

Social and ecological transformation in Morocco and across Africa

Country Analysis Paper **Tunisia 1**





Country Analysis: Social and Ecological Change in Tunisia¹

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■ Introduction: Social and Ecological Change and Challenges in Tunisia

In recent years, Tunisia has undergone significant changes in several areas, such as the political system and governing structures, possibilities of democratic participation, human rights, freedom of speech, as well as press freedom, to name a few. After the so-called Arab Spring and the ouster of former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the country has not only adopted a new constitution, it has also held elections twice, which have generally been rated as free and fair (Freedom House 2012, 2015), and started dealing with its authoritarian past in a carefully planned transitional justice project, which should shed light on both, political and social wrongs during dictatorship. This paper discusses in how far the ruptures and transition efforts initiated since 2011 are perceived to have brought about social, ecological, and in conjunction also political change..

Prior to the uprisings, Tunisia was perceived to be an 'economic miracle' (Hibou 1999; Allal 2012; Cavatorta, Haugbølle 2012). The Tunisian economy was growing constantly, even during the peak of the global financial crisis in 2009/10 (Lust 2011, p. 4; Cavatorta, Haugbølle 2012, p. 183). Thus, this development suggested social change in the direction of a steady increase in wealth and prosperity. However, socio-economic development has been uneven, mainly benefitting the coastal areas. Moreover, the economy was dominated by a predatory quasi 'mafia-state' (Ayeb 2011; Cavatorta, Haugbølle 2012), built on cronyism and corruption and mainly benefitting Ben Ali's wider family, which had even more exclusionary consequences than 'simple deprivation'.

Uneven regional development and high youth unemployment, termed the "socio-territorial and generational double cleavage" by Amin Allal (2012, p. 824), have been among the drivers of social unrest, especially in the country's marginalised South, Centre, and West.¹ And also the so-called Arab Spring started as an expression of discontent with social injustice, corruption and unemployment in the marginalised interior regions, before demands became more political and protests spilled to the North and the coastal areas (Ayeb 2011, p. 476). Thus, notions of social change in Tunisia are often connected with quests and hopes for more social justice that the revolution should have brought about, which include socio-economic improvements in the interior regions as well as for younger people, and a renunciation of the system of corruption.

Similarly, on the surface Tunisia under Ben Ali seemed committed to protecting the environment, since the country joined several international agreements and introduced domestic regulations, accompanied by symbolic measures, such as naming streets "Boulevard of the Environment" all over the country (Goldstein 2014). However, this is assessed as mainly being for show, aimed at receiving funding from the European Union for environmental projects (ibid.). In particular the regions hosting heavy industries such as phosphate mining or processing (some of them wealthy in natural resources, but some also only factory sites) are burdened by pollution and corresponding ecological challenges. This also affects mainly the abovementioned marginalised regions in the Tunisian South and Centre.

Ecological change² can be analysed from several angles and therefore mean different things to different actors.

¹ Ayeb distinguishes "two Tunisias: one, the Tunisia of power, money, comfort and 'development', which covers the coastal areas, particularly the capital city and its upper-class suburbs and the Sahel [...] and, second, the marginalised, poor, submissive and dependent Tunisia (of the south, the centre and the west)" (Ayeb 2011, p. 470). The latter is also commonly referred to as 'the interior regions' or just 'the South'.

² Hafsia Leghrissi (PhD researcher, National Institute of Agronomy, Tunisia) pointed out that for a comprehensive

Change can have both a positive, as well as a negative connotation: it can point to environmental degradation and pollution, as well as to an improvement of the ecological situation. Linking ecological, social and political questions, and looking at the former through the same lens that sees the fall of the regime in 2011 as a crucial rupture and opportunity for change, it becomes clear that ecological change for the purpose of this paper can best be defined as change in attitudes, approaches, and opportunities toward the environment and for environmental protection.

Therefore, the paper gives an insight into (1) social and ecological injustices in Tunisia and regional disparities. It then continues with discussing (2) the question of whether any change is noted, in particular since the fall of the dictatorship in 2011, and of political will for change, including the challenge of corruption, before turning to (3) the question of whether social and ecological transformation pose competing challenges in Tunisia. This last point includes a brief discussion of the role of international actors.

