(Re)presenting the nation: state building and identity formation in Ben Ali's Tunisia (1987-2011)

MA Thesis

Leiden University

Middle Eastern Studies

15 June 2021

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Introduction

January 2021 marked the ten-year anniversary of Tunisia's so-called Jasmine Revolution: the revolution that ousted Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and set into motion a wide range of protests across the Arab world. Consequently, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria fell into turmoil. While these latter three countries still endure bitter civil wars. Tunisia, on the other hand, is often hailed as the sole country that has turned out of this period as more free and democratic than the autocratic systems that dominate the region. However, there was no room for festive commemorations to mark the revolution's ten-year anniversary, as the country's perils have grown, and political polarisation has augmented substantially. Simultaneously Tunisia had to deal with the social and economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Tunisians have grown disillusioned with the post-revolutionary status quo and large protests have instead dominated the stage during the anniversary of the revolution (Salah 2021; Jelassi 2021). The hopeful spirit of the revolution has made place for misery and widespread disenchantment, as the social-economic perspectives for an average Tunisian have not been improved. Furthermore, voter turnout figures remain low for elections and the disconnection between citizens and the state has eroded further, while Tunisians constituted the largest group of clandestine migrants that reached Italian shores in 2020 (UNHCR 2021).

The first article of the Tunisian constitution, in its old and new versions (1959, 2014) affirms Tunisia's Muslim-Arab identity. However, the interpretation of these compounds of 'Muslim' and 'Arab' and their place in Tunisian politics, society, culture, history and education differs from one group to another. Moreover, in the last ten years political debates have largely centred around the roles of religion and identity, in an effort to fill the vacuum the Ben Ali regime left. This is exemplified by the political fragmentation and polarisation that have characterised the first ten years of the post-revolutionary state (Merone 2014; Boubekeur 2015). Ben Ali's legacy is a testimony of a strong ideological chasm between the state and its population. Attempting to explain the causes of the Tunisian revolution or focusing on the future challenges of the country lie beyond the scope of this research. Rather, this research traces the antecedents of the post-revolutionary state through case studies that deal with different aspects of the nation's political, cultural and social identifications, both as a conscious construct from above and as a contested understanding from below. Nations construct a culture or identity by denoting 'the nation' through which its people can identify, through a rather vague group concept. These denotations are subsequently enumerated in the stories that are told about this group. In this

research I highlight these processes of state building through cultural institutions, state-symbols and (historical) representations, such as in Tunisia's school curricula and its tourist industry. Education is an important form of state building, as it teaches citizens about the authority of the state and a common culture. Furthermore, assessing these state-led representations contributes to a better comprehension of the contemporary Tunisian state, but also a better understanding of North Africa through a Tunisian lens. Often, authoritarian regimes construct a 'national narrative' in order to justify their rule. In authoritarian regimes, such as Ben Ali's Tunisia, power is often controlled by a single ruler or by a powerful clan, as was the case in Tunisia. Ben Ali's clan was both invested in governmental and non-governmental organisations. Often, the boundaries of an authoritarian state's control remain rather vague, and a leader frequently promotes an abstract political ideal. These principles are presented as being in favour of the national mission or the national interest of a country (Erdle 2010 p.26). This is an important element of the thesis defended in this research, in which I explore the implications of these forms of state building and state-led narratives of identity formation during Ben Ali's tenure as president from 1987 to 2011.

As Virginie Rey contends, Tunisia's ancient history has been a popular location for archaeologists for a long time. Modern Tunisia on the other hand, for a long period continued to be, until the Jasmin Revolution in 2011, one of the most scarcely researched states in the Arab world. The dearth of attention Tunisia received in academia might be illustrated by a comparison with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Tunisia was, because of the country's relative stable political climate usually considered a rather calm and uneventful country that was mostly unaffected by regional calamities (Rey 2019). Kenneth Perkins' substantial work on Tunisia (2005, first edition) is a notable exception to this rule. Despite this dearth, Tunisia presents a compelling frame for research – and has, as Perkins affirms, often been left out of research regarding the Arab world. This omission is undesirable, as the country's many contradictions and place within the Arab world compel for further academic research. The country's public image as a safe and friendly tourist destination and as one of the most progressive societies in the Arab world was undoubtedly due to the country's first prime-minister (later president) and liberator Bourguiba (1956-1987) and his emphasis on secular modernity and the advancement of women's rights. Nevertheless, Ben Ali's Tunisia (1987-2011) became the most repressive state in the Maghreb region with a record of human rights abuses and no freedom of political expression whatsoever (Lang 2014).

Methodology and scope

Recent work used for this research uses a variety of approaches to circumvent a Eurocentric view in the production of knowledge regarding MENA societies in particular. I think it is particularly important to avoid a European or western bias in research, especially on fairly recent events. I will rely on the notion that state-centric sociological analyses of colonialism and empire need to be complemented by approaches that bring both elite and non-elite local actors into the scope of analysis. As Perkins notes, the bulk of scholarly work about Tunisia is published in French, leaving a gap in the English literature regarding scholarly interest in Tunisia (Perkins 2014). This work thus aims to contribute to English language scholarship by including and reviewing French-language sources from both Tunisian and French scholars. Moreover, Tunisia has, particularly within the context of French colonial North Africa, consistently been overlooked by scholars who have since the colonial era favoured Algeria and Morocco (Thénault 2017). French Algeria and its protracted, violent demise, has mainly dominated scholarship regarding the Maghreb region. As I elaborated earlier on, in my research state-centric sociological analyses will be complemented by approaches that bring both elite and non-elite local actors into the scope of analysis. Taking the state as a sole unit of analysis risks falling in the trap of methodological nationalism and fails to account for an approach that considers the identity of a nation as a discourse that is contested between both the state and its inhabitants. It is thus important to study both horizontal and vertical conceptions of 'identity'. Processes of state formation and how these relate to 'identity' will be analysed through case studies that deal with the liaisons of culture and power in order to demonstrate how the Tunisian state constructed an identity that subsequently could function as a legitimation of the regime's rule.

The central research question of this thesis is concerned with the way Ben Ali constructed a national identity that solidified his rule after his predecessor, Bourguiba. I aim to answer this question by focusing on case studies that analyse state-led narratives of identity and state building during Ben Ali's regime. These are mostly accessed through secondary literature and policy documents issued by the Tunisian government. The theoretical foundations through which these will be analysed are further elaborated on in the forthcoming literature review. In short, I will rely on qualitative data and test theories from social, postcolonial and cultural studies. In doing so, I will mostly rely on primary and secondary sources while researching the topic, while at the same time employing a holistic approach in generating and analysing information. The time frame of 1987, when Ben Ali came to power in a 'soft coup d'état' to

2011, when he was ousted by the Jasmine Revolution is a useful scale to illustrate the processes that constitute state building and identity formation in Tunisia.

The first chapter provides a historical background, in which I put Tunisian history into perspective and explain how it relates to the thesis of my research. In this chapter, I discuss the historical developments that were later used by the post-colonial regime to distinguish and portray Tunisia as a continuous product of history. The chapter presents a starting point for examining how the country's history suited the historical discourse (and legitimation) that characterised Ben Ali's Tunisia. This historical discourse is characterised by an emphasis on Tunisia's ancient heritage and sought to present Tunisia as a cosmopolitan society. The second chapter elaborates on school curricula. Here I trace how the nation decides how its history is told, thus how it 'historicises' its presence. Recounting a nation's history is essentially a product of weighted political decisions in the present. I will be examining the school curricula that were distributed after Ben Ali took office in 1987. Doing so can tell us a lot about the discourse a nation seeks to construct and the culture that is presented as national.

The third chapter contains two case studies that deal with the state's representation and its subsequent legitimacy. In this chapter I will examine the regime's enforced collective identity through the tourism sector and the Bardo National Museum. I draw on an increased number of scholars that research the significance of museums as transmitters of identity and their role in society (Al-Ragam 2014; Boswell and Evans 1999; Kaplan 1994; Macdonald 2003 and Rey 2019). Moreover, heritage tourism presents a powerful tool to shape a country's national identity. A nation's cultural heritage helps modern governments to construct and maintain a national identity that is both ancient and continuous. Hence, the tourism industry, by promoting its heritage becomes a way through which concepts and representations of the nation-state are articulated (Palmer 1999). Moreover, in international tourism, a society's identity is primarily described in terms of a set of attracting features, which are then crystalised in a publicity image through which the native inhabitants are prompted to recognise themselves (Lanfant, Allcock and Bruner 1995). How then does a state utilise these techniques to display a particular identity? This question lays at the basis of the third chapter.

Literature review

The central research question in this thesis revolves around the methods and policies of the Ben Ali regime, and how this regime sought to enforce a national or cultural identity in Tunisia. This research thus explores the formation of a national identity as a top down, state-led process. It is therefore, for the purposes of this study, paramount to embed concepts like state-formation, culture and identity in a solid theoretical framework in order to deal with the variety of ways these terms have been understood in modern scholarship. This theoretical framework will allow us to apply the concepts of identity, culture, and the nation-state to the case of Tunisia.

Nation-states serve in today's world as the basic political unit within the international state system, with each territory on earth virtually claimed and demarcated by a political entity. The nation-state nevertheless is quite a modern phenomenon, and scholars have for decades tried to make sense of the ontological underpinnings of the term 'nation'.[1] Terms like 'nation' 'country' and 'state' are often used interchangeably and the elusiveness of these terms presents a challenge. They are, for instance, used to refer to components of a global political system, or are equated with a people or a community, or merely as a category for administrative or referential purposes (Cubitt 1999). To understand the nation, both as an object and as a project of complex and evolving meanings, an approach needs to be taken that is both historically and culturally focused, one that seeks to understand the nation as both an object and as a project of complex and evolving meanings. Analysing these shifts of meaning, contributes to understanding social change over time. The 1980s marked an important shift in the study of the nation: general studies of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and later Benedict Anderson shaped modern understandings of nations and nationalism (Cubitt 1999; Zubrzycki 2018).[2]

Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition* documents the process of national culture and explains the different motivations behind it (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). His work centres around the invention of a national culture, as what people nowadays consider part of their (national) identity was invented during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (E. Hobsbawm 1990). He argues that government agencies created symbols, myths and traditions in order to cultivate horizontal bonds at occasions of social and political uproar, and vertical loyalty to the

[1] Despite the claim that many nations have some primordial origin, it is commonly assumed that the nation-state a political and cultural form is that would not have been recognisable in the centuries before the Industrial Revolution. As Cubitt contends, nationalism proposes conceptions of identity and community that by no means are simple continuations of earlier ones (Cubitt 1999).

[2] Such as Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Traditions*.

newly created nation-states and their political elites. Contributing to this project are collective celebrations, the construction of monuments, and designing national symbols.[3] Likewise, Anderson's *Imagined Communities* presents another work in making sense of nations and nationalism. Its central treatise revolves around the concept of the nation-state as an *imagined* construction, in which its inhabitants form its *community*. This community exists because its inhabitants believe it does, despite the fact that many of them will "never know their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006, p.14).[4] Anderson however, as opposed to Hobsbawm, who argued the nation solely exists as a social construct, contends that nations, like other social formations, exist to the extent that discursive, behavioural and institutional structures are organised around the assumption of its existence. His approach stimulated new approaches that remain sociological but consider the construction of meaning in the *discursive* formation of the nation.

Gelnner, Hobsbawm and Anderson shifted the paradigm from primordialism to social constructivism, by moving away from studying particular nationalist movements and disputes to the nation and how it is created. This emphasis on a discursive approach was accentuated by Anderson's work through which he redefined the field of study. The focus was now on national identity, as opposed to the 'nation'.[5] Consequently, nationalism can neither be seen as "a unified ideology nor as a movement, but rather a discursive field where different views of the nation compete and negotiate with one other" (Zubrzycki 2018 p.510). The result of these discursive struggles, which are necessarily supported by an institutional power and embedded in both political and social structures is the establishment of the nation-state, featuring a symbolic composition. However, it should be noted that these processes inevitably involve the obstruction of different visions. This can include repressing, dislocating or sometimes eradicating the divergent visions of other groups, which results in marginalising groups that do not endorse a particular 'national' vision (Hobsbawm 1990). Pierre Bourdieu adds that

[3] Michael Billig calls these everyday practices 'banal nationalism' in his work *Banal Nationalism* (1995) (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practice) in which stories about the nation are reproduced from day to day (Billig 1995, p.7).

[4] Anderson notes in 'Census, Map, Museum' (three institutions through which the colonial state imagined its dominion) that his case study of Southeast-Asia poses advantages, since the region includes territories that were colonized by almost every colonial empire (including France) and thus offers comparative historical insights (Anderson 2006 p.115).

[5] National identity, a specific type of collective identity, is a socio-political and cultural construct which has been at the origin of the nation-state (Anderson 2006). Billig contextualises national identity as referring to the 'ways of conceiving "us, the nation", which has its unique destiny (or identity); and also involves conceiving "them, the foreigners", from whom "we" identify "ourselves" as different (Billig 1995).

comprehending the nation as a symbol contended over by different groups that manoeuvre to dominate its definition and enjoy its legitimating effects essentially necessitates identifying the universal, institutional and social contexts in which disparate factions challenge the exclusive ability to characterise the nation and its extent (Bourdieu 1991). This requires one to concentrate on the nation and its struggles, which concern both its identity and meaning as well as its vision and destiny.

In sum, *Imagined Communities* shifted the narrative from nationalism to the role of culture. Anderson re-focused the field of nationalism on cultural analysis and hereby inaugurated a discursive turn that stresses the narrative aspect of national culture, in studying nations and national identity. *Imagined Communities* focuses on post-colonial states, most notably in Southeast Asia, which is Anderson's area of expertise.[6] This presents an interesting case for comparison with the colonial experience in the Maghreb region. Moreover, this constructivist approach is helpful in understanding identity as a concept that is both constructed and contested: both as a top-down process and as a response from the population and its conceptions.

The terms 'identity' and 'culture' present the same elusiveness as that of the nation-state. In *Modernity and its Futures,* Stuart Hall traces the conceptual shifts of post-modern conceptions of the subject and identity.[7] Hall conceptualises the 'post-modern subject' as not possessing an essential, fixed or enduring identity. Hall follows Foucault's treatise in that identity is formed and transformed repeatedly with regard to the ways humans are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround one (Hall 1987; Foucault 1982). A person simultaneously assumes different identities and conflicting identities exist which continuously shift our identifications. He adds that "if we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves" (Hall 1992 p.277). The post-modern subject is confronted by a multiplicity of possible identities, as opposed to a fixed and coherent identity. Much like the discursive nature of nations has the modern individual been 'de-centred' in late modernity. This contributes to the changing conceptions of the human subject as a discursive figure.

[6] Anderson adds that scholars of other contexts should judge whether his arguments are sustainable on a wider historical and geographical stage, such as in post-colonial Africa (Anderson 2006, p.115).
[7] Hall traces its genealogy based on the works of i.e., Foucault, de Saussure and Descartes (Hall 1992).

The main sources of cultural identity in the modern world, and thus the ones that helps us define who we are, are the national cultures into which we are born (Hall 1992).[8] The nation is, apart from being a political entity, also something which produces meanings: it is a system of cultural representations. Its inhabitants participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture. A national culture can be seen as a discourse: "a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves" (Abercrombie 1992).

Cultural identity can be seen as a shared culture, a kind of collective 'one true self''. People with a shared history and ancestry hold in common this shared culture, but also other artificial or superficially imposed selves (Hall 1990 p.275). Mutual cultural codes and historical experiences are reflected in a particular cultural identity. This provides people with continuous, stable and permanent frames of reference and meaning, which lay beneath shifting divisions and changes of history. This conception of cultural identity played a significant role in struggles in the post-colonial world (Hall 1990). Post-colonial societies had, in a way, to (re)invent their story when they achieved independence. Frantz Fanon holds that, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that postcolonial societies attempted to rediscover a national identity and a precolonial culture, which the colonisers aimed to distort, disfigure and destroy (Fanon 1961). He states that 'returning' to a precolonial past is ulimately in vain, since it would romanticise history in a similar way the colonist would (Fanon 1961).

Partha Chatterjee emphasises the deeply ambigious attitude to modernity in post-colonial societies, because the modernity that the colonisers used as justification for their rule also taught the colonised societies its values. He further adds that the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa is posited on the difference with Western nationalism, and not on identity on its own (Chatterjee 1993). Hall disagrees, and states that it ultimately concerns both the rediscovery and production of identity. Cultural identity can thus be seen as a way of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It is both part of the future and of the past as they transcend history, places, time and culture. Cultural identities have histories, but go through constant metapharmoses (Hall 1993 p.394).

[8] Hall's notion of cultural identity revolves around that of Caribbean and black identity, however, the post-colonial struggles affected all colonised people and is thus not restricted to black identity, allowing to export its theory to the context of North Africa, for instance.

It is important to also consider the critique the term identity has received. As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue, the dominant constructivist position 'softens' the term from essentialism by specifying that identities are fluid, constructed and numerous. However, this hypothesis omits an excuse for discussing 'identities' at all and is insufficient in examining the dynamics and essentialist claims of modern identity politics. The prevailing constructivist stance thus strips the term of its analytical value, which has led to an analytical voidness in the social sciences and humanities (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). They further state that identity has been used as both a category of practice and a category of analysis, while this is not a problem *per se*, however it leads to an uncontrolled pluralism of social and sociological understandings. Hall's emphasis on the term identity is critiqued for its blurred contours and obstructs social analysis as an analytical tool.

They further stress that weakness of constructivist conceptions of identity, because of its vagueness, and when identity itself is elucidated, it is often represented as something of a self-conception, that can be captured in a straightforward way by *self-understanding* (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Brubaker and Cooper propose alternative analytical idioms, such as *identification* and *self-understanding.* These terms stress the subjectivity of identity (self-understanding) and the characterisation and situational and contextuality *vis-à-vis* others (identification). These terms, however, have not been widely adopted and the indispensability of the term 'identity' remains prevalent.

Identity in North Africa and the Maghreb

Identity in North Africa, and more specifically in a Maghrebi context, has been widely studied in relation to the region's shared French colonial experience, even though this experience was quite distinct for each country. The main treatises revolve around the legacies of colonial intervention that transformed and shaped Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian identities.[9] The colonial period in these countries established a previously unencountered political landscape. This colonial landscape fundamentally changed local concepts regarding power relationships, which were related to politics and identity formation (Wyrtzen 2015). These have mostly been analysed through bottom-up processes of local resistance and top-down processes of colonial state formation. Postcolonial legacies were highly influential in shaping the way contemporary North African states relate to their cultural identity. The multicultural policies of the French

[9] Such as in (Abbassi 2005) (Wyrtzen 2014; 2015) and (Willis 2014).

facilitated the maintenance of a colonial socio-political order that still endures in the contemporary states (Wyrtzen 2014).

This view is shared by Jameleddine Ben Abdeljelil, who postulates that the construction of a national identity in the Maghreb countries a process constituted that was connected with the wider struggle for decolonialisation and also the abolition of French colonial rule. Additionally, the creation of an independent and sovereign nation-state was premised on strategies and programmes that could serve the endeavour for autonomy (Abdeljelil 2007). Sylvie Thénault notes that even though these countries share a common heritage, their distinct particularities are important to underline. Adding that the Maghreb presents a valid scale of analysis, taken that nuances are considered, and national distinctions are included. Moreover, this unit of analysis can help with identifying further connections in North African societies (Thénault 2017). Classical Arabic functioned in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia as an instrument of resistance and also as a symbol of an (indigenous) Arab identity that was jeopardised, as French controlled both during colonial times and also afterwards the official public space. The process of Arabisation in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia began in the 1960s and 1970s and continues in one way or another to this day (Abdeljelil 2007).

The study of identity in the Maghreb can therefore be seen as emanating from three loci: the colonial struggle against French occupation: the role of religion (namely *Maliki Sunni Islam*) and that of pan-Arabism. However, the distinct forms of colonialism are important to highlight, as all three countries suffered on different degrees from French dominion. Algeria stands out with the country's protracted war of independence and deep penetration of the colonizer. The 'Berber Question' is, especially in Morocco and Algeria, a major front on which nationalists battled to defend the 'Arab' character of national identity. Since Berber identity did not fit within the 'Arab and Muslim' paradigm that post-colonial regimes sought to construct (Wyrtzen 2014).

Furthermore, Moroccan national identity is very much centred around the monarchy, which enjoys high admiration due to its genealogical ties with prophet Mohammed (Feuer 2017). Algeria is very much centred on a continued revolutionary image, owing to its violent past of civil strife. Tunisia, on the other hand, prior to the events of 2011, was often seen as the calm and open society that Bourguiba and Ben Ali sought to emit, even though the country became the most repressive regime in the Maghreb under the Ben Ali regime (Thénault 2017; Abbassi 2005)**.** However, Tunisia is often considered as one of the most progressive in the Arab world in terms of women's rights (Masri 2017; Charrad 2001). Abbassi's work [in

French] is one of the only contributions that combines state building with identity formation in an independent Tunisia and will be of great help in this research in making sense of the different perceptions of identity in the country (Abbassi 2005; 2007). Lastly, Perkins stresses in *A History of Modern Tunisia* the importance of Islam and Arabness as the most durable paradigm of Tunisian identity (Perkins 2014).

To conclude, the nation, culture and identity are terms that suffer from ambiguity and lack semantic clarity. As has been demonstrated, national cultures construct identities by generating an image or an idea about the nation through which its inhabitants are prompted to identify with. Memories and history serve as references that connect the nation's present with its past, through which it constructs a distinct image (Anderson 2006). However, the construction of a 'national' identity by developing a national culture and a congruent 'narrative' of the nation has consequences. Other possible identities, memories and loyalties are repressed for not being in line with the state's discourse. As Hobsbawm asserts, nations are primarily constructed from above, but should be analysed 'from below' (Hobsbawm 1990 p.47). National cultures mostly refer to a contemporary understanding, rather than referring to an ancient and coherent entity that structured modern national identities and nation-states. These nation-states had to be constructed to begin with, which ties-in with the central argument in my thesis. Namely, it presupposes that national cultures essentially are created by political elites and thus contested by the actors that operate within a given cultural or political entity.

Understanding the nation as a discursive cultural construct in which actors compete over its identity presents an organic way through which human interactions can be seen and studied. It is therefore important to take into consideration the 'everyday' construction of the nation. The discursive turn shifts the attention to examine national identities as a kind of shared form of expression, while also encouraging to reflect on the ways national cultures are constructed and contested through material objects and symbols. Understanding national identities and its connection with a national culture requires focusing on both the discursive and quotidian practices of the nation. This can be done by approaching a nation and its 'national culture' as a meaningful practice that is shared and contested by its inhabitants.

While Brubaker and Cooper are right to point out the ambiguity and over-usage of the term 'identity', the analytical value that this constructivist definition offers us is deemed indispensable for analysing the processes of social and political concepts that pertain to 'identity' and that I analyse in this thesis. The lack of appropriate alternatives that evoke the same connotations make the term 'identity' inevitable. Therefore, clear demarcation of the

analytical concepts that are used in this research are deemed sufficient in providing a coherent study that considers the ambiguity of the term. Moreover, the plurality of the term also serves the analysis in this research in making sense of identity as being ‘constructed’ (from above) and ‘felt’ or ‘lived’ (from below).

Chapter I: Historical background: Locating the colonial experience

Illuminating Tunisia's post-colonial discourse, more specifically during Ben Ali's tenure, requires examining the country's history, all the way to antiquity. Doing so gives us a better understanding of the country's post-colonial discourse and how Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the country's first two presidents, validated their nationalist narratives. Both leaders based these narratives on the country's ancient premises. Bourguiba utilised, as Safwan Masri puts it, a personality that was can be characterised as 'hybrid Mediterranean' and which Bourguiba used in his nationalist discourses (Masri 2017 p.xv). Presenting Tunisia as a synthesis and a crossroads was even more emphasised in Ben Ali's Tunisia and as we will see later on in this research, served both leaders to portray Tunisia as integrally part of the Maghreb, the Arab world at large and principally the Mediterranean world. This situated the country within a broader ensemble that includes European influences. Dissecting the country's ostensible multi-layered history thus serves a purpose: it enables one to examine the Tunisia's post-colonial identifications, which were heavily based on a 'Mediterranean' premise. Furthermore, I will in the last section of this chapter discuss the implications of these imposed identifications and examine how they relate to Tunisia's historical background and Tunisian society at large during the 1990s and 2000s. Ultimately, I will further delineate how it serves as basis for the content in the following two chapters. Doing so will illustrate how Tunisia's distinct history was not only instrumental to the country's post-colonial identifications, but also how these constructed national narratives relate to the country's past of French colonialism. The French colonists employed similar narratives to justify occupying large parts of their colonial empire in North Africa on a similar basis of historical continuity.

Tunisia's centrality within the Mediterranean region has long made it an important crossroads of cultures and peoples. Carthage, one of the most illustrious cities of antiquity, is located on the outskirts of the modern-day capital, Tunis. Today, Carthage continues to symbolise, beyond its ancient environs, the central seat of power of the Tunisian republic. The presidential palace was built here after the country achieved independence from France in 1956. This location presented a way of asserting Tunisia's Punic heritage, effectively opposing the French colonial associations with North Africa's Roman heritage (Dommelen and Samuels 2019). Carthage was founded as a colony by Phoenician seafarers from Tyre, in modern-day Lebanon. Carthage's location was strategic, as it provided a well-positioned hub between the eastern and western Mediterranean. The Phoenicians were well-known seafarers and would later pose serious competition for the ancient Romans, and Carthaginian wealth would become

renowned.[10] Moreover, Carthage also became an important location for construction and a centre of export of finely carved ivory, terracotta and jewellery, but also different kinds of wines. The economy of Carthage multiplied, as well as its extent, capacity and inevitably also its influence. The inhabitants in Carthage numbered 30,000 a century after it was founded. The city became one of the greatest cities that were located along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The population of Carthage is approximated to number around 250,000 people during the third century BCE (Masri 2017). Carthage's religion (which included elements of Phoenician polytheism) is also greatly attested, as archaeological evidence found across the entire Mediterranean indicates (Quinn 2018). However, Carthage's influence and dominance eventually became the empire's sword of Damocles. In 146 BC, Rome famously ended Carthage's hegemony in the Mediterranean world and destroyed the city, after having fought numerous wars over dominance in the Mediterranean basin. Carthage was later rebuilt as a Roman city and after its fall became a bastion of the Byzantine Empire.

The advent of Islam came with the arrival of the Arabs. The Arabs arrived already in the seventh century CE and conquered the Tunisian territory, unlike earlier conquerors, via land. Afterwards, the territory of modern-day Tunisia was governed at different stages by both Arab caliphates and Berber dynasties. Some of these caliphates and dynasties adhered to Sunni Islam and some to Shi'a Islam. Masri notes that, however, despite the fact that Muslim empires ruled Tunisia almost constantly until Tunisia was declared a protectorate by the French in 1881, Arab rule over Tunisia's territory was very fragmented. It was only until the tenth century that Arabs continuously ruled, and their rule only reappeared periodically. More significant were the various Muslim Berber dynasties, of which the Hafsid dynasty (1229–1574) was the longest, which established Tunis as the capital of their empire. However, Hafsid rule was terminated with the annexation of Tunisia to the Ottoman Empire (Masri 2017 p.104). The Ottoman Empire acquired Tunisia as one of the last territories it would conquer during its rule. Tunisia became, like other Ottoman jurisdictions a self-governing province which was overseen by the bey (a governor). Nevertheless, the central authority continued to reside with the sultan in Istanbul, who was aided by his grand vizier (Masri 2017).

[10] Punic, Phoenician and Carthaginian are terms that essentially refer to the same thing, and I use them interchangeably in this thesis. However, strictly speaking, Punic refers Western Phoenicians, such as in the Carthaginian Empire, as well as referring to the Semitic language that they spoke.

Disputes over territory between the growing power of the European nations and the concurrently diminishing Ottoman Empire lasted for much of the Ottoman Empire's lifespan, and they became more intensive during the nineteenth century. The Ottomans began to encroach militarily on Tunisia in 1840, which caused friction with the French over the control of land in North Africa. Soon after, France sent its own fleet across the Mediterranean. France had already annexed Algeria in 1830 and was preparing an eventual annexation of Tunisia as well (Masri 2017 p.124). By then, Beylical Tunisia was already suffering from economic mismanagement and became more prone to foreign intervention (more directly from the Ottomans, the French and tribes along its southern frontiers) and made calls for international assistance to assuage its economy. However, the state was already in economic disarray. The deteriorating financial circumstances were the result of excessive corruption and nepotism. This resulted in enormous debts to mostly European beneficiaries and a devaluation of its currency. This eventually led the French to slowly gain more control over the autonomous region of the Ottoman Empire, in which the Bey would continue to serve a symbolic function throughout the protectorate. Accordingly, the French protectorate of Tunisia (1881-1956) served as the immediate predecessor of the contemporary Tunisian state. Tunisia became, unlike Algeria which was formally and administratively a part of France from 1830 onwards, a colony which the French declared a protectorate with the Bardo Treaty. This treaty bilaterally recognised French dominion over Tunisia. Tunisia's ruler, Sadok Bey signed the Bardo Treaty in 1881, formally establishing French control over the Tunisian state (Perkins 2014 p.141).

Part of the French' reliance on the past was an imperial discourse that stressed the fact that the French Colonial Empire was the legitimate inheritor of the Roman Empire (Lorcin 2002). Consequently, first Algeria and later Tunisia's rich cultural heritage presented ample opportunity for an appropriation that was based on cultural premises by the French. The paradigm between the relationship with the past and the present in the French colonial Maghreb centred around descendance and was instrumental to the French notion of colonial narratives and inheritance (McCarty 2017).[11] As Patricia Lorcin notes: "the appropriation of Rome and its legacy by the French occurred on multiple levels, namely religious, scientific, literary, and mythical." It was through these themes that the French legitimatised their imperial presence in North Africa. Additionally, for the French, Rome functioned as a sort of cultural precedent as

[11] See for an extensive account of French imperial policies and how they justified their imperial policies with ancient Roman heritage in North Africa (Davis 2007) and (McCarty 2017).

themes such as imitation, justification and admiration were common in nearly all French accounts of Roman North Africa (Lorcin 2002 p.296).

The European population of Tunis in 1904 consisted mainly of Italians, who numbered 35,000, the French numbered 10,000, the Maltese 8,000 and 2,000 others, along with 80,000 Muslims and 39,000 Jews (Perkins 2014)p.58). The European presence resulted in the construction of the *ville-nouvelle*, with French style boulevards and buildings, as opposed to the traditional walled medina, in which the Muslim and Jewish populations would continue to reside. However, the French settlers would not only remain in urban areas. During the 1880s and 1890s, colonial encroachment would soon also reach the rural population, who were displaced from their lands and replaced with French farms. These areas and lands were formerly *habus* lands, shared tribal lands and also state-owned land.[12] The Tunisians who decided to carry on with herding or their farming activities were only allowed to use the negligible lands that were not good enough for the mostly French rural settlers. Some farmers that were expelled from their land could work on the French farms. However, French or Italian workers were generally preferred. They were paid higher salaries because of different work habits and because they were accustomed to other agricultural practices. This is why most owners, especially the ones that were industrialising their operations, to favour workers from Europe. Other displaced persons tried their luck in Tunisia's towns and cities, where they could only perform the least desirable jobs given their lack of education and skill (Perkins 2014 p.60).

The dislocation during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century of Tunisia's rural population had detrimental consequences for the country's urban population. Consequently, the urban population suffered from further economic competition with people that settled there from the rural areas. Furthermore, reform movements had – both secular and religious, become more prominent and vociferous in the first decades of French colonial rule. The Young Turk movement in Istanbul and contemporaneous movements inspired young Tunisian intellectuals, who founded a party in 1907, the Young Tunisians (*Jeunes Tunisiens*) (Masri 2017). In the following decades the Tunisian intelligentsia, who were mostly educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, became more vociferous in their calls for an independent Tunisia. However, Tunisia's struggle for independence cannot be solely attributed to one group. It was an unlikely alliance of dissimilar constituents, secularists and zaitounians (those who were

[12] The principle of *Habus* is known as *Waqf* in the Mashreq and Ottoman Empire and denotes an endowment (such as a property or land) under Islamic law.

educated at the Al-Zaytuna mosque). The mix also included white-collar workers, peasants, factory workers and elites, along with women and men from a variety of inclinations that participated in the struggle for Tunisian independence (Masri 2017).

The conceptions and political standpoints of Bourguiba's Neo-Destour party were similar to the pro-Western perspectives the Young Tunisians had. Many members of the Young Tunisians had been formed by the same French education that the party's founders had enjoyed at home and in Paris. Bourguiba was, in several regards, a product of the French colonial power since he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, which provided him with a Western oriented attitude. He opposed French suppression while embracing a lot of their principles, which he later implemented as president of Tunisia. Moreover, he used Islam as a force to rally the people behind his cause - traditions such as wearing religious attire, such as the hijab, were used to differentiate Tunisia from the French coloniser. Additionally, Bourguiba employed a discourse that stressed the importance of Islam, which he used to his advantage to advocate independence for the Tunisian people. He later changed his tone about religion in public quite substantially when he became president of a liberated Tunisia. Masri notes that "for him, everything was political, and the end of liberation justified any means that he found useful" (Masri 2017 p.176).

Bourguiba was not immediately the most obvious leader for an independent Tunisia, figures such as Salah Ben Youssef were also important forces that were committed to and advocated more thorough assimilation with other Muslim and Arab countries. In the Tunisian national movement, there were on one side the modernists, such as Bourguiba. He was perceived to be highly invested with the Francophone elite, whereas there were also the likes of Salah Ben Youssef and his allies, who promoted a firmer Arab identity for Tunisia (Masri 2017 p.9). These differing ideologies caused conflict between these different parties, but it were eventually the modernists that gained the upper hand in an independent Tunisian state. Bourguiba and Ben Ali were clearly part of the modernist and secularist school. Despite Bourguiba and Ben Ali's reliance on reformism in Tunisian society, the revolution of 2011 opened up new political space, in which the country's old divisions became visible again.

Bourguiba became Tunisia's first president (1956-1987) and subsequently laid the foundations for the country's post-colonial discourse and his usage of Phoenician symbols started from an explicit anticolonial angle. Hannibal functioned as the personification of anti-imperial struggle and had to distinguish the country from its former coloniser. Ben Ali went even further in using pre-Islamic symbols, such as those of Phoenician and Roman Tunisia, which helped to

consolidate even further a 'Mediterranean' identity. This 'Mediterranean' became a prevalent discourse during the 1990s (Saidi 2008; Quinn 2018 p.13). The extensivity of Ben Ali's pre-Islamic rhetoric also served the country's tourist industry, which will be a central element in the third chapter. This 'Mediterranean' identity can be witnessed on the country's dinar banknotes, which marked a departure from a 'cult of personality' that surrounded Bourguiba's persona.

As a founding father of the Tunisian republic, Bourguiba's persona was equated with the nation and its discourse.[13] The cult-of-personality that surrounded Bourguiba, as can be witnessed on the dinar notes, featuring Bourguiba's contours on both the obverse and reverse was replaced with a 'cosmopolitan' palette by the Ben Ali regime (Hawkins 2010).[14]. This palette aimed to showcase Tunisia to both Tunisians and foreigners as a Mediterranean civilization, which suggest continuity with its Punic heritage (which had already the case under Bourguiba). However, Ben Ali took this a step further by appropriating more Punic symbols, with Carthaginian general Hannibal inter alia receiving a prominent place on the five-dinar banknote.

In sum, civilisations that prospered on the modern-day territory of Tunisia – Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and Berbers all contributed as much to the larger Mediterranean history and culture as they were influenced by it. Nevertheless, they served the colonial and independent Tunisian state on a number of fronts. The French colonial period served as the immediate predecessor of the modern nation-state, and just like the newly independent state did the French colonists rely on the region's ancient cultural heritage to justify their rule in North Africa. Just as the post-colonial state in Tunisia played into this ancient cultural heritage for its political, economic and cultural relationships (Samuels 2012).

Moreover, French colonialism was closely entangled with heritage claims and Roman remains were frequently appealed to in justifications for French colonisation, particularly by connecting Roman and French colonisation of the region and asserting that the French were the 'rightful' inheritors of the Roman Empire. This was, ironically, albeit in different terms, continued under Bourguiba and Ben Ali and in the forthcoming chapter I aim to display how

[13] The links between territorial currencies and state formation (and legitimisation) have been demonstrated in numerous studies, showcasing how much work on banknote design shows how the nation asserted or challenged colonial domination. For an investigation into the role that dinar banknotes in Tunisia played in structuring a state-sponsored vision of national identity see *National Symbols and National Identity: Currency and Constructing Cosmopolitans in Tunisia* (Hawkins 2010).

[14] Parallels can be drawn with Atatürk; whose imaginary is still omnipresent on the Turkish lira coins and banknotes (Özyürek 2006).

these practices permeated into the country's historically focused narrative and state-led narratives of identity. I do this by analysing how these narratives are described and portrayed in school textbooks. In the last chapter, the country's national museum and tourism industry illustrate how these neo-colonial policies served the state's narrative and legitimation. The former glory of Carthage and the empire's opposition to Rome undoubtedly served a compelling national narrative that the Tunisian leaders sought to create. Moreover, there were certainly differences between the practices in the colonial and in the post-colonial period, which at first sight lay at the simple transvaluation of Roman heritage. Tunisia's Roman patrimony was relegated in favour of displaying Phoenician or Punic ancestry, from then on serving as an anti-colonial analogy, and intended for a nationalist narrative that sought to bind the country together. Ben Ali's cultural-identity politics in Tunisia, as will be extensively examined in the third chapter, even enhanced this narrative to portray a manicured image of his country to international visitors through the country's tourism industry.

Nevertheless, Tunisians' knowledge of their ostensible multicultural history, particularly in Tunis and along the eastern coast, is as Masri notes, important to the way they see themselves, namely as Mediterranean (*Mutawassittiyeen* in Arabic) (Masri 2017 p.104).[15] Moreover, portraying the country as quintessentially Mediterranean could keep its political discourse, following independence, in line with the West and thus served the implementation of strategic partnerships and development. Bourguiba justified Tunisia's policies, which were mainly aligned with the West by emphasising Tunisia's ancient 'Mediterranean' identity. His discourse was supported by the French, which helped Bourguiba to better oppose his domestic antagonists during the first years of his presidency, particularly Salah Ben Youssef, who was in favour of a greater position for Tunisia in the Arab world. Moreover, adjusting Tunisia's position towards the Mediterranean (and also Europe) helped to differentiate the country from the other Arab countries. In addition, this tactic could offer a legitimate alternative to the more pronounced Islamic and Arab ideals of Bourguiba's political opponents (Masri 2017 p.104). As we will see, Ben Ali was also very aware of this legacy and was careful to politicise multifaceted nature of Tunisian identity, which will be the focus in the upcoming two chapters.

[15] References to this can nowadays still be seen in a variety of different outings, such as Hannibal TV, one of the largest cable networks in Tunisia, the Tanit d'Or, the highest price of the Tunisian Film Festival, in literature, coins and banknotes, references in newspapers and in architecture. Moreover, Carthaginian generals Hannibal and Hamilcar Barca received portraits in official media and architectural reconstructions of ancient Carthage became omnipresent during Ben Ali's rule (Dommelen and Samuels 2019).

Chapter II: Constructing the nation: identity formation under Ben Ali

What representational strategies are deployed to construct our views of identity and national belonging? How Tunisia is represented, is connected to a large extent to how its citizens can identify with its 'national culture'. The narrative of how this 'national culture' is depicted or told and the way it is subsequently rendered meaningful is of concern here. Homi Bhabha posits that "nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye" (Bhabha, 1990, p.1). The question leading this chapter thus concerns the way identity is imposed from above and how the Ben Ali regime went about validating its national narrative.[16]

In *Modernity and its Futures*, Stuart Hall identifies some characteristics through which national narratives are told (Hall 1992 p.293). The first important characteristic concerns the narrative tool of the nation. How is a nation recounted and presented in national histories, literature, popular culture and the media? These narratives provide a collection of images, stories, national symbols, historical events and rituals. These subsequently represent common experiences, tragedies and victories which accord meaning to the nation. Citizens, as representatives of an 'imagined community' share a particular narrative, which connects their quotidian lives with a national destiny that is both antecedent and abiding. The emphasis on a state's origins, its continuity and its traditions are other characteristics of a national narrative. A third discursive strategy is, as described in the literature review, Hobsbawm and Ranger's treatise of 'inventing' traditions, as traditions are claimed to be old or suggest continuity. Lastly, using a national culture as a narrative tool can be premised on a foundational myth, which provides a different history or a counter-narrative to the colonial state. This pre-dates colonisation and can serve as a premise for new nations, such post-colonial states, which are then constructed on these myths (Hall 1992).

Hall and Anderson debate in their work the use of history in validating a nation's existence. However, in this chapter I argue that nations highlight a particular history for their own projection to legitimise not only their existence, but also their identity and character. History distinguishing a nation, and so the nation must define its history. Consequently, the recounting of a national history or historicising a nation's past is a state matter *par excellence*. Safwan Masri adds that "the spreading of national fervour that underscored nation-building during the

[16] It is worth noting that in Tunisia, mainstream political thinking in ruling parties (and state elites, as they were closely entangled) since Bourguiba maintained that the nucleus and basis of the national identity was centred around a 'national culture' (Erdle 2010 p.292).

postcolonial era became deeply entrenched in education systems, as education helped to construct a national identity". School textbooks thus functioned as a way to reinforce loyalty and belonging to the state and enumerated factors that validated a state's rule (Masri 2017 p.259).[17] Therefore, in this chapter, I will first shortly delve into the historical developments around Ben Ali's focus on cultural-identity politics and school curricula in Tunisia. I offer later on a detailed analysis and discussion of how school curricula, most notably those used in secondary education, helped the regime to solidify a national narrative and how these school curricula fitted into the regime's policies of state formation.

As outlined earlier, the construction of a national narrative is a way through which ruling elites in authoritarian states can legitimise their rule and create agency among the population.[18] An important aspect of legitimisation is thus the narrative that is emitted by the central state. Driss Abbassi's (2005; 2017) research on nation-building and identity in Tunisia under Bourguiba and Ben Ali analyses these narratives by examining school curricula. His work presents an especially helpful resource to comprehend the narratives and images that were developed by Ben Ali and his predecessor. Abbassi holds that both Bourguiba and Ben Ali governed post-revolutionary Tunisia through a 'historical discourse', that is, a national identity was constructed by appealing to the country's history. Additionally, he notes that Tunisia is often seen as a 'bridge' between the Orient and the Occident (Abbassi 2017 p.13) He adds that, Tunisia, being a post-colonial state, balances between an Arab and Muslim identity on the one hand and a 'Mediterranean' one on the other (Abbassi 2005; 2017).[19] This balancing act has been described by Mohamed Daoud as 'biculturalism' (Daoud 1991; 2011). However, reality seems to present a more complex image than these dichotomies suggest, as these conceptions of national identities are not static and underwent changes ever since the country's independence in 1956.[20] Steffen Erdle notes that a closer analysis reveals that these 'ideological' lines were not as apparent and fixed as such a hasty formulation would suggest.

[17] See Masri's *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly* (2017) for a comparison between educational polices in the Arab world.
[18] Authoritarian and totalitarian states are terms that should be differentiated, this thesis follows Erdle's (2010) contention that "authoritarian regimes [such as Ben Ali's] are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without an elaborate or guiding ideology." This is in contrast to totalitarian regimes, which usually aim to destroy the old order, to mobilise society in support of their objectives, and the re-educate a society in line with their views (Erdle 2010 p.26).
[19] This thesis follows (unless stated otherwise) the definition of post-colonialism as a temporal concept, thus everything that followed since the country's independence from France.
[20] As Erdle notes, "the Islamist movements (such as the Islamic Tendency Movement ITM, later Ennahda) were largely supported by Arabic speaking, religious-minded bourgeois intellectuals, and marginalised, uprooted, semi-urban migrant populations, were set against a secular establishment which rallied most of the leftist-nationalist forces, and the urban Francophone bourgeoisie at large" (Erdle 2010 p.286).

There were significant ideological and organisational similarities between the secular and religious-inclined factions. As many actors often times had blurred and continuously changing affiliations, which was evident in the early years of Ben Ali's rule (Erdle 2010 p.286).

Trying to grasp the history that Tunisians recount each other requires focusing on the production of history and textbooks. Considering history as taught in schools and universities makes it possible to gauge the effects of this discourse, especially the parts that are left out or those that are emphasised (Abbassi 2005 p.159). The history textbooks that are discussed in this section mainly concern those used in secondary education (largely pupils in the age group of 15-19) and were issued in the first decade of Ben Ali's rule, roughly from 1993 to 2003. A new educational system was implemented from 1993 onwards, in which the renewed educational programmes highlighted in their objectives cultivating openness and tolerance to other societies in both the thinking and behaviour among Tunisian youth (Abbassi 2005 p.167). Moreover, these objectives also stress the importance of being proud of the Tunisian nation and its different civilisations, both old and new, by stressing the Maghrebi, Arab-Muslim, African and Mediterranean character of the country. In Tunisia, history starts being taught at the end primary education (6-15 years of age) and is dealt with more extensively in secondary cycle education (15-19 years of age).

Mohamed Charfi, noted for his anti-fundamentalism and reformist ideas, assumed office in 1989 as Minister of Education.[21] He was in his new role tasked with implementing a pedagogical discourse that sought to complement 'critical thinking, rationality, initiative and creativity' (Abbassi 2017 p.46).[22] The educational reforms that were implemented in the 1990s by Charfi sought to refocus Tunisian history. The 'new' history introduced major changes on several subjects and were meant to be break from a Bourguiban past (Abbassi 2017 p.49). The quite literal coming into office of Ben Ali marks a significant rupture from the Bourguiba era. Consequently, the first years of Ben Ali's rule marked a confrontation between the ruling elite and the Islamist movements, which Ben Ali accommodated to some extent, by establishing a 'National Pact'. This pact acknowledged the centrality of the Arab and Islamic identity of

[21] Charfi's (1989-1994) appointment caused uproar from the ITM, who accused him of trampling 'Islamic values' (Abbassi 2017) (Allani 2009).

[22] The history curricula in primary and secondary cycle education covered a wide range, starting with ancient history up to the Arab conquest of North Africa, the French Protectorate of Tunisia and the country's history since independence (Abbassi 2005).

Tunisia, which many felt was largely subsided during Bourguiba's presidency (Perkins 2014)p.194)[23].

Charfi's educational reforms discussed for instance other sects of Islam, such as Shi'ism, as well as other religions. In the new textbooks, these other religions were not presented as fraudulent or inferior to Islam, as was the case in many other Arab countries (Masri 2017 p.267). Furthermore, school textbooks aimed to transmit an essential historical affirmation: the existence of a specific Tunisian history (Abbassi 2005 p.178). This affirmation laid the basis for a historical continuation that subsequently could claim to be a cosmopolitan Mediterranean civilisation. Hatred towards the old colonizer made place for the formation of a 'civic and national identity'. Both primary and secondary education textbooks from 1993 onwards centred around the Mediterranean as the centre of Tunisia's history. The authors of these textbooks sought to transmit a clear message, appealing to the country's ancient history served a function: Tunisia's existence and glory can only be seen through a Mediterranean ensemble (Abbassi 2005 p.202; Erdle 2010 p.291). Moreover, shaping a tolerant citizen that identified with Tunisia's different historical civilisations undoubtedly helped to oppose the Islamist tides that became prevalent in the 1980s in Tunisia. Instrumental to this process was reinforcing an identity that could transcend political Islam, which was already partly set in motion in Bourguiba's Tunisia.

Tunisia's ancient history provided a unique cadre through which the state's narrative could be valorised. The role of Carthage and thus of Tunisia, as presented in these schoolbooks is recontextualised from early 1990s onwards. The destruction of Carthage 146 BCE and the founding of Kairouan in 706 CE by the Arabs is presented as a logical continuation for the country, and both are treated in these textbooks as events that defined the Tunisian nation (Abbassi 2005 p.171). The new history textbooks in both primary schools and secondary schools now for the first time also utilise the same repository in order to reinforce a national and distinct Tunisian narrative. Terms such as exceptionality, effulgence and exchange are frequently encountered in the textbooks that write about Tunisia's history in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it is not Rome, which the French appropriated for their colonial narrative in Tunisia, but Carthage that is presented as the hegemonic reference for Tunisia's modern

[23] Despite these accommodating processes, the most prominent Islamist movement, named the Islamic Tendency Movement (ITM) in 1981 and renamed Ennahda in 1989, was severely repressed beginning in 1989 and Ghannouchi left Tunisia for exile in Europe (Allani 2009) (Perkins 2014). To illustrate, even talking about Islamism already presented problems in Ben Ali's Tunisia. McCarthy reports that Western journalists researching Islamism in Tunisia were constantly followed and intimidated by the police (McCarthy 2018).

identity. This is exemplified in the textbooks in the last year of secondary education, which devote more than a third to Carthaginian/Punic history (Abbassi 2017 p.58). Furthermore, the theme that is chosen to conclude the textbook deals with the contributions of Tunisia in the Mediterranean civilisations during antiquity. The authors of these textbooks seek on the one hand to present Tunisia's past civilisations in a purely Tunisian national context. On the other hand, they also insist on external movements in the Mediterranean while at same time emphasising the positive influence of all these ancient civilisations on Tunisia (Abbassi 2017 p.59). The new textbooks that were issued after Ben Ali's educational reforms thus presented Tunisia as an eternal entity that was prosperous and enjoyed great civilisations, reflecting the state's narrative that placed ancient heritage at the heart of the country's national history.

The emblematic role of a national hero in the new historical configuration of Tunisian history textbooks is reserved for Hannibal and Hamilcar Barca. They serve and are presented as a framework for identification for the Tunisian nation. The Carthaginian generals are noted in these history textbooks for their resistance to Rome during the Second Punic War. Hannibal's place in history textbooks is omnipresent and serves an anti-colonial analogy, as the Romans were depicted as non-native, and thus colonial.[24] For Ben Ali's regime, Hannibal thus serves as a convenient personification that can represent a distinct *Tunisian* history, distinguishing it from its former colonizer and other Arab states. Additionally, the role of Islam and Tunisia's Maghrebi neighbours were relegated to the side in the history textbooks that were issued during Ben Ali's presidency, which served, rather tactfully, to help centralise this Mediterranean identity, an identity that did not compromise being Muslim or Arab in Tunisia but instead complemented them. This way, the regime was able to assert a unique identity that is both richer, older and cosmopolitan, while simultaneously creating an image that allowed the regime to escape from the political and identity crises that marked the 1980s in Tunisia (Abbassi 2017 p.60).

The regime's focus was thus aimed at distinguishing it from Bourguiba's Tunisia by giving it a new sense of reality, which focused on the country's ancient history. Interestingly, in a survey conducted in 1997, ancient history is noted as the least favourite school subject, with pupils preferring the contemporary history of the country. Moreover, in another survey

[24] Hannibal's promotion to national hero and symbol (alluded to also earlier for his presence on the five-dinar banknote) in history textbooks is not unique to his persona, however, he is the only one who receives a prominent portrait in textbooks, notably being lauded for his perseverance and opposition to imperial Rome (Abbassi 2005 p.210).

that was conducted during 1997-1998, Hannibal was cited as Tunisia's favourite historical figure, significantly more than the Prophet Mohammed for instance (Abbassi 2005 p.217). Ironically, even though Carthage and the Mediterranean are portrayed to be the hegemonic references for the Tunisian population to identify with, most of the population, as Abbassi notes, still adhere to an Arab and Muslim identity (Perkins 2014; Abbassi 2005).[25] Ben Ali's subsequent focus was thus based on a valuation of the history and geography of Tunisia, in order to escape the political and identity crises that characterised Bourguiba's last decade as president.

In fact, Ben Ali's emphasis on Tunisia's Punic heritage was quite uncommon when compared to other states in the Middle East and North Africa (Dommelen and Samuels 2019 p.4). Masri adds that in educational policies, Tunisia stood out from other Arab countries, which would mostly present a revisionist history that only stressed the history of Sunni Islam (Masri 2017 p.254). However, another notable exception to this rule is Iraq, where the Ba'athist regime (1968-2003) aimed to rewrite the nation's history and cultural heritage. The Iraqi regime did this by drawing on its ancient Mesopotamian history, which provided an opportunity to distinguish the state from other Arab countries.[26] The regime in Iraq appropriated its Mesopotamian heritage to shape a distinct national identity. Saddam Hussein's Iraq presents some superficial similarities with Tunisia, but the regime's efforts were mainly geared to reconfigure perceptions of the (national) past. This was done to eradicate a strong propensity in the Iraqi nationalist movement that promoted political participation, cultural pluralism, and social justice (E. Davis 2005). As for Tunisia, the reliance on a pre-Arab past allowed Ben Ali, apart from serving domestic purposes, as Peter van Dommelen and Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels put in: "to build an international reputation for Tunisia as one of the most liberal and western Arab states" which earned Tunisia widespread praise among Western countries (Dommelen and Samuels 2019 p.4).

Another conclusion that can be drawn from Ben Ali's multicultural discourse can be witnessed in the linguistic situation in Tunisia's secondary education. As Daoud notes, Classical Arabic is by many Tunisians considered to be a marker of identity. However, some renounce it on the basis of being retrograde and instead prefer the local variety of Arabic. French, on the other

[25] Jemaï's research and surveys (2005) finds that pupils appropriated this Carthaginian history of Tunisia, while rejecting Roman and Byzantine Tunisia, because of their foreign origins (Jemaï 2005).
[26] See Davis' book *Memories of State: Politics, History and Collective Identity in Iraq* (2005).

hand is considered by some to signify progress, yet others still consider it a colonial language. This is exemplified by the socio-cultural rivalry that still dominates the linguistic landscape in Tunisia. Despite some Arabisation efforts under Bourguiba in the 1970s and 1980s, French continued to be the language that was used in economic and science programmes in both vocational training and in secondary education. In universities, most social science and humanities programmes also use French as the language of instruction and communication (Daoud 2011). In Morocco and Algeria, unlike Tunisia, fiercer anticolonial sentiments advocated for fast and extensive Arabisation. The usage of language was less of a hotly debated issue in politics, as there was still much discussion about the practicality of Arabic during Bourguiba's term as president (Masri 2017). Nevertheless, the Arabic language is enshrined in the Tunisian constitution, even though the linguistic situation remains ambiguous in Tunisia. Moreover, Arabisation meant, in part, accommodating to the conservative socio-cultural forces that Ben Ali increasingly grew weary of. Thus, Arabisation was implemented alongside Tunisification, which assured Tunisia's unique characteristics as a nation state, a process that was achieved by emphasising its national history, which was a product of its rich civilisations and geographical place. These influences subsequently shaped Tunisia's modern social and cultural vision (Daoud 2011).[27] These factors were then reformulated to fit Ben Ali's discourse, which heavily stressed the country's history as a continuation from its Punic origins.

Lastly, a comparison with Tunisia's Maghrebi neighbours, such as Morocco, show that there the language policies that were implemented resulted in ideological tension with older generations. These generations fought for and were invested in Classical Arabic, due to its association with the country's cultural decolonisation. Despite the more thorough Arabisation project in Morocco, the ambivalent situation between French and Arabic remains present in Morocco as well. In Morocco, education is organised in Arabic until students graduate from secondary education. However, most Moroccan students have to change to French for education in universities and then have to work in a mostly francophone and a progressively anglophone job market (Boutieri 2016 p.4). Furthermore, the general representations of national history in Moroccan and Algerian history textbooks reveals a firm adhesion to an Arab-Muslim identity, as opposed to Tunisia's emphasis on its unique history that meant to

[27] In a speech held in Beirut in October 2002, Ben Ali affirms the status of French in Tunisia, stating "Crucible of cultures for millennia, proud of its Arab-Muslim identity and its African and Mediterranean dimension, Tunisia has always considered the French language a source of enrichment and openness on the world. From this high tribune, Tunisia reiterates its appeal of the instauration and consecration of understanding and harmony between different cultures and civilizations" (Daoud 2011).

transcend both Islam and the Arab aspect of the territory. On the other hand, references to a shared Maghrebi cultural context are strongest in Moroccan textbooks and receive less importance in Algerian and Tunisian textbooks (Abbassi 2005 p.238).

To conclude, Ben Ali's rule has been called by some anti-Islamic, however, while his policies were inherently secular, this does not mean that they were *anti*-Islamic.[28] The accommodating of Islamist movements in the first years of his term, exemplified by the drafting of the National Pact, which ensured the country's Arab and Islamic heritage, suggests that it did not *exclude* Islam altogether. During the 1990s, it was simply side-lined in the country's discourse that was used to portray Tunisia's ancient past as an image that reflects accomplishment, tolerance, modernity. Tunisia was depicted as a pan-Mediterranean trading nation, a country that was culturally cosmopolitan and developed. The content of the history textbooks that were issued in the 1990s and 2000s reflected this tendency to create a cosmopolitan citizen. Ben Ali promoted a discourse that greatly emphasised Tunisia's ancient history and as a place between East and West, through which its citizens were prompted to identify with and that simultaneously used history as a legitimisation for its discourse.

While initially accommodating the Islamists, Ben Ali's Minister of Education, Mohamed Charfi's reforms in the early 1990s were decisive in their introduction of educational reforms. Charfi's reforms aimed to curb the Islamist tides that became more vociferous in the 1980s by reinforcing Tunisia's identity and history around the Mediterranean. Ironically, the content of the textbooks appropriates an identity-image that was largely constructed during the colonial era and in a way reinforces a French representation of Tunisia. Tunisia's ancient civilisations were in Ben Ali's Tunisia put in the spotlight, much like the French historical colonial narrative that was prevalent in colonial North Africa.

Furthermore, the often-quoted secular versus traditional (or modern versus authentic) dichotomy presents a too static approach in understanding the dynamics that characterised Ben Ali's identity discourse in Tunisia. The analysis of the educational reforms that were conceived under Ben Ali and its content demonstrates that shaping Tunisian citizens had a cosmopolitan approach. The content of these textbooks did not solely consist of an Arab or Muslim history, as was the case in many other Arab countries that sought to construct a national identity after colonial rule. The identity that Ben Ali sought to construct for Tunisia can thus be seen as a

[28] Such as in *Mediating Museums: Exhibiting Material Culture in Tunisia* (Rey 2019, p.15).

culturally and historically based national identity. Ben Ali's regime substantially modified Bourguiba's official state discourse. This resulted in a greater focus on both the country's Punic legacy and a somewhat marginalised Arab and Islamic history. The *tunisianité* that the regime constructed thus transcends Islam but does not exclude it. This 'national culture' appeals to its wider Mediterranean region, through which it renounces all political assertations that favour an essentialist account of a state's national identity.[29] Exactly this duality enabled Tunisian elites to shift between multicultural discourses. Moreover, the emphasis on Tunisia's historical precedents and its continuity was also extended to the tourism sector, which will be a central element in the forthcoming chapter.

[29] Nevertheless, it should be noted that it was ultimately the discourse of Islam that became prevalent and characterised political compromises in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Boubekeur 2015).

Chapter III: 'Displaying' the nation through institutions and practices

The cultural aspect of the nation, as described by both Anderson and Hobsbawm in the literature review, presents a valuable turn that allows scholars to analyse how the past and its artifacts are manifested and constructed. In addition, the ways they can give meaning to the contemporary state. Particular ideas of the nation are created and embedded in demonstrative forms that are able to 'convey' practices, such as in museums, tourism and heritage exhibitions (Boswell and Evans 1999). This chapter is concerned with this cultural emphasis in studying our perspectives of the nation and assesses how notions of identity emanate from cultural representations. The question guiding this chapter is geared towards the influence of the state's national discourse through institutions (the national museum) and practices (tourism) that seek to present a particular image to its visitor.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the salience of constructing a nation's history, which is, as has become evident, a selective process that is based on erasing or enhancing certain pasts and artifacts. These practices are, in fact, acts of state building.[30] A nation's development, thus, depends on the appropriation of existing and invented symbols with the goal of homogenising these, while its legitimation depends on the consent given by the population to this constructed dominant narrative. The discursive nature of this space is constantly being developed and negotiated in ongoing cultural practices. Museums and different infrastructures linked to heritage (such as tourism) enable and facilitate processes of state formation (Smith 2006; Al-Ragam 2014)[31]. These objects, processes and practices negotiate and contest spaces of discord and agreement and thus form the core focus of this chapter.

The membership of a political nation-state and the identification with a national culture is expressed through a cultural ideal, which can be used to unify a nation's inhabitants (Gellner 1983). In the case of Tunisia, this has been called '*la tunisianité'*.[32] As Boswell and Evans

[30] Rosie Bsheer describes these processes in the case of Saudi Arabia, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* in which she focuses on Saudi elitist' focus on state building through archival and spatial policies as a way of constructing a history through erasure, and essentially a created identity for the Wahhabist Saudi nation (Bsheer 2020).

[31] I follow Smith's definition of heritage, which moves away from treating heritage as simply tangible. As tangible sites are not intrinsically of value for people. Ancient cities, for example, are essentially an assemblage of ruins. The modern activities and cultural processes that are undertaken around these sites is what makes them meaningful and valuable, it 'monumentalises' these sites, which accords meaning to a country's cultural heritage. These sites then become part of a process that identifies them as having a symbolic meaning for social and cultural events, for instance by stressing the importance of the sites for a particular country's history (Smith 2006 p.3).

[32] For an analysis of 'Tunisianité' as a discursive construction in post-revolutionary Tunisia, see (Helal 2019) And for a study of Tunisianité as exemplified through cultural productions (such as cinema), see (Lang 2014)

assert, what is means to *feel* as a particular national of a country is connected to the way a nation is made tangible through recognisable symbolic forms and narratives that constitute cultural representations in institutions, such as a national museum (Boswell and Evans 1999 p.2). The very term 'national' museum implies a liaison between the museum as an institution of all its citizens, and the way it can function as a transmitter and how it represents the host country to both domestic and overseas visitors. While I demonstrated in the previous chapter how historicising history through a national lens helps the nation in asserting a particular identity, which essentially decides why it important for nations to preserve the past and what is worth preserving and displaying. In this chapter, on the other hand, I trace the implications of this state-legitimisation through the tourism industry and Tunisia's national museum: the Bardo Museum.

Case study: Musée National du Bardo

Museums, and especially national museums, serve as sites for the fabrication of hegemonic discourses. They represent the political nature of heritage construction and the instruments used to support these narratives (Al-Ragam 2014). Additionally, museums, as social institutions, are actively constructed. Sharon MacDonald asserts they are thus political: they can validate social claims and legitimise relations of power, and they can function as agents of social change (Macdonald 2003). However, museums are also exclusionary, as they illustrate how the past and representations of the past can be manipulated to demonstrate historical continuity, serving the interests of specific groups at particular historic moments. Museums are spaces in which elites, but also social groups can articulate their ideas and world views through the display of objects and histories (Kaplan 1994 p.2).

The national museum of Tunisia, the Bardo National Museum, was first established by Ali Bey in 1882, and opened in 1888, during the French protectorate as the Musée Alaoui and received its current name in 1957, after the country's independence (Zaiane 2008; 2012). Its location, housed in a former beylical palace, occupies, according to Rey, a central role in Tunisian public life (Rey 2019)p.1). The centrality of the Bardo Museum in Tunisia's national imagination is further exemplified by the terrorist attack that ISIS, non-coincidentally, carried out there in 2015. The group, that espouses a monolithic version of Islam, described the Bardo as a 'den of infidels and vice in Muslim Tunisia' (Rey 2018; Dommelen and Samuels 2019). The Bardo's premises, apart from hosting the national museum, also hosts the National Assembly of the

Tunisian Republic and was subsequently the site for extensive negotiations for Tunisia's democratic constitution after 2011 (Rey 2018; Jelidi 2012).

The Bardo Museum has since the institution's founding been the nation's main heritage repository and one of the country's most leading tourist landmarks (Ghali 2009; Nakhli 2016; Coslett 2020). Moreover, Tunisia has since the 1990s undergone an extensive redefinition of its cultural heritage, by embarking on a vast undertaking to enhance its cultural heritage in line with Ben Ali's 'new Tunisia'. This was commenced with a project that aimed to restructure and extend the Bardo National Palace and Museum (Gharsallah-Hizem 2011).[33] In her ethnographic research, Virginie Rey calls museums in Tunisia and their function within society 'spaces of mediation', which supports processes of collective redefinition and negotiation of Tunisian identity (Rey 2019 p.2). This claim, however, goes against the notion that museums are essentially exclusionary, as was mentioned earlier on. Correspondingly, how valid is this argument for Tunisia's national museum? I argue that the Bardo, whose exhibitions mainly consist of its world-famous mosaics and (mostly) Roman and Punic antiquities, does not seem to fit this function. The Bardo's main exhibition 'freezes' an image of Tunisia that is mainly concerned with its ancient past and Mediterranean identity. This representation serves as an extension of the regime's policies that were aimed at creating 'heritage citizens' and that were meant to make Tunisians identify with being a cosmopolitan citizen of their country.[34]

Presenting Tunisia as a Mediterranean civilisation was subsequently extended to the national museum, where the visitor is presented with an image of a country that is both ancient and multifaceted. The Bardo Museum's visitor guides promote this image. Analysing the museum's visitor guides from the late 1990s reveals that they recount a very particular version of Tunisia's history to the museum's visitor. The religious references are very occulted in these guides, instead focusing on Tunisia's Punic, Roman and Byzantine Christian history. The museum does possess Islamic art and some museum guides reference the importance of Kairouan, a Tunisian city that is the fourth most holy place in Sunni Islam. However, these references receive far less attention than the museum's Punic and Roman collections. Moreover, the loans destined for the museum's renovation were largely reserved for a new

[33] See for a detailed analysis of the Bardo's extension and renovation: *Le projet de rénovation et d'extension du palais-musée national du Bardo à Tunis* (Gharsallah-Hizem 2011).
[34] Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels describes how the Ben Ali regime created 'heritage citizens' in Tunisia through appealing to its ancient artifacts in her article *Roman Archaeology and the Making of Heritage Citizens in Tunisia* (Samuels 2012).

wing which was intended to ameliorate the display of its Roman mosaics (Gharsallah-Hizem 2011). The museum's emphasis subsequently reinforced the image of Tunisia and its ancient cultural heritage through its extensive collection of Roman mosaics. This emphasis gives the impression that the average visitor would not even know whether Tunisia is nowadays a Muslim country (Abbassi 2005 p.227). The Bardo Museum's rehabilitation was part of a project, coined the 'Tunisia Cultural Heritage Project' and was sponsored by the World Bank.[35] This resulted in the rehabilitation and renovation of the Bardo Museum, which started in 2003. The museum could, thanks to this loan from the World Bank act as a renewed bastion of cultural tourism for Tunisia, which was only finalised in 2012 after several delays (Rey 2018; 2019). However, as Daniel Coslett notes, the original proposal for simple interior enhancements was altered in 2003 (Coslett 2020 p.734). In that year Ben Ali's government decided, with the support of the World Bank, to follow a development plan that was much more ambitious and that was intended to:

> transform the Bardo into a high standard museum that primarily focused on the display of Tunisia's unique (and one of the most extensive in the world) collection of Roman mosaics, as well as artifacts from the Punic, Numidian, and early Islamic eras (WB 2012 p.9).

