

Islamist-Secular Cleavages at Tunisia's Universities

AMANDA THO SEETH

Amanda tho Seeth is a Ph.D. student, Institute of Political Science, University of Marburg, Germany. E-mail: Amanda.tho.Seeth@gmx.de.

Five years after the overthrow of the authoritarian Ben Ali regime in January 2011, Tunisia is still caught up in an identity struggle between secular and Islamist forces. In the democratic era, the demands of Islamists for stronger piety have entered politics and the public discourse, and challenge the traditional secular image of the nation. The cleavage between Islamists and secularists runs also strongly through the universities, which after decades of religious suppression and depoliticization, have been transformed into places of political dissent and activism.

ISLAMISTS DOMINATE UNIVERSITY COUNCILS

High public investments in the higher education system since the 1970s and a strong degree of international linkages—through French as the teaching and working language, and through participation in the European Bologna Process since 2006—have contributed to the outstanding reputation of Tunisian universities within the Arab region. Furthermore, the fall of authoritarianism introduced an array of democratic reforms in the Tunisian institutions of higher learning. University police, which until then had been omnipresent, was removed instantly from the campuses, and major juridical changes of the higher education law were quickly initiated by the interim government. New features are the democratic academic senates that every three years elect deans and directors, as well as the democratic university councils that elect the university presidents. Tunisian universities are in the vanguard in many respects—however, since democratization they have become sites of conflicts between Islamist and secular forces, especially within the student milieu.

Tunisian students are broadly divided between the rather leftist student organization *Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie* (UGET) and its opponent *Union Générale Tunisienne des Étudiants* (UGTE), an Islamist student organization loosely affiliated with the Islamist Ennahda party. Both UGTE and Ennahda were banned before democratization, but currently they have become powerful political actors and are now in a position to shape future university life. For the first time ever, UGTE defeated UGET in the annual elections for the university councils in November 2015. The Islamists occupy 224 (42%) of the 528 seats, whereas UGET, which used to dominate the councils, fell back to 110

seats—114 seats remain vacant.

Each university council is composed of the university president, department heads and student representatives, and manages the university's internal affairs such as study programs, human resource planning, or external cooperation. It remains to be seen how dominant the presence of Islamist student representatives will be on the campuses, leading to changes in the curricula, the introduction of stricter rules regarding gender separation and proper attire, or stronger cooperation with more conservative international providers of higher education like the Gulf States.

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As the distribution of power in the university councils is believed to mirror the wider society's political orientations, UGTE's victory is discussed in the media as an indicator for renewed support for the Ennahda party in parliament. Ennahda led the national interim government from 2011 to 2014, but after the parliamentary election of 2014 it became the second strongest force after the secular Nidaa Tounes party. In the current cabinet formed in February 2015, Ennahda plays a rather weak role and only controls the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training. However, since November 2015, Ennahda occupies again the majority of seats in parliament, when 31 members of Nidaa Tounes left the parliament after internal conflicts in the party. This concurrent coincidence of the weakness of the ruling secular party and the victory of the Islamists in the university councils could trigger a rise and stabilization of Islamist power in politics and academia in the years to come.

SALAFIST VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

While UGTE's and Ennahda's plans for Islamizing the universities currently remain unclear, the cleavage between secularists and violent Islamists groups—especially the Salafist organization, Ansar al-Sharia—has a more radical and noticeable impact on the campuses. The most prominent case where Salafists provoked violent outbreaks is the so-called "Manouba Affair" at the traditionally leftist Manouba University. A ban of the face veil on campus caused violent Salafist protests throughout 2011–2012. During the outbreaks, Habib Kazdaghli, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, was attacked and temporarily taken hostage. Kaz-

daghli became the focus of Salafist dissatisfaction because of his academic interest and expertise in the long and rich history of Tunisian Jewry. To this day, Kazdaghli is under police protection.

Furthermore, Salafist activists exchanged the Tunisian flag at the University of Manouba with a black flag depicting the Islamic creed—a symbol of Salafist presence. When student Khaoula Rachidi climbed up the flagstaff and took off the black flag, she was beaten up. The Tunisian State honored the young woman's courage with a reception at the office of the then president Moncef Marzouki. Still, during the whole course of the conflict at the University of Manouba, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, then led by Ennahda, strikingly backed off. The then minister of Higher Education and Science, Moncef ben Salem, publicly played down the conflict and declared in September 2012 that wearing the face veil at universities was legal. Also, it is rumored that members of UGTE and Ennahda were involved at the beginning of the protests against the ban of the face veil.

BETWEEN TERRORISM AND REFORM

The introduction of a democratic political system in Tunisia has turned the country into an ideological enemy and recurrent target of terrorist attacks by Islamic State (IS). Tunisian university life is affected by these attacks through the state of emergency and curfews that are imposed for security reasons by the government: Evening classes are temporary cancelled, and students cannot fulfill course requirements.

Even though Tunisian students are generally well educated, the national job market cannot absorb all university graduates. The ongoing economic crisis and high unemployment are seen as the causes for why IS, according to current data, is recruiting more members in Tunisia than from any other country. Protests and hunger strikes on campuses—especially by leftist students affiliated with UGET—against the poor prospects of university graduates, are prevalent phenomena since the introduction of democracy.

Still, the governments in power since democratization put high hopes in the role of higher education for the political, social, and economic development of the country, as laid down in the “Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Science 2015–2025.” This strategic plan aims at a better connection between universities and the job market, and regards autonomous universities as central players for the democratization of their local communities. ■

Frantz Fanon and the #MustFall Movements in South Africa

THIERRY M. LUESCHER

Thierry M. Luescher is assistant director for Institutional Research at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. E-mail: thierryluescher@outlook.com.

By his detractors, Frantz Fanon is decried as an advocate of anticolonial violence—that cathartic *muti* (the Zulu term for medicine) to rid native society of the parasitic colonial body politic. Yet, to Mandela's born free generation, he is the prophet of the present, foretelling in *The Wretched of the Earth* South Africa's presumed neocolonial condition: an elite wallowing in conspicuous consumption, a liberation party sunk into lethargy and corruption, masses of people living in poverty, a country in political, economic, and cultural decay. South Africans are disillusioned, and the black youth is angry. A telling placard held by students at one of the many protests in 2015 read: “In 1994, my parents were sold a dream; I'm here for the refund.”

#RHODESMUSTFALL

The #MustFall movements took South Africa by surprise. It all started on March 9, 2015, at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in a most unsavory way. The news of a UCT student soiling Cecil John Rhodes' towering statue on campus with human waste reached around the world. Rhodes is one of Cape Town's grandest “sons”: mining magnate, former prime minister of the Cape Colony, conqueror of the colonial “hinterland.” UCT is built in large parts on Rhodes' estate. #RhodesMustFall became the first iteration of the 2015 student movement in South Africa. Black students learn to voice their experience of being “black on campus” and throw the white masks handed to them by institutional culture, along with Rhodes, onto the ash heap of history.

While #RhodesMustFall mobilized students demanding the removal of Rhodes' statue and disappeared from the public gaze when the statue was removed on April 9, 2015, the excision of this “symptomatic sore” was but a symbolic step in the Fanonian “decolonization” process of healing the post-apartheid university, and creating a new intellectual space. Xolela Mangcu, professor of Sociology at UCT, wrote in *University World News* in March 2015 that the quality of discussions in the occupied buildings on campus “was not anything [he] had seen at the University of Cape Town, Cornell, Harvard or any of the universities [he] had attended.”