

## RESISTING THROUGH LANGUAGES: DĀRIĠĠAH AND CARICATURE IN CONTEMPORARY TUNISIA

CRISTINA LA ROSA\*

*The genesis of graphic literature in the Arab world has its roots in twentieth-century Egypt and Lebanon, which are the main focus of recent academic studies on comics and cartoons (Jacquemond 2008). However, also Maghrib, and particularly Tunisia, boast some relevant independent artists and collectives. This paper aims at analysing some caricatures contained in the book Khalti Khadhra by Mohamed Doggui (2017) and some other cartoons taken from the writer's and Anis Mahrsi's Facebook pages. The relationship between the linguistic code (Tunisian dāriġġah) and the visual code (cartoons) will be analysed, emphasizing the role of Tunisian Arabic as a language of a written culture, accessible to a vast audience thanks to the use of their mother tongue and the web, and a means of resistance expressing all the contradictions of the post-revolutionary Tunisia.*

### *Graphic Literature as a Pan-Arab Tendency*

This paper aims at analysing how two contemporary Tunisian intellectuals use caricature and satirical literature as a means of social and political resistance. Therefore, the analysis of some caricatures taken from the satiric book *Khalti Khadhra* (*Ĥālātī Ĥaḍrā'*, My Aunt Ĥaḍrā', that is The Green)<sup>1</sup> by Mohamed Doggui (Muḥammad Duqqī) and the author's Facebook account will be presented<sup>2</sup>. Doggui is a contemporary Tunisian poet and writer who usually expresses himself in Spanish. The caricatures included in the book are by the Tunisian illustrator Anis Mahrsi (Anīs al-Maḥarsī); the cartoons taken from Doggui's Facebook account have been realized or assembled by the writer himself.

Since 2011, new forms of resistance expressed through the combination of word and image, namely comics, graphic novels and caricatures have been very widespread in the Arab world, where intellectuals succeed in conveying values of political and social resistance through graphic literature. Image and words are complementary in constructing the meaning because the latter completes the sense conveyed by the former and helps the reader

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\* University of Catania.

<sup>1</sup> Henceforth *Khalti Khadhra*, as it is expressed on the book cover.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to his personal Facebook account, Doggui has a page in Tunisian Arabic called *Kothr elham idhahhek* (It Is Better to Laugh than Cry) with more than 120000 followers.

understand. For this reason, cartoons and comics are a very powerful tool of expression because they construct the meaning on several levels at once (Høigilt 2019: 11)<sup>3</sup>.

To say it in Høigilt's words (2019: 3-4), whose considerations on comics are applicable to caricature too:

Adult comics are by now a notable cultural phenomenon in many Arab countries. [...] There is of course no lack of cultural products – films, photography, music, novels, poetry – that criticize and challenge various aspects of the Arab society and politics, historically and presently. Furthermore, adult comics do not have much impact on Arab societies. Their audience is limited, their influence probably minuscule. [...] Adult comics are interesting in part simply because they are a new medium that has flourished in the last ten years. [...] The combination of images and text unique to comics makes them a powerful visual medium, but it also allows for whimsical playfulness. It invites intense immersion, but also easy reads: comics are an extremely versatile medium. Furthermore, adult comics in the Arab world are made by mostly young people writing in a youthful idiom, and they are made mostly for young people – those Arabs who participated or watched – exhilarated, as the 2011 uprisings expressed their desires and ambitions, their way of communicating and socializing. Many of these comics represent, in concentrated form, the spirit that animated the so-called Arab Spring, and unlike that breath-taking moment, they continue to flourish today. In short, Arab adult comics are interesting not for what they do, but for what they are: consistent attempts to depict and think life and society in new ways in countries where the ruling elite keeps recycling the same old oppressive patterns (patriarchy, authoritarianism, violent conflict and widespread censorship). These comics are colourful expressions of young people's views on politics, society and gender relations. In addition, since they are crafted by a combination of linguistic and visual codes, they provide an opportunity for studying how language and political criticism are connected. [...] Therefore, they are a good lens through which to observe how young Arabs employ cultural expressions as a means of carving out their own space and criticizing the current ideological order<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the importance of the expressive power of caricature see also 'Abd al-Tawāb 2020: 53-59.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to point out that it is not possible, in my opinion, to separate completely the story and the functions of comics and cartoons, since comics are composed of sequences of different cartoons and drawings (strips, panels), which, linked together, create a story. Of course, cartoons and comics use two forms of expressive language because they have different aims. As Smith (2013: 230) claims: «In moving from the single cartoon image to the comic strip, comics began to accentuate the logic of the panel in conjunction with aspects of the frame and the window». Therefore, in this paper, it will be inevitable to make references to some studies on comics and more generally graphic literature. On the other hand, in caricature, narration is only involved in a single frame, characterized by a strong stylistic and graphic element highlighting the artist's personality and

The genesis of graphic literature in the Arab countries is relatively recent. The genre of caricature and comics for adults has roots, between the 1960s and 1980s<sup>5</sup>, in Egypt and Lebanon and, for more than a century, political caricature has been a very appreciated vehicle of social criticism and is now enjoying a golden moment in the whole Arab world (Ghaibeh 2017: 9; Mercier 2017: 8). The authorities often consider comics and cartoons childish and underestimate them, and this often allows their diffusion and circulation especially through the Internet. Despite this, especially in Europe, they are little known, but have, however, a long and rich history from Iraq to Morocco and also have an audience of specialists and researchers who are interested in them (Høigilt 2019: 3). Comics have evolved over the years adapting to the change of time, the taste of the public and the local political situations. Mercier (2017: 8) talks about a “new generation” of innovative cartoonists, including women and men, individual and collective artists, who devote their work to adult comics especially since the Arab Spring. They express the situation and socio-political condition of their countries with sarcasm, irony and anger in an acute manner. Even though we consider these artistic movements as one of the outcomes of the Arab Spring, contemporary artists were preceded by others, by whom they were inspired, who did not experience the Arab revolutions. Chèvre (2018: 5) sees the artists of the 1970s generation as their pioneers from a graphic, thematic and ideological point of view.

The new generation of artists almost always have another main work activity and are very engaged on social media where they meet, interact and create a network. In fact, comics and cartoons are often ridiculed, silenced, unpaid and seldom trigger the interest of editors; for this reason, the net remains the only place for them to diffuse their art (Ghaibeh 2017: 9).

There are a few studies on comics and cartoons (Høigilt 2017 and relative bibliography) and they mainly focus on the Egyptian and Lebanese contexts; Maghrib is rather neglected. This is probably due to the fact that the story of comic books for adults began in Lebanon, where the first comic book was published in 1980 (Khoury 2017: 13) and developed also in Egypt. The works published in the two countries opened a breach in the generalized situation of lack of freedom of expression representing forms of protests against the dictatorship (Khoury 2017: 13). More recently, in the Mashriq too, collective initiatives began to appear: “Samandal” was the first collective around which individual artists organized themselves and their own activities (Gabai 2014). Collective initiatives aimed at overcoming the obstacles of not

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making him/her immediately distinguishable (*Ibid.*). As will be shown below, caricature seems to have a wider audience since it is not only addressed to youngsters, but it also has a hold on middle-aged and older people. Besides, the easier and faster circulation of caricature on the web makes it more accessible.

<sup>5</sup> Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Tawāb (2020: 27) dates the beginning of the spread of caricature in the Mashriq back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

being published by self-publishing (Bouabdallah; Kaschl Mohni 2018: 1). “Samandal” inspired the Egyptian magazine “Tok Tok” that was born in 2011 (De Angelis 2015). It was an open platform to all the artists of the Arab world, included those from the Maghrib. So the collective was first of all a means of resistance against the constraints of the publishing world. In the turbulent context of the Arab Spring many fanzines from all over the Arab world appeared (Khoury 2017: 13). Comics, more than other artistic languages, became a unifying form of expression among artists thanks to the networks created by the above-mentioned collectives. Cultural exchange among artists and reciprocal influences became the rule (Khoury 2017: 15).

