

twelve

Tunisia's "Sweet Little" Regime

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Tunisia is neither aggressive nor is it up to North Korean standards of internal repression. Yet, in thinking about internally repressive regimes, the term “rogue,” often used for externally aggressive regimes, is useful because it connotes a regime that has run amok like a male rogue elephant. The principal characteristic of such a regime is that it deviates from the values and beliefs of the community that it purports to rule—so much so that some may perceive its leader to be irrational or mentally ill. But unlike the elephant “of a savage destructive disposition” that is “driven away from the herd,” the regime stays on to control and possibly to corrupt the state.¹ Such, at least, is the sad political situation of Tunisia today under the rule of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. It is not so much the quantity of repression per se that would define this as a rogue regime, or a very highly repressive one, as it is the extent to which its practices deviate from the expectations of the local and the broader community.

From this perspective—viewing the political leadership of such regimes as deviating from applicable social norms—it follows that regimes like those of Ben Ali are vulnerable from within. It is not so much the quantity as the irrational nature of the repression that delegitimizes them. Unable to control public opinion and retain a semblance of legitimacy, they may become vulnerable to combinations of internal and international pressures for change.

The Ben Ali regime is one of a number of dictatorships in the Arab region coddled by the United States.² It is at least as repressive as the others—Egypt,

Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the little principalities of the Gulf Cooperation Council—and it certainly deviates the most from its society's legitimate expectations. Ben Ali was initially welcomed as Tunisia's savior when, as prime minister, he had President Habib Bourguiba constitutionally removed from office by persuading physicians to certify that he was no longer physically fit to serve. The "historic change" of November 7, 1987, promised steady progress toward democracy, and the new regime efficiently carried out a structural adjustment program initiated in 1986 to meet a foreign exchange crisis. The troubles began in 1991, after the regime, having liberated Islamist opponents of the Bourguiba regime, not only refused to recognize their Nahda Party but also determined to eliminate them and intimidate anybody else who might defend them. At the height of the repression in 1991–1992, the Ben Ali regime was probably as tough as most of the others included in this volume if repression is to be measured by the number of political prisoners per capita, quantitative or qualitative indices of torture, deaths in jail, or other measures of individual suffering. This chapter presents body counts and other measures of political repression and tries to compare them with those of other regimes, but such measures require further interpretation.

It is argued here that substantive deviation from social expectations may leverage up the body counts in any fair reckoning of the extent of repression that one is asked to evaluate. Crudely speaking, one tortured Tunisian may count for more on a relative or "normalized" scale of repression than several victims of another country in which torture is more habitual and the regime has less of a political community of values to violate and less of a state tradition or rule of law to undermine.

The idea of deviating from political traditions, however, also has its pitfalls because the values and beliefs of a political community are always in flux. International fashions also change: Bourguiba's despotic developmentalism looked good to academics, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1960s, but similar Ben Ali rhetoric no longer works the same magic in the twenty-first century. Pinning down the latter's "deviation" from Tunisia's political traditions requires considerable elaboration and, unfortunately, runs against the grain of the best recent political study of the country, that of Camau and Geisser.³

Tunisia became a police state in the 1990s, with big and visible increases in the police force as well in arbitrary practices of neighborhood sweeps, arrests, torture, and detention. Estimates of the number of police vary from 80,000 to

302 *Clement Henry*

150,000, from double to almost four times the force of the mid-1980s. Even the lower number that circulates among foreign observers in Tunisia suggests that with one agent for every 110–15 Tunisians, the country has more than twice as many police officers per capita as Britain, France, or Germany.⁴ The former head of Tunisian security recalls having about twenty wire taps at his disposal for Tunisian suspects in 1983 (aside from the dozens reserved for foreign embassies) compared to about 5,000 in 2004.⁵

Body Counts

The State Department's 2005 report on Tunisia's human rights practices stated that "the government's human rights record remained poor, and the government persisted in committing serious abuses," including torture and abuse of prisoners and detainees, arbitrary arrest and detention, police impunity, lengthy pretrial and incommunicado detention, infringement of citizens' privacy rights, restrictions on freedom of speech and press, and restrictions on freedom of assembly and association. The report describes in some detail the torture techniques of Ben Ali's police:

The forms of torture and other abuse included: electric shock; submersion of the head in water; beatings with hands, sticks, and police batons; suspension, sometimes manacled, from cell doors and rods resulting in loss of consciousness; and cigarette burns. According to AI [Amnesty International], police and prison officials used sexual assault and threats of sexual assault against the wives of Islamist prisoners to extract information, to intimidate, and to punish.⁶

While asserting that there had been some improvement in prison conditions in the late 1990s, the report noted that

prison conditions ranged from spartan to poor, and generally did not meet international standards. Foreign diplomatic observers who visited prisons described the conditions as "horrible." Overcrowding and limited medical care posed a significant threat to prisoners' health. Sources reported that 40 to 50 prisoners were typically confined to a single 194 square foot cell, and up to 140 prisoners shared a 323 square foot cell. Current and former prisoners reported that inmates were forced to share a single water and toilet facility with more than 100 cellmates, creating serious sanitation problems.⁷

Political prisoners were often singled out for especially harsh treatment. Some leaders of Nahda, the banned Islamist party, have been in jail since 1991 and in solitary confinement for protracted periods. Strong circumstantial evidence existed that some were being killed in prison. The State Department report noted a recent death: "On June 17 [2005], Moncef Ben Ahmed Ouahichi, a Jendouba resident, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at La Rabta Hospital in Tunis. This followed his arrest June 10 and his release the next day, at which time he was unconscious and bearing bruises."⁸ Torture or inadequate medical care also resulted in three reports of deaths in prison in 2002 and of early releases of prisoners on death's door.⁹

Little reliable quantitative information about political prisoners is available. A credible article on prison conditions claims that Tunisia had 253 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants in 2002—which would make a total of roughly 25,000 prisoners for this country of 10 million.¹⁰ But how many of them were political prisoners? In *Report 2001*, covering the events of 2000, Amnesty International claimed there were "up to 1,000" political prisoners but subsequently reformulated it to "hundreds," including "many . . . held for more than a decade," even after "scores" were released on November 3, 2004.¹¹ Human Rights Watch put the number at 500 in 2004 and then raised it to "more than 500" in a detailed exposé of the abysmal situation of 10 of some 40 or more political leaders from the Nahda party and others who had been held in virtual isolation since 1992.¹² The International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners counted 542 political prisoners by name in 2004 and indicated that there were probably many more, but President Ben Ali subsequently released substantial numbers of them in 2005, and at least 75 of the 1,600 he pardoned in February 2006 were also recognized to be political prisoners.¹³ Human Rights Watch estimated, however, that over 300 political prisoners remained in jail in 2006 after these releases.¹⁴ No independent body, not even the International Red Cross, has had the opportunity to visit Tunisia's prisons since 1991, much less to perform a census.

