CHAPTER 4

MONUMENTAL RE-BOURGUIBIZATION

On the ambiguities of spectacular power

in post-revolutionary Tunisia

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Abstract

In January 2016, the first President of post-revolutionary Tunisia, Beji Caid Essebsi addressed the people, from exact the same setting as former president Habib Bourguiba's in January 1984's speech to contain popular revolts. In the proposed book chapter, I venture into the power dynamics proper to the constitution and reconstitution of state aesthetics in the process of monumental re-bourguibization. As the appropriation of spectacular power in different cities over Tunisia such as Sousse, Monastir or Tunis, was met with new waves of artistic resistance, my contribution to the book takes notice of the often-overseen processes through which aesthetic agency was temporarily halted by the re-emergence of new forms of authoritarian symbolic politics during the post-revolutionary phase. Based on a long-term participant observation in the field of visual arts in Tunisia between 2011 and 2017 and combining insights from aesthetic theory and various postcolonial critiques, I show how monumental aesthetics are not structured overnight. Looking into the formation of spectacular power in the longue durée, I argue that the thousand eyes that constitute contested monumental aesthetics in Tunisia are historical constructions, characterized by a palimpsestic structure that reveal its postcolonial disposition. This historically detour helps to untie the present apparent contradictions proper to the ambiguous processes of monumental de-bourguibization and re-bourguibization. Through the self-conscious, ostentatious, and aesthetic gesture of over-writing one symbolic order by another, the site of former colonial and postcolonial power is marked with at times opposing narratives and counter narratives of national becoming, forming a renewed, multilayered but contested site of postcolonial spectacular power.

Introduction

On Friday evening, January 22nd, 2016, the first President of the post-revolutionary Republic, Beji Caid Essebsi, addressed the people on public television, after revolt arose again in the region of Kasserine due to the government's failure to keep its promises about employment. It did not go unnoticed that the presidential address was filmed in the same decorative setting, as former president Habib Bourguiba's speech containing the bread revolts in January 1984. This staged public re-enactment was but a preview of a long-anticipated return of Bourguibist imagery in post-revolutionary Tunisia, tapping into the accumulated post-colonial symbolic power and reinforcing a concordant but still contested historical legitimacy.

In what follows, I will venture into the power dynamics proper to the constitution and reconstitution of state aesthetics in the process of a monumental re-bourguibization in post-revolutionary Tunisia. While unfolding the notion of spectacular power, echoing the situationist conceptualization by Guy Debord (1967), the confluence of ambiguous forms of disciplinary and sovereign power in the formation of state aesthetics will be rendered intelligible. As the appropriation of spectacular power in different cities over Tunisia, such as Sousse, Monastir, or Tunis, was met with new waves of artistic resistance, as I will elaborate below, my contribution takes note of the too often overseen processes through which aesthetic agency was temporarily halted by the re-emergence of new forms of authoritarian symbolic politics during the post-revolutionary phase.

In this chapter, processes of resistance are analysed, further questioning the Foucauldian tendency to look for resistance wherever power manifests itself. As suggested by Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), processes of resistance can be understood as a diagnosis of power. In this way, Michel Foucault's notion that one should look for resistance where power manifests itself can be inverted,

and the transformations of power can be analysed by looking into dynamics of resistance as a starting point. By doing so, the romantic aura of resistance can be punctured. In other words, it is through the study of resistance that it is possible to elaborate on existing theories of power and aesthetics. Foucault himself (1982: 780) already hinted at this reversal when proposing to take these practices of resistance that are shaped against different forms of power as a starting point and thus to use resistance "as a chemical catalyst […] to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used." This reversal can be used "to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them" and to trace "the complex workings of social power" and analyse "how power relations are historically transformed, especially with the introduction of forms and techniques of power characteristic of modern states and capitalist economies" (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). The question of how power can be analysed through its resistance, in our case the way the circulation of spectacular power–as the contradictory merging of repressive sovereign power and productive disciplinary power–is contested within a given police order, remains largely unexplored (Death 2010, Lilja & Vinthagen 2014).

Looking into the formation of spectacular power in the longue durée, it becomes possible to understand what Foucault (1977: 214) calls "the thousands of eyes" that constitute the disciplinary power of contested monumental aesthetics in Tunisia. These are historical constructions characterized by a palimpsestic structure that reveals its postcolonial disposition. Researching the entangled histories of monumentalization, I will show that, even if the first images glorifying political leadership already made their appearance during what Lisa Anderson (1986) calls the period of "defensive modernization," or what is generally referred to as the period of Islamic reformism in Tunisia. The efficient disciplining and controlling techniques engrained in the spectacular power circulating in monumental aesthetics are only fully developed during the

French colonial civilizing missions and improved and advanced after the liberation of the nation, through the reproduction of the image of the head of state.

This historical detour helps to untie the present apparent contradictions proper to the ambiguous process of monumental re-bourguibization. Through the self-conscious, ostentatious, and aesthetic gesture of over-writing one symbolic order by another, the site of former colonial and postcolonial power is marked with at times opposing narratives and counter-narratives of national becoming, forming a renewed, more complex, and multilayered--but still contested--site of postcolonial spectacular power, in which sovereign power coalesces with disciplinary power (Debord 1967, Foucault 1977, Fujitani 1996, Wedeen 1999).

The research for this chapter was conducted during a unique moment in the history of Tunisia, witnessing the extraordinary politics unfolding after the toppling of a firmly seated authoritarian leader, landing in the formation of a new constitution, represented by an elected presidency struggling with its historical legitimacy. Starting from online explorative research, I created a coded database of pictures, videos, and texts related to the formation of spectacular power. I mostly found these materials in the National Archives of Tunisia and surveyed various present-day journals and news outlets to keep my data up-to-date. In a second phase, I had to pose and counterpose the different pictures, videos, and texts related to the formation of spectacular power in order to decode its historical formation and present continuity. This process of coding and decoding was, moreover, based on my own sensible experiences, observations, and embodied immersion in the field. Out of this cyclical and vibrant process, navigating the capricious and sometimes unruly waves of my fieldwork, I focused solely on substantiated material that helped me to address different aspects of authoritarian state aesthetics under scrutiny in this chapter.

