

Domination & Control in Tunisia: Economic Levers for the Exercise of Authoritarian Power

Author(s): Béatrice Hibou and John Hulsey

Source: *Review of African Political Economy*, Jun., 2006, Vol. 33, No. 108, North Africa: Power, Politics & Promise (Jun., 2006), pp. 185-206

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4007159>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Review of African Political Economy*

JSTOR

Domination & Control in Tunisia: Economic Levers for the Exercise of Authoritarian Power

Béatrice Hibou

This article analyses the exercise of power in Tunisia. It does so by offering an explanation that differs from standard studies of authoritarianism, which generally focus on classifications, definitions, and terminological questions, and view power as something that can be possessed and thereby used. In contrast, the analysis here argues from two traditions within historical sociology; Weber's political economy and Foucault's analysis of the exercise of power, in order to demonstrate that techniques of domination are embedded in the most everyday economic mechanisms such as in the tax system, solidarity practices and the industrial *mise à niveau*. These practices serve both to advance the 'economic miracle' and simultaneously function as techniques of coercion and repression. An analysis of 'privatisation of the state' is then used to illustrate one mode of government and its attendant forms of domination.

Contrôle et domination en Tunisie: les modalités économiques de l'exercice d'un pouvoir autoritaire

A partir d'une critique des analyses dominantes de la relation entre «régime autoritaire» et «miracle économique» en Tunisie, cet article entend proposer une lecture originale des relations de pouvoir et des modes de gouvernement en faisant émerger les mécanismes d'exercice du pouvoir et les bases socio-économiques sur lesquelles il repose. A la croisée de deux traditions intellectuelles de la sociologie historique de l'Etat – l'économie politique weberienne et l'analyse foucauldienne de l'exercice du pouvoir et de la domination – Béatrice Hibou suggère, d'une part, que les rouages économiques fondent aussi les relations de pouvoir qui autorisent la domination, et parfois la répression et, de l'autre, que ces pratiques peuvent tout aussi bien servir la coercition que permettre au miracle de se réaliser. Pour mettre en évidence ces ambivalences et l'incomplétude des logiques d'action, l'auteur entre dans le détail des pratiques économiques quotidiennes. La fiscalité, la mise à niveau et les négociations continues entre entrepreneurs et autorités politiques et administratives constituent un premier champ d'analyse: elles montrent la réalité de la contrainte, mais aussi bien des arrangements, des accommodements et même de l'adhésion. Cette dernière est en partie rendue possible par la prégnance du mythe réformiste, mythe partagé par tous, en partie par les avantages que les uns et les autres en retirent. L'analyse de la «privatisation de l'Etat» – notamment dans

sa modalité originale du 26.26, ce système de «dons» contraints et obligatoires – constitue un second temps de la démonstration. En Tunisie, les modalités indirectes et privées de gouvernement ne sont pas contradictoires, ni incompatibles avec la tradition dirigiste et l'interventionnisme incessant. Elles doivent plutôt être analysées comme des techniques complémentaires dans l'art de gouverner, qui autorisent l'exercice d'une punition et d'une gratification, mais assurent également une sécurité économique et sociale. Elles participent du paternalisme et du contrôle social, et permettent simultanément contrôle et ascension sociale, surveillance et création de richesse. C'est pour cela aussi qu'il ne s'agit fondamentalement pas de répression et que si domination il y a, elle est souvent acceptée.

Understanding Tunisia: Two Traditions

Tunisia has been the subject of several recent informative essays and analyses. Taken together these studies can be seen as participating in two main interpretive traditions. These can be summarised as either 'Ben Ali's Tunisia' or 'Economic and Political Tunisia'.

'Ben Ali's Tunisia'

This expression refers to a common trend of analysis in both academic and non-academic writings. These works share three characteristics: the strong man, the sultan or the chief, is at the centre of political analysis and, consequentially, power relations are analysed as relations between the proprietor and his possessions. These analyses are often very general, and do not delve into the details and descriptions of specific mechanisms for the exercise of power. Sometimes they include purely political inquiries that consider 'Ben Ali's Tunisia' as simply an authoritarian regime, a dictatorship in which the head of state controls all mechanisms for policing and repression (Anderson, 1995; Lamoum and Ravenel, 2002). At other times they partake in the tradition of the liberal political economy of authoritarianism, developing rather functionalist arguments about the role of the economy in the regime; for example, analyses of Tunisia as a form of Sultanism (Chehabi and Linz, 1998) or as a bully Praetorian regime (Henry and Springborg, 2001). These first two categories are characterised by a strong tendency to personalise power. The authors of these texts tend to emphasise a number of features that underscore Ben Ali's personal responsibility for state repression: the breadth of arbitrary decisions that perturb administrative functions; the existence of a system of loyalty founded on fear of, and gratification by, the chief; and the lack of a social basis for political power associated with the perceived apathy and passivity of the given society. Another type of analysis includes the writings of human rights activists and those engaged in humanitarian associations who emphasise the importance of the police and institutional repression, as well as the absence of freedoms of expression.¹ This type of analysis is also evident among the regime's active apologists who attribute Tunisia's economic, social, and political advancement directly to President Ben Ali (Chaabane, 1996; Mbougueng, 1999; Chirac, 1999).

'Economic & Political Tunisia'

While less colourful than the first way in which Tunisian politics and society is interpreted, the idea of economic and political Tunisia highlights the break between

the economic, social, and political spheres in that country. Works that fall into this category tend to share similar assumptions. They assess the economic performance, and sometimes the political and social situation of Tunisia, in terms of success or failure, without inquiring into the workings of political power, or the details of economic, political, and social mechanisms for sustaining it. These studies are sometimes authored by political scientists who tend to marginalise economic or social processes (Benedict, 1997; Camau, 1997; Camau and Geisser, 2003). They are also attributed to political economists who see the political field as exogenous and only rarely enter into the dynamics of power relations (Murphy, 1999; Anderson, 1995; Bellin, 2002; Henry, 1996). But because academic works on Tunisia are few and far between, this type of analysis is most often carried out by politically committed (*engagés*) observers, whose positions vary from unconditional support of the regime to the most severe condemnation of it. On the one hand the 'Tunisian miracle' is theorised as a mixture of clear economic success, the development of social programmes, and the march towards democracy (Chaabane, 1996; Lombardo, 1998).² Such unconditional support for the 'Tunisian model' is founded both on the construction of the myth of the 'economic miracle' and an understanding of the specificity of democratisation in a country like Tunisia (which, as a formerly colonised, developing country that is also Muslim, has long been handicapped relative to a Western trajectory).³ On the other hand, open critiques highlight the contradiction between economic success and ferocious political repression (Beau and Tuquoi, 1999; Daoud, 1994; Simon, 1999).⁴ Between these two extremes, positions oscillate between the targeted support of social and economic programmes (which meanwhile ignore the political situation)⁵ and critical support, which recognises an economic success story that has been 'spoiled' by an increase in political restrictions.

Power & Repression in Tunisia: a Model Plague

In avoiding the pitfalls of broadly these two positions I want to highlight the apparent contradiction between political repression and the 'economic miracle'. I concentrate on this point not to account for past errors and biases of the texts cited above. Rather, following the works of Michel Foucault, I locate the mechanisms and socio-economic bases of the exercise of power in order to highlight techniques and processes of knowledge (*savoir*) that constitute political power in Tunisia today. Although it is now a commonplace understanding, it is nonetheless important to recall that no government is founded exclusively on violence and repression, even totalitarian governments (Arendt, 2002). Repressive systems function well beyond the mechanics of the police apparatus, working through economic, political, and social mechanisms and it is these that most accounts of political power in Tunisia fail to recognise.

The 'Miracle' & the Foundations of Political Domination

The basic machinery of the repressive system can be found in the mechanisms mobilised by the regime, by international donors and commentators. All of these serve to extol both Tunisian society's capacity for adaptation and reform as well as the economic and social aptitude of the regime. It is obvious that the police and its techniques for repression, *stricto sensu* (imprisonment, torture, bans on meetings, and harassment of opposition figures) play an undeniable role in Tunisian political life. Likewise, we cannot underestimate the importance of violence, fear, and a general ambiance of mistrust. But these methods of repression are only applied against

active militants and, in the case of Islamists, they also affect their entourage. While these actions clearly impact on the public perception of the regime's repressive character, they do not fully account for the modalities of the exercise of power in Tunisia today. Instead, mechanisms for control and domination of the entire Tunisian population are anchored in the most everyday relations of power. As the following remarks show, if policing has an unquestionable influence on people's frame of mind, perhaps even more than on the organisation of daily life, control takes place, above all, through constant coercive practices involving economic and social activities. And these coercive practices are themselves inscribed in relations of force that are internal to society; they are at the very heart of the struggles that pervade society.

