

The Tunisian Revolution: An Object under Construction

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This study aims to explore the social representation of a sudden and unusual object: the “Tunisian revolution”. In reference to the philosophy of sciences, the underlying hypothesis is that the uprising in Tunisia had questioned the cognitive interpretation of the reality among Tunisians. Thus, facing such an extraordinary event as a revolution, this study explores the foundations of the social representation beyond its content. More specifically, the concept of Thema (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994) is considered as a formalization of the axioms that should be explored facing the social representation of an object under construction. An empirical research was conducted to update the implicit structure of the discourse about the Tunisian revolution among a Tunisian network-connected group. A content semantic structural analysis, according to Hiernaux’s (1977) method analysis was applied to a corpus of qualitative responses to a questionnaire, collected at two different times. Results show a series of antinomies connected by different themata. They show an evolving of the revolution social representation from ambiguous categories defining the new reality to oppositions between conflictual positioning of the respondents about the events and the identity referents, expressing a new social organization.

The starting point of this study was the idea of a similarity between the process underlying the scientific revolutions described by Kuhn (1962) and a cognitive upheaval occurred to Tunisian people, following the fall of the regime, on the 14th of January 2011. The overthrow of the dictator Ben Ali, could be considered as a form of paradigm change for foreign observers, but also and especially for Tunisians who experienced and lived inside the revolution. “Paradigm shift” is a concept borrowed from the description of the scientific revolutions structure. Kuhn showed that a scientific paradigm is based on axioms that are neither demonstrable nor refutable, and that are culturally and socially determined. A scientific revolution is an upheaval of basic axioms underlying the dominant paradigm at a time. Generally, the paradigm function is to identify issues which are compatible with its frame. It defines and therefore limits the scope of issues that arise. A scientific paradigm generates specifically questions whose solutions exist in its offered framework. Similarity between a political and social revolution and a paradigm shift means that a revolution changes the framework in which reality is interpreted. It causes an upheaval to the axiomatic foundations of the social order. This is the idea we will try to support. An empirical study of social representation foundations of the so called “Tunisian revolution” among a Tunisian group will be then presented.

In fact, a revolution is more than an extraordinary event as usually described. According to the Larousse dictionary (2012), one of the definitions of “revolution” is “violent and sudden political and social change in the structure of the state (...)”. Of course, an attack or a disaster is also involving, unexpected and brutal. According to Orfali (2006, p.65), an extraordinary event is “an event which suddenly occurs at the natural, physical, social, political, cultural, historical, symbolic level, and which generates an individual and collective awareness inducing important effects on practices and social representations”. An extraordinary event is also characterized by its presence in the media and its occurrence in conversations (Orfali, 2006). However, a revolution is even more:

- It affects the whole society and is experienced by all social groups within.
- It is a massive and a total event which affects all institutions.
- It is hoped by some social groups and feared by others, depending on their position in the social structure during the former regime.
- And above all, it challenges the social order foundations.

However, there is a homology between the social representations structure and the social structure (Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992; Clémence, Doise & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1994). According to this homology principle, social structures are internalized. They determine social representations as generative principles through the social insertions of the individuals. So, if the revolution disrupts a part of the social structure by challenging the political and social order, that means that not only social relations are disrupted but the cognitive structures through which reality is interpreted, may also be affected. We can add to this the fact that the Tunisian revolution has unique features. The movement that led to the overthrow of the regime was without a guide, without an explicit strategy and without a proclaimed program or ideology. This means that none hegemonic vision in the facts interpretation had presided revolts, neither during the height of the crisis nor during its resolution, not even during the first few weeks that followed the fall of the regime. This gives a great ambiguity character to the situation's causality and future. The Tunisian revolution undermines also an essentialist despotism theory concerning Muslim-majority countries and/or Arabs. It is a thesis that was expressed in the clash of civilizations theory (Huntington, 1997). This thesis reinforced a prejudice that had persisted since the colonial era. According to this theory, so called "Muslim" people would be unable to rise up against their dictators because of their archaic relation to authority. Moreover, some internalization of this bias exists in common discourse in Tunisia. Huntington's thesis implies that civilizations are hermetic to one another, that cultures are homogeneous and that attitudes are essentially determined by the religious factor.