De/Re-Bourguibization

[Figure 4.1 here]

Figure 4.1 Atef Maatallah - The Making of a National Hero (I)

The re-bourguibization of public space cannot be disentangled from the histories of colonialization, postcolonial disenchantment, and the subsequent authoritarian turn. These histories impacted the political and aesthetic structures of Tunisian society, as they produced the very division between public and private space facilitating the maintenance of power and control over the masses (Chakrabarty 2008). Public space is therefore always also a site of struggle, where the revolting masses can contest dominant imaginaries, which allows for the circulation of symbolic power. It is then a site of aesthetic production, where new subjectivities and forms of self-determination can be formed (Ben Yakoub 2018). To understand the more recent process of what I call "re-bourguibization" at stake in this contribution, it is key to understand first the formative historical process of "de-bourguibization" that preceded it, as developed by Saidi (2007).

On Saturday morning November 7, 1987, when he was still in his function as prime minister, Ben Ali sent seven doctors to the palace of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of independent Tunisia to slide him aside after over thirty years of uninterrupted presidency. Having built up his military career to become the head of national security, Ben Ali rose in the ranks to serve as Minister of State before being appointed Interior Minister and finally Prime Minister. A medical report attested to the inability of Bourguiba to continue his duties. Ben Ali then declared on public radio that the president was "senile" and therefore "mentally unfit to govern" as stated in Art. 57 of the constitution (Saidi 2007). From its onset, the regime presented its new president,

Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, as “The Craftsman of Change,” symbolically distancing the new ruler from his charismatic predecessor, erasing all citations and public references to the legacy of the first leader of the liberated nation, Habib Bourguiba. Starting from the newly constituted “November 7, National Pact,” over the erasure of Bourguiba’s portrait from public space and national currency to the unbolting of monumental equestrian sculptures, the regime engaged in a process of de-bourguibization.

Whereas Habib Bourguiba built his power on behalf of his historical legitimacy as the father of independence and was therefore acknowledged to be the personification of power, his successor was pressed to invent another source of legitimacy (Abassi 2009). In the same way that his predecessor placed all bets on the refinement of his personality cult to preserve a semblance of legitimacy in 1978, the Ben Ali regime materialized the hegemonic discourse of the “new era” in a ubiquitous monumental landscape. Public space was saturated with monuments referring to “November 7,” with or without an inserted standard clock.[1] “November 7” became "the numerical emblem” of what was called the necessary “change,” which would open “a new era” (Geisser in: Auffray 2011). The date of the coup spread across the country as a symbol of new power relations, crystalizing in a symbolic Novemberist ideology. However, the way the annual “November 7” spectacle enfolded (Chomiak 2013), and how different artistic interventions gradually diverted the digit during the last breath of authoritarian rule, rendered visible a premonitory sense of revolutionary dissent. During the latest revolution, the monumental landscape was finally almost destroyed (Ben Yakoub & Zemni 2020).

Whereas Bourguiba’s historic legitimacy and charismatic leadership created a symbiotic relationship between himself, the state, and the people (Lacouture, 1970), Ben Ali’s acute lack of charisma and political eloquence, challenged the imagination of the regime. The image of Ben Ali

was initially built around two formally elaborated original elements: the date of the constitutional coup "November 7" and the traditional Tyrian purple color. Eventually, with increasing confidence in the resilience of his leadership, a classic presidential portrait was added to the repertoire.

From the moment Ben Ali took power, the very few times Bourguiba was officially mentioned, he was instrumentalized to legitimize Ben Ali as "his son." This de-bourguibization policy was driven by the will to symbolically kill "The Father of the Nation" (Saidi 2008). April 2000 can in this light be pointed out as a turning point in the contemporary history of Tunisia (Khiari 2003). Not the death of the "Supreme Combatant," but the problematic way the regime dealt with his public funerals caused a public feeling of humiliation that de-legitimized the regime in place (Chouikha & Gobe 2015). During the funeral, the national "Tunis 7" TV station broadcast a documentary about the life of sea snakes. The strong presence of police forces and the tightly orchestrated minimal ceremony prevented genuine collective mourning. The body of the former president was carried by a plane branded with the purple November 7 logo. As stated by Kilani (2000), the physical death of Bourguiba resulted in the political death of Ben Ali. Thousands of students dared to defy the ban on demonstrations, took to the streets and chanted "By our soul and our blood, Bourguiba, we will avenge you" (Geisser 2000).

Different artists engaged with the image of the "Father of the Nation" during the Ben Ali regime, defying the de-bourguibization policy. The photograph of the de-located statue of Bourguiba in La Goulette, central in Faten Gaddes's series "La Rue," exposed at the Ammar Farhat art gallery in 2009, not only shows the regime's wish to eradicate the historical event of national return in 1955 that the statue represents (Triki 2012), it also sensibly illustrates the ongoing process of irreverent demarcation. The image of a bronze Bourguiba sitting on the back of his horse, apparently standing on the dilapidated and nearly collapsing construction site in La Goulette

instead of the marble pedestal, is also testimony to the expropriation of some long-time residents of what was once known as Tunisia's Little Sicily for the benefit of lucrative real estate projects closely connected to the regime. The graffiti stencil of Wassim Ghoslani (2002), the Warholian screen-prints of Bassem Jelali, the speed-painting of Selim Tlili (2010), and the painting of Mehdi Bouanani (2010) all show the dissidence engrained in the reproduction of Bourguiba's portrait during the "Era of Change." Mehdi Bouanani painted different portraits of Bourguiba together with the portraits of other world leaders, such as the overthrown Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. When he was invited to exhibit in a Tunisian art gallery in 2010, he was refused entry by customs and his exhibition was cancelled.

