"COUNTRY OF RUBBISH": WASTE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACIES OF

AUTHORITARIANISM IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY TUNISIA

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Country of Rubbish": Waste and the Environmental Legacies of Authoritarianism in

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Primarily, this dissertation explores the link between dictatorship and pollution in Tunisia. Specifically, it argues that Ben Ali's authoritarian neoliberalism produced unequal socio-natural relations between waste, certain bodies and landscapes, sustained and concealed these inequalities through the manipulation of data, corruption, infrastructure and a facade of state environmentalism. It charts the emergence of this socio-spatial inequality from colonization through to structural adjustment programs and thereby interprets them in the context of the uneven social, economic and environmental costs of industries and global markets. The study demonstrates that state environmentalism was a particular governing fiction that was central to the survival of the regime and which together with widespread corruption shaped environmental governance under Ben Ali's rule. It then concludes that the waste crisis that followed the revolution was a rupture of political fictions that brought public secrets viscerally to the fore. This revelation lead to struggles over truths and meanings of the dictatorial past. Due to the physical ubiquity of waste and the reemergence of marginalized communities

associated with it, this conflict was expressed in the language of waste, thereby shaping the post-revolutionary experience of Tunisia and turning it into the *balad el-zible* (country of rubbish).

# DEDICATION

To Alia and Anwar,
Who kept the world turning.

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Notwithstanding our discipline's popular myths, ethnography was never a solitary endeavor. Becoming an anthropologist always depended on the cooperation of our interlocutors, the guidance of our professors, the support of our peers, the love of our friends and family, the assistance of university staff, and the financial backing of research institutions.  The completion of my Ph.D. therefore also crucially depended on the help and support of hundreds of individuals, who I am deeply thankful to.

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thank her enough here, but I will carry what she taught me as a scholar and human with pride and respect into the future.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**AfDB** African Development Bank

**ANGED** *Agence Nationale de Gestion des Déchets* (National Agency for Waste Manegment)

**ANPE** *Agence National de Protection de Environment* (National Agency for the Protection of the Environment)

**APAL** *Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement du Littoral* (Agency for the Protection and Management of Coastal Areas)

**API** *Agence de Promotion de l'Industrie* (Agency for the Promotion of Industry)

**ASF** Avocats Sans Frontières (Lawyers Without Borders)

**CITET** *Centre International des Technologies de Environment a Tunis* (Interntaional Center for Environmental Technologies in Tunis

**EU** European Union

**FTDES** *Forum Tunisien des Droits Économiques et Sociaux* (Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights)

**GATT** General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

**GIZ** *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zussamenarbeit* (German Agency for International Cooperation)

**IMF** International Monetary Fund

**KfW** *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (German Reconstruction Credit Institute)

**MTI** *Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique* (Movement of Islamic Tendency)

**RAC** Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Area

**RCD** *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Deomcratic Constitutional Rally)

**RSF** *Reporteurs sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders)

**OECD** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

**ONAS** *Office National de l'Assainissment* (National Office of Sanitation)

**ONS** *Office National de Statistique* (National Office of Statistics)

**OSS** *Observatoire de Sahara et Sahel* (United Nations Sahara and Sahel Observatory)

**USAID** United States Agency for International Development

**UTT** Union Traivailleurs Tunisiens (Tunisien Workers Union)

**WWF** The World Wildlife Fund

INTRODUCTION

Revolutions lend expression to public secrets, and sometimes they do so in the most visceral of ways. Weeks after the Tunisian revolution of 2011, piles of rotting garbage filled the streets due to a municipal strike, sewage was running in the rivers, and toxic waste was pumped into the Mediterranean in unprecedented amounts. The uprising unveiled, and in part created, what Tunisia's former Prime Minister Habib Essid (2015-2016) called an "environmental catastrophe" that had been festering under the dictatorships for decades. During the reign of Zine Abedinne Ben Ali (1987-2011) the Bretton Woods Institutions hailed Tunisia as Africa's poster child of economic development and like elsewhere in the world, this growth was fueled by the creation of waste. In the heyday of structural adjustment, industrial parks burgeoned, plastic bags and packaging appeared, enveloping an ever-increasing amount of consumer products, but the nascent waste management system could not keep up. The situation was similar across southern countries, of course. But Ben Ali's regime depended crucially on the constant flow of foreign investment and therefore concealed the waste crisis behind a façade of state-environmentalism.

From the early 1990s onwards, a plethora of environmental institutions were established, international legislature was signed, ratified and integrated into national law. Environmental Boulevards were designated in each village and Labib, Tunisia's environmental mascot, a desert fox in a blue unitard, populated squares and roundabouts across the country. International development organizations assessed Ben Ali's environmental record as "exemplary" (GIZ 2013) and "impressive" (World Bank 2004:

V). Meanwhile most of Tunisia's vast industrial sector dumped its waste into the natural habitat with near impunity. Some of the biggest polluters were state-owned. The Chemical Group, Tunisia's largest public enterprise alone dumped 5 million tonnes of a carcinogenic "by-product" of phosphate production a year into the Gulf of Gabes (SweepNet 2014). The country's waste management agencies were implicated in the dumping of industrial, household waste and sewage, due to decrepit infrastructure, mismanagement, and corruption.

While the systematic and widespread failure of waste disposal was concealed, even before the revolution, one only had to traverse marginalized urban areas or the country's rural industrial centers to encounter communities who endured an apparent environmental health crisis. This suffering was a material marker for the socio-economic and political marginalization of these areas. Tunisian regionalism had rooted the country's political culture and development in urban coastal communities and neglected the country's interior at least since the time of colonization. And while official political discourse since independence presented Tunisia as homogenous and downplayed class or regional disparities (Ayubi 1995; Zemni 2017), the uprising had exactly started amongst these socio-spatially[1] marginalized communities (Gana 2012; Zemni 2011).

Tunisia's revolution was sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizzi, a fruit-seller from Sidi Bouzid in the country's interior, whose livelihood had been confiscated by local police over an unpaid bribe on 17th December 2010. Following

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[1] The term socio-spatial (*socio-spatiale*) or socio-territorial (*socio-territroiale*) inequality is commonly used by Tunisian academics and increasingly amongst NGOs and the media to talk about spatially arranged socio-economic, but also ecological disparities in their country. Going back to the urban planner Amor Belhedi (1999) the term also historicizes regional inequalities in development at least since colonial times. Finally, socio-spatial inequality here is often related to various forms of Tunisian regionalism.

Bouzizi's death in hospital, protests spread from smaller towns in the interior to poor areas of larger cities with the help of social media. In each locality the regime responded with repression and police brutality, eventually leaving more than 330 protesters dead, but fueling the revolutionary cries, *Ashshab yurid isqat annizam* (the people demand the downfall of the regime) and *Ben Ali degage!* (Ben Ali get out). Protests that had started among the rural poor, reached the capital Tunis by the end of December where union leaders and the National Order of Lawyers joined the protests, galvanizing Tunisian elites across the large cities of the coast.  The army was deployed in major cities to quell the growing protests, but on the 14th January 2011 Tunisia's military turned on Ben Ali's security forces, joined the demonstrators and thereby ended nearly six decades of authoritarian rule by ousting the dictator.[2]

The revolution was a grassroots call for dignity (*karameh*) and freedom (*hurriyah*). It was a rebellion against the socio-economic pathologies associated with the fusion between neoliberal economics and authoritarianism (Mullin 2015; Wedeen 2013). Since the early 1990s, the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatization of public enterprises through structural adjustment policies in a repressive one-party system had lead to the enrichment of political and economic elites around the president, leaving large swaths of the Tunisian population unemployed, impoverished and without electoral recourse. The Arab Uprisings were thus a response to the uneven development of the global economy and its particular manifestations under authoritarian political rule in

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[2] The revolution was neither an historically isolated incident nor an unprecedented form of dissent against these inequalities.  It was steeped in a long history of opposition against authoritarian rule, permeated by a "cultural and critical intellectual capital" that dated back to the anti-colonial struggle against the French (Gana 2013: 11). Protesters built on decades of formal and informal modes of resistance, from inside and outside of Tunisia, by the Islamist al Nahda party, the country's political Left, human rights organizations, labor unions and even soccer teams (Bellin 2012; Chomiak 2011; Willis 2012).

Tunisia and other Arab countries (Amin 2016; Talani 2014).

While environmental concerns didn't figure centrally into earliest revolutionary tropes, soon revolutionary chants had transmuted into the calls *el-sha'b yureed el-bi'a esselema* (the people want a clean environment) and *el-tlawath degage* (pollution get out).[3] Waste and pollution here were seen as yet another manifestation of the dictatorship's violence. A slow violence, "that occurred gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (Nixon 2011: 2), but violence after all. In this particular temporal ideology, waste was something that lingered and remained of the regime's oppression, a physical proof of its corruption that had formerly been hidden and was now out in the open after the revolution. Waste was seen as one of the dictatorship's environmental legacies.

As Mounir Majdoub, then the country's highest-ranking environmental official in early 2014, told me in an interview, "pollution is not a new phenomenon…but what made it recognizable is freedom, the main fruit of the revolution."[4] Julia Clancy-Smith (2013: 464-465) wrote that after the revolution, environmentalism, like the human rights discourse beforehand, became a new lexicon through which rights could be claimed and inequalities addressed. Environmental suffering therefore became increasingly visible through what has been described as an "awakening of eco-coconsciousness" (Said 2014) in Tunisia, that lead to protests, and the forced closure of waste management infrastructure across the country. Newspaper headings like: "The Quiet Environmental Disaster in Tunisia" (DW 2013) or "Tunisia's Poorest Towns Left to Shoulder the

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[3] These slogans could be heard in protests in the city of Gabes, on the Island of Djerba and during the World Social Forum in Tunis.

[4] Personal interview with Mounir Majdoub, February 2015

Burden of Hazardous, Toxic Landfills" (The Guardian 2014) started to appear.  And with the waste that had flooded Tunisia's streets, wasted landscapes and communities became hyper-visible in places. It is then this tension between the presence and absence of waste and the communities affected by it under the dictatorship, the mechanisms and driving forces behind their erasure, and the revelation of these public secrets after the revolution that drives this research project.

Primarily, this dissertation thus explores the link between dictatorship and pollution. Specifically it investigates how an oppressive socio-political order persisted after the revolution by examining a large-scale environmental health crisis—the incessant dumping of industrial, household waste and sewage—that had festered under Tunisia's dictators for decades. I argue that Ben Ali's authoritarian neoliberalism produced unequal socio-natural relations between waste, certain bodies and landscapes, sustained and concealed these inequalities through the manipulation of data, corruption, infrastructure and a facade of state environmentalism. I chart the emergence of this socio-spatial inequality from colonization through to structural adjustment programs and thereby interpret them in the context of the uneven social, economic and environmental costs of industries and global markets. The study demonstrates that state environmentalism was a particular governing fiction that was central to the survival of the regime and which together with widespread corruption shaped environmental governance under Ben Ali's rule. I then conclude that the waste crisis that followed the revolution was a rupture of political fictions that brought public secrets viscerally to the fore. This revelation lead to struggles over truths and meanings of the dictatorial past.  Due to the physical ubiquity of waste and the reemergence of marginalized communities associated with it, this conflict

was expressed in the language of waste, thereby shaping the post-revolutionary experience of Tunisia and turning it into the *balad el-zible* (country of rubbish).

**Research Methods**

The study is based on 15 months of research amongst Tunisians affected by the crisis, environmental activists, development practitioners and government employees. Research activities included participant observation, interviews, archival research and analysis of contemporary and historical documents. This is thus an *ethnography of the authoritarian state,* represented thorough environmental officials and bureaucracies; an *ethnography at the margins of the state*, presented through affected communities; and an *ethnography against the state*, represented by participant observation with post-revolutionary environmental activists. Primarily this is an urban study based around the capital Tunis, though some research was conducted in other vicinities where the waste crisis reverberated most powerfully, such as the Bay of Monastir, Gafsa and Gabes and the Island of Djerba in the far South.  The field research for this study (2012-2015) fell into a period described as the Transition (2011-2015), which besides great progress in the writing of a constitution, was defined by turmoil, political assassinations, terrorism, and a crisis of disposal that made waste ubiquitous in the public domain. Through a convolution of newly found political freedoms, the ability to speak openly about pollution, and the increase in the dumping of all kinds of waste following the retreat of the authoritarian state, it was an era in which socio-environmental conflict was highly visible.

Like many anthropologists I came to this research project by listening and

following the concerns of my informants.  During exploratory research in the summer of 2012, only a year after the revolution, I stumbled into Tunisia's first water riots in modern history. Then protesters accused the phosphate industry, of large-scale depletion and pollution of water resources, which threatened livelihoods and environmental health in the Gafsa mining basin. The same year a protest on the Gulf of Gabès implicated a phosphate refinery in one of largest uncharted environmental disasters in the Mediterranean. Gafsa had been the theater to riots against the Ben Ali regime in 2008 that were seen as the precursor to the revolution (Bellin 2013; Chomoiak 2012), thereby indicating the connection between the political, socio-economic and environmental marginalization of the region.

I returned to Tunisia in the following year (2013) and began a year of fieldwork in September 2014, thinking that I would investigate the relationship between water conflicts and the phosphate industry in Tunisia. Yet after several weeks in the country's South, unexpected and unpredictable circumstances pulled me back into Tunisia's capital Tunis. With little amendments I continued my research plan there. Even before I entered the field, it had become apparent that the industries in Gafsa and Gabes were only the largest one-spot polluters in a country that was inundated with systematic and widespread environmental pollution. As the phosphate company was a public company, the state had already loomed large in my original analysis, but rather than making the company the main subject of my inquiry, in Tunis governmental waste management institutions became its focus.

Throughout most of my research I worked with research assistants. My primary assistant was a young law student, Souad, who had worked with other international

researchers. Initially she assisted me with setting up meetings, and some translations, particularly with very educated Tunisians who often code-switched between French, English, Tunisian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. As the research progressed however, and as she expressed greater interest and took some ownership over it, Souad often helped me to analyze data or even conducted impromptu interviews herself that she then later fed back into the research.

Affected Communities and Activists: In order to comprehend the experience of waste in everyday urban life, I worked with populations affected by the waste crisis. Upon arrival in Tunis I trailed and mapped polluted waterways to interview people who lived alongside them about their beliefs, practices and experiences of these waterways. This led me to communities in uncontrolled peri-urban areas around two of Greater Tunis' salt lakes. My research increasingly overlapped with that of a newly established environmental non-governmental organization (NGO), SOSBia (SOS Environment) that had made it its mission to scrutinize Tunisia's waste crisis. This organization then became a central way through which I experienced both environmental activism and the communities they worked with.  A founding member, Morched Garbouj, became one of my key informants.  This wasn't a coincidence.  Not only was Morched the one person I met most concerned with the waste crisis in the country, but his organization was also doing a kind of environmentalism that was practically new to Tunisia. Unlike most of the other organizations, that engaged in the cleaning of beaches, held workshops and conferences, or existed even to a large degree on social media, SOSBia directly engaged with affected communities, brought environmental expertise, and a new kind of confrontation with the state to their work.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews and attended meetings with over thirty other Tunisian environmentalist organizations, where I asked questions like: "what do you think are the most pressing environmental issues in Tunisia? Who do you think is most affected? Has your work as an activist changed since the revolution? Why?" I interviewed many bilateral development institutions, UN agencies and international development banks that worked on issues of pollution. Several university professors who specialized in pollution and environmental law were interviewed also. Throughout the research period, I observed and participated in conferences on environmental issues and the World Social Forum. Finally, interviews were conducted with industrialists and companies that delivered environmental services to industry in Tunisia.

Government: Interviews were conducted with the Ministry of the Environment and the various agencies working on environmental data, waste and pollution. Amongst the interviewees were a former and then present Minister of the Environment, statisticians at the National Office of Statistics (NOS), and environmental engineers at the Agency for the Protection of the Environment (ANPE), biologists and chemists at the International Center for Environment and Technology (CITET), and the director of the National Observatory for the Environment. Finally, environmental administrators were interviewed at some of Tunis' richest and poorest municipalities.

Historical and Archival Research: In the national archives, I collected speeches pertaining to issues of the environment, waste and pollution by two former presidents of modern Tunisia: Zine Abedinne Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba. At the National Observatory for the Environment, I collected all Annual environmental reports published by the government since the inception of the Observatory in the early 1990s. At the

National Office of Statistics I amassed data pertaining to waste and pollution. Throughout the research period, I collected and archived relevant newspapers articles. Finally, individual presentations and publications from the NGO and expert community were collected.

**Literature Review**

"Surely, the state is the sewer" (2000: 56) Dominique Laporte writes in his *History of Shit*. Echoing Douglas' consequential definition of dirt as "matter out of place", which through disruption enforces social boundaries, Laporte emphasizes the state's role as a regulator that excludes the unacceptable from state formation: material and symbolic waste. The symbolic association of waste with particular communities then results in their social and spatial exclusion often along societal fault lines of class, race or gender (Bauman 2004; Malkki 1995; Modan 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Sibley 1995). My study demonstrates the recursive relationship between symbolic and material waste. In other words, social exclusion through the association with waste also results in greater "environmental suffering" (Auyero and Swistun 2009: 17), a particular form of social suffering (Das 1995; Kleinman 1988; Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997), caused by the "concrete polluting actions of specific actors…that mold the experience of this suffering" (Auyero and Swistun 2009: 17).

Exclusion on the hands of the state, as Laporte (2000) points out, doesn't follow a singular logic; the networks that make up the state transpose, hide, expel, metamorphose, obscure, conceal, deny and are thereby always threatened with the disclosure of the unacceptable. Through the revolution and its aftermath, the time of my research in

Tunisia was shaped by the return of wastes, both physical and metaphorical. Sometimes immediately, sometimes slowly, sometimes with great resistance, the revolution revealed private and public secrets of the authoritarian state that society was confronted with and had to work through.

Therefore, following Douglas, the underlying methodological assumption of this project is that waste, as a "disturbance" (Hawkins 2003), disrupts boundaries between pure and impure, state and environment, public and private, inclusion and exclusion, rural and urban, colonizer and colonized, modern and archaic and so on. This disturbance thereby reveals something about the workings of political power, about the economy, about the state, about the "margins of the state" (Poole and Das 2004) that can be accessed by an attention to discarded materials. Waste, as an inherently symbolic and material entity, becomes a lens through which power as a form of inclusion and exclusion can be revealed.

Despite this frame, in many respects this study is a "traditional political ecology" (Peet and Watts 2011: 39-42) that investigates the impact of a particular political economy on the environment, probes environmental knowledge and pays attention to the history and multi-scalar nature of these developments. The project thereby contributes to the political ecology of the nation-state (Robertson 2015; Whitehead et al. 2007), and environmental governance (Bridge and Perreault 2009; Lemos and Agrawal 2004; Liverman 2004) by interrogating "authoritarian neoliberalism" (Mullin 2015; Wedeen 2013) as a particular form of environmental rule.

As Whitehead et al. (2007: 17) pointed out, studying states and nature suggests that these are bounded, easily definable subjects, when in fact they are some of the most

diverse categories in the English language. A long tradition in anthropology has asserted that the state is not a bounded, monolithic and self-explanatory entity, but rather a set of constantly morphing and contradictory techniques of power, discourses, practices and rules (Brown 1995) that manifest through a series of effects (Troulliot 2003). These effects materialize within bureaucracies (Ferguson 1990), corruption (Gupta 1995), political spectacle (Taylor 1997), violence (Lutz 2002), surveys, maps (Scott 1998) and so on. This study is then particularly interested in the discrepancy between state practices and its representations in the field of environmental governance. By focusing on representations, or what is here called fictions and facades that organize presences and absences, the study speaks to anthropological scholarship that sees the state itself as a screen for discourses and practices of power (Abrams 1988), the secret state (Taussig 1997) in which the state creates fantasies of itself (Siegel 1998).

The Tunisian state and its institutions as I encountered them during my research where structured by the legacies of a political culture that has been described as authoritarian and neoliberal (Mullin 2013; King 2007). Despite long working in political settings characterized by authoritarian practices, anthropologists have shied away from using this term. This is presumably because scholars found the label lacking in analytical rigor, obfuscating the specificities of their ethnographic setting, or problematic as states were often labeled "authoritarian" in the international system when in opposition to the West. Further, scholars of the state mentioned above have demonstrated how the seemingly authoritarian practices of secrecy and violence are present even in the most democratic settings. However, I claim the term authoritarian here to express the grip the regime had on Tunisian society through censorship, violence, and the organization of the

economy. The specificities of both Ben Ali's and former president Habib Bourguiba's authoritarian rule are discussed in detail chapter I. Authoritarian is then also an important qualifier for the particular form of neoliberalism that existed in Tunisia.

Neoliberalism here is then primarily the global project to expand the conditions for capital accumulation through the increased privatization of public assets to restore or renew the power of economic elites (Harvey 2005). The term neoliberalism in relationship to the state ordinarily indicates that the state is seen as transnational, or suspended in a network of globalized governance. Tunisia as a postcolonial "developmentalist" state was shaped by international development discourses and practices, specifically neoliberal macro-economic policy linked to structural adjustment programs imposed on Tunisia through the Bretton Woods institutions in the late 1980s. However, neoliberalism is also linked to new forms of governance that accompanied this socio-economic shift. What has been termed neo-liberal governmentality (Foucault 2008) lead to novel forms of rule by shaping the "conduct of conduct."[5] Neoliberal governmentality is ordinarily associated with a "degovernmentalization of the state" (Barry et al. 1996: 11; see also Rose 1996), meaning that increasingly private institutions, international organizations or NGOs take over governance responsibilities from the state. This redistribution of governance however doesn't necessarily lead to the weakening of state power (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

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[5] Most basically, Foucault refers to governmentality as the "conduct of conduct," (Foucault 2003: 220) which refers to all endeavors by state and non-state actors that direct the conduct of selves and others. Jonathan Xavier Inda (2005) has distinguished three scholarly approaches to governmentality. The first investigates the rationality of government, the ways in which knowledge renders particular populations visible and susceptible to governance. The second level looks at techniques of governmentality, the mechanism and discourses that form and are directed at subjects and populations. The third approach analyses the manifestations of these practices and discourses within the values, capacities and desires of subjects.

In fact neoliberalism in Tunisia, as in many other Arab states, led to the entrenchment of state power (King 2007), though increasingly as vehicle for crony capitalism through state capture (Rijkers 2013). Neoliberal authoritarianism here didn't necessarily equate with greater domination of the networks that make up the state, though in many cases it did (Hibou 2011), but it necessarily lead to a different kind of "translation"[6] (Rose 2006: 148) of state projects. In the environmental governance sector for example, neoliberalism lead to a mushrooming of state institutions that through the "envrionmentality"[7] of Ben Ali's fiction of environmentalism rendered particular populations, materials and environments legible to their rule. In other words, authoritarian neoliberalism prevented the emergence of "counter publics" (Fraser 1990) in the environmental sector through censorship, nepotism, control of civil society organizations and violent repression (see chapter III & IV).

The "environment" here is then defined by a tension between the construction of nature[8] as represented through governmental fictions, produced by these agencies and the relational, relative and emerging environment (Descola 2013; Ingold 2011) that for my interlocutors often stood in direct contradiction to these fictions. In the Tunisian Arabic dialect, waste and pollution are most commonly referred to as *masikh* (dirt) and not as *fadallat* (waste) or *talawth* (pollution) the Modern Standard Arabic and more technical

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[6] Rose (2006: 148) describes "translation" here as the act of governing at a distance. The projection of state projects, such as Ben Ali's governing fictions for example, into different localities.

[7] Several scholars have thus attempted to expand biopolitics from the administration and conduct of human life to that of life more broadly (Rutherford 1999), or as Goldman puts it, expand governmentality to an "arena that Foucault and his interlocutors have overlooked and rendered undifferentiated: nature, qualities of territory, and the political-epistemic rationalities that give meaning, order, and value to them. " (Goldman 2001: 501). This has lead to an emerging body of literature that attempts to expands Foucault's notions of biopower and governmentality to human/environment interactions, an approach that has different been label "ecogovernmentality" (Darier 1999; Goldman 2001), "environmentality" (Agrawal 2005) or "eco-governance" (Davis 2007).

[8] See (Demeritt 2002) for a discussion and historitization of the "construction of nature debate".

terms employed by waste management agencies, in literature or conversation with environmental experts. Similarly sewage was also often referred to by my interlocutors as *masikh* (dirt) or *kharra* (shit) and only by experts as *mia el-musta'mil* (used water or waste water).

Waste rather than dirt or pollution is then the primary category for the analysis of discarded materials here. This is so as the study investigates wastes in and outside of place so to speak. Waste is not always dirt or pollution as defined by Douglas, but is also investigated within trashcans, landfills, and sewage treatment plants as well as outside of them. Waste is defined as that which in a particular symbolic economy is without value (Hawkins and Muecke 2003), a surplus that has to be discarded, but at the same time is dangerous and has the power to disrupt (Bauman 2004; Moore 2008, 2009). As mentioned above, waste is then also seen as both a material entity and a moralizing symbolic category that can be attached to matter, peoples, places and even time periods. The material and the social are here co-constitutive as waste, pollution and dirt are defined by classification (Douglas 1964; Moore 2012; Reno 2015). Like other socio-natural arrangements (Descola 2013; Swyngedouw 2006), wastes are structured by their socio-historical context, such as colonialism, the mode of capital accumulation, the organization of labor, and the politics of social difference.

An ascription of the moralizing binary of clean and dirty then separates people and confines them to particular places, thereby creating and upholding particular socio-spatial orders that are maintained by the association between people, waste and morality (Alexander and Reno 2012; Creswell 1996; Dèurr and Jaffe 2012: 5). In Tunisia, "contaminated communities" (Edelstein 1988) are through this socio-spatial exclusion

predisposed to material pollution. The absence of wastes and contaminated communities from official representations of the state before the revolution, their concealment through the fiction of state environmentalism, then links this process to the silencing of the poor (Farmer 1996: 261), that of authoritarian politics (Green 1998), and the invisibility of bodies of marginalized communities (Casper and Moore 2009).

**Significance**

Until recently, human-environmental interactions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have seemed relatively neglected by the humanities and social sciences. Alan Mikhail called this, "one of the gaping holes in the study of the MENA" (2013:1).[9] However, a deeper look reveals that even in the Maghreb alone, anthropologists have produced detailed ethnographic investigations of human-environmental interaction for some time (Abu-Zahra 1988; Attia 1957, 1965, 1985; Battesti 1997, 2004; Geertz 1972; Hammoudi 1985; Hoffman 2002; Ilahiane 2004). Further, through the increasing erosion of subject and object divisions in contemporary Western philosophy, described as the "material turn" as exemplified in the works of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) and Bruno Latour (1999), scholars have started to chart the active powers of the non-human material world. In the study of the MENA, scholars of this direction have started to rewrite environmental histories (Davis 2007; Davis and Burke 2011; Mikhael 2013) through the introduction of an unexplored array of social

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[9] In anthropology, a recently edited volume on the state of scholarship on the region (Hafez and Slyomovics 2013) at the beginning of the new century and an *Annual Review of Anthropology* article (Deeb and Winegar 2012) on the same topic, make no mention of environmental anthropology, political ecology, science studies, the ecology of religion or any of the other critical approaches anthropologists have employed to study socio-natural phenomena.

actors like animals, microbes, wind, water, the desert and mountains. This study then adds to the growing environmental anthropology of the region by investigating how the material world dialectically shapes cultural and social lives in the MENA. Specifically, it builds on the few studies that explored wastes in the region (Furniss 2012; Jolé 1982, 1984, 1989; McKee 2015), by demonstrating the role of discarded materials in such major political trends as colonialism, authoritarianism and revolutions.

An essential significance of any work concerned with authoritarian legacies is a coming to terms with the past and a comprehension of its reverberations in the present. As Cavatora and Haugbølle write, most analysis of Tunisia before the revolution, focused,

> too strongly on what was visible and readily identifiable at the level of the state and state–society relations, but did not account for important unintended consequences that were occurring and diffusing in wider society as well as for less visible socio-political phenomena because they were partially trapped in the mythology served up by the Ben Ali regime (2012: 181).

Following this insight, critical social theory in a post-dictatorial environment must demythologize and do the labor of revelation. On this level the study seeks to understand how socio-environmental inequalities were created, what logics informed and sustained them, how they were hidden, and what Tunisian society did to cope. As such, this is then also a scalar project aiming to understand how localized inequalities are embedded in larger global processes, such as colonialism peripherally, but primarily international development policies, and specifically structural adjustment. To my knowledge this is the first systematic study about the environmental crimes of the former regime and is thus a small contribution to Tunisia's vast project of coming-to-terms-with the authoritarian past and its present repercussions.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

It lies in the nature of authoritarianism that the state holds a monopoly on "truth" or at least tightly controls how information enters public discussion. Crossing as a young adult from Jordan into Iraq with my father, the Iraq of Saddam Hussein, he epitomized the silencing power of the regime in a short sentence. Knowing well that I was highly opinionated and boastful, he pulled me aside and said: "Son, a human life isn't worth much here. Even the walls have ears and eyes in Iraq." This was his way of saying, keep your political opinions to yourself, a reminder of the great power that authoritarian regimes have over the flow of information even from peoples mouths. I learned more about silences and how they were a form of self-governance that shut out certain parts of experience during my years in Syria under the rule of Bashar al-Assad. Through fear, silence makes one complicit.

The Ben Ali government was considered one of the most effective censorship regimes in the Arab world (Henry 2007). It relied on campaigns of misinformation and obfuscation to present itself as democratizing, economically liberal, and environmentally progressive to the international community and Tunisian elites. There were countless different national and international, overt and covert bodies concerned with collecting data that was primarily at the disposal of the state. Revelation through the revolution blew the lid off a world of the unknown, a world of secrets, a world of accusation, a world of rumor and even of witchcraft in which everything seemed possible.

All this is to say that the social life of data in Tunisia was skewed towards governmental interests. Though the regime had fallen by the time I entered the field, or

maybe exactly because of it, it was often very hard to corroborate information or judge the accuracy of even the "hardest scientific facts." Over the course of my research I developed an understanding of how and why data was skewed, but I also understood that even in what seemed to be an all-powerful police state, data collection was messy and even the most basic organizational structures were often missing. The governance of both Tunisian dictatorships was both incredibly tight and incredibly dysfunctional. I have thus tried throughout this thesis to present various and opposing voices and often don't arrive at a clear image of what exactly was going on underneath the regime's governing fictions. This, as I understand it, is the nature of research in authoritarian settings.

What relates to this conundrum is that although this is an investigation of the neoliberal authoritarian state and its margins, a large part of my research was conducted in state institutions following wastes physically and discursively. Therefore, while this study is primarily based around greater Tunis, it is also a "nodal ethnography" (Hodgson 2011: 17) that while following wastes focused in on particular materials, sites and players rather than being deeply grounded in one ethnographic fieldsite. I thereby sacrificed the long-term, deep ethnographic engagement with the communities most affected by the waste crisis that other studies about environmental suffering propagate (Auyero and Swistun 2009). Sometimes, in my search for concrete answers in the maze of the authoritarian state, I therefore feel that I didn't give sufficient voice to affected communities, that I myself erased these people while following materials and trying to materialize the amorphous state.

Linguistically Tunisia is a very challenging research environment for the non-native speaker. Tunisian Arabic (*tounsi* or *derja*) is the common language of Tunisia.

While the roots of the majority of Tunisian words can be traced to classical Arabic, it also includes a significant amount of Berber, Latin, Italian, French and Turkish words. Educated Tunisians, who make up a large part of the urban population and a big sample of this study, constantly code switch between *tounsi*, French, English and Modern Standard Arabic. When I first entered the field, my knowledge of the Tunisian dialect was limited, as I had trained in Levantine Arabic. This meant that most Tunisians could understand me, but that I often had trouble understanding them. For interviews with more educated Tunisians, I would bring a research assistant along, who translated or helped me translate many interviews or clarify issues. Eventually however, I became accustomed to the code switch, though often comprehending without noticing when the switch occurred.

Language also shaped my positionality in the field. As an Iraqi with a Lebanese accent trying to use Tunisian grammar, words and phrases I was a highly confusing cosmopolitan and Pan Arab subject to my research participants. At the same time, the ideological ties between Tunisia and Iraq, the longstanding exchange of educational materials and the fact that Bourguiba hadn't support the multinational force that invaded Iraq in the first Gulf War meant that being Iraqi opened doors for me. Further, the fact that I was born in a town that had the claim for the largest chemical factory in the world at the time of my upbringing, that I had a grandfather who was a worker in that industry, made my research much easier. Waste is associated with shame, making many people reluctant to talk about it. However, whenever I explained that I had grown up in Germany—a country that in Tunisia is synonymous with environmental protection—but still couldn't swim in the rivers due to industrial pollution, and had to stay inside at times for fear of high toxin levels in the air, made my informants relax.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

*Chapter I: Waste as the Surplus of State Formation*, introduces the reader to the multi-scalar history of the creation and management of waste in Tunisia since colonial times. It traces the emergence of modern waste back to the association of dirt with the urban poor in Paris under the country's hygienic ideology of the 19th century. Then it demonstrates the transposition of these French classed ideologies to the colony where they transformed into a particular form of racial hygiene that lead to the restructuring of Tunisian urban fabric and its governance. After independence, this racial ideology was yet again transformed and transplanted onto Tunisian regionalism, where it associated the country's interior and specifically rural migrants to the city with material and symbolic dirt. The chapter then introduces the reader to the socio-economic rule under president Ben Ali, which coincided with structural adjustment programs in the early 1990s. Finally, throughout history the chapter shows the contradictory process by which an increased attention to waste and desire for its exclusion from public space went hand in hand with the progressive production of wastes through urbanization, industrialization and increased consumption.

*Chapter II The Clean And The Dirty: Symbolic And Material Geographies Of Waste In Neoliberal Tunis,* then demonstrates the present-day reverberations of this hygienic ideology and its concomitant forms of urban governance and socio-spatial exclusion. By introducing the reader to the uncontrolled, urban periphery of Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi it demonstrates how its symbolic association with dirt predisposed the community to greater environmental suffering and facilitated its erasure from official

reports and public representations.  *Chapter III, Fictions and Façades of State Environmentalism*, inquires into the mechanisms of this erasure from the side of state.  It demonstrates that concealment of waste was achieved through a particular kind of political spectacle and attendant social life of data that emphasized environmental successes, but downplayed and concealed environmental pollution.

*Chapter IV "Environmental Regulation Here, Pfff…." The Seeping And Leaking Quality Of Corruption,* shows that these fictions and facades also concealed various forms of corruption. It argues that corruption lead to environmental pollution by undermining the enforcement of environmental legislation, by producing decrepit waste management infrastructure, and by creating organizational cultures based on fear that further obscured environmental problems. *Chapter V "The Dictatorship Falls, And Shit Appears":  Of Revolutions And Revelations,* discusses the breakdown of dictatorial fictions and facades with the revolution.  It outlines the return of waste, wasted communities, and landscapes into public space and public discussion. In part it represents this process as a struggle of environmental NGOs that on behalf of contaminated communities confront environmental fictions and influence their representation through a form of environmental truth finding. Finally, the *Conclusion* introduces the reader to the more recent developments of the themes of waste and socio-spatial exclusion. It develops the theoretical contributions of the former chapters and illustrates their significance for scholarship on the state, authoritarianism, and wastes.

CHAPTER I

WASTE AS THE SURPLUS OF STATE FORMATION

> Djerba is drowning in garbage because we lost in the fight for independence… Bourguiba has always marginalized the South because he hated Islam. They [the government] could resolve the crisis easily, but they decide not to. Eventually however they must, not because of us but because of the tourists.[10]

Mohamed was a 23 year-old waiter in my favorite bar. He had come to Tunis from the island of Djerba to study, because the universities were better here and there was more opportunity, as he explained. His father worked in the tourist industry and Mohamed was the third of six children. We had become friends while discussing fitness—he was tall, dark and muscular, never drank for both religious and health reasons, and worked out every day. He frowned over my drinking but consoled himself by the fact that I was, to him at least, a Baathist, not a good Muslim but somebody who cherished the Pan-Arabist cause. Over the months we had maintained small talk about politics and increasingly about the garbage crisis that had enveloped his home, the island of Djerba. Djerba was one of Tunisia's prime tourist destinations. The island's only landfill was located in the smallest and poorest of three municipalities, Gelalla. While the two larger municipalities on the island received the taxes from many hundreds of high-end tourist resorts, Gelalla received only their waste. In the summer of 2013 this inequality converged with residents' worries about garbage burning, smoke, stench and effects on the local water table, which was already overexploited. When the company that managed the landfill wasn't responsive to their grievances, like in the old days, residents took matters into

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[10] Personal interview with Mohamed, January 2015.

their own hands. They stormed the barricades of the landfill, burned down offices, infrastructure and equipment and shut the landfill down by civil force. In the aftermath of this closure, the tourist paradise was gripped by a garbage crisis, which, because of its high-profile location, couldn't be ignored.

While Mohamed understood the situation, its local municipal components and the global aspects of tourism, he felt primarily that environmental suffering was inflicted upon his home as part of a larger historical marginalization of the South that in many ways was the schism at the heart of modern Tunisia. Djerba was drowning in garbage because of the fight between Habib Bourguiba, the first president of Tunisia, and Saleh Ben Youssef, over the identity of the country during the independence struggle in the 1950s (see below). Mohamed was sure that the current post-revolutionary government, which was associated with Bourguiba's rule, was not resolving the crisis because it wanted to further marginalize the South, soil its successes somehow. Like many Tunisians, Mohamed understood the scalar complexity of the waste crisis, the relationship between different localities and globalization. Waste to him was yet another expression of the socio-economic and political inequalities he as a *djerbi* had experienced at the hands of the former dictators.

This historical chapter will thus take a long view of the multi-scalar political economy of waste in Tunisia. It will demonstrate how the distribution of value in this economy led to the exclusion of particular materials, landscapes and people that were deemed dirty and disposable to the nation at least since colonial times. It emphasizes the intimidate relationship between material, socioeconomic and symbolic exclusion and charts the mutability of this exclusion throughout history as it defined first class, then

racial, then regional fault lines.

Using Zsusza Gille's concept of the *waste regime*, "that is, through what economic, political and material dynamics—waste is produced, how it is conceptualized, and how it is politicized" (2007:09) in a given time and place, I will discuss three critical historical trends that gave rise to modern waste in Tunisia: urbanization, industrialization and consumerism. The emergence of each trend roughly corresponds to a historical period and form of socio-political rule (colonization, postcolonial corporatism and neoliberalism). Waste, in each of these periods, is shaped by two contradictory processes that are inherent to modernity (Hawkins 2003; Moore 2009: 427). On the one hand modern ideologies project the need for a rational, clean, and ordered urban space and on the other, modernity is based on capitalism, an economic system that requires the constant production of waste and gives rise to social processes that increase waste exponentially (Laporte 2000; Melosi 2000; Scanlan 2005).

Each waste regime therefore responds to this contradiction through various processes of "distancing" (Clapp 2002) by which a geographical and mental distance is created between consumers, both industries and end-consumers, and the waste they produce. Distancing organizes the distribution of wastes, both locally and globally, along cleavages of race, class, and gender. Consequently, environmental health hazards, aesthetic and moral pollution associated with waste and waste management services are unequally distributed across communities and space along these lines (Bullard 2008; Clapp 2001; Pellow 2007). Being linked with waste, marginalized communities themselves become abject, disposable and excluded (Bauman 2004), thereby reinforcing their spatial exclusion (Sibley 1998). Such environmental injustices then "intrinsically

precipitates a politics of scale – since locally experienced sources of pollution are inevitably rooted in political-economic relations and processes distributed across far-reaching spatial networks" (Byckerstaff and Agymen 2009: 784). However, rather than being external to the processes that constitute these scales, waste and its distribution are central to the very "ideologies of scale making" (Tsing 2000: 347), that is the way that locality, regionality and globality are being created and perceived.

In Tunisia, waste then constituted and reinforced socio-spatial inequalities between French colonizers and Tunisian natives and then, after independence, increasingly between upper-class city dwellers and rural and ruralized urban populations. First, increased urbanization during the early colonial period led to European hygienic intervention into the Tunisian cities. Here hygienic colonial ideologies framed first the urban poor and then the whole of Tunisian society as dirty, diseased, dangerous and incapable of "civilization", thereby justifying colonial intervention and eventually leading to the imposition of Western waste management systems on the capital. These systems ruptured community-based waste management practices built on Islamic customary laws and laid the foundations for socio-spatial inequalities that resonate still today (see Chapter II). Second, after independence, the high-modernist ideologies of president Habib Bourguiba equated modernity with industrialization, thereby setting the country on a path of economically and environmentally unsustainable development practices that produced much of the large polluting industries today. Here industrial waste is part of the post-colonial condition, as it is produced through an economic and ideological drive to catch-up with the former colonizer. Third, the neoliberalization of Tunisia under Ben Ali integrated the country—as an offshore production haven for European products — into

the global economy and turned Tunisia into a pollution harbor. At the same time, Ben Ali's governance pact promoted economic freedoms and consumption amongst Tunisian elites. This was accomplished through a tradeoff between a persistently illiberal political system and liberal economic practices, which flooded Tunisia with formerly unknown quantities of consumer products that eventually turned into waste. The production of waste in each period far outperformed attempts to manage waste thereby resulting in what I call here a "crisis of disposal" that only surfaced fully once it could be discussed in the context of larger socio-economic inequality in Tunisia after the revolution.

**Colonial Hygiene and the Urban Transformation of Tunis (1830-1956)**

The colonization of Tunisia resulted in the transformation of urban space and the spatial separation of Arabs and French based on a hygienic ideology that designated Arabs as dirty, diseased and dangerous. At the fringes of the Ottoman Empire, the Tunisian Beys, the Ottoman provincial governors, who only paid nominal suzerainty to the Sultan since the early 18th century, had ruled Tunisia as a relatively independent state.  Yet as European trade grew across the Mediterranean, competition arose among Britain, France and Italy over the North African shores.[11] Slowly, mirroring the expansion of their naval forces, European powers made economic forays into Tunisia over the first half of the 18th century until under the Tanizmat (1839), the vast modernization project of the Ottoman empire (see Davidson 1963), Ahmed Bey (1805-1855) forged increased alliances with Europe to facilitate his project of military modernization. Under his reign and in the

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[11] In the early 19th century, the power of the Ottoman Empire was already in decline in the Mediterranean under European imperialism. Its waning power was epitomized in the loss of Greece in the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) and the increased autonomy of Egypt under Muhammad Ali who became a self-declared viceroy (*khedive*).

context of France's invasion of Algeria in 1830, French and British military advisers, merchants and emissaries increasingly insinuated themselves into Tunisian affairs and brought with them the techniques and tactics of Western statecraft.