The 'Social Death' of Islamists

One example highlights the impossibility of separating economics from politics. It highlights the necessity of recognising the continuum that exists between repression and political control, and the most commonplace economic and social practices. That example was the fierce repression of the Islamists following their relative success in the 1989 elections. Many documents attest to the inhumane treatment suffered by *Mouvement de la tendance Islamiste* (MIT) militants (later to become *Ennahda*⁶), practices to which they continue to be subjected today. Abusive treatment includes violent arrest, imprisonment, torture, mistreatment leading to death; solitary confinement, imprisonment in overcrowded conditions, lack of beds, sleep deprivation; malnutrition, dehydration, poor hygiene, the rapid spread of diseases; negligent or altogether nonexistent medical care; drug addiction; unsafe working conditions; prohibition of prayer; frequent and humiliating cell searches; sexual abuse.

However, very little has been said about the living conditions of former political prisoners after their release.⁷ The discrimination suffered by these ex-detainees is particularly worthy of our attention. It reveals how disciplinary and normalising practices constitute the very exercise of power in Tunisia. In a similar vein, we might cite the blurring of 'public' and 'private' spheres or methods of criminalising political activity unauthorised by the State (Lamloum, 2001). Although ex-detainees no longer face the threat of physical violence, many claim that post-carceral discriminatory practices are often more difficult to bear than the inhumane and degrading treatment suffered in prison. For instance, they are required by administrative fiat to report to a designated police precinct several times a day. These precincts are often very far from the residences of ex-detainees, which mean that they frequently cannot find work and are denied the possibility of participating in even the most basic social practices. Even when they are no longer subject to these administrative controls, they still have many problems finding work and establishing themselves in society: former civil servants are fired, while those who worked in the private sector find themselves up against former or potential employers who are harassed, threatened, and blackmailed by either the social security system or the tax administration, and who are thereby effectively dissuaded from rehiring newly-released prisoners. Former prisoners who attempt independent work are also harassed by the fiscal authorities, the municipal police, or other administrators. Detainees' wives are sometimes forced to divorce; family members and intimates are encouraged to renounce all assistance because of police intrusions into households or because of blackmail with regards to employment or social security. Social security cards of former detainees can be destroyed, excluding them from access to

health care; students are prevented from registering in universities and thus are forced to continue their studies abroad. After having come close to physical death in prison, ex-detainees experience 'social death' that is often seen to be more difficult to bear. The preceding discussion demonstrates how absolute control and domination can be achieved through economic and social mechanisms rather than through the direct intervention of the police. Nevertheless, the aim of such practices is normalisation, not definitive exclusion. If Islamists and former political prisoners agree to follow the rules and recognise the norms of the dominant political system (that is, by renouncing political Islamism and criticism of the regime), they are allowed to reintegrate into the economic and social life of the country. The illustrations that I have just given can be interpreted by using Foucault's notion of inclusion (1975).

The plague is the moment in which the surveillance of a population is carried to its extreme,' wrote Foucault, 'where hazardous communication, disorderly communities, forbidden contacts can no longer take place. The moment of the plague is that of the exhaustive surveillance of a population by political power, whose capillary ramifications constantly reach into the very core of individuals, their time, their dwellings, their positioning, their bodies (1999:44).

The plague then provides a model for the analysis of positive technologies of power, such as inclusion, observation and the formation of knowledge.

Mechanisms & Procedures for Control, Domination & Repression

In order to understand the specificity of the exercise of power in Tunisia we need to comprehend the details of day-to-day practices and behaviours. These include the concrete procedures and techniques of power and subjection especially in the economic and social sphere. Moreover, we cannot expect to understand these mechanisms without recognising the continuum of power relations that extend from global strategies and the large machinery of the state apparatus, starting with the police, to, at the other end of the spectrum, the infinitesimal tactics that touch the 'core of individuality'.

'That's the Price we have to Pay': Negotiations & Settlements

Tunisian businessmen view the constraints placed on private enterprise by the political system as the 'price' to be paid for certain advantages. As one noted in conversation with me, 'What weighs on us is also what protects us,' while another affirmed that 'this is the price we have to pay.' These business benefits include social peace and geopolitical stability as well as market protectionism, fiscal exoneration, and administrative exemptions. All of these ensure an enterprise's financial health, not to mention that of the entrepreneur. Such protection is seen as compensation for a political system widely perceived as one of observation and control, and whose tactics include such obtrusive practices as incessant administrative interference, diverse levies (including those extracted through the famous National Solidarity Fund, *Fonds National de Solidarité*, to which I refer below), more or less obligatory gifts to the RCD (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique*) and other police associations, fear of predation by Ben Ali's 'clans', and official censorship. This 'price to pay' interpretation can be challenged by pointing out its allegiance to ideas of compensation, exchange, and inevitable return, all manifestations of the Manichean vision explicitly put forward by the regime. This interpretation would reduce 'politics' to the regime and, furthermore, to an exchange commodity.

Nevertheless, the entrepreneurs interviewed above affirmed a crucial point: administrative, economic, and social mechanisms are by nature ambivalent or equivocal. They allow simultaneously for control and for margins of manoeuvre, for domination and for resistance, for economic constraints and for opportunities, for financial advantages and for costs to be extracted. In other words, businessmen are subjected to the disciplinary power – and even policing – of the Tunisian political system, and in turn enter the very system by contributing to and fueling its logic of negotiation and settlement.

A number of studies on practices of resistance in authoritarian regimes underscore this coexistence of strong interdictions and the systematic and acknowledged subversion of these interdictions (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003). In Tunisia, this is the case for the control of satellite dishes (Bras, 1999) or the internet (Chouikha, 2002), as well as the tax system (Hibou, 2003) or the informal economy (Hibou, 2006). But these paradoxes should be understood less in terms of the installation of repressive measures by the dominant, to which the dominated respond by ruse and resistance, than in terms of social struggles and power relations that are highly ambivalent and are inscribed, themselves, in these very struggles. There is not a system of power that manages and shapes both control and tolerance (or a safety valve) as long as the regime is not endangered (Larif, 1991; Chouikha, 2002), but rather mechanisms of ‘resistance’ that are inscribed in power relations and are simultaneously practices of accommodation, agreements, and negotiations (Hibou, 1999c). The example of the tax system is revealing in this regard.

The Twists & Turns of the Tax System

As in many developing countries, the Tunisian tax system comprises two complementary issues relating to tax evasion. On one hand, taken together, the failure to declare, under-declaration and the weak rate of tax collection are estimated by the Internal Revenue as representing 50 per cent of tax income. These figures are to be taken with great caution: they are above all political, participating in a political discourse, and very clearly provide the Tunisian state with a certain degree of latitude. Concretely, the public disclosure of such figures serves to justify controls and levies of all sorts, enabling the government to openly discredit, and subsequently negotiate with Tunisian businessmen. On the other hand, tax controls have been intensified over the past eight years to make up for losses arising from the free-trade agreement with Europe (evaluated at 70 per cent of customs income or 18 per cent of total tax income), as well as the decrease in income from oil. Entrepreneurs complain about the arbitrary nature of these controls and the weight of back payments. It must be noted that, for the past three decades, the administration and the political system have openly tolerated tax evasion in order to increase their legitimacy, but also and above all, as they claim to encourage the ‘development of a national bourgeoisie’. The current context, being marked by the decline, or even the disappearance, of income from oil and phosphates and the application of liberal norms (in particular, budgetary rigour), no longer permits this tolerance of tax evasion. But this by no means undermines the role of taxation as an instrument of negotiation. Although obviously never explicitly stated, tax fraud, a common practice among the large majority of entrepreneurs, continues to be tolerated and even encouraged. On one hand, much of the tax legislation is murky, such as that pertaining to VAT (value added tax). On the other hand, there is often a large gap, in time as well as content, between presidential discourse, the adoption of law, application of decrees, and reality. Legal texts relating to tax issues are oftentimes inaccessible, even when state decisions have been dependent upon them.