After the toppling of Ben Ali, and as promised by the latest president Beji Caid Essebsi, the statue was effectively unbolted and removed from its previous location in La Goulette where it had stood for 29 years. As an attempt to re-establish the post-colonial Bourguibist consensus, the "second great return" was inaugurated by the latest president on "Victory Day," for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the mythical return of Bourguiba from exile in 1955. It now stands in between the November 7 clock and Ibn Khaldun, on the main avenue carrying his name. Already in 2009, Essebsi stated in his visionary memoir 'Habib Bourguiba: the wheat and the chaff' that "when time will do its work" and "history will override the news," "Habib Bourguiba will be released from purgatory and the equestrian statue of the most illustrious Tunisian [will] resume its place in Tunis on the Habib Bourguiba Avenue, opposite the statue of Abderrahmane Ibn Khaldun, the most illustrious Tunisian sociologist of all time" (Essebsi 2009: 414). Even though the return of the equestrian statue was quickly contested, the statue now still stands in front of the ministry of interior, on exactly the same place where thousands of protesters stood in January, 2011 demanding freedom and dignity.

Historical dynamics of State Aesthetics

[Figure 4.2 here]

Figure 4.2 Atef Maatallah - The Making of a National Hero (II)

To study processes of de-bourguibization and re-bourguibization, or how in a police order, state aesthetics produces power and socializes collectivities, but at the same time how the power enmeshed in these structures is contested and re-appropriated and thus has the potential to always provoke a redistribution of the sensible, a new understanding of power is needed, and more specifically, one in which sovereign power coalesces with disciplinary power (Fujitani 1996, Wedeen 1999).

Foucault (1977) describes sovereign power as a uniform legislative form of power, negatively characterized by its prohibitive, censoring, and repressive structure. Disciplinary power on the other hand is a productive and normalizing power that multiplies, articulates, and divides, and that is thus characterized by segmentation; it is "an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way" Foucault 1977 197). This new understanding of power as a fusion of sovereign and disciplinary power, will–echoing Guy Debord (1967)–further be conceptualized as "spectacular power."

When Foucault (1977: 217) states that "our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance" and that "we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power," he is implicitly positioning his concept of disciplinary power against the way spectacular power is understood by Debord (1967). The spectacle is not only an architectural form but also a concept that facilitates our understanding of the circulation of

power (Harcourt 2015). Spectacular power circulates in a police order as a technique of state power that permanently enforces the spectacle of authoritarianism, while throwing a shadow on material and violent processes of exploitation. Or, in the words of Debord (1967: 31), spectacular power:

> imposes an image of the good which subsumes everything that officially exists, an image which is usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system's totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute star or disappear. This master of everyone else's non-consumption is the heroic image that disguises the absolute exploitation entailed by the system of primitive accumulation accelerated by terror.

Nonetheless, as stated by W. J. T. Mitchell (cited in Harcourt 2015), spectacle and surveillance are not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary, must be seen as mutually entangled forces in the application of and resistance to power. State aesthetics thus functions as a spectacular disciplinary mode of ideological and political interpellation that delineates the contours of the official national imagination. As has been convincingly argued by Lisa Wedeen (1999), the political power that circulates in the architecture of the spectacle, and that performs state power, combines a shared desire for stability with images of the sovereign's omnipotence to discipline its citizens and facilitate political obedience.

Within spectacular power, as a specific articulation of sovereign and disciplinary power, a central aspect in the structuring of state aesthetics can be distinguished, namely, an aspect Fujitani (1996: 25) aptly calls "ocular domination." The central Clock Tower on the January 14 Square in the capital of Tunis–the last monument standing–can be unravelled as the central tower of the panoptic dispositive of the Ben Ali regime (Ben Yakoub 2019). Through its imaginary structure,

this dispositive facilitates the circulation of disciplinary and sovereign power and by doing so enables surveillance. The omnipresent gaze of the sovereign in public space can be understood as a constant reminder for those moving in this space that the regime is keeping an eye on them. The pervasive image of the all-seeing autocrat central in state aesthetics produces in other words a kind of constant suspicion that one might be the object of surveillance. Through the repetition of the difference between those who see and those who are seen, the users of these spaces where state aesthetics materializes have incorporated a form of visual domination and "internalized their own surveillance" (1996: 25). Walking through public space in this context becomes a disciplining process that facilitates the symbolic structuring of a nation-state as a space "within which the people could imagine themselves as objects of observation" (1996: 25). The materialization of the all-seeing regime in the urban fabric can thus be understood as a panoptic dispositif that "allows the police to be 'present' even when one knows that they are not" (Wedeen 1999: 147).

Panopticism is concerned with the perfect arrangement and government over a given space. Central in this dispositive is the dystopic image of a city or a town immobilized by the functioning of an all-encompassing power that prevails in a discrete way over all subjected bodies in that space. When circulating through a panoptic dispositive of a given police order, spectacular power is visible but unverifiable, as the see/being seen dyad is dissociated. A condition for spectacular power to circulate, lies in its capacity to make this dissociation permanent, exhaustive, and omnipresent by rendering the governed visible and the governor invisible, paradoxically through the endless reproduction of the hegemonic representation of power, or what Foucault described as the way "the sovereign's surplus power was manifested" (1977: 202). The question whether presidential charisma is founded on different forms of legitimacy of the state, or the legitimacy of the state is founded on the charisma of the president is thus not relevant (Khiari & Lamloum 1998),

as the mechanism of state aesthetics overall does not rely on the charisma of the authoritarian president that is being portrayed and endlessly reproduced, but on the circulation of automatized and deindividualized disciplinary power through its panoptical structure. In the words of Foucault (1977: 202):

> [P] ower has its principle not so much in a person as […] in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign's surplus power was manifested are useless. There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power […] a real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation.

Seeing state aesthetics as a disciplinary structure does not only make sense of the superfluity of the supposedly indispensable charisma to construct an imaginary around a given authoritarian leader, it also illuminates the mechanism of spontaneous reproduction of state aesthetics and thus the internalization of disciplinary power by the body politic.