Aware of this increased encroachment of Europe, his cousin and successor Muhammed al-Sadiq (1813-1882) created the first constitutional monarchy in the Islamic World in Tunisia 1861, hoping to retain sovereignty and stave off both Ottoman and European hegemony.[12] However, when Tunisia went into near bankruptcy during the global financial crisis of 1872 and in part as an effect of Ahmed Bey's modernization, Muhammed al-Sadiq had to accept French, British and Italian control of Tunisia's economic affairs in 1869. France, which eventually outmaneuvered British and Italian influence in Tunisia, used the imminent collapse of the Tunisian economy in 1881 as a pretext to land its troops, finally leading to the establishment of a French protectorate over Tunisia in 1883 under the Treaty of La Marsa.

Following the Treaty, French settlers swiftly moved in—though never in the same numbers as in Algeria—and started to create administrative positions to reform the structures of the Beydom to their own advantage. Again unlike Algeria, Tunisia was never considered to be an actual French territory, but was governed by a mixture of direct and indirect rule. Emulating the monarchial politics of the Beys rather than establishing a European-style democracy or supporting constitutionalism, the French monopolized power, divided the elites and cultivated political and economic clientage while maintaining a facade of Tunisian self-determination, at least initially (Lewis 2013). This led to the development of a "neo-patrimonialist government by transferring the

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[12] The Constitution or Fundamental Pact (*And did-Amen*) gave foreigners further freedom to trade and own property.

mechanisms of patrimonialism from the informal patronage belonging to the Bey, to the state itself, even as it sustained the traditions and culture of clientalism" (Murphy 1999: 44). In other words, the colonial state was forged on the basis of absolute colonial power that sustained itself in part by indirect rule though clientage with French settlers and Tunisian elites.

For the first sixty years of the protectorate, the colonial economy was dominated by agriculture and extractive industries. France's conquest of North Africa was based on a particular "environmental imaginary" that under the "declensionist theory" viewed the North African environment as an essentially dry, desert land that had been degraded by its inhabitants from its former Roman glories since the Hilai invasion of the Arabs in the 11th century (Davis 2011). France saw it as its colonial duty to reestablish the glories of Roman civilization in North Africa in general, and the "Granary of Rome" an agricultural cornucopia for the French empire in particular. Land was therefore central to French settler ideologies and the farmer working the land became the ideal settler who was to transform North Africa (Sessions 2011: 179; see also Pritchard 2011). Thus, upon the creation of the protectorate in Tunisia, French settlers confiscated the large ottoman landholdings, leaving the Tunisian rural populations increasingly landless. While industrialization in the colonial period played only a minor role in the creation of waste, the very emergence of modern urban waste was driven by latent colonial sensibilities about hygiene, morality and the poor in the context of increased urbanization that was driven by the influx of settlers and resultant extreme rural poverty.

In the second part of the 19th century, influenced by the hygiene campaigns of European metropolises, European emissaries and Ottoman elites started to frame the

urban masses in terms of filth, infectious disease and disorder. This newly-perceived threat required hygienic intervention to control waste, urban space, and the "dangerous classes" within it (Ouled-Mohammed 1977: 56). In the 18th and 19th century, European urbanization and increased control of urban space by the state was itself driven by a crusade against filth and germs that primarily targeted the urban poor (Barnes 2006; Halliday 1999; Jackson Lee 2015; Stallybrass and Weiss 1986). In Paris, the miasma theory, the idea that diseases were transmitted through bad odors linked the urban masses with danger and epidemic and set them off against the "deodorized bourgeoisie" (Corbin 1986: 55) in the context of a growing class divide in French society. The resultant Pasteurization of France through the Hygiene Movement (Latour 1988), which practiced a "mixture of urbanism, consumer protection, ecology…defense of the environment, and moralization"(1988: 23) targeted the urban masses with a social engineering project of "gigantic proportions" (1988:24) that moralized filth and the urban poor

The Hygiene Movement became the ideological driver of the largest urban public works development in the history of humanity: the refashioning of Paris under Baron Georges Eugne Haussmann (1809-1891). The Haussmanization of Paris was directly motivated by the "hygienic sciences" and was "fundamentally conceived as a work of *assaaainissment*" (cleansing or sanitation) (Barnes 2006: 50) that lead to the demolition of slums, the construction of over 600km of sewers, and the establishment of wide open streets and squares under a new hygienic aesthetic. As Michael Foucault writes in his *Birth of the Clinic* (1994: 213), this opened-up the slums and streets of the city to urban surveillance by the state. David Barnes (2006) termed this the "hygienic gaze," the pathologizing of urban space, its refashioning and resultant surveillance of the urban

poor. Modern urban waste management in Europe was thus embedded with the, at least

perceived, control of disease and thereby the urban poor that were seen to be its vector.

The class politics of 19th century Europe were deeply integrated with the racial

politics that served as social distinctions within the colonies (Stoler 1995: 7) and hygienic

intervention was no exception. As a moralizing science, Public Hygiene was imperative

to the civilizing missions of colonial Europe across Africa (Burke 1996; McClintock

1995; Anderson 1995). Here, as in European cities, sanitary intervention was a tool for

urban governance that allowed colonizers to confine populations to particular spaces and

survey them (Masquelier 2005: 7). In the French colonies, social hygiene, the separation

of the different classes based on hygienic ideologies, was transformed into racial hygiene

that demanded urban segregation of French colonial cities and resulted in the creation of

colonial quarters that conformed to the rules of French public hygiene. These quarters

were meant to symbolize French civilization in urban space and its superiority over the

culture of the colonized (Grandmaison 2014; Wright 1991).[13] French hygienic ideologies

towards the North African colonies were perfectly expressed in a French medical journal

in 1912 where a colonial doctor wrote:

> North Africa, which had been very healthy under the Roman occupation, saw its
> sanitary conditions change from day to day during the long Arab-Turkish nightmare.
> We have witnessed continual wars, and bloody revolutions, and we have seen the
> most formidable calamities follow one another during the long centuries. In the
> middle of such miseries, epidemics have struck fatally. They found a wondrous
> terrain among these poor beings, emaciated by hunger, poorly clothed, living in
> conditions of lamentable hygiene. When one thinks of ways so primitive that our
> consuls themselves had to try to check the plagues, when one thinks also of the
> habitual indifference of Muslims which results totally from fatalism, one understands

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[13] In Algeria, the French used access to sanitation as a spatial marker for modernity, by which Algerian
cities and suburbs came to be classified as European and modern or African and backward based on their
sanitary infrastructure and therefore the perceived cleanliness of their populations (Brock 2010).

why contagious diseases caused such ravages during the long centuries. (Quoted in Gallagher 1983: 96)

Thus, echoing what Diane K. Davis has termed the declensionist narrative (2007:1) in the context of the natural environment, hygienic ideologies of the colonizer asserted that North African Arabs and Turks had degraded the sanitary conditions of their cities from the former glories under Roman rule. This narrative inserted North African Muslims into a civilizational hierarchy based on hygiene and transformed the colonization of North Africa into a civilizational restoration.

Tunis in the 19th century was in many ways a traditional North African Islamic city that incorporated the edifices of political, economic and religious power as well as living quarters within its walls (Hakim 1986). Surrounded by ramparts, it had two adjacent suburbs (*rabats*) that stretched to the north and south from the city gates and offered communication with the rural hinterland (see figure 1.1). At the center of the medina stood the Zeitouna Mosque surround by a labyrinth of souks and the adjacent *kasbah*, the citadel and seat of political power on the hill from which the whole city sloped down towards the bay of Tunis to the east and Sabkhe Esoujoumi[14] to the South.

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[14] In Tunisian Arabic, the word sabkhe denotes a shallow salt lake or saline plane, which is fed by rain, the sea or rivers.
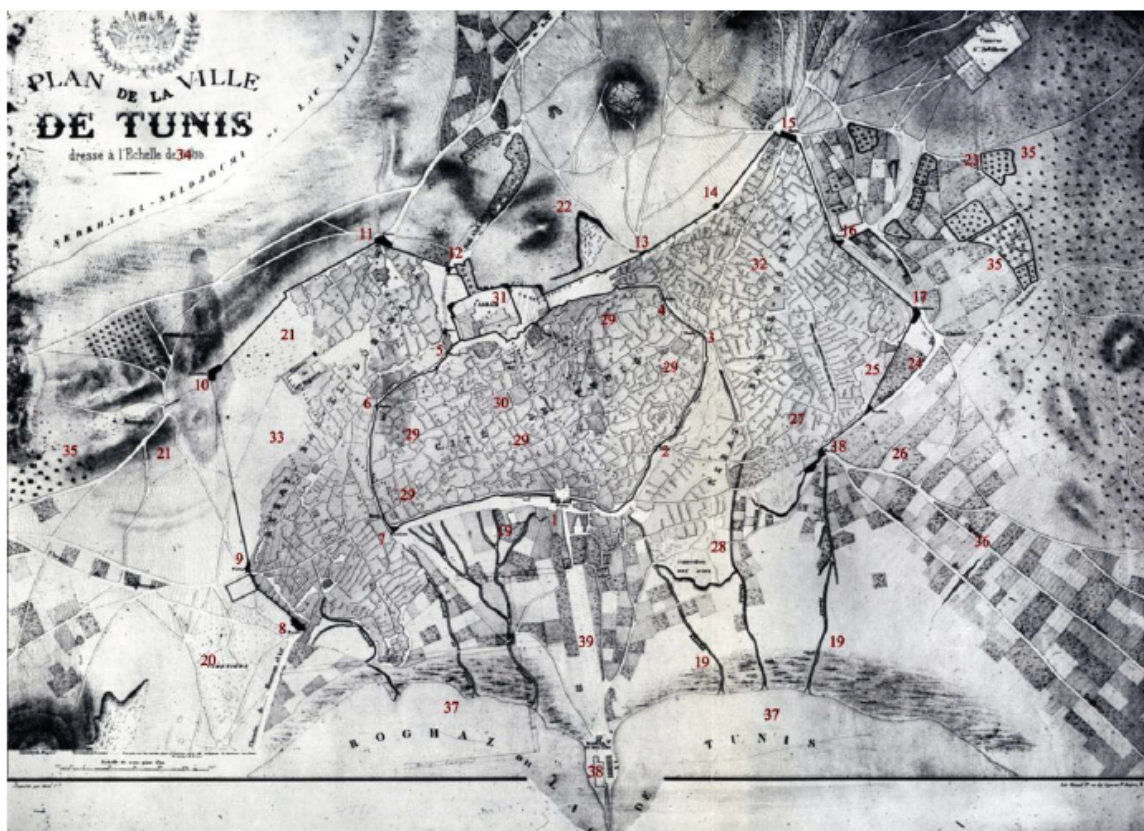
**Figure 1.1 Map of Tunis Medina by Piere Collin 1860**

The city, whose population in both the medina and the rabats was about 80,000 in 1830 (Sebag 2007: 543),[15] was divided by class and ethnicity. The *beldi* (literally meaning from the town) formed the social, economic, administrative and religious elite[16] beneath the Beys (Demeersman 1970). To be beldi meant to have a house in the medina (not the rabats) for several generations, a shop in the souk, a space (*tourba*) in the local cemetery, and to be at least an influential craftsman (working only certain professions), trader or landowner, besides religious and administrative positions (Henia 2003). The

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[15] The population of Tunis is quite disputed until the early 20th century. This number comes from the foremost scholar on the city Paul Sebag who has written for decades on its origins.

[16] Social stratification was of course more intricate, for a full description of different ranks in amongst the elites see Demeerman (1996).

beldi were set off against the working classes,[17] artisans (*harif),* traders *(tagir)* and farmers who might have lived in the poorer areas of the medina, but made up the majority of the population of the rabats. To live in the rabats was thus associated with lower class and relatively recent arrival from the countryside (Demeersman 1970; Sebag 2007). While Moors, Turks and Andalusians lived in the upper part of the city close to the center of power, non-Muslims were quartered in the lower part. Here Jews lived in the *hara,* the poorest part of the medina and European merchants were installed in hospices (*fanadiq*) near Bab Bahar (Sebag 2007).

In the 19th century Tunis there was no municipal rubbish collection[18] and sewage ran in open sewers or ditches (*khandaks*) that collected wastewater in the city streets from each house and transported it down to the lake of Tunis and Sabkhet Essoujoumi, both of which also functioned as rubbish dumps (Sebag 2007: 544). While there is no evidence for how rubbish found its way to these dumps, Hakim (1986: 49-55) describes local customary regulations *(urf)* about wastewater management and sewage maintenance under the Malkki school in the medina of Tunis in the 19th century.[19] Under these laws and regulations there was a strict distinction between rainwater, which could be used to clean the house and courtyard, wastewater that resulted from all other household cleaning actives, and wastewater that contained human excrement, each of which had to be

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[17] Joel Binen writes, that although the working class (*al-tabaqa al-'amila*) is an imprecise identity marker that is in flux, in Tunisia "workers were inflected by the initial formation of working classes during the second half of the nineteenth century—the era of colonial capitalism…and were associated with the anti-colonial struggle" (2016: 9-10).

[18] By Malki Islamic law, which was in theory followed in the time of the Hussanids, it was actually disallowed to dispose of garbage in the streets of the medina (Hakim 1986: 25).

[19] Until the early 20th century, there were two types of legal systems that influence urbanism and the built environment: a centrally imposed system (*fiq*) and a community-based customary system (*urf*). For a full explanation of how Islamic Law influenced the built environment see Hakim (2008)

handled and discharged differently. *De jure* the khandaqs should have only carried wastewater from washing activities and not excrement, which should have been collected in localized in cesspools (Hakim 1986: 176).

Overall, the rules for wastewater discharge and sewage maintenance in the medina of Tunis produced an extremely intricate physical system that involved primary, secondary and tertiary channels maintained by a social system based on private ownership of properties, cooperation, reciprocity and legal agreements between neighbors who shared a street and thereby a sewer ditch or cesspool. Primary channels, were maintained by communal, and proportional (to the numbers in a household) work from houses that lay upstream to resolve a blockage for example. Transgressions of this law could be punished with corporal punishment by a local religious authority (*ka'id*) (Hakim 1986: 50). Wastewater management in the medina of Tunis therefore bound communities together in a network of relations according to ever-increasing spatial and social units (households, streets and neighborhoods and so on). One then can at least speculate that the management of household waste followed a similar, distributive pattern based on social relations and Islamic morality.

Colonial travelers to Tunis throughout the 19th century, however, represented the medina with its "maze-like" character, its tanners, dyers, open latrines, and absence of municipal rubbish collection with a mixture of marvel and disgust. Dr. Louis Frank, in his 1819 description of the Regency of Tunis under the Beys, decries Tunis' "unbearable stench, which makes one think that one is in a vast sewer rather than an inhabitable city" (1918: 49; my translation). Upon the establishment of Tunis' Sanitary Council in the 1850s, manned by Europeans, it was remarked that,

> The great Maltese Street of Tunis that leads from Bab Bahar Gate to the Gate of Bab el-Khadra, is in a state of revolting filth. That the most infectious dirt stays there constantly without anyone taking care to remove it. And that lately the sewers are clogged for several days so that the matter that springs from them, not having been removed, mixed with the mud formed by rain produces an unnamable mixture that clogs the pavement and releases repulsive odors that are renewed with each passing wagon (Archives du Conseil Sanitaire de Tunis, Dossier 803, carton 66, Armoire 7, document 140 quoted in Barthel 2003: 72; my translation).

Similarly, after the establishment of the protectorate, Guy de Maupassant, a French orientalist, writer and traveller wrote standing on a hill above the city:

> All around this flat city garbage ferments in the swampy marshes, an unbelievable belt of rotting cesspits and naked fields crisscrossed by shimmering ripples of repulsive waters, the sewers of Tunis flowing under the blue sky. They poison the air, dragging their slow and nauseating flow through the rocky land towards the lake (Maupassant 1890: 186-187 quoted in Barthel 2003: 71 my translation).

Thus as the hygiene movement developed in Europe so did the view of waste in Tunis. Here as in the metropole, its moralization and association with first the urban poor and then the whole of Tunisian society gave Europeans an entry point into urban governance long before formal colonization started.

Hygienic intervention into the city first occurred in the context of epidemic. A series of epidemics had spread throughout Tunis in the early 19th century, first the plague in 1818-1819, then and unidentified epidemic in 1836, cholera outbreaks in 1849, 1856 and 1867 and typhus and typhoid outbreaks in 1867-1869. Specifically, the cholera outbreaks of 1849 and 1856 turned novel concerns with waste, disease and the urban poor into a moral panic that eventually led to European control over Tunisian public health and increasingly urban space in the capital Tunis. A Sanitary Council manned by European

emissaries,[20] which had already taken control of quarantine procedures in Tunisia's ports since 1835, managed the cholera outbreak of 1849 under the reign of Ahmed Bey and thereby established itself at the helm of Tunisian public health (Gallagher 1983: 49-56). At the time, both Europeans and Tunisians were still unsure about disease vectors. However, the observation that the unsanitary and poorer areas of the city were hit harder by the pandemic in the context of the miasma theory led to the removal of all filthy and potentially harmful materials from the city streets (Gallagher 1983: 45). Thus, under the advice from the Sanitary Council, and in response to the cholera outbreak of 1856, Ahmed Bey created the Municipality of Tunis in 1858, Tunisia's first waste management institution, which became responsible for the paving of roads and the cleaning of the open sewers. "The municipality was to modernize (westernize) city government" as a whole (Woodford 1989: 154).

Increasingly, the social order and hygiene of the city were equated, as had been the case in European cities, leading to new forms of urban governance and vast urban transformations. In the 1860s, the Tunis Police Council, which was responsible for keeping the social peace in the city, was also charged with the removal of household waste and clearing of sewers in the medina, transforming waste management from a private to a public matter. Following these decisions, the streets of Tunis themselves was declared public space in 1872 under control of the municipality. A hygiene tax was levied on households according to size, prompting the first census of houses in the city. These developments went hand in hand with a larger restructuring of the medina that resulted in

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[20] The council was manned by the consuls of Sweden, Spain, Naples, The Netherlands, Sardinia, Denmark, the United Kingdom and France as well as Governor of La Goulette and the personal physician of the Bey (Meddeb 2015: 125)

the demolition of its ramparts, the unhinging of city gates, and the establishment of the French consulate just outside of the main gate Bab Bhar in 1867.Quite literally, these changes left the city unprotected and open to the "hygienic gaze" of the colonizer.

After the French protectorate was established in 1881, the Sanitary Council was transformed into the *Conseil Centrale de Hygiène et de Santé Publique* in 1889. Following this development, the pasteurization of the colony was expressed in 1893 with the creation of the *Institute Pasteur* in Tunis for the control of infectious disease and sanitation (see Gaumer 2006 for a history). Hygienic French urbanism in the colonies finally found its ultimate expression in the creation of the *Ville Nouvelle* in the 1880s, a new city that was built exclusively for the colonizers outside of the walls of the original Arab medina of Tunis, so that the French could escape the perceived unsanitary conditions of the Arabs. The Ville Nouvelle was designed under Hausmann's hygienic aestheticism of Paris (Njoh 2015: 141), with straight open boulevards, separated city blocks, minor feeder streets, squares and the latest in sanitary enmities (see figure 1.2). It was built on the mudflats that stretched from the French Consulate at the Gate of Bab Bahar, now the Port du France, to the Bay of Tunis.

**Figure 1.2. 1886 Plan for the Creation of the Ville Nouvelle**

The Ville Nouvelle transformed Tunis into what architect Massimo Amodei (1985) called a "two partite," a dualistic urban structure that separated colonizer and colonized, which was partly justified by hygienic difference and the presence or absence of waste. Besides modern underground sewers, the Ville Nouvelle had a new water supply and even electricity after the development of a power station in the harbor of La Goulette in 1908. Thus wrote the Resident General of Tunis, Resident S. Pichon, in a letter to the President in France in 1906 upon the near completion of the Ville Nouvelle: "Certainly, that anyone who lays eyes on Tunis after the French occupation, sees that what was yesterday still in a pestilential swamp, was now purified and sanitized" (Quoted in Barthell 2003: 42; my translation). The miasmas didn't disappear, however. The swampy land next to the bay presented French engineers with a challenge that contemporary sanitation was not equipped for (sewage drainage into the lagoon of Tunis and associated smells were not resolved until the 1970s). The medina fell into disarray.

As the Ville Nouvelle took over the economic and administrative function of the medina and in the absence of urban development projects for the local population, an urban crisis started to simmer (Kenzari 2004: 115).

The crisis finally erupted in the 1930s, when consistently high birth rates and lower mortality rates coupled with ongoing rural poverty to the backdrop of the Great Recession drove rural populations in large numbers into the cities of the coast, and particularly Tunis. Together with the ongoing influx of Europeans under the protectorate this resulted in a near doubling of the city's population in ten years, from 258,000 in 1936 to 449,700 in 1946 (Sebag 2007: 548). The rural influx led to the creation of the *gourbivilles,* semi-urban hamlets composed of mud huts and tents erected on vacant land and the garbage dumps along Sabkhet Essoujoumi (Perkins 2004: 93-94). In contrast to other North African cities, the gourbivilles were not constructed of scavenged building materials, but of soil and clay (Micaud 1976: 150). The gourbivilles emerged in urban peripheries, on the shores of Tunis' three lakes and the hill Djebel Lahmar, places that Barthel (2003) describes as "liminal" and "dangerous", between water and land, city and country. They added a third part to the "two partite" and turned Tunis' urban structure into a "tri parti" (Amodei 1985) through the addition of rural slums and a new underclass of rural migrants.

The *gourbis*, the inhabitants of these slums, were prohibited from taking up the traditional occupations of the urban population and thereby filtered into an informal economy of rag picking, servanthood, and illicit activities. Devoid of sanitary facilities, medical services, and employment opportunities, the goubivilles again raised the "twin specters of epidemic and revolution" (Perkins 2004: 94). Forming the ultimate dirty,

rural, diseased and dangerous counter space to the modern Nouvelle Ville in the eyes of the French (Vasile 1995: 76), the initial reaction of the colonial authorities was to purge the gourbivilles, creating a special government agency, *le Commisariat à la Reconstruction au Logement* (i.e., the Agency for Reconstruction and Housing) to eliminate the settlements.

To summarize, European influence in 19th century Tunisia resulted first in the association of the urban poor with danger, dirt and disease. Under the moral panic surrounding several epidemics, this association of poverty, hygiene and danger allowed the foreign powers to take increased control of Tunisian public health and thereby the sanitary organization of the city of Tunis. As influence turned into the protectorate, this association was increasingly transferred to the whole of the Tunisian population thereby inserting it into a civilizational hierarchy. This hierarchy, based in part on cleanliness, was used by the French to present themselves as restorers of the glories of Roman civilization in North Africa. It is likely that the French hygienic gaze on 19th century Tunis was in fact based on an incomprehension and misrepresentation of waste management practices in Tunis. The squalor, miasmas and seeming absence of waste management systems that French colonists decried, were most likely just the breakdown of the social relations based on Islamic customary law that had facilitated waste management throughout the city's lifetime.

In the early 19th century the medina went through vast demographic shifts that must have disrupted the face-to-face nature and personal relationships that underlay waste management practices based on *urf*. First, the influx of Maltese and Italians throughout the early 19th century (Clancy-Smith 2011) which had approached a population of 15,000

at the eve of the protectorate (Sebag 2007: 545) and the steady inflow of European Jewery under the Tunis-Tuscan treaty of 1822, which resettled European Jewery mostly in the capital Tunis. Given that waste management practices throughout North African cities were based on Islamic customary law, and not on municipal management as was the case in Europe at the time, it is also very likely that it was particularly the quarters of the Europeans and Jews in the lower city that were most affected by the absence of waste management. While there is no direct evidence for this, it is likely that these demographic shifts skewed the representation of Europeans of the waste problems of Tunis in the 19$^{th}$ century. It is only the communalization of cleanliness and uprooting of it from face-to-face relationships between neighbors that allows for the designation of a whole people as dirty. Even in poor areas there would have been a considerable amount of variation between different parts of the streets under the Islamic customary arrangements. Clean and dirty in this way are more specific, more localized in the old medina. Moreover, the resultant transition to public waste management through municipalities in the modern city seemed to have never quite been completed. The contradictory effect that modernity has on waste can then be seen in several ways here. First, the reorganization of the city in the project to modernize it broke down the social relations that waste management was based on and thereby increased the presence of waste. Secondly, the very racial hygienic ideologies and colonial policies resulted in an urban crisis (Kenzari 2004) that produced yet more waste.

**Postcolonial Modernity and Economic Modernization (1956-1987)**

In 1956 Habib Bouguiba became the first president of a newly independent Tunisia.

Ruling with a mixture of coercion and consent, he was revered by large parts of the population and is still considered the father of the Tunisian nation today. *Bourguibisme*, his "aggressively modernist and staunchly secularist philosophy" (Perkins 2011: xi), employed authoritarian personality politics and welfarism towards the creation of a modern, urbanized, and industrialized Tunisia that would serve as a mediator between East and West. By anchoring his particularly utopian vision of modernity in technological advancement, urbanism and industrialization, Bourguiba set the country on an environmentally and economically unsustainable development trajectory that integrated Tunisia further unequally into the global economy. In the West, increased industrialization coupled with urbanization lead to the very emergence of modern waste by breaking the cycle of households, cities, and industries as closed systems in which waste found its way back into the economy as manure or animal fodder (Strasser 1999: location 208)[21]. This transition links to E.A Wrigley's (1988) notions of the switch between an "organic economy," in which both energy sources and outputs are organic matter, and "energy-based economy," where energy inputs are mineral based and outputs are increasingly metal, concrete and plastics.[22] Even if waste did not appear with industrialization, its quantity and toxicity certainly increased (MacBride 2012: 174).

From the outset, Bourguiba's political inclinations were staunchly authoritarian. With the legitimacy granted to him by the independence struggle, Bourguiba reorganized the Neo-Destour party, the political vehicle that had facilitated independence, to forge a de facto presidential monarchy. The single party became the intermediary between the

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[21] Mobi ebook format without page numbers.
[22] See also Mumford's distinction between agriculture and mining on Technics and Civilization (1934).

population and the state. Through the extension of party cadres and the burgeoning bureaucracy, he built a powerful state apparatus that reached deep into every rural and urban municipality (Moore 1965). Bourguiba, who distanced himself from the tumultuous postcolonial politics of the Arab East to pursue a collaborative though staunchly nationalist form of decolonization with France, had emerged victorious after a split in the Neo-Dustur party in 1955. His rival Salah Ben Youssef had propagated a more radical politics against the colonizer. Ben Youssef, the son of a merchant from the southern Island of Djerba, who emphasized the Arab and Islamic character of the new Tunisia, had his political power base in the rural interior and South, while Bourguiba came from the elites of the Sahel, the cities of the coast. Bourguiba eventually gained the upper hand with help of the French military.[23] Throughout his rule, Bourguiba used the state apparatus to suppress his political opponents by force. First Pan Arabist sympathizers and Tunisian leftists in the 1960s, then hundreds of students during student revolts in the 1970s and finally he turned against Tunisia's growing Islamist opposition in the 1980s.

His authoritarianism was rooted in the paternalistic view that only he knew what was best for the future Tunisia: an unequivocal vision of development and secular modernity.  He had been educated in Tunisia's first secular high school the Sadiki College, an incubator for first native colonial bureaucrats and later the post-independence political establishment. He went on to study law at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he met

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[23] Once Bourguibsts had the upper hand they hunted down youssifists and the *fellagha*, independence fighters, with the help of the French military.  To increase his hold on the judiciary, persecute Youssoufists and the *fellagha,*  Bourguiba established Tunisia's High Court, which sentenced Ben Youssef to death in absentia and created the first swath of political prisoners in the newly independent Tunisia (Perkins 2011: 151-152).

his French wife. Albert Memmi (2013 [1965]), Tunisia's chronicler of the postcolonial condition, wrote at the moment of Tunisian independence that the colonized will have two possible options in this moment, to either emulate or completely reject the colonizer[24]. Memmi writes of Bourguiba and Algerian independence leaders that, "having penetrated the colonizer's experience to the highest limit, to the point of finding it unlivable, they withdrew to their own bases…they must cling as closely as possible to them and their traditions" (2013: loc 1743).

Bourguiba's interpretation of modernity was heavily influenced by the colonizer's reading of the famous 14th century Tunisian social theorist Ibn Khaldun (Vasile 1995: 11). As an adviser at the Ottoman courts of North Africa, Ibn Khaldun's aim was to understand the threat of nomadic tribes to the Ottoman urban elites and his main explanation for this threat was *assabyya* (group solidarity). To him, the harsh lifestyle of nomads demanded more cooperation and built a stronger character, while urban Ottoman elites grew soft and complacent, thereby making them vulnerable to nomadic attack. History was thus cyclical to Ibn Khaldun. As nomads turned into city-dwellers and were eventually overthrown, empires would rise and fall, driving history around and around.

His *Muqaddimah* (1958 [1377]) is a nuanced study of the tribes that has to be historicized and understood in the context of Ibn Khaldun's position as an Andalucian working in North African courts. However, French colonial powers deployed Ibn Khaldun's argument for the colonization of North Africa. An orientalist (Said 1978)

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[24] Memmi, similar to Fanon (1967), viewed the colonial subject as having a self-alienated, split-identity. Later post-colonial writers such as Homi Bhaba (1994: location 58) speak of hybrid identities shaped in a "colonial modernity," that reject "essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures" and recognize that such claims themselves are enmeshed in colonial power relations.

reading of the *Muqaddmah* rendered Arabs incapable of establishing stable nation states thus requiring the guiding hand of French civilization (Poncet 1967). Interweaving this Khaldunian logic with modernization theory, Bourguiba saw traditional values, embodied in Islam and the countryside, rather than the external reality of colonialism (Amin 1977), as the main hindrance to his project of nation building. He conflated the city, embodied in the traditional urban upper classes (*beldi*), with order, progress and modernity, which presented his national ideal. And the country with *bedawi* (literally Bedouin) was in contrast equated with disorder and barbarianism (Boudhiba 1973)[25]. Thus, based on this particular vision, national integration, a euphemism for Bourguiba's nation building project, demanded the inclusion of some communities and the exclusion or reformation of others. It required the forceful eradication of traditional identities—clans, tribes or religious affiliation—embodied in the countryside and, not by coincidence, the power base of his former political opponent Salah Ben Youssef (Henry 2007; Perkins 2011).

While authoritarianism was central to his state-building project, Bourguiba also relied on populist politics, food subsidies and welfarism that improved education and the general health of the population. A decade after independence, the number of students attending primary school had tripled; the attendance of secondary school quadrupled; university attendance increased five-fold (Tessler and Keppel 1976: 74); and literacy rates rose from 15 to 62 percent during his rule (Murphy 1999: 86). Hygienic intervention as a form of social engineering persisted under Bourguiba in various forms. While under the colonizer it was directed against the indigenous urban population as a whole, he directed it against the countryside and what he perceived to be the ruralized

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[25] This distinction of also follows the binary between nature and culture (Ortner 1974). See Strathern and MacCormack (1980) for a critique.

slums of the city, the gourbivilles.

Transforming the countryside necessitated the restructuring of the Tunisian family as the locus of rural life, political alliances, and economic activities, thus placing rural women at the center of state intervention. The government's primary tool in this endeavor was the Code of Personal Status passed in Bourguiba's first year in office. The code established the nuclear, rather than the extended family, as subject to the law. It outlawed polygamy, gave women the right to divorce, increased custody rights and even minimally regulated inheritance (Charrad 2001). The Tunisian state expanded its influence under the auspices of the newly founded Family Planning Program into the lives and households of the peasantry. In particular, rural women were instructed in "modern hygiene" (Gana 2004). In part as an effect of hygienic intervention, infant mortality was cut from 160 per thousand in 1960 to 60 per thousand by the end of Bourguiba's rule in 1985 (Murphy 1999: 86).

The capital Tunis became a microcosm of Bourguiba's nation building project (Vasile 1995). After the French had withdrawn, the *beldi* upper-classes and emerging middle classes migrated from the Arab medina into European homes and suburbs like La Marsa, Gammarth and Cartage of La Marsa, Gammarth and Cartage, where the beldi had long held country houses. This movement started a chain reaction that shuffled populations around the city. As a result of the failed cooperative agricultural project of the 1960s, the gourbivilles of Tunis grew and grew through rural migration, reaching 275,000 inhabitants in 1975 (Murphy 1999: 83). In Bourguiba's modernist vision, the gourbivilles were dirty and disordered enclaves of bedouinism and rurality in the modern

Tunisian city.[26] And it was true that the gourbivilles had a definitively rural character, and were often adjacent to both Tunis' rubbish dumps and the lakes that received the majority of its sewage. Describing the gourbiville of Borgel, that had been erected next to a rubbish dump on the northern shore of lake Tunis, Tunisian sociologist Paul Sebag) wrote:

> If you forget how you came here, you could believe yourself to have been transported into a village of the Tunisian steppe. These adobe walls, exposed brick, clay-covered roofs and fencing made of braches in front of the gourbis; these rustic ovens, billowing with thick smoke, cows that moo in their enclosures. Everything smells of the countryside. Women in Bedouin dress (272-273)…More than once, we surprised the ragpickers at work. Without a break, the whole morning municipal trucks come pouring the garbage along the lake that they collected in the city. A large group of people awaits them: men, women and children, armed with sickles and sharp sticks. They stop for a moment gazing across the vast sheet of filth spread out under the sun, then like a storm attack the garbage trucks that empty the contents of a thousand garbage cans. Then they resume their methodical exploration to discover anything of value: paper, rags, bones, tin boxes (1958: 282; my translation).

Bourguiba thus implemented a project of slum clearance known as *degourbification*. Between the 1960s and 1980s, ten public housing estates (*melja*) were built around Tunis, mostly on public farmland, to absorb part of the slum-dwellers, others were forcefully returned to the countryside. Through funding and technical assistance from USAID and the World Bank, some gourbivilles, like Mellasine and Saida el-Manoubia, were transformed into neighborhoods under the control of the municipality of Tunis, which paved roads, constructed sewers, and started to collect garbage (Kenzari 2004). Despite *degoubification*, spontaneous settlements in peri-urban areas grew steadily since the 1980s, often adjacent to new urban housing projects, though buildings were increasingly

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[26] Mejri (2004) notes that some of the gourbis of Tunis were in fact fully nomadic peoples, or Bedouins, that had settled there. Others however were "casual nomads" that had fled rural poverty.

constructed of bricks and differed little from official housing projects (Vasile 1995).

Bourguiba's "despotic developmentalism" (Henry 2007: 301) linked the modernist ideology of ruling elites with economic modernization. State corporatism became the economic version of Bourguiba's paternalism and the Neo-Destour Party presented itself as custodian of all social classes, thereby suppressing existent class struggles in postcolonial Tunisia (Ayubi 1995: 420). Industrialization as an expression of technological progress took on a near "mythical character" as a panacea to the social and economic ills of the colonial period (Dimassi and Zaim 1987: 86). Bahi Ladhgam, the de facto prime minister in the decade after independence, declared in a speech, "A simple look at the world around us reveals that independent of the role and rights of the individual, the developed countries of East and West reach a level of social and economic equilibrium, a balance that is due to technological progress" (Quoted in Dimassi and Zaim 1987: 86; my translation). This particular postcolonial version of technological optimism saw technology expressed in catch-up industrialization as the solution to social and economic inequality, both within Tunisia and between Tunisia and the Western developed countries. The economy, not political freedoms and therefore not a liberalization of the political system, would make Tunisian citizens free and equal.

Within the first ten-year economic plan (1962-1972), strictly corporate state policy regulated the credit system and started to invest heavily into the industrial, agricultural and tourist sectors. Reviving a business that had started in the early colonial period (Clancy-Smith 2013), the tourism industry was established to earn much needed foreign currency to repay loans. The *Société des Hôtels Tunisians Toristiques* (SHTT) was established, 13,8 million dinars became available in loans and hotels were built

around the best beaches in Sousse, Monastir, on the Southern Island of Djerba. Already in its earliest days the industry "posed threats, even if not immediately apparent ones, to the fragile environmental conditions in both coastal and desert regions" (Perkins 2004: 155).

Overall, as across much of the Arab World (see Owen 1992), economic policy was based on Import-Substituting Industrialization (ISI), the nationalization and valorization of natural resources and creation of cheap products for the domestic market to lessen the economic reliance on foreign merchandise and thereby the former colonial master. ISI coupled with state corporatism then led to the alliance between two emerging post-independence elites: the industrial and bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which cemented the ties between state and economy on an informal level (Murphy 1999). As industries in the colonial period had been centered on the large cities of the Sahel, decentralization was also a core pillar of ISI policy in which agribusiness and textile plants were built in underdeveloped parts of the country. The country's first heavy industries were established in rural towns like the Kasserine Paper Mill, Beja Sugar Factory, the establishment of phosphate processing plants in Gabes and Sfax, and finally the development of the petroleum industry, cement, plastics and steel works.

While there is no data on pollution in Tunisia before the late 1980s, the phosphate plants in Gabes and Sfax that eventually became the Tunisian Chemical Group, the Kasserine paper mill and Beja sugar factory and Menzel-Bourguiba Cement Plant that were created during this earliest stage of industrialization are amongst the largest polluters in the country today (EU 2012: 21-23). Prof. Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra, a Tunisian chemistry professor who wrote the influential book *Les Poisons Du Tiers-*

*Monde* (1985), The Poisoning of the Third World, and who started the first research lab to investigate pollution from pesticides in Tunis in the 1960s, explained the government's attitude towards pollution at the time of Tunisia's early push for industrialization:

> Nobody was interested [in pollution] because the main problem at the time was creating jobs for youth. Because it was after the independence we had to prove to France that we are able to deal with the country. And that's why the first thing for the government at the time was the creation of jobs. Also it was impossible at the time to criticize the country. So I remember you spoke about phosphate earlier. We got in touch with the minister, Ahmed Ben Salah (Minster of the Economy, Finance and Planning 1961-1969), a physicist. One of my colleagues and I went to the Ministry to speak to him [about pollution in the phosphate industry]. He looked to us as if we were some foolish people. "What are you talking about pollution, my starting point is the industrialization of this country….[27]

The development of post-independence economy topped all concerns for the environment. But the cost of Tunisia's earliest push for industrialization was not just environmental. ISI polices and infrastructural modernization indebted the country further and further to international financial institutions, producing a downward spiral of unsustainable development policies.

While ISI was seen as a popular nationalistic strategy to lessen dependence on the former colonial master, it was in fact a global development orthodoxy that eventually increased the dependency of Tunisia's and other Arab countries on international financing (Owen 1992: 26-36). From the beginning of the 1960s to the end the decade the percentage of Tunisia GDP represented by foreign investment more than doubled to 23 percent of the GDP, but this investment relied heavily on loans and grants from the international community, quadrupling Tunisia's debt and producing by 1972 a debt/ GDP ratio that was higher than nearly anywhere else in the world at the time (Perkins 2004:

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[27] Personal Interview Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra, March 2015

168-169). Peter Dauvergne (2008) draws a link between environmental pollution in developing countries and the international financing system. He argues that the pressures on governments to earn enough foreign exchange to clear their debts lead to unsustainable economic practices such as a focus on extractive industries (Dauvergne 2008: 15-16). This trend was certainly true of Tunisia, which by the end of the 1960s, in a "seemingly paradoxical turn" (Dimassi and Zaim 1986:16), moved away from manufacturing to agro-mining and a reorientation on extractive industries, primarily oil and phosphates. However, this refocus couldn't curb the country's immense foreign debts and further intensified unemployment.

Thus, under pressure from its lenders, the IMF and World Bank, Tunisia embarked in the 1970s on the first wave of market liberalization. Here Tunisia gave "free rein" to another kind of industry, Consumer Relay Industry, the assembly and processing of large massive upstream imports, mostly from Europe (Dimassi and Zaim 1987: 14). In 1974, Minister of the Economy Chedli Ayari announced "the state seeks to create a generation of industrialists who will be masters of the country tomorrow" (Singoles 1984: 790). The creation of the *Agency de Promotion Industrielle* (API) led to the "spectacular" (Bellin 1991: 176) growth in industry in the 1970s. Annual average growth rates rose from 4.7 percent in the 1960s to 27 percent in the 1970s and, in the same period, imports increased from 3.4 percent to 28.4 percent (Murphy 1999:88). Industrial enterprises more than doubled from 553 in 1967 to 1,205 in 1978 (Romdhane and Signoles 1982: 60-62) and between 1973 and 1978, 523 foreign industrial firms were established (Murphy 1999: 87). The regionalization of industrial policy into interior and southern cities of the 1960s corporatism was abandoned and most industries were now established around Greater

Tunis, Sfax, and Bizerte. The largest growth, both in terms of new factories and employment, was in the textile industry, which under subcontracting with European firms created ready-made clothing for an export market (Singoles 1984). Between the early 1970s and 1980s, the import of semi-finished goods and consumer products increased seven fold, rooting Tunisia's industrial economy firmly within the global supply chain and Tunisia's industrial workforce in the global division of labor.

But still, the discontent among the poor grew. In 1983, World Bank and IMF demanded the lifting of subsidies for the ingredients of bread and couscous, doubling the price of these basic Tunisian staples and resulting in weeks of rioting that came to be known as the Bread Riots. The disappearance of subsidies destroyed the social contract of post-independence Tunisia, in which political rights were surrendered for provision of a solid welfare state (Mullin 2015). Bourguiba's very modernist development policies and investment in education had fostered high expectations amongst the emerging middle classes, which were increasingly disappointed by the economic failure of his government by the mid 1980s. Aware that future structural adjustment policies would further ostracizes the working classes, Bourguiba moved to diminish the power of any opposition. He recalled General Zine Abbedine Ben Ali, who as Director General of the National Security had quashed riots in 1978, from an ambassadorial appointment in Poland to deal with the riots and moved against the country's main labor Union the UGTT. But falling global oil prices only worsened the economic situation. In 1986 external debt reached nearly 60 percent of Tunisia's GNP, and the fulfillment of international debt required nearly 50 percent of government spending (Perkins 2004: 191). Under pressure from the IMF, Bourguiba suspended all food subsidies. Most

Tunisians felt the economic misery, but poorer communities in the country's interior were most severely affected. This discontent fed into the growth of the Movement for Islamic Tendency (MTI), a community-based Islamist organization inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which organized against the government. With the arrest of major MTI figures and plans to execute them in 1987, Bourguiba, who had declared himself president for life in 1975, pushed the country to the brink of civil war and had to be removed. Bourguiba's postcolonial politics of waste were again structured by the exclusion of metaphorical waste and the excessive production of its material counterpart. Yet while in the dichotomy between archaic and modern, the gourbis and the MTI were seen as internal other to the new Tunisian nation, modern, industrial waste was a necessary outcome of progress.

