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# The Tunisian Revolution: Empire and the Power of The Multitude

Caroline A. Burns  
caburns@usfca.edu

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The Tunisian Revolution: Empire and the Power of The Multitude

Carly Burns

Oakland, CA

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Masters in International Studies

The Tunisian Revolution: Empire and the Power of The Multitude

In partial Fulfillment of the Reuirements for the Degree

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in

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CARLY BURNS

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Under the Guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members,  
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APPROVED:

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Advisor

Date

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Academic Director

Date

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Dean of Arts and Sciences

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## **Abstract**

The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi ignited the revolution that would oust Tunisian dictator Ben Ali in 2011. The momentum of the revolution in Tunisia spread ideas, tactics, and revolutionary chants across borders to various parts of the globe. The speed and intensity of the revolution dominated the attention of the unsuspecting global community. In order to understand the conditions under which this revolution transpired, I use Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theory of Empire to show how the contemporary global system functions. Through the historical development of Tunisia and concurrent rise of Empire emerges "the multitude," the heterogeneous manifestation of "the people," the labor source and foundation of Empire. The Tunisian revolution highlights the emergence of "the multitude." Moreover, the Tunisian revolution exemplifies the role of "the multitude" to challenge the structure of Empire and its exigencies. What emerges from this analysis is an understanding of the contemporary functions of society, their impact, and ultimately, the means by which "the multitude" can challenge the structure of Empire as a means to rectify injustices and inequalities in the world.

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## **Introduction**

In December of 2010, a desperate act of self-immolation by a Tunisian fruit vendor set off a chain reaction in Tunisia that led to uprisings across the country, the ousting of a longtime dictator, and the establishment of a new constitution and free elections. The onset of these events started a domino effect of unrest and revolution in neighboring countries and ultimately, throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Following the events of 2011, rulers were forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, with uprisings and protests in up to 15 other countries by 2013.

The “Arab Spring” is now part of a list of historic political and social uprisings demanding the world’s attention, as citizens of various Arab countries rose against their governments, challenging the sovereign power in their nation states and the global power apparatus. Despite its small scale, Tunisia was the first to initiate the chain of events that would manifest in multiple countries and result in the toppling of numerous heads of state in the Arab world. To many in the international community, these uprisings seemed random and sudden in nature, yet underlying forces propelled these uprisings in Tunisia -- and their effects suggest an underlying shift that has occurred in the global system.

There has been a historical shift in the last couple of decades of the 20th century, from a global system defined politically by the sovereignty and hegemony of the nation-state to a system that more closely resembles Hardt and Negri’s concept of “Empire”- a

global system that resembles a widely dispersed network of power, made up of multiple sovereign actors. Among these actors are the nation-state itself; international institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the UN Security Council; private interests, such as corporations; non-governmental organizations; and the multitude, or the people. Empire aims to explain the contemporary global system and the current and historical models of global control and power that began with colonization, imperialism, and globalization. These modes of power evolved through time, shaping the international system we recognize today, Empire, which, led to the events that transpired in Tunisia during the Arab Spring. I assert that the Arab Spring was not simply an uprising to replace a despot. While the goals of the revolution were, in part, a vehicle for ousting the head of state, the underlying motivators and causes of the revolution run deeper. A compilation of historical factors in tandem with the present global system created a unique climate for the uprisings.

In this paper, I posit that the evolving global system's effects on Tunisia highlight the rise of Empire and furthermore, the Arab Spring uprising in Tunisia exemplifies the characteristics of "the multitude." To support this assertion, I will elaborate on how the historical colonial, imperialist and globalization factors in Tunisia led to the current global system in which, the revolutions of the Arab Spring occurred. I will also explore how the revolution in Tunisia exposes a global trend towards a changing global formation. I will heavily rely on Hardt and Negri's claim that this global system resembles their theory of "Empire" in its inception and the ways in which it was carried

out. The historically recent movement from a global system dominated by the nation-state to one in which primary power shifts between various actors has left said actors grappling to understand their role. Hardt and Negri comment on the roles that these actors now fill. I will focus primarily on the people, or the masses, and their changing role, or more aptly put, their increasing power and agency in light of this changing global order. I will analyze the theory of Empire to understand the ways in which these revolutions support or contradict their claim. This paper begins with a thorough explanation of the relevant theories, proceed to an analysis of the historical events that led up to the Tunisian revolution, and consider my theoretical analysis to the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia.

## **Section One: Colonization, Neo-Imperialism, and Globalization in Tunisia-A**

### **Historical Account**

*In the end, I chose to embrace these complex identities because all of them undeniably make me who I am today. However, unlike the majority of Tunisians, if not all, I've never felt that I belong to the Middle East because I'm Arab Muslim, or to Europe because I speak French or to the Maghreb just because we make couscous. These identities were attributed to me as I was born Muslim. I was told to be Arab, my education system taught me one side of my history and my political system tied me with Europe and the Maghreb.*

*Aya Chebbi, Pan-African Feminist Activist and Blogger*

The country of Tunisia is located in North Africa between Libya and Algeria and is situated on the Mediterranean. In total, the country is 163,610 square kilometers, or slightly larger than the state of Georgia. Towards the north or the coastal region of the



country, the climate is moderately temperate with hot and mild rains. In the south of the country, however, lies the northern part of the Sahara Desert which causes extremely hot and arid climates.

The historical development of Tunisia was a major contributing factor in the political, social and economic environment that led to the Arab Spring. First, colonization and its predecessor, imperialism, molded concepts of national sovereignty and identity within the nation's population but ultimately, failed to manifest tacit consent by the Tunisian population. Secondly, the localized impacts of colonization, imperialism and capitalism left Tunisia in an economically vulnerable state from which it never fully recovered, leading to high rates of unemployment and underdevelopment that spurred unrest among the country's citizenry. Third, globalization pulled Tunisia into an increasingly interconnected society, opening access to flows of information. In order to analyze how the historical development of Tunisia exemplifies the rise of Empire and the manifestation of "the multitude," I will cover historic systems of power and how they shaped Tunisia as a part of the global system.

### **Colonization's Impact in Tunisia: Indigenous Tunisia through the Tunisian Revolution in 2011**

Colonization and its predecessor, imperialism, molded concepts of national sovereignty and identity within the nation's population and ultimately, contributed to the basis for a national uprising. The structure of societal control that was passed to post-

independence Tunisia from its colonizer, relied on the concept of "consent" and "coercion." This "consent" is in part manufactured by a sense of nationalism that is tied to Tunisian's concepts of identity, which, while fluid and intersectional, are parts of a whole Tunisian identity.

Even in the early centuries of the Islamic period, there was conflict for rule of the Tunisian region, known as Ifriqiyah. Following early Roman rule, the region was ruled by the Vandals and Byzantines before Arabs conquered the area in AD 647. By 1230, the region became a separate Tunisian dynasty, established by the Hafsids and boasting a large population of Muslim Andalusians from Spain. Ultimately, Tunisia exemplified the shifting and waning power of the Middle East through the dwindling influence of the Ottoman Empire and the growing influence of the European world, with control of the Tunisian region exchanged from one European colonizer to another before eventually stabilizing in 1881, when France conquered Tunisia.

In her book *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*, Mary Lewis chronicles the colonial modes of power at play in the colonization of Tunisia. She notes, "France's invasion in 1881 did not lead to absolute French authority over Tunisia, but to 'divided Rule'—wherein sovereignty was split not only between France and the Husaynid dynasty of beys, as one might expect, but also between France and other European powers (especially Italy and Great Britain) whose prior treaty arrangements with the Tunisian bey secured them pockets of influence in the protectorate" (Lewis 1) Despite Tunisia's "protectorate" status with France, the majority

of economic and political power lay with France and other European powers, whose expatriate citizens were governed by European courts. Lewis explains that under Tunisian colonization, “international and domestic affairs were inextricably linked....in part because of the extent to which domestic rights intersected with questions of international law” (8). Numbers of French, Italian, and British expatriates rose steadily, increasingly blurring the lines of concepts personal identity and legal definitions of national identity.

International power dynamics were displayed within Tunisia as France grappled with sharing its power with other European states, and France struggled to maintain its colonial authority over Tunisia. In order to symbolically assert its dominance, France attempted to push its national identity onto native Tunisians, immigrants, and Europeans. Conflicts over conceptions of nationality and France shifted from social group to social group. Citizens’ concepts of personal identity became increasingly intersectional and oftentimes affected by structures of power. According to Krista Moore:

The inundation of French into a society that had previously been 100 percent Arabic speaking put into sharp relief the connotations attached to speaking a language. Establishing power in Tunisia was a *mission civilisatrice* for the French, one in which they sought to establish their culture as superior to the preexisting local cultures. The French goals were largely cultural, not economic, in nature. Arabic and consequently its speakers were classified as belonging to an inferior society and a backward way of life. Colonization, therefore, constrained identity because each language conveyed an opposing idea. The French reproduced the separation through power structures within which one had to work if he or she desired to prosper socially, economically, or politically. (Moore 6)

The lasting impact of colonization on Tunisia is exemplified by the political rule

of former Tunisian presidents Habib Bourguiba (term 1957 to 1987) and his successor, Ben Ali (term 1987–2011). These leaders assumed the characteristics of societal control from their colonial masters. Bourguiba, the leader of the independence movement, became president immediately following the independence. While the government was a self-proclaimed republic, the constitution afforded Bourguiba authoritarian-like control of state operations. Despite his authoritarian ruling style, to this day Bourguiba is beloved as the revolutionary that freed Tunisia from its colonial bonds.

