

# The “AKP Model” and Tunisia’s al-Nahda: From Convergence to Competition?

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## ABSTRACT

More than a year after the start of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts, the question of how political Islam will return to regional politics is still open. This article explores the differences between the AKP’s Turkish model and the Tunisian *al-Nahda* movement. The Tunisian and the Turkish case studies are examined and compared on three levels. First of all the historical and structural contexts of the two countries and the relationship between the state and Islam are taken into account. Secondly the two models of political Islam that have developed in Tunisia and Turkey are analyzed. Finally, the two different views of the social, political and economic life proposed by *al-Nahda* in Tunisia and by the AKP in Turkey are compared. By examining the structural differences between these two contexts, and consequently by looking at the two distinctive ways of understanding Islam in public life, the article will also demonstrate how and why the “Turkish model”, as represented by the AKP, cannot be applied to Tunisia, although the al-Nahda has itself embarked on a process of “de-radicalization.”

This paper analyzes the characteristics of the Turkish AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, the Justice and Development Party) and the Tunisian *Harakat al-Nahda* (Renaissance Movement) using a comparative perspective. This analysis follows the recent rehabilitation of the Tunisian Islamist party after the fall of former President Zine al-Abidine Ben ‘Ali and its emergence as the leading political force in Tunisia after taking 89 out of 217 seats in the October 2011 elections for the Constituent Assembly. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that the so-called “Turkish model”—proposed by many scholars and analysts as an example that Tunisia and other countries in the region affected by regime change could follow—is not easily replicable in the post-Arab Spring context. There are three main reasons at different levels why the Tunisian case could be com-

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pared with the Turkish model. At the structural level, the secular nature of the Tunisian institutional context seems to be the closest one to the case of Turkey, particularly when compared to other Arab countries. Secondly, both countries possess an economic system that is sufficiently solid to allow for a significant level of political and institutional stability, the Tunisian post-revolution crisis notwithstanding. Finally, Tunisia, like Turkey, has a moderate Islamic party that aspires to become the leading actor in the democratic transition process. If it is true that Tunisia is the most similar case to that of Turkey across the Arab world, this comparison assumes an even greater significance. It follows that if

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the AKP model cannot be replicated in Tunisia, than it would be reasonable to assume that no other Arab country would be in a position to follow the Turkish path.

The analysis focuses on the models of political Islam that have emerged and developed in both Turkey and Tunisia, starting from the assumption that *al-Nahda* is in a phase of transformation and “institutionalization”, while the AKP has become a structured party whose political maturity is at its peak. In this regard it must be stressed that the article provides a preliminary theoretical framework to understand how the evolution of *al-Nahda* could occur within the new Tunisian context. It is difficult to compare *al-Nahda* and the AKP as the former looks more similar to the previous experiences of Turkish political Islam (until the *Refah* Party government experience in 1996-1997) than to the AKP itself, but there are structural bases for a comparison in so far as the “Turkish model” has been bandied about in Tunisia since the legalization of *al-Nahda* and even more so after its electoral success. Thus, it is important to take into account the official and traditional rhetoric of the Tunisian Islamist party while, at the same time, paying attention to the pragmatism that is leading *al-Nahda* to adapt itself to the post-Ben ‘Ali political landscape.

In this paper the Tunisian and the Turkish case studies are examined and compared on three levels. First of all the historical and structural contexts of the two countries and the relationship between the state and Islam are taken into account. Secondly the two models of political Islam that have developed in Tunisia and Turkey are analyzed, noting that any particular way of interpreting a given culture or religion is conditioned by the socio-political system. Finally, the two different views of the social, political and economic life proposed by *al-Nahda* in Tunisia and by the AKP in Turkey are compared. After such an analysis, the

article shows that the two models cannot be assimilated. On the contrary, they could even be seen as in competition. The AKP in fact could be perceived as an actor trying to expand its influence in the new context following the Arab Spring rather than as a model for their democratization processes. At the same time, *al-Nahda* could be regarded as an alternative model to the AKP for Arab countries, particularly in North Africa.

### **Turkey and Tunisia: Two Different Histories**

It is impossible to study and to analyze the evolution of Islamic-inspired parties that are now operating in Turkey and in Tunisia without taking into consideration their historical and cultural backgrounds which affect the formation of their ideological model of reference. From an historical point of view, the fundamental distinction that can be traced in the evolution of these two countries has to do with the experience of European colonialism. While the current Turkish state, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, was never subjected to any kind of direct foreign domination, Tunisia achieved independence only in 1956, having been a French colony since 1881 and, before that, subject to the dominion of the Ottomans themselves. This historical background has inevitably had an impact on the national political movements that developed in Tunisia, leading to a more pronounced anti-Western sentiment, which was particularly true especially for Islamist movements. The process of modernization and Westernization of the country that Bourguiba conducted on his arrival to power was considered as imposed from abroad, and the Islamist parties identified the influence exerted by the West as the main reason for the supposed decline of Tunisian society and the model on which its traditional Arab-Islamic values were based.

