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Kasbah 3, Kais Saied, and The Construction of a
Post-Revolutionary Political Paradigm in Tunisia

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Abstract

Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 – sit-ins resulting in the expulsion of old-regime ministers, the installation of a technocratic government, and the promise of elections – are generally regarded as two of the most important popular actions in the Tunisian Revolution. Left as a footnote to this history is Kasbah 3, a third sit-in widely considered to be a failed, radical movement corrosive to the successes of the Revolution. Eight years later, with the election of Kais Saied and the failure of the pre-revolutionary establishment Bourguibist movement, the spirit of Kasbah 3 appears to have returned. This paper seeks to demonstrate the importance of Kasbah 3 by tracing the politics which emerged from the sit-in and connecting them with the emerging movements that created the conditions for the victory of Tunisian President Kais Saied. The study consists of mostly reviews of primary source materials, an interview, and quantitative data from post-Revolution Tunisian elections. In discussing election results, the execution and criticisms of Kasbah 3, and the organizations and personalities that emerged from it, this study finds direct and indirect connections between Kais Saied and Kasbah 3. More importantly, it paints a picture of the rise of a politics, unspecific to Saied, designed to disrupt the remaining influences of the pre-Revolutionary status quo.

Dedication

To my grandparents:

Myra, who taught me to explore.

Ed, who taught me have fun with my work.

Marilyn, who taught me to ask questions.

And Dietrich, who taught me to answer them.

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Introduction

Revolutions are, by necessity, disparate movements. As such, the question of “when should the revolution end?” is disputed and is often left unresolved. After the repressive dictator Zine Abadine Ben Ali fled, Tunisians continued to take to the streets. In two sit-ins, called Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2, Tunisians flooded the government square demanding a series of concessions from the interim government. Kasbah 1 succeeded in forcing reforms ranging from the ousting of Ben Ali ministers to the establishment of a political reform commission while Kasbah 2 forced the government to agree to a date for democratic elections for a body to draft a new constitution. Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 are lionized as two of the most consequential actions of the Revolution, but a third Kasbah sit-in is often left as a footnote in the history of the Tunisian Revolution.

Understanding Kasbah 3 and the politics that emerged from it demands the historical context of pre-revolutionary Tunisia. After independence from the French in 1956, the regime of Habib Bourguiba, and subsequently Ben Ali, sought to position Tunisia as a modern, Western state. In an effort to repress political Islam, Bourguiba set in place a series of liberal reforms emphasizing women’s and minority rights, a consolidated state, development, and the replacement of Islamic education with Western schooling.¹ After taking over in a “medical coup” Ben Ali established a more generally repressive regime, but

¹Marion Bouldy, "The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia since Independence." *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988): 590-614, www.jstor.org/stable/3992658.

expanded upon Bourbuiba's economic development policy by enthusiastically seeking foreign loans and investment. These policies failed to create economic growth and resulted in skyrocketing debt and unemployment, conditions that for the Revolution.²

After the ousting of Ben Ali and the second sit-in, Bourguiba's former Foreign Affairs Minister Beji Caid Essebsi was placed in charge of the technocratic government. Kasbah 3, held four months after Kasbah 2, defined itself in opposition to the technocratic government and the leadership of interim Prime Minister Essebsi. Kasbah 3 failed to garner widespread support, the government quickly quashed the protest, and today it is generally regarded as a failure. For those who partook in Kasbah 3, the Revolution was about more than democratization, it a movement to wrest political power from old-regime officials, elite figures, and Western influence.³ Democratic elections were not enough if they were of, by, and for politicians who had been ingrained in the political status quo of the last half-century.

The failure of the sit-in followed by a series of electoral victories by institutional actors, quashed any notion that Tunisia desired a continuation of the Revolution. The success of the Islamist party, Ennahdha, in the 2011 NCA elections instilled a fear of rising Islamism. The nomination of Ennahdha-backed Moncef Marzouki and the secular Essebsi in the 2014 Presidential elections,

² Lahcen Achy, "Tunisia's Economic Challenges" Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2011, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/tunisia_economy.pdf

³ "المطالب الأساسية المنفق عليها على حد الآن لتكون مطالب شعبية في إعتصام", إعتصام القصبية 3 14th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.eI9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/146806248728752/?type=3&theater>.

revealed that the political paradigm in Tunisia's first presidential election would continue to be a religious-secular one. Five more years of a stagnant economy, corruption, and declining Islamist power opened the door for challenges to this paradigm. The landslide victory of outsider Kais Saied who advocated for a decentralization of government, a crackdown on corruption, and cutting ties with the west, marked the emphatic triumph of a new politics independent of the old regimes and of political Islam.

An echo of Kasbah 3, the 2019 Presidential elections mark a transition in Tunisia toward a politics unsullied by its dictatorial history. For the first time in its post-colonial history, the country will be led by a figure not associated with the regimes of Bourguiba or Ben Ali. In this study I will evaluate the political movements that contributed to and were borne out of Kasbah 3, following them through their seeming disappearance under Beji Caid Essebsi to their re-emergence in the politics of Kais Saied. This evaluation will bring to light the shifting political paradigm in Tunisia, how it began, how it evolved, and how it is manifesting itself in today's politics.

Methodology

This study draws upon primary sources, qualitative data, and secondary source quantitative data. The former derives from a range of sources including Facebook posts, articles, and public statements from the revolutionary period as well as an interview with a sit-in attendee. The Facebook posts were primarily

utilized in the description and documentation of the planning of Kasbah 3. The public statements and articles give an outside perspective on the politics of Kasbah 3. The interview was a semi-structured with prepared questions and follow-ups. For the purposes of anonymity and in accordance with SIT policy, the pseudonym “Firas” was given to the interviewee.

Given that Kasbah 3 did not have public leadership, it was difficult to find definitive statements about the movement. While this does speak to the decentralized nature of Kasbah 3, it also presents a research challenge in that no one person can speak for the movement. The Facebook page “إعتصام القصبة 3” (The Kasbah 3 Sit-in) most closely resembled any official presence of the movement.

As for secondary source material, extraordinarily little has been written about Kasbah 3. The vast majority of mentions of Kasbah 3 in academic sources are in the context of the history of the Revolution and rarely reach beyond a description of the sit-in as a failed movement. In my research I struggled to find articles that mentioned Kasbah 3 as anything more than an aside. Most of the secondary source material utilized in this study addresses revolutionary history prior Kasbah 3 or discusses Tunisian election results. A plethora of research exists in both of these areas. In my discussion of Tunisian revolutionary history, I mostly utilized broader reviews while for the discussion of the elections I draw upon more specific studies including studies of election results and surveys of candidates.