Beatrice Hibou (2006) challenges the Machiavellian image of the prince and the pertaining myth of a centralized omnipotent power. Power is never absolute nor indivisible, let alone unconditioned, but always mediated by a web of intermediaries, entangled in nepotistic and clientelist networks encompassing nearly the whole of society. However convincingly criticized by Mahmoud Ben Romdhane (2011) for its empirical flaws and its preoccupation with authoritarian resilience, the core of Hibou's theoretical understanding of the ambiguous way power is structured through its underlying mechanisms of voluntary servitude still holds for the analysis of the

aesthetics of revolt central to this chapter. Blinded by the power of state aesthetics, modes of governance that rely on mutual dependencies and relational forms of dominance are too often overseen. Debord (1967: 4) already stated that "the spectacle is not a collection of images" but "a social relation between people that is mediated by images." Power is thus not systematically exercised from above, not from the presidential palace of Carthage or from the Ministry of Interior. Such a vision, moreover, approaches state aesthetics as a historic, fixed, determined, predictable, and eternal external given, confounding the exercise of power and political imaginary.

Focusing on the images and representations that constitute state aesthetics, one can overestimate the direct master-slave relation, as if power were linear, unidirectional, and bluntly imposed by the head of state upon the body politic. Such an approach makes one blind to the multiple, deep, and diffuse forms of domination, and to the prevailing relational processes of subjugation. The state thus exercises its power inside society, in a network of relations, in a social organization that allows it to be exercised. There is no outside of spectacular power. State aesthetics nevertheless upholds the illusion of absolute control and total discipline, instrumentalised by those in power as a technique of power, surveillance, and normalization. In short, the spontaneous reproduction inside and inherent to state aesthetics and its processes of de-and re-bourguibization shows how the body politic became the principle of its own subjection. Aware of its subjection to a given field of visibility, the subject assumes its presupposed responsibility and makes the limitations of power spontaneously play upon itself.

The subject actively inscribes itself in prevailing power relations, within a colonial distribution of the sensible, simultaneously playing the roles of both governor and governed. By the very process of incorporation or internalization, spectacular power "may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and the more it approaches this limit, the more constant,

profound and permanent are its effects" (Foucault 1997: 203). By this spontaneous and voluntary repetition and reproduction, the monumental gaze of the head of state "transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert" (Foucault 1977: 214).

State aesthetics are not structured overnight. The "thousands of eyes" that constitute state aesthetics and its processes of de- and re-bourguibization in Tunisia are historical constructions and thus characterized by a palimpsestic structure that reveals its postcolonial disposition. As reminded by Johnson and Ray (2015) in the context of India and South Africa, freshly independent states always seem to operate in and to be legitimized by polysemic and layered symbolic orders. Polysemic and layered, because they are marked by traces of previous forms of rule or older political orders and their historical contestations. When a new postcolonial elite takes over existing political institutions, it engages in a material and symbolic process of re-appropriation, and thus in an "aesthetic struggle of nation-building" (2015: 14). Through the self-conscious, ostentatious, and aesthetic gesture of over-writing one symbolic order by another, the site of former colonial power is marked with a dialectic of stories and counter stories of national becoming, that is never devoid of political processes of re-articulation, revision or even erasure, making a new but more complex and multi-layered site of postcolonial power.

However, the first political images glorifying the image of the leader already made their appearance in Tunisia during the period of what Lisa Anderson (1986) aptly calls "defensive modernization" or what is generally referred to as the period of Islamic reformism and thus before the time of French colonization. The efficient disciplining and controlling techniques engrained in state aesthetics are only fully developed during the French colonial civilizing missions and

improved and advanced after the liberation of the nation-state through the reproduction of the image of the head of state.

Inspired by paintings of European leaders sent as diplomatic gifts, the Husainid leader of the Tunisian province of the Ottoman Caliphate–Ahmed Bey–was the first to rely on the power engrained in the reproduction of his portrait by the local elites to symbolize prestige, autocracy, and authority (Moumni 2016). It was only with the consolidation of the French protectorate however, that this practice found its way outside the confined walls of the palaces of the royal ruling class. The colonial statue of Jules Ferry on what used to be "Marine Avenue," the boulevard now known as the Avenue Bourguiba, can thus be acknowledged as the historical pedestal of current state aesthetics, prefiguring its processes of de-and re-bourguibization.

Jules Ferry was the main personality immortalized and venerated by the French colonizers, next to a sculpture of Cardinal Lavigerie at Bourse Square now renamed Victory Square, a sculpture of Paul Cambon at Pasteur Square and a monument for Philippe Thomas at Station Square now Barcelona Square (Sebag 1998). Cardinal Lavigerie was one of the most important missionary figures in Tunisia, the founding father of the "Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique", commonly known as the Pères Blancs or White Fathers. He was guardian of the Saint-Louis chapel in Carthage and eventually became cardinal, archbishop of Carthage. Paul Cambon was French minister plenipotentiary at Tunis, fulfilling two terms as Resident-General. Phillip Thomas was a French archaeologist and geologist, particularly known for his "discovery" of the phosphate deposits, until today one of the most important Tunisian export products.

Ferry is commonly considered the founder of the second colonial empire of France, the man behind the first overseas thrust of the Third Republic and prime minister of the French republican government during the establishment of the French Protectorate in Tunisia in 1881. Ferry was one

of the most important inspirations of the colonial doctrine of the Third Republic. As argued by Luizard (2006), the colonization process was not only driven by a strong economic and patriotic vision, but also by a civilizational determination. Inspired by the theory of the civilizing mission in *Les Colonies et la colonisation moderne* by Lavollé (1871) and further elaborated by Lerroy-Beaulieu in *La Colonization chez les peuples modernes* (1887), Ferry legitimized the French colonial enterprise "[i]n the name of the greatness of France" and "the duty of superior races to civilize inferior peoples" (cited in Luizard 2006: 89). To legitimize the fierce bombardment of the city of Sfax to counter the resistance against French occupation in 1881, Ferry (cited in Luizard 2006: 109) again invoked the higher sentiment that goes with the achievement of the predestined and glorious national task to bring about "the triumph of civilization over barbarism, the only form of the spirit of conquest that modern morality can admit."