If we consider the imposition of the secular model on political and legal institutions, Turkey and Tunisia followed a similar path. Turkey, since its creation as a modern nation-state, accelerated the process of Westernization, evolving in a rather different manner when compared to the nation-states created in the Arab world following decolonization. The assimilation of values such as secularism, *laïcité*, and the central role of the individual in society has permeated all the institutions and political movements in Turkey, not least those that were inspired by religion. The relationship between the state and religion in Turkey has been managed by institutions set up to control all the activities related to Islam, relegating the religious aspect of Turkish culture to the private sphere. Similarly, the change Habib Bourguiba promoted when it came to the relationship between Islam and the state led to a clear separation between religion and institutions. For instance, in 1956 Bourguiba promulgated the Tunisian Code of Personal Status (CPS), creating a set of modern Westernized legal provisions regulating

family law which were unprecedented in the Arab and Islamic world. Through the CPS, the right to divorce for women was established, while polygamy and repudiation by the husband were outlawed. In many ways, the CPS became the symbol of Bourguiba's attempt to make Tunisia a country at the forefront of modernizing and secular reforms within the Islamic world.<sup>1</sup> However, despite some similarities between the Tunisian and Turkish models of secularization, there are important differences to note. Using the distinction made by Ahmet Kuru in his studies on secularism, it could be said that Tunisia adopted a form

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of secularism that gradually became more similar to "passive secularism", while Turkey on the other hand is an example of "assertive secularism".<sup>2</sup> The first article of the Tunisian constitution states that "Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state: its religion is Islam, its language Arabic and its regime a republic". The Islamic character of the country was, therefore, confirmed by the Consti-

tutional Charter, while the Turkish constitution never mentions Islam and just states (Article 10) that "all individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations". Moreover in Tunisia, especially during the first years of the Ben 'Ali regime in the late 1980s and then again in the late 2000s,<sup>3</sup> the state promoted Islamic values and used, albeit instrumentally, Islamic rhetoric as an element to strengthen regime's legitimacy,<sup>4</sup> while the leaders of the Turkish state have never resorted to the use of Islam for legitimacy purposes.

Movements and parties inspired by the values of Islam have existed in Turkey since the 1950s,<sup>5</sup> but were not granted a public space in compliance with the Kemalist ideology upon which the Turkish constitution was based. Although Turkey's history has seen periods of tension between institutions and religious political parties or movements, the progressive liberalization of the country, especially following the government led by Turgut Özal, gradually allowed all social actors to become part of the political landscape.<sup>6</sup> Thus, religious movements were among the new political entities that could benefit from the climate of openness that has since characterized civil society. It has been through this process of progressive opening that, over recent decades, the presence of parties inspired by Islam in the public sphere has become increasingly important, reaching a climax with the AKP in government since 2002.

Tunisia has witnessed a similar path of political and social openness only after the fall of Ben 'Ali in January 2011. Following independence, Tunisia continued to suppress any form of internal dissent against the regime of both Habib Bourguiba and of Ben 'Ali. Although there were some temporary concessions made to the Islamists, particularly during the first two years of the Ben 'Ali era,<sup>7</sup> not only were organized religious entities always prevented from interfering with public life, but—as in Turkey until the 1990s—the state systematically suppressed them. This political strategy was part of the nature of an authoritarian regime that did not want the emergence of any opposition, particularly if it came from the Islamists. The colonial legacy, which had led to the establishment of a relatively secular system, combined with the fear that an Islamic political movement could gather broad popular consensus, compelled the regime to act in order to remove this potential threat to its legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, Ben 'Ali used, from the 1990s onwards, a rhetoric aimed at accusing *al-Nahda* of conspiring against the state with the goal of establishing an Iranian-style Islamic regime. Consequently, members of *al-Nahda* were arrested and then forced to self-exclude themselves from the Tunisian political and social life, as demonstrated by the voluntary exile to London of their leader Rashid al-Ghannushi in May 1989.<sup>9</sup> *Al-Nahda* thus became an anti-systemic political force due to government repression and as a reaction to a system that did not allow its existence and activities.

The two different historical paths that have marked the political evolution of Turkey and Tunisia are indeed the basis behind the different ways of understanding and interpreting Islam in both countries. This consideration stands both when considering the intermingling of Islamic culture and religion in the private sphere and when studying those movements that fall into the category of political Islam.

### The Two Models of Islam Compared

Assuming that Islam, as a cultural and political phenomenon, is in constant dialogue with the political and social environment that surrounds it,<sup>10</sup> we can easily identify the elements that distinguish the two forms of "Islam-perception" that have developed in Turkey and in Tunisia. Only through this preliminary analysis will it be possible to understand the characteristics of the AKP and *al-Nahda*. Here, Islam is not considered as an element of citizens' private life. Rather, the

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focus of the analysis is on the political manifestations of Islam that have emerged in Turkey and Tunisia, as this form of Islam is potentially able to influence public life and institutions.