There is plenty left to be researched on the subject of Kasbah 3. I would implore future researchers with more time and resources than myself to dig deeper into the organization and planning of Kasbah 3. Hopefully, with the ascendance of a politics that reflects Kasbah 3, this body of research will begin to emerge.

Research Findings and Analysis

Kais Saied and Revolution at the Ballot Box

Through Tunisia's history as a young democracy, Islamism and Bourguibism, an establishment movement advocating for the maintenance of the Bourguiba's political order, have thrived at the ballot box. The shift toward these movements after the fall of Ben Ali should be seen as reactionary rather than organic. Uncertainty in the wake of the Revolution pushed the populous toward familiar political figures and movements, but each subsequent election after the Revolution demonstrates an erosion in the support for these groups. The gradual erosion of support for Ennahdha and the breakup of Nidaa Tunis, Essebsi's secular Bourguibist party, demonstrate that these movements were vestiges of Tunisia's old political era. The victory of Kais Saied ushers in a new era of Tunisian politics, one constructed by ideas and movements formed in the Revolution rather than by Tunisia's dictatorial past.

The longevity and stability of the Bourguiba regime can be attributed, in part, to a suppression of political Islam in Tunisia. By exiling the Ennahdha

movement, advocating for liberal social causes, and expanding secular francophone education, Bourguiba positioned himself in opposition to political Islam.⁴ While Ben Ali did not pursue these particular reforms as heavily, by maintaining a status quo under which political Islam was banned, he reinforced notion of Tunisia as a secular nation.⁵ With the fall of Ben Ali came the predictable return of the political Islamist movement. After nearly a half century of dictatorship preceded by French colonial rule, the extent of the popularity of political Islam was a mystery. The movement's strength would become the first political question – in both order and importance – after the Revolution and would dominate both the 2011 National Constitutional Authority elections and the 2014 Legislative and Presidential elections.

The 2011 and 2014 elections were centered on reaction and counter-reaction to the issues of secularity and political Islam. The 2011 elections proved Ennahdha and their political Islamist movement to be simultaneously Tunisia's strongest political movement and one that failed to gain the support of the majority of Tunisians. Longstanding perceptions of Ennahdha as an upstanding opposition religious movement rooted in local connection facilitated a sweeping victory. Capturing 89 of the NCA's 217 seats, Ennahdha formed a coalition with the secular Ettakatol and CPR parties in what became known as the Troika Government. The Troika government quickly became mired in controversy after it took a number of steps to establish its authority over the existing technocratic government and beyond its mandate to draft the

⁴Marion Bouldy, "The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia since Independence."

⁵Razaman Yildirim, "Transformation of the Ennahdha Movement from Islamic Jama'ah to Political Party." *Insight Turkey* 19, no. 2 (2017): 189-214, www.jstor.org/stable/26300510.

constitution. Numerous delays in the constitutional drafting process, accusations that Ennahdha sought to implement Sharia law into the constitution, and increasing violence spurred by Islamists sparked protests demanding a rapid and equitable constitutional process. Eventually The National Dialogue Quartet brought the Troika Government to the table, the constitution was completed, and the stage was set for the 2014 elections.⁶

The strength of Ennahdha demanded a united and experienced secular opposition. Essebsi, as former Foreign Affairs Minister under Bourguiba and interim President of the technocratic government, emerged as the consensus candidate for the secular movement. The attempted power grab of the Troika government, increasing Islamist violence, and the strength of Essebsi as a candidate contributed to newly founded Nidaa Tunis's success in 2014. The first round of the Presidential election revealed itself to be a re-litigation of the 2011-2014 period. Former Troika President Moncef Marzouki, backed by Ennahdha, placed second in the Presidential run-offs edged out by Essebsi. Essebsi's second round victory and Nidaa Tunis's success winning a plurality of seats in the Parliament re-established secular control of Tunisia's government.⁷

The 2011 and 2014 elections marked a choice between actors whose politics were largely understood through the lens of the pre-revolutionary era. Tunisia's 2018 Local elections represented the first opportunity for movements and ideologies constructed after the Revolution to find electoral success. Amidst

⁶ Crown Center for Middle East Studies, "Islam and Democracy in Practice: Tunisia's Ennahdha Nine Months In" Brandeis University, September, 2012, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/pdfs/1-100/meb66.pdf>.

⁷Muddassir Quamar, "Tunisia: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2014" Contemporary Review of the Middle East, DOI: 10.1177/2347798915603277, 2015.

eroding support for Ennahdha and Nidaa Tunis, independent lists claimed a plurality of local seats. The relatively poor results for both Ennahdha and Nidaa Tunis signal not only a distaste for Tunisia's political establishment, but also a decline in the import of the question of secularity.⁸

The success of independents would suggest the emergence of an anti-establishment politics possibly similar to that of Kasbah 3 but an opinion survey of locally elected officials by Democracy Index complicates this narrative. The study finds that while Independent candidates generally distrust political institutions more than other parties, they were not more likely to have participated in strikes or protests and were no more supportive of sit-ins and protests during the Revolution than other parties (see Appendix A). Additionally, independent lists were second only to Nidaa Tunis in their inclusion of former members of Ben Ali's governing party, the RCD (see Appendix B).⁹ The 2018 elections demonstrate a change in the mindset of the Tunisian electorate. The black and white contrast of the question of secularity ceded ground to more vague notions of institutional support and trust in government. While the 2019 elections did establish new political forces that exist outside of the secular-religious dominated by Ennahdha and Nidaa Tunis, they were ill-defined and unstructured.

The collapse Ennahdha and the Boruguibist movement continued in the 2019 Legislative and Presidential elections, but this time a clearer politics emerged in its place. The first round of the Presidential elections saw an

⁸Aytuğ Şaşmaz, Alexandra Blackman, and Julia Clark, "One third of new municipal councilors in Tunisia are from independent lists. How independent are they?" Democracy International, July 2018,

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/530792e4b04ca998b96b34/t/5b636a3f2b6a28b01c12baf2/1533241921425/lacs_brief_independents.pdf

⁹ Ibid.

implosion of the remnants of the Nidaa Tunis movement. The breakup of the party following a long spell of internal disputes since the election of Essebsi left the mostly coalitional movement without a torchbearer.¹⁰ While eventually independent candidate and current Defense Minister Zbidi became the heir to the movement, Bourguibist's failure to organize resulted in a fourth-place finish for Zbidi. Ennahdha's candidate Mourou did not fare much better, finishing in third.

