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How To Sever the Legs of An Octopus

Tunisia's Ongoing Revolution

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The Kasbah square is large and covered in barbwire. Military men stand on the inside of the fence cradling automatic rifles, joking, chatting, texting on their cell phones. Coming out from the bustle of the souks the square feels tranquil. It is September, seven months since the square became a temporary home to thousands of protestors who demanded the end of oppressive government in Tunisia. It was here that the Tunisian people solidified their revolution, refusing to be appeased by the flight of a figurehead while the tentacles of his regime remained.

Ben Ali ruled Tunisia for twenty-three years. During that time he was successful in amassing a large fortune for himself and his extended family. This was done mostly through corrupt investment of public funds, dolled out to companies owned by those closest to him. While Ben Ali and the Trabelsi family thrived his country slipped deeper and deeper into economic despair. Any investment made to better the lives of his people was confined to the coastal regions, where Tunisia's Mediterranean beaches became playgrounds for the European upper class. Through the years any attempts made to stand up the regime were met with harsh crackdowns by the dictator's massive secret police force. The rural interior and southern regions where poverty and unemployment were most widespread became hotbeds of dissent and hatred of the regime. Ben Ali's control on the media silenced all uprisings, with little word leaking out to the rest of the country.

The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on December 17th, 2010 was not the first instance of a young man publicly committing suicide in protest of his

poverty and despair. Several had taken similar steps in the previous years but Ben Ali's stranglehold on the country's media kept their stories quiet and their message confined to the small subaltern regions where they lived. A grainy cell phone video showing Bouazizi inflamed on the sidewalk outside of the governor's office spread like wildfire across the Facebook pages of Tunisia's youth. Both haunted and inspired by the young man's death the Tunisian people took to the streets demanding a new government. Massive uprisings rocked the country and within a month Ben Ali would be forced to flee.

With his departure Ben Ali left behind a broken governmental apparatus used to operating in the unquestioned facilitation of his corruption. With the figurehead gone the task of the Tunisian people had really begun: how to solidify their revolution and translate the collective "No!" of popular protest into constructive political action to rebuild their country.

A Sparse Revision

Following Ben Ali's departure on January 14th his long-term advisor and prime minister, Mohammad Ghannouchi, gave a speech announcing his succession as interim president. This decision was in accordance with Article 56 the Tunisian constitution, which allows for the prime minister to take over duties of the president "in case of temporary disability."¹ This understanding of Ben Ali's *temporary* inability to run the country was further evident in Ghannouchi's

¹ *Tunisian Constitution*, 2002

<http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/Tunisiaconstitution.pdf> (accessed November 2011)

language. "Parliamentary elections will be held, meetings with all political and social powers will be convened. [...]Other measures will be adopted if it is ascertained that Ben Ali's departure is final."² It seems evident from his discourse in the hours immediately following Ben Ali's departure that the regime was simply biding its time; waiting for things to cool down in the hope that Ben Ali could ultimately return and retake control.

Ben Ali did not return and on January 15th Tunisia's constitutional council declared Ghannouchi's presidency illegitimate and Ben Ali's departure final. Thus, Constitutional Article 57 was adopted with the speaker of parliament, Fouad Mebazaa, stepping in as interim president. The African Union followed suit, declaring Ben Ali's ousting legitimate and retaining Tunisia's membership in the organization: "Yesterday the prime minister announced he was taking charge of the situation on the basis of Article 56," said AU Peace and Security Director el-Ghassim Wane. "We just learned that the Constitutional Court has decided that they should rather follow Article 57, and we believe [...] that so far the Tunisians have been acting within the framework of their constitution."³ This relatively smooth constitutional transition is indicative of the limited change going on within the Tunisian government. The ousting of Ben Ali was leaderless and driven by mass

² "Constitutional Debate," *Al Jazeera English*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011114204942484776.html> (accessed November 2011)

³ Heinlein, Peter, "AU Recognizes Tunisia's Speaker as Interim Leader," *Voice of America*, January 15, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/AU-Recognizes-Tunisias-Speaker-as-Interim-Leader-113778229.html> (accessed November 2011)

uprisings, without a tangible voice to solidify the revolution it remained difficult for the Tunisian people to fully realize the change they had been fighting for.

