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Covering Political Islam: analyzing media discourses on Tunisia's *Ennahda* Movement

São Paulo - SP

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Dissertation presented to the San Tiago Dantas Graduate Program in International Relations at São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (Unesp), the University of Campinas (Unicamp), and the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), as a requirement for obtaining the title of Master in International Relations, in the concentration area "Institutions, Processes, and Actors," within the research line "Governance, International Politics, and Foreign Policy."

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POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH

This dissertation has the potential to impact multiple fields of knowledge, such as IR, and media and discourse studies, due to its critical nature and break with outdated theoretical traditions. Furthermore, the impact can be seen in the inclusion of the *Ennahda* Movement within the canon of major debates on the concept of Political Islam.

IMPACTO POTENCIAL DESTA PESQUISA

A presente dissertação tem o potencial de impactar múltiplas áreas do conhecimento, como as RI e os estudos midiáticos e discursivos, por seu teor crítico e rompimento com tradições teóricas datadas. Ainda, o impacto pode ser mencionado na inclusão do Movimento *Ennahda* dentro do cânone de grandes debates sobre o conceito de Islam Político.

IMPACTO POTENCIAL DE ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN

Esta disertación tiene el potencial de impactar múltiples áreas del conocimiento, como las RI y los estudios mediáticos y discursivos, debido a su enfoque crítico y su ruptura con tradiciones teóricas desactualizadas. Además, el impacto puede mencionarse en la inclusión del *Ennahda* dentro del canon de grandes debates sobre el concepto de Islam Político.

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Sao Paulo, 21 February 2025.

São Paulo, 21 Fevereiro 2025.

Para meus avós, Antônio Edison Pagano e Maristela Ciccone Pagano,
cujos sonhos para mim tenho a honra e a sorte de poder realizar.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Political Islam in International Relations has acquired new nuances as an outcome of the recent debate on religion's presence in politics. Within this context, the field has sought to overcome the category's inherent essentialism, producing discussions that still persist in arenas such as the media. This study examines how the idea of Political Islam is promoted by media outlets, often from a distorted and Orientalist perspective. As a case study, the *Ennahda* Movement in Tunisia is analyzed as a central actor that challenges this reductionist narrative through its conciliatory stance toward other political forces in the North African country. To achieve this, the research employs French Discourse Analysis and Constructivism to understand the media's discursive production in the post-*Thawra* period and in relation to the party. The approach includes an analysis of Western media outlets such as the BBC and France 24; BRICS agencies like G1 and TASS; and Gulf media outlets such as *Al Jazeera* English and *Al Arabiya* English. Overall, the dissertation aims to establish a connection between the development of Islamophobic thought, Orientalism, and essentialism that permeate the construction of the notion of Political Islam in the media.

Keywords: Political Islam; Media Studies; Tunisia; Discourse.

RESUMO

O conceito de Islam Político nas Relações Internacionais adquiriu novas nuances com o recente debate sobre a presença da religião na política. Nesse contexto, o campo tem buscado superar o essencialismo inerente à categoria, trazendo discussões que ainda persistem em arenas como a mídia. Este trabalho examina como a ideia de Islam Político é promovida por veículos midiáticos, frequentemente a partir de uma perspectiva distorcida e orientalista. Como estudo de caso, analisa-se o Movimento *Ennahda*, da Tunísia, enquanto ator central que desafia tal narrativa reducionista por meio de suas ações conciliatórias em relação às demais forças políticas do país norte-africano. Para isso, a pesquisa utiliza a Análise do Discurso Francesa e o Construtivismo, com o objetivo de compreender a produção discursiva midiática no período pós-*Thawra* e em relação ao partido. A abordagem inclui uma análise de meios de comunicação ocidentais, como a BBC e France 24; agências do BRICS, como G1 e TASS; e veículos do Golfo, como *Al Jazeera English* e *Al Arabiya English*. De maneira geral, a dissertação busca estabelecer uma conexão entre o desenvolvimento do pensamento islamofóbico, o orientalismo e o essencialismo que permeiam a construção da noção de Islam Político na mídia.

Palavras-chave: Islam Político; Estudos de Mídia; Tunísia; Discurso.

RESUMEN

El concepto de Islam Político en las Relaciones Internacionales ha adquirido nuevos matices con el reciente debate sobre la presencia de la religión en la política. En este contexto, el campo ha buscado superar el esencialismo inherente a la categoría, generando discusiones que aún persisten en escenarios como los medios de comunicación. Este estudio analiza cómo la idea de Islam Político es promovida por los medios, a menudo desde una perspectiva distorsionada y orientalista. Como estudio de caso, se analiza el Movimiento *Ennahda*, de Túnez, como un actor central que desafía esta narrativa reduccionista a través de sus acciones conciliatorias hacia otras fuerzas políticas del país norteafricano. Para esto, la investigación utiliza el Análisis del Discurso Francés y el Constructivismo con el objetivo de comprender la producción discursiva mediática en el período post-Thawra y en relación con el partido. El enfoque incluye un análisis de medios occidentales como la BBC y France 24; agencias de los BRICS como G1 y TASS; y medios del Golfo como *Al Jazeera English* y *Al Arabiya English*. En general, la disertación busca establecer una conexión entre el desarrollo del pensamiento islamofóbico, el orientalismo y el esencialismo que impregnan la construcción de la noción de Islam Político en los medios.

Palabras clave: Islam Político; Estudios de Medios; Túnez; Discurso.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Figure 01 - *Place de la Kasbah* (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

September 17, 2024. I find myself leaving the Medina of Tunis to be astonished by the *Place de la Kasbah*. To the casual observer, the square might seem like a mere historical site, housing landmarks: the National Monument of the Kasbah, the *Mosquée El-Kasbah*, Tunis City Hall, and Sadiki College. However, as I walked through the place, I became acutely aware of the intersections between Islam and public life, juxtaposed with other political symbols in the square's geography.

The square, which was an important part of the Westernly named ‘Arab Spring’ or the *Thawra*, hosts a public Monument, marked by Islamic references, especially the crescent structures, designed during President Ben Ali’s¹ first years in power. Leaving the Medina, on the right side of the street stands the Sadiki College, a high-school institution that shaped the

¹ Tunisia’s second President. He governed the country from 1987 to 2011.

minds of many political leaders in Tunisia, such as its first president, Habib Bourguiba². After the country's independence, the school became known for its French curriculum, inspired by the president's ideas of a French-leaning Tunisia.

The *Place de la Kasbah* encapsulates the complex and, at times, contradictory relationship between Islam and Tunisian “modern/French/secular” political identity. While Islam is used by politicians to mark their *ethos* and to harvest public support, it is frequently overshadowed by the elite's preference for the French secularist discourse. The following dissertation addresses these topics, highlighting the relationship between discourse, international media, and the ideology of Political Islam. Our intention in starting from this brief account of the Kasbah was to show how tactile the themes here discussed are.

In fact, traditionally overlooked in International Relations analysis, Tunisia only became a leading research object in the years after the ousting of President Ben Ali. Instead of addressing it as the outcome of decades of contestation and people's resistance, the *Thawra*³ was seen by observers as the product of a single man's outcry (see Ryan, 2011, Landucci; Rocha, 2021). This idea diverted international attention to the fact that the self-proclaimed West, here represented by the United States (U.S.) and France, was supporting an authoritarian dictatorship, with regularly suppressed popular protests⁴ (Botelho, 2011, p. 118; Aleya-Sghaier, 2012, p. 20; Perkins 2014, p. 221).

Among the social movements that contested Bourguiba and Ben Ali's governments, one claimed a specific highlight in Tunisia's history, considering its uplift as the central force in the Tunisian political transition, the *Ennahda* Movement. In 1981, the party, following its preaching of Islam as a *Da'wa*⁵ group and its entrance into formal politics, adopted a ‘Political Islam’ narrative as part of its ideology. With the increase in influence of similar parties in the region, the government, along with the support of its international allies, decided to persecute *nahdawis*⁶, dismantling its influence, until the *Thawra* (Gana, 2013, p. 3; Wolf, 2017, p. 84).

After Ben Ali's ousting, Tunisian society dealt with significant changes in its social arrangement, such as the place Islam should have in politics. 2011 marked the first elections after the Revolution with a victory of *Ennahda*, as the party with the most seats at the

² Tunisia's first President. He governed the country after its French protectorate, from 1957 to 1987.

³ ‘Revolution’ in Arabic. The term used to name the protest waves in Tunisia that resulted in the ousting of President Ben Ali.

⁴ In 2008, in the countryside town of Gafsa, civilians were protesting the inadequate transparency in public job selection and the rise in unemployment. The protest was eroded by the police force and the censorship of media coverage of the theme.

⁵ A practice that can be defined as the teaching and promotion of Islam's values.

⁶ Adherents of *Ennahda*'s ideology and party. It is an adjective that can also be used to name their government.

Constituent Assembly. Due to previous governments' monopoly over national identity (Helal, 2019, p. 416), *Ennahda's* success in the electoral process appeared controversial in view of the U.S. mainstream media's suspicion about the party's ideology (see Landucci, 2022).

Since 2021, the party has faced persecution from an independently elected president who came to power in 2019 and who seeks to dismantle its influence in the country. President Kaïs Saïed's self-coup thrives on its European alliances and hegemonic identity politics (see Landucci, 2023), which reiterates the importance of studies focusing on *Ennahda's* presence in the country or international image, noting its historical relevance as a contestant of dictators.

Compared to other movements and countries in the region, the choice of Tunisia is justified by its central role in the discussion of democratic transition after 2011 and the role *Ennahda* played in this debate both internally and externally. Considered a model for Political Islam by academics, *Ennahda's* portrayal in the media allows for an assessment of the broader international image of the ideology.

Departing from this background, the following dissertation focuses on how the *Ennahda* presence in Tunisian politics and its 'Political Islam' ideology was discursively constructed for Western audiences, namely the public or other news outlets. Thus, we define discourse as "[...] the space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, transformed and, accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality." (Holzscheiter, 2013, p. 03) and intersubjectivity as the knowledge shared amongst the members of the same social group (Adler, 1999, p. 99).

Considering the media as a central space for a discursive establishment with international reach, we seek to analyze six outlets corresponding to different social realities and cultural spaces, to discuss this discursive dimension. For that, we selected British BBC and France 24, as assumedly Western news flow outlets, Russian TASS English and Brazilian G1, as BRICS and counterflow representatives, and *Al Jazeera* English (AJE) and *Al Arabiya* English (AAE), as allegedly Middle Eastern counterflow outlets. From these networks, seventy articles were analyzed in this study.

The present work seeks to engage with the literature focused on academic and media Islamophobia, providing deep and complex accounts of Islam and its political discursive traditions. Covering events from the 2013 political assassinations in Tunisia to the 2021 othering of *Ennahda* by Kaïs Saïed, the following dissertation attempts to highlight how media discourse played an important factor in presenting the party's trajectory and 'Political Islam' ideology, after the *Thawra*, to the world.

2 PREACHING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

To fully address media constructions of Islam and politics, or *Ennahda's* Political Islam, in Tunisia, it is mandatory to consider what is our definition of Islam in/and politics or Political Islam. This means that we have to take into consideration the ontology of Islam in academic studies and its developments. For this purpose, an interdisciplinary approach is fundamental, especially considering advancements proposed by anthropologists in recent years.

We start our discussion in Anthropology due to the discipline's commitment⁷ and scientific engagement with Islam (see Pinto, 2010). One major example of this is Geertz (2004) in his pioneering work, 'Islam Observed', whose contributions changed the way Western academia faced Islam as a generalist and simplistic category. In his book, Geertz (2004) depicted Islam as a religion, influenced by cultural meanings and represented through symbols, which led to a view of religions as cultural systems (Asad, 2010, p. 265). Thus, through its symbols, Geertz (2004) hoped to grasp the essence of it.

Despite its initial contribution, Anthropologic debate surpassed his universal definition of religion, criticizing Western academic practices of separating power and religion, such as in the religion studies' focus on symbols (Hefner, 2019; Asad, 2010; Anjum, 2007). One of the main contributors to this idea was Asad (2009, 2010), whose studies pointed to the Protestant Reform and the rise of Modernity as a moment of discursive schism between religion and politics (or, the secular), which obscured practical interactions between faith and power.

The result of this negligence by experts was the impossibility of recognizing Islam in politics beyond a political disguise for a hazy interest (Asad, 2010, p. 264) or religions' connections with the secular. His arguments led to a discussion in Humanities about the role of Secularism, defined as a "[...] made-in-the-West discourse projected across the global south" (Hefner, 2019, p. 150) about the separation between religion (private) and politics (public).

To propose a deeper and more secure concept of Islam, Asad (2009) suggested abandoning the Western idea of Islam as a religion, as a set of symbols culturally located (Geertz, 2004), and considering it as a discursive tradition. Such a concept, for the author, can be understood as "[...] a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of

⁷ Although we focus on an Anthropological approach, it is important to also consider the field's original ties with the colonial apparatus (Asad, 2016; Asad; Reinhardt, 2017). Thus, here we present authors who oppose this trend and seek to highlight colonial dominance patterns.

the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.” (Asad, 2009, p. 20). In other words, Islam can be understood as the juxtaposition between continuous practices and understandings of sacred text and the contextual challenges facing the future of the community (Jong; Ebrahimzadeh, 2024, p. 5).

Despite his contributions, the author faced criticism, especially from Samuli Schielke (2022), whose ideas opposed the exclusive status given in his concept of Islam. In Schielke’s (2022) words, there was not a discursive tradition’s agenda in place, the idea was to highlight Islam’s specificity:

[...] those who argue that Islam is a discursive tradition do not argue that Christianity, Marxism, human rights, anthropology etc., are also discursive traditions [...]. The label »Islam as a discursive tradition« as it is commonly used these days is thus less often about an actual inquiry into discursive traditions (but see Salvatore 2007), and more often about an attempt to find a frame that allows one to look at Islam as a whole (Schielke, 2022, p. 45)

From this perspective, Schielke (2022) proposed a conception of Islam that did not separate it from other social phenomena. In his view, it is more important to understand people’s role in building religion than it is to focus on traditional pressure upon them (Schielke, 2022, p. 56). Therefore, he proposes the conceptualization of Islam as a grand scheme, a source of meaning and direction that orientates everyday experience and seems external to the agent, despite being constructed by its social practices and discourses. According to this notion, multiple seemingly exterior grand schemes intersect during the construction of one’s perception of Islam, such as Capitalism, Colonialism, and Romantic Love (Schielke; Debevec, 2012).

It is important to note that his ideas were also criticized for not recognizing some aspects of Muslims’ lives and perceptions of Islam (to understand this debate, see Fadil; Fernando, 2015; Schielke, 2015). This discussion, however, did not encompass the fact that the central idea was to perceive Islam as both an apparently external entity that pressures the subject and a product of subjective interpretations, discourses, and practices.

Still shortly explored in the field of International Relations (IR), this understanding of the categorization is useful for our study in two central ways: first, it criticizes the secluding of religion and power; second, it establishes a connection between the agent, its discourses/practices and the production of reality. This notion becomes clearer when we take Mahmood’s (2012) usage of the discursive tradition concept.

In her article, Mahmood (2012) focuses on the intersection between ethics and piety and addresses the role of subjectivity in the process of religious practice. As we consider

discourse through a French Discourse Analysis framework, the idea of subjectivity prominence would not fit theoretical criteria. However, the author's employment of a Foucauldian definition of subjectivity deepens both the concept of discourse and discursive tradition: "Foucault treats subjectivity not as a private space of self-cultivation, but as an effect of power operationalized through a set of moral codes that summon a subject to constitute herself in accordance with its precepts" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 224).

This idea of agency in reality production, constrained by and submerged in other practices and discourses, is of deep importance when we are considering the construction of *Ennahda's* party, for example. Indeed, Asad (2009) and Mahmood (2012) considered their field of study when putting forward the concept, still, their propositions stand faced with notions from Critical Constructivism and French Discourse Analysis, such as discourses, social construction, interdiscourse, and intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, we need to initially consider how International Relations has studied religion and Islam, in order to explain our choice for the 'discursive tradition' concept.

2.1 Finding Religion

In IR, especially during the first decades of the 2000s, scholars have argued that the field has founded religion. Sarcastically, Wilson (2019) questioned himself: "Where was religion hiding? What does it look like now?" (Wilson, 2019, p. 143). This disregard for religion, followed by a sudden encounter, is similar to the one faced by culture in the study area, as confirmed in Camargo e Rocha (2011, p. 10) and Rocha (2020), and is a consequence of the authors' negligence to engage with other ways to understand power than in its military and economic forms.

The roots of this overlook of religion can be traced to the initial development of the field and Western academic dominance (Philpott, 2000, 2002; Abdelkader; Adiong; Mauriello, 2018, Haynes, 2019; Wilson, 2020) and, consequently, to the central idea of secularism as an intersubjective construct (Wilson, 2014, p. 349; Wilson, 2019, p. 143; Philpott, 2021, p. 25). On behalf of the first, it is a consensual fact for academics that the Peace of Westphalia was the constructor of the modern and secular state system and of the IR field (Kayaoglu, 2010, p. 195).

On the other hand, as pointed out by recent endeavors, much of its secular features are contested, especially facing the influence of the Protestant Reform in its principles, such as non-intervention and sovereignty (Philpott, 2000, p. 207; Pasha, 2003, p. 116, Prasad, 2014, p.

37; Zarakol, 2022, p. 11). Thus, proposing the end of religious-based wars and inflating the sentiment of modernity and rationality, Westphalian police-makers excluded religion from formal political discourses, keeping its influence hidden.

This movement fueled the ideas for the Enlightenment separation of public and private on the matter of faith. In other words,

The marginalisation of religion in IR analyses is rooted in the rise of modernity in Europe and the belief propagated during the Enlightenment period that religion's importance would decline and religion would no longer play a major role in politics and society. Science and rationality were to replace superstition and authoritarian religious orders. (Prasad, 2014, p. 36)

On behalf of the secularist core of the IR academia, powered by classical Political Science and the previously mentioned historical moments, religion was seen in the field as veils for other social phenomena, such as power dynamics, class struggles, and political maneuvering (Philpott, 2021, p. 25). As diagnosed by Mavelli and Petito (2012, p. 931) and Wilson (2019, p. 156), traditional studies of IR, who sought a secularist argument, often deviated from their idealistic, democratic, and equalitarian worldview, potentially leaning towards exclusion and isolation.

As Wilson (2014, p. 349) argues, “‘religion’ is not something that exists ‘out there’ that can be defined, contained, fixed and known. What we understand to be ‘religion’ shifts depending on geographic, cultural, political, economic and historical context.”. Therefore, this negligence of religion came hand in hand with an idea of history rewriting, in which, Europe and its rationality became the epicenter for science, politics, and Humanity in general, while the ‘East’ and its faith were having their “demise” (for this discussion of history rewriting, see Zarakol, 2022).

This trend, as stated, made it possible for IR's Western authors to model the field's face and characteristics according to their own, ignoring other voices and sustaining themselves as the core of knowledge (Kayaoglu, 2010, p. 214). Differently, current scholars attempt to oppose the idea of the dominant WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant) *ethos* (Fuentes, 2004; Resende; Senhoras; Camargo, 2010; Prasad, 2014, p. 38; Wilson, 2020, p. 126; Zarakol, 2022).

In addition, this Western dominance is maintained due to some factors, such as:

(1) the systemic understanding of issues and affairs worldwide; (2) the successful linkage of (Western) historical past to (Western) present continuity; (3) (Western) hegemonic experience of colonizing the global South through incomparable military strength; (4) (Western) vast resources in finances, research institutes, universities, think tanks and scholarships, among others; and (5) the poor conditions of non-Western academic IR communities including cultural and linguistic hindrances. (Abdelkader; Adiong; Mauriello, 2018, p. 17).

These show that not only Western scholars have created the field through the adoption of Protestant principles and secularist ideas, but that they have sustained their predominance as the main legitimate academic source of IR. In turn, the lack of emphatic and diverse voices in IR made it difficult for authors to surpass the religious principles of IR, namely the Protestant ones, and left religion poorly studied in their analysis.

The difficulty in incorporating religion into the analysis can be seen, for example, in the struggle of some authors to define it, choosing to abstain from an ontological and essential debate (Fox; Sandler; Sandier, 2004; Sandal; Fox, 2013). The problem of not conceptualizing it refinedly is that scholars usually consider it as static data, analyzing its contextual presence or absence and ignoring its potential for IR.

Conversely, a shift has been made in recent years, named Postsecularism, in which these hindrances towards religion, as well as these binarisms between private/public or religious/secular, have been overcome. As developed in the IR field, the Postsecular is a critique of secularism, in which those binaries are seen as discursively constructed and new forms of political understanding are brought to light (Mavelli; Petito, 2012, p. 931; Wilson; 2014; Mavelli; Wilson, 2016, p. 269; Wilson, 2019). Ultimately, this trend solidifies numerous scholars who attempted to (re)affirm Islam in IR theory.

As Bakir (2023, p. 23) explains, the most recent studies that sought to build the bridge between Islam and IR can be traced back to the 80s. These recent efforts, despite being peripheral, have built a consistent body for the area on the matter of Islam. Besides deconstructing the idea of religion and Islam in IR, scholars have also tried to construct a theory of International Relations based on Islam and its worldview (see Abdelkader, Adiong; Mauriello, 2016; Abo-Kazleh, 2006; Adiong, 2014; Bakir, 2023; Bsoul, 2007; Sabet, 2008; Salah, 2021; Simbar, 2008). These attempts also seek to diminish, what Said (2007, p. 29) calls, academic Orientalism, which can be understood as an ontological and epistemological differentiation between “West” and “East”.

This category is remarkably interesting considering the topic proposed, as it conveys the central idea upon which International Relations have been built. Said (2007) argues that the distinction between “West” and “East”, historically constructed in imperial and colonial politics, has discursively granted the first to be understood as the central force in the International System. In this dynamic, the East is seen as underdeveloped, traditional and anti-modern, aspiring to become the West.

For the present study, “Orientalism” is not only a theoretical category but an integral

part of the analysis. This discourse is especially pertinent to the discussion of Tunisia's identity. As Said (2007) explained, the image of Arab-Muslim majority countries took a turn from mystic orientalism to an imaginative construction of a Muslim threat in the 20th century. Thus, *Ennahda's* Political Islam was constructed regarding this discourse of imminent danger, most notoriously, after the 9/11 attacks and the U.S.'s War on Terror. Consequently, the importance of Said's (2007) arguments should be reinforced, as it points out the production of an intersubjective threat and disregard for anything considered Eastern, exemplified by our focus on Political Islam.

This thinking style has structured bridges in the study of religion, especially considering the major monotheist ones: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This idea was developed by Eid and Karim (2013), whose book shows how Orientalism, fueled by secularist discourses, has fogged the connections and common genealogies of these three religions. This intersection and the political use of secularist principles in IR show the importance of not understanding religion as a factor of analysis or as a separate category.

Thus, transporting the discursive tradition concept from Anthropology to International Relations helps us even conceive the exteriority view of Islam in the field, while it constructs an image of Islam as the IR Other, based on the idea of secularism and Westphalian origins. In addition, it makes it possible for us to comprehend the relevance of understanding *Ennahda's* ideology and relation to Islam from the party's perspective, connecting it to other discursive traditions, such as the secular one. Therefore, Islam is not a category or an entity but can be viewed as a product of subjective construction, self-pressure and constraints from the tradition, even inside a field of study.

2.2 Anatomy of Political Islam

Repositioning Islam is especially important when we are considering another concept in IR: Political Islam. Political Islam in International Relations has received multiple meanings, all of them dialoguing with the field (in)definition of Islam. What we will argue as follows is that the 'Political Islam' phenomenon in Social Sciences has become self-centered and conscious of its limitations. However, the academic response to its inability to broadly capture the discourse of socio-political movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was to produce more broad and reified material on it. Thus, in this section, we have to dialogue with categories such as Political Islam, Islamism, Islamics, Islamization, Islamist Politics, post-Islamism, and Muslim Politics (Jong; Ali, 2023, p. 3-4).

On the eagerness to capture ideologies, socio-political movements, armed militancy agendas, and political parties, the academia has focused on anatomizing the idea of Political Islam to inform politicians, public opinion, and other experts on the threatening dissent of MENA actors (see Said, 2001). Fueled by Jong and Ali's (2023) angles about the incompleteness and contestation of the category, we start recognizing remarkable concepts of Political Islam (also see Volpi, 2011; Özçelik, 2022; Tausch, 2023 for further literature analysis) to later compare with our findings on media discourse about *Ennahda*, while also reinforcing the authors' solution to the term.

For Cesari (2017; 2018; 2021, p. 300), Political Islam can be explained as a political culture, a way to understand politics that has emerged as a nationalist response to Western imperialism. It surfaces in relation to modernity and is part of it in its multitude of forms, from its hegemonic presence, like in pre-*Thawra* Tunisia with the monopolization of religion by the state, or transnational format, in groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. This culture's horizon is the nation-state and, thus, derives from Western modernity.

Zubaida (2004a; 2004b; 2016) continues this idea while considering the weight of Reformation in Islam. In his arguments, Islam has undergone several reformations, especially modern and liberal ones, that made it possible for it to become an ideology framed as Political Islam. For Bayat (2013, p. 04), Political Islam refers to movements whose goals are the implementing of any sort of "Islamic order". In contrast, Roy (2020, p. 169) positions its definition historically, framing it as an alternative to Westernly-promoted political doctrines.

Ismail's (2004, p. 17) distinction between Islamist politics and Islamization solves part of the reification problem on one end, arguing that the latter also involves the work of individuals or collectives, in which their action in society is, first of all, identitarian and symbolic. Their activity is foremost socially constructed, as the prior would entail their participation in or contestation of formal politics to achieve the implementation of the loosely defined *Shari'a*⁸. Thus, complexity is addressed towards Islamization, however, Political Islam and Islamism, or Islamist politics, are still configured around generalized notions.

The list of authors and definitions continues. However, it is possible to assert that these ideas seemingly connect to the notion of a contextual and historical setting that allowed individuals to collectivize, under a specific political culture, in the form of movements or parties with the goal of "Islamizing" their society (Jong; Ali, 2023, p. 986). Inside their rendering, political parties, social movements, and armed groups would arguably be Islamists

⁸ The term encompasses the principles and activities followed by Muslims and traditionally taught as the right way.

and, then, scrutinized on their life cycle (Schwedler, 2011, p. 136). The “life-cycle” model, as argued by the author, is the anatomic study of these groups, in order to obtain an ‘Islamic modus operandi’, which in turn reinforces the idea of a ‘Political Islam coherent root’.

To summarise, although extensive research corpus has been made on understanding Political Islam, their authors fail to grasp the movements' individuality and their existence as incohesive and evolutionary movements (Schwedler, 2011b, p. 136). In addition, little has been made to clearly define what these authors understand as the divisive line between Political Islam and Islamism, or even Islamic or Islamist Politics. In some cases, they appear as synonyms (Bayat, 2013; Roy, 2020), while in others they are cause-consequence or even different categories (Ismail, 2004; Cesari, 2017; 2018; 2021; Zubaida, 2004a; 2004b; 2016).

Consequently, there is a limitation on the imprecision of what Islamization as a political goal truly means. As Jong and Ali (2023, p. 986) explain, it “[...] is either assumed as a general and imprecise notion or entails the implementation of *Shari'a*, along with the application and integration of Islamic values, symbols, and traditions into individual and social actions and structures”. This general definition fails to encompass specific political goals and essentialize these parties' objectives in an unrefined category of Islamization while fogging the ideas of what it means to be a Muslim or an ‘Islamic/Islamist’.

On this matter, we must consider Souaiaia's (2016) groundbreaking paper, where he discusses the necessity of deeply addressing the terms ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islamic’ and their political and academic usages. As he discusses, ‘Muslims’ “[...] describes a person or a group of persons who **consciously** follow or **adhere** to the religion called Islam” (Souaiaia, 2016, p. 01, our remarks). On the other hand, ‘Islamic’ “[...] can be used to describe things that are present in Islamic societies and cultures, even if their origins are **not rooted** in Islam or **produced** by Muslim peoples” (Souaiaia, 2016, p. 01, our remarks).

Thus, as the author points out, the category of ‘Islamic/Islamist’ was historically used to persecute parties adherent to the idea of Islam as a political and social source, while the state claimed a hegemonic version of Islam for itself, as also suggested by Cesari (2017; 2018; 2021). One exemplifying consequence can be seen in

[...] an unfortunate tendency to lump together quite different kinds of religiously inspired trends as “Islamist” while avoiding articulating any definition of the term, as if any Muslim man with a beard and galabia, or woman with a hijab, or volunteer in a religious association is Islamist. (Bayat, 2013, p. 04)

Therefore, these categories hardly sustain themselves when faced with historical turning points, such as the Iranian Revolution or the *Thawra* (Al-Anani, 2012, p. 467). In fact, what is possible to be perceived in current trends, according to Hamid and McCants (2017, p.

03), is the way the ‘Islamist/Islamic/Islamist politics/Political Islam’ parties have been playing with these concepts, deconstructing through their moves mainstream ideological foundations of what it means to address Islam in politics. Accordingly, Ghannouchi (2016, p. 59), arguing that *Ennahda* had become a Muslim Democrat party, showed how essentialized and fixed the ‘Islamist’ ensemble also had become.

Academically, however, the solution does not appear in the trenches of a new concept or a reformulation, as proposed, for example, by Bayat (2007; 2013) in his idea of post-Islamism. As claimed by the author, Islamist parties, with *Ennahda* as an example, have distanced themselves from their original goal, promoting rights as their agenda and not the Islamic State (Almassry, 2021, p. 27). His focus, when proposing this terminology, was the Iranian Revolution, which was erroneously assumed to be an Islamic peak in recent years (Pinto, 2010, p. 158), considering its divergence from the implementation of a theocratic monarchy through a revolutionary agenda.

In his formulation,

[...] post-islamism represented both a condition and a project. In the first instance, post-Islamism referred to a political and social condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism are exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters. [...] Islamists become aware of their discourse’s anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to institutionalize or imagine their rule. [...] Islamism becomes compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but it does so at the cost of a qualitative shift. (Bayat, 2013, p. 08).

This post-Islamist turn, according to Bayat (2007; 2013), could also be seen in *Ennahda*’s post-*Thawra* stances, due to its abandonment of *Shari’a* mentions in the 2014 Constitution (Marks, 2016, p. 55), for example. As previously mentioned, the author’s definition still fixates its meaning on a set of essentialized ideas about what the ‘Islamist’ ensemble would look like. In addition, another problem emerged with his concept, the idea of a set destiny for Islamist projects, which led to Roy’s (1994; 2020) post-Islamism definition, encompassing the imminent failure of Islamism.

To synthesize, he claimed that his thesis “[...] did not postulate that Islamist movements cannot take power. [...] However, it argued that Islamists will fail to promulgate its key objectives. The concept of an Islamic state self-destructs itself because of the contradictions of the Islamist project” (Roy, 2020, p. 168). The consequence of this ‘time-bomb’ argument, as well as Bayat’s (2007; 2013) claims, is that it shows the incapacity of the ‘Islamist’ literature to face complexity and nuances in the movements. The solution, for both, thus, appears in the creation of a secondary analytical framework, in which Political Islam is, once

again, essentialized and seen without its proper sophistication.

Moreover, another similar debate is the one regarding moderate parties and how those movements could achieve a roughly defined moderation (see Saleem, 2020). Betterly addressed as a Western attempt to tame Muslim political projects, this Huntingtonian⁹ project engages with the idea that originally Political Islam movements would be radicals and attempt to question the status quo, and through the exclusion or inclusion in formal politics, they would become moderate and aligned with the democratic system (to an inclusion debate, see Wickham, 2004; to an exclusion debate, see Cavatorta; Merone, 2013).

However, according to Schwendler (2011a, p. 350) words, “the real democratizers may be the radicals, calling into question the frequent association of moderation with such democratic norms as toleration and compromise”. Accordingly, the definition of what moderation would look like is as empty of complex meaning as the ideas of ‘Islamism’ or ‘Political Islam’. Despite that, this debate has continued, and, thus, represents one of the ways the *Ennahda* Movement has been constructed by academia.

As Jong and Ali (2023) debate, all these academic ventures on Political Islam can be addressed as three major attempts to frame it. The first is the foundationalist approach. This trend seeks to perceive Political Islam and Islamism as being founded through political processes, often imported or imposed from outside its own ventures (see Cesari, 2017; 2018; 2021; Zubaida, 2004a; 2004b; 2016; Ismail, 2004; Roy, 1994; 2020; Bayat, 2007; 2013). The main idea is the search for a foundational category that defines the entirety of these groups, from political parties, such as *Ennahda*, to armed militant groups, often represented by ISIS or *al-Qaeda* (Jong; Ali, 2023, p. 986).

A second attempt to frame Political Islam and Islamism can be defined as non-foundationalism, this is seen in Sandal and Fox (2013) and Fox, Sandler, and Sandier (2004). According to Jong and Ali (2023, p. 992), these authors in this perspective “[...] perceive political Islam and Islamism as either devoid of meaning and specific nature, or as temporary labels imposed on social phenomena, or simply as passive reactions emerging in response to particular historical and social contexts”. The lack of conceptualization and the simplification of these social and political agents is also a significant trend in IR.

Finally, the third academic compromise towards Political Islam and Islamism is the anti-foundationalist. This response, as Jong and Ali (2023, p. 993), is provisional and a

⁹ A reference to Huntington’s original inclusion-moderation hypothesis, explained in Schwedler (2011a, p. 353). It stresses the author’s cultural ignorance towards the Muslim ‘Other’ and its ties to a Western dominance project, as criticized by Said (2001)

compelling starting point for analysis. Mentioning Asad (2009; 2010) and Hirschkind (1997) as part of this group, the authors explain that for this approach, “[...] the concept of political Islam and its related notions and terms are considered false, imaginative, innovative, Western, elitist, academic, etc., concepts, that are formulated based on the interests of the colonial, secularistic regime of power.” (Jong; Ali, 2023, p. 993).

This was also our starting point, proposing an interpretative meaning of Islam and understanding the way religion and Islam have been misrepresented in International Relations. However, a question emerges: then, what do we consider Political Islam/Islamism to be? As Jong and Ali (2023, p. 997), we propose a post-foundationalist approach, in which we suspend the Political Islam homogeneous and hegemonic category to engage with a nuanced approach, searching for temporary meaning in accordance with our object of analysis, which here is the *Ennahda* Movement.

That is why the concepts of discourses and discursive tradition are so important. Through the discursive tradition concept (Asad, 2009; Mahmood, 2012) and its application in IR, it is possible to understand the idea of the externality and tradition’s pressure from the concept of Political Islam upon *Ennahda*. As Anthropologists capture the discursive tradition through individuals or communities, it is possible to engage with them through the political agent’s/object’s discourses, analyzing, for example, how *Ennahda* perceives Political Islam, conceptualizes and performs it.

Therefore, recognizing the complexity of these movements (also see Brown, 2000), our discursive tradition definition for the Political Islam category encompasses “evolutionary trends”, as the one argued by post-Islamism authors, as well as allegiance with the system, seen in the moderation debate, and references to other discursive traditions, as defended by the foundationalist. Thus, Political Islam does not exist on its own but is performed by political actors, referencing a common past, a contextual present, and an expected future, as Asad (2009; 2010) argues. Consequently, Political Islam can be defined as any political formation constrained by the interdiscourse of Islam and acting upon such discursive constructions.

The present section alluded to a preached idea in International Relations that religion and, specifically, Islam did not matter for its analysis. Consequently, there is difficulty in surpassing the Orientalist and essentialized lens of secularism. Engaging with the discursive tradition concept, we seek to surpass these issues and highlight the party’s self-comprehension of its ideology. Hence, we should continue our discussion by understanding how and referring to which categories *Ennahda* has constructed its Political Islam.

3 ON ENNAHDA'S TRAIL

Figure 02 - Zaituna Mosque (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

Important accounts have been made in the name of an academic historical construction of *Ennahda's* trajectory. Namely, Wolf's (2017), Hamdi's (2018), and McCarthy's (2018) brilliant books have delved into this matter thoroughly. Our main goal in this section, while recognizing their arguments, is to evaluate the historical progression of the *Nahdawi* Political Islam discourse and the roots of its political vision. In other words, we are concerned with how the historical events, as described by the previously mentioned authors, unfolded within the movement and in Tunisia, shaping and constructing *Ennahda's* ideological narratives.

To start our historical analysis, we should divide our efforts into four parts: the

reformism of Ahmad Bey and the Protectorate period, Bourguiba's government, Ben Ali's government, and the post-Revolutionary period. Initially, through our accounts of Ahmad Bey's rule, it is possible to understand the space Islam had in Tunisian society prior to the implementation of the French Protectorate in 1881 when its dismantling started. During Bourguiba's government, the idea of Tunisia as a Western country in Maghreb is highlighted and it is when the Islamic Group is founded. Later, in Ben Ali's rule, the persecution of Political Islam heightened and the rebranded Ennahda Movement had to face prison and exile. Finally, after the *Thawra*, the party gained popular appeal and was a central player in the Tunisian democratic transition.

3.1 Islam in Tunisia: from Ahmad Bey to Independence

The accounts of the pre-Protectorate Tunisia focus on how influential Islam was in public life. Harber (1970, p. 10) affirms that not only did it impact social and cultural environments, but religious leaders, the *ulama*, served as forces to contain the Regency legally and politically. Additionally, Wolf (2017, p. 1) highlights how Tunisia was a center for Islamic studies during this period. Perkins (2014, p. 24) stressed the role of the Zaituna mosque and university in developing an intellectual basis for Islam in Tunisia. This seems to be an odd picture for those who have studied Tunisia in recent years, especially considering its secularizing process.

Thus, our departure from Ahmad Bey's rule is justified by the need to understand the first encounter between a Western-inclined political elite and the religious leaders. Ahmad Bey ruled from 1837 to 1855 and his reforms intensified the flow of European people and products, a distancing process towards the Ottoman Empire, and the slight dismantling of religious public structures (Perkins, 2014, p. 17; Wolf, 2017, p. 12-13; Zeghal, 2024, p. 46). His central idea was to modernize Tunisia, in the face of French and Ottoman influences, which meant reinforcing the country's army, intensifying economic flow to and from Tunisia, and strengthening his power (to understand the impact of Bey's reformism, see Hibou, 2006).

Resistance to his approach to Tunisian internal and international affairs was seen, especially from those concerned with the existing Muslim legal apparatus (Wolf, 2017, p. 15). However, Ahmad Bey still attempted to cultivate a good relationship with the *ulama*, as seen in his appeal to them on the matter of slavery abolition in Tunisia (Montana, 2024, p. 45). The fear of foreign impositions in Tunisian affairs was the trend among those who opposed Bey's reformist approach. Regardless of their fears, it became clear that the following political

leaders would be faced with not only Ottoman influence but also European, especially from the British and the French.

After years of orchestrating a military stance on the country, in 1881, the French invaded Tunisia, as the new Bey, Ali Bey, used this invasion as an opportunity to maintain its position (Perkins, 2014, p. 44), and implemented a Protectorate (more on the Protectorate, see Lewis, 2013). This period had a stark impact on the religious framework in Tunisia, it arguably continued, strengthened, and intensified Ahmad Bey's efforts to deploy a secularized and Western legal body, weakening the influence of the *ulama* (Perkins, 2014, p. 51; Mullin; Rouabah, 2016, p. 156). Moreover, discursively, it highlighted the specificity of Tunisia and activated a state of emergency narrative that sustained its reforms.

Through that maneuver, the French Protectorate implemented intense changes to the national curriculum, strengthening the study of French and dismantling the study of Islam (Perkins, 2014, p. 67; Wolf, 2017, p. 18). Their idea was to extinguish any dissidence, which began to be considered radical by official discourses, through the adoption of a French/Western identity in Tunisia. This French educational agenda, however, backfired, producing a highly critical and politicized student body. Among these students, many dissident projects were developed, including the Destour (Constitution) party, created in 1920.

Their call for Constitutional implementation in Tunisia was fuelled by their demise as previous elite members and their approach, often, sought not only to align with the Protectorate but also support it (Wolf, 2017, p. 21). Consequently, the new generation of students perceived their cause as sold, thus, claiming a different position, founding the Neo-Destour party in 1934 (Perkins, 2014, p. 104; Wolf, 2017, p. 21). This new ideological approach favored "[...] a more populist approach to mobilization and succeeded in drawing support from all social classes, thus acquiring a vast membership" (Dahbi, 2020, p. 117).

After the Second World War, this new fringe gained momentum and started its independence fight, struggling to decide upon two different independence projects between Habib Bourguiba, the head of the party, and Salah Ben Youssef, the party's Secretary-General. Their opposition has been met with controversy in the literature. On one side, Wolf (2017, p. 22) and Cavatorta and Merone (2019, p. 362), for example, have stressed a mainly ideological schism between both. According to them, Bourguiba would entail a pro-Western Mediterranean national identity, while Youssef would favor a Muslim and Arab approach to Tunisian history.

On the other hand, recent work on the theme has nuanced the topic. Dahbi (2020, p. 122-123), Oualdi (2022), and Zeghal, (2024, p. 137) discussed that the core difference

between the two leaders' approaches were their strategies and proposals against French influence in Tunisia. Bourguiba favored a steady transition, in which the influence of France would slowly fade into Tunisian internal affairs. Ben Youssef, on the other hand, engaged a more critical stance, arguing in favor of the independence of other Arab states, which was seen as a pan-Arabist perspective (Dahbi, 2020, p. 123).

Despite the controversy, literature agrees that Bourguiba's victory in 1957 meant the perpetuation of a pro-Western Tunisia, which began to be developed during Ahmad Bey's rule and was further emphasized by the French Protectorate. Thus, during the following years, as we will argue in the next subsection, narratives from both Bey's reformist period and the Protectorate gained strength in an attempt to build an identity for the newly independent Tunisia.

3.2 Bourguiba and '*la tunisianité*'

After winning the feud for Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba had to deal with his opposition, especially the religious and the left. Regarding his religious opposition, despite Islam's status as the nation's official religion, the president dismantled the education system at Zaituna, persecuted the *ulama*, and discredited pious leaders for being condescending to the French, turning religion from public to private spheres (Wolf, 2017, p. 28; Sofi, 2018, p. 30; Dahbi, 2020, p. 145). Another facet of Bourguiba's new Tunisia was the Personal Status Code, which championed women's rights in the country and organized the Tunisian legal system (Zeghal, 2024, p. 140).

Due to these actions, Bourguiba cultivated an image of Tunisia as a place for moderation, in opposition to radicalism, and women's rights (Debuysere, 2016), an effort initiated by the French Protectorate, following Ahmad Bey's reformism. This picture of Tunisia was seen as a nationalist identitarian project, constructed by Bourguiba and named by the literature as the '*Tunisianité*' (Perkins, 2014, p. 135; Mullin; Rouabah, 2016, p. 156; Wolf, 2017, p. 22; Sofi, 2018, p. 39; Cavatorta; Merone, 2020, p. 362).

To understand this project, it is important to conceptualize identity and its intersections with the nation-state. By identity, we mean the product of a discursive and symbolic employment of memory, connected to a constructed related Other and that seeks to represent a collectivity as a historical product (Wodak; de Cillia; Reisigl, 1999, p. 155; Hall, 2006, p. 240; Woodward, 2014, p. 5). In its national format, it serves to amalgamate different individuals from a common territory into one shared identity, history, and memory (Anderson, 2006, p.

6).

As detailed by Oliveira (2000, p. 33), the symbols for the production of collective identity often are represented by these six categories: territory, real or constructed history, blood, language, property, and character. Bourguiba's successful identity construction project aimed at "The Tunisian Way", as proposed in the title of his article (Bourguiba, 1965). Territory refers to the immediate land division, in which the Tunisian people are circumscribed, also including who has the right to be in it. This was recently operated in Kaïs Saïed's speech on African immigrants (see Landucci, 2023), for example. As for real or constructed history, Tunisia has been defined as "[...] a homogenous nation embedded in Arab-Islamic history as well in a pre-Islamic Mediterranean past and open to elements of Western civilization and modernity" (Zemni, 2016, p. 145).

These two markers come together in Bourguiba's project to reflect the third: blood. Here we are referring to what Oliveira (2000, p. 33) calls the root of the collectivity. This category becomes clear in: "It happens that, due to our geographic position and our **Mediterranean civilization**, we share certain values with the democratic world, especially our attachment to liberty" (Bourguiba, 1965, p. 486). Despite using Arab and Muslim references, his project is mainly Mediterranean, reinforcing his rapprochement with the West.

In addition, this trend is also shown in the French language propelled by Bourguiba in the national context, as Mullin and Rouabah (2016, p. 159) and Helal (2019, p. 426) affirm, focusing on Tunisia's Western identity and shadowing the Arabic influence. Moreover, the property appears on the same lines, prioritizing heritage that explores Bourguiba's narrative. Finally, the sixth marker, character, is central to this enduring proposal and requires further inspection.

As discussed by authors focused on the theme (Cavatorta; Merone, 2015; Debuysere, 2016; Mullin; Rouabah, 2016; Zemni, 2016; Helal, 2019), the Tunisian character, as constructed by Bourguiba, is modern, anti-radical, moderate, secular, Western-inclined, francophone, and different from "other" Arab countries. As a society endeavor, these characteristics meant the struggle for: "[...] liberation of women, the modernization of the structure of society, adaptation of Islam to requirements of development" (Bourguiba, 1965, p. 485).

This project, thus, can be generally defined as "an ambiguous patriotic narrative that refers to 'a certain' Tunisian specificity, its history and identity" (Zemni, 2016, p. 142), directly connected to the modernity project. Furthermore, it is important to mention that we understand modernity as "[...] an Otherness generating machine that, in the name of reason

and humanism, excludes the hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of concrete life forms from its imaginary” (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 87, our translation).

Therefore, it is foreseeable that Bourguiba's continuity of secularization of identity politics was met with harsh criticism, especially from the youth, who sought to revive Islam in Tunisian society, opposing his Tunisian character development. Among this youth were three men - Rachid Ghannouchi, Hmida Ennaifer, and Abdelfattah Mourou - with different trajectories and united under the banner of preaching about Islam through social and educational work. From their efforts the “Islamic Group” or “*al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya*” was created (Tamimi, 2013, p. 215; Wolf, 2017, p. 36; Hamdi, 2018, p. 28; McCarthy, 2018, p. 155).

In practical terms, the group thrived in the countryside of Tunisia, due to Bourguiba's almost exclusive coastal development policies (Hamdi, 2018, p. 22) and through *Da'wa* (Yildirim, 2017, p. 193). Thus, its network managed to capture the countryside's dissatisfaction and social inequality to deepen its presence in the country, while recruiting from the discontent campus body, which perceived the left as a less attractive opposition to Bourguiba. This tendency towards political and economic debates inflated a sentiment in the party that sought to understand Islam as “[...] not just spiritual *da'wa* but creed, and worship, and a comprehensive political and social system which does not differentiate between the material and the spiritual.” (Ghannouchi, 1979, p. 15 *apud* McCarthy, 2018, p. 37).

Their movement began to thrive, especially considering the government's crackdown on the left, which gave them sufficient maneuvering power to expand their ranks and deepen themselves ideologically (Hamdi, 2018, p. 53). Hence, to comprehend their ideology in these first years, we should look for which traditional references were displayed in their discourses. Disillusioned with Pan-Arabism, the three founders sought models from the region and found them chiefly in Algeria, Egypt, and Iran.

In Algeria, a starking philosopher and writer developed his insights on the academic idea of the Muslim world's decadence. Malik Bennabi was critical of the Western view of Muslim decay as natural and embedded in its roots (Bariun, 1992, p. 326; Wolf, 2017, p.40). The author's discussions on ‘Civilization and Ideas’ (Bennabi, 2003, p. 22) were met with optimism by the Islamic Group ranks, in the 1970s. Indeed, the author reinforced the premises of free will, democracy, and freedom in Islam to explain how leaders had deviated from these principles.

In addition, his arguments propelled in his article, ‘The Chaos of the Western World’ (Bennabi, 1980), stressed the necessity of working with the West, while, as a Muslim-majority

society, searching for its own references. This claim glistened among the theorists within the Muslim group, such as Ghannouchi (Sofi, 2018, p. 33), whose work began to lay down considerations not only about a Muslim revival but also a search for a Tunisian understanding of the discursive tradition of Islam and its role in public life.

In Egypt, a profound material was also developed by the Muslim Brotherhood. The *Ikhwan*¹⁰ literature called for the revival of Islam in society through the implementation of the Islamic state. Inside their ranks, however, there was little agreement on how to accomplish this goal. Hassan al-Banna, who created the *Ikhwan* and deeply impacted the Islamic Group, translated the Western modern-state into a Muslim discursive framework (Moussali, 2013, p. 137).

One example of a long-lasting impact of al-Banna was his deployment of *Shura* - a form of community consultation - as a means to not yield to the concept of Western democracy. In the author and *Ikhwan* founder's view, "[...] the West is in decline, and Islam as an all-comprehensive ideology must save Egypt, and ultimately, the entire world." (Larsson, 2017, p.33). Thus, his remarks strengthen the argument that Islam must be part of the public sphere and work as an impactful ideology for the political realm.

Another unique take on Islam and/in politics by the *Ikhwan* was the one of Sayyid Qutb. The author is frequently referred to as the prime ideologue for militant armed groups, due to his defense of the employment of violence and his negative views towards the West, as stated by Akhavi (2013, p. 161). Yet, his advocacy was limited to the safeguarding of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) and the sheltering of the 'true Islam', especially from leaders who self-portrayed as the sovereign voice of the *Ummah* (Akhavi, 2013, p. 165).

His expansion of al-Banna's ideology was seen by the youth across the MENA as a revolutionary input on the role of religion in public life (Larsson, 2017, p. 52) and was, thus, frequently cited. Concerning the Islamic Group, Qutb was frequently alluded to by those whose impetus was to revolutionarily reestablish Islam in the political and public scenarios in Tunisia. However, his views were not hegemonic among the ranks of the group.

Finally, the Iranian Revolution, the last of the major Islamic Group's references, is a source of academic contestation. On a practical side, the revolution charged the animus around the topic of Islam and politics throughout the region and showed the movement the possibilities of their work (Wolf, 2017, p. 49; Hamdi, 2018, p. 62; McCarthy, 2018, p. 42). Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, the idea of Iran as a theocracy is constantly criticized

¹⁰ In full, *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, or translated, the Muslim Brotherhood is a political Movement from Egypt founded in 1928, see Moussali (2013).

by the literature (see Pinto, 2010, p. 158). Regardless, the Revolution strengthened the Islamic Group's Political Islam discursive tradition with the idea of the Islamic State's future possibility.

These references fuelled part of the Islamic Group's rank to expand its work from socio-economic spaces to the political arena. Although faced with internal disagreements (McCarthy, 2018, p. 38), especially from those whose desires were to focus on *Da'wa*, in 1981, the movement decided to order a political party's license (Wolf, 2017, p. 55), fighting for political representation and against Bourguiba's anti-democratic government (Islam *et al.*, 2021, p. 35). Consequently, this move led to the formation of the "Movement of Islamic Tendency" or "*Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami*" (Sofi, 2018, p. 39).

The Movement of Islamic Tendency was met with suspicion and vigilance by Bourguiba. Its request for a party's license was denied and its leaders were imprisoned by the government. Bourguiba's regime feared Iranian inspiration and *sought* to deal with the group by cracking down on its ranks (Wolf, 2017, p. 57). Thus, beyond their Muslim references, the Movement of Islamic Tendency also had to dialogue with Bourguiba's national identity project (Perkins, 2014, p. 135; Sofi, 2018, p. 39).

Despite some forms of resistance, especially with the use of the term '*hawiyya attounsia*' (Tunisian identity), the *Tunisianité* became a self-governing discipline (Zemni, 2016, p. 137, 142), or, even, a discursive tradition of the secular for political actors in the country. Indeed, this narrative was used by Bourguiba to persecute the Movement of Islamic Tendency, and, therefore, the party was required to formulate its ideology also keeping in mind this secular worldview.

Whether discursively or through the use of force, the government's repression strengthened the call for change inside not only the Movement of Islamic Tendency but the whole of Tunisian society, which led, for example, to the "Bread Riots" (Wolf, 2017, p. 60). As stated by Dakhli (2021, p. 42), the riots were a series of protests against the economic unfolding of Bourguiba's development plans. Among the protesters, the Movement of Islamic Tendency's presence worried the government, and, thus, it opted to recruit Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali as director-general of national security.