**Ben Ali's Neoliberal Authoritarianism (1987-2011)**

On the 7th of November 1987, self-proclaimed President for Life Habib Bourguiba was replaced in a "medical coup" due to increasing senility by his Prime Minister Zine Abedine Ben Ali. Ben Ali's rule combined free market economic policy and a front of democratization with novel forms of neoliberal governance and the repressive politics of the former regime. Unlike what was projected by democratization theory,[28] in Tunisia, economic liberalization did not lead to democracy. While it lifted many Tunisians out of poverty, Ben Ali's neoliberalism also increased income inequality, perpetuated crony capitalism, and tightened the regime's grip on the country (Bellin

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[28] For a discussion see King (2003: 7-12).

2002; King 2003; Murphy 1999). In fact, economic growth and the proper functioning of consumer society under the "security pact" became the very legitimation for Ben Ali's authoritarianism, both internally and abroad (Hibou 2011). The production of both industrial and post-consumer waste was thereby integral to the very survival of the Ben Ali regime.

Initially however, the new president was welcomed as a democratizer and conciliator with the MTI. He freed hundreds of political prisoners, dismantled Tunisia's notorious State Security Court and saved the country from outright civil war.  In the period described as the Opening (1987-1989), Ben Ali brought the leaders of all major social institutions together to sign the National Pact that was to lay the foundation for democratic transition, multi-party politics and signal the end to the monopolization of power in Tunisia. However, when in the 1989 elections the newly licensed Islamist el-Nahda party (formerly MTI) took almost 14 percent of the vote nationwide and nearly 25 percent in large cities (Denoux 1999: 49), Ben Ali and the his Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) Party backtracked.

The electoral law was recast to maintain a façade of multi-party democracy, while parliamentary hegemony of the RCD was guaranteed (Perkins 2004: 32). Similarly, while there was an increase in civil society organizations, the regime limited their autonomy by withholding permits and making organizations financially dependent on the government (Bellin 1995).  Under Ben Ali, Tunisia became a police state, with the president at least doubling the police force in the first decade of his rule until there was one police agent

for every 15-110[29] Tunisians, estimates vary significantly (Henry 2007: 301). Anyone suspected of organizing against the RCD, particularly trade unionists, Islamists, journalists, the political left and student movements, faced severe harassment or ended up in Tunisia's notorious prisons.[30] The Islamist opposition was especially singled out and persecuted to the harshest degree.[31] A fiction of reform was maintained through severe censorship of the media. The French Organization, *Reporters Sans Frontieres* (RSF), for example, described the Ben Ali regime as one of the most repressive in the Arab region in the mid 1990s—which is something to say—stating that "news management is a fundamental building block of the police state in Tunisia…[and that] All the institutions that could constitute countervailing powers to the regime—the judiciary, parliament, voluntary associations, political parties, universities, etc. have been systematically placed under government control" (quoted in King 2003: 41). While there was a large and growing opposition outside of Tunisia, within the country the regime was thus the primary regulator of information.

These seemingly contradictory political developments of democratization and entrenchment of the authoritarian state under structural adjustment were part of larger political trend that Stephen J. King (2009) termed the "New Authoritarianisms in the Middle East and North Africa," which took hold of the region in the late 1980s and early 90s. During this period, several authoritarian Arab republics faced increased challenges

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[29] As Henry (2007) notes, these figures are imprecise, in part because many different kinds of secret police forces existed.

[30] While there are no reliable numbers on the political prisoners held under Ben Ali, Human Rights Watch estimated that there were over 500 and Amnesty International suggested that there might have been up to 1000 (see Henry 2007)

[31] For detailed accounts of how the regime used both physical torture and the state apparatus, including state benefits against the opposition, to achieve a form of "social death" see Hibou (2011).

as their traditional political power base among workers and peasants was weakened by persistent economic crisis linked to structural adjustment in the context of the third wave of democratization. Arab regimes reacted by selectively implementing neoliberal economic policy as prescribed by the Washington Consensus, but using the privatization of state assets to develop a new patronage-based constituency amongst the urban and rural bourgeoisie. Democratization was put on display, only for it to be undermined by single-party politics and patronage-based economic practices to reinforce a new kind of authoritarianism that was characterized by liberal economic policy, controlled multi-party democracy and legitimization of these politics through electoral performance. Therefore, while Bourguiba's Tunisia had at least in part rested on populist politics and welfarism defined by broad access to education, healthcare, food and energy subsidies, Ben Ali's new Tunisia rested increasingly only on alliances with elites close to the president and his family.

On an economic level, Ben Ali's new Tunisia seemed to fully embrace the Washington Consensus. Although market liberalization had been on a slow and steady rise since the early 1970s, the 1986 budget presented a drastic shift and foreshadowed neoliberal policies of the years to come. Negotiated with the Bretton Woods institutions, it resulted in the deregulation of manufactured goods (textiles, automobile parts, construction materials, etc.); increases of 10-15 percent on food prices; removal of subsidies from gasoline and pharmaceuticals; development of plans for the privatization of 300 state enterprises (Murphy 1999: 98-99). Again, industrialization, together with tourism and agriculture, formed the unquestionable pillars of the new development policy. In 1992, more than 2 million foreign tourists visited Tunisia, which climbed to

more than 5 million by the end of Ben Ali's rule (Perkins 2004: 192). The 1986 budget was also tied to an immediate $150 million dollar loan to reform national industry, which resulted in the creation of the *Agence de Promotion de l'Industrie* (API) to coordinate industrial policy and create industrial zones for export manufacturing. In the seventh development plan (1987-1991), tariffs, which so far comprised between 5 and 236 percent on over 80 percent of all imports, were slashed to ensure industrial inputs in the growing economy and fuel private consumption (Murphy 1999: 118).

Tunisia's industrial landscape was completely transformed during the eighth development plan (1992-1996), when the RCD further reformed the banking system and overhauled its legal framework to encourage foreign investment in all sectors of the Tunisian economy with the exception of mining, energy, internal trade and finance. The Code known as CII established special industrial zones that guaranteed foreign investors free repatriation of all capital gain as long as products were manufactured for export. In certain economic priority development areas like industrialization and tourism, investors were exempt from paying taxes for a decade and paid only 50 percent thereafter. The reforms of the eight development plan thus transformed Tunisia into an offshore manufacturing heaven for primarily European industry, so that by the end of Ben Ali's rule, Tunisia was home to 2,956 European companies, 1,269 of which were French and 671 Italian (AITEC 2014: 25). The majority of these businesses were subsidiaries for large global brands, in the textile industry, agribusiness and automobile parts.

Macroeconomic development indicators improved considerably after Ben Ali took power in 1987, with official figures showing a solid 5 percent growth in GDP and a poverty rate that had declined from 14.0 to 4.5 percent in the early 2000s (Cavatorta and

Haugebolle 2012: 6). Ben Ali's neoliberal reforms seemed so successful to the international community that Tunisia joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), today the World Trade Organization, in 1990 and became the first country to sign a free trade agreement with the European Union in 1995. The World Bank coined Tunisia the "Tiger of the Mediterranean," discursively linking it to the economic success of the East Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan). Tunisia at the time was seen as indispensible proof that structural adjustment policies could work, just as critique thereof rose globally. While dictators have always been Western allies in the region, in the 1990s, Ben Ali was seen as a stable bastion of pro-Western secularism in an otherwise increasingly unstable region with growing Islamic fundamentalism. Algeria to the East was descending deeper and deeper into a civil war between the government and Islamist rebels and Libya's Colonel Ghadafi had just been declared a persona non-grata after the bombing of a passenger plane over Lockerby in Scotland.

While the World Bank and the Tunisian government initially deemed Tunisia's growth equitable (World Bank 1996 quoted in King 2003: 37), many studies have now proven that the picture of Ben Ali's "economic miracle" was more complicated. In reality the economic boom under Ben Ali primarily benefitted the wealthiest families in the country as the privatization of public assets was in fact a redistribution amongst certain elites, many of whom belonged to the Ben Ali clan itself (Harik 1992: 218–19). By the end of Ben Ali's rule, the 220 firms most closely connected to the president and his extended family were capturing an astounding 21 percent of all private sector profits, amounting to 0.5 percent of economy or $233 million (Rijkers et al. 2014). But even beyond the Ben Ali family, privatization ensured new clientage relations as arable land

was sold to large landowners and credits were favorably distributed to guarantee the loyalty of elites, who in turn built localized patronage networks amongst the local peasantry through Islamic welfarism to guarantee votes for the RCD (King 2004).

After the revolution, a report published by the National Institute of Statistics, the World Bank and African Development Bank adjusted Ben Ali's official poverty statistics of 5 percent in the early 2000s to 32.4 percent in 2000, 23.3 percent in 2005 and 15.5 percent in 2010 (National Institute of Statistics 2013). [32] While this is a considerable reduction in overall poverty, the same report notes that while the GINI coefficient decreased from 34.4 in 2000 to 32.7 in 2010, neither the decline in poverty nor in inequality benefited the center or west of the country, where poverty rates could be 14 times higher, and where both poverty and inequality increased in real terms. This created an even greater polarization of wealth in the cities of the coast. In contrast to this growing inequality, the regime prided itself in the growth of the middle classes.

In a characteristic hyperbole of statistical representation, official figures claimed that the middle class represented 72.9% of the population in 1985, 76.9% in 1995, and 80% in 2010 (Gherib 2011).[33] The middle class had been on the rise since the early 1970s as an effect of Bourguiba's educational reform, growth in medium-sized companies associated with early liberalization, rising oil prices and foreign remittances (Ayari 2003: 142; Camau and Geisser 2003: 58). Ben Ali anchored his political base amongst these rising, urban middle classes through the rehabilitation of a "non-aggressive" Arab/Islamic identity, a discourse of technological modernity and the promotion of consumerism

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[32] The poverty line in Tunisia at the time of the study was defined by a monthly income of 1277 dinars ($530) in cities and 820 ($330) dinars in the countryside.

[33] As Gherib (2011) notes, to produce these figures the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) measured the middle classes as anyone that owned their own home, irrespective of location or debt.

(Khiari 2004). Private consumption had been a key driver of Tunisia's growth since the early 1990s (Chemingui and Sánchez 2011), with official figures showing an average of 9.7 percent growth in household consumption between 1990 and 2010 (Institute National de La Consommation 2016). What these figures didn't reveal, however, was that consumption was built on the rise of a debt economy. Borrowing made available through the banking reforms of the mid 1990s had softened the impact of much of the cuts in welfarism associated with structural adjustment (Hibou 2011). And while consumption rose, household debt increased by 68 percent between 2002 and 2010 alone, so that by 2010 household debt amounted to 25 percent of the total credit of in the Tunisian economy and made up nearly 17 percent of household Gross Domestic income (Abid et al 2012: 342). Consumption, linked to Ben Ali's middle class alliances, thus became an integral part of the regimes novel forms of neoliberal governance.

Beatrice Hibou (2011) describes this as the "security pact" through which the population, but particularly the middle classes, would surrender their political freedoms and abilities to question Ben Ali's authoritarianism in exchange for security, the protection from Islamist terrorism, and easy access to credit and consumer goods. Under Ben Ali, consumption stood in for political freedoms and market liberalization for political liberalization (see King 2003). Ben Ali's deliberate focus on the middle classes under quasi-liberalizing economic polices, created "new enclaves of wealth, forms of sociability, affective connection, optimism, and pleasure" as Lisa Wedeen (2013: 855) wrote about the same developments in Syria at the time. Ordinary Tunisians could aspire to this new way of life yet rarely attain it. The reality of the neoliberal economic polices of the regime were that jobs were primarily created in the unskilled-manufacturing sector,

therefore leaving the middle classes, and particularly educated middle classes with fewer and fewer chances of employment. In the absence of political freedoms, economic elites and many other Tunisians were appeased with consumption and a promise of "the good life" (Berlant 2011), unachievable fictions of upward mobility, security and equality despite evidence of the opposite. These new middle class desires, converged with a change in trade and industrial policy to expand consumer products and packaging, which could only be attained through ever expanding personal debt. These trends produced the crisis of disposal that only became visible with the revolution.

By the end of Ben Ali's rule, Tunisia was drowning in waste. In 2012, the country produced 2, 423 million tons of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) a year, that is 0.815 kg/ day per capita in urban areas and 0.150kg/day in rural areas (SweepNet 2014: 1). Thus approaching the lower end of the range of 1.1-3.7 kg/ day per capita (the average lies at 2.2kg/day) in the OECD countries (World Bank 2012: 08). There were a further 116,000 tons of industrial waste, 90,000 tons of e-waste, 99.000 tons of packaging and 16.000 tons of medical waste that year in Tunisia (SweepNet 2014: 1). But the most staggering figure were that of 5,15 million tons of hazardous waste that in the absence of hazardous waste treatments stations found their way into the environment. The history of Tunisian governance since colonial times had resulted in a country inundated with waste.

**Conclusion**

A longue durée view of the political economy of waste in Tunisia reveals the intimate and recursive connections between physical and symbolic waste, wasted communities, landscapes and the ideologies that surround them. A history of waste is a

history of value, in its various social and economic forms, that emphasizes the surplus or discard in these economies of value. It is therefore also a history of the material aspects of social distinctions, bound up with the transformation of class and race relations.

The chapter therefore shows the complex ways in which social exclusion led to the creation of ever more waste in Tunisia. During early colonialism, the hygienic ideology represented an awakening to concerns of waste in public space. It occurred in the context of urban epidemics and major changes to class relations in Europe and made the lower classes, rather than the capitalist economy responsible for the amassment of waste in urban space. In Tunis, the ideological distancing of waste away from the colonizer created a physical emplacement of Arabs within the medina and the rabats.

Habib Bourguiba's legacy, environmental and otherwise, has to be understood in the context of modernity, colonialism, and the emergence of a post-colonial totalitarian state.  As Hamid Dabashi writes commenting on the Arab Uprisings, "The postcolonial did not overcome the colonial; it exacerbated it by negation." (2012:17). The very modernist ideology of the colonial era that was based on a hierarchy between colonizer and colonized, modern and archaic, clean and dirty, required a postcolonial refashioning of society that was of utopian proportions (Kim and Schoenhaus 2013). This utopian project necessitated a totalitarianism that encompassed all spheres of life—political, economic, cultural and environmental—to reconstruct society towards the creation of an alternative modernity for the colonized, a modernity in which the colonized could be modern and equal. Roger Griffin writes that this utopianism across the world led to a kind of totalitarianism in which:

the dominant elements within the ruling elite–rather than being motivated by

megalomania, self-interest, or sadism–set out to conquer society and gain extensive power over the behavior and thinking of the masses not as an end in itself but as an integral part of a wholesale experiment in social engineering made possible by the unprecedented power of the modern state (2013: 37).

As an effect of this modernist social engineering project, the country's interior and its representatives in the city became an "internal or domestic Other" (Clancy-Smith 2013: Location: 695) that had to be eradicated, transformed, and integrated into the modern nation. In the context of Bourguiba's utopian vision, technology expressed through "nearly mythical" status of industrialization was seen to equalize Tunisia's new modernity to that of the colonizer and absolve it of the social and economic ills of the colonial era. Yet, industrialization in Tunisia was more akin to what Timothy Mitchell described as techno-politics (2002: 42-43, 52) in the context of postcolonial Egypt: the transfer of technology as a panacea to societal problems, dished out by Western experts with often unintended and mostly ignored consequences, which mostly did not meet their desired intent. Thus Dinassi and Zaim (1987) write in this respect that industrialization in Tunisia has always been presented as the only solution to overcome economic stagnation and dependency, although in many respects it was exactly industrialization that created these very constraints. Ben Ali's Tunisia, or its present legacies, is the subject of the rest of this dissertation. In many respects, his regime can be defined by the absence of a grand utopian vision. Here utopia was transformed into political fictions and facades that deflected from the political, social, economic, and environmental costs of his particular form of rule.

CHAPTER II

THE CLEAN AND THE DIRTY:  SYMBOLIC AND MATERIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF

WASTE IN NEOLIBERAL TUNIS

At the shores of the Sabkhet Essoujoumi, only a five-minute drive from Tunisia's center

of political power, the kasbah, incessant, uncontrolled dumping of wastes has produced

vast environmental suffering that is hidden away in plain sight.  On my first visit, I

descended towards the sabkhe from Saida El-Manoubia, a former *gourbiville* that had

been transformed into a busy, working-class neighborhood with fenced in, single houses,

paved roads and social housing high rises on top of a cliff. It was hot, nearing midday and

the streets were deserted. When I reached the highest point of the neighborhood, the vast

elliptic body of water stretched out in front of me. It reflected cumulus clouds and was

engulfed by green populated hills that rolled into Tunis' hinterlands. Thousands of

flamingoes populated the shallow waters moving to and fro, hacking at the waters surface

mechanically from time to time. The scenery was bucolic. But then descending into the

valley, as if driving high-speed into an invisible wall, I hit the thick stench of human

waste. The stench, disorder and garbage increased as I neared the lake on a half-finished

road. Turning back, part of the settlement of Saida El-Manoubia was built on a cliff that

seemed to be entirely constructed of rubbish, as citizens and most likely garbage trucks

had dumped their refuse down the cliff-face for what must have been years. I crossed a

major road that set the lake apart from the city. The adjacent roundabout was populated

by day laborers waiting for employment. Now, the lake itself, like the cliff, revealed its

function as a dump and cesspit. The embankments were not only lined with tons and tons

of household waste and discarded building materials, they were constructed of tons of household waste and discarded building materials. Garbage trucks had been dumping here and the whole area was elevated by waste. The occasional weed and scrub had pushed through the mix of dried soil, rubbish, concrete and metal, giving the embankment the feel of desolate battlefield in which nature was losing against the refuse (see figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1. View of Sabkhe Essoujoumi from Saida el-Manoubia towards Sidi Hassine.**

I met a goat herder, a small, brown man with raisin-like skin, only a few teeth and bright eyes that shone at me from underneath his straw hat. He drove twelve goats along the lake's shore where they foraged on rubbish and the occasional plant, hopping over streams of fetid water that entered the lake every two hundred meters from the direction

of the settlements on the hill. Semi-urban wastelands often served as pastures for livestock in Tunis where the lines between city and country are constantly blurred. In passing I asked the man if he was not worried that his goats would drink the water and die, as I had seen pictures of dead livestock around contaminated water sources taken by SOS Bia. But he answered with confidence, "they never would. They know it's not water its sewage." After some small talk, he drove the goats on and said farewell. In a last gesture he turned around again, pointed down at the stream of sewage, then the lake, lifted a closed fist with his thumb stretched out to his mouth, pretended to drink and then ran his open hand over his closed eyes. Drink that and you die, I understood.

His gesture was pithy and painfully true. People and animals were dying from pollution, here and across Tunisia. Rarely would they drop dead upon drinking the water like my imaginary goat. Instead they suffered slowly, from industrial pollution and the fumes that the lake emitted, from contaminated groundwater, mosquito bites and the occasional diseases that arise from the mixing of waste and drinking water. Here at the shores of Sabkhet Essoujoumi, as in many areas across the country, locals endured environmental suffering that was expressed in lung and skin diseases, allergies, asthma, heart problems, cancers and birth defects. Swarms of mosquitoes terrorize inhabitants in the summer, bringing with them mostly unknown and undocumented disease. Occasionally there are outbreaks of West Nile Virus (Wasfi et al. 2016), Hepatitis (Neffati et al. 2017) even a strand of cholera was found (Kahloui 2012) in Tunisia's second largest river that the sabkhe enters into. Yet despite this apparent environmental health crisis, no systematic medical studies on the origins, effects or distribution of these

pathologies have been conducted.[34]

These inequalities in and erasure of environmental suffering is due in part to the socio-spatial exclusion of certain communities from the city. As Tunisian geographer and environmental activist Prof. Habib Ayeb writes on a fieldtrip to Saida El-Manoubia:

> I had the almost physical impression of crossing a wall or a real border between the decent and dangerous area... between the center and the margin…I had to break through a virtual wall of exclusion that surrounded their neighborhood….This spatial marginalization is part of their physical reality, but is configured on the basis of representations and imaginaries that are nourished by real facts but without real knowledge of the situation inside the marginalized neighborhood and of its collectively excluded and stigmatized population… Saïda suffers from both overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, social and urban invisibility and a terribly negative image (2012; my translation).

David Harvey (1985; 1989) has noted that control over space in the city is a prerogative of the powerful and that space communicates and reinforces social hierarchies materially and symbolically. In Tunisia, today, like during colonial times, this exclusion is still built on a symbolic association of these communities and the spaces they inhabit with waste. A symbolic geography of waste gives rise to a material geography of waste. However today, dirty areas are inhabited by a new urban underclass that was no longer excluded from the formal economy but composed the workforce that propelled the neoliberalization of the Tunisian economy. These economic changes in turn translated into urban planning policies (or the lack thereof) that furthered the marginalization of these communities. At an academic conference under the title "Urban policies and production of socio-spatial inequalities in Mediterranean in the neo-liberal era" held in Tunis in 2014, participants referred to these areas as urban margins, that is areas created

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[34] Pierre Arnaud-Barthel (2003: 62) concluded in a rare document that investigated the environmental impact of the city on the three bodies of water that surround greater Tunis that these ecosystems are essentially ill understood for a lack of research and that the outdated governmental reports that do exist (from the 1970s) refrain from calling for a need to clean up the pollution besides documenting some of it.

through neoliberal urban planning, that were at the bottom of a spatial hierarchy (Ben Othman and Legros 2015; see also Wacquant 2008). In these urban margins, symbolic waste transformed into material waste through: first the process of exclusion, which results in a lack of waste management infrastructure and services and a surplus of waste disposal infrastructure on the other. Second, exclusion and social marginalization then also rendered the suffering of these communities invisible and where they became visible blamed them for their plight. Third, authoritarian environmental governance made redress of their environmental suffering impossible. This chapter ethnographically explores the historical inequalities presented in the previous chapter in the vicinity of Sabkhet Essoujoumi and particularly the municipality of Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi (see figure 2.3.)
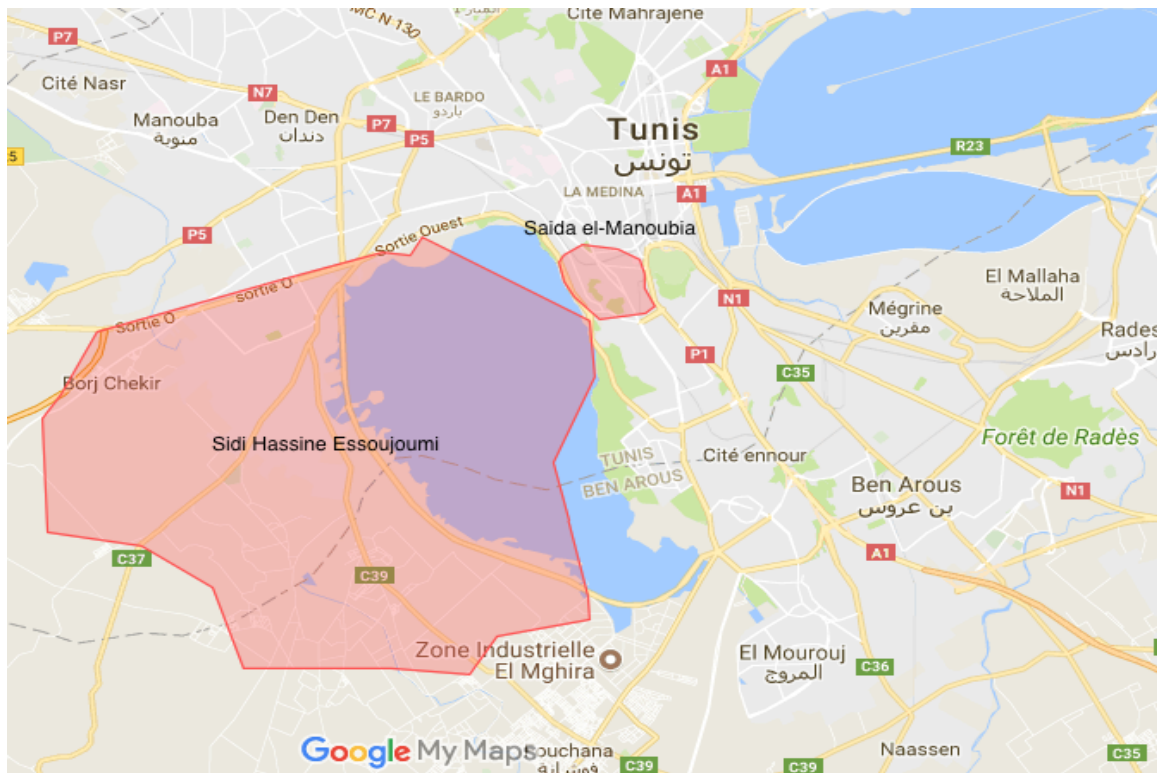


**Figure 2.2. Map of Southwestern Tunis showing Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi and Saida El-Manoubia.**

**Waste and Socio-Spatial Inequality in Contemporary Tunisia**

Morched Garbouj, the one person most concerned with the waste crisis in Tunisia, emphasized the importance of socio-spatial inequality in the distribution of wastes in our very first meeting. He was a tall, brisk environmental engineer with degrees from Canada, who co-founded SOSBia after the revolution. SOS BIA was a group of lawyers, medics, engineers, and activists who had followed the waste during the garbage crisis after the revolution. They ended up in several landfills that they were now investigating for their adequacy. Morched embodied both the outrage many Tunisians felt with the state of the country and the sense of entitlement and fearlessness inherent in the revolution that allowed him to directly confront these inadequacies. His deep insights on the waste crisis were themselves somewhat ethnographic, as he had conducted environmental assessments under the former regime and had since the revolution been working with those most affected by the crisis. He once told me: "while we have no reliable data on the waste crisis—you can't trust the government—ordinary people have all the data, they can tell you how polluted the environment is." Morched was one of my key interlocutors throughout my research. I first met him in a smoky café in al-Manar to talk about waste. As he walked up the stairs he had to pull his head in to not scrape it on the ceiling, as he was unusually tall for a Tunisian. In his mid-forties, he carried an air of restlessness ordinarily associated with youth. Often his words were racing, fast and erratic as he switched from impeccable English, to French and back to Tunisian, his blue eyes constantly seeking for the next thought.

At some point in our conversation he opened a Google Map on his computer that showed all the landfills in Tunisia's northeast and asked, "What is the pattern?" I said,

"they are all in green areas" as the map displayed semi-rural or agricultural areas. "Yes,

he said, but more importantly all the landfills are in peripheral hinterlands, poor

agricultural communities where the people have no voice and were easily intimidated by

the regime…. Waste management promised at least some employment in these areas,

where lack of employment is in itself part of greater socio-spatial inequalities" he

explained.  Thus to Morched, it was agricultural areas and urban peripheries that bore the

brunt of the pollution.   This view was confirmed to me by Stafano Corrado, chief-

environmental officer for the EU, whom I met in the fortified, unmarked headquarters of

the EU in Tunis. Corrado explained the distribution of waste in Tunisia to me as follows:

> "This is sad to say, but the people most and more exposed to environmental risk
> are those who live in the outskirts of the cities and rural areas, in the periphery….
> [In the cleanup campaigns as in general economic development] the government
> only concentrated on the coastal areas and major cities and whatever is around
> these or in between was less visible. It's a lack of democracy really; because the
> way funds were allocated under the old regime was unequal.  The regime, which
> was very well respected by Western Countries because after all Ben Ali was very
> modern and so forth, but still there was a lot of inequality." [35]

Corrado, who was very well respected amongst Tunisia's environmental community, had

come to Tunisia in 2011 just after the revolution. He was a no-nonsense kind of man who

wasn't afraid to politicize environmental issues, which was refreshing for a senior

technocrat. His first assignment upon arrival was the development of an environmental

assessment report for Tunisia and to him waste management was the country's second

most pressing environmental issue only surpassed by water scarcity.    In our

conversation, like Morched, Corrado established a geography that distributes pollution

between peripheries and centers, with peripheries and rural areas bearing the brunt of the

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[35] Personal interview with Sefano Corrado, December 2014

crisis. To him, waste, its disposal and the distribution of waste management infrastructure was part of larger social and spatial inequalities that were linked to political inequity under the former regime. His frame here was that of governance—also a major concern of the EU in Tunisia after the revolution—in which the absence of political participation under the regime lead to the disregard of particular communities and the favoring of others thereby producing inequities in environmental health. The area of Greater Tunis that seemed most affected by waste was Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi, a heavily urbanized peri-urban area just across the water from Saida El-Manoubia.

### Material Geographies of Waste

Located to the far west of greater Tunis, where the city gives way to the agricultural land of the interior, Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi was home to Tunisia's largest landfill. ONAS, Tunisia's wastewater agency was completely absent from the municipality, though a sewage plant was in construction for seven years now. Consequently, the waste water of several western municipalities, that of approximately 220.000 people, found its way into water ways, into the *sabkhet*, the Meliane, the country's second largest river, and eventually into the sea (Municipality of Sidi Hassine 2015). With more than 85,000 inhabitants, Sidi Hassine was one of the largest municipalities in greater Tunis and it was by far the poorest. In fact, the poverty rates of 17 percent were not just far above the average 6 percent poverty rate of Greater Tunis, but even surpassed the national average of 14 percent (Ministry of Planning and Regional Development 2012: 12).

During my fieldwork I visited the landfill Jbel Borj Chakir on the North Eastern end of the municipality several times on field trips with SOS Bia who were in the process of

testing the water table around the landfill for pollution. Surrounded by barb-wired barricades, Borj Chakir rose from wheat fields, vegetable gardens, olive and almond groves in the hinterlands 8km west of Tunis. Trucks and tractor-drawn carriages that wound their way up through Sidi Hassine clogged the streets while they delivered 2,500 to 3,000 tons of waste each day (SweepNet 2014). Established in 1999, Borj Chakir had then been seen as a major solution to the garbage problem of greater Tunis and to locals it had promised much-needed employment. Local farmers under the lead of a doctor who had a villa on a nearby hill, had protested the establishment of the landfill back in the 1990s but the government ameliorated their concerns with promises that they could make $400 to 600 a month in the recycling plants of the landfill. The money never came as contracts for the management of the landfill were sold to a French company. Now, nearly two decades later at 120 hectares the landfill was only meters away from the hamlet of al-Attar. Al-Attar, was composed of about 60 one and two story buildings, many of which seemed to me only half-finished. Its roads weren't tarred and al-Attar was neither connected to the sanitation system, though it was also home to the unfinished Al-Attar wastewater station, or to fresh-water supplies. Like in most of Sidi Hassine, sewage was disposed of into cesspits, which occasionally ran over through pipes that entered into the muddy streets.

When I first visited Borj Chakir with Morched in November 2014 it had been raining all morning and the air was fresh. Still even under these conditions the stench of the landfill was overpowering. We were on a scoping mission, trying to find wells around the landfill that SOSBia could test for pollution in the coming week. After visiting several wells we stopped at a coffee house in al-Atttar. The coffee house seemed modern and

shiny, especially compared to the surrounding desolation. Morched was greeted by the coffee house owner, Zain, a fifty something year old man with a mustache and intense eyes. Zain insisted on inviting us for a coffee. He had moved here with his family in the early 1970s from the northeast of the country and was one of the first arrivals here. At the time, housing wasn't regulated and the land was cheap, he explained. Zain and Morched seemed to know each other well, and were exchanging niceties. It turned out that SOSBia had helped Zain and other villagers to demonstrate against the landfill some months earlier when garbage juices were running into the small stream that passed the village and landfill from underneath the barricades. Zain finally explained that villagers here suffered from skin diseases and respiratory problems. His 12-year-old son had severe asthma and his cousin, who had long worked for the landfill, had developed lung cancer. In 2017, the gases that Borj Chakir emitted were finally determined to be hydrogen sulphide (Bocchi 2017), which under chronic exposure leads to "respiratory, ocular and neurologic effects" and is linked to "spontaneous abortions" (PHE 2016).

Ordinarily, landfills are designed to lock refuse away impermeably. They are "dry graves" whose geographical location depends on solid bedrock underneath to prevent groundwater pollution by leachate, a garbage juice that ranges from mildly toxic to biohazardous depending on its composition. Months after my first meeting with Zain, the tests of SOS BIA proved that Borj Chakir and many other landfills in the northeast were either permeable or deliberately dumped leachate into waterways (see Chapter V). They contaminated drinking water and the wells of farmers with organic compounds—the only pollutants the organization had tested for so far due to financial constraints—but the fact that these compounds were present suggest that there is worse to be discovered. SOS

Biaa also uncovered evidence that hospital and industrial hard wastes made their way into Borj Chakir and other municipal garbage dumps, which made the leachate of these landfills potentially extremely hazardous. The French company that had operated the landfill had been expelled for corruption allegations after the revolution (see Chapter IV). Waste was big business, as Zain told me. Environmental suffering in Sidi Hassine however spread far beyond the hamlet of el-Attar.

When I first visited central Sidi Hassine on foot with Souheir some weeks later we were advised not to go by ourselves but use a guide, because otherwise it would be too dangerous. Personally, I never felt any kind of antagonism during my whole time in Tunisia, apart from the police, but I heeded the advice. When we hailed a taxi in the center of Tunis and told the driver "to Sidi Hassine," he laughed, looked back at us, and said, "the way you look I thought you're going to la Marsa, Carthage or Gammarth, not Sidi Hassine" (and that despite us having tried to dress as inconspicuously as possible). We all laughed. Souheir talked on her mobile to our local guide, Mohamed, and we met him at the outskirts of the municipality at a gas station. Faisal, my brother was with us. Mohamed, born and raised in Sidi Hassine was alert and very welcoming.  He was a young man in his early thirties, with bright brown eyes, wearing a baseball cap and jeans. Souheir introduced us. His "roots," as he put it, were in the North East, meaning that his family had come from this part of the country.   He told me proudly that he had been to Austria, Germany and Italy, all illegally, and that he had a diploma from an Italian school of engineering. I was painfully aware of our near equal age and unequal position in the global order:  I visit his country legally, pretty much at will. Mohamed was part of a socio-economic group that lay at the very foundations of neighborhoods like Sidi

Hassine: the illegal migrant (*haragi*) who sent remittances from abroad. He was a young, educated man who had moved with his family to Tunis to look for employment and opportunity, but after little success, migrated to Europe where he did odd jobs with family members. Mohamed had worked many jobs, but had often returned to fixing up old European cars and bringing them back to Tunisia with his cousins.

Together we took a small grey bus with makeshift benches that I hadn't encountered anywhere else in Tunis. As we got off close to the *sabkhet's* shore, Mohamed again emphasized that we shouldn't come here by ourselves, that Sidi Hassine was the area of Tunisia with the highest crime rates (I didn't detect the slightest sense of pride in him, when he said it). But if you know many people in the community, he explained, as he did, you can keep mostly out of trouble. On the way to the shore, Mohammed told us about Fawzi Loumi, "the most powerful man in Sidi Hassine." Most people here were afraid of Loumi, Mohammed said. Loumi's family owned three factories, COFAT that manufactures auto parts for the European car makers, COFICAB one the world's leading automobile cable manufacturers and Chakira the country's largest general cable company, which produces cables and chemicals. Faouzi Loumi was one of the most influential businessmen in the country, whose Elloumi group had generated $800 million in 2011 (Wolf 2014). A former member of Ben Ali's RCD party, Loumi had just been elected to parliament with Nidaa Tounis, the secular party that had won Tunisia's first free elections. Mohamed told us that Loumi appropriated part of the sabkhe for himself some years back, filled it up with rubble and built his cable factory and in another place apartment blocks on the reclaimed land. Mohamed claimed that the waste of his cable and chemical factories went untreated, straight into the sabkhe, an

allegation that turned out to be common knowledge in Sidi Hassine and that was even corroborated by its municipality.

As we approached the shore the smell of sewage was getting stronger, until I realized that we were walking along a canal. Mohamed told me that besides sewage that was obviously pumped into the canal and the dumping of household waste, which was visible, there was also a plastic factory upstream that disposed of its waste into it. I heard these stories often. Dumping was being done through public infrastructure by industry and sometimes even by the very governmental agencies that were supposed to dispose of waste legally.  Sitting on the wall that divided the street and the putrid stream behind it was an old man, trying to light a cigarette in vain. "Do you have a lighter?" he asked as we were passing. Cloaked in a long coat, with a red *keffiyeh* (traditional shawl) wrapped around his head he smiled at us.  When we asked him about the *sabkhet* he pointed across the road and said, "I live here, flanked by the canal and the sabkhet…The smell has been like this for a very, very long time, decades really," he noted. He was in a jolly mood and joked that people here had gotten so used to the smell that if it would disappear, people would no longer be able to live here anymore. But he was also serious and resigned saying that residents had talked to the municipality again and again even after the revolution, but that "there was no action, no change."

Around the corner, two women, Aisha and Selima, were talking at the entrance of their house.  They lived across from the lake–probably the closest house to the shore I had seen yet—and they shared the old man's feelings of abandonment. Journalists, NGOs, researchers had come, but in the long run nothing was ever done about the pollution, Aisha said. They protect the birds, there are several organizations that care

about the *sabkhet* as a resting ground for migrating birds, she said half-jokingly. I explained that even my research was unlikely to have any effect on the pollution and I apologized. Again, like up at the landfill, here both women complained about respiratory diseases and allergies around their neighborhood, particularly in the young and elderly. They sputtered out names of relatives and acquaintances, particularly children that were suffering from this or that ailment. "My niece, Amira's daughter, my brother's children…". As we spoke a small crowd of passersby assembled. A man with the faintest of mustaches, held his thick neck with both hands emphasizing that he had trouble breathing especially in summer. Then, during the heat no one can leave the house the little crowd agreed. We have to stay at home and close the windows to shield ourselves from the smell and fumes, Amira said. But even now in winter as it is colder only the strength of the smell is reduced Aisha explained, but from 4am to 5am[36] the smell is unbearable every night still.

This was a common practice in Tunisia, people most affected by pollution coped with it by emphasizing the boundary between public and private spaces. In fact, this were the findings of French anthropologist Michèle Jolé (1984, 1989) who during her research in in late 1980s Tunis was puzzled by the contrast between fastidious bodily hygiene and the pervasiveness of waste in public space. To her it was exactly the cleanliness prescriptions about the body and certain private spaces in Islam that in the absence of effective municipal waste management forced people to evacuate waste from their houses into the streets and thereby created pollution in public spaces. To Jolé, this practice of

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[36] I have heard that again and again and it was suggested to me that it takes that long for the sewage created from after-work activities at home to filter their way through the sewage system. Which in Sidi Hassine means the sewage that enters the Sabkhe from areas that are connected to that system.

evacuation then exactly contributed to the creation of the division between public and private. However at the same time, following what Amira said the smell still transcended this boundary. Amira went on to explain that before the revolution, helicopters would occasionally come to drop chemicals in the *sabkhet* to kill the mosquitoes, but no longer. Looking out over the lake, she finally said: "they care more about the flamingoes, than us." It was clear that the inhabitants of Sidi Hassine suffered from uncontrolled and often deliberate disposal of waste in their neighborhoods, most of it harmful, some of it toxic, but who knew exactly. They endured this situation not out of idleness, but while being ignored, rendered invisible, by authorities and scientific community although the pollution around them here down by the lake was an established, well-known fact.

The most recent study on pollution had concluded that "sabkhet Essijoumi receives considerable amounts of sewage and industrial waste and that the body of water is increasingly marked by urbanization and the uncontrolled installation of polluting industries." (Chouari 2013: 124). According to the same study the main entry point of pollution into the lake is wadi Guériana in its North East. Like many of Tunis' former natural waterways the *wadi* (river) had turned into a canal and disintegrated into an open sewer over the years. It receives an estimated 135,000 liters of industrial waste water a day alone (Chouairi 2013: 132). There are tanneries, food processing plants, textile and other industries upstream on the wadi. Together with findings from an earlier report (Urbanconsult 1998), the study found chlorine, sulfur, chromium, sodium bicarbonate, untreated artificial colorings, nitric acid and many other pollutants flow through the river. Further the study found "significant amounts" of heavy metals in the sabkhe amongst them: cadmium sulfate, copper, lead and chromium, the most likely source of which are

two former landfills of Henchir al-Yahoudia and El Meow that were operated until the early 1990s on the sabkhet's shore (Yoshida et al. 2002).

In addition to this considerable abiotic pollution, there are vast amounts of biological pollutants in the lake. In the mid 1990s ONAS estimated that the sabkhe received 500,000 liters of sewage a day (Kammoun and Zarrouk 1995), but even then the quantity was most definitely higher (Chouari 2013). The last data on biotic pollution in lake  (Ben Sheikh 2000 quoted in Choueri 2013) found a large concentration of the intestine born bacteria fecal coliform (over 1100 per 100ml), with the strongest levels on the shores of Sidi Hassine. The wells and groundwater around sabkhe Essoujoumi are therefore polluted with fecal coliform and streptococci making them unfit for human or animal consumption (Urbanconsult 1997). During strong rains infected water runs in the streets of Sidi Hassine (Choueri 2013; Municipality of Sidi Hassine 2015). The resultant nutrient rich environment in the sabkhe in turn leads to the presence of algae in the lake that release toxic levels of sulfur, which together with the fermentation process of other organic matter in this stagnant anoxic environment produce highly noxious smells (Chouairi 2013).  Finally, a stagnant polluted, nutrient-rich environment is an ideal breeding ground for several species of mosquitoes, and other insects, which are larger and have a greater migratory ability than their ordinary kin (Chouairi 2013). While an overall epidemiology from mosquito transmitted diseases doesn't exist, there were several outbreaks of the West Nile Virus (Wasfi et al. 2016) and even some cases of Malaria (Slama 2013).

