Veiling and Unveiling Muslim Women: State Coercion, Islam, and the "Disciplines of the Heart"

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As emphasised in the works of Mohammed Arkoun, theological and interpretive questions surrounding Islam must be read – as in any other religious tradition – not only as textual issues but also as political stakes.[1] This is particularly true of the concept of reform (*iṣlāḥ*) in the history of Islam, a concept at the heart of the Prophet's mission: "I only came to reform" (*in urīdu illā al-iṣlāḥ*) (Qur'an 11:88). *Iṣlāḥ*, or the operation of re-ordering, correcting and transforming necessitates an interpretation of the current situation and a vision for a future one. Its object may be the individual as much as the collective entity or institution. As such, the enterprise of reform is not only the aim of individual religious reformers who write essays about the purpose and methods of reform, but is also among the interests and concerns of the modern state that crafts policies. This paper will focus on the ways in which, in Tunisia, the postcolonial state formulated principles for reform of their society, referred to Islam to mould specific domains of life, and developed, in the process, theological lines of reasoning and justifications. Tunisian postcolonial state officials defined specific domains in which religion could and should be interpreted and implemented. The Tunisian postcolonial state is often seen as having enacted policies shaped by a strong secularist ideology and having relegated Islam to the private sphere.[2] Contrary to this common analysis, the case of Tunisia illustrates that far from being "secularist" states circumscribing religion to the private domain, authoritarian Middle Eastern states often defined themselves as "Muslim" states and produced public theological definitions that were instrumental in their enterprises of reforming their societies. One privileged domain of intervention for post colonial reformist state elites is that of "the woman question." In Tunisia, as in most of the Muslim Middle East, nationalist movements and post-independence state elites, in

the context of their projects to establish a nation state and to give meaning to the notion of citizenship, aimed at improving women's rights. As described by Deniz Kandiyoti, the "woman question" revolved "around the issues of education, seclusion, veiling and polygyny," and "coincided with a broader agenda about 'progress' and the compatibility between Islam and modernity."[3] Kandiyoti describes two sides to the debate on women: on the one hand, a "secularist elite" with "progressive aspirations," and on the other hand those who "expressed in Islamic terms" a "hankering for cultural authenticity."[4] This article will show that the progressive aspirations of nationalist and state elites were in fact, at least in the case of Tunisia, framed within a repertoire of cultural authenticity that often included Islamic terms, and that the Islamist trend itself articulated its conception of the "woman question" in the vocabulary that the nation state had built to speak of the "Tunisian woman."

The period I will concentrate on starts in the late 1920s – when Tunisian nationalism against French occupation had matured into an organised movement – and ends in 1987, the year that marked the end of Habib Bourguiba's regime. I will focus on Bourguiba's shifting position on veiling, to help us understand how the veil became a complex and multilayered political issue in Tunisia over the course of the twentieth century. I will emphasise Bourguiba's continuities with Muslim reformist thought – in particular the Tunisian al-Tahar al-Haddad's writings since the 1930s – and, perhaps more surprisingly, with Islamist writings of the 1970s. In its reforming enterprise, the Tunisian independent state articulated a language and conception of religion that moulded themselves into older reformist tropes. These tropes were later re-appropriated by Islamist movements in their political opposition to the Tunisian government. If the political positions of state representatives and Islamist opposition are conspicuously different on subjects such as the veil, they nonetheless operate under the same regime of thought regarding the relationships between nation, religion and reform. I will argue that the opposing views of the state's elite and Islamists on the subject of women's dress are in fact formulated within similar reformist vocabularies regarding female subjectivity, the place of women in the world, and the intentionality of religious norms. I will argue that the state and Islamist activists shared similar conceptions of "religion" as circumscribed

domains of interpretation and efficacy, which were in many ways comparable to the reformist ideas of the first part of the twentieth century.

1. The controversy of 1929: nationalism, Westernisation, and the Islamic identity of Tunisia

On 11 January 1929, the francophone Tunisian nationalist newspaper *L'Etendard Tunisien* published an article by Habib Bourguiba, then a young nationalist activist and member of the old Destour party. The publication of the article marked one of the heated moments of the "battle of the veil". This article was Bourguiba's account of a meeting held at L'Essor, a literary socialist club, where he participated in a fiery debate with Tunisian and French socialists – among them Muhammad No'man and Joachim Durel – about the wearing of the veil by Tunisian women. In this debate, Bourguiba defended the wearing of the face veil, in particular against "a certain Miss Ourtani",[5] whom he accused of belonging to a group of "heroic apostles of dress feminism" supported by the French socialists.[6] Referring to another Tunisian young female activist, he added not without irony: "Ms. Menchari, a charming young lady, came, her face uncovered, and wanted to move us about the fate of her unfortunate sisters who are deprived of air and light and live under the triple weight of ignorance, gossip and the veil."[7] Manoubia Ouertani and Habiba Menchari were indeed young feminist activists who as early as 1924 had defended the possibility of unveiling, and they themselves had appeared unveiled in public.[8] If Bourguiba stood against them, it was not because he was against *sufūr* (unveiling); it was because he wanted to publicly defend what he called "the Tunisian personality" (*al-shakhsiyya al-tunisiyya*) against the coloniser's intent to Westernise Tunisia, which had been under French protectorate since 1881. Indeed, for the Bourguiba of 1929, the veil could not be abandoned as French socialists proposed, because it was a signifier of the identity of a nation under occupation. Hence, to defend the veil was to perform an act of resistance against the coloniser. Bourguiba interpreted the wearing of the veil as a symbol of the nation, rather than as a religious obligation ordered by the revealed texts or a freely chosen way of dressing that resulted from voluntary and deliberate individual choices by women.

Bourguiba did not see the veil as a religious prescription. He considered it a custom (*'āda*) that had been anchored in the practices of the national community for a long time and that had become part of the mores of his society. Bourguiba's justification made the veil the symbol of a collective tradition rather than an individual preference.