The hypothesis of basic axioms reversal in the Tunisian reality interpretation should concern foreign analysts, but also and especially those who have directly experienced the revolution: Tunisians themselves. To understand this, it is necessary to describe the height of the crisis and its resolution in January the 14th, 2011, and the days after the fall of the regime in Tunisia. On the 14th of January, a huge crowd had gathered in front of the repression symbol (the Interior Ministry) to shout "go away!" to the dictator (President Ben Ali). That same evening, Ben Ali and his family fled after twenty three years of police dictatorship, oppression and theft of the country's resources. One can imagine the strangeness of such an unnamed situation and such a speedy, sudden and unusual event. This would have been a shock facing a reality whose meaning had to be recreated. It was as if a multitude of meaning possibilities had been suddenly opened.

Then, during the week after the fall of the regime, even stranger things were observed: a reversal of roles (police officers were controlled by neighbourhood residents), and an un-differentiation of classes and individuals (people were talking and helping without knowing one another, groups of different origins gathered in the street to discuss...). Subsequently, a resignation of the police occurred, rumours of threats of murder and robbery, the presence of mysterious snipers posted on rooftops, prisons emptying their prisoners, etc. Then a feeling of imminent chaos threat appeared. In short, Tunisians were facing an unstructured reality during a very rare-at-a-human-life-scale-time moment. A joke was posted later on Facebook describing these exceptional circumstances: “a president who fled, a prime minister who is crying on TV, a blogger who gets out of prison and becomes an official, cops who get stopped by people (...), we did not legalize cannabis, we are just in Tunisia”. Aside from the anecdote, a so called “revolution” situation seems as a primordial experience, as a founder for the community. It produces a disruption of the collective life foundations and of its order. Revolution requires therefore to reorganize and to reinvent the foundations of a new order. In addition to organizing a daily social and political life, it requires a cognitive reconstruction of the new reality.

In the description of scientific revolutions, when the dominant paradigm is challenged, scientists search for new rules. This often occurs one generation after the emergence of a competing paradigm. Ben Ali’s regime lasted twenty three years. This duration corresponds to the time it takes to become an adult, to obtain an undergraduate degree, to arrive at the conclusion that the unique future perspective is to stow away for Europe risking one’s life, to be directly and for the first time confronted to injustice, to face the constraints of freedom, etc.

BEN ALI’S SYSTEM, A PRAGMATIC PARADOX

This generation faced a “pragmatic paradox” (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1972) between a mass and free education policy, a constant reference to human rights, relatively egalitarian laws, an external beautiful image, etc., and pragmatic rules that deny individuals their intelligence, their conscience, their freedom and their rights. In addition, the system established great inequalities, exactions, repression, etc. A “double-bind” situation was introduced due to the inability to escape from the system. This generation was also faced with a significant narrowing of the future and the

injustices of an extremely corrupt ruling clan. Bouazizi's and few others' spectacular and extremely violent suicide in December 2010, was a way to express the great psychological and symbolic violence generated by the paradox. At the same time, it was also a way to escape the situation definitively. In December 2010 the series of suicides have been followed by a rupture of the denial and fear logic. At that time, no one could further support the paradox.

THE "REVOLUTION", A CONSTRUCTED OBJECT

But a revolution is not simply a given object. It is a socially constructed thing. It is not a well-defined object for those who live within. It is rather a large part of reality, some multi-theme elements of reality. It is not just one moment, but multiple and prolonged moments. It is not only an event but a massive and total process which affects many life spheres of individuals, groups and institutions. Therefore, a revolution is a very complex representation object. Generally, the majority of individuals do not have sufficient data to understand an object in its entirety. There is a constitutive gap between reality and its representations. In this sense, Flament and Rouquette (2003) were wondering: is it the representation that determines the object or is it the object that determines the representation? An object representation is not inherently limited but corresponds to a "class of knowledge, situations and behaviors" (Flament & Rouquette, 2003, p.29). The representation defines a class as a coherent whole and as a single object. In fact, the representation forms the reality contours, and aggregates some of its elements. Durkheim and Mauss (1903), talking about classification, stated that the categories formed by individuals to classify the elements of reality "do not show up for themselves and are not already grouped for observation". More precisely grouping into categories is done through words, by pointing things. Moscovici and Vignaux (1994, p.35) designated "a common theme oriented process" to describe a process at the basis of social representations. According to Moscovici and Vignaux (1994, p.38) "(...) people making something thematic, relevant to their conscience, transform it (...) in an object that belongs to a chosen reality among all possible or earlier realities". To better understand this idea, the authors stated that not every experienced thing is objectified. Only what is salient in the field of consciousness is objectified at a given moment. A theme connects different objectified "regions of reality" (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, p.39). It is the process of

