

Images of Openness, Spaces of Control: The Politics of Tourism Development in Tunisia

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While images of a “clash of civilizations” and discussions about the Arab world’s failure to embrace economic globalization have come to frame much of the Euro-American media coverage of the region, Tunisia is often presented as the region’s economic success story, the place where efforts to realize European-style modernization have found their most fertile terrain.¹ In a recent travelogue, the iconoclastic political commentator Christopher Hitchens recounts the country’s socioeconomic achievements, which include a high rate of home ownership, legal rights for women, and a globally competitive, externally oriented economy.² Hitchens briefly notes that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali would soon celebrate his twentieth year of unchallenged rule and that Ben Ali’s election victories claiming over 90 percent of the vote make him nervous. But these concerns are soon pushed aside as he praises Ben Ali’s “guiding...hand.” In his portrayal of Tunisia as “an enclave of development...menaced by the harsh extremists of a desert religion” that plague other Arab states, Hitchens likens Ben Ali’s rule to an African version of Gaullism and credits it for creating an “outwardly happy and thriving society.”

Hitchens’ essay resembles American Cold War-era approaches to understanding the region. He evaluates political change in Ben Ali’s Tunisia in terms of the regime’s efforts to promote manifestations of modernity in the face of what Hitchens views as the anti-modern threat of Islamic extremism. Such an approach effectively condones increasing authoritarian forms of rule while reflecting the broader post-September 11 abandonment of the early post-Cold War narrative, found on both the left and the right, of how market reform and external economic integration generates pressures for political liberalization and democratization. More troubling, the essay, based on Hitchens’ visit to Tunisia and its tourist sites, functions to sustain Tunisia’s external image of openness and obscure its internal regime of authoritarian control. Such a

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reading hints at the broader role that international tourism has come to play in Tunisian state building under Ben Ali. It is part of an adept strategy by the regime for advancing economic liberalization and embracing globalization while constructing little more than a façade of political openness.

As Eva Bellin explains, the fiscal health of the state is a key factor contributing to the “robustness of authoritarianism” in the Middle East, along with international support networks and real and perceived threats to state security.³ Tourism is often included in lists of rentier income sources that sustain the fiscal health of the state while limiting its need to extract resources from the population (which might generate demands for political representation).⁴ But political economists who study the Middle East have yet to trace the connections between tourism incomes and the politics of state building in the same depth that the literature on the rentier state and the resource curse has done for oil, foreign aid, and remittances.⁵ When the political implications of tourism are addressed, it has usually been to note the vulnerability of tourism to political instability and the possibility for tourism to promote peace and understanding between peoples.⁶ More generally, as Debbie Lisle suggests, tourism is often viewed as “a positive force for democratic change because along with the economic benefits of hard currency, tourism also introduces liberalism, tolerance and equality: it is a peaceful way to universalize the ‘good’ and ‘just’ life that democracy provides for those within the global village.”⁷ In contrast, this essay investigates how tourism development can provide a means of sustaining authoritarianism, building state legitimacy, and projecting an outward image of stability and openness. Many authoritarian regimes that maintain closed, state-dominated economies, such as Syria, Cuba, and North Korea,⁸ have used international tourism as a way to gain hard currency in what can be viewed as a non-repressive strategy for regime survival. In Tunisia, however, tourism serves a broader function.

This essay explores the role tourism development and tourist flows have played in the efforts of President Ben Ali to integrate Tunisia’s economy into global markets while simultaneously expanding the power of the state over the economy and society. The essay first outlines how tourism was critical to an economic recovery and the maintenance of the government’s fiscal health while Ben Ali consolidated power in the period following his 1987 ouster of President Habib Bourguiba. Focusing on the years immediately following Ben Ali’s assumption of power, I show how the recuperation of the tourism sector and its expansion into a “new engine for economic growth” helped sustain the national economy and the regime’s access to economic resources at a crucial moment while it implemented structural adjustment and economic reform policies.

The remainder of the essay explores how the new patterns of tourism development that emerged in the 1990s assisted the regime’s strategy of promoting an increasingly authoritarian form of state control over the economy and society while it intensified the integration of the national economy into global markets. Flows of tourists and investment in the tourism sector assisted external economic integration. At the same time, tourism development helped the regime project an outward image of stability and openness to both tourists and investors while expanding state control over domestic spaces and transnational flows. I conclude by noting how this highly filtered form of openness, which I refer to as “paradoxical globalization,” has since emerged as the prevailing mode

for regime survival and authoritarian state building and development across much of the Arab world.

From Infitah to Le Changement

After gaining independence in 1956, Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba sought to create what he often referred to as a more "open country," meaning one turned toward the West. He argued that the "reorientation of Tunisia toward the West would represent progress and prosperity, the very objectives that an independent Tunisia aspired to."⁹ In the late 1960s, as Alan Richards and John Waterbury note, Tunisia "pioneered the 'opening up' (*infitah*) approach" towards increased economic liberalization and integration.¹⁰ By the late 1970s, as regional conflict, political violence, and revolution plagued much of the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia had successfully established an external image as a stable, relatively liberal Arab state. Until his ouster in 1987, Western media coverage of the country typically focused on Bourguiba's staunch support of women's rights, investment in social development, friendly relations with Western powers, and openness to both foreign investment and tourists.

With state efforts to mobilize capital in the tourism sector, in the 1960s and 1970s Tunisia's coasts became dotted with hotels catering to the explosion in Northern European demand for low-cost sun, sea, and sand. In 1980, the country welcomed over one and a half million visitors, generating tourism receipts totaling 7 percent of the gross national product (GNP).¹¹ The role of tourism in building the country's external image was exemplified by a profile published in *National Geographic* entitled, "Tunisia: Sea, Sand, Success."¹² These images, however, failed to represent the day-to-day experiences of many Tunisians: economic hardship, labor unrest, and growing disenchantment with Bourguiba's authoritarian rule. Beginning in the early 1970s Tunisia's *infitah* policies opened the territory to global market forces. This economic liberalization gave the Tunisian state and economy access to investment and revenues, but the increasing reliance on external markets and capital flows had the downside of limiting the ability of the state to regulate the process of economic change and its social effects. Tunisia's domestic landscape was being reshaped by these flows, leading to increased regional inequality, unsustainable urbanization, labor discontent, and growing Islamist reaction against external cultural influences. At the time, these policies were viewed, depending on one's point of view, as leading either to successful capitalist transformation and integration into Europe-centered production networks or into the trap of dependency.¹³

In any case, the nature and movement of transnational flows in the international economy shifted in the early 1980s in the wake of the second oil shock and protectionist policies in Europe. Tunisia became less able to draw capital inflows, adjust its economy to changing market environments, and provide for the social needs of its population. Moreover, the state's limited regulatory control over the spatial consequences of its *infitah* policies exacerbated the political challenges of regional disparities, rapid urbanization, and domestic and transnational labor migration. The economy's incorporation into global flows of capital, population,

and culture had led to increasing social dislocation, only made worse by economic reforms and austerity measures as well as rising support for the Islamist movement in urban shanty towns and among the rural poor. By the mid-1980s, an era of political crisis emerged when declines in oil revenues, remittances, export manufacturing, and tourism receipts left the state unable to sustain consumer subsidies and led to increased external borrowing.

In this context, Tunisia's reliance on tourism proved a double liability in ways unlikely to be noticed by *National Geographic* readers. It made the national economy vulnerable to economic decline in Europe, political instability in other parts of the Arab world, and the changing markets of the global tourism sector as the demand for mass beach tourism seemed to wane. It also provided a ripe target for the Islamists' moralistic counter-discourse. Islamists quickly became the leading political force challenging the secular authoritarian state. They replaced the left as the primary critics of economic integration and in vague terms they suggested alternative visions for Tunisia focused on what they saw as its authentic Islamic heritage. They would challenge not only Bourguiba's authority but also the state's economic and social policies, such as its reliance on tourism.

The endgame of the political crisis and the Islamist threat to the regime was launched in the summer of 1987 with a string of hotel bombings in Bourguiba's hometown on the occasion of his birthday. In reaction, an increasingly erratic Bourguiba cracked down on the mainstream Islamist movement, even though most viewed the attacks as the work of extremists. A period of political turmoil ensued, eventually leading Ben Ali, who was then prime minister, to depose the nation's aging president by having him declared medically unfit. Tunisians woke up on 7 November 1987 to a message from Ben Ali announcing he was assuming the presidency and command of the armed forces. The new president's first statement included pledges to increase political pluralism, end corruption, and revamp the political system. Ben Ali quickly set about reshaping and rebuilding the power of the Tunisian state while accelerating Tunisia's program of *infitah*, structural adjustment, and tourism sector development.