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We have in front of us a custom anchored for centuries in our mores, evolving with them at the same pace, which is quite slowly. The mores of a group, be it the family, the tribe or the nation, are what is most inherent, the most irremediably subjective to this group and what distinguishes it from all others. In a word, it is what makes its proper individuality, its personality… Is it in our interest to hasten the disappearing of our mores? … My response, given the very special circumstances we live is without doubt: No![9]

Bourguiba defined the concept of "personality" (*shakhsiyya*) again, when addressing Mr. Durel:

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The unity of territory, the community of belief, language, customs, past, the joys lived together, the failures and humiliations experienced, all of this according to Mr. Durel does not contribute to create, between the children of this country, any sentiment of solidarity, no idea of patria. … Reality is entirely different. This is because the action of the individual on customs is extremely limited.[10]

To build a nationalist ideology, Bourguiba, drew upon the concept of a "national personality," which he defined as a community of shared practices, sentiments and dispositions that crystallised through history and could be symbolised by a custom such as women's wearing of the veil. The practice was so firmly anchored that it could not be eliminated by the efforts of a few individuals. Bourguiba would later affirm – and attempt to show – that it would take the power of an independent state to uproot the custom of veil wearing.

His reaction contrasted with other opponents to unveiling, who argued that by abandoning the veil, Tunisian women would lose their respectability and fall into immorality and prostitution, subsequently leading Tunisian society into corruption. They had described the veil as a woman's "religious duty".[11] But for Bourguiba, the veil was not a device protecting women and defending the integrity of a certain moral order. He saw it as a social problem, even while defending its subsistence. In his 1929 article, he wrote, dismissing the veil's religious meaning: "I believe that it is relevant to look at the subject from a social point of view, the only point of view that presents an interest."[12]

In the words of Bourguiba, the veil was the sign of women's "unconscious atavism", but it was the veil of the colonised, and as such, it had to remain:

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The day when the Tunisian woman, going out unveiled, does not experience the strange impression that is as a scream of revolt coming from her unconscious atavism, on that day, the veil will disappear by itself without danger, because what it will be the symbol of will have disappeared. But for the moment, we are not there yet. The best proof of this is that at the end of the meeting, none of the Muslim ladies who came to listen dared to throw their veils.[13]

However, in his 1929 article he had already hinted at the necessity of unveiling in a society that had become independent, an idea that he developed later during his presidency: "... evolution must happen, otherwise, it is death. It will happen, but without a break, without a rupture. We must maintain in the perpetual evolution of our personality a unity through time that can be continually perceived by our conscience."[14] Ms. Ourtani had thrown off her veil in a dramatic gesture during the debate at L'Essor. Bourguiba recognised that in principle the gesture was legitimate, and even a question of life and death, but he also warned that it was premature.

Whereas Bourguiba described the veil as an element of the Tunisian personality, another Tunisian reformer, al-Tahar al-Haddad (1899–1935), who studied at the Zaytuna between 1911 and 1923 and frequented the reformist milieus,[15] developed a notion of the veil as an obstacle to women's participation in public life, announcing Bourguiba's later

shift of viewpoint. One year after the 1929 debate at L'Essor, Haddad published the controversial book *Our Woman in the Shari'a and Society*.[16] This book is relevant for my argument not only because it contains a justification for unveiling that Bourguiba would reassert after independence, but also because it deploys a line of reasoning about Islam as a potent religion (*din*) with a deep and positive impact on people's lives. This idea of religion as an instrument of social change and progress became instrumental for reformists who wanted to link projects of improving womens' status with Islam and was redeployed by Bourguiba in the context of the postcolonial authoritarian state.

In the preface of his polemical book, Haddad wrote a long meditation on Islam and its role in social reform:

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> The reform of our social condition is necessary for all aspects of our life (*wujūh al-ḥayāt*), and in particular for what touches our existence in life (*wujūdinā fī al-ḥayāt*). I see with certainty that Islam is not an obstacle against reform (*iṣlāḥ*) as the accusations proclaim. On the contrary, it is the religion relevant for reform (*dīnuhu al-qawīm*), and the inextinguishable source of reform. As for the decline of the Muslim world, it has no other cause than superstitions and customs that we have grown to like over a long time.[17]

Haddad saw Islam as an intrinsic source of vitality. Islam was "the eternal book of life and the regulating principles for useful work" (*dustūr al-'amal al-nāfi'*).[18] He made Islam a set of "regulating principles" (*dustūr*) that would prove to be "useful". The use of the word *dustūr* was not politically neutral since the old nationalist Tunisian Destour party (*al-ḥizb al-ḥurr al-dustūrī*) had been established in 1920, demanding the drafting of a constitution for Tunisia. For Haddad, who had become a member of the Central Committee of the Destour in 1923, Islam had a social and political role to play in order to provide guiding principles for social life. In addition, for Haddad and Muslim reformers of his time, Islam's meaning had to be recalibrated if it were to define the principles

guiding social life. Hence, it was important for them to explain what Islam said as well as what it did not say.

On this basis, Islam's functionality in life could be established. There was a double purpose in Haddad's enterprise of reform, which could be generalised to individual and state reformers of his as well as later generations: first, a principle of delimitation of the faith's meaning, and second, a process of importing this meaning to the real world. There was therefore at the same time a limiting aspect (the circumscribing of meaning through a specific interpretive orientation) and an expanding one (the implementation of this meaning in society). Haddad, who was examining what Islam said and did not say about women, believed that in order to reform society in the light of the principles of Islam, it was necessary to sift out social practices that did not belong to the religion. Prescriptions such as polygamy or the face veil were not "inherent to the religion".[19] He distinguished between "the essence"[20] of Islam and the prescriptions that could disappear without harming Islam. For Haddad, laws had two essential aims: "noble morality and the person's vital needs".[21] This was because Haddad saw the Qur'an as intrinsically related to life (*ḥayāt*); not only was Islam to be a constant source of life, but also "the [Qur'an's] shari'a was a result of life evolving, and not chapters formulated in advance to be imposed on life".[22] The revelation had thus been produced in response to questions emerging in everyday life and had been applied in life. Haddad felt that this dialectical relationship between religion and life – which implicitly made religion a humanly mediated set of principles – had to be reactivated.

