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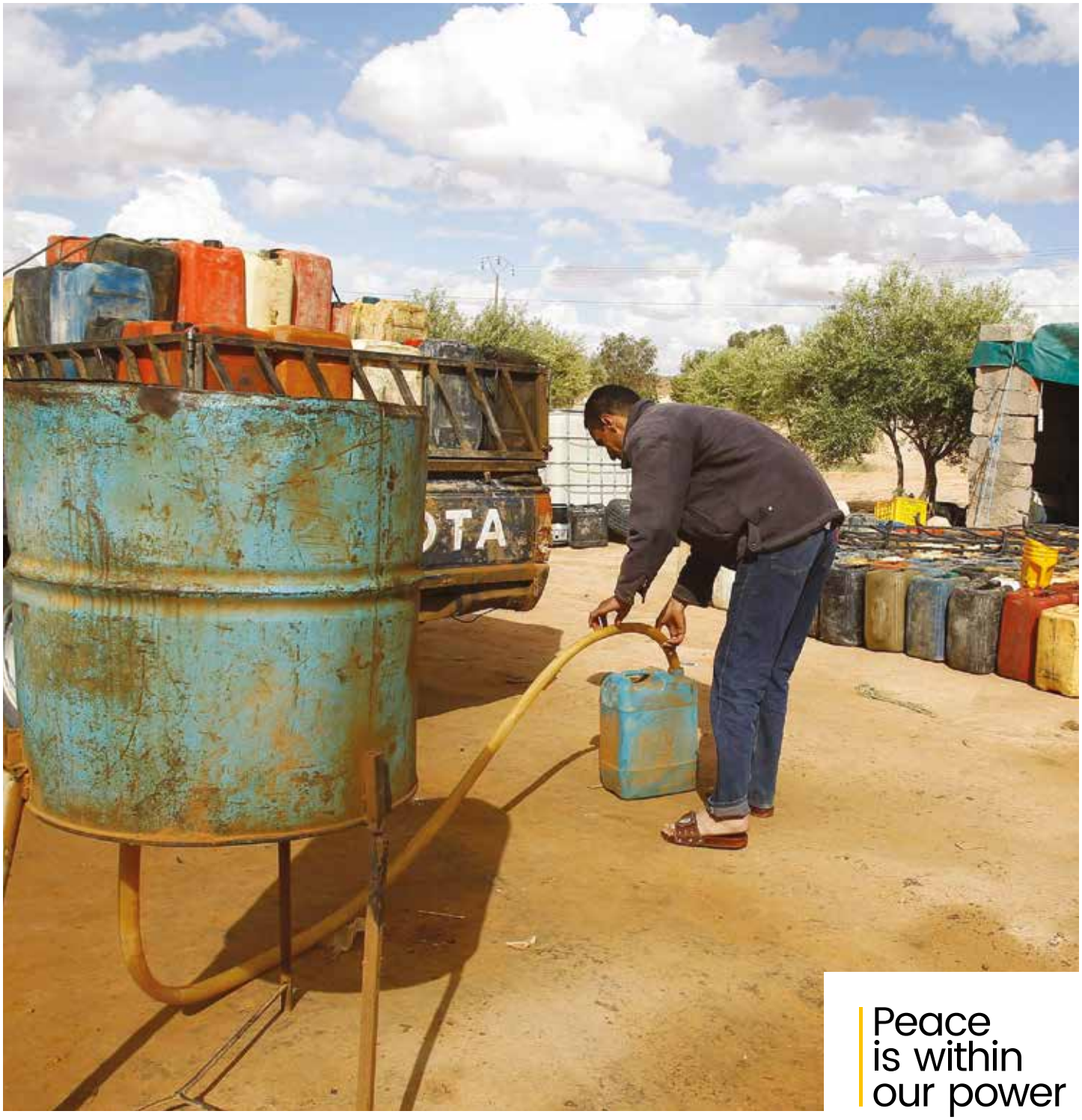
Marginalisation, insecurity and uncertainty on the Tunisian–Libyan border

Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba from the perspective of their inhabitants



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Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba from the perspective of their inhabitants

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This report is written by Olfa Lamloum, Political Scientist (PhD) and Tunisia Country Manager at International Alert.

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Contents

Executive summary

Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, two border towns in southeast Tunisia, provide the only official border crossings to Libya. Both are marked by regional disparities, despite their different modes of engagement in the national and cross-border economies, and are subject to a stigmatising national discourse, which conflates borders and border regions with smuggling and terrorism. This prevailing discourse, shared by the Tunisian government, donors and the media, ignores the reality, needs and expectations of people living along the border.

From the end of 2015 to spring 2016, International Alert undertook research aimed at understanding the situation in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba from the point of view of the people living there. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative fieldwork, which resulted in more than 700 people being interviewed in the two cities. This is the first such primary, field-based research of its kind to be carried out in these two locations. It provides an analysis of the Tunisian transition from the viewpoint of its border areas.

The research found that feelings of marginalisation (*tahmîch*) now shape the self-image of people in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, with almost 90% and 98% of inhabitants, respectively, reporting a strong sense of exclusion. This echoes a history of marginalisation of Tunisia's southern regions and from the colonial period to the present day, resulting in a bitter sense of injustice, voiced by many of the inhabitants.

In both cities, disparities with other parts of the country are evident in the lack of quality public services such as water, health and public transport, structural mass unemployment, and education.

Five years after the revolution, the border remains a financial resource, generating jobs, mainly for youth, in the absence of other employment opportunities. In Dhehiba in particular, the border is the only means of survival. However, if networks of local and cross-border solidarity once allowed residents to keep some control over the border economy, that relative bargaining power now seems altered by the chaos in Libya and the changing power structures of the border area. This is particularly the case in Ben Guerdane, where there is increasing competition between new and old actors who deploy there, laying claim to income, legitimacy and control.

Modes of governance have changed little in the period since the revolution, based on laissez-faire policies and minimal state assistance. The state adopts a heavily security-oriented approach to the border area, at the cost of increased corruption and a growing uncertainty among residents, and fails to fulfil their need for economic and social security. Over 90% of survey respondents in this area say that restrictions on border trade and lack of development are the main sources of insecurity today, rather than the terrorist threat.

For a large majority of the population, these uncertainties are coupled with a great distrust towards political elites and in particular towards the elected representatives of the region. The gap is filled to a certain extent by local civil society. However, it also appears to reinforce the attraction of Salafi jihadism for a section of the youth in Ben Guerdane.

Seen in the specific context of Tunisia's 'margins', the situation of Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba challenges the effectiveness of a purely security-focused approach to border regions, and makes it more important than ever to accurately understand and question the endogenous causes of violent extremism and terrorism.

1. Introduction

Shortly after 5am on 7 March 2016, dozens of Islamic State (IS) jihadists attacked the town of Ben Guerdane, in southeastern Tunisia, 30km from the border with Libya. Security forces neutralised this unprecedented assault in a few days. There was a heavy toll: about 50 assailants, 13 members of the police and seven civilians were killed.[1] The size of the action marks an evolution in the IS strategy in Tunisia and has renewed the debate on the security issues at stake at the border in a moment of chaos in Libya. In particular, it reveals the crucial role of the local population in the defence of border areas for there is no doubt that the defeat of IS at Ben Guerdane was partly the work of its inhabitants, who mobilised to assist the police and hunt down the jihadists. This finding calls for refocusing attention on the inhabitants, who are too often overshadowed by analyses that focus on the links between borders, smuggling and terrorism.[2]

Reduced to a simple security threat, the border loses its depth and is deprived of its basic characteristics, its relation to the state, territory, history and the Other, that is, in the anthropological sense of an "in-between space", "a threshold and a limit", but also of moments of "uncertainty and indecision".[3] This is precisely the orientation of this research, which aims to look at the border area as narrated by its inhabitants, to view it from their practices and representations, and to question their lifestyles and their relations with the state. The aim is to clarify the multiple ruptures in social and economic identity, which shape the border area and give form to the various dynamics and conflicts that crisscross the area today, five years after the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.[4]

To do this, we have chosen to conduct our field survey in two southeast Tunisian border towns of uneven urbanisation, built between the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the French protectorate to settle the nomadic populations of the region and facilitate better control over them and manage their territories. The first is Ben Guerdane, in the centre of an arid plain, the Jeffara, 526 kilometres from the capital, in the governorate of Medenine. The second is Dhehiba, a small town located 626 kilometres from the capital and three kilometres from the Libyan border, in the governorate of Tataouine. Certainly, the two cities have obvious differences – first, by their population: Ben Guerdane is a medium-sized city with 80,000 inhabitants, while Dhehiba, with its 5,000 inhabitants, is closer to a big village.[5] Second, by the scale of their

1 Tunisie- Attaque terroriste à Ben Guerdane: Des civils et des agents de sécurités tués, plusieurs terroristes abattus [Tunisia – Terrorist Attack in Ben Guerdane: Civilians and security officers killed, several terrorists slaughtered], Huffington Post Maghreb, 7 March 2016, http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/03/07/attaque-terroriste-ben-gu_n_9397022.html

2 There are countless front-page and often sensationalist articles on the links between terrorism and borders, especially in the Arabic press. Moreover, many political figures have also made statements to the same effect. For example, see the dossier in the journal *al-Jarida* (http://urlz.fr/3DGX).

3 See the work of Michel Agier on borders, particularly M. Agier, La condition cosmopolite: L'anthropologie à l'épreuve du piège identitaire [The cosmopolitan condition: Anthropological proof of an identity trap], Paris: La Découverte, 2013

4 Ben Ali was the president of Tunisia from 1987 to 2011.

5 Institut national de la statistique, Census 2014, http://census.ins.tn/en/recensement

economies and the different ways they take part in the national and cross-border economy. While Ben Guerdane has emerged as the main currency market since the late 1980s,[6] Dhehiba is a very small place, where the border is utilised for economic survival.

