

The Tunisian Forum
For Economic and Social Rights

THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN TUNISIA

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In memory of Ahmed Mani

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to analyze the securitization of migration in Tunisia by focusing on the way different political agents and influential actors on social media represent sub-Saharan migrants as sources of societal, existential and economic risks. Using the theoretical framework of Securitization Theory as developed by the Copenhagen and Paris schools and mobilizing the tools of the Sociology of Social problems, the research argues that representing migrants as sources of threat is a process that results from the intersection of the actions and interests of multiple actors emanating from different social and political fields and who are impacted by national and international constraints. The analysis focuses on discourses as well as on the national and international contexts that favored the securitization of migration in Tunisia. It puts under study the practices and tools deployed against migrants while shedding light on their political and symbolic aspects and effects on the immigrants and the state.

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INTRODUCTION

From the Political Instrumentalization of a Taboo Subject to the Securitization of Clandestine Migration in Tunisia

« We're not the police force of Europe, or anyone else for that matter. We're the Tunisian police and we only guard the Tunisian coast. »¹
Nabil Ammar, Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs

More than a decade after the 2011 uprisings that toppled the Ben Ali regime, the Tunisian authorities continue to be accused of acting as Europe's policemen. At the end of a press conference organized by Tunisian diplomacy, Tunisian Foreign Minister Nabil Ammar responded to such claims. However, his reaffirmation of Tunisia's intention to protect only its own borders can hardly hide the fact that it is also in Europe's interest to protect itself against the flow of illegal migration from Tunisia. What's more, this response reflects a reduction of the Tunisian state to a police force and illustrates the purely security-oriented approach that weighs on Tunisia's border control policy when faced with clandestine migration. Obviously, the minister's statements cannot be the answer to the questions of journalists and observers, but it is important to stress the importance of continuing the debate on Tunisia's migration policy with representatives of the state, something that was impossible in the years before the 2011 revolution. During these years, clandestine migration was a taboo subject that was off limits in the media. Academic research in Tunisia was not exempt from this censorship, with

¹ *Nabil Ammar, Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs : Tunisia is not a "police force" for Europe, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=455461730558384>*

the exception of a few studies courageously carried out despite the dictatorship² These were carried out in a context of cooperation between the Ben Ali regime and the European Union (EU) on border control. In this context of outsourcing borders to North Africa, Tunisia was on the way to becoming *Europe's Guantanamo*³.

The genesis of this cooperation goes back to the late 1980s, when the Regional Consultative Processes on Migration (RCP)⁴ began bringing together leaders from both sides of the Mediterranean to coordinate border control policies and the deployment of visa procedures. This consultation has given rise to the creation of *structured networks of interdependence*⁵ where State authorities become *socialized*⁶ to the same hegemonic practices and logics, framing the spectrum of their choices in terms of migration policies. These same lexicons linked to border outsourcing practices were further developed and assimilated by partner countries after the Berne Initiative and the establishment of the International Agenda for Migration Management (IAMM) in 2001. In Tunisia, regional consultations and exchanges within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since 1995, and since its accession to the EU's Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2005, have favored *the transfer*⁷ of European policies to the Tunisian authorities. The Ben Ali regime has not been passive in the face of European plans to delegate certain border management tasks but has been able to exploit European interests and channel them to its own advantage. Cooperation with Europe in the management of migration flows gave the Ben Ali regime an international legitimacy that enabled it not only to evade criticism of its internal policies⁸ but also to maintain the central role of its regime in the control of society, by denying its opponents the service of renewing their passports and by controlling Tunisians living abroad through associations and amicas ostensibly created to integrate the diaspora in the development process of their country, one of the principles of the IAMM⁹. In fact,

² Monia Benjemia, « Repression of illegal migration in Tunisia », in *The Maghreb challenged by sub-Saharan migration*, Hommes et sociétés (Paris: Karthala, 2009), 267-78, <https://doi.org/10.3917/kart.bensa.2009.01.0267>; Monia Benjemia, « Tunisia, the beacon of European borders », *Plein droit* 73, n° 2 (2007): 35-38; Hassen Boubakri et Sylvie Mazzella, « Tunisia between transit and immigration: migration policies and reception conditions for African migrants in Tunis », *Autrepart* 36, n° 4 (2005): 149-65; Mehdi Mabrouk, « Illegal emigration in Tunisia: Organizations and channels », *NAQD* 26-27, n° 1-2 (2009): 101-26, <https://doi.org/10.3917/naqd.026.0101>

³ Vincent Geisser, « Guantanamo at Europe's gates? », *Migrations Societe* 122, n° 2 (2009): 3-10.

⁴ Colleen Thouez et Frédérique Channac, « Shaping International Migration Policy: the Role of Regional Consultative Processes », *West European Politics - WEST EUR POLIT* 29 (March 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380500512783>.

⁵ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, « Channelled Policy Transfers: EU-Tunisia Interactions on Migration Matters », *European Journal of Migration and Law* 16 (February 2014): 97-123, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-00002050>

⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Waveland Press, 2010), <https://books.google.tn/books?id=OaMfAAAAQBAJ>

⁷ David Marsh et Jason Sharman, « Policy Diffusion and Policy Transfer », *Policy Studies* 40 (June 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442870902863851>.

⁸ Geisser, « Guantanamo at Europe's gates? »

⁹ Cassarino, « Channelled Policy Transfers: EU-Tunisia Interactions on Migration Matters ».

one of the few times that Tunisia accepted the readmission of Tunisians who had been in Europe illegally was in 2009, when the regime wanted to repatriate people who had been in Lampedusa as refugees from the repression of the uprising in the Gafsa mining basin. This readmission was used by the Ben Ali regime to demonstrate its cooperation and thus to divert the attention of European partners from the popular uprisings in Gafsa. The Ben Ali government did not *prioritize* repatriation in its migration policies¹⁰. On the other hand, Tunisia has demonstrated that it can successfully intercept the boats of *border burners*¹¹, known as *Haragas*, and anticipate the activities of smugglers before they cross the Mediterranean with dozens or even hundreds of migrants. The agreement between the EU and Tunisia was also designed to promote legal migration channels for skilled professionals and students, as part of the government's strategy to ease social tensions resulting from high unemployment rates¹². The intersection of the interests of European countries, Italy and France in particular, and the objectives of the Benalid regime has resulted in Tunisia adopting a liberal-security approach that consists of repressing bad migrants, the illegal ones, and taking advantage of good legal migrants both to develop its position in the global economy as an exporter of skilled labor and to benefit from currency transfers from abroad.

What about Sub-Saharan migrants in transit through Tunisia? They were subjected to repressive laws criminalizing them and punishing those who tried to help them¹³. Undocumented sub-Saharan migrants were practically ignored by the regime and were not even entitled to apply for asylum, as no law had been drawn up to regulate the conditions and procedures for doing so. Under these conditions, if they do not make the sea crossing or escape police control, they are either deported or placed in detention centres. The increase in their numbers since the 2000s has raised the question of whether Tunisia was being transformed from a country of departure and transit to a country of destination¹⁴ and what rights these migrants should be granted. Clandestine immigration in Tunisia has thus become a subject for researchers, whereas it was exclusively emigration that preoccupied both the academic world and the State. It was especially after the uprisings of the so-called "Arab

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, « Hierarchy of Priorities and Readmission System in Tunisia's Bilateral Relations with the Member States of the European Union », in *Maghreb et Sciences Sociales*, par Francois POUILLON et al., IRMC/L'Harmattan (Paris, 2012), 245-61, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/24935>.

¹¹ Farida Souiah, « "Burning" borders: escape or protest », in *Tunisie au présent : une démocratisation au-dessus de tout soupçon ?* (CNRS Editions, 2018), 377-93, <https://hal.science/hal-02117543>.

¹² Hamza Meddeb, « Run Or Die. El Khobza Race and Daily Domination in Ben Ali's Tunisia », *PhD Thesis*, January 1st 2012, https://www.academia.edu/43570339/Courir_ou_mourir_Course_%C3%A0_el_khobza_et_domination_au_quotidien_dans_la_Tunisie_de_Ben_Ali.

¹³ Benjemia, « Repression of illegal migration in Tunisia ».

¹⁴ Boubakri et Mazzella, « Tunisia between transit and immigration ».

Spring” and the escape to Tunisia of Libyans, Syrians - and the Sub-Saharanans who were in Libya - that the issue of immigration gained momentum and became publicized, partly due to the freedom of expression enjoyed by Tunisian society after the fall of Ben Ali. Organizations such as the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) have also played a role in publicizing the issue, extending the focus to sub-Saharan refugees and migrants.

Yet publicizing the issue of clandestine immigration and refugees has not been accompanied by the establishment of a migration policy that takes account of sub-Saharan refugees and clarifies the modalities of cooperation with the EU in terms of border control, the proof being that after 13 years of the revolution Tunisia is still designated as Europe's gendarme¹⁵ in the Mediterranean. Worse still, while the publicization of the issue during the post-revolutionary period called for the establishment of a legal framework recognizing migrants' rights and the improvement of Tunisia's capacity to receive Syrian and Libyan refugees from civil wars, today immigration is perceived as a source of threats. This perception of sub-Saharan migrants has led to violent tensions between Tunisian residents and migrants and a wave of police repression against blacks, a change that began in 2022 but has worsened since 2023.

The transformation of clandestine migration from a taboo subject, instrumentalized by the state, to a publicized phenomenon in the aftermath of the revolution has been widely debated¹⁶, however, the study of the dynamics that have given rise to securitization since 2022 remains modest, if not non-existent, if we consider only the studies that have been carried out in accordance with the approaches to securitization that we will present at the end of this introduction. In this way, our research is in line with other studies that have attempted to address this issue, albeit on the basis of a limited number of problematic questions, namely:

How have sub-Saharan immigrants come to be perceived as endangering in Tunisia? In other words, how has the securitization of immigration taken place in Tunisia? Which actors and which

¹⁵ « Kaïs Saïed to Europeans: “Tunisia is not a guardian protecting other people's borders” - Kapitalis », viewed on July 14, 2024, <https://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2023/06/11/kais-saied-aux-europeens-la-tunisie-nest-pas-un-gendarme-protégeant-les-frontieres-des-autres/>.

¹⁶ Hassan Boubakri, « Migration and asylum in Tunisia since 2011: towards new migratory figures? », *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 31, n° 3-4 (December 1st 2015): 17-39, <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.7371>; Sabine Dini et Caterina Giusa, *Externalising Migration Governance Through Civil Society: Tunisia as a Case Study*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39578-0>; Cassarino, « Channelled Policy Transfers: EU-Tunisia Interactions on Migration Matters »; Vincent Geisser, « Tunisie, des migrants subsahariens toujours exclus du rêve démocratique », *Migrations Societe* 177, n° 3 (September 27, 2019): 3-18.

contexts have favored the securitization of sub-Saharan immigration, and how does this securitization translate into state practices and instruments?

This latest development has taken place in a particular political context marked by the virtual monopolization of executive, legislative and, to some extent, judicial powers by President Kais Saied, who reinstated a Presidential political system following his constitutional coup of 25 July 2021. In this context, criticism has focused on the role of the president himself, including the securitization of immigrants to Tunisia. When the President of the Republic, Kais Saied, described sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia on 23 February 2023 as "hordes of illegal migrants", a first category of critics explained this by the racism of the state and the President.¹⁷ In the same vein, Khalil Arbi proposed a return to the cognitive framework¹⁸ of public policy to understand how racism has influenced the policy of managing sub-Saharan immigration in Tunisia since independence¹⁹. Stephanie Pouessel evokes the role of racism in Tunisian politics and the nationalist populism that aborted a process of cosmopolitanism so desired by progressive forces. Although she returns to the history of anti-black racism in society, she proposes that the resurgence of this racism in 2023 is due to the nationalist and racist political discourses of the president²⁰. Mehdi Mabrouk and Riadh Ben Khelifa instead argue that the president's anti-migrant populism goes hand in hand with a security-based approach to the management of migration in Tunisia, and analyze the role of civil society in confronting racist discourse without identifying aspects of this security-based approach beyond the president's speeches.²¹ Maram Tebini's study²² focuses on the racist discourses propagated, including by the president and the Tunisian Nationalist Party, which she argues reflect the logic of subordination once imposed by Western colonizers on the colonized and now applied by the latter to subordinate other groups. In addition to this report, investigative journalists on alternative journalism platforms such as

¹⁷ « Tunisia. President's racist speech incites wave of violence against Black Africans », Amnesty International, March 10, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans/>

¹⁸ Pierre Muller, « Cognitive analysis of public policy: towards a political sociology of public action », 2000, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rfsp.2000.395464>

¹⁹ Khalil Arbi, « Public policies and references on racism », *FTDES* (blog), May 1st, 2023, <https://ftdes.net/politiques-publiques-et-references-sur-le-racisme/>

²⁰ Stéphanie Pouessel, « An aborted cosmopolitanism? Sub-Saharan migratory routes and the entry of racism into politics in Tunisia », *Arab Initiative Reform*, January 1st, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/103229491/Un_cosmopolitisme_avort%C3%A9_Parcours_migratoires_subsahariens_et_entr%C3%A9e_en_politique_du_racisme_en_Tunisie

²¹ Riadh Ben Khelifa et Mehdi Mabrouk, « Discourse on sub-Saharan immigration in Tunisia: the great misunderstanding! », *Confluences Mediterranée* 125, n° 2 (August 3, 2023): 91-106.

²² Maram Tebini, « Anti-Saharan migrant crisis in Tunisia: Discourse and violence », *FTDES* (blog), May 23, 2023, <https://ftdes.net/en/etude-crispation-anti-migrants-subsahariens-en-tunisie-discours-et-violences/>

Inkyfada²³, Legal Agenda²⁴ and Alqatiba²⁵ have produced numerous studies deciphering the role of the media and social networks in the spread of racist hate speech.

A second line of research explains the President of the Republic's speeches in terms of an adherence to the externalization of the EU's borders, which has led the regime to adopt a repressive security approach towards sub-Saharan migrants. Among these studies is Sofien Jaballah's policy paper, which postulates that the Tunisian state's security approach to immigration is part of the strategic partnership between Tunisia and the EU, to the point where we can speak of a single Euro-Tunisian policy for the management of migration.²⁶ He suggests that Tunisia wants to expel immigrants and prevent them from crossing the Mediterranean in exchange for the regime's legitimacy and international recognition. His analysis also focuses on the impact on immigrants and on the town of Zarzis, where the criminalization of fishermen who take part in rescue operations threatens their way of life. Taking a more psychological approach, Wael Garnaoui examines the consequences of the externalization of European borders for Tunisian families suffering from the trauma of immobility, the creation of a permanent sense of fear for sub-Saharan migrants who are victims of repression, and the internalization of borders in Tunisian cities.²⁷ For her part, Ahlem Chamli coined the term "felt externalization"²⁸ to describe the experience of fishermen and residents in Zarzis. She examines how the outsourcing of European borders to Tunisia is accompanied by the subordination of fishermen to the threats and violence of the Libyan coastguard, which is funded by Italy to intercept and obstruct migrant smugglers. She uses the term "fast violence"²⁹ to describe this threat to fishermen's lives,

²³ Inkyfada, « Racism in Tunisia: the power of misinformation », viewed on July 14, 2024, <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2023/03/03/racisme-en-tunisie-le-pouvoir-de-la-desinformation/>; Inkyfada, « Between hate and fake news, what influence do social networks have on government policies? », viewed on July 14, 2024, <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2024/01/26/cyber-reseau-haine-fake-news-tunisie/>.

²⁴ Ahmed Nadhif, « Let's create our own "internal enemy": populism and the use of 'xenophobia in Tunisia.», *Legal Agenda* (blog), July 6, 2023, <https://legal-agenda.com/للتصنّف-عدونا-الداخلي-الشعبي-وتوظف/>; Yassine Nebli, « Investigation into the tragedies caused by hatred of power and exploitation networks », *Legal Agenda* (blog), November 2, 2023, <https://legal-agenda.com/لليالي-الاقلاع-في-تونس-تحقيق-في-مأس-صن/>; Youssef Chadli, « Sub-Saharan immigrants in Tunisia: victims of racism and populism », *Legal Agenda* (blog), February 23, 2023, <https://legal-agenda.com/مهاجر-و-افريقيا-جنوب-الصحراء-في-تونس/>; Yara Khayami, « Sub-Saharan Immigrants Victims of a Racist Criminal Policy », *Legal Agenda* (blog), April 29, 2023, <https://legal-agenda.com/مهاجر-و-افريقيا-جنوب-الصحراء-ضحايا-عنص/>.

²⁵ Rahma Behi, « Demonization and incitement campaigns against human rights activists... the other side of Tunisia's migrant crisis », *Alqatiba* (blog), July 25, 2023, <https://alqatiba.com/2023/07/25/>.

²⁶ Sofien Jaballah, « EU-Tunisian Policy of Managing Migration Across the Mediterranean: Addressing Regular and Irregular Flows », *Arab Reform Initiative*, June 20, 2023, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/eu-tunisian-policy-of-managing-migration-across-the-mediterranean-addressing-regular-and-irregular-flows/>.

²⁷ Wael Garnaoui, « European border outsourcing and Tunisian migration policies: a psychology of socio-political impacts », *Confluences Mediterranee* 125, n° 2 (august 3, 2023): 107-22.

²⁸ Ahlam Chemlali, « Rings in the Water: Felt Externalization and its Rippling Effect in the Extended EU Borderlands », *Geopolitics* 29, n° 3 (May 26, 2024): 873-96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2198125>.

²⁹ Jenna Marie Christian et Lorraine Dowler, « Slow and Fast Violence: A Feminist Critique of Binaries », *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18, n° 5 (october 3, 2019): 1066-75.

and points out that a form of "slow violence" is transforming both the space of the town of Zarzis, which is being turned into a graveyard for strangers driven out to sea, and marine life, as fishing zones are increasingly displaced by the vibrations of Libyan patrol boats in Tunisian waters.

The latest studies mentioned present the outsourcing of European border control to Tunisia as a given. They presuppose a causality between the designation of sub-Saharan immigrants as a source of danger in Tunisia and cooperation between the EU and Tunisia. Contrary to this idea, we believe that explaining local phenomena solely by international factors leads us to ignore the dynamics inherent in the local context that facilitate the emergence of these issues. As for studies that tend to refer the new attitudes towards black immigrants in Tunisia to the racism of the state and influential actors in the media and social networks, we believe that the single factor of the racialization of the migration issue would not be sufficient to understand the state's security approach or popular perceptions of Sub-Saharan immigration. To point to racism and European policies of border externalization as the sole causes of these two developments is closer to a logic of blame and political contestation than to an attempt to understand objectively the reasons behind the securitization of immigration in Tunisia. By introducing only two explanatory variables, these studies are limited to a descriptive analysis of the discourses and manifestations (the how) and the consequences of the alleged political racism and the externalisation of the European borders. What's more, none of these studies examines the role of all the actors at the same time, nor their influence on each other in relation to the audience that receives their discourses. Consequently, by confusing a phenomenon with its motives, we believe that these studies fail to analyse the type of governmentality operated by the state and the actors and factors that influence its management of one of Tunisia's public problems. The racialisation of migration policy and pressure from the EU are just two of the reasons for what we call the securitization of migration in Tunisia. Before coming back to better clarify what we mean by securitization, we must first point out that we don't share the assumption that Tunisia has already signed up to the EU's border control agenda. Contrary to this assumption, we design the field of struggles between the EU, the President of the Tunisian Republic and other political and media actors to demonstrate that the management of clandestine migration is the object of contestation between local and international actors who act according to their own capital and motives in relation to the issue in question, clandestine migration. We highlight how Tunisia, by refusing to adhere to the European security agenda, ends up creating its own policy for dealing with clandestine immigration, which has so far proved just as repressive as Team Europe's policy. We argue in this research that the securitization of sub-Saharan immigrants is the result of the intersection of the actions of different

actors who influence and are impacted by national and international constraints. Thus, rather than seeking a deterministic causality, we will question the network of causalities and degrees of congruence³⁰ between the various factors that have contributed to the securitization of migration.

While our research is to some extent based on the above-mentioned studies, our choice of methodology and theoretical framework is more appropriate to the study of securitization.

Theoretical frameworks and interests of the research

This research does not follow in the footsteps of traditional security studies, which seek to identify threats or to evaluate the policies implemented to help secure the State or society³¹. In other words, the study is not concerned with the question of how the state or society can be protected from the real or perceived dangers³² posed by illegal migration. This process falls within the realm of the securing logics. Instead, in order to examine the reasons why a phenomenon is perceived as a source of danger, we opt for critical theories of security. We are therefore interested in the securitization of illegal migration in Tunisia, rather than the policies to be implemented to secure the state or the society.

In our view, it is important to make this distinction at the outset of any analysis, as confusion between these two concepts and approaches is fairly widespread, due to an inappropriate translation of the English term securitization, which was introduced by the Copenhagen school, essentially by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver.³³ We still use the term securitization (and not securing) for *the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat that is sufficiently salient to have significant political effects, or the designation of an object as a threat by a legitimate authority and acceptance as such by a significant audience*.³⁴ This definition by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver highlights the influence of the subjectivity of *actors who legitimately* identify one phenomenon or another as a source of *insecurity*. The concept of security is therefore subjective and depends on the perceptions of the actors who create insecurity through their talk of threats. Securitization is an extreme form of politicization, where politicization is the designation of an issue as a public problem that requires government action

³⁰ Thierry Balzacq, *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Routledge, 2010).

³¹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, et Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 204.

³² Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Wheatsheaf Books, 1983).

³³ Buzan, Wæver, et Wilde, *Security*.

³⁴ Buzan, Wæver, et Wilde, 23.

and the allocation of resources for its solution.³⁵ When an issue is no longer presented as a problem but as an existential threat requiring urgent action outside existing procedures, there is a shift from politicization to securitization.

This link with politicization brings the analysis of securitization, as introduced by the Copenhagen School, closer to the sociology of public problems, *which is a method of analyzing the competition in the public arena between social and political actors for a situation to be recognized and defined as a public problem*.³⁶ On the other hand, securitization depends on a more specific problematization, namely the selection of one version of reality to the detriment of other versions which it makes unthinkable.³⁷ This version of reality has to present a subject as an existential threat, which gives it an authority that Cefai and Terzi refer to as the *authority of public problems*.³⁸ According to the Copenhagen School, securitization results from the actions of securitizing actors who influence the public's perception of the security of a referent object - often the state or society - in order to produce certain effects and actions³⁹, the sociology of public problems postulates that a public problem is created through the collective action of the publicizing process, which includes the phase of expressing a feeling of unease ("issueness" according to the Copenhagen School) or of identifying a problem, the confrontation between different formulations of the problem, and finally the recognition and stabilization of a single formulation, which is then institutionalized and implemented through a public action program.⁴⁰

However, the two concepts diverge on several levels. First, the proponents of the Copenhagen School focus on the discourse and language of security actors, assuming that their use of the concept and lexical field of security is performative. In other words, their utterances create the security problem where it did not exist before and legitimize actions to solve it. Consequently, they find that security discourses are *self-referential*⁴¹ in the sense that they refer to elements of representations they produce that did not exist before they were uttered, rather than to objective realities. In this logic, what actually exists is less important than what is represented, and securitized subjects - migrants,

³⁵ Buzan, Wæver, et Wilde, 23.

³⁶ Damien Simonneau, « Constructing the threat and constructing public problems: pro-‘border fence’ mobilizations in Arizona », *Études internationales* 49, n° 1 (2018): 25-56, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050543ar>

³⁷ Joseph R. Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

³⁸ Lilian Mathieu, « Daniel Cefai, Cédric Terzi, The experience of public problems. Pragmatist perspectives », *Lectures*, march 6, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.7771>

³⁹ Ole Wæver, *Securitization and desecuritization*, vol. 5 (Centre for Peace and Conflict Research Copenhagen, 1993), <https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/assets/pdf/Waever-Securitization.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Simonneau, « Construction of the threat and construction of public problems ».

⁴¹ Buzan, Wæver, et Wilde, *Security*.

for example - are perceived as dangerous not for what they are, but for what they represent.⁴² Speeches about security are also self-referential in the sense that they create their own conditions for reception by the audience, which will validate their assumption that an entity is a threat.⁴³ Thus, Copenhagen School researchers analyze what is said and the meanings and norms communicated within the discourse (*the locutionary act*); what was done when the discourse was uttered (*the illocutionary act*); and the actions taken and the effects that followed the discourse (*the perlocutionary act*).⁴⁴ The approach of the Copenhagen School reduces securitization to the result of what it calls *speech acts*, or what is defined as discursive policies according to the sociology of public action.

The sociological approach is more interested in the contexts external to the discourse that explain its resonance with the beliefs and concerns of the audience or the public.⁴⁵ Thierry Balzacq argues that in order to have an impact on the audience, security actors refer to elements that are present in the social context familiar to the audience. They use a *semantic repertoire* made up of words and expressions known to the audience and knowledge derived from shared cultural elements and past experiences and interactions.⁴⁶ The use of alien semantic fields hinders the public's compliance with the security actors' agenda, since social interaction is only possible through the mediation of symbols. Instead, the latter have to use symbols that are known in the local context in order to ultimately exercise *symbolic power*⁴⁷ by using the necessary utterances to designate an entity as a source of threat and to ensure that the public is in agreement with this perception.

Furthermore, sociological research is revisiting the concepts of securitizing actors and *legitimate authority*, evoked by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver's definition of securitization, to explain the success of the securitization process through the actors' position on the field of power and their *influence and social capital*. The securitizing actor needs to have a position that gives him or her the legitimacy to speak out and to influence public attitudes. The position and structure in which actors are trapped also has an impact on their actions and motivations for the securitization of situations. Researchers

⁴² Alessandra Buonfino, « Between unity and plurality: the politicization and securitization of the discourse of immigration in Europe », *New Political Science* 26, n° 1 (March 1st, 2004): 23-49,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0739314042000185111>

⁴³ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*.