One should note that Haddad, who had published an earlier essay on the condition of Tunisian workers and who himself came from a poor background, was deeply preoccupied with poverty, which he linked to social backwardness.[23] In *Our Woman in the Shari'a and Society*, he describes at length the difficult living conditions of poor families and links this situation to the harsh treatment of women by their fathers and husbands. In these descriptions, Haddad relates misery to the "disorder" of the home.[24] He mentions domestic accidents, unattended children and the disputes between wives in polygamous families. This disorder, according to Haddad, drove the husband to lead a

private life out of the home: "the wife, therefore, finds herself isolated in a world of worries and suffering".[25] A reform of family life, in which respect and love between wife and husband would prevail, was therefore seen as the basis for the reform of society. Haddad defines marriage as "a sentiment (*āṭifa*) and a duty (*wājib*), the coming together of two people and reproduction (*taʿmīr*)".[26] To extend the idea of sentiment, he quotes Qur'an 30:21 (*Sūra al-Rūm*), which uses the word *mawadda* (love) and describes marriage as a relation of reciprocal trust and intimacy through the idea of "tranquility of the soul with another soul" (*sukūn al-nafs biʾl-nafs*).[27]

Haddad's adversaries fiercely rejected this evocation and public recognition of "sentiment" as a basis for marriage. They identified several reasons for their rejection of Haddad, such as his treatment of Muhammad's prophecy and his imitation of Westerners, if not his "alliance" with Christian missionaries; but one argument stood as crucial: they did not favour the public deployment of sentiments produced by the visibility of women's uncovered bodies in society. Shaykh Ibn Murad, a high ranking scholar from the Zaytuna University, in his response to *Our Woman*, addressed Haddad:

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> You find repugnant the education we give to the Muslim girl on the basis of the reserve (*ḥayā*) we teach her and that is one of the branches of the faith. You claim that it kills sentiment (*āṭifa*). Let this sentiment die … Let us bury this sentiment and not raise our daughters on adornment (*tabarruj*).[28]

After independence, Bourguiba followed Haddad in his attempt to mould a new female public persona. Through his own public relations with Tunisian women, he often exemplified a public intimacy showcasing a public persona of "the Tunisian woman" and what her virtuous behaviour should be. Indeed, Bourguiba did not produce a liberal conception of the role of women. He rather envisioned a shift that the Tunisian woman had to experience – from a position of seclusion and isolation to a position from which she could communicate with the world around her. Women were expected to participate in the public arena, and this participation proceeded from the construction of family as

based on reciprocal relationships and shared sentiments between husband and wife. Bourguiba later wrote in his justification for the 1956 Personal Status Code[29]:

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> The family is the basis of society. It lacks all happiness and harmony if it is not founded on a man and a woman who are united by love and respect … With our new reform, we do not only want to elevate the woman's level, but we want also to elevate the level of the Tunisian family.[30]

Hence, according to both Haddad and Bourguiba, the progress of society was irremediably linked to a reform of the family, of the woman's role and status in it, leading to her integration in a public world of reciprocal relationships.

Haddad describes the face veil (which he calls at times *ḥijab*, at others *niqab*) as the device wrongly used to protect men and women from temptation: a "material barrier",[31] the "greatest separation between man and woman that prevents them to choose one another when they want marriage"[32] and "a social protection against evil".[33] His critique takes a symbolically harsh tone when he writes: "There is not that big a difference between the *niqab* the woman uses to cover her face to prevent debauchery, and the muzzle that we put on a dog so that it does not bite the passers-by".[34] For Haddad, the veil conjures the idea of separation, closure and lack of trust, which prevents a woman from opening up to the world and in particular from having access to knowledge, be it the knowledge of her future husband, technical and scholarly knowledge or her very consciousness of the world.

Therefore, unveiling is an act by which a woman can access awareness and knowledge: rather than being imprisoned in the home, her body must be located in the world to allow contact with society. Haddad also denounces segregation between a husband and wife at home, strangely relating it to the issue of the veil, which in principle was not worn at home among family: "The use of the veil has led the husband to lead a private life (*ḥayāt khāṣṣa*) outside of his home, a life that women do not know."[35] Hence, the private life of the wife and husband does not exist. However this absence of a shared experience between husband and wife could not logically be related to the wearing of the veil. The veil was in fact, in the work of Haddad, a metonymy for the broader problem of

gender segregation and female seclusion, which the themes that most preoccupied Haddad. The husband's absence produces an "abyss of death"[36] for the family and a life of "debauchery", "immoral activities, drinking, gambling and other distractions" for the husband.[37] Haddad also relates what he sees as problematic sexual practices that occur with gender segregation: "It is well established that hiding women from men has been one of the main factors in the spread of homosexuality, lesbianism and onanism."[38] Hence, not only will unveiling integrate women into social life, but it will also provide true intimacy in the home and reinvigorate the relationships between men and women within their families.

While Haddad's project of improving the status of Tunisian women was based in part on the idea of liberty (*ḥurriyya*), his essay does not recommend individualism and freedom to choose any type of dress. He did not defend a Western liberal conception of women, and while he saw the movement of unveiling as "triggered by European civilisation", he was against a simple imitation of European ways.[39] He was impressed by the level of education of European women, and wanted Tunisian women to emulate them in this regard, but he also considered western influence as harmful: "our sick society … is under the onslaught of a transformation that we do not understand and that completely assimilates us into a European trend dominating our current situation. We can only emerge alive from this … if we cling to our inherent strength".[40] Islam, he argues, is the religion of freedom (*dīn al-ḥurrīya*), but Islam "accepts only the servitude towards Allah".[41] Although Haddad defends unveiling, "I will only accept emancipation in the limits of the law and morality".[42] Women will have to learn how to manage their home, which should be for them a "function" (*waẓīfa*) and not a "prison".[43] The goal of their emancipation is to repair the "pain and injury" (*alam wa jurḥ*) that is felt by women as well as men, not the realisation of a liberal type of society.[44]

2. "A strong state deeply rooted in the hearts": how can a state shape individual preferences?

