

States and Revolutionary Communications

States and Revolutionary Communications, on the Role of Al Jazeera in the Tunisian Revolution  
of 2010-2011

Yahya Gahnoog

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Supervisor: Kathleen Rodgers, Co-Supervisor Frédéric Vairel

**Abstract:**

This research examines the revolution of 2010 in Tunisia due to the paucity of empirical research on the subject and to resolve analytical problems that plague research on similar events. The research is based in both the cultural turn in social movement research and the state constructionist theory of revolutions. The methodology employed is a case study which combines a content analysis of an Al Jazeera news program called *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* with data from two public opinion surveys conducted in Tunisia shortly after the revolution, and pre-existing academic research. The findings indicate that Al Jazeera did play a role in increasing mobilization against the Ben Ali regime by broadcasting the spread of protests and regime concessions. This was facilitated by the censorship practices of the Ben Ali regime which caused a popular news channel like Al Jazeera to rely purely on opposition sources for its broadcasts.

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Introduction What This Work Covers and Why it Matters.

“All political revolutions, not affected by foreign conquest, originate in moral revolutions. The subversion of established institutions is merely one consequence of the previous subversion of established opinions.”

John Stuart Mill

## **Chapter 1: Introduction: What this work covers and why it Matters**

### *Rationale, Significance, or Need for the Study*

Mohamed Bouazizi began that fateful day like he had many others over the past seven years, by pushing the vendor's cart from which he sold vegetables to support his family. As they had on previous occasions, his unlicensed cart and goods drew the attention of a local policewoman who threatened to confiscate the cart, his only means of making a living. It was only when he offered to pay her a ten-dinar fine (the equivalent of a good day's income) that the situation changed. The policewomen reportedly slapped the young man's face and spat on him, before confiscating his cart and insulting his deceased father. Angered, Bouazizi attempted to complain to municipal authorities and when they refused to see him, he returned to the same municipal building with a can of fuel and set himself on fire<sup>1</sup>. The date was December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, and the outrage of first his family members, and later the entire country would grow to transform itself into a national political revolution.

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali assumed power in Tunisia in 1987 by declaring his predecessor Habib Bourguiba mentally unfit to rule, amid a caustic and rancorous debate on issues as far apart as demographical changes and pluralism (Ware, 1998). Following the unorthodox succession Ben Ali established a strange form of authoritarianism, one that had all the appearance of liberal constitution while in effect leaving the definitions of constitutional freedoms in the hands of a legislature entirely controlled by the president (Alexander, 2010).

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Thus, while maintaining an ostensibly democratic environment the Ben Ali regime grew to be increasingly despotic maintaining tight control over the media, civil society, and political activity(Lynch, 2012). Ben Ali rebuilt potential political opponents like the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT)<sup>2</sup> after it was devastated by the previous regime, and destroyed others like the Islamic political movement Ennahda that the regime crushed in the early 1990s with massive arrests and convictions(Perkins, 2004). This lasted until Bouazizi's self-immolation triggered massive protests across the country. Ben Ali was then forced to flee the country on January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 after a month of public protest and demonstration(Hamid, 2011). This thesis makes two arguments, the first is that the manner and content of Al Jazeera's coverage of the protests taking place in Tunisia helped increase mobilization against the regime. The second is that the manner in which the Ben Ali regime censored local opposition and the media placed *Al Jazeera* outside the regime's control while also forcing it to source its coverage almost entirely from the regime's political opposition.

The Tunisian revolution marked the beginning of a series of uprisings in the Middle East that shocked the world. A long standing authoritarian regime had just been vanquished by popular protest in the first such revolution in the Middle East since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The 2010 Tunisian uprisings captured popular imaginations and inspired similar uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain;(and mobilizations in Morocco, Algeria, Jordan) as well as occupy protests in the United States and first nations protests in Canada. The global resonance of the 2010 revolution in Tunisia has already lead many other researchers to conduct thorough and interesting analysis of various aspects of these events as well as the similarities and differences between events taking place in different countries, and the possible national and regional causes of the uprisings. In this study the role of *Al Jazeera*, a prominent regional

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satellite television channel, in the uprisings is analyzed both for its impact on anti-regime mobilization and for its intersection with state censorship in Tunisia. This research poses two interrelated research questions. What was the impact of Al Jazeera's coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution? And, in what ways did the Ben Ali regime's censorship regime shape this coverage? This study is important for at least two reasons one of which relates to the nature of revolutions and another that relates to the subject and scope of cultural anthropology.

Firstly our understanding of those events in Tunisia, though advancing, is incomplete in that it does not properly integrate the impact of cultural institutions -such as the media- and political institutions -such as the state<sup>3</sup>- on mobilization during the revolution. Revolutions like the one that occurred in Tunisia are brought about by collective action which has cultural dimensions; because, culture plays a critical role in aspects of collective action such as collective identity and habitus, affecting framing of interests and determination of goals(Salman & Assies, 2009). And while there has been an extensive examination over the past two years of the political and economic causes of the 2010 Tunisian uprisings the cultural dimensions of these events has been unexamined. Cultural dimensions can be perceived in the economic and political organization of a society as well as in kinship systems, religious convictions and mass media communications all of which are involved in the actions of social movements(Salman & Assies, 2009).Culture is not static or uniform but contested. And, it is in this aspect of culture as place of contestation, that it derives its importance to the understanding of social movements(Salman & Assies, 2009).This study aims to address the lack of scholarly analysis of the cultural dimensions of the revolution of 2010 in Tunisia.

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Second, this study intersects with larger debates within anthropology about how exactly the concept of culture can be used. In order to use culture as a concept in the analysis of empirical work the concept itself must be made observable and grounded, rather than holistic and obscure. The notion of culture as a coherent whole penetrating all realms of life, might lead to the use of culture as an explanation for certain events (Salman & Assies, 2009). But, using a nebulous unclear and unobservable entity to explain observable events does not render any explanation at all. The study of culture within social movements can act as a corrective of our understanding of cultures as discreet and bounded entities that are divorced from larger societal structures and concerns (Salman & Assies, 2009). Because such a study would force analysts using culture in the study of social movements to separate the various processes that are entwined in the concept of culture and look beyond the field of culture to other processes<sup>4</sup> (Salman & Assies, 2009). This research is important because it looks at one aspect of culture, mass communication on the satellite television channel *Al Jazeera*, and evaluates its role in the 2010 revolution in Tunisia while also contextualizing that role within the confines of the media censorship of the Ben Ali regime. The idea that culture is embedded in the media communications of a society is not a novel one in anthropological thought<sup>5</sup>. Yet with its basis in multidisciplinary theory and methods, this research is a case study for precisely the kind of interaction between political structures, cultural actors and social movements that may allow for a better understanding of culture as a concept. Anthropologists have generally been missing from the multidisciplinary debate on and around social movements and as such a theatrical and methodological foundation for the anthropology of social movements remains absent (Gibb, 2001). While an interesting theoretical discussion can be had regarding the reasons for this absence<sup>6</sup> it lies beyond the scope of this research which hopes to make a contribution to the

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future full participation of anthropology in the multidisciplinary theoretical conversation on social movements and revolutions.

### *Theoretical Framework for the Proposed Study*

As was indicated above the theoretical framework for studying social movements in general is diverse connecting between literature in a variety of disciplines including but not limited to sociology, political science, economics and anthropology. Traditionally the academic literature has been split into at least two synchronous traditions, one that focuses on revolution and another that concerns itself mostly with the study of social movements (Poulson, 2005). Both bodies of literature supply aspects of this research's theoretical stance with regards to understanding the Tunisian revolution of 2010-2011. I rely on both bodies of literature primarily due to the fact that the phenomena under observation are similar leading to this research's most foundational theoretical assumption. That is, that the same processes underwrite both social movements and revolutions (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). A discussion of why this is the case follows in the literature review.

The literature on social movements has recently centered on the role of culture as a system of beliefs in the processes of social movements. This is primarily due to a growing recognition of the role that beliefs play in the processes that underwrite revolutions specifically and social movements generally. Segments of society can only resist oppression collectively if that oppression is collectively defined as both unjust and changeable (McAdam, 1999). The balance and nature of public opinion during periods of political unrest becomes of crucial importance to the outcomes of contentious politics. Protest is premised on a collective acceptance that current misery is the result of government policy and that changes in political leadership can alleviate it (Kuran, 1989). And it is in this context that social movement analysts

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have identified the importance of culture as an area of analysis. They have argued that the goals and targets of activists within political movements are culturally mediated (Polletta, 2008); and have argued for the analysis of culture as a "as a ubiquitous and constitutive dimension of all social relations, structures, networks, and practices" (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999, p. 47).

This view while useful suffers from some theoretical problems discussed at greater length in the literature review. The use of culture in this sense is too broad and it is here in refining the usability of culture as a concept that anthropological theory can make a significant contribution. The literature of cultural anthropology in general can be understood as a long term discourse about what culture is, what its impact is in daily life and how it can be studied. One of the ways this body of theory has attempted to study culture is in mass media leading to this case study's use of *Al Jazeera* as an object of analysis. Yet one of the problems of this literature has been its neglect of the role that structural conditions and existing arrangements shape cultural processes (Salman & Assies, 2009). The second body of academic literature that can be used to understand events in Tunisia, the literature on revolutions, provides a way to understand culture, movements and revolutions in the context of the structure of the state.

State centered perspectives descend from Theda Skocpol's influential: *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. They emphasize the mechanisms via which states (foreign and domestic) shape/modulate economic, associational and cultural phenomena, arguing that states are important to the study of contentious politics because contention occurs in specific political contexts directly encountered, given or transmitted from the past making state structures important to the success and failures of revolutionary movements and to their formation (Goodwin, 2001). There are several forms of state centered perspectives. This case study employs the state constructionist variant, which relates to the ways

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in which states unwittingly shape and create the circumstances of their own downfall(Goodwin, 2001). The state constructionist theory is selected because it provides a means for understanding how the state can act to shape revolutionary outcomes by shaping legal, legislative, political, and cultural practices within its territory<sup>7</sup>. Therefore the theoretical framework of this research project can be summarized in the following manner. Contentious politics -an example of which is the revolution of 2010 in Tunisia- have cultural dimensions which are crucial to a circumspect understanding of those politics. One of the ways in which such cultural dimensions can be observed is by analyzing the role of mass media, but such an analysis must also take into account the political constraints and opportunities that the regime placed on media that was accessible in Tunisia during its rule

#### *Statement of the Problem to be investigated*

This research responds to three types of problems relating to our understanding of the revolution that took place in Tunisia in 2010. The first problem is the theoretical problem addressed briefly above. Advocates of state centered theories concede that they neglect the cultural dimensions of contentious politics, while advocates of cultural theories in social movements fail to link cultural processes to any of the larger processes that we logically assume to influence them.<sup>8</sup>

The second problem is an empirical one, that is to say there has been little analysis of the role of mass communications in shaping the events that took place during the revolution, with the exception of discussions on the role of Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking applications on the revolution. Some researchers (Comunello a & Anzera, 2012) have tried to evaluate the role of media in the protests and relate it to the larger political context, but have come up short because they focused on the international rather than the domestic context<sup>9</sup> and

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because they focus on social rather than mass media. Yet social media, for example tweets concerning the Arab Spring events were primarily followed from outside the affected countries (Aday, et al., 2013) and hence were in and of themselves of limited domestic impact. Furthermore other researchers have found no consistent correlation between social media use and successful mass mobilization during the Arab Spring (Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, & Zhu, 2012). Empirical research on the role of more domestically popular satellite media in the Arab spring still eludes us.

The final problem is an analytical one that is there are serious problems with the dominant explanations for the events in Tunisia particularly in terms of the causes of the revolution. Everything from government harassment to Facebook activism has been pointed to as a cause, but it's the areas of little dispute that pose the most serious analytical challenges. The problem is that it is hard to think of any of the explanations that have -at this writing-been offered for the emergence and success of the revolution in Tunisia as causal.

The revolution began when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze to protest the lack of economic opportunity and arbitrary exercise of state power (Beinin & Vairel, 2010). Yet none of this act's dimensions can explain the popular uprisings that were to follow. Self-immolation itself can't be thought of as explanatory, since it was not a new form of political protest in Tunisia (Ryan, 2011). Self-immolations, even ones that took place in circumstances that were very similar to Bouazizi's, were not new in Tunisia. To name just one of several cases, Abdesslem Trimech another street vendor experiencing bureaucratic interference in his own work set himself on fire six months before Bouazizi's self-immolation (Ryan, 2011). Self-immolations also featured in events that took place after the revolution. On January 16<sup>th</sup> Mohsen Bouterfif set himself on fire after a meeting with the mayor of his small town of Boukhadra, in which the

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mayor said he was unable to provide the youth with a job and a house(Reuters , 2011). The political and economic circumstances alone prove equally incapable of offering an explanation<sup>10</sup> for the emergence and success of protests.

Explanations that appeal to the dire economic situation or to repression fare equally poorly in the analysis of the timing, emergence, or success of the 2010 revolution in Tunisia. Explanations that appeal to repression ignore the fact that it was present from the very start of the Ben Ali regime. Shortly after assuming power Ben Ali began using his influence with the state's security apparatus to target organizations and individuals that were agitating for reform(Alexander, 1997); and, despite having begun his rule with promises of reform, a crackdown against opposition groups and civil society began shortly after his ascent to power(Hamid, 2011).

Explanations that appeal to economics fall prey to the same kind of difficulty. Tunisia was internationally recognized by the IMF as an economic success in 1994(Borowiec, 1998) and again in 2008(Hamid, 2011).The unemployment rate was 13 % in 2009(IMF, 2010), in 1989 a year after Ben Ali assumed power it was 15.3%(Rama, 1998).Furthermore the economic situation in rural towns like SidiBouزيد has been acutely dismal for years. Structural adjustment programs implemented in the country-side concentrated wealth among rural elites and disenfranchised the peasantry since 1989(King S. J., 1999). The economic situation in Tunisia was not drastically different in 2010 from what it was in 2008 or earlier. Neither the economy, nor self-immolation, nor political repression were unique to that moment in political time in 2010 when the revolution began; implying that structural factors alone cannot be leveraged as explanations for the emergence and success of protests against the regime in 2010. Explanations based on economic factors<sup>11</sup> and repression fail because they try to explain a variable outcome

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with a constant, explanations that rely on Bouazizi's self-immolation fail to account for why this political suicide of a desperate young man is different from that of previous, or later, desperate young men.

### *Study Research Questions and Methods*

This research responds to the theoretical and empirical problem by making its focus the popular satellite television news channel AlJazeera and analyzing its role in the Tunisian revolution of 2011 referring both to its impact on mobilization and the ways in which the Ben Ali regime's media censorship might have shaped that impact. This also responds to the analytical problem by proposing two units of analysis (*Al Jazeera's* coverage of the events, and the Ben Ali regime's censorship) that might have affected mobilization against the regime. I propose two related research questions to address this:

1. What was the impact of *Al Jazeera's* coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution?
2. In what ways did the Ben Ali regime's censorship regime shape this coverage?

*Al Jazeera* was selected as a data source for two reasons. First it is popular, a 2010 poll on Arab public opinion satellite television news in general and *Al Jazeera* in particular led the way as a first source of news for respondents (Telhami, 2011). When asked what their main source of news was 69% of respondents reported television as their first mention (International Republican Institute, 2011) 79% of respondents to the Arab barometer survey in Tunisia reported television as their main source of news with only 2% reporting the internet as a source (Al Masri, 2012). Of those who reported television as their main source of news, 34% relied on national Tunisian television while 38% of respondents reported that *Al Jazeera* was their main source of news

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during the protests (Al Masri, 2012). This ushers in the second reason *Al Jazeera* was selected because it lies at the intersection of state, social movement and culture that this research is concerned with. State television while only slightly less popular<sup>12</sup>, was effectively directed in its domestic and international news coverage by the regime (Sorkin, 2001) which negates its use as a source for this research because it could not have conceivably presented coverage that challenged the regime. On the other hand, because *Al Jazeera* was banned by the regime, it relied almost entirely on reports and videos provided by citizens on the ground in Tunisia for its coverage (Khanfar, 2011).

The research methodology employed is that of a case study and has both qualitative and quantitative aspects. In order to respond to the first question the traditional media impact<sup>13</sup> study practice of breaking research into two parts one on content and one on impact is going to be used. The sample used for study is the nightly content of an *Al Jazeera* Arabic news program called *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*<sup>14</sup> specifically that program's coverage of events in Tunisia whenever widespread protests broke out between December 17<sup>th</sup> and January 14<sup>th</sup>. *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* is a regional variation on *Al Jazeera's Al Hassad bulletins*, which combine extensive news coverage of the day's headline news with in-depth analysis and interviews (Allied Media, 2004). This part of the research is qualitative and meant to gauge trends in the coverage of events in Tunisia. The impact on mobilization portion will be analyzed by relying on surveys conducted shortly after the fall of the regime such as the IRI survey and the Arab Barometer II survey to connect content with viewership. The second research question will be answered by relying on secondary academic data that describes the Ben Ali regime media censorship practices, this information will be used to leverage an explanation for trends observed in the primary source data. Both parts of the research will be combined to complete the case study.

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### *Delimitations and Limitations of the Study*

This research project focuses on Tunisia, partially due to the fact that Tunisia was the first country in the wave of democratization protests that were later labeled the Arab spring. Later protests were inspired by events in Tunisia (Saideman, 2012) and hence using Tunisia as the subject of this case study allows for the variable of regional diffusion to be safely ignored. The units of *Al Jazeera* and regime censorship can easily be exported to the analysis of other countries in the region yet any such appropriation needs to be made with the understanding that this research and its results are specifically based on Tunisia. In this I paraphrase Mark Twain, and caution persons attempting to find a larger regional meaning in this narrative to do so with care.

To establish the impact of *Al Jazeera* this research relies on surveys that have been conducted by others. This is not unusually in academic research but it does impose one key limitation on the research. That is that the questions in the survey were not designed with this research in mind so while enlightening they miss some key aspects of impact around issues of persuasion that would greatly improve this research. An expansive series of interviews with participants of the 2010 revolution asking questions specifically about their news sources and how they understood the reasons for their mobilization would have been more illustrative.

This research for reasons of brevity and capacity is historically curt. This is done in full recognition that specific historical facts might be used to provide powerfully persuasive explanations for the revolution in 2010 in the tradition of past historical political sociology of revolutions<sup>15</sup>. The regime's history of political repression and economic exclusion might serve as

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grounds for explanation for the emergence and success of protests in Tunisia. This research proceeds with the recognition that there are several alternative viable sources of explanation.