objectification which forms the object as such. The objectification explains the integration of represented elements as “terms of social reality” (Moscovici, 1961, p.318). This phase corresponds to the establishment of a cognitive framework and to the formation of a thought system and language categories. Sometimes, the object is no more real than the representation. The object and its representation are both of the same nature. Indeed, in the objectification process, ideas themselves are transformed into objects. Ideas are invested by “visible and palpable forms” (Moliner, 1996, p.21). In addition, reality itself is not homogeneous facing representational process. Reality is made up of different and unequal sections facing the knowledge process (Moscovici, 1961, as cited in Ben Alaya, 2011).

In addition, we consider that the interactions system logic (according to the Palo Alto approach) in which individuals are located, gives rise to a special relationship with reality. During twenty three years, Ben Ali’s regime imposed artificial categories of thought. This was implemented using a very sophisticated control and propaganda system. Under Ben Ali’s regime, there was no possibility of public debate or controversy about the political and social reality. To this was added a strong censorship of subversive activities. Only a propagandist discourse about a fictitious reality was allowed to circulate. The official discourse was always grandiloquent, pompous and strongly characterized by an inversion of the experienced reality. Here is an example of a stereotyped formula in the daily press, one year before the fall of the regime: “(...) judicious approach initiated by the President, with confidence and civilizational awareness to build a strong and prosperous state of science, broad expertise, competence and deep faith in the justice values, equity and human rights (...)” (Le Temps, 2010). At the institutional level, individuals had to deal with a constantly feigned reality. The contradiction between the decor and the oppression reality refers once again, to a pathogenic paradox system. The difficulty for Tunisians to meta-communicate about their context was aggravated by the foreigners’ disbelief in their description of the actually experienced situation. In such a binding and paradoxical context, reality could have only a simple binary dimension, a single one, even for the most active opponents of the regime. On the one hand, there was a system in place and its regime privileged, on the other, all those who were not. There were accomplices of the regime and others, all ideological orientations combined. In this sense one of the most devastating and deepest dictatorships, is not so much the expression or activity constraints, but the constraint of the

thought itself and its system of categories. Reducing reality to a unique axis limits the field of all possibilities and therefore the ability to act. This interaction logic between individuals and the dictatorial context would not lead to a usual common sense relation, but an altered one, characterized by a very restricted, static and rigid reality interpretation. After the fall of the regime and its binding system, the thought categories system was questioned. This would have led individuals to experience a “cognitive emptiness” caused by the collapse of the usual facts processing pattern. Subsequently, the social and political reality would have become multi-axial. A “cognitive chaos” would have followed. On this basis, and underlying the research that will be discussed later, the study of the social representation of an extraordinary event as a revolution should reflect a fundamental level in the understanding of reality: concepts themselves. From a more practical point of view, Tunisians should have redefined the situation. This redefinition involves the introduction of a new category system organizing the facts meaning and interpretation. Thus, in reference to Moscovici (1989, p. 82), we consider that studying the Tunisian revolution social representation is “understanding innovation rather than tradition, a being done social life rather than an already done social life”.

THE FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL OF REPRESENTATIONS, THE THEMATA

Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) referred to the philosophy of sciences (Holton, 1982) to speak of axioms on the basis of cognition and social representations: themata. A thema may be at the origin of several social representations. It is the background of “representations sets” (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, p.43). According to the authors, themata structure reality by bringing together under one theme, disparate elements of reality or “regions of reality”. A thema often corresponds to a bipolar oppositions system (Flament & Rouquette, 2003). According to Vignaux and Moscovici (1994, p. 68), a synthesis of opposites establishes a thematic integration (as in languages). Themata produce “archetypal images of the world (...)” (p.45). To understand this, it is useful to make a detour through the notion of archetype as originally defined by Jung (1964). An archetype includes different elements of reality by combining two opposites in the same form. Archetypes are trans-personal and collective.