However, these two Tunisian cities provide us with a valuable focus to better understanding and clarifying the issues of the 'Tunisian transition' from the viewpoint of its border areas. Heavily affected by the decline of agriculture and the devaluation of the peasantry, Ben Guerdane, like Dhehiba, is part of those spaces which are at the bottom of the hierarchy of places,[7] to the point of being called on to prove their national allegiance.[8] Conducting field studies in these two cities helped us to define their inhabitants' relationship to the state by exploring the inhabitants' perceptions of themselves and their marginalisation. It is of note that Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane are the sites of the only official border crossings in the south, the border posts of Ras Jedir-El Chibou and Dhehiba-Wazen, which today are just as much a resource as they are a source of income. Therefore, they can help explain the uses, representations and tensions in the border zone in a fluid and fragile political and security context. They allow us to direct our attention well beyond the security injunction of fortification of the southeastern border and allow us to study the various registers of conflict that are at work there.

This report aims to present and analyse the main results of a quantitative and qualitative field survey, which focused on the inhabitants of these two cities. Headed by International Alert and conducted from November 2015 to April 2016 by a multidisciplinary team, the study covered the two *délégations* of Dhehiba and the 12 *délégations* of Ben Guerdane.[9]

The quantitative survey was based on a questionnaire developed from informal exploratory interviews conducted with local leaders and political activists, four focus groups, and seminars with the researchers.[10] The first two were composed of Dhehiba activists from local civil society and city officials. The other two were held in Ben Guerdane and included activists belonging to local associations and young unemployed graduates (*diplômés chômeurs*). The representative sample of local inhabitants aged 18 and over was selected using the quota method.[11] Five control variables were used: the residential environment (urban, rural); gender; age group; educational level; and economic activity. The cross-distribution based on these variables uses data from the last national census, conducted in 2014. The final sample includes 540 respondents from Ben Guerdane and 209 from Dhehiba. The questionnaire was organised around six areas: the respondents' general characteristics (familial, economic, social, mobility and identity); their perceptions of the social and economic situation of their city; their perceptions of the security situation; their perceptions and practices involving the border; their relations with the state and the public space; and finally, their proposals to promote their region.[12]

6 See H. Meddeb, Courir ou mourir: Course à el khobza et domination au quotidien dans la Tunisie de Ben Ali [Run or die: The race for el khobza (bread) and domination in everyday life in Ben Ali's Tunisia], PhD thesis, Paris: CERI-Sciences-Po, 2012, http://www.fasopo.org/sites/default/files/jr/th_meddeb.pdf; H. Meddeb, Young people and smuggling in the Kasserine region of Tunisia: Stories of dispossession and the dynamics of exclusion, London: International Alert, 2016, http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/young-people-and-smuggling-kasserine-region-tunisia. In preparing this article, the author is indebted to Dr Hamza Meddeb for his work on the political economy of the border in Ben Guerdane, the discussions we have had with him and his work in collaboration with Alert on young people and smuggling in Kasserine.

7 L. Wacquant, Parias urbains: Ghetto, banlieues, État [Urban outcasts: Ghetto, suburbs, state], Paris: La Découverte, 2007

8 See, for example, the declaration of Mohsen Marzouk, one of the former leaders of the Nidaa Tounes party, who during a televised speech between the two rounds of the presidential elections in December 2014 said: "محسن مرزوق: أطلب من الجنوب تعديل خياراتهم وعدم الخروج عن السياق الوطني" ["ask the south to correct their choice and not leave the national framework"], Tafrika TV, 25 November 2014, https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=GWFF4Y_y9Ck

9 Dhehiba's *délégations* are Dhehiba East and Dhehiba West. Ben Guerdane's *délégations* are Ben Guerdane North, Ben Guerdane South, al-Sayah, Jamila, al-Ma'mraât, al-Amriyya, al-Taabi, al-Warsaniyya, Jalal, al-Nafatiyya, al-Chahbania and Charib al-Rajil.

10 The researchers selected have studied the southeast region from different perspectives. We would like to thank them all: Hamza Meddeb, Michael Ayari, Jilani Ellafi, Umayya Seddik, Habib Ayeb and Rafa Tabib.

11 The quota method aims to study a representative sample of the population by means of a selection based on criteria such as gender, age, income, etc. Thus the characteristics of individuals and their attitudes will be representative of the wider population.

12 We do not deal with these proposals in this report. They will be published in a separate document, with recommendations.

The qualitative survey was carried out during four visits to Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, and is based on observations and informal and semi-structured interviews with unemployed youth, local civil society activists, and local civilian and security officials (governors, police officers, members of the National Guard and customs agents).

Ten enumerators conducted the survey by way of questionnaire. Half of these enumerators were young people from Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane, and the other half were doctoral students in sociology enrolled in the universities of Sfax and Tunis. All were trained in techniques of conducting these types of surveys and supervised by a team of researchers. The quantitative data obtained were used as contextual data to define the realities in our field.

The analysis is based on various materials in addition to the fieldwork: newspaper articles, reports and official documents, and national census data from 2014.

2. Being part of the south: From symbols to stigmas

If you ask the inhabitants of Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane about their views on southern Tunisia, the region to which they say they belong, they primarily refer to the idea of 'marginalisation' (*tahmîch*) (97.7% and 88.5%, respectively). This strong perception of exclusion transcends generations and gender, although it is more acute among the young unemployed.[13] This confirms the consolidation of *tahmîch* as a cognitive category since the fall of Ben Ali, structuring the way people see themselves in all marginalised urban and suburban territories, such as in the working-class neighbourhoods of greater Tunis or in Kasserine, a governorate on the border with Algeria in the central western part of the country.[14]

However, this feeling of marginalisation is accompanied by another to which it is inextricably linked: that of 'punishment'.[15] For most people, marginalisation is a "social destiny",[16] which is understood as a punishment inflicted by the central government on all of south Tunisia. Formal and informal interviews establish a distant genealogy of this punishment, tracing its origins to the colonial period. Taking a step backwards will no doubt help us understand this shared representation, by looking at it in the context of a long period of violent history that has marked the relations of the south with the colonial and, later, the postcolonial state.[17]

Because of their geographical proximity, Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane have relatively similar historical trajectories. Both have experienced the penetration of French colonialism, resulting in the destruction of the agro-pastoral and caravan economies of the nomadic tribes of Touazine in Ben Guerdane[18] and Dhehibat in Dhehiba;[19] the forced sedentarisation of these tribes and the violent confiscation of their land; and the military subjugation accompanied in 1910 by the drawing of a fixed borderline with Libya, imposed in the wake of its colonisation by Italy. Both cities have also been marked by their resistance to colonisation, which includes two memorable episodes. First, the armed uprising of 1881 led by Ali Ben Khalifa, who found refuge in Ben Guerdane and the Tripolitania region after France took control of the large cities of Sfax and Gabès. Khalifa won the support of the tribes of the region, particularly the Touazine, but the insurrection that came after was violently repressed by the French army.[20] This was followed by the armed uprising of 1915–16, led by Khalifa Ibn Asker, who mobilised the tribes of Jebel Nafusa in Libya and the Dhehibat, which were in turn crushed in blood.[21] These episodes are still present in the collective memory of the inhabitants of the two cities. More than a century later, when asked

13 This is verified by a double cross-tabulation (age and social class).

14 We refer here to other surveys conducted by International Alert in two neighbourhoods of the greater Tunis, Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher, and in Kasserine. See O. Lamloum and M.A. Ben Zina (eds.), Les jeunes de Douar Hicher et d'Ettadhamen: Une enquête sociologique [Youth of Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen: A sociological survey], Tunis: International Alert and Arabesques, 2015; O. Lamloum, Politics on the margins in Tunisia: Vulnerable young people in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, London: International Alert, 2016, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia_PoliticsOnTheMargins_EN_2016.pdf; H. Meddeb, 2016, Op. cit.

15 The theme of 'punishment' is almost absent from the discourse of Kasserine's inhabitants. Rather the theme of neglect was prominent in the slogans chanted by the unemployed movement during the months of January, February and March 2016.

16 P. Bourdieu, L'identité et la representation: Eléments pour une réflexion critique sur l'idée de région [Identity and representation: Elements for a critical reflection on the idea of a region], Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales [Actions of social science research], 35(1), 1980, pp.63–72

17 Several interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this research raised this violence.

18 I would like to thank the historian Jilani Ellafi, who possesses a huge knowledge on the history of Ben Guerdane and taught me a great deal about the city.

19 This tribe is sub-divided into three lines: al-Thwamir, al-Brijât and al-Jabra. See M. Bouzrara, The Tunisian-Libyan borders throughout history: Dehibat tribe and its neighbours, Sousse: Saidane, 2014 (in Arabic)

20 To learn more about this episode, see Ibid.; A. Al Sgayar and A. Mnassar, Armed resistance in Tunisia: 1881–1939, Tunis: Manchourât al ma'had al 'ala litârikh al haraka al wataniyya, 1997 (in Arabic); and M. Abdelmoula, Jihad et colonialism: La Tunisie et la Tripolitaine (1914–1918) [Jihad and colonialism: Tunisia and Tripolitania (1914–1918)], Tunis: Tiers-Monde, 1987

21 See A. Al Sgayar and A. Mnassar, 1997, Op. cit.

about their representation of the south, a majority refer to the resistance to French colonisation (84.2% in Dhehiba, 72.3% in Ben Guerdane).

The violent birth of the postcolonial Tunisian state has also left scars. It was indeed marked by repression of the Youssefist movement,[22] which followed the internal autonomy agreements and provoked a split in the Neo Destour, the party that was hegemonic in the national movement as well as in the country as a whole. Supporters of these agreements, grouped around Habib Bourguiba, violently opposed those who denounced them, led by Salah Ben Youssef.[23] Party General Secretary at the time, Ben Youssef found strong support in the south. Hunted by the authorities, he fled to Libya in 1956[24] after hiding in a small village near Ben Guerdane.[25] Repression then fell on the Youssefists fiefs in the South.[26]

Bourguiba was victorious at the end of the conflict with the Youssefists. The new Republic was proclaimed and established on "the ruins of the Beylical regime and took over the administration of the protectorate".[27] The central state was strengthened by the adoption of a new administrative and territorial division. Reformism[28] was created as a "great political narrative"[29] of the new authoritarian regime, supported by the myth of the "united Tunisian nation" built on a radically alternative "designated territory, the South".[30] Throughout his speeches, *Zaïm* (Arabic for 'leader') Habib Bourguiba continued to downplay the resistance that preceded the birth of his party and to forge the image of a separate south – economically underdeveloped, politically 'immature' and even dangerous.[31]

It can be presumed, without risk of overinterpretation, that the references to 'punishment' by the majority of respondents echoed this long history of southern Tunisia, marked by repression, dispossession and denial. Transmitted from generation to generation as a duty to memory and a necessity for justice in the face of an official account written by the 'victors', this feeling of punishment has been maintained through the decades, surviving both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. And if it continues today, it is because the always acceptable *tahmîch* is seen as proof of this punishment and because some politicians are ready to maintain the stereotypes attached to it and use it in denouncing the south. Surely, five years after the revolution, the significance of punishment as the central interpretative register undermines the myth of 'national unity' and highlights the territorial fragmentation of the national memory. This fragmented memory leads not only to exhuming the dark parts of the country's history, but also to reconsidering

22 The secretary general of the Neo Destour, Salah Ben Youssef, played a leading role in 1948 when Bourguiba was exiled. In 1954, he denounced the internal autonomy agreements and demanded the withdrawal of French troops from Tunisia as a prerequisite to any negotiations. He was expelled from the party in 1955 but continued his campaign. Sentenced to death, he escaped in 1958. In 1961, he was assassinated on the orders of Bourguiba in Germany.