¹¹ Advancing to the runoff were two independent candidates with little institutional backing: Kais Saied who promised a fundamental restructuring of the state and Nabil Karoui whose vague platform mostly focused on addressing poverty.¹²

With a shoestring campaign and only a small amount of advertising, Saied decisively won the runoff election with 74% of the vote.¹³ Saied's politics neither resemble that of Ennahdha nor any of the Bourguibist parties. Instead, Saied's politics take advantage of the political void demonstrated by the 2019 independent movement to implement a politics in accordance with the revolutionary values of Kasbah 3. Saied, who attended Kasbah 3 himself, sought to build a state independent of Western thought and centralized power.^{14,15} His

¹⁰ Asma Ajroudi & Ramy Allahou, "Tunisia's Nidaa Tunis Movement in Shambles Amid Political Turbulence" Al Jazeera, December 5, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/tunisia-nidaa-tounes-shambles-political-turbulence-181202090020299.html>.

¹¹ Rim Hana. "Tunisia- The ISIE releases official results for 2019 early presidential elections" Tunisie Numerique. September 17th, 2019. <https://news-tunisia.tunisienumerique.com/tunisia-the-isie-releases-official-results-for-2019-early-presidential-elections/>.

¹² Munathara, "Tonight's #Tunisia Debate" Periscope, Accessed December 8th, 2019. <https://www.pscp.tv/w/1yoKMzYoAZoGQ>.

¹³ BBC, "Tunisia election: Kais Saied to become President" October 14th, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50032460>.

¹⁴ AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

¹⁵ Kais Saied, "Its Religion is Islam" Commencement at the University of Tunis, September 14th, 2018, <https://ultratunisia.ultrasawt.com/>

victory not only was symbolic of Kasbah 3 as eight years later Saied successfully replaces the Essebsi government, but also runs in accordance with a Kasbah 3 ideology that demands separation from the West, uprooting of corruption, and the destruction of an old political establishment. Saied's victory marks the long-delayed success of Kasbah 3 by empowering a politics independent of the pre-revolutionary secular-religious distinction imposed by Ben Ali and Bouguiba.

Spontaneity, Secularism, and Legitimate Revolution

Unlike Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2, the Kasbah 3 movement was seen by many as a radical attempt to disrupt revolutionary progress. Essebsi attacked the protesters as “extremists” stating that they were “actors who everyone knows.”¹⁶ These vague accusations levied by Essebsi, seeking to paint the sit-in as an Islamist plot, stoked fears that Islamists could attempt to compromise the progress of the Revolution.¹⁷ Essebsi calculated these accusations with the aim of removing perceptions of the movement's spontaneity and secularism, two characteristics that were closely associated with the Tunisian Revolution at-large. The hostile reaction and attempts to delegitimize Kasbah 3 by elites informs later attempts to delegitimize new political movements. Examining criticisms of Tunisian political movements on the basis of their secularity and spontaneity

الإسلام دينها قيس سعيد يغوص ويحفر في-العلاقة بين-الدين والدولة/التراغونس/سياسة/تحليلات
Obaid, Kirkuk 2019.

¹⁶ H. Manel, “Kasbah 3 est Illégitime, il est orchestré par des extrémistes qui veulent freiner les élections...” Tuniscope, July 18th, 2011,

<https://www.tuniscope.com/article/8266/actualites/politique/kasbah-034215>

¹⁷ Omar Tiss, “Urgent: BCE: Le sit-in de La Kasbah 3 n'avait pas de raison d'être” Tunisie Numerique, July 19th, 2011,

<https://www.tunisienumerique.com/urgent-bce-le-sit-in-de-la-kasbah-3-navait-pas-de-raisons-detre/>.

reveals a pattern of attempts to limit the popular conception of the Tunisian revolutionary spirit by excluding Kasbah 3 politics.

Kasbah 3 took place in a fundamentally different environment from Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2. Protesters had successfully ousted the Ben Ali regime and any remaining official no longer sought to maintain the power of the regime. Additionally, Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 took place under a destabilized government that had little ability to control the protest movements. Kasbah 3, meanwhile, occurred under a popular technocratic government which had established a new police force.¹⁸ The disorganization of the Ben Ali government and the scale of Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 allowed them to take place relatively spontaneously whereas at Kasbah 3, the failure of organizers to obtain a protest permit resulted in a police crackdown and the arrest of 34 individuals.¹⁹ The consequences of the failure to obtain this permit is demonstrative of both a change in the conditions under which Kasbah 3 took place and the consequences of disorganization for the protesters.

In addition to the stability of the technocratic government, Kasbah 3 took place months after many considered the Revolution to be over. The protest sought to challenge this notion, but the fact remained that the first two sit-ins satisfied the revolutionary appetite of many Tunisians. Lacking enough popular support for a spontaneous protest, Kasbah 3 organizers took to a familiar tool of the Revolution: Facebook. The Facebook page, created March 12, 2011, formed a

¹⁸ AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

¹⁹ Business News, “Kasbah 3 : les raisons d'un échec annoncé” July 18th, 2011, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/kasbah-3--les-raisons-dun-ec-annonce,519,25717,1>.

space in which the planning of the sit-in could be crowd-sourced.²⁰ The page published drafts of demands for public comment, interacting with those who had input in the comment section (see Appendix C).²¹ While these demands went through a long editing process, there were many other posts which made informal demands including one which called for the removal of Essebsi and provided options for his replacement.²² Who exactly made decisions as to this editing process and the publishing of informal demands remains unclear. Even the first post declaring the official date of Kasbah 3, only took place five days before the event itself.²³ What is apparent is that there was some sort of group or individual that had been planning the sit-in for months.

The space did not exist solely for planning the Revolution, but also for forging an anti-Western, anti-Zionist and anti-RCD politics through sharing memes, articles, and images (see Appendix D).^{24,25,26} The posts mostly attack Essebsi, the technocratic government, and the RCD for stymying the Revolution and promise a return to the Kasbah as a response. The page sought to

²⁰ إعتصام القصبية, Home Page, Facebook, Accessed December 7th, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/?ref=page_internal.

²¹ إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "ما رأيكم في هذه المطالب و ما تعليقكم حول هذه الأسماء؟؟؟" Facebook, July 20th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/149554785120565/?type=3&theater>

²² إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "وعدنا و سنفي انشاء الله" Facebook, March 29th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/120680541341323/?type=3&theater>.

²³ إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "إعتصام العودة" Facebook, July 10th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/145140975561946/?type=3&theater>.

²⁴ إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "على ما افاد مراسل وكالة فرانس برس" Facebook, March 16th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/117974008278643/?type=3&theater>.

²⁵ إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "نحن لانعترف بإسرائيل" Facebook, March 15th, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/130222567053787/?type=3&theater>.