What interests us is not so much the discourse of the civilizing mission, but how this discourse is being reproduced in the spectacular power that circulates through the images and monuments that constitute the state aesthetics and its processes of de-and re-bourguibization. The first statue in public space was erected in 1911 by the city council of Tunis in honor of the late Ferry, in the middle of the newly found Jules Ferry Square at the eastern end of the main boulevard connecting the old traditional medina and the newly constructed modern city. Jules Ferry was one of the co-founders of the second French colonial empire and is commonly considered the man behind the first overseas thrust of the Third Republic and one of the key inspirations of its colonial doctrine. As President of the Senate, he was at the forefront of the negotiations that led to the establishment of the protectorate, and was prime minister of the French republican government during the establishment of the Protectorate in Tunisia in 1881. The statue sculpted by Antonin Mercie was the most imposing emblem of the protectorate, embodying the French civilizing

mission. Placed vertically in height, the monument faced the city, Ferry's back turned to the Mediterranean port, looking down from his pedestal to three subservient bronze figures: a Bedouin statuette offering a bundle of wheat, a settler colonist looking up in full admiration, and a schoolboy looking up towards Ferry, in honor of his role in educational development.

The statue of Ferry was unbolted seven months after independence by the Municipality in the night of October 17–18, 1956 on the newly founded "Africa Square," revealing the Pan-African ideological preferences of the freshly liberated state. A ceremony took place around the monument in the presence of several senior officials of the newly found government and a large enthusiastic crowd celebrating while the statue was being brought down. The cheering mass shouted the name of the first president of independent Tunisia and sang the Neo-Destourian anthem. After being dismantled, the Statue of Ferry was temporarily stored on an island on the Lake of Tunis. The Municipality of Tunis has never fulfilled the intention to offer the unbolted statue to the municipality of Saint Dié, the hometown of Ferry. "Africa Square" was soon abandoned and reduced to an empty roundabout, until January 17, 1978 when the equestrian statue of Bourguiba was inaugurated for the first time.

These statues can, in the light of the civilizing mission described above, indeed be considered the "sculptural extension of racial terror" as suggested by Achille Mbembe (2013: 188). The presence in the public space of colonial or neo-colonial monuments is far from trivial. According to Mbembe, these vestiges are the signs of domination and of a physical and symbolic struggle for power. To be effective, domination must not only be inscribed in the body, it must also be anchored in the living space and imagination of the oppressed, leaving indelible marks. This subjugation must permeate the daily routine and the very structure of the unconscious. In this perspective, monuments in public spaces are not merely appealing artifacts intended to beautify

life in the city; they are instead monuments that cast a shadow over the consciousness of men and women. The political and historical power relations, of which these statues are the materialization, are symbolically expressed and determine the reading of history. Their perpetual presence is a daily reminder of what should be remembered and what should preferably be forgotten. These monuments neglect the lives of already damned populations and haunt their memories. Mbembe (2013) sees in these public artifacts a morbid glorification of the imperialist spirit, a form of necromancy, keeping alive colonial and postcolonial racism, and an inherently tight inferiority complex.

Bourguiba, the return

[Figure 4.3 here]

Figure 4.1 Atef Maatallah - The Making of a National Hero (III)

On Friday evening, January 22nd, 2016, the President of the Republic, Beji Caid Essebsi addressed the people on public television, after protests rose up again in the region of Kasserine due to false employment promises made by the government. The protests started to gain momentum five days before, after the death of Ridha Yahyaoui, who was electrocuted when climbing a utility pole in the rain during a spontaneous demonstration. Among other youth, Yahyaoui had discovered that--without any reason or notification--his name had been pulled from a list of 75 candidates who had been promised employment by Kasserine's first delegate and governor. After the accidental electrocution, peaceful sit-ins turned into forceful protests, provoking clashes with security forces. The governor's office was occupied for more than three weeks. Dissenters went on hunger strike. Public property was damaged and engulfed in flames. The fire spread, again, across the nation, from the marginalized interior south to the capital, after which the government declared a national curfew.

It did not go unnoticed that the presidential address on Friday evening was filmed in exact the same decorative setting as Habib Bourguiba's speech that had contained the bread revolt in January 1984. Most political observers had already noticed that since the presidential elections the new president of the republic had assimilated different features of the "Eternal Leader." He adopted the same form of speech, rich in popular proverbs, altered by sporadic Koranic verses, often using

sharp and readily applicable allegories, always spiced with a subtle sense of humor. Even his looks, especially the glasses and body language recall those of his predecessor, an example being making the same gestures, particularly with his hands. His Friday address was thus filmed, from the same location, sitting behind the same desk, with the national flag on his left and in front of the same classic brownish map of Tunisia framed in leather with golden stars. Different memes spread across social media, mocking “Bajbouj” for his unabashed mimicry. A viral image was launched by Anour L. who placed a “Confused Travolta” in the historical setting, an animated GIF that made John Travolta wonder how history could repeat itself in such a literal sense over a period of only 32 years.

As the wave of protest was settling down, the inhabitants of Monastir were surprised by a truck deposing an equestrian statue in the night of March 13-14, 2016, in front of the presidential palace of Skanès (Ksar Al Marmar) at the entrance of the city. Some media quickly spread the rumour that it was the original statue of Bourguiba, once displaced by the ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, which was landing in the birthplace of Bourguiba. Other news reports elucidated the confusion. It was not the original statue that made its re-appearance, but a restored bronze equestrian statue with the Zaïm wearing a "mdhalla," a traditional straw hat. The statue also seemed to be from the hand of sculptor Hechmi Marzouk but was originally erected in the city of Kairouan. It had first to be restored, as it was vandalized in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution but captured by the military who kept it safe in the barracks of Sidi Saâd. The equestrian statue was unveiled on April 6, 2016 by president Beji Caid Essebsi in person, during the festivities commemorating the 16th anniversary of Bourguiba’s death.