23 O. Lamloum and S. Khiari, Le Zaïm et l'artisan ou de Bourguiba à Ben Ali [The leader and the craftsman, or Bourguiba to Ben Ali], in Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord [Directory of North Africa], Centre national de la recherche scientifique [National Scientific Research Centre], Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman (IREMAM) [Institute of Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim World], 37, 1998, http://aan.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/Pdf/AAN-1998-37_07.pdf

24 Ben Youssef fled to Tripoli and then to Cairo. In 1961, he moved to Germany.

25 Ben Youssef spent a night in Chahbania, 40km from Ben Guerdane, at the home of Abdallah Ben Amara Laamari, who was a grandparent of the current parliamentary deputy of Ennahda, Ahmed Laamari. M. Laamari, grandson of Abdallah Ben Amara Laamari, interview by author, Tunis, April 2016

26 On this historical sequence, see the testimony of militant Youssefiste Houcine Triki: Al-Mashhad al tunisi, testimony of Houcine Triki, machhad.com, http://www.machhad.com/3107 (in Arabic); or that of Saad bin Marzouk on the trial of 3 October 1959: Testimony of Saad bin Marzouk, https://youtu.be/dxaFqXOSBfc (in Arabic).

27 O. Lamloum and S. Khiari, 1998, Op. cit.

28 For a good summary of the history of this 'authoritarian reformism' of the Bourguiba regime, see L. Chouikha and E. Gobe, Histoire de la Tunisie depuis l'indépendance [History of Tunisia since independence], Paris: La Découverte, 2015; and M. Camau and V. Geisser, Le syndrome autoritaire [The authoritarian syndrome], Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003

29 B. Hibou, Le réformisme, grand récit politique de la Tunisie contemporaine [Reformism, big political story of modern Tunisia], Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine [Review of Modern and Contemporary History], 5(56-4), 2009, pp.14–39

30 J-P. Bras, L'autre Tunisie de Bourguiba: Les ombres du sud [The other Tunisia of Bourguiba: The southern shadows], in M. Camau and V. Geisser, Habib Bourguiba: La trace et l'héritage [Habib Bourguiba: Mark and legacy], Paris: Karthala, 2004, p.298

31 H. Bourguiba's speech delivered in Ben Guerdane on 3 December 1958 as quoted by Bras (ibid.) is instructive in this regard. The Zaïm evokes the lack of "political maturity" in the local population's support of the "Youssefiste subversion".

© Reuters/Youssef Boudlal

Custom officers check Libyan refugees from the western mountains at the Libya–Tunisia border crossing in Dhehiba, 2011.

the regional reality from the perspective of people who have been subjected to it – that is to say as a legitimising attribute of the postcolonial state and a mechanism for the exclusion and subordination of exocentric populations.

Nevertheless, the south suggests more than exclusion and punishment. In the eyes of the majority of respondents, it also means being a neighbour of Libya (90.6% in Dhehiba, 85.5% in Ben Guerdane), having specific customs and habits (83.7% in Dhehiba and 83.7% in Ben Guerdane) and belonging to prestigious tribes (45.3% in Dhehiba and 71.4% in Ben Guerdane). The concordance of answers and their congruence among respondents in both cities outline the common features of a self-narrative that mobilises the resources of space (the importance of exchange networks, historical solidarity and family relations with Libya),[32] of memory (armed resistance to the occupation) and of culture (the tribal bond and specific customs).

These responses taken together highlight the markers of a shared identity,[33] and confirm a problematic relationship with the central government – guilty of having punished and forgotten its children and then having validated their invisibility by its ideological and official historical narrative. The specific identity raised by the residents of both cities suggests the valuation of a stigma developed into a distinction.[34] By evoking notions of 'prestigious tribes' and 'ancestral customs', respondents seem to see the past as a source of legitimacy and to participate as such in the analysis of regionalism developed by Pierre Bourdieu: a form of "collective struggle for the subversion of a symbolic relation of forces, which is not designed to erase the stigmatised traits but rather to overthrow the table of values which define them as stigmata".[35] Claiming descent from a prestigious tribe thus attests to a glorious past, a witness to a

32 On these forms of solidarity with anti-colonial struggles, see M. Abdelmoula, 1987, Op. cit.

33 We are aware of the multiple and somewhat ambiguous meanings of the notion of identity. Here it means "the question, from the point of view of the individual (or group), of his own definition ('who am I')". J-C. Kaufmann, L'invention de soi. Une théorie de l'identité [The invention of self. A theory of identity], Paris, Armand Colin/SEJER, 2004

34 P. Bourdieu, 1980, Op. cit.

35 Ibid.

double resistance, both to the French colonisation and to the violence of the state and its elites.[36] As for customs, which our interviewees often attributed to modesty (*hichma*),[37] they seem to embody the cementing of the unity of a group, ensuring cohesion and reproduction of its hierarchies.[38]

It goes without saying that customs and tribal reality do not have the same importance for everyone. Quantitative data clearly show that young people are less attached to these ideas. In interviews, some of them were keen to keep their distance vis-à-vis what they consider 'old beliefs' or the mark of a 'conservatism' increasingly shaken by economic contingencies. Others seem unfamiliar with the 'signs' of recognition of tribe affiliation, such as surnames or occupation of land.[39] Moreover, it is clear that, while the reference to customs is as important in Dhehiba as in Ben Guerdane, the evocation of 'prestigious tribes' marks a clear difference between the two cities. In Dhehiba, where more than half of the respondents did not mention these tribes (54.7%) in defining the south, about one in three individuals think the existence of tribes has had little or no importance in their lives, as compared to 12.7% in Ben Guerdane. How can we explain this discrepancy, considering Dhehiba clearly has fewer resources and is more geographically isolated? The most plausible answer concerns the rather different modes of insertion of the two cities in the national economy (discussed later). Still, this difference rightly recalls a conclusion of Olivier Roy that, far from being merely a residual aspect of a traditional society into a modern state, lineage solidarity "is a recomposition of networks of allegiances in a political and territorial space permanently altered by the existence of the state".[40] In this sense, the tribal reality is primarily a reinvented tradition, serving both as support and as justification for access strategies concerning material and symbolic resources.

Beyond its plasticity and its differentiated appropriation by the inhabitants of Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane, the representation of the south demonstrated by the survey shows the importance of the regional cleavage in Tunisia. More than ever, whether trivialised or exploited, buried or publicly waived in the institutional political space, this cleavage still feeds a bitter sense of injustice, as expressed by a large section of the border population. The new political context seems to have made the opposition by the majority of southerners even more legitimate.

36 Unemployed youth, interviews by the research team, Ben Guerdane, November 2015

37 This modesty develops into codes that organise social life and governing, in particular, gender and generational relations.

38 We are referring here, in particular, to the work of Clifford Geertz on the tribal bond. Geertz believed that these links are part of the cultural construction through which a society interprets its experience and imagines itself as a community of acquaintanceship. See C. Geertz, The integrative revolution: Primordial sentiments and civil politics in new states, in C. Geertz (ed.), Old societies and new states: The quest for modernity in Asia and Africa, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, pp.105–57

39 Some young people are not able to determine tribal origin from family names and do not know the tribal origin of land ownership.

40 O. Roy, Groupes de solidarité, territoires, réseaux et État dans le Moyen-Orient et l'Asie Centrale [Solidarity groups, territories, networks and the state in the Middle East and Central Asia], in H. Dawod (ed.), Tribus et pouvoirs en terre d'islam [Tribes and authorities in Islamic countries], Paris: Armand Colin, 2004, pp.39–80

3. Inequality, insecurity and marginalisation

The marginalisation question in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane is far from being a figure of speech. Data from the quantitative survey show that it is based on very tangible forms of social exclusion, which are part of the regional disparities that condition the lives of a majority of the inhabitants. The way that this exclusion affects the two cities is different, but it is particularly evident in three key areas.

The first relates to public policy. A large majority of respondents in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane judge the economic situation of their town as being 'bad' or 'very bad' (93% in Dhehiba and 80.9% in Ben Guerdane). They point to the lack of investments, to the failure of a sustained public policy and to insufficient infrastructure. When asked "What should the state do in your area", responses from most respondents demonstrate their perception of unemployment as being a public policy issue. In both cities, almost all inhabitants demand as a priority that the state creates jobs. They believe that the state has a responsibility to build vocational training centres for the unemployed (99.8% in Dhehiba and 94.5% in Ben Guerdane), to create an industrial zone in their city (99.2% in Dhehiba and 98.2% in Ben Guerdane) and to improve urban infrastructure (99.2% in Dhehiba and 98.2% in Ben Guerdane). These expectations reflect the extent of the frustrations felt by the local population. There is a particular emphasis on the strong demand for a 'social' state, one that guarantees access to health (there is an absence of emergency services in both cities and a lack of specialised doctors in Dhehiba); public transport (deemed dilapidated); justice (there is no court in Dhehiba); and urban services (water sanitation is non-existent in Ben Guerdane).[41] However, it is clear that all these demands continue to confront public policies that – even though the state has been declaring since the 1970s that it is a priority to fight against regional imbalances in the country – have in fact only exacerbated "the socio-spatial fractures between coast and inland".[42]

The second area concerns the labour market, which is characterised by mass unemployment and insecurity.[43] Note at the outset that the unemployment rate in the two cities exceeds the national average, estimated at 14.82%. It is especially high in Dhehiba (42.4%), much more so than in Ben Guerdane (18.6%).[44] However, the most striking fact is undoubtedly the relentless exclusion of women from the labour market, resulting in their social invisibility and confinement to domestic work. The results of our survey, which overlap those of the national census, show that the female unemployment rates in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane are respectively over three and two times the national rate.[45] Worse, it is clear that these high rates are far from grasping the full impact of female unemployment due to the very low economic participation rate of women in the two cities.[46] No wonder then that only 7% of mothers and barely twice that figure of young girls (14% of girls in Ben Guerdane and 12.6% in Dhehiba) contribute to the expenses of their families, reflecting the large income gap between the sexes.

