

Anne Wolf

# POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

The History of Ennahda





‘Anne Wolf’s masterly book fills a serious gap in the literature: a cool-headed and rigorously researched history of Ennahda, one of the foremost political actors in shaping Tunisia’s past and future.’

– François Burgat, Senior Research Fellow at the  
French National Centre for Scientific Research and  
author of *Islamism in the Shadow of Al-Qaeda*

‘This outstanding study bridges the gap between the origins, ideology and evolution of Ennahda from Islamist opposition to a party in government in post-revolutionary Tunisia. Comprehensive and authoritative, Wolf’s book is also compelling reading based on years of field work and interviews with both partisans and critics of the most successful Muslim democratic party in the twenty-first century.’

– Eugene Rogan, Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History,  
University of Oxford

‘This is a thorough, pioneering, reflective history of Ennahda that contextualises the unique evolution of the group since its inception. It’s a solid, compelling book that is essential reading for anyone interested in the study of political Islam in the Arab world, providing a critical, fresh angle on the issue.’

– Lina Khatib, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme,  
Chatham House

‘Anne Wolf has given us a detailed and highly readable account of Ennahda that goes far beyond its current role as one of the major players in Tunisian politics. In her meticulous and well-grounded analysis of Ennahda’s origins she has succeeded in intertwining its story with that of the Tunisian state, and with the role of Islam in Tunisian society. By taking political and historical contexts seriously, she has provided us with an excellent starting point for understanding key aspects of Tunisia’s present predicament.’

– Charles Tripp, Professor of Middle East Politics, SOAS,  
University of London

‘Based on extensive field research, Wolf’s book details the historical development and rise of Ennahda. Timely, thorough, and thoughtful, it brilliantly highlights the evolution of its ideological worldview, goals and strategies. It also diligently captures its dilemmas in Tunisia’s post-authoritarian era. Wolf’s study is an indispensable tool to all those interested in understanding the complex trajectory of the contemporary Tunisian Islamists. It is a commendable contribution to the literature on mainstream Middle Eastern Islamist movements.’

– Nouredine Jebnoun, Adjunct Assistant Professor,  
Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS), Georgetown University

‘Much has been written about the politics of the Ennahdha movement but—until now—very little about its history. Anne Wolf’s study remedies perfectly this absence with its clear, meticulously researched narrative that sets out and explains the remarkable rise, repression and survival of what is perhaps the Arab world’s most genuinely successful and democratic Islamist movement. Reproducing key texts from the movement and drawing together existing literature supplemented with extensive interviews with supporters and leading figures of the movement, Anne Wolf has produced what will become the standard reference work on the topic.’

– Michael Willis, King Mohamed VI Fellow in Moroccan and Mediterranean Studies, St Antony’s College, Oxford University

‘In addition to placing the movement at the heart of Tunisia’s democratic transition, Anne Wolf’s study of Ennahda—the country’s ‘Muslim Democrat’ party—has the singular virtue of showing how it is also a reflection of the country’s Islamic and Arab identity, stretching back to pre-colonial times.’

– George Joffé, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge

‘Anne Wolf goes beyond the ideological prejudices that pertain to “islamism”; she adopts a critical and rigorous approach to the history of Ennahda and shows that “islamists”, like any other ideological activists, are prone to change and mature, draw the lessons of the past, analyse the context and at the end enter mainstream politics, contributing both to stabilisation and democratisation. A sound, timely and objective approach to a movement that is becoming both a model and a key actor for any peaceful transition towards democracy in the Arab world.’

– Olivier Roy, Professor, European University Institute and author of *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*

‘This study is an extremely timely corrective to characterisations of political Islamic movements as expounding essentialist ideologies divorced from their contextual roots. Wolf’s highly readable and well-researched account of Ennahda could not have been better chosen to chart the diverse influences and trajectories of a movement challenged by the contemporary exercise of political power.’

– Clare Spencer, Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme and 2nd Century Initiative, Chatham House

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ANNE WOLF

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*The History of Ennahda*

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## CONTENTS

<i>Glossary</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>A note on transliteration</i>	xiii
<i>'Who's Who?' in Ennahda</i>	xv
Introduction	1
1. Beyond the Secular Myth	11
<i>Early reforms</i>	12
<i>Resisting innovation?</i>	15
<i>Thriving pan-Islamism</i>	17
<i>Temporary unity</i>	20
<i>A leadership struggle</i>	22
2. Tunisia's Muslim Brotherhood?	27
<i>The fall of the religious elite</i>	28
<i>Al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya</i>	31
<i>Towards a countrywide movement</i>	36
<i>Campus wars</i>	42
<i>The Progressive Islamists leave the movement</i>	45
<i>The Iranian factor</i>	48
3. Plotting Against the Regime	53
<i>The failure of reconciliation</i>	54
<i>Islamism thrives despite repression</i>	57
<i>A short amnesty</i>	61
<i>Escalating violence</i>	63
<i>Ben Ali: The beginning of a new era?</i>	66

## CONTENTS

<i>Foiled again</i>	70
<i>The ‘plot’</i>	73
<i>Mourou’s turnaround</i>	76
4. The Struggle for Survival	79
<i>The experience of prison</i>	80
<i>The plight of Ennahda women</i>	83
<i>The exile movement</i>	86
<i>Information warfare</i>	89
<i>Embracing non-violence</i>	93
<i>Rachid Ghannouchi: a ‘democratic Islamist’?</i>	95
<i>Allying with secular forces</i>	98
<i>The 18 October Movement</i>	101
<i>Towards reconciliation with Ben Ali?</i>	103
5. An Islamic Revival	107
<i>A religious tide</i>	108
<i>Carrots for Muslims, sticks for ‘Islamists’</i>	111
<i>War against the hijab</i>	113
<i>Ennahda’s underground movement</i>	114
<i>Reorganising the student wing</i>	119
<i>The rise of Salafism</i>	122
<i>Fighting the regime</i>	125
6. Reshaping Tunisian identity	129
<i>Ennahda’s comeback</i>	130
<i>Dominating politics</i>	134
<i>The struggle over Islam</i>	138
<i>Freedom of expression or blasphemy trials?</i>	142
<i>Salafis unchained</i>	143
<i>Contesting campuses</i>	147
<i>The temptations of jihadism</i>	149
<i>The fall of the Troika</i>	152
<i>Towards post-Islamism?</i>	156
Conclusion	163
Appendix 1: Ennahda Electoral Programme 2011	169
Appendix 2: Statute of the Ennahda Movement, July 2012	175
Appendix 3: Final Declaration of the Eighth Congress of Ennahda, May 2007	189

## CONTENTS

Appendix 4: Final Declaration of the Seventh Congress of Ennahda, 3 April 2001	199
Appendix 5: Account of an Ennahda Campaign Event in the Electoral District of Tunis	209
Appendix 6: Selected Interviews	211
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	249
<i>Index</i>	255



## GLOSSARY

Ansar al-Shari‘a	Tunisian Salafi movement, designated a terrorist group in 2013
<i>da‘wa</i>	the proselytising and preaching of Islam
fatwa	individual legal opinion
Hanafi school	one of the four law schools of Sunni Islam
<i>hijab</i>	headscarf worn by Muslim women
<i>ijtihad</i>	the exercise of independent reasoning in the interpretation of Islamic law
imam	prayer leader in mosque
jihad	literally, to strive; can mean either a personal spiritual struggle against sin or a holy war
Katibat ‘Uqba ibn Nafi	jihadi cell with ties to Ansar al-Shari‘a and al-Qa‘ida
Maliki school	one of the four schools of Sunni Islam, especially popular in North Africa
<i>mujahidin</i>	holy warriors
Muslim Brotherhood	(al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) organisation first created in Egypt, which aims to found an ideal Islamic state
<i>musta‘afin</i>	the poor, disinherited, or oppressed
<i>mustakbirin</i>	the arrogant or oppressors
<i>niqab</i>	full-face veil
Salafism	an ultra-conservative trend within modern Islam

## GLOSSARY

<i>sefsari</i>	white cloth covering the entire body, the traditional veil of Tunisian women
<i>shari‘a</i>	Islamic law
<i>shura</i>	consultation
Sufism	Islamic mysticism; its followers are divided up into various sects or orders
<i>sunna</i>	the verbally transmitted deeds and sayings of the Prophet
<i>tajdid</i>	renewal
<i>takfir</i>	accusing people of apostasy or unbelief
<i>taqlid</i>	an uncritical dependence on past precedent
‘ <i>ulama</i>	Islamic scholars
<i>umma</i>	the Islamic community
<i>zabiba</i>	‘prayer bump’: a mark on the forehead, resulting from regular contact with a prayer mat

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## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

A key challenge of transliterating Arabic into English is that no unified system exists for representing the many dialects that exist in the Arab world. Tunisians themselves often use French-based transliterations owing to the importance of this language, which was introduced during the French Protectorate over the country. For colloquial Tunisian Arabic, names, and places, I have tried to opt for this French-based transliteration to reflect the local variations and nuances in language. This means, for example, that the Arabic letter ش is transliterated as 'ch' rather than 'sh'. Moreover, names of well-known movements and groups mirror general usage. For example, I used 'Ennahda' rather than 'Ennahdha' or 'al-Nahda'. Where local transliterations are inconsistent, the most commonly used version was employed. For sources derived from Modern Standard Arabic, such as books and newspapers, and names of people and organisations in other Arab-speaking countries, I tended to use a simplified version of the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Whenever Arabic or French terms have become commonly used in English, I opted for the English form in the hope of making this book more accessible to general readers. In citations I preserved the transliterations that were employed in the original documents.



## ‘WHO’S WHO?’ IN ENNAHDA

### *Key leaders*

#### Sadok Chourou (b. 1952)

Originally from Midoun, a village in the north-east of Djerba, Chourou graduated with a Ph.D. in chemistry from the Faculty of Sciences in Tunis, and taught at the Faculty of Medicine until he was arrested in 1991 for belonging to Ennahda. As a student, Chourou was a founding member of the General Union of Tunisian Students. In the 1980s he joined the Shura Council and was elected leader of the Islamist movement in 1988, a position which he held until his arrest in 1991. Chourou was imprisoned for eighteen years, of which he spent thirteen in solitary confinement. In prison he was tortured to the extent that he was hospitalised because of his physical condition. He was released in October 2010 and elected Ennahda lawmaker in the Constituent Assembly representing the district of Ben Arous. In January 2012 he caused a controversy during a plenary session when he cited verses of the Qur’an inciting the repression of demonstrators.

#### Habib Ellouze (b. 1953)

Ellouze pursued his studies at the Faculty of Economic Science in the city of Sfax, where he was born. He is a founding member of the Islamist movement and in 1981 he was sentenced to ten years in prison

## ‘WHO’S WHO?’ IN ENNAHDA

for belonging to it, but managed to flee to Algeria and only returned in 1984 during a short amnesty. Ellouze led Ennahda’s Shura Council between 1988 and 1991, and headed the movement from June 1991 until his arrest in September that year. He was elected to the 2011 Constituent Assembly representing the electoral district of Sfax 2. Together with fellow lawmaker Sadok Chourou, he has been very critical of Ennahda’s more recent political and ideological development. In particular, he opposed the party’s decision not to support a reference to *shari‘a* in the Constitution alongside its rapprochement with Nidaa Tounes. Ellouze has called for a revival of Ennahda’s socio-cultural activities and preaching.

### Hmida Ennaifer (b. 1942)

Born in Tunis, Ennaifer received a doctorate from the University of Tunis and from the Sorbonne in Paris, where he entertained close relations to Rachid Ghannouchi. Initially influenced by pan-Arab ideology, he became swayed by Islamism in the 1960s and co-founded the Islamist movement together with Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou, representing the movement’s intellectual wing. Ennaifer was an editor of its journal, *al-Ma‘rifa*. In 1979 he split from the movement because he opposed its increasing ideological and structural ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Together with other activists who followed him, Ennaifer subsequently founded the Progressive Islamists. In 1982 they launched the intellectual magazine *15\*21*, which called for extensive Islamic reforms in line with Tunisia’s cultural heritage. In the 1980s Ennaifer also became engaged in cross-religious dialogue, joining the Islamo-Christian Research Group. After the uprisings, in May 2013 he launched the Tunisian League for Culture and Plurality. Even though he is no longer active in politics, many of Ennaifer’s early ideas have influenced the Islamist movement. Following the uprisings, Ennahda has come to embrace many of the positions he had already defended in the 1970s.

### Rachid Ghannouchi (b. 1941)

Ghannouchi is from the southern village of El Hamma, about 30 kilometres west of Gabes. In 1956 he graduated in theology from the

## ‘WHO’S WHO?’ IN ENNAHDA

University of Zaytouna. In 1964 he left for Egypt but, prevented from pursuing his studies there, he travelled to Syria, where he obtained a diploma in philosophy. In Damascus he became close to the Muslim Brotherhood and embraced political Islam. In 1968 Ghannouchi enrolled at the Sorbonne in Paris. There he joined the Pakistani Jama‘at al-Tabligh, which focused upon the proselytising and preaching of Islam. On returning to Tunisia, he intensified his religious activities and with Abdelfattah Mourou and Hmida Ennaifer became the co-founder of the Islamist movement, which he subsequently headed. He was imprisoned from 1981 to 1984. After his release he again became leader of the Islamist movement until 1987, when he was once more jailed. He was given amnesty by President Ben Ali, who took power the same year. Ghannouchi sought exile in Algeria in 1989, then in Sudan, before being granted refugee status in the UK in 1993. From London he led the Islamist movement, a function he retained upon returning to Tunisia in 2010. Ghannouchi has become Ennahda’s central ideologue, unifying force, and strategist.

### Hamadi Jebali (b. 1949)

Originally from Sousse, Jebali first studied mechanical engineering at the University of Tunis and then specialised in photovoltaic engineering in France, where he graduated in 1978. Upon returning to Tunisia he joined the Islamist movement. Following a wave of arrests of its central figureheads, in 1981 Jebali was promoted to the movement’s head, a position he retained until its leaders were liberated in 1984. In 1989 Jebali became editor-in-chief of Ennahda’s weekly newspaper *al-Fajr*, but the same year was sentenced to prison for twelve months on charges of defamation. In 1992 he was sentenced to sixteen years in jail, where, in 2002, he went on hunger strike. He was pardoned by the president in 2006. Together with other released prisoners, Jebali subsequently sought to restructure Ennahda clandestinely. He became prime minister after the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections. In March 2013 he presented his resignation following the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a decision that enhanced his standing both domestically and internationally.

## ‘WHO’S WHO?’ IN ENNAHDA

### Salah Karker (1948–2012)

Karker hailed from the Sahel village of Bodheur and was a founding member of the Islamist movement. He held a diploma in economy from the University of Tunis and a Ph.D. in statistics. In 1981 he was sentenced to ten years in prison for his religious activities, and was only released during an amnesty in 1984. In the 1980s he was very critical of the concept of democracy and was involved in the preparation of a coup against President Habib Bourguiba in 1987. In 1988 he was granted political asylum in France. His ambiguous stance on the use of violence led to his exclusion from Ennahda in the 1990s. Karker was also placed under house arrest by the French authorities. During this time he changed his political views, and even came to argue that Islamists should focus solely upon socio-cultural activities because their political project had failed. He suffered a severe stroke in 2005. In June 2012 he returned to Tunisia, where he passed away four months later.

### Meherzia Labidi (b. 1963)

Labidi, who is from Hammamet, graduated from the *École Normale Supérieure* in Sousse in 1986 and subsequently studied translation and interpretation at the Sorbonne in Paris. There she became a leading figure in inter-cultural and religious communication, leading the Global Women of Faith Network from 2006. In 2009 she became a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders. Many of her family members had been active within Ennahda, and she joined the movement after the uprisings. In October 2011 she was elected to the Constituent Assembly representing the electoral district of France 1 and subsequently became the assembly’s vice-president. During general elections in 2014 she was again elected to parliament, representing the electoral district of Nabeul 2. Labidi represents a new generation of Ennahda women seeking a political leadership role. Despite some initial opposition from the movement’s most conservative sections, Labidi has managed to become one of Ennahda’s most established and well-known figureheads.

## 'WHO'S WHO?' IN ENNAHDA

Ali Larayedh (b. 1955)

Larayedh, who hails from the southern city of Medenine, graduated in 1976 with a degree in engineering from the Merchant Navy School in Sousse. Shortly afterwards he joined the Islamist movement and headed the Shura Council between 1982 and 1986. He also led its Political Bureau from 1988 until 1990, when he was arrested. In 1992 he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, of which he spent ten in solitary confinement. After his release he sought to re-establish Ennahda's structures clandestinely. In parallel to these endeavours, he engaged in civil society activism, including with other opposition forces in the 18 October Movement. Post-uprising, Larayedh has become one of Ennahda's most high-profile politicians and is a celebrated figurehead amongst its rank and file. Between December 2011 and March 2013 he was interior minister, then prime minister until January 2014. In the October 2014 ballot he was elected lawmaker representing the electoral district of Tunis 1. Once a more confrontational activist, he has become one of Ennahda's most pragmatic leaders.

Abdelfattah Mourou (b. 1948)

Mourou went to high school at the prestigious Sadiki College in the capital, Tunis, where he was born, and later studied law at the University of Tunis, where he received a degree in law and Islamic Studies. In his youth he joined the Madaniyya Sufi order, which he frequented until the age of eighteen. Later he became active in the Pakistani Jama'at al-Tabligh branch in Tunis. He is a co-founder of the Islamist movement with Rachid Ghannouchi and Hmida Ennaifer, and was an editor of its erstwhile journal, *al-Ma'rifa*. In 1981 he was arrested and spent two years in prison. In 1991, in response to the violence linked to some Ennahda members, Mourou split from the organisation, accusing its leaders of inciting the use of force. He sought to create an alternative party but did not receive a licence for it. After the uprisings he first sought election to the Constituent Assembly as an independent candidate, but this was unsuccessful so he re-joined Ennahda and became its vice-president in July 2012. In 2014 he was elected Member of Parliament in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People and became its first vice-president. Mourou is Ennahda's

## 'WHO'S WHO?' IN ENNAHDA

most outspoken leader, and is noted for publicly criticising the organisation, something that has earned him the respect of opposition forces but which is resented by the movement's rank and file.

### *Legendary activists*

#### Sahbi Atig (b. 1959)

From Matmata in southern Tunisia, Atig studied at the Faculty of Mathematics and Science in Tunis. He also received a diploma in theology from Zaytouna University. He was arrested in 1987 and again in 1991 while an Ennahda Executive Bureau member. Atig spent over sixteen years in prison, four of them in solitary confinement. He was elected to the Constituent Assembly representing the constituency of Ariana and became head of Ennahda's parliamentary group. In October 2014 he was elected to the Assembly of the Representatives of the People.

#### Amel Azzouz (b. 1963)

Azzouz, who hails from Gabes, studied English language and literature at the University of Sousse and then at the Manouba University, west of Tunis. She subsequently taught English. At university she was an activist in the General Union of Tunisian Students. She stopped her Ennahda activities in 1991 when her husband was imprisoned. Azzouz was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 2011 and subsequently became Rapporteur of the Commission of Educational Affairs. In 2015 she was nominated State Secretary for International Cooperation for the government of Habib Essid. She is an outspoken personality and has become a central figure in promoting a moderate and female-friendly picture of Ennahda.

#### Mohammed Chammam (b. 1951)

From Gabes, Chammam is one of the most secretive personalities within Ennahda. He had a central role in the movement's attempt to overthrow the Bourguiba regime in 1987. Chammam was fiercely persecuted by

## ‘WHO’S WHO?’ IN ENNAHDA

both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. In 1990 he fled with his wife and three children to Algeria and later received asylum in Sweden, where he currently resides. He is also a member of Ennahda’s Shura Council.

### Abdelhamid Jlassi (b. 1960)

An engineer from a small agricultural town in Nabeul, Jlassi has been one of the Islamist movement’s central leaders. In 1991 he was sent to prison, where he spent the next sixteen years. After his release he participated in clandestinely restructuring Ennahda. Following the uprisings, Jlassi was nominated head of the movement’s Election Committee. He was responsible for restructuring Ennahda throughout Tunisia prior to the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections. He also became a member of Ennahda’s Executive Bureau and rose to the position of vice-president.

### Abdellatif Mekki (b. 1962)

Born in the north-western city of El Ksour, Mekki earned a degree in biochemistry and is a doctor. Whilst at university, he was general secretary of the General Union of Tunisian Students. Mekki was arrested in 1987 and again in 1991, when he was sentenced to ten years in prison. After the uprisings he was elected lawmaker in the Constituent Assembly for the electoral district of El Kef. In December 2011 he became minister of health. He was re-elected as a Member of Parliament during the October 2014 legislative elections.

### Ajmi Ourimi (b. 1962)

From Sousse, Ourimi rose in the 1980s to become one of the Islamists’ most prominent university leaders. He was imprisoned in 1987, and again in 1991, mostly in solitary confinement. He was released in July 2007. After the uprisings he continued his studies, pursuing a degree in philosophy at the Faculty of Human Sciences in Tunis, once again joining the leadership of Ennahda. He became a member of its Executive Office and, in September 2013, communications and media officer. Ourimi has a reputation for being one of the most flexible and self-critical Ennahda activists.

## 'WHO'S WHO?' IN ENNAHDA

### *Rising stars*

#### Zied Boumakhla (b. 1984)

Boumakhla was born in southern Tataouine into a family of Ennahda activists. In the 2000s he participated in the clandestine restructuring of the movement at the university level. He graduated from the Faculty of Science in Tunis with a Master's degree in biotechnology. Owing to his political activities, he was regularly harassed by the authorities. After the uprisings Boumakhla became head of Ennahda's youth wing and a member of the Shura Council. In 2012 he also became a member of the executive office of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations.

#### Yusra Ghannouchi (b. 1978)

Daughter of Ennahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi, Yusra Ghannouchi was born in Tunis but lived most of her life in London. After the 2010–11 uprisings she became the International Spokesperson of Ennahda and a member of its external relations committee. In these functions she frequently represents the movement during international conferences and on the English-speaking media. Her international activities far exceed her influence within Tunisia. Even after the uprisings Ghannouchi has continued to live mostly in London. She holds a Master's in Astrophysics and a Ph.D. from London University's School of Oriental and African Studies.

#### Zied Ladhari (b. 1975)

Ladhari, who hails from Sousse, graduated from the Faculty of Law and Politics in Tunis and later received a degree in law at the Sorbonne. He was on the Ennahda list for the district of Sousse during the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections and after being elected was promoted to spokesperson in 2013. Ladhari was again elected lawmaker during the 2014 legislative elections, and in February 2015 became minister of employment and professional training. His rapid political ascent occurred as Ennahda's leadership has promoted its most pragmatic figures, such as Ladhari, to key party posts.

## 'WHO'S WHO?' IN ENNAHDA

Sayida Ounissi (b. 1987)

Born in Tunis, Ounissi fled with her family to France in 1993. She studied political science at the Sorbonne in Paris and is a former vice-president of the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations. In 2014 she was the youngest candidate elected to the National Assembly for the electoral district of Northern France and was later promoted to secretary of state for vocational training and entrepreneurship in Tunisia. Ounissi represents a new generation of pragmatic and outspoken young women who have joined Ennahda.

### *Salafi Landscape*

Bechir Ben Hassan (b. 1973)

Ben Hassan is a leader of Tunisia's 'scripturalist' Salafis, who reject any kind of violence. Originally from Msaken, Ben Hassan studied theology in Saudi Arabia. His Wahhabi-inspired doctrine led him to adopt an ultra-conservative position in Tunisia following the uprisings. For example, he has proposed that women travelling in Tunisia should be accompanied by male guardians. In 2013 Ben Hassan was arrested in Morocco after an international arrest warrant was issued against him for having kidnapped his children from their mother, a French citizen.

Seifallah Ben Hassine (1965–2015)

Better known under his *nom de guerre* Abou Iyadh, Ben Hassine, who hailed from Menzel Bourguiba, was the head of Tunisia's main Salafi platform, Ansar al-Shari'a (Partisans of *shari'a*), which he created after the uprisings. In the 1980s he was active in the Tunisian Islamic Front. He also fought in Afghanistan, where he allegedly met Osama Bin Laden. Subsequently, he created the Armed Islamic Group. Following the criminalisation of Ansar al-Shari'a, Ben Hassine fled to neighbouring Libya. In June 2015 Libyan authorities announced that he had been killed in an American airstrike.

## 'WHO'S WHO?' IN ENNAHDA

al-Khatib al-Idrisi (b. 1953/4)

Al-Idrisi, one of the most famous Salafi clerics from the central city of Sidi Bouzid, was influenced by Wahhabi ideology when studying Islamic law in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and early 1990s. He returned to Tunisia in 1994, at a time when Salafism was gaining in prominence there. He was imprisoned between 2007 and 2009 and charged with supporting the Soliman group, which plotted attacks against state institutions, accusations he denied.

Mohammed Khouja (b. 1950)

Holder of a Ph.D. in nutrition, Khouja joined al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya in the 1960s. He split from the movement in 1981 when its leaders applied for a party licence. In 1987, together with other activists, he created the Tunisian Islamic Front. After the uprisings Khouja became a leader of the Salafi Reform Front Party, which called for the implementation of Islamic law. The party accepts multi-party democracy and has an inherently national outlook, in contrast to the transnational agenda of Ansar al-Shari'a.





## INTRODUCTION

*We veiled women used to be nothing. We were treated worse than dogs. Finally I am starting to feel normal again. I can breathe.*

Houda from Tunis, October 2011

This book seeks to understand the evolution of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda (Renaissance) movement from a beginning in the 1960s as a diffuse socio-cultural trend into one of the country's most influential political actors, even claiming a regional leadership role. It is the first comprehensive study of the Tunisian Islamists, as it was previously impossible to conduct thorough research into their organisation, which was banned until popular uprisings in 2010–11 forced long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali out of power and replaced his regime with a nascent democracy. After decades of repression many devout Muslims like Houda, quoted above, experienced for the first time a space of freedom. In a period of rapid transformation in which Tunisians are exploring their newly gained rights, understanding the stance of the Islamists is of utmost importance.

The surge of Ennahda alongside the smaller and more conservative Salafi movement after the fall of Ben Ali stood in sharp contrast with Tunisia's long-standing image as a fortress of 'secularism'. Indeed, after independence in 1956, the country's first president, Habib Bourguiba, dismantled the traditional religious establishment, once the centre of Islamic scholarship and teaching in the Maghrib, and declared Tunisia 'part of the western world'.<sup>1</sup> He launched modernisation reforms,

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

including a pioneering set of laws to strengthen women's rights, which bestowed on the country a secular face and strengthened its ties to Europe and the USA, while cracking down on Islamist challengers, an approach Ben Ali reinforced when he took power through a bloodless coup in 1987. Although religion never disappeared during either regime, political expressions of Islam were pushed underground.

The porosity of the secular façade came strikingly to the fore when Tunisia's first free elections in October 2011 saw a landslide victory for Ennahda, which gained 37 per cent of the vote; by contrast, the eight next most successful parties together received about 35 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Just months before the elections, Ennahda followers had managed to establish 2,064 offices throughout the country,<sup>3</sup> illustrating the extent to which the movement's support base had been entrenched in literally every neighbourhood. Although Ennahda subsequently lost some of its followers, parliamentary ballots in 2014 again confirmed the Islamists as a major player which will continue to shape the country's political and socio-cultural trajectories in the years to come.

However, winning the election in 2011 was easy for Ennahda compared to the challenge of changing its image among the non-Islamist portions of society. For decades the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes had been pursuing a policy that denounced adherents of the movement as a violent and regressive segment of society. An American diplomat affirmed in 2005 that 'the [government] has been waging a war of words with religious elements, characterising Muslims as "Islamists" and "terrorists"'. He concluded: 'This policy has been quite successful, as the two terms are used practically interchangeably in Tunisia today.'<sup>4</sup> Ennahda became the antithesis of everything the government claimed to represent: modernisation, women's rights, stability, as well as Tunisia's supposedly 'reformist' tradition according to which the country holds a particularly moderate and open legacy. Consequently many Tunisians came to view their country as being divided between two kinds of people. For example, a woman in her fifties, who hails from the wealthy northern Tunis suburb Gammarth and used to be an active member of Ben Ali's party, affirmed to me that Tunisian society is split between 'progressives and retrogrades [or] modernists and obscurantists'.<sup>5</sup>

Nowadays many non-Islamist or 'secular' Tunisians<sup>6</sup> continue to struggle to come to terms with the idea that Ennahda activists have

## INTRODUCTION

come to form an integral and vocal part of their society. They typically denounce them as a movement external to Tunisia that has been ‘imported’ from the more openly religious Gulf countries or Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Through powerful positions in politics, the economy, media, and administration many of them proclaim that Ennahda will lead the country back to the ‘Middle Ages’<sup>8</sup> and are keen to propagate the idea of ‘secular Tunisia’. Yet this stands at odds with the country’s historical reality. Indeed, although forced underground for much of the four decades before the 2010–11 uprisings, a strong religious current has coexisted with Tunisia’s more secular trends, which developed in the nineteenth century under the French Protectorate, established over the country in 1881.

Following parliamentary elections in October 2014, Tunisia’s main secular party, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia), had to form an alliance with Ennahda to ensure a stable governing majority. Nidaa Tounes consists of a heterogeneous membership base ‘without an explicit unifying call other than their fear of Islamism’.<sup>9</sup> It includes former members of the Ben Ali regime, leftists, trade unionists, women’s activists, and independents. Voices within the party have continuously challenged Ennahda’s very right to exist. For example, one of Nidaa Tounes’s founders, Lazhar Akremi, told me that Ennahda will eventually be ‘shut down’ just as its ‘mother branch’ had been, alluding to the 2013 overthrow of Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi and the subsequent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) there.<sup>10</sup> This deep animosity towards the Islamists led secular leaders to initially give Ennahda only one ministerial post in the government that was formed with them after the October 2014 parliamentary elections, although it had won sixty-nine of the 217 seats in the legislature, compared to Nidaa Tounes’s eighty-six. Subsequently, however, internal friction within Nidaa Tounes and the creation of a unity government in August 2016 again bolstered Ennahda’s political sway.

Mistrust of Ennahda has been reinforced by the fact that much of the movement’s historical evolution and ideological foundations have remained opaque, a gap this book bridges. Ben Ali’s condemnation of Ennahda as ‘violent’ stands in stark contrast to the moderate image its leaders try to convey. Ennahda’s first prime minister, Hamadi Jebali, even declared in 2012 that choosing to wear a bikini at one of the

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

country's renowned beaches and drinking alcohol constitute 'sacred liberties' that his party seeks to protect.<sup>11</sup> Yet such statements were vehemently opposed by others within Ennahda, including some senior members, who have called for the implementation of *shari'a* (Islamic law). Contradictory discourse has inspired allegations of double language or dissimulation, and makes it more difficult for secular Tunisians and international observers alike to understand Ennahda.

In part, contradictory rhetoric reflects diverse strategies of the leaders, especially when addressing different constituencies. It also mirrors the diversity of Tunisia's Islamist landscape, which has been shaped by different domestic, regional, and historical dynamics. Indeed, Ennahda consists of many different sub-groups, which at times has threatened to tear the movement apart. I was myself struck during my many travels in the country by its heterogeneous manifestations. In the Tunis headquarters, leaders typically greet foreign researchers and journalists with freshly prepared mint tea while affirming that Ennahda is 'a liberal party of religious affiliation' and one political actor 'just like others', commonly comparing it to Christian parties in the West.<sup>12</sup> This contrasts with my experience in Kairouan, once the Islamic capital of the Maghrib, where devout Muslim women wearing black robes and gloves characteristic of a more traditional interpretation of the Qur'an receive the mainly local visitors. In Ennahda's office in Tabarka, a regional tourist hub in the north, I was welcomed by a writer and poet who stressed the creative and artistic realms of Islam.

The more pragmatic stance of Ennahda's political class has historical roots. Many of its leaders, now in their sixties, were in the 1970s part of a vibrant religious student body, which was competing with leftists and government-affiliated activists on campuses. Through their encounters with them, Ennahda followers were subjected to a variety of ideas and were effectively forced, they claim, to widen their horizons. This changed, however, when the government intensified its repression of religious opponents in the late 1980s and early 1990s, undermining almost all independent university activism.

At the height of the crackdown some Ennahda members fled Tunisia. Many of them were granted exile in Europe, where they were exposed to democracy and multi-party politics, an experience they affirm made them more tolerant of other ideological strands. Moreover, the harsh

## INTRODUCTION

crackdown at home alongside the failure of the Algerian Islamist experience in the early 1990s and the wave of repression directed against the Egyptian Brotherhood in the mid-1990s led Ennahda leaders to reassess their movement's ideology and agenda. Many became convinced that rather than rejecting the political system, it would be more strategic to work within it. Ennahda's long-time leader Rachid Ghannouchi, who spent more than two decades in exile in London, told me that in the 1970s the movement's activists pursued 'utopian' ideas but realised later that they 'cannot do [everything]'.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of Ennahda followers, however, did not manage to leave the country during the crackdown. By the early 1990s thousands of them were subjected to torture and harsh prison terms. So the next generation of activists, typically the sons and daughters of those in jail, grew up in an environment characterised by omnipresent fear and the repression of any opposition to the Ben Ali regime, which claimed to represent 'all' Tunisians but failed to bring forward any credible ideology other than pseudo-'secularisation' and 'modernisation'. This so-called 'generation Ben Ali' was deprived of any substantial religious or political education.

Some young activists gradually came to view the ideology of Ennahda senior members as too 'weak', since it had failed to challenge the regime's grip on power, and adopted more radical approaches. The advent of satellite TV and the internet, which became increasingly popular in the 2000s, reinforced this process as many ultra-conservative channels from the Gulf and Saudi Arabia became popular, especially amongst the youth.<sup>14</sup> As a result, many young Tunisians became more religious than their parents. Some even joined nascent Salafi movements in Tunisia or al-Qa'ida-linked groups in the wider region. This dynamic led adversaries to accuse Ennahda of 'complicity' with the ultra-conservative Salafis, even though its senior members had little sway over the radicalisation of some young Tunisians, and children of secular parents were implicated as well.<sup>15</sup>

Mistrust has been reinforced by a culture of secrecy that continues to surround Ennahda. While this was in the past largely a necessity to prevent repression, reticence still prevails. The movement's leaders strive to be recognised as a force for peace, yet they have failed to acknowledge Ennahda's own ties to violence in the 1980s. Moreover,

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

they publicly state that they aspire to be a truly Tunisian party, but have been reluctant to talk about their current and past links to other movements in the region. This is despite the fact that Tariq Ramadan, a professor of Islamic studies and grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that the Tunisian activists used to be part of the international organisation (al-Tanzim al-Dawli) of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> 'Intellectually they were autonomous; organisationally they were not for a while,' he explained.<sup>17</sup> Secrecy about Ennahda's past ties to the wider Brotherhood has become even more pronounced after the 2013 crackdown on its Egyptian mother organisation, which reawakened deep-rooted fears of similar repression at home. When I asked Rachid Ghannouchi about Ennahda's relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, he suggested that such 'police questions' were unsuited for researchers.<sup>18</sup>

This book sheds light on Ennahda's historical evolution, the basis for understanding its current ideological and political orientations. The fall of the Ben Ali regime has triggered heightened academic interest in Tunisia. But recent publications have largely focused on the post-uprising period, while previous academics' interest in the Tunisian Islamists faded as a result of the heavy repression of the early 1990s, which made it impossible to carry out in-depth research on their organisation. This book not only seeks to bridge these gaps in the literature, but also provides hitherto unknown insights into the birth and evolution of the Islamist movement. Thereby it attempts to go beyond the actor-oriented approach employed by many recent studies, which focus on the Ennahda party leadership, to also highlight dynamics within the wider movement. As such it adopts an interdisciplinary approach which resorts to the fields of history, Islamic studies, political science, and sociology. Conceptually it draws upon Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition, understood as a 'historically evolving set of discourses, embodied in the practices and institutions of Islamic societies and hence deeply imbricated in the material life of those inhabiting them'.<sup>19</sup> How the traditions of Tunisia's Islamists have been shaped by domestic, historical, and regional factors, Islamic texts and precepts, alongside competition between rival factions within their movement, are central themes of this book.

The study is based on field research conducted in Tunisia over a period of four years. Over 400 interviews and informal conversations were

## INTRODUCTION

conducted with three groups of people: (1) current and former members of Ennahda and other religious groups, with whom about half of the interviews took place; (2) civil society activists, bloggers, and journalists; and (3) current and former politicians of more secular trends, including many adversaries of the Islamists. Research was also conducted in France and the United Kingdom with former exiles who are still residing abroad to learn about their activities in the 1990s and 2000s. To protect the identity of the interviewees, I used pseudonyms for many of them. I only cite full names of public officials, representatives of Ennahda and civil society. When interviewees specifically requested anonymity, I employ general terms such as ‘party leader’ or ‘activist’.

In addition, I had access to private, hitherto unexploited, archives of current and former members of Ennahda, which were particularly valuable in so far as they provided insights into confidential discussions within the inner circles of the movement. Archival research was also carried out in the Tunisian National Archives and Zaytouna University, both located in Tunis, the British Foreign Office files available at the National Archives at Kew, and the Confidential Print at the library of the University of Cambridge. Moreover, I examined secondary material in the form of academic articles, Tunisian and international media sources (e.g. *Le Temps*, *La Presse*, *Le Maghreb*, *al-Damir*), as well as cables from the US Embassy in Tunis accessed via Wikileaks, covering the period from March 1973 to February 2010. Past and current publications of Ennahda, including party pamphlets and official party publications (*al-Maʿrifa*, *al-Fajr*), were also revealing.

This book analyses these sources within their specific historical contexts. It devotes much attention to episodes that have been particularly crucial in shaping the movement. This includes the immediate period after independence, in which Tunisia’s traditional Islamic establishment was dismantled. The research also specifically highlights the period of violence starting from the late 1980s, which forced Ennahda underground and into exile for over two decades, and analyses in detail religious dynamics during and after the uprising, a turning point in its history.

Chapter 1 introduces the historical roots of the Islamist movement, which, of course, go back long before independence. It argues that the notion of ‘secular Tunisia’ has always been a myth. A powerful religious

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

trend has existed alongside more secular currents for almost two centuries. Moreover, contrary to the general belief that early Tunisian reformers are the forerunners of the country's contemporary secular current, wide-ranging changes were launched from the nineteenth century by a variety of figures, including clerics; they were typically top-down and opposed by vast sections of the more traditional population.

Chapter 2 shows that religious forces flourished as a reaction to Bourguiba's modernising efforts. They initially organised themselves as a loose association, al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), a movement focusing on public morality, which quickly became politicised and in 1979 established the Islamic Tendency Movement (Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique, MTI; Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami). I demonstrate the importance of three factors leading many devout Muslims to embrace political Islam: the increasing amount of Egyptian Brotherhood literature reaching Tunisia; the Iranian Revolution; and, particularly, an active religious student body. The MTI's rapprochement with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood led a faction of the movement advocating a 'Tunisian Islam' to split from it.

Chapter 3 explains how, when in 1981 Bourguiba became aware of the existence of the MTI, there was a showdown between its followers and the regime. Attempts by religious activists to apply for a party licence were short-lived as the president began to repress the movement, a trend which intensified under Ben Ali. Although Ennahda leaders claimed that their activism had always been of a purely civilian nature, I show that some followers were prepared to use force, and plotted to overthrow the regime. However, this only occurred at the height of the crackdown, such as after the rigged legislative elections in 1989, when it became obvious that Ben Ali was not seeking a political rapprochement, but instead intensified measures against Ennahda, which he considered his main adversary.

Chapter 4 details the diverse trajectories of prisoners and their families, as well as the exile community—the backdrop for understanding Tunisia's heterogeneous Islamist landscape nowadays. It sheds new light on the extent to which followers of Ennahda and their families were systematically tortured and repressed, mainly in an attempt to root out the movement's opposition to the regime. The exile community sought to ensure the survival of the movement by moving its

## INTRODUCTION

structures abroad. Ennahda even acquired international recognition through Ghannouchi's public embracing of multi-party politics. Yet by the late 2000s exiles were markedly divided as an increasing number of them were longing to return to Tunisia, even under the terms dictated by Ben Ali.

Although it is generally assumed that Ennahda did not have any structures in Tunisia in the years before the uprisings, chapter 5 uncovers how the movement tried to tentatively recreate itself, including at the universities, starting from the mid-2000s, when some of its prisoners were released. Yet persistent repression and the trauma of jail and torture strongly limited its membership base. In parallel, an increasing number of devout Tunisians became attracted by the Salafis (a dynamic reinforced by the spread of the internet and satellite TV), who sought to challenge Ennahda's monopoly as a religious opposition force. This chapter shows that a more general growth in piety among large sectors of the population boosted the rise of both Salafism and Ennahda activities in the 2000s, a trend that Ben Ali sought to capitalise on by reinforcing religious policies of his own.

Chapter 6 reveals that its previous underground structures and wide network of sympathisers helped Ennahda after the 2010–11 uprisings to quickly gain in relevance. Yet whilst the uprisings took place in response to economic hardship and political repression, discussions in the Constituent Assembly, elected in October 2011, quickly centred on the role of Islam in society. This exposed Ennahda's leaders to a challenging task: accounting for its frequent compromises—including on issues of religion—with secular parties, to the detriment of its more conservative grassroots, which it increasingly risked losing to the Salafis. It is clear that this is a story that has much further to go. As the first but certainly not last attempt to fathom Tunisia's Islamists, this book is designed to provide the historical and intellectual basis on which its future may be best understood.



## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

*Ijtihad [independent reasoning] is a collective obligation ... on the Muslim community according to the needs and circumstances of its different peoples and countries. The whole Muslim community is therefore sinful by failing to fulfil this obligation.*

Shaykh Mohammed al-Tahir Ibn Ashur (1879–1973)<sup>1</sup>

Islam came to Tunisia in 670 when an army led by ‘Uqba ibn Nafi, an Arab general, established a base in Kairouan, a city in the centre-east. There he founded the Great Mosque of Kairouan, also known as the Mosque of ‘Uqba ibn Nafi. The city quickly rose to become the ‘first Islamic capital’ of the Maghrib<sup>2</sup> and one of the holiest in Islam.<sup>3</sup> The second mosque in North Africa, Zaytouna, was built in 698 in Tunis. It was soon complemented by Zaytouna University, which is the oldest centre of Islamic education in the Arab world, even preceding Egypt’s acclaimed al-Azhar. Despite its rich Islamic history, Tunisia gradually became associated with a ‘secular’ legacy, a paradigm that developed during the French Protectorate and became dominant after independence in 1956 when the first president, Habib Bourguiba, dismantled the traditional Islamic establishment.

Proponents of Tunisia’s supposedly secular heritage typically describe it as a continuation of the country’s nineteenth-century reform movement, which sought innovations in a wide range of fields, including technology, the military, and education, to elevate the country’s status inter-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

nationally in the face of European hegemony. According to Béatrice Hibou, under Bourguiba and Ben Ali reformism became the very backbone of official discourse. She rightly observed that this was quite successful because ‘if you ask Tunisians what is specific about Tunisia, the reply is unanimous: the “reformist tradition”’.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the secular elite typically claims to have spearheaded this trend, one of Tunisia’s earliest reform trends was Sufism, which reached the country in the early centuries of Islam as an ascetic, mystical religious movement seeking to counter corruption, greed, and ego.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some renowned Islamic scholars in Tunisia, such as the Zaytouna Shaykh Ibn Ashur, quoted above, have long called for *ijtihad*, that is, the interpretation of Islamic law and the use of independent reasoning.

This chapter examines the origins of the nineteenth-century reform movement and its diverse manifestations in Tunisia. It reveals that far from being the forerunner of Tunisia’s contemporary secular current, innovations were introduced by both religious and more Westernised forces. Yet most of their endeavours faced widespread opposition, both from within ruling circles and the people, and were launched by figures with an elitist perception of power.<sup>6</sup>

### *Early reforms*

Nineteenth-century reforms in Tunisia were state-driven by the Husainids, who ruled the country as beys. Ahmed Bey, who was in power between 1837 and 1855, encouraged religious links to the Ottomans, but sought to limit any direct political ties to the empire with the hope of instigating an indigenous path towards reform. Yet many of his close advisers, including his personal secretary, Ibn Abi Dhiaf, were strongly influenced by socio-political developments in the Ottoman Empire, including its nineteenth-century reformist Tanzimat movement, which thus also came to sway domestic affairs. Ahmed Bey also encouraged alliances with Western countries that supported his direct strategic goals.<sup>7</sup> This gained him a lot of respect among Europeans. A British diplomat remarked in 1847 that Ahmed was ‘a man of great discernment and tolerant to the extreme’.<sup>8</sup>

One of Ahmed Bey’s most lasting reforms was the foundation of the Bardo military school, praised at the time for introducing courses in

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

geography, history, and Islamic studies. It was open not only to the elite, but also to the sons of the working class.<sup>9</sup> The bey also acquired a reputation for religious tolerance. A foreign diplomat close to him maintained that Ahmed fully adopted the maxim ‘that a bad Christian can never be a good [Muslim]’ and was strongly opposed to vehement ‘defenders of the faith’. When a Moroccan religious leader preached jihad in Tunisia, the bey declared that ‘he should be immediately sent out of the country’.<sup>10</sup>

To make the pursuit of Islamic knowledge more controllable and open, the bey introduced a set of administrative and financial measures at Zaytouna University, including the nomination of more teachers from the Hanafi school, considered the most liberal of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, to supplement those from Tunisia’s more widespread Maliki school.<sup>11</sup> Ahmed’s religious reforms led many to accuse him of being ‘a little *Christianizing* in his habits and administration’, an impression he vehemently tried to counter to avoid losing popular support.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Ahmed’s willingness to follow an indigenous path towards innovation, ultimately his reign increased foreign meddling in Tunisian affairs. This was mainly due to his lavish habits, a tendency which left his successors, Mohammed Bey (r. 1855–9) and al-Sadiq Bey (r. 1859–81), with high amounts of state debt. Whilst they were not as committed to innovation, they had little choice by this time, and were progressively pushed by foreign powers into launching wide-ranging changes. This process culminated in demands by British and French authorities in 1857 that Mohammed Bey issue a fundamental law, called ‘*Ahd al-Aman*, known as the Security Covenant or *Pacte fondamentale*. It enshrined the civil and religious equality of Muslims and non-Muslims, set up mixed courts to hear cases that involved Europeans, and gave non-Tunisians the right to own property, thus exposing Tunisia to direct Western influence.

The Security Covenant encouraged a group to pressure Mohammed Bey into launching further changes. Even Ibn Abi Dhiyf, who still held the position of the bey’s personal secretary, deplored the fact that ‘the personal exercise of power’ by the beys ‘continued to be arbitrary and total’ and was only ‘tempered and circumscribed by religious and transitional restraints’.<sup>13</sup> Together with state official Kheireddine Pasha al-Tunisi, he called upon Mohammed to instigate deeper reforms and curb

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

corruption, which was widespread and enabled the elite to enrich themselves on the expense of the wider population.<sup>14</sup> Although the bey had no desire to pursue further reforms, he had no real choice given Europe's support of the initiative. Eventually, foreign demands to turn the Security Covenant into a full constitution forced him to form several working commissions. This marked the start of Tunisia's long constitutional tradition, which has influenced politics and society until the present.

Mohammed's successor, al-Sadiq Bey, pledged support to the commissions, which in 1860 finalised a draft constitution that was formally adopted one year later. The constitution enshrined freedom of religion and equality of all citizens before the law. Beyond that, it mostly dealt with traditional issues such as the relationship between different government branches and established, at least in theory, a constitutional monarchy. Its ministers answered to a Grand Council, which was appointed by the bey and presided over by Kheireddine.<sup>15</sup> Further top-down reforms were however limited, not least because Kheireddine's elitist perception of power led him to denounce elected assemblies as 'dangerous'.<sup>16</sup> He never truly questioned the centralised powers of the beys, believing that the *raison d'état* was superior to values such as liberty, justice and equality. Larbi Sadiki has therefore argued that the 'tendency to reform remained mostly a figment of the political imagination and of the desire for renewal and regeneration'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, those tentative changes introduced by Kheireddine were often undermined by government officials who supported them only to the extent that they presented 'new opportunities for graft and private enrichment at the expense of the state'.<sup>18</sup>

Indignant at their resistance, in 1867 Kheireddine published the book *The Surest Path to Knowledge Regarding the Condition of Countries*, in which he argued that the expansion of education and deep reforms were 'the foundation of human progress and civilisation'. When Kheireddine became prime minister a few years later, he therefore focused upon educational innovation, besides tightening up controls of government expenditure, a step many high officials opposed. They attempted to protect their privileges by discrediting Kheireddine, a dynamic even recognised by al-Sadiq Bey. The latter explained to the prime minister in 1874 that people 'guided by their personal interests are spreading unfounded rumours' since they are afraid of losing 'the

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

benefits they received'.<sup>19</sup> This limited the impact of Kheireddine's anti-corruption initiatives. In education, however, he left a legacy that has influenced Tunisia to the present time. In 1875 Kheireddine founded the prestigious Sadiki College, which reconciled traditional Islamic education with the study of modern sciences. Nowadays it is one of Tunisia's most prestigious high schools, many government officials and presidents having studied there. Kheireddine also curtailed the influence of Zaytouna University by placing it under the control of the prime minister, a step many 'ulama (Islamic scholars) angrily fought, associating it with moral and religious decline.

### *Resisting innovation?*

One of the consequences of the reforms was gradual polarisation within the 'ulama, pitting the majority, who opposed this trend and favoured an uncritical dependence on past precedent (*taqlid*), against religious leaders who advocated the reopening of the gate of *ijtihad* to foster innovations and fresh legal interpretation. Arnold H. Green pointed out that in the nineteenth century religious scholars enjoyed vast 'institutionalized power', particularly in the realms of law, where they served as legal experts, trustees, and judges.<sup>20</sup> In the field of education too, their impact was tangible as they held 'the principal institution whereby ideas could be communicated to the people'.<sup>21</sup> Despite being a minority, some of the pro-reform 'ulama were highly influential as they enjoyed close ties to the ruling elite, in particular as most beys chose Islamic scholars amongst their closest advisers.<sup>22</sup> Ahmed Bey, for example, fostered close ties to a renowned imam of Zaytouna University, Ibrahim al-Riyahi. He also appointed Shaykh Mahmud Qabadu (1812–71) as the spiritual guide of the Bardo school. Qabadu advocated the reintroduction of the sciences in Islamic education, and strongly influenced reform projects in the decades to come. Aside from teaching traditional subjects, Qabadu asked some Bardo students to translate European textbooks of modern disciplines into Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, Mohammed Bey enjoyed a close relationship with Mohammed Bayram IV, the chief Hanafi mufti at that time, who was more 'dogmatic', that is, scripturalist and reluctant to independently interpret religious texts and compromise over political matters. When

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

the bey asked Mohammed Bayram IV to participate in the constitutional commission, he attended only the first session, and only after he was ordered to do so. As a matter of fact most *'ulama* did not understand the need to have a constitution at all, arguing that Islamic law was superior to any other legislation, a position many Salafis in Tunisia defend nowadays. They particularly opposed the concept of the equality of non-Muslims, a stipulation expressed for the first time in the Security Covenant. Another controversy was caused by the introduction of civil law alongside *shari'a*, which reduced the judicial function of the *'ulama*. Many religious scholars were concerned that their loss of influence would translate into more power for the beys, whose main, if not only, checks stemmed from religious precepts and authorities.

Moreover, Kenneth Perkins has pointed out that religious scholars 'feared that the door allowing European penetration of Tunisia, once opened, could never be closed', especially given that *'ulama* in the Ottoman Empire had voiced similar reservations 'a few decades earlier that, by the late 1850s, were proving prophetic'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, whilst nowadays many Tunisians hail reforms such as the Security Covenant and the 1861 constitution as 'pioneering', back then wide sections of society denounced them as displays of foreign interference threatening the country's autonomy. This was particularly the case because European powers themselves refused to obey the laws they had so fervently supported. Islam, which constituted the moral framework through which Tunisians 'participated in a single society, that of the community of the faithful', hence became 'an alternative' to the new political order 'and a symbol and rallying point of protest'.<sup>25</sup>

Many Tunisians also associated increasing European influence with economic hardship as merchants, artisans, and craftsmen had fallen on hard times since Europeans came to dominate trade. As early as 1847 a British diplomat noted the large number of 'European sofas and chairs, chandeliers and lamps' in Tunisia, explaining that in most wealthy households 'European furniture is now fashionable'.<sup>26</sup> Lisa Anderson found that European traders were highly influential 'long before [the bey] signed his first foreign loan'. She held that 'they were almost part of the government, advising, cajoling, and scheming with notables at the court and government functions'.<sup>27</sup> Naturally this trend threatened local economic structures, especially in the *souk*, and mar-

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

ginalised many people depending upon them.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the nineteenth-century reforms were multi-dimensional, and whilst for some they signified innovation and progress, for the vast majority they were closely associated with socio-economic exclusion.

Irrespective of this complex reality, some officials continued to push for wide-ranging changes. In *The Surest Path*, Kheireddine even invited the ‘*ulama*’ to join with honorable statesmen in a coalition that would cleanse government of its oppressive character’, well aware of the importance of religious scholars in legitimising his programme. By insisting that such a path was consonant with Islamic values, he persuaded a small faction of religious leaders to embrace his policies.<sup>29</sup> Such efforts, however, came too late, given mounting resistance to his rule. In a letter of 10 July 1877, Kheireddine explained to al-Sadiq Bey that his ‘efforts were hampered ... by the intrigues and malevolence of certain people’, a dynamic forcing him to resign from all government functions.<sup>30</sup> He subsequently went into self-imposed exile. But his allies in Tunisia would continue to struggle for innovation—soon, however, in the context of the French Protectorate, established over the country in 1881, and the spread of pan-Islamism in the region.

### *Thriving pan-Islamism*

The departure of Kheireddine and the start of the French occupation strengthened the sway of the anti-reform bloc. They blamed the innovators for having played the modernisation game of the Westerners and thereby ultimately facilitating European meddling in Tunisian affairs. Around the same time, the ideology of pan-Islamism emerged in the region, attracting both the reform camp and its critics, alongside many regular citizens. Most Tunisians expressed their pan-Islamic identity in reference to Abdul Hamid II, the last sultan of the Ottoman Empire. In a final attempt to counter the Europeans and to prevent the collapse of the empire, Abdul Hamid appealed to the common Islamic sentiments of an otherwise divided people, advocating the unity of all Muslims under an Islamic state.<sup>31</sup>

In Egypt the Islamic activist Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani became attracted to Abdul Hamid’s call. Al-Afghani travelled throughout the region, presenting himself as the sultan’s political guide, capable of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

uniting the people, attracting wide crowds with his powerful speeches and charisma.<sup>32</sup> He also appealed to a small but influential group of intellectuals, including his former student Mohammed Abduh, with whom he published the journal *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* (The firm bond). The publication supported universal reason, and called for deep structural changes and the adoption of modern sciences in the Arab world in much the same way that Kheireddine and Shaykh Mahmud Qabadu had sought years earlier, but now with a distinctly pan-Islamic connotation. This interested a few Tunisians, who became eager followers of al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh. Their group was led by Shaykh Mohammed al-Sanusi, who formed a secret society called the Firm Bond, in reference to the journal, which Abduh contacted during a visit to Tunisia in 1884. During his stay Abduh wrote a letter to al-Afghani suggesting that its members consisted of about ten people, mostly ‘*ulama*.<sup>33</sup> Little is known about the society, and even less about its activities. Arnold H. Green has discussed an 1885 protest in relation to its leader. That year a series of decrees stipulating, amongst others, an increase in property taxes led a group headed by al-Sanusi to demonstrate and petition the bey. The authorities broke up the protest and, under pressure from the French authorities, the bey even deported al-Sanusi to the city of Gabes in the south-east. Yet only three months later al-Sanusi pleaded with the government to forgive him for his wrongs. He was soon allowed back to Tunis, where he abandoned his pan-Islamic endeavours and became one of the most active collaborators with the French.<sup>34</sup>

The foundation of the Arabic-language newspaper *al-Hadira* a few years later by Sadiki College graduates, including al-Sanusi, further reinforced this temporal shift towards collaboration. As a mouthpiece of Tunisia’s reform camp, *al-Hadira* called for social change in line with Tunisia’s Islamic culture, but in a way that did not threaten French interests. Several religious leaders with previous links to Kheireddine welcomed the new publication, but the majority of them fiercely opposed it. In 1889 tensions between the French and the Zaytouna community heightened, when Protectorate authorities formed a commission to consider radical changes to the university curriculum. Supported by several ‘*ulama*, they advocated the introduction of the modern sciences as a compulsory part of the curriculum, a project the

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

majority of religious scholars fiercely opposed, and the modern sciences continued to be taught on a voluntary basis. Very few made use of this option, however. In 1900 770 students attended courses in Arabic grammar and 700 in jurisprudence, but only fifteen enrolled in history and five in mathematics.<sup>35</sup>

The supremacy of doctrine and tradition starkly came to the fore in 1904, when Abdelaziz Thaalbi, a Zaytouna graduate, publicly criticised Sufism and advocated a rational interpretation of the Qur'an, a stance leading the Shari'a Court to jail him for 'blasphemy'. The vast majority of Islamic scholars approved of Thaalbi's imprisonment, including many reform-minded figures who felt he had gone too far with his provocative speeches. Until the early twentieth century Sufi orders existed throughout Tunisia, which 'was still living in the period of accommodation between orthodoxy and mysticism'.<sup>36</sup> Several 'ulama such as Mahmud Qabadu were devoted leaders of Sufi orders. Whilst many Tunisians nowadays denounce Sufism as 'regressive', historically it has taken different forms and was not necessarily an obstacle to innovation. Some of the more dogmatic scholars even demanded the expulsion of the Senussi, one of the key Sufi orders, on the grounds that it supported *ijtihad*.<sup>37</sup> Thus Thaalbi's anti-Sufi rhetoric illustrates an entirely new kind of activism that emerged in the early twentieth century when a small group of graduates, often from the Sadiki College, for the first time embraced a more secular agenda.