Across much of the political spectrum in Tunisia, Ben Ali's "medical coup" was viewed with relief. Ben Ali's assumption of power, referred to as *le changement*, ended the uncertainty caused by Bourguiba's poor health and mercurial behavior and seemed to put the country on a path out of the crisis that had been building since the late 1970s while signaling a break from the despotic aspects of Bourguiba's rule. The new president skillfully defused the growing confrontation with the Islamist movement by commuting some of the harsh sentences passed against the Movement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) members and moved to reverse some of Bourguiba's policies of state secularization, for example, ordering that the call to prayer be broadcast by government media. One of Ben Ali's first major political accomplishments was to gather members of Tunisia's fractured civil society (excluding, however, the MTI) for open discussion, leading to the signing of a "National Pact" on the first anniversary of *le changement*. Many Tunisians and many academic observers were hopeful about the prospects for democratization. A year after unprecedented criticism of the Tunisian government by the U.S.

Congress, American observers were now optimistically noting that “[a] friendly country has been saved from probable chaos and set on the road to pluralism and economic openness.”¹⁴

The Uses of Tourism in Ben Ali's Consolidation of Power

While the tourism sector had long played an important role in the Tunisian economy and stood out as a symbol of the country's stability and openness, in the mid-1980s a collapse of the sector, due to political violence and/or a drop in demand, would have proved particularly devastating to the regime. As noted above, the decline of tourism contributed to the economic troubles of the mid-1980s. A year before the coup, the seventh tourism development plan (1987-1991) announced:

Today, the development of tourism in Tunisia has become an economic necessity to which there is little alternative. As a generator of foreign exchange, added value, and employment, the Tunisian tourism industry must be considered as a priority becoming one of the assets upholding the external equilibrium of the Tunisian economy.¹⁵

Meanwhile, at the time of the coup, Tunisia was implementing the 1986 economic stabilization plan that many feared would exacerbate economic hardships and social tensions before economic growth could return. While Ben Ali defused the political crisis by displacing Bourguiba and making moves toward political liberalization, the revival of tourism played a critical role in his consolidation of power and Tunisia's ability to promote economic development and again project images of stability and openness.

Thanks to some good luck, and good timing with policy maneuvers, the year after Ben Ali assumed the presidency was by far the largest tourism season Tunisia had ever seen. Tourism receipts totaled over one billion Tunisian dinars, or \$1.15 billion, representing over 13 percent of GNP. In the high season, hotel occupancy rates reached 95 percent while occupancy rates for the whole year hit 62.3 percent, up from around 45 percent for three of the previous five years. This economic activity helped postpone the need for the government to take out another International Monetary Fund loan and compensated for the growth of the state's consumer goods subsidies bill (despite a rollback of subsidy rates) caused by a drought the same year.¹⁶ The income, revenues, and hard currency generated by these flows helped to sustain the Tunisian economy through the transitional phase between the initial 1986 stabilization program and the more extensive liberalization and structural adjustment implemented in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, this season helped set a course toward promoting tourism as a motor for growth in the new externally oriented economy.

Much of the success of the tourism season was due to exogenous factors such as the resumption of economic growth in Northern Europe as well as the price competitiveness of Tunisia due to the devaluation of the dinar beginning in 1986. Nevertheless, the newly established Ministry of Tourism would publicly announce that tourism expanded significantly in 1988 because “the advent of 7 November ameliorated the external political image of Tunisia as well as gave confidence to tourism promoters

and foreign visitors.”¹⁷ The success of the tourism season helped to consolidate the legitimacy and stability of the new regime by allowing *le changement* to appear to be making good on its promises to restart national economic development—and quickly. In contrast to dire warnings from international observers about the vulnerability of the sector before the 1987 bomb blasts, Ben Ali was able to arrest the potential downward spiral. In 1988, the Economist Intelligence Unit reported that “political and terrorist incidents in and around Tunisia do not seriously affect Tunisia’s image as an attractive and relatively safe holiday location in the same mould of Spain, Greece, and Italy.”¹⁸ Even after the 1987 bombings maimed some visiting Britons, British tourists continued to visit Tunisia in record numbers.

One policy possibly responsible for mitigating the negative effects of the bomb blasts was a new marketing campaign in Europe, planned before the coup, that sought to define Tunisia as a “Mediterranean” rather than a “Middle Eastern” destination.¹⁹ This policy was coupled with restrictions on international media coverage of the bombing events and the replacement three months later of images of chaos with those of a new political leader bent on returning order to the country while opening it up politically. At the same time, in contrast to Bourguiba, Ben Ali emphasized Tunisia’s Arab identity and opened the door for a political rapprochement between Tunisia and Libya, resulting in the reopening of the border eight years after the Libyan-backed Qafsa insurrection had cut off employment opportunities for Tunisians in Libya.²⁰ A majority of the increase in tourist arrivals to Tunisia in 1988, and much of the gain in tourism revenues, was due to the opening of the border with Libya, which led to four thousand visitors a day “filling up hotels in the Sfax area.”²¹

The return of political stability and the state’s policy measures in the first year after the 7 November coup also gave local and foreign investors and tourism professionals reasons to expect the sector would now grow faster and generate stable profits. These measures included immediate steps to kick-start the tourism sector as well as signals from Ben Ali that in the longer term the sector would be sustained by active government involvement. International lending agencies and private investors were encouraged by the successful privatization of the state’s tourism assets.²² The director of the Office National du Tourisme Tunisien (ONTT), Ahmed Smaoui, promoted investment in the tourism sector, aided by the new tourism investment code enacted in 1986 that gave additional tax breaks to private investors.²³ Investment in the sector jumped from a low of \$73 million in 1987 to \$127 million in 1989 and soared to over \$290 million by 1992.

Ben Ali’s concern for promoting tourism development was discussed during his very first Council of Ministers meeting, a mere five days after *le changement*. When Ben Ali formed his first government, he created a ministerial-level tourism portfolio. In 1988 a Secretariat of State for tourism was established and given to Smaoui, an experienced tourism official. And within a year of taking office Ben Ali created a free-standing Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts and chose Mohamed Jegham to head it. Jegham’s experience developing Tunisia’s first major tourism resort complex, Port El Kantaoui, and his close ties to Ben Ali, helped to further enhance the political profile and administrative clout of the tourism sector.²⁴

In a speech in May 1989, Mohamed Jegham cited the one billion Tunisian dinars in tourism receipts for 1988 (almost 29 percent of all exports in that year) and noted the sector had directly created more than 45,000 jobs and, indirectly, close to 100,000. He also outlined a new vision for national economic development in which tourism would play a yet more vital role.²⁵ He suggested that “tourism can generate development in different sectors of production and services and play a fundamental role at the level of improving the basic infrastructure of the country as well as its urban fabric.” To accomplish these development goals, Tunisia would have to diversify its tourism product by creating new sorts of tourism experiences. Such an effort would require greater exploitation of untouched swathes of Tunisian territory, such as the southern desert, the expanded tourist commodification of its culture, and the development of additional leisure activities such as hunting and boating. Tunisia had built its tourism economy in the 1960s and 1970s through the development of mass beach tourism, offering international tour operators one of the least expensive destinations along the Mediterranean.²⁶ This strategy exploited the highly standardized nature of mass beach tourism, which allowed locations across the Mediterranean shore to compete in the global tourism market as tour operators sought less expensive locations. Pursuing this strategy, however, left Tunisia with the external tourism image as one of cheap sun-sand-sea vacations. Jegham recognized that a strategy of diversification would require that Tunisia construct theaters, museums, cinemas, and cultural and sporting centers as well as improve and promote archaeological sites to create new attractions. At the same time, Tunisia would have to vastly upgrade the quality and amenities of its coastal tourism base, such that, in Jegham’s words, eventually Tunisia would have “integrated tourism stations that cause a stir across the Mediterranean basin and the world.” These tasks would demand substantial financial resources and “a considerable effort, equally on the part of promoters, the banks, and the state to attain these objectives.”²⁷ Jegham’s Ministry of Tourism governed the existing tourism-related institutions, including the ONTT, the Agence Foncière Touristique (AFT), and the Office National de l’Artisanat Tunisien (ONAT). Building on these institutions, tourism development would be directed and controlled by a growing number of state councils, institutions, and land management policies. In the 1990s, tourism bureaucracies expanded their access to resources and influence within the wider circles of state power. For example, the resources available for marketing tourism abroad—long a weak spot of the state’s promotion efforts—were expanded. These resources allowed for an increase in the number of ONTT representatives stationed abroad and in the number of media campaigns launched in foreign markets (including many on television).