■ 1. Social and Ecological Injustices and Regional Disparities

The understanding of what constitutes social and ecological change as well as challenges for Tunisians, respectively the awareness *vis-à-vis* certain problems, differs. There are several factors, which influence awareness, for example location or topical expertise. As mentioned above, regions profited unequally from socio-economic development, respectively were excluded from it. In general, the interior regions have not profited from the abovementioned high growth rates and although these are the areas, which are rich in natural resources, they have remained marginalised. They have been suffering from high unemployment rates, and have experienced systematic exclusion from public investment in infrastructure, education, and health (Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, Avocats sans Frontières 2015).³ State institutions also often lack representation in these areas.⁴ This has led to a perception of neglect or even an absence of 'the state' in the interior regions (Hamdi, Weipert-Fenner 2017 (forthcoming)). In addition, unemployment is also particularly high among younger people, which does not only lead to economic, but also to social exclusion of a large part of society, since over half of the population is under 30 years old. While the percentages of young people who are not in education, employment, or training are generally higher in rural than in urban areas, they are also significantly higher in the South and Centre than in the coastal regions (The World Bank 2014, pp. 24–25).

Though the interior regions are rich in natural resources and there is agricultural production, value added often does not take place here, but on the coast. For example, a former member of the National Constituent Assembly⁵ from Kebili in the Centre-West of Tunisia stated: "There is no equality among the regions, which is a question of power.

analysis of socio-ecological change, one would need to analyse different sectors, such as forestation or hydration/water resources. This is beyond the scope of this study, which deals with social and ecological change, and how these may be interlinked, from a political scientist perspective and hereby concentrates on the socio-political aspects of environmental issues and ecological change.

³ Personal interview with staff members of the Truth and Dignity Commission, Gafsa, October 2015.

⁴ Personal interview with a Tunisian staff member of an international humanitarian NGO, Gafsa, October 2015.

⁵ The National Constituent Assembly functioned as Tunisia's Parliament from 2011-2014, charged with developing a new constitution, but also with regular legislative tasks.



Kebili is marginalised economically. We have only dates, but without factories. If you look at Cap Bon, there are also dates *and* factories that help with the production, but not in Kebili.”⁶ In the same vein, Hamdi and Weipert-Fenner (2017 (forthcoming)) find that unemployed activists in the mining basin struggle with the injustice of “the contrast between resources, wealth, and experienced poverty.” They quote an interview with an activist from the mining town Om Larayes, who eloquently lays out the contradiction: “In the Gafsa mining basin, we produce richness, the CPG [Compagnie Phosphate de Gafsa or Gafsa Phosphate Company] is the backbone of the Tunisian economy, but, to the contrary, richness accumulates on the coastal regions, and leaves us in unemployment, poverty, and disease.” This quote already points to the interlinkage of social and ecological challenges, since they converge in the marginalised regions.

In Tunisia, several aspects that challenge the environment faced by different countries in the Mediterranean concentrate: “fossil fuels, pollution, and tourism” (Clancy-Smith 2014, p. 14). But while in the capital city of Tunis environmental issues may often be reduced to questions of waste disposal,⁷ people in the mining basin or the country’s South may be more concerned about health and environmental effects of polluting industries, such as phosphate production or chemical factories.⁸ Since the environmental burden is particularly high in these areas, environmental pollution and corresponding health risks constitute central concerns, which interplay with the aforementioned systematic exclusion and perception of abandonment. “[I]n Gabes”, for example, which is highly affected by pollution from toxic by-products of phosphate processing, which are dumped into the Mediterranean, Eric Goldstein (2014) states, “pollution is the issue that crystallizes the public’s sentiment of marginalization.” Not only are the cancer rates in Gabes the highest in Tunisia (Hyatt 2013), it has been the state itself that violates environmental protection laws (Goldstein 2014).⁹

Laryssa Chomiak (2011, p. 72) describes how the repressive regime under Ben Ali limited any form of contestation, which aimed at engaging the state, with the help of a repressive repertoire ranging “from arbitrary economic barriers to jailing, disappearances and torture” (ibid.). Similarly to quests for social justice, which were often brutally cracked down,¹⁰ mobilisation around ecological/environmental issues was also affected by the strongly limited political space before the uprisings: “[...] the political space and influence afforded to the ordinary populations [...] was minimal” (Willis 2014), since the regime aimed at an “a-politicization” of society (Hibou 1999: 50; own translation).¹¹ A prominent example for that this also limited the expression of environmental concerns is Zouheir Makhoulf, a journalist and human rights activist, who was imprisoned for posting videos exposing pollution on Facebook (Zayani 2015, p. 135). “Pollution was a taboo topic before 2011. The conscience was there, but people did not dare to speak out,”¹² an environmental activist from Gabes explains. In this regard, the 2011 ruptures opened up opportunities for

showing (organised) discontent with pollution, respectively to lobby for environmental protection, also *vis-à-vis* state companies, which had not been there before (Goldstein 2014).

