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# **Trans-state spaces of mobilisation**

**Tunisian activism in France in the era of Ben Ali (1987-2011)**

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## ABSTRACT

Prior to the 2011 revolution, an understudied and yet central aspect of Tunisian politics was how both pro-regime and oppositional activism played out across borders, particularly amongst different political constellations of actors in France. In examining both the oppositional *milieu* comprised of Tunisian Islamists, leftists and trans-ideological actors, as well as networks of support and stakeholders within the authoritarian party-state, my dissertation seeks to explore the production and dynamics of what I conceptualise as the Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation in France within the context of the Ben Ali regime (1987-2011). Who are the principal actors working to produce this space and how does it come to be structured? What are its prominent cleavages as the pro- and anti-regime politics of the homeland aspire to inform power from afar?

This thesis therefore seeks to look at the specific relation to politics that exile activists maintain with both their country of origin and the country in which they are domiciled, and particularly the constraints and possibilities for action beyond these national spaces. By exploring the different structuring, political grammars, frames and repertoires of action both within and between these opposing activist groupings, this research hopes to help further our understanding of the key logics of activism from afar.

Drawing upon fieldwork conducted over a two-year period in both France and Tunisia, this study is based on interviews with active members of a wide range of political activists including Islamists, leftists, elites within the Ben Ali and the French regimes, as well as extensive archival data. It argues that the Tunisian political struggles in France under Ben Ali resulted from a specific space that was produced not merely by the transposition of struggles occurring in Tunisia, but also by its concomitant inscription into the specific dynamics of France. In doing so it seeks to demonstrate that the trans-state space of mobilisation is a politicised space, delineated by political opportunities of both host and home states, and which ultimately structures *differentiated* and yet also *overlapping* fields of action – those of homeland politics and immigrant politics.

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A la révolution tunisienne.

## NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

This thesis contains a large number of sources – interviews, archival work, secondary sources – many in French and some in Arabic. All translations from French and Arabic are my own, although some friends generously made suggestions for some of them.

Names of organisations are consistently given first in the original language (mostly French), followed by an English translation. All foreign words are italicised, except for political organisations once they have been first mentioned, in order to render the reading easier.

The transliteration of Arabic words is based on a simplified version of the system recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES): I removed diacritical marks for ease of reading, except for the ‘*ayn*’ which I have retained as [ ‘ ]. An exception to this is the names of individuals where an English or French spelling has commonly been accepted, and political organisations such as “*Ennahda*” and “*al-Amel al-Tounsi*”, which are referred to in accordance with usage in Tunisia.

## NOTES ON SOURCES

I have kept audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews in their entirety and in the original language for reference purposes.

Names of interviewees are cited if they gave their explicit consent and if they have public profiles. I have changed the names of interviewees when anonymisation was requested by them (e.g. Ahmed S.\*). For each interview, the name of the interviewee, and the place and date of the interview are provided. Detailed lists of interviews can be found in the bibliography and in Appendix 1.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATF	<i>Association des Tunisiens en France</i> (Association of Tunisians in France)
ACAT	<i>Association des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture</i> (Association of Christians for Abolition of Torture)
ADTF	<i>Association Démocratique des Tunisiens en France</i> (Democratic Association of Tunisians in France)
AEIF	<i>Association des Etudiants Islamiques en France</i> (Association of Islamic Students in France)
AEMNA	<i>Association des Etudiants Musulmans Nord-Africains</i> (Association of North African Muslim Students)
AMF	<i>Association des Marocains en France</i> (Association of Moroccans in France)
AT2D	<i>Association des Tunisiens pour la Démocratie et le Développement</i> (Association of Tunisians for Democracy and Development)
ATCE	<i>Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure</i> (Tunisian Agency of Exterior Communication)
ATMF	<i>Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France</i> (Association of North African Workers of France)
AVRE	<i>Association pour les Victimes de la Répression en Exil</i> (Association for Victims of Repression in Exile)
CAIE	<i>Conseil des Associations d'Immigrés en Europe</i> (Council of Immigrant Associations in Europe)
CAIF	<i>Conseil des Associations d'Immigrés en France</i> (Council of immigrant Associations in France)
CAIT	<i>Coordination des Assises de l'Immigration Tunisienne</i> (Coordination of the Tunisian Immigration Conference)
CAITE	<i>Coordination des Associations de l'Immigration tunisienne et des Tunisiens à l'étranger</i> (Coordination of the Tunisian Immigrant Associations and of Tunisians Abroad)

CDLT	<i>Coordination pour la Défense des Libertés en Tunisie</i> (Coordination for the Defence of Freedoms in Tunisia)
CEPT	<i>Collectif une Ecole pour Toutes et Tous – contre les lois d’exclusion</i> (Collective a School for All – Against the Exclusionary Laws)
CFDT	<i>Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail</i> (French Democratic Confederation of Labour)
CGT	<i>Confédération Générale du Travail</i> (General Confederation of Labour)
CIDT	<i>Centre d’Information et de Documentation sur la Torture</i> (Centre of Information and Documentation on Torture)
CMF	<i>Collectif des Musulmans de France</i> (Collective of Muslims of France)
CNLT	<i>Conseil National pour les Libertés en Tunisie</i> (National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia)
CPR	<i>Congrès pour la République</i> (Congress for the Republic)
CRLDHT	<i>Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l’Homme en Tunisie</i> (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia)
CSLCPT	<i>Comité de Soutien aux Luttes Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie</i> (Support Committee to the Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia)
CSP-UGET	<i>Comités de Section Provisoires de l’Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens</i> (Provisory Section Committees of the UGET)
CSVRT	<i>Comité de Soutien des Victimes de la Répression en Tunisie</i> (Support Committee to Victims of Repression in Tunisia)
EMF	<i>Etudiants Musulmans de France</i> (Muslim students of France)
FASTI	<i>Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec Tou-te-s les Immigré-e-s</i> (Federation of Associations of Solidarity with All Immigrants)
FDTL	<i>Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés</i> (Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms)
FEMYSO	Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations
FIDH	<i>Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme</i> (International Federation of Human Rights)

FTCR	<i>Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives</i> (Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship between two Shores)
GEAST	<i>Groupe d'Etudes et d'Action Socialistes en Tunisie</i> (Group for Socialist Studies and Action in Tunisia)
GIF	<i>Groupement Islamique en France</i> (Islamic Group in France)
IRIE	<i>Instance Régionale Indépendante pour les Elections</i> (Independent Regional Authority for Elections)
ISIE	<i>Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Elections</i> (Independent High Authority for Elections)
IVD	<i>Instance Vérité et Dignité</i> (Truth and Dignity Commission)
JMF	<i>Jeunes Musulmans de France</i> (Young Muslims of France)
JTF	<i>Jeunes Tunisiens de France</i> (Young Tunisians of France)
LCR	<i>Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire</i> (Revolutionary Communist League)
LTDH	<i>Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme</i> (Tunisian League of Human Rights)
MDS	<i>Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes</i> (Movement of Socialist Democrats)
MIB	<i>Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues</i> (Movement of Immigration and Suburbs)
MTA	<i>Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes</i> (Movement of Arab workers)
MTI	<i>Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique</i> (Movement of the Islamic Tendency)
MTI	<i>Maison des Travailleurs Immigrés</i> (Immigrant Workers House)
MUP	<i>Mouvement d'Unité Populaire</i> (Movement of Popular Unity)
OTE	<i>Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger</i> (Office of Tunisians Abroad)
PCOT	<i>Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie</i> (Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia)
PCT	<i>Parti Communiste Tunisien</i> (Tunisian Communist Party)

PDP	<i>Parti Démocrate Progressiste</i> (Progressive Democratic Party)
PSD	<i>Parti Socialiste Destourien</i> (Destourian Socialist Party)
RCD	<i>Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique</i> (Constitutional Democratic Rally)
REMDH	<i>Réseau Euro-Méditerranéen des Droits de l'Homme</i> (Euro-Mediterranean Networks for Human Rights)
RETAP	<i>Rassemblement des Etudiants Tunisiens à Paris</i> (Rally of Tunisian Students in Paris)
RSP	<i>Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste</i> (Progressive Socialist Rally)
RTF	<i>Rassemblement des Tunisiens de France</i> (Rally of Tunisians of France)
UGET	<i>Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens</i> (General Union of Tunisian Students)
UGTE	<i>Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants</i> (Tunisian General Union of Students)
UGTEF	<i>Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants en France</i> (Tunisian General Union of Students in France)
UJM	<i>Union des Jeunes Musulmans</i> (Union of Young Muslims)
Uni-T	<i>Union pour la Tunisie</i> (Union for Tunisia)
UOIF	<i>Union des Organisations Islamiques de France</i> (Union of Islamic Organisations of France)
UTIT	<i>Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens</i> (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers)

## **INTRODUCTION**

In December 2013, three years after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, which is often depicted as the trigger for social movements leading to the overthrow of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali's twenty-three year rule a month later, the *Instance Vérité Dignité* (Truth and Dignity Commission, IVD) was institutionalised. Its aim was to investigate human right violations committed between June 1955 and December 2013 – in other words, to deal with the past five decades of authoritarianism in the new revolutionary framework. In this context, Article 8 of the Organic Law relating to the establishment and organisation of transitional justice lists “enforced migration for political reasons” among other imprescriptible crimes.<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, this is one of the rare cases in the history of transitional justice in which a state has chosen to inscribe political exile as a violation of law.<sup>2</sup> Out of the 62713 files the IVD received,<sup>3</sup> 846 people have filed a complaint for enforced migration.<sup>4</sup>

However, unlike other legally recognised crimes which Tunisians were able to discover in public hearings from 2016 onwards, the question of exile has not yet fully been brought to light: the experience of the relocation of Tunisian politics abroad over the last decades does not seem part of Tunisian collective history or memory.<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, migrants are also struggling to secure a legitimate position in an increasingly securitised and hostile environment. Often described in the public sphere as homogeneous and frequently de-humanised, they are barely considered as political actors with any sense of agency. In the post-2011 context, this twofold invisibilisation of political mobilisation taking place in exile<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Organic Law of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2013, Tunisian Official Journal, available at: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/95319/112171/F-313159060/TUN-95319.pdf>, accessed 28 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> In Morocco, the *Instance Équité et Réconciliation* (Equity and Reconciliation Commission) also inscribed “forced exile” as a serious violation (El Yazami, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> According to the website of the IVD: <http://www.ivd.tn/?lang=fr> (figures from May 2018).

<sup>4</sup> For figures, see the well-researched investigation by the Tunisian online newspapers *Inkyfada*: Ben Hamadi (2016). However, I should also stress that given the tense political context in Tunisia around the IVD during which this thesis was written, I could not double check those numbers.

<sup>5</sup> The public hearings are available on the IVD website: <http://www.ivd.tn/auditions/auditions-publiques/auditions-par-temoniages/?lang=fr>, accessed 28 May 2018.

<sup>6</sup> This reminds us of Sayad's (1999) contention of “double absence”, to which I devote more explanations in subsequent sections.

stands in stark contrast to the overflow of work on transnationalism and multiple political presence in the social science literature. It is this apparent paradox that led me to start this research project. In addition, while conducting early research on Islamism and bourguibism<sup>7</sup> in Tunisia (Zederman, 2015; 2016), the study of the Tunisian Islamist movement Ennahda allowed me to encounter a significant area of its history and politics abroad that had hitherto been overlooked. This led me to “migrate” my questions on Tunisian politics across the Mediterranean Sea and focus on its dynamics in France. I discovered how Tunisia’s politics and history can only be understood by taking into account the study of exile politics and how the inquiry of such politics could represent a significant contribution. Prior to the 2011 revolution, an understudied and yet central aspect of Tunisian politics was the way in which both pro-regime and oppositional activism played out across borders, particularly amongst different political groupings in France.

In examining both the oppositional milieu of Tunisian Islamists, leftists and trans-ideological actors, as well as networks of support and stakeholders within the authoritarian party-state, this dissertation explores the production and dynamics of what I conceptualise as the trans-state space of Tunisian mobilisation in France within the context of the Ben Ali regime (1987-2011). It addresses the following research questions: What are the social and political conditions under which the trans-state space of mobilisation emerges? Who are the principal actors working to produce this space and how does it come to be structured? What are its prominent cleavages as the pro- and anti-regime politics of the homeland aspires to inform power from afar? This thesis therefore seeks to examine the specific relationships with politics that exile activists maintain with both their country of origin and country of residence, and particularly the constraints and possibilities for action beyond these national spaces. In other words, the central question of this research is: what does it mean to oppose or support an authoritarian regime from abroad?

By exploring the different trajectories, structures, political grammar, frames and repertoires of action both within and between these opposing activist groupings, this

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<sup>7</sup> This refers to Bourguiba, the first post-independence president of Tunisia (1957-1987), overthrown by what has famously become known as a “medical coup” by Ben Ali in 1987.

research hopes to further our understanding of the key logics of activism from afar. It does so in the specific context of authoritarianism, shedding light on long-term dynamics, as only a longitudinal study of political mobilisation allows us to grasp the evolving possibilities for action, as well as the reconversion of activist practices and possible defections.

Drawing upon fieldwork conducted over a two-year period in France and Tunisia, this study is based on interviews with past or present members of a wide range of political groupings, including Islamists, leftists and the elites of the Ben Ali regime. The research also benefits from the exploration of extensive archival data. It argues that the Tunisian political struggles in France under Ben Ali resulted from a specific space that was produced not merely by the transposition of struggles occurring in Tunisia, but also by its concomitant inscription into the specific dynamics of France. In doing so it seeks to demonstrate that the trans-state space of mobilisation is a politicised space, delineated by political opportunities of both host and home states, and which ultimately structures *differentiated* yet *overlapping* fields of action – those of homeland politics and immigrant politics.

## **Section I.**

### **State of the art: researching Tunisian activism from afar**

The in-depth study of the Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation offers fertile ground to engage with different literatures and add to a variety of debates. My research on Tunisian politics, political activism and exile is indeed located at the crossroads of different bodies of work that do not always interact, and which I shall now examine.

## **1. A dialogue between literature on immigrant and homeland politics**

Firstly, this research on exile politics invites to engage in a dialogue between immigrant and homeland politics, a research trend that has been increasingly filled thanks to literature on political transnationalism and diaspora politics. This disconnection is also reflected by a divide between Francophone and Anglophone literature, as will be seen, and which I modestly attempt to bridge here. When tracing the genealogy of this literature, I should however explain that the theoretical evolution of the scholarship is not only sequential but also better considered as coterminous.

### **1.1 From ethnocentric integration to immigrant politics**

As Green (2005) rightly remarks, countries of immigration such as France have mainly produced a literature mirroring their own attitudes – that is a history of immigration. This can be explained by:

the highly public politics of immigration, the places from which we write (the countries of immigration), the sources most readily available, and the languages we know have fostered the rich development of the new social history of immigration of the past three decades (Green, 2005, p. 264).

Literature on the history and politics of immigration has, in a first instance, led to a linear analysis of the processes at stake in terms of allegiance to and integration in the country in which the immigrants come to live. This in turn has led to a normative and ethnocentric literature into which integration and assimilation are placed as central analytical concepts. However, this normative notion of integration is unable to explain the phenomenon of exile activism, as it is reduced to a process that can only be discussed in terms of its success or failure. It seems therefore important to break with what Bourdieu (1999, p. 12) termed “oblivious ethnocentrism”. By focusing on the articulation and entanglement of what I will define as the fields of action between immigrant and homeland politics, my research instead shows the non-linearity, reconversion and multi-positionality of activist trajectories.

Some scholarship has demonstrated the extent to which migrants’ integration into the host country can impede homeland political mobilisation (see Waldinger, 2015). In contrast, a substantive literature shows that homeland and immigrant politics can



be successfully combined (Guarnizo et al, 2003), and more notably that “the cognitive and social skills that are useful for homeland activism are usually equally useful for engaging in the public arena of the settlement country” (Morales and Morariu, 2011, p. 141). Yet this literature is often primarily concerned in countering the argument that the remaining links to the homeland impede integration, and therefore attempts to show the degree to which integration and transnational engagement are not a zero-sum game (Portes and Rumbant, 2006, pp. 36-37). The relationship between integration and transnational political engagement has thus remained the focus as long as research questioning is framed in those terms.

A growing body of research has criticised this assimilationist concept in order to focus on the political experience of migrants, often in terms of “immigrant political participation” (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 6; Lafleur and Martiniello, 2009) and their efforts to improve their situation in the receiving country (among others, Ireland, 1994; Koopmans and Statham, 2000). In the French case, a very fruitful literature has produced work on different social and political mobilisations conducted by various categories of migrants and their descendants. Those range from struggles against discrimination, racism, and Islamophobia (Hajjat, 2013, 2005; Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013; Talpin et al, 2017), to battles against dreadful working conditions in factories and work hostels (Pitti, 2004; Hmed, 2007) or to the struggles of undocumented migrants and workers (Siméant, 1998). There is also a growing canon of literature on the general relation to politics of immigrants in associations (Hamidi, 2006; Leveau and Wihtol de Wenden, 2001), or more generally about diverse mobilisations to better the conditions of immigrants in France (Abdallah, 2000; Boubeker and Hajjat, 2008; GISTI, 2014). However, this stimulating literature is exclusively centred on the political struggles in the boundaries of the receiving state and misses the picture of mobilisations towards the homeland and the interaction between the two spaces this entails. It seems essential to bypass “methodological nationalism”, this “tendency to accept the nation-state and its boundaries as a given in social analysis.” (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1007).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a more elaborated critique of “methodological nationalism”, see also Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002.

I thus argue here for a theoretical framework that goes beyond unidirectional conceptions of migration which only account for the perspective of the host society (such as Schnapper, 1991; Wihtol de Wenden, 1988), or which only focus on the extent to which receiving states shape political mobilisation. While immigrant politics are examined in detail in Chapter 4 and the power of the receiving state in delineating possibilities of action is addressed in Chapter 2, I will show that those constitute only partial elements in understanding Tunisian activism from afar.

## **1.2 From depoliticised versions of diaspora and transnationalism to homeland politics**

The main premises of transnationalism and diaspora literature have helped shift the focus away from immigration/assimilation theories, host-state/home state dichotomies and the study of migrants' politics through the sole lens of the nation-state, to investigate various ways of mobilising for homeland politics (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Lafleur and Martiniello, 2009; Lyons and Mandaville, 2012).

Earlier conceptualisations of diaspora and transnationalism were problematic as it was easy to identify essentialism and the depoliticising effect of these theories. Two main conceptions of diaspora were in use during the 1980s-1990s, and continue to influence diaspora studies today. On the one hand, the classical vision of diaspora, which is a positivist trend of the literature, is founded on the accumulation of criteria to define diaspora according to a centre, and as being part of a continuity with a specific territory (Sheffer, 1986; Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2008). The second approach, the "off-centred", "culturalist" or "postmodern" conception of diaspora, came about in the context of projects that sought to deconstruct the identities and essences of former definitions. Instead, the approach supported discontinuity, hybridity, fluidity or (re)construction – anything but a fixed identity (Hall, 1990; Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 2004; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). This more fluid conception of diaspora has the advantage of going beyond homogeneous dimensions of the classical conception by underlining change and hybridity, although it tends to inscribe "disembodied subjects, orchestrating their lives in an unbounded and ungrounded 'space of flow'" (Smith in Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, p. xiv). In other words, it does not

account for the actors' political commitment and its sole focus on individuals makes it impossible to conceptualise the dynamics in broader terms.

From the 1990s, the literature on diaspora became even more complex, and the two opposite trends were soon divided further by the creation of the field of "diaspora studies" (Dufoix, 2012, pp. 389-446). To put it more simply, the concept of diaspora is now mainly used to describe any phenomenon of population dispersion in space which has spread to more than one territory, or the organisation of an ethnic, national or religious community within one or more countries (Dufoix, 2002). The overuse of the term is therefore one of the main criticisms that has been addressed to the notion as a whole. The term has been used so much that it has itself become "diasporic" as Brubaker (2005, p. 1) suggests, in the sense of being dispersed in terms of both conceptual and disciplinary space. The concept of diaspora now entails the risk of fixing both the origins and the communities themselves, homogenising diasporic populations by imagining unitary actors and actions. My research, however, is precisely about showing the competing and conflicting political projects within and between the groupings. Although acknowledging that alternative and fruitful readings of diaspora have been indicated earlier (Anthias, 1998; Dufoix, 2003; Brubaker, 2005) and more definitions could still be made of the term, I have decided to avoid the use of the concept in this research.

As much as the growing body of literature on diaspora provided a central starting point to the study of phenomena taking place across the borders of nation-states, it was also the proliferation of literature on transnationalism that enabled me to go beyond assimilationist views. Transnationalism has become both a lens and a research programme in its own right, used across a wide range of social science disciplines (see among others Portes et al, 1999; Vertovec, 2009; Bauböck and Faist, 2010) in order to understand "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al, 1994, p. 7). As was the case for the concept of diaspora, transnationalism has been criticised for covering many different dynamics, carrying

the risk of becoming a “catch-all and say nothing” term (Pries, 2008, p. 1).<sup>9</sup> More specifically, one of the main issues with the conceptualisation of broad transnational terms is that it does not enable scholars to isolate the specificities of political dynamics, and tends to ignore the ongoing central role of the state, as will be further discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Drawing on the study of diaspora and transnationalism, a growing body of work explores more specifically the concept of what has been termed “diaspora politics”, “transnational politics” or “homeland politics”, taking into account previously overlooked political dimensions in their analysis by including migrants as empowered social and political agents (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Bauböck, Faist 2010; Pojmann, 2008).<sup>10</sup> Although not everyone agrees with the scope and widening of this field of enquiry, claiming that it “has become somewhat of a cottage industry” (Adamson, 2012, p. 25) within various disciplines, the shift in focus from defining and identifying who or what a diaspora is to the study of processes of politicisation and mobilisations of diasporic groups represents a welcome evolution on which I shall build.

Most research on the homeland political activities of migrants has focused on their roles in periods of conflict – for instance, in the exacerbation (Adamson, 2013), resolution and post-conflict reconstruction (Koinova, 2010; 2013) of homeland contentions in the host countries. Focus is also accorded to their institutional participation in election campaigns as well as on their lobbying to improve their economic and legal status in the homeland or to influence its foreign policy. In this context, the 2011 Arab Uprisings have triggered some renewed interest in the role of diasporic actors in the Middle East and North Africa as agents of potential change (Beaugrand, Geisser 2016). New electoral transnational frontiers following the uprisings (Brand, 2013; Jaulin and Nilsson, 2015), the participation of the diasporas during the Arab uprisings and the return to home country politics (Beaugrand and Geisser, 2016; Müller-Funk, 2016; Chauvet et al, 2017) represent a stimulating

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<sup>9</sup> For a critique of the notion, see, for instance, Waldinger, 2015, pp. 11-36.

<sup>10</sup> One should note that “diaspora” literature and “transnational” literature are often conflated and used interchangeably, although they remain “awkward partners” (Faist in Bauböck and Faist, 2010, p. 9). For more on the distinction between diaspora and transnationalism, see Bauböck and Faist, 2010.

emerging literature. Yet little attention has been paid to less institutionalised forms of politics that take place in exile, as well as to previous political engagement in authoritarian regimes that could explain those changes, thereby running the risk of romanticising the apparent sudden post-2011 political-awakening of essentialised Arab diasporas.

In a similar vein to changes in the concept of diaspora, the evolution of the study of the political aspects of transnational phenomena has led to the emergence of transnational political activities as a subset of transnational studies. There has been a growing canon of literature over the last two decades that has carefully avoided reifying transnational communities by focusing on what the notion of “home” means from a comparative perspective (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002), on transnational political practices of migrants (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003a, 2003b, 2001; Lafleur and Martiniello, 2009), transnational political participation historicised over a long period (Green and Waldinger, 2016), and the transnational participation of second and third generation migrants (Levitt and Waters, 2002; Mügge, 2010). While such studies often deal with the determinants and varying levels of those transnational political practices and actions (Ahmadov and Sasse, 2016), questioning *why* one group rather than another engages in homeland politics, I am more interested here in understanding *how* such political processes occur.

### **1.3 Exile politics as a fully-fledged subject and object of study**

While the literature to date has provided details on many diverse features of immigrant and homeland politics, a more specific lens has received less attention. Exile politics in the context of an authoritarian regime is not yet considered to be a fully-fledged subject of study. There is in fact a surprising under-theorisation of exile activism in specific terms. Shain acts as an important exception here; in his pioneering work, *The Frontier of Loyalty*, he provides an important theoretical contribution by examining “a systematic overview of exile political activity in established twentieth-century nation-states” (Shain, 2005, p. 1). However, in his attempt to theoretically study variations and consistencies through a wide variety of cross-national cases, he mainly relies on second-hand sources. On the side of French political sociology,

Dufoix (2002) takes the field a step further, using the examples of Hungarians, Poles, and Czechs in France after 1945 to lay the foundations of a theory of politics of exile.

However, several invaluable case studies allow us to enrich our knowledge of exile politics. In this context, stateless groups have received the most attention: Palestinians (Brynen, 1990), Tamils (Wayland, 2004; Dequierez, 2011) and Kurds (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Grojean, 2008) are prominent examples. Other political groups have been studied, from Latin America (Sznajder and Roniger, 2009; Jedlicki, 2007), to Chinese exile politics (Ma, 1993), either as “long-distance nationalists” or specific religious and ethnic groups (such as the Alevis, by Massicard, 2003; 2005). Among other significant examples, it is worth highlighting a new publication that represents one of the rare studies that specifically engages with the politics underlying refugee mobilisation to challenge authoritarianism, drawing from the cases of Zimbabwean and Rwandan refugees (Betts and Jones, 2016). Finally, it is possible to find fruitful research from historians with which to compare Tunisian exile politics in France under Ben Ali to the politics of exile under Salazar’s Portugal (Pereira, 2012) and Franco’s Spain (Dreyfus-Armand, 1999). From this variety of fruitful literature, however, studies that look at more general frameworks to understand exile politics are rare, as they mainly focus on state or oppositional dynamics. My research, however, focuses on both pro- and anti- regime movements and the broader space in which they operate. Furthermore, by comparing Tunisian Islamists and leftists it does not confine anti-regime politics to a sole unified group. While there is a tendency to analytically oppose the actions of religious and supposedly “universalist” movements, “on the premise that they would be antithetical projects of society, relying on distinct know-how, social bases and networks and therefore contrasted modes of action” (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003, p. 19), I chose to examine their exile activism through the same analytical lens in order to understand their similar or differentiated trajectories, resources and repertoires of action further.

Finally, two aspects of exile politics in particular have been investigated in the peripheries by previous scholarship, namely Islamist politics and authoritarianism from afar. On one hand, it is striking to find very few works in the literature on Islamist

politics that explore the extra-territorial aspects of activism. While Islamist actors have acquired increasing visibility in academia, they remain often restricted to their national and/or territorial dimensions. For Tunisia more specifically, the existing scholarship on Islamist movements largely ignores its political dimension abroad (Burgat, 2008; Wolf, 2017; Marks, 2012; for a notable exception, however, see Ayari, 2007). When Islamist movements are studied in the European context, they are rarely considered as potential oppositional actors to homeland politics. Instead they are seen through the lens of their religious and social practices in the public sphere in Europe (Nielsen, 2004; Göle, 2015), through the prism of integration and adaptability to the host countries (Kepel, 1997; Maréchal, 2008) or without any clear territorial anchorage (Roy, 2004). In this rather prolific literature, religious actors are therefore understudied in terms of their activism against homeland countries in “extra-national” spaces (for recent exceptions, see Dazey and Zederman, 2017; Vannetzel, 2018). Equally, while various forms of state engagement with their citizens abroad have been increasingly examined (Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018; Délano Alonso and Mylonas, 2017; Ragazzi, 2014; Dufoix, 2010), and authoritarianism has been deciphered under various guises, the dynamics of authoritarianism from afar (Glasius, 2018; Moss, 2016) have received very little attention – a point I will develop further and engage with much more fully in Chapter 2.

## **2. A dialogue between Bourdieu’s “theory of practice” and social movement theories**

In theoretical terms, this research has gained from the concomitant evolution of two strands of literature that enjoyed very little interaction in the past. On one hand, while scholarship on social movements used to be mainly contained within the boundaries of nation-states, the last two decades have seen the inception and growth of a prolific field of research that has begun to examine those dynamics at the transnational level (such as Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Della Porta et al, 1999; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow, 2005). Siméant (2010) notes that studies on the transnationalisation of collective action often focus on NGOs, women, anti-globalisation and human rights movements, while migrant social movements are less studied at transnational levels. This should be qualified by the fact that authors in the

field of diaspora studies have increasingly drawn on social movement theory to avoid essentialist readings of diaspora, to understand how political entrepreneurs construct diasporas (Adamson, 2012; 2013), and more generally to examine the formation of diasporas through mobilisation (Sökefeld, 2006). Scholarship on diaspora politics therefore has tended increasingly to apply social movement theory frameworks to their cases (Adamson, 2002, 2012; Koinova, 2014; Wayland, 2004; Quinsaat, 2013). Building upon this, themes from social movement theory infuse this research. Major concepts forged by this literature,<sup>11</sup> such as political opportunity structures (Chapter 2), framing processes, strategies, forms and repertoires of action (Chapters 3 and 4) will be discussed and criticised.

However, I make a particular usage of those concepts by arguing that the analysis of activism from afar can gain from establishing a dialogue between Bourdieu's theory of practice and social movement theories. My conceptualisation of the trans-state space of mobilisation enables me to discuss this further. For this I build on a relatively new literature in anglophone scholarship that shows how a Bourdieusian framework is not incompatible with, and "despite certain obstacles, which must be addressed, provides a very strong basis for analysing and understanding social movements" (Crossley, 2003, p. 45; 2002).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this body of work has demonstrated that a number of concepts resonate between social movement approaches – such as resource mobilisation, political process and framing theories – and Bourdieu's theory (Crossley, 2002; 2003; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005; Ancelovici, 2009; Haluza-DeLay, 2008; Husu, 2013; Mayrl, 2013; Geer, 2013).<sup>13</sup> In the specific context of exile politics, it seems relevant to develop this effort further. I will keep a critical eye on the articulation between Bourdieu's framework and social movement theories, however, and will refrain from using key notions extracted from the context in which the authors have conceptualised them, precisely what Bourdieu (1995, p. 111) called

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<sup>11</sup> The literature on this is extensive, but see notably, Tarrow, 2011; McAdam et al, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Beyond scholars of social movements, Sallaz and Zavisca (2007) usefully show "the transatlantic diffusion of Bourdieu" in American sociology.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, these authors show how Bourdieu's formulation of different forms of "capital", and more particularly "symbolic capital" can be discussed along with "resource mobilisation theory"; other concepts such as habitus and field can enter into a "mutually critical dialogue with certain key concepts and studies from social movement analysis in such a way as to show that – and how – his approach can elucidate the nature of social movements" (Crossley, 2003, p. 45).



“concepts without a label” (*concepts dégriffés*). This is primarily because theory of practice for Bourdieu can only be understood through a number of concepts that are relational and therefore intrinsically linked, such as those of fields, capital and habitus. Bearing those epistemological precautions in mind, the combination of different theoretical tools still seems heuristic in terms of understanding the broader space in which activists from afar operate their actions. More concretely, by defining the theoretical boundaries of the trans-state of mobilisation, Chapter 1 shows the importance of concepts of “fields” as sites of struggle for understanding immigrant and homeland politics, with constraints and opportunities impeding or encouraging the evolution of those fields. The possibilities of reconversions of “activist capital” within those fields of action, as well as the “activist habitus”, are also analysed in Chapters 3 and 4.

In this way, my research examines different levels of political action in exile: the trajectories of activists (micro-level), the structuration, cohesion and strategies of the groupings and their organisations (meso-level), as well as more general constraints and opportunities (macro-level). However, it should be mentioned that I have placed emphasis at the level of *organised* forms of mobilisation. Aware of the organisational bias which tends to focus on “the stock (the activists present at the moment of the investigation) rather than on the flow” (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003, p. 119), scrutinising the level of associations and political parties nevertheless allowed me to draw a bigger picture of the trans-state space of mobilisation. This focus on rather formalised political forms should not, however, obscure the importance of the literature on everyday resistance and informal politics which offer an important avenue to decentre and widen the politics of resistance (Scott, 2000), especially in the Middle East (Wedeen, 1999; Bayat, 2013; Tripp, 2013), and upon which I build in order to understand Tunisian opposition movements in France more thoroughly.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule (2003) and Tripp (2013) have established fruitful and detailed pictures of those multiple forms and practices of resistance in Muslim societies, which sometimes echo the political practices I will be exploring in this thesis.

### 3. Tunisia as a case-study in the literature

This research analyses in detail the dynamics of pro- and anti-regime mobilisation from afar, complicates this dichotomy and investigates the broader space in which these dynamics operate. The Tunisian case in France seems propitious for understanding the modalities of exile politics under an authoritarian regime further. As will be seen – particularly in Chapter 1 – this choice has not been made by accident: the colonial history and geographical proximity of the two countries, the large number of Tunisians living in France<sup>15</sup> and the long-term and diversified Tunisian political life that has taken place in France allow us to follow the many variations of activism from afar and understand its complex nature.

While Tunisian politics have received attention, especially following the 2011 revolution, there is more room for studies that address those parts of its history and politics that were relocated abroad. Tunisian opposition politics (Lamloum and Ravenel, 2002; Khiari, 2003; Ayari, 2016), Tunisian Islamist politics (Burgat, 2008; Wolf, 2017), the politics of Tunisia seen through a Maghrebi comparative perspective (Willis, 2012), Tunisia's "authoritarian syndrome" (Camau, 1987; Camau and Geisser, 2003) and the political economy of repression (Hibou, 2006; Tsourapas, 2013) have all been analysed. The regular chronicles that have been published in the *Année du Maghreb* and the *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* throughout Ben Ali's regime are full of interesting and informative empirical details that notably allowed me to cross check information (M'Barek, 2000; Gobe, 2004; Geisser and Gobe, 2007, 2008; Chouikha and Gobe, 2009; Chouikha and Geisser, 2010).

On the subject of Tunisia and migration, the picture also allowed some space for further research relevant to my case. First, when it comes to literature on political immigration in France, I found little material on the Tunisian case before the 2011

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<sup>15</sup> It is very difficult to know the exact number of Tunisians living in France: due to a profound historical mistrust towards consulates (as will be seen in Chapter 2, they were often considered as an unofficial body of control from afar by the Tunisian regimes), many people chose not to register. Moreover, it is impossible to keep a record of so-called irregular immigrants. However, it is known that France is host of the single largest community of Tunisians. To get a broad idea, in 1986, a year before Ben Ali's ascent to power, the Tunisian population in France was estimated by the French authorities at 230,000, FNA-P 19920417, "*La Communauté Tunisienne en France*", 31 August 1988. In 2012, a year after the 2011 revolution, the *Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger* (OTE) suggested there may have been 721,397 Tunisians in France, 54,4% of Tunisia's overall foreign population (*TunisiensdeFrance*, 2015).

revolution. The focus on Maghrebi immigration to France prioritises Algeria – probably due to the fact that Algerians represent the largest minority community in France and the specific history of Algerian colonisation, decolonisation and immigration has triggered renewed interest over the last three decades (Gillette and Sayad, 1984; Silverstein, 2004). In fact the few studies that have been conducted on Tunisian migrants in France mainly focus on elites (Cassarino, 2000; Slimane and Khelif, 2009). The issues of their transferable skills and of their economic and financial contributions (such as remittances) to the host and home countries are the main questions at stake in these works. Statistics produced can be of help to gain a better picture of the Tunisian communities abroad, but it is difficult to know whether the figures are accurate and they tell us nothing in qualitative terms about individual political trajectories, as those involved are simply considered as cyphers or financial contributors rather than political actors in their own right.

In addition, when not focusing on elites, the literature on Tunisians in France mainly deals with demographic and economic facets (Boussadia, 1979; Simon, 1979; Rimani, 1988). The study of Tunisian labour migration was of interest for some researchers, especially in the 1970s-1980s, but political aspects of migration were still not addressed. For decades, emigration/immigration and politics were seen as an oxymoronic duality, as immigrants were assigned the status of temporary workers only, and were excluded from any scholarly understanding in terms of possessing the quality of political subjects (Noiriel, 2006). Tunisians in France have also been the subjects of monographs in specific settings. For instance, we can cite here a recent monograph on Tunisians in the Alpes-Maritimes (Yousfi, 2013), or monographs on different communities of Tunisians in Belleville or in Barbès (Paris) (Tlili, 1989; Simon and Tapia, 1998; Karamti, 2007). But here again, any sense of interaction between political mobilisation towards the host and home countries is missing, as the focus is on demographic and economic aspects, or at best the ethnography of a specific region of France.

When it comes to the political dimensions of Tunisian immigration in France, two works deserve our special attention, however. Brand (2006) in her book *Citizens Abroad* devotes a chapter to the Tunisian case. This very fruitful work informs us of

the Tunisian state's way of dealing with its emigrants, notably in France. However, Brand is more concerned with explaining the changing nature of the relationship between emigrants and their home states, and nothing is offered on the struggles exile activists were engaged in regarding either the homeland or the host country. In contrast, Ayari's (2009; 2016) work on the political commitment of leftists and Islamists in Tunisia under the two Tunisian authoritarian regimes, and the processes of politicisation and de-politicisation this entailed, offered a useful springboard for my research. But his focus on Islamist and leftist activists necessarily touches upon, but does not specifically deal with its dynamics abroad, and the focus on oppositional actors does not allow us to see any interaction with pro-regime actors. Moreover, as his thesis was defended in 2009, he was obviously not able to cover the important dynamics of post-revolutionary Tunisia to provide any discussion on the political commitment of Tunisians in France after that time.<sup>16</sup>

Following the 2011 revolution, as well as other uprisings in the Arab world, a proliferation of studies emerged on the theme of migration and the Mediterranean (Schmoll et al, 2015). Tunisia is no exception to this: the nexus between migration and revolution has triggered renewed interest in Tunisia (Boubakri, 2013; Natter, 2015; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017; Souiah, 2018). In the post-revolutionary context, policy papers also inform us on comparative perspectives such as the transnational practices of Tunisians in Belgium after 2011 (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015) and in Germany (Ragab et al, 2013).

Finally, it is worth mentioning here that Tunisian or French-Tunisian actors themselves have started writing and reflecting on the associative movement in France, on the history of mobilisation and on their role in the 2011 uprisings (Limam, 2014; 2015). It is striking, however, that these self-reflections – despite being a very interesting basis from which to start our research – are often produced by leftist activists close to organisations that ignored Islamists in the political history of mobilisation. This is well-exemplified by the work of Abdessamad (2012) and Dridi (2013), or the broader work of their association, the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour*

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<sup>16</sup> His doctoral thesis was published very recently, with only a couple of pages added to cover the post-2011 period (Ayari, 2016).

*une Citoyenneté des deux Rives* (FTCR, 2014) to which they both contributed. They both trace the political activities of Tunisians in France, almost without mentioning the role of the Islamists, or at least the interactions between different groupings – a question that I will address further in Chapter 4.

This thesis hopes to make a number of contributions at different levels. The most obvious one is an empirical contribution to the under-researched Tunisian history and politics of exile under Ben Ali. It also supplements existing literature in at least three main ways. It allows for a dialogue between francophone and anglophone social science literature, which enjoy little interaction on many themes. At a more theoretical level, building on the literature of immigrant, homeland and exile politics on the one hand and the articulation between the social movement literature and a Bourdieusian toolkit on the other, it puts forward a heuristic framework on which to understand further activism from afar in an authoritarian context. Finally, this research is interdisciplinary in nature, especially as I draw insights from diverse disciplines which are reflected in the methodology chosen, to which I now turn.

## **Section II.**

### **Fieldwork and methodology: how to study the trans-state space of mobilisation**

#### **1. Fieldwork and reflexive approaches to fieldwork**

Relying on a qualitative mixed-methods approach, my research uses a combination of interviews in conjunction with the investigation of historical archives and personal observations. The majority of my fieldwork, carried out between 2015 and 2017, was undertaken in France (Paris, Marseille and Lyon), where interviews were conducted and observations were made, and where the great majority of relevant archives are to be found. However, I also spent several weeks in Tunisia in order to interview those who had returned there before or after the 2011 revolution.

In acknowledging the need for these three approaches to access sources for this research, it is paramount to underline the limitations they contain. However, I will

start by offering a critical reflection on the construction of knowledge and the consequences the process engenders – in other words, the concept of reflexivity. The understanding of this process seems even more central when it comes to research on activism, especially in a revolutionary context. First, a few words are needed on my role as researcher in the research process. It is indeed the question of power relations between researcher and participants which is at stake, particularly when undertaking interviews. In *La Misère du Monde*, Bourdieu (1993) comes back to the methodology of this massive enterprise (which includes more than a hundred interviews) and considers the social relations induced by the interviewing process as asymmetric, given that it is the interviewer who institutes the rules of the game. I agree with Bourdieu (1993, p. 1391) that this symbolic violence is intensified by “a social asymmetry any time the researcher is in a superior position to the interviewee in the hierarchy of the different sorts of capital, notably cultural capital.”

In my case, being French and therefore considered an outsider to a very polarised space of mobilisation certainly helped, as I was not categorised as belonging to any specific group with hidden interests. This allowed me to navigate easily between different political tendencies. However, some realities were necessarily out of reach for an outsider, and I should also stress issues of exteriority and domination that my position as a white French female researcher could imply. Nevertheless, as Massicard (2002) noted when reflecting on her research on the Alevi movements in Europe, such a position of exteriority also has the advantage that the researchers:

...do not have to justify themselves, to define themselves or situate themselves within the studied group because they stay indisputably the other. The boundaries [between researcher and activists] are then recognised and maintained on both sides.

If it seems impossible to erase these effects as if by magic, it is also important to be aware of them in order to operate a process of self-reflection on the way the fieldwork was carried out so that these effects are controlled to the best possible extent. Reflexivity is not the sole privilege of the researcher, however. One should also note the reflexivity of the actors, which accompanies the consciousness of one's trajectories, especially when dealing with activist trajectories. There exists a propensity on the part of all the actors to self-analyse, even though the degree of

self-analysis is variable, dependent on social groups and on individual characteristics (Haegel and Lavabre, 2010, p. 99), a dimension that will be developed more fully in Chapter 4. The self-reflection of the actors, and more generally their knowledge production, complicate the relationship between researcher and political actors and renders this relationship permeable. As has been seen, the actors themselves sometimes produce knowledge on their political struggles, which is crucial to take into account during the analytical process. The actors I study in this thesis are therefore not mere objects, but were part of the research project itself.

Recognising my place, my impact, my relationship to those I was studying and acknowledging that we were all part of that world of study was the basis from which I started this research. This is one of the recognised pathways for conducting ethical research. That is why I followed Burawoy's (1998, p. 5) notion of a "reflexive model of science", one that embraces engagement rather than detachment as the road to knowledge. Unlike positivist approaches that seek to establish and maintain a distance between the observer and the object of study in order to preserve objectivity (which espouses the idea that there is an external world that can be analysed which is separate from the world of the researcher), the reflexive model is an alternative which takes context as point of departure and more importantly "thematizes our presence in the world we study" (Burawoy, 1998, p.7).

The context of production of interviews and more generally the question of the social and political conditions that underpin any investigation then become central to reflect on. It is important to remember that interviews are neither timeless, nor do they lack spatial attributes but are produced in specific contexts. They are the results of personal and collective memories and histories, of specific economic, social and symbolic positions at the time of the interviews, and of specific relationships to the researcher (Demazière and Samuel, 2010). It was therefore important for me to remain aware that I am providing a "situated" account. In this respect, it is the specific context of conducting fieldwork in Tunisia's post-revolutionary period that I should emphasise. Under Ben Ali, researchers working on various political and social dynamics could be forbidden from entering Tunisia, or could see their offices broken into by the Tunisian authorities (Hibou, 2006, p. 23; cf. Chapter 2). It is the

comparatively easy post-revolutionary access that I would like to underline. This can be explained by a number of factors. First, the period (2015-2017) was rather propitious as far as conducting work on polarised groups (pro-regime, Islamists and leftists). With the opening of the country after the revolution, Tunisian activists in France were less inclined to be suspicious of infiltration; instead they showed a willingness to testify about this period. Unlike the majority of researchers, who started work on various post-2011 themes, and which led to a degree of fatigue for the interviewees, examining the previous period seemed to be well received. Activists often appeared happy to narrate their political experience under Ben Ali, as they could take their memories as an occasion to rehabilitate themselves with their past (for pro-regime actors), or explain and justify how they played a role in regime change from their exile (for opponents). Finally, the fact that I was not new to the field, especially for Nahdawi activists, and had been recommended and vouchsafed by a number of people within the various movements, certainly helped.

## **2. Interviews**

I conducted many informal interviews, discussions and observations often at political or cultural events (debates, conferences, congresses and demonstrations) organised by diverse organisations. These were at times richer than formal interviews in terms of understanding more personal aspects of what exile politics was all about. However, I carried out more than seventy semi-structured interviews which lasted between one and eight hours (totalling several rounds of interviews in the latter case). With prior consent of the interviewees, the majority were recorded, although interlocutors frequently asked me to switch off the recorder, for instance to explain personal disagreements within the movements involving fellow members, or other sensitive questions. The actors were approached through personal contacts or through prior contact with leaders of associations and organisations. During the process I found that snowball sampling worked well. In terms of language, the interviews were all conducted in French, with some very short parts in Arabic occasionally. The interviews were later transcribed in French, with the translations into English made later, during the writing process of the thesis.



I interviewed many different actors to ensure I obtained the largest possible picture of the trans-state space of mobilisation. On the part of anti-regime actors, activists from the different groupings included leaders and rank-and-file activists from Islamist and leftist groupings, as well as independents and former Bourguibists. I also interviewed opponents who left their respective organisations, as well as the children of Nahdawi exiles and activists of newly formed post-2011 associations. It was mostly the leaders of those movements whom I interviewed, although they were not necessarily the ones who possessed more social and political visibility. Interviews were also conducted with consuls, ambassadors and leaders of associations linked to the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Constitutional Democratic Rally, RCD), Ben Ali's party-state. In addition to Tunisian pro- and anti- Ben Ali activists, I interviewed what I will later describe as French "allies" as well as French officials (see the detailed list of interviews in Appendix 1).

An elaborate set of questions was adapted for each type of actor as I chose not to follow a fixed questionnaire but to conduct life-story interviews. However, the emphasis was always put on the trajectories of the activists, their political activities and the details of their respective political organisations. I focused on themes, which I often divided into personal trajectory (family and social background, education, circles of socialisation, professional career, process of migration), pre-2011 political activities in different spheres, the organisation of their association or political parties, a cartography of the exile movements, and post-2011 political activities (revolutionary sequence, questions of return and so forth). They were welcome to introduce topics I left out but which they deemed important. Focusing on their activist trajectories allowed me to grasp their engagement in different political arenas, their reconversions and defections, thus helping me to shift the focus onto the trans-state space of mobilisation and the different fields of action which it comprises.

Interviews were used in two ways: as a complement to written archives (as will be seen in the subsequent section) and therefore as a way of accessing crucial information for the research project, and as a way of understanding political stances from a specific social position – in other words, the capacity of the interviewees to

produce a vision of their own political trajectories and of their own social roles (Laurens, 2007, p. 123). The interviews of course had an informative purpose on the political groupings themselves, but I contend that the narrativisation, the meaning that the activists themselves implied to their actions was as just interesting as the “facts” themselves, as it allowed me to understand the functioning of different fields. That is where life stories were particularly useful. As Erel (2009) explains in the case of her study of women migrants from Turkey to the UK and Germany, life-story methods “elicit not only what happened, but also how people experienced events, and how they make sense of them”.<sup>17</sup> The way activists actually narrativise their stories sheds a great deal of light on many features of their positionality and the hierarchies of the fields themselves.

However, as I expected, it was more difficult to conduct life-story interviews with officials from both the French and the Tunisian regimes. A number of them did not want to speak about their own trajectories, but remained at the level of an institutional, overall and impersonal approach to their experiences. Although this was extremely useful in terms of understanding the workings of the Tunisian party-state in France and the French authorities’ ways of dealing with Tunisian exiles (see Chapter 2), the bypassing of their own experiences was a striking feature to observe. As Laurens (2007, p. 116) explains in the case of interviews with high-ranking officials in charge of immigration in France:

The interview that focuses on organisational logic is less violent for both the interviewer and interviewee (in dominant position) as it ultimately offers to the latter the chance to only confide about his or her institutional role.

Fieldwork with different and polarised groupings in exile raises paradoxical issues: on one hand, when looking at oppositional actors, there exists a risk of fetishisation and an overflow of empathy on exiles. On the other, investigating former members of an authoritarian regime can raise difficulties. Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot (1991, p. 132) in their study of the French high bourgeoisie and aristocracy, also expounded on their difficulties and their necessity to find a balance between “paternalism towards the

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<sup>17</sup> For other interesting and reflexive uses of life-stories, see Pagis (2014) in the case of May 1968 in France (2014) and more generally Haegel and Lavabre (2010).

dominated” and “social revenge towards the dominant”. In the same way, I constantly had to objectify those feelings in order to strike a balance.

Although it was a major source of valuable information, conducting life-story interviews also contained limitations that need to be underlined. The first one is what Bourdieu (1986, p. 69) called the “biographical illusion”, the fact that:

...the autobiographical narrative takes its inspiration, at least partly, from a concern to give sense, to give reasons, to give both retrospective and prospective logic, a consistence and consistency, by establishing intelligible relationships such as the one from effect to final cause, or between successive states, thus constituted in steps of an unavoidable development.

One of the main pitfalls of life-stories is that they distort reality by adding predetermination, for example by focalising on series of events that would necessarily lead to the political commitment of the exile activists studied. It is important therefore to overcome the danger of determinism in political engagement. In the same vein, one should raise the question of the imposition of certain topics on the interviewee: I am aware of the fact that interviews are “prompted archives”, sometimes less linked to the spontaneity of the actors than to the discursive *mise-en-scène* of their life-stories (Camau and Geisser, 2004, p. 524). That is why I preferred to draw on themes or guidelines rather than rigid questions to understand my interviewees’ political trajectories.

Another issue regarding life-stories, and indeed interviews more generally, is the fact that oral testimonies rely on a form of “reconstructed subjectivity” (ibid, p. 527) in the sense that the interviewees reconstitute their past in the light of today’s realities, supporting their future trajectory according to what will give them the greatest form of legitimacy. In post-revolutionary Tunisia, this is even more acute, as several former exiles now have important political positions in Tunisia and a number of actors have to justify themselves permanently from their past and their potential support to the former benalst regime. Thus, the fact that actors re-told and reconstructed their activist trajectories in the wake of the revolution had to be critically taken into account in the analysis of the interviews, ultimately becoming a central part of the research project itself.

This was even more the case as I was interviewing activists. While some seemed to be used to narrating their activist trajectories, I tried to overcome this by meeting with them several times to approach questions from a new angle, as well as conducting interviews with people less accustomed to being interviewed and with activists who had left their political organisations and were happy to critically discuss the internal workings of activism in terms of their respective organisations. However, the “routinisation” of the narrativisation was the exception rather than the rule, and I found that one should note the emotions that could be triggered by the process of re-telling the past. This was more specifically striking for children of exiles as well as rank-and-file activists, especially when recounting the revolution and their first return to Tunisia. I was also regularly told that my interviews had inspired some interviewees to write about their own political and exile experiences.

All in all, I had to remain aware of a number of caveats inherent in the process of conducting interviews, which I tried to overcome by cross-referencing with archival work, to which I now turn.

### **3. Archival work**

As well as important work on interviews, this thesis has relied greatly on archival work. This took place at different levels. At the individual level, a number of activists sent personal documents, articles, communiqués and internal documentation concerning their associations or political parties following interviews, sometimes at my request, sometimes on their own initiative (sent by email or by post). It was often people who had left political organisations and were in strong disagreement with them who seemed more eager to send me such documents, which led me to analyse them with a particularly critical eye, even though they represented an important source of information. Following a telephone interview with one of the founders of Tunisnews, one of the most important online websites of the opposition under Ben Ali that relayed all initiatives, petitions and communiqués (see Chapter 3), I was given the opportunity to gain access to a large number of online archives. I refer to those as “Tunisnews archives” in the thesis.

It was also at the level of the organisations themselves (associations and political parties) that I gained access to valuable resources: leaflets, internal communications and other published or unpublished documents were all useful in this respect. However, there is a reflection on the condition of production of archives that must be underlined here. On the leftist side, the archives of the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives* (Federation of Tunisians for a citizenship between two shores, FTCT) as well as some documents belonging to the *Association des Tunisiens en France* (Association of Tunisians in France, ATF) were classified by the *Génériques* association, whose task is to maintain the memory of immigrant associations.<sup>18</sup> It recently transferred those documents to the French National Archives on the site of Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (in the following footnotes referred to as FNA-P), where I spent a few weeks. Simone Lellouche and Ahmed Othmani, two main opponents of the Bourguibist regime, transferred 80 boxes of archives to *Génériques*, which were later transferred to the *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine* (BDIC) at the University of Nanterre (Paris). This specialised, among other things, in the political struggles of immigrants in France and in Europe, and could have been useful in gaining a better understanding more particularly of leftist oppositional movements up to the 1980s as well as the repression from afar. However, for reasons of time I spent less effort exploiting those resources preserved by the BDIC because they did not directly touch on the period my thesis explores.

When it comes to the Tunisian Islamist movement in France, it was striking to see a much less organised access to their archives: the leaders are just now starting to conduct archival classification. This can be linked to time issues – the party was an underground movement up to the 2011 revolution and then suddenly became a governing force – but also to a different accumulation of symbolic and social capital in comparison to the leftists, with less access to French allies or to associations such as *Génériques* due to their Islamist identification as well as other circles of socialisation.<sup>19</sup> This is a central argument I will develop in Chapter 3. I was faced with

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<sup>18</sup> For *Génériques*'s website: <http://www.generiques.org/>, accessed 15 March 2015.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to note that the association *Génériques*, created in 1987, was co-created by and presided over from 1989 to 2009 by Saïd Bouziri: of Tunisian origin, he was a leading figure for leftist immigrant politics in France (Abdallah, 2010).

more difficult access to Ennahda archives, which might be explained by the fact that some documents might compromise Ennahda's narrative of a mere legalist movement at a period when its political strategy was to deploy a great deal of effort towards legitimising its positioning as an "actor like any other".<sup>20</sup> However, individual activists did send me, or showed me during interviews, pictures of demonstrations, communiqués, founding texts, etc. I refer to those documents as "Ennahda personal archives" in the thesis.

Finally, when it comes to the Tunisian party-state, my approach to accessing the corpus of documents deserves more justification here. I had the good fortune to come across different documents from the RCD thanks to a journalist for the French newspaper *Mediapart*, who worked on the topic of the occupation of the Parisian RCD headquarters, located in Botzaris (Magnaudeix, 2011). Following a number of articles addressing the question of the "stolen archives" of the authoritarian regime,<sup>21</sup> access to those documents raised both ethical issues and excitement in finding a nugget of information on this opaque political party, especially as so many myths surrounded the "Botzaris archives".<sup>22</sup> Once the disappointment – when I discovered that I was mainly in possession of a long listing of names of activists as well as minutes of social and cultural activities – had been overcome, those precious documents helped me refine my argument on the power of the RCD: Chapter 2 shows how the power of the Tunisian party-state abroad was not only coercive but also centred on control through social and cultural activities. I refer to these archives in the thesis as "RCD personal archives". I was also lucky enough to access RCD documents during my stay as a visiting fellow in Sciences Po under the supervision of

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, in the context of its 2016 Congress Ennahda wrote in a public statement that "from 2011 up to the revolution of freedom and dignity, the action of the movement inscribed itself in the peaceful struggle against dictatorship. Despite the constant pressures it had to endure from the former regime that practiced the politics of repression and persecution, the movement managed to avoid violence and instead opted for civil and peaceful methods, and clung to civil principles and reformist approaches". This document was produced to mark the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of 2016, Ennahda personal archives.

<sup>21</sup> In 2011, following the occupation of the RCD headquarters by Tunisian migrants from Lampedusa, the archives of the Tunisian regime in France constituted a real struggle in the post-revolutionary period, as some of these documents would have been stolen. For more information on what happened to the RCD archives in France (Botzaris) in 2011, see Hached and Ferchichi, 2014, pp. 54-55; Grira, 2011; Tesquet, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Some were quite creative, with for instance the description of a room for torturing opponents in the basement of the 36 rue Botzaris (Grira, 2011).

Béatrice Hibou, who kindly allowed me to access her personal archives. While working in Tunisia in the 1990s and 2000s, she had the presence of mind to print a number of documents from the RCD website, which is no longer available. This was of great help in complementing my knowledge of the structure of the RCD. In the thesis I refer to this body of documents as “Béatrice Hibou’s personal archives”.

While I initially intended to conduct archival research in Tunis, I encountered, as I envisaged, great difficulties in accessing the archives of the political police. After an investigation on the access to archives of the contemporary period in post-revolutionary Tunisia, Ben Hamouda (2014) also describes the difficulties faced in accessing certain documents. The opacity of access to archives can be a great way for the state to control the past and shape official histories. In addition, since 2014, many documents relating to Ben Ali’s regime now seem to be in the hands of the IVD (Hached and Ferchichi, 2014; pp. 51-53). However, Ben Hamouda (2014) also points out ways of achieving our goals – notably a good degree of tenacity and good contacts. Although I did meet with people in charge of foreign ministry archives as well as the director of the Tunisian National Archives at an initial stage, time was unfortunately not on my side in Tunisia in terms of accessing documents that could otherwise have supplemented my other sources.

I also assembled French official documents, such as intelligence service reports, mainly from the French Ministry of the Interior, which I collected from the French National Archives in the Pierrefitte-sur-Seine site.<sup>23</sup> Here again, it required a certain degree of tenacity as many documents were under the “twenty-five years” or “fifty years” period of incommunicability, and therefore required many applications to gain access to. However, even partial access was rewarding in understanding aspects of the French conception of Tunisian exiles, their surveillance and their relationships with Bourguiba and Ben Ali’s regimes. A more systematised access to those documents will be possible in about twenty years from now.

Finally, grey literature, such as reports from Amnesty International, proved useful for the 1990s, as well as access to French newspapers (mainly *Le Monde*) and Tunisian

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<sup>23</sup> As explained, I refer to this corpus of documents as FNA-P in the thesis.

blogs (mainly *Réveil Tunisien*, *Tunezine*, *Nawaat*) that could complement my knowledge of Tunisian activism in France in the 1990s.

## **Thesis outline**

My thesis is broken down into five main chapters, each taking on various themes pertaining to the subject of Tunisian activism from afar. Chapter 1 draws the boundaries of the trans-state space of mobilisation. In other words, it delineates the theoretical and empirical background to that space. The theoretical definition is followed by the delimitation of its time and place as well as the genealogies of its key actors. Once this conceptualisation and framework have been clarified, Chapter 2 sets the scene further by examining how both host and home states should be considered in interaction in the ways in which they shaped the possibilities of action in the trans-state space of mobilisation. By delving into the Tunisian system of control from afar, conceptualised as the politics of encadrement, I demonstrate on one hand the importance of taking into account extra-territorial practices of homeland repression characterised by a dialectic of social, economic and cultural assistance and surveillance. On the other hand, I explore how the French authorities managed the different groupings, from a diplomatic approach towards the RCD to a securitised approach towards the Islamists, and a more general indifference to the leftist movements.

Chapter 3 and 4 scrutinise the politics in each field of action. Chapter 3 focuses on the field of homeland politics. It puts a particular emphasis on the different themes and cleavages that animated that field throughout the Ben Ali regime. It investigates the modalities, frames and repertoires of action of activists fighting or supporting the regime, analyses the meaning of the turn to human rights and the building of coalitions for oppositional actors, as well as their internal structuring and circles of socialisation. Chapter 4, on the other hand, focuses on the field of immigrant politics and its articulation with the field of homeland politics. It examines the specific logics of that field, the lines of demarcation between the actors, and its progressive autonomy. It looks at how the various constellations of actors competed within sites



of action that were as much related to questions of Islam in France as they were to the conditions of immigrants. However, it also explores the ways in which the field of immigrant politics overlaps with the field of homeland politics, offering the potentiality to reconvert activist capital.

Drawing on the previous chapters, the final chapter (Chapter 5) addresses the evolution of the trans-state space of mobilisation after the 2011 revolution. The entrance of new actors and the construction of new parameters, as well as the possibility of returning to Tunisia for a number of exile activists, all appear to move the boundaries of the space. The ambivalence of this new situation allows us in turn to reflect further on the previous dynamics of all other factors studied.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Conceptualising and delimiting the trans-state space of mobilisation**

#### **Introduction**

Before starting our exploration of the Tunisian political mobilisation in France under Ben Ali, and thereby digging into the complexities of the political dynamics that were taking place in exile, this chapter aims to establish the theoretical and empirical background to that sphere of political practice. In the thesis that follows, I conceptualise this as the trans-state space of mobilisation, and by first delineating the theoretical and pragmatic boundaries of that space I aim to prepare the ground for its subsequent detailed investigation.

This chapter is structured around the following questions: How do we account for political mobilisations taking place from afar? What are the modalities of production of this space and what is specific about this? Who are its key actors and how do they relate to each other?

Whilst it is necessary to theoretically define the roles and contours of Tunisian activists' diverse arenas of action in France, it is essential to make sense of the constellation of actors who resulted from the different waves and the history of migration between Tunisia and France. This chapter aims to show that the production of that space can only be fully understood when situated against the long history of relations between France and Tunisia. The heterogeneity of competing ideological groupings in structuring the space will also be better grasped by bearing in mind the idea of different constellations of actors as nodal landmarks.

As such, this chapter begins by conceptualising the central idea of the trans-state space of mobilisation. The second section then turns to the delimitation of that space in terms of time, place and actors, before the third section traces the genealogy of the different players at work within the space. Once defined, the framework of the trans-state space of Tunisian mobilisation in France under Ben Ali's regime will enable the thesis to develop a distinct set of thematic arguments over subsequent chapters.

## **Section I.**

### **Conceptualising the trans-state space of mobilisation**

My central framework is that the trans-state space of mobilisation is a politicised space, delimited by political opportunities of both host and home states, which ultimately structures differentiated but overlapping fields of action. The distinction between “field” and “space” is essential to this understanding and will be further delineated in this section. While there are other transnational identification factors at stake, I identify two main structuring fields for this central framework, namely homeland and immigrant politics. Against this background, the analytical utility of the trans-state space of mobilisation resides in its opportunity to grasp the universe of Tunisian activism in France under Ben Ali in its relative entirety by encompassing diverse fields of political activities. It enables an understanding of different levels of interaction in a specific environment – namely individual activist trajectories, “meso-level” activities (associations, political parties, coalition movements) – against a background of broader structural constraints and opportunities (home and host states). It also allows us to reflect on the specificity, the effects of continuity and re-composition and numerous cleavages that differentiated and drove these different fields.

Over the following pages, I detail the concept of the trans-state space of mobilisation as a heuristic device that helps us understand political activism from afar. This theoretical framework enables an exclusive focus on political mobilisations and on the continuing importance of both home and host states. It is a political space constituted by the actors themselves comprising both a material and a symbolic meaning. It is also an intersectional space: drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of fields allows us to differentiate two main fields (homeland and immigrant) and an activist capital taking a specific form in the migratory context.

## **1. An analytical framework for understanding mobilisations in exile**

Firstly, my definition of the trans-state space of mobilisation is heuristic in that it enables the isolation of political activities within a defined and circumscribed space operating from abroad. Secondly, it stresses the importance of the state in that in-between space I will examine, unlike broader definitions of the transnational.

The necessity to acknowledge the space that transcends national borders in order to avoid “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) or the “territorial trap” (Agnew, 1994), has led to a burgeoning canon of literature and a proliferation of concepts focusing on cross-border phenomena. One such model that aims to capture the links between “here” and “there” (Waldinger, 2015) is the “transnational social space” (Faist, 2000; Pries and Seeliger, 2012). Faist (2004, pp. 3-4) defines this as follows:

by transnational space we mean relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states (...) space here denotes the cultural, economic and political practices of individual and collective actors within territories or place.

Amiriaux (1999, p. 3; 2003) rightly explains that resorting to the notion of transnational space avoids:

...the pitfall of an exclusively bilateral perception and enables us to follow the production of practices in different national environments, their de-territorialisation as a result of migration, and their institutionalisation.

Similarly, the increasingly popular concept of the “transnational social field” (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004), concentrates upon interaction, networks and the fact that migrants are embedded in multi-layered social fields. Social fields are defined as:

a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed (...) [they] are multidimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth that are differentiated in social theory by the terms organization, institution, and social movement (...) transnational social fields connect actors through direct and indirect relations across borders (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1009).