If 300 is roughly the correct number of political prisoners, they account for only 1 percent of the country's prison population, or 3 per 100,000 Tunisian inhabitants. By this conservative measure, Tunisia was still more or less holding its own with Egypt, Kuwait, and Morocco, and seemed slightly more repressive than Syria, estimated in 2004 to be holding only 200 Syrian political prisoners out of a population almost twice as large.¹⁵

The quality of the treatment of prisoners has improved since 1991–1992, when the big crackdown on the Nahda party occurred and thousands were arrested. At that time many prisoners, on their eventual release,

304 *Clement Henry*

described treatment that clearly amounted to torture, including routine beatings by prison guards and even by senior staff and prison wardens, and the shackling of some prisoners hand and foot much of the day. Prisoners with health problems were often denied medication or proper care, and infestations and skin diseases were rampant due to poor hygienic conditions. Inmates were subject to extremes of weather without adequate clothing and bedding. Hygiene was substandard and overcrowding so severe that cellmates had no choice but to sleep in shifts. On family-visit days, guards routinely humiliated and mistreated the inmates' relatives.¹⁶

In response to bad publicity in 2002 about prison conditions deteriorating again after some improvement in the late 1990s, Ben Ali delegated the head of his hand-picked High Committee for Human Rights and Basic Liberties (Comité Supérieur des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Fondamentales) to investigate the situation.¹⁷ Although the resulting report was not published, Ben Ali promised to carry out some of its recommendations, including better sanitation and "extending breakfast to the entirety of the prison population."¹⁸ He did not address the issue of political prisoners, especially leaders arbitrarily sentenced by military courts in 1992. Close to 100 of the 265 Nahda activists sentenced in mid-1992 for attempting to overthrow the government remained in custody in 2006, although the alleged "plot" was seen at the time as just another excuse to lock up Ben Ali's political opponents. Apparently, many of the leaders were kept for years under solitary confinement. As Human Rights Watch had concluded earlier, "Tunisia's policy of targeting specific prisoners for long-term segregation from the rest of the prison population, whether in solitary or in small-group confinement, stands in stark contrast to the claim that its prisons comply with international standards."¹⁹

Other Indicators of Political Repression

As the State Department noted in 2004, "Security forces physically abused, intimidated, and harassed citizens who voiced public criticism of the Government."²⁰ One of them was Abderrahmane Tlili, head of one of Tunisia's six officially recognized opposition parties represented in parliament and the son of a distinguished Tunisian trade unionist. Plainclothes hooligans from the police beat him up very badly in the street outside his mother's home after he threatened to expose the Ben Ali family with compromising documents.

Then, after the official police rescued him and took him to the hospital, others ransacked his home for the documents.²¹

Another victim is Mokhtar Yahyaoui, a leading Tunisian judge dismissed from his post for criticizing the manipulation of Tunisian justice by the Ben Ali regime. Tunisia's version of Haiti's Tontons Macoutes assaulted him for organizing defense lawyers on behalf of political prisoners. His nephew, who had produced an online political opposition magazine, TUNeZINE, died at the age of thirty-six of a heart attack shortly after being released from two years in prison.²²

Women were not exempt from attacks by plainclothes hooligans. Sihem Bensedrine, a journalist and political activist who resigned from the leadership of one of Ben Ali's make-believe opposition parties, suffered various police attacks and smears on her reputation, including fake pornographic videos. Human rights lawyer Radhia Nasraoui, who went on a hunger strike to get her (secular leftist) husband released from jail, also suffered numerous indignities, and her children were deprived of passports. Journalists and lawyers were special targets, and their children, like Judge Yahyaoui's daughter, might be slapped around as a further warning to unrepentant opponents. Hooligans from the police even grabbed the mobile telephone of H  l  ne Flautre, the EU parliament's president of its Human Rights Commission, and prevented her from having a private dinner conversation with the wife of a political prisoner in May 2006 by sitting down at their table in a hotel dining room.²³

Moncef Marzouki tried in 1994 to run against Ben Ali for the presidency, and two days after the elections, he was jailed for almost four months. He then continued to teach and practice medicine in Tunisia but sent his family to safety in France while he spent time in and out of jail, working for various human rights causes. Deprived of his livelihood in Tunisia, he, too, finally moved to France in 2001 to work and teach at a Paris hospital. Many independent journalists, beginning with Kamel Labidi, have also been obliged to leave the country in order to pursue their profession. Journalist Taoufik Ben Brik's passport was confiscated; in response, he went on a hunger strike that gained him international attention and protection.

The state of the public media is deplorable. "If in certain countries like Algeria, Bosnia, or even Turkey, one kills journalists standing up, in others, like Tunisia, one participates in a slow death of the profession, by asphyxiation," a group of Tunisian journalists wrote to the International Federation of Journalists in 1995. The press became so "asphyxiated," in fact, that in 1997 the World Association of Newspapers expelled the Tunisian Association of

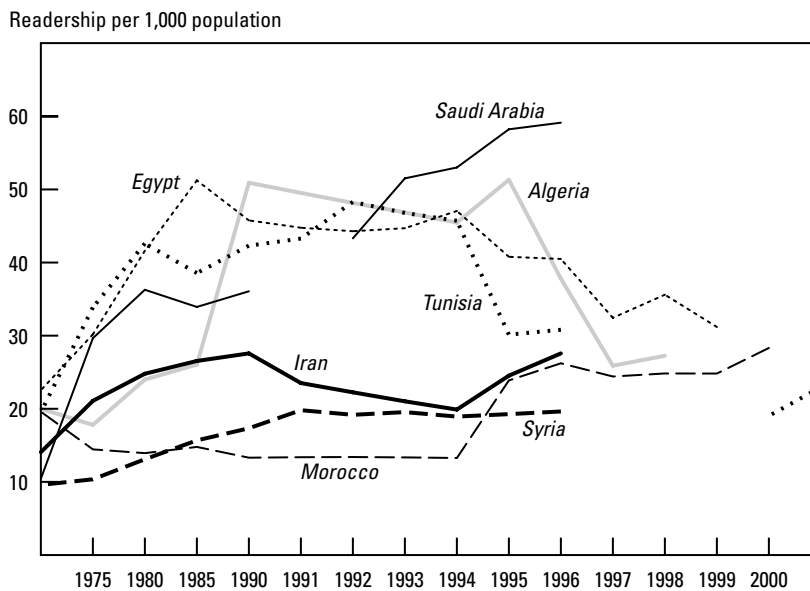
306 *Clement Henry*

Newspaper Directors—a tool of the Ben Ali regime—for its inattention to the deterioration of press freedom in the country.²⁴

Although some magazines and newspapers are ostensibly privately owned, they operate under stringent regulation and self-censorship. *Es-Sabah* lost any remaining shreds of autonomy in 2000 when its owner-publisher left the country, ostensibly for family reasons, and Abdellatif Fourati, its leading journalist, was dismissed. *La Presse*, which is privately owned but which had never displayed the independence of *Es-Sabah*, was indistinguishable from the official government press.²⁵ *Haqqa'iq/Réalités*, a bilingual weekly, briefly lost its publicity revenues from government advertisements after publishing a controversial investigative report on prison conditions.²⁶ It then published the government's version of what happened to Hédi Yahmed, the unfortunate young author of the report who departed shortly thereafter to France to pursue his professional career.²⁷ The government also refused permission for Al-Jazeera to set up an office in Tunis, despite a request by the president of the Tunisian Union of Journalists. In fact the Union, after expressing concerns about freedom of the press, was denied permission to hold its congress in 2006.