While Haddad was an individual thinker and scholar of Islam, Bourguiba was a political activist who became a statesman. Early in independent Tunisia, Bourguiba took the reins of the state and authoritatively imposed reforms on Islamic institutions: he standardized

the legislation related to family matters with the codification of personal status law in 1956, closed down the University of Zaytuna, and nationalized the Habous (religious endowments). In this paper I do not intend to evaluate Bourguiba's policies towards women in their effects on Tunisian social life, but rather, I attend to the subtle meanings deployed by Bourguiba when he dealt with the question of the veil, and to the personal proximity he built with Tunisian women to mobilize them in favour of the new Tunisian state. The ideas he developed with regard to the status of women were very close to Haddad's, but during these reforms, Haddad's name was not officially mentioned. Haddad had died young and politically isolated, his book having become the object of the ire of prominent 'ulama' of the Zaytuna.[45] Bourguiba imposed his reforms authoritatively, and perhaps did not want to take the risk of invoking such a contentious figure as Haddad.

Echoing the writings of Haddad, often word for word, the president of Tunisia shifted his earlier position on the veil and tried to persuade Tunisian women to unveil. His general views on the veil did not change: it was still a reproachable custom, the weight of which could not be lifted by mere individual efforts. However, the context had changed: a strong state was now presiding over the destiny of the Tunisian nation, and this state was robust enough to uproot such "atavistic" practices as the wearing of the veil. Within the larger context of state authoritarian reforms of religious institutions, Bourguiba attempted to convince Tunisians of the legitimacy of unveiling in his speeches as well as his public performances, during which he unveiled Tunisian women in the streets.

In a speech on 5 December 1957, Bourguiba tackled a combination of issues that demonstrate the close relationship between reform, the strength of a state apparatus and the building of an emotional relationship between the state and its subjects. He developed arguments about the state's power of persuasion, the attachment of Tunisians to that state, and the question of the veil. He linked "the country's prosperity and the individuals' liberties" to the existence of "a strong state, deeply rooted in the hearts".[46] At this time, French troops were still evacuating the south of Tunisia. Bourguiba, the Council's president since 25 July 1957, was still affirming his power: "I know that my words are listened to, that they have an effect and that my directives are followed."[47]

The metaphor of "a state deeply rooted in the hearts" expressed Bourguiba's desire for a direct and close relationship between the state and the Tunisian people. The moulding of a personality for a nation was possible only through state institutions: "There is one essential condition to safeguard a people's personality. It is necessary to have political power."[48] The highest representative of the state was also attending to the deepest emotions of Tunisians. He wanted them not only to feel emotionally attached to their nation – which they had become already – but, more deeply, to have at heart the best interests of the institution of the state. In a sense, women, more than men, were to illustrate the emotional attachment of Tunisians to the Bourguibian state, through the physical proximity Bourguiba built with them in public performances, as I will describe. This physical proximity was infused with a sense of hierarchy and emotional attachment. At the end of his speech, Bourguiba introduced the issue of women under the rubric of "social problems", as he had done in 1929, and mentioned resistances to his enterprises of persuasion regarding the veil.[49]

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> We have been informed of satisfying progress in the movement that liberates the Tunisian woman from the veil. Nonetheless, it seems that there is still some resistance. I would like the public opinion to understand exactly what our aim is with this reform. Statistics reveal that sex crimes are decreasing. It is remarkable that the cases that are still occurring precisely only implicate those young women who are raised within traditional biases and in seclusion.[50]

As in Haddad's book *Our Women in the Shari'a and Society*, the veil and women's segregation were related in Bourguiba's speech to immoral and criminal behaviour, through his reference to sex crimes. In the same speech, the veil became "a horrible rag that has nothing to do with religion".[51] Unveiling was not imposed through a law by Bourguiba at that time, and nothing close to legal dress codes was put in place in Tunisia until at least 1981. Rather, the Bourguibian strategy was a subtle mix of pedagogy and legal change. However, Bourguiba also considered direct coercion. From the same 1957 speech:

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At the social level, we understand the repugnance of aged women to abandon an ancient habit but we can only regret the obstinacy of parents who constrain young women to wear the veil to go to school. We even see civil servants go to work rigged in this horrible rag. We continuously repeat that it is abandoned in Muslim countries and that it has nothing to do with religion.[52]

He continued with implicit threats of coercion:

Parents should understand that we want the good of their children and that it is not suitable to stand against an important reform. They better not push us towards the means of constraint that we have refused to use so far.[53]

The *iṣlāḥ* (reform), supported and implemented by the state, assured the "protection" of the "virtue and honour" of women, and was to be "more efficient than the protection of a miserable rag".[54] These statements were repeated over the years, in continuity with the metaphors of life and death Bourguiba had used in 1929 and that were present throughout Haddad's essay.[55] In a 1959 interview in the Tunisian magazine *Faiza*, Bourguiba described the veil as "a sinister shroud that hides the face".[56] He associated state reforms with life and progress, and communicated and implemented them in rather illiberal ways that domesticated religious institutions and produced state pedagogies on the proper bodily conduct. The subtle, ambiguous mix of physical and psychological persuasion with the threat of coercion that Bourguiba used vis-à-vis Tunisian women and their families, is reflected in a documentary about the emancipation of Tunisian women aired on French television on 8 January 1968.[57] The fifty-minute black-and-white film weaves footage of Bedouin women in remote areas, working in their traditional garb, with scenes of women wearing the urban traditional veil (*safsārī*) in the city, and women from the elite wearing sleeveless dresses – "the *bourgeoisie* of Tunis," says the narrator, "who have not worn veils for a long time" – in the presidential palace in Carthage at a reception, being welcomed by President Bourguiba. Scenes of Bourguiba unveiling women on 13 August 1967, Tunisian's Woman's Day, help us to understand state

reforms as a practice that deploys itself through direct, local interactions between the state's elite and ordinary Tunisians.