This notion is useful in that it attempts to conceptualise simultaneity whilst reminding us that the key unit of the nation-state should at times be challenged. It therefore

offers an interesting analytical lens through which to examine and analyse the political dynamics that occur across nation-state borders.<sup>24</sup>

However, it does not recognise the specificities of social fields, which are multiple. As Ragazzi (2010, p. 50) rightly notes, the issue with their definition “is that it presupposes only one kind of structuration of the transnational experience”. Instead it seems more adequate to delve into the specificity of each mode of structuration taking place abroad (Dufoix, 2003). More precisely, neither concept explicitly accounts for the political activism of its actors. It seems relevant instead to analytically isolate the dynamics of political activities in exile rather than operating a broader focus on transnational social spaces or fields, thus obscuring the very political stakes of activism from afar. Rather than attempting to encompass all realms of everyday social life, the trans-state space of mobilisation offers a more satisfactory explanation by conceptualising political activities in a more defined and circumscribed space.

In addition to the need to narrow down the unit of analysis, the space I am conceptualising cannot be thought of in transnational terms, but needs to be considered instead as a trans-state experience. It is still important to acknowledge the continuing power of the nation-state, as all *trans*-state phenomena are not necessarily *non*-state phenomena (Dufoix, 2006, p. 122). Tunisian activists based their own form of engagement on their vision of what the Tunisian nation-state, the French nation-state, and others (Palestine for instance) should be. In addition, the presence of the home and host states as powerful actors is central to my study. Chapter 2 will address the power of both states in delineating the possibilities for action within that particular space. Collyer and King (2004, p. 186; 2015) remark in that regard how transnational literature is often written “against or beyond the state,” while the significance of the state in producing the transnational space should be highlighted. Similarly, when looking at the conditions of Algerian immigrant life in France, Silverstein (2004, p. 8) argues that “it would be premature to declare the end of the nation-state as the hegemonic form of global political sovereignty.” Instead,

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<sup>24</sup> See also Basch et al (1994) for an influential perspective that transnationalism can offer in this respect.

Silverstein promotes the concept of “transpolitics” to enable the understanding of Algerian subjectivity in France. As such, the state focus should be emphasised, as it is an explanatory factor which trans-state space terminology allows to come to the fore.

## **2. Politicising and materialising the space**

The concept of a trans-state space of mobilisation is also a way of highlighting the importance of politicising and materialising this space – in other words going beyond a mere immaterial or metaphorical view and addressing the political dimension often left out of the aforementioned definitions. Paying particular attention to the fact that actors also help construct the space shifts the focus onto the political activities of activists. The Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation thus comprises both a material sense of the term (all the political practices within it) and a symbolic sense (the meaning that the actors and myself as an observer give to it).

For this, I am indebted to an emerging literature promoted mainly by political geographers who are interested in the spatial dimension of activism and social movements. Although such works are mainly considered within nation-state boundaries, it was useful to take them as a basis to further our understanding of the intersection between space and social movements. Nicholls et al (2013, p. 3) provide a stimulating outlook on “how space plays a constituting role in social movement mobilisation”. More specifically, Nicholls (2009) raises the idea of a “social movement space”. Beyond political geography, and in terms of French political sociology, Mathieu (2007, p. 133) also sets out the concept of a “social movement space”, which he defines as a “relatively autonomous universe of practice and meaning, within which mobilisations are united by relations of interdependence”. In the Tunisian context, Camau and Geisser (2003, p. 264) highlight the formation process of a “more or less autonomous multi-organisational space”.<sup>25</sup> This space is defined:

through a triple dynamic, founded on the socio-cultural homogeneity of its members [a strong feeling of belonging to the intellectual elite], the convergence of frames of action [a shared culture of protest] and an easy integration to the NGOs’ international networks (ibid).

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<sup>25</sup> This resonates with Curtis and Zurcher’s notion of “multi-organisational field” (1973, p. 53), which they define in a broad sense as “the total possible number of organizations with which the focal organization might establish specific linkage”.

Although my definition of the Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation moves closer to a transnationalisation of Camau and Geisser's space, I find their sole focus on opposition movements questionable. Similarly, Dufoix's fruitful concept of "*exopolitie*" (2002, p. 28), which looks more specifically at oppositional political dynamics abroad, "exists only as a space of opposition and struggle against the homeland regime". However, by establishing clear boundaries between allies and enemies of homeland regimes abroad, it does not take pro-regime movements in the study of exile politics into account quite so clearly.

Over and above the specific concept of *exopolitie*, Dufoix's different "axes of research" to understanding the politics of exile (2002) as well as his concept of double presence are very relevant here. He revisits Sayad's notion of double absence to postulate the double presence of the emigrants. In the context of what he terms a "post-Sayadian" era, he considers that an investigation of transnational political engagement is necessary, although this does not mean that the exclusion and isolation Sayad described as double absence is over (Dufoix et al, 2010, p. 27). More generally, following Dufoix (2002, p. 27), it is useful to understand exile politics as a "specific political space that works from abroad, formed by groups occupying specific positions that determine in turn their relations to other exiled political groups".

Østergaard-Nielsen's work (2003, pp. 6-9) looking at transnational political practices stimulates the recognition that mobilisations cannot be fully understood except through a more holistic approach, which she refers to as a transnational perspective. Interesting parallels can be drawn with her work by focusing on different groups of migrants (pro- and anti-regime Kurds and Alevis) from the same country (Turkey) living in the same country (Germany). In the same vein, Grojean and Massicard (2005, p. 12) draw on Mathieu's idea of the "space of social movement" to transnationalise the dynamics in order to compare the mobilisations of Turkish Alevis and Kurds in Europe within the "Turkish transnational space of mobilisation". I can only follow their conclusion that this notion is well adapted to understanding the different trajectories of actors from a same country. They consider this space "not as an objective reality but as a horizon" (ibid, p. 2), in which the actors can then evaluate whichever means of action they wish to choose.

The space thus includes real boundaries as well as symbolic limitations constructed by the actors themselves. This concept allows the analysis of the concrete and multiple and at times dissonant or converging political practices between the groupings and between fields of action. As Combes et al (2016, p. 17) explain, “the space constitutes a result of practices, exchanges and social interactions that are observable in a concrete and identifiable place”. Section II links this concept with the relevance of focusing on France – more specifically Paris – as a concrete and identifiable space of reference study.

### **3. An intersectional space: exploring overlapping fields of action**

It should be noted that this space is intersectional, which constitutes one of its specificities.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the mobilisations this thesis is analysing unfold at the intersection of different fields – hence the need to emphasise “the multivalent and co-implicated spatialities of contentious politics” (Leitner et al, 2008, p. 158). Ragazzi (2010, p. 51) also arrives at the fruitful conclusion which demands that we “conceptualise the transnational in terms of a multiplicity of *transnational fields* (...) occupying a *transnational social space* structured by home and host state.” Due to the need to further distinguish between the space and the different fields that make up that space, as well as a focus on trans-state rather than transnational dynamics, I have developed other definitions of each component. This explains my use of different terminology which, far from being merely cosmetic, enables me to emphasise the trans-state space of mobilisation.

#### **3.1 Defining fields of homeland and immigrant politics**

I argue more specifically that the trans-state space of mobilisation is made up of at least two fields: the fields of homeland and immigrant politics. I follow the definitions of homeland and immigrant politics by Østergaard-Nielsen (2001; 2003a; 2003b),

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<sup>26</sup> For an interesting parallel, see Bereni (2007, p. 28), who shows in her conceptualisation of the “space of the cause of women” that it constitutes an “intersectional space”, which “crosses and encompasses relatively autonomous social spheres that are traditionally analysed in separate manners”.



who provided one of the best attempts to establish a typology of migrants' transnational political practices. She defines "immigrant politics" as:

The political activities that migrants or refugees undertake to better their situation in the receiving country, such as obtaining more political, social and economic rights, fighting discrimination and the like (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003a, p. 762).

In contrast, homeland politics denotes "migrants' and refugees' political activities pertaining to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland" (ibid).<sup>27</sup> In subsequent chapters I will look at the processes of differentiating these fields, although I will also show how they overlap.

There is no space here to develop the scope of field theories further, but it should be acknowledged that a growing body of work has theorised on the diverse ways of assessing that particular concept.<sup>28</sup> In this study it is primarily Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the field that provides the main insights. Bourdieu's theories can arguably be used beyond the attributes he conferred to it, particularly in other historical configurations.<sup>29</sup> I consider Bourdieu's concept of field as a tool box: it is not my plan to undertake *a priori* theory-testing of the field upon the empirical reality I discovered. If the fields described are not as unified and closed as the different fields described by Bourdieu (such as the artistic, religious and political fields) and do not fully correspond to all the criteria,<sup>30</sup> I argue that they still constitute a fruitful analytical device for differentiating the different spheres of action and their main attributes. In fact, the different actors have themselves differentiated and delineated

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<sup>27</sup> Østergaard-Nielsen also suggested that "emigrant politics", "diaspora politics", and "trans-local politics" were subsets of "homeland politics". Although she states that "immigrant political and homeland political claim-making are often inseparable entities in the day-to-day work of Turkish and Kurdish organizations in Germany" (2003, p. 67), she does not provide for an "overview" of the space in which these actions (whether homeland or immigrant politics) take place and does not develop how one can go from one sphere to another.

<sup>28</sup> See Martin (2003) for a critical discussion of the different variants and characteristics of field theories, and Krause (2018) on the variations in field structures.

<sup>29</sup> Many scholars mobilise the concept of space, as they consider that the field necessarily have to be national, insofar as Bourdieu has always based his reflections within such a framework and did not theorise the possibility of the transnational field. However, as Sapiro (2013, p. 71) explains, "nowhere in his work has Pierre Bourdieu said that the fields should necessarily be circumscribed to the perimeters of the nation-state". See also Cohen (2006) who, following Bourdieu's approach, understands the European development as both "a transnational space of national mobilisations" and "a national space of transnational mobilisations".

<sup>30</sup> See below.

their participation in these different fields, albeit not necessarily in those terms. We will notably see how some Tunisian activists highlighted the division of labour between homeland and immigrant fields. French and Tunisian authorities also differentiated, sometimes explicitly, the possibilities of action within each field.

Bourdieu's theory of fields offers a fruitful lens through which to examine the internal structure of each field and of the agents within that field (here, mainly exile activists and their organisations). As was explained in the introduction, a number of scholars have recently demonstrated how Bourdieu's concepts could enrich the literature on social movements (Crossley, 2003; Husu, 2013; Mayrl, 2013).<sup>31</sup> In this respect, Fligstein and McAdam (2011; 2013) are willing to "expand the scope and power" of Bourdieu's field theories by suggesting the concept of "strategic action fields" as a "meso-level social order". Péchu (2001; 2006) even theorised the existence of an "activist field". As Sapiro (2013, p.71) has argued, "the field is an abstract concept that allows the methodological autonomisation of one [sphere] of activity", which in my case are Tunisian political activities in France that were turned towards the homeland, the host country, or beyond. Bourdieu (2013, p. 19) noted himself that:

The definition of the limits of a field is also a bet on the object: we only know it at the end of the research because it is the object of the research in itself.

He also reminds us that "the boundaries of the field can only be determined by an empirical investigation" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 100).

It is difficult to summarise Bourdieu's theory of fields because he alluded to it in many different contexts.<sup>32</sup> However, he offered a broad "definition" in his discussions with Wacquant when he clarified that:

A field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution

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<sup>31</sup> In the domain of migration and diaspora studies, it is not uncommon to find references to Bourdieu's field, but it remains most of the time undefined (for a notable exception, see Ragazzi, 2010). Some of his concepts (such as capital) are used without being contextualised with his other concepts (Ryan et al, 2015). As Bigo (2011, p. 225) notes, "he is sometimes quoted, but the reference tends to be superficial".

<sup>32</sup> Among others, the religious field (Bourdieu, 1971), the political field (Bourdieu, 2000; 1981) and the literary field (Bourdieu, 1991). Also, for a non-exhaustive but well summarised list of the main attributes of Bourdieu's field, as well as a critique, see Lahire, 2003, pp. 24-26.

of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97).

Here, the field designates a universe in which political activities can be deployed and in which strategies adopted are specific to this field and make relational sense. Each field concerns struggles of position in that field, and we understand the position of each agent only in relation to the position of other agents in the field. For Bourdieu, the field is a microcosm included in a broader macrocosm. In his own words:

The social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e. spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are *specific and irreducible* to those that regulate other fields (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97).

Speaking analogically, it could be said that the fields of homeland and immigrant politics are relatively autonomous social microcosms within the broader macrocosm of the social cosmos that represents the trans-state space of mobilisation. More specifically, each field has its own rules and has an internal logic. In other words, each field has a relative autonomy in that it is organised according to its own temporalities, rules and inner principles (such as a specific division of labour, the specific capital of the actors and the originality of the rules of engagement), which in turn influence the actors' practices. In each subsequent chapter, we will see the relative unity of purpose and the different cleavages that structure and animate each field. Chapter 3 will explicitly examine the field of Tunisian homeland politics – the logic of fighting or supporting Ben Ali's regime. Chapter 4 will decipher the logics of the field of Tunisian immigrant politics – the pursuit of bettering their situation in the host country – with immigrant politics conceptualised in a broad sense, linked to questions of French Islam and the conditions of immigrants. The degree of differentiation of each field also has to be linked to different temporal criteria (for instance, periods of quiescence in the homeland field can lead to engagement in the immigrant field), to the constraints of the space (by the French and Tunisian authorities), and to the attributes of activists and trajectories of their organisations.

To understand the various positions of the actors and their interaction, I will show how each actor occupies a differentiated position and circulates differently in each field. This is based on their political label (Islamist, leftist, pro-regime) and on the

trajectories and resources of the activists, such as their supposed reason for migration, refugee status, length of stay, social and activist capital, social class and gender. In fact, differentiating between the field of homeland politics and the field of immigrant politics exposes the type of capital necessary as a prerequisite for entering each field. Indeed, the centrality of the concept of capital cannot be underestimated when looking at Bourdieu's theory of fields, because "the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) varies across the various fields" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98). Between leftists and Islamists, capital is unequally distributed, and one form of capital might be highly recognised in one field but considered irrelevant in another.

More specifically, the possibilities for action in the field of homeland or immigrant politics depend greatly on the mastery of specific competencies and resources which are notably linked to the properties of the actors, and must be mainly related to activists' trajectories and the identity of the movements. In this respect, there exist certain barriers to entry in each field. For instance, I will demonstrate in Chapter 4 that the Islamist identity of Ennahda may act as an invalidation of its symbolic and activist capital, thereby preventing it from engaging in some sectors of the field of immigrant politics. Chapter 5 also shows that within a new configuration such as that provided by the 2011 Tunisian Revolution, high levels of capital in one field can act as low levels or even barriers in another. Bourdieu (1992, p. 107) explained that "people are at once founded and legitimised to enter the field by their possessing a definite configuration of properties". In my case, the fact that Islamists, leftists and pro-regime actors do not have the same properties and "mobilizable social resources" (Anthias, 2007) lead to different rights of entry, and thus to different positions of agents in each field.

### **3.2. Activist capital in the trans-state space of mobilisation**

More precisely, Bourdieu (1986) identified different forms of capital, fundamental ones being cultural, social, economic and symbolic. Under these broad headings a number of authors have attempted to conceptualise further types of capital in order to make sense of their specific contexts and objects of analysis. Baczko et al (2016), for example, in the Syrian civil war context, recently conceptualised "revolutionary

social capital” to “describe the links arising from protest action that persist independently of their initial context”. In the specific context of migration, Erel (2010) talks about a “migration-specific cultural capital” and Ryan et al (2015) discuss “migrant capital”.

Neveu (2013) demonstrates the epistemological weaknesses of this inflationist use of capital with a non-heuristic multiplicity of adjectives appended to the notion. Thus, more than adding an umpteenth specie of capital, this thesis builds on the notion of “activist capital” (*capital militant*), a concept which is increasingly being used in French political sociology, and which is very relevant to understanding activism in the migratory context. Matonti and Poupeau (2004, p. 8) define activist capital as:

incorporated in the form of techniques, dispositions to act, to intervene, or to obey. It covers a whole set of knowledge and techniques that can be mobilised during collective actions and inter- or intra-partisan struggles. However, it is also exportable, convertible to other universes, and thus likely to ease some reconversions.

Looking at the activist capital in the trans-state space of mobilisation allows us to refine our understanding by specifying what resources and activist competences are needed and thus to grasp how activist dispositions accumulated from one (geographical) context or one specific field can evolve in another field. I hypothesise that activist capital “migrates” in two ways: firstly in a geographical sense (from Tunisia to France; and from France to Tunisia or other countries) and secondly between different fields of action (homeland and immigrant fields).

The activist capital in the migratory context is understood here as both the conversion of previous political experiences in another country and the product of the exile situation in France. Indeed one should look at the processes surrounding the accumulation of activist capital during trajectories that often started in Tunisia. For instance, it is striking that the majority of leftist political activists began their political socialisation under the framework of the *Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens* (General Union of Tunisian Students, UGET) in Tunisia. Similarly, most of the Islamist leaders of the movement in exile started their engagement in Islamist movements of the 1970s and the 1980s as heads of different branches at university or in different regions in Tunisia. The French space was then propitious to the realisation of political

dispositions that were forged in Tunisia. However, the political socialisation of Tunisian activists in France also led to the migration of activist capital towards other spheres. This activist capital is convertible from one field to another as the movements under scrutiny traverse different fields. Finally, this research also shows that activist capital is not homogenous; the unequal distribution between different groupings is precisely what leads to different forms of political engagement within the broader space.

### **3.3 Entanglement of the fields of action**

If each field appears to possess a number of specific characteristics, I would also like to emphasise the entanglement of different fields of action. These fields are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily antagonistic. As Bigo (2011, p. 240) explains,

The boundaries of the different fields and their possible entanglement are constantly shaped and reshaped both by internal struggles and external interventions of agents of other related fields; the dynamic of fields is the rule, the stability is the exception.

The fields of homeland and immigrant politics can therefore overlap despite their relative autonomy. In this respect, this thesis will show that the trans-state space of mobilisation enables the reconversion of resources and forms of capital from one field to another (from homeland to immigrant or from immigrant to homeland), and moreover that the porosity of the boundaries of each field is mainly due to the multi-positionality of some of the activists operating between the two fields.

My research therefore aims to reflect further on the nature and articulation of those different fields, which form different arenas of struggle. The conceptualisation of the trans-state space of mobilisation as constituted by different fields permits us to move beyond binary distinctions between homeland and immigrant struggles and instead explore their overlaps, although it is possible to observe progressive differentiation between different fields; distinctions which may continue to make sense to the actors.

Thus, the Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation can be considered as being made up of diverse political fields, animated by opponents and supporters of the Tunisian

regime and geared towards Tunisian, French, or other transnational political struggles. It is a specific political space that does not entirely reproduce Tunisian lines of demarcation but is shaped instead by different dynamics. Tunisian mobilisations in France are not merely the extension of mobilisations happening in the home countries. The overlapping effects of different fields create specific dimensions that will be detailed throughout this research, offering the opportunity to discover and analyse new forms of activism constituted by entangled fields of action. They also enable an exploration of how the trans-state space develops when a decisive rupture occurs, such as the 2011 revolution; this will be examined in Chapter 5. Now that the theoretical boundaries of the space of mobilisation have been clarified, I will turn to its more concrete delimitation.

## **Section II.**

### **Delimiting the trans-state space of Tunisian mobilisation**

#### **1. Time and place**

Although it seems a generalisable idea, common to other national and historical contexts, it should be noted that the trans-state space of mobilisation was first thought of as a historically situated concept concerning France and Tunisia, taking shape under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime. However, it would be hard to grasp this contextualised space without bearing Tunisia's unique position as an ex-French colony in mind and without re-inscribing the struggles in longer historical relationships between the two countries.

##### **1.1 Long-term dynamics**

Silverstein (2004, p. 242) remarked of Algeria that "in yet another postcolonial irony, one could argue that France has become a primary site for conducting Algerian politics." The same could be said of Tunisia. However, the political engagement of Tunisian activists under Ben Ali should be inscribed in the *longue durée*, hence the need to present a larger and more detailed historical and political background to the dynamics under scrutiny in order to make sense of subsequent politics.

Sayad (1999, p. 167) showed how Algerian nationalism was largely born in France and how Algerian migration to France under colonisation was the expression of a form of nationalism which one must therefore necessarily consider as political. Similarly, Tunisian activism started before Tunisian independence and France was an important hotspot for pursuing the anti-colonial struggle. As the French colonial power controlled opponents' political activities, it was paradoxically in France – and most particularly in Paris – that Tunisian activists could operate against colonial rule more freely.

More specifically, from the inter-war period onwards, Tunisian activism in France became conflated with the student movement, which “became a school of political training and broadcasting the national consciousness” (Dhifallah, 2004, pp. 313-314). In this respect, one should stress the crucial role played by the *Association des Etudiants Musulmans Nord Africains* (Association of North African Muslim Students, AEMNA), which was created in Paris in 1927. Ageron (2005) describes the major roles of Tunisians in his detailed study of the association and how a large number of future elites of the Tunisian nationalist movement of the *Destour* and *Néo-Destour*<sup>33</sup> were formed in France: it was a “laboratory in which nationalist leaders and their modes of struggle were prepared” (ibid). Liauzu (1982, p. 157) concurs that it was a political traineeship for the nationalist leaders, especially for the *Néo-Destour*, for which “forming an elite” was the main aim assigned to its Parisian section and to the AEMNA.<sup>34</sup>

After WW2, the role of student activism remained central in fighting colonialism and later opposing Bourguiba's regime once independence had been gained in 1956.<sup>35</sup> In this respect, the founding congress of the *Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens* (General Union of Tunisian Students, UGET), which was organised mainly by Neo-

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<sup>33</sup> The *Néo-Destour* party was founded in 1934, following the split with the *Destour* Party. Bourguiba was one of its leaders. It led the fight for independence against the French before becoming Tunisia's only party under Bourguiba's regime, under the name *Parti Socialiste Destourien* (Destourian Socialist Party, PSD), which in 1988 became the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Constitutional Democratic Rally, RCD) under Ben Ali.

<sup>34</sup> Beyond the role of AEMNA, Liauzu (2009, p. 120) analyses the role of migration in the emergence of a political elite during the colonial period; see also, Liauzu, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> On the socio-history of the UGET and how it acted as an alternative political space, see Elwaer, 2017.



Destourians,<sup>36</sup> was held in 1953 in Paris in the premises of the AEMNA at 115 boulevard Saint-Michel.<sup>37</sup> The Parisian section of UGET reaffirmed its importance after Tunisian independence. While UGET became a “satellite of the single-party” (FTCR, 2014, p. 6), from the 1963 Congress in Le Kef (Tunisia), its French section was one of the few that operated independently of the destourian power. In the 1970s, the division between the two opposed factions – one subordinated to Bourguibist power, the other one in opposition to it – crystallised with the creation of the *Comités de Section Provisoires de l’Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens* (Provisory Section Committees of the UGET, CSP-UGET).<sup>38</sup> The latter were considered by the French authorities to be “by far the most dynamic and well-structured of all Tunisian opposition organisations in France.”<sup>39</sup>

In the 1960s, the *Groupe d’études et d’action socialistes en Tunisie* (Group for Socialist studies and action in Tunisia, GEAST) – better known under the name *Perspectives*, from the title of its publication *Perspectives Tunisiennes pour une vie meilleure* (Tunisian Perspectives for a Better Life) – was the main opposition movement to Bourguiba’s regime. GEAST was created in Paris in 1963, emerging from the student milieu of the French capital. It was opposed to the Bourguibist stranglehold on UGET and became active in Tunisia from 1964. More broadly, Ayari (2009; 2016) shows the richness of Tunisian leftist political life in France during this period (1960s-1970s) and how struggles were often kickstarted by activists based in France.<sup>40</sup>

As the third section of this chapter will show, the main Tunisian leftist federations in France active under Ben Ali stemmed from this history.<sup>41</sup> Thus, some actors within

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<sup>36</sup> The name often used for people belonging to the *Néo-Destour*.

<sup>37</sup> 115 bd Saint Michel was one of the most important spaces of socialisation in the history of immigration in Paris: it was a university restaurant belonging to the AEMNA and most importantly it was a central place of gathering for North African student movements. See figure 6.

<sup>38</sup> After the brief existence of the *Comité d’Action et de Lutte de l’UGET* (CAL-UGET) in 1972-1973, the CSP-UGET came to be considered as a “provisory, democratic and the only representative instance of Tunisian students in Paris”, in opposition to the *Comité de Section de Paris*, which was considered to have been subordinated to the Bourguibist regime. For many documents relative to UGET sections in Paris in the 1970s, see the FTCR archives, notably FNA-P 119AS/47.

<sup>39</sup> FNA-P 19850087/29, “*Note du 2 février 1978*”.

<sup>40</sup> In this respect, one could mention the very active Tunisian Collective of the 26 January 1978, whose different actions marked the Tunisian oppositional scene at this period. It was notably the first common framework of action linking diverse ideological tendencies. See FNA-P 19870623/30 (*dossier 26 Janvier*) and FNA-P 119AS/39 for many original documents on this movement.

<sup>41</sup> Except from the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), which was created in 1934. Cf. below.

the Tunisian trans-state space drew their resources and forged their organisations and networks during this period. However, while it is important to note that political mobilisations do not emerge from nowhere, the space during Ben Ali's rule retains some specificities that deserve their own justification. The intensification of the Tunisian regime's repression, the growing number of exiles, the diversification of ideological groupings and the new modes of action this entailed make it a rich period to study.

## **1.2 The centrality of Paris**

France was not chosen by accident as a site of action. There exists a long history of activism in France, and this cannot be underestimated. To the existence of privileged links based on the history that binds Tunisia and France, other factors should be added such as geographical proximity, the commonality of language (French), the familial links that were forged for a large number of activists (many activists explained that they had families in France linked to migration of Tunisian workers in the 1960s), and host state policies (ease of access to visa).

However, in delineating the precise framework of the trans-state space of mobilisation considered in this thesis, the centrality of Paris should be underlined. Indeed, this study mainly focuses on Paris, although it does mention and compare political activities that took place in other cities. In this respect, Marseille also represents an important site for opposition and displays an interesting contrast to the dynamics of Paris. However, in terms of the delimitation of space, it is more useful to pinpoint the centrality of Paris as a city that provides specific opportunities and sets of mobilisation resources. Following Nicholls et al (2013, p. 12), it could be said that:

Certain places with this networked space are more powerful than others in terms of their material and symbolic power, they become a structuring and driving force (i.e. hub) within the broader social movement network.

Paris is definitely one such place, attracting a great majority of the movements under scrutiny in this thesis. This dimension also has a long-term legacy. Goebel (2015, p. 3) shows how inter-war Paris was an "anti-imperial metropolis", a "vantage point", from which many encounters were enabled: "it was through contacts, networks, and

connectivity that later Third World nationalists dreamed up a post-imperial world order”.

Under Ben Ali the density of the Tunisian community, as well as its activists and different institutions (media, various potential supporters of the cause, French authorities), made Paris a unique breeding ground for activism. The fact that most activists were based in Paris favoured stronger ties between them. I hypothesise that specific encounters between the different groupings also favoured new possibilities of political gathering, as will be seen in Chapter 3, which examines the dynamics of alliances between oppositional groupings. It was this proximity which facilitated contact between organisations sharing overlapping interests. As Nicholls (2009, p. 84) remarks: “when organisations reside within the same location over time, a stable basis exists for repeated collaborations between these groups”.

As the previous section explained, the trans-state space of mobilisation should be understood as a material space, and it is therefore useful to consider specific sites within the city of Paris that played a role in this regard.<sup>42</sup> The area of Belleville-Couronnes in the north-eastern part of the capital is historically “a Tunisian area”, amongst other things, with a large number of North African workers. This area was particularly invested by activists of all types. As Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 will respectively show for the periods under Ben Ali and the post-revolutionary period, a large number of demonstrations took place there. It was also particularly central for leftists during the 1970s, notably with the creation of one of the main leftist associations there.<sup>43</sup> As one of its founders explained:

“At the beginning, it was a group that was working in Paris, and in particular a section the *Goutte d’Or* area [the 18<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*] but mainly in Belleville. It was the place (*lieu*) for Tunisians at that time” (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

It was also significant in the 1990s for Islamists, who enjoyed an important socialisation period with other Islamic groups, especially in Couronnes, rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud (see also Terrel, 1994).

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<sup>42</sup> See figure 6 below.

<sup>43</sup> More on this association below.

## 2. Mapping the actors

When analysing the shape of the borders of the trans-state space, it is necessary to delimit the actors at the same time. This is also linked to a terminology issue and what can be a difficult process of categorisation (Ponty, 1996). Who should be considered as part of the trans-state space of mobilisation and as existing within each field of action?

One could begin by demarcating two different modalities of immigration and emigration: those forced into exile (often referred to as political migration) and those who emigrate by choice (often equated with economic or labour migration). However, this approach of dividing by reasons for migration fixes Tunisian exiles into a condition of exile without accounting for possible new processes, such as new political belongings or processes of disengagement from fields of action. Moreover, it disregards the fact that the reasons for migration are often blurred. I want to avoid the pitfall of defining Tunisian activists in France by intangible nature, be it economic or political (Dufoix, 2000, p. 159; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, p. 3). In fact, it is striking that the Tunisian trans-state space of mobilisation includes actors who stem from diverse trajectories, and not only from activists forced to exile – although they made up the majority. Some of my interviewees came to France to study and only started their political engagement against Ben Ali's regime once they were here. Because of their political activities they can be considered as exiles as they were not allowed to return to Tunisia. In contrast, some were forced from Tunisia into exile but were no longer politically engaged. Political commitment is therefore not necessarily linked to mode of migration.

One fruitful way seems to differentiate between the process of migration and the post-migration experience, as Dufoix (2000; 2002) suggests. Tunisian political activists are not divided any more according to their reasons for departure (political/economic; voluntary/involuntary) but only according to their proximity to political organisations in France. Shain's definition of a political exile seems quite close:

No exiles should be regarded as political unless they participate in exile politics. The reasons for the exiles' status – that is, why they left their country – then

become secondary, or at least they must be held in suspension, while attention shifts to exile activity abroad (Shain, 2005, p. 14).

It is easy to acknowledge the obvious advantage of this perspective. Studies which focus on the reasons for departure tend to render the categories fixed and unchangeable. Focusing instead on activities in the host country towards the home country allows for more dynamism. However, by only taking into account activities towards the homeland, it precludes a large part of the picture this thesis covers, namely immigrant politics and the reciprocal influences it can occasion.

Although I do not want to make the causes of departure the main focus of this study, it is still important to delineate the diversities of the conditions of origin of the activists, which will determine in turn the diversity of their political trajectories. We cannot and should not analyse political activists' trajectories and organisations as if their lives started the day they arrived in France. Sayad (1999, p. 64) remarks that "only the trajectories of émigrés that are fully reconstituted can deliver a complete system of determination [...] of what has led them to their current *point d'aboutissement*." Sayad prioritises two series of variables that he argues should be taken into account: firstly, what he terms "variables of origin" (social characteristics, dispositions, position of the émigrés in their initial grouping and geographical origin); and secondly the "variables of completion" ("*variables d'aboutissement*", the differences that separate the immigrants in France) (ibid). Such differentiation of variables allows us to break free from any homogeneous and undifferentiated vision of the em/immigrants and informs us further on the trans-state space of mobilisation. Throughout his work, Sayad takes the example of Algerian immigration to France during the colonial period and its aftermath, but his words can still be applied to this case-study. He draws a distinction between "ordinary emigrants" or "work emigrants", whose migratory projects and social trajectories before and during emigration diverge from "political emigrants" (Sayad, 1999, pp. 192-194).<sup>44</sup> Distinguishing between those two modalities will be useful in terms of this research (see also Hajjat, 2005, p. 129).

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<sup>44</sup> In the context Sayad wrote about – namely colonisation – he also reminds us that emigration is necessarily "political" in this context and that "political émigrés" are also "work émigrés" (Sayad, 1999, p. 179).

In another line of inquiry, Edward Saïd (2001, pp. 143-44) makes the following distinction, even though he acknowledges that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile:

“Exile” originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider (...) The word “refugee” has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas “exile” carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons (...) Emigrés enjoy an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country (...) but they have not been banished.

Building upon the works of Sayad and Saïd, I came up with the following distinctions: “refugee” designates those who have legal refugee status, while “political activists” or “exile activists” designate those who engage in the fields of homeland or immigrant politics. Such activists may include exiles and expatriates in Saïd’s sense or refugees in the legal sense, as well as children of exile activists who have become politically mobilised around different causes that drive the trans-state of mobilisation.

Beyond individual levels and operations of categorisation, what matters here is to see how the different actors within the space practice their activism differently and how the space is thus structured. In fact within each field, each organisation has its function and position only because of and according to the relations it maintains with other formations. Sayad (1999, p. 174), studying activists of the *Etoile Nord-Africaine* between 1926 and 1929, notes that:

It is thus necessary to reconstitute the totality of the field, or the full range of possibilities for social positions at a given time and in a specific context, in order to understand the position of any one of the elements that constitute the field.

Keeping in mind Brubaker’s critique of the notion of “groups” as homogenising units and substantial entities that are taken for granted (Brubaker, 2004), it seems more heuristic to categorise each group under the banner of different constellations of actors. The different movements under scrutiny do not remain stable over time and are multi-sectorial. The constellations act more like ideal types than fixed limitations: they are landmarks that allow us to visualise who the actors are, and to navigate more easily in this space. Each constellation of actors is defined by a shared political

identity and identification, by which the actors can recognise who belongs to the constellation and how it acts in the two main homeland and immigrant fields.<sup>45</sup>

### **Section III.**

#### **The players in the space: towards a genealogy of actors**

This section not only covers the identification of the diverse structures and the redrawing of the genealogies and characteristics of each constellation of actors, but also concerns the understanding of the different functions of their respective organisations. Willis (2002a, p. 3) sets up a typology of North African political parties, in which he stresses that the key distinction is between pro-regime and opposition political parties:

Those that are allied to and support the existing power holders; and those that are – to varying degrees – opposed to the existing system and power structures and seek to change them.

Similarly, I make a distinction here between pro-regime and anti-regime constellations of actors, although it is essential to bear in mind that this distinction should never be thought of as indefinitely fixed. In addition, although I focus on Tunisian pro- and anti-regime actors, the role of French authorities should also be emphasised, as their implications in shaping the trans-state space are central, a dimension that will be developed further in the next chapter.

For the Tunisian party-state, the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Constitutional Democratic Rally, RCD), the function and meaning were concentrated upon demonstrating omnipresence; whereas leftist and Islamist opposition movements were torn between the reproduction of Tunisian political dynamics and the necessity to evolve in the French context. Each constellation comprised different sectors through the (re)constitution of political parties, associations, unions, and more ephemeral initiatives. However, the overlap between political parties and associations is a salient feature: the boundaries are strikingly porous between

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<sup>45</sup> This definition bears strong similarity with what Dufoix (2002, p. 181) and Dobry (2009) term “*pôle de structuration*”, however the notion does not translate well into English.

partisan, associative and union political activities. The organisation of Tunisian politics in exile takes a specific turn, particularly in the French environment.<sup>46</sup>

### **1. The pro-regime constellation and the structures of *encadrement***

The pro-regime constellation comprises official state structures and the RCD as a political party because of the fusion between state and party in Tunisia under Ben Ali.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that the RCD was both representative of the state in terms of its administration as well as being Tunisia's one of the only authorised party. When examining the role played by political parties in three North African countries and their fundamental features, Willis (2002b) shows how the RCD stands as an exception insofar as it represents a hegemonic party that is also dominating the state (see also Camau and Geisser, 2003; Braun, 2006). Exploring the blurred distinction between party and state will allow this study to define not only the limits of the RCD but also the boundaries of the Tunisian state in France under various guises.

I will conceptualise this in the following chapter as the politics of *encadrement*, a dual action of social assistance for and repression of the Tunisian community living in France under Ben Ali's regime. When I asked a former consul in Paris, who was also the founder of the *Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure* (Tunisian Agency of Exterior Communication, ATCE) about the institutional organisation of control, he answered: "administratively, it was the Consulate, politically it was the Embassy, and in terms of security, it was the RCD." (Interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015). I will explain the political meaning of this distinction and how complex and blurred the mechanisms had become in the next chapter, but his response is a good reflection of the developed presence of the Tunisian party-state in France through a juxtaposition of structures and an authoritarian division of work.

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<sup>46</sup> In her study of the difference between a political party (the Party of Democratic Revolution) and social movements in Mexico, Combes (2011) also demonstrates how the categories are constructed differently depending on the national context.

<sup>47</sup> This was in continuity with the system created by his predecessor Habib Bourguiba, who established "a large centralised party structure that mirrored and soon fused with parallel structures in the state apparatus" (Willis, 2012, p. 122).



The presence of the Tunisian state in France under Ben Ali was indeed extensive, especially given the comparatively small size of Tunisia as a country. One can see a clear willingness to multiply the structures of encadrement, be they in cultural, social or political realms. For the Tunisian citizen living in France (as well as for the researcher) the differences between all these structures can be perplexing at first.<sup>48</sup> The difficulty of distinguishing between the party and the state beyond its borders, I argue, was shaped deliberately by Ben Ali's regime to show the omnipresence of the regime and to avoid one structure gaining power over the other. The fragmentation of encadrement was useful in sustaining Ben Ali's power; it ensured that no administrative corps amassed enough power to threaten the regime.

The main organisation that dealt with Tunisians living in France was the *Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger* (Office of Tunisians Abroad, OTE), which was established in 1988.<sup>49</sup> It had a double anchorage in both Tunisia and in France. Although officially independent from the consulates, in practice the OTE was attached to them until the mid-1990s, depending as it did upon the Ministry of Social Affairs. It then had two other centres that were created outside the consulates.<sup>50</sup> We will see later how useful this detachment was for associations that did not want to appear too closely related to the RCD. Beyond the OTE, Tunisia's consular network in France was strikingly very dense and active, in the wake of structures put in place under Bourguiba.<sup>51</sup> In 1988, an official French report stated that there existed four General Consulates (Paris, Lyon, Marseille and Nice) and eight secondary Consulates (Bobigny, Nanterre, Grenoble, Lille, Rouen, Strasbourg, Toulouse and Nantes).<sup>52</sup> These two different structures were related to the state and its administration, although the differences between administrative and political spheres were not clear-cut. We can examine the political presence of the party itself in France in order to understand the pro-regime

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<sup>48</sup> See Figure 1 for newcomers to the RCD's machinery, in order to assist with orientation in all these different structures.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on state institutions working abroad under Bourguiba, see Brand, 2006, pp. 92-113.

<sup>50</sup> Rue de Rome in Paris and in Aubervilliers.

<sup>51</sup> Simon (1979, p. 234) noted that the Tunisian consular network was one of the densest in France in relation to the number of Tunisian nationals in France.

<sup>52</sup> FNA-P 19920417.

constellation further, as well as the various forms of collusion between the structures of the state, the party and the nebula of associations close to the RCD.

In order to circumvent the French legislation that forbids foreign political parties to formally exist in France,<sup>53</sup> the RCD created an association called the *Rassemblement des Tunisiens de France* (Rally of Tunisians in France, RTF). However, as a RCD activist notes, the double designation continued:

“For the RCD, it was the “comité de Coordination Paris”, and in France it was the RTF. (...) there was an internal designation, and for the outside, it was called the RTF. And I guess the French authorities were aware of this, but they tolerated the situation.” (Interview with Moncef A.\*, Tunis, 22 October 2016).

The RTF could be considered as a continuance of the first sets of institutions that had been opened under the Bourguiba regime to deal with Tunisians in France, the *Amicales des Travailleurs Tunisiens en France* (Friendship societies), which were in fact “all-but-official extensions of the *Parti Socialiste Destourien*” (Brand, 2006, p. 92), the ancestor of the RCD. The first of such institutions were opened in Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Nice between 1956 and 1960 in order to control Tunisian residents abroad (Simon, 1979, pp. 236-37).

However, compared to Bourguiba’s regime, a very well organised quartering of RCD cells marked the presence of the Tunisian state in France under Ben Ali. What is most striking was the reproduction of the structure that existed in Tunisia. The leadership of the RCD was referred to as the “coordination committee”, and its headquarters – which quickly came to symbolise the Tunisian regime in France – were located at 36 rue Botzaris, in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, which was officially the socio-cultural centre of the Embassy. As such it was very common to hear people evoking the RCD using the word “Botzaris”. The first level coordination of all the European cells based in Botzaris was monitored directly by the Tunisian president, and personnel were “sent through a subterfuge used by the RCD: they were usually sent through the OTE” (interview with Amine N.\*, Tunis, 13 July 2016), under diplomatic passports. The intermediary level was made up of federations. As of 2005, according

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<sup>53</sup> This important constraint will be detailed and analysed further in the next chapter.

to figures that used to be available on the RCD website (which no longer exists),<sup>54</sup> there were 21 RCD federations in France, almost a third of which were based in the Ile-de-France.<sup>55</sup> The tertiary and final level comprised “cells” or sections. Each federation had between ten and twenty-six sections. In such a well-organised structure, the centrality of France was underlined. The fact that France was considered as a “governorate” is interesting. RCD federations did exist in other countries but a simple glance at numbers shows that France received most of the attention of the Tunisian regime.<sup>56</sup>

Each RCD cell appeared well organised, with its own secretary general, several assistant secretary generals appointed by the political bureau, federation secretaries, treasurers, head of youth, RCD activist representatives and more. However, it is difficult to decipher if this was merely a façade or if it represented concrete, existing realities. As a RCD activist told me:

“The minimum conditions for the creation of an association, an RCD cell, was to have fifty members. So of course these people had new members every year, even though [it was] the local clan leader who knew all his cousins who came from the same town where he would register them. It was usually a bit like that; if you look at members of the association, all the last names that are the same.” (Interview with Yassine F. \*, Paris, 21 December 2015).

As for the activists themselves, the number of adherents is undoubtedly open to question. The same RCD member stated that there were between “60,000 and 70,000” but immediately added that “the issue is actually knowing whether these memberships were real or not” (ibid).

Beyond this, the pro-regime constellation comprises a large number of associations organically linked to the RCD. Acting as showcases and intermediaries for the RCD, and “benefiting directly from [its] infrastructures, resources and networks” (Bouzidi,

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<sup>54</sup> Personal archives, Béatrice Hibou, “*contacts à l’extérieur, rassemblement des tunisiens à l’étranger*”, accessed 18 January 2005 on [www.rcd.tn](http://www.rcd.tn).

<sup>55</sup> 7 federations in Ile-de-France: Paris I (16 sections); Paris II (10 sections); Paris III (26 sections); Bobigny; Nanterre; Seine et Marne; Val de Marne. The biggest after Paris were: Lyon (37 cells); Marseille (22 cells); Nice (16 cells); Toulon (15 cells); Grenoble (14 cells); Personal archives, Béatrice Hibou.

<sup>56</sup> Germany (3 federations, 46 cells); Italy (5 federations; 88 cells); Belgium (1 federation, 12 cells); Netherlands (1 federation, 6 cells); Austria (1 federation, 6 cells); Canada (2 cells); Switzerland (3 cells); Great Britain (1 cell); Mauritania (1 cell); Spain (1 cell).

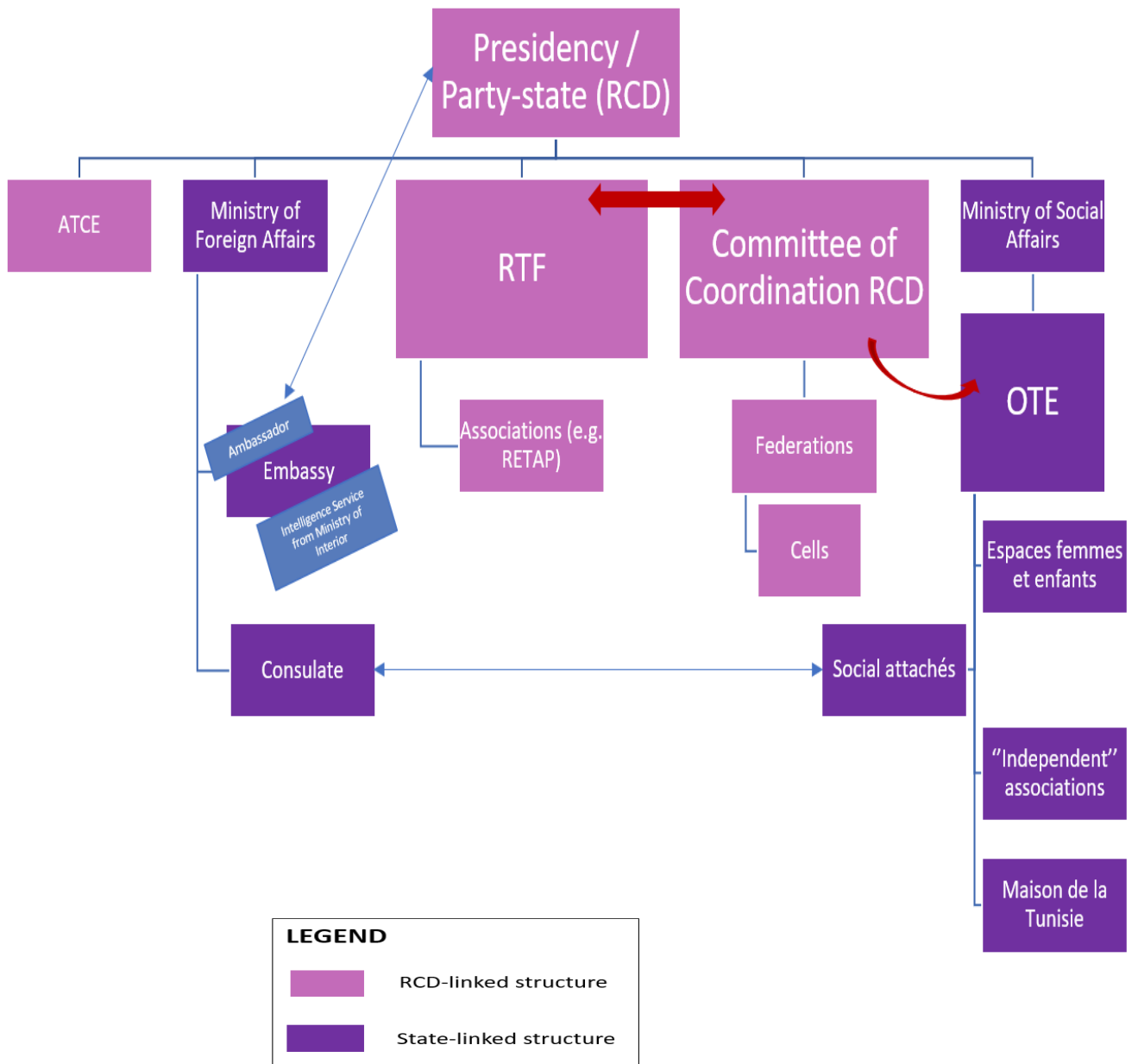
2011), this nebula of associations allowed the RCD to focus its attention on different audiences. The RTF managed an impressive number of associations all over France – and more specifically in Paris – which covered all domains. Without being exhaustive, it would be easy to list more than 200 associations.<sup>57</sup> In some of its internal documents, the RCD classified them as follows: cultural associations, new generation associations (mainly student associations), associations of friendship, associations of investment (taxis, shopkeepers and so forth), sports associations, women's associations, professional associations, social associations and associations of various skills. According to one of its members, “the RCD considered these associations as its satellites.” (Interview with Moncef A.\*, Tunis, 22 October 2016). Most of the associations domiciled with the RTF, but those that did not want to be officially affiliated with the RCD were often domiciled in Aubervilliers, in the areas settled by the OTE, or they had their own premises.

Thus defined, this specific setting of the RCD, building on undifferentiated borders with the Tunisian state, helps us understand a large part of the trans-state space of mobilisation that will be examined over the following chapters.

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<sup>57</sup> RCD personal archives.

**Figure 1: Pro-regime constellation and the party-state's encadrement**



**Source:** Author's fieldwork

## **2. Defining and locating Tunisian opposition constellations of actors under Ben Ali**

The trans-state space of mobilisation is also constituted by oppositional movements. To be more precise, both the French legislation and the Tunisian hegemonic party-state system forced greater interaction between political parties and movements, and there was a confusion between associations and political parties. On one hand, as will be explored more deeply in Chapter 2, French legislation did not allow foreign political parties, which led the activists to create associations as a legal framework under which to operate. On the other, Tunisia's political system left very few spaces for other political parties to exist, which often led them to operate outside the country's legal system, framed as "movements" or "associations" (Camau and Geisser, 2003; Willis, 2002a; 2002b; 2012).<sup>58</sup> The distinction between legal and extra-legal parties will also be discussed below.

I divide the following section into headings representing "leftists", "Islamists" and "trans-ideological" constellations of actors. However, this is not straightforward, and needs to be justified further. I argue that this division acts more like an axiological difference than a rigid boundary. Islamists and leftists are not bounded groups; they each interact in a specific space, the rules of which will be scrutinised throughout this research. Defining these constellations is in fact a process of demarcation operated by the actors themselves in order to legitimise their actions, de-legitimise opponents and distinguish themselves within each field. The competing political identities and identifications make sense to them, and is used to define the contours of the diverse groupings. In this respect, when I asked activists to describe a cartography of the space, it was striking to see the reactivation of the cleavage between "Islamist" and "leftist", albeit not necessarily in those terms. When it comes to the main Islamist movement under scrutiny, Ennahda, we can observe an external identification as

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<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Camau and Geisser (2003, pp. 227-65) show the ambivalent functioning mode of the diverse political parties in Tunisia under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, with a willingness for oppositional parties to be detached from the partisan frame of reference that reminds them too much of the "party-state" (PSD and then RCD). Opposition often used the term "movement", and there were some confusions between associative and partisan functions.

“Islamists”<sup>59</sup> by other actors (the Tunisian state, the French state and competing activist groups) but there is also an internal appropriation of the label at stake.<sup>60</sup> It is thus appropriate to make use of this categorisation. When it comes to the nebula of associations and political parties stemming in a broad sense from “the left”, different terms such as “left-wing milieu”, “modernist” or “democratic” “left-wing political family” were used. As the words “democrat” and “modernist” are subjective competing concepts that express a symbolic struggle of legitimacy more than a heuristic tool, I prefer to opt for the term “leftist”, but not in a pejorative way. It is a useful generic term that allows this study to encompass many diverse groups which have a similar historical origin.<sup>61</sup>

## **2.1. The Islamist constellation: exile and organisation of Ennahda and affiliated movements in France**

The Islamist constellation was essentially constituted by three different stages of Islamist exile to France, which corresponded to three main waves of repression faced in Tunisia by Ennahda and its ancestor the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (Movement of the Islamic Tendency, MTI).<sup>62</sup> However, it must be pointed out that Ennahda did not have a monopoly on the Islamist presence in France: among others, there were movements such as the *Jama'at al-Tabligh*<sup>63</sup> or the *Front Islamiste Tunisien* (Islamist Tunisian Front) created in the first half of the 1990s – although that was mainly based in London. Those movements were not active in opposition to the Tunisian regime, and as Ennahda was by far the most organised and largest Tunisian Islamist movement, I associate the Islamist constellation mainly with it as well as secondary related groupings.

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<sup>59</sup> Islamism refers here to “the activities of organisations and movements that mobilise and agitate in the political sphere while deploying signs and symbols from Islamic traditions” (Ismail, 2006, p. 2).

<sup>60</sup> However, it should be said that following its major Congress in 2016, Ennahda did not seek to be defined as “Islamist”. Instead it described itself as a “Muslim Democrat” party. Despite the logic of power and of differentiation in post-revolutionary Tunisia, I have chosen to keep the term “Islamist” to define those political activities taking place under Ben Ali’s regime.

<sup>61</sup> Similarly, I do not find “radical left” or “extreme left” useful definition as they offer no explanations of what is “radical”. More importantly in my case, the issue of “(non-)radicality” and rupture is a structuring line of opposition between movements, as will be addressed in more details in Chapter 3.

<sup>62</sup> For the history and evolution of the MTI/Ennahda, see Camau and Geisser, 2003, pp. 267-313; Burgat, 2008; Wolf, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> For more information on the *tabligh* movement in France, see Kepel, 1991, pp. 177-209.

It is possible to distinguish the existence of at least two different political generations, constituted by two different waves of exiles under Bourguiba and one further main wave under Ben Ali. There was also a third generation constituted by the children of Nahdawi exiles. The idea of generations is not understood in this study in the demographic sense of the term, but instead follows work of Mannheim (1990). Rather than focusing on natural data such as age or ageing, he insisted instead on basing assumptions on common historical experience. Even if there is no unity in each political generation in that other parameters should be taken into account which transcend generational factors, such as social class, gender, official status in France, etc., this differentiated marker remains the basis from which to understand the formation of the different political generations who did not experience the same history of repression under Bourguiba or Ben Ali's regime, as will be discussed below.

A few students socialised in *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* (the ancestor of the MTI, which then became Ennahda)<sup>64</sup> were present in France at the end of the 1970s. They marked the very early origins of the main Islamic organisations in France, although the Islamist constellation did not really make its presence felt until 1981, with the first wave of exiles under Bourguiba's regime. The MTI was dismantled following its request for legal validation on June 6, 1981. Shortly afterwards, approximately thirty leaders from two different groups – the student leadership of the MTI at university and the leadership of the MTI – began their exile in France, in some cases after a short period in Algeria. The second wave of exiles corresponds to repression during 1986 and 1987 at the end of Bourguiba's rule (interviews with various leaders of Ennahda, Paris/Tunis, 2015-17).

Under Ben Ali's regime, the harsh repression of 1990-92 against Ennahda led to the third and largest wave of Tunisian Islamist exiles. This represented a second political generation that had come about during the legislative elections of April 1989 in Tunisia, when the MTI, which changed its name to Ennahda, presented independent candidates. Taking advantage of the visibility of these Islamist candidates, the regime

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<sup>64</sup> It was during the 1979 internal congress of the movement that the change in name from *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* to the MTI was adopted. However, it was only officialised in 1981 following the movement's request for legalisation. See Wolf, 2017, pp. 27-48.



used the high number of votes won by Ennahda at the elections as a pretext for a massive wave of repression against the movement from December 1990. The leaders, activists and sympathisers of the movement were imprisoned or fled. Different trajectories emerged, with their provisional destinations being Morocco, Algeria and Libya. While some chose Canada, the UK, Italy, Germany, Belgium or the Gulf states as their final destination, the greater majority of Nahdawi exiles came to France – more specifically Paris. Their exact number is difficult to determine, since their asylum applications are difficult to trace, and some were refused asylum status. However, some interviewees cited roughly one thousand individuals in the Ile-de-France alone, which represents half the number of all Ennahda refugees. Others talked in terms of five hundred families. The preceding waves of the 1980s brought to France the movement's political and intellectual elite – largely students who were single men. In contrast, exiles from the 1990s were sympathisers and leaders of the movement, mostly men, from diversified social backgrounds and who were quickly joined by their families. The difference between the two generations of political exiles was thus also apparent in sociological terms.

From the constitution of the Islamist constellation at the beginning of the 1980s, the division between homeland activism and immigrant politics lay at the heart of the questions asked by the Islamist movement itself, thereby constituting an important element in the structuring of that rather well-defined gathering of groupings. In fact, the duality of activism between what some Ennahda leaders called *al-'Amal al-Qotri* (national work, meaning Tunisian homeland politics) and *al-'Amal al-'Amm* (general activities, meaning political involvement in the organisation of French Islam) was significant.<sup>65</sup>

The “general field” first mainly comprised the *Groupeement Islamique en France* (Islamic group in France, GIF), created in 1979, in which MTI leaders played a crucial role. The French intelligence services repeatedly described the GIF in the archives as “emanating from the MTI”<sup>66</sup>, although the reality was more complex. It was not a

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<sup>65</sup> This terminology is borrowed from the organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, see Vannetzel, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> FNA-P 19920417/15, “*Affaires consulaires*”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Tunisian decision to create the GIF, which gathered activists of different nationalities such as its main guide, Fayçal Mawlawi, who was Lebanese. In addition, not all MTI activists participated in the GIF (Chapter 4). As well as the GIF, the main organisation in which Nahdawi activists were involved was the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (Union of Islamic Organisations of France, UOIF). This umbrella organisation, created in 1983, covers several hundred diverse local Islamic associations and mosques. Chapter 4 will explain in more detail the tensions that were provoked by this dual engagement for some, resulting in the differentiation between the two fields.

When it comes to the representative structures of Islamist homeland politics, it seems relevant to borrow the terms of one of its leaders when he commented that “the political umbilicus of Nahdawi exile is Paris,” (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, April 2016), although Marseille was also a crucial location.<sup>67</sup> The president of the *Majlis al-Shura* mentioned that there were “fifty-four branches of Ennahda abroad, but Paris was the centre of everything.” (Interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015).

As was explained with the case of the RCD in France, the French legislature did not allow Ennahda to exist as a political party on its soil. The associational realm therefore represented an option for it to exist more openly. At the end of the 1980s, the *Comité de Soutien des Victimes de la Répression en Tunisie* (Support Committee to Victims of Repression in Tunisia, CSVRT) was created, which was subsequently replaced by *Solidarité Tunisienne* (Tunisian Solidarity, ST) in 1997. If ST acted as a façade for Ennahda in France, its first preoccupation was humanitarian in the first period (1990-1995): its main aim was to defend political prisoners and to help exiles with their asylum applications. In the 2000s, *Tawasol* (Connection) was then created with a more socio-cultural remit. As one of the leaders of the association explained:

“Names always reflected current circumstances. *Solidarité Tunisienne* was chosen at a time when we were looking for solidarity and we wanted to show solidarity

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<sup>67</sup> One activist based in Marseille explained that: “Marseille is a stopover town, so many leaders visited. We hosted them until they found a way to go to Paris or other cities. It was also a contact point with the port, so the relationship with the interior [Tunisia] was important. It was a pocket (*noyau*) because we were not numerous, but we were still important” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016).

towards each other and towards Tunisians in Tunisia. The name expressed our objective and our priority during that period. Then we came up with *Tawasol*, which stood for unity between Tunisia and France. We wanted to build a bridge between Tunisia and France, so we began a period of construction, strengthening ties with the Tunisian diaspora. That period was also a period of relief: many prisoners were released. We were all abroad, well settled there, we were all granted refugee status. So our priority – even if there was still a lot to do in terms of rights, that’s why *Solidarité Tunisienne* kept working – but as members of the Ennahda group, our priorities evolved towards building connections, bridges with France.” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

In parallel with these associative structures, Ennahda also existed as a political party, though it was not officially declared as such. In 1982 a political bureau was created in Paris, which eventually became the “committee of political affairs and communication” in 1985 (interview with Ahmed Ben Amor, Paris, 19 December 2016). More importantly, during the first internal congress organised in Germany the decision was made in June 1992 in the face of the Ben Ali regime to transfer the political structures of the party abroad due to the impossibility of being a political party in Tunisia or even of remaining an underground movement. About forty leaders elected Rached Ghannouchi as president of the movement and agreed to this historical decision to exile the leadership abroad. The reproduction of the structure is striking. As a member of the political bureau noted:

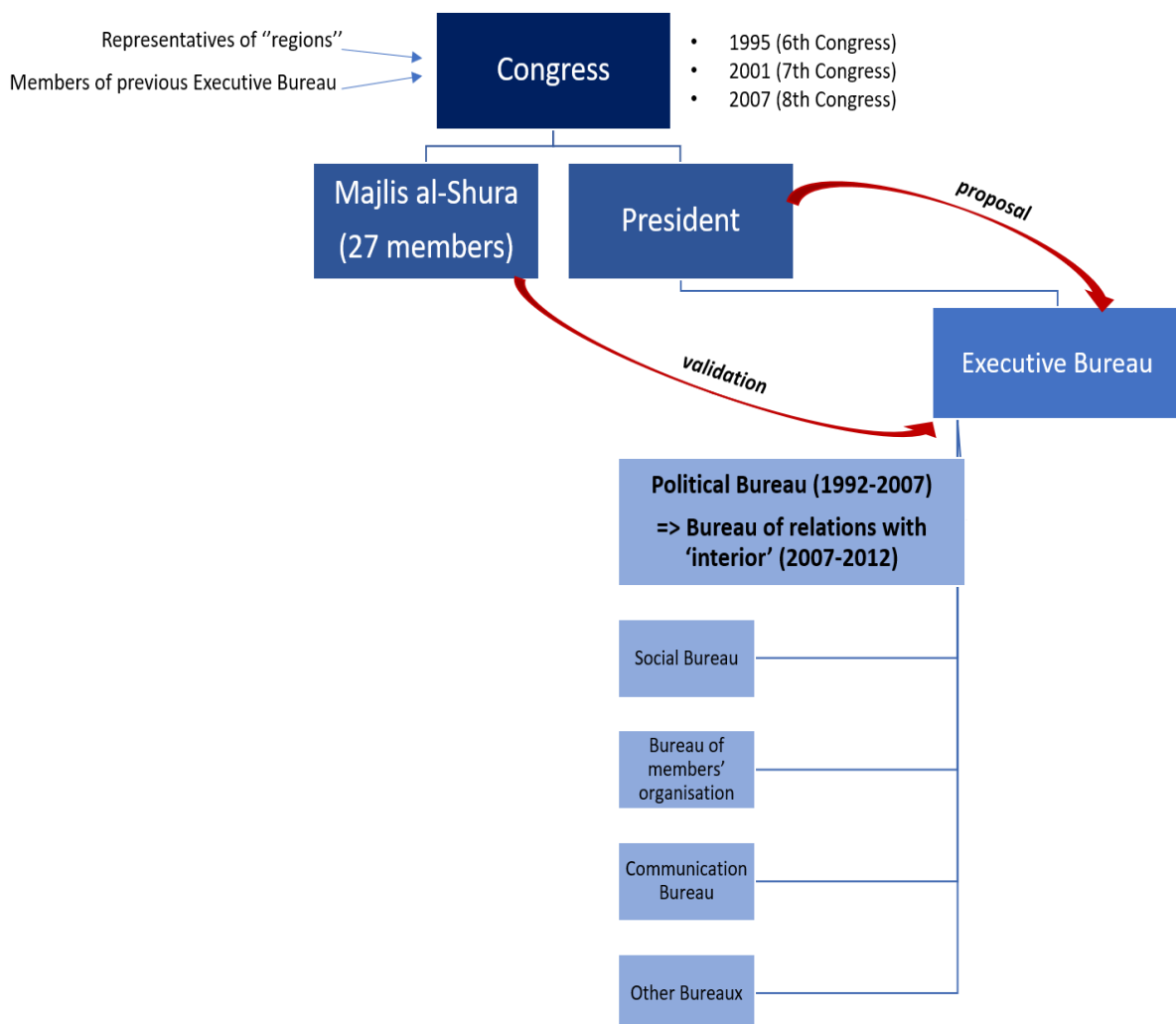
“We cloned the party – the organisational structure of the party inside Tunisia. We cloned it in exile. (...) The apparatus in Tunisia is the same as abroad. Even party membership, commitment to the party, the criteria (to enter); they were all exactly the same.” (Interview with Hamed K. \*, Paris, 3 April 2016).

While the political committee of Ennahda was relocated to Paris, the executive committee of the movement (*direction-bureau exécutif*, which was constituted by all the heads of committees) around Rached Ghannouchi was transferred to London, following the refusal of the French authorities to provide asylum. The *Majlis al-Shura* (consultative council) was spread across Europe. Each leader was responsible for a “case” (*dossier*): among others, there was a head of political affairs, a head of information, a head of member relations, a head of refugee issues, and a manager responsible for maintaining membership.

The reproduction of structures shows a willingness to continue the struggle from abroad in a similar fashion, apart from the creation of a special committee which was in charge of “relations with the interior”, as explained by the head of that committee:

“It was there from the very beginning in 1992. That committee completely changed its focus: from 1992 until about 2004, it was responsible for liaison with the families of political refugees, the human aspect, aid to families etc., collecting data on their circumstances. So there was that, and then maybe collecting some money during Ramadan (...) Later on it changed a little. The situation improved in the country, so there was a change in the structure of this committee. [It] was no longer a humanitarian aid committee, it became a political committee for the situation in Tunisia.” (interview with Ameur Laarayedh, Tunis, 12 July 2016).

