

## A controversial national history

### Is Tunisian cultural policy at a turning point?

For decades, Tunisia has primarily highlighted its location 'at the heart of the Mediterranean'. It is the image that it has proudly exhibited nationally and internationally owing to its location at the crossroads of various Western, Eastern and African civilizations whose influence it has assimilated the point of proudly boasting a 'glorious national history' dating back three millennia at least. In view of the 'revolutionary' changes that the country is experiencing since the events of 14 January 2011 and the strong emergence of a divergent mass ideology from the one which had prevailed during the last 50 years, it is worth wondering whether this old self-conception, namely the historical image of self, will be maintained or will be subject to fundamental questioning. This is one of the major interrogations that Tunisia is now facing after the Bourguiba era and his mediocre successor Ben Ali.

The elections of 23 October 2011 for a Constituent Assembly gave around 40% of the votes to the Islamist party, Ennahdha, and supremacy at both the (provisional) government and the afore-mentioned Assembly mainly in charge of providing the country with a new constitution. It is therefore likely that Tunisia's affiliation to Islam and Arab identity be a lot more emphasized than it was the case under the former regime. One of the consequences would be, as I was saying, the questioning of that historical image in favor of the Arab-Islamic past dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century (the 1<sup>st</sup> of Hegira). The three thousand years which had until now been so proudly invoked, would be simply reduced to the fourteen centuries since the "*fath*", the "holy" conquest of Tunisia and the rest of the Maghreb in the name of Islam and the message that it conveys in Arabic. All that preceded dating back to one thousand years before Christ giving evidence to the presence of Numidians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals and Byzantines, would be overlooked or marginalized as if it were a kind of "*jahiliya*".

The ensuing debate would necessarily echo, in a direct or indirect way, the one that had created much passion at independence time, around 1955. What may explain the general consensus of the time, on the constitutional status of the national State specifically established with Muslim religion and Arabic language is first the rootedness of the country and its majority population in the Arab-Muslim tradition, but also the memory of the recent trauma caused by the colonial occupation which had just been painfully shaken away and

which had by no means been respectful towards that tradition. The memory of the too Catholic Cardinal Lavignerie was still too fresh. In reference to the time of the North African Fathers of the Church<sup>1</sup> and to Saint Louis Crusades<sup>2</sup>, Lavignerie's statue, provocatively erected across the Cathedral at the heart of Tunis, reminded of the consistent attempt to "re-Christianize" North Africa.

The fact that the statue was soon dismantled and replaced by the Arab-Muslim major scholar's, Abderrahman Ibn Khaldun, is quite revealing at many levels of the orientation taken by the young Tunisian State in terms of cultural policy under the effective leadership of that who will be its first President until November 1987, Habib Bourguiba. Instead of the fervent clergyman, the figure of new statue was emblematic of the Arab-Muslim cultural and scientific heritage which is nowadays commonly referred to as "modern". Abderrahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), whose birth and childhood testify, in addition, to a biographical connection with Tunis and whose biography, work and action include almost the entire Mediterranean basin, from Andalusian Spain to Syria and Palestine<sup>3</sup>, is also known as a prominent and worthy representative of a non-theological cultural and scientific Arab-Muslim tradition with a reputation of enlightenment, rational innovation and universal openness. According to one of his specialist critics, Ibn Khaldun is the founder of a true "[historiographic] methodology concerned with capturing facts beyond their level of appearance, to grasp them rationally from inside linking them to antecedents and consequents"<sup>4</sup>. Two centuries earlier, the Austrian Orientalist Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall, had referred to him as the "Arab Montesquieu"<sup>5</sup>.

The choice of this "modernist" Arab-Muslim character to replace the religious symbol of colonialist domination is indicative of the cultural policy that Bourguiba designed and implemented<sup>6</sup> as a foundation for the new Tunisian State. Without challenging its Arab-Muslim vocation and oriental ties, he ensured that the state is actively open unto "the modern world", i.e. mainly the West and its civilization. There certainly was a pragmatic agenda if we take account of both the level of widespread under-development in which the North African State was, following independence, and the international situation with the Cold War in the background. With this explicitly-stated sovereign choice of siding with the West, considered more 'free', more prosperous and more technologically advanced, and of promoting tourism as a strategy of development economic policy, openness was in fact a

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<sup>1</sup>Including Saint-Augustine in particular, who witnessed the arrival of the Vandals at the land of Carthage in the 5th century.