As stated earlier, Turkish political Islam has historically managed to forge its own unique personality, albeit through a process of internal transformation. The result is a synthesis between the context in which it has operated and the values of Islamic culture. From the 1970s onwards, mainly due to the figure of Necmettin Erbakan, political Islam in Turkey began to organize itself into a more

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structured manner in approaching the public sphere<sup>11</sup> whereas previously it had worked through the support of parties and movements of the center-right conservative tradition.<sup>12</sup> Even at this early stage of formation of Turkish Islamic political thought, we can identify some factors that make it *sui generis* compared to the Arab-Muslim world. For instance, the so-called *Milli Görüş* (National Order) – that is the ideology behind Erbakan’s MNP (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, the

National Order Party) – contained clear references to Turkish nationalism<sup>13</sup> and the MNP itself aspired to be a part of the political contest for power in Turkey, explicitly recognizing the legitimacy and sovereignty of its institutions. This does not mean that the party led by Erbakan was not characterized by a much more “Islamist” and anti-Western ideology than the AKP, but it simply indicates that it remained framed within a recognized institutional nationalist context.

In comparison, the political message of *al-Nahda*’s leader al-Ghannushi was in sharp contrast with the Tunisian regime from the beginning. With the founding of the *Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami* (the Islamic Tendency Movement, MTI) in 1981, Tunisian political Islam created a movement that wished to make a clear break with the institutional context in which it operated. This led to its immediate identification as an anti-systemic actor in so far as the MTI refused to recognize the legitimacy not only of the incumbent regime, but of the Tunisian institutional system itself, which was perceived as a “conspiracy waged... by Western imperial powers from outside”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the MTI presented itself as an anti-systemic actor both in relation to its national context and to the international system, promoting the need to re-establish Islam as a dominant factor in Tunisian society as a clear alternative to the type of nation that Bourguiba had created. This is in sharp contrast to Turkish Islamism. Even when Turkish Islamist movements and

parties prior to the AKP consistently expressed their opposition to the policies implemented by successive governments, they never questioned the legitimacy of those governments or the state. The origins of this difference between the Turkish and the Tunisian political Islam are to be found precisely in the historical and structural features mentioned above. The repressive action suffered by Islam in Tunisia and the absence of a space for dialogue and interrelation for the Islamic opposition with the Tunisian regime are in fact two of the factors that explain the diverse nature of the MTI and subsequently of *al-Nahda*.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the rupture of the Tunisian Islamist party with its institutional environment led to the disappearance of the movement not only from the political and public scene, but also from the country's social and private life following this relentless repression. *Al-Nahda* identified the root of Tunisia's political, social and economic problems as the cultural values imposed by the West and by France in particular. This assumption is a typical feature of all the Islamic movements that emerged during the 20th century in the Arab countries of North Africa in open opposition to the influence of European values and institutional models. North African Islamism called for a return to the basic values of Islam and to the origins of Arab-Islamic culture. Interestingly, this element is not present within contemporary Turkish Islamism. This difference can be attributed to the historical experience of countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, where the process of Westernization that had begun during the colonial period was identified by Islamist parties as the main factor behind the decline and crisis of these countries in the second half of the last century. At the same time the message of MTI first, and of *al-Nahda* subsequently, as evidenced by the foundation manifesto of the *Harakat Ittijah al-Islami* (1981) and the *al-Nahda*'s statute (1988), is not directed to Tunisia alone. The reference to the Arabic language and to the Arab-Islamic identity requires an almost natural extension of the revival ideals espoused by Rashid al-Ghannushi to the entire Muslim community and especially to the Maghreb countries, which are united by a common history of colonial occupation and "cultural infiltration" from the West. In this sense, the more universal scope of the political message of *al-Nahda* differs from that of Turkey, as the AKP and its predecessors addressed solely their national interlocutors. It is necessary, at this point, to note that *al-Nahda* is currently in a phase of transformation due to the new institutional context in which

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it is operating. If we want to make a parallel with Turkish political Islam, in this phase *al-Nahda* is in a situation similar to the one experienced by Turkish Islamist parties between the 1980s and 1997, that is the period when Turkish political Islam was gradually given the chance to participate in the political sphere by taking advantage of the new liberal context and the actual first governing phase of the Islamist party. That moment represented the beginning of a new era of internal transformation of political Islam in Turkey, a phase that in Tunisia is only at its embryonic stage.

Since from the birth of the Kemalist republic, Turkey has embarked on a path that has led it to move away from the cultural and ideological basis that *al-Nahda* still seems want to retain.<sup>16</sup> The evolution of Turkish and Tunisian political Islam moves then on different lines and gives rise to two different worldviews. Following a constructivist view of political science, it could be said that the Turkish model of Islam has been able to adapt to the context in which it operated, using the “opportunity spaces” that it gradually gained.<sup>17</sup> With this in mind we can understand some unique features of political Islam in Turkey, which, in formulating its identity, were carefully developed in order not to overstep certain

