

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Jews, Music-Making, and the Twentieth Century Maghrib

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in History

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Professor Sarah Abrevaya Stein, Chair

From the early twentieth century and through at least mid-century, indigenous North African Jews came to play an outsized role as music-makers and music-purveyors across the Maghrib. In Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, all under French rule until the middle of the twentieth century, Jewish vocalists and instrumentalists, record label artistic directors and concessionaires, commercial agents, and sonic impresarios utilized the phonograph and recording technology to safeguard and promote traditional music — described alternately as “Arab,” “Muslim,” and “Andalusian” — and to pioneer popular musical forms mixed in style and language (often blending Arabic with French). Those forms produced an emerging realm of popular culture between World War I and World War II.

Jewish prominence in music was challenged during the interwar period. That challenge emanated from a set of French officials and Muslim elites, who were uneasy with minority overrepresentation in a heritage increasingly considered in national terms and increasingly understood as the exclusive domain of the majority. With the fall of the French Third Republic and the rise of the Vichy Regime during the Second World War, Maghribi Jewish musicians in North Africa and those in metropolitan France were further sidelined and silenced — although never completely. In the postwar period, as nationalist parties in Morocco and Tunisia and later Algeria marched toward independence — defining their political programs in increasingly exclusionary Arabo-Muslim terms — some Jewish musicians provided the soundtrack for that march and reached staggering heights of celebrity. Their celebrity came at the very moment that tens of thousands of Jews, unsure of their future, left the Maghrib for France and Israel. Despite their departure, the memory of Jews and especially the memory of Jewish musicians remains especially vivid among North African Jews and Muslims in the Maghrib and the Maghribi diaspora.

This dissertation then, explores both the Jewishness of music-making in the Maghrib over the course of much of the twentieth century and gives voice to North African Jewish cultural life by studying the music that Jews helped to promote and make popular. A musical frame not only points us to a unique timeline, different from that defined by political events, but provides us with new tools for thinking about Jewish-Muslim relations in the region as far more intimate and far more entangled than previously assumed.

The dissertation of Christopher Benno Silver is approved.

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In the course of completing this dissertation and its chapters, I embarked upon a number of other, life-changing chapters including getting married and having a child. It is only fitting then, that I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Emily and my son Roy, who embue me and everything I do with meaning.

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From my father, who passed away in 2003 and whose own illustrious career in the American music business I hope to someday chronicle, I learned that stars are made, not born. It was with that in mind, that I persisted in attempting to tease out the mechanics of the North African music business, even as some archival sources proved frustratingly scant. His hand can be felt throughout this entire project.

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A brief note on translations and transliterations: transliterations of Arabic follow the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) guidelines. For the names of musicians and their recorded songs, I have remained faithful to their spelling in the

French orthography at the time. (thus, Messaoud Habib and not Mas'ud Habib). All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

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RESEARCH LANGUAGES

Arabic; Judeo-Arabic; Hebrew; French

Prelude

At the turn of the twentieth century, a young Algerian Jew by the name of Edmond Nathan Yafil embarked on a mission to save the soul of a musical heritage that he referred to, alternately, as “Arab,” “Muslim,” and “Andalusian.” To do so, Yafil moved between his native Algiers and Tlemcen in order to gather the scattered works of the *nuba*, the Andalusian musical suite, a repertoire he described as cherished “by the lovers of Muslim arts and by Muslims themselves” — and at acute risk of disappearing after hundreds of years of displacement from medieval Iberia.¹ Yafil construed his mission as a national one. He also made clear that time was of the essence. After years of a project requiring that he “knock on many doors and show an obstinate perseverance,” Yafil published his magnum opus — *Majmu‘ al-aghani wa-l-alḥan min kalam al-andalus (the Collection of Songs and Melodies from the Words of al-Andalus)* — in 1904.²

Yafil’s *Collection of Songs and Melodies from the Words of al-Andalus* (or, the *majmu‘*) was immediately heralded as *the* authoritative work on Andalusian music. Over the next two decades, Yafil extended his authority to other domains. He directed, for example, the on the ground efforts of the Gramophone, Pathé, and Odéon labels (with the latter bearing his name — *Disque Yafil* — for a time). He also founded El Moutribia, Algeria’s first modern Andalusian orchestra. Later, he assumed the first chair of Arab music at the Algiers Conservatory.³ His

¹ Jonathan Glasser, “Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb,” PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2008), p. 127.

² Glasser, “Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb,” p. 127.

³ Nadya Bouzar-Kasbadji, *L’émergence artistique algérienne au XXe siècle: contribution de la musique et du théâtre algérois à la renaissance culturelle et à la prise de conscience nationaliste*, Ben Aknoun, Alger: Office des publications universitaires, 1988, p. 50.

authority and contribution have aged well. Over a century later, his original Arabic-language publication retains its foundational status in Algeria and other parts of the Maghrib, as does Yafil.

It is more accurate, however, to speak not of a single publication by Yafil but of two. In 1904, Yafil published a Judeo-Arabic version of his text alongside his Arabic one. Or maybe, it was the other way around; perhaps his Arabic language *Majmu'* was actually meant to accompany his Judeo-Arabic *Diwan al-aghani min kalam al-Andalus* (*Treasury of Songs from the Words of al-Andalus*), written in a mélange of classical and colloquial Arabic in Hebrew orthography. Regardless, Yafil's choice to publish his work in two languages reveals something fundamental about his scholarship and professional interests. While Yafil's ethnographic expedition was far from an explicit pursuit of the Jewish, it revealed its Jewishness at nearly every turn. His collaborators on the *Majmu'* and *Diwan*, the artists he recorded with Gramophone, Pathé, and Odéon, the members of El Moutribia, and his students at the Algiers Conservatory were overwhelmingly Jews, as was Yafil himself. To make music in the early twentieth century Maghrib was to immerse oneself in a Jewish world.

Edmond Nathan Yafil was well placed then to pursue music as a career. He was practically raised on it. Yafil was born to Makhlouf Yafil and Mouni Aboucaya in 1874 in the lower Casbah of Algiers.⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, that area of the Casbah, a decidedly Jewish one, was known for its cheap eats and its cafés — and the musicians and music-lovers who moved between them. The elder Yafil operated one of those greasy spoon restaurants — Makhlouf Loubia — which specialized in the white bean and tomato soup (in Arabic, *lubiyya*) reflected in its name. Makhlouf Loubia was located at the very nexus of

⁴ Glasser, "Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb," p. 125.

inexpensive eateries and cafés-cum-performance venues at the corner of Passage Malakoff, close to Rue Jenina. In earshot were famed turn-of-the century cafés like Café Malakoff — still in operation — and Café El-Boze, which was “composed of young mélomanes and Jews.”⁵

While Makhoulf and Mouni Yafil were born as native, Arabophone subjects of French Empire, their son Edmond Nathan Yafil French was born a citizen of France, who would be taught to speak an effortless French in addition to his mother tongue of Arabic. This was so because four years before Edmond’s birth, in 1870, France’s Government of National Defense adopted the Crémieux Decree, a legal curiosity which transformed almost the entirety of Algerian Jewry – including Makhoulf, Mouni, and Edmond Nathan Yafil — into full French citizens.⁶ In a single move, the Crémieux Decree, advanced by French Jewish jurist Adolphe Crémieux, had the additional effect of legally segregating Jews from Muslims, the latter of whom retained their subject status. In theory, Crémieux made Jews into Frenchmen. It also thereby made them into *colons*. As Sarah Abrevaya Stein has written, “the legacy of this ruling reached well beyond the colonial period.” As she notes:

It lay the groundwork for the eventual disassociation of Jews from the Algerian nationalist movement and consciousness; it made the emigration of the vast majority of Algerian Jews to France seem an act of inevitable ‘repatriation’ rather than, as Benjamin Stora has so eloquently put it, the ‘exile’ that it was; and it bred a historiographic assumption that there existed a natural intimacy between Algerian Jews and the colonial order that has arguably coloured the writing of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish history writ large.⁷

⁵ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, “TEXTE DE LA CAUSERIE DE Mr: Mahieddine BACHETARZI à l'occasion du Séminaire National sur la Musique Souvenirs sur les vieux Musiciens d'Alger,” 1964, p. 5, accessed June 8, 2017, http://data.over-blog-kiwi.com/1/21/68/62/20170206/ob_236e8b_causerie-mahieddine-bachetarzi-1964.PDF.

⁶ For decades, Algerian Jewish historiography has represented the Crémieux Decree as coeval to the emancipation of Algerian Jewry. The assumption was that Algerian Jews needed to be emancipated and that at the same time, emancipation was “successful” in as much as an indigenous Jewish population shed its culture and language for that of France. More recently, scholars of Algerian Jewry have challenged both of those assumptions. For a discussion of the above dynamics, see Joshua Schreier, “Algerian Jews, French Colonialism, and the Question of Nonelite History,” *AJS Perspectives*, Fall 2014, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/the-peoples-issue/algerian-jews-french-colonialism-and-the-question-of-nonelite-history/>.

⁷ Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Dividing south from north: French colonialism, Jews, and the Algerian Sahara,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 17, Iss. 5, 2012, p. 773-774.

What this legacy obscures is the fact that legal status was, in many ways, irrelevant to the quotidian intertwined worlds of Jewish, Muslim, and musical life in places like the lower Casbah. Makhlouf Yafil, of course, continued to operate Makhlouf Loubia there for Muslim and Jewish clients past the enactment of the Crémieux Decree. Steps away from the Yafil family home lived musical Jews like Eliyahu “Laho” Seror and Saül “Mouzino” Durand, practitioners of indigenous music and disciples of the famed Algerian Muslim musician Mohamed Ben Ali Sfindja. The interfaith genealogical network of musical masters and disciples remained unaffected by the Crémieux Decree, at least at the turn of the century. Despite their French citizenship, Laho Seror and Mouzino were still Jews of a certain class for whom Arabic was their *lingua franca*. Jewish musicians like Laho Seror and Mouzino made their livings not from music per se and certainly not as members of the French professional class but as watchmakers and shoemakers and as barbers and restaurateurs. Even as young Edmond Yafil attended the French *grand lycée d’Alger*, he remained grounded in the local, receiving his baccalaureate in Arabic language and music.⁸ And “like all of the Jews of that era,” Yafil’s Muslim protégé Mahieddine Bachetarzi later reflected aloud of his mentor, “he loved classical [Andalusian] music and at every opportunity afforded to him by his father, he went to listen to [Mohamed Ben Ali] Sfindja.”⁹ Just as Yafil pursued Sfindja, so too did the master of Laho Seror and Mouzino welcome the Jewish son of a well-known, if humble, restaurateur. “The great master was happy to receive him,” Bachetarzi told an all-Muslim crowd in 1964 in a newly independent Algeria

⁸ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, “TEXTE DE LA CAUSERIE DE Mr: Mahieddine BACHETARZI à l'occasion du Séminaire National sur la Musique Souvenirs sur les vieux Musiciens d'Alger,” p. 6.

⁹ Bachetarzi, “TEXTE DE LA CAUSERIE DE Mr: Mahieddine BACHETARZI à l'occasion du Séminaire National sur la Musique Souvenirs sur les vieux Musiciens d'Alger,” p. 6.

nearly devoid of Jews. “They developed a relationship.”¹⁰

This dissertation is the story of “the Jews of that era” who “loved classical [Andalusian] music” and who, like Edmond Nathan Yafil, shaped the trajectory of North African music, old and new, from the birth of the recording era at the turn of the twentieth century through Algerian independence from France in 1962 — and so too Moroccan and Tunisian independence in 1956. This is the cultural history of Jewish musicians, a minority inextricably linked to the Muslim majority, who came to dominate the soundscape not just in the French departments of Algeria but also in the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia for much of that period. That the musicians and music moved between the countries of the Maghrib has meant that I have followed their journeys across the whole region, rather than confining my scholarship to the borders of any one country.

