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Hopes and fears of migrants' contribution to political change:
A Tunisian case study

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change

- contribute to new theoretical approaches

- advance understanding of the multi-level forces driving migration

Abstract

This paper aims to set an agenda for more in-depth, holistic research on the relationship between migration and political change. The European policy discourse on migration and development has affected the academic analysis on this relationship. Almost invariably, the hypotheses on the link between migration and political change that are being tested are limited to whether migrants' transnational engagement contributes to democratization. Yet the operationalization of 'political change' as 'democratization' fails to capture the different temporalities, dimensions and directions of political change. This paper takes the case of Tunisia to illustrate the complexity of political change in relation to mobility and immobility, which appeals simultaneously towards hopes and fears of migrants' contribution to political changes. Through a historical narrative approach, I (1) give a descriptive overview of the different temporalities of political change throughout the history of Tunisia and (2) apply an actor-oriented analytical framework to deconstruct the different interrelated dimensions of political space and political change, as a process that changes over time and is both steered from below and from above, in order to establish (3) what the role of migrants and (im)mobility is in these processes, revealing a dynamic and changing role of migration and mobility. Based on this exploration, I highlight five questions to bring research on the relationship between migration and (political) change further. I conclude that a more holistic take on change itself allows for a much more interesting view on the role of mobility and immobility in processes and outcomes of both change and continuity. A policy question that arises is therefore how the right circumstances can be promoted that lead to the desired 'change'.

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Contents

1 Introduction

The European discourse dominating the discussion on the political dimension of the migration and development nexus balances between hope and fear of migrants' effect on political change. On the one hand, European policy makers have since the turn of the century developed the hope that migrants living in liberal democracies will embrace liberal democratic attitudes, which they are able to transmit to the country of origin through their transnational connections (Raghuram, 2009). On the other hand, migration was always seen as an anomaly that may threaten the stability of 'normal', sedentary life within the political unit of the nation state (King and Skeldon, 2010), and the threat of terrorism and the global economic crisis has led to a changing policy discourse that increasingly see migration as a security concern that needs to be contained (Joffe, 2008).

This Eurocentric policy discourse on migration, development and security has affected the academic analysis on this relationship. The hypotheses on the link between migration and political change that are being tested are almost invariably limited to whether migrants' deliberate political transnational engagement contributes to democratisation, and focus on isolated moments of change, such as revolution or regime change. Yet the operationalisation of 'political change' as 'democratization' fails to capture the different temporalities, dimensions, and directions of political change.

Moreover, with their focus on migration, few studies interrogate the relevance of the increased restrictions of mobility and immobility in relation to political change. To focus on the fact that people have crossed borders while others may overlook the underlying patterns of human action as a response to (political) discontent. Rather, people's ability or inability to move and be mobile can be argued to affect their behaviour more than their geographical location.

These narrowly defined studies have resulted in a lack of evidence on the relationship between migration and political change. A new discourse of pessimism increasingly interrogates the simplistic policy driven expectations (De Haas, 2012; Gamlen, 2014). However, I argue that too little has been done to systematically study the complexity of the relationship between mobility and immobility in broader terms, and the political change beyond deliberate political action (Van Houte, 2016).

In this paper, I explore the relationship between (im)mobility and political change in Tunisia through a more holistic yet systematic analysis that does not constrain the analysis to specific categories of mobile people or normative assumptions of change, using a historical narrative approach. I use the case of Tunisia as a good example of the complexity of political change in relation to mobility and immobility, which appeals towards both those hopes and fears of migrants' contribution to political changes. Mobility and migration has always been part of Tunisian life. After the political changes that happened during the popular uprising in 2011 followed by the overthrow of the authoritarian regime and a transition to democracy, migration researchers have been quick to recognize the role of migrants in this 'democratic revolution'. At the same time, it has been argued that social and physical immobility was a major driver of the revolution (De Haas and Sigona, 2012). Moreover, migrants' role is not only related to the hopes of democratic turnover, but also to fear of political unrest and young Tunisians travelling to Islamic State (IS) territory (Raghuram, 2009; Brinkerhoff, 2011).

In the next sections of this paper, I will (1) give a descriptive overview of the different temporalities of political change throughout the history of Tunisia and (2) apply an actor-oriented analytical framework to deconstruct the different dimensions of the Tunisian political space and political change, in order to establish (3) what the role of migrants and (im)mobility is in these processes. Concluding, I discuss the process and the dynamic nature of change that is both steered from below and from above in an interactive process that changes over time, and the changing role of mobility and migration herein, leading to a number of hypotheses of transnational processes in the political field. I conclude that mobility-induced change is much more fine-grained and

multidimensional than the supposed contribution of intentional political agents to democratisation (Portes, 2009).

2 Temporalities of change in Tunisia

Most analyses on the relationship between migration and (political) change focus on a specific moment of change (Raghuram, 2009). However, 'change is necessarily temporal' (Bates, 2006) and the most recent political changes in Tunisia cannot be understood without situating them into the broader political history of Tunisia. Without trying to reproduce what historians and political scientists working on Tunisia have described much more elaborately, I will focus here on chronologically describing the different *temporalities* or *rhythms* of change in Tunisian history, between continuity and revolution, each of which influenced the next. This overview will describe the paces of change during different periods of time, before gradually arriving at the most recent political changes.