Ghannouchi's announcement of a new "unity government" the following day did little to alleviate the country's fears over their halted revolution. The new government retained six ministers from the ruling RCD party in addition to Ghannouchi and interim president Fouad Mebazaa. The foreign, interior, and finance ministers, all members of the RCD, remained in the government. Only three members from opposition parties were introduced into the cabinet and in the comparatively less important ministries. Ahmed Ibrahim from the Ettajdid party was put in charge of higher education; Mustafa Ben Jaafar from Union of Freedom and Labor was named health minister; and development minister went to Najib Chebbi from the Progressive Democratic Party.⁴ The remaining cabinet positions were filled with members from civil society. In a transparent attempt to acknowledge the youth led revolution Ghannouchi invited formerly incarcerated dissident blogger Slim Amamou to serve as Secretary of State for Youth and Sport.⁵ Ghannouchi discontinued the information ministry, in charge of censorship, and announced his commitment to "guaranteeing total freedom of information."⁶ He also

⁴ "Nouvelle Composition du Gouvernement d'Union nationale," January 27, 2011 <http://www.pm.gov.tn/pm/actualites/actualite.php?id=2062&lang=fr> (accessed November 2011)

⁵ AFP, "Dissident Blogger Enters New Tunisian Government," *The Australian*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/dissident-blogger-enters-new-tunisian-government/story-e6frg6so-1225990433189> (accessed December 2011)

⁶ Daoud, Arzeki, "Anxiety Over New Tunisian Cabinet," *The North Africa Journal*, January 16, 2011, <http://www.north->

announced the dissolution of a ban on NGO's and pledged to begin releasing political prisoners. These first steps at lifting the oppressive measures of Ben Ali did little to appease the population while so many of Ben Ali's former ministers remained in government.

In an interview, student and activist Ramy Hamed described his dismay at seeing Ghannouchi remain in government:

I was very proud when Ben Ali left. I was very, very happy; all the sensations in the world cannot be like this. But when Ghannouchi stayed in power it was a bad sign. He was a figure of the regime. We said it's not enough. He has to leave. He was there during all the injustice and he saw it.⁷

The composition of the new government was met with massive protests in the streets outside the interior ministry. On January 18th Al Jazeera English reported, "up to 1,000 protestors gathered [...] to demonstrate against the announcement."⁸ The interim government responded with a harsh crackdown, deploying the military to stop the unrest, firing water cannons and tear gas into the crowd. Exiled opposition figure Moncef Marzouki called the new government a "masquerade." In a statement to Aljazeera English he declared, "Tunisia deserved much more. Ninety dead, four weeks of real revolution, only for it to come to this? A

http://www.aljazeera.com/social_politics/security_politics/5janseventeen46.html (accessed November 2011)

⁷ Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

⁸ Al Jazeera, "Tunisians Skeptical of New Cabinet," *Al Jazeera English*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011117224856588521.html> (accessed November 2011)

unity government in name only because, in reality, it is made up of members of the party of dictatorship, the [RCD],"⁹ Notably, both the moderate Islamist party Ennahda and the Tunisian communist party PCOT were excluded from the new government. The spokesperson for PCOT, Hama Hammami, was only released from prison on January 14th. In an interview with Aljazeera English he denounced Ghannouchi's feeble attempt at governmental change: "This is a national government which has nothing national about it. It's intended to conserve the old regime with all of its authoritarian institutions in place. This is why people are taking to the street with a new slogan 'we don't want the RCD'."¹⁰ The exclusion of Ennahda from the government and Mohammad Ghannouchi's initial refusal to allow exiled leader Rachid Ghannouchi back into the country is a quintessential indication of the interim government's refusal to acknowledge the demands of the Tunisian people. PCOT and Ennahda represented the most genuine opposition to the regime of Ben Ali and those most harshly repressed during his rule.