### *Summary*

This research is justified by the geopolitical and historical importance of the 2010 revolution in Tunisia. In order to address theoretical and empirical gaps in the academic literature on these events this research will study impact of *Al Jazeera's* coverage of those events on mobilizations during the revolution by employing content analysis of media content and popular opinion surveys conducted in Tunisia shortly after the protests. The impact will be understood both in light of cultural theories of popular protest and the state constructionist theory of revolutions. Chapter two presents a review of the literature on social movements and revolutions, besides presenting the universe of explanations that have been forwarded to explain contentious politics, it argues for the combined approach for the study of contentious politics, and demonstrates by example the importance of the media generally -and Al Jazeera specifically- in the study of contentious politics. Chapter three presents a discussion and justification for the methodology used in the collection and analysis of this research's data. Chapter four deals primarily with the results of this process and presents the research's findings briefly and in context. Finally Chapter five discusses the research's conclusions, alternative explanations, and the research's contribution to theory and makes recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review: States, Satellites, and Social Movements**

### *Introduction*

The Tunisian revolution of 2010 undeniably shook the world. The subsequent series of popular protests that it inspired in countries as far apart as Morocco and Yemen changed longstanding political arrangements, and laid waste to the notion that the age of revolutions has passed<sup>16</sup>. However, it remains unclear how exactly observers of the region and of revolutions might make sense of these events. It is a trivial point to note that there is a gap in the literature on contentious politics when it comes up to events that are barely two years old. But, as I intend to argue here the literature, though immensely illustrative, has serious gaps especially in areas crucial to the process of forming an understanding of the links between the various events, actors, and structures of the 2010-2011 revolution in Tunisia. This review has three purposes: to provide a summary and brief application of the various theories and models advanced to understand social movements, to summarize the various perspectives brought to bear in the academic study of revolutions, and to illustrate the limitations and advantages of the application of these theories to the 2010-2011 revolution. I make the argument that both the cultural turn in social movements and the limitations of state centric revolutionarily theories point to a more serious gap in the literature concerning the ways in which revolutionary organizations and groups marshal support to topple certain states. The literature gaps fall into three interrelated areas: the evaluation of the role of culture in the processes of contentious politics, a strategy for understanding and studying that role, and finally a way to contextualize culture in the study of social movements in a manner that preserves the usefulness of the cultural approach while avoiding what Charles Tilly called its “phenomenological fundamentalism”(Tilly, 1999, p. 60).

## Literature Review: States, Satellites, and Social Movements

Traditionally the academic literature has been split into at least two synchronous traditions, one that focuses on revolution and another that concerns itself mostly with the study of social movements (Poulson, 2005). This review sets out to evaluate the social movement literature, to evaluate the literature on revolutions, and to examine their intersections with the events surrounding the 2010-2011 Tunisian revolution. This is accomplished by proceeding into a discussion, critique, and application of theories of social movements and revolutions, presenting their limitations in relation to culture, and briefly discussing the anthropology of revolutions. All in order to make the argument that the media generally, and Al Jazeera specifically, represents a site for the study of incredibly elucidating factors of the 2010 revolution.

### *Historical overview of the theory and research on social movements*

The earliest form of social movement theories are sometimes referred to as the “classical” approach to social movements, a label that subsumes many theories all of which posit social movements as a mentally cathartic reaction to the impact of successive systemic strains on individual psychologies past a specific boiling point (McAdam, 1999). Classical approaches are problematic because they seem to imply that social protests automatically occur. In other words the classical model maps a direct and simple correspondence between system strain and collective protest (McAdam, 1999). A second problem with the classical approach is that it complicates the job of data collection by relocating the unit of analysis beyond the reach of empirical observation. The classical model not only assumes that individuals who participate in social protest are psychologically different (and hence marginalized) by their communities (McAdam, 1999), but also that the political content of a movement is merely a justification for what is at root a psychological phenomenon (McAdam, 1999). In the case of Tunisia to adopt a strictly classical approach is tantamount to dismissing the contents of the

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revolution as irrelevant, and to ignoring the processes of social movement mobilization that this research proposes to examine. Furthermore “classical” approaches do not offer a rigorous means of evaluating or measuring social strain. Classical theories do not map such strain as being directly related to any social factor political, economic, legislative or otherwise.

Resource mobilization theory was developed in part to compensate for some of the problems inherent in the classic model. Its emphasis is on the social support and constraint of social movements by focusing on movement resources, connections, and dependencies (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Its central claim is that levels of social discontent are more or less constant (rather than winding up as in classical theory), and that social movements emerge only when aggrieved groups have access to sufficient social resources (McAdam, 1999). This approach improves on the classical model for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that it reintroduces the social into the study of social movements and because unlike classical approaches it emphasises the rationality of participants in social protest. In the case of Tunisia this model permits a focus on the internal characteristics of social groups as well as social links between different groups or political alliances across borders. However it too suffers weaknesses that make using it as an explanatory model problematic. The resource mobilization theory assigns a movement’s failure and success as a function of how much elite support the movement gets and hence ignores the capabilities and resources of the masses that form the base of a social movement (McAdam, 1999). It also does not apply to the political realities on the ground; Bourguiba relied on elite infighting to remain in power, while Ben Ali saw it as useless causing elites to withdraw from politics (Alexander, 2010). This problem is compounded when you raise the level of analysis to a revolution, with an even larger base involved in attempting to alter the shape of state power (a goal one would assume most elites resist almost by definition)<sup>17</sup>.

Resource mobilization theory is ironically also made problematic by its failure to adequately define a resource. Many theorists don't provide a definition at all, those that do provide a definition that is so wide and all-encompassing that it renders the concept untestable and of dubious analytical worth (McAdam, 1999). The biggest difference between resource mobilization and classical theories lies in the assumption within resource mobilization theory that social grievances are constant. Yet this very assumption that discontent is a stable aspect of social life is problematic for at least two reasons. First, because singularly grievances cannot adequately explain mobilization (Tarrow, 1998), and second because the existence of objectively poor social conditions does not mean that they are experienced as poor in the day to day existence of the people living in those conditions<sup>18</sup>. The problem stems from a failure to distinguish the objective state of social conditions from the subjective way in which people experience them, and hence ignore the various ways in which people can subjectively interpret the same circumstances (McAdam, 1999). In the case of Tunisia both the objective economic and political circumstances remained consistently oppressive; therefore any explanation of the processes that culminated in the revolution must lie in the realm of public perception. Protest is premised on a collective acceptance that current misery is the result of government policy and that changes in political leadership can alleviate it (Kuran, 1989). Furthermore research tends to support the contention that: widespread misery on its own generates only pessimism and depression unless the circumstances change in such a way as to allow the envisioning of a realistic possibility of change (Goldstone, 2001). Understanding the circumstances and determinants of such collective reorientation (the kind of reorientation that took place in Tunisia in 2010) requires a focus on the composition and structure, and practices of social movements.

Political process theory sets about specifically that task. It assumes social insurgency to be a product of three factors: the level of organization within the aggrieved population, their perception of the prospects of a successful insurgency, and the presence of a political opportunity (McAdam, 1999). What makes this model attractive is the fact that it generates an academic focus that combines the internal characteristics of a movement, their objective political positioning, and their subjective perceptions of the relationship between the two. Political opportunities can be thought of as changes in structural circumstances that make the mobilization of a movement more likely (Poulson, 2005). In the case of the events that took place in Tunisia in 2010, the political opportunity was Bouazizi's suicide and the rural protests that it spawned in Sidi-Bouazid<sup>19</sup>. This approach is first and foremost made problematic because of the tautology inherent in using protests to explain the occurrence of protests. Furthermore assuming that political opportunities directly result in a social uprising is not accurate, since in fact the relationship between the two is bi-directional. Social movements can create political opportunities by realigning the previously mentioned subjective perceptions of social structures, but can also use political opportunities as framing opportunities (Poulson, 2005). Social movements however also mobilize in response to the collective interpretation and attribution of new threats (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). What is crucial here is the process of framing that relates between the public's subjective perceptions and the objective social conditions. The missing variable is that which related an everyday act of political oppression to the larger social context (and individual perceptions of it) in such a way as to result in wide spread public protest.

Objective social conditions are translated into subjective perceptions by social movements via a process of frame alignment. Frame alignments link between individual and social movement organization orientations in terms of values, interests, beliefs and goals (Snow,

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Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). In other words framing is a process of translating meaning, an essentially cultural process. Even with the mediation of framing, the use of political process theory in social movement research is not without its difficulties. Political process theory is conceptually muddled because theorists have been unable to reach consensus definitions of its key terms (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). This inability generates difficulties regarding the communicability and validity of research or analysis based on the concept of “political opportunity”. The concept itself threatens to be an all effacing sponge that subsumes “all the conditions and circumstances of collective action” (Gamson & Meyer, 1996, p. 275). The concept of framing is also criticised for being either broad enough to result in tautology or narrow to the point of failing to describe all the cultural dimensions of social movements (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). Jasper and Goodwin instead advocate a focus on culture since “culture permeates the political opportunities and mobilizing structures of process theorists” (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999, p. 52).

### *Culture and social movements*

Culture is meant to refer to the shared mental worlds of individuals within society, as well as their collective understandings of how the world is or should be (Jasper, 2007). Jasper’s strongly constructionist approach however is plagued by even more serious challenges than the epistemological difficulties of political process theory. Jasper argues for the analysis of culture “as an ubiquitous and constitutive dimension of all social relations, structures, networks, and practices” (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). Yet such an all-encompassing account of culture collapses all analysis as yet another form of cultural expression, obliterates the distinction between fact and fiction, and leads one to the absurd conclusion that factors such as economic activity, resource availability, and repression are devoid of any material existence. In this context Jasper’s

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insistence that: cultural meanings have an “objective existence” (Jasper, 2007) is almost mystical. Jasper and Goodwin’s critique of political process theory assumes that general explanations occur in the form of covering laws and since no such laws apply all explanations of contentious politics apply to specifically one context, and in making this assumption they ignore the possibility of wide ranging recurring casual mechanisms (Tilly, 1999). Such theories labelled by Tilly as phenomenological fundamentalism are “very unlikely source of explanations for social processes, and a very likely source of explanatory tautologies in which people do things because they have propensities to do those things”. (Tilly, 1999, p. 60). Despite Tilly’s criticism there does appear to be a gap in our understandings forced into being by the growing consensus that revolutions are, at least in part, grounded in the perceptions of the people who participate in them, necessitating the need for a more limited discussion of cultural processes in social movements.

The need to connect between the misery (or lack thereof) of social conditions and the presence (or absence) of a general popular and transformative perception of misery relies on the notion of framing. Social movement framing occurs in reference to larger master frames, which are defined as generic ideas that can be used by any number of social actors for their own purposes (Staggenborg, 2008). Social framing is a promiscuous process; via which social movements emerge within master frames (Staggenborg, 2008), and draw upon master frames for legitimacy (Poulson, 2005); while also generating master frames through their activities (Polletta, 2008). Framing processes are then alternations in the shared mental worlds that constitute culture, namely alternations in shared understandings of the world and how it should be. A cultural argument asserts that the goals and targets of activists within political movements are culturally mediated (Polletta, 2008). Of which the key word is mediated, it’s important to note

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here that culture is not an isolated, free floating entity that can be imbued with causal agency. Nor does the appeal to culture as an explanation rule out structural variables, or associational networks as being casual, the argument simply follows from the assumption that wide-spread political protest is partially related to the perception of injustice among belligerents

The challenge in using a cultural approach lies in giving culture substantial importance while recognizing it's susceptibility to organizational agendas and self-interest, and without giving up on efforts to operationalize success in terms of measurable impacts (Polletta, 2008). I will add to Polletta's list the relationship between social arrangements and processes via which cultural meanings are created. Shifts in cultural meanings intertwine with strategy because cultural meanings and feelings are products of the actions of specific actors, in specific arenas, for specific purposes (Jasper, 2007). The link between actors, framing, and cultural change is made clear in the notion of a collective action framing, which is the process via which movement leaders and organizations circulate interpretations of issues and events that lead to collective action (Staggenborg, 2008). It's important to note that such an account concerned with the roles of actors in shaping public perception is fully commensurate with the events of 2010-2011 in Tunisia; since it was the actions of members of the UGTT<sup>20</sup>, members of Lawyers associations<sup>21</sup>, and dissident journalists that coordinated the transformation of sympathy protests for Mohammed Bouazizi into national demonstrations demanding the fall of the regime (Joffe, 2011).

Nor would I be the first to point to the role of associational networks and public protest in the Middle East. The character of informal networks and their social context has been elaborated upon specifically in the context of popular mobilizations in the Middle East (Beinin & Vairel, 2010). The application of such work combined with a focus on local cultural practices might be

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particularly fruitful in understanding the dynamics of mobilization in Tunisia; as it has been put into practice recently by Reinoud Leenders with regards to the uprising in Syria<sup>22</sup>. Where he has made the argument that while regime repression, revolutions in nearby Tunisia and Egypt, and a regional history of criminal activities all contributed to the eruption of protests in Dar'a; the key factor was the region's "thick" social networks which "offered relatively autonomous sites for the sharing of grievances, the circulation and interpretation of information, and the framing of state repression"(Leenders, 2012, p. 430). Leenders account is very thorough (given the difficulty of gathering data on events occurring inside Syria at this writing) but it does neglect one key factor from analysis, namely the characteristics and behaviours of the state that dissidents are mobilizing against. The role of which is covered more thoroughly in the literature on revolutions.

### *Historical overview of the theory and research on revolutions*

The early academic literature on revolutions is divided up in Jack Goldstone's excellent and detailed review article into three generations. The authors of the first generation restricted themselves to primarily descriptive accounts, attempting to specify the major stages of the revolutionary process and to describe the social and demographic changes that revolutions produced(Goldstone, 1980). This "natural history" school of revolutions though providing a useful staging point for the further analysis of revolutions failed to provide actual explanations of revolutions(Sanderson, 2005).The authors of the second generation in some ways compensated for many of the shortcomings of their predecessors. Their accounts were more holistic, more historically grounded, based on more case studies and attempted to arrive at explanations not just for revolutions but for their varying outcomes(Goldstone, 1980). These authors can be divided into three groups. The first group based their understanding of revolutions on the cognitive state

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of the masses, and argued that revolutions occurred only when the masses arrived at a state of frustration or deprivation regarding some important goal (Goldstone, 1980). While it has not been specifically discussed the shortcomings of this kind of perspective have been alluded to above in the discussion of the classical approach to social movement. Theories of revolutions that locate the main variable of analysis inside the minds of revolutionaries are impossible to use in a practice, for no other reason than that notions like frustration and deprivation are incredibly hard to measure or compare. The second group based their analysis on the notion of structural functionalism, arguing that revolutions are the product of systemic stress being placed on society because the flow of demands and resources between the various parts of society and the environment has been disrupted (Goldstone, 1980). The problem of course with such a perspective is the assumption of society conceived of as a harmonious organism despite such things as oppression, exclusion, inequality, and conflicts of beliefs or interests. The third group drew on the literature on pluralist politics, and argued that revolutions are a manifestation of pre-existing conflict between competing interest groups made more intense by the heightened stakes that emerge when the normal tools of political resolution cease to function (Goldstone, 1980). The afore-mentioned resource mobilization theory is a scion of this tradition. The authors of the second generation indubitably compensated for some of the shortcomings of the natural history writers yet their labours did share some common problems and omissions.

The authors of the second generation all focused their analysis on variables that were difficult to observe and measure, furthermore they failed to account for variables such as the structure of the state, the composition of peasant communities, international pressures, constraints on elite behaviour and the strength or weakness of the armed forces (Goldstone, 1980). All of which are factors that later theorists would recognize to one extent or another as

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instrumental to the emergence or outcome of revolutions. The authors of the third generation can be, albeit roughly, parsed into state centered and political economy centered theorists. The third generation saw revolutions<sup>23</sup> as being the product of a contradiction developing between the needs of states and landlords to respond to international and economic pressures and the range of options made available by existent agrarian and elite structures (Goldstone, 1980). Both groups are well represented in the literature, in order to exemplify them I now turn to important works in both traditions Jeffery Paige's *Agrarian Revolution* and Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*.

Political economy centered perspectives draw on the general Marxian notion that revolutions are the product of class struggle and economic exploitation (Sanderson, 2005). And, although generally referred to as Marxian theories I consider them political economy perspectives' in order to employ modern parlance without ignoring the common focus on economic arrangements and class. Paige's argument is premised on the fact that a majority of countries in the "underdeveloped" world are dependent on the export of a few agricultural goods for foreign exchange (Paige, 1975). Therefore in the study of agrarian revolts both the goals and aims of rural protest participants and the responses of their national and international opponents are explicable by focusing on the nature of the class arraignments that emerge from this export market (Paige, 1975). Paige's analysis then proceeds to lay out the various combinations of economic export and income arrangement's that result in varied forms of rural protest. When both cultivators and non-cultivators rely on land as their principal source of income the result is a revolt aimed at land reform, when non cultivators are compensated in capital and cultivators are compensated in land the result is a reform movement concerned with market control, when non cultivators are paid in capital and cultivators are paid in wages the result is a labour movement,

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its only when non cultivators are paid in land and cultivators are paid in wages that revolutions' aimed at seizing the state as a tool for land redistribution emerge (Paige, 1975). This is a drastically simple restatement of Paige's detailed statistical analysis yet his overall argument while influential suffers both from flaws unique to it and from the types of problems that generally plague Marxian perspectives.

Generally Marxian perspectives' on revolutions are problematic because they omit one central factor, the political realm, in their overwhelming focus on economic and class relations (Sanderson, 2005). More specifically Paige's analysis is made problematic because it makes the source of income the exogenous independent variable skewing his entire analysis towards the forces rather than the relations of production, which theoretically ignores regional political factors and world political economic relationships (Somers & Goldfrank, 1979). To demonstrate the flaw by example, we can first note that revolts in Tunisia did begin in the rural countryside and were later relocated into the cities. Yet the mass of the protestors both urban and rural weren't moved towards demands centered on land reform, instead they took issue with the state as the author of their economic condition (Guessoumi, 2012). In order to more closely examine the theoretical relationships between political factors, economic factors and revolutions in the literature I now turn to the state centered faction of the third generation.

Skocpol's most enduring contribution to the literature (besides her state-centered perspective of course) is her definitional distinction between different types of revolutions. A social revolution is rapid transformation in a society's state and class structures; they are the product of the coincidental alignment of social transformations and class upheaval on one hand and political and social transformations on another (Skocpol, 1979). Political revolutions on the other hand are characterized by changes in state structures but not social structures (Skocpol,

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1979). Despite the fact that it has been over two years since the revolts of 2010 it's difficult to decide whether the events that took place then represent a social or a political revolution. The political structures have changed uncontestedly but the case of change for social structures is harder to make<sup>24</sup>.

Skocpol's primary contention is that analysts "can make sense of social-revolutionary transformations only if we take the state seriously as a macro-structure"(Skocpol, 1979, p. 29). The state is here meant to refer to a centrally controlled more or less coordinated unfitted set of administrative and coercive structures that extracts resources from the population and uses them to support its administrative and coercive structures(Skocpol, 1979). This perspective differs from others in that it sees the state as a factor all apart from entities like the dominant class, civil society, or culture. State autonomy, at least the potential for state autonomy is a key assumption of Skocpol's thesis(Sanderson, 2005), she argues that a state's involvement in the international political and economic arena is a possible basis for state autonomy over and against groups and economic arrangement's within its own borders(Skocpol, 1979).Skocpol's main argument is essentially that severe international political and military pressures created massive crises within the state machineries of Russia, China, and France and combined with economic difficulties that resulted in widespread social discontent; resulted in social revolution(Sanderson, 2005). In Russia for example Russian defeats in World War I caused the dominant class to lose confidence in the autocracy, while the strains of endless war caused the lower classes immense suffering leading to rebellion, followed -because of the international strains placed on Tsarist Russia- by revolution(Skocpol, 1979).

