POLITICAL STUDIES: 2002 VOL 50, 497–513

The Search for Citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia: Democracy versus Unity

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Commitment to unity can hinder democracy, rendering the search for pluralism into an exercise in political singularity. I contest the thesis within the theory of democratic transition that national cohesion and ethnic homogeneity are essential preconditions for democracy. Tunisia is an ethnically homogeneous society, but seems to be unable to seize on the opportunity to transcend the threshold of democracy. The Tunisian example suggests that democracy (that is, an ethos of toleration of difference), should be rethought as one essential precondition for cohesion within democratising polities. The analysis unpacks how 'fragmented' politics works in the North African country. Politics becomes 'fragmented' when 'loyalty' to the state's discourse of 'citizenship' and 'identity', becomes the one distinguishing feature by which political community is defined and membership within it is determined. National unity is another word for political uniformity. Thus understood the state's imperative of unity and uniformity contradicts political pluralism and demotes rather than promotes democratic development.

Bin Ali came to power in a bloodless coup in November 1987, ousting his predecessor, the octogenarian Habib Bourguiba, who ruled Tunisia since the end of the French protectorate in 1956 (Moore, 1988). Bin Ali set two goals for his rule: democratisation and national reconciliation (Hermassi, 1995, p. 109). This paper speaks directly to the issue of Tunisia's democratisation. Tunisia largely meets with Western approval for being a post of moderation, stability and liberal politics (Waltz, 1991, p. 29). But to an extent, there is a myth about the country's 'liberal politics'. Under the patrimonial Bourguiba (Krichen, 1992, pp. 32–41) single party rule was the order of the day (Moore, 1965). The North African country has an 'electoral' democracy under his successor. But the resulting electoral regime that has been carefully controlled by the state is largely constrictive, uncompetitive, and illiberal (Murphy, 1999; Harik, 1992; Zartman, 1991). The 'routinisation' and consolidation of Bin Ali's hold on power has, however, generated greater stability than was the case in Bourguiba's last years at the helm (Ware, 1986, pp. 30–5). That stability has come at the expense of political pluralism, as shall be elaborated below. But it is in the area of economic management that Tunisia seems to have established credibility (King, 1998, pp. 107–8; Economist Intelligence Unit, 1997). Economic liberalisation, however, has gained more momentum than political liberalisation or the implications of economic liberalisation for democratisation remain uncertain (Murphy, 1997; Hermassi, 1994, pp. 227–42).

Cohesion first, democracy second?

The conventional wisdom within development and democratisation theory has traditionally insisted on social and political, cultural, ethnic cohesiveness and unity

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as prerequisites for reproducible stability and democracy. This paper does not share this wisdom. In Tunisia the straightjacket of national unity has historically compromised pluralism and plurality. Continuing with a model of electoral politics that is informed by the primacy of national unity offers nothing more than the reproduction of the status quo. Thus elections cannot be considered an adequate test of Bin Ali's dicing with democracy.

Whatever the definitional requisites ascribed to the notion of democracy, it remains an essentially contested concept. There is no single definition or practice of democracy that can be taken as normative (Held, 1996; Sartori, 1987). However, a set of broad standards must be obtained for a genuine transition from authoritarianism to stand a good chance of success. The relevance and significance of proceduralism (periodic elections), legality (independent judiciary; fundamental liberties), institutionalism (non-personalist institutions; separation of power) cannot be stressed enough when democracy is under construction. It is, however, the standard of equal opportunity for organising and representing difference that renders a particular liberalising experiment congenial to or at odds with democracy. Thus conceived, democratic community reads as 'one which permits and perhaps also encourages every man and woman individually or with others to choose the course of his or her life, *subject to recognition of the right of others to do likewise*' (Parry and Moran, 1994, p. 4 – emphasis added). The practice of political pluralism in key 'liberalising' Arab states is read political conformism and monism. Salamé notes how insistence on national unity has meant persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab World (Salamé, 1994, pp. 4–6). National unity is seen as a prerequisite for stability and development. Thus Owen notes how stability as a political value is more important than democracy in many Middle East polities (Owen, 1992, p. 245). No challenge therefore is perhaps greater than the building of an autonomously associational milieu that breathes life into the fledgling processes of democratisation. Norton and Ayubi stress the importance of civil society for the maturity of democratisation (Ayubi, 1995, pp. 396–9; Norton, 1993, pp. 205–16, 1995, pp. 5–9). The Arab state's 'authoritarian corporatist' approach to ruling state-society relations interferes in this space theorised from Hegel (1952) to Gramsci (Femia, 1981; Bellamy and Schecter, 1993) to be outside the state's coercive apparatus.

Democratisation theory presents the student of Arab transitions with more problems than answers.[1] Rustow's transitional model presupposes a set of three sequences for the realisation of democracy (Rustow, 1970). These are authoritarian decay and collapse; institution-building; and democratic habituation. However, a prerequisite for this transition is national cohesion. In practice, national unity has become symbiotic with an expectation by Arab ruling elites for their peoples to rally around the state, direct all loyalty towards central government and be politically deferential. National unity is spelt singularity.