²⁶ إعتصام القصبية ٢٠١١، "دخلنا منذ قليل يوم 24 افريل" Facebook, April 23rd, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/E3tisam.el9asba.3/photos/a.116976275045083/125814767494567/?type=3&theater>.

simultaneously build a politics, a community, and a movement that would culminate in Kasbah 3. While not a tool for the construction of spontaneous movements, Facebook was vital to the existence of a protest that aimed to build a political movement and community rather than topple a government. Spontaneity might have been a central component of the Revolution under the Ben Ali regime, but in order for the Revolution to continue under a popular technocratic government, it needed to take to social media to increase its reach, remain out of reach of the authorities, and build a community of dedicated ideologues.

The lack of transparency in the planning of Kasbah 3, its use of Facebook as a crutch, the relatively small turnout, and the ultimate failure of the protest left the movement open to criticism from Essebsi's technocratic government.²⁷ The validity of Essebsi's attacks, suggesting Kasbah 3 to be an Islamist plot, were disputed and unverifiable, but they signal a larger trend of post-Revolution efforts to stoke fear surrounding political Islam.^{28,29} Bourguibists continued to utilize this attack through the 2019 Presidential elections directing them toward any movement that sought to oppose Bourguibism.³⁰ The fear evoked in these attacks is certainly legitimate, political Islam until the Revolution was the sole political threat to the Ben Ali and Bourguiba regimes. The fall of the Ben Ali regime and subsequent democratization surely provoked a fear that political Islam would fill

²⁷ Business News, "Kasbah 3 : les raisons d'un échec annoncé."

²⁸ Omar Tiss, "Urgent: BCE: Le sit-in de La Kasbah 3 n'avait pas de raison d'être"

²⁹ Omar Tiss, "Rached Ghannouchi: Ennahdha est contre la violence et soutient les revendications des sit-inneurs de Kasbah 3" Tunisie Numerique, July 19th, 2011, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/rached-ghannouchi-ennahdha-est-contre-la-violence-et-soutient-les-revendications-des-sit-inneurs-de-kasbah-3/>.

³⁰ Business News, "Témoignage de Jaouhar Ben M'barek à propos de Kais Saïed" September 16th, 2019, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/temoignage-de-jaouhar-ben-mbarek-a-propos-de-kais-saied,520,91069,3>.

the void and in 2014 those fears were confirmed with the victory of Ennahdha. The subsequent decline in Islamist power caused this argument to crumble and the labeling of Kais Saied as an Islamist in the 2019 Presidential election demonstrated its weakness.³¹ While these attacks might have been effective enough when Essebsi used them to target the Kasbah 3 protesters, Essebsi's own success in defeating political Islam at the ballot box quelled fears of this threat.³²

Attacks directed toward Kasbah 3 on the basis of its secularism and spontaneity sought to discredit a movement that threatened to create a new politics to challenge Bourguibism. As those legitimate fears have receded, the continued attacks on movements presenting alternatives to Bourguibism have declined in efficacy. The result of these receding fears is a decline in the impact of labelling movements as Islamist, allowing opportunities for new styles of politics rooted neither in Islamism nor Bourguibism to emerge. This shifting dynamic has propelled movements constructed during the Kasbah 3 sit-in to the forefront of Tunisian politics.

Intellectuals, Grassroots Movements and Resuscitating the Revolution

The fall of Ben Ali opened the door for the participation of academics and activists in the political sphere. Kasbah 3, as a relatively small movement within the Revolution, provided an opportunity for those interested in more extreme ideals to stake out their territory as dedicated revolutionaries. Kasbah 3 politics,

³¹ Kaouther Larbi, "Outsider Kais Saied, backed by Islamist party, set to win presidency in Tunisia" October 14th, 2019, Times of Israel, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/outsider-kais-saied-backed-by-islamist-party-set-to-win-presidency-in-tunisia/>.

³²AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

defined by an ant-establishment effort to keep the Revolution alive, has been adopted by a number of political figures and organizations emerging from Kasbah 3 movement. These people and organizations have sought to reinvigorate the revolutionary spirit for the purpose of building a movement to challenge elite institutions.

The most successful, of course, has been Tunisian President Kais Saied and the ideological movement surrounding him. Many in the Kais Saied's inner circle attended the sit-in and their ideologies often closely align with Kasbah 3 ideals. Through communication with journalists and sit-in attendees I confirmed that activist and public Saied supporter Sonia Charbti and campaign advisor Abderraouf Betaieb both attended Kasbah 3.^{33,34} Betaieb, a former diplomat and legal scholar, was appointed Cabinet Minister shortly after Saied assumed office.³⁵ Charbti, while not directly tied to the Kais Saied campaign, posted photos on her Facebook of her campaigning with Saied almost four months before he officially announced his campaign (see Appendix E).^{36,37} Additionally, Charbti has produced work for an organization by the name of Ligue des Forces de

³³ AJ Braverman, 2019, Twitter Direct Message with journalist, December 2, 2019.

³⁴ The journalist from who I obtained this information also said that they thought Saied and Betaieb met at Kasbah 3 but that they could not be sure.

³⁵ Il Boursa, "Le Diplome Abderraouf Betaieb, serait désigné Chef de cabinet du Président de la République" October 23rd, 2019.

https://www.ilboursa.com/marches/le-diplome-abderraouf-betaieb-serait-designe-chef-de-cabin-et-du-president-de-la-republique_19332

³⁶ Tunisie Numerique, "VIDEO : Kais Saied annonce son intention de se porter candidat aux prochaines présidentielles" December 28th, 2017,

<https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-video-kais-saied-annonce-son-intention-de-se-porter-candidat-aux-prochaines-presidentielles/>.

³⁷ Sonia Charbti, "Uncaptioned Image" Facebook, Accessed December 8th, 2019,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1615733678500669&set=picfp.100001921575023&type=3&theater>.

Tunisie Libre (FTL).³⁸ Kais Saied's closest campaign advisor Ridha Mekki founded the FTL during the Revolution in 2011 and Kais Saied is known to attend meetings.^{39,40}

The FTL is an organization dedicated to creating “anti-system” political movements.⁴¹ According to their Facebook page the FTL has a loose structure suggesting no formal membership or leadership, however it is clear that Mekki plays a large role as a spokesperson, thinker and activist.⁴² Mekki is no stranger to taking on large institutions; he gained political experience after founding Wataj, an organization which sought to challenge the Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie, Tunisia's national student union.⁴³ His action with the FTL has been no less bold. Mekki has frequently called for a fundamental restructuring of the post-Revolution democratic order.