Morched, who as an environmental engineer, had worked in environmental assessment under Ben Ali and Gaddafi in Lybia, once told me,

> "Under the dictatorship in an environmental assessment you look at everything except the human aspect. So you look at animals, are there any trees…but humans we don't care. If there are 1000 people, if there's a 100,000 people we don't care. If it's going to be built, it's going to be built. So they're still doing the same thing."[37]

Therefore, despite the existence of this data on pollution in Sabkhet Essoujoumi, its impact on the environmental health of the community of Sidi Hassine beyond their experience, is hard to assess. There is a general difficulty in linking toxic pollution to environmental suffering, or what Swistun and Auyero (2009) have termed "toxic uncertainty." This results in part from the multi-spot nature of most pollution, the competing practices and discourses around toxicity (scientific, legal, laymen, etc.), which often amount to an active labor of confusion. Further, the gradual pace in which their suffering unfolds, the slow, creeping and constant contamination seems to normalize their condition, or at least doesn't give it the attention that cataclysmic environmental disasters receive (Nixon 2011). While these reasons for the normalization of their suffering and absence of environmental health assessments apply to "contaminated communities" (Edelstein 1998) across the globe, the authoritarian politics under which much of the polluting industries and waste management infrastructure were established, and the issues of governance Corrado described, are particular to Tunisia (see chapters III & IV). The

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[37] This erasure of people was corroborated by Donna Mejri, a social impact assessment for an environmental assessment company. She said, "Companies don't require a stakeholder analyses or social impact assessments by law. Even after the revolution until today, and despite all the disruptions there is no legal framework for this, but companies still do it sometimes…. Before the revolution, the authorities would stop any stakeholder analyses in these assessments, they literally wouldn't allow the consultancies to perform them. The only stakeholder that was consulted before the revolution would be the local government representative (who was RCD of course)." (personal interview April 2015).

invisibility of the poor by their association with waste as discussed above is here made tangible through their absence in the scientific reports about pollution. Under Ben Ali's environmentalism people were actively omitted from reports that would measure the environmental impact of industries and infrastructure. Under the dictatorship a "labor of confusion" (Swistun and Ayero 2009) was turned into an active labor of erasure of contaminated communities. Like the erasure of these communities, so the history of their marginalization had been effaced. And while it was clearly true that Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi suffered excessively and disproportionately, no one in Sidi Hassine could exactly explain to me why. There were many theories, most of them based on socio-economic reasoning, but it was a visit to one of Tunisia's most affluent areas that finally put their suffering into a historical perspective for me.

**Symbolic Geographies of Waste**

Miriam taught yoga classes to foreign aid workers and cosmopolitan Tunisians from the basement of her villa in the upmarket neighborhood of Carthage, one of the affluent eastern suburbs of Tunis. In her sixties, her sinewy figure exuded the tranquility of a yogi and the matriarchal authority as head of her family in equal measure. French was a marker of class and education in Tunisia; her classes were exclusively francophone intercepted by the occasional Hindi chant. After we had exchanged formalities, she asked what neighborhood I lived in. "Marsa Ville," I responded. La Marsa, or what is half-jokingly called the Republic of la Marsa *(jummhuryet la Marsa)* by many to emphasize its exceptional status within Tunisia, is the country's richest municipality. It is located in the east, on the diametrically opposed side of the city to Sidi Hassine. But

Marsa Ville still retained a more traditional feel to it, as it was originally a fishing village that had been swallowed up by the expanding capital. A traditional neighborhood in Tunis was defined by its economic activity and the distribution of shops. In Marsa Ville I still had to buy my milk and yoghurt at the *a'atar* or *djerbi* (an all-round corner store), my meats at the *zarzar* (butcher), poultry at the *dajaaj* (butcher that sells only chicken), fish at the *huat* (fishmonger), my nuts, newspapers, and if I would have smoked, cigarettes at the *hmass* (kiosk) and my coffee cost only 40 millean ($0.20). Key here was that each of these shops would give credit to its customers and that on Eid, the shopkeepers would forgive some of the credit to its poorest customers as a form of Islamic alms giving (*zakat*). These shops would create a communal infrastructure, a kind of public space of personal interaction, economic balances and Islamic morality that built trust and resembled the "traditional" way of life in the medina. These traditional, yet respectable, neighborhoods were set against the middle class neighborhoods that had arisen since the 1970s like Menza, el-Manar, or Lac, which lacked such communal infrastructure, "high-end housing that [is] only connected to water and electricity, but otherwise isolated and walled" as Mohamed, my Derja teacher once put it.[38]

"Marsa is pretty," Miriam continued, "a clean neighborhood"—here she made an exception and used the Arabic word for clean (*nthif*), supposedly as its French equivalent didn't carry the same symbolic weight. With some deference, I replied, "but your neighborhood Carthage is far more beautiful," thinking "clean" was a euphemism for aesthetics. She said, "Yes, it is much cleaner (*anthaf*). I replied, "Carthage is one of the nicest neighborhoods in Tunis," again adhering to the etiquette of exchanging niceties at

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[38] Personal interview with Miriam December 2014.

the start of a conversation. With some fervor, she replied, "No, Gammarth is clearly the cleanest. Carthage is clean, but Gammarth is the cleanest [neighborhood] of them all." At the time, I was puzzled and did not understand how a conversation about my residence had been framed in a vernacular of cleanliness, but it was clear that Miriam was not exclusively referring to the physical state of these neighborhoods, even in the face of the waste crisis. My first visit to Saida el-Manoubia kept nagging at me in relationship to this conversation about clean and dirty neighborhoods. And as I found out, clean areas were of course juxtaposed with dirty areas.

In part, Miriam's assessments of place were clearly socio-economic, as regions of both Carthage and Gammarth were some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the whole of Tunisia. Marsa municipality, which incorporates large parts of Gammarth, the countries richest neighborhood, is home to many four star resorts, presidential palaces, villas, embassies, restaurants and the nightclubs. It incorporates Tunis' only seemingly protected forest, one of the largest patches of public space in the capital, and the city's cleanest beaches where Tunisians and tourist alike bake in the sun in summer. It was the original summer residence of the Bey and later that of the French Resident Minister. Both of these neighborhoods and Carthage were Miriam lived, were formerly also summer residences of the *beldi* elites, where large villas with wide and open blocks of land dominated. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s however, the *beldi* elites moved permanently to these residencies, as rural migrants increasingly dominated the medina and Ville Nouvelle (Kenzari 2004). This "beldi flight to the suburbs" slowly created the affluent and "clean" Eastern suburbs of Carthage, Sidi Bou Said, Marsa and Gammarth by the sea. Miriam herself was in fact from the old beldi stock of the medina and so was her

husband as both her maiden and her husband's surnames suggested.

The Eastern suburbs were also mostly physically clean, even after the revolution. Marsa's municipality, which was housed in a former Beyical palace, sported three separate recycling citizen initiatives that worked with the municipality and international development agencies to keep "La Marsa Clean," as the one of the campaigns was called. Here and there you could find separate recycling bins for paper, glass and aluminum, the first encounter of which struck me as surreal and made me laugh out loud. But Miraim's vernacular of cleanliness was about more than riches and material cleanliness. Her vernacular expressed a geography that divided the city and country as a whole into "the clean" and "the dirty," which older Tunisians carried in their heads and could readily recount with great consensus. Within this assessment, clean areas were often physically cleaner, with more affluent municipalities that delivered better services through a more sophisticated waste disposal infrastructure. Sewage treatment plants, the often-open air canals that fed them, landfills, industry or even waste distribution stations were exclusively located in "dirty areas." Dirty areas thus designated places that were physically more polluted, with lower rates of trash collection and access to sanitation, zigzagged by dirt roads that spurred up clouds of dust with every passing car in summer and turned into mud paths in the winter. Sidi Hassine was by all accounts Tunis' most dirty neighborhood, followed only by Ettadhammen. Physical dirt within these spaces was then moralized by correlating waste with disease, higher crime rates and a general sense of moral corruption.

The particular mechanics of this causation between dirt, people, their thoughts, actions and the places they inhabited was most aptly explained to me by Fadel, a taxi

driver from a popular neighborhood neighborhood of Hay al-Zuhur. Hay al-Zuhur itself

was a popular working-class (*shaabi*) neighborhood, but was not considered dirty,

although all dirty areas were considered popular and working class.  As Fadel explained,

a clean person is decent, has a good mind (literally clean minded *a'd nathif*), and good

intentions. He used a Libyan client he met the day before as an example. Fadel said, his

Libyan client was decent, as he came to Tunisia with good intentions, to make

investments and not spend his money on girls, nightclubs and alcohol, as is the typical

stereotype of Libyans in Tunisia.[39] Fadel insisted, therefore, that dirty places don't always

produce dirty people. He went on to explain that when you go to a dirty neighborhood for

example, Hay el-Noor or Saida el-Manoubia, you will find people who are decent (clean-

minded), have good intentions but are still judged as filthy and morally corrupted. He

maintained that individuals who try to thrive—who study, for example—could become

clean-minded despite the dirty places they inhabit. Fadel here clearly used an exception to

explain the rule: dirty areas produced dirty people. These morally corrupted, dirty,

people, are then to blame for the physical state of the areas that they inhabit.[40] However,

he wouldn't go as far as to say that clean areas produced decent people, which might have

had to do with the post-revolutionary climate in which he was speaking. Broad-scale

revelations about corruption and torture by exactly those people who lived in the

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[39] Here the symbolic geography of dirt expands beyond Tunisian borders. There is a huge amount of distrust against Libyans in Tunisia, and certainly Tunisians as a whole in my experience consider themselves to be more progressive, less tribal, and more civilized than Libyans. Some of my Libyan friends, whom I gravitated towards because of their Anglophone education, were constantly subject to various forms of prejudice, racism and jokes.  Muhawi (1996) writes that the negative stereotypes of Libyans in Tunisia have their origin in the economic inequality of the two countries because of Libya's oil and the expulsion of Tunisian workers from the oil industry in the 1970s.

[40]  Argyrou (1997: 12) found very similar conflation between morality, civilization and dirty on the Island of Cyprus in Greece. Here "ignorant peasants" are blamed by the middle classes for littering, but it is not ignorance that predisposes them to littering, but littering that is proof of their ignorance.

"cleanest areas" of Carthage or Gammarth were being revealed in the media and labeled as "dirty" behavior.

One way to think about this conflation of dirt, morality, people and place is through the conundrum of the homeless. In Tunisia, as elsewhere, the homeless are kept out of the most affluent areas. Police round them up, especially in the center of the city around Avenue Habib Bourguiba. The homeless are not allowed to inhabit clean spaces and when they repeatedly do so, these spaces are threatened with pollution, become dirty and are places unsuitable for inhabitation by decent people. Simultaneously, it is the association with unclean places, as well as the absence of access to sanitary facilities that render the homeless person dirty in the first place. This relationship then expresses an intrinsic quality of both physical and moralized dirt: unlike cleanliness, it sullies. Thus by this logic, dirt, whether that of people or areas, whether physical or moral, has the power to pollute. Morally corrupted people will produce physically and morally corrupted areas and vice-versa. There is then a recursive relationship between dirt, morality and people in Tunisia that is mapped onto the city and country, dividing it into the clean and the dirty, the decent and indecent.

This juxtaposition of clean and dirty areas and their moralization of course echoed colonial hygienic ideologies and the underlying distinction between *beldi* and *bedaoui* that in Tunis was exemplified in the division between the *gourbiville* and Ville Nouvelle. Saida el-Manouba, the very place asphyxiated by waste described above and unquestionably a "dirty area," was in fact a former *gourbiville* that had been integrated into Tunis through Bourguiba's program of *degourbification* in the 1970s and 80s. Sidi Hassine was a new kind of uncontrolled per-urban settlement form however, which

between 1975 and 1985 comprised more than half of all housing built in Tunis and made up 30 percent of the city's territorial growth (Kenzari 2004: 121). Former inhabitants of the *gourbivilles* who were displaced through *degourbification* primarily populated these new settlements in areas that were considered unfit for housing developments[41]. These new western suburbs of Tunis, populated by the *bedaoui* were then contrasted with the eastern older suburbs of Gammarth, La Marsa, Sidi Bou Said and Carthage that had been populated in the *beldi* flight to the suburbs, as discussed in chapter I. The spatial vernacular of clean and dirty had colonial legacies. In fact, the formidable and sadly unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Elisabeth Aristie Vasile (1995) traced the neoliberal transformation of the city of Tunis and its inherent socio-spatial inequalities back to the *beldi/ bedaoui* distinction. She demonstrated how the increasing inequalities in neoliberal Tunis changed yet intensified this distinction in the 1990s.

**The Clean and the Dirty in the Neoliberal Tunis**

Starting in the 1970s, but accelerating drastically in the 1990s, the shift from state corporatism towards the liberalization of the Tunisian economy and its increased embedding in flows of global capital shifted territorial and urban planning in Tunisia. These changes were first associated with a shift away from the regional integration of the post-independence period and return to metropolization of development policy in which the creation of private and public investment returned primarily to the cities of coast

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[41] In fact the majority of industrial zones in greater Tunis were established in peri-urban areas that were seen as unfit for housing developments. Thus rather than industrial areas having been planted amidst uncontrolled housing settlements, both seek out the same kind of peri-urban land. And while Tunisia's urban planning regulations outlaw housing in near these industries (Soussi 2012: 48), a look at the map reveals that these regulations aren't enforced for controlled or uncontrolled housing in greater Tunis.

(Belhedi 1999). In Tunis, liberalization and new elite alliances lead to an increase in housing developments for the elites and large-scale prestigious projects that would make Tunis a "global city" (Kenzari 2004). The resultant change in the capital was of "spectacular" proportions (Stambouli 1996: 51), with the emergence of high-rise buildings in the city center, the expansion of the airport, the development of the new industrial area of Chargina, which housed such international brands as IBM, Ford, Peugeot and Phillips, and finally in what has been called the "urban project of the century" (Stambouli 1996: 52) the luxury development of Lac I & II at the northern shore of lake Tunis. This added a third, global part, to the original tri-parti (see chapter I) of Tunis (Kenzari 2004).

Under Bourguiba, the very first decrees of land-use planning resulted in *degoubification* and accelerated housing for the emerging middle classes. By the 1977 the average so-called "economic housing unit" built by the government cost between 7,000 and 10,000 dinars, a price absolutely unaffordable to Tunisia's working classes (Chabbi 1986: 121).  Together with another wave of urbanization in the 1970s, this resulted in a working class housing crisis that was in part resolved through uncontrolled settlements like Sidi Hassine.  Overall, the liberalization of the economy had by the late 1970s been accompanied by a retreat of the state and increased laissez-faire attitude towards Tunisia's poorest sub sections of society, a trend that intensified until the revolution at least (Hibou 2011). Laissez-faire politics in urban planning terms meant a move away from the bulldozer policies of *degourbification* to a tacit acceptance of peripheral urban sprawl in the west and north of the city.
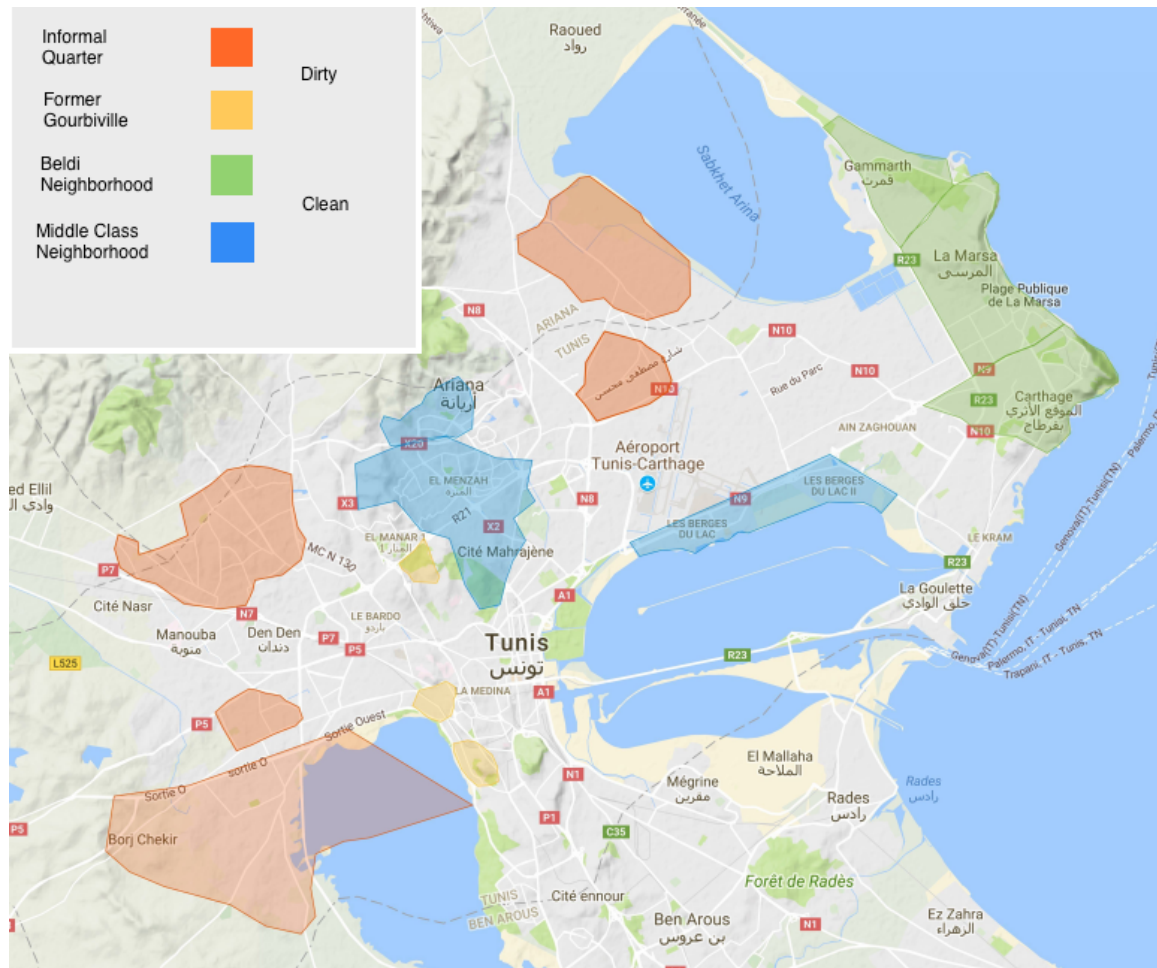
**Figure 2.4. Map of Uncontrolled Urban Neighborhoods, 'Clean' and 'Dirty' Areas.**

Here, land was made available through a new illegal entrepreneurial housing agent, the pirate sub-developer. These were primarily locals of humble origins. They understood the laissez-faire political climate and housing needs who manipulated the legal system to illegally appropriate state owned land, subdivide it and sell it far under the market price[42] (Chabbi 1988). Increasingly pirate-sub-developers rose to the status of local notables, using their knowledge of the legal system and party connections to

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[42] This was possible, first, as Bourguiba's state had after independence appropriated religiously owned land endowments (*habous*), but never systematically recorded it. Second, when land ownership was unclear, Tunisian property law granted legal rights and ownerships to squatters under lengthy procedures. While this procedure was stuck in the courts, the pirate developer would divide and sell the land to the former gourbis, who were often illiterate and had never bought property before the state turned a blind-eye.

provide infrastructural services to the uncontrolled settlements (Chabbi 1988). Seen from this angle, Fawzi Loumi, "the most powerful man in Sidi Hassine," was really just an extreme form of a pirate-sub-developer, who acquired land through quasi-legal channels, developed it and is shielded himself from persecution through his proximity to power.

The new informal settlements differed from earlier spontaneous popular housing communities like the *gourbivilles*. Houses were no longer constructed of mud and clay, but increasingly took the form of a *haouch,* the ruralized version of the traditional urban Arabic house of the medina (*dar el-arabi*),[43] which was built around a courtyard. These improvements in housing were related to greater security of tenure through quasi-legal ownership and were paid for to a large degree by the remittances that poor migrant workers earned abroad in Europe (Vasile 1995: 170). Rather than being excluded from the formal economy like the *gourbis*, the inhabitants of these new settlements became the workers who drove the development of Tunisia's offshore production and neoliberalization of its economy. While being therefore physical and socio-economic improvements on the *gourbivilles*, these settlements continued to house populations with origins in the countryside (however distant). And their inhabitants' lives were characterized by new contradictory socio-spatial dynamics. On the one hand, residents were defined by socio-economic upward mobility through education, higher-paid jobs, and the adoption of urban norms (language, styles of dress and consumption patterns) formerly associated with the elites. On the other, they were defined by spatial stagnation, as they continued to be "despised by the ruling elites that associated them with crudeness

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[43] With the *haouch* the overall enclosure tended to be larger than that of the *dar al-arabi.* Also, only one room might have been covered by four walls with the rest of the enclosure left to livestock or outdoor chores.

and ignorance" (Vasile 1995: 236). While the divisions between *beldi* and *bedawi* therefore remained, and according to Vasile even increased during the neoliberalization of Tunis, their terms had transformed.

During Vasile's research in the 1990s the main discursive distinction had been *zero huit* (08, the telephone code of the northeast) and most importantly *arabi* (literally Arabic) and *suri* (meaning Syrian but denoting primarily French and secondarily Western). Vasile wrote:

> It was undeniably true that the correlations between class, culture, and region were becoming stronger among the privileged strata , so that the bourgeoisie's class position and their cultural distinction - as suri (western) - could easily be substituted one for the other in the popular consciousness and discourse….The association of the national bourgeoisie with what is suri introduces a new oppositional pair into Tunisian social discourse: suri and arbi, where suri designates what is modern and French, and arbi that which is uncultivated and old-fashioned, and Arab. This pair overlays the earlier one of beldi and badwi (1995: 115-116).

During my research, these versatile labels equated Arabic with traditional and Western with modern in a variety of domains. There was for example Gammarth el-Arabi and Gammarth el-Suri, dividing the upmarket eastern suburb into a traditional neighborhood (*arabi*) and the richer villas established for the *beldi* elites (*suri*). Here there was a clear spatial distinction between *beldi* and *bedaoui*, rich city dweller and rural migrant, that was defined by the duality of *arabi* and *suri*. The boundaries between these two areas were sharp, though in constant flux as Gammarth el-Suri expanded on vacant land, and even protected forests, and slowly swallowed up Gammarth el-Suri. Quality of housing, which in many ways was a key distinction, could also be described as *arabi*, as in the traditional *dar el-arabi* with its inner courtyards, and thick outer walls and its more urban version the *haouch*, which could still have earthen inner courtyards and older forms of

sanitation. This was contrasted with the *dar el-suri*, denoting modern, western housing in the newer middle class neighborhoods. At the same time there were such oddities as a *djaaj el-arabi* (arabic chicken) or a *djaaj el-suri* (a western chicken) meaning a free range versus a cage-raised chicken. Cars and all kinds of other technology could be *arabi* or *suri*. An old, beat up Renault was for example considered *arabi* and a new and modern car was *suri*. *Arabi* and *suri* were therefore also associated with status symbols, such as better housing, better cars, and better technology, directly linking them to markers of social class.

The origin of the distinction between *arabi* and *suri* and the equation of Syrian with Western modernity was one of the bigger conundrums of my research. Why would the Syrians be equated with Western modernity in the eyes of Tunisians? As far as my research revealed the distinction between *arabi* and *suri* and its equation with western resulted from a distinction in dress. Originally, *suri* meant western dress as in trousers and shirts versus traditional Tunisian dress. This is apparently also where the conflation with *suri*, Syrian, and western occurred. As during Bourguiba's post-independence school reforms and francophonization of the Tunisian school system, Syrian and Lebanese[44] teachers were imported as there were initially too few French speaking Tunisian teachers to accommodate the new system. These *suris*, Syrians, had been under francophone educational rule for longer and according to my informants, wore western dress, spoke French and were associated with Western scientific knowledge. The *suri* then literally transmitted Western knowledge, modern ways of life and civilization in accordance with Bourguibism through the school system to Tunisians.

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[44] Until the WWI under the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon was in fact considered a province of Greater Syria meaning that Lebanese considered themselves for a long time Syrian.

As time went on, the educated and French speaking *beldi* and post independence upper class elites where then equated with *suri* as French and Western ways became markers of upper class in Tunisia and as the real Syrians left back to Syria. On the flipside, the countryside and rural immigrants to the city who still primarily spoke Arabic, weren't schooled in western ways, and retained a more Arab/ Islamic identity remained *arabi*. Here a distinction between colonial master and colonial subject was on the basis of Tunisian regionalism and via a detour through Syria transformed into a distinction between Tunisians. Discursively however, it still made this distinction between Arab and French thereby transforming the elites into the former colonial master. As *bedaoui/ arabi* had already in colonial and Bourguibist hygienic ideology been equated with dirt, dirty people and dirty neighborhoods in the contemporary symbolic geography of waste were yet again of rural origin. Although now often of a second generation and no longer inhabiting the *gourbivilles* but more recent uncontrolled illegal settlements in the city.

*Arabi* didn't of course always signify *bedaoui* or dirty and by the same token, *suri* wasn't always associated with the *beldi* and clean areas. That is the symbolic geography of waste didn't always correspond to the settlements of rural migrant and the neighborhoods of the *beldi* alone. Middle class neighborhoods, like Mensa, Manar and Nasr, for example were considered to be clean and the middle classes could be considered *suri* also, especially if they were proficient in French, followed a particular upper class, urban and Europeanized habitus and lived in a respectable area. Traditional neighborhoods, the villages towards the eastern suburbs could be *suri* when they were swallowed up by the *beldi*, like Marsa and Sidi Bou Said, but were considered *arabi*

when still being inhabited by the lower socio-economic spectrum like Gammarth el-Arabi. However, I never met or ever heard of anyone with a *beldi* background who inhabited what was considered a dirty area. Further, all the areas I visited over my field research with SOS Bia in Greater Tunis, therefore all the areas that were pollution hot spots, were considered symbolically dirty areas and were primarily inhabited by rural migrants.

**Conclusion**

Environmental pollution and the suffering it causes the people dwelling on the shores of Sabkhet Essoujoumi is real, incessant and despairingly quotidian. Sidi Hassine, as many poor, peripheral areas across the country pays the price for the economic progress Tunisia made under Ben Ali, but it hardly shares in its benefits. Ben Ali's economic miracle was not only unequal because it primarily benefitted Tunisia's elites, but also because the ecological, aesthetic and environmental health costs of that progress were unequally distributed with Tunisia's poor bearing its brunt. This leaves the lake dwellers feeling unrepresented, voiceless and abandoned in their suffering even years after the revolution (see chapter V).

The reasons for their disproportional suffering are complex. Environmental pollution and the distribution of diverse forms of wastes are structured by economic, socio-political, and material processes that operate at different scales. The symbolic geography of dirt, although not the only reasons for the excessive presence of wastes in Sidi Hassein, Saida el-Manoubia and other dirty areas, certainly indicated the primary reason: social and spatial exclusion from the neoliberal city based on Tunisian

regionalism. The marginalization of the lake dwellers finds its origin in the making of the modern city in Tunisia under colonialism where modernist discourses based on hygiene separated the city into the clean and dirty. These discourses, and the socio-spatial arrangements that emanated from them linked the French with modernity, cleanliness and order and the Arabs with backwardness and filth. They inscribed this segregation onto the urban landscape through moralized socio-spatial divisions that found their epitome in the binaries between the Nouvelle Ville and the *gourbivilles*. After independence, this hygienic ideology linked recent rural migrants to the city with dirt and unequally integrated them into the new Tunisian nation and Tunis as it microcosm. As this chapter has demonstrated, the moralizing links between metaphorical dirt, Tunisia's poor and the landscapes they inhabit persist until today. Here there is a recursive relationship between dirt, morality and people in Tunisia that is mapped onto the city and country, dividing it into the clean and the dirty, the decent and indecent. By this moral logic it is the immorality of its inhabitants, not authoritarian politics or socio-economic status, that predisposes them to environmental suffering. Like waste itself, these wasted communities are both included and excluded from the city, leading to the very "urban and social invisibility" that Ayeb (2012) described. Thus the link between dirt, communities and landscapes renders them invisible, takes away their voice and thereby predisposes them and the areas they inhabit to pollution. This process is attested in the absence of people from environmental assessment reports. Even where invisible waste becomes visible in these reports, people are still emitted. Authoritarian governance silences affected communities and eradicates their suffering form official records. The processes, by which this erasure occurs, are subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

FICTIONS AND FAÇADES OF STATE ENVIRONMENTALISM


"The development of environmental policy in Tunisia may in many respects be regarded as exemplary for a Southern country," a (GIZ 2013: 2) a report by the German Development Cooperation concluded at the end of Ben Ali's rule. Similarly, a World Bank report that chronicled environmental performance during the early years of his presidency (1993-2003) noted that Tunisia had "A very impressive record that needs to be perfected" (World Bank 2004: V). Measured by the environmental governance apparatus and waste management infrastructure established under Ben Ali, these assessments seem justified.

Starting in 1988, the first year after Ben Ali took power, he established the National Agency for the Protection of the Environment (ANPE), followed by the founding of the Ministry of the Environment in 1991, the Tunisian Observatory for Environment and Sustainable Development (OTEDD) in 1994, the Agency for the Protection and Planning of Coastal Regions (APAL) in 1995, the International Center for Environment and Technology in Tunisia (CITET) in 1996, the National Agency for Waste management (ANGED) in 2005 and the National Gene Bank in 2007. During the same period Tunisia signed, ratified and passed more than twenty pieces of legislation pertaining directly to environmentalism and implemented twelve environmental programs, ranging from the National Action Program for the Protection of the Environment in 1990, to the 2003 Fund for Cleanliness and Aesthetics of Villages. A full

list of environmental institutions and legislations since 1956, but accelerating dramatically in the early 1990s, published in a report by the GIZ (2013: 17-23) runs over six pages.



**Figure 3.1. Labib Statue; Environmental Blvd; Recycling Label**

In terms of waste management specifically Tunisia was a forerunner, one of the first countries in Africa to transform public dumps into sanitary landfills in the 1990s (Blaise 2014). Between 1995 and 2005 the collection of municipal garbage in the country rose from 45 percent to 93 percent, according to official figures (OTEDD 2006: 17). Between 1994 and 2004 Tunisia added over 10,000 kilometers of sewage infrastructure to its network (World Bank 2004: 33-34), reaching levels of access to sanitation at 88

percent in urban areas and 81 percent in the countryside by 2007 (OTEDD 2008). Additionally, by the time of the revolution, 252 depollution projects, which cleared up pollution hotspots, had been implemented by the government through the National Depollution Fund established in 1993 (GIZ 2013: 48). These dazzling achievements in environmental infrastructure and legislation were only surpassed by the gargantuan array of environmental data that these institutions produced during Ben Ali's rule.

Overall, environmentalism was something Ben Ali's Tunisia stood for. As mentioned in chapter I, these developments have to be understood in the context of neoliberal governance discourses that in the early 1990s compelled leaders across the developing world to reorganize state institutions and engage in improved, more efficient governance (Brown 1995; Rose 1996). Political rhetoric was riddled with talk about the ecology and the need to protect it for future generations. Environmentalism loomed large in public space—much larger than any country I've ever experienced—where each neighborhood and village had a designated Environmental Boulevard and where Labib, Tunisia's environmental mascot, was ubiquitous on roundabouts, packaging, plastic bottles, in school books, and even on television (see Figure 3.1.).

However, Tunisia under Ben Ali was a country of sharp contradictions. It was a country in which a government with an "exemplary" environmental record was dumping 5 million tons of carcinogenic phosphogypusm into the Mediterranean through its public enterprises, a country where all industrial waste found its way into nature with impunity (see chapter IV), a country where countless communities like Sidi Hassine were suffering as a result (see chapter II), a country where environmental activists were tortured and imprisoned. While environmentalism in the West had arisen from the grassroots protests

against the dumping of toxic chemicals (Carson 1962), in Tunisia the grassroots were heavily regulated by the state.  As discussed in chapter I, Ben Ali's progressive rhetoric was often contradicted by his authoritarian politics, and environmentalism was no exception.



**Figure 3.2. Unpublished work by Labib Inventor Chedly BenKhamsha, which chronicled the other side of Tunisia's development in the early 1990s.**

When I asked Professor Wahid Ferchichi what he thought about this "exemplary record" and Ben Ali's environmentalism in general, he answered "*Ce le manqué de harmony*" (it lacks coordination). A youthful, well-dressed man in his early forties, Ferchichi, a law professor, environmentalist and human rights activist, was central to pushing for the inclusion of article 45, in which "the state guarantees the right to a healthy and balanced environment and the right to participate in the protection of the climate. The state shall provide the necessary means to eradicate pollution of the environment" into the Tunisian constitution in 2014. He was considered one of the country's highest-ranking environmentalists outside of government and Tunisia's primary environmental legislator by most of the activists I worked with. He was currently preparing the creation of a Constitutional Commission on the Environment.[45] In the classroom where I met him, which was formerly an insane asylum as he joyfully remarked, he explained.

> There is a huge problem with political will, when it comes to environmentalism in this country. Mostly it is only a façade…There are hundreds and hundreds of overlapping legal texts on aspects of the environment, but there's absolutely no coordination or consonance… The very same problems exist on an institutional level; one hand doesn't know what the other is doing. I give you an example. What does the minister of the environment do? (long pause)…*rien* (absolutely nothing). What does he realistically achieve on a material level? He is a minister of coordination, consultation and study, apart from that he does nothing. On the contrary the Minister of Agriculture is the one that rules what should be the domain of the Minister of the Environment. He oversees the forests, the parks, grass, water, sun and air, because his ministry is one of economic interest and exploitation not one of protection. So go and figure this logic. Therefore the major problem is structural, the interest of the environment is within the hands of [economic] exploration

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[45] Following the passing of the constitution 2014, these commissions would oversee the transition from dictatorship to democracy. To date the commission for the environment has not been formed.

Prof. Ferchichi of course pointed to a more general and global problem here, namely that economic interests often overrule environmental concern. However, in the words of the foremost environmental legislator in Tunisia, the vast array of environmental laws, programs, commissions and much of the environmental institutions described above, which are testament to Tunisia's "exemplary record," were overshadowed by economic interests, ineffective at best, or in his words a "façade" at worst. This assessment of Ben Ali's state environmentalism as a "façade," a "fiction," an "empty shell," "an alibi" was pervasive in post revolutionary Tunisia.

Several recent observers of Tunisia have established that Ben Ali's rule depended crucially on these "governing myths," "facades" or "fictions." Fictions such as that of the economic miracle, democratic gradualism, secularism, and state feminism, prevented a clearer understanding of the political and socio-economic situation of Tunisia from emerging (Cavatorta and Haugbølle 2012; Hibou 2011; King 2009: 88-89; Tsourpas 2013). Beatrice Hibou (2011) argues that these fictions were not empty rhetoric, but were governing mechanisms that allowed the regime to conceal certain aspects of its rule from the elites and the international community. Surveying two institutions that were central to the perpetuation of the fiction of the economic miracle, the Tunisian Solidarity Bank and the National Solidarity Fund, Gerasimos Tsourpas (2013) concludes that rather than being tools for poverty reduction and economic liberalization they were strategic mechanisms to ensure domination, enrichment of the elites, and a deeper penetration of the state to guarantee regime survival. Commenting on the role of political fictions, Achille Mbembe notes that in the post colony state power is created by forging "its own world of meaning" (2001: 103), by creating and distributing fictions through bureaucratic

and administrative channels that serve as  "a master code" by which society can be interpreted. The postcolonial state here attempts to turn fictions into reality by making them the "common sense reality" for citizens. These fictions, I argue, have to be understood in the context of Ben Ali's neoliberal authoritarian mode of governance (see chapter I) and the switch from the utopian, and ideologically driven authoritarian politics of Bourguiba.  Ben Ali's form of rule substituted ideological content with governing myths, or what Griffin (2014: 40) describes as a shift from totalitarian to authoritarian politics in which ideologically driven regimes give way to kleptocracies that rely on what Benjamin called the "aestheticization of politics"[46] rather than a deep rooted ideological project[47].

The fiction of state environmentalism was such an aestheticization of politics, which enabled the government to present an image of ecological concern, especially towards the international community and Tunisia's elites despite the overwhelming presence of waste in the country. In the context of the security pact, environmentalism appealed to middle-class values of modernity, science and progress  (Tsing 2005: 8) and attracted foreign funding, while simultaneously obscuring the harmful effects of Tunisia's economic development model, the broad-scale dumping of waste. The fiction

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[46] The phrase  "So it is with the aestheticization of politics, which is being managed by fascism" appears in one of Benjamin's most seminal essays "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968) where he assesses the impact of photography on mass culture under Fascism. A key concern here is how politics through their aestheticization have turned into a spectacle that assuages the masses.  In Buck-Morss (1992) explication of Benjamin's essay, she writes that fascism manages sensory alienation, which lies at the heart of the aestheticization of politics, and which results in a near phantasmagorical existence of the masses, an "anesthetic" existence in a world removed from sensory experience. This is pertinent to the fiction of environmentalism in the context of the waste crisis where it attempts to substitute sensory experience of waste with environmentalism.

[47] Similarly, anthropologists have linked forms disinformation, non-knowledge, and political fictions across Africa to "millennial capitalism," where disinformation is created and distributed to directly or indirectly serve political and economic interests of elites, though often its effects are less determinate (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

of state environmentalism thus attempted to create an image of Tunisia in which Tunisians were not suffering from pollution. Through the fiction, it framed the pollution that did exist as a legacy of the former regime or as the fault of the "ignorant" Tunisian citizen, which the Ben Ali government was trying to reform.

The fiction of state environmentalism was maintained in three main ways: first, through the manipulation of environmental data, deflection and the censorship of the media, all of which downplayed pollution and highlighted the state's environmental achievements; second, through the control of state-sanctioned environmentalism, which projected diversity and a vibrant environmental civil society; third, through socio-spatial arrangements that highlighted environmental infrastructure and downplayed wasted landscapes and impoverished communities suffering from pollution. This chapter then introduces the structuring principle of the myth of state environmentalism, theater or spectacle, and investigates how this principle played out in the social life of environmental data and the distribution of environmental infrastructure.

### *Marsrahyieh (spectacle)*

The organizing principle of the fiction of state environmentalism in Tunisia became clear to me during World Environment Day 2015. Against my expectations, World Environment Day was a big deal in Tunisia and, according to organizers, it had been for a long time. For days, people had talked about it on the radio and in newspapers. On June 5th there was a long stretch of tents on Avenue Habib Bourguiba organized under the hospices of the Ministry of the Environment. The mood was festive, with balloons, pins and posters that projected empty slogans, a life-size mermaid stood in as a steward of the

sea, even obligatory clowns were running through the crowd. Each environmental government agency, ONAS, ANGED, CITET, APAL, had a stall that showcased its achievements on large billboards and glossy publications.  And therein lay the problem. This wasn't a campaign to raise awareness over emerging environmental issues in Tunisia, as is the purpose of Environment Day elsewhere, not even in the context of the waste crisis, though the theme this year was Consume with Care. Environment Day was an opportunity to showcase how enlightened and advanced Tunisia was when it came to environmental issues. The Ministry of the Environment celebrated with its citizens, middle class citizens as far as I could tell, while the country was drowning in waste, while waste management infrastructure was being blocked by citizen initiatives and courts across the country, while the Island of Djerba was covered in garbage, but no word of any of that.

To me, the pinnacle of this irony was a five by three meter model of Sabkhet Essoujoumi (see figure 3.3.). There lay the small sabkhet in front of visitors, palpable and sanitized, all with paved roads, clean rolling hills, a completed el-Attar waste water station at its center.  Overblown and out of proportion, the wastewater station looked orderly and rational. I had visited the real Attar West Tunis Wastewater Station, as it was officially called, months before and it looked nothing like this.
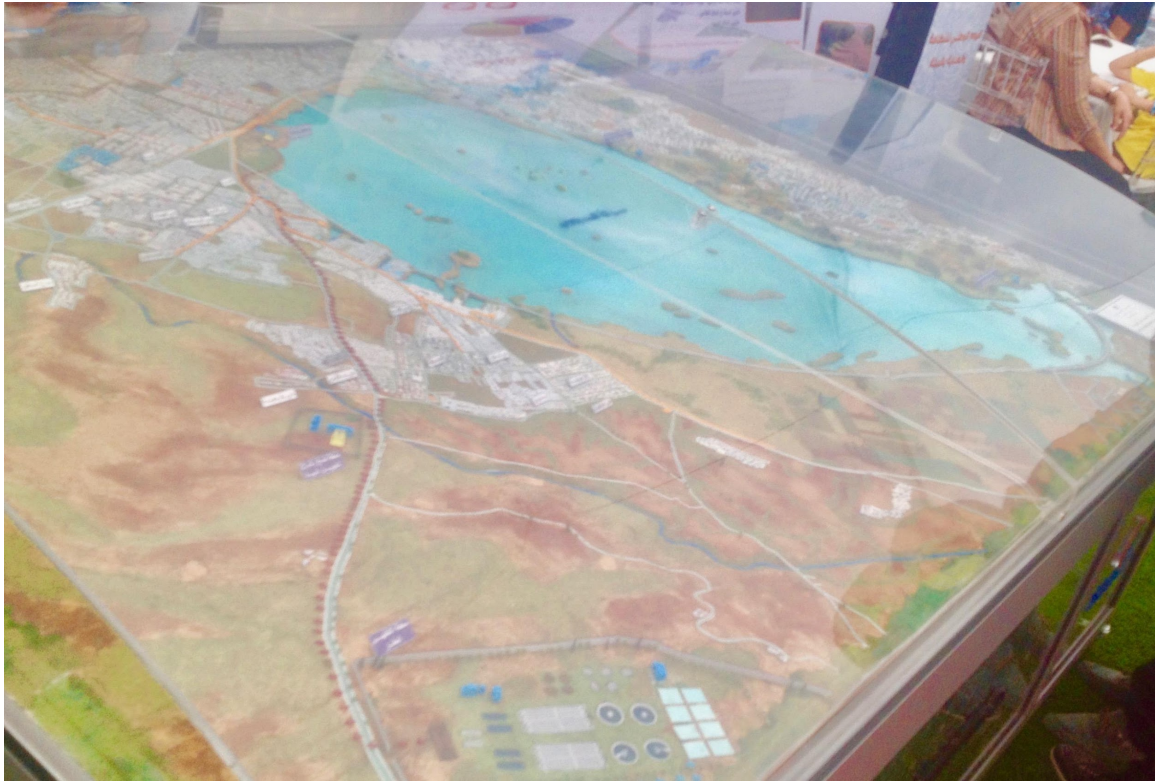
**Figure 3.3. Model of Sabkhe Essoujoumi**

The original wastewater station lay in ruins (see chapter IV) and had been looted. On the model, the adjacent landfill Jbel Borj Chakir was absent and so was the village of al Attar that choked on its waste. Sidi Hassine itself was about half the size of its original urban sprawl and looked contained. Again, waste and wasted communities were absent here. It wasn't exactly clear to me why this model was necessary in the age of computer modeling. It didn't include actual topography, the watershed or anything discernible that could facilitate the building of the real wastewater station. This suggested that the model was built to showcase that the government was in the process of building the station. It presented a projection, an ideal reality, that couldn't be further from the truth given that the station was in the making for seven years and construction had been abandoned years ago. No word of the wastewater of 220,000 people flowing into nature at the periphery of the capital. It was this sanitized model of the sabkhe, not its polluted reality, that middle

class Tunisians could experience here safely at the center of the city without ever having to visit the polluted reality of the Tunis' periphery. Sidi Hassine from this angle was an environmental success, a triumph of the state against urban sprawl and pollution. And it was this misrepresentation of achievements and emission of problems that underlay the whole of Tunisian state environmentalism. A TV interview that I had watched some months earlier had given this practice a name, *masrahiyeh* (theater or spectacle) and elucidated its workings further.