As respected economic journalist Hédi Mechri wrote in 1989, “The blue gold [i.e. tourism] has dethroned the black gold [i.e. oil] and all the others.”²⁸ Mechri reflected both government and private sector views when he observed, “This infatuation [for tourism development] represents the new national spirit... it constitutes henceforth the motor and the locomotive of the Tunisian economy.”²⁹ The logic of this policy direction was supported by trends in international tourism growth. In aggregate numbers the period of 1987-1990 saw a revival of global tourism where the growth in world tourist arrivals averaged about 8 percent, while tourism receipts often expanded by 20 percent

annually.³⁰ Much of this expansion was a reflection of the reduction of cross-national barriers and costs of international travel caused by the decline of oil prices and the end of the Cold War. The increase in tourist arrivals was also due to the expansion of business and leisure travel produced by increased global trade and the newly industrialized economies of East Asia. The director of marketing for the ONTT noted that “the expanding globalization of tourist activities, the lowering of barriers, geographic as well as cultural, due to technological developments”³¹ was opening new markets for Tunisian tourism. He added that Tunisia should commit itself to a new promotional strategy with the goal of “seriously conquering” markets in North America, the Middle East, and Japan. Moreover, while in the late 1980s and into the 1990s the value of the basic packaged beach vacation was declining in the markets of the advanced industrial economies, there was a growing demand for this product from the emerging middle classes of Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, in the advanced industrial economies there was a growing demand for cultural, heritage, and nature-based tourism, for which Tunisia had considerable untapped resources.

A new vision of tourism development was codified in the eighth national development plan, covering 1992-1996, in which tourism was set to play a more critical role than ever.³² The national development strategy stated, “Tourism has become an important industry generating a flow of foreign currency enabling a consolidation of Tunisia’s policy of openness with regard to the outside world.”³³ Although Ben Ali promoted the development of a range of other economic sectors, by the mid-1990s oil incomes and remittances were not expected to grow further. Tourism receipts, therefore, were critically needed as a source of hard currency, state revenue, and national income.

New Strategies for Economic Liberalization and Political Control

In announcing his assumption of power on 7 November 1987, Ben Ali declared, “We have chosen, with firm conviction, to open our country to the outside world.”³⁴ After consolidating his power, he guided an overhaul of the Tunisian economy through the next two development plans, the seventh plan covering 1987-1991 and eighth plan of 1992-1996. The first focused on achieving macroeconomic stability while the second sought to promote foreign investment, privatization, financial liberalization and “closer integration of Tunisian trade into world, and especially European, markets.”³⁵ As the World Bank would often note about its *bon élève*, “In the mid-1980s Tunisia made the strategic choice to become a modern, market-oriented, and internationally integrated economy.”³⁶

Economic liberalization and integration under Ben Ali did not simply extend the 1970s *infatih* policies. To a large degree *laissez faire* liberalization in the 1970s—while limited to only a few sectors and types of transnational flows—contributed to the destabilization of Bourguiba’s regime, as government institutions and policies were unable to manage effectively the spatial transformation of development patterns within Tunisian territory or the dislocating social consequences of the opening domestic markets to transnational flows. In contrast, Ben Ali proceeded by developing strategies to manage markets and development such that local and foreign private firms had the ability to find profitable opportunities while remaining dependent on state actions and

policies. As the political economist Robert King has argued, “The Tunisian state has encouraged market forces, but only through a bureaucratic-corporatist containment. . . . [It] liberalizes through its [own] institutions.”³⁷ For example, many investment projects require special entitlements from the state and involve large sunk costs that increase the dependence of private capital on the state. Likewise, Bradford Dillman notes, “Foreign investors need to cooperate with state officials if they want the special entitlements that will allow their investments to reach fruition.”³⁸ At the same time, the regime has been willing to forgo more fluid forms of investment, such as portfolio capital. As Clement Henry notes, Tunisia remains an “information-shy regime” constantly calibrating its economic policies to help its firms compete on global markets while cautious of policies and technologies that might allow the private sector and the broader population to mobilize a more autonomous civil society.³⁹

While many economic liberalization and structural adjustment policies have negative consequences for vulnerable segments of society, Ben Ali’s regime has skillfully sought to counter these. As Guilain Denoeux explains:

the regime has been shown capable of correcting a part of the important disequilibriums which had become apparent under Bourguiba, not only between social classes, but between cities and the countryside, between coastal and interior regions, and between the northeast of the country and the south and southwest.⁴⁰

One of the regime’s tactics has been to create a national solidarity fund, commonly referred to by the account number “2626” to which donations to the fund are sent. This fund is used to support needy families, low-income housing, and development projects in the poor and underdeveloped “shadow zone” of Tunisia. Besides the highly personalized patronage effects of the aid, the image of state legitimacy is furthered by Ben Ali’s frequent visits to these zones, creating numerous public relations and photo opportunities for propagation by the national media.

Although tourism is only one element of the regime’s strategy to open up to transnational flows while maintaining and expanding state control over society and economy, it has played a critical role as a site for the development techniques for maintaining state control over development patterns while fostering a economically dependent and politically acquiescent private sector. Following Ben Ali’s consolidation of power in 1988 state officials continued to advocate a greater role for tourism development in shaping the ongoing structural transformation of the rules, institutions, and techniques used to govern territory and population. Accomplishing these tasks, in the context of changes in the global tourism economy, required that the tourism product continually be enhanced and further diversified. The state would have to promote new forms of tourism development—in particular, those that would rely more heavily on place-specific cultural, heritage, and natural resources over which the state maintained territorial control. These efforts also included the development and expansion of tourism complexes, such as Port El Kantaoui, which created enclaves that generate territorially based rents and positive external economies for the firms operating in them.⁴¹ State control over transnational networks and flows associated with

tourism (from tourist spending to media reports and images of the country) relies on the ability of state agencies to govern territory and images of territory. As a result of these strategies, tourism development functions as a means of increasing state power and widening state legitimacy. It has done so by more effectively mitigating regional disparities, creating new private-sector and middle-class partners to bolster the state's fragmented political support, and increasing state control over the construction and manipulation of the icons, symbols, and cultural practices that shape the national identity of the state and its citizens.

Expanding Tourism Development into the Desert South

Ben Ali demonstrated his commitment to diversifying Tunisian tourism at his first council of ministers meeting on 12 November 1987. He instructed state agencies to develop tourism in the southeast and offer incentives to investors to establish hotels and other facilities throughout the region.⁴² Ben Ali seemed well aware that tourism development would be one of the fastest methods to create jobs and economic opportunities in the country's poorer rural regions.⁴³ Moreover, tourism in this desert area, home to many natural and cultural tourism resources, could augment the image of Tunisia by catering to an expanding market of tourists looking for new experiences.

The southeast quadrant of Tunisia is where the boundary of its national territory cuts into the northern edge of the Sahara desert. Traveling inland from the eastern coast, the landscape consists of semi-desert plains that merge into sand dunes and rocky hills. The desert is dotted with green patches of palm groves surrounding the numerous oases including Tozeur located along the large salt lake of Shatt al-Jarid. Regional development since the colonial era has mostly been limited to the mining operation at Qafsa, where a wage-labor force has long helped to foster militant labor activity. While state policies in the 1960s attempted to create poles of development in several interior towns, with the turn toward economic liberalization in the 1970s the private sector expressed little interest in investing in this underdeveloped region. As a result the region became progressively more marginalized as capital investment and job creation became concentrated within Tunisia's northeastern littoral region.

The eighth national tourism development plan for 1992-1996 noted the need to create "thematic tourism products" and it called, in particular, for making desert tourism "*le must*" of Tunisian tourism.⁴⁴ The promotion of tourism development in the south was Tunisia's first major effort to develop a market segment based on the commodification of a highly distinctive experience of place. The ONTT defined the new product as "*le tourisme saharien*" in order to evoke romantic images of the desert popularized in Western books and films.⁴⁵ The label helps to exoticize the tourism product without demanding that the tourist have prior knowledge of Tunisia's cultural past or the specific complex histories of the region. An ONTT brochure notes that the region now provides comfortable modern accommodations and welcomes "visitors who are eager to experience feelings of disorientation and exoticism."⁴⁶ Saharan tourism development also sought to promote opportunities for smaller scale regional entrepreneurs. The government opened up parts of the desert near the Algerian border, otherwise defined as a security zone, to certified firms so they could take tourists on four-wheel

drive “adventures” through the sand dunes. State agencies also developed new types of policies and promotional efforts that have since become common in other efforts to diversify the tourist product and its image. The eighth tourism development plan additionally called for “the adoption of architecture and decoration inspired by the local traditions and use motifs and materials from the region.”⁴⁷ In contrast to the experience of development in many other parts of the country, where tourism development is defined by ever larger white concrete blocks of beach hotels, tourism planners in the south have sought to maintain the traditional quality and characteristics of buildings and markets of old city centers so that they remain a draw for tourists.

