

# “FREEDOM, DIGNITY & EQUALITY” FOR TUNISIAN WOMEN

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*The Actors and the Focus of Public Discourse  
before the 2014 Legislative Elections in Tunisia*

## BACHELOR THESIS

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster | University of Twente

Prof. <sup>in</sup> Dr. Gabriele Wilde | Prof. Dr. L. L. Roberts

**Julia Krickl**

Public Administration | European Studies

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster | 399191

University of Twente | s1609963

julia.krickl@gmx.net | Howaldtstraße 10, 60314 Frankfurt am Main

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*List of Acronyms*

AEC	Agency for External Communication
AFTURD	Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement
ATFD	Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSP	Code du Statut Personnel (Personal Status Code)
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ERTT	Etablissement de la Radiodiffusion Télévision Tunisienne
HAICA	Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication
INRIC	National Authority for the Reform of Information and Communication
MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
MoC	Ministry of Communication
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONT	Office National de Télédiffusion
UGET	General Union of Tunisian Students
UGTT	General Union of Tunisian Workers
UNFT	Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne (National Union of Tunisian Women)
UTAP	Tunisian Union of Farmers and Fishermen
UTICA	Tunisian Union of Industrialists, Merchants and Artisans

## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Freedom, Dignity and Equality”(Mulrine 2011:16), these were the demands of Tunisian women during the ‘Jasmine Revolution’<sup>1</sup> in 2011 that happened to spark civil unrest in almost all countries of the Middle East and North Africa<sup>2</sup>. The self-immolation of fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi marks the symbolic starting point of the uprisings in Tunisia that soon infected all neighbouring countries with a seldom experienced revolutionary domino-effect. The story of Bouazizi reflects the underlying roots of the uprisings and social unrest, namely the frustration with the weak economy, resulting in a poor socio-economic situation which affected all citizens in the country, touching all social milieus (see Mulrine 2011 and Tamer 2014).

“Women were equal and active participants within the revolution.” (Mulrine 2011:17) Women were present in equal numbers in the revolution and felt equal ownership of the political transitions. There are already assessments of the participation of civil society organisations in the post-revolutionary period, documenting the vital role of women’s organisations and other civil society<sup>3</sup> actors in the constitution building process (see Wilde/Sandhaus 2014). However, there is little material on the participation and importance of civil society actors, especially women’s organisations in the public discourse after the implementation of the new constitution in January 2014. To be able to reflect on the standing of women in society and how the prevailing power relations prevent them from equally participating in public life, I chose to analyse women’s organisations as representative agents of the status of women in the country. Tunisia’s women’s organisations historically worked towards a society that realises democratic gender

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Jasmine Revolution’ was predominantly used by Western media to describe the uprising and regime transition in Tunisia, however it was criticised as romanticising the events in early 2011. For similar reasons I will not refer to the events in the MENA region in 2011 as ‘Arab Spring’ (see Tamer et al. 2014). In this thesis I will use the terms ‘revolution’ or ‘uprising’ synonymously.

<sup>2</sup> In early 2011 civil unrest swept over the MENA region, resulting in regime change (in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya) and the challenging of political authorities (in Morocco, Jordan, Syria and even in Saudi Arabia)(Piccand 2014). For a detailed description of the events see Tamer et al. 2014, Brynen et al. 2012, Nordhausen/Schmid 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Civil society is defined in the radically democratic understanding of Chantal Mouffe. It forms out of various combinations of power relations via the constitution of hegemonic discourses. Those discourses evolve from the citizens need to articulate and putting in question their unequal power relations and making these perspectives public (Wilde 2014a).

relations; in fulfilling their emancipatory approach, they naturally fight for a more equal society in terms of participation, visibility and legal standing of women (Moghadam 2013).

The visibility and potential of action of Tunisian women cannot only be measured by the number of female members of parliament or de-jure gender equality stated in the constitution, but rather by the multiplicity of perspectives and differences that are included in the public discourse (see Wilde/Sandhaus 2014). Women's organisations as agents for women's rights in the country are therefore the focus of this thesis. In this thesis, civil society will be at the centre of analysis as the role of women's organisations during the pre-election period in the public discourse, as reflected in the texts published by mass media outlets. The pre-election period from September until the end of October 2014 is of special interest, as it determined in which direction Tunisian society will develop. As we have seen in the past and recently in Tunisia's neighbour country Egypt, elections don't guarantee civil freedoms or democratic structures (Boose 2012). The public discourse and the culture of communication before the decisive event of legislative elections is an indicator of the democratic culture in the country. It shows that if a plural public discourse exists that guarantees various voices to be heard during the time of electoral campaigns. This discourse can only exist in a pluralistic society, which is the precondition for democracy to exist (see Carpentier/Cammaerts 2006).

In this thesis I try to shed a light on the neglected public discourse in Tunisia, which took place in the months prior to the first free parliamentary elections in October 2014, the role of civil society organisations in the discourse as well as on the very decisive role of plural civil actors in the democratic transformation process of the country. *How was the portrayal of women's organisations before the parliamentary elections in October 2014, in Tunisian media available online?* – will be the leading research question in my thesis. Furthermore it will be determined if the following theses can be confirmed: 1. A higher representation of women's organisations in mass media increases the visibility of inequality structures in Tunisia. So, gender relations which are understood as power relations become a subject of discussion. 2. If in the pre-election public discourse women's organisations as agents for Tunisian women are present, this increases the democratic potential of women in general. Women are presented as actively taking part in the democratic process which increases their potential of action.

To answer the research question and discuss the theses, first I will discuss the historical context, which enables to put the recent events into context and get a better grip of the fast and complex transformation process. Secondly, I will introduce the theoretical framework of this thesis, the concept of Hegemony and Radical Democracy by Chantal Mouffe. The theory will help to unravel the underlying societal power structures that are reflected in the media. Mouffe's concept is one of the few in contemporary political science that takes the constitutive connection between gender relations as power relations and the political order systemically into account. With the help of this theory I will be able to shed a light on the representation of civil society actors and their position in the public discourse. Mouffe's theory will help to examine if there are substantial changes in societal power relations that will ultimately reflect on the gender relations in Tunisia and forecast if the society is becoming more plural, thus increasingly democratic.

To accomplish this analysis, two distinct media outlets have been chosen to adequately reflect on the Tunisian media landscape that is in flux since the revolution. The more traditional media, i.e. print media has to be taken into account as it is still reaching a vast majority of the citizens in the languages French and Arabic. The Tunisian daily *La Presse* was chosen, as it remains the most distributed newspaper in the country and it is available in both languages resulting in a higher distributing rate (Ben Achour 2012). The second outlet is Al-Jazeera as it reflects the increasingly hybrid media landscape of the country. The broadcaster takes Twitter and Facebook comments into account and actively inserts them into its TV-shows and articles posted online (Zayani 2015). Also Al-Jazeera was able to improve its position as one of the most important broadcasters in the region during the revolution and still remains so (ibid.). To be able to grasp and critically analyse the media reports, without neglecting the agenda and own interest of the media outlets, a Critical Discourse Analysis will be used. With the analytical tools that draw upon CDA, the way discourse (re)produces power and inequalities, but is still a constitutive element of society shall be explored in the Tunisian public discourse before the parliamentary elections.

## **2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS**

To understand the position of women in Tunisian society, and ultimately how women's organisations help to improve it, the historical context has to be taken into consideration.

The pre-election discourse cannot be viewed as an isolated event, independent from the processes that shaped the current understanding of gender relations in Tunisian society. Tunisian civil society is in transition, and so are the media and civil society actors. Many different scholars give civil society organisations valuable credit for their democratising effect; a strong civil society is a key factor in toppling autocratic or hybrid regimes and consolidating democracy (Merkel 2009 and Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010). Simple ‘top-down approaches’ like the ‘state-feminism’ introduced by Bourguiba consistently fail to achieve full gender equality – or democratic gender relations, to put it in the words of Mouffe (see section 3.) (Mulrine 2011:24). As Moghadam reveals “participation in NGOs and especially in women’s rights organizations has contributed to civil society and to the development of civic skills necessary for building democracy.”(2013:273) The specific role of civil society organisations (CSOs), especially women’s organisations in the democratisation process of the country will be examined within the historical framework that shaped Tunisian society. Only in this context the necessity of female participation for achieving democratic structures will become apparent.

“[...] Civic skills – along with women’s continued participation in the new political parties – will be vital to the success of the democratic transitions [...]”(ibid.:273)

## 2.1 WOMEN’S ORGANISATIONS IN TUNISIA

The current status of women in Tunisia can only be analysed under acknowledgment of the historical processes that shaped current society and culture. A contextualised view of the advancement of women’s rights and their legal status will provide the basis of the following analysis (section 5).

Women’s rights have a history of being instrumentalised to increase legitimacy and stability of those in power in Tunisia. In order to grasp the long way to the current position of women, the developments under authoritarian rule as well as the events after the uprising in 2011 have to be analysed.

