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COLONISATION IMMIGRATION AND BORDERIZATION

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOROCCAN AND TUNISIAN LEFT



Montassir Sakhi

Anthropologist

Author : **Montassir Sakhi**

Translated from French to English : **Dhaouadi Mohamed**

Editorial design and illustration : **Yessine Ouerghemmi**

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Montassir Sakhi holds a PhD in anthropology from Paris 8 University Vincennes-Saint-Denis and is a postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven (Belgium). His research focuses on the border, the repression of mobility and the phenomenon of revolution in the Arab world. He is the author of "**La Révolution et le djihad : Syrie, France, Belgique**", published by La Découverte (2023).

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the main discourse of political actors in the Tunisian and Moroccan left in regard to the migration issue. The evolution of this discourse will be examined between two key periods of immigration history from these two countries to Europe. The first period saw a relative opening of borders after gaining independence (from 1956 until the end of the 1980s), while the second period was marked by the establishment of visa systems and the Schengen area at the beginning of the 1990s. I will start with the following hypothesis: after the North-South border had been the structuring matrix of the emerging left within the national decolonization movement, the prolonged process of nationalization, endorsed by the 1956 independence, had a profound influence on the socialist-communist discourses, making them align with “national” priorities and relegating the issue of borders and immigration to a secondary level. However, the year 2011 marks a shift in perspective. In the southern bank of the Mediterranean, it was a year of heightened awareness of the centrality of the migration issue and the problems posed by an increasingly repressive border. This leads to the second part of my hypothesis: the Arab Spring is also the name of a re-enlightenment movement – meaning the awakening of collective consciousness – in the face of borderization and the prohibition of mobility.

Before revealing the investigative method informing to this article, it is necessary to first situate the hypothesis in an experience that is both political and personal. It is a dual position that guides the research process. The first one comes from my own experience as an activist within the Moroccan left. I was a member of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) from 2006 to 2012. I participated in the 20th February Movement, which was the frame of reference for the Arab Spring in Morocco in 2011. I have also been an actor within the Federation of the Democratic Left (FGD – Morocco) from 2012 until today. These political experiences have allowed me to grasp the major protests and discursive references of the Moroccan left in specific, and the Arab left in general; particularly within dynamics such as the Maghrebi Social Forum (FSMagh). The second position is about my own immigration experience that led me to Europe (where I currently reside) in the aftermath of the Arab Spring of 2011. This experience is marked by an immersion within diasporic organizations of the Moroccan and Tunisian left, particularly in France, offering me an overall vision of the protest dynamics and the main left-wing causes in the context of immigration.

Therefore, in both Tunisia and Morocco, it is a matter of exploring the main discursive lines in the middle of what is now being addressed as “the immigration issue” in government discourses north of the Mediterranean. Moving on, the analysis will focus on the main political positions regarding four specific issues. First of all, this article will examine the ties between the Tunisian and Moroccan left and the European borderization policies, including visa restrictions and the establishment of a migrant-selection process. Second, I will study their position regarding irregular immigration and the death and disappearance of migrants on the way to Europe. Third, these leftists’ perception of the conditions of migrants, mainly sub-Saharanans in transit through these two countries, will be explored. Finally, the analysis will seek to assess the levels of cooperation between diasporic and national left organizations regarding all of these issues, as well as the migratory situation in the face of racial and social issues in host countries. All of these questions will be addressed based on testimonies and extracts from interviews with actors involved in the left and diasporic associations.

The results of this study must be taken as a first restitution of a field in progress, even if we are relying on observations and an immersion that mobilizes several years of Action Research on the themes of the Arab Spring of 2011¹ and of postcolonial immigration in the face of borderization². The perspective of ethnographic observation is refined in this text by using four new extensive interviews with actors playing a central role within the Tunisian and Moroccan left. I carried out these interviews between 2023 and 2024. The first interview is with Mohamed Achâari. He is from the Moroccan left and he was the former minister of culture. Before he joined to the transitional government, he was the personification of a socialist critique marked by the tricontinental and decolonial struggles. knowledgeable of the migration issue and committed to the organization where he held positions of responsibility (the USFP), Achâari's thinking rehabilitated the stances of leaders and founding thinkers of the Moroccan left, such as Mehdi Ben Barka and Mohamed Abid al-Jabiri. The latter had long stressed that the colonial relations are anchored in the north-south division. The second and third interviews were conducted out with two activists from the Tunisian radical left. In the circles of the post-revolutionary mobilization of 2011, they were committed to promoting the inseparability of "democratic struggle and the problem of immigration restriction". The fourth interview is with an artist who is also a founder of numerous Tunisian diasporic associations in France and a coordinator at the Federation of Tunisians for Citizenship of Two Banks (FTCR) in France.