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symbolic boundaries that would compromise its very existence and its social and political development. It should be noted here that Turkish Islamist parties still had a chance to act reasonably freely within the national institutional framework, while the level of repression suffered by *al-Nahda* during the 1980s and the early 1990s was too high to allow it

to perform any political or social activity. For this reason, Tunisian political Islam cannot be compared to that developed in Turkey in terms of adaptability to the environment because the Tunisian context denied it any kind of interaction with existing institutions and with society itself. As a consequence, *al-Nahda* developed a specific policy of advocating a clear institutional break, which was different from Turkish political Islam which instead aligned itself in continuity with its institutional reference system. Essentially, due to the different genesis of political Islam in Turkey in comparison to the model represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, and in particular by *al-Nahda*, two organizations ended up with different characteristics when it came to developing their political programs, the terminology they use, the constituencies they address, the vision of the state they have, the economic policies they pursue, and, not least, the goals and the very nature they embody. The AKP is a typical conservative political



party with a clear structure and program of government, while *al-Nahda* still oscillates between being a social movement and a political party, behaving as an actor dealing with society rather than a party of the institutional world. It is true that *al-Nahda* has presented new features in its new post-2011 phase, but it still has to deal with the state administration and must overcome its internal contradictions: being a movement that through almost all the period of its activity has developed an ideology that differs from what it now seems to advocate.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that the founder of *al-Nahda* had been absent from Tunisia for more than 20 years and had not been able to operate directly in the political landscape of the country until his return from exile. This factor, along with al-Ghannushi's education in previous decades,<sup>18</sup> has meant that he has presented himself as an intellectual-activist rather than as a political leader, similar to other thinkers of contemporary Islam like Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. These figures saw themselves primarily as Islamist reformers of the political and institutional contexts in which they operated through activism from below, rather than as having a political program designed and suitable for the exercise of power. *Al-Nahda* presents the characteristics of an Islamist movement that is making a move towards a structured party with all the contradictions that come with it. In contrast, the AKP was already created as a real party able to make policy proposals on the most important issues on the political agenda. Both Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül have a history of militancy in the parties led by Erbakan, but the process of evolution and adaptation to the Turkish environment has led them to promote a different political idea. In this way they distanced themselves from traditional Islamism by assuming a more moderate position and by providing programs that are more suitable to the institutional reality of modern Turkey.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is possible to understand another characteristic of Turkish Islam: the emphasis placed on the individual dimension rather than on the community, taking advantage of the opportunities arising from market-liberalization reforms. The process of socio-economic openness has not been yet brought to an end in Tunisia. Consequently Tunisian political Islam has yet to develop an individualistic conception, running the risk of remaining anchored to another fundamental concept of classical Islamic rhetoric—the *umma*—even if new forms of Islamic associations are emerging that are based on a more personal relationship with Islam.<sup>20</sup> The change proposed by Turkish Islam is indeed

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relevant and makes it a particular model of Islam in which "... new forms of individualism of Muslim actors replace Islamists' communalism",<sup>21</sup> with all the consequences that this different way of living its relationship with religion will bring from a political and economic point of view.

All the factors discussed above show the uniqueness of the AKP and the seeming impossibility to replicate this type of party outside Turkey's borders, unless there is a strong structural change not only within Islamist movements, but in the political, social and economic dynamics surrounding them. The example of Turkey, in fact, seems to tell us that the development of a particular form of political Islam is determined by the evolution of the respective environments in which political parties operate, rather than in the opposite direction.

### **The Politics of the AKP and of *al-Nahda***

Given the different historical paths that the two parties have travelled, *al-Nahda* is without a doubt an actor still looking for a clear political agenda and for a day of reckoning with its past. This condition is understandable given the historical moment that the Tunisian Islamist party is facing as it is in the midst of a redefinition of the institutional and political effects of the so-called Arab Spring in the country that, more than all the others in region, seems to have made significant progress in terms of discontinuity with the previous regime. If features of the AKP can be clearly inferred from its actions in government over the last ten years, in order to analyze the progressive transformation of *al-Nahda*, both in terms of ideology and political programs, it is useful to start from its two founding acts: the founding manifesto of the MTI<sup>22</sup> and the *al-Nahda*'s

statute.<sup>23</sup> Despite the awareness that these are old sources, the choice of these two documents is dictated by the absence of a clear manifesto for the 2011 election. The two founding acts of the movement are currently indicated as the documents that offer the political thinking of *al-Nahda* on its official website. Despite the absence of recent sources outlining *al-Nahda*'s ideological and political stances, al-Ghannushi's thinking could function as a proxy. His substantial work as a thinker and writer, in addition to the interviews and the statements released after his return to Tunisia, can be a useful benchmark to explore the changes, if any, that the movement went through since its inception.

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#### *The AKP and al-Nahda*

The first element that differentiates the two parties is the terminology used in expounding their political thought. This element is related to the relationship that the AKP and *al-Nahda* have with Islamic culture and religion. Although undoubtedly inspired by the cultural and moral values of Islam and its origins in a rather ideological type of Islamism, the AKP declares itself simply a "conservative democratic" party. This means that it has taken a step that has led it to be much more inclusive and to hold positions of greater openness than in the past, particularly on issues of foreign and economic policy. On the contrary, the vocabulary used by al-Ghannushi in describing his party's objectives is borrowed directly from key concepts of Islamic culture. The first of the political objectives that *al-Nahda* says it wants to achieve is to "implement the principle of popular sovereignty and to establish *shura*". The term *shura* is a Quran-derived word indicating the consultation of believers within the Islamic community regarding the temporal affairs of their society. In contemporary Islamic thought it is a kind of "Muslim version" of a parliamentary assembly. In the fifth paragraph of the same document it is also stated that another political ambition of *al-Nahda* is "to promote the spirit of Arabic and Islamic unity and awareness of the fundamental issues of the *umma*, so as to put an end to hostilities, divisions and secession; to concentrate our efforts on our most decisive issues; to strive to bring about comprehensive unity and to support all serious steps toward this; and to give supreme importance to the unity of the countries of the Arab Maghreb". In this passage the use of typically Islamic terminology is clearly evident and, in addition, the desire to address the Muslim community as a whole and, above all,