### 2.1.1 UNDER AUTHORITARIAN RULE

To understand the position of women in Tunisian society, the roots of Tunisian feminist discourse have to be disclosed. The ideas of Tahar Haddad<sup>4</sup>, a scholar at Zitouna University

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<sup>4</sup> Tahar Haddad (\*1899-1935) called for improvements in the status and education of Tunisian women. The goal was to ensure women to be better wives, mothers and citizens. Emancipation was not a value in itself but

in Tunis, shaped the political and social thought that made it possible to draw upon Islamic principles to ultimately advance the emancipation of women (Mulrine 2011 and Daniele 2014). During the French occupation, however, feminist discourse was suppressed and the ideas of Haddad dismissed. Clear and repressive gender roles as constructed by a patriarchal society helped to sustain the stability of French colonialism that lasted 75 years. When Habib Bourguiba became the first president of the Tunisian Republic in 1957, the predominant target was to safeguard the national identity through emphasis on Tunisian culture and traditions. However as nation building became the focus of Bourguiba's policies, the anti-colonial rhetoric changed to a more progressive one, focussing on family law (Marks 2013).

“Bourguiba viewed women as the center of the family and as able contributors to state-building efforts.” (Mulrine 2011:7)

Even before the new constitution was ratified, Bourguiba implemented the Personal Status Code (CSP<sup>5</sup>), which elevated Tunisian family law to be the most progressive in the Arab world (ibid.).

“Tunisia’s Personal Status Code, [is] a document that broke with Islamic law without completely abandoning it, thereby radically reforming Muslim family law while stopping short of completely secularizing it.” (Gilman in Mulrine 2011:8)

Bourguiba shaped a fundamentally paternalistic approach of promoting women’s liberation. In a “paternal mission” he granted Tunisian women improved legal status and even enforced policies to promote gender equality whilst declaring himself “the father of Tunisian women’s liberation” (ibid.).

Under Bourguiba’s rule the only acknowledged women’s organisation was the state-sponsored and controlled Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne (UNFT). The role of UNFT as mere landmark of benevolence of the Tunisian state towards women’s rights becomes obvious when looking at the non-existing participation of the organisation in the promulgation of the family law. As neither the UNFT nor other women’s organisations did take part in the legislative process, and weren’t able to form associations or publicly express

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women should actively contribute in advancing the Tunisian society as a whole (Mulrine 2011). For more information see, Labadi (2007).

<sup>5</sup> The CSP regulates marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and several other critical areas, which transformed the legal construction of women’s status in Tunisia. For more information on the Personal Status Code see Daniele (2014) and Chambers /Cummings (2014).

their opinion, the reform of the family law can be seen as a political manoeuvre to please international actors (Naciri 2003). The result was an intrinsically masculine ‘state feminism’<sup>6</sup> which has higher goals that shall be achieved through female emancipation (ibid.).

“This ‘state feminism’ was above all a ‘masculine feminism,’ rooted in a reformist political movement that raised the issue of women’s liberation as a necessary condition to an Arab renaissance. It is a ‘masculine feminism’ because it does not aim at transforming women’s traditional roles, but at making them more efficient within a patriarchal family structure.” (ibid:23)

Consequently there existed no independent feminist movement, but rather a small elitist group of upper-middle-class women, who belonged to the Neo-Destourian party of Bourguiba and were charged with representing the interest of women in the country (Murphy 2003:176).

After the toppling of Bourguiba in a “medical coup d’état” by his former prime minister Zine El Abidine Ben-Ali in 1987, the commitment to the advancement of women’s rights became a characteristic of Tunisian politics (Jebnoun 2014). With the continuing efforts of Ben-Ali to maintain Bourguiba’s state feminism, the advancement of women’s rights remained a pillar of legitimacy and stability for the regime. Another factor of legitimisation was the increasing number of emerging NGOs and associations in the first years of Ben-Ali’s rule, increasing economic liberalisation and short lasting concessions to pluralistic democratic life in the country (Erdle 2010:101 and Murphy 2003:177). The new associations complemented the already existing ‘associations nationales’<sup>7</sup> which emerged during early independence and fulfilled stabilising social functions (Erdle 2010). The large majority of associations focused on non-political issues, lacked autonomy due to affiliation with the regime, and operated within the closely monitored bureaucratic system. Consequently they only existed due to the benevolence of the state and fulfilled outsourced state functions (Mulrine 2011). In spite of the hostile environment for associations, two independent women’s organisations

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<sup>6</sup> Marks (2013) identifies Bourguiba’s motive behind the implementation of the CSP as a political manoeuvre to neutralize both Islamist and leftist political opposition. For a detailed historical analysis of Bourguiba’s motives see Marks (2013): Women’s Rights before and after the Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> UTICA (Tunisian Union of Industrialists, Merchants and Artisans), UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Workers), UTAP (Tunisian Union of Farmers and Fishermen), UNFT (National Union of Tunisian Women), UGET (General Union of Tunisian Students) These corporatist organisations provided support for government policies and indirectly integrated the population in the political complex affiliated with the ruling party (Erdle 2004:209 and Alianak 2014:41)

were founded in 1989, when the regime was in need for allies in the struggle against the Islamist opposition. The Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (also called Femmes Démocrates) and the Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement were founded and legalised. However they remained the only significant associations focussing on women's rights that were allowed to operate under Ben-Ali's rule (Marks 2013). The organisations still had to operate with the constant fear of losing the right to assemble and under the threat to lose their ground to state-sponsored women's associations in case they engaged publicly in political actions against the regime.

"For both [ATFD and AFTURD], political and societal issues, the rights of women, and the promotion of democracy, are in reality interconnected and interdependent." (Erdle 2010:253)

This understanding of emancipation as a means to increase women's political voice and ultimately promote more democratic structures, made them veritable threats to the regime, which resulted in a very repressive and hostile environment for both organisations (Mulrine 2011). On the one hand they were needed as a stabilising factor, as arguments against the Islamist opposition and as a representative factor for international allies, however on the other hand the potential of action of these organisations and with them Tunisian women remained very limited due to ongoing surveillance and oppression from the regime.

During the 23 years of his rule, Ben-Ali made little to no improvement to the status of Tunisian women. The only mentionable effort is the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, which was founded in 1993 and can be seen as continuing the tradition of 'state feminism' (ibid.). With this step the image of women who cannot exist independently from the role as mothers and wives was institutionalised. Most women's organisations were only able to operate under Ben-Ali, to maintain the image of a Tunisian society that protects women's rights. Another stabilising factor was the regime acceptance of many women activists and even foreign observers who were convinced that the dictatorship was the lesser of two evils, the alternative being an unpredictable government probably led by Islamists (Marks 2013 and Jebnoun 2014). Women enjoyed the rights they obtained with the CSP, even under authoritarian rule of Ben-Ali, however their freedom was neither full nor equal as their potential for independent action remained very limited.

### 2.1.2 DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 2011

Female revolutionaries, civil society organisations and other associations played a decisive role during and in the aftermath of the revolution that was sparked by the self-immolation of young fruit vendor Bouazizi<sup>8</sup>. Despite ongoing repression and censorship under authoritarian rule, Tunisian civil society remained active but concealed, and played a decisive role in ending the dictatorship. When the uprisings began in December 2010, civil society structures significantly aided the course of the revolution (Gueblaoui 2014). Observers noted that civil society was able to direct the “popular rebellion for better conditions of life into a Revolution calling for the fall of the regime.” (ibid.:10)

After the revolution Tunisian civil society experienced a renaissance, the estimated number of new civil society organisations in the country since 2011 elevated to ~2.000 (ibid.). The non-governmental sector grew dramatically alongside with the steady democratic transition; most notable was the formation of numerable women’s associations.

“The post-revolutionary state witnessed an influx of grassroots women’s organizations that reintroduced a [public] feminist discourse to assert the place of women as important contributors to the revolution and in response to rising concerns over women’s status in the post-revolutionary society.” (Mulrine 2011:21)

Women’s associations alongside feminist activists played a decisive part as multipliers, grass root level organisers, food distributors and neighbourhood watchwomen (ibid.).

“[...]the January revolution illustrated that men and women had equal stakes in the transformation of their political and social reality and were equally committed to bringing about that change. The revolution, above all, was the first instance in which the citizens of the Tunisian state reversed the precedence of “top-down” approaches to reform by standing up and taking ownership of their political realities and taking on the role as actors in a democratic “bottom-up” power structure.” (ibid.:18)

Especially young, educated women became active as social-media activists, distributing information via the internet, organising meetings and providing pictures, videos and other material to the public, as well as to international media outlets (Moghadam 2013). Soon after the first protests it became apparent that the Ben-Ali regime lost power over its

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<sup>8</sup> Although the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi is often referred to the ‘Spark of the Arab Spring’(see Worth 2011) many national, regional and international dynamics have to be taken into account when trying to analyse the various origins of the uprisings.

people, as state censorship and with it the fear of Tunisian citizens experienced a breakdown.