¹ Sakhi Montassir, *Revolution and Jihad. Syria, France, Belgium*, La Découverte publishing house, Paris, 2023.

² See the special issue of IBLA's journal *The Review* dedicated to this restitution: "Borders Mobility Migrations: Investigations, Testimonies, Representations", IBLA, Vol. 86 No 232, Tunis, 2023. <https://ibla.tn/index.php/ibla/issue/view/1>

BORDERS: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE ?

The choice to focus on the left is justified by the founding principles and the centrality of the notion of borders in its critical discourse at the time of its founding. If we refer to Marxism as theorized by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, this notion refers to the contestation of national orders in the call for revolution³. In the decolonial experience, it also refers to the criticism of relations of domination founded on the north-south separation. Without returning to the literature that deals with the internationalist inclinations of the left, it is important to recall this centrality in the colonial context. The left in Tunisia and in the south of the Mediterranean in general⁴ has built part of its opposition and discourse against a backdrop of conflict with mechanisms of colonial domination. Belonging to the communist Eastern Bloc and being part of the Non-Aligned Movement are experiences that marked the North African left between the 1940s and the 1970s. The internationalist Marxist heritage has come to be grafted onto the socialist experience, opening up to new currents of critical postmodern thought that emphasize the relations of domination which create the center (the Metropolis) and the margins (the colony)⁵, norm and deviance, north and south⁶, West and East⁷, etc. But while traditional criticism based on decolonization - as we can see for example in the condemnation of the "Françafrique" policies - remains in the North African leftist thought, it is clear that this oppositional relationship⁸ never ceases to deteriorate in the face of two major phenomena. The first relates to the heavy legacy of the process of Nation-state creation, which gave rise to new framings of critical politics which, since the 1970s, involved themes anchored in the experience of the independent Nation-state. This is what is at stake in the rise of social-democratic discourses that emphasize notions such as democracy, class relations in the national space, human rights and freedoms, citizenship, and union rights. The second phenomenon impacting the internationalist heritage of left criticism is undoubtedly related to the major transformations of border repression devices which, in the north as well as in its externalization towards the south, succeeds in implanting the discourse and the related practices from there to public migration policy. This policy naturalizes national borders and turns criticism to the order of local government policies, thus clearing border repression of mobility.

When we admit this postulate on the decline of the border aspect in the criticism and mobilization of the postcolonial left, the contemporary actors of these transformations help to best identify the causes. From their political practices, they describe this situation and more generally, the moment of the formulation of the *colonization, immigration, and borderization* triptych in the left-wing political itinerary. This is the case of Mohamed Achâari who highlighted this aspect during our interview:

³ On this question of the relationship of the Nation-state in Marxism, see Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France (The Paris Commune)*, 1871; and Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State [1884]*, chapter 9, "Barbarism and Civilization." See also the first chapter of Vladimir I. Lenin's book, *The State and Revolution*, "Class Society and the State", 1917.

⁴ Khalil Dahbi and Montassir Sakhi, "Between Presence and Conspicuous Absences: Fanon in Moroccan political thought", *POMEPS publications*, to be published (April 2024).

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, La Découverte publishing house, 2002 [1961]

⁶ Samir Amin, *Unequal development. An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, Éd. de Minuit publishing house, Paris, 1973.

⁷ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism. The East created by the West*, Seuil publishing house, Paris, 1980.

⁸ About the "relational" functioning of ideologies, we refer to the work of Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Éditions of the MSH, 2006 (1929).

« It is not only the issue of colonization, and especially new colonization, that is disappearing from our movement (the USFP). After 1975, the issue for us was to keep an eye on the critical theory of the West while centering our actions on democracy. We were all aware of the exploitation of the new colonization. The thinker Abid Al Jabiri kept mentioning it at the party. But we knew that only democracy would make it possible to put this question back on the table. So yes, our intellectuals read and translated Fanon. But while we agreed on his findings, we adopted a completely different tactic»⁹.

When invited to specify the intellectual and political relationship with borders during the national and postcolonial turning point, he clarified the nature of this choice based on his political practice within the party. Thus, the formulated question aims to compare the new critical aspect with the intellectual project of Frantz Fanon and Mehdi Ben Barka – where the north-south border issue is central.

