

What impact has the El Kamour social movement had on the establishment of a new socio-economic development model in Tataouine (Tunisia)?

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DOI: 10.17170/kobra-2024051710159

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IN SHORT

EN

- Tunisia has faced socio-political crises linked to the exploitation of natural resources, mainly in the southern part of the country, over the past two decades.
- These crises had national and regional consequences, challenging a development model based on rent and the exploitation of underground resources.
- Certain southern regions, such as Tataouine and Gafsa, are considered marginalized, with significantly higher unemployment rates than the national average.
- Persistent marginalization led to popular protest movements, including the El Kamour movement in Tataouine in 2017, calling for the redistribution of oil revenue for regional development.

DE

- Tunesien erlebte in den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten sozio-politische Krisen, die mit der Ausbeutung von Rohstoffen im Süden des Landes verbunden waren.
- Diese Krisen hatten nationale und regionale Konsequenzen und stellten ein Entwicklungsmodell in Frage, das auf Renten und der Ausbeutung von Rohstoffen basiert.
- Die südlichen Regionen Tunesiens, wie Tataouine und Gafsa, gelten als marginalisiert, mit deutlich höheren Arbeitslosenquoten als der nationale Durchschnitt.
- Die anhaltende Marginalisierung führte zu Protestbewegungen, darunter die Bewegung El Kamour in Tataouine im Jahr 2017, die die Umverteilung der Öleinnahmen und deren Nutzung für regionale Entwicklung forderte.

FR

- La Tunisie a connu des crises socio-politiques liées à l'exploitation des ressources naturelles, principalement dans le sud du pays, au cours des deux dernières décennies.
- Ces crises ont eu des conséquences nationales et régionales, remettant en question un modèle de développement basé sur la rente et l'exploitation des ressources du sous-sol.
- Certaines régions du sud, comme Tataouine et Gafsa, sont considérées comme marginalisées, avec un taux de chômage nettement plus élevé que la moyenne nationale.
- La marginalisation persistante a conduit à des mouvements de protestation populaire, notamment le mouvement El Kamour à Tataouine en 2017, réclamant la redistribution des revenus pétroliers pour le développement régional.

ES

- Túnez ha experimentado crisis socio-políticas relacionadas con la explotación de recursos naturales, principalmente en el sur del país, durante las dos últimas décadas.
- Estas crisis tuvieron consecuencias a nivel nacional y regional, desafiando un modelo de desarrollo basado en la renta y la explotación de recursos subterráneos.
- Algunas regiones del sur, como Tataouine y Gafsa, se consideran marginadas, con tasas de desempleo significativamente más altas que el promedio nacional.
- La marginación persistente llevó a movimientos de protesta populares, incluido el movimiento El Kamour en Tataouine en 2017, que pedía la redistribución de los ingresos petroleros para el desarrollo regional.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Tunisia has experienced socio-political crises linked to the exploitation of natural resources in the south of the country. These crises, which have had striking consequences on a national and regional scale, constitute an event that is both circumscribed in time and recurrent (Guy, 2016), and mark the undermining of a development model based, among other things, on rents and the exploitation of subsoil resources. This model, which has reached its limits, has been called into question by various social and political players at national, regional and local level. These players have all called for it to be superseded and replaced by a new model based on sound management and governance of natural resources on the one hand, and social and spatial equity in the redistribution of rent resources on the other.

Some regions in southern Tunisia, such as Tataouine and Gafsa, are considered marginalized, with

unemployment rates significantly higher than the national average (28.4 percent in Gafsa and 26.1 percent in Tataouine in 2014, according to the National Institute of Statistics) and significant infrastructure under-equipment. This marginalization, which persisted after the December 17, 2010 revolution, was at the root of a popular protest movement that spread to several southern regions. While protests in the Gafsa mining basin broke out as early as 2008 and resumed after the revolution, those in Tataouine began in 2017 following the outbreak of an unframed popular protest movement calling for the redistribution of revenues derived from oil resource exploitation.¹ Indeed, this social protest movement, which slipped out of the control of traditional intermediation structures, claimed that part of the revenue (20 percent) from oil resources extracted from the Tataouine governorate should be devoted to promoting job creation and regional development.

Protest outbreak in marginalized Tunisian regions

Mass protests in countries undergoing democratic transition are directed towards new social and economic claims, particularly when achievements in terms of freedom of expression and political and civil rights are not backed up by social rights (McCarthy, 2022). If the implementation of social rights lags behind political freedoms, protests can represent a major challenge for the new democracy (Silva and Rossi, 2018). This socio-political context accounts for the marginalization of parties and formal political institutions and favors the rise of demands that fall beyond these institutions' control and hence can assume autonomous forms (Flesher Fominaya, 2015).