With the riots controlled, the following years showed the weakening of Bourguiba as a ruler, as the opposition grew strong. These tensions escalated to a point in which a coup by the Movement of Islamic Tendency's members was possible (Wolf, 2017, p. 66). Noticing the current government's support eroding and seeing the probability of an overthrow, Ben Ali conducted his bloodless seizure of power in 1987, taking down Bourguiba and assuming the

role of president of Tunisia. His criticism of his predecessor was met with hope by the opposition, who saw a democratic change on the horizon (Hamdi, 2018, p. 109). However, their aspirations were shortly crushed.

3.3 Ben Ali and the persecutor's new clothes

In 1988, the Movement of Islamic Tendency changed its name to the “*Ennahda* Movement” or the “Renaissance Movement”. This switch was also marked by a strong stance on building a civic state, not an Islamic one by the party (Wolf, 2017, p. 69; Hamdi, 2018, p. 116; McCarthy, 2018, p. 62). The reasoning behind the group’s actions was to follow new electoral rules, specifically the one prohibiting parties from being formed under religious banners, and, consequently, to enter formal multiparty politics.

On this matter, Wolf (2017, p. 70) addresses how these were changes that deeply affected the ideological links between the newly founded *Ennahda* and the Muslim Brotherhood and resembled the actions of other Political Islam groups in the region. As the author points out, al-Banna opposed the idea of multipartyism as a colonial tool, and, thus, the choice of entering this realm would damage these connections between the *Ikhwani* and the *Nahdawi*. However, Moussali (2013, p. 130) explains that the Egyptian ideologue was concerned with corruption and manipulation inside the country’s parties.

Regardless, the change can be seen as a distancing from the *Ikhwani* Political Islam discursive tradition regarding the discursive future of the community. The matter of differentiation would not be the political move by itself, but the discourse that accompanied it. Hence, the party welcomed a new horizon, different from the Brotherhood’s Islamic State and closely tied with the Algerian Political Islam theory, as Ghannouchi was increasingly more connected with Algerian ideologues (Perkins, 2014, p. 199). Additionally, they engaged with a new framing of their political program, which entailed fewer mentions of Islam and a discourse turned to formal politics.

In 1989, without a party’s license approved yet, the party opted to run candidates independently in the elections, which ended up showing their public appeal (McCarthy, 2018, p. 64). Threatened by it, a few months after the poll, Ben Ali took advantage of the situation in Algeria to start persecuting *Ennahda*, similarly to its predecessor (Perkins, 2014, p. 199). In 1990, in the bordering country, the Islamic Salvation Front's victory in elections was seen as a menace by the Algerian military, who began to clash with the government and made a coup, which erupted into a civil war. Consequently, Ben Ali gained enough discursive maneuvering

room to ignite anti-*Nahdawi* feelings in Tunisia

The unfolded confrontation between Ben Ali and his opposition was violent, as the president ensured a highly policed regime (Wolf, 2017, p. 73; Yildirim, 2017, p. 197). In 1991, the clash peaked as protesters, connected with the *Ennahda* Movement, burned down a ruling party's office in Bab Souika. This event was met with controversy among the leaders and the ranks of the *Ennahda* Movement, as Ghannouchi did not condemn the use of violence by its followers, seeing the action as understandable (Murphy, 1999, p. 196). Protesting against this affirmation, many left the party, including one of its founders, Abdelfattah Mourou.

Months later, authorities cracked down on an alleged plot against the government in Barraket Essahel, which was aiming for the installment of an Islamic republic (Wolf, 2017, p. 73-74). This event led to the imprisonment and torture of many critical of Ben Ali, especially those tied to the *Ennahda* Movement. Although its reality is still contested, the Barraket Essahel affair helped the government to justify its clash with the 'evil Islamists'.

Among Ben Ali's actions, his politics toward women's rights, which maintained Bourguiba's features (Debuysere, 2016), appeared remarkably relevant to his Western partners. As Marks (2013, p. 229) argues, for the president, "women's rights represented little more than a smokescreen — an illusion of modernity that distracted many secular-leaning Tunisians and some foreign observers alike from scrutinizing the country's numerous human rights abuses". Thus, the accounts provided to Wolf (2017, p. 84) are foreseeable.

On one side, Ben Ali promoted a pro-Western and pro-women's rights foreign policy, fueling a partial view of Tunisian society that served the interests of one of his biggest partners, the United States (Botelho, 2011). On the other hand, the government was torturing, harassing, and imprisoning women tied with the *Ennahda* Movement. This shows that not only did Ben Ali maintain the Protectorate and Bourguiba's Tunisianité discourse, but he also evolved it more violently to accomplish his desires.

Hence, the fate of *Nahdawi* politicians and partisans was sealed: imprisonment and torture or exile. The exiled, led by Ghannouchi, attempted to forge an abroad action, which failed to accomplish much since its members were scattered across multiple countries. However, this was an important moment for ideological development, especially considering the party's leader publications. Despite McCarthy's (2018, p. 6) critique of over focusing on the Muslim party's leadership, for many, Ghannouchi was and still is the face of *Ennahda*; therefore, we should briefly address his thoughts.

Since the Islamic Group's creation, Rachid Ghannouchi's work leaned toward and

followed the group's evolution. As accounted by Tamimi (2013, p. 217) and Sofi (2018, p. 82), Ghannouchi effortfully tried to escape the democracy-Islam debate, stating that both Western democracy and Islam had been misrepresented by political actors. The ideologue, thus, had a special interest in bridging these roughly defined categories, understanding the multiplicity behind each one, and recognizing Western and Muslim societies' misuse of these ideological tropes.

In one of his most influential books, written in exile, 'Public Freedoms in the Islamic State', Ghannouchi (2022) constructed the idea of employing Islam as a study framework for the category of democracy. His work directly referenced Bennabi's and also stressed the importance of liberty and rights within the state. Additionally, the author's usage of *Shura* reflects his commitment to previous accounts of Islam in politics, while endeavoring to build his own discourses about it. Indeed, Ghannouchi's work became a living part of the *Ennahda's* discursive tradition of Political Islam.

Among his reconsiderations during exile apparent in his publications, the matter of violence was of stark importance. After Salah Karker's arrest, who was the leader of the movement in France, due to connections with armed militants, the party, led by its leader in Britain, Rachid Ghannouchi, adopted a firm stance in favor of non-violence (Wolf, 2017, p. 94). This claim reinforced Ghannouchi and the party's changes after being persecuted and exiled, showing the plurality of interpretations within the *Nahdawi* discursive tradition of Political Islam.

The work of Ghannouchi was also important for another major feature of *Ennahda's* Political Islam discursive tradition: the matter of pluralism. As Alisakun (2020, p. 39) explains, the ideologue favored a power-sharing approach for his political views, opposing full control of power by a single agent. This commitment was translated, for example, on *Ennahda's* participation in both the Call of Tunis Agreement and the 18 October Movement, alongside also exiled parties with different political views, such as the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Ettakatol Party (*al-Takattul al-Dimuqrati min 'ajl al-'Amal wal-Hurriyyat*).

The Call of Tunis Agreement, as explained by Wolf (2017, p. 101), was a statement made by dissident forces, which favored an opposition towards Ben Ali. However, its impact was small-scale compared to its cross-ideological successor, the 18 October Movement, responsible for producing both discussion and statements questioning the Tunisian government and its supporters. Although limited, its effect was noteworthy, as stressed by Jourchi (2013, p. 362) and Allani (2009, p. 265), as it was the biggest opposition force against

Ben Ali's regime and its Western alliances.

Thus, this plurality approach favored by Ghannouchi and his party has deeply impacted their views on political alliances and their role as political agents. It became a feature later seen in its post-Revolution alliances, through the formation of the *troika* government. Its connection with namely secular parties, however, was usually met with suspicion by national and international commentators, as was the case for the 18 October Movement (Boubekeur, 2018, p. 110) and the *Troika* Alliance (Boubekeur, 2018, p. 113). This idea, especially reinforced by Ennahda's critics, fails to frame the root of this change within Ghannouchi's discourses and the party's practical actions

Regardless, the seeming gradual conciliation between the regime and the 18 October Movement, a brief period after its foundation, appeared atypical for more critical branches of Tunisian society, especially for pious individuals and organizations (Wolf, 2017, p. 106). In addition, this criticism was met with Ben Ali's monopolization of religion, claiming his spot as the "[...] real defender of Islam" (Wolf, 2017, p. 112), and the persecution of women wearing Muslim veils (Wolf, 2017, p. 113). Consequently, a pious movement, generally addressed as the Salafi, was being forged against both Ben Ali and his complacent critics, the *Ennahda* Movement.

Once in politics, in 2011, the party led by Ghannouchi had to incorporate this reproof into its political discourse, hence it is important to understand its roots. Although insufficient consensus has been reached on defining this movement, the literature usually addresses the term "Salafi" to encompass "[...] a loose collection of religiously right-wing individuals" (Marks, 2012, p. 2). Indeed, the usage of this term deeply differs from the traditional idea of Salafism as a technique endeavored by individuals to restore the 'true meaning' of Islam, without resorting to political means (Gelvin, 2015, p. 66; Landucci, 2024, p. 70).

This definition changed to an umbrella concept that surrounded social movements that embraced, according to these perspectives, "ultraconservatism, radicalism, or even militancy" (Saeed, 2013, p. 38), claiming the return of a "real Islam" through violence (Cavatorta; Merone, 2013, p. 258). In our work, we understand both the original "Salafi" term and its armed militant version as narratives inside the discursive tradition of Islam. Additionally, its current use has the specificity of also being considered "[...] an expression of socio-economic malaise and a tool of revolutionary mobilization that has a far greater political dimension than one that is strictly religious or doctrinal" (Zouaghi; Cavatorta, 2018, p. 01).

In short, these movements attempted to directly oppose Ben Ali and his opposition, endeavoring a pragmatic and militant approach. The Salafi, as they began to be called,

represented one in many groups seeking to dismantle Ben Ali's police regime. Their efforts, however, went unnoticed due to the regime's oppression apparatus, as explained by Aleya-Sghaier (2012, p. 20) in her defense of the Gafsa protests as a *Thawra's* prologue. As discussed in Landucci (2022), the Revolution caught Western attention and was received with surprise, especially due to Ben Ali's highly effective police oppression system, which had diminished any opportunity for opposition.

While working underground and in exile, the *Ennahda* Movement understood the revolutionary eruption as an opportunity to legally engage with Tunisian society through politics, marking a new era in their work. Thus, this process brought new challenges to *Ennahda's* discursive tradition of Political Islam, reinforcing the party's need to engage openly with Tunisian identitarian debates and political identity. Moreover, the transition that unfolded, as we will discuss, stressed the idea that Revolutions are processes that do not end with the toppling of the current government.

3.4 The *troika* and the transition

Commonly framed as a single man's outcry for justice and democracy (see Landucci; Rocha, 2021), the Tunisian *Thawra* was a moment that captured a myriad of frustrated voices that sought to oppose Ben Ali's regime. When the president fled to Saudi Arabia, Tunisia embarked on a political transition, characterized by continuity and change from the previous authoritarian governments (Keskes; Martin, 2018). Due to its underground and exiled work, *Ennahda* was able to rapidly adapt to the new scenario, continuing its political practices shortly after Ben Ali's toppling (Wolf, 2017, p. 133; Yildirim, 2017, p. 199; McCarthy, 2018, p. 130; Alencar, 2022, p. 104).

Thus, facing the promised openness, *Ennahda's* fresh structure and vibrant support made a sweeping victory in the first post-Revolution election, the one for the Constituent Assembly, possible. The party's new platform, as addressed by Alencar (2022, p. 105), bypassed the namely "secular" opposition's criticism, not mentioning the *Shari'a* or the idea of the Islamic state, while vowing to maintain women's rights and favoring human rights. Curiously, despite criticism that *Ennahda* would diminish rights in Tunisia, it still "was the only major party to fully respect the gender parity rules for electoral lists" (Marks, 2013, p. 225).

As Wolf (2017, p. 134) explains, however, the mistrust towards the party was not solved, especially after its appropriation of main ministerial posts. This suspicion around

Ennahda's real goal was the hegemonic response to what came to be known as the *Troika* government, a coalition of *Ennahda*, CPR, and Ettakatol to forge a majority in the Assembly. Following this shortage of faith in the newly formed administration, the party, during the Constitutional building process had difficulties in asserting its agenda. On the matter of the *Shari'a*, the party was divided into applying it as a source for laws or excluding it from the new Constitution (Wolf, 2017, p. 139; McCarthy, 2018, p. 130; Alencar, 2022, p. 110). Ghannouchi later announced that, due to its controversy, the party would refrain from its appeal to mention the *Shari'a* in the Constitution.

Another theme that aroused public discomfort towards the *Troika* government was the discussion of blasphemy in Islam. As explained by Ali, Deng, and Khalid (2023, p. 9), in Islam's discursive tradition, blasphemy is often understood as the act of stating sacrilegiously against the Prophets, angels, and Muhammad's companions and wives. It is, therefore, a matter of intense discussion by jurists in Islam. In Tunisia, this debate was ignited after the screening of *Persepolis* (2007) and the art exhibition entitled *Printemps des Arts* (McCarthy, 2015, p. 453).

Marjane Satrapi's movie depicted "Marji's self-declaration as a prophet and her long, irreverent conversations with God, who is depicted as a benevolent, bearded old man." (Ostby, 2017, p. 578), which was met with protests in pre-2011 Tunisian elections (Farmanfarmanian, 2017, p. 1052; Marks, 2012, p. 2). In the following year, the owner of the television station that aired the movie was fined by authorities. The 2012 exhibition, as McCarthy (2015, p. 453) explains, geared manifestations due to its criticism towards Islam, stirring more controversy.

McCarthy (2015, p. 464) then emphasizes how *Ennahda*'s position regarding these blasphemy claims directly connects to their waiving of the *Shari'a* inclusion in the Constitution. As the author continues, the discursive tradition of Political Islam framed by the party sought to establish an Arab-Islamic identity for Tunisia, instead of the accomplishment of the Islamic state foundation. However, the Movement's lack of harsh stances against the violence in the protests fuelled the opposition discourse with more distrust and the idea that they would engage directly with the armed militant branch of a pious group in Tunisia (Hernández-Gutiérrez, 2023, p. 48; Landucci, 2024, p. 78), the *Ansar al-Shari'a*.

Founded in 2011, the movement mostly endorsed *Da'wa* through a vision similarly entailed by the Islamic Group, however, a militarized branch became noticeable for both experts and politicians in Tunisia. In general terms, they distanced themselves from *Ennahda* in their discourses and discursive tradition references:

Ansar al-Sharia represented a social bloc that did not seek inclusion in the state. Instead, it called for the dismantlement of the liberal-democratic institutional system being created because the group had never benefited from it, and would not do so if a compromise on the concept of *tunisianité* were to be reached through liberal-democratic institutions (Zouaghi; Cavatorta, 2018, p. 01).

Initially, *Ennahda's* engagement with the *Ansar al-Shari'a* favored dialogue and communication (Cavatorta; Torelli, 2021, p. 9), another reason for its commitment to endorse the protests against blasphemy, as the Salafi-inclined movement led part of it. However, this identification process, as detailed by Lorch and Chakroun (2020, p. 206), was hindered by the *Shari'a* discussions in the Constituent Assembly, as the so-called secular opposition pressured the party to give up on its mentioning in the new Tunisian Constitution. With Ghannouchi's stance abstaining from adding the *Shari'a* to the Constitution, *Ansar al-Shari'a* and its armed militant wing began to emphatically oppose *Ennahda*.

Moreover, 2013 offered difficult challenges for the *Troika* government, which helped shift their views on the *Ansar al-Shari'a* militancy. On one hand, the assassination of two leftist politicians and strong opponents of *Ennahda* and its rendering of Islam and politics, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, put the administration in the spotlight. Thus, as their liberal economic style (see Salem, 2020) failed to accommodate revolutionary expectations, the party endured protests criticizing both the failing economy and the peak in violence in the country.

On the other hand, in nearby Egypt, a military coup toppled the Muslim Brotherhood government, which for most scholars was *Ennahda's* primary discourse reference. However, according to Marks (2017, p. 105), the "Egypt-centric approach has obscured the growing regional influence of Turkey's AKP". In fact, during the 2000s and, especially, after *Ennahda* came back to the Tunisian political arena, the main discursive reference was the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP), despite its different trajectories (Torelli, 2012).

As Akkoyunlu, Nicolaïdis and Öktem (2013) explain, the 'Turkish Model', known for its neo-liberal economy and strong religious freedom beliefs (Alencar, 2022, p. 236) was turned into a discursive tool by Western and MENA agents, ensuring the Turkish and Western interests in the region. Thus, the *Ennahda*-AKP connection framing served as a tool for *Ennahda* to engage with a highly Western-approved Political Islam discourse, favoring its international position.

Regardless, the 2013 coup in Egypt endorsed the idea that a firm stance against the *Ansar al-Shari'a* was necessary, especially when facing criticism from other political parties. Thus, the party's previous engagement with non-violence came in hand with their othering

process against the Salafi branch, as discussed by Lorch and Chakroun (2020, p. 211). Among the defiant forces from this period, a new political party was forged in 2012, the *Nidaa Tounes*, and later discursively profited from the Egyptian opposition coup against the Brotherhood (Marks, 2016, p. 8).

Created by Beji Caid Essebsi, former minister of foreign affairs during Bourguiba's government, *Nidaa Tounes* became known as “[...] a melting pot, bringing together the ousted Bourguiba and Ben Ali elite with left-leaning movements and organizations including Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT)” (Zollner, 2021, p. 382). Therefore, the party did not present a clear agenda, besides its oppositional stances against the *Ennahda* Movement, which became highly appealing facing its accusations of pro-Salafi actions from the government (Boubekeur, 2018, p. 116).

In the Tunisian political atmosphere, facing a peak in armed militancy and political assassinations, the *Troika* government handed over its position to a claimed ‘technocrat apolitical’ administration (Marks, 2016, p. 8), which shattered its support base, especially considering time proximity to the 2014 election. Its internal tensions, however, only increased, expressly after the government's initial unwillingness to side with Hamadi Jebali, the country's Prime Minister and *Ennahda* member, in his resignation and proposal of handing power to an “apolitical” temporary administration.

Simultaneously, the *Nidaa Tounes*'s defiance received exceptional Western approval and gained space in the Tunisian political field. In the words of Marks (2014):

Despite feeling kinship with the party because of its secular label, westerners understand surprisingly little about *Nidaa Tounes*, mainly because they've tended to hold the magnifying glass of critical inquiry up to Islamists but not secularists over the past three years. Counter-intuitively, *Nidaa Tounes*'s internal structure is noticeably more authoritarian than *Ennahda*, which boasts representative decision-making structures from its grassroots to national leadership (Marks, 2014).

Thus, despite its controversial internal structures, the party managed to win both parliamentary, collecting 86 of the 217 parliamentary seats, and presidential elections, with Beji Caid Essebsi becoming the successor of his opponent, CPR's Moncef Marzouki. The challenge of finding a majority to govern Tunisia proved that “secularists” would have to join their “Islamist” enemies, whom they had been campaigning against openly for years (Alencar, 2022, p. 162). This move, once more, reiterated Ghannouchi's pluralist views, endorsed by his *Troika* coalition and again shown in his lobby for union with *Nidaa Tounes*.

The following years were challenging for the ruling government and, especially for *Ennahda*'s political discourse. The 2015 attack at the Bardo National Museum, for example,

turned the eyes to Tunisian youth armed militancy once more (see Landucci, 2022, p. 35). In addition, after the Syrian Civil War, the Libyan crisis, the Egyptian coup on its Islamist government, and the rise of militant branches of Islam, such as ISIS, the tensions around the Political Islam discourses were high. Moreover, in Turkey, AKP's reaction to the Gezi Park protests and its involvement in the Syrian Civil War rotted its Western love (Akkoyunlu, 2014).

Faced with this “lost love” towards its main discursive reference and Tunisian internal tensions, *Ennahda* decided to distance itself from its position as a Political Islam party to embrace a Muslim Democracy ideology. Announced at a party conference, *Ennahda*'s leaders promised a rupture, seizing to be a religious movement and strictly becoming a political party, separating “Mosque and the state” (Islam *et al.*, 2021, p. 32). With this action, the party intended to “[...] focus exclusively on politics and to leave behind social, educational, cultural, and religious activities” (Ghannouchi, 2016, p. 61), while Islam would be a reference among other discourses.

The reason presented was that their goal to preserve Arab Muslim identity was guaranteed by the 2014 Tunisian Constitution, therefore, they had no reason to maintain this socio-political purpose and could break from its original social movement organization. This change follows *Ennahda*'s desire to deepen its entrance into formal politics. Thus, by distancing itself from the highly criticized concept of Political Islam and its 'mother-organization', the party sought to demonstrate its commitment to Tunisian party politics (Zollner, 2021, p. 393).

As evidenced by AKP's “love loss” and the critical situation other regional players were in, the change was also explained due to the party's need to differentiate from other forms of political-religious discourses, especially from armed militant voices. As discussed by one of its members, “we can no longer use a term so charged with negative connotations when describing what we consider to be one of the most positive phenomena taking place in the Muslim World today” (Ounissi, 2016, p. 8). Thus, our criticism towards the Westernly framed Political Islam resonates with the party's Political Islam discursive tradition, or Muslim Democracy discursive tradition.

In fact, faced with our definition of Political Islam as a discursive tradition, the 2016 *Ennahda* Conference fallout falls under the same contradictions of the post-Islamist concept, showing how this concept creation became academically and politically counterproductive. Thus, in our understanding, the idea of Muslim Democracy is part of the Political Islam discursive tradition, as other symbols, discourses, and meanings are being displayed, featuring

a political discourse of Islam.

Moreover, this discursive change was also fuelled by *Ennahda*'s new position in the Tunisian parliament. As Wolf (2017, p. 160) explains, in the first days of 2016, twenty-eight *Nidaa Tounes*' partisans left the party due to ideological differences, reducing its force in politics. Consequently, its weakening made *Ennahda* the biggest power in the political body, strengthening its decision-making power and emphasizing its need to refrain from simplistic discourses around its ideology, thus, also justifying the decision.

In addition, in a groundbreaking investigation, Ash (2023) reflected on this *Nahdawi* rupture between party and religious movement, considering the public's reaction and its political gains. As discussed previously, a myriad of academic studies have focused on the "moderation" debate, normally framing that, to survive and gain support, a Political Islam party should become more moderate/secular/modern (see Wickham, 2004; Cavatorta; Merone, 2013). However, according to Ash's (2023) findings, the 2016 *Ennahda* discursive change negatively affected the party's overall support.

As explained by the author, more secular-prone branches of society tend to have an inelastic reaction toward Political Islam, despite favoring reforms and internal changes in those parties. On the other hand, in anti-system and/or pious portions of society, however, the effect is generally negative (Ash, 2023, p. 20), as *Ennahda* had become more similar to those parties they deeply criticized. Thus, in this separation, which shows *Ennahda*'s commitment to formal politics and active listening toward its critics, the political gain was insufficient to impact its political presence.

Thus, in the following years, the *Ennahda* party continued to stir public debates with its Political Islam/Muslim Democracy discursive tradition display. One example can be seen on the topic of the LGBTQIA+ community. In public discourses made in 2018, "the *Ennahda* president Rached Ghannouchi has repeatedly stated that he respects homosexuals' freedom of choice and that they should be held accountable to God only, not to the state" (Alencar, 2022, p. 144).

Ghannouchi's statements directly broke from and related to an academic concept named "Homocolonialism". In its triangled argument, Rahman (2018, p. 106) shows how the idea of the West as the central pro-LGBTQIA+ rights advocate (Massad, 2007, p. 163) typically relates to discourses of modernity and colonialism, as well as how it is often responded with resistance by Arab-Muslim majority countries' political actors. Thus, those three correlated discourses constitute what the author calls "Homocolonialism".

Therefore, disrupting the idea of a post-colonial homophobic resistance discourse,

Ghannouchi showed his party's usage of plural references to its political agenda, differentiating itself from the static image portrayed by the West about Political Islam/Muslim Democrat parties. Still, it is possible to argue that these *Nahdawi* commitments negatively affect not only the party but also the Tunisia political arena, as *Ennahda* is formating its ideology through a *Tunisianité* reference, where a single "secular/Western/modern/moderate" model is the mold for political action.

Regardless, *Ennahda*'s relationship between religion and politics has undergone many discursive changes in its years in power. Since 2020, however, new challenges have been imposed on its politicians, showing that their new Muslim Democrat framework was, possibly, not enough to make it survive its opposition's wish to dismantle the party. Under the presidency of, 2019 elected, Kaïs Saïed, the party's strugglings began to heighten in 2020, after "100 party members published a rare open letter complaining of tactical confusion, poor electoral performance, and internal paralysis" (McCarthy, 2024).

Consequently, external challenges were especially damaging for the party, remarkably due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the misconduct of the health situation in the country caused a wave of anti-government protests. Fueled by public support (see Aliriza, 2021), the president sacked the Prime Minister, dismantled the parliament, and began a series of reforms to concentrate power in his hands (Cherif, 2022, p. 7; Radeck, 2022). As explained in Patel's (2022) interview with Andrew March, the party's response was to join forces with the opposition to Saïed, avoiding starting a crackdown on its ranks by the president.

Despite this, Saïed continued his power grab, while his opposition sought ways to counter his actions. With the president's eventual crackdown on dissident forces, in 2023, Ghannouchi was arrested, in a move that deeply destabilized his party. Thus, the current challenge for *Ennahda*'s discourse is to create a political alternative to engage the politically disenchanted population, despite its descending public support and its leader's imprisonment (McCarthy, 2024).

To summarize, the present chapter discussed the Political Islam discursive tradition of *Ennahda* through a historical account, showing how it varies in different periods and according to certain challenges. This initiative came in order to break with simplistic accounts of Political Islam as groups that want to Islamize society and to show the myriad of references displayed in the *Nahdawi* political discourse, as well as its initial developments under Bey's reforms. From Egyptian and Turkish to Algerian references or through the import of concepts and the creation of a Tunisian identity, *Ennahda*'s ideology is internally diverse and plural, as any other political party.

Thus, the next step in our debate is to discuss what we exactly understand as discourse. Despite its previously mentioned definition by Holzscheiter (2013, p. 03), we must comprehend its theoretical and methodological framings to continue with the study of the media's discourse on *Ennahda's* role in the Tunisian transition. Concluding the present chapter, *Ennahda's* trail is an interesting path for those who seek to understand the connection between Islam and politics in Tunisia in its complexity and richness.

4 STUDYING DISCOURSES

The idea of a ‘discursive tradition’ definition for Islam and our focus on meaning construction around *Ennahda*’s Political Islam demands further conceptualization of discourse. This quest is especially relevant in light of the recent debate on language in International Relations (IR). As stated by Rocha and Camargo (2011, p. 8), the matter of language in IR was traditionally seen as a space of reflection and not as analysis. Thus, initially, the quest was not to discuss how language studies could be part of IR’s canon but to inquire its relevance (Fierke, 2002, p. 351).

Considering this debate, our goal is to approach a interdisciplinary view of language and discourse, considering French Discourse Analysis (FDA) as our departure point. Structured around a post-structuralist proposal of language studies, as more than a syntax analysis, FDA’s field bridged concepts from Althusser and Foucault, for example, to provide theoretical and methodological solidity to the study of discourses (Gregolin, 2003). This school of thought was exceptionally developed in Brazil by Brandão (1995) and Orlandi (2005).

Comprehending discourse as “the space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, transformed and, accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality” (Holzscheiter, 2013, p. 03), through FDA, means that the discourse is submerged in its context of production and, therefore, can be a destabilizing or a sustaining force for a worldview. Another way of conceptualizing discourse is through its Foucaultian roots, as “a strategic game of action and reaction, of question and answer, of domination and eluding and, also, as a fight” (Brandão, 1995, p. 37, our translation). These definitions are relevant because they address two central definitions for French Discourse Analysis: the notions of interdiscourse and condition of production.

Defined as “all sets of previously made and forgotten formulations that define what we say” (Orlandi, 2005, p. 33, our translation), interdiscourse is a central concept for the FDA. For authors, such as Maingueneau (2004; 2015, p. 28) and Di Fanti and Brandão (2017, p. 10), the discourse only has meaning in relation to others or, in other words, the interdiscourse is the producer of meaning for an intersubjective discourse. Thus, to analyze a discourse, we must look for its references to other ideas and propositions.

These interdiscourses, however, do not exist freely or collect the entirety of humanity’s discourses, they are submerged in a context that uplifts and stabilizes them. This context is called conditions of production, better defined as the socio-historical background

and the place of speaking (Brandão, 1995, p. 105). The conditions of production restriction and stabilization of interdiscourses forge the discursive-ideological formations, conceptualized as “what can and must be said” (Orlandi, 2005, p.43, our translation) in that specific surrounding, or, in other words, the process through which memory activates meaning in such intersubjective context.

This, in turn, helps us conceive Mahmood’s (2012) definition of the subject. For Orlandi (2005, p. 50), the subject can operate, freely, in certain discourses, submerged in an interdiscourse, forged by a condition of production. Therefore, subjectivity exists, however, it is constrained by the historical emergence of its social context and the position the subject occupies in that given place. All these considerations highlight that French Discourse Analysis is not merely a theory or methodology, but a complete field with internal debates and concepts relevant to this discussion.

In International Relations, this debate on language and discourse was found in a period named the linguistic turn in the 1980s (Resende; Senhoras; Camargo, 2010, p. 46; Rocha; Camargo, 2011, p. 8; Fierke; Jorgensen, 2015, p. 4; Debrix, 2015, p. 4; Aydin-Düzgit; Rumelili, 2019, p. 286). The linguistic turn sought to analyze language beyond the discussion of its relevance and hoped to bridge IR knowledge on that matter. It is important to note that prior to this movement, language, when present in analysis, appeared essentialized and limited, without proper conceptualization, as in Wendt (1999).

Thus, the linguistic turn is credited for the insertion of language and discourses at the core of International Relations, especially considering the work of pioneering scholars, such as Der Derian and Shapiro (1989), Onuf (1989), Kratochwil (1991), Doty (1996), Milliken (1999; 2015), and Fierke (2002). Their work was parallel to the positivist crisis, after the end of the Cold War, which gave space for post-positivist approaches to gain mainstream status in recent years. In addition, considering these authors, it is important to mention their connections with two central IR theories: post-structuralism and Constructivism.

To these authors, language was not a political tool or a distant abstract category, it was a political constructor of reality, through which meaning and world understanding are produced, creating boundaries and approximations (Wodak, 2012, p. 216). However, although admitting the importance of considering language and discourse in their analysis, no agreement was established in a shared definition of the latter and about concepts surrounding a linguistic debate.

Therefore, different academic discussions on the topic became notable. Initially, the borders of post-structuralism and Constructivism were clear. The first considered that

everything only existed through and inside the discourse, while the latter admitted a social reality outside of it (Debrix, 2015, p. 7). Still, through the years, this boundary was eroded in light of the works of constructivists called critical constructivists who sought to understand intersubjectivity and discourse through a critical lens, and social reality as the product of discourse.

Although limiting, Das (2009, p. 962) defined two ‘boxes’ in which to put constructivist scholars. The first is Conventional Constructivism, or thin Constructivism (see Holzscheiter, 2014, p. 3), whose work was defined by the stress on matters of norms, and ideas, and the noticeable focus on interaction. In addition, structural factors were highlighted through these concepts, which made social reality intelligible and apprehensive, existing outside of interpretation. In this category, it is possible to consider a variety of authors, such as Wendt (1999), Onuf (1989), and Kratochwil (1991).

The second categorization is named Critical/postmodern Constructivism (Das, 2009, p. 962), or thick Constructivism (Holzscheiter, 2014, p. 3). Deeply embedded in Foucaultian and Derridian debates, these authors considered meaning and discourse as the space for suspending a specific social reality. Their views on reality are similar to those discussed by post-structuralists, but these scholars propose a unique engagement with the idea of intersubjectivity. Authors such as Doty (1996) and Milliken (1999; 2015) appear among these thinkers.

A second manner to understand this dichotomy is through the idea of a Habermasian and Foucaultian schism inside of Constructivism. As Epstein (2008, p. 9) proposes, the Conventional Constructivism engagement with discourse, when happened, was notably rational and deliberative, in other words, they advocated for a ‘clash of the best discourse’. On the other hand, critics have stressed the meaning production character of discourse (Holzscheiter, 2014, p. 8), acknowledging its power in social reality construction and sustentation.

This differentiation shows how profound and compelling is the discussion on discourse in International Relations, despite positivists’ questioning of its academic validity (Ghica, 2013). Thus, to counter this, we should look further at Critical Constructivism epistemology and methodology, since it is the theory we seek to engage with, considering their Foucaultian influence and proximity with French Discourse Analysis. Two scholars are central to this study in that regard.

First, we must consider Milliken’s (1999; 2015) groundbreaking paper on discursive studies. Pioneeringly, the author proposes four methods to study discourse in International

Relations (Milliken, 1999, p. 242, 243). Initially, there is the deconstructive method, in which the study engages with internal analysis, looking for the process of reality construction present in a certain text and trying to propose other ‘truths’ through meaning deconstruction. The second method is the juxtapositional one, in which the researcher compares two narratives on the same subject, trying to replace the idea of objective truth with a flexible understanding of reality.

The next, called subjugated knowledge, not only takes into account other forms of ‘truth’, but also deepens the analysis of those, trying to resist mainstream forms of thinking. Finally, the genealogy method seeks to discuss power relations through historical discursive accounts. In the present work, we consider an alignment between the last two, to accomplish a deep defiant analysis that surpasses prejudice and simplification around Islam in International Relations.

These four methodological accounts are part of an approach called functionalist, through which the text is studied in a context. This takes us to the second scholar, Godinho (2016). The author is relevant due to her typification of linguistic approaches’ criteria and methods in International Relations. She systematically describes three ways to study language, the functionalist, the descriptive - focused on the structure and syntax of the text -, and the autonomous - which is methodologically open-ended. In addition, she establishes a connection with Holzscheiter's (2014) categories to produce the following table:

Table 1: The discursive-constructivist approach in International Relations

Approach Criteria	Possibility of objectification of international facts	Thin Constructivism (Yes) Thick Constructivism (No)
	Identity of the power of discourse	Deliberative power (Habermas) Intersubjective power (Foucault)
Type of methodological approach	Descriptive	Grammar, Stylistic, Non-verbal, Argumentation
	Functionalist	Text in context
	Autonomous approaches	Content analysis,

		experimental, Hermeneutics
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Source: adapted from Godinho (2016, p. 7).

It is important to highlight that inserting a study into a theoretical ‘box’ is necessary, despite its evident limitations. This is justifiable, especially, considering positivists’ criticism, which affirms that discursive studies do not address the method in depth and are mainly reflective. Thus, our approach, as we tried to explain, is based on a thick/Critical Constructivism theory, focusing on the intersubjective power of discourse, through a functionalist apparatus, in which subjugated knowledge and genealogical methods are applied.

Additionally, our work is also aligned with a text selection based on genealogy and FDA, through availability and relevance criteria found in Charaudeau (2013), Tatum (2018, p. 355) and de Souza (2004). This study analysis was conducted in two parts: quantitative selection and qualitative discourse analysis. On the first matter, we selected news pieces that dialogued directly with our theme, choosing texts about *Ennahda* or that actively mentioned the party.

Methodologically, the quantitative task was “[...] the choosing of cases to provide a reasonably generalizable set of texts from which to draw conclusions about patterns and changes in discursive systems.” (Tatum, 2018, p. 355). To proceed with profound analysis, we opt to select up to four texts for each defined topic. Our topic’s choice was based on key moments after *Ennahda* got into power, specifically, the 2013 political assassinations, the 2014 election, the 2016 ideological changes, and the 2021 Saïed self-coup.

After the quantitative selection, we followed Souza’s (2004), as well as Brandão’s (1995) and Orlandi’s (2005), qualitative methods, which consisted of a historical understanding of the context both in Tunisia and in the news agency country, recognizing the importance of context to the production of meaning. Then, our work consisted of analyzing the textual discourse, considering its condition of production, interdiscourses, discursive-ideological formations, and meaning production. Focusing on *Ennahda*, therefore, we sought to understand how its ideology and political presence were constructed by different news vehicles.

Therefore, setting the methodological framework of the study, we can discuss what we understand as the media’s political power, how it connects with its base country’s political ideology, and why each news outlet was selected for the current study. In general, in the

following subsection, we ponder the question: who has propelled the discussion of Media Studies, and how does this reflect on who speaks in the International System?

4.1 Who speaks?

One interesting outcome of these propositions from French Discourse Analysis and Critical Constructivism is the possibility of understanding discourses concerning prejudice in international matters, especially considering its relation to religion (Wilson, 2020). For Van Dijk (2008, p. 146), “ethnic prejudices and ideologies are not innate, and do not develop spontaneously in ethnic interaction. They are acquired and learned, and this usually happens through communication, that is, through text and talk”.

This statement is sustained by recent academic arguments on Islamophobia, for example, which have highlighted the process in which constitutive silence and local silence¹¹, in the sense of Orlandi (2005, p. 83), have collaborated to the increase in prejudice towards Muslim communities throughout the world (see Brazilian case in Barbosa, 2022a), as their voices have not silenced. On that matter, it is important to contextualize the meaning of Islamophobia, since it is part of the concepts we ought to comprehend facing *Ennahda*’s construction by the media.

Initially, Allen (2016, p. 190) appears as the most encompassing conceptualization of the term:

Islamophobia is an ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting in similar ways to that which it has historically, although not necessarily as a continuum, subsequently pertaining, influencing and impacting upon social action, interaction, response and so on, shaping and determining understanding, perceptions and attitudes in the social consensus – the shared languages and conceptual maps – that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other (Allen, 2016, p. 190).

The idea, thus, is that Islamophobia is not an interpersonal prejudice but a discursive-ideological formation, sustained and forged in interdiscourses that display three significant components: racialization, religious intolerance, and an Othering process (Green, 2019; Kumar, 2021; Barbosa, 2022b; RInsha’Allah..., 2024). These three components reiterate the necessity to fully capture Islamophobia as a process of racial prejudice, in which

¹¹ By constitutive silence, we understand the employment of one term instead of the other. For example, to say that the *Thawra* was the first demonstration of people’s power in Tunisia excludes former protests and crowd mobilizing in the country. By local silence, we consider pressures from the immediate context of publication, such as editorial guidance and format restrictions, and censorship in all its forms.

religious symbols and discourses are seen as components of an Other, alongside an oblivion of the close upbringing of Western religions and Islam (Eid; Karim, 2014; dos Santos, 2016).

The concept of Islamophobia as an analytical tool to understand media's discourse about Political Islam is relevant to us due to Green's (2019) eight Western narratives around it: Islam as monolithic and static; Islam as separate and other; Islam as inferior; Islam as the enemy; Islam as manipulative; Racial discrimination against Muslims justified; Muslim criticisms of the West invalidated; and Anti-Muslim discourse as natural. At the center of this construction of Islamophobia is the media, whose discourses are the "[...] source (and authority) of knowledge or opinions about ethnic minorities" (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 152) for the general public (Said, 1997).

Methodologically, when faced with our current study, these claims posit a question: how can we distinguish between Islamophobia and a simple opposition towards *Ennahda*? Our goal in approaching the Islamophobia concept, beyond introducing the discussion of media, is to temper these discourses, arguing that criticism towards *Ennahda* can directly touch Islamophobic tropes. Therefore, this is a theme that will appear in our analysis of the media coverage of *Ennahda*, alongside the construction of the Orientalist interdiscourse.

Additionally, the importance of media related to prejudice is seen in its power to "[...] establish certain representations, integrated with the "us" and "other" paradigm, through discourses and indicators and mostly reproduce these representations." (Okmeydan, 2021, p. 465). Moreover, Gezgin, Yalçın, and Evren (2021, p. 6) address how the media continues to reproduce a generalized picture of the East, according to Said's (2007) arguments, requiring an overlook the question of the power of media and how its studies were developed.

Media studies, as a research field, is a plural study corpus, with interesting connections with International Relations (see Camargo, 2009), our departure point. In fact, we could dwell on different approaches and debates. Due to our IR focus, we aim to look at the relationship between power and communication, diluting the separation between national and international forms of power, and recognizing the recent efforts and attempts to oppose the dominance of American and European scholars in media discussions (see Waisbord; Mellado, 2014).

In general, the study of power and media has been focused on two dialoguing categories: media power and power over media. In other words, authors usually focus on power coming from the agent (media), while being pressured by the structure (political context). In International Relations, following Media Studies development, media power became an appealing theme after the Gulf War, when CNN conducted a 24/7 news streaming,

instead of waiting to cover the topics in the newscast, broadcasting the front lines of the conflict live (Zingarelli, 2010, p. 8-9).

Scholars, such as Livingston (1997) and Bahador (2007), began to reflect on how CNN's coverage of the War had had an impact on public opinion and, consequently, on policy-makers. The central idea of this literature corpus was to discuss the "CNN Effect" or the media's influence on politics, whether by response time or agenda structure. Despite its catchy appeal, as discussed by Gilboa (2005), it failed to address international media coverage impacts on politics beyond this CNN-Gulf War framing, thus, being emphatically contextual (Thune, 2009, p. 41-42; Kirkpatrick, 2015, p. 204).

However, different approaches continued to be developed at the core of this American-produced theory. One example can be seen in the idea of the "Al Jazeera Effect" (Seib, 2008; Zingarelli, 2010, p. 38). The concept behind this theory was the discussion of Al Jazeera's power in shifting the state-media relation in the Middle East, defying censorship, and surpassing the technology shortage in comparison to other international communication vehicles, especially coming from the Global North.

Both attempts to address media power failed to advance beyond case studies and to surpass a deeply rooted academic Orientalism in Media Studies. As explained by Waisbord and Mellado (2014) and Ranji (2021), Media Studies still have a problem of fixing binaries and expectations surrounding geopolitical agents, when discussing media's autonomy from and power over the political system. Due to its initial venture as a US-centered discipline (Neveu, 2004, p. 332), the research on media has been more concerned with generalized assumptions connecting the country's political system to the idea of media freedom than actually recognizing the grey areas of autonomy.

In other words, freedom of speech and media freedom have been intrinsically related to national conditions and regimes of power. Thus, when talking about democratic countries the normative is to address media power, as it is shown as an independent agent, sometimes influenced by politics. On the other hand, when focusing on an authoritarian country, the premise is to stress the absence of journalist agency given by the government, considering the idea of power over the media (Ranji, 2021, p. 1140).

Thus, in regard to theories concerning media power and/or power over media, we find ourselves stuck on binaries that seek to explain how censored Arab media culture is or how free Western media environment is (for an example, see Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2011). Conversely, Karim (2011, p. 135) affirms that "[...] within a particular ideological system (be it free market, socialist, or Islamist), mass media workers consciously or unconsciously produce

integration propaganda that serves the overall interests of elites”, which reinforces our discussion on subjectivity and conditions of production.

Beyond this “effect frenzy” or censorship/freedom Orientalist debate, many attempts were made to frame the media’s power (Thussu, 2018b). There are the “dominant meaning” approach from the Cultural Studies perspective (Hall, 2007), the public opinion production theory from Herman and Chomsky (2002), and Castells’s (2007) network society. These are a few examples of how productive and complex the debate we engage with is. Thus, we need to position the present study within one frame of the media power.

Recognizing societies’ complexity, the theory we engage with was detailed by Yüksel (2013, p. 63) and received the name of the Cascade Model. Through this perspective, we question given models of state/media or, even, media power to look for contextual answers to our questions. In this theory, the media is neither seen as an extension of national actors’ interests nor as an independent agent that freely formulates public opinion. Indeed, Yüksel (2013) argues for the understanding of multiple networks of influence, in which the media, national and international elites, politicians, and public opinion mutually influence each other.

Additionally, this proposal highlights the dual character of media outlets, being deeply influenced by a myriad of actors in a national, regional, and international context while producing frames based on their own agenda (Thune, 2009, p. 30). This constricted agency of media helps us incorporate the conditions of production into our arguments, thus, signaling our choice for this model.

Moreover, another important aspect of our engagement with Media Studies is the idea of flow and counterflow of news, as proposed by Thussu (2006, p. 10). Based on Castells’s (2007) discussions, the author argues that the strength of journalism coming from the West is not solely based on its discourse, but also on its dominance of technological and economic apparatus to propel their news worldwide. On the other hand, a few outlets have managed to break this dominance by reaching global audiences, such as Brazilian TV Globo, Russian TASS, Qatari *Al Jazeera*, and Saudi Arabia *Al Arabiya*, for example. These are known as counterflow news agencies.

Despite understanding this proposition, we seek to question the idea of what it means to be a counterflow media vehicle. Should we base our analysis solely on numerical data, or should we also take into account the actual discourse when evaluating whether it challenges the hegemony of Western news? In our analysis, it is crucial to highlight that this methodological distinction between flow and counterflow is critically assessed. Instead of viewing these as rigid or inherent categories, we recognize their relevance within specific

methodological frameworks and will conduct our analysis by taking into account the particular characteristics of each object under study.

Interestingly, we hope to assess how media agencies within the same theoretical box can engage with different discourses, endorsing Ranji's (2021) critiques of academic Orientalist generalization of distinct countries' media. Therefore, our quest to look further into the media is accompanied by a discussion of our analytical objects' upbringing. Specifically, in the following subsection, our debate on Media Studies takes a turn on matters of news circulation led by BBC and France 24, on the discussion of flow, TASS and G1, facing their counterflow approach, and the Gulf media landscape, understanding the production of discourses on Political Islam and the *Ennahda* Movement within different regional frameworks.

4.1.1 Reinforcing the flow

The idea of an international flow of information and news in the International System is easily conceivable when we understand who dominates the use and application of technology globally. Consequently, it is not only a matter of discursive and narrative preponderance, but it is a story of material development. This convergence of material and discursive prominent forces constructed the two enterprises we seek to analyze in this section: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and France 24 (F24). They have in common that they are financed by license fees paid by each household to access their content, portraying them as “media outlets of the people”.

Their outreach and dominance in anglophone and francophone countries justify their selection, as well as their upbringing as communication institutions. In this section, we seek to assess their development, their relationship with society, considering the Cascade Model, and the specific way the social community they are inserted in deals with Muslim-related news, such as diaspora, Islamophobia, and the Palestine cause, for example. Our attempt is to briefly discuss each media outlet's conditions of production and relations with national and international discourses.

Known as a longstanding enterprise, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is our starting point due to its long-running history (BBC, 2022). Their trajectory followed the making of British society during the twentieth century, accommodating its major debates and reproducing starkly their radio business. Its role in society is extensively discussed in academia, as pointed out by Curran (2002, p. 137), however, no general agreement has been

made on its community-construction power.

Founded in 1922, their public-interest focus, due to its public fees funding, was highly exported to its colonies, making it a worldwide media phenomenon (McPhail, 2010, p. 159). Its later launched broadcasting television channel was also extensively lauded, becoming an example of high standards and reliability for news productions (McPhail, 2010, p. 159; Aitken, 2013, p. 240; Lewis; Cushion, 2019, p. 480; Hendy, 2022, p. 12). In addition, its turn to web news started roughly but managed to eventually stabilize, becoming an agile source (Robbins, 2024, p. 1134).

As the BBC evolved throughout the 20th century, its reputation for reliability and impartiality became central to its identity. However, in the 21st century, this trust has been increasingly scrutinized in the wake of various scandals, challenging the very foundations of its public image. As Mytton (2008, p. 571) explains, the BBC attracts a global audience by reliably addressing topics often excluded in heavily censored media environments. However, as pointed out by Aitken (2013, p. 239), trust in an institution is indivisible, making it difficult to gather support after big scandals.

Hendy (2022, p. 828) briefly describes what was the first major BBC's twenty-first century scandal. In the context of the Iraqi invasion by the US-led coalition, the outlet investigated the dossier released by the British government on mass destruction weapons in Iraq. After the inquiry, they criticized the document on air by stating its exaggeration and lies. The scandal, on the other hand, started when their source, Dr. David Kelly was revealed, which led to his suicide and criticism of misconduct towards the BBC (Grunge, 2023).

The tensions between other political actors and the outlet continued through the first decade of the 2000s. Due to its public funding, it was especially affected by audience criticism. Another example of reliability fragmentation happened in 2011, when longtime BBC presenter, Jimmy Savile, died and investigations came forward to expose his crimes. According to Aitken (2013, p. 239) and Hendy (2022, p. 844), the scrutiny that proved he had over 450 victims of sexual abuse, mostly vulnerable children and teenagers, still heavily affects the way people perceive the BBC.

On the matter of impartiality, controversies have surrounded the outlet, from both its audience and the academia. As Lewis and Cushion (2019, p. 493) and Hendy (2022, p. 858) argue, recent studies proved that, despite the criticism from the public and part of the academia of impartiality towards the left (as seen in Aitken, 2013, p. 248), the BBC coverage has become more tendentious towards right-wing ideologies. This trend was seen in the space given to right parties in elections, the use of sources aligned with the right, and the replication

of narratives from those political ranks.

This is the scenario the BBC currently faces, while their public funding mode has been highly criticized and disputed by *streaming* services and social media news outlets. Therefore, the current expectation from the public of the news outlet is the reinforcement of credibility and impartiality. The BBC's struggles highlight the broader role of media in shaping public perceptions while being affected by it. Thus, it is necessary for us to shift our focus to how British society, as well as the BBC, deals with topics related to Muslim communities, the Palestinian issue, and Islamophobia.

This discussion reposition helps us conceive which interdiscourses the outlet's coverage of the *Ennahda* Movement in Tunisia was submerged in. Initially, it is important to consider how these themes deeply affected the impartiality debates about BBC within British society. For example, Ameli *et al* (2007, p. 32) discuss how, in 2004, after allegations of pro-Israeli bias coverage of the Palestinian genocide, the outlet decided to change crucial parts of their news apparatus on the topic, addressing the context more often and appointing a prestigious correspondent to the situation.

This shows its commitment to responding to public disapproval, especially facing the Palestinian genocide, which deeply affects Muslim communities throughout the world (see Barbosa, de Souza e da Silva, 2023). However, due to its position as the people's outlet, BBC would often reproduce Islamophobic tropes. In Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) and Al-Hejin (2015), it is discussed how this impartiality from BBC often ends up simply reinforcing the elite's perspectives on Muslim minorities. Al-Hejin (2015), for example, stresses how Muslim women are seen as lacking agency and being oppressed, due to their veils (for further discussion on the veil see Abu-Lughod, 2002).

After the Brexit, as Abbas (2020, p. 507) explains, the trend was a “[...] growing normalisation in relation to cultural racism against minorities of observable immigrant and minority backgrounds, often casually lumped together as ‘Muslims’” in the United Kingdom. This, on the other hand, is reflected in a media that reinforces these stereotypes and Islamophobic categories, in the face of anti-immigrant discourses (Kallis, 2023, p. 552, 568). Thus, our expectation with the current work is to discuss, specifically about BBC, how this legitimacy crisis aligned with an overall societal normalization of Islamophobia affected its coverage of the *Ennahda* Movement in Tunisia.

Although working through the same funding mechanism, France 24 (F24), our second news flow outlet, is noticeably different from BBC, especially due to its short-running history, compared to the British company, and to its audience focus. Launched in 2006, France 24 is a

quadrilingual channel, namely French, English, Arabic, and Spanish, and has reached millions of users monthly worldwide (France 24, 2024). F24 holds a special position in the French media ecosystem, due to its international positioning, being created to depict the “French version” of news and compete with other international audiences targeted outlets, namely BBC World and CNN (Blet, 2008, p. 155; Połowska-Kimunguyi; Gillespie, 2017, p. 253).

Therefore, the vehicle does not face relatively common problems from the French ecosystem, such as hypercompetition (Kuhn, 2019, p. 238), while still working within the advantages of establishment journalism in France (Cointet *et al.*, 2021, p. 4). In fact, according to Kuhn (2019, p. 237) and Cointet *et al.* (2021, p. 4), the fast-changing pace in the news market in France and the self-discipline journalistic ethic in the country have produced a complex market, which indirectly favors F24, due to its stability and expansion to other countries, while not directly dealing with competition in its home-country (Saragosse; Bonos, 2016, p. 12).

In a complex relationship, described by Saragosse and Bonos (2016, p. 10) and Blet (2010), France 24 has become the voice of France for many nations, representing its interests and often depicting its values. In the words of Marie-Christine Saragosse, director of France Médias Monde, the owner-group of France 24:

On the international level, I see – the dramatic events of 2015 have confirmed this – that there is great expectation around France. We enjoy a collective imagination driven by history. In the eyes of most countries, France remains the nation of Enlightenment and Revolution, that of the art of living as well as impertinence. We are also recognized for our relationship to beauty and our ability to generate concepts as complex as secularism. (Saragosse; Bonos, 2016, p. 10, our translation)

Concerning the media scenario in France, “there is a clear link between how Islamophobia is handled in politics and how the media prepares public opinion for the implementation of future anti-Muslim regulations” (Najib, 2023, p. 249). Accordingly, in the last decade, French media in general has been intensely concerned with the matter of press freedom (Dawes, 2021, p. 180), especially in face of the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015.