A couple of weeks after the first government was voted into power in February 2015, a national campaign of cleanliness was launched by Nejib Derouiche, the newly elected Minister of the Environment. Derouiche was a technocrat with no experience in politics who had been appointed to the post in a political horse-trade between the different parties. One of his first official acts was to visit the working-class neighborhood of Hay el-Zuhur to check on the state of the garbage crisis at the heart of the capital. Hay el-Zuhur was on the shores of Sabkhet Essoujoumi, adjacent to Sidi Hassine and was one of the "dirty neighborhoods" that Fadel the taxi driver had used to explain the mechanics of the symbolic geography of waste to me. Somehow, the local municipality got wind of Derouiche's so-called surprise visit and quickly embarked on a massive clean up operation of Hay el-Zuhur to present the minster with a clean neighborhood and well-functioning municipality. But in post-revolutionary Tunisia with an emerging free press such a charade didn't go unnoticed.

A local TV channel reported on the cleanup operations and interviewed partly amused, partly outraged residents. A man in his fifties, with a mustache in a windbreaker explained.

> This is the first time that this neighborhood is so… (considers his choice of words), so decorated (laughs)..if you came here two days ago, the whole thing would've looked quite different. There were four garbage trucks at work today, four, and one ONAS truck cleaning and scrubbing. We normally hardly see one [truck] a week. This is how it used to be in the old days [meaning the days of Ben Ali]: an important person comes and we put on a spectacle(masrahiyeh). I thought the days of spectacle were over, but it seems that nothing has changed. They're not bringing Derouiche to Hay al-Zuhuur, they are bringing him to the Bardo.

In this spectacle of cleaning, the municipality turned an ordinarily "dirty neighborhood," Hay el-Zuhur, with all the connotations explained in the former chapter, into a clean neighborhood, like Bardo just to its north, to manufacture an appearance that would please a high-ranking official. It is an understandable undertaking if one considers the organizational culture of the Tunisian administration based on fear (see Chapter IV), which had presumably driven officials in the municipality to implement this spectacle to not embarrass themselves and potentially lose their jobs. But this spectacle of cleanliness, hiding reality of dirt through an act of *masrahiyeh*, also demonstrated the larger working of the fiction of state environmentalism in Tunisia. In the absence of the free press, high ranking officials and all those watching on television when the minister finally arrived would have seen a poor, but clean and dignified neighborhood. The facade would have reaffirmed an image of Tunisia in which even poorer neighborhoods received adequate services, an image that was in harmony with the fiction of state environmentalism.

*Masrahyieh* is in these terms is then a mechanism used to project a world that is in harmony with authoritarian fictions, a practice that is both material and discursive. It is akin to what Garon termed the regime's "happy agenda," national news media that concentrated on "ornamental rhetoric and empty slogans" (2003: 47-48). One way to interpret *masrahiyeh* then, and Ben Ali's political fictions in general, is as an attempt to

organize presences and absences, to control what could be perceived of Tunisia's political, economic, and social realities and what couldn't. However, *masrahiyeh* wasn't passively absorbed and accepted by the Tunisian publics. Writing about Hafez al Assad's Syria, Lisa Wedeen argued that here political spectacle flooded public life with what she called "instructive symbolism" (2013: 850). Such symbolism was not necessarily believed, but provided a map of what could and couldn't be spoken about under a particular censorship regime. It allowed Syrians to stay safe. Similarly in Tunisia, the force of *masrahiyeh* as a driving principle of the political fictions lay not in its power to persuade, but exactly in the creation of knowledge that was known and could not be articulated in public. *Masrahiyeh* and its concomitant governing fictions created public secrets, that it turn made the violence of the regime unknowable (Taussig 1999). *Masrahiyeh* then, and the governing fictions it buttressed, were co-constructed. Their "instructive symbolism" implicated publics and audiences of these fictions and made them complicit in their perpetuation. The fiction of state environmentalism allowed the regime to eliminate the environmental suffering of Sidi Hassine and communities like it by implicating the whole of the population into the "intimacy of tyranny" (Mbembe 2001: 92) and thereby silencing it. *Masrahyieh* permeated all of Tunisia's state environmentalism, and as far as I could tell all of its bureaucracies and administration. Spectacle was apparent in the way environmental data was constructed and presented in Tunisia, the way environmental infrastructure was arranged across urban space, and the way that Tunisia's famous environmental mascot taught environmental education.

**The Social Life of Environmental Data**

The primary vehicle for the spread of the fiction of state environmentalism was a never-ending stream of environmental data produced by countless governmental agencies. It was in the country report, the survey, the economic plan and other classificatory schemes that the state required the power to shape realities. As James Scott writes, " In dictatorial settings where there is no effective way to assert another reality, fictitious facts-on-paper can often be made eventually to prevail on the ground.... [T]he categories used by state agents are not merely means to make their environment legible, they are an authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance" (Scott 1998: 83).   In the context of the fiction of the economic miracle, Beatrice Hibou (2011) describes the near obsessive production of data under Ben Ali as a from of governance that misrepresented economic data in the absence of public discussion. This not only concealed the reality of the Tunisian economy, but it governed thought and behaviors by forging a fiction of a macro-economically efficient, stable and socially just Tunisia (Hibou 2011: 21). Similarly the production, manipulation and unequal distribution of environmental data, in the absence of public debate, concealed the real environmental and social cost of Ben Ali's economic policies. The concept of masrahiyeh thus produced a particular social life of data in general and environmental data in particular that aimed to correspond to dictatorial fictions. While statistical data was collected by experts in each branch of government, the final place for their correlation and interpretation was the National Office of Statistics (ONS) a considerably old government instrument for central planning.

The ONS was a large emblematic, multi-building complex in the center of Tunis. Signs on the outside announced its different departments. Souad and I were here to interview Kerim, the head of the environmental statistics unit. The building that housed

the unit was nearly a caricature of itself, a socialist style office building, grey walls, cracks here and there, the heavy smell of smoke hung in the air. We found Kerim's office at the end of a long corridor with identical doors leading off to the left and right.  I knocked on his door and he opened it. My first impression of Kerim was… well that he was not very representable for a government employee. His hair was disheveled, he was unshaven and more smoke hung in his office. There was a large mold spot in the upper right hand corner above his desk.  It was early, 12:30 just after lunch. I had worked long enough in bars to gage people's level of drunkenness and while Kerim was not drunk, he certainly had had a few beers for lunch. He was probably about my age, or a couple of years older, but his demeanor reflected the state of the building he was working from, he seemed decrepit.

Still, Kerim was welcoming and open. He had a masters degree and had worked on environmental statistics out of the ONS for over a decade. He started the conversation by explaining the history of the ONS, that it had been founded in 1969, but the environmental unit was only established in 1999 in response to a project about the Barcelona Convention against the pollution of the Mediterranean sea. "The statistical system in Tunisia is generally decentralized: Each field works on its own statistics" he explained. I asked him what he thought about the quality of the environmental data in Tunisia. He answered that the ONS itself didn't produce but correlated numbers. For example the evaluation of solid wastes required expert-knowledge.  But the ONS didn't have this kind of capacity, it was an institution that was primarily concerned with statistics as they affected the population, he explained.

> But there is clear problems with the data and its dissemination amongst policy makers and the general population…. good data is important for policymaking… Beyond a lack of awareness there is also technical problems, and clearly bad faith when it comes to some issues. For example the statistics on green space to citizen ratio are always being inflated, they present fake numbers for political gains.

I remembered having been very impressed and perplexed by these figures, as they didn't correlate to my experience of Tunisian cities. The so-called, Urban Aesthetic Green Space, had apparently grown from 4.4m2 per habitant in 1994 to 14.7m2 per habitant in 2007 (OTEDD 2008:2). "How exactly do they do that?" I asked.

> They try to show only their many achievements, so they over-value the situation. This is Ben Ali's system: all the statistics exist but only the most interesting [to the regime] are promoted in the media to show to the population that the situation is constantly improving….when Ben Ali for example promotes  a 4 percent poverty rate in Tunisia, people do not check whether this rate is for a particularly region of the whole country. Statistics exist, but, people do not check…But the problem is also linked to the fact that the NOS was manipulated by the police and it was prevented from analyzing some fields.

While Kerim clearly stated that the ONS often produced statistics for political gain and was prevented from making certain inquiries, the most powerful weapon of the government in using statistics was misrepresentation, using the poverty statistics of central Tunis for example to represent the whole country.  In the spirit of masrahiyeh, the government directed attention to statistics that were in accord with governmental fictions and obscured others. These findings about environmental statistics echoed what Beatrice Hibou (2011) found when inquiring deeper into financial data produced under the regime. The functionaries, who collected and aggregated data were always aware that the collection and representation of data is somewhat "fictional," obscuring sometimes problematic variation (Scott 1998: 96).  However, employees in Tunisia's environmental sector, like Kerim, were highly aware of the script they had to follow, the "instructive

symbolism" of the authoritarian fiction weighed heavier on them than on the general population.   The central vehicle for the distribution of this continuous stream of environmental disinformation was the flagship "Annual Report on the State of the Tunisian Environment", published by the Ministry for the Environment and Land Use Planning (subsequently Ministry of the Environment) since 1992 in Arabic, French and eventually in English.

The proclaimed aim of this glossy publication was "to provide citizens, and all those involved in the development process, with reliable, up-to-date information and data on the state of the environment" (Ministry of the Environment 1992: 2). Each report commenced with a picture of the president standing by the Tunisian flag and a quote from him about the importance of environmental protection, such as in the first report "certainly, the protection of the environment is expensive. Nevertheless, we are convinced that guaranteeing the rights of future Tunisian generations to a healthy development is priceless"  (Ministry of the Environment 1992: 3). This opening sentence foreshadows the very bias of environmental data presented in these reports.  Namely, that the protection of the environment comes at a cost, a potential cost for the economic development strategy of the former regime, a potential cost for the acquisition of development funds that hinged on particular environmental reform, a cost to the kleptocracy that turned a blind eye to pollution or even promoted it to enrich the elites (see Chapter III). It is due to this cost that environmental data in Tunisia is skewed or misrepresented towards the regimes interest and political fictions.

In Orwellian double speak, each of the reports then explains the importance of reliable data for the protection of the environment. The first Minister of the Environment,

Mohamed Mehdi Mlika, Ben Ali's nephew, proclaimed in the first flag ship annual report

on the State of the Tunisian Environment in 1992.

> Knowledge and readily available information on the different features of the environment—water, soil, air, the sea, natural habitats and biological diversity— are essential for Tunisia as it sets out on the road to sustainable development. Good information is the essential precondition to any serious action for democracy and sustainable development. It is the basis of the projects for society advocated by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1992).

In other words, a healthy environment and accurate environmental data were foundational

building blocks of a functioning democracy, development, the very project of the Ben Ali

regime and the future of Tunisia. In another report he concludes,  "We will spare no

effort to improve the quality and usefulness of information and data in this report… [the]

National Report on the State of the Environment in Tunisia aims to be an example of

public information. It will be as widely distributed as possible to decision makers and the

general public" (Ministry of the Environment 1995: 6).  To rephrase, this report is

emblematic of the importance of production and transparent distribution of data in the

Tunisian republic. And in many ways the first report seems to live up to this promise.

Published in 1992 it is impressively blunt when talking about the issue of

industrial pollution for example. It goes so far as to implicate large public enterprises like

the Gafsa Phosphate Company and the Tunisian Chemical group and names major

polluters in each industrialized city. It is truly groundbreaking in that respect. Similarly,

the second report published in 1994 further chronicles the problem of pollution in the

phosphate industry in even greater detail and excavates environmental issues around

several sewage treatment plants.  Both of these reports seem to live up to the promise of

the president and minister. They are however only published five years after Ben Ali took

power and within the climate of a larger awakening of environmental sentiment across the developing world pushed by international organizations following the Rio Declaration. Thus in these reports the current government bears no guilt, since it was not in power when these industries were established, nor had a wave of environmentalism swept the globe beforehand. What is pointed to in these reports is the legacy pollution of the former regime that existed in relative environmental ignorance, and is now being assessed by a more enlightened, more democratic, more transparent and environmentally friendly government. This rhetoric matches the general progressive political rhetoric of the *Changement,* the early years of Ben Ali's rule discussed in chapter I. But together with that general rhetoric, the tone of the reports quickly changes with the 1995 report.

This report was published in the same year that Tunisia signed a free-trade agreement withe the EU. It is the first report that also appears in English, and is compiled and published by the newly established Observatory for Environment and Development (OTED), a body that under the Rio Principle 21 "satisfies an urgent need for full and reliable data, easily accessible, on the environment in Tunisia" (1995: 11). In other words, this report seems to be written for a more international development audience, rather than internal Tunisian public. The overall rhetoric of the report shifts from providing "reliable, up-to-date information and data on the state of the environment" to the policy of masrahiyeh, promoting primarily the environmental achievements of the Ben Ali government. The first chapter of the report is titled "Institutional and Legislative Developments" and the second, "New Tools for Sustainable Development," both chronicling, the context, ratification and implementing the Rio declaration in Tunisia. The 1996 Report again has one lengthy chapter on, "The Evolution of the Institutional

and Legal Framework," and another on "Environmental Protection Programs," leaving one chapter in the report to "Population Pressures" on the environment and another on "The State of Natural Resources." While these reports still admit to environmental problems here and there, the proportion of achievements to environmental data and analyses had drastically shifted by 1995. At times the subsequent reports are still incredibly frank, but generally they start to read, like much of the media, as a mouthpiece of the government that only showcases Ben Ali's successes and represents much of the pollution as a problem of political legacies.

As we had seen in Derouiche's visit to Hay al-Zuhur, many of these governing principles were still in place today and many of these tactics still defined governance and access to information when I did my research even several years after the revolution. It was hard and often quite impossible to come by even environmental data that to me didn't seem sensitive at all. In this way, as a researcher I experienced how public secrets were maintained in a seemingly democratic environment with nascent access to information laws. As so often in Ben Ali's Tunisia, these tactics were subtle and veiled in the bureaucratic and administrative practices of plural democracies. Besides putting on a spectacle, the most powerful tool in maintaining the governments fictions was spreading uncertainty and non-knowledge about pollution.

**Secret Bureaucracies or How to Get an Interview with the Interior Ministry**
During my research the government launched a national campaign of cleanliness March 2015. The campaign was set up between the Ministry of the Environment and the Interior Ministry, which was responsible for coordinating garbage collection with municipalities.

The Interior Ministry was notorious in Tunisia. As the seat of the secret police, it was generally seen as the center of Ben Ali's power. It was a symbol for public secrecy, demonstratively erected at the mouth of Ave. Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia most famous street, in the center of the city. Present at the heart of the capital filled with state secrets, but mostly impenetrable to citizens until today. During the three years in which I returned to Tunisia, the barbwire, metal and concrete barricades never disappeared from outside the ministry and even at the end of those three years the Ministry was still not ready to reveal its secrets, even on a matter so seemingly mundane as a national cleaning campaign.

As we had done with governmental agencies beforehand. Souad tried to arrange meeting about the campaign. She started, like any citizen of a newly-transparent polis would, by calling the Ministry. "The woman on the phone was very rude, shouted and said, if you want anything, you have to go to the Ministry's office of public affairs" she retold. The very fact that the Ministry had an office of public affairs struck me as a form of deflection. When only some hours later, Souad stood in front of the office, she was asked by a police officer "why didn't you call?" The policeman sent her on to an office within the belly of the building. After waiting for 15 minutes a woman came up to Souad and explained, "you're in the wrong office, you need to go to the office of the director of local communities, he is responsible for trash collection." When Souad found her way through long winded corridors, another policeman at the door told her she couldn't enter without an appointment. Souad, patient and tenacious as ever, got her mobile phone out and tried there and then to get an appointment, to no avail. After talking to the policeman for a while—there is still leeway in most procedures in Tunisia—he sent her to the fourth

floor, to the so-called general office. When Souad explained to the lady behind the counter what she was doing there, the woman laughed and proclaimed, you must be the first student to have ever just entered this building.  Serendipitously the lady turned out to be one of the secretaries of a Mr. Samir, who actually seemed partially responsible for the cleanliness campaign. She interrogated Souad further about who she was working with, what the approach of the study was and so on and wrote a memo for Mr. Samir.  Once she was satisfied, she said, "of course you can meet anyone you want because we are very proud of what the campaign is trying to achieve, proud as Tunisians and we want to share our experience with the whole world." Souad explained that she felt like she was getting the usual RCD party talk, or what we have termed *masrahyieh* above. The secretary took Souad and the memo to the secretary of the general director for local communities, who in turn knocked on a large wooden door to pass the memo on. "Mr. Samir is in a meeting with foreigners about decentralization," she proclaimed. Souad waited again. After half an hour or so, her phone rang and she was invited in, strangely via a phone call. But just before she entered, the secretary disappeared behind the wooden door and reappeared with a name scribbled on yet another memo. Souad didn't meet Mr. Samir, and was taken to another office. Again, she told yet another secretary everything about the research, anthropology and why she was interested in the campaign. But this time the secretary was visibly afraid. Souad explained again, trying to assuage her fears but to no avail. The secretary told Souad to send her the research questions via email. We sent the questions, but nothing ever happened. We never got the interview, despite our perseverance.

Every bureaucracy aims to increase its power by keeping its knowledge secret,

Max Weber wrote in 1918. In fact he believed that the "official secret" a secret that is known but cannot be told, what I have called a public secret, like that of state pollution in Tunisia for example, was a specific invention of bureaucracies to balance their power against the legislature.   Yet in the encounter above and many others like it, no disinformation was being spread, no particular fiction was embraced, secrecy was perpetuated, but secrecy as such wasn't at stake here, as the cleaning campaign was a public campaign with posters and more. Everyone readily admitted to its existence, but no one was ready to talk about its details.   What was happening was that reality and authoritarian fiction alike were clouded in billows of bureaucratic ambiguity; anything seemed possible behind this impenetrable façade, thus deflecting the issue to official discourses and poster campaigns.  Despite the experience of state power as represented in this bureaucracy, no information was spread or hidden. What was being spread was non-knowledge, ignorance and uncertainty. Sociologist Jennifer Croissant calls these cases "intentionally produced agnoses" (2014: 16), moments where ignorance is spread in order to produce an experience of absence. The regime didn't need to rely on the direct production of fictions, as these fictions themselves, through their organizational grammar, through what could and couldn't be said, produced other concomitant forms of non-knowledge. Just as Kerim had said, all data was there, but it was very hard to get to.

**Feel-Good Environmentalism**

In the fall of 2009, Zouheir Makhlouf was intimidated, beaten and imprisoned for investigating illegal dumping in two industrial areas in his hometown of Nabeuel, 40miles southeast of Tunis. Makhlouf was now one of the country's most prominent

human rights activists. With a background in Amnesty International and union activism, he had become one of the leaders of the Tunisian Commission for Truth and Dignity (*Instance Vérité et Dignité*) after the revolution. He was a quiet man with a face that suggested life's struggles. Contrasted with his unusually broad figure, his small, wet eyes emitted empathy, passion and pain in equal measures during our interview.

> On October 11, 2009 I took a camera and filmed the dumping of waste from Nabeul's industrial zone, called El Karmama. This industrial zone dumps into an incredibly polluted ravine that causes all kinds of illnesses to the people living alongside it. The ravine Dar Chaabane El Fehri has the same problem and Sabkhet El Mamouri, which connects to it. I was arrested at home, beaten and put into prison for four months…My videos showed how the industrial zones destroy the local environment and that was a threat to Ben Ali. There was some leeway with criticizing Ben Ali's human rights record, but if you attacked his developmental or economic policies you were in deep trouble….You just could not criticize Ben Ali's environmentalism or development record, because the entire world was convinced that the Ben Ali regime stood for sound economic development, ecology, women's rights, youth-development and so son. No one could question him in these domains.[48]

He was brave enough to stand up for his community, but quickly realized that the police state was not there to protect its citizens from pollution, but to protect industrialists from environmental activism. He was finally released after a campaign by several foreign international NGOs amongst them Amnesty. His experience lay in sharp contrast with the environmentalist credentials of the Tunisian state, and the vibrant environmentalist civil society it projected before the revolution.

During the Ben Ali years, citizen environmentalism wasn't outlawed, but it was allowed to exist in a particular form only, a form that we might call aesthetic or, as it has been described to me, "feel-good environmentalism". This kind of engagement with ecology consisted of beautification programs, the management of green spaces,

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[48] Peronal interview with Zouheir Makhlouf February 2015.

specifically under Mehdi Malika's program for the quality of life, the planting of trees and the cleaning of beaches. I've been told several times that there were over 200 registered environmental NGOs during the late Ben Ali years, although I couldn't corroborate that number. Overall civil society organizations increased nearly five-fold during his rule, from 1,776 in 1987 to 9,350 in 2009 (Freedomhouse 2011). And while the regime projected an image of a vibrant civil society that supported the president—in the 2009 elections 8,500 organization pledged their public support to Ben Ali—only very few organizations were politically and financially independent. The vast majority of these 9, 350 organizations were "government organized non-governmental organizations", what in Tunisia was called Ben Ali's "servile society" not "civil society." These organizations focused on apolitical issues under the guidance of the government in order to present an image of a plural and independent civil society to the international community. This was certainly true in the field of the environment. Like Caruthers discusses for environmental NGOs under Chile's dictatorship (2013: 11), many of the NGOs in Tunisia had a scientific or steward-like orientation and strategically avoided more structural issues like industrial pollution. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) had been operating in Tunisia for decades, yet adhered as far as I could tell to the rule of aesthetic environmentalism and was therefore tolerated. Greenpeace, on the other hand, which had been present for some years under Ben Ali's rule was evicted because it clashed with the fisheries over illegal dredging practices.

The most influential Tunisian environmental NGO before the revolution was the Friend's of Belvedere Park. Belvedere Park was a large green space, quite unusual for an Arab capital placed at the heart of Tunis. It was created under colonial rule in 1892 by the

then chief gardener of Paris. Today it features one of the best view-points over the capital, free-roaming peacocks and even a zoo—that despite many attempts, I could never bring myself to visit. The Friends of Belvedere were the custodians of the park and the oldest Tunisian environmental NGO. The organization engaged in environmental education, celebrated Environment Day, in which children planted trees in the park, and held talks on aspects of environmentalism. The head of the organization, during my research period was Abou Bakr Houmam, a geography professor and former State-Secretary of the Environment (just after the revolution) who had run the institution for many years. Houmam, or Boubou as I was invited to call him, was a highly educated, lateral and radical thinker who could talk for hours, weaving together the most disparate topics into a sometimes mind-boggling tapestry of knowledge. I considered him a good example of a genuine environmental activist, someone who deeply cared about the Tunisian environment and people, who tried his best to work for the good of the environment within the restraints of an authoritarian system.  Once the system fell he was at the helm of its reform in the environmental sector. Even some of the most critical activists I spoke to said, "Boubaker is a great man, but his organization, the Friends of Belvedere was set up to polish the image of the Ministry of the Environment. They paint little birds with children and plant trees." And from what I could tell about the organization these critiques were true. The Friends of Belvedere represented the kind of state-sanctioned environmentalism that even NGOs could engage in before the revolution. It was the only place where one could express a concern for the environment outside of working for the government directly.  Like many people under the dictatorship, the Friends of Belvedere struck a bargain to not engage in politicized issues in order to

maintain some space for political maneuver when it came to the ecology. In fact the Friends of Belvedere managed to stop the sale of some the parkland through advocacy under Ben Ali.

Before the revolution, Tunisia even had several Green Parties since 2004, which were some of the few parties that ran in the elections against the RCD. But these parties have widely been described as "Alibi Organizations" or "False Green Parties," implying that they were used as an alibi when Ben Ali was being criticized for his de facto one-party state (Nawaat 2010). However, when I interviewed Adelkhader Zitouni, the general of one of Tunisia's Green Parties since its inception, much of his concern for the environment seemed genuine. He was an anxious man, cooped up in a dark and dirty office that functioned as the headquarters of Tunisia's Green Party. He had clearly fought the accusations against his party for years and used our interview mainly to vindicate himself. Yet, when I asked him what it was like to be an environmentalist under Ben Ali's rule, he replied, "We have to be honest, Ben Ali wanted to create environmental policy. However, he was also hiding the [polluted] reality of the country. I blame him for that. If he would have permitted us to talk openly we would be in a better situation now."[49] In this way Abdelkhader Zitouni suggested that Ben Ali himself struck a bargain, that he cared for the environment, but didn't care enough to loosen his grip on society and the economy.

David Caruthers (2001), noted that in Chile, environmental principles, policies and institutions were modeled on Europe and America, and that they were swiftly supplanted to other countries and regions following the Rio summit of 1992—which was

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[49] Personal interview with Abdelkhader Zitouni, March 2015.

certainly also the case in Tunisia. These policies and institutions were predicated on an "administrative rationalism" (2001: 07), that in the environmental sector relies on advocacy, lobbying, litigation and education in both America and Europe. However, while this presupposes "healthy political pluralism," mostly environmental institutions in Chile have been implemented in a socio-economic climate that favors elite politics and neoliberal principles, a "contradiction [that] tends to render their best intentions stillborn." (Ibid.: 8). What the state offers these institutions is limited funding and a lack of political will, under which the most basic environmental infrastructure is scant and in which there are few limits to polluting activities or a right to access to information.

All in all, Tunisian civil society in general and environmental civil society organizations in particular were a political facade under Ben Ali that hid the political and environmental realities of the country. This isn't to say that individuals weren't earnestly invested in environmental work. In fact, environmentalism's near universal appeal to modernity, science and progress (Tsing 2005: 8) created real aspirational value for many Tunisians. Environmentalism linked up to a larger mythical structure that Tsourpas called Tunisia's "myth of *primisme*", from the latin *primus inter pares* (first among equals). This myth represents Tunisia as the most modern and progressive Arab country, as it had had the first constitution, was the first defender of women's rights, was the first to have a movement of national independence, human rights and even environmentalism.

In many ways, this myth has kernels of truth, Tunisia is the most progressive country when it comes to women's rights, especially in terms of legislation, yet at the same time this reputation prevents further progress, obscures vast differences between the cities and the countryside and didn't prevent Ben Ali's security forces from making

systematic use of sexual violence (Gall 2015). Women served as a kind of straw (wo)men of the regime, "alibi women" as Tunisian human rights activist and post-independence prime minister Moncef Mazrouki called Ben Ali's feminism. Julia Clancy-Smith (2013: location 527) writes that Ben Ali "managed women's rights as a political hedge fund against national and, above all, international accusations of the abuse of human rights." This was then also the case with environmentalism.

While civil society organizations managed to do good and express their concern for the environment within the confinements of the authoritarian state, they also aided that state in its persistence by deflecting criticism and serving as a front for Ben Ali's very selective form of liberalization. They also functioned as a kind of pressure valve particularly for middle-class activists who were concerned with the environment as an aspirational value, but were only distantly affected by the effects of Tunisia's crisis of disposal. As we have seen, the fiction of state environmentalism was predicated on a socio-spatial inequality; harmony or dissonance with it depended on social, spatial and economic positioning as is clear from the contrast between Sidi Hassine and La Marsa discussed in Chapter II. In the same way that the overwhelming presence of waste could jeopardize a belief in the environmentally conscious state, environmental management infrastructure was as a visual clue that reinforced the fiction. The spatial organization of this environmental infrastructure in relationship to waste was thus in itself a form of *masrahiyeh*, a spatially organized demonstration of environmental consciousness, a physical facade, that allowed the fiction to unfold.

**Façades of Environmental Infrastructure**

Arriving at Tunisia's main airport of Tunis-Carthage, visitors or returning Tunisians were greeted by the country's environmental mascot Labib on the very first roundabout before exiting the airport vicinity. Most tourists, visitors and affluent Tunisians would take the route down Boulevard Yasser Arafat towards the main highway that connects the capital with its affluent eastern suburbs of La Marsa, Cartage and Gammarth. Immediately on their right they would pass three large solar panels, four wind turbines—that mostly lay idle—and again the environmental mascot Labib in various sizes demonstratively erected in front of the Tunis International Center for Environment and Technology  (CITET). This shiny, large complex in a neo-orientalist style also housed the Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC) and the United Nations Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS).  Slightly further down the boulevard, just before turning onto the N9 or Marsa highway, visitors would pass Tunisia's Gene Bank, a high-tech storage facility for Tunisian plant and animal genetic material to preserve the environmental heritage of the country. Having left the airport, visitors on their way to Tunis' most upmarket neighborhoods, would have seen many of Tunisia's environmental agencies in the first couple of minutes of arrival.  Entering the N9, the president himself, dignitaries, international and embassy staff and tourists who reside in the capital would turn east towards the eastern suburbs. Here they would pass one of the most prestigious real estate projects in the country, Berge the Lac, a new village built at the edge of the Lake of Tunis with money from the Gulf, which now houses many Western embassies and international development organizations. On their left they would pass the airport and a large military compound hidden behind a wall overgrown with bougainvillea. This corridor was the very first road that was cleaned and beautified with the start of the

cleanup campaign. It was also the same corridor that flew the flags of any important dignitary visiting from Europe, as I had observed with the visits of the French and German foreign ministers, each having their flags attached to most lamp poles on the highway, in another form of political spectacle. This spatial arrangement created a hyper visibility of environmental infrastructure that was contrasted with the relative absence of waste in these spaces.

Given the socio-spatial arrangement of environmental infrastructure and the manicured cleanliness of certain areas, visitors on short trips, as is the case with many environmental consultants (see next chapter) could have the impression that Tunisia had an "impressive" environmental record. Socio-spatial arrangements and the routes taken by foreign visitors and dignitaries were again a form of representation of environmentalism, a way to manage presences and absences, to project a clean and progressive Tunisia. However the country's most successful and ubiquitous façade was Labib himself. Outside of the capital, Labib and the Boulevards of the Environment were the only physical representations of state environmentalism.

**Labib: Tunisia's Ubiquitous Environmental Mascot**

The central protagonist in the performance of state environmentalism in Tunisia was Labib. The *fenec* or desert fox, adorned roundabouts in most, if not every single village in Tunisia, lingered often quite randomly at the side of the road, sat with his family in front of every environmental agency and many of Tunisia's tourists sights. He was on posters, many trashcans, most drink bottles, cans and packaging as he was the symbol of the Tunisian recycling program. He featured in school books, was the mascot of the

*kechefah*, Tunisia's boy scouts, and he even had his own comics and a cartoon on television for a while. Labib was thus the most visible symbol of Tunisian state-environmentalism. Tunisians before the revolution and especially those of the X and Y generations who grew up in the 1990s had a close, often emotional relationship to him. As Souad once told me, she would mumble "Sorry Labib" whenever she threw garbage into the streets. A closer look at Labib delivers some insight into how state environmentalism was represented and perceived by a large swath of the Tunisian population.

Labib was created in 1992 by one of Tunisia's most famous political cartoonists, Chedli Ben Khamsa. Ben Khamsa told me in an in interview that despite there being over fifty different designs for an environmental mascot, Mehdi Mlika's grandmother insisted on the design of the desert fox. "She was from the South, from Gabes, where the Mediterranean sea and the desert meet, the natural habitat of the fenec. She explained that the fenec is not just one of the most iconic animals of Tunisia, but that he has very keen senses to detect pollution, large ears and a sensitive nose and he kills scorpions and snakes. In the past travelers in the Sahara would keep a desert fox with them as a good omen because they he could sense danger from a great distance." The desert fox was thus an iconic animal in Tunisia; he had keen sensory perception and was seen as a protective omen at least in the South.

The Labib of children's cartoons however was not a protector of people. Instead he was decisively authoritarian in his environmental activism, which was mostly directed towards Tunisian citizens. One cartoon clip, for example, depicted a quintessential

Tunisian family scenario: a day by the beach. A father, mother and two children sat under a parasol, accumulating packaging and food-waste around them. The scene switched suddenly to pristine southern deserts, with traditional architecture and palm trees, where Labib detected the odors of the family's rubbish from thousands of miles away with his acute nose. Swiftly he mounted a green skateboard, to an intense 1990s techno tune, flying through the air. He shot lighting from his hands that picked up the garbage the family had left behind and covered them in it. The family was shocked and shamed. Finally, Labib pointed at the rubbish bin smiling and winking. Another video educated Tunisian citizens about the burning of rubbish. It concluded by showing how when Labib handled landfills, green trees grew and everything was clean—very much unlike the experience of the inhabitants of Attar. Yet another video about noise pollution taught Tunisian citizens to respect their neighbors at night. Once again here a furious Labib shut down the noise with lightening.

Labib was therefore not an all-benevolent protector of the Tunisian environment, but an authoritarian educator of Tunisian citizens. Who were here blamed for their "individualized" (Princen et al. 2002: 15) behavior in the creation of waste. In a characteristic disconnection of political economy from waste, Labib was a half-hearted attempt by the government to fashion an environmental subject (Agrawal 2005) producing the environment as a "critical domain" (16) and "conceptual category" (164), often in the absence of functioning waste management infrastructures. Labib, as a cartoon character, symbol of the recycling program, or as statue, was then yet another way to frame the presence of waste. Labib's presence was intended to signify that the government was environmentally friendly, that state environmentalism was in fact real.

This reality however clashed with environmental deterioration in many Tunisian villages and neighborhoods (see chapter II). Labib was also an all-present, watchful figure and probably the most common representation of the Tunisian state throughout the county. As Labib's creator, Chedli BenKhamsa, told me in many towns and cities the Labib statues replaced statues of Tunisia's former president Habib Bourghuiba after Ben Ali took power. Populating the villages with Labib was an uncontroversial way of diminishing the personality cult of the former president, replacing it with the symbol of a particular kind of individualized environmentalism that demanded order and compliance from its citizens. That Labib was a representation of state power was also indicated by the fact that the Labib figures were disfigured and destroyed across Tunisia just before and after revolution. As BenKhamsa said, "starting from 2008 when Ben Ali started to fall, people saw these statues as a symbol for the state not as a symbol for the fight against pollution.…they attacked him because he was created in his era and because they obliged people to put the trash in a specific place. In fact, behind the environment there was the law and the law is the state." Nawaat Journalist, Mohamed Mestri called Labib an "alibi-symbol for the preservation of the environment" (2016). Labib stood for empty slogans, for the farce that was state environmentalism, especially when contrasted with the garbage that surrounded these figures before and after the revolution. As Mamia el-Bana, the first Minister of the Environment after the revolution and the politician who after nearly two decades ended the Labib campaign told me, Labib was attacked because he stood for the charade that was Ben Ali's environmentalism, he was a symbol of that charade that people were no longer ready to accept. Therefore they destroyed him.

**Conclusion**

The fiction of state environmentalism and the facades it created were in many ways useful to the government. Environmentalism had political-currency with Tunisian elites and the international community. It covered up and distracted from the real social and environmental costs of Tunisia's authoritarian neoliberalism, namely the material marginalization of Tunisia's socio-economically disenfranchised communities and the ecological disaster that resulted from the large-scale dumping of waste. More so however, like the other governing fictions of the regime, the fiction of state environmentalism was a powerful tool through which the regime defined the frame of reference for environmental problems in general and the crisis of disposal in particular. The gloss it put on environmental politics depoliticized environmental pollution. Commenting on the aestheticization of politics, Buck-Morrs describes that here "aesthetics changes from a cognitive mode of being in touch with reality, to a way of blocking out reality, [that] destroys the human organism's power to respond politically" (1992: 20). In this vain, the fiction forced an interpretation of the world onto Tunisians that particularly in marginalized and polluted areas stood in direct opposition to the daily sensory and embodied experiences of a physically polluted environment. But rather than blindly believing the fiction, this "regime of unreality (régime du simulacre)" (Mbembe 2001: 108), created a double bond between the population and state power. Silencing marginalization and violence, literally making them unknowable through the creation of public secrets and their maintenance through administrative practices, increased the hold the regime had on those it governed. The power to make violence unknowable supersedes the act of violence itself Taussig writes (1999). Those whose realities were marred by

pollution were not only marginalized by environmental suffering, but also by their inability to make these realities commensurable with public discourse. Now after the revolution it is hard to assess how successful Ben Ali's governing fictions were in preventing the emergence of subaltern discourses around waste and pollution and therefore the emergence of counter publics (Fraser 1990). However, the case of Zouheir Makhlouf personifies the potential cost of creating alternative discourses about waste and placing them in even the digital public domain.

Tunisia's state-environmentalist record wasn't completely empty however. Its effects were real and material. A dazzling amount of useful institutions were created, much needed legislation was passed, hundreds of environmentalists were employed and citizens were educated in schools and the street by Tunisia's environmental mascot to care about the Tunisian environment. In fact part of the force of Ben Ali's political fictions was the efforts that was put into them, the seeming commitment to at least a partial or aspirational truth, one that looked more likely for certain sub-sections of society than others. Thus like the other governing fictions of the regime (Cavatora and Haugbølle 2012: 190), belief in state environmentalism was also highly classed in Tunisia. Projecting a world free from waste was based on a vision of the world in which one didn't have to engage with waste materially, a division between mental and physical labor, between Tunis' eastern and western suburbs, between the clean and the dirty. As "it is only when the world can be kept at arm's length, so to speak, that one can begin to constitute the world as a spectacle" as Argyrou writes in relationship to a garbage crisis in Cyprus (1997: 160). State environmentalism was therefore mediated by and predicated on the same socio-spatial inequalities that it was trying to hide. But what

made this fiction so successful among the elites was not just the relative absence of waste in their lives, but the near universal appeal to modernity, science and progress that environmentalism represented. It fit into the larger mythical structure of "first among many" that underlay Tunisia's security pact. Finally, as the next chapter will show, the fiction of state environmentalism resulted in real monitory gain for both the government and its cronies and at the same time hid corrupt practices.

CHAPTER IV

"ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION HERE, PFFF…."

THE SEEPING AND LEAKING QUALITY OF CORRUPTION

> The environmental slogan was just an easy way to get money from everybody…Industry by law has to be equipped so that their waste water when released from the factories is according to a certain standard. On paper again it's the responsibility of the National Agency for the Protection of the Environment to oversee that, but all these agencies do is pump money from the system. Normally this agency is the policeman that monitors the industry and fines companies when they're polluting. But what happened under the Ben Ali regime, they used the agency to collect money for the family. You give us whatever, a bribe of ten thousand dinars, and everything is fine. Environmental regulation here, pffff.[50]

Morched and I were driving to the Chotrana sewage treatment plant that was apparently dumping sewage, sewage sludge, and industrial liquid wastes around Sabkhet Ariana, the Northeastern salt lake of Greater Tunis. As the above comments make clear, Morched saw corruption as the primary reason for the environmental catastrophe that had engulfed the country. He believed that the very reason why state environmentalism existed in Tunisia was to fill the pockets of officials. In his view, Tunisia's neoliberal developmental model, coupled with crony capitalism allowed elites to exploit natural resources and pollute the environment with impunity to support the rent-seeking behavior of "el mafia" (as he often called the cronies and waste management agencies alike). To him public works, like waste management infrastructure, were sub-standard as much of the money for infrastructure projects in Tunisia was being funneled into the pockets of

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[50] Personal Interview with Morched Garbouj November 2014.

officials.[51]. Consequently, environmental pollution was seen as the direct outcome of various forms of corruption often linked to the very agencies that were supposed to protect the environment.

Morched's claims were at least partially justified. A huge corruption scandal had engulfed Jbel Borj Chakir (see chapter I), the landfill in Sidi Hassine and other landfills that SOSBia was working on. After investigations by the Tunisian Corruption Commission, in 2011 the Tunisian government expelled Pizzorno Environment Group, the French company that had managed Borj Chakir and other landfills in the northeast. The commission wrote in its recommendation that, "It appears that FL [Francois Leotard the Director of the company in Tunisia and former French Minister] used his authority and personal relations with the Tunisian officials to influence the market price, to conclude it in favor of Pizzorno / Sovatram and thus to grant an unjustified advantage [to the company]" (Nice Matin 2011). The Tunisian-Italian company ECOTI that took over the landfills from Pizzorno, also received its contracts under dubious dealings with ANGED, Tunisia's waste management agency and was under corruption allegations in Italy (El Houda Chabaane 2015). Finally, just a few months ago in 2017, the long-term director of ANGED, and later adviser to the Ministry of the Environment, was charged with corruption and imprisoned for four years (Realites 2017). Clearly, corruption abounded in the waste management sector. While there was no direct link between the

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[51] In 2010, the last year of Ben Ali's rule, Transparency International's (TI) Global Corruption Perception Index (2010) ranked Tunisia 59/ 178, placing it in the vicinity of countries like Croatia, Turkey and Latvia. However, in 2014, after the revolution, its position in the index had dropped to 79/ 175 (Transparency International 2014). The Transparency International index however is a corruption perception index and openly speaking about corruption under the former regime could land a person quickly in jail. Further as the rankings are produced by TI primarily as a commercial service to large international organizations, they have a bias towards the public sector in Tunisia, resulting in a reduced TI score for the country (Baumann 2017: 10).

pollution of Borj Chakir and corruption, locals in Attar firmly believed that corrupt practices were to blame for both the pollution of the landfill and the halt of the Attar wastewater station.

Talk of corruption in general was ubiquitous after the revolution. Revelations about "the mafia's" grand corruption was in the courts and all over the media. The near obsession with corruption was in part what Marilyn Strathern (2000) termed the "tyranny of transparency," in which the post-revolutionary attempt to render the obscure behavior of the former regime transparent resulted not only in revelations but also in endless attention to what yet hadn't been revealed. At the same time, corruption was also very real of course. Everyone I knew, including myself, were constantly confronted with it, mostly in the guise of bribery requests from police and public officials as petty corruption increased with the retreat of the state during the Transition (Transparency International 2015). In part due to this omnipresence, the term "corruption" was imprecise and problematic, as it incorporated such diverse practices as bribery, nepotism, conflicts of interest, and so on. In Tunisia corruption was variously described as *fasaad* (corruption), "*hadyie*" (gift) or *rashwue* (bribery). "el mafia" could refer to Ben Ali's cronies in particular but also to governmental agencies more generally. *Alaqa* (relationships) broadly referred to widespread nepotistic practices, especially in the public sector. Multifarious in its meaning, the trope of corruption was often used by Tunisians to express what they perceived to be obscure, dubious and degenerate aspects of the old regime. And here again, these moral assessments were often expressed in the vernacular of "clean" and "dirty" as there was talk of having a "clean government" in the run up to the 2014 elections. "Clean" here meant a purging of the former regime and the corrupt

governing practices it stood for.