⁴⁴ Bruno Ambroise, « J. L. Austin's philosophy of language: what the spoken word does », *Philopsis*, January 14, 2015,

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01246820>

⁴⁵ Thierry Balzacq, « The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context », *European Journal of International Relations - EUR J INT RELAT* 11 (June 2005): 171-201,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052960>

⁴⁶ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*.

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

using the sociological approach also consider how *habitus* - the set of dispositions and habits imparted by the field of power and the actor's position within it - affects how the actor is perceived and acts.⁴⁸ This consideration leads some studies to question the intentionality of the actors in the securitization process. Similarly, Vincent Pouliot argues that social action does not need to be preceded by premeditated planning, and that a practice can become targeted without the actor being aware of it.⁴⁹ According to Thierry Balzacq, securitization can be intentional, or it can result from practices that were not intended to create a security problem.⁵⁰ Philippe Bourbeau adds to the above that the legitimacy of the actors of securitization does not necessarily depend on their positions or on their social power, but rather postulates that these actors can acquire legitimacy by talking about a security problem that they themselves have defined.⁵¹ His idea is that speech acts contribute to the formation of agents' positions in the field as well as their social capital and authority. By *emergent legitimacy*, he refers to the fact that an agent may have no authority prior to the securitization of a subject and find him/herself with significant legitimacy at the end of this process. He makes a distinction between *speaking with authority*, that is, speaking while having the legitimacy to speak, and speaking *with authoritative power* before one has acquired this legitimation.

Another discrepancy between the Copenhagen School's conceptualization and the sociological approach to securitization is the latter's interest in the operational technological tools and instruments of securitization, not just the discourses.⁵² However, it is not limited to the technical aspects of these instruments, but also encompasses their political and symbolic dimensions. The political dimension refers to the reasons behind the choice of certain instruments over others and the political mobilization to legitimize this choice. The symbolic dimension sums up the perceptions of the problem reflected in the choice of instruments and the images of threat they propagate.⁵³ In addition, the process of spectacularizing images of risk has a greater significance than the operational aspects of the tools.⁵⁴ In fact, by publicizing the use of certain instruments, securitizing actors create

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, « Structures, Habitus, Practices », in *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 52-65, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503621749-005>

⁴⁹ Vincent Pouliot, « The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities », *International Organization* 62, n° 2 (April 2008): 257-88, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818308080090>

⁵⁰ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*.

⁵¹ Philippe Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order* (Taylor & Francis, 2011).

⁵² G. B. Peters, « The Politics of Tool Choice », in *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*, par Odus V. Elliott (Oxford University Press, USA, 2002).

⁵³ B. Guy Peters et F. K. M. van Nispen, *Public Policy Instruments : Evaluating the Tools of Public Administration*, New Horizons in Public Policy (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Pub., 1998).

⁵⁴ Nicholas Genova, « Spectacles of migrant “illegality”: The scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion », *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (July 1st, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.783710>

scenes of stigmatization that influence the audience's perception of the securitized subject, generating what Daniel Cefai calls a *publicizing process*.⁵⁵ Thierry Balzacq suggests that securitization tools can be divided into two categories: *regulatory tools*, such as laws, constitutions and national strategies, which aim to prohibit certain activities that are perceived as threats; and *capacitive and technological tools*, which strengthen the ability of the authorities to implement certain decisions through new resources, the use of force, training and information management technologies.⁵⁶ According to his definition, securitization becomes " *an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development.*"⁵⁷ Securitizing is therefore discursive and non-discursive, intentional and non-intentional. ⁵⁸

While Didier Bigo's study focuses on the role of *security professionals* as securitizing actors who enjoy a legitimacy derived from their expertise and their claim to know "secrets" that the public does not, Alessandra Buonfino⁵⁹ and Fred Vultee⁶⁰ highlight the role of the media in formulating and *intensively* publicizing images of threat and in *putting a problem on the agenda*, which they pass on to the political authorities and the public. Other researchers, such as Ornella Urso, focus instead on the securitizing discourse of political actors, highlighting the political instrumentalization of immigration, which is always redefined according to the interests of each political party and actor.⁶¹

Finally, the Copenhagen School assumes that securitization depends not only on the discourses of securitizing actors and the actions of functional actors - who do not trigger the process but facilitate its establishment - but also on the support of what it sometimes calls a "*relative audience*" and

⁵⁵ D. Cefai, *Why we mobilize: theories of collective action*, Collection « Recherches » (Editions La Découverte): Serie « Bibliothèque du MAUSS » (Découverte, 2007), <https://books.google.tn/books?id=ddQTAQAAIAAJ>; Simonneau, « The construction of threats and the construction of public problems».

⁵⁶ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 17-18.

⁵⁷ Balzacq, 3.

⁵⁸ Balzacq, 2.

⁵⁹ Buonfino, « Between unity and plurality ».

⁶⁰ Fred Vultee, « Securitization as a Media Frame: What Happens When the Media 'Speak Security' », in *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, par Thierry Balzacq (Routledge, 2010), 77-93.

⁶¹ Ornella Urso, « The Politicization of Immigration in Italy. Who Frames the Issue, When and How », *Italian Political Science Review / Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica* 48, n° 3 (November 2018): 365-81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2018.16>

sometimes an "*important or sufficient audience*"⁶², the sociological approach is interested in the different types of audiences, which are diverse and can have different *decodings* of the discourses received, and can therefore approve or resist them according to their decodings.⁶³ Salter distinguishes four categories of audiences: *elites, technocrats, scientists and the working class*, and each category responds to securitizing discourses and actions according to its intellectual capacity, power and interests.⁶⁴ Philippe Bourbeau underlines the fact that the public is not only a receptive and reactive entity, but can also participate in the securitization process.⁶⁵ According to Paul Roe, audiences can provide formal support by helping to implement certain policies and instruments, and moral support by mobilizing with securitization agents.⁶⁶

Mobilizing these conceptual frameworks will help us to achieve the three objectives we have set for this study, over and above answering our research questions.

Firstly, this study aims to demonstrate the specificity of the study of securitization in Tunisia, during the period from 2022 to 2024, in comparison with studies focusing on Western countries. Indeed, the political context of this period, marked by the dissolution of parliament, makes it inappropriate to resort to approaches that focus on the role of political parties and the polarization between the different versions of the problem presented by these parties. In such a context, the study should instead focus on the other actors that contributed to the securitization of immigration, in line with the populist character of the regime. By suppressing opposing voices and intermediary bodies, and by proclaiming itself the servant of the people, this regime has eliminated any polarization on public issues and allowed the actors present on social networks - whose discourse is in line with the president's positions - to become more influential than the other parties. As a result, these influential actors, which include social network influencers and micro-trottoir channels, have become the only actors able to problematize a public issue and contribute to putting it on the political agenda, apart from the political decision-makers themselves. By focusing on the case of Tunisia, our study

⁶² Buzan, Wæver, et Wilde, *Security*, 27.

⁶³ Jan Ruzicka, « Have you seen a failure lately? Why failed cases of securitization matter », in *Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, New York, NY, USA, 2009*, <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=8180219206982639616&hl=en&oi=scholar>

⁶⁴ Mark B Salter, « Securitization and Desecuritization: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority », *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11, n° 4 (December 1st, 2008): 321-49, <https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2008.20>

⁶⁵ Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*, 41.

⁶⁶ Paul Roe, « Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK's Decision to Invade Iraq », *Security Dialogue* 39, n° 6 (December 2008): 615-35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010608098212>

contributes to the enrichment of securitization theories (traditional or sociological), as it is based on factual elements that testify to the specificity of the securitization process beyond the Western world.

The second aim of this research is to introduce critical theories of security, and more specifically the theory of securitization, to Tunisia. Admittedly, the analyses we develop are open to criticism, and we do not aim to do a flawless job. Rather, we want to introduce conceptual frameworks that have not yet been developed in Tunisia, with the aim of being able to decipher discursive and non-discursive policies through more appropriate analytical grids than those of the study of racism or descriptive discourse analysis. We believe that the concepts of the Copenhagen School (CS) and the sociological approach to securitization deserve to be mobilized more in Tunisia, especially in a context where the country is governed by a populist regime that implements a governmentality of fear. We see our research, which is a case study focusing on the securitization of migration, as a step towards the realization of this project, which can be extended to other dimensions and other cases. In line with this objective, we try to show that an analysis that takes into account the complexity of the phenomena and the multiplicity of state and non-state actors involved in decision-making in Tunisia is possible if we abandon the logics of blame and political contestation in a relatively objective analysis. This objective explains our use of theoretical frameworks from the sociology of public problem construction to analyze the role of non-state actors in the securitization of migration in Tunisia.

Such a study is needed since Tunisia has always been analyzed as a country of departure for migrants whose presence in Europe is a certainty. In order to understand the governmental and popular reactions to Tunisia's ongoing transformation from a transit country to a country of destination, it is essential to look at this process and replace the old paradigms of analysis. Through this kind of investigation, we can also understand how leaders and influential actors in a Third World country, whose nationals are subject to racism in the West, can adopt the same discriminatory logic and securitize migration. In this way, the study of the Tunisian case fits in with the study of securitization as an international phenomenon that can take place in any country according to its specific contexts. The study of the Tunisian case fits into the study of securitization as an international phenomenon that can emerge in any country according to its specific circumstances, but those circumstances cannot be isolated from the international and regional context that makes any analysis of securitizing within a country interesting for the analysis of securitizing in a region and the influence of the transnational field in this process. In this context, studying Tunisian securitization provides important

insights into European maneuvers. Therefore, this study postulates that through a multiscale analysis of the process of constructing immigration as a source of danger in a country, it is possible to capture what we call the securitization⁶⁷ continuum between different countries and regions.

Methods and conditions of the research

Drawing on the contributions of the sociological approach to securitization, our research analyses the process of securitization of migrants in Tunisia since 2022 and the attempts to de-securitize them. Since this process is not limited to discourse, but develops through specific tools and practices, and since the contexts that constrain or favor securitization frame this process, we use mixed methods⁶⁸ to answer our research questions. In the first chapter, we use the method of critical discourse analysis to analyze both the semantic repertoire of the political authority and the Tunisian Nationalist Party (PTN) and to understand their securitizing discourses through the analysis of their positions in the power field. We analyze the speeches, communiqués, petitions and reports of these actors in order to understand the cognitive framework that makes their discourse specific. The analysis will not be limited to speeches aired in 2023 but will cover the period from 2019 to July 2024. This focus on discourse will help us to understand the intertextuality⁶⁹ between the discourses of these two actors, as well as their convergences and divergences in relation to the alarmist statements of influential actors in social networks, which we analyze in the next chapter. The second chapter is devoted to a study of the international and national constraints that have shaped the thinking of securitization actors on the issue of migration. In the first part of this chapter, we show that the EU's pressure to involve Tunisia in its policy of outsourcing border management and its funding of NGOs reinforced a hostile attitude on the part of the state towards these NGOs and the idea of establishing an asylum policy in Tunisia. This attitude, shared by parliamentary deputies and certain sectors of civil society, ultimately created one of the conditions for securitization, namely the illegality of immigrants. This section is based on semi-directive interviews with a former Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA), a parliamentary deputy who is a member of the Foreign Affairs and Migration Committee, and the

⁶⁷ We borrow the concept of the security continuum, but postulate that this logic leads to the emergence of a securitization continuum. In other words, a field in which the securitization of a phenomenon in one country can lead to the export of this logic to another, under the influence of the transnational fields of security professionals. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, et Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

⁶⁸ Christopher Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations* (SAGE, 2021), 139-58.

⁶⁹ Iver B. Neumann, « Discourse Analysis », in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, éd. par Audie Klotz et Deepa Prakash (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 61-77, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230584129_5

director of an organization working on migration issues in Tunisia. As our interviewees asked us to keep their identities anonymous, we have chosen to omit any information about the period in which they held their positions that might allow our interviewees to be identified. This choice was made in order to respect the ethical principles of academic research and to honor our commitment to those people who agreed to meet with us, while others refused for various reasons. For example, one of the post-revolutionary MFA refused our request on the pretext that he was not an expert on migration, even though this had been the main challenge during his short tenure at the ministry. It should also be noted that our request to meet an official from the Ministry of the Interior was never answered. Under these conditions, we can see that it is better to retain the few people who accept our interview requests. However, this does not mean being satisfied with the interviewees' answers without questioning them. Semi-structured interviews enabled us to debate and contradict our interviewees' answers, to provoke more sincere, detailed and improvised statements. The second part of this chapter looks at the role of negative media coverage of immigration and discriminatory logics in shaping hostile attitudes towards sub-Saharan immigrants. We argue that these elements will serve influential actors on social networks to attract audiences to their alarmist discourses and put the issue of immigrants on the political agenda. The research in this section is based on the analysis of content shared on social networks, deploying the grids of the sociology of the construction of public problems to understand the narrative configurations created by the media and the reports of micro-trottoir programs established to generate a specific version of the migration issue in Tunisia. We show that this version, although to some extent at odds with elements of the PTN and presidential discourse, has influenced the perceptions of popular categories and decision-makers about sub-Saharan immigrants. The interest of this section is to examine securitization as a process that depends not only on securitizing actors, but also on public perceptions and cause entrepreneurs who crystallize immigration as a cause of divergence from local norms. In order to capture public perceptions and contrast them with the discourses and actions of securitizers, our research is based on observations in the cities of Sousse and Tunis during the months of June 2022 and January 2023, in addition to the period from June to August 2024. During the latter period, we published a questionnaire to which 240 people replied. It should be emphasized that we maintained our objectivity in publishing this questionnaire, kindly refusing any opinion that could provoke a hostile reaction against us, justifying this refusal with our interest in not influencing our respondents' choice of answers.

The final chapter looks at the practices and instruments used by the Tunisian authorities against immigrants and their supporters, focusing on their political and symbolic aspects. We will see that

these practices reflect the Tunisian state's intention to appear in control of the situation, as well as the EU's interest in creating a banoptic system of exclusion and refoulement of immigrants by proxy, all while clarifying the role of the transnational field of security professionals in providing capacity and technological tools to Tunisia. The second part of this chapter examines how securitization creates an atmosphere of insecurity among its victims: immigrants, citizens and members of immigrant support associations. To this end, we conducted interviews with migrants living in Tunis, while anonymizing their identities. These interviews took place in the evenings in a café near the respondents' homes in Tunis, and were organized after discussions on the WhatsApp application, at their request. We accepted this choice in order to reassure the interviewees and to conduct the interviews in a place where they felt safe. We also took care not to raise people's doubts by visiting the café where the interviews took place every day before the day of the interviews, and by establishing a friendly relationship with the owner and waiters of the chosen café. On the day of the interviews, we made a conscious decision to wear appropriate clothing and not to bring a computer, so that no one would mistake us for members of an immigrant support organization.

Finally, in the last paragraphs, it is argued that the securitizing of migration has also caused damage to the State, including the loss of the monopoly of legitimate violence and diplomatic tension. We note that the Tunisian regime attempted to mitigate the consequences but without renouncing on the president's rhetoric introduced by the presidency.

Before we start, we'd like to be clear that throughout the research we move back and forth between different scales of analysis: the authorities representing the state as rational actors-not in the sense of trying to maximize their profit, but rather as actors acting according to certain theories/views of the world⁷⁰ and their understanding of their interests in a specific context; the resources and instruments used; and the influential actors beyond the state authorities, including the media, security professionals, social network influencers, and members of associations.

⁷⁰ John J. Mearsheimer et Sebastian Rosato, *How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 2023).

01 | A CRITICAL DISCOURSES ANALYSIS

The issue of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia only came to the fore in the international media following the President of the Republic's speech on February 21, 2023, and the subsequent wave of violence against immigrants. This part of our research looks at the specifics of Kais Saied's remarks, which have largely been analyzed through the prism of the study of racism. Instead, we develop the President's motivations for securitizing the phenomenon of migration, before turning to the Tunisian Nationalist Party, whose theses were adopted and reshaped by the President. We highlight the influence of the cognitive framework of these two actors on their interpretation of migration issues, as well as the impact of their positions in the field of power in Tunisia, in order to understand their interests.

1.1 The President of the Republic

1.1.1 Representation of Migrants as a Societal Threat

On February 21, 2023, the President of the Republic, Kais Saied, chaired a meeting of the National Security Council devoted to “*the urgent measures to be taken to deal with the arrival of large numbers of sub-Saharan migrants*”⁷¹. There were four key elements to this meeting which reflect a security approach to clandestine migration.

⁷¹ Presidency of the Republic, ‘President Kais Saied chairs a meeting of the National Security Council’, February 22, 2023, [رئيس الجمهورية قيس سعيد يترأس اجتماعا لمجلس الأمن القومي | رئاسة الجمهورية التونسية](#)

Firstly, the holding of a meeting of the National Security Council on the subject is evidence of the security prism that weighs on the Head of State's management of the issue. This Council essentially comprises the Ministers of Defense, Interior and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Director General of the National Intelligence Centre, the Chiefs of Staff and the Directors General of National Security and the National Guard. It has been organized since 2017 at the request of the President to safeguard the national interests and sovereignty of the State, and to assess internal and external threats.⁷² The institutional framework of the presidential speeches includes the issue of irregular migration as a matter of national security and classifies it among the dangers that require 'urgent measures'.

The framework chosen by President Kais Saïed is in line with his statements describing the migration of sub-Saharan Africans as a source of danger. At the meeting, the President declared that this was an abnormal situation and stressed that the arrival of hordes of Sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia was part of a '*criminal plot to change the demographic composition of Tunisia*'. He also points out that "*the implicit objective behind the successive waves of irregular migration is to consider Tunisia simply as an African country that does not belong to the Arab and Muslim communities*". It is clear that these statements describe irregular migration as a threat to Tunisia's societal security and to the preservation of the core values, culture and religion that constitutes the 'us', or the supposed national identity⁷³ that distinguishes 'Tunisians' from others. To better understand President Kais Saïed's logic, we need to understand his vision of migration, based on previous statements and the work of the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (ITES), which is attached to the Presidency of the Republic. On January 31, 2023, following the shipwreck of clandestine Tunisian migrants found off the coast of the city of Zarzis in December 2022, Kais Saïed declared that it was a "premeditated crime and that the sons of the Tunisian people had been murdered".⁷⁴ On 18 July 2023, at a meeting with the Director of the Arab Labor Organization, the President *insisted* that '*the necessary regulatory frameworks must be established so that young people stop thinking about emigrating, whether legally or illegally*'.⁷⁵ The same ideas were echoed during his meeting with the Minister of Higher Education on February 22, 2024⁷⁶ to give just one more example. As far as the ITES is concerned, its first seminar after the

⁷² The Geneva Centre for Security Governance in Tunisia, 'Government Decree No. 70 on the National Security Council', consulted on July 25, 2024, <https://legislation-securite.tn/ar/latest-laws/-2017-جانفي-19-مؤرخ-في-70-لسنة-2017-مؤرخ-في-19-جانفي-2017>

⁷³ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*.

⁷⁴ Business News, 'Kaïs Saïed : the Zarzis shipwreck is a premeditated criminal act', viewed on July 25, 2024, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/kais-saied--le-naufirage-de-zarzis-est-un-acte-criminel-premedite.534.126471.3>.

⁷⁵ Presidency of the Republic, 'Meeting with the Director of the Arab Labor Organization', July 27, 2023, <https://url1.io/RtqtG>

⁷⁶ Presidency of the Republic, 'Meeting with the Minister for Higher Education', February 23, 2024, [لقاء رئيس الجمهورية قيس سعيد مع السيد منصف بوكنير، وزير التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي | رئاسة الجمهورية التونسية](https://www.presidence.tn/fr/actualites/rencontre-avec-le-ministre-de-l-education-superieure)

appointment of its new director, Sami Ben Janet, by the President of the Republic, on December 4, 2019, focused on the immigration of skilled workers⁷⁷, barely two months after the election of Kais Saied. In addition, two reports produced by the same institute look at the impact of the 'brain drain', in particular on health professionals⁷⁸ and engineers.⁷⁹ Taken together, the Tunisian president's remarks on sub-Saharan migrants on February 21 2023, his comments on the shipwreck of Tunisian migrants, and his guidelines on the emigration of skilled workers from Tunisia are evidence that Kais Saied sees the arrival of sub-Saharan migrants as part of a plot to replace Tunisians who are forced to emigrate with sub-Saharan migrants who have arrived in large numbers. This theory was put forward by Abderrazak Khalouli, president of the 25 July Movement and member of Kais Saied's election campaign, in an interview broadcast on February 16 ,2023⁸⁰. From the above, we can see that Kais Saied's cognitive framework reproduces the ideas of the 'Great Replacement' theory, which is quite widespread in the discourse of far-right parties in Europe, and he places migration in the line of threats to Tunisian social security, both in terms of identity and in terms of the functioning⁸¹ of society, which requires the preservation of Tunisian skills.

In addition to portraying migration as a threat to societal security, the president's speech on February 21 criminalized sub-Saharan migrants. He said that '*successive hordes of migrants generate violence, crime and unacceptable behavior*'. These statements reflect a generalization that encompasses all irregular sub-Saharan migrants, who are portrayed as violating the individual security of Tunisians as well as national/state security. As unacceptable behavior, the President highlights the establishment by certain migrants of their own traditional courts and churches in the Tunisian territories where they are present. The President of the Republic considers this to be a violation of the sovereignty of the State and its institutions.

In this way, sub-Saharan migrants are portrayed as enemies⁸² of society, the individual and the state. They are enemies of Tunisian society because, coming from outside, they pose a threat to its homogeneity and to the norms of national identity that exist within its borders. Enemies of individual

⁷⁷ ITES, 'ITES - Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies, ITES, Strategic Studies', viewed on July 25, 2024, <https://www.ites.tn/news/611ba57ca8797048509574a6>

⁷⁸ ITES, 'ITES - Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies, ITES, Strategic Studies', viewed on July 25, 2024, <https://www.ites.tn/post/6615682e285bb65f10309d2c>.

⁷⁹ ITES, 'ITES - Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies, ITES, Strategic Studies', viewed on July 25, 2024, <https://www.ites.tn/news/6682a454a5b34162629a93c6>

⁸⁰ *Undeniable facts about the one million sub-Saharan Africans currently in Tunisia*, 2023, sc. 5 :50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I94YlcLmqgU>

⁸¹ Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*.

⁸² Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, 2006, 177, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203008690>

Tunisians because they threaten their well-being and peace. Finally, they are enemies of the State because they replace its judicial institutions and establish churches without State authorization, after having violated its borders.

A year and a half later, the president's speeches are no longer aimed solely at sub-Saharan migrants, but at anyone who comes to their aid, including members of humanitarian organizations and Tunisian citizens. At a meeting of the National Security Council on May 6, 2024,⁸³ the president described the associations working to help migrants as networks dependent on other foreign networks, from which they receive sums running into billions of Tunisian millimes. He even went so far as to denigrate the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), saying that *'they don't provide anything except press releases' and that 'only the Tunisian state should be addressed by associations'*. The issue is not freedom of expression, but treason, disorder and violation of the laws of the state, as far as critics of his previous statements are concerned. *"Freedoms are guaranteed by the constitution, international treaties and national laws, but freedom does not mean disorder and violation of the state and its laws. They have unsuccessfully targeted the state, and they are also targeting society by all means, including drug trafficking. The war must be waged mercilessly against these networks, which, together with international actors, undermine the security of society"*. Without specifying who these networks are, and by mentioning drug trafficking when he was talking about associations working to help migrants, the president establishes a link between migration, drug trafficking and conspiracies against the security of society. This technique, intentional or not, is part of what Didier Bigo calls the *"misgiving generation"*. Confusion between external and internal dangers, migration and trafficking, associations and plots against the security of the state and society. All these confusions create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety in the public, especially as this technique involves the failure to define and delimit the exact nature of these issues. The association of a series of threats, as if they were the result of migration, generates extreme vigilance on the part of institutions and citizens and justifies exceptional measures on the grounds of dealing with an "abnormal situation", a phrase repeated several times in the speeches of May 6, 2024, and February 21, 2023. The targets of this vigilance are migrants and humanitarian associations. We can therefore conclude from this speech that the president does not tolerate support for migrants or counter-discourse, the direct result of which is the creation of a

⁸³ Presidency of the Republic, 'Inaugural speech at the meeting of the National Security Council', May 7, 2024, [كلمة رئيس الجمهورية قيس سعيد في افتتاح اجتماع مجلس الامن القومي | رئاسة الجمهورية التونسية](#)

*discursive hegemony*⁸⁴ that criminalizes any opinion that contradicts the narrative propagated by the president and his supporters.

The final element to be highlighted in the speech delivered on 6 May 2024 is his identification of the role of citizens, “*Citizens must act according to their sense of belonging to the homeland, to preserve the homeland. I'd like to come back once again to the question of immigrants: how can this happen, and why do these immigrants stay in residences for so many years when the law obliges them (citizens) to inform the security authorities?*”. The use of oratorical questions is significant because this time the president is not addressing migrants and members of humanitarian associations, but the people, the central element of his populist regime. Turning a blind eye to the migrants' settlement is seen here as an unpatriotic act, a desertion in wartime and a betrayal of the homeland. This indirect intimidation is aimed more at accusing citizens in order to influence their behavior and encourage them to act as informers. This is part of the rationale of *governmentality of unease*⁸⁵, which encourages individuals to act in a way that is favorable to the interests of the state, without using coercive means, but rather by creating a *culture of insecurity*⁸⁶ in which every member of society is responsible for protecting the homeland against dangers that threaten the values and components on which the 'we' is based.

The elements present in President Kais Saied's statements lead us to conclude that they bear witness to a securitization based on governmentality of unease. His speeches targeted sub-Saharan migrants and members of civil society associations and framed the field of action of Tunisian citizens. At the popular level, they portray migrants as a source of threat to social security, designating them as public enemies who threaten national security and the sovereignty of the state in order to mobilize the judiciary and the security services as functional actors⁸⁷ of securitization.