The success of the revolution can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the unpredictability of protests, increasing numbers of participants and pre-existing civil society structures, however the decisive factor might have been the unified body of citizens – including Tunisian women. The revolution, starting as a purely ideological call for freedom and dignity soon transformed into a more specific set of demands. Discourses about identity and religion became the focus and soon a proxy debate in the state-building process.

“Women’s personal status lies directly at the center of these discourses and the development of a strategically placed feminist discourse would be critical to maintaining the gains made under Bourguiba.” (Mulrine 2011:19)

## 2.2 THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN TUNISIA

As civil society and with it power relations are in transition – the media landscape cannot stay isolated from the extreme shifts. In this work the significant role the media played in the transition period itself is of great interest. After the uprisings in the MENA region, Arab media experienced a ‘mushrooming’ of new satellite channels, websites, bloggers and even press agencies (Brynen et al. 2012). Some researchers speculate about the ‘new Arab media’ creating a ‘new Arab identity’ and with it a “critical and articulate Arab public sphere” (ibid.: 233). In this thesis the history of the Tunisian media landscape will be helpful in order to show the decisive role of media in shaping the public discourse and showing the public image of women’s organisations. Moreover existing power relations can be seen and analysed in the public discourse that is shaping social realities. Tunisian media serves as catalyst for change and arena in the frequent clashes between the moderate Islamists and the new secular opposition. Tunisian media as a barometer of the country’s new democracy holds a key position in transmitting the public image of women’s organisations and other actors.

### 2.2.1 UNDER AUTHORITARIAN RULE

For decades, Tunisian media law was one of the most restrictive worldwide, resulting in a monotone and heavily censored media landscape (El-Issawi 2012). The state held a monopoly on the sectors of television, radio and print media; only allowing private publishers to work in the latter. Under Bourguiba the three sectors were strictly separated

and monitored. With the rule of Ben-Ali, media laws softened and opened the possibility for private publishers to establish themselves (Erdle 2010). In 2003, the audio-visual sector which before was dominated by the *Etablissement de la Radiodiffusion Télévision Tunisienne* was opened to private investors. Although the liberalisation of the media sector increased plurality and enabled differentiation, the different publishers were by no means politically independent. The industry remained ‘micromanaged’ by a selection of governmental bodies which strictly controlled both independent and state-run outlets (El-Issawi 2012). Different institutions covered all relations to national and international press agencies and providers, resulting in a closely monitored and regulated media system. The Ministry of Communications held responsibility for the regulation of Tunisian media and was legally entitled to supervise public institutions in the broadcasting sector, according to law 2007-33 (Buckley et al. 2013). Part of the MoC was the *Office National de Télédiffusion*, which imposed state control by restricting access to the transmission enabling frequencies, and the Agency for External Communication. The two institutions were created to serve a propaganda function as their mission reads “contribute to the promotion of communication, culture and general policies of the State” (ibid.:73). The function of the AEC was to regulate communication with international media, but it also held responsibility for distributing funds to Tunisian media outlets (El-Issawi 2012). Due to this system, the regime upheld a close grip on outlets and publishers with a simple financial ‘reward or punish’ strategy. Additionally to the nepotism of the industry – as close ties between the regime and publishers were established and upheld, all private broadcasters were prohibited from reporting on politics, which remained the secured domain of state-owned media (ibid.). Another key role in censoring publications was the Tunisian Internet Agency that policed online content. This centralised system of internet filtering did not only restrict free speech and freedom of information, but also limited freedom of association (Buckley et al. 2013)<sup>9</sup>.

The media landscape under the reign of Ben-Ali was far from independent and free<sup>10</sup>. Print press was dominated by government owned newspapers, opposition publications were

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Tunisian media landscape, see: Buckley et al. (2013).

<sup>10</sup> A number of pirate radio stations and various opposition websites, blogs and Facebook pages existed before the revolution. These outlets also influenced the successful revolution, as they provided for a connected basis of activists who further fueled the protests with information and publications. These kinds of media, however, were not available to the majority of the public, and were not as broadly consumed after the revolution as

marginalised; public radio and television were the mere voice of the regime as only two private television channels and five private radio stations were authorised to broadcast. Moreover all of these outlets lacked editorial independence, either due to proximity to the regime or heavy censorship (*ibid.*). However, the environment media had to operate in changed drastically after the revolution.

### 2.2.2 DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 2011

After the fall of the regime, the traditional media went through radical change. Most official media tried to align themselves with the public opinion, crossing regime imposed 'red lines' and seeking to express the popular will. Some broadcasters previously loyal to Ben-Ali became 'spokespersons' of the revolution, demonstrating their unconditional support for the revolution as they did months ago for the regime. Gradually the system of filters was removed and information began to flow freely in and out of the country. Local journalists previously acting as government policy communicators were overtaxed with the responsibility of the new and sudden freedom of expression (El-Issawi 2012 and Buckley et al. 2013).

Although a National Authority for the Reform of Information and Communication (INRIC) was established to oversee the reform of media after the revolution, it takes time to restructure a system that has to learn to regulate and impose code of conducts on itself. El Issawi states that, "the media industry [is] ill-equipped to translate their new freedom into professional practices" (2012:6). Local journalists are lacking experience, editorial boards were established but fail to ensure quality of reporting, and ethical codes of conduct are still absent, resulting in a tabloid style pursuit of sensationalism in print media. The restructuring of government owned media is in process, but far from complete, and government institutions which carried out repressive functions (like the MoC) are shut down (El-Issawi 2012). However, the functions of these institutions did not disappear after the revolution and fear of re-instalment of censorship still lingers. Freedom House reports on ongoing threats to the freedom of press, from Salafi extremists and forces that seek to reinstall the old regime, however Reporters without borders rate Tunisia at place 126 out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index 2015, an improvement by 12 points compared to the year 2012

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information began to flow more freely (Rosenfeld 2012 and Ryan 2011). Therefore these underground media are not the focus of this thesis.

(Reporters without Borders 2015). There have been short periods of press freedom in Tunisian history, when the press enjoyed the freedom of criticising the regime. Challenges that will determine the future of Tunisia's media landscape are recent appointments of persons with links to the old regime and the lack of professionalism in the industry (El-Issawi 2012).

The role especially print media and broadcasters played in presenting women's organisations as capable actors in public discourse is to be examined. This is going to be accomplished with the theoretical framework of Radical Democracy by Chantal Mouffe, which will be described in the next section.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the work 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy', Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe developed a radical political theory that will help to analyse hegemony and shifts of power in Tunisia. The work, first published in 1985, emerged in an era of crisis of the political left and with the background of the new social movements<sup>11</sup>. First it was an attempt to reformulate the Gramscian version of Marxism. By now, Mouffe's work has extended and is labelled postmarxist, discourse theoretic and radically democratic (Mouffe 2013:130).

The central question of Mouffe's theory is

“how the maximum of pluralism can be defended without destroying the framework of the political community as constituted by the institutions and practices that construe modern democracy?” (Mouffe 1992:3)

Plurality is essential for Mouffe's understanding of politics:

„Pluralism here also means that there is no ultimate reconciliation possible. This view forms the basis from which I understand politics“ (Carpentier/Cammaerts 2006:9).

The conflicting fight over hegemonic power in a plural society is the only way pluralism can exist according to Mouffe. So the acceptance of a conflictual and antagonistic fundament of

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<sup>11</sup> *New Social Movements* describe a vast number of collective protest actions that arose in mostly western nations since the late 1960s, forming a variety of movements e.g.: the ecology movement, the solidarity and peace movement of the women's movement (Kriesi et al. 1998 and Offe 1985).

society is essential to the concept. The central thesis of Mouffe's theory is that social objectivity is constituted through acts of power.

"This implies that any social objectivity is ultimately political and that it has to show the traces of exclusion, which governs its constitution." (Mouffe 2000:24)

There are many forms and expressions of power and in this understanding of society, antagonisms and hegemonies mint not only societies but social existence. Mouffe argues that power cannot be described as an external relation, but rather as constituting identities.

"Since any political order is the expression of a hegemony, of a specific pattern of power relations, political practice cannot be envisaged in simply representing the interests of pre-constituted identities, but in constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable terrain." (ibid.:24)

Identities construct themselves via a relational external; in this understanding antagonisms and hegemony structure a society which always remains plural.

Another central term in Mouffe's theory is discourse, which is the creating momentum of differences. In individual discourses meanings are fixed and (collective) identities constructed; here antagonisms amongst and within competing discourses become visible through communication. Antagonisms that surface in discourses are articulations of political animosity between 'adversaries'. Following this assumption one can see the inherently conflictual nature of modern pluralism.