Environmental economics has long linked environmental pollution to corrupt practices. Such studies often build on the Environmental Kuznet Curve which hypothesizes a relationship between economic development and environmental quality and the more controversial Pollution Haven Hypothesis that posits that in the context of globalization, companies will seek out territories with lax environmental regulation resulting in greater pollution in developing countries (see Cole et al. 2006 for a discussion). Research following in this vein has, for example, shown that corruption negatively affects the stringency of environmental legislation in the context of trade liberalization (Damania et al. 2003), that controlling corruption positively affects the impact of the shadow economy on pollution (Biswas et al. 2012), and that political instability affects environmental stringency if corruption levels are high (Fredrikson et al. 2003). In the social sciences the relationship between corruption and environmental pollution is most often enveloped within the larger discussion of the "resource curse," which emphasizes the negative impact resource wealth has on governing institutions (Auty 1993; see also Williams and Le Billon 2017).

Anthropologists have demonstrated the relationship between corrupt practices and environmental degradation in the context of forest management (for example, von Hellermann 2016). There is also much anecdotal evidence that links corruption to pollution in mining operations (Dupuy 2017; Tsing 2005) and industrial settings (Economy 2004; Lora-Wainright 2010; Lora-Wainright and Chen 2016: 400-401). In fact, a recent edited volume that is trying to shift the discussion over corruption and natural resources away from the resource curse to a political ecology approach hardly

touches upon the issue of pollution (Williams and Le Billon 2017). What this volume achieves, however, is integrating an understanding of corruption and natural resources broadly into the materiality of resources, local histories, power relations and the political economy (2017: 1-2). This approach reflects a broader shift in the literature on corruption (Haller and Shore 2005) away from corruption as an abstracted deviance from the norm of good governance, to an analysis that sees corruption as integral to local power relations and therefore as a widespread form of environmental governance in itself (Bridge and Perreault 2009). This understanding of corruption as governance is certainly echoed by Tarek Dahou (2011), an Algerian political ecologist who sees corruption as a form of governance at the very heart of environmental degradation in North Africa. In his research, oligarchies and a lack of transparency have perpetuated a misdistribution and overexploitation of resources and therefore the degradation of land and waterscapes.

This chapter, then, investigates the nature of corruption in Tunisia in general. In particular, it ascertains whether or not various forms of corruption led to environmental pollution and the crisis of disposal in Tunisia. In so doing, it treats corruption as a form of environmental governance and in particular as a form of waste governance. While waste management is understood as the relationships between non-state, state actors and materials in order to hide wastes away or make them invisible (Moore 2012: 786), corruption, I argue is a form of governance that makes wastes flow, leak and seep into places where they don't belong. In other words, while waste management as a form of environmental governance aims to hide wastes, corruption reveals it. Further, in the context of neoliberal authoritarianism, corruption becomes a structuring principle that organizes the relationship amongst people, materials, landscapes and the economy. As

corruption undermines the hiding of wastes, so wastes makes corruption, an ordinarily obscure and secretive practice, visible, which fed into perception of corruption during the garbage crisis after the revolution (chapter V).

The problem for the researcher, however, is that corruption is hard to prove. Haller and Shore (2005: 19) point out that the anthropological study of corruption is not unlike the anthropological study of witchcraft in that it deals with "second-order data," accusations, and their perceived effects. In the case of my research, nonetheless, these perceived effects potentially lead to large-scale material and embodied suffering across Tunisia. What follows is therefore an attempt to push beyond the "discourse of corruption" (Gupta 1995; Harvey and Knox 2016), to investigate how corruption structures these relationships between national and international development institutions, materials, landscapes and people. It is an analysis of how corruption seems to have produced and sustained large-scale environmental pollution in Tunisia. I offer a  careful and critical approximation of proof via a discussion of different viewpoints on the topic coming from civil society, the donor community, government and administration, and an embedding of these viewpoints in particular case studies of pollution.

From this discussion it is clear that there are at least three different, interlinked ways that corruption led and leads to environmental pollution in Tunisia. These are ideal-type like explanations that attempts to disentangle social processes that occur at various different levels simultaneously and in a mutually reinforcing manner to produce pollution. The first occurred in the public sector, where the siphoning off of funds from public procurements resulted in the creation of substandard waste-management infrastructure. The second was linked to bribery, and happened where the public sector

and private enterprise intermingle, so that the potentially polluting activities of industries were actively hidden away or carried out with impunity. The third form was subtler, steeped in the culture of authoritarianism and nepotistic practices that implicated people into the workings of the regime. Here self-censorship, distortion of reality and constant deflection of responsibility linked to the practice of marsrahiyeh (see Chapter III), made environmental problems hard to assess and therefore hard to address. It is clear, however, that these processes weren't linear or straightforward, as corruption always interacted with mismanagement, weak environmental governance, underfunding of agencies and a lack of skills, tools and infrastructure in the production and revelation of wastes in the public sphere.

**Grand Corruption and the Quality of Waste Management Infrastructure**

Morched and I finally arrived at Chotrana. SOS Bia was working on a project that measured the output of the two ONAS stations around greater Tunis. I had gone along on several field missions to Chotrana, Tunis' largest sewage plant and the Canal El-khaleej, in which sewage travels from the plant to the Mediterranean Sea.  On this occasion, we first met Khaled, another core member of SOSBia. Khaled was a quiet and dapper man. He always wore a dark suit, even during field missions like this one that involved sewage sludge and open sewage drains. He was a bit of an environmental law aficionado who, as I learned later, could suspend his taciturn demeanor to deliver long lectures on the ins and outs of Tunisia's versus international waste management standards. With his dark skin, even darker, thick hair, aviators and tightly cropped mustache he reminded me of my uncles; stuck in the Iraqi fashion of the 1970s. Like Morched, Khaled was well

acquainted with Tunisia's waste management system. He had studied chemistry at a university in Tunis and his first job in the early 1990s was to start a municipal garbage collection pilot project in Hay el-Khadra for the municipality of Tunis. "This was during the old system, the old garbage dumps, before they established sanitary landfills like Borj Chakir," he once told me with a smirk to emphasize how dirty his work was then. To my initial surprise and against what I understood of Tunisian class politics, Khaled and Morched would be considered middle class, and both prided themselves in getting their hands dirty. "This is the real work of an environmental activist," Morched said, setting himself and his organization apart from the feel-good environmentalism described in the previous chapter.

Even in this post-revolutionary environment, Khaled and Morched were clearly afraid during missions that often bordered on clandestine operations. Every step was documented with camera phones, escape routes were discussed and cars were parked in strategic positions so one could make a swift escape—all during reconnaissance missions of public infrastructure. Chotrana was situated in an industrial zone at the shores of sabkhe Ariana and it discharged its supposedly partly treated sewage into the canal El-khaleej. The khaleej was a partially open canal that lead from Chotrana to the north, through some of Tunis' poorer, and uncontrolled peri-urban neighborhoods and entered the Mediterranean in Rouad. In many places the khaleej was not much more than an open cemented ditch that reeked of sewage and was visibly filled to the brim with human excrement. The environmental health situation around the canal was much the same as that for the people at the shores of Sabket Essojoumi: skin lesions, allergies, respiratory problems and armies of mosquitoes.
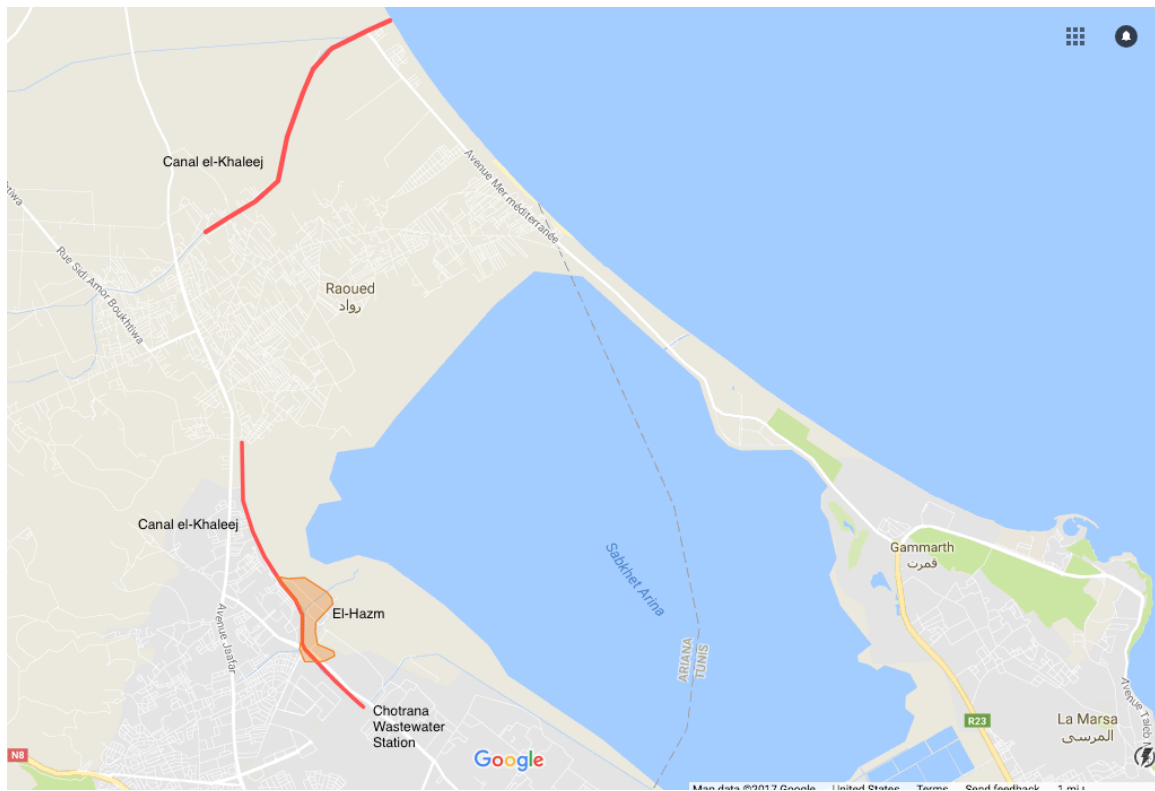
**Figure 4.1. Map of Sabkhe Ariana, El-Hazm and Canal El-Khaleej**

After driving down a dirt road towards Sabke Ariana and leaving Khaled's car behind, we encountered a large elevated field at the water's edge. We stopped the car and walked up an embankment. Almst immediately three man left a little shack on the other end of the field and walked towards us. "We'll tell them we're property developers and want to buy this land," Morched whispered, "Just play along" (I didn't play along, I just kept quiet).  The men came and went, seemingly satisfied with the explanation. Content with his deception, Morched used his phone to film in plain sight as we moved across the field. The ground was strange to walk on, puffy somehow, like freshly fallen snow. And there right in front of us were little mounds – fifteen, maybe twenty of them – that had the texture of bark.

**Figure 4.2. Close Up of Sewage Sludge**

"Sewage sludge" Morched said. Khaled knelt down and inspected it, stating "All of it, everything we're standing on. Sewage sludge." To my surprise the sludge didn't reek, though I could smell the nearby salt lake and canal. "ONAS is dumping its sludge here," Morched said triumphantly (see figure 4.2). "Sewage sludge" or "biosolids" refer to semi-solid wastes produced by municipal waste water treatment. Its risks to environmental health are hard to assess, as amounts of organic chemicals, toxic metals, pathogens and chemical irritants included in the sludge vary extremely and as its build-up in soils and leaching into waterways have not sufficiently been studied (Lewis et al.

2002). However, there is clear evidence that sludge can be extremely harmful to human and ecological health (ibid.). Legally speaking, in Tunisia ONAS must dispose of this material in landfills or incinerators and there were some pilot projects for its commercialization. "They're dumping this stuff here and someone is pocketing the money for the proper disposal," Morched said. It was as good an explanation as any to me then, but I wondered how much dumping of sludge was going on around the country. Morched documented everything with his phone, which he tended to do, and posted the videos on SOS Bia's Facebook page.

We returned to the car, picking Khaled's car up on the way, and inspected the Canal el-Khaleej. We drove along the water's edge to the neighborhood of El-Hazm, couched between Sabkhet Ariana, the Canal el-Khaleej and a flood control channel. This salt lake didn't seem as polluted as Sabkhet Essoujoumi, in part because it had a greater water exchange with the sea, in part because the farms of many rich Tunisians bordered on the sabkhe. I attended a barbeque at the shores of the lake one night where a friend inhabited the old servant quarters of a large adjacent villa. The villa had been owned by a high-ranking police officer who moved abroad after the revolution. My friend said that as long as the high-ranking official lived there, helicopters would drop chemicals into the sabkhe every couple of months to kill the mosquitoes and that twice a year bulldozers would clear out the sludge in front of his mansion. El-Hazm, however, wasn't afforded such services.

El-Hazm was a peri-urban uncontrolled settlement of about 70 houses, with dirt roads. Although it was located next to the country's largest sewage treatment plant, and an open sewage canal went right through their neighborhood, none of the houses were

connected to the system. Houses were equipped with cesspits and water trucks would deliver drinking water at exuberant prices. We walked along the floodwater canal and up another embankment where the stench was visceral. And there it was on top of the embankment: the Canal el-Khaleej, a river of shit.



**Figure 4.3. Canal El-Khaleej in Rouad, November 2014**

We walked along the canal to scout for places that SOS Bia could take water measurements. Morched and Khaled told me that the canal had flooded parts of the neighborhood in the fall of 2007, when heavy rains pushed the sewage out of its bed and into the streets. On our way back to the car, on a little bridge that crossed over the flood canal, we met an older man who lived there and knew Morched and Khaled. I explained who I was and he took us down the floodwater canal to show us where residents had sealed a water gate that had allowed ONAS to dump sewage from the Canal el-Khaleej

into the floodwater canal and thus Sabkhet Ariana. On this day, Khaled, Morched and I followed the canal through poorer Tunisian suburbs to the sea (see Chapter V), but I returned several time to el-Hazm.

During one of my visits, a middle-aged man with a neatly trimmed mustache and red wool cap, leant over the garden wall of his half-constructed abode and asked what we were doing. I was with Wael, a friend and geography PhD student who was writing his dissertation on groundwater quality around Sabket Ariana. We both answered, "We study pollution." "You've come to the right place," the man responded, "but I am sure you can see and smell that. Look at this (he waved his arm across the area), we are stuck between the Khaleej, the flood canal and the sabkhe, all three dirty to the core." Suddenly, a woman quickly approached from across the dirt track and took over the conversation, as if she was worried that he would say something inappropriate.

Dressed in an apron, and colorful, red headscarf, she told us that all her children were suffering from the pollution. They could hardly breathe, she explained, and her youngest had to go back and forth to the hospital in Bab Sadooun for treatment of a blood infection. The infection was caused by a mosquito bite, though she couldn't remember the name of the disease. Others had shown me deformities on themselves that had apparently been caused by West Nile diseases transmitted through mosquitoes. An old man in his sixties with shortly trimmed white hair and a mustache, who lived on the main dirt road next to the floodwater canal complained.

> Whenever a car passes my house, the dust enters into the windows. You see this canal (pointed at the floodwater canal), ONAS dumps waste from the industrial zone upstream into the sabkhe through it. They do it through one of their subcontractors and always at night. Suddenly the water starts flowing in strange colors, which cans still be seen in the mornings.

Whenever I returned to el-Hazm, people shared similar stories about ONAS. SOS Bia had helped to document their plight with the help of local doctors, to create a dossier that inhabitants could use to lobby the municipality. But nothing ever happened, locals told me.

ONAS was plagued by underfunding, inefficiencies, mismanagement and ostensibly corruption. A 2012 report of the Court of Auditors (*Court des Comptes*), a quasi-judicial body that conducts financial and legislative audits of public institutions in Tunisia, found that 33 wastewater stations in Tunisia didn't meet the country's standards, thereby releasing an estimated 75.8 million cubic meters of raw sewage a year into the country's waterways (WebManager 2014). The same report noted that 74 percent of industries didn't comply with industrial wastewater regulations and warned of the health risk associated with the dumping of liquid wastes. As ONAS was responsible for the secondary treatment of all industrial wastewater besides sewage, its canals and eventually Tunisian waterways often carried an unknown mix of chemicals from various industries implicating the private and public sector in ONAS pollution. Morched and Khaled were clear over why el-Hazm and other communities across the country were suffering from the dumping of liquid wastes. As Morched explained.

> Wastewater stations were built with huge grants from the EU, World Bank and so on. On paper they are [built] to international standards, but in practice corruption gobbled up the money. Billions were given in aid but only millions made it into mediocre wastewater stations, that even back then didn't work to the capacity required.

In his logic, sewage plants were pumping industrial and domestic wastewater into the waterways here and across Tunisia because they were built with substandard materials

and cheap labor upon falsified numbers. Morched could actually explain the arcane

Tunisian art of doctoring population statistics against sewage output figures—after all, he

had been an environmental engineer under the regime.  Khaled's view was slightly more

measured.

> ONAS has a lot of funds (national and international support) and there are a lot of
> corrupted people who want to benefit from this money…. The government wants
> to make lots of projects and increase the amount of foreign donations and funding.
> This is the only thing they want, but they are not thinking about something that
> really serves the benefits and interest of the citizens. This didn't exist before and
> doesn't exist right now. Despite corruption and problems, the ONAS is highly
> organized, but overwhelmed by the task.

I perceived Morched to be militant, a political position that in my eyes was and is

absolutely necessary within Tunisia's environmental movement, but it also made me take

his straightforward explanation with caution. If Morched and Khaled were right, though,

and both of them had worked for years in Ben Ali's environmental system, the impact on

all Tunisian infrastructures would be immense. Corruption could at least partly explain

why Tunisia's landfills were leaking and why its sewage treatment plants were pumping

sewage into the waterways, as it would affect roads, bridges, dams and so on. Yet, while

bribery was a well-established fact of Tunisian life, large public sector corruption was not

as visible and was disputed by the very international organizations invested heavily in

Tunisia's public sector.


**The ONAS Portfolio Manager**

Elie (pseudonym) was an environmental engineer who ran the ONAS portfolio for

one of the large donor banks that funded Tunisian infrastructure. Based out of a Western

capital he visited every two to three months to monitor, evaluate and check progress on

ONAS' projects, one of which was the partial submersion of the canal el-khaleej. His bank had also paid for the Chotrana plant, which was polluting el-Hazm and which Morched claimed did so because of corruption. When I met him in his hotel over dinner, he was on a monitoring mission that lasted only 24 hours. We had connected through a common friend and Elie's attitude was friendly and open. He was exceptionally well educated, had worked in his job for six years, had a portfolio much larger than Tunisia, and spoke with the certainty that defines what it means be an expert. He began by explaining the relationship between the bank and the Tunisian government. The Tunisian government comes to the Bank with project proposals, which the Bank then evaluates for viability and approves or rejects. When a project is approved, the bank conceptualizes its details in cooperation with the government and supports it by finding contractors to implement the project. Then, in the second phase the bank retreats into a monitoring role only, while the Tunisian government together with contractors implements the project. I asked him about the delays in the wastewater station of Tunis West of Al-Attar, which were central to the environmental crisis of Sidi Hassine (discussed in chapter I) and which had been partly funded by his employer. I recounted that several locals in Attar had told me the reason for its delay was corruption. But Elie brushed this accusation aside with near ridicule. "There isn't that much money to be made in the sector," he insisted.[52] The problem with Attar is that the quality of the work done by the contractors was sub-standard. The first contractor had to be replaced and the bank had to "clean up the mess," as he put it. Basically, the same work had to be done twice, which together with the revolution delayed the completion of the project considerably. Thus according to

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[52] According to the ONAS website itself, their budget in 2015, the year Elie and I met, was 134.8 million dinars (approximately $61 million), 64 percent of which came from foreign loans and grants (ONAS 2016).

Elie, the problem with the Attar station was not an issue of corruption at all, but one of

mismanagement of the project on the part of the government.

> However, the sub-standard labor practices that led to the rebuilding of the Attar Wastewater station had been described to me as a common exploitative labor practice used to syphon off money from public works in the Ministry of the Environment. Mohamed, my Tunisian teacher, who had worked with many international organizations, explained it to me like this: "Exploitative labor practices in the public and private sector are linked to corruption." Talking about the Ministry of the Environment he explained, "the Ministry takes a loan from an international lender to build a project, let's say a waste water station. Then the minister goes to a contractor (*muqaawil*), who is normally one of the cronies.[53] The contractor receives the money, but instead of employing salaried, high-skilled workers, he employs the cheapest casual labor (*u'umal alhhdadir/u'umal almunaawuilah*) available. This kind of day laborer has little training, no social or job security. This way the contractor can save money on the budget from the lower end of the spectrum and pocket more money on top. This money is then distributed back to ministry officials. Corruption therefore leads to, one bad service delivery, which leads to a sub-standard output. It deprives skilled laborers of their job and exploits the poorest of the poor.

Labor exploitation and corruption therefore seem to directly impact unemployment of the

educated classes and is linked to environmental degradation. Still, I had no proof that

this was what happened in Attar.

I turned my conversation with Elie to ONAS' dumping in the canal el-khaleej.

Again, Elie diverted responsibility for the pollution of the canal from ONAS completely

and explained that the Khaleej receives partially treated wastewater from the station, but

also, further downstream meets a river that is already polluted with sewage, household

waste and agricultural run-off. He explained that everyone thought that ONAS was

corrupt, but that as far as he was concerned they were doing a good job. They were just

terribly understa ed and underfunded, but ten years ago ONAS was the most developed

wastewater management organization in the whole Arab region, he exhorted. To Elie,

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[53] This had of been the case with Pizorro's contract at Borj Chakir for example.

part of the problem was public relations. The people who worked for ONAS, like himself, are "a bunch of engineers" who don't know how to communicate with the public, he explained.[54] Thus according to Elie, mismanagement of contracts, underfunding and the general population were primarily to blame for ONAS problems, not corruption or the agency itself. And he was not alone in his assessment of corruption in public procurements.

Similarly, the Tunisian manager of the environmental portfolio of another major development bank that funded infrastructure and cleanup projects across Tunisia told me that corruption hadn't been a problem at all for her employer. She explained that, "Ben Ali always protected European investments specifically, because that was the bread and butter of his government."[55] From my perspective, both individuals and their employers were still caught up in the fictions of the Ben Ali regime, while people on the ground and increasingly the data were clearly disputing these fictions, as more and more individuals brought corruption cases to the courts. Thus, while the international donor community didn't seem to be concerned in the least about public sector corruption, Tunisia's Corruption Commission was.

**The Corruption Expert**

When I asked Samir Annabi, the head of Tunisia's hailed anticorruption

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[54] Harvey and Knox (2016) make a similar observation in their work on corruption in public works in Peru, when writing that expert knowledge in the absence of trust in regulatory authority creates widespread uncertainty and at least rumor that can translate into corruption allegations.

[55] Here she seemed to have echoed what was revealed by Wikileaks-published cables of the American Embassy in Tunisia in 2010. Namely, that despite widespread corruption, the offshore manufacturing sector, populated by large international brands, seemed to experience less corruption (Baumann 2016: 6).

commission, to explain the specific nature of corruption in Tunisia to me, he answered,

> Corruption touches every single activity in the country and is very widespread. Real estate, customs, fiscal administration, all these and public procurements of course. We don't have any precise statistics, because the subject matter is not easy to handle, to know about. It's a very secret crime and then you have shell companies behind, screen companies, behind screen companies. It's very difficult to identify, but I would say it was very, very common.

After trying to get in touch with Samir Annabi for months—he was a very busy man— we finally met in the small offices of the anti-corruption commission facing Belvedere Park. Given the behemoth task he was charged with, I was impressed with the size of his offices and staff, of which he had only 17. He was clearly underfunded. Still, with his meager resources he had referred over a hundred corruption cases to the courts and published an extensive report on corruption in Tunisia. In his first year in office he had received more than 550 corruption cases alone. His work was also dangerous; our bags were x-rayed and there were several security guards at the entrance of the building. Despite the very bad reputation that lawyers had in Tunisia (see below), Annabi was a highly respected man. People viewed as having integrity, as his position attested. He came from an old *beldi* family that had practiced both secular and Islamic law for generations. Like Bourguiba and other *beldi* elites he attended Sadiki College during the independence years, had law degrees from Tunisia and France, and was once a doctoral candidate at Syracuse University in the 1970s. He had very deep and pronounced folds that reached from his nose nearly down to his chin and despite his dignified and somewhat stressed demeanor, his eyes were jovial. He seemed to always smile without ever raising the corners of his mouth.

Like Morched, Samir Annabi, the highest-ranking anti-corruption official in Tunisia, was convinced that corruption was at the very heart of the creation of state environmentalism in Tunisia.

> Corruption is not only a matter of paying bribes, it's more of a system you know. Just to give an example, in order to get some permits or authorization to work in this field [environmentalism] you had to be member of the family, of the clan or pay a certain amount of money. Why? Because there was a lot of money in this field, from different sources, primarily international aid. Also because you can get some fiscal advantages and privileges because this [the environment] is supposed to be sensitive to the population. So this is why access to this field was limited to the family and friends.

While he admitted that it was hard to track public sector corruption during the transition. One reason why it was so hard was that the archives of the Ministry of the Environment had been burned down by the last administration during the revolution.[56] Annabi also pointed out that Mohammed Mehdi Mlika,[57] nephew of Ben Ali, the architect of much of Tunisia's environmental management infrastructure, and longest-serving Minister of the Environment, was well-known for his corruption. He was "Mister 15 percent," as Annabi put it, by which he meant that 15 percent of every project that was implemented under

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[56] Personal interview with Mamia El-Bana, first Minister of the Environment after the revolution February 2015.

[57] Mlika, the nephew of Ben Ali, had been described as the "grand gardener of Tunisia" a "linchpin in the development and protection of the environment" in a newspaper portrait in 2006 (Jeune Afrique 2006). Mlika had been the CEO of ONAS from 1988 to 1992 when many of Tunisia's wastewater stations were planned and built and in 1992 he took control of the ministry of the environment during the Rio summit, under what has been described as "scandalous circumstances" (La Presse 2011). He was then Minister of the Environment from 1992 till 1999, after which yet another scandal around the embezzlement of money from a national park forced him to resign from the post (La Presse 2011). Promptly a new post was created for him and he was made special adviser to the Prime Minster chairing the National Committee for Cleanliness and Aesthetics of the Environment. This was a move up for Mlika, as the Committee was basically the fund that managed all funds for environmental projects, received much of its funds from the business community and distributed them to various environmental agencies. Mlika was one of 110 politicians whose assets were confiscated by the Tunisian state in February 2011 and he spent several months in prison, though he was never convicted. While Mlika's corruption certainly tainted the image of state environmentalism in Tunisia, it still didn't prove that Tunisia's crisis of disposal was a direct outcome of corruption in the public sector.

Mlika's reign ended up in his pocket. Annabi's assessment was supported by numerous data on public sector corruption in Tunisia.

An OECD report lamented that there was no systematic tracking of corruption in Tunisia's public procurement that involved international cooperation (OECD 2013: 49, 63-64). And a report by the African Development Bank concluded that "increased top-down corruption and the rent-seeking behavior of the ruling elite …contributed to the concentration of economic power to the elite through their interference in privatization and public procurement" (AfDB 2012: 17) in Tunisia. Even the Tunisian Court of Auditors, which has been accused of self-censorship, found "irregularities" in the accounts of the Ministry of the Environment. The report, "revealed irregularities in particular relating to the execution of expenditure, park management, implementation of administrative expenditure and the granting undue advantages to the former president and some of his sons in law." (Court de Auditors 2014: 22; my translation). It goes on to incriminate the "fund of environmental cleanliness and aesthetics of cities" managed under Mohamed Mehdi Mlika for making credit payments to ONAS, ANGED, and other environmental agencies "without being subject to monitoring and control" (Court de Auditors 2014). The Court of Auditors report cited above made the fund responsible for much of the "irregularities" of transfers between the different environmental agencies. Finally, the report also shows that 68 million dinars were redirected from the Ministry of the Environment towards the presidential election campaign and other personal enrichment of the Ben Ali clan.

Despite explicitly stating that the ministry was being coopted for the personal enrichment of the Ben Ali family, the report suggests that reasons for these errors were

mismanagement of funds rather than explicit corruption.[6]    However, a prominent

Tunisian lawyer, Faouzia Bacha Amdoun, who investigates corruption in Tunisia's

energy sector, interpreted the report in a press conference, where she nearly repeated

Morched's view of environmental governance and corruption verbatim:

> People tend to accuse the revolution of all evils including the environmental
> disaster that has persisted for three years in the country [talking about the waste
> crisis]. In fact, the latter was not caused by revolution, but by corruption and a
> mafia regime whose bosses are still there and do not want to change things for fear
> of being discovered. The same Department of Environment was […] not created to
> develop policies and innovative projects of waste treatment or sanitation stations,
> but to receive resources from international agencies [to invest] in personal projects
> that benefitted the clan in power. (Direct Info 2014).

Finally, in 2016 the new head of Tunisia's anti-corruption commission, Chawki Tabib,

estimated that $1 billion had been "drained" from public spending due to corruption and

poor governance. He announced in a press conference, "The most dangerous type of

corruption is related to public money" (Middle East Monitor 2016). In an interview with

a Tunisian radio station he emphasized that corruption in Tunisia was a public safety

issue as it affects the construction industry, water and sanitation infrastructure due to sub-

standard labor and materials (Mosaique FM 2016).

So did corruption in the public works lead to failures of waste management

infrastructure and thereby contribute to the pollution of El-Hazm, Sidi Hassine and many

such places across the country? While there is no direct evidence that the output of

sewage from the Chotrana plant, the dumping of sludge, possibly industrial waste and the

failures of Borj Chakir and el-Attar were caused by corruption, the circumstantial

evidence that large-scale corruption did occur in public procurements is overwhelming.

The fact that large development banks hardly seem concerned with corruption in public

works contradicts ethnographers who have shown that the World Bank has launched a crusade against corruption (Simpson 2005). Szeftel (1998), for example, has suggested that these anti-corruption crusades are a way to distract from and in part explain the failures of structural adjustment programs. But of course in Tunisia structural adjustment had worked or so it had seemed. Thus, admitting to corruption would also be an admittance of the failure of the economic miracle, which many people, including the two employees of the development banks above, were not ready to do. Further, and on a more intimate level, admitting to corruption would also be an open admission of collusion, as these organizations, and in fact both employees above, had worked with Ben Ali before the revolution. Thus accepting corruption as an explanation for the failure of Tunisian infrastructure would make them partly responsible for pollution, and of course they partly are. While there is so far no clear evidence that proves that corruption in the Ministry of the Environment led to pollution by the ministry's agencies, there is clear evidence that corruption in the ministry led to pollution by industry.

**Bribery and Environmental Regulation**

When I asked Mamia El-Bana, Tunisia's first Minister of the Environment after the revolution, where the waste of all 10,000 industrial units in Tunisia was going, her answer was definite, "In very rare cases companies export it… otherwise directly into nature," she said throwing her hand over her shoulder in a chucking gesture. El-Bana was small, but featured both a kind and fierce demeanor. She was an idealist who had pushed for change too hard and too quickly and had become a controversial figure, not least because she wore a headscarf but was also a minster for a secular party. Mostly however,

she was pushed out of her job because of a conflict with the unions over her fight against nepotistic practices in the ministry.

I asked this question again and again during interviews with environmental administrators and it was mostly met with timid silence. But when individuals did answer, the answer was always the same as el-Bana's. Official figures suggested that of the 10,000 companies about 12,000 were extremely polluting (OTTEDD 2007: 28) and that 150,000 tons of hazardous industrial hard wastes was being dumped, or possibly stored under unsuitable conditions, every year in Tunisia (SweepNet 2014). This excluded, however, 5 million tons of phosphogypusm dumped by the public Tunisian Chemical Group, moreover the numbers hadn't changed at least since 2007, though industrial activity had grown. Yet, a study conducted in 1998 by the Japanese Development Cooperation (JICA) found that the amount of toxic hard waste even back then was 4.6 million tons per year, still excluding phosphogypusm (OTEDD 2007: 33). This huge discrepancy comes from the definition of hazardous materials, as JICA rightfully included waste from articles produced after their consumption and not only in their production. An ONAS study that surveyed 2,000 industrial companies found that most of them were dumping liquid toxic wastes into the natural habitat[58] with "more or less harmful effects. [And that] these discharges pollute large areas of the water table"

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[58] The study concludes that "The following 16 examples are best studied in terms of liquid industrial pollution: tanneries that discharge about 2500 m3 / day of chromium, sulfide and suspended solids; The treatment of alfa by SNCPA, which generates significant quantities water loaded with organochlorines, Tanneries are responsible for the evacuation of 55 000 m3 / day of water loaded with organic matter also; Liquid waste from the textile sector is estimated at around 250 000 m3 of which 65% are discarded through the national network of ONAS and the rest in streams and rivers. These liquid present serious environmental problem in view of the dyes and suspended solids they contain; The oil and gas sector rejects almost 500,000 tons of margines containing 7 to 17% of organic matter and between 1 to 3% of inorganic materials." (quoted in OTEDD 2007: 29-30)

(quoted in OTEDD 2007: 29). In a now-familiar paradox, environmental regulation of those industries was very tight on paper and bribery in the environmental oversight bodies could in part explain the discrepancy between seemingly tight environmental governance and the reality of industrial pollution.

Bribery here wasn't just the payment of money (financial corruption) for administrative or political services, but rested to a large degree on towing the party line, in this case facilitating investment in exchange for administrative or political power (administrative bribery). Nepotistic practices and sometimes outright blackmail (see below) within the one party system guaranteed that those who administered environmental legislation either looked the other way or when necessary actively implemented the interest of the regime and business community, which was primarily concerned with foreign investment. Bribery was thus situated where the public sector and private enterprise intermingled so that the potentially polluting activities of industries were actively hidden away by the ANPE or carried out with impunity. While impunity was particularly widespread in the pollution produced by public enterprises like Tunisian Chemical Group, or enterprises directly owned by the oligarchy, like Loumi's factories in Sidi Hassine, impunity for environmental crimes also seemed a near universal standard within the industrial sector in Tunisia. This of course led to huge industrial outfalls, the most publicized of which occurred in the Bay of Monastir, or what locals in the town of Kisbet Mediouni called "the triangle of death."

In the summer of 2013, more dead fish than usual washed up on the Bay of Monastir, near the town of Kisbet Mediouni. The bay was the site of a major toxic spill from nearby factories in 2006 which flooded the bay with untreated industrial wastewater

and sewage from two ONAS wastewater plants. Back then the Ben Ali regime undertook a large cover-up operation that justified the spill as a natural phenomena (FTDES 2013), as Monastir, a town at the northern end of the bay, was the hometown of former president Habib Bourguiba and a seat of elites. The two ONAS sewage plants of Frina and Lamta, built in the early 1990s, still discharged sewage and industrial wastewater from the highly toxic textile industry[59], as much of the industry disposed of its waste into the sewers, and some directly into the sea (ibid). A local study by the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (FTDES 2013) found that the bylaw which required first phase treatment of waste water by the textile industries was being disregarded and that local officials had turned a blind eye to these environmental crimes. Pollution here had been longstanding and ongoing, and its first victim was Monastir's fishing industry, which had shrunk by two thirds since the early 1990s (FTDES 2013: 12). Algae that emitted noxious odors and were mildly toxic plagued inhabitants around the inland waterways and bacterial water analysis by a local laboratory found that contact with seawater could cause skin infections in the short term, urinary tract infections, dysentery and gastroenteritis (FTDES 2013: 22). FTDES also highlighted the psychological and moral effects on the local community that, in a familiar scenario from Sidid Hassine and El-Hazm, felt abandoned by the state government. The report concluded that, "we lack reliable data today on the number of direct victims of pollution." It noted, however, "a considerable number of cancers were detected in the population of Ksibet El Mediouni" (2013:8).

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[59] In a series of reports under the name Toxic Threads, Greenpeace (2012) had just designated the textile industry as one of the most polluting industries on the planet and had particularly highlighted the practices of dying and stone-washing, which were practiced by factories across the Bay of Monastir, as extremely damaging.

Mounir Hassine, a geographer, former union organizer and local leader of FTDES told me in an interview, that "the underlying problem with pollution in Tunisia is the neoliberal development model which was imposed on us with structural adjustment policies in the 1980s. With the market liberalization we created incentives for foreign investment in Tunisia without considering its environmental impact. It was then that the textile industry, which was rejected from the Western countries because of its negative impacts on ecology, was set up here. 95% in Monastir's industries are foreign-owned," he told me. He went on, "Anyway, these industries are legally required to have a treatment station in their factories, however treatment is expensive and where treatment stations exist they are a front, but don't really function" Mounir's insight was far reaching and global. He linked the degree of pollution in Monastir to global textile agreements signed in 2005 that put immense strain on the subsidiary companies in Tunisia. But what he suggested more broadly was that the ability to pollute with impunity was part of Tunisia's informal pitch to international industries. In his view, Tunisia was Europe's pollution haven. The government actively hid pollution, because direct foreign investment "is considered to lie in the president's domain," because the offshore production zones are of great importance to the central administration and are therefore protected and rules are violated in favor of them, as Beatrice Hibou writes about financial corruption (2011: 298). The administration goes along "without batting an eyelid" when the President's interest or that of his cronies is concerned (2011:298). In the case of industrial pollution the administrative body that oversaw pollution was the National Agency for the Protection of the Environment (ANPE). Tasked with enforcing international environmental standards, it was understaffed, underpaid and blocked from effecting any

real reform by the country's notoriously corrupt courts.

The ANPE was a "watchdog without teeth," crippled by administrative bribery as one of its employees put it to me. I spent days in the organization and as compared to many other administrative bodies, the ANPE was open about the shortcomings of their operations. Its staff seemed frustrated with their own work, especially after the revolution in face of the waste crisis. Ahmed, the ANPE's head officer specializing in industrial pollution, with degrees from France in environmental engineering, was particularly forthcoming despite his long-standing position of power in the ANPE. When I made an impromptu visit to his office on the third floor of the shiny bright headquarters of the ANPE in the Menza district of Tunis, he seemed bored, yet was very welcoming. His dark eyes lit up when I explained what my research was about and became evermore animated as our interview progressed. He often smiled, which gave him an appearance younger than his middle age, sputtering out words from underneath his thick mustache and gesticulating heavily.

He started by describing the process by which companies set up in Tunisia. According to Tunisia's environmental code, which is directly taken from the Rio summit, requires an environmental assessment report from each company. Private environmental companies produced these reports, after which the responsible Ministry (agriculture, industry, etc.) and the ANPE then approved or rejected them. "We receive thousands such assessment reports each year," he explained, "but at this initial stage we don't double check their validity." The companies that provided these assessment reports were always close to the government, or as Samir Annabi told me, working in the environmental sector always required the green light of the Ben Ali clan, as there was a

lot of money to be made there. Most, if not all environmental expertise before the revolution was held in the hands of the government. The only environmental company that I interviewed during my fieldwork was owned by a former government official, used to head Tunisia largest industrial polluter, the Tunisian Chemical Group. These kinds of companies were making initial environmental assessments. Again, where such agencies wouldn't be compliant the regime had different methods. As Hibou writes (though not speaking about environmental research in particular), "a research consultancy which refuses to accept certain of these [corrupt] practices finds that the administrative obstacles will increase in number, preventing it from keeping to the deadlines issued for the competition" (2011: 297). Finally, the vast majority of environmental assessment data in Tunisia is analyzed by the Centre International des Technologies de l' Environment (CITET), a governmental research body that operates under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment and was subject to the same administrative corruption as other government bodies (see below).

Ahmed emphasized that his branch of the ANPE, though it was officially mandated with controlling industry, lacked the power to enforce against transgressions. He pulled up a presentation on his laptop and explained via the numbers in front of us. In 2004, the ANPE, which had about 30 staff members to monitor 5,000[60] industrial units all over Tunisia, handed out over 600 environmental fines in that year. Of these, 150 actually made it to the court. However, the actual fines, which the ANPE can only suggest to the courts, were often reduced by judges to the nominal amount of 50 dinars ($30), Ahmed

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[60] The numbers of how many industrial units exist in Tunisia seems to change a lot, ranging from 5,000 to 6,500 to about 10,000. This discrepancy is due to how buisnesses in the manufacturing sector are classified as industrial. The OTTED in its report on sustainable industry in Tunisia refers to 10,000 units (OTEDD 2007).

told me with great frustration. Samir Anabbi, the head of the anti-corruption commission who had litigated on behalf of the ANPE in his former law firm some fifteen years ago, confirmed to me this state of affairs. By then he had tried to bring several cases of industrial pollution in the city of Sfax, Tunisia's second largest city and industrial capital, before the courts. He said most of the cases were settled with the court in private without making it to trial. When a case did make it to court, "they would appoint an expert [to speak on behalf of industry] and the expert can here be bought and sold like any item on the market in Tunisia." Ahmed and his colleagues felt cheated by this state of affairs, but at the same time he lamented that after the revolution, there was absolutely no control over industrial dumping; that the ANPE, like the Tunisian police itself, had lost the little power it had maintained.

As Ahmed explained, judges were the linchpin in the enforcement of environmental legislation. But Tunisia's judges under Ben Ali were notoriously corrupt. In an interview with someone high up in the Syndicate of Judges, let's call her Alia[61], I was told that: "Before the revolution the role of the judiciary was like any other state body: it was in the service of government…And everyone knew that the judiciary was corrupt." Administrative corruption meant following orders from local RCD offices or the interest of the president and his clan. "When I talk about corruption in the judiciary, those in decision-making positions were corrupt, like the public prosecutors. High judiciary positions wouldn't be appointed because of competence, but the main criteria would be their allegiance to the system," Alia said. The state would see who the financially corrupt judges were, she explained, and appoint them into positions of power.

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[61] Alia (alias) asked me to not further describe her.

When necessary the regime used files they kept on them that proved corruption to further blackmail them. Another tactic was to rotate judges who weren't compliant enough with the RCD into the backwaters of the country. Thus the government didn't need the whole chamber in every court, but would have two or three judges who were promised the right positions and would get all the privileges. In the absence of independent civil society organizations in Tunisia, the state was the only check on the environmental crimes of public and private enterprises. Yet the Ben Ali regime had a vested interest not only to ignore, but also actively cover up pollution, as was the case in Kisbet Meidouini. In this way, bribery and administrative corruption undermined even the best environmental legislation in Tunisia and resulted in the large-scale dumping of industrial wastes. Grand corruption and bribery in environmental companies and the courts were immense problems. However the culture of corruption that permeated public life and governmental agencies under Ben Ali, seemed to have the most impact on environmental pollution and attempts to mitigate it.