« These questions asked and problematized by Fanon were debated by party intellectuals during the 1980s as well. The issue of new colonization as well as the role of the national bourgeoisie in the new phase and the relationship with the West were indeed discussed. But these issues were not considered to have the power to speak to people and mobilize them, both within the party and in society. It was considered a matter for Party intellectuals. Moreover, in 1985, during the party congress, the text that had to be adopted was the one centered entirely on the relationship with new colonization. But it was rejected by the congress presidency before being presented to activists. Why? It was considered to be too “intellectual”, too “abstract”. I think these questions were at the forefront of our ideas, but only inside the party »¹⁰

The distinction between “inside the party” and “society” can be understood in the reality of a Maghrebi social space largely shaped by the in-depth work of Nation-states since independence. The focus on gaining independence was the official discourse par excellence allowing government elites to take ownership of the management of interstate relations and the territorial borders of the nation in general. *In the Moroccan case, this issue was largely impacted by the struggle between Ben Barka’s UNFP (and later on Abderrahim Bouabid’s USFP) and the monarchy; not only over sharing power, but*

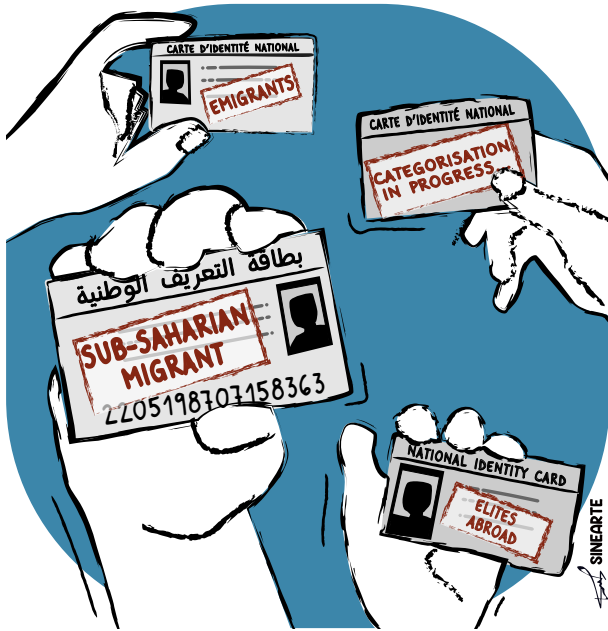
also for the appropriation of an issue constituting the limit of national sovereignty and relations with neighbors – Algeria. Within the Moroccan left, the question of the Western Sahara confirmed this path of gradual abandonment of the internationalist aspect. The balance of power obviously resulted in the monarchy monopolizing “foreign affairs”, border-relations management, and the Sahara issue. This same Sahara issue will be the backbone of a rupture of the Moroccan socialist movement from numerous international left-wing movements in favor of the Sahrawi people’s right to self-determination¹¹

⁹ Interview with Mohamed Achâari, 08/2023

¹⁰ Interview with Mohamed Achâari, 08/2023

¹¹ Omar Bendjelloun, “If we are wrong, the people will judge: Omar Bendjelloun’s final interview”, interview conducted by Jean-Louis Hurst, *Liberation newspaper, December 22, 1975.*

This event, which confirmed the government's exclusive prerogative in defining national discourse and priorities, was just one in a long series of events¹² that eventually relegated a differentiated view of international relations to an "internal" discussion within Morocco's left-wing parties.



However, the migratory issue is vast. Its scale is carefully buried by the slicing effect introduced by public policies dividing an object intrinsically internal to society. It is thus reduced to a form of exteriority. This is the division of migrants residing abroad: (al-jâli-ya)/emigrants applying for immigration; sub-Saharan migrants in transit/nationals harqa candidates; students and elites abroad (diaspora)/national workers abroad, etc. This creation of national government categories goes hand in hand with the silence on other categories suffering from border measures and forgotten in public discourse and policies,

such as people denied visas; migrants missing in the Mediterranean and at border points; the families of missing migrants; expelled and those stripped of nationality in host countries; nationals suffering from migration policies while being settled in host countries; national migrants who are victims of racism and human rights violations or those held in detention centers and refugee camps.



¹² These same issues were also raised when talking about Palestinian solidarity, and later on when talking about Iraq and the Syrian revolution. Through freedom of protest laws, as well as anti-terrorism laws, these forms of solidarity are largely controlled by government power to the detriment of various Moroccan opposition actors.