Since the revolution in Tunisia, an important recurrence of circulating archetypal images on Facebook is remarkable, knowing that this social network has played a special role during the events. In these archetypal images we can see opposite antinomies linked by a common theme. Various presentations of the archetype are there:

- A synthesis of antinomies, for example a satirical poster parodying the Tunisian Tourism Ministry campaigns. In the poster, we can see a burqa covered woman, surfing on a surfboard. Surfing and wearing a burqa are antinomies joined in the same figure. This image denounces the paradox of an Islamist threat in a country that lives by its mass tourism.
- An antinomy whose poles are juxtaposed, as for example a picture of a young girl carrying proudly the national flag, alongside a picture of a young man wearing the signs of a religious radical person tearing the national flag off the mat to replace it by the banner of his movement. This juxtaposition is intended to create a contrast, signifying opposition of values.
- An antinomy whose poles are separately presented, meaning the charge and denial of one pole, and the glorification and recognition of the other.

SEARCHING ONTOLOGICAL AXIOMS IN THE DISCOURSE ABOUT THE TUNISIAN REVOLUTION

An empirical research about the social representation of Tunisian revolution has been conducted in Tunisia. It aimed to capture the vivid traces of ontological axioms underlying the representation process by searching themata but also antinomies they gather.

A Themata Identifying Method

A content analysis method based on Greimas's linguistics (1966) seemed appropriate for searching these antinomies and what connects them. More precisely, we used a discourse structural analysis founded by Hiernaux (1977). To better support the reconciliation of the themata study with an approach inspired by the linguistic area, it may be noted that for Moscovici

(1961, p.333) “language does not arise up in a world of completed objective perception (...). (...) It is (...) the mediator (...) to build a world of real objects”. In Hiernaux’s analysis method, disjunctions between semantic units of speech are identified. Terms of these discourse disjunctions are comparable to antinomies. Specifically, pairs of words or groups of words “that have something in common while being different” or, in other words, that “both refer to the same category of reality”, are identified (Piret, Niet & Bourgeois, 1996, p.14). Then the semantic axis which connects these semantic units is defined. This axis is comparable to a thema. A common category to both terms of the disjunction is concretely identified. An axis can be explained either by the speaker himself or inferred by the analyst according to the speaker’s thought frame.

In this analysis, implicit elementary structures underlying speech are updated at first. These basic structures can be then condensed or combined to generate more complex structures such as:

- “Parallel” structures that describe reciprocal implication relationships between elementary structures.
- “Hierarchical” structures where one of the terms of a disjunction is a semantic axis that defines a disjunction of a second level (or more) included in the first one.
- “Crossed” structures that combine two elementary structures that are not in an implication relationship (which may be likened to two orthogonal dimensions). Crossed structures can sometimes correspond to a “dilemma”.

Hiernaux’s structural analysis, allows accessing an implicit structure generating the discourse meaning, beyond the manifest content. The underlying idea is that “an unordered representation” exists in the discourse (Piret, Niet & Bourgeois, 1996).

The Collection of the Discourse about Revolution

This analysis was applied to a set of answers to an open question, collected through a Facebook account. The question was: “Write whatever you want about what happened in Tunisia with the fall of Ben Ali’s regime”. The questionnaire was distributed every month at regular intervals since February 14th, 2011 (the fall of the regime occurred on January 14th, 2011). Then, a

comparison between the two different time responses to the questionnaire was done: a month after the regime fall (on February 14th, 2011) and five months later (June 17th, 2011).

The Surveyed Network

The questionnaire respondents were members of the virtual network built around the Facebook account through which distributed the questionnaire. New members were welcomed as the investigation was progressing in time. The network did not stop growing. It should be noted that there had been, since the first revolts in Tunisia, a very intensive use of virtual social networks, especially Facebook, to exchange about the events. According to statistics¹, in September 2011, 25.97% of Tunisians were using Facebook, meaning 76.39% of internet-connected in Tunisia. It is also noted that over 25% of internet users, had joined the social network following the events that led to the regime fall in 2011. Social networks generate a temporal and spatial amplification of the exchange process, because of the communication immediacy and globalization. In addition, Facebook had played an important role during the uprising. On this basis, one can assume that the information exchanged during the revolts in Tunisia, has played a role among virtual communities in their new reality construction.