The reappearance of the equestrian statue from Kairouan in Monastir seemed to be just a rehearsal for the real return of the image of the “Father of the Nation” in the capital. On Tuesday

morning May 24th, commuters preparing for a new working day and passers-by on Bourguiba Avenue were surprised by a new monument in front of the Ministry of the Interior in the capital. Still packed in plastic, it showed the contours of the original equestrian statue. The triumphal equine statue of Habib Bourguiba, once displaced by Ben Ali to the port town in the Northern suburb, made its appearance in the eponymic central avenue in downtown Tunis. As promised by the latest president Beji Caid Essebsi, the equestrian statue was effectively unbolted and removed from its previous location in La Goulette, where it had stood for 29 years.

The statue eternalizes the image of the historical moment when Bourguiba, the "Mujahid El Akbar" or "Supreme Combatant" returned from exile from Brittany's Groix Island, in the port town of La Goulette, after signing the Franco-Tunisian agreement recognizing the internal autonomy of Tunisia on the 1st of June 1955. Even though the public celebration seemed to have spontaneously emerged, it had been meticulously orchestrated by the nationalist party to show that the entire country, uniting the various Tunisian regions, was behind him (Labidi 2021). Reminiscent of the equestrian statue of Louis XV on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, the statue of Bourguiba pursues the French Monarchical trend in equestrian monumentalization. The president is monumentalized, strongly perched on a galloping horse, confidently and triumphantly saluting the cheering mass, dressed in a modern tailored suit and a traditional Tunisian chechia.

It was only in January 1978, after twenty-two years of independent rule and the sharpest social and economic challenges in the history of post-colonial Tunisia, that the capital was refurbished with a triumphant equestrian statue of the Zaïm. In the '70s the socialist experiment of post-independence was abandoned, and economic liberalization dynamics pushed forward to open the local markets to the international financial system. As Bourguiba declared himself "president-for-life" in 1975, the government moved slowly but surely towards political authoritarianism,

promoting a new kind of state capitalism. When the economic growth started to sputter, social and political protest erupted and gained momentum during the historical "Black Thursday" on January 26th, 1978, when the government killed about 200 Tunisians. It was thus in the light of what Hele Beji aptly termed "national disenchantment" that Bourguiba's monumental statues were erected. The Tunisian press agency saw the five meters high and four tons bronze statue as a "symbol of fidelity' implying that the Tunisian people still stood behind the "Father of the Nation."

In June 1988, however, less than one year after Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's medical coup on November 7, 1987, the equine statue of Bourguiba in the centre of Tunis was relocated to a parking space in the northern suburb of La Goulette, where the president literally first set foot when he came back from exile in 1955. It was replaced by a Clock Tower. "Africa Square," where the equestrian statue used to stand, was renamed "November 7 Square." The main avenue kept its name in reference to the first president of independent Tunisia, but most of the streets referring to Bourguiba were renamed, referring to the date of the coup. The different Bourguiba statues in all Tunisian cities were removed from public space, except the statues in Monastir, Tabarka, and Ksar Helal. With the renovation of the main avenue at the end of the 1990s, the outdated clock monument was replaced by the modernized "Mongela" as it stands today in honour of the third millennium.

It was in light of the first presidential elections in 2014, two years before the comeback of the equine statue in Monastir and Tunis, and based on the newly instituted post-revolutionary constitution, that a debate started in a response to an open letter by Gilbert Naccache, a prominent intellectual, demanding that the presidential candidates "engage with the revolutionary demands of the people." In a public post on social media responding to popular preoccupations concerning the memory of the martyrs and the wounded of the revolution, Moncef Marzouki proposed a "symbolic reparation" to be achieved by erecting "a monument to the glory of the martyrs" on the January 14

Square. Such a monument would replace the clock tower representing the recently overthrown Ben Ali regime. On the other hand, interviewed by Jeunes Afrique, the rival candidate Beji Caid Essebsi stated that "without Bourguiba, Avenue Bourguiba had no sense." The future president stated that, if he had the opportunity, he would without a doubt organize the return of the "Father of the Nation." That came as no surprise given that Essebsi served as minister of Interior, Defence and Foreign Affairs in the Neo-Destourian government from 1965 to 1986. Moreover, already in 2009, he stated in his visionary memoire "Habib Bourguiba: the wheat and the chaff" that "when time will do its work" and "history will override the news," "Habib Bourguiba will be released from purgatory and the equestrian statue of the most illustrious Tunisian resume its place in Tunis on the Habib Bourguiba Avenue, opposite the statue of Abderrahmane Ibn Khaldoun, the most illustrious Tunisian sociologist of all time."

After Beji Caid Essebsi won the presidential elections, Mohsen Marzouk, one of the founding members of the Nidaa Tounes party, and political advisor to the President, confirmed on April 9, 2015, during a conference dedicated to "Bourguibist thought" that, after the November 7 clock tower on the January 14 Square would be unbolted, the equestrian statue of Habib Bourguiba in La Goulette would be reinstalled in its original place. This symbolic movement would function as an example for all the municipalities in the different regions of the country. The Novemberist Clock, referring to the authoritarian ideology that symbolically crystalized around the date of Ben Ali's historical coup on November 7th, 1987, would be moved three kilometers north to Place Pasteur. The presidency later withdrew the proposition, evoking a lack of funds. As every commuter could see with their own eyes on that Tuesday morning, however, the statue of the Father of the Nation now stands in front of the ministry of interior, next to the clock tower, in exactly the

same place where thousands of protesters stood five years earlier demanding the president's departure.