Businessmen practice tax evasion for a number of reasons and under a number of guises. Sometimes tax evasion can occur almost unintentionally, as an unexpected result of an imperfect command of current rules and regulations. Other times it is practiced as a means of alleviating the financial costs of an enterprise, or even of ensuring survival in the face of domestic, and especially international, competition. In other cases, tax evasion can manifest itself as a power struggle with fiscal authorities, as a preventative tactic in view of future levies, or as a 'counter-conduct' or subversion of an administration's behaviour when that administration is perceived as both intrusive and arbitrary. From the point of view of the state, however, tax fraud enables central power to justify its arbitrary interventions in economic matters and allows civil servants in the tax administration to benefit from bonuses in proportion to recovered taxes. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the name for the General Direction of Taxes in Tunisia is the Direction of Tax Controls. At times, back taxes are so significant that they lead to negotiations between the government and the taxpayer. For the most serious cases, such negotiations take place directly between the company director and the President. One of the biggest conglomerates in the country, which owed back taxes of three or four times its annual profit, managed to have them reduced by half in exchange for a contribution to the NSF (National Solidarity Fund, or the so-called 26.26, which refers to the fund's postal account number) and the listing of one of its companies on the stock market. A certain implicit haggling is at the heart of all fiscal practices, as is suggested by the example, *a contrario*, of perfectly legal businesses that do not contribute to the 26.26. It is thus by no means certain that the business community, even while claiming to be the victim of central power, is the real financial loser in this game.

Tax evasion in Tunisia should not be interpreted as a sign of lack of controls, resistance by 'civil society', or a safety valve generously accorded by an omniscient central power. Nor should it be seen as compensation for the absence of political representation and civil liberties. Fiscal practices are never simply a game of negotiations and settlements; the fiscal arm can be used for repression as well, especially since it is generally viewed as a site of struggle, power relations, compromises, and the exercise of power more generally. This widespread belief results in part from a romantic and certainly biased interpretation of Tunisia's history, particularly its fiscal history. The Tunisian *imaginaire* is fueled by the myth of resistance to taxation as a way of supporting both the struggle for national liberation and the opposition to power, perceived as 'external' (Chérif, 1986; Ganiage, 1959; Brown, 1974; Bachrouch, 1977; Hénia, 1980; Dakhliya, 1990; Chater, 1984). This *imaginaire* is fed, in turn, by current practices, whether the use of sanctions, laissez-faire policies, or the granting of fiscal amnesty. The latter results in the appeasement of tensions and the possibility of reconciliation between business and central power. Indeed, the tax system is considered a seat of power. Whether or not the aforementioned strategies are efficient is of little importance; what matters is that the tax system is perceived as an instrument of punishment. And this perception is all the more fertile given that the popular interpretation of certain events as illustrations of the tax system's repressive power continuously serves to reactivate this *imaginaire*. Thus when a struggle breaks out between the authorities and members of the opposition, one of the first repressive measures to be employed is taxation or social security (*Caisse nationale de Sécurité Sociale* or CNSS). Judge Yahyhoui, who is now a symbol of independent justice in Tunisia, began a fierce struggle against the Tunisian authorities and President Ben Ali himself over a personal tax matter.⁸ Here, we find the essential ingredients of the Tunisian system

of repression, which touches private lives and the intimate sphere; it mixes public and private and spans the continuum from details to broad political strategies.

Multiple Economic Procedures & Techniques of Domination

The example of the tax system demonstrates all the political ambivalence of a mechanism that exerts power through economic means. The primary function of taxation is not, however, repressive. Yet when repression does occur through economic means the tax system is undeniably the most efficient and systematic instrument available. But the preceding developments allow us to nuance this assertion by raising two issues. First, discipline is not the principal motor of the tax system in Tunisia: bureaucratic processes, adaptations to the international economy, clientelism, social and economic patterns of behaviour and, most importantly, the necessity of sufficient state revenue all determine the shape of the Tunisian tax system. Second, 'fiscal punishment' is rarely ever executed 'from above'. In the rare cases where the tax office actually decides to exert decisive control or domination, such actions are made possible by a preexisting environment: a whole series of mechanisms and patterns of behaviour that serve as footholds for the tax administration and for political power.

This article is just one part of a more extensive study and cannot therefore develop further examples to illustrate this point (Hibou, 2006). I will simply point out some of the primary sites where the logic of policing, control, and repression infiltrate economic and social processes. Apart from the tax system, these sites include the social security system, social programmes for disadvantaged people, rural and urban development programmes, and bank credit. In a more general sense, they also entail financial mechanisms, aid and privileges for enterprises, privatisation, the liberalisation of domestic and international trade (like the nationalisation, protectionism, and permits that preceded them), solidarity and the invocation of civil society, the 'management' of Islam, and the control of illicit, illegal, and informal practices. I cannot here either detail an analysis of the procedures and techniques through which the logic of control, domination and repression permeate economy and society. Beyond the tactics, discussed below, whose effects and tactics are to blur the lines between the public and private spheres, there are a number of additional mechanisms worth mentioning. These include the perpetually refueled processes of social exchange and negotiation, recourse to nationalist principles while simultaneously recognising the need to be connected to the world economy, and the construction of a discourse surrounding the 'economic miracle' and the 'stability and security of Tunisia'.

Numerous techniques make the 'economic miracle' both a discourse of truth and a technique of power. We might cite, for instance, the strategic choice of comparisons: measuring Tunisia's economic performance against that of sub-Saharan Africa rather than that of Asia or Turkey, or judging present advances against strategically chosen periods in Tunisia's history. There has also been a systematic amnesia with regards to past performance; the appropriation by the administration and central power of social dynamics; the elaboration and concealment of facts; recourse to secrets and rumours; a continuously blurred line between 'transparent' and 'opaque' practices; the absence of critical analysis and a free press; selectivity of information used and the deployment of such information; modes of presenting domestic decisions according to current fashion and international rhetoric; and difficulties of access to information. This situation is not specifically Tunisian (Minard, 1998), but it is applied here in a systematic and centralised way in devices

for the production of knowledge. The 'economic miracle' is thus a fiction that can neither be invalidated, nor even partially challenged (Arendt, 2002; Ricoeur, 1983). This is why unemployment statistics or the poverty levels are often deliberately concealed for years.

It was precisely this discourse on stability and security, emphasising the efficacy of the regime's decision to prioritise order that incited the Tunisian authorities to deny, for four days, that the Islamist terrorists had carried out the Djerba attack, an event that was presented, as we might imagine, as an accident. The significance of this discourse on security, and its widespread acceptance, can only be understood by going beyond the simple idea that it represents a single man's design (President Ben Ali), a direct product of the sultan's palace, the latter being constrained to follow this strategy in order to 'remain in power'. Instead, the security stance is deeply rooted in Tunisian political struggles. Because the relative success of the Islamists in 1989 was experienced as a political upheaval by a large portion of the population, the Tunisian authorities were able to manipulate public opinion in order to intensify and generalise the perception of a massive threat. This strategy only functioned because it had effective relays in society, because it took root in the already divisive fabric of Tunisian society on the question of political Islam (Lamloum, 2001). This division, moreover, refers back to other historical opposition (Dakhliya, 1990) that continue today, even within the political opposition (Khiari, 2003), and this, despite the fact that, on the one hand, its members being both 'Islamists' and 'democrats,' all shared their 'hatred' of Ben Ali and that, on the other hand, *Ennahda* was wiped out by years of repression.

These illustrations indicate how mechanisms of repression are by no means the President's monopoly. Neither are they the monopoly of Ben Ali's regime, his entourage or police services. On the contrary, they are deeply rooted in Tunisian society and in social and economic mechanisms of power, all the more so because they participate in processes of state formation. Political control and repression, two undeniable facets of Tunisian life, are the result of a

multiplicity of often minor processes, with different origins, scattered locations, which intersect, repeat, or reverberate, resting upon one another, distinguishing themselves according to their space of application, converging and elaborating, little by little, a general method (Foucault, 1975:162-163).

The Privileged Space of Perpetual Reforms

Economic and social reforms are particularly interesting sites for the observation and analysis of repression and control. On the one hand, as I indicated above, discourse on reforms and on the 'economic miracle' constitutes one of the principal techniques of power and the production of knowledge in Tunisia today. On the other hand, after 'development', 'reforms' are now at the centre of the international community's understanding of 'underdeveloped' countries.