41 For example, SONEDE (national water company), STEG (national electricity and gas company), ANETI (national employment agency) and CNSS (national security social fund) do not have offices in Dhehiba.

42 A. Daoud, La révolution tunisienne de janvier 2011: Une lecture par les déséquilibres du territoire [The Tunisian revolution of January 2011: A lecture on the imbalances of the territory], EchoGéo, September 2011, http://echogeo.revues.org/12612, accessed 26 April 2016

43 The World Bank states that in 2014 "approximately 56 percent of the population and 92 percent of all industrial firms in Tunisia are located within an hour's drive from the three largest cities, Tunis … Sfax, and Sousse" and that "average poverty rates remained four times as high in the interior of the country, compared to the richer coastal areas". See World Bank, The unfinished revolution: Bringing opportunity, good jobs and greater wealth to all Tunisians, Development Policy Review, Report No. 86179-TN, Washington DC: World Bank, 2014, pp.282, 302, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/658461468312323813/pdf/861790DPR0P12800Box385314B00PUBLIC0.pdf

44 Institut national de la statistique, Census 2014, http://census.ins.tn/en/recensement. Our survey results indicate that in Dhehiba unemployment affects those age 20–29 particularly heavily.

45 It is 77.66% in Dhehiba and 49.21% in Ben Guerdane, while the national average is 22.45%.

46 This seems to be particularly true in Ben Guerdane where the rate is 15.99%, as compared to 28.20% nationally.

Unemployment follows the lead of unreliable employment. Data collected on the employment structure[47] in both cities show great weakness in the forms of institutionalised secondary integration thanks to a widespread precarious workforce, concerning 61.9% of those questioned in Dhehiba and 74.3% in Ben Guerdane. For example, one respondent out of five in Dhehiba reports working under unstable conditions on (government-sponsored) projects (*ouvrier dans les chantiers*), 15.9% as artisans or independent workers, and 13.5% as construction workers. Only 2% report that they are middle managers or high school teachers. In Ben Guerdane, more than one respondent out of four reports working in the trade and services sector (27.1%), about one in five as an artisan or independent worker, and 12.2% work as *sarafa* (money changers) in the black market or at the border.[48] The unpredictable nature of the labour market is confirmed by the importance of the 'illegal' sector,[49] in which 19% of respondents in Ben Guerdane and 33.7% in Dhehiba work. As a consequence, there is a low rate of social security coverage in both cities (66.7% and 50.1%, respectively).

The study of the long-term employment structure from the data collected on employment distribution by the fathers' occupational category highlights the developments and changes in the social structure in both cities. It underlines the erosion of wage labour in agriculture. Farm workers, which in the fathers' generation accounted for 29.2% of the total workforce in Ben Guerdane and 17.1% in Dhehiba, now account for 7% and 5.7%, respectively. Remarkably, as well as the very high rate of unemployment among women, cross-referenced data of gender and employment distribution show that, in both cities, the employment rate for women in this sector is 0%. However, the employment structure has seen a relative increase in the number of workers in the trade and services sector, driven in particular by the emergence of a new form of employment, namely the border worker.[50] The net decrease in the number of agricultural workers and the proliferation of border workers illustrate the decline of food production and the impoverishment of small farmers,[51] to the benefit of a volatile tertiary sector resorting to precarious wage labour. It is thus clear that, despite its formal mutation, the labour market is still characterised by insecure labour, thereby confirming the social reproduction of subordination and its transmission from one generation to another. Despite political changes, this subordination seems to persist, penalising women and youth in particular, five years after the departure of Ben Ali.

The third area is education. Note from the outset that in Tunisia no quantitative studies exist on the relationship between territorial distribution, social milieu and academic success.[52] However, despite their limited scope, quantitative data from the survey elucidate some aspects pertaining to this area. First, the data reveal the progress in the country over the last 30 years in access to school by comparing the educational levels of two generations of inhabitants: respondents on one side and their parents on the other.

47 It should be noted here that in Tunisia the National Institute of Statistics (INS) does not publish breakdowns by occupational categories in censuses and employment surveys. Therefore, as we did not have a tool to gather information about the employment structure, we chose to follow the occupational nomenclature used in French investigations, adapting it to the local context. We have thus integrated the categories, among others, of workers on (government-sponsored) projects under precarious conditions (*ouvrier dans les chantiers*) and workers on borders or currency exchange workers in the black market (*ouvrier sur la voie ou dans le change*).

48 According to the World Bank, in 2013, some 3,800 people worked in informal trade in Ben Guerdane, which was 20% of the workforce. See L. Ayadi, N. Benjamin, S. Bensassi and G. Raballand, Estimating informal trade across Tunisia's land borders, Policy Research Working Paper 6731, The World Bank Middle East and North Africa Region, Public Sector and Governance Unit, December 2013, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/856231468173645854/pdf/WPS6731.pdf

49 Far from any value judgements, 'illegal' is the category cited by the respondents themselves.

50 In Ben Guerdane, the employment rate in this sector increased from 18.5% in the fathers' generation to 27.1% today. In Dhehiba, it has risen from 3.5% to 8.9%.

51 On the role of postcolonial irrigation policies and the marginalisation of the peasantry and subsistence farming, see H. Ayeb, Compétition sur les ressources hydrauliques et marginalisation sociale, à qui profite la disparition des canaux? Le cas des oasis de Gabès en Tunisie [Competition over water resources and social marginalisation, which one benefits the disappearance of channels? The case of the oasis of Gabès in Tunisia], in C. Aspe (ed.), De l'eau agricole à l'eau environnementale: Résistances et adaptation aux nouveaux enjeux de partage de l'eau en Méditerranée [Agricultural water to environmental water: Resistors and adapting to new water-sharing issues in the Mediterranean], Versailles: Editions Quae, 2012, pp.143–55

52 To our knowledge, the only study that has addressed this subject is the one dedicated to voluntary school dropouts, conducted by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights. Published in September 2014, it examined this phenomenon in three governorates: Kairouan, Kasserine and Monastir. Mounir Houcine, Voluntary school drop-outs. The phenomena and the causes, Tunis, Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux, 2014, p.52, http://ftdes.net/rapports/descolarisation.pdf (in Arabic)

The substantial decrease in the number of illiterates in the population aged 18 and over reflects and confirms a national reality. In both cities, the illiteracy rate was more than halved from 57.6% to 20.2% in Dhehiba and from 47.1% to 22.1% in Ben Guerdane from the generation of the fathers surveyed to their children.[53] This reduction also affects women, whose illiteracy rate is now at levels close to the national average (28.7% and 26.7% in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, respectively). The investigation also demonstrates the absence of territorial disparities in access to primary and secondary school: the relative rates for these two educational levels were close to the national averages.

It should be noted here that schooling for girls in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane, contrary to popular belief, also follows national trends.[54] Democratisation of education has fully benefited girls who now attend primary and secondary school as much as boys. Even better, universities have opened their doors to women almost as much as to men in Ben Guerdane and even more so in Dhehiba, where 9.5% of women have a university-level education, as compared to 5.8% of men. However, despite these advances, territorial disparity in access to education does exist, in a specific form. In Dhehiba, this is reflected in the very low rate of individuals who have completed university (7.6% against 11% nationally).[55] It is also illustrated through the significant disparities between secondary and university rates for men in both cities. Indeed, young boys often compromise their future careers by dropping out of school, which happens before university level and particularly affects those aged 19–24. Among 19–24-year-old men, the school enrolment rate is almost half that of the national average.[56] How can this phenomenon be explained? Respondents who were early school leavers provide two types of reason, which we have already encountered in previous surveys. In Ben Guerdane, the main reason is the lack of interest in school (61.8%), while respondents in Dhehiba more often cite financial difficulties (51.3%). Some local sources say that, in the wake of the influx of refugees due to the Libyan crisis, the number of early school leavers has increased.[57] Thus, to many young people in the two cities, school not only appears as unable to serve as a motor of social mobility or of ensuring access to a stable job, but also leans strongly towards validating the regional differences in cultural capital and reproducing resultant inequalities.[58]

For most inhabitants of Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, unpredictable employment and unemployment make the nuclear family the main refuge for the individual,[59] to the degree that the father remains the main provider of the entire family group (69.2% in Dhehiba and 83.6% in Ben Guerdane), although he is often supported by the boys (41.8% in Ben Guerdane and 36% in Dhehiba). The role of the extended family is shown to be secondary.

53 In 2011, the national illiteracy rate among 15-year-olds was 20.3% (28.2% women, 12.3% men). See B. Gribaa and G. Depaoli, Profil genre de la Tunisie 2014 [Gender profile of Tunisia 2014], June 2014, p.5, http://www.fondationface.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/profil_genre_tunisie2014_courte_fr.pdf. This paper was prepared as part of the 'Identification mission of a human gender equality programme in Tunisia', which was funded by the European Union.