Mekki spelled out his views on what he sees as a failed post-Revolution politics in an article posted on the FTL Facebook page entitled, “Is the idea - the historical bloc - a way out of the disruption of the Tunisian Revolution?” The article does not seek to directly answer the question, but rather puts forth a

³⁸ Sonia Charbti, “من هي قوى تونس الحرة” LinkedIn, Accessed December 8th, 2019, <https://www.slideshare.net/SoniaCharbti/-8295333>.

³⁹ Khaled Boumiza, “Le secret de «Robocop» levé. Simple devanture publique pour les FTL de «Lénine»?”

⁴⁰ Maisie Odone, “Jemna's Land Collective Looks to New President With Hope” October 31st, 2019, Meshkal, <http://mesh-kal.com/2019/10/31/jemnas-collective-land-association-looks-to-new-president-with-hope/>.

⁴¹ Khaled Boumiza, “Le secret de «Robocop» levé. Simple devanture publique pour les FTL de «Lénine»?” September 17th, 2019, Africa Manager, <https://africanmanager.com/le-secret-de-robocop-leve-simple-devanture-publique-pour-les-ftl-de-lenine/>.

⁴² Ligue Des Forces De La Tunisie Libre, “About” Accessed December 8th, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/LIGUE-DES-FORCES-DE-LA-TUNISIE-LIBRE-126887614060891/about/?ref=page_internal

⁴³ Khaled Boumiza, “Le secret de «Robocop» levé. Simple devanture publique pour les FTL de «Lénine»?”

doctrine. Declaring the “constitution in the trash,” Mekki cites 30 reasons why Tunisia has struggled to fulfill the promise of the Revolution. This list paints a picture of a Tunisian state that has undergone transition in little more than its form of government. Mekki calls the “democratic transition” nothing but a “slogan... that relieves the state of tyranny towards political freedom.” He makes clear that it is not the democratic transition itself that he opposes but rather the use of it as a talking point to obscure the failure of the government to sufficiently provide for the people. Instead of using the democratic transition to explain away the failures of the new system, Mekki suggests a “qualitative transition in the state and society.” Mekki’s qualitative transition would not be controlled by any one group, but rather would be simultaneously disparate and adverse to coalitional politics which Mekki argues prevent the achievement of revolutionary social change. Mekki suggests that given the already established unity of the Tunisian people across political blocs as proven by the Revolution, a “political restructuring of the State from the bottom up” that disperses state power would result in the type of economic and social change that the current government has failed to deliver. Ultimately, Mekki blames elites for co-opting the successes of the Revolution and believes the Revolution to be fundamentally unfinished.⁴⁴

Mekki has believed in the longevity of this revolutionary project since before Kasbah 3. In a May 2011, in an interview with Francophone newspaper *Le Presse*, Mekki expressed his optimism at the possibility of a continuation of the

⁴⁴ Ridha Mekki, “هل تمثل فكرة - الكتلة التاريخية - مخرجا لتعطل الثورة التونسية؟” *Modern Discussion*, May 19th, 2015, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=468588&fbclid=IwAR2fstDSYZcRU1OTaMP_Dq6xwOLuDNfnC-E9g4Y7FaLTqafAeJzcf94Jz0. Trans. Rym Bouderbala (La Marsa: 2019)

revolution despite the lull in actions after Kasbah 2 stating that, “the people need time to sharpen their weapons.” His interview further reinforces the notion of the FTL as an organization dedicated to structural rather than ideological change.

According to Mekki this structural change should come in the form of a state that has broad social and economic responsibilities – not interventionist or Keynesian ones – and where control is granted to regions over a central government.⁴⁵

Kasbah 3 politics need not propose a specific solution to the failures of Tunisian institutions as Mekki’s does. The movement was, by nature, vaguer and based on a revolutionary coalition rather than the thoughts of an individual. It did, however, closely align with Mekki’s belief in the continuation of revolutionary movement against Western and elite influence. Among a number of other demands specific to the Revolution, the sit-in sought to continue the Revolution while demanding further inclusion of a diverse coalition of revolutionary youth in the High Political Reform Commission, established to oversee the implementation of revolutionary reforms. The official demands of Kasbah 3 also called for the cancellation of debt and disentanglement from foreign influences (see Appendix F).⁴⁶ It is in these demands that the doctrine of Ridha Mekki, the politics of Kasbah 3, and the campaign of Kais Saied intersect.

In alignment with the ideology of Mekki, Kais Saied centered his campaign on empowering localities and decentralizing government.⁴⁷ While he advocated for a conservative social politics, Saied continually insisted that these

⁴⁵ Samir Dridi, “Tête pensante de la campagne de Kais Saied: Ridha Lénine, un stratège passé quasiment inaperçu” October 17th, 2019, La Presse, <https://lapresse.tn/29866/tete-pensante-de-la-campagne-de-kais-saied-ridha-lenine-un-strategie-passe-quasiment-inapercu/>.

⁴⁶ “المطالب الأساسية المنفق عليها على حد الآن لتكون مطالب شعبية في إعتصام”, إعتصام القصبية 463 Facebook.

⁴⁷ Munathara, “Tonight’s #Tunisia Debate”

personal beliefs were not part of his political goals. Saied's politics go beyond the reforms suggested by Mekki. In a 2018 lecture at the University of Tunis titled "Its Religion is Islam" (referencing to Article One of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution) Saied spells out his views on the influence of the West and Islamic thought on Tunisian politics. The lecture covers the relationship between religion, the state, and a third distinction made by Kais Saied: the nation.⁴⁸

In the lecture, Saied argues that constitutional declaration of a state religion is a Western ideal and that Islamic thought has always considered the question of state religion as settled, not a necessary aspect to include in a constitution. The inclusion of such a clause, according to Saied, puts the state in the difficult position of litigating the meaning of such a clause which inevitably forces the state to make legal judgements on what is and is not Islamic. He cites Somalia, Egypt, and Iran as examples of Western intervention resulting in the creation of such clauses. For Saied the role of Islam should be present in the nation not the state. It is not something that should be codified or embedded in the state, rather it should be forged through social and political efforts. This distinction informs Saied's claim that his socially conservative stances are not a mark of Islamism, but rather politically insignificant personal views. The distinction here can be made between what Mekki conception "ideology" and structural reform. Saied's ideology is undoubtedly rooted in Islam, but under Mekki's definition of ideology, Saied's political project is not ideological, it is

⁴⁸ Kais Saied, "Its Religion is Islam" Commencement at the University of Tunis, September 14th, 2018, <https://ultratunisia.ultrasawt.com/>
الإسلام دينها قيس سعيد يغوص ويحفر في - العلاقة بين الدين و الدولة / الترانس / سياسة / تحليلات
Obaid, Kirkuk 2019.