Prime Minister Ghannouchi responded to the criticism in an interview with France's Europe-1 radio. Defending his decision to retain RCD ministers Ghannouchi argued, "we need them in this phase." He attested to their "clean hands" and "great competence," asking the country to "give us a chance so that we can put in place this

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ryan, Yasmine, "Opposition Leaders Excluded," *Al Jazeera English*, January 18, 2011, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/africa/2011/01/18/opposition-leaders-excluded> (accessed November 2011)

ambitious program of reform."¹¹ His pleas for reconciliation fell on deaf ears and by that evening four member of his cabinet had resigned in response to mass protests. Current president of the constitutional assembly, Mustapha Ben Jaafar who was then serving as health minister resigned in what proved to be apt political maneuvering. The remaining three resignations came from ministers affiliated with the UGTT, Tunisia's national labor union. Spokesperson for the UGTT Abid Al-Briki demanded the exclusion of all Ben Ali's ministers from the government, expecting the prime minister. "This is in response to the demands of people on the streets," he said in a statement to Aljazeera English.¹² Ahmed Ibrahim and his constituency from Ettajdid threatened to pull out as well if the remaining RCD ministers did not cancel their party memberships. In the following days all eight remaining RCD members including interim-president Mebazaa and Ghannouchi terminated their memberships with the former ruling party. The RCD further pledged to dissolve its central committee while still maintaining daily operations.

These gestures did little to curb unrest in the streets, as the Tunisian government remained a far cry from the tangible change expected from the revolution. UGTT's condemnation of the transitional government was a sharp blow to Ghanouchi's legitimacy. An Al Jazeera English report published on January 20th said, "It will be the union's presence that can win this government the public support that it needs," explaining the delay in the first cabinet meeting, "as the

¹¹ Al Jazeera, "Tunisia's New Government In Trouble," *Al Jazeera English*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011118194731826312.html> (accessed November 2011)

¹² Ibid.

president and prime minister are trying to get the union members to come back to join the government."¹³ In an interview, Tunisian activist and English business professor N'hamdi Faysal described UGTT's reaction to the transitional government: "They realized their mistake in becoming part of the first Ghannouchi government. They would have been inside, embracing its decisions and being part of the game. The trade union could only survive outside of politics. They realized their role was to be opposition, a watchdog for the people."¹⁴ With the UGTT out and the nation still caught up in the fervor of political change the interim-government scrambled to maintain control.

In a speech following his resignation from the RCD Interim-President Fouad Mebazaa promised a "total break" from the past regime and a complete separation between political parties and the government.¹⁵ The government continued releasing political prisoners, promising "media freedoms and an independent judiciary." He also assured the country that presidential elections would be held in accordance with Tunisian constitutional law. "Together we can write a new page in the history of our country," promised the president.¹⁶ Of course, this "new page" was

¹³ Al Jazeera, "Tunisia's Government Under Pressure," *Al Jazeera English*, January 20, 2011

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/201112091121160589.html>
(accessed November 2011)

¹⁴ Faysal, N'hamdi. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 31, 2011.

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, "Tunisia's Leader Vows Break With the Past," *Al Jazeera English*, January 20, 2011

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011119201252887481.html>
(accessed November 2011)

¹⁶ Ibid. TLVBWTP

turning out to be merely a sparse revision of the government the Tunisian people had suffered under for decades and fought hard to overthrow.

The Liberation Caravan and Kasbah One

Far away from the political wrangling in Tunis, youths from the rural south were preparing a march to demand real change to their government. They came from small towns within the governorate of Sidi Bou Zid where the revolution was born. They congregated in the small town of Menzel Bouzaiane and began their march to the capital. After walking fifty kilometers they were picked up by supporters who drove them the rest of the way to Tunis. Their trek was advertised on Facebook through video posts and declarations of support from people across the country.¹⁷ Former Tunisia-live reporter Hassam Sta Ali described his initial reaction in an interview: “I was on Facebook and saw the videos. I said “What the hell!” You could see very long lines of people heading toward Tunis. In that insane anarchy I thought they were going to attack Tunis or something. I actually was scared.”¹⁸ Upon reaching Tunis the protestors were welcomed by supporters. “They brought tents, food, everything – they marched for three days it was really quite historical.”¹⁹ Al Jazeera English labeled this march “The Liberation Caravan” and began reporting on its developments. “They're chanting the same slogan that has echoed across the country - 'Down with the regime, down with the former party,

¹⁷ Sghayer, Ramy. Interview with author. Informal Conversation. La Marsa, November 18, 2011.

