

Tunisian Politics in France

What does it mean to oppose or support an authoritarian regime from afar? During the years of Ben Ali's dictatorship in Tunisia between 1987 and 2011, diaspora activism played a key role in the developments of post-independence Tunisian politics. Centring this study on long-distance activism in France, where the majority of leftist and Islamist exile groups took refuge, Mathilde Zederman explores how this activism helps to shed new light on Tunisia's political history. *Tunisian Politics in France* closely explores the interactions and conflicts between different constellations of pro-regime and oppositional actors in France, examining the dynamics of what she persuasively describes as a 'trans-state space of mobilisation'. In doing so, Zederman draws attention to the constraints and possibilities of long-distance activism. Utilising material gathered from extensive fieldwork in France and Tunisia, this study considers how the evolution of diaspora activism both challenges and reinforces the boundaries of Tunisian politics.

Mathilde Zederman is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Paris-Nanterre. Her research and teaching examine exile politics, social movements, archives and memory, with a particular focus on circulations between France and North Africa.

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Mathilde Zederman

Frontmatter

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Tunisian Politics in France

Long-Distance Activism since the 1980s

Mathilde Zederman

University of Paris-Nanterre



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Notes on Translation and Transliteration

This book contains a large number of sources, from interviews and archival research to secondary sources, many of which are in French or Arabic. All translations from French and Arabic are my own.

The names of organisations are consistently given in the original language (usually French). The reader can find the English translation in the list of abbreviations below. Foreign words are italicised, except for names of political organisations and associations, which also follow maximum capitalisation, in order to render the reading easier.

The transliteration of Arabic words is based on a simplified version of the system recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*). I have removed diacritical marks for ease of reading, except for the *ʿayn*, which I have retained as [ʿ]. Exceptions to this rule are the names of individuals where an English or French spelling has commonly been accepted, as well as political organisations such as Ennahda, and its members (the Nahdawis), and el-ʿAmel el-Tounsi, which are referred to in accordance with usage in Tunisia.

Chronology of Key Events

Tunisian and French Immigrant Politics

- 1920 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Destour Party and the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT)
- 1927 *France*: Creation of the Association des Étudiants Musulmans Nord Africains (AEMNA)
- 1934 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Néo-Destour Party
- 1953 *France*: Founding congress of the Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie (UGET) in Paris (July)
- 1956 *Tunisia*: Proclamation of Tunisian independence (20 March)
France: Creation of the first Amicales des Travailleurs Tunisiens en France
- 1957 *Tunisia*: Proclamation of the Tunisian Republic (25 July); Habib Bourguiba is elected president
- 1963 Convention on labour agreement between France and Tunisia (August)
France: Creation of the Groupe d'Études et d'Action Socialistes en Tunisie (GEAST) / Perspectives
- 1964 *Tunisia*: The Néo-Destour Party becomes the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD)
- 1971 *France*: Creation of the Palestine committees, which were replaced by the Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes (MTA) the next year
- 1972 *France*: Marcellin-Fontanet circulars, which led to more restrictive regulations for entering, remaining and being regularised in France; this led to numerous *sans-papiers* hunger-strike protest actions
- 1973 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Mouvement d'Unité Populaire (MUP). In France, the Movement became active at the end of the 1970s
France: Creation of the Maison des Travailleurs Immigrés. In 1983, it became the Conseil des Associations d'Immigrés en France (CAIF)

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- 1974 *France*: Creation of the Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens (UTIT). It changed its name to Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des Deux Rives (FTCR) in 1994
France: The provisory suspension of the immigration of workers was enacted by the French government led by Jacques Chirac (July)
- 1976 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH)
- 1978 *Tunisia*: General strike followed by military repression of trade union activists. The events are famously known as 'Black Thursday' (26 January)
France: Creation of the Tunisian Collective of 26 January
- 1979 *France*: Creation of the Groupement Islamique en France (GIF)
- 1981 *Tunisia*: al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya becomes the Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) and requests legal validation (6 June); this was followed by a wave of repression and the first main wave of Islamist exiles to France
France: Law granting freedom of association for foreigners (9 October)
France: Creation of the Association des Tunisiens en France (ATF)
- 1983 *France*: Creation of the Union des Organisations Islamiques en France (UOIF)
- 1986 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie (PCOT), with a section in France
- 1987 *Tunisia*: Bourguiba is considered medically unable to govern and is deposed. Ben Ali takes power
France: Creation of the Union des Jeunes Musulmans (UJM) in Lyon
- 1988 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger (OTE); Tunisians living abroad are granted the right to vote in presidential elections; the PSD becomes the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD)
- 1989 *Tunisia*: The MTI becomes Ennahda; its request for legalisation is refused
Tunisia: Legislative elections and presidential elections; Ben Ali, the only legal candidate, is elected President of the Republic with more than 99 per cent of the vote
France: 'Headscarf case' in Creil: exclusion from school of three young female Muslims wearing a hijab