“They are right to defy the borders”

COORDINATES OF A NEW LEFT-WING DISCOURSE ON BORDERS

Due to the heritage instilled in militant organizations, the interviewed left-wing political actors affirm this practical knowledge of repression through borders. But they recognize the difficulty of making this demand a central part of the political project. Despite the feeling of resignation in the face of the divisions relegating the migratory issue to the exterior and to the sphere of “international and bilateral relations”, the testimonies reveal the scene of a problem of a relational and complex order. The new surge in consciousness about the importance of border consideration is all the more motivated by cruel events around the war – the Palestinian issue which resonates during interviews – and the discovery of racism in society following official declarations in Tunisia with the speeches of President Kaïs Saïd,¹³ and in Morocco with the tragic events in Nador which caused the death of several migrants following the use of public force¹⁴. Likewise, the rise of demands and the spotlighting of the misfortunes of the families of the missing migrants in the Mediterranean by a new generation of researchers, as well as the considerable figures of disappearances and deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean, are all elements sharpening a critical spirit regarding border policies among these actors. Furthermore, it is the revolutionary experience of 2011 that further promotes this awareness through at least two elements in Morocco and Tunisia: first, the discovery that a large number of activists are leaving the country under the effects of visa selection, border closure, and the structuring of the choice to leave without a possibility of return; and Second, the phenomenon of the European sanction by the quota

aimed at the middle and bourgeois classes, having benefited from visas in the postcolonial period which makes border domination palpable. The first phenomenon is felt within activist organizations which have lost a large part of their executives between 2011 and today under the effect of visa selection. The second phenomenon of visa sanctions is widespread, giving rise to a position acquired by the left which favors the right to free movement. It is through emotion and anger that this awareness seeks political alternatives where borders take the form of a general policy of domination, requiring new objectives for critical and conflictual construction.

Therefore, the testimonies adopt a relational approach in the sense that the perception of the migration issue is achieved by placing side-by-side issues relating to various social spaces: irregular migrants, families of the missing, immigrants and workers abroad, sub-Saharan migrants in transit through the country, people whose visas got declined, etc. Several common points bring together all of these groups of people, increasingly confronted with the same border measures such as visas, detention centers inside Europe or at its borders, the denial of rights, and racism, both in transit countries as well as immigration countries.

The following extracts are taken from an interview carried out with two Tunisian activists who played a key role in establishing the student branch of the Tunisian radical left in the 1980s, while also actively engaging in

¹³ Abdelhamid, Maha. “The importance of the struggle of black Tunisian women in the anti-racist fight in Tunisia. Reflections on the events of February 2023 », *Africa in motion*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2023, pp. 92-94.

¹⁴ Tyszler, Elsa. “Negrophobic massacres on the borders of Ceuta and Melilla”, *Plein droit* publication, vol. 139, no. 4, 2023, pp. 23-26

They describe the process of questioning the issue of immigration which has emerged in the recent decades in Tunisia. They immediately associate this process with the relationship formed in the face of superiority and domination belonging to the old “north-south” categorization. Far from being a slogan inherited from communist and socialist organizations, this North-South separation is based on a questioning of the inability to overcome the threshold of the North's inhospitality and a national economy and politics controlled by Western technical superiority. This sentiment and this image of repression are quickly questioned closely to borders and immigration. This is the proof provided by the actor on the issue of domination, coupled with the issue of belonging to a society ravaged by “intervention” according to these actors. Youssef and Moez, two left-wing lawyers and leaders within the socialist circles of the city of Sousse, show through their testimonies how the process of this awareness of border separation took on a novelty: it included, since 2011, the new problem of closure and externalization of borders despite its embryonic character within a left in search of restructuring.

Youssef :

There is a strong relationship between the problem of visas and colonization. And this relationship was not obvious before, at least to us in the left. But today it is becoming clearer and clearer. We are always under pressure to find solutions that serve the well-being of the colonial states. And this is in an indirect manner. There is no direct colonization, but we feel this colonization. (...)

Moez :

This question has never been asked with the same urgency as today. It is beginning to pose itself as a real, central political problem. Our generation looked at immigration differently during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Within the left, as well as among all political actors in Tunisia, we were not aware of the major problems imposed by borders. Our criticism was to state that the democratic struggle and the transformation of the political class will ensure that Tunisians will no longer have to think about a visa or apply for one. It was not a priority. There were even people from the middle and bourgeois classes who said “It’s normal for Europeans to protect their borders. It’s the law and those are their rights.” When sub-Saharan people began to come to Tunisia for work or transit, some asked a question that made no sense. You would hear people in Tunisia saying: “And would you want foreigners to come to us without inspection or visas? ”.

At the beginning of harqa (illegal immigration), there was this astonishing discourse: “And why do you make yourself die at sea to risk crossing the border? ”. This idea of opening all borders, just like the idea emphasizing the fact that borders stem from colonization, was not on the agenda. It was a debate focused solely on the fact that “we havenot achieved an economic development that stops illegal immigration”. The purpose of these debates was to convince you by arguing that “before, the Sicilians immigrated to Tunisia” or “we, the Tunisians, went without visas to Italy in the 1980s, because we were rich, because the Nation-state was strong, because we were good”. And they continued: “They closed the borders because we went backward economically.”

But things have changed today. People are starting to understand that this is essential. And it’s not just the left-wing and intellectuals. It’s changing within the entire population. Because ordinary people are starting to say: “They would be right to defy these borders”.



These interview extracts demonstrate changes in perceptions within the Tunisian left. They designate the moment from which the left takes up a public question that continues to rise as a problem following the experiences lived by considerable portions of the social space – of the working classes exposed to death in the Mediterranean, up to the middle classes faced with visa refusals or the problems of regularizing residence permits in immigration countries. The heritage neglected for a generation – our interviewees recall the intellectual desert crossed by the left wing over this issue between 1980 and 2010 – is reactivated during the revolutionary moment to revive decolonial thought and criticism of north-south relations. This reactivation, which is taking place in the south, coincides in the north of the Mediterranean with the adoption of migration policies restricting the right to freedom of movement. Our interviewees emphasize the relational aspect of the new critical discourse on borderization that is taking shape within the left. One of its major challenges is to face a counter-discourse that is widespread within society and has long been adopted by the left itself. It is the counter-discourse that makes the problem of *harqa* and the desire to migrate the sole responsibility of the national government. Therefore, the change in perspective involves retrospection and self-analysis that occur within organizational and intellectual spaces.

While calling for this reflexivity, the new perspective acknowledges the centrality of inquiry as a means of understanding the rationales at work in both the North as well as the South in the face of the issue of borders and immigration.

Finally, in the testimony of our two interviewees from the Tunisian left, as well as with the former minister from the Moroccan left, this awareness presents itself as both generational and contemporary. If we need to find an organizational and political point that connects this new temporality asserting itself in 2011, it is undoubtedly its manifestation within the dynamics of the social forums established notably in Morocco since 2004. Between 2004 and 2010, in a context of political openness marked by the Equity and Reconciliation Authority (IER), the social forums constituted a space for the intellectual renewal of leftist parties, particularly opposition ones. As someone involved in this process within the Maghrebi socialist youth, I can bear witness the intersection between the problem of borders and the principles already tested within the left: “citizenship of the world” and “freedom of movement”.

■ THE ROLE OF THE MIGRATORY EXPERIENCE IN THE RENEWAL OF BORDER CRITIQUE

The transformations experienced within the left in Morocco, as well as in Tunisia, cannot be understood without investigating activist and organizational dynamics in immigration countries – In our case, Europe. From the pioneering work of Abdelmalek Sayad, we know that the phenomenon of immigration (the social and cultural condition of migrants in host countries) and more generally the suffering of migrants are inseparable from the condition of emigration (collective life confronted with the effects of migration in the countries of departure)¹⁵. We should take this same methodological precaution when studying mobilizations and political discourses about migration. The investigation of the left and the migration issue must take into account not only the discourses of actors and people in the south but also the work of organizations and political discourses that we call “diasporic”.

For Tunisia and Morocco, the present ethnographic and exploratory interviews confirm the gap between the expectations of left-wing diasporic organizations and left-wing national ones despite the growing awareness in the countries of emigration in the face of new restrictions of mobility. In these two postcolonial Maghreb countries, the disorganization of the migration issue is first and foremost the consequence of the inability of states to produce a counter-discourse in the face of European public policies based on studies, practices, laws, and institutions with homogeneous visions dedicated to the production of the border in its different forms. In Tunisia and Morocco, backed by the new policies of border externalization, the power of the borderization system

¹⁵ Abdelmalek Sayad, *Double Absence. From emigrant illusions to immigrant suffering*, Seuil publishing house, Paris, 1999.

produces a form of subjugation and an assignment to accept the major hegemonic discourses on immigration. It is in this sense that we should read the reception of national governments, of actors – in particular from the right and the extreme right – of the restriction of movement. Other than certain discourses of embryonic critical politics revived under the name "right to movement", there is a general tendency assigning responsibility for the tragedies of borders - death and disappearance in this case - to Tunisian and Moroccan national politics, instead of questioning the closure of the European space. It is indeed national government policy that is most often presented as responsible for illegal immigration and thus, the solutions are to be sought through national reforms.

However, this trend is largely reversed when it comes to questioning the perception of diasporic actors and organizations. For the remainder of this article, you will read extracts from an interview that illustrate this consciousness forged in the migratory experience situated between the two banks: the double absence and the double presence between the territories of emigration and immigration.

The interviewee, Mohamed Bhar, is the founder of numerous Tunisian diasporic associations in France and leader of the Tunisian Federation for a Two Banks Citizenship (FTCR) in France. By tracing the evolution of this association which was founded in the early 1970s to support immigrant workers, we can find the tipping point of numerous collectives adapting to the transformation of the migratory space to integrate new audiences. Each extract will illustrate one figure of these transformations which we summarize in four major political forms that we largely believe to be present in the collective consciousness of the organizations of the postcolonial diasporic left.

First, the discourse of the diasporic left is constructed through the struggle of migrant workers and the awareness of the importance of advocacy, distinct from that of worker unions in host countries, which are not very receptive to the singularity of migrants' rights. Second, this discourse is also shaped by the arrival of new migrants to the labor market. These migrants were the result of the selective immigration policy and the establishment of restrictive visas, which led the diasporic left to modify its strategy. Since the 1990s, it embraced the cause of undocumented migrants and established alliances with national organizations (in Tunisia and Morocco) around common issues, highlighting central notions like "citizenship" and "human rights". Third, the experience gained in host countries brings the diasporic left to a better understanding of the situation of irregular migrants, pushing it to adopt their causes and advocate for their regularization. However, it struggles to integrate this issue into the discourse of the national left; despite the momentum of the alter-globalization social forums opening up to freedom of movement. It was only with the advent of the 2011 Arab Spring that we started to witness a new awareness within the left of the liberticide and murderous effects of borders. Finally, based on its migratory experience of racism and repression of mobility in the host countries, the diasporic left is particularly sensitive to and informed of the issues of racist discourses brewing in their countries of origin. It thus calls for the reactionary option to be taken seriously, within the Tunisian and Moroccan left, in order to counter the nationalist trap set by migration policies and the externalization of borders.

DISTINGUISHING ONESELF FROM FRENCH SYNDICALISM

« I was part of the second generation of FTCR. In the beginning, this federation of associations was called UTIT (Union of Tunisian Immigrant Workers), created in 1974 by students and workers with the idea of defending the rights of Tunisian migrants, at a time of a strong presence of migrants facing the rise of racism in France, exploitation at work, unfair dismissal, etc. It was created along the same lines as other associations such as the Association of Moroccan Workers in France (ATMF). There was a general movement that created links with unions like the GCL. This is the case for Spanish, Portuguese, or West African immigrant workers. But for us, it was also a matter of distinguishing ourselves from French unions because, in their demands, they did not take into account the specificity of immigrants. The French syndicates said that they defended all workers without discrimination, but for us, there were specific issues that these syndicates did not defend: the rights of migrants »

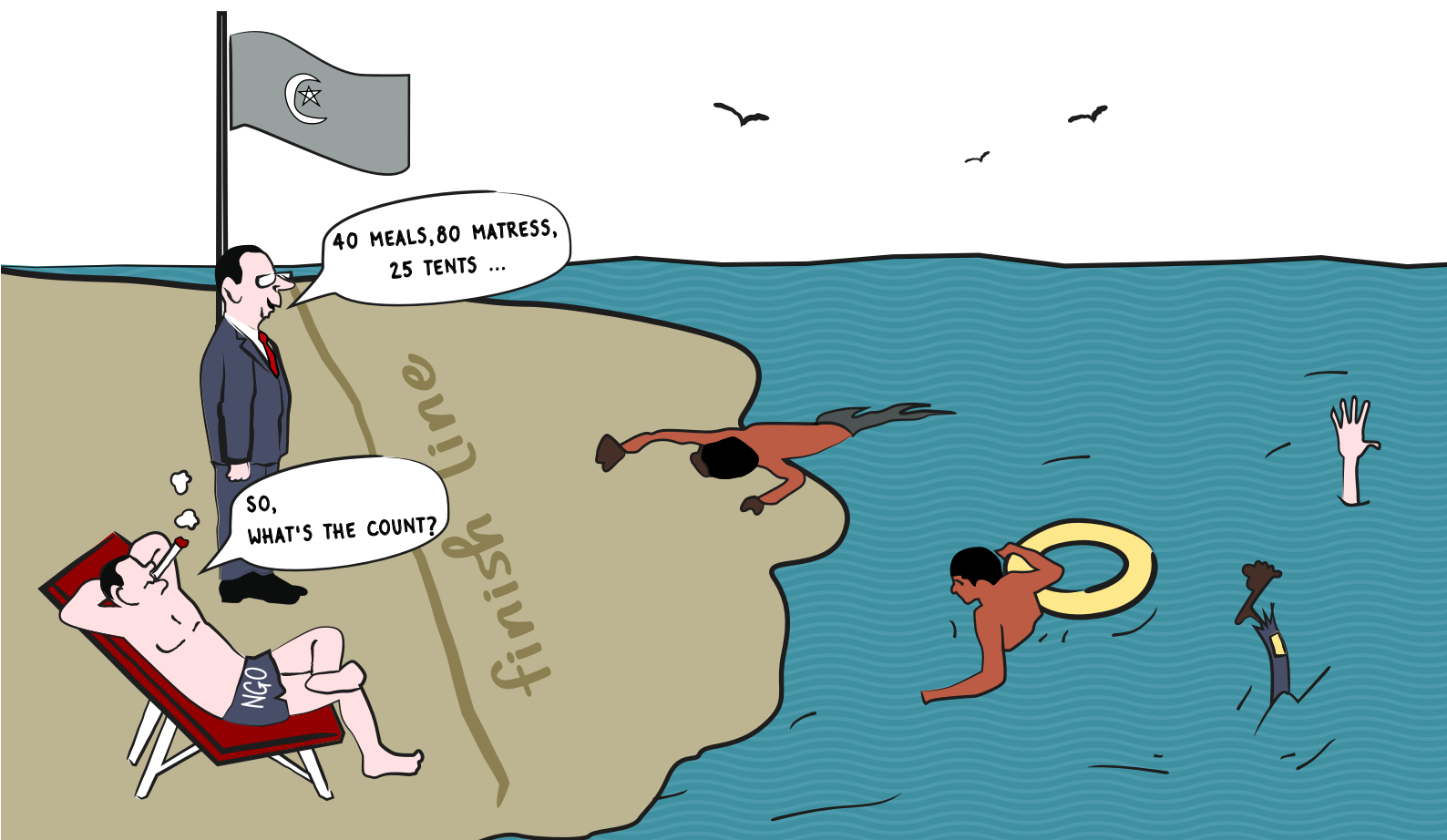
CITIZENSHIP: SUPPORT FOR MOBILIZATIONS IN TUNISIA DURING THE ERA OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE RIGHTS OF RACIALIZED MIGRANTS IN FRANCE

« In 1995, a congress was organized to change the name of UTIT. We added an essential dimension to the previous work: the issue of citizenship between the two banks. In Europe and Tunisia. A new dynamic of common struggles was developed and we relayed the protests taking place in Tunisia. For example, in 2008, we supported the Gafsa mining basin protests. We started to work collaboratively with the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and civil society associations on both aspects of the struggle for democracy and rights.

On the other hand, prior to 2011 in Tunisia, it was rather the UGTT that relayed the requests of Tunisians living abroad. The union had a program and most importantly, a person responsible for the migration issue within the executive office. Since at least the early 1970s, the UGTT has taken initiatives to defend the rights of Tunisian workers living abroad. The union was created relationships with organizations abroad for this purpose. I remember the 1980s, during the period when the leader of the UGTT Habib Achour was in prison as well as Tayeb Bachouch, the UTIT was there, carrying out several activities in support of prisoners and bringing together organizations and French unions for solidarity. It was within the framework of the January 26 commission (lajnat January 26, 1978) following the massacre and revolt of 1978 which took place in Tunisia. I was a member of this commission. Since then, and throughout the 1980s, we have organized the annual commemoration of this heinous massacre in France.

The main demands relayed by the UGTT were the rights of migrants in Europe because it considered migrants as workers. From our side, we relay the problems of Tunisians living abroad. In Tunisia and Morocco. Because all families have working or migrant members abroad. If they are not direct members, they are members of the extended family. So, whenever there was a racist incident, there was immediate solidarity. This also has a link with our collective memory marked by colonization". »

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE ISSUE OF HARQA IN THE FACE OF THE SILENCE OF ORGANIZATIONS IN TUNISIA



Circling back to illegal immigration, I have the feeling that this issue remains foreign to the Tunisian left. It's as if immigration does not concern them. And this is a big mistake. Because the principle must be indivisible in the struggle. That of equality, democracy, and human rights. But when it comes to immigration, these principles disappear. It is as if migrants should only benefit from a handout instead of being subjects under the law. In Tunisia, there are few associations that support this cause. Today, we have the FTDES (Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights). (...) But migrant associations in general, and the FTCT in particular, have this awareness of immigration. Of course, when this question arose after the forceful introduction

of the visa system, there was this heightened awareness and especially statements in support of migrants. Not so long ago, during the time of former president Caïd Essebsi, the EU signed a new agreement with Tunisia for more border closures. And immigration associations mobilized against this decision. We refused. Because the basic question of freedom of movement is an essential principle. I also remember the dynamics of the social forums where we participated and promoted this right. I remember back in 2006 in Bouznika (Morocco) and in other locations.