Also the Maghrib, however, has an important cartoon tradition. As for Tunisia, between the end of the 1980s and the year 2000, only a few festivals and magazines managed to keep the comic scene alive within the region: the Tunisian festival, the Salon de la Bande Dessinée of Tazarka (1997), and the Festival Méditerranéen de BD et de l’image de Tunis in 2000 (Cassiau-Haurie 2011)<sup>6</sup>. In the 2000s, some artists also succeeded in publishing their comics books. Since 2018, there has also been a yearly festival in Sousse<sup>7</sup>. On the wave of the expanding collective movement, a group of Tunisian comics *amateurs* with different backgrounds in graphics and informatics released the magazine “Lab619” in 2013 with the goal of spreading comics as an artistic expression. The founders of “Lab619” published 7 issues and a special issue was dedicated to migrations. They also organized three artists’ residencies between 2016 and 2017 on the themes of migration, frontiers and identities. “Lab619” also won the prize as the best magazine of Cairo Comics in 2015 and in 2017 (Mannone 2020: 59; *La bande dessinée arabe aujourd’hui* 2018: 94)<sup>8</sup>.

The Maghrib, for its part, is undergoing a different development in comparison to the Mashriq, because it was, until recently, characterized by the colonial influence and the use of French as a language of culture and oral expression. In fact, the comic strip from this region, often in French, rarely spread to the rest of the Arab world. Thus, the Maghribi pioneers of comic strips are little known in Egypt and the Levant countries.

More specifically, concerning satirical literature and caricature in Tunisia:

La presse humoristique a fait son apparition en Tunisie avec la période coloniale d’abord en français, puis un certain nombre de journaux en langue arabe se sont spécialisés dans la satire comme un moyen de lutte contre le colonisateur. Au cours de l’ère de Bourguiba et malgré l’absence d’une réelle liberté d’expression, des caricaturistes publient dans les colonnes de certains journaux indépendants. L’ère de Ben Ali constitue la plus sombre période pour la

<sup>6</sup> Available at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-africultures-2011-2-page-10.htm>, retrieved 11/03/2020.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.bdtunisie.com>, retrieved 11/03/2020.

<sup>8</sup> The author of the chapter on “Lab619” is not clearly inferable.

caricature : parmi les quelques rares caricaturistes qui ont continué à publier, on peut citer Lotfi Ben Sassi, dessinateur de presse chez *La Presse* ; il réalisait une vignette par jour pour la une du premier journal national et une BD hebdomadaire dans le magazine supplément du même quotidien. On citera aussi le caricaturiste Tahar Fezza (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 145; see also Ketiti 2014: 447)<sup>9</sup>.

Despite the fact that satirical literature and particularly cartoons have always been opposed by the colonial and post-colonial regimes, they have always continued to be attractive to artists and, after the Arab revolutions, the genre of caricature enjoyed renewed interest (De Poli 2012: 4). According to Langone (2014: 222-223), the diffusion of caricature, and especially the ones accompanied by texts, is the result of different elements: the post-revolutionary political changes which involved Tunisia, a consequent greater freedom of expression, also attained through the use of humour, and what the author calls a revivification of the arts in the country.

Satire through social networks is actually the direct consequence of the fall of totalitarian regimes and of the access to freedom of expression also through satire (De Poli 2012: 15). The riots that led to the fall of ten-year regimes in North Africa in 2011 have also stimulated collective irony, and new forms of satirical resistance were born, starting from the derisory attacks against the regimes which became an integral part of the protest, and «the shouted jokes on the public square taken up by the international networks, were projected on the monitors of the whole world, assuming a planetary dimension» (De Poli 2012: 11)<sup>10</sup>. Maha Ben Abdeladhim (Mahà b. ‘Abd al-‘Aẓīm) defines this phenomenon “humour of resistance”<sup>11</sup>.

After 2011, in Tunisia, a generation of artists and caricaturists was born and, besides “Lab691”, 14 artists belonging to the collective *Bande de BD* published the comic book *BD koumic*<sup>12</sup>. They had all graduated in arts or graphic design, some of them had their works published and others put them on their blogs and Facebook pages (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 148). Among the favourite subjects of the Tunisian caricaturists there are the ousted President Ben Ali (Bin ‘Alī), the politicians and the Islamists who won the first elections in Tunisia. The revolution developed in the squares and on the web

<sup>9</sup> Caricature has its origins in the *Nahḍah* and it has as a precursor the Italo-Egyptian Ya‘qūb Ṣanū‘ (d. 1912) who founded the first satirical magazine containing the first cartoons in Egyptian Arabic (Langone 2014: 222; Ettmüller 2012 and about the author see also el-Beih 2014). Among the studies about caricature in the Mashriq see De Blasio 2008; 2019a and 2019b.

<sup>10</sup> English translation is mine.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.france24.com/fr/20110122-tunisie-ben-ali-humour-facebook-rh%C3%A9torique-jeunes-resistance>, retrieved 22/01/2020.

<sup>12</sup> Tunis, compte d’auteur, 2011. See Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 148.

thanks to these artists, so that the Tunisian cause gained an international solidarity (Sibilio 2011: 81-82)<sup>13</sup>.

### *Languages of Resistance*

In the Maghrib, the linguistic question has always had peculiar features since the most significant graphic novels have been published in French: for instance, *La Revanche du Phénix* (2008) by the Tunisian Gihen Ben Mahmoud (Ġihān b. Maḥmūd), *Les Passants* (2011) by the Moroccan author Brahim Rais (Ibrāhīm Ra'īs) and *Les Vêpres Algériennes* (2012) by Nawal Louerrad (Nawāl Luwarrād). The majority of the works produced in the Maghrib deal with political issues such as war, the colonial past and the construction of post-independence national identities (Di Ricco 2015: 193). The Arab Spring was a watershed and since then there was a trend reversal in Tunisia, where, before the revolution, comics were mainly written in *fushà* and in French (Ghaibeh 2015: 4), but now artists choose to write more and more in *dāriġah*: «Far removed from official circles and traditional commercial distribution, which is furthermore highly different from country to country, these authors evoke everyday city life using Arabic dialects rather than classical Arabic, adopting an implicitly political approach» (Mercier 2017: 10). These artists and intellectuals represent emotions by using, and sometimes mixing, Arab dialects and Western languages.

As Ketiti (2014: 449) states, Tunisian artists have also created a specific register for humoristic language:

Parallèlement à la diffusion de l'actualité, les usagers des réseaux sociaux ont inventé un langage humoristique avec un registre lexical spécifique qu'ils utilisent pour commenter les événements. [...] le tanbir tounsi (moquerie tunisienne) [...] s'exprime de plusieurs manières en fonction de la situation : A'afsa (persiflage), Zala' (raillerie), Taqrid (moquerie), tmaq'ir (sarcasme). Il fait partie d'un vocable plus générique très utilisé Tafrika qui signifie littéralement désarticulation ou démantèlement. C'est un acte de ridiculisation d'une personnalité politique ou sociale qui devient l'objet de risée du groupe. L'expression Tafrika qui fait désormais partie de la nouvelle culture du rire est une invitation à une diversion collective à travers la déconstruction symbolique des personnages et des événements politiques importants. Converti en force collective, le rire populaire devient, selon Bakhtine (1994) un agitateur politique subversif qui joue un rôle important en tant que démystificateur du pouvoir.

Artists are proud of their dialects, according to them a place of honour, and tend to limit the use of European languages. *Fushà*, in fact, has been dominating the literary domain as a consequence of the Pan-Arab ideology that

<sup>13</sup> On the role of social media in the political and social struggle during the Arab Spring, see Sibilio 2011 and Nicosia 2011.

saw it as the main means of unification of Arab countries and of the Arab nation. Thanks to the social and political revolutions in the Arab countries, dialects have gained more and more importance: the collectives “Tok tok” and “Garage” used Egyptian Arabic, “Lab619” Tunisian, “Skefkef” Moroccan, “Masaha” Iraqi and “Habka” Libyan<sup>14</sup>. By using dialects and names referring to common things used in everyday life, their aim is to break with the Pan-Arab tradition, and revendicating the use of Arabic dialects helps affirm the “I” over the “we” to defend the cultural, intellectual, social, political uniqueness of individuals against the oppression of a unifying top-down force (Khoury 2017: 15)<sup>15</sup>. Douglas and Malti-Douglas (1994: 4), on the other hand, claimed that choosing a dialect to write a work is to sacrifice a broader Pan-Arab distribution for a potentially greater local popularity. Only one dialect, in fact, is sufficiently well known in the whole Arab world to allow a wider accessibility of the texts, that is the dialect of Cairo<sup>16</sup>.