54 The European Union-funded study on girls' education shows that there is a difference in the level of access to middle schools, high schools and university of 21.4% between rural areas (59.3%) and urban areas (80.7%), and a difference of 26% between Kasserine (55.1%) and the District of Tunis (80.9%). See B. Gribaa and G. Depaoli, 2014, Op. cit., p.4

55 In 2015, the success rate for graduating with a high school diploma in Dhehiba was zero. For inequalities in higher education, see M.H. Zaiem, Les inegalites regionales et sociales dans l'enseignement superieur: Comment l'école est passée d'ascenseur social à un lieu privilégié de reproduction des inégalités [The regional and social disparities in higher education: How school has transformed from a tool of social enhancement to a privileged site of reproducing inequalities], http://www.unfpa-tunisie.org/usp/images/stories/pdfs/m3/LES%20INEGALITES%20REGIONALES%20ET%20SOCIALES%20I.pdf

56 It was respectively 21.18% in Dhehiba and 26% in Ben Guerdane, as compared to 40% nationally. Source: National Census of 2014

57 Focus group with civil society in Dhehiba, December 2015

58 In both cities, this applies to the three dimensions of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu: "embodied" capital (availability of education), "objectified" capital (cultural goods) and "institutionalised" capital (academic qualifications). P. Bourdieu, The forms of capital, in J.E. Richardson (ed.), The handbook of theory of research for the sociology of education, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp.241–258

59 Respondents in Ben Guerdane consider family as being very important in their lives (99.4%), more so than religion (97.7%), school (84%), tribe (71.7%), culture (46.7%), sports (36.8%) and politics (17.1%). In Dhehiba, respondents expressed the same preferences with slight differences in percentages: family (92.5%), religion (91.4%), school (54.9%), tribe (42.5%), culture (34.6%), sports (24.1%) and politics (18.9%).

4. Governing the periphery: Between laissez-faire and assistance

Over the years, the progressive reduction of opportunities for emigration to Europe[60] combined with the endemic deficiency in public policy have made trade with Libya a vital resource for the inhabitants of the two cities. The border economy, however, is far from having the same rate of development or of generating the same benefits for all its players. While today, Ben Guerdane seems to have kept its role as a trading post, Dhehiba increasingly has been specialising in fuel smuggling, which remains a means of survival for many of its inhabitants. The disparity between the two cities is obvious to the simple visitor. Dhehiba, unlike Ben Guerdane, has no market for imported goods and no currency exchange counter. Our survey also reveals that activity rates for border-related economic activity are much lower than in Ben Guerdane, where the border has become a source of income for the accumulation of profits and enriched some local players. No wonder that, of the 264 *délégations* in the country in 2012, Dhehiba occupied the 249th place on the scale of the regional development index and Ben Guerdane the 156th.[61]

What explains these differences? The answer lies in the long term and relates to governance models that underpin the local political economy of both cities.

Adjoining northwestern Tripolitania, one of the most developed regions of Libya, Ben Guerdane's economic role developed from the early 1980s thanks to the breaking of Tunisian–Libyan relations in the aftermath of the attack on the town of Gafsa, perpetrated by a commando supported by the Gaddafi regime. This made the city a suitable place for the deployment of Tunisian labour smuggling networks,[62] the repatriation of income from these workers and the importing of products subsidised by the Libyan compensation fund. With the restoration of relations between Tunisia and Libya, following the destitution of Bourguiba and the coming to power of Ben Ali in 1988, Ben Guerdane strengthened its position and profited from the expanding trade between the two countries.[63] The *sarafa* asserted themselves as the principal actors in the border economy. And although the 1990s saw the development of other commercial or financial centres in Asia, the city has hardly lost momentum.

Following the embargo imposed on Libya between 1992 and April 1999,[64] the nearby town of Ras Jedir became its major terrestrial opening to the outside world, giving Ben Guerdane a role as a trading post for imported goods and a big marketplace for currency exchange.[65] Ben Guerdane started supplying

60 Net migration is -49 in Dhehiba and -263 in Ben Guerdane.

61 Developed in 2012 by the Ministry of Regional Development and Planning, this indicator is to be taken with caution insofar as it covers the year 2012 only and is based, as recognised by the Ministry itself, on statistics which were not updated regularly. See Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Regional Development and Planning, Indicateurs de développement régional [Regional development indicators], Tunis: Ministry of Regional Development and Planning, 2012

62 Moustapha Chandoul and Hassan Boubakri show how illegal migration channels, using difficult routes of access in the marshy area of Kteff and Jedlaounie, prefigured the first smuggling networks. Not having bank accounts in Tunisia, these illegal Tunisian migrants were responsible for the emergence of a parallel exchange market. See M. Chandoul and H. Boubakri, Migrations clandestines et contrebande à la frontière tuniso-libyenne [Illegal migration and smuggling on the Tunisian-Libyan border], Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales [European Journal of International Migration], 7(2), 1991, p.159

63 For discussions on the political economy of Ben Guerdane and its development as a trading centre, see H. Meddeb, 2012, Op. cit. and H. Meddeb, 2016, Op. cit. We are only summarising here.

64 Note that the suspension of the embargo came after Libya surrendered to an international tribunal the two suspects of the Lockerbie bombing.

65 Luis Martinez also notes the retaliatory measures adopted by the Jamahiriya, which certainly strengthened the role of Ben Guerdane since "a 1996 law punishes with death 'any person making foreign exchange transactions in violation of regulations of the central bank'". See L. Martinez, L'après-embargo en Libye [Post embargo in Libya], CERI, February 2002, http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/artlm2.pdf

the various souks that flourished throughout Tunisia. Border economic networks were formed and strengthened, diversified their activities and took root in Asia.[66] The players in this trade saw the reinforcement of their bargaining power with the centre. From the mid-1990s, the stranglehold on the country's economy of the Trabelsi, the family of the wife of Ben Ali, spread to the border economy of Ben Guerdane. But with their comparative advantages (historical precedence, geographical proximity with Libya and well-established cross-border family and tribal networks), influential local players have also managed to secure their share of the border income.

The border economy dovetails perfectly with economic liberalisation policies. In addition, it is a method of Tunisian integration in the global economy via its periphery, an integration favoured by the privatisation of the state and the relegation of its distributive functions to the private sector. In this sense, the rise of smuggling through the development of its networks and the participation of segments of the state, particularly as part of its control apparatus, in this unlawful regulation, are indicative of how the control of the 'periphery', especially the border area, and the exercise of power over its population worked under Ben Ali. This 'laissez-faire' power[67] allowed the authorities – subject to various agreements – to spread into lucrative activities, control the dynamics that escaped it, absorb unemployment at a smaller cost and, at the same time, ward off social conflicts. But by spreading uncertainty and establishing arbitrariness and pillaging, this 'model' has in fact ended up generating anger and dissent. The revolt of Ben Guerdane in August 2010 prefigured and announced that of December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid.[68] Sit-ins, marches and clashes with security forces continued for a week spearheaded by the city's youth. The crackdown on the town was fierce and these events seemed to announce the end of the Ben Ali era. Six years later, when questioned about the events that had the greatest impact on their lives, 61.6% of the respondents answered "the revolt of Ben Guerdane".[69]

Conversely, Dhehiba's topography and political history have objectively slowed down the growth of border trade. Located east of the Libyan Nafusa Mountains, largely populated by Berber (Jbaliya) opponents of the Gaddafi regime, Dhehiba is a small isolated town, far from the coast, the ports and Libyan highways. Classified as a military territory under the French occupation, it has barely evolved under Bourguiba or Ben Ali. Dhehiba was never able to escape the watchful eye of the government, particularly because of its proximity to the Remada military base and El Borma oilfields.

Here, the border is a very recent material fact. The first border post, set up in a colonial building inside the city, only began to be used in 1957.[70] The formation of the Dhehiba *délégation* itself was late, created only in 1981. Destitute and impoverished, most of its inhabitants live by a rudimentary agriculture and public assistance for those most in need. A few figures are sufficient to give an eloquent overview of the Dhehiba economy under Ben Ali. Some 334 of the 800 families living in the town were classified as poor and received more or less regular assistance. In addition to agriculture, most jobs in the fathers' generation were in the construction sectors, mainly public work (19.1% of workers) and in the public service (14.3% were junior civil servants and teachers). The management of the Dhehiba population has been virtually unchanged from the time of French colonisation to the Ben Ali era: authoritarian governance, together with some safety nets.[71] The presence of the state has been

66 A. Doron, De la marge au monde: La structuration mouvementée d'une place marchande transnationale à Ben Guerdane (Tunisie) [From the margins to the world: The hectic construction of a transnational marketplace in Ben Guerdane, Tunisia], Les Cahiers d'EMAM [Notebooks of EMAM], 26, 2015, http://emam.revues.org/1065, accessed 29 June 2016

67 H. Meddeb, 2012, Op. cit.

68 Tunisie: Situation toujours tendue à Ben Guerdane après des dizaines d'arrestations [Tunisia: Situation still tense in Ben Guerdane after dozens of arrests], Nawaat, 18 August 2010, https://nawaat.org/portail/2010/08/18/tunisie-situation-toujours-tendue-a-ben-guerdane-apres-des-dizaines-arrestations/

69 This revolt seems to have mostly affected those aged 30–39.

70 The current position of the post, located outside of the city, was inaugurated on 27 May 1983. Interview with border guard, Dhehiba, June 2016

71 The case of Dhehiba is very telling in that it shows the continuity of the colonial and postcolonial state.

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The poster of a local NGO reads: "Ben Guerdane tomorrow for investment and development."

principally centred on security, the welfare being reduced to minimal support aimed at protecting the state from the threat of the Libyan neighbour and settling the local population. For years, the city has been almost without any public and private investment. The army and local government have been the only employment opportunities for residents and the ultimate horizon of any social advancement offered by the state.[72] This favoured the creation of client dependency links with the authorities, guaranteeing collective subjugation of a section of the population. Local inhabitants seem condemned to a sort of 'ethics of subsistence', marked by the survival imperative.[73] Familial- and artisanal-style fuel smuggling, which emerged in the late 1990s and is practised by the impoverished population, has not changed the situation. Despite its remoteness and difficult access, the Dhehiba border has not escaped the greed of the circles of power. Excluded from Ras Jedir, the private preserve of the Trabelsi, members of the Ben Ali family seem to have been involved in smuggling copper, which transits the Dhehiba border post.[74]

However, it was in Dhehiba that the power of Ben Ali was first shaken, demonstrating the decline of its controlling bodies, in the uprising of the entire city in the summer of 2007. Poorly documented, this 'Intifada' took the form of a three-day general strike, in which a local leader of the governing *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique* (Democratic Constitutional Rally, RCD) played a leading role. The local inhabitants decided to leave the city and camp near the border, signifying to the authorities their willingness to give up a country unable to offer decent living conditions.[75] They demanded measures to support development.