Charlie Hebdo is a weekly posted magazine, which depicts satires about politics and often portrays images of *Allah* and the prophet, as well as Islamophobic cartoons. In January 2015, two men attacked its office, in a movement that rapidly produced “[...] an intensive spectacle of identification and disidentification, of ideological differentiation and moral antagonism, of political reaction and repression” (Titley, 2017, p. 01).

In fact, it deepened the mainstream understanding in the country’s media and public discourses of Muslims as threats and ‘Others’, despite their French nationality or identity

(Połowska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie, 2016, p. 580; Mondon and Winter, 2017, p. 31). Thus, the attack ended up generating an Islamophobic response in European nations, which saw the event as a defiance of Western ideologies and principles and perceived Muslims as the ones to blame (Freedman, 2017, p. 209).

The problem of Islamophobia in France is not only social but also political (Bayrakli; Hafez, 2023, p. 223). The exclusion of ‘race’ from the Constitution, for example, has resulted in a peak of prejudice, as a result of a dialogue vacuum (Dawes, 2021, p. 180-181). The obsession with the veil also appears as a central limitation on public discussion of Islam and Islamophobia. This trend also meets with the rise of far-right movements that condemn Islam and Muslims, as seen in 2015 (Esteves, 2016, p. 156) and reinforced in 2022 (Najib, 2023, p. 234).

Moreover, on foreign policy, France has had different approaches towards Tunisia in its history. During the street protests that led to the Revolution, former French president Sarkozy supported Ben Ali until the day of his ousting, followed by silence in his comments on Tunisian affairs (Krüger, 2017, p. 107). Hollande, Sarkozy’s successor, changed this approach, siding with *Ennahda* and stressing the links between Islam and democracy (Krüger, 2017, p. 112; Krüger; Stahl, 2018). Finally, Macron, president since 2017, reinforced a policy of persecuting “radical Islam”, which ultimately affected the lives of Muslims in France (Najib, 2023, p. 234).

Thus, discussing the discursive construction of *Ennahda* in France 24 is relevant to highlight the structural prejudice against Muslims and the interests of a country that had a colonial past with Tunisia and reverberates a secular and modern foreign policy. Comparatively, despite BBC’s scandals, both outlets cherish deep appreciation and trust from international audiences. If we aim to understand how the *Ennahda* Movement appeared to Western spectators, analyzing BBC’s and F24’s coverage helps us grasp how technologically and discursively dominant outlets constructed its image.

In conclusion, the idea of flows and counterflows of news should be put in context and argued with nuance. BBC and F24, due to their technological development and international range, benefit from their position as structured and mainstream media, while endorsing their countries’ foreign policy to enjoy more credibility. This, however, is not the scenario encountered by many international outlets, whose positions are usually challenging the hegemony of Western media, in an international system of informational competition.

4.1.2 Defying hegemony

The Western dominance in global media is currently being contested by countries such as China and India, which seek to counterflow the media circulation coming from the West (Thussu, 2018a, p. 1; Mutsvaio, 2021). This structural challenge has also surfaced in the Brazilian and Russian media landscape, especially facing their international propelling due to the BRICS (de Albuquerque; Lycarião, 2018, p. 2874; Thussu, 2021, p. 280; Thussu, 2022, p. 1588). Considering Brazil and Russia's position on this matter, we address both as objects of analysis for our current inquiries.

In Brazil, this opportunity, however, faces the challenges of a turbulent environment and a complicated history between the Brazilian government and the media. The conditions of production of news in Brazil are marked by an oligopolist structure, championed by its main player, the Grupo Globo (Paulino; Guazina, 2021, p. 75). From Grupo Globo, founded in 1925, the most influential digital journalist enterprise was the website G1, launched in 2006 and upgraded in 2008, after hitting the mark of 55 million users per month (Dos Santos, 2022). It is among the most accessed websites in Brazil (Thussu, 2021, p. 283) and profoundly impacts public opinion in the country.

Internationally known for its telenovelas, Grupo Globo has faced difficulties from the rise of streaming and social media in its media monopoly ecosystem. The current scenario for Globo is different from the one described by Rêgo and La Pastina (2007), in which Brazilian telenovelas would cherish global partnerships for international broadcasting. The defiance imposed by Netflix and other streaming platforms has deemed the telenovelas world range, hiding this content in crowded catalogs. Social media, similarly, has offered a public space for non-mainstream sources, which has become appealing after the credibility crisis suffered by Brazilian traditional media in the 21st Century.

Despite its undefeated hegemonic past in news production, especially due to its "*Padrão Globo de Qualidade*" (Globo Standard of Quality) (Meimaridis, 2024, p. 11), the network has also been facing difficulties in overcoming this credibility crisis in the Brazilian media ecosystem. Two of the main causes of this legitimacy deficit are rooted in the media's involvement with President Dilma Rousseff's controversial impeachment in 2016 (Dijk, 2017, p. 226) and anti-media Bolsonaroist discourses (Ortellado; Ribeiro, 2018, p. 3).

Accused of a crime of responsibility, Dilma Rousseff, a center-left politician, endured her impeachment at a moment when traditional media explicitly abused its bias to fuel discontent around her government (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 41). Especially among the left, a mistrust sentiment was fuelled towards news outlets, since it was evident that "there was a

consensus among the most prominent Brazilian journalistic organizations concerning the importance of ousting Rousseff” (Pimentel; Marques, 2021, p. 298).

On the right-wing side in Brazil, known for its conservative position, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, Brazilian president from 2019 to 2022, during his campaign, regularly attacked mainstream media and Grupo Globo for its “liberal” positions (Barbosa; Machado; Miranda, 2021, p. 8). At the same time, his government financed part of the mainstream media, namely Rede TV!, Record, and SBT, channels that championed his discourse and supported his policies (Fernandes; Presser, 2021, p. 158). This strategy created mixed feelings towards traditional media and hatred concerning Globo on the right, while the left maintained its opposition towards mainstream outlets.

Grupo Globo, through its editorial guidelines, stresses its identity as a “[...] non-partisan, secular, sensitive to the need to be plural in newsrooms and the news, supporter of democracy and freedom of expression” (Christofoletti; Becker, 2021, p. 145-146, our translation) media outlet. In their recent study, however, Milhorange and Singer (2018, p. 10) found that part of the Brazilian public discontent with Grupo Globo is due to the premise of impartiality, which never lives up to reality. The partiality claims are damaging to media worldwide and are fuelled by the outlets' insistence on impartiality.

On this topic, according to Paulino and Guazina (2021, p. 76), Grupo Globo also has to deal with a public opinion aligned with Catholicism and evangelical Christianity conservatism, usually belonging to a Bolsonarist narrative, often influencing news production and being responsible for Islamophobic acts in the country (Barbosa, 2022, p. 27). Therefore, claiming impossible impartiality and suffering from a shortage of trust from the right and left, the outlet still has to respond to an audience forged within a hegemonic religious view. Moreover, some critics of the media outlet often highlight its reliance on international news agencies and frames for their news (Teixeira, 2021, p. 15), making it an interesting object of analysis, considering BRICS's disruptive attempts into news flow.

The Brazilian Christian upbringing, its dependence on Western news outlets, and its alliance with supposedly Eastern countries justify G1’s choice as an analytical object on Islam. Considering that Portuguese is spoken by over 260 million people worldwide, it is essential to analyze the role of language in framing news about *Ennahda*. From Portuguese G1, French France 24, and the English version of the other outlets, it is possible to draw comparisons between coverages and deepen the analysis further.

Finally, in the context of the BRICS challenge and Grupo Globo's reliance on international news, it is important to profoundly assess if G1 acted as a discursive counterflow

outlet during the *Ennahda* government in Tunisia. Similarly, the Russian case is another interesting study case, due to its also complex relationship between the public, politicians, and the media. Therefore, we question the Russian position in BRICS's defiance of the international flows of media from the perspective of a state agency, TASS. The Russian media ecosystem has been thoroughly studied and provides us with questions on matters such as political influence, the Middle Eastern Russian agenda, and the role of the state in promoting its voice globally.

Media Studies concerning Russia have divided its recent history according to three major changes: the instability of the USSR dissolution in the 90s, the following stabilization, and the transformation after the development of the internet (Lehtisaari; Miazhevich, 2019, p. 1). Throughout these periods, authors sought to bridge the gap between political influence and the shortage of press freedom. Overall, the Russian media ecosystem is usually described “[...] as semi-authoritarian or authoritarian” (Lehtisaari, 2015, p. 3), where “[...] market forces, state ownership, power struggles between actors in different sectors, obstacles to media freedom and challenges within the media” (Lehtisaari, 2015, p. 1) occur.

Reaffirming Ranji's (2021) position, these authoritarian/market binaries used to measure press freedom fail to grasp the complexity of state/market-media relationships. Thus, authors, such as Oates (2016, p. 417) and Vartanova (2019, p. 12) reinforce the many challenges endured by Russian journalists, surpassing the Orientalist state centrism in Media Studies. Beyond the worldwide internet phenomenon as a new source of audience competition, traditional Russian media has also faced business and financial pressures, from its historically fresh news ecosystem, safety issues, and legal and administrative hindrances (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 409-412).

The state component, especially under Putin's administration, is one of the many challenges the “[...] handcuffed but free [...]” (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018, p. 422) Russian news system experiences. Still, as described by Vartanova and Smirnov (2010, p. 25) and Zakem *et al.* (2018, p. v), the increasing ownership of the media apparatus by the Russian state is, indeed, one topic to be vigilant about, due to, its increasingly uncritical depiction of Russian foreign policies, especially regarding the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Heywood, 2015, p. 209; Strovsky; Schleifer, 2020, p. 22) and Putin's attempts to control the country's international image in Russian global communication platforms.

One example can be seen regarding Russia's involvement in the Civil War in Syria. Described as “[...] a chessboard whose players and movers were the superpowers, primarily the U.S.A. and Russia, and regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran”

(Zisser, 2017, p. 555), the Civil War against Bashar al-Assad began after protests inspired by the Tunisian Revolution and were fueled by foreign actors into a humanitarian catastrophe. In fact, for Russia, it was an exercise of power, nationally endorsed by news outlets (Strovsky; Schleifer, 2020, p. 9).

Despite not being driven only by its relation to the West, Russia's interest in the MENA region, especially after the Revolutions from 2011, gained new contours in the setting for the 2014 annexation of Crimea, which deeply affected EU-Russia relations (Alpher, 2014, p. 3). From Russia's international isolation and economic consequences from its invasion, the Kremlin's role in the MENA region was an opportunity to reinforce Russian discourse as a superpower, while countering the political and economic constraints propelled by Western actors (Kozhanov, 2018, p. 28-29).

Although limited, as explained by Wasser (2019), the Russian role in the Middle East and North Africa since 2012 has been central to its foreign policy and, therefore, deeply impacted its news ecosystem, which often sided with official narratives on the matter. In the case of Tunisia, Russia's ruling party signed a cooperation agreement with *Nidaa Tounes* in 2017, stressing the importance of dialogue and cultural exchange between the parties (Sputnik, 2017).

Furthermore, its politics in the region were also inflamed by a desire to counter national separatists and international militant groups, who gathered facing the dismantling of traditions of Islam in Russia (Igor; Elena, 2020, p. 32). This defiance from separatist groups was met with high notes of Islamophobia and government repression. As Miri and Vezvaei (2021, p. 259) explain, the case of Islamophobia in Russia shows the complexity of the term in different national contexts.

As they discuss, in Russia, Islamophobia has not always been connected to immigration or xenophobia but was seen especially through the lens of colonialism in their regional presence. In other words, it existed according to the state's desire to accommodate one culture as an "Other" or as an "Us". Accordingly, coverage of the topic is close to non-existent in the country's media, as well as in academic research. Overall, like in France, Russia faces difficulties in opening the public discussion on Islamophobia, due to its government's actions (Miri; Vezvaei, 2021, p. 259).

Recently, the matter has gained new tones with the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces. Bayrakli and Hafez (2023, p. 222) and Sopa (2023, p. 482) explain how the event generated a conservative response countrywide, where disagreements with the state would endure prosecution and silencing. Militarism and security schizophrenia were also

perceivable, as mosques were being raided by the police (Sopa, 2023, p. 484) and monitored in Tatarstan, one of Russia's republics highly influenced by separatist groups, as the tension overall enlarged. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, therefore, inflated an ongoing country's policy of monitoring and pressuring specific regions within its territory.

Throughout all these periods and within the complex Russian news ecosystem, one actor was responsible for propelling Russian views on national and international matters. Created in 1904, the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency (SPTA) evolved with Russian history, from the fall of the czar to the fall of the Soviet Union (TASS, [s.d.]; Vartanova; Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 1847). Only in 1925, did it become the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), a highly praised informational spine for the Soviet media system and international presence.

In the years after the Soviet Union's dissolution, the agency was rebranded as ITAR-TASS and continued to receive funding and aid from the Russian government, earning its post as one of the top news agencies in Russia (Vartanova; Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 1848). However, with the development of technology and the internet, the ITAR-TASS commenced a quick descent towards obsolescence. In 2012, its team was short-staffed, its range was small, and its use of technology lacked the dynamism required in the international news market competition (Vartanova; Vyrkovsky, 2020, p. 1849).

Finally, in 2014, it took a step towards rebranding and technological evolution, changing its name back to TASS and committing "[...] to become a symbol of professionalism, enthusiasm, readiness of its team for personal development and the agency's bid to preserve and develop its best traditions" (TASS, [s.d.]). The evolution embraced a staff and range enlargement while inclining toward technological development to regain the international status it once had. By 2018, it was the Russian most cited news agency in the world, showing its power, including over Western agencies.

Interestingly, despite its state ownership, Vartanova and Vyrkovsky (2020, p. 1851) found it difficult to assess the state-TASS relationship. According to their interviewees, TASS's role in Russian policies is a public one, serving Russian people and assuring their position in the news. Its reliance on the state, however, seems to confirm Putin's administration criticism, especially concerning his use of the media to harvest public support. Regardless, TASS has also to deal with the challenges of an evolving media landscape and competition, while playing the Russian version of national and international news.

As it is perceivable, differently from the other objects of analysis for this work, TASS is an English news agency, adding another layer to the current study. While the previously

selected outlets produce news for the public, TASS, as an agency, processes it to a different audience, namely news outlets, serving as a quoting source. This choice was designed to dialogue with both the role of BRICS in international news flows and counterflows and with TASS's unique position as a strong source for multiple international actors. It is relevant to address that its orientation as an agency is profoundly considered in the analytical sections, still encompassing our goal to see the production of news to Western audiences, even if these are news vehicles.

To conclude, if the BRICS, here represented by the Brazilian G1 and the Russian TASS, actually oppose the traditional Western international news flow discourse about the *Ennahda* movement is an important research question for this study's analytical section. Regardless, their coverages have been highly praised in academia for their global range and their national role regarding political elites and internal conflicts, keeping in mind the propositions from the Cascade Model. During the Tunisian *Thawra*, however, the media world system was dominated by news outlets outside of the BRICS defiance, notably the Qatari *Al Jazeera* English and the Saudi *Al Arabiya* English, the anglophone branches of *Al Jazeera* (AJ) and *Al Arabiya* (AA).

4.1.3 The Gulf media landscape

The Gulf media landscape has recently emerged as an interesting focal point in the challenge to Western domination over international news flow. Often, it is depicted simplistically as an authoritarian news ecosystem, where government and media are one and journalists have no agency. However, according to Ranji (2021, p. 1140), more than this Orientalist view is needed to comprehend the cascade relationship between government, elites, the public, international forces, and news outlets. Thus, in order to understand the role of *Al Jazeera* English and *Al Arabiya* English nationally and internationally, we must keep in mind this traditional academic urge to simplify their role.

Launched in 2006, *Al Jazeera* English was the first anglophone news channel located in the Middle East (Figenschou, 2014, p. 8). It was inaugurated in an environment, in which the media was often seen as a governmental extension aligned with its foreign policy (Figenschou, 2014, p. 9; Sadig, 2019). Moreover, the outlet promoted an international *ethos*, similar to the one of *Al Jazeera* Arabic, in which its position would be seen as defiant to this media structure in the Middle East (Bebawi, 2016, p. 70). Generally, it became known as a disruptor of authoritarianism and one of the few free media outlets in the region.

For Qatar, AJE was seen as an opportunity to express its modernizing agenda by commentators, alongside the 2022 FIFA World Cup for example (Figenschou, 2014, p. 23, Cherribi, 2017, p. 4). That is why authorities regularly stress *Al Jazeera's* independent agenda concerning the government, reinforcing its “modern” free press strategy. However, the channel, in its Arabic or English format, often receives criticism due to three related points: its finances, the ‘Voice of the Voiceless’ dilemma, and AJ’s alignment with Qatari foreign policy.

Concerning its finances, the controversy began with the initial loan from the Qatari government, which was considered a political influence on AJ’s news agenda (Figenschou, 2014, p. 27). This point is also propelled by the network’s constant subsidies and sponsorship from Qatari national companies, such as Qatar Airways, Qatar Gas, and Qatar Petroleum (Figenschou, 2014, p. 40,41). Therefore, commentators reiterate the impossibility of a free press with constant national support, almost meeting a dependency.

Interestingly, the channel’s connection with Islam is often depicted as an example of government influence in the outlet. As controversially stated by Fandy (2007, p. 8), “If one were tempted to do a comparative ideology study of Al-Jazeera and its Islamic hue, the most similar channel in the West would be the American Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), not the BBC, and not CNN for sure”. According to our research on religion and media, we emphatically reject this idea, which entails binaries such as secular and religious, as a way to frame freedom or the complexity of *Al Jazeera's* ideology. Therefore, we must look to other examples of criticism towards the outlet that are not based on the simplification of the relationship between religion and news.

Beyond its financial status, *Al Jazeera* also claims a position as the ‘Voice of the Voiceless’, which often receives dubiety. Despite advocating a special spotlight as the voice of the Global South and the population on the streets (see AJ's influential role in the *Thawra* in Cherribi, 2017), it still displays a majority of hegemonic voices as representatives of the voiceless. “The subaltern is spoken for and represented by male, independent elites, such as oppositional politicians, representatives from international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media or cultural personalities, analysts, academics and channel staff” (Figenschou, 2014, p. 117). In addition, critics have described AJ’s agenda as occasionally close-tied with US interests in the region (Zayani, 2005, p. 10).

The overall AJ’s position on this matter is controversial, especially, considering the idea that it would serve to create a space for opposition and resistance in the “Arab world” (Zayani, 2005, p. 02). Thus, its use of elite sources and display of them create a dissonance between what is usually expected from its coverages and the actual content it produces. This

highlights the difficulty of in fact being the ‘Voice of the Voiceless’. One example of this trend happened during the protests against Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, while the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen were widely explored (Abdul-Nabi, 2022, p. 26).

This preference to hide Bahraini and Saudi discontent showcased not necessarily the government’s influence in the outlet but exposed its alignment with Qatari foreign policy. In 2014, for example, when the connections between Bahrain and Qatar began to erode, *Al Jazeera* shifted its position, reframing its coverage of political opposition in its neighboring country (Abdul-Nabi, 2022, p. 319). Thus, the third controversy relates to AJ’s reluctant stance on the Qatari government's disapproval, while highlighting other countries’ oppositional forces.

The news outlet often focuses on other regional countries’ condemnations and turns a blind eye to Qatar polemics (Figenschou, 2014, p. 41). This issue resulted in a diplomatic crisis in 2017 after the vehicle suffered years of constant attacks from other Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain (Ajaoud; Elmasry, 2020, p. 227). The countries

[...] accused Qatar of assisting Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Gaza, and Islamist fighters in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. They also accused Qatar of supporting terrorist groups and having an overly close relation with Iran, the regional rival of Saudi Arabia, and of using Qatar’s national network *Al Jazeera* to foment protest, especially during the Arab Spring in 2011 (Zweiri; Rahman; Kamal, 2021, p. 01)

The tensions escalated in a way that economic and political ties were broken between the three countries and Qatar. In addition, among their list to cease the blockage, the countries exhorted for the closure of *Al Jazeera*.

Therefore, at the center of this tension was *Al Jazeera* and Qatar’s support of ideologically portrayed Political Islam parties (Ajaoud; Elmasry, 2020, p. 228). Contrary to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Qatar sought to reinforce its relations with Islamic political movements, in a manner to reiterate its intellectual roots (Zaier; Völk, 2017, p. 67). This was seen, for example, in Qatari diplomatic support to *Ennahda*’s government in Tunisia. On the side of *Al Jazeera*, Cherribi (2017, p. 250) addresses the ways the outlet endorsed Political Islam in the region:

Al Jazeera’s inclusive approach to all aspects of political Islam, from radical to moderate to conservative, has resulted in five major achievements: (1) promoting political Islam as a mainstream political philosophy instead of reducing it to a narrow *jihadist* ideology; (2) gaining the trust of all major political Islamist actors, who see *Al Jazeera* as an important ally; (3) overrepresenting opposition leaders in Arab countries, especially advocates of political Islam, on many of *Al Jazeera*’s talk shows; (4) shifting the political focus onto the controversies between political Islam and secularism and between *Sunnis* and *Shias* (Cherribi, 2017, p. 250).

As explained by Abunajela and Jebril (2020, p. 135), *Al Jazeera*'s representations of the Muslim Brotherhood were highly controversial for regional and international actors. Consequently, it began to harvest disapproval for siding with parties connected with the discursive tradition of Political Islam. On this matter, the coverage aligned with the Qatari government's foreign policy, showing another reason for international suspicion. However, we must stress that this was mainly the case for the Arabic branch of *Al Jazeera*, following the study from Abunajela and Jebril (2020). Thus, our analysis inquired attentively to this matter, when considering its English branch.

The differences between *Al Jazeera* English and *Al Jazeera* Arabic (AJA) are often reinforced by academic studies. In Satti (2020, p. 5), the author claimed that AJE focused more on the 2017 Gulf crisis than its Arabic counterpart, for example. Similarly, AlSamirin (2018, p. 37) argued that AJA displayed more critical news frames, especially regarding violence in the Middle East and North Africa, than AJE. Overall, the scenario points to the anglophone version of *Al Jazeera* enjoying its Western audience focus to reinforce Qatari's foreign policy, which could or not relate to government interference.

Thus, considering AJE and Qatar's relevance to the theme, the outlet was selected for analysis, seeking the understanding of this position as a counterflow news vehicle (Thussu, 2018b). In addition, *Al Jazeera*'s funding, its alleged ties with the government and the controversies around them, make AJE an interesting and compelling study case. Despite *Al Jazeera*'s pioneering presence in the region and in the world, other countries began to found and fund their own news enterprises. In 2003, this was the case of *Al Arabiya*, which was presented as a "modern" pro-US Saudi version of AJ (Lynch, 2005, p. 38).

Launched precisely before the invasion of Iraq, *Al Arabiya* (AA) ended up following a regular pattern in media takeoffs. Often, a new outlet is founded before a shocking period and takes advantage of its position in time and space to create dense coverage on the topic. This was the case for CNN in the Gulf War and *Al Jazeera* Arabic in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example. Thus, *Al Arabiya*, which was launched to counter *Al Jazeera*'s influence in the region (Ajaoud and Elmasry, 2020, p. 230), profited from its position to claim its spot in the Middle Eastern news ecosystem (Zayani; Ayish, 2006, p. 482). In addition, the network's English version was inaugurated in 2007, aimed at the expansion of its international role.

Although only a few academic endeavors have been dedicated to the platform (Alhendyani, 2019, p. 52), *Al Arabiya*, in its English or Arabic format, is regularly compared

to *Al Jazeera*. This is not a trend solely based on academic comparisons, but the Saudi outlet has made efforts to differentiate itself from other Arab-majority countries' media. Therefore, it is common for authors to highlight how it has “[...] pitched itself as a neutral channel that cares for Arab interests and stays away from pursuing ambiguous agendas and other parties' interests” (Zayani; Ayish, 2006, p. 483) or as “[...] exhibiting more professionalism than typical government-owned, highly censored Arab news outlets” (Ajaoud; Elmasry, 2020, p. 230).

In studies, the trend could be more conclusive if authors questioned the discourse from both *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* depending on the topic. For El-Nawawy and Strong (2012, p. 6), in the context of the essentialized “Arab Spring”, AA appeared as more moderate than AJ, which endeavored a revolutionary street-support view against the regimes in the region. However, during the 2017 Gulf crisis, Kharbach's (2020, p. 461) study focused on AJE and AAE proved that the first was less biased than the latter in their coverage of the political tensions in the region. This, on the other hand, highlights the difficulty of assessing bias and its complexity as a research topic.

Moreover, other studies continued to stress the different approaches from AA and AJ. Elmasry *et al.* (2013, p. 764), regarding a period in Israel's apartheid against Palestinians, described, for example, how “*Al-Arabiya* was negative toward Hamas, and positive toward Egypt, the USA, and the United Nations. *Al-Jazeera*'s direction of coverage was the opposite, positive toward Hamas and critical of Egypt, the USA and the United Nations.”. Generally, the academic tendency is to portray both networks as aligned with their countries' strategies, and regional and foreign policies (Ajaoud; Elmasry, 2020, p. 238)

Overall, the studies so far have stressed how connected with the Saudi position *Al Arabiya* is. Behraves (2014, p. 346) argues about how the outlet was designed in a way to spread the Saudi version of regional and international events, pursuing an agenda closer to the government. As the author claims, regionally, the network's intentions were “[...] not only to fit but also to further a Saudi-friendly order in the Arab world, in the face of contending narratives promulgated by Riyadh's regional rivals, not least Tehran and Doha” (Behraves, 2014, p. 346).

The reasoning behind this correlation between the Saudi government and *Al Arabiya* frequently stems from its funding, similar to *Al Jazeera*'s case, and the pressure it has occasionally suffered from politicians. As described by Cochrane (2007, p. 05), the network funding has followed the international pattern of economic monopoly of news production, which results in the media's control by the hands of a few. In the Saudi case, this is reflected

in its state sponsorship (Al-Rawi, 2017, p. 29; Pukl, 2024, p. 24). More clearly than the *Al Jazeera* case, *Al Arabiya* has fallen into a myriad of controversies regarding political involvement in its coverage production.

Regarding this topic, El-Nawawy and Strong (2012, p. 7-8) described how in 2007 a series on the Saudi King was canceled after some negative feelings among the royal family or in 2010 the network suffered backlash after a commentator portrayed the image of Wahhabism as connected to terrorism. Incidental lay-offs and program cancellations have become common in the *Al Arabiya* workplace, which has extensively been connected to the Saudi royal family's interference in the channel.

On the matter of Political Islam, this alignment trend persisted. As described by Behraves (2014, p. 346) and Al-Rawi (2017, p. 29), *Al Arabiya*'s coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt highlights its home country's engagement with Political Islam groups and the general perception of this discursive tradition as a disruptor of the status quo. In the network, for example, the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi, often seen as a military coup, was seen as a second revolution (Behraves, 2014, p. 346). Thus, the network constructed an image of revolutionary forces as a threat to peace and stability, ensuring Saudi Arabia's major regional position.

Finally, despite few studies focusing solely on *Al Arabiya* and its English-based news outlet, many conclusions can be drawn when analyzing the role of national, regional and international forces in the condition of production of its coverage. In fact, in a Cascade Model analysis, followed by a critical and anti-Orientalist view from Ranji's (2021) conclusion, the media landscape in the Gulf is complex and compelling. Indeed, *Al Arabiya* English and *Al Jazeera* English are its biggest players, justifying their selection for this study.

In conclusion of this chapter, the selection endeared by the present study highlights how each outlet presents attempts to be seen as the voice of their country. Additionally, the networks strive from different languages, perspectives and positions relating to local elites, national and international discursive formations, funding, positions in the news flow, themes about Islam, and occasionally Islamophobia.

Each of them had major events that disrupted their coverage: Brexit, the Charlie Hebdo attack, Russian invasions, Brazilian ideological polarity, and the Gulf diplomatic crisis. These events have stressed the importance of media and the need to understand it with clarity and profoundness. Considering each object's background and existence, the present chapter was written to present a context to the analysis, highlighting what are the central questions regarding the chosen outlets.

5 “BUILDING A THEOCRATIC STATE”: THE 2013 POLITICAL TENSIONS

Figure 03 - *Place du Martyr Mohamed Brahmi* (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

Since Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation, the matter of martyrdom in Tunisia has gained new shades in the country’s political discourse (Buckner; Khatib, 2014; Lachenal, 2021). Our analysis begins in a period when the opposition extensively maneuvered the martyr discourse to attack the *Troika* government led by the *Ennahda* Movement. Avoiding the initial reactions to the party’s victory in the 2011 elections, we chose to highlight its most intense challenge in government, when two members of its opposition were killed. On 6 February 2013, Chokri Belaid was shot in front of his house, and, on 25 July 2013, Mohamed Brahmi suffered from the same fate. The *Place du Martyr Mohamed Brahmi* in Tunis marks these moments’ intensity and stresses the importance of considering them.

In addition, international commentators were deeply worried about the “Arab Spring” countries. Libya and Syria were in an intense civil war. Egypt’s elected Muslim Brotherhood-inclined government endured constant criticism from Egyptians and international actors. Whereas expectations around the revolutions were dropping, Tunisia appeared as a solid case to be alert about, where chances of democratic success were still high. This was marking the intensification of a civilizing narrative, in which, especially, the West had to take the reins of the Tunisian transition and guarantee its success, as asserted by Borg (2016, p. 223).

Therefore, all these elements, along with the intensification of militancy by some Salafi branches, compose the media stage for this period. In the present chapter, we are going to address each news piece regarding its context of production and within a subsection representative of its news outlet. Finally, we will conclude with the correlation between each of our objects of analysis, keeping in mind their discursive-ideological formations and the effects of meaning around the *Ennahda* Movement's role in the Tunisian transition.

5.1 France 24

In the coverage of France 24, the news outlet concentrated on the tension provoked by both political assassinations. Beyond gathering an audience only due to the events' shocking details, F24 in its discourses attempted to focus on the socio-political consequences of the crimes. From this topic, we have analyzed four pieces, selected due to their relevance, from February to August 2013. The texts are in French and were, thus, analyzed in that language, but for the writing of the present work, we opted to translate its quotes into English, to maintain a pattern in the analysis.

The first news piece is titled “Assassination of Chokri Belaid: ‘They wanted to silence him’” (Hamza, 2013, our translation¹²) and it was published on the day the politician was murdered in front of his house. In the news article, one of the most interesting facts is its reliance on official sources to establish objectivity in its claims. Despite describing it as an unprecedented event, the article relies on Adel Fekih, Tunisia's ambassador to France, as a reassuring figure, constructing the assassination as abnormal in Tunisia.

“‘Tunisians have not been used to this [...] This is an isolated case’[...]” (Hamza, 2013, our translation¹³) are markers that differentiate Tunisia from other countries. Due to this, we hypothesize that not only was F24, while quoting him, trying to assure the audiences of the ongoing status of the democratic transition but was attempting to distinguish it from the unfolding violent processes in the countries part of the Westernly named Arab Spring. Concretely, while the ambassador refused to talk about destabilization in Tunisia's transition, F24 produced this meaning of the event as an exception to the successful Arab Spring case.

Furthermore, the Tunisian political class is also represented as a news source, especially considering the introductory statement that the assassination “[...]has sent unprecedented shockwaves through the Tunisian political class” (Hamza, 2013, our

¹² In the original: “*Assassinat de Chokri Belaïd : ‘Ils ont voulu le faire taire’*”.

¹³ In the original: “*Les Tunisiens n'ont pas été habitués à cela [...] C'est un cas isolé*”.

translation¹⁴). Fayçal Nacer, *Ennahda*'s head of communications, appears as a figure to finally claim that the crime was motivated by Belaid's ideology, declaring it as a political act, based on ideology in his quotes: “[...] We don't wish Tunisians to die for their ideas [...]” (Hamza, 2013, our translation¹⁵). Additionally, his call for unity emphasizes *Ennahda*'s image as a party mourning the event.

The third source that composes the F24 discourse in the news segment is Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a member of the *Ennahda* party, whose credentials are not stated in the piece. His discourse directly associates with the *Thawra* interdiscourse, connecting the assassination and Revolution: “[He] immediately condemned this ‘political assassination and the assassination of the Tunisian revolution. By killing him, they wanted to silence him,’ [...]” (Hamza, 2013, our translation¹⁶). As seen, his discourse also stresses the narrative of the political assassination, highlighting the political value of the crime.

The news piece concludes with a concise political profile of Chokri Belaid, briefly mentioning him as a lawyer, and focusing on his defiance posture against *Ennahda*. He is described as “[...] unsparing in his criticism of the Islamist party in power. The Popular Front, a left-wing coalition of which he was one of the leaders, is one of the main political opponents of the *Ennahda*-dominated government” (Hamza, 2013, our translation¹⁷). This particular use of the word “*dominé*” and the fact that he “*ne ménageait pas ses critiques contre le parti islamiste au pouvoir*” (Hamza, 2013) produces a unique effect of meaning.

Despite favoring a position towards the country's stability, F24's discourse broadly launches apprehension towards the *Ennahda* Movement. The use of “*Ils ont*” in French marks an impersonalization of the subject in the title¹⁸, aligned with the neglect to mark Jebali as a member of *Ennahda* and with the mentioning of Belaid's critical voice towards the party, generates suspicion around its involvement in the crime. In this sense, overall, the news piece constructs the assassination as an exception in Tunisia, which would not change its democratic course, while producing fear of its governing party's involvement in the crime.

The second news piece from F24 is titled: “In Tunisia, laics and Islamists seek a solution to the political crisis” (En Tunisie [...], 2013, our translation¹⁹). In general, the

¹⁴ In the original: “*provoque une onde de choc sans précédent au sein de la classe politique tunisienne*”.

¹⁵ In the original: “*On ne souhaite à aucun Tunisien de mourir pour ses idées*”.

¹⁶ In the original: “*a immédiatement condamné cet ‘assassinat politique et l’assassinat de la révolution tunisienne. En le tuant, ils ont voulu le faire taire*”.

¹⁷ In the original: “*ne ménageait pas ses critiques contre le parti islamiste au pouvoir: Le Front populaire, coalition de gauche dont il était l’un des leaders, est l’un des principaux adversaires politiques du gouvernement dominé par Ennahda*”.

¹⁸ In our translation, we opted to maintain the use of “They”, another possibility was to translate as: “He was wanted silent”.

¹⁹ In the original: “*En Tunisie, laïques et islamistes cherchent une solution à la crise politique*”.

informational piece published after the assassination of Brahmi departs from the previous exceptionality of the event, claiming the context as a political crisis in the country. This change highlights the possibility of countering the *Troika*, without declaring the defeat of the *Thawra* within Tunisia, especially considering its use of protesters as sources for calling for the government's resignation.

The use of the protests by France 24 comes from a context in which the street gained a political tone in Tunisia. Thus, when positioning that “The initiative comes as thousands of demonstrators called for the resignation of the government led by Islamist *Ennahda* on Saturday during the opponent's funeral.” (En Tunisie [...], 2013, our translation²⁰), the outlet is creating a meaning based on the local population. Besides the use of protesters to claim the liveliness of the public voice in Tunisia, especially against *Ennahda*, it is important to consider which initiative is being mentioned by the journalist and, particularly, by whom it has been proposed.

Despite claiming in the title an alliance between the laics and the Islamists to search for a solution, the agents of the news are the “[...] laic allied with the Islamists in power in Tunisia” (En Tunisie [...], 2013, our translation²¹). Despite initially being unnamed, in the second to last paragraph they are mentioned as the Congress for the Republic and the *Ettakatol* Party, enforcing that the idea was not to focus on their compromise and the *Troika*'s unity but to highlight its differences, between laic and Islamist, potentializing the idea that the uncompromising segment of the government was the *Ennahda* party.

Combining both the laic parties' appeal for unity and broadening of the political base and the construction of the Tunisian scenario as a political crisis, for which *Ennahda* is not interested in finding a solution, F24 maintains its focus on the political consequences, rather than only on the assassinations, changing exclusively their meaning around the “Islamists”. Differently from the previous news piece's suspicious meaning, this particular text constructs the party as an obstinate setback to the solution of the political crisis in the country.

This slight shift, therefore, follows the increase in street protests against *Ennahda* and the international fear produced by the assassinations, which could lead to the failure of the Arab Spring's successful case. Consequently, this posture would reach its peak after the party's call for protests in its favor, on the 4th of August. The article “Massive demonstration in Tunis at the call of *Ennahda* Islamists”(Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²²)

²⁰ In the original: “L'initiative survient alors que des milliers de manifestants ont appelé à la démission du gouvernement dirigé par les islamistes d'Ennahda samedi lors des funérailles de l'opposant.”.

²¹ In the original: “alliés laïques des islamistes au pouvoir en Tunisie”.

²² In the original: “Manifestation massive à Tunis à l'appel des islamistes d'Ennahda”.

dialogues with the previous informational pieces, advancing a meaning characterizing Tunisia as the stage for a fight between laic and Islamists, boosting the suspicion on *Ennahda*.

At the backbone of this quarrel is the memory of the Revolution, which appears in different contexts throughout the news piece, and the matter of legitimacy. First, it compares the protests in favor of *Ennahda* with the *Thawra*, followed by a quote from Ghannouchi, claiming that the Tunisian Revolution was a candle lighting up the world, while the opposition seeks to try “[...] to extinguish it by organizing a coup d'état” (Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²³). Discursively, this relates directly to the conditions of production, marked by the coup suffered by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood government in the month before.

For the opposition, the matter is not shown as a dispute over the Revolution, but rather a loss of legitimacy by the *Troika* government. The reasoning for that is unmentioned, which analytically gives to the reader the power of meaning construction behind it. In other words, it shows the strength of the implicit discourse in the text that is hidden within the other passages. Through the examination of the text, three connected connotations are possible to be constructed regarding the opposition critiques towards the government: *Ennahda* as stealing the Revolution and the streets, *Ennahda* as being double-standard, and *Ennahda* as not countering the terrorist threat.

Initially, the idea of Islamists “robbing” the streets from the people is a relatively broad interdiscourse. In ‘The Square’ (2013), this was brought to the cinema, as the documentary about the Egyptian Revolution shows an opportunist Muslim Brotherhood, who joined the protests at the last minute and stole the government from the people. This discursive construction appears in the news with the idea of Ghannouchi mentioning the *Thawra*, while his party strategically “[...] were planning a ‘a march of a million’ people” (Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²⁴). Thus, the street appears as a concept being captured by the “Islamists” to guarantee their power.

Additionally, the *Nahdawi* double standard of calling for national unity, while marching against its opposition appears fueling its dissidents’ discourses. The use of the Prime Minister, Ali Larayedh²⁵, direct discourse confirms this trend: “‘Tunisia needs national unity [...] I call for calm so that the army and security forces can fight terrorism and do not

²³ In the original: “*veut essayer de l'éteindre en organisant un coup d'État*”.

²⁴ In the original: “*prévoient ‘une marche d'un million’ de personnes*”.

²⁵ The Prime Minister was the substitute of Hamadi Jebali, as the position continued to remain with the *Ennahda* Movement.

disperse their efforts” (Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²⁶). This posture of calling for joint action while preparing a demonstration of a million is contradictory, which can appear as a justification for the claim that “The main opposition groups refused to participate in talks [...] to end the political crisis” (Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²⁷).

Finally, the discourse around security and the fear of Muslim terrorism is present in the totality of the news piece, marking a suspicion about Islamists. The use of terms such as “Islamist activist” and “jihadists” (Manifestation massive [...], 2013, our translation²⁸) connects to the terrorist interdiscourse²⁹, in which the Muslim is portrayed as the natural agent of terror and the essence of the armed militant is strictly connected to its religious identity. Likewise, while the party calls for national unity and prepares massive protests in its favor, the “terrorist threat” continues to be disregarded by the government.

In that sense, despite not directly claiming the problem of the opposition with *Ennahda*, the news piece shows it as inapt to the government and unfitting to solve the political crisis in Tunisia. Generally, the coverage maintains its rational and consequence-focused tone, while deepening its criticism of *Ennahda*’s credibility to govern. Finally, the last analyzed news, titled “Tunisia: *Ennahda* says it is ready to negotiate with the UGTT union” (Tunisie: [...], 2013, our translation³⁰), from the 22nd of August shows a weak compromising *Ennahda* party, willing to negotiate, while creating suspicion around the possibility of their maintenance in power.

Interestingly, the news piece displays two sources for their text. The first is Ghannouchi’s direct discourse claiming to have accepted the talk initiated by the UGTT: “The *Ennahda* movement accepts the proposal of the UGTT (union) as a starting point to resolve the political crisis in the country” (Tunisie: [...], 2013, our translation³¹). Thus, his discourse directly connects to the *Nahdawi* resistance to solve the crisis in the previous news pieces. For the second, the general secretary of the UGTT confirms his claims, showing that only up to that point national dialogue would start.

²⁶ In the original: “*La Tunisie a besoin d'unité nationale [...] J'appelle au calme afin que l'armée et les forces de sécurité puissent combattre le terrorisme et ne dispersent pas leurs efforts*”.

²⁷ In the original: “*Les principaux groupes d'opposition ont refusé de participer [...] à des pourparlers pour sortir de la crise politique*”.

²⁸ In the original: “*activiste islamiste*” and “*djihadistes*”.

²⁹ By terrorist interdiscourse, we refer to the Islamophobic and Orientalist narrative that associates terrorism with a religious and specifically Muslim context. This discourse gained prominence and was reinforced by the War on Terror following the attacks on the Twin Towers.

³⁰ In the original: “*Tunisie: Ennahda se dit prêt à négocier avec le syndicat UGTT*”.

³¹ In the original: “*Le mouvement Ennahda accepte la proposition du (syndicat) UGTT comme point de départ pour résoudre la crise politique dans la pays*”.

Their claims, which capture the idea of *Ennahda*'s resistance toward national unity and crisis resolution, are then questioned by another sentence: "However, the two men did not say whether *Ennahda* would therefore accept a change of government and they did not respond to journalists' questions." (Tunisie: [...], 2013, our translation³²). The meaning constructed through this assertion reinforces mistrust around *Ennahda* and reiterates the idea that their resistance was harming the country and, therefore, was preventing the crisis from ending.

Again, as in the last piece, the opposition is shown as correctly reluctant to accept any deal from the suspicious *Ennahda*, reinforcing F24's meaning positioning: "The opposition has ruled out any talks with *Ennahda* until the government resigns to make way for a cabinet of national salvation." (Tunisie: [...], 2013, our translation³³). The use of the term "*salut national*" displays an intensification of F24's meaning around the crisis, which is later described as Tunisia's "[...] most acute crisis since the fall of President Ben Ali in January 2011" (Tunisie: [...], 2013, our translation³⁴).

The use of the memory of the Revolution is strongly expressed in F24's coverage of the 2013 assassinations, which directly attaches to the Arab Spring interdiscourse, as something to be protected and cultivated by the West (see Landucci, 2022). The usage of official sources confirms the positioning of the outlet within the elites' discourse in Tunisia, as well as its difficulty in assessing local discourses, beyond the political apparatus. Moreover, this trend is also confirmed by the use of street discourses in the form of its binary position, pro- or against *Ennahda*, simplifying the political scene in the country.

Its initial call for stability and calm is rapidly turned into an intense dive into suspicion around *Ennahda*, favored by the opposition's discourse. In general terms, despite focusing on political aspects around the assassinations, the consequences shown in F24's discourse fall into the binarism of laic/Islamists, in which the first appeals for national dialogue and public protection, while the second fails to address the problem of terrorism and is eager for power. These claims, indeed, are masked by the implicit and the unmentioned discourse, which is an important component of media discourse (de Souza, 2004).

5.2 BBC

³² In the original: "*Les deux hommes n'ont toutefois pas dit si Ennahda acceptait dès lors un changement de gouvernement et ils n'ont pas répondu aux questions des journalistes.*"

³³ In the original: "*L'opposition a pourtant exclu tous pourparlers avec Ennahda tant que le gouvernement n'a pas démissionné pour laisser place à un cabinet de salut national.*"

³⁴ In the original: "*crise la plus aiguë depuis la chute du président Ben Ali en janvier 2011*".

Similar to France 24's coverage, BBC's discourse is highly dependent on the idea of the Arab Spring as a political phenomenon caused and endorsed by the West, constantly referring to it. On a different note, however, the accusations around *Ennahda's* misgovernment of Tunisia are notably direct and also supported by local and international sources. BBC's analyzed coverage contains four pieces from February to October of 2013. Differently from the previous outlet, BBC deeply connects with the dramatic features of the assassinations, capturing the audience with the feelings around the events.

The first analyzed text, published on the 8th of February, exemplifies this trend right in its title: "Tunisia mourns murdered politician Chokri Belaid" (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013). The use of generalized agents, or even personification, intensifies the emotions displayed, enlarging the drama around the assassination of Belaid. "Thousands of Tunisians have attended the funeral of opposition leader [...]" and "[...] many workers are observing a general strike" (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013) also amplify the sentiments within the country's population, providing uncertainty to the number of people involved in the grieving, continuing its title discourse.

In addition, the news piece employs this generalization as a source for their claims, especially when accusing *Ennahda* of the assassination: "Unions say the Islamist-led government is to blame for the killing, an accusation it denies." and "Crowds chanted slogans accusing the government of murdering Mr Belaid, 48." (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013) are examples of this application by the outlet, which produces objectivity to their claims, while refraining from actually quoting a source.

Moreover, the production of drama surrounding the feelings after the assassination of Belaid is also enhanced by the discourse of martyrdom and Islamists stealing the Revolution. In "'With our blood and our souls we will sacrifice ourselves for the martyr,' the mourners shouted." (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013), the text continues to refrain from quoting direct sources, this time employing the martyr interdiscourse as a strategic tool to enhance the drama. On the other hand, the second discourse is produced by a named source quoting a generalized agent labeled as "people".

This is the case of Wyre Davies, BBC journalist, who emphasizes that "[...] people who thought the violence and division had ended as the Arab Spring swept through the country two years ago now find themselves protesting on the same streets, fighting with riot police and accusing the Islamist-led government of stealing their revolution." (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013). Thus, while avoiding making a strong claim in their name, BBC maneuvers these

generalized actors to produce meaning with objectivity. Furthermore, Davies is also used for claiming that “tension had been simmering for many months between liberal, secular Tunisians and the Islamist-led government.” (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013), in a binary argument similar to the one of France 24.

In the following passages, the piece continues with the use of unnamed sources, as is the case of: “Critics say that Ennahda has allowed ultra-conservative Muslim groups to impose their will on a bastion of Arab secularism.” (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013). Interestingly, this affirmation points out two major topics regarding the *Ennahda* Movement, their connections with ultra-conservative groups, often presented as Salafi terrorists or jihadists, and the frame of the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse. The latter is especially relevant for being connected directly to the idea of Tunisia’s secularism initiated in Ahmad Bey’s reforms and strengthened during the Bourguiba government.

Symbolically, *Ennahda* is portrayed by these anonymous critics as anti-Tunisia, the reason for “Thousands of people [...] urging the government to stand down and calling for a new revolution.” (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013). Conversely, Belaid is presented as an important figure and direct opponent of *Ennahda*’s anti-Tunisia discourse. Quoting, he was a “[...] respected human rights lawyer and left-wing secular opponent of the government which took power after the overthrow of long-serving ruler Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.” (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013). The news piece also raises suspicion around *Ennahda*’s stubbornness to cede power, mentioning their Prime Minister’s posture:

Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali **has tried to defuse tensions** by announcing he would form a non-partisan, technocratic government.
His governing *Ennahda* party **has rejected this**. But Mr Jebali on Friday told reporters he would go ahead with his plan, saying a technocratic government would not require the approval of the constituent assembly. (Tunisia mourns [...], 2013, our remarks).

In general terms, the analyzed news piece shows what *Ennahda* is and who Belaid was without quoting directly from sources. Instead, the generalized agents presented make way for the intensification of their arguments regarding each political figure in this dramatized scenario. The second analyzed news piece, titled “Tunisian politician Mohamed Brahmi assassinated” (Tunisian politician [...], 2013) and published on the 25th of July, continues to intensify the idea of *Ennahda* as a problem to the Revolution and the picture of Tunisians as urging for its step down from the government.

In notes similar to the previous piece’s unnamed sources, it states that “Protesters have gathered in Tunis and other cities across the country calling for the government to resign”

(Tunisian politician [...], 2013). *Ennahda*'s response is shown in Prime Minister Ali Larayedh's quote, who "condemned his assassination, but said: 'We are against all calls to dissolve the government to create a [power] vacuum.'" (Tunisian politician [...], 2013), stressing the party's resistance to cede power, as urged by "protesters".

The composition is later followed by a general claim regarding a "[...] deep division between Islamists and secular opponents since the revolution" (Tunisian politician [...], 2013), which is seen as a unified movement through the MENA region. This binary is accused of producing opposition from "Many Tunisians, particularly the young, [which] complain that their quest for secular democracy has been hijacked by intolerant Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood which forms part of the current government, our correspondent says." (Tunisian politician [...], 2013). Once more, the source for this information is a third party, namely BBC's diplomatic correspondent James Robbins, whose indirect discourse requires further inquiry.

Initially, the unclarity within the term "intolerant Islamists" and the idea of their opposition to secular democracy produces a meaning that connects to the *Ennahda* Movement, with an implicit discourse. Moreover, the mention of the recently deposed Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is important for both generalizing Political Islam movements and also pointing out the then-recent coup as a possible solution for Tunisia's problems. Once more, the idea is to protect the Western-inspired Arab Spring from the Islamists seeking to steal it.

Despite the use of generalized sources, the piece also accuses the party by using the victim's family as a source: "The family of Mr Brahmi has accused the governing Islamist *Ennahda* party of being behind the killing." (Tunisian politician [...], 2013). The accusation is followed by an apathetic sentence claiming that "The party has not responded to the claim, but released a statement expressing 'sadness and shock' regarding the 'cowardly and despicable crime'." (Tunisian politician [...], 2013), which appears in the context as a too simplistic answer.

From this point onward, the piece depicts the attacks suffered by *Ennahda*'s headquarters and the anger from protesters, showing dramatization in the discourse. This, however, is responded to by *Ennahda* one more time with the use of the Prime Minister's discourse, claiming that

Mr Brahmi's murder was aimed at taking advantage of the upheaval in Egypt, where President Mohammed Morsi was recently ousted after mass protests against him and his ruling Muslim Brotherhood.

'This is aimed at pushing us into the unknown, whether it is chaos, fighting, civil war, or the return of tyranny,' Mr Larayedh said in a televised address on Thursday evening. (Tunisian politician [...], 2013).

This quote shows the Egyptian coup's impact on the discourses in Tunisia. On one hand, the reproduction of it in the country's political landscape appears as an opportunity to counter the Islamist influence, especially considering the youth's desire for liberal democracy according to the coverage. On the other hand, *Ennahda* is displayed as desperate regarding this possibility, attempting to construct it as a risk to Tunisia. Facing the suspicion generated by the coverage so far, it is not surprising that the first one is the most discursively appealing.

On the matter of sources, the piece concludes with a section aimed at describing the political scene in dramatic tones or, in the words of Amnesty International, as “a ‘blow to the rule of law in Tunisia’, which was experiencing a ‘worrying tide of political violence’.” (Tunisian politician [...], 2013). To reinforce this impact, some final paragraphs are dedicated to a short profile of Brahmi, who is described as “not as big a political figure as Mr Belaid, but he too was a leftist critical of *Ennahda*.” (Tunisian politician [...], 2013). The last sentences of the news highlight a vision from the party:

Ennahda came to power following the overthrow of long-term ruler Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011.
The party has faced growing popular unrest over a faltering economy and a rising extremist Islamist movement.
After Mr Belaid's assassination in February, many Tunisians accused *Ennahda* of not doing enough to stamp out a rise in Islamist violence, with some critics saying the party was actively fomenting it, correspondents say.
The party denied the accusations. (Tunisian politician [...], 2013).

Thus, the party is held accountable for not only the political murders but for everything that went wrong after the Revolution, especially, the rise of militant actors in Tunisian politics and the economic hindrances. This, consequently, shows a shift compared to F24's coverage, in which the criticism was subtle and implicit. The use of binarism liberal/secular as opposed to Islamist also is enhanced, producing an intrinsic connection between this tension and the political situation in Tunisia. However, unlike F24, there was no mention of a crisis in BBC's coverage, until the third news piece: “Tunisia crisis: Protesters call for *Ennahda* resignation” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013), published on the 8th of September.

From its previously mentioned features, the news piece starts with the use of unnamed generalized sources, as in “Tens of thousands of demonstrators have marched in the Tunisian capital, Tunis, calling for the resignation of the Islamist-led government.” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013). It is important to address how the idea of the government as led by Islamism is highly problematic for endorsing the view that its agenda was only tied to religious objectives, ignoring other political stances.