**Figure 2: Ennahda’s internal organisation in exile**



**Source:** Author’s fieldwork

During the congress of 2007 the decision was taken to transfer the political committee to Tunisia. The head of the committee explained that he would then become “head of the community in charge with the contact with the ‘interior’” (ibid). All the decisions were thereafter coordinated with Tunis, which had the final say on political decisions, up until the revolution, after which a fusion between the interior and the exterior took place. In this respect, the division that was so often evoked in the interviews between the “interior” (Tunisia) and the “exterior” (France) is interesting to note because it entails a specific way of imagining the spaces for Nahdawi leaders in exile.

In addition, the Islamist presence was apparent from the beginning of the 1990s in the sphere of student union activity. The Islamist affiliated *Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants* (Tunisian General Union of Students, UGTE) had a branch in Paris from 1991, the *Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants en France* (UGTEF). There was no official relationship between Ennahda and the UGTEF, but an overlap in membership soon became outward, although not all its members were affiliated with Ennahda.<sup>68</sup> Following a programme of repression on Tunisian university campuses against UGTE members, the imprisonment of some of its leaders in Tunisia from 1991 and its ban in March-April 1991, a number of students came to Paris. The core of the UGTE was then moved to Paris. Although the main aim of UGTEF was to be active in the student realm on diverse matters that were not always political, the repression and exile of some of its leaders led the UGTE in France to become a central element of opposition. One of its leaders explained:

“So we ended up welcoming the refugees, and became truly involved in politics. From then on it became very political, given the repression from the regime. Meetings were held. We still welcomed a few students but due to how things were now being done, students who weren’t very politically involved could no longer join the UGTE. This was a real danger. That was why I could not return to Tunisia. My passport eventually expired, and then they refused to let me enter.” (Interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2015).

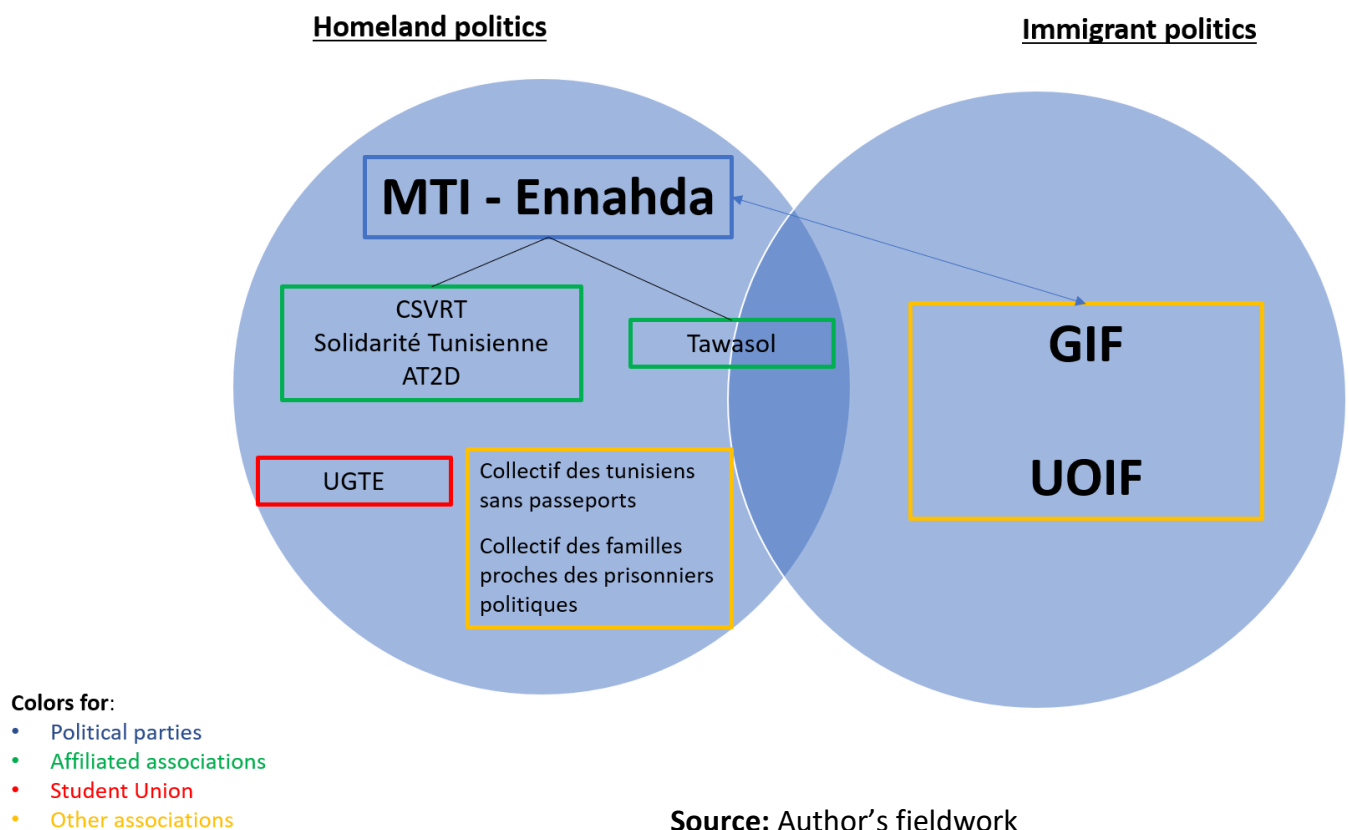
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<sup>68</sup> One of its leaders said that  $\frac{3}{4}$  were Nahdawis and  $\frac{1}{4}$  were not. (Interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2015).

As shown in Habib's case, socialisation within the UGTEF could lead to politicization within the Ennahda movement. Habib became a member of Ennahda in the mid-1990s.

Beyond the associations that represented Ennahda, and beyond its political structures abroad as well as the student unions in France, it is also important to mention initiatives close to the movement that were created by Islamist exiles, which were to play a role in the trans-state space of mobilisation. This was the case with the *Collectif des familles otages en Tunisie* (Collective of hostage families in Tunisia), the *Collectif des tunisiens sans passeports* (Collective of Tunisians without passports) (1997), and the *Collectif des familles proches des prisonniers politiques* (Collective of political prisoners' families) (2004). Nahdawi exiles also became involved, along with other sympathisers of the movement in a number of associations that acted as useful brokers, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

**Figure 3: Tunisian Islamist constellation of actors in France under Ben Ali**



## 2.2 The leftist constellation: exile and organisation of leftist movements in France

While the Islamist movement seemed homogeneous in its structure, the leftists were so diverse that they could be best described as a “nebula”, or a large political family, to use the terminology of the leftist activists themselves. Despite the fact that each association and political party exhibited a different history, it is still useful to consider them under a leftist umbrella in the broader sense, as was explained in the previous section. Under Ben Ali, they mainly differentiated themselves through both their position towards the Tunisian regime (their degree of opposition to it) and their stand against Islamists. The leftist constellation is constituted by political parties and associations which occupy different positions in the trans-state space, sometimes working together and at times working in competition.

Although leftist movements in France under Bourguiba were often the product of waves of exile in the 1960s (from movements such as *Perspectives* and *al-‘Amal al-Tounsi*), leftist movements under Ben Ali were mainly composed of “work emigrants” in Sayad’ sense, or former exiles from the previous period who had remained in France. This is one main difference between them and the Nahdawi activists, who were mostly forced into exile under Ben Ali. This distinction is central, as the difference in status does not produce the same effects in terms of chosen forms of activism, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters. The life-story interviews conducted with the main activists who composed the sphere of the Tunisian leftists in France inspired me to paint a broad sociological portrait of their trajectories. The majority belonged to a common political generation: leftist opponents under Ben Ali were mainly men, who had mostly been politically socialised on university campuses in Tunisia under the framework of the student union UGET, and who came to France either following the repression of the student movement under Bourguiba or to look for jobs in France in the context of the economic crisis in Tunisia under Ben Ali. Of course, there were some notable exceptions to this and Chapter 4 will further delineate differentiated trajectories between leftist activist groupings and political generations.

In terms of organisation, I have already commented that Ennahda strikingly reproduced its structures abroad. However, when it comes to the leftist constellation,

the organisational architecture is slightly different. It is possible to observe the reproduction in France of the political parties that were in place in Tunisia at the beginning of the 1970s, but shortly afterwards a different trajectory can be noted with the creation of diverse associations in the field of human rights and associations that took advantage of their own autonomy to specialise in immigrant politics. However, these organisations remained interlinked, mostly thanks to the multi-positioning of some activists who were members of both associations and political parties.

The history of Tunisian leftist movements in France under Ben Ali took root during the previous period. Under Bourguiba, the reconstruction of the Tunisian partisan scene in France was salient, notably with the existence of the Communist Party's 7th congress, which was created in France in 1980,<sup>69</sup> and the *Mouvement d'Unité Populaire* (Movement of Popular Unity, MUP) created by former Destourian Minister Ahmed Ben Salah in 1973, but which became particularly active in France at the end of the 1970s.<sup>70</sup> Under Ben Ali, some individuals remained active, but their structures had a very limited audience which rarely took action on their behalf. Similarly, a number of small political parties as well as individuals, often former Bourguibists, who were active under Bourguiba disappeared or had marginalised activities.<sup>71</sup> While it is important to mention them in order to keep in mind a richer cartography of leftist activists acting from afar, this study will not examine their limited actions in any great detail.

The leftist constellation also rooted itself in the previous period in the wake of the political legacy left by the *Perspectives/al-'Amal al-Tounsi* movement from which

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<sup>69</sup> The Tunisian Communist Party – 7<sup>th</sup> Congress was born in 1962 in Tunisia out of a schism with the Tunisian Communist Party following a disagreement on what attitude to adopt towards the Tunisian regime. FNA-P 19920417/15, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "*Regards sur la communauté tunisienne en France*", 18 August 1988.

<sup>70</sup> For more on the history of the MUP and its leader Ahmed Ben Salah, see Braun, 2006, pp. 26-28; Toumi, 1989, pp. 106-13.

<sup>71</sup> Such were the cases of Mohamed Mzali and Mohamed Masmoudi, both former Ministers under Bourguiba and who, following their destitution, became dissidents in exile, as well as Ahmed Bennour, former Director of National Security during Bourguiba's regime, at an individual level. Their roles should not be underestimated.



different movements subsequently emerged.<sup>72</sup> In terms of political parties, one could start with the *Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie* (Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia, PCOT). This party was created in January 1986 in Tunisia, although a group of activists in France also participated in its formation. This extra-legal party had a section in Paris comprising exiles and refugees, as well as ordinary emigrants who had come to France to study or work, but who all had previous political engagements in Tunisia. The French section had fewer than ten leaders, but there were a number of sympathisers also present on French soil. The PCOT maintained its existence in Tunisia throughout Ben Ali's regime (interview with Adel Thabet, Paris, 31 January 2018). The Parisian section was part of the more global structure, which is markedly different from the associations that will now be examined in further detail.

Leftist activists were also operating in the associational realm, although those associations were related – if not affiliated in some cases – to Tunisian political parties. The first such association is the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives* (Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship between two Shores, FTCT) which began in February 1974 as the *Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens* (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers, UTIT). Its activists mainly belonged to *al-Shu'la* (the Flame) or *al-'Amel al-Tounsi* (the Tunisian Worker). This was a *de facto* association between 1974 and 1982, before formalising its existence with the French authorities in 1982.<sup>73</sup> It started in Paris but then gathered up different associations around France, becoming a federal association from the end of the 1970s. Under Ben Ali, more specifically in 1994, UTIT changed its name to become the Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship between Two Shores (FTCT)<sup>74</sup>, reflecting a “partial gallicisation of associative engagement” at this point (Abdessamad, 2012, p. 7) as their presence in France was no longer seen as provisional. As its charter described in 1994:

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<sup>72</sup> See Figure 4. One should note that not all activists were heirs of Maoism. Some activists (a tiny minority) came from the Trotskyist group of the 4<sup>th</sup> International (including Olfa Lamoum and Sadri Khiari: interviews, Tunis, 2016-17).

<sup>73</sup> *Journal Officiel*, FNA-P 10 119AS/1, October 1982.

<sup>74</sup> More precisely, the former UTIT divided into two different structures, the main one becoming FTCT and some other activists kept the name and structure UTIT.

The FTCT gathers associations from diverse backgrounds and activities. They have in common a dual geographical reference. The first is French society, which is the permanent country of residence for most of us. But the attachment to the memory of the home country, to its culture and its language, confers a dual feature to our federation. A twofold face (*double visage*) therefore, endowed with one and unique vision and language: for a full citizenship here and there.<sup>75</sup>

This dual reference is central to understanding activism in the two different fields and will be a determining factor in the structuring of the leftist constellation and its modes of action. Such reflections on how to delimit the spheres of action laid at the core of UTIT political preoccupation from the beginning. If the initial aims of the activists were to extend the social and political struggles started in Tunisia in exile, the organisation produced an important founding text called *Autonomy and Belonging*, in which they reflected on where to situate themselves, as they considered themselves both as “workers” and “Tunisian immigrants”. A text produced five years later (in 1979) explained that “it was because of this dual character of immigration (...) that UTIT developed this general principle that will guide all its action”.<sup>76</sup> Their definition of “belonging” (*appartenance*) was that “Tunisian immigrant workers are an integral part of the working class and are part of the class struggles taking place in the country in which they are working” (ibid). But this “belonging” to the working class went hand in hand with the idea of “autonomy”: “the Tunisian immigrant workers consider themselves as integral part of the Tunisian people and participate in the struggle for its social and national emancipation” (ibid). As I will further develop in Chapter 4, they thus considered what I formulate as homeland and immigrant politics as being intrinsically linked.

The *Association des Tunisiens de France* (Association of Tunisians of France, ATF) is the second main leftist federation. It was born in 1982 from different factions of the far left, mainly from the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), and Marxist-nationalist activists from the group *al-Haqiqa* (the Truth), although the activists of the two federations were often described as belonging to the same political family. There was

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<sup>75</sup> Charter of the association, available at:

[http://www.citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=936:charte-de-la-ftcr-pour-une-citoyennete-des-deux-rives&catid=52:histoire-memoire-&Itemid=176](http://www.citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=936:charte-de-la-ftcr-pour-une-citoyennete-des-deux-rives&catid=52:histoire-memoire-&Itemid=176), accessed 16 February 2015.

<sup>76</sup> FNA-P 119AS39, “A propos de l’autonomie et de l’appartenance” in “Qu’est ce que l’UTIT”, May 1979.

also a circulation of activists between the two federations according to the conjunctures and political choices made by the associations,<sup>77</sup> as well as their common actions. One main difference, however, concerns their political relationship with the Islamists. In line with the position of the PCT in Tunisia under Ben Ali, which became *al-Tajdid* (The Renewal) in 1993, the ATF was often reluctant to acknowledge any forms of partnership with Nahdawi exiles in its oppositional stance regarding the authoritarian regime. This crucial question, which will be at the centre of the analysis in Chapter 3, even led to the creation of a new association from the ATF, named ATF-Paris (interview with Tarek Toukabri, Paris, 28 October 2015). The ATF followed a similar trajectory to the FTCT in its renewed aim of activism both in France and Tunisia from the early 1990s. It explained in its documents that from “an association of immigrants” (*association d’immigrés*), it became “an association of immigration” (*association de l’immigration*) (Abdessamad, 2012).<sup>78</sup>

The increasing involvement of these two associations in immigrant politics was paralleled by the emergence in 1996 of the main leftist organisation acting against Ben Ali’s regime, the *Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l’Homme en Tunisie* (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia, CRLDHT). The CRLDHT could be understood as coming from the FTCT, although the CRLDHT was conceived to act as an “interface” made up of various actors (Tunisians, French, North Africans, etc) (CRLDHT, 2016). The FTCT was slowly detaching itself from the Tunisian cause. In the context of the declaration of Barcelona (1995) and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, some leftist activists from the FTCT noted the increasing violation of basic human rights in Tunisia. They appeared willing to create a committee to raise awareness about the situation, particularly at the European level. This was also linked to the fact that Ben Ali’s regime started from the mid-1990s to target different leftist and human rights movements once Ennahda had been eradicated. In this respect, the arrest of one of the main figures of the left, Khemais Chammari, vice-president of the *Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes* (Movement

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<sup>77</sup> For instance, Tarek Ben Hiba was first General Secretary of the ATF and later President of the FTCT.

<sup>78</sup> See also FNA-P 119AS/93, “*Projet d’Orientation pour la 4<sup>e</sup> Assemblée Nationale de l’ATF*”, 2000 ; and Nadia Chaabane, “*Pour une nouvelle approche associative*”, in “*La lettre de l’ATF, 4<sup>e</sup> assemblée générale nationale*”, 17 April 1993.

of Socialist Democrats, MDS), triggered the constitution of the CRLDHT, as the activities of the Committee in the first year of its creation demonstrate.<sup>79</sup>

In this context, it was starting to become dangerous for FTCT activists to mobilise against Ben Ali's regime. Many of them noted persecution when they returned to Tunisia, or the non-renewal of their passports, and as some were not willing to take action against the Ben Ali regime for political reasons, activists of the FTCT created another structure, the CRLDHT. The main founder of the Committee, Kamel Jendoubi, was also the president of the FTCT. The CRLDHT was often referred to as "the big committee" to set it apart from the "small committee" that had been created at the end of the 1990s, the name of which was in fact the *Comité de Soutien aux Luites Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie* (Support Committee to the Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia, CSLCPT). Its members were similar in outlook to the CRLDHT, but were politically in disagreement when it came to the degree of radicalism in their approach towards the regime (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 2016). To end this overview of the leftist constellation, it is necessary to include the existence of activists in the student realm, with the UGET acting as a parallel to the Islamist-leaning UGTE. As we have seen, the UGET was historically a central component of the opposition against Bourguiba. Under Ben Ali, the UGET section Paris 8 and Jussieu universities were particularly active.<sup>80</sup>

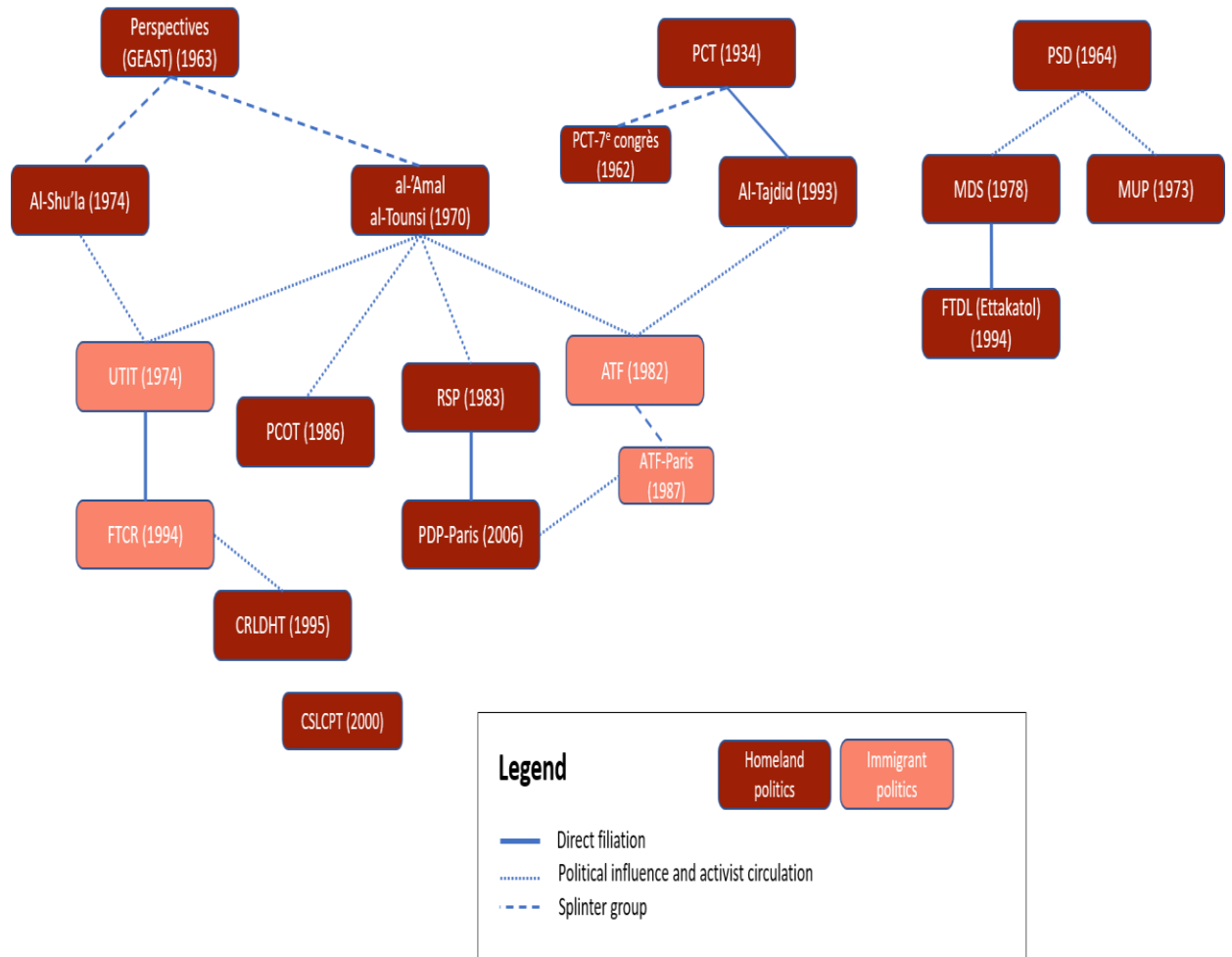
When looking at the organisation of the leftist constellation, it is possible to discern blurred distinctions between associations and political parties, which could not be regulated in the same way as they were in Tunisia, and the myriad of multi-positioned actors whose forms of behaviour and association are nevertheless linked to their positioning towards the regime and towards Islamists. Armed with those distinctions, it will be much easier to understand the dynamics that were at play in the trans-state space of mobilisation.

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<sup>79</sup> Mainly communiqués informing about and offering support to Chammari; see the different communiqués in CRLDHT, 1996.

<sup>80</sup> However, the 18<sup>th</sup> UGET Congress which took place in 1988, 17 years after its beginning in Korba, ended the existence of the provisory sections, and from this point the UGET became less visible in the struggle against Ben Ali's regime.

**Figure 4: Tunisian leftist constellation of actors in France under Ben Ali**



**Sources:** Author's fieldwork

### 2.3 "Trans-ideological" parties: the CPR and the PDP

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Tunisian political space in France witnessed a revival of political parties, demonstrating the evolution and vitality of oppositional politics during this period. However, one should note that these political formations had a longer history, stemming either from the structure of the political party itself (case of the *Parti Démocrate Progressiste*, Progressist Democratic Party, PDP), or from the fact that their founders had a previous activist background in other

domains, as in the case of the *Congrès pour la République* (Congress for the Republic, CPR). The novelty of the situation is that the two parties that emerged during this period collected different ideological tendencies, to the point that they were referred to as “catch-all parties” by one of CPR founders (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 9 September 2016). The two political formations I will now discuss were both relatively small. Despite different historical backgrounds, different workings and scales, the two parties shared a similar conviction of the necessity to provide a “common front” against Ben Ali’s regime, thereby going beyond the leftist-Islamist dichotomy. This leads me to group them together under a banner of “trans-ideological parties”.<sup>81</sup>

The CPR was founded by Moncef Marzouki, a famous Tunisian activist in the field of human rights, in July 2001. Members from different backgrounds gathered around the figure of Marzouki: followers included leftists from the former *Perspectives* movement, independents and former Islamists. The party existed both in Tunisia and in France, where its main section was in Paris, although branches in Aix-Marseille and Briançon also gathered a few activists. The section in Paris was more specifically constituted by a group of friends from a common Islamist political background, former members of, or sympathisers with Ennahda or the UGTE.

That same year, in 2001, the *Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste* (Progressive Socialist Rally, RSP) – a political party created in 1983 and legalised under Ben Ali in 1988 – held a congress in Tunisia at which it decided to change its name to the *Parti Démocrate Progressiste* (Progressive Democratic Party, PDP) to reflect a change in attitude to the regime (Ben Mbarek, p. 410). The PDP Paris started its political life in the mid-2000s. However, while the CPR was born from the political will and trajectory of its leader, Moncef Marzouki, the PDP had a longer history that dated back to the 1970s. Former activists of *al-Haqiqa*, some of whom founded the ATF-Paris, had been involved in the RSP (interview with Tarek Toukabri, Paris, 28 October 2015). The

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<sup>81</sup> Several political parties or movements that were not included in this study could also belong here: the Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms (*Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés*, FDTL, also called Ettakatol) of Mustafa Ben Jafaar, created in 1994 and officially recognised in 2002 by Ben Ali’s regime, is one of them. The party had only a very few activists in France. The above-mentioned MUP also gathered activists from diverse ideological tendencies, and the Nasserist Unionists had a couple of activists based in France. See Figure 5.

Parisian section of the PDP was not created from this political inclination, but rather by members who had a previous activist background, often in leftist structures either back in Tunisia or in France (they were notably active in the above-mentioned *petit comité*). They put forward different reasons for joining the PDP and creating the Parisian section. These included the need to be efficient in the struggle against Ben Ali's regime and the opportunity to join a legal structure that was well-established in Tunisia and which had its own newspaper, *al-Mawqif*, a publication with a wide distribution in Tunisia (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016). One other marked difference was that the PDP was a legal party in Tunisia, which was not the case for the movements discussed so far. Another PDP activist added to those arguments the idea that:

“where the PDP was very interesting is that it offered us a frame of action on Tunisia that was not an exclusive framework, through which we could become involved in other [structures]” (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 2 November 2017).

The PDP and the CPR were parties with broad ideologies that were able to act as mediators, as will be seen in Chapter 3. However, while the PDP included Islamists and stated that one of its main aims was to be a transversal party, some of its members still stressed their sense of belonging to the “leftist family”. In contrast, the CPR was often associated with Islamists, even when its members in Paris were in disagreement with Ennahda. It is important to keep those distinctions in mind in order to fully understand the dynamics that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

**Figure 5: Tunisian opposition party politics**

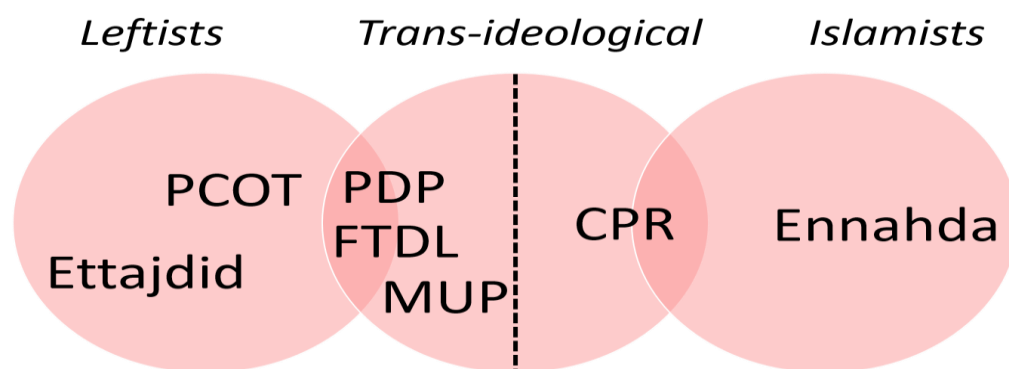
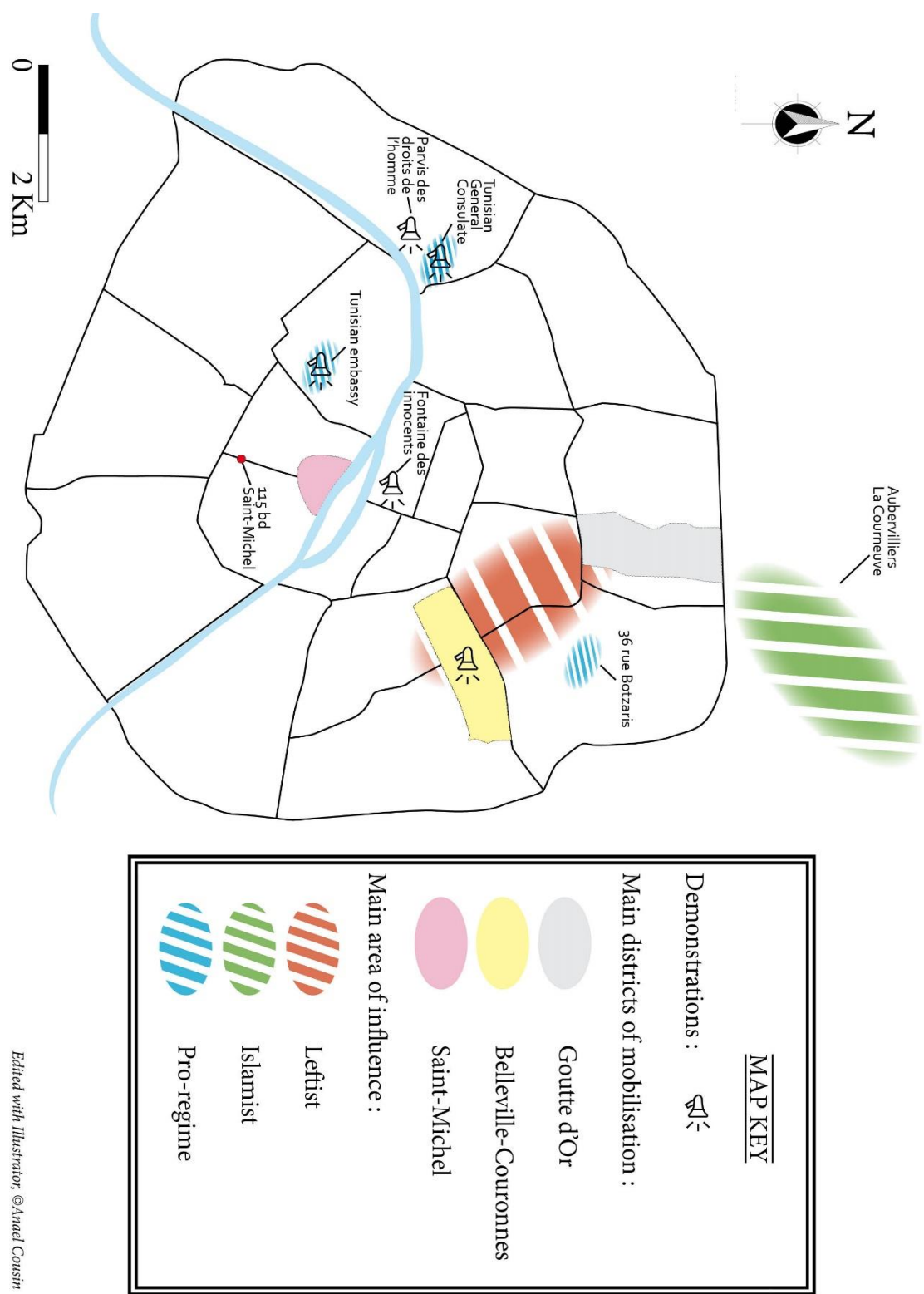


Figure 6: Map of Tunisian activism in Paris under Ben Ali



Edited with Illustrateur, © Anael Cousin



## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that Tunisian activists in France under Ben Ali are better understood as operating in a trans-state space of mobilisation. I have argued that this specific space is a political and relational battleground on which the positions of each actor play a role. It is a material space in that it is delineated by the actors themselves, yet it also entails imaginative boundaries. The importance of both host and home states in structuring the various fields was also underlined, hence the necessity to use a terminology centred on “trans-state” rather than “transnational”. I have also argued that this space is intersectional. More precisely, drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of fields, I have explained that the space structures at least two fields, namely homeland and immigrant politics, which are differentiated yet overlapping fields of action.

In addition to delineating the theoretical boundaries of the trans-state space of mobilisation, I have defined how this space was located in time and place. I have clarified the idea that more historical continuities should be taken into account when analysing Tunisian activism in France, and the centrality of Paris as a city of activism has been stressed. Finally, I have shown how activists created political parties, associations, or other movements in which to conduct their politics. This trans-state space is also composed of different constellations of actors, which I have divided under pro-regime, Islamist, leftist, and trans-ideological categories.

Having drawn the boundaries of this universe of exile politics, I turn in the next chapter to examine how host and home states delimited the possibilities for action within the trans-state space of mobilisation.

## CHAPTER 2

### The trans-state space of mobilisation between constraints and possibilities for action

#### Introduction

A high-ranking French Intelligence Service official said in the 1990s: “Tunisians are a community which does not engage in political activities [...] they are a dream for the French intelligence service [...] The Algerians were much more active” (Lamloum, 2001, p. 434). Without going quite this far, Tunisians who became politically mobilised against Ben Ali’s regime did indeed represent a small minority in France, and the underlying causes of this need to be addressed and analysed. As such it seems relevant to begin the analysis of the trans-state space of Tunisian mobilisation by exploring the opportunities and constraints that both Tunisian and French authorities operated.

This chapter focuses on the following questions: how and why did the Tunisian party-state manage to maintain some degree of control over Tunisian groupings living abroad? How did the French authorities manage these different actors? And, as a consequence, how did the opportunities and constraints affect the Tunisians’ possibilities for action in exile?

The concept of political opportunity structures (POS)<sup>82</sup> has become increasingly influential as a dominant paradigm through which to understand transnational or diasporic political mobilisation. The concept has been used to frame and explore what the forms and strategies of diasporic actors owe to the context of the country of residence,<sup>83</sup> and more generally what external factors permit or impede their movements (Wayland, 2004; Koinova, 2014; Müller-Funk, 2016). Chaudhary and Moss (2016, p. 4) take this a step further by suggesting the idea of a “triadic political

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<sup>82</sup> The literature on the concept of political opportunity structures is abundant; see *inter alia*: McAdam et al, 1996; Tarrow, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> In this respect, Ireland (1994) was one of the first to apply POS analysis to immigrant mobilisations, when he showed that different conditions in France and Switzerland as host countries led to different mobilisations among immigrants from the same background.

opportunity approach” (the host state, the home country and what they refer to as “transnational political action”), explaining that transnational political actions are “embedded in multiple political opportunity contexts”.<sup>84</sup> In this respect, it is essential to identify the characteristics of both the long arm of the Tunisian regime and the fluctuations of the French national environment, each of which have exerted an influence on the possibilities for the development of pro- and anti-regime activism.

Bearing in mind the critiques addressed to the concept of POS,<sup>85</sup> my research seeks to go beyond an “objectivist definition of opportunities” (Fillieule, 2006, p. 209) and provides instead a more dynamic definition of specific opportunities and constraints. I will demonstrate that Tunisian constellations of actors have not merely been established as a mechanical reaction to the policies of the Tunisian and French authorities but should be ideated as a form of interaction with them, following temporal variations. Leftist and Islamist opposition movements and pro-regime activists appear to be sufficiently dynamic to emerge, remain and adapt their means of action according to varying political contexts. From a dialectical standpoint, it therefore seems essential to consider what forms of activism owe to the political environment in which they take place as well as how they influence their environment. This chapter shows that some opportunities and constraints are similar across all constellations of actors, some are specific to each. These affect in turn each broader political configuration.

I also argue that this strong relationship of strategies, means of organisation and mobilisation to the context is intrinsically linked to the political identity of the actors. That is where comparisons between the different constellations (pro-regime, leftists and Islamists) become increasingly interesting to consider. The main idea behind this chapter is therefore to reflect on the different opportunities and constraints that shape the trans-state space of mobilisation. The chapter examines the Tunisian system of control from afar – what I conceptualise and refer to as the “politics of *encadrement*” – and how such a political approach became possible. I will

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<sup>84</sup> In a similar vein, to account for a “complex institutional environment”, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, p. 26) argues that “a process of ‘multi-level institutional channelling’ is taking place”.

<sup>85</sup> The concept has been criticised, among other things, for its tautological and rather vague character, which has led some authors to call for “abandoning” the concept (Fillieule, 2006; Mathieu, 2010).

demonstrate how homeland repression does not necessarily stop at homeland territorial boundaries, but is part of a larger repertoire of action that articulate different practices (cultural, political and surveillance), and even more importantly how this influences and constrains political actions. The end result of this process is that the Tunisian party-state has created a system that is aimed more at demobilising Tunisian actors in France on the opposition to the regime through a “system of fear” using various different means, rather than endeavouring to mobilise Tunisians abroad with the RCD as a political project. The chapter also scrutinises and links different types of constraints by looking at the complex interaction between the politics of *encadrement* and the French authorities. It closes by examining the different and differentiated perceptions of the various constellation of actors by the French authorities: they take a diplomatic approach towards the RCD, a strongly securitised approach towards Islamists, while the leftist movements are subjected to comparative indifference.

## **Section I.**

### **The role of the Tunisian party-state in France: between social assistance and transnational repression**

#### **1. Conceptualising the politics of *encadrement***

It is necessary to begin with a fuller conceptual definition of the politics of *encadrement* in order to decipher the exercise of state power working from afar and pro-regime mobilisation. Through a detailed examination of “extraterritorial authoritarian practices” (Glasius, 2018), the Tunisian party-state offers an interesting case study of a “dialectic of repression”, namely the twin strategies of co-optation/patronage on the one hand and deterrence/fear on the other.

The increased academic attention given to states and their various and contradictory policies towards their populations abroad is noteworthy (Gamlen, 2006; Adamson and Demetriou, 2007; Dufoix et al, 2010; Collyer, 2013; Délano and Gamlen, 2014; Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018). However, authoritarian state practices have often

been overlooked in recent literature on diaspora engagement policy. Adding a transnational aspect to Torpey's (1998) notion of states "embracing" their populations, my standpoint challenges the liberal assumptions of studies that focus on the "positive" aspects of states engaging with their diasporas. Gamlen (2008) set out a typology of diaspora engagement policies which breaks down into two main mechanisms: "diaspora building" (mainly through developing state institutions in order to govern diasporas) and "diaspora integration" (mainly through extending rights and extracting obligations from diasporas). However, Gamlen's typology omits aspects of repression included in state policies towards communities living abroad. Ragazzi (2009; 2014) goes a step further by analysing the different ways of "governing domestic populations abroad" from a Foucauldian perspective, referencing the concept of surveillance as a disciplinary modality of government. Nevertheless, the growing canon of this literature tends to omit concrete and detailed modalities of state presence in forms of repression and thus its impact on mobilisations.<sup>86</sup>

As well as attempting to overcome the liberal bias in the literature on states governing and managing their diasporas, conceptualising the politics of *encadrement* as a specific dialectical movement of control allows us to broaden the analytical framework on authoritarianism across borders. This adds new dimensions to the literature that shows that the diasporic or transnational space is removed from the homeland, thereby allows freedoms that are repressed at home.<sup>87</sup> Despite large amounts of literature on repression and increasing elaborations of the concept (Combes and Fillieule, 2011; Davenport et al, 2005; Earl, 2003), it is common to assume that repression has borders and is therefore confined to nation-states.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gamlen and al (2013) even argue that "in many origin states around the world, diaspora members once disdained as victims, deserters or traitors are now more likely to be feted as national heroes", hence establishing "formal diaspora engagement institutions (diaspora institutions) of various kinds".

<sup>87</sup> Such as works that use the Keck and Sikkink's boomerang pattern model of political actors being blocked in one state and then exiting it and using another state to engage in homeland politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

<sup>88</sup> Some very recent literature produced on repression from afar seems to announce a new trend that might more systematically and analytically look at those processes. See notably the research programme "authoritarianism in a global age", whose main theoretical contribution is to assess "how authoritarian rule is exercised over populations abroad and to connect this extraterritorial dimension to the character and resilience of contemporary authoritarian rule" (Glasius, 2018). See also the cases of the Syrian repressive state in Sweden and the US (Jørum, 2015; Moss, 2016), the

However, following a new research agenda on “transnational repression” (Moss, 2016) and “transnational authoritarian security governance” (Lemon, 2016),<sup>89</sup> I argue that homeland repression does not necessarily stop at the border of the homeland, and even more importantly it shapes and constrains the trans-state space of mobilisation in a number of ways that need to be scrutinised in detail (Moss, 2016).

Some recent exceptions are worth noting when it comes to examining this authoritarian “extra-territorial gap” (Glasius in Dalmasso et al, 2018). Beyond repression, Collyer and King (2015) conceptualise the production of a transnational space through the physical, symbolic and imaginative policing strategies of states beyond their territorial boundaries.<sup>90</sup> In a more elaborate approach, Glasius offers a fruitful typology of different authoritarian state practices which govern populations abroad, which can be summarised as follows:

the authoritarian state approaches its populations abroad, and includes or excludes them, as subjects to be repressed and extorted, as clients to be co-opted, or as patriots to be discursively manipulated (...) When populations abroad resist being included in these ways, they may be excluded, and treated as outlaws (denied any trappings of legal personality) and/or as traitors (castigated and scapegoated as enemies of the state) (Glasius, 2018, p. 180 and p. 186).

However, the author considers that categories are not necessary mutually exclusive, and what makes the Tunisian politics of *encadrement* particularly distinctive is that it combines diverse types of repression and forms of mediation and benefits. In fact, these two strategies feed into and reinforce each other.

In more specific terms, the politics of *encadrement* are not only coercive and repressive but are significant in a dual role of “facilitator” through a diversity of cultural and social offers and the creation of a system of fear. These highly politicised cultural and social activities and services by states of origin remain understudied

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Turkish state in Germany (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, pp. 116-22) and the workings of “authoritarian emigration states” analysed by Tsourapas (2018) in the case of Egypt.

<sup>89</sup> Through this concept, Lemon studies in the case of Tajikistan how the state exports its security apparatus abroad, through diverse practices such as intimidating or monitoring its opponents abroad, recalling the typology established by Shain (2005). In a similar vein, Lewis (2015) studied extraterritorial security practices in the case of Uzbekistan in a recent article, informing us about the production of alternative “state space”, and Cooley and Heathershaw (2017) note different types of authoritarian foreign policy practices in central Asia.

<sup>90</sup> See also Collyer’s work on “transnational governmentality” in the case of Algeria (2006).

when it comes to North Africa.<sup>91</sup> Yet the idea of the home state “courting migrants” (Hein De Haas, 2007) and playing a facilitating role does not seem specific to Tunisia, but is in fact a shared feature of Maghrebi states towards their communities in France<sup>92</sup> and of other authoritarian regimes elsewhere.<sup>93</sup>

By exploring the dialectic of *encadrement* through cultural, social and administrative activities and political control, I argue that the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD) shaped the possibilities for political action through the dual action of social assistance and repression. My argument bears strong similarities with that of Pereira (2012), in which he analysed a system of *encadrement* in the case of the Portuguese state under Salazar that was aimed at keeping the population in a state of political apathy towards its communities living in France. What the author termed “inefficacy as a mode of government” finds a direct echo in the Tunisian techniques of *encadrement*.<sup>94</sup>

It is quite difficult to translate accurately the term *encadrement* into English.<sup>95</sup> In French it is a concept that reflects the idea of control or framing in the sense of social and administrative support as well as surveillance (Brand, 2006, p. 102). As previously explained, it is precisely this dialectic that I am interested in exploring in this thesis. That is why I will be using the term both as a description and as an analytical tool. The term has in fact been used by Tunisian officials themselves. In this respect, one Tunisian general consul illustrated the confusion of words bearing political meaning:

“The word *encadrement* is very important here because for Ben Ali the Tunisians had to be “*encadré*”; what does *encadré* mean? put them in a *cadre* (frame), which means to control them. It does not mean taking care of them (*les accompagner*). There is a difference between taking care of them, in their life, and *encadrer*, controlling them (*surveiller*). They need to be controlled (...) they should

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<sup>91</sup> With notable exceptions such as Escafré-Dublet (2012), who analyses the role of states of origin’ social and cultural activities in France in the 1960s and 1970s, and Brand (2006).

<sup>92</sup> For the case of Algeria and the role of *Amicales des Algériens en Europe*, see Labat (2010). For the case of Morocco and its *Amicales des travailleurs et des commerçants marocains en France*, Hein de Hass (2007), Dumont (2007), Lacroix (2005).

<sup>93</sup> As can be seen in the case of the Portuguese state with Pereira (2012), the cases of European Eastern Communist regimes with Dufoix (2002) or Fascist Italy with Wiegandt-Sakoun (1986).

<sup>94</sup> Although less developed, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, p. 12) also explains that the Turkish state aimed more at controlling rather than mobilising its citizens abroad, the “main efforts of the Turkish authorities are reactive rather than proactive”.

<sup>95</sup> Torpey (1998, p. 245) also reflected upon untranslatable terms such as “*erfassen*” in German and “*surveiller*” in French that lack English equivalent in political and historical terms.

not join the opposition whether political or religious opposition.” (Interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016).

Through this *encadrement*, the aim of the Tunisian regime was to show that the space abroad was also controlled, so that the Tunisian population in France maintained allegiance to the home country and to prevent any political dissidence. It is to the different modalities of the politics of *encadrement*, and its main political constraints, that I now turn.

## **2. Social, cultural and political *encadrement*: the party-state as “facilitator”**

The first aspect of the dialectic of *encadrement* is the one constituted within the role of social and cultural assistance. Analysed as a device to help maintain control, this section argues that cultural and social *encadrement* is about politics, in that it acts as a tool that activates and preserves loyalty to the authoritarian regime. The role of cultural and social *encadrement* as facilitators leads us to reflect on the notion of clientelism. Focusing on Morocco, De Hass (2007, p. 20) describes a process of change “from controlling to courting the diaspora”, a shift that dates back to 1989 in terms of Moroccan emigration policies. What is salient in the Tunisian case is the continuing dialectic between the courtship and control.

### **2.1. Courting the Tunisians abroad and propaganda efforts**

Under Bourguiba, the danger the Tunisian government feared the most was the political contamination of young Tunisian emigrants living in Paris. Bourguiba was scared that they would be influenced by the revolutionary ideas which were spreading through France in the 1960s, and which directly contradicted his idea of a single-party (Simon, 1979, p. 132). In Bourguiba’s view, emigration must be controlled, a trend that was strengthened further under Ben Ali.

Both Bourguiba and Ben Ali’s regimes expended a great deal of effort in strengthening links between Tunisians living abroad and the homeland. This was initially for economic reasons: both leaders quickly realised that Tunisians abroad could contribute to development back home through economic development and modernisation. As Meddeb (2012, p. 414) notes, “emigrants’ economic remittances constituted considerable sources of currency and an essential lever for maintaining



financial and macroeconomic balance for the regime to survive.” Although economic considerations and remittances are central to the interests of the Tunisian state in terms of its citizens abroad, and have underscored much of the research on states and its diaspora communities, economic factors do not tell the full story. There were also strong political reasons. Different Tunisian officials told me that Tunisians in France were supposed to be the ambassadors of Tunisia abroad. The Tunisian state had tacitly given them the responsibility to present a positive cultural and political image of Tunisia, which served the Tunisian regime in its efforts to maintain good relations with the French state and maintain their commitment to Ben Ali’s various projects. Thirdly – and this is the main focus of this chapter – the aim of this strong relationship between the Tunisian state and its citizens abroad was to deter them from any form of political dissidence and make certain that they remained loyal to the RCD.

Ben Ali’s regime soon came to realise that the Tunisian communities in France could help the homeland both financially and politically. The idea that they were part of the Tunisian polity intensified and it was decided that links between them should be reinforced through different processes. This change in vision in fact followed a more general change in the structure of migration, leading in turn to new forms of *encadrement*. As the general consul in France summarised:

“The interest of Tunisian power was that Tunisians are better integrated socially and politically because the more they are integrated, the more their situation is prosperous and the more this has positive impacts on the Tunisian economy” (interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016).

Under Bourguiba, Tunisian migration to France was understood to be provisional by the Tunisian state. This was reflected by the name and the political framework used to define them: Tunisians abroad were referred to as a migrant workforce and were represented by the *Office des Travailleurs Tunisiens à l’Etranger* (Office of Tunisian Workers Abroad). The idea that the Tunisian migrants were workers who would one day return home was altered under Ben Ali, who changed their terms of reference and supporting bureaucracy. Under Ben Ali, the migrants were *muwatinin bi-l kharij* (citizens abroad) or *al-tunisiyyun fi-l kharij* (Tunisians abroad) represented by the Office of Tunisians abroad (OTE) (Brand, 2010). As Brand (2006, p. 129) points out:

Emigrants were no longer faceless exported labourers whom the state monitored in order to keep them in line politically; instead they were members of a social and political community that was an extension of the homeland.

A general consul also noted, “[Ben Ali] could not neglect them, they represent 10% of the Tunisian community, they are a potential, they are an electoral reservoir for presidential elections” (interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016). Ben Ali granted Tunisians abroad the right to vote in presidential elections in 1988, and they had their first opportunity to exercise this right in the 1989 elections. This was seen as a way for Ben Ali’s regime to legitimise its power abroad and cultivate loyalty (Jaulin and Nilsson, 2015; Brand, 2010).

The Tunisians abroad were therefore courted by the homeland regime, which in turn had a great impact on deterring them from conducting oppositional mobilisation. Omar C.\*, a 35-year-old French-Tunisian, mobilised in a French-Tunisian association since 2011, summarised this quite well when he explained ironically that:

“One thing was quite clear: when you were an immigrant and you arrived in Tunisia, you were pampered. For Ben Ali, the immigrants had to be pampered because they were the financial manna of Tunisia. So why would I seek any hassles while I am welcomed home like a lord? [...] You live here (in France), you have somewhere you can spend your holidays and the only thing they tell you is: ‘*marhababik* (welcome) to Tunisia, don’t touch drugs, don’t touch politics, but apart from that you can do whatever you want,’ so why do you want to get too caught up in it all?” (Interview with Omar C.\*, Lyon, 3 February 2016).

It was also thanks to propaganda by the *Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure* (Tunisian Agency of Exterior Communication, ATCE) that the regime abroad was able to court, and thus control, its population abroad (Abid, 2011). The ATCE was created in 1990 and quickly set up a Paris office.<sup>96</sup> Its official mission was to reinforce the media visibility of Tunisia abroad and promote its politics in all sectors (*Rapport Général de l’Instance Nationale pour la Réforme de l’Information & de la Communication*, 2012, p. 152; Ben Sedrine and Mestiri, 2004, pp. 65-9). More specifically, it played an important role in circulating a discourse on Tunisia that was mainly centred around the concepts of “democratic gradualism” (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012), the protection of so-called “minorities” (Jews and women, according to the official discourse), the so-called “economic miracle” (Hibou, 1999)

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<sup>96</sup> Tunisian *Journal Officiel* n°52.

and the fact that the regime represented a unique guarantee against Islamism. This official discourse, spread through specific media and voices in France,<sup>97</sup> was an important means for the Ben Ali regime to both legitimise its actions towards the French authorities and strengthen its power over Tunisians living abroad. One of the founders of the ATCE explained that:

“Obviously it was [created to] enhance the image of the Tunisian state [...] They did a great job of lobbying with French media [...] A country pleasant for tourists, a good place for women, strong economic progress, and trying to counter to a certain extent the whole propaganda of human rights.” (Interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015).

One aspect of the ATCE was therefore to extol the virtues of the Ben Ali regime. However, as subsequent sections will show, its role was also to discredit opponents.

Beyond the ATCE, the regime also conveyed “political publicity” (Garon, 2003, p. 113), and thus attempted to favour pro-regime mobilisation, through a nebula of associations, TV shows and intellectuals based in France.<sup>98</sup> For instance, before one of Jacques Chirac’s presidential visits to Tunisia, an open letter was signed by hundreds of Tunisian associations in France close to the regime in which the “undeniable progress” of a “dynamic and enterprising Tunisia” was highlighted. The visit was planned to allow Chirac “to discover other aspects of the ‘Tunisian miracle’”. The letter sought to counter opposing political parties’ discourse on the regime, referring to them as:

...fundamentalists, common criminals and habitual offenders [who] under the guise of noble democratic values which are not part of their backward ideology, come up with all sorts of fantastical narratives about Tunisia for political purposes. Their international networks, which often merge with those of extremism and international terrorism, try to manipulate the media and international public opinion to disguise the Tunisian reality which is quite different, as you will see yourself.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For an interesting inventory of the media who collaborated in some way in spreading this very positive image of Tunisia, see Beau and Tuquoi (2011) and Bredoux and Magnaudeix (2012). The journalists mentioned in those works were often offered luxury holidays in Djerba or Hammamet in exchange for writing propaganda articles. In addition, the French advertising agency Image 7 signed a contract with ATCE to promote the image of the regime in France (Mediapart, 2011).

<sup>98</sup> Ben Ali’s regime could rely on some Tunisian intellectual figures living in France, such as Mezri Haddad (interview, Paris, 21 June 2016); but also on French academics to relay the myth of the “Tunisian exception” (for instance, Sfeir, 2010). For more details, Bredoux and Magnaudeix (2012), pp. 149-183.

<sup>99</sup> RCD personal archives, “*A monsieur Jacques Chirac, Président de la République Française*”, un-dated.

More specifically, the *Association Neapolis*, which was created in 1994 as an independent association (interview with Simone R.\*, Paris, 21 December 2015) represents a good illustration of the regime's political propaganda through associative work. Its official aim, as described in its status documents, was to organise cultural events for Tunisians in France, more specifically around boxing and the city of Nabeul. However, it also acted as a defender of the Tunisian regime. The president of the association described in a book she co-wrote that the *Association Neapolis* was aimed at "promoting our country, publicising the presidential politics and bringing some sun to those who are missing it" (Bellaiche Haddad, n.d.). Ben Ali decorated the president of the *Association Neapolis* with the Tunisian order of the Republic for services rendered.

Finally, the propaganda was substantively achieved through television programs that were broadcast every Sunday morning, dedicated to Tunisians living abroad (*hamzat wasef*) on Canal 7. In those programmes, Tunisia was "promoted as the 'motherland' and as an 'exotic country'." (Geisser, 2017, p. 11; see also Brand, 2006, pp. 127-8).

## **2.2. The politics of *encadrement* as a form of mediation and clientelism**

The lucrative benefits available to the population abroad is the first aspect of the dialectic of the politics of *encadrement*. The Tunisian state courted its population abroad via politics and the media, and in terms of practices this was made possible because of its clientelist approach.

The politics of *encadrement* appears clearer when viewed through the role of consulates as facilitators. Consulates played a double role of intermediaries and mediators for Tunisian and French regimes, providing the Tunisian population with state services such as renewing passports, providing death and birth certificates, managing licences and work permits (Simon, 1979, p. 235; interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015). Although the consulates officially helped any Tunisians living in France administratively, some aspects of their actions came closer to a form of clientelism (Briquet and Sawicki, 1998). Establishing loyalty and thus legitimacy was the main aim of the small favours offered, following Médard's definition of clientelism, as "a relationship of personal dependency not related to kinship, which

relies on a reciprocal exchange of favours between two persons, the patron and the client who control unequal resources” (Médard, 1976, p. 103). In a more concrete example of how they operated as facilitators, the president of an association created after the 2011 revolution recounted:

“I was also in contact [with the Consulate] because there is a Tunisian soccer club in [my city]. There were always two or three people from the consulate there. It was run by the associations. They might say, for example, we’re going to come to the soccer club, we’ll get you passports. We knew that people would go back [to Tunisia] in June-July. There was really no mistrust or distrust for people like they had in Paris [regarding the RCD]. I am not here to defend the RCD, but they acted as facilitators.” (Interview with Hédi B., Paris, 31 October 2015).

They also created special offices which they opened on a Sunday, so “they could have papers for certain [administrative] authorisations.” (Interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015). However, facilitation goes hand in hand with control. Suspensions were raised for those who were not willing to be part of the Tunisian polity as conceived by the Consulate. Two members of the same association recalled that when their parents came to the Consulate to renew their passports, consulate employees would insist on asking why their children did not participate in proposed activities. This suspicion appears even clearer when one consul explained to me that:

“What I know is that when anyone comes to the Consulate, presents his file and we see that he has not been to Tunisia for at least two years, we ask for a check in Tunis.” (Interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015).

This demonstrates the degree of allegiance expected by the regime.

As analysed in Chapter 1, the main official body in charge of assisting Tunisians living abroad was the *Office des Tunisiens à l’Etranger* (Office of Tunisians Abroad, OTE). The OTE had a wide range of responsibilities, but generally oscillated between mediation and acting as the political long arm of the regime. As facilitator, it was engaged in a programme of administrative and economic assistance, “providing information about the homeland” (Brand, 2006, p. 84) and “facilitating the reinsertion of Tunisian emigrants returning to Tunis into the national economy” (ibid, p. 118). This facilitating role is exemplified by the annual conference, an important moment of *encadrement* for the OTE. During this large-scale meeting that fell just before the summer return, Tunisians had the opportunity to ask any questions they

may have had in the presence of state officials, the airline Tunisair, banks and often Ben Ali himself (interview with Wassim R.\*, Tunis, 27 October 2016).

The OTE also had a social and cultural role, organising many activities such as study trips or summer camps. As mentioned by some interviewees who had the occasion to participate in these free activities, they represented a great opportunity to showcase the Tunisian regime and acted for the regime as a “form of patriotic and cultural revitalization” (Geisser, 2017, p. 11). Moreover, the OTE helped create some *espaces femmes et deuxième génération* (women and second-generation spaces) to “strengthen the cohesion of the community and of the family” (Brand, 2006; interview with Hassine F.\*, Paris, 2 January 2017). It also concentrated part of its activities on Arabic language instruction. Through free Arabic lessons, which were mostly targeted at second-generation immigrants, one notes again the clientelist relationship evidenced in such actions. A general consul remarked that:

“Social attachés and the RCD, in order to bring these people in, young people especially, they teach Arabic for free, they offer free travel every year. The office pays for it, either part of the ticket or all of it in the case of needy families, to send the children” (interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016).

When asked about how children were chosen for the free vacations in Tunisia, a pro-regime activist, one of the organisers of these trips, who was president of the *Association des mères* (Association of Mothers) in Marseille, explained that:

“At the time it was decided according to the precariousness of their livelihood. Often it was also because their parents were part of the *Amicales*. People were chosen according to their involvement in their parents’ associations.” (Interview with Meherzia V.\*, Marseille, 23 February 2016).

In addition, there is no better example of the dual nature of *encadrement* than the role of the social attachés: their actions fluctuated between mediation and a political role to recruit for the RCD. They played a very obvious social support role through offering advice on family issues and administrative procedures such as divorce or death as well as helping in hospitals and in prisons. However, one Consul notes:

“Later it changed, it became a second source of support for the party [...] They supported the RCD. It became one of their responsibilities: organising party meetings, participating, contacting activists. They moved slightly away from their mission, which remained the same, to assist Tunisians, but they moved to some extent towards politics. Towards what we called the *encadrement* of Tunisians,

organising party meetings, participating and contacting activists.” (interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016).

Through their intimate knowledge of various segments of the Tunisian population in France, the social attachés were able to make the shift from social work to pro-regime political work.

Finally, religion was notably absent from this attempt at full *encadrement*. Although the different officials I interviewed were never explicit on the subject, they all stated that it was a clear and pragmatic choice on the part of Ben Ali’s regime not to interact with religious issues. Unlike its Turkish, Algerian or Moroccan counterparts,<sup>100</sup> the Tunisian state remained cautious about trying to control its citizens abroad in religious matters. Other than sending imams to conduct religious celebrations (such as during *aïd*), and keeping Tunisian religious leaders in France under surveillance,<sup>101</sup> I could find no trace of the Tunisian state’s involvement in religious matters in France. A former ambassador stated: “the official position is that this did not interest us” (interview with Wassim R.\*, Tunis, 27 October 2016). This absence of religious *encadrement* was a deliberate part of Ben Ali’s propaganda in presenting the regime as secular. The regime had more interest in non-intervention in France and maintaining Tunisia’s legitimacy as a secular country in order to further justify the eradication of the Islamist movement.<sup>102</sup> Chapter 4 will examine in greater detail the far-reaching consequences this approach had on the possibilities for Ennahda to involve itself in the organisation of Islam in France, as it was able to work in a space that had been freed from Tunisian state control.

Thus, the role of “facilitators” was endorsed by administrative actors, the OTE and the Consulates. Their special focus on social and cultural activities showed their potential for political involvement. They could work as instruments of Ben Ali’s

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<sup>100</sup> For the Moroccan and Turkish cases, see Bruce (2015).

<sup>101</sup> In the region of Aix-Marseille the prison chaplain, Habib Kaanich, worked with the consulates to control the religious orientation of the diaspora. Discussion with Vincent Geisser.

<sup>102</sup> This strategy was not devoid of ambiguities, however. As Geisser and Gobe (2008, p. 3) note, the regime “willingly presented itself as *laïque*, if not secularist and modernist, to foreign observers; and as a guardian of essential values of middle ground Islam to its own people”. The comparison with Turkey is interesting: the Turkish regime also presented itself to the international arena as a secular regime – at the same time understanding secularism as a form of state control. However, it provided an extensive religious *encadrement* in France, through sending imams or organising state-sponsored Muslim associations (Bruce, 2013).

power-affirming strategies and reaffirm loyalty and allegiance within the Tunisian communities in France, although we will see that this attempt was not necessarily successful.

### **2.3. Demobilising rather than mobilising: the role of the RCD as a political party**

Beyond the provision of administrative bodies, the RCD also endorsed a clientelist approach to the Tunisian population abroad. In more specific terms, the regime did not look to mobilise its citizens, but instead sought to demobilise them – especially any elements of oppositions.

In France the RCD did enjoy some support during the first years of the regime. However, the unwavering adhesion to the homeland regime provoked a certain degree of disaffection over the years, to the point where several consuls and RCD members referred to it as nothing more than an “empty shell” or a mouthpiece for the Tunisian state in its latter years. The shift in the definition of the RCD suggested by Wolf (2017) from a short dawn (1987-89) to a repressive interest group also applies to its actions in France. From the 1999 presidential elections onwards, the erosion of influence and the difficulties involved in renewing membership became noticeable, and towards the end there were testimonies that very few people came to the meetings the RCD organised. “Today [in 2010], Botzaris does not get filled and its leaders often have to resort to asking members to attend to make good impression at official visits” (Bouzidi, 2011).

In fact, although the RCD organised meetings and tried to recruit from among the Tunisian communities in France, it was difficult to find many traces of partisan activities by the RCD in the archives to which I had access. However, according to Hibou (2006, p. 14), “mechanisms of control of the whole Tunisian population have deep roots in the most banal power relations.” What is most striking here once again is the RCD’s role as facilitator. RCD members helped with many small favours and privileges for Tunisians living abroad, offering them access to renew passports, arranging more convenient and cheaper transport to Tunisia during summer, or helping them to open a shop or obtain a taxi license. This helped maintain allegiance



to the RCD (interview with Lassad L.\*, Marseille, 23 February 2016; Geisser, 2012, p. 161). As one RCD member explained:

“To help Tunisians in dealing with consulates, for example when renewing a passport [...] instead of going for example (to some town) 30 km from Lyon, the head of the association gathered all requests for passport renewals, and went to the consulate. Their goal was truly social ... a lot of social work, keeping the link between Tunisians and the country alive, helping them with the red tape” (interview with Yassine F.\*, Paris, 21 December 2015).

When I discussed the role of RCD cell leaders with this RCD member, he stressed social aims more than just a willingness to mobilise around RCD political projects:

“For them, they served their country, they served the community. They did not do anything political, they never discussed political issues, for them it was about Tunisia. Tunisians living abroad received special treatment when they returned. They made daily life easier for them, in terms of advice, passports, birth certificates, all of that, and all administrative procedures and legal advice” (ibid).

The pro-regime organisation of RCD students in Paris, the *Rassemblement des Etudiants Tunisiens à Paris* (Rally of Tunisian students in Paris, RETAP), embodies the dialectic of *encadrement* through its dual role as facilitator and control.<sup>103</sup> Its aim was officially to:

...help students coming from Tunisia and who were born in France in their daily lives and also play a bridging role between France and Tunisia by organising diverse activities in the interest of intercultural dialogue and mutual exchange. (French *Journal Officiel*, 2009).

By organising various cultural activities such as conferences, football matches, concerts on the occasion of the anniversary of “*changement*” of the 7<sup>th</sup> of November<sup>104</sup> and diverse social projects, the aim was to approach the student community to recruit for the RCD. In April 2004, for instance, participation in the

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<sup>103</sup> Declared as an association to the French authorities in the 2009 under the acronym RETAP, although it was active from the beginning of the 2000s, the RETAP presented itself in its internal documents alternatively as “the student cell of the RCD in Paris”, the “RCD student bureau in Paris” or the “organisation of RCD students in Paris”, and was financed by the RCD as well as other partners such as the Maison de la Tunisie, Tunisian businessmen in France, the Embassy. RCD personal archives.

<sup>104</sup> That is how the Ben Ali regime referred to the day Ben Ali came into power, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1987.