¹⁸ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

¹⁹ Ibid.

down with the interim president and with the prime minister," reported one correspondent.²⁰ It seemed as though the push to rid the government of all vestiges of Ben Ali was truly beginning.

Upon reaching the Kasbah the mass of protestors overwhelmed the security forces outside the ministry offices and began setting up camp on January 23rd.²¹ Supporters from across Tunis flocked to the protest to offer their support. "There was a certain kind of beautiful solidarity," explained student and activist Ramy Hamed. "Everyone, that could, brought some food or meals to help them and to discuss with them. We shared a common enemy and we shared things together."²² While these southern protestors found support from many in the capital an effort was made by the government to discredit the movement.

The smear campaign itself was a testament to the massive economic disparity across the country, accusing the marchers of coming to the capital to steal and leech off the wealth of Tunis. The official media was most vocal in its attempts to discredit the sit in explained Hamed. "They said they were coming to steal, that they were throwing their trash. I was there and it wasn't true."²³ The Kasbah became the new battleground for the revolution. It's strategic position outside of the

²⁰ Al Jazeera, "Liberation Caravan Reaches Tunis," *Al Jazeera English*, January 23, 2011

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011123124352723753.html>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

²³ Ibid.

ministry offices ensured that the movement would not be ignored. “The Kasbah is a vital space,” explained former Tunisia-Live reporter Hassem Sta Ali.

They even blocked the ministers from going inside the cabinet. They could not even work or get together. That is why they wanted so bad to get people out of there. They even gave them permission to have a sit in on Mohammed The Fifth. They just wanted to get them out of the Kasbah Square. That is why it succeeded. They knew it was a weak point – the space itself.²⁴

When asked about the atmosphere in the Kasbah Ramy Hamed reflected with nostalgic wonder. “Ben Ali made a separation between Tunisians,” he explained. Before coming to the Kasbah he felt disconnected from the people of the rural interior. Inside the Kasbah, “it was a kind of nationalism you could never deny.” Fighting for the same cause Hamed felt the people finally coming together:

It's the first time you feel that fucking liberty, you feel that freedom. You touch it. You know? Many images made me cry. I never cried in my life, in that period I cried the most. I remember a prostitute from the brothel in the Kasbah. Another very religious man with a beard – they were smoking together and they were making jokes with the lighter – they were all planning to sleep there. It brought a tear to me eye. The image was very cool – no judgment. She doesn't

²⁴ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

*judge him and he doesn't judge her. They are here for the same thing. It was magic, you felt Tunisia, you felt Tunisians.*²⁵

The movement finally began to gain political weight; professor N'hamdi Faysal testified to the importance of the movement, "The Kasbah was a turning point in the history of the revolution. It gave a voice to the states that were neglected by the Ben Ali regime. It was very decisive to force Ghannouchi to reform."²⁶ On January 27th the prime minister announced a complete reshuffling of the government. This new cabinet introduced twelve new ministers while retaining nine from the original unity government. While certainly a step in the right direction, three ministers from the Ben Ali regime still remained. An Al Jazeera English report on the reshuffling questioned the impact of this reshuffle. "Some people are saying that this is quite significant and it will send people back to their homes, on the other hand the thousands who have been demonstrating outside the government compound are saying this is not enough."²⁷ Hamed and his group decided to leave the Kasbah following this announcement: "When Ghannouchi introduced oppositional ministers to the cabinet was when we left Kasbah 1. Looking back, it wasn't enough."²⁸

²⁵ Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

²⁶ Faysal, N'hamdi. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 31, 2011.