Their actions can be understood in the context of Gramsci's explanation of hegemony, or the leadership and dominance of one group over another. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci explains that a dominant group maintains its power through coercion and consent, and both are used synonymously to maintain control. Yet, Gramsci's theory asserts that in order for the state to maintain control, it relies on the consent of society through "a common social-moral language," in addition to coercion. Bourguiba appealed to a strong sense of national unity and nationalism in order to gain this "consent" while simultaneously utilizing the concept of "coercion." His economic policies were based heavily on protecting the Tunisian citizens and when he turned his back on the "common social-moral language," manifested in his protectionist policies, he was forced to rely purely on "coercion" to maintain control. This would lead quickly to his downfall. This was exemplified in the 1983 Bread Riots in Tunisia when the Bourguiba administration adopted IMF austerity measures that led to a spike in the price of bread. The Tunisian people revolted and Bourguiba crushed the riots violently, resulting in the death of over

100 Tunisians. Three years later, he was ousted by Ben Ali, a member of his cabinet.

Both Bourguiba's and his predecessor Ben Ali's regimes were known for strict repression of fundamental Islamist politics and political and religious figures, seen as a threat to sovereignty, were banished from the country. Parallels drawn between both Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's regimes show that groups in opposition to the sovereign, primarily Islamist groups, were forcibly silenced and banned from the country and media was heavily censored in both regimes – or, to explain it in Gramsci's concise words, “discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’” (Gramsci 12).

Habib Bourguiba's successor, Ben Ali, forcibly removed the Bourguiba regime and attained power in 1987. Ben Ali's regime promised “modernist” policies to make Tunisia a competitive global player that would benefit business and subsequently, sectors of civil society. Yet, in reality, these policies included crony capitalist elements and neoliberal policies which led to the country's high unemployment rate, regime corruption, and an overall mistrust and disillusionment of the government's ability to govern. By applying Gramsci's model, it is only when Ben Ali lost the “consent” of society that his tactics of coercion also failed and he lost control and power of the state. The foundation that Bourguiba built, centering around concepts like Tunisian nationalism, protectionist policies, and progressive women rights, was dismantled by Ben Ali. The loss of the foundation of “the social-moral language” that had been established by the Bourguiba regime in addition to severe government corruption, an increase in censorship, and economic policies that exploited the Tunisian people, rather than protected them,

contributed to the frustration and ultimate uprising of the Tunisian people.

As a result of colonization and the hegemonic control by French and European powers, as noted before, Tunisians developed fluid and intersectional notions of national identity. Those notions of national identity resulted from periods of colonization and the “common social-moral language” constructed during the Bourguiba regime. Thus, the colonial period provided the basis for varying national identities in addition to a society based on dominance, not consent. The significance of these intersectional national identities is the fact that despite the heterogeneous characteristics of the people, the Tunisian people were able to come together, equally frustrated with the state of their nation, to demand a truly representative government.

### **Economic Impacts of Colonization and Neo-Imperialism**

The impacts of colonization and neo-imperialism left Tunisia in an economically vulnerable condition, leading to high rates of unemployment and underdevelopment. As a French Protectorate, Tunisia was politically and economically designed to benefit its colonizer, France. Foreign investment in the form of companies favored the employment of French citizens living in Tunisia. Similar to the case of other colonized countries in which territorial acquisition was in part a means to extract natural resources for the profit of its colonizer, France searched for natural resources in Tunisia. Tunisia’s debt, which had been managed by France under its protectorate status, was suddenly returned to Tunisia following its independence in 1956. Therefore, the Tunisian government, while

newly “independent,” was designed and operated through French political design. The Tunisian economy rested heavily on industry that not only benefitted France’s economy, but also favored French interests within the country. Following independence, Tunisia was left with a foreign, imposed political system, an industrial sector that drained rather than stimulated the economy, and a mountain of foreign debt.

This period of colonial rule by France was significant because it laid the foundation for global systems of control, designed to benefit the economic and political interests of the colonizer nations over the colonized. In short, economic and political policies internally and externally benefitted France and French citizens living in Tunisia. Paul Cambon, the diplomat with primary control over the French Protectorate of Tunisia, managed to create a system that ultimately benefitted France, politically and economically: "Cambon carefully kept the appearance of Tunisian sovereignty while reshaping the administrative structure to give France complete control of the country and render the beylical government a hollow shell devoid of meaningful powers"( Perkins 86). While French control meant the acquisition and management of Tunisian debt along with the increases in infrastructural projects, French companies that settled in Tunisia primarily favored French employees rather than Tunisian employees. Additionally, French companies explored Tunisia to find hidden natural resources.

Tunisia was one of many countries that struggled for independence from the established system of colonial control and attempted to reclaim its non-colonial identity. In the speech *Cuba: Historical Exception or Vanguard in the Anti-Colonial Struggle?*,

Che Guevara succinctly explains the imperial economic model of colonial control, stating:

We, politely referred to as ‘underdeveloped,’ in truth, are colonial, semi-colonial or dependent countries. We are countries whose economies have been distorted by imperialism, which has abnormally developed those branches of industry or agriculture needed to complement its complex economy. ‘Underdevelopment,’ or distorted development, brings a dangerous specialization in raw materials, inherent in which is the threat of hunger for all our peoples. We, the ‘underdeveloped,’ are also those with the single crop, the single product, the single market. A single product whose uncertain sale depends on a single market imposing and fixing conditions. That is the great formula for imperialist economic domination.

Here, Guevara is referencing Cuba, yet the concept that colonial and post-colonial countries historically were, and continue to be, impacted by imperialism and neo-imperialist policies, applies to Tunisia as well.

While imperialism, as understood in historical context, was the exertion of power from one country onto another through diplomatic or military means, imperialism as it is understood today (or neo-imperialism) maintains the same goals but asserts itself through different means, primarily economic. This narrative can also be referred to as “dependency theory,” a theory that describes the exploitation of periphery countries by core countries. Walter Rodney, in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, describes this theory in relation to the colonized countries of Africa. Today, the “periphery” countries are the countries formerly colonized by the “core” countries, and these “periphery” countries continue to struggle with the legacy of colonization.



In the early 1900s, the fight for Tunisian sovereignty originated with the Young Tunisian Party and evolved into the Neo-Destour party led by Habib Bourguiba, the future president of independent Tunisia. As a threat to French control, Bourguiba was banned from the country and imprisoned in France. Upon his return, post-WWII, Bourguiba proposed a gradual transition of power away from France, and the Neo-Destour party utilized terrorist attacks against symbolic centers of French control until Prime Minister Pierre Mendez of France granted gradual independence to Tunisia. Power relations, however, remained the same as they existed in 1881 at the onset of Tunisia's protectorate status. In 1956, following the success of Morocco in gaining independence from France, Habib Bourguiba requested and gained independence for Tunisia from France.

Post-colonial Tunisia continued cordial relations with its former colonizer and the other European powers that had remained in Tunisia. According to Frantz Fanon, positive relations with former colonizers resulted in an ideal relationship for political leaders and the upper-middle class in formerly colonized nations, excluding lower socio-economic classes and indigenous groups. In *The Challenge of Decolonization in Africa*, Talton expands on Fanon's idea: "...it was a challenge for African nations to forge international links beyond words on paper: few national networks of administration, communication, or transportation within their borders operated consistently and effectively. In addition, the senior administrators who ran the colonies were removed with European rule, to be replaced by Africans with far less experience. Moreover, the political system that African

leaders inherited was structured to benefit the evolving ruling classes with little regard for the needs of the people”

Despite efforts to remain a truly sovereign nation, the historical legacies of colonization had already dragged Tunisia into the realm of economic interdependence. Colonization established an economic system that was primarily constructed to benefit the needs of its colonizer. "The French protectorate cleared the way for unrestricted exploitation of the Tunisian people and the plunder of their national resources by the French monopolies. People came to Tunisia in search of easy profit, seizing lands, concessions and contracts" (Lutsky)

Following its independence from France in 1956 until the Arab Spring in 2011, Tunisia remained distorted by colonization and imperialism, and economically vulnerable. At the end of the 1970s, The World Bank advised President Bourguiba to adopt liberal policies in exchange for help from the IMF, in order to save a struggling economy. The Tunisian economy had been in decline and was struggling under the weight of its foreign debt. Additionally, during this period, the European economy had been experiencing a period of economic downturn. Tunisia’s colonial legacy meant that key industrial sectors were heavily linked to the European economy, and thus, Tunisia was undoubtedly affected by the European recession. Bourguiba attempted to reach out to the international community for assistance. The IMF readily offered Tunisia a substantial loan in exchange for liberalization of trade, increased privatization, less government control of the economy, and cuts in government spending for public sectors

such as education and health; these were familiar conditions that the IMF gave to other “developing” countries, such as Haiti, during this time.

Initially, seeing no other option, Bourguiba agreed to the conditions, one of which included the termination of subsidies on wheat. Bread prices skyrocketed immediately, leading to outrage and violent protests by the Tunisian people. Bourguiba immediately backtracked and reinstated the subsidies, rejecting the IMF loan along with its conditions. Yet, the country, linked with the struggling European economy, continued to regress. Bourguiba once again accepted a loan from the IMF that stipulated an end to agricultural subsidies; once again, that led to protests – and this at a time when Tunisia was hit with an unfortunately timed drought and plunging oil reserves:

Tunisia's economic management, once held up as a model of development, has recently been the subject of adverse comment from the World Bank. The criticism is that oil-rich Tunisia has funded too many capital-intensive projects; that wage increases in the early 1980s were not matched by any productivity gains; that the rise of imported consumer goods has swelled the current account deficit; that the government has not done enough to encourage export; and that the Tunisian currency, the dinar, is overvalued. (Ghiles)

Bourguiba structured the government and economy on the foundation of a “social contract,” one based on “strong state participation in the economy, free public education, democratization of the role of women, and subsidies for basic food stuffs and fuel” (Prince). The continued decline of the economy and the erosion of the tacit “social contract” disillusioned the Tunisian public and it proved an opportune time for Prime Minister Ben Ali to oust Habib Bourguiba and take over as president. Ben Ali's ascension to power was disguised as a regime dedicated to democracy and transparency.