From 1907 they formed the Young Tunisians Party, emulating the Ottoman's Young Turks. When the Protectorate was established over Tunisia, many of its members had sought self-exile in Istanbul, where they were exposed to a process of secularisation that followed the period of pan-Islamism. Naturally this experience influenced their own socio-political vision for Tunisia. Some Young Tunisians advocated for limiting the role of Islam in society. Acquainted with European culture, and many of them with European-style educations, they demanded the right to equality and liberty—values that the French praised at home—and deplored Tunisian subordination. In other words, the elite emerging from the education system that Protectorate officials had so fiercely promoted to legitimise French ambitions emerged, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a key challenge to their rule.

When protests against the French erupted in the 1910s, Protectorate authorities were eager to blame them on the Young Tunisians, hoping for

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

a chance to discredit the organisation and crack down on its members. Yet a wide range of people took to the streets, including Zaytounians protesting against their systematic ousting from government positions. Tensions within Zaytouna intensified the same year as students demanded reforms to what they perceived as an increasingly archaic educational facility.<sup>38</sup> In this tense climate large-scale riots easily broke out, such as when an Italian tramway conductor killed a Tunisian child.<sup>39</sup> The Young Tunisians, who publicly supported the resulting protest, were subsequently either deported or jailed. But many of their demands inspired more unified and large-scale protests that erupted against the Protectorate authorities in subsequent decades.

### *Temporary unity*

The First World War damaged Tunisians' respect for European military prowess and France's supposed 'invincibility'. A militarily weakened France was also perceived as an opportunity to further pressure Protectorate authorities into enhancing the status of Tunisians at home. With this in mind, a group of former Young Tunisians, including Thaalbi, travelled to Versailles in 1919. They requested the application of the principle of self-determination in President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points to Tunisia, but in vain. Infuriated by this setback, Thaalbi wrote *La Tunisie martyre*, which proclaimed that 'only Tunisian citizens or naturalised Tunisians have the right to participate in the management of public affairs'.<sup>40</sup>

In 1920 Thaalbi became the head of the newly created Destour (Constitution) Party, consisting of well-known artisans, merchants, *ulama*, and community leaders who had seen their wealth and privileges decline under the Protectorate. They called for a new constitution and a parliament elected by universal vote. Despite these seemingly ambitious endeavours, the Destour was essentially an elite project, with many of its activities focusing upon preserving the few remaining privileges of its leaders. Indeed, its bourgeois leaders had little interest in social issues, much to the indignation of the General Confederation of Tunisian Workers (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, CGTT), founded in 1924, which supported the party. When the CGTT staged a series of strikes, and Protectorate

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

authorities cracked down on the union, which was dissolved as a result just a year later, Destour leaders made no efforts to support the labour activists. Kenneth Perkins rightly stressed that ‘party leaders considered the confrontational tactics of the union—noisy street demonstrations and strikes, both of which often ended in violent crashes with the police—as vulgar and dangerously provocative’. They sought to portray themselves ‘as an organization eschewing [such] radicalism’ in the hope not to be ‘swept up in the union’s destruction’.<sup>41</sup>

The Destour only began to pay attention to the plight of the working class in the 1930s, when a new generation of people from the rural areas joined the party. In contrast to the previous generation of leaders, whose authority typically adhered to traditional power structures and family ties in the capital, their success was due to the excellent education they had received, often at the Sadiki College. Many activists of the new generation had innovative ideas, such as Tahar Haddad, who in 1930 published *Our Women in the Shari‘a and Society*, calling for the emancipation of women—a book that was widely criticised by both the religious establishment and most Destourian activists. Basing his judgement upon Islamic principles, Haddad denounced polygamy and defended the right of women to work, to have access to legal divorce, and not be married against their will.

The new generation of Destourians accused the traditional elite of being too accommodating towards the Protectorate authorities. The old guard, for their part, did not support their more confrontational stance vis-à-vis the French. So after Habib Bourguiba, a Sadiki College graduate and one of the Destour’s most active and resolute young members, publicly called for independence in 1933, he was expelled by the Destour leadership. A year later Bourguiba, together with other former members of the Destour, created a new party, the Neo-Destour, which called for ‘total unity through total organization’.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the elitist ambitions of the Destour, Bourguiba made it a priority to include the wider population in his project, and established party chapters throughout the country. Eventually the Neo-Destour not only became a party, but also evolved into ‘a social club, an employment agency, a school, a sanctuary’.<sup>43</sup> Naturally this strongly enhanced its image. By the end of 1937 it could pride itself on about 28,000 followers in 432 different branches throughout the country.<sup>44</sup> This number again grew during the Second

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

World War, when party members took advantage of a substantially weakened France to expand their activities.

After the war Bourguiba hoped to have gained enough leverage to discuss the option of internal autonomy with Protectorate officials as a first step towards independence. Instead, however, the French swiftly prohibited him from staging any sort of political activity, and even from leaving Tunis, but Bourguiba managed to escape. During his self-imposed exile, Salah Ben Youssef, the party's secretary-general, took over the leadership.

### *A leadership struggle*

Despite its claims of unity, the national movement was polarised around two types of leadership and nationalism. Bourguiba was attracted by the Occident and disposed to promote social development according to Western paradigms. By contrast, Salah Ben Youssef was more concerned with topics of identity and cultural self-preservation, framing religion in terms of socio-economic and political norms rather than spiritual values alone, a narrative that was later appropriated by the Islamist movement.

Under Ben Youssef's leadership the Neo-Destour allied itself with the Zaytouna Student Library and Brethren, which was established in 1944. A close adviser of Bourguiba affirmed that 'Ben Youssef managed to have with him students and Professors from the Zaytouna, he told them that he was very [pro-Arab nationalism]'.<sup>45</sup> A historic 1946 meeting between the Neo-Destour and the Zaytounians even led to the adoption of a joint programme demanding Tunisian independence and membership in the League of Arab States.<sup>46</sup> This platform reflects the increasing prominence of Arab nationalism. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's promise to unite the Arab world under his leadership attracted many Tunisians who sought a regional response to the West's colonial ventures. However, in contrast to their Egyptian counterparts, Tunisians combined Arab nationalist with traditional Islamic rather than secular-leaning values.

The French, who saw in Bourguiba a 'lesser evil' compared to Ben Youssef, allowed him to return to Tunisia in 1949, hoping that this would split the Neo-Destour leadership and weaken the party. Aware

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

of this risk, Bourguiba and Ben Youssef initially tried to maintain a truce, proclaiming that the Neo-Destour was a non-ideological party which united all Tunisians.<sup>47</sup> But mounting differences between the leaders would shortly become manifest. In May 1951 a foreign diplomat observed that 'there have been several instances of disorder during the past few days when clashes took place between members of the Neo-Destour Party and students of Zaytouna University'.<sup>48</sup> In particular, the Zaytouna bloc '[finds itself] completely alienated by the Neo-Destourian tendency to adopt western modes of thought. They are essentially arabophones as against the gallophones of the Neo-Destour', he continued.<sup>49</sup>

In response to mounting tensions, Bourguiba sent a letter to Ben Youssef in which he warned him not to be 'deceived' by the Zaytounians.<sup>50</sup> He held that, like in many other countries in the Arab world, the religious establishment in Tunisia had failed to adapt Islam to the needs of modern life. He stressed that important regional exceptions included Egypt and Syria, where power was in the hands of people 'who realise that only the adaptation of the Muslim state to the necessities of international life and the modern world is able to ensure its survival'. In order to prevent Tunisia from falling into the hands of the religious establishment, Bourguiba plotted to co-opt its most acclaimed leaders, confiding to Ben Youssef that he had tried to win over the distinguished reform-minded Imam Fadhel Ben Achour, 'to deprive the religious clan of the only thinking and acting head it has'.<sup>51</sup>

In his daily speeches, Bourguiba's stance on religion was, however, more nuanced, since he was well aware of the importance of Islam in gaining legitimacy, and mobilising large sections of the population against the French, a trend that lasted even after independence. In one speech he denounced France's 'assimilation projects' by defending the *hijab* as well as the traditional veil of Tunisian women, the *sefsari*. He said that even though he believed that women covering their heads is 'incompatible with the modern times', he still 'preferred to preserve the specificities of this identity to French assimilation of which the consequences are much more dramatic'.<sup>52</sup> Bourguiba even publicly denounced Tahar Haddad's pioneering stance on women's rights, arguing that his proposed reforms would benefit the Protectorate officials and would have no positive effect on Tunisian society.<sup>53</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Bourguiba's endeavours were supported by the traditionally more left-leaning organised labour which assembled from 1946 under Tunisia's General Labour Union (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT), which succeeded the CGTT. The UGTT leadership cooperated closely with the Neo-Destourians. It profited from Bourguiba's leadership skills and financial assistance, while the Neo-Destour's prestige was bolstered by the union's wide network. In 1951 the UGTT could pride itself on almost 100,000 members, making it the second most influential organisation in Tunisia after the Neo-Destour, a leverage that it would maintain for decades to come. Norma Salem has argued that its alliance with the party helped Bourguiba 'to maintain [his] credibility at a time when the Zaytûnah associations threatened to take over the populist base through a clearer claim to the Islamic cultural tradition'.<sup>54</sup>

The link between the UGTT and the Neo-Destour became so strong that when the party leadership was arrested in 1952, Bourguiba asked the UGTT secretary-general, Farhat Hached, to lead the fight for independence, a proposition the latter accepted; shortly afterwards Hached was assassinated by the Red Hand, a terrorist organisation run by the French intelligence service.<sup>55</sup> His death caused a popular outcry, a three-day general strike, and nationwide protests. After Friday prayers at the Zaytouna Mosque around 3,000 people took to the streets. An eyewitness affirmed that the protests were met with 'repression [which] reached proportions and forms like never before'.<sup>56</sup> Mounting guerrilla actions against French targets eventually led Protectorate officials to open negotiations with the Neo-Destour over the possibility of internal autonomy, a development that provoked a leadership battle between Ben Youssef and Bourguiba.

During a Friday sermon at Zaytouna, Ben Youssef attacked Bourguiba directly, charging that his support for internal autonomy had placed Tunisia within the 'Union Française'. He affirmed that this 'was in absolute contradiction with the fundamentals of the Arab-Islamic "personnalité", basis of the legal and historical legitimacy of the nationalist movement'.<sup>57</sup> The day after his speech Ben Youssef was expelled by the Neo-Destour's Political Bureau. In the following months guerrilla actions against Protectorate officials intensified, pushing Tunisia to the brink of civil war. They were widely portrayed as a pan-Arab attempt

## BEYOND THE SECULAR MYTH

to regain power. In January 1956 the police arrested up to 120 of Ben Youssef's followers, and even raided his home, but he managed to flee to Libya.

In an author interview, Ahmed Amari, an Ennahda official who hails from the southern governorate (province) of Medenine, proudly recalled that Ben Youssef 'sought refuge in [his] family's house for about ten days to prepare his escape to Libya'. He explained that many of his family members had close ties to Ben Youssef and were convinced Arab nationalists, before eventually shifting to Islamism in the 1970s. 'There are a lot of common points between both ideologies,' Amari affirmed.<sup>58</sup> Like many provinces in the south, Medenine was famous for its pan-Arab militancy against Protectorate officials and, following independence, against Bourguiba. Naturally Ben Youssef's exile in Libya shifted the balance of power in favour of the pro-Bourguiba camp, but he continued to lead his followers from there. In March 1956 a foreign diplomat observed that 'Tunisians may now be on the threshold of independence but the anti-French campaign is still being carried on by the banished Ben Youssef operating from Tripoli. He vilifies the U.G.T.T and its ... leadership'.<sup>59</sup> The diplomat affirmed that UGTT leaders, for their part, are now 'talking openly of "Decontaminating the people of Arabism"',<sup>60</sup> a stance that reinforced deep divisions in society.

Constituent Assembly elections held on 20 March 1956, five days after independence, revealed that Ben Youssef's followers remained substantial. Voter abstention rates reached 71 per cent in Djerba in the south, Ben Youssef's home town, and 41 per cent in Tunis.<sup>61</sup> Shortly after the ballot Bourguiba proclaimed that the new state would be as 'Western in sympathy and policy as the Tunisian monarchy that was abolished',<sup>62</sup> thus denying the Arab nationalists a say in shaping the future of the country. Once he was elected president in 1957, Bourguiba was determined to eliminate his pan-Arab opponents, some of whom still sought to challenge his rule, once and for all. In 1959 over a hundred activists were found guilty of a plot to assassinate Bourguiba, leading to the execution of eight, including some from Medenine.<sup>63</sup> In August 1961 Bourguiba personally ordered the assassination of Ben Youssef in Germany.<sup>64</sup> Around the same time he started dismantling the religious establishment, a process which alienated

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

many conservative portions of society and contributed to the emergence of a more politicised Islam, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

*[In the 1960s and 1970s, practising Islam] was something that gave me oxygen. It provided me with an intellectual and moral framework. It was also a protection because it stipulated basic principles of behaviour.*

Saoussen from Kairouan, May 2015

Following independence, President Bourguiba launched a set of reforms to modernise the country and to curb the sway of traditional expressions of Islam. However, religious observance did not disappear during his rule, but essentially moved from the public to the private arena. Research conducted by Mark Tessler even found a distinct increase in personal piety in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Tunisians such as Saoussen, quoted above, turned to Islam for guidance at a time when the country's image was becoming increasingly Westernised and a vocal, although small, leftist movement emerged which was very critical of the traditional religious establishment. Islamic education typically took place within the family circle, and some parents even asked imams to teach their children the Qur'an at home.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually some pious Tunisians began to rebel against the growing marginalisation of the religious sphere. This chapter highlights three factors that contributed to the gradual politicisation of Islam. First, the increase in literature from the Muslim Brotherhood starting from the late 1960s, which quickly gained prominence amongst young people.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Second, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which gave devout Muslims in Tunisia, just as elsewhere in the region, more confidence to move beyond socio-cultural activities and fight for political expressions of Islam. Lastly, a vibrant student body at the politicised campuses, where religious activists clashed with the far left. The mounting popularity of Islam stood in sharp contrast with Bourguiba's secular reforms, which he kicked off by dismantling the traditional religious establishment.

### *The fall of the religious elite*

The president began his wide-ranging modernisation project by confiscating the property of the Habus Council, which was tasked with managing land for religious institutions, including Qur'an schools, mosques, and charities. Aware of the importance of Sufism as a popular movement with strong links to the Zaytouna, Bourguiba discredited mysticism by accusing Sufi leaders of having collaborated with the French.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein he sought to tarnish the image of the 'ulama, reproaching religious scholars for having supported Protectorate officials in order to enrich themselves and preserve their privileges, which had facilitated foreign meddling in Tunisian affairs. He went so far as to accuse them of dressing in traditional ways 'to pretend to be men of religion', whilst having 'issued fatwas on demand, in order to serve the enemy'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he reproached the 'ulama for having allied with Salah Ben Youssef, whose supporters he charged with having sought to assassinate him shortly after independence. Tunisian scholar Lotfi Hajji explained that 'the term "ulama" received [such] a negative connotation following Bourguiba's discourse [against them]' that it 'changed the relation between politics and religion'. Most strikingly perhaps, 'nobody gave credit [any longer] to the discourse of these sheikhs who had collaborated with the French Protectorate'.<sup>5</sup> This helped Bourguiba to reinforce his grip over the religious establishment, and he appointed the reformist shaykh Tahar Ben Achour, who he believed had been co-opted by the government, as rector of Zaytouna University.

In August 1956 the Maliki and Hanafi Shari'a Courts were abolished and traditional gender legislation replaced by the Personal Status Code, a pioneering set of laws bolstering women's rights. The Code established a minimum age for marriage and instituted the consent of both

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

spouses as a requirement to wed. It prohibited polygamy, and Bourguiba affirmed that this stipulation 'contradicts no religious text'.<sup>6</sup> The Code also obliged both partners to treat one another with kindness and established a legal procedure for divorce. It abolished a wife's obligation to obey her husband, but confirmed the husband as the head of the family.

In his speeches Bourguiba affirmed that the Personal Status Code was a continuation of Tunisia's early women's rights movement championed by Tahar Haddad—even though he had initially been critical of Haddad, and his approach was actually closer to that of the more secular Young Tunisians. To the dismay of many more traditional Tunisians, Bourguiba was even frequently seen on TV ripping off the veils of women bystanders.<sup>7</sup> The president portrayed this practice as a step towards 'the emancipation of women', although he made clear that 'liberty did not mean licence',<sup>8</sup> an illustration of his own limited understanding of gender equality. Most shaykhs of the traditional courts were appalled by Bourguiba's stance on gender and signed a petition against the Personal Status Code, but five agreed to accept positions as judges to apply the controversial legislation. Partial support for the laws was voiced by 'ulama from the influential Ennaifer and Ben Achour families. Bourguiba even managed to convince the Maliki *shaykh al-Islam*, Mohammed Abdelaziz Djait, to accept the code in principle.<sup>9</sup>

As for his most controversial reforms, aimed at dismantling Zaytouna University, the president waited two more years. In June 1958 he declared that through 'useful knowledge the human being is capable of miracles', but insisted that 'if the content [of education] is retrograde, the whole society falls back to the level of the herd'—a forthright attack upon Zaytouna's traditional curriculum.<sup>10</sup> The same year Bourguiba launched a wide-ranging schooling project, and one-fifth of the state's budget was allocated to creating universal basic education within a decade. This was a pioneering step given that, upon independence, only 23 per cent of children went to school.<sup>11</sup>

In this modern education system, Zaytouna University was absorbed into the University of Tunis, becoming the Faculty of Shari'a and Theology. Many teachers were recruited from France to advance Bourguiba's education programme, which paved the way for a bilingual system. Instruction in French further devalued the status of the reli-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

gious establishment, and left many Zaytouna graduates with few opportunities.<sup>12</sup> 'For us, the doors to any further education were closed since the University had been completely Westernized,' remembered Rachid Ghannouchi, one of the founders of Tunisia's Islamist movement, in one interview. 'Those wanting to continue their studies in Arabic had to go to the Middle East.'<sup>13</sup>

In an author interview Hedi Baccouche, one of Bourguiba's close advisers, justified the educational reforms by stressing that 'after independence Bourguiba and the government had the goal of unifying the education sector'. As part of this '[we decided] to transform Zaytouna into a university'—although effectively it only constituted a faculty. Baccouche elaborated that 'In terms of jobs, the Zaytounians did not educate doctors, architects, engineers. Now they say it was closed, but it wasn't closed, it remained open [in the form of a faculty]. But it wasn't the Zaytouna model that we followed in our educational reforms.'<sup>14</sup>

Having diminished century-long traditions of Islamic teaching, Bourguiba next sought to purge deep-rooted religious practices within society. These included the pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy month of Ramadan—two of the five pillars of Islam.<sup>15</sup> Well aware of their importance to wide sectors of the population, the president was careful to couch his reforms in Islamic language and as part of a wider religious obligation. Thus his plea not to fast was framed as a 'jihad against underdevelopment' to tackle increasing economic malaise.<sup>16</sup> He based this on a number of Islamic preambles, including the Prophet Mohammed's call to stop fasting during the conquest of Mecca and Islam being a religion of action and deeds—explanations many Tunisians considered too far-fetched.<sup>17</sup>

Bourguiba even claimed to have consulted Tahar Ben Achour and Abdelaziz Djait, by then grand mufti, on the matter of fasting. But both religious scholars contradicted him in public. Djait even issued a fatwa which urged believers to work hard, but proclaimed that Ramadan could only be excused by illness and military jihad. He even maintained that not respecting the fast would lead to the excommunication of the believer. Bourguiba responded swiftly by dismissing both Ben Achour and Djait. Yet their views reflected the broad popular disapproval of his Ramadan policy, and most Tunisians defied it. Only Mohammed Mhiri, former mufti of Sfax, as well as six shaykhs from Bizerte, openly supported the president.<sup>18</sup> As most imams did not agree with Bourguiba,

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

some even challenged his interpretation of the lunar month. In 1961 the head of the Zaytouna Mosque went so far as to celebrate the end of Ramadan one day later, leading to his dismissal by the president.<sup>19</sup>

The same year tensions heightened at the Mosque of 'Uqba ibn Nafi in Kairouan. Some pious Tunisians still remember with dismay the dismissal of Shaykhs Ouertani and Khelif following their opposition to the shooting of an American film, *The Thief of Bagdad*, inside the walls of the mosque. Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser stated that the shooting there 'was perceived as an act of desecration, impairing the dignity of Islam with the complicity of state authorities'.<sup>20</sup> Ouertani and Khelif's resistance to the filming was met with massive support from more traditional sections of the population. In Kairouan major protests erupted which were crushed by the government, resulting in several deaths.

Rising discontent with the Bourguiba regime was reinforced by a deepening economic crisis. In the early 1960s the president adopted a socialist economic outlook with the aim of invigorating the economy, a policy that was supported by wide sections of society, including both the left and the religious camp. To demarcate this shift towards socialism, in 1964 the Neo-Destour changed its name to the Destourian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien, PSD). Ahmed Ben Salah, a former UGTT official, was put in charge of a state-driven development plan, which focused upon agricultural cooperatives and public-sector industrialisation. Unsuccessful at instigating economic growth through socialism, Bourguiba embarked upon an even more autocratic path. A British diplomat argued in 1966 that 'there is no doubt that [the state] is a dictatorship, and no question whatever as to who is the dictator. Modern Tunisia is the creation of one man—President Habib Bourguiba.'<sup>21</sup> Similar statements were reiterated by people close to the president. Mohammed Ghannouchi, a high official under Bourguiba, told the author that 'under Bourguiba there was no democracy, there was no dialogue'.<sup>22</sup> As the country became increasingly Westernised and autocratic, pious Tunisians soon looked for alternative ways to defy their leader, including through organised Islamic activism.

### *Al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya*

Heightened interest in religious activism came at the time when a small but vocal far-left movement was gaining prominence. Its members

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

constantly clashed with the regime, which was determined to suppress its new opponents.<sup>23</sup> At first the open conflict between the leftists and the PSD further pushed pious Tunisians to retreat to the private sphere. Starting from the late 1960s and 1970s, however, they were drawn to a new kind of religious activism propagated by al-Jamā'at al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), out of which Tunisia's later Islamist movement evolved. It sought to revive Islam within the public sphere, including in mosques, associations, and educational facilities. The trajectories of its three founders—Rachid Ghannouchi, Hmida Ennaifer, and Abdelfattah Mourou—are instructive to better understand why some individuals were drawn to religion at a time when the far left was thriving.

Ghannouchi was born into a conservative family in a rural town in the Gabes governorate in the centre-east, where he was initially influenced by Arab nationalism. Pursuing a higher education at Zaytouna University, Ghannouchi was struck by the contradictions between Tunis, the progressively Westernised capital, and his traditional upbringing. This led him in the mid-1960s to leave for Egypt with a small group of pan-Arab activists, who were attracted by Gamal Abdel Nasser's call for Arab unity. As Ghannouchi recalled this period:

Bourguiba wanted to Westernise Tunisia and link it to France and not to the East. ... In 1964, together with about fifty other young Tunisians, I sought refuge in Nasser's Egypt, in Arab nationalism. After two or three months we [managed] to convince Egyptian authorities to register us at Cairo University. But only a few months [later] we found ourselves ejected from the university because relations between Nasser and Bourguiba had improved and the Tunisian embassy in Cairo asked the Egyptian authorities to expel us, because we were considered to be regime opponents. ... We were also appalled by Nasser's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>24</sup>

In Egypt, Ghannouchi eventually distanced himself from pan-Arabism. He rejected Nasser's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood and his increasingly close relations with Bourguiba. Most Tunisians did not distinguish between Arab nationalism and religious activism, as indicated by the close ties between Salah Ben Youssef and the Zaytouna establishment. Ghannouchi therefore decided to move to Syria, where he became influenced by political Islam. He explained:

[In Damascus] I followed my study in philosophy for four years. At the beginning I still believed in Nasserism, I even joined an Arab nationalist

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

party for two years. But through discussions at the university I eventually became closer to the Islamist trend. ... When I became totally convinced that [Nasser's] nationalism was against Islamism, I became convinced that I was misled by the nationalist ideology. Arab nationalism in North Africa is not contradictory to Islam, becoming Arab nationalist or Islamist is the same. ... So I decided to move towards Islam. The date of this change was June 15, 1966, when I [embraced] Islamism.<sup>25</sup>

Although Ghannouchi's change from Arab nationalism to Islamism was still atypical at the time, the pan-Arab ideology of many other Tunisians was severely shaken only one year later. Indeed, the Arab defeat in the Six Day War with Israel in 1967 deeply unsettled the many nationalists who had hoped that Nasser could re-establish Muslim unity and dignity. Within six days Israeli forces had not only defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, but had also taken control of the Gaza Strip, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and Syria's Golan Heights. Nasser was humiliated and Tunisia's Arab nationalists, as elsewhere in the region, were devastated. According to John L. Esposito the Israeli victory 'served as a primary catalyst for an Islamic resurgence' throughout the Arab world.<sup>26</sup> In Tunisia, Habib Ellouze, a former Arab nationalist who like many others later joined the Islamist movement, of which he became one of its leading cadres, recalled that '1967 was a turning point. It left deep scars amongst the youth and an identity problem began to emerge.'<sup>27</sup> To the distress of Ellouze and many others, Bourguiba was the only leader in the Arab world who did not advocate direct confrontation with Israel. Authorities in Egypt even accused him of undermining 'Arab unity', while their Israeli counterparts called him 'the sensible Arab'.<sup>28</sup>

Economic upheaval in Tunisia further reinforced opposition to Bourguiba, as the socialist experiment failed to revive the economy. Unrest gradually swept throughout the country. In 1964 riots erupted in the Sahel, the area that stretches along Tunisia's eastern shore, against the collectivisation of land. The large and influential rural bourgeoisie there, whose interests were threatened by the new socialist policies, sharply denounced what they considered an inefficient and unjust system. To save himself from blame, Bourguiba swiftly adopted a liberal economic approach and stripped Ben Salah of all his ministerial posts. When unrest persisted, Bourguiba even decided to arrest Ben Salah, accusing him of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

high treason and condemning him to ten years in prison with hard labour.<sup>29</sup> 'Many young people witnessed that the same government can be left-wing, then brutally change for economic liberalism. We were completely disoriented and no longer understood what to hold on to,'<sup>30</sup> recalled Hmida Ennaifer, a graduate of Zaytouna University from an influential Tunis family that yielded leading scholars amongst the reformist wing of the religious establishment.

In addition to the domestic upheaval, Ennaifer, who left for Paris in the late 1960s to pursue a higher degree at the Sorbonne, was perturbed by events in Europe at that time. In May 1968 protests by students and workers against the government turned violent in France. This led to the arrest of hundreds of people and the temporary closure of the universities of Nanterre and the Sorbonne. 'The West was in upheaval, the whole Western way of life was under question. This reaffirmed some of us in our conviction that Bourguiba's Westernisation reforms were not going in the right direction, that they were not a solution to Tunisia's problems,' Ennaifer affirmed.<sup>31</sup>

In France, Ennaifer had regular discussions with Ghannouchi, who was pursuing a post-graduate university degree in Paris following his studies in Syria. Unlike Ennaifer, who was still attracted by the pan-Arab ideology, Ghannouchi devoted much of his free time to religious activism. Indeed, he had encountered an offshoot of the Pakistani Jama'at al-Tabligh (the Communication Group) in Paris, one of the most influential Islamic movements at the time. Its members focused on *dā'wa*—the proselytising and preaching of Islam—believing that Muslims have gone astray from their religion, a process that has caused wrongs in their history. For the Tabligh, individuals form the cornerstone of society, so Islamic reforms can only occur through a bottom-up process of Islamic revival. Its members seek to create virtuous individuals who follow the *sunna*, the verbally transmitted deeds and sayings of the Prophet, to build a truly Islamic society. In Paris Ghannouchi became inspired by the group, and quickly rose to become one of its imams in a poor suburb.<sup>32</sup>

What Ghannouchi did not know was that a Tabligh group had also become active in Tunis in the late 1960s. There it influenced Abdelfattah Mourou, a graduate of Sadiki College who was studying for a higher degree in law at the University of Tunis. When he first encountered the

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

Tabligh, Mourou was an adept of the Madaniyya Sufi order, which was still active although Bourguiba's opposition to mysticism had substantially decreased its membership base. As Mourou recalled this period:

In 1964 I started *da'wa* activity. ... I was still a Sufi adept at that point. For me, Sufism was not against modernity, but it did not respond to questions of everyday life. I understood that it was possible to be a Sufi adept and at the same time be active in society. ... There was one event that pushed me towards the path of *da'wa*, namely my encounter with the Tabligh. A small group came from Pakistan to Tunis and they inspired me; they went from mosque to mosque and invited people to pray, and that's what I started doing as well.<sup>33</sup>

However, at a time of constant confrontation between the PSD and the far left on campuses, Mourou's religious activities were highly uncommon, so many university students did not take him seriously at first. 'Everybody knew Mourou, he was the only student at the university wearing traditional religious clothes, probably the only student in the entire country,' recalled one of his fellow students with a smirk on his face. 'We found that quite amusing at that time,' he said.<sup>34</sup> Whilst Mourou was not taken seriously on campus, Ghannouchi's family was deeply concerned when they found out about his involvement with the Tabligh. Alongside his physical changes—he began to wear Islamic dress and grew a long beard—news of his activities reached them through friends who had seen him in Paris. In 1969 Ghannouchi's brother came to Paris, luring him home under the pretext that their mother was seriously ill. In reality, his family hoped to reason with him, and persuade him to drop his 'idiotic' activities.<sup>35</sup>

Yet Ghannouchi's return was only the starting point for further religious activism. In a mosque in Tunis he encountered Mourou. Ghannouchi was thrilled to see a student praying, something unthinkable at the time he had left the country, when it was mostly elders and young children who frequented mosques. Mourou introduced him to his five-member Tabligh cell. Ghannouchi was moved that the group's activities had even reached what he thought of as 'Westernised' Tunisia. He had left the country convinced that Bourguiba had uprooted its entire Islamic heritage; but his encounter with Mourou signalled to him that there might be hope for Islam to permeate public life once again, and he promptly decided not to return to Paris. In the meantime, Ennaifer, who

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

was still in Paris, informed Mourou and Ghannouchi from there that he had distanced himself from pan-Arabism and embraced Islamism. Upon his return, he joined them in forming the first cell of al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya, which would quickly gain prominence.<sup>36</sup>

### *Towards a countrywide movement*

The three founders of al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya quickly enlarged the movement's base, recruiting new members through the method of the Tabligh. Ghannouchi affirmed that they '[called] people from the streets, cafés, and shops, to listen to lessons on Islamic consciousness'.<sup>37</sup> The mosque of Sidi Youssef in the *souk* of Tunis became their first secret meeting place. Young Tunisians were especially attracted by the Sidi Youssef cell, although other age groups joined as well. What all of them had in common was not only their rejection of Bourguiba's modernisation project and the ascent of the far left. They also criticised the 'archaic' preaching of Zaytouna University, which, they claimed, had failed to adapt its curriculum to the demands of the contemporary world. Their interest in Tunisia's current realities<sup>38</sup> led most members of al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya to eventually distance themselves from the Tabligh's focus upon individual piety.

From the Sidi Youssef cell, al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya's activities quickly spread to other cities, as its members travelled from mosque to mosque throughout the country to build a grassroots following. Support for their endeavours was particularly pronounced in—even if certainly not limited to—the *souks*, and geographically in southern and central Tunisia. In his research about the socio-economic base of al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya, Abdelkader Zghal found that a new 'social periphery' emerged after independence in rural and semi-rural areas. Its inhabitants 'witnessed a relative amelioration of its living standard'—a consequence of Bourguiba's countrywide education programme—but at the same time saw their 'prospects for social advancement' blocked.<sup>39</sup> They found it difficult to fit into the urban lifestyle and adapt to the socio-cultural codes of the more established and typically secular-leaning elite. They also felt that their areas were economically discriminated against. The traditional merchants, artisans, and craftsmen were progressively cut off from the rest of the country, which increasingly relied

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

upon European products. Indeed, as the former stronghold of Bourguiba's main rival, Salah Ben Youssef, the interior and south got the shorter end of the stick as investment was disproportionately directed towards Tunis and the coastal cities to the east.

Aside from the methods of the Tabligh, al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya leaders came to embrace an elaborate recruitment structure developed by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to boost its membership. They divided its grassroots structures into what they called 'informal families' and 'formal families'. Members of the former were taught about Islam by an activist of the 'formal family' but did not know that they were part of a wider organisation. Once the members of the 'informal families' were judged dedicated and morally intact—a process which could take several months, or even over a year—they became part of the 'formal family', where they were told about the existence of al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya and its endeavours. All people who had reached this stage paid a membership fee. A student contributed one dinar (about \$0.50) per month, a public servant five dinars (about \$2.50). Moreover, donations were accepted and, according to Ennaifer, the al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya leaders soon had self-sufficient financial resources at their disposal.<sup>40</sup>

Whilst all this occurred underground, senior members also sought to expand their activities through the available legal channels. In this respect, the Association for the Safeguard of the Qur'an (ASQ), created in 1967 by the Bourguiba government, played an important role. Having dismantled the religious establishment, including Zaytouna University, Bourguiba formed the ASQ to give practising Muslims a government-controlled channel to express their piety. As there were no alternative Islamic associations, many pious Tunisians joined it, including senior members of the country's contemporary Ennahda and Salafi movements.<sup>41</sup> However, they deplored its limitations. One religious activist close to the ASQ told me that 'Bourguiba wanted to make out of religion something archaic, this did not interest us. We wanted religion to be something concrete that adds value to our everyday life.'<sup>42</sup>

Many of the ASQ's members were, therefore, keen to join the more vibrant al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya once they heard of it. One of the group's founders, Abdelfattah Mourou, was also a senior member of the ASQ. His work in the Association permitted him to travel throughout the country, trips he used to prop up al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya's member-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

ship base. 'The Association had a licence, I had the permission to act on its behalf, while al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya remained an underground movement,' he explained. 'In principle, I gave Islamic courses for the Association for the Safeguard of the Qur'an. I travelled to different provinces in the country. Eventually, however, I also conducted *da'wa* which was not within its scope,' he elaborated.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond its promise of cultural and religious authenticity al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya also drew supporters as a source of bonding in a community. A collective, exclusive identity was cast around a broad set of social practices that included prayers but also a range of social events, sports, studying, and music.<sup>44</sup>

At first, Bourguiba turned a blind eye to the increasingly vibrant religious community. This was despite the fact that a small wing within his own party was involved. Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser found that despite the repression of the pan-Arabs and the assassination of Ben Youssef, a section of the PSD base continued to call for the Islamisation and Arabisation of society. Whilst this faction did not play a role in the creation of al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya, they were in touch with it, and hence 'fulfilled a function of intermediaries between the official Muslim scene and multiple informal scenes'. They even approached leaders of al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya, often within the framework of the ASQ, in an 'attempt to convince [them] to integrate the [PSD] to form a kind of internal Islamic pressure group susceptible to influencing the [regime's] political line'.<sup>45</sup> One former leader of al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya recalled:

Mestaoui Habib, who hailed from southern Tunisia (Gabes) and was an active member of the PSD, had tried by all means to convince [us] to integrate the PSD and to instigate change from within the party. But all his attempts failed and nobody from the movement agreed to follow him.<sup>46</sup>

In many cases the sons and daughters of the 'Islam-Destourian' tendency within the PSD became close to activists of al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya and later the Islamist movement. For example, Aicha Dhaouadi would become a senior figure within Ennahda, while her father was one of the leaders of the Neo-Destour in the governorate of Bizerte. Most famously, Nejib Karoui, the son of Hamed Karoui, a senior official who would become prime minister under Ben Ali, joined al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya and later became a prominent leader within the

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

movement. Hamed Karoui told the author that he understood the choice of his son, even if he did not agree with it, interpreting Nejjib's activism within the movement as a way to search for meaning in turbulent times.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, some 'children [naturally] joined the Islamist movement without having the impression of rupture (or treason) with regard to their family education'.<sup>48</sup>

The growth of Islamic activism, even with roots from within the PSD, initially did not concern Bourguiba, who believed that his crack-down on Arab nationalists and dismantling of the traditional Islamic establishment had been enough to keep public religious expression under control. In the late 1960s and 1970s his attention focused upon the vocal far-left movement, and he even sought to keep it in check by tolerating the religious activists, who fiercely denounced 'godless Marxism'. Between 1968 and 1974 alone, hundreds of leftists were tortured and imprisoned, often in solitary confinement. 'Bourguiba initially accepted the Islamist movement; he even facilitated its growth,' claimed Ahmed Mestiri, a minister at that time.<sup>49</sup> 'It was not an alliance but a tactical choice. He sought to control the extreme left by supporting the Islamists,' Mestiri argued.

One way of doing so was by invigorating religion within the ruling party itself. A PSD party platform published in 1979 highlighted 'the primacy given to the Muslim religion, through the consolidation of its highest values in the consciousness and behaviour of the nation and successive generations, through creating places of worship and veneration towards them'.<sup>50</sup> Through such rhetoric the Bourguiba regime sought to co-opt religious factions of society and marginalise the left. 'He only realised much later that the Islamist movement was the real opponent and [a] much more dangerous [political opponent] than the left could ever be,' according to Mestiri.<sup>51</sup>

As Bourguiba cracked down on leftists, Islamism was gaining influence at educational facilities. Some pupils were drawn to it after direct encounters with followers of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, many of whose prominent members were teachers, including Ghannouchi. Others turned to religion for guidance. They typically recalled that they did not understand the society they were living in and felt that the values propagated in public institutions were detached from those they learned at home. One journalist in his sixties explained the reasons behind his embrace of Islam:

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

In my high school in the city of Medenine in the south of Tunisia ... I could not connect to the Marxism, Darwinism and a sort of revolutionary attitude rejecting Islamism that we were taught. Teachers did not instruct us in any reconciliatory approach, which was very disturbing for me at that time. ... I eventually realised that this did not make sense, my family was Bedouin, I was the son of a simple agriculturist in a conservative family. So I started praying with other schoolmates.<sup>52</sup>

The desire of many young Tunisians to become practising Muslims was bolstered by an influx of books by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In 1970 Anwar Sadat took power in Egypt following Nasser's death. He distanced himself from Nasser's pan-Arab project and instead called himself 'the Believer President'. Sadat began to release Muslim Brotherhood prisoners and allowed them to operate in the open and to publish a monthly magazine. As a consequence, the flow of the Brotherhood's literature increased throughout the region. 'There was an enormous number of books that arrived at that time,' remembered a Tunisian activist in his sixties close to al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya. 'We used to save money throughout the year to buy literature from the Muslim Brotherhood. If I managed to buy just one book I was proud,' he said. 'We read Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, his brother Mohammed Qutb, and other popular Muslim Brotherhood thinkers.'<sup>53</sup>

Aside from the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya, especially its leaders, became swayed by the renowned Algerian Islamic thinker Malik Bennabi, whom they met in the early 1970s. Bennabi famously constructed a 'civilisation cycle' to explain why the Muslim world was in decline and how Islam could help to re-establish its dignity and power—a key concern of al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya. Bennabi elaborated a positive image of democracy, and argued that respecting plurality in society was fundamental to Islam, thus distancing himself from the more narrow political project of Sayyid Qutb. Moreover, Ennaifer and other religious activists maintained close ties to the Zaytouna establishment and its clerics, although they had been stripped of their historical role in the state and society. Whilst Bennabi and Zaytouna scholars influenced al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya's intellectual and elite circles, in author interviews most grassroots activists recounted that these intellectuals had little, if any, influence on their thinking, which was mostly guided by the Muslim Brotherhood's ideo-

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

logues. At the level of the al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya base, Sufism influenced the movement, especially in the south, where some adepts joined the movement. Moreover, Abdelfattah Mourou told the author that once a Sufi shaykh from Sfax wanted to 'cooperate with the group'. He recounted that 'when we met him we realised that this was something else, he talked about rituals and religious rules, very basic things. The Sufi discourse of that time was completely disconnected from our intellectual configuration.'<sup>54</sup> Sufism focuses upon the spiritual dimension of Islam, but members of al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya longed for concrete guidance in their everyday lives.

Al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya's initially broad and in many ways poorly defined ideological set-up was also reflected by its monthly publication *al-Ma'rifa*, launched in 1972 (one issue had appeared in 1962, but the magazine was outlawed thereafter). Abdelkader Zghal even maintained that its early publications illustrated the movement's 'absence of any reflection that exceeds the level of slogans found in all old conservative Salafi publications', reflecting that the strength of the movement 'did not reside in the thought of its leaders, but rather in the predispositions of its followers'.<sup>55</sup> Early articles in *al-Ma'rifa* focused almost entirely upon moralising and the propagation of religious values. Its authors criticised the rise of the far left and the Western way of life, without embracing any particular doctrine or suggesting solutions other than a return to Islam to counter the perceived malaise. Initially the publication also dealt solely with the socio-cultural sphere, in contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood's explicitly political ambitions.

In their search for ideological guidance the Jama'ā al-Islamiyya leaders were at first also interested in Muammar Gaddafi's ascent to power in neighbouring Libya. In contrast to the secularism of Nasser's pan-Arabism, Gaddafi promised to combine nationalist and Islamist principles through the introduction of *shari'a* and Islamic socialism. Intrigued, Ghannouchi, Mourou, and Ennaifer left for Libya in 1971 to meet with members of the Islamist movement there. But their hopes were quickly dashed when they heard of the regime's persecution of opponents, especially from the religious camp, and the closure of universities and other educational institutions. So the Jama'ā al-Islamiyya leaders swiftly distanced themselves from Gaddafi's nationalism, but still they did not adopt any particular ideology.<sup>56</sup> This changed, how-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

ever, when the first generation of religious activists left school and entered the universities, where they became quickly politicised.

### *Campus wars*

A first wave of al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya students reached the universities in the mid-1970s. They were particularly numerous within the Faculty of Science and Institute of Technology in Tunis.<sup>57</sup> Many students hailed from rural areas, were separated from their families for the first time, and felt deeply uncomfortable in the more Westernised capital. In al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya they found a peer group they felt at ease with and which was willing to accept them.<sup>58</sup> At the university many of them came under the influence of Bachir Turki, a Sadiki College graduate with a doctorate in nuclear physics who was deeply attached to Islam and sought to fight against 'the aggressive values of atheism and materialism'.<sup>59</sup> For several years he organised discussion circles at the university campus in Bardo on the topic of science and religion, which were widely attended by Jama'á al-Islamiyya activists. Although he himself never joined the group, Turki deeply inspired its members. He argued that technological modernisation would gradually lead to 'a return to the authenticity of the timeless values of Islam', providing them with the intellectual backdrop to combine their traditional religious upbringing with modern innovations and technological advancement.<sup>60</sup> The university campus in Bardo, located 4 kilometres west of Tunis, was one of the first locations where Jama'á al-Islamiyya students met, and from there they launched their activities on other campuses.

Soon they opened faculty mosques, conducted *da'wa*, and even started to participate in discussion circles, usually organised by the leftists. These encounters revealed to the Jama'á al-Islamiyya youth that its ideological background was not sufficiently developed to keep up with the heated political debates on campuses. 'We quickly realised that our training and ideas were weak in comparison to those of our opponents, that we had to strengthen our ideology,' one former student at the Manouba University in Tunis told the author. 'The discourse of the [far left] was strong, we did not have the intellectual means to counter their arguments effectively.'<sup>61</sup> Some Jama'á al-Islamiyya activists even began to study Marxist works in order to understand leftist ideology

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

and to find ways to challenge its precepts more effectively.<sup>62</sup> By the early 1970s leftists had become such a force at universities that they even came to challenge the power of the PSD students, who used to dominate the General Union of Tunisian Students (L'Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie, UGET), the most important—and only legal—student body. During UGET elections in 1971 the far left for the first time gained the majority of seats, a result the Destourians refused to recognise. In other words, the UGET came under the control of the ruling party. This led to clashes between UGET members and their leftist adversaries. The government tried to curb the unrest by issuing a law prohibiting all unauthorised student meetings, but in vain. Soon campuses became a battlefield between the PSD supporters, the far left, and, from the mid-1970s, religious activists.<sup>63</sup>

In particular, the leftists vehemently opposed the rise of the Jama'ā al-Islamiyya students. 'The ideology we pursued at that time was a kind of atheism, we did not understand the ascent of the Islamic movement,'<sup>64</sup> conceded one former leftist student to the author. As the religious student body grew bigger, tensions between the Jama'ā al-Islamiyya youth and their leftist and Destourian counterparts grew. This culminated in 1977 during discussions about the UGET's next student elections. The UGET members wanted their candidate to run unopposed. The Jama'ā al-Islamiyya activists allegedly condemned this. They organised a rally to voice their discontent, which turned violent. One of their former leaders recalled:

On Monday 26 December we held a big meeting at the Faculty of Science at the University of Manouba. We talked about the problem with the UGET's candidacy. ... The meeting resulted in a big clash between the leftists and us, several hundred students fought against each other, with hands, stones and knives. The police did not intervene and many students suffered serious injuries.<sup>65</sup>

The violence led Jama'ā al-Islamiyya students to publish their first statement, which condemned the use of force. It was signed by 'the students of the Islamic Tendency Movement', which demarcated a clear break with the leadership of al-Jama'ā al-Islamiyya. 'With the name "Islamic Tendency Movement" (Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique, MTI; Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami), we wanted to stress that our faith is embedded in the particularities of the current society and that we want

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

to respond to its dynamics,' explained an activist who helped draft the statement. 'The morality and values propagated by the Jama'á al-Islamiyya leaders were important, but we university students felt that this approach was not sufficient, that we also needed to act.'<sup>66</sup> In contrast to al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya's focus on personal piety and righteousness, the activists of the MTI on campuses were calling for social and political action to counter the secularisation and state Islam of Bourguiba. Douglas K. Magnuson argued that 'the problem from their perspective [was] the decadence of the Islamic state and society, the waning influence (or noninfluence) of Islam in legal, political, cultural, economic, and educational domains'.<sup>67</sup> To counter this trend, many students openly came to embrace the all-encompassing political Islam.

The MTI statement was well received by many religious students, and more statements, leaflets, and other publications—all signed by the MTI—were soon to follow. The young activists also launched discussion circles throughout universities, and their leaders held weekly meetings in an apartment they rented secretly in central Tunis. There they 'discussed priorities and strategy', affirmed one of its former figureheads. 'We acted autonomously from al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya's leadership, which still focused on preaching and *da'wa*,' he reflected.<sup>68</sup> Senior members even created religious youth scouts and organised retreats to rural areas. Participants adopted names of the followers of the Prophet, famous *'ulama*, or *mujahidin*, recited religious texts, and took physical exercise to remain in shape.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, many religious students practised karate on a daily basis,<sup>70</sup> certainly in preparation for future clashes on the campuses, and possibly even with the regime.

Eventually, senior members of al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya became worried about the vigorous activism of their students. They feared that the youth branch would evolve into a separate movement if they did not manage to adapt their ideology to the demands of young people. By the mid-1970s the prospect of a split heightened, at a time when a vocal syndicate movement was protesting against worsening socio-economic conditions.<sup>71</sup> On 26 January 1978, a day still remembered as Black Thursday, the executive committee of the UGTT called for a general strike. As workers—alongside many students who supported their cause—took to the streets throughout the country, state authorities called in the army to restore order. Its forces brutally crushed the protesters. Between 50 and 200 people died and up to 1,000 were injured.<sup>72</sup>

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

Whilst some Jama'á al-Islamiyya members took part in the protests, in the 1970s the bulk of the UGTT membership base consisted of left-wing activists.<sup>73</sup> 'Unionism was alien to us,' recalled Ghannouchi. 'Social confrontation between rich and poor is a Marxist formula which did not correspond to our understanding of life.'<sup>74</sup> Following the events, al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya published its first political statement in *al-Ma'rifa*, entitled 'Before the Iron Curtain Comes Down'. The title reflects the leadership's fear that Tunisia would fall into the hands of the leftists. Although the statement supported the workers' 'legitimate demands', it warned that Tunisia could be 'dragged into a civil war' and ultimately attributed the vandalism and violence to the UGTT and its 'Marxists', whom it denounced as enemies.<sup>75</sup> Despite the statement's condemnation of the UGTT, there was no unanimous agreement within al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya as to how to respond to the violent unfolding of events. Many of its students particularly opposed the statement. 'We didn't see the danger like that. We said that we needed to support the people who were so brutally suppressed by the government,' one former student leader asserted in the presence of the author. 'Some senior members of al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya actually supported our position', he claimed.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the January 1978 events not only reinforced the gap between the students and Jama'á al-Islamiyya leaders, they also accentuated mounting divergences within the leadership.

### *The Progressive Islamists leave the movement*

In the 1970s divisions emerged between Jama'á al-Islamiyya followers, oriented towards what they called a 'Tunisian Islam', and a mounting number of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. The Brotherhood's increasing sway within al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya was echoed by a new category of articles published in *al-Ma'rifa*. Whilst in the early 1970s the magazine had focused in general terms upon the need for Islamic revival, it now also published material about the Brotherhood. A 1978 article defended the sympathy of some Tunisians, especially among the youth, towards the Muslim Brotherhood, insisting that it constitutes 'the core of the reform movement as they discussed Islam within the context of an organic and moving society'.<sup>77</sup>

Another article, entitled 'The Muslim Sister's Veil', postulated that pious women 'should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

they should not display their beauty and ornaments', in accordance with Brotherhood traditions.<sup>78</sup> The same edition of *al-Ma'rifa*, however, also published an article discussing the life and legacy of Kheireddine.<sup>79</sup> This ambivalence of themes between the Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisian reformers reflected the gradual emergence of two distinct factions within al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya. While the bulk of its members were being drawn to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, a small group, led by Ennaifer and known as the Progressive Islamists, advocated a Tunisian Islam consonant with the country's specific Islamic heritage—including its Islamic reformist movement and the centuries-old Zaytouna legacy—to find responses to modern-day challenges. The Progressive Islamists were also inspired by the Mu'tazila school of Islamic theology, which flourished in the eighth to tenth centuries and called upon reason and rational thought.<sup>80</sup> Mu'tazilites believed, amongst other things, that the Qur'an was created, and is not co-eternal with God. They stipulated that intellect is a way to approach God as it serves to understand Islamic law. In a similar vein the Progressive Islamists called for rectification of Islamic thought through reason. They claimed that al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya propagated Islamic texts and precepts without subjecting them to critical review.

In 1973 Ennaifer distanced himself from the Muslim Brotherhood after meeting its leaders in Egypt. 'They did not know anything about what was happening in North Africa,' he told the author, still visibly agitated. 'When I asked a simple question, I always just received a quote from Hassan al-Banna as an answer. But al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1920s and we were living in 1973!' he exclaimed. 'The Egyptian Muslim Brothers did not know anything about the social and economic realities in Tunisia. That's why I became convinced that allying with them was not the right way forward.'<sup>81</sup> Moreover, despite the Egyptian Brotherhood's fifty-year history of activism, it had failed to realise many of its objectives and had been persecuted by successive regimes, a situation which reinforced Ennaifer's scepticism of its strategy and goals. Ennaifer, who was then editor-in-chief of *al-Ma'rifa*, publicly voiced his criticism of the Brotherhood in a 1978 article.<sup>82</sup> It included a cartoon depicting a bearded Muslim cleaning his brain with a swab, an image highlighting the risk of 'brainwashing' amongst Brotherhood followers. A paragraph

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

in which Ennaifer criticised Hassan al-Banna directly was taken out before publication, which led to his dismissal as editor-in-chief.<sup>83</sup>

Ennaifer and his supporters maintained that a lack of democratic traditions within the movement made it impossible for them to voice their criticism and constitute a progressive wing within al-Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya.<sup>84</sup> As conflicts between al-Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya's two factions heightened, followers met in the city of Mornag, south of Tunis, to decide whether to opt for a 'Tunisian Islam' or to support the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>85</sup> 'It was a very emotional debate, we were not really discussing rationally,' recalled Ennaifer. 'It was not conducive to finding a solution or compromise.'<sup>86</sup> A particular point of contention was how the Progressive Islamists proposed to respond to the mounting politicisation of the university students and to provide them with a vision. 'The defenders of the "Tunisian Islam" could not offer anything that seemed as useful as the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood to provide youth with guidance,' conceded Ennaifer.<sup>87</sup> The supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood were also by far the majority, so Ennaifer and about twenty others left al-Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya between 1978 and 1979.<sup>88</sup>

At first it was still unclear whether the split was final. Ghannouchi and Mourou continued to meet Ennaifer in an attempt to overcome the rift. Ennaifer's group considered acting as a sort of internal opposition within al-Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya similar to that of Mohammed al-Ghazali inside the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In the mid-1970s al-Ghazali had published several articles in which he was critical of some aspects of the inner working of the Brotherhood.<sup>89</sup> His public advocacy for Islamic reform and revival inspired Ennaifer's group, illustrating that dynamics within the Egyptian organisation also influenced the Tunisian Progressive Islamists. Mourou and Ghannouchi were initially not opposed to the idea. At their request, Ennaifer even wrote a study book with which he proposed to guide and educate the youth.<sup>90</sup> After reading it, however, the Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya leaders judged it unsuitable and handed it back to him. The book included an anonymous note, presumably written by an al-Jamā'ā al-Islamiyya leader, which explained that although 'many of the texts sound correct ... too many of them claim false ideas, perceptions and they include some myths [and] cannot be passed without religious and scientific discussions'. It specifically listed this 'controversial' literature, which included an excerpt of Tahar

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Haddad's book on women's rights and a piece by Egyptian scholar Mohammed Salim al-Awa,<sup>91</sup> who is famous for unequivocally embracing democracy.

The rejection of Ennaifer's book marked the final rift between the two factions. After splitting from al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya, the Progressive Islamists decided to launch their own publication, entitled *15\*21*, whose first edition appeared in 1982. The title of the magazine alludes to the fact that the fifteenth century of the Islamic lunar calendar corresponds to the twenty-first century of the Gregorian calendar, and is indicative of the Progressive Islamists' project of combining Islam with modernity. Despite their split and the appearance of a rival publication, the impact of the Progressive Islamists, and particularly Ennaifer, on al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya was not totally lost. 'We were deeply disturbed when Ennaifer left us,' remembered a journalist in his early sixties who was a student leader at the Faculty of Science in Tunis. 'He was one of the founders and we respected him very much.'<sup>92</sup> Indeed, some members of al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya agreed with many things Ennaifer had argued for, in particular a more critical reading of Islamic texts and the notion of 'progressing towards Islam' rather than 'returning' to it.<sup>93</sup> However, they decided not to join the Progressive Islamists, believing that a popular movement could be more influential than Ennaifer's more intellectual focus, a conviction they felt was confirmed by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which showed the leverage an Islamic mass movement could achieve.

### *The Iranian factor*

The Iranian Revolution, which replaced the Pahlavi dynasty with an Islamic republic, showed that Islamists can go beyond talking in theoretical ways about justice and codes of conduct, and enter the political sphere. '[The Revolution] was certainly interesting to us, it showed us a totally new dimension of Islam and what role it can have in politics,' explained Mourou.<sup>94</sup> It also led Jama'at al-Islamiyya activists to become more interested in socio-economic issues, previously dominated by leftists. The Revolution 'enabled us to Islamize some leftist social concepts and to accommodate the social conflict within an Islamic context,' stated Rachid Ghannouchi. 'While the communists insisted that

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

Marxism had discovered the nature of conflict within society ... we saw in the Iranian revolution a turbaned shaykh (cleric) commanding the revolution of the oppressed against a despotic agent of imperialism and against a rotten capitalist class.<sup>95</sup> According to his own account, Ghannouchi was particularly influenced by the Iranian scholar Ali Shariati, who had formulated a theology of liberation and Islamic revolutionism and affected his beliefs on religion and liberties in a way distinct from the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>96</sup>

The events in Iran not only captured the imaginations and aspirations of many Tunisians. Sunni and Shi'a organisations throughout the Muslim world used them as a model for their own socio-political protest and reform movements. In Lebanon, for example, they inspired the Shi'a movement Hizbullah in its fight against both the Israeli occupation in the south and Christian domination of the country. In the country's north, the Revolution also strongly influenced the Sunni Islamist Tawheed Movement in its endeavour to fight the presence of Syrian troops there and establish an emirate in the city of Tripoli in the early 1980s.<sup>97</sup> In Egypt, the establishment of an Islamic republic in Iran particularly inspired young activists of the politicised al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, a youth movement that, like its Tunisian namesake, had become influential on campuses in the 1970s and merged with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood around 1976.<sup>98</sup>

Among al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's rank and file in Tunisia, the impact of events in Iran was enormous too. A former student remembered that 'we celebrated the Revolution at university; when it worked we had a big feast at the Faculty of Science in Tunis'.<sup>99</sup> Young activists used the discourse of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, to counter the leftists at universities more effectively, portraying the events as an Islamic battle for justice.<sup>100</sup> Some students even established contacts with officials from the Iranian embassy, who provided them with brochures about the Revolution, which they subsequently distributed on campuses. In this way, they significantly boosted their membership base. 'The Iranian Revolution [is] at the origin of my membership in [the Islamist movement],' said an activist at the time. The Revolution 'proved its force and capacity to deal with great challenges', he stated. 'Other parties ... propagate only the Western or Eastern ideologies [which] have failed.'<sup>101</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Yet once Khomeini's increasingly autocratic stance became evident, Jama'at al-Islamiyya leaders gradually distanced themselves from events in Iran. They decided, nevertheless, to take Islamism in Tunisia a step further. In July 1979 a congress was convened in Manouba, west of Tunis, where the leaders changed the name of their organisation to the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI)—already adopted by the university branch two years earlier—in order to stress their relevance to the current situation and their willingness to take socio-economic and political positions.