**Organizational Cultures of Corruption**

The organizational culture of corruption produced environmental pollution by obscuring its causes and effects. Due to the intimidation and implicating nature of the authoritarian system, people working in environmental agencies were unlikely to want to deliver bad news, raise an alarm or even try to stand out positively. As Hibou writes, "Corruption as a system of alliances and relations keeps a hold on people and prevents them from speaking out, from criticizing, and opposing" (2011: 296). This inability to speak out pervaded the environmental institutions, the administration, and even society at large and

thereby obscured environmental problems and made their mitigation often impossible.

Early on during my research I had several interviews with people within the environmental community (academics and international development practitioners) that left me puzzled. What confused me, I found out later, was that I had just spoken to a person on a particular topic of their expertise and my academic interest without having learned anything—at least on the surface. In a constant deflection of sensitive matters, these interviews felt like an elaborate game of hide and seek that I hadn't learned the rules to yet. Thankfully Souheir was there, who upon reflection I realized helped me to make sense of these encounters. They were in fact close encounters with the culture of corruption.

Richard worked as a chief environmental officer for a Western government in Tunisia. He was Tunisian, dark haired in his late thirties, with a strong nose and light eyes. He hadn't easily agreed to the interview, but did eventually when he heard that we had spoken to many other international development organizations. Transparency was still an ambiguous practice in post-revolutionary Tunisia even among western organizations. Richard had had a long and successful career in CITET before joining the agency.[62] After he had informed us very technically about all the projects the agency was implementing, I asked him what he personally thought were the most pressing environmental issues in Tunisia. He pointed to citizenship and environmental education. "People just don't know how to look after the environment," he insisted. This stance of

[62] The environmental sector in Tunisia was nearly exclusively staffed with people who had worked for the government before the revolution. In fact, the head of German environmental advocacy group that had come to Tunisia after the revolution told me once that the problem with environmental activism in Tunisia was that it was impossible to find senior staff that hadn't worked in the government administration before. To him these people were "tainted" by a particular organizational cultures, though he didn't want be explicit about what this culture meant.

course echoed the Labib campaigns (see chapter III) and was an expression of his own social and spatial positioning, as part of Tunisia's urban elites. But there was more to it. After I pressed him a little, he admitted that waste management was a problem in Tunisia, that the country didn't adhere to international standards and had problems with the maintenance of infrastructure. But to him these problems were mostly due to population growth and urbanization. Again, he was right in part; urban planning was a problem in the waste management sector (see Chapter II).

But the answer that threw me off the most was to the question, "who is most affected by the waste crisis?" "Everyone, poor and rich are equally affected," Richard insisted. It had been four years since the revolution and most Tunisians had been sensitized to issues of social and spatial inequality. A mere visit to any richer or poorer area even in Tunis itself would have made it blatantly obvious that poor and rich people weren't equally affected. For someone of Richard's education and ten years of experience in a Tunisian center for environmental technology to deny that there were inequities at work here seemed a deliberate move to both Souad and I. Overall, Richard seemed uncomfortable with the interview. He didn't want us to record him, for example, which was unusual. He mumbled, speaking away from us. And Souad thought that he didn't want us to understand what he was saying as he was pouring out buzzwords and development speech without much context. Everything was generalized and he refused to take a clear position. It occurred to me only later that Richard was afraid of saying something wrong, afraid to be blamed, and perhaps afraid to lose his job. Thus here we were four years after the revolution in the offices of a Western governmental development organization and the man in front of us was scared to admit to something

that was blatantly obvious by a mere look out of the window.

The answer to this one particular question (Who suffers the most from the environmental crisis?), that I always asked in my interviews turned out to be a good indicator of these puzzling encounters.  It was an overtly political question about inequality and in these kinds of interviews it was always met with the response that "everyone suffers," sometimes "everyone suffers equally."  There was a tendency to blame the revolution for all the problems or to blame citizens themselves for polluting, just as had been the emphasis of the Labib campaign. But above all these interviews were highly technical and depoliticizing in nature. Interviewees didn't want to stick out and didn't want to incriminate the system they had been part of, and by extension, themselves.

Steve, a good friend and entrepreneur who set up several businesses in Tunisia after the revolution, told me once that it was impossible to diagnose what was going on in his businesses, as there was absolutely no transparency on the side of his employees. He said everything is pervaded by a culture of: "*ce ne pas ma faute*" (it's not my fault).   This attitude was most aptly expressed in the common Tunisian idiom: "*el-kelimeh le, ma bjiblek ble*" (the word no, doesn't bring you any trouble).  And *le* (no), was possibly the most commonly encountered word in the Tunisian language, next only to the word God (*Allah*).  It was mostly uttered three times, "*le, le, le,*" meaning a myriad of things, but mostly, this is not possible or you can't do this. It was a form of conformism and an enforcement of it. Authoritarian political cultures and everyday realities in which people didn't have a say over their own futures and current realities shaped this attitude. "No" meant nothing changed, nothing was being done, no one could be blamed for change

positive or negative, and thereby no one could potentially be punished. "*Le, le, le*" and "*ce ne pas ma faute*" perpetuating the dictatorial status quo long after the dictator was gone. It was disheartening. However, there was more going on in my interviews. It was fear not only of helplessness, not only of delivering bad news, and not only a fear of persecution. It was a fear of being implicated in the system, a fear of being at fault, and a hunch that everyone was at fault and therefore no one could be at fault and nothing could have happened. Again, Beatrice Hibou (2011) argues that corruption in Tunisia was one of the central pillars of social control. According to her research carried out amongst entrepreneurs before the revolution, corruption, rather than being just the money grabbing of the elites, was a means of implicating the whole of Tunisian society into a network of relationships. She writes:

> In the day-to-day reality of social practices, corruption and the practice of illegality produce a subtle effect of normalization in the shape of obligatory participation in a system of exchange, or of privileges, of special favours - and thus, gradually, lead to its legitimization. The central power reinforces its supervisory capacity by involving the whole population in it. The latter thereby becomes the best defender of a set of relations that at once includes it and protects it. In this, certainly, corruption is crucial and plays a full part in modes of government (2011: 300).

Concurring with Samir Annabi, here she notes corruption was intrinsic to social relations in Tunisia. Here again, the intimacy of Ben Ali's tyranny became obvious.

As Mamia el-Bana insisted, "Before the revolution, 95% of those who worked in the ministry of the environment had access to their positions based on their connections not on their qualifications." And therein lies the intimacy of authoritarian systems in general and of corruption and specifically nepotism in particular: everyone within the system was at fault, or at least implicated, and therefore nobody could be at fault. Here the state as a fantasy, or more accurately as a network of fantasies, was being created and

constantly recreated by countless individuals within and outside of the administration. The state was being built discursively, through the creation and manipulation of data, through silence, but also through material practices, the creation and circulation of reports, the cleaning of affluent areas and so on. This was the underlying current that kept on driving the authoritarian spectacle (*masrahyieh*) even years after the revolution. This was the organizational culture of corruption and it indirectly produced environmental pollution and blocked depollution.

Thomas D. Beamish's book *Silent Spill* (2002) chronicles how organizational cultures within an oil company left one of the largest oil spills in US history unnoticed for 38 years. He describes how the cognitive templates or work-culture of oil workers predisposed them to have blind spots in their responsibilities towards the spill, as "organizational frameworks provide a context that confers meaning, turning data into usable information on the basis of which appropriate choices can be made" (2002: 71). The organizational culture of corruption in Tunisia then led to a collective ignorance of all kinds of environmental and non-environmental problems. It perpetuated a complex bias in data on the bases of which environmental policy was being formed or solutions to environmental problems was being suggested.

"For me the biggest challenge is clarity," Steffano Corrado answered when I asked him what the greatest challenge to the environmental work of the EU in Tunisia was.

> The system promotes obscurity, and deflection from problems, which is hard because you never know exactly what circumstance you're working in…This is something that is also linked to the governance aspect. Because governance doesn't only mean that you're ready to exchange knowledge. It also means you must be ready to disclose information and not only disclose success information,

> like we have a new project, we have a new treatment plant or whatever, but also to disclose information related to environmental risks. I think that the old habits still prevail in a way, that Tunisia still has some path to go. There is a sort of, how to say, an unwillingness to acknowledge that we have an environmental problem. Culturally they prefer to speak of environmental solutions.[63]

His insight was deep, anthropological and got at the heart of the problem with the culture of corruption and *masrahiyeh* in Tunisia.   He offered a concrete example of the physical impact of this culture, as he turned to Tunisia's most advanced industrial wastewater station, STEP, in Rades, managed by ONAS.  STEP was situated just south of the capital in one the most industrialized areas of Tunisia and on the banks of its second largest river, the Meliane. Corrado explained that the idea behind the wastewater station was that industry as pillars of the Tunisian economy could work freely, and STEP could take care of the depollution of liquids. The station was completed in 2008, but when Corrado visited in 2012 it lay idle, because of "a minor problem with the biological treatment," as it was put to him, that had shut it down for months. Eventually the EU and the German Development Bank (KfW) produced a study of nine industrial sites to see if these were complying with environmental regulations in relationship to STEP. But what came to light in this study was that STEP had not been working for the past years, that in reality it had hardly ever worked, as Corrado told me. Morched, who had visited the site several times, told me that the waste inflows, the toxic wastewater delivered by industry, were never managed correctly. Some industries delivered by truck, sometimes through an ONAS pipelines and all of it was mixed together. This system couldn't have worked as industries didn't have the capacity to deliver the kind of primary treatment and separation of chemicals needed for STEP to work in the first place. Corrado lamented,

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[63] Personal Interview with Stefano Corrado December 2014.

It doesn't work and cannot work if you don't track what chemicals you are actually treating…It's crazy, just crazy. STEP was built to say we have something that corresponds to international standards, something very modern, but it never worked. And that's what's crazy. I am there in the ONAS plant and I am there to provide the technical expertise to get it working again and I am never told what the actual issue is…In my approach I use problem trees and brainstorming to get to the solutions of environmental problems. I analyze and then we find the money from donors. But if people don't want to admit that there is a problem in the first place, how can we work at all?

It seemed that one of Tunisia's few and certainly its most advanced industrial wastewater station had been idle for years, had probably never worked and was ill-conceived. The effect of course was that the industrial wastewater of the whole of Ben Arous, and Rades, two of Tunisia's largest industrial centers went straight into the country's second largest river, and eventually the sea. When I interviewed fishermen fished where the river entered the sea, they said there was no life left in the river for many years, but that they fished in its mouth as the organic pollution the river brings with it attracts a certain small kind of fish. Corruption, quite possibly in the conception of the project, but at least in the form of constant deflection of any problems in the wastewater station led to industrial waste flowing freely. Even when an environmental expert, ready to provide the funds and expertise to get the wastewater station running again was present, the same kind of deflection kept the waste flowing rather than the plant working

**Conclusion**

Various forms of corruption contributed to large-scale environmental pollution in Tunisia. However, this connection is never linear, never the sole reason why environmental infrastructure fails to deliver services, why public and private institutions pollute with impunity, or why there is no transparency. Waste management is an

extremely complex process that requires the cooperation of state and non-state actors, materials, the environment and citizens. It requires rational planning, efficient relationships between central government and municipalities, feedback mechanisms, constant upkeep and huge financial resources. This is to say that even in the best of circumstances, waste management is a huge challenge for governance.

At the same time, corruption has contributed to the environmental suffering of the communities of Sidi Hassine, El-Hazm, Kisbet Midouni and others across Tunisia. Coupled with exploitative labor practices, it at least seems to have contributed to sub-standard and decrepit waste management infrastructure and therefore the non-delivery of services, as is the case of ONAS in Sidi Hassine, and the dumping or inappropriate disposal of various forms of wastes into the canal el-khaleej, the shores of sabkhe Ariana, Borj Chakir and the Bay of Monastir. Further, it is certain that corruption has undermined environmental assessments of companies and the implementation of existing anti-pollution legislature. Specifically, the courts have blocked the ANPE's efforts to fine companies for their polluting activities in Tunisia, thereby rendering the enforcement agents of environmental legislation worthless. Finally, the culture of corruption and nepotism in the governmental agencies and beyond have led to deflection and cover-ups of undesirable information, so that waste across Tunisia flowed freely despite the existence of high-end waste management infrastructure. Thus, while environmental governance and particularly waste governance was supposed to clean, manage and minimize waste streams, the corruption that pervaded and seems to pervade environmental governance mechanisms and the country as a whole ensures that waste flows, seeps, spills and sits in public places where they noxiously affect people and the

environment. Corruption, in other words, makes wastes perceivable in public spaces, although in some spaces more than others, thereby exposing public secrets and bursting environmental facades while indexing corruption. It is this power of waste to burst open authoritarian fictions and facades through which the garbage crisis that haunted Tunisia immediately after the revolution had to be understood.

CHAPTER V

"THE DICTATORSHIP FALLS, AND SHIT APPEARS": OF REVOLUTIONS
AND REVELATIONS

The revolution of 2011 allowed Tunisians quite suddenly to make their grievances heard publicly, and among the first groups to exercise this right with a general strike were municipal garbage workers. Now, all workers demanded civil service contracts, better pay and working conditions, which were intolerable under the former regime. Within days, the streets of all major cities were flooded with loosely sealed red, black and blue garbage bags.



**Figure 5.1. Picture of the Disposed Dictator in the Garbage, Tunis 2011**

Like a leaky display of household consumption, broken eggshells, empty plastic bottles, tuna and beer cans, cigarette buds, fish carcasses, stale baguettes, coffee grounds and a farrago of fruits and vegetables spilled into the public arena, where they decomposed in the encroaching heat of the North African winter. Here and there images of the former dictator were visible among the refuse (see figure 5.1.), as mandatory signs of party affiliation were evicted from shops and public buildings. Away from city centers and TV sets, the revolution was not revealed by iconic flag-waving, banner-carrying crowds, but by waste in the streets.

Garbage also figured centrally in the revolutionary politics of Egypt (Furniss 2012; Wingear 2012) and a revolt against the state in Lebanon (Abu-Rish 2015). What was coined the "jasmine revolution" by outsiders started to reek in Tunisia. A sweet rotten odor took hold of the country, as illegal dumps sprang up wherever they couldn't be prevented, and waste distribution stations, often located centrally in residential areas, turned into the final resting places for consumed goods and as waste management infrastructure was being destroyed[64] and blocked by public protest. As discussed in the introduction, in Tunisia, the waste crisis intensified during the Transition that followed the revolution (2011-2014), through at least four consecutive garbage strikes, the closure of landfills and waste-management stations by civil force, large scale dumping by Tunisia's waste management authorities, industries and citizens in a general environment of lawlessness perpetuated by the retreat of the state. To add to that, in an attempt to avoid red tape and fees for permits, an illegal building frenzy erupted across the country that added second stories and extensions to houses, covering Tunisia in illegally

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[64] Mounir Majdoub, Secretary for the Environment (2013-2015) told Inkifadyah that more than 60 percent of all of Tunisia's waste managment infrastructure had been destroyed after the revolution (Plaise 2014).

discarded building materials. Thus while before the revolution waste was kept out of the most affluent areas, after the revolution waste was everywhere. Not only piling up in streets or running in the waterways, but in song lyrics and in everyday language where it revealed the zeitgeist of a new era that was partly defined by waste.



**Figure 5.1. "The situation couldn't get any worse", "if it does, if it does, don't worry about it". Ben Khamsa 2011**

The phrase *balad al-zibleh* (country of rubbish) was employed in discussions about corruption, traffic and the seemingly slow pace of political transition. On Facebook, first the garbage selfie and then the garbage-bucket challenge, mirroring the global meme of the ice-bucket challenge, expressed citizens' outcries. Eventually this

assessment of the post-revolutionary era was iconified in Hamzaoui Med Amine and Kafon's post-revolutionary hymn Houmani (a person living in a deprived urban periphery). The most famous song lyric, booming from car radios and shops during the Transition, hummed along by Tunisian's of all backgrounds was: *"Ga'din n'ichou ki zible fi poubela; ti fagri negri mangoum bikri ma na'aref moungella…"* (Here we are living like rubbish in the rubbish bin; I am so poor I don't rise early or care about time...).

In an interview with a Tunisian newspaper, Med Amine, who designates himself as a *houmani*, originating from the popular and to a large degree "dirty" Tunis neighborhood of Ariana, describes his neologism *houmani* as "this is the guy who has no means of escape, who is stuck in the neighborhood" (Auffrey 2013; my translation) like rubbish in the rubbish bin. By referencing the material and symbolic geographies of dirt, the most important anthem of post-revolutionary Tunisia was about the socio-spatial stagnation of Tunisia's urban poor as expressed in the metaphorical association between the *houmani* with rubbish and the *houma* (urban periphery), with the rubbish bin. As Parvan, wrote about the song,

> Tunisian spaces of exclusion, the heritage of the past colonial zoning and dispossession practices, are concentrated around the rural South and the over-crowded *houmas* of Tunis (such as Ettadhamen, Douar Hicher, Ariana), where time oscillates between a suffocating immobility and the anxious pursuit of everyday livelihood (2017).

The song was not purely a moral lament, it was also about solidarity amongst people of the *houma*. What it brought to the fore however was hopeless self-assessment of those living in these neighborhoods that resonated with the whole of Tunisia, expressed through an everyday material reality of the revolutionary period, that of waste.

Revolutions are moments of intense symbolic struggle, in which a former political

social and economic system, represented by its own symbols, gives way to new socio-political system with its own symbolic registers (Thomassen 2012: 698). While some of these symbolic struggles are highly scripted, like the reclamation of the jasmine flower from the RCD party and its uses as a symbol of the revolution in Tunisia (Shilton 2013: 136), many arise within what Webb Keane calls a "representational economy"[65] (quoted in Thomassen 2012: 698), in the way different systems of signification interact at particular historical moments. Waste rose to the fore in this representational economy for various reasons. As Furniss writes about the garbage crisis that enveloped Cairo after the Egyptian revolution, "The struggle with garbage is not only a physical struggle to deal with the unwanted stuff people throw away. It is also a struggle over meanings."(2012: I). In Tunis, waste in public space became a "disturbance" (Hawkins 2003), or a parallax object that disturbs the "smooth running of things" and "disrupts socio-spatial norms" (Moore 2012: 781). In part, this was due to its association with disease, its physical quality to offend (Hawkins and Muecke 2003), in part because of its association with the countryside, Barbary and backwardness in Tunisia.

Thus the reading of post-revolutionary waste, the interpretations of that symbol, like an inverse to the fiction of state environmentalism, was predicated on social, spatial and economic positioning. It was contingent on a personal experience of Tunisia before the revolution. For some people the presence of waste turned the revolution and its aftermath into failure, a betrayal of revolutionary promises of progress and modernity. For others it just revealed the societal and environmental ills that had plagued Tunisia all along, realities that were only coming to the fore with the demise of the dictatorship and its

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[65] Keane here specifically points to the importance of "material goods" and they way they are re-interpreted in this struggle for new signification.

authoritarian fictions. Here, like in the *houmani* song, waste didn't index a new post-revolutionary reality, it just revealed an uncomfortable truth about society that had been kept a public secret so far. Here waste didn't just disturb, it defaced dictatorial fictions and the public secrets that buttressed them.

According to Gay Hawkins waste is a "disturbance", because on the one hand it has the uncanny power to return, to never quite disappear despite the modern promise of its erasure from public space. On the other hand, it disturbs, because of its relationship to truth and secrecy (2003: 40-41). She notes, that like drains and sanitation, "All those other spaces for things we don't want to face—prisons, madhouses, hospitals, dumps, drains—remind us of the place of secrecy in public knowledge, of the force of the hidden and its role in political authority and social order" (2003: 41). Commenting on Michael Taussig's notion of "defacements" she further writes, "the smell of shit or the sight of a brown slick oozing out behind the breakers is disturbing not because of the shock of surprise discovery, but because of the collapse of our active desire not to know. This is what Taussig calls the public secret. Defacement then for Taussig gains its force from the revelation or the possible revelation of something that is secretly familiar (1999: 49). In other words, it is not the discovery of a newfound truth, but a lapse in the willingness not to know, a taboo that also entices with its secret appeal, that gives acts of defacement their power. Defacement thereby does not "reveal" uncomfortable public secret, but it is uncomfortable exactly because society was implicated in this secrecy, it reveals complicity. The revolution in general and waste as a revelatory symbol of it reminded society of a betrayal that underlay its former social contract, that since the very inception of an independent Tunisia had been denied. The revolution was a return of all that was

present, yet absent and made this present absence hyper-visible.[66]

**Wasted Revolutions?**

In a post-revolutionary setting all small-talk gravitates towards the temporal rupture that is a revolution, it invites endless comparisons of before and after, comparisons that in Tunisia were played out in a particular triadic script around the economy, security and cleanliness—and each was perceived to have deteriorated after the Uprising. The conversation below exemplifies this trifold concern, which I was confronted with continuously. Haythem had been a taxi driver in the city of Tunis for over twenty years, though he had a university degree in electric engineering. He was in his late thirties, and had lived nearly all his life in a working-class neighborhood in Ariana with his wife and three children, though not in an uncontrolled part of it. "How much do you think this car is worth? I only bought it three months ago," he asked me out of the blue as we were driving along the highway to the airport. He had glinting eyes that became animated when he talked about the revolution. "I don't know, ten thousand maybe. I don't know much about cars," I admitted. "Seventeen thousand. Seventeeeen thousand (he annunciated). Before the revolution it would've been twelve, maybe fourteen. The price of petrol has risen also and the insurance has gone crazy….We Tunisians always lived of credit but after the revolution you just can't survive without credit." We drove on as he explained the intricacies of the price-rises to me. "Libyans (he pointed at a car in front of us that had Libyan license plates), Libyans everywhere, we can't even control our own

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[66] Mohammed Bouzizi's self immolation itself can be interpreted as an act that made invisible communities, visible. As self-immolation "amplify the individual voice" as Biggs writes (2005: 221). But more so self-immolation gives voice and significance to life, restores unity between the self and the world; and makes the invisibility of social suffering visible through the flame that scorches the body.

borders anymore; smugglers and terrorists are coming in from Libya and from Algeria"…."and look at this rubbish everywhere  (pointing at the side of the highway), none of this was there before the revolution. It was clean and there was order."

Haythem was by no means pro- Ben Ali, "I am with the revolution" he told me. "But it was followed by gloom (*zulum*)" referring to the period of political Transition that was still ongoing, although the looming elections were about to at least formally bring an end to it. Like many he expressed his frustrations and fears about the revolution in the economy/ security/ cleanliness triad and juxtaposed the realities of the Transition with a nostalgia for an era that was more predictable, a cleaner more secure era, an era of "order" as he described it. In this view the revolution had somehow been a failure and didn't deliver.

Not long after my conversation with Haythem, in December 2014, during the elections for Tunisia's National Assembly, the country's first free elections, this sentiment of decline and the triadic script in which it was delivered was picked up by Tunisia's largest and most successful advertising agency, Karaoui & Karaoui. The agency transformed the script into a partisan poster campaign for Nidaa Tunis, an amalgamate of pre-revolutionary politicians, some of whom were perceived to have been to close to the former regime. Six different posters and large billboards appeared over night on Tunis' most crowded streets, intersections and highways. Each poster was a play on the word "temporary" as referring to the temporary governments that had led the country during the transition and each depicted the years of their rule from 2011 to 2014 . The temporary government was associated with the Islamist Nahda party, who had taken control immediately after the revolution, but was boycotting the elections now.  Thus at

this moment the temporary government was associated with Nidaa's main rival Moncef Marzouki, the current president and frontrunner in the elections.  Two of the six posters referred to the "temporary" state of the economy. One read "temporary poverty" and depicted an old women begging in the streets of the medina, cloaked in the *sefsari*, a traditional scarf associated with elderly women. The next read "temporary vegetables" and showed a vegetable stall in a Tunisian market, with a price sign that showed the inflated prices of goods. The next three posters dealt with themes around national and personal security. One read, "temporary terrorism" and showed coffins being carried through the streets—an iconic image that indexed the most divisive and perilous time during the transition, the assassination of two left-wing politicians Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013, which resulted in large clashes with police and eventually the demise of the Nahda transitional government.   The poster next read, "temporary violence" and depicted a portrait of a man's face with a concussion over his swollen black eye that hinted at the common outbreak of interpersonal violence following the first years after the revolution. And the third read "temporary hatred" and showed a man beaten and bloody, lying on a hospital bed. The final poster in the series read "temporary waste" and addressed the garbage crisis. It showed heaps of rubbish in the streets of the capital, somewhere close to the Passage area. The primary focal point of the poster was a female passerby, who walked along a large heap of rubbish, attempting to cover her mouth and nose with heir sweater, her face in a grimace of disgust.

**Figure 5.3. "Temporary Waste", Tunis, December 2015**

The posters had to be taken down as quickly as they appeared, as they didn't comply with the new electoral laws, but they were discussed for days afterwards in the streets, on the radio and the newspapers as they clearly struck a cord with popular sentiment. In the interpretation of the waste crisis that was put forward by Haythem, many urban, middle class Tunisian's I encountered, and the poster campaign, garbage became an unexpected symbol of the revolution, but a negative symbol as expressed in the phrase *balad el-zible* (country of rubbish). Garbage signified regression, backwardness, a lack of civilization as we had discussed in the correlation between dirt, moral decay and the countryside since colonial times (Chapters I & II). The presence of

garbage in the streets thereby framed the revolution, which was meant to be progressive, a giant leap forward, as anachronistic in the eyes of many Tunisians. As Malachowski wrote, garbage in the streets after the Tunisian revolution produced an "inversion of temporal progress, which may make post-revolution seem less modern than pre-revolution." (2015: 3). As suggested by the resonance of Med Amine's *Houmani* with the larger society, now it wasn't just the "dirty people" living in "dirty neighborhoods" that felt like rubbish, it was the whole of Tunisian society that felt morally, economically and environmentally regressed.

This narrative of decline seemed to hold to a degree, mostly because the state was weak during the transition, dumping had increased across the board, and little policy had been passed.  But the triadic script and the narrative of decline or regress was also build on particular vision of Tunisia before the revolution. It presented the country under Ben Ali as economically strong, safe and environmentally advanced. In other words, the interpretation that garbage signaled that the revolution had regressed the country was in part evidence for the believe in Ben Ali's modernism, a subtle agreement with his fiction of state environmentalism, and an elitist interpretation that was incommensurable with the experience of those who had lived in urban peripheries and whose experience had long been marred by waste and pollution. *Houmani*, didn't seek to represent a post-revolutionary reality of these urban peripheries, it presented an already existent reality that could only be expressed once the dictatorship had fallen. Thus as we have seen throughout this dissertation, those who were most intimately confronted and concerned with waste had a different interpretation about the *balad el-zible,* one that didn't see it as an outcome of a post-revolutionary decline, but of the authoritarian neoliberalism of Ben

Ali.

**Wasted Revelations**

As discussed earlier, many of the environmental activists, people living in peri-urban uncontrolled areas of Tunis, and even those who worked within the environmental administration blamed Ben Ali's systems and not the revolution for the environmental state of the country. As Morched had told me on our very first encounter in the cafe in Menza:

> In the times of Ben Ali they used to occasionally do environmental impact studies to make us feel like we're Sweden, but what we are finding out after the revolution through following the garbage is that we have [waste] problems like Chad and Somalia. The garbage crisis and stench after the revolution just revealed the rotten and corrupt system underneath it all[67].

For Morched and SOSBia, garbage didn't index the failures of the revolution, but something corrupt and rotten about the former regime and society at large that had suddenly come to the fore. Garbage in the streets revealed a system, a society, a Tunisia that was far less advanced, far less developed than the Tunisia that had been projected by the Ben Ali regime through its facades, as expressed in his comparison of Sweden, Somalia and Chad. To him and to those who had been affected by the crisis of disposal all along, garbage during the revolution resulted in a disillusionment with Ben Ali's fictions, in which the whole of society got to experience what urban peripheries and the country's interior had experienced all along. To SOSBia, the revolution was not an idealistic societal leap, but a revelation of dictatorial realities and an opportunity to change these for the better.

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[67] Personal interview with Morched Garbouj, October 2014.

Why waste in particular had the power to reveal the revolution and the public secrets of the dictatorship was explained to me by one of the few other scholars who had written about waste in the context of the revolution.  Prof. Ridaa Boukraa was part of an old, yet nearly forgotten tradition of Tunisian rural sociology that traced the transformation of the country in the early post-colonial period from rural to industrial lifestyles. This tradition was firmly rooted in a teleological understanding of Tunisian society, in which sociology was to deliver the tools to turn the *bedaoui* into the *beldi*, the traditional into the modern (Bouhdiba 1973).  I organized a meeting with Prof. Boukraa through a common friend.  He picked Souheir and I up in his car in the middle-class neighborhood of Menza five, a district of northern Tunis. Prof. Boukraa's most defining feature was a near manic enthusiasm for whatever he spoke of, interrupted by long silences and reconsiderations of the phrases he had just sputtered in a mix of English, French and Arabic. He liked to joke and laugh, and as junior scholar I admired the fervor that gripped this nearly ninety-year-old man when he spoke about the revolution. He finally stopped the car in a place that he called a place of transgression, where lovers meet. Having read an article on garbage of his, I asked him directly what he thought the role of waste was in the revolution and he replied:

> I tell you, I give you the definition of revolution. Revolution, what is revolution?... It's a phenomenon where all invisible things become visible. Bad things that are invisible, unconscious things are invisible become visible. Garbage was invisible before the revolution. With the revolution the garbage became visible (chuckles) and the theme of garbage became so dominant that it even appeared in the song. The famous song of Kafon, Houmani.  (I sing the iconic phrases of the song back to him "*na'aishu mitl al zible fi poubella…*").  So [as in the song] we are *poubella* (garbage). And *danque, alors vous savez,* why did it become visible? The actors became visible, the workers refused to work and the institutions [became visible], through the break down of the institution…and so garbage and *les ordures* (the smells), the garbage *hoduma* is very, very…how to

say becomes a potent sign [symbol]. A strong sign revealing the revolution. So…So…everywhere, everywhere you have political crisis in every system began like garbage in the streets in Italy, Napoli in Brazil. So what's the name, *como se appelle* the Incredible Lightness of Being, the theory of Kitsch. The dictator, the dictatorship hides the excrement, *la merde, La pueple lasce la dictateur tombe la merde appear…* [the dictatorship hides the excrement, the shit, from the people, when the dictatorship falls, the shit appears. [68]

Like Morched, Prof. Boukraa saw waste in the revolution as a potent symbol that revealed the hidden realities of the dictatorship as well as the revolution itself. It revealed the dictatorships waste, that which was excess to the dictatorial realities. Boukraa hinted also at why waste in particular had the power to burst dictatorial myths by referring to Milan Kundera's theory of kitsch and shit in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984).

To Kundera, or his fictional character Tomáš, kitsch, the aesthetic domain of all political movements, is the overly mawkish, near archetypal moment, like the kissing of the child by a politician, through which politics tries to create a political community. But kitsch is also defined in the negative as "the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (248). Kitsch is thus also the aesthetic ideal "in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist" (248). "Totalitarian kitsch" (252), kitsch that can't be escaped because of the regime's control of knowledge production, then is necessary to build dictatorial fictions upon which the affective power of political regimes rests, according to Kundera. The aesthetic of kitsch in the fiction of state environmentalism, and consequently the denial of shit, could thus be described as

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[68] The logic that material goods only reveal themselves, become conspicuous, when they break down is akin to Martin Heidegger's parable of the broken hammer (1996 [1927] :65-70). Here the hammer, as long as it works is ready-to-hand (*griffbereit/ zuhanden*), is used without much critical thought. Once the hammer breaks, however, it turns into an object that is present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) and when required for a particular task the hammer becomes conspicuous its mere presence as broken, becomes obtrusive (a missing piece) or obstinate (a hindrance).

one affective tool to create communitas, the glue between the nation and the state. Of course this glue was primarily applied to elites, who were also most affected by the uncanny reappearance of shit in everyday life.



**Figure 5.4. The Quality of "Shit" Life, Tunis 2012**

There was a sign (Figure 5.4.) that struck and amused me during my very first visit to Tunisia in the summer of 2012, which perfectly embodied this reappearance. The sign, in the emblematic purple of Ben Ali's November 7th movement, proclaimed that this was the "Boulevard of the Quality of Life," Quality of Life having been a directorate of the Ministry of the Environment that was responsible for the evaluation of the state of the Tunisian environment to suggest policy recommendations and improve the quality of life in Tunisia. The sign designated this busy road, which connected La Goulette the capital's

harbor with central Tunis, as the Boulevard of the Quality of Life. It did so despite the dust, despite the rubbish, despite the unbearable heat of summer, despite the potholes, despite the 140-year-old tram that ran alongside it, despite the view of Tunisia's largest power station, despite the stench of sewage in the air, despite the fact that Tunis had just been designated one of the least livable cities in the world (Direct Info 2012).[69] The sign thereby suggested that quality of life in itself in Tunisia was not something that had to be experienced, not some agreed upon standard of health, comfort and happiness as produced by one's surroundings or even a metric, but that in Ben Ali's Tunisia quality of life could be a mere imposition on reality. This official decree imprinted on a metal board was supposed to override experience or at least define interpretation of it. It thereby hinted at the political fictions of the regime, the authoritarian facades in which not just this road but also the whole of Tunisia was defined by health, comfort and happiness of all citizens. But this wishful thinking was marred by the reality of actual and figurative shit that could finally be expressed after the revolution. Someone had defaced this fiction by painting the word *merde* (shit), which transformed the dictatorial reality of the "Boulevard of the Quality of Life", into the post revolutionary reality of "Boulevard of the Shit Quality of Life". Shit had shattered the authoritarian fiction with the revolution on this sign and across Tunisia. Defacement had destroyed the *masrahiyeh*.

That defacement was often directed against the fiction of state environmentalism was clearest in the widespread destruction of the Labib figure and the official termination

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[69] In fact the Economist Development Unit designated Tunis 104 out of 140 in 2012, making it the best city in North Africa. However, the newspaper article proclaimed it to be one of the least livable cities in the world (Direct Info 2012). To be fair, I was spending the holidays from my field research in Melbourne, which was the most livable city in the world at the time by the same measure and I can't say that my experience matched that assessment either.

of the mascots existence.



**Figure 5.4. Destroyed Labib Figures, Zaighouan 2014**

Labib had always been seen as an ironic figure, particularly in areas where he was surrounded by waste. After the revolution, a video circulated on YouTube and social media that showed a young Tunisian woman, with frizzy, red hair walking through the streets of Tunis surrounded by garbage. The camera focused on a large Labib figure behind her, then zoomed out, and showed her throwing her garbage into the streets at the feet of the figure. As Chedly BenKhamsa had said, Labib represented the state, the authoritarian state at that, and in the context of the garbage crisis his existence made the spectacle of the Labib campaign even more visible and unbearable. It emphasized the mockery, the violence of the campaign.

Seen through the lens of defacement, the work of environmental activists like SOS Bia was not purely about environmental justice. It was labor akin to that of truth-finding commissions in which dictatorial fictions and the public secrets that sustained them were slowly being excavated. What had become clear through the persistence of the triadic script was that fictions as a frame of reference for the world had survived the dictatorship. Large parts of society were still invested in maintaining them. Revolutions thus don't reveal the magnitude of societal injustices instantaneously; they are not like the lifting of a veil on a formerly concealed object. Instead in their aftermath, they require labor like the meticulous unearthing of fossils in which a new truth emerges slowly and progressively. As with the fiction of the economic miracle, where the reassessment of poverty statistics revealed a country that was far less prosperous, far less equal, and far less homogenous than what had been projected by the regime, so the myth of state environmentalism required a kind of truth-finding. Here too, "shit" was being revealed, but not in its visceral overbearing presence, but through measurable data and its promotion in pubic space.

**Environmental Activism and the Work of Revelation**

Field missions into areas that middle class Tunisian's ordinarily didn't venture into were one of the methods that set SOS Bia apart from other environmental organizations in the country. On an overcast, early December morning, I waited for Morched to pick me up in front of the kasbah. I joined him and Lutfi on a mission to collect data around the landfill of Borj Chakir and the Canal el-Khaleej. Lutfi was a young man in his early thirties, with a nerdy disposition and glasses that defied the ridge

of his nose. He was full of long stares and uncomfortable smiles—he warmed up to me though and in the following months would call me randomly to ask how my family was and talk about his. Like so many young Tunisians he was desperate to leave the country.

On our way to meet Lutfi, Morched had explained that he had hired Lutfi's company to take the measurements, as in the past the government, especially ONAS, had tried to contradict his data by branding him as biased. I also wondered about that. Throughout my engagement with SOS Bia I was aware of what the organization in general and Morched in particular had to gain, real financial gain, from his activism. From my personal experience civil society afforded many people, particularly men, an arena to play out Big-Man politics and I could see Morched's popularity and import rise throughout my field research. In retrospect, this made me sometimes too suspicious. However, by hiring Lutfi and his company Morched's data would seem to be independent. Ironic I thought, knowing what I knew of "independent" environmental companies, but I kept quiet a little longer. We drove in Lutfi's company car, a large white mini bus that proclaimed "Mobile Laboratory for Air Analysis" in both Arabic and French; no company name, no telephone number, no contact details. Lutfi's company conducted exactly environmental risk assessments. It was a French/ Tunisian partnership as he told me trying to assuage my possibly obvious skepticism about environmental companies in Tunisia. I wondered if it was possible to buy an assessment from his company, and the answer I gave myself was that it was just a matter of price.

When I asked where the measurements would be analyzed, Morched explained that he would bring his measurements to the governmental laboratory CITET. Once again I wondered if the numbers from this center were reliable. But Morched assured me that

he trusted them, that "they were professional" as he put it.[70] Morched and Lutfi, descended into a long talk about the dangers of Mosaique FM, the country's most popular radio station, and according to Morched a mouthpiece of Nidaa Tunis. "I listen to Mosaique and then do and think exactly the opposite of what they are saying," he explained to Lutfi.

On our way to Jbel Borj Chakir, our first stop on the journey, we drove again through increasingly polluted areas on the shores of Sabkhe Essoujoumi.  As we arrived in Attar, the landfill didn't smell too strong that day, it was overcast and not that hot. We started at Zain's coffee house, again who invited us for the obligatory espressos.  It was the time of the elections, and there was campaign material for Selim Riahi on a table, his face burned with a cigarette. I asked Morched and he told me that there was a stand-off in al-Attar as most of its inhabitants were with Nidaa and that Zain was being ostracized because he campaigned for a different presidential candidate. Selim Riahi had promised Zain that his party would solve the problem of Jbel Bourj Chakir. Waste had entered the elections, I thought, at least locally.

Lutfi got a five-liter container from the back of his minibus that looked much like an ordinary milk bottle to me. He slid on rubber gloves, while he explained that he needed a quantity of 1.5 liters at least for each measurement. We walked back into the coffee house and he approached a tap, at the end of the building next to the coffee machine. While people in Attar generally didn't drink the tap water, they did use it for brewing coffee, the occasional tea, to brush their teeth, bathe their children in, and wash

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[70] I visited CITET on another occasion and was shown the high-tech equipment and met several graduate students who were doing research that could have been incriminating to the government, which reassured me.

their clothes. Lutfi disinfected the tap with the flame of a lighter, washed the container out and took a large water sample. He marked the container "Jbel Borj Chakir #1" and returned it to the back of his car.



**Figure 5.5. Measurements at a well in Sidi Hassine, near Borj Chakir, 2014**

We drove to the first well, down the road closest to the landfill, but nobody was there apart from a barking dog. Morched and Lutfi inspected the well, a round brick structure about 1.4 meters in diameter. Lutfi looked into the well and said it would be too polluted with oil from the pump to take a measurement. He explained that the water had to have moved in the past 48 hours to get an accurate measurement— I was glad and assured that he took his task that seriously. We covered three other wells, each within a

different distance to the landfill's outer walls. Morched marked them on Google Maps.

In one place a group of people was working a small field in front of a little farm. All the plots here were small, which made me wonder how people survived. They were all women and children, 11 of them, mostly older women in hijdabs and light blue frocks with logos on them that I couldn't make out. The smell of spring onions was in the air and pieces of the plant were spread out on the ground. The group was in a jolly mood, laughing working together, no men in sight. One of the children insisted while talking to Morched that the water couldn't be polluted, that the sheep, he pointed at, had given birth to three lambs and that she had been drinking the water all along.

A young man with curly hair and large sad eyes appeared and started talking to Morched. He didn't hold eye contact and was clearly concerned about the measurements. Morched had checked with the owner of each well, weeks beforehand, but he might have spoken to someone different in what was clearly a large extended family. As I heard from other farmers before, when we were scouting out wells some weeks earlier, he denied that the water could be polluted. But simultaneously asked, "What am I supposed to do if it is polluted? Where will I get my water from?" Morched told the man that he was living in a democracy now. That democracy was exactly about his right to know and that it was SOS Bia's responsibility as a civil society organization to expose the crimes of the government. The farmer didn't seem to care about democracy or "his right to know," he just didn't want any trouble, didn't want his livelihood jeopardized. Though I knew Morched cared deeply for the communities he worked with, I detected a divide between the affluent educated urban dweller, who was concerned with the lofty goal of democracy and the semi-rural farmer, who only wanted to feed his family. There seemed to be

incentives on both sites, amongst the rural poor and the urban elites, to keep Ben Ali's pubic secrets secret. ONAS had tested the groundwater here before and had concluded that it was safe. This report then became a text that supported the material interests of poor local farmers that relied on the groundwater. Mathew Hull has termed this the materiality of bureaucratic artifacts (2012: 21) in which documents are embedded in the very reality they are seeking to represent. The fictions had existed so long, that they had transformed into relationships, relationships between people, but also between people and the natural world. The frame that everything was ok with the groundwater here supported the men's livelihoods.

We left Sidi Hassine for Ariana on the other side of town to take measurements on the Canal el-Khaleej. On our way to the canal, talking about the farmers concerns, Morhced explained, "When you live under dictatorship you just don't know" and things haven't changed much. "We're only just scratching the surface with our work." Describing the general attitude of the farmers towards the wells, "Its water…(hand gesture that seems to throw something over his shoulder)..what can you do?"

The work on the Khaleej was dirtier. We started at Rouad, where the canal entered the sea and worked our way back to El-Hazm. Unlike the landfill, the canal reeked. The water was dark brown, the color of coffee, with the by now so well known pieces of black sludge and feces floating in it. I had gotten used to the smell over the course of my fieldwork and knew what to expect but it still made me retch. The same was true for Morched, but it looked to me like Lutfi was reconsidering his career choices. To be fair, he had to take the measurements. We moved on to Jafaar, another uncontrolled working class neighborhood of Ariana that had been incorporated deeper and deeper in to

the city, with major ring roads flowing through it now. There was garbage everywhere in the streets and the canal itself was a dump for household waste. The khaleej was mostly uncovered here and as we approached the sewage, Morched again said, "this is Somalia" in disgust over the situation.