72 In Dhehiba, 31.5% of respondents aged 18 and over have completed their military service, compared to only 9.4% in Ben Guerdane.

73 In terms of subsistence ethics, James C. Scott "refers to behavior marked by absolute prudence related to the imperative of survival, and assuming social and technical arrangements that avoid risk". See J. Simeant, 'Économie morale' et protestation – détours africains ['Moral economy' and protest – African detours], Genèses, 4(81), 2010, pp.142–60

74 The name of Ben Ali's sister was mentioned repeatedly in our interviews conducted in Dhehiba. Note also that, in its report published on 11 November 2011, the National Investigation Committee on corruption and misappropriation mentions her as well as her import-export companies. See The final report by the National Investigation Committee of Tunisia on Bribery and Corruption, http://www.inlucc.tn/fileadmin/user1/doc/0_rapport_cicm.pdf (in Arabic)

75 Interviews in Dhehiba, December 2015, and Tunis, May 2016

When the December 2010–January 2011 uprising broke out, Dhehiba stayed on the sidelines. However, Ben Guerdane did take part. Five years later, for most residents of the two cities the flight of Ben Ali represents an event that had a significant impact on their lives (57.9% in Dhehiba, 66.8% in Ben Guerdane). Meanwhile, modes of governance have not changed, although Dhehiba, now caught up in a laissez-faire mode, seems to be following Ben Guerdane's lead. The latter, in turn, is more dependent on the contingencies of the new context.

5. The border, as perceived by its inhabitants

The survey data provide an overview of perceptions and uses of the border, highlighting some of its recent mutations. In talking about their activities on the border, residents of Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane interchangeably use the terms "working on the border" (*yikhdim fil had*), "smuggling" (*contra* or *tahrîb*) or "border trade" (*tijarit al had*). Theoretically, there are no clear obvious nuances between these terms, which cover both the passage of people and goods through the border post of Ras Jedir and Dhehiba-Wazen – a legal passage, or passage involving a penalty or arrangement with the security services – as well as the 'unofficial' passage, which uses paths that are less exposed to the control of the authorities, with or without their consent.

The figure of the smuggler (*knatri* or *muharib*) – widely criminalised in public debates that increasingly link it to terrorism – does not leave people indifferent. Now, in both cities, there is a clearly established distinction between good and bad *muharib*. The first, *qourouch* (sharks) or *baroun* (barons, a term popularised by the media), are identified with wealthy chiefs of smuggling networks, freed from local support and/or with little respect for the morality that organises the economy.[76] The second, the good ones, are those who benefit their region with their work and participate in the protection of Ben Guerdane against the jihadist threat.[77] If smuggling is common and socially accepted, it indeed implies rules of conduct – which obviously ignore legal and normative conventions but which are established on a different conception of legitimacy and justice – based on the right to subsistence by the reappropriation and occupation of the border area. In the eyes of the people, it is the licit and the illicit (*halal/haram*) that structure the ethics of this economy, drawing a dividing line by disavowing the trade in alcohol, drugs, weapons and the trafficking of human beings. This is why very few of the respondents admit to practising illicit activities (2.6% in Ben Guerdane, 2% in Dhehiba).

Although viewed as an artificial obstacle by one person out of three,[78] the border is a financial resource for a large majority of the inhabitants (90.2% in Ben Guerdane, 89.6% in Dhehiba). It is a creator of employment in the absence of other job opportunities in the region (99.5% in Dhehiba and 91.5% in Ben Guerdane). Its importance lies mainly in the fact that for a very large number of inhabitants it represents the only lever for growth in their city (93.3% in Dhehiba and 81.1% in Ben Guerdane). This is particularly the case for Dhehiba, where 'working on the border' is a survival imperative for this very peripheral Tunisian town, insofar as the local economy is more dependent on trade with Libya than on the economic policies of the Tunisian state.[79]

However, many people admit that working on the border is also a matter of choosing a profitable business (76.2% in Dhehiba and 72.7% in Ben Guerdane). Thus, they signify their right to use and enhance the comparative advantage that is the 'revenue' embodied by the border.

76 In November 2015, a dispute arose between young protesters who blocked the road leading to the border crossing and a racehorse importer who wanted to ship his goods to Libya. The agreement that the spokespersons of both parties seemed to have reached has not been respected.

77 Apropos, see the speech of an inhabitant of Ben Guerdane at a rally organised by Ennahda in Tunis, on Independence Day (20 March 2016), in which he discusses the smugglers who saved Ben Guerdane. See Intervention by Mehdi Abdel Kabeer, a youth of Ben Guerdane on the occasion of celebrating the 60th anniversary of independence, Ennahdha Channel, 21 March 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_zBwF9jr08 (in Arabic)

78 In fact, 32.1% of the inhabitants in Ben Guerdane and 33.9% in Dhehiba think the border is only an artificial barrier.

79 R. Tabib, Effets de la frontière tuniso-libyenne sur les recompositions économiques et sociales des Werghemmas: De la possession à la réappropriation des territoires [Effects of the Tunisian-Libyan border on economic and social restructuring of Werghemmas: Possession in the recovery of territories], Les cahiers d'EMAM [Notebooks of EMAM], 21, 2012, https://emam.revues.org/463

A majority of the respondents believe that this comparative advantage benefits primarily the residents of Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane themselves (62.9% and 67.1%, respectively), followed by those in the capital and the coast (20.6% and 22.6%, respectively). Few respondents indicate the *baroun* and *qourouch* as the primary beneficiaries (16.5% in Dhehiba, 10.2% in Ben Guerdane).[80] Substantiated by qualitative data, these results suggest that the inhabitants of Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, while marked by an acute perception of marginalisation, do not feel completely stripped of the fruits of the border economy: from their point of view, benefits have certainly gone to the 'others', but also, and even more so, they have benefited themselves. This finding is confirmed by the perception of those surveyed as to where the money from this economy is placed. A majority in Dhehiba believes that such revenue is invested in the acquisition of real estate (84.9%) and in trade and services in the city (15.9%), and only marginally outside the city (7.5%). Similarly, many people in Ben Guerdane cite the real estate sector (69.5%) and the tertiary sector (48.2%) in the city. These results certainly contrast with those obtained in Kasserine, where the feeling of dispossession – demonstrating power relationships around the border economy that do not favour local residents – is clearly dominant in the responses of the inhabitants.[81]

These empirical results support a hypothesis advanced in other studies:[82] the social structures in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba, especially tribal and family solidarity, both local and cross-border, enable residents to better defend their share of the revenues from the border and to maintain some control over certain economic activities on their own territory. This relative bargaining power, however, now seems to have evolved somewhat. The first explanation for this lies with the evolution of the border economy itself. For half of the respondents in Ben Guerdane (49.2%), revenue from the border economy is now used to finance projects in Tunis or in coastal cities. During informal interviews, people in this city pointed to recent examples of projects undertaken by local inhabitants in the upscale neighbourhoods of Tunis and the Lake of Tunis. A changing border economy is thus outlined in the background. Wealthy smuggling entrepreneurs in Ben Guerdane often preferred to be discreet under the Ben Ali regime, lest they arouse the jealousy of the circles of power. Now, they seem to act more openly and are more apt at navigating without difficulty the passages between the informal and formal economies, safely recycling their money through the legal machinery of the national economy.

The second reason refers unsurprisingly to the security context in Tunisia and Libya. Five years after the fall of Ben Ali, crossing the border has become a widespread practice among residents of Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba. This is even more so, on the average, than in the rest of the country.[83] The fall of Gaddafi appears to have encouraged local residents in Dhehiba to travel to Libya more frequently. These movements are primarily justified by economic reasons. Inhabitants also cross the border to work (22.8% in Dhehiba, 19.5% in Ben Guerdane), as well as to stock up on goods for resale in Tunisia (62.9% in Ben Guerdane) or to purchase consumer goods (31.3% in Dhehiba).

Although usage of the border has not been completely turned upside down, its effect on the living conditions of the inhabitants is not self-evident. Since 2011, the situation on the Libyan border, as on the Algerian border,[84] has gone through two phases.

The first, from 2011 to 2013, following the revolution, was characterised by the collapse of the old border controls – a collapse subsequent to the withdrawal of the National Guard and the police due to the

80 Given the sensitivity of the issue, we decided to approach the question in an allusive way in the quantitative questionnaire. Field investigators were able to approach the question in a more direct manner in their face-to-face interviews.

81 H. Meddeb, 2016, Op. cit.

82 H. Meddeb, 2012, Op. cit.; R. Tabib, 2012, Op. cit.

83 To the question "Have you crossed the border at least once in 2015?", the answer was affirmative for 16.3% of the respondents in Dhehiba and for 12.1% of the respondents in Ben Guerdane. The national average is 11%.

84 H. Meddeb, 2016, Op. cit.

difficulties of establishing a new legitimate and effective apparatus.[85] A declining security situation in Libya and the porosity of the border led to the arrival of thousands of refugees in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane and enlarged the circle of actors in the economy. Over this period, the data provided by the Ministry of Interior show a jump in the number of Tunisians crossing the border into Tunisia at the border post of Dhehiba (13,600 in 2010 and 187,200 in 2013) and a net shift in Ben Guerdane (608,500 in 2010 and 439,700 in 2013),[86] certainly outweighed by the massive arrival of Libyans. It is customary to say that Ben Guerdane and to a lesser extent Dhehiba have benefited greatly from this new context,[87] but the data we collected do not confirm or refine this hypothesis.

The second period started in 2013 with the establishment of a buffer border area guarded by the army, including the exits from Ras Jedir and Dhehiba, and the border strip along the nearly parallel road between Ras Jedir and Larzot. Access to this area is now subject to official authorisation. Figures from the Ministry of Interior for 2014 show a decline in the number of Tunisians entering both cities, although in Dhehiba entries are still higher than they were in 2010.