The following sections attempt to situate Kais Saied's speeches in relation to his position as President of the Republic and his position within the state, in order to clarify his motivations for securitizing migration.

⁸⁴ Martin Nonhoff, « Hegemonic analysis: on the recent development of political discourse analysis in political sciences », *Langage et société* 120, n° 2 (2007): 77-90, <https://doi.org/10.3917/ls.120.0077>

⁸⁵ Didier Bigo, « Security and immigration: towards government by worry? », *Cultures & Conflits*, n° 31-32 (May 15, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.539>

⁸⁶ Jutta Weldes, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (U of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁸⁷ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 35.

1.1.2 Securitize to Govern

First of all, it should be remembered that every position requires its holder to deal with other influential players in the field of power. In this logic, Kais Saied's position forces him to take into account the impulses coming from other actors within the state, but also from society and the media. Each actor is influenced by these impulses, even if he is not aware of them. To explain these postulates, we need to introduce two variables linked to the political regime in Tunisia since 2021: the monopoly of power by the president in a presidential system and the populism of Kais Saied.

After ten years of political plurality and government by a parliamentary regime, the President of the Republic needed the support of the Ministry of the Interior to establish his new presidential regime. But this support cannot be guaranteed without benefits for the state's security apparatus. Securitizing migration will thus serve to justify the deployment of new resources and bonuses for the National Guard. Migration, being a phenomenon that concerns the EU, is used by the regime to acquire gains in the form of aid for border control forces and training as part of Mediterranean cooperation to counter irregular migration. In this context, an agreement with the EU provides for the financing of 278 million euros to Tunisia, two thirds of which is to be granted to the security and border control forces.⁸⁸ The desire to increase the resources of the state's security apparatus has been evident since the first year of Kais Saied's presidency and even before his constitutional coup. On August 2, 2020, during a visit to the National Guard units in the city of Mehdiya, the president stressed *"Tunisia's need for a wide range of equipment"*. He said: *'Several countries have expressed their willingness to help, but we prefer to work together to fight the causes of migration. Addressing the directors of the National Guard, he added: 'I know that you are making an enormous effort with what you have in terms of old equipment and patrols that keep breaking down, but what I wanted to say is that we need to tackle the causes of migration before we have new patrols'⁸⁹*. After his confiscation of full powers in July 2021, providing new resources has become a necessity, especially as it is no longer a question of combating the clandestine immigration of Tunisians that he referred to in the speech mentioned, but of combating the migration of sub-Saharan Africans in greater numbers. Above all, it has become an obligation because there is now discontent within the National Guard about the repeated shipwrecks of migrants at the seaside. It should be remembered that since the revolution and until 2021, fishermen and humanitarian organizations were trained and involved

⁸⁸ DW, 'EU supports Tunisia with 178 million dollars to curb migration', viewed on July 25, 2024, <https://url1.io/zTgFD>

⁸⁹ Presidency of the Republic, 'Irregular migration the subject of the President's visit to Sfax and Mehdiya', August 2020, sc. 5: 30, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/287790218993037>.

in rescue operations and searches for bodies thrown ashore, but the criminalization of such participation since 2018⁹⁰ has meant that only National Guard units are now involved in these operations, which they consider to be a burden. Since the sinking of the migrants in Zarzis at the end of 2022, the National Guard has been accused of not making the effort to search for the bodies⁹¹, an accusation it has tried to avoid by opting to intercept the smugglers instead. This dissatisfaction is evident when you listen to the Governor of Sfax interrupt the President of the Republic during a visit on June 10th 2023 to tell him that *"we have been tested by the large number of bodies rejected by the sea"*⁹², or the statements of the Minister of the Interior, Kamal Fekih: *'Why don't they talk about the huge number of corpses thrown ashore in the Mediterranean? It's become an insult to our sons and daughters of the National Guard who collect these bodies every day. 901 corpses from January to July alone in 2023'*⁹³. Must it be said that the corpses are often decomposed? and that several nurses who have to deal with them admit that they can no longer stand the sight and smell of these bodies? The other element that explains the president's recourse to a security-based approach to migration is probably its populist nature. By dividing Tunisian society between the people and the elite, and by declaring himself the defender of the former against the vicissitudes of the elite, the President of the Republic finds himself trapped in a permanent submission to the demands of the people and to other actors who convey the concerns of the people. Given that the populist regime relies on the support of "the people", it would be political suicide to oppose its tendencies. This explains why, during his visit to Sfax on August 2, 2020, the president analyzed the phenomenon of irregular immigration as the result of the impoverishment of the people and the imbalance of the world economy, and criticized the selectivity of European visa procedures,⁹⁴ while in February 2023 he used the narrative of a plot to change the demographic composition of Tunisia and the identity of Tunisians. In 2020, there was no popular pressure to block these flows, as there were not as many sub-Saharan migrants as there are today, and the president was more concerned with the irregular immigration of Tunisians. The only pressure came from the EU: *'Our position was clear: instead of sending us patrols, we need to work together to tackle the causes of immigration. In fact, the European countries, and Italy in*

⁹⁰ Voice of America, « Tunisian fishermen freed after towing migrants to Italy', September 22, 2018, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/libération-de-pêcheurs-tunisiens-qui-avaient-remorqué-des-migrants-en-italie/4582914.html>

⁹¹ FTDES, « In Zarzis and all along the Tunisian coast: equipment is mobilized for interception, not rescue', FTDES (blog), October 10, 2022, <https://ftdes.net/en/zarzis/>

⁹² *The President of the Republic visits Sfax*, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1381490775751245&rdid=16AdhP8jV5hdYcmw>

⁹³ *Interior Minister Kamel Fekih sums up the issue of immigrants in Sfax*, 2023, sc. 3 :50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqHVi_hPQ60

⁹⁴ Presidency of the Republic, "Irregular migration the subject of the President's visit to Sfax and Mehdia, sc. 7 :56.

particular, were understanding'. Since the Tunisian people were not in a hurry to stop irregular emigration, and since EU pressure did not really threaten the regime's political stability, there was no need to invent or adopt a conspiracy narrative. In 2023, the arrival of large numbers of sub-Saharan migrants was accompanied by popular and media pressure that led the president - supreme head of the armed forces and the only person in charge in a presidential regime established in a country where political power is personalized - to choose to frame the issue of irregular migration in a conspiratorial context. Admittedly, this narrative is simplistic, but it integrates the issue of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia into a complexity that could spare the president from assuming full responsibility for this issue. The president's exaggeration when he refers to the expression and vocabulary of war, when he mentions the involvement of local actors and international networks in this conspiracy, and when he insists on the sums of money used by the conspirators, all these elements present the issue as a challenge that goes beyond Tunisia and the capacity of the state. Consequently, there is no need to blame the president, who is fighting alone against all odds. The "cover your ass" strategy, in the words of Ian Lustick⁹⁵, is being used by the president to cover his tracks and mobilize the people behind the regime, especially as he intends to seek re-election and has indeed declared his candidacy for a second term on July 19, 2024.

Finally, Murray Edelman argues that migration allows politicians to ignore other structural problems and to transform them.⁹⁶ This is illustrated by the case of Tunisia, where President Kais Saïed's speeches came at a time when the country is experiencing record inflation (9.1%) and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan have failed. Rising prices and shortages of a number of food products have led to discontent among the working class, and the president has resorted to conspiracy theories to blame speculators⁹⁷ for these shortages. Sub-Saharan migrants have been added to the list of scapegoats for all Tunisia's ills. For months, the issue of sub-Saharan migrants had become so prominent that no one was talking about the structural problems and the failure of negotiations with the IMF.

At the end of this section, we conclude that the management of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia can be viewed through the prism of governmentality of unease⁹⁸ that President Kais Saïed has already applied on other issues. He governs by exaggerating the threat he attributes to an enemy in order to

⁹⁵ Ian Lustick et al., « Are We Trapped in the War on Terror? », *Middle East Policy* 13 (December 1st 2006): 1-27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2006.00267.x>

⁹⁶ Murray Jacob Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁹⁷ AfricaNews, « Tunisia: Kais Saïed 'at war' with food speculators! », March 9, 2022, <https://fr.africanews.com/2022/03/09/tunisie-kais-saied-en-guerre-contre-les-speculateurs-alimentaires/>

⁹⁸ Bigo, « Security and immigration ».

present himself as the savior of an '*abnormal situation*'. He relies on a semantic repertoire that resonated with the concerns of the population, inciting and reassuring them⁹⁹ by reminding them that "*the state is there for the people*"¹⁰⁰ to manage the crisis and that "*the president ensures the continuity of the state*"¹⁰¹. The myth of conspiracy is a way of deflecting blame and justifying the acquisition of new resources. *Politicians believe in their myths, even if they are the ones who create them. Partly because the myth is the way in which they frame political life, it is the fundamental pillar of their existence in the political sphere*, Paul Veyne suggests.¹⁰² For Kais Saïed, the myth is the only way to provide people with a simple explanation of phenomena and thus maintain control over complex situations. Kais Saïed's securitization of migration is therefore a securitization to maintain his control over the state.¹⁰³ However, as we will see in the third chapter, although this securitization allowed the security apparatus to reproduce and renew its operating methods, it got out of hand after the popular reactions that followed the speech of February 21, 2023.

1.2 The Tunisian Nationalist Party

1.2.1 Representation of Migrants as a Societal Threat

On November 26, 2022, three months before the President of the Republic's speech on February 21, 2023, he received a report drawn up by the Tunisian Nationalist Party entitled "The Ijasiyin settlement project and the eradication of Tunisia".¹⁰⁴ From the title of this report, we can see that this party takes the issue of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia to another dimension, that of national security. For its members, this is not a threat to the identity of Tunisians, but a colonization of Tunisia by sub-Saharan Africans that threatens the very existence of the nation. The actors of this colonization are the Ijasiyins, an acronym they invented from the Arabic initials of Afriquia Janoub Al-Sahra (sub-Saharan Africa) to stigmatize sub-Saharans as a category of new colonists. The report begins with the premise that Tunisia could suffer the same fate as Palestine and find itself colonized by a state called Ijsaël (in

⁹⁹ Didier Bigo, « To Reassure, and Protect, After September 11 », November 2001, <https://items.ssrc.org/after-september-11/to-reassure-and-protect-after-september-11/>

¹⁰⁰ P Presidency of the Republic, 'The President's visit to Jebeniana and El-Amra', July 13, 2024, sc. 1 :21, <https://www.facebook.com/Presidence.tn/videos/1231851581319703>

¹⁰¹ Presidency of the Republic, 'The President of the Republic talks to the people at Avenue Habib Bourguiba', February 21, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/Presidence.tn/videos/210898830783656>

¹⁰² Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks believe in their myths: an essay on the constituent imagination* (Editions du Seuil, 1983).

¹⁰³ Juha A. Vuori, « Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-Democratic Political Orders », *European Journal of International Relations* 14, n° 1 (2008): 65-99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107087767>

¹⁰⁴ Le Parti Nationaliste Tunisien, 'The Ijasiyin settlement project and the eradication of Tunisia', February 3, 2023, <https://url1.io/PFsPo>

reference to Israel). It draws a link with the creation of the state of Israel, insisting on the conditions that made it possible. These conditions include the support of European countries, the existence of a political doctrine of colonization and the complicity of local actors, which he sees as similar to what exists in Tunisia with the complicity of civil organizations, pressure from the EU to settle the Ijasiyins in Tunisia, and the existence of Afrocentrism, a doctrine that, according to the report, is similar to Zionism. The action plan proposed by the party to the president includes *the expulsion of the Ijasiyins, the prohibition of all international treaties and agreements that oblige Tunisia to receive irregular migrants on the pretext of protecting refugees, the search and surveillance of factories, restaurants and any other place where Ijasiyins work, the prohibition of landlords from renting to irregular Ijasiyins and the introduction of security permits for all rentals to foreigners.*¹⁰⁵

This action program is presented at the end of the report, after a presentation of the role of local accomplices and the Afrocentric doctrine. The report was sent to the president and published on the party's website. It was also discussed on TV channels¹⁰⁶ and in videos produced in Tunisian Arabic and broadcast on social networks.¹⁰⁷

By using this argument and this comparison with Israel, the party is exploiting a cause that is ingrained in the collective memory of Tunisians in order to influence their perceptions of sub-Saharan Africans. Apart from the fact that the Palestinian cause is part of the curriculum in Tunisia from secondary school onwards, there is a strong attachment among Tunisians to this issue, which they embrace as a religious and national cause. The party uses this fact to claim that the Palestinization of Tunisia is already taking place. In videos and press releases, its members repeat expressions such as '*Ijsaelian aggression*'¹⁰⁸ and '*Ijsaelian settlement*', referring to terms widely used in the Arab and Tunisian media to describe the conflict in the Middle East. They also use the terms '*invasion*'¹⁰⁹, '*armed organizations*' and '*self-defense groups*' to create a scenario in which the *Ijsaelian settlers create a state within the Tunisian state.*¹¹⁰

This alarmist discourse is also based on Tunisia's history, as stated in their Nationalist Vision of Tunisian Identity: "*For 1,000 years, Tunisia has been invaded from the East, the West, the North and*

¹⁰⁵ The Tunisian Nationalist Party.

¹⁰⁶ *Tunisian campaign against Ijasiyin settlement*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcW-KjG7GXI>.

¹⁰⁷ These videos can be accessed on the Party's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100090437133218>

¹⁰⁸ Zarzis, *Germany and the Final Solution against the Ijasiyin settlement*, 2024, sc. 0 :10,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPqi7ZhqjNk>

¹⁰⁹ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, 'Press release: The government's decision to expel the Ijasiyins, a positive step that must be followed by more radical measures', December 24, 2022, <https://www.tnp.tn/بيان-قرار-الحكومة-بترحيل-بعض-الأجبيين>

¹¹⁰ *The trap of legalising residence permits*, 2023,

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=884516419450383>

the South, and we have suffered every kind of violation and submission”¹¹¹ and in the party's founding declaration, they quote: “The party's objective is to make Tunisia a strong state in every sense of the word. Military strength enables us to fight against any foreign power and to win against any hostile power, it enables us to defend ourselves”.¹¹² For the faithful of the Nationalist Party, it was necessary to mobilize against the new colonists coming from the south of the country and to guard against a new invasion. This development of the lexical field of colonization has represented Sub-Saharan as a military danger that could eradicate Tunisia, and has resulted in some adhering to the logic of armed reactions, which explains such comments as we can read on the Party's web page: “I want to do my national duty against the issue of the Ijasiyins” “This is a campaign of extermination against Tunisia and its people, a plan to arm the Ijasiyins and plunge the country into war”.¹¹³ Such comments testify to some people's adherence to the narrative propagated by the party, and even to the use of the acronym it has invented.

The party's discourse focuses on the existential security of society and the military security of the state, rather than on societal and identity-based security, as one of its members puts it: “There is an extremely dangerous question that we must discuss, and that is the question of the existence of the Tunisian nation, the sovereignty and the right of the Tunisian nation to exist and to self-determine”.¹¹⁴ To better understand this premise, and to grasp what the party means by Nation, we need to re-examine its founding declaration and reports published since 2019.

*"The Nationalist Party's vision of the concept of nation goes beyond superficial collective genetic, linguistic, religious and cultural similarities. Rather, it considers the true essence of the primitive nation, centred on unity and solidarity, and thus on the capacity to act, to realise the general will and to control natural space. (...) The elements of identity (language, colour, religion, traditions...) are meaningless if we are powerless, submissive and exploited (...) Life itself is meaningless if we do not know greatness, glory, sovereignty and self-sufficiency (...) Life is meaningless without an ultimate goal and without great sacrifices".*¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Tunisian Nationalist Party, “The Nationalist Vision of Tunisian Identity”, October 26, 2020, <https://www.tnp.tn/الرؤية-القومية-للهوية-التونسية>

¹¹² The Tunisian Nationalist Party, “The founding declaration of the Tunisian Nationalist Party”, June 4, 2019, <https://www.tnp.tn/البيان-التأسيسي-للحزب-القومي-التونسي>

¹¹³ You can see the comments mentioned on the following note page: The Tunisian Nationalist Party, “Note of support for the decisions of the President of the Republic against Ijasiyin settlement,” February 21, 2023, <https://www.tnp.tn/بيان-مساندة-الحزب-القومي-التونسي-لقرا>

¹¹⁴ *The trap of regularizing residence permits* sc. 6 :30.

¹¹⁵ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, “The nationalist vision of Tunisian identity”.

"The current spirit of the Tunisian nation suffers from idleness, indifference and carelessness and rejects ambition, risk and adventure, discipline, rigour, jihad, seriousness, sacrifice and challenge (...) the Tunisian nation is suffering from a serious spiritual crisis because of a false consciousness that seeks to bury it in illusory Arab, Islamic and Amazigh unification projects." ¹¹⁶

In its Introduction to Tunisian Identity, the party argues that it doesn't matter whether the religion of Tunisians is Islam, Christianity, Judaism or any other, what matters is choosing the interpretation of a religion that serves the ultimate goal of achieving national power. He insists that instead of the Islam of impotence and ritual formalities, Tunisians must choose the Islam of victorious jihad as *"the religion of power, sacrifice and martyrs, sacrificed for the sake of the higher values in which Tunisians must believe"*. As for language, it prefers Tunisian Arabic for pragmatic reasons, as it is the language that all Tunisians understand. As for the origins of Tunisians (Carthaginian, Roman, Amazigh etc.), this is an *absurd* question according to the Nationalist Party. We must refer to Tunisians only as such and concentrate on their future instead of looking for their origins.¹¹⁷ The party also defines itself as a *spiritual-political movement that believes in the Tunisian nation and fights for the creation of the Tunisian nation-state*, with the aim of developing its power, first and foremost its military power.

From the above, it is clear that the Tunisian Nationalist Party abstracts Tunisia from its historical origins and its cultural and identity components in order to create a narrative of the establishment of a future-oriented Tunisian spirit characterized by *power, glory, discipline, strength* and other qualifications that demonstrate the military prism that dominates this party's thinking. The party's reports, declarations and communiqués reflect a totalitarian project in which individuals and their identities dissolve into the Tunisian nation-state in order to develop its power and face the dangers. Thus, the party's president, speaking of the stance to be taken against the Ijasiyins, states: *"It's not a fight between parties or associations, it's a fight for the nation, all parties, all associations, all the media and all the people must take part, all behind the state"*.¹¹⁸

In this context, Sub-Saharanans are described as a threat to the power of the State, especially those who are in an irregular situation and want to regularize their stay: *"Don't make too much of a fuss, regularization of stay means work permits, this means access to social security, it also means the right*

¹¹⁶ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, "The preliminary conceptions of Tunisian Nationalism", October 18, 2020, <https://www.tnp.tn/المفاهيم-الأولية-للقومية-التونسية-ال/>

¹¹⁷ We draw on these texts to refute the classification of the Tunisian Nationalist Party as a backward-looking movement. For an example of such an analysis, see: Ahmed Nadhif, "Fleeing to the Past: The Populist Climate and the Resurgence of Isolationism In Tunisia", Legal Agenda (blog), August 11, 2023, [¹¹⁸ *The trap of regularizing residence permits*, sc. 14 :05.](https://legal-agenda.com/الفرز-ع-الى-الماضي-المناخ-الشعبوي-/<u>https://legal-agenda.com/الفرز-ع-الى-الماضي-المناخ-الشعبوي-/
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to buy land and create housing, and therefore the organization of armed movements. This is exactly what happened in Palestine. They want to pass all this off under humanitarian pretexts, but in fact, it's a threat to the existence of the Tunisian nation".¹¹⁹

In addition, the Nationalist Party introduces a dimension that has not yet been publicized in official discourse when it refers to the right to social security that sub-Saharan migrants can enjoy if they have the right to work in Tunisia. The benefits of the *welfare state* are seen as privileges that only Tunisians should have access to, otherwise the integration of migrants into this system risks weakening the resources of the state. This is reminiscent of one of the common themes of far-right discourse¹²⁰ in Europe, the idea of national preference. Although the Tunisian state restricts the rights granted to sub-Saharan migrants, as we will see later in our study, the use of these logics in media discourse has not been one of the arguments used by state actors, and it is only recently that the economic factor has appeared in their discourse on irregular migration. Speaking at the International Forum on Migration in the Mediterranean held in Libya on July 17, 2024, the new Minister of the Interior, Khaled Nouri, said that "*clandestine migration costs the Tunisian National Guard more than 103 million euros every year, not counting the cost of voluntary deportations and not taking into account the losses to the system of subsidies for essential food products and the damage to agricultural harvests.*"¹²¹ The Minister of the Interior's list of economic losses was intended to encourage the EU countries to grant Tunisia more financial aid, a request clearly formulated by the Minister during the forum. On the other hand, the Nationalist Party wants to use the reference to economic losses to mobilize the working class to expel sub-Saharan migrants, stigmatizing them as a threat to the country's economic security.

The Tunisian Nationalist Party's securitisation of sub-Saharan migration preceded the President's speeches and consisted of presenting migrants as a new category threatening the nation's existential security and the country's economy. The party developed a narrative of victimisation and identified the threats before setting out a programme of action to deal with them. The images of threat have been constructed through the exploitation of collective memory and the semantic field of colonization and war. Members of this party have spread their story through videos, reports and communiqués in Arabic and Tunisian dialect, as well as through awareness campaigns in Tunisian

¹¹⁹ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, "Introduction to Tunisian Nationalism", sc. 5:46.

¹²⁰ The Tunisian party calls itself extremist in its founding declaration: "We do not deny or reject extremism, but we respect it because it is a sign of honesty".

¹²¹ Dbeibah chairs the meeting at the International Forum on Migration in the Mediterranean, 2024, sc. 55 :50, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=460788106748784

neighborhoods and petitions¹²² for which they claim to have collected over ten thousand signatures. This determination and mobilization of efforts and resources makes us wonder about the interest of this party in securitizing the migration phenomenon.

1.2.2 The Quest for Legitimacy

To understand the Nationalist Party's interest in instrumentalizing the issue of sub-Saharan migrants, we propose to analyze its position within the field of power in Tunisia.

The party was officially founded in December 2018¹²³, but since then it has not had the popular support to enter parliament in either the 2019 or 2022 elections. However, the party's founding declaration states that it wants to come to power in order to have the means to achieve its goal of restoring Tunisia's greatness. To this end, the declaration states that the party, which has no electoral base, will continue to disseminate its theory of Tunisian nationalism in order to gain popularity and ensure that Tunisians adhere to its theories so that it can govern once elected.¹²⁴ Party members insist that they are not in a hurry and that they are taking the time needed to do this social engineering and to train party members to participate in the elections. It is also worth noting their willingness to exercise power from where they are and to use that power to set their agenda. In light of these observations, we understand that the securitization of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia is not only in line with the party's dogmas, but also with its political interests.

Firstly, the issue of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia has allowed the party to gain popularity while at the same time proving its theses on the current weakness of the nation and the need to develop the state's military power. After its creation in 2018 and before the evolution of migrant flows in Tunisia, the party's campaigns focused mainly on Tunisia's financial sovereignty¹²⁵ but one only has to look at the videos posted on its YouTube page¹²⁶ to see that only a few dozen people followed its activities. On the other hand, the number of views recorded for its first video on sub-Saharan migration, published in December 2021, reached 3,300.¹²⁷ A second video posted online the same month was

¹²² The Tunisian Nationalist Party, "Petition of the Tunisian Campaign Against Ijasiyin Settlement," February 18, 2023, <https://www.tnp.tn/البحر-الأزرق-حملة-تجمع-تواقيع-لحملة-توا/>

¹²³ Najla Ben Salah, "Is the Tunisian Nationalist Party legal?", Nawaat (blog), March 8, 2023, <https://nawaat.org/2023/03/08/le-parti-nationaliste-tunisien-est-il-legal/>

¹²⁴ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, "The founding declaration of the Tunisian Nationalist Party".

¹²⁵ Tunisian Nationalist Party, "Financial sovereignty campaign to free the central bank," July 20, 2019, <https://www.tnp.tn/ac/>.

¹²⁶ *Demonstration to free the central bank from European management*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF6JetzRCiI>

¹²⁷ *The invasion of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2m49EixTus>

viewed 18,000 times¹²⁸ and in August 2022, one of the party's videos on the dangers of Afrocentrism in Tunisia recorded 33,200 views.¹²⁹ The issue of migration has allowed the Tunisian Nationalist Party to grow from a movement without an audience to an influential player. It goes without saying that the party will devote itself fully to this issue if it enables it to develop the popular base it lacks to participate in political life. While before 2023 the party was concerned with other issues such as financial sovereignty, natural resources and the dangers of partnerships with Europe, since then its activities have been limited to demonizing sub-Saharan migrants and all those who help them. The nationalist dogmas and the inability of the members of this party to talk about the other dimensions of the phenomenon of irregular migration have led them to include it in a conspiratorial narrative, especially as this allows them to exploit the concerns and fears of certain categories of Tunisian society.

In addition to popular support, the nationalist movement is seeking to ally itself with Kais Saied's regime in order to exert political influence, even without holding a position in his government. In this regard, we recall that Sofien Ben Sghaier, the party's president, has confirmed that he was one of the members of the Tunisian president's 2019 election campaign.¹³⁰ This explains the resonance of the party's activities with the slogans repeated by Kais Saied. Like the President of the Republic, the Tunisian Nationalist Party called for the lifting of parliamentary immunity, financial autonomy and the rejection of foreign interference, not forgetting its hostility towards civil society organizations. On the subject of migration, we can cite the note of support sent to the government after the evacuation of migrants from a sports campus in La Marsa on December 23, 2022¹³¹, or the note of support to the President of the Republic after his speech on February 21, 2023.¹³² The party's involvement in putting the issue of migrants on the political agenda in the run-up to these notes gives the party a legitimacy that it didn't have before.¹³³ Its legitimation by the state was strengthened when the president adopted certain elements of the nationalist movement's discourse, and its popular legitimacy increased when the party focused on theorizing migration when no one else was proposing such an explanation.