To allow the Sahara to be programmed as part of international tours, a government building effort upgraded the airport at Tozeur for international flights and improved road access to the smaller towns. In 1989, the ONTT initiated a project to create a *chaîne hôtelière caravanesérial* throughout southern Tunisia.⁴⁸ The state also built electricity connections for hotels and provided them with wells to supply their water needs.⁴⁹ On the edge of major towns across the Qafsa-Tozeur region, the Agence Foncière Touristique created *zones touristiques* with views of the outlying scenery in which the state agency acquired land to sell to hotel developers at much cheaper rates than other regions.⁵⁰ Hotel development was also encouraged by a large package of incentives, which demonstrated the state’s commitment to seeing tourism flourish in the region. The reaction from local hotel developers was strong. By 1990, the region’s hotel capacity expanded by two thirds.⁵¹ By 1991, in addition to the joint Tunisian-Arab Gulf development funds, almost 15 percent of the total investment in the sector was from foreign sources including tour operators such as Neckerman, Thomson, and Nouvelles Frontières, as well as Club Med.⁵² Tourists were quick to take advantage of one- and two-day visits to the region such that “while the total nights in residence declined nationally by 3 percent between 1988 and 1990, the Tozeur-Gafsa region recorded a 33 percent increase.”⁵³ More critically, between 1987 and 1994 not only did tourism receipts expand from fourteen million dinars to almost 50 million but the spending per tourist arrival also grew from thirty-seven dinars per night to about sixty-four.⁵⁴ Investment continued to expand, and in the first decade of growth the region’s hotel capacity “evolved in number and quality passing from about three thousand beds in 1987, consisting essentially of small hotels, to ten thousand in 1998 consisting of quality hotels offering all the facilities and features need for long stays.”⁵⁵ The region’s share of national bed capacity climbed from 3 percent in 1987 to 6 percent by 1995. According to the ONTT, tourism in the south directly generated 3,600 jobs and, indirectly, about 8,000.

The growth of tourism in the south also increased the demand for locally produced handicrafts and agricultural products. The distinctive motifs found in crafts such as carpets and baskets help define the new “brand” for Tunisian tourism. The local purchase of agricultural goods by visitors limits the profits skimmed off by distributors and bypasses protectionist efforts faced when exporting the same products. In particular, sale of Tozeur’s special variety of dates, called *daqlat nur* or “dates of light,” contributes “to the continued well-being of oasis agriculture and may be more lucrative than export production which is becoming more difficult.”⁵⁶ Western media coverage of tourism development in the south also includes claims that “the develop-

ment of tourism in the south has not only halted the urban drift, it is attracting many young people back from the cities.”⁵⁷ In one report, Mohamed Essayem, head of the southwest tourism sector, is quoted claiming, “With income from tourism...we have been able to win the war against desertification and multiply the agricultural output.”⁵⁸ At the same time, however, tourism development has also subjected the region to many of the social impacts and economic distortions typically caused by tourists and shifting employment patterns.⁵⁹ These consequences, which are rarely reported in the international media and travel stories, might someday produce political reverberations domestically, but in the meantime the region continues to generate a positive and appealing external image for the country.

Tunisia in Film: Image Making and Tourism Marketing

After its initial spurt in the late 1980s, tourism development in the Tozeur region grew apace of that in Tunisia nationally. By the late 1990s the Saharan component came to play a broader role in fashioning a distinct place-image for Tunisia in its marketing efforts by drawing upon cinematic representations of the region. In November 1996, the movie *The English Patient* was released in the United States and soon became an international blockbuster. One of the major storylines is set in late 1930s Egypt. These scenes, however, were shot predominantly in locations throughout Tunisia. While numerous movies had been filmed in Tunisia—including Monty Python’s *Life of Brian* and Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—*The English Patient* featured the stunning sand dunes of southern Tunisia while evoking, maybe better than any other film, the romantic, disorienting psychology commonly associated with the desert in European and American popular culture. After the film won nine Academy Awards, the ONTT made a point of broadcasting the fact that the film was shot in Tunisia.⁶⁰ It began running ads in Europe with photos of the stars from the film passionately kissing next to a panoramic view of a sand dune landscape under the title “The English Patient: A Tenth Oscar for the Tunisian Desert?”⁶¹ In the British market the Dynamo Promotional Marketing agency was hired by the ONTT to “update its image” and ran ads with the tagline “More from the Mediterranean.”⁶² The ONTT and Dynamo worked with Foresight, the promoter of the film in the United Kingdom, to include a revised ONTT logo on *The English Patient* ads along with details for entering a sweepstakes offering a trip for two to Tunisia for a “desert excursion into *The English Patient* country.” Some tour operators did more than use *The English Patient* as a marketing hook by organizing fan-oriented tours of the shooting locations. That year bookings from the United Kingdom and Ireland were up 30 percent and the Tunisian Tourist Board was voted the “Best in the U.K.” by the trade magazine *Travel Weekly*. These techniques were later replicated for other national premieres of *The English Patient* as well as later used for other films shot in Tunisia. The timing of the European release and the Academy Awards broadcast together with the successful marketing campaign helped Tunisian tourism rebound after declines in real tourist receipts of 5 percent in 1995 and 1 percent in 1996, to achieve a 10 percent growth in 1997.⁶³

As popular as *The English Patient* was at the time, the most celebrated and popular films shot in Tunisia remain those of the *Star Wars* saga. George Lucas, the creator and executive producer of the movies, had first come to Tunisia in 1977 to

shoot the original *Star Wars* feature (later retitled *Episode IV: A New Hope*). Both the sand dunes and aspects of vernacular architecture and dress from the southern desert regions were used to create Tatooine, the remote home world of Luke Skywalker. In Tunisia, the marketing experience of *The English Patient* was soon followed by the filming of the *Star Wars* prequel *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Many European tour operators running *The English Patient* tours were able to quickly convert them into *Star Wars* tours when *The Phantom Menace* was released.⁶⁴ Roads built by the film crew to facilitate access to the locations of several shoots and even many of the papier-mâché sets such as “Mos Espa,” the space port from *The Phantom Menace*, were left standing “due to the popularity of the *Star Wars* films and what the Tunisian tourist board sees as an opportunity for business.”⁶⁵ While *Star Wars* tourism is a small niche market, many destinations in the Tunisian south, such as the troglodyte underground dwellings at Matmata, are usually identified in the tourism literature by their association with the *Star Wars* films. In other words, the films have had much to do with generating place-image for contemporary tourists with little knowledge of the culture or history of the indigenous communities in the Tunisian south.

The Expansion of Tourism Complexes

While the development of Saharan tourism allowed Tunisia to begin to diversify its tourist image and spread the benefits of tourism, the main focus of the state’s efforts from the 1990s consisted of the extension and replication of the integrated tourism complex model first developed at Port El Kantaoui. The tourism complex became the framework through which Tunisian tourism was diversified and expanded while the state continued to exert influence over patterns of development and the overall product and its external image. Tunisia was seeking to refashion its image, from a cheap mass beach tourism destination into a more sophisticated, up-market Mediterranean destination that could better compete with the tourism complexes along the northern shore of the sea. As Radhouane Ben Salah, president of the Tunisian Hotel Federation, explains, “We are looking for the jet set.”⁶⁶

Integrated tourism complexes were key to the revitalization of beach resorts in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean islands. By the 1990s, complexes along the northern Mediterranean would grow in size and sophistication such that Port El Kantaoui looked small and dated in comparison. These new complexes were self-contained spaces that offered many specialized facilities, services, and experiences. These typically included larger, more luxurious hotel complexes with gourmet restaurants, extensive athletic and sporting facilities, health spas, boutiques specialty shops, conference facilities, and a variety of entertainment establishments. Some even included medical facilities and cultural institutions such as museums. In contrast, the standardized beach resort of the 1960s and 1970s offered stripped-down, generic features such as dining halls serving buffet meals and hotel discos blaring canned music. In what I have described elsewhere as “Fordism on the beach,” these standardized features allowed resorts to capture economies of scale and offer lower prices to gain more volume.⁶⁷ Several scholars have suggested that the transformation

of the mass tourism markets in the late 1970s represented something of a “crisis of Fordism” in which vertically integrated firms found themselves unable to sustain their business model as tourists sought differentiated and specialized experiences, characterized by post-Fordist consumption, and more segmented markets.⁶⁸ However, as Rebecca Torres argues, tourism complexes—like many large firms—have been able to adapt to these shifting markets.⁶⁹ In addition to continuing to supply standard beach tourism experiences, within their complexes they supplement the classical standard with diverse, small-scale post-Fordist offerings such as specialized tours to archaeological sites or facilities for medical treatment, which cater to only a small segment of visitors. At the same time, they have also been able to provide “neo-Fordist” forms of tourism, like theme park-type attractions, which offer new products for mass markets.