*“festival culture, solidarité, citoyenneté”* (festival of culture, solidarity and citizenship)

in a Parisian university, was an occasion for RETAP to:

Materialise our orientation of openness in the Parisian university environment and our permanent will to have a representation of the RCD students in all important events happening in Ile de France.<sup>105</sup>

Beyond cultural and social activities, RETAP also ran partisan activities, such as a “seminar of political formation (...) animated by Tunisian political personalities (members of the RCD political bureau, Ministers, secretaries of state, high officials)”<sup>106</sup> and participated at various RCD congresses. As part of its strategy to expand *encadrement* into the student milieu, it created new cells in Amiens and Lille in 2003-4 and said it wanted to:

pursue this strategy by the creation of new cells in order to frame the maximum of young people around the values of our Republic and the objectives of our party, the RCD.<sup>107</sup>

However, the increasing detachment towards and limitations of this RCD *encadrement* – and more generally by all the structures examined – cannot be emphasised enough. Firstly, the difficulties in controlling a population abroad are linked to the dispersion of the Tunisians in France. That was one of the specificities of the RCD in France compared to state control in Tunisia; despite a willingness to reproduce its structures, an RCD cell in the Parisian suburb could not act in the same way as a cell in the Tunisian suburb.<sup>108</sup> In addition, people who lived in more remote rural areas or who did not have active family members in the RCD did not participate much in the activities and were not directly affected by the concept of *encadrement*, as the activities were mainly concentrated in the cities. The Tunisian party-state was only really interested in situations where a significant number of Tunisians were concentrated. It was both geographical proximity and propinquity to RCD structures (mainly from a familial perspective) that helped maintaining the politics of

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<sup>105</sup> RCD personal archives, Letter from RETAP President “A son excellence Monsieur Moncer Rouissi, ambassadeur de la Tunisie en France”, Paris, 7 April 2004.

<sup>106</sup> RCD personal archives, “Implantation d’une cellule étudiants RCD à Amiens”, Paris, 16 March 2003.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Hibou (2006) analyses the “daily domination” (*domination au quotidien*) of the RCD in Tunisia in the 1990s and 2000s, which cannot be equated with the situation in France. Similarly, Camau and Geisser (2003) describe some local dynamics of RCD cells in Tunisia.

*encadrement* and therefore pro-regime activism. Beyond this, one could identify a sense of detachment towards these modes of “authoritarian allegiances” (Geisser, 2017, p. 8), especially for second and third generations of Tunisian descent.

This inefficacy was, however, a self-conscious and integral part of the politics of *encadrement* itself. The *appearance* of a strong *encadrement* was more crucial than its perceived effectiveness, and the appearance alone was sufficient to produce the required effects. The blurring of roles between administrative and political spheres and the difficulties in differentiating between the activities of the RTF, the RCD cells, consulates and the OTE, produced an effective attempt at full *encadrement*. In fact, for Tunisians living abroad all represented the Ben Ali regime’s interests in France, and this was the goal – to construct a feeling of omnipresence through various cultural and social offices.

I spoke with a Tunisian ambassador in Paris (2005-2010) for more than two hours about the modalities of the politics of *encadrement*, and he spent half the time explaining and expressing his regret at how inefficient and absurd the system of *encadrement* was:

“But what actions did this tracking take? Monitoring from afar has no impact here. They have no contact with students, no contact with the elite, supposed contact with the population which needs this administrative contact to receive subsidies and benefits. I can assure you that it goes no further than that.” (Interview with Amine N.\*, Tunis, 13 July 2016).

It is possible to observe a note of condescension and an operation of social distinction coming from an RCD member belonging to the economic and political elite when he explained that the RCD cells were not appropriate for the *encadrement* of qualified Tunisians or students:

“The influence of the associations did not reach categories such as those who graduated, or students. That was outside their purview. They were not aimed at them or did not have the capacity to, even if these people wanted to integrate these groups, their structure was not ... Intellectually it was not ... It is as if they did not know how to manage this type of profile, it was beyond the scope of their framework” (Interview with Yassine F.\*, Paris, 21 December 2015).

People working for the regime were therefore aware of this inefficiency. What matters here is the production of the regime’s effects in terms of (de)mobilisation.

The question of whether the Tunisians in France believed in Ben Ali's project or not was comparatively unimportant. Weeden (1998) illustrates this well in the case of Asad's Syria, terming it as the "politics of *as if*". A parallel can be drawn when she explains that "power does manifest itself in the ability to impose the regime's fictions upon the world," thus demonstrating "real obedience." But despite increasing levels of detachment, Ben Ali's power was still able to perpetuate its control over its citizens abroad. Khiari (2003, p. 104) highlights the regime's willingness to sustain what the author refers to as "political de-socialisation", the aim of which is "to render people dependant on the state and isolate them from one another". Thus we see the paradox of the presence of the Tunisian party-state in France: thanks to a variety of pro-regime structures and activities, the regime aimed at times to mobilise the Tunisian population around certain projects or ideals, but much more importantly it was aimed at demobilising them. The following section explores how the politics of *encadrement* was made possible because it relied not only on positive aspects such as its role of facilitator through cultural and social activities, but also on the creation of a "system of fear".

### **3. Towards the creation of a system of fear: the extension of repression across borders**

"You quickly realise that this is the kind of place where you're better off paying attention to football and beach cleanliness [rather than politics]. You go there to have a quiet holiday. And you stop asking questions." (Interview with Omar C.\*, Lyon, 3 February 2016)

#### **3.1. A pervasive sense of fear**

In one of the best-developed theoretical attempts to conceptualise repression, Earl (2003, p. 45) demonstrates that repression is a "variegated phenomenon." Repression may refer to practices that set out to "discourage, control or channelise protestation" (Hmed, 2015, p. 79) without limiting itself to the most visible and effective forms of coercion: it should include "threat, incapacitation and intelligence" (Combes and Fillieule, 2011). In order to understand pro-regime activism as well as the (non) mobilisation of the broader Tunisian communities in France, it is vital to examine the pervasive sense of threat to which they were subjected to. Indeed,

exporting fear of the Tunisian authoritarian state into French territory persuaded many to turn away from politics (Meddeb, 2012, pp. 424-25). As Pearlman (2016) explains in the case of Syria's dictatorship, silence is often a rational survival strategy, although she also describes different forms of political fear and of overcoming them through political acts.<sup>109</sup> Instilling fear through the Tunisian living abroad involved separating opponents from the wider community and limiting their activities.

Repression abroad was not only constructed through concrete repressive measures, it was also considered as a matter of perceived risks, and this had a direct impact on Tunisian activism in France. For instance, while it is impossible to know the exact number of Tunisian political police that worked in France<sup>110</sup> as the Tunisian archives are not yet available and the security system remains opaque, the knowledge that a political police force existed was often sufficient to fuel a widespread sense of fear, suspicion and insecurity. The internalised threat could work more efficiently than concrete repression itself, as it often led to self-censorship. This self-discipline due to the fear of the state is clear from the words of one interviewee, who was involved in a Tunisian association created after the 2011 revolution:

"Before the revolution, when I had to show my passport, I was always afraid, even though I had nothing to hide. I thought they would make something up, tell me some of my friends did this or that. You had not done anything and you were afraid that they would come up with something during a passport check" (interview with Omar C\*, Lyon, 3 February 2016).

Avoiding the cost of having to deal with repression resulted in a depoliticising effect. Diverse administrative obstacles, the risk to families at home in Tunisia, or the risk of having their passports confiscated after contact with a political exile, all contributed to separating politically mobilised Tunisians in opposition to the regime from others. This was more specifically the case for Ennahda, as a party spokesperson and member of the political bureau explained:

"Those of us who are exiled here, we are not afraid anymore. We discovered after the revolution that the Ben Ali regime was not a very strong regime in terms of

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<sup>109</sup> Although social scientists have increasingly included "emotions" in their study of political mobilisations – see for instance: Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Traïni, 2009 – the specific effects produced in terms of non-mobilisations remain open to further study. More specifically on the history of fear as a political idea and a political tool, see Robin, 2004.

<sup>110</sup> Except Lutterbeck (2015), who provides a detailed account of the main features of the Tunisian police and Jebnoun (2017) on Tunisia's intelligence and security apparatus.

security, but it created a climate of fear. Everyone was afraid. The fear of Ben Ali became our fear. We were afraid for people. If anyone got near us, they could be imprisoned, lose their job, all of that was fear” (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

More generally, it was striking that people did not talk about politics with other Tunisians whom they did not know very well. In this respect Hamza R.\*, who was active in a Palestinian association which included many Tunisians (see Chapter 5), became good friends with another Tunisian activist who was also involved in the association and only discovered after the revolution that he was an important member of Ennahda (interview with Hamza R.\*, Paris, 19 February 2016). Similarly, Mohamed Dhaoui, who was active in the association *Action Tunisienne* (Tunisian action), recalled that “it was intentional self-censorship (...) I only talked with people I knew very well. We really had to have a true and old friendship” (interview with Mohamed Dhaoui, Paris, 19 April 2016). This pervasive sense of threat and mistrust partly explains the small size of the Tunisian opposition in France and the limitations on their possibilities for action.

### **3.2 Surveillance activities**

It is difficult to paint a full picture of the Tunisian surveillance networks that were active in France, even when it comes to the official ones. The former Director of National Security during Bourguiba’s regime – who was exiled to Paris under Ben Ali – spoke of the existence of seventy police officers stationed in France between 1990 and Ben Ali’s departure (interview with Ahmed Bennour, Paris, 16 December 2015), but insisted that the actual number is impossible to know. What was more important was the perceived risk their imagined presence produced.

However, *encadrement* was also about concrete surveillance, mainly targeted at opponents, and this was not only the watchword of the political police but a relatively large number of ordinary people from different backgrounds who contributed to establishing some form of unofficial intelligence service. According to Jebnoun (2017, p. 32), Tunisians in France “were subjected to large-scale surveillance through complex informant networks operated by the General Directorate of Specialized Services (GDSS)”. He provides crucial information on how the Ben Ali regime “was obsessed with security and control over everything and sought absolute

centralization”, and how it notably established “the watchdog citizen that was tasked with spying on the administration” as well as opposition movements (Jebnoun, 2017, p. 31). It is difficult to know whether this was spoken from political conviction, as was the case with one interviewee who remains a committed supporter of Ben Ali five years after the revolution, or whether it was out of necessity, as was the case of the neighbour of an exiled leader of Ennahda, who admitted a few months before the revolution that he was submitting intelligence reports on him out of necessity and fear.<sup>111</sup>

Reporting and monitoring the precise details of opponents’ meetings was also quite common. In this respect, the actions of the pro-regime association RETAP are worth discussing here. RETAP is paradigmatic of the dialectic of *encadrement* as a combination of social and cultural assistance and surveillance. We have already discussed the association’s role in organising cultural and sporting events, and helping to create RCD cells, thus reproducing the Tunisian regime’s discourse of RCD propaganda aimed at students. Furthermore, RETAP also ensured that the surveillance of opponents was maintained within the student milieu. The latter was particularly prone to monitoring, and fake students were enrolled to control students (interview with Mouaffak Kaabi, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016) and academics (interview with Marguerite Rollinde, Paris, 15 September 2016). When it comes to the surveillance of opponents, one of the documents produced by RETAP was a detailed report of meetings with opponents, describing in detail the speeches, the number of people, and their physical appearance.<sup>112</sup> French academics who wanted to investigate aspects of Ben Ali’s authoritarian regime were not spared from surveillance and burglaries.<sup>113</sup> Silencing any voices diverging from the official lines was one of the aims of the regime.

The system of surveillance and control also targeted people working for the regime. Kchouk (2017, pp. 42-48) analyses the effects of discipline through fear among Tunisian elites under Ben Ali; this process directly echoes with what I observed in

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<sup>111</sup> Informal discussions, 2016. On the role of denunciations, see Gellately (1996).

<sup>112</sup> Personal archives, RETAP.

<sup>113</sup> Béatrice Hibou (2006, p. 23) recalled how her office in Sciences Po was “visited” three times for instance.

France. Focusing on the way the nomination of consuls and ambassadors worked under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime explains parts of the function of surveillance and the system of suspicion. While ambassadors were usually nominated by the Foreign Minister, Paris was more specific due to its strategic importance to the regime, as an ambassador explained: "For the ambassador of Tunisia in Beijing or Rome, it is the Minister of Foreign Affairs who decides, but in France it is special, it is the president who nominates" (interview with Wassim R.\*, Tunis, 27 October 2016). Most of the Tunisian ambassadors in the Paris office were former Ministers affiliated with the RCD or career politicians rather than simple diplomats.

The same rules were also applied to consuls: while some came from the diplomatic corps, career diplomats who were outsiders of the RCD, represented a minority. One general consul told me that:

"10% were career diplomats and 90% were senior officials of the ruling RCD party, either security officials to compensate them for their efforts, military officials, or politicians, but who were in close contact with the regime" (interview with Ali Aidoudi, Paris, 19 September 2016).

These differences of status between active members of RCD and diplomats could lead to tensions. The same consul recalled that there was:

"real suspicion towards the consuls [as] they did not defend the party that well [...] If the consul is 'professional' they would accuse us of non-activism. [...] That is why they nominated fewer and fewer consuls who did not come from the RCD machinery" (ibid).

Another consul added that "generally, when we demonstrate a bit of independence, autonomy, you get moved apart, you're reassigned elsewhere. This was Ben Ali's system" (interview with Aziz G.\*, Tunis, 1 December 2015).

Within the Consulate, a social attaché in Marseille explained that he was himself kept under surveillance and internalised the fact that he should not show any form of disagreement or dissidence with his superiors, or he would find himself in danger (interview with Lassad L.\*, Marseille, 23 February 2016). A French ambassador to Tunis recounted that two informers were always present at meetings with his Tunisian counterparts, which led him to remain silent on many points: they could only have more open discussions in the corridors on the way in and out of meetings



(interview with Yves Aubin de la Messuzières, Paris, 7 September 2016).<sup>114</sup> In a similar way, associations close to the regime were also subjected to close surveillance by the intermediaries of social attachés, especially towards the end of the Ben Ali regime. The president of the *Association des Mères* (Association of Mothers) in Marseille explained that:

“We were told we would be held accountable. Social attachés, towards the end of the regime [...] asked the community to be at their beck and call. The RCD asked [the association] to go to meetings” (interview with Meherzia V. \*, Marseille, 23 February 2016).

### 3.3 Delegitimising opponents, infiltration and co-optation

The politics of *encadrement* described so far mainly concerned the Tunisian population as a whole. However, when it comes to the second facet of *encadrement* (the system of fear), it is also worth noting the specific treatment to which opponents in France were subjected. Different strategies were used by the regime, from silencing to co-opting and infiltrating opposition groups.

Firstly, the regime exerted its propaganda through directly discrediting political opponents. For instance, defamatory videos or communiqués would be circulated about famous personalities living abroad through official newspapers and Tunisian embassies.<sup>115</sup> The Islamist movement Ennahda was more specifically targeted by this propaganda: the Tunisian regime put great effort into concocting stories of treachery or slander to delegitimise the movement or exacerbate divisions within it.<sup>116</sup> For instance, one important imprisoned Ennahda leader was accused of acts of sodomy in prison in 1991, supported by faked video clips. Videos of Mohamed Mzali, former Prime Minister under Bourguiba, later exiled in Paris, showed him enjoying extra-marital relationships.<sup>117</sup> These clips were sent to many media sources, to opponents

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<sup>114</sup> Yves Aubin de la Messuzière (2011, pp. 121-142) devoted a chapter in his book recalling his experience of French ambassador to how diplomats were kept under surveillance.

<sup>115</sup> Notably in the Arabic-language *al-Hadath* and *al-Shourouq*, the Arabic/French-language *al-l'lan/Les Annonces* (Announcement) and *Haqa'iq/Réalités* (Realities) and The French-language *Les Masques* (The Masks).

<sup>116</sup> See the report by Amnesty International for more information on the “sleaze campaigns”: *Tunisie: les défenseurs des droits humains pris pour cible*, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

in Paris and to some chancelleries. As Ahmed Bennour, director of the National Security under Bourguiba explained they also:

“...made things up: for example Mzali and I were supposed to have set up a company in Tunisia to sell rotten meat that was then sent to Algeria. Twelve people died. I was supposed to be friend with Bernard Tapie and we were selling fake furs together. Tunisian Islamists were sending me drugs that I would then sell, etc” (interview with Ahmed Bennour, Paris, 16 December 2015).

The ATCE also produced communiqués to explain that the

Tunisian Committee calling for the abdication of President Ben Ali is in fact a duo [...] known for belonging to the Tunisian fundamentalist movement and for their link to the (French) far-right.<sup>118</sup>

Another technique for delegitimising opponents was to circulate false communiqués attributed to opposition movements.<sup>119</sup> The attempt at dividing the opposition was especially clear when it came to the Islamist movement. The Tunisian regime attempted to publicly establish a distinction between Nahdavis in exile and those in prison in order to present the Nahdawi community in France as being privileged. One Ennahda leader evoked the fake press releases produced by the regime that:

“...spoke of a false marriage with Ghannouchi’s son-in-law, [explaining that] he wasted money by pretending that militants inside the country are suffering while we others abroad live like kings. And that is still being said today. You lived 20 years in exile, and that was not exile. There is a duality between people inside and those outside. Also, every month, or every other month – or every three months at most – people write under false names claiming that they are from Ennahda and they say that things are bad, they have press releases saying that there were rifts within Ennahda. Because the ultimate purpose of infiltration is to divide Ennahda.” (interview with Hamed K. \*, Paris, 3 April 2016).

Another means of action and surveillance by the Tunisian regime was to disrupt political meetings organised by opponents in various ways. Some Tunisian pro-regime activists seemed to have become professionals in how to interrupt such events through shouting and other actions to obstruct participants from speaking. Pro-regime activists also ran counter-protests when opponents organised demonstrations. Many opponents recalled that the supporters of the regime were

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<sup>118</sup> Aida Klibi, ATCE’s Communiqué, Paris, 18 March 1993. Personal archives.

<sup>119</sup> Such was the case in 1993 for the opposition association *Comité tunisien d’appel à la démission de Ben Ali*: a fake tract with the signature of Chirac, Séguin and Pasqua circulated to then explain that the comité had manufactured these fake signatures.

chanting counter-slogans in support of Ben Ali and were taking pictures of opponents as a means of unspoken threat. There were other different ways of intimidating opponents, ranging from burglary to theft of documents and computers, telephone harassment, intrusion into private lives, pressure on families and direct violence.<sup>120</sup> The Tunisian regime expressed determination in its willingness to silence opposition abroad. The method of “collective punishment” was an important strategy used by the regime: this meant that it was not only the exile activist that was tracked down but also their family who stayed in Tunisia. Lewis (2015, p. 148) notes similar mechanisms in the case of Uzbekistan: “Family ties offer a highly effective mechanism for the transmission of modes of repression from a domestic jurisdiction to transnational spaces”.

One final technique employed by the regime was to constrain the political activities of opponents through infiltration and co-optation. While the opponents were well-aware of this crucial issue and acted accordingly (as will be seen in Chapter 3) activists in at least two political parties – Ennahda and the CPR – discovered the details of infiltration of their parties only after the 2011 revolution (interviews with CPR and Ennahda activists, Paris/Tunis, 2016). Furthermore, the regime implemented a strategy of co-optation, mainly of former opponents.<sup>121</sup> In the mid-2000s, Ben Ali sent emissaries to Paris to negotiate the return of Islamist exiles. As part of a strategy of co-optation by the regime, these emissaries were not politicians but police officers who were charged with finding out who might be vulnerable in exile and tempted to return to Tunisia, thus exacerbating divisions within oppositional movements.<sup>122</sup> According to Abdelwahab Al-Hani, a former Ennahda sympathiser:

“More than fifty interviews and dozens of certificates of “clarification of situation”, or “pardon” or “grace” applications were gathered carefully. Seven

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<sup>120</sup> Direct violence was used at least in two famous cases against independent opponents, Mondher Sfar and Ahmed Manaï. This could serve in turn to set an example to others. Respectively, interviews, Paris, 9 January 2016 and Sousse, Tunisia, 27 November 2015. See also Manaï’s own testimonies, 2011; 2014.

<sup>121</sup> One telling example was Mezri Haddad, who shifted from being a fierce opponent to the regime to one of its main endorsed intellectuals (interview with Mezri Haddad, Paris, 21 June 2016).

<sup>122</sup> Several interviewees mentioned their discussion with one of them whose nickname was Hamadi.

exiles were able to retrieve their passports and go back to Tunisia in a relatively short space of time.”<sup>123</sup>

According to Geisser and Gobe (2007), “this practice of negotiation usually takes place in context of crises, the regime using the channel of pseudo-negotiation with Islamists to obtain a certain number of information about ongoing projects”.

## **Section II.**

### **The role of the French authorities: between constraints and possibilities for action**

The first section delved into the ways in which the homeland can influence the possibilities, the nature and form of mobilisation for pro- and anti-regime activists and the broader Tunisian population. The trans-state space of mobilisation is constrained by pressures that can be made to transcend the boundaries of the Tunisian state. However, these pressures should be considered in conjunction with the policies of the host state (Grojean and Massicard, 2005). In this part of the discussion I use the term “French authorities” in a loose sense; these authorities are not of course homogeneous, and there was some differentiation in treatment of Tunisian activists between the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister and the Presidency, amongst others.<sup>124</sup>

#### **1. Legal possibilities and constraints**

In terms of POS, one central aspect of the French context pertains to legal issues. The study of possibilities for action are intrinsically linked to the legal possibilities as set out by the French authorities over time, although I will show how the Tunisian actors,

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<sup>123</sup> Abdelwahab Al-Hani, “*Appel du 10 septembre 2009. Pour le retour des exilés*”, 11 September 2009, available at: <http://www.alhiwar.net/ShowNews.php?Tnd=221>, accessed 17 April 2016. This crucial question of return under Ben Ali will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>124</sup> However, Lamloum (2001) in her study of French foreign policy towards Tunisian and Algerian Islamism between 1987 and 1995 demonstrates the weight of the “security field”, and in particular the hegemonic role of the French Ministry of the Interior compared to the “political field” and “economic field” in determining the management of Tunisian Islamism – and thus its politics towards exiles.

like many other exile groups in France, managed to circumvent the French law in order to operate successfully.

It is interesting to note that foreign associations in France were banned until 1981, when the law of 9 October 1981 revoked the decree of April 1939 pertaining to the constitution of foreign associations. Article 22 of this decree stated that “no foreign association can be created and exert its activities in France without prior authorisation from the Ministry of Interior” (Ponty, 2003). However, as Dumont (2007, p. 292) explained, “the year 1981 was no year zero for migrant associations.” Foreign associations existed *de facto* (*associations de fait*) before 1981, but the new law had a significant symbolic and political influence insofar as it legitimised the expression of foreign individuals by the French authorities (Dumont, 2007, pp. 34-35, p. 291). However, the French law did not allow them to create political parties, and the fact that the RCD, Ennahda and other leftist political parties could not function as political parties within the French scene meant that they had to fall back on the creation of associations, as was shown in the previous chapter.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, foreigners in France are not allowed to take part in any political activities that would interfere with French affairs. As Dufoix (1996) and Lochak (1985) pointed out, forbidding foreign individuals from engaging in political activities is not detailed in French law, however, but instead is a normative rule guided by practice and governmental doctrine. Chapter 4 will show how this constraint was crucial in differentiating the possibilities for action in the field of immigrant politics between leftists (of whom a number were naturalised) and Islamists (who were mostly asylum seekers or refugees in the 1990s). The unofficial requirement of political neutrality for foreigners goes a step further for statutory refugees. With the exception of the circular of 12 July 1974,<sup>126</sup> it is difficult to find any precise texts that address this question. However, this circular specifically stated that refugees are not supposed to:

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<sup>125</sup> They were banned from creating political parties not because of their status as foreigners or refugees but because their political project was not compatible with the constitutional definition of political parties as defined by Article 4 of the French Constitution, which states that the action of political parties has necessarily to be inscribed in the framework of the French nation. In comparison, Ennahda decided to register as a think tank in the UK (*al-markaz al-magharebi l-al-bouhouth*).

<sup>126</sup> FNA-P 19990260/15, Circular n°74-378 pertaining to the admission in France of political refugees.

...transpose onto the national territory in a violent manner the political conflicts of the country of origin; [are expected not to] harm the interior and exterior security and not jeopardise the diplomatic relations of the country of residence.

Dufoix (2002, p. 88) suggested that it was therefore implicitly forbidden for foreigners, and more particularly for refugees, to create a political space in competition with the French national one. Thus legal political opportunity structures conditioned the possibilities for action. We can now go on to examine in more detail how each constellation of actors faced different constraints and were offered different opportunities by the French authorities.

## **2. A diplomatic management of the RCD**

The RCD, like any other foreign political party, was banned by the French state from undertaking any political activities in France. However, there was certainly a *laissez-faire* policy in place. The French authorities were well aware of the situation, as the response of the Prefect of the Bouches-du-Rhône (Marseille) to a demand from the French Ministry of Interior in January 1991 to map out all the “associations, directly linked to foreign political parties, especially from North African countries” suggests:

‘The Amicales of Tunisians of Provence’, which is the association the most representative of the Tunisian colony of the Bouche du Rhône, is considered to be the instrument of propaganda and control of the Tunisian government. Indeed the association designates its leaders with the agreement of the Tunisian General Consulate in Marseille.<sup>127</sup>

As Pereira (2012, p. 365) explains in the case of Salazar’s Portugal:

In practice, the police and intelligence services are less picky on the defence of national sovereignty than in their discourse. They accept the intervention of foreign agents on their territory as long as this is not too noticeable and that it coincides with their own interests.

This idea of converging interests dates back to the Bourguiba era in the context of a proliferation of immigrant social protests and strikes in the 1960s and 1970s in France.<sup>128</sup> As Escafré-Dublet (2012, p. 153) shows in the Moroccan case, “the aim

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<sup>127</sup> FNA-P 19960134/10, Ministry of Interior, Circular NOR/INT/A/91/00019/C, Paris, 23 January 1991; Letter from prefect of Bouche du Rhône, 6 February 1991.

<sup>128</sup> One could go as far as to hypothesise that the entanglement between French and Tunisian security services took roots in the colonial period. If we could not trace genealogies of these forms of control in detail, House (2004) notes the control of migration as part of colonial practices more generally. He shows the role of encadrement, control and surveillance that the French “counsellors” could play.

of the creation of a federation of *Amicales* presented as apolitical was to create an alternative space of socialisation to the political unions.” The French authorities could benefit from the multiplication of the Tunisian structures of *encadrement*. Under Ben Ali, the interest of social peace was coupled with a security interest, particularly in the 1990s. This was based not only on the fear of unionised workers, but also reflected the converging securitised management by both French and Tunisian authorities of the Islamist question on French soil (Lamloum, 2001).

Ben Ali’s regime was able to take advantage of an anti-Islamist consensus to arrange practises and agreements on the management of Tunisian Islamism (Lamloum, 2001, p. 225).<sup>129</sup> I have documented a number of meetings at the beginning of the 1990s between French and Tunisian authorities which were occasions for the Tunisians to renew their worries about:

...the threat that is represented, for their country, by the activities of different Islamist leaders in France (...), who would take advantage of French soil to carry out political actions directed against the Tunisian regime, under the cover of cultural or social institutions.<sup>130</sup>

Tunisia asked France to take measures accordingly against those not considered as political opponents but as “terrorists.”<sup>131</sup> The refusal of the French state to offer asylum to the president of the Islamist Movement, Rached Ghannouchi, is an example of this management. In contrast, the UK, which did accept his asylum demand, put forward a more inclusive policy towards exiles, and was accused of permissiveness by the French authorities. This has to be linked to different migratory and judiciary traditions as well as different stakes in the diplomatic relations between the UK and Tunisia (Lamloum, 2003).

The anti-Islamist consensus was reinforced by 9/11, which was a great opportunity for the Tunisian regime to reinforce its legitimacy and further justify the repression of its opponents, particularly Ennahda, by associating the Tunisian Islamist movement with Al-Qaeda terrorists. These accusations found a sympathetic ear

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<sup>129</sup> For instance, “*Opération de police française dans les milieux islamistes tunisiens*,” 1993.

<sup>130</sup> FNA-P 19920417/15, “*Note au secrétaire général*”, A/S : *Démarche tunisienne au sujet des intégristes résidant en France*”, Paris, 27 April 1990.

<sup>131</sup> “*Le gouvernement reproche à plusieurs pays leur tolérance à l’égard des ‘terroristes’ d’Ennahdha*,” 1992.

among the French authorities as they initiated their struggle against global terrorism.<sup>132</sup> In this specific context, migration and terrorism were therefore interpreted through a similar securitised prism. Lamloum (2003, p. 141) stated that “the construction of a homogenous penal and police space for fortress Europe received a tremendous push on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September,” which then had a direct impact on Nahdawi exiles. As one member of Ennahda’s political bureau rightly suggested, “after a decade of struggles, the regime was politically naked, but 9/11 gave it a new life” (interview with Hamed K. \*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

In addition to security interests, diplomatic and economic necessities allowed the Tunisian party-state room to operate in France and for the French authorities to condone this. Although on the diplomatic front the relations between France and Tunisia were not always easy,<sup>133</sup> and varied according to different party governments, I argue that bilateral diplomatic relations shape possibilities for action. According to Yves Aubin de la Messuzières, the former French Ambassador in Tunisia, the relationship between Jacques Chirac and Ben Ali was not always one of trust (interview, Paris, 7 September 2016), unlike Nicolas Sarkozy, who maintained a good relationship with the Tunisian regime.<sup>134</sup> This contradicts other accounts that stressed Chirac’s compliance towards Ben Ali (Beau and Tuquoi, 2011, p. 201) as well as reports of Chirac’s warm reception by Tunisia on official state visits in 1995 (De Barrin, 1995) and 2003 (Tréan and Gurrey, 2003).<sup>135</sup> When the French Socialist party (PS) came to power leading the 1997-2002 coalition, relations grew a little more distant, although Bredoux and Magnaudaix (2012, pp. 101-107) demonstrate a certain ambiguity in the relationship between the PS and the RCD. While it is interesting to note that the RCD was accepted as a member of the Socialist International in 1989, it seems that the Tunisian regime maintained better diplomatic relations when right-wing parties were in power in France. However, in more general

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<sup>132</sup> Chirac’s presidential speech in Tunis in December 2001 is telling in this respect (Chirac, 2001). More generally, on the impact of 9/11 on the treatment of asylum seekers as well as the warming of relationship between the Tunisian and French regime, see Toscane (2005), pp. 111-47.

<sup>133</sup> For more information on diplomatic affairs between the two countries, see Beau and Tuquoi, 2011.

<sup>134</sup> See also Bredoux and Magnaudaix, 2012, pp. 83-121.

<sup>135</sup> This official state visit was renowned for Chirac’s statement that “the most important human rights are the right to eat, to seek medical assistance, to receive education, to have somewhere to live” (Tréan and Gurrey, 2003).



terms France needed to look after its strategic interests in Tunisia, so it played the role of ally to Tunisia from different perspectives (diplomatically, economically and more importantly on the security front), which led Garon (2003) to discuss “dangerous alliances”. This stands in sharp contrast with the constraints imposed upon Islamist actors, to which I now turn.

### **3. The securitisation of the Islamist movement in France**

If the French environment appears to provide space for Nahdawis to mobilise, the securitised management of the Islamist presence in France constrains Islamist mobilisation in the public space, thus shaping the possibilities for action. It is therefore necessary to understand how these mobilisations are framed in relation to and in interaction with the French environment.

The French context did offer some protection for Nahdawis in exile, and the activists were themselves well aware of their potential for action. As the head of the political committee commented:

“We were not recognised but we were tolerated to move around, to do our activities freely. I can testify because I was head of the political committee, I was vice-president of the movement during those years and I could travel everywhere in Europe” (interview with Ameer Laarayedh, Tunis, 12 July 2016).

One member of the same political committee went further:

“We considered the recognition of asylum to be political recognition. The recognition of Tunisian political exiles in France is political recognition. And politically the Tunisian government saw it as such. We had a political office here, we made statements here, we were practically a political party exiled in Paris. (...) I would say that the French government practiced a laissez-faire, let-live policy. This was the political philosophy of the French regime towards the Tunisian regime” (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

However, Ennahda had to adjust to a securitised environment. The arrival of the main wave of exiles at the beginning of the 1990s coincided with the advent of right wing power in France, and notably the promulgation of the Pasqua laws, repressive for all migrants. One should also contextualise the presence of Nahdawis during the suspension of the Algerian electoral process in 1992. The Algerian question escalated the Islamist management by the French state. A member of the French intelligence in charge of this management told me:

“So Ennahda suffered a bit from the concern born of the growth of Algerian Islamism. Try as I might to explain (the nuances within Ennahda), (the Directorate for the Surveillance of the Territory [DST]) puts everyone in the same bag. This idea spreads. That is, as far as the French context goes.” (interview with Bernard Godard, Paris, 25 June 2016).

One cannot fully grasp the securitised way of dealing with Nahdawi exiles without understanding the pressure that was exerted by the Tunisian regime on the French authorities. As discussed above, the Tunisian services were eager to make up any number of stories to incriminate Nahdawis and justify their demands for more surveillance and extradition. Although the same member of the French intelligence service recognised that “Ennahda was not revolutionary, whatever the Tunisian regime stated at this period” (interview with Bernard Godard, Paris, 25 June 2016), a “compensation” to the Tunisian regime is recognised when exploring the ways in which the French state dealt with Nahdawi asylum applications. Toscane (2005) offers a detailed and more precise overview of this question in the *droit d’asile benaliéné*, distinguishing between two different periods. This was corroborated by all the interviewees I spoke to. Up to 1991, asylum seekers obtained their refugee status without too much difficulty,<sup>136</sup> but the majority of claims between 1992-93 and 1995 were blocked due to pressure from the Tunisian authorities.<sup>137</sup> Ameer Laarayedh explained that:

“on the one hand, there were very well documented applications, they could not refuse the status of political refugee; but on the other hand they could not give refugee status because interests in Tunisia could be in danger and Ben Ali’s regime was threatening” (interview with Ameer Laarayedh, Tunis, 12 July 2016).

Some leaders explained that they had to wait for eight or nine years before obtaining asylum. This refusal of status was a way of keeping Islamists in a state of uncertainty, with a number of them forced to renew their residence permits every three months. The president of Solidarité Tunisienne went further when he claimed that the French administration regularly offered to help him “leave France, move to somewhere else”

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<sup>136</sup> Ameer Laarayedh, who followed nahdawi applications closely explained that “at this period, France granted political refugee status, it was almost systematic. It took from three months to one year.” (interview with Ameer Laarayedh, Tunis, 12 July 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Toscane (2005) explored the fact that French authorities studied the applications but did not give responses during excessive periods, or gave incoherent reasons for asylum refusals.

whenever he went to the French administration to renew his papers (interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015).

Even if the French state did not accede to repeated demands for extradition by the Tunisian regime, its management of Tunisian Islamism led to a sense of isolation of the movement and set the boundaries of the state's tolerance towards Nahdawi activists on its territory (Lamloum, 2001, p. 221). The case of Salah Karker exemplifies the political stakes symbolised by the presence of the Tunisian Islamist movement in France and shows how Islamist refugees could be used as bartering tools between French and Tunisian authorities. Karker was one of the founders and main leaders of Ennahda, and he had lived in exile in France since 1987. Under pressure from the Tunisian government, which considered he was one of its main political enemies,<sup>138</sup> the French Ministry of Interior put Karker under house arrest from 1993.<sup>139</sup> This kind of pressure had previously been used by the French authorities a few months before Ben Ali's ascent to power in the context of harsh repression against the Islamists: Habib Mokni, spokesperson of the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (Movement of Islamic tendency, MTI) was placed under house arrest at that time (interview with Habib Mokni, Paris, October 2016) and "Bourguiba said he was satisfied by this measure, which was presented by Paris as a gesture of goodwill towards Tunis."<sup>140</sup>

More generally, Nahdawi exiles were frequently reminded that they must be politically discreet. François Mitterrand affirmed that Tunisian Islamist exiles in France were legally and morally expected to observe the requirement of reserve ("*obligation de réserve*") (Lamloum, 2001, p. 220). While visiting Tunisia in 1992, Jacques Chirac corroborated this, stating that "one should not conflate rights to asylum with rights to "unrest" (*droit d'agitation*)"<sup>141</sup>. As one of the leaders of UGTEF explained:

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<sup>138</sup> A French ambassador in Tunisia recalled that Karker "was their obsession" (interview with Yves Aubin de la Messuzières, Paris, 7 September 2016).

<sup>139</sup> For more details on the Karker case, see Lamloum, 2001, p. 441-46; Toscane, pp. 33-54. Karker's lawyers mentioned some irregularities in this affair, potentially involving interference by the French authorities (interview with Claudie and Benoît Hubert, Marseille, 25 February 2016).

<sup>140</sup> "*La France est satisfaite du verdict 'équilibré'*," 1987.

<sup>141</sup> "*La formation du gouvernement d'Edouard Balladur. Les options extérieures de la nouvelle équipe Maghreb: la fin des tiraillements*," 1993.

“There was a red line for the French state which you should not cross. If you started getting interested in the French situation, you were in trouble. For me it was clear when I started my involvement with Ennahda, these were things I was told [...]: no armed actions, no bombings; and you are an opposition party, you are opposing Ben Ali, so you don’t meddle in French affairs. We don’t want to see you intervene in employment issues, any political issues regarding precarity, involve the mosques in any trouble... This was the red line. We were a political party from a foreign country, so we didn’t have the right to take action on French soil” (interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 6 October 2015).

This will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 4, but even from this overview we can see that this has a direct impact on the non-involvement of Islamist exiles in immigrant politics. The implicit sense of political discretion was also sustained in the aftermath of 9/11, which reinforced debates on religious neutrality in France. We will see that religious neutrality in the French public space also represents a constraint influencing both the possibility and the means of action (Bowen, 2004).

The arrival of Nahdawis in exile and the reconstruction of the Ennahda movement in France led to a somewhat securitised response from the French state which can be ascribed to regional contexts, pressures from the Tunisian state and the specificities of the French socio-political arena.

#### **4. Leftist movements and the difficulties of being heard**

Attitudes to leftist activists, as in the cases of other exiled groups (Kaye, 1992), was determined by France’s foreign policy and its relations with Tunisia. However, when looking at leftist movements and their relationship with the French authorities, it also appears that the constraints of the host country differed from one group to another: some actors seem to be considered as more legitimate interlocutors. In other words, the identity of the movement matters when it comes to opportunities and constraints. Unlike Ennahda and its securitised management of the French state, leftist movements had to face another type of constraint: the relative indifference of the French authorities.

This can be linked firstly with French diplomatic and economic stakes of Tunisia, which in turn influenced the possibilities to mobilise for opposition movements. However, unlike Ennahda, leftist movements were not discredited, and were seen as more legitimate opposition groupings. Some were even occasionally received in

“*Matignon*” (the Prime Minister’s office), although this was not common (interview with Yves Aubin de la Messuzières, Paris, 7 September 2016), as it could lead to tensions with Ben Ali’s regime. We will see in the next chapter how the European space came to be considered as a “way out” of this ghettoization of the anti-regime cause for leftist movements.

The difference in legal status between leftists and Islamists must also be highlighted here. The majority of leftist activists under Ben Ali were not given refugee status, which meant that they did not face the same obligations and constraints that we have discussed in the case of Ennahda. Some of these Tunisian leftists also had dual nationality. As Olfa Lamloum, one member of the *Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l’Homme en Tunisie* (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia, CRLDHT) explained, this constituted a strong difference between the two constellations of actors when facing the constraints of the French context in terms of their mobilisations:

“The left has always been tolerated in France. You also had people with dual nationality, all this comes into play [...] the Islamists, when they arrive, are not even refugees, they do not even have papers, so there is a vulnerability that has been maintained. Clearly, activists from the other side (the leftists), despite their differentiated degree of social insertion, are less vulnerable than the Islamists” (interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1 November 2017).

In more general terms, one of the leaders of the *Comité de Soutien aux Luttres Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie* (Support Committee to the Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia, CSLCPT) and PDP-Paris, told me:

“I think we benefited from the fact that the danger was seen as ‘bearded’ [i.e. Islamist]. As we were not identified as bearded, it surely gave us room for manoeuvre. But at the same time we did not have this privileged relationship with the governmental left that parts of the Tunisian left could have. (...) We neither had a privileged relation nor were we the targets” (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 31 October 2017).

It seems an exaggeration to speak of a privileged relationship between the French and the Tunisian left. However, it is important to emphasise the difference in treatment between different groups of leftists. If some groups remained unheard by the French authorities – or if they did not seek to be heard anyway – one can observe the processes of institutionalisation of a number of such associations, which had an

impact on their possibilities for action. This was the case for the *Fédération des Tunisiens par une Citoyenneté des deux rives* (FTCR) and the *Association des Tunisiens en France* (ATF). These two associations depended on the French authorities for funding,<sup>142</sup> which led to some (implicit) constraints. We will discuss this further in Chapter 4 and see that their discourse increasingly came to centre on “integration and citizenship”, and as one of its activists noted, the institutionalisation of the movement led to a delicate negotiation and “diglossia” between conventional speaking and anti-establishment discourses (FTCR, 2014, p. 26).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the trans-state space of mobilisation should be understood in terms of opportunities and constraints. First, through an intensively descriptive analysis of the extra-territorial practices of the diverse actors involved in the politics of *encadrement*, the logics of the first constraints appear clearer. In this attempt at understanding the role and impact of the Tunisian system of *encadrement*, I argued that the system was characterised by a dialectic of social, economic and cultural assistance as well as surveillance. I have demonstrated that this de-territorialisation of control is largely made up of different forms of social assistance: all Tunisian structures tried to render services, to embrace the Tunisian population abroad by satisfying its needs. The mechanisms of control of the Tunisians abroad should therefore not only be understood from a security perspective but also as a form of clientelist mediation. However, the Tunisian regime, acting from afar, also put in place through this mediation what I refer to as a system of fear, which prevented many from engaging in Tunisian politics. Through social and cultural *encadrement*, surveillance, propaganda, physical violence and a pervasive sense of threat, the Tunisian party-state succeeded in constraining Tunisian anti-regime mobilisation and faced increasing difficulties in encouraging pro-regime actions in France.

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<sup>142</sup> Subsidies from Paris City Hall and the *Fonds d'Action Sociale* (FAS), FNA-P 119AS/12, 119AS/1214/15.

The politics of *encadrement* were tolerated by the French authorities. The focus on host state opportunities and constraints shows how they varied from one group to another: the comparatively diplomatic handling of the RCD stands in stark contrast to the securitised management of Ennahda. Meanwhile Tunisian leftist movements were forced to contend with another type of issue: unlike Ennahda, they were not discredited because of their political identity, but they found difficulties in making themselves heard in the French political arena because of strong diplomatic and economic ties between the successive French governments and the Ben Ali regime.

Having clarified the ways in which both the home state and the host country play a central role in delineating the boundaries of participation or exclusion, we can turn to the consequences this has on mobilisation for the different constellations of actors. Here we need to emphasise the political agency of those actors who attempt to grasp the constraints and opportunities of the trans-state space of mobilisation. It is not enough to describe political opportunity structures as mere external factors. We need to view them instead as dialectic processes which shape mobilisation and are shaped in return by the actors. It is to these mobilisations that I turn in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### The field of homeland politics

#### Introduction

Having defined the opportunities and constraints of the trans-state space, this chapter now explores what this implies for the activists' mobilisation in terms of homeland politics. In other words, it turns to the analysis of a universe of practices of homeland mobilisation and the internal workings of relevant movements. It focuses for the most part on the two main constellations of actors which worked from afar against the Ben Ali regime—namely the Islamist and leftist movements. One of the main pillars in the field of homeland politics was represented by the diverse ways of opposing the Tunisian regime. However, pro-regime actors will also be examined, as power relations and hierarchies in the field cannot be fully understood without their inclusion in the analysis. I will also scrutinise the role of independent and other political parties as brokers and mediating actors.

Exploring the different mobilisation and political experiences of such diverse constellations of actors allows us to understand different features within the field of homeland politics. Such an understanding helps us to find answers to the following questions: What are the main cleavages along which the field of homeland politics is structured? What are the relations between the different activists and the types of resources needed in that field? What role does the actors' own political identity play in their choice of framing strategies, their ways of structuring their political activities and organising contention within the field of homeland politics? Under what conditions are some strategies used at the expense of others?

Despite ideological differences and dissimilarities over time in the action between leftists and Islamists, I will begin by demonstrating that the need to reach out to broader audiences in order to be heard in national and international arenas led to the framing of the cause in terms of human rights, to similar repertoires of action and to experiences of coalition-building. However, I will also show that two main lines of cleavage are crucial to the full understanding of Tunisian oppositional movements



acting from afar. These cleavage lines structure the field and determine the means of action in terms of the relationship to ideological competitors and their degree of rupture vis-à-vis the Tunisian regime. While the human rights framing fits with different opportunity structures and audiences, each constellation of actors still retained its own set of internal rulings, thereby leading to a deeply polarised oppositional milieu. The cultivation of intra-community took a different form for Islamists and leftists, favouring differentiated predispositions to mobilisation.

This chapter unfolds by firstly addressing the forms, frames and repertoires of action. It then delves into different experiences of coalition-building before finally investigating the internal system of interaction of the groupings as well as their intra-community sociability.

## **Section I.**

### **Frames and repertoires of action of activists from afar**

“What was structuring and very important was the idea that in the isolation in which Ben Ali’s regime managed to put the opposition, human rights issues flourished strongly” (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015).

#### **1. Human rights framing and repertoires of action**

This section explores the circulation of frames and repertoires of action between the constellations of actors. Leftists, Islamists and pro-regime activists commonly used human rights as a “master frame” (Benford and Snow, 1992; 2000) and oppositional activists deployed similar means of action. Widely used in social movement literature,

...frames represent interpretive schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in the “world out there” (...) As signifying agents engaged in the social construction of meaning, movements must articulate and disseminate frameworks of understanding that resonate with potential participants and broader publics to elicit collective action (Wiktorowicz, 2003, p. 15).

For oppositional constellations within the field of homeland politics, articulating grievances in terms of human rights can be understood as a form of “leverage politics,” as it allows for the recognition of ethics that lie beyond the bounds of

political conflict. Human rights activists demonstrate “the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are [otherwise] unlikely to have influence” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 16). In an attempt to bridge political opportunity models and framing theories, a number of authors have conceptualised the notion of “discursive opportunity structures” to “reveal that cultural elements in the broader environment facilitate and constrain successful social movement framing” (McCammon, 2013). This helps us to establish “which ideas are considered ‘sensible,’ which constructions of reality are seen as ‘realistic,’ and which claims are held as ‘legitimate’ within a certain polity at a specific time” (Koopmans and Statham, 1999, p. 228). In more precise terms, Koopmans and Olzak (2004, p. 202) define discursive opportunities as the “aspects of the public discourse that determine a message’s chances of diffusion in the public sphere”. This concept is very useful here as it gives us the opportunity to see how discursive opportunity structures – along with the POS analysed in the previous chapter – affect mobilisation, and thence the choice of framing.

In other words, in order to maximise their resonance with the different audiences to be targeted, the frame of human rights is a valuable tool to use when translating the cause in a more universal way so that discourse about these rights opens up access to a global arena (Passy, 1999). The idea that human rights can act as an effective frame for articulating grievances and gaining recognition seems to be common amongst activist movements suffering from negative identification with a terrorist stigma, as the case of Tamil activists in France (Dequirez, 2011), or an “Islamist stigma”, as seen in other Islamist exile movements in Europe (Dazey and Zederman, 2017).

The resonant theme of human rights follows a distinct interpretation by the actors and allows us to understand how frames “are variously embedded in and bounded by aspects of the broader culture and political context” (Snow, 2004, p. 385). For Islamists, the activation of a discourse on human rights appears as a way of circumventing the distrust to which they were habitually subjected. For the leftists, human rights could stand as a rallying point, as fighting the Ben Ali regime during this period meant embracing the Islamists as a matter of necessity, as they were main

victims of repression. Meanwhile, for pro-regime actors, the human rights frame was paradoxically a way of legitimising the regime abroad.

However, at this point two precautionary warnings should be taken into account. Firstly, the use of human rights can be understood very differently by the actors themselves; it is necessary to bear in mind a non-static and non-uniform vision of these repertoires of “self-presentation” (Mathieu, 2002). Secondly, one should be careful not to interpret this strategy of opening up through the frame of human rights as being strictly utilitarian. Was it an overt choice to base repertoires of contention on human rights, or was it contingent upon the situation? This question needs to be explored further. As I was not given access to the minutes of meetings in which decisions were taken to adopt various strategies, it is difficult to know exactly how the actors decided to privilege one strategy over another. Their decisions must be linked to the activist habitus of the actors in the field, which tends to imply “an anticipation of the actions of the other agents of the field, which does not necessarily imply conscious thinking” (Bigo, 2011, p. 241). Building on the consensus in social movement literature that actors devise and align frames to resonate with a particular audience (Snow et al, 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000) and following Contamin’s analysis of the practical dilemmas with which activists are confronted (ibid, 2005, p. 5), I hypothesise that this choice stemmed from the practicalities of the time. The actors were sensitive to particular situations and needed to adjust their strategies accordingly, either consciously or unconsciously, to the political and discursive opportunity structures of the trans-state space of mobilisation.

### **1.1 Ennahda and the necessity of universalising the oppositional message**

An initial appraisal of the different modalities of Islamist mobilisations highlights one significant feature. The need to make the cause visible and audible to as large an audience as possible, coupled with injunctions to de-politicise from both host and home states (see Chapter 2), has led to a rhetoric and repertoires of mobilisation based around human rights. It is therefore possible to observe some forms of “de-Islamisation” in this context, meaning that the frame of human rights supersedes religious and partisan frames, as humanitarian issues may be seen as more legitimate

reasons for protest by the various audiences targeted. This implies a strategy of diversion—one of opening up to more general sympathy when mobilising in order to bypass any Islamist stigma which were attached to Ennahda in the French arena. The main aim of Nahdawi mobilisation was not specifically human rights-oriented, it was more a desire to escape their situation of marginalisation in exile.

#### *1.1.1 Humanitarian means of action: between information and symbolic politics*

During the first half of the 1990s, Ennahda mobilisations remained centred on the social and administrative situations of newly arrived waves of exiles. Ennahda's focus on humanitarian actions stemmed in fact from an official decision at the party's internal congress in 1992, during which the leaders prioritised the defence of political prisoners in Tunisia as well as the support of Nahdawi families both in Tunisia and abroad (interviews with various Ennahda leaders, Paris/Tunis, 2015-17). The main activities were thus targeted at helping exiles rebuild their lives after difficult experiences of displacement, such as helping with their asylum applications, housing, and financial situations. Once their lives became more settled, the pace of activism increased from 1997 onwards but the humanitarian prism of their mobilisation remained similar. The proclaimed objectives of the *Solidarité Tunisienne* association, which represented Ennahda in France, offer a glimpse into the way in which humanitarian claims are foregrounded at the expense of partisan and religious identifications. The association was aimed at:

defending the rights of Tunisians with civil and legal means; working towards better integration of Tunisians abroad; keeping humanitarian organisations and media informed of the situation in Tunisia (regarding human rights); helping Tunisian asylum seekers and refugees materially and morally; helping the families of political prisoners in Tunisia.<sup>143</sup>

In that context, in order for their cause to be heard in the national and international arena, a series of approaches were put forward, mainly through two of the techniques identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998, p. 16) to understand how activists – in their case, what they termed “transnational advocacy networks” – attempted to draw attention to their causes. The first, information politics, describes “the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it

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<sup>143</sup> Statutes of the association, Paris, Ennahda personal archives.

will have the most impact”, while the second, symbolic politics, represents “the ability to call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away” (ibid).<sup>144</sup>

Through organising demonstrations, the activists firstly hoped to engage French audiences in order to escape their isolation. Ennahda’s political committee organised gatherings in symbolic places in Paris, such as in the *Parvis des droits de l’Homme* in Trocadéro, in the *Fontaine des innocents* in Châtelet or in front of the Tunisian Embassy and Consulate.<sup>145</sup> These gatherings were not routinised, and often took place informally on diverse occasions such as the arrest of a leader or the torture, mistreatment in prison or death of significant members. Such protests provided opportunities to mobilise against and denounce the Tunisian regime.

The demonstrations were primarily a way of alerting people to human rights issues rather than putting forward any kind of dissident political project. They relied on emotional resonance and operated through “awareness-raising devices” (Traïni, 2012). They were aimed at arousing moral indignation and evoking emotional reactions of compassion (Traïni and Siméant, 2009, p. 13).<sup>146</sup> The activists displayed pictures of “martyrs” and regularly distributed a book called *The Tragedy of Political Prisoners in Tunisia, a Book against Denial*, which gathered a number of testimonies from Nahdawi prisoners recounting the dreadful conditions in prison (*Solidarité Tunisienne* and CDPPT, 2003). The diverse slogans centred around human rights, and the presence of children of exiles carrying placards bearing slogans such as “Why cannot I go back to Tunisia?” reinforced the affective dimension that the activists were attempting to put to the fore. The “symbolic politics” and the logic of performance became clear during Ben Ali’s official visit to France in 1997, which was met by a coordinated hunger strike involving roughly ten activists, in order to protest against confiscated passports and separated families – as we have seen, one of the

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<sup>144</sup> Along the same lines of inquiry, Adamson (2002) demonstrates the different ways in which transnational activists attempt to provide alternative sources of information in order to “transform home”.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Figure 6 “Map of Tunisian activism”.

<sup>146</sup> See also Tarrow (2011, pp. 152-155) on the importance of emotion as an essential part of the culture of contention. As a comparison, Dequierez (2011, pp. 332-334) shows similar strategies employed by Tamil activists in France.

Ben Ali regime's techniques designed to promote repression against activists' families who remained in Tunisia. The hunger strike was organised by the *Collectif des Tunisiens sans passeports* (Collective of Tunisians without passports) and the *Collectif des Familles Otages en Tunisie* (Collective of Hostage Families in Tunisia) (interviews with Abderraouf Mejri, Aymen K.\* and Ameer Laarayedh, Paris, 2015-6).<sup>147</sup>

However, as the president of the *Majlis al-Shura* explained, the attention was designed to attract the support of large organisations, as

“a communiqué from Amnesty, the League [of Human Rights] or Human Rights Watch is much more important than a 10,000-strong demonstration in the streets. Because it attracts attention, its effects are wider. Because we were unable to organise mass demonstrations, this was not our chosen method. We did not mobilise Tunisians here [in Paris], for instance, as we knew it would have consequences on their security.” (Interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015)

The effort to occupy public spaces was therefore complemented by advocacy work and “information politics” designed to reach out to parliamentarians, diplomats, the media and NGOs to raise awareness on the cause of political prisoners and more generally on political opponents. Before the existence of the Internet, letters or files summarising the situation in Tunisia were sent, often by fax or posted directly through the letterboxes of MPs (interviews with Abderraouf Mejri and Ameer Laarayedh, Paris, 2015-6). At the student level, similar actions were carried out by the UGTEF to raise people's awareness about exiled students in France as well as persecuted Islamist students in Tunisia (interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2015). As one of the UGTEF's leaders recounted:

“When Hamadi Jebali [the main leader of Ennahda] was arrested, we did not do a great deal, but when such and such a student was arrested, it became our responsibility. So it was not so much a difference in action or means, but rather a difference in audience.” (ibid).

Finally, at both media and international levels, what mattered was to “present [their] cause well” (interview with Adel L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2016). The communication committee was dedicated to this process, notably through one of its leaders who was in charge of political affairs, and who remembered going regularly to different

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<sup>147</sup> About sixty families received their passports following this mobilisation (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

European and North African countries to provide official representation for the movement (interview with Mhmed P.\*, Paris, 16 December 2016).

Information politics and advocacy work were also channelled by media organisations and editing companies belonging to Nahdawi activists. Information was distilled through a number of publications, mainly in Arabic, published sporadically owing to lack of resources. When asked about the issue of language, in order to understand the audience to which these newspapers were addressed, one leader responded:

“Yes this was our dilemma. We had no access to French public opinion. The target was mainly Tunisians in the diaspora. I think we were aware of this, but we lacked the skills to write proficiently in French. Communication and information were not our strength.” (interview with Ridha Driss, Tunis, 15 July 2016).

The issue of limited resources was something about which the actors felt extremely self-conscious. Despite a willingness to reach out to a larger audience, such initiatives were somewhat restricted. This allows us to understand the difficulties with which Nahdawis were confronted in terms of means and capacity. These difficulties led in turn to a specific framing in terms of human rights, as well as a difficulty in undertaking any alternative political project, determining in turn the position of Islamists in the hierarchy of the field of homeland politics.

In chronological order I could document the existence of *al-Cha’r al-Magharebi* (Maghrebi Avenue) before 1990, *al-Fajr* (the Dawn) (edited in London from 1992 but written by people from many countries, especially France) and the weekly newspaper *al-Mutawasset*<sup>148</sup> (the Mediterranean) which ran from 1992 to 1994. Meanwhile, *al-Hadath al-Magharibi* (the Maghrebi Event) and *anba’ tunissiyya* (news from Tunisia), were aimed at spreading information on the Tunisian situation in France and in Europe more generally. In 1995 the activists attempted to publish a newspaper in French, *à l’heure de Tunis* (on Tunis Time), but only produced a couple of issues. Although it cannot be counted as an organ of the party, some leaders were also involved in a bigger intellectual project with other thinkers from the Arab world, which revolved around the publication in Arabic of *al-Insan*, which published analysis

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<sup>148</sup> According to one interviewee, *al-Mutawasset* was banned by Charles Pasqua, for alleged antisemitism following his visit to Tunisia and pressure from Ben Ali’s regime (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 3 April 2016).

on the Arab world every three months up to 1997. A French report noted that “most of these publications avoid the official distribution channels and [were] clandestinely distributed within the national territory.”<sup>149</sup> This was corroborated when the main leader in charge of the different media explained that they were “passed from hand to hand, sold in Arab bookshops or sent by fax” (interview with Ridha Driss, Tunis, 15 July 2016). In addition, the OKBA bookshop, located in *rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud*, in the area of Couronnes,<sup>150</sup> was founded by four Ennahda leaders in exile and was especially active from 1989 to 1993 in the distribution of videotapes from Rached Ghannouchi that were mostly directed at a Muslim audience (interview with Lazhar Abaab, Paris, 3 November 2015). Finally, the television channel *al-Zituna* was launched from London at the end of the 1990s, and exiles based in Paris participated regularly both financially and by featuring in the programmes.<sup>151</sup>

Beyond the media, it is also when looking at the question of violence in the chosen means of action that one can better understand the positionality of the Islamist movement and their need to be accepted. The decision to dissociate themselves from any form of violence and radical action was officially taken during a crucial internal congress organised by Ennahda in Germany in 1995, which many of the interviewees referred to as the “Congress of Self-Criticism and Evaluation” regarding the years of confrontation with Ben Ali. In order to be accepted, it was necessary for Ennahda to distance itself from any violent movements in order not to be associated with them, especially in the context of the Algerian war and its repercussions in France.<sup>152</sup> This also led to divisions within the movement. In this respect, while Salah Karker was put under house arrest by the French authorities (see Chapter 2), he was excluded from the movement as he was seen to represent a threat to the process of normalisation Ennahda was willing to go through. One ex-sympathiser of the movement recalled that:

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<sup>149</sup> FNA-P 19920417/15, “*Activités de propagande en France du mouvement islamiste tunisien ‘Ennahda’*”, 7 June 1990.

<sup>150</sup> See Figure 6.

<sup>151</sup> The channel was forced to shut down in 2002 (Wolf, 2017, pp. 91-92).

<sup>152</sup> It was striking, for instance, that Ennahda chose to distance itself from the Tunisian Islamist Front, which was seen as a violent movement during this period, in order to display an image of moderation (Lamloum, 2001, p. 447).



“From early on, since the 1990s, Ennahda was in a project of submission to the West by showing that it was not a terrorist group. This was Ennahda’s main mission (...) and Salah Karker’s house arrest came just at the right moment for Ennahda to carry on without him” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 4 June 2016).<sup>153</sup>

### 1.1.2 Looking for allies

One way to bypass difficulties and lack of resources was to look for mediators for their cause which could help Ennahda resonate beyond its constituencies, a dynamic often referred to in the social movement literature as “coalition-building” (Tarrow, 2005). These mediators were often Tunisian activists who were sympathetic, or at least not opposed, to their cause, and French human rights organisations. The next section will address the attempts to reach out to other Tunisian (leftist) groups through more organised cross-ideological initiatives in order to escape further from their marginalised condition.

The regular participation of several activists in the main dissident newspaper, *L’Audace* (Audacity) in the section written in Arabic, was key for Ennahda activists. *L’Audace* was created in 1994 by Slim Bagga and Mezri Haddad, both independent exile activists, and was distributed from about ten kiosks in Paris.<sup>154</sup> Bagga (2002) described *L’Audace* as follows:

“It is true that this newspaper is not communist, is not socialist, is not right-wing, is not Islamist. We wanted it to be a newspaper that gathered all the Tunisian elite from all these different trends.”

Although not necessarily circulating their ideas directly, the mere participation in and distribution of the newspaper allowed Islamists to promote their existence and overcome their isolation.<sup>155</sup> In the same vein, their participation in TV programmes and scheduling at the end of the 1990 and beginning of the 2000s is also worth mentioning. Nahdavis in Paris took part in programmes created by the TV channels *al-Mustaqilla* (the Independent), created in 1999 in London,<sup>156</sup> and *al-Hiwar* (the Dialogue), which was also broadcast from London. The activists also established

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<sup>153</sup> This central “affair” constituted an important line of cleavage within the movement. A number of activists left during this period and continued to support Salah Karker, notably by organising recurrent demonstrations in Digne-les-Bains (Southern France) where he was put under arrest.

<sup>154</sup> Notably in Belleville, Barbès, Nation, République and Saint Michel.

<sup>155</sup> In addition, Ennahda financed part of the publication and distributed it among its members.

<sup>156</sup> For more information on *al-Mustaqilla*, see Ben M’barek (2000, pp. 410-12).

regular cooperation with *al-Jazeera*. Ennahda could thus make themselves heard, notably through *al-Mustaqilla's* weekly show "the Great Maghreb", during which diverse opposition voices were interviewed or invited to debate various issues (interviews with various Ennahda leaders, Paris, 2016).

Beyond the media, there also existed associations that were close to the Islamists despite not being directly affiliated, and these associations granted the movement more visibility. They could act as brokers, as they had more contacts and competences, notably in linguistic terms, and kept themselves detached from the Islamist affiliation to avoid stigma. Adamson (2013, p. 69), who drew on social movement concepts to look at transnational political dynamics, defined the role of brokers as follows: "When two networks are separated by a 'structural hole', a broker can gain power by filling the gap and bringing together two unlinked networks."

This was true of intermediaries such as Ahmed Manaï, who created a number of "broker-associations". Manaï, who was exiled to France in 1991 after standing in the Tunisian 1989 legislative elections as an independent candidate, was not a true Nahdawi, although he was one of the rare activists at the beginning of the 1990s who considered it important to work directly with them and support them (interview with Ahmed Manaï, Sousse, 27 November 2015).<sup>157</sup> As a former international expert with the UN and someone with many contacts in the French arena including French MPs and journalists,<sup>158</sup> Manaï helped publicise the human rights cause in his struggle against Ben Ali's regime, especially during the first half of the 1990s, when Ennahda activists were focusing mainly on their own social situation in France. While he was not defending religious or political Ennahda projects, he attempted to work towards reducing the demonization of the Islamist movement, and thus towards its ability to merely exist in the French public sphere.<sup>159</sup> In this respect, he was at the centre of a

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<sup>157</sup> For more on his trajectory, and the question of torture, see his book, *Le supplice tunisien* (Manaï, 1995), which played an important role in denouncing and making the issue known in Europe at that time.

<sup>158</sup> It is interesting to note, for instance, that he contributed to the books *Notre Ami Ben Ali* (Beau and Tuquoi, 2011) and *La Régente de Carthage* (Beau and Graciet, 2009), published by two French journalists, books which gained a large audience in the campaign against Ben Ali's authoritarian regime.