Immediately following his presidency, Ben Ali began a new relationship with the IMF while simultaneously creating a highly repressive and authoritarian government. The IMF loan stipulated:

The loan will support the comprehensive medium term adjustment program that the Government has presented in its Seventh Plan (1987-91). The SAL will, in particular, support the establishment of an efficient structure of incentives through action in three domains. Firstly, it will support liberalization of external trade, notably the reduction of import restrictions, and the decontrol of prices. Secondly, it will help improve the efficiency of financial intermediation by bringing interest rates closer to market levels, improving the treatment of foreign exchange risk, and increasing competition among financial institutions. Thirdly, it will support reform of direct and indirect taxation. The framework of these reforms will be a medium term macroeconomic program reflected in a set of projections based on recent developments and monitoring of a set of indicators to determine any additional measures that might be needed in case of shortfall from the program's targets. (World Bank)

Michel Chossudovsky writes of the time, “Barely a few months following Ben Ali’s installment as the country’s president, a major agreement was signed with the IMF. An agreement had also been reached with Brussels pertaining to the establishment of a free trade regime with the EU. A massive privatization program under the supervision of the IMF-World Bank was also launched. With hourly wages on the order of €.75 an hour, Tunisia had also become a cheap labor haven for the European Union.” The end of subsidies, liberalization of trade, and restrictions against subsidies opened the Tunisian market to the global economy without any form of protection. As a “developing” country, Tunisian businesses could not compete against the prices of products from more affluent countries that could afford (and were permitted to) to subsidize their industries. Wage

cuts, together with liberalized trade, led to many bankruptcies throughout the country.

Jobs were cut in the public sector and food prices rose dramatically. Unemployment and income inequality rose drastically.

Yet, herein lies a paradox. After 1987, the IMF and World Bank pointed to Tunisia as a shining example of the success of neo-liberalization and the structural adjustment programs, asserting, “Tunisia has made remarkable progress on equitable growth, fighting poverty and achieving good social indicators. It has sustained an average 5 percent growth rate over the past 20 years with a steady increase in per capita income and a corresponding increase in the welfare of its population that is underscored by a poverty level of 7% that is amongst the lowest in the region.” (Chossudovsky) Yet the internal narrative from the Tunisian people during the revolution, freed from the repressive Ben Ali regime, told a much different story. Their narrative was one in which “the harsh economic and social realities underlying IMF intervention [were] soaring food prices, local-level famines, massive lay-offs of urban workers and civil servants and the destruction of social programs. Internal purchasing power [had] collapsed, health clinics and schools [had] been closed down, hundreds of millions of children [had] been denied the right to primary education.” (Chossudovsky) As the Tunisian economy struggled to recuperate and grow, unemployment steadily increased, creating an impoverished and powerless middle class and a growing and alienated number of people in poverty. The economic status near the end of Ben Ali’s reign was characterized by heavy corruption. Ben Ali and his wife’s family, the Trabelsis, were given economic and political favors and

both families used public money to fund their extravagant lifestyles.

In the historical development of Tunisia, the country was controlled through physical imperialist domination in tandem with the development of its economy as a means to benefit its colonizer. Neo-imperialist policies took the form of structural adjustment loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Emerging from colonization, the country experienced the decline of its economy and a growing relationship with the IMF, which eviscerated the Tunisian government, civil society and the economy. Ultimately, this led to three main situations: Bourguiba was ousted from power, Ben Ali took political and economic control of the country, and Tunisia entered into a relationship with the IMF.

The legacy of colonization had a major effect on the future development of the nation. Politically, Tunisia's government was set up in a way that it was diplomatically advantageous to its colonizer, France. As a colony, Tunisia's economy was designed to economically benefit France and Europe. France geared the Tunisian economy to center around industries that would ensure France's access to Tunisia's natural resources, such as petroleum. Additionally, as a colony, French citizens abroad were economically favored in terms of government and industrial sector employment. Post-independence, Tunisia's economy was already geared and linked to European interests. Despite Bourguiba's efforts to protect the interests of the Tunisian people, he also had to work around the design of a pre-established economy. Tunisia's economy was therefore linked to the success or struggle of the European economy. What followed was what could be

considered neo-imperialist pressure to adopt neoliberal policies and integrate further with the global economy -- neo-imperialist because while the former means by which imperialism had been executed were fading, the goal was the same: political and economy domination over another country. Neoliberal policies ensured that the interests of European states were protected under the guise of “assistance.” These policies, coming to Tunisia in the form of IMF loans, were a means to ensure that the flow of resources from the former colony were still accessible to European markets, despite the expense to the Tunisian people.

The economic system in which the Tunisian people found themselves was one of exploitation and inequalities. This economic vulnerability left a large amount of the population unable to survive, let alone thrive. Moreover, the nation of Tunisia had been pulled, starting with colonization until the revolution in 2011, into the global economic system. Furthermore, Tunisia’s further integration into this capitalist neoliberal system, designed to benefit the few and exploit many, was actively sought and propelled by the government of Ben Ali. As a result, the Tunisian people reached a breaking point where they could no longer accept this system of control.

### **Globalization’s Social and Political Impact in Tunisia**

As much as colonization and imperialism affected the economic, social, and political landscape of the country, globalization pulled Tunisia into an increasingly interconnected world, opening access to flows of information that directly contributed to

the Tunisian Revolution. In David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, he explains his theory of space-time compression in relation the world become increasingly globalized, noting, "...I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us" (Harvey 240). Tunisia's focus on modernization, integration into the capitalist world system, and transition to becoming a player in a globalized world resulted in the injection of modern technological advances into Tunisian culture, pulling the Tunisian people into the currents of global communication and connection.

In our globalized world, ideas and information spread at a rapid rate that defies the concept of distance and space. Since its independence, the Tunisia state had operated in a heavily censored state in the press and in the media. Leaders of the nation relied on this censorship to maintain power and control in state operations. Globalization brought platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to the Tunisian people -- modes of communication that were difficult for the Tunisian government to control and censor. During Ben Ali's regime, these platforms were controlled to the greatest extent possible, yet, in many ways the flood gates had been opened, and complete control over these forms of communication proved difficult.

Once established in Tunisia, these platforms played a vital role in helping Tunisians across the nation organize and spread news about the revolution in 2011. Previous attempts at protests and revolutions had been largely unsuccessful, as methods



for spreading news and organizing were difficult and any media converge or cell phone usage was largely censored. In the revolution, Tunisians used Facebook to spread news of upcoming protests, victories, and military brutality that quickly gained international attention (note that the introduction of these technological advances into Tunisian society was not necessarily new and cannot be heralded as the single reason the revolution gained so much momentum).

A steady growth in the circulation of information and ideas worldwide, and the increasing connectivity of global communities, supported the motivations and actions of the Tunisian people leading up to and during the revolution. The effects of globalization can be seen in the development of the street art movement in Tunisia. In a globalized world, ideas and information spread at relative ease. This, in conjunction with increases in technological infrastructure post-independence, enabled political activists and street artists in Tunisia to be influenced by artists with decidedly political messages. In his essay, *The Revolutionary Art: Street Art Before and After the Tunisian Revolution*, Korody quotes an anonymous street artist, “‘Ahl el-Kahf was born during the sit-in of Al Kasbah 2. It started as an anonymous and revolutionary form of art and expression. Basically [we created] messages [that] reflected common social demands criticized political frauds and systematic control. For example, we wrote, ‘Those who mislead him are still in here’ under Ben Ali stencils, as well as other stencils we conceived and some of Banksy’s works.’” (Korody 33). It is notable that artists from Tunisia had access to images of and meanings behind the work of Banksy, an anonymous street artist from the

United Kingdom. The messages in Banksy's street art often convey opposition against blind obedience to government, anarchist themes, anti-capitalist messages, anti-authoritarian messages, and anti-imperialist themes. In addition to the meaning behind his street art, his use of graffiti implies a rejection of central power and both public and private ownership. The anarchist themes and rejection of centralized power through the re-appropriation of public space were strong themes in the Tunisian revolution and will be touched on later.



Street art inspired by Banksy in Le Kef, Tunisia.

As Appadurai notes in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, the migration of ideas and culture as a result of globalization create communities that transcend the borders of nation states. This is Appadurai's notion of "deterritorialization" which explains that groups of street artists mobilizing in Tunisia drew inspiration from the flow of cultural phenomena through globalization and identify and connect with

subgroups outside of the perimeters of the nation state (Appadurai 49). Globalization was a precipitating factor in drawing a modernized Tunisia into an era of “real-time” communications, allowing for rapid dissemination of information that helped fueled the revolutionary ideas among Tunisians.

Among these revolutionary ideas was “anti-” or “alter-globalization”. In this context, a distinction should be noted. Globalization is understood and defined in multiple ways including cultural, social, political, and economic interaction among all humans. In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Anthony Giddens defines globalization as, “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 64). While one of the motivations behind the Tunisian revolution was the rejection of globalization, it was mainly the economic aspect of globalization, the export of capitalist and neoliberal ideals that have and continue to create a power structure that feeds off of the majority of the world’s poor and middle classes. “Alter-globalization” movements do not explicitly conclude that globalization as a whole is “positive” or “negative.” As an active concept, globalization can exist to benefit or harm an individual in multiple ways simultaneously.

The “alter-globalization” movement focuses mainly on the negative impacts of neoliberalism and capitalism and in reality is not against globalization at all; more aptly put, these movements criticize the way that globalization is altered and used by those in power to benefit the few “elite.” Noam Chomsky explains:

The term 'globalization' has been appropriated by the powerful to refer to a specific form of international economic integration, one based on investor rights, with the interests of people incidental. That is why the business press, in its more honest moments, refers to the 'free trade agreements' as 'free investment agreements'" (Wall Street Journal). Accordingly, advocates of other forms of globalization are described as "anti-globalization," and some, unfortunately, even accept this term, though it is a term of propaganda that should be dismissed with ridicule. No sane person is opposed to globalization, that is, international integration. Surely not the left and the workers movements, which were founded on the principle of international solidarity—that is, globalization in a form that attends to the rights of people, not private power systems. (Chomsky)

The distinction is that the wider access to flows of information, the technological advances, and the increased connectivity between global communities seemingly separated by large distance were not the aspects of globalization that the Tunisian revolution revolted against. Rather, as Chomsky stated, the "anti-globalization" themes that Tunisian people were rejecting was the imposition of a specific economic system that works to benefit "private power systems." As we have established, colonization and neo-imperialist policies, like loans from the IMF, described as the process of "globalization," established within Tunisia economic and political systems that forced Tunisia into these "power systems."