Discourses are not mere articulatory practices; since all social phenomena are mediated through discourse, meanings remain contingent, and cannot be permanently fixed. There exists an ongoing struggle between discourses "with perceptions of society and identity always open to new representations as meanings are constantly altered and reconfigured through contact with competing discourses." (Rear 2013:5) Meaning a universal truth cannot exist, as discourses which structure reality compete to define what is true at a certain point of time for a certain domain within the social world (ibid.). In discourse the linguistic creation of meanings produces hegemony as expression of the prevailing power structure (Wilde 2014). Hegemony cannot be achieved through violence or traditional understandings of power, but rather through articulation. As Torfing described Mouffe's understanding,

“hegemony is the expansion of a discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces” (1999:101).

“Every discourse can eventually become hegemonic, if the social practices structured by discourses become natural to society. The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed, are what we call “hegemonic practices.” [...] What is at a given moment accepted as the “natural order”, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices” (Mouffe 2008: 4).

Hegemonic struggles exist over and within every domain of the social, which makes it possible to extend power struggles over a variety of social relations – for example those of gender (Rear 2013). Mouffe develops the understanding of hegemony and goes beyond Gramsci, in order to grasp the dynamics of the political construction of articulatory practices. The political is created by discursive, hegemonic fixed meanings. Those meanings became hegemonic through institutions, however they remain contingent, as any possible consensus can only be temporary. Societies’ and ultimately the purpose of democracy is to defuse antagonisms and lead them in a democratic order. “Democratic politics should create the conditions for the conflict to find its expression in agonistic terms, avoiding that it becomes antagonistic.” (Carpentier 2006:10) Mouffe formulates the aim of democratic politics to see different opinions not as *enemies*, but as *adversaries*. An *adversary* is someone whose ideas differ fundamentally from one’s own but whose right to defend and articulate their ideas are not put into question – *adversaries* are treated as legitimate opponents in the democratic struggle over hegemony (Mouffe 2000). The task of democracy is to transform antagonisms into agonisms, so the framework of democracy helps to turn antagonistic enemies into agonistic adversaries.

“An *adversary* is an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality. But we disagree on the meaning and implementation of those principles and such a disagreement is not one that could be resolved through deliberation and rational discussion. Indeed, given the ineradicable

pluralism of value, there is not rational resolution of the conflict, hence its antagonistic dimension. This does not mean of course that adversaries can never cease to disagree but that does not prove that antagonism has been eradicated” (Mouffe 2000: 15).

Democracy is, according to Mouffe, the only form of government that can enclose all the different agonisms, it is the only space in which true pluralism can exist. Democracy has to be understood as a dialogue, the dimension Mouffe adds to the new understanding is the recognition of the inevitability of conflict as well as the refusal to suppress it with the help of authoritarian order. “[...] A democratic society asserts pluralism and makes room for the expression of conflicting interests and values.” (Mouffe 1998:13) In a modern, well-functioning democracy, conflict is recognised, legitimised and never suppressed – so a “vibrant clash of democratic political positions” is possible (ibid.). Central to this understanding is the enduring contingency of the concept: due to the lack of non-negotiable moral values, everything can be discussed, negotiated, and ultimately changed. Following this argument, democracy is the only form of government where plurality can exist and differences can be lived.

To go further, Mouffe sees citizenship as a form of political identity, rather than a certain legal status (Mouffe 1992b:231). This means being associated in terms of the recognition of the liberal democratic principles; the recognition of the authority of the principles freedom and equality for all. This builds the very foundation of the modern democratic state: of course there will always be competing interpretations of these two fundamental principles, however there still exists the final barrier between what is admissible and what is not. We still have to distinguish between “differences that exist but should not exist, and differences that do not exist but should exist.” (Mouffe 1992a:13) A “framework of consciousness” is needed that is constructed as a set of institutions and practices – a framework of consensus within pluralism can exist (ibid.). Consensus is needed concerning the institutions which are constitutive of democracy, but as already mentioned there will be disagreement concerning how and what these institutions are implementing (Mouffe 1998:14).

“We can agree on the importance of ‘liberty and equality for all’, with disagreeing sharply about their meaning and the way they should be implemented.” (ibid.)

This disagreement is the very fabric of democracy. The disagreements or antagonisms can take many forms and can never be eliminated from society. Surely, certain conflicts can be solved and an agreement on a certain matter can be established, however the form of antagonism as basis of society will never disappear. It can only be led into a democratic framework and turned into an agonistic struggle, resulting in the political system of *Agonistic Pluralism* where opinions can be expressed freely, actors are equal participants in discourse and in the struggle to reach a hegemonic status. Antagonism appears within society, it occurs in many forms at many places, this means that power cannot be attributed to a central place, person or object. Power in society is not centralised. The momentum of power remains empty. Many forms of power and oppression exist in our society, and they necessarily have to be put into question (Heister/Schwarz n.d.). The extension of the democratic struggle – meaning the calling into question of certain power relations - to all parts of society and the public is what makes this theory a radical one.

### 3.1 GENDER RELATIONS

Following the assumption that the social constitutes itself as a symbolic order, the social formation is not governed by an organising principle. Society is understood as an open system, engaging in a complex relation with the state, meaning that the social can never be permanently fixed (Pringle/Watson 1992).

“Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality.” (ibid.:66)

As society cannot have a fixed meaning, gender relations as social practices are also constantly altered by discursive structures. Gender relations have to be recognised as societal power relations in order to address them adequately and ultimately change the hegemonic patriarchal order of society (Wilde 2014), something that Tunisia’s women’s organisations as emancipatory CSOs are trying to accomplish. Responsible for the discrimination of women are hegemonic practices of articulation. If we assume the social is discursively constructed, societal gender relations cannot be seen as objective reality, but rather as a constructed form of power relations that became hegemonic (see Wilde 2014 and Pringle/Watson 1992).

In order to achieve a society where collective action against all forms of inequality is possible, *democratic equivalence* must exist (see Pringle/Watson 1992). This is the precondition for *democratic gender relations*. The extension of the democratic struggle to all parts of society – ultimately also the separated private and public sphere, which is the main societal ordering principle that minimizes the female potential of action will realise democratic gender relations (Wilde 2014a). Truly democratic gender relations cannot manifest themselves in form of quotas or other forms of positive discrimination, but rather in the access to the agonistic discourse in which different actors are fighting to gain hegemonic power (Wilde 2014). Differences are engraved in society - they construe the foundation of our social existence. The idea of a society without differences is not only utopian but also apolitical (see Mouffe 2000). Existing power asymmetries can only be combatted by contra hegemonic discourses which challenge differences in identities between adversaries. In Mouffe's understanding unequal gender relations pose a chance for democratisation. Discursive articulation of inequalities in the form of a public discourse could strengthen democracy (Mouffe 1998). The democratic moment is the combat of hegemonic discourses that manifest inequalities; the democratic fight has to be extended to all areas of society where power relations exist – as a consequence the private is a part of the public in which the struggles for hegemony take place. In the tradition of feminist theory, Mouffe's theory proves the personal is indeed political.

In this thesis the position of women's organisations in the public discourse in the Tunisian pre-election discourse is examined. Are women's organisations presented in the analysed media as actors and agents for change? Are they fighting the dominant hegemonic discourse or even altering it by making the status of Tunisian women in society a point on the agenda? The hegemonic societal power relations can only be changed if amongst the various positions in the public discourse, the emancipatory, democracy and equality promoting standpoint of women's organisations is heard and presented in Tunisian media. In order to examine if this is the case and to shed a light on the neglected position of women in the pre-election discourse, a Discourse Analysis is conducted.

## 4 METHODOLOGY – DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In order to analyse the portrayal of Tunisian women's organisations and the possible improvement of their capacity for action in public discourse concerning women's status, the method of discourse analysis will be used. In this thesis it shall be explored if dominant discourse fragments support the hypothesis of changing power relations in Tunisia. With women's organisations as actors in public discourse, are topics concerning women's status on the public agenda and if so, which implications arise from the visibility of women as actors in the public sphere? Does greater visibility of women's organisations make them recognised voices in the battle to achieve a hegemonic position in society and are they able to positively influence democratisation in the understanding of Mouffe?

### 4.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The insights gained with the usage of discourse analysis shall help to detect the portrayal of women's organisations in public discourse. It will be examined if women's organisations are present in public discourse, are their statements published, their viewpoints portrayed or neglected by the analysed media formats?

First, central terms used in the analysis have to be clarified, *discourse* is understood as abstract forms of knowledge (as described in chapter 3) whereas *texts*<sup>12</sup> are concrete written or oral documents which are direct outcomes of one or more discourses. In this analysis, aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>13</sup> will be applied. CDA "aims at revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies." (Wodak/Meyer 2009:8) Furthermore CDA shall help to explain "how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge, in organising social institutions or in exercising power" (ibid.:7). With the analytical tools that draw upon CDA, the way discourse (re)produces power and inequalities, but is still a constitutive element of society shall be explored. The texts that will be analysed in this thesis are regarded as a manifestation of social action which is determined by existing power relations and hegemonies.

"In texts, discursive differences are negotiated; they are governed by differences in power that is in part encoded in and determined by discourse and by genre.

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<sup>12</sup> In this thesis I will use the term 'texts' to describe all analysed material, including articles and videos.