<sup>159</sup> See for instance his speech in which he called for support to all the Islamist prisoners on the International UN day on torture (June 1999).

number of initiatives including the *Coordination pour la Défense des Libertés en Tunisie* (Coordination for the Defence of Freedoms in Tunisia, CDLT),<sup>160</sup> and the Tunisian Institute for International Relations (ITRI). He also took part in the Centre for Information and Documentation on Torture (CIDT) which was created in May 1994 in Besançon,<sup>161</sup> and the *Comité Tunisien d'Appel à la Démission de Ben Ali* (Tunisian Committee Calling for Ben Ali's abdication) along with fellow activist Mondher Sfar.<sup>162</sup>

In order to overcome their marginalised status, it was crucial for Nahdawi activists to look for broader allies in the French arena. It was here that the frame of human rights became even more central as it was a way to put across a more readily understandable and acceptable message. In other words, de-Islamising the message seemed to be the only way for Ennahda to make itself heard outside the political and ideological Islamic space. Nahdawi activists turned to NGOs and any other organisations which could possibly act as intermediaries and broadcasters of their cause to new audiences, such as the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), Amnesty International, Reporters without Borders, the CIMADE, and the Association of Christians against torture (ACAT).<sup>163</sup> They could also rely on the support of French individuals who created organisations to support the victims of repression and torture.

Such was the case of Hélène Jaffé and the *Association pour les Victimes de la Répression en Exil* (Association for Victims of Repression in Exile, AVRE), which she created in 1985 and which lasted until 2007. As a doctor, she managed health centres for victims of torture, raised awareness on this cause, and helped asylum seekers to write their narratives in support of their asylum applications (Lacoue-Labarthe, 2013). She was often cited as a friend of the cause by Ennahda activists. However, she considered her role as humanitarian above all else, as a continuity of her work at

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<sup>160</sup> The CDLT gathered *Démocratie Maintenant* and the *Association des droits de l'homme pour les maghrébins et au Maghreb* (Association of human rights for Maghrebis and in the Maghreb, DLMM), created by one Nahdawi member.

<sup>161</sup> Khaled Ben M'Barek, along with Mezri Haddad, Ali Saidi, Younes Othman.

<sup>162</sup> The full name was "Tunisian Committee Calling for Ben Ali's abdication & for the formation of a provisory government of national reconciliation & for the protection of Republican institutions", FNA-P 119AS/61, "declaration of principles", January 1993.

<sup>163</sup> Nahdawi activists also mentioned sporadic relations with journalists (*Canard Enchaîné*, *Libération*) as well as academics and specialists working on the Arab world.

Amnesty International and other human rights structures.<sup>164</sup> She was asked to be honorary president of the CIDT, but this was only a symbolic gesture as she explained she did not have any practical role in the Centre (interview with H  l  ne Jaff  , Toulouse, 30 June 2016).

The centrality of support from French outsiders who were sympathetic to the human rights cause appears even clearer in the case of Claudie and Beno  t Hubert during the “Mehdi Zougah affair” in 2000-01. These two “cause lawyers” (Sarat and Scheingold, 2006) offered support to Zougah, a French-Tunisian activist from Marseille who was arrested and imprisoned in Tunisia for almost a year for allegedly belonging to Ennahda. Their support was central in raising the profile of the cause.<sup>165</sup> In recounting how the two lawyers organised the liberation of Mehdi Zougah, the resonance and success of the struggle appears clearly linked to the involvement of well-placed French human rights activists. They knew they could rely on the mobilisation of many French and North African Muslims whom Mehdi Zougah had known as an imam in one of Marseille mosques and through his involvement in the French Muslim field. However, the lawyers pointed out that: “it was a convergence of people who had the networks, the experience of activism, the know-how on how to write a leaflet, and what we should or should not say.” (Interview with Claudie and Beno  t Hubert, Marseille, 25 February 2016). Mehdi Zougah himself explained that:

“Ennahda was not involved in the mobilisation – for the better, by the way, because those I knew told me they did not want to interfere in this mobilisation [as it could have caused harm]” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 4 June 2016).

However, difficulties were encountered by Ennahda as their actions of appeal were somewhat limited. Generally speaking, French organisations remained mistrustful due to the Islamist stigma attached to Nahdawi exiles. Collaboration with human rights associations was limited to sharing information and providing legal and medical aid to victims of human rights violations. This is noticeably different from leftist

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<sup>164</sup> On the ethical tensions and practical dilemmas regarding support for exiles that is inherent in the work of the medical professions dealing with exiles, see Halluin-Mabillot, 2012, pp. 215-40.

<sup>165</sup> For more on the affair, see the case file prepared by the League of Human Rights (*F  d  ration des Bouches du Rh  ne*), “Mehdi Zougah, un marseillais innocent emprisonn   en Tunisie depuis le 11 ao  t 2000”; see also Leras, 2001; Henry, 2001.

organisations, which could gather forms of material and symbolic support from which Ennahda was excluded, as I will show in the next section. We should therefore highlight the comparatively fewer resources available for Islamists, as well as the persistence of Islamist stigma in the eyes of both the French allies and humanitarian organisations, which agreed to support Ennahda in exile but only on condition of political neutrality. When looking at the ongoing risk of being disqualified, the limited room for manoeuvre for Nahdawi activists becomes more understandable, as does their use of human rights as the sole possible frame.

### *1.1.3 De-Islamisation and the human rights frame*

Framing grievances in terms of human rights rather than in religious or partisan terms allowed Nahdawi activists a role in the field of homeland politics, but also shows the difficulties in proposing alternative political projects. It was very difficult to move away from what Ben Ali implicitly defined as the range of what was politically acceptable. In the context of exile in France and the struggle against an authoritarian regime, Islamists who remained aligned with human rights rhetoric struggled to put any other political projects or frameworks to the fore. As the leader of the committee for the relations with the interior said, Ennahda's main aim was "freedom for everyone" (interview with Adel L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2016). One Nahdawi activist added that:

"We could not talk about political projects as there was no politics in our country. We understood that we had to classify our priorities. We could not talk about political projects as long as there was a problem of freedom. Priority was given to freedom of speech, freedom of movement, human rights and that all repressive practices should end." (interview with Aymen K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015).

Under such pressures, it is not hard to see why Nahdawi leaders justified themselves as being:

"very careful. We were not in an era where political propaganda could be used. We almost stopped this political propaganda process ourselves (...) we were not looking at alternatives (...) we weren't even thinking about them, we just wanted to live." (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 3 April 2016)

The different constraints analysed in the previous chapter influenced the way in which Ennahda mobilised itself through the de-Islamisation of the political message and the adoption of a discourse of human rights in its stead. However, reaching out

to different constituencies through the frame of human rights is not obvious in any given context. As a comparison, when studying Egyptian mobilisation in Vienna and Paris, Müller-Funk (2016) showed that the Egyptian Islamist movement in Vienna kept Muslim identity to the fore more easily due to different relations with the religious sphere in France and Austria. By looking at one of the most important Alevist organisations in Berlin, Massicard (2005, p. 295) also demonstrated that actors can strategically decide to inscribe their mobilisation processes within the religious sphere, as long as the context is one of opening of the “opportunity of recognition in this domain” (ibid). She showed that Alevists in France from the same sociological backgrounds have not adopted “this religious tone”, but have used instead a “humanist” and “secularist” framing (Massicard, 2003). We see from these examples that actors themselves take into account the perception of their potential “chance of success” (Grojean and Massicard, 2005, p. 11). Furthermore, what appears as a “de-Islamisation” of the message can in fact be justified in religious terms by the actors themselves:

“We consider that fighting the dictatorship is part of religion because religion, Islam, stands for justice and the respect of rights. So there is no need to refer every time to a religious text [in our communiqués].” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

## **1.2 Leftist mobilisations and the turn to human rights**

When turning to assess leftist movements, a key distinction that must be emphasised concerns their different positions in the field and their different dispositions towards mobilisation. When compared to Ennahda, leftist movements have more resources and more capital in both material and symbolic terms, which is due to the fact that they have existed in France for longer and their political identification as non-Islamist allowed them a broader range of inclusion within the country. Islamist actors themselves are also aware of this: “they [the leftists] are more professional than we are, in terms of networks...” (interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015). This has to be taken into account when looking at how means of action are selected. But having said this, I argue here that leftist frames and repertoires of action are close to

the ones adopted by the Islamists: the turn to human rights is again a prominent feature of leftist mobilisation, and this is an area which will now be explored further.

### *1.2.1 Different modes of opposition: from the social question to human rights*

While Marxist or Maoist vocabularies punctuated the literature of leftist movements in France under Bourguiba (Ayari, 2009), it is interesting to note that revolutionary references have been substituted by human rights frames by the leftist constellation of actors in the Ben Ali era. With the exception of the 2008 social movement,<sup>166</sup> leftist mobilisation was no longer taking the form of social and political claims: there were no traces of critiques of the links between the dictatorship and neoliberalism; instead the leftists relied on a discourse of contestation focused on torture and the plight of political prisoners.

The consensus on human rights as a vehicle of contestation must be re-contextualised. The 1990s constituted a period when the recourse to this frame quickly became the norm, far beyond Tunisia. The fall of the USSR and the subsequent decline of Third-Worldist and revolutionary referents led to a difficult period of ideological renewal. The theme of human rights “became a political resource and a critical frame of analysis for actors facing the collapse of their ideological referents” (Chouikha and Gobe, 2009, p. 4). More specifically, analysing the emergence of the human rights question in North Africa, Karem (1995, p. 208) shows that until the 1980s, “the idea of human rights referred to a reactionary and bourgeois conception whose goal would have been to conceal the exploitation of the proletariat.” He further argues that the “disaffection with revolutionary romanticism constitutes the main [trajectory] of North African activists towards thoughts of human rights.” (ibid).<sup>167</sup> Leftist activists in France seemed to have followed the same trajectory. In concrete terms, their actions comprised two main dynamics: on the one hand, raising awareness on human rights; on the other, lobbying institutions on human rights issues, mostly at the European level.

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<sup>166</sup> See below.

<sup>167</sup> Rollinde (2002) also analyses the movement of human rights in Morocco. Beyond North Africa, El-Khawaga (2003) interestingly notes that the principle of human rights provided for a new model of oppositional action for former leftist activists in Egypt at the same period.

As one of the leaders of the *Comité de Soutien aux Luttres Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie* (Support Committee to the Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia, CSLCPT) explained:

“In fact, in the first part of the 1990s, the stakes were to break the blockade (*“casser le blocus”*). It was still very difficult to express ourselves against the dictatorship in Tunisia. This was not only because of repression but also because we were facing a kind of black-out that was enacted by all those who had access to media, even those considered as democrats.” (Interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016).

The president of the *Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie* (CRLDHT) expressed the same idea, prioritising the need to “break the wall of silence” (interview with Kamel Jendoubi, Tunis, 29 November 2015).<sup>168</sup> The first aim was therefore to stay informed on the situation and relay all the initiatives started by human rights organisations based in Tunisia. The CRLDHT described its mission as follows:

Working for the promotion of democratic values, freedom and human rights in Tunisia as defined by the international community (...); taking action for the promotion of humanist values – in particular freedom of conscience and gender equality; promoting links of solidarity between the peoples of North Africa and between the two shores of the Mediterranean; campaigning for the liberation of all prisoners of conscience and for the promulgation of a general amnesty.” (CRLDHT, 2016)

This role of “information politics” was also pursued through the publication of a number of reports on torture (such as CRLDHT, 2001), as well as interventions in different media using the TV channels *al-Mustaqilla* in London and *Hiwar al-Tounsi* (the Tunisian Dialogue), which broadcasted from Paris. Beyond the CRLDHT, a PCOT branch leader in Paris told me that it was activists based in Paris who created the party’s website, which relayed opposition information (interview with Adel Thabet, Paris, 31 January 2018). Thabet was also a co-founder of *Hurriyya Liberté* which helped spread information and awareness on the human rights situation in Tunisia,

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<sup>168</sup> See also the proceedings of the seminar, which took place at the European Parliament (CRLDHT, 2005).



more particularly through its website *Maghreb des droits de l'homme* (Maghreb of human rights).

In this respect, the leftist movements could rely on allies to help spread their oppositional message. As it was for the Islamists, the question of support from outsiders in the human rights sector was central to mediate the cause. While collaboration with human rights organisations was rather limited for the Islamists, leftist movements had support and found allies within diverse anti-racist organisations as well as non-Tunisian migrant associations, such as the *Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France* (Association of North African Workers of France, ATMF). Through decades of political involvement on French soil, leftist activists were able to forge links with different actors,<sup>169</sup> thus benefiting from a greater degree of material support and a larger media coverage. The difference in the symbolic and activist capital between leftists and Islamists is therefore central to their comparison. The CRLDHT was in this respect a heteroclite grouping that worked with the participation of well-connected human rights figures such as Driss al-Yazami (Moroccan, vice-president of the French League of Human rights and General Secretary of the International Federation of Human rights [FIDH]) and Hamida Ben Saadia (French-Algerian, also member of the League of Human Rights).

The role of other key French individuals also has to be stressed, as they were able to act as brokers of the cause. The fact that two French citizens held positions in the initial committee of the CRLDHT would be something inconceivable for an Islamist organisation.<sup>170</sup> The PCOT also had the support of key individuals, such as Marguerite Rollinde, researcher and former leader of Amnesty International, who sympathised with Tunisian leftist opposition movements. She recounted that:

“when Hama [Hammami] was arrested, I personally sent faxes from my house every day, offering health bulletins to the press. This cost me a lot of money and was very time consuming. Because at the time there were no other means.”  
(interview with Marguerite Rollinde, Paris, 15 September 2016).

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<sup>169</sup> For instance, this was demonstrated in the archives of the association FTCT, FNA-P 119 AS/83: a whole file of contacts (telephone and email) of associations, political parties and journalists, which showed the extent to which leftist activists from FTCT-CLRDHT was (relatively) well inserted.

<sup>170</sup> The case of one of them, Luiza Toscane, will be examined further below.

Considering her relative ability to mobilise material and symbolic capital, Rollinde's support played a role in opening up the cause. She also co-created the association *Hurriyya Liberté* mentioned above.

However, despite those efforts and strong relationships with well-connected figures, support and resonance for Tunisian leftist anti-regime struggles remained limited. As we saw in the previous chapter, leftist movements faced various degrees of indifference in the French arena. This is particularly noticeable when it becomes apparent that they did not enjoy support from any French political party, except from the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Communist League, LCR) and sporadic encouragement from individuals in the Communist, Socialist and Green parties.<sup>171</sup>

The European dimension often appeared as an appropriate arena for the Tunisian leftist opposition as it was neglected by the French authorities, which instead opted to consolidate its diplomatic and economic relationship with the Ben Ali regime. This echoes Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang pattern" (1998, p. 12), according to which "where channels of participation are blocked, the international arena may be the only means that domestic activists have to gain attention to their issues". For the leftist opposition, which saw itself as being rather isolated, the decision to direct its lobbying towards Europe proved useful. CRLDHT activists were often invited to the EU Parliament and could rely on the support of specific MPs such as H  l  ne Flautre, Jean-Paul Lemarec and Halima Boumedienne, all of whom played important roles in allowing the Tunisian anti-regime cause to enter the European parliament. In this respect, during May 1996 – the year in which the CRLDHT was created – the "united European left group" proposed an urgent motion in line with the CRLDHT on the question of human rights in Tunisia, a motion which was adopted by the EU Parliament (CRLDHT, 2016). The president of the CRLDHT, Kamel Jendoubi, also presided over the *R  seau Euro-M  diterran  en des Droits de l'Homme* (Euro-Mediterranean Networks for Human Rights, REMDH) at that time. The knowledge of

<sup>171</sup> In comparison, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the RCD was accepted in 1989 to the Socialist International during the 18<sup>th</sup> congress in Stockholm, and the French Socialist Party did not oppose this until the 2011 revolution.

all those human rights networks constituted an interface – a framework even – making the cause more visible within a broader arena.

If the mobilisation was centred around the frame of human rights, it is interesting to note a return to the social question in 2008 during mobilisations in the mining region of Gafsa in Tunisia, more particularly in the city of Redeyef (Allal, 2010). The mobilisation centred around the right to work and dignity, and led to the revival of the FCTR on the political scene, where it played a central role in opposition. Activists from the FCTR created a committee of solidarity named the *Comité de Soutien aux Habitants du Bassin Minier* (Support Committee to the Inhabitants of the Mining Region) in February 2008, which led and animated much of the mobilisation in Paris. It played “the role of interface for and correspondent to the national committee in Tunisia” (FCTR 2014, p. 54). The FCTR-led Committee played a central role of informing on and raising concerns about the situation. It issued communiqués,<sup>172</sup> and managed to get most French trade-unions to support the cause, organising several demonstrations as well.

The PDP and the PCOT were also active by sending France-based activists to Tunisia in 2008, whose main activities were to provide logistical support and broadcast the struggles in Tunisia by relaying information.<sup>173</sup> This was especially crucial as the Ben Ali regime put many efforts into

...‘locking’ all the means of information and communication, up to the point that Tunisians in France were often more informed on what was really happening in Redeyef (the epicentre of the social movement) than the Tunisians themselves (Chouikha and Geisser, 2010).

One member of the FCTR justified the involvement of the association by saying that:

“it’s true that the 1990s were all about the question of human rights – until the 2000s, when the problems in the mining region emerged. And then UTIT-FCTR became involved once again, because we found this new social dimension: the 2008 mobilisation was almost all working-class, meaning here legitimate social claims, to which we could add all the experience we had accumulated, including

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<sup>172</sup> For many of the communiqués (April-May-June 2008), see the section of the FCTR publication *Passe Muraille* dedicated to social movements in the Mining District of Gafsa (FCTR, 2008).

<sup>173</sup> For information on the mobilisation specifically in Nantes, see Dumont, 2011.

the question of human rights, liberties, democracy and all” (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

### *1.2.2 Supporting the Islamists: main demarcation lines within the leftist constellation*

To understand the turn to human rights as a master frame for leftists further, we need to highlight the main structuring issue that divided the leftist constellation of actors, and which acted as one of the main fault lines in the field of homeland politics: their positioning towards the Islamists. Indeed, the arrival of the Nahdawi exiles in the 1990s led to major divisions, and in turn to a mutation of the debate on human rights more generally.

Positioning towards the Islamists constituted one main line of demarcation within political parties such as the PCOT, but also between the two main leftist federations of associations in France, the ATF and the FPCR. Despite greater subtleties that existed within the associations themselves,<sup>174</sup> the ATF broadly aligned itself with the eradication approach of the Tunisian Communist Party, which was enjoying close ties with Ben Ali’s regime at the beginning of the 1990s. One former leader of the ATF, who left the movement to create its own association ATF-Paris among other reasons because of this political divergence on this question, told me: “I understand that they [the ATF] are ideologically anti-Islamist, but to justify torture...” (interview with Tarek Toukabri, Paris, 28 October 2015). The FPCR itself was more cautious on the matter, but a number of its activists took part in the founding of the CRLDHT, and as one of its members explained:

“The committee was all the same a step forward as for the first time, despite quite a lot of reservations, it was about defending without a priori human rights *for everyone*” (interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1 November 2017, my emphasis).

However, defending the Islamists was not straightforward for the CRLDHT. Luiza Toscane, a French activist within the Association of Christians for abolition of torture (ACAT), was a key figure of support for Tunisian exiles. In a short testimony on her

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<sup>174</sup> Within the FPCR, some activists were closer to ATF position when it comes to the stance to adopt towards the Islamists. In addition, needless to say that the activists do not necessarily stick invariably to their position and can evolve over time.

experience in the CRLDHT and the “daily practices” within the organisation, Toscane explained that she was suspected of being “the social assistant of the Islamists”. She recalled that one member of the CRLDHT even told her “I will never forgive you for everything you have been doing for these bastards [referring here to the Islamists]” (Toscane, 2003, p. 292). Similarly, one member of the CRLDHT, who came from a different political background from the majority of the other Tunisian members of the CRLDHT (as her affiliation was Fourth International Trotskyist) explained that:

“For a long period, defending the Islamists felt like an obligation rather than a conviction [for them] (...) There was some reluctance because of a culture I did not share, which equated Islamism almost with fascism” (interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1 November 2017).

Some activists, such as Lamloum, did attempt to suggest a third approach: “we considered that neither side [the Islamists and the regime] was good, and that we could not bet on one to neutralise the other” (ibid).

Marguerite Rollinde recalled that the debate was similar in human rights organisations such as Amnesty International: The president of Amnesty resigned “because she could not bear the idea of supporting the Islamists. Within Amnesty, there was a conflict.” She went on to add:

“the argument that I would hear was: ‘you defend people who will force you to wear hijab’. I systematically answered that I had been campaigning for Amnesty for twenty years and I would always hear: ‘you defend people who will send you to the gulag’. I want neither gulag, nor sharia, I wanted citizenship.” (interview with Marguerite Rollinde, Paris, 15 September 2016).

This anti-Islamic stance shared by many leftist activists in France can in fact also be linked to a generational dimension of the Tunisian leftist constellation based in France. Indeed, if we go back to the trajectory of many activists as well as the broader history of Tunisia, the former generation of exiles of the 1960s and 1970s had a history of struggle against the Islamists on university campuses in Tunisia (Camau and Geisser, 2003, pp. 315-351). Political enmity dates back to this period for this generation, and the memory of those violent conflicts plays a role in trying to understand the virulent anti-Islamist positioning of many older activists. As illustrated by Adnane Ben Youssef, who was born in 1975 and arrived in France in 2000, the

younger leftist generation stemmed from another historic period, leading to a different relationship with the Islamists:

“Even though I am from the left, I have no prejudice [against the Islamists] as people of the other generation do. They fought, sometimes with weapons, in Tunisian universities in the 1970 and 1980s. Islamists were violent, but the left was violent as well in the framework of the PCOT, of Perspectives. They were all underground movements, so the question of political violence...They fought and some died and there was a lot of hatred. I don’t come from this history.” (Interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015).

It is therefore easy to start understanding how generational cleavages can add up to other divisions in the field of homeland politics.

### *1.2.3 Trans-ideological parties and the human rights frame*

For some actors in the trans-state space, the recourse to human rights as a frame and medium for contention enables them to transcend ideologies and erase ideological differences. This renders the discourse more coherent in its universality by including the Islamists, who were after all the main victims of the repression under Ben Ali. In other words, the frame of human rights is useful as it does not equate to supporting the Islamists’ political projects, but allows different ideologies to share oppositional activities. This is a more explicit version of the stance I defined in Chapter 1 as trans-ideological, involving parties such as the *Congrès pour la République* (Congress for the Republic, CPR) and the *Parti Démocrate Progressiste* (Progressive Democratic Party, PDP). As one CPR member in Marseille remarked, “for the CPR, the basis was the negation of ideology: we were not going into the ideological terrain; instead we focused on the action of struggles for freedom” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 4 June 2016). One of the founders of the CPR in Paris concurred: “We don’t have an ideology, we are not an ideological party. What interests us, the essential element of our programme, is the struggle against dictatorship” (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 30 August 2016). In the same vein, the PDP in France did not have an “ideological framework” and did not therefore base its actions on supporting or not supporting the Islamists (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 2 November 2017).

The idea of negating ideology therefore also plays a role in the primacy of human rights as a frame for opposing the regime. However, trans-ideological parties could act as intermediaries and move demarcation lines in the field of homeland politics, as we will see in the next section. The president of the CPR, Moncef Marzouki, stated that “certainly I was fighting the Islamists both politically and ideologically, but I considered that they had the right to exist and express themselves on the political scene” (Marzouki and Geisser, 2011, p. 93). According to Marzouki:

The line of demarcation was not between democrats and Islamists, but between those democrats and Islamists who were colluding with the dictatorial system and those democrats and Islamists who were fiercely opposing it (ibid, p. 99).

### **1.3 Pro-regime activists and human rights as a party-state ideology**

The upsurge of rhetoric on human rights as a way to oppose the authoritarian regime must finally be contextualised as a feature of the ideology of the Tunisian party-state itself. Ben Ali was indeed mobilising human rights discourses in the same way in attempts to legitimise his regime abroad. This was true to the point that the head of the North Africa department at Amnesty International in the 1990s talked about an “official bureaucracy of human rights” to define these strategies as monopolising the discourse of human rights (Donatella Rovera in Lamoulou and Ravenel, 2002, p. 153).

More generally, Amnesty International (1994) pointed out Ben Ali’s “high international human rights profile”. In the 1990s, Ben Ali devised the position of presidential adviser for Human Rights; in 1991, the regime created a High Committee for Human Rights and fundamental freedom; and in 1992 the presidential Medal for Human Rights was invented (Ayari, 2009, p. 140). An Amnesty report notes:

Praise of human rights appears in nearly every speech by nearly every public figure. Human rights are cited daily in press articles, and several major conferences a year relate to human rights. Tunis is the seat of the *Institut arabe des droits de l'homme*, the Arab Institute for Human Rights; it hosts an Amnesty International Section and in November 1992 it was the venue for the African Regional Meeting of the World Conference on Human Rights (Amnesty International, 1994).

Vairel (2008, p. 218) identified a similar trend in the case of Morocco as “the reference to human rights was all the more authentic to the extent that it

participated in the search for support aimed at stabilising the Moroccan authoritarianism.”

Pro-regime associations in France would also frame their mobilisation around human rights. For instance, following the resolution of the European Parliament denouncing the human rights situation in 1996,<sup>175</sup> several pro-regime associations in France addressed letters to the president of the EU parliament to contest such allegations. They based their argument on human rights, as illustrated by Gabriel Kabla, a prominent defender of the regime, who explained that:

“the various decorations and honours bestowed by international organisations or NGOs upon the president of the Tunisian Republic are evidence of the particular concern of the latter to the rights, health and lives [of Tunisians]. We can only encourage you and ask you to bring all your support to Tunisia”.<sup>176</sup>

The regime’s use of human rights discourse thus entailed a paradox for opposition movements: it represented an opportunity to subvert that discourse and also helped politically neutralise those who might have otherwise indicted the regime for human right abuses. In fact, the ambiguity of the frame of human rights, hides another line of tension in the oppositional milieu in exile to which I now turn: the attitude to adopt vis-à-vis the Tunisian regime.

## **2. A new line of cleavage: the degree of rupture with the Ben Ali regime**

### **2.1 A central theme dividing the opposition**

The common use of human rights as a master frame and the leftist fault line regarding what attitude to adopt towards the Islamists converge towards another line of tension in the field of homeland politics, namely the stances and strategies that should be adopted towards the authoritarian regime.

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<sup>175</sup> “Le parlement européen montre du doigt la Tunisie”, May 1996.

<sup>176</sup> RCD personal archives, letter written by Gabriel Kabla, 27 May 1996, Paris. On the 26th of May 1996, the *Association des Taxis Parisiens*, *Association des Tunisiens en France* and *Association d’échanges de promotion des vacances scolaires* also addressed the same kind of letters, RCD personal archives.



The shift to human rights frames first raises the question of the potential depoliticisation process that was experienced by the opposition from abroad. According to several opponents, Ben Ali succeeded in his main objective of depoliticising the opposition and confining the movements to oppose the regime in terms of human rights (Khiari, 2003; interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016). One CPR activist deplored this turn to human rights, stating that:

“there was no project, only the struggle against Ben Ali and the police, but no discussions on what we should do, how we should fight (...) then you pay the price when the dictatorship falls because you don’t know what to do” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 5 June 2016).

The recourse to a human rights frame may in fact conceal a deeper debate on the degree of opposition to the regime. In the case of Latin America, Cheresky (1993) argues that the “irruption of the idea of human rights had been central for the questioning of non-democratic regimes” and had in the final analysis been a factor of politicisation. In the case of Tunisia, the whole paradox of human rights could be highlighted. In an authoritarian and an exile context, where room for manoeuvre is limited, a universalist discourse can substitute a political language. However, it can also act as a refuge with its own potential for radicalism. In fact, focusing on the degree of radicalism and rupture with the Tunisian regime as a means of differentiating the stances and positions of different activist movements illuminates new lines of demarcation, animating the oppositional constellations in the field of homeland politics. This in turn allows us to move beyond the rigid dichotomies between leftist and Islamist mobilisations.

According to some actors, the polarisation of oppositional movements between different approaches dates back to the very beginning of Ben Ali’s regime, and basically differentiates between “those who have said no [to the regime] since the 1990s and those who compromised themselves until the late awakening when repression also impacted them” (interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1 November 2017). This led Sadri Khiari (2003, p. 156), an activist in Tunisia within the *Conseil National pour les Libertés en Tunisie* (National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia, CNLT), to highlight:

...two competing approaches: on the one hand, the 'moderate pole', which in other words was the network constituted by those who more or less accepted compromise with the regime in the period 1990-1995; and on the other hand, the 'radical pole', which is the gathering formed by those who refused this implication or were excluded from it.

This analysis might seem somewhat reductive, in that more nuances should be considered. This question of which strategies to adopt was a line of division within the movements themselves and the latter also evolved in their own positionings over time. In addition, those accounts mainly concentrate on the leftist constellation, while this central issue in fact encompassed all activist groupings, including Ennahda, constituting an essential cleavage within the field of homeland politics. This second line of division – the degree of rupture with Ben Ali's regime – shaped in turn the discourses and forms of action chosen by the activists.

When it comes to Ennahda, it is striking to note the evolution of the movement towards a rather accommodationist stance over the years. This has to be linked to the constraints seen in the previous chapter and the necessity to be accepted in the West as a legitimate opposition force. As the president of the *Majlis al-Shura* explained:

"Freedom of speech, the recognition of all different political parties, and then free elections: we thought that we could put pressure on Ben Ali using these issues. We thought that if faced by a radical discourse, (Ben Ali) would not leave, he would instead use this to say 'you see what's waiting for you if I leave: the fundamentalists'. So we knew that a discourse of radicality would not serve the cause" (interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015).

Another member added:

"We did not ask much, we demanded a democratic minimum wage, freedom to circulate, freedom of speech, freedom to create political parties. We did not ask for Ben Ali's departure at that time" (interview with Aymen K. \*, Paris, 20 October 2015).

One member of the political bureau summarised Ennahda's stance in these terms: "It was good that the direction stayed on track, it did not change its politics towards Ben Ali: resisting, discussing; discussing, resisting" (interview with Hamed K. \*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

However, it is important to stress a form of evolution here, over the years, as exile activist movements are not static. Geisser and Gobe (2008) note that from 2001

Ennahda engaged in a “process of ‘discreet normalisation’, the unstated aim of which [was] a negotiated return onto the national political scene”. However, this more “compromising” line became formalised from 2007 onwards. At the eighth congress of the Islamist party it was explained, among other things, that:

“We are hereby 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.”<sup>177</sup>

According to Wolf (2017, p. 105), “the rapprochement between the regime and Ennahda [was] also echoed in mounting conciliatory rhetoric, and its leaders began openly to call for national reconciliation”. This was shown in a declaration published following the 2007 Congress, which stated that “[Congress] participants stressed the movement’s compliance with the principle of civil political action, and [called] for achieving comprehensive national reconciliation without excluding anyone” (ibid).

The evolution of an increasingly conciliatory stance by Ennahda towards the regime drew a line of tension within the party itself. At the beginning of the 1990s, some activists left Ennahda as they strongly opposed the leadership’s position towards the Ben Ali regime and requested that the Islamist movement went through a process of “self-criticism,” openly admitting responsibility for its antagonistic actions that had led to the exile and imprisonment of so many of its members. In this respect, as one founder of Ennahda – a dissident since 1994 – declared: “sometimes it is necessary to compromise with a dictator if we don’t have the means to thwart him.” (interview with Lazhar Abaab, Paris, 3 November 2015). Interestingly, the opposite trend marked the beginning of the 2000s. The increasingly accommodationist stance of parts of the leadership of Ennahda led some activists to leave the movement and was cited as one of the reasons that drove other former Islamist sympathisers to create another political party, the CPR in Paris.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the fact that the CRLDHT – a human rights organisation – took a major role in the opposition to the regime is also relevant here. One founder of the CSLCPT explained that:

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<sup>177</sup> Final declaration of the eighth congress of Ennahda, May 2007, in Wolf, 2017, pp. 189-197.

“In fact this is hard to understand for someone who does not know Tunisia: they would tell you that it is normal for a human rights organisation to position itself on human rights rather than from a position of radical rupture, as this is not its role (...) The problem is not that they did not have a political discourse of rupture, because theoretically it’s not their job, but the issue is that they became representatives of the Tunisian opposition. The Tunisian opposition could be summarised in this milieu without having to develop very clear political discourses” (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 31 October 2017).

In this respect the CSLCPT – which was created because its members were dissatisfied with the conciliatory approach of other leftist structures, and which became one of the competitors of the CRLDHT – advocated a more politicized approach of rupture with the regime. It associated this with more radical discourses and means of action. Along those lines, the first and one of the last actions of the organisation was to attack and occupy the headquarters of the RTF, the association representing Ben Ali’s party state in France. Dozens of people entered the building and a press conference was organised by the activists, which was broadcast by Al-Jazeera (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016).

The positioning of rupture and radical approaches towards the regime was a minority one. Very few openly called for Ben Ali’s resignation, apart from individual initiatives such as the Tunisian Committee Calling for Ben Ali’s Abdication in 1993.<sup>178</sup> The shift from human rights to a political project in rupture with the regime that was embedded in a political party is, however, exemplified by the trajectory of Moncef Marzouki. Marzouki left the *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l’Homme* (Tunisian league of Human Rights, LTDH) in 1994 (of which he was president) because of the new accommodationist line adopted by the *Ligue* (Chouikha and Gobe, 2009). The new line nominated a puppet leadership to please the regime, at which point Marzouki participated in the creation of the CNLT. Later on, he co-founded the CPR. The fact that the CPR could take a radical position of rupture with the regime has also to be linked to the symbolic and material resources that its founder was able to accumulate, as he was an important and well-networked figurehead of human rights. Marzouki explained that he:

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<sup>178</sup> FNA 119AS/61, folder “*Tunisie-droits de l’homme*”, “*Déclaration de principes du Comité tunisien d’appel pour la démission du président Ben Ali*”, Paris, January 1993. As was explained in Chapter 2, the two activists at the origin of the Committee were physically targeted by the regime for this.

“...started to become aware of the limits and the perverse effects of human rights associations. Finally, dictatorial regimes in the Arab world tend to accommodate very well with the presence of human rights associations. I therefore thought that we had to take the next step by creating a political party that would clearly call for a rupture with the dictatorship.” (Marzouki and Geisser, 2011, p. 119).

One CPR leader in Paris further expounded:

“It’s true that we changed our mode of battle. It was in Ben Ali’s interest that the fight remained based on the question of human rights. The CPR started talking about the system, that we had to change the system, that we needed a real Republic. That is why we called the party the Congress for the Republic.” (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 7 December 2016).

Marzouki even distinguished between “opponents” and “resistance fighters”: he included himself in the latter to define those who had rejected any forms of compromise with the Tunisian regime (Marzouki, n.d.).

However, it is difficult to find traces of any tangible suggestions for alternatives in the CPR communiqués. As Chokri Hamrouni recalled:

“we transposed the debate from human rights to political questions, but we stayed at the level of ideals (...) the project was to rid Tunisia of [a system based on] a single voice, a single thought, a single regime. It was more concerned with high ideals” (interview, Paris, 7 December 2016).

In fact, one could follow Khiari (2003, p. 181) when he explains that:

the radical pole might be best defined by its pugnacity, by the force of its engagement and a discourse without compromise towards Ben Ali regime than the affirmation of a real strategy of rupture.

In addition, as we saw with Ennahda, the degree of rupture was here again a factor of division within the CPR itself, which even led to the defection of some of its members who were increasingly supporting the option of negotiating with the regime from 2008 to find a solution (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 30 August 2016).

If the question of the degree of rupture with the regime is thus central to understanding oppositional dynamics in the field, one should also stress a chronological evolution: we will see in the next section a tendency towards radicalisation in the discourse of all forces in the 2000s, together with an attempt to organise more collectively on behalf of the anti-regime struggle.

## 2.2 The Internet as a medium for radicalisation

From the start of the new millennium, the Internet took a major role in the process of radicalisation of the opposition's contestation of the regime. I will not be focussing here on what has been called the "virtual space of contestation" (Lecomte, 2009; 2013) or the "autonomous cyberspace in an authoritarian space" (Chouikha, 2015, p. 49), as these aspects of the Internet have been scrutinised elsewhere.<sup>179</sup> Instead, I am more interested in the role of the Internet as a vector of contestation, which favoured in turn the radicalisation of the oppositional message. Not only did the Internet allow the oppositional actors to gain far more knowledge about each other, it also enabled a larger degree of exposure regarding their actions. In this respect, in addition to the different online fora (notably *Réveil Tunisien* and *Tunezine*), one can only stress the importance of the anonymous mailing list Tunisnews:

Tunisnews was launched in October 1999, with a very small team not exceeding two people working from Stockholm. We first started circulating brief news about Tunisia among a limited number of friends using what we called Liste99. Then, we began searching for the email addresses of people, organisations and companies believed to belong to Tunisians. Within weeks, we managed to collect several thousands of emails and on May 1st, 2000 we started distributing our newsletter on a daily basis. For a number of years the working team consisted of only 4 people residing in different parts of the world. (Gharbi, 2014; telephone interview with Mehdi Gharbi, 20 January 2016).<sup>180</sup>

Tunisnews's first aim was to act as a broadcaster of counter-information, as explained by one of its founders, who stated that: "the aim of our work was to circulate information to the widest possible audience and to put an end to the incredible opacity that surrounded Tunisia" (in Lamloum and Ravenel, 2002, p. 250). In other words,

[their] priority was to raise awareness and tell the Tunisian people the truth. From there, the idea of launching a newsletter that would inform Tunisians about what was going on around them emerged. We first focused our efforts on breaking the authorities' monopoly over news and information (Gharbi, 2014).

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<sup>179</sup> For more information on "virtual" mobilisations and cyber-dissidents, often animated by activists from afar, such as in *Takriz*, *Tunezine*, *Réveil Tunisien* and *Nawaat*: see Lecomte, 2013, 2009; Chouikha, 2015; Kallander, 2013.

<sup>180</sup> See also Mehdi Gharbi's own testimony, available at: [http://swsd2012.creo.tv/wednesday/mehdi\\_garbi/d4p4-mehdi\\_garbi](http://swsd2012.creo.tv/wednesday/mehdi_garbi/d4p4-mehdi_garbi), accessed 28 July 2017.

Following Granjon's (2003) study of different classes of online intermediaries, Tunisnews can be considered as what he calls an "intercessor", whose main aim is "to share data that activist communities possess, although they are not necessarily the authors of such data."

Most interviewees recounted the immensely important role of Tunisnews as a source of alternative information, and thus of "information politics". The daughter of a Nahdawi exile recalled:

"For the refugees, it was a real breath of fresh air. We did not have much information before, if we called each other we could not say anything as there was always the risk of being wiretapped. So Tunisnews was very important" (interview with Asma Soltani, Paris, 21 October 2015).

For the activists, "Tunisnews became the first Tunisian site of information (...) It became the site of reference for everyone" (interview with Aymen K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015). It is indeed striking that everyone read Tunisnews, from the leftists to the Islamists and the pro-regime spheres.<sup>181</sup>

Tunisnews also increasingly became a "forum for a free, serious and open debate between all the political tendencies and trends of thought in our country" (Tunisnews in Lamloum and Ravenel, 2002, p. 250). More radical discourses also acquired space for expression. As Gharbi (2014) explains:

The subjects that we published at that stage centered around everything that was censored by the regime, such as activities of political parties and civil society organizations. In addition, Tunisnews circulated articles that were published outside Tunisia and were not allowed access inside the country. The newsletter also served as an open platform for debates over the political situation, the deterioration of human rights, the state of the media, in addition to topics about corruption.

It represented in turn a useful organisational resource for activists, who could spread their communiqués. It allowed for the visibility of their actions and the opening up of their causes: beyond ideological affinities, Tunisnews allowed each group to make its initiatives known to other groups. This paved the way for more organised alliances, as will be seen in the next section.

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<sup>181</sup> A former ambassador recalled when I asked whether he read Tunisnews, "I had an alert, I read it every morning at 7am. Ben Ali did the same thing, to have the information" (interview with Amine N.\*, Tunis, 13 July 2016).

The diverse repertoires of mobilisation that I have scrutinised were shaped by constraints and opportunities in the field of homeland politics. The malleability of the language of human rights enabled all the actors to mobilise it, as they became increasingly familiar with mastering the frame required in that field. It thus became a master frame which entailed major consequences. I have also examined the different means and repertoires of action. This allowed me to bring to light different accumulation of activist capital between the different constellations of actors, as well as highlighting the unequal resources actors had to compete with, thereby conditioning competing positionings and hierarchies within the field. This led me to underline the different cleavages that were animating the field, such as the relationship with the Islamists and with the authoritarian regime. It was these lines of demarcation that shaped hierarchies in the field. While the forms and means of contestation might seem compartmentalised between different groupings, the necessity to escape their marginalisation in the French context, as well as the persistence of Ben Ali regime's repression, led oppositional Tunisian activists of different ideological tendencies to form alliances. It is to these alliances that I now turn.

## **Section II.**

### **Towards a common political project? Cross-ideological alliances in the oppositional milieu**

While the ideological barriers and deep divisions between Islamists and most leftist movements impeded any forms of common actions at the beginning of the 1990s,<sup>182</sup> claims centred on human rights could constitute a first gateway to coalition-building. As one CPR activist rightly summarised, human rights “could create links, sometimes it could break ideological taboos (...) we needed to find a common object and the human rights could create convergence” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 4

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<sup>182</sup> However, they existed some friendships and informal meetings, which could go beyond “official” meetings: the hypothesis of a link between informal spaces of socialisation and more organised cross ideological alliances (one that would have favoured the conditions of possibilities of the second) would be relevant to explore further.



June 2016). In other words, human rights could provide an “effective coordinating master frame” (Snow, 2004, p. 390). This section focuses on the different forms of coalition-building that were constituted in France throughout Ben Ali’s regime.

Basing their reflections on the cases of Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, Clark and Schwedler (2006) point out that from the early 1990s, groups in ideological opposition could cooperate, leading to new forms of political contestation.<sup>183</sup> They set up a fruitful typology that reflected on three different forms of cooperation, reminding the various coalition types analysed in social movement literature about the conditions under which activists compete or produce different levels of coalition (Tarrow, 2005, p. 167). The lowest level of coalition is tactical (short-term basis, issue-based). Mid-level cooperation is strategic, meaning that it is more sustained and encompasses more issues. At this level, “groups share a commitment to working together in a sustained manner, but not to forging a shared political vision or ideology” (Clark and Schwedler, 2006). The highest level is ideational, in which “groups remain distinct entities but strive to develop a collective vision for political, social, and economic reform” (ibid).

Examining different experiences of cooperation and alliance operating from a distance, I will demonstrate that in the Tunisian case commitments ranged from low to mid-level. While oppositional movements could gather under common human rights claims, it seemed more difficult to come up with a political platform with a common political project to fight the authoritarian regime. Cross-ideological alliances remapped the oppositional milieu, but focusing on these experiences shows how the debates that animated oppositional movements regarding this question converged each side of the two main lines of demarcation studied in the previous section – the relationship with the Islamists and the degree of rupture with the regime.

It is necessary to bear two precautions in mind before starting the analysis. Firstly, although it is useful to highlight a chronological evolution, one should be careful not

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<sup>183</sup> It is also important to locate these experiences in a broader context of cross-ideological alliances taking place in the Arab World between diverse groups of leftists and Islamists, which are increasingly documented. In this respect, see, *inter alia*: Dot Pouillard, 2009; Abdelrahman (2009) for the Egyptian case; Clark (2010) for Jordan; Durac (2011) for Yemen; and Wegner and Pellicer (2011) for Morocco.

to produce an evident and teleologic genealogy, as if one experience of joint initiative or alliance would necessarily lead to the next. Secondly, focusing on oppositional alliances brings with it the risk of fetishising or romanticising those experiences into the cliché of good opponents all coming together to fight the authoritarian regime. I will instead demonstrate how building cross-ideological alliances provoked ruptures and crystallised dissensions within the constellations of actors themselves.

## **1. “Breaking the taboo” gradually: different founding experiences of collaboration**

### **1.1 Early experiences (1991-2002)**

#### *1.1.1 The experience of Démocratie Maintenant (1991-92)*

The first organised attempt at collaboration between opponents from diverse ideological tendencies I could document under Ben Ali was called *Démocratie Maintenant* (Democracy Now), created in 1991 and which lasted for a couple of years.<sup>184</sup> Nahdawi activists (mainly from the 1981 political generation), activists from the *Mouvement d’Unité Populaire* (Movement of Popular Unity, MUP), Arab nationalists, Nasserists, former *Destouriens* and independents came together to form the first unitary gathering for political action (interviews with Younes Othman, Paris, 17 November 2015; Ahmed Manaï, Sousse, 27 November 2015). This then became part of the Coordination for the Defence of Freedoms in Tunisia (CDLT). The main aims of the association, as explained by the first communiqué of *Démocratie Maintenant*, were to collect and publicise information on human rights violations in Tunisia, defend political prisoners, their families and refugees, and “promote a political democratic process”.<sup>185</sup>

However, *Démocratie Maintenant* did not include leftist organisations such as the PCOT or the associative realm (FTCR, ATF) which were at the time opposed to any forms of collaborative work with the Islamists. As will be seen, it was only from the

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<sup>184</sup> Under Bourguiba, other forms of cross-ideological gatherings could be documented and would deserve a study in itself.

<sup>185</sup> Démocratie Maintenant’s Communiqué, 10 September 1991, available at: <https://tunisitri.wordpress.com/2008/11/23/%C2%AB-tunisie-democratie-maintenant-%C2%BB-n%E2%80%99est-plus/>, accessed 17 October 2016.

beginning of the 2000s that leftists and Islamists started to become more broadly involved in joint public initiatives. This experience was therefore limited in time and in number, but it did at least pave the way for other structures to emerge later. More importantly, having contact with other opposition movements represented an important step for Ennahda as it allowed the Islamist movement to reinforce its efforts to be recognised by other Tunisian forces in France.

Although this first structured attempt at cross-ideological cooperation was rather limited, such initiatives intensified in the 2000s. In this context, it is insightful to mention the role of Tunisian activists who acted as brokers, connecting diverse networks and helping to break the taboo against possible gatherings between Islamists and leftists. In this respect, the trajectory of one particular UGTEF leader who later became involved in Ennahda is interesting, and will be developed further in Chapter 4, as this activist acted as an intermediary between different scenes. His involvement in the field of immigrant politics led him to meet Tunisian leftist activists, and in turn served as a point of informal contact between the different groupings (interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2015; 1 September 2016). The case of Chokri Hamrouni also helps define figure of mediation more clearly. As a former Nahdawi sympathiser and one of the founders of the CPR in Paris, his intimate knowledge of Nahdawi leaders (his brother was a leader of Ennahda in exile) and the knowledge of activists in many different political parties enabled him to act as a broker between a number of leftist and Islamist groupings (interviews with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris/Tunis, July-December 2016). He also played a concrete role in mediation, such as co-organising the meeting in Aix-en-Provence.

### *1.1.2 Common mobilisations around the 2002 referendum*

In the context of the constitutional referendum organised by Ben Ali in May 2002,<sup>186</sup> and following a meeting in Tunis to boycott what was considered as a “presidential plebiscite” (Gobe, 2004, p. 5), the CRLDHT organised a joint meeting in Paris on 18

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<sup>186</sup> Which among others proposed to modify Article 39 of the Constitution by removing the limitation of three mandates, thereby allowing Ben Ali to stand as a candidate for the fourth time for the 2004 presidential elections. The opponents denounced the willingness to establish “a life presidency”.

May 2002.<sup>187</sup> All political tendencies were invited to denounce the referendum. For the first time, the CRLDHT publicly announced that:

“It will continue to echo all initiatives, without exclusion, which develop in Tunisia to attempt to make the voices heard of associative and political actors campaigning for freedom, human rights and democracy in their diversity and differences that represent sources of synergy”.<sup>188</sup>

The mere idea of bringing Ennahda and other leftist movements together on the same stage marked a process of rupture with the regime, in that it crossed one of the lines of demarcation that had been imposed, namely that of non-communication with Ennahda. The initiative did not in itself create a common political project, but as the president of the CRLDHT recalled: “I think it was the first time that Ennahda spoke publicly in a meeting in the presence of all the *laïcards* and people from the left”.<sup>189</sup>

## 1.2 Aix-en-Provence Meeting (2003)

A year later, a three-day meeting in Aix-en-Provence in Southern France took place from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2003, organised at the initiative of the French association *Aix-Solidarité* and French individual supporters of the “Tunisian cause”<sup>190</sup> as well as leaders of the CPR in France. Tunisian political parties (CPR, FDTL, Ennahda, PDP), associations,<sup>191</sup> independent journalists and activists participated in talks regarding the adoption of a common strategy for opposing the regime. This was organised following three different workshops: “Freedom of speech and media clampdown, which strategies of communication?”, “The independence of justice; human rights: which struggle?”, and “Political actors and associative actors: the same struggle; which democratic project for the post-dictatorship era?”<sup>192</sup>

The meeting in Aix was firstly an important moment of intellectual rapprochement and secondly an indication of the start of organised collective action. As one of the

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<sup>187</sup> Communiqué CRLDHT, n° 725, 13 May 2002, available at: <http://www.tunisnews.net/2016-05-22-12-22-14/item/4842>- accessed 19 October 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Kamel Jendoubi, conference “*L’union fait-elle la force face à l’autoritarisme? Regards critiques sur le mouvement tunisien du 18 octobre 2005*,” 2016.

<sup>190</sup> Researcher Vincent Geisser and lawyers Claudie and Benoît Hubert.

<sup>191</sup> CNLT, AJA, AISPPT, RAID, CPIJ, CNDLE, CIDT, ATTAC, *Association des anciens résistants, Solidarité Tunisienne, Association des jeunes avocats*.

<sup>192</sup> Tunisnews archives, 2003.

CPR organisers remarked, “Aix broke the effect of demonization (of Ennahda): the rapprochement between the Islamists and others became possible” (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 7 December 2016). The president of *Solidarité Tunisienne* corroborated this: “it was a very important reversal which allowed us all to have more confidence between people. Later the meetings were increased and broadened” (interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015). The meeting in Aix also went a step further in terms of willingness to refuse to negotiate with the regime. The proceedings of the meeting were never published as such but were released online a month later in the form of the “Call of Tunis of the 17 June 2003”, which listed twelve points for fighting the authoritarian regime and proposed an alternative, calling for a “political contract establishing a democratic society.”<sup>193</sup> For one of the CPR organisers: “this was like a declaration of war against Ben Ali’s regime” (interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 4 June 2016). As the communiqué of the organisers underlines, the Aix meeting was therefore crucial in two respects. It was a central:

“declaration in its content (a new political and social contract for Tunisia, breaking without ambiguity from the dictatorship and laying the foundations for a real alternative for our country) and it was important in the consensus that it generated”.<sup>194</sup>

However, the final document of the meeting was not signed by two main political parties involved in the meeting, the PDP and Ettakatol. Furthermore, although they were invited, the PCOT and the human rights association CRLDHT were noticeably absent. In 2003, working with the Islamists was still not considered acceptable for some activists. The leader of Ettakatol released a communiqué a few weeks later explaining that he recognised the importance of Aix as a “new milestone in this process that should lead the diverse trend of the opposition to better know each other”. However, he continued:

“believing or pretending that an alliance has been sealed (...) around a ‘new social and political contract’ is premature: it is indeed illusory and not serious to imagine that an exchange of few hours is enough to answer multiple questions, erase

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<sup>193</sup> Tunisnews archives, “Call for Tunis”, June 2003.

<sup>194</sup> “Déclaration du Comité d’organisation des rencontres d’Aix”, Paris, 26 May 2003, available at: <https://tounis.wordpress.com/category/francais/>, accessed 19 October 2016.

divergences that are sometimes deep, and re-establish a fragile confidence, even if the participants have put a lot of passion into it.”<sup>195</sup>

Despite the limits of this experience and the on-going significance of ideological cleavages, the meeting in Aix-en-Provence laid the foundation for a broader convergence two years later, which was a turning point of the field of homeland politics.

## **2. The movement of 18 October 2005**

While these cross-ideological alliances appear to show that human rights was the only possible common denominator for oppositional movements, a further step was taken with the Parisian collective of 18 October 2005. This broadened the political spectrum of the alliance by gathering the great majority of anti-regime Tunisian political parties and associations based in Paris. Paradoxically, it also exposed and reinforced the main divides that animated the field (relations with Islamists/relations with the regime). However, we will also see that the question of alliances was not devoid of tensions within the political organisations themselves. In this respect, I follow here the definition of an alliance, which corresponds to the “mid-level” cooperation explained above, as:

typically formed by actors who want to keep some of their autonomy and distinctiveness, and therefore refrain from merging into a single entity whose prior constituent elements become more or less invisible, or completely dissolve as distinguishable units (Rucht, 2004, p. 202).

### **2.1 Genesis and proceedings**

In October 2005, as the Tunisian regime was about to host the World Summit on the Information Society, eight people from the main political tendencies (ranging from leftists to Islamists, Arab Nationalists and independent human rights activists), went on hunger strike in Tunis. For the Tunisian regime, the Summit was an occasion to showcase itself in a good light, but for the oppositional activists in Tunisia, the context of international visibility represented an opportunity to make what Geisser and Gobe (2007a, 2007b) termed a “political coup”. As one of the hunger strikers explained, “to

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<sup>195</sup> Communiqué from Mustafa Ben Jafaar, General Secretary of Ettakatol, 28 May 2003, Tunisnews archives.

carry out a political action at this precise time against the regime was like defying someone on their wedding day”.<sup>196</sup>

The hunger strike lasted for thirty-two days and led to the creation of the Coalition of the 18 October for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia.<sup>197</sup> The Coalition revolved around three main watchwords: freedom of speech and of the press; the liberation of all political prisoners and a general amnesty law; and the respect of the right to constitute political parties and associations. It was also broadened to include other axes of reference in 2007: the struggle for independent justice, the fight against corruption and free and fair elections (*Collectif 18 octobre pour les droits & les libertés en Tunisie*, 2010). A subsequent “Forum of the 18 October” produced two main texts on equalities between men and women and freedom of conscience (ibid).

As Omeyya Seddik recalled: “We welcomed here (in Paris) the coalition and the hunger strike as a golden opportunity, as a reason to do something that we’d needed to do for a long time” (Paris, 2016).<sup>198</sup> From the first day of the hunger strike, all opposition movements took the initiative to broadcast the details in France. Between October and December 2005, a “foreign support committee for the 18 October 2005 hunger strike”<sup>199</sup> was constituted, which issued newsletters and communiqués and regularly organised gatherings and demonstrations in Paris. A forty-eight-hour hunger strike was also organised on the 15 November in Paris, in which most of the oppositional leaders participated.<sup>200</sup>

A further step was taken with the creation of the Parisian Coalition of the 18 October, which described itself as a “permanent framework for work and coordination”, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006. The main political parties in exile (the CPR, FDTL, Ennahda,

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<sup>196</sup> Businessnews.com. “Mouvement du 18 Octobre 2005, dix ans après, les grévistes témoignent.” October 16, 2015.

<sup>197</sup> For a detailed description of the organisation of the movement in Tunis see Gobe and Geisser, 2007a.

<sup>198</sup> A large part of this subsection draws on a conference I organised with Wajdi Limam in Paris (CERI-Sciences Po), which gathered activists from the 18 October Coalition both from Tunis and Paris, and researchers (“*L’union fait-elle la force face à l’autoritarisme? Regards critiques sur le mouvement tunisien du 18 octobre 2005*”, 31 March 2016). When quotations do not stem from specific interviews, they come from this conference, which I transcribed in full, and are referenced as follows: (Paris, 2016).

<sup>199</sup> Tunisnews archives, “Movement of 18 October: Declaration of Paris”, 21 October 2005.

<sup>200</sup> Tunisnews archives.

PCOT and Nasserist Unionists), the main associations (Association of Political Prisoners' Families, CRLDHT, CNLT, *Solidarité Tunisienne*, *Voix Libre*) gathered along with independent figures to form a coordinated structure with a General Assembly and a Committee of Coordination. They released their political platform under the slogan "we need to defend society – political platform for a common action" on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2006. Although the Parisian Coalition situated itself as an extension of the movement that started in Tunis, its initial platform expressed a more autonomous character: "our movement maintains a relationship of privileged partnership [with the Tunisian movement] but remains autonomous" (*Collectif parisien du 18 octobre, 2006*). One of its specific aims was the defence of exiles and political refugees.

One of its organisers, the CRLDHT's Tarek Ben Hiba, explained that two tasks were assigned to this committee: gathering all available forces to fight against the Ben Ali regime and spurring debate between different political groups (Paris, 2016). Indeed, the Parisian Coalition was particularly significant in breaking two taboos, especially for leftists: working with the Islamists and operating a clear rupture with the regime.

## **2.2 Breaking two taboos**

From the leftist side, Kamel Jendoubi explained that the Coalition "contributed to defuse the relations between secularists and Islamists" (Paris, 2016). It thus allowed a reduction of the aversion to Islamist movements. From the Islamists' perspective, one of its members recounted that:

"This hunger strike woke us all up. It's the first time that I posted pictures of Hama Hammami [leader of the PCOT] with everyone at metro stations and on highways in Ile-de-France" (Interview with Aymen K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015).

As Rucht (2007, p. 197) rightly suggests, "seeking allies can become critical for a movement's survival, particularly when it is in an outsider position". For Ennahda, working with other Tunisian groups was central to escaping their isolation and being officially recognised by other leftist movements as full actors within the opposition milieu. As we have seen, working with other groupings was not a new concept. The head of Ennahda's political bureau pointed out that:



“Since the end of the 1990s Ennahda had always kept in mind that it was vital to unite the opposition and that Ennahda was part of this opposition and not alone” (interview with Ameer Laayaredh, Tunis, 12 July 2016).

But the framework of the 18 October coalition offered Ennahda a new and broader opportunity. One member of the same political bureau put this clearly: “for us [the 18 October] was historic: uniting with the opposition marked our return onto the public scene (...) The 18 October 2005 saw the political return of Ennahda” (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 18 April 2016).

The coalition also allowed the taboo of rupture with the regime to be broken, as it clearly expressed publicly and widely for the first time the hypothesis of regime change. Compared to the Tunisian platform, the text of the Parisian Collective explicated the idea of a “real democratic rupture with the dictatorship” (*Collectif parisien du 18 octobre*, 2006). It even went a step further by explicitly stating the need to “redefine the necessary frame of convergence for resistance to the dictatorship and the defence of rights in society” as well as “the necessity to break [with the dictatorship] without further delay” (ibid). Thus,

“The qualitative contribution of the 18 October initiative is the willingness to go beyond denunciation and protestation, and towards the gathering of the effective political forces that are able to impose these demands” (ibid).

Ben Ali’s regime unsurprisingly perceived this as a threat, especially as the cross-ideological alliance undermined the rhetoric of Islamist threat upon which the regime continually played. It therefore came as no surprise that the regime responded with intensified repression. In this respect, a number of communiqués from the CRLDHT alerted on the diverse techniques of intimidation that had increased following the constitution of the Coalition.<sup>201</sup>

### **2.3 Alliance as a form of compromise**

The constitutive text of the Parisian platform explained that the diverse components of the unity of political action “must adhere in a clear and explicit manner to basic fundamental principles” which revolved around the “principle of complete equality”, the “principle of independence” (from any forms of colonial domination), and the

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<sup>201</sup> Tunisnews archives, Communiqués CRLDHT, 2006.

“rejection of violence” (both as a means of action and in terms of state violence) (*Collectif 18 octobre pour les droits & les libertés en Tunisie*, 2010). However, one should stress that this represented indeed a “minimum” that was necessary for the alliance to function. The alliance appeared to be based on consensus as opposed to being articulated around a common political project.

In this respect, the alliance was first and foremost based on a politics of compromise between its own different ideological tendencies. For the sake of unity, the actors avoided exploring potentially controversial topics in any great depth, so as not to alienate the divergent components. One example was offered by Omeyya Seddik when he recalled the compromise around the rights of gay members in the text: “we came up with a phrase in the text, ‘equality whatever members’ existential choices are’”, which implicitly referred to homosexuality but still remained vague enough to please Ennahda leaders (Paris, 2016). As Dot Pouillard (2009) explains in other cases of trans-ideological alliances: “if there is to be a primacy of politics above ideology, there must also sometimes be a primacy of the practical”.

The choice of the name of the initiative reflects a deeper debate on the meaning and the difficulties of forging cross-ideological alliances and the misunderstandings that may underlie such a move. In Tunis, the hunger strikers chose the neutral name “18 October”, which was the day the hunger strike started, in order to avoid any tensions. The choice of name also led to debates in the Parisian Coalition. The activists finally settled on “Unity of Action for a Democratic Change in Tunisia”, as the term “unity of action” allowed the aim of the coalition to remain vague compared to words with distinct connotations such as “Collective” or “Front”. For some the idea of a “Front” reflected the idea of a common project of society, which was something many coalition members rejected.

However, not all actors agreed on the meaning – platform, front or alliance – reflecting a disagreement on the actions that should result from the creation of the coalition. According to one of the hunger strikers, Ayachi Hammami:

“the 18 October has never been a political front (*front politique*). By the way, its name is clear. It is the ‘collective of 18 October for rights and freedoms.’ It’s not

a political platform, it does not have a political programme, it did not demand regime change.” (Paris, 2016).

Similarly, another hunger striker, PDP leader Néjib Chebbi distinguished between “unity of action” and “alliance” in a text published in 2006: “A unity of action would distinguish itself from an alliance by the extent of its programme and its duration in time”.<sup>202</sup> Chebbi also explained that the movement in Tunis was a “unity of action”, which “removed any agreement on an alternative programme for the moment”.<sup>203</sup>

There is a noticeable difference here from the aims of the alliance taking place in Paris. According to Omeyya Seddik, the Parisian text was different from that described by Ayachi Hammami in that it had a real “programmatic ambition”: “We [in Paris] really wanted a political alliance” (Paris, 2016). Tarek Ben Hiba expressed another perspective:

“Omeyya presented his vision but for me the name ‘unity of action’ conveyed this in-between [idea] well; it did aspire to be a political front (...), it was an attempt at political restructuring, but one which never had either the bravery or the time to take this idea to its final conclusion.” (Paris, 2016).

Meanwhile Kamel Jendoubi said that “the creation of a 18 October forum here in France gathered all the Tunisian tendencies in France, so of course the movement was within the field of human rights” (Paris, 2016).

The difficulties in defining the meaning of the alliance limited such an experience as an organised alternative to the authoritarian regime, demonstrating the difficult transition from the human rights frame to a political project. For instance, there were no traces of economic and social claims in the rupture with the regime in the Parisian movement of 18 October. Furthermore, Moncef Marzouki, despite having been at the forefront of former cross-ideological experiences, was pushed into the background during the 18 October Coalition. In addition to personal rivalries, it was more importantly because he wanted to go further in the rupture with the regime. He explained in 2006 that:

“You know the positions I have always defended, but this should not rely on minimums or maximums, but on what the political situation requires. What this

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<sup>202</sup> Néjib Chebbi, “*Amorce d’un débat*”, 10 March 2006, available at: <http://tunisnews.net/2016-05-22-12-23-05/item/4599->, accessed 23 October 2016.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

situation required was a political front against the dictatorship that presented itself as a clear political alternative (...) what the situation required was to gather around a political project of rupture and struggle” (Marzouki in Bagga, 2006).

In addition, the presidential elections of 2009 exposed divergences within the coalition. While some advocated for boycott, others wanted to participate in the name of the Coalition or under the banner of individual political parties. Haugbølle and Cavatorta (2011) studied oppositional movements in Tunisia and their failures to coordinate under authoritarian constraints: while their argument of “coordination failures” is not empirically supported, their argument that those ranged from “ideological differences and strategic divergence to personal rivalries among opposition leaders” is relevant here.

#### **2.4 Alliance as a factor of disagreement within the movements**

A further difficulty encountered by the dynamic of the alliance related to the divisions within the constellations themselves. The 18 October Coalition particularly exposed intra-leftist divisions surrounding the central question of their relationships with Islamist forces, and of whether or not to include them in the oppositional milieu. While most of the opponents to the regime supported the hunger strike, the move to create a Coalition afterwards crystallised these tensions (Abdessamad, 2017). The willingness to participate in the Coalition was not hegemonic within the associations and parties themselves. While the Parisian platform was created in February 2006, an important text in the form of a petition signed by about a hundred high profile members in both Paris and Tunis was published – “à propos d’une dérive” (concerning a drift) – which explained the reasons for opposing the alliance.<sup>204</sup> A number of the signatories, who defined themselves as “belonging to the Tunisian democratic family of the left” came from the FTCT. Although they shared the three original claims of 18 October movement, they considered that “democratic debate is one thing, the alliance at any price is another” (ibid).

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<sup>204</sup> “A propos d’une dérive”, February 2006, available at: <http://nachaz.org/blog/doc-1-brochure-du-collectif-du-18-octobre-pour-les-droits-et-les-libertes/#Toc439340005>, accessed 12 April 2017.