This dissertation rethinks the Jewish-Muslim “relationship” in North Africa (in Arabic, the *Maghrib*) — through the figures of Yafil, his disciple Bachetarzi, and others. It is at turns a tale of harmony. At other points it is a narrative of discord. But this is far from a simple accounting of the rise and fall of the Maghrib’s Jewish music-makers and music-purveyors among Muslims as the twentieth century wore on. Nor is it a teleology of the inevitable. When it came to music, the Jewish-Muslim relationship in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia was often intimate, improvised, and delightfully unpredictable. In a way, this was not unlike the music itself.

At the outset of the last century, just as the phonograph gained a foothold in the Maghrib, a striking number of indigenous Jewish vocalists and instrumentalists, concessionaires, commercial agents, music venue proprietors, and sonic impresarios came to play an outsized role

¹⁰ Bachetarzi, “TEXTE DE LA CAUSERIE DE Mr: Mahieddine BACHETARZI à l'occasion du Séminaire National sur la Musique Souvenirs sur les vieux Musiciens d'Alger,” p. 6.

in the production of music at the local level and across the region. The international record labels, which began their recording activities in Algeria and Tunisia at the turn of the century and then slightly later in Morocco, boasted catalogues almost entirely filled with Jewish male and female artists and small orchestras, who executed what the companies often referred to as “Arab song” and “Arab music.” Labels were represented locally by Jews such as Edmond Nathan Yafil in Algeria, Jacques and Aurelio Bembaron in Tunisia, and Jules Toledano in Morocco — each of whom also acted as talent scouts and producers. Records were distributed within country and across borders through a network of Jewish commercial enterprises, businessmen, and peddlers, who sold and rented instruments and phonographs — in addition to the flat, brittle discs.

So Jewish was music across North Africa at the time that contemporaneous observers commented on the phenomenon as though self-evident, even if worthy of further inquiry in their opinion or subject to their derision. The Algerian case again proves illuminating. In 1930, for example, the literary figure Gabriel Audisio, whose father directed the Algiers Opera, commented at length on a new entry into the Algerian record market. “Parlophone,” Audisio stated in the pages of *La Revue Musicale*, “like the other record labels, speaks to the professional natives of Alger, who are, moreover, for the most part, the Jews of the country. This is a point that we should not neglect in the study of this music.”¹¹ Two years later, the Algerian critic Abdelkader Hadj Hammou took such issue with the Jewish composition of El Moutribia, the acclaimed orchestra founded by Edmond Nathan Yafil, that he referred to their output, which was a mix of Andalusian, Egyptian, and emerging Algerian popular music (all sung in Arabic), as “*la musique juive*” (“Jewish music”).¹² In 1937, Algerian Bureau of Native Affairs charge

¹¹ “Algerian Recordings,” Gabriel Audisio, *La Revue Musicale*, July 1930, 11th year, number 106, p. 57.

¹² Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires, 1919-1939; suivis de Étude sur le théâtre dans les pays islamiques*, Alger: Éditions nationales algériennes, 1968, p. 155.

Bachagha Smati, lecturing his fellow officers on the origins of the “Arabic language record industry,” castigated Algerian Jews. “It is, in particular, Jewish elements,” Smati proclaimed, “who were the artisans of this vogue for records.”¹³

Between the World Wars, however, the demographic balance of North African music began to shift. During that time, robust nationalist movements emerged in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Their leadership called for increased control over their own internal affairs. New orchestras and conservatories were established as a result. Motivating these activities was the feeling that Andalusian music had fallen into the wrong hands. Set against the backdrop of this shift and operating in tandem with the proliferation of radio, Muslim participation in music waxed as Jewish numbers dipped. Jewish musicians, still a sizable percentage of North African recording artists, pushed on. In doing so, they pushed Andalusian music and especially Arab popular music in inventive and exhilarating directions.

The Second World War was a turning point.¹⁴ While music was far from silenced in the Maghrib during those years, Jewish musicians, whether living in metropolitan France or in North Africa, certainly were.¹⁵ The post-war re-entry of Jews to the stage was slowed by the chaos of the drive toward Moroccan, Tunisian, and then Algerian independence. And yet, it was during this most politically turbulent of periods, in which Jewish participation in nation building became ever more vexed, that some of the most iconic of Jewish musicians not only made their debut but so too became national and nationalist heroes. When the independence moment finally came,

¹³ “Le Disque de Lange Arabe.” ANOM/15h/32, February 1, 1937.

¹⁴ On World War II as a pivotal moment in the politicization of Moroccan Jewry, see Alma Heckman, “Radical Nationalists: Moroccan Jewish Communists 1925-1975,” (PhD, Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015).

¹⁵ Metropolitan France was divided between Nazi German forces in the north of the country and the Vichy regime in the south. Vichy rule also applied to North Africa. Germany directly occupied Tunisia following Operation Torch in 1942. For more, see Chapter Three, “Sounds and Silences in the Shadow of the Second World War.”

some Jewish musicians stayed but most eventually left for the less familiar shores of France, Israel, and Canada. Wherever they went, their music and the memories of that music remained firmly embedded in the Maghrib and among the North African diaspora.

That the North African music scene was *so* Jewish in the twentieth century raises a number of initial questions. To start with the very question that initially launched this project, how do we account for that Jewish preeminence in the first place? This dissertation proposes some answers: that music in the Maghrib was classed in a way that favored minority involvement, that Jewish networks and connections permitted the growth of a trans-regional and trans-national industry that favored Jewish music-makers, that Jews' status as insider-outsiders allowed them to pursue careers taboo to Muslims. To me, however, these conclusions satisfy only in the broadest of strokes. As my research progressed, other questions, less obvious and more intriguing, came to feel equally pressing. What did Jewish participation in such large numbers say about their changing place in the countries of the Maghrib over the span of more than half a century? What was the nature of their contribution to North African music? And how were Jewish musicians and their musical output viewed by their Muslim peers in times of concord and dissonance? If Abdelkader Hadj Hammou disparaged the Jewish musicians of El Moutribia, Mahieddine Bachetarzi, the orchestra's Muslim president at the time, credited Jewish-Muslim musical harmony and Jews themselves for saving Arab music. "It is extremely unfortunate that an artistic effort has aroused confessional animosity," Bachetarzi wrote in response to Hadj Hammou in his memoir.¹⁶ "Good relations have done much more to aid the development of Arab music," he believed strongly. And the evidence bore that out. "Jews," he reminded his detractor, "YAFIL, Laho SEROR, MOUZINO, had been the first to spread it [Arab

¹⁶ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 155.

music].”

The outsized role played by Jews in the production of Arab music in the Maghrib should make us think anew about modern Jewish-Muslim relations in the region and beyond. Indeed, given that Jewish musical life was nearly inseparable from Muslim culture, my work has led me to question the usefulness of the “Jewish-Muslim relations” model as it is currently formulated. Instead, this dissertation suggests we consider approaching Jews and Muslims in the region through new frames focused on entanglement, enmeshment, and inseparability. Those frames, which bristle at binaries and boundaries, cleave closely to the paths forged by the very Jewish musicians this dissertation is so concerned with — the artists of a period not so far removed from our own who traversed physical borders and divides of genre with impunity longer than anyone could have expected.

This dissertation and its introduction take as a starting point the robust contribution of Jews to Maghribi culture as embodied by the figure of Edmond Nathan Yafil. So too, however, am I concerned with understanding how Jews in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia experienced a changing world around them. For that, we will turn in the coming pages to the Tunisian Jewish comic-artist Kiki Guetta, who took on quotidian pleasures, modern (in)conveniences, and the Jewish community itself in Arab song. But first we turn again to Yafil.

Edmond Nathan Yafil and the Jewishness of Arab Music

By the very end of the nineteenth century, Yafil’s family life and professional life came together. In 1897, he married Mathilde Messaouda Seban.¹⁷ Their first son Martial Maklouf

¹⁷ Glasser, “Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb,” p. 125.

Yafil, named for Edmond's father, was born a year later.¹⁸ Around this time, Yafil entered into another relationship — a professional one. Jules Rouanet, a French journalist-turned-musicologist who was sixteen years Yafil's senior, had taken a keen interest in the figure of Muslim master musician Mohamed Ben Ali Sfindja. Yafil, who had already developed a relationship with Sfindja, connected to Rouanet. Together, the two found themselves increasingly concerned by what they regarded as the loss of musical patrimony. Ethnographic and musicological work had to be done in order to salvage and then rescue what remained of the Andalusian repertoire, the music born of Muslim Spain. And it had to be done with Sfindja before he died — before he took his knowledge with him. As Sfindja spoke little French and Rouanet spoke no Arabic, Yafil, fluent in both, served as intermediary — and much more.

Between 1899 and 1902, Yafil and Rouanet transcribed, in Bachetarzi's precise estimation, "exactly 76 airs, touchiate, noubate, neqlabate, etc."¹⁹ Strikingly, the *noubate* (more commonly referred to in the singular as *nuba*), the *neqlabate* (or *inqilabat*), and *touchiate* (or *tushiyyat*), which together constituted the core of Andalusian music, were transcribed for that most un-Andalusian of instruments — the piano. The *nuba* might be best thought of as a suite, an ordered set of musical pieces. Traditionally, each *nuba* was composed of five movements for which an instrumental overture (the *tushiyya*) set the emotional mood and introduced the suite. Those moods may have originally comported to a total of twenty-four suites, each connected to and reflecting an individual hour of the day and each based in a particular musical scale known as a mode. By the time Yafil and Rouanet set out to transcribe them, only fourteen of the *nuba* remained. In the related but distinct Andalusian musics of Morocco and Tunisia, a similar

¹⁸ ANOM, L'Etat Civil, accessed April 9, 2017, <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/caomec2/pix2web.php?territoire=ALGERIE&acte=938443>.

¹⁹ Bachetarzi, "TEXTE DE LA CAUSERIE DE Mr: Mahieddine BACHETARZI à l'occasion du Séminaire National sur la Musique Souvenirs sur les vieux Musiciens d'Alger," p. 6.

number of complete *nuba* held on into the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century — as today, the remaining *nuba* were the domain of vocalists and string instrumentalists. Percussion instruments played an important, if supporting, role. As for a sense of what this sounded like and still sounds like, Jonathan Glasser has written that, “the governing aesthetic is one of heterophony, rather than either unison melody or harmonic progression.”²⁰ In other words, Andalusian music swirls as instrumentalists play variations of a single melody simultaneously. So too can it sound ancient — or at least medieval — with its classical Arabic lyrics, generally of unknown authorship, rhyming at the level of verse and chorus. As for its subject matter, love, wine, and exile loom large.

Related forms, like the *inqilabat* notated by Yafil and Rouanet, were derived from the *nuba* and later paired with it. These traditions tend to be lighter in sound than the *nuba*. This includes *qasida* (pl., *qasa'id*, also referred to as *malhun*), which employs colloquial lyrics — reflecting its Maghribi origin — in place of the classical Arabic. Together, the *qasa'id* and the *nuba*, constitute what Glasser has termed “the nuba complex” — the super-genre more commonly referred to as “Andalusian music” (in Arabic, *al-musiqa al-andalusiyya*; in French, *la musique andalouse*).

It was the nuba complex, Andalusian music reduced from twenty-four to fourteen suites, North African art music which stretched back to medieval Europe, known as *al-ala* in most of Morocco, as *san'a* and *gharnati* at the Moroccan-Algerian borderland and moving east; and *ma'luf* in and around the frontier of eastern Algeria and Tunis and moving across Tunisia, that Yafil, Rouanet, and others increasingly considered national heritage which conformed to borders

²⁰ Glasser, “Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb,” p. 9. I have found Jonathan Glasser’s dissertation and his monograph to be the most erudite and accessible explanations of Andalusian music in English to date. For his recent monograph, see Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusian Music in Urban North Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

and states. It was that heritage that was at acute risk of disappearing with the imminent passing of figures like Sfindja. In order to save the centuries-old music, Edmond Nathan Yafil would employ the most modern of tools: the printing press and the phonograph.