Besides, according to Qassim (2007: 63): «Normally in cartoons, official persons tend to use *fusha*, whereas ordinary people and sometimes soldiers use *‘āmmiya*. Maybe political personalities’ use of the colloquial could be seen as some kind of mockery. In any case, to ascribe *‘āmmiya* speech to a president must be seen as a derogatory or at least ridiculing measure on part of the cartoonist»<sup>17</sup>. However, in today’s political language in Tunisia, some Arab presidents tend to use dialect in their official speeches to the people

<sup>14</sup> The fact that in the 1980s in Lebanon there were some adult comics in dialect was an exception.

<sup>15</sup> “Lab619”, for instance, refers to the Tunisian barcode starting with 619.

<sup>16</sup> Pedro Rojo Pérez (2014), President of Al Fanar Foundation for Arab Knowledge maintained that: «However, the use of dialect is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it allows artists to reach the local audience directly; however, it does so at the expense of the pan-Arab dimension, as some of the jokes, based as they are on local vernacular, will be lost on audiences from other countries. The use of dialectal Arabic has likewise gone hand in hand with the growing use of swear words and lewd expressions, which Arab societies, though used to hearing them on the street, are not quite used to hearing in the media, even in a satirical context, much less when a programme is supposed to be family-oriented. Many of these problems have been solved through direct contact between the audience and the artists via social media, giving rise to a candid jargon that, while still lively and innovative, is acceptable in family contexts». Available at: <https://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-la-mediterrania/sumaris/iemed-mediterranean-yearbook-2014>, retrieved 13/08/2020.

<sup>17</sup> Langone’s article (2014: 228) shows that *fushà* is used in cartoons whose addressees are religious people, such as those focused on the theme of women’s rights. What emerges from the scholar’s analysis is that, in the newspaper “al-Šūrūq”, in post-revolutionary caricatures, the majority of the cartoons are characterized by a combination of languages: *fushà* for the caption, *lahğah* for dialogues and French for other dialogic elements. The caricatures in Tunisian dialect are usually in Arabic script and seldom in Latin script (*Ibid.*, 230-231).

(see La Rosa 2018 and 2019). Moreover, thanks to the efforts of the Association Derja and of some contemporary writers, Tunisian Arabic is starting to be considered by intellectuals as a language of culture. *Fuṣṣḥā* is no longer always preferred as the exclusive language of culture<sup>18</sup> and the fear of the threat of Pan-Arabism seems to be fading. Perhaps this is also due to the fact that the satirical caricatures are strongly anchored in the Tunisian context and the recipients are mostly Tunisians. Moreover, the authors' aim is to awaken the consciences of citizens and they do this in the people's language (Qassim 2007; Mazraani 2008).

Arabic dialects are not the only language of resistance used by authors: talking about caricature, in fact, the relationship between verbal and non-verbal texts aroused the interest of many scholars. The visual language offers a powerful alternative to the written word, enabling comics and cartoons to reach a wider audience. Moreover, living in a world with a prevailing image culture made the medium far more influential (Gameel 2014 online). In caricatures, non-linguistic elements are as important as the linguistic ones. A linguistic and a non linguistic text can convey the same meaning or the opposite one (Hatfield 2005: 36); in the case of *Khalti Khadhra*, the two dialogue and are complementary since the text accompanies the image and completes it. According to Raskin (1985: 81), «a text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the (following) conditions [...] are satisfied [...] i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts [and] ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite [...]». A script is defined as «a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it», i.e., all the information, both intralinguistic and extralinguistic, or encyclopedic, included in a lexical unit (Attardo 1994: 201; Abu Hatab 2016: 71). The cartoon image is the handcrafted output of a creative mind and conveys the message desired by the author (Pedri 2013: 137; Wolk 2007: 121). How the two codes intertwine in Doggui's *Khalti Khadhra* will be shown below.

The various forms of art which spread after the very strong and generalized awakening unchained by the Arab Spring in Tunis and in other Arab countries were not always considered in a positive way by the critique. The artistic movement was, in fact, defined as the art of the *crise*, the manifestation of a sort of group therapy (Fakhfah; Tlili 2013: 143). A sort of art of the ephemeral, which is nourished by the daily news and becomes old the day after (Fakhfah; Tlili 2013: 143-144). The proliferation of artists and social media pages through which they promote their caricatures proved that this is not the case, however one cannot but observe how most of the blogs and satirical sites born during the Jasmine Revolution have become inactive im-

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.bettounsi.com/> and al-Ša'ri 2017. In the Arab world, of course, there are several language purists who strongly oppose the use of dialects as languages of culture. See, among others, Ḥanafī 2013.



mediately after or shortly after the end of the revolts. Whether this is due to a decline in interest in satirical art as a means of revolution and social resistance, due to the disappointments that followed the end of the Arab Spring or other reasons, like censorship, is not known<sup>19</sup>.

Tunisia is considered to be the most liberal country that, after Ben Ali's ousting, has promoted more laws for the freedom of opinion, of press and of academics. After the attacks of 2014 and 2015, the anti-terrorism laws have restricted many forms of freedom. Bouazizi's (Bū 'l-'Azīzī) immolation in Sīdī Bū Zīd in 2011, not only triggered the explosion of the Jasmine Revolution, but it also influenced the political situation of other Arab countries in which the protests broke out shortly afterwards. The street vendor's act has inspired many artists, Doggui included. Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Šābbī's lines were among the main slogans for the protests in Tunisia and beyond. Poetry, in fact, constantly accompanies the revolts and the resistance manifestations to the point where it is called "the poetry of revolution" (Colla 2011; Simon 2015). Besides, dialectal poetry is often contained in other forms of arts, such as theatre and caricature, as in the case of *Khalti Khadhra*.

The movements of resistance born in 2011 are still in existence and *Khalti Khadhra* is the example of how Tunisian intellectuals and the people still struggle against political and social injustice in 2017.

Today, Arab comics and cartoons are characterized by freedom of expression and openness towards individual experimentation. They explore taboos linked to sex, religion and social traditions, such as feminism, homosexuality, promotion of diversity and rebellion against the past. Moreover, many artists are activists and are women (see for instance *Willis from Tunis*; see Ketiti 2014 on this subject)<sup>20</sup>.

#### al-Adab al-Sāḥir and Caricature

Caricature belongs to the genre of *al-adab al-sāḥir* or "satirical literature"<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> As already mentioned above, digital media have represented a serious alternative means of production and publication. They also represent a way to bypass censorship.

<sup>20</sup> It is impossible to mention the entire multitude of cartoonists and artists currently engaged in political and social resistance all over the Arab world, suffice it to think, for instance, of some members of the collectives, such as the Egyptians Muḥammad Šalāh and Aḥmad Tawfīq, the Anglo-Lebanese 'Umar Ḥūrī and the Lebanese Ġanā Tarābulusī or the Moroccan Maḥdī Anāsī. Many others are independent cartoonists such as the famous Du'ā' al-'Adl and Andeel (Qindīl) (about the latter, see Daniela Potenza's contribution in this issue, pp. 115-136).

<sup>21</sup> The notion *al-adab al-sāḥir* appears to have come into use relatively recently; it is very difficult to translate. I will not mention the numerous studies about terminology (see, for instance, Guth 2018; Woidich 2010: 81; Rāḡib 2000: 9; Van Gelder 1998: 693). In this paper, I will translate it as "satirical literature" for con-

In 2009, Kishtainy (2009: 54) claimed that: «Encouragement of the development and widespread use of political humour and satirical literature should be an essential part of any strategy of civil resistance». This is what happened a couple of years later. In a more recent contribution, Fakhfakh and Tlili (2013: 144) wonder whether caricature can be considered revolutionary art or art of revolution, it is able to have a role in mass political education or it is only a safety-valve for an oppressed people. According to Abu Hatab (2013: 72) and similarly to what Fakhfakh and Tlili maintain, in the Arab world, humour has always been used by people to relieve themselves from anxieties, frustration and hopelessness<sup>22</sup>. It is a persuasive communication technique stimulating positive feelings in the people and strengthening bonds between them. Moreover, humour is second only to poetry in popularity in the Arab world, and always has been, as the works by al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 868 A.D.), among the most renowned of Medieval Arab humorists, prove<sup>23</sup>. As Ketiti (2014: 447) claims:

une véritable catharsis discursive ironique s'est emparée des réseaux sociaux virtuels, multipliant les images satiriques, les vidéos comiques et les dessins humoristiques qui visent principalement les symboles du régime et les acteurs de la transition politique. Ces œuvres se sont érigées comme nouveau langage politique populaire énonciateur d'une nouvelle socialité virtuelle protéiforme basée sur la dérision et l'humour. Émanant de la douleur et du chaos politique, le rire virtuel n'a pas seulement œuvré comme thérapie mais aussi comme un catalyseur social créant de nouveaux territoires de complicité collective et réaffirmant ce que disait Bergson (1964: 3) à propos de son caractère intrinsèquement groupal : « notre rire est toujours le rire d'un groupe (...) et dans ce sens il doit avoir une signification sociale »<sup>24</sup>.

The Internet has allowed all Tunisians to participate in the public and political life of Tunisia. Before the Tunisian Arab Spring, creating a caricature of a Head of State was strictly forbidden; moreover, the profession of the caricaturist was almost dead because it was not remunerative at all. More and more, after the Jasmine Revolution, anonymous caricaturists have taken up this form of art again (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 145). The satirical press and caricatures appeared in Tunisia at the time of colonialism to make fun of the colonists, first using French and then Arabic. Tunisian satirical periodicals were published from 1906 onward and colloquial poetry soon appeared, occupying even half the newspapers during the 1930s (Gliouiz 1978: 38). During Bourguiba (Būrqībah)'s time, some caricaturists still worked and had the

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venience. For a definition of *ṣuḥriyyah* as a literary genre and for a description of its political and social aim see Ismā'īl 2014: 18-21.

<sup>22</sup> See also Kishtainy 2009: 62-63.

<sup>23</sup> For an excursus of Arab humour see Branca; De Poli; Zanelli 2011.

<sup>24</sup> On the meaning of humour and on meme-caricature in Tunisia, which will not be dealt with in this paper, see Mannone 2020: 58-63.

possibility to publish in some newspapers, while Ben Ali's period was the darkest for this profession (Mannone 2020: 54, 57). After the election of Marzoughi (al-Munṣif al-Marzūqī), interest in caricature suddenly increased, proving the desire of the public to achieve freedom of speech and expression. Caricature has also become a tool to exorcise the tensions and concerns of the people (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 146). It played a fundamental role in a very delicate moment of transition between the revolution and the reconstruction of a Tunisian state as a political weapon and an instrument of struggle for freedom of expression, suppression of taboos and therefore has had a role in the construction of the new society. Thanks to the Internet, which made the images accessible to everyone, awareness was raised and caused an awakening of political and social conscience (Mannone 2020: 55-56; Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 163-165). For the first time, there was the elaboration of a direct, explicit and militant political satire that passed through caricatures.

In April 2013, a caricature fair was held in Sousse for the first time and the caricature was finally defined as a true artistic genre (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 147-148). One of the outcomes was *Yakayaka*, the first Tunisian website where all the caricaturists of the nation gather<sup>25</sup>. In addition to the work of well-known and recognized artists, there is a considerable number of anonymous *amateurs*. They are not professional artists, but experiment with new languages and techniques of expression that are not particularly refined, but are immediately understandable to the public (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 150).

*Khalti Khadhra* belongs to the genre of *al-adab al-sāḥir*, as the author, Mohamed Doggui, claimed in the introduction of the booklet.

*al-Adab al-sāḥir* is a very popular genre in Egypt, but it (re)emerged also in many Arab countries, where the tendency to write entirely or partly in the vernacular is very widespread (Håland 2017:142). Also Doggui, in the intro-

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<sup>25</sup> It is not available anymore at yakayaka.org, but it can be accessed through the link arabcartoon.net. On the Homepage, an article by Nedal Hashem (Niḍāl Hāšim) announces the end of the Arab Cartoon House Website: «Like all beautiful ideas, there is always an end, and this is the end of the Arab Cartoon House website. The site will halt due to the lack of usefulness, and poor attention of professional cartoonists. In a time when the beginning was modest in terms of services provided, there was broad interest from professional cartoonists, which formed our identity as a site specialized in professional caricature. However, with the spread of social networking sites that have become a strong competitor to various types of sites, we have become in front of a strong octopus which we cannot resist, especially with the great desire for sites such as Facebook to monopolize the cyberspace». Regarding the importance of the meaning of censorship on internet websites, see Mannone 2020: 67-68, who explains how an artist has probably his site or blog censored when he speaks the truth.

duction to his *Khalti Khadhra*, mentions the rebirth of satirical literature, that he wants to bring into vogue again (Doggui 2017: 2).

Once more, many studies on satirical literature and humour are based on Egyptian literary production, very limited on the Maghrib, and especially Tunisia. Jacquemond (2008: 356-357) states that *al-adab al-sāḥir* has a close correlation with politics and caricature: for the scholar, mocking politicians and rulers allowed the denouncement of some social and political issues, to vent and avenge their disappointment and frustration and, I add, resist injustice. The Arab Spring offered a renewal of the genre thanks to the work of a new generation of artists and satirical literature became an object of interest for some researchers in modern Arabic literature. Until recently, *al-adab al-sāḥir* has not received enough attention from scholars or critics. According to Jacquemond (2008: 155), this is because it is «too hybridized to interest the folklorists and too “low” to retain the interest of the legitimate criticism». He describes it as a kind of literature that «has an uncertain status somewhere between fiction and nonfiction, journalism and literature, and writing and orality». According to Fahmy (2011: 34), the content of satirical or humorous works, and especially newspapers, was expressed in everyday vernacular, more suited to comedy and satire than *fushḥā*, «considered too serious for effective satire» (Fahmy 2011: 81). Today, the social and political situation in many Arab countries has created a need for light and humorous literature, where criticism can be expressed in a disguised manner. It appears that the notion of *al-adab al-sāḥir* today is used to describe humorous texts, whether satirizing and moralizing with a correctional goal, or simply “lighter” humour, in which the goal is entertainment.

Doggui, on his Facebook page, shares Šamsī Wāqif Zāda’s<sup>26</sup> definition of satirical literature, on his Facebook page *Kothr elham idhahhek* (22/12/2018):

The role of satirical literature.

Satirical literature does not mean the laughter in itself, in fact, this is called joking, but *al-adab al-sāḥir* is black comedy, which expresses the citizen’s political and social pains and presents the poet as a sarcastic person who draws the smile on the face and puts a knife in the heart.

The use of *‘āmmiyyah* is not a precondition for *al-adab al-sāḥir*, but the genre does, however, seem to carry higher acceptance for use of *‘āmmiyyah* or a mixed variety, as it is a genre that has extensive use of humorous elements such as irony, sarcasm and parody (Fakhfakh; Tlili 2013: 161). According to Jacquemond (2016: 358-359): «Another characteristic of *adab sāḥir* is its tendency to use *‘āmmiyyah* rather than *fushḥā* Arabic, or a mix of both, which is one of the major reasons of its appeal, but this is not a development specific to this genre – writing in colloquial Egyptian or mixing it

<sup>26</sup> A scholar of the Islamic Azad University of Varamin.

with standard written Arabic, a growing trend since the 1990s at least, seems to have gained momentum in the post-2011 context»<sup>27</sup>.

Egyptian cartoonists, for example, claim that *fushà* is not a true language and that for this reason they do not use it to animate people walking in the streets (Høigilt 2017: 179).

In the case of Doggui, the choice of dialect is even more representative from the point of view of his ideology and linguistic policy since he is a renowned poet and novelist who usually writes in Spanish and won the prize in Certamen Internacional “Cuentos del Estrecho” in Spain, the Mención de Honor en el Certamen de poesía Juegos Florales de Primavera in Argentina. He authored some novels, such as *Alizeti: la fugitiva del Sol*<sup>28</sup> and *Mamadú y los verbos españoles*<sup>29</sup>. Among his poetical compositions we mention *Resonancias de ausencias*, *Derroche de azabache*, *La sonrisa silábica* and *Entre Levante y Poniente*<sup>30</sup>.

According to Høigilt (2017: 188), by using dialects, authors give voice to marginalized groups from different social strata in the Arab countries and foster the ideal of authenticity by treating issues close to the people using their mother tongue. For Mejdell (2017: 81):

These publications are expressive of a language ideology from below that legitimizes the use of the vernacular in print to treat serious issues. Writing in ‘*āmmiyyah*’ opens a third space in which authors can introduce thoughts and issues alien to mainstream culture, without placing themselves outside it. On the other hand, satire has limits since satire and caricatures are considered entertainment, not ‘real’ literature, and not governed by norms for variety usage. As Woidich argues, using ‘*āmmiyyah*’ is not controversial for purposes of humour and joking, nor for the ‘oral’ genres, mimicking direct speech, as drama and plays.

### Khalti Khadhra

As already mentioned above, *Khalti Khadhra*<sup>31</sup> was born from the collabora-

<sup>27</sup> For some reflections on the use of Arabic varieties in satirical literature see, for instance, al-‘Isīlī 2011: 23.

<sup>28</sup> Barcelona, Plataforma Editorial, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Cádiz, Fundación Dos Orillas, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> The first was published in Oviedo by Ars poetica in 2018, the second and the third were published in Barcelona by Ediciones Carena in 2017 and 2016 and the last in Madrid by Sial Ediciones in 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Khalti Khadhra* is a very common name or nickname in the Maghrib. Also Algeria, in fact, is known by this middle name because of its green areas. *Khalti Khadhra* is also the main character of Assia Sadoun Chaïb-Draa (Asyā Sa’dūn Šāyb Dīrā’)’s *Délivrance*, published in 2016 and, in Algeria, is also a novel by Maïssa Bey (Maysā’ Bāy), *Au commencement était la mer* and it is also the name of a char-

tion between a writer and a caricaturist, both socially engaged. The two are very active on the Internet and they have also been publishing some of their works in Tunisia. Doggui's book is a satirical collection and a mix of several genres ranging from committed poetry to popular sayings, gathered in the form of stories illustrated by Anis Mahrssi's caricatures that seem to bring the characters to life while reinforcing the satirical and critical aspects of the book, where the events take place in the post-revolutionary Tunisian context – a post-revolutionary Tunisia where nothing has changed. This is testified by the cover of the booklet, in which the expression *qismah w-ḥayyān*, mostly used to indicate that a match ends with a draw, shows how ordinary citizens have made the revolution and the wealthiest classes, politicians included, have enjoyed the fruits. So, nothing has changed. The cartoon on the cover reflects the credulity of Tunisians who had expectations of unlimited wealth, freedom and development after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, but were betrayed and disappointed.

Unlike a comics book, *Khalti Khadhra* is made up of separate cartoons that constitute micro stories in themselves; the set of caricatures certainly gives a complex picture of contemporary Tunisia and its people. Every panel is independent from the previous and the following one, but, seen all together, the cartoons depict a precise image of contemporary Tunisia.

The socio-economic problems and concerns related to the daily life of Tunisians in the face of rising prices are among the central themes of the book. The humorous nature of the work reinforces the seriousness of the criticism, particularly towards Tunisian intellectuals, who failed to understand in time the threats hanging over Tunisian society and the foundations of the revolution.

Doggui has given some interviews in which he provided some interesting statements about the purposes of the book, among which the fostering of Tunisian language as a language of culture, and declared that he himself had to resist several attacks<sup>32</sup>.

Doggui, in fact, faced a trial for the use of some bad words in his work and was exonerated, in the end<sup>33</sup>.

The cartoonist Anis Mahrssi, in perfect symbiosis with the author, completes Doggui's lines with illustrations whose genuine and naïf characters are often deeply embedded in the memory of Tunisians.

Also Mahrssi has been experiencing censorship and has not had an easy

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acter of cartoons and of the film *Bastardo* by Nejib Belkadi (Naǧīb bi 'l-Qāḍī).

<sup>32</sup> An example is available at <https://www.babnet.net/festivaldetail-141346.asp>, retrieved 11/03/2020.

<sup>33</sup> A webpage in support of Doggui is <http://www.manifiestoapoyomohameddoggui.com>, retrieved 20/02/2020. See also the image titled *Non-lieu*, published by Doggui on his Facebook account (09/03/2018).

career<sup>34</sup>. In 2017, he published the book *Carica-tous-risques* (Caricature at All Costs), whose title is emblematic. The main character is a young intellectual who undergoes censorship and struggles against it and by doing this denounces some social injustices of Tunisia. Mahrssi, in fact, since 2011 resists what he calls a “soft censorship” through which artists are “discouraged”, by way of “advice” to drop or avoid certain topics that are presumably “uninteresting” or “not worth discussing”. Intellectuals are then pressured until, stifled and exasperated, they quit and give up dealing with some issues<sup>35</sup>.

Mahrssi’s caricatures are very effective and he sometimes addresses his interlocutor without mincing words, especially if they are politicians, such as in the following example available on the caricaturist’s Facebook account (11/08/2018)<sup>36</sup>:



I have the solutions to the problem of the people: equality in inheritance, legalisation of homosexuality, elimination of death penalty.

In the signs: price increase of basic goods, unemployment, poverty, crime, crisis. This cartoon criticizes the Présidente de la Commission pour les libertés individuelles et l'égalité Bochra Belhaj Hmida (Bušrà Bilḥāḡ Ḥamīdah). She is represented as if she were a man, symbol of the mockery of her affirmation about equality between men and women. She promises revolutionary reforms while she ignores the people's first needs.

### *Analysis*

*Khalti Khadhra* opens with a dedication to Tunisian dialect showing Doggui's consideration of it:

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2017/03/27/anis-mahrssi-caricaturist-at-all-costs/>, retrieved 14/03/2020.

<sup>35</sup> For further information about Anis Mahrssi, see [https://www.facebook.com/pg/ANISMAHRSIART/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/ANISMAHRSIART/about/?ref=page_internal). Unfortunately, the practice of artistic censorship continued to dog artists even after the old regimes fell and new leaders were appointed. In Tunisia it took on a new form, shifting from state to religious censorship (Bousquet 2012 online; see also Ketiti 2014: 452). A famous case is that of the caricaturist Zouhair Yahyaoui (Zuhayr Yahyāwī), whose alias was Ettounsi, jailed because of his articles and posts against the regime.

<sup>36</sup> As well as his personal page, the caricaturist is the administrator of different accounts. *Anis M. Art*, for instance, has 13.325 likes and has more than 13.404 followers.

*al-Lahğah al-tūnisiyyah, illī bi-faḍl qudrithā 'l-ta'bīriyyah 'l-daḡīqah wi 'l-ta'bīriyyah fī mağāl al-šu'ūr wi 'l-aḡāsīs maknitnī bāš nablāğ ḡawāḡir nunqud fihā mumārsāt wa awḡā' siyāsiyyah wi iğtimā'iyyah fī iṭār namaṭ adabī 'arīq yusammā al-adab al-sāḡir* (Doggui 2017: 2).

Tunisian dialect, whose expressive power, precise and emotional in the field of sections and sensations, has allowed me to communicate ideas in which I criticize actions, political and social situations by using an ancient literary genre, which is called satirical literature.

After the short dedication, the author and the illustrator insert the caricatures dealing with several social and political themes.

In my opinion, there are three main issues dealt with in the book. The analysis of the most representative cartoons will be presented below.

#### *A) The role of the intellectual in Tunisian society*



#### *Commitment<sup>37</sup>*

The poet who is the son of his mother  
and who loves his country  
if he doesn't speak from his mouth  
speaks from his side

In this caricature, there is a clear reference to censorship: it is impossible to silence an intellectual, son of his country, associated to a mother. The intellectual has the duty of commitment: he has to narrate the events of the country and to denounce injustices. From a formal point of view, the structure of the lines is AAAA and the *ḡarakāt* are indicated, in this case like in the rest of the book. Moreover, Doggui uses the lexical repetition of the relative pronoun *illī* and of the word *yunṭuq* “speaks”. Repetition, in Arabic language, can have a didactic, playful, emotional, artistic, ritual, textual and rhetorical function and is a process through which discourse is built (Johnstone 1994: 6). It is not only considered a stylistic expedient aimed at emphasizing the meaning of discourse and ensuring the cohesion of the text, but it is also an essential part of the structure of the language, also characterized by redundancy and the use of paraphrases and abstract generalizations (Sa'adeddin 1989: 48-49). Lexical repetition means the use of the same lemma more than once or the iteration of a term derived from it in a given text (al-Khafaji 2005: 6), as in the case of *illī/willī* “who/and who” and *yunṭuq/mā yunṭuqš* “speaks/does not speak”.

This satirical cartoon contained in *Khalti Khadhra* is better explained when integrated by the one published by Doggui on his Facebook page *Kothr elham idhahhek* (17/12/2018):

<sup>37</sup> *Khalti Khadhra*'s pages will not be given because they are not marked in the book.





*Always forward like the al-Šayḥ Imām*<sup>38</sup>  
Here is the committed poet  
his role is to cause troubles  
on books and on Facebook  
as well as in the street, if necessary

This cartoon might also refer indirectly to Doggui's personal battle against censorship. The raised fist holding a pencil is symbol of intellectual commitment and struggle. From a formal point of view, the rhyme is ABBA, and repetition of the words having the same root is evident in *multazim* "engaged" and *lizim* "is necessary"; phonological repetition is used in *al-šbūk* "troubles", *al-fāysbūk* "Facebook" and in the words beginning with the consonant /š/. Another example of lexical repetition is the preposition *fī* "in".

### B) Tunisia

The second main theme of the book is Tunisia's conditions.



*Zero-zero*  
Celebrate the revolution,  
be joyful Sidi Bouzid (Sīdī Bū Zīd),  
here we are, make the revolution for us  
and we left the party for you

From the cover of the book Doggui's thinking on the Tunisian political and economic situation is evident from the expression already mentioned *qismah w-ḥayyān*.

In the picture, you can see an emaciated Tunisian man, with a look that seems both amazed and alienated. This man is not sure what he is celebrating or whether it is worth doing it or not. On the other side, there is a quite "curvy" smart man, probably a politician, eating a big cake, who feeds on the fruits of the revolution made by the Tunisian people. He is wearing a suit, while the other Tunisian man has patches on his clothes.

As mentioned above, Sidi Bouzid is the small village where Mohammad Bouazizi set himself on fire and where the uprisings of December 2010 star-

<sup>38</sup> al-Šayḥ Imām (1918-1995) is a famous Egyptian singer renowned for his political songs against the upper-classes and the oppression of the poor classes. His songs often led him to detention and were banned on Egyptian radio and tv stations. See, for instance, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2011/6/19>, retrieved 06/04/2020.

ted. The rhyme is ABAB, and Doggui adopts a series of formal and linguistic strategies. Firstly, he uses the lexical repetition of the words *tawrah* “revolution” and *īd* “celebration, party”. Besides, the first two lines have a similar structure as they start with the imperatives *iḥtafil* “feast” and *ifrah* “be happy”; moreover, an assonance is present in the second two in the words: *iḥdīnā* “make for us” and *ḥallīnā* “we left [for you]”.



### *Dog's Life*

He set himself on fire to study and work  
he did not find a job, they burned his stuff  
in Europe they welcomed him with indifference  
he could not stand indifference and he set  
himself on fire

This is a cartoon in which the reference to the young Bouazizi clearly shows in the first line. Bouazizi, as is well known, died and did not migrate to Europe. Therefore, the second part of the lines is dedicated to illegal migrants. Here there is a very direct attack on Europe, blamed for its approach to migration and migrants, for its immigration policies, since it does not support migrants in general. From a formal point of view, the rhyme here is ABCD. The lines present lexical repetition, *tagnīs* and puns. Lexical repetition concerns words having the same root: *yihdim* “he works”, *hidmah* “work”, *hraq* “to migrate illegally” and “to burn”, repeated three times. In this last word, there is an interesting and probably voluntary double meaning between “to burn” and “migrate illegally”, as the words are homographs in the text and are not distinguished by the pronunciation of *hraq* “to burn” and *hrag* “to migrate illegally”<sup>39</sup>. The author also makes a reference to the brain-drain and to the destiny of the youngsters who try to migrate to Europe to build their own future. *Li-Urubā/lu rubā* is a sort of *tagnīs murakkab*, «composed, when one of the two rukn consists of two distinct words» (Betini 2007: 497). Europe disappoints youngsters and does not help them, but ignores them and leads them to death in some way. The artist’s aim is to raise people’s awareness of illegal migration which affects Tunisia particularly. As for puns and paronomasia, they characterize many of Doggui’s cartoons, as will be shown below. Paronomasia is a figure of speech based on play on meanings using homonymous or polysemic words or using two or more words with synonymous meanings which are often alliterative or rhyming. It is usually employed for humorous effects (Shivtiel 2008). Many proverbs or dicta are based on paronomasia whose main aim is to attract the reader’s at-

<sup>39</sup> For *tawriyah*, a figure of speech through which a desired double sense is created, see Shivtiel 2009: 538.

tention. In this cartoon, note the assonances, the play on words with nouns that contain the same radicals, but in a different order that make the verse effective. So we have both lexical repetition (*ḥugrah*) and *ḡinās muḍāri*<sup>40</sup> between *ḥraq* “to burn” and *ḥrag* “to migrate illegally”, written in Arabic script with three dots (حرف) to create ambiguity between the two meanings<sup>40</sup>. The consonant /q/, in sedentary dialects of Tunisia, is usually pronounced as voiceless /q/, but in some regions characterized by a Bedouin variety it is realized as voiced /g/. However, none of the Tunisian varieties know the exclusive use of /q/ or /g/, but some terms, using the deaf pronunciation of /q/ in which the consonant is made as /g/ and vice versa, are attested in speech (Mion 2015: 271 and also Skik 2003; Bahloul 2007: 255)<sup>41</sup>. Between *ḥugrah* and *ḥraq* there is also a sort of *ḡinās maqlūb*, characterized by the inversion of the order of syllables and consonants in two words (Bettini 2007). Doggui, here, aims probably at creating a sort of *tawriyah* to convey a double meaning to the reader. Lastly, the word *rūḥu* “his soul” in the last line recalls *muhḥu* “his brain” in the first one.



#### *Inertia*

Every volcano becomes an extinguished fire  
the word *dégage* was marked  
and now a child dies frozen  
and we started to say “*c’est dommage*”

<sup>40</sup> In the dictionary TUNICO, available at <https://tunico.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/dictionary.html?query=%E1%B8%A5rq> (retrieved 08/04/2020), the entry *ḥraq* is given only for “to burn”. The two entries linked to the idea of migrating illegally are *ḥarrāg* (plural *ḥarrāgah* or *ḥarrāqah*) “person (m) who illegally migrated to Europe” and *ḥarqah* “illegal emigration to Europe”.

<sup>41</sup> In Mion’s words (2015: 271): “Nous savons que les parlers citadins de l’Afrique du Nord, qualifiés par David Cohen de «kairouanais» en raison de leur descendance généalogique de l’arabe de Kairouan, sont caractérisés par une réalisation uvulaire sourde du \*qāf, donc q. C’est ainsi que tout au moins les Tunisiens se servent des deux expressions *tkallām bə-l-gāla* et *tkallām bə-l-qāla* pour indiquer les différents dialectes du pays. Mais deux observations préliminaires s’imposent : aucun parler tunisien ne connaît un emploi exclusif de l’une ou de l’autre variante et pour établir la réalisation propre à un dialecte il faut chercher dans son lexique fondamental les termes les plus communs ; dans le territoire tunisien, par rapport à la diffusion de g, la réalisation sourde en q est minoritaire et limitée, sur le plan géographique, à peu de gouvernorats qui donnent sur la mer, dont les principaux sont Bizerte, Tunis, Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia et Sfax ; à ces régions il faut quand même ajouter la ville de Kairouan, dans l’arrière-pays. Mais il faut aussi observer qu’à l’intérieur des gouvernorats à q, les localités caractérisées par l’usage de g sont très nombreuses”.

The scenario described by Doggui and Mahrsi is post-revolutionary Tunisia, in which the fire of the revolution has gone out, good intentions have disappeared and Tunisians have fallen back into indifference. The objective here is to awaken the consciences of people to be more active. The role of the pun between the French loanwords *dégage* “go away”, slogan of the Jasmine Revolution lately diffused also in other countries such as Egypt, and *dommage* “pity, shame”, the new motto of Tunisian people, is emblematic of this change of attitude. Note also the use of the *ġinās* in *hāmdah/ġāmdah* meaning “extinguished” and “frozen”. Artists, in general, do not disdain the use of some Latin scripts in their works and neither do Doggui and Mahrsi<sup>42</sup>.



#### *Support fund*

Bread, oil and the crisis  
of our subsidized basic goods  
and so the country goes on  
God let this prosperity

Doggui uses the word *na'mah*, meaning both “cereals” and “wellness, prosperity”<sup>43</sup> to define ironically a very delicate situation of economic crisis that is affecting Tunisia. The cartoon shows a humanized olive oil bottle, a loaf of bread and a basket receiving economic aid, and between them the word *al-fasād* “the corruption”<sup>44</sup>. This economical support allows the country to keep surviving. This is just one of the caricatures dedicated to the crisis affecting Tunisia realized by Doggui in *Khalti Khadhra*<sup>45</sup>. The rhyme scheme here is ABAB. The author chooses words composed of the same number of syllables or that produce an effect of assonance: *fasād/bilād*, *al-mda'mah* and *ha-l-na'mah*. Internal assonances are *fasād*, *mawād*, *titqaddim*, *idawim*.



#### *Advance backwards*

He started an embellishment programme of  
the neighbourhood  
my progress is important  
Rip off the jasmine with the axe  
and put on the old nettles

<sup>42</sup> Other examples are available in *Khalti Khadhra* and on Doggui and Mahrsi's Facebook accounts.

<sup>43</sup> While *ni'mah* means “charity”. See Beaussier; Ben Chneb; Lentin 2007: 987.

<sup>44</sup> Several articles are available in the online magazines. See, for instance, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2018/09/23/le-pain-et-nous-considerations-sur-la-politique-alimentaire-de-la-tunisie>, retrieved 16/04/2020.

<sup>45</sup> Many others are available on Doggui and Mahrsi's Facebook accounts.

Once more, Doggui points out that nothing has changed since the revolution and eventual changes have been for the worst. The author uses a pun concerning flowers, that is jasmine, which are cut away with an axe: this recalls the elimination of good purposes brought by the revolution in the name of a false progress which is leading the country backwards. The rhyme is AAAA and root repetition is evident in the words *tqaddum* “progress, development”, *qādūmah* “axe” and *qadīmah* “old”. Doggui creates a sound effect also through the repetition of the consonant /h/: *haṭ* “put”, *ḥurriqah* “nettle”. Also the sound /q/ is repeated in the mentioned words *tqaddum*, *qādūmah*, *qadīmah*, *ḥurriqah* and *qalli*.

### C) Social issues.

#### *Youngsters*

Young people are the active protagonists in the revolutions and the main promoters of the Pan-Arab artistic and intellectual movement expressed through the usage of dialects in graphic literature, satirical literature, music and street art (Høigilt 2019: 143-160).

Despite this, in Arab countries, which mostly have a population consisting of young people, there is a well-known situation involving millions of youngsters with a higher education who are unemployed and unable to create their own family (see among others Singerman 2007; Backeberg; Tholen 2017; Høigilt 2019: 127)<sup>46</sup>. According to Paciello, Pepicelli and Pioppi (2016: 3), until the 1960s, governmental policies were oriented towards the promotion of strategies of employment and Tunisia was a labour-centred social system. After the 1970s, the country started to change its economic policies:

The reorientation of the economy toward a neo-liberal free market model and the significant decline in the offer of stable employment in the public sector owing to cuts in state expenses, had the cost of an exponential growth of unemployment, especially for first insertion in the job market (more than loss of jobs). There was also a general increase of informal temporary and low-paid jobs, coupled with growing social and regional inequalities especially with respect to access to employment and public services (Paciello; Pepicelli; Pioppi 2016: 4).

Despite this, in the 1990s, many initiatives to support youth employment were taken and fostered by the Ben Ali government until 2011, even if access to youth employment programmes was conditional on political loyalty. After the Jasmine Revolution, also named youth revolution because of the dynamic and active role of youngsters, the initiatives undertaken have proved insufficient, as the continuous youth protests against unemployment

<sup>46</sup> For a recent survey see Assaad; Krafft 2016, available at [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Caroline\\_Krafft/publication/301748738\\_Labor\\_market\\_dynamics\\_and\\_youth\\_unemployment\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_East\\_and\\_North\\_Africa\\_Evidence\\_from\\_Egypt\\_Jordan\\_and\\_Tunisia/links/5725152b08aef9c00b846973.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Caroline_Krafft/publication/301748738_Labor_market_dynamics_and_youth_unemployment_in_the_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_Evidence_from_Egypt_Jordan_and_Tunisia/links/5725152b08aef9c00b846973.pdf) and Schäfer 2018.

in Sidi Bouzid region and the increase of illegal migration show (Paciello; Pepicelli; Pioppi 2016: 5-7).

According to Backeberg and Tholen (2017: 1-2) unemployment and exclusion of youngsters is an old issue in Mediterranean Arab countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Lebanon, due to several elements, but little is known about its causes. Exclusion, concerning more men than women, involves three domains of youngster's life: political, social and economic, and is the highest in Tunisia (Backeberg; Tholen 2017: 9, 16). After the ousting of Ben Ali, illegal migration to Europe and especially Italy increased as a response to the crisis and economic, social and political instability (Paciello; Pepicelli; Pioppi 2016: 16-18). According to the Sahwa Project Survey held in 2016<sup>47</sup>, in comparison to Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Lebanon, in Tunisia, the wish to migrate is the highest (Sánchez-Montijano; Girona-Raventós 2017: 6) because of economic reasons, poor conditions of life or inadequate opportunities of study. Doggui addresses the subject in some cartoons, of which I chose the more representative ones.



#### *A rational policy*

The first thing we start with  
to fight this unemployment  
the youngsters who are stuck in it  
let's/we consider them pipe smokers

Through these simple lines, Doggui desires to criticize the (ir)rational policy adopted in Tunisia towards youngsters. A rational policy should be a rational approach to making decisions whose only outcome seems to be that the Tunisian government did not undertake any measures to help youngsters, and people consider them superficially and only have prejudices and stereotypes regarding them. From a formal point of view, the language is very simple and plain and the rhyme is ABAB.

The previous caricature can be better understood by reading the following humoristic and bitter cartoon published by Doggui on his Facebook account (07/01/2018):



#### *The Free Man Understands with a Wink*

My boys, pack your bags  
we don't trust you  
and before we honour you with a *dégage*  
do it yourself [and go away]

<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.sahwa.eu/>.

This cartoon recalls part of an Arab proverb meaning that to the smart and free man, a wink is sufficient to understand something, but the stupid understands with a sting: *al-ḥurr min ġamzah w-l-bhīm min hamzah*. Doggui criticizes the Tunisian attitude towards youngsters. It is a society which does not encourage them to remain in the country, but pushes them to go away. After being the main protagonists of the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisian youngsters have been paid with indifference. They feel the humiliation of unemployment and the difficulty of finding their place in society. Doggui invites them to honour themselves and go away voluntarily from a country which will disappoint them and chase them away. This is a very hard cartoon showing all the sadness and bitterness affecting young Tunisians. From a linguistic point of view, the rhyme is ABAB and Doggui chooses to use the French word *dégage*, spelled in Arab letters دجاج (*daqāġ*). *Dégage* rhymes with the French *bagage*, spelled بجاج (*baqāġ*) in the first line<sup>48</sup>.

*Gender equality and violence against women*<sup>49</sup>



*The Love of Poor Quality*<sup>50</sup> is Dying  
Anyone I ask about her,  
answers “with my soul and blood I protect her”,  
and now tell me, with the glory of God,  
but where do her problems come from?

Tunisia is compared to a woman. Here the value of the lines is twofold: the first aim is to raise the audience’s awareness of violence against women, committed especially by those who should love them; the second one is to focus on mistreatments of Tunisia, vilified by its rulers and its own people. The traditional *šāsiyyah*, symbol of tradition worn by the man in the image, depicts him as a backward Tunisian; the woman, Khalti Khadhra, has signs of violence and mistreatments. The rhyme is ABAB and Doggui uses *ġinās nāqiš* in the title, *bū ḍarrūḥ/rūḥ*, and uses phonological repetition of /ḥ/ especially in the title where, in addition to the already mentioned words, we also find *ḥubb* “love”.

The previous cartoon can be connected to the following one, also contained in *Khalti Khadhra*:

<sup>48</sup> For French loanwords in Tunisian Arabic, see among others Mzoughi 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Literature on the subject is extensive. I will limit myself to mentioning Mahfoudh; Mahfoudh 2014; Abbott 2017; Hursh 2017; Pepicelli 2017; Borrillo 2019 and their bibliography.

<sup>50</sup> *Bū ḍarrūḥ* is an expression indicating something of low-quality, synonymous with *mḍarraḥ*. Doggui uses it also in another cartoon in *Khalti Khadhra*.