The piece goes on to elaborate on its opposition/Islamist discourse, in which both arguments are presented and no breakthrough is predictable. On one side, “the moderate Islamist government has blamed Salafist hardliners for the killings of Mr Brahmi and secular opposition leader Chokri Belaid” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013). On the other hand, “The opposition coalition, led by the National Salvation Front (NSF), has accused *Ennahda* of failing to rein in radical Islamists and improve the faltering economy.” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013). This imbroglio reinforces the idea that *Ennahda* should have dealt better with the Salafists, before accusing them of the country’s issues. Thus, the meaning produced is that *Ennahda* is to blame.

Furthermore, the idea of the *Ennahda* Movement as anti-Tunisia appears again, with the quote of unnamed protesters saying ““We need a government for all Tunisians,”” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013). This is also met with suspicion around its previous organized protests: “*Ennahda* held mass rallies throughout August in support of what it calls its ‘legitimacy to govern’” (Tunisia crisis [...], 2013). Thus, in general terms, the author’s objective appears to be the announcement of the crisis, which the *Ennahda* Movement is responsible for, and the proposal of a new government worried about all Tunisians, following the unnamed source.

The final analyzed piece, titled “Tunisia: *Ennahda* and opposition agree on power transfer” (Tunisia: [...], 2013) and published on the 5th of October, deals with the arrangement that empowered a presumed “new technocratic cabinet” (Tunisia: [...], 2013). It starts by signaling the parts of the agreement, namely the “governing Islamist *Ennahda* party” (Tunisia: [...], 2013) and a generalized opposition. The move is seen as an attempt by the parties to end “Tunisia’s political deadlock” (Tunisia: [...], 2013) through *Ennahda* ceding of power.

The correlation between the fact that “*Ennahda* agreed in principle to relinquish power” (Tunisia: [...], 2013) and the factual ending of the political tensions is unmentioned, leaving the implicit context producing the party as the reason behind it. This implied position continues when the justification of the crisis is put on the political assassination of opposition leaders, which suggests the possibility of *Nahdawi* involvement in the events.

Moreover, the piece justifies the importance of understanding the crisis by connecting it to the Arab Spring interdiscourse, since it had “threatened to disrupt a democratic transition that began after Tunisians threw out their decades-old authoritarian government at the beginning of the 2011 uprisings, widely referred to as the Arab Spring.” (Tunisia: [...], 2013). Specifically targeted at a Western audience, whose esteem for the Revolution is highly present, this interdiscourse stresses the urgency of ending this crisis by its roots, purportedly

by *Ennahda* ceding power.

In addition, the use of unnamed sources continues a trend for BBC. In the passage, “Correspondents say the agreement represents a setback for the moderate Islamist *Ennahda* Party, which has run the country since winning elections in October 2011.” (Tunisia: [...], 2013), the source remains unknown as other commentators could interpret the movement as a continuation of the party’s democratic compromise. The employment of unspecified sources, thus, remains a strategy to produce objectivity to the coverage’s arguments. In this case, it enforces the idea that the party is eager for power, having their actions only focused on that.

This is especially confirmed by the second use of generalized sources: “The opposition has accused *Ennahda* of pushing an Islamist agenda on a traditionally secular nation.” (Tunisia: [...], 2013). The notion of its “Islamist agenda” remains unclear, as the outlet reinforces the interdiscourse of the *Tunisianité*, framing the country as “[...] a traditionally secular nation.” (Tunisia: [...], 2013). Additionally, in the excerpt: “The rivalry intensified after the murders of prominent left-wing figure Chokri Belaid in February and opposition politician Mohammed Brahmi in July” (Tunisia: [...], 2013), it becomes clear how the anti-Tunisian aspect of *Ennahda* is a mark of BBC’s coverage, as the binary argument of secular/Tunisian versus Islamist is maintained as a substantial tendency.

Finally, the terrorist interdiscourse, in which the Political Islam discursive tradition is directly connected with armed jihadism, appears at the end of the piece: “*Ennahda* condemned the killings but the opposition accused it of failing to rein in radical Islamists.” (Tunisia: [...], 2013). In general, the use of interdiscursive Orientalist tropes by BBC was more common than in France 24, pointed out by the fact that the British outlet deeply relies on generalized or unnamed sources to produce their discourse. Analytically, it is possible to assert an elevated dependency on elite and intersubjective discursive-ideological formations by the platform.

Credited as flow producers of news, both the French and British outlets displayed an intense use of the Arab Spring interdiscourse, positioning *Ennahda* as a hindrance to the democratic transition and Tunisia’s stability. The assassinations are attributed to the party implicitly, but objectivity is produced through the use of the elite, in the case of France 24, and anonymous generalized sources, in BBC’s coverage. Overall, *Ennahda*’s image in the Western-based analyzed outlets has stressed the intersubjective notion of Political Islam as a threat to democracy and stability.

5.3 G1

Theoretically accredited for generating counterflow and hegemonically defiant news coverage, BRICS's media is here represented by the Brazilian G1 and the Russian TASS. Differently from the previous outlets, G1 displayed a modest coverage of the 2013 events, publishing three pieces, which will be analyzed in the following, from February to July 2013. As with France 24, the texts from G1 are in Portuguese and were, thus, analyzed in that language, however, we opted for translating its quotes to English, to maintain the established pattern.

The first news piece was published on the 6th of February, titled: "Tunisian opposition leader is assassinated" (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation³⁵). The news lead states the assassination of Chokri Belaid, naming his brother as a source, and framing the period in Tunisia as one "of great political violence in the country" (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation³⁶). Furthermore, the opening paragraph mentions the Revolution, positioning the then-current events in a larger context. These claims set the tone for G1's one coverage, which relies on dramatization strategies to capture the audience's interest.

Accordingly, Belaid's family quote is structurally used to produce this victim-focused empathic coverage. Two examples are seen in "'My brother was assassinated, I am more than desperate and depressed'" (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation³⁷) and "The politician's wife told [...] that her husband was shot twice when he was leaving the house" (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation³⁸). Employing these sources in the opening paragraphs connects the audience with Belaid's personal life, generating empathy and anger, which is set to be put on the perpetrators of the crime, the *Ennahda* Movement, according to the news.

This is seen in: "The brother accused the Islamist *Ennahda* party, which governs the country, of the crime. 'I accuse (the *Ennahda* leader) Rached Ghannouchi of having ordered my brother's death,' he declared." (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation³⁹). The use of the street as a source then is employed to reinforce the injustice sentiment towards the party: "More than a thousand Tunisians protested this Wednesday morning [...] Protesters shouted 'shame, shame Chokri has died', 'Where is the government?', and 'The government

³⁵ In the original: "*Dirigente da oposição tunisiana é assassinado*".

³⁶ In the original: "*de grande violência política no país*".

³⁷ In the original: "*Meu irmão foi assassinado, estou mais que desesperado e deprimido*".

³⁸ In the original: "*A esposa do político afirmou [...] que o marido recebeu dois tiros quando saía de casa*".

³⁹ In the original: "*O irmão acusou o partido islamita Ennahda, que governa o país, pelo crime. 'Acuso (o líder do Ennahda) Rached Ghannouchi de ter ordenado a morte de meu irmão', declarou*".

must fall” (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁰). The descriptions of the protesters’ acts produce a scene in which *Ennahda* appears as the perpetrator of the crime.

Moreover, the news piece switches its focus from familiar and street sources to official ones. For the president, Marzouki, the crime is “[...] a threat, it is a letter sent that will not be received” (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation⁴¹). In this sense, the *Nahdawi* voice is also heard, represented by Prime Minister Jebali’s quote: ““It is a criminal act, an act of terrorism not just against Belaid, but against the entire country”” (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation⁴²). Thus, despite positioning the blame on *Ennahda*, its voice is still shown in the piece, suggesting an attempt towards objectivity by the journalist.

The text concludes with two profile remarks. The first is Belaid’s, constructing him as a “[...] leader of the left-wing opposition and strong critic of the government, he joined a coalition of parties, the Popular Front, which aims to be an alternative to power.” (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation⁴³). The second one is dedicated to Tunisia’s context, described as “Social and political violence has increased in the country in recent months. Several opposition parties and trade unionists accused pro-Islam militias of attacks against opponents.” (Dirigente da oposição [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁴). The use of the term “pro-Islam militias” connects to the terrorist interdiscourse, reinforcing the blaming on *Ennahda*.

Therefore, this piece sets a profoundly dramatic scene of the situation in Tunisia, in which the victim’s family quotes and the terrorist interdiscourse are combined to construct a condemnable *Ennahda*. The second analyzed piece, published 8 days after the previous and titled “*Ennahda* Islamists call for a demonstration on Saturday in Tunisia” (Islamitas do Ennahda [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁵), persists on this argument as it produces meaning regarding the party’s movements after Belaid’s assassination.

Initially, it describes a big convocation by the party to protest in favor of its governing rightfulness, while, oppositely, the Prime Minister and also a member of the party seeks a solution for the crisis:

The *Ennahda* party’s Islamists called for a large demonstration for this Saturday in

⁴⁰ In the original: “*Mais de mil tunisianos protestaram nesta manhã desta quarta [...] Manifestantes gritaram ‘vergonha, vergonha Chokri morreu’, ‘Onde está o governo?’, E ‘O governo deve cair’.*”

⁴¹ In the original: “*uma ameaça, é uma carta enviada que não será recebida.*”

⁴² In the original: “*‘É um ato criminoso, um ato de terrorismo não apenas contra Belaid, mas contra todo o país’.*”

⁴³ In the original: “*líder da oposição de esquerda e forte crítico do governo, se unira a uma coalizão de partidos, a Frente Popular, que pretende ser uma alternativa ao poder.*”

⁴⁴ In the original: “*A violência social e política aumentou no país durante os últimos meses. Vários partidos da oposição e sindicalistas acusaram as milícias pró-Islã de ataques contra os opositores.*”

⁴⁵ In the original: “*Islamitas do Ennahda convocam manifestação para sábado na Tunísia.*”

Tunis, in support of their 'legitimacy' to be in power, at the same time that Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a member of the party, is preparing an apolitical government to leave the crisis that hits the country (Islamitas do Ennahda [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁶).

These different meaning approaches are set to produce internal dissonance, within the party's ranks, and reinforce its eagerness for power. Despite its criticism of *Ennahda*, the piece relies on its vice president as a source to claim that the manifestations are being called to “defend the revolution and the country's interests” (Islamitas do Ennahda [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁷). However, it is still possible to perceive the suspicious connotation behind the employment of this source, reproducing the idea of a mischievous Political Islam and their use of the Tunisian street for their agenda.

After describing the details of the protest, the short piece concludes with an important statement: “In the opposite direction to his party, the prime minister is trying to form an apolitical government.” (Islamitas do Ennahda [...], 2013, our translation⁴⁸). The relevance of this claim certainly lies in the confirmation of this suspicion around *Ennahda*'s intentions. Accordingly, it is constructed as an eager-for-power fragmented party focused only on spreading its “Islamist agenda” in Tunisia and claiming its position in the Tunisian political scene, despite the crisis endured by the people.

The entirety of these trends is summarized in the last analyzed news piece, published on the 25th of July and titled: “Confusion grips Tunisia after death of laic politician” (Amara, 2013, our translation⁴⁹). In its lead, Mohamed Brahmi is described as an “[...] opposition leader [whose assassination] provoked violent protests in the capital and the interior against the Islamic-oriented government” (Amara, 2013, our translation and remarks⁵⁰). The use of the term ‘violent’ and the mention of *Ennahda*'s government as the target continues G1's trend of shallowly assessing the scenario in Tunisia.

Additionally, the news piece also displays a reference to the Revolution: “Brahmi was the second liberal politician to be assassinated this year in Tunisia, the country that was the birthplace of the wave of popular rebellions known as the Arab Spring in 2011.” (Amara,

⁴⁶ In the original: “*Os islamitas do partido Ennahda convocaram uma grande manifestação para este sábado em Túnis, em apoio a sua 'legitimidade' para estar no poder, ao mesmo tempo em que o primeiro-ministro Hamadi Jebali, integrante do partido, prepara um governo apolítico para sair da crise que atinge o país.*”

⁴⁷ In the original: “*defender a revolução e os interesses do país*”.

⁴⁸ In the original: “*Na direção oposta ao seu partido, o primeiro-ministro tenta formar um governo apolítico.*”.

⁴⁹ In the original: “*Confusão domina Tunísia após morte de político laico.*”.

⁵⁰ In the original: “*líder opositorista [cuja morte] provocou violentos protestos na capital e no interior contra o governo de orientação islâmica*”.

2013, our translation⁵¹). The use of opposition, laic and liberal to describe the politician constructs the crime as ideologically oriented, smoothly facilitating the framing of *Ennahda* as the reason behind it.

Similarly to Belaid's assassination coverage, Brahmi's family is also used as a central source. His widow blames a "[...] criminal gang [that] killed Brahmi's free voice" (Amara, 2013, our translation and remarks⁵²), producing objectivity to the outlet's claims that this was an ideologically based crime. More directly, one of his sisters is used as a source to blame *Ennahda* for the crime: "A sister of Brahmi later blamed the crime on the ruling Islamic party *Ennahda*, which denied involvement." (Amara, 2013, our translation⁵³). Once more, it is possible to assert G1's attempt to produce objectivity and drama to its meaning of *Ennahda* as the perpetrator and the situation in Tunisia as chaotic.

As it follows, the discourse connects both assassinations in the country, assessing the current situation in Tunisia as "the worst wave of violence in Tunisia since the overthrow of the autocratic regime of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali" (Amara, 2013, our translation⁵⁴). Thus, the interdiscourse of the Arab Spring, or the idea of the Arab Winter⁵⁵ (see Landucci, 2022, p. 33) is present as a tool to describe the situation in Tunisia and connect it to other revolutionary attempts that ended up in coups or civil wars.

This discourse is seen in: "Divisions between secular and Islamist politicians have deepened in Tunisia since the Arab Spring rebellion, which also toppled leaders in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, as well as leading to a civil war in Libya." (Amara, 2013, our translation⁵⁶). Therefore if Brahmi was "[...] staunch critic of the governing coalition led by *Ennahda*" (Amara, 2013, our translation⁵⁷), he can be seen by the meaning produced as another victim of the Islamist rise after the Arab Spring.

In addition, Western, namely the US and French governments and the UN's Human Rights high commissioner, and street sources are also used in the piece to stress the instability

⁵¹ In the original: "*Brahmi foi o segundo político liberal a ser assassinado neste ano na Tunísia, país que foi o berço da onda de rebeliões populares conhecida como Primavera Árabe, em 2011.*"

⁵² In the original: "*quadrilha criminal [que] matou a voz livre de Brahmi*".

⁵³ In the original: "*Uma irmã de Brahmi posteriormente atribuiu o crime ao partido islâmico governista Ennahda, que negou envolvimento.*"

⁵⁴ In the original: "*a pior onda de violência na Tunísia desde a derrubada do regime autocrático de Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali*".

⁵⁵ The Arab Winter is often referred to as an academic description of the "Arab Spring" consequences in countries, such as Egypt, Syria, and Libya, which are commonly understood as setbacks in relation to their Revolutions' expectations.

⁵⁶ In the original: "*As divisões entre políticos laicos e islâmicos se acentuaram na Tunísia desde a rebelião da Primavera Árabe, que também derrubou líderes no Egito, na Líbia e no Iêmen, além de levar a uma guerra civil na Líbia.*"

⁵⁷ In the original: "*crítico contumaz da coalizão governista liderada pelo Ennahda*".

and reinforce the importance of the moment in the country. Regarding the latter, it is shown how there was an appeal for *Ennahda*'s power ceding by the population: “‘Down with the Islamist regime,’ the protesters shouted, demanding the government's resignation.”(Amara, 2013, our translation⁵⁸).

In general, more profoundly than the previous outlets, G1 dived deep into the dramatic tones of the situation in Tunisia to produce an evil and scheming *Ennahda*, whose objectives are aligned with their eagerness for power and Islamist agenda. Interestingly, the use of laic, and not secular, deepens the division between oppositional forces and the government, reinforcing the binary interdiscourse of Islamists versus laic/secular. In the counterflow sense, G1, in 2013, failed to produce meanings different than the ones presented by hegemonic agencies, deepening problematic stances regarding the *Ennahda* Movement's Political Islam.

5.4 TASS

As a news agency, the expectation around TASS coverage remains on the production of directive and clear news pieces, showcasing a counterflow dissident position, according to the arguments from BRICS Media Studies experts. Indeed, the four texts analyzed from July to October 2013, are short and straightforward, stressing the Russian position in the context discussed. It is relevant to state that there was no piece available on Chokri Belaid's assassination, which could indicate an absence of initial interest in the matter by the Russian outlet.

This interest, however, resurfaced on July 30th, when the agency published a news piece titled: “Confrontation between secular forces and Islamists in Tunisia to heighten - expert opinion” (Confrontation between [...], 2013). The title proposes the piece's initial engagement with the interdiscourse of secular and Islamist binary, positioning its coverage within these essentialized discursive-ideological formations. Yet, differently from the former outlets, this discourse relies on an expert source, not local Tunisian elite or international governments' representatives.

Boris Dolgov, from the Russian Academy of Sciences, asserts the obviousness of the confrontation between the two ideologies, secular and Islamist. According to the expert's discourse:

‘It is obvious that confrontation between Islamists and secular forces in Tunisia will heighten,’ he said. ‘Radicalization of the Islamist movement in Tunisia goes on.

⁵⁸ In the original: “‘*Abaixo o regime dos islamitas*’, gritavam os manifestantes, exigindo a renúncia do governo.”.

Tunisian Islamists are fighting in Syria. When they are back in Tunisia, the situation in the country will aggravate still more,' [...] (Confrontation between [...], 2013).

His discourse serves as a producer of objectivity and authority, engaging with truthful meaning around his claims. Thus, the use of fear of jihadist terrorism aligned with the failed Arab Spring interdiscourse constructs a catastrophic scenario in Tunisia. Indeed, he directly engages with the construction of a radicalized image of *Ennahda*, which appears as the generalized “Islamist movement”. It is unclear, however, which “radicalizing” groups he is including under the same banner. The imminence of his prognostication, emphasized by the image of the Syrian conflict, displays a dramatized scenario, in which international powers must act upon.

Similarly, the scenario of the Egyptian coup is also operated by the agency in the news piece, suggesting a possible solution for the presented problem. Indirectly quoting the expert, it is claimed that “Tunisia lacks a strong army that could play the same role in the confrontation with Islamists as the Egyptian military” (Confrontation between [...], 2013). This claim indicates the role international powers could exercise in Tunisia to solve its crisis. In creating this parallel, the discourse relates the *Ennahda* Movement with the Muslim Brotherhood, simplistically connecting them as “radicalized Islamists”.

Moreover, *Ennahda*'s actions are mentioned as hindrances to a military coup in Tunisia, similar to the one in Egypt. This is seen in the passage: “He recalled that after the president of Tunisia Ben Ali had been ousted there were reforms and a considerable number of security services' staffers were dismissed.” (Confrontation between [...], 2013). Thus, the image of the Egypt coup is displayed as both a solution for the Tunisian crisis and an example of how the “Islamist government” disengaged the country's institutions.

Finally, the piece ends with a description of Brahmi's role in Tunisian politics and a scheme of the then-current scenario: “Brahmi was known for his protests against Islamists whose representatives now hold the key posts in the national cabinet. Supporters of the secular parties in Tunisia held protest rallies in the subsequent days, some of them ending in clashes with police.” (Confrontation between [...], 2013). These claims prove that the piece was using “Islamists” in general to talk about *Ennahda* and endorse the idea of the violent outcomes of the *Nahdawi* government, as defended by the expert.

In the second analyzed news piece, it becomes clear how the Egyptian solution had become common in TASS's discourse. Titled “Russia's envoy for Africa: Rerun of Egyptian scenario in Tunisia possible” (Russia's envoy [...], 2013) and published on the 24th of October, the text relies on a new authority source to claim the coup solution for Tunisia's

Ennahda. Mikhail Margelov, presidential envoy, was quoted as saying:

“In either country the Islamists spearheaded secular opposition protests to come to power via elections. In either case the Islamists embarked on a policy of building a theocratic state in defiance of the political, social and economic (in other words, purely secular) goals of the Arab Spring,” [...] (Russia's envoy [...], 2013)

The feeble attempt to build this bridge between the Muslim Brotherhood and the *Ennahda* Movement produces a simplistic and baseless argument, in which they were both pursuing a “theocratic state”. This discourse, based on the fear of Political Islam, fails to grasp the movements’ complexity and political aims. As demonstrated by its actions throughout history, *Ennahda* has discursively ditched the goal of the Islamic state, favoring a position that would directly engage with Tunisian democratic upbringing.

Furthermore, the expert claims that civilians and the army were unsatisfied with the “[...] Islamist regime of the *Ennahda* Movement” (Russia's envoy [...], 2013) and a rerun of the Egyptian coup could be possible, producing hope for the audiences’ fear of Political Islam. His declarations are ended with a generalized source mentioned and the idea that this suspicion around the *Ennahda* Movement was hegemonic: “the events in Egypt and Tunisia ‘[...] are refuting the quite common view shared by many experts the latest revolutions in the Arab world inevitably lead to theocracy.’” (Russia's envoy [...], 2013).

Unparalleled to any of the previously mentioned outlet coverages, TASS explicitly positions its criticism on the realm of the Orientalist fear of Islam and enjoys the intersubjective generalized image of Political Islam to favor the party’s opposition. To conclude this piece, the situation in the country is briefly mentioned, initially regarding the Prime Minister's dubious acceptance of the roadmap leading to the party’s resignation: “Tunisia’s PM Ali Laarayedh previously said the government was ready to resign in order to comply with the road map to steer the country out of the political crisis, **but at the same time he made no firm promises**” (Russia's envoy [...], 2013, our remarks).

Finally, it addresses the assassination of six national guards by “[...] an armed militant group” (Russia's envoy [...], 2013) and the protests in the country, reinforcing the chaotic meaning of Tunisia it seeks to produce. The exacerbation of the tensions in Tunisia and the suspicion around *Ennahda* had marked the agency's coverage and, especially, the last two pieces analyzed, whose focus was on the possibility of the party not stepping down from the government, despite its claims.

In “Tunisian government ready to step down” (Tunisian government [...], 2013), published on the same day, it is said that despite the stated acceptance of the roadmap to

change the *Troika*'s government for a technocratic one, "the prime minister did not give the expected firm pledge to do this, and this was the main demand of the opposition to start talks with the Islamists. Thus, the 'national dialogue' to resolve the political crisis has not yet begun." (Tunisian government [...], 2013). As seen in pieces of the aforementioned coverages, *Ennahda* is once more seen as resistant and power-eager. The piece concludes with remarks about the country's situation similar to the previous piece.

Moreover, in "Tunisian opposition demands Government submits written commitment to step down" (Tunisian opposition [...], 2013), also published on the 24th of October, once again *Ennahda* is shown as weak and the opposition as strong, as the latter demands the party's ceding of power. Interestingly, it is the first analyzed piece to mention the *Nidaa Tounes*, claiming it is the "leading opposition party of Tunisia" (Tunisian opposition [...], 2013). *Nidaa Tounes* is mentioned as commanding written proof of *Ennahda*'s willingness to cede power and is presented as an organization led by "[...] former Prime Minister of Tunisia Beji Caid el Sebsi" (Tunisian opposition [...], 2013).

Despite reiterating the same stances about the situation in the country in its development, the conclusion of the piece differs from the previous texts. Instead of describing the scenario, it uses unnamed sources to claim that: "The government was accused of numerous military casualties: the public deems it to be unable to successfully resolve the security issue in the country. Moreover, the opposition accuses *Ennahda* in turning a blind eye to Salafi radical groups." (Tunisian opposition [...], 2013). The connection established between the party and the armed militancy developed within some fringes of the Salafi movement endorses the terrorist interdiscourse, constructing the party as a threat.

In conclusion, among the displayed outlets, TASS had the strongest stances against *Ennahda* and Political Islam. Its use of Russian elite sources, namely experts and politicians, shows their alignment with their government's voice and interests. Interestingly, it can be argued that, indeed, TASS served as a counterflow agency, due to its strong pro-Russian position, especially considering its government's later agreement with *Nidaa Tounes*, and despite its heavy reliance on Orientalist stances. Since G1 and TASS had profoundly different approaches to *Ennahda* in 2013, it is interesting to look at *Al Arabiya* English and *Al Jazeera* English's coverages, as other alleged counterflow networks.

5.5 *Al Arabiya* English

Al Arabiya English's coverage of the 2013 political assassinations preserves an

interesting position within our analyzed outlets. Unlike the previous assessments, especially from Western networks, AAE did not favor a positive view of the Revolution, which could indicate an initial alignment with the Saudi government's position. Comparatively, it places its meaning similar to G1 and TASS in its four analyzed pieces, published from February to October 2013. From the first, it leans towards dramatizing the scenario, relating especially to the feelings around the moment. From the second, it also directly criticizes *Ennahda*, making strong claims about the party's involvement in the crimes.

These claims can be seen in the first analyzed piece's title: "Family of slain Tunisian opposition leader blames ruling Islamists" (Family of slain [...], 2013), published on the 7th of February. In its lead, the piece also reveals the possible reason behind the crime: "The family of slain Tunisian critic Chokri Belaid accused Thursday the ruling Islamist *Ennahda* party for the assassination of their son in an attempt to **silence opposition voices** in the post-revolutionary Tunisia." (Family of slain [...], 2013, our remarks).

As discussed, using Belaid's family as a source to accuse *Ennahda* of the assassination is a discursive tactic that generates both impartiality and compassion in its audience. It produces meaning's objectivity since it outsources a strong and appealing claim, shifting responsibility away from the outlet. The use of the family's discourse gears empathic feelings from the audience, who are induced to feel grief and pain, facilitating the argument of *Ennahda* as the crime's perpetrator.

Likewise, the culpability around the crime is also related to the *Thawra*, which is seen as the reason for *Ennahda*'s rise to power. This is evidenced by the second paragraph, which highlights:

Chokri's brother, Abdel Majeed Belaid told *Al Arabiya* in an interview that his brother had been imprisoned and tortured by the dictatorial regime of the ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, blaming the current regime for acting 'worse' than the previous one toppled in the 2011 revolution. (Family of slain [...], 2013)

The weight of the victim's relative claiming that the *Troika* government had been worse than the regime that persecuted and tortured his brother should not be dismissed. The meaning produced in this sentence sets the discourse on a trail of connecting the Revolution to the rise of *Ennahda*, which ended up killing Belaid. Thus, it is explicit the coverage's reliance on dramatic and sentimental claims to lead the audience to a certain conclusion, before diving into the party's discourse.

Hence, contrasting the accusation, the piece displays Rached Ghannouchi's declarations about the subject. The *Nahdawi* leader's argument is used to contrast emotion

with rationality, as seen in “‘Is it possible that the ruling party could carry out this assassination when it would disrupt investment and tourism?’” (Family of slain [...], 2013). However, this appears less convincing, especially regarding the previous claims. His quotations continue: “He blamed those seeking to derail Tunisia’s democratic transition: ‘Tunisia today is in the biggest political stalemate since the revolution. We should be quiet and not fall into a spiral of violence. We need unity more than ever,’” (Family of slain [...], 2013).

His call for unity appears as the most substantial position his discourse constructs while referencing the Arab Spring’s sole success interdiscourse. However, this affirmation is contrasted by the following paragraph, in which the leader blames the opposition for producing dissatisfaction towards his party: “He accused opponents of stirring up sentiment against his party following Belaid’s death. “The result is burning and attacking the headquarters of our party in many areas,” he said.” (Family of slain [...], 2013).

Therefore, by combining both settings, the dramatic and the defensive, it is possible to draw comparisons between the validity production within the piece. Indeed, Ghannouchi’s discourse appears contradictory and shallow, compared to the powerful declarations from the victim’s family. Moreover, as the piece continues, his discourse is shown as increasingly superficial, reiterating the importance of the argument made about the then-current government’s worsening of the Tunisian life. This is especially accurate in the outlet’s description and quotes of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali’s actions:

Islamist Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali said in a televised address after Belaid was shot dead outside his home in Tunis Wednesday that he would form a new, non-political administration ahead of fresh elections.
‘I have decided to form a government of competent nationals without political affiliation, which will have a mandate limited to managing the affairs of the country until elections are held in the shortest possible time,’ he said. (Family of slain [...], 2013)

Consequently, Ghannouchi’s discourse is confronted both by the emotional appeal from Belaid’s family and by the practical stance pushed by the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, Jebali’s position as an “Islamist” still grants him a questionable discourse, marking the outlet’s focus on directly criticizing the Political Islam discursive tradition as a distrustful ideology.

This is seen in “Jebali did not specify that he was dissolving the existing government, nor did he set a date for the reshuffle which must be confirmed by the national assembly.” (Family of slain [...], 2013). Finally, the piece concludes with a brief and emotional note from President Moncef Marzouki affirming the crime “[...] as an ‘odious assassination’” (Family of

slain [...], 2013).

The second analyzed piece directly connects to the previous skepticism about *Ennahda*, constructing the party as the reason for “Tunisia’s crisis” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). In “Islamist Ghannouchi holds key to ending Tunisia’s crisis” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013), published on the 5th of March, *Al Arabiya* develops a profile of the *Nahdawi* leader, Ghannouchi, while it compares his actions with Jebali’s, transferring the solution of the crisis to his shoulders.

Interestingly, the news lead starts with important information about the piece’s theme: “A solution to Tunisia’s political crisis lies with Rached Ghannouchi, hardline leader of *Ennahda* party, but his determination to see the Islamists retain power is foiling efforts to end the deadlock, experts say.” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). Initially, the use of the term “hardline” should be addressed, especially connected to the fear of Political Islam interdiscourse endeavored by Saudi Arabia in its stances against the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, the idea of *Ennahda* as eager for power is assessed with truth through the use of the unnamed experts' source.

The piece, then, continues constructing a hardline Ghannouchi, capturing frames suggesting its Islamist authority position. This is especially clear in: “Ghannouchi, respectfully called ‘The Sheikh’ by supporters, made his intentions clear on February 16 by telling a rally that ‘*Ennahda* ... will never give up power, as long as it benefits from the confidence of the people and the legitimacy of the ballot.’” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). The use of the term *Sheikh* is aimed at shocking the Anglophone audience, who could relate this term to an authoritarian Orientalist figure, producing an antagonistic position concerning the man.

His quote relates to the following passage, which highlights Jebali’s compromising and practical stance: “Hamadi Jebali, resigned as prime minister after failing to garner support from his own party for his initiative to form a government of technocrats he said was necessary to pull Tunisia out of its worst crisis since the revolution two years ago.” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). Thus, the meaning produced reiterates the image of *Ennahda* as a power-eager party.

One argument to be noted in *Al Arabiya*’s coverage is the Revolution as crisis interdiscourse, which is produced by the proximity construct between the current catastrophic situation and the *Thawra*. This also relates to the, aforementioned, signaling of the Revolution as the cause for the *Nahdawi* rise in the country, which can also be seen in the passage concerning the fact that Belaid’s assassination “[...] deepened a crisis already building for

months due to rising tensions between the country's Islamists and liberals.” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). The use of the terms ‘liberals’ appears differently than the other networks, which used laic and secular, positioning the opposition within a Western appealing ideology.

To summarize, there is a direct correlation between the Revolution, the rise of *Ennahda*, the current crisis and the role of Ghannouchi in this scenario. As quoted by the political analyst Ahmed Manai, the idea the piece wants to construct is that “‘Rached Ghannouchi, chief of *Ennahda* for 35 years, is currently... the chief of Tunisia, especially one against whom nothing can be done,’” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). In addition, his hardline position is deepened by the article, claiming that “[...] not even the moderate figures from within *Ennahda* publicly backed the former premier” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013).

Additionally, this *Sheikh* figure is fueled by a second expert, who affirms: “[...] all those who want to deal with the authorities are obliged to go through (Ghannouchi)” (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013). Therefore, the solution to the crisis appears to be impossible, due to *Ennahda* and, specifically Ghannouchi's reluctant position in relation to ceding power to a technocratic government. Finally, the last used source, the local network, *La Presse*, crowns this exceptionally critical towards *Ennahda* and Ghannouchi discursive-ideological formation:

‘It is significant to note that at every decisive moment of the country Rached Ghannouchi takes a stance, sets the tempo and leads the way ahead,’ it said. This ‘irritates and only prolongs the uncertainty, with president of *Ennahda* overstepping his role and prerogatives outright,’ the newspaper said, adding that ‘it was about time *Ennahda*'s hegemonies ended’. In his address declaring he was stepping down, Jebali had warned that only a ‘neutral government’ could bring ‘clear and urgent solutions’ to Tunisia's crisis. (Islamist Ghannouchi [...], 2013)

The third analyzed piece, published on the 26th of July and titled “Tunisia faces strike after opposition's Brahimi assassinated” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013), continues this *Ennahda* accusation focus in its discourses. After setting the crisis tone surrounding the assassination of Brahmi, it states that: “It was not clear who carried out the killing, but the ruling *Ennahda* party, a moderate Islamist group, was forced to deny accusations from his family that it had been involved.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013). Distinctively, it is possible to apprehend a construction of weakness surrounding the party, which was obliged to assess its innocence.

The description of the political scenario in Tunisia highlights the tension and the protests against the *Troika* government. Quoting the UGTT, the general commotion is described as against “[...] terrorism, violence and murders” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013), in an attempt to deepen the connections between the party and the terrorist interdiscourse. The idea

of the Islamist terrorist threat as related to *Ennahda* appears as the most evident marker of simplification and Orientalism, especially if we consider the Anglophone targeted audience's relation with the terror interdiscourse.

The report also follows other official and politician sources, as a fellow partisan of the Popular Movement, who dramatically describes the events of the assassination of Brahmi: “He was riddled with bullets in front of his wife and children, [...]” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013). His death is then compared with Belaid's assassination and Brahmi's family appears as a source for blaming *Ennahda* on the murders. Despite claiming no evidence was shown to support their affirmation, producing an objectivity effect to the outlet's discourse, the piece deeply relies on the sentimental account to shock readers and convince them of the possibility of *Nahdawi* involvement:

‘I accuse *Ennahda*. It was them who killed him,’ the MP's sister Chhiba Brahimi told AFP at the family home in Sidi Bouzid, without providing any evidence. ‘Our family had the feeling that Mohammad would suffer the same fate as Chokri Belaid,’ whose family also blamed the authorities, she said. (Tunisia faces [...], 2013).

Ghannouchi, the leadman of the previous piece, is quoted as calling the event “[...] a catastrophe for Tunisia.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013), while maintaining distance from the assassination, calling for unity against those who sought to divide the country. Interestingly, his voice is followed by Western commentators, namely the EU foreign policy chief, the UN human rights chief, and the US State Department deputy spokeswoman, who directly condemned the assassination, in a discourse resonating with the Western Arab Spring interdiscourse, as explained by in “‘Violence has no place in Tunisia's democratic transition,’ State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf said.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013).

Following this international commotion, the piece briefly assesses Brahmi's trajectory diving into paranoid claims about “the Islamists”, as seen in “[Brahmi] resigned as general secretary of the Popular Movement, which he founded, saying it had been infiltrated by Islamists.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013, our remarks). Unsurprisingly, this discourse is sustained by local protesters' quotes, as in “‘Tunisia is free, Brotherhood out!’ they chanted, referring to the Muslim Brotherhood-linked *Ennahda*. [...] ‘Ghannouchi murderer!’ they shouted.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013).

The interesting reference regarding the Egyptian Brotherhood conveys the then-recent appeal Sisi's coup had provided *Ennahda*'s opposition with. The use of this comparison deepens the idea of a generalized Political Islam discursive tradition, in which different actors, such as *Ennahda* and the Muslim Brotherhood had necessarily to respond to each other's

actions. Later in the piece, the reference is once more used: “In Sidi Bouzid, crowds chanted ‘Down with the Brothers, down with the people’s torturers!’” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013).

By outsourcing these claims to the streets, the piece evokes the sentiment regarding the Arab Spring, pointing to the possibility of a *Troika* ousting through the Tunisian street appeal, as proved by: “Mohamed Maaroufi, a member of a youth committee that organized the protest, told AFP that they would stay in the streets until *Ennahda* had been forced from government.” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013). This is followed by Prime Minister Ali Larayedh’s discourse calling for calm and claiming the crime targeted the whole country, while being marked as “[...] himself an Islamist” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013) and not commenting on the possibility of leaving the government.

The piece finishes with quotes from President Francois Hollande of France, marked as the country’s former colonial power, targeted at enhancing the urgency discourse. In AAE’s words, the president “[...] called for ‘light to be shed as quickly as possible’ on the murders of both Brahimi and Belaid” (Tunisia faces [...], 2013), reinforcing the necessity of finding the perpetrators of the crime and leading the text to a brief explanation of the current status of the investigation.

In general terms, investing in common Western interdiscourses, such as the Islamist terrorist threat, the Tunisian street voice, and the Arab Winter possibility, the piece continues AAE’s anti-*Ennahda* approach. Differently, however, the text relied especially on international sources to construct its chaotic setting for Tunisia, calling for governmental change and the ousting of *Ennahda* from power. This coverage is then crowned with the last analyzed piece, whose focus relies on the Islamist vs liberal/secular interdiscourse.

Published on the 5th of October and titled “Report: Tunisia rivals agree to form technocrat govt” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013), the piece initially assesses the roadmap talks and position it as a conquest within the country’s history: “The crucial talks aim to pave the way for a transitional government and end the political deadlock in the country.” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013). This response, however, emerges, in the piece’s discourse, as a resolution to the bittersweet outcomes of the “Arab Spring”: “Protests which erupted following the assassination of an opposition leader put the country in crisis and chaos for weeks. The North African country had spurred the “Arab Spring” revolts across several countries in the Middle East since 2011.” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013).

Despite the agreements and talks surrounding a government shift in the country, *Ennahda*’s posture was met with suspicion both by local sources and the network. According to the piece:

[...] the opposition accused the moderate Islamist movement *Ennahda* of refusing to sign the roadmap drafted by mediator to end the crisis triggered in July by the assassination of prominent MP Mohamed Brahmi.

‘We don’t see why *Ennahda* is refusing to sign. This is a sign of bad intentions and breeds a climate of mistrust,’ said Mongi Rahoui of the opposition National Front. (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013).

Additionally, this suspicion is expanded to the entire *Troika* with *Ettakatol*'s claims of last-minute impositions by the opposition being dismissed as the source is said to have “declined to give details” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013). There is, thus, a production of restlessness around *Ennahda*'s signaling of the document. This is seen, for example, in: “*Ennahda* ‘must pledge the government’s resignation,’” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013), a quote by an opposition member. Indeed, this is highlighted by the presentation of the roadmap as the sole viable solution for Tunisia’s crisis in the following paragraphs.

Moreover, AAE's outsourced accusations become clear in one of the last paragraphs, stating that “*Ennahda* has been accused of mismanaging the economy and failing to rein in Tunisia’s jihadist movement, which is blamed for murdering Brahimi and opposition MP Chokri Belaid, another prominent secular politician killed six months earlier.” (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013). As mentioned, the Saudi’s network coverage had deeply harvested the terrorist interdiscourse in its coverage, throwing suspicion and fear around the *Ennahda* Movement. On a final note, the piece also adds doubt to the move, through the quote from the newspaper *Le Quotidien*:

‘Tunisians are hanging on the words of political actors, protagonists in a national dialogue... Will this dialogue lead to a saving solution?’ asked the francophone daily *Le Quotidien*.

‘It’s like watching a Mexican soap opera, but without the romance,’ it quipped of the two-month-long standoff. (Report: Tunisia [...], 2013).

To summarize, the pessimistic and suspicious tone has marked the *Al Arabiya* English’s discourse around the 2013 political assassinations in the North African country. Its usage of Westernly produced interdiscourses shows its intention of harvesting Anglophone audiences through intersubjective discursive-ideological formations while constructing an evil, Muslim Brotherhood-alike, power-eager *Ennahda* Movement, whose interests do not lie with the Tunisians' necessities. Interestingly, it used a myriad of sources, combining local and international, elite and family quotes, to construct its dramatized discourse.

Its coverage is similar to TASS, in its direct accusations towards *Ennahda*, and to G1, in its use of empathy construction. Compared to F24 and BBC, however, the Saudi outlet did not have a completely positive view of the Revolution, often presenting it as an implicit cause of the rise of *Ennahda* and the crisis development in the country. *Al Arabiya*, following the

media counterflow argument, has served to present a partially different view than the Western media coverage, while still taking advantage of Orientalist interdiscourses to produce its wanted meanings.

5.6 *Al Jazeera English*

Al Jazeera English's selected coverage ranged from February to September 2013 and addressed the politicians' reactions regarding the political assassinations with special focus. Similar to the other outlets, it enjoyed its distant position to dive deep into the crisis setting in Tunisia, remarking the situation as an intense period for Tunisians. Comparatively, the Qatari coverage positions itself close to the Western outlets' coverage, addressing criticism towards the *Ennahda* Movement in more subtle and indirect manners.

In this sense, the first analyzed piece, published on the 16th of February and titled "Mass rallies in Tunisia for *Ennahda* party" (Mass rallies [...], 2013), focuses on the party's protest call after accusations of illegitimacy to govern and of perpetrating the killing of Belaid. In its lead, the piece clarifies *Ennahda*'s intentions: "Thousands of members of Tunisia's ruling Islamist party *Ennahda* have protested to support their movement's legitimacy and denounce plans for a government of technocrats aimed at resolving a major crisis." (Mass rallies [...], 2013).

The nod to the crisis resolution creates an image of a power-seeking *Ennahda*, similar to the previous framings, while the remark on the quantity of partisans shows the party's strength, in a manner different from the previous accounts. This, however, is met with mistrust, especially considering the description of the protesters, who were said to be "[...] many waving party flags and some holding black Salafist banners" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). To attentive eyes, the Salafi mention could lead to a connection between some Salafi fringes' armed militancy and the party's actions and discourses.

The piece continues to produce the rally as opposed to *Nidda Tounes* (Call of Tunisia) and its head Beji Caid Essebsi and "[...] denouncing remnants of the former regime, the seculars and the opposition, saying that they are trying to undermine *Ennahda*" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). This construction reinforces the secularist versus Islamist interdiscourse, implicitly describing the tensions in Tunisia as religiously based.

Moreover, *Ennahda*'s resistance towards Jebali's plan is also highlighted, reinforcing the notion of the party as power-seeking, regardless of the dramatized crisis. This is seen in: "The mass rally was called by *Ennahda* to denounce Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's plan to

form a government of technocrats in a bid to resolve Tunisia's worst political crisis since the revolution." (Mass rallies [...], 2013). Despite holding a strong picture surrounding *Ennahda*, its internal fragmentation is presented as a way to balance this power claim, as said in: "The violence plunged Tunisia into further turmoil after months of failure to overhaul the government, while also laying bare divisions within the ruling party" (Mass rallies [...], 2013).

The scenario and rally descriptions are followed by a section titled "Secular versus Islamists" (Mass rallies [...], 2013), directly referencing the previously appointed binary interdiscourse. In this section, the first paragraphs briefly discuss the party's history, from its repression under Ben Ali to Ghannouchi's "[...] hero's welcome" (Mass rallies [...], 2013) after the Revolution. Interestingly, it deepens its internal divide arguments by separating the party between moderates and hardliners.

On one side, Jebali, who is appointed as seeking to cede power to technocrats and solving the crisis, is marked as moderate, while, on the other, Ghannouchi is constructed as a hardliner. The reasoning behind the division appears to concern the later refusal "[...] to give up key portfolios, insisting on the party's electoral legitimacy" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). This is deepened by the quoting of Belaid's family as accusing "[...] *Ennahda* of orchestrating his killing" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). Thus, the use of family sources, as well as generalized categories for the party's representatives emerges as a trend in AJE's coverage.

Following this, the news highlights the stress between *Ennahda* and its opposition, claimed as "liberals", framing Tunisia under the *Tunisianité* secularist argument. This is seen in: "Tensions between liberals and Islamists have simmered for months over the future direction of the once proudly secular Muslim nation" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). The dramatic setting created by this formulation is crowned by the idea that Belaid's supporters blamed "a controversial group linked to *Ennahda*" (Mass rallies [...], 2013) for his assassination.

The use of unnamed sources to accuse the group, named the League for the Protection of the Revolution, continues in the fragment: "the group has denied using violence, despite accusations by civil society and opposition groups that it was behind several brutal attacks that have shocked Tunisians and prompted calls for its dissolution" (Mass rallies [...], 2013). Similarly, its connections to *Ennahda* are implied, as it "expected to swell the numbers of protesters at Saturday's pro-Islamist rally" (Mass rallies [...], 2013).

Therefore, in its initial coverage of the assassinations in 2013, *Al Jazeera* English claimed a position close to F24 and BBC by using unnamed sources and connecting the party with Belaid's murder. Its description of Ghannouchi as a hardliner uses a generalized view of his stances and seems to gear the Anglophone audience's attention, especially, regarding

Ennahda's alleged proximity with Salafi militancy. Overall, this initial piece sets the tone for the remaining texts, positioning its main interdiscourses and references in the meaning construction of *Ennahda*.

In the second piece, published on the 17th of March and titled "Tunisians mark politician's assassination" (Tunisians mark [...], 2013), the blaming on *Ennahda* as the main perpetrator of Belaid's killing is maintained as a discursive-ideological formation. This trend is visible in the news lead, which states that "Thousands of Tunisians have taken to the streets of the capital Tunis to demand the fall of the Islamist government they blame for the assassination of a leading secular politician 40 days earlier." (Tunisians mark [...], 2013).

Interestingly, the street, in the format of the protesters, is used as a source for the outlet's claims, especially concerning the ruling party's involvement with the crime. This tension between *Ennahda* and the opposition is also highlighted by the following paragraph which describes the moment as "[...] the worst unrest since the Jasmine Revolution that toppled long-time President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 and started the Arab Spring." (Tunisians mark [...], 2013), referring to the Arab Spring interdiscourse.

Indeed, the correlation between the demonstrations and the Revolution is emphasized by markers on the quotations from the people involved, as in: "The protesters [...] chanted 'Ennahda go', 'The people want a **new revolution**' and 'The people want to bring down the regime'" (Tunisians mark [...], 2013, our remarks). Thus, it is possible to draw similarities between BBC and AJE, for example, using generalized unnamed sources for their strong claims.

Parallel to Brazilian G1, the piece also contains quotes from Belaid's family, as the empathic-building source, to argue for *Ennahda*'s involvement in his demise. In his widow's discourse, it is possible to see the construction of the victim's figure as highly important for the Tunisian political scene: "They killed Shokri but they cannot kill the values of freedom defended by him," (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). Furthermore, in the following section, his family is directly appointed as the ones accusing *Ennahda*, as the official institutions generalize the perpetrators as "Salafist Islamists": "No one has claimed responsibility for the killing, which Belaid's family blames on Ennahda. The party denies involvement and police say the killer was a Salafist Islamist." (Tunisians mark [...], 2013).

The ties between the murdered politician and the Arab Spring martyrdom are deepened, as he is said to have "spoke for many who fear religious radicals are stifling freedoms won in the Arab Spring." (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). Interestingly, a second martyr is also constructed after an unnamed "unemployed man who set himself on fire underscored

popular discontent with high unemployment, inflation and corruption.” (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). Thus, for AJE, it is clear how the memory of the *Thawra* is constantly activated and constitutes the lens through which the outlet produces its discourse.

Moreover, the last section of the piece stresses the tensions between “Liberals” and “Islamists” in the country. It starts by, once more, referring to the homogeneous Arab Spring process, in which Egypt and Libya are failed experiments. This is evident in: “Tunisia’s transition has been more peaceful than those in Egypt and Libya, and has led to freedom of expression and political pluralism.” (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). Therefore, the situation in Tunisia appears as something to be protected from the destructive power of Islamists.

In addition, the piece also reiterates the idea of *Ennahda* as Revolution robbers, similar to the argument presented in ‘The Square’ (2013), as seen in: “Tensions, however, run high between liberals and the Islamists, who did not play a major role in the revolt but were elected to power.” (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). The interdiscourse of the Arab Spring, consequently, appears as the main reference for the arguments presented in the piece.

To conclude, the outlet affirms in its second to last paragraph: “Lacking the huge oil and gas resources of neighbours Libya and Algeria, Tunisia’s compact size, relatively skilled workforce and close ties with Europe have kept alive hopes that it can set an example of economic progress for the region.” (Tunisians mark [...], 2013). Once more, the idea constructed is that one of the reasons for the success of the transition in Tunisia was the role of Europe and the West against its government, led by Islamists.

Likewise, its third analyzed piece, published on the 26th of July and titled “Protests after Tunisia politician shot dead” (Protests after [...], 2013), continues this trend in the context of Brahmi’s assassination, especially by reiterating the power of the streets in Tunisia. Once more, emotionally based sources create an empathic atmosphere, when talking about the crime, as in: “‘He was riddled with bullets in front of his wife and children,’ Mohsen Nabti, a fellow member of the small leftist movement, said in a tearful account on Tunisian radio.” (Protests after [...], 2013).

As proved by the example, the majority of sources employed by the network remain around politicians, international organizations, and the victims’ families. This is also confirmed by the use of quotes from UN human rights chief, Navi Pillay. In her discourse, the drama is extensively constructed, turning the spotlight to the country’s government: “‘I am shocked and deeply saddened by the news of Mr. Brahmi’s assassination. I call upon the authorities to immediately launch a prompt and transparent investigation to ensure that the people who carried out this crime are held accountable, [...]’” (Protests after [...], 2013).

The piece subsequently turns to Brahmi's family to deepen this focus on governmental action, while accusing the party of involvement in the crime, as seen in:

The slain politician's widow, Mbarka Brahmi, told Reuters news agency 'this criminal gang has killed the free voice of Brahmi,' without specifying who she thought was behind the shooting.

Brahmi's sister, Souhiba, meanwhile, accused the main Islamist *Ennahda* party of being behind the killing.

"*Ennahda* killed my brother," she said. *Ennahda* has condemned the murder. (Protests after [...], 2013)

In addition, a local source, namely Mehdi Horchani, a resident of Sidi Bouzid, is mentioned as a source to intensify the street power, emphasizing the tensions within the country: "Thousands have taken to the streets. People have blocked roads and set tyres alight," said Mehdi Horchani, a resident of Sidi Bouzid. "People are very angry." (Protests after [...], 2013). This use of different sources points to AJE's favor of local voices, despite its major reliance on official quotations.

Finally, the piece's last part, titled "Radical Islamists", focuses on the governmental reaction to the assassination and its effort to capture the crime's perpetrators. The most compelling statement is based on the interior ministry's claims, blaming the murder "on a cell of 'radical Islamists'" (Protests after [...], 2013), whose identities or further identification are left unknown. This affirmation is met with doubt by the piece's last paragraph which articulates: "Since the revolution that toppled the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, 'hardline Islamists' have been blamed for numerous acts of violence" (Protests after [...], 2013).

The use of passive voice brings suspicion to the insistence on the Tunisian problems' guilty of "radical/hardline Islamists". The mention of the Revolution, thus, continues the distrustful approach towards *Ennahda* endeavored by the outlet. This strategy is crowned by the final analyzed piece, published on the 28th of September and titled "Tunisia coalition government agrees to resign" (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013), in which criticism related to the party is intensified, despite its compromising stances.

Initially, in the news lead, it is said that "Tunisia's Islamist-led coalition government has agreed to resign in an attempt to resolve a political crisis sparked by the assassination of a leading opposition figure." (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013). Similar to other coverages, the ruling government is constructed as the source of the crisis, as its stepping down would, possibly, develop into a solution for the situation in the country. Interestingly, it mentions the coalition and not *Ennahda* solely as the actor agreeing on the change, which fully represents all involved players.

Subsequently, however, the coverage returns to the posture of emphasizing the *Ennahda* versus secular actors discourse, simplistically framing the political scenario. This is seen in: “**The *Ennahda* Party** agreed on Saturday to resign after negotiations that could start next week with **secular opponents** to form a non-partisan, caretaker administration and prepare for new elections.” (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013, our remarks). The mention of the coalition is, consequently, left only in the lead.

Similar to the previous accounts, AJE directly constructs the crisis as a setback for interdiscursively homogenous Arab Spring, as stated: “The talks aim to end weeks of crisis involving the government and opposition parties that threatened to derail the transition to democracy in the North African country where the uprisings began in 2011.” (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013). Thus, the idea of the birthplace of the Arab Spring having a political crisis is disturbing within these discursive-ideological formations.