In Tunisia, mass protest movements driven by socio-economic demands after the 2010 revolution can be interpreted as a tool for the struggle of poor popular classes with little access to the political arena (Weipert-Fenner and Wolff, 2020). Marginalized groups mobilized to assert themselves as stakeholders vis-à-vis the state,

while demanding deeper democratic reforms using new forms of protest (sit-ins, road blockades...) in contrast to the classic forms of institutional demands put forward by political agents and trade unions (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 7).

The revolution led to the implementation of a democratic system in Tunisia, which in turn led to the staging of multiparty elections in 2011 and the subsequent establishment of a Constituent Assembly, which voted for a new constitution and introduced a new parliamentary political system. During this first phase, which lasted until 2014, the new political actors, dominated by the Islamist party Ennahda, gave priority to political action and to containing social protest by providing tens of thousands of jobs in the public sector at a time when economic growth was at its lowest, thereby running up a deficit in state finances.

¹ This transfer took place for the first time in 2016 in Kerkennah (governorate of Sfax) following the outbreak of a social movement demanding a share of the profits generated by the petrochemical company Petrofac.

Following the 2014 elections that reshaped the political spectrum, the political landscape was marked by an alliance between the country's two leading forces (Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda), who opted for political compromise despite ideological divergence, which entailed a simple redistribution of power between them (Marzouki, 2015). This phase was also marked by the absence of far-reaching socio-economic reforms and the perpetuation of the inherited development model. As a result, there was little change in the development of peripheral territories (the interior and southern regions), and the social situation worsened sharply as the unemployment rate soared while the purchasing power of the middle and poor classes declined.

Unlike the political parties and civil society, who were calling for a new form of territorial governance based on decentralization and the establishment of local power, the working classes made demands that went beyond political rights in the narrow sense of the term, demanding a return of the "state" to create new jobs or reallocate resources.

This context of socio-economic crisis has weakened public confidence in institutions and political parties, due in part to the resurgence of administrative corruption and political clientelism. Thus, on the eve of the Kamour events, and according to a survey carried out in 2016 by the Arab Barometer, Tunisians' confidence did not exceed 35 percent for the government and justice sector, 20 percent for

parliament and 19.9 percent for political parties (Arab Barometer, 2016).

Since then, Tunisia has seen one of the world's highest rates of social mobilization per capita. In 2017, for example, there were 11,000 individual or collective social mobilizations against social and environmental injustices (Temlali, 2018). Most protests were not framed by political parties but rather characterized by autonomous forms of organization, driven by job demands (Jöst, 2020; Weipert-Fenner, 2020), or anti-corruption campaigns (Chomiak and Salman, 2016).

Indeed, political activity took place, to a certain extent, outside party structures, in informal networks. Participants in these activities were ordinary people who wanted to produce social change in the absence of ideology, without leadership and without any form of organization (Bayat, 2013, p. 15).

In southeastern Tunisia, a social movement broke out beginning in February 2017, lasting four months, in the governorate of Tataouine, located 500 kilometers south of Tunis, to protest against unemployment and the region's underdevelopment. Hundreds of unemployed workers staged a sit-in and then shut down an oil pipeline to demand thousands of new jobs and higher state funding for their regions. The El Kamour demonstrators refused to be framed by political parties and trade unions, and stepped up their actions by negotiating directly with government representatives, yet without challenging the legitimacy of the state.

| Emergence of social mobilization and El Kamour movement in the Tataouine region

Unlike other southern areas (Gafsa, Médenine or Gabes), the governorate of Tataouine is characterized by a particular context that has not fostered the growth of protest movements, even under authoritarian regimes, owing to factors such as: a weak urban fabric, a dominant pastoral economy, the absence of industry, a lack of trade union tradition, a land tenure system still dominated by collective landholdings, and a relatively inactive civil society—all elements that do not encourage the creation of networks for collective mobilization, despite the existence of strong tribal structures.

Accordingly, resourceless local populations rarely took part in protests because they lacked networks and mobilizing organizations (Ekiert and Kubik, 1998; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001). It was the partisan structures of the ruling party then, Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD),² that acted as intermediaries between the authorities and the population, in order to satisfy the demands of marginalized groups who lacked the financial means to organize. The prevalence of tribal structures in society fostered the development, on the

² Party in power in Tunisia until its dissolution in 2011.