The participants also discussed their relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. The majority voiced their support for the Brotherhood, yet, according to Mourou, the MTI did not join the organisation formally.<sup>102</sup> This contrasts with statements by members of the MTI who told the author that they had sworn allegiance to it. A possibility is that they joined the Brotherhood individually and not as part of the MTI. However, Tariq Ramadan maintained that MTI activists were initially part of the international organisation (al-Tanzim al-Dawli) of the Muslim Brotherhood, although their leaders sought some independence at the national level. 'Intellectually they were autonomous, organisationally they were not for a while,' he told the author. The strategy of some regional chapters was devised at the level of the international Muslim Brotherhood, but according to Ramadan this was more difficult in the case of Tunisia, as Ghannouchi was intellectually quite independent.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, not all MTI activists were fervent supporters of the alliance, including Mourou, who understood the connection from a strategic point of view but remained ideologically close to Tunisian Islamic traditions.

The 1979 congress also established the basic rules and structure of the new organisation. It created the General Congress, the supreme authority of the movement, which met every three years and elected the president of the movement and the Shura Council (consultative body), which convened every three months and was tasked with deciding on all key political and strategic matters. The congress also established an Executive Office, led by the president and composed of nine members, which implemented the decisions of the Shura Council. Moreover, local representatives were charged with putting policies into effect in different governorates.<sup>104</sup> Naturally the establishment of a

## TUNISIA'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

clear structure with democratic elements was a major achievement for MTI followers, although much power remained with their leaders, especially informally, a legacy which persists. The Congress also determined that universities and schools would constitute independent entities for Islamist activism. Ghannouchi was elected leader of the movement and Salah Karker, a fierce defender of the Brotherhood, became his deputy. Although the MTI existed underground, the mounting public prominence of the Islamists did of course not escape the attention of the government, which became increasingly worried about its new adversaries.

Bourguiba soon realised that he had underestimated the religious activists. This became glaringly apparent in 1975, when regime loyalists hosted the famous philosophy professor Hind Chelbi, a veiled practising Muslim, on TV during Ramadan, in an attempt to prop up the PSD's religious credentials. However, Chelbi not only refused a kiss on the cheek from the president on live TV, she also denounced his state feminism as an infringement of the values of Islam—a direct attack. Many Tunisians still remember this event as the starting point of increasing frictions between Bourguiba and the Islamists. Eventually the president ordered Interior Ministry officials to monitor them. In December 1979 Ghannouchi and Mourou were arrested and held for several days, accused of spreading false information and promoting subversion. In the following months and years Bourguiba's confrontation with the MTI further intensified, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.



## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

*[Within the MTI] we spent a lot of time discussing democracy. I embraced the concept in its entirety. In my view there was no difference between democracy and shura [consultation]. However, others did not see it like that. They said shura is not the same as democracy. They accepted some aspects of democracy but not the concept in its entirety.*

Abdelaziz Temimi, former student activist, Tunis, February 2014

Even after the Progressive Islamists split off, the MTI remained divided between a more pragmatic trend, close to Abdelfattah Mourou, and dogmatic activists led by Salah Karker, who took a scripturalist approach and rejected the independent interpretation of religious texts. They disagreed on many basic notions such as democracy and women's rights. Mourou and activists such as Abdelaziz Temimi, quoted above, said they accepted multi-party politics, including cooperation with secular actors, whilst Karker and his associates sharply denounced the idea as 'un-Islamic'. Rachid Ghannouchi attempted to mediate between the factions to prevent further ruptures within the movement. Yet, starting from the mid-1980s, Karker rose to such prominence within the MTI that he even succeeded in pushing students such as Temimi out of the movement.

The ascendancy of the dogmatic faction was bolstered by mounting state repression of the MTI once its existence was discovered, a dynamic that reinforced the faction's perception that seeking to work

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

within the political system could only lead to no good. Despite the Islamists' insistence that it always constituted a purely 'civil' movement, this chapter demonstrates that, from the mid-1980s, some MTI members sought to respond to the repression by plotting to overthrow the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Yet such plans were only devised once it became evident that neither regime would tolerate their activism. The chapter also illustrates that, in contrast to the wide perception that post-independence Tunisia was a 'secular' state, both Bourguiba and Ben Ali embarked upon a more religious policy in an attempt to capture the increasingly pious public mood. They were completely taken by surprise, on first learning of its existence, by the extent of the MTI support base.

### *The failure of reconciliation*

On 5 December 1980 the police stopped two members of the MTI's Executive Bureau, Salah Karker and Ben Issa Demni, and found them in possession of an organisational chart of the movement. 'We knew we were sometimes being monitored,' recalled Demni. 'But in 1980 they stopped us in a routine patrol, we were very unlucky.'<sup>1</sup> Suddenly the regime became aware of the full scope of the Islamists' activities, i.e. that they were not merely a loose trend but had a tightly organised movement that was active in all provinces. They also discovered that the Islamist university students were in reality part of the youth branch of the MTI.<sup>2</sup> Under severe torture, Demni and Karker revealed the names of the movement's leaders and details of its activities.

'Until our arrest, the regime did not know so much about us. We were a relatively new phenomenon. Bourguiba was much more familiar with his leftist and Arab nationalist opponents,' affirmed Demni. 'So when they arrested Karker and myself, they tried to get as much information from us as possible. They were particularly interested in our activities outside the capital, about which they knew nothing at all.'<sup>3</sup> Naturally Bourguiba was furious when he learned that the religious activists had managed to establish themselves throughout Tunisia right under his nose, including in the interior and the south, once the stronghold of the Arab nationalists. The president was concerned that, through their countrywide base, they could challenge his power just as

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

Ben Youssef and his supporters had once sought to. In expectation of a crackdown, MTI leaders swiftly decided to dissolve the Shura Council, the Executive Bureau, and the committees. However, its followers continued to meet underground, and under strict safety precautions even held a congress in Sousse in April 1981. 'Most people had their eyes covered when they were driven to the congress so that they could not remember its location,' explained a senior activist who attended the event. 'We also used different names to protect our identities.'<sup>4</sup> In this way, participants could not provide details about the identities of MTI members and the congress location if they were arrested.

At the congress Ghannouchi proposed a dramatic solution, namely to announce the movement's existence and apply for a party licence to continue its activities within a legal framework. Mourou supported this idea while the more dogmatic wing, led by Karker and supported by the majority of students, opposed it. They argued that this would only make the Islamists more vulnerable, and ultimately give the authoritarian regime a certain degree of legitimacy. Instead, Karker proposed to simply declare the existence of the MTI, without asking the government for authorisation.<sup>5</sup> The heated debates in Sousse laid bare the deep tension between the two trends, but they finally settled on a common strategy. Ghannouchi and Mourou agreed to reactivate the movement's structures to continue its activities underground. At the same time, figureheads decided to announce the existence of the MTI and demand a licence to operate as a political party.

During a press conference in June 1981 Ghannouchi, Mourou, and Demni asked the government for official recognition. They presented a political programme which called for the revival of Tunisia's Islamic legacy and the unity of Islam to 'liberate the Islamic conscience from civilisational defeat by the West'.<sup>6</sup> Although the MTI was dominated by men, its leaders had asked three successful female activists to officially endorse their programme so as to look more 'progressive'. One of the women told the author that she truly believed in the possibility of obtaining a licence owing to a temporary change in the political climate in the early 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, on the day that the Sousse congress took place, the PSD met to decide upon a new strategy which stressed 'openness' and 'multi-party politics'. Bourguiba announced elections for later in 1981, and even proclaimed that he would formally recog-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

nise parties that gained more than 5 per cent of the vote. This was not only of interest to the MTI, but also to secular-leaning contenders. The Movement of Social Democrats (MDS), founded in 1978 by defectors from the PSD, had emerged as an important opposition force. The opening up of the political landscape was also reflected by the 1980 nomination of Mohammed Mzali, an advocate of Arab culture who was open to compromise with the Islamists, as prime minister. This convinced some MTI activists that the regime might finally embark upon a genuine process of democratisation. The distinguished scholar François Burgat pointed out that when Mzali became minister of education in 1969, a position he used to Arabise schoolbooks, the editors of *al-Ma'rifa* even published a picture of him in the magazine.<sup>8</sup> They were now confident that they had found a key ally within the regime who supported many of their demands.

However, Bourguiba's apparent change in political strategy stemmed primarily from the need to curb creeping social unrest, not a belief in democratic power-sharing. As a mounting number of Tunisians felt alienated by his politics, some had begun to plan armed action. On 26 January 1980, the second anniversary of Black Thursday, up to 300 Tunisian Arab nationalists, supported by the Libyan government, attacked a police station, the National Army and the National Guard in the west-central city of Gafsa.<sup>9</sup> They hoped that their actions would draw wide popular support and acquire sufficient momentum to overthrow the regime. Calling themselves Tunisia's Liberation Army, the dissenters strove for 'liberation of the country from the PSD dictatorship and neo-colonial domination'.<sup>10</sup> Within less than two days, however, Bourguiba managed to break up the group. Despite its swift dismantling, the wider impact of the first armed resistance against the regime was substantial. The MTI formally released a statement condemning the Gafsa affair, but many of its followers actually supported it. 'One senior member quickly sent the statement although the leadership was divided on the topic,' remembered a former leader at the university. 'Many members of the student wing actually sympathised with the event,' he said.<sup>11</sup>

Suspecting collusion between the Gafsa attack and the MTI, the regime once again heightened the surveillance and repression of its activists on campuses. Tensions burst out in February 1981 when

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

Islamists at the University of Manouba took the dean of the Faculty of Science hostage after security forces surrounded the campus. 'In the minds of the students, this was a banal thing, but for the regime it was as if the Iranian model was imposed,' reflected a former student who witnessed the events.<sup>12</sup> The incident reminded the regime of the Iranian hostage crisis (November 1979–January 1981), during which students in Tehran held fifty-two Americans captive. Newspapers close to the government reported that the hostage-takers were armed, masked, and had tied a rope around the dean's neck<sup>13</sup>—accounts the perpetrators strongly denied. However, one former student who witnessed the events said that the dean's arms and feet had been tied with rope, and that some of the hostage-takers discussed the possibility of using the chemical laboratory on the campus to attack the security forces.<sup>14</sup> In retrospect, Ghannouchi acknowledged that the hostage-taking was a 'stupid, irresponsible act' which triggered a 'terrible crisis'.<sup>15</sup>

### *Islamism thrives despite repression*

In July 1981, a month after the MTI had applied for a licence, its request for registration as a political party was rejected. An assessment in a later article in *Le Monde* was that 'by preventing the Islamists from freely expressing themselves, Bourguiba underestimated the political maturity of Tunisians'. It argued that allowing the MTI to enter the political sphere would have forced its followers 'to become publicly "responsible"'—including for the violence on campuses—and 'to defend a programme'.<sup>16</sup> Over the next few months more than a hundred religious activists were jailed in what constituted the first large-scale crackdown on their movement. The charges included the dissemination of false information, the operation of an unauthorised association, and incitement to violence, especially on campuses.<sup>17</sup> Amongst the detainees were Mourou, Ghannouchi, Karker, and many other senior figures, including some from the university branch. Prison sentences ranged from one to eleven years. The interior minister at that time, Driss Guiga, admitted with hindsight that the government had overreacted,<sup>18</sup> especially given that many detainees belonged to the MTI's pragmatic wing and publicly advocated political reconciliation.

The repression strengthened the MTI's public image, as a growing number of Tunisians denounced the regime's crackdown. A leader of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

the Progressive Islamists published an article in the popular weekly newspaper *Réalités* to defend the MTI's 'inalienable right ... of total liberty of action'.<sup>19</sup> Popular dismay with the regime rose further following the 1981 elections, which exposed the limits of Bourguiba's declared political 'opening'. The president falsified the results to give the PSD 94.6 per cent of the vote, so no other party made the 5 per cent threshold required to be legally recognised. Naturally the election results provoked an outcry amongst opposition forces. Bourguiba later decided to license the MDS, the Party of Popular Unity (PUP), and the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), a move Kenneth Perkins rightly interpreted as a way to divide adversaries while nurturing fresh hopes of gradual democratisation.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, in prison, the MTI leaders, who were sharing a cell, discussed how to refine their strategy and ideological outlook to strengthen their movement. 'The big questions we dealt with in jail were understanding what went wrong, why we failed to resist Bourguiba's repression, and how to do better in the future,' remembered a former student detainee. 'We discussed how to develop and improve our movement, both from an institutional and ideological point of view.'<sup>21</sup> This proved particularly difficult as friction heightened between Karker and Ghannouchi, who blamed one another for the regime's crackdown on the religious activists. Karker claimed that Ghannouchi's insistence upon negotiations with Bourguiba had weakened their organisation; Ghannouchi, by contrast, held that Karker's confrontational stance had provoked the repression. Tensions between the two leaders further intensified when in 1983 the regime uncovered the MTI's new underground structures, which were headed by Hamadi Jebali, an engineer from Sousse. Jebali managed to escape with a group of activists to France, where they were granted exile, but the majority were again jailed. On 8 January alone, seventy-six MTI followers were arrested.<sup>22</sup>

The emerging crisis only reinforced tension within the inner circles of the movement. Followers not only disagreed on basic strategic considerations, but also adopted different stances on key ideological issues, such as democracy. A formerly jailed student leader told the author that he embraced democracy in its entirety but conceded that his stance was not shared by all of his fellow MTI inmates. Another point of contention was gender relations. 'The Qur'an stipulates that men

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

and women are different. We spent a lot of time discussing what that meant,' the interviewee recalled.<sup>23</sup> Karker even proposed a referendum on the Personal Status Code, and Ghannouchi was initially also critical of the legislation.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Karker and Ghannouchi debated the role of the UGTT in society and the MTI's relationship with the union. Karker denounced the UGTT as a leftist body. Ghannouchi, who had so strongly condemned the labour unrest of 1978, gradually became more lenient towards union activism, and even began to encourage MTI followers to join the UGTT, a position embraced by many students who otherwise tended to be close to Karker. One member of the MTI explained that 'starting from the mid-1980s, Ghannouchi encouraged us to join the UGTT. He said that Fadhel Ben Achour, one of the fathers of the Islamic renaissance and defender of Islam in Tunisia, was one of the UGTT's founders.'<sup>25</sup> Ghannouchi's appeal to join the union proved quite successful, and by 1989 Islamists reportedly constituted up to 20 per cent of its membership base.<sup>26</sup> Ghannouchi insisted that political Islam and labour activism are not contradictory and that his followers should also fight for the rights of the workers.

Alongside UGTT activism, MTI leaders came to have a voice in key sectors of society by developing 'career plans' for its members. Amongst others, MTI activists integrated with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company, and sensitive institutions such as the police and the army. According to Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser the MTI even established clandestine sectorial committees which were present in each ministry and which 'intervened directly in promotions and professional changes, orientating [members] according to the strategic interest of the movement'.<sup>27</sup> In defence of this policy, Karker claimed that 'the MTI had never obliged anyone to accept or to refuse a post', adding that it only provided 'recommendations', which 'people sometimes followed, but sometimes did not take into account'.<sup>28</sup>

As the MTI was gaining a voice within both the state and civil society, many of its followers actively supported popular protests, which erupted again in January 1984.<sup>29</sup> Just like in 1978, prices of basic commodities doubled in 1984 as the IMF and the World Bank demanded the lifting of subsidies on basic food items, triggering countrywide

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

unrest. In contrast to the 1978 protests, which were organised by the UGTT, the 1984 so-called Bread Riots erupted spontaneously in the marginalised south and then spread to other parts of the country.<sup>30</sup> Government officials blamed ‘uncontrolled elements’ for the turmoil, and refused to give in to the people’s demands.<sup>31</sup> Events escalated when demonstrators threw stones at a vehicle in which Bourguiba was sitting. Security forces responded with harsh repression, leaving 89 people dead and over 900 wounded.<sup>32</sup> A particularly worrying development was that Bourguiba decided to recall the infamous government official Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali from an ambassadorial post to the position of director-general of national security, in which capacity he had previously forcefully crushed the 1978 unrest. The MTI’s active involvement in the Bread Riots particularly unsettled the president since it showed its rapid evolution from a loose religious group to a major socio-political opposition force with a quickly growing membership base. One of Bourguiba’s former advisers explained:

[Bourguiba] was convinced that using Islam to gain power would allow people who are against modernity, who are incapable and ignorant, [to] disrupt his efforts to modernise and develop the country. Therefore they needed to be eliminated. ... He put all of his efforts and power to reduce [the Islamists’] power and eliminate them. And Bourguiba chose Ben Ali for this very reason, because he understood that only Ben Ali was able to confront and win the battle against the Islamists.<sup>33</sup>

The government accused the MTI of having masterminded the protests, and arrested many of its activists who had publicly supported or participated in them. Yet it could not provide any evidence that they were behind the Bread Riots, so most of them were released after several months in prison.<sup>34</sup> The decision to free them was taken under the advice of Prime Minister Mzali, who insisted that Bourguiba had to adopt a more conciliatory approach to restore the regime’s credibility and stability, as well as to counter the MTI’s growing membership base. Indeed, Michael Willis found that ‘repression of the MTI ... failed to staunch its growth and in many eyes the two developments—the growth of the MTI and growing violence—were linked’. Even if this was ‘not in terms of formal responsibility then in terms of the MTI becoming the outlet for widespread frustration and anger at the regime’.<sup>35</sup> Bourguiba was initially undecided about how best to elimi-

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

nate the perceived threat stemming from the religious activists, and his strategy varied between repression and limited engagement.

### *A short amnesty*

In the early 1980s Mzali pressured Bourguiba for reconciliation with the MTI, and managed to persuade him to release its remaining prisoners. Bourguiba initially began secret negotiations with the jailed leaders via middlemen. Eventually he spoke directly with Mourou, who had been released in 1983. The Tunisian scholar Alaya Allani revealed that, upon his release, Mourou had sent a letter to Bourguiba in which he reassured the president of the Islamists' commitment to the rule of law, their acceptance of modernity and rejection of any kind of violence.<sup>36</sup> In response, on the occasion of Bourguiba's birthday on 4 August 1984, the president issued a general amnesty. The MTI subsequently entered a period of semi-liberty, and its status was scarcely distinct from that of other opposition forces.

Shortly after their release, MTI activists decided to convene a third national congress, which took place in November 1984 in the town of Soliman. A key issue on which the Shura Council voted was whether the MTI should adopt a more pragmatic approach, advocated by Mourou, or return to its dogmatic roots, a position fervently defended by Karker. Ghannouchi functioned primarily as a mediator between the two currents. The years of repression had strengthened the position of Karker and his supporters, who perceived them as confirmation that negotiations with the regime could lead to nothing good. They doubted that Bourguiba's latest rapprochement with the movement was sincere. The influence of Karker became evident when he pushed some of the MTI's most pragmatic members out of the movement. As one of them recalled:

Karker strongly rejected my unconditional support for democracy, women's rights, and other Western concepts ... he thought this was against the spirit of Islam. He threatened to exclude me and like-minded people from the movement. Ghannouchi tried to mediate between us; he often talked to us and claimed that he understands our point of view ... but ultimately he did little to defend us and we left the movement.<sup>37</sup>

Ghannouchi's failure to guarantee key members of the pragmatic wing a place in the movement highlights that, despite his re-election as

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

head of the MTI at the 1984 congress, he did not manage to assert full control over its activities. As a result, Karker, who was elected as president of the Shura Council, won a vote in favour of returning to the movement's dogmatic roots. The leaders agreed a compromise to continue their socio-political projects, including negotiations with the regime. They also decided to strengthen the MTI's civil society engagements, and even managed to secure a place on the Executive Committee of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH), a key advocacy group created in 1977. Moreover, in 1985 the student wing gathered more than 15,000 signatures to formally create the Tunisian General Union of Students (L'Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants, UGTE), an Islamist-leaning student body. Thus the religious youth, which had been so severely crushed on campuses in previous years, suddenly had a relatively free space in which to continue their activism.

Rapprochement between the MTI and the government culminated in November 1985, when Mzali formally received Mourou and Ghannouchi and announced that the government would like to normalise its relationship with the Islamists. 'As long as they don't pretend to have the monopoly over Islam and [agree to] give up some of their demands, [their legalisation] is possible,' declared Mzali, adding, 'When I received them, they said they never asked for a referendum over the personal status code. In that case, there are no problems.'<sup>38</sup> Despite such outward rhetoric, the activities of MTI followers remained restricted. For instance, Ghannouchi and Mourou could not preach sermons at mosques and former detainees were not allowed to work in the public sector or to resume their studies. 'After the general amnesty, I wanted to re-enrol at university, but all my applications were rejected,' one remembered, still visibly indignant. 'I even received a scholarship to study at a university in Belgium, but authorities confiscated my passport so I could not leave.'<sup>39</sup>

As Mzali's promises failed to come to fruition, Ghannouchi's attitude to the government became more confrontational. This came at a time when secular opposition forces were also exerting more pressure upon Bourguiba, amongst others, by boycotting the 1985 municipal and 1986 parliamentary elections. Public disillusionment with the regime heightened as the ageing Bourguiba, by then in his eighties,

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

proved progressively incapable of dealing with day-to-day affairs.<sup>40</sup> In July 1986 the MTI lost its sole ally in the government when Mzali was abruptly fired. The *New York Times* reported that '[Bourguiba] woke up from a nap and dismissed his handpicked successor, Mohammed Mzali, as Prime Minister and replaced him with Rachid Sfar, who in turn was replaced by Mr. Ben Ali'.<sup>41</sup> In view of such turmoil, most opposition forces came to agree that the president had to leave, if necessary by force, a stance also embraced by the MTI.

### *Escalating violence*

A military response to Bourguiba was a possibility for the MTI, given that many of its members and sympathisers worked in the police and army, some in leadership positions.<sup>42</sup> They were mostly young, but some senior members who in the 1960s and 1970s had fought as Arab nationalists against Bourguiba also sought to topple the president. Indeed, sources with close knowledge of the security establishment maintained that Arab nationalists in the military came to support the MTI after the failed 1980 Gafsa attack.<sup>43</sup> Some of them joined the MTI, while others never formally became part of the organisation although they agreed with many of its principles. Contact between the MTI and a faction of security officers came at a time when the dogmatic wing dominated the movement. This does not mean that its more pragmatic elements completely disappeared. Indeed, a text produced in 1986, entitled *al-Ru'yya al-Fikriyya wal-Manhaj al-'Usuli* (The intellectual vision and the fundamental approach) called for *ijtihad* and a 'harmonious relationship between revelation and reason'.<sup>44</sup> The same year, however, an MTI manifesto discussed the issue of *takfir* (accusing people of apostasy or unbelief) for the first time. It asserted that 'we do not declare Muslims to be unbelievers ... except for those who agree with words of unbelief or publicly reject the faith or clearly oppose the Quran or interpret it in a way not supported by the grammatical rules of the Arabic language or basically behave in a way that does not support anything but unbelief'.<sup>45</sup> The statement, although generally vague, clearly maintains that in some cases Muslims can be judged as unbelievers.

The manifesto, which was rejected by more pragmatic sections of the MTI, provided the ideological backdrop to its approaching show-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

down with the regime. In February 1987 the government cracked down on the UGTE on campuses. A month later Ghannouchi was again jailed after delivering an unauthorised lecture in a mosque. Further arrests rapidly followed, and by 24 April more than 200 activists were behind bars. They were tried for defamation of the president, attempting to overthrow the regime, and treason.<sup>46</sup> In June anti-regime demonstrations were countered by tear gas, and the government published pictures of weapons allegedly found close to Tunis.<sup>47</sup> A senior MTI member acknowledged that 'the idea of a violent response and the use of arms [against the regime] grew over time', especially amongst young people. 'We started hearing about the creation of violent cells out of the control of the [MTI leadership],' he recalled. They could have 'committed assassinations' and 'dragged the country into a civil war'.<sup>48</sup>

With Ghannouchi imprisoned, Karker assumed the leadership. Tensions between the regime and the MTI culminated when in August four hotels in Monastir and Sousse were bombed, wounding thirteen people. A group called Islamic Jihad, some of whose leaders broke away from the MTI around 1984, claimed responsibility, but the government sought to link the violence to the Islamists. Bourguiba sentenced the two hotel bombers to death, alongside MTI chiefs Hamadi Jebali, Salah Karker, and Ali Larayedh in absentia. Ghannouchi was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, which was changed to capital punishment alongside other MTI inmates. France, the USA, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia tried to persuade Bourguiba to refrain from carrying out the death sentences. Ben Ali was also opposed to capital punishment in this case, warning that martyrs would only reinforce the Islamists' strength and determination to fight the regime. For his part, Ghannouchi began to expect the worst. 'I am a human being and I want to live longer. But if it is God's will that I become martyr of mosques, then so be it,' he announced. 'However, I warn you that my death will not be in vain and that from my blood Islamic flowers will flourish.'<sup>49</sup>

Through their links to the security establishment, MTI figures claimed to have found out that 30 December 1987 had been set as the date for the execution. In author interviews they said that, in order to save their jailed 'brothers', they had plotted to overthrow the regime in a coup d'état.<sup>50</sup> However, it is likely that plans to topple Bourguiba had been prepared even before he condemned the activists to death,

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

given that Karker and many others had never believed in reconciliation with the regime in the first place. Moreover, it seems logistically and militarily almost impossible for the MTI, which had no experience as a unified military actor, to prepare a coup in no more than three months—the time between the Sousse hotel bombing and the date set for the coup. According to Mohammed Elhachmi Hamdi, a previous member of the MTI with close links to its leadership, the coup was devised by Karker, the overall leader, who was then based in Paris and London, Said Ferjani, a former military official in Tunis, and Mohammed Chammam.<sup>51</sup> Chammam has been much discussed in Tunisia, mainly because little is known about him and his position in the MTI. While many Tunisians suspect him of being the secret leader of a military branch, Chammam told the author that, at the time of the coup, he was the movement's vice-president and was responsible for its structure and administration.<sup>52</sup> Whatever his post, it was never formalised, but was part of a parallel organisational structure. Indeed, despite the Islamists' public insistence that it was a purely civil movement, these leaders had developed a military wing also known as the Security Group, by which they sought to topple Bourguiba. One of its activists, who was both a member of the MTI and of Bourguiba's security establishment, said that 'there were strict criteria to join the group, it was very selective. Courage, willpower and discretion were very important, as was one's commitment to strictly follow the instructions of [one's] superior without asking questions.'<sup>53</sup>

The Security Group was divided into 'circles' of importance, each of which consisted of several units. Some of its members recalled that only five people were part of their unit, which was headed by a leader who reported to the head of the circle. Because of this elaborate organisational structure, many of the Group's members did not even know the identities of the three main leaders. Although nowadays Ennahda leaders typically assert that the Security Group relied solely upon peaceful means to topple the regime, a source close to the Group's leadership held that internal estimations placed the expected casualty rate during the planned coup at a minimum of 600 people, including pro-regime security personnel and protesters.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the Security Group managed to secure 5,000 tear-gas bombs, firearms, planes, tanks, and other military vehicles, as well as important com-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

munication devices, which were provided by its supporters in the security forces. The MTI envisioned that, several hours after the planned coup, civil elements, particularly students, would intervene in order to bestow an image of popular support upon its actions.<sup>55</sup> Despite these careful preparations, events unfolded very differently.

On 5 November an activist of the third circle of the Security Group confided elements of the plan to his uncle. Although he did not know much, except that his unit was supposed to destroy some vehicles on 7 November, the tense atmosphere in the country led the uncle to suspect a bigger plan, and he informed the Interior Ministry. That day the police arrested his nephew with his three colleagues. A day later a meeting took place at the Interior Ministry under the leadership of Ben Ali. Pre-empting a possible coup by the Islamists, Ben Ali, who had been preparing his own coup for months, reacted swiftly. The same night, just a day before the MTI planned to topple the regime, he launched a bloodless coup that ousted Bourguiba.

### *Ben Ali: the beginning of a new era?*

On 7 November 1987 Ben Ali declared in a speech to parliament that he had taken power, as Bourguiba's senility and ill-health made him incapable of leading Tunisia. He sharply denounced Bourguiba's policies, proclaiming that 'our people deserve an advanced and institutionalized political life, truly based on the plurality of parties and mass organizations'. Ben Ali said that the republican idea underlying the Tunisian state 'guarantees the conditions for a responsible democracy'.<sup>56</sup> The new self-declared president even promised to issue a bill to ensure that political parties and the media would play a greater role in developing Tunisia.

For MTI members, however, Ben Ali's actions belied his seemingly noble intentions. In the weeks following his seizure of power, 157 of them were arrested and subjected to torture. 'The regime tried to convince the Tunisians that we were a group of criminals,'<sup>57</sup> affirmed a member of the Security Group. Yet Ben Ali was careful not to repeat the mistakes of Bourguiba, who had not managed to contain the growth of Islamism using brutal repression alone. A few months after taking power the new president halted the crackdown and, between

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

November 1988 and April 1989, freed all MTI prisoners. This even led some of its activists to believe that his declared political opening-up might actually materialise. Senior members went so far as to call Ben Ali's coup a 'historic event' and 'a divine act meant to save the country from civil war created and sustained by the former President'. They expressed their willingness 'to turn over a new leaf concerning the past, to establish a dialogue with [Ben Ali] without any reservations or complexes, to support the country's stability and security'.<sup>58</sup>

Others were hopeful as well. A foreign diplomat judged in 1988 that 'for most Tunisians, Ben Ali has lived up to [his] promises'. The diplomat observed that on 20 March, Independence Day, 'for the first time in Tunisia's history, the legal opposition parties were allowed to participate in the parades'.<sup>59</sup> There were additional positive signs. The first year of Ben Ali's presidency passed without the banning of newspapers or books, and with no death sentences. Mourou and Jebali were allowed to return to Tunisia from exile and, to the religious students' delight, the UGTE was given official recognition—certainly a clever step to neutralise the more militant MTI youth, which had remained sceptical of the regime's 'true intentions'. Ben Ali also withdrew the constitution's 'presidency for life' stipulation introduced by Bourguiba,<sup>60</sup> and announced a tentative privatisation programme to boost the economy. To demarcate the beginning of a new era, supposedly based upon more socio-economic and political liberties consonant with Tunisia's constitutional tradition, Ben Ali renamed Bourguiba's Socialist Destourian Party the Constitutional Democratic Rally (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*, RCD).

The new president even allowed a member of the MTI to be part of the committee charged with negotiating a 'National Pact', which sixteen parties and organisations signed in 1989. The National Pact enshrined the signatories' support for human rights and the Personal Status Code, alongside freedom of opinion and association 'within the context of the law'.<sup>61</sup> It is an explicit reference to the 1857 *Pacte fondamental*, and even mentioned Kheireddine as an inspiration of the reforms that Ben Ali and his supporters sought to implement. Béatrice Hibou argued that the reference to Kheireddine in the National Pact 'suggests that it was not so much the reforms (in terms of their content) that were glorified as the reformism, understood as a way of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

seeing and understanding, a way of being in the world'.<sup>62</sup> This reformism stipulated the need for consensus in politics to realise modernity, moderation, and justice, thus glossing over the extent to which sectors of society differed in their vision of reform and Tunisia's future. Naturally this limited the Pact's provisions on plurality and betrayed its claim to uphold people's 'legitimate right to differ, which signifies neither sedition nor division'.<sup>63</sup> The call for consensus and national unity was, according to Hibou, 'shared by all protagonists in the political life',<sup>64</sup> even the Islamists. This was despite the fact that the National Pact explicitly decreased the power of the MTI. It reaffirmed the need to create an Arab Maghrib in line with Tunisia's Arab-Islamic roots but included a document enshrining that it was the responsibility of the state and not religious scholars to 'watch over the noble values of Islam',<sup>65</sup> a clause most MTI followers disapproved of, yet were open to compromise on.

Indeed, Ben Ali was keen on reviving the notion of Tunisia's Arab-Islamic heritage, well aware that Bourguiba had alienated many devout Muslims with what they denounced as 'extreme' secular policies. Yet he was careful to stress that Arabism took priority over Islamic precepts, and not the other way around.<sup>66</sup> Immediately after taking power Ben Ali decided to broadcast the call for prayer on television and radio. In a swift move, in 1987 he even reopened three Islamic studies colleges at Zaytouna University and restored its status as a university. Yet Zaytouna University had lost all of its distinguished scholars, and would never regain the prestige and influence it had enjoyed before independence. Shortly afterward, Ben Ali established a Ministry of Religious Affairs, a Centre of Islamic Studies in the holy city of Kairouan, and a Supreme Islamic Council tasked with ensuring that state legislation was compatible with Islam.<sup>67</sup> The MTI's Mourou was even nominated as a member of the Council in what was certainly an attempt to co-opt the most pragmatic followers of the movement. Shaykh Khelif, who had been dismissed by Bourguiba after opposing the shooting of the US film *The Thief of Bagdad* inside the walls of the Mosque of 'Uqba ibn Nafi in Kairouan, was also nominated to the Supreme Islamic Council. Clearly Ben Ali was seeking to distance himself from Bourguiba's unpopular religious policies. The new president also reintroduced the sighting of the moon as a method to determine

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

the beginning of Ramadan, publicly denouncing Bourguiba's decision to resort to the Gregorian calendar. In 1989 the government launched the initiative Ramadan for Everybody, whose claim to provide free food to marginalised families served to bolster the legitimacy of Ben Ali.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, the media regularly showed the president during religious ceremonies and while fasting. An American diplomat observed that many Tunisians felt that the 'revival of local traditions ... fostered a sense of togetherness'.<sup>69</sup> He even remarked that, during embassy gatherings, many of the Westernised Tunisian elite who generally drink alcohol fasted. The diplomat judged that 'part of [Ben Ali's] approach may stem from personal piety, but part also stems from a desire to prevent Islamic fundamentalists from becoming a greater political force'.<sup>70</sup> In fact, more restrictive legislation would soon reveal the limits of Ben Ali's religious measures. Steffen Erdle has argued that Ben Ali made it clear that 'Islam should be given the *place* it deserves in society, but it should *not* be given the *power* to rule that society'.<sup>71</sup> In 1988 the president passed a law criminalising all activities and meetings in mosques by people other than those appointed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, thus appropriating the MTI's traditional recruitment base and site of activism. Moreover, the new political parties law, under which six opposition parties were registered, prohibited the formation of parties on religious, racial, ethnic, and territorial/geographical grounds. In 1988 Islamist officials therefore changed the MTI's name to Harakat Ennahda or 'Renaissance Movement'. According to Tunisian scholar Elbaki Hermassi, the choice of name 'reveals the [Islamists'] concern to become closer to the Tunisian intelligentsia by adopting a similar line, that of the Renaissance, which, starting from Kheireddine in the nineteenth century, led to Thaalbi Taher, Tahar Haddad and Tahar Ben Achour'.<sup>72</sup>

Ennahda's party programme embodied a more political outlook in contrast to the socio-cultural approach of the document it had furnished in 1981 to apply for authorisation as a political party. It deleted all negative references to the West, and instead stressed the need to engage in a balanced foreign policy. Whilst in 1981 the application for a licence was part of a survival strategy to prevent a regime crack-down, by the mid-1980s the movement's pragmatic wing had developed a keen interest in joining multi-party politics. Its followers

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

accepted the coexistence of various political parties in a Muslim community, including the far left. Their conciliatory stance illustrates the great extent to which the ideas and traditions of some Ennahda followers were only loosely related to the ideological foundations of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, al-Banna viewed multi-party politics as a tool used by colonial powers to corrupt society, and equated ideological religious disunity and internal divisions with *kufir* (unbelief).<sup>73</sup> The evolving nature of the ideological underpinnings of Ennahda is a trend also visible amongst other Islamist movements. In Egypt, for example, a reformist current of the Muslim Brotherhood came to stress 'a commitment to civic democracy and the rotation of power'.<sup>74</sup> During elections in 1984 and 1987 the Brotherhood even allied itself with the secular nationalist New Wafd Party and the Amal and Ahrar Parties respectively, although this stance was not necessarily shared by more dogmatic sectors of the organisation.<sup>75</sup>

### *Fooled again*

Ben Ali scheduled early presidential and parliamentary elections for 1989, a time at which Ennahda was led by Ghannouchi and Sadok Chorou, a chemist born in Djerba. Chourou was a close associate of Salah Karker, who had refused to return to Tunisia from exile in France as he believed that Ben Ali was not trustworthy. So Chorou took over many of Karker's responsibilities, and was even elected president of the movement in October 1988, a post that he kept until his imprisonment in February 1991. A key question at the time was how Ennahda, whose application for official recognition had not yet received a response, would participate in the 1989 elections. Ghannouchi proposed that a few members should run as independents in a limited number of constituencies so as not to alarm Ben Ali with their real force. By contrast, Chourou's powerful faction pushed for full participation, believing they were strong enough to gain a parliamentary majority. They rejected Ghannouchi's more gradualist approach, saying that the time had finally come for their organisation to claim its rightful place in politics. Hence Ennahda leaders decided to have their members run on independent lists in as many constituencies as possible, a decision that Ghannouchi judged in retrospect to have been a 'fatal mistake' as it 'provoked the

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

regime, which felt truly threatened'.<sup>76</sup> Aware of the religious appeal among wide sections of the public, Ben Ali persuaded shaykhs to run on the RCD list as well, such as Abderrahman Kheli, who became head of the list in the electoral district of Kairouan.<sup>77</sup> This highlights the enduring presence of an Islamo-Destourian trend, as some religious conservatives preferred the RCD to joining Ennahda.

Yet the election results confirmed the popularity of the Islamists, who had campaigned on issues of economic and cultural marginalisation, framing their struggle as one that pitted the *musta'afin* (oppressed) against the *mustakbirin* (oppressors).<sup>78</sup> They became the biggest opposition force to the RCD. Ennahda-backed candidates officially won 14.5 per cent of the national vote, and even up to 30 per cent in some urban provinces.<sup>79</sup> Michael Willis has suggested that the actual figure might have been twice as high.<sup>80</sup> Ben Ali, however, was unwilling to give the religious activists any seats in parliament, so the RCD was declared victorious in all constituencies. Moreover, in presidential elections held the same day, Ben Ali won with an obviously rigged 99.27 per cent, evoking an outcry amongst opposition figures. This ended Ennahda's honeymoon with the regime. With hindsight, some of its members even held that Ben Ali had never intended to play the democratic game. 'The elections were a clever opportunity for him to understand Ennahda better, who we were and what our force really was,' stated one woman in her sixties who witnessed the events. 'The result was a catastrophe, it started our dark era,' she said.<sup>81</sup>

In June 1989 Ennahda's application for party status was rejected on the grounds that some of its leaders had criminal records and had been imprisoned for more than three months. Ben Ali consulted the RCD's Political Bureau on the decision and, according to one of its members, Mohammed Ghannouchi, only about three of his colleagues, out of eleven in total, voiced reservations about excluding the religious activists from politics. 'We were called to give our views on the recognition or non-recognition of [Ennahda],' Ghannouchi remembered. Those advocating its integration into politics were 'just a minority', he said.<sup>82</sup>

In the following weeks, harassment of Ennahda followers and their families mounted. Human rights activists reported passport seizures, arbitrary arrests, and torture.<sup>83</sup> The Tunisian embassy in Paris refused to renew the passport of Rachid Ghannouchi, who had left the country

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

shortly after the election results were announced. In a June 1989 statement Ben Ali clarified his approach to Ennahda, stating that 'we say to those who mix religion with politics that there is no way of allowing them to form a party'.<sup>84</sup>

The regime's only apparent concession was that it allowed Ennahda in January 1990 to produce its own publication, *al-Fajr*. In reality, however, this was also a trap. The prime minister at the time conceded with hindsight: 'Ennahda speaks more than one language and has more than one face. We gave them permission to found a newspaper to discover their views and programmes.'<sup>85</sup> So just a few months after *al-Fajr* was launched, its director was arrested and accused of having published defamatory articles. The publication was banned in January 1991. As tensions between the regime and Ennahda rose, one of its senior members accused Ben Ali of being 'incapable of dialogue'. He encouraged religious activists to 'continue the fight' because 'there is no longer any means of reaching an agreement with the government'.<sup>86</sup> From abroad, Ghannouchi's rhetoric sharpened as well. He called upon Tunisians to rise up against Ben Ali, and advocated a stricter application of Islamic law and the veiling of women.<sup>87</sup>

In parallel, secular opposition parties sought to put pressure on the increasingly authoritarian regime. The MDS, the Popular Unity Movement (MUP), the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), and the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party (POCT) met regularly to formulate a set of common demands. However, their cooperation had little impact. In June 1990 Ben Ali agreed to make changes to the electoral law that governed municipal elections, but it was still not feasible for opposition parties to win. As a result, they boycotted the ballots. Some secular activists, although in minority, also called upon the president to legalise Ennahda.<sup>88</sup> Yet external factors, particularly the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS; al-Jabha al-Islamiyya lil-Inqadh) in neighbouring Algeria, reinforced Ben Ali's determination to fight his religious opponents. In Algeria, a process of political openings culminated in free local elections in June 1990 in which the FIS emerged as the dominant party. Afraid that the electoral result there would bolster the confidence of Ennahda, Ben Ali tried very hard to undermine the dissemination of information about the FIS victory, and enforced tighter media controls.<sup>89</sup> The election outcome

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

in Algeria confirmed his view that it was impossible to ‘contain’ Islamists by integrating them into politics. In subsequent months he therefore reinforced repression, while Ghannouchi encouraged Tunisians to replicate the ‘splendid Algerian intifada of 1988’.<sup>90</sup>

### *The ‘plot’*

In early 1990 confrontations between Ennahda supporters and the regime came to a head. In preparation for a crackdown on the Islamist movement, Ben Ali reshuffled cabinet positions to move his key supporters into sensitive security posts. Abdallah Kallel became minister of defence and Abdelhamid Escheikh minister of the interior.<sup>91</sup> This made it easier for the president to take increasingly harsh measures against Ennahda followers, particularly its fervent youth on campuses. In September 1990 a student was shot during a demonstration, an event that triggered more protests, followed by large-scale arrests. A former UGTE spokesperson recalled that ‘in the late 1980s arrests at the university started, which was still a fief of Islamic militancy. Many of us were imprisoned and tortured just for participating in demonstrations on campuses.’<sup>92</sup>

As the regime intensified its repression, some opponents endorsed more radical methods. In February 1991 activists with links to Ennahda burned down an office of the RCD party in Bab Souika in central Tunis at night. One of the RCD guards died in the fire. The details of the event are still not clear. Ben Ali certainly exaggerated them, and presented limited evidence for the involvement of the twenty-eight people who were subsequently rounded up and tried in a process deemed unfair by international human rights associations.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the regime claimed that the guard who died had been tied up with a rope before being burnt, but Ennahda members insisted that this was fabricated, and the rope presented as evidence in the trials did not show any signs of fire.<sup>94</sup> The defendants said they did not even know a man was inside the house, otherwise they would not have set fire to it.<sup>95</sup> This account was corroborated by a resident of Bab Souika in his fifties, who witnessed the fire as he worked in a café nearby. He claimed in an interview with the author that local officials told him that the person who had been burned had no business being there at night, a testimony

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

which seemed credible given his otherwise fierce anti-Islamist stance.<sup>96</sup> The five alleged key perpetrators received the death penalty; the other detainees were sentenced to up to thirty-nine years in prison.

When questioned about the event, most Ennahda leaders insisted that the incident had not been authorised by them, and that it was the work of 'simple sympathisers' of their movement. At the same time, however, some senior members described it as 'an understandable response to state repression'.<sup>97</sup> Ennahda leaders have been notably quiet about the Bab Souika affair, which raises suspicions that it might have been more than an unfortunate event for which a few individuals were responsible. As a matter of fact, author interviews came to reveal that following the 1989 electoral disaster, Ennahda adopted a new strategy guided by the principle of 'self-determination', which gave local branches the power to 'decide for themselves the specific action on the ground'.<sup>98</sup> Thus, incidents such as Bab Souika would not even have to be authorised by the leaders, but rather the movement's representatives in that locality. In reference to the Bab Souika incident, Mourou acknowledged that 'some leaders knew what happened and let it happen'.<sup>99</sup> Ghannouchi, for his part, vowed in relation to the violence that 'Ennahda will reveal what happened and why it happened when the right time has come'.<sup>100</sup>

The Bab Souika affair led to a new wave of repression. The renowned scholar Emma Murphy argued that Ghannouchi's failure to unequivocally condemn the violence was a 'profound tactical mistake' as it divided the Islamists and 'served to alarm the population, rather than mobilize it'.<sup>101</sup> In consequence, the government was able to continue its crackdown on Ennahda almost unopposed. A former member of the RCD's Political Bureau acknowledged that '[the Bab Souika events] were exploited to imprison the Islamists and to pursue a radical solution. There was no longer dialogue but only the use of force', he said.<sup>102</sup>

Two months after Bab Souika, officials claimed to have uncovered yet a bigger plot, namely that Ennahda was attempting to overthrow the government through a carefully designed five-stage plan ranging from mobilising its base, through instances of sabotage and violence, to the overthrow of the regime and the establishment of an Islamic republic.<sup>103</sup> Abdallah Kallel, by then interior minister and one of the most powerful men in Tunisia, announced the arrest of 300 Islamists, including 100 from the military, in what would become known as the

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

Barraket Essahel affair—alluding to the place where security forces allegedly met to plot the overthrow of the regime. Even more people were rounded up in the months that followed.

‘The entire Barraket Essahel affair was made up by Ben Ali to discredit the Islamists!’ claimed an army major, Samir Kourda, who described himself as politically independent and was amongst the people arrested. ‘There were maybe four or five amongst us who sympathised with the Islamists, but that’s it. Ben Ali felt threatened by us, because we could think autonomously and he wanted to get rid of us.’ Indeed, as early as 1988 the president had dismissed many independent military officials from leadership posts. ‘Ben Ali was a putschist and obsessed by the idea that other putschists will try to force him out of power,’ Kourda insisted. ‘He did everything to make sure this was not a possibility.’<sup>104</sup> Government and judicial authorities confirmed his account after the 2010–11 uprisings and the convicted military officials were cleared of all charges.

In May 1991 security forces raided the headquarters of the UGTE, claiming to have found petrol bombs that were to be used against the government. A subsequent court decision dissolved the union, one of the most prominent recruitment and mobilisation arms of Ennahda. The government announced yet another plot a few months later, claiming that Ennahda activists were trying to kill Ben Ali by downing his aircraft with a Stinger missile, which was to be smuggled from Afghanistan through Algeria to Tunisia. In a 2012 interview with the author, Mourou said that a plan to use a Stinger missile had indeed existed at that time. He stated that the people responsible for the plan to shoot down Ben Ali’s plane were imprisoned after 1991.<sup>105</sup> Other Ennahda followers also testified that the idea of assassinating Ben Ali using a Stinger missile had been discussed. However, they claimed that ‘it was still at the discussion stage’ amongst some individuals,<sup>106</sup> and the government also failed to provide proof to the contrary.<sup>107</sup> Whilst the regime attempted to portray the Barraket Essahel affair and the missile plan as part of the same plot, they had of course nothing to do with one another, as the former was entirely made up.

Several senior Ennahda members alluded to another plan to topple the regime that was being discussed at the time. ‘Many people in the security forces had family members who were repressed, sometimes

tortured,' remembered one of them. 'They wanted to get rid of Ben Ali.'<sup>108</sup> Details of the alleged plot against the regime and who was behind it remain a closely guarded secret. The vast majority of Ennahda leaders vehemently denounce its very existence as regime propaganda against their movement. They typically portray the Islamists solely as victims of Ben Ali's repression, a myth most members of the movement, who were kept in the dark about the plan, have internalised.

Regardless of the nature of the plot, Ben Ali's violent response to it was certainly disproportionate and in stark violation of basic human rights. According to Amnesty International, by late 1992 around 8,000 activists had been imprisoned,<sup>109</sup> although the estimated number was later reduced to 2,000. Further weakening Ennahda, a major split occurred following the events of Bab Souika when several senior members left the movement.

### *Mourou's turnaround*

On 7 March 1991 Mourou and two other leading figures in Ennahda, Ben Issa Demni and Fadhel Beldi, published a statement announcing their split from the movement. They affirmed that 'some young people from the Ennahda movement were involved in the [Bab Souika affair], with the agreement of certain leaders' and that violence was 'rejected by the precepts of our religion and is contrary to the values of our civilisation'.<sup>110</sup> In a subsequent interview with the weekly magazine *Réalités*, Mourou stated that, whilst Ennahda activists were being forcefully repressed, this did not justify responding with violence. He claimed that other followers of Ennahda's pragmatic wing shared this perception, even though they did not wish to leave the movement.<sup>111</sup>

Naturally the decision of three senior activists to leave Ennahda at such a critical point in its history sent shock-waves through the movement. Many of its members viewed it as a betrayal since it seemingly confirmed the regime's accusations of violence.<sup>112</sup> Their refusal to acknowledge that some within Ennahda were prepared to use violence in many ways resembles the PSD's attempt to rewrite history by denying its crackdown on the pan-Arabs and other regime opponents. Most Ennahda activists thus sharply denounced Mourou when he advised Ghannouchi, whose statements from abroad had become more con-

## PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

frontational, not to resort to force.<sup>113</sup> The rift between Ennahda and the Mourou group became insurmountable when the latter announced that it intended to create a new political party. When asked by a journalist if in theory Ennahda's president would be allowed to join it, Mourou denounced this as 'unacceptable because it would bring us back to the point of departure',<sup>114</sup> a statement that illustrates the extent to which he wanted to break with the movement.

Mourou declared that the positions adopted by his party would be rooted in Tunisia's cultural heritage, including its Arab-Islamic traditions, which is similar to the stance laid out in Ennahda's 1988 political programme. Yet he maintained that unlike Ennahda he did not intend to create a religious political force. He also stressed that his new party would accept the country's legal framework in its entirety. This included the political parties law, which prohibited parties based on religion, and the mosque law, which gave the state full authority over the content of sermons—stipulations most Ennahda activists opposed. Mourou furthermore alleged that Ennahda had changed its name solely out of 'tactical' calculations, that is, in order to conform to the political parties law, whereas his group endorsed the legislation out of 'immutable convictions'.<sup>115</sup>

In many ways, Mourou's group was similar to Ennaifer's Progressive Islamists, which, however, focused upon intellectual discussion rather than party politics. Yet neither Mourou nor Ennaifer's group gained momentum. Through their more intellectual discussions, the Progressive Islamists had failed to provide an alternative for the many Tunisians longing for a popular movement to fight for an increased presence of Islam in politics. Mourou, for his part, quickly dropped the idea of establishing a political party after several members of his faction were interrogated by the police. 'It was a trap,' he recalled. 'I realised that the regime did not want to give anyone a licence, neither Ennahda nor us.'<sup>116</sup> Amidst an environment of fierce repression, many religious activists also perceived Ennaifer and Mourou as too submissive towards the regime. Ennahda's most fervent supporters attempted to continue their activism underground or in exile, but with limited success as Ben Ali did his utmost to eradicate their movement, as will be discussed in the next chapter.



## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

*The police regularly entered our house while we were sleeping, they wanted to scare us. They harassed me and my son and tried to persuade me to divorce my imprisoned husband. But I did not give in.*

Samia from Tunis, May 2015

Following the regime's massive crackdown on its activists, Ennahda vanished from the public eye in Tunisia. Emma Murphy has argued that the Islamist movement 'had virtually been demolished in Tunisia' within two years as far as their 'organisational and operational structures' were concerned.<sup>1</sup> Apart from subjecting thousands of activists to harsh prison terms, the regime persecuted many of their family members, such as the above-quoted Samia and her son, on a daily basis. Those who managed to flee Tunisia were often granted exile in Europe, where they were exposed to multi-party politics. Naturally such diverse experiences shape the contemporary and future political landscape in Tunisia, particularly as many former Ennahda prisoners and exiles have come to hold key government posts following the uprisings.

This chapter details the various trajectories of former prisoners, their families, and the exiles, that is, the backdrop for understanding Tunisia's heterogeneous Islamist landscape nowadays. Some scholars have argued that 'repression can "force" the moderation of Islamist parties' such as Ennahda.<sup>2</sup> Yet this chapter demonstrates that the regime's crackdown had

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

multiple and sometimes unintended consequences. Significantly, it facilitated the emergence of a new generation of religious activists whose social and economic marginalisation pushed them towards more conservative ideologies. Indeed, some youthful activists who grew up under Ben Ali gradually became convinced that violent militancy was the only way to counter the regime's repression. This set them apart from their leaders, who tended to be more pragmatic as they were strongly influenced by previous exposure to leftists on campuses or by their time in exile, where they allied with secular forces.

### *The experience of prison*

Ben Ali and his supporters made Ennahda's experience in prison as humiliating and brutal as possible, believing that this would prevent its followers from ever challenging the regime again, even after their release. Torture and human rights abuses were the regime's main tools to 'break' the Islamists. The Tunisian scholar Nouredine Jebnoun has argued that under Ben Ali torture became a means to 'purify' society, to cleanse it of the 'evil influences' of Islamism, which was portrayed as a threat to national unity and peace. It did not occur in isolated instances, 'but was the pillar of an overall institutional mechanism'.<sup>3</sup> Authorities were particularly careful to undermine any kind of collective religious pursuits among inmates. Although most Ennahda prisoners were allowed to pray individually, those who tried to hold communal prayers were severely punished, including by solitary confinement.<sup>4</sup> Some were even prevented from reading the Qur'an or praying individually in an attempt to disrupt their religious observance and deny them the spiritual consolation that it offered.

Assaults on inmates persisted throughout the entire period of detention. In fact, such practices were worse under Ben Ali than they had been in the time of Bourguiba, whose abuses were generally limited to the period immediately following arrests. 'Later in prison we had a certain degree of liberty,' said one activist who was jailed under both regimes. 'But under Ben Ali torture continued, there were always deprivations and violence.'<sup>5</sup> Many former Ennahda inmates testified that they had regularly endured physical violence over a period of several years and that the guards actively looked for reasons to punish

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

them, often in the most brutal ways. In an interview, Abdallah Zouari, a senior activist and journalist in his sixties, recalled that a fellow detainee secretly possessed a needle, which inmates used to sew ripped clothes. When prison officials caught him using it, they punished him by stripping him naked and beating him. They reportedly even put sugar on his naked body and left him in a room close to a wasps' nest. 'We heard him screaming for several hours, it was horrible', he remembered, still horrified at what he had witnessed that day.<sup>6</sup>

More conventional methods of torture were also used against political prisoners. These ranged from beatings with batons, electric shocks, mock executions, and death threats to depriving prisoners of food, water, clothes, or medical supplies for an extended period of time. Torturers also frequently used the 'roast chicken' method, in which inmates, typically naked, were suspended for long periods from an iron bar by their wrists and knees, while being hit or electrocuted. Moreover, rape in custody was common. Several jails even had specific cells, nicknamed 'lion cages', in which prisoners were forced to engage in 'diverse sexual perversions'.<sup>7</sup> In some cases inmates died as a result of the torture they endured, because of insufficient medical supplies, or severe hygiene deficiencies. Between 2000 and 2003 alone, over forty prisoners reportedly died under suspicious circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Overcrowded prison cells exacerbated the inmates' plight. The '9 Avril' jail in Tunis, for instance, was built to accommodate 900 inmates, but hosted around 5,000 people, resulting in a chronic hygiene crisis.<sup>9</sup> Former detainees described some cells as so overcrowded that people had to queue for several hours to use the toilets, and were forced to sit or stand during the night as there was simply no space on the floor to lie down to sleep.<sup>10</sup> Jails were so packed that, by the mid-2000s, the proportion of the Tunisian population in prison was the fourth highest globally.<sup>11</sup>

Many former Ennahda inmates also said that they were attacked by fellow inmates, who were often ordinary criminals. Indeed, as part of the regime's strategy of intimidating religious activists, prison officials put them into cells with common criminals. In author interviews many Ennahda followers recalled their shock on realising that they were sharing their cells with people who were in jail for crimes such as murder or manslaughter. To make things even worse, some of the criminals

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

collaborated with the prison guards, who ordered them to assault Ennahda detainees or to eavesdrop on them. 'Some Islamists were transferred to solitary confinement because of what the criminals had reported about them,' remembered Samir Ben Amor, a lawyer who represented political prisoners under Ben Ali.<sup>12</sup>

Solitary confinement was probably the harshest way in which senior members of Ennahda were punished. 'I spent nine years alone in a cell measuring 1.40 metres by 2.50 metres,' affirmed Abdallah Zouari. 'Some Islamists spent even longer in solitary confinement. ... I had nothing. No books, no paper and no pen,' he said, still visibly distressed, adding that many prisoners had difficulty maintaining their mental health under such circumstances.<sup>13</sup> This was especially the case since the regime combined harsh prison terms with an elaborate scheme of psychological terror. It included coercion, blackmail, and deliberate indifference to the plight of inmates. 'One of my worst experiences in prison was when I was completely ignored when there was a problem, typically, when I needed a doctor,' explained Ali Larayedh, an Ennahda leader who would become prime minister after the uprisings.<sup>14</sup> In some cases the security guards did not speak to prisoners who were in need of help for several days, not even a word. This strategy was designed 'to deny our existence and to make you feel like you mean nothing at all', he stated. Larayedh also recalled that some inmates would hit their heads on the wall or scream to get attention, but that 'nobody ever came'.<sup>15</sup> This led some prisoners to suffer from severe mental health problems such as depression. Others became extremely ill because they were denied medical treatment.