The previous reference to coincidences is essential as it implies the structural nature of Skocpol's conception of revolution in relation to other more agency centered perspectives.

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Skocpol's main critic has been William Sewell Jr. who it should be noted also conceives of revolutions in a primarily structured manner. Sewell argues that her argument does not take the factor of ideology into account as a fundamentally different perspective through which revolutions might be analyzed (Sewell, 1985). He argues that all "social relations are at the same time ideological relations" (Sewell, 1985, p. 6), and that the French revolution was an "ideological event of the first magnitude" (Sewell, 1985, p. 84). His argument is essentially that the philosophy of the enlightenment contradicted the monarchical state because the latter was based on notions of divinity contradicted by the enlightenment's naturalism, and because the monarchical state was based on hierarchies of privilege while the enlightenment advocated the universal applicability of reason to human affairs (Sewell, 1985). According to Sewell the "structure" of revolutionary ideology plays a crucial role as cause and also in the outcome of revolutions, and that in order to understand this role we need a conception of ideology that treats it as "anonymous, collective, and constitutive of social order" (Sewell, 1985, p. 84). This view has been criticised most thoroughly by both Skocpol herself and others.

### *Culture in revolutions*

Skocpol has argued that belief systems and ideologies are the product of the social and political circumstances of a group, and that there is little evidence that widespread intellectual transformations cause revolutions (Sanderson, 2005). In order to better understand this position her use of the word "coincidence" in her definition of revolution is crucial. Skocpol contends that any good theory of revolution must be non-voluntarist and structural (Sanderson, 2005). She contends that "revolutions are not made; they come" (Skocpol, 1979, p. 17). Wickham Crowley, also a structuralist, argues that in the case of the French revolution peasant revolts were not guided by enlightenment philosophy but by a desire to preserve their economic

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interests(Wickham-Crowley, 1997). He argues that a cultural view of revolutions is further testified against by the fact that the “core” processes of state collapse in China, Russia and France were increasing fiscal distress and external military pressure, the notion that revolutionaries inspired by communist ideologies brought about the fall of the regimes in Russia and China is according to him laughable(Wickham-Crowley, 1997). There are many points that can be made here. First there is little logical connection between the notion that revolutionaries guide outcomes and the notion that revolutions have ideological components(Sewell, 1985). Second the lack of applicability of cultural modes of understanding revolution to specific case studies is far from a repudiation of the applicability of such perspectives across the board. Skocpol herself admits as much when she recognizes the Iranian revolution of 1979 as an exception to her contention(Sanderson, 2005). Sewell argues that ideologies being structured in no way makes them inaccessible to conscious human choice, only that such action is shaped by pre-existing ideological actions and constrained by other realities(Sewell, 1985). The issue of voluntarism is really a question about whether human will is admissible as an explanatory factor in the study of revolutions. Both Skocpol and Sewell agree to oppose “naïve” voluntarism. The distance between them is a matter of the extent of the importance we ought to accord to conscious will(Sewell, 1985). Returning to the case study of Tunisia it’s rather clear that a mass ideology such as communism (China and Russia) or Socialism (Cuba) or Shia Islamic identity (Iran) has not informed the revolution in Tunisia in 2010, yet it’s a mistake to ignore the point put forward by Sewell entirely. After all, the protests were launched on the basis of dignity and equality and in opposition to injustice and economic discrimination(Guessoumi, 2012) not to mention humiliation and degradation(Beinin & Vairel, 2010). Wickham-Crowley holds that structural theories are those that focus on the relationship between social units such as world

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systematic structures, patterns of interstate competition/cooperation, social conflicts and the relationship between formal organizations and society(Wickham-Crowley, 1997). Yet the value of such theory in explaining the case study is unclear if not dubious. This becomes particularly problematic when one considers the Arab spring as a whole.Events taking place in Tunisia and Egypt inspired protests in countries across the region (Saideman, 2012)<sup>25</sup>(Kienle, 2012), and activists in Syria saw events in Tunisia and Egypt as inspirational to their own struggle to get rid of their regime(Leenders, 2012).If an analyst were to adopt a strictly non-voluntarist explanatory regime(that is if ideas and beliefs are to be ignored) he would be hard pressed to explain what exactly it was that spread from Tunisia, to Egypt and so on.

To be fair to Wickham-Crowley he does concede that cultural theories have the ability to make greater sense of conscious mobilization and new ideologies(Wickham-Crowley, 1997). To understand how I now turn to the work of Eric Selbin, who argues that voluntarist constructions such as symbolic politics, collective memory, and the social context of politics are central to understanding revolutions and that without people articulating compelling stories and shared visions of the further revolutions such revolutions will not come(Selbin, 1997). Selbin's account while veering dangerously towards the romantic is from an explanatory point of view both illuminating and confusing when compared against the case of Tunisia. He emphasises the role of leaders in shaping and guiding and mobilizing populations, while we know that the revolts in Tunisia were leaderless (Guessoumi, 2012). Yet his emphasis on the role of ideational streams as powerful and mobile appears to settle nicely with what we know about the effect of the events in Tunisia on other countries. According to Selbin there are strong historical and contemporary connections among modern revolutions, the example he uses is that of Cuban revolutionaries drawing on Mexico's independence struggle only to be used in turn as inspiration (along with

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Mexico) for Nicaraguan revolutionaries; as well as the example of Iranian leftists in 1979 taking inspiration from the writings of Che Guevara (Selbin, 1997). Selbin contends that there are two histories one that is written from above; and another that is accessible in the instruments of popular culture<sup>26</sup> which creates the possibilities or lack thereof of fundamental change because of the fact that most resistance movements often see their labours as extensions of some longer historical struggle held in collective memory (Selbin, 1997). Selbin's argument while fitting some part of the empirical reality of events in Tunisia suffers from some problems of its own. Selbin himself recognizes that terms like culture are so woefully imprecise so as to threaten utility, and advocates that to avoid this problem the focus must shift to individuals (Selbin, 1997). This is problematic because cultural theories of revolutions when they appeal to nation-specific culture or narrative restrict themselves to a sample of  $n=1$  making comparison in general impossible and seriously challenging the utility of such an analysis (Wickham-Crowley, 1997). The idea is put best directly by Wickham-Crowley:

“thus a French cultural theorist certainly could tell us something about the ‘frenchness’ of the French revolution just as an English cultural theorist might convey the ‘englishness’ of the English revolution of the 1640s but the peculiar cultural traits of the people or of the revolutionaries are very unlikely ever to tell us why a revolution occurred here but not there now but not then” (1997, p. 64).

When reduced to individual traits and actions the problem of uniqueness is even more acute. So far I have offered an incredibly dichotomous account of the major perspectives of revolutionary theory ignoring what areas of grey I could find in favour of sharply delimiting the areas within which key authors disagree. Yet it's important to note that many more recent perspectives/theories/analysis appear in the literature not as representations of poles in a debate

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but of perspectives that mark a synthesis of previously described factors such as the state, economy, ideology, and culture.

The arguments selected to work as examples of the combination of these variables all combine theoretical promiscuity with a focus on applying their compositions to empirical cases of social, or political revolutions. Misagh Parsa's argument on the causes of the social revolution in Iran combines elements of Paige's work along with aspects of Skocpol's state centric theory. Parsa's argument is based on the previously discussed notion that for collective action to occur people need to identify a social or human entity responsible for this situation, a process that becomes more likely when the state intervention in capital accumulation and allocation intensifies (Parsa, 1989). Economic factors combine with state behaviours in Parsa's perspective to produce revolutionary situations. Economic crises set the stage for such situations by worsening social conditions and enhancing social consolidation which depending on the extent of state intervention in capital accumulation and allocation causes different social outcomes<sup>27</sup> (Parsa, 1989). Parsa's explanation of the events leading up to the revolution in Iran is based both on the international context within which states act (Skocpol's world international context<sup>28</sup>) and class based analysis of different economic actors in Iran. Essentially he argues that the Iranian state under the Shah relied heavily on oil revenues and hence rendered the country vulnerable to the international commodities market; the state then used its revenues to intervene heavily in the Iranian economy causing revenue absorption crisis and demand pull inflation among other economic ills (Parsa, 1989). But for Parsa it was not the states international economic malfeasance but the political implications of its domestic behaviour that brought about the revolution of 1979. The Shah's accumulation policies in Iran favoured large landlords, industrial owners, the bureaucratic bourgeois and large merchants; and hence its response to

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domestic economic difficulties was essentially targeted at the smaller merchants who operated within the Bazar fixing profit rates at half the rate of inflation and causing many bankruptcies(Parsa, 1989). The economic relationship between the state and society as a whole also played a part. Workers both blue collar and white initially campaigned for economic goals that were made political because of the all-encompassing nature of state involvement in the economy(Parsa, 1989).The clergy was divided and had been previously antagonized by government policies such as land reform and female franchise; furthermore their power was directly attacked by government attempts to institute parallel religious institutions, reductions to clerical student stipends, and attempts to expropriate religious property; yet they were only important in revolutionary events because they controlled the mosques which became a common sight of protest(Parsa, 1989).The final collapse was brought upon by a combination of several variables. The merchants disrupted economic activity, workers disrupted private and government services, the mosques provided a site of protests and when the state attempted to use the military to crush dissent the army which was mostly composed of conscripts from the very same communities they were now meant to repress fell apart(Parsa, 1989). Parsa's account of the social revolution in Iran is very persuasive and strongly built on empirical fact, its discussion here is meant to illustrate the analytical utility of combing state centered perspectives with other explanations of revolution however it does in its strong focus on economic and political structures leave some serious questions unanswered.

Parsa argues that popular political action in Iran was spontaneous and hence that the arrival of Ramadan<sup>29</sup> provided a great opportunity because of the large number of people gathering in mosques(Parsa, 1989). Yet he never attempts to mention why it is that large numbers of people attend the mosque at this specific time of the year. While he makes the

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argument that the mosques became a site of popular protest because it was the only site free of government repression(Parsa, 1989) he doesn't stop to wonder why it was that the mosques were viewed as the kind of places where government repression was inappropriate.

Other scholars have offered similar perspectives that integrate the economic and political factors that Parsa employs with some level of ideational focus. Farideh Farhi applies Skocpol to Iran and Nicaragua and comes away with an analysis that strongly links ideology to revolutionary situations in both countries. She argues that both Iran and Nicaragua were shaped by their place in the international political and economic system, the fact that specific leaders had access to this system allowed them to ignore structural reforms which placed them in contention with various classes within their own societies who generated ideologies as a means to gain control of state apparatuses(Farhi, 1988). Farhi's work goes some distance in making the needed connections yet the Gramscian notion of hegemony she combines with ideology is very difficult to bind and apply elsewhere. Even within her case studies she concedes that the circumstances around the development of Shi'ism changed in Iran are very different from those under which Catholicism changed in Nicaragua(Farhi, 1988). She also fails to provide a generalizable accounting on the agents of changing worldviews in either country. Two things can be concluded from a discussion of Parsa and Farhi's work, the first is that it is possible and desirable to combine state-centered perspectives with other factors such as ideology or economics. And, second that such combination would be strengthened by a specific and empirical accounting of the cultural processes involved.

Perhaps the most variable inclusive perspective on revolutions comes from John Foran who attempts to include all the previously discussed variables into a comprehensive multi case analysis of third world revolutions. He argues that revolutions are a product of dependent

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economic development,(characterized by rapid growth in GNP, foreign trade and industrial and agricultural input combined with increasing inequality, debt and inflation) repressive governments, (characterized by the repression of the lower classes and the political exclusion of the middle and upper classes), world systematic opening, (characterized by disruptions between the ties of regimes experiencing dependant development and core economies<sup>30</sup>) and political cultures of opposition and resistance(the processes via which broad segments of the population articulate their experiences in such a way as to mobilize politically and form coalitions with other groups)(Foran, 2005). Foran's model is a good one in that it covers many of the variables that the literature discusses but most of it might not be applicable to the case of Tunisia. The economic situation in the country hadn't changed dramatically around the time of or shortly before the revolution, Tunisia was internationally recognized by the IMF as an economic success in 1994(Borowiec, 1998) and in 2008(Hamid, 2011), the unemployment rate was 13 % in 2009(IMF, 2010), in 1989 a year after Ben Ali assumed power it was 15.3%(Rama, 1998). One could make the argument that Tunisia was experiencing what Foran would call dependant development, but this development was no more dependant in 2011 than it was a decade before that. Furthermore the economic situation in rural towns like SidiBouzid<sup>31</sup> has been acutely dismal for years. Structural adjustment programs implemented in the country-side concentrated wealth among rural elites and disenfranchised the peasantry since 1989(King S. J., 1999). The regime was no more repressive in 2010 than in its beginning when Ben Ali promised reform and delivered a crackdown against opposition groups and civil society shortly after his ascent to power(Hamid, 2011). And the notion of world systematic opening is rendered irrelevant by the fact that Tunisia's external relationships with its main trade partner France did not change around the time of the protests. The notion of political cultures of opposition and resistance though

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might provide for an explanation for aspects of the revolution of 2010. Such as why protests erupted in places like Kasserine and Gafsa before it spread to the larger cities of Tunis and Carthage, or why previous strikes and protests as well as the government's brutal and repressive response to them were referenced during protests (Guessoumi, 2012).

Political cultures of opposition and resistance refer to the multiple ways of understanding one's circumstances that members of social groups sometimes articulate to make sense of their political and economic surroundings (Foran, 1997). For Foran political cultures are essential to the revolutionary process arguing that, prior to revolutions multiple groups elaborate multiple political cultures fashioned from such things as folk beliefs, historical memories of struggle and common experiences (Foran, 1997). The problem is that Foran does not explain why some political cultures win out over others (in terms of influence) or why it is that certain groups articulate specific political cultures in the first place and how and why some political cultures end in being "efficient" and some other do not. His account in other words veers dangerously close to the type of naïve tautological voluntarism that suggests revolutions occur because people accept revolutionary ideas. The best approach to this kind of problem would be one that recognizes the economic and political circumstances within which mass ideational shifts occur while also leaving enough room for actors to interact with this apparatus in varied ways with varied results. That is, on the voluntarism question I take a view similar to that of Farhi who argues that any explanatory perspective on revolutions needs to take into account the relatively enduring but also changing structures that condition and limit the actors whose behaviour constitutes world history (Farhi, 1988).

Skocpol's state centered perspective in its most recent version as formulated by Goodwin offers an interesting possibilities for analysis. Goodwin argues that revolutions are not only the

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product of economic exclusion or inequality but are more directly a response to severe and brutal repression typically violent and indiscriminate (Goodwin, 2001). He argues that states are important to the study of revolutions because revolutions necessarily involve the destruction or reorganization of the state, and because people revolt (or attempt to) in specific political contexts directly encountered, given or transmitted from the past; that is to say state structures are not only important to the success and failures of revolutionary movements but to their very formation as well (Goodwin, 2001). Besides generally creating the circumstances within which people rebel (a topic this review returns to in the coming paragraph) it's also important to note that the very actions of states influence the type and scale of political contentious challenges they encounter. One way states may do this is via repression; empirical examinations on repression lend support to both the idea that state repression dampens protest activity and the opposite notion that state repression increases protest activity (Beinin & Vairel, 2010). Yet the relationship between other state actions such as concession on protests is better established. Concessions, particularly when inconsistently granted, have been found to increase protest activity because they increase the likelihood that potential protestors will see their individual participation as impactful and their goals as achievable (Rasler, 1996). The evidence that state actions have an impact on the development of protest within their borders is further reason to factor the state into the study of contentious politics.

State centered perspectives emphasize the mechanisms via which states (foreign and domestic) shape modulate economic, associational and cultural phenomena (Goodwin, 2001). There are several types of state centered perspectives but for the argument I wish to make only the state constructionist perspective is relevant. According to Goodwin, states sometimes act in such a way as to shape the ideas, goals, strategies of actors in civil society by unintentionally

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fostering an environment that makes revolutionary grievances morally justifiable (Goodwin, 2001). While this perspective is limited in one key way, two analytical stops are needed before the argument can be completed. First Goodwin concedes that state centered perspectives are limited because they do not account for collective beliefs; second he argues that the fact that state constructionist perspectives are based on the notion of potential state autonomy and variable state capacities makes them compatible with the inclusion of other types of analysis (Goodwin, 2001). Therefore it follows logically that since states can construct the ideational (cultural) dimensions of revolutionary activity by the way they organize themselves, the interaction between cultural actors and the states attempts to control the political ideational arena is crucial to the understanding of revolutions and hence present a glaring gap in the literature on revolutions. Since it's generally accepted that the capability to communicate revolutionary agendas and broadcast regime violence is crucial for the development of revolutionary movements, the operation of the aspects of state organization that have bearing on this process, and more importantly the interactions of those aspects with revolutionary actors promises to be a fecund area of inquiry.

In order to clarify the point let me use Parsa's analysis of the Iranian revolution as an example. He argues that mourning ceremonies for the dead at mosques and poetry nights hosted and organized by Iranian writers were instrumental in the process of solidarity formation and mobilization against the Sha (Parsa, 1989). The reason why they were instrumental is obvious in light of what was previously discussed: the mourning ceremonies commemorated those killed by the regime and the tapes writers circulated were of poetry critical of the regime. However the reason such ideational outlets were available is because the Shah's state constructed a regime of censorship that made them attractive options of airing dissent. The same gap that is of lack of

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analysis of the intersection between contentious communication, revolutionary actors, and the state exists in reference to social movement literature as well. And while some social movement work exists on the role of newly emergent ICT<sup>32</sup>s and the effect they have on social movement participation the research is problematic for three reasons. First the results are wildly contradictory ranging the gambit between ICTs having no effect and ICTs increasing participation, second there is little analysis of the conditions under which different technologies are used differently for different results, and finally the studies conducted so far are so centered on particular organizations and actors as to make generalization difficult (Garrett, 2006).

### *Anthropology and contentious politics*

It's my contention that drawing a boundary between what is a social movement and what is a revolution is a task one should approach with great care, because both are underwritten by similar mechanisms and processes (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). The difference in terms is partially due to a difference in the phase of contentious politics that one chooses to analyze. Revolutions being defined here as being constituted by efforts to change political leadership drawing on a contrasting image of a just society, a notable degree of mobilization, and efforts to make this change through non-institutional means (i.e. protests, strikes, violence) (Goldstone, 2001). They are sudden large scale shifts in collective sentiments that surprise even the participants by their occurrence (Kuran, 1989). And the academic literature on revolutions is mostly centered on the state breakdown phase, or attempts at initiating such phases. Social movements on the other hand are characterized by slower processes such as a public campaign and the creation of special purpose advocacy associations (Tilly, 2004). That is the realm of activism that generates frames, gathers resources, organizes participants and generally takes place slowly and intermittently (depending on the government's vigilance) before the occurrence

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of revolution. Both revolutions and social movements represent forms of contentious politics. The term contentious politics describes situations in which actors make claims that impact or have a bearing on someone else's interest in which governments are either targets or third parties (Tilly, 2008). Revolutions can be distinguished from social movements<sup>33</sup>, because they are bigger (both in terms of number of participants and geographical spread) and because they usually involve a change in the personnel and/or philosophy of the state (Poulson, 2005).