¹²⁸ *Tunisia under threat from African settlement*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQtA_xPPFLk

¹²⁹ *The hidden truth about the Ijasiyin presence in Tunisia*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdZBU_17Jro

¹³⁰ Najla Ben Salah, « Tunisian Nationalist Party: Government-Authorized Racism », *Nawaat* (blog), March 4, 2023, <https://nawaat.org/2023/03/04/tunisian-nationalist-party-government-authorized-racism/>

¹³¹ The Tunisian Nationalist Party, “Communiqué: The government's decision to expel the Ijasiyins, a positive step that must be followed by more radical measures”.

¹³² The Tunisian Nationalist Party, “A memorandum in support of the decisions of the President of the Republic against the settlement of Ijasiyins”.

¹³³ Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*, 44.

For its part, Kais Saied's regime has not commented on its links with the party. Only the foreign minister mentioned the party, in response to a question at a press conference: *"As for the party you mentioned, it doesn't exist legally, I don't know... What would we have said if we had banned a party? we would have talked about the violation of freedom of expression, etc."* It seems that the minister either has no knowledge of the legal existence of this party in Tunisia or chooses to deny it. What's more, he defends the party's activities on the pretext of defending freedom of expression, when in fact he represents a regime that has dissolved parliament and abolished the party system, not to mention the waves of arrests of political figures, members of associations and journalists. The minister's response and the silence of the president and the heads of government on the party's activities show that the state is giving it the freedom to campaign in line with the president's discourse, while several organizations have filed complaints against the party in vain. However, the public prosecutor's office is quick to mobilize against voices that oppose the president's narrative, including on the issue of sub-Saharan migrants. Whether intentional or not, the repression of criticism and indifference to the Nationalist Party's statements can only strengthen the regime's discursive hegemony. The party in question uses this framework to exert its influence, otherwise it would have been prosecuted for incitement to hatred under the provisions of Law 50 against racial discrimination, passed in 2018.¹³⁴ The success of this movement is clear when we listen to the president of the 25th of July Movement, affiliated to Kais Saied, who, in an interview on 16 February 2023, referred to its videos to argue that the arrival of sub-Saharan migrants is part of a plot to colonize Tunisia: *"We have seen **videos** that show these people (the sub-Saharans) talking about their right to appropriate Tunisian land. They say that Tunisia is theirs and that we Arabs and Muslims drove them out. It's time for them to get their land back. Now we have to inform the President of the Republic and the relevant authorities so that they adopt radical solutions"*.¹³⁵ The President was quick to react: on 21 February 2023, he called on the Security Authorities to take urgent action to take urgent action.

Conclusion of Chapter One

In this section, we have shown what the securitization of the arrival of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia means for the political project of the Tunisian Nationalist Party and how the regime's permissiveness towards this movement enables it to pursue its objectives. We have highlighted the peculiarities of

¹³⁴ JORT, "Organic Law No. 2018-50 of October 23, 2018, on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination", October 26, 2018., <https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/loi-organique-n-2018-50-du-23-octobre-2018-relative-a-lelimination-de-toutes-les-formes-de-discrimination-raciale/>

¹³⁵ Bila-Kinaa, *Undeniable facts about the one million sub-Saharan Africans settling in Tunisia*, 2023, sc. 3 :50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I94YlcLmqgU>

this party's narrative in relation to the president's discourse, in particular by highlighting how this party treats the issue of immigration through the prism of the existential and military security of the "nation-state", and how it presents migration as a source of impoverishment for the economic system. This party's communication has consisted of simplifying the accessibility of its postulates to popular categories by exploiting Tunisians' familiarity with the Palestinian cause and using the Tunisian dialect in drafting reports and communiqués. The president's use of the conspiracy narrative in his first speech on sub-Saharan migrants, and his adoption of certain elements of the Nationalist Party's report, reveal an interest in studying the party's role as an influential causal agent in Tunisia. The militarization of society promoted by this party and Kais Saied's populist project have ultimately reinforced the securitization of migration in Tunisia, which is also subject to the constraints of the international context and popular concerns.

02 | INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL CONSTRAINTS

The rhetoric of security actors would have had no effect without the presence of national contextual factors, such as negative media coverage and discriminatory logics that we study, before turning to the dissemination of popular concerns and alarmist rhetoric by actors active in social networks. Before addressing these dimensions, we will first analyze the influence of the European policy of externalizing borders on Tunisia's adoption of a security-based approach to managing migration flows, and how attitudes towards this policy within the state, parliaments and civil society organizations end up fabricating¹³⁶ the illegality of migrants in Tunisia.

2.1 International Context

2.1.1 The Position of Tunisia in Relation to European Policies

Tunisia's geographical position has always made it one of the main transit countries for clandestine immigrants to the European continent. At the time of writing, Tunisia has fallen back to second place as a transit country for clandestine immigrants to Europe, but in 2023 it was first, well ahead of Libya, with 93,000 immigrants arriving in Europe from its shores.¹³⁷ This fact explains why Tunisia has been given a great deal of attention in European policy on the externalization of borders. Since the beginning of the 2000s, this policy has been conceived within the framework of the "external dimension of asylum and immigration"¹³⁸, the term used by the European Council in those years. It is

¹³⁶ Vincent Geisser, "Tunisia, sub-Saharan migrants still excluded from the democratic dream," *Migrations Societe* 177, no. 3 (September 27, 2019): 13.

¹³⁷ Benoît Delmas, "Tunis, capital of illegal migration", viewed on August 2, 2024, https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/tunis-capitale-de-la-migration-illegale-07-04-2024-2557015_3826.php

¹³⁸ European Parliament, "Analysis of the external dimension of the European Union's asylum and immigration policies - summary and recommendations for the European Parliament", June 8, 2016, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/fr/document/EXPO-DROI_ET\(2006\)374366](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/fr/document/EXPO-DROI_ET(2006)374366)

based on the mobilization of the EU's partners in the management of migratory flows, on the one hand through the strengthening of border controls and readmission agreements, and on the other through the creation of a system for the management of asylum applications in safe third countries. For the EU, a safe third country is any country that has ratified and respects the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.¹³⁹ Only if a country has a legally guaranteed asylum procedure can it be considered a safe country.

Since the Ben Ali era, Tunisia's involvement in this policy has been limited to the repression of irregular migrants and smuggling networks, while the readmission of irregular Tunisians from Europe has rarely been allowed.¹⁴⁰ Under the Ben Ali regime, the Ministry of the Interior developed a know-how in the management of clandestine migration that still prevails today. In 2011, however, the state lost control of the so-called "border burners" following the regime change and the upheaval within the ministry.¹⁴¹ In the years following the revolution, the weakening of the state's security apparatus was reflected in the recurrence of terrorist attacks and assassinations, as well as the porosity of land and sea borders. In addition, successive governments set themselves the goal of establishing a new political system and a development plan that would meet the aspirations of young people after the revolution, but tensions between Islamists and progressive forces meant that it took three years for the National Constituent Assembly to approve the constitution.

In this context, migration has not been high on the agenda of successive governments and the EU has relied on other actors to try to stem the flow of illegal immigration. Non-governmental organizations were an important partner in this context. In the post-revolutionary zeitgeist, these civil society organizations were seen as an integral part of the democratic transition, whose presence demonstrated both the involvement of the people in this transition and the maturity of political life in Tunisia. These NGOs have multiplied, taking advantage of the trend to empower civil society bodies and include them in decision-making processes¹⁴², including on migration issues. For example, several organizations led advocacy campaigns for the rights of asylum seekers, while others were active in helping refugees in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Tunisia.

¹³⁹ Official Journal of the European Union, "Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 26, 2013, on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection", June 26, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Cassarino, « Channelled Policy Transfers: EU-Tunisia Interactions on Migration Matters ».

¹⁴¹ Dini et Giusa, *Externalising Migration Governance Through Civil Society*.

¹⁴² Grégoire Chamayou, "Empowering", in *La société ingouvernable*, Hors collection (Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2018), 190-200, <https://www.caim.info/la-societe-ingouvernable--9782358721691-p-190.htm>

The activities of these organizations, such as Terre d'Asile, have been criticized for focusing on immigration and asylum without clarifying their position on the European policy of externalizing borders, as well as on the basis of their EU funding. This criticism even came from other organizations working on the rights of refugees and migrants in Tunisia. A director of one such organization told us in an interview that his organization had participated in the campaign to advocate for the introduction of an asylum procedure in Tunisia, but that it had withdrawn as soon as it realized that the other organizations had other intentions behind the campaign.¹⁴³ He also confessed to having discovered, after inquiries with migrants, that the activity of these organizations consisted in convincing them not to emigrate. Tunisians deported from Europe or who have failed to cross the border are encouraged to resettle and build a career in Tunisia. As for sub-Saharan Africans, the UNHCR helps them with voluntary return procedures after their asylum applications have been rejected.

In this way, the outsourcing of European border management has evolved from the cooperation with Ben Ali's authoritarian regime to a logic more akin to governmentality¹⁴⁴, that is, using NGO capacity-building programs within a framework of individual empowerment and participation in decision-making to guide and enable civil society to do what European states cannot do themselves. However, this approach has not yielded significant results, as irregular immigration flows have continued to increase, and European countries have reverted to the classic practice of intimidating the regimes in power to cooperate in managing these flows and resolving the issue of asylum seekers. In February 2017, German Chancellor Angela Merkel criticized Tunisia's lack of cooperation in expelling Tunisians residing irregularly in Germany after the attack attributed to Anis Amri, a Tunisian whom Tunisia refused to readmit in 2016.¹⁴⁵ The chancellor also insisted that Tunisia should cooperate in the establishment of refugee camps, but the response from government leader Youssef Chahed was negative: *"Tunisia is a young democracy, I don't think this can work and we don't have the capacity for refugee camps. The solution must be found with Libya"*¹⁴⁶. This response didn't stop Belgium's Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration, Theo Franken, from saying in September 2018 that *"the EU must provide Tunisia with a more elaborate offer to accept migrants, as was done to Mr. Erdogan in Turkey"*¹⁴⁷. In 2018, the European Council also proposed the creation of regional disembarkation

¹⁴³ Interview with an organization director, July 14, 2024.

¹⁴⁴ Laurent Jeanpierre, "Is a Foucauldian sociology of neoliberalism possible?", *Sociologie et sociétés* 38, n° 2 (2006): 87-111, <https://doi.org/10.7202/016374ar>

¹⁴⁵ Cherif Rached, "Youssef Chahed: No migrant camps in Tunisia," *Le courrier de l'atlas*, February 13, 2017., <https://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/allemande-tunisie-youssef-chahed-pas-de-camps-de-migrants-en-tunisie-7450/>

¹⁴⁶ Rached.

¹⁴⁷ RTL, "Tunisia must take in migrants, there's no other solution", for Theo Franken: can money convince Tunisia?", viewed on July 30, 2024, <https://www.rtl.be/actu/la-tunisie-doit-accueillir-les-migrants-il-ny-pas-dautre-solution-pour-theo/2018-09-30/article/149380>

centers, and its conclusions report of 29 June presented a map introducing Tunisia as one of the countries where such centers could be set up to receive intercepted and rescued migrants and process asylum claims.¹⁴⁸ Other maneuvers have taken place since: France, for example, announced in 2021 that it would reduce the number of visas granted to Tunisians by 30% compared with last year, given its reluctance to issue the consular passes needed for repatriation.¹⁴⁹

The pressure exerted by European countries has not produced the expected results but has rather reinforced the already existing idea that the EU wants to contain migrants in the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. This idea is the main reason why there is still no asylum law in Tunisia, despite the fact that there have been several versions of this law since the revolution. We discussed this issue with a former Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Migration to understand the position of Tunisian diplomacy. *'I don't believe in conspiracies, but it's a mean of pressure deployed by the EU'*.¹⁵⁰ This is how the minister describes the debate on the asylum law in Tunisia. When we asked him why this was a false debate, he replied as follows: *"Tunisia is not an asylum country. Asylum requires that people who are granted this status be given protection, and this entails a responsibility on the part of the state that Tunisia is not in a position to provide. We once asked a Libyan refugee, and he told us that he would prefer to seek asylum in the United States. Moreover, Tunisia has always welcomed refugees. When we were in power, we took in Libyans and Syrians"*. In response to our question about the case of people who are still seeking asylum in Tunisia, he said: *"Maybe this law will be in place in the next few years. I don't know exactly what the legislation is in Algeria and Morocco, but I don't think they have an asylum system. We have to distinguish between asylum seekers on the one hand and migrants fleeing economic conditions in their countries on the other. When we were in power, the EU sent us several proposals to receive illegal migrants, but we refused, firstly because Tunisia is not responsible for the conditions in these countries, and secondly because only a development plan for these countries can help reduce irregular migration."*

The former minister's answers provide us with three elements for understanding Tunisia's position. Firstly, there is a hostile perception within the Tunisian state, and not only within Kais Saied's regime, towards NGOs involved in helping migrants. We understood during the interview that the desire to protect freedoms and the context of democratic transition meant that previous governments had

¹⁴⁸ European Council, "MIGRATION: REGIONAL DISEMBARKATION ARRANGEMENTS", July 18, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_19_6503

¹⁴⁹ Catherine Chatignoux, "France to drastically reduce the number of visas granted to Maghreb countries | Les Echos", September 28, 2021, <https://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/gouvernement/la-france-reduit-drastiquement-le-nombre-de-visas-accordes-aux-pays-du-maghreb-1350030>

¹⁵⁰ Interview with a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad, July 15, 2024.

allowed these organizations to carry out their activities without ever accepting the proposals relating to the asylum law. As we shall see later in the third chapter, with the change of regime on July 25, 2021, this perception of NGOs has been translated into repression. Secondly, we understand that the previous regimes practiced a policy of denial by avoiding any involvement in an asylum law and by giving total responsibility to Europe itself for managing migratory flows. When we asked the minister for his opinion on the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the EU and Tunisia on July 16, 2023¹⁵¹, he replied: *“The EU proposed a similar agreement and we rejected it. I think the memorandum signed in 2023 shows a weakness in current Tunisian diplomacy because it is very vague, its elements are unclear, and we don't really know what Tunisia's role is.”* Finally, the minister's answers, and in particular his reference to the legislation in Morocco and Algeria, which he admits he does not know exactly, but which he considers to be the same as that in Tunisia, make it clear that the diplomatic elite understand the refusal to introduce an asylum law as an integral part of the defence of a national interest shared by the North African countries threatened by European plans. Such a schematization removes the question of cooperation with the EU on refugee management from the circle of individual or partisan preferences and reintroduces it into the realm of national interests that must be preserved.

The impact of the international context can also be seen in the position of some organizations on the draft asylum bill. *“We have withdrawn from the campaign because we believe that the draft law favors the EU agenda more than the rights of asylum seekers. We believe that the asylum law should be a last step, preceded by the revision of laws regulating the rights of foreigners to stay and work, as well as all discriminatory laws”*, explains the director of the organization interviewed.¹⁵²

As for the parliamentary deputies, our interviewee explained that they refuse to participate in lobbying campaigns for the asylum law for fear of losing the support of their constituents if they support a law in favor of foreigners while local problems remain unresolved.¹⁵³ We asked an assemblyman who is a member of the Foreign Affairs and Migration Committee in the parliament that has been in office since March 13, 2023, and he told us that no discussion related to an asylum bill has taken place in the assembly.¹⁵⁴ His explanation was that this Parliament is still new, and there are other issues that take priority.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, “Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia”, July 16, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3887

¹⁵² Interview with a director of an organization.

¹⁵³ Interview with a director of an organization.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with a member of Parliament's Foreign Affairs and Migration Committee, July 19, 2024.

2.1.2 The Fabrication of Illegality of Migrants

Between the preoccupation of state elites with the supposed national interest, the concern of parliamentarians to win re-election and the reluctance of civil society organizations, legislation on the rights of refugees and migrants in Tunisia remains very limited. This fact is one of the factors behind the securitization of immigration in Tunisia, as it provides one of the arguments used by the securitizing actors: the illegality of the presence of migrants in Tunisia.

Indeed, the laws governing the rights of migrants in Tunisia are restrictive. For example, Law N66-27 of April 30, 1966, promulgating the Labor Code, stipulates that “*any foreigner wishing to work as a salaried employee of any kind whatsoever must be in possession of an employment contract and a residence permit bearing the words ‘authorized to work as a salaried employee in Tunisia’*”.¹⁵⁵ This law leaves migrants at the mercy of employers, who are unwilling to offer official contracts so that they can continue to exploit and poorly pay these migrants. Migrants agree to work in the informal sector in order to pay their rent and stay, hoping that the employer's promise of a contract will be fulfilled.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the law stipulates that “*foreigners may not be recruited if Tunisian skills are available in the specialties concerned*”. In addition, the application for a residence permit requires a one-year rental contract, which not all landlords provide in order to avoid having to disclose and pay taxes. Unable to provide work and rental contracts, migrants find themselves in an irregular situation, even if they entered Tunisia legally. Again, Tunisian law penalizes those who overstay their permits, with a fine of 20 dinars for each week of irregularity, or around 24 euros per month. Only students are exempt from these penalties if they re-enroll in an academic course and provide proof of enrolment.¹⁵⁷ These restrictions are compounded by administrative bureaucracy, which means that applicants for residence permit renewals far exceed the three-month validity period of the provisional residence permit before the authorities grant them the definitive residence permit. As a result, migrants spend more time with a provisional permit, which expires after three months, than with a permanent permit.¹⁵⁸

The fabrication of the illegality of migrants in Tunisia places them in a precarious situation, but above all it creates a pretext for the security forces to exercise blind legalism¹⁵⁹ justifying the exclusion of

¹⁵⁵ Tunisian Republic, “Article 258-2”, Labor Code (2011), [https://guide.tia.gov.tn/uploads/code%20de%20travail\(1\).pdf](https://guide.tia.gov.tn/uploads/code%20de%20travail(1).pdf).

¹⁵⁶ Interview with a Congolese worker, July 10, 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with a second Congolese worker, July 10, 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a Senegalese student, July 13, 2024.

¹⁵⁹ Khaled Tababi, “‘Right’ But ‘Law’: A Reading Of The President's Speech On The Issue Of Migrants”, *Legal Agenda*, June 15, 2023, <https://legal-agenda.com/الحق-لكن-القانون-قراءة-في-الخطاب/>

migrants on the basis of their irregular presence in the country, when it is the state itself that generates this irregularity. Thus, the non-development of the legislative framework and the maintenance of migrants in conditions of uncertainty serve the Tunisian state's interest in not being considered a safe third country, and in not transforming itself into a destination or even transit country. While Tunisia's porous borders with Algeria have made it a de facto transit country, the current regime refuses to acknowledge this reality. In this sense, President Kais Saied has repeated on several occasions that *“Tunisia refuses to become a transit point or a place of resettlement”*.¹⁶⁰ We believe that it chooses instead to exploit European interests to finance the security system and strengthen maritime and land borders, while at the same time providing financial support for economic development. The memorandum of understanding signed on July 16, 2023 stipulates that *“The European Union shall endeavor to provide adequate additional financial support, in particular for the acquisitions, training and technical support necessary to further improve the management of Tunisia's borders”*.¹⁶¹ In the same context, on June 19, 2024, Tunisia created a search and rescue zone (SAR zone)¹⁶² as predicted in the memorandum, in order to intercept irregular migrants, but the agreement also states that *“Both parties also agree to support the return of irregular migrants in Tunisia to their countries of origin, with due respect for international law and their dignity”*.¹⁶³ The Tunisian government also sought to mobilize its Maghreb neighbors within the framework of a Tripartite Consultative Process organized on April 18, 2024, between Tunisia, Algeria and Libya, represented by the President of the Presidential Council. At the first meeting, the three parties decided to *“form joint task forces to coordinate efforts to protect the security of the common borders against the dangers and flows of irregular migration and other manifestations of organized crime, and to develop a participatory approach to the development of these regions.”*¹⁶⁴

By strengthening its maritime and land borders and guaranteeing cooperation in returning migrants present in Tunisia to their countries of origin, Tunisia can deter migrants from crossing its territory. This logic of deterrence had already produced results when applied in Libya and Algeria, results that were in the interests of these two countries, but which put Tunisia in a difficult position, despite the

¹⁶⁰ Presidency of the Republic, “Meeting between the President of the Republic and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad”, April 12, 2024, <https://url1.io/YDYuC>

¹⁶¹ European Commission, ‘Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia’..

¹⁶² Frida Dahmani, ‘By becoming a “SAR zone”, Tunisia takes another step towards controlling migratory flows’, June 20, 2024, viewed on August 2, 2024., <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1579763/politique/en-devenant-zone-sar-la-tunisie-fait-un-pas-de-plus-dans-le-controle-des-flux-migratoires/>

¹⁶³ European Commission, « Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia ».

¹⁶⁴ La Presse, ‘Final declaration of the first tripartite consultative meeting between Tunisia, Algeria and Libya: Unifying positions, protecting borders and facilitating the movement of people and goods’, April 23, 2024., <https://lapresse.tn/2024/04/23/declaration-finale-de-la-premiere-reunion-consultative-tripartite-entre-la-tunisie-lalgerie-et-la-libye-unifier-les-positions-protoger-les-frontieres-et-faciliter-la-circulation-des-perso/>

fact that it has no land borders with sub-Saharan countries. Indeed, the involvement of Libyan militias in the interception and detention of irregular migrants¹⁶⁵ has led to migrants choosing to cross the Mediterranean via the Tunisian coast. As Tunisia has been building a separation wall¹⁶⁶ on its borders with Libya since 2015 to protect itself from terrorist groups present in the neighboring country, migrants are forced to take the detour via Algeria to enter Tunisia. Those who come directly via the Algerian borders avoid crossing into northern Algeria, preferring¹⁶⁷ instead to go to Tunisia for fear of being pushed back into the deserts by Algerian authorities, where they would be abandoned.¹⁶⁸ Now that Tunisia has decided to tighten border controls, migrants will have to find other routes to Europe. Those who are already in Tunisia are trapped in the country.

For Didier Bigo, this fortification of borders stems from the myth that it is possible to control borders and from the desire to control them on the part of political leaders who want to stop the flow of migration, while reality shows that this is impossible.¹⁶⁹ The only effect of border controls is to change people's status, to declare who is illegal and who is legal. Border controls crystallize the image of migrants' illegality and their status as illegal migrants. According to the same author, the state transforms its lack of power¹⁷⁰ (inability to stop illegal migration) into a symbolic power that stigmatizes and categorizes migrants.

Having shown how the constraints of the international context affect the visions and choices of actors in Tunisia and how they contribute to the creation of illegal migrants¹⁷¹, we must now analyze the national context that has made it possible to securitize migration in Tunisia.

¹⁶⁵ Alexandre Bish, « Migration Proxy Warfare: Exploring the Role of Non-State Armed Actors in Libya's Refugee Rentierism », *Project on Middle East Political Science* (blog), March 22, 2024, <https://pomeps.org/migration-proxy-warfare-exploring-the-role-of-non-state-armed-actors-in-libyas-refugee-rentierism>.

¹⁶⁶ Tarek Amara, « Tunisia finishes Libya border fence intended to keep out militants | Reuters », February 7, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/tunisia-finishes-libya-border-fence-intended-to-keep-out-militants-idUSL8N15L0KS/>.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with a Sierra Leonean migrant, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ BBC News Afrique, 'Algeria abandons migrants in the desert', May 18, 2018., <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-44168480>.

¹⁶⁹ Didier Bigo, "The illusory control of borders", *Le Monde diplomatique*, October 1, 1996, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1996/10/BIGO/5826>.

¹⁷⁰ Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*.

¹⁷¹ Shreya Parikh, 'How Tunisia produces 'irregular migrants'', *Plein droit* 139, n° 4 (2023): 35-38.

2.2 National Context

2.2.1 Negative Media Coverage and Discrimination

Political instability and economic crises, exacerbated since the spread of COVID-19, have led to an increase in the number of migrants leaving sub-Saharan African countries. The porous nature of the border with Algeria¹⁷² explains the increase in the number of sub-Saharan Africans entering Tunisia in the hope of reaching Europe. Clearly, this number is increasing at an unprecedented rate, but there is still no precise census. In April 2024, the interior minister estimated that 23,000 sub-Saharan migrants¹⁷³ of 27 different nationalities were in the country, putting an end to the claims of those who put the number in the hundreds of thousands. Most of these migrants have settled in Sfax, the country's second largest city and economic and industrial hub. This choice is explained by their desire to work and travel to Europe from the shores of this port city. The same reasons explain why others went mainly to the capital, Tunis, and the city of Sousse. In the absence of a comprehensive legal framework and infrastructure for the reception of refugees and the management of migrants present on the territory, many found themselves in a precarious situation, without shelter or resources. Camps have sprung up in olive groves belonging to local residents, creating an atmosphere of discontent among them. Tents have also sprung up in the suburbs, where the presence of migrants is more visible. Although some of them have found work in catering, agriculture and gardening, they are still paid 20 dinars, or 6 euros a day, even though they are exploited and forced to work 8 hours a day before being paid at the end of the week.¹⁷⁴

In these precarious conditions, some have opted for other ways to find the means to survive. So, we read in the media headlines such as *“Irregular **Africans** kidnap foreign businessman and demand ransom”*¹⁷⁵, *“**Africans** kidnap young man, burn him and assault him with knives”*¹⁷⁶, *“Arrest of **African woman** and her partner for setting up prostitution den”*¹⁷⁷. It should be noted that press articles, television channels and radio stations began to disseminate this type of information before the political discourse became interested in these issues, and it is especially since 2020 that media

¹⁷² FTDES, ‘Preliminary results of a field study on the situation of migrants in Tunisia’ (Tunis, July 23, 2024), <https://ftdes.net/resultats-preliminaires-dune-etude-de-terrain-sur-la-situation-des-migrants-en-tunisie/>

¹⁷³ ‘The Minister of the Interior presents the latest statistics on sub-Saharan migrants’, May 21, 2024, <https://url1.io/MdLx>

¹⁷⁴ Interview with a Congolese worker.