One main reason for opposing the alliance is reminiscent of what Abdelrahman (2009, p. 53) notes in the case of cooperation between the left and Islamists in Egypt: “the fear is that the process of building a broad coalition of opposition forces might lead to the further weakening of an already divided Left”. Indeed, Chérif Ferjani explained that he was against the alliance because: “This front contributed to the division of the left, which needed to be united: if it wanted to carry weight in the debate, it had to remain united” (Paris, 2016). When it comes to Ennahda, only a tiny minority opposed the 18 October movement, and this remained at the internal level and was never made public. One member, for example, explained that she did not trust the movement from a political perspective as she considered it as a “political exploitation” of Ennahda because “the left in fact needed [Ennahda] to have a [coherent] political image” (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

### **Section III.**

#### **Internal structuring and intra-community sociability**

The focus in Section II on various experiences of alliance should not present a picture of a homogeneous oppositional milieu or smooth over the cracks of the deep divides between various constellations of actors. One important antagonism relates to internal structuring, which can have direct consequences on the modalities and the forms of opposition movements (Grojean, 2008, p. 37). This section will therefore investigate the intersection between activist political practices and the culture of internal organisation. By examining the processes chosen to preserve the identity of the movements, we can illuminate the differences between practices directed at internal and external audiences.

##### **1. Islamic intra-community structuring**

“Few people distinguished between their social experience and their intellectual and political convictions. There was no distinction, there was porosity between the two. We all lived socially and politically together.” (Interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 30 August 2016)

I have analysed the diverse modalities of external mobilisation for Nahdawi exiles, which entailed processes of de-Islamisation and a turn to human rights. Internal Islamic mobilisation is defined by close mechanisms of Islamic community structuring, what I will call “*entre-soi*” (in-group). As studied in other contexts such as in Latin America, one notices a shift from “*lieux of exile*” to “*milieux of exile*” (Sznajder and Roniger, 2009, p. 193). In other words, the processes of exiles’ settlement led to the instigation of various infrastructures designed for activists and their families, enabling in turn the reproduction of Islamic networks and spaces of sociability in France.<sup>205</sup> The attachment and loyalty to the group and its heritage – inducing specific affinities, connections and transmissions – must therefore be scrutinised. Far from a so-called “Islamist culture” that would explain a specific way of structuring the exile community, the Islamist *entre-soi* can be explained by the different constraints and possibilities that were operating within the boundaries of the trans-state space as well as the evolving trajectory of the movement in exile in France. More specifically, when facing difficulties in surviving as a political force in exile, some mechanisms can be put forward that remind us of what Taylor (1989, p. 772) noted in the case of American feminist movements: “In an abeyance phase, a social movement organization uses internally oriented activities to build a structure through which it can maintain its identity, ideals and political vision.”

As the president of *Solidarité Tunisienne* said, “We were cut off; we lived in a closed circle, cut off from the Tunisian community because we were avoiding them to avoid giving them any problems.” (Interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015). Many children of exiles recounted that they did not talk with Tunisians they did not know. When I talked about “isolation” or *entre-soi*, several activists rather described the situation in terms of being “in a vacuum” (*vase-clos*), a “shell” (*carapace*) or, in a more positive way, in “self-sufficiency” (interviews with Ennahda leaders, Paris, 2015-17). The structuring of Nahdawi activist intra-community as

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<sup>205</sup> An interesting parallel can be drawn with the study of Kuwaiti exiles in London: Dazi-Heni (1994) shows the reconstruction of Kuwaiti social networks through spaces of informal sociability such as the *diwaniyya*, and how the setting up of those networks can lead to the construction and preservation of a specific community identity.

*entre-soi* therefore oscillates between being a resource to unite the group and allow it to persist in exile, and an obstacle to mobilise against the regime.

The Islamist constellation of actors recreated a Tunisian Islamic sociability in order to preserve the polity. One of the leaders of the political committee expressed clearly this idea of a social body to protect:

“We did not recruit, we were protecting the community (*corps*). How did we protect this corps? We create associations where we are, we have a moral commitment towards Tunisia. Especially helping prisoners and their families socially (...) There is a social relation first. And this social relation was [based on] moral engagement.” (Interview with Hamed K. \*, Paris, 18 April 2016)

Through such networks of knowledge, Nahdawi activists participated in identity-building processes, notably through the drawing of symbolic lines between “us” and “them” (Sommier, 2010, p. 199; Voegtli, 2010). Several interviewees mentioned the notion of a “second family” to define this “us”. As the son of one founder of Ennahda exiled in France recounted:

“There was this whole community of refugee families here. I grew up with many of those people. It’s like a second family for me as I did not have another one. They were like my cousins. If I have to present them to people I say they are my cousins.” (Interview with Amin Karker, Paris, 12 October 2015).

One member of *Tawasol* expounded further:

“It was in this way that we filled the void of the real family, the blood family. So we did not feel deprived of family (...) even Tunisians after the revolution when they saw how we were linked they were astonished!” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 21 January 2016)

The role of Nahdawi encadrement, which could be drawn closer to the economy of affectual ties of the group (Sommier, 2010), is here central to understanding the internal structuring and networks of sociability. While “Islamist outreach efforts” (Wickham, 2002, p. 121) have been scrutinised, an interesting parallel can be drawn with the French Communist party, which operated – through diverse vectors – a much more complete encadrement of its activists than Ennahda (Ethuin, 2003; Misch, 2003). Lacroix (2013) also shows how Basque “patriotic” organisations produced and maintained loyalty to the cause in diverse ways. In the same vein, Ennahda’s encadrement played a role in the production of adhesion and reinforced loyalty to the group.

This took the form of a competing *encadrement* to the one that had been set in place by the RCD, which I examined in the last chapter. It has previously been shown that the religious sphere was not invested in by the Tunisian state. For the Nahdawis, this allowed them some space in which to create their own structures and visions of what should be the right *encadrement*, thus producing cohesion within the group but also imposing forms of social control on its members. This *encadrement* was notably targeted at the children of exiles. As one Nahdawi leader who was in charge of youth programmes explained:

“We organised a programme of care (*prise en charge*). We introduced them to our history, our aims, our political choices. We tried to cover French society, and what their rights and duties were. We also had a spiritual *prise en charge*; we tried to give them another vision of religion so they would not be approached by Salafism, fundamentalism or jihadism.” (Interview with Salah Taggaz, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016).

This idea of creating the right *encadrement* was corroborated by one leader of *Tawasol*, who recounted that:

“For us as Tunisians, we also had this vision that our vision of Islam is the right one. We think that the “middle-ground vision” (*al-Wasatiyya*)<sup>206</sup> is the best for Muslims in France, so we also wanted to pass down this idea to our children (...) Therefore they had to learn religion when needed. We were scared of Salafist recruitment, and we were scared for our children.” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

It was mainly through social and cultural activities that the in-group was preserved.<sup>207</sup> For instance, leaders organised holiday camps in Normandy (referred to by the interviewees as the *moukhayem*) every summer and sometimes during the spring holidays, socio-cultural activities such as conferences organised by *Tawasol* in the 2000s, community gatherings at the occasion of weddings, funerals or *aïd* parties, as well as Arabic classes every weekend in Islamic schools created by Nahdawi exiles.

Indeed, it was notably through the establishment of schools that attempts at *encadrement* were made possible. The first school was created by one of the main leaders in exile in the 1980s, Habib Mokni and his wife Saoussen Mokni. The school *Calama* was active from 1985 to 1990 in the North of Paris (interviews with Habib

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<sup>206</sup> Cf. Chapter 4, Section II.

<sup>207</sup> Children of exiles recounted that they never talked directly about politics in those activities.



and Saoussen Mokni, Paris, March and October 2016). More strikingly, the school *La réussite* ("Success") in Aubervilliers, founded in 1992 by another Ennahda leader in exile, Dhaou Meskine, was repeatedly mentioned by the children of exiles. They took Arabic classes on Wednesday afternoons and at the weekends as well as religious education. There was some degree of evolution in the audience: it was open to everyone without exclusivity, but at first only Nahdawi exiles came, and it was only later that other nationalities and sociological profiles of Tunisians attended.<sup>208</sup> However, the establishment of those schools corresponded to a true desire to organise themselves, according to Habib Mokni (interview, Paris, 6 October 2016). He mentioned that they were an "internal problem", as it was vital "not to get lost, to take care of ourselves" (ibid). Other Nahdawi exiles opened schools to teach Arabic and Islamic education in other parts of Ile-de-France (notably the *école Avenir*, created in 1997 in La Courneuve, and the *école Espoir* in Vitry in 1998).

The focus on the schools created by Nahdawi exiles also provides information on networks of solidarity, which grew to create a community of experience. A large number of exiles came from the field of education in Tunisia and these schools offered an opportunity for these exiles to find jobs. This was all the more crucial for a number of women (Nahdawi activists or wives of male Nahdawi activists) who could not work as schoolteachers in French public schools as they were wearing hijabs. As well as those schools, networks of solidarity were strikingly effective, especially when looking at several companies led by Nahdawi exiles who employed other Nahdawis. Some leaders were also funded by the movement to create their own businesses. Thus, "there is no poverty within Ennahda because there is this form of solidarity (...) and this form of shell protects us all" (interview with Chokri Hamrouni, Paris, 30 August 2016).

However, the protection and advantages the activists could get from their political involvement has to be nuanced by the fact that only the leadership of the movement seemed to have a direct and obvious access to those networks. Ayari (2007, p. 63)

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<sup>208</sup> The director of the school even mentioned that children of RCD members came at some point (interview with Mhmed P., Paris, 16 December 2016).

rightly suggested that “the activist solidarity depends of the [degree of] insertion within the party apparatus”. One ex-sympathiser of the movement explained that:

“It mainly worked through networks run by people who knew each other in Tunisia (...) The more high-ranking you are, the easier you find solutions, but when you go down in the hierarchy there are no solutions any longer, and this was a burden.” (Interview with Mehdi Zougah, Marseille, 5 June).<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, if the isolation described showcased the attempt to strengthen and maintain forms of continuity in the Nahdawi community in exile, one should also look at the difficulties this entailed for the anti-regime cause. The impossibility of recruiting in exile is striking, which affects in turn the possibility of remaining an opposition movement acting from afar in the long run. The president of *Solidarité Tunisienne* explained that:

“Basically we classified the community. Those people whom we could approach; those ones we could approach according to their availability; others we should not get [close] to.” (Interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015).

As mentioned in the last chapter, simple contact with a Nahdawi exile could lead to security issues, especially for families who stayed in Tunisia. They did not therefore take the risk of reaching out to the broader community, perpetuating in turn their state of isolation.

Beyond the protection of the Tunisian community, their own security as a movement was also at stake. The risk of infiltration was high and the procedures they put in place for new members joining the movement made it impossible to recruit in the 1990s. I gathered a number of testimonies from people who are now active in Ennahda, and who had demonstrated interest in the movement before the 2011 revolution but had never managed to join. The system of “sponsorship” that was put in place by Ennahda in exile – a recommendation from an active member was needed – made it impossible to integrate unknown sympathisers into the structure. Only children of exiles could be considered part of the movement. One active sympathiser whose sister and brothers held high positions within the party explained that “the inner circle was difficult to reach even for people [like me]” (interview with Chokri

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<sup>209</sup> A further investigation with a larger number of rank-and-file activists would allow to deepen this point, which was not fully graspable from my empirical research.

Hamrouni, Paris 9 September 2016). In fact, as one of the leaders said, “it was about resisting, not recruiting” (interview with Habib Mokni, Paris, 6 October 2016). Another explained that “recruiting was not a priority, we were trying to survive” (interview with Adel L. \*, Paris, 9 December 2016).

In addition to the inability to recruit, there were also a number of defections in varying forms.<sup>210</sup> One of the leaders referred to “passive” defections – activists who were no longer active but remained loyal to the movement, some of whom continued to participate in cultural and social events (interview with Habib Mokni, Paris, 6 October 2016). Grassroots activists, often sympathisers forced into exile, made up most of these. Some activists were unable to stabilise their own social situation in exile and could not continue their involvement in the political struggle. The social downgrading and the difficulties of the life in exile could lead to a distancing from the movement, and others were disappointed by the lack of practical and symbolic reward that their activism within the movement produced. Defection was for some others much more of a political choice. A number of activists from the leadership of the movement chose to quit the movement because of divergence regarding strategy.<sup>211</sup> As some activists recalled, when you chose to leave the “political” sphere of Ennahda, you were excluded from its social space, thus reinforcing the *entre-soi* dynamics.

## **2. Leftist “*entre-soi*”**

While the Nahdawi *entre-soi* was about identity convergence – meaning that the social identity of the activists was isomorphic with the collective identity of the movement (Voegtli, 2010, p. 216) – the leftist constellation had a different understanding of *entre-soi*.

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<sup>210</sup> For an important contribution on the question of disengagement processes in activism, see Fillieule (2005).

<sup>211</sup> Three main factors led to “active” defections. Firstly, centring on a process of “self-criticism” in the mid-1990s, one group of activists accused the leadership of misconduct and requested that the leaders publicly acknowledge those mistakes or resign. Secondly, the Karker case discussed above was a main point of disagreement, leading to some resignations. Thirdly, in the 2000s, interaction and negotiation with the Ben Ali regime constituted a main line of division.

It is difficult to examine a coherent and structured leftist *encadrement* because the groups under scrutiny were multiple and disparate. While we have seen that Ennahda clearly put a great deal of effort into the creation of a “community of experience” and *encadrement*, no such work was done by the leftists. Unlike Islamist activism, which was very family-centred, intra-structuring mechanisms were different for the leftists, who had a distinct history of migration and activist trajectories. For instance, children of leftist activists were barely mobilised at all, and the subject of families never came up in discussions with activists, for whom exile and political trajectories were above all individual struggles which were not family-centred. The next chapter will examine different processes of transmission of activist memories between Islamists and leftists. In fact, the sociability of leftist exiles did not operate on a day-to-day basis but was mainly revitalised during periods of action.

However, there were tight networks of leftist activists, which we can conceptualise as a leftist milieu or family: several activists from the CRLDHT, FCTR, and political parties such as the PDP and the PCOT, referred to this idea of family, defined as either a “modernist family” or a “leftist family”. This reminds us of Della Porta and Rucht’s (1995, p. 232) idea of a “movement family”, which they characterise as “a set of coexisting movements that, regardless of their specific goals, have similar basic values and organizational overlaps, and sometimes even join for common campaigns.” One activist summarised this quite well when he described his relationship with other leftist movements:

“We are in contact, they are friends, everyone socialises, all those involved in Tunisian politics know each other very well. *No, all those involved in non-Islamist Tunisian politics know each other very well. And some also know the Islamists*” (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016, my emphasis).

The *entre-soi* relies on both external sociability and similar trajectories for the activists. It is striking to see commonalities in trajectories of activism and belonging to prior organisations, which in turn united the group. In other words, the pre-existing networks favoured the *entre-soi* for activists who often belonged to the same political generation. As one member of the FCTR, Hichem Abdessamad, exemplified: “in fact, our affinities are first of all [to be found] in our pre-history as leftists, who are today chastened but not reformed” (interview conducted by Michaël Ayari, Paris, 2004).

The shared previous history and thorough knowledge of each other, which could often be traced back to their political engagement in Tunisia in the 1970s,<sup>212</sup> also led leftists to create activist structures that could act as employment opportunities. In this respect, a number of activists were remunerated for their work in the two main federations, the ATF and the FTCT.

Although compared to Ennahda the *entre-soi* was more fluid and was not organised through specific structures, an implicit line of demarcation still delineated who belonged to the group through a shared political culture and history. When activists did not follow the same trajectory of activism (as was the case for independent activists often described as “lone wolves” or “weird people” by leftist activists), they were *de facto* considered as suspect and rejected from the leftist *entre-soi*. In this respect, one member of the PDP when talking about the CPR activists evidenced the importance of inter-knowledge networks and mechanisms of exclusion:

“Except for Moncef Marzouki, they came, all the same, from a certain Islamist atmosphere. They were in rupture with the Islamists – although not enough to be integrated to the general movement of, let’s say, the Tunisian modernist opposition movement” (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 2 November 2017).

The leftist *entre-soi* was also delineated by a strong gender bias. One activist, coming from a Trotskyist background, recounted that it took her years to discover the existence of this milieu and get in touch with it. She associated this with aspects of gender:

“There were very masculine networks, I did not know them (...) I think that it is a very masculine milieu, very narrow, and from my perspective also very male chauvinist” (interview with Olfa Lamoulou, Tunis, 1 November 2017).

## **Conclusion**

When scrutinising the range of practices and political grammar that were deployed by Tunisian activists from afar – mainly Islamist and leftist opposition movements in exile – a number of defining features emerged, which shed a great deal of light on

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<sup>212</sup> Some activists were even detained at the same time and in same prisons because of their anti-Bourguiba activism in the 1970s.

the field of homeland politics. I have argued that although (perceived or real) ideological dimensions matter when attempting to understand mobilisations in exile and the internal organisation of different movements, other cleavages are just as crucial in determining the frames, means of action and evolution of the oppositional milieu, if not more so. These cleavages traversed the constellations of actors themselves and were concerned with the relationships between competing ideological actors and the attitude they adopted vis-à-vis the Tunisian regime.

For both constellations of actors, the goal was to make the anti-regime cause visible and continue the struggle from abroad. Despite differentiated access to allies and timelines of action that were linked to distinctive processes of accumulation of social and activist capital, the framing of the cause remained in terms of human rights at the expense of partisan and religious affiliations, and the movements availed themselves of similar means of action. In this respect, ideological cleavages could appear to be downplayed in exile: the language of rights and freedoms was seen as ambivalent, although it appeared as an efficient rhetorical tool in generalising grievances and to aligning frames with a broader audience.

The field of homeland politics was also found to be interactive, and was best grasped in relational terms, hence the turn to different experiences of cross-ideological alliance in the second section. However, the necessity to maintain at least a semblance of continuity and coherence in the exile community led to a specific intra-structuring of each constellation. While the constellations of actors shared forms of *entre-soi* and faced difficulties in reaching out to the broader Tunisian community, the intra-community structuring nevertheless varied depending on the movement under scrutiny.

Having focused in this chapter on the characteristics of homeland politics, the next chapter will examine the ways in which these key features interact with the field of immigrant politics.

## CHAPTER 4

### The field of immigrant politics

#### Introduction

Drawing on insights from the analysis of homeland politics in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on what defines the field of immigrant politics and how it interplays with the field of homeland politics. This will help us by illuminating a new central feature of the trans-state space of mobilisation. Not only were Tunisian leftists and Islamists active in fighting Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, but several of them were also at the forefront of organisations concerned with immigrant politics, which were as much related to the workings of French Islam as it was to the conditions of immigrants.

Following which processes did the field of immigrant politics emerge and to what extent could it be considered as being fairly separate from the field of homeland politics? How are the two fields mutually articulated and what does this tell us in turn about our understanding of the trans-state of mobilisation?

This chapter demonstrates that the trans-state space of mobilisation is constituted by increasingly autonomous yet overlapping fields of struggle. By examining the specific logics of the field of immigrant politics, we will be able to see that the distinction between "immigrant" and "homeland" can make sense. However, despite different agendas for action, a central claim is to study the complementarity and the interactional features of both fields.

This chapter starts by tracing the progressive autonomisation of the field of immigrant politics through historical inquiry. The second section scrutinises three cases of competitive relations between Tunisian leftist and Islamist activists, arguing that the field of immigrant politics is best considered as a site of struggle and delineates its main features. The third section allows us to delve into the nuances at work within the dichotomy between the fields of homeland and immigrant politics by investigating the extent to which they overlap.

## **Section I.**

### **The relative autonomy of the field of immigrant politics**

In this first section, I analyse the emergence of Tunisian actors in the field of immigrant politics and justify the dissociation of the two fields of action in which they operate. The articulation between homeland and immigrant politics was the *raison d'être* of the Tunisian exile activist movements themselves.

#### **1. Towards the autonomy of Islamist immigrant politics**

The political involvement of Tunisian Islamist exiles in what some authors have termed the French Muslim field (Peter, 2006; Fregosi, 2008; Bruce, 2015) is particularly salient. It deserves scrutiny insofar as it entails a specific integration and positioning in the field of immigrant politics.

##### **1.1 The 1970s to the 1980s: a relative concomitance**

A short historical synopsis is necessary in order to understand the processes by which immigrant politics became a relatively autonomous field of action for Islamist exiles. As was explained in Chapter 1, Islamist activists differentiated two main areas of mobilisation, what they termed *al-'Amal al-Qotri* (meaning “territorial work”, in this sense activism linked to Tunisia) and what they called *al-'Amal al-'Amm* (“general work”, which in this context means investment in the organisation of the Muslim communities in France). However, this explicit duality was not self-evident from the outset.

After its 1979 congress, the Tunisian Islamist movement<sup>213</sup> took the decision to send two of its leaders<sup>214</sup> to represent the movement in France (interviews with various Ennahda leaders, Paris/Tunis, 2016-2017). Following the willingness of the Muslim Brotherhood's international organisation (*al-Tanzim al-Dawli*) – with which the MTI

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<sup>213</sup> As a reminder, it was then called *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic group), the ancestor of the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (MTI), which became later Ennahda.

<sup>214</sup> One was a leader of the movement at university and member of the *Majlis al-Shura*, the other was a leader in the “territory”.



was affiliated<sup>215</sup> – the two Tunisian leaders were expected to be active in France within *al-‘Amal al-‘Amm*. In the same year, following an internal crisis within the *Association des Etudiants Islamiques en France* (Association of Islamic Students in France, AEIF)<sup>216</sup>, the *Groupement Islamique en France* (Islamic group in France, GIF) was created,<sup>217</sup> which included several Tunisian members from *al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya*. The GIF existed more effectively from 1981 once Faysal Mawlawi acted as a figurehead to the movement. While the leadership was not only Tunisian,<sup>218</sup> the GIF was reinforced from 1981 with the arrival of the first wave of MTI exile leaders, which has been depicted in Chapter 1. The GIF described its object as follows:

To foster religious ties among Muslims and assist them in the fulfilment of their religious duties. To welcome newcomers, to advise and guide them and to give them moral, material and spiritual support. To ensure that its members stay in contact with those of other like-minded organisations. To open GIF chapters outside of Paris.<sup>219</sup>

Although it was not necessarily an official Tunisian Islamist decision to create the GIF, it was *de facto* controlled by Tunisian Islamist leaders in its initial stages. It was then mostly animated by student sympathisers of the Tunisian *al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya* and Muslim Brothers from other nationalities. As Amghar (2008, p. 71) explains,

these organizations provided a base for multinational Islamist opposition, a sanctuary where militants could be trained whilst waiting for the liberalization of the political field in their home countries (...) Thus, they first appeared as political structures that looked after the militants of the Brotherhood whilst allowing them to pursue their activism.

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<sup>215</sup> The question of whether the MTI officially swore allegiance to the Brotherhood during its Congress in 1979 received contradictory answers. However, a number of MTI members used the word “affiliated” (in organisational and intellectual terms) to describe this relationship.

<sup>216</sup> This was the association funded by Muhammad Hamidullah in 1963. The crisis was caused mainly because Tunisian activists and others wanted to link the AEIF to “the Egyptian branch of the international stream of the Muslim Brotherhood, whereas the majority of the organisation’s members wanted to remain under the control of the Syrian branch of the Brotherhood. Confronted with the refusal of the leadership of the association, the AEIF split” (Amghar, 2008, p. 70). It is interesting to note that Rached Ghannouchi has been part of the AEIF (see Ternisien, 2010, pp. 251-54).

<sup>217</sup> The GIF was officially declared in Valenciennes (Northern France). FNA-P 19970062/1, “*Note groupe islamiste en France*”, *chef du service de coopération technique internationale de police*, February 1984.

<sup>218</sup> For instance, Faysal Mawlawi was Lebanese, leader of *al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya*, the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>219</sup> FNA-P 19920417/15, “*Regards sur la communauté tunisienne en France*”, 18 August 1988.

Indeed, the GIF provided logistical support to MTI exiles during the 1980s. One MTI leader at the Tunisian university, who took the route of exile in 1981 through Algeria, recalled that to arrive to Paris:

“I was officially invited by the GIF, as an intellectual, to come to France to lecture, etc. I was given the royal treatment (...) Logistically they took good care of us. I remember, they picked me up at the airport, I was taken to Antony<sup>220</sup> with a student, I was also given a stipend.” (Interview with Salah Taggaz, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016).

Thus, at the initial stages at least, the actors allied themselves under a sort of natural continuity between their political engagement in Tunisia and in France, namely between the GIF and the MTI, which was also linked by broader philosophical and ideological ties to an organisation that transcended nation-state boundaries, the Muslim Brotherhood. As one leader explained, “when you are [active with the] MTI, you were automatically [active] in the GIF” (interview with Mmed P., Paris, 16 December 2016).

However, it is important to note that this was not true of all Islamist exile activists. At the beginning of the 1980s, several exile MTI activists, most of whom came from the student leadership, chose not to join the GIF. This took place during a period of friction between what was often referred to as “the revolutionary students” and the “conservative leadership”.<sup>221</sup> The MTI student leadership was actively opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood’s ascendancy and was strongly influenced by the contemporaneous Iranian revolution. They were therefore reluctant to join the GIF, which was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. There were a number of other ideological reasons.<sup>222</sup> (Interviews with Lazhar Abaab, Salah Taggaz, Mhmed P.\*, Paris, 2016).

The GIF, along with other associations, was part of a framework that led to the creation of one of the dominant umbrella organisations of the French Muslim field:

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<sup>220</sup> This was a reference to the student residence “Jean Zay” in Antony (Ile-de-France), which was an important base for GIF and MTI activists; FNA-P 19920417/15, “Tunisia”.

<sup>221</sup> The confrontation between the “revolutionary students” and “the conservative leadership” mainly revolved around the MTI’s request for legalisation in 1981: the student leadership at university opposed any forms of dialogue with the Bourguiba regime and refused the leadership’s decision to legalise the movement.

<sup>222</sup> For instance, women were not allowed into meetings of the GIF, while the MTI encouraged mixed-gender political meetings.

the *Union des Organisations Islamiques en France* (Union of Islamic Organisations in France, UOIF) in 1983. Tunisian Islamists were pioneers in the setting up of this organisation (Dazey, 2018).<sup>223</sup>

## **1.2 The 1990s: tensions and relative autonomisation**

When it comes to the 1990s, the duality between the UOIF and Ennahda and the resulting tension structured the Tunisian Islamist mobilisation in exile. They were stuck between two ways of understanding activism from afar, and the result was a growing autonomy of the two fields of action. It was no any longer a logical continuity but a more noticeable division of activist work. As one Nahdawi leader clarified, however, “there was no precise allocation: it was a personal choice that influenced the belonging to one field or another” (interview with Ahmed Ben Amor, Paris, 21 December 2016). This gradual autonomy within the field of immigrant politics can be explained by a number of factors.

First, the “myth of return” withered gradually for the first political generation of Tunisian Islamist activists from the end of the 1980s onwards. A number of them began to consider their presence in France as permanent, especially when witnessing the intensification of repression under Ben Ali over subsequent years. As Jouanneau (2007) remarked regarding the UOIF, “the prospect of its permanent establishment in France forced the UOIF’s founding members to examine what their goals may be regarding the field of Islam in France.” One could see a divide gradually emerging. On the one hand there were those who considered themselves as being settled in France, with the return to Tunisia increasingly fading as a horizon of expectation, who therefore decided to engage in the organisation of French Islam. On the other, there were those who wished to continue the struggle against the Tunisian regime and remained centred on Tunisia. This tendency considered any engagement in the immigrant field as a betrayal and a waste of political energy at the expense of their main struggle, the fight against the Ben Ali regime. In this respect, several Nahdawi activists declared that they felt a strong sense of guilt to engage in questions related

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<sup>223</sup> MTI leaders Habib Mokni, Dhaou Meskine and Ahmed Jaballah played a central role in launching the UOIF.

to French Islam. This demonstrates in turn the dissonance between immigrant and homeland politics for the actors themselves. As the president of the *Majlis al-Shura* explained:

“Our generation had a sense of obligation. We felt a little guilty with respect to our brothers and our friends back home, who suffered a lot. It’s true that being in exile is difficult. You are uprooted and it’s painful, but let’s not overdo it. We could prosper here. We could complete our studies, we have professional opportunities, we have our dignity and our freedom, and we are not constrained here. It’s true that we have problems like everyone else, like all Tunisians living in France and like all French people, but we succeeded as a family and as individuals in making a life here. Compared to our friends back home, where individuals and families were shattered. We had to stand with these people, they were part of us, especially as leaders.” (Interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015).

In addition, the French context, which required assimilation and discretion, quickly re-emerged in shaping possibilities for action. Although a number of Nahdawis did have some responsibilities in the leadership of the UOIF at first, tensions appeared at the beginning of the 1990s when Ennahda as an opposition movement was judged to be too political for what could be considered an “integrationist” organisation that was above all seeking legitimacy within the French arena (Amghar, 2005; 2009). Indeed, one should note that a process of “gallicisation” of UOIF took place, which coincided with the arrival of the main wave of Nahdawi exiles under Ben Ali. A leader recounted that:

“Underlying all this was the fact that Ennahda grew very rapidly in France between 1990 and 1994, going from thirty or forty activists to several thousand. The UOIF was afraid of Ennahda as this imbalance increased. Suddenly Ennahda activists might have accounted for up to 60% of all UOIF activists, so there was a shift towards mutual distrust.” (Interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 1 September 2016).

As part of its strategy of institutional inclusion into the French Muslim field, the UOIF shifted from the “Union of Islamic organisations *in* France” to “Union of Islamic organisations *of* France” in 1990. Geisser (2006) notes:

A process of nationalization of its official rhetoric, of its references and of its acronym, elements of ‘gallicization’ which are not merely ‘strategic’ or ‘opportunistic’, but also ‘experienced’, which emerged as a result of a protracted process of autochthonisation of the organization and of its leaders.

Thus while the UOIF’s struggles were initially also linked to the activists’ country of origin, the context of institutionalisation and a willingness to play a central role in the management of French Islam has led the organisation to distance itself from the

North African political scenes and mostly disregard the Nahdawi struggles against Ben Ali's regime. Dazey (2018) in her fruitful conceptualisation of the "politics of respectability" further explains that it is the securitarian, political and media pressures that have led UOIF leaders to follow this course of action. The main shift of the UOIF at the beginning of the 1990s – termed "*Tawtin al-Da'wa*" (rooting the action in France) by some Tunisian activists – therefore led to a growing separation of the commitment in the two fields.

As one Nahdawi activist who was involved with both Ennahda and the UOIF explained, a decision was taken by the UOIF at the time, according to which "if you are someone important – a high-ranked activist if I can say so – you should not be highly ranked in the other [sphere]" (interview with Ahmed Ben Amor, Paris, 21 December 2016). Another Nahdawi leader went a step further by explaining that "if someone is active at the UOIF he has to cease any political activities [with Ennahda]" (interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 3 April 2016). If the UOIF did not take any official decision to exclude Nahdawis (it was more a process of orientation), Nahdawis took this decision of their own accord later: people working for the UOIF could not be part of the direction of the Nahdawi movement. One activist talked about "a declared, fraternal divorce" in 1992 (interview with Ahmed S.\*, Paris, 28 January 2016). As Samia Driss expressed, for the UOIF:

"It [was] also a question of priority: its priority at the beginning was not the Tunisian question, so the UOIF never issued communiqués to support Ennahda in Tunisia. They did not take a stance because they were not political, they said so. And we were not happy with this, it played a part in what caused our divergences. At some point we wanted them to support us; we needed additional support to help us in this very difficult fight against the dictatorship. But from their point of view they were against taking a side as so not to involve the organisation in political questions. So you have those who understood this position and thought that a separation of the two spheres was needed and those, who considered that [the UOIF] did not support us, that they were only looking after their own interests." (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

Some forms of aid could exist, however, although they were neither official nor open. *Solidarité Tunisienne* ran a stand at the Annual Gathering of France's Muslims in Le Bourget, organised by the UOIF every year since the late 1980s, which allowed Ennahda to render the cause of political prisoners visible to a wider Muslim audience

and receive some donations (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 21 January 2016). One leader recounted that:

“For us, UOIF events are a godsend. We have VIP passes so we can go backstage, and that’s where we can meet people we otherwise wouldn’t have access to. It’s an opportunity to talk, to introduce ourselves” (interview with Salah Taggaz, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016)

In addition, temporalities of action in the two fields could differ, further explaining different types of engagement over time between immigrant and homeland politics. One of the spokespersons for Ennahda, who was also member of the UOIF, recounted that the temporalities of mobilisation of the UOIF and Ennahda varied to the extent that being engaged in the Muslim field required a daily commitment while the Tunisian question could be slower and included periods of relative inactivity (interview with Habib Mokni, Paris, 6 October 2016). This meant that activists were sometimes engaged with the UOIF and sometimes with Ennahda. This was explained further by Ahmed Ben Amor:

“Our options changed depending on the situation. For example, from 1984, when the brothers were liberated in Tunisia, until 1986, and then from 1987 to around 1990, there wasn’t much for us to do. The brothers were over there, they organised their own activism in their own way and we were there to support them. You know, we have energy, and that energy has to be (spent) one way or the other. That’s just the way it was”. (Interview with Ahmed Ben Amor, Paris, 19 December 2016).

Another leader, who had been engaged in a competing umbrella organisation to the UOIF created at the beginning of the 1990s called the *Collectif des Musulmans de France* (Collective of Muslims of France, CMF),<sup>224</sup> concurred:

“Yes, at the time I was in the political office and I stepped down. But by the early 2000s, Tunisia had become rather barren, to tell you the truth. The opposition’s voice needed to be heard, but there didn’t need to be so many of us just to write a press release every two or three weeks. The press release wouldn’t have been much better if there’d been three, thirty or three hundred of us, but really... So things were rather dreary. On the other hand, I had made a lot of progress with activism in France, so it became difficult to maintain both (...) I found myself caught between one area where there was a real need, for which I had more time, and another where our meetings were just kind of going in circles.” (Interview with Habib L. \*, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016)

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<sup>224</sup> The CMF was developed from the Lyon-based association *Union des Jeunes Musulmans* (Union of Young Muslims, UJM), which I discuss below. See also Pingaud, 2012.

As Habib L.\* pointed out in my interview with him, the diverging temporalities of action have also to be understood in terms of the lack of resources. It was very difficult indeed for Islamist exiles to maintain political activities in the long term in both fields, and the situation required certain adjustments.

We can therefore note a degree of detachment between activism in the “Muslim field” and activism against the Tunisian regime, which led to the relative autonomisation of the field of immigrant politics. This was linked to diverse structural and internal causes as well as to more sociological factors and differentiated temporalities of action. I now turn to a similar process of (relative) autonomisation concerning the leftists.

## **2. Leftist trajectory of autonomy in the field of immigrant politics**

The external and internal constraints also led to a trajectory of relative autonomy in the field of immigrant politics for the leftist constellation of actors. To address this I focus mainly on the cases of the *Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens* (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers, UTIT), which became the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives* (Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship between two Shores, FTCR), and the *Association des Tunisiens en France* (Association of Tunisians in France, ATF). These organisations typify this process.

### **2.1 The 1970s to the 1990s: from concomitance to “a new orientation”**

As explained in Chapter 1, the reflection on how to delimit spheres of action was at the core of UTIT political and organisational preoccupations right from the start. From their founding document *Autonomy and Belonging*, in which the activists explained the dual character of immigration, one understands that they inherently linked the struggle for improving the conditions of immigrant workers with the Tunisian “struggle for social and national emancipation”.<sup>225</sup> When defining its general orientation, the UTIT explained in the 1970s that it was:

“to inform, raise awareness, coordinate, mobilise and unite Tunisian immigrant workers around the struggles of the Tunisian people, of other Arab peoples and of all other oppressed peoples and nations throughout the world, as well as the

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<sup>225</sup> FNA-P 119AS39, “*Qu’est-ce-que l’UTIT?*”, May 1979.

struggles of immigrant workers and the working class as a whole in France and Europe; these are the guiding principles of the UTIT's activities."<sup>226</sup>

The change under Ben Ali is striking: from a focus on workers and immigrants as two sides of the same coin, one notices an evolution towards relative autonomisation between the two fields of action. After twenty years of existence, UTIT changed its charter and its name in 1994 to become the FPCR under a new watchword: "for a full citizenship here and there."<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of its actions were turned towards the field of immigrant politics.<sup>228</sup> For the ATF, a new orientation was also established in 1990, notably because, as explained in its text:

"the ATF's persistent efforts within the immigrant movement led to new and broader perspectives. It broadened the scope of its actions to new areas and to include young people from immigrant backgrounds."<sup>229</sup>

This marked a definite evolution from what the association had described at the beginning, which was that "everything we did was shaped by the 'limited time frame' of our presence in France". Although this does not mean that they avoided focusing on the political evolution of Tunisia, they later insisted on their "cultural specificities" in France: "Although the connection to the homeland has grown weaker, it nevertheless remains, and we should not seek to sever it. Doing so might turn us into 'modern-day vagabonds'."<sup>230</sup> Similarly, the FPCR based its claim both "as an integral part of the Tunisian people" and "as immigrants living abroad".<sup>231</sup>

Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, p. 47) notes a similar evolution for the Kurds and Turks in Germany in the 1980s, with an increasing effort to "redefine themselves as immigrant organisations" and in turn emphasise "*immigrant political agendas*, which were to supplement or, in some cases, meant to replace the *homeland political agenda* of the organizations". Lacroix (2005) and Dumont (2007) also point to dissociation from the

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Charter of the association, available at:

[http://www.citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=936:charte-de-la-ftcr-pour-une-citoyennete-des-deux-rives&catid=52:histoire-memoire-&Itemid=176](http://www.citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=936:charte-de-la-ftcr-pour-une-citoyennete-des-deux-rives&catid=52:histoire-memoire-&Itemid=176), accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>228</sup> The statutes of UTIT in 1990 already reflected this change, with a particular focus on the cultural links between Tunisia and France and the struggles for better conditions in France and against discriminations. FNA-P 119AS/1, "Statutes association UTIT", November 1990.

<sup>229</sup> FNA-P 119AS/83, "Projet d'orientation de la 4e Assemblée Nationale de l'ATF", folder ATF, 1992.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> For instance, FNA-P 119AS/81 "Motion adressée au Président de la République", no date.



field of homeland politics for a number of Moroccan associations in France that held similar sociological features to the Tunisian associations I am discussing here. These works often stress a chronological evolution and tend to underline the increasing detachment of those associations towards the homeland, despite some sense of return to Moroccan homeland politics. Several factors contributed to the emergence of a distinct field in which Tunisian leftist activists participated.

## **2.2 The 1990s: towards (relative) autonomy**

Firstly, similarly to the Islamists, a gradual process of relative autonomy of the field of immigrant politics from the field of homeland politics can be linked to the decline of the myth of return and the myth of a provisory presence of both activists and more generally of Tunisian communities in France. Both processes led to a new orientation for their actions.

While UTIT stated in 1979 that “the majority of immigrant workers are in favour of returning home relatively quickly, which speaks to the extent to which they consider their expatriation to be temporary,”<sup>232</sup> in 1990, it explained that:

“The UTIT’s charter of demands frames itself in the context of French society (...) these demands revolve around two themes: the first is that of the Tunisian community’s belonging within French society, the second is that of its belonging among the Tunisian people.”<sup>233</sup>

In its annual activity report for the same year, it was said that the activities “demonstrate our association’s commitment to projects that aim to integrate immigrants by combating social, cultural and political exclusion and through the enrichment of French society.”<sup>234</sup>

Although they experienced an older political socialisation in the French political arena compared to Islamist activists, one could notice a similar process of familial, professional and activist trajectories progressively inscribed in France for this political generation. One of the founders of the UTIT-FTCR explained that:

“We are in a society named France; there are problems, difficulties, things that are good and things that are less so, but we are here anyway: we are not going

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<sup>232</sup> FNA-P-119AS39, “*A propos de l’autonomie et de l’appartenance*”, p. 24, in “*Qu’est-ce que l’UTIT?*”, May 1979.

<sup>233</sup> FNA-P 119AS/4, “*Charte nationale revendicative*”, Lyon, 17-18 February 1990.

<sup>234</sup> FNA-P 119AS/11, “*Rapport d’activités du siège national*”, 1990.

back [to Tunisia] because people are here now with their families, there are new generations who were born here, so we had to get involved in the debate here [in France]" (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

As Mohsen Dridi pointed out, sociological factors as a result of their inclusion in France (such as weddings with French women, children growing up in France, etc.) as well as the specific trajectories of Tunisian leftist associations in the French landscape, led to an increasing engagement with immigrant politics. Hichem Abdessamad, who was engaged in the 1970s as leader of the student movement in Tunisia with *al-'Amal al-Tounsi* and active in France within the UTIT-FTCR from 1987, recounted that when he arrived in France in the 1980s :

"We were refocusing on immigration, on anti-racism, on the need to work together on what was happening in France. As I said then, we had started to shed our tropism towards the homeland. We were in exile but served the revolution over there, and this mind-set was dying out, so people started settling, started establishing themselves here, thinking of themselves as Frenchmen without entirely dismissing the homeland, yet planning for their future within the framework of French democracy." (Interview with Hichem Abdessamad, conducted by Michaël Ayari, Paris, 2004).

It was not only the activists' situation that evolved and became increasingly grounded in the French environment. The larger sociological evolution of the Tunisian communities in France followed suit. As Mohsen Dridi pointed out:

"The reality for Tunisians compelled us to do this. We began to understand that Tunisians who were here would be here for a long time, even if we didn't think they would stay for good and settle down. We understood that these people would be here for a protracted period and that their problems would need to be dealt with here and now. This is what distinguished UTIT from other groups, which mainly concerned themselves with Tunisia's political problems in terms of the Tunisian government, the human rights situation in Tunisia and the repression of the student movement." (Interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

The gradual end of the myth of return is also telling when we look at the trajectories of leftist leaders in the French political scene (French trade unions, associations and political parties). In this respect, the trajectory of the former president of the FCTR, Tarek Ben Hiba is illuminating. An activist with *al-'Amal al-Tounsi* in the 1970s in Tunisia, he arrived in France in 1988 and quickly became an important figure of leftist Tunisian activism in France. He was first involved at the ATF, participated in the creation of the CRLDHT, and then became president of the FTCR in 2000. Meanwhile, he was also active as secretary to the French Union *Confédération Générale du Travail*

(General Confederation of Labour, CGT) in a Parisian suburb. In 1995, he drew up a “left-wing citizen” independent list for the local elections and in 2005 he was elected regional councillor for the Ile-de-France (Ayari, 2009, p. 318).

However, it would be misleading to equate and postulate a detachment from homeland politics solely with an increasing inscription – what some authors refer to as “integration” – into the host society. Following in the footsteps of Østergaard-Nielsen (2001, pp. 265-66), my inquiry into Tunisian activism in France “challenges such functionalist and quite reductionist explanations of political allegiance as a function of integration.” Not only does my research show how the two fields of action are interlinked to the extent that they should be thought of as existing in the same space (as will be developed in Section III) – but also that other factors should be taken into account.

Progressive participation in the field of immigrant politics must also be considered in relation to political socialisation with other immigrant political actors in France. In this context, one should note the importance of the *Maison des Travailleurs Immigrés* (Immigrant Workers House, MTI)<sup>235</sup> where Tunisian actors could meet immigrant activists of other nationalities. The MTI was created in 1973 as a non-state coordinating structure for immigrant associations<sup>236</sup> (Dridi, 2007, pp. 255-56). The UTIT joined in 1978.<sup>237</sup> As Mohsen Dridi, active in both the UTIT and the MTI pointed out:

“what also really helped us was the fact that we were relating to other associations in the context of the MTI. This was something very interesting for us because it allowed us to be in contact with other nationalities – Moroccan, Egyptians, Syrians, yes, but also Africans and Turks. And there were some dimensions that we’d been ignoring, and we were discovering them [thanks to our encounter] with other nationalities.” (Interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

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<sup>235</sup> It should be borne in mind that the *Maison des Travailleurs Immigrés* (MTI) and the Movement of the Islamic Tendency (MTI) bear a similar acronym but should not be confused.

<sup>236</sup> It first gathered the *Association des Marocains en France*, the *Union des Travailleurs sénégalais en France*, the *Encontro Portugêses*, and was later joined by other nationalities (Algerian, Senegalese, etc.)

<sup>237</sup> Two French NGOs, the CIMADE and the *Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement* (CCFD) first financed and managed the MTI, it then became increasingly autonomous and gathered an increasing number of immigrant associations. It disappeared in 1982, cf. below.

Paris and the specific context of the *Maison des Travailleurs Immigrés* was therefore a “hub” for meeting such activists and forging privileged links with other leftist movements from other countries: they could share their common immigrant experiences and conditions, thus establishing some basis for a common political strategy. The case of the *Association des Marocains en France* (Association of Moroccans in France, AMF), which later gave birth to the *Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France* (Association of North African Workers of France, ATMF), is particularly relevant in this respect (Dumont, 2007). We could document a number of communiqués from the AMF supporting the “associations of Tunisian immigrants in France.”<sup>238</sup> The UTIT also signed common communiqués on diverse immigrant struggles with the *Comité des Travailleurs Algériens* (Committee of Algerian Workers) and the *Fédération des Associations de Travailleurs Immigrés Portugais* (Federation of Portuguese Immigrant Workers), all of which were members of the MTI.<sup>239</sup>

The political socialisation with other immigrant organisations was later enabled by the *Conseil des associations d’immigrés en France* (Council of immigrant associations in France, CAIF),<sup>240</sup> created in 1983 to follow on from the MTI and in which leftist Tunisian associations were able to meet up and discuss their respective political orientations. Both the ATF and UTIT were central components of the CAIF. In UTIT’s activity reports, it was striking that a whole section was always dedicated to the “inter-associative” activities and to the importance of working with other associations.<sup>241</sup> It was also at the European level in the framework of the *Conseil des Associations Immigrées en Europe* (Council of Immigrant Associations in Europe, CAIE) (created in 1988 and which gathered immigrant associations across Europe) that activists from those associations could meet up, discuss and share political experience with other activists, thus influencing their own and each other’s political evolution.

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<sup>238</sup> FNA-P 119AS/43.

<sup>239</sup> For instance, FNA-P 119AS39, press release 28 March 1979.

<sup>240</sup> The full name of the organisation was: *Conseil des associations d’immigrés en France, pour la promotion de la vie associative*.

<sup>241</sup> See also FNA-P 119AS/11, “*notes d’opportunités*”, 1990, which stresses the importance of inter-associative work and discussions with other associations.

As well as immigrant organisations, decades of those structures' presence in France often led to close relationships with French associations which supported the "migrant cause" in various ways,<sup>242</sup> with left-wing parties and trade-unions such as the CGT and CFDT.<sup>243</sup> Although it might seem anecdotal, Tunisian leftist associations such as the UTIT-FTCR have always been present with a stall at the *Fête de l'Humanité*,<sup>244</sup> as well as during the first of May celebrations, along with French left-wing activists and organisations.

The autonomisation of the field of immigrant politics must also be explained in the light of the process of institutionalisation of those associations. One should note the contradictions inherent in more institutionalised forms of activism, as they contain the risk of a "domestication of the movement, with the activists being confined to a position as 'official protestors' without any real influence over the decisions" (*Militantismes institutionnels*, 2005, p. 3). To be subsidised by French authorities has obvious implications on the possibilities for action.<sup>245</sup> Even at the discursive level, the evolution was very striking when reading the "project of platform" in 1979 that revolved, among other things, around the struggle against imperialism, exploitation and domination and the much more guarded vocabulary that became established in the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, we have seen in Chapter 3 that the FTCR and the ATF could act as employment opportunity frameworks, but more generally it is interesting to note that a number of Tunisian leftist actors became professionals in the fields of immigration, such as in the formation or management of associations related to immigrants. The accumulation of activist capital was reconverted towards a professional career in several cases (Ayari, 2009, pp. 321-22). The activists could thus benefit from economic rewards through their engagement with those issues. For instance, Mohsen Dridi was an employee of the CAIF in 1985-1990, and later became director of the *Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec Tou-te-s les Immigré-e-*

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<sup>242</sup> Such as the CIMADE and the GISTI.

<sup>243</sup> In the reports of activities in 1990, one can find many minutes of meetings and common communiqués with French unions such as the CGT and CFDT, or French associations such as the *Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples* (MRAP), the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* (LDH), and the *Ligue de l'enseignement*; FNA-P 119AS/1.

<sup>244</sup> This is the event that has taken place every year since 1930, organised by the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*, which hundreds of thousands of people attend.

<sup>245</sup> The FTCR was mainly subsidised by the *Fonds d'action sociale* (FAS), a public body.

s (Federation of Associations of Solidarity with All Immigrants, FASTI) between 1991 and 1996 (interviews with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015, 31 July 2017).

Finally, the process of redirection of activist capital from homeland politics towards immigrant politics has to be understood in a context of the obstructed Tunisian potential for activism. As discussed in Chapter 2, the context of increased repression under Ben Ali came to influence the possibilities for action. Massicard (2012) shows how repression can lead to reengagement for other causes, or in other forms, by analysing the phenomenon of “reconversion ‘post-repression’”. The distinction between immigrant politics and homeland politics then makes more sense for the actors themselves, as reflected by a division of work in order to protect safer possibilities for action. This was particularly true for the creation of the *Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l’Homme en Tunisie* (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia, CRLDHT) in 1995, one of the most active anti-regime organisations (see Chapter 3) which was created by several UTIT-FTCR activists. As one FTCR leader explained:

“It’s quite simple, the members of this committee were UTIT members, although they were distinct organisations. The integrity of each structure was respected. Anything which related to human rights [was done with the CRLDHT].” (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

As has been analysed in the previous chapter, the FTCR and the ATF remained active as long as the social aspect of the struggle was evident, as expressed by Mohsen Dridi: “We were founded out of *al-Shu’la*, a Marxist-Leninist workers’ organization (...) so everything that was related to trade unionism and social issues was important to us.” (ibid). The eruption in France of the Islamist constellation of actors under Ben Ali changed the general dynamics, as leftist activists were confronted with a situation of denouncing what they considered as “a fundamentalist peril” (to define the Islamists) and the downward repressive spiral of the Tunisian government.<sup>246</sup> It could therefore be argued that engagement in the field of immigrant politics enabled leftist organisations to distance themselves from homeland politics as the activists were in a complex ideological situation under Ben Ali. However, at the same time this allowed them to retain their activist visibility. In 1996 the FTCR became particularly alarmed

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<sup>246</sup> FNA-P 119AS/80, UTIT’s internal reports, 12 July 1991; 12 August 1991.

by the situation concerning human rights and decided to issue an official declaration to “break the silence”. Yet it explained that: “we must remain united, and not fall into the trap of divisiveness, while making sure not to impose upon our Federation any responsibilities which may exceed its reach.”<sup>247</sup> In 1994, the ATF and the FTCT signed a common communiqué at the first of May celebrations, which summarises their “neither-nor” position quite well:

“While reasserting their hostility towards medieval fundamentalist agendas, the UTIT and the ATF believe that Tunisia’s salvation can only come through the *genuine* respect and practice of democracy, liberty and human rights.”<sup>248</sup>

In a number of documents released throughout the 1990s, the FTCT reiterated that they had been active in the struggle to “defend the democratic forces”, but wished to “normalise” their relations with diplomatic and administrative Tunisian authorities.<sup>249</sup> The position of “neither-nor” on Tunisian politics therefore also plays a role in their turn to immigrant politics.

I have shown that several factors need to be taken into account to understand the relative dissociation between the fields of homeland and immigrant politics for Islamist and leftist constellations of actors, which in turn redefines the contours of the trans-state space of mobilisation. Both host and home state constraints led to a division of activist work as well as the institutionalisation of a number of relevant political organisations. The political socialisation with other political actors in the French environment and the gradual end of the myth of return also led to a more progressive autonomy. Along with a different temporality between the two fields, it was also possible to notice a differentiation in their delimitation. I now turn more specifically to why and how the field of immigrant politics should be considered as a field of struggle.

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<sup>247</sup> FNA-P 119AS/4, “Réunion du conseil d’administration”, Lyon, 23 June 1996.

<sup>248</sup> FNA-P 199AS/81, “Déclaration UTIT-ATF”, 1994.

<sup>249</sup> FNA-P 119AS/12, “Projet d’orientation du siège national de l’UTIT”, May 1993; FNA-P 119AS/12, “Rapport d’activité 1993 présenté au FAS”.

## **Section II.**

### **A field of struggle**

I have identified three subsectors within the field of immigrant politics which can be categorised as three different sites of struggle. This allows us to recognise how the field of immigrant politics can be considered as an irreducible “site of a logic” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97) under the heading of homeland politics. To understand different mobilisations, I aim to demonstrate how the identity of the actors, their trajectories and their capital determine their legitimacy and their points of entry into the field of immigrant politics. I now turn to the competition between the different players on these three main sites of struggle.

#### **1. Immigrant and worker conditions as a site of struggle**

I have shown that several Nahdawi activists were active in the French Muslim field, but one striking aspect is their lack of mobilisation in the area of immigrant conditions. In contrast, leftist activists came to concentrate their political struggles in that area. This discrepancy between leftist and Islamist approaches is a research puzzle in itself insofar as at first sight all the exile activist groupings share a common “immigrant condition” (Sayad, 1991). I argue that the explanation for this has to be linked to the constraints of the host state, to the trajectory of the movements in France and to the social features of the activists themselves (nationality status and class dimensions).

##### **1.1 Status: the stake of nationality**

Firstly, one should underline the different legal status of the various activists and their organisations, which delineated different possibilities for action in the field of immigrant politics. Indeed, as was explained in Chapter 2, being a statutory refugee, a foreigner or a naturalised citizen introduces further contours of political participation. Foreigners are *de facto* excluded from citizenship in France and are therefore more vulnerable in their political participation, while refugees are expected to respect political neutrality (*obligation de réserve*). As Sayad (1991, p. 64) explained:

There is a kind of politeness which is expected of foreigners, and which they believe is expected of them – you could argue that they are only bound to it



because they believe it is expected of them. It is one of those social deceptions (...) through which political dictates are imposed and compliance with these dictates is ensured.

While UTIT referred in its 1979 text to the “humiliating project of dual nationality”,<sup>250</sup> a large number of activists later chose to naturalise<sup>251</sup>. Hichem Abdessamad, for instance, explained that:

“After five years, what typically happens (...) is that you become a citizen in order to stay in France. This is essentially an admission of being French. You think, all right, I can’t just live here scot-free, I might as well marry into the legal and social spheres and actually become French.” (Interview with Hichem Abdessamad, conducted by Michaël Ayari, Paris, 2004).

In this respect the situation is not homogeneous within the leftist constellation. For instance, one can see a difference between FPCR-CRLDHT activists, who had an older trajectory of migration to France, and activists from the *Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie* (PCOT), which had a different history of exile and legal status for most of them. As Olfa Lamloum remarks:

“With the POCT or others, for example, these were immigrants who for the most part had been in France for five or six years, and were still somewhat rootless, without any institutional or social integration. Most of us were students, people who were just starting to work, etc. We were outsiders in every respect, in terms of work, French institutions and French civil society. That had a profound impact on the kinds of activism and involvement we could follow, and also on what was possible in terms of advocacy and mobilisation for those [activists].” (Interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017)

When it comes to Ennahda, the question of their legal status in France becomes even clearer in delineating the available forms of activism – in this case inhibiting political participation. Indeed, in the 1990s, Nahdawi activists were either foreigners or obtained status as refugees.<sup>252</sup> As was further explained in Chapter 2, the “red line” established by the French state for Islamists had been formalised in terms of a

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<sup>250</sup> FNA-P 119AS39, “*Qu’est-ce-que l’UTIT?*”, May 1979.

<sup>251</sup> However, it should be stressed that a number refused for administrative or ideological reasons to be naturalised. For a more elaborate reflection on the stakes of “naturalisation”, see Sayad, 1999, pp. 393-459.

<sup>252</sup> Although I could find no evidence of the exact number of people requesting naturalisation, in the interviews I conducted it was striking that a very few were in a position to ask for their naturalisation in the 1990s. This came later, in the 2000s, with a large number of exiles requesting naturalisation once their children had reached the age at which they faced the choice of asking for the French nationality.

guarantee of protection in exchange for non-involvement in French immigrant politics. The internalisation of those limits and the “duty of discretion” imposed by the French authorities allowed only a tiny minority to engage in domestic political issues. Nahdawi activists often invoked their refugee status to explain their clear unwillingness to get involved in any political struggles on what were considered to be French internal affairs. One interviewee justified this by saying:

“It was clear for Ennahda that French soil was a fall-back position born of necessity. We were chased out of our country, so we were not going to cause problems, we were watching our step.” (Interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 December 2015).

One former leader, talking about Nahdawi activism, explained that by the 1980s:

“We had drawn some red lines: France welcomed us, so we must comply with French law, and that was in the text right from the start (...) Because we were political refugees, classified as an Islamic movement, we did not intend or want to get involved in demonstrations related to French domestic policy. We had shown our support at individual level, but as a party we did not want to participate (in these struggles) because we felt that this could be a breach of the tacit agreement between refugees and the state.” (Interview with Lazhar Abaab, Paris, 3 November 2015)

This idea of caution – added to the fact that it could have consequences on homeland activism – was further confirmed by one leader of the political bureau:

“At first we really felt like exiles, as though we had no right to take part in French affairs. If we took part in the French opposition, maybe that would have a negative impact on relationships with Tunisia. Maybe. We were very cautious.” (Interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 3 April 2016).

This shows a marked difference from the attitudes of leftist movements, who in the main did not have the refugee status and were not therefore subject to the same moral and political code demanding discretion. Ennahda was confronted by different rules of the game in that field of immigrant politics. The Islamist activists did not have the same rights in terms of entering the field of struggle, and these “barriers to entry” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 100) can be related to the Islamist identity of the movement, which acted as an invalidation of the activist capital of its members.

Helping newly arrived Islamist exiles with their administrative requirements in gaining access to refugee status was one of the main activities of Ennahda activists in France during the first half of the 1990s. While a number of mobilisations related to

this (see Chapter 3),<sup>253</sup> these initiatives were exclusively centred on the Nahdawi community and were not thought of in terms of broader political claims. In contrast, the issue of domestic status is precisely what mobilised a large number of Tunisian leftist activists. It is striking to see that Tunisian leftists were often at the forefront of the undocumented immigrants' (*sans-papiers*) political struggles in France. The UTIT was even created in the context of early mobilisations of undocumented immigrants against the Fontanet-Marcellin circulars in 1972-74, which led to more rigorous regulations for entering, staying and being regularised in France (Siméant, 1998, p. 15; Abdallah, 2000, pp. 32-33).<sup>254</sup> The support to the *sans-papiers* was a common theme of the two main leftist federations – UTIT-FTCR and ATF – throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and particularly during the central mobilisation of 1996, often referred to as “the undocumented immigrant movement of Saint-Bernard” (*le mouvement des sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard*) (Dridi, 1997). In this context, a number of activists from the FTCR and the ATF were behind the creation of the *Troisième collectif des sans-papiers* (Third Collective of Undocumented Immigrants) in 1996, which organised actions to support the *sans papiers* cause (Dridi, 1997, p. 48).

## 1.2 The “class” dimension

It was obvious that the worker and immigrant dimensions were intertwined at first for leftist movements, leading to a specific mobilisation on those struggles. In contrast, Ennahda was less prone to focusing on the amelioration of the social conditions specifically for immigrants, and to reaching out to the broader Tunisian immigrant and working-class community. This was also linked to factors of class.

When scrutinising UTIT texts that set out the organisation's aims, it is striking to see the emphasis on “workers” – to the extent that UTIT defined itself in the 1970s as “the organisation of the masses of Tunisian immigrant workers”.<sup>255</sup> It also repeatedly described its aim as the “unification of Tunisian immigrant workers” in its documents.

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<sup>253</sup> Such as the Collective of Tunisians Without Passports, see Chapter 3.

<sup>254</sup> For more on the detailed history of the “*cause des sans papiers*” from 1972 to the 1990s, see Siméant, 1998.

<sup>255</sup> FNA-P 119AS39, “*Qu'est-ce-que l'UTIT?*”, May 1979.

This early focus on the condition of Tunisian workers led to a wider engagement with the right for foreigners to vote and created a watchword for the movement centring around “citizenship for all” and “equality of rights” from the 1980s onwards (FTCR, 2014). Several activists from those associations were part of the initiative, or joined diverse central movements such as *Mémoire Fertile* (Fertile Memory) (1987-1990), which in 1988 organised the General Estates of Immigration, whose aim was to establish a picture of the associative movement of immigration. The struggle against racism also grew to become a core focus of political activity.

This centrality of the immigrant cause led the UTIT-FTCR to concentrate a large part of its activities on information addressed to Tunisian workers specifically, and to the wider Tunisian immigrant community more generally. For instance, the association published a widely spread guide for Tunisian workers in France, which later became a “legal guide for Tunisians in France” that included administrative, legal and social advice related to Tunisian immigration in France (Gasmi, 2002).<sup>256</sup> It also ran action at the “infrapolitics” level, such as tutoring and offering legal and social advice.<sup>257</sup> From 1985 it organised the project *Informations Vacances pour les Immigrés Tunisiens* (Information Holidays for Tunisian immigrants, IVIT). According to the association itself, this operation constituted “a high point of mobilisation and of contact with the Tunisian community”, distributing thousands of leaflets providing practical administrative information before the summer return to Tunisia, which were mainly handed out in airports and ports.<sup>258</sup> These social activities, more particularly with IVIT, can be thought of as a competing form of *encadrement* to the one put in place by the RCD which was explored in Chapter 2. This was made clear by the UTIT activists themselves in one of their reports of activity in 1990, in which they detailed the Tunisian authorities’ reaction to this project, which was mainly seen by the Consulate as a competing one.<sup>259</sup>

In contrast, despite sharing an immigrant condition, politics of differentiation applied for Islamist activists in that field of immigrant politics. Contrary to my initial

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<sup>256</sup> The first edition was published in 1996, the second in 2002.

<sup>257</sup> As demonstrated by their internal reports, FNA-P 119AS/80.

<sup>258</sup> See document “*audit FAS*” in FNA-P 119AS/1.

<sup>259</sup> FNA-P 119AS/11 “*Rapport d’activité du siège national*”, 1990, pp. 32-33.

expectations, the “immigrant condition” was poorly valued in terms of a political struggle for Ennahda, which remained an elite movement as far as the trajectories of its actors and in its actions were concerned. However, it would be misleading to assume that all activists belonged to the upper classes. For instance, when looking at the statutes of *Solidarité Tunisienne*, the professional occupations of its members gives an indication of the positions they occupied in French society. They were mainly members of an educated middle-class. The leaders were all employees, engineers or worked in the medical field, which is the classic sociological profile found in research on Muslim Brotherhood movements in the Arab world (Wickham, 2002).<sup>260</sup> But it is necessary to highlight the processes of social downgrading in many trajectories of exile, notably in professionally terms. Many activists have told me that they could not find a job in their previous field or one that met their level of study and qualifications. More than postulating a homogenising “class” dimension to a community of Islamist exiles which was on the whole relatively socially diverse anyway, what matters instead is to underline the strategies of social distinction that the activists operated between their experience as forced political exiles and the other Tunisians who supposedly chose to come to France for work. This distinction was well defined by Asma Soltani:

“We were really different [from other Tunisians who were not political refugees]. We were not economic refugees. Most of [our parents] had very comfortable jobs. My parents, for example, were civil servants. My mother was a schoolteacher, my father worked in the post office. They couldn’t be fired. They had wages, social benefits. For them, immigration was ideological, whereas economic immigrants didn’t necessarily connect, they didn’t have much in common apart from their geographical origin.” (Interview with Asma Soltani, Paris, 21 October 2015)

It was also possible to observe social boundaries, insofar as Nahdawi activists were not willing to socialise with the activist milieu that mobilised on immigrant social questions. They considered them as leftists exhibiting different social habits. However, far from an essentialist reading that would link the non-mobilisation regarding the condition of immigrants’ lives to the religious identity of the

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<sup>260</sup> *Statutes Solidarité Tunisienne*, Ennahda personal archives. Two members of the bureau were marked as “unemployed”. Nevertheless, at least one of them was subsidised by Ennahda (interview with Ameer Laarayedh, Paris, 1 April 2016).

movement, we must remember that a movement that put Islam at the centre of its political identity need not remain disengaged from the struggles of worker immigrants. The example of the *Union des Jeunes Musulmans* (Union of Young Muslims, UJM) is telling in this regard. The association was created in Lyon in 1987 among others by a Tunisian activist, Abdelaziz Chaambi, who was not a Nahdawi, but who did socialise with a number of them (interview with Abdelaziz Chaambi, Lyon, 2 February 2016).