On a more personal level, detainees were deliberately kept in prisons far from their homes in an attempt to deprive them of supportive family contact. As a consequence, some only received visitors every two or three months, in some cases even less frequently. To make things even more challenging for Ennahda inmates, the regime moved them every few months, making it virtually impossible for their relatives to stay close to where they were being held. A few Ennahda women proudly affirm their dedication to their husbands to the extent that they moved from city to city with them, but for the vast majority financial restrictions and family commitments made this impossible. Often, family members were not even notified that an imprisoned relative was

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

being transferred to another jail. Some recalled that they occasionally had to travel to several prisons all over the country, generally under severe financial constraints, to be finally told where their relative had been taken. 'It was demoralising and humiliating,' said a woman in her forties who followed her husband throughout Tunisia.<sup>16</sup>

Prison guards also controlled the flow of information between inmates and their families. 'When we received letters from our families, they generally kept those that contained good news, but always gave us immediately those with information that would upset us, for example, that a family member had passed away or our children did badly at school,' said Nawfel, a primary school teacher and former prisoner in Sousse.<sup>17</sup> To prevent good news from reaching Ennahda inmates, or simply to make them feel more isolated, they were sometimes denied visitors over an extended period of time. Abdelhamid Jlassi, a senior leader, said that his most difficult time in jail was when he did not receive news from his wife. 'She was not in touch for months, there were neither visits nor letters and I did not know why,' he recalled. 'This feeling of powerlessness was the worst thing I ever experienced.'<sup>18</sup> Finally, he learned, to his horror, that his wife—like many other women under the Ben Ali regime—had also been imprisoned, although most of their stories have not been told so far.

### *The plight of Ennahda women*

The number of women in jail was small compared to that of men. This was mainly because Ben Ali tried to portray himself—especially to Western partners—as the protector and champion of women's rights, in order to gain legitimacy, garner support for his regime, and strengthen bilateral ties. In August 1990 the government created the Centre for Research, Study, Documentation, and Information about Women (Centre de Recherches, d'Études, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme, CREDIF), which was linked to the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. CREDIF officials were tasked with portraying the president—and in particular his wife, Leila—as vanguards of women's rights. Yet this image stood in sharp contrast to the hardship endured by many female Islamists, whose suffering was at least as severe as their husbands', and sometimes even more pro-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

nounced. They were regularly humiliated and assaulted, either during their daily lives or while being jailed. Under Ben Ali there were two types of women prisoners linked to Ennahda: (1) female Ennahda supporters; and (2) the relatives of activists, typically the wives of prominent members. Naturally, public knowledge of their imprisonment would have undermined the president's ambition to be seen as the champion of women's rights. Most female inmates were therefore jailed for only a few months so as not to draw attention to their plight, but some also spent several years in prison.<sup>19</sup>

Female prisoners with ties to Ennahda faced the same kind of torture and humiliation as their male counterparts, although the violence against them was more often sexual in nature. Many formerly jailed women recalled in interviews that they were forced to take off their clothes, often in front of their detained husbands and while prison guards were watching them. Some were stripped completely naked, were raped, or had to simulate sexual acts. Although it is difficult to know the actual number of Ennahda women who were sexually abused in jail, given the sensitivity of the topic and the shaming frequently associated with it, interviewees suggested that it was high. Indeed, when being asked about the topic, most Ennahda women were easily able to name at least one or two of their friends who had been sexually assaulted or raped in jail. Some said that this experience had been so traumatic that they were no longer able to have normal relationships with their husbands.<sup>20</sup>

The harassment of the women continued after their release from prison. Indeed, many of them even affirmed that the worst period for them began once they left jail, a perception most of their male counterparts shared. 'The life outside prison was even more difficult than the prison itself,' one woman maintained. 'In prison you are faced with violence and humiliation, but you sometimes also find fellow prisoners who console you. ... I was imprisoned for two years, but was even more often harassed after I was released.'<sup>21</sup> Many women recalled that policemen regularly entered their houses, typically at night, to intimidate them and their children. Sometimes the entire family was threatened or assaulted. They could not talk to anyone about this, not even their neighbours or friends, out of fear for the latter's safety or more violence against their own family if the police found out. As a consequence, many women came to suffer from extreme isolation.<sup>22</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Police were particularly keen to persuade women to divorce their husbands, who had often received life sentences. 'We were the moral support for our husbands, which was the most important thing they had in jail,' reflected one of them. 'The police knew this, so they tried everything to undermine our support.'<sup>23</sup> Some women were even promised houses, cars, and other luxury items if they filed for divorce. As if this was not enough, the security forces also pressured them to provide regular information about the activities of alleged Ennahda sympathisers in their neighbourhoods who had not been imprisoned, or had already left jail. 'They wanted me to spy on the friends of my imprisoned husband!'<sup>24</sup> one exclaimed in indignation.

Whilst the vast majority of women did not give in to such demands, some reportedly did.<sup>25</sup> Often this occurred out of financial necessity. Indeed, in most cases their husbands had been the main breadwinners before they were jailed, so many women could hardly make ends meet without them. Of those women who had been working, some could not keep their jobs, at least temporarily, because they had to report to a police station up to five times per day. This obligation could be enforced for several years, and is known in Tunisia as *pointage* ('checking-in' or 'control')—a system intended to disrupt the lives of Ennahda members and their families outside prison and to isolate them from the rest of society. 'If you have to go five times a day to a police station, it is impossible to find work, no boss accepts that!' one activist explained angrily.<sup>26</sup> After several months, and sometimes a few years, the *pointage* system was often relaxed, allowing some Ennahda women to work, at least in part-time jobs.

Naturally, this harsh reality weighed heavily on the children of Ennahda activists. Doris H. Gray and Terry Coonan, who have conducted excellent research on the impact of Ben Ali's repression on family life, found that many children of political prisoners were not allowed to attend government schools. However, most families did not have the means to pay for private instruction, so the education of their children was frequently interrupted. Some women were even forced to take their children out of school to earn money to help their families get by. 'My children and I actually became non-Tunisians, or as we say here we became one-fourth Tunisians as we only had one-fourth of the rights of Tunisians,' stated one woman. 'My children are now twenty-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

six, twenty-three and twenty-one—all of them without any real qualifications and without jobs.<sup>27</sup>

In author interviews, children of political prisoners often recalled that, starting from the mid-2000s, when the internet was becoming more popular in Tunisia, they searched for information online to better understand why they were growing up under such harsh conditions. To protect them, many parents avoided talking with their children about Ennahda and the reasons behind the regime's repression. Some children maintain that, as a consequence, they began to experience real identity crises. They did not understand who they were, what their parents believed in, and why the authorities were treating them so badly. 'I read everything I could find on the internet about Ennahda and Islamism more generally; sometimes for days I was just looking for information to understand why my father was imprisoned and why we were being treated so badly,' testified the son of a former political prisoner.<sup>28</sup> During their search, some children themselves became attracted to Islamist ideologies. In some cases they even came to believe that their parents' doctrine had been too 'weak', and advocated more radical interpretations of Islam to counter the Ben Ali regime. This trend partially explains the movement's current dialogical nature, a theme discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

These difficult family circumstances, coupled with daily repression and socio-economic hardship, forced many women over the years to become self-supporting and independent. One Ennahda activist asserted that her sister, the wife of a political prisoner, came to be addressed in her town as 'Mr', not 'Mrs', as it was very unusual for a woman to work as hard as she did.<sup>29</sup> Whilst some women had relatives who supported them financially, many did not. The Ennahda movement in exile attempted to help those families in need, but such assistance remained limited, mainly because of a lack of coordination and communication between exiles and activists in Tunisia.

### *The exile movement*

Many Ennahda members who managed to flee Tunisia were accepted abroad as refugees, typically in the West, and decided to re-establish the movement's structures there. Since the early 1980s there had been

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

attempts to establish a presence for Ennahda in Europe, facilitating its restructuring in the late 1980s and 1990s. In 1981 some of its followers left Tunisia for France after Bourguiba rejected Ennahda's demand for a party licence and cracked down on its activists. Subsequently, some decided to stay in Europe to advocate for the movement's rights there. In 1987, following Bourguiba's plan to execute key Islamist leaders, they created a Political Bureau and communications office in Paris to inform the public of their plight and to try to mobilise international public opinion against his regime, with some success.

Once Rachid Ghannouchi arrived in London in 1989, Ennahda officials decided to create an Executive Bureau abroad, of which he became the leader. This meant that the movement now effectively had a double structure. In fact, Sadok Chourou, who had been elected the movement's leader in 1988 when Ghannouchi was jailed, was at the time still heading the organisation. However, this had not been formally announced, and Ghannouchi represented the movement officially in order to inform the international community of Ennahda's ideology and views, as well as the repression it faced in Tunisia. 'There were a lot of invitations for Ghannouchi, he was often asked to participate in events and conferences at that time,' remembered one leader who lives in France. 'So we decided to create another leadership [structure] to meet these international demands. The period was very rich, we had a lot of official meetings.'<sup>30</sup>

By the early 1990s, by which time most of the Tunis leadership had been imprisoned, Ennahda refugees decided to hold a major party congress, which took place in Germany in 1992, to re-establish its overseas structures. Most exiled senior members were present at the event, although Ghannouchi did not participate as he was initially not allowed to leave the UK. 'We elected a Shura Council in order to continue our activities,' the chairman of the congress recalled proudly.<sup>31</sup> Participants also formally confirmed Ghannouchi as the head of the movement and set up his Executive Bureau. Many formerly exiled Ennahda leaders maintain that this congress was crucial as it gave them more confidence and an actual institutional framework through which they could organise activities abroad. 'The congress was important, because it showed that we wanted to continue to fight for our rights,' one leader affirmed.<sup>32</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

However, organising an exile movement which was dispersed over more than seventy countries<sup>33</sup> remained a challenge throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Many activists had travel restrictions, were sought by Interpol, or constrained by financial difficulties. This prevented them from participating in Ennahda events, particularly during their early years as refugees. Moreover, the leadership was centred on London where Ghannouchi lived, but the movement's membership in the United Kingdom only numbered between thirty and forty people, while thousands of Ennahda members were based in France, Germany, and Switzerland. In these countries, institutions were established that managed day-to-day activities quite autonomously. Yet despite such organisational efforts, Ennahda's exile movement remained weak compared with its previous structures in Tunisia.

This was partially the case because the rank and file initially did not share the leadership's enthusiasm to re-launch Ennahda's institutions and activities abroad—mainly out of safety concerns. Indeed, in exile Ennahda remained under close surveillance by Tunisian authorities. Until the very eve of the 2010–11 uprisings many of its members were being monitored by people linked to Tunisian intelligence, who were filing reports about their activities. As a consequence, some exiles were afraid that the movement's activities abroad might increase the repression their friends and relatives faced in Tunisia. 'At the beginning, people linked to the Tunisian authorities were even searching our rubbish to collect information about us,' one former exile in London claimed angrily. 'Once we caught them and took pictures, then British authorities talked to them and this stopped.'<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Ennahda's base in exile was initially more concerned with rebuilding their lives and those of their families than with organised religious activism. Many refugees at first found it quite challenging to adapt to their new home countries, which they had not chosen and did not always feel comfortable living in. Some suffered from severe trauma owing to the repression they had experienced in Tunisia or the circumstances of their escape. Several families had fled the country via the Algerian border, and recounted having hidden in caves and mountains under harsh conditions and in constant fear of being found and imprisoned by the Tunisian authorities. This experience most often left deep scars on them.<sup>35</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

At the beginning 'we were fighting for our existence', explained Samia, who sought refuge in Paris. 'But once we became recognised exiles, our struggle focused on helping Ennahda members who remained in Tunisia and who had no means to speak up for their rights.'<sup>36</sup> Many exiles became actively involved in initiatives to support political prisoners, provide financial aid to families, and to inform people abroad of the repression they faced in Tunisia in an attempt to exert pressure on the Ben Ali regime. The 1992 Ennahda congress in Germany reflected these themes. Beside re-establishing its structures, congress participants also set up a commission to rethink and re-evaluate the strategy of the Islamist movement.<sup>37</sup> The commission would redefine its priorities vis-à-vis a public discourse about human rights and democratisation, a strategy that would trigger information warfare between Ennahda and the Tunisian regime.

### *Information warfare*

In an attempt to legitimise his crackdown on the Islamist movement and undermine its organisational activities abroad, Ben Ali tried very hard to convince the authorities in countries hosting Ennahda exiles that they had taken in violent 'extremists'. In 1990 he went so far as to create the Tunisian Agency of External Communication (Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure, ATCE), which was tasked with promoting Tunisia's socio-economic and political 'achievements' abroad, to convey a positive image of the president and discredit his adversaries. ATCE's finances were as extensive as that of an ordinary state ministry.<sup>38</sup> To counter the spread of potentially regime-critical information inside Tunisia, state officials also prohibited the dissemination of foreign newspapers, mostly from France. It is in this light that the 1990s Arabisation campaign of Abdelweheb Abdallah, one of Ben Ali's close advisers, must be understood. Abdallah fixed the amount of French-language usage within the administration and public enterprises at a minimum in an attempt to fight the 'attacks of the French press'.<sup>39</sup> Ennahda supporters, for their part, attempted to counter the regime's media campaigns by launching targeted counter-propaganda, which detailed the repressive practices of Ben Ali and presented a peaceful vision of their ideology and activities. One former refugee in France explained the thinking behind this strategy:

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

[In the 1990s] the main fight between [Ennahda] and Ben Ali was about information, because back then there was no internet or Facebook in Tunisia. The government was the sole source of information, there were no other sources. ... Journalists in Tunisia also had no sources available other than the government's. There were even people in France who wrote articles to support Ben Ali, because they were part of his network. So Ennahda tried to create another network with the support of international human rights associations and independent associations to tell people what was really happening.<sup>40</sup>

Ennahda's activities in France were particularly important because of the country's close political and economic ties to Tunisia. Whenever Tunisian officials visited France, exiles reportedly demonstrated in front of the Tunisian embassy, informing curious bystanders and journalists about the repressive practices of the Ben Ali regime. 'We were sometimes able to gain rights after protests in France,' maintained one former exile proudly in Paris<sup>41</sup>—although this is likely to be an overstatement, as most French authorities supported Ben Ali's regime even when the uprisings erupted in 2010–11. When President Jacques Chirac visited Tunisia in December 2003 he even declared that 'the most important human rights are to eat, to have medical care, receive an education and have a place to live', elaborating that 'from this point of view, Tunisia is very advanced compared to many other countries'.<sup>42</sup>

Exiles also attempted to reach out to the Tunisian public, sending home newsletters and Ennahda statements to inform them of their situation. Initially, letters were posted randomly to the addresses of companies in the hope that someone there would be interested enough to read them. Eventually some Ennahda exiles began to use faxes to reinforce the scope of their propaganda. 'I started phoning people and companies in Tunisia for fax numbers; at some point I had around 2,000 numbers,' recalled one former exile in London.<sup>43</sup> This practice continued for about five years. However, huge phone bills and the fact that sending the faxes was having no obvious results eventually led him to stop sending them.

There were other ways in which exiles spoke out against repression, including by relaunching *al-Fajr* in 1992 in London. In Paris members of the movement also founded the publication *al-Insan*. However, its editors sought to be independent from Ennahda, and were at times even critical of the positions taken by the leadership in London. The

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

publication tackled topics of general relevance to the Arab world, such as the 1990–1 Iraq war, and its contributors hailed from diverse Muslim communities. In many ways it reflected an attempt by some Ennahda followers to become involved within the wider Muslim communities of their host countries, activities some came to prioritise over those within the Ennahda exile organisation.<sup>44</sup> *Al-Insan* lasted for about five years, slightly longer than *al-Fajr*, which had only around seven issues.<sup>45</sup> The absence of a unified publication representing its entire exile community was a major failure for Ennahda. It was also indicative of the extent of its internal divisions and a lack of coordination between exiles from different countries. Whilst most of its activists stated that a lack of funds was the primary reason for closing *al-Fajr* and *al-Insan*, in later years Ennahda managed to finance much more expensive projects, which suggests that the publications might have continued if they had represented a more unified endeavour.

Ennahda's most ambitious initiative was the Zaitouna TV channel, which was launched in 1999. Starting from the late 1990s, an increasing number of Tunisians had access to rooftop satellite dishes. Exiles hoped that they could rebuild their image and support base in Tunisia by broadcasting content promoting their ideology and political views from abroad. Reinforcing their ties to the grassroots in Tunisia was particularly important because relations between the Ennahda exile community and the rank and file at home had become increasingly soured. Many prisoners' families accused the exiles of not providing them with enough financial support, while enjoying luxurious lifestyles abroad. Whilst such accusations were certainly exaggerated, they reflect the communication gap between activists in Tunisia and those abroad, as well as growing animosity towards the exiles—challenges which the new TV channel sought to address. The deliberate choice of the name Zaitouna reflects the fact that Ennahda exiles sought to appeal to the wider religious community in Tunisia by presenting their movement as embedded in the country's religious and cultural history, as opposed to the transnational endeavours of the Muslim Brotherhood. The whole exile movement in Europe reportedly participated in financing the channel, which cost about £20,000 a month.<sup>46</sup>

However, in 2002 the licence of Zaitouna TV, which broadcast via the French satellite provider Eutelsat, was withdrawn, and the channel

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

was forced to shut down. According to one activist who was involved in the project, this was because Tunisian authorities exerted pressure on French officials, who subsequently accused the TV station of being anti-Semitic. 'We were also financially exhausted, but we would have managed to continue if we had not been prevented,' he insisted.<sup>47</sup> The closure of Zaitouna TV must also be understood in the light of an increasingly tense geo-political context following the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in the USA, an event which had a major impact upon European attitudes towards Islamist groups, including Ennahda. As one former exile explained:

9/11 had very negative repercussions on our movement, although we absolutely condemned it. At the end of the 1990s Ben Ali actually started being a bit isolated, people came to realise that we need democracy and free elections. People in and outside Tunisia started having sympathy with Ennahda. Ben Ali came to have problems with everybody; not only the Islamists, he cracked down on all opponents. But in the aftermath of 9/11 there was suddenly much less pressure on the Ben Ali regime, as everybody was talking about fighting terrorism.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, by the late 1990s Ben Ali's support in Tunisia was gradually weakening, as it became clear that he would not support true moves towards democracy. However, divisions amongst opposition voices continuously undermined the emergence of a more unified force that could challenge his power. Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta illustrated that, throughout the years of Ben Ali's rule, the perceived threat of Islamism served as a crucially divisive factor amongst political opponents. Indeed, many of Tunisia's more secular dissidents perceived Ben Ali as a lesser evil than Ennahda.<sup>49</sup> However, it was only following 9/11 and America's declared 'War on Terror' that Ben Ali's crackdown on the Islamists gained more acceptance internationally, a dynamic that drastically lessened the impact of Ennahda's anti-regime propaganda.

The geo-political climate also facilitated the regime's repression of all kinds of opposition forces. A famous leftist dissident, Sihem Ben Sedrine, remarked that in Tunisia 'the attacks of 11 September provoked a brutal cessation of the [democratic] processes', because they triggered 'fear amongst almost all western governments'.<sup>50</sup> Many European officials reinforced their political ties to the Tunisian authorities. This even

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

included representatives of the French Socialist Party such as Bertrand Delanoë, the mayor of Paris, who had previously tended to be more critical of Ben Ali's rule. Delanoë visited Ben Ali shortly after the attack, reassuring him that 'the Parisians love Tunisia'.<sup>51</sup> Such support came despite the fact that Ben Ali visibly tightened his grip on power after 9/11. Even the London satellite channel al-Mustaqilla, a popular voice for dissidents, stopped airing during this period. It is in this context that researcher Khaled Ben M'barek observed that 'the independent Tunisian opposition [had] the feeling of having been sacrificed [for] the global fight against terrorism [which is], as far as Tunisia is concerned, completely fabricated'.<sup>52</sup> Alongside leftists and independent opponents of the regime, Ennahda officials condemned the attacks sharply. In exile, the Islamists had years earlier committed themselves to a policy that unequivocally denounced any sort of violence, including that arising from self-defence.

### *Embracing non-violence*

In the early 1990s Ennahda's exile community remained divided between its more dogmatic wing, led by Karker in France, and the more gradualist approach of Ghannouchi in London. 'It was a leadership struggle' around different political and ideological projects, remembered one former senior member of the movement.<sup>53</sup> Karker endorsed the notion that violence is sometimes necessary to liberate countries from their 'despotic and anti-Islamic leaders', an approach inspired by Sayyid Qutb, one of the key ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>54</sup> In exile, Ghannouchi distanced himself from this stance. Karker, however, allegedly even entertained contacts with militants from Afghanistan and Algeria who were prepared to use force to confront their regimes. Naturally, this was particularly contentious in France, where the violence of the civil war in Algeria was gradually spilling over. In 1995 bombings in the Paris Metro, conducted by Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, killed eight and injured more than a hundred people. So when French authorities found out about Karker's controversial contacts, he was detained and kept under house arrest, although human rights groups claimed that he never had access to a fair trial.<sup>55</sup>

In author interviews, Ennahda activists confirmed that Karker was in contact with militant fighters, but they insisted that these connec-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

tions occurred solely on an individual basis and never represented any official policy of their movement. Indeed, in the mid-1990s senior members claimed to have marginalised Karker because of his more hardline approach. 'He had controversial views and when he was put under house arrest, this placed Ennahda in a very inconvenient position,' one explained. 'Our members were still seeking asylum, the situation with Karker complicated this, as it offered a controversial point of view of the movement.'<sup>56</sup>

Ennahda's Executive Bureau, led by Ghannouchi, decided to present Karker with a choice: he must either renounce his discourse condoning religious violence in countries such as Algeria and Afghanistan, or leave the movement. In response, Karker reportedly said that 'he would not use violence in Tunisia', but insisted that the Islamists in Algeria and Afghanistan were doing 'something legitimate', one figurehead recalled. 'We could not tolerate this position,' he affirmed.<sup>57</sup> As a consequence, the Executive Bureau decided to put Karker on leave, and eventually even excluded him from Ennahda—decisions that were later formally approved by its Shura Council.<sup>58</sup>

Ennahda's distancing from Karker came as its leaders began to embrace an official policy of non-violence, which was formalised at a 1995 congress in Switzerland, one of its most important congresses to date. At the event, congress participants re-evaluated the movement's confrontation with the Ben Ali regime during the late 1980s and early 1990s. They criticised the fact that Ennahda had been politically isolated and had failed to establish relations with allies who could have supported the movement during the repression. Participants also felt that their actions had gone too far. 'You cannot drag people into confrontation, because you have some kind of agenda,' reflected one of them. 'Politicians have to follow the demands of the people, not the other way around.' The participant went on to say that back then in Tunisia there was 'no general atmosphere of revolution and no calls for drastic political change' among the wider public, despite mounting socio-economic hardship and political disillusionment. 'The movement had been pushing it too much,' he acknowledged.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, at the 1995 congress the notion of unconditional non-violence initially triggered 'heated discussions'. Many Ennahda members did not understand why violence should always be ruled out as an

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

option, including for self-defence and no matter how harshly they were repressed. 'Violence spread in Algeria, Bosnia and Egypt at that time,' one activist remembered. 'It was very attractive [and] some asked why we should not react to state violence.' But the Ennahda leadership insisted that violence must not be used 'in any case' and, allegedly, most members eventually came to agree.<sup>60</sup> Whilst Ghannouchi asked his followers to embrace non-violence, it is noteworthy that his earlier stance on the topic was somewhat more ambiguous, and this may have contributed to the controversy. A closer look at his earlier writings and statements helps to illustrate this.

### *Rachid Ghannouchi: a 'democratic Islamist'?*

In 2001 Azzam Tamimi, a researcher with links to the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>61</sup> published a biography of Ghannouchi, praising him for being 'a democrat within Islamism'.<sup>62</sup> In many ways, however, Ghannouchi is, first and foremost, a political strategist. Many of his past statements, including those on democracy and violence, were politically driven, and thus seem contradictory. His positions on two key events, namely the 1990–1 Iraq war and the victory of Algeria's FIS in elections held in 1990 and 1991, help to demonstrate this point.

During his early years in exile Ghannouchi became one of Saddam Hussein's main supporters in the 1990–1 Iraq war, celebrating him as a leader who attacked Israel and tried to resist international aggression. At that time, public opinion in Tunisia also strongly leaned against the US-led war, and people accused Ben Ali of being too compliant towards his American allies. Ghannouchi viewed this as an opportunity to try to destabilise the regime. He even suggested that Saddam Hussein 'deserved to give orders and to be obeyed' and was entitled to 'money and lives',<sup>63</sup> thereby portraying him as the leader of an Islamic nation resisting the Western military presence.

Whilst the majority of Ennahda followers condemned the US-led war, many also denounced Ghannouchi's unequivocal support for Saddam Hussein. They particularly disapproved of his apathy regarding the Iraqi leader's autocratic record and notorious human rights abuses. *Al-Insan* in France, for example, at the time published several articles that were critical of Hussein. Eventually, pressure from within the movement's inner

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

ranks led Ghannouchi to change his position. He subsequently issued statements in which he accused Hussein of belonging to a camp of Arab leaders who are 'neither democrats ... nor Islamists'.<sup>64</sup>

In a similar vein, Ghannouchi initially praised Algeria's FIS. He called its victories in local elections held in 1990 and general elections a year later 'a chapter in the Islamic struggle which uncovers the true face of the secular élite in the Maghreb'.<sup>65</sup> Naturally, Ghannouchi's support for an Islamist group of which some members later became linked to violence, alongside Ennahda's own confrontation with the regime in the 1980s, triggered a controversy within the movement. In 1993 friction led to dispute when the head of Ennahda in France, Azhar Abaab, resigned, accusing its leaders of an inability to follow 'moderate and rational politics' and of having 'pushed the movement into a vicious circle of confrontation with the regime'.<sup>66</sup> A year later, a member of the Shura Council, Fouad Mansour Qassem, wrote a resignation letter in which he charged Ghannouchi with 'preferring force to reason' and of delivering speeches that are 'irresponsible and not realistic [with] disastrous consequences'.<sup>67</sup> Around the same time, twenty members of Ennahda's youth wing left the movement to join the Congress for the Republic (Congrès pour la République, CPR; al-Mu'tammar min 'ajl al-Jumhuriyya). Calling themselves Young Tunisians—a reference to the early twentieth-century reformist group of the same name—they advocated a return to Arabo-Muslim values, but in the framework of a political organisation that featured no explicit reference to Islam.

Such internal pressure, as well as the start of the Algerian civil war once the 1991 electoral results were overturned there, eventually forced Ghannouchi to distance himself from the Algerian Islamists and, in particular, their use of force. By the mid-1990s many of them had become involved in extreme brutality against civilians, journalists, and foreigners—although it is believed that the Algerian government infiltrated some of their groups. It is in this volatile regional context that Ghannouchi began to advocate unconditional non-violence. He also cautioned Ennahda's rank and file to remain 'vigilant' and avoid any potential traps that would allow people to accuse the movement of mingling with extremist groups.<sup>68</sup> Political considerations, including ongoing applications by Ennahda members for refugee status abroad, certainly played a central role in adopting this stance, which somewhat

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

reassured the West. In addition, some scholars argued that Ghannouchi's stay in London helped him to 'deprovincialise' in that he was exposed to a multiplicity of Islamic discourses there.<sup>69</sup>

In London Ghannouchi gradually refined his ideology, developing a distinctive Islamic school of thought, as revealed by his *al-Hurriyat al-'Amma fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* (Public liberties in the Islamic state).<sup>70</sup> There he argued that the West had failed to realise that the changes and challenges the Arab world is facing nowadays are a response to decades of oppression and injustice. According to Ghannouchi, a new generation of intellectuals, comprising Ennahda's leadership, was seeking to 'shoulder the responsibility of reforming society' by advancing 'modernity', a notion he defined as 'the attainment of freedom, dignity, and effective power sharing'.<sup>71</sup> Whilst stressing that the region's new intellectuals draw inspiration from the positive achievements of the West, Ghannouchi affirmed that socio-economic and political reforms occur best in the framework of an Islamic state.<sup>72</sup> He wrote that a key problem with Western democracy is that it 'separated body and soul, then ignored the soul, killed it, declared war against God and fought ferociously to put the human being in His place'.<sup>73</sup> Because of this dynamic, Ghannouchi concluded that values such as secularism, nationalism, and consumerism are not fundamental to democracy.

Instead, Ghannouchi proposed an 'Islamic democracy' based on *shari'a* and *shura* (consultation).<sup>74</sup> Allah has the supreme authority and reigns over all human laws. Every Muslim has the duty to uphold His rule by following *shari'a*, which is the source of a state's legitimacy.<sup>75</sup> Ghannouchi held that *shari'a* is superior to Western laws as it was made by Allah and not by a ruling majority or dominant political class. To make his Islamic state 'democratic', *shari'a* is implemented through institutions that are chosen by the people, a process through which authority is given to the *umma* (Islamic community).

Naturally this Islamic democracy is an ideal to strive for, and Ghannouchi insisted that he accepted Western-style multi-party politics as long as it did not marginalise or reject religion, a stance which set him apart from more conservative Islamic movements. He also, somewhat ambiguously, stated that Tunisia's constitution under Ben Ali could be made Islamic by ensuring that all existing and future laws were compatible with *shari'a*, suggesting that it would not have to be

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

replaced entirely.<sup>76</sup> In exile Ghannouchi even changed his position on Tunisia's pioneering Personal Status Code, which promoted Western-style rights for women. Whilst he had initially called it part of a 'new crusader campaign to Westernise our society and to destroy its Arab-Islamic identity', in London he came to accept it as a 'body of choices and decisions which are part of different schools of Islamic thought'.<sup>77</sup>

Ghannouchi's increasingly gradualist stance and acceptance of the Personal Status Code probably did not reflect a complete about-face in his ideological convictions and beliefs, but were influenced by strategic considerations. In particular, his embrace of the Code elevated Ennahda's standing in the West, ahead of the secular political opposition. In a way, Ghannouchi's political realism is similar to that pursued by some far-left parties in Europe, which typically backtracked on some of their more controversial stances when seeking acceptance in the political scene after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the case of Ennahda, Ghannouchi's more pragmatic line guaranteed that the exile movement would continue to enjoy the support of its European hosts. It also opened the doors for collaboration between Ennahda and more secular opposition forces, including its previous enemies on the far left, also fiercely repressed by the regime.

### *Allying with secular forces*

Once Ben Ali had cracked down on the Islamists, he attempted to neutralise the regime's more secular-leaning opponents, including the influential MDS, LTDH, and UGTT. His creeping authoritarianism was most evident in the way he manipulated elections. As Kenneth Perkins remarked, Ben Ali's declared 'Historic Change' resulted in 'very little' change as far as elections were concerned since the president increasingly looked 'like a repackaged version of the first'.<sup>78</sup> A new electoral law entitled opposition parties participating in the 1994 parliamentary elections to compete for a proportion of a mere 12 per cent of seats in the National Assembly—that is, nineteen out of the total 163 seats. The regime was trying to create the perception of a path towards multi-party politics, but the new legislation clearly did not provide the opposition with any real voice. Moreover, in presidential elections held the same year, Ben Ali rejected the candidacy of his only opponent, Moncef

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Marzouki, an influential LTDH leader, who was subsequently arrested and held in solitary confinement for four months.

As a result of the increasingly repressive political environment, in 1995 two MDS leaders wrote an open letter to the president, denouncing the lack of freedoms. They were both jailed, and Ben Ali subsequently adopted even more drastic measures to consolidate his power. In presidential elections held in 1999, he announced victory with an obviously rigged 99.44 per cent of the votes. A constitutional reform three years later abolished the presidential term limits, enabling Ben Ali to remain in power after 2004. It also conferred upon him 'judicial immunity for life', which meant that he would not be held accountable for any crimes or power abuses that occurred during or after his presidency.<sup>79</sup>

A 1992 Law of Associations severely restricted the activities of NGOs, and opened them up to government interference. The LTDH in particular was targeted. Alongside the UGTT and the ruling party, the League was arguably one of Tunisia's most powerful organisations, as its membership base was spread over the entire country. Ben Ali was determined to undermine this source of opposition. 'He wanted the League to be obedient,' recalled Moncef Marzouki.<sup>80</sup> The new Law of Associations stipulated that members of the LTDH could not be active within other associations and political parties, which severely limited its impact. Indeed, many LTDH leaders had been key figures of opposition parties, including the MDS. The new legislation also denied organisations the right to exclude citizens from membership. This paved the way for RCD officials to join the LTDH and subsequently co-opt its leadership. A League member claimed that this led to a real 'coup' in 1994, when people close to the regime took over its leadership.<sup>81</sup>

In a similar vein, the regime managed to assert control over the UGTT. Ben Ali even decided to handpick union figureheads himself, so most of its senior members came to entertain close ties to the regime. UGTT activists who opposed such practices were persecuted by security forces and prevented from creating an alternative labour union. Ben Ali managed to co-opt the traditionally leftist UGTT to the extent that, in the 1990s, union leaders went as far as to publicly back the regime's World Bank-ratified socio-economic reform programme. At election time, moreover, they encouraged voters to support Ben Ali and the RCD. This completely stripped the UGTT of its previous status

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

as a key opposition force, which it had acquired during its important role in the struggle for Tunisian independence and major union protests against Bourguiba's socio-economic reforms.<sup>82</sup>

As it became apparent that Ben Ali had never intended to genuinely embark upon a path of democratisation, some secular-leaning dissidents decided to engage in a 'marriage of convenience' with the Islamists to exert more pressure on the regime.<sup>83</sup> In 1991 former prime minister Mohammed Mzali, who was exiled in France at the time, published his own account of the political transformations under Ben Ali, accusing him of being no better than Bourguiba. Whilst sharply criticising the president, he defended Ennahda. Mzali argued that Islamist ideas are 'legitimate in a country whose inhabitants are Muslim'. He even went as far as to state that Ennahda consists 'for the most part, of men of honour, pacifists and democrats', affirming that they did not want violence for anyone in Tunisia.<sup>84</sup>

Mzali's proclamations opened the door to a tentative process of reconciliation between Ennahda and other opposition figures. In May 1991 Mzali, Ahmed Ben Salah, and other dissenters published a statement together with Ennahda leaders in which they denounced the regime's violence and called for a national alliance against Ben Ali. In November 1995 they published another communiqué in which they called for democracy in Tunisia and asked for freedom of expression, a freely elected parliament, and an independent judiciary.<sup>85</sup> Such attempts at cross-ideological cooperation, although modest, bestowed further legitimacy upon Ennahda's cause in the West as it reinforced its commitment to democratisation and non-violence.

Human rights activist Moncef Marzouki also reached out to Ennahda after having been granted exile in France upon his release from jail in 1994. Marzouki, who combined Arab nationalist and leftist ideas within a framework of human rights advocacy, had grown up in a rural area close to Tunis, and was familiar with the movement's ideology, having family members who were close to it. He stated that Ennahda supporters needed to be part of the opposition's struggle against Ben Ali. He called upon Tunisians to 'forget about the divide between secularists and Islamists and instead focus on the divide between democrats and non-democrats'.<sup>86</sup> In exile, Marzouki created the Congress for the Republic (CPR), which brought together people of different ideological currents dedicated to fight against Ben Ali.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

During Ramadan in 2001, Ennahda activists in France invited representatives of the CPR alongside other exiles to break the fast together, an invitation many accepted. The rapprochement of different political forces within the exile community resulted in the Call of Tunis Agreement, which was signed by Ennahda and the CPR, alongside other dissidents, in Aix-en-Provence in June 2003. It called for democracy, the liberation of all political prisoners, and a continuation of the fight against corruption. The statement also demanded ‘respect for the identity of people and its Arab-Muslim values and a guarantee for freedom of belief and the political neutrality of places of worship’. It thereby highlighted demands crucial to the Islamists. More secular-leaning forces, for their part, insisted on the need for a ‘constitutional democracy’ based on the rule of law, as opposed to *shari‘a*, in which equality ‘between men and women’ would dominate.<sup>87</sup> The agreement was signed by leading members of Ennahda, the CPR, and dissident journalists, lawyers, and university professors. It formed the basis of later deliberations and compromise between Ennahda and secular opponents, including the 18 October Movement, arguably the most extensive attempt at cross-ideological collaboration under Ben Ali.<sup>88</sup>

### *The 18 October Movement*

The 18 October Movement was launched in 2005, a month before the UN World Summit on the Information Society took place in Tunisia, an ironic choice of location given Ben Ali’s clampdown on basic freedoms. It consisted of eight opposition leaders, including Nejib Chebbi of the leftist Progressive Democratic Party (PDP; al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Taqaddumi), Hama Hammami of the far-left Tunisian Communist Workers’ Party (POCT), and a number of journalists and lawyers. On 18 October they all went on a one-month hunger strike to demand freedom of expression and association, as well as a general amnesty of political prisoners. International media coverage about Tunisia heightened during the UN summit, drawing attention to the group. After the termination of the UN summit, the 18 October activists decided to continue their activities, together with Ennahda supporters.

The 18 October Movement was split into two entities. The 18 October Forum was tasked with launching discussions with various

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

political and social actors about key socio-economic and political questions in Tunisia. By contrast, the 18 October Collectif, which consisted of twenty-two people, including the initial hunger strikers, was responsible for activities in Tunisia and abroad. The Collectif was led by notable opposition figures such as Chebbi and Mustapha Ben Jaafar, secretary general of the Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms or the Ettakatol Party (al-Takattul al-Dimuqrati min 'ajl al-'Amal wal-Hurriyyat). It also included Ennahda followers, such as the head of the International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners, Mohammed Nouri, as well as its prominent leaders Ali Larayedh and Zied Doulatli, who had by then been released from prison.<sup>89</sup>

The Collectif's members published several statements, including about women's rights and gender equality.<sup>90</sup> The participation of senior Ennahda figures was contentious, and divided the Collectif's more secular leaders. While some, such as MDS senior leader Khamis Chammari, considered the alliance 'a tactical necessity, but something to avoid in the long term',<sup>91</sup> others, including Chebbi and Ben Jaafar, were potentially open to more long-term cooperation with Ennahda. In a 2006 statement Chebbi wrote that 'Islamists are Tunisians' and that their 'right to participate in the political life' needs to be recognised, as does their right to 'come to power through elections'—a declaration which opened up the possibility of a close alliance between the PDP and Ennahda.<sup>92</sup>

Chebbi's position was highly controversial amongst many secular dissidents, particularly from the far left, some of whom consequently decided not to join the Movement, thereby limiting its impact. The diversity of the 18 October Movement was further restricted because some key opposition figures, such as Marzouki, seemingly were not convinced by its promises and strategy. In public statements from exile he insisted that only complete regime change could lead to democratisation, as a 'dictatorship cannot be reformed'; he therefore doubted the impact of the Movement's statements and declarations.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, friction between the Collectif's leaders, Chebbi and Ben Jaafar, quickly heightened, as both intended to run in the 2009 presidential elections—although it quickly became apparent that Ben Ali would never let anyone take the presidency but himself. The leadership competition was exacerbated when Ben Ali decided, in a strategic move, to legiti-

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

mise some parties that were loyal to him but had no intention of challenging his power base. This once again created the impression of gradual democratisation, without providing much substance, and aggravated disunity within the opposition camp.<sup>94</sup>

As a result, the actual impact of the 18 October Movement remained limited. Indeed, an American diplomat remarked a year after its creation that the Movement's 'popularity has waned', saying that 'one would be hard-pressed to find a Tunisian on the street who has even heard of [it]'.<sup>95</sup> This led many opposition forces, including Ennahda, to believe that they would never be able to challenge the regime. 'We ended up thinking that Ben Ali would never leave power,' one recalled.<sup>96</sup> Some Ennahda members therefore decided to embark upon a process of tentative reconciliation with the regime.

### *Towards reconciliation with Ben Ali?*

Once it became apparent that neither the activities of Ennahda's exile community nor those of the 18 October Movement had done much to weaken Ben Ali's grip on power, friction erupted amongst Islamist exiles. Some began accusing Ghannouchi of being too antagonistic towards Ben Ali, and openly called for reconciliation with the regime. This trend became formalised in the late 2000s when, together with other political refugees, some Ennahda members launched the Right of Return initiative, calling upon the regime to allow them to come back to Tunisia. Some exiles had family members whom they had not seen for almost twenty-five years and just 'wanted to find a compromise with the regime', explained one—even if that meant ceasing to criticise Ben Ali and accepting his rule.<sup>97</sup>

Allowing some exiles to return home presented an opportunity for the president to reinforce an image of gradual political opening, and he agreed to launch a policy of 'individual solutions'. It stipulated that anyone who wished to return to Tunisia could make an application at any Tunisian embassy, and that decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis. This policy was a useful tool for the regime to further divide the exile community. Many Ennahda members in France accepted the idea of individual solutions in principle, and saw it as a potential path towards more rights, a position fiercely rejected by the London leadership. 'We

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

were calling for a common solution, the solution of [Ennahda] not the solution of some people to return to their country,' explained Ghannouchi. 'We were working as a group and we struggled for common freedoms.'<sup>98</sup> Some of his close advisers even called those who individually made a demand to return 'egotistical'.<sup>99</sup> Whilst suggesting that his struggle was high-minded in that it concerned the rights of the whole movement and not just some individual activists, it is noteworthy that Ghannouchi probably also had personal motivations for not supporting the individual solutions initiative. Indeed, as the leader of the movement, he would most certainly not have been allowed to return home himself. Thus, rather than the Right of Return, Ghannouchi started calling for a transition similar to that in Morocco, envisioning a symbolic presidency in the framework of a parliamentary democracy, thereby accepting Ben Ali's presidency for life. He elaborated:

Why do Tunisians not think about a presidency which lasts long but would have a symbolic function and limited powers? The power could be redistributed between ministers responsible before Parliament and elected governors. Would it be possible [for] a democracy without a broad redistribution of power, based on a central power with a symbolic character, to exist in Tunisia?<sup>100</sup>

Yet Ben Ali had little interest in giving wide powers to the parliament and initiating a more democratic process. His rigid stance reinforced the perception of some exiles that the Right of Return initiative was the only way they could ever make it back to Tunisia. Those who accepted the individual solution process accused the London leadership of being too 'extremist' by preventing even exiles suffering from particular hardship—for example, those with relatives in Tunisia who were about to pass away and who wanted to see them one last time and attend their funerals—to return. Eventually, some of them, including senior leaders of the Shura Council, decided to return to Tunisia without Ghannouchi's consent. Naturally, this caused major friction within the movement. 'There was no consensus about anything within the movement and we were struggling to survive,' suggested one activist.<sup>101</sup> This perception was shared by researchers Vincent Geisser and Éric Gobe, who judged that by the mid-2000s 'the Islamist movement [had] become no more than a phantom of itself, bloodless after twenty years of fierce repression and weakened by the numerous defections of

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

some of its historical leaders and activists'. They affirmed that it had no more than a thousand active members and was centred entirely on the prestige of its charismatic leader, Rachid Ghannouchi.<sup>102</sup>

The weakening of Ennahda's structures and membership base gradually forced Ghannouchi to adopt a more conciliatory stance towards the regime. In early 2007 journalists of the opposition newspaper of the PDP, *al-Mawqif*, disclosed that they 'learned from well-informed sources that the authorities have convened a group of leaders of Ennahda in order to question them about a letter of good intentions and reconciliation, which [the Islamists] had addressed to the regime last July'.<sup>103</sup> The rapprochement between the regime and Ennahda was also echoed in mounting conciliatory rhetoric, and its leaders began openly to call for national reconciliation. A declaration published by Ennahda after its eighth congress in May 2007 stated:

[Congress] participants stressed the movement's compliance with the principle of civil political action, and [called] for achieving comprehensive national reconciliation without excluding anyone. ... As part of this principle, the movement bears full responsibility for adopting the role of constructive opposition that not only takes difference into account, but respects it and considers it a necessity for maintaining a balanced socio-political and intellectual life in Tunisia within an approach of political dialogue with various parties. ... Participants ... [suggested] avoiding controversial issues that represent idiosyncratic doctrine and political ideology. ... The movement's commitment to work with its partners in the national opposition fills a natural role in the path to reconciliation and democratic reform. Such reform complies with the mechanisms of opposition action that accepts criticism and advice based on wisdom and moderation.<sup>104</sup>

Ennahda's insistence on 'moderation', 'reconciliation', and 'compromise' illustrates that its leaders came to adopt the same 'reformist' language that Bourguiba and Ben Ali had used to justify their longtime rule. In particular, Ennahda leaders cast their organisation as part of the nationalist reform movement, commonly referencing some of the movement's champions, such as Kheireddine Pasha al-Tunisi, in their statements and congress declarations. This was part of an attempt to counter the official regime discourse that portrayed it as a foreign import led by the Muslim Brotherhood, and hence unpatriotic. Moreover, by identifying Ennahda as part of the 'constructive opposi-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

tion' and rejecting 'idiosyncratic doctrine and political ideology', the congress participants implicitly recognised Ben Ali's denunciation of 'radical' opponents.<sup>105</sup> The latter typically referred to the CPR's Moncef Marzouki, who continued to declare from exile in France that democratic change would only be possible without Ben Ali. Geisser and Gobe have, therefore, argued that 'it [was] no longer so much the ultraconservatism or the "double language" of the Islamists which caused a polemic in [secular] opposition circles but more their desire of rapprochement with the authoritarian regime'.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the PDP's *al-Mawqif* sharply denounced the Ennahda leaders as being satisfied by a policy of 'détente' vis-à-vis the regime, arguing that they thereby '[repelled] *sine die* the questions of democracy and necessary legislative and political reforms'.<sup>107</sup>

The increasingly conciliatory rhetoric of Ennahda leaders and their generally weakened organisation eventually led Ben Ali to believe that they no longer constituted a significant threat to his rule.<sup>108</sup> The president therefore decided to ease his stance towards the movement. He also came to view Ennahda as a lesser evil than the more conservative Salafis, who became increasingly prominent in Tunisia in the 2000s, a topic that will be tackled in more detail in the next chapter.

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

*I was released from prison in 1999. During my time in jail I could not stop thinking about recreating Ennahda. So that's what I started doing together with its leaders when I was freed.*

Zouhair from Sousse, May 2015

Once state officials believed that Ennahda was too weak to challenge Ben Ali's power yet again, they gradually relaxed some of their repressive policies towards its members. They allowed some exiles to come back to Tunisia and pardoned various political prisoners, such as in 2006, when about seventy inmates with ties to Ennahda were freed. These included Jebali, former editor of *al-Fajr*, who served as temporary head of the movement after the 1981 imprisonment of its leadership, as well as the above-quoted Zouhair, a follower from Sousse. Other activists had left jail even earlier, such as Ali Larayedh, former president of Ennahda's Political Bureau, who had been released in 2004 and subsequently participated in the 18 October Movement.

Although it is generally assumed that Ennahda did not have any structures in Tunisia in the years before the uprisings, this chapter demonstrates that in the mid-2000s its senior members launched tentative steps to recreate their movement. In parallel, the more conservative Salafis gained ground in Tunisia. Although a minority, they proved particularly attractive to young people, traditionally Ennahda's recruit-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

ment base. Salafis<sup>1</sup> try to live according to the example of the Prophet's closest companions and the first three generations of Muslims. The 'scientific' or 'scripturalist' trend focuses on *da'wa* and the study of Islamic texts. Whilst it is mostly apolitical, some of its followers entered politics in the aftermath of the 2010–11 uprisings. There are also Salafi jihadis, who are prepared to use violence to reach their goal of implementing *shari'a*, although others have interpreted the notion of *jihad* more broadly, in terms of striving for a better life and society. This chapter shows that in the 2000s an increase in piety among the wider population boosted the influence of both the Salafis and Ennahda, a dynamic that Ben Ali sought to capitalise on by launching more religious policies.

### *A religious tide*

The sudden increase in piety in the 2000s was highly visible amongst wide sectors of society. A foreign diplomat observed at the time that the number of women wearing the headscarf was skyrocketing. This trend ranged 'from teenagers to the elderly', and included 'rural and urban areas alike'. He affirmed that the number of *hijab* wearers had increased to the extent that visitors who arrived in Tunisia after several years frequently state that this was 'among the first changes they noticed'.<sup>2</sup> Shops specialising in headscarves began to open,<sup>3</sup> a trend previously unthinkable. The increased presence of headscarves can be understood, at least in part, through the lens of 'militant veils', a concept coined by Mohamed Kerrou that casts the headscarf as a way to express opposition to the regime. However, the surge in popularity of the *hijab* was also part of the emergence of a wider trend of 'new veils' that are not only political and religious, but also symbolic and linked deeply to notions of culture and identity. They 'are a mark of distinction from modern clothes considered as "foreign" and "imported" and morally/aesthetically "indecent"'.<sup>4</sup> The revival of public piety spread beyond the issue of headscarves, and began to affect advertising. When posters promoting a skin cream appeared, featuring a naked female body, they were quickly 'covered with a piece of draped cloth' before being taken down.<sup>5</sup>

An increasing number of Tunisians also studied at Zaytouna University. As a matter of fact, the academic year 1999/2000 was the

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

first in a decade in which the number of students (about 900) enrolling at Zaytouna did not decrease, but actually grew compared to the previous year. This trend continued throughout the decade, reaching 1,412 new students during the academic year 2010/11, just before the uprisings. Even though the number of young people registering at Zaytouna in the 2000s was still lower than before Ben Ali had cracked down on the Islamists,<sup>6</sup> the rising demand for religious education was clearly indicative of a renewed quest for piety.<sup>7</sup> In addition, many thirty- to forty-five-year-olds, especially women, started attending Qur'an classes, and religious discussion groups multiplied in mosques, universities, and cafés.<sup>8</sup> Many government officials 'were shocked that the country that banned polygamy, embraced secularism, and developed a domestic wine industry fifty years ago has seen such a reversal of religious identity', remarked a US diplomat.<sup>9</sup>

A set of domestic and international factors helps to explain this religious resurgence. Domestically, Ben Ali's popularity was waning in the face of persistent political repression combined with the increasing economic hardship suffered by many people. Indeed, the Tunisian 'economic miracle', lauded by international institutions such as the World Bank at that time, was mainly profiting the president and his cronies.<sup>10</sup> Marginalisation led many people to disengage from politics. The fiftieth anniversary of Tunisia's independence from France, celebrated in March 2006, illustrates this particularly well. On the anniversary, a diplomat observed that the country was festively decorated to celebrate what was supposed to be a day of 'nationalism and pride'. However, very few people took interest in the celebrations. Most were deeply disappointed 'with the pace of change since independence', he said.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the wake of the 2009 presidential elections, in which Ben Ali claimed to have received 89.62 per cent of the vote, local media showed masses of people celebrating the results in the Olympic stadium in Rades, south-east of Tunis, which holds 60,000 people; however, they had been bused to the stadium, and allegedly had also been paid, as most Tunisians were deeply discouraged by the obviously rigged ballots.

In addition, a mounting number of Tunisians, often without any ties to Ennahda, deplored a lack of spirituality in society. Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle found that in part this resulted from the sharp decline in their

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

local traditions that had come with the rise in consumerism. Symbolically this took off in 2001, when the French supermarket chain Carrefour opened in Tunisia, followed by Géant four years later. While many people did not have the means to shop there, an emerging new middle class was keen to take advantage of ‘the many new possibilities offered to them’. They also started to [invest] in cars, villas, and took out loans from the bank’ and were moving to the middle- and upper-class suburbs of Menzah I–IX and Cité Ennasr.<sup>12</sup> Yet after a decade or so, some of them came to view their new lives—typically in modern buildings surrounded by shops selling Western clothes and gadgets—in a different light. They deplored the fact that their neighbourhoods had ‘no identity’ and ‘lacked values and warmth’.<sup>13</sup> This drove some to attend sermons in local mosques. Residents of Cité Ennasr even established a private Qur’anic association in 2007, which quickly gained in prominence.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond such internal factors prompting people to search for meaning and values, external events, particularly the 2003 Iraq war, strongly contributed to the increased interest in religious expression. An American diplomat explained in 2007 that a growing number of Tunisians were attracted by ‘the pan-Arab and Muslim identity’, partially because of Ben Ali’s repressive policies, but also ‘in reaction to US policies in the region that are viewed as attacks on Arab and Muslim brothers’.<sup>15</sup> Many veiled women stated that opposition to the American war in Iraq was a key factor behind their choice to wear the *hijab* and display their religious identity more openly in public.<sup>16</sup>

Increasing internet penetration played a central role in the return of piety. By 2007 17 per cent of Tunisians were surfing the web, and this number rose sharply in subsequent years.<sup>17</sup> Satellite dishes became highly visible on rooftops throughout the country. Many Tunisians were using these new sources of information to learn about Islam and the Arab culture—often, however, interpreted conservatively in the traditions of the Gulf states. While the internet was used primarily by younger people, entire families came together during weekday evenings and Sundays to watch religious programmes. Ben Ali sought to adjust his policies to pander to the people’s increasing religious demands, whilst outlawing Islamic practices and symbols perceived as a threat to his regime.

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

### *Carrots for Muslims, sticks for 'Islamists'*

In mid-2000 a foreign diplomat reported that the president had taken 'steps to co-opt the popularity of religious sentiments in Tunisia by highlighting his own religious sentiments and practices', along with those of his family.<sup>18</sup> This culminated in 2003, when he built the extravagant Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali Mosque in the wealthy suburb of Carthage, which he subsequently attended during religious holidays to pray. During Ramadan, moreover, pictures of Ben Ali and his family fasting and hosting *iftar* dinners were distributed. On one such picture all the women, including his wife, had their hair covered. Although most were wearing the traditional Tunisian headscarf, one was even photographed with the *hijab*. Of course, on ordinary days none of them covered their hair. Relatives of Ben Ali also wore headscarves while travelling to Mecca for the Hajj,<sup>19</sup> and it was reported that one of his daughters had even started wearing the *hijab*.<sup>20</sup> To further reinforce his religious credentials, the president had a hand in the 2007 creation of Tunisia's first Islamic radio station, Radio Zaitouna, which was owned by his son-in-law, Sakher el-Materi. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also organised annual pilgrimages to Mecca, and particularly successful students were even awarded free tickets.<sup>21</sup> This religious strategy was an obvious attempt by the regime to hold onto power and claim legitimacy.

Despite his apparent promotion of Tunisia's Islamic identity, Ben Ali was careful to control the religious discourse. The minister of religious affairs set the topics of sermons in mosques, which were written by ministry officials and distributed to the imams. Provincial governors, usually with close ties to the ruling party, nominated imams, who were then appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Most imams had no qualifications, and were therefore not experts on Islam; furthermore, they were unpaid, so they had to have other jobs on the side.<sup>22</sup> Many observant Muslims claimed that under Ben Ali sermons were commonly full of mistakes. They deplored the fact that some imams were not even able to recite the most basic verses of the Qur'an.<sup>23</sup> Plainclothes security officials attended the sermons to make sure that the imams did not deviate from their pre-written speeches, and to report any 'suspicious' activities, such as unauthorised meetings.

Ben Ali even decided to strike an agreement with the few remaining Sufi orders in the hope of encouraging the growth of apolitical Islamic

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

expression that would not pose a threat to his rule. This cooptation of the Sufi movement began after Ennahda's success in the 1989 elections, but accelerated in the 1990s and 2000s to balance the increasing prominence of politicised religious activism. The government gave Sufi orders financial backing, in return for which their leaders had to provide information on all their activities and the identities of their members. In some cases the cooptation went so far that Sufi shaykhs asked followers in their sermons to vote for the RCD, a practice also pursued by many imams in mosques. During major unrest in the city of Gafsa in 2008, the leader of the Qasimiyya–Ismailiyya order even actively tried to discourage protesters, in order to protect the regime.<sup>24</sup> Although the actual number of Sufi adepts in Tunisia remained comparatively low,<sup>25</sup> some of their shaykhs became established public figures under Ben Ali, and influenced public debates.

To some extent, Ben Ali's strategy of presenting himself as the leader of Tunisia's religious community resonated with the public. One scholar observed, for example, that some Tunisians were spontaneously praising his religious policies. One of them said that 'the state is the guarantor of the real Islam'—unlike, for example, Ennahda and the Salafis. 'Ben Ali has defended Islam', she insisted.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, during an interview in September 2015, Mehdi, a craftsman in the traditional *souk* of Tunis and former RCD member, proudly told the author that Ben Ali protected the country against 'extremism'. He even had a *zabiba* (prayer bump) on his forehead, the result of constant contact with a prayer mat and therefore proof of his strict observance of daily prayers, but affirmed that 'people should have the choice between bars and mosques'. Mehdi maintained that 'people who say [Ben Ali] was against religion were part of Ennahda', charging that its followers 'spread rumours against the regime in order to make politics in the name of religion'.<sup>27</sup> His remarks illustrate that the 'Islam-Destourian' tendency within the RCD was still active. Some of its members joined Ennahda after the uprisings, whilst others, such as Mehdi, remained very critical of the movement.

In the 2000s, moreover, many Tunisians also had a clear awareness that the state was paying for local mosques and Qur'an classes. They also praised the presents that Ben Ali offered to families during the holy month of Ramadan. Sami, a fruit vendor in the Bab Souika neighbour-

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

hood of central Tunis, recalled nostalgically that ‘during Eid and other holidays there were long queues at municipalities, as people were long-ing to receive the presents Ben Ali gave us’. He claimed, however, that many of the gifts disappeared, alleging that ‘municipal authorities reserved at least half of the presents for their friends’.<sup>28</sup>

Naturally, these accounts challenge the idea that all pious people perceived Ben Ali’s regime as hostile towards religion. However, the majority of those identifying with more political interpretations of Islam, or displaying outward signs of religiosity, still did. One young Tunisian in his early thirties remembered with indignation that local authorities had threatened him because he grew a long beard, had a *zabiba*, and attended sermons in mosques regularly.<sup>29</sup> Such public signs of religiosity deeply unsettled the authorities, which perceived them as expressions of political dissent. Ben Ali decided to take harsh measures against the symbols of Islamism, most publicly by combating the *hijab*.