Contentious politics are often characterized by what Tilly calls contentious performances. Contentious performances are process of claim making during contentious episodes which could involve speech acts or actions like cheering, throwing flowers, defacing or cursing (Tilly, 2008). The aim of such communication is the creation of narratives. Narratives in the form of stories, tales, anecdotes, or allegories serve as part of the framing process by investing moral meaning in a sequence of events in such a way as to construct and maintain individual and collective identities, as well as imply a teleological sequence stretching into the future (Polletta, 1998). Which brings us neatly to the aforementioned gap, that is analysts of contentious politics be their focus revolutions' or social movements take the capacity to communicate with others for granted despite the fact they all implicitly recognize that this capacity is vital, and despite the fact that such capacity is a function of the state regime in relation to which they are mobilizing. Appeals for the inclusion of culture into the study of social movements are concerned with the carriers of cultural meaning (Jasper, 2007), which can vary depending on the situation. In discussing the role of culture in contentious politics another gap becomes apparent, the relative lack of anthropological literature on revolutions.

Despite the multidisciplinary nature of the literature on contentious politics anthropologists have hardly been represented in it at all. Generally when they have, their

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discussion has not related to the larger literature on revolutions or social movements (Gibb, 2001). This is a glaring omission in light of the recent cultural focus of the contentious politics literature. It is beyond the scope of this review to launch into an exploration of the reasons for this absence<sup>34</sup>, nor is this an attempt to assert some anthropological ownership over all things cultural. Part of the problem with using the term culture is its relative vagueness. Its use does not endorse the existence of a “quasi-ontological, isolated, bound cultural layer underneath the concert action and manifest opinions of social movements and their participants” (Salman & Assies, 2009, p. 207). The second problem with using the term culture is that its boundaries and description are often areas of contestation, yet it’s in precisely because of the pluralistic, fragmented, and contested nature of culture that makes it so important to the study of contentious politics (Salman & Assies, 2009). Contentious politics not only have cultural dimensions but culture forms part of the arena in which contentious claims are made. Cultural arrangements legitimize and uphold particular political and social relations, and hence part of the work of social movements is to try and challenge such arrangements and attempt to create alternative cultures (Salman & Assies, 2009). Culture plays a critical role in aspects of collective action such as collective identity and habitus, affecting framing of interests and determination of goals (Salman & Assies, 2009) and therefore such processes can be perceived in the culture dimensions within which contentious claims are made. Those dimensions exist in the economic and political organization of a society as well as in kinship systems, religious convictions and mass media communications (Salman & Assies, 2009). This research examines mobilization to overthrow the Ben Ali regime inside one mass media source viewable in Tunisia at the time Al Jazeera but other aspects of culture in this case kinship could serve just the same analytical purpose.

*The role of mass Communications in Contentious Politics*

The hypothesis argued for above is that states construct the ideational environments within which contentious politics unfolds and hence that the contents of that environment as well as the way they interact with states are crucial to the process of contentious claim making. This contention is not in opposition to the literature, as the media and other sources of communication frame a movement both for its participants and the larger audience (Mcadam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Besides the aforementioned information concerning the literature on contentious politics literature from communications scholars also identifies the mass media, and more importantly the type of mass media to be instrumental to the process of political mobilization.

We know from previous literature in the contentious politics tradition that the space of contention and the role of the public in contentious claim making has changed greatly. In contention described by Charles Tilly for instance interactions between protestors, authorities and the public were localized, immediate and direct; protestors gathered and acted immediately by seizing grain, physical confrontation, or chanting, and authorities responded directly either with repression, or negotiation, or by addressing the crowd (Tilly, 1986). In the past the only segment of the public that was important were the bystanders who would cheer or boo and report events after the fact; in modern protests however the public that really matters is the larger public that are absent from events but are consuming media reports of the social protest (Koopmans, 2004). The shift in emphasis from direct localized actions to a focus on larger public has not erased direct localized action. But, even in the most prominent direct interactions between protests and the authorities in contentious politics today, that between police and demonstrators,

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the presentation, evaluation, and reactions to their actions in the media is often more significant and consequential than the actual events (Koopmans, 2004). Koopman's work focuses on parts of the developed world in which electoral politics, and hence voter perception and participation, are crucial to the maintenance of the political status quo. Yet while the kind of argument he makes is more applicable to the analysis of social movements in liberal democracies, because authoritarian regimes in general and the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia specifically obsess over the control of information the portrayal of social movement interactions with the authorities in the media might be as crucial. Not because it threatens the electoral future of individuals in the regime, but because it informs what would otherwise be an ignorant public about challenges to the regime. The importance of the media to social movements lies in the goals and motivations of movements and the media.

The relationship between the media and social movements is a relationship of mutual but uneven dependency. Social movements need the media for three purposes: to communicate with and mobilize the viewing public, to validate the movement as an important political player, and to widen the scope of the political contention to include new players as either mediators or partisans (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). All of which are processes that are integral to a movement's chances of succeeding in mobilizing support and effecting social change, but the media also need social movements. Social movements provide exciting (and hence profitable) content for the media filled with conflict, drama, and action (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Yet while the needs of the social movements can only be met by media outlets the media's need for dramatic content can be met from a variety of sources, meaning that movements need the media more than the media needs movements which makes the dependency uneven and tilts the power balance in favor of the media (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Gamson's explication of the

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relationship between social movements and the media is theoretically progressive but problematic because it's one sided. Social movements rely on the media in order to mobilize the public, garner validation and to involve third parties, that is they use the media as news makers but they also rely on the media as news consumers. Social activists rely on the media as a source of information not just on the stances of authorities and third parties but also a means to evaluate the reactions of others to their activities(Koopmans, 2004). The relationship between social movements and the media is not simply uneven relationship of mutual dependence it can be viewed as competitive.

Both the media and social movements are engaged in the process of interpreting events or framing(Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993)(Staggenborg, 2008). Journalists are in the business of turning raw happenings into news and in doing so choose a storyline for reporting and develop arguments supporting particular frames or interpretations of those happenings(Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). This process might or might not place the media in competition with social movements because some frames are more conducive to mobilization, validation, and the inclusion of new participants than others are. Empirical data supports the idea that what is important to social movements is not just that their activities are broadcast on mass media but how they are broadcast. The general textile strike of 1924 was enabled by the media which allowed textile workers across the American south to share grievances and hear president Roosevelt's supportive broadcasts (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001).. Furthermore the case of the textile workers provides an excellent application of state constructionist theory in the study of contentious politics. Since the founding of radio stations in the South had the unintended consequence of creating a relatively autonomous community of musicians (many of them former

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mill workers) who not only passed information from mill town to mill town but also wrote and performed songs that expressed the concerns of mill workers(Roscigno & Danaher, 2001).

Other examples also exist in the literature. During the 1990s with Germany in the midst of a public debate that cast asylum seekers as the most serious problem facing it, radical right wing attacks against asylum seekers grew while their violence against other targets remained unchanged or decreased, but when the asylum issue left public discourse the radical right wing violence against asylum seekers decreased(Koopmans, 2004). An example of the relationship between mass media and popular mobilization in the Middle East is the role of the Voice of the Arabs radio broadcasts during the 1950s. The period, termed the Arab cold war, saw a contest for power between nationalist governments and more conservative regimes aligned with the west, in which the nationalist Voice of the Arabs broadcasts from Cairo triggered political protests in Amman, Beirut, and Baghdad(Lynch, 2012). Since the events of the Arab Spring a new narrative, one that concerns itself with ICTs<sup>35</sup> generally and social networking website specifically, has developed that points to yet another way in which the media might have impacted moralization.

Explanations for events in the Arab spring as a whole which rely on social networking have been prominent in the press(Alterman, 2011). Yet they are also popular among scholars trying to understand contentious politics generally. Scholars studying the role of new ICTs in social movements have mainly focused their work on the role of ICTs in social movement mobilizations(Garrett, 2006). ICTs are thought to influence mobilization in three ways. They increase political participation by reducing participation costs and facilitating the creation of a collective identify with shared grievances/demands, they intensify contentious activity by accelerating and geographically spreading social movement protests and facilitating the

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communication of likeminded individuals, and they improve social movement organization by facilitating communication between social movement organizations and by creating new forms of decentralized and non-hierarchical organizations that are more mobile and resilient(Garrett, 2006). Social media was instrumental in the Arab Spring because it created the communication infrastructure that allowed civic leaders to activate large numbers of protestors(Howard & Muzammil, 2013). Empirical examination of this question in relation to the revolution in Egypt is not supportive. In their examination of the question Brym et al use survey data to classify respondents as demonstrators (people who opposed the Mubarak regime and protested against it) or sympathetic onlookers(people who only opposed theMubarak regime) and found that while new media news sources such as Facebook and Twitter were more popular with demonstrators factors such as grievances, structural availability, and organizational ties were far more important in determining whether one was a demonstrator or onlooker(Brym, Godbout, Hoffbauer, & Menard, (Forthcoming)2014). Arguments for the importance of social movements in the study of Arab Spring while consist with the research on the role of mass media in social movements are problematic for reasons explained at length in the conclusion

Outside social movement research there is tentative support for the existence of a relationship between mass media and political mobilization to be found both in the actions social activists and in those of police states. In Syria at the start of the uprising citizen journalists as well as professional journalists risked their lives in order to broadcast the regime's actions to their countrymen and to the world at large (BBC, 2013). In China, the government internet censors blocked the word "Jasmine" in order to attempt to try and prevent sympathetic protests from taking hold there as they did in response to the events in Tunisia in other countries(Kneissl, 2011). That contentious politics is deeply intertwined with communication and the ways in

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which the state regulates it seems to be recognized by both the state and people protesting it, yet it remains seriously under theorized. The point can be made more clearly if China is to be used as an example again. The Chinese government according to a recent wide-ranging statistical analysis seems to allow criticism of the government and its policies no matter how vitriolic but seems to censor efforts at collective action no matter the politics or purpose (King, Pan, Jennife, Roberts, & E., 2013). It's trivial to point out that police states censor media content. But, the fact that they as well as activists seem to view censorship as a tool to curtail/enhance collective action is indicative of the fact that there exists a relationship between the media, political mobilization, and state censorship.

### *Al Jazeera and protest*

Al Jazeera rose to prominence during the wars in Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2001) because most of the international media relied on its reporting for their coverage (Lahlali, 2011). Al Jazeera's coverage is widely credited to have been influential in mobilizing public opinion, inspiring protest of the Iraq war (both for the bombing of 1998 and the invasion in 2003) and protests in support of Palestinians in many Arab countries (Lahlali, 2011)<sup>36</sup>. Since then it is known to have played a role in driving anti regime protests in Egypt and Tunisia (Kneissl, 2011). Moreover the regimes in question and the activists knew that it did meaning its presence along with the interaction between it and the state apparatuses aimed at information control played a role in protests activity. That media specifically and Al Jazeera in particular is influential in shaping public opinion in the middle east is also partially indicated by the fact that when they were discontented with Al Jazeera's coverage both the United States and Saudi Arabia launched satellite news channels of their own (Al Hurra and Al Arabiya respectively) (Lahlali, 2011). The main reason Al Jazeera is influential in the Arab media market is directly related to

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how states in the region attempt to control information within their territories. Transnational Arab media (of which Al Jazeera is an example) have a tremendous impact on public opinion because they provide people in the region with otherwise hard to find venues to exchange views; furthermore they strengthen linguistic and cultural ties between countries for instance by broadcasting cultural festivals taking place in one country throughout the Arab world(Lahlali, 2011).

*Summary of what is known and what is unknown about the role of communication in contentious politics*

This review has discussed the literature on revolutions, social movements and communication in contentious politics, there are several important points that can be drawn from this discussion in summary. The first -from the literature on social movements-is that people do not rebel in response to objective misery but require a process of translation that establishes a connection between the state and their current misery, and which portrays the situation as changeable(McAdam, 1999)(Kuran, 1989). This process of framing connects between the values, interests, beliefs and goals of social movement organizations and the general public, and because it's essential a meaning creating process is cultural.

The second is that the literature on the relationship of mass media to social movement's mobilization points to the fact that it's not that their activities are broadcast but how their activities are broadcast that is important in terms of social movement mobilization. The logical inference being that broadcasts that communicate to the larger public the kinds of frames that social movements communicate to participants and spectators of their claim making when they are mobilizing support are more likely to help movements mobilize. Social movements mobilize

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support by casting dissatisfactory situations as the fault of authorities, painting protestors as representative of the average citizen, and pointing to the risks that face the community in question if they do not protest (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). All of which are frames that social movements communicate in rallies, and protests but which can also be effective when communicated via mass media.

The third and final conclusion that can be drawn from an examination of the literature on revolutions is that states matter in the study of revolutions. States are often the targets which revolutionaries want to destroy or reform, they are also intimately involved in shaping the economic, political, and cultural environment within which such challenges take place (Goodwin, 2001). States are also important in the study of revolutions not simply as targets of contentious claims, or as shapers of the general environment within such claims are made but also because their actions in response to challenges sometimes enhance the mobilizations of their publics. Actions like state concessions spur protests because they communicate to protestors that their goals are achievable (Rasler, 1996).

In conclusion I argue that that while illustrative the cultural turn in social movement research doesn't actually provide us with a good strategy to study culture in social movements and ignores the larger structure within which movements mobilize. State constructionist theories provide a workable method to evaluate this structure but do so at the expense of many variables that could prove crucial to a circumspect analysis of revolutions in general and the events in Tunisia specifically. The theoretical argument made in this review is then summarized as follows: contentious politics have cultural dimensions, those dimensions are perceptible in the media, and the media in general and Al Jazeera specifically deserve attention if we are to develop and understanding of the 2010-2011 revolution in Tunisia.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology: The Revolution will be televised**

#### *Restatement of the Research Problem*

Various aspects of the 2010 revolution in Tunisia are atypical of previous revolutions described and analyzed in the literature. For instance, the uprisings were leaderless and not animated by any overarching ideological commitment (Guessoumi, 2012). Furthermore they were largely non-violent because the military -the largest and best armed part of the security forces -stood down in the face of continuous public protest. One way in which the revolution in Tunisia mirrors previous revolutions is that it was entirely unpredictable, even to regional observers who were looking to make precisely that kind of prediction (Goodwin, 2011). Yet despite this important similarity the events occurring during the revolution both complement and contradict previous theoretical work on revolutions in ways that can generate several types of research problem.

The research problems posed by the revolution can be split into at least two categories: an empirical problem, and a theoretical/analytical problem. Empirically speaking, despite valiant scholastic efforts to gather empirical data on the events taking place at the time in Tunisia, there still remains a paucity of empirical data concerning those events especially in the areas of media content, access and impact on mobilization that this research project concerns itself with. It is part and parcel of the scientific project to align previous theory with new observations and the relative lack of empirical data threatens to make previous understandings outdated.

On the analytical side the chief explanatory variables of economics, state structure, and repression remained unchanged at the beginning of the revolution in December

2010. New explanatory variables fare equally poorly, economic disparity (Achy, 2011) and rising food prices (Lagi, Bertrand, & Bar-Yam, 2011) are a regional rather than Tunisian only phenomenon and are in some instances more acute in countries that did not have a revolution than they are in countries that did. Internet social networking was instrumental in Iran in 2009 yet that popular unrest never coalesced into a second Iranian revolution. A working understanding of why and how revolution occurred in Tunisia in 2010 in order to be externally valid would not only have to explain the causes of the 2010 revolution in Tunisia it would also have to explain why's a revolution failed to occur in similar circumstances elsewhere.

Theoretically speaking students of contentious politics have offered up a variety of explanations for previous contentious activity that do not mesh with the empirical facts of the case study, necessitating a re-examination of theories of contentious politics in light of the events in Tunisia. State centered approaches to revolutions are theoretically useful because they encapsulate key aspects of the specific events that took place in Tunisia in 2010 as well as provide persuasive answers to fundamental questions about revolutions generally. Questions like why revolutions only occur in the historical record beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, why revolutionary movements concern themselves with collapsing or changing the state, and why revolts and civil disturbances are common but revolutions rare (Sanderson, 2005). Yet state-centered approaches to revolutions fail to adequately account for the importance of collective beliefs and discourse in revolutions (Goodwin, 1998). This is of particular importance since, segments of society can only resist oppression collectively if that oppression is collectively defined as both unjust and changeable (McAdam, 1999). The aim in pointing this out is not to discard state-centered analysis but to try to understand the ways in

which particular state arrangements foster and give rise to collective beliefs that eventually overthrow them. Cultural theories because they are based on collective beliefs are also of incredible value in analyzing the events that took place in Tunisia. Culture is also important in the study of contentious politics because it is not static but a place of continuing contestations and redefinitions (Salman & Assies, 2009). In a sense this research is a continuation of the anthropological tradition of studying cultures from afar<sup>37</sup>.

### *Research Questions*

The failure of many of the classical variables that have been employed by students of contentious movements is, as I have previously argued in this thesis, a product of a gap in the literature in regards to the interactions between government policy and cultural discourse. One scene of such culture discourse is locally popular mass media, and it is the purpose of this thesis to examine this relationship as it relates to the Tunisian revolution of 2010-2011. This research responds to the theoretical problem by making its focus the popular satellite television news channel Al Jazeera and analyzing its role in the 2011 Tunisian revolution referring both to its impact on mobilization and the ways in which the Ben Ali regime's media censorship might have shaped that impact. This also responds to the analytical problem by proposing two units of analysis (Al Jazeera's coverage of the events, and the Ben Ali regime's censorship) that might have made attempts to overthrow the regime more successful. I propose two related research questions to address this:

1. What was the impact of Al Jazeera's coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution?
2. In what ways did the Ben Ali regime's censorship regime shape this coverage?

*Research Methodology*

The overall methodology selected for this research is that of the case study. Case study research involves the selection of a bounded system for analysis using data from a variety of sources to report a case description (Creswell, 2007). In this case the object of study is the interaction between popular mobilization, Al Jazeera, and the Ben Ali regime's media censorship regime between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011. This case study represents a type of instrumental case study, a case study that focuses on an issue of concern, and then selects a bounded case as an example of the issue (Creswell, 2007), instrumental case studies aim to provide insight into an issue and refine theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this case the issue of concern (as detailed at greater length in the review of the literature chapter 2), is the intersection of popular protest, mass media and state censorship of the media to address the following questions. What was the impact of Al Jazeera's coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution? And, in what ways did the Ben Ali regime's censorship shape this coverage?