Different politicians and activists referred to the merely symbolic politics behind the decision to reinstate the Bourguibist sculptures, unbefitting the context of growing marginalization and revolt. Mohamed Abbou (Ex-CPR and founding member of the "Democratic Current") was one of the first politicians to publicly contest the return of the image of the Father of the Nation and proposed to launch a contest for proposals for a new monument that would symbolize "the end of dictatorship." Architect Ahmed Zaouche endorsed that proposition because an extensive public consulation could mobilize the whole city in a democratic way. Under the title "One of the most important achievements," a certain Malek Feki uploaded on social media a series of digitally altered images of the equestrian statue. In one of these images it salutes from atop a garbage pile in the city center; in another one it stands in the middle of a street blocking the way of a congested bus; in another image it stands on the roof of a concrete container school, somewhere in the south of the country in a desert in the background of a hungry Bedouin family; and again, it it shown somewhere in a city as witness to flooding streets. In Feki's collage, Bourguiba is no longer proudly saluting "his" people, but real social and environmental issues. The collage criticizes the political priorities given to symbolic interventions instead of real political challenges. Rym Thairi of the Mahaba Current likewise critiqued the return of the Zaïm in the Assembly of Representatives of the People. She condemned the monumental intervention as unjustifiable, trivial, futile, and even contra-revolutionary symbolic politics. Considering the precarious socio-economic condition of the country, such a monument would neglect the real preoccupations of the people.

On the other hand, according to an op-ed by architect Moncef Kamoun (2016) on the Kapitalis website, Bourguiba is today, even without the statue, more present and more alive than

ever before. Bringing the equestrian monument back to its original place is therefore the least one can do in recognition of "one of the few true modernist references" in an "Arab world that is looking to the past and haunted by the forces of death." Sociologist Mohamed Kerrou (2016) also writes in the Huffington Post that the political use and rehabilitation of the charisma of the 'Father of the Nation' can be understood as a form of resistance to the "Islamist and populist threat" engendered by the Troika that ruled the constitutional Assembly during the bumpy constitutional revolutionary period. The historian Kmar Bendana (2016) joins the debate in an op-ed in *Le Quotidien d'Oran* and states that the return of the Bourguibist imagery is the logical consequence of the ubiquitous "present absence" of Tunisia's former leader in the last two decennia. When Ben Ali took power in 1987, Bourguiba was placed under house arrest, where he remained from the day of the coup until his death on April 6th, 2000. The regime not only removed every reference to the legacy of the former president, it also actively silenced Neo-Destourian partisans and Bourguiba loyalists. His 17 years of permanent isolation and abandonment passed without public opposition, until the day of his death. His coffin, embellished with a portrait depicting a sick old man, was carried from Tunis to Monastir in the belly of a purple plane stamped with a "November 7" logo. The funeral was not even broadcast on national television. In short, the death of "The Father of the Nation" was never properly mourned. Bendana thus argues that this unchallenged abandonment still has repercussions, enhancing a feeling of guilt, remorse, and frustration over the fact the Zaïm never really received a rightful historical place. In an unexpected post-revolutionary context lacking clear leadership, this discontentment only reinforces the general appeal to Bourguibist symbolism.

Evoking an ounce of the legacy of Bourguiba during "The Era of Change" was indeed unthinkable and was nearly considered a form of treason. During the autocratic times of the Ben

Ali regime, different artists engaged with the imagery of the "Father of the Nation" as a form of dissent (Ben Yakoub 2021). The photograph of the dislocated statue of Bourguiba in La Goulette, central in Faten Gaddes's series "La Rue" exposed at the Ammar Farhat art gallery in 2009, not only shows the regime's wish to eradicate the historical event of national return in 1955 that the statue represents, it also sensibly illustrates the ongoing process of irreverent demarcation. The image of a bronze Bourguiba sitting on the back of his horse, apparently standing on the dilapidated and nearly collapsing construction site in La Goulette instead of the marble pedestal, is also testimony to the expropriation of some long-time residents of what was once known as Tunisia's Little Sicily for the benefit of lucrative real estate projects closely connected to the regime. The graffiti stencil of Wassim Ghoslani (2002), the Warholian screen-prints of Bassem Jelali, the speed-painting of Selim Tlili (2010), and the painting of Mehdi Bouanani (2010) also show the dissidence engrained in the reproduction of Bourguiba's portrait during the Ben Ali Era. Mehdi Bouanani for instance, crossed the border of political sensibility with his painting of different portraits of Bourguiba. When he tried to exhibit these paintings in a Tunisian art gallery in 2010, he was refused entry by Tunisian customs and had to submit to a police interrogation. His exhibition was cancelled.

The most cutting-edge response came from the promising art philosopher Adnen Jdey (2016) in an op-ed for the online Nawaat platform, where he compared the second life of the statue of Bourguiba to the figure of Don Quixote, galloping about and confusing the order of the real and the symbolic to reinforce the prevailing political consensus. The double exile and the double triumphal return of the Zaïm, once in 1978 and once in 2016, function as a fiduciary *jouissance* facilitating the real reproducibility of the status quo. For Jdey the two apparently different bodies of Bourguiba, the patriot and the despot, the "supreme combatant" and the "enlightened tyrant," are two different sides of the same coin, casting a shadow on the still present Novemberist clock

tower, which together with the equestrian statue forms the still erect phallus of an entrenched power structure.

The second great return was finally inaugurated on "Victory Day," June 1, 2016, for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the mythical return of Bourguiba from exile in 1955. Escorted by security services and covered by a dozen security agents, Beji Caid Essebsi was welcomed by Mariem Bourguiba, the granddaughter of the "Father of the Nation," her husband, and a couple of other highly esteemed guests, before opening the red curtains, hiding the golden inscription on the marble pedestal of the equine monument. The filmmaker Hicham Ben Ammar (2017), present during the historical festivities for his documentary "The return of Bourguiba" was the only one noticing the absence of the sculptor of the original monument, Hechmi Marzouk. Although Marzouk had passionately worked for months to restore what he considers his lifetime achievement, he was not invited to participate in the ceremonial inauguration. He had to stand behind the security fences, humiliated and hurt, during what he imagined would be the apotheosis of his oeuvre. Inside the security perimeter, surrounded by a mob of journalists, Essebsi explained that June 1st was chosen as the inaugural date so as not to reinstate a new personality cult, but to commemorate a day of national cohesion without precedent. The return of the statue was a response to the need for a solid national unity to get out of the situation Tunisia had been in since the revolution. The president further reminded the journalists that Bourguiba Avenue used to be named after Jules Ferry, and that the statue of Bourguiba replaced the one of the French instigators of the French protectorate. The president tried to convince the journalists that a symbol of colonization was being replaced by a symbol of liberty and independence.