the Muslims of North Africa emerges. Moving on, in the fourth part of the *al-Nahda*'s statute - the one related to the cultural sphere - the first point calls "to assert and to reinforce the Arab-Islamic identity as one of the condition for its revival; and to accord it the status it deserves by implementing the requirements of the country's constitution and laws, in respect of the fact that Islam is both a set of values for civilization and a way of life, and that Arabic is the language of national culture". From this sentence we can deduce two other elements that characterize *al-Nahda*'s message: the appeal to a form of nationalism that transcends Tunisian boundaries becoming a larger Arab nationalism, and the implicit reference to *shari'a* as a means of regulating the life of the community. The reference to the Arab nation comes from the fact that Arabic is the vehicle of the Islamic message and, at the same time, can be seen as a legacy of the pan-Arab ideology developed in the 1950s and 1960s. From this point of view *al-Nahda* seems to be characterized by a greater ideological drive, while the AKP presents itself as a pragmatic political force with clear and defined programs in various policy areas, exclusively referring to the Turkish context, without an ethnic (as *al-Nahda* does for the Arab element) or religious (Islamic) basis.

With regard to the reference to the Islamic values in the organization and the management of public life, the exercise of power and the ideal of the state that the two parties embody are crucial. On this point the official documents of *al-Nahda*, such as the positions expressed directly by its President al-Ghannushi, are not entirely clear. Surely the views expressed before the fall of Ben 'Ali have been partially revised due to the entrance of *al-Nahda* in Tunisia's political landscape<sup>24</sup> and *al-Nahda* has since displayed some of the characteristics of what some scholars refer to as "pragmatic de-radicalization".<sup>25</sup> At the same time, in the abovementioned article of the Tunisian movement's statute, Islam was referred to as a "way of life", implying that the religious element should not be relegated to the private sphere, but that it should even be the term of reference for the state's constitution. During the years of his voluntary exile, al-Ghannushi repeatedly expressed his thoughts about the role of religion within the state, stressing that "we reject your [Western] conception that is to separate religion from social life".<sup>26</sup> When judging the Tunisian constitution of 1988 al-Ghannushi said that only two amendments would be sufficient in order to make it adaptable to the political view of *al-Nahda*: one that said that all state's laws must be compatible with *shari'a*, and another that established an Islamic Council so as to ensure the compatibility of the laws passed in parliament with Islamic law.<sup>27</sup> In his work *al-Hurriyat al-'amma fi al-dawla al-islamiyya*, al-Ghannushi defines his idea of the state as an "Islamic democracy",<sup>28</sup> in which the traits of democratic systems such as free elections and popular sovereignty co-habit with the respect for *shari'a* as "the supreme legislative authority"<sup>29</sup> and the revival-

ization of the role of the mosque as the center for popular mobilization. This is in stark contrast to the Turkish AKP position on the issue. This very model of Islamic democracy could be an alternative to Erdoğan's conservative democracy in Turkey, at least from a theoretical point of view. It is to say that in the current political debate over the new constitution, *al-Nahda* seems to partially leave out these issues, striking compromises with the other Tunisian social and political actors. Al-Ghannushi has, however, always insisted on the need for a collective effort in establishing an Islamic government and these distinct basic ideas lead to two different visions of the state in so far as the principle of secularism on which Turkey is founded is called into question in the Tunisian case. In Turkey, the principle of secularism is not only respected, but has also been promoted by Erdoğan himself during his visit to Tunisia and Egypt following the fall of the old regimes of Ben 'Ali and Hosni Mubarak,<sup>30</sup> but it is precisely the reiteration of secularism on the part of Erdoğan that partly clashes with *al-Nahda*'s vision of the future.

While acknowledging that Turkey represents the closer reference model to Tunisia's case, al-Ghannushi stressed that these are two different contexts and that there is no need for a purely secular model in Tunisia

It is from these bases therefore that the potential competition between the model of governance espoused by the broader Muslim Brotherhood, of which *al-Nahda* is part, and the so-called Turkish model arises. Erdoğan's calls for "neo-laicism" as the basis of the new constitutional and institutional set up in Tunisia were implicitly rejected by al-Ghannushi. Although he has expressed support for the establishment of a democratic republic respecting all the country's identities and has made it clear that he has changed some of his views with respect to his writings dating back to the period of his London exile, in the months following the fall of Ben 'Ali al-Ghannushi has argued against the views the AKP espouses. Against Erdoğan's call for the adoption of a secular state, al-Ghannushi has argued that as the Islamic culture is an important part of Tunisia, as it certainly is, it cannot be excluded in post-Ben 'Ali Tunisia.<sup>31</sup> Consistent with this assumption, he added that in Tunisia a "mild form of *shari'a*" would be preferable to the neo-laicism proposed by the AKP.<sup>32</sup> However, it must be said that subsequently *al-Nahda* has officially stated that it has no intention of applying *shari'a*, but it is also true that it is determined to keep intact the first article of the constitution.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the possibility of resorting to the use of Islamic law as a legal source is not precluded *a priori*. While acknowledging that Turkey represents the closer reference model to Tunisia's case, al-Ghannushi stressed

that these are two different contexts and that there is no need for a purely secular model in Tunisia.<sup>34</sup> Part of the problem has to do with the evaluation of the principle of secularism whereby *al-Nahda*'s position is different from AKP's because of a different historical legacy, in so far as the French definition of secularism that was applied, albeit with some differences, both in Tunisia and Turkey, was introduced into Tunisian system on the back of harsh colonialism.<sup>35</sup>

