Manīsh msāmiḥ

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In May 2016, in a manner that is unusual for Tunisian ⚡Football fans, supporters of Espérance sportive de Tunis, one of if not the largest sports team in the country, react violently against a political campaign. The campaign involves putting up a series of “Wanted” posters, later shared on ⚡Social Media. Launched by the Manich Msamah (*mā-nīsh msāmiḥ*, Tunisian for “I am not going to forgive”) campaign, it is aimed at symbols of the former regime [⚡Past vs. Present]. Its first target was Slim Chiboub (YT, May 22), the emblematic former president of Espérance, a FIFA executive and the son-in-law of the deposed president Zin El Abidine Ben Ali (Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Bin ‘Alī), who profited significantly over many years from the impunity and favoritism.

Equating the attack on Slim Chiboub with a condemnation of the team, numerous supporters of Espérance reacted by counter-attacking on Manich Msamah (*mā-nīsh msāmiḥ*)’s Facebook page, criticizing what they regarded as a politicization and instrumentalization of football.

The “Wanted” campaign had a broad impact: it was discussed lengthily on social media as well as by national and international media (KOTTOOR), at times to denounce it as an organized lynching, at others to describe it as a movement fighting impunity. Traces of it could be found in numerous Tunisian cities and even abroad.

Founded in August 2015, it is mainly over the past year that *Manich Msamah* has come to national and international prominence as the main umbrella organization of the opposition to the so-called economic and financial reconciliation law. While the campaign critiques the transitional justice process underway since 2011 for failing to meet the demands of the “revolution” [⚡Public Hearings], it nevertheless also defends it as a minimal gesture that is threatened by the governing coalition, who favour reconciliation based on impunity and dressed up with terms like “national unity” and “tolerance” (BEN HASSINE, June 22).

The campaign was formed mainly by young activists after President Béji Caid Essebsi’s appeal to “overcome the past and achieve national unity,” which was implemented in practice by the president’s introduction, in mid-July, of draft legislation for “economic and financial reconciliation.” It has grown in scale since, thanks to its success in occupying the spotlight by effectively combining street-level actions with its communications strategy, and employing nimble tactics.

From the outset, Manich Msamah drew on a diverse repertoire. Gatherings, protests, press conferences, art workshops in public space, online campaigns, café discussions, etc., all combined with simple and well-organized communication. For example on July 11 the campaign sent each of the 217 members of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) an open letter accompanied by a brief against the proposed legislation and a request for a hearing at the Assembly, all also published on *Manich Msamah*’s Facebook page. On July 13, it organized a press conference (CHENNAOUI), attended by numerous prominent figures of the Tunisian opposition [⚡Celebrities] as well as national and international media (YT JAZEERA MUBASHER), in the course of which it presented itself as combating the

presidential office (ICTJ) [↗“**The System**” vs. “**The People**”] and called for protests, which in fact did occur, starting in Tunis on July 15 and in no fewer than 16 other Tunisian cities in the days following (OBSERVATOIRESECURITÉ) [↗**Center vs. Periphery**].

A number of these actions took place during a period of political stagnation, which contributed to the visibility of *Manich Msamah* (BEN HASSINE, June 14) [↗**Voice vs. Silence**].

The campaign T-Shirt was also an important device for generating visibility, both in person and online. Initially worn by the most active members, requests to have one made or buy one grew over time, exceeding *Manich Msamah*’s capacity to produce them. Several models of T-Shirt with the campaign logo ended up being worn by people who did not go through *Manich Msamah* to obtain them or who, fed up of waiting, made them themselves. People wearing *Manich Msamah* T-Shirts made declarations against impunity, corruption, and even against the police and certain politicians involved in cover-ups, in front of the stadium or historic monuments emblematic of Tunisia or other countries, then shared them on social networks, often sending their posts to the campaign’s Facebook page [↗**Social Media**].

Manich Msamah relied heavily on social media, centralizing and rebroadcasting any information related to the movement. Its Facebook page (MANICHMSAME7) has 50,000 followers this year, mostly youth, and the number is growing constantly.

The campaign’s significance can be seen in the way it was treated by the media. Initially ignored completely, it began to appear marginally, couched in a hostile discourse, to finally become an important actor in the debate around the proposed legislation for “economic and financial reconciliation,” that media sought out often and less fiercely [↗**Voice vs. Silence**]. As every public appearance by its members was an opportunity to draw attention to its (the) campaign, make its positions known, and distinguish itself from other political actors while avoiding confrontation with those supposed to be on the same side, *Manich Msamah* always insured a careful choice was made as to who would appear, and that the positions they defended were carefully prepared.

This was only possible because of the position it carved out for itself on the political scene through its flexible tactics, which came together in its efforts to unite the struggle against the proposed legislation, while avoiding becoming an actor of secondary importance and allowing itself to be instrumentalized by senior political figures [↗**Young vs. Settled**].

Having members with experience in different parties and associations on different sides and with different ideologies was one of *Manich Msamah*’s strengths, although certain parties and associations with aging leadership attempted to co-opt the campaign through their members within its ranks. These organizations encountered criticism within *Manich Msamah*, but this did not prevent its members from putting the connections to work in order to make their positions heard within these organizations. The activists within the group showed great tactical flexibility in their negotiations with such organizations, which allowed the campaign to become, in the span of several months, the intermediary between several parties and between the parties and several associations. Within one year of its creation, the campaign had made itself politically unavoidable (BLAISE). It also led to an unprecedented practice in street protests. This consisted of convincing (forcing) political parties to

participate without their partisan colours, in other words using the flags, T-Shirts and slogans of the campaign almost exclusively.

This was not achieved without tensions inside of the campaign and critiques from outside. Conflicts erupted over the justness or effectiveness of allying with certain organizations. The members contested certain alliances on ideological and political grounds. However such protests did not get far within the group because of the blurriness of the campaign's political identity, which generally did not allow for clear decisions on non-consensual issues and favoured, in such cases, established activities and alliances, for the sake of the campaign's credibility.

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ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Football ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Social Media

CODES – Center vs. Periphery ♦ Past vs. Present ♦ “The System” vs. “The People” ♦ Voice vs. Silence
♦ Young vs. Settled

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