Yafil's efforts in the early aughts transformed him from a lover of Andalusian music ("like all of the Jews of that era") to the individual at the center of a colossal effort to rescue, revive, and then propagate the storied musical tradition. He accomplished that feat by publishing the most authoritative compilations and sheet music of the Algerian repertoire in the early twentieth century — all of which were soon to become the canon itself — and through directing the earliest efforts of the nascent commercial recording industry in France's Algerian departments. In both cases, his pioneering work exposed a constellation of indigenous Jews at the core of Andalusian musical practice.

Yafil's early oeuvre can be dated to 1902. In that year, he began publishing installments of sheet music for piano under the title of *Répertoire de musique arabe et maure* (*Repertoire of Arab and Moorish Music*), "under the direction of Mr. Jules Rouanet."²¹ As both the ornately-illustrated, mauresque cover and Rouanet's French-language introduction to the "*Collection Yafil*" — as it was also titled — indicated, Sfindja's Jewish disciple Eliyahu "Laho" Seror was an integral partner on the project. "This is the fruit of our labor," Rouanet wrote, "to which the well known native musician Laho Seror has contributed, which we offer the public."²² With an appended word — "native" — Rouanet seemed to pay little mind to the legal and emancipatory implications of the Crémieux Decree and French citizenship on Seror. The same was true for

²¹ Those installments were published over the course of many years. See Glasser, "Genealogies of al-Andalus: Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb," p. 125.

²² Edmond Nathan Yafil, *Répertoire de musique arabe et maure*, various dates, accessed June 9, 2017, [http://imslp.org/wiki/R%C3%A9pertoire_de_musique_arabe_et_maure_\(Yafil,_Edmond-Nathan\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/R%C3%A9pertoire_de_musique_arabe_et_maure_(Yafil,_Edmond-Nathan)).

Yafil, who labored over his most celebrated work — the *Diwan* — a Judeo-Arabic text dedicated to what he often called Arab music. He did so alongside “Eliyahu Seror,” as the Hebrew orthography on the frontispiece rendered his first name in full.²³

Seror and Yafil were among the earliest Algerians to record commercially in North Africa. In fact, Yafil was largely responsible for the sum of the output of the major international labels, which began recording in earnest on cylinder and then flat disc in the Maghrib as early as 1904. As Pathé, Gramophone, and Odéon found their footing in Algeria, their catalogues were almost entirely filled with Jewish musicians. Here, the hand of Yafil, who acted as talent agent for and representative to Pathé, Gramophone, and Odéon, could be detected. Jewish names already familiar to us — Yafil’s collaborators from his work with Sfindja — Laho Seror and Saül “Mouzino” Durand — and those whose reputation was no less illustrious like Alfred “Sassi” Lebrati, Zegbib, Elie Narboni, Maklouf Bouchara, Abraham Derai, Berhoun, Saoud l’Oranais (né Medioni) and an ensemble called simply, “*l’Ecole de la Musique d’Alger*” (“the Music School of Algiers”), were now remade as recording artists.

In July 1912, Yafil formally registered his free “*l’Ecole de la Musique d’Alger*,” as El Moutribia, making it the first association dedicated to Andalusian music in North Africa.²⁴ With a few notable exceptions, El Moutribia’s board members were Jews who hailed from the lower Casbah. According to El Moutribia’s official bylaws, the association was established “to save from oblivion the traditions of Arab art music.”²⁵ The association set out to accomplish its aims by “allow[ing] young natives to learn Arab and Moorish song tuition free and thus multiply the

²³ In the Arabic-language in Arabic orthography *Majmu’*, he is referred to simply as Laho Seror.

²⁴ Archives Wilayales d’Alger/1Z6/420, July 4, 1912.

²⁵ Ibid.

number of singers, who disappear with each passing year and who threaten the native repertoire with their disappearance.” Finally, “to spread this Moorish music,” El Moutribia started holding concerts. In time, El Moutribia’s concerts, executed by dozens of Jewish musicians, would go from periodic to regular and move from the public squares just outside of the lower Casbah to the largest venues in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Europe. If Jews were a decided minority in Algeria, their outsized role in music made it seem otherwise.

Just as Yafil’s activities in Algeria made clear the Jewishness of Arab or Andalusian music, a similar phenomenon was afoot to the east in Tunisia. Like Algeria, the language of printed songbooks in Tunisia was, in large part, Judeo-Arabic. To give but one example, we might turn to a publication of *ma’luf*, the Tunisian branch of Andalusian music, similar in intent to Yafil’s *Diwan* but narrower in scope. At around the time Yafil published his compilation, Abraham Uzan and Benjamin Costa published their Judeo-Arabic, “*Noubet El-Ha’ssine: Recueil de Chansons Arabes d’usage chez les Musiciens Tunisiens*” (“*Nubat al-ḥasin*: Collection of Arab Songs for use among Tunisian Musicians”), which was dedicated to a single Andalusian *nuba* in the melodic mode of *ḥasin*.²⁶ Given their choice of publishing language, their assumption, of course, was that their target audience of Tunisian musicians was either proficient in Judeo-Arabic or could read French transliteration as if it were so. Indeed, while the title page announced that the songbook could be read in, “Arabic and French,” it did so in the Hebrew lettering of Judeo-Arabic. The only Arabic in Arabic orthography to be found in the primer was a phrase found on the title page that read, “*Nubat al-ḥasin*.”

To delve deeper into the printed Judeo-Arabic songbooks of early twentieth century Tunisia tells us not just of robust Jewish participation in Maghribi cultural life but of the cultural

²⁶ A. Uzan and B. Costa, “Noubet El-Ha’ssine: Recueil de Chansons Arabes d’usage chez les Musiciens Tunisiens.” 8= 92 A 4246/Rare Collection/National Library of Israel (NLI).

lives of Tunisian Jews themselves. Beyond the attitudes of Tunisian Jewish communal leadership and the impressions of non-native teachers in the French Jewish educational system known as the *Alliance israélite universelle* (AIU), topics that have attracted the attention of scholars before me, the Arabic-language music of Tunisian Jews allows for something different, something more intimate.²⁷ How Tunisian Jews approached the day-to-day, how they navigated the trappings of modernity, and how all of it was subjected to their own satire emerge through song. If Yafil, his collaborators, and his activities give us a sense, then, of the Jewishness of Algerian music, Kiki Guetta, Jewish star of the Tunisian *belle époque*, provides us with a remarkable glimpse into the inner lives of Tunisian Jews.

Kiki Guetta and Tunisian Jewish Cultural Life

“The Tunisian Paulus,”²⁸ Jacques (Jacob) “Kiki” Guetta, was born in La Goulette, the port of Tunis, in 1882.²⁹ Coming of age at the height of the burgeoning *café-chantant* scene, Guetta consciously imitated the mannerisms and music of his continental colleagues — albeit in the idiom of Arabic and a shore away. In both song and on stage, he reflected a certain Tunisian Jewish encounter with French modernity. Guetta, for example, performed at the myriad cafés-turned-music venues that had cropped up in Tunis in tuxedo, not in traditional dress. And he ventured well outside of *ma'luf*, the Andalusian tradition associated with eastern Algeria and Tunisia. There, at that edge, he transformed, for instance, the colonially-inflected “*La Petite Tonkinoise*” (“the Little Vietnamese Woman”) into “*Ghnaïet Bibia*” (“The Song of Bibia”) — a

²⁷ The Alliance israélite universelle (AIU) was founded in 1860 by Adolphe Crémieux. The AIU founded its first school in Tetouan, Morocco in 1862 and then spread across North Africa and the Middle East. The AIU operated in French and was guiding by a version of the “civilizing mission.”

²⁸ Paulus, born Jean-Paul Habans in Paris, was among the most celebrated singers of the French *belle époque*.

²⁹ “Kiki” is a common Tunisian Jewish nickname for Jacob.

love song full of humorous innuendo, made for local consumption.³⁰ Guetta would ultimately keep the music — which is somewhere between polka and tango — but swapped the French lyrics for Arabic ones.

My friend, I'm dying for her
This Bibi, this Bibi, this Bibia (imitating the original lyrics of, "*Sa Tonki-ki, sa Tonki-ki, sa Tonkinoise*")
She has a sweet beauty and is so distinguished
And when she dances at home, she eclipses all others
This Bibi, this Bibi, this *Bibia*!³¹

Guetta's "*Ghnaïet Bibia*" was far from the art music Yafil was so intent on rescuing. It was popular music of recent vintage. It spoke to changing Tunisian (Jewish) mores and attitudes, in which Guetta could sing of lust — not love — on the public stage while inviting mixed male and female audiences to peer into Bibia's private home. And it was exactly what some Tunisians seemed to want. In singing of a young woman dancing alone, Guetta elicited laughter from his audiences but little outrage. The same might be said for his skewering of the institution of marriage. In "*Ghnaïet Marti dima ouraia*" ("My wife always hovers over me," he sang:

My wife always hovers over me
Wherever I go, she is always attached to my back
Do you hear my words, O Lord?³²

On October 30, 1907, the *Archives Israélites*, the French Jewish weekly printed in Paris, reported that "the hilarious Kiki Guetta" sang for an hour before a Jewish audience. As he exited stage

³⁰ Among the most famous versions of "La Petite Tonkinoise" was that of the Paris-based, American star Josephine Baker (b. 1906 – d. 1975).

³¹ Kiki Guetta, "Ghnaïet Bibia: sur l'air de 'La petite tonkinoise,'" Tunis: Librairie, papeterie & imprimerie du phénix, held in NLI, accessed June 8, 2017, http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE12250403&gathStatIcon=true.

³² Kiki Guetta, "Ghnaïet Marti dima ouraia," Tunis: Imprimerie de l'avenir, 1916. Rare Collection/0= 2010 A 12987/NLI. Interestingly, profits from sale of this songbook in particular were given to those wounded in recent action in World War I.

left, “the applause of the spectators forced him” back on stage.³³

Guetta’s subject matter was decidedly modern — or at least, captured the Tunisian and Tunisian Jewish encounter with a sense of the modern, in which the past seemed to be giving way to the present. Even as Guetta embraced the new medium of the phonograph record — recording with Pathé, Odéon, and Columbia — and borrowed from French song, he continued to narrate the changes around him in Tunisian Arabic. With comic levity, he harpooned nearly every trapping of modernity by way of the disc — from the switch to the Western shower (in Arabic, “*al-Dush*,” in French, “*La Douche*,” Pathé 59.102) to the clamoring for the TGM, the electric railway linking his La Goulette to Tunis and La Marsa, (in Arabic, “*al-Tramway*,” in French, “*La Tramway*,” Pathé 59.103). As for that mode of transportation, Guetta even sang of Jews who on the eve of the Passover holiday, in violation of the prohibition on work, prayed for God to preserve them, so that they could “take a ride on the tramway, like heretics.”³⁴ Alongside Guetta, Joseph “Sosso” Cherki’s Arabic-language “*Charleston*,” recorded for the Columbia label, and Mr. Cohen’s “*Hattikva*,” (“the Hope,” the anthem of the Zionist movement), recorded alongside a youth choir from Tunis for Gramophone, spoke to the daily pleasures and the national-messianic yearning of Tunisian Jews. In a similar fashion, Tunisian Jewish attitudes toward topics ranging from the automobile to the Great War (such as, “*Haj Guillaume*,” a satirical song about Kaiser Wilhelm and the impact of World War I on North Africa) were expressed in song.³⁵

³³ “CORRESPONDANCE PARICULIERE DES «ARCHIVES»,” *Archives Israélites. Revue Mensuelle*, October 30, 1907.

³⁴ Kiki Guetta, “Aadabna fi bissah,” Tunis: Imprimerie de l’avenir. Held in NLI, accessed June 8, 2017, http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE12250141&gathStatIcon=true.

³⁵ J.S., “Ghnait Hadj Guillaume.” Rare Collection/8= 2011 A 5145/NLI.