RCD's part, of clientelism to a considerable extent (Ben Jelloul, 2014).

The post-revolutionary context, characterized by freedom of expression and the spectacular development of social networks among the youth ranks, represented a favorable field for the birth of a social movement initiated by young unemployed graduates and non-graduates who no longer trusted the political class or central government. The latter had failed to meet their expectations in terms of jobs and better living conditions.

Indeed, a number of studies have shown that the mobilization of the unemployed in particular does not necessarily rely on the resources of political mediators; it can develop in the event of a sharp rise in unemployment and when networks are organized through a "local anchoring" (Chabanet and Faniel, 2012, pp. 13-14), or when unionization is in decline (Baglioni et al., 2008). These conditions combined in the Tataouine case because of the rise in popular discontent due, among other things, to the spectacular increase in unemployment rates, particularly among young graduates. Thus, at the outbreak of the Kamour social movement in 2017, the socio-economic crisis in Tataouine had reached an acute phase, with an unemployment rate of 32.4 percent (45.9 percent for young graduates) (ODS, 2018). Thus, the rise in unemployment and particularly among young graduates was the main factor behind mobilization.

However, collective mobilization and its ensuing manifestation in the form of social movement is not always contingent on the emergence of popular discontent. A number of conditions must coalesce to enable the emergence of a social movement (Neveu, 2005). With regard to the Tataouine governorate, four factors, some of which are quite relevant to the local territory, favored the emergence of collective protest and the birth of a social movement.

Firstly, restrictions on informal trade across the Libyan border have hit the local economy hard. These restrictions, which led to the decline of the border economy with Libya, were exacerbated by the military presence, which severely restricted smuggling routes (Meddeb, 2021). This situation provided a strong

incentive for all those who made their living from the informal sector and smuggling to join the movement and support it both materially and morally.

Secondly, the social initiative in the area mobilized tribal structures and kinship ties to create a social environment favorable to the movement, thus highlighting the poor quality of public services and the lack of local facilities and services in the governorate. In this way, the movement won the sympathy and support of most local populations, and was able to mobilize them during bouts of confrontation with the authorities.

Thirdly, communication via social networks, and Facebook in particular, has enabled the movement's leaders to inform and mobilize the entire local community in support of their causes, and has given the movement national and even international scope, bringing it the support of vital social forces, although this communication has played a negative role among a large fringe of the Tunisian society that has rejected the movement and stigmatized its leader, following his direct appearances on Facebook and his discourse deemed extremist.

Ultimately, the existence of a leader with strong personal resources is essential but insufficient, particularly when the social base of the mobilization in question has "weak resources" (Mouchard, 2010). Movement spokesperson, Tarak Haddad, managed the protests and mobilized the local population, who gave him strong support particularly when he was arrested.

These factors, which were instrumental in the emergence of the social movement, were followed by the El Kamour coordination's adoption of a strategy consisting in bringing the protest into the public arena. This evolutionary approach enabled the movement to gain ground and break through, thus defying regional and national authorities. Initially, the occupation of public space took the form of sit-ins in front of the sites of power (Mouchard, 2010), namely the governorate headquarters. In a second phase, the movement relocated outside the city,³ 90 kilometers to the south, to the junction of the El Kamour road, leading up to the construction of an "alternative" public space. Finally, the decision was taken to stop the pipeline in order to prove to the central authorities the protesters' determination

³ In March 2017, several dozen men from the village of Ksar Ouled Debbab, located 10 kilometers southwest of Tataouine, set up roadblocks with burning tires to stop trucks heading for the oil fields to the south, in protest against unemployment. Within a few days, the roadblocks spread to surrounding villages and the city of Tataouine, and were accompanied by placards reading: "Oil is a collective right."

and the radicalization of their movement so as to force the State to meet their demands.

The movement seized the place name, "El Kamour", which became its symbol and the identity linking it to the oil resource around which revolved the conflict with the state over the redistribution of oil revenues. The movement will be identified as the "Coordination of El Kamour".

From the outset, this movement set itself apart from political parties and trade union structures. The

protesters self-organized according to a participatory model, involving eighty representatives from the neighborhoods of Tataouine and neighboring villages to map out a strategy. Among them, a dozen representatives created the "Coordination of the Kamour sit-in".

The first phase of the movement ended with the government accepting the protesters' demands, promising 4,500 new jobs and 80 million dinars (\$32 million) in annual development funding, according to the terms of the agreement reached by both parties.