To sum up, there has been a strong sense of social and ecological injustice in Tunisia, which is particularly pronounced in the marginalised regions. Consequently, the predominant understanding of social and ecological change emanating from the research is related to an expected reduction of these injustices. After the 2011 revolution, hopes were strong that the rupture would bring about the desired transformations.

■ 2. No Change in Sight? Perception and Political Will

Since the 2011 ruptures in Tunisia were triggered by demands for social change, for more social (and albeit less prominently, also ecological) justice, it is important to look at whether change is perceived to have actually occurred. Here, one can distinguish change in various areas.

First, as indicated above, the ‘authoritarian grip’ and “net of fear” (Hibou 2011, p. 81) does not have the same strong power over the people anymore.¹³ Thus, there has been change with regard to possibilities to publicly point out grievances and to do so also *vis-à-vis* the state and/or the ruling elite.¹⁴

Second, ‘numerical’ indicators of social and ecological change do not hint to a reduction of social and ecological injustices. The World Bank downgraded Tunisia from *upper* to *lower middle income country* in 2016 (World Bank Data Team 2016).¹⁵ Unemployment has remained high and though the state minimum wage was raised after the uprisings, it still is at not even 120€ per month.¹⁶

With regard to ecological issues, according to historian Julia Clancy-Smith, industrial pollution has even climbed during the transitional years. But given the visibility of environmental problems, public debate has become possible after the uprisings. And framing concerns within an environmental discourse offers the opportunity of claiming rights, even when problems are more multi-layered and touch sensitive areas, such as governmental weaknesses and profiteering (Clancy-Smith 2014).

Third, considering the perception of change, not only, but particularly in the interior regions, people do not see that the revolution and the accompanying increase in international aid have improved their lives and there is a sentiment of being abandoned by the state. In Gafsa, an interlocutor emphasized the lack of infrastructure and the grim living

6 Personal interview with NCA member, Tunis, April 2014.

7 Skype interviews with Nidhal Attia, 17 August 2017.

8 Skype interview with Adel Dhahri, 16 August 2017.

9 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

10 See for example Allal (2010) on the protests in the Gafsa region, which are now often described as precursor to the 2010/11 uprisings or Perkins (2014, p. 172) on the so-called Bread Riots in late 1983/early 1984.

11 Laclau and Mouffe (2014) posit that for democratic struggle to be possible, a plurality of political spaces is necessary. The limited political space under authoritarian rule, thus, enclosed possibilities for expressing different opinions and for pointing out grievances.

12 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

13 Though the secret police has been dissolved after the fall of the regime, the ‘deep state’ did not suddenly entirely vanish. However, even if some structures are still in place and people in powerful positions, they are not able to exert a level of repression like under Ben Ali.

14 Several personal conversations inter alia with journalists, Tunis, 2014-2016. Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017. See also Hyatt (2013), Clancy-Smith (2014).

15 I am aware that data provided by international financial institutions should not uncritically be accepted as a given. However, they provide easily accessible indicators to compare trends over time.

16 As of August 2017; exchange rates change frequently due to heavy inflation.



conditions in the area, pointing out that even under colonialism there was at least a cinema in town.¹⁷ Thus, the hopes for social change toward more social justice have not been fulfilled so far and discontent and lack of perspective remain sources of unrest. Vathauer and Weipert-Fenner (2017, pp. 9–11) show that in 2016, there were even more socio-economic protests than in 2011, the year of the revolution. The same is observed with regard to ecological justice in those areas where environmental concerns trump more general quests for social justice: although promises have been made, there is no visible change in attitude or behaviour from those bearing responsibility for pollution.¹⁸

Thus, while at the beginning of the transitional period after the revolution not only the hope, but also the *push* for change was great, both have diminished in the meanwhile: “In 2011, the priority of priorities was [...] how to assure the rupture with the past, how to build a new Tunisia that assures respect for human rights and where there is also respect for economic and social right in the different regions. But unfortunately, that hasn’t continued.”¹⁹

Policy and Application

The new Tunisian Constitution, adopted in January 2014, recognizes both, the right to a healthy environment and the aspiration to eliminate pollution, as well as the importance of social justice, with specific emphasis on equality between the regions.²⁰ Thus, it evokes hopes that there is political will to work toward more social and ecological justice. Moreover, as mentioned above, environmental protection laws and policies have indeed been in place in Tunisia already before the revolution²¹ and they would provide strong legal grounds for penalising those who are polluting. Their application, however, has remained scarce (Goldstein 2014).