It follows that, drawing from the historic colonial opposition to Western influence, there is also a kind of Third-worldism in *al-Nahda*'s ideology. While Turkey in recent years has embarked on a foreign policy that is more autonomous from its traditional Western allies, the AKP does not seem to be establishing strong anti-Western positions. Rather, the AKP presents itself to the electorate as the only genuine pro-Western party in Turkey in a political landscape where the nationalist elements seem to push towards greater detachment from Europe. Although al-Ghannushi didn't put himself in open conflict with the West, it is at least doubtful that *al-Nahda*'s foreign policy will move strongly towards the adoption of pro-Western attitudes. For instance, the greater attention paid to the construction of a framework of solidarity and cooperation with other countries of the Arab Maghreb is much more in line with the ideological basis of the party if compared with the AKP's pragmatic rapprochement to the Arab world. The so-called process of "neo-Ottomanism" that Erdoğan's party has undertaken is in reality not driven by a common sense of belonging to the same framework of cultural and religious values<sup>36</sup> but is a realistic and pragmatic approach for Turkish foreign policy for strategic and economic reasons. In this sense, the formulation of the foreign political agenda of the two parties stems from different assumptions and highlights the different cultural bases of *al-Nahda* and the AKP.

Finally, the Turkish model of development is not only political but also economic. The sustainability of the AKP's model is based on a level of economic growth that is unmatched in the whole Middle East and the wider Mediterranean. This is undoubtedly due to Turkish historical and structural characteristics, but also depends on the gradual adaptation of Turkish political Islam to its environment. While we have highlighted the social repercussions of the individualistic character promoted by the AKP, it is on economics that this peculiarity becomes more evident. The appeal of Fethullah Gülen,<sup>37</sup> the most important ideologue of Turkish Islam, to exploit the opportunities offered by economic liberalism in order to be better integrated into the Turkish system has resulted in a higher degree of business ability from many individuals who adhere to the message of Turkish Islam. At the same time, the AKP has been able to use the potential of small- and medium-sized businesses in a major political and economic development program, fostering their growth. The most dynamic force that supports the AKP

in today's Turkey is in fact a new class of socially conservative capitalists.<sup>38</sup> This represents a new element in the Muslim world that has led commentators to coin the term "Islamic Calvinism",<sup>39</sup> paraphrasing the Weberian idea of the interrelation between Calvinism and the development of capitalism in Europe. The AKP's base of support is a new generation of businessmen, especially in the Anatolian region, as well as the conservative electorate closer to the values of Islam and its practice. *Al-Nahda* is more popular among the poorer social classes and, because of its Third-Worldism, has also always been anti-capitalist, although in a rather veiled manner.<sup>40</sup> The reference made in the party's statute is to a "strong, integrated national economy, which will rely essentially on our resources" until reaching "self-sufficiency", as well as to the promotion of a "close co-operation in the Maghreb, and with the Arab-Islamic world". Along with al-Ghannushi describing the need to promote greater openness to foreign investment and to Western economies in a recent statement, he has also reiterated his desire to build a stronger economy across the Maghreb and to transform Tunisia into the regional hub of Islamic finance in order to reduce its dependence on Western economies.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Tunisia is experiencing a new development phase in which a new class of highly educated young people are emerging. This class pays great attention to Islamic values as a reference model for its behavior in private and social life, but it is also characterized by a liberal economic vision. It can be said that this new kind of social Islam is a crucial element of the *al-Nahda* consensus and it is for this reason that *al-Nahda*'s position on capitalism is changing to pragmatically meet new types of demands and to adapt itself to the new Tunisian context.<sup>42</sup> The fact remains that from a domestic point of view, *al-Nahda* pays much more attention to the role of the state in the economy and, primarily, to the concept of the collective entity, given the theoretical role it assigns to the community rather than to the individual. Concerning economic relations with other countries, the party seems to prioritize the development of an integrated economy with the other Arab and Muslim countries in the Mediterranean region. In this sense, it seems that *al-Nahda*'s rhetoric could be compared to Erbakan's and his D-8 project<sup>43</sup> while the AKP, in comparison, privileges the role of private enterprise and promotes investments and trade particularly with Europe. The AKP does take advantage of the opportunities created in the Middle East to expand its economy, but not in order to create an Islamic economic front on an ideological basis.