¹⁷⁵ Shems FM, ‘Irregular Africans kidnap foreign businessman and demand ransom’, January 28, 2022, <https://url1.io/CPeAy>

¹⁷⁶ IFM, ‘Africans kidnap a young man, burn him and attack him with knives’, February 1, 2023, <https://url1.io/PFKLJ>

¹⁷⁷ IFM, ‘Arrest of an African woman and her partner for setting up a den of prostitution’, February 8, 2022, <https://url1.io/PDIPY>

coverage of the presence of sub-Saharan migrants has intensified. However, as the titles of the articles show (*Appendix 1*), this coverage has been limited to crimes committed by a few individuals of sub-Saharan origin. Obviously, intensifying the propagation of a single image of migrants as criminals has a generalizing effect and shapes the perception that the public and the authorities must have of the issue. By omitting the issue of migrants' rights and other questions of migration such as the integration of workers who contribute to the country's development and the contribution of sub-Saharan students to the academic influence of Tunisian universities, and by reporting only on the crimes committed by certain individuals, the media are practicing what Jurgen Habermas calls the management of public opinion.¹⁷⁸ This tendency to select only "bad news"¹⁷⁹, can be explained by the interest of these private media in attracting¹⁸⁰ listeners with incidents and dramatic news which, according to their logic, are more shocking and attractive¹⁸¹ than "good news". Before February 2023, the disastrous consequences of this trend had not yet been understood, and it was only after these consequences - which are the subject of our third chapter - that the Independent High Authority for Communication (HAICA) urged a more responsible approach to media coverage of migration issues.¹⁸²

Furthermore, the use of the term African to designate sub-Saharan Africans creates a dichotomy between Tunisians on the one hand and nationals of sub-Saharan countries on the other, who are considered Africans because they are black. Talking as if Tunisians are not also Africans reinforces a differentiation between 'Us' and 'Others', the difference between the two being skin color. In fact, this racialization of the issue is reminiscent of the common names given to the black population in Tunisia, which date back to the history of slavery¹⁸³. The names Oussif in the singular and Oussfane in the plural mean Negro(es) but literally refer to second(s) or servant(s), while the name Kahlouch refers directly to the color of black skin. The black populations in Tunisia were always distinguished with these terms as a distinct group, even though they were an integral part of the national body. Often considered to be second-class, they are subjected to forms of racism both within society and by politicians. For example, the President and founder of the Republic, Habib Bourguiba, was quoted

¹⁷⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁹ Toni G. L. A. van der Meer et al., « Mediatization and the Disproportionate Attention to Negative News », *Journalism Studies* 20, n° 6 (26 avril 2019): 783-803, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1423632>

¹⁸⁰ David L. Altheide, « "The News Media, the Problem Frame, and the Production of Fear" », *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, n° 4 (September 1, 1997): 647-68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1997.tb00758.x>

¹⁸¹ Sean Aday, « Chasing the Bad News: An Analysis of 2005 Iraq and Afghanistan War Coverage on NBC and Fox News Channel », *Journal of Communication* 60, n° 1 (March 1, 2010): 144-64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01472.x>

¹⁸² HAICA, 'Reference document on media coverage of migration and migrant issues, February 2023', <https://haica.tn/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Document-contextuel.pdf>

¹⁸³ Inès Mrad Dali, "Racism and slavery in Tunisia in the 19th century", *Sensibilités* 12, n° 1 (2023): 39-48, <https://doi.org/10.3917/sensi.012.0039>

as saying “What are we going to get from Oussfane (black people) apart from coca and bananas?”¹⁸⁴. Nowadays it is also sub-Saharan Africans who are stigmatized¹⁸⁵ on the basis of their skin color.

The logic of regionalism, or discrimination on the basis of region,¹⁸⁶ also weighs heavily on perceptions of sub-Saharan Africans. Tunisia has always been driven by regional identity, and the economic disparities¹⁸⁷ resulting from the development plans adopted after independence have exacerbated mistrust between Tunisians from different regions, especially between those from the coastal regions and those from the interior. In addition to cultural differences, dialects and different pronunciations,¹⁸⁸ the idea that the political class has always favored the coastal towns since independence to the detriment of the other towns has an impact on relations between Tunisians. There is also a differentiation within the same cities between those who live in urban areas and those who come from rural areas, the latter not always being well integrated when they move to the city in search of work. With the arrival of sub-Saharan Africans, it is they who are now suffering the effects of this regionalism. The whiteness of their skin makes some people forget that Tunisia is also African, which explains why Sub-Saharans are called Africans and thus categorized as otherness from another world. In fact, to describe the arrival of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia, many people in the media and on social networks have used the word *Nouzouh*, which means rural exodus, and which has a pejorative connotation in Tunisia. By using this term, they are equating migrants with people who come from rural areas to settle in the city and who, according to their logic, are compromising city traditions and customs.¹⁸⁹ Others hoped that the arrival of immigrants would lead to reconciliation between all Tunisians and unification against the exodus of sub-Saharan Africans to Tunisia.

If we add that most Tunisians are culturally and spiritually attached to either the Western world or the Orient¹⁹⁰, we can better understand this relationship with sub-Saharan otherness in Tunisia as the result of Tunisians' alienation from their own identity. This is important in order to understand why, when it comes to the rare articles dealing with the conditions and rights of sub-Saharan migrants or

¹⁸⁴ Haseeb Al-Jaridi, *Multiculturalism in the national community, Minorities in Tunisia: Berbers, Jews and Blacks* (Tunis: Maison d'édition Al-Bedoui, 2016).

¹⁸⁵ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Simon and Schuster, 2009).

¹⁸⁶ Alarab, “ Behind the panels ‘ The regionalism controversy re-emerges in Tunisia’, March 9, 2019, <https://url1.io/KMUCc>

¹⁸⁷ Amor Belhedi, ‘Spatial disparities in Tunisia: current situation and challenges, *Méditerranée* 91, n° 1 (1999): 63-72, <https://doi.org/10.3406/medit.1999.3088>

¹⁸⁸ Hedi Timoumi, *How the Tunisians became Tunisians* (Sfax: Med Ali Ed., 2022).

¹⁸⁹ For example, see the following publication,

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100077048391306/search/?q=%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%AD>

¹⁹⁰ Mohamed El Aziz Ben Achour, *Tunisia: from ancient times to the meeting of East and West*, Leaders (Tunis, 2024), <https://www.leadersbooks.com.tn/produit/la-tunisie-de-jadis-et-de-naguere-a-la-rencontre-de-loccident-et-de-lorient/>

their participation in development¹⁹¹, the reactions to publications do not exceed a few dozen, whereas they amount to thousands when it comes to a crime committed by a sub-Saharan.

Racism, regionalism and alienation on the part of some Tunisians also explain the mockery of sub-Saharan Africans on social networking sites. Videos taken in Tunisia and elsewhere in the world that poke fun at the names, cultures, dances and specific traditions of certain migrants have been circulating long before their numbers began to grow. Making fun of migrants in Tunisia is not a phenomenon restricted to Sub-Saharans; even Libyans suffered this kind of denigration when they came after the civil wars of 2011, 2014 and 2019. Indeed, Tunisians recognize Libyans as brothers, but there is a perception of Libyans as intellectually backward rich people compared to Tunisians. Even among the elites in Tunisia, this idea is based mainly on a comparison between the meritocratic system which encourages people to pursue an academic career in Tunisia, and the rentier economy which meant that neither the Libyan state had developed state institutions nor Libyans had any interest in pursuing a degree. Although they were well received in Tunisia¹⁹², because of the fraternal ties between Libyan and Tunisian families and the interest of Tunisians in taking advantage of the wealth of certain Libyans, they were the subject of mockery and jokes for years. Facebook pages and blogs¹⁹³ have been set up specifically to publish jokes about Libyans. In addition to family and historical ties, the geographical proximity between Libya and Tunisia and Tunisians' awareness of events in Libya explain their empathy with Libyans. When sub-Saharan migrants started arriving in Tunisia in large numbers, they were mocked on social networks. However, the general ignorance of most Tunisians about sub-Saharan countries and the consequent lack of empathy towards them meant that this mockery was accompanied by hostility as a result of alarmist rhetoric.

¹⁹¹ Radio Tunisienne, 'African students complete the preparation and equipping of a primary school and the connection to a water source in the Fernana delegation', September 18, 2021,

<https://url1.io/knvaj>

¹⁹² Tarek Guizeni, 'State of relations between Libyan refugees and Tunisia', viewed on August 4, 2024.,

<https://url1.io/zttNP>

¹⁹³ For example, see the blog 'Tunisian jokes about Libyans', viewed on August 4, 2024,

https://nokatounsia.blogspot.com/2018/08/blog-post_23.html.

Suivez-vous l'actualité dans les pays subsahariens ?

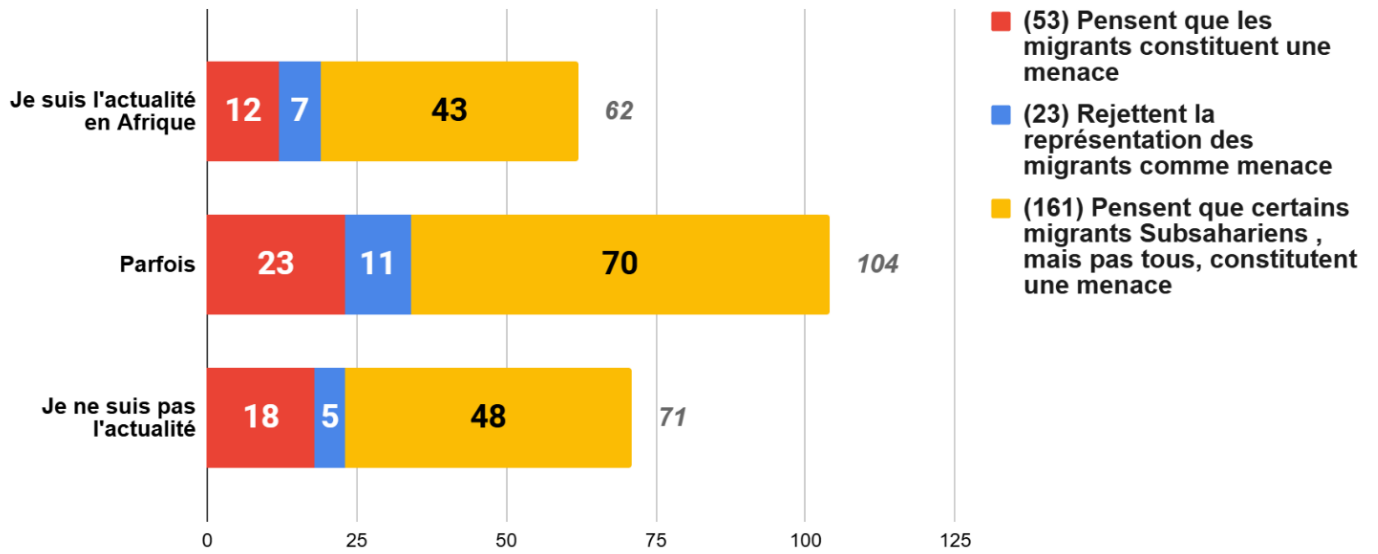


Figure 1

DO YOU FOLLOW THE NEWS IN SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES?	
I do follow the news in sub-Saharan countries	53 think that migrants are a threat
Sometimes	23 reject the portrayal of migrants as a threat
I don't follow the news in sub-Saharan countries	161 believe that some, but not all, sub-Saharan migrants pose a threat

2.2.2 Popular Concerns and Alarmist Discourses

This hostility towards sub-Saharan Africans is explained by the perception that they are a source of nuisance and disruption to urban life. People have complained about the behavior of these migrants, who are perceived as deviating ¹⁹⁴ from norms to the extent that their very presence has become disruptive. These are the observations we have drawn from our observations of residents in Tunis and Sousse, and they can also be drawn from the videos of Bila-Kinaa ('Without Mask'), a street interview program broadcast on YouTube and Facebook, where videos on the migration of sub-Saharan Africans are the most viewed of all the videos dealing with this issue on social networks. One of these videos, entitled 'Africans invade metro and bus stations, open scrap metal markets and roadside barber shops'¹⁹⁵ was broadcast on February 18, 2023, three days before the President's speech, and has been viewed 802,274 times. The following are statements made by the people interviewed in this video: 'The Africans have become bandits'¹⁹⁶, 'We've been suffering for years from people who don't respect us, who cause pollution and disorder'¹⁹⁷, 'This is no longer a bus stop, they've turned it into a market', 'The Africans are suffocating us, they're everywhere, they're taking everything away from us, our seats on the bus, what we eat and drink, in short everything, plus they're pushing us into the metro and we can't even talk back to them (...). the government has to find a solution'¹⁹⁸. It is these reports that have been used by other actors on social networks to demonize¹⁹⁹ sub-Saharan migrants through well-chosen testimonies to imbue a single image, that of the disorder that threatens other cities where the presence of migrants is not yet sufficiently visible. These testimonies are not arbitrary; they are provoked by questions such as 'Do Africans bother you? As soon as the person answers 'yes', another question is added about 'how', and then another about the solutions to be found and the demands to be made to the authorities. In several interviews, these questions are supplemented by the question of who is responsible for the situation. Sometimes it is the moderator of the interview who intervenes to influence the attitude of the person being questioned. Take, for example, this exchange between a presenter of a street interview program (A) and a resident of Sfax (B).

¹⁹⁴ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies on the sociology of deviance* (Free Press, 2008),

<https://books.google.tn/books?id=3Vjsn0BQUOoC>

¹⁹⁵ *Africans invade metro and bus stations, open scrap metal markets and roadside barber shops*, 2023,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve3A51_Zv7k

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, sc. 4 :40.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, sc. 5 :40.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, sc. 7 :50.

¹⁹⁹ Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (University of California Press, 1988).

(A): - I'll let you address a final message to the State

(B): - The person primarily responsible for what is happening today is the President of the Republic.

(A): No, it's not the President of the Republic. Let me explain. The fault lies with former President Moncef Marzouki²⁰⁰ who signed the visa exemption agreement. We are waiting for the current parliament to suspend this agreement.

(B): - Yes, that's who I'm talking about. I don't want to see this criminal come to Tunisia again.

(A): - Look at the camera and address President Kais Saeid.

(B): - Mr President, for pity's sake (he repeated this three times), get rid of these Africans present in the country.

(Journal 619)
February 12, 2023²⁰¹

In this way, the presenters seek to create a detailed narrative ranging from the culprits to the solutions claimed, via the narration of the experiences of the interviewees with migrants. This narrative is generally followed by a staging²⁰² of the encampments and tents, which serves the purpose of sowing fear among the inhabitants of these towns who are not yet interested in the issue of migrants.

Mohamed Bouzidi, the producer of *Bila-Kinaa* and an investigative journalist, has been particularly active in this area. He has always taken up the same elements of Kais Saied's discourse, including the war on corruption, the discrediting of political parties and, since February 21, 2023, migration.

The fact that the public prosecutor's office has several times mobilized to open investigations²⁰³ following reports by this journalist on 'corruption cases', bears witness to his influence. What's more, when Bouzidi was asked whether there was a link between the report²⁰⁴ in which he criticized Saadiya Mosbeh²⁰⁵ - an anti-racism activist and president of the Mnemty association - and the arrest of the activist the day after the report was broadcast, without denying any such link, he replied that he

²⁰⁰ President of Tunisia from 2011 to 2014, Moncef Marzouki is now the subject of a warrant for attempted assassination with the aim of changing the form of government.

²⁰¹ *Violence, alcohol, prostitution, knives: Africans transform a warehouse into a church*, 2023, sc. 8 :50, <https://www.facebook.com/humatalhima9/videos/960843498232625/?rldid=esRtwedYSoomwQM>

²⁰² Daniel Cefaï, 'The construction of public problems. Defining situations in public arenas', 1996, <https://doi.org/10.3406/reso.1996.3684>

²⁰³ Jawhara FM, 'Sousse: Opening of an investigation following a citizen's statements in the "Without mask' program', May 7, 2022, <https://url1.io/lcame>

²⁰⁴ *The hidden face of the demonstrations by associations against the President and in defence of African migrants*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGajEIE_yvw

²⁰⁵ Monia Hamadi, 'Tunisia: the arrest of anti-racism campaigner Saadia Mosbah rekindles fears in the black community', May 9, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/05/09/tunisie-l-arrestation-de-la-militante-antiraciste-saadia-mosbah-ravive-les-craintes-de-la-communautaire-noire_6232359_3212.html

would rather weep for the misfortunes of Tunisians than worry about the misfortunes of Africans²⁰⁶, before continuing his usual denigration of migrant aid associations.

Certainly, the popular reactions to these reports on the issue of sub-Saharan migrants make Mohamed Bouzidi's contribution to the problematization of the phenomenon of migration indisputable. This journalist does not hide his support for Kais Saied, even to the point of claiming to be proud of being accused of working on behalf of the President²⁰⁷. This explains why on February 16, 2023, he interviewed Abderrazek Khalouli, President of the 25 July Movement and member of the 'explanation campaign' (*hamla tafsiriyya*) for the President's political program. During this meeting dedicated to the subject of immigrants,²⁰⁸ both claimed that the number of sub-Saharan migrants amounted to 1,000,000 and both described the situation as tragic, but while Abderrazak Khalouli took up the conspiracy theories of the Tunisian Nationalist Party, the journalist dealt with aspects of the disorder in the city, the crimes, and the concerns of the people he met during his street interview program, and said he did not want to subscribe to the conspiracy theory developed by the Nationalist Party, which he considered irresponsible.²⁰⁹ This is where we see the difference between the representation of migrants invented by political discourse, which places them in a context of conspiracy, and the popular perception governed both by the cognitive framework of racism and regionalism and by concerns about crime and disorder.

There are two other factors that contribute to the mistrust towards migrants.

First, there is the criticism of what some have called the absence or even complicity of the State, and the idea that the State has abandoned the people in the face of migrants. 'The first person responsible for everything that happens is the President of the Republic'²¹⁰ said one of the interviewees during a street interview, reflecting what many people were repeating on social networks before February 2023. Linked to this idea is the feeling of being abandoned by civil society actors, who tend to come to the aid of migrants instead of helping the victims of the crimes committed. In this respect, Riadh Ben Khalifa, historian and member of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, believes that the emergence of hate speech is due to what he describes

²⁰⁶ Tunisna, 'Mohamed Bouzidi: Why cry over the misfortunes of Africans when our young people are suffering?', viewed on August 1, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=382623674822157>

²⁰⁷ Atessia, 'Mohamed Bouzidi says he is proud to be accused of working for Kais Saied', January 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-McdFNif72I>

²⁰⁸ *Undeniable facts about the settlement of one million sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia, February 16, 2023*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l94YlcLmqgU>

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, sc. 4: 30.

²¹⁰ *Violence, alcohol, prostitution, knives: Africans turn a warehouse into a church*, 2023, sc. 8 :56, <https://www.facebook.com/humatalhima9/videos/960843498232625/?rldid=esRtwedYSoomwQM>

as the ‘one-upmanship’ of human rights defenders in Tunisia, who have limited themselves to supporting sub-Saharan migrants without taking into account the people who feel affected by the presence of migrants.²¹¹ We would add that this NGO approach has been perceived and represented by the Tunisian Nationalist Party and others as proof of their involvement in a plot against the people. Secondly, the deteriorating economic situation over the years has created individualistic attitudes. The shortage²¹² of several foodstuffs has intensified since the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the government's decision to reduce imports and preserve currency reserves. Many Tunisians believe that migrants are the cause of this shortage, especially since rumors put their numbers at 1,000,000 or 700,000, whereas in fact there were only 24,000.

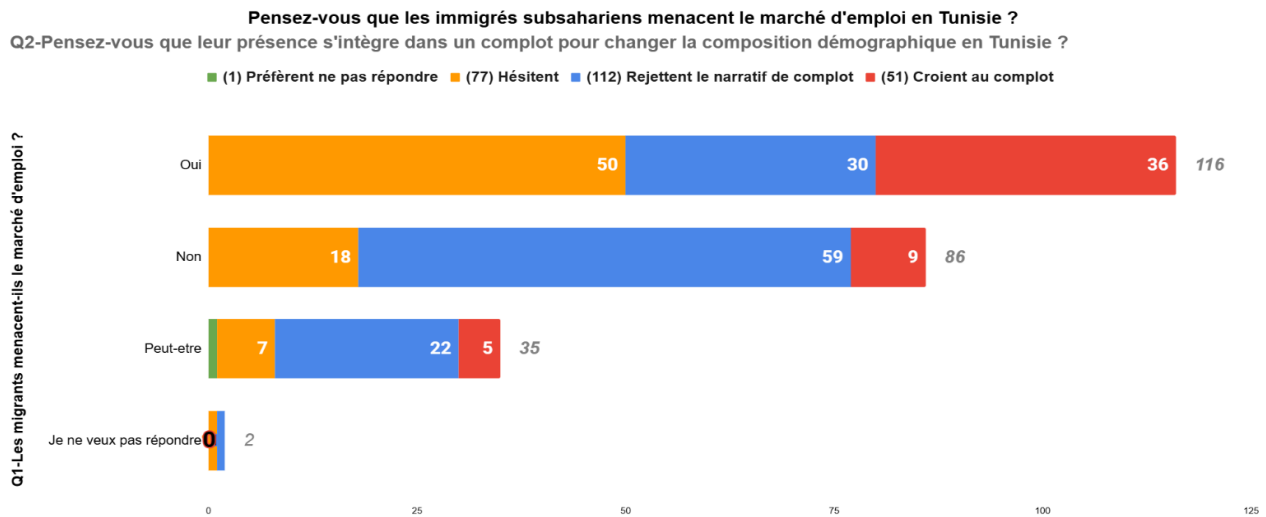


Figure 2

²¹¹ Behi, ‘Demonisation and incitement campaigns against human rights activists... the other side of the migrant crisis in Tunisia’.

²¹² Monia Ben Hamadi, ‘Tunisia to the test of shortages: ‘We spend our day trying to do the shopping’, Le monde, viewed on 4 August 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/03/la-tunisie-a-l-epreuve-des-penuries-on-passe-notre-journee-a-essayer-de-faire-les-courses_6180360_3212.html.

Do you think sub-saharan migrants are a threat to the tunisian job market?

Q1: are migrants a threat to the job market?

Q2: do you think their presence is part of a conspiracy to change the demographic composition of tunisia?

(1) Prefer not to answer

(77) Hesitate

(112) reject the conspiracy narrative

(51) believe in the conspiracy

The inability of the state to solve the problem of unemployment, which reached 16.2% in 2023²¹³ and the preference of employers to hire cheaper labor have meant that Tunisians feel they are competing with migrants. *'We need to find work for our young people, but they (the Sub-Saharan) are the ones working everywhere; they accept all kinds of work. They are welcome, but to be honest, there is now a lot of competition to find work'*, ²¹⁴ says a Tunisian worker.

To measure the impact of this last factor, we asked our 240 respondents whether they thought the presence of migrants threatened employment opportunities: 116 said yes; 86 said no; 35 hesitated and 2 preferred not to answer.

We also asked whether they thought the presence of migrants was part of a plot to change the demographic composition of Tunisia. We noted 51 yes answers, 112 no answers, and 77 people who hesitated to choose.

As for their views on the idea that there is a plot to undermine the identity of the Tunisian people through the influx of sub-Saharan, 57 said yes, 58 said maybe and 123 said no to this idea.

²¹³ National Institute of Statistics (INS), 'Employment and unemployment indicators, first quarter 2024 | INS', 2023, <https://ins.tn/publication/indicateurs-de-lemploi-et-du-chomage-premier-trimestre-2024>.

²¹⁴ *Africans are invading metro and bus stations, setting up scrap metal markets and hairdressing salons by the roadside*, sc. 11:00.

However, when we asked them whether they thought the influx of migrants had increased the crime rate in Tunisia, 70 people answered yes, 119 thought that the arrival of some migrants, but not all, had led to a recurrence of crime and 47 answered no.

Pensez-vous que leur présence s'intègre dans un complot pour porter atteinte à l'identité des Tunisiens?

Je ne veux pas répondre
0.8%

Peut-être
24.2%

Oui
23.8%

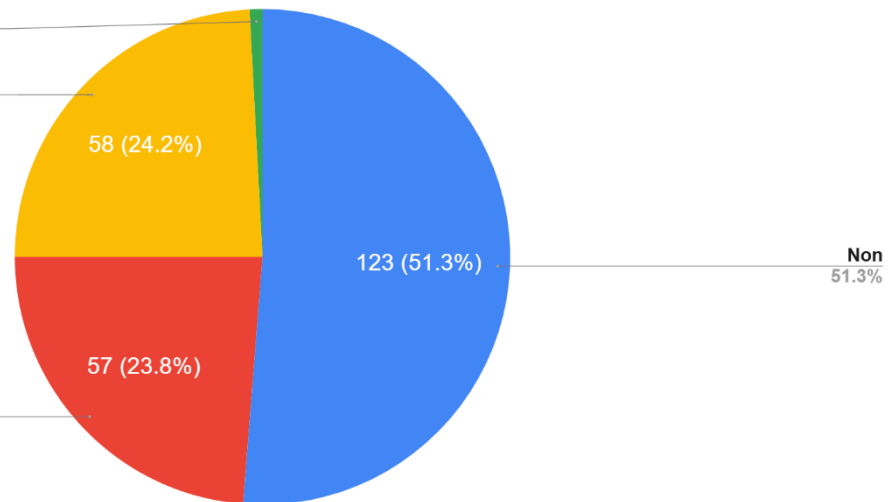


Figure 3

Do you think their presence is part of a plot to undermine the identity of Tunisians?