Tunisia, Ben Ali and Al Jazeera are an example of this phenomenon. A single case is examined rather than several in order to make the process of data collection and analysis feasible and because, the more cases are selected the less in depth the analysis becomes (Creswell, 2007). Case Study methodology requires a contextualized detailed description based on multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007) (Baxter & Jack, 2008), making this approach ideally suited to a project concerned with studying a phenomenon (the mass media's role in popular protest) in context (in light of state imposed limitations and opportunities). Furthermore the need (as argued for in the literature review) to understand *Al Jazeera's* impact on popular protests in the larger context of the state calls for the use of a

case study, because case studies are useful in circumstances where context is important and the behaviour of participants cannot be modified or manipulated<sup>38</sup>(Baxter & Jack, 2008). While well suited for use in this type of research, the case study method has some draw backs.

First, it is possible to define a case too broadly and hence lose analytical focus, brevity and rigor due to the copious amounts of information that need to be collected and analyzed(Baxter & Jack, 2008), in order to respond to this problem the data sample will be rigidly delimited. The second problem is more fundamental, that of identifying the case and determining its boundaries in a non-arbitrary manner(Creswell, 2007). The fact that this is an instrumental case goes some way towards compensating for this as there is a theoretical gap in the literature that this case is meant to occupy, More detailed justifications for the boundaries of this case are presented in the section on research sample and sources.

The case study consists of two parts responding to the two questions of research, the first is an evaluation of the impact of Al Jazeera on mobilization during the Tunisian revolution, and the second an evaluation of that impact in light of the Ben Ali regime's censorship regime. That is to say the second part of the case study will relate between the regime's control of the media environment and the impact of Al Jazeera on mobilization. To ask about the impact of Al Jazeera on popular mobilization in Tunisia during a specific period in time is to broach discussion of a causal relationship between the content of Al Jazeera broadcasts and popular protests, as well as launch into an exploration of the complex mechanisms that underwrite revolutions. Revolutions while not characterized by general laws are characterized by wide ranging recurring casual mechanisms(Tilly, 1999). Various methods exist to establish causation amidst these mechanisms; in this case causation will be

established in several analytical steps. Tilly recommends establishing a plausible relationship between variables, examining variations in the variables to be measured, and forming contingent predictions of the relationship between variables (Tilly, 1995). Furthermore in parsing the causality puzzle this research attempts to qualify the type of causation as either necessary or sufficient.

The relevance of necessary and sufficient causes in the study of revolutions is contested by many social science methodologists because, among other reasons, they are skeptical that such causes actually exist (Mahoney, 2004). Such criteria are irrelevant if there is no manner to identify, and distinguish between, sufficient and necessary causes in revolutions in general and the 2010 Tunisian revolution specifically. In fact however there exist empirically viable definitions of causality and a selection of analytical methods to make the distinction. A trivial necessary cause is one that is present in all cases irrespective of the value of the dependant variable; a tautological sufficient cause is one that is included in the very definition of the phenomenon in question (Mahoney, 2004). In this case the causality runs in two directions, this research is concerned with understanding the impact of Al Jazeera's coverage (independent value) on popular mobilization (dependant value) during the 2010 revolution; and with the impact of the Ben Ali regime's censorship (independent value) on Al Jazeera's coverage (dependant value)<sup>39</sup>.

To examine media impact is to examine the way in which this content brings about some change in people's thoughts and behaviours (Sparks, 2002). Sparks (2002) advocates that a statistical analysis be conducted to establish impact, in this case that would involve determining media content and then relating coded variables to actual incidences of popular protest, but since no independent source of the size and occurrence of popular

protests in Tunisia during the revolution exists statistical correlation is not possible in this case. Questions of effect cannot be answered by appealing to the content of the media alone, because content analysis cannot solely be used to infer audience reactions or behaviour (Macnamara, 2005). Surveys of what people's habits are with regards to the media (and for this research of people's political opinions and behaviours) are an excellent method to evaluate the relationship between variables (Sparks, 2002). As a sample survey this research relies on two surveys of popular opinion that were conducted in Tunisia shortly after the fall of the regime. The international republican institute survey (IRI) and the Arab barometer survey of public opinion (AB), which were conducted on March 2011 and September 2011 respectively.

While relying on the surveys of others does raise some problems with regards to validity (what methods were used) and control (what questions were asked) it does pose some advantages. Firstly in terms of validity both surveys detail the methods employed in their data collection as well as the method of selecting a sample representative of the whole country in a scientifically and academically satisfactory manner. The IRI survey relies on person to person interviews conducted by a Tunisian market research firm, while the AB relies on surveys distributed to households. The limitation of relying on questions formulated for other purposes by other researchers instead of questions formulated specifically for this research cannot be overcome by any method other than selecting the survey questions that have the closest bearing to the subject of this research. In terms of advantage both surveys collect public opinion information from across the country with a cumulative sample size of 2489 respondents (IRI 1293 and AB 1196).

Content analysis traditionally can be either quantitative or qualitative<sup>40</sup>; this research relies on qualitative content analysis over the popular quantitative method. Quantitative content analysis is capable of processing larger bodies of data and producing neat mathematical representations of media content, but because it relies on establishing impact by measuring repetitiveness it relies on a simplistic formulation of media impact in which more repetition means more impact (Macnamara, 2005). Many other forms of emphasis are possible, and repetition of a message does not enlighten us as to its impact on viewers or the context in which it is repeated. Factors such as size and intensity do not necessarily map onto the impact of media content or its social meaning, nor is it clear that other factors such as context are unimportant to impact and meaning (Macnamara, 2005). A qualitative approach will allow for a deeper understanding of media content, although the use of that methodology necessitates conducting the analysis on a smaller sample. What this methodological decision means in practical terms is that instead of documenting variable counts by reviewing the content in terms of how many times a specific idea or word is used this research will instead try to ask questions about how specific ideas are used, who uses them and where they fit in with the overall political context. The content analysis will be conducted using Al Jazeera news reports and the methods of analysis are described in greater detail later in this chapter. In order to respond to the second question concerning the Ben Ali regime's media censorship descriptions of this relationship in peer reviewed research will be employed as well as statements from Al Jazeera's former Director General Wadah Khanfar and pre-existing academic research found to be useful for accurately describing this relationship.

### *Research Materials*

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An important aspect of case study research is binding or limiting the scope of the case study to make data collection and analysis feasible, cases can be bound by time and place, by time and activity, and by definition and context(Baxter & Jack, 2008). I chose Tunisia as a case study over other countries in the region experiencing similar events in order to limit the impact of regional diffusion, a widely observed phenomenon in which protests in one Arab country inspired protests in another (Saideman, 2012). Since this case study is concerned with the role of mass media in mobilizing revolutions it is bound by concept. The case is further conceptually bound by its emphasis on the role of mass media in transforming isolated regional protests against the regime into a national revolution. The mass media might have functioned differently in the other Arab Spring countries. And, because it specifically examines the revolution against the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, it is bound in time to the twenty eight days between the start of protest on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 (Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation) and the departure of Ben Ali on January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Al Jazeera was selected as a media source for three reasons. First Al Jazeera is incredibly popular in the Arab world generally and in Tunisia specifically. In a 2010 poll on Arab public opinion satellite television news in general and Al Jazeera in particular led the way as a first source of news for respondents(Telhami, 2011). Al Jazeera has a potential audience in Tunisia of 1.6 million viewers(Allied Media, 2004), and in real rather than potential terms it was remarkably popular during the protests in 2010-2011. When asked what their main source of news was 69% of the IRI's Tunisia survey respondents reported television as their first mention( International Republican Institute, 2011) 79% of respondents to the Arab barometer survey in Tunisia reported television as their main source of news with only 2% reporting the internet as a source(Al Masri, 2012). Of those who reported television

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as their main source of news, 34% relied on national Tunisian television while 38% of respondents reported that Al Jazeera was their main source of news during the protests (Al Masri, 2012). The popularity of its broadcasting in Tunisia makes Al Jazeera's coverage of the events incredibly useful to this case study.

The second reason has to do with clarity. Social influence is dependent on the clarity, and richness of communication and its relative lack of barriers, filters or monitoring (Latane, 1996). Concerning clarity, the most popular media source in Tunisia is the television<sup>41</sup> with 207 per 1000 people, second comes radio with 158 radio receivers and then newspapers with 19 per 1000 people (Carnegie Endowment, 2004). Internet statistics are not used since the internet is a multidimensional tool and therefore statistics about internet access do not correspond directly to media consumption the way radio, television and newspaper statistics do. Yet in terms of lack of barriers, both newspapers and radio information is suspect as a source of research data. Arab governments have traditionally maintained tight control over the dissemination of information filtering any information that could compromise the government (Lahlali, 2011), and Tunisia is no exception. The press practiced self-censorship for very good reason. The government allowed a variety of newspapers and magazines to appear (even funding some of them) while signalling limits to writers and editors by seizing newspaper copies (*Al Mawqaf* and *Realités* in Dec 1988) and jailing journalists (Alexander, 2010); by never specifying an explicit list of unmentionable topics the government was able to maintain both the appearance of relaxed formal restrictions and a wooden self-censored press (Alexander, 2010). Radio media was under no looser scrutiny. In 2010 during the protests the country's four national stations were all state owned and operated, and the five privately owned radio stations operating in the country

operated under licenses that were granted to associates of President Ben Ali (Reporters Without Borders, 2011). State television on the other hand was effectively directed in both its domestic and foreign coverage by the regime (Sorkin, 2001). Satellite television channels like Al Jazeera while not free of mediation and barriers were subjected to far less control by the regime.

Finally in terms of concept, this case meant to illustrate the relationship between popular protests, mass media, and regime censorship; Al Jazeera's function and role in 2010-2011 in Tunisia uniquely positioned it at this intersection. Al Jazeera was banned by the Ben Ali regime and so did not have a news bureau in Tunis during the time of the protests, instead Al Jazeera relied on and reported first person accounts and video from people who were involved in the protests (Khanfar, 2011). During the protests Al Jazeera's staff collected obscure user generated content and broadcast it to audiences in Tunisia (Alterman, 2011); transforming Al Jazeera during the protests into a popular source of and distributor of cultural ideas and values, a position distinct from any other news channel that was viewable in Tunisia at the time.

Relying on media as a source of research poses some general and some specific methodological challenges, questions of media bias, blindness, or incompetence are ever present. Generally speaking, social movements and the media are both in the business of framing social events (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993) (Staggenborg, 2008), yet the relationship between them is asymmetric<sup>42</sup> meaning media representations of social messages might shed more light on media practices than on social movement activity (Staggenborg, 2008). Focusing on a single well known satellite station does help, in the sense that there exists previous academic research on their framing traditions and media practices

This case study does not rely uniquely on content analysis data; it also consults data from the AB and IRI surveys concerning public opinion viewership patterns and other factors to contextualize the media content. Furthermore in order to adequately establish the recent history of the Ben Ali regime and Al Jazeera's relationship in response to the second question of research, a brief history of that relationship will be included. This historical analysis will only be used to describe the relationship of the regime to Al Jazeera in the years leading up to the start of protests in December 2010 will be based on using secondary peer reviewed research materials to map out a sketch of that history. Using historical data is always a venture that should be approached carefully because research biases, observer errors, informant errors, and errors in recording render historical data contentiously prone to error(Bernard, 2006). Restricting data to peer-reviewed research does go some way to help resolve some of these issues.

### *Data Collection and Sampling*

Case study validity can be enhanced by relying on multiple sources of data to study the same phenomenon(Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this case the data can be split into primary sources and secondary sources. In terms of secondary sources, data is gathered from the IRI survey of public opinion in Tunisia, the AB survey of public opinion, and peer reviewed prior research on the relationship between the Ben Ali regime and Al Jazeera. The primary data for this research are broadcasts of the Al Jazeera Arabic news channel program *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* (Gathered from the Maghreb) between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011. Broadcasts were solicited from the Al Jazeera Center for Studies<sup>43</sup> which liaised with the channel headquarters in Doha to obtain the recordings. After defining the object and purposes

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of this research the data set was made available in the form of labeled and recorded compact disks featuring *Al Hassad's Al Maghrebi's* broadcasts during the aforementioned period.

Because this is an instrumental case study meant to provide an example of the interaction described briefly above and at length in review of the literature the sampling method employed is purposive. That is to say that the sampling selects from the available data the segments most relevant to the research questions (Macnamara, 2005). The program airs nightly and was selected as a source for data based on the assumption that Al Jazeera's most comprehensive coverage of the protests will be aired on the news program that specializes in the North African region.

The unit of data collection will be each day of reporting in which in the program reported on protest activity in Tunisia. Since each episode of the program spans several topics only the sections of the programming that referred to popular protests unfolding in Tunisia were selected again based on the assumption that this is the section of the reporting that is likely to have the greatest impact on events taking place in Tunisia. Popular protests are defined as per the definition used in the Arthur Banks dataset includes riots, general strikes, and demonstrations<sup>44</sup>. That is to say that in this research I will restrict the object of observation to news reports of contentious collective activity in the previously defined form of riots, strikes and demonstrations. The terms of measurement in the Arthur Banks data set are large, requiring a relatively large number of people to be involved in order for an event to count as a form of contentious collective activity which might ignore politically important but demographically underrepresented acts of protest (Bouazizi's self-immolation for example). The rationale behind this preference is probabilistic. Since larger events are more likely to be reported, focusing the analysis on reports of larger events means there is a smaller chance of

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selective analysis, while small events because some of them might be overlooked would produce a more capricious sample.

The final issue of data collection is a linguistic one, since the contents of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* are aired in and viewed in Arabic but are reported and analyzed in English some of the show's content was inevitably lost in translation. This process is unavoidable, however two steps were taken in improve the quality of the translation. The translation of the selected segments of reporting was done all at once and consistently with areas of linguistic confusion being adjudicated by appeal to the Oxford essential Arabic dictionary. Randomly selected parts of the translation were played back to other Arabic speakers to confirm accuracy of the translation. The selected translated transcripts of the content of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* represent the dataset of this research.

### *Methods of Data Analysis*

The analysis portion of this case study takes place in three stages; the first a content analysis of the information from *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*, followed by combination of that content analysis and survey information as they relate to questions of mobilization, and concluding with a use of the secondary literature on censorship in Tunisia with an eye to determining how that censorship might have impacted Al Jazeera's coverage. In order to analyze the type of causation that is at play this research also employs the method of difference and the method of agreement to distinguish trivial necessary causes and tautological significant causes. In the method of agreement an analyst concludes a type is not necessary for an outcome if the type is present and absent in cases that include the outcome; in the method of

difference an analyst can conclude a type to be insufficient for an outcome in cases where the outcome is both present and absent(Mahoney, 2004).

The analysis of data (as well as its collection) was guided by event catalogues, which are useful for this kind of research in particular because of their strict emphasis on scrutinizing data categories and measurement criteria. An event catalogue is a set of descriptions of multiple social interactions collected from a delimited set of sources according to relatively uniform procedures(Tilly, 2002).Using the event catalogue in this case might be problematic because catalogues are only as reliable as the data from which they are constructed, in this case the recordings of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*. The mass media and social movements have as previously mentioned an uneven relationship of mutual dependence, the media and movements are both in the business of framing events and because some frames are more conducive to the interests of social movements than others the relationship can become contentious(Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993)<sup>45</sup>. This doesn't present a serious problem here because any event catalogue (or other research method for that point) would suffer from the inherent provisionality of data in scientific research. In that sense the data employed remains useable until a more circumspect data set is compiled.

Qualitative content analysis has been criticized as unscientific because it relies heavily on the subjective interpretations of the researcher(Macnamara, 2005). In order to ensure precision and enhance validity the content analysis will focus on manifest rather than latent media messages. The assumption being that manifest meanings are by definition easier to measure, compare and analyze<sup>46</sup> and hence allow less room for researcher bias. Furthermore since the conceptual focus of this case study is media impact it is logical to assume that the

more manifest the content the more likely it is to have been understood by the audience, and hence the more relevant it is to impact.

This case study relies on a priori design for similar reasons. Coding data inductively (through the process of analysis) rather than deductively (before analysis) allows for biases because it allows issues and messages to be added at the whim of the researcher and hence results in the data being treated in an inconsistent manner (Macnamara, 2005). Yet trying to construct codes and erect categories based on previous research and theory might cause innovative perspectives and concepts to be ignored during analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). In order to enhance validity and treat data consistently while also leaving room for the data to surprise, the codes and categories of this case study have been based on exploratory research. Which involves a cursory examination of the data to be analyzed (in the case, the recordings of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*) before the coding scheme is finalized (Neuendorf, 2002). This will also allow for a more accurate delimitation of categories and specification of what is measured.

Event catalogues analysis emphasizes internal regularities of phenomenon (Tilly, 2002), in this case the sections of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* the coverage the protests in Tunisia. The days of broadcasts serve as this research's unit of analysis, in this case the unit of data analysis and the unit of data collection is the same. Segments from each day of data collection will be categorized based on the source of information (i.e. person or organization it comes from) and the message. In terms of message, part of what this research conceptually relates to is the role of mass media in the mobilization of protests. In order to study this, the message will be coded in terms previously discussed in the theory section. Coding only for positive messages (or in this case revolutionary messages) is unbalanced (Macnamara, 2005),

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therefore for each code included from the literature there will also be an anti-code that indicates it's opposite. This makes the research falsifiable by allowing for the existence of a conceptual world in which Al Jazeera could have reported on events and still not have had an impact on mobilization. A message can be coded as follows:

Subversive	It points to a dissatisfactory social, political, or economic situation and blames the current government for it.(Mcadam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001)
Loyal	It points to a dissatisfactory social, political, or economic situation but doesn't blame the government for it.
Attributes similarity	It connects between Tunisians at large (or a demographic group such as young people) and protestors.(Mcadam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001)
Attributes difference	It distinguishes between Tunisians at large (or a demographic group such as young people).and protestors.
Attributes threat	Points to the negative consequences of a failure to protest.(Mcadam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001)
Attributes safety	Points to the negative consequences of protesting.
Signals opportunity	It reports contentious activity as spreading geographically, growing numerically, or being supported by civil society organizations, also if it discusses concessions on behalf of the regime(Rasler, 1996).
Signals Mischance	It reports on contentious activity shrinking geographically ,dwindling numerically, being criticised by civil society organizations , or regime intransigence

Table 3.1

The above coding scheme will be utilized to sort each reporting day's broadcaster segment, video and interview segments. These codes are not mutually exclusive, the same message could be subversive, attributing of similarity and threat, and also signal opportunity. This is useful because it allows the content analysis to touch on potency, because each of these codes

is thought to be mobilizing in and of its own right, the presence of more than one in one segment can be deduced to indicate a more potent message<sup>47</sup>. Also the relative rigidity of these categories makes for qualitative analysis that is a both replicable and systematic assignment of codes to passages of text.

In term of validity, because this research relies on purposive sampling and conceptual categories validity is sought outside the traditional criterion of generalizability. Content validity refers to the extent to which the codes capture the full extent of the concept being measured(Neuendorf, 2002), which in this case is bolstered by retrieving concepts that relate to mobilization from the literature and incorporating them in the coding scheme. Construct validity refers to the extent to which the constructs being used in this research relate to other constructs in a way consistent with previous theory(Neuendorf, 2002).While this is an exceedingly difficult standard to meet because of the fluid usages of words like mobilization, opportunity, and threat in the literature, the use of previous research to create the constructs from which this research works goes a long way towards ensuring construct validity.