The integrated complex turns the spatial logic of mass beach tourism inside out, thereby facilitating this broad range of experiences. Simple beach hotels are focused outward, toward the sea, as their touristic value is based on their proximity to the beach. By controlling this limited resource, they extract rents from tourists who value the sand, sun, and sea experience. The integrated complex, in contrast, is mostly focused inward. While proximity to the beach and other tourist attractions may be important, the added value is constructed in large part by the quality and variety of features and services provided within the enclave of the resort itself. This shift in focus alters the territorial dynamics of tourism development. In the linear beach model, each new developer generally finds a location down the coast from existing developments in a recognized tourist zone. In contrast, integrated complexes require that all elements be decided upon ahead of time, giving the planner considerable power to extract rents from potential developers and service providers seeking the locational value accorded to the facilities within the complex. Even when projects are undertaken by private developers, state control over territorial resources, planning processes, and financing sources give a range of state agencies considerable ability to shape the nature of these projects. The creation of tourism complexes has the potential to create and extract rents, but, with the integration of auxiliary services and activities, they also generate positive external economies from the flow of tourists in the hotels. While the income generated from these flows may be termed “externalities” from the point of view of each firm, the developer of the complex might also own (and possibly also manage) these firms or rent space to others and thus indirectly capture the benefits created. As Timothy Mitchell explains in the context of changes in patterns of tourism development in Egypt:

Managers seek to increase their profit by channeling more and more tourist expenditure within their own establishments. The grand Egyptian hotels that used to provide little more than accommodation and a dining room have been replaced by complexes that offer three or four restaurants, several bars, shopping arcades, a swimming pool and fitness club, cruises and excursions, business facilities, and evening lectures and entertainment.⁷⁴

Moreover, the self-contained nature of the complexes helps to isolate the negative social, cultural and environmental impacts. Creating more distinct and isolated enclave spaces for tourism became important as the government, in an effort to appease conservative religious and cultural attitudes, began restricting alcohol sales, gambling by Tunisian nationals, and the opening times of cafés during Ramadan. In addition, the ability to generate positive external economies within its own self-contained space, enables a complex to be built in a diverse range of locations—including those that have yet to draw international tourists—allowing the state to create tourism-related employment in underdeveloped regions. The complexes provided the backbone of the effort to expand hotel capacity. By 2001, Ben Ali oversaw the doubling of Tunisian capacity since 1987. With a concerted focus on luxury hotels, by 2002 half of all capacity and bed nights was in the four- to five-star range.

The effort to promote regional development is best exemplified by the building of the most isolated complex, located in the northwestern coastal town of Tabarka, which sits close to the Algerian border. The northwest region is one of the least developed regions of Tunisia. The government built a new airport and invested heavily in other infrastructure works such as roads and water supply. Like Port El Kantaoui the Muntaza Tabarka project is a self-contained *zone touristique* that was planned to include a number of more expensive hotels amounting to ten thousand beds, a yachting harbor, a golf course, and facilities for diving and fishing. A joint venture between the state and the Kuwait Development Bank, tourism planners also envisioned that this complex would serve as an “economic and political pole” anchoring regional ecological and cultural tourism activities and providing hotel jobs as well as work for local handicraft manufacturers.⁷¹

Another major tourism project of the 1990s was Cap Gammarth, situated on a cape just past the wealthy suburbs on the far north side of Tunis where many foreigners live and well-to-do Tunisians have summer villas.⁷² After many years of delay, a Saudi Arabian businessman revived the project. The initial design of the complex included a large five-star hotel, an apartment hotel, a health and sports center, a beach club, as well as a casino and a Las Vegas-style theater for live shows. The project is a joint venture of Tunisian, Kuwaiti, and Saudi Arabian investors and was initially managed by the American “Cleopatra’s World” casino and resort operator. By 2000 several hotels were built while a Tunisian-Singaporean venture was adding a conference center and a sports and leisure complex with a golf course and marina. The expansion of Cap Gammarth was also to include a film center and a large nature park. Gammarth was built in proximity to Tunis, which until the 1990s had played a limited role in national tourism development planning. Since the 1960s the bulk of tourism had remained the packaged beach type, though Tunis did attract a small share of culturally oriented tourists. These numbers, however, remained too small for the government to devote much time and effort toward heritage preservation and museum development. It was only in the late 1990s that work on renovating the Carthage archaeological park was begun.⁷³ While tourists would often visit the city—especially to see the medina, Carthage ruins, Sidi Bou Said, and the Bardo Museum—most would quickly move on to other locations. The Gammarth project was an effort to promote a tourism complex within the

Tunis region that could expand the role of the capital in tourism development as well as attract higher spending tourists by providing an exclusive vacation stop for those visiting Tunis as part of a leisure holiday or business trip. Moreover, the Gammarth complex is close enough to the capital to function as a business hotel and conference center or host parties held by local business and government elites. As hotels with golf courses were built, Tunisia entered the niche market for golf tourism. While adding a more sophisticated “country club” image to the tourism product, this also attracts business/conference tourism and allows Tunisia to better welcome prospective foreign investors, especially those from North America. The efforts to appeal to *haut de gamme* (or high-end) tourism increased as the tourism economy recovered from the impact of September 11, the April 2002 attack on the old synagogue on the island of Jarba, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In 2004, the minister of tourism declared that developing *hotels de charme* was a priority and cosmopolitan gourmet restaurants began appearing in Tunis and elsewhere.⁷⁴

The third major project built during the 1990s was the massive Yasmine-Hammamet complex. The tourism zone Hammamet-Sud is located six miles down the coast from the main center of Hammamet with its long string of hotels spread along the beach. Located on Tunisia’s northeastern coast within an hour of the capital Tunis, Hammamet developed in the 1960s as one of the county’s most crowded zones of mass beach tourism. With an understanding of the aesthetic and environmental damage inflicted by the poor planning, rundown hotels, and dirty beaches that marred the Hammamet and Nebeul region, the development of Hammamet-Sud was part of a program to reshape the built environment of the region with “the goal of creating an integrated and harmonious tourism zone.”⁷⁵ Yasmine-Hammamet was planned to be Tunisia’s largest tourism complex. Once completed, it is expected to hold over forty hotels and hundreds of apartment units with the capacity to accommodate up to 30,000 residents and visitors at a time.⁷⁶ As one travel writer notes, stretched along the boulevards of the complex are “47 Las Vegas-style themed hotels. Here you can stay in mock-Roman opulence, in a pseudo-Greek temple or a Moorish theme park with hookah pipes and Turkish baths, all safely controlled by security guards and electronic gates.”⁷⁷ The complex also includes a shopping center, marina, golf course, and clubhouse. Cleopatra’s World was tapped to run a hotel-entertainment center with a casino and theater where concerts could be held. The state-of-the-art conference center is intended to host large international gatherings. With the hope that the venture would launch Tunisia into the deluxe tourism circuit of the global jet set, the first units to be built were five-star “palaces,” some of the most luxurious ever built in Tunisia, with most of the rest expected to be four or five stars.⁷⁸ Targeting upscale tourists is an attempt to create on the southern shore of the Mediterranean a “French Riviera”-style destination. In 2004, the Médina casino was inaugurated with a gathering of the “European, Arab, and African jet set,” complete with diplomats and movie stars. The developer’s ambition is to make Tunisia a destination known for quality facilities and “shine a light on Tunisian tourism and glorify the image of the country.”⁷⁹

The complex is also notable for its efforts to develop cultural and entertainment features not yet found in North Africa. Its Médina Mediterranea commercial and enter-

tainment complex is built, according to its designer, in the style of an Arab medina, with architectural recreations that trace the history of Tunisia and the Mediterranean from the Punic era through Arabo-Islamic and Andalusian influences. Much of the project is the brainchild of Abdelwahab Ben Ayed, president of the Poulina Group. Like many contemporary tourism developers, Ben Ayed runs a conglomerate of diverse businesses (Poulina's early focus was in agricultural products and food processing), which has more recently moved into tourism and real estate in order to diversify its holdings and exploit expanding opportunities. When asked to explain the motivation for building Médina Méditerranée, Ben Ayed recalled he had dreamed of reconstructing a medieval city "with active souks, authentic artisan workshops, multicolored *fondouks* that could transport the tourist out of familiar surroundings and allow them to rediscover with the Tunisians their identity."⁸⁰ For a small admission fee, the Médina presents a pseudo-public space filled with music, film, and other artistic activities. There is a religious museum that incorporates Christian, Muslim, and Jewish teachings, as well as the family-oriented, Disney-like theme park Carthagoland, which is packed with interactive educational exhibits. Ben Ayed notes, "We wish to make Tunisia a center for cultural and tourist radiance for all the Mediterranean.... Let us not forget that Hannibal wanted to link together all the circumference of the Mediterranean."⁸¹ The Médina Méditerranée represents a neo-Fordist form of tourism development that can be centrally managed and controlled within the space of a tourism enclave well integrated into transnational flows of capital, peoples, and images.

Tourism and the Uses of Culture

Under Ben Ali, the regime also began articulating the view that developing cultural resources is necessary to counter the threat of cultural globalization. As Mohammed Ghannouchi, a minister in charge of foreign investment, stated, "Culture is key to coping with any external crises or challenges our country may face."⁸²

While the lack of cultural tourism had allowed the sector to languish, Tunisia has more recently begun showing great concern for its cultural heritage with the formation of groups like the Association Sauvegarde de la Medina that gained outside funding to conserve sections of the Tunis medina.⁸³ In the 1990s, the government passed laws to protect and conserve cultural heritage. And in 1997 it created the Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de la Promotion Culturelle "with the objective of enhancing historic and archaeological sites for tourism development."⁸⁴ The development of these resources would not only expand the country's ability to tap into a growing segment of the global tourism economy that generally produces higher revenues, but cultural tourism could also bring income to smaller, inland towns and create jobs for a wider range of Tunisians such as craftsmen, artists, and guides.

For its advocates the development of cultural and heritage tourism is viewed as a means to combat the threats of cultural globalization. By valuing cultural heritage in this way, more funds and efforts are put into heritage conservation, which helps limit the impact of uncontrolled tourism or other forms of development near sensitive sites. In 2001, the World Bank granted Tunisia a loan to protect several of its cultural heritage sites (including archaeological ruins, museums, and religious centers) and better

prepare them for tourism. The government expanded its cultural affairs spending to over 1 percent of its total budget. The state built a new national library, revamped and opened new museums, and organized more exhibitions and festivals.⁸⁵ These cultural programs can serve to augment the country's tourist image, but they are also part of creating a greater public awareness of the state's vision of Tunisian cultural heritage, especially through school tours.

While many of these projects seek to expand tourism revenues and protect cultural resources with tourism value, these projects also represent a dovetailing of tourism development and image making with national identity formation and myth making. The effort to promote the Carthaginian general Hannibal, he of the elephant-borne crossing of the Pyrenees during the second Punic war, as a national "mascot" best exemplifies this convergence.⁸⁶ As highlighted in the Carthagoland theme park and ONTT brochures and advertisements, Hannibal has become an important element of the Tunisian "brand" used to mark a distinctive, territorially rooted identification for the nation's external image. At the same time, on the domestic front, the promotion of Hannibal as a national hero and icon has been stage-managed by the government, in part as a means of countering efforts by Islamists to encourage Tunisians to identify exclusively with Islam and the Arab world. The image of Hannibal is used to promote a pluralistic Tunisian identity with a seemingly authentic local resonance, though Tunisians have not typically embraced Hannibal as a nationalist figure or direct ancestor.

Official efforts to project this "modern" identity and external image, however, often amount to state-managed forms of cultural production. They sometimes generate opposition from historians, archaeologists, and cultural heritage preservationists who view the state as intruding into their realms of professional knowledge.⁸⁷ One way to contain the erosion of state control over the process of myth making is to develop state-sponsored institutions and scholars.⁸⁸ In addition to the development of Hannibal-related memorials, most notably at Carthage, a central element of this effort is the formation of officially sanctioned "Hannibal Clubs," dedicated to understanding and promoting the legacy of the figure. Hannibal Clubs have also been established overseas, generally with the help of the local Tunisian embassy and used as a context to recruit and celebrate friends of Tunisia. The clubs often seek to present Hannibal not as a nationalist military leader (who, in the end, provoked the Roman destruction of Carthage) but as a figure of world history who represents universal values and can help promote cultural bridges, trade, and tourism. In establishing the Hannibal Club USA, Ambassador Nouredine Mejdoub, an artist himself, emphasized that Hannibal's legacy was not war and conquest, but the "promotion of commercial relations around the shores of Mediterranean."⁸⁹

Efforts to promote commercial relations around the Mediterranean took an ambitious turn in the 1990s with the Oslo peace process and the U.S.-backed effort to promote the economic integration of Israel into the Middle East.⁹⁰ The Tunisian government has long affirmed that Muslim Tunisians maintained relatively tolerant relations with the country's Jewish community. Many Tunisian-born Jews, however, have felt that post-colonial Tunisia, especially after 1967, failed to fully integrate its Jewish community into what came to be defined as an Arab state.⁹¹ The Oslo process

and the seemingly impending closure of the Arab-Israeli conflict opened a new window of opportunity between Tunisia and Israel, states with no formal diplomatic relations. Tunisian officials began making an effort to encourage and facilitate visits by Israelis and Jews with Tunisian roots. In 1993, the Tunisian foreign minister even expressed to a visiting Jewish leader from the United States that he thought there was “a major tourist market for American Jews anxious to uncover ancient Jewish roots in exotic Tunisia.”⁹²

External Openness, Internal Control: The Paradoxes of Tunisian Globalization

Under Ben Ali, Tunisia has become ever more open to and integrated into the networks of the global economy. By generating flows of tourists and capital across the Mediterranean Sea, the state’s tourism development efforts have played a critical role in shaping this process. Increased marketing and efforts to diversify the Tunisian tourism product helped to expand tourism revenues by over 60 percent (in real terms) between 1990 and 2000.⁹³ At the same time, Ben Ali has sought to define Tunisia’s path toward globalization as a bridging of distances across the Mediterranean through economic flows as well as the projection of a pluralistic, Mediterranean-based cultural identity. The result of these efforts is well represented by a visit to the post-modern Médina Méditerranéenne, where diverse elements of Tunisia’s Mediterranean identities are brought together within a space exposed to the gaze of international tourists and sustained by the flows of hard currency they bring. This space of “openness,” however, is like the pseudo-public space of a theme park or shopping mall. It is a space of control, one that is politically managed rather than defined by the actions and interests of autonomous agents within a system of democratic participation. In other words, media representations of Tunisia’s external openness belie the domestic regime of control that governs the integration processes. This paradoxical form of openness also characterizes patterns of development in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gulf, as these states also seek to use tourism as a means of promoting global economic integration through the construction of enclaves where state authorities maintain the ability to manage the transnational flows of people, capital, and images.⁹⁴

It was soon after Ben Ali consolidated the power of his regime that the moment of internal political openness and pluralism ended. By the early 1990s, political liberalization and reform were abandoned in an all-out effort to crush the Islamist movement following the outbreak of clashes with Islamist activists. These confrontations began in the context of Algeria’s descent into civil war. Tunisia’s external orientation made the economy especially vulnerable to being tarnished by association with the violence next door. Civil freedoms and civil society were soon sacrificed to this internal war. The regime banked on the middle classes, the left, women’s rights activists, and the trade union movements to support the government and marginalize the Islamist challenge.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Ben Ali moved aside the old guard of the Parti Socialiste Destourien and renamed it the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique while expanding its base through a recruitment drive. While periodic elections continued to take place, they occurred in an environment where Ben Ali’s forces have eliminated all traces of autonomy and divergence in the trade union leadership, the existing opposition politi-

cal parties, the press, and civil society organizations such as the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme.

Moreover, state control over society was expanded through the introduction of a *mukhabarat* (security police) state where the number of police increased from 20,000 during Bourguiba's last days to 80,000 ten years later.⁹⁶ Unlike "police states" in the region, the Tunisian regime continued to articulate a discourse of pluralism, democracy, and openness to buttress its cosmopolitan tourist image throughout its period of political deliberalization.⁹⁷ Tunisia can support an image of "openness" with reference to its very progressive personal status laws, social programs such as the 2626 efforts, mentioned above, its enthusiastic support for negotiating free trade agreements with the European Union (and, later, the United States), and its constant expansion of tourism and attraction of investment capital. At the same time, the state's authoritarian power is likely to be far more stable than in other Arab states more often referred to as police states in the Western media.

Not long after Ben Ali's regime of authoritarian control was established in the early 1990s, the European Union (E.U.) embarked on a process with its southern neighbors across the sea to forge a series of cooperation agreements seeking to create a zone of peace and prosperity. The E.U. states had a particular interest in promoting economic development to help stem the tide of (illegal) immigration. Many were also concerned that poor economic conditions would create an environment conducive to a militant Islamist movement. Following the E.U.-Mediterranean Barcelona declaration in 1995, Tunisia became the first state to sign an "association agreement" with the E.U. It marked a new phase of development as Tunisia committed to economic reform, a full embrace of economic globalization, and a complete dismantling of tariff barriers by 2010. In order to ready Tunisian firms, the state instituted a *mise à niveau* program by which firms receive government support to upgrade and modernize in order to compete internationally. While many small, labor-intensive firms emerged in the 1970s, by the 1990s Tunisian firms were no longer able to achieve comparative advantage through lower wages and needed to increase skill and technology levels. Firms had to create internationally competitive goods or else provide the subcontracting operations needed by European firms in the high tech, business services, and flexible manufacturing sectors. In 2005, the manager of the industrial *mise à niveau* program, Slim Tlatli, was appointed secretary of state at the Tourism Ministry and charged with developing a *mise à niveau* program for the hotel sector to be funded by Arab and French development agencies.

The *mise à niveau* program, however, represents another expression of the country's paradoxical globalization. It promotes economic integration and external openness, but via a process managed by state agencies. The result is a highly filtered form of openness in which, in order to avoid the effects of the 1970s *inftah*, it prioritizes maintaining social order over private sector autonomy and the spread of new ideas and methods. In the program, assistance generally comes at the price of closer monitoring and dependence on and direction from state institutions. As Jean-Pierre Cassarino argues, "For the private sector the program represents a selective adjustment.... Its purpose is not to rescue business concerns as a whole, but to buttress the ability of a select number

of private firms to survive international competition, by modernizing and optimizing their production lines, developing vocational training, and promoting their export capacity."⁹⁸ The state has encouraged the development of Tunisian conglomerates by a set of "captains" of industry because they can best gain economies of scale and acquire new production technologies needed for surviving increased trade liberalization. Politically, Cassarino explains, "by mobilizing the 'Captains' of these corporate groups, it enhances its control over economic liberalization, in the interest of securing social order."⁹⁹ Interestingly, after listing some of the captains of Tunisian industry, Cassarino notes, "It has to be said, however, that the most emblematic figure of the 'Captains' is perhaps 'Aziz Milad, who manages one of the most profitable private export-businesses in Tunisia, namely Tunisian Travel Service."¹⁰⁰

These are tradeoffs that businessmen and entrepreneurs in Tunisia are generally willing to make.¹⁰¹ The result, however, is that as Tunisia becomes more closely integrated into European and American marketplaces, its political economy remains constricted by the surveillance of an increasingly authoritarian state. Unlike reforming socialist states, such as China, where market reform has been enacted within a system of authoritarian state control, Tunisia was long considered one of the most open, liberal states in the Arab world with a rich history as a meeting point for intellectual and cultural flows across the Mediterranean. By 2000, however, the *Economist* was suggesting that "with the exception of Syria and Libya, Tunisia has the most closed society on the Mediterranean."¹⁰² These forms of political and social control are evident in the tourism sector where hotel operators are required to be sure that any meeting held in their facilities has been approved by the proper authorities. The ubiquitous police lining the roads and highways and intersections keep a close eye on travelers and will often redirect cars that are not tourist vehicles away from tourist complexes. Many tourists do not seem to mind. Especially in the wake of the wave of attacks against tourists in Egypt in the 1990s, and the 2002 Jarba bombing, tourists are likely to welcome the added security. Tourists who stay within the confines of their seemingly cosmopolitan enclaves or do not wander off from their group tours might not even notice. As an American travel writer noted in a *Condé Nast Traveler* essay touting Tunisia's makeover as a luxury destination for cultural tourists, "Largely invisible to tourists, the police-state machinery is impressively efficient."¹⁰³ Nor have these political changes yet put a damper on the country's external image of openness, modernity, and cosmopolitanism. As long as visitors such as Christopher Hitchens—impressed by its "stylish females," "clean streets," and "efficient taxis"—continue to view Tunisia simply as a "success story," tourism development and tourism flows will continue to sustain the country's march along the path of paradoxical globalization.¹⁰⁴

ENDNOTES

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⁶ Salah Wahab, "Tourism and Terrorism: Synthesis of the Problem with Emphasis on Egypt" and Abraham Pizam, "Does Tourism Promote Peace and Understanding Between Unfriendly Nations?" in Abraham Pizam and Yoel Mansfeld, eds., *Tourism, Crime and International Security* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1996). For one of the few studies of the political economy of tourism in Tunisia, see Robert A. Poirier and Stephen Wright, "The Political Economy of Tourism in Tunisia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 31, no. 1 (March 1993). For a brief survey of the political economy of tourism across the Middle East and North Africa, see Robert Vitalis, "The Middle East on the Edge of the Pleasure Periphery," *Middle East Report* 196 (September-October 1995).

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¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Tunisia-related tourism data is gathered from Office National du Tourisme Tunisien (ONTT), *Le Tourisme Tunisien En Chiffres* (Tunis: ONTT, various issues) and/or from the ONTT website, <http://www.tunisiestourisme.com.tn/professionnels-e/stat.htm>.

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¹³ For the first point of view, see World Bank, *Tunisia's Global Integration and Sustainable Development: Strategic Choices for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC, 1996); for the second, see Nicholas S. Hopkins, "Tunisia: An Open and Shut Case," *Social Problems* 28, no. 4 (April 1981) and Daniel Kamelgarn, "Tunisie (1970-1977), Le développement d'un capitalisme dependant," *Peuples Méditerranées* 4 (1978).

¹⁴ Michael Collins Dunn, "Tunisia: Untold Story from the Arab World," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1988.

- ¹⁵ ONTT, *Le VIIème plan: le développement du secteur touristique, bilan et perspectives* (Tunis: ONTT, 1986), 14.
- ¹⁶ Emma C. Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1999), 106, 114-115.
- ¹⁷ Ministère du Tourisme et de L'Artisanat, *Le VIIIème plan, 1992-1996: rapport définitif de la commission sectorielle du tourisme, du themalisme et de l'artisanat* (Tunis, 1991), 11.
- ¹⁸ Michael Hopkins, *Tunisia to 1993: Steering for Stability* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 1989), 72.
- ¹⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), "Tunisia and Malta," *EIU Country Report 2* (1987), 26.
- ²⁰ In late January 1980, on the second anniversary of a massive anti-government protest that the Tunisian army was called out to suppress, 300 Libyan-armed Tunisian exiles seized control of the town of Qafsa in an attempt to destabilize Bourguiba's government. Bourguiba broke relations with Libya as its military made a show of force at the border. The Tunisian army soon reclaimed control of the town, though the border with Libya remained closed.
- ²¹ EIU, "Tunisia," *EIU Country Report 2* (1988), 17.
- ²² Iliya Harik, "Privatization and Development in Tunisia," in Iliya Harik and Denis J. Sullivan, eds., *Privatization and Liberalization in the Middle East* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 217.
- ²³ EIU, "Tunisia," *International Tourism Report 4* (October 1988), 37.
- ²⁴ Built in the late 1970s and located just north of Sousse, Port El Kantaoui represented Tunisia's first effort to build a government-planned integrated tourism complex that would replicate the pattern of development found along the Spanish coast. The design of the complex consists of a marina hub surrounded by a cluster of hotels, apartments, restaurants, shops, and other facilities. For more about the development of Port El Kantaoui and its socioeconomic impact, see James Sharp, "The Port El Kantaoui Tourist Complex and Its Regional Consequences," in Ray Harris and Dick Lawless, eds., *Field Studies in Tunisia* (Durham, UK: Department of Geography, University of Durham, 1981), 88-96; Frederick C. Huxley, "Development in Hamman Sousse, Tunisia: Change, Continuity, and Challenge," in Muneera Salem-Murdock and Michael M. Horowitz, eds., *Anthropology and Development in North Africa and the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).
- ²⁵ Mohamed Jegham, closing remarks at "Le tourisme tunisien face aux défis de l'an 2000," colloquium sponsored by Centre de Recherches et d'Études Administratives and Information Touristique, 19 May 1989, Tunis, 46-47.
- ²⁶ On the rise of the mass beach tourism economy in Tunisia, see Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts*, chapter one.
- ²⁷ Jegham, closing remarks at "Le tourisme tunisien face aux défis de l'an 2000."
- ²⁸ Hédi Mechri, "Les commentaires du rédacteur," *Réalités* (Tunis), 7 July 1989.
- ²⁹ Hédi Mechri, "Tourisme Tunisien: Un choix irréversible," *Réalités* (Tunis), 7 July 1989.
- ³⁰ World Tourism Organization, *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics*, 51st ed. (Madrid, 1999).
- ³¹ Tahar Saihi, "La Tunisie et les nouveaux marchés touristique," paper presented at "Le tourisme tunisien face aux défis de l'an 2000," 7.
- ³² Ministère du Tourisme et de L'Artisanat, *Le VIIIème Plan, 1992-1996*, 38.
- ³³ Tunisian External Communication Agency, *Tunisia, 1992-1996: The Development Strategy* (Tunis, 1994), 22.
- ³⁴ Cited in Abdelaziz Testas, "The Contribution of EU Investment to Tunisia's Economic Development," *Journal of North African Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 23.
- ³⁵ Emma C. Murphy, "Economic Reform and the State in Tunisia," in Hassan Hakimian and Ziba Moshaver, eds., *The State and Global Change: The Political Economy of Transition in the Middle East and North Africa* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2001), 142.
- ³⁶ World Bank, *Tunisia's Global Integration*, xiii.

- ³⁷ Robert J. King, "The Political Logic of Economic Reform in Tunisia," in Azzedine Layachi, ed., *Economic Crisis and Political Change in North Africa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 120.
- ³⁸ Bradford Dillman, "Facing the Market in North Africa," *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 204.
- ³⁹ Clement M. Henry, *Challenges of Global Capital Markets to Information-Shy Regimes: The Case of Tunisia*, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research Occasional Paper 19 (Abu Dhabi, 1998).
- ⁴⁰ Guilain Denoeux, "La Tunisie de Ben Ali et ses paradoxes," *Maghreb-Machrek* 166 (October-December 1999), 48.
- ⁴¹ For a detailed presentation on how tourism development generates rents and positive external economies, see Waleed Hazbun, "Globalization, Reterritorialization, and the Political Economy of Tourism Development in the Middle East," *Geopolitics* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2004).
- ⁴² Later, 12 November would become the "National Day of Saharan Tourism."
- ⁴³ See "Développement touristique régional: Le Soleil brille pour tous," *Tourisme Info* (Tunis), 16-30 November 1998.
- ⁴⁴ Ministère du Tourisme et de L'Artisanat, *Le VIIIème Plan, 1992-1996*, 67.
- ⁴⁵ Sue Bleasdale and Sue Tapsell, "Saharan Tourism: Arabian Nights or Tourist 'Daze'?" in Mike Robinson, Nigel Evans, and Paul Callaghan, eds., *Tourism and Cultural Change* (Newcastle: Centre for Travel and Tourism, University of Northumbria, 1996), 29.
- ⁴⁶ Tunisian National Tourism Office, "Tunisia: The Oases," pamphlet, n.d.
- ⁴⁷ Ministère du Tourisme et de L'Artisanat, *Le VIIIème Plan, 1992-1996*, 67.
- ⁴⁸ Robert Gant and José Smith, "Tourism and National Development Planning in Tunisia," *Tourism Management* 13, no. 3 (September 1992), 335.
- ⁴⁹ Bleasdale and Tapsell, 31; Mohamed Aziz Tajina, "Le tourisme saharien et son impact sur le développement régional du Sud-Tunisien," *Cahiers de CERES Serie Sociologie* 18 (1991), 169-170.
- ⁵⁰ Tajina, 148-151.
- ⁵¹ Bleasdale and Tapsell, 44.
- ⁵² Tajina, 173.
- ⁵³ Gant and Smith, 335.
- ⁵⁴ Bleasdale and Tapsell, 44-45.
- ⁵⁵ "Sahara: Oasis et sable," *Tourisme Info* (Tunis), 1-15 December 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Bleasdale and Tapsell, 37.
- ⁵⁷ Anver Versi, "Destination Made in Heaven," *The Middle East* (March 1999).
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ See Claude Llana, "Tozeur, ravagée par le tourisme," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (July 2004). In contrast to the uncritical accounts typically found in outlets such as *The Middle East*, travel magazines or newspaper travel sections (not to mention the sponsored sections of the *International Herald Tribune*), Llana presents a devastating picture of the impact of tourism on the local society and environment. He notes, for example, that the tourism industry's demand for water has commercialized it, making access to the resource expensive for many local farmers.
- ⁶⁰ See *Profession Tourisme* (Tunis), 15 April 1997.
- ⁶¹ See Guillemette Mansour, "Du Cinéma au tourisme: 'Le Patient Anglais': Dans le sillage d'un grand film," *Profession Tourisme* (Tunis), 15 April 1997, 21-23.
- ⁶² This case study is presented in "Integrated: Tunisia," *Marketing*, 10 September 1998.
- ⁶³ Within the American market Tunisian tourism would gain a marketing plug from an unlikely source. On 13 March 1997 the top-rated television situation comedy *Seinfeld* ran an episode where the character Elaine, an employee of an adventure clothing company catalog, gets into trouble with her boss for not liking the movie *The English Patient*. He sends her to on a trip to appreciate the Tunisian desert where, he notes, the film was shot.

⁶⁴ Many devoted fans travel as adventure archaeologists to “dig up” remnants of the “past.” See the report of the first archaeological field survey of *Star Wars* shooting in Tunisia, printed in a *Star Wars* fan club magazine. David West Reynolds, “Return to Tatooine,” *The Insider* (December 1995). See also *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), 5 September 1999.

⁶⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1999. An anonymous reviewer for the *Arab Studies Journal* informs me that as a consequence the sets have since “been allowed to go to nature in the desert with no protection—no one seems to own them or care for them.”

⁶⁶ *Financial Times*, 22 September 1997.

⁶⁷ See Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts*, chapter one. The notion of Fordism refers to the establishment of political, economic, and technological arrangements that achieve economies of scale and sustain the mass production of standardized goods by ensuring a stable supply of labor and demand for those goods. Such a system is viewed as underpinning economic expansion in the advanced industrial states between 1950 and the mid-1970s when the arrangements that sustained it broke down. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 124-140. For an explanation of the breakdown of Fordism, see Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1993), 274; and Auliana Poon, *Tourism, Technology, and Competitive Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ Rebecca Torres, “Cancun’s Tourism Development from a Fordist Spectrum of Analysis,” *Tourism Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002).

⁷⁰ Timothy Mitchell, “Worlds Apart: An Egyptian Village and the International Tourism Industry,” *Middle East Report* 196 (September-October 1995), 10.

⁷¹ Mahmoud Hosni, “Tourisme: Le Nord-Ouest devrait se prendre en charge,” *La Presse de Tunisie*, 16 June 1997. See also Andreas Kagermeier, “Le développement de nouvelles zones touristiques en Tunisie: L’Exemple de Tabarka,” *Revue Tunisienne de Géographie* 31 (2000); and Andreas Kagermeier, “New Touristic Centres in Peripheral Regions of the Maghreb: Their Development and Economic Importance in Tunisia and Morocco,” *Arab World Geographer* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2001).

⁷² See “Le Palace-Gammarth: À la recherche du produit complete,” *Profession Tourisme* (Tunis), 15 December 1996; EIU, “Tunisia,” *EIU Country Report* (1995); EIU, “Tunisia,” *EIU Country Report* (1996); EIU, “Tunisia,” *EIU Country Report* (January 2001); EIU, “Tunisia,” *EIU Country Report* (January 2006).

⁷³ Sophie Bessis, “Carthage’s Long-Awaited Rescue,” *UNESCO Courier* (September 1999).

⁷⁴ Isabel Choat, “Tunisia: Charme Offensive,” *Guardian*, 19 June 2004; Susan Hack, “Desert Bloom,” *Condé Nast Traveler* (January 2007).

⁷⁵ See “Grand recensement sur la commercialisation de produit tunisien en septembre,” *La Presse de Tunisie*, 7 June 1997.

⁷⁶ M’hamed Jaïbi, “Hammamet-Sud, La marina: c’est parti!” *La Presse de Tunisie*, 12 May 1997; “Le nouveau joyau de Hammamet Sud,” *Tourisme Info* (Tunis), 16-30 September 1997; and EIU, “Tunisia,” *EIU Country Report* 3 (1994).

⁷⁷ *Independent*, 10 December 2000.

⁷⁸ *Financial Times*, 22 September 1997.

⁷⁹ Raymond Matar, “Le Casino-Le Médina,” *L’Economist Maghrébin* (Tunis), 19 May-2 June 2004.

⁸⁰ Ridha Lahmar, “La Médina de Yasmine-Hammamet,” *Réalités* (Tunis), 7 October 1999.

⁸¹ “Cartes sur table avec M. Abdelwahab Ben Ayed, Président du Groupe Poulina,” *Réalités* (Tunis), 19 February 2004.

⁸² *International Herald Tribune*, 25 November 1999. See also *Financial Times*, 22 September 1997.

⁸³ Association Sauvegarde de la Medina, *Projets et Réalisation 1980...1990: Pour La Promotion de la Medina* (Tunis: Ville de Tunis, 1990).

⁸⁴ World Bank, “Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Loan to the Republic of Tunisia for a Cultural Heritage Project,” (Washington, DC, 2001), 4.

- ⁸⁵ Fawzia Zouari, "Cap sur la culture," *Jeune Afrique*, 11 June 2006.
- ⁸⁶ *Guardian*, 11 April 1997.
- ⁸⁷ See World Bank, "Project Appraisal Document," 22.
- ⁸⁸ The state has supported the work of local historians who have worked to improve the country's external image, such as those seeking to challenge accounts of the ancient Carthaginian practice of infanticide. See *Wall Street Journal*, 26 May 2005.
- ⁸⁹ Nora Boustany, "Punic Partnership," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1998.
- ⁹⁰ See Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts*, chapter three.
- ⁹¹ See Albert Memmi, "Jews, Tunisians, and Frenchmen," *Literary Review* 41, no. 2 (Winter 1998).
- ⁹² *Jerusalem Post*, 25 August 1993.
- ⁹³ Calculated from International Monetary Fund, *Tunisia: Recent Economic Developments* (Washington, DC, 2000); ONTT, *Le tourisme tunisien en chiffres* (Tunis, 1995); and World Bank, *World Tables* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
- ⁹⁴ On the cases of Jordan and Dubai, see Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts*, chapters four and five.
- ⁹⁵ Denoeux, "La Tunisie de Ben Ali et ses paradoxes," 34-35.
- ⁹⁶ *Economist*, 13 January 1996.
- ⁹⁷ See Sadok Chaabane, *Ben Ali et la voie pluraliste en Tunisie* (Tunis: Ceres Editions, 1996).
- ⁹⁸ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "The EU-Tunisian Association Agreement and Tunisia's Structural Reform Program," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 65.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69ff.
- ¹⁰¹ See Eva Bellin, *Stalled Democracy: Capital, Labor, and the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁰² *Economist*, 15 April 2000.
- ¹⁰³ Hack, "Desert Bloom."
- ¹⁰⁴ Hitchens, "At the Desert's Edge." ♦