Just as Guetta took on all manner of subject, he also performed in all manner of venue. This included a cross-section of non-Jewish and Jewish spaces — from municipal theaters to music halls to the gatherings of the *Alliance israélite universelle* (AIU). Here, Guetta helps us think anew of the AIU, often understood as an exclusively French institution, as a place where Arabic-language music could be heard. On June 7, 1922, for instance, the *Alliance israélite* schools in Tunis hosted Kiki Guetta and offered an “Egyptian concert” at their annual celebration.³⁶

This dissertation is as much about figures like Kiki Guetta and a changing North African Jewish world, as it is about Edmond Nathan Yafil and Jewish embeddedness in a Muslim cultural environment. It is the yet untold story of Habiba Messika, the “second Sarah Bernhardt,”³⁷ Salim Halali, “the oriental Tino Rossi,”³⁸ and Samy Elmaghribi, “the Antonio Machín of the Jews,”³⁹ musicians who spanned the Maghrib in space and time. In the chapters that follow, however, it will be made clear that these artists represented far more than those comparisons belie. Their lives, music, and careers broadcast the sounds of their societies and

³⁶ “BULLETIN TRIMESTRIEL des Ecoles de Tunis,” ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE, no. 5, October-November 1922, accessed June 9, 2017, http://www.rachelnat.net/media/aiu/periodiques/FR_AIU_P1244_Y1922_M10-12_D_V05_N_F.pdf.

³⁷ The French Jewish actress Sarah Bernhardt was the most celebrated actress in the world at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. “A/S. des obsèques de HABIBA MESSIKA,” February 24, 1930 in *Watha’iq*, no. 24-25, Tunis: Centre national universitaire de documentation scientifique et technique, 1994, p. 122-123.

³⁸ Cabaret singer and film actor Tino Rossi, born in Corsica in 1907, was among the best-selling French recording artists of the twentieth century. Among other publications, *Paris-soir* referred to Salim Halali as “the oriental Tino Rossi.” See *Paris-soir*, March 9, 1940, p. 4, accessed June 9, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7644065j/f4.item.r>.

³⁹ Cuban artist Antonio Machín, born in 1903, helped popularize Cuban music around the world with his 1930 hit “El Manisero” (“The Peanut Vendor”). For the reference to Samy Elmaghribi as “the Antonio Machín of the Jews,” see “UNE SALLE COMBLE POUR ECOETER SAMY ELMAGHRIBI,” *Maroc-Presse*, April 30, 1953. Private collection of Amzallag family (courtesy of Yolande Amzallag in Montréal, Canada).

their communities that have long been difficult to hear.

By way of conclusion, let us listen to the past then once more. Here, we return to Edmond Nathan Yafil but this time to the solemn occasion of his funeral on October 8, 1928 in Algiers. At fifty-four, the man who embodied the Jewish contribution to Arab music in North Africa had died too soon. His death, as reported by *l'Afrique du Nord Illustrée*, “aroused strong emotions among the Jewish and Muslim populations of our city, and brought consternation to the entire musical world.”⁴⁰

Yafil’s funeral procession began on the morning of October 8, 1928 at the Hara synagogue on Rue Volland in the lower Casbah.⁴¹ From there it slowly weaved its way to the Saint-Eugène cemetery. Representatives of the Governor General of Algeria were in attendance. So too was the imam of the Grand Mosque of Algiers. A delegation of “Arab musicians from Algiers” and members of El Moutribia were present as well. At the cemetery, Rabbi Fridman, Algeria’s chief rabbi, “extolled in glowing terms the good man who was Mr. Yafil.” Then Mahieddine Bachetarzi, his Muslim disciple, spoke, “in a voice broken by sobs.” “Your life’s work, my dear master,” Bachetarzi told those gathered, “will not have been in vain, for I hereby make a solemn oath to pursue the object of the efforts of your active existence, and will, inspired by your example, endeavor to spread this music that you have loved so much and to which you gave the best of yourself.” Bachetarzi then turned to the orchestra and Yafil’s family to offer his condolences. Amidst Hebrew “liturgical chanting,” Yafil, “one of the greatest supporters of Arab music,” was laid to rest.

Yafil’s burial marked the ending of an early chapter of the story of North African music

⁴⁰ “Mr. Ed. Yafil,” *l'Afrique du Nord Illustrée*, October 13, 1928, p. 9, accessed April 5, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583775g/f19.image.r>.

⁴¹ “Les obsèques de M. Ed. Yafil,” *L'Echo d'Alger*, October 9, 1928., accessed April 4, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75812299/f5.item.r>.

in the twentieth century. That the occasion of the funeral of “one of the greatest supporters of Arab music,” was filled with Hebrew music is telling of an intertwined and entangled Jewish-Muslim history. What follows is the rest of that story.

Chapters and Sources

Each of the four chapters in this dissertation is at once diachronic and synchronic. This is a study that is as much about change over time, as it is about resistance to those forces, as well as the weight of a particular moment. We begin with the rise of the commercial recording industry in Algeria, Tunisia, and then Morocco in the early years of the twentieth century in order to uncover the Jewish infrastructure that was at its core. Not only did the collective efforts of Jewish label representatives and talent scouts contribute to the emergence of the region’s first superstar Habiba Messika, “the second Sarah Bernhardt,” but also its first scandal. In 1930, at the age of twenty-seven and at the height of her fame, the Tunisian Jewish Habiba Messika was murdered on a winter morning. In this first chapter, we ask what Messika’s short life tells us. In fact, her life is considered in parallel to the aftermath of her tragic death when her popularity swelled to an even greater degree. Her more nationalist records, especially those recorded for the Baidaphon label, based in Berlin, Germany, circulated in increasingly large numbers as far as Morocco. While the commercial recording industry was initially celebrated by French authorities in North Africa and Messika’s celebrity originally heralded, their patience with her and the business wore thin as efforts to stem the flow of her music after 1930 proved near impossible.

In the second chapter, we come to a focus on the popular music of the interwar Maghrib and the Jewish vocalists and composers who pushed Arab song in new directions. In this chapter, we dwell on popular songs like Dalila Taliana’s “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” (“Where were you, mademoiselle”), which were mixed in language (French and Arabic) and musical style

(often blending elements of the lighter forms of the Andalusian complex with waltz, rumba, and cha-cha) and brought a coalescing Jewish and Muslim public together like few other types of music could. In this way, close examination of the popularity of artists like Taliana and Louisa Tounsia, the inheritors of Habiba Messika's mantel, expand upon the near-exclusive scholarly attention paid to the Andalusian tradition, a cherished, high art music to be sure but one with a marginal following. In addition, the music of Dalila Taliana and Louisa Tounsia, in the Tunisian context, and that of Lili Labassi and Salim Halali ("the oriental Tino Rossi"), in the Algerian case, point to other types of mixing — of Jewish musicians passing for Muslims, of songs originating in one place but soon adopted over the border, of secular tunes rendered sacred, and of Zionist anthems coexisting with local forms of nationalism. All of this mixing engendered a backlash by conservatives and conservationists. As new orchestras formed and as high profile musical gatherings convened, Jews found themselves excluded with greater frequency.

In the third chapter, we find the Algerian Salim Halali marooned in Paris under Nazi German occupation. In coming to a focus on the fate of Halali and other musicians, this chapter provides a sonic history of World War II as it came to envelop North Africans trapped in metropolitan France and played out in the Maghrib. We ask what could now be heard and who could no longer be heard as the Vichy regime assumed control of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. We also consider the responses of Muslim artists to fascism and anti-Semitic legislation in the midst of war. Finally, we treat the music that marked the end of the war, which appeared in songbooks and on disc, in order to examine what those sounds reveal about the divergent experiences of Jews and Muslims in the preceding years.

We conclude with the meteoric career of the Moroccan Jewish artist Samy Elmaghribi, whose star rose in parallel to nationalist gains in Morocco. While Jews have long been written

out of post-war North African historiography, or viewed from the vantage point of impending departure for France and Israel, Samy Elmaghribi and his unparalleled celebrity — among Jews and Muslims in Morocco and Algeria — stand in resounding contrast. Close reading of Samy Elmaghribi allows us to capture the exhilaration of a concert or the simple pleasure of a radio jingle that is as rooted in the memory of North Africans as is the turmoil, chaos, and exile that marked the same era.

In the conclusion, we explore Jewish musicians departed and departing while probing the memory of Jewish voices lost and recovered.

To write the story of Jews, Muslims, and North African music in the twentieth century, I have had the great pleasure of working with sources conventional and novel. Together, the two show that historians can gain as much from the study of music as from the study of politics. While the French colonial archives in Nantes and Aix-en-Provence in France, and the various national archives in North Africa have proved invaluable, the documents there are heavy on bureaucratic concern and anxiety and light on the music itself and the larger than life personalities that created the sounds of a generation (or several). I have thus sought out (or in some cases, been found by) aging Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian musicians and their families in the Maghrib but so too in France, Israel, the United States, and Canada. Some musicians produced significant archives over a lifetime and multiple continents — preserving concert ephemera and handwritten lyrics, maintaining chronicles of recording sessions and their daily lives, and holding on to fragile shellac records and disintegrating tape reel. Their children have proved no less engaged stewards of this vanishing history. Chapter Four relies heavily on one such archive — that of Samy Elmaghribi — ably cared for by his daughter Yolande Amzallag in Montreal.

Because of the movement of musicians across the Maghrib and then around the globe, documents have revealed themselves in the most unlikely of places. In Jerusalem, I came across Radio Tunis transcripts. In Aix-en-Provence, a prying glance at another researcher's folder — marked "X" (9x/24) and filled with miscellany — led me to an exceedingly rare Parlophone record catalogue that appears in and shaped much of the thinking of Chapter Two. In Montpellier, a nonagenarian Oranian Jew sold me a stack of forty-odd Algerian records from the interwar period, including many by the Jewish artist Lili Labassi. Those records proved to be as invaluable to my research as the paper documents in traditional archives and good listening throughout the dissertation writing process.

For nearly ten years I have been collecting early twentieth century North African records, their paper sleeves, concert posters, phonograph needle tins, business cards, postcards from midcentury cabarets, and the like. Gathering such materials has brought me into spaces not typically associated with the dissertation projects of historians — like aging record stores and bric-a-brac shops from Tunis to Tel Aviv — and has allowed me to build a different type of archive. That archive permitted me to glean historical realia from the physical, such as the printed labels and matrix numbers at the center of records, which, in the best cases, provided for the name of a vocalist and composer, initials of an engineer, and the date of pressing. Records also sometimes carried the sole mention of a long-forgotten musician or labels in existence for the briefest of moments. Paper record sleeves, printed by music-purveyors like Bembaron and which listed their branches, allowed me to map the network of music-purveyors detailed in Chapter One. Every time I had thought I had seen it all, a record sleeve branded with a regional distributor of music suddenly materialized. Inevitably, that sleeve carried a record on an independent label I had not known existed, with a musician I had never encountered, executing a

piece of music that surprised and delighted. Above all, my homegrown archive, fashioned one record at a time, allowed me to listen to the past in ways I never thought imaginable.

That musical documents have survived outside of formal archives is remarkable. Musicians, in general, do not tend to keep their own materials. To begin with, music is a difficult business. It often forces our greatest artists to travel lightly at the best of times. Many of the musicians in this dissertation, like Salim Halali, endured war, turmoil, and geographic dislocation. Their musical output, their phonograph records especially, could never have been expected to last. Of awkward size and weight, made of the most brittle of material, vulnerable to mishandling or the application of the wrong equipment, and many decades old, records, containing just a few minutes of music per side, were seldom held on to by their creators. But individuals did. Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians grasped them carefully over great distances and many years hoping to hear them one day again. Now, miraculously, many of them in my possession and a number of them discussed in detail in this dissertation, I aim to give them voice once more.

Chapter 1

Recording the Maghrib

“In this letter, allow me to thank you,” Habiba Messika wrote to the heads of the Baidaphon record label on April 21, 1928, “for the fine electrical recordings of my Arab records which have been more than exceptional as far as I am concerned [...]”⁴² Since 1925, the global record industry, including Baidaphon, had shifted from recording acoustically – a process whereby the phonograph horn captured sound – to recording electrically with the aid of the microphone. Electrical recording allowed for a range of sound and a depth of detail unattainable with acoustic recording. Messika seemed to agree. Her latest for the Berlin-based Baidaphon label was, in her words, “better than anything I have recorded previously.” And the Tunisian Jewish artist, twenty-five years old and undoubtedly North Africa’s biggest star, would have known.

Just a few weeks earlier, Habiba Messika had made a series of recordings in Tunis with the Gramophone label, then under the direction of Tunisian Jewish impresario Messaoud Habib.⁴³ In previous years, she had recorded extensively with Pathé, also with Habib at its helm. “It is for the first time that I have heard my voice so clear, so natural,” Messika penned in an immaculate French cursive to the Baida brothers, the Lebanese Christian family from whence the label drew its name, “and I wish you nothing but success.”

Messika’s note, however, was far from private correspondence. It was a flash of brilliant marketing. Messika, a brand with few equals, was being used to sell Baidaphon records. Not

⁴² Baidaphon Records, June 1928 catalogue. “Istwanat Baydafun, Katalawg haziran 1928.” This catalogue is held at Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis. CMAM holds a number of uncatalogued catalogues related to Tunisian recordings.

⁴³ Habiba Messika recorded with Gramophone on April 3, 1928. See Gramophone Company matrix series 1898-1932. [York] : [A. Kelly], [2009] [computer file].

only did her letter of thanks occupy the first-page of Baidaphon's Tunisian record catalogue of 1928 but so too did her face adorn its cover. There, the Baidaphon logo of gazelle and the photo of Messika practically blended together.⁴⁴

But just as Baidaphon used the Jewish artist to sell their records, Messika — dubbed by her contemporaries as “the second Sarah Bernhardt” — used the label to sell hers.⁴⁵ Unlike the overwhelming majority of North African musicians of the era, who were forced into exclusive contracts and who were paid per record made, Messika's fame allowed her to move between labels, on the one hand, and to collect royalties from her thousands of records sold, on the other. Royalties, it should be noted, came on top of her standard recording fee.

In many ways, Messika represented the triumph of commercial recording across Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. So too did she stand in for its complexities. Those complexities included the mechanics and dynamics of the international record trade, which operated trans-regionally; the movement of engineers, their equipment, and talent between Europe and North Africa; the negotiation of contracts and royalty schemes — and the subsequent intrigue that followed on the heels of success. Indeed, less than two years after her Baidaphon sessions, which brought unprecedented attention to her and the label, and helped spurn the growth of the record industry, Habiba Messika, at only twenty-seven, was dead. Or more accurately, murdered. The news that she had been “cowardly murdered,” as the inscription on her tombstone read, quickly

⁴⁴ The gazelle (in Arabic, *ghazal*) is a classic motif of both North Africa and Middle East. The figure of the “*ghazal*,” which literally means “gazelle” but is understood to mean “love,” appears frequently in Arabic-language poetry and music. In medieval Hebrew poetry, the gazelle (“*tzvi*”) carries the same meaning.

⁴⁵ The French Jewish actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) was arguably the first female global celebrity of the modern era. She was known for both her acting prowess, especially her commanding performances as the male lead in the most iconic turn of the century theatrical productions, and her appearance — not to mention her eccentricities. Eccentricities aside, Habiba Messika drew constant comparison to Sarah Bernhardt from the earliest years of her career. The comparison, as this chapter demonstrates, was not without its logic. My thinking on Bernhardt is indebted to Mary Louise Roberts' *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

went international.⁴⁶ On February 28, 1930, the French daily *Le Petit Journal*, for example, ran her photo and a brief obituary on its front page. Under the headline, “The Tragic Death of Ms. Habiba Messika,” readers found an image of the young Tunisian flapper dressed as Napoleon II. Like Bernhardt, Messika had also been an actress and the two had performed the same title role in Edmond Rostand’s play *l’Aiglon*.⁴⁷ By 1930, both were gone.

Visitors to Tunis observed the impact of Messika’s disappearance on fans for years to come.⁴⁸ So too did French authorities across the Maghrib as the enduring popularity of her music became the subject of their increasing concern. Both Messika’s impact and the concern she generated is at the heart of this chapter. In order to plot the rise and tragic fall of “the second Sarah Bernhardt” — and the fallout from her murder, we will map the constellation of actors and conditions that enabled Messika’s emergence. As of yet, the fundamentals of how record labels like Gramophone, Pathé, and then Baidaphon operated in the Maghrib has remained little known. In connecting to the artistic directors who identified talent like Messika, exploring their approach to contracts and copyright, and parsing the mechanics of making, marketing, and selling commercial phonograph records, this chapter serves as a necessary corrective to that silence.

In following the trail of Habiba Messika, we will explore a history of the emerging North African commercial record industry inclusive of artistic directors, commercial agents, and even record store proprietors — in addition to the musicians themselves. One of the aspects of this

⁴⁶ Habiba Messika’s tomb in the Bourgel Jewish cemetery in Tunis is still accessible. Part of the inscription on her tombstone reads, “*Assassinée lâchement*” (“Cowardly murdered”).

⁴⁷ “Le Mort Tragique de Mlle Habiba Messika,” *Le Petit Matin*, February 28, 1930. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k632074d/f1.item.r=mort%20habiba%20messika.zoom>. Accessed March 22, 2017.

⁴⁸ For reflections on the impact of Habiba Messika’s death, see the travel writing of Henry Bourdeuax, *Le Miracle du Maroc*, 1934, p. 245-251 and Alejandro Vicuña, *Bajo Cielo Africano: Notas de un Viaje Por Marruecos, Argelia y Túnez*, 1931, p. 184-185.

story that will rise to the fore is the prominence of Jews as talent scouts, representatives, and music-purveyors in the Maghrib. Together with the artists, these Jewish impresarios and entrepreneurs made recorded music in North Africa happen.

Beginnings

Commercial recording commenced in Algeria and Tunisia during the earliest years of the twentieth century, much as it did in Europe.⁴⁹ Pathé, the French label for whom “North Africa was almost a home market,” started recording in Algeria as early as 1904.⁵⁰ The English Gramophone Company began its operations there and in Tunis the same year.⁵¹ The French subsidiary of the German Odéon label would soon follow. In all of those cases, Algerian Jewish impresario Edmond Nathan Yafil not only served as interlocutor for the labels but directed their on the ground efforts.

The first substantial Gramophone sessions in the Maghrib in 1906 set a precedent for the rest of the acoustic recording era. During that period — which began at the turn of the century with the advent and then utilization of the wax cylinder, continued with the conversion to the flat

⁴⁹ In *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age*, Andrew F. Jones writes persuasively that, “technology, in short, traveled roughly at the speed of the steamships that plied colonial trade routes” (11). Thus, we should not understand technology like the phonograph as first (and only) in the West and much later in the “rest.” North Africans welcomed the phonograph at roughly the same time as their European or American counterparts. As Jones shows, the Lumière brothers first screened film in 1895 in Paris, France. The same was done at a teahouse in Shanghai, China in 1896. To give but another example, famed Neopolitan-tenor Enrico Caruso made his first American recordings in 1904. See Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age*, Duke University Press, 2001.

⁵⁰ Pekka Gronow, “The Record Industry Comes to the Orient,” *Ethnomusicology* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 1981), p. 263. Independent researcher Thomas Henry has generously shared documents gleaned from his research at *Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé* in Paris, France. According to the surveyed materials – mostly the meeting minutes of Pathé’s board of directors – Algerian cylinders were recorded no later than February 1905. The first flat-disc Algerian and Tunisian records – 29 cm in diameter or about 11.5 inches – appear in Pathé inventories by February 1907.

⁵¹ Gramophone Company matrix series 1898-1932. [York]: [A. Kelly], [2009] [computer file].

disc, and lasted until the birth of electrical recording around 1925 — international record labels like Gramophone, Odéon, and Pathé dispatched engineers and recording equipment to North Africa where musicians were recorded in cities like Algiers and Tunis. In 1906, Gramophone sent engineer Charles Scheuplein, an American long-resident in Europe, to Algiers and then to Tunis to record. Scheuplein provided the technical know-how, recording equipment, and make-shift studio, which was usually housed in a rented hotel ballroom. Edmond Nathan Yafil was the natural choice to serve as artistic director for Gramophone's nascent activities in the Maghrib.⁵² He was Arabophone and Francophone, indigenous and legally French, the internationally recognized authority on "Arab music," and as a Jew he was deeply enmeshed with the very musicians Gramophone aimed to record. In short order, he became the artistic director for Odéon and Pathé as well.

In his capacity as artistic director, Yafil brought musicians directly into Scheuplein's temporary recording studio and populated Gramophone's record catalogues with talent. In 1906, those musicians and that talent included, but was not limited to, Mohammed Ben Ali Sfindja, the great Muslim master of Andalusian music, and his equally renowned Jewish students Saül "Mouzino" Durand and Eliyahu "Laho" Seror.⁵³ Yafil joined them — not just as artistic director but as recording artist too.

Acoustic recording required musicians to perform directly into the phonograph horn. The 1906 sessions under Yafil's watchful eye and ear were no different. When Scheuplein announced

⁵² See Allalou, *L'Aurore du Théâtre Algérien (1926-1932)*, Oran: Université d'Oran, Centre de recherche et d'information documentaire en sciences sociales et humaines, 1982, p. 13.

⁵³ Gramophone Company matrix series 1898-1932. [York] : [A. Kelly], [2009] [computer file].

his readiness to record, Mouzino began bowing his *rbab* (spike fiddle)⁵⁴ and started singing. Yafil accompanied him on mandolin. The sonic vibrations caused by Mouzino and Yafil were then funneled through the phonograph horn, which forced a diaphragm outfitted with a cutting stylus to convert the sound waves into etched grooves in the soft wax of the master record.⁵⁵ As the technology was only able to capture limited audio frequencies, acoustic recording favored higher-pitched sounds, which included tenors like Mouzino as well as instruments like his two-string *rbab*. The size and speed of records, which varied — in the case of those bound for the Maghrib — from 25-35 centimeters and hovered around 78 to 80 rotations per minute (rpm), constricted recording time to approximately three minutes of music per side. This meant that Mouzino and Yafil necessarily had to record a single selection from the *nuba* (the Andalusian musical suite) over a series of discs or adjust to the format by truncating the repertoire to fit one double-sided record. It also meant that popular genres, whose music was lighter, shorter, and thus better suited to the technological limitations of the phonograph record, emerged as dominant.

Following sessions with Mouzino, Seror, and Yafil, Scheuplein shipped the master records to the Gramophone factory in Hayes, an industrial town just outside of London. At Hayes, records made from shellac were then cut from the master. Matrix numbers were pressed into the grooveless wax toward the center of the record. Printed labels were then affixed, which, in addition to indicating the performer, their gender, and song title, identified the series number

⁵⁴ The *rbab*, a two-string bowed instrument with a spike at the bottom. The spike allows for the instrument to rest on the ground. The instrument is common to much of North Africa and the Middle East. As the twentieth century wore on, musicians increasingly swapped the *rbab* for the violin.

⁵⁵ For more on how acoustic recording works, see Walter Leslie Welch and Leah Brodbeck Stenzel Burt, *From Tinfoil to Stereo: The Acoustic Years of the Recording Industry, 1877-1929*, University Press of Florida, 1994; David Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*, JHU Press, 2006; and Steve J. Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds: Technological Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media*, Columbia University Press, 2008.

and the initials of the recording engineer.⁵⁶ The finished records were then sent back to Algeria and Tunisia in generic Gramophone paper sleeves for local consumption.

In the initial years of recording in the Maghrib, Yafil became so identified with the industry – representing Gramophone, Pathé, and Odéon — that at least one major label actually bore his name for a time. During the aughts, Odéon records — normally branded in French as “*Disque Odéon*” (“Odéon Records”) — were labeled “*Disque Yafil*” (“Yafil Records”) for the Algerian market. Special Algerian printed labels were even attached to *Disque Yafil* records, which depicted the traditional Islamic symbols of crescent, hand of Fatima, and five-pointed star — all in an attempt to promote Odéon records to the local population.⁵⁷ Yafil’s initial design and trademark for the label, deposited at the *Grefte du Tribunal de Commerce* of Algiers on July 23, 1907, featured a six-pointed star.⁵⁸ Even if some of Odéon’s Algerian records were not emblazoned with the *Disque Yafil* label, *all* were somehow identified as Yafil productions. Most Odéon pressings, for example, carried an import stamp, which designated “Yafil” as the company’s agent.⁵⁹ Other companies, namely Gramophone and Pathé, indicated that Yafil had a

⁵⁶ Some of this process was particular to Gramophone. Pathé, for example, etched the name of performers and song titles into their earliest records. Pathé records also did not necessarily indicate engineer.

⁵⁷ For an example of a “*Disque Yafil*” record, see: “Meaalma Yamina* - Frag Ghezali / Ma Ani Fradji,” Discogs, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://www.discogs.com/Meaalma-Yamina-Frag-Ghezali-Ma-Ani-Fradja-/release/9465559>. On *Disque Yafil* records, the Odéon moniker was relegated to a smaller font just below Yafil’s name.

⁵⁸ The six-pointed star was a common North African and Middle Eastern motif. Henri Chamoux, “DÉPÔTS DE MARQUES PHONOGRAPHIQUES FRANÇAISES DE 1893 à 1940: Documents tirés des bulletins de l’INPI,” 2015, http://www.archeophone.org/rtf_pdf/Marques_phonographiques_inpi.pdf. Chamoux’s work catalogues the copyright for other North African labels as well.

⁵⁹ For an example of a “Yafil” import stamp, see: “Sfindja* - Chouhil El Aain / Ana Ked Kana Li Khalil,” Discogs, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.discogs.com/Sfindja-Chouhil-El-Aain-Ana-Ked-Kana-Li-Khalil/release/9465372>.

hand in a song or held a piece of music in copyright by printing “Ed. Yafil” — “Ed.” being shorthand for “Edmond” — on many of their records.⁶⁰

By hand-picking which musicians were brought to Gramophone, Odéon, and Pathé engineers in the coming years, Yafil helped build a burgeoning star system around an overwhelmingly Jewish universe of music-makers. This was reflected in the first North African record catalogues, whose rosters were assembled by Yafil, in the Algerian case, or likely with his oversight, as in the Tunisian case.⁶¹ In 1910, for example, Gramophone’s Tunisia catalogue was entirely Jewish, save for a single musician.⁶² When the Pathé catalogue was released there that same year, it was similarly dedicated to a handful of Jewish artists.⁶³ Likewise, in Pathé’s 1912 Algerian supplement, all of the artists on offer performing selections from the Andalusian repertoire were Jewish — with the notable exception of the famed female vocalist Yamina Bent El Hadj Mahdi.⁶⁴

The mostly Jewish cadre of North African recording artists assembled by Yafil performed a range of Arabic-language music, much of it related to the nuba complex but not all.

⁶⁰ For an example of Edmond Yafil’s name printed as “Ed. Yafil” below that of the performer, see: “MAHIEDDINE BACHTARZI Mahboubati algeria arab arabic islamic pathe 59653 80 rpm,” Popsike, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.popsike.com/MAHIEDDINE-BACHTARZI-Mahboubati-algeria-arab-arabic-islamic-pathe-59653-80-rpm/231926255579.html>.

⁶¹ For more on the early record industry in Tunisia, see: Bernard Moussali, “LES PREMIERS ENREGISTREMENTS DE MUSIQUE TUNISIENNE PAR LES COMPAGNIES DISCOGRAPHIQUES,” remarks delivered at the colloquium, “Liens et interactions entre les musiques arabes et méditerranéennes,” Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis, 1992. See also Ruth Davis, *Ma lūf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*, Scarecrow Press, 2004.

⁶² Gramophone Company matrix series 1898-1932. [York] : [A. Kelly], [2009] [computer file].

⁶³ “Pathéphone: Répertoire tunisien des disques Pathé,” 1910, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l’Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

⁶⁴ “Pathéphone: Répertoire algerien des disques Pathé,” 1912, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l’Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

This included instrumental overtures (*tushiyyat*) and interludes (*istikhbar*); more popular, colloquial, or lighter forms accompanied by vocals (from the *inqilab* to *hawzi* and extending to *qadriyyat*, and *zindani*); and increasingly, the spoken or sung comic monologue of recent vintage.

Yafil's imprint could also be detected in the prominent place given to *piyyut* (Hebrew paraliturgical music) in the first North African record catalogues. Just as Yafil had published his *Majmu'* in Judeo-Arabic, Gramophone and Pathé printed portions of their catalogues in the cursive Hebrew orthography known as Rashi script. In Gramophone's 1910 catalogue, "Arab songs, recorded in Algiers and Oran" and their 1911 supplement "New Arab Records," the Hebrew language-recordings of Yossef Bensahine (listed as a "Jewish cantor"); a certain Daniel (also listed as a "Jewish cantor"); Michel Dadouche; Elie Narboni (identified as the "cantor at the Jaïs synagogue of Algiers"); and Jacob Benhaime, (described as the "cantor at the Serfate synagogue of Algiers"), were printed in semi-cursive Hebrew characters.⁶⁵

It should be noted that from the turn of the century through World War I, consumers of music in the Maghrib had little idea of what their favorite recording artists looked like. Through the end of World War I, the only way to catch a glimpse of Tunisian Jewish recording artist Leïla Sfez, for example, whom Pathé described in their 1910 Tunisian catalogue as "the famous singer of the café-concerts of Tunis," was to see her in person at one of those *café-concerts* in Tunis.⁶⁶ Neither record catalogues, paper sleeves, nor the printed labels displayed images of Sfez or anyone else. Most record catalogues printed nothing but generic company logos and

⁶⁵ "North African Recordings, Discography," Sephardic Music, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.sephardicmusic.org/appendix-north_african_recordings.htm. In other catalogues, Narboni was listed as the "cantor at the Grand Synagogue of Algiers."

⁶⁶ "Pathéphone: Répertoire tunisien des disques Pathé," 1910, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l'Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

corresponding French and Arabic text on their covers. Early Gramophone catalogues for both Algeria and Tunisia, on the other hand, did feature artwork, but of the Orientalist variety. In both cases, the same caricature of a “native” in a mosque, clad in *jalaba* (a long, traditional robe) leaning on what appears to be a *minbar* (mosque pulpit) with his ear to the phonograph horn graced their catalogue covers.⁶⁷ In lieu of images and for those unable to read the labels in the first place, the beginning of all recordings featured an introductory announcement in a booming voice — “*Istwanat Gramafun*” (“the Gramophone Company [presents]”), for example — and then the name of the performer and his or her honorifics (“the master,” “the famous,” etc.). In its own way, this announcement system also served as an early form of copyright, albeit one that did not necessarily accrue financial profits to performers.

How payment worked exactly during the early Yafil sessions is not entirely clear. Likely, as with the case of Egypt, well-known performers — like Sfindja, Mouzino, and Seror — commanded considerable sums upfront to record.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, most North African musicians during this period, like their Egyptian counterparts, were paid per record or more precisely, per series of records. While Yafil as artist-producer took it upon himself to register compositions with the French *Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique* (SACEM) and then

⁶⁷ “North African Recordings, Discography,” Sephardic Music, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.sephardicmusic.org/appendix-north_african_recordings.htm. In other catalogues, Narboni was listed as the “cantor at the Grand Synagogue of Algiers.”

⁶⁸ In 1929, Oscar C. Preus, who headed the Parlophone label in the United Kingdom, wrote the following of Egyptian singer Um Kulthum: “You must know that our ‘Stars’ in the East are generously compensated for their services. Consulting my ledgers, I find we paid Om Kalsûm, a famous Egyptian-Arab contralto, only nineteen years old, E. £750 for fifteen records, according to the rate of exchange that month, being worth 20s. 6d. in English money. She would insist upon being paid spot cash after every third record...” “Round the Recording Studios, No. 1 — ‘Songs of Araby,’” Oscar C. Preuss, *The Gramophone*, March 1929, p. 412.

collect royalties on those arrangements, musicians in the Maghrib only started to pursue the SACEM path in earnest with the close of World War I.⁶⁹

The Gramophone, Pathé, and Odéon records produced by Yafil were distributed via a largely Jewish commercial infrastructure spread across the Maghrib. Firms like J. & A. Bembaron, founded by Jewish brothers Jacques and Aurelio Bembaron in Tunis no later than 1903, were initially established to sell Western musical instruments, especially pianos. But Bembaron soon turned to also supplying phonographs, phonograph equipment, and the phonograph records themselves as the record industry gained firmer footing. Bembaron, whose flagship store was located at 5 Rue Es-Sadikia in the capital, not only sold musical instruments, phonographs, and music but also took on forms of artistic direction by capitalizing on established and emerging talent who were intrigued by their wares. It was Bembaron, for example, that first connected Tunisia's two premier pianists of the first half of the twentieth century — Mohammed Effendi Kadri and Messaoud Habib — to the player-piano and its possibilities. On April 18, 1914, Mohammed Effendi Kadri, pianist to the Bey (the Tunisian monarch) provided a description of his relationship to Bembaron in the Parisian daily *Le Figaro*.⁷⁰ Interviewed by reporter L. de Crémone, Kadri recounted that he was “walking down rue Es-Sadikia in Tunis one day, when his attention was suddenly drawn to the Pianola [player-piano] on display in the window of Mr. Bembaron, the local agent for the company Aeolian.” The player-piano or self-playing piano — branded the “Pianola” by Aeolian — which sat in Bembaron's window, quickly drew him into the store. De Crémone informed *Le Figaro's* readers that, “this ‘diabolic’

⁶⁹ For more on Edmond Nathan Yafil and controversy surrounding copyright, see Jonathan Glasser, “Genealogies of Al-Andalus Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), p. 147. Ultimately, Yafil and Jules Rouanet would have a falling out over the issue.

⁷⁰ L. De Crémone, “Courrier Musical,” *Le Figaro*, p. 6, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k290289b/f6.item>.

instrument, as he [Kadri] himself called it, immediately appeared to be the dream instrument for the execution and preservation of works of Arab music which require prodigious fingers.” De Crémone continued, “Mr. Kadri had nothing more than a single desire — to record for Pianola a number of the more brilliant pieces of his vast repertoire of Arab music.” Thanks to Kadri, Pianolas, de Crémone reported, were now selling well in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. In addition to holding exclusive concession for Aeolian and its “Pianola” brand, Bembaron also produced Kadri’s music rolls and those of his young competitor Messaoud Habib on its own “*Collection Bembaron*” imprint.⁷¹

Among the keys to Bembaron’s success was the firm’s propensity to secure sole concessionaire status from any number of Europe-based music and record companies. In this way, the company cornered the music market and record industry in the Maghrib. As they did with Aeolian, Bembaron quickly established themselves as the exclusive representatives of Pathé’s Arab music catalogue in Tunisia. Indeed, throughout the interwar period, Bembaron acquired “sole concessionaire” status for nearly every international record label that entered the Tunisian market.

Bembaron’s reach – in Tunisia and beyond — was also crucial. In the years after the establishment of the French and Spanish protectorates in Morocco in 1912 — or perhaps, more accurately, in the aftermath of Gramophone’s first recording sessions there in 1913 — Bembaron expanded its operations to the far edge of the Maghrib.⁷² In 1916, Bembaron partnered with

⁷¹ For an example of a Messaoud Habib piano roll on “Collection Bembaron,” see: “Tickling the Ivory in Tunisia: Messaoud Habib and the 1928 Columbia Records Sessions,” Jewish Maghrib Jukebox, May 12, 2016, accessed April 28, 2017, jewishmorocco.blogspot.com/2016/05/tickling-ivory-in-tunisia-messaoud.html.

⁷² Gramophone’s earliest Moroccan recordings date to September and October 1913. Again, Jewish artists featured prominently. Among them were m'aalim Simon of Mogador and m'aalim Joseph Elmalah, recorded in Marrakesh; and the cantor Mushi Seneha, recorded in Tangier. Gramophone Company matrix series 1898-1932. [York] : [A. Kelly], [2009] [computer file].