²⁷ Al Jazeera, "Ben Ali Allies Dropped From Cabinet," *Al Jazeera English*, January 28, 2011 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112720356405308.html> (accessed November 2011)

²⁸ Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

The protestors who remained in the Kasbah following the prime minister's announcement experienced a brutal crackdown from the police forces. The secret police forces as activist Ramy Sghayer described them wore all leather and carried batons. Two officers that targeted him as an agitator beat him to the ground. Pictures from the incident show his head bloody and eyes glazed over. "I almost died that day," he recalls with evident pride at having stood up to fight for his country.²⁹ By his count over two hundred were injured in the raid and the remaining protestors forced from the square.

Following the crackdown on Kasbah 1 Human Rights Watch issued a statement condemning the rash use of violence to silence the protests. The report called from newly instated minister of interior Farhat Rajhi to "issue clear orders to all police forces to respect freedom of assembly and to use force only when strictly necessary."³⁰ They also called for immediate investigations into reported claims of brutality. Former Tunisia-Live reporter Housseem Sta Ali expressed less sympathy for the injured protestors.

I remember crowds coming from Kasbah 1 holding rocks and attacking the interior ministry. They shot tear gas that day; you could see bruises on the

²⁹ Sghayer, Ramy. Interview with author. Informal Conversation. La Marsa, November 18, 2011.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: End Police Attacks on Protestors," *Trust.org:Alert Net*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/tunisia-end-police-attacks-on-protesters> (accessed December 2011)

*protesters. But they were the ones who provoked the police. They can't just victimize themselves; they wanted confrontations.*³¹

Following these confrontations the first Kasbah sit in officially came to a close. Though Ghannouchi and his allies who served under Ben Ali remained in government it had become evident that meager reforms would not be an acceptable end to the revolution. In response to continuing protests across the country Ghannouchi announced the official suspension of all RCD party activities on February 6th.³²

Kasbah Two

Two days later Ramy Sghayer and ten fellow activists began their efforts to organize a second Kasbah sit in.³³ They met in Café Univer, on Avenue Bourguiba in downtown Tunis. The committee was made up of young activists from the student and labor unions as well as independent activists. They were fed up with the slow changes taking place in the government and the prospect of their revolution fizzling out. Over the next two weeks they drafted a list of demands to ensure tangible change in Tunisian political life. Inspired by PCOT leader Hamma Hammami's call for a new constitution that would solidify the values of the revolution, the organizers built their platform around the demand for constitutional assembly

³¹ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

³² BBC, "Tunisia Suspends Ben Ali's RCD Party," *BBC*, February 6, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12378006> (accessed December 2011)

³³ Sghayer, Ramy. Interview with author. Informal Conversation. La Marsa, November 18, 2011.

elections. “Presidential elections were a way out of the revolution,” explained Sghayer, “a way for someone from the RCD to take over as president. The ministry of interior was still there who faked previous elections why not this one?”³⁴ The group compiled a list of demands in an attempt to give tangible voice to the protest movement. The dissolution of the remaining government and the destruction of the RCD were foremost on the minds of these organizers. Furthermore they called for the destruction of Ben Ali’s secret police force, an integral part in the suppression of dissent under the old regime. After twelve days of planning and gaining support the group moved into the Kasbah.

In an interview with Redpepper.org Sghayer outlined the group’s reasons for returning to the Kasbah.

*We called the second Kasbah sit-in because we felt the revolution had been stalled. Why were we not speaking about politics any more? We are now campaigning for a revolution based on our imaginations and our dreams. [...] We're showing the government that we still have our eyes open and we can put them under pressure.*³⁵

The group was joined by thousands of protestors from across Tunis and the rest of the country. The following two weeks of protests were the biggest the country had

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sebystyen, Amanda, “Voices From the Tunisian Revolution,” *Red Pepper*, May 2011, <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/voices-from-the-tunisian-revolution/> (accessed November 2011)

seen since the ousting of Ben Ali on January 14th. Ramy Hamed described his reasons for turning out once again to sleep in the Kasbah.