<sup>13</sup> As a detailed description of the complexity and different approaches of CDA is not possible in this thesis see, Wodak/Meyer (2009) and van Dijk (2011) for more information.

Therefore, texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance." (Wodak/Meyer 2009:10)

What will be crucial for the following analysis are the overall structural features in the discourse concerning women's status and the parliamentary election in Tunisia. With the help of CDA this thesis aims to analyse structural relationships of power and inequality. Moreover the way language – in this case the texts produced by *Al-Jazeera* and *La Presse* – constitutes inequality in discourse will be examined. I will draw upon the understanding of Van Dijk, when it comes to analysing the relationship between text and context as relational, constituting realities. Social situations are not objective, but always constructed and necessarily contingent. Meanings as well as power relations are not fixed, but rather in constant flux that is shaped and altered by participating actors in various discourses (van Dijk 2011).

#### 4.2 CRITERIA OF ANALYSIS

To be able to analyse the public discourse in Tunisia, criteria of analysis have to be developed that reflect the outcomes and different articulations of the discourse. Drawing on the central concepts of Mouffe's theory the following key questions will be the guideline of analysis in this thesis:

- I. Is there a discourse concerning women's status in the context of the parliamentary elections?
- II. Are women's organisations present as actors in this discourse?
- III. Does discursive articulation of inequalities exist? And if so are inequalities and predominant power relations challenged by women's organisations?
- IV. Are women's organisations successful in making the feminist/emancipatory agenda hegemonic in the public discourse?

The answers to these questions will help in determining how power manifests in society and which articulations either support the prevailing hegemony or offer a counter-hegemonic point of view, challenging existing power structures. Without a public discourse on inequalities, unequal gender relations cannot be put into question and a shift in societal power relations that determine those inequalities is not possible.

#### 4.3 AL-JAZEERA & LA PRESSE DE TUNISIE

To be able to conduct a Discourse Analysis I will use texts published by *Al-Jazeera* and *La Presse* in the time period from 01.09.2014 until 31.10.2014, the time before and shortly after the first free parliamentary elections were held in Tunisia. The articles refer thematically to the election and women's status in Tunisian society. First, the text corpus was inspected to identify if the amount of data would be sufficient to produce a convincing result. Second, key words were used to select the relevant articles which report on the election and women's organisations<sup>14</sup>. The third step was a first examination of the relevant texts, before a more detailed analysis of the corpus was started. The last step was a thorough analysis of the texts in order to answer the guideline questions derived from Mouffe's approach.

A national as well as an international media format was chosen due to availability, representation and to appropriately reflect the market share of outlets in the country. After the revolution in 2011, Tunisian media landscape experienced an influx of various new media formats and outlets. Especially Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera*<sup>15</sup> (which already operated in Tunisia prior to the revolution) increased its influence played a key role as distributor of current information from a variety of channels. The broadcaster collected information from various social networks and acted as a new voice in the political discourse of the day. "The satellite station went on to set new standards for news reporting and talk shows in the region" as it reported emotionally and ideologically subjective and set a stark contrast to the former government-censored standard of reporting (Brynen et al. 2012:235). *Al-Jazeera*'s role in the uprisings was so decisive that Tunisians celebrated their independence with "Shukran lil-Jazeera" (Thank you *Al-Jazeera*) placards (ibid.). Moreover as Zayani states, *Al-Jazeera* contributed to the rise of political consciousness, through its agenda setting power and political significance of its reporting (2015:185). *Al-Jazeera* positioned itself as an advocate for democracy also due to the close involvement with social movements in Tunisia. Adding to that role is the fact that it is operating in a hybrid media environment which further enhances its influence in the country (ibid.). Due to this positioning, *Al-Jazeera*

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<sup>14</sup> Following key words were used to pre-select the texts in the analysed media corpus: Tunisia, women, femme(s), woman, election(s), élection(s), parliament, législative(s), société civile, civil society, women's organisations, organisations civiles. The topics 'women' and 'elections' or 'civil society' and 'elections' had to appear both in one text, to guarantee relevance for the investigation.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on *Al-Jazeera* see, Brynen et al. (2012).

is also a representative for the various new media and social media channels that influenced the course of the revolution (Penner Angrist 2013).

„Al-Jazeera deserves close attention not only because it has been closely involved with social movements in Tunisia but also because of the innovative nature and political significance of its reporting. Relying extensively on user-generated information circulated on the social Web, Al Jazeera latched onto the events in Tunisia, positioning itself as a leading source of news.”(Zayani 2015:185)

As analysing all aired TV-shows, talk shows and news reports would by far go beyond the scope of this thesis, I chose to analyse online articles and videos published by *Al-Jazeera English* during the period of interest. This includes comments by journalists, news articles and reports – to grasp the general opinion *Al-Jazeera* is making public in Tunisia and reflect on their general style of reporting on local events<sup>16</sup>.

To contrast the reporting of international broadcasters, the second source of analysis will be *La Presse de Tunisie*, a former government-owned newspaper which has the largest distribution range in the country (Ben Achour 2012). *La Presse* is a daily newspaper that is available in French and Arabic and was restructured, but remained publishing after the revolution. Due to the special separation of the Tunisian market, I chose *La Presse* as representative newspaper. *La Presse* publishes the same content in French and Arabic and is so able to reach different social groups in different geographic areas of the country and also publishes articles online<sup>17</sup>. The Tunisian market is split in two large audiences, a minority of French-speakers (ca. 20%) who hold the majority of purchasing power and a much larger group of Arabic-speakers (ca. 80%) who mostly consume (satellite) television (Erdle 2010). In order to take the special market situation in Tunisia into consideration and to appropriately analyse public discourse, print media and television broadcasters have to be analysed. This I am trying to accomplish with the selection of analysed formats *Al-Jazeera* and *La Presse*. *La Presse* represents the more traditional media formats that are still widely consumed in

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<sup>16</sup> Al-Jazeera is one of the biggest broadcasters in the Arabic speaking world and contributed significantly to the course of the uprisings in 2011 (Dahdal 2012:222). Although some researchers suggest that A-Jazeera Arabic and Al-Jazeera English differ in their style of reporting, the general tune of reporting as well as their focus remains similar (Essaid et al. 2012). The analysis of Al-Jazeera English is a way of sampling the broadcasting of Al-Jazeera Arabic, to represent the general style of reporting and the dominant opinion published by the media outlet, which remains a widely consumed broadcaster in Tunisia (Zayani 2015).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.lapresse.tn>

Tunisia, and *Al-Jazeera* as a more innovative media outlet, publishing a variety of texts ranging from television and online content to online shows, covers the quickly changing media landscape of the country (see Zayani 2015). *Al-Jazeera* demonstrates a discourse counter to the official media discourse in the Tunisian context. Analysing its publications compared to and in contrast with the publications of *La Presse*, might reveal the underlying conflict between discourses and ideologies in the aftermath of the revolution.

## 5 ANALYSIS OF TUNISIAN NEWSPAPERS AND THE PORTRAYAL OF TUNISIAN WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS BEFORE THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN OCTOBER 2014

"Some have suggested that the new Arab media, with its emphasis on debating taboo topics, is creating a new, critical and articulate Arab public sphere" thus enabling a liberal and pluralistic public discourse, also in Tunisia (Brynen et al. 2012:233). Yet how does this development reflect on the role and position of women's organisations in the pre-election discourse?

As Mouffe argues, and many feminist scholars agree, "a polity is not fully democratic when there is no adequate representation of women" (Moghadam 2013:217). As historical record shows, there is not only a strong positive relationship between economic development (especially a large middle class) and democracy, but also between women's participation and improved status and the institutionalization of democracy (ibid.). Moghadam claims "women's political participation reflects and reinforces democracy building" (2013:217). A democratic order is defined by its ability to ensure plurality through the constitution of a public sphere (Wilde 2014). Especially women's rights movements in the MENA region stand out for their explicitly democratic nature.

"A 2008 press release issued by the Association des *Femmes Tunisiennes pour le Recherche et Developpement* (AFTURD) declared that 'no development, no democracy can be built without women's true participation and the respect of fundamental liberties for all, men and women.'"(ibid:227)

Although Tunisia's women's rights movement is continuously working to further female participation in the public, even in international cooperation with different organisations

from neighbouring countries<sup>18</sup>, their representation in national and international media seems to remain limited. Nevertheless the way how women's organisations and also more generally women are presented and represented in the analysed media, will help to understand how the social identity of women in Tunisia is constructed in public discourse and how this identity affects their position in society and in societal power relations.

It is important to mention the strict regulations set by the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication for media coverage during the electoral campaign. Advertisements for candidates or parties were forbidden. Only three minute slots on state television were reserved for candidate appearances, also daily debates were broadcasted but only on selected radio and private TV channels (Amraoui et al. 2014). These regulations might be a reason for the limited number of articles that include or refer to the topics *elections*, *women's organisations*, and *women*. The coverage of *La Presse* on women's organisations was more extensive than that of *Al-Jazeera*. In the month September 20 articles that fit into the analytical framework were found in *La Presse* and 12 on *Al-Jazeera*, even though the time frame was extended from the first of September until the end of October.