In general, the assessment of my interview partners is that “politicians do not care effectively about the environment.”²² The question of whether this is due to a lack of competence/capacities, resources, or political will is mainly answered with the assessment that the reason is a combination of all these factors.²³

Marine biologist and environmental activist Nidhal Attia points out that both, environmental discourse in the public, as well as policy actions often remain concentrated on ‘visible’ issues such as the waste problematic.²⁴ Waste is often not properly disposed of, but dumped on the street or burned and landfills are not properly equipped and thus harmful to the environment (Said 2014). Since the proliferation of waste has grown since 2011 (Your Middle East

2017), this problem is also often associated with the government’s missing ability to govern effectively.²⁵ This may be one of the reasons why a special ‘green police’ unit has been deployed in June 2017 and campaigns to raise public awareness about, for example, the excessive usage of plastic bags are on the rise. This leads environmental activists from the South to the conclusion that these public-oriented measures are indeed welcome, but that they also distract from more severe conditions: “environmental crime is still neglected.”²⁶

Another link between social and environmental change is the question of sustainable development. Development, and the quest for (international) investment, is still largely connected to the extracting industries. *Sustainable* development would require a rethinking in several realms: it would require politicians to get a better sense of ‘the situation on the ground’, including the specificities of different localities, and accordingly an adjustment of policies and political strategies.²⁷ While researchers and activists observe some change from policy-development that has been exclusively top-down, to an approach that shows more willingness to work together with the local population, with researchers and civil society actors, these changes in attitude as well as in practice are happening very slowly.²⁸

Results of studies that tested whether one can observe development in Tunisia conforming to an environmental Kuznets curve,²⁹ thus, whether there is a relationship between economic growth and environmental degradation and pollution that corresponds to an inverted U-shape, differ with regard to the question of whether the hypothesis is found to be viable in the long run (Ben Jebli, Ben Youssef 2015; Shahbaz et al. 2014; Fodha, Zaghdoud 2010). They however agree in their conclusion that Tunisia has not reached the tipping point of the curve, meaning that pollution and emissions are not decreasing, and that policies, respectively their application, so far have not been conducive to do so. One example would be subsidies for fossil fuel consumption, which Ben Jebli and Ben Youssef (2015) recommend to reform substantially and they also point to the weak implementation and application of existing projects and regulation. This is in line with assessments of my interview partners.³⁰

To sum, both the empirical research as well as scholarly literature show the dominant perception that there is no viable political strategy for sustainable development, which works both toward social and ecological justice. The non-application of existing regulation, furthermore, points to a lack of political will for change, especially with regard to environmental protection.

The challenge of corruption

Not only were the uprisings expression of discontent and anger with social injustices and corruption, the underlying structures have not suddenly disappeared with the fall of the regime and neither have the corresponding grievances. Those who have experienced the “Ben Ali system”³¹ describe it as diffuse and networked, a “market of power”³²

17 Personal interview with a Tunisian staff member of an international humanitarian NGO, Gafsa, October 2015.

18 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

19 Personal interview with the director of the Tunisian branch of an international human rights NGO, Tunis, March 2015.

20 Both aspects are mentioned in the preamble, the right to a healthy environment and the aim to eliminate pollution are specified in Article 45, social justice and equality between regions in Article 12, respectively. <http://www.legislation.tn/sites/default/files/news/constitution-b-a-t.pdf>, accessed on 18 August 2017.

21 For example the Water Law of 1975 and the Law on the Management and Disposal of Waste of 1996 Goldstein (2014).

22 Skype interview with agronomist Amin Abdedayem, 21 August 2017. See also skype interviews with Adel Dhahri, Nidhal Attia, Hafsia Leghrissi and Khayreddine Debaya, all August 2017.