### **Section One: Conclusion**

The messages and motivations behind the Tunisian revolution are an accumulation of the legacy of colonization, imperialism, and certain aspects and conceptions globalization. While these specific historical, social, cultural, and economic

characteristics of Tunisia fueled the specific events of the Tunisian Revolution, the underlying themes are simultaneously specific to the Tunisian condition and universal in nature. Alter-globalization, a rejection of capitalist power structures, neo-imperialism, and established structures of power are relatively new concepts and themes to emerge in contemporary society. Contemporary society functions based on the formation and evolution of contemporary structures of power, some of which can be seen through the lens of the historical development of Tunisia. Furthermore, the relatively new globalized condition of contemporary society has put a spotlight on these structures of power and the interconnectivity of the global system has made the condition of the modern citizen both specific and universal. In the context of new ways in which the world functions, I will show that the Tunisian Revolution highlights the growing consciousness of the “people”, understood as the multitude, in determining their role in the global system and the means by which they can challenge these structures of power and modern inequalities.

## **Section Two: The Global System and How Contemporary Society Functions**

In order to understand the specific significance of the Tunisian Revolution, I will analyze the ways in which the world functions differently than it has before. In this section, I will strongly reference Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, mainly their works *Empire* and their pamphlet *Declaration*. I will give a thorough explanation of Hardt and Negri’s theory of Empire as it applies to contemporary society. I will then explore Hardt and Negri’s pamphlet, *Declaration*, to understand the role of the modern individual in

contemporary society, as understood through Empire.

### **The Theory of Empire**

Empire, written by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, is a literary and theoretical work that aims to explain the state of the world as we see it now. Co-author Antonio Negri, an Italian political philosopher and sociological Marxist, was indicted on charges of conspiring against the state and lived periodically in France where he taught alongside Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida and also spent a period of time in prison, where he continued to work. Negri teamed up with Michael Hardt, also a political philosopher and literary theorist, to theorize and write *Empire*. The theory of “Empire” is Hardt and Negri's explanation of the way that global society interacts present day. The theory asserts that the age of imperialism is over and has been replaced with a new political order of globalization.

Theorists have generally fallen into two camps: that globalization exists and therefore the nation state is declining, or that the power of the nation state still exists, therefore globalization doesn't exist. Michael Hardt notes that some assert that the sovereignty of the nation-state is decreasing, specifically in economic terms, to the extent that the nation state is no longer able to control capital flows -- in other words, the triumph of the economy over the political. Hardt and Negri argue that this is not the case; instead, they assert that the political, through such things as state functions and regulations, continue to exist -- but in a different form. This new form of sovereignty is a

global network of distributed power, made up of different actions, that exist under "a single logic of rule" called Empire. In Empire, the power of the sovereign hasn't decline but has been reorganized.

Here, in Empire, we see a break from the old world order, one in which inequality is no longer as black and white as the "core" and "periphery" or the "ruling class" and "proletariat." In other words, inequalities don't aren't purely manifested in "core" countries exploiting "periphery" countries through colonization, for example, or the "bourgeoisie" exploiting the "proletariat" class through labor relations. Instead, this distributed network of power reveals a more complex series of inequalities. Gopal Balakrishnan explains, "The logic of this volatile totality evades and transgresses all the inherited divisions of political thought: state and society, war and peace, control and freedom, core and periphery; even the distinction between systemic and anti-systemic agency is blurred beyond recognition."

Michael Hardt explains that the term "Empire" is used because the state of global order today is reminiscent of the Roman Empire in its construction, one in which a monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy exist simultaneously. "Hardt and Negri argue that the new world order can be envisaged as an analogous structure, in which US nuclear supremacy represents the monarchical, the economic wealth of the G7 and transnational corporations the aristocratic, and the internet the democratic principle—Bomb, Money and Ether composing the contemporary version of the constitution of the Roman Republic, on the morrow of its defeat of Carthage" (Balakrishnan). Essentially, the world

functions as this network of power relations, comprised of multiple actors constantly interacting and shifting the balance of power.

Hardt and Negri build off the concept of a “superimperialist” system, a Marxist term initially coined by the Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky. Both “Empire” and the concept of a “super-imperialist” power can be understood as multiple imperialist powers in a web of constantly changing power relations. Where the theory of “Empire” distances itself from the concept of super-imperialism are the actors that come to play in our current system. As previously defined, imperialism is "a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means" ("Imperialism"). Hardt and Negri argue that this power historically originated in European nation-states in the form of colonization. The acquisition of territory and a physical expansion of the borders of a nation-state was the main way that balance of power and power relations fluctuated. The concept of "Empire," on the other hand, is "decentered" and “deterritorializing." Although Hardt and Negri don't explicitly define the concept of "Empire," it can be understood generally as "a decentered and deterritorialising apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (Hardt and Negri xii). This theory differs from accepted concepts of globalization and imperialism by asserting that this new world order is lacking in one centralized imperialist power. Historically, this central imperialist power was the sovereign of a nation state defined by physical borders and while the balance of power historically shifted as well, the novelty of “Empire” is the “deterritorialized”



nature of the actors within shifting power relations. For example, in today's world, supra-national organizations such as the United Nations interact and vie for power against multinational corporations. In this sense, it is often difficult to clearly identify the actors or who at one time maintains control or power in this system.

Rather than theorizing that Empire exists as a result of challenges against the exigencies of global capitalism, Hardt and Negri claim it exists because of it, out of the ashes of the old system dominated by nation states and colonization. Furthermore, they assert that the seemingly unstoppable and uncontrollable force that is capitalism, can, in fact, be challenged through rebellion. Here, their concept of "the multitude" is introduced. "The multitude" is a heterogeneous grouping of the world's laborers, with "heightened powers of subversion", made possible through the metaphorical weakening of the nation state borders. Their rebellion relies on a common desire for liberation from a global system that perpetuates inequalities and exploitation. The challenge for "the multitude" is both their optimism for a more just world and their inability to accurately analyze the global order and identify a roadmap to achieve greater power. Yet, Hardt and Negri claim that in some ways, their challenges are irrelevant because, "although local struggles no longer trigger off horizontal, upwardly spiraling revolutionary sequences, they can now immediately catapult up to the global level as unforeseen media events. By this more direct vertical route, the virtual centre of Empire can be attacked at any point" (Balakrishna).

## **Contemporary Figures of Society: The Condition of the Modern Global Citizen**

In their pamphlet *Declaration*, Hardt and Negri lay out the symbolic figures of contemporary society. It is through these figures that we can begin to understand the ways in which the contemporary system functions differently than it has before. It is also through these figures that we can understand the role of the people, “the multitude” within this contemporary society. Hardt and Negri identify four main figures in society: “the indebted,” “the mediatized,” “the securitized,” and “the represented.” These figures are symbolic of the condition of the individual in society, regardless of geographic location, and they represent the current condition of “the multitude.” The comprehension of their current status and understanding the ways in which they were manifested in Tunisia give us insight into the internal motivators behind the events of the Tunisian Revolution.

### **“The indebted”**

Hardt and Negri begin by introducing “the indebted.” They assert that existing with some form of debt in today's society is a highly normalized condition of living and almost impossible to exist without. As such, debt is a means of control and power, enforced by responsibility and guilt, that regulates and affects the decision that are made. Today, the nature of capitalism has shifted from the time of the wage laborer, where the owner of capital equally exchanges said capital, for labor. Capitalist production is not confined to the “factory”; instead, it permeates all aspects of life. Furthermore, the owner

of the capital is farther removed from the production and labor is produced more autonomously.

Debt acts as a tool to control the relationship of the production and exploitation. "Debt obscures the productivity of the workers but clarifies their subordination. You survive by making debts, and you live under the weight of your responsibility for them" (17) note Hardt and Negri on the moral power of debt, driven by guilt and responsibility. Capitalist production has transcended the boundaries of "the factory" and has permeated all aspects of life. The means by which the capitalist exploits the laborer has shifted. "Exploitation today is based primarily not on (equal or unequal) exchange but on debt, that is, on the fact that the 99 percent of the population is subject-owes work, owes money, owes obedience, to the 1 percent" (17). The relationship between work and time and life has a blurred line, maintaining that the laborer must give their whole life. The capitalist, far removed and exploiting through debt, does not see the suffering of the laborer.

Hardt and Negri maintain that there is a new figure of the poor, one that includes the unemployed and "precarious worker" and the "stable waged worker" that is the middle class. Here, Hardt and Negri break from their understanding of Marx. The proletariat, at one time, was free in the sense that they were not property of their masters or bound in medieval servitude. The poor today, however, are bound by their debt and become figures reminiscent of an indentured servant.

## **“The mediatized”**

Technology has created a society where the flow of information is rapid and far reaching. In the history of social movements, this is a new tool that gives people the means to share, organize, and express themselves. Yet, the rise of media and its involvement in everyday life is a double-edged sword, acting both as a means to achieve liberation and a mode of control. In this way, the ease and quantity of the flows of communication is paradoxical; according to Deleuze, "the problem is no longer getting people to express themselves, but providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say" (Deleuze 129). Part of the challenge for “the multitude” in a highly globalized world is not getting information per se, but instead, finding information of quality.