0.8% I don't want to answer

24.2% maybe

23.8% yes

51.3% no

Pensez-vous que la présence des immigrants subsahariens a fait augmenter la criminalité en Tunisie ?

Je ne veux pas répondre
1.7%

Oui
29.2%

Non
19.6%

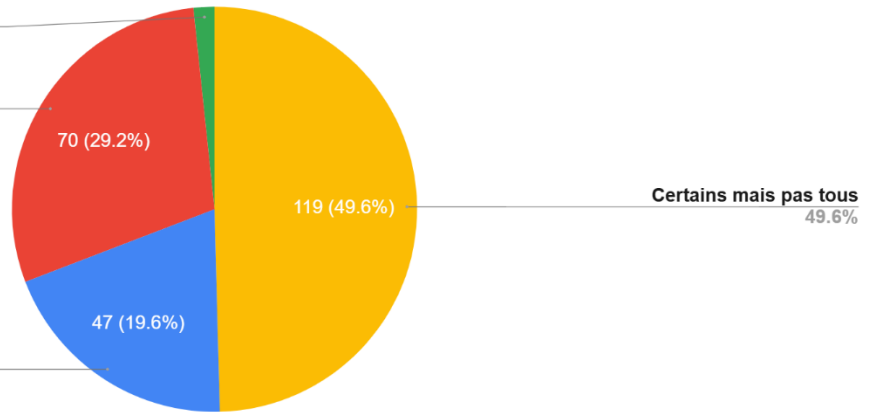


Figure 4

Do you think that the presence of sub-Saharan migrants has led to an upsurge in crime in Tunisia?

1.7% I don't want to answer

29.2% yes

19.6% no

49.6% some, but not all of them

Pensez-vous que leur présence s'intègre dans un complot pour changer la composition démographique en Tunisie ?

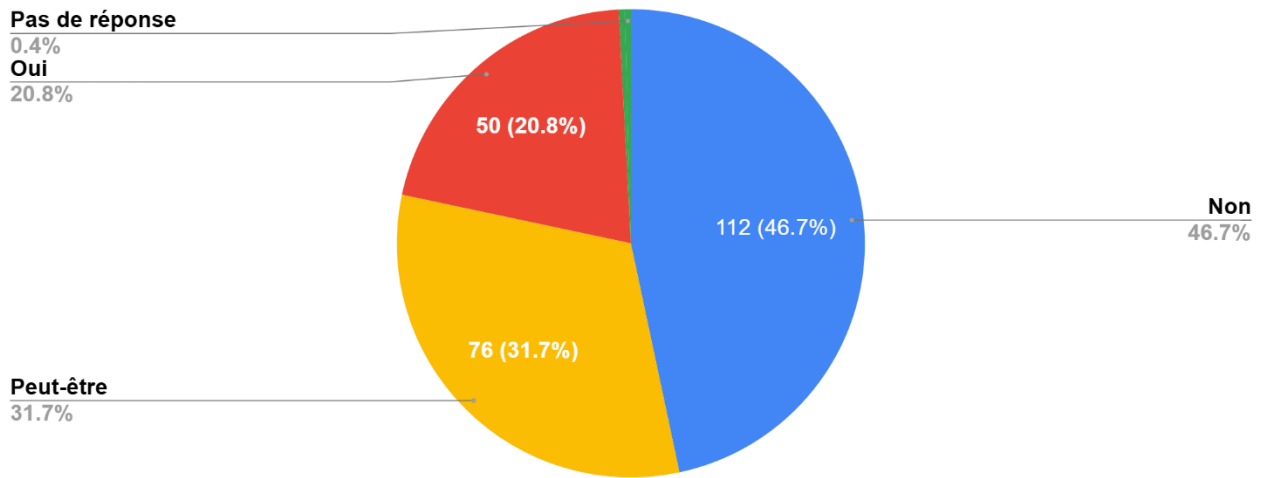


Figure 5

Do you think their presence is part of a plot to change the demographic composition of the population?

0.4% no answer

20.8% yes

31.7% maybe

46.7% no

These responses prove that people are more decisive when it comes to job opportunities and their personal security than when they are asked about their opinion on the conspiracy narrative, which many categorically refute. However, the people who believe in this thesis do exist and are influential. It should also be noted that 222 of our respondents have a university degree. The proportion of

responses in agreement with the conspiracy theories would have been higher if we had published the survey among other categories.

The conspiracy scenarios have been taken up and disseminated since the end of 2022 by certain people who declare themselves to be part of the national resistance against the settlement of Sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia. For example, a page called 'Resistance against the African colonization of Tunisia'²¹⁵ was created in December 2022 and broadcasts videos demonizing migrants to its 46,000 subscribers, including videos from the Tunisian Nationalist Party. The acronym of this page, which combines the Amazigh and Tunisian flags, and the name of the group indicate the same logic of popular mobilization against migrants. It should also be noted that there are public groups dedicated to specific cities and pages for Tunisians living abroad too. Naturally, these pages propagate edited videos and speeches taken out of context to divulge a conspiracy narrative in which even US President Joe Biden²¹⁶ and George Soros²¹⁷ are implicated. The impact of this narrative, based on the theories of the Tunisian Nationalist Party, on people's perceptions is illustrated by this sentence from a woman interviewed: *"They have been convinced that North Africa belongs to them, now they want to concentrate everywhere in Tunisia in order to dominate us as soon as they are a demographic force that surpasses us"*.²¹⁸

Finally, it is important to stress that the common denominator of the actors running these sites is that they all want to draw the attention of the state, and more specifically President Kais Saied, to what they describe as a colonization agenda or a source of unease and crime. While their videos and the petitions they share are meant to garner public support, their ultimate goal is to get their version of the migration issue to the president. The Tunisian head of state, after eliminating the intermediary bodies²¹⁹ and declaring himself the servant and voice of the people,²²⁰ has reinforced the idea that he will listen to popular mobilizations, as long as they do not come from those who betray the popular cause. In this context, political parties and associations have been marginalized and repressed since the constitutional coup of 25 July, while actors on social networks have imposed themselves as

²¹⁵ « Résistance contre la colonisation Africaine de la Tunisie », consulté le 4 août 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/humatalhima9>

²¹⁶ Voir par exemple la vidéo intitulée « Pas de hasard dans l'exode des Africains en Tunisie, tout est planifié » <https://www.facebook.com/100086941703235/videos/pcb.150096534565069/1401634253997404>

²¹⁷ Al Janoubia, « Affaire Soros, voilà le rôle de l'homme d'affaire américain dans le peuplement des Africains en Tunisie », 18 juillet 2023,

<https://www.facebook.com/aljanoubiatv.officialle/videos/186806204375998/?rdid=RVFQ4n0xfFcMCASa>

²¹⁸ *Africans are invading metro and bus stations, setting up scrap metal markets and hairdressing salons by the roadside*, sc. 8 :50.

²¹⁹ CESMA, *The crisis of intermediary bodies: studies on the Tunisian case*, Cérés, 2024,

²²⁰ Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Century of Populism. History, theory, criticism* (Editions du Seuil, 2020), 52.

producers/ entrepreneurs of the cause²²¹ without having any positional resources or expertise.²²² In fact, in such a populist regime, only two resources need to be acquired: conformity to the president's conspiracy theories and a camera.²²³ On February 21, 2023, the President adopted a reworked version of the conspiracy narrative developed on social networks, and since then even social media pages that relativize the conspiracy discourse, such as Bila-Kinaa, have joined the President's discourse and mobilized in his defense. We can see how these sites have managed to influence the president's attitude when we hear him say, for example, to the residents of Jebeniana: “*Don't worry, I'm following your situation **every night** and I'm here today to reassure you that the state is with you.*”²²⁴ It turns out that social networks are the place where popular concerns, alarmist rhetoric and the President of the Republic interact.²²⁵

Conclusion of Chapter two

In this section we have seen how racism, regionalism and an attitude of denigration have an impact on society's perceptions of migrants. These factors explain the widespread criminalization of migrants and the reactions to their behavior, which are seen as deviating from the norms. Furthermore, the results of our questionnaire, which was published after more than a year and a half of the President's speeches, show that the economic and security interests of citizens²²⁶ and their concerns are more influential among the public/audience than conspiracy theory despite the fact that these dimensions were not addressed in the Presidential speeches and did not represent the focal point of the Tunisian Nationalist Party's discourse. These findings show that the audience retains a degree of autonomy in relation to these discourses. They themselves produce images of threats and feel anxieties that are subsequently exaggerated and dramatized²²⁷ by the media and influential actors in social networks.

²²¹ Érik Neveu, ‘The analysis of public problems. An interdisciplinary field of study at the heart of current social issues’, *Idées économiques et sociales* 190, n° 4 (2017): 6-19, <https://doi.org/10.3917/idee.190.0006>

²²² John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Longman, 2011).

²²³ Even Kais Saied's choice of governors and ministers depends on these conditions. For example, the Minister of Education, Saloua Abassi, who was appointed by the President on 1 April 2024, was only appointed to the post after publishing a video in which she revealed ‘a case of corruption within the Ministry’ linked to falsified diplomas. The affair ended with the dismissal of the previous minister and the appointment of Saloua Abbassi.

²²⁴ Presidency of the Republic, ‘The President's visit to Jebeniana and El-Amra, sc. 3 :40.

²²⁵ Marcel Burger, Joanna Thornborrow, et Richard Fitzgerald, ‘Analysing the interactive spaces of new media and social networks, in *Discours des réseaux sociaux : enjeux publics, politiques et médiatiques*, Culture & Communication (Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck Supérieur, 2017), 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dbu.thom.2017.01.0007>

²²⁶ Paul M. Sniderman, Louk Hagendoorn, et Markus Prior, « Predisposing Factors and Situational Triggers: Exclusionary Reactions to Immigrant Minorities », *American Political Science Review* 98, n° 1 (February 2004): 35-49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305540400098X>

²²⁷ Stephen Hilgartner et Charles Bosk, « The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model », *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (July 1st, 1988): 53-78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/228951>

These media arenas²²⁸ became involved in the problematization of the issue of migration in Tunisia and crystallized it in the media and on social networks.

In addition to these local actors, we have seen that pressure from the EU for Tunisia to set up a system for managing asylum applications has had more of an impact in terms of impregnating an attitude opposed to this agenda and to the NGOs suspected of having been involved in its implementation. The internalization of this attitude within the State, certain NGOs and Parliament, has resulted in the fabrication of the illegality of migrants instead of the development of a legislative framework enabling the protection of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers.

In the light of the conclusions of this section, it becomes clear that securitization is a process that involves several actors with different logics, and that this process requires codependence between agents, contexts and the public²²⁹. In the final chapter we argue that securitization, once adopted by the regime, legitimizes its own repressive measures as well as the actions of other actors within society in such a way that the process becomes beyond the control of the state.

²²⁸ Cefai, 'The construction of public problems. Defining situations in public arenas'.

²²⁹ Balzacq, *Securitization Theory*, 48.

03 | SECURITIZATION IN ACTION: PRACTICES AND CONSEQUENCES IN TUNISIA

The rhetoric around security in Tunisia has been accompanied by a set of practices that, together with the regulatory and capacity-building tools that make the rhetoric possible, form what Michel Foucault calls the ‘dispositive’. This is ‘*a resolutely heterogeneous whole comprising discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proposals*’²³⁰ which, according to Giorgio Agamben, ‘*have, in one way or another, the capacity to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, shape, control and ensure the gestures, behavior, opinions and discourses of living beings*’.²³¹ According to Thierry Balzacq, the securitization mechanism embodies an image of a specific threat through which public action is articulated to resolve a safety problem.²³² This leads us to analyze, beyond the technical nature of the tools and laws, the intention behind the deployment of these instruments and the effects they produce. In this section, we will look at the securitization of migration in Tunisia through its instruments²³³ and the repercussions they have had. Firstly, we present the measures unleashed by the security apparatus against migrants and how they were implemented by deploying the capacity tools provided by the EU. We then highlight the laws that enabled the state to introduce such measures, and the effects of the criminalization solidified by these

²³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (Knopf/Doubleday Publishing Group, 1980).

²³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *What is a dispositive?* (Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2014).

²³² Thierry Balzacq et al., Security practices, *The International Studies Encyclopedia Online*, January 2010, 1-16.

²³³ Pierre Lascoumes et Patrick Le Galès, ‘Public action through its instruments, in *Gouverner par les instruments*, Académique (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2005), 11-44, <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.lasco.2005.01.0011>

laws on migrants, citizens and associations. Secondly, we analyze the effects of the securitization of migration on migrants, civil society associations and the state itself, in particular the loss of the monopoly of legitimate violence and the diplomatic crisis.

3.1 Towards a Tunisian Ban-opticon? The Practices and Instruments of Securitization

3.1.1 Securitization Practices: Repression, Interception and Surveillance

The President's speech on February 21, 2023, and his order to take urgent measures legitimized the deployment of repressive practices, some of which were already being applied. After this speech, waves of arbitrary arrests and document checks multiplied. Reports indicate that more than 1,546 people²³⁴ were arrested in February, while other organizations such as Lawyers Without Borders estimate the number to have reached 2,000.²³⁵ These arrests were aimed at sub-Saharan migrants in an irregular situation, but in reality, the authorities arrested all black people, including Tunisians and sub-Saharan with legal residency. Since the police officers in charge of these campaigns are suspicious of the people arrested and question the validity of their documents, those arrested are taken to police stations and then to other stations where fingerprints are taken, and people are sorted.²³⁶ In addition, homes were raided, and migrants were evicted from their homes. Those living in tents in the town had their camps dismantled after being evacuated²³⁷ by the police and the BNR (National Rapid Intervention Brigade), part of the anti-terrorism unit directorate. These operations were filmed and broadcast on the Ministry of the Interior's Facebook page²³⁸ in addition to other pages on social networks. Using sophisticated cameras and drones,²³⁹ and accompanied by suspenseful music, the videos shared create a spectacular atmosphere ²⁴⁰ for these operations. The

²³⁴ Sofian Philip Naceur, « Back to Dictatorship with Police Violence and Racist Agitation », viewed on August 18, 2024, <https://www.disorient.de/magazin/tunisia-saied-dictatorship-police-violence-racist-agitation>.

²³⁵ Julia Terradot, ‘Sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia faced with the inaction of international organizations’, viewed on August 18, 2024., <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2023/03/16/migrants-subsahariens-oim-hcr-tunisie/>.

²³⁶ Driss Rejichi, ‘A new wave of arrests against migrants and their supporters’, viewed on August 18, 2024, <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2024/05/17/arrestations-migrants-soutiens-tunisie/>.

²³⁷ Ministry of the Interior, ‘Organisation of security operations to deal with demonstrations that disrupt public safety’, May 3, 2024., <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1808578086275841&t=10>

²³⁸ Ministry of the Interior, ‘Evacuation of a youth hostel in La Marsa’, May 4, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=343712918724280>

²³⁹ Top Buzzz, ‘Security evacuates residential buildings of African migrants and violent clashes’, May 1, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/supported_browsers?next_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DOE_BhOUK2-6U

²⁴⁰ Simonneau, ‘The construction of threat and the construction of public problems’..

evacuation of a residence inhabited by sub-Saharan migrants thus becomes a spectacle applauded²⁴¹ by the people present, who celebrate such operations by singing the national anthem. With such spectacles, the evacuation takes the form of an act of liberation of an occupied territory. This allows the State to demonstrate that it is taking charge of the situation²⁴², but above all, these scenes of exclusion crystallize the idea of the illegality of migrants and therefore justify their exploitation or what Nicholas Genova calls their obscene inclusion.²⁴³

While the arrests and evacuations receive a fair amount of media coverage, the practices of refoulement and deportation are omitted from the broadcast. In fact, the arrested migrants are brought back in buses and dedicated vehicles to push them towards the borders with Algeria and Libya. The parliamentary deputy, Moez Barkallah, assumed that since July 2023, 1,000 migrants have been deported every day to the two neighboring countries.²⁴⁴ Migrants left behind at the Algerian border are grouped together by the authorities in the town of Tamanrasset before being deported to Assamaka in Niger.²⁴⁵ In Libya, deportees are captured by the Stability Support Authority (SSA) militias, who are accused of torturing and killing these migrants.²⁴⁶ For the former Minister of the Interior, Kamel Fekih, videos and testimonies about these expulsions are faked in order to damage Tunisia's image, and migrants falsify their testimonies to mobilize associations.²⁴⁷ The Minister for Foreign Affairs also denied these expulsions²⁴⁸. However, President Kais Saied stated for the first time during his speech on May 6, 2024, that the authorities had sent 400 migrants back to the eastern borders that day.²⁴⁹

Criticism from civil society organizations has made the perpetuation of these expulsions more complicated, so the Tunisian state has chosen to resort to other practices. It has mobilized African countries and the IOM to organize the 'voluntary return' of migrants. The IOM has stated that

²⁴¹ Tunisie Numérique, 'Hundreds of sub-Saharan Africans evacuated from a building amid intense security reinforcements', April 29, 2024,

https://www.youtube.com/supported_browsers?next_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dp1d_Vjhzd2s

²⁴² Didier Bigo, « Security, exception, ban and surveillance », in *Theorizing Surveillance* (Willan, 2006), 55.

²⁴³ Genova, « Spectacles of migrant "illegality" ».

²⁴⁴ Mosaique FM, 'Deputy Moez Barkallah: 1000 migrants repatriated a day', July 5, 2023,

<https://www.mosaiquefm.net/fr/actualite-midi-show/1176274/le-depute-moez-barkallah-1000-migrants-rapatries-par-jour>

²⁴⁵ Abbas Asamaan, 'Thousands of Africans expelled by Algeria in distress in Niger', June 11, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/06/10/au-niger-assamaka-porte-de-l-enfer-des-senegalais-chasses-d-algerie_6238507_3212.html

²⁴⁶ Amnesty International, 'Libya. The leaders of the Stability Support Authority militia must be held accountable', May 4, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2022/05/libya-hold-stability-support-authority-militia-leaders-to-account/>

²⁴⁷ Interior Minister Kamel Fekih sums up the issue of migrants in Sfax, sc. 1: 50.

²⁴⁸ Josep Catà Figuls, « Tunisia's Foreign Minister: 'We Are Not the EU Police' », November 30, 2023, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-30/tunisia-foreign-minister-we-are-not-the-eu-police.html>

²⁴⁹ Office of the President of the Republic, 'Inaugural speech at the meeting of the National Security Council', May 7, 2024, sc. 1: 56, [كلمة رئيس الجمهورية فيس سعيد في افتتاح اجتماع مجلس الامن القومي إرناسة الجمهورية التونسية](https://url1.io/IPYVj) <https://url1.io/IPYVj>

between January and July 2024, it facilitated the return of more than 4,100²⁵⁰ migrants to their countries of origin, noting an increase of 200% compared to the same period in 2023.

Irregular sub-Saharan migrants who refuse to return home and who have not been expelled are being driven out of the cities and back to rural areas and the desert south of the country. Interior Minister Kemal Fekih told a parliamentary session that this was a 'strategic' choice to disperse migrants and protect cities from crime. He said: *'I can reassure you, don't worry about the Medina (...) I prefer to see migrants in the suburbs rather than in the city (...) In rural areas we can eliminate them easily (...) I am obliged to disperse these migrants, otherwise it will be a mess if they gather in a single area'*.²⁵¹ Apart from the fact that these statements make explicit the regionalist rationale behind the Minister's desire to protect the towns and the 'Arab Medina' of Sfax to the detriment of rural areas, the strategy he described is reminiscent of the counter-guerrilla approach, which consists of neutralizing the insurgents once they have been identified, located and fixed.²⁵² The National Guard and anti-terrorist brigades are pursuing the migrants and evicting them²⁵³ from their camps in rural areas, although it was the authorities themselves who moved them from the cities to these regions. The pretext for these operations is the complaints of the inhabitants, but it is clear that the intention is to prevent the expansion of the camps and to destabilize the migrants. This strategy is in line with the State's objective of not allowing Tunisia to become a resettlement country. This can also be seen when we compare the preparation of a strategy in 2017 to receive more than 50,000 people in the event of war breaking out in Libya²⁵⁴ and the practices deployed by the current regime. Rather, these practices bear witness to a non-welcoming policy that rejects any idea of creating camps equipped to receive refugees or immigrants, especially as this time it is not Libyans. National television²⁵⁵ broadcasts of clashes between armed forces and immigrants and of evacuations serve the purpose of dissuading immigrants from passing through Tunisian territory if they want to get to Europe.

²⁵⁰ IOM Tunisia, 'Voluntary return of more than 4,100 people to 28 different destinations', viewed on August 18, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/iomtunis/posts/900858228747208?ref=embed_post

²⁵¹ *The Minister for the Interior: those who preceded me signed agreements to make Tunisia a country of asylum*, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGYmcPwmp7c>

²⁵² Christian Olsson, 'Total war and/or minimal force? The history and paradoxes of hearts and minds.', *Cultures & Conflicts*, n° 67 (November 15, 2007): 35-62, <https://doi.org/10.4000/conflicts.3102>

²⁵³ Charlotte Boitiaux, 'In Tunisia, migrants terrified by the latest army intervention in El Amra', April 25, 2024, <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/56683/en-tunisie-les-migrants-terrifies-face-aux-dernieres-interventions-de-larmee-a-el-amra>.

²⁵⁴ Sophie-Anne Bisiaux et al., 'Policies of non-accommodation in Tunisia', June 2020, 46, http://migreurop.org/IMG/pdf/politiques_du_non-accueil_en_tunisie_fpdf

²⁵⁵ Tunisian Television, 'Security units evacuate a building seized by migrants from sub-Saharan Africa', 29 avril 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/TVN.Tunisie/videos/864890938996491/?rldid=osVs2iLBKsALUSei>

With the intention of making the passage through Tunisia more unbearable, police repression has not been limited to the latter but has also included citizens who come to their aid. For example, two individuals were arrested on May 8, 2024, for harboring an undocumented migrant²⁵⁶, and arrest warrants have been issued for Tunisians involved in withdrawing money transfers for sub-Saharan migrants.²⁵⁷ Through this repression, the state prohibits undocumented migrants from withdrawing money sent by their families through the post office in order to deprive them of the means to finance their passage to Europe. It criminalizes any assistance to these migrants in order to discourage the local population from cooperating with them by showing them that it is more expensive to cooperate with the migrants than with the security forces.²⁵⁸

In the same vein, the Tunisian government has set up checkpoints inside the country, focusing on the departure points of irregular migrants, in order to anticipate the hargas and prevent smugglers and people wishing to leave from gaining access to these areas. For example, the security forces ask anyone wishing to enter Kerkennah Island to prove that they are resident there, and they ask workers to provide authorization from their employer and a sworn statement.²⁵⁹

All these practices contribute to the internalization of Tunisia's borders in order to stem the flow of irregular migrants even before they reach the coast and the external borders, which have become increasingly guarded.

In the same interest of combating clandestine migration, the interception of migrant boats is another practice that has developed since 2023. For the Tunisian authorities, allowing these boats to pass creates a draught and encourages other migrants to choose to cross Tunisia in order to reach Europe. As a result, the authorities have stepped up their surveillance of maritime borders, with interceptions rising from 31,297 in 2022 to 69,963 in 2023, of which 54,224 were sub-Saharan African nationals.²⁶⁰ It is very likely that these figures will increase in 2024, given that the National Guard has already declared that, from January to April 30, 2024, it intercepted 21,454 migrants compared with 17,576 in the same period last year.²⁶¹ Tunisia's strategy, in addition to the repressive policies of Algeria and

²⁵⁶ Mosaique FM, 'Monastir : In custody for housing an undocumented migrant | Mosaique FM', May 8, 2024, <https://www.mosaiquefm.net/fr/actualite-regional-tunisie/1269014/monastir-en-garde-a-vue-pour-avoir-heberge-un-sans-papiers>

²⁵⁷ Jawhara FM, 'Tunisians involved in the withdrawal of money transfers for African migrants arrested', June 27, 2024, <https://feji.us/yylsax>

²⁵⁸ Olsson, 'Total war and/or minimum force?', 45.

²⁵⁹ Mohamed Youssfi, 'For Meloni's eyes: how did Kerkennah become a quasi-closed security zone?', July 16, 2024, <https://urls.fr/lvFYqi>

²⁶⁰ InfoMigrants, 'Tunis announces 70,000 interceptions at sea, and remains accused of deportations to Libya', December 11, 2023, <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/53791/tunis-annonce-70-000-interceptions-en-mer-et-reste-accusee-de-renvois-vers-la-libye>

²⁶¹ Alhorria, 'New official statistics on the phenomenon of illegal migration in Tunisia', May 12, 2024, https://urls.fr/h_ls5i

the Libyan militias, is succeeding in forcing migrants to resort to other routes. In March 2024, a report²⁶² by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, known as Frontex, stated that the number of illegal migrants coming via West African routes had increased by 541% from January to February 2024 compared with the same period in 2023, while the number of such flows coming from the central Mediterranean had dropped to -70%.

3.1.2 The Capacity and Regulatory Instruments of Securitization

“If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.”

Abraham Harold Maslow²⁶³

The development of the number of interceptions and the practices analyzed in this section would not have been possible without the capacity resources provided by the EU and the United States to strengthen the surveillance of Tunisia's borders. In 2017, the United States confirmed that it was offering 26 patrol boats to the National Guard and installing 13 radar stations along the Tunisian coast.²⁶⁴ In addition to the purchase by Tunisia in 2016 and 2017 of 24 OH-58D Kiowa attack helicopters and 12 UH-60 Black Hawk transport helicopters from the United States²⁶⁵, the National Guard acquired an air unit²⁶⁶ of 3 Bell 429 model helicopters thanks to an Italian donation in 2019. These helicopters were bought to fight terrorism, but in 2023 it turned out that they were used to monitor the coast and track down smugglers, according to National Guard spokesman Houcemeddine Jebabli²⁶⁷.