On February 14th, 2011, the Facebook account used for the survey had 104 connected members, and on June 17th, 2011, they were 337. The questionnaire was gradually transmitted through the network: immediate members of the Facebook account responded to the questionnaire and shared it to others and so on. The respondents who were not Tunisian nationals or non-resident nationals at the fall of the regime were excluded from the analyzed corpus. Analysis concerned precisely the answers given by twenty two respondents on February 17th and by twenty-two others on June 17th, 2011. The first group consisted of 9 men and 13 women whose average age was 45 years ($SD = 14.76$). The second consisted of 11 women and 11 men with an average age of 35 years ($SD = 14.8$). The minimum education level for both samples corresponded to secondary level education, the maximum, to PhD. Occupations corresponded to those of the socio-economic lower-middle to high class.

¹ <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/tunisia>, consulted September 30, 2011.

The questionnaire was in French as well as the answers in general, with few cases of code-mixing which is very common in informal situations in Tunisia. So we had to deal with rather French-speakers respondents, which does not exclude that they may be also very good classical and/or dialectical Arabic-speakers.

It should be noted that what was intended in this study was not the exploration of the explicit discourse content among a representative group of Facebook users, or even among a representative group of the network formed around the virtual account, but rather the identification of implicit and non-measurable traces of a general process underlying a social representation. So it was a qualitative and intensive approach. The representativeness of the surveyed groups was therefore not sought in this study, but rather an in-depth exploration.

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT THE REVOLUTION ON 14TH FEBRUARY, 2011

On January 14th, 2011, on one hand “what happened” is called “revolution”, but on the other hand, it is defined by a disjunction which opposes “what no one imagined” to “what the people could do”. Paradoxically to what seems to be a stereotypical use of the word “revolution”, in this definitional structure, “what happened” has no name as if it was an unthought-of thing. “What happened” appears as an ambiguous object. Its ambiguity is supported by its “unimaginable” character. It is also characterized by a series of parallel structures linked by a mutual involvement relationship. These interlinked structures illustrate the idea of various “regions of reality” joined by one theme, or the idea of a “part of reality” including various elements. These structures describe “what happened” carrying out opposites synthesis operated by the following themata:

- “The time”
- “The type of moment”
- “The type of action”
- “The state of consciousness”
- “The psychological state”
- “The state of the situation”
- “The type of human relations”
- “The state of mind”

- “The state of the society”
- “The type of relation to reality”
- “What has been achieved”

In almost all of the structures organized by these themata, opposed antithetical terms are generally jointly expressed by the same respondents. Concerning these objections terms, it appears that on February 14th, 2011, “what happened in Tunisia with the fall of Ben Ali’s regime” is modulated by two radically disjoint times:

- An ontological first time, that of the revolt itself, which is designed by “liberation” and the “overthrow of Ben Ali”. This time is described as “amazing”, “extraordinary”, “euphoric” and is represented as a great social cohesion period (expressed through “solidarity”, “consensus” and “sacrifice of life”).
- A post-revolutionary second time, on the contrary characterized by “social fracture”, “selfishness” and “sabotage”. This time is described as “panic”, “chaos”, “critical” and a “shocking” one.

It is remarkable that these two times involve different states of consciousness. The first one is called an “amazing dream”, the second is a “rude awakening”, a “hangover”. This description recalls a founding myth described by Girard (1982), that of the height of a social crisis and its resolution by an expiatory sacrifice. The ecstatic enjoyment state experienced at first corresponds to that of the total un-differentiation phase, at the height of the crisis and its resolution, where the relations are reversed, and social groups merged into one, oriented towards one aim. The second is when once the “sacrifice” achieved (as it happened with the overthrow of Ben Ali), the ecstatic state gives way to a disorder and chaos fear. It is the precise moment when the society revises its foundations, and is faced with an imperative to reorganize its institutions. Psychologically, it corresponds to a danger threat because of the situation strangeness and the uncertainty generated by the disruption of the collective life foundations. It is as if the content thematizations organizing the discourse about revolution reflected upstream a break at the cognitive level; and downstream, a process of social reality disintegration. Concerning the “shock” expressed in the discourse, it is comparable to an insight, a gestalt reversal as described by the Gestalt theory. The revolution is explicitly defined as “what the people could do” versus “what no one could imagine”. What is meant by