The following analysis is structured as follows, first texts published by *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera* will be analysed separately. It will be investigated if women's organisations are present as actors in the pre-election discourse of the country. Are they mentioned in articles dealing with the upcoming elections and consequently do they have a voice in the democratic processes that shape Tunisia's political landscape? Are women presented as actively taking part in the democratic process which increases their potential of action?

The second step will be a thorough analysis of the texts and the answering of the questions derived from the theoretical framework. Lastly all results will be integrated in the wider framework of the historical and political context in order to summarise the role of women's organisations in public discourse during the pre-election period<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité: In the year 1995 the Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité was created; it is a network of women's rights advocates and different associations in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (see Moghadam 2013 and Mahfoudh 2014).

<sup>19</sup> A list of the analysed texts can be found in the annex.

## 5.1 ANALYSIS OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN LA PRESSE DE TUNISIE

In articles published by *La Presse*, one can find detailed reporting on the candidates on the election lists for the legislative elections. The names of the heads of electoral lists are listed and the specific number of women is mentioned

“L’Alliance démocratique se présente aux législatives avec 29 listes (25 à l’intérieur du pays et 4 à l’étranger) dont deux présidées par des femmes (Tunis 2 et Nabeul 1)” (a.u., LP 01/09/14).

In these enumerations, women appear as mere numbers, and are only mentioned quantitatively.

A different light sheds the article “*En 2011, le mot d’ordre des élections était l’Islam. En 2014, c’est l’Etat*” on the reporting of *La Presse*. In this interview with Adel Ltifi, the historian argues that there exists a secularisation of the political consciousness in Tunisia.

“Par exemple, le débat de fond sur la femme tunisienne n’a commencé qu’après le 23 octobre. La raison est que, pour la première fois dans son histoire moderne, la société tunisienne fait face à son propre conservatisme. Jusqu’alors, la société tunisienne n’a jamais vécu ni géré ses propres contradictions.” (Baraket, LP 15/09/14)

In this quote, he argues that the Tunisian society has to face its own conservatism for the first time in the legislative elections and that Tunisians never had to steer or regulate their own social contradictions. This argument confirms the far reaching influence of state feminism on Tunisian society. The interview also shows that the former regime controlled newspaper *La Presse* now publishes liberal ideas, as the article’s author Adel Ltifi propagates a ‘modern state’ and states in the interview that notions like citizenship, freedom and equality are all derived from a rationalisation of public service. He further states that one cannot rationally manage a society if the people are not free and equal.<sup>20</sup> (Baraket, LP 15/09/14)

Supporting the perceived conservatism of Tunisian society are discriminatory stereotypes that are articulated and therefore possibly reinforced by *La Presse* articles, e.g. by the question, if the missing horizontal parity that is requested by the Tunisian constitution is

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<sup>20</sup> Original quote: “D’ailleurs, des notions comme citoyenneté, comme liberté, comme égalité sont à l’origine des éléments de la rationalisation de la gestion des affaires publiques. On ne peut pas gérer rationnellement une société si les gens ne sont pas égaux, si les gens ne sont pas libres.” (Baraket, LP 15/09/14)

due to “lack of competence” of female candidates or due to the prevalent belief that “women and politics don’t go well together”<sup>21</sup>. However stereotypes are partly refuted later in the article, as politicians’ opinions on the topic are investigated.

“La candidate de Nida Tounès explique, elle, la faible présence féminine comme têtes de liste des partis à partir de plusieurs facteurs: d’abord par la misogynie qui est une réalité, même en Occident, car il existe une mentalité et une culture qui considèrent que les femmes n’ont pas leur place dans l’espace politique.” (Dami, LP 04/09/14)

A member of Nida Tounès Party states that the weak representation of women is due to immanent misogyny of society and a culture and mentality that still fails to see women as actors in the political space. This statement of the politician is also supported by texts published by *Al-Jazeera* (see section 5.2).

Civil society organisations are only mentioned occasionally, one actor that is most often mentioned is the ever present general workers’ union UGTT. There are some exceptions, however often international CSOs are mentioned and specific references to women’s organisations are seldom made. A good example is the article *“La Tunisie est sur un chemin résolument démocratique”* from 17<sup>th</sup> September, a report about an investigation prior to the legislative elections, organized by *L’Institut National Démocratique* (NDI) and *L’Institut International Républicain* (IRI), both US American CSOs, in order to oversee the electoral process in Tunisia. The IRI is a CSO which tries to elevate marginalized groups in society, including women. The article focuses on the work of the delegation and publishes the goals that were formulated in the course of the examination of the electoral processes. Recommendations were formulated concerning the administration of elections, the political environment, as well as civil society and media. The advice concerning women’s organisations and other CSOs reads

“Les associations de la société civile devraient encourager le développement de programmes politiques qui répondent aux préoccupations des femmes et préconiser leur adoption par les partis politiques.” (a.u., LP 17/09/14)

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<sup>21</sup> „S’agit-il d’une question de manque de compétence féminine ou d’un problème de mentalité qui veut que la femme et la politique ne fassent pas bon ménage ? »(Dami, LP 04/09/14)

This statement translates into: Tunisian CSOs should encourage further development of political programs that help to include women and are picked up by political parties; an advice that is very vague. As previously mentioned, the newspaper publishes the heads of electoral lists and explicitly mentions the number of female heads, however no party accomplished full parity on their lists, although parity is legally required according to the constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia 2014: 10). This adds to the thesis of mentioning women and women's representation as it seems as merely fulfilling a formal requirement in Tunisian society to do so, however an in depth analysis of the underlying reasons for the prevailing exclusion of women and explicit mentioning of the difficulties and problems women face in the political landscape are still missing.

One of the few articles specifically addressing the work of women's organisations was published on the September 28, "*Deux sessions de formation au profit des femmes têtes de liste*" (a.u., LP 28/09/14). It announces a workshop for female heads of electoral lists organized by the *Centre de la Femme Arabe Pour la Formation et la Recherche* (CAWTAR) and *La Fondation Internationale pour la Démocratie et les Élections*. The article, however, was of purely informational nature. It made the work of women's organisations public, and might have been a statement issued by the CSOs themselves. If it was a statement issued by the CSOs then it could be rated as a step towards visibility and activism of women's organisations in Tunisian media, but as already mentioned, it cannot be said if that is the case.

A certain double standard in Tunisian media reporting on women can be observed. This becomes clear in the article "*Souhair Belhassen, lauréat du Prix Elyssa-Didon*". This article illustrates how certain advocates for women's rights like Souhair Belhassen, member of La Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, L'Associaction des femmes démocrates and multiple other human rights associations, are celebrated as a national heroines. Belhassen is due to receive the *Prix Elyssa-Didon pour la promotion des femmes en Méditerranée* for her outstanding engagement. A quote from the article reads,

"Souhair Belhassen, we all know her, all of us followed her courageous path"<sup>22</sup>  
(Hamza, LP 19/09/14).

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<sup>22</sup> Translated by the author, the original quote reads "Souhair Belhassen, nous la connaissons tous, et avons tous suivi son parcours courageux" (Hamza, LP 19/09/14)

This quote illustrates how Tunisian media celebrates certain advocates like national heroines while women in less fortunate social milieus still have to fight for basic human rights in their daily lives. A fact that is proven by the Gender Gap Report in which Tunisia scores 0.6272 points and ranks on the 123 place of 142 (World Economic Forum 2014). Here the schizophrenic image of women that is conveyed in Tunisian media becomes apparent. This double standard is also illustrated by a quote of Tunisian journalist Myriam Ben Ghazi in an Al-Jazeera article from 25<sup>th</sup> October:

“I’ve never believed that Tunisia is a leading country in terms of women’s rights, simply because I am a woman and I live in Tunisia.” (Amraoui/Kalboussi, AJ 25/10/14).

## 5.2 ANALYSIS OF TEXTS PUBLISHED BY AL-JAZEERA

As there were not enough texts available for analysis in the time period of September 2014, the analysis was extended to the time period from 01.09.2014 to 31.10.2014, to be able to recur to enough data when trying to make a scientifically valid statement. The density of texts including the keywords *women* and *elections* increases before the first free legislative elections on the 26th of October (see Annex). Seemingly the topics *elections* and *gender issues* are related, or women’s status becomes more important in connection with the elections because more texts are published relating to both key words at the same time. As the status of Tunisian women has a history of being instrumentalised, this comes as no surprise. As Amel Grami, professor of gender studies notes in the Al-Jazeera article of 25th of October,

“[...] the gender gap is apparent. It is related to a state of mind. There is always a gap between discourse and practice in our society because people are not able to assume their choice.” (Amraoui/Kalboussi, AJ 25/10/14)

Although Al-Jazeera frequently shows female hosts and journalists in its short videos, and even interviews women in their positions as party representatives or journalists, in its written articles, quite a different image is conveyed. Except for a few examples women are talked about but are no active and equal members of the political discussion (see Amraoui/Kalboussi, AJ 25/10/14). Women’s organisations as spokespersons do not appear at all in the given time period.