2.1 Continuity / Pre 1956

Many sources highlight that the story of change in Tunisia needs to be situated in the overall continuity of 3,000 years of Tunisian history at the crossroads of cultures and civilizations. The territory that is now Tunisia was always in touch with the outside world: the dry climate of Tunisia with unreliable domestic production meant that the country has long focused on external factors for its economy: tourism and export of labour migration through trade.

2.2 Transition / 1956–1987

The groundwork for the modern Tunisian state was further constructed after the country's independence from France, in 1956. Under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba, who has been described as an authoritarian modernist (Sadiki, 2002), a first period of socio-economic transition started. Bourguiba and his regime quickly installed a constitution and reformed the state towards a modernised and secularised state under authoritarian rule. This led to a repression of religious institutions on the one hand, and a promotion of gender equality on the other. The best-known reform he made was the introduction of a series of laws that enhance gender equality, such as the ban on polygamy and the right of women to work and vote. Although the modernisation meant progress for some, it also felt like an imposition, constraining Islamic cultural values and practices to others (Grami, 2008). Economically, Bourguiba took a centralised approach, while the economy was always in touch with international markets. When oil and gas were found in the 1960s, it was nationalised and given to the national electricity company and Tunisia became a net exporter of gas (Ayadi and Mattoussi, 2014; Dinh, 1984). After major economic setbacks in the 1980s, Tunisia adopted a liberalising economic agenda and implemented structural adjustment programmes suggested by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Murphy, 2006). As a result, sharply increased food prices led to strong public protest that brought an end to Bourguiba's rule when Zine El Abidine Ben Ali took over power in a relatively peaceful coup d'etat (Sadiki, 2002).

2.3 Stagnation / 1987 – 2000

After the first years of hope for change under Ben Ali, it became clear that Ben Ali's rule led to a continuation of Bourguiba's legacy, and a stagnation of change. The modernisation project in combination with increasing authoritarianism continued (Zaman, 2010; Charrad et al., 2006; Charrad, 2007; Singh, 2009; Leveau, 2000). Ben Ali's rule has been described as 'a sophisticated dictatorship', an authoritarian regime that kept up a myth of democratisation and human rights in order to keep its international legitimacy (Sadiki, 2002; Cavatorta and Hostrup Haugbølle, 2012). Ben Ali's increasing authoritarian rule was largely accepted as long as it was based on economic growth. But when an economic recession started in the early 1990s, this basis of legitimacy of the Ben Ali regime slowly started to fade, sparking a peak of repression and corruption by Ben Ali, his wife and their family. In the post-9/11 era, the regime made use of the (international) call for securitisation and anti-terrorism

to legitimise intensified repression. The opposition was increasingly silenced and divided in order to sustain the regime (Hibou, 2006; Hostrup Haugbølle and Cavatorta, 2011).

2.4 Acceleration / 2001–2010

While the repression of the Ben Ali regime was ongoing, things started to accelerate after the turn of the century, as grievances about increasing regional inequality and decreasing employment opportunities for both low- and high-educated people, became fuel for the widely-carried protests. People who had previously accepted the situation of servitude in exchange for economic prosperity started to withdraw their support (Perkins, 2014; Elbaz, 2009). A few key moments stand out as defining and symbolic. First was the World Summit on the Information Society that was held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November in 2005. Through hosting the Summit, the regime attempted to display itself as an open and modern society. Yet in the run-up to the Summit, eight opposition political leaders and civil society activists seized this stage to denounce Ben Ali's regime and to send a message to the outside world that what the regime was trying to broadcast was incorrect and that Tunisia was in fact a very closed society. They went on a joint month-long hunger strike. This moment is considered as laying the groundwork for bringing together the divided opposition and for later collaborations (Mabrouk, 2011; Angrist, 2013).

A second key moment was the public uprising in 2008 in the mining area of Gafsa. Local miners protested against unemployment and regional inequality. Although this was effectively repressed by the state (Allal Amin, 2011), this event too laid the groundwork for a level of organisation between workers, civil society and urban middle class, although not everyone was ready to let it slide into a revolution. A last key moment in this period was the 2009 elections. The fact that these were not only once again staged, but a means for Ben Ali to seemingly prepare his wife to take succession, triggered more discontent among a wider middle class of lawyers, teachers and academics and entrepreneurs (M02). Between 2009 and 2010, a critical mass emerged of both low and high educated, both religious and secular, from different socio-economic classes, professional sectors and geographical regions, who were increasingly aware of the repression, helped by increased access to social media, increasingly struggled to find a livelihood and felt they deserved better. Yet the government in power could not manage a transition to address these problems (Durac, 2013; Angrist, 2013; Baccar, 2012).