<sup>2</sup>He died in his military camp, near Tunis, in 1270. In a letter of 14 July 1830 from Polignac, French Consul in Tunis, Matthieu de Lesseps (father of Ferdinand de Lesseps) ordered to claim land from the Bey to build a chapel in memory of Saint-Louis. The small monument on the heights of Carthage, Lavignerie later turned into a sort of cathedral, nowadays occasionally used as a cultural venue.

<sup>3</sup>See Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sur les pas d'Ibn Khaldûn*. Tunis 2006.

<sup>4</sup>Abdelwahab Bouhdiba in : *Ibn Khaldûn aux sources de la modernité*. Proceedings of the international symposium held at the 6th centennial of his death (13-18 March 2006). Carthage (Beit al Hikma) 2008, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>See Annemarie Schimmel, *Ibn Chaldun*. In : *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, 19/1969, H. 2, pp. 113-117.

<sup>6</sup>Whose predilection for Ibn Khaldun is extensively revealed in his speeches filled with historicizing digressions where he enjoyed quoting him whenever relevant.

pre-requisite; it means that readiness and ability to communicate comprehensively and uninhibitedly with the West and its culture, is in combination with Arab-Muslim belonging and identity. Needless to say that this agenda that Bourguiba had called for from the beginning, did not receive everyone's consent; it is demonstrated by the schismatic conflict openly started end 1955 between Bourguiba and his rival Salah Ben Youssef, dividing the society into two opposing camps. Unlike Bourguiba, Ben Youssef called for taking a distance from colonialist West and for the unconditional affiliation of independent Tunisia to the Arab-Muslim world. The conflict, which ended with the assassination of Ben Youssef in 1961 and a strong repression of his followers, is currently very topical in current debates which, since 14 January 2011, reflect the concerns of society and parties.

A "modern" State, imperatively secular, requires a society with a "modern", intercultural, open culture. This is certainly the rationale and conclusion that Bourguiba must have drawn while performing the task of making the decolonized but "underdeveloped" Tunisia such a State. This was also his argument when defending himself against frequent criticism for choosing bilingualism and for granting French, the language of the abhorred colonizer, "an almost equal status to our mother tongue, as the language of culture, work and meetings".<sup>7</sup> From the top of the podium at the University of Montreal on 11 May 1968, Bourguiba explained that it is only by "controlling a language like French", and "without denying anything in its past, including Arabic as its language" can Tunisia "fully take part in modern life and culture."<sup>8</sup> Bilingualism was politically dedicated to opening the way for multiculturalism and ensuring its consolidation.

Bourguiba often substituted "bilingualism" by "bi-culturalism".<sup>9</sup> He believed that Tunisia had already headed towards openness to foreign languages and western cultures even before the beginning of the Protectorate (in 1881). This was in reference to Khayreddine, Tunisian statesman and reforming minister rightly regarded as the main precursor of the modernist movement in the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We largely owe him the milestones he had grounded since the 1870's<sup>10</sup>, making possible the emergence of a politically and intellectually enlightened class of Tunisians, open to the outside world. According to Bourguiba, resorting to western languages and endorsing western civilization was then neither servile mimicry nor postcolonial submission to a dominating foreign culture, but rather a voluntary adherence to an adopted and enforced "national" policy. He argued that it was necessary to return imperatively to this former policy of openness, now dictated by the initial difficulties of the State after release from colonial rule, in order to leave all forms of crippling under-development behind.

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<sup>7</sup>H. Bourguiba, Speech of 11 May 1968 at the University of Montreal (see : <http://ressources-cla.univ-fcomte.fr>)

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Especially with the creation of *Collège Sadiqi*, in 1875, where Habib Bourguiba and many of his comrades went to school

This approach reflects the ideals rooted in Bourguiba's vision and his political conception marked by realism. These ideals center on guiding conceptions, recurrently repeated in his early speeches in the new Republic: "Openness unto the modern world", "encounters" and "dialogue (with others)" instead of "insularity", withdrawal and confinement "to the sources of a single culture".<sup>11</sup> As early as 1956, principles and objectives are clearly stated :

«With its Arab-Muslim tradition, Tunisia shall not live in isolation and become a closed society. That perspective is not in line with our deep desire to keep pace with modern life. The path consists in keeping the windows open to western culture, in order to have a grip on reality. Hence, our country will remain loyal to its past while securing the tools for its future".<sup>12</sup>

Robert Ilbert, specialist in the history of the Mediterranean, has successfully grasped the meaning: "Through assertion in a national discourse, Bourguiba's vision placed the renewal process of the future in the use of history with the aim of achieving a cultural synthesis".<sup>13</sup>