Reformism as a Traditional Form of Power in Tunisia

The 'new' theme of liberal reforms in Tunisia must be understood with respect to a very specific historical trajectory: the tradition of Ottoman and then Tunisian reformism which has characterised the political economy of the country since the mid-19th century (Tlili, 1974; Bachrouch, 1984). Reformism, and most notably the work and myth of Khayr ed Din, continue to inform the understanding of relations

between national construction, international insertion, and economic transformations, captured by stigmatised and ambiguous oppositions, such as modernity/archaism or secularism/obscurantism.⁹ Since the great era of the Fundamental Pact (1857), administrative, social, economic, and political modifications have always been formulated in terms of reforms. This is the case under the French Protectorate (1881-1953); during the nationalist movement (1930-1953); in independent Tunisia from the 1950s to the 1970s, including the socialist period (1960-1969) and in the developmentalist rhetoric typical of the entire so-called Third World up to the present era of structural adjustment and liberalisation (Hibou, 2005).

It is as if this rhetoric of perpetual reforms fulfils a particular purpose in the formation of the state and in mechanisms of control and domination; we might say that perpetual reforms function as an effect of power. In spite of the government's rhetoric of 'Change' (*Le Changement*) and, similarly, the voluntarist discourse of the international donors that puts forth the notion of radical change, the reforms implemented since 1987 (the implementation of structural adjustment programmes corresponds with the 'medical coup d'état' of Ben Ali), are a continuation of the history of economic policy in Tunisia. First, the liberal turn took place in 1970. But, more importantly, since the 19th century, the ideal of Tunisian reformism has been both liberal and technicist, even though it has also been interventionist and centralising. There is doubtless an 'authoritarian reformist tradition' (Camau, 1987; Krichen, 1987:297-341) which should not, however, be taken as the imposition of modernising and technical reforms 'from above'. This tradition has endured precisely because it has been anchored in existing mechanisms of power and, concomitantly, because it has been able to structure power relations more generally.

The Example of '*Mise à Niveau*'

A good example is the case of the Tunisian '*mise à niveau*' (bringing up to standard) – a programme mostly financed by the World Bank and the European Union, designed to prepare industrial firms for international competition.¹⁰ In the Tunisian government's tradition of industrial interventionism,¹¹ this programme was a 'state affair' (Camau, 1997). It was guided by the principles of a form of liberalism that was both interventionist and authoritarian.¹² On the one hand, the *mise à niveau* is implemented in a highly interventionist way: it is urged, if not imposed, upon private actors; incontestably, the dynamic of the process comes from the administration. To use the language of Tunisian officials, entrepreneurs are invited to make the 'civic gesture' of following the movement. It is without doubt a heavily bureaucratic process, a far cry from the liberal discourse on competitiveness. Enterprises are invited or obligated to open up to and prepare themselves for international competition. But, they are to do so in a decidedly old-fashioned way: the incentives are subsidies and financial facilities that entrepreneurs interpret as a continuation of past policies. And they are obtained through bureaucratic and political relationships. On the other hand (and contrary to received wisdom, which sees economic liberalisation as a means of depoliticising economic action), the *mise à niveau* is a highly political process. The programme manifested the will to modernise from above and to exercise political control over enterprises (Cassarino, 1999, 2000; Camau, 1990, 1987; Krichen, 1987).

Entrepreneurs are better off adhering to this process if they are to be well received by the state. The events (or adventures) which accompany the entry (or rejection) of one or another firm into the *mise à niveau* reveal less the enterprise's will to modify its management, to open its capital or to invest, and more the importance of

relationships between the business world and presidential power. In keeping with this reformist tradition, moreover, the will to political control goes hand in hand with the capacity for adaptation and a certain pragmatism as well as a responsiveness to recriminations. Thus, despite these attributes, international donors support the programme because it illustrates the Tunisian bureaucracy's capacity to understand and integrate international constraints, to translate them into concrete measures, and to transform these measures as the context evolves. In response to difficulties encountered in implementation, the *Bureau de la Mise à Niveau* developed discourses and, occasionally, new procedures. At the beginning of the process, there were only subsidies for material investment, but after confronting many bottlenecks, these subsidies were extended, with beneficial advantage, to non-material investments. Likewise, the *mise à niveau* was initially only designed for businesses at the micro-economic level, but it now relates to other sectors at the meso-level: administration, banks and, more generally, the firms' environment, macro-economic level.

But this portrayal of the *mise à niveau* programme is insufficient. The political voluntarism that characterises the Tunisian authorities' discourse of control and command should not be understood as necessarily true; it is rather one procedure amongst other techniques of power which produce knowledge. It is deployed internally, of course, but it also has its exterior usages. And international donors are less taken by the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme than by its conceptualisation and the discourse surrounding it. Thus, despite the many qualifications he made during our discussion of the very mixed results of the *mise à niveau* program, one of the international bureaucrats I interviewed in Tunisia concluded that, 'here, they know what they want; they have a plan that is generally positive.' Furthermore, and more importantly, the entrepreneurs are by no means simply 'subjected' to a politically instrumentalised reform process. The Tunisian authorities' global strategy of control and domination is effective only because it is located locally. Entrepreneurs are active in this process: the most dynamic firms have benefited from this through subsidies for investments that have reduced their indebtedness. Others enter into these arrangements in a quest for financial or business opportunities, or as a means to gain greater autonomy. This is what explains the weak rate of investment in the *mise à niveau* programme and the great number of firms that do not go beyond the diagnostic phase. Moreover, enterprises do not necessarily adopt strategies that adhere to the objectives set by the administration, such as the modernisation of the production apparatus or the increase in competitiveness. Investments are oriented less towards industries than towards services (insurance, tourism), commerce (agro-alimentary, textiles), and agriculture (especially animal husbandry). They seek out protected sectors (sometimes with the participation of foreign investors, who are only interested in access to the domestic Tunisian market), fiscal advantages (with very low levels of taxation in the agricultural sector), financial advantages (easy credits in the tourism and agricultural sectors), or investments for speculation (on agricultural lands or land suited for tourism). Some fear that Tunisia will become an *entrepôt* economy: the country has often played such an intermediary role between Europe and Africa or the Ottoman Empire. Also, the trend toward conversion to commerce inspired by liberalisation programmes and the *mise à niveau* is now accompanied by a trend toward the re-exportation of goods, like second-hand clothing, and the creation of free trade zones. In sum, the *mise à niveau* programme allows for control, the exercise of power, and even repression, but this is only because the procedures employed respond to solicitations 'from below', on the part of entrepreneurs.

A similar analysis could be made with respect to privatisation or work relations (Hibou, 2006). The heterogeneous, variable, and unstable character of investment incentives are moreover manifestations of both authoritarian endeavours and the depth of processes of negotiation or, quite simply, power relations and force relations (*rappports de force*) between the administration, the political sphere, and entrepreneurs (Baccouche, 2000).

Privatising the State as a Procedure of Control

Reforms succeed one another, but all are not similar. Modes of government are transformed according to international configurations, economic and political transformations on the domestic level, material constraints and opportunities. In Tunisia as elsewhere, the present phase of reform, a dominant manner of governing consists of what I call 'the privatisation of the state' (Hibou, 1998, 1999d, 1999e, 2003).

There are many instances that suggest the demise of the state. The state increasingly delegates its regulatory or even sovereign functions to private intermediaries; 'markets', 'networks', and private actors have become increasingly important; and pressures from the international economy have become more direct. It is also clear that recourse to violence for private appropriation has become a predominant mode of governing in many countries. Nonetheless, the state not only resists these changes, but it continues to structure itself through constant negotiation between the 'public' and 'private' realms, and through processes of delegation and *ex post facto* control. In other words, the 'privatisation of the state' does not necessarily mean the loss of its capacities for control or its cannibalisation by private interests. It does, however, refer to its reconfiguration and the modification of modes of governing that are induced by national and international transformation.