23 Ibid.

24 Skype interview, 17 August 2017.

25 Several personal interviews and conversations, Tunisia, 2014-2016.

26 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

27 Skype interview with Amin Abdedayem, 21 August 2017.

28 Skype interviews with Hafsia Leghrissi, 18 August 2017, and Amin Abdedayem 21 August 2017.

29 The environmental Kuznets curve hypothesis assumes that economic growth at first goes along with worsened environmental degradation, before average income reaches a point after which environmental quality gets better.

30 Several skype interviews with environmental scholars, practitioners, and activists, August 2017.

31 Personal interview with NCA member, Tunis, April 2014.

32 Personal interview with anti-corruption official, Tunis, October 2015.



involving many people. Therefore, the system was not entirely dismantled when Ben Ali fled the country: “The fall of Ben Ali - that was only the fall of the head of the corrupt regime. That was not the fall of the entire corrupt regime. Hence, the corrupt regime still exists.”³³ The ongoing problem of corruption stems from both, the old networks and those who protect them, but also from ‘trickled down’ petty, day-to-day corruption, which has grown more common.³⁴

And though Prime Minister Youssef Chahed has recently launched a ‘war against corruption’, the underlying structures are still in place.³⁵ The Prime Minister’s campaign also stands in contrast to the President’s efforts to push through a ‘Reconciliation Bill’, which provides amnesty for corrupt state officials and in its initial version should have done so also for businessmen.³⁶ These efforts have been met with fierce opposition from the grassroots ‘Manich Msamah’ (‘I will not forgive’) campaign, who has been mobilising against the law since 2015 (for an overview see Lincoln 2017).

However, corruption does not only affect socio-economic issues such as hiring practices in the marginalized regions (see e.g. Salehi, Weipert-Fenner 2017). According to Adel Dhahri President and CEO of Gafsa-based Impact Foundation, also the environment, respectively the regulation of pollution is affected by corruption.³⁷ The existing structures of cronyism and corruption benefit on the one hand those who profit from polluting industries. On the other hand they protect those responsible for economic crimes from facing accountability. “The crime is there, it’s very clear”³⁸ Khayreddine Debaya, a spokesperson of Gabes’s ‘Stop Pollution’ campaign states, and also the legal provisions to penalise it, but in fact, there is no action taken against it (see also Goldstein 2014).

Therefore, one can conclude that grassroots actors fighting for social as well as ecological change struggle with persisting structures of corruption and cronyism that stand in the way of both, more social and ecological justice

■ 3. Social and Ecological Transformation: Competing Challenges?

The ecological burden is particularly high in the South and Centre, due to the heavy industries located in these parts of the country. These are also the areas, in which unemployment (in particular of young people and graduates) is especially high. Thus, injustices are multi-layered and there is some tension between social and ecological questions.

Employment in the mining sector is still highly sought after³⁹ and the demand for jobs bears great mobilising potential in the mining region. Protests for employment (and a share of the wealth from the regions’ resources) emerging in the marginalised regions have the potential to spread to other parts of the country, including the capital and “rock the nation” (Hamdi, Weipert-Fenner 2017 (forthcoming)). In mid-2017, the army was deployed for the

first time to protect industrial sites, oil and gas fields, in the Southern province of Tataouine, which were blocked by protesters (Deutsche Welle 2017).

The Economist (2014) quotes ‘locals’ from phosphate producing or processing areas suffering from pollution caused by state-managed industries, who state that authorities do not introduce measures to reduce harm to health and the environment because this could lead to reduced profits – a concern, which has not been substantiated by economic research (Fodha, Zaghdoud 2010).⁴⁰ Moreover, Adel Dhahri recounts results of a recent survey Impact Foundation has conducted in the mining basin. Accordingly, much more people would be concerned with pollution and effects on their health than aspire to gain employment in the mining industry. He further posits that the public perception, respectively the media depiction are skewed, because of the level of attention gained by public protests for employment.⁴¹

However, choice and opportunities seem extremely limited to unemployed graduates: “In our region of Gafsa, we don’t have many opportunities. All people, even the state [think] that the CPG, the Gafsa Phosphate Company, that’s the only recruitment society [sic]. So, we don’t have much choice.”⁴² This, however, is perceived differently in Gabes, as Khayreddine Debaya recounts. Here, alternatives would be there, given the location at the Mediterranean coast, but the pollution caused by the chemical industry destroys other business opportunities, such as fishing or tourism. Given its dominance in defining what the city is perceived to be about (chemical industry and pollution) and what is possible here in terms living conditions and job opportunities, Debaya finds that “the *Groupe Chimique*”⁴³ touches the identity of the *Gabesiens*.⁴⁴

Therefore, one can draw the conclusion that whether ecological and social issues stand in perceived competition to each other depends on the location of the affected actors, as well as the question whether an alternative to working in polluting industries is seen. Those who do not see any alternatives for employment would prefer the factories to continue running (and offer employment), even if this poses a risk to health and the environment.