Generally, there is broad consensus within democratic theory that homogeneity is far more conducive to democracy than heterogeneity. Like Rustow, Dahl in his *Polyarchy* (1971), as Przeworski notes, produces substantial empirical data correlating democracy with national and ethnic homogeneity (Przeworski *et al.*, 1995, pp. 19–21). Multinational or multiethnic states are written off as good candidates

for democratisation, a view that Przeworski rightly questions (1995, p. 20). The primordialist idea of being born into an identity suggests fixity and permanence. In a sense this view writes off the possibility of multiple layers of identity, and says very little about the imagining and constructing of identity. The view of a manipulable and changing identity strikes a chord with the instrumentalist conception of identification. This conception rejects anchoring identity in historical experience or reducing them to blood affinities or immutable loyalties. Identities are not objective givens operating outside space or time. They are constructed and mobilised by events and myths and myth inventors in specific contexts. They do not obtain from generalised categories. Reducing identity to a single underlying category, such as ethnicity, nationality or religion, is both essentialist and reductionistic.

The analysis below turns to the question of how the political mapping of processes of inclusion and exclusion has been executed discursively and practically in Ben Ali's Tunisia (1987 to present), comparing it with Bourguiba's Tunisia (1956–87). In both discourse and practice of 'citizenship' and 'identity' are centrally controlled. They preclude alternative forms of self-identification, especially Islamist reimagining (Hermassi, 1995, pp. 115–17). Islamists refer here to activists espousing ideologies that stress the implementation of Islam in public affairs (Esposito, 1992, pp. 2–16).

Imagining Identity and Community in Tunisia

In theory, at least, Tunisia's homogeneity makes for a solidaristic society. This homogeneity is *sui generis* a ready-made unifying force, an *esprit de corps* that links state and society. Ibn Khaldun, Tunisia's fourteenth-century philosopher of history, deploys the concept of *asabiyya* (social solidarity; tribal kinship) to impart his appreciation of the dynamic of social cohesiveness or lack thereof in the processes of state making and unmaking (Rosenthal, 1967, pp. lxxviii–lxxxi). Just as the social bond that obtains from *asabiyya* engenders state making and, subsequently, *umran* and *hadara* (sedentary culture), homogeneity in modern theory of democratic transition strongly implies stability and democratisation, as stated above. The notion of *asabiyya* persists and is entangled in the political process in the modern Middle East (Salamé, 1994; Zubaida, 1989). For Salamé modern *asabiyyat* (plural of *asabiyya*) complicate the search for democracy in the Middle East. The continuing legitimacy of community organisation and identity is not always receptive to the individualism of Western democracy. Thus the struggle for democracy in the Middle East can be directed concomitantly at the authoritarianism of the state as well as of the group (Salamé, 1994, pp. 9–11). For Zubaida traditional group solidarities have not disappeared and interpenetrate with nation-states, political parties, and parliaments (1989, p. 84). He argues that the constitution of political forces relates to various and shifting bases of social solidarities, which are themselves affected by changes in political and economic conjecture, including state structures and policies (1989, p. 90). In Tunisia, the dominant solidarity that has had more say in the shaping of national identity and political community is *baldi-Saheli*, which is *francisant* and bourgeois. This *asabiyya* built what Zartman calls a 'bourgeois republic' (1998, p. 3).

The imagining of identity in a pre-nationalist and pre-modern stage rested on

inherited conceptions of belonging that naturalised the image of identity as kinship or some form of clan or tribal *asabiyya*. In Tunisia, even in post-independence there were still vestiges of this genealogically based form of self-identification. Individual identity was cemented to clan or tribal collectivity. But the tribe or clan was not the only identity. There were significant identities attached to urban as opposed to rural dwelling, and to social groupings such as the *baldi* (urban Tunisois families), *afaqi* (rural outsiders), *al-makhzan* (the state) and the *ulema* (learned scholars of Islam). The prefix *ouled* (kin of; literally, sons of) was as important as the name of the sire, male ancestor or clan chief it preceded (e.g. ouled jlas or simply al-jlas; (ouled) al-farashish; (ouled) al-hamama, etc.). It was an identity template. It denoted a genealogy that marked out for clan members the boundaries of belonging and identity. The tribal pluralism in that pre-nationalist milieu was a function of economic, physical and psychological security. During colonisation, imagining of community rested on a dichotomous formula: 'us' versus 'them' – 'French' versus 'Tunisian'. But this dichotomy should not detract attention from the complexities of cultural assimilation among certain classes, and the importance attached by Tunisian élites to the modernising impact of colonial rule. Nonetheless, the presence of an occupying force, France, not only made the drawing of lines between indigenous and non-indigenous a fairly uncomplicated exercise, but it also became identical with a historical moment in the imagining of community. 'Tunisian-ness' had to be invented as a legal construct and a national identity (Sraieb, 1987). This marked the onset of state oriented ethnic nationalism.