**Figure 5.6. Measurements Canal el-Khaleej, el-Jaafar, Ariana  2014**

But this was not Somalia. It was the new Tunisia in which NGOs could take water samples to disprove governmental agencies. This, as Morched had said to the farmer, was "now a democracy" in which environmental grassroots organizations were finally able to stand up to the government and industries, where it was even their "responsibility to expose the crimes of the government."

Similar to the song Houmani, Morched and his colleagues made waste, wasted

people and landscapes in Tunisia visible here. They were trying to reverse their erasure, although "they were only scratching the surface." But SOS Bia didn't deface public secrets by smearing them with "merde", but confronted the fiction of state environmentalism on its own grounds with "merde" in the form of hard, measureable environmental data that contradicted the state. This data could then put an end to the ambiguity over whose fault the crisis of disposal was, it didn't leave any doubt over if the revolution or the regime was to blame for the waste crisis. Through their fieldwork and conferences SOS Bia and other environmental NGOs were literally waging a data war on the social life of data under the dictatorship. Under this particular temporal ideology, proof of pollution, proof of decrepit infrastructure was in fact proof of a lingering and still emergent form of the regime's violence. Not a direct form of violence, but one that resulted from exclusion, marginalization, neglect and corruption. SOS Bia's data proved that the landfills were leaking and that ONAS studies were trying to hide it. Eventually, SOS Bia organized several conferences that brought Tunis' environmental activists together with affected communities, academics, the press, and even with governmental agencies.

**Confronting Fictions in Conferences**

The conference was held in a luxury hotel in the center of Tunis that stood in stark contrast to the conference subject matter. There were posters, banners, pens and notebooks bearing SOS Bia and the funder's logo (in this case the EU and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung). Everyone wore suits and formal attire—only Khaled wore his usual uniform— and the atmosphere was very ceremonial. The master of ceremony, a woman to my

surprise, that, in a secular/ religious blend that only exists in Tunisia, commenced the conference with words "*bismillah el-rahman el-rahim…*" (In the name of God the most merciful, the most compassionate). My own professional experience as a peace activist had made me weary of civil society conferences, and Tunisia had certainly caught a conference fever after the revolution when the country was inundated with a "non stop docket of conferences, trainings and meetings" (IFIT 2013: 7). But this particular conference turned out to be quite different. It became a platform in which environmental activists, the communities they represented, and the state could confront each other directly.

The room was packed. Eighty-to-a-hundred people at least, coming from civil society, government, international institutions, universities and even ministers from opposing political parties. More importantly to me though, there were familiar faces from El-Attar, El-Hazm and other members of the communities that SOS Bia had worked with, and other residents of communities suffering from pollution across Tunisia. There were representatives from the Gafsa mining basin, from the city of Gabes, where the Tunisian Chemical Group had its headquarters, from the Bay of Monastir and from the Island of Djerba. After initial introductions by Stefano Corrado, who through the EU had funded aspects of the second round of data collection by SOS Bia, Morched started his presentation with the findings from field missions. Around Borj Chakir, all the wells had turned out to be polluted with organic compounds, proving that leachate from the landfill was filtering into the surrounding aquifer. There were alarmingly high levels of nitrates in the water, about four to five times higher than the international standard allowed, which in humans and animals could interfere with blood oxygen levels. The research also found

that the leachate pools in Borj Chakir and other landfills in the northeast were illegally constructed and maintained. In the Khaleej, the data again clearly showed that sewage was being pumped into the canal, though it couldn't be ascertained to what degree that sewage had been treated. Morched and Khaled even showed pictures of the sludge dumping that we had come across around Sabkhet Ariana.

There was a presentation from the Municipality of Sidi Hassine, demonstrating the issues of waste collection and particularly the sanitary crisis in the absence of the Attar sewage station. Another presentation was held, by the head of an organization that worked in the Gafsa mining basin and was currently collecting data to prove the relationship between phosphogypsum dumping, fluoride pollution in the basins aquifer, and tooth decay amongst miners. Wael, the PhD student I had visited Sabkhet Ariana with, gave an excellent presentation on groundwater pollution. A researcher from the Ministry of Health talked about an ongoing study that investigated the garbage crisis in Djerba, and she emphasized the psychological marginalization associated with the presence of waste across Tunisia. Here during this conference for the very first time during my research, the widespread and systematic nature of environmental pollution across Tunisia was being made public. And this in the presence of representatives from both ONAS and ANGED.

ONAS was represented by three men dressed uniformly in black and dark grey suits. They appeared like a caricature of state agents, yet huddled together, clearly uncomfortable, increasingly tense, their body languages defensive, legs and arms crossed. I felt bad for them and remembered what Elie had said about ONAS being "just a bunch of engineers." To my surprise, it was ONAS' turn to give a presentation. One of the three

men in dark uniforms rose from his small band, and timidly moved towards the podium. He gave a very technical presentation in a monotone voice. It was in fact nothing more than a technical brief developed for the World Bank project currently under way to submerge the remaining parts of the Khaleej and use some of the recycled wastewater from Chotrana for localized agriculture.[71] The presenter was, once again, not addressing the problems in ONAS that had led to the various environmental issues at hand, but described plans to mitigate them. The Bay of Monastir wasn't ONAS' fault, but that of industry he insisted. The situation in Sidi Hassine will be resolved with the creation of the Attar station and so on. But the audience, composed of people directly affected by pollution, was not satisfied. A young woman in a hidjab from Soleiman, another region in the Northeast of Tunisia where ONAS was allegedly dumping into waterways and a landfill polluted groundwater with leachate, rose from the audience. "What is your plan to make sure these problems don't reoccur continuously?" She spoke with great ardor. A water specialist who had given an earlier presentation rose from the crowd. "You can't fool us we can all smell the issue on our nose. The issue of the toilet in Tunisia." Other members of the audience got up. "What about Sabkhet Essoujoumi? What about the Meliane?" another women cried. The audience was getting agitated, people started talking on top of one another, and screaming "liars" at the ONAS representative. "ONAS is above the law," someone yelled.

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[71] It is hard not to sound cynical, but I visited the project site several times. The planning and implementation of the project coincided with what was considered to be Tunisia's largest and most prestigious development project of all time. It was the construction of a new financial hub and physical harbor, called the Financial Harbor of Tunis. The project site was just north of the capital amongst uncontrolled urban settlements in Rouad, exactly where the canal al-khaleej was entering the Mediterranean Sea. Once the project had the green light, property developers bought up land in Rouad and started construction. It was in this context that the World Bank had funded the project that was covering the canal al khaleej. Also, the site where waste water was being recycled for agriculture was not an agricultural community or even farmland.

These kinds of emotional outpourings in front of authority were commonplace. The Transition was an era of utter truculence, "uncertain times" (Ghannam 2012: 32) that were underlined by political assassinations, terrorist attacks, widespread interpersonal violence, ongoing strikes, and the violent transformations of the Arab Revolutions in Libya, Syria and Yemen. During my first visit to Tunisia in 2012, the air was thick with frustration, as the grievances of sixty years of dictatorships had suddenly burst into the open. I saw individuals and groups erupt into shouting matches, chanting and fistfights over such banal encounters with authority as the buying of train tickets, the acquisition of alcohol in the supermarket, the queue at the motor mechanic, but also at more formal encounters with the state during the border crossings or at police checkpoints. Revolutions and their aftermaths are thus also affective states (Ghannam 2012; Winegar 2012) defined in part by euphoria, but primarily anger, uncertainty and fear.

By now I felt sorry for the ONAS representative. Though ONAS didn't grant me an interview, I had worked with enough governmental officials in the waste management sector to know that most employees were well-intentioned. Morched took the microphone and confronted the ONAS representative directly; to make sure he would answer the accusations. But another ONAS representative stood up in the audience and came to his rescue. "This is not true…you live in a dream world. Come and visit our stations ," he said. "Please let me talk," he insisted as the audience spoke on top of him.

> Most purification stations are effective, more than 80% effective. The water that enters the station is extremely polluted and we treat it at least to 80% up to our norms, to Tunisian norms….We have problems with some stations, for example in northern Tunis, but we are now working on it…. There is a large project for that. We have a budget of over 100.000 dinars for this project. Don't put our work down, we accept constructive criticism. We are trying very hard to do our work. And we are a little delayed with our work. And in Meliane we have the

industrialists who are polluting and we have a large budget for that…. ONAS is only 5% of the problem.

It didn't matter if the man was lying or thinking that he was telling the truth. Knowledge, and especially knowledge about a field as complex as waste management in Tunisia had its very own dynamics and truths for reasons described in earlier chapters. These conferences however were a clash of different worlds, or at least a clash between the world as experienced in the regions and how it was thought of and represented within governmental institutions. Socio-spatial divisions here had guaranteed that these worlds had rarely met. However, here in a post-revolutionary system that somewhat equalized the power between state agents and those affected by pollution, the state could be held accountable, attacked even, for its environmental crimes. It lies in the interplay between the promise of erasure, and its return, that waste finds its political power Sarah Moore (2008) writes. Waste rather than rendering the country's interior and peri-urban peripheries absent as it had done before the revolution, had become a force for mobilization something that had made these communities present.

**Conclusion**

Revolutions are not only potent moments for the restructuring of political and economic orders, but they require the establishment of a new symbolic vocabulary, a rewriting of existing semantics in order to legitimize and make sense of these new orders. These processes are structured by the inherently revelatory nature of revolutions, the reappearance of public symbols from the fog of public secrecy. Waste became such a symbol in the post-revolutionary era. Through the garbage crisis, waste gained the power

to index the revolution itself and the underlying secrets of the Ben Ali regime. How waste as a symbol was interpreted was roughly based on the experience of individuals before the revolution and their agreement or disagreement with dictatorial fictions. This points to the existence of publics and counter-publics even before the revolution, however these counter publics lacked "the power to transpose themselves to the level of the state" (Warner 2002: 16).

These differing interpretations further demonstrate how governing fictions as legacies influence the post-revolutionary period. These fictions do much harm to the revolutionary project, since post-revolutionary realities always lag behind the authoritarian mirage. Not only because a new social and economic order has to be established, but also because citizens have to be disabused of a reality that never actually existed. The conviction that Tunisia was cleaner, more prosperous, and more equal before the revolution inspired a sense of nostalgia for the former regime and framed the revolution as a period that was "unclean" and somewhat a failure.

Still, waste, wasted communities and landscapes rose to the fore in the revolution. They appeared in public discussion and made themselves heard through same symbolic language that had originally been used to exclude them: the language of waste. Hamid Dabashi (2012) described the Arab Uprisings as the end of postcoloniality in the region. He saw the revolutions as an eradication of imperial baggage, of the tyranny and inherent inequalities of the postcolonial Arab state. While his insights now, six years after the revolution, have to be tempered, the emergence of waste and wasted communities in Tunisia is the emergence of that which had been left out at the inception of the postcolonial state. It is the return of a surplus, both metaphorically and materially that had

always been there but no one wanted to admit to.

CONCLUSION

On the 16th of June 2015, a case was brought in front of the Tunisian Truth and Dignity Commission that would establish Kasserine, a governorate in the country's interior, as a "victim region…[that had] suffered from organized marginalization" (Sbouai 2015; my translation). Following Kenya's precedent, Tunisia's Truth and Dignity legislation, aware of the inequalities inherent in Tunisian regionalism, had made it possible for a geographical region to become legally-speaking a victim of the dictatorships.   The case was put forward by the Tunisian Forum of Social and Economic Rights (FTDES), a prominent NGO with deep roots in Tunisia's marginalized communities and the Belgium organization Lawyers Without Borders (*Avocats Sans Frontières*). The case depended crucially on two lines of argument. First, that the "marginalization" and "exclusion" of the region had to be "organized" and "systematic." And second, that this systematic exclusion and marginalization had occurred at the hands of the nation state under the rule of one of its former dictators. The definition of marginalization and exclusion put forward by the two organizations, in accordance with the Truth Commission's wording, was,

> Marginalization is defined as a form of discrimination, disadvantage or severe disadvantage that persists, which jeopardizes the group's chances in life and that stem from institutionalized processes, that are, political, social and economic…Exclusion […] is a process that denies or excludes a group's access to services or rights: the right to work, education or health. (Sbouai 2015; my translation)

Lawyers of the two institutions made their case by comparing the region's development indicators (access to infrastructure, education, health and employment) to the national average, demonstrated the drastic socio-spatial inequalities between Kasserine and the

rest of the country, and particularly the coastal cities. As I have argued in this dissertation, in Tunisia socio-spatial marginalization is partially structured by and experienced through waste and pollution. Kasserine was no exception.

The governorate was industrialized after independence under Bourguiba's corporatist plan to bring development to Tunisia's interior. As I have discussed in chapter I, this wave of industrialization was not just unsuccessful in terms employment and development, but it also resulted in large-scale environmental pollution. In Kasserine, Bouguiba's plan lead in 1962 to the establishment of the National Society for Cellulose and Paper (Société Nationale de Cellulose et de Papier Alfa), the country's largest paper factory. A 2016 study by SOSBia in Kasserine (Chennaoui 2016), showed that poor management and chronic leakages resulted in heavy chlorine and mercury pollution around the plant, which affected the environmental health of factory workers, land, surface and ground water. Naceur Hamdi, deputy director of environmental health at the Regional Health Directorate in Kasserine, explained that there are more and more complaints from the victims of pollution:

> The Alfa fiber industry is consuming basic chemicals such as rock salt brine, chlorine, hydrogen, freons, hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, caustic soda, bleach and mercury. Because of a poor hygiene protection strategy, these products have contaminated the inhabitants, agriculture and environment of Kasserine. Farmers use the plant's wastewater illegally for irrigation. A dozen diseases, caused by this pollution, affect a large part of the population such as asthma, hypertension, cardiac disorders, cancers and even neurological diseases. (Chennaoui 2016; my translation)

Sofiane Amri, president of the Regional Association of Environmental Protection in Kasserine added, "on the one hand, the plant is a source of income and offers jobs to a few hundred inhabitants. On the other hand, it destroys, with utter impunity, the

environment of Kasserine and causes diseases that we are unable to mitigate*"* (Nawaat 2016; my translation). While the case of Kasserine didn't make explicit mention of environmental pollution, a subsequent case did.

In 2016, The Tunisian League for Human Rights (*Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme*) filed a very similar case with the Truth and Dignity Commission under the title, "Gabes a Victim of Pollution." Here environmental pollution was the main argument for the victimization of the region. Focusing on the impacts of the Tunisian Chemical Group in Gabes, another region that was industrialized under Bourguiba's regional development plan, the case established "environmental marginalization" of a region as legal category. This category stipulates that the dictatorships discriminated systematically against the region economically and in terms of environmental health and therefore "jeopardized Gabes inhabitants' chances in life."

The notion of the "victim region" and "environmental marginalization" makes an equivalence between environmental and other crimes of the dictatorships on bases of human dignity. Tunisia's Truth Commission in both its Arabic and French translations (*hai'at el-haqiqa wa el-karāma* or *Instance Vérité et Dignité*) refer to a crucial concept of the Tunisian revolution, that of dignity. In fact, Tunisians refer to the revolution itself as "The Dignity Revolution" (*thawrat el-karameh*). The concept of human dignity[72] here was related to the absence of basic human dignities in the authoritarian system, such as freedom from cruel or inhumane treatment, the ability to feed one's family, access to water and so on (Mullin 2015). Thus in this case, "environmental marginalization," like

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[72] Dignity was a central concept in the Arab Uprisings. It was partially rooted in sharia law (Abou el-Fadi 2015), linked to freedom to inhumane treatment (Mullin 2015) though after the revolution, it was defined in very different ways by Tunisia's different social classes (Zemni 2015: 86).

torture, rape or other inhumane treatment, at the hands of the authoritarian state, had

infringed upon the human dignity of a people based on their geographical location. The

large-scale dumping of wastes had formally been recognized as a form of authoritarian

politics and socio-spatial marginalization in Tunisia.

While these cases concentrate on the pollution from large, public enterprises,

cases that are supposedly easier to prove in court, I have demonstrated that environmental

crimes based on socio-spatial inequality by the authoritarian state were far more

widespread, systematic and historical than suggested by these two cases alone. Here the

dignity commission grapples with the same inherent question as this dissertation: What

was the link between the dictatorships and environmental pollution in Tunisia? These

cases echoed some of the major socio-environmental conundrums and theoretical themes

of this dissertation, namely: socio-spatial exclusion, the dismantling of authoritarian

facades, and the politics of waste and pollution.


**Socio-Spatial Exclusion at the Margins of the Authoritarian State**

Talal Assad, in his comment on Das and Poole's *Anthropology at the Margins of the*

*State* (2004), asked "where are the margins of the state?" (2004: 279). While, he wasn't

probing for geographical location, his question sought to understand how margins were

constructed and fit into an emerging new concept of the state. The margins of the state as

understood through the lens of "environmental suffering" caused by the "concrete

polluting actions of specific actors…that mold the experience of this suffering" (Auyero

and Swistun 2009: 17) however are decisively spatial. Waste and pollution are a spatial

phenomenon (Cox and Campin 2008). Through environmental risk, its abject qualities or

symbolic association with moral decay, waste creates socio-spatial margins of a multi-scalar political economy. Expressed for example in the term authoritarian neoliberalism, this means that the margins of the authoritarian state are, in this case, also the margins of the global economy. Waste here partially created these margins and influenced people's experience of them. Waste in 19th as well as 21st century Tunis for example was pushed to the spatial margins of the city, primarily its surrounding waterfronts, spaces that then became inhabited by those who were socially and economically marginal. Spatial, political, environmental and economic margins of the state and global economy are therefore intersectional.

Contributing to the literature on colonial hygiene (Anderson 1995; Brock 2010; Burke 1996; Masquelier 2005; McClintock 1995), this dissertation has demonstrated that the transplantation of hygienic ideologies from 19th century France to Tunisia, through the moralization of dirt and the urban poor, resulted in colonial control over urban space long before formal colonization had started. Following Marilyn Strathern's (2004) argument that class politics in the metropole are linked to racial politics in the colonies, I have traced not only the transformation from social hygiene in France to racial hygiene in Tunisia, but also the reverse movement back to social-hygiene in post-independence Tunisia. In each step, the moralization of material and symbolic dirt created and maintained socio-spatial divisions in Tunisia, first between the colonizer and the colonized and then between urban elites and rural migrants.

Already Mary Douglas (1966) demonstrated the moral dimensions of pollution, as in her terms dirt threatened the social and moral order. Although her work was not explicitly interested in space, her widely accepted definition of dirt, as "matter out of

place" gave her analysis a distinctively spatial character that has been productively used by scholars to interrogate spatial practices and specifically spatial exclusion (Creswell 1996; Malkki 1995; Modan 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2012). Cultural geographer David Sibley, who explicates how associations between morality and filth have been used to create "spaces of exclusion" since antiquity, writes that "spatial boundaries are in part moral boundaries. Spatial separations symbolize a moral order as much in […] closed suburban communities as in Douglas's tribal societies" (1995: 35). An ascription of the moralizing binary of clean and dirty then separates people and confines them to particular places, thereby creating and upholding particular socio-spatial orders that are maintained by the association among people, waste and morality (Alexander and Reno 2012; Creswell 1996; Dèurr and Jaffe 2012: 5; Stallybrass and White 1986). If spatial borders are transgressed, thereby creating physical or symbolic pollution, the moral order is in peril. Looking at the mechanisms by which this link among people, waste, and place is forged, Emily McKee (2015) has recently coined the term "trash talk" to describe the discursive process by which Bedouins in Israel and the reportedly dirty places they inhabit are socially and morally assessed.

What I have argued in the case of Tunisia is that an attention to waste in both its symbolic and material form demonstrates the recursive relationship between materials, people, their thoughts and actions, in the moralization of place. This recursive relationship then allows each category involved in moralization through the idiom of waste—people, places and matter—to exude morally polluting, or in Douglas' terms, dangerous, qualities that threaten the moral and spatial order. The *gourbivilles* and its urban successors in Tunis were a case in point. Seen as vectors of disease, crime and

revolution, these spaces of exclusion threatened the very existence of the modern, progressive, ordered and clean nation state in its microcosm, the capital Tunis. While the exclusion of the *gourbis* was always produced and partially justified by their association with waste, each political economy, each form of governance—colonial, corporatist and neoliberal—produced different kinds of exclusion. The creation of a modern, clean French city under colonialism rendered the Arab medina and then the *gourbivilles* in contrast as disordered and dirty, thereby laying them open to colonial surveillance. In independent Tunisia this lead to the physical erasure of urban slums, and displacement of its inhabitants under Bourguiba's *degourbification* program. Finally, the neglect and symbolic erasure of uncontrolled urban housing under neoliberalism produced the "urban invisibility" that Tunisian Geographer Habib Ayeb described (chapter II).

Further, I have demonstrated that the symbolic association of rural migrants with waste resulted for various reasons in the material pollution of these spatially excluded communities. Their economic marginalization made them more welcoming towards polluting industries, as was the case with Gafsa, Gabes and Kasserine in the 1960s. Their exclusion from the city made them seek out the same liminal spaces, between city and country, that were formerly reserved for wastes and polluting industries. Also, the underdevelopment and neglect of these areas resulted in the absence or weakness of waste management infrastructures. Finally, the symbolic erasure of wasted communities, their absence of voice under Ben Ali's authoritarianism, made it impossible for them to speak out against pollution and address environmental suffering.

Viewing Sidi Hassine Essoujoumi through the lens of environmental suffering brings into focus that the margins of the state are also the margins of the global economy.

Sidi Hassine supplied both the workforce for Tunisia's neoliberal economy, and was a sink of economic globalization. The cables manufactured in Loumi's COFAT cable factory made their way across the city to the port of la Goulette, from which they travelled across the Mediterranean through the port of Marseille and would eventually find their way into German luxury cars. The waste from the production of these cables was pumped into sabkhe Essoujoumi. While commodities and money travelled out of these spatial margins, waste and the wasted communities it created stayed behind, socially and spatially stuck. In part, the margins of the state were constructed by founding myths of the Tunisian nation and under the dictatorship the fiction of state environmentalism wreathed the environmental suffering of these margins in silence.

**Fictions and Facades of the Authoritarian State**

In a seminal paper, Phillip Abrams wrote, "the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is" (1988: 58). Abrams here questioned the materiality of the state, presented it as a screen, a "fictional reality" (Aretaxaga 2000), behind which real politics could be concealed. The efficacy of this screen decisively depends on state secrecy (Taussig 1993, 1997). Yet, in Western liberal democracies, because of a free press, access to information laws, and organizations like Wikileaks, this secrecy is incomplete. The screen that is the state is diaphanous. The constant leaks coming out of the current US government attest to this. Here the state as a screen or mask constantly reveals the underlying reality of political practice. The authoritarian state of Ben Ali on the other hand, had such a hold on society that what was projected onto this screen, these fictional

realities, were primarily what was known of political reality. Through national myths and governing fictions, distributed through state media, state-run civil society and state administrations, Tunisia's dictators created an image of the state that vastly differed from political practice and realities on the ground. Again, authoritarianism here didn't necessarily meant complete domination over the constantly emerging and situational networks of practices, discourses, and materials that make up the state, but it provided greater success in the "translation" of state projects into the various localities (Rose 2006 :148). Authoritarianism made "governing at a distance" more successful through censorship, but more importantly by implicating the whole of Tunisian society and the international community in its fictions. In other words, authoritarianism influences the efficacy of the state as a screen, it can increase the distance between political fictions and material realities.

These fictions gained their power not only from censorship, but also through their continuation and consistency. Tunisia's political myths thus followed a particular mythical structure (Levi-Strauss 1973: 209-212) that progressively developed "founding myths" of the nation (Hobsbawm 1990) into governing fictions. Both are forms of ideology in that they aim to veil the material and class interests of political elites (Mannheim 1936; Marx and Engels 1846). Founding myths are one way the link between nations and states are created. They directed national cultures, shaped national fantasies and created collective subjectivities (Borneman 1993; Grant 2001). Creating mass-mediated subjectivities, these myths also imagine an ideal-type and singular public audience for its reception.

The mythology surrounding Tunisia's independence struggle for example

established Habib Bourguiba, through his personality cult, as the father of the Tunisian nation. His victory over Saleh Ben Youssef and Islamist Pan Arabism, inextricably linked the independent Tunisian nation to Bourguiba's vision of secularism and modernity. This in turn established *beldi* culture of the urban, upper classes of the coast and associated urbanism as the primary "imagined community (Anderson 1986) of Bouguiba's nation-building project. The myth thereby excluded the country's interior and southern communities from the independent Tunisian nation, as they were associated with the image of the *bedawi*, backwardness, tribalism, dirt, Islamism, and so son.

At the same time, the myth of Tunisian social cohesion obscured class struggles and regional inequalities inherent in the new Tunisian nation. As Ayubi (1995), noted social cohesion and the assumption that the state did what was best for all citizens irrespective of their social class, sect, or geographical origins, lay at the very foundations of post-independence corporatism. The myth of *primisme* (Tsourapas 2013: 10) then projected constant progress of the nation (see chapter III). It presented Tunisia as progressive pioneer amongst its Arab neighbors, allowing for a comparison in which Tunisia always seemed more advanced, more democratic, and economically stronger than its neighbors.[73] Whereas Bourguiba's national myths were rooted in a utopian modernity and accompanied by vast social engineering programs, Ben Ali's governing fictions were a reactionary response to the collapse of Bourguiba's nation-building project and his populist social contract with the working classes. These governing fictions developed many of the original "mythemes" (Levi-Strauss 1973) of nation, but with little political commitment to them. Put differently, here the distance between the state as a fiction and

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[73] A founding myth of the second republic was the fight against Islamism (Erdle 2010: 431), which resulted in the security pact between Ben Ali and the growing middle classes.

material reality drastically increased.

Ben Ali's governing fictions of the "economic miracle," "democratic gradualism," and "feminism" (Cavatora and Haugbolle 2012; Hibou 2011; Tsorapas 2013; Yacoubi 2016) were partial truths, "alibis," that aimed to assuage any critique of the regime, conceal its authoritarianism and sustain its longevity. Yes, Tunisia had ongoing economic growth throughout the early 2000s, yet the myth of the economic miracle inflated that growth and obscured drastic regional inequalities. Yes, Tunisia was holding elections and had a resemblance of civil society, yet the myth of democratic gradualism concealed the brutality of Ben Ali's rule. Yes, Tunisian women had more freedoms than their Arab neighbors, yet the myth of feminism conflated the former with "state feminism, a clientalistic and disciplinary state project that has sought to 'raise up' and 'modernize' the gender order" (Yacoubi 2016: 255). The fiction of state environmentalism, while producing useful institutions and legislation, also hid the harmful effects of the regime's development policies, inefficiencies and corruption in the waste management sector. It allowed for environmental development money to flow, while it concealed environmental suffering at the margins of the authoritarian state. As the impact of the state is experienced differently at various levels (Poole and Das 2004), the perceived veracity of these fictions depended to a degree on social, spatial and economic positioning.  In the 1990s and 2000s, inhabitants of La Marsa for example were increasingly wealthy, had the freedom to consume, were on the surface more emancipated, and lived in a neighborhood that was mostly clean. This points to the existence of "split publics" (Rajagopal 2001) in which the dynamic, situational experience of the network that makes up the state creates a different experience of that

state, and thereby differing publics. Depending on discourse and material experience, but also on personal interests, as we had seen with peri-urban farmers in Attar, the fantasy of the state was differently absorbed and interpreted. The presence of absence of waste in relation to the emergence of situational publics then resonates with what Latour and Weibel (2005) have termed *Dingpolitik,* in which "objects…bind all of us in ways that map out public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label 'political'" (Later and Weibel 2005: 14). The revolution is then also the return of these counter publics that now shape public policy.

Robert Griffin (2012) argued that authoritarian fictions are representative of what Walter Benajmin called the "aestheticisation of politics," a method for depoliticizing the masses and "attempt at brain washing" (2012: 41). Aesthetics is a particularly useful way to understand the fiction of state environmentalism, which was concerned with hiding away the excrement of the regime. Prof. Boukraa presented authoritarianism in these terms when he described it as a system which hides physical and metaphorical "*merde*" (shit) from society. His definition echoes with what Jaque Ranciere called the politics of aesthetics, the "specific distributions of space and time, of the visible and invisible, that creates specific forms of 'common sense'" (Ranciere 2012 :141). Similarly, Asher Ghertner (2015) following Ranciere, has since termed this the "rule by aesthetics," in which the delineation between attractive and unattractive, legal and illegal, visible and invisible forges new forms of governance. Aesthetics here is not beauty, but refers in the more original sense of the term to the manipulation of perception (Eaggleton 1991). Achille Mbembe writes in his "Aesthesis of Vulgarity" that in the postcolony state power relied on forging this common sense reality or "its own world of meaning" (2001: 103),

by creating and distributing fictions through bureaucratic and administrative channels that serve as "a master code" by which society can be interpreted.   Yet, these governing fictions weren't blindly believed, rather they flooded the public sphere with "instructive symbolism" (Wedeen 2013: 850). Fictions provided a symbolic map of what could and couldn't be spoken about, or even perceived, in Ben Ali's republic.

The fiction of state environmentalism organized the presences and absence of waste, wasted communities, and landscapes by providing a master code through which the waste crisis could be interpreted in the public domain. It covered up and distracted from the real social and environmental costs of Tunisia's authoritarian neoliberalism, namely the material marginalization of Tunisia's socio-economically disenfranchised communities and the ecological disaster that resulted from the large-scale dumping of waste. The fiction forced an interpretation of the world onto Tunisians that particularly in marginalized and polluted areas stood in direct opposition to the daily sensory and embodied experiences of a physically polluted environment. The fiction therefor rested on public secrecy.

Waste and wasted populations were public secrets akin to Sedgwick's (1990) "open secrets" or Bourdieu's "silent complicity" (1977: 188) that sustained the ideology of a progressive, clean, modern and environmentally-friendly state. This "regime of unreality (*régime du simulacre*)" (Mbembe 2001: 108), created a double bond between the population and state power.  It implicated society, not at least through corruption and nepotism, in the silencing, marginalization and violence of the state. Literally making environmental suffering unknowable, through the creation of public secrets and their maintenance through administrative practices that upheld the fiction. It is this power to

impose a fiction onto a contradictory material reality, impose it to a degree that this reality can no longer be expressed, and the practices by which this imposition is implemented that makes this dissertation claim the term "authoritarian." However, even in an authoritarian system there is always an excess to these fictions, always a threat of the return of the material world.

**History and Revolutionary Politics of Waste**

Urban pollution is not only an enormous environmental health problem in the Middle East and North Africa, but it is also source of great shame and material reminder of the state of the region. A decade ago, my father visited me in Damascus where I lived in a 400-hundred-year-old Ottoman house by the inner walls of the Old City. We spent our days getting lost in the meandering alleys of the medina. Throughout the day, my father would contrast the great civilizations materialized in the urban landscape around us with the garbage in the streets.  In Damascus, like in Tunis, the old city was divided by sect, had Christian and formerly Jewish quarters. When we ended up in the Christian part of the city, around Bab Touma, he got particularly agitated noting that Christian areas are always cleaner wherever you go in the Arab World. "Why can't Arab/ Muslims keep their countries clean?" he asked with regret.

He was an Iraqi who came of age in the post-independence era, an era that is often described as a "golden age." In the 1960s and 1970s, colonization had been shaken off, oil was discovered, development skyrocketed, illiteracy rates fell to the lowest in the developing world, an era of seemingly endless progress and modernity when "everything you touched turned into gold," as he would say. In the context of the rise of Arab

nationalism, it was era that made him proud of his identity as Iraqi and Arab. Yet like others of his generation, he had his pride and dreams squashed by the reality of dictatorship, war, corruption and underdevelopment. For reasons that I have discussed throughout this dissertation, he found this agitation, his sense of civilizational decline, the anachronism of progress in the region expressed in this urban pollution around us. Waste embodied everything that was wrong with the Arab World as compared to the West and Christianity, his sense of moral decline, much like in the phrase *balad el-zible* (country of rubbish). I feel that through my research in Tunis, I partly answered his question of why the Arab World was so dirty and further understood why waste had the power to represent the complex politics of East and West, post-colonialism, urban space and even time. By historicizing the material catalyst of his shame and agitation, I have countered the hygienic ideologies that link Arabs with dirt (Anderson 1995; Brock 2010; Burke 1996; Masquelier 2005; McClintock 1995 McKee 2015).

Until the 19th century, waste management at least in Tunis, but very likely across Arab cities, was based on the cooperation of very small communities. It relied on face-to-face interactions between neighbors that were regulated by Islamic customary law (*urf*). Managing urban waste bound communities together in ever increasing spatial and social units (households, streets, neighborhoods and so on) reflecting the emphasis put on neighbors and community in the Arab/ Islamic context. As long as these relationships were maintained, waste management stayed intact. However, when these personal relationships broke down, due to changes in the city's demographics, they were replaced with a rational, Western management concept and practices that could never quite materialize under the political conditions of colonial and post-colonial authoritarian rule.

Public space never quite became public in Tunisia, thereby undermining the citizen component of modern waste management.

These findings relate to the work of French anthropologist Maurice Jole (1982, 1984, 1989, 1991), who posited that waste in part created the difference between the public and private in Arab/ Islamic societies, where strong taboos on the pollution of the body and private space coincide with ubiquitous urban pollution. According to her, here waste had to be evacuated from private space. But in the absence of social bonds that would transport waste further away from urban space and the relative failure of modern waste management systems, waste stayed in place and transformed into urban pollution. There it intrinsically produced a politics of the material (Braun and Whatmore 2010).

Because of its association with risk (Bullard 1993; Davies 2006), the abject (Hawkins 2003; Hawkins and Muecke 2003) or because it is parallax object "that which objects, that which disturbs the smooth running of things" (Žižek quoted in Moore 2012: 781), waste invites political action. However, under Tunisia's dictators public space wasn't public and political action came with great dangers. Thus the politics of waste were latent until Tunisia's garbage crisis following the revolution. Here together with wastes, the politics of waste spilled into the public arena.

Garbage in particular also figured centrally in the revolutionary politics of Egypt (Wingear 2012) and more recently a revolt against the state in Lebanon (Abu-Rish 2015). In Egypt, garbage became in the post-revolutionary period "another metaphor, a black-humor shorthand, for explaining all that doesn't work" as an L.A. Times article wrote. Jessica Winegar (2012) talking about the public cleaning campaigns that followed the revolution in Egypt, described how these were attempts at reclaiming public space after

decades when that was ruled by state police. Cleaning the garbage away was a form of cleaning space of the dictatorial past, thus, in the absence of a fiction of state environmentalism, equating waste and dirt with the Mubarak regime. Similarly, in the revolt against the Lebanese state the al Al-ahram Newspaper asked "Lebanon's anti-trash protests: A belated Arab Spring?". Here the YOU STINK campaign against the state equated garbage with the weak Lebanese state, corruption and even the Syrian refugee crisis (Abu-Rish 2015). As I have demonstrated, waste was not only linked to corruption by its association with moral decline, but because corruption made waste flow into public space and thereby materialized corruption, an ordinarily obscure practice. Waste had the power to express something about Arab authoritarianism that couldn't be fully expressed before the revolutions.

In Tunisia's revolution, the reappearance of waste, wasted communities and landscapes signaled the final breakdown of the "fantasy of absolute elimination and purity'' (Hawkins 2003: 42) as expressed through the fiction of state environmentalism. This revelation produced "disturbances" (Hawkins 2003) that provided opportunities for a politics of the material to emerge. The breakdown of the myth and presence of waste revealed the original arbitrariness of a highly exclusionary socio-spatial system that was partially based on the moral and metaphorical boundaries drawn by the distinction between the clean and the dirty. In the same way that the idiom of pollution was employed in the creation of socio-spatial orders, it necessarily became central to their demise.

Waste and pollution then also created a particular temporal ideology about the Arab revolutions. When waste flooded the streets, a hidden, violent past emerged with it.

Wasted landscapes, like ruins erode "the singularity of the present by signaling a quasi-absent past…a conception of temporality that is replete with a time of retentions, protensions,[74] and disruptions, one that situates the individual in an environment of competing and comingled tenses" (Viney 2015: 25). Environmental disaster thus invited both a view backwards in time to the moment or moments of its inception and at the same time represented an uncertain future, expressed through impacts of pollution and the possible repetition of disaster (Nixon 2011: 64). As Paul Watt (2007: 85) notes, "To understand the significance of urban place images and the intertwining of physical dirt with social disorder, we must introduce a temporal as well as spatial dimension into the analysis. Place images are not fixed but can change their meaning over time." It was in part this material temporality of waste that tainted the revolutionary and post revolutionary period. In either explanation, as an expression of a dictatorial past in the present or a failed revolutionary present that heralded greater failure in the future, waste had the power to not only pollute, people and places, but also whole time periods.

Viewing the politics of waste through the prism of kitsch and shit in dictatorial fictions further illuminates the role of waste in the Tunisian revolution. Here waste became a central part of the post-revolutionary aesthetic, but an aesthetic that were multi-sensory, embodied and affective (Pinney 2004: 8). Waste became an embodied symbol through which the revolution was revealed, perceived, understood and evaluated. As one of the first visceral signs of the revolution, it laid bare what was formerly hidden in plain sight under the dictatorship—a rotten and unequal system of rule—and was therefore simultaneously perceived as a symptom of an old dictatorial and new revolutionary

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[74] In Husserl's On Phenomenology of Consciousness and Internal Time (1991), "retentions" are the retainments of a perception in our minds and "protention" is the anticipation of the next moment.

reality. The reappearance of "merde" (shit) defaced (Taussig 1999) political fictions of all kinds and dissolved the public secrets that had maintained them. Thus, to the surprise of many Tunisians, underneath these fictions Tunisians found a society perforated with social and environmental conflict (Dakhlia 2012; Said 2015).

**Final Reflections**

The original reason why I came to Tunisia was that the Tunisian revolution gave me hope. Yes, I had abandoned Iraq as a field site because of the growing political violence in 2012. Imminent fatherhood, as my partner Alia pointed out, meant that my life was no longer only my own. I chose Tunisia as an alternative site because in 2011 it promised to be positive story. Before I joined the Anthropology Department at Rutgers, I worked for years as a conflict management consultant across the Middle East and North Africa. I was a peacebuilder in a time and place where peace was elusive. More so, with the rise of Islamic State and the bloody aftermath of the Uprisings in Syria, I saw friends die and several of my former homes (Iraq, Syria and Lebanon) devastated under the onslaught of yet another violent conflict. I felt, and still feel, exactly what my father felt expressed in Damascus' garbage: I feel hopeless about the future of my region.

Tunisia, in many ways does show a way forward though. It rid itself of a dictator with minimal bloodshed compared to Libya, Syria or Yemen. In a collaborative process between Islamists, Leftists and the former elites, Tunisians wrote one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. During my research, Tunisia went through two elections, the first free elections in the history of the country, with only minor skirmishes.

In a region where hope for a secure future is a very rare commodity, Tunisia gave us hope. Yet despite all these achievements, in Tunisia this hope is waning.

The revolution was a quest for dignity and freedom. And while political freedoms have materialized, while people can vote and talk politics publically, the underlying socio-economic and regional inequalities and the rampant corruption that perpetuate them remain.  As a recent report by the Crisis Group, a think tank that traces political unrest, concluded,

> Despite the formation of a national unity government comprising the main political parties, the country suffers from a growing sense of socio-regional exclusion and weakening state authority, which are nurtured by spreading corruption and clientalism. (2017)

The relative weakens of the state will result in more pollution, which in turn will structure the experience of social and regional exclusion.  As I have shown, this exclusion is systematic and multi-scalar. Governance structures are plagued by authoritarian legacies. Margins don't disappear because of political protest alone. The problem with revolutions is that they embody exactly a young energy, a fiery desire for instant change—patience has never toppled a dictator. But the reality of the revolution is that its outcomes are unpredictable, that its gains might not be realized for decades, if at all. In this way, revolutions are intrinsically tantalizing, dangling the fruits of change over revolutionary heads, promising the long-desired reordering of society without the guarantee to ever satiate that hunger. And, in Tunisia at least, that occurs under the constant threat of chaos and reversal. Tunisians have sought other ways out of their socio-spatial marginalization. Today they make up the largest proportion of Islamic State fighters (Washington Post 2017), and the Arab Uprisings, in Tunisia and elsewhere, started the largest movement of

people since the Second World War (Guardian 2015). Rubber boats suggestively cross economic and socio-spatial boundaries like never before. What is true for social inequality is also true for environmental inequality in Tunisia.

Pollution clean-up projects have commenced in Gabes, Bizerte and around Tunis. During the end of my research the then Prime Minister and former minister of the environment Habib Essid visited Sabkhet Essoujoumi and proclaimed that "the environmental situation in the capital Tunis is disastrous and requires urgent intervention" (Guiana 2015). As an effect, he fired the head of ONAS. The landfill Borj Chakir is being closed and a new landfill for greater Tunis is built in the southern suburb of Megerine. The el-Attar wastewater station is being completed. During my last visit to the sabkhet Essoujoumi, small palm trees had been planted at its shores facing Saida El-Manoubia. Palm trees however only dress the underlying structural reasons for socio-spatial exclusion and environmental suffering here. All political parties, Islamists and former regime representatives alike, are staunchly neoliberal in their economic outlook for Tunisia. The local and global political economy that produced waste and pollution in Tunisia and underpin social exclusion haven't changed, and there is no indication that they will. One thing has changed though. Authoritarianism is on a steady decline. People's voices from the grassroots, through organizations like SOSBia, will ultimately change the crisis of disposal and the environmental suffering that emanates from it.

Early on in my field research with Morched, he would ask, "why are you here? Why Tunisia?" He regarded me with some suspicion and none of my explanations seemed to satisfy him. Eventually he gave himself an answer that did. Tunisia was the only country amongst the 22 countries of the Arab League where I could've conducted

this research project. It was the only place in a region that spreads from the Atlantic across two continents nearly to the Caspian Sea that now had the political freedoms that allowed me to investigate the social realities emanating from waste and environmental pollution. The revolution has radically transformed the political landscape in Tunisia. It has rewritten the very principles of government with an inspiring new constitution that guarantees all citizens a "healthy and balanced environment." But what revolutionaries throughout the ages have learned is that governance exists beyond political systems and legal documents, it is engrained in an unequal international order and its local manifestations. The specters of authoritarianism in Tunisia still haunt people's minds, but they also dwell in their bodies and landscapes in real, tangible ways through the scars of torture, hunger, poverty, illness and the impacts of waste and pollution. Yet NGOs and truth commissions slowly uncover the environmental crimes of the regime. Thus, while the environmental legacies of authoritarianism remain in post-revolutionary Tunisia, a call for a clean and healthy environment is finally being heard.

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