Coding of the transcripts was accomplished by uploading transcripts into the software program QDA miner and coding transcripts based on whether they conform to the categories in table3.1. Computer software is used because it streamlines the process of media content analysis by providing a place to store and analyze data (Macnamara, 2005). The coding is partially reliant on computer software rather than completely automatic, because fully automatic content analysis software misses context and often makes arbitrary associations between words and phrases(Macnamara, 2005).Furthermore, fully automated analysis programs often do not reveal the precise workings of their coding processes resulting in output devoid of understanding, or “black box” measurement(Neuendorf, 2002).

In order to construct an event catalogue we need to explain: how the phenomena in question leaves traces, how we can observe those traces, and how can we use those traces to reconstruct specific causes and effects of the phenomenon (Tilly, 2002). In this case the impact of Al Jazeera during the Tunisian revolution of 2010-2011 is not perceivable by focusing on the content of Al Jazeera alone, instead analysis will rely on the public opinion surveys the IRI and AB surveys whose information will be used along with the theoretical notion of the “free rider”<sup>48</sup> problem to better understand *Al Jazeera’s* impact. The final part of this analysis will include the use of academic research on media censorship in Tunisia generally and as it relates to Al Jazeera specifically to explain the nature of that impact. There are at least two theoretical problems with using event catalogues, one the events being described might not mean what an analyst takes them to mean, and second the records being examined might not be a complete picture of the phenomenon at play (Tilly, 2002). Both present biting challenges to this analysis and can only be compensated for partially, on questions of meaning careful attention is taken to focus on manifest meaning and double check the integrity of the translations. As for the question of circumspection it’s true that this research focuses only on a small portion of the material aired on Al Jazeera Arabic news channel during the revolution, however it is highly unlikely that content differs in a drastic degree from one program to another or from one hour of broadcasting to the other,

### *Summary*

This research sets out to evaluate the impact of Al Jazeera on popular mobilization during the Tunisian revolution of 2010, as well as the role of government censorship in shaping this coverage. These research topics respond to theoretical gaps in the literature by creating an empirically guided instrumental case study. The case study is based on data gathered from

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three sources broadcasts of the Al Jazeera program *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*, two public opinion surveys conducted in Tunisia after the protests the IRI and AB surveys, and previous academic research on the censorship regime of the Ben Ali regime. Broadcasts of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* are selected based on whether or not they report on protest activity in Tunisia and are qualitatively assigned to a theoretically generated list of concepts that relate to mobilization from the literature. Data is collected and analyzed using event catalogues, and the final case report includes the catalogue, survey data and censorship research.

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis: How Ben Ali Assisted Al Jazeera Assist him out of Power**

### *The Study Plan*

This research set out to construct an instrumental case study that examines the role of mass media in revolutions by evaluating the impact of the satellite news channel Al Jazeera's coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution, as well as looking at the way regime censorship shaped that coverage. In terms of data sources this case study has relied on three sources, recordings of the Al Jazeera news channel program *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi* -specifically on its coverage of protest activity inside Tunisia-, the results of two surveys completed in Tunisia shortly after the fall of the regime conducted by the International Republican Institute and the Arab Reform Initiative, and previous research on the Ben Ali regime's censorship practices.

Since the survey information and previous research both come in a form that is easily amendable to incorporation in analysis, the main task of this research has been the selecting, translating, and transcribing of the broadcasts of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*. Broadcasts were analyzed in terms of the source of information, and the message of the broadcasts. The message was coded in reference to the literature which identifies certain types of messages as being conducive to instigating revolution, a selection of which were used in the analysis of the messages of the broadcasts.

### *Research Questions*

In order to address the empirical, analytical, and theoretical gaps previously discussed this case study concerns itself with the resolution of two questions:

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1. What was the impact of *Al Jazeera's* coverage on mobilization in Tunisia during the 2010 revolution?
2. In what ways did the Ben Ali regime's censorship regime shape this coverage?

### *Overview of the Protest Footage:*

Before delving into means, and methods of this case study a short overview of what the broadcasts of *Al HassadAl Maghrebi* looked like would be instrumental to describe the general political atmosphere in Tunisia at the time. Each broadcast essentially has three sections, a broadcaster segment, usually followed by a video segment, and one or more interviews. The first protest video that was aired was footage of the demonstration in Sidi Bouzid showing a crowd of several hundred men and women of various ages gathered around the entrance of the police station. The following day's images of protest were also from Sidi Bouzid and showed a larger peaceful gathering before the police station in the city in which people were chanting slogans and giving speeches to the crowd, as well as less peaceful adolescents throwing rocks at an unidentified target.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010 *Al HassadMaghrebi* showed an even larger solidarity demonstration only this time protest had moved into the capital Tunis. The crowd, which was primarily composed of artists and members of civil society, gathered before the national theater to express their sympathy with the residents of Sidi Bouzid, condemn government repression, and demand the release of those still held by security forces across the Tunisian Interior. The gathering was peaceful until police confronted the crowd, the video showed tear gas being fired into the crowd as well as the crowd being forcibly halted by a wall of riot shields. On December 31<sup>st</sup> the broadcast ran internet footage of lawyers protesting outside the national courthouse in

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Tunis facing a wall of police as they chanted for the police to clear the way. The program also ran video of lawyers at the courthouse in Djerba attempting to march their way past another police blockade while singing, only one line of the song can be heard in the video “Once the people wanted to live /and they must one day achieve that destiny”. The program also ran footage of lawyers protesting at other courthouses in unspecified parts of the country, one of which was a video of policemen assaulting one of the protesting lawyers.

On January 8<sup>th</sup> *Al HassadMaghrebi* showed a large gathering of UGGT members in support of the residents of Sidi Bouzid and other parts of the country facing government repression, as well as footage of various marches and clashes in unspecified parts of the country. On January 12<sup>th</sup> *Al Hassad* showed the largest demonstration yet of what appeared to be several thousand people marching in Sfax. On that day they also showed clashes between tear gas wielding police and rock throwing protesters in several unspecified Tunisian cities. They also showed large crowds gathered in Tunis as well photos of military members deploying in various parts of the city. That day’s broadcast also carried images of protesters clashing with police in Douz one of whom lay still bleeding from both his lower back and from somewhere on his head. The video from Nabil showed protesters who had been clashing with police taking an unconscious boy away presumably for medical assistance. On that day *Al HassadMaghrebi* took its viewers inside the hospital of Kasserine showing various protesters in various states of injury on stretchers many of them suffering not just from injuries inflicted by tear gas or beating beaten but by gunfire aimed at their heads, backs or stomachs. Such was the situation in Tunisia between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, a continuous expansion and escalation of protest meeting ever intensifying levels of state repression.

The impact of these images on the mobilization against the Ben Ali regime is unclear. Empirical examination of this question both in terms of the impact of repression on mobilization and the impact of mobilization on repression is an extensive area of study<sup>49</sup>. Generally mobilization has been found to increase state repression; state repression has been found to cause activists to run away, fight harder, or not respond at all (Davenport, 2005). Since the literature on the relationship between repression and mobilization is unclear the relationship between media broadcasts of repression and mobilization is hopelessly confusing. This overview is not meant to forward an argument regarding the images of protest but to provide some insight into the circumstances in Tunisia during the period analyzed below.

#### *Al Jazeera's impact on Mobilization during the Revolution*

The following analysis makes two inter-related arguments in response to the two research questions. In response to the first research question, the central argument of this analysis is that Al Jazeera's broadcasts during the revolution helped bring about the fall of the Ben Ali regime, because they widely circulated content and activity that was critical of the regime which encouraged the mobilization of its opponents. This conclusion is based on the fact that content on Al Jazeera programs mostly fell into the category of messages that the literature identifies as being conducive to revolt and on what we know about the demographics of media viewership and popular opinion in Tunisia at the time of the revolution.

In order to assess the impact of Al Jazeera on mobilization during the 2010 revolution, three steps were necessary. First the content of the broadcasts needed to be evaluated in order to determine if it represents the type of content that the literature suggests would encourage protests. Though various types of messages fall into this category for the purposes of this

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research broadcasts were reviewed for messages that were labeled subversive, loyal, attributive of similarity, signaling of opportunity or attributing of threat. For the sake of objective analysis each category of protest encouraging message was paired with a possible but logically opposite category of message. This allows for the research results to be falsifiable since it's entirely possible for Al Jazeera to report on events in Tunisia in a way that would not include the type of content that the literature identifies as being conducive to revolt. Table 3.1 in the methodology section outlines the coding scheme that was utilized.

In order to better understand how the codes were used during the research, examples of the categories that were found present in the sample are illustrative. Table 4.1 below presents one instance of each of the codes that appear in the results table.

Table 4. 1

<u>Code/ Date</u>	<u>Statement</u>	<u>Speaker(Title)</u>
Subversive/December 18 /2010	“In truth what concerns us with this situation are the true reasons for these clashes and protests. The real reason is that this is a region that is entirely deprived region in a country that permits selective deprivation. In Sidi Bouzid there are thousands of unemployed resulting in hopelessness, deviance, and wide scale migration to nearby countries. In truth, the young in Sidi Bouzid live this reality every day and it can only be fixed by elections.”	Ali Al Zariy (Member of the executive office of the UGGT in Sidi Bouzid as well as its Press agent)

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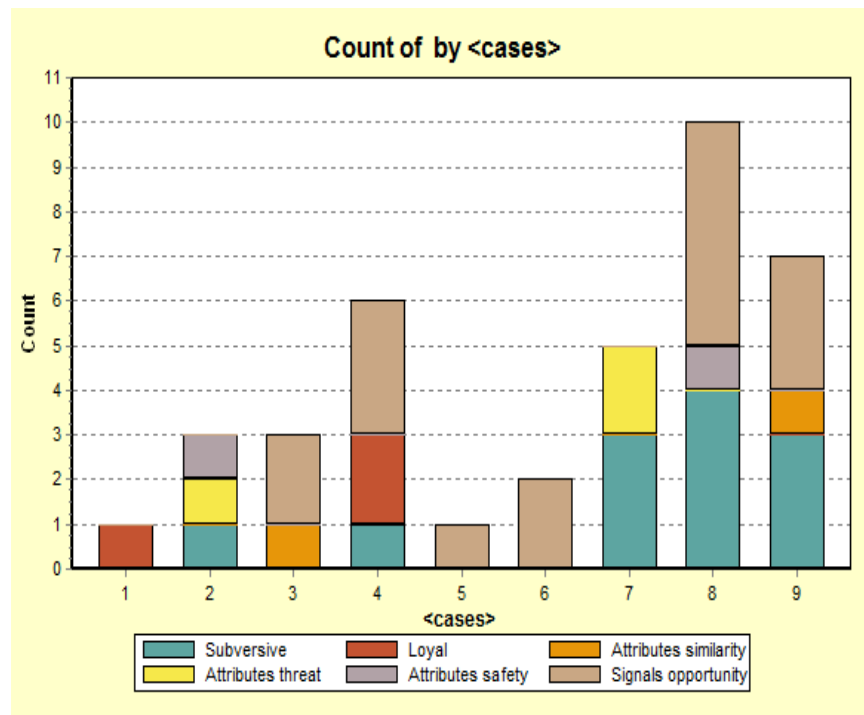
<p>Loyal/ December 17/2010</p>	<p>“It [original protest in Sidi Bouzid] was spontaneous, because of this painful incident the uprising might have contained people who were active in political organizations or parties but hundreds of others gathered spontaneously. We are living in a state of mass unemployment and the people that gathered there gathered in order to commiserate with his family knowing that this is not the first time that a young man has attempted suicide due to unemployment and poverty. This gathering lasted for hours and was a site for calls for national employment programs from several political directions. ”</p>	<p>Ali Al Bouazizi (General writer and assistant press agent) for the university office of the democratic progressive party)</p>
<p>Attributes similarity/ December 23/2010</p>	<p>“We are Tunisian artists....who decided to have a peaceful demonstration this afternoon in front of the national theater in Tunis, to express our solidarity with our fellow citizens who are facing down police fire and to condemn the disgusting brutality with which they have been faced, and to join our voices to the voices of all free Tunisians in pursuit of work and national dignity. And we ask for the fundamental freedoms of association,</p>	<p>Fathiel Al Jaibiey (Playwright and director)</p>

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	expression, speech and we ask for the removal of controls on the media and the release of all those who've been arrested since the protests began.”	
Attributes threat/ January 11/2011	When asked if he agreed with a statement from the ministry of interior reporting that protestors had attacked a government building:  “It's a lie, the evidence is the current situation in Menzel Bouzaiane where security forces are causing chaos in the market destroying stores and property and blaming it on the protesters.”	Mohamed Fathil  (Trade unionist and eyewitness)
Attributes safety/ December 18/2010	” In other news eye witnesses have reported that there have been and unspecified number of arrests of those within the ranks of protestors as well as the occurrence of light injuries to other protestors who've since been transported to hospitals.”	Broadcaster
Signals opportunity/ December 23/2010	“What happened was that a gathering of disgruntled youth appears to have attempted to organize a small march and they were obstructed and repressed by security forces. After which a violent counter reaction ensued resulting in property damages. This was considered a	Lotfi  Hajji(Journalist in Tunis)

	<p>dangerous development because if it took place in a community near the capital and could spread to other areas, close the capital, which are have what can be described as a high amount of poverty.</p>	
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Using the aforementioned rubric the day to day reporting on protests taking place in Tunisia between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 can be graphed as it is bellow to give at a glance image of the contents of *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi*'s coverage of protests in Tunisia. Cases refers to the days of broadcasting that reported on protests, case one through nine represent December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2010, December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010, December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, January 8<sup>th</sup> 2011, January 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, January 11<sup>th</sup> 2011, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, and January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011 respectively.



Several observations about the content of *Al Hassad al Maghrebi* can be drawn by examining the above graph. The content of the program leans heavily towards the type of message that would facilitate protest, out of the thirty eight counted

Figure 4.1 incidences of messages that fit the parameters in the table thirty three were either: subversive, signaling opportunity, attributing of threat or similarity. For the most part

the content leaned heavily towards that which signaled opportunity by reporting that protests were spreading throughout the country and that the regime was making concessions in terms of promises by the president to usher in reforms, grow jobs and job programs, and the firing of members of his inner circle responsible for repression.

Impact however cannot be assessed from the content of media alone (Neuendorf, 2002), in order to establish impact this analysis would have to present a plausible mechanism for impact and to present some evidence to connect between the plausible and the specific situation (Sparks, 2002). The notion of a free rider problem is useful in order to explain how Al Jazeera could plausibly have had an impact on mobilization during the 2010 Tunisian revolution. The problem arises when analysts assume participants in revolutions to be rational actors, then the fact that the benefits of a successful revolt cannot be withheld from people that do not participate, along with the fact that joining a revolution entails serious risk makes the decision to participate in revolutions an irrational one (Moore, 1995). Many people were killed and wounded by security forces during the Tunisian revolution of 2010; especially in the early days of protest, the decision to join in said anti-governmental protests was a risky one. One method of overcoming the free rider problem is called the tipping phenomenon, which argues that people's decisions to join revolutions are contingent on other's decision to join (Moore, 1995). The assumption being that there exists segment of the population ready to rebel against the government at any time and that groups with different but complimentary goals will join the revolution as the number of people who join the revolution increases (Moore, 1995). *Al Hassad Al Maghrebi's* coverage because it reported between December 17<sup>th</sup> and January 14<sup>th</sup> that: protests against the regime were spreading, that the anti-regime political coalitions<sup>50</sup> were growing, and that the government was

making concessions in the face of the protest might have solved the free rider problem in Tunisia.

Several observations from the survey data support this contention. First, when it comes up to media impact, when asked what news sources Tunisians used to follow protest events 79% of respondents reported television as their main source of news compared with only 1.9% reporting the internet (Al Masri, 2012). The data from the IRI survey reports those numbers as 69% for Tunisian television and 17% for the internet (International Republican Institute, 2011). This discrepancy might be a result of the fact that the question posed by the Barometer survey asks specifically about what sources respondents relied on during the revolution, while the IRI question because it does not specify a time presumably reflects media consumption patterns at the time it was conducted in March 2011 three months after the fall of the Ben Ali regime. When asked specifically which news channel they relied on to follow reports of the events during the revolution, the most popular response was Al Jazeera with 36% of respondents reporting it as their main source of news about the revolution (Al Masri, 2012).

Digging further into the Arab barometer survey data provides further support for the tipping phenomenon formulation of Al Jazeera's impact on the Tunisian revolution. 82% of respondents reported that they were opposed to the regime during the protests yet only 16% reported that they actually took part in protests against the government (Al Masri, 2012). The presence of a large pool of willing but reluctant rational participants indicates that the Tunisian revolution of 2010 really did suffer from a free rider problem. The survey data also indicates that the free rider problem was overcome, 36% of respondents reported taking part in the protests of between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, 47% of respondents reported taking part in

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protests between January 1<sup>st</sup>2011 and January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, and 84% of respondents reported their participation in protests between January 10<sup>th</sup> 2011 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 (Al Masri, 2012). A pattern that is consistent with the proposition that different groups with different agendas participated in anti-regime protests as they became aware of the participation of others.

Returning to the broadcasts of *Al Hassad al Maghrebi* the content defined as that which is conducive to revolution shoots up dramatically between December 17<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> and does so again between January 8<sup>th</sup> and January 13<sup>th</sup>.

The argument for Al Jazeera's media impact then is as follows; on December 17<sup>th</sup> when protests broke out against the Ben Ali regime only a small number of people /organizations participated in the antigovernment protests despite the fact that the vast majority of the population opposed the regime. The media can be more directly influential in mobilization when it shapes prospective movement participants perceptions of political opportunity (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001). And, Al Jazeera did this by constantly reporting on each episode of contention which caused protests to grow as more and more people were informed that more and more people were joining the protests. Each report of the growth in the size and geographical scope of protests or concessions by the regime served to signal to the viewing public (most of whom already opposed the Ben Ali regime) that their goals were achievable, and that it was safer to protest since more people meant that regime repressive resources would be thinly stretched. This argument is evidenced by the pattern of growing protests in relation to the content of Al Jazeera Arabic broadcasts. To address the second question of the research the impact of the Ben Ali regime's censorship on this coverage an evaluation of the sources used in the coverage of *Al Hassad Al Maghreb* is necessary.