Thus the marking out of national identity is essentialised, combining two different approaches. The first is derived from a liberal notion of identity predicated on the primacy and indivisibility of nation. This construction of identity conceives of identity as fixed and 'objective' with ethnicity occupying a central place within it. Ethnicity entails commonalities of race, history, and language. When comparing ethnicity to other categories, such as class, some sociologists accord it endurance, comprehensiveness and uniqueness in terms of common memories and histories. Hence ethnicity is affirmed to be endowed with 'a greater affinity ... for sentimental elaboration of identity, and a larger capacity for reasserting exclusive loyalties, after long periods of increasing commitments to broader, more inclusive civic loyalties' (Kuper, 1969, p. 461). According to this conception, identity is a primordial given. Unlike the category of class, it does not follow from particular modes of capitalist production. The primordialism of this conception has been challenged by Anderson's seminal work, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1991). The crux of his thesis is that nationalist identity is an artifice. It is the most articulate interrogation of naturalised representations of the nation as timeless and universal, extending from ancestry and sanguine relationships. Anthony Smith's equally important work stands somewhere in between primordialist and instrumentalist representations of identity. He neither naturalises the conception of identity nor makes it so fluid and adaptive to material or political changes and pressures. He contends that any 'modern' nation carries within it elements of a 'pre-modern' ethnie (1986, p. 18).

Whereas the first liberal conception of identity lays insufficient stress on religion, the second makes it inseparable from self-identification. Two useful concepts will be briefly invoked to understand the dynamics of identity construction and recon-

struction: 'ethnonationalism' and 'ethnoreligiousness' (Ben-Dor, 1999, p. 1). If ethnonationalism is the endeavour to give ethnicity a territorially statist expression, ethnoreligiousness rests on the assumption of 'an overlap of religious consciousness with some other characteristics of ethnicity – common origin, culture, or language'. The resulting 'ethnic activism' is not always territorially bound (Ben-Dor, 1999, p. 1). These two frames of reference intertwine a great deal when it comes to sketching the routes chartered by identity mapping in Tunisia.

The main catalyst for ethnonationalism was French colonisation. In the Mouvement Jeune Tunisien (Young Tunisia), the nationalist movement had a precursor in the group Ali Bash Hamba founded in 1908 (Khairallah, 1957). Separateness and separation from colonial France were central to the group's imagining of identity. However, at that early stage in the struggle against colonisation, ethnonationalism overlapped with ethnoreligiousness. The 1911 events of al-Jallaz when resistance against a plan to build a road across a Muslim cemetery erupted into violent clashes with the occupying army illustrated the strength of religious forms of self-identification. That plan, along with the attempt to place the administration of al-Jallaz cemetery under the jurisdiction of the Tunis municipality instead of its historical custodians, the *waqf* (religious endowments authority), was widely seen as a violation of religious identity and sensitivity. Again, in the 1932–34 *tajnees* (naturalisation) campaigns introduced by the French to foster a policy of assimilation, the resentment to colonial rule, still simmering from al-Jallaz incidents, boiled over into renewed resistance to occupation. The overlap, as Ben-Dor puts it, of religious consciousness with some associate of ethnicity such as language and culture was visibly strong. It was strong enough to spawn the nucleus of anti-French 'ethnic activism'. Such an activism and the narrative supporting it resonated with traditionalism, grounding identity in a naturalised imaging of identity in Arabo-Islamic terms. The country's first political party, al-Hizb al-Destouri (Constitutional Party), co-founded in 1920 by Abd al-Azeez al-Tha'alibi and nationalists, including scholars from the Islamic al-Zaytunah Mosque-University, did not develop enough of a territorially bound identity.

Bourguiba's al-Hizb al-Destouri al-Jadeed (Neo-Constitutional Party – Neo-Destour) was bolder in the assertion of a territorially oriented identity. Ethnoreligiousness was relegated to a secondary status. Ethnonationalism, be it one not devoid of religious idioms, was boldly pronounced. Unlike al-Tha'alibi, the *francisant* Bourguiba, a French trained lawyer, had much use for the grammar of secular nationalism which was to inform his rule's mapping of identity in Tunisia (Salem, 1984). The shaping and reshaping of identity under pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings represented a continuous act of adjusting the ethnic imagery to politically value-laden narratives. But perhaps identity's most lasting and deepest disturbance was that caused by colonialism and post-colonialism. The first disturbance was wrought by the confusion of a violent encounter with an outside 'otherness': Christian, European, mechanised, colonial and secular. This led to the awakening or activating of ethnoreligiousness in the search of secure boundaries within which to ground identity. The French assimilationist politics of identity was retorted to by an indigenous manipulation of identity whose anchorage was Islam. From the indigenous perspective, succumbing under those particular colonial cir-

cumstances to the colonies' assimilation would have been co-option not inclusion. Bourguiba and his fellow Neo-Destourians opposed assimilation at that time. But at the level of norms and ideology, Bourguiba and his Francophile allies did not reject French culture and had close contacts with the French left in the 1930s (Micaud, 1964, pp. 74–5). After independence, they set about modernising independent Tunisia, by trying to copy the French model (Zghal, 1991, p. 207). Thus Krichen criticises Bourguiba's approach of mimicking Western modernisation by mixing mutually exclusive fragments, such as of Occidental capitalism and Oriental pre-capitalism (1992, p. 49).