### *War against the hijab*

In 1981 Bourguiba passed regulation number 108, which prohibited public employees, students, and teachers from wearing ‘sectarian dress’ in public. Initially the regulation was enforced rather arbitrarily. In 2006, however, a foreign diplomat remarked that Ben Ali’s ‘campaign of words and actions against Tunisian women wearing the hijab has increased in intensity’, with regulation number 108 ‘being applied with increased regularity’.<sup>30</sup> The police tore off veils, and ‘arrested and interrogated’ women wearing the *hijab*.<sup>31</sup> In one instance, the governor of Manouba, accompanied by security officials, visited high schools and gathered all veiled students. They were threatened and forced to sign a document stating that they would never again wear the *hijab* on their campuses. Some veiled students were even suspended from their schools, while bearded men were forced to shave before attending classes.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the government started employing security officials at university entrances. They wrote down the names of women wearing the *hijab* and forced them to remove their head coverings. In a display of disobedience towards this policy, some female students searched for ways to circumvent the orders. ‘I had some friends who decided to

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

dress in the traditional way of Mali women, who also have their heads covered', said Rahma, a former student at the National Engineering School in Tunis in her early thirties. 'The government officials subsequently thought they were exchange students and did not bother them anymore,' she affirmed.<sup>33</sup> Other students decided to wear the traditional Tunisian headscarf, which the government did not consider to be 'sectarian dress'.

Government attempts to limit the spread of the veil also occurred in conjunction with several secular women's associations, especially the National Union of the Tunisian Woman (L'Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne, UNFT). One of its meetings in October 2006 deliberately targeted *hijab* wearers. An observer at the event remarked that through 'techniques from whispering in their ears to tugging at veils and [verbal abuse]' some participants were coerced into removing their headscarves. In one case, a UNFT member removed the scarf of a rural woman, proclaiming 'Look how pretty you are!' as the woman screamed in horror 'I am naked!'<sup>34</sup> This clearly shows to what extent some Tunisians felt brutalised by the regime's anti-*hijab* policies.

As a result, an increasing number of pious Tunisians began to question Ben Ali's religious credentials. They felt that the president's approach to the veil contradicted his stated 'duty to respect, safeguard and protect Islam'.<sup>35</sup> They also perceived his policies as an infringement of the constitution, which enshrined Tunisia as an 'Islamic country', and so increasingly defied his religious policies. A foreign diplomat affirmed in mid-2000 that 'a quick drive around any Tunisian city' is sufficient to see that he 'is losing the war against the *hijab*'.<sup>36</sup> In this contentious atmosphere alternative religious trends sought to mobilise, most importantly Salafism and Ennahda, whose leaders sought to gradually restructure the movement.

### *Ennahda's underground movement*

Tentative attempts to rebuild Ennahda's institutions and membership base were launched in the early 2000s, when Ben Ali started releasing some of its prisoners. Once senior activist Hamadi Jebali left jail in 2006, these endeavours intensified. Later that year Jebali clandestinely recreated Ennahda's Executive Bureau, which he subsequently headed.

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Its members were geographically divided between Sousse, where Jebali hails from, and Tunis, where Ali Larayedh was based. Although all known Ennahda leaders were under constant security surveillance, they still managed to hold secret meetings on a regular basis. 'Sometimes the police just left for one hour, then we would try to come together,' explained Larayedh.<sup>37</sup> Meetings between leaders in Sousse and Tunis took place approximately once a month. In addition, in both cities a small group of less well-known members met on an almost weekly basis. They would come together in the family houses of Ennahda adherents. 'We had four to five places, where we would regularly meet,' said one member of the Executive Committee. 'If the police had discovered our secret gatherings, everybody would have gone to jail, including the entire families,' he proudly said, underlining the great risk some were willing to take.<sup>38</sup>

The possibility of another crackdown on their movement did not prevent the leadership from striving to reconstruct Ennahda. Their efforts received a boost in 2007 with the release from jail of Abdelhamid Jlassi, who had traditionally been responsible for overseeing the movement's countrywide institutions. An engineer living in Sousse at that time, Jlassi tried to reorganise the Islamists throughout Tunisia. 'We felt a change within the movement when Jlassi started to restructure Ennahda within Tunisia's many provinces,' remembered one. Jlassi was less publicly prominent than Hamadi Jebali, who regularly met with representatives of embassies and international organisations. 'Jebali was a politician, he was strong in terms of Ennahda's external relations, but he was not the type of person who could have recreated its local offices,' said one activist.<sup>39</sup> In order to regain influence in society, Jebali and Jlassi decided to relaunch Ennahda's structures, along with a small number of activities throughout the country.

Jebali and Jlassi's commitment inspired the movement's exiled chiefs in London to begin discussions on whether the leadership should move back to Tunisia. 'They proposed that Ennahda's leadership should shift to us [in Tunisia],' remembered Larayedh. 'But we did not have the means yet. So we instead decided to have two power bases, one official in London, and one undeclared in Tunisia.'<sup>40</sup> Together they formulated two priorities to accelerate Ennahda's reorganisation. The first was to enhance the movement's public relations to facilitate an eventual come-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

back, a task the exiles had been pursuing for the previous two decades. To improve the image of the Islamists, ties to key international actors and associations were henceforth also strengthened from within the country. This was pursued by Jebali and Larayedh, who were active in the 18 October Movement. Just like the exiles, Jebali and Larayedh tried very hard to portray Ennahda's struggles in terms of human rights advocacy and a call for democratisation. To a certain extent such efforts were successful as, starting from the mid-2000s, a growing number of international NGOs documented Ben Ali's repression of the movement; however, this did not result in progress towards democracy.

The other priority was Ennahda's internal restructuring, with Jlassi in charge. This proved to be far more challenging. Beyond activism in Tunis and Sousse, Jlassi had, by the late 2000s, established local representation in Bizerte, Monastir, Sfax, Gabes, Kairouan, and Kebili. Often this consisted only of a few members.<sup>41</sup> The reasons behind the difficulties in reviving Ennahda in many governorates were twofold. Most importantly, severe security surveillance made activism all but impossible, especially in the interior provinces. This heightened in 2008, when demonstrations erupted over the course of several months in the mining area of Gafsa, in the centre-west, from where they spread to neighbouring areas. Protesters condemned unemployment, a lack of economic development, and preferential hiring practices at Gafsa's Phosphate Company, the main source of labour in the governorate. The demonstrations, sparked when the company announced that it would reduce the number of local employees from 11,000 to 5,000, were the most important revolts since the Bread Riots in 1984. However, whereas the protests back then were quickly crushed, the Gafsa uprising lasted for several months. Security forces cracked down brutally on protesters, leading to several deaths. Very little information was available about the events at the time, as security forces blocked all roads entering the area, preventing independent observers and journalists from entering it.<sup>42</sup> Even once the turmoil in Gafsa came under control, Ben Ali reinforced security in Tunisia's interior, making it impossible for Ennahda to develop structures there. 'It was even difficult for us to understand what was happening in the cities of the interior, such as Gafsa, Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid,' acknowledged one activist. 'Security was so tight that interior provinces became really cut off from the rest of the country.'<sup>43</sup>

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Moreover, even in the cities where Ennahda leaders had managed to create cells, the membership base remained weak. This was mainly because years of severe repression had left deep scars on many Islamists, who were simply not ready to rejoin Ennahda. 'We had to undergo a very painful experience after Ben Ali's clampdown, and our entire families had to pay for it,' explained Aouf, a primary-school teacher and former Ennahda sympathiser from Sousse. When he was contacted by its leaders in the early 2000s to do a small task for them—monitoring the newspapers in order to keep pace with political developments—he refused. 'Psychologically, I was not ready', he said.<sup>44</sup> Others decided to distance themselves because they did not agree with the leadership's decision to re-establish structures underground. 'I refused to rejoin Ennahda because I don't believe you can do politics in secrecy,' explained Omar from Sfax. 'Also in terms of objectives, I did not see what we could have gained from it.' Instead of recreating Ennahda's countrywide network, many thought it more constructive to work on reviving its ideas in society, for example through community work. However, being affiliated with Ennahda, whose members were vilified as violent and terrorists, was 'not useful ... while Ben Ali was in full power and the police everywhere,' Omar maintained.<sup>45</sup>

Even in Sousse, host to one of Ennahda's most structured underground movements, the membership base and activities remained very limited. 'The fear of the people was always dominant,' remembered one activist there.<sup>46</sup> Typically, Ennahda sympathisers did not even dare to greet each other on the street, because they were afraid that the security forces would see and punish them. The activist recalled having once waved in the street to Jebali, who subsequently advised him to stay away, because his security surveillance was tight and he did not want to put him in jeopardy. He claimed that in the late 2000s he and three of his friends took the decision to 'fight the fear'. One day they met up in public to have coffee together, something unthinkable back then. Although the next day all of them were questioned by the police, the activists were determined to meet again and fight for more rights. 'We decided to have coffee together at least once a week,' he said. Even though the police summoned them after every meeting, they persisted. The activists eventually even decided to visit each other's families and

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

to organise a small trip together. 'This was not only shocking to the police, but also to most of our [Ennahda] brothers, who did not understand how we could be that courageous,' he proudly affirmed.<sup>47</sup>

To facilitate the reconstruction of Ennahda amidst an environment of fear and repression, its leaders decided shortly before the 2010–11 uprising to launch an internal inquiry. Over the course of several months they met up with groups of activists to find out how they saw the future of the movement. In total, 350 people participated in the project, presumably all the members of Ennahda's underground movement at that time. During the group discussions, two main trends emerged. On the one hand, Ennahda leaders were keen on reviving political activities, while its rank and file, on the other, were longing for a purely social project. 'The majority of people wanted Ennahda to improve their social and economic situation, provide financial aid, and revive Islamist ideas in society ... but the leaders fiercely defended a political approach,' recalled one activist who participated in the inquiry.<sup>48</sup> This internal divide is also crucial to understand post-uprising dynamics, when Ennahda's support base decreased somewhat once it became apparent that the party did not have an immediate recipe to tackle socio-economic malaise.

The grassroots were particularly concerned with their socio-economic situation, as many families were struggling to make ends meet. In the 2000s Ennahda activists in Sousse established a fund that distributed about 3,000 Tunisian dinars (about \$1,500) per month to needy members. However, this was far from enough to support the poor in the city, supposedly one of the wealthiest in Tunisia. Financial support from the exile community also remained scarce.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, whilst in the 1980s an increasing number of Islamists had vented their economic stress via UGTT activism, under Ben Ali a law was passed that criminalised union activities for former political prisoners. In this way the president tried to control any internal union dissent, especially from Ennahda, whose members thenceforward had few ways to voice their plight. Despite the grassroots' focus on socio-economic activities, however, senior figures decided to also embark upon a tentative political programme. Reviving university activism became a cornerstone of this project.

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

### *Reorganising the student wing*

Senior Ennahda members were convinced that they needed the support of young people to regain leverage, given the key role students had played in pushing the movement towards greater political activism in the 1970s. Since the late 1980s universities had come increasingly under the sway of RCD supporters, who had gained influence within the leftist student union, the UGET. Those who publicly denounced the regime's grip on campuses were systematically persecuted and expelled. In 2003 a small group of students with family ties to Ennahda launched tentative attempts to re-establish the Islamists' university movement. They were all the sons of former Ennahda prisoners, whose fathers—and in some cases mothers—were simultaneously striving to revive the movement. For example, in Sfax senior activist and former prisoner Moncef Ben Salem was responsible for clandestinely recreating the movement there; his son, Oussama, relaunched the city's Islamist university branch during his studies at the Faculty of Science. Aside from Sfax, by the early 2000s the students were also organised at the Faculty of Science at al-Manar University in Tunis.<sup>50</sup>

Starting from 2005, Islamist students in Sfax and Tunis began regrouping themselves under the umbrella of the Independent Students, which also participated in university elections—although the latter were systematically rigged in favour of RCD activists. At first they numbered only around ten people, but by 2010 this had reportedly grown to several hundred. 'The regime did not allow any partisan movement, that's why we chose to call ourselves "Independent Students"', explained Zied Boumakhla, one of its previous leaders who became head of Ennahda's university branch after the 2010–11 uprisings. 'However, in our actions and beliefs we were of course Islamists,' he insisted.<sup>51</sup> One of its former senior members even went so far as to call the Independent Students a 'recreation' of the previous Islamist-leaning student union, the UGTE.<sup>52</sup> In 2009 leaders of the Independent Students created a steering committee consisting of twenty-two people, who met once a month to decide on strategy and activities. In the Cité Ibn Khaldoun, next to the al-Manar University campus in Tunis, they rented a house where they met secretly. 'It took us almost two months to organise one meeting,' said one former leader. 'Security surveillance was very tight.'<sup>53</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Whilst the number of Independent Students increased quickly, its leaders were careful not to reveal their links to Ennahda. Indeed, until the 2010–11 uprising, only the founders of the university branch knew about this connection. Starting from 2005, they met regularly with Ennahda's senior leaders, such as Larayedh and Jlassi, to discuss how to further revive student activism, but they kept all these encounters secret. In Tunis the university activists focused on distributing religious materials, such as CDs about the Qur'an and copies of Islamic books. They also managed to create a place for prayers at al-Manar University. They organised protests about a variety of topics, sometimes even together with leftists, such as the state of the university accommodation and the hardship faced by their Muslim 'brothers' and 'sisters' in Gaza and Palestine. However, discussing Tunisian politics was usually off-limits to avoid further confrontation with the regime. Students who decided to openly criticise the repressive environment were most often expelled. Activists from the Faculty of Science at al-Manar University gradually tried to reach out to other students in the capital, such as at the University of 9 Avril and the National Engineering School. One engineering student remarked that by the mid-2000s 'whenever there was an activity at the Faculty of Science' Islamists from all other faculties 'came to participate in it', or they organised 'similar activities at their own campuses'.<sup>54</sup>

With the secret help of senior Ennahda figures, the heads of the Independent Students eventually decided to develop detailed programmes in an attempt to extend their activities to universities throughout the country. An Ennahda leader in Sousse said that the strategy paper on creating a university branch in this city alone numbered around forty pages.<sup>55</sup> To launch its activities, one of the founders of the Independent Students in Tunis enrolled at the University of Sousse. 'For Ennahda, I decided to move to Sousse to revive Islamism at the university there,' he explained. 'I had to change my name to Aymen; everybody thought that was my real name until the uprising,' he recalled proudly.<sup>56</sup> His willingness to change his identity and move to a different city to help revive Ennahda illustrates how committed some activists were and how far they were willing to go for the movement. Representatives of the various university branches also sought to develop activities for female Islamist students, which was particularly

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

challenging. 'Because of our headscarves, we were spotted directly,' said Rahma, who became the leader of the female student branch in Sousse. 'It was impossible' even for a small group of veiled women to meet in public 'without being questioned afterwards by the authorities,' she affirmed.<sup>57</sup> Many women were therefore less involved in the immediate activities of the Independent Students. However, they insist that their choice of wearing the veil in public was already considered an extremely 'courageous' form of quiet anti-regime protest.<sup>58</sup>

By the late 2000s the Independent Students were active in Tunis, Sfax, Sousse, Monastir, Gabes, and Bizerte, cities in which Ennahda had also managed to develop clandestine cells. As with the rift between Ennahda's politicised leaders, typically from Tunis, and its rank and file, primarily pushing for social activism, its students were divided internally. Their founders remembered that students who hailed from outside the capital were much less interested in political affairs than those from Tunis. One leader in Sfax asserted, for example, that activities in his city 'were essentially cultural and educational', because 'there was no politics in Sfax'.<sup>59</sup> These tensions between the priorities of the capital and those of the rest of the country are still highly visible within the movement.

Despite Ennahda's tentative restructuring of a university wing, its activities remained limited, especially compared to the dynamic programme of the UGTE in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, many secular-leaning students told the author they had never even heard of the organisation's name or activities, suggesting that some Ennahda activists might have inflated its profile. Part of the challenge of reviving religious activism on campuses was linked to the poor religious education of the youth. These young people, often referred to in Tunisia as 'generation Ben Ali', grew up in a repressive environment that discouraged any sort of critical thinking, Islamic or otherwise. So the vast majority of them did not even know what the ideology of Ennahda was about. When the Independent Students discussed religion, they talked about it in general terms, and 'never discussed Ennahda' out of fear of a crackdown if state officials found out.<sup>60</sup> Some students keen to know more about Islam enrolled in Qur'an classes, most of which were state sponsored and hence controlled by the regime. Those who were more hostile towards Ben Ali and found the religious training provided by the Independent Students too limited, began looking for alternative ways

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

to express their religiosity. This provided a fertile recruitment ground for the more conservative Salafis.

### *The rise of Salafism*

Since the 1980s the Salafi movement has slowly been gaining ground in Tunisia. Alison Pargeter described this contemporary Salafism as ‘ultra-conservative, introspective and seemingly a form of escapism that has buried itself in the past and in the humdrum details of what is halal and what haram’.<sup>61</sup> Tunisia’s al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya/MTI was also home to a Salafi current. Some of its members split in 1981, because they denounced the leader’s decision to apply for a party licence to try to become part of parliamentary politics. Bourguiba’s subsequent crack-down on the movement reinforced their perception that politics was not the right way forward. His harsh repression of the Islamists alongside the MTI’s perceived failure to withstand regime violence contributed to the radicalisation of some, who thenceforth adopted jihadi measures to fight the state.

It is in this context that Shaykh Lazreq, a former Arab nationalist turned Islamist, left the MTI. A previous contributor to *al-Ma‘rifa*, Lazreq teamed up with Habib Dhaoui, a preacher from Sfax, and Kilami Ouachachi, an army lieutenant, to create Islamic Jihad, which plotted attacks against the state and the tourist industry. Although the three founders of the group were captured in 1986 and executed, the movement’s grassroots continued their struggle against the state. They attacked a police station and a post office—both with limited impact—before, in August 1987, placing bombs in hotels in the tourist cities of Sousse and Monastir, home of then-president Habib Bourguiba. Thirteen people were injured in the explosions,<sup>62</sup> one of whom had his leg amputated. Two members linked to Islamic Jihad, including Mehrez Boudegga, the bomb maker, were subsequently arrested and condemned to death. However, most of the group’s activists, including the person who placed the bombs in the hotels, have remained at large.<sup>63</sup>

Another militant group became active around the same time. Its founders also split from the MTI around 1981. They included Mohammed Ali Harrath, an activist from Sidi Bouzid who in 2004 founded the Islam Channel while in exile in the UK. Mohammed

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Khouja, a nutrition scientist who would create the Salafi Reform Front Party after the 2010–11 uprising, as well as Rafik Ouni, who would become that party's spokesman, were also part of it. In 1987 they created the Tunisian Islamic Front (Front Islamique de Tunisie, FIT). Its leaders claim that their early activities focused solely on 'trying to understand Islam' and 'educating people'.<sup>64</sup> They were arrested as part of Ben Ali's clampdown in the 1990s, with the exception of Harrath, who fled Tunisia and was granted exile in the UK. All other activists were sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison, although authorities later reduced their jail time and most were freed after one year.<sup>65</sup>

Subsequently, the FIT tried to reorganise itself, together with 'a second generation' of more militant activists who had joined its leadership.<sup>66</sup> In February 1995 the Tunisian regime claimed that the FIT took responsibility for attacking border guards at Tamerza between Tunisia and Algeria. Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA; al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha) also claimed responsibility for the assault, suggesting that it may have been a collaboration. Moreover, in June 1995 French authorities stated that they had uncovered a network of FIT and GIA activists who were plotting attacks.<sup>67</sup> However, former FIT members vehemently denied involvement in violent activity and ties to the GIA. It is possible that Ben Ali made both up to justify his repression of religious opposition. Around seventy people linked to the FIT were imprisoned between 1995 and 2006, rendering its activities obsolete.<sup>68</sup>

Although strictly speaking not of Salafi ideology, the ultra-conservative Hizb al-Tahrir (the Party of Liberation) also became active in Tunisia. It was originally founded in Jordan in 1952 by Shaykh Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani. Under the leadership of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadim Zallum, it opened a chapter in Tunisia in 1977. This branch 'call[ed] on the sons of the grand Islamic umma to rise with [it] and to work to reestablish the Caliphate which the impious colonisers have suppressed and to reestablish Islam in the Islamic territories'.<sup>69</sup> To achieve its goal of overthrowing the government and replacing it with an Islamic state, Hizb al-Tahrir was recruiting from the Tunisian armed forces, especially the Air Force Academy.<sup>70</sup> Its bold and elitist stance appealed to some activists keen on fighting the regime. One of them remembered proudly that in the 1980s he spent several years trying to make contact

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

with Hizb al-Tahrir until he finally managed to meet its followers and join the movement, which was operating clandestinely under severe security precautions. He described its admission criteria as 'highly selective', as only the most 'disciplined and committed' activists were accepted.<sup>71</sup> From the mid-1980s Bourguiba and then Ben Ali heavily suppressed the movement, so it had lost ground by the end of the decade, until it re-emerged after the 2010–11 uprising.

Beyond domestic activism, some ultra-conservatives also left Tunisia in the 1980s to join the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, but they were a minority and no organised transfer of foreign fighters existed at that time.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, until the 2000s, Salafi jihadis were solely represented in isolated cells and did not gain popularity amongst wider sectors of society. This changed, however, with the al-Qa'ida-led assault on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and America's subsequent 'War on Terror'. Just months after the World Trade Center attack, in April 2002, a fuel tanker exploded next to the synagogue of Djerba in what was the first large-scale bombing on Tunisian soil. Fourteen German tourists, four Tunisian citizens, and one French citizen were killed in the explosion which was claimed by al-Qa'ida. The attack was carried out by a Tunisian, Nasar Nawar, but was largely directed from abroad. In 2009 a Paris court found that al-Qa'ida's Khalid Shaykh Mohammed, the principal architect behind 9/11, was implicated, as was Christian Ganczarski, a Muslim convert with ties to him, and Nawar's brother, who was based in France.<sup>73</sup>

In response to the incident, the Tunisian parliament in 2003 adopted new counter-terrorism legislation, which gave the government wide power to detain suspects. It also allowed authorities to extend pre-trial detentions for an unlimited duration. The legislation was widely abused to arrest dissidents, including peaceful Ennahda followers and leftists, yet did little to contain the growing appeal of jihadism. A diplomat remarked in the mid-2000s that 'leftists, communists and Baathists now find their own children are enthralled with al-Qaeda and dream of joining the Iraqi resistance'. He affirmed that 'even when raised by the most secular families, Tunisian youth appear to be increasingly supportive of extremist ideologies'.<sup>74</sup>

A growing number also decided to join foreign wars. Mohamed Tozy rightly remarked that the extent of their involvement stood 'in sharp

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

contrast to the image conveyed by the regime of total control of the religious field and of a Tunisia not concerned by jihadism because [it is] modern and open to the West'.<sup>75</sup> Seized records of Iraqi insurgents listed 24 Tunisians among 700 foreign fighters who had entered the country between August 2006 and August 2007, a considerable number given Tunisia's geographical distance from Iraq and small population size. Almost half of them had been assigned suicide missions.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, as part of America's War on Terror, around ten Tunisians were imprisoned in Guantanamo. Whilst this may at first sight seem a small number, it is substantial compared to the total number of prisoners, that is, 125. Indeed, they made up around 7 per cent of inmates even though the proportions of Tunisians amongst Muslims is less than 1 per cent.<sup>77</sup> Other militants, especially those who did not manage to leave for Iraq, decided to wage jihad on Tunisian soil, most importantly as part of the Soliman group.

### *Fighting the regime*

In 2006 five Tunisians and one Mauritanian founded what became known as the Soliman group, after the town where it was later broken up by the security forces. In April that year they entered Tunisia from Algeria armed with Kalashnikov rifles and grenades, having received training from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, GSPC). Their leader was Lassad Sassi, a jihadi veteran of the Bosnian war who hailed from the suburb of Carthage in Tunis. Sassi had also been involved in a terrorist cell in Milan before joining the GSPC in the mid-2000s, where he met the other founders of the Soliman group. The group aimed to establish a nationwide jihadi movement to bring down the Ben Ali regime by force.<sup>78</sup> Beyond targeting state institutions and security forces, its activists allegedly also plotted attacks on Western targets.

Before any of their plans could be realised, however, the police uncovered the group and, between December 2006 and January 2007, arrested most of its activists. The Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced thirty of them to punishments ranging from death to five years in jail. Despite its short duration, it is noteworthy that in a period of only six weeks the Soliman group expanded from four activists (two of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

the original founders were arrested shortly after crossing the border) to forty people at its height. 'Clearly, this was accomplished with the assistance of a much broader network of sympathisers,' commented one foreign diplomat at that time.<sup>79</sup> Most of the group's members were in their twenties and early thirties, but other generations were represented as well. Their backgrounds also varied: of the twenty-eight imprisoned activists for whom professional data is available, nine were workers or tradesmen and six were students, while only two were unemployed.<sup>80</sup> This challenges the assumption that socio-economic marginalisation was the main factor behind their choice to fight the regime. Rather, the activists harboured much deeper 'grievances against the state and its repressive security regime', one of their defence lawyers reportedly specified. This was either 'due to a personal experience of perceived harassment, or that of a loved one, prior to being radicalised'.<sup>81</sup> Various defence lawyers also claimed that the absence of open dialogue about politics and religion in Tunisia strongly contributed to their attraction to Salafi jihadism.<sup>82</sup> It is striking that one of the activists of the Soliman group, Mohammed Amine Jaziri, was even the son of the president of the RCD party in Sidi Bouzid, a marginalised governorate in central Tunisia. 'If educated and privileged Tunisians inside the regime cannot prevent their children from supporting extremism, one has to wonder about the future of the less fortunate,' a US diplomat remarked at that time.<sup>83</sup>

For their part, Ennahda leaders took advantage of the Soliman event to present themselves as a moderate alternative to violent Salafis. A declaration published after Ennahda's eighth congress in May 2007 stated that '[Congress] participants said [Ennahda] has a key role in promoting moderate ideology [and safeguards] against extremist and violent tendencies', and that the 'closed political situation has negatively impacted the overall quality of social, economic and cultural life'.<sup>84</sup>

As detailed in the previous chapter, the rise of Salafi jihadism indeed prompted Ben Ali to step up negotiations with Ennahda's leaders, with a possible long-term prospect of national reconciliation. In a more immediate attempt to counter jihadi activism the Ben Ali regime adopted a double strategy, consisting first of reaffirming its monopoly on Islam at a time many Tunisians were turning to religion. Amongst others, the 2007 creation of Radio Zaitouna must be understood in this context. The name

## AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

not only refers to Tunisia's historic Zaytouna mosque—university, but was also the name of the satellite TV station launched by Ennahda in 1999. The director of Radio Zaitouna, Kamel Omrane, announced that the new radio station sought to 'show to the people that extremist ideas represent a threat for the entire world' and that it 'will provide a pacifist vision of [Tunisia's] religious tradition.'<sup>85</sup> Also in 2007, the administrative tribunal annulled circular number 102, issued in 1986, which prohibited the wearing of the headscarf in public institutions, particularly at schools and universities. Vincent Geisser and Éric Gobe evaluated this decision as 'revealing of the failure of the repressive politics vis-à-vis women who wish to wear the *hijab*'.<sup>86</sup>

In parallel to the authorities' endeavours to reinforce their Islamic credentials, security forces intensified their crackdown on jihadis. Friends or family members of suspects were typically judged 'guilty by association'. The repression reached such a height that by 2008 between 1,000 and 2,000 Tunisians had been jailed under the 2003 terrorism legislation, the majority of whom were innocent of the crimes they were charged with.<sup>87</sup> The scope of this suppression came at a time when socio-economic strain had intensified, as illustrated by the Gafsa unrest. Most Tunisians received information about the Soliman event and the Gafsa revolts not from the regime, which continued to convey a picture of stability and order, but from Arab satellite TV, particularly Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya, and Abu Dhabi TV. The increase in information flow challenging official state rhetoric, combined with the marginalisation of an increasing number of people, particularly in the interior provinces, would soon fuel new, unprecedented protests, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

*After Ben Ali left, I felt a real thirst for religion. I was trying to learn everything about Islam to understand who I was and what it meant to be Tunisian. ... A lot of other people felt like me. We were searching for our religious identity and that of Tunisia.*

Mohammed from Tabarka, May 2012

Decades of repression and grim economic prospects increased popular disenchantment with the regime. A critical mass was reached on 17 December 2010 when Tarek al-Tayeb Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor from Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire after municipal officials humiliated him. The event sparked protests which quickly spread throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> On 14 January 2011 Ben Ali left for Saudi Arabia. His prime minister, Mohammed Ghannouchi, formed a new government and announced early parliamentary elections. However, continuing demands for 'full revolution' led him to resign on 27 February. Subsequently, Beji Caid Essebsi, foreign affairs minister under Bourguiba and parliamentary spokesman under Ben Ali, was appointed interim prime minister. He dissolved the infamous RCD and announced elections for a Constituent Assembly later that year in order to rewrite Tunisia's constitution, illustrating the enduring importance of its long constitutional tradition.

Essebsi also freed all political prisoners and legalised a number of parties, including Ennahda. The movement's activists had kept a low

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

profile during the uprising, but would gain relevance in its immediate aftermath. They became the strongest force in the Constituent Assembly, turning the country's long-held secular image upside down. This chapter demonstrates that, while the uprisings took place in response to economic hardship and political repression, discussions in the legislature quickly centred on identity topics, particularly the role of Islam in society. Many Tunisians such as Mohammed from Tabarka, quoted above, affirmed that the period following Ben Ali's fall saw a search for their identity and that of their country in what constituted 'a return to an unresolved historical dispute'.<sup>2</sup> This proved to be a difficult task, even for Ennahda. For decades the movement's followers had been divided by prison sentences, exile, or underground activism. The diverse experiences and challenges they had been exposed to led many to adopt distinct and sometimes contradictory views on what Tunisia's future, and the role of Islam therein, should look like.

### *Ennahda's comeback*

After years of fierce repression, the uprisings took Ennahda supporters by surprise. 'Initially I did not believe that the regime could fall,' was a typical response from one follower, who was involved in underground activism during the Ben Ali era. 'The people who started the protests [in the interior] were more convinced than us of the possibility of [political change],' he acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> The countrywide riots also caught Ennahda's exile community off guard. As shown in the previous chapter, by the late 2000s its leadership had even begun to negotiate with Ben Ali through middlemen with the aim of eventual 'national reconciliation', on the assumption that the president had a strong grip on power. Once the revolts grew in magnitude, Ennahda leaders in Tunisia gathered in the capital to discuss possible responses, using Skype to include their exiled counterparts in the discussions. They decided that the leadership would keep a low profile during the uprisings so as not to divide protesters and alarm the international community with what might look like an Iranian-style Islamic revolution. Moreover, many senior members believed that Ben Ali would be able to retain control of the situation. They were not willing to risk involvement in the uprisings at a time when many of its followers sought a

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

settlement with the regime. Nevertheless, some lesser-known Ennahda activists took to the streets. 'The priority was to participate with everybody else in the protests, to not distinguish ourselves,' one recalled enthusiastically. 'We wanted our demands to be identical with those of other people. We were calling for more freedom and jobs.'<sup>4</sup>

Of course, many observant Muslims who were not formally affiliated with Ennahda also actively supported the uprising, including on social media, which played a crucial role in mobilising and organising demonstrators. One, who had been using Facebook since the mid-2000s, proudly remembered having created around 200 social media profiles once the protests took off. 'Authorities could not block all my sites, there were too many,' he explained. Together with other activists, most of whom were leftists, he shared videos of the uprisings and encouraged people to organise against the regime. Whilst before the revolts erupted he had mainly posted videos on Facebook containing religious slogans and recitations from the Qur'an, the new revolutionary environment changed his priorities. To overthrow the regime, 'we needed to unite, regardless of our differences', he said.<sup>5</sup>

In the presence of the author, Ennahda leaders claimed that once clashes between the regime and protesters intensified, resulting in over 330 deaths, and it became clear that Ben Ali was losing his grip on power, they convened another meeting in which they shifted their strategy. 'We decided that senior members of Ennahda should from now on also participate in the demonstrations ... to show that they were fighting for the rights of the people as well,' affirmed one leader.<sup>6</sup> However, until the very day of Ben Ali's departure, partisan slogans were absent from the protests. Moreover, many Tunisian activists stated that, with the exception of some individuals such as Samir Dilou, they did not see any senior Ennahda members demonstrating. Indeed, in retrospect, many Ennahda followers probably exaggerated the level of their participation in the protests so as to suggest that they also played a role in the fall of Ben Ali. Given their limited role during the uprisings, secular Tunisians were bewildered when, just two weeks after the regime's fall, on 30 January 2011, Rachid Ghannouchi, accompanied by other Ennahda leaders, returned to Tunis, where they were greeted by a crowd of around 10,000 supporters.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, although Ennahda had been out of the public eye for two decades, it still enjoyed a vast network of supporters who had never

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

identified with the country's supposedly secular legacy. A wide variety of people were also attracted by Ennahda's decades-long history of activism against the regime and its perceived victimhood. No other opposition force had faced the scale of fierce repression and harassment that the Islamists had suffered. This gave Ennahda a certain degree of legitimacy, even in the eyes of people who had never formally supported it. In an attempt to capitalise upon this public mood, its activists worked relentlessly after the uprisings to re-establish their organisational structures throughout the country before the Constituent Assembly elections took place. The Ennahda cells created clandestinely in the time of Ben Ali facilitated this process, but only to a limited extent given that their institutional and membership bases had remained quite rudimentary. Abdelhamid Jlassi, who had already been responsible for secretly reviving the movement's structures in the early 2000s, was tasked with recreating a physical Ennahda presence on the ground. In mid-March, just after Ennahda received its party licence, he sent a team of activists to tour the country. He claimed that in a period of less than six weeks they established 2,064 Ennahda offices, including twenty-four bureaux representing different governorates. 'People worked day and night,' Jlassi proudly recalled.<sup>8</sup>

The newly established offices became meeting points for former political prisoners and their families. Activists typically recalled having initially spent most of their free time at a local Ennahda branch, where they 'met old friends [they] had not seen in two decades'.<sup>9</sup> There they also discussed how to deal with their newly gained liberties, and how to respond to their former political adversaries of the RCD, alongside former Ben Ali associates in the security apparatus. Many were especially upset that the people involved in repressing Ennahda were not facing any charges. However, Ennahda leaders instructed them not to attempt revenge. 'At the beginning for a lot of people it was very difficult not to pursue acts of vengeance,' admitted one former political prisoner, now a primary-school teacher in his fifties. He said his experience in jail was still haunting him decades later, not least because he regularly saw his former torturer in the streets of Sousse, his home town. 'However, we needed to think about what is in the interest of the country,' he reflected, visibly distressed.<sup>10</sup> The Islamists' early success in minimising acts of revenge illustrates the extent to which they were

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

able to establish internal discipline at this time. Unity was facilitated by their organisational capacities, particularly the rapid establishment of party branches throughout the country, which gave an immense boost to the confidence of their activists in the months after the uprisings. Their highly visible presence throughout Tunisia's provinces also attracted curious local residents, who enquired about their activities and political programme.

Ennahda's campaign was cleverly tailored to respond to specific local characteristics and demographics. For example, a rally in Hammam-Lif, a popular coastal town next to Tunis, featured live music as well as a speech by a female academic, who stressed the role of women in the uprisings.<sup>11</sup> The movement's leaders even persuaded an unveiled female activist, Souad Abderrahim, a former member of the UGTE, to run on the Tunis 2 electoral list to reassure less religiously conservative constituencies and Western partners of their willingness to combine 'Islam with modernity'.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, campaigns in more socially deprived environments, such as in the southern town of Hajeb El Ayoun, 'highlighted local health concerns'.<sup>13</sup> Such elaborate electoral strategies, combined with Ennahda's institutional and organisational leverage, gave the party an immense advantage over its secular counterparts, whose structures were mainly limited to the coastal areas and the capital.

Secular-leaning parties were, moreover, weakened because they did not form coalitions, wrongly assuming that they had enough supporters to make it into government. Some, including the PDP, led by Nejib Chebbi, also employed fierce anti-Islamist rhetoric, claiming that Ennahda would lead Tunisia back to the 'Middle Ages'.<sup>14</sup> This attitude owed more to electoral considerations than principles, however, as the PDP's attitude to Ennahda before the uprisings had indicated a willingness to compromise. By contrast, the CPR's Moncef Marzouki and Ettakatol's Mustapha Ben Jaafar, both of whom had entertained close relations with religious activists during the 2003 Call of Tunis Agreement and the 18 October Movement, adopted a more conciliatory stance. This proved to be more successful at a time when identity and anti-regime militancy were key topics for the electorate.

Ennahda, which gained 37 per cent of the votes during the 23 October Constituent Assembly elections, managed to capitalise upon all of these themes. Alongside their focus on religious identity and cultural authen-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

ticity, Ennahda leaders also stressed their willingness to foster economic redistribution and justice by proposing to compensate people who had suffered under Ben Ali, such as political prisoners. Ennahda was trailed by the CPR, which received 8.7 per cent of the vote, Ettakatol with 7 per cent, and a populist electoral list known as the Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice, and Development (6.7 per cent). Whilst the Islamists fell short of an absolute majority, their political leverage was reinforced by the otherwise fragmented political scene. Indeed, the eight most successful parties after Ennahda only gathered about 35 per cent of the vote combined.<sup>15</sup>

### *Dominating politics*

The fragmentation of secular parties facilitated Ennahda's emergence as the dominant political force. Only representatives of the CPR and Ettakatol agreed to join it in a coalition government, which became known as the Troika. Other secular figures wrongly assumed that they would be more influential in opposition, believing that Ennahda would, in any case, attempt to control politics. This assumption was confirmed when its leaders took all key ministerial positions. 'They wanted everything for themselves,' said Moncef Marzouki later.<sup>16</sup> Ennahda senior members sought to justify their appropriation of the principal ministries by asserting that their secular counterparts would have done the same if they had had similar political leverage, insisting that they were 'bad losers' not used to the democratic game.<sup>17</sup> They also pointed to the fact that Moncef Marzouki was awarded the presidency while Ben Jaafar became the head of the Constituent Assembly. However, their influence remained limited compared to that of Ennahda. In retrospect, the Islamists' initial domination of the political scene was certainly one of their biggest tactical mistakes, as it reinforced the mistrust of their opponents, while key challenges of the volatile transition period were blamed on their organisation.

It also led to an early crisis within the Troika when Ennahda's newly appointed prime minister, Hamadi Jebali, decided to extradite Baghdadi Mahmoudi, a former Libyan prime minister, apparently against the wishes of Marzouki, even though this prerogative was actually the president's. 'As a human rights activist, I could not have given

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

this man back,' maintained Marzouki, adding that 'it was chaos in Libya'.<sup>18</sup> When the new president heard about the extradition, this triggered the 'most important crisis' within the Troika.<sup>19</sup> Some secularists began calling for Jebali to resign. Others split from the CPR and Ettakatol because they felt that their parties had 'sold out their principles'<sup>20</sup> to become the 'puppets' of the Islamists, allowing Ennahda to claim the legitimacy of multi-party rule while themselves remaining unable to meaningfully influence policies.

By the end of the Troika government, almost half of the CPR and Ettakatol deputies had left their parties. The PDP also faced a major internal split owing to its weak opposition politics, later attempting to regroup itself with other political forces as part of al-Hizb al-Jumhuri, which like the PDP focused on the human rights legacy of Nejjib Chebbi, but with limited success. In addition to their fragmentation, non-Islamist parties in parliament were weakened by a considerably lower degree of internal party discipline compared to that of Ennahda. For example, at the end of 2013, only 59 per cent of CPR deputies and 47 per cent of Ettakatol lawmakers were present during voting sessions. Representatives of the Democratic Bloc (al-Kutla al-Dimuqratiyya), the largest opposition coalition, only participated in around 40 per cent of the votes.<sup>21</sup> Ennahda deputies were much more rigorous about attending voting sessions, in which, on average, 82 per cent of them took part.<sup>22</sup>

However, this does not mean that everything within the party was going to plan. In fact, the early months of the Troika government witnessed a rise in internal dissent. Until the Constituent Assembly elections, all of its efforts had been devoted to restructuring and campaigning. Yet once it had become the strongest political force, friction quickly emerged. In particular, the appointment of Ghannouchi's son-in-law, Rafik Abdessalem, as foreign minister led the grassroots to accuse the leadership of nepotism. 'Rafik was not the most qualified for this job,' argued one. 'This angered many of us.'<sup>23</sup> Moreover, two decades of leading separate lives had left Ennahda's exile community, underground activists in Tunisia, and political prisoners alienated from one another. Some of those who had stayed in Tunisia reproached the exiles for having enjoyed the luxuries of a Western lifestyle at a time when they were being fiercely repressed, only to dominate Ennahda

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

upon their return. In particular, Ghannouchi's leadership was questioned by some circles within the movement. Some activists deplored the fact that, despite its elaborate internal decision-making apparatus, in particular the Shura Council, too much informal power lay with Ennahda's leader, which made it almost impossible to climb up the movement's ranks independently, without patronage and cooptation. 'You need to be noticed and supported by Ghannouchi to succeed,' claimed one member.<sup>24</sup> To address some of these tensions, members organised a major congress in July 2012 in Tunis, in which over 1,000 representatives participated.<sup>25</sup>

To bolster Ennahda's support base and enlarge its constituencies, leaders encouraged activists who had formerly split from the movement or been forced to leave to reintegrate themselves. This included Salah Karker, who had been excluded from the exile movement in the 1990s after refusing to condemn the use of all kinds of violence, including for self-defence. However, Karker was severely ill after having suffered a stroke in France, and passed away shortly after the congress. Moreover, the leaders smoothed over their strained relations with exiles who had come back to Tunisia before the uprisings in the framework of Ben Ali's 'individual solution' initiative. Some were even promoted to leadership posts. Ghannouchi, while still in London, had fiercely opposed their return to Tunisia, resulting in deep divisions within the exile community.

Even Abdelfattah Mourou, the co-founder of the movement, who had left it after members had resorted to violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was allowed to return. He had unsuccessfully contested the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections as an independent. Many activists, especially at the grassroots, were very critical of Mourou's return. One of them said scornfully that 'he had abandoned the Islamists at their most difficult time'.<sup>26</sup> Yet the reintegration and subsequent promotion to vice-president of one of Tunisia's most outspoken and pragmatic Ennahda leaders was highly strategic. Indeed, Monica Marks has pointed out that the movement's adversaries frequently accused it of working like an 'army' owing to its high degree of discipline and outward uniformity in party discourse.<sup>27</sup> As far as its leaders were concerned, Mourou, who is famous for critically evaluating Ennahda policies in public, served to convey an image of tolerance and

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

to demonstrate that they accepted a variety of opinions. In this respect, Ennahda had certainly evolved from its previously more narrow outlook, since its activists had not been willing to tolerate similar internal opposition in the 1970s, leading its co-founder, Hmida Ennaifer, to leave the movement.

In an attempt to reinforce Ennahda's democratic credentials and to formally allocate responsibilities, the congress participants also elected its Shura Council. Sadok Chourou, Ennahda's dogmatic former leader and a long-time political prisoner, received the highest number of votes (731), while Fathi al-Ayadi, one of the movement's most pragmatic members and a former exile in Germany, was elected head of the Shura Council.<sup>28</sup> Wide support for Sadok Chourou clearly illustrates that many activists identified with its dogmatic wing. Yet Rachid Ghannouchi, who was again elected head of the movement, was keen to support the rise of pragmatists such as Fathi al-Ayadi to key leadership positions. For distinguished scholar George Joffé the election of former exiles to leadership positions was key to the democratic process. He went so far as to claim that Ennahda 'was able, eventually, to operate effectively within a nascent democratic environment because its leadership had spent two decades in exile observing how democratic systems, despite their imperfections, actually worked'.<sup>29</sup>

For secular opponents, Rachid Ghannouchi's re-election as president of Ennahda was deeply contentious. They reproached him for being by far the most influential figure within Ennahda, and even the proud owner of a diplomatic passport, despite not holding any official political position. A formal split between the Islamist movement and its political party might have helped to define internal responsibilities and prerogatives more clearly, but most religious activists opposed it back then, arguing that this would be contrary to the comprehensive message of political Islam. 'We don't distinguish [between] social and political activities; this idea is foreign to us,' insisted one of them in 2012.<sup>30</sup>

Conference participants also discussed Ennahda's history, including the controversial period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the details of which remain a closely protected secret. A small wing within the movement, led by former exiles from France and England, advocated complete transparency about the past. 'I think a critical reading of our history could strengthen Ennahda,' argued one.<sup>31</sup> However, the major-

ity, including Ghannouchi, affirmed that the 'right time' for such a step had not yet come.<sup>32</sup> They insisted that the transitional period was too volatile, as the Islamists' right to exist continued to be questioned by political rivals as well as influential media outlets still consisting of Ben Ali-era journalists. They asserted that complete disclosure of their history, including the contentious period, could be misused by these adversaries. Hence Ennahda's internal charter, updated after the 2011 congress, obliged its members to 'guard the party's secrets'.<sup>33</sup>

To provide a more balanced account of their ideological and political outlook, religious activists promoted the establishment of alternative media, including Zaitouna TV and the weekly newspaper *al-Damir*, and relaunched Ennahda's publication *al-Fajr*. However, their actual impact remained limited in comparison to more established outlets. Some journalists and public figures at times played a dysfunctional role during the transition, misrepresenting information and framing events in a way that increased tensions between Ennahda and its adversaries. In author interviews, many Tunisians criticised the persistent disagreements and insults aired in the media between figures of opposing political leanings. The heated public debates reflected what was essentially a struggle over identity, and particularly the role of Islam in society and politics.

### *The struggle over Islam*

Ben Ali had criminalised opportunities to discuss issues of religion and identity freely, and so after the uprisings many people sought to discover for the first time what it meant to be 'Tunisian', a difficult task, including for the Islamists. Much of their past ideology had been built on the basis of struggling against Ben Ali, but 'leading a country and defining its priorities is much more difficult', admitted a senior member.<sup>34</sup> Many Ennahda activists could not agree on fundamental issues such as the role of Islamic law in society. Prior to the elections, the leadership had promised not to include a reference to *shari'a* in the constitution, but senior members of its dogmatic wing, such as Habib Ellouze, publicly denounced this stance, as did many youth activists.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, within the Constituent Assembly, representatives of the Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice, and Development openly demanded a reference to Islamic law in the constitution. So, to the dismay of the secularists, within

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

a few months of the elections *shari'a* was one of the topics most strongly debated in parliament.<sup>36</sup>

Wide sections of the population supported an increased role for religion in politics. A Pew Poll conducted in late 2011 found that 56 per cent of Tunisians believed that *shari'a* should be made the official law. However, only a minority (42 per cent) thought that religious courts should oversee family and property law. Of the Tunisians who believed that *shari'a* should be made the official law, 44 per cent also favoured punishments such as cutting off the hands of thieves. Whilst this is a high number, it is much less than, for example, Egypt (81 per cent) or Jordan (76 per cent).<sup>37</sup> The large proportion of Tunisians favouring Islamic law strikingly exposed the porosity of the secular image the country has enjoyed since independence.

In response to calls for *shari'a*, Ennahda leaders launched a series of internal debates, among them with its more conservative youth wing. They 'came to our meetings to discuss *shari'a* with us,' remembered Taycir, a student in her early twenties. 'I am in favour of *shari'a* but after discussions with our leaders I understood that it would be problematic to include a reference to it in the constitution because people don't agree on the meaning of Islamic law,' she elaborated.<sup>38</sup> However, Taycir acknowledged that not all young activists shared her pragmatic views and those of the leadership. Ghannouchi argued that a reference to Islamic law would divide society during the volatile transition period. He also insisted that people were not yet ready to embrace Islamic law, and first needed to be educated about its 'true' significance.<sup>39</sup> This resonated with some who were open to multiple interpretations of *shari'a*, such as Taycir. Indeed, according to an April 2013 Pew Poll, 72 per cent of Tunisians believed that Islamic law has more than a single interpretation, by far the highest percentage amongst the twenty-one Muslim-majority countries surveyed.<sup>40</sup> Western pressure and fear of secular opposition may also have played a role in the leaders' rejection of a constitutional reference to Islamic law.

Ennahda finally settled the matter internally and declared, on 26 March 2012, that *shari'a* would not be included in the constitution, a decision strongly denounced by its more doctrinal wing. Thousands took to the streets in response to the announcement, including Habib Ellouze and Sadok Chourou. Moreover, an estimated 10 per cent of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Ennahda's youth branch subsequently left the party, accusing the leadership of betraying the very Islamic principles it claimed to follow.<sup>41</sup> Some of these young activists subsequently joined the Salafis, who pledged never to compromise over *shari'a*.

The final constitution, adopted in January 2014, gives political parties the possibility of Islamising society in more tacit ways. Article 6 defines the state's role in religion in vague and contradictory terms. On the one hand, 'The state ... guarantees liberty of conscience and of belief, the free exercise of religious worship and the neutrality of the mosques and of the places of worship.' On the other, it 'commits itself to ... the protection of the sacred and the prohibition of any offence thereto'. The result of a broad political compromise, this vague stipulation could be used to foster stricter observance of Islamic laws, for example through blasphemy trials and restrictions on women's rights, other themes intensely debated soon after the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections.

Discussions of gender roles became particularly heated when the Constituent Assembly published the first draft constitution in the summer of 2012. Article 28 triggered an uproar among many secular women, who denounced it as reducing them to the 'complements' or 'associates' of men. A scholar observed that over 6,000 mainly 'upper class, unveiled women strongly opposed to the country's governing Islamist party' took to the streets in response to the article.<sup>42</sup> Local media, followed by international outlets, even wrote that it defined women as 'complementary to men'.<sup>43</sup> The actual draft Article 28, however, read as follows:

The state guarantees the protection of women and supports their achievements, considering them as men's true partners in building the nation, and their roles complement one another within the family. The state guarantees equal opportunity between men and women in carrying out different responsibilities. The state guarantees the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

The Arabic word *yukammil*, here translated as 'complement', can also mean 'fulfil', which would give the article an even broader connotation. In any case, its imprecise wording facilitated misinterpretation and reinforced secular women's fears that Ennahda would limit their rights. The uproar was due at least partially to the movement's

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

failure, including by its female followers, to reach out to secular portions of society and assure them that their achievements would also be protected. Many Ennahda women held important political posts after the uprising. They were often the wives of former political prisoners, and many of them had become independent and assertive during years of repression and social marginalisation. One activist, Meherzia Labidi, was even awarded the vice-presidency of the Constituent Assembly, the highest political post held by a woman in the Arab world at that time.

Yet even these Ennahda women did not initially take the concerns of their more secular counterparts, who were under-represented in the Constituent Assembly,<sup>44</sup> very seriously. 'In some fields women enjoy certain privileges, while in others it is the man,' commented one on the subject of gender relations, alleging in passing that Tunisians who advocate full equality in every aspect of life are just 'a minority'.<sup>45</sup> As Ben Ali's state feminism mainly benefited secular female activists, he 'tied them down to his repressive politics', according to Dalenda Larguèche, who became the head of CREDIF after the uprisings.<sup>46</sup> Initially, many Ennahda followers therefore assumed that once his regime fell, secular women would lose their relevance.

Yet the mass protests against the draft Article 6, which led the government to delete the controversial clause, clearly defied this view. Women's rights became even more heatedly debated a few months later, when discussions erupted over Tunisia's Personal Status Code, even though Ennahda leaders had promised before the elections not to touch the legislation. Some of its followers claimed that several of the Code's principles contradicted *shari'a*. After much internal deliberation, the leadership convinced the more dogmatic rank and file to accept the legislation in principle. The final constitution introduced some of the region's most pioneering gender legislation, which goes even beyond the stipulations introduced by the Personal Status Code, although many of its laws need still to be implemented in practice.

Women's rights 'are nowadays part of Tunisian identity', Rachid Ghannouchi stated, explaining the reasons behind embracing the pioneering gender laws in an interview with the author. 'So Tunisia's Islamists try to adapt Islam to [this] reality', he went on.<sup>47</sup> This shows that, when faced with sufficient external pressure, Ennahda was willing to make significant concessions, even if that meant embracing a

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

very flexible interpretation of Islamic precepts to meet Tunisia's specificities. In contrast to the issues of *shari'a* and women's rights, however, Ennahda activists have been much less inclined to compromise on freedom of expression.

### *Freedom of expression or blasphemy trials?*

Heated discussions about blasphemy broke out days before the Constituent Assembly elections, when Nessma TV aired the French film *Persepolis*. The film is critical of Islamism and includes a scene in which a young girl is talking to Allah, even though depicting Him is prohibited by Islam. However, if the film's aim was to 'warn' people against Islamism it clearly failed, as Tunisians of diverse backgrounds told the author that they found *Persepolis* disrespectful and insulting. In May 2012 Nabil Karoui, head of Nessma TV, was found guilty of 'disturbing public order' and 'threatening public morals'. He was fined \$1,600. Ironically, vague laws from the Ben Ali era on free speech prosecution and an unreformed judiciary facilitated the verdict.

A month after the incident, in June 2012, thousands of people took to the streets protesting against an art exhibition which they considered blasphemous in the northern suburb of La Marsa. Protesters threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at police stations, the offices of several secular parties, a court house, and a UGTT bureau. Sixty-five members of the security forces were wounded. One of the paintings in the exhibition depicted ants crawling out of a child's school bag and forming the name 'Allah', which demonstrators considered particularly offensive. The riots led the government to impose a curfew and 162 protesters were detained.<sup>48</sup>

While Ennahda officials condemned the incident, they also suggested that the artists had crossed a line. Mehdi Mabrouk, minister of culture at the time and close to Ennahda, told the author that 'art can sometimes be provocative, but the current state of society does not allow for [exhibitions] like in La Marsa' as they stirred social divisions and chaos during the fragile transition. He also maintained his opposition to 'all kinds of defamation against the sacred', insisting that 'sacred symbols cannot be used to define art!'<sup>49</sup> It is in this context that Rory McCarthy argued that Ennahda's argument for limiting freedom of

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

expression in order to protect religious values has become the very heart of its project to champion Tunisia's Arab–Islamic identity and claim to 'cultural authenticity',<sup>50</sup> particularly once it became clear that a constitutional reference to *shari'a* was non-negotiable.

The La Marsa protests were encouraged by several local preachers, who were often close to the Salafi trend. They included Shaykh Houcine Laabidi, a cleric of the prestigious Zaytouna Mosque. In one of his sermons Laabidi even went so far as to denounce the artists as 'infidels' and their work 'blasphemous'. Therefore they should 'be killed and their blood be spilled', he vowed.<sup>51</sup> Ennahda's initial failure to take harsh measures against such inciters of violence partially resulted from its own political calculations, as it did not wish to alienate the many Salafis who had voted for it in the October 2011 elections. Its leaders also underestimated the power and agency of the ultra-conservatives, who quickly gained relevance after the uprisings and strove to shape the country's future according to their own principles and priorities.

### *Salafis unchained*

Amongst the first changes many Tunisians and international observers noticed in the aftermath of the uprisings was the increasing number of men wearing long beards and white robes.<sup>52</sup> Many Tunisians were startled to see women wearing the *niqab*, something unthinkable under Ben Ali. Most had never even seen a full-face veil before, and secular activists were keen to blame this new phenomenon on Ennahda, accusing it of 'Islamising' the country. Many also suspected a 'foreign conspiracy' behind the sudden appearance of Salafis, pointing out that their country was famous for its 'modernisation' and 'openness'.<sup>53</sup> Such discourse illustrates the extent to which many Tunisians had uncritically internalised the reformist myth propagated by Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Although Salafism had gained ground from the early 2000s, Ben Ali's fierce repression of its followers meant that most people had in fact been completely unaware of their existence. The former president had praised himself for having 'eradicated' Salafism once the Soliman militants were put behind bars in 2007. After the uprisings, however, Salafis gained unprecedented freedom when Essebsi's interim government took the decision to release all political prisoners, including many ultra-conservatives.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Amongst them were known jihadis, such as Seifallah Ben Hassine, alias Abou Iyadh, who had previously fought in Afghanistan, as well as some of the Soliman group. After leaving jail, Abou Iyadh founded Ansar al-Shari'a, which quickly rose to become Tunisia's biggest Salafi movement.<sup>54</sup> In May 2012 its leaders organised a mass rally in the holy city of Kairouan. It brought together over 5,000 activists, proof of their rapidly rising popularity and grassroots structures.<sup>55</sup> Buses were organised throughout the country so that interested parties could easily attend the event. Although it was dominated by young men, entire families participated in it, including children, many of whom were happily waving the black flag used by jihadi groups throughout the region.

However, most participants were eager to stress the primacy of *da'wa* and charitable activities. Many embraced the notion of jihad but insisted that they saw it more in the sense of internal striving to become a better Muslim. To that end, they provided food and clothes to the poor and delivered educational and security services in deprived neighbourhoods, such as in the western Tunis suburb of Ettadhamen,<sup>56</sup> which quickly gained them local recognition and standing. What is less widely known is that the group's leaders also proposed a tentative political programme, including *shari'a*-compatible tourism. It rejected multi-party politics and denounced Ennahda's alliance with two secular parties as 'un-Islamic'.<sup>57</sup> As Ansar al-Shari'a's membership base expanded, its structures quickly encompassed the entire country. Governorate representatives were nominated and charged with arranging local activities to attract more followers. Most of them were keen to assert that they were pursuing an inherently peaceful agenda aimed at enhancing the lives of others through Islam—something, they claimed, the Troika government had failed to do. Whilst many seem to have truly believed in this stance, a branch within the movement, including amongst its leadership ranks, also endorsed some violence. Indeed, the movement's official website, which was later shut down by the Troika, extensively praised Osama Bin Laden.

Alongside its *da'wa* and charitable activities, Ansar al-Shari'a's growth was bolstered by influential educational institutes. Indeed, many members offered free Islamic education for the pious and their children, for example through Qur'an reading classes and Islamic kindergartens.<sup>58</sup> This was particularly attractive to the devout, who

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

typically described having felt a ‘thirst’ for more Islamic knowledge post-uprising, after what they maintained had been years of ‘secular dictatorship’.<sup>59</sup> Some of them enrolled at Zaytouna University, where the number of new students increased by over a third in the years after the ousting of Ben Ali. Indeed 2,175 new students enrolled there for the 2014/15 academic cycle, compared to 1,412 in 2010/11, just before the uprisings.<sup>60</sup> The Zaytouna Mosque, which is institutionally separate from the university, located in the *souk* of Tunis, also offered religious courses, and vowed to re-establish its historical role as a pioneer in Islamic education—with limited success, however, given government opposition and because it had lost all of its distinguished scholars.