Tunisia's low newspaper circulation may be seen as another indicator of the regime's repressiveness because people are free not to buy papers, which suffer from a lack of real news content. Figure 12-1 shows that interest peaked in the 1980s and early 1990s, when there was some give in the political system, but then it declined, reaching levels in 2000 and 2001 similar to those of 1970, when Tunisia was a much poorer and less literate society. Figure 12-1 also compares Tunisia with America's other important allies in the Arab region as well as with Syria and Iran. Tunisia and Syria run neck-and-neck for the lowest newspaper circulations.

Tunisia's handling of the Internet is another sad story. One of the first southern Mediterranean states to gain full connectivity to the Internet (1991), it was among the last to extend it to the public. When, in 1997, President Ben Ali finally decided that Tunisia needed to catch up, he still managed to keep control of the public's access to news and even to personal correspondence. The law defining the service providers required them "to assure continual surveillance of the content of servers exploited by the service provider so as not to permit dissemination of information which is contrary to public order and morality," as if they were running a cinema or theater.²⁸ Consequently, few dared to respond to official tenders. Ben Ali's daughter and a close friend of the family run the only two service providers that offer connections to the public. People are encouraged to set up their e-mail accounts with the service providers rather than with Hotmail or Yahoo

Figure 12-1. Newspaper Circulation, 1970–2001^a

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, CD-ROM edition (Washington, D.C., April 2004).

a. Countries are listed in the order of their most recent newspaper count. The World Bank stopped publishing these data after the 2004 World Development Indicators; otherwise, Algeria would probably be upgraded ahead of Egypt and Morocco. I counted the circulation claimed by thirty-five Algerian newspapers in 2002 to reach 1,492,000, or close to 50 readers per 1,000 inhabitants, approaching the level reached in 1990 when political reformers governed the country.

because the latter are periodically shut down, although it is common knowledge that the official service providers also offer full access to Tunisia's Internet police, which has been strengthened in recent years. Telephone and Internet charges have been reduced to encourage people to use their home connections, where they can be easily monitored. As the Tunisian League of Human Rights (Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme [LTDH]) reported in May 2004, "the e-mail, particularly of political or human rights activists, can be intercepted and mailboxes shut down by pirating passwords." One journalist was thrown into prison for four months for sending an e-mail from an Internet cafe.²⁹

Tunisian opposition sites and newspapers are blocked, as are many foreign journals and newspapers like *Le Monde* and other potentially subversive resources. Tunisia's "publinets" (Internet cafes) are so restricted by spy software in the computers and so infested with plainclothes police that demand

308 *Clement Henry*

for their services may be decreasing rather than increasing, although most of Tunisia's 700,000 users depend on them rather than on more expensive connections at home. In any event, the number of these publicly sponsored enterprises dropped from 340 to 260 in 2002, mainly as a result of police sweeps in June and July directed against publinets that did not fully comply with regulations.³⁰ There were 305 publinets in 2005, serving as a "low-tech point of control" because the cafe owners were "required by the state to monitor customer access to prevent access to 'banned' content."³¹ At least three groups of young Internet surfers were caught, imprisoned, and in some cases tortured in 2002 before being subjected to trials and long prison sentences.³² Released in 2005, the Zarzis group remains deprived of educational opportunities and under virtual house arrest.

The development of the police state in Tunisia, moreover, has not been confined to niche specializations like Internet surveillance. With a four-fold numerical increase since 1987, police are more visible on the streets. They specialize in repressing NGOs as well as political dissidents.

A final indicator of repressiveness, much more difficult to quantify, concerns the degree of political pluralism that a regime tolerates. How autonomous are the NGOs and in what domains are they allowed to operate? Tunisia has thousands of them, but only a dozen or so are truly independent, not government satellites encouraged by the regime as a "civil society" counterweight to opposition Islamists.³³ The Islamists are in exile, jail, or, in the cases of those released in 2005 and 2006, under virtual house arrest—suffering "social death," as Hibou describes their condition.³⁴ The regime has, however, encouraged a semblance of political pluralism by legalizing a few "opposition" parties and even allocating to them a small percentage of seats in parliament that they could not otherwise win against the state party juggernaut, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* [RCD]).

Although handpicked for their loyalty, opposition leaders have sometimes been in trouble for trying to do their job. Tlili, mentioned above, is one example. Another was Mohamed Mouada, the head of the largest opposition party. He was arrested in 1996 and sentenced to eleven years on charges of providing intelligence to a foreign power; though he was released after a few months, he remained under constant surveillance. Mouada was arrested again in 2001 after criticizing the president and again was released after a few months.

The regime has not succeeded, however, in totally abolishing political activism. Human rights organizations exist, though they operate with great difficulty. One tactic used to neutralize the Tunisian League of Human Rights

was to pack its meetings with an influx of RCD activists. Another was to encourage “moderates” to desert the “extremists,” whom the regime could not control. This tactic virtually paralyzed the LTDH in 1994, when it fell victim to internal power struggles that removed activists like Marzouki from office. Other organizations operate illegally and are consequently vulnerable. However, Tunisian human rights activists enjoy significant support from international NGOs and occasional backing from France and even the United States. Therefore the regime must weigh its sense of security against the political costs of incremental losses of international support.

In May 2006, the regime seemed to be panicking. First the police broke into the office of the head of the Tunisian Bar Association and attacked lawyers protesting a new law that threatened the profession’s independence. On May 11, security forces detained the head of the newly formed Syndicate of Journalists for holding a secret meeting. A week later, the police even prevented the family members of a deceased human rights activist from entering the headquarters of the Tunisian League for Human Rights to attend a memorial ceremony in his honor. Then the police detained the Swiss representative of Amnesty International, who was attending a meeting of the Tunisian section, and asked him to leave the country on May 21. A week later, in the presence of foreign guest observers, including Flautre, police physically blocked LTDH delegates from holding their congress.³⁵

Fortunately for the opposition, Tunisia is too close to France for its suffering to be ignored totally. Online and in France, various opposition groups publicly engage in exile politics and support Tunisian human rights. The ruling party insulates the masses from the small elite of human rights activists at home, however, and the only serious threat to the regime would be if internal dissidents within the ruling apparatus were to join forces with those activists.