On the side of a road in an unknown location, where Bourguiba is probably visiting a town, Bedouin women in traditional dress are welcoming him. (Properly speaking, their dress is not a veil, since a *safsārī*, a long piece of white fabric attached at the waist and covering the whole body, would be impractical for women working in the fields.) Urban women wearing the *safsārī* are also welcoming Bourguiba, who is guarded by policemen. It is difficult to say whether the crowds have gathered spontaneously. Bourguiba was popular at that time, but these events were closely monitored and served as propaganda to appear in newspapers and on the radio.

To understand the performance of that day, it is important to comprehend the shape and use of the traditional urban veil that Tunisian women wore at that time. The *safsārī* provides some flexibility for a woman to cover and uncover because it is held on the head and shoulders by the hand or teeth rather than by pins. With a quick move of the hand, it is easy to cover and uncover one's face and shoulders.

Facing this crowd of women, Bourguiba embraces several Bedouin women and their children. The women seem spontaneously to go towards him and embrace him. He then directs his attention to a woman in a *safsārī*, and uncovers her head. This gesture seems easy and is not met with any resistance. The woman is holding the *safsārī* over her head with her hand, and the veil's fabric slides down her hair. The woman smiles, but seems slightly embarrassed, and attempts to put her veil back on her head. Bourguiba uncovers her again in the same motion. This series of successive gestures, a silent yet public exchange through physical contact between the anonymous woman in the midst of the applauding crowd and the president, concludes with the woman remaining unveiled. We do not know if she covered herself again when the camera stopped filming, but it is a fact that the wearing of the *safsārī* by Tunisian women became uncommon in Tunisia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a sign that the changes effected by the Bourguibian elite certainly had an impact on women's dressing practices and gender relations in Tunisia. In the documentary, the atmosphere seems calm, and some policemen guarding the event are smiling and laughing with the women. The president continues to unveil some of the women before leaving with his motorcade. Revealing to the public and the camera the

dresses they wear beneath their *safsārī*, the women seem happy. In this moment of public intimacy with Bourguiba, the process of unveiling does not seem to cause them pain. This atmosphere of liberation and happiness hides the enterprise of soft coercion at play in the public performance of unveiling. The unveiled women seem attracted to and entirely persuaded by – even if after slight hesitation – the path of change that Bourguiba has opened to them.

While at the first glance the film does not suggest imposition or submission, the presence of the policemen and the slight hesitation of one woman subtly indicate that the state project of liberation of women was a pedagogical endeavour disseminating new types of disciplines. A change of *habitus* – represented by the "habit" of the veil that was ingrained in body and mind – had to be brought about by the seemingly gentle physical intervention of the state's highest representative. Bourguiba's gesture was to be taken as a model to be replicated by all Tunisian women.

The desire for such a general transformation was resented in some milieus, celebrated in others, but most importantly for the argument of this paper, the desire for transformation was moulded by a state that was progressive in the sense that it aimed for progress, but was not democratic and liberal. The state did not attempt to hide its illiberal nature, and its representatives saw their function as to shape the preferences and behaviours of their population authoritatively. Important elements of patriarchy and conservatism accompanied this vision, which was not necessarily based on a conception of the nation as a collection of free individuals.[58] Family values in particular had to be preserved as well as a sense of morality, echoing Shaykh Ibn Merad's appeal to *ḥayā'* (a sense of modesty). For instance, in 1966, Bourguiba's speech to the National Union of Tunisian Women addressed women on the necessity of adhering to moral behaviour: "one has to know how to discipline her heart".[59] Bourguiba's woman, like Haddad's, was expected to shape her behaviour according to the reformers' conceptions of dignity and morality.

3. The "new" veil: how state and Islamist opposition share a reformist stance

In the early 1970s, a new type of dress appeared in Tunisian towns and cities. Women were wearing a garment that was neither the face veil that Bourguiba was still protecting

in 1929, nor the *safsārī* or any traditional type of veiling. It was the hijab we know today: a short veil covering the hair but not the face, secured with pins, and combined with a long dress or trousers. The hijab was not worn as an instrument of seclusion in the home and did not prevent women from going to school or from attending the workplace, since it was precisely in these public domains that women in this new attire made themselves visible. It showed itself publicly, exemplifying a new version of religiosity that was urban, young and educated. It was no longer the "horrible rag" that Bourguiba had associated with rural life and ignorance, but a sign that women had found the veil to be a relevant dress for the public arena. The varying interpretations of the wearing of the veil – as a way to discipline oneself into piety, an instrument for emancipation, a tool for patriarchal reproduction, a sign of female submission, an instrument of liberation – are numerous and diversified. I will not explore them in this paper,[60] but will instead underline the changes in the political elite's perceptions of the veil and the possibility for these meanings to form a multilayered, complex set of interpretations.

In the 1970s, when the new veil appeared in Tunisia, it surprised most of the intellectual and political elite, who saw it as the "symbol" of the nascent Islamist political opposition who wanted to signal its new power, and not as a way to public piety and virtue on the part of veiled women. The ways in which different segments of society viewed the hijab were in fact linked with the state of relations between government and the Islamist opposition. In 1981, an administrative decree (no. 108)[61] that forbade the wearing of the hijab in schools, described it as "confessional and sectarian".[62] This was two years after the Iranian revolution, when Tunisia was witnessing the influence of foreign Islamist movements within its borders, as well as the emergence, since the end of the 1970s, of a potent domestic oppositional Islamist movement. This decree was not applied in any systematic way, but was used at random by the authorities when dealing with the Islamist opposition, in particular in secondary schools and on college campuses.

