

**Black Tunisians and Racism in the
Discourse of National media, urban
élites and rural local actors: the case
of ‘Abid Ghbonton**





After 2011, an anew sentiment of freedom and a loosened censorship on internet, newspapers, and television:

- **Number of associations doubled**
- **Qualitative leap: new focus on human rights**
- **Geographical reshuffling: penetrating the interior**

The “progressive and environmentally unsustainable hyper-concentration of anthropogenic pressures and activities on increasingly vulnerable areas” has as causes

- The burgeoning business of international tourism (resorts, villas..)
- The de-localization of European manufacturing activities (textiles)
- The extreme exploitation of phosphate mines and industries

and as consequences:

- Hyper-urbanization
- Environmental catastrophes (e.g. the Gulf of Gabès)

The «coastalization» of Tunisia

Julia Clancy-Smith (2014)



**Who are «Black
Tunisians»?**



Slavery: the Trans-Saharan slave trade

- First country to abolish slavery in the Arab and Middle-Eastern world: in 1846 thanks to the far-seeing policy of Ahmed Bey (1837-1855)
- Transformation of slavery into *wala*
- Denial of the legacy of slavery and of racism under the nation-building post-independence process (Habib Bourguiba)
- With no apparent minority, the South has functioned as a «domestic other»

Abolition

- Less than 25% of Blacks attend secondary schools
- Lowest ladders of society
- Strict endogamy
- No political representation before 2011, scarcely after 2011
- Morally lacking authority, less «pious» than Whites: Blacks' jobs are socially despicable: blacksmiths, prostitutes, musicians, singers

Black Tunisians today

Associations for Blacks' rights

- Urban-based
- Highly educated Blacks
- French-speaking
- Women
- Young and digitally-educated
- Fight for the introduction of a «hate crime»



- Southern, conservative village
- Blacks and Whites share the same patronymic and belong to the same *qabyla* (tribu) but Blacks are called «Slaves of the Whites»
- Blacks and Whites divided by a *oued* (small river) and practice a strict endogamy
- They survive as clam collectors, musicians, blacksmiths, emigrants (Djerba and Libya)



El Gosbah

- Linguistic differences: French *vs* Tunisian Arabic
- Locally pursued strategies of emancipation (migration, music) *vs* calls for «hate crime»
- Geographical cleavages: North (coast, cities) *vs* South (centre, South, borders)
- Theoretical/Religious frameworks: Western-oriented discourse on «Apartheid» *vs* Islamic institution of *wala*

Why do 'Abid Ghbonton not understand urban activists?