Nevertheless, the museum's rehabilitated exhibition halls were largely centred around its Roman mosaics. This can be seen as exemplary of the regime's 'pluricultural' image and reinforces the distinct Mediterranean image of the country through its national museum.

The terrorist attacks of 2015 in the Bardo Museum, while being one the most traumatic events in post-revolutionary Tunisia, can be seen as part of a larger patrimonial crisis in Tunisia. This crisis is related to the different societal groups that dispute meanings to places that they deem important for Tunisian identity. This identity crisis can be seen as a product of Ben Ali's extensive cultivation of creating a cosmopolitan citizen that could identify with his national narrative and that would not challenge his rule. Nevertheless, heritage has in Tunisia been at

[35] The World Bank report discloses the aims of the loan (that was granted in 2001) with an amount of 19.2 million euros to implement a national strategy for cultural asset conservation and management. "The project will facilitate the implementation of the Code du Patrimoine and the creation of a museum policy; The project will develop a sense of cultural identity in local population through school programs and participation by local NGOs (such as the *Associations de sauvegarde des medinas*); it will create mechanisms to channel local government and community support for the maintenance of cultural sites and develop public/private partnerships; finally, the project will stimulate employment generation and local economic development in the vicinity of cultural sites, through artifact production and sales, tourism services, and traditional restoration skill training" (The World Bank 2001).

the heart of serious political turmoil, due to its firm connection to identity and memory (Rey 2018 p.69). Consequently, heritage has been used by different societal groups to endorse, assert their difference from or contempt toward the type of citizenship that was promoted by the state through this process of patrimonialisation.[36] Moreover, the political changes in the 1990s and the reliance on the state's patrimony by Ben Ali's government can be seen as a very strategic step, which coincided with an emphasis on tourism development and economic opening. This strategy undoubtedly was meant to promote a more intense connection between the state's territory and its inhabitants. In addition, it was also necessary to develop a stronger tourism industry, in which the state's patrimony could be showcased. The tourism industry was, as we will see in the following section, regarded as a central pillar of Tunisia's economy and as an extension of Ben Ali's state building project.

Case study: Tourism in Tunisia

Identity is often framed in opposition to another, and in fact, it is through differences that we evoke value to our own unique features. For tourism purposes, distinct identities are often capitalised upon and marketed as something specific for a particular location, which often has to be exotic and 'different' in order for us to appeal to it. Nevertheless, simply attempting to evoke it already presents problems. According to the WTO, promoting the public image of a country is exercised by the state in the form of a ministry that deals with tourism or culture (WTO 1985). The nation, through its representatives, subsequently exploits a particular image for the tourist, while at the same time reinforcing an image of national coherence. Then, a constructed representation is showcased to flatter national identity (Lanfant, Allcock and Bruner 1995).

Under Ben Ali, a plethora of institutions were created in order to cater to the ambitions of the world tourism market (Rey 2019).[37] This was in the case of Tunisia, as was mentioned earlier, exemplified by Ben Ali's emphasis on Tunisia's mythological heritage, these pre-Arab symbols aided the regime in shaping a versatile Tunisian identity (Dommelen and Samuels

[36] The term *patrimonialisation* refers to the "transformation of sites, customs, or cultural traits into marketable heritage" (Rey 2018, p.69). Moreover, this process has also been called *heritagisation* in modern scholarship, e.g., in Lafrenz Samuels' *Roman Archaeology and the Making of Heritage Citizens in Tunisia* in which she describes how the Ben Ali regime created 'heritage citizens' in Tunisia through appealing to its ancient artifacts (Samuels 2012).

[37] During the early 1990s the national heritage institute (*L'institut National du Patrimoine*) was restructured and the national agency for heritage development *(l'Agence nationale de mise en valeur et d'exploitation du patrimoine*, ANEP) was created. Moreover, a number of laws were passed that set the precedent for a process of patrimonialisation (heritagization) which was still ongoing in 2008 (Saidi 2008 p.105).

2019; Perelli and Sistu 2013). Moreover, various scholars have demonstrated how in Tunisia state-building was premised on the country's ancient heritage and that tourism was an inevitable part of this (Dommelen and Samuels 2019; Quinn 2018; Saidi 2008). Tourism has essentially been an important force in the development, production and preservation of an 'official' culture, which supports a discourse of national identity. Moreover, heritage tourism presented a powerful tool to assemble and assert a type of national identity. Accordingly, historical symbols and the nation's patrimony are used to attract tourists.me In sum, the tourism industry presented a well-suited opportunity through which a distinct Tunisian identity could be promoted and through which contemporary concepts and understandings of the nation's image are defined.

What other site than Carthage could exemplify Ben Ali's appeal to a national narrative that centred around Tunisia's ancient past? Efforts were already made in the 1970s for the site's preservation and Carthage was eventually in 1979 inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List (Perelli and Sistu 2013). However, it was not until 1996 that Carthage was designated a national archaeological park. The World Bank's 'Tunisia Cultural Heritage Project' (that also allocated funds for the Bardo's extension and a number of other sites of touristic potential) also served Carthage's archaeological park and rehabilitation. The World Bank report discloses the aims and states that: "the project represents a major step toward the sustainable management of the country's heritage and the development of cultural tourism. Such projects are critical for the preservation of assets and for the national identity. They can also contribute greatly to local development and economic diversification" (WB 2012 p.37). This project thus undeniably served Ben Ali's aim to refocus Tunisia's tourism industry, which was largely centred around the country's extensive beach resorts (such as around Sousse and Hammamet on the country's east coast). These beach resorts were bustling during the 1970s and 1980s and cultural heritage sites, such as Carthage (and other heritage sites, such as the Roman amphitheatre in El Djem) presented suitable options to present another, more cultured image of Tunisia (Perelli and Sistu 2013; Dommelen and Samuels 2019).

A site like Carthage is created in a similar way (ethnographic) museum are created, namely, to preserve and display historical moments that carry some sort of mythological meaning, which often precedes modernity. These practices raise questions about its connection to modernity and tradition. An approach that is often used in academia is to portray 'the traditional' and 'the

modern' as antipodes (Rey 2019; Mitchell 2000).[38] This dichotomy is evidently present in the tourism industry as well. Western tourists often imagine countries in the MENA region as 'traditional' and thus authentic, while modernity is often considered its antipode. The supposed antipodes of modernity and authenticity or Western and Arab/Islamic, were also encountered in the previous chapter through the society's struggle with accommodating both Western (and thus colonial, e.g., French) and Arab/Muslim influences. The modern is considered to be orientated towards the future (as can be witnessed in the in the linguistic situation in Tunisia that was described in the previous chapter). On the other hand, a traditional vision is often considered to be archaic and impermeable to change. In the Middle East and North Africa, societies are frequently depicted through a contest between advancement and dogmatism, which is a rather monolithic approach to understand any society.

Instead, these supposed antipodes do not have to exclude one another. Western tourists want to see an 'authentic' culture, even though countries in the MENA region do not exist within some suspended temporal space. During Bourguiba's Tunisia, tourism was mainly centred around mass tourism and package tours, which allowed the state to present a catered image of the country (Dommelen and Samuels 2019). Bourguiba's government, as Habib Saidi notes, drew attention to exotic and Orientalist 'subjects' (e.g., beaches, camels, palm trees, belly dancers and desert landscapes) in tourism guides. The emphasis on this particular image duplicated almost the same oriental stereotypes as those used during the French period in Tunisia (Saidi 2005; 2008).

Despite the fact that Ben Ali's government re-shifted the focus of the tourism industry to heritage tourism to justify his new Tunisia to both domestic and foreign audiences, both approaches [of Bourguiba and Ben Ali] epitomise the exclusionary practices of representing an image of a country for touristic purposes. This essentially misrepresents a local culture (or at least gives a one-dimensional account) and identity, which creates a fragmented society through people who either endorse or contest this particular image. Moreover, as Habib Saidi notes, the augmenting tourism numbers increased this gap between a developed Tunisia (along the coast) and a more traditionally orientated (in its interior) and changed Tunisians' image of their country and the collective self. This binary image was divided between rich and poor, modernised and non-modernised, urban and rural people. On one hand, there was a coastline

[38] A notable example being Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), which presents a stark monolithic reading of culture and where countries and cultures are presented as each other's antipodes. Another example is Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995).

which somewhat reflected Western modernity and on the other hand, there was a marginalised interior that could not recognise itself in the reflection of the regime's promotional strategies (Saidi 2014).

Ben Ali's emphasis on Tunisia's ancient heritage (such as Carthage) and its recently renovated national museum reinforces essential notions of a sophisticated Tunisian national identity that suited the regime. Carthage was used to represent the Tunisian nation, which developed over the course of time. Additionally, Carthage also symbolises the national renaissance that Ben Ali wanted to emit, allowing him to break away from his predecessor's shadow. The Phoenician references served as a 'missing link' of Tunisian identity, opposing its former coloniser but which were also rightly fitted to explain the uniqueness of Tunisian culture, which could act as a legitimation of Ben Ali's rule. It enabled the regime to differentiate itself from European imperialism, which was framed through the ancient opposition between Carthage (native) and Rome (which was considered foreign).

On the other hand, it could also serve to differentiate Tunisia from Muslim theocracies, which were portrayed as dogmatic and hostile, and were thus considered as external ideologies and civilisations (Erdle 2010 p.295). Ironically, the regime's presentation of its Punic heritage became rather stereotyped and represented French colonial notions of identification and identity. Despite the fact that most cultural heritage in Tunisia is of Roman origin, as the Romans rebuilt several Punic cities after they destroyed them, including Carthage. Presenting an oversimplified version of history however risks constructing a monolithic understanding of a country's history.

To conclude, cultural heritage and Ben Ali's aggressive promotion of Tunisia's pre-Arab past and cultivation of a 'heritage citizen' was meant transform Tunisians into 'tolerant citizens of the world'. In addition, the regime's policies also had the intention to legitimise its rule and educate people that were not willing to challenge the state's authority. Nevertheless, it had the opposite effect, it led to divisions within society, as different elements of Tunisian society started to actively oppose these enforced 'Tunisian' identities. For instance, the various Islamist movements, out of which Ghannouchi's Ennahda would rise to prominence following the 2011 revolution. The (mostly European) tourists that came to Tunisia were catered to by an image of a tolerant country with an ancient history. This reinforces the assumption that heritage is always political, from the decision of what heritage is – and thus what is preserved, to the decision of what is promoted in museums and tourist guides, actively serving the agendas

political elites and thus state formation. Museums, as we have seen, facilitate the expression of a collective identity and of a past that the visitor comes to reclaim.