To understand how the Islamist opposition dealt with the question of veiling and related to Bourguiba's interpretation, I will refer to Rashid al-Ghannushi's writings on the Tunisian woman. In his book *The Muslim Woman in Tunisia*,[63] he develops a critique of the submission of women to men. Echoing Haddad and Bourguiba, he is critical of the conception of a woman as a person lacking strength and autonomy. However, his focus

on the definition of the "ideal Muslim woman" differs in the sense that it is formulated in an anti-imperialist tone. For Ghannushi, the market economy and Westernisation had weakened women; they now submitted to a culture of consumption that gave physical appearance too much significance in their lives. For Ghannushi, Western colonisation as well as neo-colonialism had destroyed traditional life, and with it the sense of honour in women – a value that should be recovered. Against this new culture, he insisted on the primacy of "traditional values". The Islamist discourse hence inverted Bourguiba's dichotomy between the "modern" (associated with progress) and the "traditional" (related to ignorance). Indeed, Bourguiba criticised practices that he saw as "traditional" – that is, values and practices that merely imitated past customs (*taqlīd*).

It is rarely noted that both the Bourguibian and Islamist visions rely on the desire to define and mould a national personality. Ghannushi recognised the decline of religion and its institutions before independence, and the necessity to reform them. In his view, Bourguiba dissolved (*tamyīʿ*) Islam,[64] especially in his policies of reform toward the Zaytuna, the shariʿa, the religious endowments and the status of women. While both agreed that a shared community of sentiments was necessary to build a nation, the Islamist conception did not accept the Bourguibian state's claims to shaping these "disciplines of the heart".

Ghannushi was in agreement with Bourguiba, however, about the condition of women in the twentieth century. According to Ghannushi, the twentieth-century woman "had been deprived of her personality (*shakhsiyya*) as a person entirely responsible".[65] "She had been deprived of the light (*nūr*) of knowledge and Gnosticism (*irfān*)".[66] "Decline (*inḥiṭāṭ*) had touched her like it touched man, but worse".[67] In the same vein, Haddad and Bourguiba had diagnosed Tunisian women as twice subjugated. Bourguiba declared before and after independence that women were living under the yoke of both colonialism and patriarchy.[68] Echoing Haddad's *Our Women*, Ghannushi wrote in the 1970s: "She was not allowed to even choose her husband. She was deprived even of her part of inheritance and to decide what to do with her own property."[69] And, he added, "this was not, at that time and in that place, because of the values of Islam."[70] Here again, Islamist activist Ghannushi was in agreement with statesman Bourguiba's diagnosis: Islam was not the culprit. But, he said, the fact that the Tunisian woman had progressed

so far in education could not be attributed to the Personal Status Code or to Bourguiba himself. Such progress would have happened no matter what. "Nowadays women are educated and work in all Arab countries," he wrote. "This is thanks to the movement of religious reform of the nineteenth century."[71]

For Ghannushi, it seemed, reform could not be conceived or implemented by the state, but came from the historical influence of new ideas. In this way, Ghannushi erased Bourguiba from the history of religious and social reform, whereas Bourguiba had tried to place himself in this historical line of Muslim reformers, whom, except for Haddad, he often quoted. The contention around the Personal Status Code, and more broadly Bourguiba's understanding of the role of women, was not so much a struggle between two different visions of women's role in the public arena as a competition – and an unequal one at that – between two political actors struggling to be part of the "reformist" legacy. Indeed, recognising the positive elements in the new 1956 code, Ghannushi wrote a discreet footnote to his *al-Mar'a al-muslima fi tunis*: "All is not bad in the Code of Personal Status. The great majority of its texts are a copy and sometimes a distortion of Shaykh Dj'ayyit's codification, after it was purged from its Islamic values and principles."[72] His reference to Shaykh Muhammad al-'Aziz al-Dj'ayyit's 1948 codification of Tunisian law showed Ghannushi's interest and desire to connect his own ideas to those of earlier reformers. Developing further on the reform of the status of women, he quoted Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Hassan al-Banna and the two Tunisian shaykhs, al-Tahar and al-Fadhel Ben Achour. These names formed an eclectic group. The reference to al-Fadhel Ben Achour – then in the service of the postcolonial Bourguibian regime – may seem strange, but perhaps Ghannushi's point was to refer to the legacy of reformist 'ulama' that Bourguiba had submitted to the modern state, rather than build a rigorous intellectual chain of legacy and influence. For Ghannushi, the Personal Status Code went beyond the Bourguibian policies and was part of a strategy to "de-Islamise" the country on the part of the West: "It is indirect colonisation", he wrote.[73]

Ghannushi believed that it was a mistake to "think that we only need little changes such as longer dresses and the abandoning of lipstick to become an Islamic society".[74] Islam, he wrote:

EXT

does not interact with women by talking to them about their dresses'
length or width, but rather, it is interested in the woman's vision of life
and what this vision leads her towards. The aim is for her … to look at life
as … an opportunity to elevate the persons from the level of the animal to
the human level.[75]

Bourguiba and Ghannushi had different understandings of the veil, but they shared a
repertoire for talking about the Tunisian woman's place in society. What mattered for
both of them, as well as for Haddad, was the vision women had of the world that
surrounded them. They were both interested in women's subjectivity and awareness: they
were particularly intent on linking female subjectivity with access to knowledge, morality
and responsibility, all in the name of "progress". Women also had to be integrated into
the public arena. For Bourguiba, this path had to be taken without the veil; for
Ghannushi, the path could only be taken with the veil. But for both of them, the
destination was the same, especially in terms of women's education. Ghannushi wrote:

EXT

We have to differentiate between the question of the education of women
and the question of dress. To insist that the young woman (*al-fatāt*) must
show modesty (*ḥishma*) and virtue (*'iffa*) in her dress does not mean
depriving her of her legal right to learn all the sciences she wants. Or has it
been written that the Muslim young woman, unlike all the other women,
should not have access to knowledge without letting go of the principles
that make her national personality? Was this imposed to the young
Japanese and Chinese women? They have reached the highest scientific
level and retained at the same time their national personalities. Why is it
only the young Muslim woman who should accept to erase her personality
in exchange for obtaining some knowledge?[76]

In this particular writing, the defence of the veil by Ghannushi does not come as a "legal
prescription" but as a defence of the national personality in opposition to the West,

exactly as in Bourguiba's words in the 1929 "battle of the veil". One can recognise in this quotation the influence of Bourguibian postcolonial vocabulary, interweaving "the discipline of the heart", morality and virtue with the primacy of a people's personality. However, Ghannushi also reproached Bourguiba for his Western influences and the erasing of Islam that, in his view, the Personal Status Code caused.[77] Knowing that Islamic theological justifications were given by Bourguiba for the Personal Status Code, he added: "If Islam was evoked, this was to prepare some of its texts and modify them in order to use them to feed the masses so that they swallow the bitter pill of the Western solutions."[78]

Conclusion

What can we infer from the continuities between the postcolonial state's conception of veiling and that of the Islamist opposition? Both conceptions sprang from the desire to form a new and in the end similar "habitus" for Tunisians. Bourguiba's intent was to mould the Tunisian woman's personality and behaviour into the image he had of the Tunisian nation: a Muslim and Mediterranean entity anchored in European culture. Bourguiba wanted to regulate the physical behaviour and body of Tunisian women in combination with circumscribing the prerogatives of Islamic law. This combination did not reflect a "liberal" conception of the body but an authoritarian vision of the nation and of the subjectivity of its citizens as "enlightened", "reasonable" and "virtuous". In addition, Islam had to play a substantial part in the definition of this specific type of subjectivity. For Islamists such as Ghannushi, Bourguiba's conception imposed a deplorable rupture in history. However, their evaluation of the postcolonial state's policies was the product of their oppositional standing, rather than of an entirely different conception of society. In fact, in Ghannushi's idea of the Muslim veiled Tunisian woman, the body was disciplined within a representation of the nation that one could find in Zaytuna-educated Haddad's, as well as in President Bourguiba's unveiled woman.

Veiling and unveiling were in fact two contrasting disciplines given to women to fulfil the same end: that of an educated woman taking care of her family, as well as integrated in the public arena. These political postures opposing and in favour of the veil perhaps also defined each other in a competition that reified the two positions as

"Islamic" and "secularist", and in which women were seldom authorised to intervene. The first difference between Ghannushi and Bourguiba was not their view on Islam, for both referenced it as a "religion of life" – but their will or refusal to refer to the West. Second – and as a direct consequence of their political roles – Bourguiba made Islam a province of the state, whereas Ghannushi did not accept the construction of such a monopoly, which made the state define and administer the conduct of individual and collective piety. Ghannushi's refusal to accept this illiberal set of constraints on Islam could not prevent him from speaking the language of the state itself on normative conduct, a direct product of reformist thought and of the postcolonial state's legal and ideological new constructs.

These continuities between reformist thought, postcolonial conceptions of Islam and Islamist oppositional discourses help underline the role played by the modern postcolonial state (prior to the emergence of Islamist movements) in developing and disseminating normative prescriptions and body disciplines that also helped the state appropriate Islamic narratives and domesticate religious institutions. These normative prescriptions were in turn used by Islamist movements for their own political purposes. Whereas states and Islamists are today in a relationship of political opposition and competition, I argue that in order to explain the religious language of Islamist movements, and more generally the mobilising power of Islam on the political scene, one must turn to the shaping and use of the tradition of Islam by the postcolonial state's elite. This elite institutionalised Islam as a political resource, thereby providing a foundation on which Islamists could formulate their ideologies.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] For instance, M. Arkoun, "Actualité du problème de la personne dans la pensée islamique", Die Welt des Islams, News Series, Bd. 29, Nr. 1/4 , 1989, p. 1–29.

[2] To cite only a few examples, J. Entelis writes: "The Tunisian experience has shown that there can be such a thing as a liberal secularist authoritarian regime", in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 4. O. Roy provides a similar description for Algeria, Turkey and Tunisia, in *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), in particular on pp. 5, 82 and 96–97.

[3] D. Kandiyoti, "Introduction," in D. Kandiyoti ed., *Women, Islam and the State*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, p. 3.

[4] D. Kandiyoti, p. 3.

[5] For a more detailed account of the meeting and those involved, see I. Marzouki, "Le voile des colonisées, Tunisie, 1924–1936", *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*, 51 (61), pp. 59–89.

[6] H. Bourguiba, "Le voile", *L'Etendard Tunisien*, 11 January 1929. The article is reproduced in H. Bourguiba, *Articles de Presse, 1929–1934* (Tunis: Centre de Documentation Nationale, 1967), pp. 1–6.

[7] Ibid. p. 1.

[8] I. Marzouki, *Mouvement des femmes en Tunisie au XXème siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1993), Chapter 2.

[9] Bourguiba, *Articles de Presse* (Tunis: Centre de Documentation Nationale, 1967), pp. 2–3. Translation by the author.

[10] Ibid. p. 4. Translation by the author.

[11] The reactions against *sufūr* are described by I. Marzouki, "Le voile des colonisées, Tunisie, 1924–1936", *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* 51 (61), pp. 59–89.

[12] Bourguiba, *Articles de Presse* (Tunis: Centre de Documentation Nationale, 1967), p. 2. Author's translation.

[13] Ibid. p. 5.

[14] Ibid. p. 5.