The situation is, afterward, smoothed by an *Ennahda* official source, who claimed that the party: “[...] has accepted the plan without conditions to get the country out of the political crisis,” (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013). Moreover, the correlation between the party and the crisis is also intensified by one of the following paragraphs, which states: “The union, opposition, lawyers and human rights advocates said *Ennahda*’s inability to ensure security led to the killings of the opposition figure in July along with another one last February.” (Tunisia coalition [...], 2013). Therefore, the use of multiple, still unnamed, sources produces objectivity and truthfulness in its discourse.

In general, as said, the piece intensifies the use of interdiscourses related to the Revolution and the binary of Islamists and secularists in order to produce persuasion on the Anglophone reader. Consequently, regarding a counterflow framing, *Al Jazeera* English failed to differentiate its claims from the ones produced by the analyzed Western outlets, especially depicted in its generalized position regarding the *Ennahda* Movement and the Tunisia Revolution. Therefore, despite the academic idea of its ideological proximity with Political Islam parties, AJE displayed a generalized sentimental-based depiction of *Ennahda* in 2013.

5.7 Conclusion: Staging the Crisis

In the international coverage of the 2013 political assassinations in Tunisia, the major themes mainly concerned substantial references to the Revolution, within and outside the country, the binary interdiscourse of Islamists vs liberal/secular/laic, deeply endorsed by the academia, the martyrdom discourse, and the suspicion around *Ennahda*’s moves. In this

conclusion, we will draw connections between the coverages and argue that the party's presence in media discourse during this period was, overall, focused on accusing it of the unfulfillment of the *Thawra's* goals, crowned by an idea of the Movement as the political assassinations' perpetrator.

Regarding the interdiscourse of the Revolution, it was possible to observe two distinct stances: a pro-Western vision of the generalized "Arab Spring" and a notion of the Revolution as the root of Tunisia's problems. The first, especially represented by F24, BBC, and G1, conveyed a particular vision of the Revolution as a subproduct of Western history and influence in the region which should be protected from the Islamists. Less explicitly, AJE coverage endorsed this vision, not necessarily assuming a pro-Western vision, but referencing this homogeneous version of the protests and implicitly advocating for the idea of *Ennahda* as the cause of the Revolution derailing.

The second discursive-ideological formation was produced remarkably considering the Egyptian coup context, portraying the Revolution as a gateway for Islamists to create chaos and attempt to build a theocratic state. This is especially true considering TASS's and AAE's coverages, which did not entail an optimistic view of the Revolution, in comparison to the other, but recognized its efforts as being stealed by Islamists. Interestingly, this negative view of *Ennahda* as robbers of the Revolution also appeared in analyzed pro-Western coverages.

Additionally, the second interdiscourse thoroughly mentioned was the binary of Islamists vs liberal/secular/laic. This trend was observed across the entire analytical corpus but was linked to specific sources and the unique discursive and ideological frameworks of each outlet. Overall, we argue that this vision is constantly endorsed by academic studies, as discussed in the chapter "Preaching International Relations". We reiterate the troubling consequences of naturalizing these essentialized and acritical concepts by academia and international commentators, causing biased views on the Political Islam discursive tradition.

Regarding, especially F24, BBC, G1, and TASS, it is possible to connect this essentialized vision with a broad naturalization of Islamophobia in their countries. The case of BBC distinctly exemplifies this tendency by using unnamed sources to make strong claims, suggesting an overall acceptance of unsourced information regarding themes around Islam. Another striking illustration is TASS's use of academic sources to generalize the party and produce intense fear around its ideology and intentions. It is not to say, however, that the fear of Islamists is produced solely by Islamophobic interdiscourses. Indeed, we recognize the imbricated historical factors of its production, yet, we acknowledge the influence of this

prejudice in its sustenance.

Moreover, in the case of AAE, this binarism appears rooted in the country's intersubjective opposition against the Muslim Brotherhood and its international fringes. Regarding AJE, this discourse implicitly entailing criticism towards the party appears to confirm the general academic picture of the outlet as focused on dissidence outside its home-country borders. Nevertheless, in both cases, the reference to Islamophobia as a discursive basis can be claimed regarding its Anglophone-focused targeted audience, reiterating the importance of discussing this specific discourse.

Additionally, the third theme, namely the case of martyrdom and the production of Belaid and Brahmi as secular/laic/liberal martyrs appears especially highlighted by intensively dramatized coverages. This is the case of coverages of BBC, G1, TASS, and AJE, which used the discourse of the victims' families to create an image of the martyr and suggest *Ennahda's* involvement. The use of emotion is uniquely present in these accounts, indicating an attempt to gather an audience through the usage of dramatic discourses. In addition, this also connects to the Revolution interdiscourse, considering the intersubjective appeal martyrdom has gathered in Tunisia during its transition.

Ultimately, all these discourses produce the final theme, the suspicion around the *Ennahda* Movement. Indeed, Keskes and Martin's (2018) paper confirms the overall pressure suffered by the transitional government in Tunisia and suggests a continuity and change framework to ground academic and media comments on the topic. Thus, in the analyzed news pieces, the discourses assigned blame to the party for mishandling the transition grounded on generalized and imprecise stances, such as the possibility of it building a theocratic state in the country. The picture, therefore, is of an overall anti-Tunisian *Ennahda* related to the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse endorsed by the the country's elite, presented as a source in most of the events' coverage.

Interestingly, the image of the traditionally secular Tunisia appears as a counterposition of the party, ignoring its attempts to directly dialogue with this framework in its political discourses and actions. Consequently, the overall assessment points out a general agreement on *Ennahda's* involvement in the crimes and Tunisian problems, despite individual framing differences. In this sense, concerning the counterflow theory, TASS and AAE appeared as the most distinguished coverages, in relation to F24 and BBC, flow outlets. These results reinforce the need to reassess or soothe the arguments made by the flow-counterflow scholars.

To conclude, we propose a view of the crisis as staged by commentators, which

directly sought to intensify Tunisia's polarization and stress criticism towards *Ennahda*. Regarding our research question, in 2013, the media, overall, constructed the party as a criminal organization involved in the murders and Political Islam as an inefficient source of political discourses. It is important to highlight that each outlet used sources differently to compose their argument, still maintaining direct or implicit criticism towards *Ennahda*. These results reinforce the importance of historical accounts, avoiding generalized and prejudice-based claims, and the understanding of the Movement beyond the Orientalist view of Islam as a threat to human dignity.

6 “OLD REGIME, BUT WITH AN INJECTION OF BOTOX”: THE 2014 ELECTIONS

Figure 04 - Memorial to President Habib Bourguiba and Tunis Clock Tower (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

The previous chapter emphasized how, during Tunisia’s transition, international actors rejected *Ennahda* condemning it for the country’s problem. The search for a new hope within the nation’s parties found with exhilaration the outspoken critical voice of *Nidaa Tounes*, a previously described ideological “[...] melting pot, bringing together the ousted Bourguiba and Ben Ali elite with left-leaning movements and organizations including Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT)” (Zollner, 2021, p. 382). Thus, the current chapter explores the mechanisms, specifically the interdiscourses and discursive-ideological formations, that were employed to transform this nascent, multifaceted party into a dominant force within Tunisia's political landscape.

Nidaa Tounes’s unique ideological positioning reinforces the idea that “the terms secular and secularism are essentially used by Tunisians to express opposition to the Islamists.” (Wolf, 2018, p. 55, 56), rather than compromising a developed historical category, similar to some Western countries (Wolf, 2018, p. 51). Consequently, as Wolf (2018) and Cavatorta and Merone (2020, p. 364) argue, the party did not follow the criteria to be confined within the secular discursive tradition, constructing its identity on the opposition of *Ennahda*,

which gathered support, especially in Tunisia's coastal cities.

Furthermore, its ideology was described by Wolf (2018, p. 61) as a minimalist doctrine, in which Tunisia's modern character and anti-Islamist identity, both represented by the broad *Tunisianité*, were combined in its political platform. On the other hand, it was observed by Wolf (2018) that the party relied more on religious themes in its campaign than the ruling *Ennahda*, whose focus remained on economic subjects. This posture, discussed by Wolf (2018, p. 65), continued a trend of secular-identified politicians claiming to serve the "real Islam".

Indeed, Beji Caid Essebsi, its leading figure and one of the main characters in the analyzed news pieces of the 2014 election, often positioned its actions within an explicit religious discourse (Cavatorta; Merone, 2020, p. 364). Moreover, as described by Wolf (2018, p. 56, 57), Essebsi profited from both his political experience, as a leading figure under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and his eventual absence from politics from the mid-1990s until 2012, eventually leading him to the post of president, after the 2014 presidential elections in Tunisia.

The local political scene during this section's analyzed period in Tunisia, thus, is one of polarization, remarkably in the challenges presented by the 2013 political assassination and ongoing economic and security instability. Therefore, it is unsurprising that, to understand the construction around *Ennahda* during this period, we ought to look at how its main opposition was also produced.

The present chapter dialogues with the international media construction of this period and *Nidaa Tounes* and *Ennahda's* presence in it. Through the analysis of the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, in which Essebsi's party became the dominant figure within Tunisian politics, our goal is to continue stressing how national and international discourses were important to the production of *Ennahda's* Political Islam image.

6.1 France 24

France 24's coverage during the 2014 election extensively vocalized an overall sentiment among Tunisian voters of discontentment regarding formal politics. In this sense, its four analyzed pieces published from October to December 2014, advocated for *Nidaa Tounes* sometimes timidly and other moments extensively, while attempting to stress locals' loss of faith in politicians. Hence, the production of objectivity appears as F24's motto for constructing the party, its leader, and the ruling party, the *Ennahda* Movement. Another trend

of its coverage was the dissection of the party's ideology, especially, regarding France's connection with the concept of laicity and an endeavor to accurately construct *Nidaa Tounes* regarding its proposals.

The first analyzed news, titled “Tunisia: ahead of the results, the main secular party says it is confident” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁵⁹) and published on the 26th of October, connects directly with the first discourse, proposing a critique of Tunisia's political scenario. For its discourse, the outlet forwarded a distinction between the importance of the elections, within the broad context of the “Arab Spring”, and the voting options, focusing on the weak voter turnout.

In its lead, the first theme appears as Tunisia is described as “[...] a country presented as the ‘ray of hope’ in a tormented region.” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁰). This connects to the constantly recalled “Arab Spring” interdiscourse, in which each specific Revolution's success or failure is generalized to present a homogenous vision of this complex historical process. However, this discourse is diluted by attributing it to an impersonal discursive agent, as it is framed as merely being ‘presented’.

The lead is followed by three paragraphs regarding the possible results of the elections. The first reminded the reader that the official results would yet be announced by the responsible organization. This discourse generates objectivity to the subsequent claims from Essebsi and one of *Ennahda*'s leaders, Abdelhamid Jelassi. Described as the “[...] leader of the main secular party” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶¹), Essebsi appears optimistic when portraying the possibility of his party's victory in the parliamentary elections, the theme of the news.

Interestingly, this presents a shift in F24's coverage which previously favored the term “*laïc*” over “*séculier*”, especially during the 2013 coverage. In one of the following analyzed pieces, the reasons for this change are scrutinized thoroughly, marking a distance from other French-based news outlets. For now, it should be noted that the network was attentive to the political and discursive use of religion by *Nidaa Tounes*, which is indicated by the different framing.

In addition, as mentioned, his quote appears as grounded in optimism, as seen in “We have positive indicators that *Nidaa Tounes* could be in the lead” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶²), and in objectivity, demonstrated in “We can only talk about the results of

⁵⁹ In the original: “*Tunisie : avant les résultats, le principal parti séculier se dit confiant*”.

⁶⁰ In the original: “*un pays présenté comme la ‘lueur d’espoir’ d’une région tourmentée*”.

⁶¹ In the original: “*Le chef du principal parti séculier*”.

⁶² In the original: “*Nous avons des indicateurs positifs selon lesquels Nidaa Tounès pourrait être en tête*”.

these elections once they are officially announced” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶³). These claims construct Essebsi as a truthful and clear headed source while pointing to one of the possible election results.

On the other hand, the third paragraph presents its opposition, represented by the figure of Jelassi, as pessimistic and unwilling to come forward with his expectations. The strong claims displayed in this section reiterate the truthfulness of Essebsi’s positivity and expectations. This discourse is exemplified by: “[Jelassi] ruled out ‘giving forecasts of results’, calling on ‘the political class to be patient’” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation and remarks⁶⁴).

Subsequently, the piece addresses the voting turnout, stressing the importance of the elections. This section is aimed at the continuity of marking the elections within the “Arab Spring” chain of events while preparing the ground for criticizing the political parties for the country’s mistrust in politics. Indeed, the poll attendance was initially compared to the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections’ turnout, which shrank from 4,3 million to 3 million. Following this, the voting is constructed as “[...] crucial because it should allow Tunisia to build sustainable institutions nearly four years after the uprising that kicked off the Arab Spring, but many observers were counting on a significant abstention given the extent of Tunisia's dashed hopes” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁵).

The reference to the generalized “*Printemps arabe*” and the idea of the “*espoirs déçus*” implicitly began constructing the idea of a political problem in Tunisia, which produced suspicion around the country’s parties and, consequently, Essebsi’s optimism. This is, then, deepened by the description of Tunisia’s

[...] profound economic and social difficulties, key factors in the revolution that ousted Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power in January 2011 [...] [and] rise since 2011 of jihadist groups responsible for the deaths of dozens of police and soldiers as well as two opponents of *Ennahda*. (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁶).

Subsequently, the theme is changed to the voters' reactions during the elections. Safa Helali, one local source, crowned the discourse entailed by the news with her voter's

⁶³ In the original: “*Nous ne pouvons parler des résultats de ces élections qu'une fois qu'ils seront annoncés officiellement*”.

⁶⁴ In the original: “*a exclu ‘de donner des prévisions de résultats’, appelant ‘la classe politique à la patience’.*”

⁶⁵ In the original: “*crucial car il doit permettre à la Tunisie de se doter d'institutions pérennes près de quatre ans après le soulèvement qui donna le coup d'envoi au Printemps arabe, mais nombre d'observateurs misaient sur une abstention importante compte tenu de l'ampleur des espoirs déçus en Tunisie..*”.

⁶⁶ In the original: “*profondes difficultés économiques et sociales, facteurs clés de la révolution qui chassa en janvier 2011 Zine El Abidine Ben Ali du pouvoir [...] [et] l'essor, depuis 2011, de groupes jihadistes responsables selon les autorités de la mort de dizaines de policiers et militaires ainsi que de deux opposants à Ennahda..*”.

perspective. She claimed that “‘It is out of duty that I came to vote and not out of conviction in the lists in the running,’ [...], reflecting the mistrust of many Tunisians towards political parties.” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁷). Her local perspective produces objectivity to the piece's general suspicion regarding all parties, which appears as failing to solve the country's issue.

Despite producing mistrust towards parties in Tunisia, including *Nidaa Tounes* indirectly, the political process is described as satisfactory by another quotation, this time from the European Union observatory mission. This emphasizes the use of multiple official sources by France 24 while referencing local sources when agreeing with the overall statement produced by its coverage.

Finally, the piece concludes with a section claiming the impossibility of solitary ruling from the victorious party, soothing the suspicion towards the possible winning parties and describing the frontrunners. *Ennahda*, which was constructed through a pessimistic lens regarding the election results, claims to “[...] be ready for an alliance of circumstance with *Nidaa Tounes*” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁸), showing the party as weak and implicitly recognizing its defeat.

Moreover, *Nidaa Tounes* appears as “[...] a heterogeneous party that brings together former opponents of the ousted dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali as well as leaders of his regime” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁶⁹). Consequently, the praises for the Revolution implicitly produce distrust around the party's intentions facing its connection with the old regime. In addition, it is also portrayed in the last paragraph: “The large secular party, which poses as the only alternative to *Ennahda* and regularly describes it as an obscurantist party, plans to form a coalition with ideologically close parties in the event of victory. It also did not rule out collaborating with the Islamists.” (Tunisie : avant [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁰).

Overall, the piece prioritized an equitable view, producing suspicion about both parties, ruling out the possibility of a winner's lonely rule and emphasizing the need for coalition-building. However, it is important to mention how *Nidaa Tounes* appears as the stronger and *Ennahda* the weaker in their relation, regarding the call for coalition and

⁶⁷ In the original: “‘C'est par devoir que je suis venue voter et non par conviction dans les listes en lice’, [...], reflétant la méfiance de nombreux Tunisiens envers les partis politiques.”

⁶⁸ In the original: “être prêt à une alliance de circonstance avec *Nidaa Tounès*.”

⁶⁹ In the original: “une formation hétéroclite rassemblant aussi bien des anciens opposants au dictateur déchu Zine El Abidine Ben Ali que des caciques de son régime”.

⁷⁰ In the original: “Le grand parti séculier, qui se pose en unique alternative à *Ennahda* et le qualifie régulièrement de parti obscurantiste, prévoit en cas de victoire de former une coalition avec des formations idéologiquement proches. Il n'a pas non plus exclu de collaborer avec les islamistes.”

optimistic/pessimistic sentiment production in their discourses, generating distinctive meaning concerning their political presence.

The second analyzed news piece, titled “‘The president of *Ennahda* congratulated me on the victory of *Nidaa Tounes*’” (“Le président [...], 2014, our translation⁷¹) and published on the 27th of October, covered the party’s leading preliminary results on the elections, using Essebsi as its source. Thus, in its lead, the party leader objectively claims: “‘I think it's established,’ [...] ‘We still have to wait for final results’ but ‘we know that *Nidaa Tounes* is in the lead,’” (“Le président [...], 2014, our translation⁷²).

To produce persuasion for *Nidaa Tounes*’s victory, the piece adds: “‘And by the way, the president of *Ennahda* has just phoned me to congratulate me on the victory of *Nidaa Tounes*. I obviously thanked him and I really appreciated this gesture.’” (“Le président [...], 2014, our translation⁷³). Implicitly, the discourse continues the previous text's posture of portraying *Ennahda* as the weak force, conceding defeat after refraining from accepting any preliminary result. This discursive-ideological formation of presenting *Ennahda* as powerless is seen in the following paragraph:

The Islamist *Ennahda* party, which is expected to come second in the legislative elections, called on Monday for a government of national unity in Tunisia. A request to which Beji Caïd Essebsi considers it ‘premature’ to respond. The president of *Nidaa Tounes* prefers to wait until the end of the electoral process. (“Le président [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁴).

This meaning of *Ennahda* as weak is confirmed by Essebsi’s framing of the party’s call for unity as “*prématuré*”. Thus, its attempt to build a coalition is not seen as a democratic effort, but rather a shot at grabbing its losing power. This image of *Ennahda* follows the previous theme meaning of the party as eager for control present in 2013 France 24’s coverage. This time, however, the general strong opposition is framed within the figure of Essebsi and his *Nidaa Tounes*.

Moreover, the concluding paragraph addresses the party’s leader’s past, especially in the face of his old regime connections. Despite being described as extensively connected to Bourguiba and Ben Ali’s government, the segment uses his quotes to respond to his critics. On the matter of his past, he claims: “‘My ambitions are in the past.’” (“Le président [...],

⁷¹ In the original: “‘*Le président d’Ennahda m’a félicité de la victoire de Nidaa Tounès*’”.

⁷² In the original: “‘*Je pense que c’est établi*” [...] “*Il reste que nous devons attendre des résultats définitifs*” mais “*nous savons que Nidaa Tounès est en tête*””.

⁷³ In the original: “‘*Et d’ailleurs le président d’Ennahda vient de me téléphoner pour me féliciter de la victoire de Nidaa Tounès. Je l’ai évidemment remercié et j’ai beaucoup apprécié ce geste.*’”.

⁷⁴ In the original: “‘*Le parti islamiste Ennahda, pressenti en seconde position des élections législatives, a appelé lundi à un gouvernement d’unité nationale en Tunisie. Une demande à laquelle Béji Caïd Essebsi juge ‘prématuré’ de répondre. Le président de Nidaa Tounès préfère attendre la fin du processus électoral.*’”.

2014, our translation⁷⁵). About his advanced age, often used by opponents to affirm his unability to govern, he adds: “My party and I thought that I would be useful during the next two or three years, to develop the program that we have already prepared, and which needs all the skills [...] to implement it.” (“Le président [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁶).

This conclusion refers directly to his campaign for the presidential elections in the following month. Interestingly, although the coverage portrays its critics' arguments implicitly, through his quote, France 24 deconstructs their argument by showing his version of himself. The idea of suspicion on both sides of the secular/Islamist binary is, arguably abandoned, to portray a strong figure of Essebsi and a powerless picture of *Ennahda*. This discursive-ideological formation of implicitly praising the party, while pursuing objectivity through the display of his critics' arguments, marked the entire analyzed corpus from France 24 in 2014.

Therefore, similarly, in the third analyzed piece, “Tunisia: laïc, secular, anti-Islamist... how to qualify *Nidaa Tounes*?” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁷) published on the 28th of October, France 24 explains the abandonment of the term “*laïc*” to describe the party, favoring the use of “*séculier*”. The piece resembles an argumentative text, showing the outlet's commitment to deeply assessing the party's ideology, a trend unseen regarding *Ennahda*'s Political Islam, simplified by their discussions about religion.

The news lead starts by pointing out the French discourses concerning *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory in the elections, generally seen as a “[...] victory of the laïc over the Islamists of *Ennahda*” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁸). Subsequently, the piece shows caution regarding these claims, affirming that: “While there is no doubt that *Ennahda* is an Islamist party, can we really qualify its opponent *Nidaa Tounes* as ‘laïc’?” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁷⁹). This confirms our argument that ideological precision and analyses are not a necessity for the “object of Islam in politics”. Similar to Said's (2007) argument, the East or Islam is a known voiceless object that does not require complex assessment.

The importance of 2014 for our analysis is to see how different the coverages around the Islamist/secular binary were. In the case of France 24, this piece shows a grounded and complex approach favoring a deep understanding of *Nidaa Tounes*. The F24's concern with

⁷⁵ In the original: “*Mes ambitions, c'est dans le passé*”.

⁷⁶ In the original: “*j'ai pensé et mon parti a pensé que je serais utile pendant ces deux ou trois prochaines années, pour mettre au point le programme que nous avons déjà préparé, et qui a besoin de toutes les compétences [...] pour le mettre en exécution.*”

⁷⁷ In the original: “*Tunisie: laïc, séculier, anti-islamiste... comment qualifier Nidaa Tounès?*”.

⁷⁸ In the original: “*victoire des laïcs sur les islamistes d'Ennahda*”.

⁷⁹ In the original: “*S'il ne fait aucun doute qu'Ennahda est un parti islamiste, peut-on réellement qualifier son adversaire Nidaa Tounès de "laïque"?*”.

which term to describe the party reinforces this idea. Even local discourses are employed to stress accuracy: “If the term seems incongruous in the eyes of many Tunisians, it is first of all because it refers to a notion more linked to the history of France and its relationship with Christianity.” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁰).

Interestingly, the piece resonates with the academic view entailing the party’s use of religious references and discourses. In Essebsi's quoted discourse, “‘The Islam of *Nidaa Tounes* is not that of the *Ennahda* movement. Our Islam is Tunisian.’” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸¹), the discourse deepens this discussion by referring to the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse and the idea of *Ennahda* as anti-Tunisian. The monopoly of religion by self-proclaimed secular politicians was one of the central discourses regarding the *Tunisianité*, thus, its presence in Essebsi’s quotation produces meaning surrounding *Ennahda*’s Political Islam.

This posture is exacerbated by Taïeb Baccouche, the party's secretary general, quote, regarding their usage of the term “*séculier*” in opposition to the *Nahdawi* “*islamisme politique*”. According to the politician,

‘There is no political Islamism: for me, there are political parties that hide behind religion or that use religion for political purposes [...] Religion is something common to all Tunisians, no one has the right to consider themselves the representative of religion, no one [...] Get involved in politics and leave religion aside: it is a heritage, a common good for all Tunisians, behave like a political party.’ (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸²)

As mentioned in other cases, the employment of quotes produces objectivity to the claims, as a way to outsource France 24’s criticism of the *Ennahda* Movement. Therefore, while simplifying *Ennahda*’s ideology, experts are interviewed to comment on the nuances of using the term “*séculier*” rather than “*laïc*”. This is the case of “‘Secularization would have achieved a better balance between respect for the faith and individual freedom than French-style Laicization.’” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸³).

The last segment of the piece, departing from the expert debate on the uses of “*séculier*” and “*laïc*”, is aimed at producing meaning about *Nidaa Tounes*’s identity and

⁸⁰ In the original: “*Si le terme semble incongru aux yeux de nombreux Tunisiens, c’est d’abord parce qu’il renvoie à une notion davantage liée à l’histoire de France et à son rapport avec le christianisme.*”

⁸¹ In the original: “*L’islam de Nidaa Tounès n’est pas celui du mouvement Ennahda. Notre islam est tunisien.*”

⁸² In the original: “*Il n’y a pas d’islamisme politique : pour moi, il y a des partis politiques qui se cachent derrière la religion ou qui utilisent la religion à des fins politiques [...] La religion, c’est quelque chose de commun à tous les Tunisiens, personne n’a le droit de se considérer comme le représentant de la religion, personne [...] Faites de la politique et laissez-la religion de côté : elle est un patrimoine, un bien commun à tous les Tunisiens, conduisez-vous en parti politique.*”

⁸³ In the original: “*La sécularisation aurait réalisé un meilleur équilibre entre le respect de la foi et la liberté individuelle que la laïcisation à la française.*”

political discourse. Initially, its members are defined as “[...] businessmen as well as intellectuals, trade unionists, left-wing activists and people close to the former regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁴). The general definition of this group is qualified by an academic source as “[...] ‘catch-all party’ that has been able to surf on the growing mistrust of part of the population towards the Islamists of *Ennahda*” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁵).

These markers produce the party as attractive and in line with the interests of Tunisians. This trend is confirmed by the researcher's use of the terrorist and “Arab Spring” failure interdiscourses in: ““We are in an uncertain Arab regional context - violence, jihadism, terrorism, a return to dictatorship in Egypt - which means that the Tunisian vote was motivated by a watchword, that of fear,”” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁶). Thus, while producing the meaning of *Nidaa Tounes*, *Ennahda* is constructed as a problem only secularism can solve.

In addition, this general trend to perceive the party with a complexity lens, while using sources to produce objectivity to its favoritism, continues in the last two paragraphs. Initially, it is claimed that

the party that won the legislative elections refuses to be reduced to pure and simple opposition to the Islamists, who are responsible, in the words of Beji Caïd Essebsi, for having ‘taken Tunisia backwards’. Accused by his detractors of having no other program than to propel his leader to the presidency, *Nidaa Tounes* is working to put forward an economic program that looks towards liberalism. (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁷)

This perspective is crowned by the last paragraph’s final sentence: “What if *Nidaa Tounes*, champion of a ‘modern and progressive state’, was simply a liberal party?” (Tunisie : laïc [...], 2014, our translation⁸⁸). Producing the party as the face of liberalism, modernism and progress, F24 constructs its ideology as aligned with the interests of the West and as the antonym of *Ennahda*’s Political Islam.

This favoritism position, which only sees *Nidaa Tounes* as worthy of complex

⁸⁴ In the original: “*des hommes d'affaires que des intellectuels, des syndicalistes, des militants de gauche ou encore des proches de l'ancien régime de Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.*”.

⁸⁵ In the original: “*‘parti attrape-tout’ qui a su surfer sur la défiance grandissante d’une partie de la population à l’égard des islamistes d’Ennahda*”.

⁸⁶ In the original: “*Nous sommes dans un contexte régional arabe incertain - violences, jihadisme, terrorisme, retour à la dictature en Égypte - qui fait que le vote tunisien a été motivé par un mot d’ordre, celui de la peur*”.

⁸⁷ In the original: “*Le parti sorti vainqueur des législatives refuse d’être réduit à une opposition pure et simple aux islamistes, responsables, selon les termes de Béji Caïd Essebsi, d’avoir ‘ramené la Tunisie en arrière’. Accusé par ses détracteurs de n’avoir d’autre programme que de propulser son chef à la présidence, Nidaa Tounès s’emploie à mettre en avant un programme économique lorgnant du côté du libéralisme.*”.

⁸⁸ In the original: “*Et si Nidaa Tounès, chantre d’un ‘État moderne et de progrès’, était tout simplement un parti libéral?*”.

accounts regarding its ideology, is extended to the figure of Essebsi in the last analyzed piece. “Essebsi, a veteran at the helm of Tunisia” (Leduc, 2014, our translation⁸⁹) was published on the 22nd of December, after the politician's victory in the presidential election. In this piece, Essebsi is created as the face of Tunisia, with the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse in mind, especially referring to the idea of moderation, secularism, state prestige, and eagerness to bring stability to the country.

In its lead, through processes of objectivity, Abdelhamid Larguèche, a Tunisian historian, is quoted saying Essebsi “[...] has become the man for the job by creating a **political balance** in a period of unstable transition” (Leduc, 2014, our translation and remarks⁹⁰), referring to his moderation character. Subsequently, the profile piece points to the criticism about his age, which is counter argued based on his experience, showing him as a paternalistic figure who would “[...] like the return of the state, but what state? A state of law in which citizens are equal before the law. And a state that is just so that every human being can find his or her rights, not a state of favoritism” (Leduc, 2014, our translation⁹¹).

This quote from Essebsi refers to *Tunisianité* state prestige discourse and criticizes *Ennahda*'s alleged rule for Islamists. Similarly, his image is constructed as “*séculier*”, defending Tunisian Islam, as seen in previous pieces, which also references the *Tunisianité* image of moderation and production of the monopoly of Islam. Relating to this interdiscourse, France 24 hopes to construct the politician in relation to Tunisia's Western image, while the *Ennahda* Movement appears as anti-Tunisian, in coverage close to the 2013 BBC.

Another feature employed by the piece concerning this Tunisian image is the reference to Essebsi's connections and appraisal of Bourguiba, as “he claims to be a follower of Bourguibian thought, named after the ‘father of Tunisian independence’ whom he describes as a ‘visionary’ and ‘founder of the modern state’.” (Leduc, 2014, our translation⁹²). This posture reinforces its opposition to *Ennahda*, as Bourguiba was known for his persecution of the Movement of Islamic Tendency.

Finally, this general approbation is met with objectivity, as the discourse of Tunisian activists is used to raise doubt regarding his reincarnation of the old regime. However, their arguments about the politician's protection of the regime during the Revolution are countered

⁸⁹ In the original: “*Essebsi, un vétéran à la tête de la Tunisie*”.

⁹⁰ In the original: “*est devenu l'homme de la situation en créant un équilibre politique dans une période de transition instable*”.

⁹¹ In the original: “*J'aimerais le retour de l'État mais quel État ? Un État de droit dans lequel les citoyens et les citoyennes soient égaux devant la loi. Et un État juste pour que tout être humain y trouve ses droits, pas un État de favoritisme*”.

⁹² In the original: “*se réclame de la pensée bourguibienne, du nom du ‘père de l'indépendance’ tunisienne qu'il qualifie de ‘visionnaire’ et ‘fondateur de l'État moderne’.*”.

by his claims of working within the Constitutional framework and ensuring the continuity of democracy in the country.

In conclusion, France 24's coverage of the 2014 elections used the image of Essebsi and his party to deepen its criticism of *Ennahda*. F24's favoritism in relation to *Nidaa Tounes* is balanced with attempts at objectivity through the use of sources and references to widely accepted interdiscourses. Altogether, the Political Islam party continued to be portrayed as a hindrance to the democratic transition and Tunisia's stability, while a solution was found within the ranks of its most outspoken opponent, *Nidaa Tounes*.

6.2 BBC

BBC's coverage during the 2014 elections reproduced its 2013 discourse on the protection of the Revolutionary gains while criticizing both parties. Compared to France 24, it showed less favoritism towards *Nidaa Tounes*, but still attempted to counter its critics' claims and produce the party as stronger than its main opposition, the *Ennahda* Movement. The coverage, ranging from October to December, showed attentive eyes from the British network towards Tunisia's political landscape, linking the elections to the broader legacy of the "Arab Spring".

The first news piece, titled "Tunisia election: Secularists set to oust *Ennahda* party" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014) and published on the 27th of October, focused on the preliminary victory of *Nidaa Tounes*, with "[...] the country's ruling Islamists pushed into second place." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). As seen in the following quote from the news lead, *Ennahda* is constructed as losing power and weak in comparison to the victorious group. Indeed, this is also true in the sentence: "*Ennahda* officials have congratulated *Nidaa Tounes*, external and **urged them** to form an inclusive government." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014, our remarks).

Subsequently, the discourse of the "Arab Spring" is employed in: "Tunisia's transition to democratic rule after a 2011 revolt has been hailed as a regional success story." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). In an attempt to deepen the importance of the Tunisian outcome, it adds "The revolt was the first and least violent of the Arab Spring uprisings against autocratic governments across the region." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). Combined with the previous stances, it is hoped to produce, indirectly, the image of *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory as another "Arab Spring" success.

This narrative is followed by quotations from two members of *Ennahda*, Lotfi Zitoun

and Rached Ghannouchi, calling for a unity government. In addition, the party's leader's discourse connects his calling with the "Arab Spring" interdiscourse, as seen in: "This is the policy that has saved the country from what other Arab Spring countries are going through, [...]" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). It is, thus, important to stress how their discourse is displayed with desperation and power eagerness.

Abruptly adding a section to its piece titled "At the scene", BBC describes the local reactions to *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory. Described as "[...] a hotchpotch of independents, secular politicians and - to the dismay of many - former regime officials who served under deposed President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014), *Nidaa Tounes* first place appears surprising for a generalized source, "many Tunisians" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). Additionally, the party is depicted as connected with the country's elite.

In this section, *Ennahda*'s defeat is portrayed as "[...] a bitter pill to swallow" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014), because "the electorate has punished them for the lack of economic and social reform" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). The segment ends with a quote from an *Ennahda* member that appears to smooth the piece's blaming of it, bringing objectivity to BBC's coverage of the 2014 elections: "Governments that are leading during a political transition are often punished at the polls." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014).

Finally, the piece concludes its text by returning to the "Arab Spring" interdiscourse, comparing Tunisia to the regional failure and referencing the Islamist/secularist binary. This is seen in "Tunisia's secularists and Islamists have managed the transition to democracy with less acrimony and bloodshed than their neighbours, correspondents say." (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014). The last paragraphs also mention the country's "[...] low-level threat from militants" (Tunisia election: Secularists [...], 2014), showing the importance of attentive eyes to impede Tunisia to also fall into chaos.

This BBC's trend of more critically assessing *Nidaa Tounes* than F24 is also seen in the second analyzed piece titled "Secularist *Nidaa Tounes* party wins Tunisia election" (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014) and published on the 30th of October. Despite repeating the same initial and final paragraphs, with *Ennahda* urging for an inclusive government and the reference to the "Arab Spring" interdiscourse, the piece interestingly assesses the meanings of the parties in its middle segment, titled: "Analysis: Naveena Kottoor, Tunis" (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014).

Maintaining its trend of employing generalized sources, it starts with "In with the old' is what some Tunisians have been saying about *Nidaa Tounes*" (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014).

The sentence connects to the idea of the old regime association within the ranks of the party and the presence of members partisans of Ben Ali's government is said to be met with controversy, meanwhile, it is claimed that "[...] the party will still need to find coalition partners to be able to govern." (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014).

Interestingly, this discourse highlights the true interest of BBC lies within the protection of the "Arab Spring", while *Nidaa Tounes* is a plausible solution to the Tunisian crisis that still requires vigilance. The suspicion appeased through the necessity of a coalition directly refers to this view and was often employed to describe the *Troika* formation in 2011 (see Landucci, 2022, p. 26). Thus, the role of Essebsi's party is understood with caution unseen in F24's coverage.

On the "Islamist" side, the coverage once more touches on the electoral punishment suffered by *Ennahda* and its coalition by a generalized subject, the voters, as seen in: "Meanwhile, the political Islamist *Ennahda* party and their secular coalition partners have been punished by voters for their three years in government." (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014). This directly relates to BBC's view on the 2013 crisis as a consequence of the *Troika* government. The pouring of this critique into *Nidaa Tounes* reinforces our argument that BBC's real interest is in the idea of the generalized "Arab Spring".

The final paragraph of the segment addresses the generalized "many Tunisians - especially those who are younger and from poorer parts of the country [...]" (Secularist Nidaa [...], 2014), who are described as excluded by the government and boycotting the elections. This is seen with suspicion and follows the outlet's worries about a possible chaotic turnout in the country, following the "Arab Winter" in the region.

Continuing its tendency to stress the limits of unhindered political action from Tunisia's main political actors, the third analyzed piece was titled "Tunisians choose president in run-off elections" (Tunisians choose [...], 2014) and published on the 21st of December. Describing the elections as "[...] a landmark in the country's move to democracy" (Tunisians choose [...], 2014), the piece starts its text by naming both candidates and presenting Essebsi as the representative of the "secular-leaning *Nidaa Tounes* party." (Tunisians choose [...], 2014). Furthermore, the stage is constructed as "[...] the first country to depose its leader in the Arab Spring and inspired other uprisings in the region." (Tunisians choose [...], 2014).

These claims emphasize the coverage's dependence on the "Arab Spring" interdiscourse and the binary of Islamist/secular. The last is confirmed later in the news piece, when Essebsi's opponent, Moncef Marzouki, is described "[...] as likely to attract support from the moderate Islamist *Ennahda* party, which has played a key role in Tunisian politics

since the Arab Spring but did not field a candidate.” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014). Thus, despite not belonging to the *Ennahda* Movement, Marzouki is still constructed within the binary.

Moreover, similar to F24, the preliminary results appear to create meaning regarding each candidate's positive or pessimistic stance. Essebsi, an objectivity-producing source, positively claimed that indicators have pointed to its victory. On the other hand, “a spokesman for Mr Marzouki said the claims were ‘without foundation’” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014). This constructed duality positions Essebsi as a confident candidate, with an optimistic posture regarding his appeal to Tunisians and Marzouki as his antonym.

Concerning this image, the piece subsequently describes each candidate's short history and appeal. Besides mentioning Essebsi’s connection with the prior regimes, the text uses the confidence created in the former paragraphs to show him as basing “[...] his appeal to voters on stability and experience.” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014), while being “[...] popular in the wealthy, coastal regions” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014).

On the contrary, Marzouki appears as “[...] a 67-year-old human rights activist forced into exile by the Ben Ali government” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014) and responsible for guiding the transition as president. The comparison between old regime allies and rivals strengthens our argument regarding the lower praise of the coverage concerning *Nidaa Tounes*. In addition, the interim president is also described as “[...] more popular in the conservative, poorer south” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014). Thus, the binary between Essebsi and Marzouki is evident.

The final section of the piece reiterates the impossibility of uncontrolled ruling, stressing that “Whoever wins faces restricted powers under a constitution passed earlier this year” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014). On a different note, the text ends with a reference to the regional terrorism discourse, mentioning a video “[...] of Islamic State militants claiming responsibility for the 2013 killings of two Tunisian politicians” (Tunisians choose [...], 2014) and the unrest in the Tunisian-Libyan borders. The claim about the video is especially interesting considering BBC’s 2013 indirect blaming on *Ennahda*.

Lastly, the final analyzed piece was titled “Tunisia election: Essebsi wins presidential run-off” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014) and published on the 22nd of December, after the confirmation of Essebsi’s victory. In its initial paragraphs, the piece establishes the electoral results and refers to Marzouki's resistance, in a similar fashion to the power-eager *Ennahda* discourse. This is seen in “Mr Marzouki, a 67-year-old former exile, earlier refused to admit defeat.” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014). Additionally, he claimed with tones

presented as dramatic in the piece: “The announcement of victory is undemocratic and we should wait if we want to be a state that respects the rule of law, [...]” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014).

On the other hand, Essebsi is not positively constructed in the piece, as it is said that he “[...] has urged all Tunisians to ‘work together’ for stability but critics say his win marks the return of a discredited establishment.” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014). This return is, then, related to the “Arab Spring”, credited for ousting the former regime led by Ben Ali. Considering the high praise given by the coverage of the Revolution, this view, which is not countered as in F24’s pieces, is relevant for the construction of Essebsi as a politician.

His former credentials are even displayed with sarcasm through the use of a generalized unnamed source, as seen in “Tunisians joke that he and his party represent the old regime, but with an injection of Botox.” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014). This strong vision is succinctly countered, however, by the idea of his pragmatism and experience, as well as his agreement “[...] to enter a dialogue last year with his arch-enemies, the moderate Islamist *Ennahda* party, to resolve a political crisis at the time” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014). Still, differently from F24’s coverage, this claim hardly counters the appealing joke made regarding Essebsi’s image. The view of *Ennahda* as moderate and Essebsi’s arch-enemy maintains this image of the winning candidate as resistant and politically strategic.

In addition, Essebsi’s victory is connected to the theme of martyrdom, a topic especially important for BBC’s coverage of the 2013 political assassinations. This is seen in his discourse, claiming: “I dedicate my victory to the martyrs of Tunisia.” (Tunisia election: Essebsi [...], 2014), while also calling for cooperative work with Marzouki. Regarding the possibility of one-man rule, the piece finishes repeating the previous claims of limited presidential power, countering the fears of an authoritarian turnout in the Tunisian “Arab Spring” success.

Overall, compared to its 2013 coverage, BBC’s news pieces regarding the 2014 elections were timid and repetitive, while persisting on the use of unnamed or elite sources. Its shy criticism of *Nidaa Tounes* and Essebsi differs from the hopeful approach favored by France 24 but maintains the Western focus on the idea of the Arab Spring as an object to be protected from any interference. In conclusion, the image of *Ennahda* is constructed as powerless and resistant to cede power, traits seen in the meaning around Marzouki as well, while its main opposition appears as powerful, regardless of its connections with the authoritarian regimes in the country.

6.3 G1

In 2013, the Brazilian outlet dwelled on the political tensions in Tunisia relying on procedures of dramatization, to gather an audience, and Western agencies, to produce its news pieces. Comparatively, in 2014, the same dramatized and emotional trend continued, now leaning on the terrorist interdiscourse to claim the problems surrounding armed militancy in the country. Overall, it also persists in its “Arab Winter” discourse, showing many correlations with BBC’s coverage. G1’s three analyzed pieces range from October to December and confirm the importance of caution when perceiving BRICS’s media as a discursive news counterflow.

This trend is confirmed by the first analyzed piece titled “Tunisia prepares for crucial elections” (*Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation*⁹³) and published on the 25th of October. In its lead, the outlet addresses and connects two interdiscourses, the “Arab Spring” and the terrorist. This is seen in “Tunisia's first legislative elections, on Sunday (26), are a "hope" for the Arab world, declared this Saturday (25) Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa, very optimistic despite the jihadist threat against this crucial vote for the country.” (*Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation*⁹⁴).

Quoting Jomaa, interim Prime Minister, to produce objectivity, the lead produces disillusionment regarding the “Arab Spring” success in the face of the “Islamic threat”, embodied by the term “*jihadista*”. This discourse continues, as Jomaa connects the Tunisian success as a menace for jihadists:

The democratic transition in the country since the 2011 revolution "is the counter-project of these people, these groups, who know that the success of this experiment will be a threat to them, not only in Tunisia, but throughout the region", said Jomaa, while most countries that experienced the Arab Spring are plunged into chaos or repression.

‘We know that this experience will be targeted (by extremist groups), because it is unique in the region, it carries hope,’ he added. (*Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation*⁹⁵)

This dramatized account takes the reader on an emotional discourse highlighting the

⁹³ In the original: “*Tunísia se prepara para eleições cruciais*”.

⁹⁴ In the original: “*As primeiras eleições legislativas da Tunísia, no domingo (26), são uma "esperança" para o mundo árabe, declarou neste sábado (25) o primeiro-ministro Mehdi Jomaa, muito otimista apesar da ameaça jihadista contra esta votação crucial para o país.*”.

⁹⁵ In the original: “*A transição democrática no país desde a revolução de 2011 "é o contra-projeto dessas pessoas, desses grupos, que sabem que o sucesso desta experiência será uma ameaça para eles, não só na Tunísia, mas em toda a região", afirmou Jomaa, enquanto a maior parte dos países que viveram a Primavera Árabe está mergulhada no caos ou na repressão.*

‘Sabemos que esta experiência será alvo (de grupos extremistas), porque é única na região, ela carrega a esperança’, acrescentou.”.

importance of saving the Revolution and its intentions from the “Islamist villains”. Thus, Brazilian G1 continued its reliance on emotive procedures to convince its readers of its discourse’s veracity. In parallel, the country’s minister of Defense added: “I ask all Tunisians to vote because this day is very important for the country's political history, and not to be afraid of terrorist threats that aim to prevent elections, the creation of a democracy, the rule of law” (Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation⁹⁶), attesting the use of local sources to verify G1’s emotional setting.

Subsequently, the piece turned to a different problem, political participation in the elections. In one of its paragraphs, it is claimed that “The popular participation is unknown. Many Tunisians say they are disappointed by politicians who delayed the elections by two years.” (Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation⁹⁷). Thus, instead of relying on the hope of the “Arab Spring” interdiscourse, the coverage turns to the “Arab Winter” argument, stressing the problems suffered by Tunisia since 2011, without profoundly discussing the political aspects of the elections.

Replicating the image produced by F24 and BBC, the piece describes the two leading parties differentiating the strength of each, specifically showing *Ennahda* as desperate for a convenient alliance with *Nidaa Tounes* and its adversary, the “biggest laic party” (Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation⁹⁸), as having “[...] campaigned as a unique alternative to *Ennahda*” (Tunísia se prepara [...], 2021, our translation⁹⁹) and being able to choose who to ally with, even opening the possibility of coalition with the Islamists. In addition, the first is seen as ceding power in 2014 because of the political assassination and the rise of jihadist attacks.

In the second analyzed news piece, titled “Laic party *Nidaa* wins legislative elections in Tunisia” (Partido laico [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁰) and published on the 30th of October, the focus on the dramatized scenery in Tunisia is displayed in the last paragraph. In the piece’s conclusion, it is stated that the election’s themes were “[...] security, at a time when Tunisia has witnessed the emergence of jihadist groups responsible for attacks that killed dozens of members of the security forces, and the economy, which remains anemic and

⁹⁶ In the original: “*Peço a todos os tunisianos que votem porque este dia é muito importante para a história política do país, e não tenham medo das ameaças terroristas que visam impedir as eleições, a criação de uma democracia, de um Estado de Direito*”.

⁹⁷ In the original: “*A participação da população é uma incógnita. Muitos tunisianos se dizem desiludidos pelos políticos que atrasaram em dois anos as eleições.*”.

⁹⁸ In the original: “*o maior partido laico*”.

⁹⁹ In the original: “*fez campanha como alternativa única ao Ennahda*”.

¹⁰⁰ In the original: “*Partido laico Nidaa vence eleições legislativas na Tunísia*”.

injured by unemployment and poverty.” (Partido laico [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰¹).

Interestingly, two terms highlight the coverage’s drama procedures. First, the use of “*jihadistas*” connects G1’s discourse with the “Muslim threat” discursive-ideological formation, part of the broad terrorist interdiscourse. The second, responsible for emphasizing the dramatic scene, is “*anêmica*”, complementing the production of a chaotic setting in the country. Nonetheless, it is important to discuss the production of the sentiment of hope regarding the elections, which are set to “give Tunisia stable institutions four years after the January 2011 revolution that ended the dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.” (Partido laico [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰²). Therefore, the coverage wants to produce a myriad of intense feelings through its discourse.

Lastly, the piece describes *Nidaa Tounes* as “[...] a heterogeneous group that brings together personalities from the left, center right and chiefs of the Ben Ali regime, [that] carried out an aggressive campaign against the *Ennahda* Islamists, accused of obscurantism.” (Partido laico [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰³ and remarks). The reference to a subjectless critique regarding the *Ennahda* Movement justifies *Nidaa Tounes*’s confrontational campaign, especially since this critique is not diluted or countered, being produced as true. Still, the short piece shows a shortage of interest in the political debates regarding Tunisian elections, describing the scene in vague and dramatized terms.

Finally, the last piece from G1 in 2014 was published on the 22nd of December and titled: “Anti-Islamist Esebsi wins the presidential election in Tunisia” (Anti-islamita Esebsi [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁴), focusing on the “former Prime Minister” (Anti-islamita Esebsi [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁵) victory at the elections. Focused on the figure of Essebsi, the piece reproduces the image of a politician willing to compromise, even with his opposition, while they are presented as eager for power and resistant. This trend is seen in

‘The near and distant future obliges us to work together for Tunisia,’ he said, nodding to his opponent, President Marzouki.

The latter, in turn, immediately rejected the opponent's statement, considering it premature to say who won the dispute (Anti-islamita Esebsi [...], 2014, our

¹⁰¹ In the original: “*a segurança, num momento em que a Tunísia tem testemunhado o surgimento de grupos jihadistas responsáveis por ataques que mataram dezenas de membros das forças de segurança, e a economia, que permanece anêmica e ferida pelo desemprego e a miséria.*”.

¹⁰² In the original: “*dar a Tunísia instituições estáveis quatro anos após a revolução de janeiro de 2011, que acabou com a ditadura de Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.*”.

¹⁰³ In the original: “*um grupo heterogêneo que reúne personalidades de esquerda, centro direita e caciques do regime de Ben Ali, realizou uma campanha agressiva contra os islâmicos do Ennahda, acusados de obscurantismo.*”.

¹⁰⁴ In the original: “*Anti-islamita Esebsi vence as presidenciais na Tunísia*”.

¹⁰⁵ In the original: “*ex-primeiro-ministro*”.

translation¹⁰⁶).

Therefore, Marzouki's resistance to accepting his opponent's victory, endorsed by his director of the campaign, is countered by the local discourse, as the piece describes that "hundreds of Essebsi supporters celebrated the candidate's victory in front of his campaign HQ" (Anti-islamita Essebsi [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁷). Essebsi's positive image is employed by the news piece even by refraining from commenting on the time he was Prime Minister, avoiding his connections with Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

After the mention of a man's attempt to attack a military base responsible for the safety of electoral materials, G1 mentions the former presidents. In the segment, it adds: "Habib Bourguiba, the country's first president, and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who in January 2011 fled to Saudi Arabia after a popular uprising, always resorted to fraud, or a type of plebiscite" (Anti-islamita Essebsi [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁸). On a related note, subsequently, the piece concludes by addressing that "Marzouki was appointed to the position following a political agreement with the Islamists from the *Ennahda* party." (Anti-islamita Essebsi [...], 2014, our translation¹⁰⁹).

The shortage of connections between Essebsi and the former autocratic governments, the reference to Bourguiba and Ben Ali's illegal strategies, and the suspicious agreement between Marzouki and the "islamitas" produces the winning candidate as a solution to the "Islamist" threat presented by *Ennahda*, which implicitly adopted mischievous autocratic agreements. The piece, thus, favors the dramatized stance propelled by G1's previous pieces and crowns the outlet coverage's simplification of the events.

Thus, maintaining the production of drama to gather the audience's attention and shallowly describing the political actors involved in the 2014 elections, the Brazilian outlet shows a superficial reproduction of the Western agencies' discourses. In regard to the counterflow argument, in its discourse, it is possible to see a contribution to flow dominant narratives. In conclusion, the three analyzed pieces reinforce our findings about G1's

¹⁰⁶ In the original: "*O futuro próximo e distante nos obriga a trabalharmos juntos pela Tunísia*", afirmou, acenando para o adversário, o presidente Marzuki. *Este, por sua vez, rejeitou imediatamente a declaração do opositor, considerando prematuro dizer quem venceu a contenda.*"

¹⁰⁷ In the original: "*centenas de simpatizantes de Essebsi comemoravam a vitória do candidato em frente ao seu QG de campanha.*"

¹⁰⁸ In the original: "*Habib Bourguiba, o primeiro presidente do país, e Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, que em janeiro de 2011 fugiu para a Arábia Saudita após uma revolta popular, sempre recorreram à fraude, ou a um tipo de plebiscito.*"

¹⁰⁹ In the original: "*Marzuki foi designado para o cargo após um acordo político com os islamitas do partido Ennahda.*"

endorsing baseless perspectives in its 2013 coverage.

6.4 TASS

In comparison with the other coverages, the Russian TASS's discourse was closer to G1's timid and scarce news production than to the attentive Western eyes regarding the elections. The agency's three analyzed news pieces range from October to December and its coverage dwelled on the description of the events in 2014 constantly mentioning the "Arab Spring" interdiscourse. Interestingly, it appears to have maintained its favoritism towards *Nidaa Tounes*, apparent in its coverage of the 2013 political assassinations.

In its first analyzed news piece, titled "Secular party wins Tunisia parliamentary election – media" (Secular party [...], 2014b) and published on the 27th of October, the five displayed paragraphs depicted important details about the elections, such as the preliminary results and the turnout. Regarding our focus on the *Ennahda* Movement, two interdiscourses are employed by the agency to construct its news piece.