²⁶² FRONTEX, « Irregular border crossings down in Central Med, up in Eastern Med and Western Africa », March 13, 2024, https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/irregular-border-crossings-down-in-central-med-up-in-eastern-med-and-western-africa-XWspJx?fbclid=IwY2xjawEvUihleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHVN1RIwKgXiCeMAMFhXKzose0kluf-j83xFCcbf-VxtEOmt17jSH0kFLCA_aem_jUCIc27eUQOTmWNoFjLABw

²⁶³ Abraham Harold Maslow, *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance* (Harper & Row, 1966).

²⁶⁴ U. S. Embassy Tunis, « Tunisian Navy Receives Two U.S. Patrol Boats », U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, January 16, 2017, <https://tn.usembassy.gov/tunisian-navy-receives-two-u-s-patrol-boats/>

²⁶⁵ Opex360, ‘Tunisia has received its first 6 OH-58D Kiowa attack helicopters - Zone Militaire’, viewed on August 19, 2024, https://www.opex360.com/2017/02/05/la-tunisie-recu-ses-6-premiers-helicopteres-dattaque-oh-58d-kiowa/?fbclid=IwY2xjawEva3IleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHQySHdbUFS4AwYjoSgMycFDkw2U7YheYtGDgcXCRtGnZ12vDK2zpVnmhGw_aem_cbW5Or-FMmNT0y-SFq1_tA

²⁶⁶ Business News, ‘Creation of a new National Guard unit supported by 3 helicopters’, August 2019, https://www.businessnews.com.tn/creation-dune-nouvelle-unite-de-la-garde-nationale-soutenue-par-3-helicopteres,520,90322,3?fbclid=IwY2xjawEva2ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHci2vfIDAG7PmjG6alV0p4wdDH7fM42E06SeTa32s3igCiosdStyLVZLA_aem_yL_P6spZHP2NhAHtuI3KdA

²⁶⁷ Webdo, ‘Tunisia: What's the story with the helicopter and the migrants?’, September 6, 2023,

The pursuit, evacuation and refoulement of sub-Saharan migrants would not be possible without the vehicles provided by European countries as part of bilateral cooperation. For example, on March 13, 2019, Italy donated 50 4x4 all-road vehicles to the Tunisian National Guard.²⁶⁸ On February 27, 2023, Italy supplied 100 Nissan Navarro pick-ups²⁶⁹ to Tunisia, and other vehicles were delivered on June 14, 2023.²⁷⁰ In the same context, in November 2018 Germany supplied the National Guard with 20 minibuses, 27 4x4 vehicles, 5 Unimog trucks and 26 quads²⁷¹, followed by further vehicles²⁷² in March 2021.

In addition to patrol boats and vehicles, bilateral cooperation between Tunisia and Italy, France and Germany have also focused on developing technologies for control and surveillance systems. In 2017, Italian ambassador Angelino Alfano confirmed his country's contribution to the introduction of the automatic fingerprint identification system (AFIS) in Tunisia.²⁷³ At the same time, Germany supplied 100 AFIS fingerprint readers with identification software in 2018.²⁷⁴ France is also involved through its Support Program for the Reform and Modernization of the Security Sector in Tunisia (PARMSS), designed by CIVIPOL.²⁷⁵ During their visit to Tunisia on June 18, 2023, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin and German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser held talks with the Tunisian authorities on the modernization of their fingerprint identification system.²⁷⁶ With this in mind, the French company Idemia, formed from the merger of Safran Identity & Security and Oberthur Technologies (OT), has

https://www.webdo.tn/fr/actualite/national/tunisie-c-est-quoi-l-histoire-de-l-helicoptere-et-des-migrants/208447?fbclid=IwY2xjawEva1hleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHaOGbN2eym4lk7JS51pkQmwyOgrX8Uo_c93M_XPCLMujp4SEYDaYPrvmNQ_aem_GPGFIxWLPFITAetOeinOw

²⁶⁸ Business News, 'Italy donates 50 4x4 vehicles to the National Guard', March 14, 2019,

<https://www.businessnews.com.tn/litalie-fait-don-a-la-garde-nationale-de-50-vehicules-4x4,520,86328,3>

²⁶⁹ Altraeconomia, « Dall'Italia cento pick-up alla Tunisia per il controllo delle frontiere », viewed on August 19 2024, <https://altreconomia.it/dallitalia-cento-pick-up-alla-tunisia-per-il-controllo-delle-frontiere/>

²⁷⁰ Kapitalis, 'Donation of Italian equipment to Tunisia to combat illegal migration - Kapitalis, June 14, 2023, <https://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2023/06/15/don-dequipements-italiens-a-la-tunisie-pour-lutter-contre-la-migration-irreguliere/>

²⁷¹ Raja Bessais, 'Delivery of security material and equipment donated by the FRG to the National Guard', Webmanagercenter (blog), November 2, 2018, <https://www.webmanagercenter.com/2018/11/02/426230/livraison-de-materiel-et-equipements-securitaires-offerts-par-la-rfa-a-la-garde-nationale/>

²⁷² Webdo, 'German donation of security equipment for the Tunisian National Guard, March 18, 2021, <https://www.webdo.tn/fr/actualite/national/don-allemand-dequipements-securitaires-au-profit-de-la-garde-nationale-tunisienne/139009>

²⁷³ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, « Italy-Tunisia: Alfano initiates collaboration with Tunisia on strategic sectors », February 9, 2017,

https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2017/02/italia-tunisia-alfano-stringe-collaborazione/

²⁷⁴ Sofian Philip Naceur, « An “accessory to repression”? Police training and equipment aid by the EU in North Africa and the Sahel », March 2018, 30,

https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Ausland/Afrika/Beihilfe-zur-Repression_Drucksachen.pdf

²⁷⁵ CIVIPOL, " Technical Assistance to the Support Program for the Reform and Modernization of the Security Sector of the Republic of Tunisia - PARMSS Tunisia ", viewed on August 20, 2024, <https://www.civipol.fr/fr/projets/assistance-technique-au-programme-dappui-la-reforme-et-la-modernisation-du-secteur-de-la-0>

²⁷⁶ The French Embassy in Tunis, "Joint Communiqué - Visit of Gérald Darmanin and Nancy Faeser", June 20, 2023, <https://tn.ambafrance.org/Communique-conjoint-Visite-de-Gerald-Darmanin-et-de-Nancy-Faeser>

been asked to develop the MBIS automated biometric identification software in Tunisia.²⁷⁷ This software can manage fingerprints, palm prints and facial prints.

In 2022 and after the campaign of arbitrary arrests targeting migrants to take their fingerprints and force them to undergo DNA tests²⁷⁸, we have understood that the development of these biometric identification technologies is targeting sub-Saharan migrants in particular. The authorities justified these actions by the intention to carry out a census of migrants, even though no such census had been previously announced, and the arrests had no legal basis. In addition to bilateral cooperation, the development of border surveillance technologies has been the focus of cooperation between Tunisia and the European Union. As part of the Maghreb's integrated border management program, European countries have provided Tunisia with new technologies enabling it to cope with the flow of irregular migration.

In this context, the Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (ISMaris)²⁷⁹ has been implemented since 2015 to facilitate the collection of real-time information from offshore assets and coastal radars, and to link the sensors of Tunisian National Guard patrol boats. This system is designed to facilitate communication between observation and command centers. Through the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the EU is providing Tunisia with technological equipment including navigation radars, thermal cameras²⁸⁰, remotely operated underwater vehicles (ROVs)²⁸¹, side scan sonars and communications equipment for NAVTEX patrol boats²⁸². The ICMPD was also mobilized in 2022 for the construction of the Nafta inter-agency training center in Tozeur²⁸³ and the Oued Zarga inter-agency training center on the site of the National Guard commando school in Beja.

²⁷⁷ Jeune Afrique, "How Paris discreetly helps Tunis finance police software - Jeune Afrique", February 22, 2024, https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1540040/economie-entreprises/comment-paris-aide-discrettement-tunis-a-financer-un-logiciel-policier/?fbclid=IwY2xjawEwbDdleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHR90kQWLOQPbEEfBiJXaNmKksMkqdfUE9JO-YWKNgU-bi_NDBBNx5hGsUw_aem_S8mRwXI8IXgIjHOcT1dgBA

²⁷⁸ Aïda Delpuech, "Arbitrary arrests and residence permits racist ordeals for Sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia", February 12, 2022, <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2022/02/23/carte-sejour-subasahariens-racisme-tunisie/>

²⁷⁹ European Parliament, "Parliamentary Question | Answer for Question E-000891/20 | E-000891/2020(ASW)", April 29, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-000891-ASW_EN.html

²⁸⁰ ICMPD, « Contract Award Notices -SUPPLY OF NAVIGATIONAL RADARS AND THERMAL CAMERAS », December 30, 2020, https://www.icmpd.org/content/download/51334/file/Award_notice_No_20.028_TCR_ONETECH_INTERTECH_EAGLE_CURRENTCORP.pdf.

²⁸¹ ICMPD, « Contract Award Notices - SUPPLY OF REMOTELY OPERATED VEHICLES AND SIDE SCAN SONAR EQUIPMENT », November 4, 2020, https://www.icmpd.org/content/download/51332/file/Award_notice_No_20.022_ROV_Intertech_group_Eagle.pdf

²⁸² ICMPD, « Contract Award Notices - SUPPLY OF NAVTEX EQUIPMENT », October 6, 2020, https://www.icmpd.org/content/download/51331/file/Award_notice_No_20.021_-_NAVTEX_Equipment_-_MS_Marine.pdf

²⁸³ ICMPD, « Contract Award Notices - CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTER-AGENCY TRAINING CENTRE ON THE SITE OF THE CUSTOMS SURVEILLANCE AND RESEARCH BRIGADE IN NEFTA », March 21, 2022, https://www.icmpd.org/content/download/57274/file/Award%20notice_21.062_GTR.pdf

²⁸⁴. These centers are intended to train officers from the Border Police, Customs and the Tunisian National Guard in a first phase, before being transformed into regional training centers for Algerian, Libyan and Tunisian forces.²⁸⁵ There is nothing new about European organizations training national guards. The European Gendarmerie Force has been organizing train-the-trainer courses for National Guard commandos since 2018²⁸⁶, and in 2017, Germany signed an agreement with Tunisia on cooperation in the training of authorities involved in the fight against irregular migration.²⁸⁷

Supporting the ability of Tunisian forces to combat irregular immigration is one of the pillars of the outsourcing of European border management. This is what we understand from the action plan sheets (leaked by Statewatch) of the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADÉM)²⁸⁸ and the Council of the EU²⁸⁹ on security cooperation with Tunisia. In these sheets, we find, for example: *“The EU encourages Tunisia to cooperate with Frontex and to finalize the working agreements with Europol and CEPOL. The EU will seize every opportunity (conferences, missions, visits) to clarify Frontex's role and familiarize the Tunisian authorities with the agency”; ‘The Commission will relaunch discussions on an international agreement for the exchange of personal data between Europol and the Tunisian authorities’.*

But we also find notes stating that *“Tunisia is currently refusing to cooperate with Frontex”*. These notes tell us that the EU plans to keep up the pressure on Tunisia to join Frontex, despite the country's refusal to agree. Tunisia's refusal is in line with its strategy of exploiting European aid to stop the flow of migrants, without integrating into European institutions. It also reflects Tunisia's interest in avoiding public criticism on this issue. According to the results of our questionnaire, most people are in favor of strengthening land border controls (*figure 6*) but are against cooperation with the EU in intercepting migrants at sea (*figure 7*).

²⁸⁴ ICMPD, « Contract Award Notices - CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTER-AGENCY TRAINING CENTRE ON THE SITE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD COMMANDO SCHOOL IN OUED ZARGA », May 6, 2022, https://www.icmpd.org/content/download/57556/file/Award_notice_No_21.069_GTR_.pdf

²⁸⁵ ICMPD, « Support Programme for the Tunisian Government in the field of Integrated Border Management - ICMPD », viewed on August 20, 2024, <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/support-programme-for-the-tunisian-government-in-the-field-of-integrated-border-management-ibm-tunisia-phase-iii>

²⁸⁶ The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, “Training Tunisian National Guard commandos at Oued Zarga | EEAS”, March 23, 2018., https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/42074_fr

²⁸⁷ German Parliament, “Security cooperation agreement between Tunisia and Germany”, March 13, 2017., <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/18/115/1811509.pdf>.

²⁸⁸ Council of the European Union, « MOCADÉM Tunisia action file », December 15, 2023, <https://www.statewatch.org/media/4205/eu-council-mocadem-action-file-16821-23.pdf>

²⁸⁹ Council of the European Union, « Operationalization of the Pact – Action plans for strengthening comprehensive migration partnerships with priority countries of origin and transit. Draft Action Plan: Tunisia », February 22, 2022, <https://www.statewatch.org/media/3241/eu-council-pact-tunisia-action-plan-11392-21-rev2.pdf>

Pensez-vous que l'État doit renforcer le contrôle des frontières terrestres ?

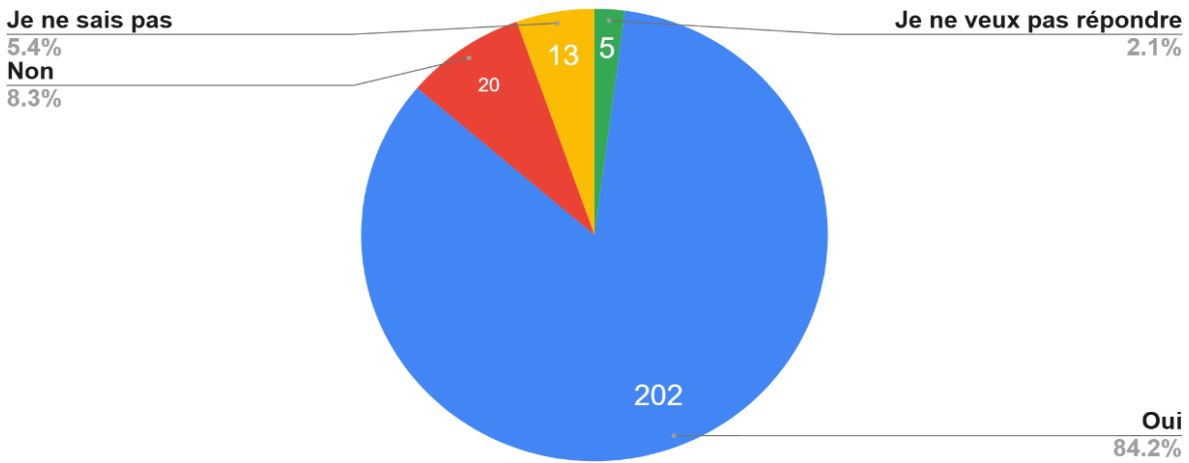


Figure 6

Do you think the state needs to tighten control of its land borders?	
2.1%	I don't want to answer
5.4%	I don't know
8.3%	No
84.2%	Yes

In fact, whether the Tunisian state is integrated into European agencies or not, the training and assistance provided by the EU, while enabling Tunisian security professionals to renew their operating methods and benefit from new equipment, leads them to adhere to a strategy of refoulement by proxy.

It is important to note that European aid is part of the cooperation framework set out in article 17 of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, promulgated on March 16, 2004,

which stipulates that “*States Parties shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible to prevent and suppress the smuggling of migrants by sea, in accordance with the international law of the sea.*”²⁹⁰ In this respect, assistance programs for Tunisian forces have always been the subject of inter-ministerial agreements that never go through the ratification process of the Tunisian parliament. Even the agreement signed on July 16, 2023, was concluded in the form of a “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a Strategic and Global Partnership” rather than an international treaty, in order to escape parliamentary scrutiny. What's more, the memorandum allows Tunisia to continue its adhoc course²⁹¹ by avoiding signing any binding agreements. In addition to exploiting gaps in international law, the Tunisian regime deploys restrictive laws to crack down on irregular migrants, while flouting international rules on the protection of these migrants' rights. Among these laws, article 18 of law N68-7 of March 8, 1968, on the status of foreigners in Tunisia²⁹² states that “*The Secretary of State for the Interior may issue an expulsion order against any foreigner whose presence on Tunisian territory constitutes a threat to public order*”. Article 25 of this law states that “*Any person who knowingly directly or indirectly assists or attempts to facilitate the entry, exit, movement or illegal residence of a foreigner in Tunisia shall be liable to imprisonment of between 1 month and 1 year and a fine of between 6 and 120 dinars*”. In addition to this law, several members of migrant aid associations have been arrested for months on the basis of articles of organic law N2015-26 of August 7, 2015, relating to the fight against terrorism and the repression of money laundering²⁹³, and this, without the State having any evidence of their involvement in money laundering operations. This legal arsenal, which criminalizes aid to immigrants and allows them to be deported, reduces immigrants to the status of Homo Sacer, (Sacred Man), who loses all rights and can be excluded and tortured with impunity, in the name of exercising and preserving sovereignty²⁹⁴.

²⁹⁰ JORT, “Decree no. 2004-1400 of June 22, 2004, on the publication of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”. (2004), <https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/decret-n-2004-1400-du-22-juin-2004-portant-publication-du-protocole-contre-le-traffic-illicite-de-migrants-par-terre-air-et-mer-additionnel-a-la-convention-des-nations-unies-contre-la-criminalite/>

²⁹¹ Katharina Natter, « Ad-hocratic immigration governance: how states secure their power over immigration through intentional ambiguity », *Territory, Politics, Governance* 11, n° 4 (May 19, 2023): 677-94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2021.1877189>

²⁹² JORT, ‘Law No. 68-7 of March 8, 1968, on the status of foreigners in Tunisia’. (1986),

<https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/loi-n-68-7-du-8-mars-1968-relative-a-la-condition-des-etrangers-en-tunisie/>

²⁹³ JORT, ‘Organic Law No. 2015-26 of August 7, 2015, on the fight against terrorism and the repression of money laundering’. (2015), <https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/loi-organique-n-2015-26-du-7-aout-2015-relative-a-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-et-a-la-repression-du-blanchiment-dargent/>

²⁹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

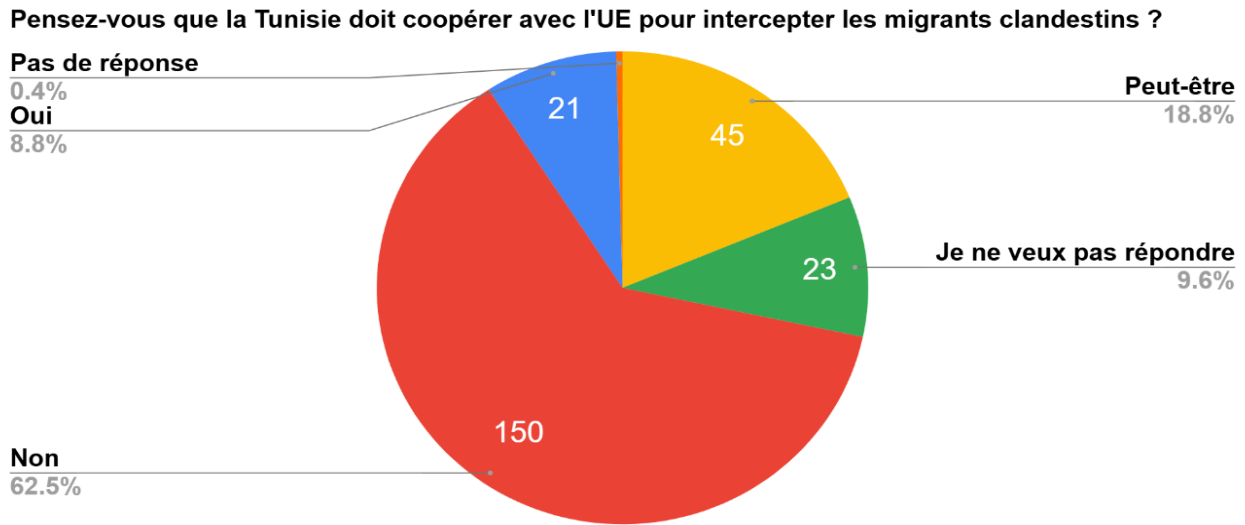


Figure 7

Do you think the Tunisian state should cooperate with the EU to intercept irregular migrants?
0.4% No answer
18.8% Maybe
9.6% I don't want to answer
8.8% Yes
62.5% No

The combination of practices and regulatory and technological instruments deployed by the state to track down, monitor and repress irregular migrants represents the securitization mechanism that enables the construction of what Didier Bigo calls the Ban-opticon.²⁹⁵ Here, technologies are mobilized to monitor a particular category of the population, which is excluded in the name of

²⁹⁵ Didier Bigo, « Globalized (in)Security: The Field and the Ban-opticon », *Terror Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes After 9/11* 4 (July 1, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203926765>

protecting other categories. In this condition, emergency measures tend to be perpetuated by a process of routinization in the use of profiling and surveillance technologies. According to the author, this process not only depends on the country's internal fields, it is also the result of the influence of what he calls the transnational networks of security professionals, who see threats as globalized and de-territorialized dangers requiring cooperation between national and international agencies, and the establishment of a continuum between internal security and external defense.²⁹⁶ Considering the recent developments in biometric identification technologies in Tunisia and taking into account the sophisticated border surveillance resources provided by the EU to the North African country, and not forgetting that since 2022 Tunisia has begun taking fingerprints from migrants and forcing them to undergo DNA tests, it seems to us that Tunisia is well on the way to putting this logic of exclusion into practice.

After looking at practices relating to the internalization of borders in Tunisia and techniques linked to the fortification of external borders and the tools that have enabled these practices to be used, the next part highlights how the securitization of migration has been experienced by migrants and members of migrant aid associations before tackling its repercussions on the State.

3.2 Effects of Securitization

3.2.1 Effects on migrants and their supporters: Popular Violence and Insecurity

Racist, xenophobic and regionalist attitudes have always existed in Tunisia, and they have had an impact on Tunisians' perception of sub-Saharan migrants without this translating into widespread acts of physical violence against them. However, popular violence against migrants increased after President Kais Saied's speech, which was interpreted as authorising the use of violence against migrants, who were now portrayed as public enemies. The fact that the President of the Republic himself made a hate speech against sub-Saharan migrants was enough for some people to unleash an unprecedented wave of violence and believe themselves to be immune, since the President himself had singled out migrants as a threat to the demographic composition and identity of Tunisians. As soon as the speech of February 21, 2023, was broadcast, the hunt for migrants was

²⁹⁶ Balzacq et al., « Security practices ».

unleashed in parallel with the police crackdown. Individuals set fire to migrants' homes ²⁹⁷, others were chased from their homes after house raids and several were chased, assaulted ²⁹⁸, and stabbed ²⁹⁹. There were also clashes with stones and knives between Tunisians and sub-Saharan. ³⁰⁰.

In addition, many landlords and employers chose to protect themselves against the regime's restrictions and intimidation by forcing migrants out of their rents and jobs. From one day to the next, these migrants found themselves without work and without shelter, so that many chose to set up camps in front of the IOM and UNHCR offices before these organizations asked the police to remove them.³⁰¹

In this context, an atmosphere of terror has settled over all migrants, whether documented or irregular. *"I've never been so scared in my life"*³⁰². This is what Zaher, (one of the few students who agreed to meet me), told me when I asked him how he experienced the period following the President's speech. Having come to Tunisia in 2019, Zaher explained that he had been insulted by racist words, but that he had also been treated well by his neighbors and employers. On the other hand, he says that since 2023 *"he doesn't feel like he used to"*. He says: *"The president's speech gave people access to do anything. Before, Tunisia was a country where I felt safe, the police were everywhere. But afterwards, when the security that's supposed to protect you turns its back on you, you don't feel safe anymore. I have a friend who was pelted with stones, and I've watched videos of people being attacked and evicted from their homes in Sousse and Sfax without even being able to lodge a complaint"*. Zaher explained to me that since February 2023, he has begun to keep a close eye on what's happening in the country through sub-Saharan communities' posts on social networks and WhatsApp groups that have been set up to keep immigrants aware of the dangers they may face. On these groups, alerts are regularly shared designating "red districts", a name alerters give to places where attacks on migrants are more frequent. It should be noted that Zaher has never been attacked. He told me that it's through his friends and social networking groups that he learns about acts of

²⁹⁷ The Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia, "ATTACKS OF BLACK STUDENTS IN TUNISIA", February 24, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/AESAT.Officielle/videos/921688738864785/>

²⁹⁸ The Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia, "Communiqué following the attack on 4 students", February 26, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=6029149890454583&set=a.806328572736767>

²⁹⁹ "Malian student stabbed to death in Bizerte", February 27, 2023,

<https://www.facebook.com/abass.doumbia.5494/posts/1128089464552780/?rclid=MV9OKUqnXi81jUw5>

³⁰⁰ "Clashes between sub-Saharan migrants and Tunisians on the night of February 25", February 26, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/3317818658233715/permalink/6662574790424735/?rclid=dbC7FLsza7Njm9M&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2Fv%2FT6wGdGxqkTRcSAUN%2F; viewed on August 21, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/reel/1397744907655580

³⁰¹ Nissim Gasteli, "In Tunisia, migrants' resentment of UN agencies", April 14, 2023,

https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/04/14/en-tunisie-le-ressentiment-des-migrants-face-aux-agences-de-l-onu_6169589_3212.html

³⁰² Interview with a Congolese worker.

violence. The same was true of Rami, a student who has been in Tunisia since 2022. He said: *“ It's a good thing I live in front of the university, otherwise I'd have done the same as my friends, who stopped coming to classes”*.³⁰³ He points out: *“ Personally, no one has done anything to me, but I have a friend who was robbed and attacked with a knife. Another was hit with stones by little children “*. Asked about the wave of violence against migrants, he replied: *“I was more terrified by what I saw on the media than by what I saw myself. I realized that it was no longer safe to leave the house through the successive publications by associations on WhatsApp groups. Then I realized that many of them were publishing fake videos to encourage people to emigrate to Europe with them. The African Students' Association alerted us to this “*. Shocked by the President's remarks, Rami began to follow the media to try and understand what was happening in Tunisia: *“I read on social networks that the President wants to chase away sub-Saharaners. Seeing this information shocked me. At first, I didn't understand the context, so I followed the debates on Western and African media. Some said it was a strategic choice on the part of the President to make people forget previous problems, while others explained his remarks by the cooperation between Kais Saied and the EU in the fight against illegal migration. It started to make sense, but it didn't reassure me “*. He adds: *“ I don't have ' residence permit' written on my forehead so that people don't attack me when I leave my house “*.