As de Galembert (2009, p. 38) notes, this association distinguished itself insofar as Islam was considered a “vehicle for social and civic engagement” (ibid), leading to new forms of activism in the field of immigrant politics. Chaambi defined himself as:

“Some sort of oddball, a two-headed unidentified political object: I had the face of a Muslim and the face of a left-wing activist, a far-left trade unionist, the whole package.” (Interview with Abdelaziz Chaambi, Lyon, 2 February 2016).

He explained that:

“We were working to establish a model for socially active Islam. We saw that the majority of Muslims were poor. They were workers, farmers, and we were going to work with this population. Our priority was working class neighbourhoods, workers, the unemployed, battered women, all those suffering from social discrimination. But we would be acting as Muslims all the time, in the name of our Muslim values. In the name of the Republic’s values as well, certainly, but in the name of our Muslim values above anything else. Some are driven by their vision of a proletarian revolution, others by Trotsky’s Transitional Program, still others by Jaurès’ humanism. We are driven by Islam. We saw no reason why Islam should not participate in these struggles, so we decided to get involved” (ibid).

This led Chaambi to engage with several political structures such as the *Mouvement de l’Immigration et des Banlieues* (Movement of Immigration and Suburbs, MIB),<sup>261</sup> the World Social Forum, the European Social Forum, The *Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires* (Popular Neighbourhood Social Forum) and others.<sup>262</sup> He would meet other activists from Tunisian leftist movements in those activist spaces, thus representing common spaces of socialisation. As will be seen in the next chapter, regular meetings in that specific field of action that was not related to Tunisia led the leaders of the *Instance Régionale Indépendante pour les Elections* (Independent

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<sup>261</sup> The MIB is discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>262</sup> He also created the *Coordination contre le racisme et l’islamophobie* (Coordination against racism and Islamophobia, CRI) in 2008.

Regional Authority for Elections, IRIE) after the 2011 revolution<sup>263</sup> (who also happened to be leaders of the Tunisian leftist movements in France) to suggest his name for taking a leading role in the IRIE (interview with Abdelaziz Chaambi, Lyon, 2 February 2016).

While Ennahda was not involved in that specific subsector of the field of immigrant politics, a notable exception must be acknowledged. Habib L.\* was a former leader of the *Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants en France* (Tunisian General Union of Students in France, UGTEF) and was an active Nahdawi member in the political bureau from the mid-1990s onwards. At the same time he was also active in diverse political movements, involving himself in local mobilisations in the Parisian suburbs and in the MIB. He was also a founding member of the *Collectif des Musulmans de France* (CMF), and was part of the organisational committee of the European Social Forum in 2003 (interviews with Habib L.\*, Paris, December 2015, September 2016). As he explained, in the 2000s, “I left Ennahda’s political office. I no longer wanted to appear as part of Ennahda. Well, Ennahda wasn’t organizing the ESF [laughs], so I distanced myself.” (interview, Paris, 9 December 2015). It was thus striking that he was well aware of this non-involvement in Ennahda in that subsector of the field, which he seemed to consider as something obvious.

Yet this multi-positionality led him to acquaint himself with a large spectrum of activists and, although not necessarily knowingly, he acted as a form of intermediary between the groupings and between the scenes of action. A leftist activist recalled that:

“Personally, I became acquainted with the Islamists when a group called the *Collectif des musulmans de France* came to participate in the social forum. In late 2002, early 2003, I started meeting with people from Ennahda because they came on a progressive axis of activism. (...) I met [Habib] through the CMF, and we later became friends.” (Interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015).

When he later stated during this interview that “[Habib] is one such actor, who participated in ‘our’ struggles, even if that isn’t the best way to put it, Palestine, immigration” (ibid), he operated a distinction that reflects well how those political

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<sup>263</sup> Its main aim was to ensure that the first free and fair elections in 2011 unfolded in a “democratic” way. Cf. Chapter 5.

struggles act as arenas of competition in which each actor attempts to draw attention to their legitimacy to exist in that field.

## **2. Islam and islamophobia as sites of struggle**

One other subsector of the field of immigrant politics that deserves more scrutiny is the struggle around the representation of what was considered to be the right French Islam, the fight against Islamophobia and what some authors have referred to as the “cause of the veil” (*cause du voile*) (de Galembert, 2009), around which diverse Tunisian constellations of actors also competed. This constitutes a further arena of struggle, exemplifying the relations of power within the field of immigrant politics. Furthermore, this focus exposes the different resources and types of capital necessary for the activists to exist and compete in that field.

### **2.1 Islam as a competing arena of struggles in the 1990s and 2000s**

While we have seen that some Nahdawi activists were pioneers in the organisation of French Islam, it was only in the 1990s that this subsector really became a competing arena, at the point when Tunisian leftist activists also started to become engaged in this area. Against the “Islam of the middle-way” supported by Ennahda activists, leftist associations increasingly put forward a more “secular Islam”.

It was in the context of the 1989 “headscarf case” in Creil (Bowen, 2007; Deltombe, 2005, pp. 98-120) that the two main leftist federations (the ATF and the UTIT-FTCR) started to play a role, which the activists justified on the grounds that “the question of Islam brings us back to the larger question of immigration”.<sup>264</sup> UTIT issued a communiqué opposing the decision to exclude three young female Muslims wearing a veil from school, because this was deemed incompatible with the principles of French secularism, which they referred to as the “veil war” (*guerre du voile*) in their communiqué.<sup>265</sup> In more general terms, they regretted their late engagement with that question as, according to them, “our lack of vigilance allowed religious activists to assert their authority over religious issues; we overlooked the creeping

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<sup>264</sup> FNA-P 119AS/62, Nabil Azouz, “*Le mot de clôture de l’UTIT*”, in the framework of the conference “*les acteurs associatifs face à l’Islam*”, April 1990.

<sup>265</sup> FNA-P 119AS/63, Communiqué UTIT, “*La guerre du voile*”, 25 October 1989.



development of such movements”.<sup>266</sup> They explained what triggered their involvement in that field:

“Recent events prompted us to ask ourselves some serious questions, all the more so because on one hand religious activist movements were taking over more and more space within a field we believed had been secured, and on the other, exclusionary *laïcité* was turning Islam into a religion of the poor, a religion of immigrants, most of whom are Maghrebi. The debate around headscarves spoke volumes regarding the polarization between the exclusionary *laïcité* promoted by supposedly left-wing intellectuals and a political class devoid of any real inspiration and a kind of Islamist one-upmanship which was presented as the sole representative of Muslims in France. (...) The result was a new and painful awareness of the question of Islam in France”.<sup>267</sup>

UTIT therefore presented itself as a middle ground between two “extremes”. In the 1990s, the “culture and citizenship” committee of UTIT organised a cycle of conferences around “Islam and the Republic”, including conferences on the themes of “Islam and *laïcité*”, “Islam and Islamism in France”, and “Islam and women”. That same year, the association sent out a call “for a project for a secular charter of action for Muslims in France” in which they proposed “some principles and rules for the observance by Muslims of their faith in accordance with the institutions and laws of the Republic.”<sup>268</sup> Throughout the 1990s the organisation of debates, conferences and publications on Islam, immigration, the associative movement and the Republic, took up much of the association’s business.<sup>269</sup> The idea was to “promote a pluralist secularism”. In the same vein the ATF, in its “project of orientation”, talked about its engagement with French Islam and its intention “to engage with and participate in the search for a solution to the question of Islam in France”. One of its main goals was to put forward a “secular Islam” (*Islam laïc*), but there was also emphasis on the right to exercise one’s religion freely:

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<sup>266</sup> FNA-P 119AS/62, Hamouda Hertelli, “*Témoignage de l’UTIT*”, in the framework of the conference “*Les acteurs associatifs face à l’Islam*”, April 1990.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> FNA-P 119AS/62, “*Pour un projet de charte d’action laïque des musulmans de France*”, UTIT, 21 April 1990.

<sup>269</sup> The FPCR organised a series of seminars in 1995 on “Islam, immigration and the associative movement”; it also published “Islam, the Republic and immigration or the triangle of misunderstandings” (1992).

“The question of Islam must be addressed in the light of our right to full citizenship, to equal rights, and our attachment to our culture of origin with all of its progressive and democratic values.”<sup>270</sup>

This middle-way finds an echo in the representation that Ennahda also wished to convey as reflecting what they considered to be the right Islam, the “Islam of the middle-way” (*al-Wasatiyya*).<sup>271</sup> As one of its activists explained:

“As Tunisians, we also believed that our vision of Islam was the right one. We thought that the idea of a middle-way was best for Muslims in France and we wanted to pass it on to our children, to our friends and to Muslims.” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).<sup>272</sup>

When examining their individual trajectories, several activists came from a background of theological study back in Tunisia, and they were happy to highlight this to justify their legitimacy. Emphasising their religious knowledge of Islam – which formed part of their symbolic and social capital – they could both demarcate themselves from and present themselves as an alternative to what they saw as extremist groups, such as the Salafists. Dean (2014) also shows how “justly balanced Islam” can be understood as “symbolic capital which Muslim religious agents strive to accumulate in order to gain hegemony over their field”. As explained in the previous chapter, this “middle-ground” Islam was displayed internally through a specific form of *encadrement*. It was also striking that several Nahdawi activists stressed their engagement with questions related to interreligious dialogues, demonstrating that they had a role to play as a dialoguing and moderating force on questions of Islam. This was the case for Samia Driss, leader of Tawasol and her husband Ridha Driss, the president of the *Majlis al-Shura*, who were strongly involved in the association *Initiatives et Changement* (Initiatives and Change), which sought to

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<sup>270</sup> FNA-P 119AS/83, “*Projet d’orientation pour la 4ème Assemblée nationale de l’ATF*”, 2000.

<sup>271</sup> The concept of “*wasat*” comes from the Quran. The concept of “*wasatiyya*” is a particular school of Islam, from which the MTI drew its inspiration, since its inception. As Samia Driss explained when recounting her trajectory in Tunisia with the MTI and her theological training: “it was in fact a phase of traineeship. We learned the Muslim religion, which is a religion of the middle-way (*une religion du juste milieu*). This has been the case since I was a student: we favour the middle-way. This is our strong claim. There are several schools: the literal school, for which interpretations are really textual, the reading of the objectives, *al-Maqasid*, and there is the reading of the middle ground, *al-Wasatiyya fi-l Islam*. We studied that already in the MTI circles. (...) We also studied quite a lot the writings of Youssef al-Qaradawi, because he is also a founder of the thinking of the middle-way” (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

<sup>272</sup> For more on this idea of “middle-way” Islam, more specifically put forward by the UOIF in the field of French Islam, see Peter, 2006.

promote inter-cultural dialogue<sup>273</sup> (interviews with Ridha and Samia Driss, Paris, October 2015, January 2016).

It is becoming possible to see how each actor attempted to put forward and mobilise what they considered as being the right vision. The focus on “Islam and the Republic” stands in contrast to the religious vision of the “middle-ground” advocated by Ennahda. In addition, the leftist associations were able to claim another form of legitimacy in the French environment because they did not bear the Islamist stigma attached to Ennahda as an Islamist party. Through activist know-how and resources, they accumulated more activist capital, which allowed them to exist on that question more easily. It was for instance striking to see renowned French and international scholars invited to speak in the diverse cycles of conferences organised.<sup>274</sup> The leftists were also subsidised by French public bodies to organise these conferences, something that was unconceivable as far as Ennahda was concerned.

The UTIT-FTCR was conscious that “reflection is not enough. Action on the field is needed (education, hostels, etc.).”<sup>275</sup> However, most of the work remained in this realm during the 1990s, and this stayed the same until the beginning of the new millennium. As a result of 9/11, there was a rise of Islamophobia in France and immigrants shifted from being ethnicised to being increasingly racialised and considered as a “problem” or a “threat” (Deltombe, 2005; Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013). This led to an evolution in the positioning of leftist associations. As one activist explained when discussing the post-9/11 period:

“It may seem paradoxical, but the left was aware that after 2001 it had to position itself differently within French society in relation to cross-sectional questions like Islam. We could no longer defend ourselves in the usual way like the extreme secular (*laïc*) left. (...) It produced a different awareness for the left at that time. The French left started looking at us differently, no longer simply as *laïc* leftist militants, but also as Muslims. So we were forced to position ourselves in that context” (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 2 November 2017).

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<sup>273</sup> See their website: <https://fr.iofc.org/>, accessed 13 March 2018.

<sup>274</sup> Such as Mohamed Harbi, Bruno Etienne, Claude Liauzu, Maxime Rodinson, etc. See conference programmes in FNA-P 119AS/62.

<sup>275</sup> FNA-P 119AS/62, Hamouda Hertelli, “*Témoignage de l’UTIT*”, in the framework of the conference “*Les acteurs associatifs face à l’Islam*”, April 1990.

As Talpin et al (2017, p. 33) note, the “essentialisation of the ‘Muslim’ category has contributed to crystallise this ‘minority status’”, which in turn has shaped new forms and experiences of mobilisation. The FTCT, in its publication in the 2000s, observed that:

“long confined to an anti-racist, socially conscious culture which disregards religious realities (...) we have marginalised ourselves and allowed the confrontation between religious organisations and public authorities to take hold. Today, as we belatedly but surely awoken to these problems, we must participate in the struggle against Islamophobia and stand up gradually against its leading figures (...) in order to distinguish ourselves from identity politics.” (FTCT, 2008, p. 4)

From that point onwards the aim was to elaborate “a neutral voice on Islam in France articulated and championed by a secular immigrants’ association” (FTCT, 2008, p. 5). A programme called “Islam from here” (*islam d’ici*) in 2008-2009 was put forward to implement this change, through its willingness to constitute an observation post, to intervene with local authorities and to organise training programmes (FTCT, 2008, pp. 5-6).

The discourse of demarcation between the “two poles” through what they considered as a “neutral voice” should not obscure the fact that the question of Islamophobia in the 2000s emerged as a common battle for all actors, transcending Tunisian leftist and Islamist ideological affiliations.

## **2.2 The case of *Ecole pour tout-e-s***

This was especially the case in the context of heated debate and mobilisation in 2003-4 in reaction to the law prohibiting any clothing that would “ostensibly” call attention to religious affiliation. As most of the debate focused on the headscarf ban, the law was mostly considered to reflect the prohibition of the veil in public schools. As Bowen (2008, p. 36) argues, “although worded in a religion-neutral way, everyone understood the law to be aimed at keeping Muslim girls from wearing headscarves in school”. This political struggle was omnipresent for activists during this period. For instance, when asked how she “arrived” into this struggle, one activist answered: “There was no way for you not to arrive at that question in France in 2003! That was all there was.” (interview with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017). It was against this background that the *Collectif une Ecole pour Toutes et Tous – contre les*

*lois d'exclusion* (Collective a school for all – against the laws of exclusion, CEPT) emerged in 2003.

Leading figures of the Tunisian left and political parties mobilised either individually or in the name of their political grouping.<sup>276</sup> For Ennahda, this was mainly women activists working as individuals in the collective *Ecole pour toutes et tous* through their association *Femmes Musulmanes en France* (Muslim women in France). They participated in the demonstrations and signed petitions to oppose the law (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016). This common arena of struggle led to new political alliances. Hajjat and Mohamed (2013, p. 244) note that “the configuration of this collective was quite new both in terms of its size and its eclecticism”. The mobilisations of 2003-2004 showed, according to de Galember (2009, p. 43):

A desire to open up the cause by shifting its focus from religion to feminism, anti-racism and the struggle against discrimination (...) For the first time since the controversy over headscarves began, a bridge was built between Islamic groups fighting for the veil and some of their potential allies among experienced protesters, whether anti-globalization, the far left, seculars, anti-racists or feminists. The latter, although they may not support headscarves outright, condemn the punitive nature of a law which, in the name of *laïcité*, promotes exclusion rather than empowerment.

There were some nuances regarding the fact that the Tunisian actors were not central actors of the CEPT, and not all Tunisian activists from each association took part in protests. However, the mobilisation against the law, which finally passed on 15 March 2004, still constituted an example of a struggle that mobilised the whole ideological spectrum of Tunisian actors.

It should also be noted that there were some asymmetries in the mobilisation. Ennahda as a party remained rather quiet on this question, while the leftist movements were more broadly invested and well inserted within wider networks within which they shared a common history of struggle in other political arenas. This might at first sight appear to constitute a paradox insofar as Tunisian Islamists were less engaged in a political issue that directly touched upon their own religious practices. However, this does not come as a surprise if the class variable is brought

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<sup>276</sup> For instance, see a list of signatories against the law at: <http://lmsi.net/Liste-des-signataires-contre-1>, accessed 12 June 2017.

to the fore. Ennahda exile activists did not intensely mobilise on issues pertaining to broader Muslim communities as this is also part of what constitutes the social distinction. Nevertheless, I hypothesise that some forms of common activist sociability and interpersonal relations emerged during this mobilisation which paved the way for the possibilities of alliances on other questions (such as the cross-ideological movement of 18 October 2005 that was investigated in Chapter 3). The Palestinian cause also plays a role as a common reference point that could inspire other forms of common mobilisation.

### **3. The “Palestinian cause” as a site of struggle and a common reference point for mobilisation**

Although it would first appear disconnected from the field of immigrant politics, mobilisation around the Palestinian cause is relevant here for at least two reasons. Firstly, the Palestinian cause acted as a powerful symbol of identification to later mobilise on immigrant politics. Secondly, it represented another common arena of struggle between Tunisian Islamists and leftists.

The meaning of the Palestinian cause for the different actors involved once again reveals the struggle to establish one’s legitimacy. What Dot-Pouillard (2012) observes about the post-revolutionary period in Tunisia seems to apply both in exile and under Ben Ali: “some privileged a vision [of the Palestinian cause] that we could qualify as ‘Arab-Third Worldist’ or ‘Arab-progressive’; others an ‘Arab-Islamic’ identity”.

For leftists, intense mobilisation on the Palestine issue is not new. In one of UTIT’s leaflets, for instance, the Palestinian people in the 1970s were considered as the “vanguard of the Arab revolution”.<sup>277</sup> In fact, the Palestinian cause served as the ideological matrix for a number of immigrant movements in France. The example of the *Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes* (Movement of Arab workers, MTA) is interesting in this respect, especially in the way they linked the Palestinian cause to the defence of the social and economic conditions of the immigrants in France. Many

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<sup>277</sup> FNA-P 119AS/39, “*Vive la lutte armée du peuple palestinien, avant-garde de la révolution arabe*”, in leaflet “*Vive l’unité de la classe ouvrière de France ; vive l’unité des travailleurs immigrés tunisiens*”, no date.

Tunisians were involved in the “*Comités Palestine*” (Palestine committees) created in 1971, which were then replaced by the MTA in 1972 (Hajjat, 2005; 2006). The shift from Palestine to worker conditions and anti-racism was in fact not considered as a shift at all by the actors. As Hajjat (2005, p. 15) indicates, “for them, there existed a homology of position between North African workers facing French capitalism and Palestinians facing Zionist and American imperialism”. Establishing a parallel in the conditions of exploitation and oppression was a way of mobilising on immigrant politics.<sup>278</sup> In a similar vein, Adnane Ben Youssef, one of the PDP leaders in Paris who was also active in the FTCT, was especially mobilised on the Palestinian question. He was a notable spokesperson for the campaign “a French boat for Gaza”<sup>279</sup> (interviews with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 2015-17). He explained his political engagement in terms of a “trio”:

“Many things required our engagement as we were politicised movements... So I think that there is a trio here [struggles on Tunisia, on immigration, and on Palestine] (...) and the space of struggle for democracy [in Palestine] is what drew me to the politics in our home country” (interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015)

As far as Ennahda were concerned, the president of the *Majlis al-Shura* summarised their position quite well. When asked what causes Ennahda mobilised on, he answered “95% for Tunisia, 5% for the Palestinian cause” (interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015). The activists linked the question of the rights and freedoms they were fighting for in the Tunisian context to their support for the Palestinian cause: “We attended all demonstrations regarding Palestine, we mobilised with our troops, microphones, we prepared slogans etc” (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016).

However, the relationships in a field are not only about competition, they are also about cooperation. In this context, the Palestinian issue can work as a unanimous discourse that seems to transcend conflicting ideologies. In other words, it acts as a

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<sup>278</sup> See the interview with one Tunisian leader of the *Comités Palestine* and MTA, Saïd Bouziri, which reflects this shift and this homology between the different struggles very well (Siméant, 1998, pp. 78-80.)

<sup>279</sup> See <https://www.france-palestine.org/+Un-bateau-pour-Gaza->, accessed 9 July 2018.

common referent for both Islamist and leftists insofar as it represents a “mobilising symbol” (Dot-Pouillard, 2012). Omeyya Seddik recalled that:

“The first time we joined in activism with people from Ennahda was in 1992. We met at a demonstration to support 415 Palestinians who had been moved away from Gaza and the West Bank. It was the first time we’d met people from Ennahda and that we had shared activities together.”<sup>280</sup>

A Nahdawi leader recounted a prior encounter, which was made possible thanks to the intermediary position represented by the Palestinian cause. When Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, came to Paris in 1988, a demonstration was organised and “the procession was organised by nationality, so [Tunisian leftists and Islamists] were quite close to each other” (interview with Habib L.\*, Paris, 9 September 2015). As was explained in the case of mobilisation in the framework of *Ecole pour tous*, other spaces of activism in the field of immigrant politics that are not directly related to Tunisian politics can create common framework of activist socialisation, thus potentially leading to more organised forms of alliances at a later date.

Focusing on three different arenas of struggles has thus allowed us to develop a number of key themes of the field of immigrant politics. Firstly we can now understand its relational aspect (competition but also common mobilisations) and its hierarchies. It has also enabled us to see that the study of activism from afar does not simply relate to a pro- and anti- regime divide. It shows us that other perspectives are also central. The ideological and class dimensions are certainly such perspectives.

### **Section III.**

#### **A space of reconversion and of overlapping fields**

While I have shown evidence of the process of increasing autonomy of the two fields of homeland and immigrant politics from each other, we must also remember that the two also overlap. This section examines the processes of convertibility of activist

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<sup>280</sup> Omeyya Seddik, conference “*L’union fait-elle la force face à l’autoritarisme? Regards critiques sur le mouvement tunisien du 18 octobre 2005*,” 2016.



capital; the complementarity, continuity and simultaneity of activism in the two fields. I therefore demonstrate that the two fields of action should be thought of as working in interaction.

### **1. Recycling activist capital and understanding the activist habitus**

Although we have seen that a number of activists from both the Islamist and leftist constellations followed a trajectory of recycling their engagement in the immigrant associational realm, and at times allowed themselves to remain detached from Tunisian politics, I argue that this turn towards immigrant politics does not translate into a linear evolution. Instead it should be considered as complex process of reconversion, in which activist capital can be converted from one field to another as the movements under scrutiny traverse different fields.

For exile activists, being active in the field of immigrant politics allowed them to continue their political engagement while respecting the implicit and explicit rules set by the French environment. It also enabled them to remain in existence as activists in this context and in the longer term. In the trans-state space of mobilisation, activists forged what could be understood as an “activist habitus”. Following Bourdieu (1980, p. 88), who defined a habitus as a “system of durable and transposable *dispositions*”, the activist habitus is more specifically concerned with the set of dispositions incorporated by the activists throughout their life. This set of dispositions is understood to have been acquired both during their activist experiences but also in other spaces of socialisation and from realms of experience not necessarily linked to activism at all, either in France or in Tunisia.<sup>281</sup> Following Crossley (2003, p. 51), it could be argued that:

It is this same habitus which leads the activist to continue in activism and thus to contribute to the perpetuation of activism as a social practice; the activist habitus is thus a structuring structure, or rather, as Bourdieu says of the habitus more generally, a structured and structuring structure.

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<sup>281</sup> A critique of the linear and deterministic vision of activism that could be implied by this notion is further discussed below. In a similar vein, drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Crossley (2003) came up with the concept of a “radical habitus” to show how social movements create durable dispositions to further political activism.

The actors themselves did not necessarily consider the fact of engaging in the field of immigrant politics as a mere rupture, but rather as a way to continue their activism through other forms in order to “survive” in the space of mobilisation. In other words, it is the recycling of their activist capital that was mostly underlined. Olfa Lamoulou, recounting her trajectory from an exiled Tunisian Trotskyist active in different structures opposing Ben Ali’s regime in the 1990s to her activism for the “veil cause” in the 2000s, among others, explained that:

“Exile is painful for many people; I had meant to spend one year in France, not twenty-two. It’s a way of expressing that a little, to say at some point that I need to turn the page, to ask why would I give more of myself to this country than any other? And I think that my activism on the headscarf issue was also a way to move on and tell myself that I’ll never go back home anyway. It’s not easy; you lose your connection with everyone, with family and friends, with the realities over there. (...) Also, at some point, you need to structure yourself around something else just to survive. Emotionally I was very happy in France, that wasn’t the problem, but I would increasingly struggle to find any real meaning to my activism, in a country which was becoming ever more inaccessible and which also seemed to be getting more and more authoritarian.” (Interview with Olfa Lamoulou, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017)

This resonates with the words of Ahmed Ben Amor, member of the UOIF until 1998 and head of Ennahda France (1992-1994), who recounted that in the 1980s and 1990s:

“We were very distant from Tunisian militancy [in France]; information was scarce. It’s not like it is now, there was no Internet, no phones, we weren’t up to date about what was happening. If you aren’t on the battlefield, in direct confrontation, you are more or less on the sidelines, you are less involved. (...) At some point you need to fill the void this creates. Some people study. In terms of activism, there are other paths you can take. Activism in the French field then becomes an option” (interview with Ahmed Ben Amor, 19 December 2016).

Thus, filling the void that the field of homeland politics could start to provoke through political engagement in new causes in the field of immigrant politics is a central component of understanding activist trajectories in the trans-state space of mobilisation. For instance, “the fact of playing an important role within French Islam perpetuates the social visibility of [Tunisian Islamists]” (Ayari, 2007, p. 59).

Furthermore, the circulation of activist know-how and competencies is something noticeable between the field of immigrant and homeland politics. The accumulated experience in some political organisations can indeed allow activists to capitalise a

system of dispositions and political practices, which can then be transferred to other social and political arenas. As one interviewee expressed clearly when discussing her parents' involvement with Islamic schools in France:

“They recycled their Tunisian political engagements in France (...) From the outside, it may look slightly proselytising, but in fact [our parents] were using the skills they had. Tunisia did not expel its communication engineers, or we would have had plenty of communication companies run by Tunisians in France! Individuals do what they can do and what they know, according to their skills. For instance, my mother was a school teacher in Tunisia and she became an Arabic school teacher here” (interview with Asma Soltani, Paris, 21 October 2015).

More specifically, the organisational culture that has been learned and practised in one context (immigrant politics) can influence the modalities of action in the struggle against Ben Ali's regime, something that is often referred to as a “diffusion process” in the social movement literature (McAdam et al, 2001).

For example, Omeyya Seddik recounted his experience within the *Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues* (Movement of Immigration and Suburbs, MIB), which was created in 1995 and federated many actions and associations, mainly on the terrain of police violence and institutionalised racism (Boubeker and Hajjat, 2008, pp. 207-214). This played a role in the way Seddik wanted to organise his anti-Ben Ali regime structure, the *Comité de Soutien aux Luttres Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie* (Support Committee to Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia, CSLCPT). He explained that he was influenced by the organisational and political culture of the MIB, “so he did not want a structure that was too well-organised” when taking action against Ben Ali (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016). The activist skills can be migrated from one field to another, and the acquisition of new resources in the field of immigrant politics can in turn serve activism in the field of homeland politics.

The fact of being strongly involved in diverse political struggles in the field of immigrant politics can also serve to recruit for the field of homeland politics. The *Parti Démocrate Progressiste* (Progressive Democratic Party, PDP) is a case in point in this respect. As some activists recounted, recruitment for this Tunisian party, especially after the 2011 revolution, was made possible precisely because the founders of the Parisian section had previous political experience in the field of immigrant politics, such as in the MIB or in various Palestinian organisations: “this really opened up our

perspectives and allowed people who were hard to reach to take part” (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016). Another PDP-activist concurred that:

“Our affiliation with our other activities, which gave us a great deal of notoriety, served the PDP in a way. Omeyya was quite well known, regarding Palestine I’m becoming more widely known (...) so this group was well-respected for its other activities and was there to promote Tunisian concerns through the PDP.” (Interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015).

The involvement of several activists in diverse Palestinian organisations was particularly central in terms of raising awareness for anti-Ben Ali politics, if not recruiting. As will be seen in the next chapter, pro-Palestinian political activism often sparked militancy of the actors, notably for many young Tunisians who could not mobilise on Tunisia, often for fear of repercussions on their families in Tunisia (see Chapter 2). It was striking to note that many young Tunisians who became involved in French-Tunisian organisations after the revolution had been active earlier in associations such as *Génération Palestine* (Generation Palestine), in which they met Tunisian activists fighting against Ben Ali’s regime. Adnane Ben Youssef explained that the Palestinian space

“was for us also a space of recruitment for integrating the Tunisian question. It was a space because there were many Tunisians. [It did not necessarily work straight away], but those people came to see us after the revolution and they trusted us because of our engagement on Palestine.” (Interview with Adnane Ben Youssef, Tunis, 23 November 2015)

The dynamics at stake not only refer to conversion and complementarity, they can also represent the simultaneity of political commitment. The trans-state space of mobilisation is not merely made up of antagonistic fields of action but is intersectional. A number of activists were active in the two fields at the same time. Despite the tensions described in the first section above, it is interesting to note that a limited number of Islamist activists were involved for instance in both the UOIF and Ennahda, and therefore did constitute a bridge between the two. This was also made possible by the fact that the whole complex process of membership of Ennahda was the equivalent of ascent within the UOIF: an active member of Ennahda was systematically considered as an active member of the UOIF (interviews with leaders of Ennahda, Paris, 2015-16). Similarly, activists within the FTCT who struggled to improve the conditions of immigrants could be active simultaneously at the CRLDHT opposing Ben Ali’s regime. Østergaard-Nielsen (2003, p. 47) also indicates the

“continuing significance of homeland politics alongside immigrant politics”. Taking the example of Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Germany, she discusses how “homeland political and immigrant political claim-making [can be] closely connected” (ibid, p. 64) as “these organisations increasingly have their head not only in Turkey but also in Germany as their information campaigns gradually integrate with the German political system and discourse” (ibid, p. 69).

However, the accumulation of activist capital is not intrinsic to all the movements and all activists and should therefore be qualified. The possibility of converting activist capital seems to be a strong characteristic of the leaders. This should not obscure all the processes of social and political downgrading that the activists could experience, which is an area upon which this research does not focus particularly strongly. Furthermore, concentrating too much on the different forms and spheres of action within Tunisian activism brings with it the risk of a teleological and pre-determined vision of activism, as if the multi-positionality and the transfer from one field to another were obvious processes. Keeping those caveats in mind, it is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of an overly deterministic perspective on activist trajectories, by underlining that some did not engage in both fields, and others even withdrew from any political activities within the trans-state space of mobilisation. In fact, it is central to remember that the level of resources and networks should be taken into account when analysing the multi-positionality of activists working from afar. Not all the actors are equally equipped for dealing with multi-positionality (Vauchez, 2013, p. 14), and this is also where Islamist and leftist trajectories differ. As has been argued, activist capital, the (non) constraints of home and host countries, the length of stay and the (perceived) identity of the actors provided for different access to networks and different opportunities for mobilisation, and these factors in turn influenced the possibilities for multi-positionality.

## **2. Making sense of processes of reconversion: narrativisation and transmission of activism**

It is interesting to also examine how the actors themselves make sense of these processes of reconversion, and how they express their trajectories by demonstrating

forms of logical continuity and consistency. In a similar way, while looking at trajectories of Moroccan activists, Cheynis (2013, pp. 149-150) shows that:

The focus placed on the narrative of these transformations highlights the lack of disruption, a continuity of purpose and a certain 'commitment to oneself' (...) [and] the extent to which these transitional processes can be experienced as a continuity.

In this respect, when exploring the documents produced by the FTCT, it is striking to see the regular emphasis on the "terrain of struggle here and at home" and the drawing of a very conscious itinerary of continuity and simultaneity. The thematic of "citizenship" was very helpful here as a watchword for activists to justify the link: "We find it impossible, as people who work to promote full citizenship in France, to remain indifferent to problems which threaten fundamental freedoms and human rights in home countries."<sup>282</sup>

Similarly, Omeyya Seddik, who as we have seen was active in many diverse political initiatives, restored a logical and coherent narrative to his actions by emphasising the idea of a "junction" between the different struggles:

"In France, [it was about] a connection with Tunisians and immigrants in France, more generally in terms of immigrant struggles, etc. More broadly, we felt that in order for this political movement to be successful and meet our objectives, it had to be connected with the other struggles present in the Arab world. At the time, alterglobalism was on the rise, so we had (a connection) with alterglobalist struggles. This was no mean feat. It meant we were also very scattered, involved in a thousand things at once." (Interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016)

Seddik summarised his action under three headings: "There were three pillars: democracy – those movements that declared they stood for democracy – and there was a social pillar and an anti-colonial pillar" (ibid). As discussed above, Adnane Ben Youssef, who was equally active on different political fronts, also thought of his political engagement in terms of a "trio" that included the struggle regarding immigration, the struggles in Tunisia, and the Palestinian struggle (interview, Tunis, 23 November 2015).

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<sup>282</sup> FNA-P 119AS/12, "*Rapport d'activité du siège national*", 1992.

However, the fact that leftist activists are themselves well aware of their capacity to mobilise on multiple scenes and more easily highlight hybrid identities and narratives of multi-positionality represents a notable difference from Ennahda. It demonstrates that the “narrativisation” of multi-positionality is also part and parcel of their activist capital. One former president of the FPCR, Tarek Ben Hiba, introduced a magazine celebrating forty years of mobilisation of the association by employing the term “double presence” (FPCR, 2014). Similarly, Hichem Abdessamad (2012), who also worked on tracing the history of the Tunisian associative movements in France, evoked the idea of “Janus” as an introductory remark:

“it will be a question of the role of actors that were unable to stand still, quite literally: implicated at a distance in Tunisian political affairs, they chose to be somewhere else for a long time. Dual association, labile, frontier, in one word: ‘janusians’.”

While a narrative of continuity of action for the Islamists was less noticeable in the interviews I conducted or in the internal documents I read, the trajectory of continuity and reconversion was in their case linked to the transmission of activism to their children. Indeed, the engagement of the children of Nahdawi exiles, who had been born and raised in France, was also seen as a way of continuing and renewing their parents’ engagement with homeland politics. The involvement of the children of Nahdawi exiles in the UOIF or in related associations, such as *Jeunes Musulmans de France* (Young Muslims of France, JMF), *Etudiants Musulmans de France* (Muslim students of France, EMF), or at a broader European level the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) is indeed striking. A number of them were also active in the Annual Gathering of France’s Muslims in Le Bourget, which was organised by the UOIF. This also played a role in “identity preservation” as one leader put it (interview with Habib Mokni, Paris, 6 October 2016). Three of the founders of the section Ile-de-France of the JMF, for example, were the children of Nahdawi exiles. Asma was one of them. She explained that:

“My parents encouraged me [to get active with JMF] a lot. It was the natural continuity of their engagement. For them, to get (politically) active has in fact always been something natural” (interview with Asma Soltani, Paris, 21 October 2015).

As this thesis analysed in the previous chapter, the willingness to transmit forms of activism was notably accomplished through a specific *encadrement* within Islamic specific spaces of socialisation – what I termed “Islamic *entre-soi*”. One of the leaders of *Tawasol* explained that the Nahdawi exiles pushed their children to get involved in France on those subjects:

“We told them: ‘you are French Muslims of Tunisian origin. Get involved in questions related to Muslims in France: you should integrate yourselves into French political parties, associations (...) The questions of headscarf, racism and discrimination (...) because [our children] are the ones who are better positioned to talk about that; they have mastered the French language more successfully than we did, they are young people who were born here.” (Interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 21 January 2016).

The president of the *Majlis al-Shura* specified that this encouragement to get politically involved “was not a collective strategy taken in a congress, it was a simple matter of families playing their roles” (interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015). One can therefore point to the importance of familial transmission of activism, and the next chapter will further develop the generational prism through which one can also understand the trans-state space of mobilisation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the fields of homeland and immigrant politics at times possess their own logic and universes of political practices. I have examined processes of progressive autonomy of the field of immigrant politics that derived from the field of homeland politics. The comparison between Tunisian leftists and Islamists has allowed me to underline specific ways of being active in each of these two arenas and has shown how the activists faced different rules in that field. I have defined “immigrant politics” largely by including subsectors related to questions of Islam in France and struggles linked more particularly to the immigrant condition, and this has enabled me to see how the various constellations of actors compete within those sites of action.

However, I have explained that autonomy is relative insofar as the two fields also interact. I have even argued that linkages and entanglements between “immigrant



politics” and “homeland” dissent have to be studied further. The activists can simultaneously be embedded in different fields, they can traverse and transcend the homeland/host country categories, thus challenging the distinction between home and immigrant mobilisations. Examining how the two fields of homeland and immigrant politics function autonomously but also influence each other and feed into each other, this chapter has advanced the broader argument of the thesis: the inscription in multiple scenes is another specificity of the trans-state space of mobilisation, which does not merely act as a sounding board of home country dynamics. More specifically, I have focused on the reconversion of the activist capital towards other fields. This transfer and convertibility of activist know-how is a common feature of Islamist and leftist exiles, although they have invested the two fields differently as they have not accumulated forms of activist, social and symbolic capital equally. In the next and final chapter of this thesis I will turn to the reconfiguration of the trans-state space of mobilisation in the post-2011 revolutionary context.

## CHAPTER 5

### The trans-state space of mobilisation during and after the 2011 revolution

#### Introduction

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted from power, ending his twenty-three year authoritarian regime in Tunisia, a period which seemed to constitute the main *raison d'être* of the trans-state space of mobilisation for both pro- or anti- regime constellations of actors. The expanding boundaries of the political space in the post-2011 period – both geographically with the question of a return to Tunisia and in terms of new actors coming into that space – raise new questions which will be addressed in the last chapter of this research.

This chapter explores the trans-state space of mobilisation in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, particularly with the entrance of new actors and newly evolving politics. In other words, how does the transfer from anti- and pro- regime struggles evolve following the demise of the central purpose of these struggles and the movements they inspired? In what ways are the boundaries redefined through different fields of action and the growth of new divisions?

Scholars have mostly focused on how the revolution unfolded in Tunisia without considering mobilisations from afar.<sup>283</sup> This chapter fills this crucial lacuna and argues that the revolution was a pivotal moment that re-shaped and is continuing to re-shape the dynamics of the trans-state space of mobilisation. However, the chapter does not romanticise this as a political awakening of Tunisians in France. Instead it analyses the ways in which previous mechanisms survived and exist in tandem with the new changes. My argument demonstrates that new elements contingent on the new arrangement exist in parallel to elements from the old configuration. The 2011 revolution therefore simultaneously represents a decisive rupture *and* a continuity: this combination is a source of instability but also offers new opportunities.

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<sup>283</sup> For notable exceptions, see the literature review in the introduction.

To this end, this chapter starts by examining the diverse implications of Tunisian activists in France in the revolutionary process as well as the reconfiguration of the trans-state space of mobilisation, in terms of both its rules and its actors. Secondly, it goes a step further by analysing the ambivalence of this reconfiguration, scrutinising the simultaneous break from and continuation with the past. Finally, it focuses on the meaning of return (or non-return) to Tunisia of activists before and after the revolution and looks at the dynamics this entails for the trans-state space of mobilisation.

## **Section I.**

### **Redefining the contours of the trans-state space of mobilisation**

When exploring the role and implications of activists from afar in the Tunisian revolution, one notices how the revolutionary situation broke the “wall of fear” imposed by the Ben Ali regime over two decades. It led not only to an expansion and a shift of the actors involved (which will also be qualified) and in the function of political organisations abroad, but also to an evolution in the rules animating the space.

#### **1. Breaking the wall of fear: the implications of Tunisian activists in France during the 2011 revolution**

Some authors have shown how the revolution in Tunisia should be inscribed in a longer historicity of mobilisations, stressing in particular the importance of the protests in 2008 in Tunisia’s mining district of Gafsa (Allal, 2012; Hmed, 2012). Although one should not trace a teleological reading of revolutionary processes in which the 2008 protests would necessarily lead to the 2011 revolution, “one should not, nevertheless, accept a spontaneous movement [in December 2010] and believe in any kind of ‘immaculate contestation’” (Allal, 2012, p. 822). Those mobilisations drew on previously built material and symbolic resources. This deeper revolutionary sequence echoes an interesting parallel in France. The networks that were mobilised in 2008 were remobilised during the sequence of 2010-2011, notably through all the

work that had been conducted with the media (interview with Omeyya Seddik, Tunis, 11 July 2016). As in 2008, Tunisian activists based in France served as a useful interface between activists based in Tunisia and media such as Al-Jazeera and France24 between December 2010 and January 2011. Furthermore, as was explained in Chapter 3, activists who mainly came from the leftist federation FTCT created the *Comité de Soutien aux Habitants du Bassin minier* (Support Committee to the Inhabitants of the Mining Region) in February 2008. A couple of days after the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, in December 2010, the same France-based Tunisian activists established the *Collectif de Solidarité avec les Lutttes des Habitants de Sidi Bouzid* (Collective of Solidarity with the Struggles of Sidi Bouzid Inhabitants). This gathered the majority of Tunisian associations and political parties, including both leftists and Islamists.<sup>284</sup> As Hichem Abdessamad (2012) notes “the first big mobilisations [of 2008] constituted a kind of general rehearsal before those of December 2010-January 2011, and the Gafsa committee prefigured the committee of Sidi Bouzid”, with many of the activists taking similar roles. The *Collectif* also gathered a wide spectrum of French and North African political organisations, which had also been active in the 2008 events (FTCT, 2014, pp. 52-53). Not only was this initiative striking in its unitary composition but also in terms of the number of its supporters. The list of supporters, which included French political parties as well as immigrant associations, demonstrates that Tunisian activists could build on previous networks, which were constructed in the fields of both immigrant and homeland politics over years of activism.<sup>285</sup>

The first demonstration by the *Collectif* took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 in Couronnes (Paris).<sup>286</sup> This was followed by numerous protests that took place almost every day in front of the Tunisian Consulate or Embassy, in Belleville-Couronnes, as well as in symbolic places such as the *Fontaine des Innocents* in Châtelet. These were

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<sup>284</sup> FTCT, CRLDHT, *Voix Libre, Solidarité Tunisienne*; ATF; ATF-Paris. Political parties: PDP, CPR, PCOT, Ettajdid, Ennahda (FTCT, 2008).

<sup>285</sup> For a list of supporters, see the announcement of a solidarity meeting organised on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 (see below), available at: <http://indigenes-republique.fr/tunisie-meeting-de-solidarite-le-jeudi-13-janvier/> accessed 7 December 2017.

<sup>286</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, Belleville-Couronne, located in the North-Eastern part of Paris, is an area where many Tunisians live, hence a frequent tendency for all the activists to gather in that specific place. See Figure 6.

the main locations used by the activists during previous decades (see Chapter 3).<sup>287</sup> The *Collectif* organised a well-attended rally on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, the day before the demise of Ben Ali, in the trade-union centre in Paris. The knowledge of these symbolic places and the relatively easy access to French associations and newspapers, who could be relied on to report the initiatives, reveal the activist know-how, which had been forged over decades in the trans-state space of mobilisation under Ben Ali. The FTCT took a leading role in the logistics. These mobilisations were a regular occurrence for activists who were accustomed to organising demonstrations. However, after the first few days of mobilisation which attracted the “usual” players, an increasing number of Tunisians in France began to join. In this respect, Hela Boudabous, one Tunisian activist who was not engaged in Tunisian politics before the 2011 revolution but was a member of a youth Palestinian organisation in France (*Génération Palestine*), recalled that:

“With Tunisian friends from the Palestinian movement, we started to go to the first demonstrations. They were mainly children of refugees. We knew [about the events] thanks to Facebook. Everyone shared things, nobody was scared anymore (...) We knew the great majority of Tunisians through other means, there were people who were not activists but who were there all the same. There were many people. The first time we went we were scared to death, then we got used to it, really. I was wondering what I would be doing next time I go back to Tunisia” (interview with Hela Boudabous, Paris, 8 February 2016).

Several weeks of protest in Tunisia and abroad culminated in Ben Ali’s overthrow on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011. On the 15<sup>th</sup> January, the day after his departure, demonstrations gathered thousands of people in all major cities of France, displaying a striking change from the usual protests under Ben Ali that always seemed to gather the same activists (see Geisser, 2012, pp. 155-56).<sup>288</sup> The slogan “we will never be scared again” was chanted, and expressed in various ways, demonstrating how “the wall of fear” put in place by Ben Ali, and described in Chapter 2, had clearly been broken. The scores of French-Tunisians present at this demonstration illustrated that the system of fear installed by the Tunisian regime was not working on its citizens living abroad anymore. Without romanticising the revolutionary situation, it could be

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<sup>287</sup> For a precise chronology of the gatherings, which took place between December 2010 and January 2011 outside Paris, see Dridi (2013).

<sup>288</sup> For images of the demonstration of the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, see, for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ctx2nPkDgco>, accessed 14 May 2018. Other initiatives took place outside Paris. For a list of these see the above-mentioned chronology (Dridi, 2013).

said that it brought about a moment of “unanimity” (Geisser 2012; 2017) and of “communion” (Dot Pouillard, 2013) – although it did not last for long and was essentially illusory. The myth of Tunisians abroad united against the regime that seemed to prevail during the revolutionary sequence was a mobilising fiction.<sup>289</sup> The “recovered” and “proud” Tunisian was the theme mentioned most during my interviews when evoking this short period in the life of activists and newcomers to Tunisian politics.

One should also note that the 2011 revolution acted as a politicising factor for a number of people who had not previously been engaged in Tunisian politics from abroad (Beaugrand and Geisser, 2014). To fully understand the nature of the unprecedented reaction in 2011, we need to look at spaces of interaction that had been shaped by decades of mobilisation in France. However, the emotions triggered by events in Tunisia at that specific time also played a role as a mobilising force with multiple socialising effects.<sup>290</sup> More generally, Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule (2012, p. 788) point to the

autonomous dynamic of a transforming event. This is the force of events themselves that lead participants far beyond anything that they could have first imagined, or that they could ever have dreamt about.

The 2011 revolution thus accelerated the process of politicisation for many Tunisians in France (Geisser, 2017). This was not in fact specific to Tunisia but represented a common outcome throughout the Arab Spring in France,<sup>291</sup> which led to a willingness to become engaged in homeland politics for a number of actors. This “creative effervescence” (*effervescence créatrice*) (Dobry, 2009) during the 2011 revolution brought about a new configuration of the trans-state space of mobilisation, to which I now turn.

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<sup>289</sup> In an interesting parallel in the case of protests in Egypt in 2011, Carle (2016) analyses the revolutionary slogans that played a role in the construction of a federating and revolutionary imaginary.

<sup>290</sup> For a stimulating comparison, see Pagis’s (2014) work on May 1968, in which she analyses in great detail the mechanisms through which the “event” plays a socialising role.

<sup>291</sup> For the case of Egypt, see Müller-Funk (2016) and Lamblin (2016); and more generally for the “Arab Spring” Beaugrand and Geisser (2016).

## 2. Reconfiguration of the actors and of the rules of the space

The 2011 revolution had a far-reaching impact on the transfiguration and renewed forms of the trans-state space of mobilisation. The unprecedented move towards the creation of numerous associations and political organisations, the shift in function of political parties abroad as well as new political claims ruling the space, all played a part in this reconfiguration.

### 2.1 The entrance of new actors

The opening created by the revolution initially led to the creation of many new associations, all of which declared their ambition to play a role in the “Tunisian political transition” and in more general terms showed their solidarity with the Tunisian revolution.<sup>292</sup> The arrival of new actors with different social trajectories alters and diversifies the trans-state space of mobilisation. The space is no longer the political monopoly of exile activists, whose trajectories I have examined throughout this thesis. It now also includes French-born Tunisians with varied social profiles. One association that epitomises this phenomenon and plays a significant role is the association *Union pour la Tunisie* (Union for Tunisia, Uni-T). This association was created a few weeks after the revolution “with the willingness to accompany and ensure the development of a democratic state in Tunisia.”<sup>293</sup> More precisely, its former president explained that one of its aims is:

to act as a forum for unity and dialogue among Tunisians living abroad which transcends their varied political affiliations, with the exception of eradicators. This is about addressing issues that many struggle with. How can we allow Tunisians in the diaspora, Tunisians from immigrant backgrounds, to be politically active here in France, as well as in their country of origin? (...) The second objective was to participate, despite the geographic separation, in the consolidation of the revolutionary process. How could we, here in France, work to prevent any retreat into authoritarianism? How could we participate from afar? (Limam, 2018)

Its online forum on Facebook has been one of the most active since 2011 and provides an essential platform for many Tunisians in France to take a stance and

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<sup>292</sup> See the following inventory of newly created associations, established and regularly updated, by Mohsen Dridi (2016).

<sup>293</sup> On Uni-T website: <http://www.uni-t.fr/a-propos/> See also the association’s charter: <http://www.uni-t.fr/charte/>, accessed 27 February 2015.

follow the numerous political debates animating the post-revolutionary Tunisian political landscape.<sup>294</sup>

One of the effects of the revolution was therefore the entrance of new actors, often bi-nationals, who are heirs of their parents' migratory trajectories throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and who had become somewhat detached from homeland politics under Ben Ali for the various reasons explored throughout the thesis. However, the notion of new actors needs to be qualified. In this respect, the association Uni-T is again an interesting example to help us understand that the newcomers are in fact often activists who had been engaged in other political spheres before the revolution. The majority of its members have previous political experience in the field of immigrant politics as well as in Palestinian organisations (interviews with Uni-T members, Paris, 2015-2016). Beyond the case of Uni-T, Limam (2015) in his study of the Tunisian diasporic scene in France in 2011-2013, concurs by explaining that the great majority of its interviewees who created associations after 2011 had previous experience of activism in organisations in the French suburbs, a practice that influenced the way they conceived of their new engagement for the Tunisian cause (see also Pouessel, 2016).

This shows the reconversion of activist capital for a number of Tunisian actors in France, who as a result of the revolution started to become more politically active specifically in Tunisian politics. Such is the case, for instance, of Karima Souid, who had mostly been active in the associative work against racial discrimination in France. One of the local leaders of the French Socialist party encouraged her to enrol at the top of the electoral list of the Tunisian social-democrat party, FDTL (Ettakatol), and in 2011 she was elected as a MP for the constituency France 2 (interview with Karima Souid, Lyon, 4 February 2016). The revolution therefore opened new opportunities, particularly for bi-nationals, for whom the revolutionary process acted as a point of

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<sup>294</sup> In more concrete terms, the association was particularly active in 2011-2014, especially during the 2011 and 2014 electoral campaigns, and organised numerous meetings with Tunisian MPs representing French constituencies. It also regularly organised debates on topics related to both Tunisia and the situation in France and the Arab World (personal observations, 2015-2017); see also its website: <http://www.uni-t.fr/nos-actions/>, accessed 11 March 2018.



bifurcation in their life stories (Bessin et al, 2010). Lamblin (2016) showed a similar process in the case of Egyptian diaspora politics in France.

However, this bifurcation can also be understood in terms of a reconversion for many exile activists. Until 2011 they had focused their political activities on other causes, yet following the revolution they shifted their political centre of gravity back to Tunisia. In fact, the return to homeland politics was a common feature for all of my interviewees, although this took diverse forms, from the creation of associations to more direct political roles back in Tunisia, as I will show below. Olfa Lamoulou, who was at the forefront of the anti-Ben Ali cause in the 1990s, had prioritised her engagement to other struggles in the field of immigrant politics from 2002 onwards, as has been discussed in preceding chapters. She explained how the revolution changed her life, and how she could no longer find any meanings in her other political engagements in Lebanon or in France:

“Just as for many others, the revolution overtook us, caught us by surprise; it moved us a great deal and completely changed our lives. I did not for a second think I would stay here, not at all. Journalists started contacting me, I was in Lebanon but suddenly Tunisia became the centre of my life. I discussed this with others, my life no longer made sense outside of Tunisia.” (Interview with Olfa Lamoulou, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017).

The involvement in the field of immigrant politics was thus momentarily suspended for the majority of activists in the revolutionary situation.

## **2.2 A shift in the function of political parties abroad**

The 2011 revolution acted as a critical juncture which entailed a reconfiguration of trans-state politics. However, it was not only the shift in political actors involved that needs to be stressed, but also a shift in the function of political parties abroad. From being political parties fighting against or supporting Ben Ali’s regime, the revolution introduced another meaning to their *raison d’être*. The focus on the cases of Ennahda and the RCD are particularly relevant here.

Ennahda was forced to transform itself from an opposition party in an authoritarian setting with a clearly defined enemy to a political party striving to animate – like any other party – its political life abroad. Its aim is now to “work towards the success of

the democratic process in Tunisia.”<sup>295</sup> This transformation implies new constraints and opportunities. Firstly, its name reflects this evolution. From *Solidarité Tunisienne*, it became the *Association des Tunisiens pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (Association of Tunisians for Democracy and Development, AT2D) to represent Ennahda France 1.<sup>296</sup> As one of its leaders explained, the change in name was debated but seemed obvious for the activists as the goals had shifted: “after the revolution, it was time to build democracy and help our country to develop on social and economic fronts” (interview with Samia Driss, Paris, 7 January 2016). A leaflet distributed in Le Bourget during the Annual Gathering of France’s Muslims in 2016 on the AT2D stall expressed this further:

“After fighting for many years for human rights and against tyranny in Tunisia, AT2D’s ambition today is to serve the Tunisian community in France, to bring all generations together in order to celebrate our revolution and ensure its continuation while participating in our homeland’s economic and social development, which is now its real challenge.”<sup>297</sup>

The aim of reaching out to the broader Tunisian community in France has thus become a central facet of Ennahda’s policies in the post-revolutionary period – although this does not go without any problems, as will be explored in the following section. As Abderraouf Mejri, the former president of AT2D, who was also president of *Solidarité Tunisienne*, explained:

“When January 14 came around, we asked ourselves this: our meaning, our essence, that which led us to choose this label of solidarity, is it enough? It turned out that it wasn’t; our scope was growing. We could now reach a much broader community. There were only 1000 of us, but we could now impact the entire Tunisian community. Secondly, we would participate, we would be involved, we would communicate with officials, with the Tunisian authorities. (...) Thirdly, we had not been paying attention to the interior, we only focused on security, our families’ needs, social, family-oriented issues, following up on our brothers who had been released from prison and helping them re-educate themselves. Now we were dealing with the needs of Tunisia as a whole. (...) So we decided to change the name to the Association of Tunisians for Development and Democracy. We are convinced that we have a great role to play in pushing things forward in the direction of the revolution, in helping the democratic process succeed.” (Interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015).

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<sup>295</sup> Statutes of the association AT2D, January 2012, personal archives.

<sup>296</sup> Following the new electoral division after the revolution (see below), Ennahda divided its presence between Ennahda France 1 covering the northern part of the country and Ennahda France 2 for the southern half of France.

<sup>297</sup> Ennahda’s personal archives and personal observation, April 2016.

There were also changes on the other side of the political spectrum – those who supported Ben Ali. The occupation of the RCD headquarters in May 2011 by Tunisian migrants could have been seen as symbolising the fall of Tunisian authoritarian structures in France (Magnaudeix, 2011). However, the question of the return of the leadership of the former regime that preoccupied the Tunisian political scene after 2011 is as much an issue in France as it is in Tunisia. In March 2011, after the dissolution of the RCD, its foreign cells fragmented into new political entities. The *Rassemblement des Tunisiens de France* (Rally of Tunisians of France, RTF) declared its new status in June 2011 under the name of *Union Générale des Tunisiens à l'Étranger* (General Union of Tunisians Abroad), demonstrating its capacities to readapt to changes in the revolutionary context. Still based at 36 rue Botzaris in Paris, the association was now about “the general interests of the Tunisian community: to defend fundamental freedoms, cultural identity, to favour professional, educational, social and economic insertion in the host country and in Tunisia.”<sup>298</sup> In 2012, *Nidaa Tounes* (Call for Tunisia) was formed by the current President of the Republic Béji Caïd Essebsi, and branches were created in France.<sup>299</sup> As an “incoherent grouping of liberals, leftists, and old regime officials, held together by its charismatic founder, Essebsi” (Boukhars, 2015, p. 9), it represents possibilities of rehabilitation for a number of RCD members in France and of mobilising their networks to encourage their continued existence.<sup>300</sup>

I have demonstrated in Chapter 2 that the politics of *encadrement* were maintained under three main pillars which carried the seeds of their own limitations: an administrative and social control that relied on mediation and clientelism, a political control by a group of RCD activists that withered over the years, and the politics of fear. With the fall of Ben Ali’s regime, the hypothesis of the politics of *encadrement*

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<sup>298</sup> *Journal Officiel*, 2011. A former consul explained, however, that the association was an “empty shell” and quickly fell into decay. Informal discussion, July 2018.

<sup>299</sup> It formally declared its existence to the *Journal Officiel* in 2014, see: [http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/publications/assoc/pdf/2014/0006/JOAFE\\_PDF\\_Unitaire\\_20140006\\_01315.pdf](http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/publications/assoc/pdf/2014/0006/JOAFE_PDF_Unitaire_20140006_01315.pdf), accessed 17 September 2017.

<sup>300</sup> For instance, former leaders of the RCD played important roles in the constituency France 1: Adel Jarbaoui (former deputy secretary of the RCD) and Raouf Khamassi (former member of the central committee of the RCD) were appointed coordinators of Nidaa Tounes abroad. Marouan Falfel, current MP for the constituency France 1 (Nidaa Tounes) was a former activist of the RCD student group.

as a willingness to maintain the Tunisian community in a form of political inaction rather than mobilising the community around the RCD seems to have been confirmed. Unlike the 1990s, pro-Ben Ali activists in France were noticeably absent to support the regime during the demonstrations that demanded the fall of Ben Ali between December 2010 and January 2011. Yet it is essential to provide insights into what happened to the system of *encadrement* in the wake of the 2011 revolution.

The position of State Secretary of migration and Tunisians abroad, reporting to the Minister of Social affairs, was created in 2012 by the new government led by Islamist leader Hamadi Jebali.<sup>301</sup> However, this new institution did not signify a clear-cut rupture from the old regime. The modes through which people were controlled still persist, and continue to shape the scope for action. As has been said, RCD networks found a way to recycle their newly formed associations. Moreover, one can note institutional continuity that in turn interrogates the durability of Tunisia's authoritarian structures. For instance, the *Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger* (Office of Tunisians Abroad, OTE) remains unchanged, in terms of its functions and most its members. However, while the politics of *encadrement* and RCD networks did not simply evaporate after the revolution, control through the politics of fear and more generally the repressive facet of *encadrement* have disappeared, leading to new possibilities of mobilisation, as can be seen by the creation of all the associations mentioned above.

### 2.3 Renewed political claims

As well as the reconfiguration of its actors, the shift from Ben Ali's rule to the revolutionary period entailed new political claims. It re-drew the political boundaries of the trans-state space of mobilisation, to the point at which elections and issues around representation seemed to take centre stage in political struggles.

We saw in Chapter 2 that Ben Ali granted the right to vote in presidential elections to Tunisians living abroad in 1989. However, they were granted the right to vote in the legislative elections only after the 2011 revolution. The first such elections took place

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<sup>301</sup> Tunisian Official Journal. See its prerogatives: <http://www.ilo.ch/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/91896/106753/F1098576434/TUN-91896.pdf>, accessed 17 September 2017.

in October 2011 for the National Constituent Assembly. Six new electoral constituencies were officially recognised for Tunisians living abroad, and they could vote for 18 representatives out of a total of 217 (Brand, 2014). Ten representatives were nominated for the two constituencies attributed to France. This new franchise was then inscribed in the 2014 Constitution under Article 55 (Jaulin, 2015). As Brand (2014, p. 56) notes, this could be explained by a number of factors, including: “the desire to make amends for past human rights abuses, to reincorporate exiles, and to mobilize human and financial resources as new regimes attempt to consolidate power”. However, Brand (ibid) also stresses the significant role of Tunisian activists from afar in imposing these changes. Indeed, two competing but similar initiatives, each led by the two main leftist associations based in Paris that were active under Ben Ali, are relevant here. They were both centred on equality between Tunisians living in and outside Tunisia, reflecting the shift in aims within the post-revolutionary trans-state space of mobilisation.

A month after Ben Ali’s fall, a steering committee was established to organise the *Assises de l’immigration tunisienne* (“Conference of Tunisian immigration”) (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 31 July 2017).<sup>302</sup> Mostly led by activists from the FPCR, who were accustomed in the field of immigrant politics to organising and framing issues in those terms,<sup>303</sup> this committee gathered a large number of associations in May 2011 to claim the right “to fully participate in the political and social life of the country.”<sup>304</sup> They set out a “register of grievances” (*cahier de doléances*) that was directed at the new Tunisian authorities, notably at the High Authority for Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, the highest authority before the first Tunisian elections. One

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<sup>302</sup> For a list, see “*Assises de l’immigration tunisienne 2011, cahier de doléances*”, personal archives. The assises de l’immigration were followed by the creation of the *Coordination des Assises de l’Immigration Tunisienne* (CAIT) in June 2013, and later by the establishment of the *Coordination des associations de l’immigration tunisienne et des tunisiens à l’étranger* (CAITE) (interview with Mohsen Dridi, Paris, 7 October 2015).

<sup>303</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to note that Mohsen Dridi who was at the forefront of the organisation of the General Estates of Immigration in 1988 (Chapter 4) was also the leading organiser of the *Assises de l’immigration tunisienne*.

<sup>304</sup> “*Assises de l’immigration tunisienne 2011, cahier de doléances*”, p. 5. See also the 2013 documentary by Fethi Saidi “*Tunisiens des deux rives*”, which shows images of central debates taking place at the *Assises*.

of the main committees of the *Assises* was focused on the question of “representation”, with its two main claims being the right to vote and eligibility for Tunisians living abroad in all elections.

Meanwhile, during the same period, another collective initiative led by the main competing leftist association, the *Association des Tunisiens en France* (Association of Tunisians in France, ATF), created the *Dynamiques Citoyennes des Tunisiens à l’Etranger* (Citizen Dynamics of Tunisians Abroad, DCTE).<sup>305</sup> In a similar vein to the previous initiative, a central claim was:

“The rights of Tunisians living abroad to vote and stand as candidates, particularly for the Constituent Assembly and legislative elections, are a prerequisite, but they alone do not suffice. Representation for Tunisians abroad [are also required], through the creation of a High Council for Tunisians living overseas (HCTE), a specialised structure with cross-disciplinary expertise capable of developing an approach encompassing the economic, human and strategic dimensions of migration.”<sup>306</sup>

Through diverse lobbying initiatives including petitions, meetings with various influential people such as ambassadors, ministers of social affairs, ministers of foreign affairs as well as with the head of ISIE, the activists of both the *Assises* and of the DCTE demonstrated a willingness to be heard on the question of elections. In other words, they claimed equality between Tunisians living abroad and in Tunisia, and asserted their entitlement to play a central role in the new Tunisia.<sup>307</sup> As can be seen with DCTE’S claims, beyond the subject of elections, activism in the post-revolutionary period centres on the question of the representation of Tunisians abroad. The claim to break with past means of collusion between the party and the state acting abroad led the activists to focus their political demands on the creation of an authority that would deal with the representation of Tunisians abroad. The creation of a Council of Tunisians abroad has become a new battlefield between the diverse political groupings.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> It was difficult to decipher whether this competing initiative was created only from reasons of personal rivalries.

<sup>306</sup> Personal archives, DCTE, August 2011.

<sup>307</sup> Personal archives, “*Assises de l’immigration tunisienne 2011, cahier de doléances*”.

<sup>308</sup> See the *Haut Conseil des Tunisiens à l’Etranger*’s (High Council of Tunisians abroad) project: <http://www.projet-hcte.org/fr/>; and a letter expressing contestation by new associations:

I have tried to show that the 2011 revolution had a tremendous effect on activism from afar. Not only was it possible to see a reconfiguration of actors, it was also possible to discern new claims and stakes: political issues around elections, representation, and claims for legitimacy are now regulating the trans-state space of mobilisation. However, the repositioning of actors and the rules that constituted the space should not obscure the ambivalence of this period.