Privatisation is at the heart of liberalisation reforms that have been applied to all developing countries. But this is not limited to public enterprises, public services, and other economic actors in keeping with the 'promotion of the private sector'. This orthodox aspect of the reform process – the gist of the dominant discourse of the international community – is only one element in the 'construction' of economic policy (Berman and Lonsdale, 1992; Bayart, 1994). Privatisation has also diffused to other domains and other state interventions. And this is not simply the result of incentives taken by the bureaucracy or political power. Instead, it is the effect of at least two highly interconnected movements. First, the reforms themselves have produced lateral, unintended, and often undesired consequences that have enabled this diffusion. These include the reduction of budgetary expenditures, which has imperiled national administrations; the delegitimation of public authorities; the fragmentation of decision-making processes; the primacy given to international legitimacy over domestic legitimacy; the emphasis put on the speed of modalities for action and on results over means. Second, through specific strategies, conflicts, and compromises, as well as negotiations undertaken between different social groups, various economic and political actors have transformed the context and the substance of the reforms. In so doing, they have etched out a new outline of the state and new contours of modes of governing (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Hibou, 1998). Thus, today, privatisation involves development, economic resources, regulatory functions, and the sovereign functions of states. As diverse as they are, both programmed and spontaneous processes of privatisation have certain points in common: they are well-regarded by the reigning liberal discourse; they make

increasing use of private means for governing; and they modify both economic and political regulation, as well as forms of sovereignty. In this sense, they displace and blur the frontiers between the public and private domains. This 'vulgarisation' (or popularisation) of privatisation is now a dominant form of governing in countries of the South, the 'formation' of privatisation having largely overtaken its 'construction'. It should be underscored that reference to the privatisation of the state, even if it has an ironic dimension in respect to donors' discourse, is not simply a play on words. More than that, this expression reflects the generalisation of the use of private intermediaries for what were until now state functions as well as the reconfiguration of the state itself.

Tunisia underscores the extreme ambiguity of 'the public' and 'the private', and consequentially 'privatisation' as well. Tunisia is in some ways a country that is strongly marked by public interventionism. The programme for the privatisation of public companies, and especially private banks, is relatively undeveloped and hardly applied. Concessions to private companies and the delegation of public services to the private sector are much less widespread than in many other countries. Moreover, the authoritarian regime never sought to delegate its security functions, its maritime ports or its customs service to private entities. Tunisian 'liberalism' is characterised by significant state interventions, which are most often direct, largely due to the fact that its bureaucratic apparatus is rooted in the functions of power and in a strong state (*dirigiste*) tradition. The political history of independent Tunisia is that of strong controls over society by a centralising state (even if this state must constantly assure its legitimacy, which has been at times highly contested).

This bureaucratic tradition and direct public interventionism is not contradictory and does not hamper the emergence of different modes of government, in which private intermediaries and non-state actors are increasingly present. This 'privatisation of the state' takes many, diverse forms. These include repeated recourse to civil society, to NGOs, and to other non-state actors which are seen to have the virtues of efficiency and flexibility. They are also seen to be critical of the administration and incompetent bureaucracy. Such criticism is even repeated by the Head of State, who does not refrain from denigrating the very bureaucratic apparatus that is supposed to accomplish the policies he defines and, *in fine*, manages. Likewise, the kind of rhetoric about the role of entrepreneurs, the market, private initiative that we find in many countries today is also part of Tunisian public life. An entirely different aspect of this privatisation is the development of corruption and the monopolisation of wealth by 'clans' close to Ben Ali. Intermediation is increasingly the only function of allegiance to official discourse and especially to the personal benediction of the President. Public life has become monopolised by people with highly personal links to Ben Ali. Finally, this process takes on one form that is perhaps the most significant: the privatisation of the power to tax, a state function par excellence.

These different modalities of the privatisation of the state have at least two common characteristics. The first is the diffusion of a discourse (but not necessarily practices) which place primacy on private actors, individuals, the market and, at the same time, criticism of the public sector, of the administration, and of the state. The second is the ambivalence, blurring, and fluidity of the 'private', which becomes reified. In Tunisia, for instance, non-governmental organisations are actually governmental. Similarly, the private sector is still highly dependent on the state for public interventions. Private intermediaries base their power on their proximity to the highest function, which is, of course, public. And the President is constantly obscuring his status, blurring the distinction between its public and its private

nature through his different funds as well as through his approach to the administration.

Privatisation of the State & Exercise of Power

Of course, these modes of action have always existed. Previously, this type of intervention, posture and the different modalities of 'privatisation' were merely ingredients of the Tunisian political system and power relations. However, they now constitute one of the main foundations of politics in terms of power and in terms of legitimating discourses and rationalities of power. Similarly, the monopoly over resources and the rise of corruption are evidently not specific to this time period but their significance is. Previously, Bourguiba's intimates surely sought to establish personal capital and new wealth. But this quest took place in the context of a war for succession, the rotation of the political elite, positioning in the public sphere, through economic exchanges, and relations of power. Power struggles took place on the public scene of politics, and these economic practices were mostly 'collateral damage'. Under President Ben Ali, these practices have become constitutive of the system of control, and even of repression, in Tunisia today. All political stakes are stillborn; those who benefit from these monopolies and exactions are close to the President. They are private actors and not political pretenders; their only objective is to accumulate wealth. In other words, the meaning of the personalised management of power has been transformed, and it is in this sense that we can speak of a rupture.

During Bourguiba's reign, state management also took on private forms. It was largely restricted to political interests and political aims, in a political game that remained, in spite of it all, open to those of the inner circle. Since Ben Ali's rise to power, monopolisation of resources, corruption, and diverse economic accumulation have become new modes of governing. Thus the private management of the state has been extended to various domains: predation on large contracts, intermediation, stock-holding in privatisations and concessions, land and housing speculation. It has also been extended beyond traditional clientelism, including racketeering, forced joint ventures with entrepreneurs in significant markets, non-payment of suppliers, the constitution of private monopolies and duopolies, and the use of non-refundable loans. More than that, the interference of these private circles in economic life has taken on a new political significance. It is in this sense that we can talk about the privatisation of the state and move beyond analysis in terms of just corruption. Privatisation is a supplementary and fundamental means of control of economic and political life by the regime. Through the politics of repression, the political field and the public sphere are monopolised by the president; the economic and financial fields are now the only sites of conflict, the only objects in which stakes can be placed. All the recent politico-financial affairs attest to this (the El Taïef affair, the pharmacist's episode, etc.).¹³ Even if the agents of inveiglement or corruption are private, or even mere hoodlums, politics is always present, being the only thing that tolerates them, uses them, and confers another meaning on their activities.

These affairs constitute a clear political warning to a business class that is increasingly reticent with respect to these kinds of activities and the evolution of the regime. Thus the regime's extreme susceptibility to charges of corruption and predation, the imprisonment of Sihem Ben Sédrine, the harassment of journalists like Taoufik Ben Brick or Tunisian militants of Attac attest to its reluctance to face criticism. The regime sustains itself less through repression and the use of public force than by its hold on economic and social life. And this hold does not transpire uniquely in a public manner through economic and social policy, through pedant

administrative interventions or through political clientelism. The regime increasingly bases its power on hybrid means (semi-public, semi-private) through intermediaries recognised as such by the Presidency or, more directly, by a personal allegiance to the President and his discourse. The frontiers between the economic and the political are increasingly blurred, which is a primordial aspect of the privatisation of the state.

Although practices are not very different from one time period to the next and do not necessarily concur with official discourse, we cannot discount the fact that certain things are given exemplar status in the rhetoric of the Tunisian authorities. These include the private sector, private modes of action, private actors of development or even private actors of public life. The latter are valorised despite the fact that the bureaucracy remains present in all economic domains, and despite the fact that state actors remain strongly involved in economic life. Whatever the reality, businesses, 'civil society', the market, and private economic actors are now the ultimate referents, the legitimate institutions. This discourse trivialises the 'private' practices of power while also seeking to legitimate them. Modes of government are gradually modified by this discourse and by the systematic denigration of the administration and the presence of the 'clans' in the state apparatus. The administrative environment is deteriorating. Even if it remains central, the administration is partially dispossessed and especially delegitimised – for example, by working for the 26.26 while it has the capacity to manage similar public programmes. Likewise, all major decisions are taken by the competent administrations, but they are also and especially made by 'Carthage' (the location of the presidential palace).