Raoul Hazan, a son-in-law to one of brothers, to form the flagship Bembaron et Hazan franchise, based in Casablanca. Bembaron et Hazan, purveyors of “pianos et musique,” launched in “old Casablanca,” in the midst of World War I before moving to their better known location at 86 Rue de Bouskoura.⁷³

In Morocco, Bembaron et Hazan soon operated branches in Rabat, Meknes, Fez, Kenitra, Tangier, Larache, Oujda, Marrakesh, Mogador, and of course, Casablanca.⁷⁴ By the mid-to-late 1920s, Bembaron expanded into Algeria as well.⁷⁵ Their flagship store in Algiers was well-placed, located on Rue Dumont d’Urville — in close proximity to the Municipal Theater. In short order, Bembaron in Algeria opened stores of varying size in Oran, Bône, Souk Ahras, Djidjelli, Setif, and Constantine.⁷⁶

In Algeria — more so than in any other place — Bembaron faced stiff competition from European-owned franchises. Among them was P. Colin, sometimes referred to as Paul Colin (its founder’s full name), whose flagship in Algiers was within earshot of Bembaron et Hazan on

⁷³ “La Maison Bembaron et Hazan,” *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée: journal hebdomadaire d’actualités nord-africaines: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc*, May 19, 1928, p. 59, accessed March 1, 2015, gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k58519778/f205.item.

⁷⁴ See advertisements in *La Revue Musical du Maroc: Arts, Theatre, Cinema*, edited by Raoul Hazan, number 7, January 1931, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://bnm.bnm.ma:86/ClientBin%5Cimages%5Cbook247997%5Cdoc.pdf>.

⁷⁵ “Au Stand des Etablissements Bembaron (Pathe-Radio),” *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée: journal hebdomadaire d’actualités nord-africaines: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc*, December 15, 1928, p. 12., accessed March 13, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583813q/f22.item>.

⁷⁶ The exact fate of those Bembaron et Hazan locations in both Morocco and Algeria is unclear. Bembaron et Hazan was sometimes referred to as Pathéphone Exploitation. In 1938, French intelligence reports started referring to Raoul Hazan’s enterprise as “Art et Industrie,” located at Rue 5 Chenier in Casablanca. See: “A/s Disque subversif relatif à ALLAL EL FASSI.” CADN/MA/200/193, November 10, 1938.

Rue Dumont d'Urville, and which held exclusive concession for Gramophone in Algeria.⁷⁷ At P. Colin, Algerian Jews and Muslim bought Arabic-language records — or those in Hebrew and Kabyle — on a number of labels, just as they could from Bembaron et Hazan and Bembaron.

In Tunisia, however, J. & A. Bembaron ruled the record roost. By the 1920s, Bembaron served customers from branches in Bizerte, Sfax, Sousse, Gabès, Nabeul, Béja, Le Kef, Mateur, and Mahdia, and boasted seven locations in Tunis alone.⁷⁸ In addition to its headquarters on 5 rue Es-Sadikia, Bembaron establishments could be found on Rue de la Casbah, Rue Bab Souika, Rue al-Djazira, two on Rue Jules Vernes, and then one on Rue du Constantine run by Messaoud Habib, the pianist who had recorded player-piano music rolls for the company just a few years prior.⁷⁹

If Edmond Nathan Yafil built the commercial record industry in the Maghrib around a series of Jewish artists, he relied heavily on the infrastructure of firms like Bembaron. Both smoothed the way for Messaoud Habib, who placed Habiba Messika and the customer at the center of a rapidly expanding trade in records.

Habiba Messika and Messaoud Habib: Superstar Artist and Artistic Director

The triumph of Bembaron and the commercial recording industry in the Maghrib owed much to two singular Tunisian Jewish personalities, musicians, and frequent collaborators:

⁷⁷ P. Colin, which may have acted as Gramophone's recording hub, also came to rely on Edmond Nathan Yafil. See: Delahaye, "La propagande en pays musulman." AN/CHEAM/20000002/18, 1941. Société Colin-Trionfo held the Gramophone concession in Tunisia.

⁷⁸ Bembaron branch information is gleaned from Polyphon paper record sleeves distributed in the Maghrib. During the interwar period, the French branch of the German Polyphon label began recording North African musicians in earnest and Bembaron again held exclusive concession. Polyphon sleeves not only identified Bembaron outlets but also named Messaoud Habib as the proprietor of the location at Rue du Constantine. The sleeves are found in my personal collection.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Habiba Messika and Messaoud Habib. Habiba Messika was North Africa's first bonafide superstar. By her early twenties, Messika — actress, recording artist, and dancer — drew comparison to her globally famous French Jewish counterpart Sarah Bernhardt.⁸⁰ Messika, known as “the queen of musical ecstasy,” drove record sales like no artist before her thanks to her look, magnetic voice, and sexuality.⁸¹ Just as it was Habiba Messika that the theater-going and record-buying public wanted, it was Messaoud Habib — artistic director, pianist, and entrepreneur — who figured out how to market her to them. In doing so, Messika and Habib changed the course of the record industry in the Maghrib — at once, expanding sales, and at the same time, bringing unprecedented attention to musicians and their music. That attention, especially when it came from French officials, was not always positive.

Habiba Messika was born as Marguerite Messika in the capital of Tunis in 1903. Habiba was both her Arabic and Hebrew name. As for details about her very earliest years — where she went to school or what her family life was like — the archives are almost entirely silent. What is known, however, is that her father Daïda (or Daidou) Messika was a proprietor and that both her parents were amateur musicians.⁸² Her father may have even recorded although this is not clear.⁸³ But it was Messika's aunt, Pathé recording artist Leïla Sfez, “the famous singer of the café-concerts of Tunis,” who drew the young Messika into the music business. In 1918, Messika

⁸⁰ French Jewish actress Sarah Bernhardt, born in Paris, France in 1844, can be considered the first truly international female celebrity. Possessing both tremendous beauty and talent, she masterfully executed the lead — assuming both male and female roles — in the most respected theatrical productions of her generation and so too in film. She was received with enthusiasm around the world during her global tours.

⁸¹ Hamadi Ben Halima, *Un demi-siècle de théâtre arabe en Tunisie: (1907-1957)*, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines, 1974, p. 54.

⁸² For the most complete work on Habiba Messika to date, see the Master's thesis of Margarida Maria da Mota Ferreira Machado, entitled, “Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível,” Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2006. The detail about Daïda Messika is found on page 25.

⁸³ See reference to “Bnini Mssika,” in “Quelques-Uns des Artistes du Répertoire Tunisien de Disques,” Pathé, held at Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis.

was first “discovered” by Egyptian-born actor-singer Hassane Bannane, one of the few Muslim artists to be featured in Pathé’s Tunisian catalogues.⁸⁴ When Bannane found her, she was performing alongside her aunt in one of the *café-concerts* in which Sfez had gained notoriety.

In 1918, at the age of fifteen, Habiba Messika may have already started to headline concerts.⁸⁵ In 1920, she began acting professionally.⁸⁶ Months after joining Tunis’ premier theatrical troupe *Chahama Arabia*, directed by Mohamed Bourguiba, Messika assumed the weighty role of Desdemona in an Arabic-language adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*.⁸⁷ Within a year of her stage debut, she was selling out thousand-plus seat concert venues — such as at La Palmarium in the port of La Goulette. She was also quickly heralded as a star. “More than 1,500 people applauded the return [last night] of our talented and incomparable Tunisian star, Mademoiselle Habiba Messika,” *Le Petit Matin* reported on her September 20, 1921 concert at La Palmarium.⁸⁸ And her “artistic merit increases with each passing day,” the paper proclaimed.

Messika’s success soon earned her a number of sobriquets in addition to that of “star.” She was the “queen of musical ecstasy” or sometimes the “the sultana of art and musical ecstasy.”⁸⁹ She was referred to as “the star of the theaters” and “the princess of actors.”⁹⁰ Her

⁸⁴ Moncef Charfeddine, “La folle vie de Habiba Messika,” *L’Action Magazine*, no. 22, March 8, 1982, p. 7. Cited in Machado, “Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível,” p. 45. Mohammad Bourguiba was brother to Habib Bourguiba, first and long-serving president of independent Tunisia.

⁸⁵ “Pathé, Supplément au Répertoire Tunisien,” 1925, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l’Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

⁸⁶ Ben Halima, *Un Demi-Siècle de Théâtre Arabe en Tunisie (1907-1957)*, p. 71-72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁸ “Le Théâtre Arabe,” *Le Petit Matin*, September 21, 1921, p. 2. Cited in Machado, “Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível,” p. 91.

⁸⁹ Messika was called both “*malikat al-tarab*” (“queen of musical ecstasy”) and “*sultanat al-fan wa-l-tarab*” (“the sultana of [musical] art and musical ecstasy”). For the latter, I have consulted a handbill from a staging of “*Harun*

fans, ever devoted, had even taken the epithet, the “soldiers of the night.”⁹¹ One such “soldier” was Habib Bourguiba, brother to director Mohamed Bourguiba but also the first president of Tunisia in 1956, who missed secondary school with regularity in order to see Messika perform.⁹² But above all, it was the “divine” and “fantastic” Sarah Bernhardt — the pencil thin, Jewish actress who conquered the turn of the century French stage in traditionally male roles — to whom she was most often compared.

In a March 20, 1924 article on “Arab Theater,” *Le Petit Matin* reported on “a curious detail,” in relation to an upcoming Arabic-language staging of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliette* in Tunis. “The role of Romeo,” the paper nearly winked, “will be played by Mademoiselle Habiba Messika, and in so doing, imitates Sarah Bernhardt in [her performance of] the [title] role of *l’Aiglon*,” (Edmond Rostand’s six-act play about Napoleon II).⁹³ Much as Bernhardt, a woman, had famously performed the principle male role in *l’Aiglon* — or for that matter, the Prince of Denmark in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Messika was now doing the same as Romeo.

ar-Rashid,” which once appeared on a Tunisian scholar’s Facebook page but like so much with Habiba Messika has now disappeared.

⁹⁰ For the first nickname, see Ben Halima, *Un Demi-Siècle de Théâtre Arabe en Tunisie (1907-1957)*, p. 72. The second is again taken from the vanished handbill.

⁹¹ Among the earliest references to the “soldiers of the night,” is Abdelaziz Laroui’s 1937 article in *Le Petit Matin* entitled, “Les Soldats de la Nuit.” The article is cited in Mohamed Turki, *Abdelaziz Laroui: témoin de son temps*, Editions Turki, 1988, p. 242.

⁹² One summer in 1925, Habib Bourguiba and Habiba Messika even acted together. In his memoir, Bourguiba boasted of trying to persuade Messika to kiss him “amorously” on stage as opposed to “maternally” despite the fact that they were playing son and mother. “In taking on the role of her son [in the play], I demanded, before coming on stage, that she kiss me not maternally on the forehead, but...amorously.” See: Habib Bourguiba, *Ma vie, mes idées, mon combat*, Publications du Secrétariat d’Etat à l’Information, 1977.

⁹³ “Le Théâtre Arabe,” *Le Petit Matin*, March 20, 1924, p. 2 — as cited in Machado, p. 96. Edmond Rostand’s six-act play *l’Aiglon* takes the life of Napoleon II as its subject. The title role of “*l’Aiglon*” (the nickname for Napoleon II, son of Napoleon I) was originally written for Sarah Bernhardt. In 1928, at the height of her career, the twenty-five year old Habiba Messika fully assumed the persona of a Tunisian Sarah Bernhardt. By the end of the year, Messika had taken on the role of Napoleon II in “*an-Nisr as-Saghir*,” (“the Little Eagle”), the Arabic-language adaptation of Edmond Rostand’s play *l’Aiglon* (“the Eaglet” — the nickname for the title character).