Deviating from Tunisian Traditions?

In terms of repression indicators, the Ben Ali regime holds its own against other regimes in the Arab region that routinely torture political suspects and keep some of their opponents under lock and key. As noted earlier, its ratio of political prisoners per 100,000 population roughly matches that of Egypt, Kuwait, and Morocco, and even exceeds Syria’s. Its press is among the dullest and most conformist in the region. This dismal human rights record is further darkened by the degree to which the Ben Ali regime has deviated from the country’s established norms. Serious observers argue, however, that the Ben Ali regime did not significantly deviate from Bourguiba’s norms.

310 *Clement Henry*

In 1956, Bourguiba became prime minister of independent Tunisia and proceeded with the full support of his Neo-Destour Party, which in turn controlled an elected national assembly, to establish a presidential regime. He then reorganized the party to ensure his personal authority. In 1974 he had the Tunisian constitution amended to award him a life-long presidency.

Like Ben Ali, Bourguiba murdered or physically intimidated his opponents, even as far back as 1937 when his Neo-Destour Party battled and outflanked the old Destour forces of Abdelaziz Thaalbi. When a split occurred in 1955 between Bourguiba, who favored independence in cooperation with France, and his erstwhile collaborator and party organizer, Salah Ben Youssef, who preferred a more radical pan-Arab approach, the result was virtual civil war. The new Tunisian government, with French military assistance, cracked down on the Youssefists in the early months of independence, and captured Youssefists suffered miserable fates in Tunisian jails unless they were shot on the spot or hanged in a public square. The estimated 900 deaths in 1955–56 were double those of Tunisians killed or executed in their independence struggle against France (1934–54). One of Bourguiba’s “enforcers” supervised the execution of Salah Ben Youssef in a Frankfurt hotel room in 1961. Apparently, too, trade union leader Ahmed Tlili and former planning minister Ahmed Ben Salah were subsequently targeted.³⁶

Bourguiba’s regime was torturing students returning from the Middle East as early as 1963 to preserve Tunisians from infectious Arab ideologies such as Baathism. Then in 1968, it was the turn of home-grown leftists. The state security court convicted 130 students and young graduates, although many had apparently already suffered “torture with unheard of cruelty” so as “to terrorize them out of any desire for contestation.”³⁷ The treatment may have been extended to hundreds of students arrested in the early 1970s. Then in the 1980s, it was the turn of the Islamists. Ever more senile, Bourguiba called back his “enforcer” to be assistant director of the ruling party and demanded capital punishment for Rashid Ghannouchi, the Islamist leader, and others among the scores of Islamists on trial.

Instead of deviating from Bourguiba’s legacy, Ben Ali could be viewed as rectifying it and preventing the excessive punishments Bourguiba sought when, as prime minister in 1987, Ben Ali conspired with party director Hédi Baccouche and others to retire the old man from office. As president in 1988, he released the hundred or so Islamists whom Bourguiba had jailed. He also intended to curb some of Bourguiba’s other excesses. Close associates of Ben Ali insisted at the time, for instance, that the president had no desire to emulate Bourguiba’s personality cult. Rather, he advocated freedom of the press

and other measures of political liberalization in 1988. The public media were deplorable in Bourguiba's final years: the daily television news opened with archives of Bourguiba delivering speeches in the 1950s and 1960s before showing a few current scenes of a doddering old man being adulated by his courtiers.

By the early 1990s, however, Ben Ali was practicing the full Bourguiba, cult and all. The presidency grew at the expense of the ministries, the council of ministers, and the prime minister, for the youthful looking president, computer at hand, took active control of the administration. Instead of breaking with the one-party system, he encouraged the ruling party to grow even more, from roughly 1 million members in 1986 to 2 million in 1997, fleshing out some of the older leadership with new cadres.³⁸ The party continued as it had during much of Bourguiba's reign to be an appendage of government administration, with hierarchical controls extending in parallel with the ministry of the interior down to the local level. It did not serve as a recruitment channel for political leadership since ministers tended to be recruited for their technocratic organizational abilities and then parachuted into party command posts rather than the reverse. In Bourguiba's time, ministers tended to have had more of a political background in the party, trade union, or student union than those recruited after 1987.³⁹ But Bourguiba's party, too, had been largely transformed into an administrative apparatus by 1958, two years after independence.⁴⁰ The exercise of personal power, moreover, tended to transform the political elite into insecure individual courtiers seeking the presidential monarch's favor. In this sense, little has changed between the Bourguiba and the Ben Ali periods.

By engineering constitutional change in 2002 to permit him to keep holding office, Ben Ali even seemed to be competing with Bourguiba's legacy of a life-long presidency.⁴¹ Indeed, if it is true that Ben Ali has cancer and is grooming his wife to succeed him, he may outdo Bourguiba's excesses.⁴² Ben Ali's cult of personality is an even greater deviation from Tunisian traditions because he is no Bourguiba; when history repeats, the second time has to be a farce. What most Tunisians could accept of their founding father, they can hardly accept of an upstart ex-military intelligence officer with limited political experience. Ben Ali lacks Bourguiba's historical legitimacy.

The Ben Ali regime's economic corruption, moreover, has exceeded all Bourguibian boundaries. True, Bourguiba built palaces—although not removing all of his neighbors for security reasons as Ben Ali did in extending the perimeters of his Carthage palace. True, some of Bourguiba's wife's family and friends may have made commercial mistakes. One of them, for

312 *Clement Henry*

instance, was chairman of the Union of International Banks, which had become an insolvent state enterprise by 1986 when he was fired and imprisoned—at about the time Bourguiba divorced his wife.⁴³ These stories pale, however, against the lurid tales of the corruption of the “seven families” surrounding Ben Ali. Some reports even suggest that Ben Ali has lost control of the battle among those family clans.⁴⁴

Undermining the State

The question of how deviant the Tunisian regime may be should not be decided by comparisons between Ben Ali and Bourguiba in his later years but rather by how much each deviated from Tunisian political traditions. Both leaders insisted on a state of law but proceeded to undermine it.

