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Discipline and reform – I

In Tunisia as elsewhere, an analysis of the ‘authoritarian regime’ that rested content with explanations in terms of violence and coercion, of populist demagoguery and manipulation, of bad faith, ignorance and illusion, of corruption and opportunism, of delusory discourse and oversimplistic pragmatism, or even of discipline and normalisation, would be insufficient to grasp the dynamics of the exercise of power. Such an analysis would evade the question of the full and often active participation of internal actors and the massive support of foreign and international actors who express, in financial and diplomatic terms, their satisfaction with the receptivity of the Tunisian authorities to the ‘necessary reforms’. It’s why I would like to turn more specifically to the attraction of political movements, i.e. to the myths, beliefs, passions, ideals and forms of behaviour, the aspirations and projects that form an integral and significant part of the exercise of power¹.

This perspective allows us, I believe, to advance in the understanding of the Tunisian paradox that could be formulated in these terms: the practices and modes of government that are most often akin to training and control are largely accepted. Indeed, they are generally appreciated as a ‘success’ by donors, by foreign partners, and by Tunisian leaders, of course, but also to a great extent by the opposition and by the vast majority of the population. The economic model is a success, political voluntarism is a success, social policies are a success, the fight against extremism is a success... My hypothesis is that this positive vision has largely

¹ E. Gentile, *Qu’est-ce que le fascisme?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005) whose views I have here summarized.

emerged from the problematisation of the exercise of power in the terms of reformism². I would like to grasp, in all its complexity, what has gradually appeared to me as one of the most clearly structuring factors of ‘voluntary servitude’ and the ‘good’ Tunisian government.

Reformism must here be considered in the meaning specific to the Muslim world, and not the way it is generally interpreted as a political form opposed to revolution. This intellectual and political movement, born in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire, was an attempt to respond to the challenges laid down by the European powers by adopting a whole series of reforms: political, juridical, military, educational and administrative. Throughout the 20th century, this theme of reformism was reformulated, notably in Tunisia, where it became the expression of ‘good’ government: to be a reformist meant governing with moderation, being sensitive to openness to the international world while preserving national achievements and specific characteristics; it meant to enhance reform as a way of being and behaving.

Far be it from me to venture yet again into the abstract debate over the relation between economic reforms and the nature of the political regime – a debate whose inanity Max Weber had already brilliantly demonstrated, in particular in his writings on Russia³ – nor, as far its application to Tunisia is concerned, over the relation between liberal reforms and authoritarianism⁴. My analysis tackles the exercise of power in Tunisia on the basis of a historical understanding of the idea of reform, taking the latter very widely, i.e. less in technical terms than in terms of people’s thoughts and way of life, in other words their ethos. With this in mind, I will set out from what is currently accepted by all specialists on Tunisia and the

² This questioning in terms of ‘problematisation’ is drawn from the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his *History of Sexuality*, tr. by Robert Hurley, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (London: Viking, 1986), especially ch. I, introduction (pp. 14-24). See also M. Foucault, ‘Polémique, politique et problématisations’, in *Dits et écrits 4, 1980-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 591-598.

³ Anyone who has read Max Weber’s various political essays cannot fail to be astonished at the permanence of these debates, over a century after his brilliant analysis of the plasticity of social forms, on the importance of contingency, and on the exceptional nature of the experience of Enlightenment Europe, etc. See M. Weber, *Political Writings*, ed. by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴ S. Waltz emphasises the incompatibility of liberal reforms and authoritarianism, the ‘exit option’ on the part of economic actors being the only possible solution for getting round the latter: see S. Waltz, ‘Clientelism and reform in Ben Ali’s Tunisia’, in W.-I. Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia: the Political Economy of Reform* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 29-44, and J.-P. Cassarino, *Tunisian New Entrepreneurs and their Past Experiences of Migration in Europe: Resource Mobilisation, Networks, and Hidden Disaffection* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2000). On the other hand, E. Bellin maintains that ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ favour authoritarianism, see E. Bellin, ‘Tunisian industrialists and the State’, in W.-I. Zartman, *Tunisia*, op. cit., pp. 45-65, and *Stalled Democracy Capital, Labor and the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2002). C.M. Henry shows that economic opening and international pressure ought to oblige those in power to extend their basis of legitimacy to nourish a new social contract which, sooner or later, should entail a democratisation or at least an opening up of the regime, C.M. Henry, *The Mediterranean Debt Crescent. Money and Power in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996). Likewise L. Anderson, ‘Politics pacts, liberalism and democracy: the Tunisian national pact of 1988’, *Government & Opposition*, vol. 26, no. 2, Spring 1991, pp. 244-260 and ‘The prospects for democracy in the Arab world’, *Middle Eastern Lectures*, no. 1, 1995, pp. 59-71, sees in the National Pact a step – a fragile one, admittedly – towards pluralism. Conversely, E. Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisi. From Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (New York; London: St Martin’s Press, 1999); MacMillan Press, 1999, shows that the economic reforms have tended to reinforce the single party and authoritarianism.

Ottoman Empire: the authoritarian character of the reforms, in the 19th century as well as today; what (following or in parallel with the theoretical work of Barrington Moore on authoritarianism as a conservative modernisation) Aziz Krichen and Michel Camau have called ‘authoritarian reformism’, Clifford Geertz and Abdelbaki Hermassi ‘authoritarian liberalism’, and Clement Henry Moore a ‘modern administrative dictatorship’⁵. My aim is to grasp reformism in all its historical depth, in other words to grasp it in its system of belief, so as to understand the proportion of support and positive values that it transmits, even when the practices related to it are restrictive and sometimes violent. I would therefore like to question the idea that ‘reformism is a good thing, that goes without saying’⁶, submitting to critical investigation not the idea that reformism is a good (or bad) thing, but the idea that ‘it goes without saying’, by trying to show how it has been constructed, from what it emerges, and how it perpetuates itself. As Jean Leca reminds us: ‘Unfortunately, when a word is used to convey the ideas of self-evidence, self-explanation, historical or natural (or supernatural) necessity and universal goodness, reason (and in particular social-scientific reason) is in trouble.’⁷.

This issue of *Société Politique comparée* will focus on reformism as expression of the ‘correct training’ (in the foucauldian meaning). The next issue will focus on concrete economic reforms and their political meaning.

REFORMISM: THE ‘CORRECT TRAINING’

Reformism immediately appears as the backbone of current official discourse⁸. There is not a speech, not a press article or a lecture in which the attachment of ‘Ben Ali’s Tunisia’ to

⁵ B. Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord And Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); A. Krichen, ‘La fracture de l’intelligentsia. Problèmes de la langue et de la culture nationales’, in M. Camau (ed.), *Tunisie au présent. Une modernité au-dessus de tout soupçon?* (Paris: CNRS, 1987), pp. 297-341; M. Camau, ‘Le Maghreb’, in M. Flory, R. Mantran, B. Korany, M. Camau et P. Agate, *Les Régimes politiques arabes* (Paris: PUF, 1990) and ‘Tunisie au présent’, in M. Camau (ed.), *Tunisie au présent*, op. cit., pp. 9-35; C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); A. Hermassi, ‘Socio-economic change and political implications: the Maghreb’, in G. Salamé (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (New York; London: Tauris, 1994), pp. 227-242; and C.H. Moore, *Politics in North Africa* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970), p. 108.

⁶ During my interviews, this was a judgment often expressed to me, in this form or in other, less explicit, ways, but all based on the same sense of certainty.

⁷ J. Leca, ‘Democratization in the Arab world. Uncertainty, vulnerability and legitimacy’, in G. Salamé (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats?*, op. cit., p. 53. Jean Leca carries on: ‘Such is the case when a concept (however vague and sometimes because it is vague) is taken for granted and is considered as expressing a conventional wisdom which it would be indecent to question’.

⁸ To convince oneself of this, one need merely read the speeches of President Ben Ali, or simply the press. The National Pact refers explicitly to the reformers: ‘The National Pact has lately appealed to our thinkers to follow the examples of the Renaissance and the Reformation who had managed to create a solid platform on which to base progress and social ascent and to build a civilised and advanced society, and to make their voices heard in support of the promotion of women’, speech of 15 August 1989.

reforms is not mentioned⁹. But reformism is not merely a discourse. More profoundly, it needs to be understood as a mode of the exercise of power insofar as, beyond the rhetoric, the government of Tunisia insists on showing itself, on being, and on being thought of, as reformist. The economic or social actors are for or against the reforms depending on whether they are more or less 'enlightened'; politicians always pose as reformists, criticising the 'fake' reformism of the others; exterior constraints are measured by the reforms, whether they hamper them, as often, or whether they speed them up, as sometimes happens. The reforms are sometimes difficult and painful, but they are always 'beneficial'. It is easy to see that integration into the public sphere necessarily passes through the reformist prism. If you ask Tunisians what is specific about Tunisia, the reply is unanimous: the 'reformist tradition'. During my nine years of research, I have never heard a single actor, a single intellectual, a single observer, or a single opponent who failed to cite this Tunisian 'virtue' to me; not a single person has ever questioned reformism, criticised it or even subjected it to a detached investigation. This unanimity, this all-too-obvious consensus raised in me first the shadow of a doubt, then a working hypothesis, and finally a thesis: reformism is a myth, a central myth of Tunisian governmentality, its principal *imaginaire*. This does not mean – on the contrary – that it does not constitute an oppressive reality. This latter is admittedly expressed in repeated discourses, but above all in an ethos, in particular ways of thinking and grasping the social and political realms.

Elements of construction of the reformist myth

If we are to believe the official phraseology, reformism is an openness to the West which does not deny Muslim religion and culture; it is the primacy of judicial texts, laws, the Constitution; it is the priority given to order and stability, moderation and the golden mean; it is the expression of a rational exercise of power; it is modernism and integrity.

The current outlines of official reformism

The ruling elites share an essentialist and normative vision of reform and reformism. The latter, moderate by nature, is a process of controlled modernisation, careful to preserve the achievements of the past. It is the assimilation of the contributions of the West, combined with respect for Islam and national sovereignty. It is progress, economic and political advance, social

⁹ On the RCD site, the page devoted to the President bears the title, 'Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, reforming President of an innovative party'.

advantages; it represents the sensible path of adaptation to globalisation; it is an attempt to restore the prestige of the State and respect for the rule of law. It fights against dishonourable behaviour, corruption and laxity¹⁰. Discourse on reform is a closed discourse, in which nothing is discussed and which no external gaze disturbs, in which everyone finds his or her place around God the Father Khayr ed-Din¹¹. The myth of reformism, after all, is indissociable from the myth of the strong man¹²: reformism is elitist, and explicitly presents a dualist vision of society, an uneducated, easily-swayed people living in obscurantism and easily overcome by passion, but enlightened by a rational, cultivated, open and structured elite; and saved by the man of providence. So reformism transmits the myth of the State as in advance of society, the only body that is in a position to give concrete form to the implementation of modern, rational ideas thanks to the impetus given by the strong man¹³.

On all these points, State reformism cannot be separated from Islamic reformism, in its demand for the belief in a golden age and the quest for the purity of lost origins, in its support for the reform of institutions, in an effort at rationalisation that rejects blind fidelity to the elders and the scriptures and, on the other hand, also rejects the servile imitation of the West. Or rather, it cannot be separated from a *certain* Islamic reformism since it is well known how rich the debates were, and how diverse the positions that could be adopted in this regard¹⁴. Historians have brought out the consubstantial character of Islamic reformism and State reformism. They have shown how the two reformisms, often presented as opposite, in reality constituted the two faces of one and the same movement. They had both issued from the same Islamic culture; Muslim reformism did not hesitate to borrow from the West and was also influenced by its relation with the latter. In particular, the return to the supposedly original

¹⁰ This analysis is based on interviews and informal discussions during my nine years of research, but also on the analysis of official speeches, especially those delivered by Ben Ali. For quotations, see B. Hibou, *Surveiller et réformer. Economie politique de la servitude volontaire en Tunisie*, habilitation thesis, IEP, Paris, 7 November 2005, ch. V.

¹¹ Khayr ed-Din, a Mamelouk of Circassian origin, is considered as the great precolonial reformer. As a statesman, he was in particular president of the Financial Commission and then Prime Minister from 1873 to 1877. He also wrote essays, especially *Aqwam-al-masalik fi ma'rifat ahwal-al-mamalik*, published in 1867 – the French translation followed the next year, under the title *Essai sur les réformes nécessaires aux Etats musulmans* (presented and annotated by Magali Morsy, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1987) (*Essay on the Reforms Necessary for the Muslim States*), which had considerable influence during his lifetime, and up to the present day.

¹² M. Camau, 'Le Maghreb', op. cit.; S. Benedict, 'Tunisie, le mirage de l'Etat fort', *Esprit*, March 1997, pp. 27-42.

¹³ M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003); I. Marzouki, 'L'individu au mépris du citoyen', *Bulletin de l'ASLIF*, no. 21, 2005, pp. 169-182 (quotation p. 175). As with many other themes, this is also frequently found in Bourguiba, who stated: 'Only the strength of the State can guarantee the security and well-being of individuals', 1 June 1959, National Constituent Assembly, quoted in M. Camau, 'Leader et leadership en Tunisie', in M. Camau et V. Geisser (eds), *Bourguiba, la trace et l'héritage* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), pp. 169-191.