Not more than two months after the second inauguration of the equine statue of Bourguiba, fulfilling Essebsi's long lasting desire to reinstate Bourguibist imagery and ideology, Ghassen

Bouazzi, at that time head of the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET), the syndicalist student movement, and Hamza Nasri, activist of the Popular Movement (Popular Front) engaged in a more direct action related to the process of re-bourguibization pushed by the post-revolutionary regime. Bouazzi he climbed upon the recently erected equine statue and tagged the marble pedestal of the monument with the following phrase: "Weldek Fi Darek" (Your children should stay in your house) “we Nsibek zeda" (and your brother-in-law too). The campaign "Weldek Fi Darek" was launched as a hashtag on social media after the line was first enunciated by Ammar Amroussia, deputy Popular Front, during the plenary in the Assembly on July 30, for the renewal of trust in the government of Habib Essid. The tag on the pedestal of the equine statue was a direct message to president Beji Caid Essebsi not to favor his son Hafedh’s accession in Tunisian political life as head of “Nida Tunes” and Youssef Chahed as head of the government of National Unity, but also a general warning not to further institute nepotistic structures behind a symbolic veil of historicity. Bouizi and Hasri were eventually arrested for vandalizing the statue and accused of an offense against the head of state, but the Court eventually dismissed the case.

Despite protest after its resettlement in Tunis and Monastir, the statue symbolizing Bourguiba's triumphant return in 1955 was also resettled in Sousse. The equestrian statue was relocated to its former location as it was installed in 1977 at the intersection of Bab Bhar, in downtown Sousse. The inauguration, planned for the celebrations of Republic Day,” the date of the establishment of the Republican regime on July 25th was postponed until August 13, 2016, for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the personal status code. The inauguration ceremony was attended by local politicians and civil society and joined by former ministers under Bourguiba, such as Mohamed Sayah and Tahar Belkhoja.

Conclusion

It is clear by now that President Essebsi's staged public re-enactment was but a preview of a long-anticipated return of Bourguibist imagery in post-revolutionary Tunisia. The newly founded president was tapping into the accumulated post-colonial spectacular power in order to engage in a process of re-bourguibization. In this chapter, processes of resistance were analysed as a diagnosis of power, questioning the Foucauldian maxim that one should look for resistance wherever power manifests itself. Our analysis identified the power dynamics proper to the constitution and reconstitution of state aesthetics in the process of monumental re-bourguibization in post-revolutionary Tunisia, the confluence of ambiguous forms of disciplinary and sovereign power in the formation of state aesthetics. The state appropriation of spectacular power in different cities in Tunisia, such as Sousse, Monastir, and Tunis, was met with new waves of artistic resistance, re-appropriating the reconstituted state aesthetics. It thus became visible how the collective aesthetic agency of the revolting masses was effectively temporarily halted. Looking into the formation of spectacular power in the longue durée, it was made clear that the disciplinary and sovereign power that constitutes this postcolonial spectacular power are palimpsestic, polysemic, and layered historical constructions.

Analyzing the emmeshed histories of monumentalisation, this chapter revealed that efficient disciplining and controlling techniques engrained in the panoptical dispositive through which spectacular power was circulating in Tunisia, originated in the French colonial civilizing missions. This panoptical dispositive was further enhanced once the nation state was liberated through the endless replication of the portrait of the head of state. Even though Tunisia already relied on the power engrained in the reproduction of the portrait of its the Husainid leader in the 19th century, it was only during the French protectorate that this practice found its way outside the

confines of the palaces of the royal ruling class, reproducing the image of Jules Ferry and later that of Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali in public space. Looking into the various ways spectacular power circulates through the images and monuments that constitute the state aesthetics helped us to understand the more contemporary processes of re-bourguibization, characteristic of the search for legitimacy of the first post-revolutionary president Caid Essebsi.

Statues of the "Father of the Nation" successfully came back to occupy and re-bourguibize public space. Yet this did not happen without contestation. Foucault (1978: 95-96) insisted that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." As power encloses within itself the framework of its own resistance, state aesthetics not only produces political power, but also invites transgression and thus forms the aesthetic agency of the revolting body politic. Both aesthetic agency and state aesthetics are interconnected and entangled in the same way that power and resistance are interconnected and entangled. Thus, both exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. Pointing to the relational character of power, Foucault holds that power has no absolute outside. In this light, resistance is not subordinated to power, nor is it a consequence or negative form of power. It is instead a heterogeneous form of power that is characterized by multiplicity, as it consists of various spatial nodes that structure relations in a given territory.

Despite pockets of resistance, a renewed process of de-bourguibization from below is not yet on its way, even if it remains a lingering possibility. As I demonstrated in this chapter, spectacular power does not trickle down from the state to its subjects through its essential representation (in the form of a statue, for instance). It also moves and circulates in a diffuse, multiple, and heterogeneous manner in the intricate way state aesthetics is produced, reproduced, but also contested and thus diverted. For Foucault (1978: 93) "power" is only "permanent,

repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing" as "the overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement." In this light, Foucault (1978: 93) emphasizes the omnipresence of power, as it is always produced in a diffuse way "from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another […] not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." From a productive perspective, domination and resistance are intertwined and create subjectivity and thus also, potentially, aesthetic agency. The revolution was then a momentary instant when the diffuse circulation of power concentrated in its official representation in public space and piled up to provoke its own destruction. If the representation of power creates the illusion that power is permanent, homogeneous, fixed, and self-reproducing, it is only in its singular, momentary, and unique violent destruction that power paradoxically comes together and unites, to represent or signify its radical rejection.

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