## **Section II.**

### **Between survival of the past and fragmentations of the space**

It is striking to note the dynamics of reproduction of previous political trends in the trans-state space of mobilisation in the post-2011 political landscape. This section addresses the “survival of the past” (Dobry, 2009, p. 257), or to borrow Bourdieu’s terminology, at “hysteresis effects”, which are defined as mechanisms of inertia and the phenomena of discrepancy between the new social and political structure and incorporated dispositions (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 8; Dobry, 2009, p. 263). Once the “unanimous” period was over, not only did new cleavages emerge, but old cleavages also reappeared.

#### **1. The establishment of new lines of division**

While I discussed the question of defection and exit from political organisations in Chapter 3, it is interesting to examine how the arrival of new actors affects the dynamics of the trans-state space of mobilisation. Indeed, the entrance of new actors in the field of homeland politics reconfigures power relations. We must therefore explore the interactions between these newcomers and the more established actors, in terms of the logic of their mobilisations as well as their struggles over legitimacy. The creation of new associations and the fragmentation of the space of mobilisation points towards processes of generational divide. Newly formed associations have very few links with the older, more established associations in terms of political

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<https://nawaat.org/portail/2013/08/22/loffice-des-tunisiens-a-letranger-et-le-secretariat-detat-a-limmigration-une-nouvelle-arnaque/>, accessed 14 April 2017.

projects, ways of functioning or profiles of activists. Joint action between structures created before and after the revolution are the exception. It is also quite rare to see the recruitment of new activists within older associations, or recruitment difficulties for political parties.

### **1.1 Generational cleavages between and within political organisations**

Post-2011 associations do not seem to identify with the activist repertoires of action of older associations. Amin Karker, born in 1989 and president of the association *Jeunes Tunisiens de France* (Young Tunisians of France, JTF), which was created in 2012, expressed this idea of a generational cleavage:

“There’s a really big divide in the way we work, in the way we do things. And they’re a little arrogant, they’re a little like ‘who are you? We’ve been here for 20 years, and you show up out of nowhere’. We think they’re a little old-fashioned. They’re like press release factories, they’re constantly issuing press releases backed by something like thirty different associations, when in fact all of the associations are run by the same person!” (Interview with Amin Karker, Paris, 12 October 2015)

Hedi B.\*, a member of Uni-T, born in 1985 who was not active in any organisation before the 2011 revolution, also demonstrated the generational gap in terms of means of action. I asked him if he had known any activist organisations when he arrived in Paris to work in 2012:

“No. I had never heard of them. It’s really a sociological issue. We’re young, 20 or 30 years old, we know the ins and outs of modern communication tools, they don’t: they communicate very little, very poorly, and on platforms that young people don’t use. So honestly, I didn’t know anything about them at all, and even to this day I don’t know them” (interview with Hedi B.\*, Paris, 31 October 2015)

This gap, however, must be qualified. Those who were politically active in other spheres, such as Palestinian or immigrant issues would sometimes meet and collaborate with previous generations of activists. Furthermore, thinking in terms of generational divides might obscure other dynamics, such as the transmission of activism across generations, as I will explain below.

In addition, the question of legitimacy represents a new stake in the struggle between different political generations of activists. For some activists under Ben Ali, “the associations [created] after 2011 lack the memory of past struggles (...) they don’t understand anything, they don’t know anything about Tunisia” (interview with



Houcem T.\*, Paris, 17 June 2015). The space of mobilisation thus brings in new hierarchies that are dependent on the level and historical depth of activism: older activists can claim greater legitimacy due to years, if not decades of activism, which they have accumulated in the fields of homeland and immigrant politics. Several activists in newly formed associations explained the confrontations they faced and the operations of disqualification they experienced with older activists in this respect. One activist, who mobilised after the revolution within the association Uni-T, recounted his experience when he attended a variety of meetings of political parties after the revolution:

“The political parties were monopolised by those who thought they were the most legitimate. At every meeting, everyone explained their activist history. All the meetings I went to it was like ‘we were there before so we’re going to explain to you’” (interview with Hamza R.\*, Paris, 19 February 2016).

Hela Boudabous, who was involved in the same association, concurred:

“It’s a good thing they were there before, because we weren’t born yet. But what I can’t stand is people telling me where you were when I was 20 and I was an activist at my university, when I was not even in my mother’s womb. We all have our own paths. I started with Palestine before I became an activist for Tunisia, while others came straight here. Some have been fighting from the very start because they were immersed in it. They come from activist families, but that’s not how it went for me.” (Interview with Hela Boudabous, Paris, 8 February 2016)

One can see how the reference to her engagement around the Palestine cause helped to legitimise her position. Such engagements constitute a symbolic reservoir, although this resource did not seem to be enough to count as part of her activist capital and allow her to be recognised as a strong source of legitimacy for activists under Ben Ali.

Within the organisations themselves, the opening offered by the 2011 revolution revealed new generational cleavages. The example of the Youth Committee of Ennahda is telling in this respect. Unlike the previous homogeneity that was inherent in the composition of the movement, one could observe two different activist profiles – those born in France, who are often children of Nahdawi exiles, and those who came to France in the mid to late 2000s to study or work. The latter were often linked to the party through previous engagement back in Tunisia or through family socialisation with the party (such as parents who were sympathisers or members)

and constitute the majority of the Youth Committee. Interviewees exposed two ways of acting between those two categories. Some explicitly referred to a cleavage between “*beurs*” and “*blédards*”.<sup>309</sup> “Beurs” refers here to the French-born children of Tunisian parents, while “*blédards*” points to Tunisian migrants who had arrived in France more recently. The use of those terms should not necessarily be viewed as being employed in a pejorative manner. However, it does reflect the struggles for positions (Schiff, 2008). The president of AT2D also expanded on this:

“There are two types of young people here [at the AT2D]. There are those who were born or educated here. And there are those who come from Tunisia to study, for internships or to work. So their mindsets are different (...) The *blédards* pay attention to domestic affairs, they follow the local news. The others don’t. So we try to encourage them to travel to Tunisia occasionally, on holidays, for example: last summer we had a bus that toured all over Tunisia (...) our children don’t know the heart of Tunisia” (interview with Abderraouf Mejri, Paris, 8 December 2015).

While children of Nahdawi exiles accumulated symbolic and social capital stemming from their parents’ history and trajectories, they lack many of the necessary resources to play a role in the new Tunisian political configuration: not only are they disconnected from Tunisian political life, they also face certain linguistic difficulties. The newly elected president of the Youth Committee, one of the rare leaders of the Ennahda youth movement who was actually born in France, explained that it was not easy at first to follow the meetings, as the other members mainly conversed in Arabic and her level of understanding was not as high (interview with Amal Fethi, Paris, 5 November 2015). Mouaffak Kaabi, who came to Paris from Tunis in 2007 to study and was a member of the *bureau des cadres* expounded that:

“The leaders of Ennahda speak in Arabic when they come here. For the youth, when people from their own party come and speak Arabic and they can’t understand them, that just doesn’t cut it. So not only do they not keep up with what is happening in Tunisia – and you really need to pay close attention to what is happening, you can’t settle for a broad outline (...) – they can’t even understand their own party leaders. And this goes on until the day they distance themselves” (interview with Mouaffak Kaabi, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016).

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<sup>309</sup> Informal discussions with members of the youth bureau, during the Ennahda Youth Congress, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

## 1.2 Transmission of activism and hysteresis effects

Focusing our attention to children of Nahdawi exiles enables us to nuance and complicate the idea of a “generational gap” and to shift the focus on transmission of political engagement and the effects of hysteresis. It is possible to notice activism being based on ties of filiation, but not necessarily within the framework of Ennahda. More generally, this also raises analytical questions on the longer-term adherence to political groupings following dramatic events such as the 2011 revolution.

Soon after the departure of Ben Ali, the children of Nahdawi exiles became highly mobilised on Tunisian politics, notably during the presidential and legislative elections of 2011, with a high proportion of them volunteering in their organisation in France (such as acting as observer in polling stations). At first, they considered it natural to be engaged within the Nahdawi framework. This natural sense of affiliation resulted from a strong sense of belonging to this political community, and can be linked to the analysis in Chapter 3: Ennahda’s *encadrement* played a strong role in the production of adhesion and the reinforcement of loyalty within the group. As the head of the Youth Committee explained:

“This was a problem with many young people. For a time they were not asking themselves any questions about the philosophical underpinnings of Ennahda. They were pro-Ennahda by birth, they thought ‘this is the kind of thinking I was brought up with, so that settles it’. At first, the young people really just wanted to be part of the action.” (Interview with Amal Fethi, Paris, 5 November 2015).

However, a cleavage quickly emerged between those who found it natural to continue in the footsteps of their parents and maintain their involvement with Ennahda, and those who wanted to be engaged more widely on behalf of Tunisia and not in the more partisan game which some of them rejected. This became formalised with the creation of the association *Jeunes Tunisiens de France* (JTF) in 2012. To quote Amin Karker, who was one of the founders and president of JTF:

“It was not at all obvious for me at first, because as a young person, being in a political party is very restrictive, especially in a party like Ennahda, which is very disciplined. I don’t like being involved in partisan politics. And most of all, there is more to life than politics. So very quickly our group decided to set up an association. Politics were really secondary in the beginning, there were lots of other things for us to focus on: cultural issues, solidarity, humanitarian issues, there were lots of things.” (Interview with Amin Karker, Paris, 12 October 2015)

JTF thus detached itself from Ennahda's Youth Committee. Amin Karker continued:

"The conclusions were straightforward: some were saying 'we must be guided by our history; our parents were refugees, that is the path we must follow'. And that is when we realised that despite having the same history, our aspirations were completely different" (ibid).

Another member of JTF concurred:

"Then there was a bit of a crisis because Ennahda's bureau was thinking 'great, we are going to have a fresh new energy, the party's driving force'. They were already preparing for their future leaders. It made sense! They were thinking 'we'll bankroll you', but then we said no. They were a little disappointed, of course; they had seen us grow up (...)" (Interview with Asma Soltani, Paris, 21 October 2015).

Several members of the association mentioned the incomprehension and even the "betrayal" that older Nahdawi activists felt following the creation of JTF outside the boundaries of Ennahda.

More than a direct filiation, it seems more appropriate here to underline generation divides as well as the diversification of trajectories of the heirs of Islamist political exiles. When looking at the implications for many children of exiles in diverse structures linked to Islam (such as FEMYSO, JMF, EMF) as well as to other political struggles (such as Syria and Palestine), I hypothesise that they might inherit a particular disposition regarding engagement.<sup>310</sup>

However, what is also striking is the affective link that remains between children of Nahdawi exiles and the Islamist movement, which can be considered as another form of adhesion to Ennahda, although one that is detached from the political institution. Children of Nahdawi exiles are often engaged in social and cultural activities that Ennahda leaders organise. Dufoix (2002) emphasises the difficulty of disrupting a very anchored and long-standing belief system when faced by a brutal change of environment, in his case the fall of the Communist regime for anti-communist Hungarians, Poles and Czechoslovaks. Because the associations that reflect such belief systems are spaces of sociability, they offer their members a certain form of recognition and of social insertion which becomes invaluable for these actors,

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<sup>310</sup> For a constructive critique of the notion of "disposition", see Lahire, 2003, pp. 63-69.

meaning that it can sometimes be difficult to dissolve these groups despite the disappearance of their functions and aims.

The concomitant involvement in cultural activities and the detachment from political ones is something that the leadership regrets and tries to tackle. During the National Congress of the youth bureau I heard comments such as: “they only come for the football tournament or the *moukhayem*”.<sup>311</sup> One of the main subjects discussed during the Congress was finding innovative ways of mobilising and recruiting among their own supposed ranks. In fact, one of the main issues of the post-revolutionary period – which is not only specific to Ennahda and also significant in Tunisia itself (Geisser and Perez, 2016) – is the question of recruitment, in other words of renewal within the older, more established political organisations that were active in the period under Ben Ali. Not only did Ennahda activists express their worry that what the leaders called “second generations” were difficult to mobilise, but the party also indicated more generally that it remained too “closed”. While we have seen how it was impossible to join the party in the era of Ben Ali for security reasons, opening up to newcomers suddenly became an acute issue in the post-revolutionary context.

The picture is complex in what appears to be a saturated but fragmented space following the revolution. There is a gap between the older, more established organisations and the new ones, relating to legitimacy issues, differentiated repertoires of action, as well as difficulties in recruiting due to years of *entre-soi*. Furthermore, there is a problem of recruitment for these older organisations within their own ranks. In the case of Ennahda, many of the exiled activists’ children were either moving in their own political direction or becoming disengaged.

## **2. Resurgence of old cleavages and restructuring**

The post-2011 space of mobilisation involves contradictory dynamics: while new cleavages emerged, old dynamics also persist. Indeed, once the first period of consensus around the revolution had faded away, the old cleavages re-appeared. This predominantly consists of issues surrounding the relationship with the Islamists, and the treatment of former members of Ben Ali’s regime.

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<sup>311</sup> Personal observations, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

The survival of the previous configuration is also striking. We saw in Chapter 3 how the leftists' relationship with the Islamists was a central feature in terms of animating and delineating positions and hierarchies in the field of homeland politics. This was reactivated after the revolution and Ennahda's accession to power after the first free and fair elections of 2011. A number of Tunisian leftist activists in France joined the newly formed party, Nidaa Tounes, whose main purpose in 2012 was their clear opposition to the Islamists. The political field in Tunisia was increasingly polarised between secularists and Islamists, and this division re-surfaced in France too. Many new associations that were created after 2011 had no clear political affiliation. They remained autonomous but were regularly accused of "playing into the hand of the Islamists" or "being financed by the Islamists" by a number of leftist activists who discovered those new actors (interviews with leftist activists, Paris, 2016). Dynamics of alliance or opposition between different groupings, mainly after 2012, seem to revolve around these alleged affinities with the Islamists.

A second cleavage, which does not necessarily intersect with the first, concerns the divide between former opponents and supporters of the Ben Ali regime. We have already seen that the RCD networks remained rather discreet between 2011 and 2012 – some leaders took retirement, others distanced themselves from Tunisian politics – and that the creation of Nidaa Tounes in 2012 ensured a more favourable climate for the renewal of those networks. At an initial stage, especially immediately after the creation of the party, coexistence between the former RCD elite and parts of the Tunisian left in France was quite striking. However, the heterogenous composition within the new party quickly gave way to the reappearance of the former lines of separation between opponents and supporters of Ben Ali's regime. Some leftist activists openly denounced the return to former authoritarian practices, such as threats addressed to activists or the discretionary nominations of former RCD members in France.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> See for instance the petition "*Non au retour aux commandes de l'ex RCD*", which makes an inventory of those practices and denounces them, available at : <http://petitionpublique.fr/Default.aspx?pi=P2012N31295>; and the petition "*non à l'intimidation et à la violence des milices rcdistes*", <http://petitiontunisie.wesign.it/fr>, accessed 17 November 2016.

The majority of organisations created during the post-14 January 2011 period of effervescence did not survive, or found it difficult to adapt their ideas, especially after 2014.<sup>313</sup> This helped the former configuration to survive, despite the changed dynamics. Furthermore, the issue of reconciliation with former regime activists played a role in the repositioning and maintenance of Tunisian actors in France. The governmental coalition between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes following the presidential and legislative elections in 2014 had consequences in France. Many activists interviewed expressed their disillusionment at what appeared to them as a counter-intuitive alliance of the two former political enemies, leading to the demobilisation of a number of structures after 2014 and the repositioning of some activists in the humanitarian realm. This was well expressed by a former member of Ennahda, who co-founded the humanitarian association T2RIV,<sup>314</sup> when I asked him if he was still an active member:

“That is a good question. I’m not very active anymore. I focus more on useful community work. I have some ideas, and I feel I have remained true to my convictions, but I disagree with what Ennahda has done: reconciliation with the former regime... In my opinion they have capitulated and are legitimising the corrupt, that’s how I see it. They have their reasons, I know that. But for now I am not convinced, and we must remain true to our convictions. We have done no harm to anyone, we have only done good, we have betrayed no one.” (Interview with Ayman K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015)

Once the “revolutionary effervescence” had faded, many activists suggested that they did not know what role to play in the new political configuration. In the words of the president of the JTF:

“For the past year, we have found it difficult, and I guess all associations will tell you the same thing: many people stopped being involved because they felt they were floundering. Before, you had the impression that there was some hope, some change; not anymore, it has become stagnant (...) People are a bit bored [by the new political configuration]. Not because of the election results, but really the fact is that there is no improvement and no real hope, and the political class is getting worse and worse.” (Interview with Amin Karker, Paris, 12 October 2015)

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<sup>313</sup> In the same way, Jaulin (2015) shows that the rate of participation between 2011 elections and 2014 was cut by half.

<sup>314</sup> See its website: <https://www.t2riv.org/>

When looking at the post-2014 collapse of the majority of newly created associations in France, one could hypothesise that the post-revolutionary trans-state space of mobilisation entails some “effects of selection” (Fillieule, 2005, p. 12). Associations that seem to be maintained are those that have a previous activist history or those whose members have a previous activist background, for instance in the field of immigrant politics (such as the case of the majority of Uni-T members). This raises the question of an “entrance fee” to the space of mobilisation during periods of reconfiguration: it seems difficult for newcomers to enter that space as it requires an accumulation of activist capital, linked to the legitimacy and practice of past struggles. In other words, the structuration of decades of activism shapes the trans-state space of mobilisation even after its goal is attained, in this case the demise of the Ben Ali regime. It is here that the idea of Bourdieu’s “hysteresis effect” and Dobry’s (2009) hypothesis of “continuity” make sense. Analysing the context of political crises, Dobry (2009, p. 257) shows the processes through which:

a society’s past, what it has been and the experiences it witnessed, tends to persist and shape even the perception and behaviours of the actors precisely in those moments when the social world seems to be coming apart around them.

Despite the fact that the political structure and environment have both changed, it is still comparatively easy to spot mechanisms of discrepancy and resistance to change.

Although different rules animate the space, it is striking to see the same activists playing an active role, despite the addition of newcomers. In this respect, a telling illustration is the case of the Regional Independent Instance for the Elections (IRIE), which shows how durable dispositions shape ways of action and reinforce hierarchies, despite new institutional configurations. After the fall of Ben Ali’s regime, the High Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, of Political Reforms and Democratic Transition, was set up in Tunisia. Between March and October 2011, the High Authority was in charge of organising “the transition from revolution to elections” of the Constituent National Assembly (Lieckefett, 2012, p. 133). In the High Authority, the category “Tunisians from abroad” (*Tunisiens de l’étranger*) was created. Two Ennahda-affiliated activists in France, Néjib Achouri and Riadh Bettaieb and three main figures from the leftist constellation, Lakhdar Ellala (president of the ATF), Tarek Ben Hiba (president of the FPCR) and Kamel Jendoubi



(president of the CRLDHT) were nominated to supervise that category. The High Authority was given charge of creating the High Independent Authority for the Elections (ISIE), of supervising the elections of the Constituent Assembly, as well as creating regional offices (the IRIE).<sup>315</sup> Kamel Jendoubi was elected as president of the ISIE. Limam (2015) has analysed processes of co-optation of members around the Higher Authority in France as well as the IRIE-France 1 in 2011. Limam (ibid) mentions that the call for candidacy for the IRIE was only circulated on mailing lists close to leftist networks and how the great majority of its members already belonged to this political constellation.

This was corroborated by the two IRIE general secretaries (France 1 and France 2) that I interviewed (interviews with Abdelaziz Chaambi, Lyon, 2 February 2016 and Aymen K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015). They underlined the importance of previous experience and circles of sociability, which were formed during decades in exile. The general secretary of IRIE France 1, a former member of Ennahda, explained how he was appointed to this position:

“I knew Kamel Jendoubi [president of the ISIE] well, we have worked together for years. When he was appointed I presented my candidacy. I called him and expressed my willingness to participate in this historic moment. (...) but I have suffered during the elections, they put me 11 people [from the left] (...) [it was decided by] cronyism (...) Kamel Jendoubi had the last word. He wanted more balance, so he chose me because he knew me.” (interview with Aymen K.\*, Paris, 20 October 2015)

In this way, the forms of *entre-soi* were created by decades of Tunisian activism in France, reinforcing hierarchies and cleavages not only between more established actors and newcomers, but also between Islamists and leftists. The different forms of capital accumulated during years in the fields of both homeland and immigrant politics placed those actors in a better position to negotiate and play an active role in the post-revolutionary trans-state space of mobilisation.

However, any amount of activist capital accumulated cannot necessarily be converted into the electoral or political realm in Tunisia. Some prominent leftist oppositional activists under Ben Ali decided to run as candidates for the 2011

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<sup>315</sup> Two IRIE were created in France, following new electoral divisions: IRIE France 1 (representing Northern France) and IRIE France 2 (representing Southern France).

legislative elections. Tarek Ben Hiba, president of the FPCR, decided to run as leading candidate for the “*Associatifs de l’Immigration Tunisienne*” list and justified this as follows:

“The work we conducted for many years against the dictatorship in Tunisia, our actions for defending the rights of Tunisian emigrants and our struggle against discrimination and racism means that we have to continue to strive at your service within the new institution that is the Constituent Assembly”.<sup>316</sup>

Similarly, Tarek Toukebri, president of the *Association Démocratique des Tunisiens en France* (Democratic Association of Tunisians in France, ADTF), ran as a leading candidate in the list of the *Parti Démocrate Progressiste* (PDP, Progressive Democratic Party).<sup>317</sup> Neither candidate received many votes, showing that the activist capital they had accumulated in France in the specific context of the authoritarian regime was not necessarily enough for them to be elected or to reintegrate the Tunisian political field.<sup>318</sup> This leads us to our last subject area, which will close off this discussion on the meaning of return.

### **Section III.**

#### **The meaning of return for the trans-state space of mobilisation**

The return to Tunisia of many exiles, some of whom took up major roles in the new Tunisian political scene, is a central feature of the post-revolutionary setting. This raises questions about how the return to Tunisia impacts on and re-defines the contours of the trans-state space of mobilisation. Exile and return seem to constitute at first sight a logical dualism when studying exile politics. However, one should not fall into a teleology of return that would logically regards that return to the home country as victorious conclusion of a cycle of mobilisation, as this would imply that the 2011 revolution closed the trans-state space of mobilisation. In other words, the return should not be considered as the endpoint of a trajectory or cycle of exile

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<sup>316</sup> Declaration of the list conducted by Ben Hiba, 5 September 2011, available at: <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/6231-france-1-nord-tarek-ben-hiba-conduira-la-liste-des-associatifs-de-l-immigration-tunisienne>, accessed 25 September 2016.

<sup>317</sup> For some images of the campaign of the PDP France Nord, see the documentary “*Tunisiens des deux rives*” by Fethi Saidi, 2013.

<sup>318</sup> For more detail on the results of 2011 legislative elections abroad, see Jaulin (2015).

politics (King and Christou, 2011, p. 457). Instead, it should be seen as a marker for the emergence of new dynamics.

There are multiple ways to conceptualise the idea of return. The great variety of returns – as well as the concept of “non-return” – range from a definitive return to a more distanced one, or from a provisional return to a holiday visit. It also includes a return to politics, which may entail more investment in the home country politics while staying physically in the host country. It also implies a difference in the nature of return based on the position of the returnee in the political spectrum which may depend on a different timing – in other words, the return to Tunisia before and after the 2011 revolution entails salient dynamics worthy of deeper exploration.

By placing the return against a longer history, which is no longer specific to the post-2011 period, and by being careful not to conflate geographical space and political space, this section shows that the idea of return is multifaceted. The return entails an interrogation of the internal coherence and duration of the Tunisian constellations of actors in France, and consequently includes the potential emergence of new trends in the trans-state space of mobilisation.

## **1. Return before the revolution**

Indeed, topics of return were being discussed long before the revolution of 2011. Under Ben Ali, the issue of return to Tunisia was not just an individual question. It was a political one that directly influenced the space of mobilisation. The issue was highly politicised, divided the activist movements and questioned their long-term endurance, thus redefining the contours of the space and the politics that belonged to it.

This was especially true for Ennahda. Indeed, the meaning of return was different for leftists and Islamists. As we have seen in previous chapters, leftists and Islamists differed in terms of their legal status in France, thus entailing different possibilities for action and different forms of geographical displacement. Under Ben Ali, most leftist activists could go back to Tunisia, and in more precise terms the majority of

them could circulate between France and Tunisia.<sup>319</sup> In addition, some historic figures chose to return to Tunisia even before 2003-2004, such as Ahmed Ben Salah<sup>320</sup> in 2000 and Mohamed Mzali in 2002.

But on a different scale, from 2003-2004 and more so after 2008, different motives impelled a number of Islamist exiles to return to Tunisia. In a context in which Ben Ali's regime was freeing the vast majority of political prisoners and starting to negotiate the issue of exiles' return<sup>321</sup> – notably by sending regime emissaries to France, as was further explained in Chapter 2 – some exiles saw no purpose in remaining in exile.<sup>322</sup> There were personal reasons involved as well, which had no specific links to the exiles' political commitment: the growing fear of never seeing their country again, ageing or loss of family members, the precariousness of their situation in France and professional reasons. These could all lead former exiles to get out of their conditions as exiles or refugees. Their return could take diverse forms, such as sending only the children, going back with the whole family, a definitive return in terms of permanent relocation, or returning only sporadically for holidays. Abdelwahab el-Hani (2009), a former Nahdawi activist in exile, ended his defence speech for the return of exiles with the following words:

“Allow me to dream of a dignified return, as any fellow citizen who wants it would... Allow me to dream of a Tunisia for all Tunisians without exclusion... Allow me to dream of participating, all of us, licking our wounds and turning over a new leaf to create many other beautiful things... Allow me to forget the time when exile destroyed the best years of our lives, for just a few seconds of friendly hugs with parents, sisters and brothers, friends... Allow me to dream, with my co-exiles, of a normal life, of normal human beings who are not deprived of our motherland, of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters?”

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<sup>319</sup> However, some exceptions must be noted. Not only did we see that some activists of the PCOT were statutory refugees, but two leading leftist associations figures had their passports confiscated for a period of time. This was the case for Kamel Jendoubi in 2000, president of the FPCR and CRLDHT (see the communiqué of the *“Comité d'action pour le passeport de Kamel Jendoubi”*, <http://tunisnews.net/2016-05-22-12-22-14/item/3802->); and Mohieddine Cherbib, following his leading role in supporting the struggles taking place in Redeyef in 2008 (interview with Mohieddine Cherbib, Paris, 17 July 2015).

<sup>320</sup> The French diplomatic services in Tunisia explained that “the return of the opponent Ahmed Ben Salah” was a “non-event”, 31 August 2000. Béatrice Hibou's personal archives.

<sup>321</sup> For details on official negotiations between the Tunisian regime and the direction of the movement taking place in Berne in November 2004, see Abdelwahab el-Hani's open letter (2009).

<sup>322</sup> For the list of “returnees”, see the above-mentioned letter who mentions a large number of figures. However, it was not only key leaders but also hundreds of rank-and-file activists, as suggested by the list sent by one of my interviewees who coordinated from Paris this delicate question of return.

Just like this letter, a number of open letters circulated denouncing the “hostage taking” and manipulation of political leaders in exile who did not allow their activists their right to return.<sup>323</sup> This was most notably the case for the CPR and Ennahda, whose activists openly asked both the party leadership and the Tunisian authorities to offer an open return for everyone, not by selecting applicants on an individual basis (interviews with Ennahda activists and former sympathisers, Paris/Tunis, 2015-2016).

More specifically for Ennahda, from individual decisions, the defence of the return of exiles in the 2000s became: “a trend. And even a trend within the direction. They were everywhere, in the [*Majlis al-]* *Shura*, in the executive committee, in the political committee.” (Interview with Hamed K.\*, Paris, 3 April 2016). Two separate logical paths confronted each other. On the one hand, the direction of the movement, mainly embodied by the president Ghannouchi himself, considered the question of return as a political one. It had therefore to be treated comprehensively. According to this approach, exiles had to go back all together. Leaders were opposed to “case by case” assessments and issued a disciplinary decision to forbid individual return. However, any decision to return to Tunisia that contravened that dictum was not followed by exclusion from the movement. Despite expressing a feeling of betrayal, Islamist activists in exile were not numerous, and could not afford to alienate part of their base (interviews with Ennahda leaders, Paris/Tunis, 2015-16).

On the other hand, especially from 2008 onwards, when all Islamist political prisoners had been freed, a different trend privileged the argument for individual negotiation with the regime in order to escape from exclusion. For some leaders I interviewed, this was a pragmatic choice. At the time it seemed impossible to overthrow Ben Ali through mobilisation, so activists felt it was more useful to negotiate their return and find a political solution, a trend that was discussed at greater length in Chapter 3. For others, it was about occupying the “space” allowed by a climate of relative openness in the mid-2000s (interview with Ridha Driss, Paris, 28 October 2015).

Returning to Tunisia contained symbolic, practical and far-reaching consequences for activism in France. Voluntary return was sometimes viewed as abandonment and

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<sup>323</sup> For a similar rhetoric, see Chokri Hamrouni’s text “for a dignified return of exiles”, 2008, personal archives.

betrayal.<sup>324</sup> Dufoix (1998, p. 81) shows that the same types of mechanisms were at work in the case of Hungarians, Czechs, and Poles in France, who:

...considered as a breach of rule. [The return] falls under the interpretation of exile itself as it shows a proximity between the one who comes back, even momentarily, and the regime in place, which carries the risk of a 'switch' of allegiance, with the exile becoming [a] regime 'agent'.

In the same vein, Graham and Khosravi (1997, p. 119) examine the way Iranian political exiles from Sweden "who return are labelled as spies or collaborators." The issue of return created a crucial cleavage that stretched far beyond the case of Ennahda, questioning the homogeneity and long-term durability of all activist constellations. The fall of Ben Ali's regime brought to the fore a new set of questions regarding the processes of return.

## **2. Return after the revolution and the migration of activist capital**

The 2011 revolution led to a new conception of the space, both in terms of geographical contours and political boundaries for Tunisian activists from afar. For Nahdawi activists in particular it was striking to see many waves of return that began as soon as February 2011 – only a few weeks after Ben Ali's departure. From being a taboo, "return" became the norm given the opportunities created by the revolution. The narrative of return was an emotional one, particularly for those activists who were returning to Tunisia for the first time in twenty years. They were often accompanied by their families, and many of their children had never seen the country. These precious moments soon became a prevalent feature of my interviews.

The second aspect of returning to Tunisia, this time in terms of returning to politics faced activists with a more difficult set of choices. From this stemmed central questions: could the capital accumulated in France be transposed to the Tunisian political scene? Did their experience allow for returning exiled activists to continue to play prominent political roles? I argue here that those activists who had accumulated the most activist capital during their exile were in a better position to

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<sup>324</sup> See for instance Ahmed Manaï's text (2008) on his "end of exile", where he evokes the hostility that his return in 2008 could provoke.

play a more visible role in politics back in Tunisia. However, we will see that activism in exile can act as a valued resource – although not for everyone.

I have shown that the new legal and political configuration, also brought about by the new constitution, allowed activists based in France to return to the Tunisian political scene. It is a prevalent feature of Tunisian post-2011 politics that a significant number of the new political personnel comes from this history of activism in exile in France. Such is the case of both the former president of the Republic (2011-14) Moncef Marzouki, who was the former president of the CPR, and the former vice-president of the National Assembly, Meherzia Labidi who had been an Ennahda activist. Some leaders of exile activism in France were also appointed to ministerial positions back in Tunisia. For instance, after being president of the ISIE, Kamel Jendoubi was appointed as Minister in charge of relations with constitutional bodies, civil society and human rights organisations in 2015.

Meanwhile other exile activists were strongly represented in the Parliament. At the National Constituent Assembly of 2011, out of the ten MPs allocated to the two French constituencies, four were from Ennahda and were former exiles; two were former exile activists from the CPR and one had been active in the ATF.<sup>325</sup> Following the second legislative elections of 2014, it is interesting to note that the child of a Nahdawi exile was elected and later replaced by another child of a Nahdawi exile. In addition to MPs in charge of overseas representation, some exile activists were also elected in their home constituencies.<sup>326</sup> Some of the MPs who were elected in 2011 to represent constituencies abroad were subsequently elected in local lists in 2014 (Perez, 2016).<sup>327</sup>

In a less visible way, political return could take the form of important responsibilities within the political parties themselves. A number of the activists I interviewed took up roles – even for a limited period – as counsellors within their respective parties,

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<sup>325</sup> For a more detailed study of the trajectories of the 18 MPs in charge of representing “overseas” constituencies at the National Constituent Assembly, see Pouessel, 2016.

<sup>326</sup> Such as the case of Aicha Dhaouadi, an Ennahda activist from Bizerte exiled in France who was elected in Bizerte (interview with Aicha Dhaouadi, Bizerte, 5 November 2017).

<sup>327</sup> Such are the cases of Ameer Laarayedh (elected on the constituency France 1 in 2011 and for the Medenine constituency in 2014) and Meherzia Labidi (elected France 1 in 2011 and the Nabeul constituency in 2014).

to the government or to the presidency (interview with Khaled Ben M'barek, Nabeul, 24 November 2015; interview with Mondher Sfar, Paris, 9 January 2016). When looking at those positions, it was particularly striking to see the specific influence of socialisation in exile in France that shaped the new post-revolutionary Tunisian elite. Interpersonal networks forged in exile seem to play a central role in the way nominations were decided. In addition, when studying the restructuring of the post-Ben Ali Tunisian political field, Perez (2016) examines the emergence of new political personnel, specifically in the Assembly. She shows how the narrative of activism in exile provided alternative types of resources and a form of legitimacy for this new elite that could not rely on the more classical economic, social and cultural resources of the former Destourian elite. Finally, a number of activists found alternative professional opportunities to reconvert their capital, such as taking up positions in NGOs or in Tunisian media outlets (interviews with Olfa Lamloum, Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017, and Sadri Khiari, Tunis, 30 November 2015).

However, far from a romanticised vision of "return" which would only stress supposedly success stories of political exiles going back to Tunisia within the higher political spheres, it seems relevant to underline the different trajectories of return of political activists, the discrepancies these returns entailed and the difficulties for many returnees in readapting. If trajectories of activism in exile constitute a resource in the homeland, it is necessary to remember that this was mainly the case for the leaders of the movements. A discrepancy has to be noted between sympathisers and party executives. The general secretary of the IRIE France 2 indicated specific socialisation through a Parisian *entre-soi*, which favoured co-optation between the elites of each movement (interview with Abdelaziz Chaambi, Lyon, 2 February 2016).

Moreover, those who managed to find high political positions after their return faced a difficult quest for legitimacy. Political returnees found themselves facing difficulties precisely because of their political experience abroad. It is not always easy to reintegrate, especially for activists who were born or raised in France. Focusing on the case of MPs at the National Constituent Assembly, Pouessel (2016) demonstrates how those MPs coming from abroad found themselves being rejected as other MPs could often refer to their "external" origins, especially in a context where issues of



what constitutes “tunisianity” and the lack of bi-national legitimacy crystallised in the debates: linguistic dissonance represents a striking example of this tension.

A parallel can be drawn with what Jedlicki (2007) describes in the Chilean case: the “*retornados*” were mostly seen as illegitimate to the hierarchy of the victimhood of dictatorship, and the difficulties of the act of return is an important aspect of exile politics. Dufoix (1998) similarly shows the difficulties implied in the process of returning after the fall of communism. Those difficulties persuaded some to go back to France, following a legislative mandate for instance. Finally, a number of practical, professional, and familial reasons – such as children schooled in France, which were often mentioned – worked towards dissuading the activists from returning to Tunisia.

## **Conclusion**

This concluding chapter has argued that the post-2011 period of Tunisian activism in France represents an interesting site for deciphering the seemingly paradoxical logics of the space of mobilisation. It delved into the multifaceted effects of the 2011 revolution and the collapse of Ben Ali’s authoritarian regime after a gruelling 23-year period. By examining the repositioning of many of the Tunisians who had been in exile and the difficulties of entry for new actors in what has increasingly become a saturated space, the chapter delineated essential features of their condition before and after the revolution. Although the criteria have been recodified, decades of activism have regulated the practice of activists from afar and reinforced the informal rules of the trans-state space of mobilisation.

After investigating the revolutionary involvement of activists from afar who drew on activist know-how forged over decades, I explored the new boundaries of the trans-state space. The entrance of new actors, the political reconversion of others who shifted to a Tunisian-centred politics, new rules of the game and the various possibilities of return, all redefine its modalities. New cleavages emerged between more established actors and new activists, or within the groupings themselves. More than politicising a new generation of French-Tunisians, the 2011 revolution moved those who were already politically active to focus on Tunisian-centred politics. By

differentiating “newcomers to politics” from “newcomers to Tunisian politics”, it is clear that one should not exaggerate the effects of the 2011 revolution: “newcomers” with no previous political experience were quickly disbanded. What we have discovered is a trans-state space that was more fragmented between old and new organisations, with the latter having political yet a different experience (such as in the field of immigrant politics). This space is fragmented because the lines no longer follow an apparent dichotomy between pro- and anti-regime activism, but are divided in more complex ways based on factors such as language, generation difference, parental history, political experience, connection to Tunisia, connection to France and legitimacy of representation.

However, this reconfiguration does not obstruct political tendencies that are more entrenched, and which help distinguish the ambivalence of the period. Far from romanticising the post-revolutionary era, the subtle reactivation and reproduction of old lines of fracture need to be highlighted. Finally, by examining the question of return and the attendant difficulties of reintegrating back into Tunisian life, the question that needs to be asked is how will this fragmented space move forward?

## **CONCLUSION**

It might be a stretch, perhaps even wishful thinking, to suggest a direct causal link between decades of activism in exile and the 2011 revolution in Tunisia. Although this thesis has argued that political change can in part be ascribed to a long process of exile activism, reconstructing linear and causal schemata leading from an authoritarian situation to a revolutionary setting makes little sense and might even have the effect of turning the research into a form of self-fulfilling prophesy. Measuring the precise effects and presumed success of exile activism on the homeland situation often rests upon normative and mechanical assumptions about what activism is about. This thesis has avoided the pitfalls of teleological explanation and argued that the politics of exile in an authoritarian setting can be a focus of study in and of itself.

The purpose of this research was to examine a relatively long-durée period from the activist perspective in order to understand the evolution of political action when activists cross national borders and start, continue, or reconfigure the struggle(s) from abroad, thus challenging but also reproducing the boundaries of nation-states. Through a rich empirical investigation and interdisciplinary tools, this research has addressed and explored political life in exile in its various guises, and has combined different levels of analysis. It has analysed the trajectories of exile activists, the sociology of their political practices, the varieties of resources and the accumulation of their activist capital. It has performed an in-depth analysis of the structuration of the organisations themselves, their repertoires of action and their internal sociability, and the opportunities and constraints of the space in which these actors operate.

By paying particular attention to the broader space in which activism from afar can exist, and by scrutinising the interactions within that space and its evolutions, this thesis sheds light on the diversity of dynamics within this universe of exile politics. In this conclusion, keeping in mind all the aforementioned caveats and intellectual precautions, I aim to draw a first attempt at a narrative of this still young and fragile window of history that I have opened: the trans-state space of mobilisation applied to the Tunisian case. Each chapter has illuminated one central theme in the logic of

the trans-state space of mobilisation and has followed its evolution over time. If I could not find any clear sense of unity within the trans-state space, I have analysed a number of implicit – and at times explicit – rules regulating the possibilities and means of action in exile. I have demonstrated that the trans-state space was in this case a space that was both dependent and independent from Tunisian and French national political fields, producing compelling circulations between the two. The focus on two particular fields of action – homeland and immigrant politics – allowed me to show that the tension between the reproduction of the Tunisian political field in exile and the specificity of the dynamics taking place in France lies at the heart of what I have conceptualised as the trans-state space of Tunisian mobilisation.

This conclusion concomitantly summarises the main themes and contributions of this thesis and points to new avenues of research which the study of Tunisian activism from afar under Ben Ali has introduced.

### **1. Revisiting political transnationalism and diaspora politics through the understanding of a polarised space**

This research has allowed us to transcend homogeneous visions of a Tunisian community or diaspora and acknowledge that different cleavages animate the space, which deserve to be the focus of analytical attention. In this respect, the trans-state space of mobilisation functions as a heuristic framework for understanding the different positions and dispositions of various actors in a relational way, highlighting the logic of their competition and cooperation. Indeed, the focus on effective relations between the activists facilitated the analysis of a number of cleavages and polarisations, to which I now turn.

First, when interrogating the functioning of that space, I explored different constellations of actors who bore and accumulated different forms of capital as well as range of mobilisable resources that relate to the activists' positionings within their fields of action. This was a central element to take into account, as it entailed different and unequal possibilities and means of political action. We have seen that these positionings were determined by an array of factors, some of which were related to macro-dynamics such as diplomatic relations between France and Tunisia

that favoured the Tunisian party-state, the RCD, rather than oppositional groupings (Chapter 2). However, I have also followed the ways in which the various constellations evolved over time. For instance, pro-regime mobilisation decreased over the years as the Tunisian party-state was increasingly focusing its attention on the politics of fear rather than mobilising its members in France; meanwhile, the processes of institutionalisation of some leftist associations, and the contrasting Islamist stigma attached to Nahdawi activists, all played a role in the possibilities and means of action. I discovered that the actors were not equally allowed or equipped to take on an “authorised” discourse in the two fields of action. The different trajectories, the unequal access to resources and the role of identity and identification of each movement are thus parameters conditioning the hierarchies in each field (Chapters 3 and 4). I have also shown the different implicit principles of selection in those fields: the difference between the pre- and post- 2011 periods were particularly telling in this respect (Chapter 5).

I have thus demonstrated the necessity of analysing various political interactions that constitute the trans-state space of mobilisation. I have set particular emphasis on pro- and anti-regime lines of differentiation. In addition, the different themes of each chapter have also shown that other logics were at stake, thereby adding complexity to the Tunisian activist scene in France. One important dividing line influencing the chosen means of action was the logic of rupture versus negotiation in relation to the Ben Ali regime. We saw the different cleavages within the movements themselves, but we also followed the evolution of their positioning regarding this issue. In this respect, the case of Ennahda in the 2000s exposed the relative fluidity of activism from afar. The Islamist organisation was able to simultaneously negotiate with the Ben Ali regime and forge alliances with oppositional forces. We have also witnessed the oscillation of one of the main leftist federations in France, the FTCR.

Beyond the split between the pro- and anti-regime forms of activism, other cleavages were found to be central, and this allowed the analysis to go beyond rigid dichotomies. Ideological lines of demarcation continue to play a role in exile and can at times become exacerbated. For a number of oppositional leftists, for example, the relationship with the Islamists was sometimes a more important dimension in

conditioning their activism than their relationship with the Ben Ali regime. However, the situation of exile, and more specifically the concentration of their political activities in the same city (Paris), tended to favour new forms of cooperation between oppositional movements. The common master frame of human rights, which the majority of exile activists mobilised for decades, was found to be a possible bridge across which to form cross-ideological alliances in order to oppose the authoritarian regime more coherently. This, however, also had implications on the de-politicisation of the oppositional message, which in turn reinforced intra-oppositional divides. Furthermore, divisions were not only ideological; it was also played out at other levels. We have seen the extent to which class and generational differences were crucial variables through which to understand the different fields of action. Distinguishing between different political generations of activists and stressing activists' operations of social distinction proved particularly relevant not only in following their mobilisations in immigrant and homeland politics, but also their abilities to enter each field.

Those different lines of cleavages were thus central in structuring and shaping the different fields of action within the trans-state space. However, other criteria of classification emerged while conducting this research (albeit in a less pronounced way), and these constitute important future avenues for research. In this respect, the question of gender also conditions the hierarchies of the different fields. The trans-state space may appear to have been depicted as a masculine environment, but I have been careful not to ignore women's role throughout the thesis. For instance, of the women activists within the various political organisations I interviewed, it was striking that they were rarely positioned at the head of political organisations. Although many exile activists were women who played prominent roles in both the oppositional (leftist and Islamist) or pro-regime milieu, it was possible to decipher some processes of invisibilisation of female activists' work, as well as a reduced potential of ascension for women within the organisations, and sometimes a gendered division of activist work. One can only agree with Fillieule and Roux (2009) when they stress the importance of studying how gendered social relations are deployed and may be reproduced in activist spheres. However, those processes were

barely touched upon in the interviews conducted, which has led me to put greater emphasis on other dynamics. A more particular focus on gender could, however, be used in future research under a different research heading.

## **2. Revisiting activism through a “distanced” lens**

This thesis has been particularly interested in the various ways activists from afar were able to mobilise. This led me to use a number of concepts borrowed from the sociology of social movements, as they were found to be fruitful for the understanding of activism from a more distanced lens. However, they appeared at times to be too mechanical and dry, and ran the risk of not doing justice to a rich empirical investigation based on the testimonies and archives of the activist movements. As such, I have attempted to humanise those concepts as much as possible by taking time and effort to hear the voices of the activists themselves. Bourdieu’s conceptual arsenal, juxtaposed against social movement literature, was especially useful in helping to conceptualise the space in a relational way and bring to the fore the importance of activist capital in a migratory context, as well as the activist habitus and the consequent fields of action. The conceptualisation of activism from afar through the trans-state space of mobilisation thus enabled me to redraw the contours of and give new meaning to the political dynamics playing at a distance.

This was at different levels, yet all these levels interacted. Firstly, when drawing the contours underpinning the trans-state space, I stressed the role of states in shaping possibilities for action. In this respect, Chapter 2 evidenced how the movements are not independent from their context of action. Political mobilisations in exile do not operate in a “free” (distanced from Tunisia) or “democratic” (taking place in France) space. In other words, far from normative and liberal accounts that would necessarily present France as a democratic and free space of mobilisation for the exiles, I have shown how the trans-state space can also be considered as a constrained space, yet one which is constrained and practiced differently by the various ideological groups. The situation of exile can definitely act as the purveyor of new resources, and I have scrutinised this throughout this research, but the roles of the Tunisian state abroad and of the French state in shaping possibilities for action were found to be central. The concept of trans-state space thus allowed me to focus on those dynamics and

contribute to the emerging literature on “transnational authoritarianism” (Glasius, 2018).

At another level, delving into Tunisian activism from afar was a way to further grasp the frames (the centrality of human rights), the means and repertoires of action (the study of demonstrations and lobbying, the relations to outside supporters or cross-ideological coalition movements), the different temporalities between groupings and between the fields and the importance of places of sociability (Paris), which were all part of the specific situation of exile in France. This was more particularly the focus of Chapters 3 and 4.

In addition, examining the dynamics of Tunisian activism from afar enabled me to further understand the workings of political parties and associations. In Chapter 1, I explored the various structures that the constellations of actors chose to develop, and also how Tunisian political parties and associations were intermingled, which linked to both the French legal environment and the specificities of Tunisian party politics. I was also able to study the internal cultures of organisation of the movements throughout the different chapters. Despite the different political cultures – notably due to ideological differences and various lengths of time spent in France – I noted similarities in the mechanisms through which attempts were made to maintain long term loyalty despite distance, as well as in terms of political and social control. This was more especially the case for the RCD (Chapter 2) and Ennahda (Chapter 3), which operated competing forms of *encadrement*. Finally, it was particularly fruitful to observe different activist trajectories and experiences at both individual and organisational levels. They were found to be not necessarily linear, thus challenging integration theories. However, the way the activists themselves put their trajectories into a coherent whole was telling. The narrativisation of activism plays a role in the positioning of actors within the trans-state space of mobilisation. The study of activism from afar can thus also contribute to the understanding of the workings of political organisations – despite operating from a distance.

The trans-state space of mobilisation was framed in a specific context. From an inductive perspective, I first tried to make analytical sense of what seemed at first to be the contradictory dynamics of Tunisian activism taking place in the setting of a



former colonial power and pitted against an authoritarian regime. Although I stressed the importance of the specific context in which this activism was inscribed and deployed, I suggest that the analytical approach of the trans-state space of mobilisation will enable us to interrogate other examples. By helping to further our understanding of political action taking place across borders, such a framework might offer a solid basis for analysing other cases of movements fighting authoritarianism from afar, beyond the North African context. The recurrent comparisons with other historical cases I have pointed out throughout the thesis (such as the Portuguese under Salazar, Turkish Kurds, Eastern European anti-communist groups, Tamils, etc.), seem to strengthen the possibility of de-specifying the Tunisian case. The comparison of Tunisian activism in France with mobilisation taking place in other countries also offers interesting avenues for further research. In this respect, as the headquarters of the Islamist movement Ennahda was based in London, but very few leftist or pro-regime groupings were based there, a comparison of Tunisian mobilisation between the UK and France could help to refine some of the arguments and test further the hypothesis of the importance of the French environment in shaping political action.

### **3. A political sociology of mobilisation between the two shores**

As the primary focus of this thesis was on the context of production and evolution of a space whose dynamics interact between the two shores of the Mediterranean, the concept of the trans-state space of mobilisation proved particularly useful as a way of documenting and analysing political struggles in France (through the angle of immigrant politics) and in Tunisia (in terms of homeland politics). I argued that this space encompasses diverse fields of political activism, and I have examined the articulation between the two fields of action. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I showed the logic of each distinctive field and how exile activists operated differently between each field. In fact, the distinction between the two fields was at first methodological and might at times seem artificial. However, the separation was not only discursive and symbolic but also made sense for the actors themselves, and produced very concrete effects such as the internalisation of limits in their action and the division of activist work between the two fields. I have also demonstrated how and where the two fields overlap. In this respect, I emphasised the multi-positionalities of some of

the activists in the fields of homeland and immigrant politics, which allowed them to accumulate sufficient resources to then play a role in the Tunisian political field after the 2011 revolution, as outlined in Chapter 5.

The development of these two fields of action also contributes to suturing what often appears as two different literatures and areas of research on migrant activism. This thesis contributes to the history and political sociology of immigrant struggles in which Tunisians in France played a central role. This was as much in the domain of the “Muslim field” in France as in other struggles to claim equality, improve the immigrant condition and fight racism. However, Sayad’s (1999, p. 15) famous call according to which...

we cannot study the sociology of immigration without, at the same time and by the same token, studying the sociology of emigration; immigration here and emigration there are the inseparable faces of a same reality, and one cannot be explained without the other

...is often quoted but goes unheeded as studies often separate political engagement regarding homeland and immigrant politics. By examining long term activist trajectories, which often started in Tunisia and were unequally reshaped in France across the spectrum of activists, the foregrounding of the trans-state space of mobilisation within this thesis has enabled us to grasp the universe of the politics of exile in a more holistic way.

As such, it is essential to situate this research between the two sides of the Mediterranean. Indeed, the analysis here is also a contribution to the politics of Tunisia, albeit from a decentred angle, on which this thesis attempted to shed light. I have documented and analysed the way Tunisian politics played out across borders and over time. I have shown what makes this trans-state space specific, as it cannot be considered a mere replica of Tunisian politics. More particularly, focusing on different antagonist groupings that are not often studied together (pro-regime, Islamists and leftists) offered me a point of entry into the complexities of the Tunisian political scene. I have scrutinised their structuring in exile and the various debates that animated this, and I have shown how those constellations of actors are far from homogenous. Conflicts and lines of cleavage analysed in exile – which are not always those expected – therefore provide insights into the Tunisian political field. We have

also seen how several prominent political figures in today's Tunisia stem from the history of past struggles that took place in France.

However, one possible question that arises from this, and which could constitute an interesting avenue for further research, is the relationship between opposition activists in exile and those who stayed in Tunisia. I have analysed the question of return and how the re-integration in the post-2011 Tunisian scene was far from smooth for all concerned (Chapter 5). However, questions remain on the different temporalities, different means of action, the relations between activist exiles and activists from the homeland and the legitimacy of exile activism for the homeland opposition. For instance, tensions are often noted between Ennahda activists who spent years in prison in Tunisia and Ennahda exiles in France who escaped such treatment.

While the 2011 Arab uprisings and revolutions challenged many of the region's regimes, they also represented an opportunity to rethink the study of political mobilisation between North Africa and nations on the other side of the Mediterranean. From an empirical perspective, they have allowed us to conduct solid research on this little-known aspect of Tunisia's past, the marks of which are still visible on today's politics in Tunisia. From a theoretical perspective, they have enabled us to underscore the rich heuristic value of studying activism from a distance. Tunisian exile activists are still not considered as full political actors, either in France or in Tunisia. Yet at the end of this overview of Tunisian political activism taking place in France in the era of Ben Ali, this thesis hopes to have demonstrated how migrants and their descendants are not a depoliticised, disembodied and homogeneous category. Instead, their multiple political presences between the two shores raise many interesting avenues for researching further the politics of exile under its various guises.

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3.	Hichem Abdessamad	15/07/2015, Paris	Unrecorded
4.	Mohieddine Cherbib	17/07/2015, Paris	Unrecorded
5.	Mohsen Dridi	07/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
		& 31/07/17, Paris	Unrecorded
6.	Amin Karker	12/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
7.	Aymen K.*	20/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
8.	Asma Soltani	21/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
9.	Hedi B.*	31/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
10.	Ridha Driss	28/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
		& 15/07/16, Tunis	Recorded
11.	Tarek Toukabri	28/10/2015, Paris	Recorded
12.	Lazhar Abaab	03/11/2015, Paris	Recorded
		& 13/10/2016, Paris	Unrecorded
13.	Amal Fethi	05/11/2015, Paris	Recorded
14.	Younes Othman	17/11/2015, Paris	Recorded
15.	Adnane Ben Youssef	23/11/2015, Tunis	Recorded
		& 02/11/17, Tunis	Recorded

16.	Khaled Ben M'barek	24/11/2015, Nabeul	Recorded
17.	Kamel Jendoubi	29/11/2015, Tunis	Unrecorded
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		& 01/09/16, Paris	Recorded
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## Appendix 1: detailed list of interviewees

	Name	G.	Age <sup>328</sup>	Main organisation & Position (under Bourguiba and Ben Ali's regimes)	Main organisation & Position after the revolution (2011-2014)
1.	Houcem T.*	M	60	AIDDA, founding member	AIDDA; Nidaa Tounes France Nord (2012-2013), founding member
2.	Hamadi Aouina	M	60	ATF, founding member	Front populaire section France, spokesperson
3.	Hichem Abdessamad	M	62	UTIT-FTCR, member	FTCR, member
4.	Mohieddine Cherbib	M	60s	FTCR, President; CRLDHT; <i>Comité de Soutien aux Habitants du Bassin minier</i>	FTCR, member; Collective of solidarity with the struggles of Sidi Bouzid inhabitants
5.	Mohsen Dridi	M	71	UTIT-FTCR, founding member; MTI, CAIF, FASTI	FTCR, Member
6.	Amin Karker	M	26	Born to Ennahda exile parents	President JTF; Head of Ennahda youth in France (2012)
7.	Aymen K.*	M	52	Ennahda, Member ; <i>Collectif des familles otages en Tunisie ; Collectif des Tunisiens sans passeport ; Collectif des Familles et des Proches des Prisonniers Politiques</i>	T2RIV, member
8.	Asma Soltani	F	28	JMF la Courneuve, founding member; Born to Ennahda exile parents	JTF, member
9.	Hedi B.*	M	31	-----	Uni-T, President
10.	Ridha Driss	M	53	Ennahda, President <i>Majlis al-Shura</i>	Ennahda, leader

<sup>328</sup> At the time of the interview.

11.	Tarek Toukabri	M	59	ATF-Paris, founding member	Chief candidate PDP France Nord ; President ADTF
12.	Lazhar Abaab	M	58	MTI, Head of MTI France (1982 – 1987); Ennahda, member of political bureau (1988 – 1992)	<i>Association Amis de Bengardane en France</i> , member
13.	Amal Fethi	F	23	Born to Ennahda exile parents	Ennahda, head of Ennahda Youth in France (2017 - ...)
14.	Younes Othman	M	68	Démocratie Maintenant, President	-----
15.	Adnane Ben Youssef	M	40	Huriyya Liberté, member; FTCCR, member; PDP-Paris, founding member	FTCCR, member
16.	Khaled Ben M'barek	M	56	CPR, member; CIDT, founder	Adviser to the President of the Republic on Human Rights
17.	Kamel Jendoubi	M	63	UTIT-FTCCR, President; CRLDHT, President REMDH, President	President ISIE; Minister of the Relations with Constitutional instances, Civil Society and Human Rights
18.	Slim Bagga	M	54	<i>L'Audace</i> , co-founder	<i>L'Audace</i>
19.	Ahmed Manaï	M	74	Démocratie Maintenant; Tunisian Committee Calling for Ben Ali's abdication; CDLT, ITRI	ITRI
20.	Sadri Khiari	M	57	CNLT ; Attac-Tunisie ; Indigènes de la République	-----
21.	Aziz G.*	M	Early 60s	General Consul Paris 2006-7; ATCE, founder	-----
22.	Habib L.*	M	48	UGTE, leader; Ennahda, member; CMF, leader	General Consul Paris; AT2D, President

23.	Abderraouf Mejri	M	59	Ennahda France, President; Solidarité Tunisienne, President	AT2D, President
24.	Ahmed Bennour	M	Late 70s	Secretary of State for Interior and Defense (under Bourguiba); Independent opponent	-----
25.	Simone R.*	F	70s	Association Néapolis, President; RCD sympathiser	-----
26.	Yassine F.*	M	31	RCD youth member	MP Nidaa Tounes France Nord
27.	Zenjebil Jouini	F	32	-----	Ennahda youth bureau, member
28.	Mouaffak Kaabi	M	31	-----	Ennahda <i>bureau des cadres</i> , member
29.	Samia Driss	F	50	Ennahda, member; <i>Tawasol</i> , leader; <i>Femmes musulmanes en France</i> , member	AT2D, leader
30.	Mondher Sfar	M	60s	Tunisian Committee Calling for Ben Ali's abdication; CPR, member	Adviser to the Ministry of State Property and Land Affairs
31.	Mehdi Gharbi	M	-----	Tunisnews, editor Ennahda sympathiser	-----
32.	Haithem Chtourou	M	29	-----	Ennahda, head of Ennahda youth abroad (2014-2017)
33.	Ahmed S.*	M	38	-----	Ennahda, <i>bureau des cadres</i>
34.	Abdelaziz Chaambi	M	59	UJM, co-founder; CRI, President MIB, member	General Secretary IRIE France Sud ; <i>Collectif amis de Mohamed Bouazizi</i>
35.	Issam Ayari	M	34	-----	CPR, member
36.	Omar C.*	M	35	-----	Uni-T, member
37.	Karima Souid	F	45	Local associations against discriminations in Lyon suburbs	Ettakatol France Sud, MP
38.	Itidel Barboura	F	39	-----	Head of an official study on HCTE
39.	Hela Boudabous	F	35	Génération Palestine	Uni-T ; ADTF ; PDP-Paris, member

40.	Hamza R.*	M	36	Génération Palestine	Uni-T, member
41.	Meherzia V.*	F	55	Association des mères, President; RCD sympathiser	-----
42.	Lassad L.*	M	-----	Consulate of Marseille, social attaché	Consulate of Marseille
43.	Mouldi Sabri	M	62	ATF-Marseille, member	-----
44.	Claudie & Benoît Hubert	F & M	60s	Aix-Solidarité ; sollicitors Salah Karker, Mehdi Zougah	-----
45.	Saoussen Mokni	M	Early 60s	Ennahda, member; Ecole Avenir	Ecole Avenir
46.	Ameur Laarayedh	M	51	Ennahda Vice-President, Head of Political bureau (1994-2007)	Ennahda, MP France 1
47.	Hamed K.*	M	48	Ennahda, Member political bureau	Ennahda, MP France 1; State Secretary of migration and Tunisians abroad
48.	Mohamed Dhaoui	M	36	Action Tunisienne; ATTAC; LCR	Action Tunisienne, President
49.	Mehdi Zougah	M	47	Ennahda sympathiser; CPR, member	-----
50.	Mezri Haddad	M	55	Tunisian Ambassador UNESCO; RCD sympathiser	-----
51.	Bernard Godard	M	66	French Intelligence Service	-----
52.	Hélène Jaffé	F	Late 70s	AVRE, President ; Amnesty International, member	-----
53.	Omeyya Seddik	M	49	CSLCPT, leader; FTCR, member PDP-Paris MIB, member	-----
54.	Amine N.*	M	69	Tunisian Ambassador in France 2005-2010	-----
55.	Karima Taggaz	F	34	Ennahda, head of Ennahda youth France (2011-2012) Voix Libre, member EMF, President	Ennahda; head Ennahda youth; MP France 1
56.	Chokri Hamrouni	M	50s	Ennahda sympathiser; CPR Paris, co-founder	-----

57.	Khemais Chammari	M	74	MDS, leader LTDH, leader REMDH, president	Tunisian Ambassador UNESCO
58.	Yves Aubin de la Messuzières	M	74	French Ambassador in Tunisia (2002-2005)	-----
59.	Marguerite Rollinde	F	60s	CRLDHT, member Hurriya Liberté, member; Amnesty International, member	-----
60.	Ali Aidoudi	M	-----	General Consul in Marseille	-----
61.	Habib Mokni	M	64	MTI- Ennahda, leader; UOIF, member	Ennahda, member
62.	Moncef A.*	M	60s	RCD, member	-----
63.	Larbi Chouikha	M	64	CNLT, member	-----
64.	Fadhel Beldi	M	-----	MTI-Ennahda, co-founder	-----
65.	Wassim R.*	M	76	Central committee RCD, member; Tunisian ambassador in France 2003-2005	-----
66.	Salah Taggaz	M	60	MTI students, leaders Ennahda, Youth leaders	Ennahda, member
67.	Adel L.*	M	60	Ennahda, leader	Ennahda, leader
68.	Mhmed P.*	M	62	Ennahda, member; UOIF, member	-----
69.	Ahmed Ben Amor	M	63	Ennahda, head France (1992-1994); UOIF, member	Ennahda, member
70.	Hassine F.*	M	-----	RCD member; Consul Toulouse ; Head <i>Espace Femmes et Enfants</i>	-----
71.	Olfa Lamloum	F	51	CRLDHT, CSLCPT, <i>Ecole pour toutes</i>	-----
72.	Aicha Dhaouadi	F	56	Ennahda, member	Ennahda, member; MP Bizerte
73.	Adel Thabet	M	-----	PCOT, spokesperson in France	Front Populaire France, member



## Appendix 2: List of main organisations studied

### Political parties

- *Congrès pour la République* (Congress for the Republic)
- *Mouvement d'Unité Populaire* (Movement of Popular Unity)
- *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (Movement of the Islamic Tendency) - *Ennahda*
- *Nidaa Tounes* (Call for Tunisia)
- *Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie* (Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia)
- *Parti Communiste Tunisien* (Tunisian Communist Party)
- *Parti Démocrate Progressiste* (Progressive Democratic Party)
- *Parti Socialiste Destourien* (Destourian Socialist Party)
- *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Constitutional Democratic Rally)

### Official institutions & organisations close to the Tunisian regime

- *Association des Mères* (Association of Mothers)
- *Néapolis*
- *Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger* (Office of Tunisians abroad)
- *Rassemblement des Etudiants Tunisiens à Paris* (Rally of Tunisian students in Paris)
- *Rassemblement des Tunisiens de France* (Rally of Tunisians in France)

### Islamist associations & organisations

- *Groupement Islamique en France* (Islamic group in France)
- *Solidarité tunisienne* (Tunisian Solidarity)
- *Tawasol* (Connection)
- *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (Union of Islamic Organisations of France)
- *Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants en France* (Tunisian General Union of Students in France)

### Leftist associations & organisations

- *Association Démocratique des Tunisiens en France* (Democratic Association of Tunisians in France)
- *Association des Etudiants Musulmans Nord-Africains* (Association of North African Muslim Students)
- *Association des Tunisiens en France* (Association of Tunisians in France)
- *GEAST – Perspectives*
- *Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens* (General Union of Tunisian Students)
- *Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens* (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers) - *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté entre les deux rives* (Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship between two Shores)

### Joint platforms

#### ➤ *Pre-2011*

- *Démocratie Maintenant* (Democracy Now)
- *Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie* (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia)
- *Parisian Collectif of the 18 October Movement*

#### ➤ *Post-2011*

- *Coordination des Assises de l'Immigration Tunisienne* (Coordination of the Conference of Tunisian Immigration)
- *Dynamique citoyenne des Tunisiens à l'Etranger* (Citizen Dynamic of Tunisians abroad)

### Post-2011 associations and parties

- *Union pour la Tunisie* (Union for Tunisia)
- *Jeunes Tunisiens de France* (Young Tunisians of France)
- *Bureau des jeunes, Association des Tunisiens pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (Association of Tunisians for Democracy and Development)

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