In this vision of a modern Tunisia, it is necessary to have the right kind of citizen to support such a project, one with a mentality knowingly "Tunisian", or "bourguiba-tunisian", if one may say, to be more accurate. In the speech on 11 May 1968 at the University of Montreal, Bourguiba referred to it as a personal, already achieved goal: "We are also aware that we have succeeded in creating a Tunisian mentality which is a modern one". It would first need to free itself from the limited use of "the sources of a single culture". In this sense, what seems clear is the flat rejection of the one-dimensional and exclusive reference to the Arab-Muslim culture which would impede openness to other cultures. Instead he advocated a "Tunisian" pathway; which, at the time, probably favored the genesis of the notion of "tunisianness".<sup>14</sup> Arab and Muslim dimensions in the national identification have certainly remained dominant, but Tunisian character and frame of thought, in the bourguibian concept, have to derive from an awareness of being "Tunisian". The argument would not be only geographical, determined by the north-African location, eminently Mediterranean, facing Europe, but mainly historical, in rootedness in a three-millennium-old past. Hence Tunisian history would not be limited to the fourteen centuries of Arab-Muslim presence and tradition. Its roots date back to a much earlier time, to at least two thousand years before the "*fath*", as it is customary in Islamic lands to describe the "holy and salutary" conquest of North Africa in the 7<sup>th</sup> century by Arab troops in the name and on behalf of Islam. In consequence, according to the bourguibian discourse, history would undeniably vehicle the stamp of other peoples and cultures who also took part in shaping the national tradition and designing the "Tunisian" heritage.

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<sup>11</sup>Bourguiba, Speech of May 1968 at the University of Montreal.

<sup>12</sup> Bourguiba, Speech. In "*Action Tunisienne*" of 17 December 1956. See Driss Abbassi, *Entre Bourguiba et Hannibal. Identité tunisienne et histoire depuis l'indépendance*. Paris 2005, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Ilbert, Preface of: Driss Abbassi, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup>An internet search reveals that it is again in use, and in controversial contexts. See for ex. „*La Tunisianité, marque déposée, ne sera jamais déposée* », in: <http://arfaouitarak.wordpress.com>

This is undoubtedly the rationale on which Bourguiba founded the reform aimed at drawing the frame of thinking of targeted standard Tunisians away from a limited, self-sufficient vision, limited to the dimensions of a “single culture” to a broadened horizon, to openness to the modern world and to principled disposition to dialogue with others of different culture and religion.

Obviously, it was also important that the cultural, educational and cultural policy of the young “bourguibian” State be in tune with this directive. When creating a Ministry of Culture<sup>15</sup>, President Bourguiba entrusted it mainly with the task and mission “of enhancing our long-ignored heritage, so that it becomes part of the contemporary national life, and to provide the Tunisian people with a clearer awareness of their past”; and of determining that past and specifying its extent, as he added (in the same speech of 7 November 1962): “It is unfortunate that the vast majority of Tunisians are unaware that it is the culmination of a progression which dates back several millennia”.<sup>16</sup> The framework of Tunisian history and national cultural heritage are given their true dimension, which is not limited to the Arab-Islamic era. Apart from the “*fath*” heroes, of the venerable conquest carried out in the name of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, other figures, of prior periods, until then ignored or repressed from collective memory, re-emerged and gained recognition. It was not a coincidence if Bourguiba at the time enjoyed stating his affiliation to “Jugurtha, the successful”.<sup>17</sup> His spectacular “pilgrimage” to Hannibal mausoleum in Turkey and his attempt to repatriate the remains of the great Carthaginian General was ostensibly part of this same process of

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<sup>15</sup>It was created in 1961 as « Ministry of State for Cultural Affairs and Information» then was turned into « Ministry of State for Cultural Affairs » in 1969, and « Ministry of Culture and Protection of Cultural Heritage » in November 2004.

<sup>16</sup>Bourguiba, Speech of 7 - 12 - 1962. In this speech, Bourguiba states: “The history of Tunisia, from Carthage to the present, has such wealth that it is not easy to determine its contours in a few sessions. The various periods of our history should be the object of distinct works and advanced and objective studies. Although basic, such works would be of great benefit to professionals and youth. We would like our glorious past to arouse the enthusiasm of our young historians”. Further, he regrets that “while some young peoples do their best to collect and preserve elements of unequal value from a relatively poor past, we do little for our country whose history, which foreigners know better than ourselves, dates back to more than 3,000 years. Our glory is taught at European universities. Ibn Khaldun’s theories on sociology, Hannibal’s strategy at the battle of Cannes are continuously studied and discussed outside Tunisia”. In a speech of 15 August 1970, Bourguiba again evokes the importance of studying history stating: “we need not only to undertake studies of the period from 1864 to the present but also go back in time to Jugurtha’s. Such an effort is likely to cement the nation and to further reinforce the national unity that owed Tunisia its respect as a country”.

<sup>17</sup>See Camille Bégue, *Le message de Bourguiba*. Paris 1972, p. 8. The author highlights a “radical” difference between the two men; between Jugurtha, the clever and ruthless warrior, and Bourguiba, the “political artist” and “master of negotiation”. The comparison allows deducing that Bourguiba perceived both the Roman period and the French colonization as foreign occupation, fought by the indigenous population. In the above-mentioned speech of 7-12-1962, he adds that: “It is true that throughout its history, Tunisia experienced many conquests. It only integrated its conquerors once; when Arabs have occupied it, bringing over a religion which grants the same rights to all believers. Before that, and for centuries, Rome had subjected the people to its rule but failed in assimilating it. But armed with a faith founded on equality, Arabs were successful in a relatively short period of time”. In assessing the Roman era, Bourguiba was probably also influenced by the colonial impulse of Italy towards Tunisia since 1870 and more so under Mussolini (who, as we know, had attempted in vain, with Hitler in 1942/43 to use Bourguiba to mobilize the people against the Allies in Tunisia), on the basis of centuries when the country was a Roman province.

cultural reform and “re-education”, aiming at broadening perceptions and raising national awareness.<sup>18</sup>

From that time on, although non-Muslims, these historical figures became “national heroes” like other iconic figures including Queen Elyssa / Dido, the legendary founder of Carthage, or Sophonisbe or even Kahena, the Berber princess who ruthlessly fought Muslim invaders from Arabia.

This approach was also concerned with national unity and with building and implementing a compact and unified “Tunisian nation” around a common national project. Evoking memories of a common “glorious Tunisian history” rooted in a past which used to be little or badly known should address issues of disparity and dislocation that the society had faced for a long time, and issues of tribal, regional, cultural... divisions with the aim of establishing and strengthening a socially unifying “collective memory”.<sup>19</sup>

Identifying Tunisia to its three-millennium-long history and going beyond the traditional Arab-Muslim time frame, as a consequence of Bourguiba’s “cultural revolution”, had progressively consolidated to the point of freezing as a hackneyed cliché then was finally firmly established in national conscience.

Obviously, constant reminiscing of an “extended” Tunisian history and “rehabilitation” of pre-Islamic Tunisia, prompted national interest for traces and remnants which testify to the presence of such a past and which are scattered throughout the country. Much interest was indeed generated and received considerable support from the authorities. Until then, only foreigners and European travelers at first manifested such interest in ancient monuments, of Punic, Roman or Byzantine origin, regarded as the only attraction of the country<sup>20</sup>, and helped themselves freely in the visited archeological sites, with whatever was easy to carry away. So did the colonial authorities afterwards.<sup>21</sup> Whether out of religious superstition or ignorance, the indigenous population did not see more value in such relics of pagan ancestors than in using them as out of a quarry. The fact that the Bardo Museum Foundation was a Tunisian initiative was quite an unusual exception. As reported by the German Orientalist traveler Heinrich von Maltzan, Mohammed Khaznadar son of Prime Minister

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<sup>18</sup> “Since independence, as early as 1956 and throughout the 60’s, Tunisia started a process of establishing a nation-state according to the western model. By asserting a national discourse, the bourguibian vision placed future rebirth in a process of resorting to history with the aim of achieving a cultural synthesis”. Driss Abbassi, *Entre Bourguiba et Hannibal*, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>About the “bourguibian national project”, Laurence Pierrepont-de Cock writes: “The issue of nation is a major political question in the history of decolonization and post-colonialism which joins that of self-identification”. L. P.-d.C., *Projet national bourguibien et réalités tunisiennes*. In : M. Camau/ V. Geisser, *H. Bourguiba. La trace et l’héritage*. Paris 2004, pp. 29.

<sup>20</sup>It is worth noting that archeological richness in Tunisia had harmed the image that former European travelers in earlier centuries had, when comparing the state of decay in which the country appeared to them, to ancient prosperity suggested by the monuments. The transition from prosperity to decline generally occurred with the arrival of Arabs and Islam. This explains why it was denigrated as the main cause of decline in North Africa. See M. Fendri, *Kulturmensch in ‘barbarischer’ Fremde. Deutsche Reisende im Tunesien des 19. Jh.* München 1996.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. C. Gutron, *L’archéologie en Tunisie (XIXe-XXe siècles)*. Paris/Tunis 2010.

Mustapha Khaznadar started as early as around 1860 to set up a private museum of antiquities in their Manouba palace.<sup>22</sup> It was probably the core of the Alaouite Museum officially set up in 1882 and publicly opened in 1888 to become the National Bardo Museum after independence.

In 1957, INAA was created (National Institute of Archeology and Arts) with the main task of organizing and promoting archeological and historical research, of safeguarding and enhancing the national museographic heritage; of performing the inventory, study conservation and development of popular arts and traditions.<sup>23</sup> Besides, the Institute was entrusted with the task of pursuing “a popular educational task which consists in making the historical and archeological heritage available to the largest possible audience tours, conferences, brochures, catalogs, photographs or casts”.<sup>24</sup> The announced ideological objective was conveyed by the formula: “promotion of national culture and wide openness on universal culture”.<sup>25</sup> Museums gained a prominent role. According to a semi-official report in 1969 on the cultural policy of Bourguiba’s government, museums “were intended to serve as a major instrument of collective culture” with the main role “of saving works from the past, but also of being centers of visual information to the people so that they know and like their past, the foundation of their progress and their thrust, likely to support the process of the new construction.”<sup>26</sup>

Soon after independence, a large activity of archeological digs and exploration was carried out in a new framework. It was in line with the new national cultural policy of enhancing the historical heritage and enlarging the cultural horizon and the individual perception of identity. In addition to the ideological motive, economic interest loomed large. Tourism was indeed promoted to that end and appeared since the early 1960’s as main sector for job creation and foreign currency influx. The ancient archeological heritage, notably from Roman period, gained the value of a quality touristic product, carefully offered to foreign visitors supplying hard currency. In 1970, Camille Bégué notes: “Tunisia is tuning to archeology. Trowels in the hands of skilful and jealous restorers replace the demolishing picks in sites and ancient cities. Since ancient Rome is all over the country, its remains are everywhere highlighted with such care and taste that many European countries wished to own the secret.”<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, under Bourguiba’s successor, President Ben Ali, in power since November 1987 (until his fall on 14 January 2011), the policy of “openness” and “intercultural dialogue” was maintained and pursued. It was used to serve the propaganda of what was referred to as the era of “change”; it was excessively exalted and more and more brazenly extolled as a merit of

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<sup>22</sup>In his travel relation, Maltzan tells that in 1868 he had returned to Tunis with the purpose of seeing Khaznadar’s collection of Punic steles in his Manouba palace. His request was granted after repeated attempts. See H. v. Maltzan, *Reise in den Regentschaften Tunis und Tripolis*. Leipzig 1870.

<sup>23</sup>Rafik Saïd, *Tunisie, terre de Culture*. UNESCO, 1970. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000011/001172fo.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>C. Bégué, op.cit., p. 148.

the “new regime”.<sup>28</sup> It was again, in the terms of Ben Ali’s electoral program in 2004, a question of “reinforcing national identity, enhancing the universal dialogue between civilizations and promoting the values of openness, tolerance and solidarity”.<sup>29</sup> According to the same discourse, the choice of such a cultural policy “derives from the awareness of the important role that, throughout its glorious history, Tunisia has played in enriching human civilization”.<sup>30</sup> It also reflects the share of Tunisia in spreading universal values and principles. The same summary of Ben Ali’s cultural policy highlights Tunisia’s role in promoting the culture of dialogue and tolerance and strengthening the spirit of cooperation and solidarity between peoples”.<sup>31</sup>

In reinforcing ties of partnership and association with the European Union<sup>32</sup> and with the growing need to polish the image of the regime, the propaganda-driven discourse highlighting openness gained magnitude.<sup>33</sup> Drawings (or plagiarism) were consistently made from Bourguiba’s repertoire, for instance to extol “diversity” as a specific feature of Tunisian cultural identity and therefore a mark of readiness for intercultural dialogue”.<sup>34</sup> Enthusiasm was cultivated for all that recalls Carthage and its prestige as an instrument of propaganda for the regime and an attractive emblem for Tunisia. The consequences of such abusive practice, namely a transition from sublime to ridicule, did not fail: It is not surprising to still see in Tunis and elsewhere, shops of all kinds, including sordid cheap restaurants, flaunting the name of Hannibal. However, and with growing dissatisfaction towards Ben Ali and his corrupt regime all messages and slogans issued by his system of propaganda lost credibility.