*The Ben Ali regime's Censorship*

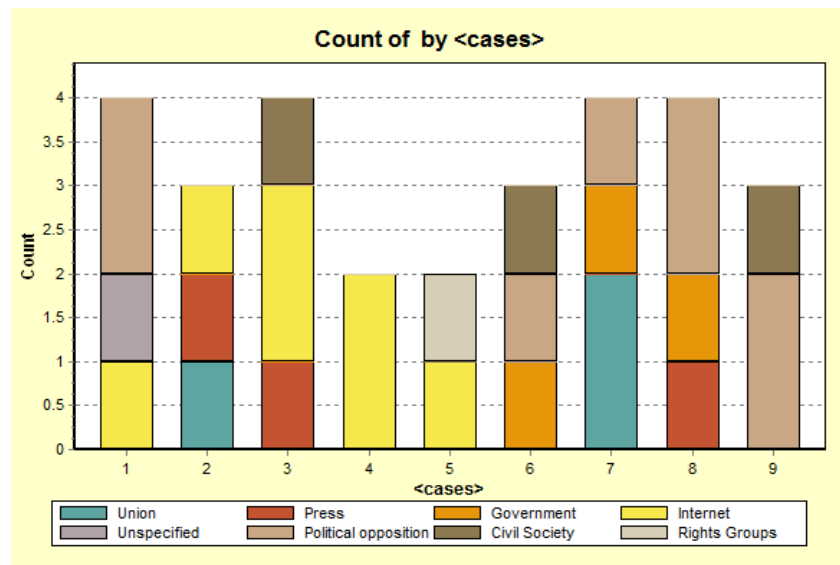
The second argument of this analysis is that the Ben Ali regime's censorship created the structural environment in which Al Jazeera's coverage impacted mobilization; this argument is based on the sources used during the broadcasts and the media control history of the Ben Ali regime. On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 the broadcast reported that Mohamed Bouazizi had set himself on fire after being humiliated by local police harassing him for a bribe, the broadcast relied on internet video and a spokesman from the Democratic progressive party<sup>51</sup> to report events. On December 18<sup>th</sup> the broadcast reported that clashes had broken out between protestors and the security forces relying once again on internet videos of clashing protestors and a regional UGTT press agent was interviewed who argued that the government was responsible for creating an economic situation of selective deprivation which led to the troubles in Sidi Bouzid. On that day too *Al Hassad* interviewed a Tunisian print journalist who appealed for calm and advocated that the solution to these problems would not come through civil disturbance but through national unity.

Five days later, on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010 *Al Hassad* reported on spreading protests once again relying on internet videos of people protesting in Tunis, as well as a video of a mother mourning the death of her son and a funeral for one of the people killed in clashes with the government. On that day the interviewees were two members of civil society, a press journalist and a prominent playwright, both of whom in different ways reinforced the message of growing protests and growing government heavy-handedness. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, *Al Hassad* reported on protests by lawyers in various cities<sup>52</sup> relying on three types of internet sourced footage: video from inside the room as the lawyers spoke about the government's disregard for their and

Tunisian people in general's rights, video from the outside showing the security forces gathered around the legal compound, and video of the lawyers themselves chanting and signing as they marched on towards the blockade. The interviewee that day was the dean of lawyers in Tunis and he confirmed that the government had repressed what he claimed was a peaceful protest violently, but also assured viewers that the protest was fully legal and not in conflict with the authorities.

Nine days later on January the 8<sup>th</sup> 2011, *Al Hassad* reported that the UGTT had officially declared its support for the protestors and that they have declared a general national march to this effect. They relied on internet sourced footage of clashing protestors and of a union solidarity rally in the capital and once again interviewed a union press agent to report on the rallies. On January 8<sup>th</sup> *Al Hassad* reported short snippets of President Ben Ali addressing the Tunisian people in which he described the protests as foreign inspired terrorism conducted by armed mercenaries. This particular broadcast also discussed the concessions being made by the president in the face of protests. Later in that broadcast *Al Hassad* interviewed a modern history professor based in Paris who proceeded to demonstrate the impossibility of the president's central promise to create jobs as well as recalling Ben Ali's track record for promised but never delivered reforms. On January 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 *Al Hassad* reported on further clashes by relying on two union sources who were eyewitnesses to widespread destruction and government repression of protestors, the first witness in Menzel Bouzaiane described the peacefulness of protesters and contrasted it with the brutality of the security forces, while the second reported routine harassment while also criticizing proposed government reforms as "a mirage". The broadcast concludes with video of the general secretary of the Democratic progressive party Maya Jribi

laying the blame for both the dissatisfactory economic situation in Tunisia’s interior and the deaths and injuries of protestors on the government. On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 *Al Hassad* reported on growing protests using un-sourced amateur video footage of protests, and interviewed the former head of the Tunisian press syndicate who expressed his suspicions of the president’s reform promises in light of Ben Ali’s history of promising reform and not delivering them. In the same broadcast *Al Hassad* interviewed a union member who speculated that union participation in the protests would grow. On the final day of broadcasting before the fall of the regime, *Al Hassad* reported on growing repression and interviewed the former head of the banned Ennahda party and a professor of international relations from the University of Tunis both of whom prescribed that the situation can only be resolved by the fall of the government.



This brief account of the sources used in *Al Hassad*'s reporting on the revolution is visualized in Table 4.2, 62% of the sources used in the broadcasts were either political opposition sources,

**Figure 4.2** amateur internet video or union sources. The pattern fashions an answer to the ways in which government censorship impacted the broadcasts of *Al Hassad*. In order to explain how a brief description of the Ben Ali regimes approach to media control is necessary.

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The state constructionist theory of revolutions is based on the notion that states by the very way in which they organize the cultural, economic, and political environment under their control create the very circumstances that bring about their downfall (Goodwin, 2001). In the case of the revolution in Tunisia the above event catalogue focusing on the message and sources of reporting for *Al Hassad* between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 allows the inferring of the general trend that Al Jazeera relied in its reporting on sources that were at best critical of the government. In that way the content of *Al Hassad* was almost always content that criticised the government's performance, showcased its repression, and encouraged protest. Al Jazeera has traditionally made a practice out of the use of native reporters, and of acting as a voice for the voiceless by providing politically excluded communities with a public platform (Lahlali, 2011). Yet it was the actions of the Ben Ali regime that cast its political opponents out of the public conversation, ensuring that when Al Jazeera needed voiceless local reporters their pool of potential participants would be stacked with members of movements politically opposed to government.

The first way the regime established control over the media was directly: by the early 2000's 90% of the media in Tunisia were state controlled (Sadiki, 2002). The press in Tunisia took their cues from the national news agency *Tunis Afrique Presse*, commenting on the government only positively (Borowiec, 1998), lest they fall foul of the invisible standards expected by the Ben Ali regime. In order to maintain the veneer of press freedom the government encouraged newspapers to flourish, but it created a climate of self-censorship by signaling the boundaries of acceptable conversation with newspaper seizures and by jailing journalists (Alexander, 2010). The Ben Ali regime controlled radio broadcasts in a different

manner, by granting the licenses necessary to operate private radio stations to regime loyalists(Reporters Without Borders, 2011). Strict libel laws made it nearly impossible to even investigate let alone report on government malfeasance(Sadiki, 2002).

Besides keeping journalists and reporters on edge the censorship regime of the Ben Ali government provided a great deal of political cover. When quizzed internationally on media censorship in Tunisia the regime denied that any such censorship existed, while domestically blaming any dissatisfaction with the media on the clients the regime picked to run it(Sadiki, 2002).International media sources critical of the regime such as the French papers<sup>53</sup>*Le Monde and Liberation* were banned(Sadiki, 2002), a fate shared by Al Jazeera with one crucial difference. Al Jazeera was banned from having offices or staff in Tunisia(Khanfar, 2011). But, the overrepresentation of internet video (especially of the early protests) indicates that the regime lacked the technological resources to prevent citizens from using the internet to upload their recordings of events taking place in the country. Opposition politicians, civil society members and union members could also appear as interviewees on *Al Hassad* using the telephone or over the internet. Although internet video is anonymous and therefore protects its provider from regime retaliation, the people on the phone were identified by name and hence enjoyed no such protection. In attempting to stifle media criticism the regime undercut its only lever of control over Al Jazeera's broadcasts, and so thoroughly stifled domestic media and the political opposition that it ensured (or constructed) the circumstances of its own downfall. When popular protest broke out and information regarding those protests began appearing on the internet, Al Jazeera was free to craft a citizen journalist narrative of events with domestic oppression providing a large supply of citizen journalists (most of whom were hostile to the regime), and

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because of the widely known censorship imposed on local media this narrative was very popular with viewers.

### *The Question of Causation*

Thus far two arguments have been presented in this analysis: that Al Jazeera increased mobilization against the Ben Ali regime between December 17<sup>th</sup>2010-January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, and that this effect was the result of the way the Ben Ali regime controlled the media in Tunisia at the time of the protests. It's important at this juncture to point out that arguing for the existence of casual mechanism in workings of revolutions does not necessitate the existence of laws that govern how every revolution works(Tilly, 1999). Rather it's the assertion that regularities in political life consist of recurrent causes which in different circumstances lead to variable results that are no less explicable for their variation(Tilly, 1995). The casual aspects of the argument then are an attempt to map out one area of that variation, how mass media, state censorship and political mobilization intersected in Tunisia in 2010.

There are a variety of ways in which students of contentious politics have attempted to grapple with the question of causation in their work. One way has been to attempt to establish causation in terms of temporal succession, to argue in essence that the variable's impact can be determined by its relation in time to another variable(Mahoney, 2004). This approach is not wrongheaded, since it's logically impossible for something to have an impact on events that occurred before it occurred. The problem with this method of establishing causation is that: "social science methods are not well-suited for the analysis of such temporal arguments"(Mahoney, 2004, p. 91). Specifically for this case the argument that Al Jazeera caused more people to mobilize to protest the regime cannot be substantiated in this way because

no one other than Al Jazeera was tracking the size and occurrence of protests at the time of the revolution.

Instead the kind of causation that will be using in this research can be thought of as a form of counterfactual causation<sup>54</sup>. Counter-factual causation attempts to specify what could have happened if the casual configuration (that is the argument that x caused y) had been different(Tilly, 1995). There are three steps to establishing such counterfactuals: establishing a plausible relationship between variables, examining variations in the variables to be measured, and forming contingent predictions of the relationship between variables (Tilly, 1995). All three steps need to be applied to both arguments, the argument that Al Jazeera caused an increase in mobilization during the revolution and the argument that Ben Ali regimes censorship shaped its content to have that effect. Establishing the plausibility of the posited relationship is trivial for both arguments. Mass media is known to impact mobilization<sup>55</sup>, and regime censorship is designed explicitly to control the resulting content of broadcast media. Two possible variations of the variables of both arguments can be constructed. With respect to the first argument the counterfactual needs to include a situation that was similar to Bouazizi's self-immolation and the small protests that followed it in Sidi Bouzid but that did not have Al Jazeera coverage and evaluating its outcome. And, with respect to the second argument locating news channels that were not subjected to same treatment as Al Jazeera by the Ben Ali regime and evaluating their content. Locating counterfactual cases that fit these parameters precisely is difficult, imprecise work but it goes some way in establishing the verisimilitude of the arguments presented in this case report.

In 2008 wide-spread protest broke out against the Ben Ali regime in the phosphate rich investment poor city of Gafsa, for the next six monthsthe region erupted into protests both peaceful and violent involving workers, students and the unemployed (Gobe, 2010). The protests that occurred in Gafsa in 2008 were similar to what happened in Sidi Bouzid in 2010 in many ways: the protests concern the same issues of employment and economic justice, the protestors faced sever regime repression, and the protests began in a financially deprived part of the Tunisian interior away from the capital. Gobe argues that the protests in Gafsa failed to spread because the participants were marginal both socially and organizationally (in the sense that the members of the UGTT were marginal within the organization and incapable of bringing the organization into the protest), and because government repression was fierce(Gobe, 2010). Yet government repression was fierce in 2010 as well<sup>56</sup>, and according to their interviews on *Al Hassad* the union members who participated in the protest at the beginning were also marginal. Important to the content of this argument however is the tight censorship of news of the protests(Al Jazeera English , 2011), which would have made it near impossible for Al Jazeera the only non-government controlled popular news source to report on those events and they didn't. The protestors in Gafsa unlike their counterparts in Sidi Bouzid two years later lacked any means of informing the lager Tunisian public of their grievances and actions. Though no reliable data exists on the attitudes of the Tunisian public towards the Ben Ali regime they can safely be assumed to be not too distinct from the massive unpopularity of the regime in 2010. The counterfactual of Gafsa in 2008 includes almost all the variables that were present in Sidi Bouzid in 2010, the main variation lying along this analysis's casual variable that one protest was entirely absent from Al Jazeera's news coverage while the other was covered extensively.

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In terms of the second argument a counterfactual would have to present instances of media reporting controlled by the Ben Ali regime in a different way resulting in a different kind of content. The only source of data to draw from for this counterfactual is Al Jazeera's coverage of the coverage of two other news sources Agency: *Tunis Afrique Presse* and the French news channel TF1. On December 18<sup>th</sup> when *Al Hassad al Maghrebi* reported the protests at the Sidi Bouzid police station the national news agency *Tunis Afrique Presse* was busy ignoring the protests and expressing gratitude to President Ben Ali's Tunisian interior<sup>57</sup> development programs. The reasons for why the public challenge to the regime was not reported on the national news agency are, in light of the previous discussion of censorship in Ben Ali's Tunisia, obvious. The content of *Tunis Afrique Presse* was not only directly censored but was used by the regime as a means to single the boundaries of acceptable conversation to other news outlets (Borowiec, 1998). On January 12<sup>th</sup> the broadcast of *Al Hassad* relied on content that was borrowed from the French news channel TF1. TF1 reporters were able to evade their minders and circumvent road blocks and get to the city of Regueb in the province of Sidi Bouzid to interview a sixteen year old girl who was shot in the back by security forces. People in Regueb also told TF1 of snipers firing rounds into citizen's houses and security forces firing live ammunition at protestors at point blank range. The broadcast indicates that foreign news sources operating in Tunisia during the revolution were not only monitored by the ministry of the Interior but were also physically denied access to areas in which protests were taking place by security checkpoints. In this case the reporters had to evade government censorship to report information that was critical of the regime indicating that the controls imposed on this worked at least in the past. The report was from two days before the collapse of the regime which probably explains TF1's ability to evade its minders in this instance. In both cases the regimes censorship shaped

the outcome of their news content which supports the notion that regime censorship did the same in Al Jazeera's case. The counterfactuals presented here do not demonstrate the casual arguments that are contained in this analysis definitively, yet they do support the interpretations of events contained in this analysis.

### *Unanticipated Results*

This case study was occasioned by the suspicion that the protests were enabled and made successful by the coverage of the protests by Al Jazeera. At the onset, the assumption was always that Al Jazeera operated to mediate between Ben Ali's political opposition and the larger public. Yet the discussion on Jan 8<sup>th</sup> union struggle indicates that it might have operated within opposition organizations themselves. One of the differences between events in Gafsa and those that took place in December 2010 is that the regional union's involvement in Gafsa never grew to encompass the whole national organization (Gobe, 2010). The January 8<sup>th</sup> broadcast of *Al Hassad* included a conversation that took place between a regional union member and the Al Jazeera broadcaster in which he (the union member) argued that the national union should get involved in the ongoing anti-regime protests because the size of its membership and extent of its organization made it one of only a few forces that could topple the regime. This discussion was followed by coverage of union members in Tunis holding solidarity marches; in later coverage the union declares national strikes and protests in support of the protests across the country. While not the subject of this research Al Jazeera might have also played a role in the power struggle inside the UGTT between regional members in the Tunisian interior who were taking part in the protests and the reticent national organization. By nationally broadcasting this

discussion Al Jazeera might have acted to embarrass the leadership of the UGTT into committing its national resources in support of the protestors.

### *Summary*

In conclusion, it's important to delimit the argument made in this analysis. The content of *Al Hassad* fits within the parameters of the kind of content identified in the literature as conducive to the mobilization of protest. It broadcast the skepticism of the political opposition, the churning momentum of change, and the brutality of the status quo all at once, and in that way facilitated the mobilization of a population the majority of which was dissatisfied with the regime. The coding scheme for this research was explicitly designed to distinguish between simple reporting of the events and reporting which would have encouraged the mobilization of anti-regime protestors, therefore it's not simply that Al Jazeera reported the events but the manner in which they reported them that is crucial. A regime that was so thin skinned in its reaction to criticism that it banned the second most popular news channel in the country, neglecting the fact that by banning Al Jazeera the regime forfeit any ability to exercise physical control over its staff and reports as it appears to have done with TF1. This guaranteed that when the time came the regime's opponents would have a popular and regime independent medium to address the Tunisian public. The argument is not that Al Jazeera and Ben Ali caused the protests in Tunisia. Rather it is that when the protests began the structure of the Ben Ali regime's censorship ensured that it created a media environment that put the regime in jeopardy.

Conclusion: Where to go From Here

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion: Where to from here?**

*Conclusions: To be drawn based on Findings.*

This research set out to examine the intersection of cultural actors and state structures in the processes of contentious politics. This was done by examining the role of Al Jazeera, a popular regional news channel, in popular mobilizations during the Tunisian revolution of 2010 by constructing an instrumental case study. The data for the case study was primarily sourced from a nightly news program on the Al Jazeera's Arabic news channel called *Al Hassad al Maghrebi*, specifically its broadcasts on protests between December 17<sup>th</sup> and January 14<sup>th</sup>. In order to understand if and how this content impacted mobilization during this period the data from the content analysis was complemented with the results of two larger surveys of public opinion conducted in the year after the collapse the Ben Ali regime, the International republican institute survey and the Arab barometer survey. This data was explained in the context of the censorship regime of the Ben Ali government.

Examination of the content of *Al Hassad* over the period of the protests between December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 found that its content conforms rather closely to the kind of material that the literature indicates would be effective in mobilizing social protest. The IRI and Arab barometer surveys indicate that Al Jazeera was the most popular news channel during the protests, that the vast majority of the population opposed the Ben Ali regime, and that the number of people protesting the regime grew at a steady rate during the protests. This information supports the conclusion that Tunisia suffered from a free rider problem<sup>58</sup> when the protests began that was solved in part because Al Jazeera continually broadcast the growth of popular opposition and the regimes concessions to the public. A look at the sources that were

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used during these broadcasts and previous research on how the Ben Ali regime censored the media in Tunisia supports the conclusion that the Tunisian state under Ben Ali constructed the media control environment that resulted in its downfall. Causation is incredibly difficult to establish in the social sciences, but applying a counterfactual analysis that examines the previous round of regime challenges in Gafsa in 2008 and the content of other news outlets like Tunis Afrique Presse and TF1 supports both these arguments.

#### *Alternative Explanations of Findings*

The analysis of the previous chapter offers two arguments, that Al Jazeera was instrumental in the growth of protests against the regime resulting in its eventual downfall, and that the regime's censorship shaped Al Jazeera's narrative to have that effect. Alternative explanations exist for both those phenomenon, accounts that explain the spread and success of protests against the regime with variables other than Al Jazeera and accounts that explain the nature of Al Jazeera's coverage relying on factors other than the structure of Ben Ali's autocracy. And though this accounting of alternate perspectives is not exhaustive, some points of view are either well established in the literature or so ubiquitously mentioned in the current conversation on the Arab spring that they cannot be ignored. Below is a selection of those views.