¹⁴ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse; New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000); B. Thili, *Les Rapports culturels et idéologiques entre l'Orient et l'Occident en Tunisie au XX^e siècle (1830-1880)* (Tunis: Publications de l'Université de Tunis, 1974); C. Kurzman, 'Introduction: the modernist Islamic movement', in C. Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940. A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 3-27.

ideas of Islam is concomitant with a dogmatic and elitist conception of the exercise of power, which El Ayadi summed up very expressively in the following formula: reformism is ‘the ascendancy of dogma over reality’¹⁵.

In parallel with the attempts at modernisation of the bureaucratic apparatus and modes of government, the foundational reformism of the 19th century was forever rethinking its relation with the religious realm and seeking a path for modern Islam. In particular, the ulemas actively contributed to the transformation of the State, at its very heart and not outside it, and participated in the debates on the political and social reconfigurations underway, even if fallback strategies could sometimes exist¹⁶. The discourse of the ‘Change’ falls explicitly within this ‘tradition’ and mentions these religious reference points that were constitutive of Tunisian historical reformism¹⁷. On this point, it also demands a break with Bourguiba, renewing the dialogue, between 1987 and 1989, with the Islamists and, over and above mere words, adopting ostentatiously favourable measures to a certain expression of religiosity¹⁸. However, current reformism is first and foremost linked to one tradition – among others – of reformism, that of Khayr ed-Din and the Sadiki college that he created to educate the bureaucratic elite, to the detriment of that of Thaalbi and the teachings promoted by the Zitouna, the great mosque in Tunis¹⁹.

A reading of the official texts and government propaganda suggests that it is less reforms that are glorified than reformism, the definition of which – restrictive and normative – is provided by the Tunisian authorities. Reforms are understood in relation to their contents; reformism is a way of seeing and understanding. Thus the myth of reformism must not be simply understood as a ‘Tunisified’ version of the general movement of valorisation of reform

¹⁵ M. El Ayadi, ‘Du fondamentalisme de l’Etat et de la Nasiha sultanienne: à propos d’un certain réformisme makhzénien’, *Hespéris-Tamuda*, vol. XXXIX, fasc. 2, 2001, pp. 85-107.

¹⁶ Khayr ed-Din, *Essai sur les réformes*, op. cit.; M. Morsy, ‘Présentation de l’Essai’, in Khayr ed-Din, *Essai sur les réformes*, ibid.; A. Abdesslem, *Les Historiens tunisiens des XVII^e, XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Essai d’histoire culturelle* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1973); M. Talbi and G. Jarczyk, *Penseur libre en Islam* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002). On the post-colonial period, A. Hermassi, ‘Le mouvement islamiste en Tunisie et en Algérie’, in *Les Mouvements sociaux en Tunisie et dans l’immigration* (Tunis: Cahiers du CERES, série Histoire n°6, 1996), pp. 263-296.

¹⁷ National Pact of 1988: ‘The Tunisian State must strengthen this rational orientation which proceeds from *Ijtihad* and endeavour to ensure that *Ijtihad* and rationality have a clear impact on education, religious institutions, and means of information. [...] The Renaissance and Reformation movement in Tunisia is not limited to *Ijtihad* on the level of religion and has not merely advocated modernity, but has also opposed absolute power, and demanded a power that is governed by law’.

¹⁸ Y. Ben Achour, *Politique, religion et droit dans le monde arabe* (Tunis: Cérès-production, 1992), speaks of a ‘burdensome bigotry’; F. Frégosi, ‘Les rapports entre l’islam et l’Etat en Algérie et en Tunisie: de leur revalorisation à leur contestation’, *Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord*, vol. 34, 1995, pp. 103-123, writes that ‘the 7 November marked a clear break in the symbolic order by consecrating the advent of a regime that would pay more attention to traditional religious values’, p. 114; J.-P. Bras, ‘L’islam administré: illustrations tunisiennes’, in M. Kerrou (ed.), *Public et privé en islam* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002) pp. 227-246.

¹⁹ Thaalbi, a Muslim reformer and sheikh, was one of the most active political leaders under colonisation: he was the co-author of *la Tunisie-martyre* (*Tunisia Martyred*), which provided Destour with its programme. He is one of the fathers of Tunisian nationalism. He opposed Bourguiba and, when the split happened, remained faithful to the old Destour and was for that very reason labelled a ‘traditionalist’.

understood as a progressive improvement in the social order, opposed to the revolution as well as to the status quo. In Tunisia, reformism is a posture that takes into account the, as it were, identity-based dimension of a recurrent implementation of reforms; it comprises the main form of historical persistence in social relations²⁰.

Techniques of the mythification of reformism

This reformism of the Tunisian authorities is a construction. The central power has at one and the same time pre-empted the contents, the conception, and the very idea of reform, as well as its positive dimension in the social *imaginaire*. Reformism is a discourse of power on itself. It aims to show that the central power – the beylicate, then the protectorate, and finally the independent national State – is the active producer of reforming modernity. In order to achieve this end, the ‘Tunisia of the Change’ reconstructs the history of the reformism of Khayr ed-Din in function of its own preoccupations and the vision it aims to defend. Even if, in its rhetoric, its themes and its argumentative ploys, continuity with Bourguiba and the Destour wins hands down, the ‘Change’ was immediately presented as a new version of Tunisian reformism, of a certain reformism that neglects a more intellectual slant and emphasises action²¹. In order to help people forget their continuity with the Father of the nation, his charisma and his historical legitimacy (but also out of genuine conviction), the 7 November inaugurated a return to long-term history. The references to Hannibal, to Ibn Khaldun, and above all to 19th-century reformers, albeit only some of them, are immediate and have remained a permanent feature²².

The National Pact of 1988, which expressed the consensus between different Tunisian political forces, draws inspiration explicitly from the foundational event of Tunisian reformism, namely the Fundamental Pact of 1857. It mentions Khayr ed-Din as the inspirer of reforms which Ben Ali and his supporters intended to implement. Here there appears a first element of the construction of reformism as an ethos: the elaboration of a consensus. Reformism is presented as the unifying value, the way of being, thinking and behaving which makes it possible for Tunisian society to be a unity; it provides a sense of national cohesion; it is the bearer of positive values that can be shared by all, whatever their social positions, their interests defended, their visions of life in society. The construction of a sense of unanimity is based around the proper value ascribed to the reforms. Several policies share this objective:

²⁰ On the way history persists in social relations, see J-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects: a political critique of globalization*, tr. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), especially ch. II, ‘The State: a product of globalization’.

²¹ Thus the blessing of Khayr ed-Din and his *Essai* is forever being invoked, whereas Ibn Dhiaf, who plays the part of an intellectual more than a statesman, is much less frequently quoted, as are his *Chronicles*.

²² See the President’s speeches and the exegetical texts of the organic intellectuals of the central power.

reinforcing national integration, promoting the unity of society, and homogenising the Tunisian population and territory. Press articles to the glory of the 26.26 point to this desire to build unity and above all to maintain unanimity and consensus: the 26.26 acts to ‘reintegrate entire swathes of the national territory’ and to strive for ‘the homogeneity of the nation’²³; the FSN constitutes ‘the ever-stronger expression of this desire for unity and, through it [the FSN] for political regeneration’²⁴; ‘the aim is not so much to attenuate social inequalities as to lay down the bases of a society that is jealous of its indivisibility and whose primary strength lies in the way it is flawlessly bound together’²⁵.

Official discourse is a discursive practice like any other. Reformism is a myth: it is the expression ‘of the being and the appearance of power, what it is and what it would like people to believe that it is’²⁶. This is proved by the plurality and diversity of historical knowledge about the reforms and reformism which are today emerging in every scholarly milieu, but which are however neither recognised nor integrated into Tunisian reformist ideology and official historiography. The diversity of reformist thinking right from the start can be explained by the desire to promote a common future through a change in continuity, in other words by the double attachment to the modern, thanks to the desire for renewal and adaptation, in particular to western modernity, but also to tradition, thanks to the necessity, felt by all, of respecting the laws and values of Islam. It also results from the multiplicity of its objectives and preoccupations, which are often contradictory: to build the State and contribute to the centralisation of power, and simultaneously to limit State power; to base activity on elitism while promoting egalitarianism; to rationalise the State and discipline society while striving towards the horizon of freedom; to be pro-European and simultaneously anti-imperialist; to envisage the strategic use of traditional teaching but to reject it as the sole basis for education; to envisage a return to the Islam of the golden age but to seek novelties and historic changes²⁷... These original ambivalences explain how very important the debates between reformist trends were²⁸, and why, until the present day, the reformist movement has been characterised by its ambiguities, its paradoxes, its plurality and its misunderstandings²⁹.

I do not wish to go here into too much detail about the way knowledge becomes de-subjectified, but I do wish to mention briefly the current techniques of mythification of

²³ *La Presse*, 9 December 1996.

²⁴ *Le Renouveau*, 11 December 1994.

²⁵ *La Presse*, 12 December 1994.

²⁶ R. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1967), pp. 32-33.

²⁷ C. Kurzman, ‘Introduction: the modernist Islamic movement’, op. cit., pp. 3-27.

²⁸ Ibid., and S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, op. cit.

²⁹ B. Tlili, *Les Rapports culturels et idéologiques entre l’Orient et l’Occident*, op. cit.

Tunisian reformism³⁰. Diversity is left in the shade; the official discourse on reformism shows a negation of differences, a refusal of pluralism, an impossibility of divisions and oppositions. On the other hand, historians have shown that reformist thought always unfolded in accordance with very different modes, traditions, and trajectories; that the reformers had fought each other, even resorting to violence; that their visions of religion, openness to the West, economic policies, the place of the Sultan and the Porte, and later, their position vis-à-vis the colonial authorities were often opposed; that the positions of the different groups were extremely fluid; that behind archaic attitudes a great deal of modernity was often concealed – and vice versa³¹. These cover-ups smooth out the relations of force and meld into a universal consensus. This neglect of differences makes it possible *de facto* to erase the ambiguities of reforming actions. Official historiography sets up as exemplary the ‘good reformers’ who wish to apply ‘good reforms’ and have to confront the oppressive slowness of ‘archaic and corrupt’ leaders and an ‘uneducated’ population.

Certain techniques have thus made the transformation possible, in particular the simplification of reformism. In the first instance, it is a matter of selecting the right reference points and symbols. The Ben-alist discourse has chosen Khayr ed-Din rather than Tahar Haddad, Mohamed Ali, Qabadu or Bin Dhiat³²: it thus lays the emphasis on the statist and technocratic dimension of reformism, since reform has to limit the Sultan’s absolute power, with the aim of rationalisation and government efficiency. It is this tradition which is currently being highlighted, rather than the purely political – and democratic – dimension. Then, some serious confusions have been perpetrated: so the 1861 Constitution is identified with the

³⁰ I investigated this situation in B. Hibou, ‘Tunisie: d’un réformisme à l’autre’, in J.-F. Bayart, R. Bertrand, T. Gordadze, B. Hibou and F. Mengin, *Legs colonial et gouvernance contemporaine*, vol. 1 (Paris: FASOPO, December 2005), pp. 209-263 on the FASOPO website: www.fasopo.org/publications.htm

³¹ For Morocco, see A. Kaddouri, ‘Les réformes au Maroc: usages politiques, usages sociaux’, *Hespéris-Tamuda*, vol. XXXIX, fasc. 2, 2001, pp. 39-45. J. Baida, ‘La pensée réformiste au Maroc à la veille du Protectorat’, *Hespéris-Tamuda*, vol. XXXIX, fasc. 2, 2001, pp. 49-69, details at least five reform projects, written and assembled on the eve of the Protectorate. For the Ottoman Empire, S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (op. cit.), shows very precisely, via contrasted portraits, how diversified and plural reformism was, and how significant the divisions between the groups were. On the game of hide-and-seek between modernism and archaism, see F. Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II* (Paris: Fayard, 2004). For Tunisia, see L.C. Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey (1837-1855)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). Here, the author shows that a display of modernity conceals the maintenance of traditional practices, especially those revealed by the place of the Palace. For the economic dimension of reformism, M.-L. Gharbi, *Impérialisme et réformisme au Maghreb. Histoire d’un chemin de fer algéro-tunisien* (Tunis: Cérès, 1994).

³² Under the Protectorate, Tahar Haddad was one of the leaders of the Destour, and close to Thâalbi; he got himself noticed thanks to his favourable attitude towards the emancipation of women and the proletariat. During the same period, Mohamed Ali was particularly aware of social questions. Bin Dhiat, a fervent defender of administrative and State reforms, wrote the chronicle *Ithaf ahl az-zaman bi ahbar muluk Tunus wa ‘ahd al ‘aman* (*Chronicle of the Kings of Tunis and the Fundamental Pact*). He was one of the main authors of the 1861 Constitution. A sheikh and a poet, Mahmoud Qabadu can be considered as one of the main Tunisian thinkers of reformism: he was an associate of Ahmed Bey, and in 1844 he wrote an essay (*Diwan*) that theorised the reforms undertaken by the Bey. He was an educationalist, a professor at the Ecole polytechnique of the Bardo, then mufti and professor at the great mosque at Zitouna; he suggested that Europeans be copied in two institutions, translation and education. The reformers who succeeded him developed in greater detail their thoughts on the power of the State and its organization.

establishment of a liberal and participatory democracy; reformism is identified with the ability to reform. In addition, certain realities are underestimated, such as the importance of the Ottoman Empire or the influence of foreign thinkers in Tunisian reformism. Finally, the reformist myth is constructed through the simplification of reformism itself. The use of binary oppositions – traditionalists versus modernists, Zaytounians versus Sadikians, conservators versus reformists – is in fact particularly unpropitious for any real representation of the complexity of social phenomena.