So we understand that the situation triggered by the President of the Republic's speech has created a condition of insecurity and uncertainty for migrants in Tunisia. Faced with this uncertainty, they began to adopt a kind of vigilance to avoid any danger, but also to understand why they suddenly became targeted by the state and by people. The intensive dissemination of videos of assaults, both real and fake, helped to imbue this feeling of insecurity. The people I interviewed also told me that they had to calm the anxiety of their parents and families back home: *“My relatives were saddened, my mother called Tunisian students she met in my homeland to support me. My roommate's father called to tell him to come home, saying 'I don't want you to die in Tunisia '*. Insecurity is also a feature of the experience of members of civil society associations involved in helping migrants. Indeed, the arrests of the directors of organizations such as Terre d'Asile Tunisie, M-nemty and the Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR)³⁰⁴ and their designation by the President of the Republic, the Tunisian Nationalist Party and other actors on social networks as traitors, mercenaries and agents working for the benefit of foreign networks, have had an impact on people's attitude towards the members of these organizations. The latter fear both state repression and popular violence, so much so that many

³⁰³ Interview with a Senegalese student.

³⁰⁴ Rihab Boukhatia, “Tunisia's migration crisis: Kais Saied's liberticidal alibi”, May 10, 2024, <https://nawaat.org/2024/05/10/crise-migratoire-en-tunisie-lalibi-liberticide-de-kais-saied/>.

of them are wary of any media appearance or even interviews with journalists or researchers. We tried to meet some of these activists, but only one agreed to meet us and only two others answered our questions online. All three confirm that they are afraid of being prosecuted by the state or attacked by the public for their activities in favor of respect for migrants' rights. *“We are living in an atmosphere of terror”*³⁰⁵ says one of these activists. *“We can no longer go out into the field or express ourselves freely. From now on, we can't do anything. For the first time in my life, I've been harassed and insulted by people because of my pro-migrant stance. Since then, I've started to choose my words carefully.* Popular intimidation has also prompted organizations to change their working methods to adapt to the circumstances: *“We no longer share the programs of our events on social networks, and sometimes we share the programs without mentioning the date and location of the event”*. Insecurity has also had an effect on relations between these organizations: *“Several organizations now refuse to sign joint communiqués, whereas before they did.”*

So, in addition to the physical violence that migrants and activists suffer, they are also subject to a form of slow violence³⁰⁶, a moral violence that impacts them and their families. In this way, securitization is not reduced to the statements of actors or the practices they develop to the detriment of migrants and their supporters but is reflected in the experiences of its victims and becomes a lived and felt securitization. The Tunisian state has securitized migration under the pretext of securing the country and its borders, but in reality, it only creates a culture of insecurity among the victims of its discourses. In the following paragraphs, we will see that securitization is counterproductive for the state itself.

3.2.2 Repercussions on the State: Loss of the Monopoly of Violence and Diplomatic Crises

Securitization doesn't just mean adopting a security approach and implementing restrictive practices and tools, it also means portraying migrants as a source of threat through discourse. In Tunisia, popular adherence to these discourses has resulted in voluntary mobilization against immigrants by factions of the Tunisian people who have chosen not to rely on the state to confront sub-Saharanans, now conceived as enemies. In addition to the attacks mentioned in the previous paragraphs, sub-Saharan Africans were detained by bandits in Tunisia, and attacks on legal students increased in the

³⁰⁵ Interview with an organization director.

³⁰⁶ Christian et Dowler, « Slow and Fast Violence ».

days following the President's speech. Indeed, once the state had incorporated migrants into a conspiracy, it lost control over the popular reactions of people who truly believed themselves to be in a war of self-defense. Securitization therefore led to the delegation of the use of force to popular factions, against the will of the state, which subsequently tried to resolve the issue. As a result, by proclaiming its desire to tackle a public problem (more specifically, a security threat), the state has created a real public problem for itself, represented by factions wishing to manage the issue of migrants themselves.

After the outburst of violence against migrants, new elements were incorporated into the President's speeches and visits concerning clandestine migration. For example, during a visit to Sfax on June 10, 2023, we see the President of the Republic holding a baby in his arms, saying that Sub-Saharanans "are brothers"³⁰⁷. During this meeting, he maintained his usual sovereigntist stance, but repeated that "*the State continues to protect these migrants and will not let anyone attack them*". During his visit to Sfax on July 13, 2024, the President kept repeating that "*It's the State that must protect the residents*". Addressing a resident, he demanded: "*I've come to reassure you that the State is there with you. Don't say that the State no longer exists. It is the state authorities who must protect you, and no one must replace the state (...) you must inform the state of your claims, and the authorities must protect you.*"³⁰⁸. This visit also included a meeting with the governor of Sfax, where he was seen saying: "*We must send this message to everyone: the Tunisian state exists (...) There is no question of anyone replacing the state. It is the State alone that monopolizes legitimate violence*"³⁰⁹. These statements and this use of the Weberian conception of the state³¹⁰ prove that popular reactions are now one of the President's concerns. Nevertheless, this has not led him to revise his remarks, as he is still heard repeating the theory of the settlement of migrants in Tunisia. This fact leads us to conclude that the President wants to restrict the role of citizens to informing the relevant authorities, rather than confronting migrants. We also point out that the President's speeches tend to focus more on conspiracy theories than on the migrants themselves, but this has no meaning for the public if in any case migrants are conceived as integral parts of this conspiracy. From this, we postulate that the President's remarks after February 2023 are not part of a process of de-securitization³¹¹ but can be explained by a desire to contain clashes between Tunisians and sub-Saharanans.

³⁰⁷ *President of the Republic visits Sfax*, sc. 1 :00.

³⁰⁸ Presidency of the Republic, "The President's visit to Jebeniana and El-Amra", July 13, 2024, sc. 1 : 00-4 : 00, <https://www.facebook.com/Presidence.tn/videos/1231851581319703>.

³⁰⁹ Presidency of the Republic, sc. 4 :00.

³¹⁰ Max Weber, *The Savant and the Politician* (Union générale d'éditions, 1963).

³¹¹ Wæver, *Securitization and desecuritization*.

In addition to managing the internal crisis largely generated by the President's speech, the Tunisian state had to deal with a diplomatic crisis, which represented the first challenge for the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nabil Ammar, appointed on February 7, 2023. In fact, the President's remarks were severely denounced by international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). On February 24, 2023, the AU called on its member countries to “refrain from any hate speech of a racist nature, likely to harm people”, and the communiqué issued by the chairman of its commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, described Kais Saïed's remarks as “*shocking declarations*”.³¹² The Tunisian Foreign Ministry responded by expressing its “astonishment” at the AU's position, which it considered to be based on “*baseless accusations*” and “*a misunderstanding of the positions of the Tunisian authorities*”.³¹³ That same day, Minister Nabil Ammar welcomed the ambassadors of African countries to Tunisia and published an image of himself with the diplomats, clasping their hands.³¹⁴ On February 25, the Minister sent a message of “*fraternity and responsibility to all African brothers present on Tunisian soil, whether they are legally or irregularly resident*”, assuring them that the State was looking after their safety and calling on those in an irregular situation to report to the authorities to organize their return.³¹⁵ Tunisia also expressed its “*astonishment*”³¹⁶ at criticism from the UN when its Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued a “*solemn warning to the Tunisian authorities on April 4, 2023 to put a stop to racist hate speech*”.³¹⁷ Worse still, on March 5, 2023, the World Bank (WB) suspended its partnership with Tunisia “*following statements by the country's president that triggered acts of racist harassment and violence*”, according to its president David Malpass.³¹⁸ On the same day, on March 5, 2023, the Tunisian government announced measures in favor of migrants, including the creation of a toll-free number for residents of various sister African countries to report any violations against them,

³¹² Le monde, “Tunisia: the African Union condemns President Kaïs Saïed's “shocking” statements on sub-Saharan migrants”, February 25, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/02/25/tunisie-l-union-africaine-condamne-les-declarations-choquantes-du-president-kais-saied-sur-les-migrants-subsahariens_6163294_3212.html.

³¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Communiqué in response to the African Union”, February 25, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=584865760350716&set=a.252639480240014>.

³¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Meeting with African ambassadors”, February 24, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=584410687062890&set=a.252639480240014>.

³¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Communiqué of February 25, 2023”, February 25, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=584950630342229&set=a.252639480240014>.

³¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Communiqué in response to the UN”, April 6, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=610173451153280&set=a.252639473573348>.

³¹⁷ ONU Info, “Tunisia must put an end to 'hate speech' against Sub-Saharan”, April 4, 2023, <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2023/04/1133917>.

³¹⁸ Andrea Shalal et Angus McDowall, « World Bank Says Pausing Future Tunisia Work amid Reports of Racist Violence », *Reuters*, March 6, 2023, sect. Africa, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/world-bank-says-pausing-tunisia-work-amid-racially-motivated-violence-2023-03-06/>.

and the immediate issue of a one-year residence permit to students³¹⁹. With the same aim of easing the crisis, President Kais Saïed received the President of the Economic Community of West African States (CEDAO), and the Presidency published his speech in which he stated that *“he could not believe that the President of Tunisia, the country of Bourguiba, could be racist or xenophobic”*.³²⁰

Nevertheless, these measures have not prevented calls for a boycott of Tunisian products on the markets of sub-Saharan countries, putting companies in a difficult situation. The Jadida company in Senegal, for example, issued a press release clarifying that *“its products are 100% Senegalese”* to get around the boycott.³²¹ In this context, organizations such as the Tunisia Africa Business Council (TABC) have tried to reassure African communities about the situation of their loved ones in Tunisia.³²²

Criticism from IGOs and boycott campaigns prompted the MFA to step up interviews with Western and African TV channels to calm the crisis, without abandoning the President's declarations. According to Nabil Ammar, *“the Tunisian authorities are within their rights to sound the alarm when there are increasing flows of irregular migrants, with all the consequences that this can entail”* and *“there is no question of excuses”*.³²³ For Tunisian diplomacy, criticism of the President's position is *“part of a campaign aimed at damaging the country's image, whose initiators are well known”*.³²⁴

In addition to the diplomatic crisis with international organizations and African countries, we note that relations with the EU experienced a period of tension between September and December 2023. Admittedly, this crisis was partly due to Tunisia's rejection of the European Parliament delegation's visit to study the political situation in the country, deeming it to be an act of interference in the country's internal affairs.³²⁵ But it has also manifested itself in the reimbursement to the Tunisian

³¹⁹Presidency of the Tunisian Government, “Communiqué of March 5, 2023”, March 5, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=574366928054476&set=a.248208084003697>.

³²⁰ RFI, “Kaïs Saïed receives the President of the Cédéao in the midst of a controversy over migrants”, March 9, 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230309-tunisie-ka%C3%AFs-sa%C3%AFed-re%C3%A7oit-le-pr%C3%A9sident-de-la-c%C3%A9d%C3%A9ao-en-pleine-pol%C3%A9mique-sur-les-migrants>.

³²¹Souleymane Loum, “Collateral damage: a famous Tunisian brand in trouble in Senegal”, March 6, 2023, https://www.tunisienumerique.com/degat-collateral-une-celebre-marque-tunisienne-en-difficulte-au-senegal/?fbclid=IwY2xjawEzdsxleHRuA2FlbOIXMAABHRsT5aAreetQCsR_Ge46FvNGjnFTK4-us1FwPJY19TVbu15WnOWsfEMEZg_aem_6ljbF6e9KgBIDRmn2hB_Gg.

³²²Wejden Jlassi, “Boycott of Tunisian products in sub-Saharan Africa: a campaign with far-reaching consequences”, March 8, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/monde/boycott-de-produits-tunisiens-en-afrique-subsaharienne-une-campagne-lourde-de-conséquences/2840277>.

³²³ Jeune Afrique, “There's no question of an apology”: the Tunisian Foreign Minister backs down on Kaïs Saïed's remarks”, JeuneAfrique.com, viewed on August 21, 2024, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1422213/politique/il-nest-pas-question-dexcuses-le-ministre-tunisien-des-affaires-etrangeres-revient-sur-les-propos-de-kais-saied/>.

³²⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Communiqué of March 5, 2023”, March 5, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=590369313133694&set=a.252639480240014>.

³²⁵ Delegation of the European Union to Tunisia, “Tunisia: Statement by the Spokesperson on the rejection of the European Parliament's visit by the authorities”, September 14, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tunisie-d%C3%A9claration-de-la-porte-parole-sur-le-rejet-de-la-visite-du-parlement-europ%C3%A9en-par-les_und_fr?s=126.

regime of a sum of sixty million euros provided by the EU, claiming that this is a derisory amount not included in the agreement signed, and that Tunisia refuses alms and charity.³²⁶ Indeed, several parties in Europe interpreted the measures launched in February 2023 and the conclusion of the memorandum on July 16, 2023 as a sign of Tunisia's agreement to integrate European border management outsourcing policies. This did not go down well with Tunisian diplomacy: *“Stop taking this view of this partnership, as if we were at the mercy of this assistance. Every time, you repeat messages that are not in the spirit of this memorandum of understanding, a partnership of equals and mutual respect. It's insulting and degrading. We mustn't give the wrong idea, letting people think that this partnership is reduced to “we give you four pennies and you police the Mediterranean and detain irregular migrants”.* ³²⁷ said Minister Nabil Ammar. Tunisia thus sought to distance itself from European plans, while at the same time responding to critics who see it as guarding European borders. Finally, it's important to note that Tunisia sought to avoid a diplomatic crisis with Algeria after several observers criticized it for turning back migrants at Tunisia's borders. The country's dependence on Algerian energy and the state's political dependence on the Algerian regime make any official denunciation of Algerian policies unthinkable. Instead, Tunisian diplomacy has chosen to call for regional cooperation between Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

Through these examples, it becomes clear that the representation of migrants as a source of threat and the adoption of a security-oriented approach to migration have generated diplomatic crises that the Tunisian state has tried to circumvent by multiplying diplomatic maneuvers and introducing new measures in favor of migrants, while maintaining the same sovereignist discourse. This also leads us not to consider these orientations as emanating from a choice to de-securitize migration, but rather to understand them in the context of attempts to manage diplomatic crises. However, while these tensions may have been resolved, the internal crisis is far from over, since clashes still persist and some residents have chosen to rebel against the state by blocking roads to call for the expulsion of migrants.³²⁸

³²⁶ Euronews, “Tunisia snubs the EU and repays 60 million euros in aid”, October 12, 2023, <https://fr.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/10/12/la-tunisie-sno-be-lue-et-rembourse-60-millions-deuros-daide>.

³²⁷ Tunsicope, ““Europeans are unclear on the memorandum,” according to Ammar,” October 9, 2023, https://www.tunsicope.com/article/365586/actualites/international/selon-amm-421216?fbclid=IwY2xjawEzwdlleHRuA2FibQIxMAABHRi4EvjZl2N4i73PIqrRaRSA4t0KbE4BZaZVRIGUrlVUug9IhFYzq-EaVg_aem_AiQHV2ve9Fq5h2mlwRPKg.

³²⁸ Kapitalis, “Security reinforcements in Jebeniana: Residents block the road due to the aggression of irregular migrants”, August 2024, <https://kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2024/08/05/%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9->

To conclude this section, we emphasize that the designation of migration as a public problem, and more specifically as a source of threat (its securitization), is not without consequences for the state. Before this securitization, there was neither widespread violence against migrants nor diplomatic tensions linked to migration. It should be pointed out, however, that these harms are not linked to the adoption of a securitized approach to migration in practice, but rather to official discourse. We make this point bearing in mind that, as we saw in the previous section, a number of securitization practices and tools have been in existence for many years, without this leading to crises. Securitization as a discursive policy is thus more damaging to a state's reputation, but this does not prevent it from being, in all its forms, devastating for its victims - migrants and their supporters.

Conclusion of Chapter Three

In this section, we have argued that the securitization of migration cannot be reduced to the rhetoric of securitizing actors, and that it encompasses repressive practices made possible by capacity-building and regulatory tools. The practices deployed by the Tunisian state against migrants and their supporters were only possible with the aid provided by European countries and the United States, and the restrictive regulatory arsenal criminalizing migrants and anyone who comes to their aid. We have also seen that, with the involvement of a transnational field of security professionals and the introduction of surveillance technologies, Tunisia is increasingly tending to become a Ban-opticon for profiling and monitoring migrants in order to exclude them before they cross into Europe. The repercussions of this Ban-optic logic are far-reaching, not only for migrants and their supporters, but also for citizens deprived of their right to free movement within the Tunisian territory, whose borders are now internalized. Finally, we have shown that the Tunisian state is not spared from the misdeeds of securitization, which are largely self-induced. By proclaiming its desire to resolve the “abnormal situation” caused by migrant settlement, the state ends up creating new problems beyond its control, including popular violence and diplomatic crises.

[%D8%A8%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84/.](#)

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the representation of sub-Saharan migrants as a source of threat depends on the intersection of the interests of several actors. We have shown the divergences between the declarations of the President of the Republic, who has designated migrants as the cause of societal dangers, and the discourse of the Tunisian Nationalist Party, which has represented them as dangers to the existential and economic security of the Nation. We have demonstrated the conspiracy dimension shared by these two securitizing actors by analyzing the cognitive framework that explains this recourse to conspiracy theory. The president's interest is to secure his power by securitizing migration, which allows him to legitimize the allocation of resources to the National Guard and to avoid blame. On the other hand, the migration issue has enabled the PTN to gain in popularity and acquire a legitimacy it did not have before its focus on this issue. The securitization of migration provided an opportunity for this movement to exert the influence it sought. In a second section, we argue that this process also depends on factors emanating from the international and national contexts. On the international stage, pressure from the EU to integrate Tunisia into the European asylum system has led Tunisia's diplomatic elites to adopt an attitude hostile to the idea. The concern to preserve national sovereignty and the interest in not becoming a country of detention resulted in the blocking of all legislation in favor of the introduction of an asylum policy. This preoccupation with the national interest of the Tunisian state also explains the position of its leaders with regard to NGOs providing assistance to immigrants. In addition, the reluctance of parliamentarians and certain NGOs to fight for an asylum law for fear of favoring European agendas or being accused of treason is another factor that has contributed to the production of migrants' illegality. At a local level, negative media coverage and the logics of racial and regionalist discrimination have encouraged the spread of alarmist discourses by actors on social networks. We have shown that street interviews crystallized the migration issue as a source of deviance from local norms and disorder. In addition to their influence on popular perceptions, the relationship between certain presenters of these programs and the entourage of the President of the Republic leads us to postulate that these actors have influenced the

Rais' conception of the migration issue. The fact that the President himself says he follows the situation of El-Amra's inhabitants at night through these videos testifies to the influence of these actors, whom we can consider to be cause entrepreneurs. Thus, we have presented how social networks are becoming a space for interaction between citizens, media actors, and political decision-makers. This argumentation shows the importance of not disempowering non-state and non-political actors in the securitization process, and of avoiding focusing on the discourse of political actors. This research has also highlighted the fact that both types of actors employ a semantic repertoire that resonates in convergence with popular concerns and the collective memory of the audience.

Finally, the research highlighted the fact that the state's security approach is reflected in the instruments and tools it deploys against migrants and their supporters. These practices, which include arbitrary arrests, expulsions, fingerprinting, DNA testing and the setting up of paper checkpoints within Tunisian territory, produce an internalization of Tunisian borders that also impacts the cities and rights of Tunisian citizens. In addition to the internalization of borders, the interception of boats at sea and the use of sophisticated technologies to monitor them prove that the Tunisian state is in the process of setting up a ban-optic system that filters migrants and denies them passage to Europe. This serves the EU's interests in curbing irregular migration flows by providing its security forces with the equipment and training they need to deal with them. For its part, Tunisia maintains restrictive laws that criminalize migrants as well as the NGOs and citizens who help them. We examined the effects of the deployment of these instruments on migrants and NGOs, who now experience an atmosphere of insecurity and are forced to change their practices to guard against police and popular violence. Finally, the analysis focused on the repercussions of securitization on the State, which had to manage diplomatic crises with African countries and intergovernmental organizations that denounced the President's speeches. While these tensions have been resolved, the state is still unable to contain the popular violence of factions that challenge the state's monopoly on legitimate violence and clash with migrants.

Throughout this research, we have shown the ambiguity of Euro-Tunisian cooperation in managing clandestine migration flows. Our analysis has relativized this cooperation and shown how the Tunisian regime exploits European aid to maintain its power and strengthen border control without agreeing to integrate the asylum system or European agencies.

In this way, we have demonstrated the value of analyzing migration management in Tunisia through the prism of securitization and the governmentality of unease. Such an approach enables us to take into account the multiple factors and issues that analyses focusing on the racism factor and the European policy of outsourcing border management overlook.

APPENDIX

Negative media coverage of sub-Saharan migration

Attessia TV : 9 million subscribers on Facebook

Result (From 2020 to February 20, 2023)

Link to articles: [قناة التاسعة | Facebook](#)

Crimes and arrests of sub-Saharan migrants: 17 articles

Migrant and refugee rights: 3 articles
december 24, 2022

4 foreigners intercepted trying to infiltrate Tunisia.

December 9, 2022

Mahdia: 5 Africans burned after an irregular migration boat malfunctions.

November 11, 2022

Sfax: Africans kidnap a Guinean citizen and demand 5,000 dinars for his release.

November 7, 2022

Arrest of 10 Africans who had crossed the land border without identity papers.

November 4, 2022

Siliana: 7 sub-Saharan Africans arrested for unauthorized residence.

October 7, 2022

Some Africans try to attack the owner of the house with knives.

October 5, 2022

Three young Africans arrested after the murder of a young man in his home.

September 14, 2022

Al-Marsa: 10 Africans arrested. They were terrorizing passers by with knives.

September 9, 2022

8 Africans detained in Sousse after kidnapping a woman.

July 7, 2022

Events at Carthage airport: committal orders issued for 8 Africans.

June 3, 2022

Nabeul. 9 illegal Africans arrested.

May 18, 2022

Warrant of committal for 3 Africans preparing terrorist operations in Tunisia.

January 31, 2022

Africans turn their homes into tequila factories.

December 29, 2021

Arrest of an African terrorist group belonging to Boko Haram in Tunisia.

December 12, 2021

An African migrant kidnaps a three-year-old child and demands a ransom of 75,000 dinars.

October 15, 2019

8 Africans wishing to cross the maritime border surreptitiously arrested in Zarzis.

April 19, 2022

African refugees protest to demand their evacuation from Tunisia.

October 18, 2021

Demonstrations by African students. They demand to know the fate of their colleague who disappeared a week ago.

April 21, 2020

Faouzi Ben Gamra visits foreign Africans living in Sokra.

El Hiwar Ettounsi TV : 11 million subscribers on Facebook

Results (From 2020 to February 20, 2023)

Link to articles: [Elhiwar Ettounsi | Facebook](#)

Crimes and arrests of sub-Saharan migrants: 9 articles

Migrant and refugee law: 3 articles

February 1, 2023

Al Kram: They demand a ransom to free her... Africans kidnap a woman, torture and burn her.

January 2, 2023

Aouina: Sub-Saharan Africans convicted for detaining and abusing a businessman.

November 7, 2022

Siliana ... 10 Africans of different nationalities arrested without identity papers.

August 4, 2022

Nabeul: 3 Africans arrested for using an apartment to sell alcoholic beverages.

May 16, 2022

Sfax: An argument between Africans ends with the burning of an apartment and the destruction of cars in Sultania.

April 13, 2022

They kidnapped a girl and demanded a ransom. Sub-Saharan Africans arrested in Sfax.

July 23, 2021

Al-Darabek neighborhood in Sfax: Violent quarrels between sub-Saharan Africans.

June 14, 2021

Africans terrorize the inhabitants of Sfax and attack their property.

November 20, 2020

Aouina: Africans sell alcohol surreptitiously.

March 2nd, 2022

Haïdara: 3 African migrants, including a child, were found dead of cold, hunger and thirst.

November 11, 2021

UN experts accuse Tunisia of expelling African migrants to Libya.

September 21, 2020

The Forum for Economic and Social Rights condemns the racist attack on African workers in Sousse. _

Nessma TV : 8.1 million subscribers

Results (from 2020 to February 20, 2023)

Link to articles: [Nessma](#) | [Facebook](#)

Crimes and arrests of sub-Saharan migrants
:10 articles

Migrant and refugee law : 0 articles

February 7, 2023

Ariana: Five Africans involved in the murder of a woman are detained.

February 1, 2023

Capital: Africans kidnap a young man. They mistreat him, burn him and demand a ransom from his sister!

November 11, 2022

Sfax: Sub-Saharan Africans kidnap a resident.

August 3, 2022

25 people surreptitiously cross maritime borders, including rescued Africans.

July 5, 2022

Carthage airport: African travelers assault security forces with extreme violence!

May 4, 2022

Sfax: 7 communes commit to burying the bodies of illegal African migrants

December 21, 2021

They threatened his father with the removal of his organs. A three-year-old child kidnapped by young Africans.

August 27, 2021

Sfax: Arrest of a group of sub-Saharan Africans who had set up a "security center".
August 2nd 2020

Arrests of 2 Africans for crossing borders

July 1, 2020

Africans arrested and tested for Corona virus after crossing borders.

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