*Al-Nahda*, especially in the early stages of its activity, did not develop a real economic vision, apart from some general references to pan-Islamic and pan-Arab cooperation and to social justice. This is also the reason why in the 1980s the movement moved closer to the ideals of Khomeinism, which had managed to address economic and labor issues in Islamic terms, precisely at a

time when Tunisia was experiencing difficulties related to an economic crisis. This led *al-Nahda* to approach the Tunisian unions and leftist movements,<sup>44</sup> developing therefore a different idea on economic issues to the AKP's conserva-

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tive and capitalist ones. Now that the Tunisian framework has changed, economic issue will be the most sensitive area for *al-Nahda* to manage. Given the Tunisian economic difficulties after the 2010-2011 uprising and the global crisis that is hurting economies across the world, labor and economic-related issues must be a priority for the government's agenda if it is to be successful in the democratization process and to maintain popular consensus. Thus, it will

be largely on the basis of its economic policies that *al-Nahda* will be judged. In Tunisia, as in Turkey, the economic reforms that have taken place throughout the last few decades have created new opportunities only for a narrow segment of society, and in the current phase of pluralism and political liberalism, it is expected that these opportunities will be extended to all social classes. Thus, *al-Nahda* will need to meet the demands of these new social actors and, at the same time, to foster their entrepreneurship as a "private sector led industrialization is the necessary if not sufficient condition to lay the economic foundations for sustainable democracy".<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusions

This analysis has highlighted both how similar the Tunisian and the Turkish structural contexts are, but also how different the Muslim Brotherhood's movements in the Maghreb—and in our case *al-Nahda* in Tunisia—and the AKP model are. Though both are superficially similar expressions of political Islam, a more detailed analysis that takes into consideration the socio-economic and historical-institutional contexts in both countries highlights different starting points from which two conflicting visions of Islam, and of their relationship with politics, arise. The evolution of Islamic-inspired political parties and movements in Turkey has gone on for longer than in Tunisia and has been more in tune with the social, economic and political context. For its part, the Tunisian *al-Nahda* still looks like an Islamist movement in a transitional phase towards full political maturity, as can be understood from its very name (the Arabic word *Harakat*



in the full name of the organization, *Harakat al-Nahda*, indicates just an associational movement, as *Hizb* is the term used to designate a political party). For this reason there are substantial differences between the AKP and *al-Nahda*. Referring to the former, we can speak of a political party inspired by Islam and by its values, while we can still refer to the latter as purer expression of political Islam. Al-Ghannushi's personality is closer to that of the famous Egyptian preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi<sup>46</sup> rather than to Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan. With its specific features regarding its conception of the state, relations with the Arab-Islamic world and with the West, its economic vision, and its references to civil society as *umma*, *al-Nahda* may be itself a model for political Islam in the Arab Maghreb. This does not mean that Tunisian political Islam and the party cannot experience a transformation, but that its evolution has just started.

Much of the future evolution of political Islam in Tunisia and in the rest of North Africa will depend on the institutional framework that takes shape after the waves of the Arab Spring have subsided. While the Islamic movements themselves will contribute to the formation of new institutional arrangements, changes within the reference framework could affect the development of so-called Islamist parties, as had happened in Turkey. At the moment, despite *al-Nahda* making several references to Turkey as a model (hence the apparent convergence), the preconditions for the repetition of the AKP model in Tunisia, at least in the short term, are not present. Tunisia has yet to complete its democratization process and Tunisian political Islam has yet to demonstrate its commitment to changing its past attitudes, although it has moved to a significant degree on some issues such as the role of *shari'a* in the constitution. In addition, the party has to counterbalance the secularist demands coming from its leftist and liberal opponents with the ones expressed by the most conservative fringes within the Islamic framework itself.

For its part, the AKP can be perceived more as an actor looking to expand its influence in the Maghreb under the umbrella of its "model" rather than as a model for *al-Nahda* itself. The statements of al-Ghannushi on secularism and the different socio-cultural contexts of Turkey and Tunisia, while not suggesting an automatic divergence between the two countries and the two parties, could lead to a very different practical application of Islamic values in politics, making the competition between the two parties, if not inevitable, at least certainly possible.

## Endnotes

1. See Mounira M. Charrad, "From Nationalism to Feminism. Family Law in Tunisia", Kathryn M. Yount and Hoda Rashad (eds.), *Family in the Middle East. Ideational Change in Egypt, Iran and Tunisia* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 118-119.

2. Ahmet T. Kuru, “Changing Perspectives on Islamism and Secularism in Turkey: the Gülen Movement and the AK Party”, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, Conference Proceedings (London: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007), pp. 140-151.

3. As is witnessed for example by the launch of the first Islamic media organization, called *Radio Zitouna*, in 2007. For a more detailed analysis of the re-appearance of Islam in Tunisian regime’s discourse in the late 2000s, see also Rikke H. Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta, “‘Vive la grande famille des medias tunisiens’: Media reform, authoritarian resilience and societal responses in Tunisia”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2011), pp.1-16.

4. Emma C. Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p. 174.

5. The reference is to the advent of a multi-party system after years of one-party rule led by the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), founded by Mustafa Kemal.

6. See Sedat Laçiner, “Özalism (Neo-Ottomanism): an Alternative in Turkish Foreign Policy?”, *Journal of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2 (2003-2004), pp.161-202.