Reformism, an imaginary *polis*

This mythification in no way abates the power or effectiveness of reformism; nor does it lessen the veracity of its historical foundations. 19th-century reformism is, like the 1789 Revolution for France, simultaneously a founding event and a real myth, which is forever being appropriated in contradictory ways³³. The problem is not the reality of 19th-century reformism, the reality of the Fundamental Pact of 1857 and the Constitution of 1861; it is the statement, affirmed by all, that ‘reformism has been the specific feature of Tunisia since the 19th century’, the statement – taken as a principle of truth – of a seamless historical continuity without any break or change in meaning, a smoothing-out which defines a fixed and definite cultural identity.

Masking differences and discontinuities

The construction of current Tunisian reformism, indeed, also proceeds from a specific perception of history, created first and foremost from continuities and parallels³⁴. The idea of a continuum in the perception of power and of modes of government – an idea which the confusion between constructed tradition and historical past makes possible – eliminates any breaks and erases social transformations. It seems that, as far as this historicist reading is concerned, it is of little account that the relations between actors, the influence of the latter in

³³ E. Balibar, ‘The Nation form: history and ideology’, in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race. Nation. Class. Ambiguous Identities*, tr. by Chris Turner (New York; London: Verso, 1991), pp. 86-106.

³⁴ Practically all contemporary authors consider this – implicitly – as an unquestionable given. For an explicit formulation, see N. Sraïeb, ‘Elite et société: l’invention de la Tunisie’, in M. Camau, *La Tunisie au présent*, op. cit., pp. 65-97; M.-L. Gharbi, *Impérialisme et réformisme au Maghreb*, op. cit.; R. Ben Achour, ‘L’Etat de droit en Tunisie’, *Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord*, vol. 34, 1995, pp. 245-256, writes very accurately that the legitimate State and constitutionalism have constituted ‘a constant of the dominant political culture in Tunisia’ since the 19th century, p.247. Foreign scholars also promulgate this myth: see for example L. Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) or M. Morsy, ‘Présentation de l’Essai’, op. cit.

society as in political activity, the national and international context, and the demographic, economic, social and political situation are just not comparable³⁵. (28) However, the ‘reformists’ do not come from the same social strata, they do not share the same ideals, the society they wish to reform is not the same... Certain factors nullify this, in particular demography, education and literacy, urbanisation, women’s emancipation, economic development, and the complexification of the operation of the country’s political economy. And so, objectively speaking, everything has changed in Tunisian society, and it is impossible to apply the analysis and interpretation of 19th-century reformism in a rough-and-ready way to the current situation. However, not only does official discourse reify reformism, it also insists on these continuities and direct inheritances. This posture, which ‘consists in believing that the generations which succeed one another over centuries on a reasonably stable territory, under a reasonably univocal designation, have handed down to each other an invariant substance’ thus appears as ‘an effective ideological form, in which the imaginary singularity of national formations is constructed daily, by moving back from the present into the past’. This illusion is also part of the myth, of a myth shared by the political actors and the elites of Tunisia, but also by several recognized observers and analysts of the country. ‘Might not the Tunisian “exception” – as Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser wonder – ‘reside precisely in this permanent ambiguity, this political *Tunisian-ness* largely cultivated by the governing as well as the governed, by the dominating as well as by the dominated? The latter must indeed be treated not as a waste product of history in the sense of the culturalists, but first and foremost as a political project, inaugurated by the 19th-century reformers, taken up by the national liberation movement, and confirmed by Bourguiba’s regime in the days following independence and today pursued by its successor’³⁶.

This constitution of the myth did not happen all at once. It was made possible by the recurrence of a common term that nonetheless signified different things. These correspondences and this common language, full of misunderstandings, made it possible to invent a direct relation between 19th-century reformism and that of the new independent State to form what was henceforth considered as the ‘reformist tradition’. The current myth thus proceeded from a whole series of simplifications, of abbreviated quotations, of historical short-cuts, of confusions

³⁵ Even if her analysis is sometimes excessively culturalist, A. Larif-Beatrix provides an analysis that is more mediated and more sensitive to the break in Bourguiba’s nation-State, sensitive in particular to the current social foundations of practices that might be described by some as reformist. See A. Larif-Beatrix, *Edification étatique et environnement culturel. Le personnel politico-administratif dans la Tunisie contemporaine* (Paris: Publisud-OPU, 1988). An author such as Michel Camau does not fail to emphasise the methodological problems posed by such a problematisation in terms of continuities. See for example M. Camau, ‘Politique dans le passé, politique aujourd’hui au Maghreb’, in J.-F. Bayart (ed.), *La Greffe de l’Etat* (Paris: Karthala, 1996). The fact remains that he sometimes fall prey to various errors, as the following quotation suggests.

³⁶ M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire*, op. cit., p. 20.

between written texts and real actualisations (or between representations and facts), of the neglect of contingencies and conflicts between social groups, of instrumentalisations and procedures of legitimization that were set in motion right from the establishment of the Protectorate. In short, the myth of reformism proceeds from a cover-up of the historicities proper to the various reformist movements³⁷.

The first stage of this mythification is concomitant with the establishment of the Protectorate. Whether it emerges from the associationists, the pan-Islamists, the religious reformists or the nationalists, hostility to French colonisation is expressed by a systematic reference to the Fundamental Pact and the Constitution of 1861. These texts are seen as the first expression of a certain number of fundamental principles – the equality of citizens before the law, respect for human rights, the primacy of the law against arbitrariness, and parliamentary representation. In spite of the suspension of the new institutions in 1864, and the consequent absence of any real experience of the benefits of the Constitution, the latter represented, for the Tunisian elite under the Protectorate, the political panacea, the ultimate guarantee against the ills of colonisation. It was in the mid-1920s that this myth of the ‘first liberal Constitution in the Arab world’ started to emerge.

The second stage of the construction of the reformist myth came with the country’s independence. On the one hand, the religious dimension of reformism is covered up. On the other, the strategy of the monopolisation and construction of the reformist stereotype is reinforced by the eradication of the paradoxes and nuances in reformist thought and action. This tendency to a rigid dualism is also expressed in the writing of history: individual trajectories are outrageously simplified (the ‘good’ Khayr ed-Din against the ‘bad’ Khaznadar³⁸ as well as intellectual ones (the ‘good’ Sadikians against the ‘bad’ Zaytounians), and the trajectory of men and their ideas becomes linear and unambiguous.

The third and final stage occurred at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s. The construction of the reformist myth may be correlated with the erosion of nationalism and the loss of the national ideology. This evolution is concomitant with another: the disappearance of the revolutionary thematics. Its corollary is thus the at least partial transformation of the meaning of reformism with the massive reappearance of the Muslim dimension in the political lexicon and its metamorphosis into a real myth. Even if it did not emerge from a complete void,

³⁷ B. Hibou, ‘Tunisie: d’un réformisme à l’autre’, op. cit.

³⁸ Mustapha Khaznadar, Prime Minister of the Bey from 1837 to 1873, was also the father-in-law of Khayr ed-Din: he gradually came to be considered as the figure *par excellence* of the ancien régime and the antireformist trend, even though he supported the Fundamental Pact. This bad reputation is linked to his role in the financial degradation of the beylicate, which ended up bankrupt and, in the end, allowed French colonisation to take place, partly as a result of this corruption.

it was from Ben Ali that reformism became reified, endlessly evoked and invoked. Bourguiba was at the centre of everything and he to some extent 'exceeded' the very tradition that he instrumentalised. Ben Ali could not call on the same historical legitimacy, nor on the aura of the 'Supreme Fighter'; he sets himself explicitly in the line of a long history, and draws his legitimacy from his ostentatious reference to reformism. Resorting to this golden age thus appears as a powerful element of legitimization, and the reformist episode of the 19th century is part of a shared historical memory, an *imaginaire* that is common to the whole population.

This view of reformism, including its historical dimension, is familiar to Tunisians. That is precisely why this rhetoric is not merely instrumental, functioning as a myth. 'By constituting the people as a fictively ethnic unity [...], national ideology does much more than justify the strategies employed by the state to control populations,' as Etienne Balibar points out. 'It inscribes their demands in advance in a sense of belonging in the double sense of the term – both what it is that makes one belong to oneself and also what makes one belong to other fellow human beings'³⁹. This also explains that, in the continued dialogue between heritage and political innovation, reformism can be viewed as an *imaginaire*. Insofar as it sets out to sum up the being of the entire nation and reveal the permanent interactions between past, present, and the projection of the future, it may even be considered as an 'imaginary *polis*'. It is not merely a political unconscious since it indisputably occupies 'the *front* of the stage, and is part of the actors' consciousness'⁴⁰.

Reformism, the obligatory problematic of the political

Reformism is also an element of language, an imposed reading of the political – in other words, a 'legitimate problematic'⁴¹. These days, those who govern and those who would like to govern can problematise themselves and can problematise their actions only in terms of reformism. When I tested this hypothesis of reformism as a myth on various Tunisian interviewees, I came up against failure to understand, a scepticism, and even a sense of dismay. 'Does that mean that, in its application, every reformism is doomed?' 'I don't see what you're getting at – so is all reformism hopeless?' 'So what's the answer?' In Tunisia, reformism really is the absolute horizon of the political. It structures consensus.

However doubtful, this myth needs to be taken seriously: it does more than inform us about the intentions of the central power and lay bare its ruses. Social actors refer to it more

³⁹ E. Balibar, 'The Nation form', op. cit., p. 96.

⁴⁰ J.-F. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, tr. Steven Rendall (London: Hurst, 2005) title of ch. 3 and p. 145.

⁴¹ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, tr. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

than one might believe: reformism is not merely a discourse with significant effects of power, but also a vital means of action, a fully-fledged mode of government, a process of subjection in the Foucauldian sense of the term, i.e. a process whereby individuals emerge as moral subjects, 'not in the mode of submission to an external rule imposed by a direct relation of domination, but in that of belonging'⁴². The Tunisian political *imaginaire* is structured around reformism, the myth of which, these days, is shared by all the protagonists of political life: the government, the RCD and the legal opposition, of course, but also – and this may appear at first sight more surprising – the unrecognized opposition, including the Islamists who had all, directly or by interposed 'independents', signed the national Pact of 1988 which made explicitly reference to it⁴³.

Islamists emphasize their attachment to the 'movement of Renaissance and Reform', the *Ijtihad* and *Islah*. They point to the desire for modernisation recurrent in the history of Islam⁴⁴. Admittedly, they tend to refer to Thaalbi rather than to Khayr ed-Din or Haddad, but they vaunt the same merits of modernisation out of respect for a certain original integrity and Arab-Muslim identity⁴⁵. The unrecognized secular opposition, which emerged from the same school of Bourguiba, shares the obsession for moderation and the golden mean, the faith in the providential man – who is very often the one who is speaking... –, the belief that the reformist tradition constitutes a definite asset and a basis for democratisation, or indeed similar definitions of 'good government' and thus of reformism⁴⁶. For example, one of the leaders of the opposition, Mohamed Charfi, defines reformism as a modernising theory, but a theory that

⁴² All the problematisation in terms of subjection comes from the work of Michel Foucault. For the quotation and the specific problematisation of globalisation, see J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects*, op. cit.

⁴³ N. Bhiri, a member of the Islamist movement, signed the Pact, officially in his own name, but all the actors in Tunisian political life had interpreted it and understood it as an expression of Nahdha's tacit commitment.

⁴⁴ A. Zghal, 'Le retour du sacré et la nouvelle demande idéologique des jeunes scolarisés: le cas de la Tunisie', in C. Souriau (ed.), *Le Maghreb musulman en 1979* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1981), pp. 41-64, and 'The new strategy of the Movement of the Islamic way: manipulation or expression of political culture', in I.W. Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia: Political Economy of Reform* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 205-217; M. Talbi, *Plaidoyer pour un islam moderne* (Tunis: Cérés, 1998). See also G. Krämer, 'L'intégration des intégristes: une étude comparative de l'Égypte, la Jordanie et la Tunisie', in G. Salamé (ed.), *Démocratie sans démocrates* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), pp. 277-312 (English version: 'The integration of the integrists. A comparative study of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia', in *Democracy without Democrats?*, op. cit., pp. 200-226); M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ See the interviews of Ghanouchi, for example his interview: Ghanouchi, 'Déclarer l'échec de l'islamisme politique relève de la précipitation', pp. 255-269, in O. Lamoum and B. Ravenel (eds), *La Tunisie de Ben Ali. La société contre le régime* (Paris: L'Harmattan, Les Cahiers de Confluences, 2002). For a sociological analysis of the positions defended by the Tunisian islamists, see E. Hermassi, 'La société tunisienne au miroir islamiste', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 103, January-March 1984, pp. 39-55, and 'The Islamist movement and November 7', in W.I. Zartman (ed.), *Tunisia. The Political Economy of Reform* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 193-204.

⁴⁶ See for example the manifesto of 20 March 2001 (written by M. Charfi and H. Redissi): the presence of M. Charfi comes as no surprise, since he is the man who drew up the National Pact of 1988, and was minister under Ben Ali from 1987 to 1994. However, it is interesting to note that figures of a quite different opposition, such as Ben Jaafar or Marzouki (see for example M. Marzouki, *Le Mal arabe. Entre dictatures et intégrismes: la démocratie interdite* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004]) share this vision. See also M. Camau, 'Le discours politique de légitimité des élites tunisiennes', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, vol. X, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1971, pp. 26-68.

finds effective concrete shape in the sphere of action⁴⁷ – a definition that is precisely the same as that given in 1993 by President Ben Ali when he described the RCD as a ‘reforming party’⁴⁸. It is even more revealing that one of the few texts ever to have tried to lay the basis for an alliance between the different opposition movements, both secular and Islamist, should have turned reformism into one of the cornerstones of their common work base. In this way, the signatories declare that they are reaffirming ‘their faith in the Tunisian people, which very early on in its modern history experienced *a reforming movement*, a people which was *one of the first Arab peoples to endow itself with a Constitution* limiting absolutism by law, a people which has contributed so many martyrs, a people which struggled for decades *for real political reforms* and social development, and *whose elites have always demonstrated great dynamism*, a people which produced *reformers in every field*, including Kheireddine, Mohamed Ali Hammi, Tahar Haddad, and Farhat Hached’⁴⁹.

Political elites, whichever side they come from, have all emerged from the same mould, the same schools, the same universities, the same political experiences: Islamism was born from the nationalist movement and built itself up as an opposition, in the universities, in contact with extreme leftwing movements; the secular opposition was for long associated with the exercise of the central power, during Bourguiba’s period, or during the first years of the presidency of Ben Ali; the Destour and Neo Destour were already aligning themselves with reformism – as, indeed, was colonialism⁵⁰. So we might talk of the significance of a kind of non-institutionalized *paideia* which provides the whole Tunisian elite with a ‘common imaginary landscape’⁵¹ by giving it the same political culture. Or, as Pierre Bourdieu put it, we may conceive of reformism as a ‘field of the politically thinkable’, which finds expression by hijacking meanings but also by reinforcing schemas of thought and action implicit in the habitus of the elite⁵². Opponents, defectors and dissidents involuntarily reinforce the discourse of the ‘regime’, even if not all of them paint the ‘common imaginary landscape’ in the same colours.

⁴⁷ Intervention at the conference *Les Processus de démocratisation au Maghreb*, Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences, Tunis, 12 March 2005.

⁴⁸ ‘The RCD is the party of action in the field’, speech by President Ben Ali delivered at the RCD Congress on 30 July 1993.

⁴⁹ Declaration of Tunis, June 2003. My emphasis.

⁵⁰ On the contemporary situation, S. Khiari, *Tunisie, le délitement de la cité. Coercition, consentement, résistance*, (Paris: Karthala, 2003); M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire*, op. cit. On the colonial period, M. Kraïem, *Pouvoir colonial et mouvement national. La Tunisie des années trente* (Tunis: Alif, 1990).

⁵¹ P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 41.

⁵² P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, op. cit., pp. 397-465.

Foreign actors also praise the all-pervasive reformism, without always being aware of its mythical nature. They are often naïve about the assertions of official discourse, remembering the simplicity of the expressions rather than the ambiguity of practices and meanings⁵³. Donors involuntarily participate in the construction of the reformist myth in at least two ways: on the one hand, they understand the rhetoric of the central power in the western intellectual tradition which sees reform as the opposite of revolution; on the other hand, they participate in various misappropriations which transform practices in the name of reformism in a sense contrary to the essential and ideal definition of the latter. However, all of them – external partners, international donors, and foreign analysts – emphasize the moderate, open aspect of the reforms in Tunisia, which makes them so propitious to democratisation. They also emphasize the modernity and westernization of a government considered as favourable to secularism, and the desire to construct a modern, liberal State; in short, the pedagogic dimension of reform and its civilising mission⁵⁴.

Thanks to its polysemia, reformism manages to talk to everyone, and everyone uses it as a point of reference. In a recognised language, which everyone deems to be transparent, it makes it possible to articulate the concepts, ideas and beliefs inherent in Tunisian political practices. This idiom allows people to confront the globalized version of modernity, as it had already done in the recent past with nationalism or, in the 19th century, with liberalism⁵⁵. So myth is simultaneously language and metaphor of the political which enables all groups to express different things.

A similar unanimity does not prevent criticisms of the modes of reformism (for example, of the perversion of reformism by the ‘regime’) from being voiced. This criticism targets in turn the instrumentalisation of reform, the neglect of certain of its fundamental elements, the corruption of the term and the degradation of its basic principles; but it never targets the use of reformism as a basic point of reference; it is always made in the name of reformism itself, in the name of ‘true’ reformism. The debate on its nature – ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – actually has no significance here. On the other hand, the dynamics of this evaluation shows that reformism is

⁵³ See, among many others, for instance K. Dalacoura who emphasises the liberal and democratic potential of Tunisia on the basis of this reformist tradition (K. Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism, and Human Rights* [London; New York: Tauris, 1998]); N. Grimaud, *La Tunisie à la recherche de sa sécurité* (Paris: PUF, 1995); including M. Morsy, ‘Présentation de l’Essai’, op. cit. The volunteers are generally showered with praise, in terms which reproduce the discourse on the benefits of reformism, voluntarism and openness to the West. Interviews, Tunis, 1997/2005; for the first years of independence, F. Decorsière and M. Lelong, ‘L’expression tunisienne’, *Esprit*, no. 7-8, July-August 1970, pp. 131-137.

⁵⁴ O. Lamloun, *La Politique étrangère de la France face à la montée de l’islamisme: Algérie, Tunisie, 1987-1995*, (PhD thesis in political science, Université Paris VIII, December 2001).

⁵⁵ C.A. Bayly develops this argument with regard to liberalism in the India of the 19th century. See C.-A. Bayly, ‘Liberalism and “moral economy” in nineteenth-century South and Southeast Asia’, paper presented at the Franco-British conference *Economies morales et formation de l’Etat dans le monde extra-européen* (Paris; Cambridge: CERI, FASOPO, and Trinity College, 27 May 2005).

first and foremost a discourse of truth and that it produces knowledge: a particular actor is disqualified because he is not a reformer, or because he has usurped this noble designation. These days, for example, those in government and secular opponents deny Islamists the label 'reformer' because of their intrinsically archaic nature, their 'anti-modern' behaviour, their 'irrational' political thinking, and their opposition to 'women's emancipation'. The interest of these judgments resides elsewhere, in the mechanism that transforms reformism into an instrument of inclusion and exclusion, a means of classification, and a way of defining good and evil. For reformism is a moral way of thinking, which defines the true and the false, the just and the unjust. Even if, in concrete terms, individuals do not define these terms in the same way, they all aim to incarnate the 'true' reformism and with this aim in mind describe the reformism of everyone else as 'false'. This situation is made possible by the very mythical nature of reformism, an abstract idea and irenic vision of social being, available for appropriation by all.

The social foundations of reformism

National elites and foreign actors are, however, not alone in granting a central position to reforms in their interpretation of the political. The positive values of reformism are widely shared by the Tunisian population. The reformist project is intimately linked with national construction and the formation of Tunisian identity, and so imbues society through and through. But, at the same time, the widespread idea (even found among the shrewdest analysts of Tunisia), that there is a gap between the elites and the popular masses that has caused the reforms to fail, issued directly from the reformist ideology⁵⁶. This apparent paradox evaporates if we stick to a broad conception of the political, which includes the participation of all, through often anonymous actions, in the exercise of power.

Reformism as a process of subjection

The processes whereby the demands of the population are justified can be expressed only in the common language of the governing class, since any other words are inaudible and even unutterable. So these demands are without any doubt shaped by the all-pervasive official discourse. Indeed, this suggests one of the strengths of reformism: by never mentioning the

⁵⁶ M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire* (op. cit.) mention this in connection with the process of the autonomisation of the reform of civil society. Conversely, S. Khiari implicitly rejects this break and speaks in terms of elitism among the middle classes: see S. Khiari, 'De Wassila à Leïla, premières dames et pouvoir en Tunisie', *Politique africaine*, no. 95, October 2004, pp. 55-70.

content of the transformations, any break, any continuity, any policy can be included, precisely because it is characterised first and foremost as a step to be taken, a way of thinking, a belief. But the implicit reference to reformism is not a mere evanescent discourse stuck onto an official discourse. It rests on the population's own demands. These are sometimes expressed in terms of 'reform'; often, they are not; but they are definitely never expressed in terms of 'reformism'. However, they imperceptibly contribute to the reformist ethos by means of many wild uncharted tracks: the systematic appeal to the State as clear-sighted and 'in advance' of society, alone able to 'get things moving'; participation in the 'incessant interventions' of the administration and thus legitimization of bureaucracy as principal vector of the reforms; belief in rational progress and material modernisation; a shared developmentalist ideology⁵⁷; the expectation that sources of accumulation imperilled by globalisation will be protected and preserved; a keen awareness of the loss of national sovereignty and the attacks on the Arabo-Muslim identity of Tunisians; the wish, too, to see rules and regulations respected, nepotism and corruption criticised; and the demand for the rule of law.

So reformism is not simply a State project, nor even a way of conceptualising the power specific to elites. It is a shared myth and a complex process, bringing into play every individual and the entire fabric of social relations. In other words, reformism is not merely instrumentalised by central power and the elites, but the element of support plays a vital role in its emergence as a legitimate problematic and as an *imaginaire*; reformism can be interpreted as the vulgarisation of power *par excellence*, the principal form of historical persistence in Tunisia; the reforms constitute more than an elitist idea and project, but they also benefit from undeniable social foundations; this *imaginaire* is in the final analysis common to all, as is revealed by certain widely-read novels and, more generally, by artistic production as a whole⁵⁸.

Over and above perfectly real demands, Tunisians recognize themselves in reformism: its problematic contributes to shaping them as subjects, both in the mode of voluntary servitude (as subjected beings), and in the mode of the support they show (as active subjects)⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ A. Zghal, 'Le concept de société civile et la transition vers le multipartisme', in M. Camau (ed.), *Changements politiques au Maghreb. Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* (CNRS, Paris, 1989), pp. 207-228, and 'Le concept de société civile et la crise du paradigme développementaliste', *Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales*, no. 115, 1993, pp. 67-94.

⁵⁸ The main interest of the book by K.-J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) is that he includes within his analysis literature, cinema and artistic creation in general. As regards our present concerns, see in particular pp. 197-201. See also Abdelaziz Belkhouja, *Le Retour de l'éléphant* (Tunis: Appolonia, 2004), one of the popular successes of recent years, which suggests the significance of beliefs in progress, rationalisation, positivism and modernisation, not to mention (of course) the importance of the myth of Hannibal and Carthage.

⁵⁹ See M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, op. cit., vol. 2, and J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects*, op. cit. See also E. Balibar, who links Foucault's ideas with those of Lacan, Bataille and Althusser in E. Balibar, *Droit de cité* (Paris: PUF, 1997), and 'Insurrection et Constitution: la citoyenneté ambiguë', *Mouvements*, no. 1, November-December 1998, pp. 109-119.

This *imaginaire*, in fact, is indissociable from the ‘theology of servitude’⁶⁰; reformism appears as an element of integration of political servility and hence its modernisation through the administration, that ‘house of servitude’ as Max Weber called it⁶¹, by means of the political shaping of Tunisian-ness. Beneath the surface attractions of modernism and adaptation to external constraint, it makes it possible for practices of domination to be perpetuated by being transformed. Starting with socially accepted norms, it puts in place new mechanisms and principles of action. In the 19th century, this was one of the functions of the administrative and educational systems, notably the famous Sadiki college. These days, economic mechanisms play this role, for example enterprises, those zones of modernity constituted by offshore zones, industrial zones and tourist zones, and social mechanisms, such as subsidies and programmes of support and solidarity.

Be that as it may, Tunisians are also constituted as subjects in the mode of active support, ‘recognition’ and acceptance of themselves⁶². Reform takes on another meaning for the multitude of these individuals on the edge of official reformist knowledge. It none the less constitutes a frame of reference in the behaviour and lifestyle of the entrepreneur adapting to openness and free trade with Europe – whether he does this willingly or under duress, optimistically or pessimistically, by allying himself with foreigners or by exploiting political or administrative relations. It is crucial for the employee confronting liberalisation and privatisation – he may take part in illegal strikes, increase his productivity, accept a drop in his purchasing power, move house, or organise a hunger strike. It affects the migrant faced with the closing of frontiers – he may abandon the idea of migrating, go illegal, change his destination, decide not to come back, or to wait. It is central to the hotel proprietor who needs to be ready to meet tourists’ needs, the smuggler seeking to adapt to new conditions of trade, the trade unionist facing up to transformations in welfare and working conditions, the farmer suffering from a drying-up of financing, the banker seeking to restructure debt, the intermediary needing to accommodate to the partial privatisation of the State, and the civil servant getting used to the modifications of interventionism... Reform produces particular modes of existence, including for the individuals who are deemed to be ‘subjected’ to reforms conceived at the summit of the State – reforms whose shape, and sometimes even whose very existence, they criticise.

⁶⁰ See M. Tozy, ‘Eléments pour une lecture de sociologie historique de la gouvernance au Maghreb’, pré-rapport pour le rapport Banque mondiale, *Gouvernance dans la région MENA*, mimeo, December 2002, and in particular *Monarchie et islam politique* (Paris: Presses de SciencesPo, 1998) which presents a very subtle analysis of the exercise of power on the basis of Muslim thinkers but also of Etienne de la Boétie.

⁶¹ M. Weber, ‘Parliament and government in Germany under a new political order’, in *Political Writings*, ed. by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 130-271, p. 153.

⁶² See J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects*, op. cit., pp. 126-130.

Reformism, in its effective and mythical aspects alike, is an *imaginaire* to which individuals in Tunisia find themselves linked in one way or another; it is one of the norms they must in their own interests take into account, whether with approval or indifference, constraint or criticism, detachment or misappropriation, avoidance, transformation or conversion.

Such, for instance, is the case with the Rassemblement pour une alternative internationale de développement (RAID/Attac Tunisie – Rally for an International Development Alternative), an anti-globalisation association linked to the international Attac network. Its criticism of liberal globalisation makes it possible to legitimize the problematic of reform and put it at the heart of public debate. Anti-globalizing rhetoric, a recent development in Tunisia as in the Maghreb as a whole, does seem to have largely developed as an attempt to tap into the symbolic resources of a recognized world movement. This phenomenon is a new illustration of the importance of the vocabularies imposed and the inevitable instrumentalisation of significant reference points: the demands of the RAID are certainly closer to certain elements of the reformist ethos than to anti-globalization properly speaking⁶³. In relation to its European counterparts, the Tunisian movement exaggerates the importance of national questions, expressed in terms of sovereignty and independence of development. It fuels reformist rhetoric by over-interpreting the role of liberalism in Tunisia, stimulating ideas about the necessary economic transformations, arousing expectations about State interventions, putting forward and hoping for other types of reform, and highlighting the link between authoritarianism and liberalism⁶⁴.

The strength of the UGTT comes not merely from its active participation in the national struggle, but also from its ‘reformism, which confirms on it a certain flexibility and a remarkable capacity to adapt to variations in historical circumstances’⁶⁵. The trade union explicitly stands by its reformism even though it simultaneously attempts to diminish the impact of the reforms set in place by the government. Until the mid-1980s at least, wage-earners, workers, employees and civil servants recognized themselves in this problematisation and in this representation of power and the relations of force. These days, the low level of support for the trade union in the world of work needs to be interpreted less in terms of the

⁶³ S. Khiari, ‘Les balbutiements du mouvement altermondialiste au Maghreb’, *Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord*, vol. 91, 2003, pp. 113-125.

⁶⁴ Interviews, Tunis and Paris. This appears clearly from a reading of the documents published by the RAID/Attac Tunisie, *Raid-Niouz* (illegal bulletin of the RAID), for example, on privatisations, on the role of the trade union in support for strikes, etc.

⁶⁵ R. Zghal, ‘Nouvelles orientations du syndicalisme tunisien’, *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 162, October-December 1998, pp. 6-17, p. 7.

rejection of reformism and more in terms of a rejection of any total alignment with the reforms put forward and implemented by successive governments⁶⁶. Wildcat strikes and hunger strikes, for example, represent mainly a demand for human dignity and an insistence on access to the material conditions of modernity, not a rejection of modernity itself. During the strikes at the ICAB factory in Moknine, the workers (especially the women) who had been laid off had only one demand: they wanted to find another job, and to be treated properly; the discourses denouncing the predatory and corrupt character of the central power, or the damaging effects of liberal globalisation, were entirely constructed by the organisations – RAID, LTDH, CNLT, certain trade unionists – who supported the strikers so as to make their demands more audible on the international level⁶⁷. The various criticisms aimed at the liberalism of the Tunisian authorities express another demand, which the reformist register can include perfectly well within itself: a demand for rules of law defined in advance (i.e. the maintaining of employment promised within the framework of privatisations) to be respected, an insistence on citizenship, and another type of relation to the Other, the State and the administration; and *not* a demand for withdrawal or self-sufficiency, even if the nationalist underpinnings of such an expectation are very strong, notably in terms of sovereignty, national independence and economic development⁶⁸.

The spread of this ethos is thus also found in the business world. Thus, those businesses that present themselves as the most dynamic emphasize the rationality of their approach, the modernisation of management procedures, and the questioning of the arbitrary and vague rules – all of them themes which echo the reformist rhetoric. Sometimes the vocabulary used makes explicit reference to it. This is true, for instance, of executives trying to stimulate the employees they supervise. The latter, indeed, understand them in these terms, as is revealed by a Poulina worker who states: ‘The “setting at a thousand” [a system of evaluation] started with X, I had a fixed wage and now he’s told me: “if you want a bonus, you need the *Ijtihad* if you’re going to get a result”’⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ S. Khiari, *Tunisie, le délitement de la cité*, op. cit., ch. III, ‘Désengagement de l’Etat et désocialisation’.

⁶⁷ Interviews, Tunis, Monastir, December 2003, January-March 2005 and Paris, August 2005. The term ‘dignity’ is the one used by the strikers themselves.

⁶⁸ S. Ben Achour, ‘L’administration et son droit, quelles mutations?’, introduction to the conference *Les Mutations de l’administration et de son droit*, Association tunisienne pour les sciences administratives, Faculté des sciences juridiques de Tunis, Tunis, 17 April 2002; A. Bédoui, ‘La question de l’Etat et la gouvernance en Tunisie’, *La Lettre de Dilapidation économique et budgétaire en Tunisie*, no. 5, November 2003; D. Chamekh, *Etat et pauvreté en Tunisie: assistance et/ou insertion*, DEA dissertation in political sciences, University of Tunis III, Tunis, academic year 1998-99; H. Fehri, ‘Economie politique de la réforme: de la tyrannie du statu quo à l’ajustement structurel’, *Annales d’économie et de gestion*, vol. 5, no. 10, March 1998, and S. Khiari, ‘Les balbutiements du mouvement altermondialiste’, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Quoted by H. Yousfi, E. Filipiak and H. Bougault, ‘Poulina, un management tunisien’, *Notes et documents*, no. 17, Paris, AFD, May 2005, p. 60.

Reformism: plurality of meanings

This makes it easier to see that, far from the unitary and consensual myth of reformism, the conception of reforms diverges from one individual to another, one social category to another, one interest to another. The worlds of production and the social universes are different, and people's behaviour ambiguous, but reform is common to all. That is why analyses in terms of binary confrontations (for or against the reforms), of opposition or resistance to reforms, turn out to be partial and, in a word, incorrect: individuals certainly do have different positions vis-à-vis the reforms, and to the (themselves very diverse) practical problems which they have to resolve or to which they need to adapt – privatisation, liberalisation, the opening of borders, public health or social measures, competition, the weight of bureaucracy, and the absence of rules. They express complex and subtle opinions, but they all express them in terms circumscribed by the reformist myth. So the problematizing in terms of reform and reformism does not come merely from 'on high'; it is not merely the instrumental expression of a political will to domination, a technique of control, a mode of the exercise of the centralised and authoritarian power; it is just as much fuelled by aspirations 'from below', by positive demands for transformations and by existential preoccupations.

If we follow the reasoning proposed by Etienne Balibar in his analysis of nationalism and citizenship, we can say that at the heart of the reformism of the 'dominant' dwell the representations of the 'dominated'⁷⁰. The secret power of reformist domination resides in the *imaginaire*, the awareness of identity and the reformist demands of the Tunisians themselves. They all recognise themselves in these precisely because the meaning of reform is plural, not to say 'empty'⁷¹. Reform is endorsed by the vast majority of individuals, even if this endorsement challenges the reformist logic of the central power and its technique of domination in an attempt to highlight, every individual in his own manner, his own vision, his own strategy, his own logic of action, or quite simply his own desire for survival. That is also why support is partial and partly deployed in the field of representations and in the *imaginaire*⁷². For all these groups, it is not a question of adopting a reformist package, but rather of choosing certain elements from it, borrowing certain forms of behaviour and rejecting others, of taking certain of its meanings and even certain of its shapes in order to reject its philosophy or modes of existence. This is the case with middle-class consumerism, which is not merely outrageous consumption, westernisation and modernity, or the mechanism of domination by debt, but can

⁷⁰ E. Balibar, 'Insurrection et Constitution', op. cit.

⁷¹ In the sense given this word by C. Colliot-Thélène, *Etudes wébériennes wébériennes* (Paris: PUF, 2001), ('Thus, the vacancy of meaning [...] is one of the senses of the disenchantment of the world according to Weber', p. 7).

⁷² J.-F. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity and Global Subjects*, op. cit.

be an instrument of social integration and recognition, an effect of distinction, a symbol of protest... This eclecticism is all the more significant in that Tunisian reform is disparate, including Arab nationalist thought as much as the Islamisation of society, the westernizing as much as the orientalizing of social practices, and a return to origins as much as an openness to the future.

Reformism and ‘Tunisian-ness’, a diffuse *ethos*

Ever since the 19th century, reformism has also constituted the historically constituted mode of extraversion, to use the expression coined in the African context by Jean-François Bayart⁷³. Even though she does not use the term, Magaly Morsy offers us a rich re-interpretation of the work of Khayr ed-Din, seen through the prism of a process of westernisation that ‘cannot be equated with an imitation since it must, on the contrary, impugn passivity in the face of European penetration’; this process carries out ‘a necessary return to religious roots’ insofar as ‘only a reform that is deliberately accepted and integrated into the inner movement of Muslim societies has any meaning’⁷⁴.

The myth of a Tunisia ‘at the crossroads of East and West’ rests on facts whose importance is doubtless exaggerated but no less real. Historians have shown that incomings, economic resources, political resources, men, and legitimacy all stemmed largely from relations with foreigners and that the confused interplay of foreign powers with the internal quarrels of Tunisia made possible both a certain dependency and, at the same time, a certain autonomy⁷⁵. Likewise, it now seems that the thesis of reformism as a response to decline, internationalisation, and the crisis of the nation-State in the Muslim world is a gross simplification⁷⁶: internationalisation significantly predates the 19th century and has always contributed to the formation of the nation-State; reformism, furthermore, was a response to internal dynamics proper to Tunisian society⁷⁷.

⁷³ J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: the politics of the Belly*, tr. by M. Harper, C. and E. Harrison, 1st edn (London: Longman, 1993); 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), and ‘Africa in the world: a history of extraversion’, *African Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 395, April 2000, pp. 217-267.

⁷⁴ M. Morsy, ‘Présentation de l’Essai’, op. cit., p. 46.

⁷⁵ M.H. Chérif, *Pouvoir et société dans la Tunisie de H’usayn Bin Ali (1705-1740)*, University of Tunis, Tunis, vol. 2, 1986; L.C. Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ This is the thesis held by certain reformers and its still has its supporters today, for example in the book by C.M. Henry, *The Mediterranean Debt Crescenz: Money and Power in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco Tunisia and Turkey* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) and in C.M. Henry and R. Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷⁷ See B. Tlili, *Les Rapports culturels et idéologiques*, op. cit.; T. Bachrouh, ‘Le réformisme tunisien. Essai d’interprétation critique’, *Cahiers de Tunisie*, no. 127-128, 1984, pp. 97-118; O. Moreau, ‘La réforme de l’Etat dans le monde islamo-méditerranéen vu du Maghreb. XIX-XX^e siècles’, *Correspondance*, no. 66, May-June 2001, pp. 3-11.

The novelty, in the 19th century, came from the simultaneous pursuit of a long movement of emancipation from the Sublime Porte, from growing (and suddenly aggressive and pressing) competition from western empires, from the economically dependent position in which Tunisia was placed by those same European powers, from the emergence of nationalism across the world (more particularly in Europe, but in Tunisia, too), from the reinforcement and centralisation of nation-States, and from technological developments. The novelty also provoked this new problematisation in terms of reformism as a system of thought that indissociably bound together the process of national construction and openness to (or at least awareness of) the Other. From this moment on, therefore, the project of reform was an essential part of the recurrent operation of the nation-State.

A Tunisian way of being in the world

The reforms of the 19th century gave birth to, and fed into, a powerful nationalism by introducing the notions of belonging and citizenship, and by placing its relations with Europe and the rest of the world at the heart of its interventions. But this modern nationalism is not a mere relation with the Other. It is a relation mediated by the State, by State interventions⁷⁸. Because State bureaucracy has become rooted and has spread throughout society as a whole, and because reformist ideas have constituted themselves as the structuring ideas of Tunisia, ‘Tunisian-ness’ is expressed now even more than before by that permanent ambivalence between understanding the other and withdrawal into self, between the demand for a precocious and exceptional openness and a haughty sovereignty⁷⁹.

In official rhetoric, as in its mythical construction, ‘Tunisian-ness’ is a way of managing global modernity and, simultaneously, the conviction that Tunisia is by nature an exception. This exception, it seems, resides in the perfect synthesis between western modernity, nationalism and a sense of belonging to the Arab and Muslim community – which reformism itself encapsulates. Reformism and Tunisian-ness are thus inseparable, and both of them symbolise the ‘specific nature of being Tunisian’, as the authorized vocabulary puts it, and marking – right from the start – the profound ambiguity of these mythical narratives. For Bourguiba, ‘Tunisian-ness, at the same time as expressing a *project of civic patriotism*, was based on a *communitarian nationalism*. It was demanded and justified in the name of membership of the Arab and Muslim communities. It was doubtless associated with

⁷⁸ E. Balibar, *Nous, citoyens d'Europe? Les frontières, l'Etat, le peuple* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001) emphasises that ‘it is an antagonistic relation to the State that is experienced in an indirect way, and projected as a relation to an Other’, p. 235.