2.5 Revolution / 2010 – 2011

With the failure of the economy for working class, the need for dignity and inclusion for middle classes and elite, Ben Ali had gradually alienated all layers of support: the political class, civil society, businesspeople, the workers' unions, youth, lawyers, women's movement. People felt stuck. It was this nation-wide cocktail of discontent, in combination with a growing collective courage to face the fear of repression that led to a mass nation-wide protest movement between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011 (Pearlman, 2013). Different groups protested for different reasons: dignity, work and liberties, but increasingly connected to each other and collaborated in the logistics of the largely peaceful protests. When they knew the fall of Ben Ali was going to happen, the traditionally loyal actors such as the workers' union (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT), the military (Brooks, 2013; Nepstad, 2011) and the political elite also pulled away from the regime and facilitated the protest against it. After a month of protest, Ben Ali resigned and went into exile.

2.6 Stagnation / 2011 - 2013

Directly after the revolution, the situation was described as a total collapse of all state structure, after which nobody knew what was going to happen. Most of the opposition was not organised to take up power. Although the power of the masses had been instrumental for reactive action that shaped the revolution, it was much harder to bring about pro-active reform to shape the post-revolutionary state. In this power vacuum, two remaining organisations emerged (Durac, 2013). UGTT, as one of the few remaining civil society organisations, was vital in the installation of the Haute Instance pour la Realization des Objectifs de Revolution. This body took over the role of the parliament, and the

interim presidency, and focused on legal reform to be able to organise elections. After a quick road to elections for a constitutional assembly that would be in charge of writing a constitution, the Islamist party Ennahda won the first elections. They started a number of both democratic and Islamist oriented reforms (Bayat, 2013). This process brought previously suppressed heterogeneity in the political space to the forefront, which centred on the role of Islam in politics and issues of gender (Berman, 2015). In the meantime, political violence was happening, followed by public protest, which had a negative effect on the economy through decreased tourism and foreign investments. The elected Assembly lost its credibility, leading to a political crisis in August 2013.

2.7 Transition 2013—present

After two political assassinations, four main players in the civil society, led by UGTT, appealed to all parties to start a national dialogue. In October 2013, the ruling party Ennahda agreed to step down after pressure from people and civil society. A civil war was avoided. A government of technocrats was installed, charged with finalising the new constitution. Following new elections, Ennahda and the newly founded party Nidaa Tounes form a coalition of a government that claims to give a voice to all (Louden, 2015). The new political climate is one of continuous contestation and negotiation.

Although several experts are convinced that innovation will come from this political liberty, there is also an awareness that if there had been a democratic revolution, it is not finished yet. As long as the focus was on legal and political reform, the socio-economic concerns that also sparked the revolution had disappeared from the debate. International loans were taken to foster the transition, which were mainly spent on salaries and public services. But after the constitution and politics stabilised, a pressing issue for the present and future has become how the economy is going to be dealt with (Paciello, 2011). There have been no reforms in education, health, and the fiscal system, nor has employment been created or investments generated. Several experts therefore oust the concern that the success of the revolution now relies on economic reform. In addition, and linked to the economy, security issues of radicalisation and terrorism threaten to undermine the revolution.

3 Analytical framework

The chronological overview shows that change in Tunisia happened at different paces or rhythms. But what changed exactly? What is 'political space' made of and how does it change? And what has been the role of migration and (im)mobility in it? To go beyond the assumptions in the migration and development debate, I use an actor-oriented perspective to analytically deconstruct different dimensions of the political space and hence political change, to examine the interrelations with migration and mobility (Portes, 2010). In another paper, I describe this actor-oriented analytical framework as a way to analyse interrelated dimensions of change and migration, which distinguishes between four dimensions of the political space: political structures, capacities, desires and agency (Van Houte, 2016). Here, I will limit myself to explaining these four dimensions.

The *structural* dimension of the political space is made up of all political forces external to and impacting on people, which are dynamic and can change over time. Political *capacities* are made up of the human and non-human resources that can serve as a source of power available to people, and are per definition unequally distributed and can be contested. Political *desires* consist of the attitudes and motivations to act, that live within people, but are influenced by structures and capacities. Political *agency* is defined as a self-perceived sense of power or freedom over one's actions or non-actions when confronted with political discontent. Agency is not the action in itself but the choice to take action or not (Van Houte, 2016).

Political change can be observed as movements between these different dimensions of the political space. Change happens when political structures alter political desires and capacities; when changing political desires and capacities alter people's political agency; and when action or non-

action coming from this political agency in turn alters political desires, capacities and structures, as visualised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four-dimensional framework of the political space and political change
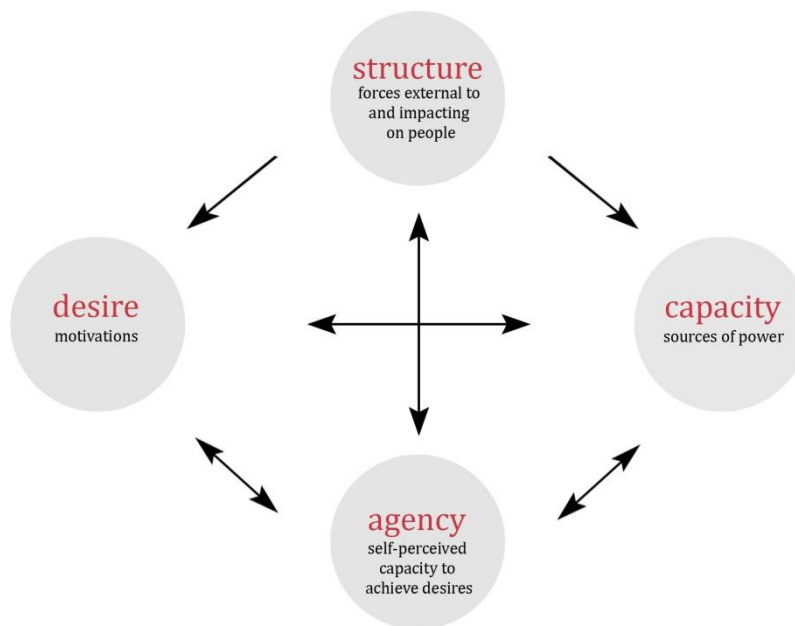
Source: (Van Houte 2014)