As part of this religious revivalism, religious classes in deprived neighbourhoods became more popular. They were not only provided by followers of Ansar al-Shari‘a but also by other self-declared religious clerics. Some had become influential local imams after having chased out preachers who had worked under Ben Ali. By October 2011 the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced that it had lost control of about 400 mosques.<sup>61</sup> In some cases the new imams had links to the Soliman group and other violent cells formed in the 2000s. Veteran jihadis also became active within the League for the Protection of the Revolution, spontaneously created by various ideological forces after the uprisings to keep peace and security at a local level, but gradually becoming dominated by its religious wing.

In what probably constituted an attempt to contain the spread of violent Islamic activism by giving ultra-conservatives a political voice, the Troika authorised the Salafi Reform Front Party (Hizb Jabhat al-Islah).<sup>62</sup> The timing of its licensing on 29 March 2012 was strategic, as it came just after Ennahda formally decided not to include a reference to *shari‘a* in the constitution, a decision that alienated many Salafis. At the time of writing the party is led by Mohammed Khouja, who was a prominent member of the Tunisian Islamic Front in the 1980s, but now claims to have left all violent activities behind to participate in democratic politics. He entertained close relations with Ennahda activists in jail, which certainly also explained their licensing of his party. However, as leader of a political player to Ennahda’s right, Khouja is keen to reiterate the importance of advancing *shari‘a* in society, vehe-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

mently asserting that a politician's job is to distinguish between the *haram* (illicit) and *halal* (licit).<sup>63</sup>

Whilst one of Khouja's stated prime goals was to absorb the religious youth to prevent them from joining violent streams of Salafism, the Reform Front Party has hitherto enjoyed little popularity. 'The Reform Front Party does not mean anything to us, we do not believe in politics!' exclaimed one ultra-conservative. He added with disdain that '[the party] is actually just an extension of Ennahda'.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Khouja was a member of Ennahda's predecessors, al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya and the MTI, which he left when its leaders sought to apply for a party licence in 1981, as he rejected multi-party politics at the time. In addition, many ultra-conservatives criticised the Reform Front Party for prioritising domestic policies over the transnational causes pre-eminent within the Salafi community. They denounced its strategy of focusing first upon 'the problems within Tunisia, and then looking elsewhere'.<sup>65</sup> So, despite Khouja's insistence on the need to implement *shari'a*, young Salafis saw the party as a nucleus of the old guard seeking the gradual Islamisation of society from within the state. The large reservoir of young Tunisians who had been radicalised in the time of Ben Ali rejected any institutionalised politics and preferred to rely upon bottom-up activism. It is therefore of little surprise that the Salafi party did not gain a single seat in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

In July 2012, moreover, the government licensed Hizb al-Tahrir. While the Reform Front Party aims to be a mass party, Hizb al-Tahrir endeavours to create an ultra-conservative elite fully dedicated to creating a caliphate. In author interviews followers said they wanted to bring about a caliphate through an Islamic revolution or coup d'état, although the party temporarily accepted multi-party politics as a way to further its overall aim of Islamising society. As in the 1980s, Hizb al-Tahrir only accepted the most committed and disciplined personnel post-uprising. 'If someone does not appear at our weekly meetings twice or three times, he has to leave us,' maintained one of its leaders in Jendouba.<sup>66</sup> However, despite wide domestic media coverage after its legalisation, Hizb al-Tahrir's support base remained limited, with rallies generally attracting a few hundred people at most. Indeed, most ultra-conservatives were much more interested in joining popular Salafi movements such as Ansar al-Shari'a. They rejected the elitism of

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

both Hizb al-Tahrir and the Reform Front Party led by Khouja, a proud holder of a Ph.D. in nutrition science who had spent time in Europe. Naturally, these mainly young activists were also eager to compete for influence on the politicised campuses alongside the more numerous Ennahda followers.

### *Contesting campuses*

Soon after the uprisings, the struggle between leftist and religious students that had dominated the 1970s and 1980s reappeared on campuses, but this time with a clear Salafi component. Islamists, many of whom had previously been part of the Independent Students, revived the UGTE. Its followers accused their secular rivals, the UGET, of having supported the former regime, even though many UGET activists had also been persecuted and had participated in the uprisings. The secular students, on the other hand, watched the rise of their devout counterparts with suspicion, anxious that they would take control of campuses.

Yet internal Student Academic Council elections on 15 March 2012 confirmed the UGET's predominance, an edge they would retain in subsequent years. In the ballots UGET members secured 36 per cent of the council seats, compared to 31 per cent for the UGTE. In part, the latter were defeated because, following the ousting of Ben Ali, many religious students directed all their energy towards recreating Ennahda, leaving little space for university activism. Reviving the UGTE was also more difficult compared to Ennahda's restructuring, given the more fluid and rapidly changing student bodies. 'By the time of the [2012 university] elections, we only had representatives in roughly half of the districts,' explained a UGTE leader at the Manouba University. 'But in this context, we still did quite well,' he said.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, religious students found it challenging to redefine their priorities and activities at universities. Beyond promoting religious spaces, such as prayer rooms, the union's official publication described its mission in vague terms. UGTE activists sought to become the voice of the 'marginalised' and 'unemployed' youth, but beyond that cast the movement's role essentially in opposition to that of the UGET, which they accused of trying to monopolise student affairs and of imposing the 'Western model' on campuses.<sup>68</sup> Naturally the lack of previous

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

union experience and a weak ideological foundation following decades of repression did not help them in formulating a clearer stance about their role on campuses.

Furthermore, whereas in the 1970s members of Ennahda, alongside some independents, made up the bulk of the UGTE, its composition had since become more conservative, consonant with the general trend towards stricter interpretations of Islam amongst young people. The union also included members of the Salafi movement, which exacerbated tensions with its secular competitor. Friction led to action in early 2012, when a Salafi took down the Tunisian flag from the rooftop of the Manouba University and replaced it with the black flag. Although the national flag was quickly restored, tensions increased soon afterwards when the UGTE supported Salafi women in their demand to wear the *niqab* at university and while taking exams. 'Dress should be a matter of personal freedom,' insisted one of the union representatives.<sup>69</sup> Most secular-leaning students and university professors vehemently opposed the full-face veil on campuses. However, in September 2012 the minister of education, Moncef Ben Salem, and President Moncef Marzouki called upon the universities to tolerate the *niqab*, including during exams.<sup>70</sup>

UGET students interpreted this decision as evidence of the Troika's collusion with the UGTE, and were keen to stress their own support for the parliamentary opposition. One researcher was of the opinion that the politicising of the unionists on campuses led them to '[neglect] their primary roles in defending students' rights and developing education'.<sup>71</sup> This is particularly true for the campuses in the politicised capital. As a matter of fact, unionists in other parts of the country, particularly the south and the interior, pursued more traditional agendas, concerned, for example, with the price of student accommodation and health issues; yet their endeavours remained low profile.<sup>72</sup>

Tension between rival union factions in Tunis led to regular clashes, leaving severely wounded students on both sides. In mid-2014 the secretary general of the UGET was attacked and hospitalised, in a coma. Beyond the conflicts between rival unionists, however, tensions gradually also heightened within the inner circles of the UGTE, after some of its Salafis, although a minority, endorsed a more violent interpretation of Islam. This internal UGTE conflict mirrored creeping friction

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

between Ennahda and the Salafis. Mounting disputes pitting the ultra-conservative minority against the majority of UGTE members eventually forced most to leave the union. Some subsequently joined violent Salafi cells.

### *The temptations of jihadism*

Having kept a low profile in the months after the uprisings, by the mid-2012 jihadis, including those with ties to Ansar al-Shari'a's violent branch, had gained ground in Tunisia. They made themselves felt for the first time when hundreds of rioters attacked the US embassy in Tunis in September 2012. They were furious over a YouTube trailer for the US-produced film *Innocence of Muslims*, which they considered blasphemous. The trailer had triggered similar protests in other countries in the region. President Marzouki had to order the presidential guard to secure the embassy after it became apparent that police and military forces were unable to deal with the crowd.

Four Tunisians were killed and about thirty wounded in the embassy incident, which authorities later blamed on Ansar al-Shari'a and affiliated groups.<sup>73</sup> An American school in Tunis was also attacked and ransacked. A Tunisian court sentenced twenty people to jail for their involvement in the riots, including Abou Iyadh, who, however, managed to flee to Libya. From there he continued to direct Ansar al-Shari'a. However, his absence meant that others quickly sought to challenge his leadership and climbed up the ranks of the movement.

Some of them had links to violent jihadis in the region, a general trend reflecting their increasing cross-border collaboration. Indeed, shortly after the US embassy assault, the Troika announced that it had broken up a violent cell with ties to Ansar al-Shari'a and al-Qa'ida operating in the mountainous Chaambi area, in the north-west on the Algerian border. Its members called themselves Katibat 'Uqba ibn Nafi (the Battalion of 'Uqba ibn Nafi), and had previously received training in Algeria and Libya, some of whose citizens had also joined the group.<sup>74</sup> Their regional composition was reflected in the choice of the cell's name, referring to the famous Arab general 'Uqba ibn Nafi, who launched the Islamic conquest in North Africa and established a base of operations in Tunisia's holy city of Kairouan. Like the Soliman group in

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

2006, these jihadis pursued a domestic agenda, targeting mainly Tunisian security forces. Despite the government's claim to have neutralised the group, it continued to clash with security forces in subsequent years, leading to high numbers of casualties on both sides. On 16 July 2013, for example, Katibat 'Uqba ibn Nafi assaulted Tunisian soldiers close to the Chaambi Mountains, killing fifteen and wounding twenty of them.<sup>75</sup>

It is noteworthy to recall that in 2006 the Soliman group had grown quickly because many of its members found it logistically difficult to join the rebels in the Iraq war and instead decided to wage jihad at home; yet the Chaambi cell attracted members despite the comparative ease of joining foreign battles at that time, such as in Libya, Syria, and Iraq. This revealed that Tunisia itself had become a priority ground for religiously inspired violence. Former president Moncef Marzouki eventually had to acknowledge that state officials had underestimated the jihadi threat. 'We didn't realize how dangerous and violent these Salafists could be,' he acknowledged in a December 2012 interview.<sup>76</sup> Less than a year later a suicide bomber blew himself up on a beach in the tourist resort of Sousse; no one was hurt except the assailant. The same day the police foiled a coordinated attack on ex-president Habib Bourguiba's tomb in Monastir. Although both assaults failed, they clearly illustrated the growing sway of religiously inspired violence in the country, foreshadowing what was yet to come.

A key challenge was that jihadis were recruiting heavily amongst unemployed and disenchanted young people. Many of them were disappointed by the Constituent Assembly's slow path of reform as deputies failed to revive the economy and create jobs, central demands behind the 2010–11 uprisings. An OECD report found in early 2015 that youth unemployment stood at almost 40 per cent. Of those young people who had work, almost 50 per cent were informally employed with little or no social protection, a situation the organisation described as a 'true social tragedy'.<sup>77</sup> An increasing number of young people consequently complained that 'nothing has changed' since the ousting of Ben Ali.<sup>78</sup>

Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, who conducted excellent research on the emergence of Salafism after the uprisings, argued that the message of the ultra-conservatives 'allows them to find points of reference that explain their marginal socio-economic condition and a

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

map to get out of it in a world they cannot otherwise make sense of'.<sup>79</sup> The Salafis' blaming of the 'impious' Troika for the people's plight appealed to an increasing number of alienated Tunisians. It also made them easy recruits for foreign battles. Chaos in civil war-prone Libya and its vast uncontrolled borders with Tunisia facilitated the flow of foreign fighters, many of whom received combat training there before travelling to other parts of the region. A UN expert group claimed that by mid-2015 'there [were] some 4,000 Tunisians in Syria, 1,000–1,500 in Libya, 200 in Iraq, 60 in Mali, and 50 in Yemen', most of whom had joined jihadi groups linked to al-Qa'ida or the Islamic State.<sup>80</sup> Elaborate recruitment networks were established between Tunisia and Libya, with recruiters allegedly receiving between \$3,000 and \$10,000 per new fighter.<sup>81</sup> However, these figures, originating from Tunisia's Ministry of Interior, are estimates that are difficult to validate. Moreover, some experts have argued that officials might have amplified them in order to receive more security assistance from Western partners, especially the United States.<sup>82</sup>

In any case, the mounting jihadi component amongst Salafis gradually forced Ennahda to redefine its relationship with the ultra-conservatives. Until late 2012 its followers typically insisted that 'dialogue' was needed to convince them to operate in a peaceful and legal framework. Ennahda leaders repeatedly affirmed that they did not want to repeat the mistake of Ben Ali, whose clampdown on religious activists, they said, had only 'encouraged the creation of the Salafi movement'.<sup>83</sup> They also stressed that they were from the same ideological family, although Ennahda's followers opted for a gradualist approach towards Islamising the society while the Salafis aimed to implement Islamic law immediately. Ghannouchi even claimed in an interview in mid-2012 that the Salafis reminded him of his own youth,<sup>84</sup> later explaining that in the 1970s and 1980s Ennahda activists also 'thought [they] can dominate everything'.<sup>85</sup>

Yet Ghannouchi soon sought to distinguish Ennahda more clearly from the ultra-conservatives. In an interview with the author he claimed that his followers had 'developed', and instead of 'utopian' goals now 'deal with the reality'. He also stressed that his movement denounced religious activists who resort to violence as 'terrorists'.<sup>86</sup> This more confrontational stance came after jihadi violence culminated

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

in the assassinations of two leftist opposition politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi, in Tunis in February and July 2013. The killings, which were claimed in December 2014 by Abou Bakr al-Hakim (alias Abou Mouqatel), a French Tunisian who subsequently joined the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, triggered massive protests which eventually forced the Troika government to resign.

### *The fall of the Troika*

Many secular Tunisians accused Ennahda of having turned a blind eye to the rise of Salafi jihadis. In August 2013 the Initiative for Discovering the Truth about the Assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi, launched by family members of the victims, accused the government, and its Islamist components in particular, of 'complicity in the killings' and 'collusion with terrorist movements'.<sup>87</sup> Such accusations, not based on hard evidence, reflected the extent to which a mounting number of Tunisians distrusted the new state officials. A survey found that the number of people affirming that Tunisia was going in the wrong direction had more than doubled in the period between the Troika assuming office and shortly after the assassinations.<sup>88</sup>

In February 2013, in response to fading public confidence, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali called upon the government to resign. He proposed replacing it with independent technocrats charged with finalising the constitution and preparing the next elections. Yet Ennahda's rank and file strongly disapproved of Jebali's initiative, arguing that the resignation of Tunisia's first democratically elected government would weaken the transition and slow down the constitution-drafting process.

Jebali nevertheless decided to step down unilaterally as prime minister. He was replaced by Ali Larayedh, the former interior minister, who vowed to take harsher measures against the ultra-conservatives to boost public confidence. He banned Ansar al-Shari'a's second rally in Kairouan, scheduled for May 2013, and even declared it a terrorist organisation following the July assassination of Mohammed Brahmi.<sup>89</sup> However, this reflects more a last-ditch attempt to allocate responsibility for the killing in the face of popular uproar than the existence of any hard evidence linking Brahmi's death to Ansar al-Shari'a, whose leaders denied any involvement in the incident. A link between Abou

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

Mouqatel, the Islamic State fighter who had claimed responsibility for the killings, and Ansar al-Shari'a was also not proven.<sup>90</sup>

Ennahda's harsh stance towards the ultra-conservatives opened the doors to a showdown between the two. In September 2013 Ansar al-Shari'a leaders issued a statement in which they openly declared 'their long-standing loyalty to jihadist groups and warned that the authorities are dragging the country into a bloodbath'.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the Interior Ministry uncovered a death list which also named several Ennahda followers as possible targets. In May 2014 the home of former interior minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou, perceived as close to the Islamists, was attacked.<sup>92</sup>

This sharpening conflict between Ennahda and the Salafis, however, did little to appease more secular members of society, thousands of whom took to the streets in response to the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi. Their initially fragmented political representatives had gradually regained leverage through unification initiatives, the most important of which was the Nidaa Tounes Party, licensed on 6 July 2012. It was founded by former interim prime minister Essebsi as a project 'destined to regroup' Tunisia's secular voices to counter the dominance of Ennahda.<sup>93</sup> As such, it included people as diverse as former RCD members, leftists, trade unionists, independents, secular women activists, and veteran members of the Destour movement.

After assuming office, Ennahda leaders had decided not to back the persecution of former RCD senior members, probably to avoid making powerful enemies who might challenge its power.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, according to leaked Saudi diplomatic cables, Abdul Sattar al-Masoudi, an official supposedly linked to the Troika government, approached Ben Ali via his lawyer and offered to open discussions with the prospect of 'national reconciliation', a proposal the ousted ex-president supposedly accepted.<sup>95</sup> Naturally, the goal of national reconciliation, a continuation of the policies formulated by the exile movement decades earlier, was fiercely contested by the Islamist base. Some even alleged that the leadership had struck a deal with former Ben Ali officials: Ennahda would not prosecute them, and in exchange ex-RCD members would not try to reveal information about the movement's contentious activities in the 1980s and early 1990s. This might indeed have been attractive to some of its senior figures, given that not everything Ben Ali had accused them of was made up, as we saw in chapter 3.<sup>96</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Ennahda's reconciliatory stance facilitated the comeback of former regime figures, most importantly through Nidaa Tounes. Alongside other secular voices, including the UGET and women's associations, Nidaa Tounes created the National Salvation Front (Jabhat al-Inkadh al-Watani), on 26 July 2013, one day after Brahmi's assassination, with the aim of forcing the government out of office. Their confidence had received an immense boost after the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi earlier that month, followed by the banning of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood there, events that led some secular activists to enthusiastically declare the era of Ennahda over. 'The failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has shown that political Islam is outmoded,' announced a leader of Nidaa Tounes to the author shortly after the removal of Morsi by Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. 'All the Muslim Brotherhood's regional branches, including Ennahda, will now close automatically,' he affirmed.<sup>97</sup> However, once Sisi's crackdown on regime opponents commenced, many anti-Troika protesters became less inclined to copy the Egyptian scenario, preferring to avoid similar bloodshed at home.

To distance his followers from the events in Egypt, Rachid Ghannouchi was quick to suggest that 'Morsi committed mistakes', emphasising that Ennahda was 'a Tunisian party' and 'one of the champions of the idea of the compatibility between Islam and democracy'.<sup>98</sup> This marked a turning point in Ennahda's relations with its Islamist 'brothers' and 'sisters' in the region. Indeed, in the wake of the uprisings Ennahda had initially tightened its ties with organisations such as the Egyptian and Syrian Brotherhoods as well as with Hamas, representatives of which even attended Ennahda's 2012 congress. The emir of Qatar, moreover, participated in the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly, as did the Turkish minister of foreign affairs,<sup>99</sup> both of whom many opposition parties accused of interfering in Tunisian affairs.

However, following the fall of Morsi, as well as increasingly repressive policies by Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP), Ennahda leaders re-evaluated the situation, and decided that such ties had weakened their own political aspirations by conflating the challenges and controversies of other Islamist organisations with those of their movement. They henceforth distanced the movement from them and claimed to aspire to become a 'true' Tunisian

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

party, openly dissociating themselves from the international ambitions entrenched in the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology.<sup>100</sup> In response to criticism that Morsi had pursued an autocratic ruling style that gave the presidency sweeping powers, Rachid Ghannouchi stressed that 'we in Tunisia ... offered compromises in terms of the constitution so that it will represent all Tunisians'.<sup>101</sup>

Ennahda's aloofness from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood following Morsi's ouster was a strategy also pursued by other Islamist movements to minimise negative effects on their organisations. The Jordanian Brothers also disengaged from the Egyptian mother organisation in 2013, albeit more gently. Moreover, the Syrian Brotherhood's spokesperson stated shortly after the coup that the Egyptian Brotherhood had made 'a mistake', elaborating that 'I believe that we have to work within a coalition'. In Morocco, Abdelilah Benkirane, the head of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) affirmed that 'we [PJD] have nothing to do with the Muslim Brotherhood'.<sup>102</sup> The dissociation of Ennahda alongside regional Muslim Brotherhood branches from the Egyptian organisation reflects a more general focus on domestic issues that Islamist organisations throughout the Arab world have increasingly pursued over the past decades. Some scholars, such as Alia al-Kadi, even go so far as to argue that the international aims of the Brotherhood primarily helped their organisations to acquire more power at home and did not reflect any larger global ambitions or strategy.<sup>103</sup>

In the case of Ennahda, despite its efforts to dissociate itself from the Brotherhood in Egypt, pressure on its movement increased further after Brahmi's assassination in July 2013, when about a quarter of the Constituent Assembly deputies took the decision to resign and massive anti-Troika protests swept the country. To the dismay of Ennahda and the CPR, even Ettakatol supported the National Salvation Front's call to dissolve the government. Ennahda therefore had little choice but to join a national dialogue led by the UGTT and three other civil society organisations (the so-called Quartet), which mediated between the movement and the National Salvation Front. The UGTT was not a neutral broker since its leadership was dominated by leftists who were keen to see Ennahda leave office. Ennahda officials had encouraged their base to join the union, but during a December 2011 congress labour activists altered internal laws in such a way that it became more

difficult for religious activists to reach leadership positions.<sup>104</sup> So Ennahda had little alternative but, in October 2012, to sign, together with secular forces, a Quartet-devised road map for the country's future that forced the government to cede power.

The power of secular forces was, however, not completely unrestrained, and the National Salvation Front did not succeed in all of its demands. In particular, its leaders opposed the selection as prime minister of Mehdi Jomaa, minister of industry under the Troika, arguing that he was close to Ennahda. However, one of their own leading candidates, Mohammed Ennaceur, would later become the vice-president of Nidaa Tounes, highlighting the secularists' double standards when it came to finding an independent figure. Moreover, the National Salvation Front called for the immediate resignation of the government, but Ennahda officials only agreed to cede power in January 2014, once the constitution was finalised, so as to credit the Troika with this key achievement in the country's volatile transition.

The constitution, adopted on 27 January 2014, stipulated Islam as the religion of Tunisia and the state the protector of the sacred realm.<sup>105</sup> Ghannouchi and other senior members of Ennahda have since insisted that it enshrined Tunisia's 'Arab Muslim heritage', and that therefore the struggle for Tunisia's identity was over. They affirmed that Ennahda had to focus henceforth upon more pressing challenges, including the country's fragile security and economic environments, and put identity politics aside in order to become a 'regular party', a stance fiercely contested by the more dogmatic portions of the movement's base.<sup>106</sup>

### *Towards post-Islamism?*

The shift in the leadership's strategy away from identity politics came strikingly to the fore for the first time during the 2014 electoral campaign. Many civil society activists noted that, ironically, the 'only party that does not talk about religion is Ennahda'.<sup>107</sup> Rather, its senior members stressed the need to 'revive the economy' and 'establish security'.<sup>108</sup> The leadership also resisted demonising its opponents, stressing instead the need for 'national consensus' to tackle the country's pertinent challenges—including, if necessary, in collaboration with former senior RCD members. Naturally this stance was extremely

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

contentious amongst the grassroots, which reproached its leaders for having failed to bring former Ben Ali officials, some of whom had been involved in severe human rights violations, to justice. They warned that a 'counter-revolution' (*al-Thawra al-Mudadda*) led by ex-RCDists was under way and Ennahda was not doing anything to stop it.<sup>109</sup> In an attempt to get its rank and file on board, the leadership proclaimed that Ennahda's withdrawal from power and conciliatory stance towards secular forces was proof of its 'democratic credentials' and demonstrated that the party had Tunisia's 'best interest' at heart.<sup>110</sup> To some extent, such efforts were successful. Indeed, although many aspects of Ennahda's new political outlook continued to be contested within its inner circles, the party's support base remained quite steady. In countrywide polls conducted in late 2013 and mid 2014 around 13 per cent supported Ennahda both times.<sup>111</sup>

Whilst Ennahda was refining its electoral strategy, secular parties became increasingly entangled in old power battles. The National Salvation Front quickly broke apart after the Troika resigned, as its diverse constituents had little more in common with each other than their opposition to Ennahda. Even within its dominant component, Nidaa Tounes, friction erupted between its various ideological currents. Many of its members opposed the promotion of former RCD leaders to key party positions, a dynamic which of course also alarmed many Ennahda followers. They were particularly indignant when, in September 2013, Mohammed Ghariani, the last secretary general of the RCD, joined the party as adviser to Essebsi.<sup>112</sup> Nidaa Tounes leaders attempted to defuse internal tensions by improving the image of former RCDists, calling them 'Destourians', but with limited success. Four senior members of the party's office in Sfax resigned in December 2013. Such an outward display of disunity was an important factor in the erosion of its support base from 19 per cent in October 2013 to 13 per cent by mid-2014.<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, Tunisia's 26 October 2014 parliamentary elections confirmed Nidaa Tounes, which gained eighty-six seats in the 217-seat legislature, as the largest party. Its leaders garnered support in the weeks before the ballot by emphasising the importance of 'utility voting' and 'sanction voting', suggesting that all those who did not want Ennahda to become the biggest political force once again should back

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Essebsi to prevent the fragmentation of the secular spectrum. In other words, many Tunisians voted for it because they sought to change the status quo, not because they necessarily believed in the party and its promises. Nidaa Tounes was trailed by Ennahda, which received sixty-nine seats in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, which replaced the Constituent Assembly. Next came the populist Free Patriotic Union (UPL) with sixteen seats, the leftist Popular Front (fifteen seats), and the liberal Afek Tounes (eight seats). It is striking that, with the exception of Ennahda, all these forces had little or no former influence within the Constituent Assembly, displaying the extent to which many Tunisians longed for a new start after what they believed was a disappointing Troika experience. This trend was reinforced when Essebsi beat Moncef Marzouki in a run-off presidential ballot in December 2014. As part of an increasingly gradualist strategy, Ennahda did not put forward any presidential candidate, so as not to fuel its opponents' fears that its followers were trying to dominate politics yet again.<sup>114</sup> Even though this policy was controversial with its grassroots, Ennahda's traditional constituencies remained relatively loyal to the party during voting. Indeed, during parliamentary elections Ennahda came first in practically all of the marginalised governorates in the south and centre. During the presidential ballots, Marzouki, perceived as the candidate who was closest to the Islamists, won in these areas.

The Ennahda leadership was eager to join the government with Nidaa Tounes, whose officials were unable to form a stable government without the Islamists. The UPL, Afek Tounes, and independents also joined the cabinet, which was led by Prime Minister Habib Essid, a former Ben Ali official close to Nidaa Tounes. It comprised twenty-eight ministers and fourteen secretaries of state. Ennahda obtained the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training as well as secretaries of state for finance, investment, and health. Moreover, Abdelfattah Mourou became vice-president of parliament, which was presided over by Mohammed Ennaceur. Given its few portfolios in government, however, Ennahda's participation was initially mainly symbolic. In addition, its leaders received posts in which they could not possibly succeed, given persistent economic stagnation. Many grassroots activists such as Mohammed, a student in his late twenties from Sousse, believed

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

that Ennahda's limited posts in government was proof of the insidiousness of the coalition partners. 'These people cannot be trusted!' he declared, adding in a shaking voice, 'They imprisoned us, they tortured us, and they assaulted our families!'<sup>115</sup>

Yet Ennahda leaders still preferred a limited role in government to joining the opposition, which traditionally had little power. A safe place in the cabinet also protected them somewhat from their adversaries, who blamed Ennahda for religious violence, which reached a new height shortly after the elections. In March 2015 three gunmen assaulted Tunisia's acclaimed Bardo National Museum, located next to the parliament, taking visitors hostage and killing twenty-two of them, mostly Europeans. Around fifty more were injured. One of the attackers was shot by the police while another managed to escape. The Islamic State claimed responsibility, celebrating the gunmen as 'knights' and vowing that the museum, world famous for its collection of Roman mosaics, was a 'den of infidels and vice'.<sup>116</sup> However, the government blamed Katibat 'Uqba ibn Nafi for the attack, killing nine of its members shortly afterwards.<sup>117</sup> It is possible that the two groups acted jointly; another possibility is that state officials blamed Katibat 'Uqba ibn Nafi to give the impression that they were in firm control of the events. In any case, violence heightened only three months later, when an armed gunman attacked a tourist resort close to Sousse, killing thirty-eight people, thirty of whom were British. Thirty-nine more were wounded. The perpetrator was gunned down by security forces during the assault, also claimed by the Islamic State. Authorities, however, suspect that the attack was carefully planned by several people, but failed to track the accomplices down.

On 7 March 2016 major violence erupted once again, this time in Ben Gardane, a southern city at the border with Libya. Armed forces affiliated with the Islamic State, who had trained with its Libya branch, seized the city's mosque and started attacking state facilities and security forces. Clashes between the assailants and the Tunisian army continued for two days. Eyewitnesses claimed that many of the attackers had Tunisian accents and were probably supported by some Ben Gardane inhabitants, given that they had managed to carefully plan the assault unnoticed. In total about forty-five of the assailants were killed, thirteen members of the security forces, and seven civilians.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Such violent events showed vividly that the Essid government had no immediate solution for Tunisia's security challenges either, which bolstered Ennahda's image. Indeed, until the 2014 ballots the party had taken most of the blame for religious violence and economic recession, challenges that only became more pronounced following the violence in Bardo, Sousse, and Ben Gardane. In contrast to Ennahda, whose activists had formed strong bonds through the experience of repression, prison, and exile, many Nidaa Tounes members had only recently got to know each other. Friction between rival factions soon burst out into the open.<sup>118</sup> By mid-January 2016 twenty-eight Nidaa Tounes lawmakers had resigned from the party, reducing its parliamentary seats from eighty-six to fifty-eight. Thus, with sixty-nine seats, Ennahda once again became the biggest force in parliament.<sup>119</sup>

Alongside fragmentation of the secular spectrum, persistent support from key constituencies, combined with Ennahda leaders' clever diplomatic manoeuvres and political flexibility, continue to give the party an edge in politics. In May 2016 the movement held its tenth congress in Hammamet, during which Rachid Ghannouchi, who was re-elected as president, announced that Ennahda had left 'political Islam' behind to embrace 'Muslim democracy'. Sayida Ounissi, a young Ennahda lawmaker who rose to prominence after the uprisings, explained that the term 'Muslim democrats' was first used 'to help the media understand the pitfalls of instantly and unanimously labelling diverse political actors as Islamists, despite their differences'. She elaborated that it was adopted at the May 2016 congress because:

we can no longer use a term [Islamists] so charged with negative connotations. ... It would be a waste of quite a lot of time and energy for us to take up the task of constantly distancing ourselves from a violent and dangerous ideology which is precisely the sort of model we are fighting against. ... We ... [must] make our differences with [the Islamic State] and other extremists clear to all. In a nutshell, Muslim Democrat is the most accurate term to describe what Ennahda is trying to accomplish since the beginning: reconciling Islam and democracy in the Arab world.<sup>120</sup>

Clearly, Ennahda's re-branding as 'Muslim democrats' was mostly a response to the pitfalls associated with embracing political Islam in the age of the Islamic State, but did not represent a fundamental transformation in the movement's ideology. Indeed, it is unlikely that Ennahda

## RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

would have embraced the concept at all in a regional context marked by Islamist strength, which had not experienced the overthrow of Morsi in Egypt and the conflation of Muslim Brotherhood organisations with the Islamic State or al-Qa‘ida-type groups.<sup>121</sup> At the congress, moreover, Ennahda announced a separation between its political activities and preaching, something its activists had rejected as recently as May 2012. This meant that some of its leaders known for preaching, such as Sadok Chourou and Habib Ellouze, were no longer allowed to engage in proselytising and political activities simultaneously. The congress also eased its entry requirements. Applicants no longer needed to be endorsed by two party members, and the word ‘morals’ was entirely deleted from the membership prerequisites.<sup>122</sup>

Many pundits interpreted the decision to separate political activities from preaching as the end of political Islam or the commencement of a ‘post-Islamist’ age, a term coined by Asef Bayat and Olivier Roy, who views it as the ‘weariness, indifference or simply irrelevance of the Islamic norm in the political field’.<sup>123</sup> However, it is important to highlight that, internally, Ennahda leaders did not sell this decision as a separation, but rather a ‘specialisation’. For example, Farida Laabidi, a Shura Council member and Ennahda deputy, reflected that ‘our references will remain Islamic, but it’s not logical for us to try to do everything from *tarbiya* (religious education) to making economic policy’.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, whilst Ennahda leaders are keen on comparing Ennahda to Christian democratic parties in the West, there are important differences between them. Indeed, Christian democratic parties evolved during a decline in religious observance in the West and became thus absorbed into social democracy, but Islamic belief and practice in Tunisia is stronger than ever.<sup>125</sup> Some members of Ennahda have compared their ideological evolution with former communist parties in Eastern Europe which, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, joined the political scene while fighting for the rights for workers through other channels, such as associations and unions. Clearly the notion of post-Islamism denies political Islam the flexible and evolutionary interpretation that other political actors have enjoyed, including in the West. As with all religious traditions, the meaning of political Islam remains contested, including within the inner circles of Ennahda. Yet as an ideology it remains highly relevant as long as political legitimisation is sought through religious sources and interpretations.<sup>126</sup>

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

A key challenge for the Ennahda leadership is to balance its pragmatism with the demands of its grassroots. In November 2013 the members of Ennahda's office in Gafsa resigned after accusations that its leaders had betrayed the goals of the revolution and failed to achieve social justice.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, many activists of Ennahda's base continue to call for an increased role for Islam in politics, irrespective of the formal separation between preaching and political activities. The question is: to what extent can Ennahda leaders realise their own political demands without reaching a breaking point? Despite the movement's outward display of unity, this book has highlighted that splits occurred previously, particularly in the 1980s, when some leaders attempted to join mainstream politics, a move rejected by more dogmatic activists. Those who left the organisation often joined more radical groups. Nowadays, Ennahda's real challenge is to pursue an increasingly conciliatory political line without losing a mounting number of followers to the more uncompromising Salafis, who have become deeply entrenched in society, a dilemma which is difficult to overcome.

## CONCLUSION

*We are for reconciliation. As for the details, they can be discussed. The project may be amended, but it will pass.*

Rachid Ghannouchi<sup>1</sup>

This book sheds light on Ennahda's historical evolution, the backdrop to understanding its current ideological and political orientation. Following Tunisia's 2010–11 uprisings, many pundits analysed political developments through the prism of 'Islamists versus secularists' or 'modernists versus obscurantists'. Whilst typically contrasted with more secular currents, Ennahda actually has much in common with them. Since the mid-2000s its leaders have attempted to position their movement within the traditions of the nineteenth-century Tunisian reformist movement just as Bourguiba and Ben Ali had sought to do decades earlier. Like them, senior Ennahda figures have engaged in a rewriting of history to portray their organisation as entirely non-violent and democratic, attempting to erase from its memory periods that conflict with this narrative. Bourguiba did so by downplaying, if not denying outright, his violent crackdown on the Ben Youssef opposition, an approach both he and Ben Ali later adopted regarding a range of dissidents. Ennahda leaders have taken a similar approach, if on a smaller scale, when dismissing the existence of plans in the 1980s to overthrow the regime by force. They have also downplayed the past violence of some of its own members. Rather than acknowledging past mistakes and controversies, the vast majority of its activists have internalised a one-sided discourse of victimisation and suffering.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Reinterpreting some aspects of its history has shaped Ennahda's evolution in the period following the uprisings. Just as Bourguiba and Ben Ali portrayed their politics as 'exceptional' in the Arab world in terms of their 'moderation' and 'modernisation', Ennahda officials adopted a rhetoric stressing their 'specificities' compared to other Islamist movements in the region. They re-evaluated what it means to be 'modern', stressing that religious precepts are central for socio-political renewal and progress. Most famously perhaps, Ennahda has been keen to highlight the pioneering role of women within the movement, framing this as a continuation of Tahar Haddad's legacy on gender equality. Many activists even go as far as to claim that Haddad's call for greater women's rights was widely supported by religious scholars, even though the vast majority of them fiercely opposed his stance, as did more secular portions of society. Indeed, the prominence of some women within Ennahda is actually a relatively recent phenomenon, and virtually all of its historic leaders have been men. Ennahda's insistence upon its supposed 'exceptionalism' was reinforced by external developments, most importantly the military coup against Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi, an event many of its activists feared might be repeated in Tunisia. Distancing themselves from other Muslim Brotherhood branches has been a conscious strategy in order to preempt similar anti-Islamist actions in Tunisia, a real threat in 2013 following the assassinations of two opposition politicians. The killings triggered massive protests, which were supported by the political opposition, who called for the downfall of the Troika government. Ghannouchi's 2016 announcement that Ennahda had left political Islam behind to embrace 'Muslim democracy' and focus upon its *tunisianité* must be understood in this heated domestic context, alongside mounting instability in the wider region.

The Ennahda leadership increasingly adopted a set of policies that are likely to guarantee the party a future place in politics, even if they are seemingly in stark conflict with the movement's ideological background. Quoted above, the stance of Ghannouchi on a law stipulating economic reconciliation—which envisions the freezing of ongoing corruption charges against officials from the Ben Ali era in exchange for injecting their funds into the economy—is a case in point. Since its very creation, one of Ennahda's main *raison d'être* has been its pro-

## CONCLUSION

claimed fight for social justice through Islamic precepts. However, the main rationale behind supporting the law is probably not its supposed economic benefits, as Ghannouchi has been keen to stress. Rather, it lies in the leadership's attempt to strike a deal with former regime figures, who remained influential in Tunisia, in order to further its wider goal of 'national reconciliation'. A pact would act as insurance that they would not try to destabilise the movement yet again to regain leverage. Whilst surprising to some, the willingness of senior members to compromise with former regime figures is not a new development. Indeed, in the 2000s senior activists in exile were already calling for reconciliation with Ben Ali in the hope that this would stop the repression of its members in Tunisia and enable them to return home.

What Ennahda's focus on reconciliation shows is not only the primacy of consensus for the sake of survival, but also the movement's lack of an alternative strategy. The Troika government failed to revive the economy and foster stability. Whilst this was also the result of rising religious violence, Ennahda did not present a credible socio-economic reform programme. Like Ben Ali's RCD and Nidaa Tounes, it has largely followed an economically liberal platform, without making it a priority to combat deep-rooted corruption, which would be needed to foster inclusive growth and social justice. Like its political competitors, Ennahda has failed to provide answers to improve the lives of the thousands of Tunisians who took to the streets in 2010–11 to protest against repression, unemployment, and poverty. In this respect, its experience has been different from that of Turkey's Justice and Development Party, which has long reinforced its legitimacy by its capacity to promote prosperity. In part, the failure of the Ennahda leadership to create jobs is a result of its somewhat vague ideological precepts, including those of Rachid Ghannouchi, which have for decades been shaped by the experience of repression and exile rather than a context in which leadership and concrete policies were demanded. Indeed, many of the earlier writings of the movement, including Ghannouchi's work on 'Islamic democracy', offered very little practical guidance on how to rule the country in the messy and rapidly evolving reality of Tunisia's post-uprising period.

Ennahda's failure to fight poverty was a key reason why its popularity decreased during the Troika period, the other being mounting reli-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

gious violence. Jihadism emerged in Tunisia at a time when Ben Ali was fiercely repressing challengers to his rule. Whilst Ennahda's old guard responded to this violent experience by a willingness to compromise with Ben Ali and his associates and attempt reconciliation at all costs, some younger activists accused their leaders of having not fought hard enough against the regime. They believed that Ennahda was so harshly repressed because its ideology was too moderate and weak. Post-uprising, this stance has become somewhat reinforced as Ennahda leaders' focus upon consensus and compromise has alienated some young activists. Many were particularly appalled by their eagerness to join a ruling coalition with Nidaa Tounes following the October 2014 parliamentary elections. The especially high incidence of Tunisians amongst the ranks of al-Qa'ida-affiliated groups as well as the Islamic State must, at least in part, be understood in this context. A high unemployment rate and instability in neighbouring Libya, which shares a vast, uncontrolled border with Tunisia, has also contributed to this trend. Moreover, violent Salafis enjoyed unprecedented liberty to preach and recruit followers in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings, and Ennahda initially entertained ambiguous relations with them, which also enabled them to thrive.

The stark contrasts between Ennahda's pragmatic leadership, its more dogmatic base, and the increasingly violent Salafi trend in Tunisia illustrate the mounting diversity of the country's evolving religious landscape, especially compared to the 1970s and 1980s, when Ennahda, or one of its predecessor organisations, constituted the main outlet for religious activism. Initially many pundits ignored this complex reality, especially the presence of violent actors, proclaiming Tunisia a 'model'<sup>2</sup> in a regional context that saw violence sweeping through countries ranging from Libya, Egypt, and Yemen to Syria and Iraq following the 2010–11 uprisings. Yet such designations, inherently based upon regional comparisons that demarcate Tunisia's transformation as the least worst, in some ways contributed to instability, as it downplayed the many challenges the country faced. For this very reason, the threat of violence and instability in Tunisia surprised many observers in 2013, even though both dynamics had already been markedly apparent months after the October 2011 Constituent Assembly elections.<sup>3</sup> What the uprisings have achieved in Tunisia is not yet an example for other

## CONCLUSION

countries in the region, despite important developments, particularly the opening up of the political and social spheres to forces fiercely suppressed under Ben Ali.

This more plural and inclusive environment forced Ennahda to reinvent itself, a process through which some of the myths about its own history and supposedly pioneering policies have become a political reality. Indeed, its biggest strength and real 'specificity' has been its capacity to adapt to a changing environment, as indicated, for instance, by the leadership's promotion of women in the party, acceptance of the Personal Status Code, and its support of multi-party governance, even together with more secular forces. As this book has shown, both issues were historically contested within the movement, and remain so within its more dogmatic circles. Ennahda's real challenge nowadays is to translate some of its supposedly avant-gardist policies into ideological tenets accepted more widely amongst its grassroots, and to promote inclusive economic growth and security. Only then can it become the liberal, tolerant, and successful party its leaders claim it is, which can serve as a 'model' for the wider Muslim world.



## APPENDIX 1

### ENNAHDA ELECTORAL PROGRAMME 2011

*(Excerpt)*

*In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Beneficent*

#### Preamble: The Goals of the Revolution within Our Grasp

Anyone who studies the path of Tunisia's civilisation and culture over the last 150 years can perceive a three-dimensional public awareness within society and its cultural, political and administrative elites. The first is an awareness of the country's civilisational backwardness compared to the progress achieved by western nations, which has given rise to power, pride and prosperity thanks to the liberation of minds from illusions and the freedom from despotic rule. The second is a deep consciousness of the absolute necessity of bridging this gap by making every possible effort to acquire modern science and technology and develop administrative and political institutions so as to achieve efficiency, develop effective means of production and avert the scourge of despotism. The third is a deep awareness of, and confidence in, the validity of Islam and its heritage as a value and cultural reference and a basis for this project of reform and modernisation through *ijtihad* (creative interpretation), *tajdid* (renewal), and the activation of dialogue with the contemporary concerns, sciences, and achievements of the modern age. These dimensions form the essence of the reform project and their relative significance continues to be the subject of ongoing debate.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

The ENNAHDHA (Renaissance) Movement, which considers itself a continuation and evolution of the message of political, social and cultural reform, presents to you its programme in the various fields, hoping that it will be of interest to you and meet your expectations of responsibly and effectively addressing our country's achievements, our revolution's objectives and our people's aspirations. The main themes of our programme are as follows:

1. Tunisia as a free independent state, with Islam as its religion, Arabic as its language, Republicanism as its system, and the achievement of the objectives of the Revolution as its priority.
2. Islam as a supreme point of reference that is balanced and interactive with any human expertise of proven benefit, through the method of *ijtihad*.
3. Arabic language and literature as a tool of communication, a culture and the medium for opening to and interacting with all world languages, particularly those most relevant to modern sciences be they eastern or western.
4. The Republican system as the best guarantee of democracy and best use of the country's wealth for the benefit of the people, as well as the guarantor of the essentials of a dignified life, including employment, health, education, respect for human rights without discrimination on the basis of sex, color, belief or wealth, and the affirmation of women's rights to equality, education, employment and participation in public life.

### *Democratic Political System*

The ENNAHDHA Movement proposes to Tunisians to establish a political system that eradicates the roots of dictatorship that have become entrenched throughout our history and deviated the State from its mission and has dedicated it instead to the repression of freedoms and aspirations and the protection of corrupt gangs in total contradiction to the principles of consultation, human rights, and trustworthy management of public funds.

It is the Parliamentary system which guarantees public and private freedoms, independence of the judiciary, freedom of information and alternation of power through the balanced, dynamic distribution of pow-

## APPENDIX 1

ers between the various state institutions and through free pluralistic elections. The Parliamentary system further ensures the strength and independence of civil society and promotes comprehensive development in all regions of the country and across all segments of society.

### *Comprehensive Economic and Social Development*

The aim of our programme is to establish a national development model which balances the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. Guided by our Islamic values, national experience and human experience in general, we aim to achieve the objectives of our blessed Revolution—of providing employment, regional development, combating corruption, the increase of investment in all sectors and fields and the deepening and diversification of relations of cooperation and partnership with neighboring and friendly countries.

That is the development model we put forward, hoping that it responds to the aspirations of our people who have struggled and sacrificed greatly for the sake of justice, freedom and dignity.

‘Fulfill your promises, for indeed every promise shall be questioned about.’ [Quran, Chapter Al-Isra: verse 34]

### *Introduction*

Our nation is preparing to elect a National Constituent Assembly as an expression of its sovereignty, an achievement of the goals of the revolution and a break with the reign of tyranny and corruption.

The ENNAHDHA Movement pays its respects to the martyrs thanks to whose pure blood, along with God’s help, Tunisia has achieved its independence, liberated itself from tyranny, and is now preparing to build a state based on freedom, dignity and justice.

The ENNAHDHA Movement, as a responsible national actor, is committed to the preservation of the spirit of accord and coexistence among all Tunisians without exclusion or discrimination within a system that guarantees every citizen’s freedom and dignity, achieves the country’s growth, development and stability and respects its aspiration to achieve modernity in harmony with authenticity.

In view of the above, the ENNAHDHA Movement sets the following major objectives as priorities in its programme:

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

1. To establish a democratic system that breaks with tyranny, founded on the basis of citizenship, freedoms, dignity, the supremacy of the Constitution, rule of law and all standards of good governance.
2. To implement an economic and social plan aimed at providing jobs for all Tunisian men and women, offering all the amenities of a dignified life, Ennahdha Electoral Programme 2011 achieving balanced regional development and promoting investment in all economic sectors.
3. To build a modern, balanced society, steeped in solidarity and rooted in its identity as well as contemporary culture that nurtures its human resources and wealth and promotes its position and influence in the world.

Before presenting the details of our programme for achieving the above goals, we outline below the general principles and guidelines that govern it.

### Tunisia as We See it: The Nation and the Citizen

Our vision for the present and future of Tunisia is based upon a comprehensive reading of its geographic location and its historical and cultural significance, factors which must be taken into account in any development programme aimed at cementing its international stature and enhancing its regional role so that it provides a successful model on a variety of levels.

Tunisia has remained throughout the various civilisational periods that marked its rich history a centre for science and civilisation, shining across the different corners of the Mediterranean. Ifriqiyya, with Kairouan as its centre, played a significant role in staging Islamic expansion throughout the region and the Zeitouna mosque made significant contributions to Islamic sciences and knowledge, the propagation of Arabic language, and the shaping of the reform movement.

Tunisia is a country with multiple dimensions and relationships: Arabic, Islamic, Mediterranean, and African. It also enjoys special ties with its neighbors Algeria and Libya due to geographic proximity, the social and historical intermixing between the peoples of the three countries, and because Tunisia's neighbors represent bridges connecting it along the Arab and African dimensions. Tunisia also possesses

## APPENDIX 1

strong relationships, weaved by geography, history, and common interests, with various countries along the sides of the Mediterranean.

Tunisia is characterised by a distinguished geographic location, a cohesive social fabric, and notable human resources. Its population enjoys a racial and religious homogeneity rarely found in the region or in the Arab World. It also boasts high literacy rates, widespread schooling and a leading role for women in various fields, in addition to a skilled labor force and integrated administrative and institutional frameworks. All the aforementioned factors form a solid foundation to any future development programme. Consequently, the efforts and priorities of Tunisians should be to focus on exploiting and leveraging these factors as best as possible, and that includes developing further the human resource capital given that it's the most important resource for our country.

The revolution of dignity has given Tunisia a prominent international status and opened new horizons for it to fulfill the aspirations of its citizens in achieving freedom, dignity, social justice, balanced regional development, and eradicating of corruption so as to erect a modern state capable of guaranteeing full citizenship and dignified livelihood for all segments of society throughout the various regions on the basis of a social contract valuing work and redistributing wealth fairly while ensuring the efficiency and sustainability of institutions.

The main contributing factors to success in the political aspect consist of unleashing freedoms and spreading a feeling of safety and confidence in the future and in the readiness of our people to face the challenges and to make some sacrifices for the benefit of this national project.



## APPENDIX 2

### STATUTE OF THE ENNAHDA MOVEMENT, JULY 2012

*(translation from Arabic)*

*Edited Statute (from 7th Congress)*

#### Part One: Introduction

##### Article One

The Ennahda movement is a moderate Islamist national political party that operates in accordance with the provisions of Decree no. 87 of 2011 dated 24 September 2011 on political parties, and within the context of the Republican Law. Ennahda aims to contribute to building a modern and democratic Tunisia that ensures equal opportunities for all its citizens, a country that is proud of its religion and identity and seeks to reinforce the values of citizenship, freedom, social responsibility, and justice and supports the endeavours for achieving the unity of the Greater Maghrib as one step closer towards achieving Arab unity and Islamic unity, and the liberation of Palestine and cooperation among all peoples based on mutual respect.

The party relies on responsibility and democracy in decision-making, assigning duties and responsibilities and setting visions and programmes. [...]

Part Two: Objectives and Mechanisms

Article Six: Objectives

Ennahda seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Maintain and reinforce national independence and unity, strengthen the unity of the Greater Maghrib, and support the efforts towards unity among Arab and Islamic nations.
- Contribute to reinforcing the culture of moderation and strengthen the Arab Islamic identity.
- Reinforce the principle of the sovereignty of the people by building [a] democratic, civil, and fair state and work on achieving equality among citizens and develop the structures of civil society, and provide it with the necessary mechanisms to perform its full role and actively contribute to comprehensive development.
- Ensure public and individual freedoms and justice, being fundamental values in embodying God's honouring of his creatures and their humanity, reinforce their rights and emphasise pluralism, and freedom of media, press, and creativity.
- Develop and strengthen women's role, and seek to maintain and support family unity and coherence.
- Provide adequate circumstances for child- and youth-care and development.
- Build a strong and integrated national economy that incorporates various groups and entities, provides wide-scale fields of operation, and contributes in achieving integration on the Maghrib, Arab, and Islamic levels, as well as global openness.
- Encourage scientific research and give due respect to researchers and inventors/innovators out of belief in their role in achieving growth and development for the country and supporting its independence.
- Adopt the Arabic language as the primary language in education and administration fields, and develop the language to serve as a tool for development that contributes to the unity of the nation and facilitates positive and innovative interaction with world cultures.
- Contribute to establishing a foreign policy based on the pride, unity, and independence of the country, establish international relations based on mutual respect, cooperation, justice, equality, and the right

## APPENDIX 2

of self-determination, and seek to help and support vulnerable peoples and just causes, notably the Palestinian cause.

### Article Seven: Mechanisms

For the purpose of achieving its objectives, the party adopts legitimate mechanisms within the context of effective and applicable laws.

### Part Three: Affiliation and Membership

#### Article Eight: Affiliation Criteria

Any Tunisian may be eligible to join the Ennahda movement and become affiliated thereto, if they meet the following criteria:

- to be sixteen years of age or more
- to be clear of any legal impediments
- to enjoy good manners, virtues, and ethics
- to believe in the principles and objectives of the party and endeavour to [help it] achieve its aims
- to comply with the party’s agenda, statute, and bylaws
- not to be affiliated with any other political party
- to be endorsed by the local office

The regional office shall make a decision regarding the request for affiliation based on recommendation from the local office. Affiliation in the party is not a right granted automatically to the applicant. The party reserves the right to reject any request for affiliation.

#### Article Nine: Rights of Affiliated Individuals

Each affiliated individual shall be entitled to:

- obtain the affiliation card
- review the regulations, laws, and decisions of the party
- express opinions on political, regulatory, and financial issues of the party within its institutions
- participate in the party’s activities and benefit from its training programmes
- elect the party’s officials in accordance with requirements of the bylaws and statute

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

### Article Ten: Membership

Each individual who has been engaged for at least three years in the party, was not subject to disciplinary procedure, and who has participated regularly in the movement's training programmes and activities in accordance with the terms and procedures specified in the statute shall be granted membership.

### Article Eleven: Member Rights

In addition to the rights of the member as an engaged individual, each member shall be entitled to run for the following leadership positions, after fulfilling the requirements for each position:

- president of the party
- member of the Shura Council
- member of the Executive Office
- member in regional offices
- head of the Disciplinary Committee
- head of the Financial Audit Committee

### Article Twelve: Duties of Members and Engaged Individuals

Each member shall:

- comply with and respect the party's principles, values, and decisions
- comply with the statute and bylaws and requirements of regulations issued from the various bodies within the party
- not assume any political office except after approval by the Shura Council or Executive Office, in accordance with the party's regulations and laws
- not have any official political affiliation or connection with any foreign entity except pursuant to decision of the Executive Office
- work on proper execution of the party's programmes and mandates
- pay subscription fees
- guard the party's secrets
- possess good manners, ethics, and virtues
- ensure participation in the training activities organised by the party's committees

## APPENDIX 2

### Article Thirteen: End of Membership

Membership in the party shall end pursuant to one of the following causes:

- loss of legal eligibility
- resignation pursuant to requirements of bylaws
- expulsion pursuant to requirements of bylaws
- death

### Part Four: Party Structures

The party structures shall be classified as follows:

- central structures
- regional structures
- local structures

### Article Fifteen: Central Structures

- General Assembly
- Shura Council
- president of the party
- Executive Office
- Disciplinary Committee
- Financial Audit Committee

### Article Sixteen: General Assembly

The General Assembly is the highest authority in the party. It comprises representatives of the members, according to a quota and representation specified by the Shura Council, plus president of the Party, head of the Shura Council, and members of the Executive Office.

The Assembly shall convene on an ordinary basis every four years with attendance of the absolute majority of the Assembly members. In the event the quorum is not met, the Assembly shall properly convene twenty-four hours later with the existing attendees.

The Shura Council shall choose two committees to be under its supervision. The first committee shall be in charge of developing content for the Assembly and the second committee shall be in charge of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

all other preparations for the Assembly, in coordination with the Executive Office.

### Article Seventeen: Extraordinary Assembly

The Extraordinary General Assembly shall convene pursuant to a request from the president of the party, two-thirds of members of the Shura Council, or one-third of affiliated individuals. The Extraordinary General Assembly may not convene except with attendance of an absolute majority of attendees. If the quorum is not available, the assembly shall properly convene twenty-four hours later, regardless of the number of attendees.

### Article Eighteen: Agenda of the General Assembly

The Shura Council shall be in charge of preparing for the General Assembly as well as proposing its agenda if it is an ordinary assembly. The entity calling for the Extraordinary Assembly will be in charge of proposing its agenda.

### Article Nineteen: Structure of the Shura Council

The Shura Council shall comprise 150 members, two-thirds of whom shall be elected by the Assembly attendees through direct and secret ballot. Two-thirds of the Shura Council members shall be in charge of selecting the remaining one-third, during the first session of the Shura Council, to be inclusive of representatives from qualified individuals, various entities, immigrants, youth, women, parliament, and the party's government team.

Any vacancy in the Shura Council shall be filled as follows:

If the vacancy is related to an elected member from the Assembly, the vacancy shall be filled immediately by referring to the results of the Assembly's elections according to due order.

If the vacancy is related to a selected member by the Shura Council, the Council shall select a new member on the same basis as Para. 1 of this article. [...]

## APPENDIX 2

### Article Twenty One: President, Office, and Committees of the Shura Council

The first session of the Shura Council shall be chaired by the most senior members (by age) with assistance of two of the immediately younger members. The Shura Council members shall elect a president through direct and secret voting in the second session of the Council, and after its completion. The Council may exempt the Shura Council president or accept his resignation in accordance with the provisions of the Council's bylaws.

The Shura Council office: The Shura Council president shall propose the office members for recommendation by the Shura Council.

The Shura Council committees: The Shura Council shall have competent committees to help it perform its mandates properly. The Council may also establish temporary special committees.

The bylaws of the Shura Council shall regulate the Council's workflow, president, office, and committees.

### Article Twenty Two: Shura Council Rotation

The Shura Council shall convene every three months, and as needed, pursuant to calls from its president, one-third of its members, or requests from the movement's president.

### Article Twenty Three: Shura Council Mandate

- Develop the party's major policies and general directions.
- Select who will head the state, the government, or the legislative council, in the name of the party.
- Recommend the party's government team on the basis of proposition from the party's candidate for president or proposition from the Executive Office in case the presidency is not given to the party.
- Specify the terms and procedures for choosing the party's candidates for parliamentary, regional, municipal, or other elections.
- Monitor the workflow of the executive body.
- Recommend members of the executive office.
- Develop and monitor the execution of the financial policy.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

- Look into the objections submitted against disciplinary decisions.
- Ratify the regulations and laws submitted by the executive office.
- Propose amending the statute to the General Assembly.
- Impeach the Executive Office or one of its members.
- Prepare for the General Assembly according to the provisions of the bylaws.
- Elect members of the Disciplinary Committee, the mandate, structure, and mechanisms of which are laid out in the bylaws.
- Elect members of the Financial Audit Committee, the mandate, structure, and mechanisms of which are laid out in the bylaws.
- Develop the party's bylaws.
- Develop the Disciplinary Committee's regulation.
- Develop the Financial Audit Committee's regulation.

### Article Twenty Four: Criteria for Candidacy for Party Presidency

A candidate for the party president shall be eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- at least forty years of age
- a member in the party for ten full years
- not in violation of the membership duties
- involved for five consecutive years in one of the following:
  - the movement's presidency
  - membership of the Shura Council
  - membership of the Executive Office
  - presidency of the Disciplinary Committee
  - presidency of the Financial Audit Committee
  - as a regional general secretary

### Article Twenty Five: Electing the Party President

The General Assembly shall elect the party president by direct and secret voting. In the case that none of the candidates obtains more than half the votes of the voters in the first round, a second round shall take place between the first and second candidates. No member shall head the party for more than two consecutive terms. As soon as elected, the party president shall be committed full-time to his mandate.

## APPENDIX 2

### Article Twenty Six: Party President's Mandate

The party president shall be the executive official of the party and shall be in charge of performing the following mandate:

- Head the Executive Office.
- Propose the party's plans and strategies with the assistance of the Executive Office.
- Implement the party's policies and decisions according to regulations.
- Facilitate the party's executive structures.
- Represent the party in domestic and foreign relations.
- Issue pardons and reduce penalties.

### Article Twenty Seven: Party Presidency Vacancy

The party presidency position shall be vacant in the following cases:

- The president is unable to perform his duties, at the discretion of the Shura Council.
- The president submits his resignation, which is accepted by the Shura Council.
- Death.

In the event of party president position becoming vacant, the Shura Council shall elect a new president of the party.

### Article Twenty Eight: Executive Office

The party president shall propose the Executive Office members to the Shura Council, including a secretary-general and one or more representatives thereto, from among the members who meet the criteria stipulated in Article Twenty herein.

A candidate who is recommended by the absolute majority of the Shura Council members shall be a member in the Executive Office.

Members of the Executive Council shall be selected on an individual basis and according to duties.

The party president may exempt or accept the resignation of any of the Executive Office members. The party president should notify the Shura Council of exemptions.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

No person may be a member in the Shura Council and Executive Office simultaneously.

The Shura Council may withdraw the trust from all or any members of the Executive Office pursuant to the same majority required for their selection.

### Article Twenty Nine: Executive Office Mandate

Under the responsibility of the party president, the Executive Office shall perform the following mandate:

- Implement the General Assembly's and Shura Council's decisions.
- Develop annual action plans.
- Develop the regulations for executive structures and present them to the Shura Council for ratification.
- Propose the budget and monitor its implementation after its approval by the Shura Council.
- Take stances on all issues that are raised at the national and international levels.
- Create central offices according to duties, competencies, and sectors and in accordance with the forms stipulated by the bylaws.
- Create permanent and temporary competent committees.
- Select the party's candidates for the parliamentary, regional, municipal, and other elections in accordance with the conditions, powers, and procedures specified by the Shura Council.

The Executive Office may convene on a wider scale with the regional general secretaries.

### Article Thirty: Regional and Local Bodies

The bylaws shall regulate the regional and local bodies, and shall specify their structures, powers, and relations.

### Article Thirty One: Common Provisions in Relation to Assuming Leadership Duties Across the Party and State

The party members may not combine two leadership positions simultaneously, regardless of whether the leadership duty is in the party or state.

## APPENDIX 2

### Part Five: Miscellaneous Provisions

#### Article Thirty Two: Disciplinary Committee

The Shura Council shall elect a Disciplinary Committee to be in charge of looking into the objections relating to penalties and disciplinary procedures. The bylaws shall regulate its structure, duties, and workflow.

The disciplinary penalties shall be in the following order:

- warning
- blaming
- rebuking
- suspension from activity for a certain period
- final expulsion

#### Settlement: Financial Audit Committee

The Shura Council shall elect a financial audit committee to be in charge of monitoring and auditing the financial accounts of the party. The bylaws shall regulate its structure, and work mechanisms.

#### Article Thirty Four: Financial Resources

The party's financial resources shall comprise all proceeds that are permissible to be accepted according to law.

#### Article Thirty Five: Party Dissolution and Suspension of Activity

The party's activity may be suspended on an exceptional and temporary basis pursuant to a proposal presented by the absolute majority of the Shura Council members, to be ratified by the majority of two-thirds of the Shura Council members.

The temporary suspension decision shall specify its duration and conditions for lifting it.

The competent authorities shall be notified of this decision. Upon end of the duration, or upon fulfilling the conditions of lifting the suspension, the movement's president shall call upon the various structures of the movement to re-convene and resume their regular activity.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

If they believe that the conditions for lifting the suspension are met, one quarter of the Shura Council members may request the convention of the Shura Council within fifteen days of the date of request to investigate meeting the conditions of lifting the suspension and calling upon the various structures to resume regular activity.

The party may be dissolved pursuant to a decision from the majority of two-thirds of the attendees in an Extraordinary Assembly.

In the case of ratifying the proposal of party dissolution, the Assembly shall create a committee to be in charge of settling its funds according to the effective and applicable laws.

### Article Thirty Six: Interpretation of the Statute

The Shura Council shall be in charge of interpreting the articles of this statute.

### Article Thirty Seven: Editing the Statute

This statute shall be edited by an absolute majority of the attendees.

### Article Thirty Eight: Enforcing the Statute

This statute shall come into force and effect after being ratified in the General Assembly.

### Article Thirty Nine: Interim Provisions

Seniority and responsibility-bearing during the period preceding obtaining approval shall be taken into account when evaluating the criteria for candidacy for party president, Shura Council membership, and Executive Council membership.

With regard to the condition that the movement president may not head the movement for more than two consecutive rounds stipulated in Article Twenty Six herein, responsibility bearing shall not be taken into account before the ninth congress.

Candidates for Shura Council and Executive Office membership affiliated to the movement for a period not less than ten years shall be exempted from the responsibility-bearing condition.

## APPENDIX 2

Candidates for Shura Council and Executive Office membership involved in the party who have not turned thirty-five years of age on the date of the assembly shall be exempted from the seniority condition.

Man proposes and God disposes.



## APPENDIX 3

### FINAL DECLARATION OF THE EIGHTH CONGRESS OF ENNAHDA, MAY 2007

*(translation from Arabic)*

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

We have successfully held the eighth congress of the Ennahda movement. The congress commenced with reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an, then the participants paid their respects and condolences to the martyrs of the movement, who have given their lives for the sake of justice and freedom, and to their children and families. The participants further expressed their gratitude and respect to members of the movement and those who fight for freedom from behind bars [...].

They saluted all those who were persecuted only because of their fight for freedom, and called for alleviating the suffering of the detainees and the persecuted by setting them free, eliminating persecution, and giving them their full rights. They further saluted the Tunisians who were forced to leave their country and urged them to be patient in the diaspora and be positive in their countries of residence and upon return to their home country.

The moral and financial reports were presented and discussed thoroughly. They were ratified by the majority of attendees. The attendees discussed items on the agenda in depth, made key notes and considerable adjustments, and concluded with agreeing on the following decisions:

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

The congress was held under certain global, regional, and local circumstances and inputs that were taken into account by the congress as follows:

The world is witnessing particular conditions, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 events. Dominant global powers are maintaining a tighter grip on other countries and their people, and the Islamic region in particular. Negative repercussions of globalisation have escalated and reached every aspect of life, namely economic, cultural, and political aspects. This has had a negative impact on the economic conditions of people, who are getting even poorer, and the higher human values, which are being undermined by global bipolarity and discrimination, leading to the escalation of violence, spread of wars, and increased desperation.

The engorged global conditions have had a negative impact on the regional conditions, notably the military invasion of Islamic nations, causing chaos and wide-scale damage and destruction; people's freedom was flagrantly violated, and atrocities against the unarmed Palestinian people continue to be committed by the occupation forces, along with policies of blockade, starvation, and destruction imposed by global forces because of the democratic choice of the Palestinian people. All this occurs amid a state of Arab fragmentation and an absence of solidarity and cooperation.

These violations have led to grave damage in the region's countries, and have resulted in strong demonstrations of popular resistance, as seen in countries in the Maghrib and Arab world, with considerable political openness, remarkable progress in their endeavours towards democracy, and serious endeavours towards national reconciliation.

The internal situation is witnessing a rejection of the reforms demanded by the Tunisians.

On the political scene, Tunisia seems out of place in the Greater Maghrib, which is experiencing some sort of openness towards democracy and citizens' engagement. On the other hand, Tunisia continues to adopt closed-door policies, as well as violations of public and private freedoms, prohibition of civil movements and parties, and repressive security measures, control of the judiciary, and the arrest and conviction of dozens of activists, in addition to the continued injustices against Ennahda prisoners for nearly seventeen years. This political

### APPENDIX 3

inflammation has had serious consequences, leading to armed violence such as we have not seen in Tunisia for over thirty years. This portends serious repercussions in the country if the political life does not undergo serious and genuine positive developments. This closed political situation has negatively impacted the overall quality of social, economic, and cultural life.

The popular image of efficient and developed economic conditions is exaggerated and untrue. It fails to represent the true reality of life in Tunisia. The country's economy is facing great challenges and difficulties [due to both international and local factors]. These challenges include the issue of unemployment, particularly among graduates. Experts state that unemployment far exceeds the official rates. However, this issue will be addressed soon in light of current economic projections. Other economic issues include increased deficits in public budgets in light of fragility, failure to apply reforms and amendments and economic stimulation, all of which has negatively affected the citizen's purchase power and individual level of income.

On the cultural scene, there is a blatant contradiction between state policy and social developments. Additionally, the state confiscates any scientific research, and intellectual and cultural output, and allows only what agrees with its policies. This has led to the state of intellectual and cultural stagnation witnessed currently in the country.

In the social arena, feelings of rage and frustration are brewing over social injustice, the spread of all forms of corruption by authorities who have control of public funds, and the spread of bribery, favouritism, and other forms of corruption across state administrative bodies, all while the authorities are tightening the noose around the activities of unions and civil society organisations that defend the interests of workers, vulnerable classes, skilful people, and graduates, who have become victims of unemployment and negligence, after the society incurred the costs of their education, training, and qualifications. All these conditions led to a state of despair and frustration among various groups within society and to unprecedented phenomena such as organised crime, lack of security, addiction to alcohol and drugs, increased cases of suicide, and family disintegration, in addition to other conditions that are threatening to our society, and which continue to escalate thanks to the policies adopted by the state.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Under these circumstances, which are mostly negative, the congress lays the foundation for positive changes, particularly for political action by opposition leaders, represented in some human rights organisations, and who have taken significant steps in the fields of freedom and human rights, thus achieving increasing success. This success is reinforced by joint action and cooperation by various opposition parties in a new reconciliation initiative that has great potential to expand. The positive developments led to the religious revival across a wide spectrum of society, and increased action by union and student forces in defending these vital sectors in our society. Other organisations and agencies embarked upon defending human rights and freedoms thanks to the resolve and persistence of their leaders and taking the right steps in the right path.

Amid this situation in which the congress is held, and stemming from the principles upon which the movement is based and the objectives it seeks to achieve, the congress has reached decisions in the following areas:

### 1. The Movement's Identity

The participants stressed Ennahda's compliance with the identity set out in its previous documents, which calls for dependence on the Islamic ideology and the affirmation of higher socio-political values including freedom, consultation, respect of the people's choice, social interdependence, and equality among all citizens in rights and duties without any exclusion or discrimination. This identity is considered an extension of the efforts of reform and renewal exerted by reformists inside and outside Tunisia. The movement adopts a moderate approach that guides it in all its opinions, socio-political stances, and cultural positions.

### 2. Political Sphere

The participants stressed the movement's compliance with the principle of civil political action, and the call for achieving comprehensive national reconciliation without excluding anyone. The call for such reconciliation was recorded in the 1995 and 2001 congresses. The movement suffers from persecution and injustice, but continues to adopt this principle as the sole path to achieving reforms in the coun-

## APPENDIX 3

try. As part of this principle, the movement bears full responsibility for adopting the role of constructive opposition that not only takes difference into account, but respects it and considers it a necessity for maintaining a balanced socio-political and intellectual life in Tunisia within an approach of political dialogue with various parties.

Ennahda's pursuit of reconciliation does not mean that [it is prepared to encourage the unacceptable]. It simply asserts the rules of national action based on mutual acknowledgement, respect for fundamental rights of citizens such as freedom of expression and information, and organising political life based on true democratic changes and reforms.

In this context, the participants considered the initiatives aimed at consolidating political and civil society forces around this constructive approach to be necessary and in need of continuous support and protection against breakdown, particularly those involved in basic priority issues, and avoiding controversial issues that represent the idiosyncratic doctrine and political ideology of each of these parties. Accordingly, the movement calls upon various partners to overcome obstacles, and any individual differences, for the sake of the higher national interest and to build a constructive dialogue that will lay the foundation of reconciliation and then nourish it.

Even at the peak of its ordeal, the movement continued to seize every opportunity and make every attempt to bring the country out of its misery and chaos. There is no doubt that the road of reconciliation is full of hardships, but the movement has continued to strive ceaselessly, despite the harm it sustained, in order to achieve public interest and overcome the past. In this context, the movement adopted every possible measure to end the suffering of detainees and alleviate the pain of their families. It adopted various political techniques and diplomatic channels to invite the state to forget about the past and make the necessary political reforms in the country. This comes out of its belief that these reforms will save Tunisia from avoidable costly waste of resources. However, these endeavours fell on deaf ears. We are here renewing our call to start a political dialogue with the state and with other national parties with the purpose of creating an atmosphere of transparency and openness on the road of true political reforms. The movement hereby demands once again its right of political action, being a basic right of citizenship.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

The congress deemed that the movement's interim mission is to achieve political openness as a path to democratic change, the primary target of the entire region. Tunisia certainly wishes to be part of this initiative. Any delay in the process will only make matters more complicated. The participants stressed the need for joint action to achieve political openness and democratic development with all serious opposition forces, particularly with the 18 October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms. The movement recommends supporting this group and helping it get rid of any internal obstacles that may hinder its progress and consistency.

The movement's commitment to work with its partners in the national opposition fills a natural role in the path to reconciliation and democratic reform. Such reform complies with the mechanisms of opposition action, which accepts criticism and advice based on wisdom and moderation. It seeks to find a middle ground to meet with others and contribute in consolidating efforts to achieve the desired balance of powers and urge the state to engage in the path to reform.

The congress further called upon the movement to exert bigger efforts in defining its project domestically and abroad by developing political relations with all stakeholders, and invest these relations in addressing the grave human rights violations, serving the democratic process and supporting this action by efforts, both on the ground and in the media, that are influential and effective.

The participants said that the movement has a key role in promoting moderate ideology against extremist and violent tendencies. The congress further stressed the positive importance of attending a number of Islamic events in the fields of human rights and media action, and their role in modernising practice and discourse that encourage all parties to facilitate the demand for openness. In this context, the movement deems it necessary for the interest of our country to lift the blockade and end the persecution and harassment of thousands of Tunisians forced to leave the country, which should encourage them to return to their country and assume positive roles [in the moves] towards real national reconciliation.

The congress called upon the movement's leaders to take adequate political action to support the engagement of women and youth and to ensure the promotion of renewal and modernisation in political action as well as in other aspects.

## APPENDIX 3

Ennahda would like to take this opportunity to make a number of demands that it deems necessary and a key step in addressing the political paradox in our country and achieving the desired openness. These demands include:

- End the suffering of detainees who have been in prison for so long; end the harassment of Tunisians who were forced to leave the country, secure the right to return without restrictions that may negatively impact their dignity and rights as citizens
- Grant general legislative amnesty to erase the past and start a new phase of public life in the country
- Initiate serious national dialogue among all parties with the aim of building a real reform project for political life in the country
- End unjust arrests and political trials, as well as all forms of violations of human rights and dignity, and address the causes of the clashes that took place earlier this year, namely infringement upon Islamic identity, political stagnation, and social injustice
- Fight financial corruption and initiate national dialogue on socio-economic solutions and the effects of globalisation on the labour market and purchasing power of Tunisians
- Respect, and not belittle or underestimate, the Arab and Islamic identity of our country

The participants further stressed their support for justice, freedom, and human rights inside and outside Tunisia, particularly:

Support all human rights organisations in their defence and protection of all human rights

Support the autonomy of media and cultural civil society organisations

Demand the independence of the judiciary, and end unjust arrests and the practices of torture

Support the efforts of workers' and students' unions to defend workers' rights and ensure open campuses

Support the unemployed and job seekers, particularly graduates

Support liberation movements that fight to liberate their countries

Support movements that fight against the negative effects of globalisation

Support organisations that fight for environmental safety

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Support organisations that fight in order to maintain family, child-care, and women's rights

While raising these demands and supporting these organisations and agencies, Ennahda realises its role inside Tunisia and abroad in order to push the country towards reconciliation, openness, and reform. The movement is committed to exert its utmost efforts to ensure freedom, democratic openness, and the adoption of initiatives that serve the goals of the congress.

### 3. Internal Action by Ennahda

- The congress called upon its supporters and members worldwide to make their presence in these countries positive and noticeable, to engage in community service, and to be active participants in development, not only its consumers.
- The congress decided that Ennahda should give due diligence to its members with regard to education and qualification, and provide them with effective guidance towards excellent education and the acquisition of experience in various specialisations. The congress further decided to introduce structural reforms in response to the needs of this phase. In this context, the congress ratified the decision to limit the movement's presidency to two successive terms.

After the congress ratified these decisions and guidelines, a president for the movement and the Shura Council was selected. The movement's former president Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi apologised for his inability to run for another term as president. He called for the application of the principles of rotation and renewal in the movement's leadership. However, the majority of attendees elected him as president of the movement in its next term. He won by 60 per cent of the votes. They affirmed that they understand the present circumstances and the tasks entailed in this renewal.

The president of the congress declared Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi the elected president of the Ennahda movement. Shaykh Ghannouchi gave an address in which he urged the attendees to fear God, carry out the mission of the movement, perform the duties and responsibilities assigned to them, and exert efforts to lift the siege enforced on the movement and all the persecuted.

### APPENDIX 3

The congress concluded by praising God and praying for success in the performance of duties.

On behalf of the Ennahda movement, Tunisia  
Leader of the movement/Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi  
May 2007



## APPENDIX 4

### FINAL DECLARATION OF THE SEVENTH CONGRESS OF ENNAHDA, 3 APRIL 2001

*(translation from Arabic)*

#### *Slogan of the Ennahda movement*

‘And they had been guided [in worldly life] to good speech, and they were guided to the path of the Praiseworthy’ (al-Haj: 24).

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, and may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon the most honoured of messengers our master Muhammad and upon all his family and companions, and whomever called for their message until the Day of Judgment; [...]

Our Congress was held outside Tunisia, and this is not the fault of the movement. Ennahda was founded in the late 1960s. It became clear afterwards that the former president and his party deviated blatantly from the reform and modernisation project that Tunisia had been undergoing since the mid-nineteenth century in the framework of Arab Islamic culture and in serving the interest of the country and resisting the colonial forces. This project was led by Shaykh Bairam the Fifth, Shaykh Salim Bu Hajib, and Kheireddine Pasha al-Tunisi.

Reforms were resumed in the early twentieth century by the Young Tunisians party under the same ideology based on the ‘adoption’ of Western culture in the framework of Islam and Islamic values. [...]

The national movement was born in the Zaytouna Mosque and by the alumni of the Sadiki College, who were students of reformist

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

shaykhs. Tunisia could have adopted the same principles for its reformist project as those in the majority of Islamic nations and Farthest Maghrib, where national struggles took place along revivalist and Salafist lines, in accordance with the first principles of the reformist project. However, the colonial intervention attempted to crush the Islamic reformist project on the one hand and marginalise its members and institutions for the sake of the 'Westernisation project' on the other. Moreover, the dominant current in the religious institutions has failed to keep pace with the developments, although development in the religious institution itself was enough to modernise Tunisia at the Arab Islamic cultural level, though not at that of Westernisation. The triumph of independence was more an overshadowing of the Arab Islamic identity of Tunisia than a victory over the occupation and its culture. In order to cause discord among Tunisians, and impose the Westernised model, the authorities maintained power over individual and civil forces in order to paralyse and resist any modernisation attempts. The society was repressed by the authorities, including the leader and his party. The destiny of the entire country was in the hands of al-Mujahid al-Akbar (the greatest warrior).

With the marginalisation of civil society and the undermining of its values and institutions, the developmental project inevitably fell apart, particularly when the state was on its way to become the private property of the leader and his party. The society inevitably felt betrayed and concerned about its identity, particularly in the late 1960s. The Islamic movement was born in response to the people's demand for the protection and maintenance of their identity amid a strong wave of Westernisation. The movement spread fast. Within ten years, people were starting to go back to the mosques and the quiet Islamic *dā'wa* was calling for Islamic modernisation, stressing the justice and mercy of Islam, and committing itself to the approach of dialogue and conversation. The movement called for the dignity of the nation and solidarity of its people, despite disparate views. It denounced resorting to aggressive and repressive methods to settle differences in ideologies and policies. It called upon Tunisians to start a new phase based on reconciliation and consensus inclusive of everyone, instead of a nation stuck with the use of force and the hegemony of one leader and his ruling party. The movement was certain that the only driving forces for develop-

## APPENDIX 4

ment and reform are freedom, promoting the role of individuals, reinforcing the sovereignty of the people, supporting the participation of civil society, and encouraging a political community with a multi-party opposition. Based on that, the reform movement became associated with the struggle against oppression and dictatorship, and the call for the rule of law and consensus through the freedom of opinion, organisation, and separation between authorities and engagement in governance in an organised expression of the will of the people in elected institutions of deputies through fair elections that are held on time. All these mechanisms help the consultation process and turn the *shura* from mere preaching and slogans into a ruling institution and one for managing differences in a peaceful way that does not exclude anyone with a different opinion. Upon practical application, such institutions are not necessarily connected to philosophies such as materialism, secularism, and nationalism. Each institution may contain one or more of these ideologies, and that is fine. In his religious life, a dictator may be a believer or an atheist and a just ruler may be secular or religious. As stipulated by the scholars of Islam, God supports a just nation and governance, even if it is non-believing. God does not support an unjust nation even if it is a Muslim nation. We should not then confuse ideologies and means, and democracy and secularism as the naïve and ill-intended people do.

These are our principles that we fought hard and peacefully to maintain. They are public in Tunisia and abroad. However, since 1979, all the movement's congresses have been held in secrecy for obvious reasons, specifically the rejection of the principles of democracy, human rights, independence of civil society, transparency of governance and rules of accountability by the authorities, and their persistence in dictatorship and wide-spread corruption.

In the course of resistance to this outdated style of government, and in order to promote the culture of liberation in line with the reformist project, our movement has been experiencing the arrest and expulsion of its members since 1981. The first ordeal came after the movement requested to be officially acknowledged as a political party operating within the scope of the law. The response to its request came in 1981 with the arrest of 500 of its leaders and members, who replaced the leftist and union prisoners. When they were released four years later in

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

the aftermath of the Bread Riots, we held our third congress, in which we decided to reapply in 1985. The response this time was more elaborately prepared by the interior minister, who was preparing to succeed the old dictator. He exploited the crisis with the Islamists to seize power, exaggerating the danger posed by the Islamists and imprisoning nearly 10,000 Islamists. The street riots led by the movement in 1987 produced the results Ben Ali was waiting for and following closely. On the day of his coup, he declared that there would not be any injustice after that day, and that a permanent presidency was not what Tunisia had fought for. He seized power in the wake of all the slogans of the opposition in democracy, pan-Arabism and Islam.

Tunisians, including the Islamic movement, were optimistic about the new leader, especially as he released opposition activists from prisons and received opposition leaders. However, the first test came in 1989 and it was disappointing. The president won 99.99 per cent of the votes and his party won all of the assembly seats, while the true winners were the independents supported by Ennahda. The state did not only falsify the results but decided to punish the winners by eradicating any Islam-related parties in the country.

The dominant atmosphere was one of fear of Islam, exacerbated by some errors committed by the movement in managing the conflict, such as not consulting with the opposition as to how to respond to the attacks by the authorities, misreading and misinterpreting the regional conditions, especially the local, regional, and international restructuring changes resulting from the Gulf War. The movement admitted these errors, among others, in a self-critique conducted by the previous congress and published in a comprehensive declaration. Due to greed and concerns, the authority had the opportunity to make life hell for the Islamists and the entire society, and 30,000 people were detained. The oppression later applied to wide sectors of politicians, activists, and union members, including women, who were not spared the persecution and injustice. Women's civil, political, and social rights were violated in a blatant paradox, while the regime was falsely calling for the liberation of women.

In the face of this catastrophe, and growing injustice, the intellectuals of Tunisia started coming together and consolidating their views and efforts, with understated protests amid loud supporting voices. Since

## APPENDIX 4

the second half of the 1970s, people have begun to appreciate the scale of the catastrophe, the primary goal of which was to oppress and eradicate all Islamists, and crushing the backbone of society's power in order to gain total hegemony over social life. Tunisians realised eventually that democracy and exclusion cannot coexist, even if the victims of the exclusion are a minority. The victims in this case were the majority. [...] Amid this wide-scale political oppression, there was an organised misappropriation of public funds and quick wealth for the president and his circle, leading to off-market trading, market manipulation, bribery, and financial corruption, as well as higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and reduction of national capital. Thus the phrase 'Tunisian Economic Miracle' was totally false, and illustrates the failure to separate political development from economic development.

On the road of resistance against the repressive police measures, and since the beginning of independence, several generations of opposition movements, with various ideologies—nationalists, socialists, union workers, communists, liberals and Islamists—have spent a decent share of their lives behind bars rather than in power. Today, after they have suffered brutally at the hands of dictatorship, they have become aware that democracy should be for everyone or no one. Supporters of freedom, liberals and Islamists alike, have started focusing on dialogue, finding common ground and overcoming differences. They started to meet and hold dialogues. Voices throughout the country started growing loud, echoing the demands of the movement, namely general legislative amnesty, release of political prisoners, denouncing torture and police supremacy, calling for respect for democratic mechanisms, and the autonomy of civil forces. This proves the vitality of the Tunisian community and its readiness for a real democratic life, as well as envisioning change after its bitter experience, which is still not improving.

What is certain today is that Tunisia is witnessing a new and serious beginning of a new kind of equilibrium with the government that makes change mandatory. Change is the point where national Islamic, right-wing, and left-wing forces can come together with civil society and with the people, even though foreign powers are lending their unconditional support to the regime. The joint declaration issued by the Movement of Socialist Democrats and Ennahda on 19 March 2001, on the occasion of the Day of Independence, was a major event, as it

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

came in response to the ambitions of leaders of both movements as well as the general desire for change in Tunisia. The joint declaration laid the foundation for ending the divisions, abuse of power and infighting among the opposition over the past decade, with the authorities exploiting this situation to their benefit. It is evident that Ben Ali's government is losing the trust of foreign powers in its ability to accommodate this new situation and deal with it in a sound manner.

Under these circumstances, the seventh congress of Ennahda was held. After deliberating and ratifying the moral and financial reports, along with the Shura Council action report, the congress reached the following cultural, political, and structural options and guidelines for Ennahda:

### *Islamic Identity*

The identity of the country is considered to be Islamic, the movement's reference framework, and the content of its reformist project against the state's modern and oppressive policies and war against Islam. Our movement is participating in these efforts based on its adoption of Islam as its core doctrine, from which the various insights, political and socio-economic choices derive that specify the identity of this movement and set its strategic directions and stances.

However, the movement's assertion of its Islamic identity in its words and actions does not mean that it only adopts Islamic ideology in its political struggle. The movement was never the official mouthpiece of Islam, and that is not what it aspires to be.

The movement primarily struggles for freedom. Our movement has proved without doubt that its main demand is freedom, and considered this struggle to be a duty from an Islamic and cultural perspective that our members along with all parties who believe in it should fight for. The movement further aspires to guarantee a democratic transition aimed at ending dictatorship on the basis of democratic legitimacy rooted in respect for the sovereignty of the people, free from any form of tutelage, while reinforcing the right of the people in exercising their rights, namely the freedom of expression and organisation, and all other legitimate rights, and cooperating with all national forces to that end.

The movement seeks to protect the country's independence, and maintain its cultural identity against Westernisation and dependence on

## APPENDIX 4

foreign powers. In order to face these dangers, our movement has stressed the need to build the foundations and pillars of political, cultural, and economic independence based on a strong and coherent society, away from any forms of injustice and oppression.

The real independence of our country cannot be fragmented, but should reflect the deep Maghribi, Arab, and Islamic strategic and cultural identity of the country, along with concluding agreements that guarantee common interests instead of ideological slogans. This should come as part of the country's openness, participation, and cultural engagement, in the international arena as well as in the Mediterranean sphere.

### *Major Plans for the Forthcoming Stage*

#### A. Reinforcing the Choice of a Peaceful Society

Our nation and our people, and the priority of comprehensive political consensus based upon wide-ranging intellectual reform will shut the doors of political violence and its causes, whatever they are.

Ennahda calls for commitment to developing the culture of peaceful coexistence and consensual political action as part of the reform strategy and comprehensive cultural renaissance. It is a strategy that should put at the top of its priority and objectives the dignity of the nation, maintaining the security of society and its social coherence against any causes of division, as well as protecting the country against closed-door policies and ensuring social reconciliation against extremism and bias. Such negative actions will surely drive people away from moderation and tolerance and will shut the doors of dialogue, replacing it with repression and exclusion.

#### B. Publicity

Publicity is essential for the movement and its actions as well as its projects and events, which are transparent and open to the society, at the level of discourse and organisation. The public management of the movement sets the values of consultation, prevents duality as a negative practice, and ensures that the movement's ideology and gains are public property.

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

### C. Democracy or Public Framework of the Political Process

This framework represents the movement's perspective on the mechanisms of political consensus in our country as well as the solutions that can address oppression and repression by the authorities to create a healthier and more peaceful atmosphere where each individual or group can express their opinion, and exercise basic rights of citizenship without fear. Ennahda has always maintained and affirmed the values and principles of democracy as the context in which to exercise the basic rights of citizenship and to manage and resolve disputes between social and political parties, and as a mechanism of peaceful transfer of power. The political events in our country and the region do not indicate the presence of a strong base that can enable a swift transition to full democracy. Therefore, the political movement in our country needs to be focused on the struggle to achieve gradual democratic progress.

#### *Political Direction*

The congress affirmed our political principles for the sake of publicity, integrity, and democracy, while enriching them by referring to the movement's articles of association:

- The articles of association for the Islamic Tendency Movement, 1981
- Statement announcing the formation of the Ennahda movement, 1988
- Comprehensive political statement, June 1996
- The ideological vision and fundamentalist approach of the Islamic Tendency Movement

The congress concluded by adopting the objective of achieving political openness based on the comprehensive national reconciliation base.

#### *On Relations with the Opposition*

The congress stressed the need to coordinate with the serious national opposition and consolidate efforts with it regarding the demand for freedom and establishing joint action, and to include the movement's demands under those of the [general] political movement in the country,

## APPENDIX 4

and to denounce all voices calling for exclusion and eradication from inside or outside the authority, which are aimed at depriving any political party of its natural right to expression and political organisation.

### *Role of the People*

The congress reiterated the role of the people as a key element in the political equation and as an essential input to adjusting the balance of power between the authority of the state and society.

### *Arab and International Role*

- Reiterating the principle of Arab and Islamic solidarity and fighting the negative impacts of brutal globalisation
- Demanding the lifting of the ban imposed on Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Iran
- Political rhetoric: committing to the value of moderation and seeking joint destiny with our political partners and civil forces

### *Political Demands*

Participants stressed that the struggle will continue until the following political demands are achieved:

- Release of political prisoners and the granting of legislative amnesty
- Freedom of political practice for all and the guaranteeing of freedom of information and expression
- Lifting of the restrictions imposed on civil society
- Fighting corruption and misappropriation of national wealth
- Social justice and defence of the people's demands
- Enforcing comprehensive constitutional and legal reforms
- Lifting restrictions on freedom of religion and removing the state's control over religion and religious institutions

### *The 2004 Presidential Elections*

The former president let Tunisians down when he failed to provide them with a republican democratic state, but instead turned it into a dictatorship and autocracy. He rendered null and void the decision of

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to announce a republic and eliminate monarchy. Today, his successor is also trying to be an autocrat, breaking his promises to the people that 'autocracy is not even an option', and ignoring the articles of the constitution that he has himself compiled.

Stemming from its strong belief in the peaceful transition of power, while not suggesting it as a substitute for power, Ennahda calls for compliance with the constitutional provisions, rather than changing them for personal gain and interest. This is to ensure that the 2004 elections will be historic, where the people can exercise their full rights in electing the president for their country in democratic, free, and fair elections.

### *Structural Elections*

- Participants stressed the need to expand the *shura* (consultation) base and enhance the practice of democracy within structures and institutions
- The participants agreed to develop the referendum mechanism to guide direction and ensure a wider representation of the base in decision making

### *Position of Women*

The participants stressed the position of women in the movement's project for change and development, as well as [its commitment to] enhancing women's presence and representation across various leading positions, and to ensure that women enjoy the high-level position granted to them by Islam, noting their advanced role in the battle for dignity and freedom in Tunisia and in the diaspora.

The congress concluded with electing a leader of the movement and members of the Shura Council.

Shaykh Rached Ghannouchi was re-elected as the movement's leader by 64.75 per cent of the votes. Walid Bennani was elected as president of the Shura Council.

*London, 9 Muharram 1422 Hijri, corresponding to 3 April 2001*

Leader of Ennahda, Tunisia  
Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi

## APPENDIX 5

### ACCOUNT OF AN ENNAHDA CAMPAIGN EVENT IN THE ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF TUNIS 1

Recounted and written by an anonymous author who participated in the event; published under the title 'Electoral Notepad: The Islamist Meeting' in *Réalités*, no. 189, 31 March–5 April 1989 [author translation].

#### *Electoral Notepad: The Islamist Meeting*

Date: Thursday, 23 March, 6.30 p.m.; location: Cultural Institute, El Gorjani. Electoral district of Tunis 1.

At 6.20 p.m., when I arrive, the room is already packed. There must be around 400 people, almost as many women as men. This is the first thing I notice: the massive presence of women, which is unusual during political reunions, and, at the same time, the rigorous seating segregation. The men are all sitting on the right and the women on the left. ... Most men have beards and almost all women wear the veil. ... The organisational personnel are impressive. They consist of at least fifty people; the majority appear to be students. ... They are gradually starting to warm up the audience through invocations about Allah and gripping political slogans. ... The speakers finally arrive around 7.15 p.m., so the serious part [of the meeting] can start. It takes place in three stages.

First: chanting. Suddenly, without any prior announcement, a young man in his twenties goes to the microphone and starts to recite the

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Qur'an. His voice is beautiful and deep. The intervention lasts only a few minutes, but it is long enough to put the audience under a spell, to establish a powerful emotional bond between the Islamists and the public. [...]

Second: the prayer. ... All members of the Islamist electoral list introduce themselves. ... Afterwards, Shaykh Lakhoua takes the floor. ... [His] lessons, provided in excellent classical Arabic and therefore largely incomprehensible to many listeners, have no direct relation to politics ... they are anchored in the culture and the sacred. [He] cautions against reliance on the sciences and conveys the need for political Islam.

Third: political discourse. It is developed by two speakers. ... Their interventions are focused around:

- defending the Arabo-Islamic identity;
- defending the *mustad'afin*, the oppressed.

The identity: Bourguiba has stripped Tunisians of their authentic personality. The programme of the Islamists: reconstituting the lost identity. What Bourguiba represents ... is alienation. [...]

The *mustad'afin* Islamist discourse: we are the oppressed, we are the excluded of the system, we are excluded from work, housing, health, and education. Once we arrive in parliament we will implement a repatriation of the national wealth, which will put an end to this unbearable injustice.

## APPENDIX 6

### SELECTED INTERVIEWS

*Interview with Hmida Ennaifer, Bardo, 21 July 2013*

I met Ghannouchi in Damascus, we were students of the year 1964. I held a scholarship to pursue university studies in Syria, Damascus, I was in the second year at the Humanities Faculty. ... Ghannouchi arrived in 1964. At the beginning he was mostly Arab nationalist, not [Islamist]. I was mostly Arab nationalist, I had no links with the Muslim Brotherhood. ... Ghannouchi and a Libyan student ... started talking about the Islamist discourse. Generally students supported either the Tunisian government, or were Ba'athists ... at that time the Islamist discourse appeared strange. [...]

Personally I did not have a very good relation with [Ghannouchi] at that time. We didn't agree. Together with other students I was in the Arab nationalist movement. ... I graduated in 1966 and then moved to Paris. Ghannouchi ... arrived after one or two years with a degree in philosophy. [...]

For me two moments [changed my ideology]. First, the defeat of June 1967 when the Arab armies were crushed by the Israeli military. [As] an Arab nationalist, this was a major defeat. The idea of nationalism ... no longer had the consistency it had had before. In addition, [in France] I witnessed the revolution of 1968. ... The West was in crisis, it was no longer a world that was ideal. These two years of 1968 and 1969 were, for me, a big change. And by continuing discussions with

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

Ghannouchi and other Tunisians, it was at this time that I started changing my way. [...]

In 1970 I came back to Tunisia. Ghannouchi had already returned. At this moment I met for the first time [Abdelfattah] Mourou. Mourou had already gathered around him a certain number of people. He was the first person who started forming this new orientation, it was not Islamist ... at the beginning it was no Muslim Brotherhood orientation with Mourou. ... But he already accepted the notions of religious identity, Islamic identity. I was no longer convinced that Arab nationalism could be the response to the questions we asked. [...]

Ghannouchi had the Muslim Brotherhood orientation, that is, the idea to create a movement with a political reference. But he was also influenced by the Tabligh. When we returned to Tunis, Mourou was already active [with the Tabligh] but he also had a Sufi orientation. ... Mourou ... was influenced by the Madaniyya order. But Mourou also had [another] tendency, he was also very influenced by traditional Tunisian Islam. [...]

Between 1970 and 1973 we had many different orientations, we didn't know yet which ideological tendency to adopt. ... The issue of having a clear ideology became necessary in 1975 and 1976 [when] members of [our] group arrived at the university. ... In 1976 the government and the UGTT had a big conflict, [with] big demonstrations, strikes, including at the university level. We could no longer continue with handicraft ideologies ... it is easy to understand the decision taken at the time, [that is], a total commitment to the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideology.

In 1977 we met ... we held a mini congress that lasted for three days. We discussed which direction to take. ... [Most people] talked about the Muslim Brotherhood with a lot of respect. [When some] people criticised the Muslim Brotherhood, others were [indignant], they shouted. ... Some were hesitant. Mourou ... was neither for nor against [the Muslim Brotherhood] ... Ghannouchi was in favour, that's for sure. ... The person who insisted most was [Salah] Karker. [...]

In 1979 [I left the movement]. Together with some others [I created the Progressive Islamists]. In 1981 we created the magazine *15\*21*. ... We thought we needed to rethink the state of the country, analyse the current period [and whether it] was only negative or not, and then see how to ... progress together with various forces. [...]

## APPENDIX 6

Ennahda thinks it represents the people. ... The Tunisification idea is a novelty, it didn't exist before ... however, some elements [within Ennahda] believe in Tunisification, there are some progressive elements. [...]

I believe there is a fear to reread, review what happened. We don't know how the members of Ennahda think about their movement, their histories. ... It is like someone driving a car who does not want to look back, but just goes forward.

*Interview with Ali Larayedh, Bardo, 12 May 2015*

The Troika government was a new experience. In Tunisia we used to have only a single party that governed. All organisations, parties, and people were used to a single party. Suddenly we had a revolution. How do we manage this [new environment]? It is very difficult ... We are not used to making coalitions to govern. It was the first time three parties [ruled together] ... even for the people it was difficult to understand that this would be complicated, [with] negotiations and discussions. It was a very rich experience but also difficult. [...]

Some political parties said, even before the [October 2011] elections, that the government would be a failure. They were in the opposition even before the elections. ... On all fronts, economically, socially, and politically, the [Troika] experience was difficult. A lot of people were against you. However, we managed to have a successful transition to democracy. ... What remains now is the economic transition, which is more difficult. [...]

In the minds of the people, the Interior Ministry is the worst, as if it is someone who can 'smell the repression'. Not all of this is true, the Interior Ministry is not as powerful as people think, the revolution also showed that. ... I became [interior minister] almost a year [after the revolution]. ... People took me as someone who was a victim of this ministry, I had suffered a lot from it [during Ben Ali]. So they trusted me on the human rights front. ... At the ministry I realised that only a few people [working there] did bad things, the rest are victims as well, they are afraid of these people. [...]

Fifteen days after I became interior minister, we discovered young people with arms between Sousse and Sfax. We decided we needed to

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

find the responses to several questions: why do they have arms? Where did they come from? And will they be used in Tunisia or outside the country, such as in Algeria? Is there an armed organisation in Tunisia? Is there a financing body? This was in late January 2012. In the summer we were sure that there was an organisation with [arms]. At the beginning we thought it was [Katibat] ‘Uqba ibn Nafi, but it was actually Ansar al-Shari‘a, although they were linked. Elements in the group went to Mali, to Afghanistan, and then came back to Tunisia. [...]

It is impossible to curb criminality, struggle with the economy and strikes, and at the same time fight a war against the terrorists, while also implementing political reforms. Everything together does not work. We asked the people on strike to stop, but unfortunately this did not work, so we had to deal with all of these challenges at the same time. That’s why the result was not very quick. The Salafi terrorists were not clear with us. ... I started hearing things such as ‘This minister [Larayedh], who was [a] victim, now he is the worst, it is Stockholm syndrome, those who suffered will make others suffer even more.’ I tried to explain that this was not the case. We are different from them [Ben Ali officials]. We will discuss with the Salafis, that’s our culture, but there are Salafi terrorists, we need to fight them. Even in my own movement [Ennahda], I had difficulties convincing people of this, it took a long time until everyone understood. [...]

[In the 1980s] I was more hardline, I was young. ... I changed with age, experience, through reading, but you also learn from lessons. ... The more a party is involved in political issues, economic problems, the more it becomes pragmatic and realistic. At the beginning we followed big principles and objectives that had only a small connection to reality, it was a bit radical.

*Interview with Said Ferjani, Tunis, 8 June 2015*

I used to study ... in 1974, 1975, we had problems in terms of money so ... I went to the air force ... [to study] engineering. Then I was teaching electronics. ... in 1984 I left. ... I really wanted to speak out my mind [and] criticise the government, even if it takes the jail. If you are in the air force you are not allowed to do that at all. ... The big questions we asked [were] why we are suffering, underdeveloped, why

## APPENDIX 6

we are backward. Bourguiba tried to [argue] because you are attached to your faith, this was unacceptable. [...]

We tried to safeguard our meetings ... [and] be vigilant towards security, towards the government. The art of survival [is] to know what is going on behind the scenes in the regime. ... [We] tried to [establish] networks of people who are not very well known, [so] ... if you have people in jail, you have other people who can continue. [...]

[In 1987] we heard that [Bourguiba] was going to kill about thirty [MTI] leaders. ... So we thought that maybe the best idea [was] to try to prepare for a coup d'état [with] ... people who are in the security [forces], outside the security [forces], university students, a bit of everything. ... The idea [was] not the coup d'état itself, it was to try to do something in order to [prevent] ... [the] killings, because if [they happened], then the country would be on fire. [...]

Mohammed Chamam ... wasn't part of any kind of decision. This [coup was] decided by three people [Moncef Ben Salem, myself, and Kacem Ferchichi] ... these people have their networks of people who they know ... it [was decided] neither by Ennahda nor its institutions.

### *Interview with Habib Ellouze, Tunis, 14 June 2015*

I was close to [Salah] Karker, because he was a man [with] an Arabist tendency ... that is ... he believed in an Arab nation. ... Later he became Islamist. ... At the 1979 congress I became [the MTI's] head of Sfax and executive committee member. Ennaifer criticised the movement [at the congress]. He said it was not democratic, constitutional, and realistic. He chose to leave with [Slaheddine] Jurchi [and others]. I became close to the Muslim Brotherhood ... while Ennaifer had another tendency.

Today things are similar. I realised that I don't have the same thinking as [Rachid] Ghannouchi. Ghannouchi threw himself too much into a [way of] thinking [stressing] democracy, modernism, ... compromise with *laïque* orientations. I am sure he [Ghannouchi] is truly Islamic, I am sure he is truly nationalist, that is, he [cares] about the Tunisian nation. ... He wants to create a political environment in which all people, all parties participate. ... I am not against this, but you cannot trust all people, all parties, all orientations. Some want to create prob-

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

lems in Tunisia and stop the democratic process, such as the Popular Front, Beji Caid Essebsi, Nidaa Tounes. I don't have confidence in them. I am sure they want to ... create a coup d'état. Perhaps they cannot use the army, the Interior Ministry, the security forces ... [so] they want to create a coup d'état with anarchy, the media. ... I am sure they won't be able to stop the democratic process, but if we accept the conditions of these people, we create a very dangerous situation in Tunisia. ... That's for sure. These people want to create the same situation that we have in Egypt. [...]

Ansar al-Shari'a had members ... who were involved in terrorism. The state discovered small groups that were involved in terrorism, that's true. It is necessary that the state stops these people ... this is a national duty. However, we cannot put all Salafis into the same box. ... I believe that the best solution ... is a solution with different channels: discussions, cultural activities, solving the social problems of these people, providing opportunities to direct them towards *da'wa*, discussing with them in mosques. ... We shouldn't close all doors to them. I tell you that if we only fight against them with the security forces, the police, [and through] prison sentences, we do the same thing Ben Ali did to us.

### *Interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, Tunis, 16 June 2015*

Islam is a universal religion, so there isn't a special Islam for Tunisia. However, Islam ... has to deal with the realities. The Tunisian realities are different from those in Libya and Egypt and the [realities in] Tunisia today differ [from those] in Tunisia in the past. So we tried to integrate Islam into Tunisian realities. For example, ... in Tunisia women's rights are nowadays part of the Tunisian identity. So Tunisian Islamists try to adapt Islam to [this] Tunisian reality. ... At the beginning we considered that polygamy is not an obligation, but a personal choice. ... But ... we realised that the holy texts can be interpreted ... in a manner that the government can limit what is licit ... and consider it illicit. [...]

The problems of nowadays are not the same as in the 1980s. Now the main problem is political, for example the problem of extremists. ... The Ben Ali regime tried to [denounce] us as terrorists, but people did not accept this, because it is not a reality. So I think our movement is now more open than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. We need more

## APPENDIX 6

openness [as] a national party [and] accept all Tunisians ... who accept our programme, regardless of their personal, religious behaviour, whether they pray or not, wear the *hijab* or not. These issues are private issues. [...]

Religiosity is part of our society. ... Civil society can work for this goal, not a political party. A political party has to prepare itself to rule the country, to solve [economic] and general political problems. ... We really have to establish religious education, but in Tunisian style, not in Daesh or Salafist style. Many Tunisians import their religion, their religious thoughts, from the outside, because we don't have any source of religion. ... Only Ennahda tries to reestablish a Tunisian sort of thinking Islam, to rethink Islam in Tunisian manners.

*Interview with Mohammed Ghariani, last secretary-general of the RCD, Tunis, 27 May 2016*

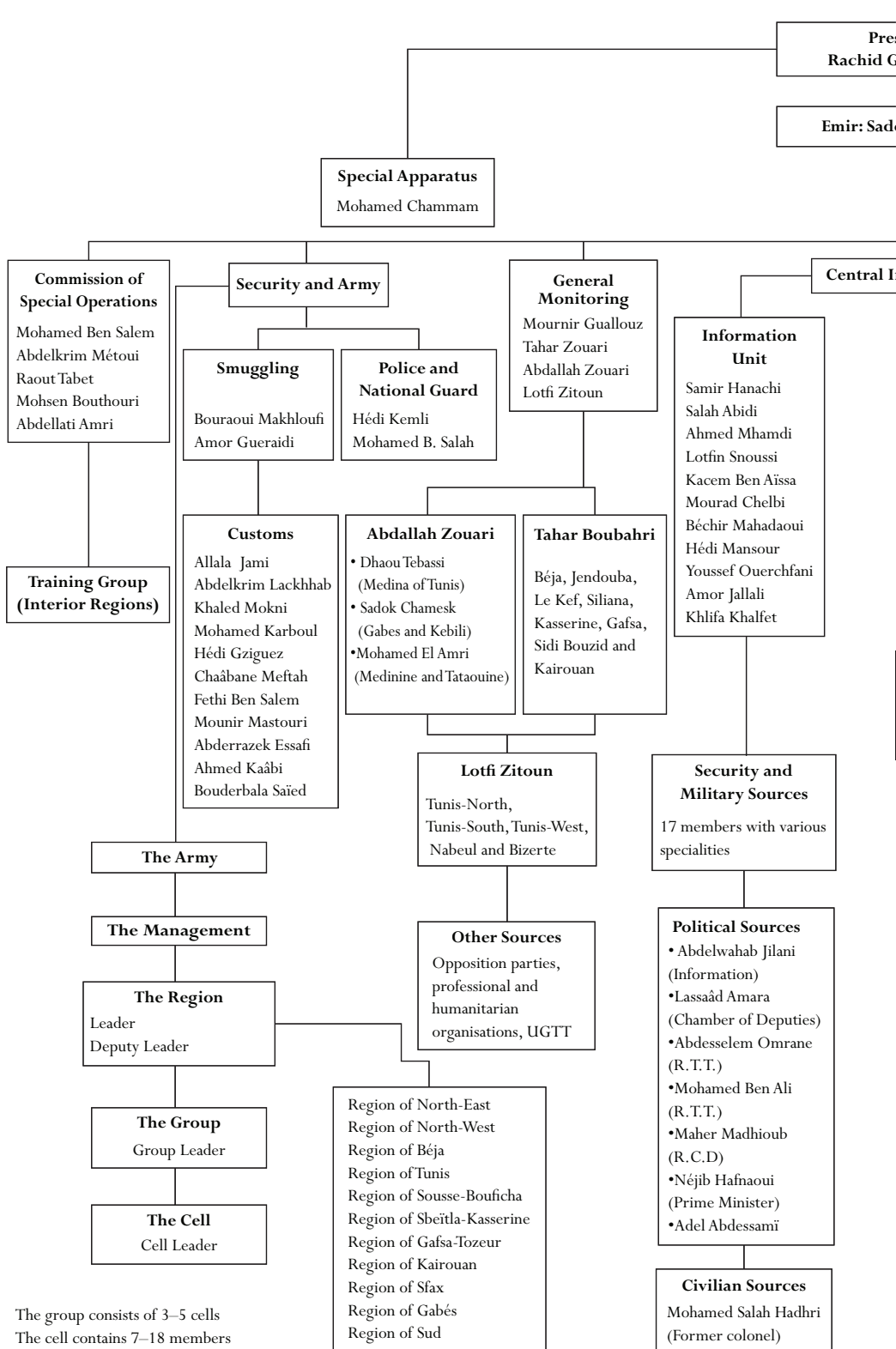
[In April 2016] I met [Rachid] Ghannouchi ... it was symbolic, a message [to show] national unity. I had this idea when I heard that ... Ghannouchi had an accident. ... It was a way to overcome a psychological ... barrier. ... It was almost a reconciliation between the people ... Rachid Ghannouchi meeting the former secretary-general of the RCD. ... However, there is still one tendency [amongst former RCD members] ... who thinks that Ennahda is the Muslim Brotherhood, that they are extremists. ... To me, this is a fascist idea. [...]

Islam is different [from Christianity]. The West managed to separate religion from politics. In the Muslim world, this is difficult. I am in favour of reforming Islam and I prefer to encourage political currents that accept change [and] make efforts to reform their ideological and religious ideas. I consider Ennahda in this context. ... We need to entertain dialogue with them ... because ... if they feel excluded, they become aggressive. [...]

The reconciliation with Ennahda ... started just after the revolution. ... Before the revolution, there were contacts with Ennahda. Ben Ali came to relax his policy towards Ennahda by basing himself on what we call human principles. [He did not allow] an organisation or an Islamist political party, but looked at every single case on a purely human level. This was during the last period of Ben Ali, when he changed his political line slightly, after hardline policies [against the Islamists]. [...]

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN TUNISIA

If Ben Ali had remained in power, I believe there would have been a lot of changes in line with the promises he made in his speeches [during the revolution]. ... Even before the revolution ... Ben Ali had understood that he needed to make concessions. ... He declared that he would not run for president again in 2014, so he was obliged to have the sympathy of others, his former enemies [Ennahda]. ... In a way, he wanted to put in order the unfortunate dossiers of his rule.



President  
Channouchi

Sadok Chourou

Information

**Executive office**  
Sadok Chourou  
Mohamed Gueloui  
Abdelhamid Jlassi  
Ajmi Lourimi  
Sahbi Atik  
Mohamed Mahjoub  
Ali Chniter

**Finance**  
Habib Rebaï

**Shura Council**  
members were elected during the March 1988 congress in Sfax.  
  
Hassine Jendoubi  
Sahbi Atik  
Habib Ellouze  
Sahbi Harmi  
Ahmed Labyedh  
Salah Ben Abdallah  
Abdelhakim Abdelkarim  
Walid El Banani  
Amin Zidi  
Sahnoun Jawhari  
Ahmed Lahouel

**Training Unit**  
Youssef Bouthelja  
Abdelmajid Amdouni

**Political Office**  
Ali Laâridh  
Mohamed Chammam  
Hamadi Jebali  
Lazhar Mokdad  
Mohamed Akrouf

**Training Group**  
•Abdefattah Trimech (Sahel)    •Rachid Fessi (Ettadhamen)  
•Hamadi Jlassi (Tébourba)    •Mounir Ben Abdallah  
•Taoufik Smida (Jedaïda)    (Mellassine)  
•Abdelkader Bjaoui  
(Sidi Thabet)

**Educational and Unions Unit**  
Mohamed Gueloui

**Cultural, Social, and Mobilisation Unit**  
Sahbi Atik

**Delegations Unit**  
Ali Chniter  
Abderrazek Majri  
Hassouna Nabli  
Khaled Khalfi  
Taoufik Bennour

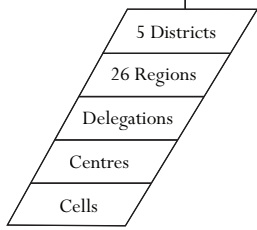
**Politics and Information Unit**  
Ajmi Lourimi

**Organisation and Administration Unit**  
Abdelhamid Jlassi

**School Office**

**University Office (UGTE)**

**Union Office**



**Administration Office**

**Organisation Office**

**Liaison Members**

**International Office**

**Cultural Office**

**Social Office**

**Politics Office**  
Ajmi Lourimi  
Mohamed Gueloui  
Sahnoun Jaouhari  
Sadok Sghaïer

**Information Office**  
Sadok Sghaïer  
Ahmed El Adhli  
Lassaâd Kallel

**Propaganda Office**

**Mobilisation Office**

## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

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80. See also Mohamed Tozy and Béatrice Hibou, 'L'offre islamiste de justice sociale: politique publique ou question morale?' in Irene Bono, Béatrice Hibou, Hamza Meddeb, and Mohamed Tozy, eds., *L'état d'injustice au Maghreb: Maroc et Tunisie*, Paris: Karthala–CERI, 2015, p. 170.
81. Author interview with Hmida Ennaifer, Bardo, July 2013.
82. Hmida Ennaifer, 'Where to Begin?', *al-Ma'rifa*, 6 (March 1978), p. 4.
83. Author interview with Hmida Ennaifer, Bardo, July 2013.
84. Magnuson, op. cit., p. 170.
85. The meeting took place at a farm belonging to Abdelkader Slama, an opponent of Bourguiba and a graduate of Zaytouna University.
86. Author interview with Hmida Ennaifer, Bardo, July 2013.
87. Ibid.
88. For more background on Hmida Ennaifer and his ideological evolution see the interview with him in Appendix 6.
89. Personal communication with Hmida Ennaifer, November 2016.
90. Note that in an author interview Ghannouchi denied having any knowledge of the book.

91. This information was retrieved from private archives of the Progressive Islamists in Tunisia.
92. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, February 2014.
93. Salah al-Din al-Jurshi, 'Limadha al-Fikr al-Islami al-Mustaqbali?' [Why the futuristic Islamic thought?], *15\*21* (January 1983), pp. 14–15.
94. Author interview with Abdelfattah Mourou, Tunis, July 2013.
95. Rachid Ghannouchi quoted in Tamimi, op. cit., p. 53.
96. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, 'Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party', *Democratization*, 20, 5 (2013), p. 861.
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98. Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition*, London: Saqi Books, 2010, pp. 42–3.
99. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, February 2014.
100. Author interview with Ben Issa Demni, Ras Jebel, June 2014.
101. 'Ni est, ni ouest', *Réalités*, no. 9, 11 December 1982, p. 19.
102. Author interview with Abdelfattah Mourou, Tunis, May 2015.
103. Author interview with Tariq Ramadan, Oxford, October 2015.
104. 'Voyage dans le mouvement islamiste', op. cit., pp. 14–15.

### 3. PLOTTING AGAINST THE REGIME

1. Author interview with Ben Issa Demni, Ras Jebel, June 2014.
2. Author interview with Habib Ellouze, Bardo, May 2012.
3. Author interview with Ben Issa Demni, Ras Jebel, June 2014.
4. Author interview with Mohammed Chamam, Tunis, June 2014.
5. Author interview with Habib Ellouze, Bardo, May 2012.
6. Quoted in Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998, p. 151.
7. Author interview with female Islamist sympathiser who supported the programme, Paris, May 2015.
8. François Burgat, *L'islamisme au Maghreb, la voix du Sud*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 1988, p. 228.
9. 'L'attaque contre Gafsa, la relation des événements', *Le Temps*, 29 January 1980.
10. Tahar Belkhodja, *Les trois décennies Bourguiba: témoignage*, Paris, Publisud, 1998, p. 172.
11. Author interview with Ajmi Lourimi, Tunis, May 2012.
12. Ibid.