⁷⁹ See M. Camau and V. Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire*, op. cit., especially pp. 18-20 and pp. 95-112.

bilingualism as a means of openness to the modern world, in the course of a history whose beginnings apparently go back to Jugurtha. But Tunisian identity in its conquest of historicity was inseparable from the Arabic language, the national language (and language of authority) and to Arabness⁸⁰. In practice, however, national ideology and rhetoric on cultural identity have also been tools of political domination, transforming the offensive and dynamic project of constructing the national State into defensive and instrumentalist strategies⁸¹. These days, Tunisian-ness is primarily mentioned as a way of ‘remaining oneself’ amid globalisation or ‘trying to find an identity for oneself’⁸². In this sense, Tunisian-ness is indisputably an instrumentalisation with populist aims, a skilful but facile arrangement in the subtle interplay between maintaining control over society and remaining open to the international dimension.

But Tunisian-ness is much more than that. It strives to be a value, a Tunisian way of being in the world, one that is deeply anchored in society. All the opposition’s texts mention respect for national sovereignty, the Arab and Muslim nature of the community, and the specific nature of Tunisian identity as part and parcel of the reformism demanded⁸³. The Tunis Declaration of 17 June 2003, for instance, was a compromise text, aimed simultaneously at reassuring secular opponents and getting the Islamists to sign it. General terms such as ‘specific nature of Tunisian identity’ are precisely chosen so that everyone can read into them the meaning that best suits them: some will hear it as a synonym of ‘Islam-ness’, others as ‘Arab-ness’, and yet others as a reference to the ‘western’ meaning of reformism, i.e. a reformism resolutely turned towards Europe. Those who hold power interpret such expressions as the affirmation of their historical legitimacy drawn from the direct heritage of the struggle for national independence, stigmatizing opponents who represented foreign interests⁸⁴. Opponents read them as the pursuit of the struggle for an independence that has not yet been achieved, whether the current dependence be exclusively economic (secular opponents), or cultural (Islamist opponents) or even linked to the absence of a united Arab nation (Arab nationalists)⁸⁵.

⁸⁰ M. Camau, ‘Leader et leadership en Tunisie’, op. cit., p. 175 (author’s emphasis).

⁸¹ ‘These emblems that are *cultural identity*, *specificity*, and *national entity* have undergone a transformation that no longer makes it possible to equate them with forces of resistance’, as Hélé Béji puts it in *Désenchantement national. Essai sur la décolonisation* (Paris: Maspéro, 1982), p. 16 (author’s emphasis).

⁸² Interviews, Paris, January 2005 and Tunis, January-March 2005.

⁸³ The abovementioned Declaration of Tunis of 17 June 2003 thus devotes two out of its twelve points to this question. After mentioning the specificity of Tunisian identity, the signatories ask for ‘4. respect for the identity of the people and its Arab-Muslim values, a guarantee of freedom of belief for all, and the political neutralisation of places of worship’ and ‘5. the defence of the independence of the country and the sovereignty of the national decision’.

⁸⁴ S. Chaabane, *Ben Ali et la voie pluraliste en Tunisie* (Tunis: Editions Cérès, 1996) thus states that secular opponents are linked by ideology to Westerners and that Islamist opponents are linked to the Islamic internationale.

⁸⁵ Interviews, Tunis, December 2001 and December 2003 and Paris, August 2004.

The ambiguity of 'Tunisian-ness'

In spite of disillusion and 'disenchantment', national feeling remains strong in the population. The national idea is even more than ever integrated into people's self-awareness⁸⁶. These contradictory appropriations are indeed part of the virtues of 'Tunisian-ness' as pedagogy⁸⁷, or of its vices as 'cowardice', as Sadri Khiari calls it⁸⁸. Cowardice in the sense that Tunisian-ness is defined 'negatively', in opposition to Ottomanism, Arabism, or the *umma*, while still being unable to deny those elements that simultaneously constitute it. Or, to be less normative, it is less cowardice than an illusion: the misunderstandings at work here act as the negotiated version of reality, and the national Pact as the tacit celebration of the compromise whereby everyone realises his own *imaginaire*⁸⁹. In parallel with the discourse on the economic miracle, Tunisia is thus presented as another model, that of national construction and the management of extraversion, notably for the Arabic and African world. Just as reformism is fundamentally a myth, Tunisian-ness appears first and foremost as a 'fictive ethnicity'⁹⁰.

The weight of colonisation is evident in this oppositional vision of identity and nationalism. The very concept of 'Tunisian-ness' was, after all, invented by colonisers to prop up their power, by differentiating between the local juridical system and the French system and taking the 'Tunisian issue' into account⁹¹. As a piece of rhetoric, but also as a feeling, 'Tunisian-ness' has become more precise and stronger with the struggle for independence. It was subsequently renewed in view of new circumstances and new international and national relations of force; defeat in the Six Days' War of 1967 and, more generally speaking, the failure of the Arabic nationalist project, provoked a first shift in the way it was conceived. The idea of 'Tunisian-ness' was again brought to the forefront by the confused situation that emerged from the war in Kuwait (1990-1991) and the expansion of the Arab media – and this movement became indisputably more important after the 11 September attacks and the Iraq War. It was also little by little transformed by the exercise of power and by the integration of the rhetoric of

⁸⁶ H. Béji, *Désenchantement national*, op. cit., in particular chaps 9 and 10.

⁸⁷ M. Brondino, 'Bourguiba, *policy maker* entre mondialisation et tunisianité: une approche systémique et interculturelle', in M. Camau and V. Geisser (eds), *Habib Bourguiba*, op. cit., pp. 463-473.

⁸⁸ Interview, Paris, August 2004.

⁸⁹ J.-F. Bayart develops this argument in connection with colonisation in *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, op. cit., pp. 163-164. For Tunisia, see I. Marzouki, *Un compromis atypique, ou les alliances dangereuses*, mimeo (Tunis, 2003).

⁹⁰ E. Balibar, 'The Nation form', op. cit. The author gives the name of 'fictive ethnicity' to the community instituted by the nation-state. This is an intentionally complex expression in which the term fiction [...] should not be taken in the sense of a pure and simple illusion without historical effects, but must, on the contrary, be understood by analogy with the *persona ficta* of the juridical tradition in the sense of an institutional effect, a "fabrication" (p. 96).

⁹¹ S. Ben Achour, *Aux sources du droit moderne tunisien: la législation tunisienne en période coloniale*, thesis (Tunis, 24 January 1996): what Sana Ben Achour says here in legal and technical terms is here read in political terms.

cultural identity into the mechanisms of domination⁹². This development suggests the significance of the ambiguities at the heart of Tunisian-ness, which simultaneously contrasts and corresponds with Arab nationalism and Islamism, identifying itself with the Arab and Muslim world as a whole, while at the same time seeing itself as different. But in the contemporary context where the State is central through its interventions, and even more through the way it structures thought, Tunisian-ness is simultaneously an objective institution of discipline and domination, and a fantasy through which all national individuals tend to perceive the singular character of their own relation of dependence on, and demands made on, the State⁹³.

In parallel with the benevolent discourse of President Ben Ali with regard to the West and to the '*primisme*'⁹⁴ of the authorities, other discourses aim at underlining the defence – without concession – of national interests⁹⁵. Just as certain editorials exalt the openness of the country in the purest of pro-western reformist traditions, whether they highlight the importance of links with Europe or the boldness of a tentative dialogue with Israel, other articles feed into a virulent anti-westernism, expressing xenophobic, anti-Zionist, or even anti-Semitic sentiments. The difference between the French-speaking and Arab-speaking press is clear, but it concerns less the contents than the form. In any case, it is interesting to note that 'the most western of countries in the Maghreb' is also the one in which the population looks most at middle-eastern media – comparatively speaking, much more than at the European media⁹⁶.

In the shadow of reformism, we can observe activities, attitudes and frames of mind that are much more complex, and even frankly nationalistic and hostile to any form of openness to 'the West'. There are many expressions of this, and I shall now attempt to illustrate this ambiguity, starting with the various 'distortions' of the reforms of liberalisation that are currently taking place in Tunisia. To gain a better understanding of the extreme complexity and plurality of logics at work behind these consensual myths, the following pages will go into the detail of economic practices and daily administrative procedures.

⁹² H. Béji, *Désenchantement national*, op. cit.

⁹³ E. Balibar, 'Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa', in E. Balibar, *Nous, citoyens d'Europe*, op. cit., pp. 221-241.

⁹⁴ 'Firstism' is the position that highlights the fact that Tunisia always comes first in everything: the first country in the Arab world to have a Constitution, the first to have a popular movement for the independence of the country, the first to sign an agreement on association with the European Union, the first to have created an organisation for the defence of human rights, the first to have developed the Internet, etc.

⁹⁵ On this well-worn rhetoric, see for example N. Grimaud, *La Tunisie*, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Médiamétrie study, December 2004. See also J. Garçon, 'La télé française en déclin au Maghreb', *Libération*, 20 June 2005.

National preference and limited openness: economic ‘nationalitarianism’ in practice

Ever since the start of the 1990s, the external observer cannot fail to be struck by the increasing importance of questions of sovereignty. Discussions with foreign partners are held under the sign of respect for sovereignty. Liberalisation, privatisations, direct foreign investments and, more generally, liberal economic reforms are read through the interpretative grid of sovereignty. This problematisation is demanded in the name of reformism which, as people point out in Tunis, has been structured around the question of debt and the placing of the heavily-indebted country under financial supervision, which led to the French Protectorate and the end of national sovereignty for more than 60 years. The opening of the Tunisian economy to Europe and more generally the world paradoxically thus finds expression by a degree of closing down, and by the establishment of often implicit national preferences – in short, ‘economic patriotism’.

An explicit economic nationalism

Defensive nationalism and a keen awareness of the need for sovereignty to be respected explain, first and foremost, how a certain number of national laws are in complete contradiction with international commitments signed by the Tunisian authorities. Whether it is a matter of reciprocal protection for investments or of fiscal conventions, national laws and internal norms take precedence over the international treaties that have been ratified, which creates continual tensions. In spite of the free trade agreements between Tunisia and the European Union, juridical and legal decisions express an open reticence towards foreigners, including Europeans. For example, foreign investors cannot become landowners without the prior authorization of the governor, who controls these permits strictly. Resident foreign companies cannot recruit more than four expatriates without a special exemption from the Commission supérieure des investissements (Superior Commission of Investments), to which it needs to be proved, for each job, that a candidate with the required qualifications cannot be found in Tunisia itself. To recover foreign holdings in Tunisia, prior permission is required, and obtaining this can turn out to be extremely difficult, and in any case a laborious bureaucratic process. In addition, by law, one needs to have resided for at least two years in the country before one can become the managing director of a company; and, in practice, nothing is done to make it any easier to obtain permission to stay, and the annual renewal of residence permits⁹⁷.

⁹⁷ All these examples are taken from interviews, Tunis, April 1998, January 1999, December 2001 and December 2002 and Paris, January 2005.

A foreign shareholder of resident service companies that are not totally devoted to export cannot hold a majority interest, which frequently hampers the strategy of large international groups. This is the case with the insurance group Allianz (ex-AGF), which owns 36% of the shares of the local company Astrée, which succeeded in rising to 42% but proved unable to benefit from the departure of Axa in 2002, or that of Generali in 2003, to become a majority holder. So, in 2004, it decided to leave Tunisia and sell off its shares to nationals as well as foreigners – in this case, the Crédit mutuel-CIC – which had had the good taste to opt for the Tunisians' favourite strategy, namely that of sleeping partners⁹⁸. Generally speaking, a system of prior authorisation is always a live option for a certain number of activities, in particular when foreign holdings are higher than 50% of the capital. The Commission supérieure des investissements is strictly obliged to give its prior agreement to potential foreign investors⁹⁹. This rule concerns strategic sectors such as transport, communications, and caretaking and education services, which all affect national sovereignty – sectors which, in every country, are relatively well-protected, such as public works and finance, but also areas that appear much more innocuous such as tourism, supplying buildings with electricity, laying tiles, mosaics and false ceilings, shaping plaster, or checking roofs for leaks... sectors which are certainly not strategic in terms of national sovereignty but which can turn out to be extremely sensitive in terms of employment and accumulation of wealth for the ruling elite.

It is also becoming easier to understand what nationalism means: not just an ideology, but the central power's fear of losing its control over the economy and having to manage an unstable situation. Thus, the disciplinary instrumentalisation of nationalism, what Hélé Béji felicitously calls 'nationalitarianism', is not confined to the sphere of ideas. It can be, as Max Weber would have put it, 'economically oriented', allowing domination to operate through the control of economic activities and behaviour.

The example of the liberalisation of international trade

This is the case with international trade. The liberalisation of international trade is mainly negotiated not merely with international donors and organisations, but also with the different Tunisian economic actors. The decision to appear as the 'good pupil' of the WTO and, above all, of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership cannot happen against the interests of entrepreneurs or, to be more exact, cannot come about in a way too opposed to their interests. But these can

⁹⁸ In other words, a position of passive partnership, interested solely in the sharing of financial benefits, not in the strategy of the enterprise. Interviews, Tunis, December 2003 and February 2005.

⁹⁹ Decree 94-492 modified by decree 97-503 of 14 March 1997 published in the JORT, no. 24, 25 March 1997. The list of sectors is provided on the government's website.

very easily be taken into account thanks to the decree of 29 August 1994, which authorizes all sorts of restrictions, and thanks also to the temporary safeguarding measures included in the agreement on association and article 28 of the latter which authorizes prohibitions and restrictions for ‘reasons of public morality, public order, public security, protection of the health and life of people and animals’¹⁰⁰. These juridical arrangements make it possible for ‘distortions’ in openness to be legalized – distortions which thus do not seem to be a violation of the free trade agreements.