As visualised in the figure above, the process of change can be seen as cyclical and happening under continuously changing circumstances that are both steered from below and from above in an interactive process that changes over time. The framework furthermore indicates the heterogeneity of mechanisms and outcomes of change, in relation to migration (Burgess, 2012; Portes, 2009).

4 Methodology

How can we analyse the relationship between political change and migration in an encompassing and non-normative framework, which can be replicated and compared across cases? The approach I took reflects a search for innovative ways to get a relatively quick overview of a complex and interrelated matter. For this, I took a wide-to-narrow historical-narrative approach, using the above-described analytical framework as a basis.

First, a broad literature search with the key search words 'Change' and 'Tunisia' was carried out, in English and French, in Google Scholar and Web of Science. The publication date was limited to between 2005 and 2015. The results of this extremely broad search were inductively labelled into key themes on each of the four analytical dimensions of the analytical framework. Each theme was then investigated in more detail through more in-depth literature review and online content analysis. This led to a first narrative on change in Tunisia.

Second, key experts were identified, who observed and experienced change in Tunisia on one or multiple of the identified themes from a professional point of view: academics, international organisation, grassroots organisations, media, and private actors. Based on the desk research on each of the themes, a basic number of experts were identified. These experts were approached via e-mail and telephone to contribute to an interview on change in Tunisia. Interviews took place during a four-week visit to Tunisia in November 2015. Other experts were identified through 'purposeful snowball sampling' on these themes while in Tunisia. This led to a list of key experts, divided by theme and type of profession. In total, thirty-two experts were interviewed: eight academics, eleven

representatives of civil society organizations (CSO), five representatives of international organisations (IO), five experts from the private sector and three professionals from the media.

Interviews were divided into two sections. First, the expert interviewee was asked to give a free account from their professional point of view on what had changed in Tunisia over the past ten years. Second, to give a bit more structure and focus to this free narrative account, respondents were asked to identify on a timeline the key moments in those changes, linking to them the processes that made them happen; the main actors contributing to this change, and last but not least, the role of mobility and migrants in these moments of change. Interviews normally lasted one hour. Ethical approval for the field study was obtained from the Central University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Oxford. Respondents gave their verbal consent based on written and verbal information. They were ensured confidentiality and we met at a location of their choice.

The interview narratives and timelines were then used to complement, nuance and deepen the insights from the literature review in four steps. First, all data was read with a broad brush, based on which a detailed coding sheet was developed to give substance to the different themes. Based on this, a first narrative of the different themes was written. Second, all data was read again with a focus on moments of change. Based on this, a common timeline was made, bringing all perspectives of change from different sectors and dimensions together. Third, the emerging narrative was compared to the existing literature and checked for factual accuracy. Fourth, all data was read once more with an emphasis on obtaining a deeper understanding of the observed patterns. Fifth, this working paper will be communicated back to interviewees for their feedback. The focus on a timeframe of ten years allowed for a focus on specific moments of change, while being broader than a focus on, for example the Arabic spring. At the same time, the perspective on processes of change allowed origins of the current changes to be situated in the past, which have happened at different paces and periods of time. In the next section, I will sketch the background of these temporalities of change in Tunisia, in which the current change is situated.

5 The multidimensional political space and mobility in Tunisia

Applying the four-dimensional analytical framework to the case of political change in Tunisia, we can distinguish between changes on the level of political structures, capacities, desires and agency.

5.1 Structures

Within the structural dimension, four distinct subthemes of political change can be identified, namely political regime, political system, political ecology and political economy.

5.1.1 Political regime / class – foreign education and exile

The most obvious thing about change in political structures of Tunisia is change of political regime. R*egime* is about *who* rules the country, or the political elite that is in charge. The main change of the past decade is that President Ben Ali, who had been ruling the country since 1987, stepped down following the nationwide protests that happened in a short period of time, as described above. After this revolution, a sequence of government changes quickly followed after each other. Five years later, many experts observed continuity in the sense that several figures from the Ben Ali regime have found their way back into the political regime. All political figures of the post-independence regimes were foreign educated, mostly in the former colonial power, France.

Mobility has facilitated the nature of regime turnovers and accountability of political elites through the possibility of exile: Under Ben Ali's increasingly repressive regime, individual members from the political opposition and other dissidents started going into exile, as an alternative for prison and torture, from the 1990s onwards. In return, the fact that Ben Ali and some key figures from his

regime were able to go into exile facilitated a transition without excessive bloodshed, while it also prevented the Ben Ali regime from being held accountable by a transitional justice system.