Chronology of Key Events

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- 1990 Creation of the Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure (ATCE); a Paris office is created shortly after; Massive wave of repression against Ennahda, leading to the main wave of Nahdawi exiles arriving in France (from December)
- 1991 *Tunisia*: Ban of the Islamic-leaning Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants (UGTE)
France: Creation of the Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants en France (UGTEF)
France: Creation of Démocratie Maintenant (Democracy Now), gathering activists from Ennahda, MUP, Arab nationalists, former *Destouriens*, and independents
- 1992 *France*: Ennahda's internal congress (June); decision to transfer the leadership of the party abroad (June); suspension of the Algerian electoral process, causing an escalation in the security-oriented management of the Tunisian Islamist party by the French authorities
- 1993 *France*: Creation of the Collectif des Musulmans de France (CMF)
France: Passing of the Pasqua laws, repressive regulations regarding conditions for entering and staying in France for immigrants (*immigration zero*)
- 1994 *Tunisia*: Presidential election resulting in the re-election of Ben Ali
- 1995 Key internal congress of Ennahda in Germany, referred to as the 'Congress of Self-Criticism and Evaluation', covering the years of confrontation with Ben Ali; Declaration of Barcelona and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
France: Creation of the Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues (MIB)
- 1996 *France*: Creation of the Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie (CRLDHT)
France: Central undocumented migrant (*sans-papiers*) movement, with the occupation of the Saint Bernard church; creation of the Troisième Collectif des Sans-Papiers
- 1997 *France*: Creation of Solidarité Tunisienne, an association representing Ennahda in France
- 1998 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Conseil National pour les Libertés en Tunisie (CNLT)
- 1999 *Tunisia*: Presidential elections; Ben Ali elected with more than 99 per cent of the vote; creation of anonymous mailing list Tunisnews

- xii Chronology of Key Events
- 2001 *Tunisia*: Creation of the Congrès pour la République (CPR)
 Tunisia: Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste (RSP) changes its name to the Parti Démocrate Progressiste (PDP)
- 2002 *Tunisia*: Adoption of the constitutional referendum removing the limitation of three presidential terms, thereby allowing Ben Ali to stand as a candidate for the fourth time for the 2004 presidential election (May)
 France: Joint meeting in Paris during which all Tunisian political tendencies based in France were invited to denounce the referendum
- 2003 *France*: Meeting of Aix-en-Provence (23–25 May), forty opposition political actors based in France and Tunisia meet in the South of France to begin a process of trans-ideological dialogue
 France: Creation of the Collectif une École pour Toutes et Tous – Contre les Lois d’Exclusion (CEPT)
 France: European Social Forum (Paris); Tunisian activists (mainly from the left, a few from Ennahda) took part in its preparation
- 2004 *France*: Law prohibiting any clothing that would ‘ostensibly’ call attention to religious affiliation in public schools (15 March)
 Tunisia: Ben Ali is re-elected for his fourth mandate
- 2005 *Tunisia*: World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis; eight activists from the main political tendencies went on a hunger strike in Tunis; creation of the Collective of 18 October for Rights and Freedoms immediately afterwards
- 2006 *France*: Creation of the Parisian Collective of the 18 October 2005 gathering Islamists, leftists and human right activists (2 February)
- 2007 Ennahda party congress in Germany and a formal decision taken to transfer the leadership to Tunisia
- 2008 *Tunisia*: Massive protests in Tunisia’s mining district of Gafsa; massive repression of those protests (from January)
 France: Creation of the Comité de Soutien aux Habitants du Bassin Minier (February)
- 2009 *Tunisia*: Legislative and presidential elections; Ben Ali is elected for a fifth mandate with almost 90 per cent of the vote (October)
- 2010 *Tunisia*: Self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid (17 December); the start of massive protests leading to the fall of the Ben Ali regime

	<i>France:</i> Creation of the Collectif de Solidarité avec les Luittes des Habitants de Sidi Bouzid; its first demonstration took place in Couronnes in north-eastern Paris (23 December)
2011	<i>Tunisia:</i> Ben Ali flees the country (14 January) <i>France:</i> Demonstrations attracted thousands of people in all major cities of France (15 January) <i>Tunisia:</i> Sit-in of Kasbah II; demonstrators from all over the country demand the resignation of the government and the organisation of constituent elections (February); legalisation of former banned parties such as Ennahda, the PCOT and the CPR (1 March); creation of the High Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, of Political Reforms and Democratic Transition (15 March); legislative elections of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) (23 October); Tunisians living abroad are granted the right to vote in legislative elections; ten representatives were nominated for the two constituencies attributed to France; Moncef Marzouki is elected provisory President of the Tunisian Republic by the ANC (12 December) <i>France:</i> Assise de l’immigration tunisienne in Paris (May)
2014	<i>Tunisia:</i> Adoption of the new Constitution by the ANC (26 January); legislative elections of the Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple (ARP) (October); Beji Caid Essebsi is elected President of the Republic (21 December)
2019	<i>Tunisia:</i> Legislative and presidential elections; Kais Saied is elected President of the Republic
2021	<i>Tunisia:</i> Coup d’état of Kais Saied, who seizes full powers, suspends Parliament and introduces a state of emergency (25 July) <i>France:</i> Creation of the Collective ‘Citizens abroad against the coup d’état’
2022	<i>Tunisia:</i> Dissolution of Parliament (30 March) <i>Tunisia:</i> A new Constitution is approved by referendum (25 July) <i>Tunisia:</i> Legislative elections (17 December)