The state building of the precolonial and colonial periods may have been incomplete, but Tunisia's state tradition is at least as strong as Morocco's or Egypt's and arguably stronger, given the degree to which a protracted nationalist struggle steeped Tunisia's elites in the colonizer's political culture. Bourguiba built upon this legacy in his golden years of political pedagogy (1955–65). After his first heart attack in 1965, a politically debilitating succession crisis ensued that lasted over two decades. The critical turning point came in 1971–72, when Bourguiba—had he not been a megalomaniac—might have accepted reforms within the ruling party that would have institutionalized pluralistic competition. Instead, he purged the liberals with the help of organized labor, got himself elected president for life (boasting in the process about himself being a miracle that happens only once in a millennium), and then suppressed the major trade union.

Ben Ali's autocracy is a logical continuation of Bourguiba's. But Ben Ali's deviations from the rule of law are excessive for several reasons. International public opinion is no longer as tolerant of developmental despots as it was in the 1960s. Echoes of disapproval in turn influence elite public opinion inside Tunisia, leading to greater disaffection, just as opposition from within receives more support abroad than in Bourguiba's day. The Tunisian middle classes have vastly expanded from a core of less than 5,000 university-educated professionals in 1965, and they are in constant contact with Europe, as are the lower classes.⁴⁵ Tunisia also enjoys a rich legacy of nongovernmental organizations and political infrastructure, social capital that is currently wasting away under centralized party command.

The costs to the state budget of developmental dictatorship are greater than they used to be. On the positive side, prudent economic policies have

kept inflation in check while spurring growth and substantially reducing, although not eliminating, poverty. The state banks, however, have huge portfolios of nonperforming loans that stubbornly persist despite vast sums spent each year to clean them up.⁴⁶ Many of the loans are to the regime's wealthy retainers. Corruption, too, deters private investment. Tunisia is extremely competent in getting more than its share of aid from the EU, but its ability to attract foreign direct investment is limited by business perceptions of a voracious local mafia. Consequently, unable to attract enough investment, Tunisia takes on more debt in the race to grow fast enough to keep unemployment under control. Although debt service has not reached the level that obliged a major economic stabilization agreement with the International Monetary Fund in 1986, the need for continued growth may keep nudging up Tunisia's debt level ratios. In 2005, the value of the short- and long-term external debt amounted to 79 percent of gross national income, higher than any other country's in the Middle East and North Africa (including Turkey) except for Syria and Lebanon.⁴⁷

Support from the United States and the World Bank helps Tunisia stay afloat. The World Bank promised loans worth at least \$200–\$300 million annually for the period from July 2004 to June 2008 if Tunisia pursued structural reform or \$100 million if reforms stalled. Tunisia managed to obtain a loan to develop its Internet capabilities in preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society that it hosted in 2005 (on behalf of the United Nations and the International Telecommunications Union) to discuss management of the Internet. It gained this privilege after being praised by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers for democratizing the local Internet!⁴⁸ No new loans from the World Bank were forthcoming in 2006 and 2007, however, except \$66.8 million toward a Tunis sewage project.⁴⁹

If corruption has not yet, as in the nineteenth century, undermined Tunisian state finances, the police and the judiciary do seem to be unraveling. Torturing prisoners has become routine. While at a Geneva hospital in 2001, a former minister of the interior narrowly escaped arrest for the torture of a former Tunisian victim then residing in Switzerland.⁵⁰ In the opposition press, one also reads that the police are incapable of doing routine duties because they are so caught up in political surveillance and other tasks. There is a danger, in fact, that the police may displace the ruling party as the focus of control, as happened to the Baath Party in Iraq. Within the party there are echoes of disturbances at the local level, such as the arrest in 1998 of a Central Committee member who was mayor of Kasserine (in the relatively neglected southwestern part of the country) and had criticized government policy.⁵¹

314 *Clement Henry*

The most spectacular sign of state breakdown occurred in 2001, when Tunis civil circuit chief judge Moktar Yahyahoui wrote a letter to the president denouncing the total absence of independence of the Tunisian judiciary. The correspondent for *Le Monde* went so far as to write of “Ben Ali’s lost battle,” now that the true state of the regime’s foundations lay revealed.⁵² Indeed, the human rights opposition seems bolder of late, sensing a weakening of authority. Even the cowed and quiescent press showed some signs of life in 2004, when a number of journalists from *La Presse* and *Essahafa* wrote an open letter to the prime minister and other government officials complaining of “a return in force of the policy of censorship and of pressure on their writings” and of their newspapers’ editorial practices.⁵³ The investigative activities of independent Tunisian journalists during the October 2004 elections also indicated a growing impatience with fake competition.

These presidential and parliamentary elections did little to strengthen the regime. As in previous presidential elections, Ben Ali had token opposition and won 94.8 percent of the vote (with a participation rate of 74 percent of the eligible voters). Independent journalists observed that the president’s campaign virtually monopolized the media, receiving 77 percent of the minutes accorded by the broadcasting media and 92 percent of the surface of the written press. Two of Ben Ali’s presidential contenders, moreover, expressed their support for the incumbent president and were permitted prime time, whereas afternoon prayers interrupted the third opponent’s broadcast. Little time or space remained for any of the parliamentary candidates, and most time was allocated to those of the ruling RCD. Although the opposition did manage to be heard, “in several cases the MDS [Mouvement Démocratique Socialiste, the largest of the opposition parties] and independent candidates announced their support for President Ben Ali instead of presenting their own programs.”⁵⁴

Another source of embarrassment for the regime was the World Summit on the Information Society. How could a regime so unfriendly to the free flow of information be an appropriate host to such a gathering? The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)—an international consortium of NGOs such as Article 19 (named after Article 19 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), the International Federation of Journalists, and Reporters Sans Frontières—wrote an open letter to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan urging the United Nations and member states to change the venue of the world summit unless minimal rights could be guaranteed, including those of local as well as international media.⁵⁵ From January 14 to 19, 2005, when the IFEX fact-finding mission was in Tunisia, the authorities

unblocked some websites, but further monitoring demonstrated systematic filtering based on an American software program. A careful study published on the eve of the summit showed that the government blocked not only the obviously political sites such as Kalima, an online opposition newspaper, but virtually all “anonymizer” sites from which Tunisians could engage in undetected surfing.⁵⁶

Indeed, the human rights situation deteriorated in 2006. In a six-part series about Tunisia’s “political mafia,” one Tunisian wrote that “Tunisia has turned back to the German Gestapo of Hitler’s era. Criminal networks have been formed to shut off all publicity or information because they are aware of the danger that weapons of confrontation represent: they have banned the press, have restructured it and organized it, forbidden any publicity from opposition elements, and repressed all free thought, reflection, and political activities.”⁵⁷