The second disturbance to the plurality of *asabiyyat* took the form of a systematic effort of self-identification calculated to create a collectively binding and overarching notion of national identity. In one sense, the identity reconstruction in this phase was geared to reclaim what was thought to be a natural image of Tunisian identity, one that preceded the society and political community re-imagined by the nationalist leaders. What legitimised this identity mapping was its resistance to a colonially divided society. For the plurality of *asabiyyat* tilted the balance of power in favour of the hegemonic 'other', the minority of *colons*, to the exclusion and exploitation of the indigenous majority. The appeal of the nationalist reconstruction of identity can be summed up in its symbiosis with emancipation and inclusion. But emancipation was double-edged: throwing the colonial yoke out, and then unshackling would-be *muwatinoon* (citizens) from the variety of *asabiyya*-based particularities. From the outset, the reconstruction of identity was, in theory at least, oriented toward a universal incorporation of *muwatinoon* into an indigenously governed order of *adala* (justice) *hurriyya* (freedom) and *musawat* (equality). By and large, all three remained intangibles in Bourguiba's Tunisia (Moore, 1988, pp. 179–80, 186–7). Colonial hegemony was substituted with an indigenous hegemony. For nearly three decades the new masters went about homogenising society and polity. The nationalist ethnic imagery lacked a democratic imagery. Its democratic deficiency is beyond empirical doubt. The first book of its kind on Bourguiba's thirty years in power by one of his former *protégés* and ministers provides ample testimony to this deficiency (Belkhodja, 1998, pp. 241–66; Zartman, 1988, 1994). Krichen goes further by noting that the ruling culture was clientelistic in nature and that the notion of the 'constitutional state' was more of a myth than a reality (1992, pp. 119–20).

Through the lens of the newly reconstructed identity, national unity continues until this day to be shorthand for political uniformity. The hegemonising and homogenising character of the state meant banning rival centres of power. After independence, this applied to the ruling party machine as well as to trade unions (Anderson, 1991, pp. 250–1, 257–9; Moore, 1988, p. 179). Before independence it applied to traditionalist and pan-Arab tendencies. Thus Bourguiba's unmistakably Francophile and secular politics placed him at odds with Salah Bin Yusif, his rival nationalist leader (Moore, 1988, p. 177). In the then newly constructed nationalist identity with its stress on uniformity, there could be room for only one identity narrative. Bin Yusif and the Yusifists' destiny was sealed in the 1955 Neo-Destour Party's Congress held in Sfax. Bourguiba's quasi Atatürkism was irreconcilable with the traditionalism and Arabism of Bin Yusif and al-Tha'alibi (Krichen, 1992, p. 35).

The Politics of Exclusion: Ethnos and Demos

The Tunisia bequeathed to Bin Ali was politically decaying, with a weak legal-rational basis. The break with Bourguiba's political practices has not been total. A few aspects of continuity beg details. A naturalised image of Tunisian identity forms the cornerstone of the nationalist and territorial state under both Bourguiba and his successor. As a consequence, a key to the post-colonial state's transition from *ethnos* ('pre-political community sharing kinship ties') to *demos* ('nation constituted as a state') (Habermas, 1998, pp. 129–30) was the assimilation of clan *asabiyyat*. This task was achieved fairly easily, with the state using a combination of repression (e.g. Ouled Shirayyit in the country's south) and equalisation through welfarist redistribution of goods – e.g. education, housing, health, employment – (Zartman, 1991, p. 30). In particular, state welfarism partly made the clan redundant. Dependence of individuals on the clan's safety net gradually decreased and, today, it is almost non-existent. Also, the breaking down of clan *asabiyyat* is due to a long history of centralised control over regional peripheries. Also, Tunisia's relatively large *Sahelian* middle class (Micaud, 1964, pp. 9, 81) and its higher prosperity helped foster welfare programmes.

The democratic imagery leaves much to be desired. The regime has not yet transcended the political syndrome of Bourguiba's 'first republic': political singularity. This singularity is the most salient feature of Bin Ali's 'second republic' (Vandewalle, 1988). The difference between Bourguiba and Bin Ali is one of quantity not democratic quality. In the early 1980s, Bourguiba's Tunisia, partly thanks to former Prime Minister Muhammad Mazali, committed itself to pluralism. On 10 April 1981, in the eleventh congress of the ruling Destour Socialist Parti (PSD), Bourguiba reluctantly agreed to broad participation by all the different socio-political groups. There was a degree of seriousness by the liberal elements in the Bourguiba regime to steer an increasingly unstable country away from crisis point. The fact that the move towards pluralism should draw heavily on the turbulence of the 1970s is not surprising. Single party rule was no longer suited to a country whose achievements in literacy and higher living standards, especially in the north and the Sahel, were constantly on the rise, necessitating political openings. Then there was the relative radicalisation and pluralisation of political life. Workers' syndicates, headed by the then powerful *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT) and its leader Habib Ashur, turned trade unionism into a fairly dynamic and autonomous, and at times confrontationist, branch of civil society. Disillusionment within the PSD led to a splinter liberal tendency headed by Ahmed Mistiri; later on it took the form of the Democratic Socialist Movement (MDS). An assertive student movement sprang up at the University of Tunis with currents within it representing the new centrifugal forces within the polity and society. So did unofficial Islam in the form of the Association for the Preservation of the Holy Quran, the precursor of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) and al-Nahdah (Hermassi, 1991). Increasing policing of universities, syndicates and schools galvanised human rights activists into founding *la ligue Tunisienne des droits de l'homme* (LTDH) in 1977 (Waltz, 1989, 1995, p. 11). It is against this backdrop that Bourguiba committed his regime to let diverse political organisations operate (Belkhodja, 1998, p. 249).