Abbreviations

ACAT	Association des Chrétiens pour l’Abolition de la Torture (Association of Christians for the Abolition of Torture)
ADTF	Association Démocratique des Tunisiens en France (Democratic Association of Tunisians in France)
AEIF	Association des Étudiants Islamiques en France (Association of Islamic Students in France)
AEMNA	Association des Étudiants Musulmans Nord-Africains (Association of North African Muslim Students)
AMF	Association des Marocains en France (Association of Moroccans in France)
ARP	Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple (Assembly of the People’s Representatives)
AT2D	Association des Tunisiens pour la Démocratie et le Développement (Association of Tunisians for Democracy and Development)
ATCE	Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure (Tunisian Agency of Exterior Communication)
ATF	Association des Tunisiens en France (Association of Tunisians in France)
ATMF	Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France (Association of North African Workers of France)
AVRE	Association pour les Victimes de la Répression en Exil (Association for Victims of Repression in Exile)
CAIF	Conseil des Associations d’Immigrés en France (Council of Immigrant Associations in France)
CAL-UGET	Comité d’Action et de Lutte de l’UGET (UGET’s Committee of Action and Struggle)
CDLT	Coordination pour la Défense des Libertés en Tunisie (Coordination for the Defence of Freedoms in Tunisia)

List of Abbreviations

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CEPT	Collectif une École pour Toutes et Tous – Contre les Lois d’Exclusion (Collective a School for All – Against the Laws of Exclusion)
CIDT	Centre d’Information et de Documentation sur la Torture (Centre for Information and Documentation on Torture)
CMF	Collectif des Musulmans de France (Collective of France’s Muslims)
CNLT	Conseil National pour les Libertés en Tunisie (National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia)
CPR	Congrès pour la République (Congress for the Republic)
CRLDHT	Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et des Droits de l’Homme en Tunisie (Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Tunisia)
CSLCPT	Comité de Soutien aux Lutttes Civiles et Politiques en Tunisie (Committee for the Support of Civil and Political Struggles in Tunisia)
CSP-UGET	Comité de Section Provisoire de l’Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie (Provisional Section Committee of the General Union of Students of Tunisia)
CSVRT	Comité de Soutien des Victimes de la Répression en Tunisie (Committee for the Support of Victims of Repression in Tunisia)
EMF	Étudiants Musulmans de France (Muslim Students of France)
FASTI	Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec Tou-te-s les Immigré-e-s (Federation of Associations for Solidarity with All Immigrants)
FDTL	Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms)
FEMYSO	Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations
FIDH	Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme (International Federation of Human Rights)
FTCR	Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des Deux Rives (Federation of Tunisians for a Citizenship Between Two Shores)
GEAST	Groupe d’Études et d’Action Socialistes en Tunisie (Group for Socialist Studies and Action in Tunisia)

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GIF	Groupement Islamique en France (Islamic Gathering in France)
IRIE	Instance Régionale Indépendante pour les Elections (Independent Regional Authority for Elections)
JMF	Jeunes Musulmans de France (Young Muslims of France)
JTF	Jeunes Tunisiens de France (Young Tunisians of France)
LTDH	Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (Tunisian League of Human Rights)
MDS	Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes (Movement of Socialist Democrats)
MIB	Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues (Movement of Immigration and the Suburbs)
MTA	Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes (Movement of Arab Workers)
MTI	Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (Movement of the Islamic Tendency)
MUP	Mouvement de l'Unité Populaire (Movement for Popular Unity)
OFPRA	Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons)
OTE	Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger (Office of Tunisians Abroad)
PCOT	Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie (Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia)
PCT	Parti Communiste Tunisien (Tunisian Communist Party)
PDP	Parti Démocrate Progressiste (Progressive Democratic Party)
PSD	Parti Socialiste Destourien (Destourian Socialist Party)
RCD	Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (Constitutional Democratic Rally)
RETAP	Rassemblement des Étudiants Tunisiens à Paris (Gathering of Tunisian Students in Paris)
RSP	Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste (Progressive Socialist Gathering)
RTF	Rassemblement des Tunisiens en France (Gathering of Tunisians in France)
UGET	Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie (General Union of Students of Tunisia)

UGTE	Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants (Tunisian General Union of Students)
UGTEF	Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants en France (Tunisian General Union of Students in France)
UJM	Union des Jeunes Musulmans (Union of Young Muslims)
Uni-T	Union pour la Tunisie (Union for Tunisia)
UOIF	Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (Union of Islamic Organisations of France)
UTIT	Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers)