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"Securing the state" in post-2011 Tunisia: performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I adopt the theoretical lens of authoritarian neoliberalism coupled with the concept of performativity to analyse post-transition Tunisian counterterror politics. In doing so, I argue that "securing the state" from discursively constructed "threats" such as terrorism, political Islamism and the associated instability they are perceived to engender can be understood as a performative enactment of statehood in the context of reduced sovereignty associated with neoliberal deregulation, as well as a crisis of legitimacy faced by successive post-transition governments in Tunisia. However, performative counterterror discourses and practices are aimed not only at "flexing the muscles" of the state. They also seek to construct moral panic surrounding certain groups and thus justify the roll out of repressive policing of already marginalised communities rather than merely suspected terrorists. This performance is intended to distract from some of the root causes of radicalisation in contemporary Tunisia: economic inequalities and dispossession linked to failed neoliberal deregulation. Thus, through the exploration of the Tunisian case between 2014 and 2021, I contend we can best understand (in)security in the MENA when adopting an analytical approach bringing together security studies and International Political Economy (IPE).

Introduction

In 2015, Tunisia was rocked by a series of high-profile terrorist attacks targeting its security forces and symbolic sites (Bobin 2015). Notwithstanding some of the initial attempts to "reform" Tunisia's security sector following the fall of the former authoritarian regime in January of 2011 (Hanlon 2012), the security "crisis" of 2015 marked a shift in Tunisia's post-revolutionary political landscape (Hanau Santini and Cimini 2019), leading to the introduction of "exceptional" counterterrorism measures, the re-emergence of repressive security practices and huge increases in the levels of foreign assistance provided to "train and equip" Tunisia's security forces (Maryon 2023).

While scholarly focus has considered the relative "success" of Tunisia's counterterror measures as well as its security cooperation with external actors (Cimini and Santini 2021), fewer accounts have explored the *politics* of security and more specifically, counterterrorism,

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in Tunisia (Aliaga and O'Farrell 2017). This is indicative of security studies' tendency to conceptualise security as something exceptional and thus, depolitised (Lister 2019; Neal 2012). In contrast, I explore the *politics* of security in post-uprising Tunisia. Even fewer accounts have sought to situate discussions of counterterror politics within the context of broader debates about the relationship between neoliberalism and coercive state power (Brouard et al. 2021). This is despite the vast body of work showing that intensified recourse to coercive state practices has comprised part of the reconfiguration of the state in late neoliberalism (Tansel 2017). Thus, I adopt an analytical lens bringing together International Political Economy (IPE) and security studies (see Wynne-Hughes and Weldes 2017) to better understand (in)security and its relationship to neoliberalism in the Tunisian context.

By employing the theoretical lens of authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff 2014; Tansel 2017) coupled with the concept of performativity (Weber 1998; Lister 2019) to analyse post-transition Tunisian counterterror politics, I show how counterterrorism can be conceptualised as comprising part of the so-called "penal fist" of late neoliberalism. In fact, I show that the 2015 security "crisis" was capitalised upon by domestic political elites to introduce supposedly "exceptional", but de-facto permanent measures, clamp down on political opposition and repress social movements – in other words, to intensify their authoritarian neoliberal governance. More precisely, I argue "securing the state" from discursively constructed "threats", such as terrorism, can be understood as a performative enactment of statehood in the context of reduced sovereignty associated with neoliberal deregulation as well as a crisis of legitimacy faced by successive post-transition governments in Tunisia. In other words, unable to provide for security of their populations, due to the failure of neoliberal reforms and their devastating consequences, successive post-transition governments have sought to construct their claims to legitimacy upon the notion of "securing the state" from certain securitised, supposedly "existential", threats.

I do not claim that certain threats are not "real". Terrorism, for example, has posed a significant threat to the security of individuals and the political regime at times in the post-transition context (Byrne 2015). However, I do assert that 1/ these threats are exploited by political elites who perform and perpetuate a sense of crisis around them to portray the level of threat as larger than it is (See Hall 1978) and that 2/ this "crisis" serves to justify to the introduction of repressive policies and practices which are often used against political opponents, popular protests and social movements as well as suspected terrorists. Thus, the purpose of this "roll out" of the coercive apparatuses of the state is not *merely* to respond to the terror threat, but to "mop up" and police the dislocated populations "left behind" by neoliberal restructuring (Wacquant 2010) – in this case the urban poor and those living in Tunisia's marginalised regions. It also serves to performatively distract from government's growing inability to assert its statehood in a multitude of areas and provide for a basic level of economic and social security (Wacquant 2009).

Through my analysis of post-revolutionary Tunisian counterterror politics, I show why the critical security studies researcher must centre questions of political economy. I also attempt to make a theoretical contribution to the research agenda on authoritarian neoliberalism by exploring one of the additional analytical tools, in this case performativity, with which it can be deployed in research which goes beyond the disciplinary boundaries of IPE. Finally, through my exploration of the Tunisian case, I aim to contribute

rich empirical analysis to the existing theoretical discussions regarding counterterror politics as performativity of the neoliberal state (see Lister 2019).

Accordingly, this paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline my use of the concept of performativity within the authoritarian neoliberalism theoretical framework (1) and expand on this paper's methodology (2). I then engage with the particularities of authoritarian neoliberalism in the post-transition context to better understand performative counterterror politics (3) and analyse examples of contemporary counterterror politics which, I argue, can be theorised as a performative enactment of sovereignty and reassertion of statehood (4). I then show how this is used to construct moral panic surrounding particular marginalised communities rather than merely suspected terrorists, "justifying" the rollout of repressive policing of such communities (5). Furthermore, it also serves to distract from some of the root causes of radicalisation and extremism in contemporary Tunisia: economic inequalities and dispossession linked to decades of failed neoliberal deregulation.

The case for performativity in the study of authoritarian neoliberalism

The connections between neoliberalism and counterterrorism in post-transition Tunisia may seem somewhat tenuous at first glance. However, neoliberalism so often thought to involve the retreat of the state, is conducive to "greater emphasis on coercive control" (Lister 2019, 19) and "repertoires of domination" (Hall 1978, 217). In other words, the "roll back" of the state in certain areas, including macroeconomic and budgetary policy, is coupled with the "roll out" of the state in other areas such as workfare, policing, incarceration, border regimes (see Axster et al. 2021) and, as scholars have increasingly argued, counterterrorism (Brouard et al. 2021; Herring and Stokes 2011). While scholars have been analysing the illiberal manifestations of neoliberalism since the 1970s, those mobilising the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism argue that there has, since the 2007 crash, been a qualitative shift in the illiberal propensities of neoliberalism (Bruff 2014; Tansel 2017).

Authoritarian neoliberalism refers to the spectrum of state strategies employed in so-called liberal democratic states and authoritarian contexts in both Global North (Bruff 2014; Sotiris 2017) and Global South (De Smet and Bogaert 2017; Goonewardena 2020; Tansel 2018) to protect and reinforce neoliberal economic policies and to close the social and political spaces for their contestation. Indeed, contemporary neoliberalism, "reinforces and increasingly relies upon 1/ coercive state practices that discipline, marginalise and criminalise oppositional social forces and 2/ the judicial and administrative state apparatuses which limit the avenues in which neoliberal policies can be challenged" (Tansel 2017, 2). Given the constraints of this article, it would be impossible to outline every single mechanism which acts to insulate neoliberalism from contestation in post-transition Tunisia. However, in Section 4, I do outline the *particularities* of authoritarian neoliberalism in the Tunisian case.

The research agenda of authoritarian neoliberalism has furthered our understanding of the links between neoliberal policies, declining standards of living, eroding legitimacy, and the rise of neoliberal security states. Some argue that this work is characterised by a conjunctural reading of contemporary neoliberalism as being discontinuous from other forms of capitalist accumulation (Ryan 2019). While I do

not agree with this critique, noting that post-2008 neoliberalism is characterised by novel, authoritarian and increasingly pre-emptive state strategies, I do concur that capitalism has long relied on repressive state practices to maintain societal cooperation with extractive economic models (Bhattacharyya 2018). Thus, in contrast to seeking to identify a "starting point" at which neoliberalism became "more" authoritarian, I argue that there are periods characterised by an *intensification* of the recourse to coercive state power to insulate neoliberalism from contestation and quell dissent that does emerge. In the Tunisian case, this intensification can be theorised, as per conjunctural analysis associated with Stuart Hall (1978), as a response to the contemporary context of insecurity, reduced sovereignty and eroding legitimacy associated with the so-called 2015 "security crisis".

Furthermore, in addition to the recent explosion of academic literature mobilising authoritarian neoliberalism as a concept, including that which focuses on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (De Smet and Bogaert 2017; Ozden, Akca, and Bekamn 2017; Tansel 2018), there is a need to reflect upon additional conceptual tools with which it can be applied (Bruff and Tansel 2019) particularly in research which goes beyond the disciplinary boundaries of IPE. Accordingly, this paper makes the case for the incorporation of the concept of performativity within the conceptual framework provided by authoritarian neoliberalism to better understand consent-seeking strategies for the intensification of coercive state practices in late neoliberalism.

Performativity is based on the notion that reality is socially constructed through reiterative and citational practices (Butler 1993, 234). A performative understanding of the state proposes that it is constructed and sustained through performative enactments of sovereign statehood. Thus, the state – constructed and sustained through performative discourse and practices – has led to the proliferation of a multitude of policies, institutions and frameworks all of which have very real impacts on people's lives (C. Weber 1998). While work on performative states has often focused on its gendered construction (C. Weber 1998), the concept can further our understanding of the relationship between neoliberal deregulation and the intensification of coercive state power (see Lister 2019). In short, performativity is illuminating for those wanting to understand the implications of neoliberalism on security because "performativity (of sovereignty) often takes strongest form when the state appears to be at their least sovereign" (Lister 2019, 14) and "thus insist upon their sovereign subjectivity all the more" (C. Weber 1998 cited in Lister 2019, 14). Thus, performativity of the neoliberal state is aimed at 1/ demonstrating that the state is real, concrete and doing something in a time of limited economic governance and 2/ reconfiguring its legitimacy when it is being challenged (Lister 2019). The Tunisian case provides a productive context to reflect on the incorporation of these two concepts because the Tunisian state, already deprived of its ability to performatively enact its sovereignty in certain areas associated with neoliberal deregulation, faces far more constraints to its sovereignty because of the influence of external actors in both economic (Aliriza 2020; Gallien 2022) and security domains (Mullin 2023; Santini 2018). Furthermore, the post-revolutionary context, which requires a reconfiguration of the foundations of regime legitimacy, makes for a fruitful terrain in which to explore the connections between counterterrorism, neoliberalism and consent-seeking strategies. By incorporating the concept of performativity, we can better understand *how*, *why* and *when* the *intensification* of the authoritarian neoliberal state's propensity to resort to coercion and

violence takes place, as well as how the state seeks to mobilise consent, albeit it to varying degrees of success, for this intensified recourse to coercive state power.

Furthermore, performativity helps us understand the cultural and historical significance of the registers that the authoritarian neoliberal state employs to mobilise consent for the intensification of coercive state practices. In short, we can only fully understand performative security discourses and practices by situating them in their historical, cultural and political context because "audiences interpret certain practices as providing security only if they conform to pre-existing sociocultural ideas of 'suitable' security activities and capabilities" (Zaiotti 2011, 543). Performative security discourses and practices which seek to construct moral panic surrounding political Islam become all the more significant given that political Islam has long been presented as a "bogeyman" figure in Tunisian politics (Hibou 2006). They are also shaped by global politics: characterised by the demonisation of political Islam associated with the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and racialised hierarchies that continue to operate within global security governance (Abu-Bakare 2020).

Methodology

In order to analyse counterterrorism as performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state, semi-structured interviews were held with political commentators, activists, academics, journalists, security-sector consultants, NGO and CSO workers, diplomats and Tunisian politicians. These interviews were part of a broader doctoral project exploring the "security/neoliberalism" nexus in post-transition Tunisia. These interviews were conducted both in-person and online between July 2019 and December 2022. The names of all participants have been anonymised. The anonymisation of interviews was taken in line with the demands of the relevant ethics committee as well as for the safety of the participants given that talking about the Tunisian state is becoming an increasingly dangerous thing to do (Crouch 2021). There were occasions when participants requested to be named but I have not been able to do so due to the demands of my ethics committee. This risks exploiting insights from Tunisians without accrediting them (Godfrey-Faussett 2022), thus reinforcing already significant issues surrounding coloniality and knowledge extraction in the social sciences.

Furthermore, balance had to be struck between interviewing those I was able to access on the one hand and creating a balanced sample of perspectives on the other. As this project progressed, Tunisia's political landscape closed. It was, thus, less possible and useful to engage with political elites and representatives of the state (TransparencyInternational 2022). This meant that I have predominantly engaged with activists, journalists and people working with or from marginalised groups in Tunisia as opposed to security practitioners and political elites – not withstanding some level of engagement with these individuals, particularly in the earlier stages of this project. As a responsible and reflexive researcher, I have taken all possible steps to avoid any potential biases on the research and its findings. Indeed, such issues are mitigated by the focus of this article. In other words, I am not seeking to replace the more traditional, technical, counterterrorism approaches and their decision of the Tunisian case, but rather supplement them with an account of what counterterrorism can *do* politically and how this is linked to questions of political economy.

This article's use of interview data is supported by in-depth documentary analysis to engage in a comprehensive analysis of security discourse, policy and practices. Such an analysis coupled with the lens of performativity furthers our understanding of counter-terror politics (C. Weber 1998) as part of the "garish law and order spectacle" (Wacquant 2014, 1694) associated with neoliberalism. Building on Weber (1998) and Butler's (1993) focus on discourse, I incorporate the work of scholars such as Krahmann (2017) and Higate and Henry (2010) who explore performative security discourse *and* practice. Furthermore, in contrast to Weber's focus on foreign policy[1], I engage with performative discourses, policies and practices situated within the realm of *internal* security, in this case counter-terrorism, to understand how policymakers perform the role of the state in terms of the monopoly of legitimate violence within their territory (M. Weber 1919) and thus insist on their sovereignty through their *internal* security politics[2] to better understand authoritarian neoliberal state strategies and their political impacts.

Before I engage in my analysis of performative counterterror politics, I must first elaborate the particularities of authoritarian neoliberalism in Tunisia. It is only within this context that we can understand performative counterterror politics as an attempt by policymakers to both perform sovereignty and reconfigure their claims to legitimacy as the providers of security from certain existential threats.

From neoliberal authoritarianism to authoritarian neoliberalism

The transformation of the Tunisian capitalist state did not happen overnight following the abdication of Ben Ali. The former regime was characterised by a kleptocratic form of neoliberalisation which enriched Ben Ali's inner circle while he pursued his ultimate objective: his own survival (Willis 2012). Consequently, scholars have argued Ben Ali's Tunisia was defined by neoliberal authoritarianism (Görmüş and Akçalı 2021).[3] In contrast, I argue that the post-transition environment is characterised by authoritarian neoliberalism – in which pre-emptive and coercive mechanisms insulate neoliberalism, rather than authoritarianism, from contestation.

Indeed, rather than representing a radical overhaul of economic policy, the Tunisian transition led to a consolidation of the process of neoliberalisation (Mossallem 2016). In a similar fashion, although initial attempts were made to reform the security services following the revolution, repressive security practices failed to disappear and illiberal policies have re-emerged since 2015 (AmnestyInternational 2017). Consequently, certain coercive security practices continue to limit the space for contestation of neoliberalism as seen in the repressive policing of anti-austerity protests (Hamouchene 2018). Such trends have only worsened since President Kais Saied's authoritarian power grab. Thus, in contemporary Tunisia, authoritarian neoliberalism is becoming increasingly disciplinarian and violent.

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the manifestations of authoritarian neoliberalism in contemporary Tunisia (See Maryon 2023), nor to recreate perspectives that focus exclusively on the role of external actors in neoliberalisation thus neglecting the agency of global southern actors (Bruff and Tansel 2019). However, it would be impossible to understand "securing the state" as performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state without an account of the constraints that manifestations of authoritarian neoliberalism place on policymakers' ability to performatively enact the state's

sovereignty in other areas. Since 2011, several financial assistance packages from external actors have made it de-facto impossible for Tunisian policymakers to pursue economic models which deviate from the neoliberal agenda upon which assistance is conditional (Hecan 2016). These packages come with regular monitoring and rounds of disbursements that act as mechanisms of surveillance and discipline (Sotiris 2017). Such mechanisms allow external actors to refuse or delay funds in instances where reforms are deemed to have not been implemented. It is only within this context of reduced sovereignty, that we can fully understand the political motivations of performative security politics. In other words, the state, robbed of its ability to performatively enact its sovereignty in some areas, uses performative security politics to flex its muscles – thus reasserting itself.

Significantly, performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state is not just about reasserting the sovereignty of the state, but also represents an attempt by policymakers to reconfigure their claims to legitimacy around the notion "securing the state" from certain "threats". The inability of the former regime to provide economic security of vast swathes of the population, while the inner circle of Ben Ali amassed vast quantities of wealth, eroded the legitimacy of the government, contributing to Ben Ali's fall (Bogaert 2013). Given this, it seems clear that reconfiguring the legitimacy of the new regime would require tackling the socio-economic concerns of the population. However, the Tunisian economy today is in a worse position than it was in January 2011. For example, Tunisia's sovereign debt has risen from 40% of GDP in 2011 to over 90% in 2023 (Crisis Group 2023) trapping it in a debt cycle. Furthermore, since 2016, austerity measures, such as reducing state subsidies on staple goods, have caused rising costs of living for most families while unemployment rates have stagnated (Ben Gahda 2022). Indeed, between 2016 and 2021, poverty in Tunisia rose (Dridi 2021). In short, "externally dictated reforms contradict the mantras of Tunisia's revolution: freedom, dignity, employment and social justice" (Sadiki 2021), eroding the legitimacy of Tunisia's transition and arguably it's democratic system.

Successive governments' attempts to reconfigure their legitimacy have also been hampered by political instability and terrorist attacks. In November 2015, 47% of survey respondents stated that terrorism was the biggest problem facing Tunisia: a stark rise from the percentage who expressed this view in 2011 (Andersen and Brym 2017). By 2015, public opinion was increasingly accepting the perception that reforming the security services following the revolution had left Tunisia vulnerable to terrorist attacks.[4] Therefore, the post-transition regime, unable to provide economic security due to stagnation and worsening standards of living and faced with an existential security "crisis" in 2015, used performative counterterror politics, framed as "securing the state" to both perform its sovereignty and reconfigure its legitimacy.

Securing the state: performing sovereignty and reasserting statehood

While there are many examples of performative counterterror politics in the post-transition period, I focus my following analysis on three examples: 1/ articulating the need to secure the state, 2/ declaring war on terror and 3/ the repeated declaration of the state of emergency. I also briefly reflect upon the way in which such discourses and practices helped pave the way for Saied's authoritarian power grabs.

Articulating the need to secure the state

From 2015 onwards, there are many examples of elite discourse which emphasise the threat of terrorism and the need to secure the state. For example, on 4 July 2015, just 8 days after ISIS claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack which targeted tourists at the Sousse beach resort, former President Beji Caid Essebsi declared a state of emergency stating "these difficult conditions can be described as exceptional conditions which therefore require exceptional measures" (Bryne 2015). Through the lens of performativity, we can think of these sorts of discourses as moments in which the state's policymakers are insisting on its sovereignty when it is being most challenged (C. Weber 1998). Indeed, the security forces were deeply criticised for their failings during this attack[5] (Reuters 2017) – thus undermining notions of both internal security and sovereignty. Furthermore, feminist scholars have shown us how, particularly in the context of the GWOT, elites, such as President Essebsi, seek to present themselves, through their performative security discourses, as hypermasculine warrior-like decision-maker figures and thus insist on the sovereignty of the state and their ability to mobilise the forces of state security accordingly (Athanassiou 2014; C. Weber 1998).

President Essebsi, now deceased, was one of the most significant figures in security politics in the post-transition period. This is because the President, as per the Constitution of 2014,[6] had responsibility for national security, defence, and foreign policy. Given both his constitutional powers, and his popular mandate as the first democratically elected President of Tunisia, President Essebsi made several official statements and speeches, regarding terrorism, which fall into the notion of this "garish" national security "spectacle" (Wacquant 2014, 1695). Such performative discourses and practices are also used to shore up the legitimacy of the state as the provider of security from such threats. Significantly, many of these emphasised the need to introduce certain exceptional policy responses to "secure the state". However, rather than merely fighting terrorists, these policies target the left behind groups or edge populations of contemporary neoliberalism and thus serve "as a bait and switch for the (deeper?) socio-economic forms of inequality (and resultant insecurity)" (Lister 2019, 428).

Declaring "war" on terror

At 8.17 pm on the night of the Bardo museum attack,[7] the former President made a televised public announcement in which he promised to engage in a "war against terror without mercy" (Bobin 2015). This was just one of his many references to being at "war" with terrorism during this period. The then Prime Minister, Habib Essid, reiterated the President's sentiment when he stated "we are engaged in a ferocious war against terrorism to protect lives and property, defend the republican regime . . . the civil state and its institutions . . . We would not have felt obliged to decree the state of emergency if we were not convinced that our country was facing numerous terrorist plans" (Bryne 2015). This declaration of "war" on terror can be understood as a performance of statehood in the context of reduced sovereignty and overlapping security, economic and political crises. In such a context, this hyper masculinise militarised performance of statehood seeks to reassert the sovereignty of the state as well as reconfiguring the legitimacy of the executive and its policymakers are "warrior-like decision-makers" (Athanassiou 2014; C. Weber 1998).

Baker-Beall (2011,) and Jackson (2005) have argued that the expression "war on terror" is used to justify more coercive and military-minded policy responses than may be used to deal with other domestic security issues (see also Butler 1993). Theoretically, the act of declaring war is one of the unique functions of a sovereign state and so is a powerful performative enactment of the sovereignty of the state (Baker-Beall 2011; Jackson 2005) which mobilises militarised masculine notions of power and urgency associated with the state (C. Weber 1998). While declaring war on terrorism may enable policymakers to mobilise consent for a certain set of "exceptionalised" policy responses, it is virtually impossible to ever declare a victory, defeat, or announce the end to the war on terrorism. This means that supposedly exceptional measures, associated with the GWOT, become long-term and increasingly "normalised" aspects of policy frameworks (Butler 2004; Kilpatrick 2020).

The performative nature of declaring war on a security threat that does not fall into the remit of traditional military security threats was further underscored in March 2020 when the then Prime Minister declared "war" on the coronavirus (Jrad 2020a). Significantly, the security-oriented discourse surrounding the pandemic was used to justify the expansion of emergency security frameworks, many of which were initially enacted in the name of counterterrorism, to respond to the threat of the pandemic and even repress social movements (Jrad 2020a, 2020b). For example, on 13 January 202213 January 2022, the President used emergency security powers to ban protests citing the threat of coronavirus which had first reached Tunisia almost 2 years previously (Mohamed 2022). For many, this ban was a cynical attempt to prevent protests due to take place the next day, on the anniversary of the 2011 Revolution, which have become a platform to denounce the failure of successive governments to deliver on the demands of the revolution (Mohamed 2022). This is indicative of the way in which performative security discourses and practices serve to both clamp down on contestation of neoliberalism as well as serving to distract from the "real" causes of instability and insecurity: neoliberal deregulation and austerity (Lister 2019; Wacquant 2014).

Significantly, by performatively declaring war on terrorism, policymakers seek to Presidentialise policy responses to terrorism taking them from legislative and Prime Ministerial areas of competence (Abbes 2017). The attempt to circumnavigate Parliamentary scrutiny and deliberation of counterterror and security policy through the Presidentalisation of competency areas is a phenomenon witnessed globally in the post 9/11 era including in non-Presidential systems (Abbes 2017). Often this performance rests on a binary distinction between the hyper-masculine warrior-like decision-maker executive able to take swift and decisive action and weak effeminate Parliamentary procedures presented as impeding and slowing down necessary actions (Athanassiou 2014). Nonetheless, the attempt to circumnavigate Parliament is not just about amassing Presidential power. It also aims to take powers away from moderate political Islamist party, Ennahda, who were the strongest political force in Parliament between 2014 and 2021 while having never held the Presidency in this same period. Indeed, since 2011 there has been an attempt by political and security elites to keep Ennahda away from security politics based on the idea that they were "illegitimate political force that was allegedly operating against the interests of the state and pursuing a partisan Islamic security agenda" (Santini 2018, 88).

What we can say, then, is that declaring war on terror is performative. It is about insisting on the sovereignty of the state in those moments when it is most challenged. Vitally, it is neoliberalism itself which constrains the ability of policymakers to performatively enact their sovereignty in other areas.

Declaring and redeclaring state of emergency

On 4 July 2015, President Essebsi declared a state of emergency following a high-profile terrorist attack targeting tourists in Sousse (Bobin 2015). The Tunisian state of emergency has been renewed many times and is still in place at the time of writing. The declaration and repeated renewal of the state of emergency is an element of counterterrorism in both the Global North and Global South which has garnered much academic interest in the post-9/11 era (Agamben 2005; Butler 1993). It provides governments with a framework with which to monitor, police and repress their populations (Greene 2020; Kilpatrick 2020). In many cases, such frameworks have been used to target particular marginalised communities beyond those suspected of terrorism (Greene 2020; Kilpatrick 2020). The very "garish" spectacle (Wacquant 2014, 1695) of publicly declaring and repeatedly renewing the state of emergency can be understood as performativity of the militarised hyper-masculine state (Athanassiou 2014; Butler 2004). This is all the more significant as the state of emergency, as per the Constitution of 2014, also empowered the executive branch of government enabling it to circumnavigate normal Parliamentary procedures. The argument in favour of the state of emergency is that when the state is faced with an immediate and pressing threat, it needs to act swiftly and unilaterally to respond to that threat. Once again, Parliamentary deliberations surrounding counter-terror policy are discursively constructed as weak, slow, and effeminate (Athanassiou 2014). Whereas the bold, swift, and relatively unaccountable action by the executive, enabled by the state of emergency, can be understood as a performative enactment of masculinised-militarised statehood (Athanassiou 2014).

The declaration of the state of emergency also enables certain supposedly "exceptional" security practices that would not be considered legal nor legitimate outside of the state of emergency.[8] For example, it gives the police exceptional powers, such as the ability to impose curfews, special powers to guard important buildings and gives the armed forces the power to carry out certain police duties (to reinforce police numbers) (Bryne 2015). It has provided Tunisian security services with the tools to target and monitor political Islamist groups, or individuals perceived to belong to them, with little evidence and in a manner which circumvents civil liberties and rule of law[9] (AmnestyInternational 2017). It has also been exploited by policymakers to crack down on resistance of neoliberal policies and austerity measures (Mullin 2023; Author 2023). For example, when declaring the state of emergency in July 2015, Essebsi acknowledged that one of its main purposes was "to limit strikes and protests" (cited in Han 2021, 163).

As alluded to above, further evidence of the declaration of the state of emergency as evidence of the performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state came in with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. Tunisian policymakers pursued a "national security" response to the pandemic using the framework of the state of emergency, already in place since 2015, to rush through emergency health measures, crack down on any resistance to pandemic restrictions and to push through neoliberal reforms (Cherif 2020; Jrad 2020a). Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic enabled the

President, with his competence in national security and his role as the head of the National Security Council (Abbes 2017), to consolidate power within his hands and at the expense the legislature (Cherif 2020; Jrad 2020b) as I explore further in the section below.

July 2021: exceptional powers or constitutional coup?

In the sections above, I demonstrated how policymakers, including President Saied, in the period between 2014 and 2021, used performative counterterror and security discourses and practices 1/ to justify expansive security powers and repressive security practices, to 2/ expand their own competency areas and 3/ to legitimise themselves as the providers of state security. However, Saied's expansive interpretation of security and instrumentalisation of the state of emergency was taken to new realms in July, 2021, when the President used a particularly creative reading of Article 80 of the 2014 Constitution, the same article which outlines the procedures for the state of emergency, to suspend Parliament (Reuters 2021). This has been interpreted as a reactionary response to critique of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and mounting socio-economic grievances[10] which were leading to successive anti-austerity and anti-government protests.[11]

President Saied added to this "suspension" of Parliament, by pushing through neoliberal reforms (Hammami 2020) which would have normally had to go through Parliament had it not been closed, suspending the Constitution, dissolving the supreme judicial council (RFI 2022) and holding a highly problematic, but ultimately successful, referendum on a new Constitution in August 2022 (Abouaoun, Hill, and Siebert 2022). In fact, Saied only reopened Parliament in January 2023, following widely contested elections in which many candidates were banned from standing, and after its role and structure has been radically redesigned as part of his new Constitution (Abouaoun, Hill, and Siebert 2022). Saied's use of performative discourses and exceptional security measures to enact authoritarian power grabs demonstrates that performative security discourses, policies and practices have real political impacts. The President here is using a constitutional article designed to deal with existential threats to national security to navigate a political crisis and ultimately empower his own office at the expense of the Tunisian Parliament: the institution in which his political opponents, Ennahda, were strongest.

The performative use and abuse of supposedly exceptional security measures is not unique to Tunisia. Indeed, this forms part of a larger trend, associated with the so-called GWOT, of normalisation of exceptionalism and urgency which means that supposedly "exceptional" measures become de-facto permanent aspects of security and legislative frameworks (Kilpatrick 2020; Payé 2004). However, such discussions are particularly pertinent in the post-transition Tunisian context because the former authoritarian regime used counterterror frameworks to repress political opponents and activists (Willis 2012). In a similar vein, counterterror measures enacted since 2015 have been used for political purposes such as the repression of social movements and protests (HumanRightsWatch 2021). In the following section, I analyse moral panic constructed around the terrorist threat. I argue this moral panic is used to portray Islamism, as well as social movements and sites of protest, as synonymous with terrorism and thus "justify" a set of policy responses which target particular groups rather than just those suspected of terrorism.

Policing the Islamists

Before we can understand the significance of moral panic surrounding political Islamism in the period between 2014 and 2021 and the policy responses it seeks to justify, we must first explore the historical significance of these discourses in Tunisia. During French colonial rule, Islamism was constructed as a threat to modernity, "civilised" society as well as to French rule because of Islamist movements' perceived ability to mobilise the Tunisian population (Willis 2012). Consequently, such groups were closely monitored and disproportionately targeted by security services (Thomas 2007). Although Islamism served effectively as a mobilising force in the fight against colonialism (Willis 2012), Tunisia's first post-independence government did not break radically with the discourse of the need to protect the state from the threat of political Islamism. President Bourguiba perceived Islam as a threat to Tunisia's "modernisation" and economic development as well as his own personal grip on power (Willis 2012). Consequently, his government pursued harsh security crackdowns on political Islamist groups (Thomas 2012). Arguably, Ben Ali's regime, which instrumentalised the GWOT (Bras 2016) to repress opponents including Ennahda, represented an even tougher stance on political Islamism.

Thus, throughout French colonial rule and Tunisian independence, Islamism was presented as a both an economic and existential threat. Vitally, successive regimes attempted to construct their claims to legitimacy upon the notion that they were protecting the state from this threat (see Hibou 2006).

Policing the Islamists or delegitimising ennahda?

Thus, "securing the state" from the threat of political Islamism is not entirely novel in Tunisian political history. Indeed, nor is the use of performative security discourse surrounding terrorism to create moral panic to delegitimise particular social groups unique to the contemporary Tunisian context. Lister's (2019) work on UK counterterror politics suggests that if you replace the words "mugging" with "terrorism" and the words "1970s" with "2000s" in Stuart (Hall. 1978) classic, *Policing the Crisis*, we can understand how UK counterterror policy has disproportionately targeted and discriminated against British Muslims in ways not dissimilar to the racialised policing of black Britons in the 1970s. Significantly, both authors argue coercive policing of marginalised groups, be they British Muslims since 9/11 or black Britons in the 1970s, is a reactionary response to security "crises" which are amplified to distract from the more pressing "crisis" associated with the fallouts of neoliberal deregulation. In Tunisia, moral panic is similarly constructed to mobilise consent for the policing of particular marginalised groups. However, rather than placing the "blame" for terrorist attacks solely at the door of the terrorists, elite discourse depicts political Islamism as synonymous with, or at least partially responsible for, Islamic extremism to delegitimise it and justify measures which disproportionately target such groups.

One of the clear political purposes of this is to delegitimise Ennahda as a political force. Ennahda, who were banned under the Ben Ali regime, have consistently been one of the most dominant political forces in Tunisia since 2011. Since 2015, there have been many attempts to delegitimise Ennahda through discourse that presents them as synonymous with terrorism. For example, when asked if there had been negligence in the initial years following the revolution, the

former President replied "the government, aware of the dangers, allowed it to happen. Could you say 'encourage' … . The heads of political Islamism were lenient with the terrorists and extremist groups" (Essebsi cited in Chabot and Essebsi 2016, 70).

The former President is suggesting that Ennahda did not take the threat seriously and that their leniency with the extremists in their movement enabled these attacks to take place. Regardless of the reality of Ennahda's actions in these initial years, this is demonstrative of the widely held view among Tunisians that this initial post-transition government, in which Ennahda was dominant, led to weak and ineffective security governance (Santini 2018). "Ennahda did not take young Salafis in their movement seriously, they thought they could control them … but these are young angry men who have few options and opportunities … this failure of judgement risked Tunisia's security".[12]

In a similar vein, since his accession to Presidency in late 2019 until his authoritarian power grab in July 2021, President Saied used vague accusations when referring to security threats (Guesmi 2020) often focusing on the notion of Ennahda as being "traitors" or "conspiring with external forces" or "plots" being "hatched" abroad (Guesmi 2020). Participants suggested that these were deliberate, and yet intentionally vague, references to Ennahda, who allegedly have international connections to Islamist parties across the Middle East.[13] However, other politicians were far less subtle in their attempts to portray Islamism as synonymous with terrorism. Parliamentarian Abir Moussi, suggested that Ennahda, who she labelled as the "Brothers", in a clear reference to the more radical Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, were aiming to destabilise the legitimacy and sovereignty of the government in a similar fashion to that witnessed in Libya (Guesmi 2020). Furthermore, Moussi claimed that under the reign of Ennahda leading figure, Rached Ghannouchi, the Tunisian Parliament had become "an incubator of terrorism and violence and serves as the operations control room (…) from which relations with terrorists and those returning from hotbeds of tension are managed" (Guesmi 2020).

Attempts to delegitimise political Islam through performative security discourse and practices have political motivations given that Ennahda have been one of the most dominant political forces in the post-transition period. However, such discourses have taken a more sinister form since July 2021 coup with Saied using accusations of terrorism to arrest, charge, harass and detain political opponents including Ennahda figures. Given that Ennahda were the dominant political force within the former Tunisian parliament and their vocal critique of Saied's attempts to seize control of Tunisia, it is unsurprising that this rhetoric and repressive policing of such groups has intensified under his rule.

Delegitimising the unemployed and policing protest

As I have shown through the concept of performativity, political elites in the period between 2014 and 2021 constructed moral panic around terrorism and Islamism as an attempt to 1/"flex their state-like muscles", 2/present themselves as the providers of security from certain "existential threats" and 3/delegitimise their political opponents. However, these very same discourses also acted to demonise young men from poor urban areas and economically marginalised regions of Tunisia. While these individuals are perceived to be more vulnerable to radicalisation (Aliaga and O'Farrell 2017) they are also more likely to be involved in protest movements contesting the neoliberal consensus (Han 2021).[14]

In fact, Han (2021) writes "Tunisia's ruling elite attempted to marginalise the unemployment issue and regulate the protests of the unemployment, partly, and significantly, through their (ab)use of the threat of terrorism" (p.157). In other words, protestors, including those protesting unemployment, lack of economic opportunities and austerity, were presented by policymakers as both intentionally, and unintentionally, helping terrorists infiltrate Tunisia. For example, on 9 February 2018, President Essebsi said, when referring to protests, "there are those who tried to hijack this protest and spread terrorism" (Han 2021, 162). This comment came just 6 days after leading Nidaa Tounes figure, Farid El-Baji, stated "it is the terrorists in Tunisia who enjoy these acts of subversion and chaos, because such acts are the only way they can overthrow the state ... the security forces were overwhelmed by domestic protests. It makes it easier for terrorists to cross the borders with weapons" (2018 cited in Han 2021, 162). Thus, the purpose of such discourses was to both delegitimise these protests and their contestation of the neoliberal consensus constructed at elite levels as well as justifying their harsh repression as necessary from a national security perspective.

Significantly, these same marginalised communities, including poor urban neighbourhoods and marginalised regions, particularly those in the South, have been the backbone of much of Ennahda's electoral support (McCarthy 2014; Merone 2015). Therefore, attempts to portray certain marginalised groups as synonymous with the threat of terrorism clearly have political motivations. For example, former President Essebsi, accused voters of Moncef Marzouki, his opponent and native of the South, of being terrorists since being Islamists. It is true that certain southern regions have been characterised by higher-than-average rates of terrorist activity since 2011 (Jrad and Ghanem 2021). Nonetheless, these very real threats have been capitalised upon to further delegitimise and police these communities. Santini (2018) writes, "the narrative construction of a backward and threatening south has remained and has received new force" (Mejri 2014 cited in Santini 2018, 69). Therefore, the political expediency of securitising such communities combined with terrorist activity in some of these areas has made already marginalised communities easy targets for delegitimising discourses which, of course, seek to mobilise consent for a particular course of action. Mobilising consent is about constructing a consensus that the subversive group identified is a threat and that certain measures must be taken to deal with the threat (Hall 1978; Lister 2019).

Policing the subversive minority

From 2015 onwards, Tunisian security policies and practices, particularly in the realm of counterterrorism, became increasingly repressive and illiberal. The state of emergency provided Tunisian security services with the tools to target political Islamist groups, or individuals perceived to belong to them, with little evidence and in a manner which circumvents civil liberties and rule of law. Furthermore, on the 25th of July 2015, the Anti-Terrorism and Money Laundering law was approved by the Tunisian parliament by a landslide majority (Bras 2016, 309–323). The law created several exceptional measures and powers that would have not have been legal prior to its adoption including; the re-establishment of the death penalty for terrorist activities or the murder of people protected under international law, granting the authorities the right to detain people suspected of terrorist activities for up to 15 days without access to a lawyer or being brought before a judge, the right to increase controls on the media and ban strike action

or social mobilisation deemed dangerous to public order (AfricaResearchBulletin 2015). One of the most worrying aspects of the 2015 law is that it recreates many of the structures of the 2003 Anti-Terror Law used by the former regime to impose harsh oppression of human rights activists, journalists and political opponents including Ennahda (Bras 2016).

Significantly, NGOs and journalists have argued that the Anti-Terror Law of 2015 is being misused to target those believed to sympathise with radical Islamism often without evidence or trial. Amnesty International (2017) claims that the misuse of house arrests against individuals accused, somewhat vaguely and without any evidence, for being "Salafists" is one of the most worrying examples of the re-emergence practices during the former regime. There are reports of individuals being detained because the length of their beards aroused suspicion or because they had travelled to Turkey (Amnesty International 2017; Human Rights Watch 2016). Furthermore, it is claimed that torture against those accused, not necessarily convicted, of terrorist offences is not uncommon (Amnesty International 2017; Human Rights Watch 2016). Tunisian Human Rights lawyer, Radya Nasrawi, claims "They use electric shocks . . . and prisoners are being raped. (.) We thought such methods had disappeared with the fall of President Ben Ali"s dictatorship. But these savage methods are still being used in Tunisia" (Torture in Tunisia 2015).

Thus, performative security discourses which present political Islamism and terrorism as synonymous with one another have been used to justify increasingly illiberal policies and repressive security practices levied against both accused terrorists and political Islamists. However, they have also been used to stifle protests and social movements.

Counterterrorism as a means to repress contestation of neoliberalism

Heavy-handed security policy responses do not just serve to perform statehood, nor to police the subversive minority, they are also about cracking down on sites of contestation and resistance of neoliberalism that do emerge. "Declaring the state of emergency and the war on terror was linked to an attempt to criminalise social protests".[15] This criminalisation of protest was enabled, for example, by the 2015 Anti-Terror Law's notably broad definition of terrorism which "leaves the door open to political interpretation" (Alzubairi 2019, 190). The law was also used stifle popular movements as it does not distinguish between acts of social mobilisation or terrorist act (Alzubairi 2019, 1). Evidence of this came in September 2015 when, using the exceptional powers created by both the state of emergency and the 2015 Anti-Terror law, the government banned organised protests (Salem 2015, 14). This is indicative of how the neoliberal security state relies upon an intensification of the coercive apparatuses of the state to quell dissent (Tansel 2017).

Furthermore, the use of counterterror measures to ban protests, including those contesting neoliberalism, austerity and extractive economic relations, can be understood as a pre-emptive mechanisms of authoritarian neoliberal governance (Bruff 2014). Further evidence of the *pre-emptive* use of emergency security powers to insulate neoliberalism from contestation came in January 2022, when Saied used counterterror and coronavirus measures to ban the political protests which take place on the anniversary of the revolution each year. In recent years, these protests have become significant sites of contestation of the neoliberal consensus where Tunisians have voiced their dismay at the lack of economic reform since 2011 (Gallien 2018; Hamouchene 2018). The anniversary protests

took place despite the ban and were met with some of the most overt police brutality seen since the revolution of 2011.[16]

Furthermore, repressive policing, under the guise of counterterrorism, has been used to clamp down on sites of resistance that do emerge. In January 2018, protests erupted surrounding the Finance Law which sought to put in place debt ceilings and cement austerity measures (Gallien 2022; Hamouchene 2018). These protests rejected neoliberal consensus in Tunisia as well as the influence of external actors in shaping Tunisian economic policy (see also Aliriza 2020, 40). These protests, in which hundreds were arrested and many were beaten, are just one example of the many occasions when anti-austerity protests have been very harshly repressed. Although many of these repressive practices are criminalised under Tunisian law, there is a growing disparity between Tunisia's legal frameworks and the practices of the security services.[17] This is indicative of the way in which we have seen the re-emergence of repressive security practices, associated with the former regime, particularly in terms of the policing of protests and police brutality levied against deprived communities and those contesting austerity under the guise of counterterror frameworks.

As I have argued, Tunisia's marginalised regions – such as the so-called "backward South" – have been discursively constructed as hotbeds of radicalisation in part due to their electoral support of Ennahda and more socially conservative views. However, many of these marginalised regions, including, but not limited to, the South of Tunisia, have also become significant sites of contestation of the economic status quo – in other words, contestation of neoliberalisation, austerity, economic inequalities and dispossession (Han 2021; Jouili 2023; Mullin 2023). For example, the Kamour movement in Tataouine, has occupied and blockaded an oil and gas facility in the region several times since 2017 in protest at the way in which the resource-rich region was often left out of development policies and did not see the benefits of its extracted resources (Meddeb 2021). In many of these resource-rich areas, we have seen an intensification of security personnel presence and even the establishment of militarised zones (Mullin 2023). While such personnel are there, theoretically, to protect Tunisia from security threats such as terrorist attacks, there have been occasions where security forces have been sent in to repress sites of resistance by marginalised communities or those living in resource rich but economically deprived regions who are contesting their economic conditions (Mullin 2023). For example, in November 2021, one man died in Agareb after security forces struck him with tear gas and another died from inhaling the same tear gas during a mass protest against the lack of economic development and at the environmental impacts of a massive landfill site (Al 2021). This incident took place less than two years after Agareb had been visited by President Saied who had promised significant investment in the region during this visit. One protester summarised people's frustration in stating "Thank you Mr President, for the tear gas you use to attack us instead of offering the development you promised us when you visited Agareb" (Hammami 2021). And thus, the threat of terrorism has been used to justify the roll out of the coercive apparatuses of the state in ways that act to repress contestation of the economic status quo as well as to ensure the continuation of economically lucrative resource extraction from resource rich but impoverished areas (Mullin 2023). Authors such as Doug Stokes (Stokes 2013) have shown similar trends in Columbia – demonstrating neoliberal security states' propensity to (mis)use counterterrorism to repress marginalised groups and their resistance of neoliberal extraction globally.

"The bait and switch": distracting from dispossession and inequalities

While repressive security practices and exceptional security measures "clamp" down on contestation of the neoliberal consensus, constructed moral panic surrounding Islamism aims to distract from some of the negative social consequences of neoliberal reforms. In the words of one CSO worker, "marginalisation and underdevelopment are among the main reasons why people have turned to violence and are easy prey for violent groups".[18] In other words, the moral panic surrounding political Islam is used to distract from the clear evidence that radicalisation is linked to dispossession, inequalities, and lack of opportunities (Moos 2017; Süß and Aakhunzzada 2019) – all of which are fundamentally connected to and reinforced by the negative social consequences of neoliberal policies. Lister refers to this process as the "bait and switch" (2019 p.428). A prominent political commentator interviewed for this paper stated

> I think in the case of Tunisia, the jihadi threat has been blown up by elements of the state itself to distract from questions of social economic justice. Because of neoliberal policies there are people in Tunisia that are suffering from poverty and are desperate . . . I think some people in the security forces or some people in the state were very happy to talk about the problem of jihadism to really lay the blame on Ennahda. For me, this was about trying to distract from socio-economic issues and say the challenge right now is terrorism and not necessarily focus on trying to meet the demands of the revolution . . . and the need for a fairer and more equitable Tunisia[19]

In a similar vein, Fadhel Kaboub, a prominent Tunisian economist, wrote on Twitter "it is insane how quickly the media & political class narrative of the crisis of #Tunisia has shifted to security, terrorism and parties blaming each other. The fundamental problem is the #neoliberal economic model that is designed to impoverish Tunisia" (2018).

Indeed, various studies suggest that those living in deprived urban areas as well as economically marginalised regions of Tunisia are more likely to turn to violence and radicalisation because of lack of economic opportunities and the disillusionment this causes (Aliaga and O'Farrell 2017; Jrad and Ghanem 2021; Meddeb 2021). However, the role of economic insecurity and marginalisation as contributing factors in the insecurity which can lead to radicalisation is a complex and contested debate (Kanol 2023) including in Tunisia. Perhaps more importantly, moral panic surrounding terrorism and the construction of the subversive minority acts to distract from open discussion about the impact of neoliberal policies and their negative social consequences including radicalisation among marginalised groups.

Therefore, (in)security in Tunisia is fundamentally linked to neoliberalism and its increasingly authoritarian manifestations in post-2011 Tunisia. Speaking to me in October 2021, a prominent Tunisian academic and political commentator suggested "what truly threatens Tunisia today is not the relatively well contained threat of radicalisation, but the ever-present danger of despair caused by the devastating social and economic effects of neoliberal policies and austerity politics". One cannot theorise the attempts by contemporary policymakers to reconfigure their claims to legitimacy without an understanding of the way in which performing statehood through "securing the state" acts to distract from some socioeconomic concerns. Significantly, these socioeconomic concerns, caused by the fallout of decades of failed neoliberal policies, are linked to both the contemporary crisis in which Tunisia finds itself as well as the context of insecurity in the MENA more broadly.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that counterterrorism discourse, policies and practices in contemporary Tunisia can be understood as performativity of the authoritarian neoliberal state. This is because the state, deprived of its sovereignty in certain areas associated with neoliberalism and faced with challenges to its legitimacy, uses performative security practices to reassert its sovereignty and reconfigure its legitimacy. However, performative counterterror politics is aimed not merely at fighting terrorism but also delegitimising political Islamism and societal opposition to the neoliberal consensus constructed at elite levels. Thus, moral panic constructed around marginalised groups and broadly defined "Islamists" is about justifying the rollout of repressive policing of such communities. Furthermore, by delegitimising societal contestation of the so-called Tunisian consensus, political elites are seeking to distract from poverty, dispossession and the failure of neoliberalism as very real contributing factors in the insecurity that pushes individuals to radicalisation.

Thus, through its exploration of the Tunisian case, this article sought to make an empirical contribution to the theoretical arguments of Lister (2019) regarding counterterrorism as performativity of the neoliberal state. Indeed, in contrast to Lister's (2019) theorisation of the neoliberal state, my analysis of authoritarian neoliberalism in Tunisia allowed us to explore the connections between neoliberalism and counterterrorism in a far more holistic way. Furthermore, by mobilising the concept of performativity to analyse the authoritarian neoliberal state, I have expanded the theoretical toolbox of the research agenda on authoritarian neoliberalism – reflecting upon the additional conceptual tools with which we can think beyond political economy in study of authoritarian neoliberalisms. Finally, through its empirical focus on the Tunisian case between 2014 and 2021, this paper has demonstrated that the critical security studies scholar can best conceptualise in(security) in MENA when adopting an analytical lens bringing together security studies and IPE. In doing so, I make the call for the breaking down of the disciplinary boundaries between security studies and IPE in research about repressive state practices in the context of contemporary and increasingly authoritarian neoliberalism. More precisely, I have shown that counterterror politics can be understood as part of the so-called "penal fist" of late neoliberalism.

Notes

1. Indeed, Weber asserts that it is particularly illuminating to study foreign policy speeches, cables and press conferences as such examples enable us to see how states insist on their sovereignty when faced with the impossibility of being sovereign (C. Weber 1998, 92)
2. See also the work of Joseph Ward and Thomas Vieira Da Costa (2024) on the elevation of home affairs in Britain and France.
3. Neoliberal authoritarianism is used with reference to states where "neoliberalism has been introduced and functioned hand in hand with authoritarianism"(Görmüş and Akçalı 2021 introduction para4)
4. Interview with security practitioner, January 2021.
5. The gunman was able to walk over 2 miles along Sousse beach killing 38 people before being "neutralised". 13 security agents were charged with negligence or cowardice in the weeks following the attacks.

6. This refers to the constitutional frameworks between January 2014-July 2022 prior to the constitutional referendum of 2022 changing many some of these provisions.
7. In which 21 people the majority of whom were European tourists were killed.
8. See Article 80 of the Constitution of The Tunisian Republic 2014.
9. Interview conducted with security focused NGO, Tunis, January 2020.
10. Interview with Tunisian political commentator, October 2021.
11. Interview with Tunisian political commentator, October 2021.
12. Interview with prominent political commentator, January 2020.
13. Interview with Tunisian political commentator, May 2021; Interview with security concerned NGO worker, January 2020.
14. Interview with Tunisian academic specialising in CVE in marginalised regions of Tunisia, May 2021.
15. Interview with Head of security concerned NGO, January 2020.
16. Interview with freelance journalist, May 2022.
17. Interview with worker at Security Sector Reform NGO, Tunis, January 2020.
18. Interview with CSO worker in Tunis, January 2020.
19. Interview with prominent Tunisian political commentator, May 2021.

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Disclosure statement

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