First the idea of the election as a contend between Islamists and secularists appears in its lead: "Tunisian *Nidaa Tounes* ('Call of Tunisia') party, which is considered to be the main rival of the Islamist *Ennahda* ('Renaissance') party, has won parliamentary election." (Secular party [...], 2014b). Thus, the only parties mentioned by TASS were the two, producing a simplified political scene in Tunisia that is problematic coming from a news agency, which works as a source for media networks.

The second interdiscourse is the one of the "Arab Spring", used to highlight the importance of the electoral period in Tunisia. This is seen in: "The country's first post-Jasmine Revolution of 2011 parliamentary election took place in Tunisia." (Secular party [...], 2014b). The Revolution is also mentioned concerning the turnout in one specific city, showing a presence of the argument to sell the importance of *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory.

This shortage of political interest in the country is also perceived in the second analyzed piece, titled "Secular party wins parliamentary election in Tunisia" (Secular party [...], 2014a) and published on the 30th of October. Similarly, besides informing the reader of the number of seats won by each party, now mentioning more than the Islamist/secular binary, the only interesting aspect of this piece is its persisting reference to the "Arab Spring". As seen in:

Parliamentary election, which was held on 26 October, is the most significant event in the recent history of the country. As a result, a permanent legislative body — the 217-seat assembly — was created for the first time since the Tunisian Revolution in

2011 that brought down the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Secular party [...], 2014a).

The reinforcement of the elections as an important part of Tunisia's history appears as the main discursive-ideological formation in TASS's coverage. This discourse also appears in the last analyzed piece, titled "New Tunisia president to be sworn in" (New Tunisia [...], 2014) and published on the 31st of December. In this text, TASS highlights Essebsi's victory as a result of the "Jasmine Revolution", as seen in: "The 88-year-old politician is the first president in the modern history of the country elected at general democratic election on December 21 after previous President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was toppled during the Jasmine Revolution on January 14, 2011." (New Tunisia [...], 2014).

This last piece, however, concludes its two paragraphs with an interesting meaning production. Regarding both *Nidaa Tounes* and Essebsi's wins, it claims: "So, Tunisia is making a political U-turn, as after a triumphant coming to power of the Islamist *Ennahda* party amid a public upsurge of the Arab Spring Tunisians preferred again to give the reins of power to secular politicians." (New Tunisia [...], 2014). This is important to stress the "U-turn" moment, not for the generalized "Tunisians", but for TASS itself.

In 2013, facing *Ennahda*'s presence in the government, the Russian agency favored a critical assessment of the Revolution, connecting it, as in this last quote, to the election of the party. Nonetheless, after *Nidaa Tounes*, a party positively mentioned in its 2013 coverage, success in the elections, TASS began to portray the Revolution as a success story. Aligned with the country's bigger foreign concerns in 2014, namely Russia's annexation of Crimea, it is possible to hypothesize that its shallow coverage of the elections can be a strategy to simply use interdiscourses to praise *Nidaa Tounes* in internationally accepted discourses.

In conclusion, this "U-turn" engendered by TASS, similar to G1's coverage, reinforces the importance of considering the counterflow discussion discursively and not only in numerical terms. Overall, TASS's coverage appeared distant and primarily data-driven, seemingly focused on other matters. Consequently, the agency sustained a negative portrayal of *Ennahda* during the 2014 elections by aligning it with a positive view of the "Arab Spring" only after *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory, in a period in which generalized Tunisians have chosen the secular over the Islamist.

6.5 *Al Arabiya* English

In 2014, as TASS significantly shifted its coverage, *Al Arabiya* intensified its critical

stance on the Revolution in its early coverage, increasingly emphasizing its adverse consequences. As *Nidaa Tounes* won the elections, the Saudi network changed its discourse to a positive stance regarding the “Arab Spring”, usually addressed as a “revolt”. Unsurprisingly, in its four analyzed pieces, published from October to December, the network emphasized a negative view of the identitarian debate following the beginning of the transitional period in Tunisia and an optimistic view of the possible role of Essebsi and his party. Nonetheless, *Al Arabiya* continued to underscore the negative impact of the secular-Islamist divide, drawing attention to the obstacles it posed for both security and economic stability.

In its first piece, titled “Political Islam tries to adapt to Tunisia election landscape” (Political Islam [...], 2014) and published on the 24th of October, AAE broadly discussed the role of Political Islam in Tunisian politics, also focusing on the adaptive posture endured by the *Ennahda* Movement. The piece’s lead emphatically focuses on an agent, a woman activist, promoting her party. It is said: “From behind a **niqab veil masking all but her eyes**, Tunisian activist Fedia Mkaouar stops passersby in a busy street to make a pitch for her **conservative Islamist** party chasing votes in Sunday’s parliamentary election” (Political Islam [...], 2014, our remarks).

In the excerpt, two markers initially symbolize the woman: the veil, revealing only her eyes, and her affiliation with a conservative Islamist party. Within the context of production, directed at a Western audience, these markers, the veil and her political alignment, appear interlinked. This focus on Muslim women’s attire fosters sentiments of empathy and pity within Western contexts, as the veil is often constructed as a symbol of oppression (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The use of this narrative in the lead, therefore, frames a particular perspective for the reader, situating the piece’s interdiscursive elements within a familiar Western framework.

Moreover, the political discussion continues in the following paragraph, as the piece commences with its critical perspective of the Revolution. In the segment, Mkaouar and other “conservative Islamists” boycott of the 2011 elections is addressed, as it is recognized that the vote happened during a “[...] fierce debate over Islam in politics that threatened to engulf its nascent democracy” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Critically, it hopes to position the post-Revolutionary period as one moment of religious debate and not democratic development, underlining its unfavorable view on the transition.

The 2014 elections are described as a vote in which “Islamist parties, even conservatives, are joining the scramble for a place in a national assembly that will choose the government of one of the Arab world’s most secular countries” (Political Islam [...], 2014).

The employment of the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse stresses the unreasonable turn to religion in the country, due to the role of “conservative Islamists”. Thus, the posture seen in the previous period continues in the network.

Affirming the need for coalition building by the two frontrunners, which are mentioned unnamed, the piece stresses the importance of solving the security and economic issues. In this call for solutions regarding this area of interest, Mkaouar quotes are used to claim that “We have to convince people that everyone can contribute to save the country, veiled or not. All Tunisians have a place, [...] Political Islam can play a role to reduce unemployment and confront corruption.” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Once again the veil marker is emphasized and her positive view on the role of Political Islam in Tunisia contrasts with the overall piece’s tone.

This approving view is highlighted by the following paragraph that focuses on how Tunisian politicians had developed a compromise model, despite describing the country’s transition as “sometimes shaky” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Namely, the gains of this posture were represented by the recognition of Islam in the country’s constitution and its championing of religious pluralism. In addition, this image of Tunisia’s “Arab Spring” success model is countered by mentions of other unsuccessful stories, where “[...] violent polarisation over the role of Islam” (Political Islam [...], 2014) affected Libya and Egypt.

Conversely, this favorable perspective on the compromises during Tunisia's transition is transformed into the broader discursive-ideological framework within the outlet of reinforcing a negative portrayal of the secular-Islamist binary confrontation. Initially, around this topic, it is claimed that “it was not always an easy accommodation for Tunisia, where many are proud of their **secular tradition** and feared Islamists threatened **women's rights** and liberal education.” (Political Islam [...], 2014, our remarks).

Justifying the description of the woman’s veil, the piece employs both the *Tunisianité* and the veil obsession interdiscourse to stress how the Tunisian society has a comprehensive distance from the Political Islam discursive tradition. As explained by Debuysere (2016), the discourse of women’s rights was frequently used by politicians to persecute the *Ennahda* Movement, which could explain its appearance in the piece, connected to the idea of secular Tunisia and the veil. Thus, it is possible to perceive a turn in the discourse, meeting with suspicion the prior claims made by Mkaouar.

Furthermore, this stance continues as the *Ennahda*’s rise to power is paralleled with the appearance of “[...] conservative Salafists seeking an active role for religion in society” (Political Islam [...], 2014). The worrying sentiment around the Islamists is also triggered in

“An ultra-conservative movement, *Ansar al-Sharia*, was blamed for attacks on secular Tunisians and later encouraged the storming the U.S. embassy.” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Therefore, *Ennahda*’s victory is described within the context of the rise of conservatism and violence in the country, as the party was “[...] accused of being too tolerant of hardliners” (Political Islam [...], 2014).

Subsequently, the piece turns to the then-current problems of Tunisia, as the debate between the two main contenders, *Nidaa Tounes* and *Ennahda*, “focused on economic opportunities, security, and how to create jobs and development -- more than the questions over religious identity that dominated the 2011 legislative election.” (Political Islam [...], 2014). The simplification around the 2011 elections shows the network’s commitment to distort *Ennahda*’s political engagement and propositions.

Similarly, it quotes Lotfi Zitoun, an *Ennahda* adviser, in an attempt to bring objectivity to the claim that his party initiated the religious debate and was the root of the Tunisian security and economic problems. This is seen in: “‘We consider the new constitution ended this debate, and no one is questioning the identity of the country, a Muslim Arab state,’ Lotfi Zitoun, an *Ennahda* adviser. ‘We want to debate toward economy and security just like any other democracy.’” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Thus, despite giving space to the party, it uses its discourse to show the anti-secular character of its ideology, which appears as anti-Tunisian.

Throughout the news piece, there is an evident oscillation. In some parts, it shows advancements made by the Islamists, while in others, it portrays *Ennahda* as the root of Tunisian problems. This trend appears to construct an attentive and precautions sentiment towards the party. This is confirmed by the segment: “Debate over Islam in politics maybe less fierce now than three years ago, but many secularists still harbour lingering fears hardline Islam threatens the values of modernity.” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Indeed, historically, the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse was operated by politicians and commentators as a precaution against *Ennahda*, confirming this anti-*Nahdawi* bias in the outlet.

Bringing objectivity to its critique, AAE quotes Essebsi, when the politician called *Ennahda* “undemocratic saying its leaders want to impose a strict sharia interpretation of Islam. [...] ‘They are not democrats,’ he said.” (Political Islam [...], 2014). This Orientalist view of the *Shari’a* shows the continuity of the anti-*Ennahda* construction by the outlet, using Westernly accepted essentializations to produce a discourse that deepens the criticism towards Political Islam, if compared with the Western analyzed networks.

In addition, despite producing objectivity by showing *Ennahda*’s rejection of this critique, the *piece*’s claims about the party’s self-image persist on the idea of suspicion around

it. This is seen in: “Since leaving government, *Ennahda*, led by Islamist scholar Rached Ghannouchi, has sought to portray itself as a party that learned lessons from its past” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Indeed, it is relevant to understand these positive claims toward the party as endeavors of objectivity, an attempt to be regarded as unbiased.

Moreover, the party’s discourse is also used to intensify AAE's attempt to frame the post-Revolutionary period in Tunisia as a crisis between secularists and Islamists, despite mentioning the compromises made by both sides. Exemplified in Ghannouchi’s quotes affirming that ““There are extremists who use weapons and the state must reply with weapons. But there are other extremists gathered in legal parties and we must deal with them through ideas”” (Political Islam [...], 2014), the piece produces a dramatic painting of the political discussions about the elections.

Finally, in its last paragraphs, the piece returns to Mkaouar’s party, as, ““Unlike *Ennahda*’ (Political Islam [...], 2014), promoting an expansion of the role of Islam, while accepting ‘the rules of democratic progress’” (Political Islam [...], 2014). Interestingly, through the defense of a minor Political Islam party, AAE aims to persuade the reader of its unbiased position. The mention of Mkaouar’s "Reform Party" is, thus, a strategy to create objectivity and temperance regarding the network’s claims surrounding the *Ennahda* Movement.

Dramatically, it concludes with a dialogue between a man, pointing at the woman’s veil: ““How can you convince us in parliament behind this wall.”” (Political Islam [...], 2014), and Mkaouar, answering: ““We want to promote political Islam and the values of Islam, but we will accept coexistence with all Tunisians and respect the right of others to wear what they want,’ [...]” (Political Islam [...], 2014). On an interesting note, the piece seems to strategically use the veil discourse to stress *Ennahda*’s disengagement with women’s rights, while showing other options that value freedom and democracy. Indirectly, it favors *Nidaa Tounes* by giving space and a complex account to a minor Political Islam party and reifying *Ennahda* in Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes.

Differently from this first piece, the second analyzed text, titled “Tunisia’s secular *Nidaa Tounes* sweeps parliament” (Tunisia’s secular [...], 2014) and published on the 30th of October, displayed a shift similar to the one from TASS. As *Nidaa Tounes* secured most seats in the parliament, in a vote portrayed as “one of the last steps in the North African country's transition to democracy after the 2011 uprising against Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.” (Tunisia’s secular [...], 2014), the image of the transitional process is depicted in positive notes, possibly motivated by *Ennahda*’s defeat in the ballots.

This change in AAE's coverage is also perceivable in the use of Tunisian exceptionalism and *Tunisianité* discourses, which deepens the previous piece's praise of the compromise stance made by political actors in the country. This is exemplified in: "One of the most secular Arab countries, Tunisia has been hailed as an example of political compromise after overcoming a crisis between secular and Islamist movements and approving a new constitution this year that allowed the elections." (Tunisia's secular [...], 2014).

Therefore, the focus on the news changed from directly countering *Ennahda's* actions and opposing the Revolution, which is defined as "revolts", to subtly portraying the party as weak and showing the advantages of the transitional period after Essebsi's party's victory. On a note similar to the previous coverage, concerning the coalition talks the piece claims: "*Ennahda* has called for a national unity government including its Islamist movement." (Tunisia's secular [...], 2014).

On a different note, continuing the first piece's critical assessment of *Ennahda*, the third piece entails in its title the critical view of the party: "Tunisian elections: Islamists fall from grace" (Tunisian elections [...], 2014). Published on the 30th of October, the text begins with a dramatized lead, claiming in generalized stances that "Political Islam suffered a blow in Tunisia this week, with *Ennahda* party coming second to the secular *Nidaa Tounes* in parliamentary elections." (Tunisian elections [...], 2014). As previously argued, when a party or movement aligns itself with the discursive tradition of Political Islam, it frequently assumes responsibility for responding to events involving ideologically similar political actors.

Subsequently, after constructing *Nidaa Tounes* as a quickly emerging *Ennahda's* opposition and an "alliance of former government officials, leftwing trade unionists and businessmen" (Tunisian elections [...], 2014). The piece uses the discourse of an expert to claim that "there was a misunderstanding between the voter and the candidate in the 2011 elections" (Tunisian elections [...], 2014), as voters were hoping "to 'punish' and 'go the opposite direction to that of the old regime'" (Tunisian elections [...], 2014), while expecting *Ennahda* to be non-corrupt, due to its connection with religion.

The expert continues by saying "But *Ennahda* came in with one face in the beginning, then ended up showing another face." (Tunisian elections [...], 2014). The use of the authority discourse to produce truth in their meaning construction is an important tool to avoid claims of bias. This is also seen in the *Tunisianité* reference made by another expert claiming that: "[...] party's rule projected a vision that 'doesn't go in tandem with Tunisian society's mentality.'" (Tunisian elections [...], 2014) and in: "*Ennahda* 'has been trying to impose its Islamist agenda on the country since it won in Oct. 2011,' [...]" (Tunisian elections

[...], 2014).

Moreover, the piece continues by bringing objectivity and showing the party side, asserting they “paid the price” to avoid a political crisis like the Egyptian. However, this is followed by the affirmation that the “[...] divide between secularism and Islamism often halted the work of Tunisia’s National Constituent Assembly”(Tunisian elections [...], 2014), producing suspicion and doubt surrounding the party’s claims. Furthermore, this is also seen in: “*Ennahda* tried to amend Article 1 of the constitution - which says Tunisia is a republic and Islam is its religion - to add the Quran as the ‘principal source of legislation.’” (Tunisian elections [...], 2014).

Additionally, the piece continued its discourse by quoting an expert connecting *Ennahda*’s political actions with the narrative of women’s submission in Islam. This is seen in “Its political program projected many ‘violations of freedoms,’ including women’s rights, [the expert] added. [...] *Ennahda* ‘wanted to make the constitution say women are complementary to men,’” (Tunisian elections [...], 2014, our remark). Once more, it instrumentalized women’s rights in order to produce suspicion and dissidence concerning the *Nahdawi* role in Tunisian politics.

Comparatively, the piece continues its coverage by opposing this image of *Ennahda* with the one from Bourguiba, referencing the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse. This is seen in the following paragraphs:

Bourguiba, seen as the father of Tunisia, is often praised for his secular, pro-Western policies, and especially for emancipating Tunisian women. His 1956 Code of Personal Status, which recognized the right to abortion and prohibited polygamy, is arguably the Arab world’s most progressive piece of women’s rights legislation. (Tunisian elections [...], 2014).

Moving from women’s rights to the economy, the piece addresses the positive market response to *Nidaa Tounes*’s victory, quoting another analyst saying: ““The Tunisian stock market made gains literally the day after the provisional electoral results were announced,”” (Tunisian elections [...], 2014). The increase in tourism, recognized as a key source of national revenue, is also highlighted as a positive factor. The reference to the “Arab Spring” failures as contributing to the decline in tourism suggests that *Nidaa Tounes* is positioned as a solution to multiple crises. In comparison, it is mentioned that “*Ennahda*’s mismanagement of the economy and administration of the state are also behind the economic stagnation” (Tunisian elections [...], 2014).

The piece concludes on a positive note, saying that even *Ennahda* was celebrating the elections’ results as a victory for all Tunisians. This overall optimistic tone was also displayed

in the last analyzed piece from *Al Arabiya*, titled “Essebsi wins Tunisia’s presidency” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014) and published on the 21st of December. After the news lead describes Essebsi’s victory over Marzouki briefly, the elected president's discourse is displayed, saying: “I will be president for all Tunisians,” the 88-year-old Essebsi said in a brief speech on state television.” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014).

Differently from the previous news reliance on expert discourses, this piece uses elite sources to create Essebsi as “the right man for the right time” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014). Showing a transition from pessimistic stances during the *Troika* government to a favorable view of the new government led by *Nidaa Tounes*. This discourse builds on the frameworks established in the second analyzed piece, presenting the transition in a positive light, as seen in: “The election of Essebsi, whose party dominated legislative elections back in October, completes Tunisia’s democratic transition after the overthrow of its dictator in 2011.” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014).

The figure of Marzouki, in opposition, is constructed as doubting the results, despite accepting the defeat. In this direction, the piece states: “In a short television address Marzouki accepted his defeat despite what he said were suspected vote irregularities, which he would not challenge.” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014). This reinforces the narrative of the *Troika* as undermining democracy, positioning Essebsi as the appropriate figure to counter the former government’s chaotic rule, a position also seen in the description of Marzouki’s contestation of Essebsi’s preliminary victory.

In addition, the results were also praised by official sources outside of Tunisia, namely Egyptian President Sisi and the European Union foreign policy chief. The latter claimed that “Tunisians have written a historic page in the country’s democratic transition,” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014), showing this positive image of the transition and of Essebsi’s presidential victory constructed by *Al Arabiya*.

Finally, the piece concludes with a brief profile of Essebsi, described as “the technocrat Tunisia needs after three messy years of the Islamist-led coalition government that followed the revolt.” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014), countering critics’ claims regarding his connections to the old regime. Comparatively, to further this production of untruthfulness around his detractors, the piece finishes with a comparison between him and Marzouki. In the segment, Essebsi appears as wrongly accused by an opponent tied with *Ennahda*, a party seen with suspicion and caution:

Marzouki, a former activist during the Ben Ali era, has painted an Essebsi

presidency as a setback for the 'Jasmine Revolution' that forced the former leader to flee the country into exile. But many critics tie Marzouki's own presidency to the Islamist party's government and its mistakes. (Essebsi wins [...], 2014)

In conclusion, the key feature of Al Arabiya's coverage of the 2014 elections was the extensive use of Westernly accepted interdiscourses, refraining from a discursive counterflow position. The instrumentalization of women created suspicion around *Ennahda*, while the image of Bourguiba as the father of Tunisia and the portrayal of *Shari'a* as an obstacle to democracy were used to shape the narrative surrounding the party. As a result, Essebsi is presented as the embodiment of Tunisia's previous regimes' modern identity. In other words, the strategic use of official, elite, and expert sources effectively continues the narrative established by AAE in 2013.

6.6 *Al Jazeera English*

Compared to its 2013 discourses and the previous outlet's coverage, in the 2014 elections, *Al Jazeera English* distanced its narratives from a subtle critique of the *Ennahda* Movement acknowledging the difficulties of governing during a post-Revolutionary period. Furthermore, it was the only outlet that deeply engaged with *Nidaa Tounes*'s opposition claims, portraying Essebsi's party as part of the "old regime" and a setback to Tunisia's democratic transition. Across the four analyzed pieces, published from October to December, AJE produced a profound body of coverage, engaging deeply with the positions of various political actors regarding the country's electoral process.

In its first piece, titled "Secular party takes lead in Tunisia elections" (El Amraoui, 2014a) and published on the 27th of October, *Al Jazeera* refrained from characterizing the parties dichotomously as either strong or weak, similar to the approach made in the previous coverages. Indeed, the network presented in its first paragraph a powerful image of both actors, presenting *Nidaa Tounes* as "Tunisia's leading secular party" (El Amraoui, 2014a) that "looked like the big winner after the country voted for its first full parliament since a revolution in 2011" (El Amraoui, 2014a), and *Ennahda* as the party that "[...] had dominated the north African country's politics since the revolution" (El Amraoui, 2014a).

Despite presenting the results as "a setback for *Ennahda*, which had expected to fare much better by leaning on its popularity with the poor in many of the country's marginalised communities." (El Amraoui, 2014a), the piece attributes this defeat to its critics' unsupported accusations. In fact, the text mentions the critique of "mismanaging the economy and of

inexperience” (El Amraoui, 2014a), but it counters it by employing the discourse of a member of *Ennahda*, Ahmed Gaaloul, asserting:

‘Most of the post-revolution governments faced difficulties, simply because people’s expectations are higher after revolution. Governing is not an easy task in those conditions because you don’t want to prove powerful when people revolted against that,’ Gaaloul told Al Jazeera.

‘Winning the last elections put us in a very hard exam. With most of our leadership spent years in jails or exile, it was hard to govern,’ he said. (El Amraoui, 2014a).

This meaning construction around *Ennahda* produces an image of a party that had a difficult job and was destined to fail due to the expectations. Thus, *Al Jazeera* avoids its previous subtle criticism towards the party by grounding the problems it had faced on the anticipations common to a post-Revolutionary period. The member’s discourse is also relevant to place the party’s avoidance of the powerful image, which is later contrasted with the framing of *Nidaa Tounes*’s victory as “[...] a return of what was a more orderly time before the revolution” (El Amraoui, 2014a), as the party is seen as part of “the country’s long-established elites” (El Amraoui, 2014a).

Consequently, the network implicitly positions *Ennahda*’s counter argument to its critics as a source of denunciation towards *Nidaa Tounes*. This continues as Essebsi roles under Ben Ali and Bourguiba are discussed. Despite mentioning his supporters’ praise for the politician as a counterweight to *Ennahda*, this implicit disapproval of him is also evident in his detractors’ portrayal of his intentions as focused on restoring dictatorship in Tunisia.

Moreover, the focus on a dual side in the 2014 elections stresses the secular/Islamist binary, which is here addressed as old regime/Islamist, failing to bring complexity to the piece’s discourse. The necessity of overcoming differences by “the Islamist-secular divide” (El Amraoui, 2014a) is mentioned without a proper context of where these contrasts rely and what could be done to overcome it. However, it explains the reason for this need, namely the certainty of coalition building to govern.

To conclude the piece, differently from the other coverages, on the other hand, *Al Jazeera* privileged a positive view of *Ennahda*’s call for a partnership with *Nidaa Tounes*. Quoting the party’s members, it is said that ““Our vision is that if they are elected, we have to govern within a coalition. It is in the benefit of the country to include all the political players,”” (El Amraoui, 2014a). Therefore, the desperate image is changed in favor of an inclusive image of the party.

In general, this piece illustrates both continuity and change in relation to the 2013 AJE’s coverage. On one hand, it continued viewing the Tunisian political scene as a clash

between secularists and Islamists, essentially creating these actors in the image of a “return to the old regime” and a party that suffered the consequences of fate. On the other hand, it ditched its implicit critique of *Ennahda* to focus on an indirect condemnation of *Nidaa Tounes* and Essebsi’s intentions, as a possible return to the dictatorship. It is also relevant to mention that its only source was a member of *Ennahda*.

Similarly, in the second analyzed piece, titled: “Tunisia’s *Ennahda* ‘faces defeat’ in elections” (El Amraoui, 2014c) and published on the 28th of October, AJE continued employing these discursive-ideological formations. Much of the text’s content is, in fact, a replica of the previous piece.

Regarding *Ennahda*, the article repeats the mentions of its defeat as a setback, the accusations of mismanagement and inexperience, Ahmed Gaaloul’s discourse countering these criticisms, and the party’s call for a coalition. As for *Nidaa Tounes*, it reproduces the framing of the party’s victory as a potential return to the old regime, Essebsi’s connections with Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and his image as a counterweight to *Ennahda*.

Differently, the piece focuses on the reactions to *Ennahda*’s imminent defeat to *Nidaa Tounes* in the elections. The party, described as “The North African nation’s leading Islamist party” (El Amraoui, 2014c), is shown as accepting of this destiny. This is seen in Soumaya Ghannouchi’s account of her father congratulating Essebsi and Lotfi Zitoun, an *Ennahda* official, accepting the defeat and congratulating the winning party.

In addition, it cites “the party’s call for the formation of a unity government including *Ennahda* in the interest of the country, regarded as the birthplace of the Arab Spring.” (El Amraoui, 2014c). The use of the “Arab Spring” interdiscourse and reinforcement of the country’s interests contrasts AJE coverage from the others, for seeing more positively this call for the coalition from the party, which was often perceived as a desperate move.

Overall, this piece does not add significantly to AJE’s discourse but reinforces its underlying intentions and narratives. From both initial pieces, it is possible to frame the network’s coverage as portraying *Ennahda*’s challenges within a justifiable context, while *Nidaa Tounes* appears as close-tied to the former regimes. Interestingly, this general suspicion of the network about *Nidaa Tounes* is confirmed by the third piece: “Tunisian dilemma: Deal or no deal?” (El Amraoui, 2014b), published on the 18th of November.

Its most clear discourse is evidenced in the fourth paragraph, where it is claimed that: “If Essebsi is confirmed as president, too much power will be handed to *Nidaa Tounes*” (El Amraoui, 2014b). Moreover, in its lead, the piece explains, referencing the *Tunisianité*, that the party’s victory has “[...] restored the strongly secular tradition of the country’s politics” (El

Amraoui, 2014b). In addition, “its charismatic leader Beji Caid Essebsi” (El Amraoui, 2014b) promised to return with the state’s prestige and stability, by countering the security and economic issues of a country “plagued by terrorist attacks and two political assassinations since the 2011 revolution” (El Amraoui, 2014b).

Combining the claims’ narratives, it is evident that *Al Jazeera* is attempting to connect *Nidaa Tounes* with arguments often employed by the old regimes in Tunisia. Its leader’s personality, the prestige of the state, the terrorist threat, and the restoration of the secular tradition, when faced with the possibility of complete power seizing by the party, are clear references to the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse, thus, preparing the reader for a construction of *Nidaa Tounes* as leaning towards authoritarianism.

However, the challenge for total control over the government's decisions, as explained through the use of an expert's discourse in the piece, lay in the coalition choice that the party still needed to make. Indeed, the decision proposed in the news concerned the inclusion or exclusion of *Ennahda* from this coalition, seeing the former possibility as the way to govern in a majority. This is seen in: “The big decision coming up for the leadership of *Nidaa Tounes* is who their coalition partners will be. The party will either opt for an inclusive coalition that includes *Ennahda* or drift towards a government with smaller parties, leaving *Ennahda* in opposition.” (El Amraoui, 2014b).

Contrarily, however, by framing that the “*raison d’être* of *Nidaa Tounes* [...] [was] to provide a counterweight to the rise of *Ennahda*” (El Amraoui, 2014b, our remark), the choice for including the “Islamist party” appears as “self-destructive for *Nidaa Tounes*” (El Amraoui, 2014b). Facing possible political scenarios proposed by the expert, the piece appears to express the inclusion of *Ennahda* as the best alternative, even with *Nidaa Tounes*’s purpose of countering the Troika government. This is exemplified by using generalized sources and stressing the Political Islam party importance:

The majority of political analysts in Tunisia believe the disadvantages of [excluding *Ennahda*] far outweigh its advantages, making it a much less desirable choice to meet the challenges the country is facing. They argue that *Ennahda* remains a significant force in the country and its role is crucial for any future decision-making. (El Amraoui, 2014b, our remark).

Interestingly, the piece seems not only to convey criticism and suspicion towards *Nidaa Tounes* but also to position *Ennahda* as a counterbalance to the actions of the winning party. This is also seen in: “small parties may exercise no power in the ruling coalition, in that larger partners could use their leverage to wring concessions from them, leading to the emergence of a new authoritarian style of government.” (El Amraoui, 2014b). Additionally, a

source formerly connected to Essebsi's opponent, Marzouki, confirms this position by claiming:

‘If Essebsi wins the presidency, all executive powers will be shared by him and his party that enjoys a majority in the parliament and which will nominate a candidate for the prime minister's office. This can become a source of worry. Yet, the party cannot and will not be able to govern by itself,’ [...] (El Amraoui, 2014b).

Relevantly, the piece also proposes that newcomers could also solve the problems of Tunisia, by using the source's discourse. In this way, it is suggested that: “All current parties are running out of genuine solutions to the country's pressing issues and challenges. They all somehow copied and pasted the programmes of Ben Ali's governments.” (El Amraoui, 2014b). Thus, by critically assessing the country's parties, it redirects attention from the hope built around *Nidaa Tounes* to the production of suspicion of the winning party.

Finally, the piece concludes with the possible international reactions concerning a coalition between *Nidaa Tounes* and *Ennahda*. On the Western side, countries are said to support this alliance, however, European countries refrained from investing in Tunisia due to their own crisis. Contrarily, concerning the Gulf, their investment is portrayed as a possibility only if *Ennahda* had a minor role in the government.

Overall, the call for a coalition between the two forces is constructed as complicated but necessary to avoid power abuse by Essebsi's party. Regardless, it is said that “fragmentation of political support could lead to a fragile coalition and consequently to political paralysis amid squabbles between the parties over policy issues.” (El Amraoui, 2014b). Thus, as argued, the inclusion of *Ennahda* in the then-upcoming government appears as the discursive goal of the piece.

In the final piece, titled “Essebsi wins Tunisia presidential vote” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014) and published on the 23rd of December, there is a continuity to the criticism towards *Nidaa Tounes*, focused now on the figure of Essebsi. Beyond describing the victory and Marzouki's congratulations on the rival win, the piece employs an interesting meaning concerning the winning politician connected to the constructions made on the former analyzed text.

After defining the vote as the last step to democracy, the elected president is described as a “former official in Ben Ali's one-party administration, [that] reinvented himself as a technocrat” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014, our remark) and his party as “having profited from the backlash against the country's first post-revolt Islamist government” (Essebsi wins [...], 2014). The relevant mentioning of the “one-party administration” of Ben Ali and Essebsi

connection to it relates to the previous news worries, producing a sentiment of suspicion around the party's and its leader's victory in elections.

This narrative is supported by the mention of a generalized source, namely the "Tunisians". On their regard, it is said that:

Tunisians are more concerned than they are excited because there is a relative unknown factor as to what would happen after an Essebsi win. The country has become more and more polarised over the past couple of years because it is a relatively new thing in the Arab world, particularly in Tunisia, to have the freedom of expression and to mobilise politically.

People are worried that with Essebsi winning, because of his connections to the old regime and the fact that many in his political party served under Ben Ali, there will be a regression in democracy and progressiveness here in Tunisia (Essebsi wins [...], 2014)

Through this production of objectivity and truthfulness by using generalized sources, such as "Tunisians" and "people", the network brings a local perspective to their argument, backing its discourse. Thus, to a reader, the possibility of an authoritarian turn by Essebsi is feasible and threatens the success of the Revolution. A second employment made by the piece to convince its interlocutor of this threat is the mention of the Egyptian, Libyan, and Syrian "Arab Spring" cases and the overall success of Tunisian democracy, leaning on the "Arab Spring" failure as an imminent threat.

Subsequently, it describes both negative and positive reactions to the results and claims that "Essebsi's victory will enable him to consolidate power, with his new secular party already controlling parliament after defeating the main Islamist party in legislative elections in October." (Essebsi wins [...], 2014), once again posing the elected president as a threat. In addition, the suspicion construction is soothed by Essebsi's claims of not excluding others and dedicating his victory to the martyrs, referencing the martyrdom interdiscourse employed after the 2013 political assassinations.

This trend to alleviate the criticism towards Essebsi and his party is confirmed by the use of a local source, claiming that "'I voted for Beji Essebsi, because he has a lot of experience, and we have a lot of faith in him that he will fix the country,' one supporter told *Al Jazeera*" (Essebsi wins [...], 2014). The only return to the previous critical stance is made using Marzouki as a source by adding that he "had warned that Essebsi [...] would bring back the authoritarian policies of previous regimes." (Essebsi wins [...], 2014).

To conclude the piece, the network adds a mention concerning "Tunisia's moderate Islamists" (Essebsi wins [...], 2014), namely the *Ennahda* Movement, and its position on the presidential elections between Essebsi and Marzouki. It is noted that, despite not formally backing any candidate, the party was "[...] believed to lean towards Marzouki" (Essebsi wins

[...], 2014).

Overall, the piece confirms AJE's coverage of implicit, and often explicit, opposition to *Nidaa Tounes* and Essebsi, producing meaning about their connections with the old regime and a return to pre-*Thawra* moments. In addition, to generate objectivity, it soothes its claims by showing the support received by Essebsi and his cooperation declarations. In conclusion, it also mobilizes the discourse of the Revolution being threatened to engage its interlocutor with the opposition of *Nidaa Tounes*.

In an overview, the coverage of the 2014 elections by *Al Jazeera* English has interesting features, such as the change of implicit criticism from *Ennahda* to *Nidaa Tounes* and the often use of the former as the only quoted source in its pieces. Regarding the counterflow argument, AJE appears to oppose the hegemonic view of *Nidaa Tounes* as the solution to the Tunisian crisis, recognizing the problems it might impose on the country, endearing an opposite view in relation to the general flow of news. In conclusion, the network's coverage favored a unique view of *Nidaa Tounes* and *Ennahda* if compared with the general media coverage.

6.7 Conclusion: Finding a Solution

In our analysis of the 2013 international media coverage, we argued that the networks dramatized the crisis, amplifying its causes, influences, and consequences. In contrast, the 2014 coverage reflects a focus on a found solution, namely the victory of *Nidaa Tounes*. Indeed, the general trend during the electoral period was to construct the winning party and its elected president as powerful and experient, while *Ennahda* appeared as the main reason for Tunisia's economic, political, and security problems.

To pursue this meaning production, especially, F24 and BBC employed the call for coalition by *Ennahda* as proof of its desperation for power. Both networks, particularly F24, also emphasized *Nidaa Tounes's* experience as a strategic advantage. The extensive discussion of the party's "*laïc*" credentials highlights the French outlet's interest in its victory and secular debate. On the other hand, BBC preserved its praise for the "Arab Spring" as its central feature, even establishing criticism towards Essebsi's party.

More drastically, the coverage from *Al Arabiya* English deepened its criticism of the *Ennahda* Movement, making more substantial critiques than both mentioned outlets. It continued opposing the positive view of the Revolution displayed by the Western networks, stressing the relationship between the problems endured by Tunisia and the tensions resulting

from the secular/Islamist clash in the country. However, with the victory of *Nidaa Tounes*, the network started to frame the *Thawra* with positive eyes, timidly resembling F24 and BBC's discourses.

The block represented by the BRICS network, as seen in the Western agencies, had relatable coverage, especially, considering their scarcity of news and profound analysis of the period. TASS shifted its posture, vaguely defending *Nidaa Tounes*, which had appeared in its 2013 coverage, and demonstrating timid interest in the North African country's politics. Meanwhile, G1 continued its dramatized account of Tunisian politics, by using adjectives such as "anemic" and focusing on the "jihadist threat". Thus, both coverages resemble each other in their lack of profound assessment of the period.

In addition, similar to AAE, TASS also shifted its view of the Revolution after the victory of *Nidaa Tounes*. In the case of TASS, this change is discussed as an overall lack of interest in Tunisia by the Russian agency, since its favored party was ahead in the polls. The case of AAE appears to demonstrate the outlet's opposition to Political Islam parties, which emerged as a force in politics after the North African countries' specific Revolutions. Facing a secular shift, in this binary discourse, *Al Arabiya* changed its view on the *Thawra*, also considering the coup suffered by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Distant from the hegemonic view, AJE's critique of Essebsi's party positions its coverage as the unique highlight of this period. As the previous outlets briefly mentioned Essebsi's posts at the Tunisian prior dictatorships, in its account, the connection between the old regimes and *Nidaa Tounes* is emphasized. There is criticism directed toward *Ennahda*, however, it is emphatically timid compared to its account of the 2013 political assassinations in the country.

Overall, the use of sources was aimed at the production of objectivity, often endorsing the outlet bias towards one of the secular/Islamist binary. TASS, however, is the only analyzed object to have avoided the use of quotes, preferring to directly display the information. Indeed, the sources' identities ranged from experts to elite politicians, often siding with local voices in Tunisia. Thus, compared with the 2013 dramatic use of family members as sources, in 2014, the quotes appeared to produce a veracity effect on each outlet's claims.

Similarly, the use of interdiscourses indicates a generalized preference for the secular/Islamist binary and an intense mention of the "Arab Spring" success/failure dichotomy. The use of interdiscourses as a persuasion technique is evident, as commonly accepted narratives in anglophone countries are employed to convince the interlocutor of an intended meaning. The most relevant examples are the veil's discourse displayed by the Saudi

Al Arabiya English and the idea of the “Arab Spring” as a consequence of Western actions in the region.

Indeed, the extensive use of the secular/Islamist binary must be viewed as a tool for simplifying the debate in Tunisia and persuading the audience to choose only one side. Commonly, its employment is associated with a suspicious view of Political Islam, fueled by Islamophobic tropes, such as the veil marking Muslim women’s submission, and Orientalist meanings. As a matter of fact, this is also prejudicial to *Nidaa Tounes*, which also employs the discursive tradition of Islam in its political discourses and intentions.

In conclusion, revisiting our research question, the 2014 media portrayal perceived the *Ennahda* Movement as tied to *Nidaa Tounes*, casting both as deeply connected yet oppositional forces. Its image continued to be generally painted with suspicion and fury concerning its fault for Tunisia’s problem. The construction of *Nidaa Tounes* as its mired image, naturally trustful and experienced, produces the Othering of *Ennahda*. This Othering process is typically seen in the former government’s employment of the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse, which, indeed, confirms the international media’s hope for Essebsi’s party identity to be related to the old regime, but with an injection of Botox.

7 “THE ‘HEGEMONIC’ TEMPTATIONS OF POLITICAL ISLAM”: THE 2016 PARTY CONGRESS

Figure 05 - In Memoriam for the Bardo National Museum attack’s victims (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

Two years after *Nidaa Tounes*'s victory in the 2014 elections, the context of Tunisian politics had rapidly changed. The coalition government established between the majority party and *Ennahda* faced challenges similar to the ones the *Troika* endured, such as the Bardo Museum attack¹¹⁰. This last event, symbolized by the picture above, reinforced a branding problem regarding the *Ennahda* Movement: its ideological positioning within the Political Islam discursive tradition.

The term “Muslim Democracy” emerged as a strategic solution, aiming to acknowledge the influence of Islam on *Ennahda*'s actions while avoiding associations with

¹¹⁰ See Landucci (2022) for discourse analyses on this event.

interdiscourses linked to other groups and movements in the region. This approach is best understood not only within Tunisia's domestic context but also in response to regional dynamics, particularly the rise of armed militancy by the Islamic State and the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by the Sisi regime. Concerning its own discourse, its leader explained:

We seek to create solutions to the day-to-day problems that Tunisians face rather than preach about the hereafter. To be clear, the principles of Islam have always inspired *Ennahda*, and our values will continue to guide us. But it is no longer necessary for *Ennahda* (or any other party) to struggle for religious freedoms: under the new constitution, all Tunisians enjoy the same rights, whether they are believers, agnostics, or atheists. The separation of religion and politics will prevent officials from using faith-based appeals to manipulate the public. (Ghannouchi, 2016, p. 59).

As we have stressed, this move reinforces the problematic use of uncontextualized foreign terms, such as Political Islam. This rebranding solution defended by the party emphasizes the difficulty of taking academic ‘boxes’ to the political realm. As seen in the previous chapter, the *Ennahda* Movement endured deep criticism and was often positioned as aligned with armed militancy inside and outside of Tunisia. Therefore, we choose to interpret this change as a discursive rather than a practical action. This suggests that it was primarily directed at shaping the party’s oppositional discourse and its social engagement, limiting its *Da’wa* work without significantly altering its political vision.

Including this period in the analysis allowed intriguing quantitative insights, particularly highlighted by the absence of coverage of this ideological shift by BBC, TASS, and G1. Within the framework of counterflow theory, it is evident how an absence of discourses on such a matter shows a commitment from both TASS and G1 to narratives typically aligned with the intersubjective construction of Political Islam within their borders. Their previous reliance on the terrorist interdiscourse and the Islamist/secular binary appears in accordance with this silence on the nuanced and historically significant ideological repositioning of the party.

Similarly, BBC, which in previous analyses stressed emotional and general accounts regarding the party, also chose to abstain from covering this ideological shift. This absence can be attributed to its editorial tendency to prioritize emotive accounts over rational or pragmatic analyses of the *Ennahda* Movement. For all three outlets, engaging with a complex, historically situated ideological shift likely did not align with their existing editorial approaches.

Thus, the present chapter positions how France 24, *Al Arabiya* English, and *Al Jazeera* English constructed the party’s ideological change in its 2016 congress. As it will be

discussed, each outlet prioritized a view of the political move, overall, opting to perceive it positively. The discourse in which it is understood drastically changes from one media network to another, emphasizing the importance of this period to our study.

7.1 France 24

Closely resembling BBC, TASS, and G1's silencing coverages, France 24 had only one piece available for analysis. Despite recognizing the limitations of conducting a single examination, the discussion of the piece titled "The Tunisian Islamist movement *Ennahda* holds a congress to become a 'civil party'" (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹¹) gives us information concerning our research question, emphasizing the network's understanding of the party's Political Islam ideology and eventual change to "Muslim Democracy".

Published on the 20th of May, the piece describes the party's ideological shift as a turn to a civil party, as seen in the title. This is important because each individual network has focused on one aspect of the change's discourse to construct it. Consequently, in the piece, it was important to look for clues regarding F24's definition of civil party and in which aspects Political Islam misses this category.

Initially, in the piece's lead, *Ennahda*'s transformation into a "civil party" is dramatically described as "[...] a new phase in the evolution of the Tunisian political landscape" (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹²). The idea, thus, is to connect this metamorphosis with the Tunisian broader "Arab Spring" narrative, seeing it as a consequence of the democratic evolution in the country. As seen before, this decontextualized internal discussions within the party, implicitly constructing the move as a consequence of social pressure, namely from the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse.

By briefly assessing the party's suffered repression under Ben Ali and its years in power, described as "[...] two years of tumultuous exercise of power" (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹³), the piece attempts to contextualize the Congress's result within the party's actions. This is also seen in the discourse of Hamza Meddeb, an expert from the European University Institute in Florence, which portrays the party as united and cohesive. Hence, when portraying Rached Ghannouchi's re-election as head of the party, the piece constructs it as "A formality, because 'there is no one to succeed him'" (Le mouvement [...],

¹¹¹ In the original: "*Le mouvement islamiste tunisien Ennahda en congrès pour devenir un 'parti civil'*".

¹¹² In the original: "*une nouvelle étape de l'évolution du paysage politique tunisien*".

¹¹³ In the original: "*deux années d'exercice mouvementé du pouvoir*".

2016, our translation¹¹⁴), according to a European diplomatic source.

Interestingly, Ghannouchi's figure appears with notoriety in the three analyzed coverages, especially to explain the change for their audiences. In the case of F24, he claims: "We are moving in the direction of a party that specializes solely in political activities [...]. We are moving away from political Islam to enter Muslim Democracy." (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹⁵). As we have criticized before, the term Muslim Democracy emerges as meaningless as Political Islam, without a proper definition and historical context, and its definition is left empty by the discourse.

Moreover, the piece attempts to produce meaning regarding this change in reference to the Muslim Brotherhood connection interdiscourse. As explained by the expert, Meddeb, the metamorphosis is represented by a shift from *Ennahda* as part of the *Ikhwani* model to a leaning toward democracy and civil society. As we have shown this is historically inaccurate and ignores the party's actions towards compromise and the internal and external development of democratic institutions. The expert full discourse can be seen in:

'After this congress, it will no longer be the Ennahda movement – once built on a Brotherhood model [derived from the Muslim Brotherhood] – with branches active in social, educational, charitable, religious and political action. There will only be the *Ennahda* party, a party that wants to be civil and democratic while keeping the Islamic reference,' [...] (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹⁶)

To demonstrate this idea of democratic turn urged by the Tunisian society, which appears as the most influential cause of *Ennahda*'s decision, the piece subsequently describes the results of a poll from the Tunisian Sigma Institute, in collaboration with the Arab Observatory for Religions and Freedoms and the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation. According to those institutions, "73% of Tunisians are in favor of 'the separation between religion and politics'" (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹⁷).

Intriguingly, the piece omits other relevant results from the study. In Sigma (2016), it is shown that despite having a negative perception of religion in politics, which was also often employed by alleged "secular governments", more than 48% of Tunisians agree that their religious identity is more important than their national identity. Another interesting piece of data came on the topic of religious extremism regularly connected to the work of *Ennahda* by

¹¹⁴ In the original: "Une formalité, car 'il n'y a personne pour lui succéder'".

¹¹⁵ In the original: "Nous allons dans le sens d'un parti qui se spécialise sur les seules activités politiques [...]. On sort de l'islam politique pour entrer dans la démocratie musulmane".

¹¹⁶ In the original: "Après ce congrès, ce ne sera plus le mouvement Ennahda – jadis construit sur un modèle frériste [dérivé des Frères musulmans] – avec des branches actives dans l'action sociale, éducative, caritative, religieuse et politique. Il n'y aura que le parti Ennahda, parti qui se veut civil et démocratique, tout en gardant la référence islamique".

¹¹⁷ In the original: "73 % des Tunisiens sont favorables à 'la séparation entre la religion et la politique'".

the media. According to Sigma (2016, p. 23), the majority of the analyzed sample (30,4%) believed that the West was the primary inciter of religious extremism.

Thus, the piece's focus on a study's theme that is often polarized within Tunisian society, while overlooking other relevant aspects, offers limited insights. Indeed, a broader approach would help us better understand the context deeply. Regardless, this bias towards a distorted vision of secularism helps us examine how the outlet constructs the image of the *Ennahda* party and, consequently, of Political Islam.

Finally, relating to these matters, the piece turns to the coup suffered by the Brotherhood in Egypt to explain, quoting the European diplomatic source, that “‘Ghannouchi has a near-obsession with showing Western partners that *Ennahda* is not the Muslim Brotherhood.’” (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹⁸). This reiterates an image of the West as the central force in Tunisian politics. Consequently, the ideological shift, which was initially portrayed as a response to society's pressure, is also occurring due to the West's hatred towards the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, entailing a limited view of Political Islam.

In conclusion, the piece dramatically questions the party's integrity and willingness to separate religion from politics by using quotes from two pieces. This is seen in:

Ennahda 'lulls us with the illusion that the 'hegemonic' temptations of Political Islam are behind us,' commented the Swiss French-language newspaper *Le Temps*. Meanwhile, the Arabic-language newspaper *Al Chourouq* expressed skepticism, stating it remains to be seen whether these promises will end up as 'empty words.' (Le mouvement [...], 2016, our translation¹¹⁹)

The dramatic use of “*les tentations 'hégémoniques' de l'islamisme politique*” and the claim of the change as “*paroles en l'air*” further amplify their recurring narrative of suspicion surrounding Political Islam. This reinforces their tendency to depict political Islam as a threatening and unreliable agent, stressing a discourse of doubt regarding its genuine transformation.

Overall, France 24's single piece continues the outlet's production of a simplified view of *Ennahda*, more worried about the protection of the Tunisian “political evolution” than with an accurate depiction of political actors. The use of official elite sources was maintained and the partial quoting of the study shows a compromise with their vision rather than an attempt to comprehend the party. In conclusion, it maintains the West as the leading actor in the International System while presenting Political Islam as a threat to its values, which often

¹¹⁸ In the original: “‘il y a chez Ghannouchi la quasi-obsession de montrer aux partenaires occidentaux qu'*Ennahda*, ça n'est pas les Frères musulmans’”.

¹¹⁹ In the original: *Ennahda* nous berce de l'illusion que les tentations 'hégémoniques' de l'islamisme politique sont bien derrière nous, a commenté le quotidien suisse francophone *Le Temps*, tandis que le journal arabophone *Al Chourouq* dit attendre de voir si ces promesses ne resteront pas 'des paroles en l'air'.

employs mischievous manners to obtain power.

7.2 *Al Arabiya* English

While France 24 entailed a vision of *Ennahda*'s ideological change as a shift from Political Islam to a civil party, *Al Arabiya* English incorporated a view in which the same move was seen as the specific party's separation between politics and religion. In the two analyzed pieces from the Saudi network, dating May 19 and 21, many references appeared similar to the French coverage, especially, the centrality around the figure of Ghannouchi, the Muslim Brotherhood interdiscourse, and the democratic development in Tunisia. However, as explained the meaning concerning the transformation essence changed to stress a defeat of Political Islam by highlighting the decoupling of politics and religion..

Notably, both selected pieces contained identical sections, suggesting a potential overlap in content or source material, which justifies conducting their analysis simultaneously. Titled "Tunisia's *Ennahda* to separate politics from Islamic activity" (Tunisia's [...], 2016) and "Tunisia's Islamist *Ennahda* holds key congress" (Tunisia's Islamist [...], 2016), the news stories delved into the reasons and consequences of the party's move, quoting Ghannouchi as a source and exploiting the view of Political Islam defeat in the "post-Arab Spring" period. Despite the resemblances, we opted to focus on the first piece as our guide through the analysis, avoiding the repetition of quotes from the articles.

Initially, beyond the mention of the party's move as a separation between the political and religious activities, the two reports constructed the party's leader as "[...] an intellectual who once advocated a strict application of Islamic sharia law" (Tunisia's [...], 2016). This claim, once more, lights suspicion around *Ennahda*, while failing to contextualize its information. Subsequently, contrasting with this image, the pieces used Ghannouchi's discourse to affirm that "there was no room left in post-Arab Spring Tunisia for 'political Islam'" (Tunisia's [...], 2016).

Similarly, AAE uses its narrative to stress its vision of the failure of Political Islam in the broader Arab context by using the Tunisian example as a model. The idea of the monopoly of religion by politics, as we have attempted to emphasize, is a trend especially involving the self-proclaimed secular governments of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. On the other hand, when producing the meaning of the change as the cessation of the political manipulation of religion, the context suggests that it specifically pertains to *Ennahda*, further amplifying the outlet's critique of Political Islam. This is seen in the following Ghannouchi's quotations:

‘Tunisia is now a democracy. The 2014 constitution has imposed limits on extreme secularism and extreme religion [...] We want religious activity to be completely independent from political activity [...] This is good for politicians because they would no longer be accused of manipulating religion for political means and good for religion because it would not be held hostage to politics,’ (Tunisia's [...], 2016)

Similar to F24, the move is also described as a party attempting to specialize in political activities, distancing itself from its religious work to become a “[...] political, democratic and civil party” (Tunisia's [...], 2016). Despite the mention of the “civil party” narrative, quoting Ghannouchi, this does not appear as the focus of the piece, which mostly entails the party’s separation of religion and politics. In addition, as done by F24, there is also a mention of the party’s references remaining rooted in ancient and modern forms of Islam, acknowledging the complexity of the shift.

Additionally, also quoting the *Ennahda*’s leader, it is said that they “[...] are leaving political Islam and entering democratic Islam. [They] are Muslim democrats who are no longer claim[ing] to represent political Islam,” (Tunisia's [...], 2016, our remarks). Indeed, by the description produced by AAE in both pieces, it is still unclear the meaning behind “Muslim Democracy” and, even, what is understood by the outlet as Political Islam. This is relevant because, in the emptiness of meaning, a meaning is yet produced.