Within the literature on revolutions is the long standing perspective that explains the spread and success of revolutions as a function of the weakness of the army, and example of which is Misagh Parsa's accounting of the reasons for the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979. He argues that the Shah had a mostly poor, mostly conscript army, which when widespread protests broke out (usually working in their native parts of Iran) was placed in the awkward position of having to kill millions of its members own neighbours to preserve the regime leading to

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widespread dissent and the eventual fall of the regime (Parsa, 1989). This explanation for the success of revolution in Iran is also applicable to Tunisia. The regime finally collapsed only when the military refused to fire on its own citizens prompting Ben Ali's flight (Lynch, Glasser, & Hounshell, 2011). The reasons for this refusal remain opaque, and to opine on them is beyond the scope of this research project. It's important to note though that the military in Tunisia did not fracture or disintegrate (as in Iran). Instead according to the reports from *Al Hassad* the army mobilized to secure key government buildings from protestors in the last days of the protest and managed the subsequent transition. The January 12<sup>th</sup> broadcast of *Al Hassad* even featured an amateur video of a Tunisian citizen approaching a soldier and asking him which side he was on, only to thank and praise him when the soldier reported being on the protester's side. This case study argues that Al Jazeera was a key cause of the revolution's success but this does not mean that it was the only cause. Admitting that whatever factor explains the Army's decision to abandon the regime is a causal factor in the spread and ultimate success of protest against the regime does not contradict this analysis's main argument since I do not make the case that Al Jazeera is the only cause for the spread and success of the popular protests in 2010.

Some researchers have argued that the main causes of the revolution are economic. For decades the country experienced a two tier economic system with benefits of growth both socially (Kienle, 2012) and regionally (King S. J., 1999) conscribed. Others have related protest activity in the Arab spring to specific economic factors such as food prices (Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, & Zhu, 2012). The improvised and un-egalitarian nature of the economy was a indubitable cause for the protests, 76% of IRI survey respondents said the economy was either somewhat or very bad (International Republican Institute, 2011), while 63% of respondents to the Arab barometer survey said the most important cause of the protest was the economic

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situation (Al Masri, 2012). Yet assessing such factors as the cause of the revolution's success or even of its emergence is deeply problematic, since it represents a fundamental confusion about the distinction between necessary and sufficient causes in the study of revolutions. Arguing the revolutions are caused by widespread inequality, political repression, or misery is to elevate a trivial necessary cause to the level of explanation. Trivial necessary causes are those that are present in every instance of revolution (Mahoney, 2004). People do not revolt in pleasant circumstances; almost by definition revolutions entail widespread misery. Yet to argue that a revolution is caused by misery because you observe misery to exist is tantamount to arguing that specific revolutions are caused by the presence of people because the presence of human beings is highly correlated with the emergence of revolution. Besides being illogical, arguments that attribute the emergence of success of revolution to the presence of misery, oppression, or the absences of employment tell us nothing about the processes that cause that misery to manifest itself in the form of a revolution<sup>59</sup>.

Some researchers have made the case that social networking was instrumental in the emergence and success of the popular protests that were subsequently termed the Arab Spring. Though the Arab Spring refers to protests that took place in several countries in 2011 the argument is so ubiquitous in discussions of the 2011 mobilizations that examining it in relation to Tunisia in 2011 is necessary. The popular press in 2011 for instance credited the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter with the fall of Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia and the Hosni Mubarak regime in Egypt (Alterman, 2011). The argument has been presented in academic research as well. Arguing that digital media played a casual role in the Arab Spring by providing communications ties and organisational capacity activists would eventually use to activate a larger number of protestors (Howard & Muzammil, 2013). Though the argument of this research

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that Al Jazeera caused the expansion of mobilizations against the Ben Ali regime is not in principle contradictory to the social media thesis, it remains my contention that internet activism played only a marginal role in the protests of 2011. Sustained examinations -though early at this point- support this contention. Multi-country examinations have found that there is no consistent correlation between social networking use and successful mass protest (Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, & Zhu, 2012). Research based on internet emissions from the MENA<sup>60</sup> region (specifically archived Twitter content and Meta data from the URL shortening site Bit.ly) during the protests also disconfirms the hypothesis that social media was instrumental in domestic popular mobilization. Most of the people who clicked on Twitter links related to the protests were not only located outside the countries in which protests were taking place but also outside the MENA region entirely (Aday, et al., 2013). Further disconfirming the hypothesis that social media was instrumental in mobilization domestic protest.

In terms of Tunisia specifically the hypothesis fares even more poorly. Examining changes in the proportions of Tunisians who had access to the internet renders some support to the hypothesis, in early part of the 2000s only 5.07% of Tunisians had access to the internet (Carnegie Endowment, 2004) by 2011 that number had risen to 41% (The World Bank, 2012). Yet several key data points contradict the hypothesis, first according to the reporting from Al Hassad the protests began in the least developed parts of Tunisia and only spread to the wealthier coastal cities after clashes had been going on for several weeks. Assuming that Satellite television is more prevalent in less developed parts of Tunisia than the internet, if protesters were mobilized through the internet mobilization would be expected to begin in the most developed parts of the country and spread out rather than the opposite. The hypothesis is further damaged by the data from the Arab Barometer survey, when asked about the sources of

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information they relied on during the protests only 1.9% of participants reported relying on the internet, with a whole 0.1% of participants reporting email and twitter (Al Masri, 2012).

Returning to the internet emissions work mentioned above in reference to Tunisia specifically further damages the hypothesis. 86% of people clicking on Bit.ly links concerning the protests in Tunisia were located outside the country(Aday, et al., 2013). Examining the pattern of clicks on popular Twitter hash tags such as #SidiBouزيد shows that clicks are fairly dormant and then spiked when Ben Ali fled(Aday, et al., 2013). If such internet activity was instrumental in domestic mobilization the pattern would reverse itself since the amount of activity when mobilizing would be highest and it would drop off once the regime was toppled.

The above evidence supports the contention that it's nearly impossible for social networking and internet activism to have been casual in domestic mobilization in Tunisia specifically, I remain skeptical on its role in mobilizing domestic protest in the Arab Spring as a whole. But examining the broadcasts from *Al Hassad* indicates that the internet was instrumental in informing people outside Tunisia about the protests as well as relaying the video footage that was used in their broadcasts. There is no evidence to indicate that international actors played a role in the fall of the Ben Ali regime. Regarding whether the footage from Al Jazeera would have been as efficacious in mobilizing protests without the video of real time repression and resistance from the internet I plead complete ignorance.

On the other wing some analysts argue that social media and Al Jazeera cannot and should not be considered as alternative explanations for the recent protests but should be looked at as means and resources because they were available before the eruption of protests(Kienle, 2012). To be clear this case study does not argue that Al Jazeera alone caused the protests, the position I take is that internal political dynamics of the Ben Ali regime's censorship as well as

## Conclusion: Where to go From Here

the coverage of Al Jazeera and the pre-existing popularity of Al Jazeera in Tunisia caused Al Jazeera's coverage to be a key factor in the toppling of the Ben Ali regime. Al Jazeera did not cause Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation nor is there any evidence to indicate that he or his family knew what the ultimate result of their actions would be. But once protests began Al Jazeera served to magnify the opinions, views, and experiences of the protestors to a public that was ripe for a regime change. The fact that Al Jazeera was available in Tunisia before the protests is immaterial, because the argument I present is not that Al Jazeera's presence magically causes revolutions. Rather that the quality of Al Jazeera's coverage during the protest in concert with facts on the ground such as Al Jazeera's popularity and Ben Ali's unpopularity caused the fall of his regime.

Finally there is only one other widespread explanation for the nature of Al Jazeera's coverage. Though this analysis has made the point that the content of Al Jazeera was shaped by the way that the Ben Ali regime censored the media other analysts see it's criticism of Ben Ali as representing something else; arguing instead that Al Jazeera is an instrument of Qatari Soft power. In this narrative Al Jazeera is a proxy for Qatari foreign policy ambitions, evidenced by the widespread reporting of the revolutions in North Africa but downplaying of civil unrest in Bahrain(Maloney, 2011). Thorough comparative analysis of the content of Al Jazeera's coverage of protests in different countries in the context of their relationship to the government of Qatar is an excellent place to substantiate such a thesis. Advocates of this argument have yet to produce such an analysis. Until then, the proposition remains an interesting but unsubstantiated counter explanation.Content analysis alone is not enough to make inferences about the producers of that content(Neuendorf, 2002), and this research has restricted its data to events and information

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relating to Tunisia so to comment beyond that on the soft power argument's merit is beyond the scope of this work.

### *Strengths Weaknesses and Limitations of the Study*

Like any inquiry into the causes and processes of revolution this case study's particularity is both its key strength and its main liability. The data examined for the most part is entirely related to Tunisia and even information that describes protests and mobilizations in other countries is used primarily to shed light on the events that took place in Tunisia. This strict focus has netted what I hope is an instrumental and specific case study of the revolution of 2010, and while some themes are exportable the conclusions remain restricted in both time and place to the Tunisian revolution of 2010.

Furthermore the dataset that informs this research was entirely based on the coverage of only one of Al Jazeera Arabic's news programs during the revolution. While it is highly unlikely that the news content and sources shifted drastically from one program to another the use of such a small data set for content analysis remains a key limitation of this research. An examination of a representative sample of the entire programming runoff Al Jazeera's programs during the revolution would be greatly inform this work's arguments.

The most important limitation of this research is in the way that it connects between the content of Al Jazeera and political attitudes on the ground. While using popular opinion polls conducted by other researchers has been immensely useful actually interviewing the protest participants regarding their political opinions, sources of information, and their previous political activism as well as organizations that supported them during the protests would have been eminently more illustrative.

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*Implications for a Scholarly Understanding of the Field and Theory Building*

This case study is an instrumental case study of the intersection between cultural actors and state structures. In that, the first implication of this research is that it is both possible and desirable to study revolutions from the unified theoretical perspective of contentious politics. And, that the combined perspective championed most notably by Tarrow, Tilly, and Mcadam is thoroughly capable of generating new and exciting research venues. The second implication of this research on theory is that it serves as an endorsement of the flexibility of Goodwin's state centered perspective on revolutions as well as its unlimited research potential once its shortcomings are compensated for with the inclusion of other theories notably cultural theories of social movements. Finally this case study stands as an empirical account of the role of Al Jazeera in the revolution in Tunisia and might be useful as part of a regional and systematic evaluation of the phenomenon.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

In terms of future research the argument presented by this research while specific to Al Jazeera and Tunisia in terms of data is not limited to them. In other words, every attempt has been made to construct this research project so as to immunize it from Wickham-Crowley's particularism critique. The phenomena described herein are not unique to Tunisia. Al Jazeera is a popular channel through the Middle East a region which has experienced by my count three revolutions and a revolutionary civil war at this writing. Nor is Al Jazeera the only regional, popular satellite channel. Future researchers might well wish to conduct a systematic long term interrogation of Al Jazeera's content during the protest and describe it both in terms of local public opinion and in terms of the differences in each state's political and media environment.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the account are paraphrased from the Time's article on the event by Rania Abouzeid, "Bouazizi: The Man Who Set Himself and Tunisia on Fire":  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2044723,00.html>.

<sup>2</sup>The initialism comes from their French name Union Générale Tunisienne du travail

<sup>3</sup>This is not say that the two are unrelated, on the contrary the larger point of this writing is precisely about their relationship.

<sup>4</sup>An example of which is the structure of state.

<sup>5</sup>See Bateson 1942, Benedict 1946, Mead 2004, Spitulnik 1993.

<sup>6</sup>Such as a discussion has been attempted by Gibb cited above but most notable by Escobar 1992 in Culture, Practice and Politics: Anthropology and the Study of Social Movements.

<sup>7</sup>A point discussed at greater length in the literature review.

<sup>8</sup>The theoretical problem is explained at greater length in the literature review that follows.

<sup>9</sup>Comunello and Anzera's work is centred around evaluating the role of social media in all the protest and while international politics did not play a significant role in Tunisia, it did in Egypt and certainly in Libya, so in light of their research questions using that rather than domestic politics might be far more defensible.

<sup>10</sup>A more detailed account of the conception of causality that guided this research follows both in the methodology section and in the analysis section.

<sup>11</sup>For a sketch of what an economic model might look like see (Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, & Zhu, 2012)

<sup>12</sup> As far as this writing the Arab Barometer data is the most scientifically cogent and relevant source for media consumption trends in Tunisia during the uprisings.

<sup>13</sup> Impact here is a formulation borrowed from Sparks, Glenn G (2002) Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview in general the term impact refers to impact of media content on the consuming audience. In this case it refers to impact on mobilization.

<sup>14</sup> Loosely translates to Gathered from the Maghreb.

<sup>15</sup> For example Theda Skocpol's earlier mentioned work

<sup>16</sup> See Foran 2005 p. 258-259 for synopsis of this debate.

<sup>17</sup> See James C Scott's seeing like a State Chapter 5 titled: The Revolutionary Party as an example of the kind of pandemonium this process entails.

<sup>18</sup> Not to mention a dominant order by definition implies coercion providing those dominated with good reasons to endure their condition.

<sup>19</sup> This can only be designated a political opportunity because we know that it started protests that resulted in the 2010 revolution, i.e. in retrospect a problem that is discussed at greater length below in the section discussing the shortcomings of the notion of political opportunity.

<sup>20</sup> Refers to the Tunisian General Labour Union's French initialism

<sup>21</sup> See: Gobe, Eric. "Of Lawyers and Samsars: the Legal Services Market and the Authoritarian State in Ben 'Ali's Tunisia (1987–2011)." MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL, 2013: 45-63.

<sup>22</sup> In (Leenders, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> It's important to note at this point that the third generation includes scholars such as Goldstone himself who advocated for an analytic shift towards state-breakdown models rather than revolutionary ones, and whose argument is centered on the way demographic (example

population growth) and economic (example price of bread) factors contributed to state breakdowns. An approach I deliberately avoided mentioning in this review due to its relative theoretical infertility compared with Marxist and state centered approaches.

<sup>24</sup>This point does not relate directly to this research which is concerned with the process rather than the outcome of revolution. Yet because it ultimately aims to explain the causes of the emergence and success of revolutions Skocpol's distinction is important to at least keep in mind as it relates to the question of what it is that is being explained.

<sup>25</sup> It's important to note that according to Saidmen those events inspired autocratic regimes as well.

<sup>26</sup> For example folk tales, songs, plays.

<sup>27</sup>When such intervention is high the result and consolidation is low the result is repression, when intervention is low and consolidation is high the result is reform and when intervention is high and the consolidation is high the result is revolution.

<sup>28</sup> For more on this see States and Social Revolutions pg. 23-24

<sup>29</sup> A month of fasting and enhanced religious observance across the Muslim world.

<sup>30</sup> Based on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein especially World Systems I, II and III.

<sup>31</sup> The area in which anti-regime protests began

<sup>32</sup> Information and communication technology

<sup>33</sup>While I support the notion that social movements and revolutions represent extensions of the same kind of political activity, there exist serious semantical challenges in using the term social movement which is used on occasion to cover any type of social struggle from intellectual 'movements' to peasant rebellions(Tilly, 2008). Furthermore the term social movement has been made more imprecise because analysts tend to extend it to all types of popular collective action of

which they approve, example feminists retroactively incorporating heroic women into the women's movement or environmental activists labeling any popular initiative anywhere on behalf of the environment part of the worldwide environmental movement (Tilly, 2004). The use of social movement literature to describe the common dynamics of contentious politics is necessary for this research so long as these semantical challenges are kept in mind.

<sup>34</sup>The interested reader can find the discussion of this question tackled first by Escobar (1992) *Culture, Practice and Politics: Anthropology and the study of social movements in Critique of Anthropology* and in (Gibb, 2001).

<sup>35</sup>Information and communication technologies

<sup>36</sup>For a more in depth discussion of the role of the Arab media in mobilizing public opinion, see Lynch, Marc *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>37</sup>It should be noted as a methodological caveat that anthropologists who study the media do so to make larger conclusions about the culture in question (like Mead's national character studies) while I'm using the media specifically to make inference of a much more limited scale.

<sup>38</sup>I.e. no experimentation or alteration of conditions is possible as is the case in this research.

<sup>39</sup>The details of the analytical procedure for distinguishing such causes are explained in the analytic procedures section below.

<sup>40</sup>Or some combination of both

<sup>41</sup>As a subset satellites are very large with 156 Satellites per 1000 people but presumably those people would have access to the same local TV channel meaning the sets overlap somewhat.

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<sup>42</sup> In the sense that social movements need the media to spread their messages but the media does not need them and hence the media might be less restricted in the way they represent social movements(Staggenborg, 2008).

<sup>43</sup>The Al Jazeera Center for Studies is a think tank extension of the AL Jazeera network which specializes in studying the Al Jazeera organization as well as the analysis of current affairs both regionally globally.

<sup>44</sup> Riots, which will refer to violent demonstration of more than 100 people involving the use of physical force;  
general strikes which will refer to a strike of a 1000 or more industrial or service workers involving more than one employer and aimed at the government; and demonstrations which will refer to a peaceful gathering of a 100 or more people for the primary purpose of voicing or displaying opposition to government authority or policy(Ulfelder, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> A point discussed at greater length above and in the literature review section on social movements and the media.

<sup>46</sup>Some researchers reject the distinction between manifest and latent meanings arguing instead that media messages fall on a continuum between most manifest and most latent(Neuendorf, 2002), in that light this research would focus on the most manifest meanings.

<sup>47</sup> Rough as this indication might be since such things are impossible to quantify and scale.

<sup>48</sup>The free rider problem refers is the perceived tendency of rational actors to abstain from contributing to protest activity and incurring risk because they already know that they will share in the benefits of successful protest activity regardless of participation(Moore, 1995).

<sup>49</sup>For an extended evaluation of the topic see Davenport, Johnston and McClurg-Mueller (2005)

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<sup>50</sup>An example of this is when Al Hassad reported that the UGTT (the Tunisian national workers union which has offices and members across the country) was joining protests against the regime.

<sup>51</sup>A secular Liberal Party operating in Tunisia between 1983-2012 it has not merged with the republic party.

<sup>52</sup> Which included but was not limited to Djerba, Tunis, Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, and Mahdia.

<sup>53</sup> French is the second most spoken language in Tunisia after Arabic.

<sup>54</sup>For an in depth accounting of this manner of causation see the Stanford dictionary of philosophy page at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/causation-counterfactual/#TemAsyCauDep>

<sup>55</sup>See section in Literature review.

<sup>56</sup>With the exception of the military's involvement a topic I return to in the conclusion.

<sup>57</sup>Tunisia can be roughly divided into a rich costal region dependent on export and tourism and a deprived interior region where Sidi Bouzid and many of the towns that saw the most vicious clashes between protests and security forces are located.

<sup>58</sup> The free rider problem refers is the perceived tendency of rational actors to abstain from contributing to protest activity and incurring risk because they already know that they will share in the benefits of successful protest activity regardless of participation(Moore, 1995).

<sup>59</sup>Not to mention since economic inequality, rising food prices and widespread youth unemployment are endemic to the region an explanation of the events in Tunisia or elsewhere that appeals to them needs to account for why such revolution did not succeed in Algeria, did not even emerge in an large sense in Morocco , or is still absent from Jordan.

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<sup>60</sup>Middle east and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.