Local actors' role in a new development model: redistributing oil revenues

For the first time in Tunisia's history, the central government engaged in direct negotiations with local stakeholders, without recourse to traditional negotiation structures (such as professional organizations, partisan structures, civil society, etc.). Indeed, the protesters proposed an alternative economic model in which a new system of redistribution of the rent from oil resources could finance local social development (Ajl, 2019).

The El Kamour movement was based on a critique of the model of natural resource extraction that takes place in marginalized southern territories and benefits Tunisia's more prosperous coastal regions. In the case of El Kamour, extractivism provided a stimulus for the demonstrators' demands, and oriented their range of actions. On the one hand, the demands focused on the need to provide jobs in oil companies, and on the other, they required a redistribution and sharing of oil revenues.

Although the protests began with a simple demand for jobs for hundreds of young unemployed graduates and non-graduates, the emergence of the movement and

the solidarity that developed between the various components of the local society helped with the maturing of the demands, which evolved into a questioning of the current system towards the establishment of socio-spatial equity and a more egalitarian system of redistribution by the State. The protesters repeatedly referred to the 2014 constitution, which no longer considers natural resources to be state property, but rather public property belonging to the people, thus justifying their demands for a new, fairly structured development model aimed at impoverished regions.

Negotiations actually resulted in a number of measures in favor of the region, the main ones being the creation of an annual development fund and an investment fund, each valued at 80 million dinars, the hiring of 125 people by local oil companies and the recruitment of 1,000 people by a so-called environment company. In addition, a budget of 2.2 million dinars was allocated to finance projects for unemployed young people, and a fund of 1.2 million dinars was granted to development associations. Finally, 2.6 million dinars were granted to the governorate's municipalities.

Recommendations for equitable and sustainable regional development

The lessons to be learned from the El Kamour experience should guide political decision-makers towards a thorough review of the development and territorial governance model, which should be based, among other things, on the distribution of rents in favor of marginalized territories, with the aim of diversifying the regional economic basis.

The State needs to move beyond the scattergun policy applied in these areas since the pre-revolutionary period. The most significant example concerns the environment, planting and gardening companies that were set up in the oil zones (and previously in the Gafsa mining basin in 2008) with the aim of procuring social peace. This initiative, which created jobs for young people who had long been marginalized, had no impact;

either on the environment or on reducing unemployment, as the jobs that were created were precarious. The State needs to review this policy by directing the substantial financial manna devoted to these companies towards a development fund that can be made available to the Tataouine regional development council or to the recently-created District Council N°5, encompassing the governorates of Gabes, Médenine, Tataouine and Kébili.

It is also necessary for public authorities to cede some of their prerogatives in the field of territorial governance by giving greater power and autonomy to local, regional and district councils, who must decide on the development model to be adopted in their respective territories.

Conclusion

Without calling into question the legitimacy of the State, the El Kamour movement, through direct action aimed at central government, has achieved its objective of visibly changing the way rents from extractivism are shared. Part of these rents now accrue to the region, thanks to the annual development and investment fund managed by the regional council (a decentralized structure) and put at the service of regional development projects. The mobilizing discourse of the El Kamour movement's leaders linked "development" to the right to work and the demand for a fair share of

energy wealth, while embedding these demands in the process of the population's struggle to establish spatial equity (Ajl, 2019).

However, the measures taken by the authorities are still insufficient, and must go further by granting greater autonomy to the recently created decentralized structures and providing these marginalized territories with more public facilities and basic infrastructure, in order to better integrate them with the rest of the national territory and entitle them to upgrading.

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EXTRACTIVISM

| The Project

The collaborative research project *extractivism.de* links the Universities of Kassel and Marburg. The project scrutinizes the extractivist development model and proposes new economic, political, and sociological conceptions of extractivism. It preliminarily focuses on Latin America and the Maghreb patterns. The project researches the conditions under which these patterns affect the persistence and transformative capacity of extractivism and its respective institutional settings. Finally, it explores how extractivism affects cultural processes and habitual routines and questions under what conditions and how far the development model extends into institution-building and social practice, i.e., everyday life.

The project aims to understand extractive societies not as deviants from the Western trajectory of development but in their own logic and their own particularities. The project, therefore, combines a strong empirical focus with theoretical work. It links both broad field research and data gathering of primary data and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of available secondary sources with a stringent transregional comparison. It develops methods in cross-area studies and investigates whether and why similar patterns of social change emerge in different areas and world regions despite significant cultural, social, or religious differences. Finally, the project intends to translate the findings for politics, society, and development cooperation.

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