The Example of 26.26

The case of the *Fonds National de Solidarité* (FNS) is a good example of how power in Tunisia is exercised. Established in 1992, The National Solidarity Fund, better known as the 26.26, which is its postal account number, is a fund designed to 'eradicate shaded spaces' (*'éradiquer les zones d'ombre'*, as official rhetoric put it) and poverty by the year 2000. It is worth noting that this fund did not disappear in 2000. Instead, a new one, the *Fonds National pour l'Emploi* – the National Fund for Employment – was added to it. This latter fund shares the same philosophy as the first. The FNS is intended to supply the basic needs of those sectors of the population that have been hitherto denied. The official presidential statement underscores that the FNS is a new mode of social policy that is to be carried out through the solidarity of all citizens. Although these arguments are not false, they are not the only ones put forth. Many social instruments existed in the 1990s and even in the 1980s, such as the programme for integrated rural development, the programme for rural development, and the programme for needy families.

Generally speaking, the financial modalities of the 26.26 are very specific (Lombardo, 1998; Ayad, 1999; Zamiti, 1999; Hibou, 1999b). On the resources side, it is well known that the so-called voluntary donations are mostly given under duress. All the firms have to give 2DT per month and per employee to the FNS. They also have to donate large sums at certain moments of the year, such as 7 November (the anniversary of Ben Ali's arrival to power), 8 December (Solidarity Day), during the election period or, more generally, to ensure the authorities' good will. An entrepreneur who does not openly perform his solidarity duty risks difficulties insofar as he would be subject to tax controls, would find it difficult or perhaps impossible to have access to public markets, and would be an ideal victim for

bureaucratic delays and other red-tape. Civil servants have to give a day's earnings every year and peasants have to give 1 per cent of their resources. All Tunisian 'subjects', whether in Tunisia or abroad, receive constant pressure when having papers issued (ID, passport, driver's license) or when seeking other administrative services. But the state also gives a substantial amount to the fund. It is very difficult to know exactly how the 26.26 really earns its money. Officially, the resources of the FNS reached an average of 15 MDT without contributions from the state budget. But many observers question these figures. One estimate indicates the resources of the FNS to be more or less 24 MDT per year, accounting for contributions by enterprises only. That figure is twice the amount of official resources according to the official budget for 1997 (11,7 MDT) (Ben Romdhane cited in Ayad, 1999). Those in the economic milieu estimate these resources at 40 MDT, 38 MDT of which come from the biggest businessmen (Simon, 1999).

On the spending side, it is impossible to have detailed data other than the official information. There is no budget, no beneficiaries list, no chart of management organisation, no pattern of resource distribution, no evaluation of the fund's activities. The Tunisian research centre CERES conducted an evaluation in 1998, but due to political pressure, conflicts between researchers ensued and no final report was published. This opacity does not necessarily mean that money is not distributed: it most certainly is, although in a clientelistic, discretionary (Khiari and Lamoum, 2000), and inefficient way (Zamiti, 1996).

While payments to the fund are onerous for some enterprises, the total amount allocated to the 26.26 is not quantitatively significant insofar as social policies have been diversified through numerous forms of intervention for over three decades. But the visibility of the FNS is explained by the motivations that underlie its implementation. It expresses both a political discourse directed towards the middle classes (Benedict, 1997; Bras, 1996) and the ambition to eliminate the principal 'scourge' that threatens order and discipline: it represents the desire for the political control of the poor and the elimination of Islamists and uses the very methods that Islamists themselves copied from the single-party, as is suggested by the vocabulary and rhetoric used to justify the actions of the FNS.¹⁴ In this sense, it is a way of circumventing the pressures exerted by both the IMF and the World Bank with regards to the decrease in social spending and budget cuts. At the same time it is another instrument of the system of negotiations and settlements between the business community and the presidential palace. The 26.26 reflects a strong correlation between, on the one hand, tolerance of the non-respect of certain rules and, on the other hand, gifts to the 26.26 (Hibou, 1999c); it demonstrates a strong capacity for appropriating and controlling social security and, lastly, it is a manifestation of the 'privatisation of the state', since the obligatory nature of the gift and the absence of any control by public entities allows one to approach the 26.26 as a form of private taxation (Hibou, 1999a).

Despite being instrumentally important, 26.26 cannot be reduced to a mere stratagem: indeed, it reflects a real concern with social problems. Since 1994, Ben Ali brought together more than 20 *Conseils ministériels restreints* (CMR) – which are the real decision-making entities of the regime to review employment, youth, and job training. He launched numerous studies and committees whose goals were to probe questions such as employment, youth, and new technologies. In so doing, Ben Ali demonstrated his awareness of the political risks stemming from unemployment, youth and social tensions, and general discontent¹⁵ and was more acute than the moribund political opposition claimed. And, last but not least, the 26.26 is a symbol

of Ben Ali's personality cult. The FNS is his own creation; he is the only owner of the account (there is no control by Parliament or by the Account Court); and all the donations are made in the name of the President and not in the name of the state, or of the otherwise oft-criticised administration (Camau, 1997).

Above all else, the 26.26 is a mechanism for enforcing order, a tool, which, by eliminating the 'shaded zones', claims to anticipate the inevitable social and economic dangers of poverty. It is likewise a technique of discipline and control that renders manifest the subjection of those who are perceived as its 'objects' and the objectivisation of those who are subjected to its control. In its exercise of power, the 26.26 makes visible those subjects that require surveillance; it turns each individual into a 'case' to be gauged, classified, listed, exemplified, corrected, excluded, or normalised. But like the other mechanisms reviewed in this study, it works only because such techniques are part of networks of power in which individuals circulate. The entrepreneurs I spoke with (but this applies to individuals and families as well), are subjected to the 26.26 but they are also the relays through which it works. As intermediaries of Tunisian state power, individual businessmen may, for instance, enact exactions on salaries; they may negotiate payment in exchange for tax reductions or tax evasion; or they may obtain contracts, access to markets, or administrative in-roads. The 26.26 only functions because it finds an echo in the constant demands by economic actors for protection, aid, and facilitation. Intermediary elites and notables, the upper levels of the professional and social hierarchy, act as indispensable links in the FNS's collection of sums: the entrepreneur applies pressure on his employees; the school principle on teachers, parents, and students; the administrative director on his team of civil servants; the *omda* on the chiefs of Party sub-units (*chefs de cellule du Parti*); the latter on artisans and independent workers.

This process works, moreover, because all requests must pass through the hands of notables, partisan elites and intermediaries officially recognised by central power. 'The tyrant subjugates one person by means of another' (Etienne de la Boétie, 1993:214). Similarly, the public's acceptance of the very principle of the FNS derives from the high value traditionally accorded to practices of solidarity. The latter were remobilised during the 1980s by the Islamist movement, but their legitimacy is rooted in an earlier, apolitical conception of Islam. Principles of redistribution and social development participate in the history of the construction of the Tunisian national state, and the funds, be they private or public, partake in these practices. In the case of the 26.26, 'power transits through individuals, it is not applied to them' (Foucault, 1997:26).

There are other, simultaneous and related processes of statisation and the nationalisation of economic and social phenomena. As we saw above, this is the case for the *mise à niveau* programme and the form of interventionist and centralising liberal reforms. It is also true for the management of Islam (Bras, 2002):¹⁶ the state and the highest Tunisian authorities responded to the rise of Islamist protest by creating numerous state structures for the administration of Islam, producing many norms about Islamic practice which has led to the bureaucratisation of that religion. This is true with regards to salary negotiations (Fehri, 1998; Bedoui, 1990, 2004; Khiari, 2003) which are handled not by employees or labour unions and entrepreneurs or bosses, but by the central administration which reviews them every three years in a highly bureaucratic fashion. It is true for economic success, since all cases of such success are 'naturally' attributed to the administration, the state, and the Tunisian authorities. And it is true for justice (Mamlouk, 2000) which does not function

according to the law, but rather according to social and national protection and to the rationale of the defence of society.

Conclusion

In order to understand the exercise of power in Tunisia, we must put aside paradigms that have structured post-war developmentalist thought, as well as those that inform the present-day Washington Consensus. I have rejected the dualist and technicist accounts of the way in which political power is created and maintained. I have also critiqued a functionalist vision of economic reforms and the link between economic reforms and political systems. Economic reform can be instrumental to a political system, such as that of Tunisia, but not in terms of a global, orchestrated, and highly mastered organisation by the highest authorities or external development banks. Similarly, political control and strategies of repression are not held by President Ben Ali and his entourage, nor by the institutions and networks that are somehow supposedly independent of economic and social mechanisms. Instead, economic and social mechanisms otherwise independent of system of political control simultaneously end up serving logic of domination or even repression. This dynamic resonates well with Michel Foucault's analysis of power (1975:208):

Power ... works like a machine. And if it is true that its pyramidal organisation gives it a 'chief,' it is the entire apparatus that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field. This is such that disciplinary power is both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always attentive, leaving no shaded space and constantly controlling the very people who are supposed to control; and absolutely 'discreet' since it is constantly at work and mostly silent.