structural. While skepticism of Mekki's conception of ideology – which places structural changes outside its scope – is reasonable, it is still helpful in understanding how Saied thinks of the relationship between his conservative beliefs and his political platform of decentralization. For Saied, the issue of Islam is not a state issue, it is a national one. It is not for a constitution to dictate but is rather for the people to decide. Such conceptions of the relationship between Islam and the state expand upon ideals of Kasbah 3 that seek a revolt against Western thought and calls for a reimagination of the state.⁴⁹

Not all movements emerging from Kasbah 3 built upon the sit-in's ideology in this way. Constitutional scholar Jaouhar Ben M'Barek, an attendee of the sit-in, later formed the Destourna Network.⁵⁰ Founded after protests in Mahdia calling for youth participation in the constitutional writing process, the Destourna Network has adopted causes related to constitutional issues ranging from women's rights to civil liberties.^{51,52} Ben M'Barek has since become an ascendant figure in Tunisian politics. Neither an ally nor an enemy of Kais Saied, Ben M'Barek has been openly critical of Saied's policies, but a careful look at his criticisms reveals their common connection to Kasbah 3 ideology. While outspoken in his criticisms on Saied's vision of the structure of the Tunisian government and his socially conservative politics, Ben M'Barek has praised Saied as a trustworthy figure citing his dedication to revolutionary ideals.⁵³ While

⁴⁹ Kais Saied, "Its Religion is Islam"

⁵⁰ AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

⁵¹ Participedia, "Tharek (T7arek)" Accessed December 8, 2019, <https://participedia.net/organization/6253>.

⁵² Arab.org, "Destourna Beja" Accessed December 8, 2019, <https://arab.org/directory/doustourna-beja/>.

⁵³ Business News, "Témoignage de Jaouhar Ben M'barek à propos de Kais Saïed"

the ideologies and politics of Saied and Ben M'Barek differ, they have a common root in Kasbah 3 politics.

The Tunisian Revolution marked the first opportunity since the nation's independence to form a politics separate from Bourguiba, Ben Ali, and Islam. Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 were vital to the success of the Revolution as a project of democratic transition, but they failed to form a new politics to stand in contrast with old political dynamics. Kasbah 3 sought not only to reinforce its vision of a successful democratic transition, but also sought to forge a politics centered in revolutionary ideals that could challenge political Islam and Bourguibism. While Kasbah 3 alone did not construct these politics, it provided an opportunity for individuals interested in perpetuating revolutionary politics to identify themselves, make connections, and emerge into public politics. The movements that emerged are not uniform, but they are rooted in an anti-Western, anti-institutional politics that calls for a revival of revolutionary spirit. In the eight years since Kasbah 3, people and organizations like the FTL, Ridha Mekki, Kais Saied, and Jaouhar Ben M'Barek have helped these ideas evolve into more complete theories that can be deployed in traditional political spheres rather than on the streets. The evolution of Kasbah 3 was not instant, but its eventual emergence in the 2019 Presidential election proved its validity as a force in Tunisia's future.⁵⁴

⁵⁴AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

Democracy and Maturity: A Conversation with a Kasbah 3 Convert

I sat down with Firas at his home in La Marsa, a suburb of Tunis. Firas lives in Paris but had returned to Tunisia while awaiting a new work visa. He had just returned from a walk in the woods when we met for our interview. His dog had caught two Grouse which he was in the process of defeathering. Before he moved abroad for work, Firas lived in Tunis. During the Revolution he attended all three sit-ins though he made clear that he attended Kasbah 3 not as an ideologue but as a supportive observer. He believed that the Revolution had ended with Kasbah 2 but sympathized with the goals of the protest. Now, after nearly a decade of a stagnant economy and political gridlock, he thinks differently about the sit-in, its goals, and the politics that emerged.⁵⁵

Firas's initial skepticism of Kasbah 3 stemmed largely from a desire to begin the process of rebuilding the nation's government. Pressures such as rising debt and a spiraling economy created an environment in which Tunisian citizens, especially young people, sought greater stability. According to Firas there was a sentiment that "we had what we wanted" and that Kasbah 3 potentially threatened it. While he agreed with broader aims to root out corruption and the RCD, he felt that Tunisia was ready to move out of a state of revolution.⁵⁶

Firas also described a motivation of Kasbah 3 that I came across little evidence to support, but nevertheless is worthy of consideration. Pinning Tunisia's current political challenges on the 2014 Constitution, Firas stated that, "Kasbah 1 was right" in that it called for a change in government but not a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

destruction of the 1959 Constitution and that “Kasbah 3 was also right” in what he saw as an attempt to push for a new constitution not written through a democratic process but on the terms of the protesters. While Firas had celebrated Kasbah 2’s success, today he fears that the election of a body to write the 2014 Constitution caused an entrenchment of Islamist power. According to Firas, the protesters at Kasbah 3 understood this threat and believed that a democratically drafted constitution would result in an entrenched of the politics they feared. This suggestion that Kasbah 3 politics were anti-democratic cannot be confirmed but also should not be dismissed. On the surface an anti-democratic politics seems fundamentally incongruent with Kasbah 3, but many structural changes that protesters sought were unlikely to be a product of a constitution drafted by a democratically elected body. The interest of any elected body with the opportunity to draft a constitution is to entrench power both for the politicians who have been elected and the body itself. Unsurprisingly, the constitution drafted by the National Constituent Assembly (which essentially acted as a parliament) left little power to the executive, the courts or to local governments. The protesters of Kasbah 3 wanted the new constitution to be the product of the Revolution, not the result of a process occurring years after the Revolution had ceased. Although the suggestion that Kasbah 3’s aims were anti-democratic is questionable given that its demands included a solidification of the election date, it is worth considering the possibility that this strand of politics existed within the movement.^{57,58}

⁵⁷ “المطالب الأساسية المنفق عليها على حد الآن لتكون مطالب شعبية في إعتصام”، إعتصام القصبة 3 Facebook.