In our more highly technological and mediatized society, this bleeds into the economic, blurring the lines of work and life further. "With your smart phone and your wireless connections, you can go anywhere and still be on the job, which you realize quickly means that anywhere you go you are still working!" (19). Hardt and Negri further explain that the merits of a "mediatized" society lie in the distinction between the type of information that is being spread and furthermore, the power that comes out of such information and communication is the masses' ability to see the power in the physical manifestation and power of mass assembly.

## **“The securitized”**

Hardt and Negri introduce "the securitized" based on the supposition that all of us exist in a society that is more and more scrutinized and surveilled. Today, everyone exists as both the subject and object of security, driven by fear. We exist in a society where we are constantly policed by the state, our peers and ourselves. We all exist in a "state of exception," a concept created by Carl Schmidt to explain the sovereign's power to transcend the state of law for the public good. Empire currently exists in this state of exception, where military interventions and just wars are justified in the name of "essential values of justice."

As a result, Hardt and Negri maintain that Empire is in a constant state of war with varying levels of intensity depending on what part of the world you live in. This can be seen in the extreme rise of incarceration in the United States, along with massive expansion of the prison complex despite a relatively constant rate crime rate. Hardt and Negri also point to the growing militarization of our society, not necessarily by an increase in physical military power, but by their increased "social stature." Again, Hardt and Negri point to the fear that exists to control society, "Fear of the ruling powers and their police is a factor but more important and effective is fear of dangerous others and unknown threats - a generalized social fear" (25).

### **"The represented"**

As a global society, we are told that we are in the process of spreading democracy and abolishing oppression and tyranny. Yet, a common theme in the uprising following

2011 was the rejection and critique of representative forms of government that practically exist today. Hardt and Negri argue that "the represented" band together "the indebted," "the mediatized," and "the securitized." The critique that arises out of "the represented" in the uprisings in 2011 is a critique of the functions of western-exported democracy. "The represented" in this form of government are only represented by those with enough wealth to enter the field with their own resources, as information is filtered and controlled through big media, and the fear of "the securitized" is reinforced by big media. "The represented recognizes the collapse of the structures of representation but sees no alternative and is thrust back into fear" (28)

"The extinction of civil society and its broad fabric of institutions was in part the effect of the decline of social presence of the working class, its organizations, and its unions" (28). They argue that there is a myth of true representation and if there was, in fact, true representation within a nation state, that means less and less in the context of global society. The emergence of a global order and global institutions undermines the concept of true representation as we understand it, which is through the lens of the nation-state. "The emerging global institutions make little pretense to represent the will of populations. Policy accords are agreed on and business contracts are signed and guaranteed within the structures of global governance, outside of any representative capacity of the nation-states" (28). And so, "the represented" are robbed of their ability to facilitate political action. "So many of the movements of 2011 direct their critiques against political structures and forms of representation, then, because they recognize

clearly that representation, even when it is effective, blocks democracy rather than fosters it" (28).

## **Section Two: Conclusion**

As the roles of the people of Tunisia and other nations change and the means of control over people are less effective, "the multitude" are subverting and challenging traditional forms of societal control. The Tunisian revolution is a manifestation of this subversion, as the revolution displayed a rejection of the Western monetary system and the influence connected to the indebted society. The Tunisian revolution displayed the power of the new connected world, vastly different from the former regimes where information was held by the ruling class. The revolution displayed a disdain for the security state that existed in many Middle Eastern countries and was a remnant of the coercive tactics used by the former colonial governments. Finally, the Tunisian revolution displayed a much different type of revolution than previous changes in government where one power structure was replaced by another. In the Tunisian revolution and the aftermath, the revolutionaries represented all the different factions of society.

## **Section Three: The Tunisian Revolution in Relation to Empire and "the Multitude"**

Hardt and Negri's theory of Empire aims to explain the global system that we see now, a world that is highly globalized and shaped by processes such as colonization.

They claim that it is a society with a foundation of "the multitude." In an attempt to

challenge the functioning of Empire, which is currently defined by its neoliberal policies and modes of control, it is the role of “the multitudes” to subvert these mechanisms of power. In the Tunisian Revolution, the people subverted and rejected various modes of control that contemporary society relies on. I assert that the theory of Empire accurately describes the state of contemporary society. Thus, the Tunisian revolution signifies the manifestation of “the multitude” as the force of the people challenging the exigencies of the nature of Empire. Among these exigencies is the economic and political exploitation of “the multitude.” To this effect, the manifestation and mobilization of “the multitude,” as seen in Tunisia, reveals the means by which “the multitude” can overcome established structures of power to work towards a truly democratic society.

On December 17, 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor from Sidibouazid in the southern region of Tunisia, self-immolated in front of the local police station. In Sidibouazid, the unemployment rate had reached almost 30%. Twenty-six-year-old Bouazizi had earned a degree in computer science, but, unable to find a work, he turned to street vending to support himself and his family. Bouazizi was provoked by an altercation with police, who had confiscated his cart and earnings for the day. Unable to bribe the officers, he ran to the governor’s office and before setting himself on fire, shouted, “How do you expect me to make a living?”

On December 18th, protestors took to the streets. Initial protests were censored on major Tunisian news outlets by the government, yet, videos of clashes between protestors and police were leaked on Facebook and Twitter. In the following days, despite a strong



response by police and military, protestors continued to demonstrate. By December 27th, the protests had moved from Sidi Bouzid to the capital of Tunis and various other cities. The momentum of the revolution continued with multiple demonstrations organized by activists, students, lawyers, and teachers. By January 14th, 2011, Ben Ali fled the country to Saudi Arabia. Despite a national curfew, protests continued after Ben Ali fled, demanding the resignation of all members of his cabinet. In the following weeks, the police forces began to join the demonstrations, and Rachid Ammar, the country's army chief, sided with the protestors and vowed to "defend the revolution."

Mohammed Ghannouchi stepped up as president of the interim government and promised to step down following free and transparent elections within six months. Yet, protests continued with many calling for his resignation. Activist Naim Garbousi commented, "The new line-up is a theatre. The symbols of the old regime are left, like Ghannouchi. Why is he insisting on staying? We are 10 million people, there will surely be someone who can replace him" (source, page). When protests showed no signs of dissipating, Ghannouchi stepped down and Béji Caïd Essebsi replaced him.

### **Empire and the Tunisian Revolutions: An Analysis of Empire through the Historical Development of Tunisia and the Tunisian Revolution**

Hardt and Negri's characterization of Empire, Multitude, and Declaration explain the messages, goals, and themes of the revolution and reveal the nature of Empire and the

means by which it can be challenged. Through the historical development of Tunisia and through the motivations of the Tunisian revolution, we can see how the world functions in a way that resembles Hardt and Negri's Empire. The main ways, through the study of Tunisia, that we see the world operating as Empire are four-fold. First is the characteristic of Empire as "network of power," in which actors on the global stage constantly vie for power in their interactions. Second is the deterritorialized nature of Empire as understood through the example of the revolution. Third is the use and subsequent subversion of biopolitical power within Tunisia specifically, as well as on a global scale. Finally, the manifestation of "the multitude" is shown through the example of the people in the Tunisian revolution. Furthermore, I will show how the Tunisian people embody the "subjective figures of society" described in *Declaration* and, as a manifestation of "the multitude," how they subverted these roles to challenge Empire.

### **Empire's Network of Power: The Effects of Multiple Global Actors in Tunisia**

As described, Empire is a transnational global network of power united under one rule of law. The world today does not exclusively act as though this concept, a truly transnational and global rule of law, exists. Rather, globalization and economic neoliberalism have slowly been revealing the need to understand the world through a lens that recognizes the globalized nature of our society on a cultural, political and economic level. The period of colonization reveals the dominance of the nation-state at that time as the sovereign; political and economic decisions were made and were controlled within

physical borders of a nation state.

The twentieth century has seen a challenge to the absolute nature of state sovereignty in the form of international human rights, military intervention, and the International Monetary Fund, for example. Empire explains this challenge to state sovereignty, not as a decline in nation state sovereignty, but as sovereignty taking a new form on a global supranational scale. Hardt and Negri suggest that as a result of this network of power, the actors within it are constantly shifting power and are in conflict with one another. For example, consider a formerly colonized, developing, country which decides to allow a dam to be built on one of its waterways. The corporation that will build this project is based in the United States and aims to sell the energy harnessed from the dam to another country. During the project's construction, the UN identifies that international human rights are being violated in an effort to complete this project. In this scenario, you have three different actors -- the United Nations, a multinational corporation, and the nation-state -- interacting with one another to manage this project, which has global implications. This example reveals the fact that in contemporary society, economic or political decisions are not necessarily within the control of a nation state.

A historical examination of Tunisia reveals it was largely shaped by external and internal actors. Even at the beginning of Tunisian independence, Tunisia's economy had been linked to Europe's, and in many ways, President Bourguiba was unable to control flows of capital in and out of the country. Tunisian liberation brought an end to foreign

domination through physical occupation that was ultimately replaced with dominance by the global capitalist economy, a system operating to benefit former colonizers. The adoption of the IMF loans and neoliberal policies further linked the Tunisian economy to the global economy. Tunisia's development post-independence largely coincided with the evolution of state sovereignty as described by Hardt and Negri; that is to say, Tunisian independence coincided with the beginning of the rise of Empire. Although Tunisia evolved into a nation-state as a sovereign country, until the latest revolution, flows of capital were increasingly uncontrollable and political decisions were imposed or influenced by foreign actors .

### **The Deterritorialized Nature of Empire through the Lens of the Revolution**

Empire is described as largely deterritorialized and decentered, with no physical epicenter of power. This characteristic of Empire can be seen in the Tunisian revolution which was simultaneously a territorialized conflict and a global decentralized conflict that spread through the confines of nation-state territorial lines. The Tunisian revolution spread beyond physical boundaries and broke out of the imposed colonial-era national borders. Revolutionary ideas, activists, and concepts spread through national borders to influence the means by which the revolution began and transpired. In the theory of "Empire," conflict and war are both local and specific while also existing within and affecting the global system. The physical manifestation of the Tunisian revolution began as a highly territorialized conflict that was local and specific to the condition of the

Tunisian people. At the same time, the ideas and means by which it transpired were universal, and so, it linked and spread to other areas and affected multiple parts of the global system.