But that commitment was never consummated. The 1981 elections were not fully multiparty since the only opposition party legalised was the Parti Communiste Tunisien (PCT). No other party obtained the required five percent of the vote to be legalised. The political parties of the time had no funds, significant power-bases, and access to the state-owned media. Also, the electoral system of first-past-the-post favoured the ruling party. The elections were a strategy for regime consolidation not a trial run of democratic procedures. Thus the conduct of the elections did not confirm a genuine commitment by the PSD's machine to broaden political participation. The elections themselves were a disappointment. The PSD-UGTT coalition – the National Front – swept the board, winning 94.6 percent of the vote. The MDS was second with close to four percent (Belkhodja, 1998, p. 253). However, as Belkhodja confirms, illiberal elements within the PSD decided, apparently with Bourguiba's blessing, not to relinquish PSD hegemony over political life and rigged the results of the poll (1998, pp. 252–3).

The crises that beset the country in the 1970s were the driving engine of change in the 1980s. The 1970s witnessed the growth of the trade union movement into a political heavyweight in its own right, with dissident elements within it attempting to act as a formidable counter-weight to the ruling PSD. Had it not been chastened by draconian interference, it would have animated political life at a time when Tunisia's civil society started to take shape (Alexander, 1997, pp. 34–5). It was, however, considered by some to be primarily a creation of the Neo-Destour Party (King, 1998, p. 118). Definitely, after independence the UGTT succumbed to corporatist pressures by the state (Waltz, 1995, p. 50), becoming a vehicle for Bourguiba to mobilise support for the party and assume monopoly over labour issues. But for the greater part of its history, the UGTT depended on Bourguiba for status and thus never possessed any political power of its own. It remained as Zartman puts it a 'potential opposition party' (Zartman, 1988, p. 83). Nonetheless, Belkhodja is right in noting that the UGTT in ten years was transformed from a workers' movement into a dynamically and open rallying arena for intellectuals, professionals and technicians and activists of all political colours. The PSD offered these cadres little or no space for democratic participation. As a result, Belkhodja suggests, The UGTT became a sanctuary for a new generation of highly educated cadres trained in France's *grandes écoles* and eager to change things radically (1998, p. 132). There was visible tension in the late 1970s between the PSD and UGTT. Not even the Social Pact of 1977 could glue the unions and the state together any longer, especially in the face of price hikes of staples. January 26, 1978 was 'Black Thursday': the army interfered in an open and violent clash that pitted state against society, leaving in its wake hundreds dead.

Bourguiba's obsession with unity engendered hegemony and singularity. It was that very singularity that made him purge a comrade-in-arms, Bin Yusif, followed by the clans, Bin Salah, Mazali, amongst others. The same was true of organised politics, ranging from the UGTT to MTI. During some fifty years of Bourguibist domination of the political scene, the dogmatism with which *ethnos* and *demos* were blurred in Bourguiba's Tunisia rationalised the discarding of viable identities: religious, tribal and democratic. That hegemony was embodied in *l'Etat-patron* (state as tutelary) and *l'Etat-parti* (state as party) (Belkhodja, 1998, p. 131). Bourguiba's brand of nationalism left no room for any free space for non-governmental or non-

party actors. Rival centres of power were essentialised as fissiparous. Bourguiba ruled in a patrimonial fashion (Moore, 1988, 178).

Citizens and Denizens in Bin Ali's Electoral Democracy

The 7 November 1987 change led by Bin Ali was welcomed widely amongst Tunisians from all walks of life. But consensus over his advent to power was not universal. Many entertained scepticism about whether the new leader's military and security background would bode well for reversing the personalisation, de-institutionalisation and the privatisation of the state he inherited from Bourguiba. Despite the modest 'democratic' stirrings evident under his rule, exclusivity and singularity are once again intrinsic to the manufacturing of political community and ethnonationalism in Tunisia. The continuity of exclusivity and singularity contradict with the democratic plans Bin Ali articulated in his maiden speech (see text of speech in Chaabane (1997, p. 18)).

Quantitatively, at least, under Bin Ali Tunisia has moved from single party rule and exclusivity. Following the 1999 elections, the opposition holds 34 seats in the newly expanded 182-member unicameral parliament – 15 seats up from the 1994 elections. The expansion of the *Chambre des Députés* (Chamber of Deputies) from 163 to 182 can be read in two ways: a gain for the opposition, and a further decrease in the government's domination of parliamentary politics. With 34 seats the opposition holds nearly 19 percent of the total seats, a 7 percent increase from the last Chamber. King sees this as the regime's answer to increasing *pro forma* mediation after the oppression of the early 1990s (King, 1998, p. 121). The only transition has been from single party rule to ruling party hegemony. Electoral politics in this case has been about returning the incumbents to monopoly of political power. Thus the regime continues to *possess the democratic process*, employing bureaucratic-corporatist strategies (King, 1998, p. 120; Waltz, 1995, p. 50). It has, more or less, appropriated and deployed all state resources to reproduce itself without much serious competition. Murphy has reservations about the prospects of democratic consolidation under Bin Ali, noting how he alone has been deciding 'the pace, scope and spheres of reform' (Murphy, 1999, p. 223).