the terms of this disjunction corresponds to the properties of ambiguous figures used in the experiments demonstrating the perception Gestalt theory principles. In these figures, when we perceive the form that is in the center, instead of the background, or vice versa, not only the perception is changed but the concept itself of what is perceived. It is impossible to perceive both forms in the figure at the same time. “What the people did” could not have been conceived before he has achieved this “unimaginable”. The two times that of “doing the unthinkable” and that of “what cannot be imagined”, are inherently incompatible.

The thema “what was done” by connecting “overthrow of Ben Ali” to “laborious post-revolution” is actually a common denominator between two radically different things. On the one hand, the overthrow of Ben Ali is a sudden and fleeting event, a breaking point; on the other hand, post-revolution is a non-event, an incomplete process that lasts. It means something in the making, a reconstruction work and an ongoing development. We are tempted to say again that the discourse collected on February 14th expresses the incompleteness of what is thought. On the contrary, the first moment of the revolution (with the “overthrow of Ben Ali”) has a static definitely developed meaning. The movement of “reversal”, with the idea of falling, and the gravitational force action that it implies, has only one conceivable, perfectly predictable and inevitable consequence. This time is different, unique, compared to what followed and what continues to happen. The “overthrow of Ben Ali” corresponds to an ontological event where the chronological time is no longer valid. Unlike the post-revolution where everything has to be rethought yet, the revolution first time could be permanently built as a myth.

The analysis allowed identifying other structures describing “what happened with the regime fall” which does not directly correspond to a definition of “revolution”. Among these structures there are those relating to the Tunisians’ definition. Two hierarchical structures, each containing nested sub-structures, were identified. The first structure refers to various opposed categories of actors: “young” versus “other rebels”, “regime ancients” versus “saboteurs”, etc. The second structure describes Tunisians according to the profit from the revolution. Condensation of the two structures reveals a consensual dichotomy of the Tunisian people into two broad categories: “the benevolent” and “the malevolent”.

Two other more complex structures have been identified. They can be summarized as follows:

The first structure (Table 1) called “situational analysis and prognosis”, crosses two semantic axes: “the maturity of the revolution results” and “the state of the political system”. The combination of their disjunction terms (“immediate results” versus “expected results” and “dictatorship” versus “revolution”) gives four different realities, one of which not being envisaged by the respondents (“expected results with the dictatorship”). This unthought-of reality indirectly means that nothing could be expected from the dictatorship.

The second cross structure (Table 2) corresponds to a dilemma. Situations “with revolution” and “without revolution” each have “gains” and “losses”. This cross structure combines two axes which are “the balance of the revolution” and “the state of the current situation”. One of the four realities generated by the combination of these two axes is not conceived by respondents (“gains without revolution”), meaning indirectly that there is nothing to win without the revolution.

Table 1. Situation analysis and prognosis

	With revolution	With dictatorship
Immediate results	Freedom	Theft, cruelty, greed
Expected results	Rude democracy installation	(Un-conceived reality by respondents)

Table 2. Dilemma cross structure of the revolution balance

	Gains	Losses
With revolution	Survivors’ awareness of being alive	Fellow actual death
Without revolution	(Un-conceived reality by respondents)	Lack of awareness of being alive, for all

“Nothing to win with the dictatorship” and “nothing to gain without the revolution” is the meaning that can be inferred through the two structures cross. Considering the two structures at once, one could see a deep psychological uprising motive. On one hand, “the loss of life” and “the difficulty of installing democracy” are two negative realities generated by the revolution, but which prevents that everyone “does not feel alive” (one of the three other conceived realities of

the second cross structure). “Not feeling alive” is not worth the trouble of being. On the other hand, “the loss of life” prevents “cruelty”, “greed” and being a “theft victim” (one of the three conceived realities of the first cross structure). “Not feeling alive” makes intelligible the logic underlying the violent suicide of Bouazizi and others, as well as the final transgression of the fear logic by the revolted crowds. The underlying logic here is the idea that the Tunisian people have nothing to lose, not even life, by revolting, because without it there is no life.