Within this sociological analysis of power in Tunisia, however, I have also underscored one mode of government, that of the privatisation of the state. The practice of domination and even repression in Tunisia are hereafter increasingly mobilised by this specific form of governance.

Beatrice Hibou, CNRS – CERI (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches, Internationales – Sciences Po), Paris; e-mail: Hibou@ceri-sciences-po.org. Translated by John Hulsey.

Endnotes

1. CNLT, Rapport sur l'état des libertés en Tunisie, Tunis, miméo, 15 mars 2000; CNLT, Deuxième rapport sur l'état des libertés en Tunisie. Pour la réhabilitation de l'indépendance de la justice, Tunis, miméo, 2002; LTDH, Rapports annuels 2001 et 2002, Tunis, miméo; CNLT, Rapport sur la situation dans les prisons en Tunisie, Tunis, le 20 octobre 1999; LTDH, Les murs du silence. Rapport sur les prisons, Tunis, 2004; Amnesty International, Le cycle de l'injustice, MDE 30/001/2003, London, June 2003.

2. See also the advertising financed directly by the Tunisian government (the MédiaFrance supplement inserted regularly in *Le Monde* or the same supplements in *The Herald Tribune* or *The Financial Times*), as well as those financed indirectly by the large Tunisian companies (eg. the advertising paid by the Poulina group in *Le Monde*, 16 October 1999, in preparation of the elections and selling the merits of a stable and prosperous country).

3. 'It is not democracy that creates development, it is development that creates democracy,' writes Séguin (1999), justifying the official philosophy adopted by Tunisia with regards to the necessarily specific nature of democracy in non-Western and undeveloped countries.

4. Newspapers such as *Le Monde*, included detailed and otherwise interesting reports, such as the series of articles by Catherine Simon that appeared on 21, 22 and 23 October 1999. Paradoxically, human rights organisations also adopt this interpretation and do not extend their critique to the economic realm.
5. Taken from a confidential document written by a European economic agency, the following quotation details, in exhaustive manner, the different reasons to congratulate Tunisia: 'Tunisia has maintained an annual growth rate close to 5 per cent over the last 10 years, while preserving the coherence of its social tissue thanks to an active policy related to health, education, housing, and the modernisation of civil society. The prudence and rigor of its economic policy allows it to maintain these fundamental great equilibriums'.
6. See note 1.
7. Interviews with former political prisoners, family members of detainees, lawyers, and human rights activists, especially during December 2001, December 2002 and December 2003. Citation: Interviews with former political prisoners, family members, lawyers, and human rights activists.
8. Personal communication with Judge Yahyaoui, Tunis, December 2001 and December 2002
9. Nineteenth century's authors are Khayr ed-Din, 1987 and Bin Dhiyf 1871. On Tunisian reformism, Tlili, 1974 and 1984; Bachrouch, 1984; Abdesselem, 1973; Mardin, 2000. On the myth of the 'reformist tradition', Hibou, 2005.
10. This programme has been conceived after the signature of the association agreement with the European Union (Barcelona Agreement, November 1995) even it has a more general ambition with the preparation of the implementation of the new rules of the WTO.
11. Signoles (1985) makes a distinction between, on the one hand, the statist voluntarism (in industrialisation, urbanisation and transformation of the Tunisian space) and, on the other hand, results, efficiency and even actuality of the concrete measures.
12. Bellin (1991) shows that, whatever the discourse and the qualification of the policy, the latter was always characterised by both strong state interventionism and an orientation in favour of the private sector. Waltz (1991) underscores the authoritarian nature of the regime: however, she concludes that there is an inevitable opposition between reforms and authoritarianism and personality cult. I think that current events show how this assumption was (is) naïve.
13. The owner of a laboratory and a number of other pharmacists were arrested under the pretext that they had been selling a pharmaceutical product without proper authorisation. In reality, their arrest was a political manoeuvre on the part of members of Ben Ali's 'clan'. These members had sought to participate in and profit from this flourishing pharmaceutical business, but the company's owner refused. Kamel El Taief, a businessman who had worked closely with Ben Ali during the coup d'état on 7 November, was incarcerated for several days in 2001 for publicly denouncing the president's 'family mafia' and its illicit economic activities.
14. On that score, the Tunisian press is edifying: the role of the FNS is 'to eradicate shadow zones' (FNS propaganda), to pass from 'darkness' to 'light' (*Le Renouveau*, 8 December 1996, which uses religious terms), to 'rescue society's rejected' that were previously attracted to Islamism (*Le Renouveau*, 11 December 1994), and to 'canalize oboles and gifts' (*Le Temps*, 22 March 1993). 'Facing dangers inherent to such situations, which are on the point of idling the national edifice and putting into question the homogeneity of the nation,' the '26.26' should 'reintegrate entire swathes of the national territory' (*La Presse*, 9 December 1996). The objective is less to weaken social inequalities than to fix the fundamental principles of a society anxious to safeguard its indivisibility and whose primary force is its seamless aggregation' (*La Presse*, 9 December 1994).
15. According to INS official statistics, in Tunisia those seeking employment numbered 71,300 per year for the 1996-2000 period; this figure will rise to 79,200 for the 2001-2005 period, 73,200 for the 2006-2010 period, and 53,100 (which is the level of the 1970s) by 2011.
16. Certain citations from central power's discourse give insight into the statist and national nature of control: 'The High Islamic Counsel of the Tunisian Republic will do everything in its powers to preserve the nation, with respect to its religion, from all moral laxity, all confinement, and all that could have a negative influence on the foundations of the authenticity of the nation' (cited by Bras, 1996:234). Islam will be open and modern so as to 'preserve spiritual values ... and oppose the

dangers of closure and extremism, and to conserve the civilisational foundations of the Tunisian personality' (cited by Bras, 1996:237).