⁵⁸ AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

Firas thoroughly refuted arguments that Kasbah 3 was an Islamist movement but nuanced this by admitting that the fears propelling these accusations were legitimate. “Now when you call them Islamists people sometimes laugh at you,” he quipped, but he also described the fear during the Revolution that Islamists would co-opt the movement. According to Firas this made it “easy for the establishment to criticize [Kasbah 3] by saying ‘it’s Islamist’.” Firas sees the invalidation of these accusations over the last several years as central to the success of Kasbah 3 politics today stating, “one of the things that helped it... to become what it is today – accepted – is that the Islamist fear is not the same from 2011 to now.” It also took time though, the way Firas sees it, “Kasbah 3 lived for 8 years now and now it evolved with democracy and now we have a President from Kasbah 3. So it is like Kasbah 3 is living again a little bit, but more mature.” This perception of maturity is essential to understanding the initial failure and deferred success of Kasbah 3. The sentiment that Kasbah 3 was inimical to focusing on debt and improving stability stemmed from perceptions that the movement sought only to disrupt. Eight years of constructing civil society organizations, making arguments in the press, and cultivating political candidates has allowed the movement to portray itself as more serious in its ability to carry out its goals.⁵⁹

In the 2019 Presidential elections, Firas voted for Kais Saied. Describing the first time he read his platform Firas said, “I totally understood what he wanted because I had all of what I had lived during Kasbah living again.” Bourguibism

⁵⁹ AJ Braverman, 2019, Interview with Kasbah 3 attendee, La Marsa, November 26, 2019.

seeks to draw upon the nostalgia of national unity and stability. Islamism seeks to draw upon nostalgia rooted in religion. The Revolution, however, evokes ripe memories of possibility reminding people of a time where they had the power to topple governments. With a platform of structural reforms, this feeling of possibility was not just beneficial to Kais Saied, it was necessary to build a coalition large enough to give him a mandate. Possibly its most crucial asset, the ability of the Kais Saied campaign to evoke the collective memory of the Revolution enabled them to build a coalition across religious-secular divisions.

Nearly nine years after the Revolution, the movement remains alive in the memory of the Tunisian people. By evoking a nostalgia for this time of possibility, Kais Saied built a mandate for the reconstruction of the Tunisian government on the terms of the Revolution. While the opinions of Firas are certainly not representative of everyone, they are instructive as to how a political outsider, using a sit-in of a couple hundred radicals as a springboard, reconstructed the Revolution in the minds of millions.

Conclusion

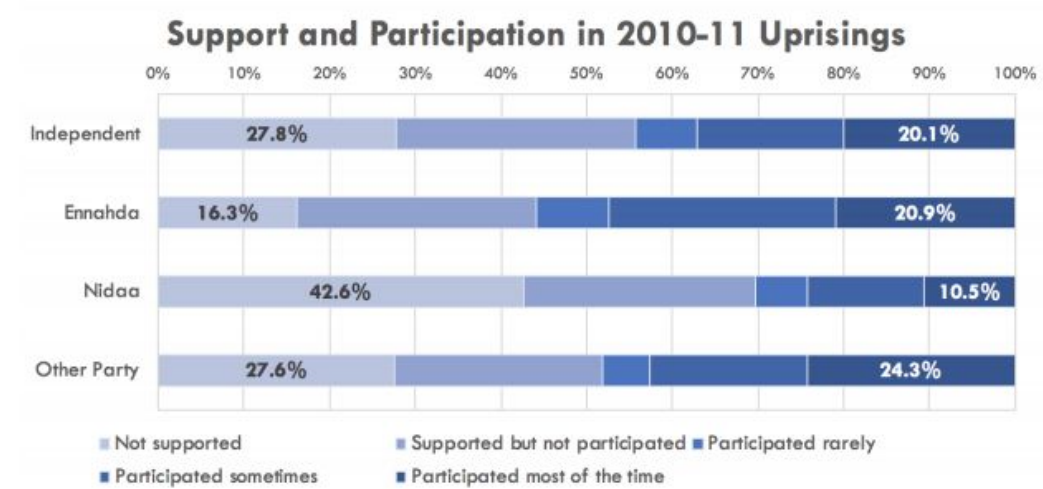
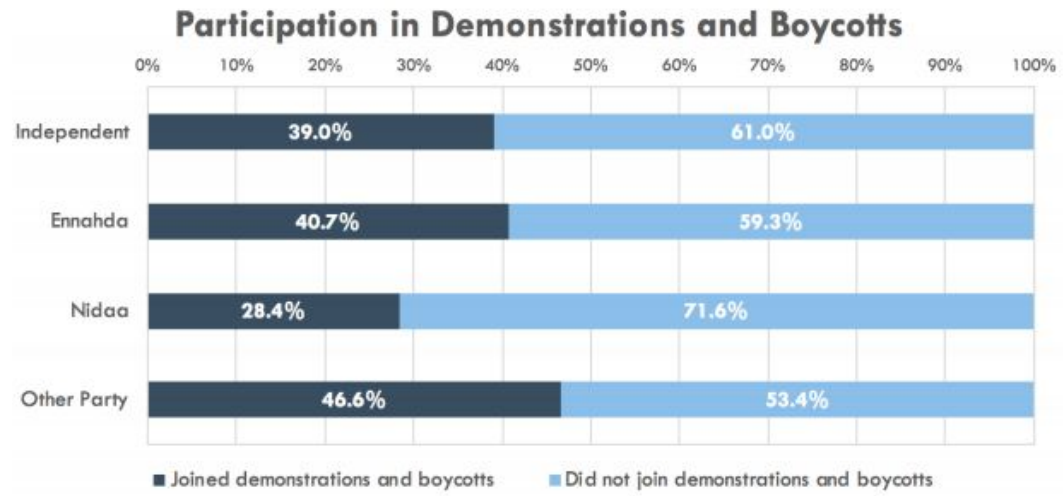
Little can be definitively said about Kasbah 3. Who attended, their exact goals, and what took place is largely unknown. It is possible that the accusations against it are true. It is possible that Islamists planned the sit-in as Essebsi's accusations suggest and it is possible that the movement was indeed planned as an anti-democratic one however these statements cannot be definitive. What we

do know is that the movement was diverse and the aims not universally agreed upon, we know the official demands and statements as posted on the Facebook page, and we know the movements founded by its attendees. From this information, a picture of a revolutionary, anti-Western, and anti-establishment politics can be pieced together.