*No Good in the Master nor in his Women*  
 One fans him, one praises him  
 and the other washes the feet of her master  
 Tāhir al-Ḥaddād<sup>51</sup> stirs  
 and wonders “where is the woman I desired?”

Resistance, sometimes, passes through the recovery of tradition: here we find a desperate al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād<sup>52</sup> wondering where the woman for whom he had fought is; he only finds a woman who is excessively obliging towards a macho-man, almost depicted as a man’s slave. Images and words are very strong and hard with a very bitter irony showing a society which has not understood the real value of women. Doggui, however, blames both the sexist men and the women who do not react to this behaviour. From a linguistic point of view, the rhyme is ABCB and Doggui uses lexical repetition in the title, *lā ḥayr fī* “there is no good in”, and in the first line, *waḥdah* “one”.

### *Concluding Remarks*

What emerges from the analysis of the cartoons by Mohamed Doggui and Anis Mahrsi, is that they are representative of one of the *modi operandi* adopted by contemporary post-revolutionary Arab intellectuals to express their forms of resistance. As Ketiti (2014: 453) states:

Leur succès auprès du public internaute réside dans leur capacité de saisir ce que Bakhtine dénomme l’impulsion communautaire du rire populaire et son lien intime avec le sentiment historique. Ils ont inscrit leurs dessins humoristiques aussi bien dans le contexte sociopolitique que dans l’humour populaire en interceptant son énergie subversive collective. Leurs œuvres représentent en quelque sorte l’expression raffinée de cet humour populaire. Dans un contexte de profondes mutations sociales, la caricature satirique fait du rire un mécanisme à la fois de rupture et de reconstruction. D’une part, elle rompt avec la culture de la peur du pouvoir despotique en déployant l’arme de la dérision et d’autre part, elle récupère les espaces de dialogue social laminés par la répression, en restituant le statut déchu de l’humour populaire au sein des rapports sociaux. Enfin, les dessins humoristiques ont relaté la révolution et la transition tunisienne avec un langage différent qui se démarque des dis-

<sup>51</sup> This is the way in which the name of al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād is written in *Khalti Khadhra*.

<sup>52</sup> Tunisian writer, considered as the pioneer of the movement for the liberation of women in Tunisia. See *al-Haddād*, in *EI online*, retrieved 10/04/2020 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004206106\\_eifo\\_SIM\\_8581](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004206106_eifo_SIM_8581).



cours médiatiques et historiques dominants. Ils représentent une sorte de narration populaire imagée de l'histoire, émanant des citoyens qui ont poussé leur expression artistique jusqu'aux limites de l'impertinence<sup>53</sup>.

What we find, by comparing the issues treated by Doggui, and those addressed by the intellectuals of the other Arab countries, is that they are the same: disillusion after the Arab Spring, oppression, censorship, critique of power<sup>54</sup>, price increase of essential goods/items and some other social and more general issues such as violence against women, public health and road safety. The aim of the author and caricaturist of *Khalti Khadhra* is to raise Tunisians' awareness of these questions and relight the fire of revolutionary good intentions and civic duty. This is done through new means of resistance that may not be new in themselves, but that are innovative with respect to the ways in which they are used<sup>55</sup>. I refer here to some innovations consisting mainly in the choice of new means of communication, such as social media, and in linguistic strategies, focusing on the use of dialect, adopted by Doggui and Mahrsi.

In fact, the authors, in the same way other contemporary Arab intellectuals do, express their urgencies and needs through various linguistic forms, verbal and non-verbal languages and above all through Tunisian dialect, conceived as a language of written culture. Moreover, Doggui's choice to compose brief simple poetical lines in Tunisian Arabic is emblematic<sup>56</sup>. If poetry, on the one hand, is able to follow and adapt to the sudden changes of society, its main form *par excellence* is the classical *qaṣīdah* written in *fuṣḥā*, here substituted by small compositions of four lines in a very simple colloquial language. We must also bear in mind that innovation and tradition in this book are linked and this is clear from Doggui's use of popular Tunisian dicta

<sup>53</sup> For a reflection on some negative aspects of humour, see Mannone 2020: 53-54.

<sup>54</sup> Literature about this is abundant; see, among others, Kishtainy 1985 and Badarneh 2011 and relative bibliographies.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, the new idea of reading conveyed by the Tunisian journalist Nizār al-Ša'ī in *Tūnis fī 'īnāyyā* (Tunisia in My Eyes, 2017) through the use of multimedia and hypertext. See also La Rosa (forthcoming) on this book.

<sup>56</sup> Doggui's choice of writing short dialectal poems is not innovative in itself, but it is remarkable in a context in which artists and intellectual often choose brief or long prose texts. As Talib (2018: 13) states, in fact, the use of short poems in Arabic literature dates back at least to Medieval times: «Sometime in the 13th century or perhaps slightly earlier, Arab littérateurs started referring to very short poems as *maqāṭī'* (sing. *maqṭū'*, or *maqṭū'ah*)». Considered a sort of new genre of poetry, *maqāṭī'* have continued to be very popular until the 19th century (Talib 2018: 70). On the subject, see also Talib (2018)'s references. On colloquial Arabic poetry as a form of resistance in modern and contemporary Egypt see also Booth 1992a. It is not possible here to refer to the huge bibliography about the origins of dialectal poetry, I will limit myself to mention Booth 1992b and, for Andalusī poetry, Zwartjes 1997.

and proverbs and from the mention of some important Tunisian personalities such as al-Ṭāḥir al-Ḥaddād, in a certain way emblem of tradition and revolution at the same time. In order to give dignity back to *dāriġah*, Doggui, Mahrsi and other intellectuals struggle to make people consider it a real language of culture and written expression. This is a cause promoted by the members of the Association Derja in Tunisia that many contemporary writers have helped and sustained. Note also that Doggui and Mahrsi choose two different kinds of language relating to their cultural backgrounds: Doggui chooses the timeless poetry, which distinguishes him from most contemporary Tunisian intellectuals, and Mahrsi the youth slang<sup>57</sup>.

The following claim by Høigilt (2019: 9) is also applicable to caricature:

Comics are one medium among several that make extensive use of written dialect, potentially contributing to fundamental changes in the Arabic language system and language ideology – essential parts of Arab identity. [...] Arabic adult comics merit interest because they give us a particularly vivid picture of a hypothesized development: that written Arabic is becoming a property of the masses, and that one consequence of this is that there is more room for variation and informal styles in public written language.

The use of dialect, in *Khalti Khadhra* as in the caricatures published online by Mahrsi, is proof of a trend that Caubet (2017: 122), talking about the linguistic situation of Morocco, has defined as «an informal passage to literacy», that is a general trend involving a young and less young generation publishing on the Internet, but not only there, long complex texts of different genres in dialect. Certain genres, when expressed in *fushḥà*, are not effective and only the dialect is suitable for them. In fact, dialect involves as many individuals as possible from different social groups as it makes the content more accessible to readers using their mother tongue (Høigilt 2019: 162-163, 167). Moreover, writing in *dāriġah* allows some authors, aiming at breaking the strict rules of Standard Arabic, to distinguish themselves from the other writers. According to Høigilt (2019: 169), comics, and then cartoons I would say, occupy a third space (Bhatt 2008) between high and low culture, in a sort of in-betweenness expressed through with serious issues in a playful language through the combination of *fushḥà* and *‘āmmiyyah*, on the one hand, and of Arabic and European languages on the other.

However, we should bear in mind that an “artistic colloquial Arabic” (Palva 1992), close to spoken language, has always existed (for Egypt see Davies; Doss 2013) and that the contemporary writing practices are confirming an existing process that has deep ideological roots, since authors are generally very conscious of the linguistic code they are using in their works (Håland 2017).

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<sup>57</sup> This is clearly evident from his Facebook accounts.

In addition to this, Tunisians are more and more conscious of the fact that Tunisian Arabic, *tūnsī* as they call it, is a different variety from Modern Standard Arabic and from other Arab dialects (Walters 2003).

Contemporary Tunisian literary production<sup>58</sup> is the symbol of the gradual disappearance of the differentiation of the social functions between dialects and Modern Standard Arabic, not only at an oral level, but also at a written one; it is the outcome of the «development of informal literacy in several parts of the Arab world» (Høigilt 2019: 160).

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<sup>58</sup> Contemporary Tunisian literary production in dialect is rather abundant. I have been analysing the phenomenon in some forthcoming contributions.

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