Bin Ali took over the reigns of power in order to change the status quo. Up to now the monolithic machinery of the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) points to a singular trajectory. It is the PSD dressed in the *jibbah* (Tunisian traditional long garb) of democracy. The PSD was rebuilt with a view to making use of the Destourian and Bourguibist power base. The recycling did indeed involve more than substituting the epithet 'socialist' for 'democratic'. The party was intended to be a *ruling party* not one competitor amongst equals in the era so-called of *tajdeed* (renewal). In the July 1988 party's *inqadh* (salvation) conference, Bin Ali lectures his audience of his plans to renounce single party practice and mentality. He states that 'for all [the PSD's] massive heritage, its established history of resistance, its wide electoral base, cannot claim to represent all the political forces of the country' (Chaabane, 1997, p. 79). In practice Bin Ali has given *l'Etat-patron* and *l'Etat-parti* a lease of life. At no stage has he considered separating state and party (Tessler, 1990). The party was from the outset intended to fulfil two functions: serve both as a unifying force and a vehicle of stability. This signals a top-down approach to

democratisation. This approach was typical of the PSD whose self-indulgence in its historical mission to unify, stabilise and edify the masses downsized all viable political forces and identities.

The dyads *l'Etat-patron* and *l'Etat-parti* are today a massive support system that hogemonises and homogenises political life to the point of stultifying political life below the state. The figures below bespeak a reality of one-party rule not a preparatory stage, for 'post-one-party' political life:

> Today, in top form for the *competition*, [the RCD] stands as a force to be reckoned with on major political occasions, significantly boasting a following of almost a quarter of the country's university lecturers ... Similarly, student membership of the party has risen from a few hundred in 1987 to better than 8,000 in 1995. In 1993, total party membership stood at 1,720,374.
>
> The party boasts 6,713 branches and 300 associations distributed across the Republic. There are 54,870 officials at branch level, 83,390 candidates having stood in the elections for local cell officials in 1993, i.e. 1.8 candidates per seat. Of that number, 4,400 were women, of whom 2,930 were elected – that is, 67 percent of the female candidates carried the day over their male counterparts (Chaabane, 1997, p. 81 – my emphasis).

With such impressive figures talk of competition in the excerpt above cannot be serious. A case in point is the latest October 1999 elections in which Bin Ali won his third and theoretically last five-year presidential term. He ran 'opposed', unlike in the two previous presidential plebiscites, by two handpicked candidates from the opposition. Neither Muhammad Bilhaj Amor (leader of the Popular Unity Party) nor Abd al-Rahman Talili (head of Unionist Democratic Union) were presidential. Neither man volunteered his candidacy. Those who did in the past such as Human Rights activist Moncef al-Marzouqi and Abd al-Rahman al-Hani, a known lawyer, were both prevented from standing (King, 1998, p. 121). This highlights Bin Ali's predilection for omnipresence and singularity in playing the role of Tunisia's new national mentor.

The rise of alternative identities, spatial or political, in the community manufactured by the regime is not only unimaginable, but also carries risk (Article 19 Organisation, 1991; Amnesty International, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994; Waltz, 1995, pp. 175–85). In the words of a Tunisian academic the country is akin to '*un commissariat*' (a police station), quintessentially a *mukhabarat* state. This '*commissariat*' has been justified by the exaggerated paranoia and fear of a 'fundamentalist threat' (Simon, 1999, p. 14). Bin Ali has used the Islamist threat to justify excessive policing (Murphy, 1997, pp. 121–2). The gradual breakdown of the Bourguiba-PSD legitimacy formula in the late 1970s to mid-1980s partly explains Bin Ali's exclusionary politics. Bin Ali (an ex-security chief) might be paranoid about loosening the reins. One way of explaining Bin Ali's authoritarian bent is the regime's deep fear of a region-wide Islamist threat, sharpened of course by the Algerian bloodbath. To an extent the regime's behaviour is exogenously driven. Zartman confirms the existence of a kind of transnational anti-Islamist group (on the part of heads of state and ministers of interior) (Zartman, 1997, pp. 213–17).

The fault-line in Tunisia does not stem from manufacturing the polity and society at the expense of an *ethnie* or ethnic particularity. Such a particularity does not exist. Rather, it happens at the expense of potentially viable political identities – especially Islamist – which cannot be mediated only through democratic rule. The blending of *ethnos* and *demos* in the name of social cohesiveness and unity has been undertaken within an authoritarian framework, precluding democracy as a harmonising force. Here lies Tunisia's problem. Fierce contest over the interpreting of identity must not be underestimated as one source of the heightened antagonism between the regime and the Islamists. An Arab-Islamic identity must for al-Nahdah be reified through greater Islamisation and Arabisation of society and polity (Hermassi, 1995, p. 117). For the ruling élite, which itself does not reject Arab-ness and Islam in the shaping of Tunisia's identity, secular-nationalism is the only route to modernity and development. Al-Ghannushi declares that the stand-off of his outlawed al-Nahdah with the regime has largely been oversimplified, with many analysts reducing it to a 'race with the regime for the seat of power' (Author's interview, 20 November 1999).

As mentioned above, such construction and reconstruction of identity have vacillated between the poles of ethnoreligiousness and ethnonationalism. The swinging of the political pendulum between these two poles made and unmade elites, fixed and unfixed membership and opened and closed political space. Politics as the art of the possible has been a continuous act of 'levelling identities [something] pivotal to strategies of modernisation and modernity' (Nisan, 1991, p. 22). This levelling of identities has definitely been visible in Tunisia. Both under Bourguiba and Bin Ali the state appears to have an ethnonationalist tendency and a strong secular-national basis. But under neither leaders has the state lived up to its declaratory policy of privatising religion – *al-din ila Allah, wa al-watan ila al-jami'* (religion is God's; the fatherland is for all). Bourguiba closed the well-known university-mosque, al-Zaytunah; in the 1970s he publicly declared his defiance to fasting during Ramadan, an act he deemed inimical to development; and in the mid-1980s he issued 'circular 108' which bans veiling (Chaabane, 1997, p. 32). Bin Ali reopened al-Zaytunah but, like Bourguiba's Atatürkist fashion, strictly bans veiling and the sporting of beards.