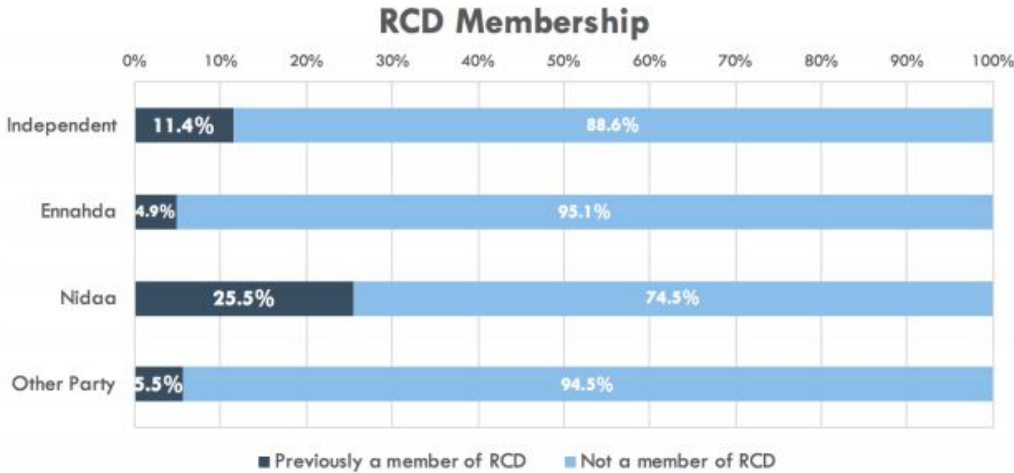
Saied's landslide victory marked the emergence of a new politics rooted in a reimagining of the state inspired in accordance with the Revolutionary ideals of Kasbah 3. While Saied is the current torchbearer of the Kasbah 3 movement, he – by no means – has a monopoly on this politics. The fading religious-secular paradigm has opened the door for others who build their ideologies to appeal to Tunisia's revolutionary, anti-establishment spirit. While Saied has built on Kasbah 3 politics with his own theories about the nature of the state, others like Jaouhar Ben M'Barek have had success with other constructions. Evoking a revolutionary politics presents an alternative to appeals to the traditional paths of Tunisian politics: political Islam and Bourguibism. Whether this politics will continue to ascend remains to be seen, but what is certain is that eight years after the Revolution, movements, ideologies, and individuals related to Kasbah 3 have firmly planted their roots in Tunisian politics. An echo of Kasbah 3, the 2019 Presidential elections have empowered a movement that sees past the secular-religious dynamic of pre-revolutionary Tunisia.

Appendices

Appendix A



Appendix B



Appendix C



الجمعة السوداء

نحن شباب ثورة تونس، شباب ثورة الكرامة والحرية، لئن عبرنا طيلة 6 أشهر منذ اندلاع قتل الثورة المباركة على تمسكنا بتحقيق المطالب الشرعية التي لا يختلف عليها إثنان من الشعب التونسي والتي تبلورت بمرور الأيام لترسي في 15 جويلية 2011 باعتماد القصة 3 على هذه المطالب:

1. إعادة هيكلة «الهيئة العليا لتحقيق أهداف الثورة» بإقصاء «دعاة التطبيع
2. ضرورة تشريك الشباب
3. إقالة وزير العدل والداخلية
4. إستقلال القضاء
5. محاسبة قتلة الشهداء و رموز الفساد
6. تفعيل العفو التشريعي العام
7. التمسك بموعد الإنتخابات في 23 أكتوبر.

ورغم شرعية مطالبنا ووعينا بحساسية الوضع و **عدم مطالبتنا بإسقاط الحكومة** قوبلت مسيرات شباب الثورة بوحشية قوات الأمن "الذين إحتفينا بهم بالورود في القصة 3" من ضرب وإهانات وإعتقالات فقد توضح أن النظام السياسي الحالي لا يعدو أن يكون لآلة الثورة المضادة والإلتفاف عليها و لذلك نطالب نحن شباب الثورة بما يلي :

إنشاء مجلس أعلى مؤقت للجمهورية التونسية متكون من :
مصطفى الفيلاي . مختار الجياوي . أحمد المستيري . قيس سعيد
مهمته تسيير شؤون البلاد و ضمان إجراء إنتخابات المجلس التأسيسي المقررة يوم 23 أكتوبر في ظروف شفافة و نزهاء والعمل على تحقيق المطالب المذكورة أعلاه .

لذلك نطالب من كل تونسي حر و تونسية حرة وكافة مكونات المجتمع المدني من أحزاب و جمعيات و نقابات المشاركة و دعم **إعتصام القصة 3 يوم جمعة الصمود المقرر في 22 جويلية 2011 على الساعة الثامنة بعد الزوال بالعاصمة** : التعبئة الشعبية من جميع أحياء العاصمة نحو ساحة القصة وفي باقي الولايات : أمام مقر الولاية

إعتصام القصة 3
July 20, 2011

ما رأيكم في هذه المطالب و ما تعليقاتكم حول هذه الأسماء؟

16 22 Comments

Like Comment Share

View 4 more comments

Ahdi Kaddas
لن نخضع لقمعهم سنواصل الكفاح اذن الله
Like · Reply · 8y

إعتصام القصة 3
<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=149099551832755&set=a.116976275045083.21501.116965818379462&type=1&comments>
Like · Reply · 8y

إعتصام القصة 3 voila la liste
Like · Reply · 8y

Erjij Beji d'accord mais juste donnez nous une idée sur chaque personne nommés merci
Like · Reply · 8y

Med Hedi chkoun 7atthom he la3bed hedhom ena we7ed messnes me 3andich thi9a fehom, malla fdaye7 bel esm wallew
1

Write a comment...

Post text: What is your opinion about these demands? What is your comment about the proposed candidates?



إعتصام القصة 3
May 15, 2011 · 🌐

...

نحن لانعترف بإسرائيل



👍 18

2 Comments

Post text: We don't recognize Israel



إعتصام القصة 3
April 23, 2011 · 🌐

...

دخلنا منذ قليل يوم 24 افريل ... انشاء الله يكون يوم عظيم في تاريخ تونس



👍 12

1 Comment

Post text: Long live Tunisia. Long live the youth of the revolution. And glory to the martyrs.

Appendix E



Sonia Charbti added a new photo.
August 9, 2017 · 🌐

[Follow](#) ⋮



👍❤️ 9

1 Comment

Appendix F



Post text:

The main demands agreed upon, by popular demand, for the "Friday return" are:

1. Restructuring the High Political Reform Commission by removing Yadh Ben Achour and Zionist members. Youth from the revolution should be included in the new structure of the institution to maintain balance and ensure the full representation of people of different backgrounds.
2. Resignation of Minister of Interior and Minister of Justice
3. Resignation of the Judiciary
4. Accountability for the killers of martyrs and people charged with corruption
5. Enact general amnesty for remaining political prisoners
6. Adhere to the election date of October 23, ensuring that it is transparent and fair. Prior registration for election should be abandoned and people all that is needed should be an ID.
7. Criminalizing support for Israel and Zionist entities
8. Withdrawal of assembly party licenses
9. Efforts should be taken to cancel all debts
10. No foreign 'guardianship' or interference should be allowed in Tunisian affairs

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