In the immediate aftermath, other Arab countries were affected such as Egypt, Algeria, and Syria. Yet, the ideas and specific tactics utilized in the Tunisian revolution have spread and manifested in various other social movements happening worldwide. This is not to say, however, that the ways in which the Arab Spring transpired in each area were remotely similar; in fact, in all instances, the actual revolutions and their aftermaths were vastly different. The important thing to note is that the localized conflict that began in Tunisia did and continues to have lasting effects on multiple areas of the world.

### **Empire's Mode of Societal Control: Biopower as a Means of Control in Tunisia**

Hardt and Negri expand on this idea of "biopower" by using it to explain their ideas of resistance and rebellion. They elaborate, "When life itself is negated in the struggle to challenge sovereignty, the power over life and death that the sovereign exercises becomes useless. The absolute weapons against bodies are neutralized by the voluntary and absolute negation of the body" (332). Hardt and Negri claim that if the world is in fact in the age of Empire, and there is a decline in the sovereignty of the nation-state replaced instead by the sovereignty of Empire, our notions of war and politics in relation to the sovereignty of that nation state have evolved. For example, war

traditionally has been understood as the conflicts between sovereign states but now we are finding that increasingly, war is being defined as conflicts between people.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witnessed an evolution of this concept with the emergence of wars that were not necessarily between two sovereign nation-states: in a U.S. context, exemplified by the “War on Terror” or the “War on Drugs.” These “wars” signify the reemergence of the concept of “just war” and have no “spacial or temporal” end in sight. Whereas conflict between nation-states was confined to a physical area and the eventual end defined as defeat or victory, these “wars” do not. Empire replaces the notion of multiple sovereign nation-states and their law with a supranational rule of law that governs all entities. Empire is theoretically in a constant state of flux as a result of globalization, economically, socially, and politically. Hardt and Negri explain that in order for Empire to maintain control, it exists in a "state of exception." This concept, introduced by Carl Schmidt and further elaborated upon by Giorgio Agamben in his book *State of Exception*, centers on the nation-state or sovereign's ability to suspend the rule of law or act outside of established law in times of emergency. Empire exists constantly in this state of exception where multiple sovereignties act outside of the rule of established law in defense of "universal values." The implications of acting against these “universal values” is the threat of retaliation on behalf of the sovereign. Additionally, the fear of this retaliation creates a society in which we police ourselves and others.

The nature of Empire is global rule and thus, control, through biopower. Biopower is essentially the means by which a group of individuals is controlled as a group and so, in political terms, this is the control of populations. As explained by Foucault, biopower in modern Western society is the power of the nation-state over its citizens to "make live and let die" as opposed to the medieval means of control by the sovereign in which they can "let live and make die." Modern government controls society less through the daily management of individual lives and focuses on more external and operational matters and leaves society to govern itself and self-regulate. So, biopower exists in the social interactions of the population.

Hardt and Negri refer to Foucault's writings on the concept of biopolitics to understand this changing perception of politics and war. In Foucault's perspective, the concept of war has lost its specificity to conflicts between nation-states and as a result, all relations are political relations between actors and individuals and are the instances of war as a means to dominate and control. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri quote Foucault, "The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology, but in the body and with the body. For capitalist society biopolitics is what is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal" (XX). The utility of the complicit body in the neoliberal capitalist society that is Empire currently is paramount to its functioning.

According to Foucault, and alluded to by Hardt and Negri, biopower is a new

form and structure of control over a mass. Specifically, the power of the sovereign has developed since the beginning of neoliberal global policies from the ability of the sovereign power to “make die, let live” (the right to make war or take life) and evolved into the ability of the sovereign to “make live, let die,” as the state fosters the “quality” of life (Foucault 135). Hardt and Negri expand on this idea of “biopower” by using it to explain their ideas of resistance and rebellion. They elaborate, "When life itself is negated in the struggle to challenge sovereignty, the power over life and death that the sovereign exercises become useless. The absolute weapons against bodies are neutralized by the voluntary and absolute negation of the body” (332).

Applying their principles to Tunisia in the era of Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia experienced a restriction on political and economic freedoms, highly controlled media, and government corruption at the state and local level. The single act that literally and figuratively ignited the revolution in Tunisia was the act of self-immolation by Mohammed Bouazizi, the farmer in rural southern town Sidi Bouzid. "Therefore, the weakness of the sovereign can be exploited when those reject the submission of the sovereign power by turning life itself – through the destruction of their own body – into a weapon" (Uzzell). Where historically, violence and nonviolence against sovereign power were ineffective, Mohammed Bouazizi’s form of resistance was effective: “When life itself is negated in the struggle to challenge sovereignty, the power over life and death that the sovereign exercises becomes useless. The absolute weapons against bodies are



neutralized by the voluntary and absolute negation of the body” (332). When the uprising started in Tunisia, it represented a challenge to the biopower of the sovereign.

Arnoni argues in her essay, *Challenging the biopolitical: The Arab Spring and the Multitude*, that the Arab Spring represents a manifestation of the multitude (according to the definition laid out by Hardt and Negri), and challenges the control of societies through biopower. Arnoni continues, "...the multitude manifests itself by entering into the terrain of biopower where, with the use of democratic uses of violence such as social media, effectively creates an alternative to the current global order of Empire" (3).

Arnoni argues that Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation spread the idea that citizens no longer had to be controlled through biopower. In many countries that participated in the Arab Spring, there existed a lack of trust and confidence in the government, public services, and the global economic system. In Tunisia, the ruling elite was highly corrupt. Ben Ali and his wife's extended family, the Trebelsis, profited largely, and illegally, through state operations. In the weeks following the uprisings in Tunisia, many spaces, both public and private, were widely vandalized with street art that dictated the words of the revolution and the frustration that the Tunisian people had felt in the years leading up to the uprisings.

### **The Tunisian Revolution Shows the Manifestation of “the Multitude”**

Hardt and Negri define their concept of “multitude” as “...an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or,

much less, indifference) but on what it has in common” (100). The idea of “multitude” is, in essence, a social class in both an economic and political sense, in the struggle against the dominant power. “We begin to understand that in an important sense the multitude is what it does: it is brought into being by resisting the oppressions that define it” (Woodard 6). Hardt and Negri explain this concept through the contemporary example of the Arab Spring and a series of co-occurring social movements:

Each of these struggles is singular and oriented toward specific local conditions. The first thing to notice, though, is that they did, in fact, speak to one another. The Egyptians, of course, clearly moved down paths traveled by the Tunisians and adopted their slogans, but the occupiers of Puerta del Sol also thought of their struggle as carrying on the experiences of those at Tahrir. In turn, the eyes of those in Athens and Tel Aviv were focused on the experiences of Madrid and Cairo. The Wall Street occupiers had them all in view, translating, for instance, the struggle against the tyrant into a struggle against the tyranny of finance. You may think that they were just deluded and forgot or ignored the differences in their situations and demands. We believe, however, that they have a clearer vision than those outside the struggle, and they can hold together without contradiction their singular conditions and local battles with the common global struggle.... The movements also share their internal organization as a multitude. (Hardt and Negri, "Take up the Baton")

The themes of the revolution were universal to “the multitude.” Even a cursory analysis of the revolutions shows the people’s desire to break free from repressive regimes. Hardt and Negri comment, “Although the primary demand throughout the Arab world focuses on the end to tyranny and authoritarian governments, behind this single cry stands a series of social demands about work and life not only to end dependency and poverty but to give power and autonomy to an intelligent, highly capable

population” (Hardt and Negri). The role of “the multitude” within Empire is both its foundation and its demise -- not a demise that brings the entire system crumbling down, but instead, a demise that ends the economic and political exploitation of the people. More than a rejection of an authoritarian ruler, the Tunisian people were rejecting a system that had failed them, an economic system that had stripped them of their agency and an internal and external political system that robbed them of true representation. These themes transcended nation-state boundaries because they are universal to the condition of citizens globally. The easiest to note were the subsequent revolutions within the Arab world, yet the themes and characteristics of the Tunisian revolution can be seen in various other areas of the world such as the United States in the case of the Occupy Movement, and in social movements in Argentina and Bolivia. Among the ideas and concepts that began to emerge more frequently following the Arab Spring in Tunisia is the concept of collective political action and resistance without a defined leader. “The organisation of the revolts resembles what we have seen for more than a decade in other parts of the world, from Seattle to Buenos Aires and Genoa and Cochabamba, Bolivia: a horizontal network that has no single, central leader” (Hardt and Negri) This organization is of particular note because it signifies a rejection from the trend of hierarchical forms of organization or a regression to a previous form of political organization.

The authors call attention to the absence of a "central leader" in this movement, instead referring to it as a "horizontal network." "What they don't understand is that the multitude is able to organise itself without a centre – that the imposition of a leader or

being co-opted by a traditional organisation would undermine its power. "(Hardt and Negri, *Arabs are democracy's new pioneers*). The organization of the Tunisian people from the onset and throughout the Arab Spring illustrates this concept of "multitude." All Tunisians, through the process of challenging and overthrowing the established sovereign power, united in opposition. Just as the "multitude" is characterized, participants in this revolution were in no sense a homogenized group of individuals. "...[T]he members of the multitude do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other. They remain different in terms of race, sex, sexuality and so forth. We need to understand, then, is the collective intelligence that can emerge from the communication and cooperation of such varied multiplicity. (Hardt and Negri 91-92) As previously noted, the history of colonization in Tunisia created a myriad of national identities. Moreover, participants of the revolution largely differed in their views of how the country should be structured politically, socially, religiously, and economically. In this, they encapsulate the idea of "multitude" as a heterogeneous network.