When focusing on civil society organisations in general, the great impact of CSOs on democracy building, voters' registration and distributing information is positively mentioned and even honoured in the analysed texts. Certain CSOs are portrayed positively and volunteers and activists are interviewed. However the focus on women's organisations lacks completely. The focus rather lies on the activism of young people, the involvement of youth volunteers, and CSOs that concentrate on engagement of youth in the election process.

"Young activists haven't been inspired by political parties and politicians, so joining NGOs and civil society organisations is a way we can make ourselves useful in Tunisia without having to deal with age-old bureaucracy, deceitful politicians, and just bad communication." (Avi, AJ 26/09/14)

If women's organisations are mentioned then it is often in a critical manner. An often mentioned issue concerning the established women's organisations is the lack of inclusion. In the texts, the organisations are often accused of developing into an elitist, exclusive movement, only including highly-educated, middle-upper-class women in their activism. The 'class-division' of Tunisian society seems to hinder an inclusive, feminist movement from being successful (see Ghannoushi, AJ 24/10/14).

"Myriam says that setting right gender injustices through legislation alone is not enough, pointing out that true women's emancipation can be achieved only if awareness campaigns are intensified to include all women from all walks of life in both cities and rural areas." (Amraoui/Kalboussi, AJ 25/10/14)

The call for an inclusive feminist movement appears in 3 of the analysed articles, but there are no statements, interviews or quotes from members of the prominent Tunisian women's organisations addressing this issue. Whether the organisations did not address these accusations publicly, or their statements were simply not published by either *La Presse* nor *Al-Jazeera*, cannot be investigated in this thesis but should be scientifically researched in the future.

What is also apparent is the representation of international CSOs, which are far more present in *Al-Jazeera* articles than local ones, e.g. *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International* are frequently cited, interviewed and portrayed. This might be due to the international audience *Al-Jazeera* tries to address, however it could be interpreted as an indication for the poor visibility or lacking public relation skills of local CSOs; or is simply an

effect of the much bigger budget of international CSOs. The presence of international CSOs in texts published by *Al-Jazeera* as well as by *La Presse* hints at the imminent *NGO-isation* of Tunisian civil society as Islah Jad has described (see Jad 2004). This development might negatively influence the public visibility of local CSOs and therefore also impede their power in the public discourse.

Issues like the instable security in the country and pressing economic problems are far more dominant in the analysed *Al-Jazeera* articles than human rights issues. Threats and repressions the civil society has to face were mentioned, but the dominant problems remain the high (youth) unemployment rate and various security threats from the neighbouring countries.

### 5.3 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE RESULTS

In order to put the results gained from the analysis of texts from *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera* into context, the questions derived from the theoretical framework namely the theory of Hegemony and Radical Democracy, will be answered. The following four questions shall be answered in the next chapter in order to gain insight into the portrayal and representation of women's organisations before the legislative elections in October 2014. I will investigate which implication the answers have for the democratic potential those organisations were able to develop and what the results imply for the plural public space in Tunisia.

1. *Is there a discourse concerning women's status in the context of the parliamentary elections?*

Women are mentioned in both *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera* texts, however often they are talked about and not present as actors shaping the discourse. In texts published by *La Presse* women are often mentioned in terms of representation on electoral lists, in an article from the 4<sup>th</sup> of September the weak presence<sup>23</sup> of women is discussed, and the specific percentages of women as heads of electoral lists are listed. Political goals, opinions or other details were not mentioned, however this might be due to the strict regulatory media framework installed by HAICA in the pre-election period. Discriminatory stereotypes are reinforced by *La Presse* articles. In these articles the divergence of Tunisian society and public discourse becomes obvious, but the duality is never really investigated or openly

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<sup>23</sup> „Quelles sont les raisons de la faible présence des femmes en tant que chefs de file ? »(Dami, LP 04/09/14)

addressed. Oftentimes official statements or interviews with Tunisian intellectuals do not reflect on the everyday life of most Tunisian women, but propagate the image of a liberal and equal society. This distorted image that is conveyed in both *Al-Jazeera* and *La Presse* texts, fails to acknowledge the struggles of women in marginalized social milieus.

Concluding it can be said that stereotypical beliefs about gender roles are deeply rooted in Tunisian society and reproduced and upheld by both media formats analysed. Supporting the impression of stereotypical gender beliefs is the survey from Borovski and Ben Yahia that investigated the perceptions of women and their roles in Tunisian society (2012). The survey shows that the belief of men and women being different and having different abilities and therefore separate tasks in everyday life is a widely held opinion (ibid.). Moreover the deeply rooted beliefs about gender are not actively challenged in a public discourse shaped by mass media formats like *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera*. The question of how decisive the image conveyed by mass media is on reinforcing stereotypical gender beliefs should be answered by future research.

All in all women's status is a topic in the pre-election period, which might result from the historically highly politicised nature the issue has since the rule of Bourguiba. However, only a marginalised discourse concerning women's status in the context of the legislative elections is present in the analysed media outlets.

## *II. Are women's organisations present as actors in this discourse?*

Certain women are visible, mostly famous advocates or civil society figures in Tunisia, e.g.: Meherzia Labidid, vice president of the Constituent Assembly or Souhair Belhassen, who was awarded a price for her engagement for Tunisian women. However women's organisations are not present as spokespersons for women's rights or more generally for Tunisian women. The focus lies on mostly privileged women's rights advocates who try to depict the situation in Tunisia, but often fail to include women from all social milieus.

There also is a discourse identifiable concerning the work of CSOs, especially their important work prior to the legislative elections. They played a decisive part in voters' registration, informing citizens about the electoral process, and distributing information material. While CSOs working with the youth of the country were extensively portrayed, the work of women's organisations was hardly mentioned.

Women's organisations are only marginally present as actors in the pre-election discourse. In the case they are present, it is mostly only as passive subjects of discussion rather than critical actors voicing their opinion in the discourse. A marginalisation in the discourse can be seen, as other CSOs get a bigger platform than women's organisations in the months September and October 2014. The other actors are primarily international CSOs, human rights advocates and journalists who are portrayed as experts of civil society in Tunisia.

As women's organisations are not visible actors, they seem to have little influence on the discursive construction of women's identities and with it on women's position in the pre-election discourse. Here it can be stated that the quantitative mentioning of female heads of electoral lists does little to help to challenge existing power structures and fight hegemonies supporting the discrimination of women. A discourse concerning unequal power structures would be needed to achieve this goal, and institutionalised organisations like Tunisia's women's organisations would be the right actors to advocate for this task. Due to the lack of public representation, the potential of publicly relevant action of these organisations remains limited.

### *III. Does a discursive articulation of inequalities exist? And if so are inequalities and predominant power relations challenged by women's organisations?*

Certain articles deal with the status of women in the country. However one cannot see a pattern of representation, nor are articles concerning women's status of frequent occurrence. Three texts in *La Presse* and only one in *Al-Jazeera* are specifically discussing women's position in Tunisian society, the others are mentioning women either quantitatively or in a different matter. Women are mentioned – maybe to uphold the image of the 'modern and equal' Tunisian society that was fostered the last decades. Realities of discrimination and harassment are also addressed, predominantly in *Al-Jazeera* articles.

*Al-Jazeera* mentions the difficult security situation for women in Tunisia, which seems to have worsened in the years after the revolution. Reasons which are mentioned are the general lack of security in the country due to higher activity of terrorist organisations and the delicate political situation in the neighbouring countries Libya and Egypt. However the discriminating traditions, which are still practiced in Tunisia, like the heritage

law that favours male heirs, are mentioned in the Al-Jazeera article from the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, but the shortcomings in legislation on this topic are attributed to Ennahda party. Ambitions to radically change discriminatory traditions or alter gender stereotypes are not as present as the upholding of the division between Secularists and Islamists. A tradition that might stem from the Ben-Ali era, when the fear from the Islamists made women's rights advocates and other human rights activists accomplices of the regime (Daniele 2014).

Inequalities are articulated in both *Al-Jazeera* and *La Presse* texts. Spokespersons for women's rights are often journalists or university professors, confirming the thesis of elitist spokespersons for the women's movement in the country. The long established women's organisations are neither portrayed nor are their activities mentioned or discussed. CSOs dealing with the status of women seem excluded from the discourse, when it comes to topics like the equal representation of women on electoral lists, the hurdles women have to take to become heads of electoral lists or similar issues in connection with the legislative elections. If the status of women in the country is discussed, seemingly women's organisations are left out of the equation.