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT THE REVOLUTION ON JUNE 17TH, 2011

On June 17th, “what happened” is named through two antinomies: “just a popular uprising” in opposition to “the best revolution of all time” or “a major historical movement”. The qualification of “what happened” becomes both less ambiguous and more controversial than February 14th. On June 17th, the terms of “what happened” are not only defined but are also carrying strong meanings and values. “What happened” is no more unanimously designed by the notion of “revolution”. On June, a net positions polarization is observed.

Two general positions are distinguished:

- On the one hand, the enthusiasm expressed by “we won” and the notion of “revolution gains”.
- On the other hand, deception expressed by “terrifying moments”, “problems”, “insecurity”, “chaos” and “anarchy”.

These positions generally divide respondents but sometimes coexist. The enthusiastic position seems to correspond to the revolts occurred in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Libya, meaning the large impact of the Tunisian revolution in the Arab world. The pessimistic position refers to the idea of “undeserved democracy” and reactive prejudice of “necessary despotism”. This position seems in correspondence with the country internal events, meaning an anarchy situation. We can deduce a questioning of the revolution principle through this pessimistic position.

On June 17th, the discourse contains also a definition of the identity referents among the enthusiasts. This definition is modulated by two opposed times: “before the revolution” and “now”. Tunisians are advantageously defined. They are described as perpetuating a “gently

image” while moving from the status of a “ridiculed people” for this very gently, to the status of a people who “gave proof of their strength”. On June 17th, the pessimists also suggest a category about Tunisians but describe their relationship to democracy (more precisely, their “lack of democracy”) rather than the national reference itself.

According to enthusiasts, Tunisia has evolved from a stereotypical tourist image (expressed by “couscous” and “beaches”) to the image of a country that has “acceded to an international level”. We observe among enthusiasts a strong identity questioning. On June they evoke Tunisia and Tunisians as global categories, while on February, respondents divided Tunisians into good and bad in an almost consensual manner.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, five months after the regime fall, the expression of reorganizing social relationships is detected through the discourse. While one month after the regime fall, a synthesis of contradictions is expressed, four months later appears a tension between contrasting positions. On this point, according to Moscovici and Vignaux (1994, p.68), the postulates underlying the ordinary cognition emerge in the discourse “as recurrent opening or closures dynamics”. The notional schema contradictions that underlie the social representations “have a dialectical relationship, oscillating between tension and opposites’ integration” (Camara, 2009, p.87). It is this “synthesis of opposites” (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994, p.68) which “found, like in language, the integration of each thema noticeable in one or more concepts” (p. 87).

Concerning the Tunisian revolution, it seems that polarization positions had succeeded over time to the organizing principles establishment in the understanding of the new reality. It is as if, after the implementation of common thought categories, we witnessed a second phase, that’s of negotiation of the commonly identified referent meaning. At the same time, self-positioning is negotiated as Tunisians. On February 2011, respondents seemed focused on trying to understand “what happened” and on creating the revolution as a represented object. On June 2011, they are concerned with the assignment of meaning and specific value to the object. This is done through a favorable definition of identity referents for some, and through questioning the merits of the revolution and a revival of the necessary despotism idea, for others.

According to Moscovici (1961), at the same time that we create the object, we create ourselves. More specifically, we position ourselves “in the social and material world” (p.46) according to our reality reconstruction. On June 17th, 2011, five months after the regime fall, the redefinition of social groups through contrasting positions is underway.

There remains a question concerning the hypothesis of a cognitive level disrupt following the regime fall: breaking the logic of fear behind the uprising, could have been generated itself by a challenge to the usual interpretation of the facts. In this case, the cognitive disruption may not only be a consequence of the sudden context change, but rather its origin. Events that led to the regime fall would then be created from a representation and not the reverse. But the reality may be more complex, facts and representation feeding and giving life to one another.

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