7. In 1987, when Ben ‘Ali came to power, he promised to include the Islamic Tendency Movement, the forerunner of *al-Nahda*, and the ranks of all political parties in Tunisia as part of a wider process of democratization. The romance between political Islam and the regime was, however, brief, before the partial success of Islamists in the elections of April 1989 (17 percent of the votes obtained by Islamist candidates, who ran as independents) convinced the former Tunisian president to return to suppress the movement by executing mass arrests of Islamists between 1991 and 1993. More of this in Mohamed E. Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 61-74.

8. According to estimates elaborated by Amnesty International, between 1990 and 1992 more than 9,000 members or followers of *al-Nahda* were detained and tortured.

9. See Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 71.

10. See also M. Hakan Yavuz, “Is There a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (October 2004), pp. 213-232.

11. Erbakan founded the first Islamic political party, the MNP (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, the National Order Party). This movement mimicked the positions of the Islamic groups acting in the country since the 1950s: the very word “Order” contained in the party name was used to emphasize the desire to establish new political and social standards that were more respectful of Islamic values.

12. See also Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2008), pp. 36-37.

13. For a discussion on the ideology of the *Milli Görüş* see Fulya Atacan, “Explaining Religious Politics at the Crossroad: AKP-SP”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 2005), pp. 187-199.

14. Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam*, p. 42.

15. In 1988, the MTI changed its name to *Harakat al-Nahda* since the new electoral law in April 1988 prohibited the explicit reference to religion by any political party. However, the content of *al-Nahda*’s message remained substantially unaltered compared to that of MTI. See Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam*, pp. 66-67.

16. Consider for example the reference to the Arabic language, abandoned by Kemal after the founding of the republic of Turkey.

17. See also Eran Tatari, “Islamic Social and Political Movements in Turkey”, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2007), pp. 94-106.

18. For a reconstruction of the ideological and political education of al-Ghannushi, see Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, pp. 3-62.

19. In 1998 the Constitutional Court dissolved the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) led by Erbakan, which had led the Turkish government between 1996 and 1997. It was at this historical moment that the party felt the need for a change. The older generation, led by Erbakan and anchored

to a still very conservative idea of political Islam, founded the *Saadet Partisi* (Happiness Party), while the new generation consisted of the so-called modernists and led by Erdoğan and Gül, gave birth to the AKP, a moderate and pro-European, albeit conservative, party.

20. See Rikke H. Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta, "Beyond Ghannouchi. Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia", *Middle East Report*, No. 262 (Spring 2012), pp. 20-25.

21. See Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 139.

22. *Al-bayan al-ta'sisi li Harakat al-Itijah al-Islami*, last retrieved in Arabic from <<http://www.nahdha.info/arabe/Sections-artid-98.html>> on March 25, 2012.

23. *Al-qanun al-asasi li Harakat al-Nahda*, last retrieved in Arabic from <<http://www.nahdha.info/arabe/Sections-artid-97.html>> on March 25, 2012.

24. The party was legalized on March 1, 2011.

25. See Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis", *World Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 347-376.

26. "Rached Ghannouchi: 'Pour qoui je suis islamiste'", *L'Express*, April 29, 1993.

27. Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam*, p. 126.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

29. Rachid Ghannouchi, "The Participation of Islamists in a Non-Islamic Government", John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 273.

30. "Erdoğan offers 'Arab Spring' neo-laicism", *Hürriyet*, September 15, 2011.

31. "Ghannouchi: State does not have right to monopolize Islam", *Today's Zaman*, September 23, 2011.

32. "Tunisian Islamist in favor of mild Shariah", *Hürriyet*, October 7, 2011.

33. "Nahda battles to implement vision of exile", *Financial Times*, March 29, 2012.

34. "No need for secularism in Tunisia: Ghannouchi", *Hürriyet*, December 24, 2011.

35. "Tunisian Islamist in favor of mild Shariah", *Hürriyet*, October 7, 2011.

36. In this there is a partial change compared to the party led by Erdogan.

37. Gülen is the leader of the most important Islamic social movement in Turkey and is considered one of the instigators of the AKP. For further inquiry see *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, Conference Proceedings (London: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007)..

38. Gamze Çavdar, "Islamist 'New Thinking' in Turkey: A Model for Political Learning?", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 121, No. 3 (Fall 2006), p. 483.

39. See *Islamic Calvinism: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia*, European Stability Initiative, September 19, 2005.

40. Robin Wright, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation", *Journal of Democracy* (April, 1996), p. 71.

41. "Ghannouchi: State does not have right to monopolize Islam", *Today's Zaman*, September 23, 2011.

42. See also Haugbølle and Cavatorta, "Beyond Ghannouchi: Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia".

43. See Berdal Aral, "An Inquiry into the D-8 Experiment: An Incipient Model of an Islamic Common Market?", *Alternatives: The Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2005), pp. 89-107.

44. Christopher Alexander, "Opportunities, Organization and Ideas: Islamists and Workers in Tunisia and Algeria", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (November 2000), p. 472.

45. Robert Springborg, "The Political Economy of the Arab Spring", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (November 2011), p. 427.

46. Of which al-Ghannouchi is the deputy chief in the International Association of Muslim Scholars.