The Bardo's collections are based on a selection of objects brought together by a few specialists and educated people, conveying a particular image of Tunisia as seen through foreign and local eyes. Moreover, the presentation of monuments and heritage is defined in Tunisia in a certain fashion that originated largely from French nineteenth-century notions of nationalism. This idea is, due to Tunisia's ongoing close connection with France, explicitly felt and internalised, cultural heritage therefore becomes 'monumentalised' and is used to represent conceptions of national identity, continuity and legitimation. Moreover, tourism was tied into these heritage sites, where the regime actively constructed a distinct image of the nation. Nevertheless, museums are above all what society wishes to make of them: a place of identification and commemoration for national integration. It will be up to the nation's citizens to decide the extent of a possible reconciliation with a plural Tunisian identity. This could include a broader national narrative, which would also include groups that were often marginalised in Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's Tunisia. These minority groups have become increasingly politically involved ever since the Tunisian uprising, after which several groups started to advocate their causes to the new Tunisian governments.

Ben Ali's focus on a pre-Islamic and Mediterranean identity, while aiming to be inclusive, did not appeal to everyone. Ghannouchi, currently the leader of Tunisia's largest party, stated in 1992 shortly after leaving for a self-imposed exile that he saw the French colonial power to be a continuing under Bourguiba. Tunisia's independence was not a triumph for an Arab and Muslim civilisation in Tunisia, but rather one against it. He stated that the post-colonial state rather ambiguously supported the principles of its former coloniser. Ghannouchi asserts that the identity of Tunisians who lived according to more conservative principles was compromised by both Bourguiba and later even more extensively by Ben Ali's process of 'modernisation' (Rey 2018).[39] Moreover, the politicisation of the country's cultural heritage remains elusive as its 'multi-faceted' identity is replaced with a renewed zest of Islamic appeal, that has gained élan in a new democratic Tunisia. Furthermore, the rise of Ghannouchi's Ennahda party has characterised the country's postrevolutionary discourse. The party's

[39] Ghannouchi currently holds the influential position of Speaker of the House in the Tunisian Parliament, a post he has held since 2014.

important role in drafting the constitution of a more democratic Tunisia suggests an increased role for a ‘democratic Islam’ in Tunisia’s postrevolutionary political and social identifications.

Conclusion

The social construction of nation-states is an essential product of modernity. Ultimately, countries are always in construction; they are never fully made or remade. They capture the desires, anxieties, struggles, and histories of their inhabitants, and especially of those in power. As this research has demonstrated, it is impossible to simply grasp the identity of a country, as it is always a contested, multi-layered and mediated concept. In Tunisia, Ben Ali's regime aimed to construct a national culture that transcended the hegemonic forces of Islam and Arabness, which allowed the regime to enhance the country's uniqueness in the Arab world and simultaneously oppose its French colonial legacy. However, Tunisia's relation with its past and France remained and remains quite ambivalent, as its language and preservation policies exemplify, by resembling a form of colonial continuity. Moreover, *recounting* or *displaying* a particular image essentially is a top-down process, as Ben Ali's envisioned Tunisia 'freezes' the country in a particular frame. This particular image meant that there was no room for other forces of identification, such as those of Islamists or Berber, as they were prohibited to subscribe or make claims to this 'national' culture.

While I have taken a state-centric approach in illustrating Ben Ali's state formation and identity building in Tunisia, my research considered transnational forces in order to comprehend the distinct identifications that permeate the Arab world, such as the role of Islam in politics and culture and society at large. Evidently, these transnational forces have distinct national characteristics, which should be studied in their relevant contexts. The comparisons with Tunisia's Maghrebi neighbours reveal distinct differences, but also similarities. Moreover, the recounting of a nation's history serves political agendas, as I demonstrated with the content of the countries' history textbooks. These differ significantly, as the image of a country is always based on political choices. Additionally, the post-colonial Tunisian state, like so many others, employed a national identity discourse as a means to control people and regulate cultural expressions. Tunisian writer Hélé Béji calls national identity in her work *Le désenchantement national: essai sur la décolonisation* the 'narrative tool of the nation' (Béji 1982 p.72). That is to say, in Tunisia, unity, authenticity and identity are in correspondence with the mechanisms of the state's domination, both under Bourguiba and later under Ben Ali.

How did Ben Ali's regime construct a particular image of the Tunisian state and what is it that this Tunisian identity consisted of? While these questions formed some the foundations of this thesis, answering them presents methodological difficulties. Just as with any discursive figure, do nations solely exist within the eye of the beholder, its identity is depended on how its

inhabitants but also anyone who visits the country perceive it. An appropriate definition of identity requires an examination not only of the multiplicity of discourses around it, but also the power structure that affects it, as well as the dynamics of complicity and resistance. In this thesis I have tried to treat it as a constructed concept through which Ben Ali's regime sought to create legitimacy to both Tunisians and international visitors. This research aimed to showcase a nuanced vision of a country that does not solely exist as a monolithic block, just like any other country or state in the world, as peoples and cultures are so often confined to.

I traced in the first chapter the multi-layered history of Tunisia, which was marked by a multiplicity of different civilisations, which neatly served the newly independent country's first two leaders' political agendas. In the second chapter I demonstrated that identity formation through historicising a nation's history necessarily entails the obstruction of opposite voices and histories, as was especially the case in Ben Ali's Tunisia. Hannibal and the country's cultural heritage served as useful links that meant to connect Tunisians and visitors to Tunisia with a distinct image of the country. Moreover, the state was deeply penetrated into the public realm and civil society was severely subjugated, making it impossible for other voices than the state's dominant narrative to be heard. Consequently, the resurgence of the Ennahda movement after the 2011 revolution exemplifies the tendency of a majority of the population to oppose Ben Ali's policies of shaping a distinct Tunisian Mediterranean identity and adhere more to an Arab and Muslim identity.

Furthermore, the analysis of school curricula illustrated how the regime validated its mission of constructing a particular Tunisian history and presenting the country as a continuous entity, from antiquity to the state's independence in 1956. The content of these textbooks is essentially made to educate Tunisian pupils into citizens of their society. The tourism industry in the chapter that follows shows how this image is extended to external visitors, effectively justifying the tolerant and multi-faceted image of the country. This adequately ties in with the regime's envisioned image to both its own population and its visitors. Nevertheless, the exact extent to which pupils and the country's citizens could identify with this image remains difficult to localise. However, the country's extensive and contested negotiations for a new constitution that was finally implemented in 2014 can somewhat serve as an indicator of the ideological vacuum the Ben Ali regime left when he departed for a self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia.

The third chapter showed how Tunisian development largely depended was on the country's tourism industry and how important the links between heritage sites and development of the tourism industry were for the regime. The chapter investigated how in Ben Ali's Tunisia tourism instrumental was to control and shape notions of Tunisian identity to both visitors and Tunisians alike. This focus concurrently supported economic growth and advocated assimilation within the international economy. Additionally, selecting a heritage site, such as Carthage and the preservation strategies that pertain to heritage are formed consistently by relying on a particular image of Tunisia that is subsequently exported to both the domestic and international visitor.

The Roman mosaics of the recently renovated Bardo National Museum serve a certain irony. Despite the post-colonial state's strong identifications with its Punic past, most archaeological objects at display in the country (and with which the state identifies itself) are in fact of Roman origin. The post-colonial Tunisian state is an apparent case of how a regime can use heritage sites, such as Carthage, and the tourism industry to construct and legitimate a national identity. The regime can subsequently reinforce a manicured form of nationalism by constructing a 'new' state. The archaeological site of Carthage was by Ben Ali's regime selected as a symbol in promotional strategies for both national and international tourists. In this sense, tourism has been a central factor in the production, development and conservation of a distinct Tunisian culture. The country's tourism industry supported a discourse of national identity in a number of ways. First, the division between local and tourist spaces promptly diminished with Ben Ali's focus on cultural heritage, away from the packaged beach resorts. Like in other mass tourist destinations, tourists and locals alike increasingly participate in the same areas of consumption, which leads to a greater awareness of Tunisian national heritage among the country's population. This concurrently leads to increased divisions between the country's inhabitants and their perspectives of their country.

The government's policies were, ironically, alike to the colonial policies the French coloniser implemented in the Maghreb. Colonial classifications fragmented societies in the Maghreb, which then crystallised into distinct identities. Even though these different perspectives never faded in an independent Tunisia, they were reinforced by the regime through its policies that strengthened notions of Arabic-French, traditional-modern and religious-secular among its population. The quite paradoxical policies and social transformations were perceived by a part of the population as a form of colonial continuity, the equivocation of 'otherness', such as an external otherness represented by tourists and an internal otherness that became more apparent

by Tunisians from different classes and backgrounds, creating conflicting perspectives about the nation.

One could argue that no individual component (such as an archaeological site, a museum, a name of an institution, a textbook or a historical figure) bears any substantial semantic meaning. However, these elements do collectively comprise a larger ensemble that can influence perceptions of a distinct Tunisian national identity. In addition, they are not thought about in a detailed manner because they are so omnipresent, they are perceived but not quite inferred. My research has explored the different manifestations of Ben Ali's cultural-identity politics and their correlations with other aspects of life through which I aimed to illuminate the different conceptions of Tunisian national identity. My research can however also serve as a possible model for similar work in other locations in the Arab world or beyond. For instance, between Tunisia and Lebanon where, in the latter's case the Phoenician past also became a tool for political elites' claims about contested notions of the nation, identity and thus also of belonging. In Lebanon, the country's Phoenician remains became politicised in the 1920s, when it became a French mandate.

In addition, Ba'athist Iraq and how its Mesopotamian past manifested itself in contemporary conceptions about the Iraqi nation presents valuable insight into other countries in the MENA region who seek to construct an image that is not solely based on a monolithic reading of one's history, but rather one of several distinct (ancient) influences. This is also true for Egypt, where for instance the Egyptian pounds are adorned on one side by references to Islam, such as mosques and minarets, but on the other side by images which exalt Egypt's famous past. These countries present valuable material for further research into the different manifestations of national identities and the construction of nationalism. Additionally, in Egypt similar processes existed that reiterated the country's pre-Islamic past and a part of a 'Mediterranean' ensemble.

In sum, much room still exists for further research into the different representations of national identities and how these relate to nationalism and practices that make a state 'tangible' to both its inhabitants and visitors, such as tourism. Nevertheless, while the research in this thesis has tried to answer the central research question, it has certainly raised more questions. My research has mainly focused on the Tunisian state, however, as outlined above, much potential still exists for comparative approaches that study how cultural representations relate to the state and how states validate their narratives. Moreover, it should be noted that Tunisia occupies a very specific place within the Arab world, both because of its current position and the country's first two leaders' emphasis on ostensible modern reforms, that were largely

inspired by Western principles.

The political potential of archaeological sites and their capability to bolster a national identity has fervently been employed and exploited from the end of the French period in Tunisia by first Bourguiba and later even more pervasively under Ben Ali's administration. Both administrations' ways reflected in one way or another the country's former French colonial rule. This effectively means that distinct parts of Tunisia (and the relation with its past) have not been 'de-colonised'. This presents challenges for future political dynamics in a now more democratic Tunisian state. Political elites thus for a large part decide a state's discourse and thus how it is perceived. However, it goes without saying that in fact all citizens constitute and contribute to the mosaic that is Tunisia.

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