#### *IV. Are women's organisations successful in making the feminist agenda hegemonic in the public discourse?*

This question has to be answered with a distinct no. Women are present in the public discourse, they are visible as journalists and politicians. Voices addressing the issues and remaining inequalities women have to endure in Tunisia are there, but very often women are talked about and not participants in the discourse about their own position in society. Women's status in Tunisia is still a highly political issue that can easily be instrumentalised like in the days of Ben-Ali's rule.

What else is apparent is the strong class division of the women's movement. This issue is only addressed in texts published by Al-Jazeera, however.

„But just as [the protesters] have translated freedom, the first demand of the Jasmine Revolution, into a democratic constitution and free elections, they must turn dignity, its second rallying cry, into development, equal distribution of wealth among its regions and welfare for all its citizens.” (Ghannoushi, AJ 24/10/14)

This might be the result of the missing professionalism of Tunisian journalists as indicated by El-Issawi as the class division of the women's movement was not mentioned in *La Presse* articles (2012).

There are several reasons why the emancipation of Tunisian women is in fact mentioned but far from becoming a topic that can be hegemonic public opinion in the future. First, although women's organisations are mentioned, their agenda is not. In the analysed time period no statement, official press release or interview with a representative of a women's organisation was published. Furthermore, women's organisations are in a disadvantageous position to further their goals, as they are still not prone to instrumentalisation by political parties or other actors in power. Historically, women's status is a highly politicised topic in Tunisia, since Bourguiba made the CSP his flagship against political opponents. The external factors which can be seen in the pattern of the discourse are the most decisive in limiting the visibility and power in discourse for women's organisations. However the internal factor of the intrinsically class divided women's movement is another weakening factor in the discourse.

Summarising the results gained from the analysis of texts from *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera*, women in general were mentioned. Women's rights and status was further instrumentalised by political actors – may it be parties or certain famous persons. The topic of the position of women in Tunisian society can still be used as a political tool, be it to warn from Islamist forces or to further personal political goals. The media focus on the dualism between the secularists and religious parties is upheld and enforced. One can see women as spokespersons in some *Al-Jazeera* videos. Women are visible however women's organisations are seldom portrayed as actors.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The equal participation of women and men in the revolution can be seen as an increased potential for action of women in the context of the revolution. This increased potential to influence political decisions was upheld during the constitution building process, as can be

seen on the example of the ‘complementary clause’<sup>24</sup> (see Antonakis-Nashif 2013). Even the relatively high share of women in the Tunisian parliament gives an optimistic forecast of the development of a plural political society (World Bank 2014). With 31 percent female members of parliament, Tunisia lies far above the Arab average of 19% and even surpasses the European average of 25.8% (IPU 2015).

Nevertheless, without a public debate putting into question unequal power relations and stereotypical gender relations that severely impede women’s status in society, the hegemonic constructions of women’s identities as lower compared to men cannot be fought and patriarchal hierarchies cannot be changed. The articulatory fixation of meanings cannot be put into question without the adequate public discourse, which is not taking place in the analysed media formats. This is hinting at the remaining importance of traditional gender roles in post-revolutionary Tunisia as the lack of discourse about fixated meanings of gender and women’s status in society will change little about inequalities and existing power structures. Women’s organisations didn’t appear as visible actors in the pre-election discourse. One could argue that prominent public figures like Selma Mabrouk and Souhair Belhassen shaped the discourse in favour of the participation of women. More influential was probably the implementation of the new constitution in January of 2014, which laid decisive groundwork for an increased participation and visibility of women in the political process. Important cornerstones were the reform of the electoral law, which called for gender parity on electoral lists and the specific formulation of article 21 in the Tunisian constitution,

“All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination.” (Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia 2014:8).

As many scholars have proven, de-jure equality does not mean much for the de-facto status of women in a society (Wilde/Sandhaus 2014). Even so it seems that the constitution paved the way for further reforms, higher participation of marginalised groups and “[...] it exhibits all the features of a political framework that are prerequisite for a democratic reality.” (Wilde/Sandhaus 2014:14)

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<sup>24</sup> Heavily discussed article 28 of the Tunisian constitution mentioned that women were complementary to men. However Selma Mabrouk leaked the article online and helped to spark outrage amongst civil society actors, resulting in no limitation of gender equality in the second draft and also the final version of the constitution (see Wilde/Sandhaus 2014 and Antonakis-Nashif 2013).

The revolution itself, the increased activity of civil society actors in the aftermath of the revolution, as well as the new constitution have contributed to an increased visibility of women in the Tunisian public sphere, but women's organisations as agents for women's rights were not present in the investigated discourse. The question if the role and image of Tunisian women changed in contrast to before the revolution should be a topic for further research. What can be said is that the investigated discourse which is part of the public sphere, is still male dominated. The majority of interviewees and spokespersons in the investigated time period were male. Unequal power structures were not systemically challenged by women's organisations or other CSOs in the analysed media formats. Women's organisations did not appear as prominent actors in the pre-election discourse which is an indicator for their weak position in the struggle for democratic gender relations.

Concluding it can be stated that the recent events in Tunisia, including the implementation of the new constitution and the first free legislative elections in 2014 contributed to a higher visibility of women. However this did not lead to a shift in the hegemonic structure of Tunisian society and could not lead to a higher potential of action for women in general.

There exists an active network of Tunisian women's organisations, which is well connected and organised and also exercising its power to articulate its opinion publicly. However how willingly or to which extent its opinion is heard by mass media outlets like *La Presse* and *Al-Jazeera* is a different matter. As Wilde and Sandhaus have rightly claimed

"[Free and open elections] alone, however, will not suffice to justify Tunisia as a democratic society. This requires - as the Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe (2007; 2000) maintains - radical democratic structures of a discursive public that are open to all civil society and political actors. For this, it is essential to have a strong parliament that does not ignore social pluralism and is ready to handle the conflicts that arise in the face of differing views of justice, equal opportunities for participation, and individual self-determination."(2014:14)

To guarantee change of power relations not only on the political level but also on a societal level, women have to be more visible to create a more just and more plural public sphere in Tunisia. A higher visibility and with it an increased potential for action can only be realised through the abolition of traditional gender-based hierarchies, which are currently limiting the

plurality of the public, resulting in the exclusion of women from many parts of the public sphere. However to achieve this goal, fixations of meanings have to be perpetually put into question in an open-ended, freely accessible public discourse that makes predominant gender relations as power relations a subject of discussion.

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## 8 ANNEX

### La Presse

Date	Title	Keywords
01.09.2014	L'Alliance démocratique	femmes, législatives
01.09.2014	L'Union pour la Tunisie	femmes, législatives
02.09.2014	Ben Jaâfar officiellement candidat d'Ettakatol	femmes, élections
02.09.2014	Ettakatol dévoile ses têtes de liste	femmes, législatives
02.09.2014	Vers une révision des dotations ?	législatives, élections, société civile
03.09.2014	Les têtes de liste de l'UPL	femmes, élections, législatives
04.09.2014	Les «têtes» sont ailleurs...	femmes, élections, législatives
04.09.2014	Les têtes de liste d'Afek Tounès	femmes, élections, législatives
06.09.2014	Têtes de liste du Courant démocrate	femmes, élections, législatives
07.09.2014	Les têtes de liste du Mdre	femmes, élections, législatives
07.09.2014	Malaise à l'intérieur, contestations à l'extérieur	société civile, élections, législatives
07.09.2014	Emna Mansour Karoui, candidate à la présidentielle	femmes, élections, législatives
13.09.2014	Abderrahim Zouari au-devant de la scène «En 2011, le mot d'ordre des élections était l'Islam. En 2014, c'est l'Etat»	femmes, élections, législatives
17.09.2014	La Tunisie est sur un chemin résolument démocratique	femmes, élections, législatives
18.09.2014	Une stratégie de sensibilisation en deux volets	femmes, élections, législatives
18.09.2014	Voter pour la Tunisie	femmes, élections, législatives
19.09.2014	« L'UPT créera la surprise aux prochaines législatives »	femmes, élections, législatives
19.09.2014	Souhaïr Belhassen, lauréat du Prix Elyssa-Didon	femmes, élections, société civile
28.09.2014	Deux sessions de formation au profit des femmes têtes de liste	femmes, élections, législatives

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Date	Title	Keywords
26.09.2014	Will Tunisia's youth head to the ballots?	elections, civil society
21.10.2014	The rival ideological narratives in Tunisia	elections, women
22.10.2014	Will Tunisia continue its democratic march?	elections, civil society
23.10.2014	Tunisia's Transition Test	elections, women
24.10.2014	Police battle fighters in Tunisian town	elections, women
24.10.2014	Tunisian security forces in deadly home raid	elections, women
25.10.2014	The gender fault line in Tunisia	elections, women, civil society
26.10.2014	Voting under way in landmark Tunisia polls	elections, women
26.10.2014	Tunisia counts votes after historic poll	elections, women
26.10.2014	High turnout in Tunisia vote defies forecasts	elections, women
26.10.2014	Tunisia's political parties and their shared vision	elections, women
27.10.2014	In with the old Tunisia	elections, women