Polarisation is exacerbated by the exclusion of the Islamist al-Nahdah Party. This exclusion, according to al-Ghannushi, pre-empts dispersed debate over the question of political identity, rights, freedoms, power sharing and *muwatana* (citizenship) (Author's interview, 20 November 1999). The state, being the sole hegemon in charge of value allocation and assignment, resists and rejects any rival plans for imagining political community. Despite rhetorical commitment to Arab-Islamic imagining of identity, the regime is in reality following a different trajectory – 'secular Francophony' as al-Ghannushi puts it. For al-Ghannushi, 'defining who is Tunisian under Bin Ali is based on simple reasoning: if you are not with him, you are against him. That is the reason why many have lost employment; others cannot obtain a passport or get theirs confiscated; and many others lose their freedom ... That is tragic when it happens' (Author's interview, 20 November 1999). Inclusion into political community is conditional on four core principles, explains al-Ghannushi: respect of pluralism of ideas, political programs, shared democratic space, and peaceful contestation. For him, these principles should bring together

all kinds of political choices in a democratic community. But the only preconditions he insists on are respect for Tunisia's Arabo-Islamic identity and some role for religious morality in public affairs (Author's interview, 20 November 1999). Islamists placed premium on Arab-Islamic identity in the only elections they contested in 1989 (Hermassi, 1995, p. 115). As al-Nahdah received percentages of the vote varying between 17 and 25, its imagining and contesting of identity must have some appeal amongst Tunisians (Waltz, 1986).

Democracy as Inclusion of Difference

The kind of polarisation mentioned above over political rights highlights an important friction over how to blur the boundaries between *ethnos* and *demos*. The idea of the nation state is founded on the optimistic assumption that a '*demos* of citizens rooted in [an] *ethnos* of nationals' should translate into political freedom and equality (Habermas, 1998, p. 132). Yet ethnonationalism and the political associations resulting from it have everywhere, because of their insistence on ethnic commonality, victimised difference (Habermas, 1998, p. 142). In Tunisia this difference has been only marginally ethnic (e.g. the Berbers). In the main, political space has been denied to clan identities, religious forms of self-identification and dissenting political discourses and practices. But two aspects that apply to Tunisia have complicated the question of juridico-political and cultural equity in the post-demos phase.

The first, Habermas points out, is that national independence does not automatically terminate discrimination. Discrimination demands inclusion and sensitivity to difference (1998, p. 145). Although the difference Habermas invokes here is cultural, individual and group-specific, political difference is as essential. Habermas strongly advocates, especially in the case of multicultural societies, 'difference-sensitive inclusion'. The modalities of this inclusion range from compensatory policies to guarantees of cultural autonomy for minorities. While these modalities serve to consolidate democracy by way of including citizens in the *demos*, Habermas notes that political equity, especially in heterogeneous societies, should not be bought at the expense of the fragmentation of society (1998, pp. 145–6). The same principles should apply in largely homogenous societies. Independence in Tunisia did not lead to automatic civil and political rights. It is the absence of these rights that prevented the emergence of what Habermas refers to as 'common political language and conventions of conduct to be able to participate effectively in the competition for resources and the protection ... of a shared political arena' (1998, pp. 145–6).

The various paroxysms of the 1970s attest to the fact that the state-led corporatist project of social and political engineering never succeeded in engendering an inclusive citizenship, shared political space and stability. Owen likens this brand of authoritarian corporatism in the Middle East to that of Mussolini's Italy. Both insist on national unity as a means of social and economic development. National unity entails political deference to the state in return for welfare benefits (Owen, 1992, p. 225). In the same vein, Ayubi stresses the solidaristic character of corporatism, which creates a variety of clientelistic networks and places intermediaries under state patronage. Thus the state has the ultimate say over political inclusion and exclusion (Ayubi, 1995, pp. 33–5). In Tunisia the homogenising character of cor-

poratism (Ayubi, 1995, p. 420) is bound up with state hegemony over the interpretation and allocation of cultural and political values. The repression of the late 1980s and the 1990s, on the other hand, show that Tunisia is still a long way from a democratically conceived political community with shared political space and values. The verdict on Bin Ali's political reforms is that they are homogenising Tunisia not democratising it.

The second aspect, which is inextricably linked with the first, is that citizenship rights and the refiguring of individuals into 'legal subjects' does not 'cut off people from their origins'. Habermas elaborates this important point by arguing that the legalising of subjectivity is not a neutral process. It affects, as he puts it, 'the integrity of the forms of life in which each person's conduct of life is embedded' (Habermas, 1998, p. 144). It is the extent of the assault on this integrity that sets the scene for fierce contests over not only identity but also political norms and values. Habermas further elaborates this political quandary of legalised identity:

> In addition to moral considerations, pragmatic deliberations, and negotiable interests, this aspect of the law brings strong evaluations into play that depend on intersubjectively shared, but culturally specific, traditions. Legal orders as wholes are also 'ethically imbued' in that they interpret the universalistic content of the same constitutional principles in different ways, namely, against the background of the experiences that make up national history an in light of a historically prevailing tradition, culture and form of life. Often the regulation of culturally sensitive matters, such as the official language, the public school curriculum, the status of churches and religious communities, and the norms of criminal law ... or the demarcation of the private from the public realm, is merely a reflection of the ethical-political self-understanding of a majority culture that has achieved dominance for contingent, historical reasons (1998, pp. 144–5).