One segment that reinforces this claim is in the mention that: “Ghannouchi and other intellectuals inspired by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood in 1981 founded the Islamic Tendency Movement, which became *Ennahda* in 1989” (Tunisia's [...], 2016). By this connection with the Brotherhood and the absence of clear meaning in the definition of Political Islam, it appears that the party is changing from being a branch of the Brotherhood to becoming a “political, democratic and civil party” (Tunisia's [...], 2016). Still, regardless of its socio-religious structure, *Ennahda* was a political and democratic party before the shift, as proven by its actions.

Differently from the first piece, the second adds an unclear layer to this negative subtext. In its final paragraphs, it adds: “On Friday *Ennahda* supporters in Rades chanted ‘we want *Ennahda* again’” (Tunisia’s Islamist [...], 2016). This segment aims to reinforce how its support base has developed an allegiance to this Brotherhood descendancy, emphasizing the idea that this shift might not be permanent or in line with the party’s identity. In other words, it serves to produce suspicion around its action, since it would be counterintuitive to consider a party acting against its supporters.

What can be captured from the analysis of AAE’s coverage is an attempt to build a negative image of Political Islam, based on the party’s decision to separate its political and

religious activity. By vaguely defining *Ennahda*'s previous ideology, it fuels the audience with meanings derived from interdiscourses with unfavorable connotations towards it, such as the Muslim Brotherhood reference, suggesting that secular governance is more democratic. Overall, the network maintained its tendency to perceive Political Islam and *Ennahda* as threats to Tunisia and the region, while depicting the transformation positively, even with the narrative of suspicion around the party present in the second piece.

7.3 *Al Jazeera English*

With the deepest coverage available, *Al Jazeera English* emphasized a notion of the party's ideological change as a distancing from Political Islam. Consequently, while F24 aimed to frame it as a move towards civil democracy and AAE portrayed it as a separation of religion and politics, AJE produced its discourse regarding the shift in relation to the negative historical view of Political Islam in Tunisia and the West. Also dated from May, the three analyzed articles were dense and contained in-depth analyses of the practical changes regarding the results of the party's congress.

Titled "Tunisia's *Ennahda* distances itself from political Islam" and published on the 21st of May, the first piece opens its discourse by claiming that: "Tunisia's conservative *Ennahda* party says it has separated itself from any association with political Islam after being considered 'moderate' Islamists for 30 years." (Tunisia's [...], 2016). Three major points can be made concerning the statement. First, the use of "conservative" produces the idea of resistance to change, which is a relevant meaning considering the event in question. In addition, it is not clear what is meant by the adjective and under which context it is considered conservative.

The second important meaning produced is the perception of *Ennahda* being considered moderate for 30 years. The shortage of precision surrounding this source produces an interpretation of suspicion as if the party would not act moderately and would only be considered as such. Finally, it positions the network's meaning concerning the shift, as a separation from the concept of Political Islam. This is relevant to differentiate the outlet's coverage from F24's civil party approach and AAE's religion and politics separation meaning. Indeed, the importance of the change is placed on the definition of Political Islam.

Subsequently, it also employs Ghannouchi's discourse to explain the change and construct their vision of the party's transformation. Interestingly, the use of the ideologue's comments by each network emphasizes their vision of the party and the shift. In his words,

“We are keen to keep religion far from political struggles, and we call for complete neutrality, [...] A modern state is not run through ideologies, big slogans and political wrangling, but rather through practical programmes.” (Tunisia’s [...], 2016).

By quoting, the *Ennahda*’s leader, AJE referred to the separation between religion and politics, similarly to AAE coverage, but focused deeply on the ideological meaning of the change. While stressing terms such as “neutrality”, “ideologies”, and “big slogans”, it further amplifies its discourse connecting the congress’s results with a separation from the ideological meanings of Political Islam.

This approach is deepened by the discourse of an *Al Jazeera* reporter, whose indirect quote explains the move as an attempt from the party to “broaden its appeal to the wider sectors of society” (Tunisia’s [...], 2016). Beyond describing the practical consequences of the change, the reporter connects this endeavor as a response to the Tunisian - in relation to the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse - and Western fear of Political Islam, echoing the network’s description of the party’s reformation as a distancing from this ideological concept.

According to the correspondent, “Tunisia and the West in general still view the label of Islamists as connected to groups like Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram. So it is trying to move away from that label, but it doesn’t mean it won’t have Islamic values. It still will.” (Tunisia’s [...], 2016). Remarkably, *Ennahda*’s avoidance of the negative connotation of the term is indeed presented as the motivation for its shift, while the terrorist interdiscourse is activated in a critical manner, stressing the essentialization around the term Political Islam.

Moreover, the piece continues by addressing that “Ghannouchi and other intellectuals inspired by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood in 1981 founded the Islamic Tendency Movement, which became *Ennahda* in 1989.” (Tunisia’s [...], 2016), similar to F24 and AAE. In light of this similarity between the three coverages on the use of the Brotherhood interdiscourse, we hypothesize that the outlets have drawn their coverage from a common information provider or newswire service.

Interestingly, this suggests a generalized media uninterest in producing meticulous and singular pieces on the theme, which could be explained by its complexity or by an overall indifference to dwelling deeply on the topic. Thus, the main difference from each narrative appears in the reasoning behind *Ennahda*’s shift. Despite this simplification by AJE, it is still important to emphasize that the other pieces differed deeply from this initial reductive meaning production by the party.

Finally, this first piece concludes with a brief discussion of the party’s history, especially addressing its victory in the 2011 elections. Comprehensively, this article reflects

the tone set by *Al Jazeera* concerning the change, which relies extensively on the insubstantiality of the term “Political Islam” and its intersubjective connection with the terrorist interdiscourse. Thus, the party is not portrayed as becoming a civil party or only separating its religious and political activities but avoiding the negative view of its former discursive ideology.

Differently, the second piece, titled “Why is Tunisia’s *Ennahda* ditching political Islam?” (Sadiki, 2016) and published on the 24th of May, presented itself as a specialized perspective on the matter. In its title, it is evident how the piece continues AJE's perspective about the shift, focusing on a possible discarding of the idea of Political Islam. Indeed, in its lead, this focal point is emphasized, when the author questions if the party was “renouncing ‘Islamism’, its doctrinaire sine qua non and the basis of its foundational identity” (Sadiki, 2016).

The author continues by framing the congress as a pluralistic arena of discussion, whose outcome was *Ennahda*’s commitment “[...] to separate the religious (*al-da’awi*) from the political (*al-siyasi*)” (Sadiki, 2016). In this segment, the use of Arabic terms suggests, in contrast with the first article, a devotion to a specialized audience, whose objective in reading the text was to deepen their knowledge regarding the theme. This is especially evident since this was the first piece using such language to clarify their concepts.

Subsequently, the following paragraphs highlight interdiscursive references to the Political Islam and Muslim Democracy ideologies, relying on recognized parties, and employ established narratives on the event, such as the civil party discussion. Initially, the piece aims to attach Political Islam to the Brotherhood, while describing Muslim Democracy as a discursive frame operated by the Turkish AKP. The descriptions of each party are important to frame both ideologies under banners of partial secularism or complete religiosity in politics. This is seen in:

A vision that was upheld for more than three decades has ceded to a new brand of civic Islamism. That is, by analogy, a neo-*Ennahda* has not only edged closer to the notion of a civil state, but also to Turkey’s ruling AK Party and further from Egypt’s standard Muslim Brotherhood or ‘*Ikhwani*’ model: The former operates politics with minimum ideology, the latter has historically harboured ambitions of Islamising polity. (Sadiki, 2016).

Interestingly, this segment reinforces our argument concerning the essentialization of Islam in politics, through which the term Political Islam has gained simplistic accounts, even in academic and specialized contexts. The text's reference to “minimum ideology” referring to the AK Party produces an unspoken meaning, especially, facing a context in which the word

ideology could be replaced by “religiosity”, a fact confirmed by the following argument relating to the *Ikhwani* Islamization of politics.

Although vaguely addressed in the previous paragraph, the subsequent section provides a definition of a civil party, considering the neo-*Ennahda* narrative. Labeling Ghannouchi as a *Sheikh*, a term used by its supporters according to Islamist Ghannouchi [...] (2013), the author claims that the leader explained the change as if the party was “adopting a new discourse angled at stressing the primacy of the market, economic growth, renouncing the politics of identity, very much part of the fundamentals of his thought for more than 30 years” (Sadiki, 2016). Thus, the author positions the “civil party” narrative within the narrative of liberalism.

In the following section, the piece shifts from explaining the neo-*Ennahda* discourse to a discussion of the reasons behind the new *ethos*. In its first lines, it is clear how AJE’s focus on explaining the change as a response to the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse remains a central feature of the coverage: “The shift is intended also to pre-empt criticisms from liberals and secularists that it does respect Tunisia’s political identity.” (Sadiki, 2016). Thus, the network appears to also emphasize the simplification suffered by *Ennahda* due to its Political Islam discourse. Also concerning this *Tunisianité* interdiscourse and the rationale of the shift, the author adds:

[...] one of the reasons is the normalisation of *Ennahda* party with the ‘deep state’, a term coined to refer to the politico-security establishment that has preserved the imprints of late Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba’s political modelling of it a la Francophile: secular in nature.
Tunisia’s society is similarly shaped, manifesting a deeply hybrid personality that reveres Islam but with a bent for civic engagement of all aspects of the horizontal side of life, including politics.
Ennahda is finally being deftly adaptive, seeking a brand of ‘Tunisification’ of its identity [...] (Sadiki, 2016).

Notably, what can be apprehended from this explanation, however, is that, although the simplification appears as a problem, it is still *Ennahda*’s fault for not “[...] being deftly adaptive” (Sadiki, 2016) and not following Tunisia’s identity. In other words, while acknowledging part of the problem as stemming from a reified perspective on the party’s actions, it still attributes the core issue to an overly simplified interpretation of these actions, fueling its critique on the *Tunisianité* argument, here defined as “deep state”.

Moreover, the second rationale behind the reason is presented as a professionalization, defined by the separation of religion and politics, as the party would turn into a “fully-fledged civic political party.” (Sadiki, 2016). This simplistic view is further justified by “*Ennahda*’s partnering in the *troika* government, that delivered the country’s democratic constitution in

early 2014, provided the party with an invaluable ‘reality check’, which it used to reflect, revise and adjust” (Sadiki, 2016). According to this perspective, *Ennahda*’s “evolutionary” choice only occurred because of the influence of its alliance with secular parties.

Once more, it is evident how the piece misses the point of the continuous maturation of *Ennahda*’s ideology, as we presented previously, seeing this move only contextually and not historically. This becomes even more reified considering the weight put on the party’s alliance with secular forces as another reason for it, or, in the words used, as its “reality check”. Therefore, differently from the first piece, which attempted to critically address the contextual limitations of the Western concept of Political Islam and the party’s historical commitment to adaptation, this second piece falls into the reified narrative, despite its attempts to produce a specialized view on the theme.

The final reason presented by the piece was characterized by its author as a “democratisation via factionalisation” process (Sadiki, 2016). Defined by the author as a process of open discussion of the party’s future from its different branches, this democratic feature is described as “unthinkable before the 2011 revolution in Tunisia” (Sadiki, 2016), which once more prove the absence of historical accuracy in this piece portrait of *Ennahda*.

Furthermore, reverberating AJE’s vision of the shift, this factionalization and the overall results of the party’s congress are presented in reason of “exigencies and necessities of the Tunisian context [...]. Religiously inspired actors in the Muslim world are trying to define themselves in opposition to the likes of ISIL. *Ennahda* is no exception, with a narrative pitting ‘moderates’ versus ‘radicals’” (Sadiki, 2016). Thus, the final paragraphs of the piece maintain its general focus on the context, stressing the problems of the term Political Islam, as done by the coverage of the 2016 shift by *Al Jazeera*.

This focus is also evident in: “In the Tunisian national milieu, *Ennahda* is probably responding to the misgivings of its detractors that it is hiding a secret theocratic agenda: That once in power it will impose dictatorship.” (Sadiki, 2016) and in “The shift is intended also to pre-empt criticisms from liberals and secularists that it does respect Tunisia’s political identity. *Ennahda* can now claim it is transcending politics of identity.” (Sadiki, 2016). In both paragraphs, the conclusion of the democratic internal discussions of *Ennahda* appears enclosed in the secular vs. Islamist narrative.

In comparison with the first piece, this contextual specialized text avoids history to see the change as a response to a secular Tunisian context and the pressure from Tunisian society upon the party. Indeed, the congress’s results are constructed as a party maturing, which is, in fact, a consequence of its history. Distinguishable from the other networks, the portrait of the

party's reconfiguration was still maintained in the realm of the image problem surrounding the Political Islam discursive tradition.

Juxtaposed with this ahistorical account, AJE's final piece regarding this period, "What is left of Tunisia's *Ennahda* Party?" (Souli, 2016), brought a historical in-depth analysis of the party's unfolding. Beyond a description of the pragmatic effects of the transformation and a claim of the party's new ideological positioning, the piece remarkably focuses on understanding the role of religion in Tunisia's historical path. An example can be made in its portrait of Bourguiba and Ben Ali: "Both governments were secular, repressive and sought to manipulate interpretations of Islam to monopolise political control" (Souli, 2016).

The party's original *Da'wa* past is explained not in relation to a static view of the party as a movement but as a consequence of the "Repressive government policies [that] relegated *Ennahda* to operating primarily out of mosques and homes [...]" (Souli, 2016, our remarks). The recognition of the problems of the secular is relevant facing its overall praise by international media. Similarly, it is stressed how oppressive Ben Ali's government was, considering *Ennahda*'s necessity to move their work underground.

In the years following his ousting and the party's victory, the piece claims that "Yet despite showing a willingness to compromise by participating in a coalition government, the party faced challenges governing Tunisia in the tumultuous years following the revolution." (Souli, 2016). If we contrast the following claims, we see how two narratives followed the party's history: "willingness to compromise" (Souli, 2016) and "finally being deftly adaptive" (Sadiki, 2016). On one side, we have an acknowledgment of their work as a compromising party, on the other, it is constructed as a conservative reluctant organization.

Thus, it is important to emphasize how a singular network can entail different views on a topic while endearing the same narrative concerning the topic. In both cases, the discourse focuses on how the problem was in the Political Islam concept, but one developed a historical account in which the secular role in creating this suspicious narrative is evident and the other aimed at portraying the party's resistance to ditch this ideology before.

Continuing with the piece, it goes further by pointing out the party's opposition effort to diminish its commitment to the Tunisian transition. In the following segment, it is evident how the discourse aims to show how incorrectly *Ennahda*'s ideology and actions had been constructed:

Despite this, *Ennahda*'s secular critics and political rivals insisted the party did not

do enough to counter what they describe as a rising Salafi movement. The assassination of two political opposition leaders further tainted the party's image, despite the fact that party leaders condemned the assassination (Souli, 2016).

Significantly, the piece continues the party's history by addressing its 2014 ceding of power. This move, which orbits on the agreement between the figures of Ghannouchi and Essebsi, is constructed as "an effort to keep Tunisia's democratic transition afloat" (Souli, 2016). In this segment, AJE continues its positive coverage regarding *Ennahda*, differently from the previous piece. Also, concerning this interpretation, the role of the party during the transition is highlighted, opposing the Western - and often BRICS - vision of it as a signal of possible democratic distress in the country.

Another disputed discourse in this piece remained on the comparison of the strong *Nidaa Tounes* and the weak *Ennahda*. This is seen in: "this year 20 of [*Nidaa Tounes*] party's politicians resigned amid internal disputes, and *Ennahda* now has a majority in parliament." (Souli, 2016, our remarks). Thus, despite a possible uninterest, another possibility of the shortage of coverage from the other networks is precisely how eroded by time and history their discourses had become so far. The 2016 shift signified a change in narrative that would, in fact, compromise part of their editorial narratives up to that moment, distinctly from what occurred with AJE.

Similarly, the discourse from the party's Secretary General and Congress President encapsulates this piece's discourse, as a "[...] a natural development within Tunisia, a natural evolution of the *Ennahda* party and of a democratic Tunisia," (Souli, 2016). On a different note, objectivity is attempted by the use of Shadi Hamid, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, discourse. According to the specialist, the decision was not completely consensual and was propelled by Ghannouchi.

Still, it is claimed that "the party has stated that it desires neither an Islamic state nor the implementation of *sharia* law, the question of rebranding the party's image has been internally debated for years" (Souli, 2016). Therefore, despite the recognition of the centrality of the leader in the decision and possible internal dissent, the desire to change the party's image appears agreed upon by the majority of *Ennahda*. In addition, the piece takes advantage of the segment to deconstruct usually distorted oppositional narratives relating to the party, such as the Islamic state and the *Shari'a* reference.

The reasoning behind the change, despite positioning it in contextual features, is operated from the party's discourse. In one of its paragraphs, it is said to take into consideration "the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS) group, which

uses the term political Islam to describe its extremist activities; and Tunisia's new constitution, which protects freedom of religion and limits extreme secularism." (Souli, 2016).

On this matter, the reference to other parties which endeavor a Political Islam discursive tradition serves to broadly contextualize this claim. This happens with the constantly mentioned Brotherhood coup threat interdiscourse and with the recognition of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front's impossibility of governing. Consequently, this reference amplifies the construction of the party as compromising, such as in: "*Ennahda* has often made concessions to highlight its desire to keep one foot in Tunisian politics, no matter what the cost" (Souli, 2016).

Despite the suspicion produced by the last phrase surrounding a power-eager image, the next paragraph makes clear what it is referring to, namely, the loss of support by part of its base after the party's agreement with *Nidaa Tounes*. In the final two paragraphs, this trend is further elaborated through the incorporation of Hamid and Monica Marks's discourses regarding the potential erosion of the party's support base after the ideological shift.

In the conclusion, it quotes Hamid claiming that "It's a movement, and if you take that away, then you have to ask yourself: What makes *Ennahda* distinctive?" (Souli, 2016). In accordance with the piece's general setting, this final line brings complexity to the blind approval concerning the ideological shift and to the neglect of the term Political Islam by international media. In other words, it sees the shift as an erasure of the party's uniqueness.

Overall, there is a lack of cohesion in AJE's coverage, as it simultaneously highlights the problematic discourse of Western perspectives and Tunisian secularists while sometimes suggesting that the true solution lies in abandoning Political Islam. The three analyzed pieces diverge in focus and depth, as the first works as an informational piece, the second as a contextual analysis, and the third as a historical account of the party's actions. Indeed, the continuity that ties them together is the acknowledgment of the problems within the concept of Political Islam, while the use of it by *Ennahda* is seen differently by each of them.

7.4 Conclusion: Searching for a New Identity

When analyzing the media's discourse, academics often face the challenge of addressing nonlinear, often contradictory, and evolving narratives. This is also the case for the analysis of political parties. *Ennahda*'s shift, as we have tried to argue, was a consequence of historical debates within its ranks. It is even possible to defend that it was simply a theoretical

rebranding due to the pragmatic difficulties of fitting the party's actions on the reified media's image of Political Islam. Thus, the analysis of the 2016 *Ennahda* Congress faces this double challenge.

Initially, we must consider the editorial silencing of the theme by TASS, G1, and BBC. Considering their analyzed coverage, G1's absence of news pieces about it seems unsurprising, since the *Ennahda* party came across in its coverage as a side character, overshadowed by the murdered politicians' family's dramatic accounts and by the criticism of *Nidaa Tounes*. The case of TASS is different, as it may indicate a focus on topics more deeply tied to Russia, such as its intervention in the Syrian conflict. Finally, considering BBC, the British network's silence emerge as the most peculiar, considering its interest in the "Arab Spring". Regarding this outlet, we hypothesize that the theme was eclipsed by the preparation of the BREXIT referendum.

In regard to the available coverages, it is interesting how the identitarian debate inside the party's congress reflected on a search for a new *Ennahda* construction by the outlets. In the case of France 24, the solution appeared on the idea of a civil party, celebrating the *Nahdawi* choice, while questioning the legitimacy of the shift, on a discourse similar to its previous accounts. *Al Arabiya* saw the transformation as an opportunity to stress the defeat of Political Islam as an ideology. In its discourse, the change was depicted as a separation between religion and politics, strengthening the network's pro-secular coverage, while framing the party in a different light.

The case of *Al Jazeera* was the most complex, due to the previous network's shortage in discourse. The Qatari brought in-depth analysis and academics to explain the change and consider it as part of a contextual and historical flow. In its discourse, the reason for the shift appeared on the hegemonic definition of Political Islam and how it constantly threatened and pressured the party's decisions and actions.

Regarding similarities, in all three coverages, Ghannouchi was employed as a central source, which ignores different internal positions and reinforces his "*Sheikh*" image. Another equivalence was the presence of the *Tunisianité* interdiscourse, often used to justify the change. Its employment was not, however, entirely seen as positive, especially if we consider the discourse of AJE.

In general, there was no consensus on the reason behind the move, its definition, or the framing of *Ennahda*'s new identity. The concept of the Muslim Democracy, similar to its academic format, was still roughly defined and only developed in reference to liberalism, secularism, and the AKP Model. Thus, as we have argued, there was also a search for the new

Nahdawi identity within the coverages' discourses at times, to critique it within a new framework, and at others, to dialogue with its evolving *ethos*.

If the 2013 coverage created a crisis and 2014 found a solution in *Nidaa Tounes*, the 2016 media engagement sought to recover its attention on *Ennahda*, facing its return as the major force in Tunisia's parliament. In other words, the outlets' search for a new identity can be seen as an effort to preserve vigilance, particularly after the waning hopes of *Ennahda's* disappearance following *Nidaa Tounes'* victory. In conclusion, while limited, the 2016 coverage evidently highlighted the media's absence of precision in defining Political Islam and its overall ahistorical approach to *Ennahda*.

8 “FOR THE SAKE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PATH”: SAÏED'S 2021 SELF-COUP

Figure 06 - Mural art from the Djerbahood open-air museum (Djerba)



Source: Author's collection. Unknown artist.

After the dismantling of *Nidaa Tounes*, *Ennahda* remained a central force in the Tunisian political landscape, especially in the 2019 parliamentary elections. On the presidential side, after Essebsi's death in the electoral year, an independent candidate won the polls by a landslide. Kaïs Saïed claimed, in his campaign, to be a fighter against corruption and, during his term, constantly rivaled Ghannouchi, the speaker of the unicameral legislative, and Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi. The tensions rose culminating in a power grab in 2021 by the president, surpassing the Constitutional order and the balance of power.

Understood as a self-coup, the politician's actions undermined the authorities of the legislative branch and the Prime Minister. Still, the president garnered significant support

from segments of the population, particularly due to widespread frustration with the legislature's failure to effectively address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, the events of July 2021 signified an *Ennahda*'s forced return to the opposition, in which the challenges tested the party's unity and decision-making.

Ultimately, the academic views on the events have deeply differed. Although we hold Lynch's (2022, p. 9) view that *Ennahda*'s ideological change did not result in a shift in public opinion and criticism, we disagree with his analysis of Saïed's move as a "blessing in disguise" (Lynch, 2022, p. 8) to *Ennahda*. In his opinion, its return to the opposition would grant it the opportunity to reassess its political and ideological decisions, focusing on gathering public support. This stance resonated with the party's leadership since the self-coup allowed *Ennahda* to ally with its opposition and send it on a renovation debate (Blanc, 2024, p. 7).

Contrarily, this would also require a critical reexamination of the party's actions since it came to power and, potentially, harm internal cohesion (Blanc, 2024, p. 1; Alsoos; Dihstelhoff, 2024, p. 526). In pessimistic tones, Blanc (2024) and Alsoos and Dihstelhoff (2024) question the party's leadership resistance to factual change and the difficulties of connecting with the people, especially, since it separated its religious activities from its political actions. In Blanc's words:

Ennahda appears trapped in the memory of what it used to be, a movement of resistance to oppression. There is no escaping the biological end of *Ennahda*'s historic generation [...]. There is also no straightforward way out because *Ennahda* only exists as a party and has no cohesive movement to fall back on, as it withdrew from the religious field, implemented a specialization policy, and left civil society to itself. (Blanc, 2024, p. 18).

Interestingly, Saïed's 2021 self-coup was another significant moment due to the party's internal and external reevaluation. In other words, the constructions around its identity so far would not be able to extensively comprehend its role after the president's power grab. Regarding this period, we question if the 2016 ideological changes signified a transformation in the party view by the media and also seek to comprehend if its return to the opposition had any impact on such constructions.

In the international media, considering the analyzed outlets, different approaches are notable in the period. Networks such as France 24, *Al Jazeera*, and *Al Arabiya* had a year-long coverage on the matter, deeply focusing on the role of the party before and after the self-coup. While, BBC, TASS, and G1 had restrained approaches, limiting their coverage to the immediate aftermath of Saïed's power grab. Overall, the president's actions and *Ennahda*'s

reactions garnered significant attention, making them focal points in their reporting.

8.1 France 24

Published from February to October 2021, the four analyzed news pieces from France 24 broadly continued its suspicion narrative surrounding the actions of the *Ennahda* party. Its initial coverage focused on the party's potential monopoly of the streets in its favor, which was displayed amidst *Ennahda*'s overall desperation for power. In the last months of 2021, however, facing the continuity of Saïed's self-coup, the coverage began to emphasize the problems of the president's actions and pursued a positive construction of *Ennahda* as a symbol of the opposition.

The first piece, published on the 27th of February, depicted the first discourse, as evidenced by its title: "Tunisia: *Ennahda* supporters mobilize amidst political crisis" (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁰). The core narrative of this text was to shock its audience by showing the party mobilizing its supporters in the street during a highly contagious COVID-19 crisis. Relatably, in its lead, the manifestation is constructed as "one of the most significant in recent years, comes as the social crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic is compounded by growing budgetary difficulties" (Tunisie : les [...], our translation¹²¹).

In addition, to stress the significance of the economic crisis, the discourse of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is employed, following a claim of the difficulties of salary payment and the rise in debt. According to the organization's account, "[...]public debt would become unsustainable unless a solid reform programme is adopted" (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²²). The use of this discourse is crucial for maintaining the article's objectivity, as it relies heavily on quotes from this official authority source.

The suspicion around the party is exacerbated by the following paragraph, which positions Saïed as a figure with "significant popularity" (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²³) and *Ennahda* as a party seeking to reorganize the government in favor of one composed of its allies. This move by the party appears to be paralyzing the government, according to the piece, in a construction that further develops this vision of *Ennahda* as a power-seeking actor.

¹²⁰ In the original: "*Tunisie : les partisans d'Ennahda se mobilisent en pleine crise politique traduz*".

¹²¹ In the original: "*l'une des plus importantes de ces dernières années, intervient alors que la crise sociale accentuée par la pandémie de Covid-19 se double de difficultés budgétaires grandissantes.*".

¹²² In the original: "*la dette publique deviendrait insoutenable à moins d'adopter un programme de réformes solide*".

¹²³ In the original: "*importante popularité*".

Subsequently, the piece moves to a section titled “Recurrent political instability” (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁴). It starts by quoting the protesters shouting for “national unity” (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁵) during Rached Ghannouchi’s discourse and stresses the party’s hypocrisy by ordering unity but failing to compromise with the president’s demand. This criticism continues under the discourse of a protester calling for democratic and Constitutional respect who “came from Sfax despite the travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic” (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁶).

His discourse continues as he defends that: ““We are in a parliamentary system, it is not up to the president to decide alone who can govern or not!”” (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁷). Concluding the piece, F24 contrasts this quote with a claim that “The political instability that has hindered substantial reforms since the 2011 revolution has deepened since the rise to power in 2019 of a fragmented and deeply divided Parliament.” (Tunisie : les [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁸). By comparing the claims, it is possible to infer the network’s intentions in highlighting the *Ennahda*’s empty calls, as protesters shouted for the work of an alleged nonfunctional Parliament.

Generally, the piece opens France 24’s discourse on the matter, even before the coup, by emphasizing a power-eager *Ennahda* and a dysfunctional government clashing with a popular president. In this sense, the sanitary, political, and socio-economical crisis in Tunisia is portrayed as a consequence of the actions of Ghannouchi’s party, which attempts to steal the streets from Tunisians through unsafe manifestations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Comparatively, on the day of Saïed’s self-coup, F24 published a piece on a demonstration against the government and, specifically, *Ennahda*. In its lead, the piece, titled “In Tunisia, thousands of protesters march against their leaders.” (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our translation¹²⁹), highlights the party’s culpability in the crisis. This is seen in: “Several thousand Tunisians protested [...] against their leaders, particularly the main parliamentary party *Ennahda*, as the country finds itself caught between a deadly pandemic peak and power struggles at the top of the state.” (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹³⁰).

¹²⁴ In the original: “*l’unité nationale*”.

¹²⁵ In the original: “*Instabilité politique récurrente*”.

¹²⁶ In the original: “*venu de Sfax en dépit des restrictions de déplacements en vigueur en raison de la pandémie*”.

¹²⁷ In the original: “*“Nous sommes dans un système parlementaire, ce n’est pas au président de décider tout seul qui peut gouverner ou pas !”*”.

¹²⁸ In the original: “*L’instabilité politique qui a entravé les réformes de fond depuis la révolution de 2011 s’est accentuée depuis l’arrivée au pouvoir en 2019 d’un Parlement morcelé et profondément divisé.*”.

¹²⁹ In the original: “*En Tunisie, des milliers de manifestants défilent contre leurs dirigeants*”.

¹³⁰ In the original: “*Plusieurs milliers de Tunisiens ont manifesté [...] contre leurs dirigeants, notamment contre le principal parti parlementaire Ennahda, alors que le pays est pris en étau entre un pic épidémique meurtrier et des luttes de pouvoir au sommet de l’État.*”.

The emphasis on the deadly character of the pandemics and *Ennahda* and the Parliament as leading figures in this disaster produce a dramatic account of the protests, in which the party is the main reason behind the country's problems. This is also emphasized by the section: "They notably chanted slogans hostile to the Islamist-inspired party *Ennahda* and to the Prime Minister it supports, Hichem Mechichi, shouting 'the people want the dissolution of Parliament.'" (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our translation¹³¹). Interestingly, the use of the adjective "*meurtrier*" followed by the description of the protesters' passions against *Ennahda* builds an emphatic feeling for Tunisians and a distrust around *Ennahda*.

Additionally, this passion is also emphasized by the description of *Ennahda*-targeted violence in the country. One example is the city of Tozeur, "a southern region particularly affected by Covid, and confined until August 8, [where] young protesters vandalized an *Ennahda* office" (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹³²). Therefore, this dramatic violent response appears as a justified cry for governmental action and crisis solution, especially by Ghannouchi's party in the Parliament.

Further clarifying the reasoning behind the protests, the piece adds that "public opinion is frustrated by the bickering between parties in Parliament and the standoff between Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi, also leader of *Ennahda*, and President Kaïs Saïed, which paralyzes decision-making" (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our translation¹³³). As evident, the tension between the two politicians elicits a justifiable violent response, as Parliament fails to provide a public solution to the pandemic. This, allied with the suspicion around *Ennahda* constructed so far by the French coverage, sets a target in the party as the reason for Tunisia's problems.

The number of deaths due to the pandemic also serves as an indicator of the Parliament's public health mishandling and justification for the manifestations. Relating to the solution to these afflictions, the piece comments on the protests' goals as "a change in the constitution and a transitional period leaving a large place for the army, while maintaining President Saïed as head of state" (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our translation¹³⁴). Consequently, the

¹³¹ In the original: "*Elles ont notamment scandé des slogans hostiles à la formation d'inspiration islamiste Ennahda et au Premier ministre qu'elle soutient, Hichem Mechichi, criant 'le peuple veut la dissolution du Parlement'.*"

¹³² In the original: "*À Tozeur, région du Sud particulièrement touchée par le Covid, et confinée jusqu'au 8 août, de jeunes protestataires ont vandalisé un local d'Ennahda, selon des vidéos mises en ligne par des médias locaux.*"

¹³³ In the original: "*L'opinion publique est exaspérée par les chamailleries entre partis au Parlement, et par le bras de fer entre le chef du Parlement Rached Ghannouchi, aussi chef de file d'Ennahda, et le président Kaïs Saïed, qui paralyse les décisions.*"

¹³⁴ In the original: "*un changement de Constitution et une période transitoire laissant une large place à l'armée, tout en maintenant le président Saïed à la tête de l'État.*"

president appears as a trustworthy figure, while the Constitution and the Parliament symbolize the perpetrators of Tunisia's problems.

The piece concludes with a quote from a young Tunisian, Aymen, about the protests' objectives. While the *Nahdawi* supporters appear irresponsible in the face of the pandemic, the concluding quotations from Aymen show the opposition's worries about it. Implicitly, this emphasizes the network discourse favoring Saïed as the solution to the crisis. In the man's words: "We hesitate to go protest, but the objectives are unclear. [...] For it to be effective, there need to be steps, a plan: shouting our anger without any other purpose is pointless, and it's even dangerous during the COVID pandemic," (En Tunisie [...], 2021, our translation¹³⁵).

In the third analyzed piece, titled "Tunisia: The Speaker of Parliament warns about 'the return to the absolute power of one man'" (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹³⁶) and published on the 24th of September, this blunt criticism towards *Ennahda* concedes space for a subtle blaming of the party for the country's crisis. Similarly, it shifts from defending Saïed as a figure worried about Tunisia to a straightforward critique of the president's resistance to end his power grab move.

In the article's lead, this tendency is exposed by the quote of Ghannouchi as a critical source against Saïed. According to *Ennahda*'s leader, the president's move represented "'a step backward.' The Speaker of the Tunisian Parliament and leader of the Islamist-inspired *Ennahda* party, Rached Ghannouchi, called [...] for a 'peaceful struggle' against 'the absolute power of one man.'" (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹³⁷). Ghannouchi's call for peace and the meaning construction surrounding the president's actions, as evidenced by this segment, alerts for a possible meaning change.

Considering the Parliament Speaker's discourse, the piece connects a return to pre-Revolutionary times, as he suggests Saïed is a "return to the absolute power of one man against whom the revolution took place" (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹³⁸). *Ennahda*, presented as the president's "*bête noire*", appears as the leader of a Constitutional fight against Saïed's abuses. Notably, the latter is framed as an official coup by the piece, after the politician promulgated exceptional provision.

The entirety of this construction continues as the piece emphasizes Ghannouchi's

¹³⁵ In the original: "On hésite à aller manifester, mais les objectifs ne sont pas clairs. [...] Pour que cela soit efficace, il faut des étapes, un plan : crier notre colère sans autre projet ça ne sert à rien, et c'est même dangereux en plein Covid", estime-t-il."

¹³⁶ In the original: "Tunisie : le chef du Parlement alerte sur 'le retour vers le pouvoir absolu d'un seul homme'."

¹³⁷ In the original: "'un retour en arrière". Le chef du Parlement tunisien et du parti d'inspiration islamiste *Ennahda*, Rached Ghannouchi, a appelé [...] à la 'lutte pacifique' contre 'le pouvoir absolu d'un seul homme'."

¹³⁸ In the original: "retour vers le pouvoir absolu d'un seul homme contre lequel la révolution a eu lieu".

position against the coup, which, according to *Ennahda*'s leader, is “[...] a clear coup d'état against democracy, against the 2011 revolution, and against the will of the people.” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹³⁹). *Ennahda* in the subsequent paragraphs is constructed as fighting the president's actions peacefully. Indeed, the section ends with a call from the quoted source for a fight “[...] against the dictatorship” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹⁴⁰).

In this context, the following section focuses on the matter of democracy in the country and produces an image of a divided Tunisia, facing deep and successive political crises. Similarly, the context of the Revolution is presented as a strong interdiscourse, reinforcing the idea of the country as the only success of the general Arab Spring and concerns for the maintenance of the democratic structures following this period. This employment is interesting because it uses the Revolution's “failure”, formerly connected to *Ennahda*, to criticize Saïed's measures.

Concerning *Ennahda*'s responsibility for further exacerbating the crisis, the piece affirms that “Rached Ghannouchi acknowledged that his party was partially responsible for the crisis that led the president to seize full powers on July 25” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴¹). Remarkably, this shows F24's attempt to frame the party according to its own discourses and with complexity. Interestingly, the complex framing of *Ennahda* is followed by the continuous use of Ghannouchi as an objective source, accusing Saïed of “having shirked any dialogue before July 25 to settle the crisis” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴²).

The shift in the perception of Ghannouchi is evident, particularly in the portrayal of his ability to compromise. This is seen in: “Rached Ghannouchi states that he is not opposed to an ‘update’ of the 2014 Constitution, which has been a source of recurring conflicts, as long as it goes through Parliament and not through presidential decrees.” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴³). In the segment, it is possible to conclude an evolution of the view of *Ennahda*, especially if we consider F24's construction of the party in 2013 and 2014, now choosing to side with it against Saïed.

Moreover, in this imbroglio, the Constitution is described as the target of Saïed's

¹³⁹ In the original: “*un coup d'État caractérisé contre la démocratie, contre la révolution [de 2011] et contre la volonté du peuple*”.

¹⁴⁰ In the original: “[...] *contre la dictature*”.

¹⁴¹ In the original: “*Rached Ghannouchi a reconnu que son parti était partiellement responsable de la crise qui a motivé le 25 juillet le président à s'arroger les pleins pouvoirs*”.

¹⁴² In the original: “*s'être dérobé à tout dialogue avant le 25 juillet pour régler la crise*”.

¹⁴³ In the original: “*Rached Ghannouchi affirme ne pas être contre une "mise à jour" de la Constitution de 2014, source de conflits récurrents, à condition de passer par le Parlement et non par des décrets présidentiels*”.

actions. According to the piece's singular source:

‘The Constitution was drafted by all democratic forces and it was adopted by more than 90% of the elected members of Parliament, Islamists and non-Islamists. We are committed to this Constitution and we will fight with all the other parties that have approved it so that it is respected,’ (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁴).

In the piece, the Constitution is presented as the source of connection between multiple forces in Tunisia, which is described as a positive side of the coup, since the risk of Saïed dismantling it “pushed the political parties to put aside their differences to unite against him” (Tunisie : le [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁵). This opposition leadership assumed by *Ennahda* and described by the piece is important when we consider this shift of construction by the network.

In its last paragraphs, the article confirms the president's public support, through Ghannouchi's discourse, but highlights the strong opposition he faces from political parties. In addition, it continues to stress the compromises made by *Ennahda* to adhere to any elections or alliances against the president and in favor of the Tunisian Constitution and democracy. Thus, overall, F24 showed a malleable coverage, in which its interests are more important than maintaining a cohesive approach towards the party.

Finally, the last piece confirms this shift by focusing on a manifestation against Saïed on the 10th of October. Titled “Tunisia: Thousands of people protest 'against the coup' by President Saïed” (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁶), the article starts by describing the rally as “‘The people against the coup’: several thousand people took part in the largest demonstration against President Kaïs Saïed” (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁷).

The imprecision regarding the exact number of individuals involved can be attributed to the contrasting display of Saïed's supporters in a prior rally, which was reported to be as large as 10,000. This ambiguity is strategically employed to downplay the size of his supporters, favoring his opposition. Among his opposition, the *Ennahda* is mentioned, shedding light on the party's commitment to build a strong opposition against the president's coup.

Subsequently, the article dives deep into the street, showing the protesters' local perspective and dramatically describing their clash. Their number is finally shown, stated by

¹⁴⁴ In the original: “‘*La Constitution a été élaborée par toutes les forces démocratiques et elle a été adoptée par plus de 90 % des élus au Parlement, islamistes et non-islamistes. Nous tenons à cette Constitution et nous nous battons avec tous les autres partis qui l'ont approuvée afin qu'elle soit respectée*”.

¹⁴⁵ In the original: “*ont poussé les partis politiques à mettre de côté leurs divergences pour faire bloc contre lui*”.

¹⁴⁶ In the original: “*Tunisie : des milliers de personnes manifestent ‘contre le coup d’État’ du président Saïed*”.

¹⁴⁷ In the original: “‘*Le peuple contre le coup d’État’ : plusieurs milliers de personnes ont participé [...] à la plus importante manifestation contre le président Kaïs Saïed*”.

the police between 6,000 and 8,000, as well as their ideological position. Regarding the latter and quoting a demonstrator's discourse, the piece adds: "I came as a democrat and a supporter of Moncef Marzouki" (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁸). Thus, the defense of democracy is a central piece of F24's coverage and its shift against the president.

The dramatic scene is specially constructed in relation to the police blockade of the protest, as seen in: "I am not your enemy, I am here for the love of Tunisia," said the demonstrator, national flag in hand, to a police officer who forbade him to join the crowd." (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁴⁹). In addition, another discourse was also important for producing the emphatic meaning towards the opposition on F24's audience in this dramatic positioning of actors in the piece: "We are a generation that has known torture and has not had an easy life! We are the ones who elected Saïed, and it will be us who will remove him from power," says a man in his sixties." (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁰).

The demonstrators' slogans are emphasized in their call against the coup and in favor of the Revolution perpetuation. Described as sympathizers of Saïed's "bête noire", the protesters also criticized the Egyptian dictator, who is held accountable for the coup against the Brotherhood. To further produce credibility around their discourse, F24 adds generalized International NGOs as sources, which can be seen in the passage:

They chanted, 'This is Tunisia, not Egypt,' and 'Sissi [the Egyptian president] is the enemy of God.' Some Tunisians view Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi as a 'dictator' who 'suppresses' freedoms. International NGOs report over 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt, a country frequently criticized for its human rights record. (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵¹).

Subsequently, after replicating a protester implicitly comparing Saïed to the devil, the piece describes its action with suspicion around his justification of "imminent danger". Finally, concluding the piece and stressing the veracity of their account, the piece adds that "After the president's coup, Tunisian and international organizations criticized a 'power grab' and said they feared for public rights and freedoms" (Tunisie: [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵²). This reinforces F24's criticism of the president and persuades its audience to follow its

¹⁴⁸ In the original: "*Je suis venu en tant que démocrate et partisan de Moncef Marzouki*".

¹⁴⁹ In the original: "*Je ne suis pas votre ennemi, je suis ici par amour de la Tunisie, dit ce manifestant, drapeau national à la main, à l'adresse d'un agent de police qui lui interdisait de rejoindre la foule.*".

¹⁵⁰ In the original: "*Nous sommes une génération qui a connu la torture et qui n'a pas eu une vie facile ! C'est nous qui avons élu Saïed, et ce sera nous qui le chasserons du pouvoir, lance un sexagénaire.*".

¹⁵¹ In the original: "*Ici c'est la Tunisie et ce n'est pas l'Égypte, Sissi [le président égyptien] est l'ennemi de Dieu, ont-ils scandé. Certains Tunisiens considèrent le président égyptien Abdel Fattah al-Sissi comme un dictateur qui réprime les libertés. Des ONG internationales font état de plus de 60 000 détenus d'opinion en Égypte, pays régulièrement épinglé sur la question des libertés.*".

¹⁵² In the original: "*Après le coup de force du président, des organisations tunisiennes et internationales ont critiqué un accaparement du pouvoir et dit craindre pour les droits et libertés publiques.*".

account.

Overviewing the French outlet's coverage of the 2021 Saïed self-coup, it is possible to note how it maintained a relationship of interest with *Ennahda*, according to its own agenda and despite the party's self-construction. The employment of the party's narrative, constructed as a strong opposition to the president, served to produce objectivity and delegate the criticism to its discourse. Indeed, *Ennahda* was used as a discursive tool in F24's discourse, whose democratic intentions are emphasized when necessary.

In conclusion, despite rendering a positive image of the party, the network maintained its dominance over *Ennahda*'s discourse, failing to recognize its complexity throughout the 2021 coverage. Imagistically, Ghannouchi's party remained subject to the simplifications and Orientalist narratives evident in the company's 2013 and 2014 coverage, with its discourse appropriated and reshaped to align with the network's agenda, now framed under new images and a shared adversary.

8.2 BBC

Across all the analyzed networks, BBC displayed a coherent and constant appeal to the protection of the Revolution or, more precisely, the Arab Spring. In 2013 and 2014, it echoed the fears of *Ennahda*'s critics by urging for a shift in the party's coalition government in order to protect the accomplishments of the Arab Spring. In 2021, this discourse continues, as it seems to appeal for international support for the Tunisian transition after Saïed's self-coup while emphasizing the role of Ghannouchi's party in aggravating the country's crisis. In the three analyzed pieces from July to August, BBC employed an interesting discourse focused on foreign perspectives and reactions regarding the topic.

In the network's first piece, titled "Tunisia's PM sacked after violent Covid protests" (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021) and published on the 26th of July, the focus on the chaotic setting in the country is employed as the central narrative. The protests against the government are portrayed as violent and the ideological polarization in Tunisia is emphasized as a complex issue. This is seen in the reactions after the president's self-coup:

[Saïed's] supporters erupted in celebration, but opponents in parliament immediately accused him of staging a coup. Clashes among rival groups continued on Monday. They threw stones at each other outside the legislature, which has been barricaded by troops, who have also prevented workers from entering some government buildings. (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021, our remarks).

The reason behind these clashes is presented as rooted in "the government's handling

of a massive recent spike in Covid cases [that] has added to general unrest over the nation's economic and social turmoil.” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021, our remarks). This is important for the outlet's construction of the chaotic scene, as the people appear to be responding to a deeper and more complex problem from the Tunisian political arena. Indeed, this argument is confirmed by the stressing of the “long-standing feud” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021) between the president and the Prime Minister, who is mentioned to have “[...] the backing of the largest party in parliament, *Ennahda*” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021).

The piece presents Tunisia's contextual problems and the then-recent developments of the COVID-19 pandemic as the background of this clash. Additionally, this chaotic grounding is contrasted with the country's image as the only revolutionary success of the generalized Arab Spring, as seen in: “Tunisia's revolution in 2011 is often held up as the sole success of the Arab Spring revolts across the region, but it has not led to stability economically or politically.” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). Particularly, this comparison is important for producing an appeal for international intervention in Tunisia, especially, if we consider the weight of the Arab Spring interdiscourse.

Subsequently, the piece brings attention to the image of Saïed according to the local population in a section titled: “Statesman or dictator?” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). It focused on the demonstrations against *Ennahda*, intensifying its accounts of violence against the party's headquarters to deepen further the dramatized account of the country's polarization. This is also explored in the local quotes, as in a woman's description of Saïed's move as “the happiest moment since the revolution” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021) and a person's characterizing of the president as “[...] a true statesman” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). Contrastingly, another resident claimed that “These fools are celebrating the birth of a new dictator.” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021).

Remarkably, the combination of the protesters' polarized discourses and the focus on the violence produces a solution urgency to solve the issues concerning the precious Arab Spring's sole success. Notably, this is also emphasized by the security forces raiding of offices from “*Al Jazeera* TV, which has been viewed as sympathetic to *Ennahda*” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021) and Ghannouchi's impediment to getting into the Parliament. In contrast to the violent backdrop, *Ennahda*'s leader stages “a sit-down protest with his own loyalists” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021), projecting an interesting image of the party as a peaceful respondent.

Moreover, Saïed's discourse appears as well, producing an image of strength, by promising to employ the military voice against “who think of resorting to weapons... and whoever shoots a bullet” (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). In contrast to *Ennahda*'s sit-in protest, the

president's strong statements appear aligned with his supporters, who resort to violence, thereby dramatizing and emphasizing the country's growing polarization. Evidently, the BBC can be perceived as attempting to frame the scenario rather than exclusively siding with one of the extremes of the polarization, due to their construction of Saïed's public support and *Ennahda's* peaceful approach.

Following the article's development, it interestingly transitions into a brief analytical section, where a correspondent emphasizes this polarization. In her words, "To many, it feels like fresh hope after a year of chaotic governance - to others a move that is constitutionally questionable, with potentially destabilising ramifications and far-reaching consequences" (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). Based on her discourse, the British outlet appears to be cautious to frame Saïed's actions as a coup, preferring to wait to see "how quickly a new prime minister is appointed - and a new plan communicated on moving forward" (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021), before making any strong claims.

In the section that follows, the coup accusations are discussed, emphasizing the political dispute, as the constitution guarantees that "the president oversees only the military and foreign affairs, but Mr Saïed has long been in conflict with Mr Mechichi." (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). In this sense, despite recognizing that "Tunisia's legal and political framework is unclear." (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021), the piece produces doubt surrounding Saïed's actions as it states that the "2014 constitution calls for a special court to be set up to decide disagreements like this, but it has not been established" (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021).

Ennahda appears in this imbroglio as a denouncing force against the president. Thus, Ghannouchi's discourse is employed to reinforce the risk of setbacks regarding the developments earned from the Arab Spring. In this context, the parliament speaker accused Saïed of staging "a coup against the revolution and constitution" and called on the Tunisian people to defend them both." (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). Interestingly, it also stresses that "*Ennahda* denounced attacks on its offices, blaming 'criminal gangs' who were trying to 'seed chaos and destruction'" (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021). Considering BBC's narrative so far, the employment of *Ennahda's* discourse appears to follow the same lines as the F24 coverage, monopolizing the party's discourse in the outlet's favor.

Finally, the piece's final section focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences in Tunisia, facing the lack of efficient efforts to counter the disease spreading. However, the article's final paragraphs portray the country's problems as also rooted in other factors. According to BBC,

Covid is only one factor in the unrest. Tunisia has had nine governments since the

2011 revolution, many of them short-lived or fractured.
 Deep-rooted problems of unemployment and crumbling state infrastructure that were behind the uprising have never been resolved.
 Tunisia now has budget deficits and debt repayment issues that could require a new loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
 But that could hurt Tunisians with the loss of state jobs and reduced subsidies on goods. (Tunisia's PM [...], 2021).

Overall, this final segment underscores the central message of the piece, namely the reinforcement of the need for international assistance to ensure the continued survival of Tunisia's Revolution. Indeed, as we attempted to frame, BBC's first piece avoided siding with any of the political players, choosing to maintain its narrative focus on the Arab Spring, a trend seen in other periods, as well. Therefore, it is unsurprising to see *Ennahda* as partially responsible for Tunisia's problems while being displayed as a legitimate and peaceful opposition to the president.

Similarly, in its second analyzed piece, BBC reinforced this narrative, especially by discussing the international reactions regarding the theme. Titled "Tunisia President Kais Saied accused of coup amid clashes" (Tunisia President [...], 2021) and published on the 26th of July, the article began by contrasting views on the president's action. On one side, "Tunisia's main political parties have accused the president of staging a coup" (Tunisia President [...], 2021). Conversely, "Kais Saied says he acted in accordance with the constitution" (Tunisia President [...], 2021). Interestingly, this set the tone for the network's polarization discourse.

Saïed's move is presented as a response to "violent mass protests over the government's handling of the coronavirus outbreak and the economic and social turmoil" (Tunisia President [...], 2021), while once more Mechichi, the dismissed Prime Minister, is constructed as a compromising figure. Concerning these responses, the piece diverts its focus to the international community and its "growing calls [...] for restraint" (Tunisia President [...], 2021).

If we argue that the previous piece produces a plea for international assistance and vigilance, this article shows the appeals from the international community, regarding the chaotic setting. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the UN called the president for dialogue between the involved components. Similarly, the EU appears urging for law conformity and avoidance of violence. As clashes are described, the appeals from the Arab League, Russia, and Qatar are also displayed to show the importance of attentiveness in relation to the Tunisian scenario.

From the dramatized clashes' accounts, the article moves to the construction of Saïed

as “an independent who was elected in 2019, [and that] has had a long-standing feud with Mr Mechichi, who has the backing of the largest party in parliament, the moderate Islamists *Ennahda*” (Tunisia President [...], 2021). The feature of *Ennahda* in the conflict is important especially because it is presented as siding with the mediatory part of the struggle while the president appears as facing international calls for resolution involving all actors.

As seen in the previous piece, the interdiscourse surrounding the Arab Spring is once more utilized to emphasize the necessity of maintaining a vigilant stance toward Tunisia. Similarly, other previously observed narratives are leveraged to reinforce this perspective, including the violence perpetrated by Saïed’s supporters, his assertion of potential military action, the obstruction of Ghannouchi from entering Parliament, and the raid on *Al Jazeera*’s offices.

Moreover, the subsequent and last two sections of the news piece replicate content from the previous one, specifically regarding the correspondent analysis and the discussion of the COVID-19 impact. Indeed, the contrasting feature in this article is the reliance on international actors’ discourses to stress the relevance of the events in the North African country. As seen, BBC’s coverage preserved its appeal to safeguard the Revolution and its democratic outcomes while opting to not side with any conflicting party. Still, the network chose to produce the president as less conciliatory than the Prime Minister and *Ennahda*.