International Entanglements

The role of international influence with regard to social and ecological transformation has been described as ambiguous for several reasons and it reflects competing challenges as well. On the one hand, international standards serve as reference frameworks for domestic activists to voice their demands. Debaya, for example, said that the ‘Stop Pollution’ movement “demand[s] an environmental code corresponding to international conventions, of which Tunisia is part of.”⁴⁵ International organisations, such as the European Union, also often provide funds for environmental protection projects (Goldstein 2014) or for ‘sustainable development’ more general.

33 Personal interview with NCA member, Tunis, April 2014. This point was also made in interviews by civil society representatives.

34 Personal interview and conversation with lawyer and journalist, Tunis, August/September 2016.

35 For a critical take on the ‘war on corruption’ see Kahlaoui (2017).

36 The law proposal has been renamed from ‘economic’ to ‘administrative reconciliation law’ and adopted by Parliament on 16 September 2017

37 Skype interview, 16 August 2017.

38 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

39 Several personal interviews and conversations, Gafsa, October 2015.

40 Fodha and Zaghdoud (2010) find that the relationship between income and pollution in Tunisia is unidirectional, meaning that policies and investment aimed at the reduction of emissions and pollution will not hurt economic growth.

41 Skype interview, 16 August 2017.

42 Personal interview with graduate (double degree in civil and mining engineering), who had been unemployed between 2008 and 2015, and recently got employed by a newly established state institution, Gafsa, October 2015.

43 Groupe Chimique Tunisien, the state-owned company that administers phosphate processing.

44 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

45 Skype interview with Khayreddine Debaya, 25 August 2017.

On the other hand, foreign companies profit from the structures of pollution and social marginalisation in several ways; they are invested in heavy industries and are not held accountable for countering the pollution caused by their businesses.⁴⁶ Similarly, they also do not meet their social responsibilities, for example by benefiting the local population with social responsibility funds (Blaise 2017).

Lastly, looking back to recent history, structural adjustment requirements for state companies, demanded by international financial institutions, have not only led to massive job cuts in state-owned companies, which have often been the main employer in the respective region. These companies also often provided infrastructure and basic social services, including environmentally relevant ones such as drinking water and health services. Service quality however dropped significantly in the wake of cutbacks and reforms pushed for by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Hamdi, Weipert-Fenner 2017 (forthcoming)).

Therefore, while international normative and legal frameworks, as well as material support can be conducive to social and ecological change, it is important to note the role of international (both governmental, as well as business) actors in bringing about the grievances in the first place.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed social and ecological change and challenges in Tunisia against the backdrop of the 2010/11 ruptures. It has shown that social and ecological injustices are distinct, but interlinked and sometimes one causes the other.

It has furthermore laid out regional disparities, both in terms of the socio-economic situation and development as well as with regard to the ecological circumstances. The regions in the South, West and Centre of Tunisia, which host companies that are either extracting or processing the country's natural resources, do not only carry the high ecological burden of these industries, they also suffer from socio-economic marginalisation. Therefore, the predominant definition of change goes along with the quest for more social, as well as ecological justice.

And while the possibilities for mobilisation and voicing discontent have changed dramatically, hopes for change have not been met so far. Unemployment rates in the interior regions and particularly among young graduates remain high and the responsible companies have not stopped their polluting (and illegal) practices. Moreover, corrupt structures that enable these practices as well as the marginalisation, have remained in place also after the revolution.

There is disillusionment with the political class, which is either seen as unwilling or unable to bring about change. And while in the ecological realm small changes are acknowledged, they are perceived as rather cosmetic. The overall perception with regard to social justice is that "nothing has changed" (Hamdi, Weipert-Fenner 2017 (forthcoming)), which is similar for ecological justice.

⁴⁶ Skype interview with Adel Dhahri, 16 August 2017.

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