I returned to Kasbah 2 because the Ghannouchi government was very weak. It had no plans. They were talking about rewriting the constitution, presidential elections, solving economic and social problems. That was not our concern. We were concerned with the leadership, with the system. Ghannouchi was protecting the system. The old regime was still there. So we rose up.³⁶

Professor N'hamdi Faysal returned as well, encouraging his students at Manouba University to do the same. "It was revolution number two, we needed new faces, new people who believed in the revolution. People who were ready for a new Tunisia."³⁷ The politicized community inside the Kasbah came together in this final push to truly change their government.

It's a feeling – I can't describe it. It was awesome. There was sense of solidarity, a sense of community - people from the neighborhood bringing us food, bringing us lunches, our dinners. It was like ok this is Tunisia, the whole country coming together. [...] It was all happening during the winter and it was cold, but you couldn't find people who were upset. Even with all the difficulties

³⁶ Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

³⁷ Faysal, N'hamdi. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 31, 2011.

*in terms of food and warmth and logistics. But people were happy and so determined to be there. So determined that the government hear their voices.*³⁸

Music within the Kasbah became a rallying cry for the protestors. Over the cold and the rain voices sang out demanding their freedom. Ayoub Mnakbi, a student musician played through the night, songs of rebellion, freedom and redemption. “[The music] was just like Tunisia, very international, lots of percussion, guitars, oud and gambri.”³⁹ Reggae and rap were the most common genres, known for their revolutionary character. “I discovered that many Tunisians like reggae, explained Ramy Hamed, “there was a rebellious reggae attitude in the Kasbah.”⁴⁰ In his New Yorker article Steve Coll reported on the revolutionary musical community, “Students, robed lawyers, jobless men, Islamists, and parents toting young children gathered in loose groups to sing the Tunisian national anthem or Palestinian revolutionary songs with lyrics adapted to the sit-in’s cause.”⁴¹ Lebanese activist and singer Marcel Khalife was very popular within the Kasbah along with Algerian revolutionary musical group Labess.⁴² Even with all this solidarity and support within the Kasbah, it was not enough to force the government

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mnakbi, Ayoub. Interview with Author. Recorded Conversation. Manouba, November 28, 2011.

⁴⁰ Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

⁴¹ Coll, Steve, “The Casbah Coalition,” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2011 http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/04/04/110404fa_fact_coll?currentPage=all (accessed November 2011)

⁴² Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

to acknowledge their demands. After a week of being ignored the organizing committee held a special meeting to decide on their next step.

The organizers went back and forth over whether or not a violent confrontation with the police would be conducive to achieving their goals. Ghannouchi and his ministers had relocated to Carthage after being blocked from their offices and the organizers saw the interior ministry on Avenue Bourguiba as the next real target to make their voices heard. Sghayer described his fear at encouraging violence at this stage. His memory continued to flash back on the brutal repression of the first Kasbah sit in; he did not want to see more people killed and injured in the name of revolution. After initially voting against the action Sghayer decided to support it. "This is a revolution, we have to be radical," he recalled thinking.⁴³

On Friday February 25th the "Day of Madness" began. The protestors streamed down from the Kasbah into the center of Avenue Bourguiba. They threw stones at the police who responded with tear gas and water cannons. All Africa reported that tens of thousands of protestors had come to demand a new government and the departure of Ghannouchi.⁴⁴ After three days of clashes that left

⁴³ Sghayer, Ramy. Interview with author. Informal Conversation. La Marsa, November 18, 2011.

⁴⁴ All Africa, "Protestors Flood Government Square," *All Africa*, February 26, 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201103021102.html> (accessed November 2011)

three protestors dead and nine injured Ghannouchi finally acknowledged their demands.⁴⁵

The End of An Era

In a television address on February 27th Ghannouchi finally announced his resignation. "I am not willing to be a person that takes decisions that would end up causing casualties," he explained. "This resignation will serve Tunisia, and the revolution and the future of [the country]."⁴⁶ Reacting to the speech former Tunisia-Live reporter Housseem Sta Ali said, "You could see a sense of relief during his last speech when he decided to resign."⁴⁷

You can tell from what he said there was pressure on him not to fulfill the demands. Its not as if personally he just ignored the demands. There was something else. Maybe the [former RCD regime] was just putting him in a façade where all the hate was targeted to him so when they remove him from the picture and replace him with someone else all the hate just goes away.⁴⁸

Sta Ali went on to describe the long awaited feeling of happiness with Ghannouchi gone.