13. ‘Tous les détails sur la prise d’otage du doyen de la Faculté des Sciences’, *Le Temps*, 22 February 1981.
14. Author interviews with former student involved in taking the dean hostage, Tunis, April–May, 2015.
15. Hamdi, op. cit., p. 44.
16. ‘Le procès du Mouvement de la tendance islamique en Tunisie: l’acharnement de M. Bourguiba contre les intégristes’, *Le Monde*, 20 September 1987.
17. Hamdi, op. cit., p. 43.
18. Burgat, op. cit., p. 231.
19. Zyed Krichen, ‘Le point de vue des Islamistes Progressistes’, *Réalités*, no. 2, 23 October 1982, p. 23.
20. Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 168.
21. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, March 2014.
22. Samir Abdellah, ‘La démocratie de l’imparfait’, *Réalités*, no. 13, 8 January 1983.
23. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, May 2014.
24. This position was also held by Ghannouchi’s wife, who gave an interview during his imprisonment to *Réalités*, in which she stated that the Code introduced laws that were ‘foreign’ to Tunisian society and defended polygamy. See, for details, ‘Mme Rached Ghannouchi: “j’assume pleinement l’action de mon mari”’, *Réalités*, no. 14, 3 February 1984, pp. 30–1.
25. Author interview with Faycel Nasser, Tunis, May 2014.
26. Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003, p. 294.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
28. Salah Karker quoted in *ibid.*, p. 302.
29. Author interview with Kaouech Daoud, Bizerte, April 2015.
30. Taoufik Majeri Saibi, ‘Que faire?’, *Réalités*, no. 14, February 1984, p. 11.
31. ‘Curfew Imposed across Tunisia as Riots Spread’, *New York Times*, 4 January 1984.
32. ‘Tunisia Report Places Blame for Bread Riots’, *New York Times*, 23 April 1984.
33. Author interview with Hedi Baccouche, Tunis, September 2015.
34. Perkins, op. cit., p. 171.
35. Michael J. Willis, ‘Containing Radicalism through the Political Process in North Africa’, *Mediterranean Politics*, 11, 2 (2006), p. 139.

36. Alaya Allani, 'The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980–2008', *Journal of North African Studies*, 14, 2 (2009), p. 262.
37. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, May 2014.
38. Quoted in Burgat, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
39. Author interview with Abdelaziz Temimi, Tunis, May 2014.
40. Bourguiba even divorced his second wife in July 1986, accusing her of having violated the constitution by giving political statements without his permission.
41. 'Tunisia's Premier Seizes Power, Declaring Bourguiba to be Senile', *New York Times*, 8 November 1987.
42. Author interviews with various members of the Ennahda movement.
43. Author interview with Ali Lafi, Tunis, June 2015.
44. Rory McCarthy, 'The Tunisian Uprisings, Ennahdha and the Revival of an Arab-Islamic Identity', in Shabnam J. Holliday and Philip Leech, eds., *Political Identities and Popular Uprisings in the Middle East*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2016, p. 161.
45. Quoted in Michael C. Dunn, *Renaissance or Radicalism? Political Islam: The Case of Tunisia's Ennahda*, Washington, DC: International Estimate, 1992, p. 154.
46. Hamdi, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
47. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
48. Moncef Ben Salem, *Mudhakkarat 'Alim Jami' wa-Sajin Siyasi: Sanawat al-Jamr* [Memoirs of an academic researcher and political prisoner: the years of tension], n.p. [Tunisia]: self-published, December 2013, p. 43.
49. Quoted in Hamdi, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
50. Author interviews with key Ennahda figures of the 1980s.
51. Hamdi, *op. cit.* Note that Said Ferjani offered a different account of the events. See, for details the interview with Ferjani in Appendix 6.
52. Author interview with Mohammed Chamam, Tunis, June 2014.
53. Author interviews with former member of the Security Group, Tunis, June 2013.
54. Author interview with activist close to the Security Group leadership, Tunis, September 2014.
55. Ben Salem, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–5. See also Hamdi, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–7.
56. 'Tunisia, the Overthrow of Bourguiba. November 7, 1987', *al-Bab*, 11 February 2011.
57. Author interview with a former member of the Security Group, Tunis, June 2013.
58. Quoted in Elbaki Hermassi, 'The Islamicist Movement and November 7', in Ira William Zartman, ed., *Tunisia: The Political Economy of Reform*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, pp. 197–8.

59. 'Tunisia Celebrates 7 November; Elections Next April; National Pact Signed', Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 8 November 1988, Wikileaks.
60. Stephen J. King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
61. Christopher Alexander, *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 53; 'Tunisia Celebrates 7 November', Wikileaks, op. cit.
62. Béatrice Hibou, 'Le réformisme, grand récit politique de la Tunisie contemporaine', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* (2009), p. 15.
63. Alexander, op. cit., p. 53; 'Tunisia Celebrates 7 November', Wikileaks, op. cit.
64. Hibou, op. cit., p. 15.
65. Hamdi, op. cit., p. 158.
66. Ibid., p. 157.
67. Steffen Erdle, *Ben Ali's 'New Tunisia' (1987–2009): A Case Study of Authoritarian Modernization in the Arab World*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2010, p. 98.
68. Nejib Lakenji, 'Ramadhan pour tous', *Réalités*, no. 193, 28 April–4 May 1989, p. 16.
69. 'Ramadan in Tunisia: Observance and Tolerance', Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 19 May 1988, Wikileaks.
70. Ibid.
71. Erdle, op. cit., p. 98.
72. Elbaki Hermassi, 'État Tunisien et le Mouvement Islamiste', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 28 (1989), CNRS, p. 304.
73. John L. Esposito and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 139.
74. Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition*, London: Saqi Books, 2010, p. 58.
75. Ibid., p. 45.
76. Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 70–1.
77. For details see interview with Cheikh Abderrahman Khelif in *Réalités*, no. 189, 31 March–6 April 1989.
78. For an example of themes raised by Ennahda during an electoral campaign meeting, alongside details about the event's participants and organisation, see Appendix 5, 'Account of an Ennahda campaign event in the electoral district of Tunis 1'.
79. Tamimi, op. cit., p. 70.
80. Michael J. Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring*, London: Hurst, 2014.

81. Author interview with Amel, Kairouan, May 2012.
82. Mohammed Ghannouchi affirmed to the author that aside from himself, Habib Boularès and Ismaïl Khelil supported a gradual integration of the Islamists. Note that I was unable to confirm his account. Author interview with Mohammed Ghannouchi, Tunis, October 2015.
83. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
84. Hamdi, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.
86. Ali Larayedh quoted in Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Historically, the MDS defended Ennahda and called upon the regime to recognise it. Moreover, in a 1991 interview, the MUP's Mohammed Belhaj Amor stated: 'We need to act in a democratic framework and therefore recognize Ennahdha.' For details see Khélil Zamiti, 'Ennahdha et les avatars de la non-reconnaissance', *Réalités*, no. 280, 04–10 January 1991.
89. Emma C. Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999, pp. 194–5.
90. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 195.
91. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
92. Author interview with Faycel Nasser, Tunis, June 2014.
93. 'Further information on UA 219/91 (MDE 30/20/91, 28 June 1991)—Death Penalty', *Amnesty International*, 11 October 1991.
94. Author interview with Faycel Nasser, Tunis, June 2014.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Author interview with resident in Bab Souika, Tunis, September 2015.
97. Human Rights Watch, 'Repression of Former Political Prisoners in Tunisia', New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010, p. 7.
98. 'La Couverture: Procès d'Ennahdha', *Réalités*, no. 358, 24–30 July 1992. Information corroborated through author interviews.
99. Author interview with Abdelfattah Mourou, Tunis, July 2013.
100. Author interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, Tunis, August 2012.
101. Murphy, *op. cit.*, pp. 200–1.
102. Author interview with Mohammed Ghannouchi, Tunis, October 2015.
103. For details see *Le Temps*, 10 July 1992.
104. Author interview with Samir Kourda, Tunis, August 2014.
105. 'Abdelfattah Mourou: l'alternative Islamiste', *Réalités*, no. 1365, 23–29 February 2012, p. 14.
106. Author interviews with members of Ennahda.

107. ‘Tunisia: Heavy Sentences after Unfair Trials’, *Amnesty International*, September 1992, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/023/1992/en/>, last accessed October 2014.
108. Author interview with former Ennahda leader, Tunis, May 2015.
109. ‘Tunisia: Prolonged Incommunicado Detention and Torture’, *Amnesty International*, 4 March 1992, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/004/1992/en/>, last accessed October 2014.
110. Quoted in ‘Vers un deuxième parti islamiste: le coup de poker de Mourou’, *Réalités*, no. 290, 15–21 March 1991, p. 4.
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112. Author interviews with various members of Ennahda, 2012–15.
113. ‘Mourou’s Statement’, *Réalités*, 17 May 1991.
114. Mohammed Raja Ferhat, ‘Portrait d’un parti à venir’, *Réalités*, no. 294, 12–18 April 1991, p. 4.
115. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
116. Author interview with Abdelfattah Mourou, Tunis, May 2015.

#### 4. THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

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2. Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 4.
3. Nouredine Jebnoun, ‘Ben Ali’s Tunisia: The Authoritarian Path of a Dystopian State’, in Nouredine Jebnoun, Mehrdad Kia, and Mimi Kirk, eds., *Modern Middle East Authoritarianism: Roots, Ramifications, and Crisis*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 114.
4. For details see *Les murs du silence: rapport sur les prisons tunisiennes*, Tunis: Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme, 2004 (pamphlet), p. 50.
5. Author interview with Abdelhamid Jlassi, Tunis, May 2015.
6. Author interview with Abdallah Zouari, Tunis, May 2015.
7. *Les murs du silence*, op. cit., p. 52.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. Author interviews with various former political prisoners throughout Tunisia.
11. *Les murs du silence*, op. cit., p. 11.
12. Author interview with Samir Ben Amor, Tunis, April 2015.
13. Author interview with Abdallah Zouari, Tunis, May 2015.
14. Author interview with Ali Larayedh, Bardo, May 2015.
15. *Ibid.*

16. Author interview with the wife of a political prisoner, Bizerte, April 2015.
17. Author interview with Nawfel, Sousse, May 2015.
18. Author interview with Abdelhamid Jlassi, Tunis, May 2015.
19. For details see Doris H. Gray and Terry Coonan, 'Notes from the Field: Silence Kills! Women and the Transitional Justice Process in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 7, 2 (2013), pp. 348–57.
20. Author interview with Ennahda women, Tunis, May 2015.
21. Author interview with formerly imprisoned Ennahda member, Sousse, May 2015.
22. Author interview with Ennahda women, Tunis, May 2015.
23. Author interview with wife of formerly imprisoned Ennahda leader, Tunis, May 2015.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Author interview with formerly imprisoned Ennahda member, Sousse, May 2015.
27. Gray and Coonan, op. cit., p. 353.
28. Author interview with the son of a former prisoner, Tunis, February 2012.
29. Author interview with Meherzia Labidi, Bardo, May 2015.
30. Author interview with former leader of Ennahda exiles in France, Tunis, May 2015.
31. Author interview with Ridha Driss, Tunis, May 2015.
32. Author interview with Meherzia Labidi, Bardo, May 2015.
33. François Burgat, *L'islamisme au Maghreb, la voix du Sud*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 1988, p. 308.
34. Author interview with Lotfi Zitoun, Tunis, May 2015.
35. Author interview with former exiles in France, Paris, May 2015.
36. Author interview with Samia, Paris, May 2015.
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38. Vincent Geisser, 'Le Président Ben Ali en campagne contre les "médias sataniques"', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 38 (1999), CNRS Éditions, p. 381.
39. Ibid., p. 386.
40. Author interview with former Ennahda exile, Paris, May 2015.
41. Ibid.
42. 'Controverse sur les propos de M. Chirac sur les droits humains en Tunisie', *Le Monde*, 4 December 2003.
43. Author interview with Lotfi Zitoun, Tunis, May 2015.
44. This was particularly true for the children of exiles, some of whom

- came to identify, at least partially, as French, British, or German Muslims, and became very involved in Islamic umbrella organisations in their countries.
45. Author interview with Saoussen, Paris, May 2015.
  46. Author interview with Lotfi Zitoun, Tunis, May 2015.
  47. Ibid.
  48. Author interview with Habib Mokni, Tunis, May 2015.
  49. Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Will the Real Tunisian Opposition Please Stand Up? Opposition Coordination Failures under Authoritarian Constraints', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 3 (2011), pp. 323–41.
  50. Quoted in Khaled Ben M'barek, 'Chronique politique: l'élan brisé du mouvement démocratique', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 34 (2000–1), CNRS Éditions, p. 420.
  51. Ibid., p. 421.
  52. Ibid.
  53. Author interview with former exiled leader of Ennahda, Tunis, May 2015.
  54. Ibid.
  55. Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 1999', London: Amnesty International Publications, p. 165.
  56. Author interview with Jalal, London, March 2015.
  57. Author interview with Ridha Driss, Tunis, May 2015.
  58. In 1994 Karker was put on leave, and in 2002 he was officially excluded from the movement. It is noteworthy that, during this period and while under house arrest, Karker changed his political line to the extent he even claimed that the Islamist approach leads to political stalemate. In one interview he stated: 'It is necessary that we partially apply laïcité, an artificial separation between Islam and politics, because after this wave of horrors people suffered they are in need of a long-term confessional and educational restoration process until they regain an Islamic healthy character and find the need to subscribe to an Islamic agenda. ... I think ... the reality proves that the people and we are not ready to realise an Islamic government and succeed in it': Karker quoted in Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003, p. 307.
  59. Author interview with Lotfi Zitoun, Tunis, May 2015.
  60. Ibid.
  61. Ibid. Azzam Tamimi is a supporter of Hamas, the Palestinian organisation founded in 1987 as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

62. Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
63. Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998, p. 119.
64. Ibid.
65. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 278.
66. Camau and Geisser (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 306.
67. ‘Selon un quotidien saoudien: démission d’un responsable du mouvement islamiste tunisien’, *Le Monde*, 11 August 1994.
68. Camau and Geisser (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 311.
69. See also Mohamed Tozy and Béatrice Hibou, ‘L’offre islamiste de justice sociale: politique publique ou question morale?’ in Irene Bono, Béatrice Hibou, Hamza Meddeb, and Mohamed Tozy, eds., *L’état d’injustice au Maghreb: Maroc et Tunisie*, Paris: Karthala–CERI, 2015, p. 170.
70. Rachid Ghannouchi, *al-Hurriyat al-‘Amma fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* [Public liberties in the Islamic state], Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-Arabiyya, 1993.
71. Tamimi, *op. cit.*, pp. 170–1.
72. Ghannouchi, *op. cit.*
73. Rachid Ghannouchi quoted in Hamdi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
74. Ghannouchi, *op. cit.*
75. Ibid.
76. Quoted in Hamdi, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
77. Ibid., p. 129.
78. Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 210.
79. Jebnoun, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
80. Author interview with Moncef Marzouki, Tunis, May 2015.
81. Author interview with Moncef Marzouki, Tunis, May 2015.
82. Stephen J. King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 173–4.
83. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
84. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 216.
85. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 217.
86. Author interview with Moncef Marzouki, Tunis, May 2015.
87. ‘Appel de Tunis du 17 juin 2003’, <https://tounis.wordpress.com/2008/10/11/appel-de-tunis-du-17-juin-2003/>, last accessed February 2015.
88. Author interview with Moncef Marzouki, Tunis, May 2015.
89. ‘Movement of 18 October: Weak, Divided, But Optimistic on One-

- Year Anniversary’, Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 31 October 2016, Wikileaks.
90. ‘Documents sur le Mouvement du 18 Octobre’, <http://www.nachaz.org/index.php/fr/textes-a-l-appui/politique/102-2012-09-11-12-11-20.html?showall=1&limitstart=>, last accessed 15 June 2015.
  91. ‘Movement of 18 October’, Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Wikileaks, op. cit.
  92. ‘Documents sur le Mouvement du 18 Octobre’, op. cit.
  93. Author interview with Moncef Marzouki, Tunis, May 2015.
  94. For details see Anne Wolf, ‘Can Secular Parties Lead the New Tunisia?’, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 30 April 2014.
  95. ‘Movement of 18 October’, Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Wikileaks, op. cit.
  96. Author interview with secular opposition politician, Tunis, February 2014.
  97. Author interview with Jalal, London, March 2015.
  98. Author interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, Tunis, June 2015.
  99. Author interview with adviser of Rachid Ghannouchi, Tunis, May 2015.
  100. Rachid Ghannouchi, ‘Comment expliquer la supériorité de l’expérience marocaine sur celle de la Tunisie?’, article published via [www.ezzeitouna.com](http://www.ezzeitouna.com), October 2002 and quoted in Camau and Geisser (2003), op. cit., p. 313.
  101. Author interview with Jalal, London, March 2015.
  102. Vincent Geisser and Éric Gobe, ‘Un si long règne ... le régime de Ben Ali vingt ans après’, *L’Année du Maghreb*, 2008, CNRS Éditions, p. 356.
  103. *al-Mawqif*, 19 January 2007, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 358. Note that representatives of Ennahda allegedly engaged repeatedly in negotiations with Ben Ali through middlemen, and held discussions with the president’s son-in-law, Sakher el-Materi, who invested in Islamic finance and media in an attempt to bolster his political leverage by garnering the support of religious conservatives (author interviews with source close to Ben Ali’s family, Tunis, October 2016).
  104. For an excerpt of the declaration see Appendix 3, Final Declaration of the Eighth Congress of Ennahda.
  105. For details see also Geisser and Gobe, op. cit., p. 359.
  106. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
  107. Abdelmajid Mouslimi, ‘Le congrès d’Ennahda ... des messages politiques réalistes’, *al-Mawqif*, 22 June 2007, quoted in Geisser and Gobe, op. cit., p. 360.

108. There were other reasons behind Ben Ali's more conciliatory approach towards Ennahda. By then in his mid-seventies, Ben Ali had allegedly started evaluating options for his successor, for which the most likely candidates included his wife, Leila, his son-in-law Sakher el-Materi, and a more distant relative, Kamel Morjane. Naturally, a general domestic climate of unity and compromise, including with Ennahda, would have facilitated a smooth transfer of power (author interviews with former members of the Ben Ali regime, Tunis, May and June 2016). For more details see the interview with Mohammed Ghariani in Appendix 6.

## 5. AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

1. The term Salafism stems from the Arabic word *salaf*, meaning 'ancestors' or 'predecessors'.
2. 'Tunisian Government Cracks Down on Hijab', Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 13 October 2006, Wikileaks.
3. Ibid.
4. Mohamed Kerrou, *Hijâb: nouveaux voiles et espaces publics*, Tunis: Cérès Éditions, 2010, p. 47.
5. 'The Dichotomy of Islam in Tunisia', Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 29 November 2005, Wikileaks.
6. For example, in the academic year 1988/9 approximately 2,600 students enrolled at Zaytouna—almost twice as many as in 2010/11 (private archives of Zaytouna University, Tunis, accessed June 2015).
7. This information was retrieved from the private archives of Zaytouna University, Tunis, accessed June 2015.
8. Mohamed Tozy, 'Les enchaînements paradoxaux de l'histoire du salafisme: instrumentalisation politique et actions de sécularisation', in Irene Bono, Béatrice Hibou, Hamza Meddeb, and Mohamed Tozy, eds., *L'état d'injustice au Maghreb: Maroc et Tunisie*, Paris: Karthala–CERI, 2015, p. 229.
9. 'Extremism in Tunisia: Fertile Ground?', Secret Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 25 January 2008, Wikileaks.
10. For details see Amnesty International, 'Behind Tunisia's "Economic Miracle": Inequality and Criminalization of Protest', London: Amnesty International, June 2009.
11. 'Independence Day Passes Largely Unnoticed', Confidential Cable from US Embassy, Tunis, 22 March 2006, Wikileaks.
12. Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, 'New Expressions of Islam in Tunisia: An Ethnographic Approach', *Journal of North African Studies*, 20, 3 (2015), p. 330.

13. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 331.
14. *Ibid.*
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## 6. RESHAPING TUNISIAN IDENTITY

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## CONCLUSION

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## INDEX

- 15\*21* (magazine): launch of (1982), xvi, 212
- 18 October Movement: 101, 133, 194; 18 October Collectif, 102; 18 October Forum, 101–2; launch of (2005), 101; members of, xix, 101–2, 107, 116
- Abaab, Azhar: 96
- Abdallah, Abdelweheb: Arabisation campaign of, 89–90
- Abderrahim, Souad: 133
- Abdessalem, Rafik: family of, 135
- Abduh, Mohammed: 18
- Abdul Hamid II: 17
- Abu Dhabi TV: 127
- Afek Tounes: electoral performance of (2014), 158
- al-Afghani, Jamal ad-Din: 17–18
- Afghanistan: xxiii, 94, 144, 214; Soviet Invasion of (1979–89), 124
- ‘*Ahd al-Aman* [Security Covenant; *Pacte fondamentale*]: 16, 67; aims of, 13–14; issuing of (1857), 13
- Ahmed Bey (r. 1837–55): 12; reforms of, 12–13; ties to figures in ‘*ulama*, 15
- Ahrar Party (Egypt): political alliance with Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, 70
- Akreimi, Lazhar: founder of Nidaa Tounes, 3
- Algeria: xvi–xvii, xxi, 5, 64, 72, 94, 125, 172, 214; borders of, 88, 149; Civil War (1991–2002), 93, 96
- Allani, Alaya: 61
- Amal Party (Egypt): political alliance with Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, 70
- Amari, Ahmed: 25
- Amor, Samir Ben: 82
- Anderson, Lisa: 16
- Ansar al-Shari‘a (Partisans of *shari‘a*): xxiv; branches of, 149; criminalization of, xxiii, 152–3; founding of, 144; Kairouan Rally (2012), 144; members of, xxiii, 144, 146–7, 216
- Arab Spring: 3, 9, 90, 123–4; Egyptian Revolution (2011), 166; Libyan Civil War (2011), 151, 166; Syrian Civil War (2011–), 166; Tunisian Revolution (2010–11), 1, 6,

## INDEX

- 163; Yemen Revolution (2011–12), 166
- Al-Arabiyya: 127
- Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA; al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha) (Algeria): creation of, xxiii; members of, 123; Paris Metro Bombing (1995), 93
- Asad, Talal: view of Islam as discursive tradition, 6
- Assembly of the Representatives of the People: elections (2014), xix, 158
- Association for the Safeguard of the Qur'an (ASQ): creation of (1967), 37; members of, 37–8
- Atig, Sahbi (b. 1959): background of, xx
- al-Awa, Mohammed Salim: writings of, 48
- al-Ayadi, Fathi: head of Ennahda Shura Council, 137
- Azzouz, Amel (b. 1963): background of, xx
- Baccouche, Hedi: 30
- al-Banna, Hassan: 70; criticisms of, 47; founder of Muslim Brotherhood, 46; writings of, 40
- Bardo military school: founding of, 12–13; personnel of, 15
- Bardo National Museum: assault on (2015), 159–60
- Barraket Essahel affair (1991): 74–5
- Battalion of 'Uqba ibn Nafi: *see* Katibat 'Uqba ibn Nafi
- Bayat, Asef: concept of 'post-Islamism', 161
- Belaïd, Chokri: assassination of (2013), xvii, 152
- Beldi, Fadhel: split from Ennahda (1991), 76
- Belgium: 62
- Ben Achour family: 29
- Ben Achour, Fadhel: 23, 59
- Ben Achour, Tahar: 28, 30, 69
- Ben Ali, Leïla: family of, 83
- Ben Ali, Zine el-Abidine: xvii, xxi, 8–9, 60, 68–9, 75–6, 108, 126, 163–4, 218; alleged assassination plots targeting, 75; family of, 83; individual solution initiative, 103–4, 136; legitimising of loyal political parties, 102–3; opposition to, 54, 121–2; regime of, 2, 5, 12, 38, 80, 83, 89, 92, 94, 97, 101–3, 106–7, 109, 132, 138, 143, 145, 157, 165, 167, 213, 216–17; religious policies of, 109–13, 138; removed from power (2011), 1, 6, 129–31; repression of political parties under, 72–3, 89, 98–100, 116–18, 123–4; rigging of election, 71, 109; rise to power (1987), 2, 63, 66–7; state feminism of, 141
- Ben Amor, Samir: 82
- Ben Gardane Attack (2016): perpetrators in, 159
- Ben Hassan, Bechir (b. 1973): background of, xxiii
- Ben Hassine, Seifallah [Abou Iyadh] (1965–2015): background of, xxiii, 144; role in US embassy riots (2012), 149
- Ben Jaafar, Mustapha: as member of 18 October Collectif, 102; head of Constituent Assembly, 134
- Ben Jeddou, Lotfi: attack on home of (2014), 153
- Benkirane, Abdelilah: 155
- Ben M'barek, Khaled: 93

## INDEX

- Bennabi, Malik: influence of, 40
- Ben Salah, Ahmed: 31; arrest of (1964), 33–4; writings of, 100
- Ben Salem, Moncef: 215; family of, 119; Tunisian Minister of Education, 148
- Ben Salem, Oussama: family of, 119
- Ben Sedrine, Sihem: 92
- Ben Youssef, Salah: 22–4, 28, 55; assassination of (1961), 25; supporters of, 25, 32–3, 37
- Bennani, Walid: leader of Ennahda Shura Council, 208
- Bin Laden, Osama: xxiii; supporters of, 144
- Black Thursday (1978): 44, 56; role of UGTT in organising protests during, 60
- Bosnia-Herzegovina: 95
- Bouazizi, Tarek al-Tayeb  
Mohammed: self-immolation of (2010), 129
- Boudegga, Mehrez: role in hotel bombings (1984), 122
- Boularès, Habib: xviii
- Boumakhla, Zied (b. 1984): 119; background of, xxii
- Bourguiba, Habib: xxi, 1, 24, 39, 51, 55–6, 60–1, 68–9, 87, 122, 164, 210, 215; coup d'état against (1987), xx–xxi, 62–7; electoral victory of (1957), 25; founder of Neo-Destour, 21; licensing of political parties, 58; modernisation efforts of, 1, 8, 11, 25, 27–9, 31, 36, 100, 163; opposition to, 33, 37, 54; regime of, 1–2, 12; regulation number 108 (1981), 113; return to Tunisia (1949), 22–3; supporters of, 24, 30–1; view on religion, 23, 124
- Brahmi, Mohammed: assassination of (2013), 152, 155
- Bread Riots (1984): 60, 116, 202
- Burgat, François: 56
- Call of Tunis Agreement: 133; singing of (2003), 101
- Camau, Michel: 31, 38, 59
- Carrefour (supermarket chain): opened in Tunisia (2001), 110
- Cavatorta, Francesco: research on Salafism, 150
- Centre of Islamic Studies (Kairouan): 4
- Centre for Research, Study, Documentation and Information about Women (Centre de Recherches, d'Études, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme, CREDIF): creation of (1990), 83; personnel of, 83
- Chammam, Mohammed: 65, 215; background of, xx–xxi
- Chammari, Khamis: view of 18 October Collectif, 102
- Chebbi, Nejib: as member of 18 October Collectif/18 October Movement, 101; leader of PDP, 133
- Chelbi, Hind: 135; hosted on TV (1975), 51
- Chirac, Jacques: visit to Tunisia (2003), 90
- Christianity: 4, 13, 49, 161, 217
- Chourou, Sadok (b. 1952): xvi, 87, 137, 139, 161; background of, xv, 70

## INDEX

- Commission of Educational Affairs: xx
- Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (CGTT: General Confederation of Tunisian Workers): 24; founding of (1924), 20; strikes staged by, 20–1
- Congress for the Republic (Congrès pour la République, CPR; al-Mu'tammarr min ajl al-Jumhuriyya): 155; creation of, 100; members of, 96, 106, 133–5
- Constituent Assembly: xv–xvi, xviii, 129–30, 138, 150, 171, 208; elections (2004), 208; elections (2011), xvii, xx–xxii, 2, 9, 132–5, 140, 143, 166–7; personnel of, 134, 141
- constitution: 14, 16, 67; adoption of (2014), 156; Article 28, 140; Article 6, 141; provisions of, 97, 156; references to *shari'a* in, 138–40
- Constitutional Democratic Rally (Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique, RCD): 112, 132, 165; dissolving of (2011), 129; formerly Destourian Socialist Party (PSD), 67, 76; members of, 71, 99, 119, 126, 153, 156, 217; offices of, 73–4; Political Bureau, 71, 74
- Coonan, Terry: 85
- Cuba: Guantanamo Bay, 125
- al-Damir* (weekly newspaper): 7, 138
- da'wa* (proselytising and preaching of Islam): 34, 38, 44, 108, 200, 216; primacy of, 144
- Delanoë, Bertrand: 93
- Demni, Ben Issa: 54; split from Ennahda (1991), 76
- Democratic Bloc (al-Kutla al-Dimuqratiyya): members of, 135
- Destour Party: ideology of, 21; members of, 20
- Destourian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien, PSD): 35, 38–9, 55, 58; members of, 56; student members of, 43
- Dhaouadi, Aicha: 38
- Dhaoui, Habib: role in founding of Islamic Jihad, 122
- Dilou, Samir: 131
- Djait, Mohammed Abdelaziz: 29–30
- Doulatli, Zied: as member of 18 October Collectif, 102
- Driss, Ridha: 57
- Egypt: 3, 6, 17–18, 23, 32, 139, 216; Revolution (2011), 166; Sinai Peninsula, 33
- Ellouze, Habib (b. 1953): 33, 138–9, 161; background of, xv–xvi
- emir: 154
- Ennaceur, Mohammed: Vice-President of Nidaa Tounes, 156
- Ennahda: 1, 9, 37, 75–6, 79, 88, 92, 98, 100, 105–7, 109–10, 114–18, 136–7, 140–3, 149, 156–61, 163, 167, 171–2, 189, 191–3, 195, 199, 204–6, 213, 217–18; activists associated with, 73, 151; Election Committee, xxi; electoral performance of (1989), 70–1; electoral performance of (2011), 2, 133–4; electoral perfor-

## INDEX

- mance of (2014), 158; Electoral Programme (2011), 172; members exiled in Europe, 87–8, 103–4, 115, 137; Executive Bureau, xx–xxi, 87, 94, 114–15, 178–80, 182–4; Executive Office, xxi; Extraordinary Assembly, 179–80, 186; General Assembly, 179, 181–2, 184, 186–7; Congress in Germany (1992), 87, 89; Harakat Ennahda, 69; Congress (2016), 160; harassment of followers, 71–2; ideology of, 87, 105–6, 139, 164–5, 170–1, 175–7; imprisonment of members of, 80–4, 86, 107, 190; joint declaration issued by (2001), 203–4; links to Independent Students, 120; members of, xv–xvii, xix–xx, xxii–xxiii, 2–4, 7–9, 25, 70, 73–4, 76–7, 82–7, 89, 93–4, 102–3, 107–8, 119, 126, 130–2, 135–6, 147–8, 162, 184; political alliance with Nidaa Tounes, 3; Political Bureau, 87, 107; reconciliation efforts of, 153–4; rejection of application for party status (1989), 71; repression of, 71, 80–1; shortcomings of, 165–6; Shura Council, xvi, xxi–xxii, 94, 96, 104, 136–7, 161, 178–87, 196, 204, 208; Switzerland Congress (1995), 94–5; ties to violence, 5–7; ties with Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood, 154; youth branch of, 140
- Ennaifer family: 29; members of, 34
- Ennaifer, Hmida (b. 1942): xvi–xvii, 32, 35–6, 77, 137; background of, 34; criticism of Hassan al-Banna, 47; meeting with Muslim Brotherhood (1973), 46
- Erdle, Steffen: 69
- Escheikh, Abdelhamid: Tunisian Interior Minister, 73
- Esposito, John L.: 33
- Essebsi, Beji Caid: 153, 216; dissolving of RCD, 129; electoral victory of (2014), 158; interim government of, 129–30, 143, 157
- Essid, Habib: administration of, xx, 158–60
- Ettakatol party (al-Takattul al-Dimuqrati min ajl al-<sup>ᶜ</sup>Amal wal-Hurriyyat; Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms): 155; electoral performance of (2011), 134; members of, 102, 135
- European Council of Religious Leaders: members of, xviii
- façade: secular, 2
- Facebook: 131
- Faculty of Science: faculty of, 57; student politics in, 42, 48
- al-Fajr* (newspaper): 91; banning of (1991), 72, 138; editorial staff of, xvii, 107; relaunch of (1992), 90
- fatwa: issuing of, 28, 30
- Ferjani, Said: background of, 65
- Firm Bond: formation of, 18
- First World War (1914–18): 20; Treaty of Versailles (1919), 20
- Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations: members of, xxiii
- France: xviii, xxiii, 29, 58, 87–90, 93, 95–6, 100, 103, 109, 136–7; Aix-en-Provence, 101; Paris,

## INDEX

- xvi–xvii, xxiii, 34–6, 65, 71–2, 89–90, 124, 211; Paris Metro Bombing (1995), 93; protests (1968), 34; Versailles, 20
- Free Patriotic Union (UPL): electoral performance of (2014), 158
- Gaddafi, Muammar: rise to power (1969), 41
- Gafsa Attack (1980): political impact of, 56–7
- Ganczarski, Christian: role in Djerba Bombing (2002), 124
- Geisser, Vincent: 31, 38, 59, 104, 106, 127
- General Union of Tunisian Students (L'Union Générale des Etudiants de Tunisie; UGET): elections (1971), 43; members of, xv, xx–xxi, 43, 147; role in creation of National Salvation Front, 154
- geo-political: 92
- Germany: 87–9, 137
- Ghannouchi, Mohammed: 71
- Ghannouchi, Rachid (b. 1941): 6, 30, 32, 39, 45, 48–9, 55, 57, 61–2, 71–3, 76–7, 95, 141–2, 151, 155, 164, 196, 211–12, 215, 217; background of, xvi–xvii; detaining of (1981), 57; exile of, xvi, 5, 9, 87, 97–8; family of, xxii, 35, 135; *al-Hurriyat al-'Amma fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* (Public Liberties in the Islamic State), 97; imprisonment of, 87; leader of Ennahda, 70, 94, 105, 137; leader of MTI, 51; return to Tunis (2011), 131; shift in political rhetoric, 96–8, 104; support for Saddam Hussein, 95–6
- Ghannouchi, Yusra (b. 1978): background of, xxii
- Ghariani, Mohammed: last Secretary General of RCD, 157
- al-Ghazali, Mohammed: writings of, 47
- Global Women of Faith Network: members of, xviii
- Gobe, Éric: 104, 106, 127
- Gray, Doris H.: 85
- Green, Arnold H.: 18
- Guiga, Driss: Tunisian Interior Minister, 57
- Habus Council: confiscation of property of, 28
- Hached, Farhat: assassination of, 24
- Haddad, Tahar: 23, 29, 69, 164; *Our Women in the Shari'a and Society* (1930), 21, 47–8
- al-Hadira* (newspaper): ideology of, 18
- Hajji, Lotfi: 28
- al-Hakim, Abou Bakr [Abou Mouqatel]: role in assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi (2013), 152–3
- halal* (licit): 122, 146
- Hamas: ties with Ennahda, 154
- Hamdi, Mohammed Elhachmi: 65
- Hammami, Hamma: as member of 18 October Movement, 101
- Hanafi school: 13, 28
- Harakat Ennahda: see Ennahda
- haram* (illicit): 122, 146
- Harrath, Mohammed Ali: background of, 122–3; split from MTI (1981), 122
- Haugbølle, Rikke Hostrup: 109–10
- Hibou, Béatrice: 12, 67–8

## INDEX

- hijab*: 110, 127; opposition to, 113–14; support for, 23, 108
- Hizb al-Asala (the Authenticity Party)
- al-Hizb al-Jumhuri: aims of, 135
- Hizb al-Tahrir (Party of Liberation): chapters of, 123; founding of (1952), 123; ideology of, 146–7; licensing of (2012), 146; members of, 123–4
- Hizbullah: 49
- Husainids: 12
- Hussein, Saddam: supporters of, 95
- Ibn Abi Dhiaf: personal secretary to Ahmed Bey, 12
- Ibn Ashur, Shaykh: 12
- al-Idrisi, al-Khatib (b. 1953/4): background of, xxiv
- iftar* (first meal after day's fasting during Ramadan): 111
- ijtihad* (exercise of independent reasoning in interpretation of Islamic law): 169; support for, 12, 19, 63
- imam (prayer leader in mosque): 15, 27, 30, 34, 145; political use of, 111–12
- Independent Students: growth of, 119–20; links to Ennahda, 120; members of, 147; women amongst, 121
- Initiative for Discovering the Truth about the Assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi: launch of, 152
- al-Insan* (Ennahda-linked periodical): 91, 95–6; founding of, 90–1
- Institute of Technology: student politics in, 42
- International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners: members of, 102
- International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations: executive office of, xxii
- International Monetary Fund (IMF): 59
- internet: 5; popularity in Tunisia, 86; spread of, 9
- Interpol: 88
- Iran: 50, 207; Islamic Revolution (1979), 8, 28, 48–9, 130; Tehran, 57; US Embassy Hostage Crisis (1979–81), 57
- Iraq: 125, 168, 207; Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003–11), 110
- Islam: 2, 4, 6, 9, 16, 21, 27, 37, 39–40, 51, 55, 59, 77, 97, 114, 130, 141, 148, 154, 162, 169, 201, 204, 208; as state religion, 156; five pillars of, 30; Hajj, 30, 111; political, xvii, 8, 26, 28, 32, 44, 160–1, 164; Ramadan, 30–1, 51, 69, 101, 111–12; spread of, 11
- Islam Channel: founding of, 122–3
- Islamic Group: *see* al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya (Tunisia)
- Islamic Jihad: 122; claim of responsibility of hotel bombings (1984), 64, 122
- Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS; al-Jabha al-Islamiyya lil-Inqadh) (Algeria): 72–3; electoral victory of (1990/1991), 95; supporters of, 96
- Islamic State group: 160–1, 217; affiliates of, 151; claim of responsibility for Bardo National Museum Assault (2015), 159;

## INDEX

- members of, 152; role in Ben Gardane attack (2016), 159
- Islamic Tendency Movement (Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique, MTI; Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami): 50–1, 53, 60–1, 63–4, 122, 206, 215; establishment of (1979), 8, 43–4; Executive Bureau, 50, 54–5; General Congress, 50, 62; members of, 54–5, 64–5, 67, 69, 122, 146; rejection of request for political party registration (1981), 57; relationship with UGTT, 59; repression of, 8, 57–8; Security Group, 65–6; Shura Council, 50, 55, 61; state repression of, 53–4; statement released by, 43–4; underground structures, 58
- Islam-Christian Research Group: members of, xvi
- Israel: 33
- Italy: Milan, 125
- al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya (Egypt): 49
- al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya (Tunisia): 8; ‘Before the Iron Curtain Comes Down’, 45; cells of, 36; ideology of, 42–3, 45; members of, xxiv, 37–9, 41, 47, 49, 146; ‘Muslim Sister’s Veil, The’, 45–6; supporters of, 39, 42–4
- Jama‘at al-Tabligh (Communication Group): branches of, xix, 34
- Al-Jazeera: 127
- Jaziri, Mohammed Amine: family of, 126
- Jebali, Hamadi (b. 1949): 3–4, 152; as member of 18 October Movement, 116; background of, xvii; header of MTI underground structures, 58; imprisonment of, 114; issuing of death sentence to (1984), 64; resignation of (2013), 152; return to Tunisia, 67; Tunisian Prime Minister, 134, 152
- Jebnoun, Nouredine: 80
- jihad/jihadism: 124–5; preaching of, 13; Salafi, 126, 152
- Jlassi, Abdelhamid (b. 1960): 83; background of, xxi; release from jail (2007), 115
- Joffé, George: 137
- Jomaa, Mehdi: 156
- Jordan, Hashemite Kingdom of: 33, 123, 139
- Justice and Development Party (PJD) (Morocco): members of, 155
- Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) (Turkey): 154, 165
- al-Kadi, Alia: 155
- Kallel, Abdallah: 74–5; Tunisian Defence Minister, 73
- Karker, Salah (1948–2012): 53–5, 59, 70, 136, 215; background of, xviii; connections with militants, 93–4; deputy leader of MTI, 51; detaining of (1981), 57; exile of, 93; issuing of death sentence to (1984), 64–5
- Karoui, Hamed: family of, 38
- Karoui, Nabil: family of, 38; fining of (2012), 142
- Katibat ‘Uqba ibn Nafi’ (Battalion of ‘Uqba ibn Nafi’): 214; assault on Tunisian soldiers (2013), 150; blamed for Bardo National Museum Attack (2015), 159; members of, 149–50

## INDEX

- Kerrou, Mohamed: concept of 'militant veils', 108
- Kheireddine Pasha al-Tunisi: 13–14, 18, 46, 67, 105, 199; founding of Sadiki College (1875), 15; *Surest Path to Knowledge Regarding the Condition of Countries, The* (1867), 14–15, 17
- Kheli, Abderrahman: 71
- Khelif, Shaykh: dismissal of, 31
- Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah: 49–50
- Khouja, Mohammed (b. 1950): 145–6; background of, xxiv; role in creation of Front Islamique de Tunisie (1987), 123; role in creation of Reform Front Party, 122–3, 147
- Kourda, Samir: 75
- kufra* (unbelief): 70
- La Marsa Protests (2012): 142–3; support for, 143
- Laabidi, Farida: 161
- Laabidi, Shaykh Houcine: support for La Marsa protests, 143
- Labidi, Meherzia (b. 1963): background of, xviii; Vice-President of Constituent Assembly, 141
- Ladhari, Zied (b. 1975): background of, xxii
- Larayedh, Ali (b. 1955): 82, 115; as member of 18 October Collectif, 102, 107, 116; background of, xix; imprisonment of, 64, 107; issuing of death sentence to (1984), 64; Tunisian Prime Minister, 152
- Larguèche, Dalenda: head of CREDIF, 141
- Law of Associations (1992): provisions of, 99
- Lazreq, Shaykh: role in founding of Islamic Jihad, 122
- League of Arab States: members of, 22
- League for the Protection of the Revolution: 145
- Le Monde*: 57
- Libya: xxiii, 25, 149, 172, 207, 216; borders of, 159; Civil War (2011), 151, 166; government of, 56; Tripoli, 49
- Mabrouk, Mehdi: 142
- Madaniyya Sufi order: members of, xix, 35
- Maghrib: 1, 4, 11, 68, 190; Farthest, 200; Greater, 175–6, 190
- Magnuson, Douglas K.: 44
- Mahmoudi, Baghdadi: extradition of, 134
- Mali: 214
- Maliki school: 28
- al-Manar University: Faculty of Science, 119–20
- Manouba University: 42, 148
- al-Ma'rifa* (journal): 7, 41, 45–6; editorial staff of, xvi, xix, 46, 56
- Marks, Monica: 136
- Marxism: 42–3, 49
- Marzouki, Moncef: 106, 133–5, 148–50; electoral defeat of (2014), 158; rejection of political candidacy, 98–9; role in creation of CPR, 100
- al-Masoudi, Abdul Sattar: 153
- el-Materi, Sakher: owner of Radio Zaitouna, 111
- al-Mawqif* (newspaper): 106; editorial staff of, 105
- McCarthy, Rory: 142–3

## INDEX

- Mekki, Abdellatif (b. 1962): back-ground of, [xxi](#)
- Merone, Fabio: research on Salafism, [150](#)
- Mestiri, Ahmed: [39](#)
- Mhiri, Mohammed: [30](#)
- Mohammed, Khalid Shaykh: role in Djerba Bombing (2002), [124](#)
- Mohammed, Prophet: [30](#), [34](#), [44](#); Companions of, [108](#)
- Mohammed Bayram IV (Hanafi mufti): relationship with Mohammed Bey, [15–16](#)
- Mohammed Bey (r. 1855–9): issuance of *‘Ahd al-Aman* (1857), [13](#); relationship with Mohammed Bayram IV, [15–16](#)
- Morocco: [xxiii](#), [155](#)
- Morsi, Mohammed: removed from office (2013), [154–5](#), [161](#), [164](#)
- Mosque of ‘Uqba ibn Nafi: [31](#); filming of *The Thief of Baghdad* in, [68](#); founding of, [11](#)
- Mourou, Abdelfattah (b. 1948): [xvi–xvii](#), [32](#), [47](#), [53](#), [62](#), [77](#), [136](#), [158](#), [212](#); background of, [xix–xx](#), [34–5](#); co-founder of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, [37](#); detaining of (1981), [57](#); member of Association for the Safeguard of the Qur’an, [37–8](#); return to Tunisia, [67](#); split from Ennahda (1991), [76–7](#)
- Movement of Social Democrats (MDS): [72](#); founding of (1978), [56](#); joint declaration issued by (2001), [203–4](#); licensing of, [58](#); members of, [102](#); repression of, [98–9](#)
- mufti, Grand Mufti: [30](#); Hanafi, [15](#)
- Mujahidin (Afghanistan): [124](#)
- multi-dimensional, multi-party: [xxiv](#), [17](#); governance, [167](#); politics, [4](#), [9](#), [53](#), [55](#), [69–70](#), [79](#), [97](#), [135](#), [144](#), [146](#), [167](#), [201](#)
- Murphy, Emma: [79](#)
- Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun): [27](#), [91](#), [105](#), [161](#), [212](#), [215](#); al-Tanzim al-Dawli, [6](#), [50](#); Egyptian, [xvi](#), [3](#), [5–6](#), [37](#), [40](#), [47](#), [154](#); ideology of, [40–1](#), [46](#), [70](#), [155](#); political alliances of, [70](#); suppression of, [3](#), [5](#), [32](#), [154](#); Syrian, [154–5](#); ties with Ennahda, [154](#)
- mustad‘afin* (the poor, disinherited, or oppressed): [71](#), [210](#)
- al-Mustaqilla (satellite channel): [93](#)
- mustakbirin* (the arrogant or oppressors): [71](#)
- Mu‘tazila, Mu‘tazilites: ideology of, [46](#)
- Mzali, Mohammed: [60](#); exile of, [100](#); Tunisian Minister of Education, [56](#); writings of, [100](#)
- al-Nabhani, Shaykh Taqi al-Din: role in founding of Hizb al-Tahrir (1952), [123](#)
- Nasser, Gamal Abdel: [22](#), [33](#), [40](#); death of (1970), [40](#); pan-Arabism, [36](#), [40–1](#); suppression of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, [32](#)
- National Assembly: electoral laws affecting, [98](#)
- National Engineering School: students of, [114](#)
- National Pact (1989): negotiating of, [67](#)
- National Salvation Front (Jabhat al-Inkadh al-Watani): call for dissolving of government, [155–6](#);

## INDEX

- creation of (2013), 154; disintegration of, 157
- National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT): members of, 114; opposition to *hijab*, 114
- nationalism: 22, 41, 105; Arab, 22, 25, 32–3, 39, 54, 100, 122, 211
- Nawar, Nasar: role in Djerba Bombing (2002), 124
- Neo-Destour: 23–4, alliance with Zaytouna Student Library and Brethren, 22; as Destourian Socialist Party (PSD), 31–2; formation of (1934), 21; members of, 38; Political Bureau, 24
- Nessma TV: personnel of, 142
- New Wafd Party (Egypt): political alliance with Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, 70
- New York Times*: 63
- Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia): xvi; licensing of (2012), 153; electoral performance of (2014), 157–8; members of, 3, 156, 160; political alliance with Ennahda, 3; role in creation of National Salvation Front, 154
- niqab*: policies targeting, 148
- non-governmental organizations (NGOs): 99, 109; international, 116
- Nouri, Mohammed: as member of 18 October Collectif, 102
- Occident: 22
- Omrane, Kamel: Director of Radio Zaitouna, 127
- Organisation Tunisienne du Travail
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): 150
- Ottoman Empire: 12, 17; Tanzimat movement in, 12; ‘*ulama* in, 16
- Ouachachi, Kilami: role in founding of Islamic Jihad, 122
- Ouertani, Shaykh: dismissal of, 31
- Ouni, Rafik: role in creation of Front Islamique de Tunisie, 123
- Ounissi, Sayida (b. 1987): background of, xxiii, 160
- Ourimi, Ajmi (b. 1962): background of, xxi
- Palestine: 120, 177, 190; Gaza, 120; West Bank, 33
- pan-Arabism: 32, 36, 40–1, 202
- pan-Islamism: 17–19
- Pargeter, Alison: observation of Salafi movement, 122
- Paris Nanterre University: 34
- Party of Popular Unity (PUP): licensing of, 58
- Party of Young Tunisians: *see* Young Tunisians
- Perkins, Kenneth: 16, 21, 58, 98
- Persian Gulf War (1990–1): 91, 95, 202; belligerents of, 95
- Personal Status Code (*Code du statut personnel*): 98, 167; implementation of (1956), 28; provisions of, 28–9, 141
- pointage* system: concept of, 85
- Popular Front: 216; electoral performance of (2014), 158
- Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice, and Development: electoral performance of (2011), 134; members of, 138
- Popular Unity Movement (MUP): 72
- post-Islamism: concept of, 161
- Progressive Democratic Party (PDP; al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati

## INDEX

- al-Taqaddumi): 105–6; members of, 101, 133
- Progressive Islamists: 47–8, 53, 58, 212; shortcomings of, 77
- Qabadu, Mahmud (1812–71): 19
- al-Qa'ida: 161; affiliates of, 5, 151, 166; members of, 124; role in 9/11 Attacks, 124
- Qasimiyya–Ismailiyya Sufi order: 112
- Qassem, Fouad Mansour: 96
- Qatar: 154
- Quartet, the: 155–6
- Qur'an: 4, 58–9, 80, 109–10, 120, 131, 144, 189, 209–10; revelation of, 46; teaching of, 27; verses of, xv, 111, 171
- Qutb, Mohammed: family of, 40
- Qutb, Sayyid: 93; family of, 40; writings of, 40
- Radio Zaitouna: creation of (2007), 111, 126–7; personnel of, 127
- Ramadan, Tariq: 6, 50
- Ramadan for Everybody: political use of, 69
- Réalités* (weekly newspaper): 76
- Red Hand, The: role in assassination of Farhat Hached, 24
- Reform Front Party (Hizb Jabhat al-Islah): authorisation of (2012), 145; creation of, 123; members of, xxiv, 147; supporters of, 146
- Right of Return initiative: 104; launch of, 103
- al-Riyahi, Ibrahim: 15
- Roy, Olivier: concept of 'post-Islamism', 161
- al-Ru'iyya al-Fikriyya wal-Manhaj al-'Usuli* (The Intellectual Vision and the Fundamental Approach): 63
- Sadat, Anwar: release of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners, 40
- Sadiki, Larbi: 14
- Sadiki College: 18, 21; students of, 34, 199–200
- al-Sadiq Bey (r. 1859–81): 13–14, 17
- Salafism: xxii, xxiv, 5, 16, 37, 106, 108, 114, 123, 143, 149, 152, 162, 166, 214, 217; spread of, 9, 107–8, 122; violent, 146
- Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, GSPC): training provided by, 125
- al-Sanusi, Mohammed: founder of Firm Bond, 18
- Sassi, Lassad: leader of Soliman group, 125
- Saudi Arabia: xxiii, 5, 64; Mecca, 30, 111
- Second World War (1939–45): 21–2
- sefsari* (traditional veil of Tunisian women): 23
- Senussi Sufi order: 19
- Sfar, Rachird: 63
- shari'a* (Islamic law): 16, 41, 97, 101, 139, 145–6; compatibility issues, 97–8, 141–2, 144; proposed implementation of, 108; references in constitution, 138–40
- Shariati, Ali: 49
- shaykh: 12, 15, 18, 28, 41, 49, 68, 122–3, 143, 196, 199, 208
- shaykh al-Islam*: 29
- Shi'a: 49

## INDEX

- shura* (consultation): 97
- Shura Council: xvi; members of, xv
- el-Sisi, Abdel Fattah: rise to power (2013), 154
- Six-Day War (1967): 211; political impact of, 33
- socialism: 33; Islamic, 41
- Soliman group: xxiv, 125, 149–50; founding of (2006), 125; growth of, 125–6, 150; imprisonment of members (2007), 126, 143
- souk*: 16, 36, 112, 145
- Soviet Union (USSR): collapse of, 161
- Sudan: 207
- Sufism: 12, 28, 41; orders of, 19, 111–12
- sunna* (verbally transmitted deeds and sayings of the Prophet): 34
- Sunni: 49
- Supreme Islamic Council: establishment of, 68
- Switzerland: 88, 94
- Syria: 23, 32–3, 166; Civil War (2011–), 166; Damascus, xvii, 211; Golan Heights, 33
- Taher, Thaalbi: 69
- tajdid* (renewal): 169
- takfir* (accusing people of apostasy or unbelief): discussions of, 63
- Tamimi, Azzam: writings of, 95
- Tanzimat movement: political influence of, 12
- taqlid* (an uncritical dependence on past precedent): 15
- Tawheed Movement: 49
- Temimi, Abdelaziz, 53
- Tessler, Mark: 27
- Thaalbi, Abdelaziz: anti-Sufi rhetoric of, 19; head of Destour Party, 20; *La Tunisie Martyre*, 20
- al-thawra al-mudadda* (counter-revolution) 157
- Tozy, Mohamed: 124–5
- Troika: 134–5, 156, 165–6, 213; criticisms of, 144, 151; resignation of (2013), 152, 157
- Tunis Court of First Instance: 125
- Tunisia: xvii, 4, 6–9, 11–12, 16, 24–5, 28, 30, 59, 68, 77, 79, 83, 85, 88, 106–8, 156–7, 165, 169, 172–3, 190, 193, 195, 201–3, 207–8, 214; Bardo, 42, 160; Ben Gardane, 159–60; Bizerte, 116, 121; Djerba, 25, 70, 124; Djerba Bombing (2002), 124; El Hamma, xvi; El Ksour, xxi; French Protectorate (1881–1956), 3, 11, 17–20, 22–3, 25, 28; Gabes, xvi, xx, 18, 32, 116, 121; Gafsa, 56, 116, 162; Hajeb El Ayoun, 133; Independence of (1956), 1; Kairouan, 11, 31, 71, 116, 144, 152, 172; Kasserine, 116; Kébili, 116; Matmata, xx; Medenine, xix, 25; Monastir, 64, 116, 121–2; Mornag, 47; Msaken, xxiii; Rades, 109; Revolution (2010–11), 1, 6, 129, 163; Sahel, 33; Sfax, xv, 30, 41, 116–17, 119, 121, 157, 213; Sidi Bouzid, xxiv, 116, 122, 126, 129; Sousse, xvii, xxi–xxii, 55, 58, 64–5, 83, 107, 115–17, 120–2, 150, 158, 160, 213; Tabarka, 4, 130; Tataouine, xxii; Tunis, xv, xxii–xxiii, 2, 7, 11, 18, 25, 35–6, 47, 64, 81, 100, 109, 112–13, 115–16, 121, 136, 149, 152
- Tunisian Agency of External Communication (Agence Tunisienne de Communication

## INDEX

- Extérieure; ATCE): creation of (1990), 89
- Tunisian Communist Party (PCT): 72; licensing of, 58
- Tunisian Communist Workers' Party (POCT): 72; members of, 101
- Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company: 59
- Tunisian Islamic Front (Front Islamique de Tunisie, FIT): creation of (1987), 123; members of, xxiv, 145
- Tunisian League for Culture and Plurality: launching of (2013), xvi
- Tunisian League of Human Rights (Ligue Tunisienne Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme; LTDH): Executive Committee of, 62; members of, 98–9; RCD co-option of leadership, 99; repression of, 98–9
- Tunisian National Archives: 7
- Tunisian General Union of Students (L'Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants; UGTE): 67, 121; members of, 73, 133, 147–8; raiding of headquarters (1991), 75; repression of (1987), 64
- Turkey: 154
- Turki, Bachir: influence of, 42
- ʿulama* (Islamic scholars): 15, 18–19, 28, 44; polarization within, 15–16
- umma* (Islamic community): 123
- Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT: General Labour Union): 24, 155, 212; activist activity of, 118; offices of, 142; personnel of, 24–5, 31, 45; relationship with MTI, 59; repression of, 98–100; role in organizing Black Thursday protests (1978), 60
- un-Islamic: 53, 144
- United Kingdom (UK): 87–8, 122–3, 137; London, xvii, xxii, 5, 65, 87–8, 90, 97–8, 103–4, 115
- United Nations (UN): 151; World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)(2005), 101
- United States of America (USA): 2, 64, 95, 151; 9/11 Attacks, 92–3, 124, 190
- University of 9 Avril: 120
- University of Manouba: 57
- University of Tunis: xvi; Faculty of Shari‘a and Theology, 29; students of, xvii–xix, 34
- University of Zaytouna: xvii, 7; graduates of, 18–19
- ‘Uqba ibn Nafi: 149; role in introduction of Islam to Tunisia, 11
- al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa* (journal): 18
- Wahhabism: xxiii–xxiv
- War on Terror: 125
- Wikileaks: release of embassy cables, 7
- Willis, Michael: 60, 71
- Wilson, Woodrow: Fourteen Points, 20
- World Bank: 59; socio-economic reform package of, 99
- Yemen: 166; Revolution (2011–12), 166
- Young Tunisians: 19–20, 96; formation of (1907), 19; ideology of, 29
- Young Turks: influence of, 19
- YouTube: 149

## INDEX

- zabiba* ('prayer bump': mark on the forehead, resulting from regular contact with a prayer mat): 112–13
- Zaitouna TV channel: launch of (1999), 91; withdrawing of licence of (2002), 91–2
- Zallum, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadim: leader of Tunisian chapter of Hizb al-Tahrir, 123
- Zaytouna Mosque: 24, 31, 127, 143, 145, 199
- Zaytouna Student Library and Brethren: alliance with Neo-Destour, 22
- Zaytouna University: 13, 20, 28, 36, 40, 46; assimilation into University of Tunis, 29–30; political control of, 15; students of, xx, 23, 32, 34, 108–9, 145
- Zghal, Abdelkader: 36, 41
- Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali Mosque: construction of (2003), 111
- Zouari, Abdallah: 81–2