The series of articles observed “signs pointing to the collapse” of the regime but expressed little confidence in Tunisia’s divided and impotent opposition parties. One sign of the regime’s vulnerability, more reminiscent of the Soviet Union than Nazi Germany, was instructions given to the national soccer team training in Switzerland not to talk to the foreign press. Of greater political import, but expressing the same closed mentality, the authorities sabotaged a seminar of international NGOs in September 2006. It was meant to prepare the International Conference on Employment and the Right to Work in the Euro-Mediterranean Region to be held in Berlin in 2007. The European and Arab delegates arrived to discover that there were no longer any hotel reservations, despite arrangements made by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, a German foundation that had earlier worked with Tunisia on an EU-sponsored project to develop trade unions. Even the Amilcar Hotel, owned by the Tunisian General Union of Labor, was closed to the delegates despite available space. Evidently the authorities had taken umbrage at the presence of leading Tunisian human rights activists protected by the Europeans.⁵⁸

Policy Implications

Tunisia, a well-known development model in the 1950s and 1960s, could again become a modern showcase, albeit not on its present course of mixing bogus privatization and cosmetic reform with the standard practices of a police state. For policymakers interested in democratizing the Arab and Muslim world, Tunisia deserves serious attention because it offers the best prospects for success: a relatively large middle class, social capital, political

316 *Clement Henry*

infrastructure, prudent economic management, and relatively efficient administration.⁵⁹ Although it is still in practice a one-party state, grassroots party organizations could take on new life if the rule of law came to be respected. It remains a relatively powerful state, although corruption and a brutal disrespect for human rights are corroding its strength.

There is little that the United States alone can do to halt the deterioration, but the European Union is also committed to human rights and democratic reform through partnership agreements with its southern neighbors. The two must work together despite their differences; indeed, a common European commitment to better governance in Tunisia would also serve to strengthen its own union. Whether or not Tunisia is the most egregious violator of human rights in the region, it is the most promising target for reform. Not only do its internal social and economic conditions augur well for democracy, but with fewer economic or strategic rents than its neighbors, the country is less able to derail a common approach by the outside powers. Combined EU-U.S. efforts could also help to heal the divisions within the Atlantic alliance over other countries such as Iraq, where the stakes are higher.

There are some signs that the European Union may be reevaluating its relationship with Tunisia. Shortly after Flautre's mission, the European Parliament passed a resolution regretting that "the situation as regards freedoms and human rights in Tunisia is still a cause for concern" and calling for Tunisia to cooperate with the EU and the United Nations on a number of fronts, including agreeing to a visit by the UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. Noting that Tunisia held the presidency of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament also called for "better cooperation" between the assembly and the Tunisian presidency "in terms of respecting human rights."⁶⁰ Although the parliament has little power over the EU executive, much less its constituent states, the countries that have some influence on Tunisia, such as France, Germany, and Italy, may use the resolution to put more pressure on Tunisia and to encourage the parliament's human rights committee to continue its fine work. The United States, too, could be more responsive to the EU parliament's concerns and also to those expressed by its own State Department human rights section.

Working together, Europe and the United States could attempt to persuade Ben Ali that his place in history lies in presiding over a genuinely competitive succession process when his term expires in 2009. Meanwhile, the Europeans and Americans should continue to support those few genuinely autonomous

NGOs that continue to defy dictatorial and arbitrary rule.⁶¹ Since the EU currently enjoys greater moral authority than the United States in the region, it should be especially persistent in defending the human rights movement within Tunisia, as its moral authority may serve to curb some of the excesses of the police. Awareness of strong outside support may in turn further embolden the domestic opposition.

Tunisia could regain the moral high ground that it occupied during its first ten years of independence under a healthy Bourguiba, but this time under leadership constrained by stronger institutions and the rule of law. It could again become a model for development and political change in Africa and in the Arab world were the current regime to be exposed to gentle but focused and sustained international pressure.

Unfortunately, the United States sends the wrong signal by stationing a regional bureau of the Middle East Partnership Initiative in the country. Although any liberation of Tunisia is likely to be accompanied by a torrent of anti-American political rhetoric, a new dialogue with aspiring Tunisian democrats (including the Islamists) could also offer both parties an opportunity to recover their positive political traditions. If the United States were ready to face up to a Middle East with fewer friendly repressive allies, Tunisian civil society (and Tunisian officials embarrassed by the excesses of the police state) could positively respond to the U.S. commitment to freedom and democracy.

Notes

1. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, II (Oxford, 1971), 2566.

2. An alternate meaning for “rogue” is “one who is of a mischievous disposition,” as in William Shakespeare’s “Ah, you sweet little Rogue” in *Henry IV* (1597), or as another dramatist wrote in 1672, “It’s a pretty little rogue; she is my mistress.” *Ibid.*

3. Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris, 2003), 18.

4. *Ibid.*, 204–05.

5. Ahmed Bennour, personal communication, Paris, July 16, 2004. Bennour also observed that the budget for the Ministry of the Interior had increased from 170 million Tunisian dinars in 1984 to about 660 million in 2004.

6. U.S. State Department, “Tunisia,” in *2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (Washington, D.C., March 8, 2006), www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61700.htm.

7. *Ibid.*

318 *Clement Henry*

8. Ibid.

9. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia," in *World Report 2003* (New York, 2003), www.hrw.org/wr2k3/mideast8.html.

10. Hédi Yahmed, "Hal yajib islah es-sujoun fi Tunis?" ("Do Tunisia's Prisons Need to Be Reformed?"), *Haqa'iq/Réalités* (Washington, D.C., December 12, 2002), cited by U.S. State Department, "Tunisia," in *2003 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (February 25, 2004), www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27939.htm. See also Sami Ben Gharbia, "Tunisian Prison Map" (2006), kitab.nl/tunisianprisonersmap; "La carte des prisons tunisiennes," *Tunisnews* (October 4, 2006), www.tunisnews.net/5octobre06f.htm. Both Tunisian sources cite "Le système carcéral en chiffres," *Le Monde diplomatique* (June 2003), 25, www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2003/06/A/10218. Tunisia came fourth, after the United States, Russia, and South Africa, but ahead of China and Israel, in the number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants.

11. Amnesty International, "Tunisia: Releases of Scores of Political Prisoners Is a Positive Step" (London, November 4, 2004), web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENG/MDE300092004?open&of=ENG-TUN; "Amnesty International Report 2001: Tunisia" (New York, 2001), web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webmepcountries/TUNISIA?OpenDocument.

12. On the eve of Ben Ali's visit to Washington, Human Rights Watch stated, "Most of Tunisia's 500 political prisoners are suspected Islamists who were convicted after unfair trials on nonviolent charges such as membership in a political organization outlawed by the government." Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Long-Term Solitary Confinement of Political Prisoners," Report XVI (July 2004), 4, hrw.org/reports/2004/tunisia0704/.