Bibliographic Note

- Abdesselem, A.** (1973), *Les Historiens tunisiens des XVIIe, XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. Essai d'histoire culturelle*, Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck and Tunis: Publications de l'université de Tunis, Série Histoire, XI.
- Anderson, L.** (1995), 'The Prospects for democracy in the Arab world', *Middle Eastern Lectures*, 1, 59-71.
- Arendt, H.** (2002), *Les origines du totalitarisme*, Paris: Quarto-Gallimard.
- Ayad, C.** (1999), «Le 26.26, c'est le président Ben Ali!», *Le Soir*, 2 August.
- Baccouche, N.** (2000), «Les implications de l'accord d'association sur le droit fiscal et douanier» (pp.5-27) in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Habib Ayadi*, Tunis: Centre de Publication Universitaire.
- Bachrouch, T.** (1977), *Formation sociale barbaresque et pouvoir à Tunis au XVIIIème siècle*, Tunis: Publications Universitaires de Tunis; (1984), *Le réformisme tunisien. Essai d'interprétation critique*, Cahiers de Tunisie, 127-128.
- Bayart, J.F.** (ed.) (1994), *La Réinvention du capitalisme*, Paris: Karthala.
- Beau, N. & J.P. Tuquoi** (1999), *Notre ami Ben Ali. L'envers du «miracle tunisien»*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Bedoui, A.** (1990), Les relations sociales dans l'entreprise in *L'entreprise et l'environnement social*, Tunis: IACE, 159-223; (2004), *Spécificités et limites du modèle de développement tunisien*. Communication au colloque Démocratie, développement et dialogue social organised by UGTT in Tunis, November.
- Bellin, E.** (1991), 'Tunisian Industrialists and the State' in W. Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia, the Political Economy of Reform*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner; (2002), *Stalled Democracy. Capital, Labor, and the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Benedict, S.** (1997), 'Tunisie, le mirage de l'Etat fort', *Esprit*, 230-231, mars, 27-42.
- Bennani-Chraïbi, M & O. Fillieule** (eds.) (2003), *Résistances et protestations dans les sociétés musulmanes*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Berman, B. & J. Lonsdale** (1992), *Unhappy Valley, Conflict in Kenya & Africa*, Oxford: James Currey.
- Bin Dhiab** (1869), *Ithaf ahl az-zaman bi ahbar muluk Tunus wa 'ahd al 'aman (Chronique des rois de Tunis et du Pacte fondamental)*.
- Boetie, E. de la** (1993), *Le Discours de la servitude volontaire*, Paris: Payot.
- Bras, J. P.** (1996), Tunisie: Ben Ali et sa classe moyenne, *Pôles*, 1, 174-195; (1999), Les paradoxes de la parabole: images et identités au Maghreb, *Hermès*, 23-24, 235-242; (2002), 'L'islam administré: illustrations tunisiennes' in M. Kerrou (ed.), *Public et privé en Islam*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 227-246.
- Brown, L.C.** (1974), *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey (1837-1855)*, Princeton University Press.
- Camau, M.** (ed.) (1987), *La Tunisie au présent. Une modernité au dessus de tout soupçon?* Paris: Editions du CNRS; (1990), 'Le Maghreb' in M. Flory, R. Mantran, B. Korany, M. Camau et P. Agate, *Les régimes politiques arabes*, Paris: PUF; (1997), 'D'une République à l'autre. Refondation politique et aléas de la transition libérale', *Monde arabe*, Maghreb-Machreck, 157, 3-16.
- Camau, M. & V. Geisser** (2003), *Le Syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Cassarino, J. P.** (1999), 'The EU-Tunisian Association Agreement and Tunisia's Structural Reform Program', *Middle East Journal*, 53 (1), 59-74 ; (2000), *Tunisian New Entrepreneurs and their Past Experiences of Migration in Europe: Resource Mobilisation, Networks and Hidden Disaffection*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Chaabane, S.** (1996), *Ben Ali et la voie pluraliste en Tunisie*, Tunis: CERES.
- Chater, K.** (1984), *Dépendance et mutations précoloniales. La Régence de Tunis de 1815 à 1857*, Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines, série Histoire, XXVIII.
- Chebabi, H. E. & J. Linz** (eds.) (1998), *Sultanistic Regimes*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Cherif, M. H.** (1986), *Pouvoir et société dans la Tunisie de H'usayn Bin Ali (1705-1740)*, Tunis: Publication de l'Université de Tunis, vol.2.
- Chirac, J.** (1999), 'Conférence des Ambassadeurs' in *Le Monde*, 26 August.
- Chouikha, L.** (2002), 'Autoritarisme étatique et débrouillardise individuelle, arts de faire, paraboles, Internet, comme formes de résistance voire de contestation' in O. Lamoum & B. Ravenel (eds.), *La Tunisie de Ben Ali, la société contre le régime*, Paris: L'Harmattan, Les Cahiers de Confluences.
- Dakhli, J.** (1990), *L'oubli de la cité*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Daoud, Z.** (1996), 'Tunisie, chronique intérieure', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* 1994, CNRS Edition.
- Fehri, H.** (1998), 'Economie politique de la réforme: de la tyrannie du statu quo à l'ajustement structurel. Annales d'économie et de gestion', 5 (10), 81-122.
- Foucault, M.** (1975), *Surveiller et punir*, Paris: Gallimard; (1997), *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1976*. Paris: Gallimard et Le Seuil; (1999), *Les Anormaux, Cours au Collège de France 1974-1975*, Paris: Gallimard et Le Seuil.
- Ganiage, J.** (1959), *Les Origines du Protectorat français en Tunisie (1861-1881)*. Paris: PUF.
- Henia, A.** (1980), *Le Grid, ses rapports avec le Beylik de Tunis (1676-1840)*, Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis.
- Henry, C. M.** (1996), *The Mediterranean Debt Crescent. Money and Power in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida
- Henry, C. M. & R. Springborg** (2001), *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hibou, B.** (ed.) (1998), 'Retrait ou redéploiement de l'Etat?', *Critique internationale*, 1, 128-194; (1999a), 'De la privatisation de l'économie à la privatisation de l'Etat' in B. Hibou (ed.), *La privatisation des Etats*, Paris: Karthala;
- (1999b), 'Les marges de manœuvre d'un bon élève économique: la Tunisie de Ben Ali', *Les Etudes du CERI*, 60; (1999c), 'Tunisie: le coût d'un miracle économique', *Critique internationale*, 4, 48-56; (ed.) (1999d), *La privatisation des Etats*, Paris: Karthala (in english translation: (ed.) (2004), *Privatising the State*, London: Hurst & Co and New York: Columbia; (ed.) (1999e), 'L'Etat en voie de privatisation', *Politique africaine*, 73, 6-121;
- (2003), 'Fiscal trajectory in Morocco and Tunisia' in S. Heydemann (ed.), *Economic Networks and the Political Economy of Fiscal Reform in the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press;
- (2005), 'Tunisie: d'un réformisme à l'autre' in J.F. Bayart, R. Bertrand, T. Gordadze, B. Hibou & F. Mengin, *Legs colonial et gouvernance contemporaine*, vol. 1, Paris: FASOPO, December, 209-263.
- (2006), *Surveiller et réformer. Economie politique de la servitude volontaire en Tunisie*, Paris: La Découverte (to be published in October).
- Khayr Ed Din** (1867), *Aqawam-al-masalik fi ma'rifat ahwal-al-mamalik*, Traduction de l'introduction en français en 1868; *Essai sur les réformes nécessaires aux pays musulmans*.
- Khiri, S.** (2003), *Tunisie, le délitement de la cité. Coercition, consentement, résistance*, Paris: Karthala.
- Khiri, S. & O. Lamoum** (2000) (1998), 'Le Zaïm et l'Artisan: de Bourguiba à Ben Ali', *Annuaire du Nord de l'Afrique*, XXXVII, 377-396.
- Krichen, A.** (1987), 'La fracture de l'Intelligentisia. Problèmes de la langue et de la culture nationales' in M. Camau (ed.), *La Tunisie au présent*. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Lamoum, O.** (2001), 'La politique étrangère de la France face à la montée de l'islamisme: Algérie, Tunisie, 1987-1995', Ph.D. dissertation. Paris: Université Paris VIII, December
- Lamoum, O. & B. Ravenel** (dir.) (2002), *La Tunisie de Ben Ali. La société contre le régime*. Paris, L'Harmattan, Les Cahiers de Confluences.
- Larif, A.** (1991), 'Changement dans la symbolique du pouvoir en Tunisie' in M. Camau (ed.), *Les changements politiques au Maghreb*, Paris: CNRS.
- Linz, J. J. & A. Stepan** (1996), *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lombardo, S.** (1998), *Un printemps tunisien. Destins croisés d'un peuple et de son président*. Marseille: Editions Autres Temps.
- Mamlouk, A.** (2000), 'Commentaire de l'arrêt n°69197 du 6 octobre 2000 de la Cour d'appel de Tunis', *Revue tunisienne de droit*, Tunis: Centre de publication universitaire, 463-475.
- Mardin, S.** (2000), *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

- Mbougueng, V.** (1999), *Ben Ali et le modèle tunisien*, Paris, Les Editions de l'Orient.
- Minard, P.** (1998), *La Fortune du colbertisme. Etat et industrie dans la France des Lumières*, Paris: Fayard
- Murphy, E.** (1999), *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia. From Bourguiba to Ben Ali*, London: Macmillan & New York: St.Martin's Press.
- Ricoeur, P.** (1983), 'Preface to H. Arendt', *La Condition de l'Homme moderne*, Paris: Calman-Levy, Pocket.
- Seguin, P.** (1999), *Le Monde*, 30 October.
- Signoles, P.** (1985), 'Industrialisation, urbanisation et mutations de l'espace tunisien in R. Baduel' (ed.), *Etats, territoires et terroirs au Maghreb*. Paris: Editions du CNRS, 277-306.
- Simon, C.** (1999), *Le Monde*, 21, 22 and 23 October; 'Les appétits d'un clan', *Le Monde*, 22 October.
- Tlili, B.** (1974), *Les rapports culturels et idéologiques entre l'Orient et l'Occident en Tunisie au XIXème siècle (1830-1880)*. Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis; (1984), *Nationalismes, socialisme et syndicalisme dans le Maghreb des années 1919-1934*. Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis.
- Waltz, S.** (1991), 'Clientelism and reform in Ben Ali's Tunisia' in W. Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia, the Political Economy of Reform*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 29-44.
- Zamiti, K.** (1996), 'Le fonds de solidarité nationale: pour une approche sociologique du politique', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 35, 705-712.
-