⁴⁵ Willsher, Kim, "Tunisian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghannouchi Resigns Amid Unrest," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/27/tunisian-prime-minister-ghannouchi-resigns> (accessed December 2011)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

⁴⁸ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

They were celebrating in the Kasbah the day Ghannouchi stepped down. I didn't see any happiness after Ben Ali's departure; there were three days of nightmare after he left. The only time when Tunisians celebrated anything was the success of the Kasbah. Even the constituent assembly elections were bitter sweet. They felt a sense of accomplishment when Ghannouchi left, like "we did that."⁴⁹

In the following days, Bourguiba-era politician Beji Caid Sebssi replaced Ghannouchi. The decision was made by Fouad Mebazaa who remained interim president. Elections for the constituent assembly were promptly announced and Tunisia began moving forward in its quest for dignity and democracy. An Al Jazeera report announcing Caid Sebssi's position lauded the new leader for "breathing new life into Tunisian politics."⁵⁰ N'hamdi Faysal described this decision as the perfect step for Tunisia moving forward.

He was chosen by Fouad Mebazza – his buddy. Mebazza couldn't trust new figures, he was afraid that if he chose someone new the changes would disrupt everything. Mebazza was afraid of being indicted in courts or being blamed for being part of Ben Ali rule. He chose someone he trusted. That was a good choice, perfect balance between revolutionary and maintaining the old system. Either choose a new face and things go in a way no one can predict or

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Moshiri, Nazanine, "Veteran Leader Breathes New Life Into Tunisian Politics," *Al Jazeera English*, March 4, 2011, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/africa/2011/03/04/veteran-leader-breathes-new-life-tunisia> (accessed November 2011)

*choose someone who is very competent and knows the country well who can make things right.*⁵¹

The security situation immediately improved when Caid Sebsi took control of the government. No longer did people fear their revolution would fall back into the hands of the RCD. “We can say that the most powerful regime is gone,” said Ramy Hamed. “If there was not Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 they would have stayed in place.”⁵² Seeing the security situation improve, Housseem Sta Ali finally felt confident for his country’s future.

*It was magical after Beji Caid Sebsi came to power, everyone just calmed down. I don’t really know what happened, you can only analyze that from a psychological point of view. Tunisians wanted a father, needed a father, many of them turned to God as a symbol and many turned to Beji Caid Sebsi as a reference to Bourbuiba. I think someone with another charisma or personality would not have been able to succeed, even if he made the same decisions. It’s not about the decisions or the demands, its more than that. It’s about his integrity, his character, his charisma.*⁵³

After three months of revolutionary uprising the Tunisian people finally had government they could trust. The demands of the revolution, though disparate and

⁵¹ Faysal, N’hamdi. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 31, 2011.

⁵² Hamed, Ramy. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 30, 2011.

⁵³ Sta Ali, Housseem. Interview with author. Recorded Conversation. Tunis, November 27, 2011.

far reaching could never have succeeded without first removing all vestiges of the old regime from power. In October Tunisia successfully went through the first round of elections to solidify the country's new democratic rule. With the new constituent assembly in the midst of writing what will become the tangible manifestation of their revolution, the Tunisian people remain vigilant. Many are still in the streets pledging to keep watch on the government's activities and never again let the country slip into despotic rule. Perhaps the country's new political life was best summed up by Tunisian blogger Bassam Bounenni when he wrote, "Any head of government who will come will no longer need opinion polls. He will just have to peek through his office window at Al Kasba Square to check his popularity."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bounenni, Bassam, "A Night In Tunisia: Al Kasbah's Lesson," *Nawaat*, March 8, 2011, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2011/03/08/a-night-in-tunisia-al-kasbas-lesson/> (accessed December 2011)