13. For the figures from the International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners, see State Department, "Tunisia," *2005 Country Reports*. See also Chris Hefelfinger, "Jailed Extremists Pardoned in Tunisia," *Terrorism Focus*, III (Washington, D.C., February 28, 2006), jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369914.

14. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Free Jailed Website Moderator" (March 17, 2006), hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/16/tunisi13005.htm.

15. Amnesty International's 2005 annual report estimated Egypt's political prisoners to be in the thousands, for a population seven times Tunisia's; Kuwait's 29 known political prisoners for a population well under one-tenth of Tunisia's gives a slightly higher ratio. See "Amnesty International Report 2005" (New York, 2005), web.amnesty.org/report2005/index-eng. With triple Tunisia's population, Morocco had prosecuted some 1,500 of the 3,000 suspects arrested after the Casablanca bombings of May 2003. Amnesty reports that substantial numbers of them were imprisoned, again filling the jails after earlier releases of most of Morocco's thousands of political activists jailed in the 1960s and 1970s. See Amnesty International, "Annual Report 2006" (New York, 2006), web.amnesty.org/report2006/mar-summary-eng. For Syrian figures, see Joshua Landis, "Is Syria Holding Fewer Political Prisoners than

Any Other Major Middle Eastern Country?" (August 11, 2004), faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/2004/08/is-syria-holding-fewer-political.htm. Not included in the Syrian count are perhaps 200 Lebanese and numerous Palestinian and Jordanian prisoners.

16. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Long-Term Solitary Confinement," 10.

17. The concerned functionary, Zakaria Ben Mustapha, a former minister and mayor of Tunis, had made an earlier investigation in 1995, when prisons were probably at their worst, and reported that they fully met international standards. See Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Long-Term Solitary Confinement," 13, citing "La situation dans les prisons répond aux 'normes' internationales, selon une commission d'enquête," *Agence France-Presse* (August 15, 1995).

18. "Prisons: Des mesures immédiates," *Haqa'iq/Réalités* (February 20, 2003), www.realites.com.tn.

19. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Long-Term Solitary Confinement," 35.

20. State Department, "Tunisia," in *2003 Country Reports*.

21. Abdelqahhar, "Limogeage et agression d'Abderrahmane Tlili: La fin d'une entente mafieuse," *L'Audace*, CIII (September 2003), web.archive.org/web/20030925155018/http://www.laudace.fr/#6. According to this account, Tlili's original crime was to have been overheard on a tapped phone conversation promising one of his mistresses that she would become Tunisia's "first lady." Other accounts say he had asked Ben Ali for a government of national union and for *alternance*. Ben Ali dismissed him from his position as head of the Civil Aviation Authority, one of a succession of parastatal management positions he had occupied since the 1980s. Rather than quietly accepting political disgrace, Tlili retaliated by threatening to reveal documents implicating Ben Ali's family in various schemes. This article in *L'Audace* estimates that Tlili stole an amount equivalent to one-fifth of Tunisia's national debt (\$12.6 billion at the end of 2002) over the years. He was tried for generating projects for friends worth about \$4 million and for having foreign bank accounts and real estate. In April 2004, he was sentenced to nine years in jail and fined 52 million dinars.

22. TUNeZINE (www.tunezine.com) stopped publishing on March 14, 2006, but its website points to other opposition press sources online, notably www.reveil.tunisien.org and www.tunisnews.net.

23. Hélène Flautre, "Compte-rendu de la visite d'Hélène Flautre en Tunisie des 26-27 mai 2006" (May 29, 2006), www.flautre.net/spip.php?article241.

24. Hamed Ibrahim, "Une presse asphyxiée, des journalistes harcelés," *Le Monde diplomatique* (February 1997), 4-5; Kamel Labidi, "How Tunisia Slid off Its Progressive Course," *Christian Science Monitor* (August 18, 1997).

25. Its long-retired editor revisited *La Presse* in 1998. He told me that some of his former associates were complaining to him, some of them in tears, about being professionally humiliated by some of the newer recruits. Personal interview, Tunis, July 1998.

26. Yahmed, "Hal yejib islah es-sujoun fi Tunis?"

320 *Clement Henry*

27. “L’affaire Hédi Yahmed.’ Les points sur les ‘i,’” *Haqa’iq/Réalités* (January 9, 2003), www.realites.com.tn. For Yahmed’s version, see “The Article That Forced Hedi Yahmed to Flee His Country,” *RAP21 Newsletter*, XVI (January 5, 2003), www.rap21.org/article1153.html?var_recherche=Hedi+Yahmed. Both articles are cited by Human Rights Watch, “Tunisia: Long-Term Solitary,” 15–16.

28. *La Presse* (April 20, 1997), 3.

29. “Médias sous surveillance: Rapport de la LTDH-Tunisie Mai 2004,” final section transcribed in *L’Audace*, CXII (June 2004), 24. The report also observes that neighboring Algeria has 1.3 Internet cafes per 10,000 inhabitants compared to Tunisia’s 0.3.

30. States Department, “Tunisia,” in *2003 Country Reports*; Human Rights Watch, “Tunisia 2002.”

31. OpenNet Initiative, “Internet Filtering in Tunisia 2005,” (November 2005), 7, www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/tunisia/ONI_Tunisia_Country_Study.pdf.

32. Six youths and a minor were arrested in Zarzis in late 2002 on grounds of “forming a band with the object of preparing armed strikes [*attentats*].” They claimed simply to be surfing the net for information about the political situation in the Middle East. Jailed and originally condemned to sentences ranging from nineteen to twenty-six years in jail, they gained slight reductions, down to an average of thirteen years on a prison farm, on appeal in July 2004. Florence Beaugé, “Six jeunes internautes devant la cour d’appel de Tunis,” *Le Monde* (July 6, 2004), 3; José Garçon, “Six internautes tunisiens dans la toile de Ben Ali,” *Libération*, (July 7, 2004), cited in *L’Audace*, CXIII-CXIV (July-August 2004); International League of Human Rights, “Tunisie: Condamnation des ‘internautes de Zarzis’ à de lourdes peines au terme d’un procès entaché d’irrégularités” (July 7, 2004), www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=1558.

33. By one count, Tunisia had 7,500 NGOs in 2001–02, or 53.6 organizations per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the higher densities in the Arab world. See Salim Nasr, “Arab Civil Societies and Public Governance Reforms: An Analytic Framework and Overview,” paper presented at the United Nations Development Programme Conference on Good Governance for Development in the Arab Countries (Dead Sea, Jordan, February 6–7, 2005), www.arabgov-initiative.org/publications/civilsociety/arab-civil-society.pdf.

34. Béatrice Hibou, “Domination and Control in Tunisia: Economic Levers for the Exercise of Authoritarian Power,” *Review of African Political Economy*, CVIII (June 2006), 188–89.