Systematic technical controls have been used, for instance on tyres, to limit their import: when there are no Tunisian norms, European norms are applied, but their verification is still implemented by the INNORPI, the Tunisian organisation which administratively controls all imports and can, very opportunely, deem them unsuitable for home consumption¹⁰¹. Respect for the terms and conditions, including the extremely numerous conditions that need to be respected for the imported product, is scrupulously controlled, and when a competitor has already implemented all the administrative and technical procedures required, the new importer is obliged to repeat every step, even though the product imported is exactly the same¹⁰².

In addition, the lowering or indeed suppression of customs duties is often purely cosmetic, with the suppressed tax being surreptitiously transferred to other levies. This is the case with cars: while customs duties for a 4 hp car were 27% in 1995, and consumption duty 30%, the former actually disappeared in 1998 after application of the free trade agreement with the European Union, but the latter had been raised almost as much, reaching 55%¹⁰³. If there are any uncontrolled developments in the balance of current transactions, or a lack of currency, the Central Bank gives oral instructions to the banks and public organisations to limit imports. The modes of intervention are varied: customs formalities may be multiplied, there may be restrictions on the provision of currency to importers and obstacles to obtaining documentary credit, delays in the arrival of products with the harbour authorities being urged to slow down customs clearance procedures and access to the necessary documents, occasional and unofficial increases in customs duties, unfavourable judgments on the import of the product due to production defects, and absence of adequate information or, quite simply, substandard quality... Admittedly, all exports are in principle free, but, for this to be valid, one must have an accommodation address with a qualified intermediary. In addition, there is an unofficial list

¹⁰⁰ A detailed analysis of these measures can be found in N. Baccouche, ‘Les implications de l’accord d’association sur le droit fiscal et douanier’ (mélanges Habib Ayadi, CPU, avril 2000).

¹⁰¹ Interviews, Tunis, April 1998 and January 1999.

¹⁰² Interviews, Tunis and Sfax, April 1998 and January 1999.

¹⁰³ Interviews, Tunis, May 1997 and April 1998. For more detail, B. Hibou and L. Martinez, ‘Le partenariat euro-maghrébin: un mariage blanc?’, *Les Etudes du CERI*, no. 47, November 1997.

of products that are excluded from this liberty, a list containing (in particular) the most lucrative products, especially the export of olive oil¹⁰⁴.

It is clear that protectionism and nationalitarianism are both vectors of favouritism and socioeconomic inequality. When import depends on subjective judgments, more or less unofficial administrative procedures or the quality of personal relations, protection becomes an obvious instrument in the service of the central power and its objects of control.

The many instrumentalizations of 'nationalitarianism'

However, these protectionist practices do not result merely from administrative decisions, but more from their convergence with economic strategies (both public and private) as well as from a heightened sense of national awareness. The colonial episode founded the defensive character of Tunisian nationalism and the preoccupation with what might be called a 'national preference', expressing the desire to build up a nation-State that is also economically independent and to draw up a security pact¹⁰⁵. That is why this economic nationalism, too, appears in a particularly obvious guise: under a fully liberal ideology, it expresses and cements a general resistance on the part of the Tunisians, not to openness, liberalism or globalisation in general, but to a real or supposed dissolution of national independence¹⁰⁶. National-liberalism, a strange alliance of liberalism and economic nationalism, is thus not created by a voluntarist project of the State; it expresses the ambiguity of an entanglement of different ways of being, more or less well-thought-out strategies, tactics of power, and economic and political activities.

The example of the obstacles placed in the way of foreigners entering helps to understand the complexity of processes at work¹⁰⁷. In the sensitive sectors – banking, insurance and telecommunications – we observe the convergence of different interests ensuring that a highly technical sector of activity, which might have been able to benefit from expertise and a specialised, internationally-recognized know-how, remains in the hands of national actors (the case of insurance and consumer credit) or in the hands of foreign actors chosen for their docility

¹⁰⁴ Interviews, Tunis, January 1999, July 2000 and December 2002; Sfax, April 1998 and December 2002.

¹⁰⁵ This appears even more clearly if we compare the path taken by Tunisia with other situations, in Asia, for example: on Taiwan and China, F. Mengin, 'A contingent outcome of the unfinished Chinese civil war: state-formation in Taiwan by transnational actors', paper presented at the Franco-British conference *Economies morales et formation de l'Etat dans le monde extra-européen* (Paris; Cambridge: CERI, FASOPO, and Trinity College, 27 May 2005), and *Trajectoires chinoises – Taïwan, Hong Kong, Pékin* (Paris: Karthala, 1998); on Korea, A.-H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); M. Lanzarotti, *La Corée du Sud: une sortie du sous-développement* (Paris: PUF, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ Etienne Balibar underscores the difference between 'invisible' nationalisms, those of the dominant countries who express their domination, and 'too visible' nationalisms, those of the dominated countries who express a resistance: see E. Balibar, 'Internationalisme et barbarie' in *Lignes*, 17, October 1992, pp. 21-42.

¹⁰⁷ All the following examples are drawn from the national press and from interviews, Tunis, 1998-2003 and Paris, 2003-2004.

and their grasp of national interests (the case of the mobile phone industry), even if it means going astray down dead-ends and incurring grave crises (the BATAM affair and spiralling household debt) or not benefiting from the best technology and logistics offered on the market (the case of the second GSM licence for which Telefonica was ousted in favour of ORASCOM, an Egyptian-Emirates operator). Or we could point to the ill-will of the Tunisian authorities in the negotiations on the readmission agreement with France or Italy, in particular the financial demands linked to that demand; the fixing at unrealistic levels of the minimal sums demanded by the Tunisian authorities when privatisations are carried out or concessions granted, leading to the failure of several operations; the refusal to grant more flexibility for ad hoc recruitments, as with the Alcatel group in the framework of the creation of the platform of qualifications in the area of technologies and information, or with the BNP (Banque nationale de Paris) in the framework of its majority holding in the UBCI (Union bancaire pour le commerce et l'industrie), or for the resolution of conflicts, as with the dispute over property with France; or indeed the national preference granted de facto in the case of privatisations¹⁰⁸.

Over and above all these facts, one must point out, too, that these decisions and attitudes did not in the main emerge from bureaucratic and political apparatuses. In the insurance case mentioned above, the refusal to see Allianz rise in the capital of the national company is in reality the result of a profound agreement between the ministries concerned, the Banque centrale de Tunisie and the economic and financial establishment. This agreement bore on the simultaneous maintenance of secure incomes, opportunities for interventions, possibilities of control and perpetuation of the system of mutual dependence making accumulation and disciplinary normalisation possible¹⁰⁹. In the case of the UIB (Union internationale de banque), the Société Générale found it difficult to reach a clear and complete vision of the real situation of the company as a result – of course – of the hostility of the management and the departing team (implicitly supported by the public powers), but also because of the absence of transmission of strategic information on the part of the firms' executives. These 'nationalist' reflexes of closure and distrust in particular be explained by the fear of being called a 'collaborator', an 'informer' and a 'traitor'¹¹⁰, a fear exacerbated by the nationality of the buyer, by institutional reflexes akin to private protectionism, and by the hegemonic positioning of certain actors in the different niches of activity. Generally speaking, these activities make themselves known under the benevolent gaze of the authorities (as with the importing of certain makes of car) or with their support (as with the production of certain products with the setting

¹⁰⁸ Over 90% of the operations of privatisation have been carried out to the benefit of Tunisians. See my discussion of the political significance of privatisations in chapter 9.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews, Tunis, December 2003.

¹¹⁰ Interviews, Tunis, December 2002.

up of normative or health-related checks which prevent or de facto put a brake on competitors' imports).

If we adopt a technical, normative and liberal vision of these and similar nationalist practices, there is no doubt at all that they need to be analysed as contradicting the openness espoused by reformism, representing economic 'distortions', 'bad habits', and 'irrationalities', 'rentier behaviour' and 'unhealthy protectionism', or even 'irrational moves guided by an old-fashioned blanket support for the Third World'¹¹¹. On the other hand, an awareness of political, social and symbolic dynamisms obliges us to abandon any normative evaluation: nationalism is neither good nor bad, 'it is a historic form for interests and opposed struggles'¹¹². In spite of its emotional character, which as often as not drags the analysis into the perilous paths of denunciation or justification, it needs to be taken as a total social given. These practices need, then, to be understood as the expression of a complex appropriation of openness and a now inevitable international integration.

The previous examples have shown that a practice described as 'nationalist' can at one and the same time be the result of an explicit nationalist demand in the name of national sovereignty; of a political, populist or opportunist instrumentalisation aimed at legitimization; of a public and state interventionism; of strictly bureaucratic logics; of a classical protectionist policy operating in the name of employment, upgrading, apprenticeship, or adaptation to competition; of an inability to find an adequate mode of action; of the sense of a dead end and a desire to conceal problems, hassles and difficulties; of an anti-westernism and a reasoned struggle against neo-colonialism; of a diffuse nationalist awareness; of a reminiscence of colonial domination and the economic discrimination that accompanied it; of a desire for political control; of a policy of integration and implementation of measures of economic and social security; of a clientelist strategy or of corruption; of a determination to keep control over the levers of action on the national economy; and so on...

Those who (like Arab nationalists, groups on the extreme left, or indeed many individuals without any political affiliation) criticise the authorities' lack of nationalism underline in their turn this plurality of meanings and this instrumentalisation. Their criticisms bear first and foremost on the behaviour of elites in pursuit of their own material interests (and not the pursuit of the service of the ideal of the country's general interest), on the instrumentalisation of the nationalist ideology for clientelist and nepotistic purposes, and on the failure of economic policies to meet the objectives of full employment, growth or industrialisation. For – *pace* those who believe in consensus – Tunisians do not defend identical positions in this regard, since

¹¹¹ All these expressions are taken from interviews.

¹¹² E. Balibar, 'Internationalisme ou barbarie', op. cit., p. 28.

some of them defend a clear economic nationalism (middle classes, employees, civil servants, trade unionists), while others play the card of a systematic alliance with foreigners (certain big entrepreneurs, certain segments of the State), while yet others do not have any cut-and-dried position, being principally preoccupied by their own economic situation (small entrepreneurs, migrants, tradesmen, workers in the informal sector), while others, finally, wish to preserve their powers of negotiation (senior civil servants, the ruling elite, certain major entrepreneurs, party members) or are moved by demagoguery (the popular press, certain segments of the central power and the RCD).

In the abovementioned examples, the different logics have converged to create the image of a defensive and timid nationalism, or even an 'exacerbated nationalism'. But these cases mainly display a quite individual configuration, which brings in actors seeking to protect their rents and their positions within society, defending a social reproduction in which they benefit from a privileged position and instrumentalising nationalism for power. These are all perfect illustrations of economic 'nationalitarianism'. Nonetheless, this is not always the case: more often than not, the ambiguity and incompleteness of different and indeed contrasting logics proves decisive.

National-liberalism, a complex management of international integration

The practices characteristic of national-liberalism are indeed often less unambiguous than the previous examples suggested. In reality, there are many who, while having internationalised their activities and their behaviours are just as much preoccupied by their national integration and yet, while continuing to claim that they are nationalist actors, are no less 'globalised'.

Multiple logics of action

In fact, the figures of national-liberalism, a contemporary economic version of reformism, are diverse and ambiguous. There is, of course, the out-and-out nationalist reformer, like Khayr ed-Din and today the higher civil servants who simultaneously conceive the great reformist projects and nationalist and protectionist strategies on a day-by-day basis. We also find the technocrats of diverse administrations who implement the reforms of liberalisation and at the same time the various ways of side-stepping these; the members of agencies who promote bureaucratic modernity while at the same time piling on the paperwork and fuelling an administrative hierarchy that deprives anyone of real responsibility; elites trained abroad who

have passed through international institutions and hamper the internationalisation of Tunisian capitalism; the big bankers and businessmen who steer a course between Paris, London or New York and Tunis, but who are the first to demand that the CEOs of banks or enterprises should be nationals¹¹³.

But we also need to be aware of the whole mass of anonymous individuals who hope to become an integral part of international modernity while at the same time behaving like easily-offended nationalists. There are entrepreneurs who support ‘upgrading’ and free trade and form alliances with foreigners, while requesting subsidies and defending a preference for national interests. There are industrialists who accept foreign acquisitions of holdings, sometimes with a majority stake, and at the same time never stop demanding the application of discriminatory measures against foreigners. There are members of associations that share the ideology of modernity, democratisation, and an international lifestyle, while denouncing European neocolonisation. There are individuals who consume Coca-Cola, dream of MacDonal’d’s and Pizza Hut, equip themselves with the most up-to-date household appliances, and simultaneously demonstrate against American imperialism in the region, criticise western materialism and listen to *Al Jazira* or *Al Manar*. Bankers and tradesmen contribute to the spread of consumption and modern lifestyles, but also to a political economy comprised of clientelist interventionism, and of networking on the regional, family or friendship level. Workers in free zones, and employees in tourist complexes are, by day, the best allies of international capitalism and of foreign consumers and, by night, the faithful representatives of a traditional Islamism (reformist or not), of a vengeful ‘Arabo-Muslim’ set of ideas, of family and kinship values.