Finally, the last analyzed news piece, titled “Tunisia crisis: Democrats, despots and the fight for power” (Abdelhadi, 2021) and published on the 3rd of August, strengthened BBC’s presented narratives. Its dramatized account begins in the article’s lead, claiming that the “eyes of many people are on the small country in North Africa that set the Middle East on fire when in 2011 it toppled a dictator that had ruled it for 27 years.” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Notably, the use of the Arab Spring interdiscourse is evident in its attempt to capture the audience’s attention.

The following paragraph continues the network’s drama production and use of the Arab Spring memory, as it affirms that “Tunisia - the birthplace of the so-called Arab Spring - shook the tectonic plates of power in a vast and strategic region, and no-one knows when and how they will settle back: in the same old despotic order or a new one that is yet to be born?” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Significantly, the mention of the despotic order serves as a reference to Saïed’s actions, strategically setting the stage for BBC’s critical stance against him.

The employment of this critique begins in the subsequent paragraphs, as the journalist explains Saïed’s move and the international response surrounding it. The piece states that the president’s move “stunned the world” (Abdelhadi, 2021) and, regarding his extraordinary

actions, the article questions “if he will embark on something else” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Remarkably, it also emphasizes that for “Tunisia watchers the development came as no surprise. The poster child of the ‘Arab Spring’ has long been moving inexorably towards the precipice” (Abdelhadi, 2021).

From these accounts, it is possible to confirm our conclusions regarding BBC’s coverage. First, its target audience is the international community, stressing the importance of its focus on Tunisia. As a justification for this, the British network employs a dramatized framing of the Arab Spring interdiscourse, in which the world, and especially the West, should be responsible for its success. Furthermore, Saïed’s actions are portrayed as a focal point of concern, particularly in light of the potential resurgence of authoritarianism.

Moreover, not only does the Arab Spring seem to rest in the hands of the international community, but democracy itself in Tunisia appears to be at stake. Mentioning economic data, the piece reinforces its argument, asserting that these contextual problems “have convinced a growing number of Tunisians that democracy is not delivering for them” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Additionally, while referencing the COVID-19 response, the piece relies on an imprecise source - “All of this has created a large number of Tunisians a sense of hopelessness and a loss of faith in parliament and the country’s political parties” (Abdelhadi, 2021) - to justify “why Mr Saied’s draconian measures were met with jubilation on the streets” (Abdelhadi, 2021).

Additionally, the article alludes to international sources to justify dramatized adjectives, such as “draconian”, following this account, as the piece claims that “‘A replacement strongman is not the answer to Tunisia’s problems,’ The Economist publication warned in a recent editorial.” (Abdelhadi, 2021). This discourse prepares the audience for the following section focused on internal contestations against Saïed, especially from “*Ennahda*, the Islamist party that has the biggest block in parliament” (Abdelhadi, 2021), a challenge ‘independent observers concur’ (Abdelhadi, 2021).

The fear of a regional democratic backsliding, especially on the Arab Spring’s cradle, is central to the article’s argument against Saïed. This is seen in: “Regionally, the autocrats - from Egypt to the Gulf - were rubbing their hands with glee, and rushed to express support for Mr Saied. The democrats feared the worst and sounded the alarm.” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Thus, the president’s actions appear closer to authoritarianism than to democratic settings, which justifies BBC’s fears.

On top of that, the piece describes Saïed’s actions as dramatic and positions the country’s polarization as a clash between those who believe in the power of the Constitution

and those who understand the power of the majority as central to the political scene. In this way, despite reiterating the president's move as a coup, the piece produces a complex account of the stemming of political power.

Despite this narrative confrontation, the article mentions that “no-one is denying that this is a slippery slope that could spell the end for Tunisia's precarious transition to inclusive government” (Abdelhadi, 2021). Consequently, this positions Saïed among other regional autocrats, such as Sisi, whose example is used to further explain Tunisia's possible democratic decline. In the journalist's words, the ousting of the Brotherhood from the government in Egypt was met with “the jubilation of huge crowds on the streets, in scenes similar to Tunisia after Mr Saied's announcement” (Abdelhadi, 2021).

However, as the piece critically assesses, Saïed was elected in a poll and the army is not a historical force in Tunisia, as it happens in Egypt. Indeed, the police force has had the role of the backbone of authoritarianism in Tunisia. Thus, the Brotherhood interdiscourse, which regularly appears as a shadow of *Ennahda's* actions, is thoroughly evaluated, reinforcing the importance of recognizing the sociopolitical context of each country individually.

In addition, the polarized Tunisian context is also mentioned in an evaluation of Tunisia's problems, political paralysis, and ten post-Revolution governments. Indeed, the country's political system comes across as a reason for Saïed's actions. Subsequently, this deteriorating democratic scenario is used to highlight the regional context, drawing on the generalized MENA framework, as seen in the Arab Spring interdiscourse, where individual nations are stripped of their singularity and burdened by the actions of other regional actors.

In the coverage, this appears in the segment: “Autocrats in the region are hoping it will give them more ammunition to argue that ‘Arabs are not fit for democracy’ and the democrats are clinging to the hope that Tunisia will remain a beacon.” (Abdelhadi, 2021). In its concluding paragraph, the piece resorts to the Arab Spring more dramatically once more, as it questions: “Could the country that gave the Arab world its memorable slogan of revolution 10 years ago, ‘The People Want the Downfall of the Regime’, be the one that writes its epitaph, ‘The people can't eat democracy’?, as an angry Tunisian woman once put it.” (Abdelhadi, 2021).

Overall, in BBC's coverage, the focus remains on the Revolution as a Western construct to be safeguarded and maintained, regardless of the adversary. In retrospect, *Ennahda's* negative construction in 2013 and 2014 appears to fall in this network narrative and is justified by its Political Islam ideology. In 2021, the British network sides with the

party to criticize the president, under the pretext of regional authoritarianism. The difference, however, lies in the intricate understanding of Saïed's actions, whereas *Ennahda* was subjected to simplifications against Political Islam.

In conclusion, BBC's 2021 coverage underscored the dominance of Western media over *Ennahda*'s discourse, failing to actively engage with Ghannouchi's party, even when it aligned with it. In its three pieces, the British network opposed Saïed's move and aimed at producing concern in its audience. As a whole, the outlet's coverage stressed the Revolution as a product and actively called for an international intervention to impede democratic backsliding in the country, failing to critically endorse Tunisians' views on the matter.

8.3 G1

Comparatively, G1 showcased weak and distant coverage regarding Saïed's 2021 self-coup. In its single analyzed piece from the period, the Brazilian network largely reproduced the Arab Spring interdiscourse and reinforced the absence of an authorial perspective on the subject. Indeed, the 2021 outlet coverage confirmed our argument that G1 mostly mimics Western agencies when producing its news pieces. Consequently, Saïed's move is seen similarly to F24 and BBC's initial coverage, especially considering the use of *Ennahda* as a quote to question the president's actions.

Titled "Tunisian President Suspends Parliament and Dismisses Prime Minister" (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵³) and published on the 25th of July, the article starts by presenting how Saïed determined the suspension of the Parliament and deposed the Prime Minister. Remarkably, his move is justified by his discourse claiming that the actions respected the Constitution and were made to counter an "imminent threat" (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁴). Similar to the previous outlets, it also reinforces the role of the president as only focused on foreign affairs and the Armed Forces.

The justification for Saïed's actions is presented in the "protests held [...] against the country's authorities, particularly the ruling party *Ennahda*, of Islamist orientation" (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁵). Additionally, this is further explored in: "tens of thousands of people remained in the streets of the capital Tunis and other cities to

¹⁵³ In the original: "*Presidente da Tunísia suspende Parlamento e destitui primeiro-ministro*".

¹⁵⁴ In the original: "*Perigo iminente*".

¹⁵⁵ In the original: "*protestos realizados [...] contra autoridades do país, em especial o partido governista Ennahda, de orientação islamita*".

support Saïed's decision.” (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁶). In this way, the president’s actions are framed as reflecting popular support, particularly in response to dissent against *Ennahda*.

Remarkably, the piece follows the Western networks’ tendency to manipulate *Ennahda*’s discourse in its favor, specifically, to produce doubt over the actions of the president. In this way, *Ennahda* is constructed as “the largest party in the Tunisian Parliament, [that] has become the country's main political force since 2011, when a popular uprising led to what is known as the Arab Spring” (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our remarks and translation¹⁵⁷). The reference to the Arab Spring interdiscourse produces an image of the party as aligned with its interests and, consequently, suggests it is a truthful source, despite its loss of public support.

As a result, the party’s accusations shed doubt on the president’s intentions and actions, when it is said that “The party considered Saïed's decision, who acts as an independent, a ‘coup against the revolution and the Constitution.’” (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁸). In this sense, *Ennahda* appears as an instrument to produce objectivity and outsource the possibility of a Saïed authoritarian turn. This is also seen in F24 and BBC further suggesting G1’s subordination to hegemonic discourses.

Finally, the piece concludes with an overview of Tunisia’s problems in a panoramic manner. The COVID-19 death ratings and the precarious government response to it are central to the country’s imminent issues. However, the political feud between Saïed and Mechichi and the economic crisis are also presented as important causes of the population’s overall discontent regarding the Tunisian government. This is seen in: “The country has also been experiencing a political dispute between Saïed and Mechichi for over a year. Additionally, Tunisia's economy is facing a severe economic crisis.” (Presidente da Tunísia [...], 2021, our translation¹⁵⁹).

In conclusion, on many occasions in this piece, G1 appears to replicate F24 and BBC’s discourse suggesting the use of the same sources. Concerning the counterflow perspective, it fails to create substantial coverage to present itself as an independent counter-hegemonic player in news flow. Regarding Saïed’s coup, it reproduced the Western search for critique

¹⁵⁶ In the original: “dezenas de milhares de pessoas permaneceram nas ruas da capital Túnis e de outras cidades para apoiar a decisão de Saïed.”

¹⁵⁷ In the original: “maior partido no Parlamento da Tunísia, [que] se tornou a principal força política do país desde 2011, quando uma revolta popular deu início ao que ficou conhecido como Primavera Árabe.”

¹⁵⁸ In the original: “O partido considerou a decisão de Saïed, que atua como independente, um ‘golpe contra a revolução e a Constituição’.”

¹⁵⁹ In the original: “O país também convive há mais de um ano uma disputa política entre Saïed e Mechichi. Além disso, a economia tunisiana enfrenta uma forte crise econômica.”

outsourcing by also maneuvering *Ennahda's* discourse in its favor and similarly initially justifying the president's actions under his public support.

8.4 TASS

In each analyzed period, TASS's coverage, differently from G1, performed its identity, especially, considering Russia's interests in the region and, overall, disapproving outlook regarding Political Islam. The network, in its three analyzed articles from 2021, positively constructed Saïed's actions as a move based on justice against a problematic Parliament, which deepened the problems of Tunisia. In this sense, TASS fashioned most of its coverage with narratives that singularly differed from the ones propelled by hegemonic outlets and agencies. Still, the outlet displayed a superficial coverage with two short pieces and one press review.

In the first piece, titled "Tunisian president freezes parliament's activities" (Tunisian president [...], 2021), TASS explicitly aligns itself with the president, emphasizing his role in holding "those responsible for the country's deteriorating pandemic and economic situation" (Tunisian president [...], 2021) accountable. The brief article presents his actions as in line with the public's interests, and notably, there is no mention of any opposition to his move. Consequently, his power grab is portrayed in a way that resonates with the concerns of the protesters.

In the second analyzed piece, published on the same day and titled "Government troops deployed to Tunisian capital - TV" (Government troops [...], 2021), the initial focus is the deployment of troops, producing a dramatic effect and bringing importance to the theme. Differently from BBC's mentioning of violence or the use of security forces, in TASS, the use appears to produce a sense of security and strength to the president, as his move follows "nationwide protests demanding that parliament be dissolved and those responsible for the country's deteriorating pandemic and economic situation be brought to justice" (Government troops [...], 2021).

In this sense, the produced meaning reflects an idea of Saïed as a politician acting according to the population's needs and with a firm grip. In a fashion contrasting with BBC's, this resorting to a strong posture is not contrasted with Ghannouchi's call "on the Tunisian people to act peacefully to restore democracy" (Government troops [...], 2021). Conversely, the Parliament Speaker does not appear to counter the president's actions but materializes an appeal for public conformity in its use by the Russian outlet.

The final article analyzed is a Press Review, namely a summary of the media's coverage of a certain matter. Although it compiles and summarizes various media coverage of the events in Tunisia and includes the disclaimer "TASS is not responsible for the material quoted in these press reviews" (Press Review [...], 2021), the selection of employed discourses and their presentation are significant. Indeed, these choices still reflect TASS's perspective and worldview on the matter, in other words, it reproduces its discourses and narratives.

In its lead, the piece states that a "political crisis is gathering force in Tunisia" (Press Review [...], 2021), which produces theatricality and stresses the importance of the matter. Although this crisis appears to follow Saïed's actions, the president's move is justified by the "protests against the poor performance of the government and parliament in handling the coronavirus pandemic and the nation's socio-economic problems." (Press Review [...], 2021). In this sense, the politician is portrayed as fighting alongside Tunisians for better conditions.

Moreover, *Ennahda*'s figure comes across as countering the president's move in a pacific manner. This is relevant since the Press Review reveals TASS's choice option for reproducing discourses similar to BBC's, especially in the comparison of actions between the clashing forces. In this sense, the following segment highlights a vision of Saïed responding violently against a compromising posture from *Ennahda*:

The main political force in Tunisia's parliament - the moderate Islamist *Ennahda* Movement - stood up to Saïed and the demonstrators. On July 26, Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi, an *Ennahda* leader, accused the president of acting against the constitution. On the same day, *Ennahda* launched a sit-in protest in front of the parliament building. The president, in turn, ordered government troops to be deployed in the capital. (Press Review [...], 2021).

Subsequently, a historical context is brought on the matter by the mention of the Arab Spring interdiscourse, which conveys TASS's overall negative view of the post-Revolution outcomes and governments. This is seen in the indirect quoting of the Dialogue of Civilizations Institution's Research Director, claiming that "the reason behind popular discontent in the country is that the post-revolutionary government failed to raise the living standards and curb unemployment" (Press Review [...], 2021). In this sense, public opinion appears to be siding with Saïed and opposing the Parliament, in a move that seeks a solution regarding Tunisia's issues.

Additionally, the indirect quotation continues with an interesting portrayal of Tunisia as "the most westernized country of the region, willing to follow the West's democratic practices" (Press Review [...], 2021). According to this view, two scenarios are produced by

the discourse. First, Saïed's move is democratic and follows this *Tunisianité* intersubjective aspect of the country's identity. On the contrary, Tunisians, whose identity lies within these premises, would similarly rise against him as they did during the 2011 Revolution.

Relevantly, this view is endorsed by the expert's described idea "that in the long run, the unrest is likely to spread to other countries, including Egypt and Algeria, so we will see a new 'Arab Spring.'" (Press Review [...], 2021). The regional homogeneity discourse, pivotal to the Arab Spring interdiscourse, is central to this portrayal that sheds a positive, or a less doubtful, view upon Saïed's actions

Concluding the piece, the expert adds an unseen perspective, framing the political crisis as a "standoff between secular and Islamist forces [...] on the surface" (Press Review [...], 2021). This framing of the political conflict as a religious one confirms TASS's overall negative view toward Political Islam and, consequently, toward *Ennahda*. In addition, to bring complexity to its essentialized view around the matter, he adds that "religion is not the only thing that matters. The Tunisian people have different views of the country's future" (Press Review [...], 2021).

According to the expert: "By freezing the parliament's activities, the president actually sought to make the people decide how inviolable the 2014 constitution is, which was adopted through nationwide dialogue" (Press Review [...], 2021). Interestingly, this expert's final sentence constructs doubt surrounding Saïed's actions, especially, considering the future of the country. This brief shift of narrative could be suggested by the format of TASS'S article as a Press Review.

Notably, by analyzing TASS's Press Review, it is possible to assert its overall choice for sources and discourse legitimization process. Differently from its initial pieces, this review shortly sides with hegemonic constructions, doubting Saïed's intentions, while positively understanding his move in a general sense. The article, thus, is important for highlighting the matter of religion, which appears distant to the pragmatic discussion in 2021 Tunisia, and focuses on a perdured dissent against the post-Revolutionary governments mainly led by *Ennahda*.

In conclusion, TASS's brief coverage showcased Russia's general negative posture toward Political Islam and *Ennahda*'s governments in Tunisia while symbolizing Saïed's self-coup with hope. The portrayal of the president focuses on a strongman fighting for justice and solutions to Tunisia's problems, a narrative deeply endorsed by demonstrators calling for action against the Parliament. Indeed, the production of doubt seen in the Press Review is preceded by a description of Tunisia's post-Revolution chaotic scenario in which Saïed

appears to be acting upon.

As we have previously discussed, from a counterflow perspective, TASS's defense of Russian interests and intersubjective discourses can be framed as counterhegemonic. Consequently, TASS can be seen as a counterflow news agency. Despite endorsing and reproducing simplifications of *Ennahda*'s discourse and its Political Islam ideology, the Russian agency still displays a distinguishable discursive ethos, which comparatively highlights G1's hegemonic reproduction

8.5 *Al Arabiya* English

Al Arabiya English's coverage of Saïed's self-coup largely mimicked its previous discourses by highlighting a chaotic context in Tunisia due to the Revolution and the presence of Political Islam in politics. The four analyzed pieces, whose publishing months ranged from May to September, stressed the country's tensions and produced suspicion surrounding the *Ennahda* party in a similar fashion to its 2013 and 2014 coverages. Consequently, as expected, the network delved into the party's polemics and problems.

The first piece, titled "Tunisia's *Ennahda* demands probe into 'coup plot paper'" (Tunisia's [...], 2021) and published on the 26th, described the party's response to a leaked document which affirms that "The president would [...] declare a 'national emergency' and, in the presence of the prime minister and speaker of parliament, invoke Article 80 of the constitution, allowing him to seize powers." (Tunisia's [...], 2021). Posted on the Middle East Eye, it fueled indignation from *Ennahda*, framed by the article as intensifying the country's polarization and tensions.

The plot details contained a plan by the president to "call an emergency meeting of the National Security Council at the presidential palace, under the pretext of the coronavirus pandemic and spiraling public debt." (Tunisia's [...], 2021), followed by his power grab move. Despite predicting, or planning, almost exactly the events of Saïed's self-coup, *Ennahda*'s demand for investigations is indirectly dismissed by its framing as a party "which leads an unwieldy coalition government and has a poor relationship with the presidency" (Tunisia's [...], 2021). Thus, appearing as ineffective and opposing the president, their criticism concerning the paper is constructed as suspicious.

On the other hand, "Tunisia's presidency says the document was generated maliciously and has nothing to do with the presidency" (Tunisia's [...], 2021), producing more doubt over *Ennahda*'s criticism. In addition, the use of a source close to the president deepens

this tension by adding that the document “[...] is a poorly conceived piece of theatre” (Tunisia’s [...], 2021). These contradictory statements exacerbate the tensions in Tunisia and prepare the ground for the overall coverage of the Saudi network.

Subsequently, the piece turns to generalized sources to further produce suspicion over *Ennahda*’s accusations and calls for an investigation. This can be perceived in “Supporters of Saïed have accused *Ennahda* of creating the document so as to tarnish the presidency’s image.” (Tunisia’s [...], 2021). Moreover, this trend is also perpetuated by “Independent observers of Tunisian public life have likewise been skeptical about the document’s authenticity” (Tunisia’s [...], 2021). In this sense, *Ennahda* appears to harm Tunisia’s stability by dramatically engaging with conspiracy theories.

This clash between a reasonable figure, Saïed, and an attacking *Ennahda* is augmented by the concluding paragraphs of the article. One describes how the “*Ennahdha*-led coalition government has for months been at loggerheads with the president, an independent scholar elected in 2019.” (Tunisia’s [...], 2021). The last characterizes the tensions by adding that “He accuses lawmakers of corruption, while deputies have in turn accused him of seeking to extend presidential powers, amid his rejection of several parliamentary votes” (Tunisia’s [...], 2021).

In this sense, the piece focuses on a positive image of the president, as an independently elected political actor, whose intentions lie in solving corruption issues in the country. On the other side, *Ennahda* is portrayed as an agent who produces dissent within the country and whose goal is to disfigure the president’s actions and image. Consequently, as it can be seen throughout all AAE’s coverages, the production of chaos and dissonance within Tunisia created by *Ennahda* is the hegemonic narrative.

In “Tunisian Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi accuses president of coup” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021), the second analyzed article, this focus continues, as Ghannouchi is put under the spotlight after Saïed’s self-coup. Published on the 26th of July, the piece states in its lead that “Tunisian Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi accused President Kais Saïed of launching ‘a coup against the revolution and constitution’” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021). Following AAE general coverage, this initial criticism can be understood under suspicion framing.

In *Ennahda*’s leader’s words, “‘We consider the institutions to be still standing and supporters of *Ennahda* and the Tunisian people will defend the revolution,’ [...]” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021). Importantly, Ghannouchi’s direct discourse sheds light on a generalized source, the Tunisian people, whose intentions, according to the politician, lie with

his. Conversely, the following paragraph describes how “Tunisia’s president dismissed the government and froze parliament on Sunday in a dramatic escalation of a political crisis, prompting huge crowds to fill the capital in his support, but his opponents labeled the moves a coup.” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021).

These contradictions produced concerning *Ennahda*’s official discourses are important for our analysis because they prompt the audience to consider the party untrustworthy, as the president appears with the support of the population. Consequently, despite framing Saïed’s actions as “the biggest challenge yet to a 2014 democratic constitution” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021), his objectives are portrayed as aligned with the majority of the population’s hopes.

On this matter, the piece also adds the layer of the Revolution and the Arab Spring interdiscourse: “Tunisians rose up in revolution in 2011 against decades of autocracy in the first eruption of the Arab Spring, installing a democratic system that ensured new freedoms and has navigated repeated crises, but which has not delivered economic prosperity” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021). In addition, the chaotic context is emphasized by the description of “Years of paralysis, corruption, declining state services and growing unemployment had already soured many Tunisians on their political system before the global pandemic hammered the economy last year and COVID-19 infection rates shot up this summer.” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021).

Although not explicitly addressing a source of blame for these chaotic settings, the piece concludes by mentioning “Major protests [...] with much of the anger focused on the Islamist *Ennahda* party, the biggest in parliament.” (Tunisian Parliament [...], 2021, our remarks). Consequently, aligning the population and Saïed against *Ennahda*, the produced meaning sets the guilt of economic, political, and sanitary chaos scenario in the country on the party led by Ghannouchi, generating doubt over his critiques targeted at the president.

Generally, this negative meaning about *Ennahda* is worsened by the third piece, titled “Tunisia’s President Saïed rejects dialogue with ‘traitors’” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021) and published on the 15th of September. In the article’s lead, the continuation of this discourse is perceivable, as it describes how “Tunisia’s President Kais Saïed said on Tuesday he would not do deals with those he described as ‘traitors’, an apparent reference to the Islamist *Ennahda* party, the biggest in the suspended parliament.” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021).

While the party “called for a national dialogue to find a way forward” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021) after Saïed’s power-grabbing, the president rejected their proposals framing them as “traitors and those who pay money to offend their country. No dialogue with them” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). As described by the piece, the tensions rose after local

media reported that *Ennahda* had “[...] paid nearly 3 million dinars to foreign lobbying groups to harm their country,” said Saïed in the video, without naming *Ennahda*” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). In addition, the article explained that the party denied the accusations.

This turbulent scenario is crowned by AAE moving toward also criticizing Saïed, as “his intervention thrust Tunisia into its biggest political crisis since introducing democracy in a 2011 revolution that triggered the Arab Spring” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). The Arab Spring interdiscourse, as often employed by the outlet, appears to produce a negative view of the Revolution, as the root of the country’s disorder. Regardless, Saïed’s possible suspension of the constitution and delay in choosing a Prime Minister are portrayed as broadly rejected by “The union, as well as *Ennahda*, other political parties and Western democracies that have supported Tunisian public finances” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021).

Concluding its text, the article ends with a comment from Saïed claiming that “The government is important. But what is more important is how this government will work.” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). Although the piece displayed criticism of the president, the final section reveals how this is tempered by the president’s own narratives, a privilege never extended to *Ennahda* in its coverage.

Overall, regardless of the subtle shift around the image of Saïed, AAE continued its tendency to negatively portray *Ennahda*, employing doubt and suspicion around their claims and actions. The latter is also seen in the final analyzed piece, titled “Over 100 officials from Tunisia’s *Ennahda* Party resign amid crisis” (Over 100 [...], 2021) and published on the 25th of September. Focused on “the biggest blow yet to the party which is facing a severe split” (Over 100 [...], 2021), the piece dramatically depicts the party’s internal problems after 113 members resigned from its ranks.

The reasoning behind the massive quitting was portrayed as the party crisis caused by Saïed’s self-coup and the “wrong choices by *Ennahda*’s leadership, which had led to its isolation and failure to engage in any common front to confront Saïed’s decisions” (Over 100 [...], 2021). To produce importance to the event, the former positions of those who resigned are presented, especially from “eight lawmakers and several former ministers” (Over 100 [...], 2021).

Moreover, the discourse of the former Minister of Health Abdellatif Mekki is employed to engage with the dramatized account of the events. In his words, “I feel deeply sad...I feel the pain of separation...but I have no choice after I tried for a long time [...]” (Over 100 [...], 2021). This emotive discourse generates empathy with the resigning politicians and negative feelings toward the party, which subsequently is presented as the

cause of their sadness.

According to the article, the massive stepping down is explained after party officials unsuccessfully “demanded that their leader Rached Ghannouchi, the parliament speaker, resign over the party’s response to the crisis and strategic choices he has made since a 2019 election” (Over 100 [...], 2021). Thus, the problems it faced after 2021, for example, are mostly attributed to its leadership while Saïed’s self-coup is briefly presented as one reason for the party crisis.

In the final paragraphs, *Ennahda* is described as “the most powerful party in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution that led to the ousting of its long-time president, playing a role in backing successive coalition governments” (Over 100 [...], 2021). This description shows a strong image, which is countered by the last paragraph: “However, it lost support as the economy stagnated and public services declined” (Over 100 [...], 2021).

In general, AAE in 2021 sustained its ongoing skepticism regarding the Revolution and *Ennahda*’s role in its aftermath. The outlet’s depiction of Saïed’s actions was not entirely positive, however, it mostly portrayed *Ennahda* as the root of Tunisia’s crisis. Especially, the network’s first and last articles show how strongly constructed the suspicion around Political Islam is in its coverage. In conclusion, as seen in other analyzed outlets, AAE coherently followed its narratives, which presents a discourse opposed to the mainstream narrative, positioning it as a counterflow agency.

8.6 *Al Jazeera English*

Throughout its coverage of the *Nahdawi* role in post-Revolutionary Tunisia, *Al Jazeera* showcased a general interest in portraying the party with nuance and, at times, aligning with its perspective. This was also the case in 2021, as its accounts aimed at showing the party as searching for a pacific solution while its opposition resorted to violence as the answer to Tunisia’s polarization. In this sense, the network’s coverage, despite eventually criticizing Ghannouchi and *Ennahda* leadership, fashioned a positive view of the party’s discourse, negatively portraying Saïed.

In the Qatari network’s first piece, titled “*Ennahda* calls for dialogue to resolve Tunisia’s political crisis” (Foroudi, 2021) and published on the 27th of July, the discourse produced directly focuses on this siding with the party. In its lead, the article states that: “Tunisia’s largest political party has called for dialogue to resolve the political crisis, changing tack after initially urging MPs and its supporters to protest outside parliament”

(Foroudi, 2021).

The mentioning of *Ennahda* as the largest party and the focus on its shift regarding the opposition creates an image of strength and compromise regarding its actions. This focus is confirmed by the following paragraph stating that “the Islamist *Ennahdha* party reiterated that they considered President Saïed’s decision to suspend parliament and sack the prime minister as ‘unconstitutional’, but took a more conciliatory approach, calling on Saïed to reverse the measures” (Foroudi, 2021). Consequently, the party is shown as a pacifying figure in the Tunisian context.

This is highlighted by the mentioning of the Arab Spring interdiscourse while discussing how “Tunisia, touted as a **success story of the 2010 Arab Spring revolutions**, is facing deep political uncertainty after the president froze parliament for 30 days and fired Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi amid rising COVID cases and a faltering economy” (Foroudi, 2021, our remarks). In the sentence, it is evident the use of the interdiscourse to emphasize the problems caused by Saïed’s actions, which could potentially harm the Revolution.

Remarkably, while Mechichi is also shown as compromising with the president’s measures, Saïed’s actions are contextualized under the protests against “the government’s mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis [...] the country’s economic stagnation, rising living costs and frustration with a political class embroiled in infighting.” (Foroudi, 2021, our remarks). Despite describing the reaction of “tens of thousands of Tunisians” (Foroudi, 2021) as jubilant, their actions are framed within a discourse of violence, as seen in: “*Ennahda* party flags were burnt and the party offices were targeted in some parts of the country” (Foroudi, 2021).

Conversely, the following section focuses on Ghannouchi’s calls for a sit-in protest, showing a contrast between Saïed’s supporter’s violence and *Ennahda*’s “[...] position of containment [...]” (Foroudi, 2021), as described by an expert. According to the Carnegie Middle East Center’s analyst, “Confrontation in the streets would be costly and bloody and will delegitimise them so they are choosing political channels but keeping their position to reject the decision,” (Foroudi, 2021). Consequently, different from AAE blaming *Ennahda* on Tunisia’s political context, AJE opted to highlight its search for solutions.

In this sense, the raiding of *Al Jazeera*’s offices is also employed to criticize the president’s enthusiasts, while the majority of parties appear as opposing the politician power grab. The mention of former allies of Saïed turning against him is also important to further produce this negative view of his moves. Conversely, the UGTT is depicted as supporting the

president with “guarantees that these exceptional measures will be limited and not become permanent” (Foroudi, 2021). Interestingly, the political arena of Tunisia is described as opposing Saïed despite his public support, as “many view his actions as exceeding the limitations of the constitution” (Foroudi, 2021).

In conclusion, the piece adds the discourse of Amna Guellali, deputy regional director for Amnesty International claiming that: “Suspending parliament doesn’t square well [with article 80] but in the absence of a constitutional court, it is the president that interprets. He is the guarantor of rights and of the constitution,” (Foroudi, 2021). Her authoritative discourse is important to bring objectivity and persuasion to the audience in AJE’s overall argument against the president.

Ennahda’s active role in solving the crisis is also highlighted in the second analyzed piece. Titled “Tunisia tries to reassure as *Ennahdha* presses for early elections” (Tunisia tries [...], 2021) and published on the following day, focuses on Saïed’s supporters’ attempts to tranquilize international actors, such as the European Union, Turkey, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, while the opposition urges for elections in Tunisia.

These endeavors were concentrated on portraying the president’s actions as momentary, as the international “counterparts pledged their continued support to the fledgling democracy” (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). In addition, regional players namely Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Algeria were also mentioned as supporting or meeting with Saïed. Interestingly, the piece counters this modest international backing by focusing an entire section on the president’s opposition.

In it, oppositional forces, mainly *Ennahda*, emphatically call for elections and warn against an autocratic turn by Saïed. Ghannouchi’s party, used as a source, claims “that ‘for the sake of the democratic path,’ it is ‘ready to go to early legislative and presidential elections’ while warning ‘that any delay is not used as a pretext to maintain an autocratic regime’” (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). Indeed, this peaceful campaign is emphasized in the section to challenge Saïed’s international supporters.

After the mention of violent clashes, the doubt over its allies is emphasized by *Ennahda* saying that “‘organised thugs’ were being used to ‘provoke bloodshed and chaos’, and urged its supporters ‘to go home in the interests of maintaining the peace and security of our nation’” (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). Further dramatizing this claim, the network employs the Arab Spring interdiscourse to affirm that the “young North African democracy of 12 million people, the cradle of the Arab Spring uprisings 10 years ago, was thrust into a constitutional crisis” (Tunisia tries [...], 2021), emphasizing its negative view of the president.

Similarly, this is seen in Saïed's warning that "armed opposition would be met with a 'rain of bullets'" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021), the description of clashes, and the police raiding *Al Jazeera's* office. In this way, framing his and his supporters' actions as violent, the network chooses to side with the Parliament's "'absolute rejection and strong condemnation' of the president's actions" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021).

Moreover, although it recognizes the support of a generalized "Many Tunisians" (*Tunisia tries [...], 2021*) as "thousands flooded the streets to celebrate" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021), it emphasizes others' "fear of a return to dictatorship" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). This imprecise mentioning of sources is important to produce doubt over which group is the majority or, in other words, which has more strength. Similarly, by quoting a French newspaper, AJE reinforces this numerical doubt, seen in: "Le Quotidien [...] wrote that Saïed's 'kick ... in the parliamentary ant hill has taken many people by surprise, starting with *Ennahdha*'" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021).

Searching for a way to further stress the importance of opposing Saïed's action, the piece mentions Tunisia's "young democracy [...] as the sole success story of the Arab Spring, which was sparked across the region" (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). This is reinforced by the citing of the Algerian political tensions and the Libyan crisis, strengthening its argument against the president and in defense of his opposition's urgent call for democratic and constitutional conformity.

To conclude the piece, AJE resorts to a discourse focused on the international response to Saïed's action, similar to the one employed by BBC. Quoting the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the article focused on his call for adherence to democracy, human rights, and an "[...]open dialogue with all political actors and the Tunisian people," (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). Also in this sense, the EU foreign policy chief "urged 'the resumption of parliamentary activity, respect for fundamental rights and an abstention from all forms of violence'." (Tunisia tries [...], 2021). Concluding, "the chairman of the African Union Commission [...] called for 'the strict respect of the Tunisian constitution ... and the promotion of political dialogue'." (Tunisia tries [...], 2021).

The use of these official voices aims to convey objectivity while outsourcing AJE's interpretation of Saïed's self-coup. This approach highlights how the piece initially appeared to address the president's actions' support but gradually deconstructed the notion that it was aligned with democratic principles and constitutional values. Overall, the article portrays *Ennahda* as a robust political force with discourses aligned with international-level players, showing more complexity than the simplistic view of the party as the root of Tunisia's

problems.

Similarly, the third analyzed piece, titled “Tunisia’s President Kais Saïed extends suspension of parliament” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021) and published on August 24th, continues the displayed narrative, aligning national and international oppositional sources against the president. This is evident in the claim that a “month after Saïed’s sudden intervention, he has not yet a new prime minister or announced a road map demanded by Western allies and key players in Tunisia, including the powerful UGTT Union” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021).

Despite mentioning his public support, the article recognizes the “concerns among some Tunisians about the future of the democratic system that the country adopted after its 2011 revolution that triggered the Arab Spring.” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). Once more, the Arab Spring interdiscourse is employed to fuel anti-Saïed sentiments in the Anglophone audience, especially, since his actions appear to move against the Revolutionary gains. Intersubjectively, as seen in BBC’s coverage, this interdiscourse has gained hegemonically positive tones in Western discourse, justifying its employment in opposition to Saïed’s decisions.

Moreover, the piece subsequently shifts to discussing Ghannouchi’s dismissal of “the party’s executive committee amid criticism of his handling of a month-old political crisis” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). In this section, Ghannouchi’s decisions are presented as causes for Saïed’s intervention, labeled as a coup by the party. Indeed, his actions are portrayed with criticism by the outlet, which seemingly agrees with the internal critics of the leader, calling for his dismissal.

Concluding the piece, the network constructs the party as “the most consistently powerful party in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution that led to the removal of its longtime president, playing a role in backing successive coalition governments” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). Conversely, it also mentions how “it has lost support as the economy stagnated and public services declined” (Tunisia’s President [...], 2021). In this sense, the piece renders a positive fashion of the party’s internationally aligning dissent against the president while also recognizing its internal problems in a manner that produces objectivity to its discourse.

Finally, the final analyzed piece continued this employment of criticism targeted at *Ennahda*’s leadership while still condemning Saïed’s actions. “Over 100 *Ennahdha* members resign amid Tunisia’s political crisis” (Over 100 [...], 2021)., published on September 25th, in its lead makes clear its overall argument by positioning that “More than 100 prominent members of Tunisia’s *Ennahdha* party have resigned in protest against the leadership’s

performance, denouncing its inability to form a united front against what they see as President Kais Saïed's attempt to stage a coup" (Over 100 [...], 2021).

This denouncing posture against the party leadership is emphasized by the 113 officials' claims over the party's "failure to confront what they called an 'imminent tyrannical danger'" (Over 100 [...], 2021). The dual criticism, directed both at the aforementioned and the president, is emphasized through the portrayal of the politician's action of strengthening "presidential powers at the expense of the government and parliament, ignoring parts of the constitution and altering Tunisia's political system" (Over 100 [...], 2021).

Interestingly, when employing the discourse of the officials, especially from the former Minister of Health Abdellatif Mekki, *Al Jazeera* conveyed a less dramatized version of his Facebook post than *Al Arabiya*. From his Facebook post, it directly quoted: "I have no choice," he said. "We must confront the coup for the sake of Tunisia." (Over 100 [...], 2021). Thus, it partially transfers the liability for the massive quitting to Saïed's actions, in a fashion that extensively differs from the Saudi network's approach.

In this sense, the call for Ghannouchi's resignation over the party's position regarding the president's self-coup is understood under his "conciliatory approach, calling on the president to reverse the measures" (Over 100 [...], 2021). However, these tensions are historically contextualized concerning the 2020 third consecutive nomination of the politician as the party leader, highly criticized by other party members. Quoting Rabeb Aloui, an independent journalist in Tunis, the article dramatically emphasizes how "[...] this is the biggest crisis that the *Ennahdha* party has lived [...]" "It was expected since the tensions started one year ago," (Over 100 [...], 2021).

In conclusion of the piece, Ghannouchi's posture is outlined as "a position of containment, rather than opposition" (Over 100 [...], 2021), after his failed attempt to protest against the president. On the other side, Saïed's actions are explained by his indirect quote as "necessary to put an end to the government's mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis, the country's economic stagnation, and political infighting" (Over 100 [...], 2021). This move is presented as "met with jubilation by large swaths of the Tunisian population. *Ennahdha* party flags were burned and the party offices were targeted in some parts of the country" (Over 100 [...], 2021).

Thus, the conclusion of the final piece highlights the tensions between the population, in support of the president, and *Ennahda*, also criticized by former partisans. Interestingly, this issue is emphasized as driven by the party's leadership, not compromising its overall positive image by the outlet. In other words, despite criticizing *Ennahda*, it still sided with it

against Saïed, complexly and historically comprehending its internal tensions and the 113 officials' resignation.

In overview, AJE's coverage in many senses opposed AAE's constructed discourses. It sided with *Ennahda's* criticism of Saïed while still admitting the party's self-constructions and discourses, avoiding the simplistic maneuvering of it, as seen in F24, BBC, and G1. The negative image of Saïed contrasted with *Ennahda* compromising dissent in a similar fashion to international sources appears as AJE's 2021 general narrative. In conclusion, it is evident the network's appreciation for a complex and historical coverage of *Ennahda* throughout all the analyzed periods.

8.7 Conclusion: A Radical Shift in Course?

Saïed's radical shift in Tunisian politics swayed the discourses regarding the country internally and internationally. Positively seen in both political arenas, the independent president's self-coup in international media proved an interesting subject, confirming analyzed narratives and facilitating the manipulation of *Ennahda's* discourse. Overall, we question if there was indeed a radical shift in course regarding *Ennahda's* presence in politics, especially considering its ideological change, or if the contextual threat to democracy was meaningless in the face of its original Political Islam ties.

As we tried to argue, for networks such as F24, BBC, and G1, constantly reinforcing hegemonic perspectives against the ideology and, consequently, the party, the apparent change disguises a discursive maneuver to outsource the criticism targeted at Saïed. Indeed, local perspectives were still deprived of a complex account and voice by these networks, in which the employment of *Ennahda* as a news objectivity procedure prevented its possibilities as a news agent. In other words, as seen by Orientalist narratives, MENA's political actors are often deprived of agency and self-representation, conforming with the interest of Western discourses. Thus, what was seen was not a radical shift but a continuation of a superiority posture.

In a counterflow manner, both TASS and *Al Arabiya* conveyed a narrative that challenges the previously mentioned hegemonic discourse. The first coverage, although short in extension, positively fashioned Saïed's strength and use of the armed forces, in relation to *Ennahda's* passive opposition. *Al Arabiya*, on the other hand, thrived its discourse on the internal problems of Ghannouchi's party, portraying it as more problematic than Saïed's anti-democratic actions. Overall, despite discursively countering the flow of news, both

coverages failed to avoid an Orientalist posture, constructing *Ennahda* with complexity. Once more, there is no shift in the outlets' coverage due to their maintenance of the negative image of the party.

Finally, comparing 2013 and 2021 *Al Jazeera's* coverage, it is possible to see a slight shift from indirectly criticizing the party over the political assassinations and tensions in the country to the historical and complex account of its opposition and internal disagreements after Saïed's move. According to the counterflow argument, its discourse would fashion a different discourse than the hegemonic outlets, showing its commitment to counter any Orientalist image and construction. Overall, the network championed a complex view of *Ennahda*, even criticizing it when necessary.

Thematically, the 2021 self-coup stressed the importance of continually discussing the Revolution and its expectations. Disregarding the possibility of counter-revolution, almost all analyzed pieces employed the Arab Spring interdiscourse to back their argument. Interestingly, the image of a singular movement that failed in other countries is still the vision entailed by international media, failing to recognize each specific scenario within its own history and development. Thus, facing Saïed's action, the engagement with this interdiscourse prompts questions regarding the durability of democracy in Tunisia.

Overall, the period marked the different approaches concerning the Tunisian context and, more broadly, the image of Political Islam. It emphasized each network's ideological alignment and produced an interesting discourse regarding the focused theme. In conclusion, the image of *Ennahda* in international media maintained its construction as a discursive object rather than an agent for most of the networks while Saïed self-coup appeared as a threat mainly for the Western "Arab Spring". Was there a radical shift in course? Arguably, there was for Tunisians, however, for international media, the continuity of narratives remained the norm.

9 CONCLUSION

Figure 07 - The Clock Tower (Tunis)



Source: Author's collection.

In Tunis, the Clock Tower in the *Place de la République* became a focal point during the protests that led to the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The symbol of the Clock can be seen as a reminder that political changes, and revolutions in particular, are processes that unfold over time and often face counter-revolutionary forces. The most academically compelling aspect of Tunisia's Revolutionary international unfolding is its discourse appropriation by foreign commentators, especially from the West, as we have defended in Landucci (2022).

The current study proposed a discussion of the media's image of the most significant political party in post-Ben Ali Tunisia, namely the *Ennahda* Movement, and explored how commentators have upheld its domain over the country's political landscape. The case of Political Islam, *Ennahda's* claimed ideology, is stimulating due to its normative position in hegemonic Western discourses, as a source of threat and fear. However, to some extent, the discussed results present an overall manipulation of Tunisia's context and identity beyond the party's political role.

Through the analysis of the discourses from six renowned media outlets, the connection between the maneuvering of the Revolution, Islamophobic tropes, and Orientalist narratives is employed to produce an image of Tunisia aligned with each outlet's interests and broader societal intersubjective knowledge. Thus, it is important to stress how, despite being contained within *Ennahda* and Political Islam as objects, the study captured the simplification of Tunisia as a significant media trend.

Intensively, as well, this simplification was seen in the concept of Political Islam. In the seventy analyzed articles, Political Islam was framed as a source of terrorism, a violence producer, an anti-Western and anti-democratic ideology, a threat to women's rights, a significant problem for Tunisia's future, and a denial of modern advancements. Indeed, this idea appeared as a shadow, covering *Ennahda* throughout its political activities and harming its international image. In addition, simplistically, the party also became responsible for the actions of every political group that employed such narratives, losing its identity in the face of regional actors.

Hence, engaging with Political Islam as a discursive tradition serves as a response to the academic, media, and intersubjective resistance to Islam and its role in societies worldwide. Consequently, we avoid strong generalized stances, such as the post-Islamism theory or the Orientalist discussion of the connection between democracy and Islam. As proposed, we extensively defend the view of actors aligned with the ideology of Political Islam according to their own premises and discourses. This also benefits the International Relations field by surpassing its untenable secular views surrounding religion.

Building on this perspective, the presence of *Ennahda* becomes essential. Through its role as a compromising and democratic force in Tunisia, the party could arguably be portrayed in international media as the antithesis to the negative image of Political Islam, while still framing its discourse within the framework of Islam. However, its posture was negatively dissected by the majority of the analyzed commentators, desperately attempting to construct it into such reified themes.

In this sense, oppositional forces' discourses are operated to connect *Ennahda* with this antagonistic image of Political Islam. In 2014, this was seen in the electoral presence of *Nidaa Tounes*, a player incorrectly constructed as its polar opposite. Also, in 2021, the trend often manifested itself in the figure of Saïed as a politician searching for a solution to *Ennahda*'s produced problems. Indeed, regardless of the opposing actor, *Ennahda*'s Political Islam was primarily constructed as the denial of an object of political admiration by the secular media discourse.

Moreover, the division between secular and Islamist in the discourse further amplified this trend, by reifying both concepts under the actions of *Ennahda* and its detractors. This binary was ostensibly employed in the coverage and captured the precise contradictions of the terms. The central example of this trend is the use of “laic” to frame *Nidaa Tounes* or even the idea of Essebsi’s party as avoiding connecting religion and politics under the defense of secularism. These misconstructions are responsible for underscoring the players’ self-produced identity and discourses.

Likewise, in 2013, facing the absence of a unified opposition against *Ennahda*, most media coverage either devoted its admiration to Tunisia’s authoritarian past or portrayed regional armed groups as counterparts to the party. In 2016, its change from Political Islam to Muslim Democracy further emphasized the vacuum of discursive meaning in such concepts by avoiding describing their sense, contributing to their overall reification. Thus, effectively, *Ennahda*’s identity was hollowed by the construction of other actors, surviving through relational discourses.

Regarding this discursive process, *Ennahda*’s identity intersection with Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes and simplifications can be traced back to its initial foundation and its defiance of authoritarianism in Tunisia. Through our discussion of the party’s history and role in the post-Revolutionary period in Tunisia, we aimed to emphasize its role as a compromising and democratic force, searching to sustain its power but also worried about the future and hopes of the revolutionaries.

Among the analyzed networks, the discourses surrounding the party were theoretically categorized into flow and counterflow, as well as between Western, BRICS, and Gulf outlets. According to the previously mentioned theory, this division frames the circulation of news in the International System and we attempted to address it not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, perceiving if each discourse on *Ennahda* attempted to counter or support hegemonic narratives on its ideology and actions. This study’s summary of findings is presented in Table 2, highlighting the different approaches of each network.

Table 2: Summary of findings

Networks	F24	BBC	G1	TASS	AAE	AJE
Sources	Political and official	Generalized and	Dramatized and official	Russian sources	Official sources	Official sources

	sources	dramatized sources	sources	(experts and politicians)	focusing on <i>Ennahda</i>	focusing on opponents
Interdiscourses	Interdiscourse with <i>Tunisianité</i>	Interdiscourse with <i>Tunisianité</i>	Interdiscourse with <i>Tunisianité</i>	Interdiscourse with the Muslim threat	Partial defense discourse of <i>Ennahda</i>	Interdiscourse with the Islamic threat
Focus	Discourse focused on Secularism and French interests	Discourse focused on the memory of the Revolution	Discourse close to the Western	Discourse with greater focus on Russian interests	Discourse with greater focus on Qatari interests	Discourse with greater focus on Saudi interests
Image of Ennahda	Manipulation of <i>Ennahda</i> 's image in its favor	<i>Ennahda</i> related to the Revolution	Superficial discourse on <i>Ennahda</i> - threat	<i>Ennahda</i> as a threat to Tunisian democracy	<i>Ennahda</i> as a party wronged by expectations	<i>Ennahda</i> as a regional threat to stability

Source: author's production.

Regarding this division, we framed F24 and BBC as both flow and Western outlets. The decision for this proved on point due to their reliance on Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes in their overall coverages. As seen, both agencies attempted to maneuver *Ennahda* according to their interests, avoiding the attentive use of its own self-constructions. Another relatable point of connection is their use of the Arab Spring interdiscourse to produce importance regarding each period in their coverages. It is worth noting, however, that the French network offered more nuanced accounts than the British one, despite continuing to rely on oversimplified categories to interpret Political Islam. This further emphasizes the significance of debates about the BBC's credibility and bias, which were previously identified as a key focus of our analysis.

Furthermore, the importance of employing the French Discourse Analysis on coverages with two different languages, namely French and English, lies in the stress of the multiple possibilities of this methodology and theoretical frame. The employment of each language's meaning construction was important to highlight the outlets' discourses and their

construction of *Ennahda*. This matter was also emphasized by the analysis of the Portuguese-language network, G1.

G1, along with TASS, academically appeared as a source of opposition to the Western domain of the international news flow. Consequently, we framed both under the labels of counterflow and BRICS outlets. However, during the analysis, G1's position in this title lost its meaning, due to its limited coverage siding with hegemonic constructions and almost replicating BBC's and F24's discourses in Portuguese. TASS, on the other hand, produced a highly critical corpus, often opposing the Western network's coverage.

It is important to stress that this does not mean that the Russian agency sided with *Ennahda* or avoided falling into Orientalist and Islamophobic narratives. In fact, as well as *Al Arabiya*, TASS had one of the most anti-*Nahdawi* coverages among the analyzed ones. However, its employment of the negative narratives concerning the party followed Russian interests, a meaning absent in the Brazilian coverage. In this sense, by deeply opposing *Ennahda* and following its base-country ideals, TASS indeed produced a counterflowing perspective of the events from 2013 to 2021.

This was also the case of *Al Arabiya* English which was accompanied by *Al Jazeera* English in the framing of counterflow and Gulf networks. The Saudi network also produced highly critical coverage against *Ennahda*, Political Islam, and the Revolution. This followed its country's overall opposition toward regional armed groups that employ the Political Islam narrative in their actions and negative view of the Revolution as a source of national problems. Consequently, AAE had a distinct approach compared to F24 and BBC's usage of the Arab Spring interdiscourse and general image of *Ennahda*.

On the contrary, *Al Jazeera* English periodically fell under the category of counterflow, especially in 2014, when its discourse defended the party while BBC and F24 were siding with *Nidaa Tounes*. Its explicit criticism toward Essebsi's party and Saïed can be exemplified as the outlet's unique fashion among the other analyzed sources. Consequently, it is still possible to encounter media coverage that positively and complexly frames *Ennahda* and Political Islam while countering the hegemonic views on Tunisian politics.

Remarkably, this conclusion segment aimed at stressing the incompleteness and limitation of rigidly employing these conceptual frameworks in academic studies. The division of flow and counterflow is numerically useful but lacks the critical position resorted by discourse analysis. Furthermore, categorizing agencies based on their cultural or geopolitical context fails to provide meaningful specificity. For instance, G1 could easily be classified as Western, while AAE and AJE, despite their significant differences, were both

broadly grouped under the umbrella of Gulf Media Culture.

In addition, the central idea of counterflow essentializes the flow of information and news internationally. News agents from regional and international hegemonies, such as Russia, Qatar, or Saudi Arabia, could roughly be considered counterhegemonic, as they are part of a specific hegemonic arrangement. Consequently, the tendency to present BRICS or Gulf media as part of a counterflow oversimplifies the logic of international power dynamics, reinforcing binaries that do not positively advance academic discussion. Therefore, these ideas should be carefully reconsidered.

In the present study, we examined this argument as a differentiation in discourse between Western media and other informational agents. However, this approach proved challenging and counterproductive in producing a generalized argument relevant to Media Studies or International Relations. Consequently, we recommend a revision of the flow/counterflow framework by scholars, advocating for more nuanced perspectives on power dynamics in the media landscape.

Generally, the current dissertation focused on producing a critical analysis of not only the construction of *Ennahda's* Political Islam in the media but also the review of theories and concepts about religion, media identity, discourse, and the Tunisian context. This study, evidently, does not end here as more networks could be brought to light, especially those written in Arabic or born into the Tunisian media landscape. In addition, another possible track for future academic endeavors is the search for another party or group's Political Islam discursive tradition meaning in international media.

Ultimately, as we have sought to illustrate, a partial foundation for Islamophobia and prejudice can be traced within the media's portrayal of groups and parties associated with Political Islam. Academic endeavors should focus on exterminating reified views instead of propelling them while media coverage would benefit from historical perspectives in order to accurately frame a political actor's self-construction.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the significance of discursive constructions in post-Ben Ali Tunisia, raising important questions about the role academic and media actors should adopt in shaping such narratives in Saïed's Tunisia. Should we critically reassess our understanding of the country and the region, actively engaging with the self-construction of locals, or should we refrain from a critical stance and continue to place blame on the detained and persecuted *Ennahda*? The answer to sustainable academic practices and ethical media production evidently lies in revision and communication.

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