The function of the multitude, in addition to contributing to Empire, is simultaneously the force that brings the destruction and evolution of Empire. This concept is one of the more neo-Marxist aspects of Hardt and Negri's theory. The multitude has the power to overthrow Empire and create another global system of organization. Hardt and Negri argue that the Multitude must use the concept of biopower to challenge the structure of Empire.

## **The Tunisian Revolution Challenging Empire: “The Figures of Contemporary Society” Challenge Established Power Structures**

"Movements of revolt and rebellion, we find, provide us the means not only to refuse the repressive regimes under which these subject figures suffer but also to invert their subjectivities in figures of power. They discover, in other words, new forms of independence and security on economic as well as social and communicational terrains, which together create the potential to throw off systems of political representation and assert their own powers of democratic action. These are some of the accomplishments that the movements have already realized and can develop further. (Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*)

The Tunisian revolution is a manifestation of “the Multitude” and that can also be seen as challenging the nature of Empire. The Tunisian people embody the “contemporary figures of subjectivity” laid out in Declaration. The Tunisian revolution, as a manifestation of “the Multitude,” challenged these roles and in doing so, challenged Empire as it functions today.

### **“the indebted”**

Following a period of rapid economic growth, the beginning of the 1980s saw a neoliberal shift in the economic policies of the Tunisian government:

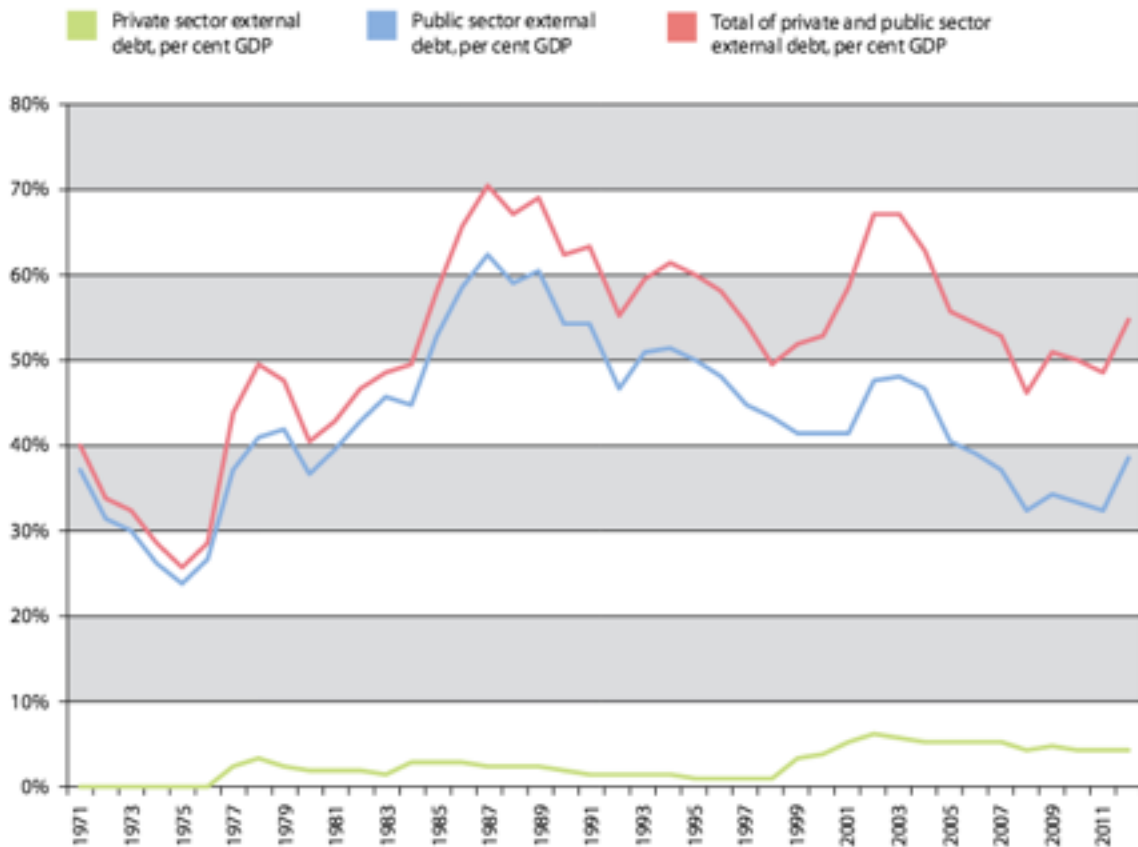
“The roots of this Tunisian 'uprising' are to be found in a lethal combination of poverty, unemployment and political repression: three characteristics of most Arab societies. Official figures place unemployment in the Arab world at 15 per cent but many economists believe the real rate is far higher than government supplied statistics suggest. A joint study by the Arab League and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) indicates that in most Arab countries young people constitute 50 per cent of the

unemployed - the highest rate in the world. According to the same report, rates of poverty remain high - reaching up to 40 per cent on average, which means that nearly 140 million Arabs continue to live under the upper poverty line".

Worse still, the study noted that the region has seen no decrease in rates of poverty in the past 20 years. The report was submitted to the Arab summit that convened in Kuwait in 2009, but found no real response from Arab officials - who continued to pursue economic policies that had, in their main outlines, been imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). In most Arab countries, rampant corruption, nepotism and inefficiency have further aggravated the impact of IMF-inspired privatisation processes, austerity measures and the reduction or scrapping of government subsidies on fuel and staple foodstuffs." (Andoni).

Within Tunisia, population demographics right before the uprising in 2011 show that 55% of the country was under the age of 25 and about 15.4% of the population was unemployed. Tunisia had a growing, educated workforce unable to find jobs.

The actions and conditions of Mohammed Bouazizi's life literally and symbolically represented the situation of many Tunisian citizens at the time. The Tunisian nation, economically dependent on the status of the European economy from its inception, as well as adopting the neoliberal policies of the global economy, left the Tunisian people vulnerable to a global system that left them continuously exploited. In this way, the Tunisian people embody "the indebted." The figure below shows the rise of public debt between 1971 and 2011. "The Tunisian government's external debt increased



rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s. It remained high throughout Ben Ali’s dictatorship; a large debt which is now being imposed on the Tunisian people.” (*Life and debt: Global studies of debt and resistance 44* ) The African Development Bank summarizes that: “Despite the country’s comparative economic success, key social and development challenges had not been addressed. The combination of youth graduate unemployment, conspicuous and predatory corruption as well as political and economic disenfranchisement had created an untenable condition of discontent among Tunisians.” (*Life and debt: Global studies of debt and resistance 44* )

In order for the multitude to subvert their role as the indebted in society and thus challenge the neoliberal economic structure of Empire, Hardt and Negri maintain they must refuse their debts. In many senses, Ben Ali was a symbol of a Eurocentric economic system, neoliberal policies, and a corrupt economic system that aimed to benefit the elites of society while driving the Tunisian population further into debt. In this way, the rejection of Ben Ali was as much literal as it was symbolic. Ben Ali's adoption of IMF loans that completely neoliberalized the Tunisian economy left a large portion of the Tunisian population without economic agency. To the world and its international financial institutions, Tunisia was the poster child for a country that had greatly benefitted from structural adjustment loans and neoliberalism. The reality for the Tunisian people was a largely different story, and the Tunisian revolution was a literal and symbolic rejection of the concepts of capitalism, neoliberalism, and the servitude that comes with indebtedness. By rejecting Ben Ali as a puppet for the economic and political whims of the global elite, the Tunisian people literally refused their debts and refused to accept a system that continued to exploit them.

While the Tunisian people had rejected this in the past, by protesting against IMF imposed policies, the Tunisian Revolution and ousting of Ben Ali was a complete rejection, not just of the neoliberal policies of the IMF, but of the colonial political and economic structure, foreign debt, and the economic policies of the Ben Ali administration, that further indebted the Tunisian people within their own nation and on a



global scale. The intensity of rejection to their role as "the indebted" in Tunisian and global society was a subversion of their role as "the indebted."

### **“the mediatized”**

An unavoidable characteristic of the revolution, something that many scholars analyzed and reanalyzed, was the role that social media played in the Arab Spring. The use of social media as a means to organize, spread information, and accrue support was undoubtedly a tool that assisted the Tunisian activists. I argue that the true importance of social media used in the Arab Spring revolutions was to give the “protestor” a power that past revolutions never gave their participants. Social media gave the “common man” a voice and a microphone that could reach further than it ever had before. The information that was spread was from the ground, unfiltered by big media, and as a result, media became a tool of liberation and not a mode of societal control, as it had existed in Tunisia and globally as well. Tunisian cyberactivist Amira Chebli noted, “It is not right on the political level to say that the revolution was made by a bunch of young people sitting in front of their computers. These young people were drawing on their experiences in the field to blog and write articles... We must not confuse the tool that was used with the political will behind it, we did use Facebook but it is not true to say that Facebook built the Tunisian revolution. Without the existence of a real free press, we had to become a news service ourselves. We had to track, verify and relay the news as well as to mobilize people.” This is an important aspect in the subversion of "the multitudes" role as "the

mediatized” during the Tunisian Revolution. Media can exist as both a tool of control and oppression as well as a tool for liberation.

The distinction lies in the type of information that is being consumed and manufactured. As noted in section two, "the mediatized" are caught in a paradox that inundates them with copious amounts of information that leave the individual desensitized and immobile. The utilization of social media in the Tunisian revolution helped the Tunisian activists disconnect from the falsities perpetuated in the global and Tunisian media. Furthermore, it acted as a platform for Tunisians to circulate and create their own “truths.” "The mediatized is not a figure of false consciousness but rather one caught in the web, attentive, enthralled. It is not only or even primarily that we need different information or different technologies. Yes, we need to discover the truths, which can be created only by singularities in networks communicating and being together" (Hardt and Negri 32).