35. Flautre, “Compte-rendu de la visite”; Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Tunisia: A Hysterical Escalation of Repression” (May 23, 2006), www.hrinfo.net/en/reports/2006/pr0523.shtml.

36. Souhayr Belhassen, “Les legs bourguibiens de la répression,” in Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser (eds.), *Habib Bourguiba: La trace et l’héritage* (Paris, 2004), 392.

On the treatment of Youssefists in 1955–1956, see pages 395–96. Belhassen is a veteran journalist and vice president of the LTDH.

37. *Ibid.*, 397.

38. Camau and Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire*, 181, 217–18.

39. *Ibid.*, 194–195.

40. Clement Henry Moore, *Tunisia since Independence: The Dynamics of One-Party Rule* (Berkeley, 1965), 113–14.

41. The constitutional amendment passed in May 2002 abolished the term limit and extended the eligibility of candidates to seventy-five years of age.

42. For a summary of recent speculation, see “Comment Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali a été dépossédé du pouvoir,” *Libération* (August 14, 2003), cited by Tamurth.net (September 7, 2003), www.tamurth.net/article.php3?id_article=390.

43. For an analysis of the Union of International Banks, see Clement M. Henry, *The Mediterranean Debt Crescent* (Gainesville, 1996), 181–83.

44. When a French banker’s yacht stolen in Corsica in May 2006 reappeared in Sidi Bou Said, with Ben Ali’s wife’s nephew Imad Trabelsi at the helm, the online journal reveiltunisien.org interpreted the event as one more illustration of the president’s family troubles. See “La famille de Ben Ali en eaux troubles,” *Reveil Tunisien* (June 14, 2006), www.reveiltunisien.org/article.php3?id_article=2218. For a background discussion of the Trabelsi family’s excesses before the yacht scandal, see Hamime, “La mafia politique tunisienne enlisée dans les affaires juteuses,” *Reveil Tunisien* (April 12, 2006), www.reveiltunisien.org/article.php3?id_article=2149.

45. Camau and Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire*, 163.

46. Despite three World Bank Economic Competitiveness Adjustment Loans (ECAL) designed to clean up the banking system, nonperforming loans constituted 24 percent of the country’s loan portfolio in 2004, up from 22 percent in 2000. See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2006* (Washington, D.C., 2006). A fourth ECAL, already promised in the World Bank’s 2004 Country Assistance Strategy, went into effect in 2005. The 2004 Country Assistance Strategy called for nonperforming loans to be reduced to below 17 percent by 2008. See World Bank Group, “Memorandum of the President of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to the Executive Directors on a Country Assistance Strategy for the Republic of Tunisia,” Report 28791-TUN (June 3, 2004), 39.

47. World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2006* (Washington, D.C., 2006).

48. Reporters Sans Frontières, “Internet under Surveillance 2004: Tunisia” (2004), www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10768.

49. World Bank, “Tunisia: World Bank Supports Wastewater Treatment Services” (July 6, 2006), web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20984909~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html.

50. With the help of Track Impunity Always (TRIAL), a Swiss human rights NGO, the victim attempted to have former interior minister Abdallah Kallel prosecuted in

322 *Clement Henry*

the Swiss court system. Because Kallel fled, this prosecution was no longer possible, but the Tunisian residing in Switzerland then attempted to mount a civil law suit against him. See Fati Mansour, "Les audaces juridiques d'un réfugié décidé à faire payer ses bourreaux tunisiens: Une victime traîne l'état tunisien devant un tribunal suisse," *Le Temps* (Geneva) (October 20, 2004), cited in *L'Audace*, CXVIII (December 2004), 12–13. On June 9, 2005, TRIAL, supporting the principle of Swiss jurisdiction in this matter, announced that the hearing was held in the absence of the Tunisian government defendant and that the Court of First Instance would issue a verdict. See TRIAL, "La plainte contre l'ancien ministre de l'intérieur Abdallah Kallel va de l'avant" (Geneva, June 9, 2005), www.tunisnews.net/9juin05.htm.

51. Camau and Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire*, 360.

52. Florence Beaugé, "Le combat perdu du président Ben Ali," *Le Monde* (July 21, 2001).

53. Reporters Without Borders, "Tunisia—2005 Annual Report" (Paris, 2006), www.rsf.org/article.php?id_article=13314.

54. These figures come from a study conducted by thirteen independent Tunisian journalists, including Abdellatif Fourati, Sihem Bensedrine, and Souhayr Belhassen, that was sponsored by International Media Support, the Center for Media Policy and Development, the LTDH, the Tunisian Association for Women Democrats, and the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia. See "Monitoring the Coverage of the October 2004 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Tunisia" (November 2004), www.i-m-s.dk/media/pdf/Monitoring%20the%20coverage....pdf. See also Larbi Chouikha, "L'Opposition à Ben Ali et les élections de 2004," in *L'Année du Maghreb 2004* (Paris, 2006), 361–73.

55. IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group, "Tunisia: Freedom of Expression under Siege" (February 2005), www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/64665/.

56. OpenNet Initiative, "Internet Filtering in Tunisia in 2005," 10, 14, 16.

57. Hamime, "Tunisie: La mafia politique et les signes annonciateurs de la chute," part III, *Reveil Tunisien* (March 1, 2006), www.reveiltunisien.org/article.php?id_article=2101. Author's translation.

58. Vanya Walker-Leigh, "Tunisia under Fire for Ban on NGO Meet," Inter Press Service (September 18, 2006), ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=34757. See also Omar Mestiri, "La Benalie 'terre d'accueil et d'ouverture,'" *Kalima*, XLV (September 3, 2006).

59. As Mokhtar Trifi, the current president of the LTDH, recently suggested. See Anne Applebaum, "A Good Place to Have Aided Democracy," *Washington Post* (February 13, 2007), A21.

60. European Parliament, "European Parliament Resolution on Tunisia," P6-TA-2006-0269 (Strasbourg, June 15, 2006), www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?Type=TA&Reference=P6-TA-2006-0269&language=EN. An earlier version of the resolution considered "that the implementation of all these reforms must be treated as a priority of the EU-Tunisia partnership and must constitute a fundamental element in the development of relations between the European Union and Tunisia; considers, in

Tunisia **323**

that regard, that if Tunisia does not act in accordance with this agenda, the Council and the Commission will have to take appropriate action in the context of the Association Agreement.” See European Parliament, “European Parliament Resolution on Tunisia,” B6-0355/2006 (Strasbourg, June 12, 2006), www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?objRefId=120192&language=EN.

61. See the two concluding paragraphs of David L. Mack, “Democracy in Muslim Countries: The Tunisian Case,” *National Strategy Forum Review*, IV (Summer 2005), www.nationalstrategy.com/Summer.2005.final.pdf.