2011 for example: at the time of the revolution, thousands of Tunisians crossed the Mediterranean. All the work of our association at the time of the revolution was centered around the haraqa (irregular migrants). In other words, issues that we had not known about before. We took care of humanitarian work: their health and hygiene. We then signed an agreement with Médecins du Monde in France. Its members came twice a week to provide care to young migrants on our premises. We made another agreement with Les Restos du Cœur that gave us meal vouchers which we distributed among them. Other associations brought us clothes, etc. Briefly speaking, it was to meet the needs of migrants arriving after crossing the Mediterranean. (...) We already have a legal aid section within the association. So, we also supported these young people by setting up a legal aid department. This is to help them obtain their papers but also to support them in finding accommodation and fighting against dismissal and exploitation at work. The main issue for us was the regularization of undocumented immigrants”.

■ « A CULTURAL REVOLUTION » THE MIGRATORY EXPERIENCE AS A RADICAL CRITIQUE

« **A person who does not move** is not free. It is the principle of freedom that is called into question by the visa and the refusal of visas. But that’s a matter of culture. When I say culture, I don’t mean music, theater, etc. I am talking about a general cultural project. The cultural project refers to thought and consciousness. Culture is all-encompassing. Cultural Revolution, that is. This is the term that should be used, because “project” reduces the meaning of the word “Cultural Revolution.” A revolution means that people cease to be confined, restricted, and immobilized. Why do people remain confined and restricted? Because society is enclosed, limited, and frozen.

(...) Undocumented migrants especially suffer the most. Try to imagine people who spend 25 years abroad without being able to come back home. Without being able to bury their dead, their parents, their loved ones. I have known several people who were unable to bury their parents, brothers and sisters. It is a terrible tragedy. A tremendous tragedy. For people who have their papers, things are not as bad. The latter can take out loans when they don't have the money. But it is a tragedy for those who don't have papers. And then there are those who cannot get visas to visit their loved ones. But there are levels to this tragedy. Undocumented immigrants have it the worst. And even when migrants do manage to obtain citizenship, their parents remain off-limits. It’s because they are faux-Europeans. Second-tier Europeans. Second-class Europeans. It is because they do not have the same rights, even though they have citizenship.

This is blackmail against undocumented immigrants. It’s a political game because in reality, undocumented immigrants do not pose any threat. On the contrary, they contribute positively to boosting the economies of European countries. Because they work jobs that even documented migrants refuse to do. Hard work and low wages. And on top of that, they consume within these European countries. They leave everything they “earn” there.”

■ OPPOSING RACISM IN FRANCE AND TUNISIA

« **For the Tunisian left**, at least, its members must make clear commitments and decisions. When we see the rise in hate speech against sub-Saharan Africans, the left parties must be united and should not hesitate for a second to demonstrate regularly and raise awareness. There is no cause more important than that relating to the principles of equality. So, when it comes to these issues, the left has to stand up. This is the highest priority. What has happened in Tunisia in regard to sub-Saharan people is scandalous. Faced with spreading racism, we need uninterrupted campaigns from the left. To raise awareness, including among educated and qualified people, because they can lack awareness. This is why I spoke to you about Cultural Revolution.

If the left had the strength it needed and the principles we discussed, the president would not have had the opportunity to say what he said about sub-Saharan people or to make agreements with Europe. Because the response must be in the form of massive demonstrations in the streets. The same goes for the reception of the Italian far-right government. They are inseparable. There is a fatigue within the left, an inability to take charge of these questions, those concerning the families of the missing as well. But despite this state of affairs, the legacy of the left is international. This can only inspire us to continue the fight.”¹⁶

■ CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to retrace some developments in the discourse of the Tunisian and Moroccan left regarding the phenomenon of borderization. The latter is approached broadly, displaying a continuum from the establishment of colonization to the new Schengenization policies of Europe, including the repression resulting from the externalization of borders. Understanding the gradual abandonment of border criticism is called for by the urgency characterizing the daily suffering caused by obstacles to freedom of movement and its effects on all postcolonial relationships – both in emigration and immigration countries. The featured interviews reveal a new awareness emerging with the events of the 2011 Spring, calling for a reconnection with the decolonial critique embedded in the foundations of the left, while confronting it with in-depth investigations and local knowledge, such as that from the experience of the diasporic left.

¹⁶ Interview conducted in Qsour Essef, Tunisia by Montassir Sakhi and Wael Garnaoui. February 2024.