The above quote is equally relevant to homogenous societies. The exclusion of the last four decades in Tunisia has triggered fierce contests over the kind of issues Habermas mentions. The Islamists resist privatising religion. The lack of a shared political space has meant that there are rival political discourses to the dominant one. The dominant political language has been couched in the grammar of secularism and republicanism with a strong Francophile accent. That of the Islamists activates Arabo-Islamic idioms and metaphors, grounding Tunisian identity in additional frames of reference and origins that the post-colonial dominant political discourse and practice have marginalised. Thus Ghannushi's Islamists' political rhetoric in the April 1989 elections dwelt on the defence of the country's 'Islamic identity' and 'Arab-Islamic identity' (Hermassi, 1995, pp. 113–15). Identity is far more complex than the homogenising nationalist project has cared to imagine. The elites that began identity deforming and reforming in the colonial era proved how transactional and negotiable identity could be. Yet after independence political discourse and practice abandoned negotiability, opting instead for fixed identity. Hybrid identity is more reason why difference-sensitive inclusion must be essential for both homogenous and heterogeneous societies undergoing democratic transitions.

Conclusion

Many 'transitologists' have taken national unity and the existence of a sovereign state as prerequisites for the development of democracy. Rustow, as mentioned above, views national unity as the necessary background condition for a transition to democracy. His position is defended on the basis that 'the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to' (1970). It has been argued that Tunisia still provides an interesting contrast because despite its ethnic homogeneity seems to be unable to democratise substantively. From this perspective, ethnic homogeneity is not a sufficient condition for genuine democratisation. Under both Bourguiba and Bin Ali the state's concerted efforts to insist on national unity actually undercut possibilities for civic participation and good government. Appeals to national unity give the state an excuse to weed out would-be dissidents. That is, the presence of national politics that overemphasise unity often comes at the expense of tolerating political diversity, as the Tunisian case demonstrates. Corporatist strategies of co-optation and mediation as well as coercion (e.g. exclusion, purges, and imprisonment) have been used to reify unity and defend it against potentially viable political projects. Hence the discourse and practice of Tunisian identity nurtured by the state has been exclusionary in the main. Bin Ali's regime, like Bourguiba's, has worked hard to construct a certain Tunisian ethnonationalism but it has surely limited success. Ghannushi's Islamists, with their opposition to secularism and excessive Westernisation, do not buy it. Their vision for an Arab-Islamic identity figured strongly in their electoral programme in 1989.

If citizenship is to be understood as 'an instrument of equality in democratic states' (Oommen, 1997, p. 38) then nothing like it has yet evolved in post-colonial Tunisia. Furthermore, the idea of nationality and ethnicity constituting grounds for conferring or denying political equality by nation-states (Oommen, 1997, p. 38) corresponds with the empirical reality in Tunisia. So far, it seems, inclusion is conferred upon those willing to work within the straightjacket of either political deference or 'loyal opposition', one aim of the 1988 National Pact (Anderson, 1991). As such inclusion is read co-option. Tunisia's corporatist politics of inclusion and exclusion is authoritarian. Interest representation within it is limited to units or groups created or approved by the state. These groups are singular, non-competitive and hierarchically ordered. Their political participation and articulation of demands must observe state controls, obey its discourse, and maintain support for them (Schmitter, 1974; Bianchi, 1989). Without the burden of reining in fractious and indissoluble solidarity groupings, the politicians in relatively homogenous societies have at least theoretically an easier time of promoting the expression of differences on an individual or interest group oriented basis. Sadly, Bin Ali has not so far taken advantage of this opportunity.

The paper has a generalisable value that might be of comparative interest in further research. The extent to which transitional polities' commitment to unity may hinder democracy is worthy of scholarly attention. The experience in newly liberalising regimes in the Middle East suggests tension between the goals of unity and democracy. Thus elections do no more than return incumbent regimes and their attendant *asabiyyat*, giving credence to Salamé's idea that democracy is the

prisoner of these *asabiyyat* (1995, p. 9). These *asabiyyat* have not only outlived the emergence of the nation-state in the Middle East, but also form an inherent dynamic in the political process (Zubaida, 1989). In Tunisia, the dominant *asabiyya* is Sahel-based, *francisant* and bourgeois. It is pitted against an Islamist *asabiyya*. Algeria, Egypt and Turkey are other cases where the quest for political uniformity exclude Islamists and undermine democratic transition.

(*Accepted*: 19 February 2002)

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Notes

1 Anderson, 1995, pp. 77–91; Brumberg, 1995, pp. 229–59; Hudson, 1988, pp. 22-37, 1995; pp. 61–76; Hermassi, 1993; Ibrahim, 1993, pp. 292–305; Esposito and Piscatori, 1991, pp. 427–40.

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