5.1.2 Political system – from increasing repression to gradual democratisation

> *In Belgium and France, they fabricate Islamists. When we go there and see all Tunisian ladies covered in head scarves, more than here, that offends us. And when they come back, we receive that back from them (Expert interview, IO-04).*

A second apparent structural change that has happened in Tunisia is the change of political *system*, or *how* a country is ruled. Unlike regime change, the change of political system is a much more gradual process: after their having had a gradual increase of more repressive and authoritarian rule in the years before the revolution, a transition towards a democratic state started after the revolution, involving changes in laws to make democratic elections possible, and the reform of the constitution. Although the formal democratic transition ended in 2014, when the constitution was finalised, many say that the democratic transition is far from finished, and needs to be fine-tuned, since the power of the state has weakened and there is a slowing down of decision-making, as things have to go through many democratic layers (Expert interviews, IO-04, IO-05).

Mobility has shaped the nature of Tunisian political system since independence. However, contrary to the most common expectation of the migration and political change debate that migrants internalise and bring back democratic and modernist ideas, foreign educated and returned politicians and leaders have been of all political colour and shape. Although Bourguiba designed the constitution according to the ideas of enlightenment he had learned in France, both Bourguiba and Ben Ali were authoritarian rather than democratic leaders. Similarly, although Bourguiba was inspired by secular values, the Ennahda leadership returning from political exile in Europe maintained and, as the quote above suggests, reinforced their political Islamist agenda.

Migrants are not seen as the initiators of the democratic changes that happened after the revolution. Rather, the political involvement of migrants has been facilitated by increasing democratic change and political will to include migrants after the revolution. For example, a politics of inclusion and heterogeneity that was advocated after the revolution led to several policies that promoted the involvement of Tunisians abroad. Seats were made available in the parliament for Tunisians living abroad, and Tunisians from abroad benefitted from the increased freedom of association by being allowed to set up associations and societies. Also, the revolution and ousting of the Ben Ali regime enabled activists abroad to dismantle offices, residences and buildings in France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, and others, that were occupied by the RCD in order to spy on and control the Tunisian community abroad (Boubakri, 2013).

5.1.3 Political ecology – adaptation mechanism in increasing scarcity, dependency and inequality

> *We see a move towards the North. They come here to find work. There is nothing there. The revenues come from agriculture. If there is a drought, there is no revenue. Leading to internal migration. Or external, if you have money (Expert Interview, IO-05).*

The political ecology is about the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of natural resources and changes therein (Bryant and Bailey, 1997), which proved to be a relevant structural domain affecting the division of power between actors. First, the depleting gas production around the turn of the century, when Tunisia shifted from being a net exporter to a net importer of energy, was directly related to the stagnating economy that removed the credibility of the Ben Ali regime. As the state decided to keep subsidising gas as it used to, state expenditure skyrocketed, which led to rising taxes and increased public unrest (Expert Interview, IO-02). A second change in the political ecology is the effects of climate change, through drought, rainfall, water scarcity and rising sea levels (Maddison

2007). In particular, droughts and aridification have affected the agricultural sector, which employed a quarter of the population (Perkins, 2014), and have reinforced regional inequality between the aridifying South and the more fertile North which led to increased social tension leading to domestic protest, violence and terrorism. The other way around, it is noted that there has been no serious drought since the revolution, which is argued to have helped the transition to be relatively peaceful (Expert Interview, IO-05) (Scheffran and Brauch, 2014).

In the fragile political ecology of Tunisia, mobility has been, and is increasingly becoming, an adaptation mechanism (Requier-Desjardins, 2010). The decreasing employment opportunities in the Southern areas and the increasing need of households to complement decreasing revenue from agriculture with other sources of income leads to internal migration towards the coastal areas and the cities, increasing the pressure on employment there, leading to international migration of those who can afford it (Expert Interview, IO-05). The displacement of tourism that is leaving areas that are getting too hot, is another aspect of mobility that adds to the regional inequality.

5.1.4 Political economy – immobility sparking protest

> *People are not yet coming back. There is no framework for them to do so. (Expert Interview, Media-01).*

The *political economy* is about the way the economy is managed. As a result of Tunisia's ecological position, the political economic system has been outward oriented (White, 2014). For this reason, the country has also been exposed to the direct and indirect effects of the global economic recession of 2008 and the increasing securitisation of migration, limiting the options for legal migration, which aggravated Tunisia's already stagnating economy. Although the regime attempted to cover this up through manipulations of statistics and budgets (Perkins, 2014), the regime also had a stake in maintaining international legitimacy, which meant that the government could not fully stop the rise of the internet and social media, making people increasingly aware of this corruption and sparking protests (Christensen, 2011). In the post-revolution period, there are no real efforts to structurally reform the way the economy is organised. There is not more transparency about public spending. The informal economy has not decreased (Expert Interview, IO-05). Rather, corruption has increased since the revolution of 2011 (Nucifora, Doemeland and Rijkers, 2014). Therefore, the political economy is going through continuity rather than change.

Mobility was an important aspect of the outward oriented political economy: From the late 1960s, labour migration was actively promoted, leading to 10% of the population being outside of the country. The role of mobility in this period can be described as contributing to the stability of the regime, hence delaying rather than promoting change. It was immobility rather than mobility that accelerated economic discontent and protest. The economic crisis of 2008 led to decreasing export, tourism, and labour migration opportunities (Hibou, 2011; Meddeb, 2011; Bessaoud, 2012), the latter of which was further constrained through the securitisation of migration, the 'Neighbourhood and partnership agreement' 2007 with the EU, and the suppression of illegal migration by the Tunisian regime, helped by EU resources. This increased pressure on domestic needs for employment, while clandestine emigration movements increased nonetheless (Boubakri, 2013; Kassar, 2005). After the revolution, although the Tunisian business community was initially keen to invest and set up business in Tunisia, they seem to have been discouraged by the unattractive business climate. Rather than bring change, they need an enabling business climate to contribute to the economy, and will invest their money elsewhere if this is not possible (Expert Interview, IO-05).

5.2 Capacities: spaces of power

The slow realisation that collective action was possible, that Tunisians could be agents of their own history (Expert Interview, CS-09).

One main theme of political change can be identified on the dimension of political capacities or sources of power, namely new and old spaces of power. Spaces of power are sites available to people to exercise a political voice. In the years before the revolution, classic spaces of power such as internal political opposition, civil society and media and external institutional forces, had been increasingly subject to repression and 'grooming' by a swollen security state apparatus. As a result, most organisations were weakly organised, not successful in their efforts to bring change (Touati 2012), and were not trusted by the population (Expert Interview, Media-03). At the same time, the rise of the internet and social media increasingly provided a way to share their discontent amongst themselves and with observers outside the country (Lotan et al., 2011; Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl, 2012), which created an alternative space to previously inactive or invisible actors (Farrell, 2012; Najar, 2013). Social media helped in overcoming the fear (Pearlman, 2013). After the revolution, old civil society and political actors gradually re-emerged, while social media, from being a space for activism, became a political space, where old and new political actors, groups and opinions were manifested (Joseph, 2012). Although reforms in the media have been implemented, people are still very suspicious about the independency of the media (Expert Interview, Media-03).

Migrants both facilitated and were facilitated by the changing spaces of power. Not seeing an opportunity to express their voice, the political opposition in exile kept silent for a long while. The gradually more enabling *and* constraining environment from the turn of the century in Tunisia gave the political opposition in exile the impression that they could play a role: following the general rise of civil and political protest in Tunisia, they started international campaigns in which they mediatised the protest and lobbied about the Tunisian situation abroad. This contributed to the emergence of an international network to support the protest in Gafsa (Allal Amin, 2011). After the revolution, the Ennahda leadership was ready to return and take up leadership. The fact that the party leadership had been able to organise from exile meant that after years of dictatorship they were one of the only working political organisations in the country. In addition, the role of social media as a critical space of power was facilitated by Tunisians abroad through avoiding censorship by technically providing access to blocked sites through proxy servers. They were the facilitators of and were facilitated by online access to information, which was vital to support the revolution (Howard et al., 2011).

5.3 Desires: political voice

Since long we had waited for that moment (…) People wanted change and waited for it, for the best moment (Expert Interview, IO-03).

On the dimension of political desires, the desire for political voice stood out as a theme that has experienced a transition, a gradual change from compliance to voice and dignity. While many people had been accepting the limited freedoms and exclusion under the authoritarian regime in exchange for stability and relative prosperity, the increased (awareness of) exclusion in combination with the decreased economic opportunities, caused the collective emotional climate to shift from fear to anger and hope, sparking a call for political voice, dignity, freedom and rights (Pearlman, 2013; Mabrouk, 2011). The desire for a political voice seems to be particularly strong in social groups that have, at a certain point in time, felt in- and excluded from the political space. A swing to Islamism right after the revolution led to a brief period in which Islamists claimed back their rights, but were contested by secular and feminist movements (El Masri, 2014). At the same time, continuity is seen in existing cleavages of class and region.

Tunisians abroad contributed to breaking the fear of the regime and contributed to the political voice of people in Tunisia. Bloggers and rappers from abroad played an influential role in posting thought-

provoking content (Expert Interview, CS-08). By saying things that were unheard of in Tunisia, they encouraged Tunisians in Tunisia to do the same.

5.4 Agency: proactive and reactive

We thought very highly of ourselves (Expert Interview, CS-09).

On the dimension of political agency, we can in the Tunisian case identify changes from proactive to reactive agency and back. Proactive agency means to pressure, lobby, fund and dialogue to contribute to an improvement of the current situation within the current frameworks. As pro-active agency by the classic actors – the political opposition parties, the workers' union and civil society organisations - was silenced and repressed through decreasing spaces of power, while a desire for a political voice was increased, people turned to reactive agency, defined as protesting, rejecting, or disengaging to show one's discontent with the current frameworks. The reactive involvement of many people and groups, which together formed a movement that became the revolution, led to the fall of the Ben Ali regime. After the revolution, while old and new actors again picked up their proactive role. The reactive movements remained very present, ready to act as a corrective factor of the new powers in place.

Mobility choices could be seen as reactive agency, both before, during and after the revolution. Before the revolution, decreasing legal options to migrate led people to leave illegally, while many others faced involuntary immobility. During and immediately after the revolution, the effective absence of Tunisian border controls in early 2011 resulted in a temporary hike in irregular emigration to Europe. Despite the hope the revolution sparked, experts said it was a pragmatic response to economic depression. In the post-revolutionary period, continued struggles to reform the economy and discontent about the outcomes of the revolution has led to an increase of people wanting to leave (Boubakri, 2013). In addition to Europe, Tunisians have since 2011 also travelled to Syria to fight in the civil war. In 2015, an estimated 3,000 Tunisians were in Syria and 1,500 in Lybia, while 15,000 had been stopped in their attempt to do so. On the other hand, the war that broke out in Libya, resulted in thousands of Tunisian labour migrants returning to Tunisia (Natter 2015).

After contributing to changed desires and capacities within the narrowing political structures, Tunisians abroad played a mainly reactive role as the recomposition of the political scene provided an enabling structure for the return of migrants with political aspirations. Political exiles came back to play a role in the political transition, while other Tunisian migrants came back to play a role in the re-emerging civil society. An expert noted that when the opportunities were there and they were treated right, Tunisians abroad were interested in giving up their lives and come back to contribute to their longstanding aspirations to change, while their double passports enabled them to leave when needed. Although business people had been interested in investing, they were put off by the obstacles they had to face. After initial investments, many have withdrawn or are losing money. Last, while external electoral turnout and mobilisation were particularly low during the authoritarian regime, external voting today has taken on a new prominence that is worth examining (Brand, 2014).

6 Discussion: Migration, mobility and change

In this deconstructed narrative of political change, migration is not a clear-cut independent variable. Rather, mobility and migration comes up as an inherent aspect of everything that happened, affecting different temporalities, dimensions and directions of change.

Mobility helped shaping the design of the political system since independence, through foreign educated political leaders. Peaceful transitions in the political regime were facilitated with the option of exile. Mobility also increasingly provides an adaptation mechanism in a fragile political ecology. Active labour migration policies then sustained the economy, and delayed rather than promoted change in the authoritarian regime, as its revenues contributed to the resilience of the

regime despite economic setbacks and increased repression. Spaces of power were limited but existent, and the dominant political desires were to comply with these limited freedoms in exchange for relative stability and prosperity. In this period, Tunisians made use of the opportunities of mobility to work and study abroad to go into exile.

However, both the depleting gas production and the global economic recession affected the economic basis of the regime, leading to increased political repression. These developments led to decreased spaces of power, increased access to information and increased desires for change. Pragmatically complying with the regime changed into a reactive agency. As options to leave decreased, protest increased as the only option for action. Tunisians abroad were able to further facilitate this process, as well as their involvement was facilitated. Rather than based on coordinated actions, this was the result of a confluence of acts across the transnational political space, coinciding in time (see Soengas, 2013). The acceleration of discontent connected working class struggles with urban activism and political oppositions to facilitate collective action, which transcended international borders (Lim, 2013). This resulted in the revolutionary movement, which led to the fall of Ben Ali. The option of exile facilitated the peaceful transition. In addition to Ben Ali, other people also reacted to the newly emerging situation through their mobility choices, both by leaving from and returning to the country.

As the situation stabilised, the enabling political situation motivated people to engage in the country, while the 'disabling' economic situation versus the limited possibilities to leave created involuntary immobility of people in precarious economic conditions only adding to the ongoing discontent and the sense that some of the drivers of the revolution are still unresolved. Table1 shows a timeline of events and their relation to migration and mobility

Table 1 Timeline of change in Tunisia and the changing role of migration and mobility

Period	Dimensions of change	Role of Mobility
Continuity pre 1956	Political economy / Desire	Part of a national myth
Transition 1956 – 1987	Political elite / Political economy	Shaping and Sustaining - Foreign education - Labour migration
Stagnation 1987 – 2000	Political elite / Political economy	Maintaining stability - Exiles - Remittances
Acceleration 2001 – 2010	Political regime / Political economy / Political ecology / Political voice / spaces of power	Contribute to acceleration - Increased immobility - Lobby / opposition
Revolution 2010 – 2011	Political elite Political voice / spaces of power	Facilitate & be facilitated - Support - Exit
Transition 2011-present	Political system Spaces of power	Reacting - Coming back & leaving - Immobility

7 Conclusions and Hypotheses of transnational processes in the political space

In this paper, I deconstructed the case of change and mobility in Tunisia as an example of analysing the relationship between migration and political change that goes beyond the assumption that any change should be democratisation, while taking a more holistic approach to mobility than merely political transnational engagement by diasporas and migrants. Other than the dominant, optimist, uni-directional migration and development discourse, or the gloomy migration and security discourse, this overview shows the intrinsic and changing role of mobility and migrants on interrelated dimensions of change in Tunisia. Rather than being the initiator of change, mobility and migration is in constant interaction with the rhythm of change in Tunisia. The overview also shows the circularity of change and mobility, which can be expected to keep changing in the future.

Through deconstructing the case of political change in relation to mobility in Tunisia, this paper aims to set an agenda for more in-depth, holistic research on the relationship between migration and change. Based on the exploration above, I argue that we need to address four questions in future research on this nexus.

The very first question and hypothesis that underpins the relationship between migration and political change is that actors, desires, capacities and structures involved in a political space are located across borders of that space. In other words, there has to be a 'transnational political space' (Adamson, 2002; see also Faist, 2000), meaning that instead of the nation state being the default container of the political, politics are located on different geographical levels and comprise not only governmental but also other types of organisation (Vertovec 2001). In addition, these political structures are not necessarily territorially rooted, but can be mobile entities as well (Vigneswaran and Quirk, 2015). Last, the dynamics between different institutional structures, such as international relations, also form part of this space (Martiniello and Lafleur, 2008; Burgess, 2012). In the case of Tunisia, we can confirm that there is clearly a transnational Tunisian political space that is located beyond the borders of the Tunisian state on all dimensions of the political space.

The second question to consider is which activities of migrants and mobile people can be considered as affecting the transnational political space. The most common hypothesis is that political change happens through explicit political activities of politicised diasporas (Turner and Kleist, 2013), who transfer particular political ideas, norms, ideas, skills, organisational support and practices (Beine and Sekkat, 2013; Boccagni, Lafleur, and Levitt, 2015), and can increase international visibility and support networks or lobby for international interventions in support of their cause (Burgess, 2012). A complementary hypothesis is that non-political activities such as financial remittance also have a political effect as they make households and groups less dependent on local powerbrokers, which lowers the costs of voice and thereby enables these counterparts to be more articulate in claiming and negotiating with political institutions (Levitt 1995, Peréz-Armendáriz and Crow 2009, Burgess 2012), which may in turn affect *power dynamics* in favour of the groups that are over-represented in the migrant community and their recipients, characterised by class, ethnicity, religion, or other (Burgess, 2012; Levitt, 1995). Since migrants are not the poorest of the poor, any migration-induced change, is more likely to reproduce social inequality and pre-existing power asymmetries (Levitt, 1995). The presented analysis of the case of Tunisia shows that actions do not need to be intentionally political to have a political effect, and moreover, that non-action can also have a political effect. Future analysis should take into account that migrants' contribution to political change happens both, as a result of deliberate political action and as a result of non-explicit political behaviour or mere movement or non-movement.

Thirdly, there is a need to better explore which capacities in migrants contribute to political change (Turner, 2008). One hypothesis is that individual migrants may have more agency to distribute 'political messages' if their socio-economic status is higher (Boccagni, Lafleur, and Levitt, 2015) especially if their remittances are sufficiently large to increase their prestige and bargaining power in

the country of origin (Burgess, 2012), and contribute to the above-described redistribution of resources. Also, the element of showing by doing is more successful when implemented by successful role models (Gammage, 2004). However, the case of Tunisia shows that even the most high-profile migrants fail to bring change if the structural circumstances do not allow them to. An alternative hypothesis is that transnational activism requires the power of the masses rather than individual capacities. In the case of Tunisia, external voting and activism represents a cross-section of the different factions in Tunisian society. Therefore, although they contribute to political participation, they do not contribute to political change.

Fourthly, more attention should be focused on which political desire is being transmitted between migrants and non-migrants, and how. While some migrants may insist on democratic deepening, others may transmit a sense of exclusion, frustration and violence, or may be motivated to sustain the status quo (Portes, 2010). The general hypothesis is that ideas for change that are close to the existing norms of the country of origin and meet the local population's desires and capacities have more influence than radically different ideas, because they are easier to absorb. Conversely, ideas are harder to absorb when they comprise of messages that are fundamentally different, when they are not evaluated positively by the local population, or when they are met with cynicism and resignation if people do not feel they have sufficient capacities to implement the changes within the current structures and therefore encounter resistance (Boccagni, Lafleur, and Levitt 2015; Cochrane, 2007; Burgess, 2012). This case of Tunisia shows this interplay in which migrants were only able to contribute to change when people within Tunisia were ready for it.

Fifthly, the question is whether the interplay between structures, capacities, desires and agency of migration reinforces political change *or* stability. While the most common hypothesis is that migrants' political and non-political transnational engagements contribute to change, an alternative hypothesis is that migrants' political and non-political remittances delay change. In this scenario, the relative wealth and independence of migrant households on local governance for basic necessities or public goods weaken voter turn-out and other forms of political participation (Vigneswaran and Quirk, 2015; Hoffmann, 2010; Burgess, 2012). For Tunisia, the data shows that mobility through different times can lead both to change and non-change. When one group's empowerment has meant the other's exclusion, mobility provides a space for the excluded groups, their organisations, their ideas and their actions to go to. In a dynamic where groups are structurally marginalised, 'mobility' represents an opportunity for a new start.

In this paper, I have shown that going beyond the policy oriented and biased assumptions of migrants' role in processes of change, a holistic take on change itself and on mobility rather than migration, allows for a much more encompassing view on the role of mobility and immobility in processes and outcomes of both change and continuity. Not migrants as such, but mobile people can contribute to peaceful change.

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