When set out like this under an external gaze, these types of behaviour may appear contradictory and reveal more or less naïve illusions. In reality, they merely reflect the plurality of logics of action, and the diversity, too, of the interpretations of national-liberalism by one and the same individual, and the complexity and ambiguity of any social practice. In this case, any appropriation of globalisation is equally complex – and the individuals concerned do not register, as such, what is commonly called ‘hybridity’ or *métissage*¹¹⁴.

¹¹³ This was clearly stated to me in interviews, Tunis, December 2001 and December 2002.

¹¹⁴ For a comparative overall analysis of these processes of appropriation, see J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects*, op. cit. On the difference in perception between external gaze and internal perception, and an implicit and highly interesting critique of hybridity, see S. Abrevaya Stein, ‘The permeable boundaries of Ottoman Jewry’, in J. Migdal (ed.), *Boundaries and Belonging. States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 49-71: she shows how the Ladino Jews of the Ottoman Empire did not experience their identity as plural; Jewishness was understood as an articulation of several allegiances, simultaneously to the Ottoman Empire, to Europe, to other millets, to modernity, etc.

The example of the informal economy

A separate place needs to be reserved for those who apparently seem to undermine the reforming projects of the central power but who, in reality, participate in this reformist and nationalist political economy. The many different actors in contraband are the archetype of this, as historians have shown for the 18th and, especially, the 19th centuries¹¹⁵. A rapid survey of economic activities and the organisation of markets will allow us to convince ourselves of the permanence and the current dynamisms of such practices.

In Tunis, ‘Moncef Bey’ and, everywhere in the country, the ‘Libyan souks’¹¹⁶ materialise the centrality of informal activities. Towns such as El Jem or Ben Gardane make of these a speciality, while, in all municipalities, fairs are organized each year on the eve of Eid or New Year’s Day, or the days preceding the beginning of the school year¹¹⁷. These permanent or occasional markets sell off products that entered the country illegally, or at least via networks of commercialisation operating on the margins of legality; they also offer second-choice products, such as the products from bankrupt factories or factories from which certain batches of products have been rejected by the principal¹¹⁸. Contraband occupies a great many actors: inhabitants living on the borders, in the case of Algeria and, especially, Libya; émigrés on holiday, false émigrés who take advantage of national dispositions to go in for street peddling, housewives, students, the unemployed, young people who specialise in business trips to Paris, Marseilles, Naples or Istanbul, recognized local tradesmen who commit customs and harbour fraud, protected wheeler-dealers who develop these activities on a large scale¹¹⁹. Contraband concerns every type of product destined for the Tunisian market, exploiting price differentials, policies of subsidy and taxation, and practices of tax evasion.

Second-hand clothes provide an opportunity for a subtler mode of contraband based on the activities of sorting, recycling and re-exporting material from the United States and

¹¹⁵ See J. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint. Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and A. Hénia, *Le Grid: ses rapports avec le Beylik de Tunis (1676-1840)* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1980) and in particular the work of Dalenda Larguèche, especially *Territoire sans frontières. La contrebande et ses réseaux dans la Régence de Tunis au XIX^e siècle* (Tunis: Centre de publication universitaire, 2002).

¹¹⁶ This name was for a long time reserved for the great informal markets situated on the border between Tunisia and Libya or supplied by products from Libya, but now extended and generalised to all informal markets.

¹¹⁷ Interviews, Tunis, December 2002, January-March 2005 and Sfax, December 2002.

¹¹⁸ C. Lainati, *Le imprese stranieri in Tunisia. Nascita e sviluppo dei circuiti produttivi: gli italiani nel tessile-abbigliamento*, research report, mimeograph, October-December 2001; M. Peraldi (with the collaboration of H. Bettaïeb and C. Lainati), ‘Affranchissement et protection: les petits mondes de la confection en Tunisie’, communication au colloque de Sousse, Tunisie, 2003.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, and the various contributions by M. Peraldi (ed.), *Cabas et containers, activités marchandes informelles et réseaux migrants transfrontaliers* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001).

Germany destined for the poorest countries¹²⁰. These activities are official and even encouraged by the authorities because of their contribution to the inflow of currency and the statistical swelling of exports. But they also permit an illegal spread of second-hand clothes across the Tunisian market and the appearance, at extremely competitive prices, of clothes and fabrics that barely resemble second-hand clothes at all¹²¹. The informal sector is consubstantial with production. It is not necessary here to go over a point well-known in Tunisian studies¹²²: how to enter into the accounts the activity of these thousands of independents and this mass of enterprises that have fewer than six employees, and which represent 85% of the total of Tunisian enterprises – the activity, too, of middle-sized and large enterprises which underestimate their production and do not declare the total number of their employees or hours worked. Fakes are numerous, too, rising sharply since 1995, with Tunisia now constituting ‘one of the traditional zones’¹²³. Although a law of April 2001 penalises this activity, fake products remain extremely common, destined for export, in the luxury sector (Vuitton bags, Lacoste clothes, brands of perfume), in objects of everyday use (lighters, biros, razors), in electronic equipment (Schneider circuit breakers, Moulinex products), in the agribusiness, (cheese), and even in the best-known logos, with GrandOptical in Tunis, for instance, operating without an official brand name.

In the first analysis, informal activities weaken the strategy of modernisation of the national economy by diminishing the tax base and promoting imports rather than local productions. They undermine the rule of law by acting illegally. They sap the Tunisian authorities’ desire for control of commercial balance and of currency by basing their activities on foreign goods... But, at the same time, these practices are indissociable from openness, and comprise another of its modes. They play against certain techniques of market regulation, while

¹²⁰ Interviews, Tunis, May 1997 and April-May 1998. In spite of the sensitive character of this activity, it is possible to obtain information on this sector in Tunisia, including within the UTICA, thanks to the discontent it arouses in many entrepreneurs.

¹²¹ According to the law, only 12% of the ‘production’ of secondhand clothes by the sixteen recognized enterprises are authorized to enter Tunisian customs territory. In reality, fraud develops on the basis of false declarations and under-estimations of weight. In addition, associated industries (transformations of secondhand clothes into rags and nets) also lie at the origin of those products smuggled in, by false declarations and under-estimation of the quality of the product. Interviews, May 1997 and April 1998.

¹²² M. Bouchrara, ‘Comment dynamiser l’industrialisation rampante et l’innovation en Tunisie?’, *Nouvelles de l’écodéveloppement*, MSH-EHESS, Paris, no. 32-33, March-June 1985; *Sept millions d’entrepreneurs. Etudes sur l’esprit d’entreprise, l’innovation et la création d’emplois en Tunisie, 1984-1987* (Tunis: mimeo, June 1996) and *L’Economie tunisienne entre sa légalité et son identité. Douze propositions pour ramener la confiance économique*, (Tunis, miméo, 1995: articles from *La Presse*, 22-29 March 1995); J. Charmes, ‘Secteur non structuré, politique économique, structuration sociale en Tunisie, 1970-1985’, in M. Camau (ed.), *Tunisie au présent*, op. cit., pp. 231-251; P.-N. Denieul, *Les Entrepreneurs du développement. L’ethno-industrialisation en Tunisie. La dynamique de Sfax* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992).

¹²³ The expression and the evaluation came from *La Contrefaçon et la piraterie* (Paris: Union des fabricants, 2003), p. 3, which notes a net increase in Tunisian fakes since 1995. I have also drawn on information gathered during interviews in Tunis with entrepreneurs, the Federation of Textile Workers, and the foreign services of cooperation, as well as in Paris and Brussels, with the OLAF, the European Anti-Fraud Office.

constituting the supreme form of that same regulation: as a result, they promote liberal reform in configurations that are different from, but probably more powerful than, those of formal commerce. Thus, they sustain the reformist dynamic, outside the rules of law and bureaucratic normalisation – but, indisputably, in accordance with the logic of the policing State and the mechanisms that underlie the security pact. Thus they play a part in the spread of capitalism and its reproduction, even though national-liberalism aims to look after the domestic actors of international competition and reduce the impact of the latter. They contribute to liberalisation, investment¹²⁴, the modernisation of mass consumption and the cultural unification of society, growth and employment, apprenticeship too, and a certain degree of professional training, town and country planning and the integration of deprived populations (the South and South-East zones in particular)¹²⁵.

Informal activities play a part in the process of economic centralisation: they constitute a practice of inclusion for the multitude of individuals caught up in these networks¹²⁶; they play a part in the mechanisms of social reproduction¹²⁷; they contribute to the desire for national unification precisely insofar as the smugglers' markets bring together local logics, activities and networks (regionalist, tribal, family) with, on the other hand, State activities, networks and preoccupations¹²⁸. These practices play a part in the increasing degree to which Tunisia is integrated into the international scene, and sometimes in a certain modernisation of its productive economy, by the development of fake goods and increasingly specialized imitations and by an increase in the productivity of certain Tunisian infrastructures designed for international trade¹²⁹.

Above all, informal activities involve the full set of Tunisian actors: consumers and investors, marginal players and wealthy wheeler-dealers, entrepreneurs operating partly or totally on the edge of legality, émigrés, people of dual nationality and Tunisians from Tunisia,

¹²⁴ H. Boubakri, 'Echanges transfrontaliers et commerce parallèle aux frontières tuniso-libyennes', *Monde arabe, Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 170, October-December 2000, pp. 39-51; thus mentions that, in the south of Tunisia, crossborder commerce had made it possible to purchase tractors and heavy agricultural equipment, all impossible to acquire by other means.

¹²⁵ Interviews, Tunis, Sfax, 1997-2005; H. Boubakri, 'Migrations, développements et réinsertion dans l'économie libérale. Cas de la Tunisie', in M. Berriane and H. Popp (eds), *Migrations internationales entre le Maghreb et l'Europe*, Verlag Passau, series Maghreb-Studien, 10, LIS, 1998, pp. 127-143; J. Charmes, 'L'apprentissage sur le tas dans le secteur non structuré en Tunisie', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, vol. 19, 1980; P.-N. Denieul, *Les Entrepreneurs du développement*, op. cit.; L. Chouikha and K. Labidi, 'Dans l'attente de la démocratie... et des investissements étrangers. La Tunisie sans filet dans le grand jeu de la libéralisation économique', *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 1993, pp. 18-19.

¹²⁶ M. Peraldi, 'L'esprit de bazar. Mobilités transnationales maghrébines et sociétés métropolitaines. Le comptoir démantelé', pp. 33-64, and S. Mazzella, 'L'arrière-boutique du port de Marseille', pp. 133-164, in M. Peraldi (ed.), *Cabas et containers*, op. cit.

¹²⁷ P.-N. Denieul, *Les Entrepreneurs du développement*, op. cit.

¹²⁸ H. Boubakri, 'Echanges transfrontaliers', op. cit.

¹²⁹ Interviews, Tunis, May 1997, April 1998, July 2000 and December 2002, and *La Contrefaçon et la piraterie*, op. cit.

police and customs officers, those close to the central power and actors who are members of 'the resistance'... We could almost repeat word for word what Dalenda Larguèche describes with regard to the 19th century: 'A marginal activity, a parallel and illicit economy, a disguised social resistance, a strategy of survival for disadvantaged social groups or illegal but lucrative activities with dynamic and rising elements – the contraband sector [and that of all illegality] is a space in which is expressed a whole series of contradictions, precisely because it simultaneously includes actors with different and even contradictory interests'¹³⁰. Like other economic sites, contraband, the informal sector, fake goods and all other forms of traffic constitute spaces of negotiation, association, and mediation, which make it possible for the social domain to be articulated in different ways. They enable poor and marginal groups to live but also enrich notables and businessmen; they express a tactic of resistance or avoidance but also a strategy of influence and diversification; and they structure both the State and the groups that gravitate around it. In other words, the reformist dynamic can act outside the rules of the bureaucratised space of the national economy and the rule of law.

What do these examples tell us? Quite simply that, beyond myth and fiction, reformism and the economic form it takes, and national-liberalism as a mode of management of extraversion, appear more as heterogeneous practices, and uncertain and unstable makeshifts. They show individuals and groups that are certainly not passive even if they are far from dominating the space of their field of action. I have tried to show that Tunisians are fully part of globalisation, in its various facets, starting with the effects of domination that it transmits and produces: to be in globalisation and to take part in it does not mean that inequality and domination are avoided – quite the contrary. In a country like Tunisia, domination appears self-evident, as the main fact of globalisation, and it even entails a neglect or a euphemising of previous and inner effects of domination.

'Reformism' and 'Tunisian-ness' appear as deceptive words which make it possible for tensions to be defused, problems to be concealed, and strategies to be legitimized, but also for heterogeneous practices to be fostered, as well as divergent interests, varied visions of the world and Tunisia's place in it. The sacralising of these terms is an effect of power: it opens the way to consensus and unanimity, the main vectors of discipline; to respect for authority; and to the indisputable character of the government's political guidelines, Plans, programmes, and economic strategies. This is also why these portmanteau words, which need to be understood in their historicity, need also to be demythified. Such a task brings out the processes of exclusion that have always been present alongside the processes of integration that alone have been

¹³⁰ D. Larguèche, *Territoire sans frontières*, op. cit., p. 9.

highlighted in discourses and myths. We need to understand that the nationalist practices and rhetorics of withdrawal are neither good nor bad. Our previous analysis, after all, has shown that actions performed in the name of nationalism often concealed political logics of quite a different nature, in particular effects of power, relations of force, and a certain free play in internal social relations. This, too, is reformism.

Traduit du français par Andrew Brown