Accordingly, what is the impact of the new context on the living conditions of the inhabitants? Inhabitants of both cities are divided when asked about the evolution of their financial and professional situation after 2011. Half respond that their situation has improved, while the other half says the opposite. Refining this result by cross-referencing it with economic activity shows that the improvement in the socio-professional situation of the respondents in Ben Guerdane has little to do with the border trade and is more related to other economic activities (77%). In Dhehiba, it clearly concerns the public service sector and is explained by the increase in resorting to hiring in *chantiers*, a very precarious mechanism created by the state to absorb the discontent of young unemployed. It is therefore clear that the border economy has been affected by the new context. In addition, in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane, the majority of people have negative feelings concerning the passage of goods at the border (88.7% in Ben Guerdane and 60.3% in Dhehiba).

On the one hand, the disintegration of the Libyan state and territorial fragmentation between various militias have made Libyan roads riskier and the Tunisian 'small hands' engaged in the border economy more vulnerable.[88] Almost all of the respondents considered kidnapping the greatest risk in Libya. In fact, since 2011, several Tunisian nationals have been kidnapped or arrested by armed groups in the west of the country.[89] On the other hand, the militarisation of the Tunisian border and the construction of a border wall[90] in the aftermath of the attack in Sousse in June 2015 have not stopped the smuggling but made it an even more uncertain occupation for the poorest inhabitants. The border is still passable but the right of passage has become more expensive: for 80% of respondents, the right to cross the border is now linked to corruption.[91]

85 This phase was interrupted by the reversal of the flow for a few months after the fall of Gaddafi, with the arrival of thousands of Libyans and foreign migrant workers fleeing the chaos in Libya.

86 Data provided by the Tunisian Ministry of Interior. Of course, these numbers should be used with caution, to the degree that they do not take into account entries outside the official border crossing, nor the fact that many Tunisians have dual citizenship and can use either one or the other, depending on the circumstances.

87 This is demonstrated by the relative and recent dynamism of housing construction in Dhehiba.

88 On the situation in Libya, see W. Lacher, Libya's transition: Towards collapse, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) [German Institute for International and Security Affairs], SWP Comments 25, May 2014, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C25_lac.pdf

89 In May 2015, Tunisia negotiated and obtained the release of 254 Tunisians held by Fajr Libya militia in retaliation for the arrest of one of its leaders, Walid al-Kalib. See Libération de tous les Tunisiens retenus en Libye par une milice de Fajr Libya [All Tunisians detained in Libya released by Fajr Libya militia], Huffington Post Maghreb, 30 May 2015, http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/05/30/liberation-tunisien-libye_n_7475640.html

90 For more on the wall or, more specifically, on the 168-kilometre trench, see S. Soudani, Frontière tuniso-libyenne: Le mur de la discorde [Tunisian-Libyan border: The wall of contention], Nawaat, 12 July 2015, https://nawaat.org/portail/2015/07/12/frontiere-tuniso-libyenne-le-mur-de-la-discorde/

91 According to the World Bank: "The economic and social importance of informal trade in the regions means that any attempt to strengthen controls at the borders would probably cost more in terms of equipment and infrastructure and probably lead to higher levels of corruption among customs officials based on the border, further undermining government control." See World Bank, 2014, Op. cit., p.121

6. Increased uncertainty and the rise of protest

Many people in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba adapt to the political and security upheavals in one way or another as a survival necessity or in the absence of alternative work. Fewer in numbers, perhaps, are those who make use of the opportunity to engage in very lucrative business affairs. The affinity between smuggling, armed conflict and political instability merely confirms this. The disorganisation of the border area appears to involve the reconfiguration of markets by creating new needs, such as for medicine in Libya,[92] thus exacerbating competition and attracting new players, among them *qourouch* and youth who are recent school dropouts.

This has not happened without provoking a strong feeling of insecurity among people – feelings that are explained less by fear of terrorism and more by increased uncertainty in the economic and social situation. The quantitative data demonstrate that the sense of insecurity originates from the fear of unemployment (97.8% in Dhehiba, 90.8% in Ben Guerdane); restrictions limiting border trade (97.4% in Dhehiba, 90.8% in Ben Guerdane); the lack of economic development (96.8% in Dhehiba, 94.4% in Ben Guerdane); and even food insecurity (89.4% in Dhehiba, 58.9% in Ben Guerdane). Recurring closures of the border post in Ras Jedir during 2015 have only strengthened this feeling of insecurity. In fact, this border crossing now seems to represent important political questions. Management of the border post is no longer subject to the whims of two authoritarian regimes, as was the case before 2011. It is now the object of complex arrangements between various civil or security actors, whether old or new, private or institutional,[93] competing for revenue and legitimacy, all of whom are subject to the vagaries of an unstable political situation on both sides of the border.

However, the fear of the Libyan conflict spilling over the border is very present in people's minds. When we completed the quantitative part of the survey, two months before the attack on Ben Guerdane, most people felt very positive concerning the security situation in their city (67% in Ben Guerdane, 84.8% in Dhehiba). A majority of Ben Guerdane residents stated that they had trust in the army (60.5%), while in Dhehiba half of the respondents said that police behaviour had improved since the revolution. But at the same time, many declared that the flow of arms was a threat (66% in Ben Guerdane and 70.3% in Dhehiba),[94] and were afraid of the infiltration of armed groups because of the Libyan disorder (77.8% in Ben Guerdane, 79.1% in Dhehiba).

This increased uncertainty appears to be coupled with a great distrust vis-à-vis the political elites. In both cities, most respondents believe that the attitude of the parliamentary deputies representing their governorates has not changed since the revolution.[95] This applies to the two main parties of the ruling coalition, the Islamist party Ennahda, which has three seats in Tataouine and five in Medenine, and Nidaa Tounes,[96] with one seat in Tataouine and one in Medenine; as well as to three other small parties: the *Union*

92 Since 2011, the Tunisian press has uncovered several medicine smuggling cases. It was recently reported on the Facebook page of the Municipality of Zuwarah that Libyan officials had intercepted a cargo of medicine from Tunisia. See Zuwarah Municipal Council, Facebook post, https://www.facebook.com/788122287876172, May 2016

93 The Tunisian-Libyan Friendship Association is among the new players. Legalised in 2012, it played the role of a 'local actor in conflict resolution' with Libya.

94 According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), "most firearms entered the country during the first half of 2011, when the security vacuum was most pronounced and when the Libyan conflict was at its height". See ICG, Tunisia's borders: Jihadism and contraband, Middle East/North Africa Report N°148, Brussels: ICG, 2013, p.16, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/tunisia-s-borders-jihadism-and-contraband.pdf. In March 2015, the Tunisian authorities announced they had discovered a weapons cache at the Tunisian–Libyan border. See Tunisie: Les forces de l'ordre découvrent une cache d'armes de guerre à la frontière avec la Libye [Tunisia: The police discovered a cache of war weapons hiding at the border with Libya], Huffington Post Maghreb, 9 March 2015, http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/03/09/libye-tunisie-armes_n_6832854.html

95 Attached to the governorates of Medenine and Tataouine, respectively, Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba have nine and four deputies.

96 A party set up by the president.

patriotique libre (Free Patriotic Union) of Selim Riahi (a businessman who made his fortune in Libya); the *Congrès pour la République* (Congress for the Republic) (founded by former President Moncef Marzouki); and the *Mouvement du Peuple* (People's Movement). While this judgement primarily concerns Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda, it has special significance for Ennahda due to the fact that the parliamentary deputy Ahmed Laamari, president of the regional office of the party in Medenine, is from Ben Guerdane.[97] For many people, after the flight of Ben Ali, Ennahda seemed to embody an alternative to the old regime. It received the majority of votes in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane in the first free elections in the country in 2014. In 2011, its victory in the election of the Constituent Assembly, after more than a decade of exile and repression, was a major event in the eyes of one in three persons questioned (over 30% of respondents in both cities).

It is hard not to see the echo of the feeling of marginalisation in this general distrust, which successive governments and electoral majorities since the revolution have been unable or unwilling to face. To this one can add the absence of legitimate local institutions, the fact that municipal elections have *still* not yet taken place five years on. Residents of the two cities are deprived of any possibility of concerted involvement in managing the affairs of their community.

The distrust and uncertainty – but also the emergence of new players disputing the ruins of the RCD, anxious to recover its patronage networks, its resources in traditional leaders and its share of cross-border revenue – are illustrated by the rising tensions and social conflict. Tensions, which have been less visible since 2013, peaked in 2012, with clashes between the inhabitants of Dhehiba and Remada concerning an obscure fuel smuggling case and between two Ben Guerdane families concerning a land dispute.[98]

This situation of social conflict testifies to the emergence of a protest space largely independent of the traditional mechanisms used to control protest activity, that is to say the political organisations of the left and the Tunisian General Labour Union workers. In Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane, respectively, 20.5% and 23.5% of respondents reported having participated in a protest movement in 2015. Very few respondents, however, say they have taken part in a union activity (1.9% in Dhehiba and 2.9% in Ben Guerdane), which is in obvious relation to the structure of employment in the two cities and the extent of unstable employment and unemployment. Similarly, the legislative elections in 2014 as well as the presidential elections have revealed the weakness of the left in both cities.[99] However, the protest space seems to overlap with a part of civil society, made up of a number of local organisations mainly led by young people. In Ben Guerdane, several associations – unevenly led and organised – emerged in the aftermath of 14 January 2011. Most such associations, such as the *Afaq* (Outlook) associations, *Sana*, *Ben Guerdane Al Ghad* (Ben Guerdane Tomorrow) or the local branch of the *Union des diplômés chômeurs* (Union of Unemployed Graduates), attract young people of both sexes and are active on the issue of unemployment, trying to establish citizen diagnoses and make proposals for development. In Ben Guerdane, 9.5% of the respondents say they have taken part in an activity of an association. Under Ben Ali, the small city of Dhehiba was completely muzzled. But the post-14 January period saw the development of some 20 associations, mostly of a charitable nature such as the Al-Rahma Association, or active on issues of development such as the Employment Association or the Veterans' Association. Some 9.9% of survey respondents are members of such associations.

97 Ahmed Laamari, born in March 1952 in Chahbania, 40 kilometres from Ben Guerdane, is one of the historic figures of Ennahda in the south. He was convicted several times under the old regime and spent 15 years in prison following the trials of the early 1990s. In 2011, he was arrested during the revolution and then released after the flight of Ben Ali.

98 The clashes took place in early May 2012.

99 See the low scores for Hamma Hammami, the left candidate in the presidential election (318 votes in Ben Guerdane and eight votes in Dhehiba). Source: Independent High Authority for Elections, http://www.isie.tn/ar/

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The security forces block a street in Ben Guerdane days after the March attack on the border city, 2016.

This protest space has gradually focused on two demands: opening the border crossing and development. Since 2014, general strikes, roadblocks on roads leading to the border crossing, sit-ins and public protests have emerged as repertoires of collective action, particularly mobilising youth in precarious employment and the unemployed. Some people see these protests as manipulations orchestrated by barons seeking to improve their position in the border economy, or the manoeuvres of a vengeful plot of the old regime. In reality, this protest, in essence, is similar to what has also been observed in other marginalised territories such as at Kasserine. It is the direct result of the politicisation and radicalisation of a part of the youth convinced, under the influence of the revolution, that employment and development are rights. It is also rooted in a long history of mobilising a register of regional marginalisation and demanding a national affiliation through economic and social inclusion.[100]

The other form of youth radicalisation is undoubtedly Salafi jihadism, which, while it continues to spare Dhehiba, has managed to take root in a section of the youth in Ben Guerdane. A police source said that 26 of the attackers in Ben Guerdane in March were from the city. How can this territorial foundation of jihadism in Ben Guerdane be explained? In fact, we made the choice not to incorporate any question relating to Salafism in the quantitative questionnaire to avoid any kind of apprehension on the part of the respondents.

During the formal and informal interviews, the subject of jihadism allowed us to understand to what degree the population rejects the amalgamation of terrorism and smuggling, which was felt to be another form of stigmatisation of poverty, marginalisation and the south in general. Some 82.2% of respondents in Ben Guerdane criticised the media coverage of the security situation in their city, as compared to 72% in Dhehiba. However, the appeal of jihadism among young people is not a disputed fact,[101] not even a new

100 The protests in Dhehiba and Ben Guerdane recall those of the unemployed in Ouargla in southern Algeria. See, for example, N. Belakhdar, 'L'éveil du Sud' ou quand la contestation vient de la marge: Une analyse du mouvement des chômeurs algériens ['The awakening of the South', or when the challenge comes from the margins: An analysis of the movement of the Algerian unemployed], in Politiques africaines [African Politics], 1(137), 2015, pp.27–48

101 A 2015 study argues that Tunisian jihadists in Syria come first of all from Bizerte and Ben Guerdane. See The Soufan Group, Foreign fighters: An updated assessment of the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq, London: The Soufan Group, 2015, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate1.pdf

phenomenon in the region. Some observers trace its origins to September 2001, when the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York received the approval of some youth. However, the real turning point seems to be the year 2003, when hundreds of young people decided to go and fight against the US invasion of Iraq.[102] It is even claimed that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (al-Qaeda leader in Iraq) reportedly said: "There is a small town in Tunisia called Ben Guerdane. If it was near Fallujah it would have liberated Iraq." Later, in 2007, 8 of the 10 young people arrested in Nahr al-Bared, a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon where very deadly clashes between the Lebanese army and a Salafi jihadist group have taken place, were from Ben Guerdane. It is clear that in 2011 several Salafi jihadists, including Meftah Manita, an alleged leader of the commando that attacked Ben Guerdane, were present in the city during the Libyan refugee crisis, either in person or through charitable associations. These Salafi jihadists played a role in the relief of the refugees. The same year, following the opening of the Syrian front, some of the young people who wanted to join the jihad against Bashar apparently passed through Ben Guerdane. The flow of young jihadists increased with the strengthening of the security checks at Tunis-Carthage airport.[103] In 2013, the classification of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia as a terrorist organisation pushed the Salafi to flee via the Libyan border and to build or consolidate smuggling networks or links of sympathy in Ben Guerdane. Later, the IS implantation strategy in Libya, facilitated by the disorder in the country, took advantage of the allegiance of Tunisian Salafi groups to the new 'Caliphate', an allegiance that also helped plan the attack on Ben Guerdane.

The few alleged attackers about whom we were able to collect information have more or less the same profile.[104] They were all young, unemployed or involved in the informal sector, and many were from the suburban areas near Ben Guerdane.

One thing is certain: the strengthening of the security apparatus, the militarisation of the border, and the active support and cooperation with Western capitals were not enough to protect the country and its border area from IS. The jihadist threat has less to do with foreign influence than it has with domestic ones inside the country. As in other marginalised territories, it highlights the crisis of state regulation and the increasingly evident link between dissident territories and territories without rights in the economic and social sense.

102 This is the estimate of the ICG. See ICG, 2013, Op. cit.

103 During our survey in the working-class neighbourhoods of Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher in greater Tunis, we were told of several examples of young people who managed to leave Syria via the Libyan border. O. Lamloum and M.A. Ben Zina (eds.), Les jeunes de Douar Hicher et d'Ettadhamen: Une enquête sociologique [Youth of Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen: A sociological survey], Tunis: International Alert and Arabesques, 2015

104 The alleged attackers have been named by the Tunisian Ministry of Interior as Bashir Slimani, Houssin Ben Khalifa, Adel el-Ghandri, Meftah Manita, Mohamed al-Kourdi, Aymen Chniter, Moustapha el-Nayib, Houcine el-Ferjani, Bachir el-Dardouri, Mohamed Naji and Chokri Houcine.

7. Conclusion

This research does not claim to fully explain the complexity of the situation in the border region of southern Tunisia, a region that has been shaken, as have other regions, by a fluid situation on both sides of the border. Following this study, Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba will no doubt continue to be partially hidden from our view in the arrangements that are made and unmade between new and old players who may be local, national or transnational, and their conflicts over revenues, hegemony and legitimacy. More modestly, the challenge of this endeavour is to illuminate the dynamics at work from the perspective of the inhabitants by offering a dual quantitative and qualitative approach capable of reconstructing the inhabitants' perceptions of their living space while presenting the structures that condition it.

As told by their inhabitants, five years after the flight of Ben Ali, Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba are a condensed version of all the consequences of the broken promises of the revolution. It was a revolution that not only failed to offer an inspiring story to all its citizens, but also failed to reduce regional disparities, and economic and social exclusion. The state continues, it seems, to reproduce its marginal border regions, thereby eroding its legitimacy and stirring up dissent.[105] In the end, it continues to consider its border regions from an exclusively security viewpoint, with little regard for the economic and social security of its inhabitants.

Recommendations

These recommendations are addressed primarily **to national and local authorities as well as security agencies**. They are also relevant to Tunisia's international partners and agencies working along the Libyan border. To ensure the inclusive development and democratic governance of the border regions, it is essential to:

Recognise regional disparities and rehabilitate the specific history of the south:

- recognise the south as a victim of systematic state exclusion and tackle the issue of regional inequality by enforcing positive discrimination in public policy;
- recognise and commemorate historical figures and the struggle of resistance against colonialism as well as victims of the repression of Youssefism, for example, in the education curriculum, memorial sites and statues, museums and so on;
- support an academic programme of research on the national liberation movement and postcolonial history in order to break with the political instrumentalisation of history and understand and acknowledge controversial and violent episodes that mark Tunisian contemporary history; and
- facilitate and support the work of the Truth and Dignity Commission to restore truth, justice and compensation to victims of repression in Tunisia.

Invest in good governance as a means to overcome political, social and economic exclusion:

- support inclusive governance by instituting participatory processes that give marginalised populations a voice in decision-making and involve them in instituting accountability (examples include participatory budgeting processes, local elections and citizen audits for public projects);

105 Similar dynamics have been observed and analysed in Algeria, indeed holding other contextual factors constant. See T. Dahou, Les marges transnationales et locales de l'État algérien [The transnational and local margins of the Algerian state], Politique africaine [African Politics], 1(137), 2015, pp.7–25

- enhance coordination between local public institutions that understand and respond to community livelihood needs and institutions mandated with the security of the border region; and
- support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to adopt a long-term, coordinated 'advocacy for structural reform' approach instead of a short-term, palliative individual-focused approach.

Adopt inclusive socio-economic development policies and a cohesive employment policy:

- adopt, in consultation with local communities, a regional development project able to respond to the needs of people;
- develop the agriculture sector by investing in agricultural vocational training, infrastructure, financing mechanisms and landownership reform;
- support projects that promote the collective interests of the local community by promoting mechanisms for the legalisation of social enterprise; and
- undertake transparent and socially responsible natural resource management in the region, including the management of oil, marble and salt, by involving local communities in the decision-making, reinvesting profits into the local community and employing local people.

Improve young people and women's participation in and access to resources, infrastructure and services:

- promote gender-sensitive policies at the national and local levels that support the allocation of resources for the benefit of women in disadvantaged areas, improving their access to infrastructure and services such as transport, water and reproductive health;
- build trust between state institutions and young people by establishing mechanisms that increase young people's participation in the decision-making processes of local authorities, including employment policies; and
- develop a proactive strategy to prevent the phenomenon of school dropouts, which is so prevalent in disadvantaged communities on the border.

Improve understanding of the border and border communities, including the border economy and its relationship to security:

- create an open dialogue between border communities and the central state, and commission participatory research in border regions to develop a nuanced understanding of the border, including the difference between the harmful illicit economy and the illicit economy as an essential survival strategy, and the relationship between terrorist groups and the border economy; and
- support the organisation of local dialogue forums in Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba on border governance, border economy and cross-border trade with Libya to develop policies able to take advantage of the border in the interests of all, such as the establishment of a free-trade zone.

Improve the accessibility and accountability of security provision along the border:

- promote security sector reforms (SSRs) that address corruption, lack of public communication and human rights violations as the drivers of insecurity on the Libyan border;
- support initiatives in favour of community participation in improving security based on respect for human rights, rule of law and accountability of security forces; and
- support and develop impartial academic understanding of processes of radicalisation and the individual backgrounds and perspectives of combatants in conflict zones in order to develop evidence-based policies aimed at countering radicalisation and rehabilitating combatants.

To international NGOs, international institutions and Tunisia's partner states, the research highlights the following recommendations:

- support SSR and social reforms that aim to improve accountability;
- prioritise bilateral and multilateral aid for youth inclusion programmes; and
- prioritise a holistic human security approach to prevent radicalisation.

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