[15] A. Khalid, "Al-taʻrif bi'l-tahir al-ḥaddad", in T. al-Haddad (ed.)*, al-Aʻmal al-kamila* (Tunis: al-Dar al-ʻarabiyya li'l-kitab, 1999), p. 14.

[16] T. al-Haddad, "Imra'atuna fi'l-shariʻa wa al-mujtama", in *al-Aʻmal al-kamila*, vol. 3 (Tunis: al-Dar al-ʻarabiyya li'l-kitab, 1999).

[17] Ibid. p. 20.

[18] Ibid. p. 24.

[19] Ibid. p. 25. When discussing the issue of the veil (*ḥijab* and *niqab* are the two terms Haddad uses), Haddad refers to the face veil.

[20] Ibid. p. 25. This essence consisted in "*unicity*, the highest morality, justice and equality between people".

[21] Ibid. p. 26.

[22] Ibid. p. 24.

[23] T. al-Haddad, *al-ʻUmmal al-tunisiyyun wa zuhur al-ḥaraka al-niqabiyya* (Tunis: Maktabat al-ʻarab, 1927).

[24] T. al-Haddad, *al-Aʻmal al-kamila* (Tunis: al-Dar al-ʻarabiyya li'l-kitab, 1999), p. 201.

[25] Ibid. p. 203.

[26] Ibid. p. 58.

[27] Ibid. p. 59.

[28] M. S. Ibn Murad, *al-Ḥidad ʻala imra'at al-ḥaddad* (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʻa al-tunisiya, 1931), p. 18.

[29] Proclaimed in 1956, the Personal Status Code consisted in a piece of legislation that regulated family matters. It was meant to improve women's rights. In particular, it made polygamy and divorce by repudiation illegal but also took pain to justify these measures through Islamic references.

[30] H. Bourguiba, Speech given at the promulgation of the Personal Status Code, 10 August 1956, in T. al-Haddad, "Imra'atuna", *al-Aʻmal al-kamila*, vol. 3 (Tunis: al-Dar al-ʻarabiyya li'l-kitab, 1999), p. 8.

[31] Ibid. p. 209.

[32] Ibid. p. 210.

[33] Ibid. p. 209.

[34] Ibid. p. 208.

[35] Ibid. p. 211.

[36] Ibid. p. 211.

[37] Ibid. p. 211.

[38] Ibid. p. 212. Note that Haddad uses "al-luwat, al-musaḥaqa wa'l-ʿada al-sirriya".

[39] Ibid. p. 215.

[40] Ibid. p. 215.

[41] Ibid. p. 46.

[42] Ibid. p. 218.

[43] Ibid. p. 237.

[44] Ibid. pp. 218–220. Note that the word *alam* (pain) is repeated several times.

[45] M. S. Ibn Murad, *al-Ḥidad ʿala imra'at al-ḥaddad* (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿa al-tūnisīya, 1931).

[46] H. Bourguiba, "Coordination des services, respect des individus et libération de la femme", 5 December 1957, *Discours*, 4, 1975, p. 17.

[47] Ibid. p. 18.

[48] H. Bourguiba, "Discours du 18 mars 1974", *Discours*, 23, 1973–4, p. 194.

[49] H. Bourguiba, "Coordination des services", 5 December 1957, *Discours*, 4, 1975, p. 21.

[50] Ibid. p. 21.

[51] Ibid. p. 21.

[52] Ibid. p. 21.

[53] Ibid. p. 21.

[54] Ibid. p. 21.

[55] Note 13: "Evolution must happen, otherwise, it is death."

[56] Quoted in C. Debbash, *La République Tunisienne* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1962), p. 150.

[57] Ina.fr, "Bourguiba Femmes", available at: http://www.ina.fr/recherche/recherche/search/Bourguiba+femmes (Accessed 8 February, 2011).

[58] L. B. Youssef-Zayzafun, *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History, and Ideology* (Boulder: Lexington Books, 2005), Chapter 4.

[59] Quoted in "Chroniques", *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*, 30ème année, no. 118–119, 2ème-3ème trimestres 1967, p. 292.

[60] See N. Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and S. Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and The Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[61] A *manshur* is a decision made authoritatively within the administration of the state to regulate its day to day functioning. Manshur 108 of the Prime Ministry, 1981, deals with students' dress. Manshur 102, 1986, deals with the teachers and workers' dress in public education. The dress should not exhibit "fanatism (*tatarruf*) or anything out of the ordinary".

[62] Quoted by L. Chouikha, in "La question du hijab en Tunisie", in F. Lorcerie (ed.), *La politisation du voile* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p. 162.

[63] R. al-Ghannushi, *al-Mar'a al-muslima fi tunis: Bayna Tawjihat al-qur'an wa'l-mujtama' al-tunisi* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1988), pp. 87–149.

[64] Ibid. p. 91.

[65] Ibid. p. 136.

[66] Ibid. p. 136.

[67] Ibid. p. 136.

[68] In his speech of 25 November 1958, Bourguiba said: "Half of Tunisia's population lived in seclusion …. This true hemiplegia that afflicted the country originated from an old mentality that it is necessary to uproot". Quoted in C. Debbash, *La République Tunisienne* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1962), p. 150. We find the same idea in al-Haddad's "Imra'atuna fi'l-shari'a wa al-mujtama'", *al-A'mal al-kamila*, vol. 3, p. 213: "A people cannot reach the greatness it desires as long as half of it lives in the shadows".

[69] R. al-Ghannushi, *al-Mar'a al-muslima fi tunis* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1988), p. 136.

[70] Ibid. p. 136.

[71] Ibid. pp. 137–138.

[72] Ibid. p. 141.

[73] Ibid. p 148.

[74] Ibid. p. 124.

[75] Ibid. p. 125.

[76] Ibid. pp. 125–126.

[77] Ibid. p. 138.

[78] Ibid. pp. 138–139.