Finally, Hardt and Negri maintain that the successful subversion of "the mediatized" comes with the physical togetherness of demonstrations and encampments, "in being together a collective intelligence and a new kind of communication are constructed" (32). This was a major tactic used by Tunisian protestors during and after the ousting of Ben Ali. "This was the moment when, after weeks of protestors occupying the country's main streets and public spaces, the President of Tunisia absquatulated. Protestors had set up temporary and ad hoc encampments in the centres of many major urban spaces as the base for a wave of protests, direct action and civil resistance. At the

epicenter of this movement was the main public spaces at the heart of the capital city Tunis, where temporary tents, encampments, tarpaulins and fabric tents were installed and formed the temporary architecture of the revolution" (Rice 74). If we look at the demographics of participation in the Tunisian Revolution, we see involvement by all members of society regardless of religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, age, gender, or socio-economic status.

"The form of political organization is central here: a decentralized multitude of singularities communicates horizontally (and social media are useful to them because they correspond to their organizational form). Demonstrations and political actions are born today not from a central committee that gives the word but rather from the coming together of and the discussion among numerous small groups" (Hardt and Negri 37).

The successful subversion of their role as "the mediatized" was through the horizontal organization of the protestors communication, facilitated by social media, and their subsequent appropriation of public spaces through encampment. In this way, the Tunisian people were able to "create their own truths," not through the rejection of media or by ceasing to engage with it, but instead by utilizing it as a tool of liberation. "Such productions of truth also involve the creation of political affects by negotiating the terms of our being together in relation to each other. Expressing these political affects in being together embodies a new truth" (Hardt and Negri 38). Once these "truths" and the messages of the revolution were created and spread, the physical manifestation of the

people through encampments and demonstrations freed the people of their role as “the mediatized.”

### **“the securitized”**

"To find a way out all you have to do is remember the basic recognition of the nature of power explained by Foucault and, before him, Niccolo Machiavelli: power is not a thing but a relation. No matter how mighty and arrogant seems that power standing above you, know that it depends on you, feeds on your fear, and survives only because of your willingness to participate in the relationship. Look for an escape door. One is always there. Desertion and disobedience are reliable weapons against voluntary servitude." (Hardt and Negri 39)

The condition of the Tunisian citizen as "the securitized" was extreme, and citizens were policed through an authoritarian regime characterized by literal police and military force, economic exploitation, and heavy media censorship and control. In addition to the physical control of the Tunisian people, because Empire denotes a biopolitical control of “the multitude,” citizens, fearing retaliation from security forces, policed themselves and others. The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi was a rejection of the biopolitical and military control of the state. It was the literal rejection of the state’s control over his physical body and thus, ignited the figurative immolation of power and control over the Tunisian people.

The power of the individual to reclaim control only exists when its subjects are no longer controlled through fear. The Tunisian protestors, understanding the implications of their actions, rejected their fear, a fear which had been used to control the country for too

long. "In the working class Tunis suburb of Ettadhamen-Minihla people attacked government buildings. Their chant, "We are not afraid, we are not afraid, we are afraid only of god", revealed both a new mood of daring and determination and the persistence of traditional thinking. For the first time the army was deployed in several cities. Many dozens of people were killed in clashes with the police over the next days" (Lawless). Despite violent retaliation by the government, Tunisian protestors set up encampments and continued with demonstrations. "The encamped protestors-being together, discussing, disagreeing, struggling-seem to have rediscovered a truth the Spinoza foresaw: real security and the destruction of fear can be achieved only through the collective construction of freedom" (Hardt and Negri 44). By coming together to reject the control over them and discussing, envisioning, and drafting their idea of a free society, the Tunisian people subverted their role as "the securitized" and thus, succeeded in ousting their controllers.

### **“the represented”**

"When financial debts have been transformed into social bonds, when singularities interact in productive networks, and when desire for security is freed from fear, then, from the inversion of these three figures, subjectivities capable of democratic action will begin to emerge" (Hardt and Negri 44). As a manifestation of "the multitude," the Tunisian people inverted their roles as "the indebted," "the mediatized," and "the securitized." The last role is "the represented," the role of the individual in society that no

longer has a say in global and local decisions that affect them, and thus has lost true representation. The final subversion of the role of "the represented" begins with the Tunisian Revolution and continues post-revolution. The Tunisian people rejected their sovereign and governmental organization, which were unable to represent the people's needs and desires.

Following the ousting of Ben Ali, the Tunisian people began the process of identifying the form of government based on true representation. "Political and constitutional debate has to be reopened. And the radical change demanded today is not only about content (from the private and the public to the common) but also about form. How can people associate closely together in the common and participate directly in democratic decision making? How can the multitude become the prince of the institutions of the common in a way that reinvents and realizes democracy? This is the task of a constituent process" (Hardt and Negri 44). The creation of the Constituent Assembly in Tunisia, post-revolution, aimed to address the themes, desires, and demands of the revolution, create a new constitution for Tunisia, and conduct the nation's first democratic elections. The rejection of a government lacking in representation and democratic processes and the subsequent process of democratic political action and constituent processes shows the subversion of their role as "the represented." Furthermore, it shows the Tunisian people as a manifestation of "a multitude capable of democratic political action and the self-management of the common" (Hardt and Negri 60).

This is the current state of Tunisia -- working through democratic political action to create and maintain a system that truly meets the demands of their revolution. “The insurrections of Arab youth are certainly not aimed at a traditional liberal constitution that merely guarantees the division of powers and a regular electoral dynamic, but rather at a form of democracy adequate to the new forms of expression and needs of the multitude. This must include, firstly, constitutional recognition of the freedom of expression – not in the form typical of the dominant media, which is constantly subject to the corruption of governments and economic elites, but one that is represented by the common experiences of network relations” (Hardt and Negri).

## **Conclusion**

Tunisia has often been called the “crossroads of civilization,” characterized by years of migration patterns flowing in and out of its borders. The architecture, language, and art within Tunisia reflect the centuries of foreign influence. Furthermore, migration patterns, foreign colonizers, and globalization created a unique Tunisian identity, one that consists of many different parts.

In the historical development of Tunisia, the country was controlled through physical imperialist domination in tandem with the development of its economy as a means to benefit its colonizer. Emerging from colonization, the country experienced the decline of its economy and a growing relationship with the IMF, which eviscerated the Tunisian government, civil society, and the economy. Neoliberal policies took the form of

structural adjustment loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a result, President Bourguiba was ousted from power, Ben Ali took political and economic control of the country, and Tunisia entered into an economic relationship with the IMF. The underlying consequences of an economy designed during colonization, Ben Ali's ascension to power, and the adoption of neoliberal policies through IMF loan stipulations created an economic climate that resulted in high rates of unemployment and inequality, with no way to ameliorate the situation.

Globalization contributed to this economic climate in the sense that the global system is increasingly economic interconnected and interdependent. Tunisia's connection with the French economy meant that any downturn of the European economy also meant the subsequent downturn of the Tunisian economy. This, coupled with the spread of a neoliberal ideology within a capitalist system, a system that thrives on exploitation, contributed to the economic situation in Tunisia. Yet, at the same time, globalization allowed for technological advancement and flows of ideas and information. The role of media and social media in Tunisia allowed for communities and individuals who were great distances apart to connect, discuss, and share.

Though the focus of this paper is Tunisia, the historical forces that shaped its specific history and climate are global. The interconnectedness of the globe economically, politically, socially, and culturally requires a re-evaluation of our understanding of the global system. The theory of Empire, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, describes the system we see today. This system comprises multiple actors that constantly interact and



shift power in what resembles a global network. These actors include the nation-state, supranational organizations, as well as “the multitude.” “The multitude,” the concept explaining the modern day working class, is the foundation of Empire, which could not exist without the control and labor of “the multitude.”

Like any system, Empire is flawed, and in its current state, it thrives on the control and exploitation of “the multitude.” There are various modes of control that can be explained through symbolic figures of contemporary society that reflect the condition of “the multitude”. These figures are “the indebted,” “the securitized,” “the mediated,” and “the represented.”

The role and condition of “the multitude” is not fixed within Empire. It is through the comprehension of these figures and the ways in which Empire functions that “the multitude” can challenge their place within Empire, and thus, work to rectify the exigencies of Empire.

Hardt and Negri argue that each “figure of contemporary society” has the power to invert themselves and regain power. “This inversion is the result not of a dialectical process but of an event, a subjective Kairos that breaks the relations of domination and overthrows processes that reproduce the figures of subjugation. This is not just a theoretical conjecture on our part, but rather a reality supported and confirmed by the cycle of struggles the began in 2011, which construct a series of instances of rebellion and resistance” (Hardt and Negri). This event, the Tunisian revolution, shows the

processes by which the manifestation of “the multitude” challenged Empire. The global and local conditions that led to the Tunisian Revolution are symptoms of the global system as described by Empire. The global network of power that is Empire, characterized by the neoliberalization and capitalist global market, is constituted and maintained by “the multitude.” It exists through economic and political control of “the multitude.” The exigencies of Empire, poverty, inequality, and subjugation can be challenged by “the multitude” in an effort to work towards a freer, equal, and just society. The inversion of the roles of “the indebted,” “the mediatized,” “the securitized” and “the represented” in Tunisian Revolution highlights the means by which this can be achieved. It is through these roles and the complicity of “the multitude” to fill these roles that Empire exists in the form that it does, and it is through the inversion of these roles, as we have seen in the Tunisian Revolution, can the true process towards a democratic society move forward.

Much like the way that Mohammed Bouazizi became a symbol of the revolution, the Tunisian revolution symbolizes a shift in consciousness. The revolution was a reaction against aspects of globalization and a reaction against established systems of power, both internally and externally. Internally, it was a rejection of the dictatorship and the means by which it functioned. At the same time, the revolution was a manifestation of “the multitude”’s nature to challenge Empire, specifically, neoliberal capitalist power structures and neo-imperialist influences. In this sense, the Tunisian revolution was simultaneously territorial and non-territorial, specific and universal. While the ousting of

Zine Ben Ali was territorially specific, the fight against capitalism, globalization, and imperialism is not.

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