In any case, Bourguiba’s spiritual legacy, based on conciliation between East and West, cultural openness and dialogue remained vivid and effective and kept marking generations in postcolonial Tunisia. Now however, a major change seems to be taking place with the massive return on the political scene of forces which had either from the beginning or at a later stage opposed Bourguiba’s ideology and its application as a cultural policy. Object of fierce repression, these forces had so far either remained silent or had been active in the underground opposition; or, so does the overwhelming electoral success of *Ennahdha* movement (now political party) at the Government and constituent Assembly lead to suppose. The movement/party is headed by leaders who continue to perceive themselves as “victims of Bourguiba’s war against Islam and Arab identity”. It is in these terms that Rached Ghannouchi, one of the founders of *Ennahdha* and its present political leader, expressed himself in a (past) interview.<sup>35</sup> He explained that “Bourguiba’s victory over French occupation” was actually for

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<sup>28</sup>See : *Commission Nationale Tunisienne pour l’Education, la Science et la Culture: Diversité culturelle et dialogue interculturel en Tunisie*. UNESCO 2009.

(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002146/214646f.pdf> )

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>An Association agreement between the European Union and Tunisia was signed in 1995.

<sup>33</sup>To that end, ATCE, (the Tunisian External Communication Agency) was created in 1992.

<sup>34</sup>„*Diversité culturelle*“ (cf. No. 27)

<sup>35</sup>R. Ghannouchi, *Islam, nationalisme et islamisme. Entretien avec François Burgat*. In : *Egypte/Monde arabe*, no 10/1992, pp. 109-122. <http://ema.revues.org/index1420.html>

him and his followers, “his victory against Arab-Muslim civilization in Tunisia”.<sup>36</sup> According to Ghannouchi, until that “victory”, he and his generation “served as bastions of Arab/Islamic thought”, while under Bourguiba the “country was westernized : the administration, culture, the university, education, the arts, humanities..., everything was westernized”.<sup>37</sup> To the people of his generation, who, like himself, “were raised in the Arab-Muslim culture”, who were educated at “Zitouna and other traditional institutions”, “Tunisia’s westernization process” was experienced as “inflicted violence”.<sup>38</sup> In his testimony, “his generation had been repressed and have suffered trauma”.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever pragmatic maturing M. Ghanouchi’s political thought may have undergone in the meantime, it is unlikely for the “trauma” to have disappeared without a trace excluding any impact or influence on the movement and the present majority party. Apart from any personal or individual consideration, it is an issue of principle closely related in this case to religion and faith. To Ghanouchi and his fellow party members, old and new, the country and society they now control is essentially rooted in Islam, fundamentally attached to Arab culture and have been so for fourteen centuries. And the project of Bourguiba to divert it however partially would be detrimental to the “original” vocation of the country and its “true values”. Such a project is to be necessarily invalidated. Such a view may not possibly remain at the opinion level when one has the power. Therein lie all the fears and concerns of the opposite camp, namely all the Tunisian men and women who, regardless of resentments towards the failures of the Bourguiba government and its negative effect, have directly or indirectly grown in the spirit of openness onto the world and multiple cultures. In case of a renewal of Islamist electoral success, there will only be hope that the leaders will use political maturity and realism to curb grassroots passion and their longing for outright eradication of the cultural heritage of the Bourguiba era indiscriminately denounced as “pro-western”. Some are already calling for the “islamization of Tunisian culture”!

To return to the effect of Bourguiba’s project to “rehabilitate” the times preceding the Arab-Muslim era, it is worth noting the extent of its impact on the reality of the country until the turning point of 14 January 2011 through the example of the car ferry ordered by the national navigation company in October 2010, received at the Port of Tunis-La Goulette in June 2012, and baptized *Tanit*, after the goddess of Carthage. One of its predecessors was named Carthage and others of the same company were registered as *Amilcar*, *Elyssa*, *Salambo* or *Ulysses*. Now, given the developments in the country since mid-January 2011, one may wonder whether this propensity for Punic and Greek-Roman antiquity is likely to continue in Tunisia or if we should expect the name of the national football team for example to change from “the Eagles of Carthage” to, let’s say, “the Hawks of Kairouan”?

Translation: Lamine Khediri

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.