This was not the first time that Messika, however, had acted as a man. In early 1923, Messika starred as the Egyptian military commander Radames in an adaptation of Verdi's *Aida*. Messika and her partner Bahija Seghira, who played captured Nubian princess Aida, were quickly denounced in the Arabic-language press. "All these sacrifices and losses, for what?" wrote Tunisian nationalist Mohammad Khalid on February 9, 1923 in the socialist journal *al-Umma*. "Not for anything great," he intoned, "but for the pleasure of seeing a woman, 'Habiba Messika,' dressed in the uniform of a man and conquering as 'The Night Goes On' her subdued colleague, the prostitute 'Bahija.'"⁹⁴ Like Bernhardt, Messika did not seem to mind or pay much attention to the violence of Khalid's words or other controversies. Nor did her fans. One year later, she was back on stage as a man — as Romeo at the Municipal Theater of Tunis.⁹⁵ If the notion of a woman "dressed in the uniform of a man" was not sufficiently scandalous, however, Messika's sharing of an on-stage kiss with Juliette, played by actress Rachida Loufet, stretched Tunisian scandal to its limit.⁹⁶

As with Bernhardt, Messika was like nothing her public had ever seen before. Messika's body type, daring sartorial choices, and overall look constituted a notable departure from the artists of a generation prior. Take, for example, her aunt Leïla Sfez, who was likened to the corpulent, French belle époque singer-actress Jeanne Bloch. Sfez's weight was even the subject of ridicule at the time, with accounts — no doubt apocryphal — of beachgoers in La Goulette

⁹⁴ Mohamed Khalid "*al-Malahi bil-hadhr wa-riwayat al-tamthil*", *al-Umma*, February 9, 1923. As cited in Muhammad Mas'ud Idris, *Fi tarikh al-masrah al-Tunisi: nussj wa-watha'iq*, Tunis: Dar Sahar lil-Nashr: al-Ma'had al-'Ali lil-Fann al-Masrahi, 2007, p. 114-116. "The Night Goes On" references Egyptian popular composer Sayyid Darwish's song by the same name. "Conquering" and "subdued" both carry the connotation of "rape" here. In *Un Demi-Siècle de Théâtre Arabe en Tunisie (1907-1957)*, Ben Halima notes on p. 80 that Habiba Messika and Bahija Seghira were also condemned in the pages of the journal *Lisan Ech-Chaab* on March 6, 1923.

⁹⁵ Machado, "Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível," p. 96.

⁹⁶ "Le Théâtre Arabe," *Le Petit Matin*, March 21, 1924, p. 2. Cited in Machado, "Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível," p. 96.

mistaking a swimming Sfez for a sea creature or stevedores using her large backside as a respite from the sun.⁹⁷ Kiki Guetta even turned those episodes into a popular song about Sfez. The few surviving headshots of Messika, on the other hand, capture images of a young, svelte woman (in comparison to her aunt), who captivated in black and white. Her slight stature belied a tremendous presence. She was a physical beauty. And she was fashionable. Her professional photos, most taken in relation to her recording career beginning in 1925, come to a focus on her round face, which was framed exquisitely by her finger-wave bob, which was in turn perfectly set just below her ears. Her bee-stung lips – together with her hairstyle – would not have been out of place in Paris or any other city typically associated with the Roaring Twenties. In at least one instance, Messika evoked one of Bernhardt's most iconic photos and did so immaculately. Here, Messika sat, wearing an off-the-shoulder, white gown — low cut at the back — tilting her head to the camera in conscious or unconscious imitation of Félix Nadar's 1865 series with Bernhardt.⁹⁸ In another photo, Messika stares directly into the camera, donning a cloche hat festooned with jewels and draping pearls.⁹⁹ In still another, Messika looks into the distance, sporting a strapless dress, with her hair wrapped in a glittery headband, and her neck adorned

⁹⁷ Raoul Darmon, *La Goulette et les goulettois: notules*, Tunis: Société tunisienne de diffusion, 1969, p. 41.

⁹⁸ Ahmed Hamrouni, *Habiba Msika: artiste accomplie*, Tunis: L'Univers du livre, 2007, p. 8. The dual language publication is numbered in both directions. The page 8 here starting from the Arabic side. Félix Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon) was among the pioneers of French photography in the mid-nineteenth century. For the photographs of Sarah Bernhardt in questions, see: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/sarah-bernhardt-a-french-stage-actress-high-res-stock-photography/128597010> and <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/sarah-bernhardt-french-actress-c1865-sarah-bernhardt-was-news-photo/464427941#sarah-bernhardt-french-actress-c1865-sarah-bernhardt-was-probably-the-picture-id464427941> (accessed May 1, 2017).

⁹⁹ Hamrouni, *Habiba Msika: Habiba Msika: artiste accomplie*, p. 8 (French).

with the silver, oval-shaped beads — possibly a family heirloom — typical of North African jewelry.¹⁰⁰

Messika's image was carefully marketed by her co-national and co-religionist Messaoud Habib. As is true of Messika, little is known of Habib before his celebrity. The few details gleaned from interviews with his descendants, however, help us begin to narrate his story. Born in Tunis at the tail end of the nineteenth century, Habib found his earliest employment at Bembaron's flagship store.¹⁰¹ According to his daughter, Habib's parents did not approve of their son's choice to pursue music. Of his professional life, Messaoud Habib's earliest "recordings" appear to have been a series of Andalusian music rolls produced for player-piano by the Bembaron firm toward the end of the World War I. Throughout the interwar period, Habib served as head of the Beylical guard — the Tunisian monarch's military orchestra — and was considered by many to be "the greatest native musician, with a reputation extending well-beyond North Africa."¹⁰² His instrument of choice was the three-octave harmonium¹⁰³ although he favored the piano as well. In addition to recording his own interpretations of Andalusian pieces on the Pathé, Odéon, and Columbia labels, he backed nearly every major Tunisian and Algerian musician of the period — Jewish and Muslim — who incorporated the harmonium or piano into

¹⁰⁰ Albert Abraham Arrouas, *Livre d'or: figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*: Régence de Tunis, Protectorat français. 1932, p. 132.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Paulette Habib (daughter of Messaoud Habib) and Murielle Abitbol-Levy, Paris, France, February 12, 2017.

¹⁰² For reference to Messaoud Habib as "ex-conductor of Beylical Guard," see: "Grand Gala Oriental," *L'Echo d'Alger*, February 11, 1931, p. 6, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7581624m/f6.item.r>. Mohammed Effendi Kadri previously held the position.

¹⁰³ The harmonium is a small pump organ, often portable, that was utilized by a number of North African pianists. In particular, Habib preferred the flattop harmonium.

their music.¹⁰⁴ This included Habiba Messika, with whom his collaboration began in earnest in 1921 and would hardly abate for the next nine years.¹⁰⁵

For the decade following the First World War, Messaoud Habib served as artistic director for the Gramophone and Pathé labels in Tunisia. Much like his piano-style, he displayed dexterity in the record business little seen since the early days of Edmond Nathan Yafil. As artistic director for Pathé and as owner of a Bembaron franchise, Habib nimbly marketed an already popular Habiba Messika to an ever-wider audience. In taking her physical image and juxtaposing that with the compelling back-story of a born artist, he helped to transform Messika from a star into a “superstar.” Under Habib’s direction, for example, Pathé’s 1925 Tunisian record catalogue featured a stunning headshot of Habiba Messika — round face, bobbed hair, and barely visible gown — on its cover.¹⁰⁶ This — the use of an artist’s photo to sell records — was a first not just for Pathé in Tunisia but for any label operating in the Maghrib. So too was biography. To the right of Messika’s photo, a short text, almost certainly crafted by Habib himself, provided for a snapshot of an artist born to record and destined for stardom. “Habiba Messika, born in Tunis, was, from her youth raised on Tunisian and Egyptian music,” readers learned — or perhaps already knew.¹⁰⁷ “Her parents,” the biography continued, “who were well-

¹⁰⁴ Messaoud Habib played or recorded with the Tunisian artists Asher Mizrahi, Babi Bismuth, Cheikh El Afrite, Dalila Taliana, Khailou Esseghir, and Louisa Tounsia — to name but a few. He did the same with Algerian artists Aron Haouzi El Baidi, M’hamed El Anka, and others. Habib also played piano on recordings of Hebrew *piyyut* and a version of the Zionist anthem “*Hatikvah*” recorded in 1926 for Pathé.

¹⁰⁵ “Le Théâtre Arabe,” *Le Petit Matin*, September 21, 1921, p. 2. Cited in Machado, “Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível,” p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ “Pathé, Supplément au Répertoire Tunisien,” 1925, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l’Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

¹⁰⁷ “Pathé, Supplément au Répertoire Tunisien,” 1925, BNF.

known musicians, provided her with a firm footing in music, which today has placed her among the leading Tunisian stars.” The biography ended on even more triumphant note:

Her debut can be dated to 1918 and the many concerts where she made herself heard. In the grand Arab operas, she has always played the lead roles [...] since then, she has reached the highest of echelons, making her one of the biggest celebrities in all of North Africa.

And the records of “one of the biggest celebrities in all of North Africa” — the catalogue’s cover made clear — could be purchased at Pathé’s Tunisian concessionaire: “J. & A. Bembaron, 5 Rue Es-Sadikia, Tunis.”

In that Pathé catalogue, the term “superstar” was applied to a North African artist for the first time.¹⁰⁸ It was Habiba Messika, of course, who carried the honor. In fact, Messika — who graced the catalogue’s cover and whose name and title (“superstar”) were printed in the largest lettering of any of the artists on offer — enjoyed another distinction. Of the twenty-page publication, more than a quarter of its pages were dedicated to Messika’s recordings. Among those were adaptations of Egyptian popular song by Sayyid Darwish, then ascendant across the region, like “*Harrag Alaya Baba Ma Rouhchi Cinéma*” (“My father didn’t let me go to the cinema,” Pathé 59316) and “*Cham el Cocaine*” (“Snorting Cocaine,” Pathé 59302), in addition to Tunisian fare like the folkloric *arubi*.¹⁰⁹

To be sure, Messika needed only be seen or heard in order to gain new fans or sate “the soldiers of the night.” That she was talented is beyond question. But the use of Messika’s image — the cornerstone of Habib’s marketing effort — was indeed an innovation and was later to be emulated. Her likeness, for example, was put to use by Pathé in two additionally novel ways in

¹⁰⁸ In the French, Habiba Messika was declared a “*Super-vedette Tunisienne*” (“Tunisian superstar”) and in Arabic, “*al-najma al-tunsiyya*” (“a Tunisian star” or “a Tunisian superstar”).

¹⁰⁹ “*Cham el Cocaine*” (“*Sham al-kokayn*”) was composed by Sayyid Darwish, among the early pioneers of Egyptian popular music including comic monologues and the *taqtuqa* (light-hearted ditties in colloquial Arabic). Messika covered many an Egyptian song from the era including those made popular by women. For discussion of women and music in early twentieth century Egypt, see: Frédéric Lagrange, “Women in the Singing Business, Women in Songs,” *History Compass* 7/1, 2009.

the coming year: first, with the publishing of the label's supplementary photo spread of its Tunisian artists; and second, with photo stickers affixed to her records. At the center of that photo spread, the first and possibly only of its kind, was none other than Habiba Messika — complete with curls and cupid's bow lips. That same circled portrait was then printed as a sticker — with her name inadvertently misspelled as “Habiba Messica” — and adhered to the labels on all of her 1926 Pathé recordings.¹¹⁰ In this way, Pathé, under the direction of Habib, turned generic, image-less labels into image-focused tools for promotion. Again the photo stickers were a first for a North African and rare for European artists as well. Among the few to earn their visage on sticker was the world's highest paid female entertainer of the early twentieth century: French singer-actress Mistinguett of Moulin Rouge fame.¹¹¹ Under Messaoud Habib, the artistic director, Habiba Messika, the superstar, could now be seen everywhere.

¹¹⁰ “Quelques-Uns des Artistes du Répertoire Tunisien de Disques,” Pathe, This is held at Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis. For an example of a “Habiba Messica” sticker, see: “Ana achakt (III), Messika, Habiba,” accessed May 1, 2017, http://www.phonobase.org/simple_search.php?Tout=Habiba%20&langue=fr&Ordre=&ligne=0&limite=1.

¹¹¹ David Bret, *The Mistinguett Legend*, Robson, 1990, p. 91.

Growing Talent, Growing Profits, and Growing Pains

In the North African record industry — like any industry — the work of artistic directors like Messaoud Habib to grow talent and grow profits led inevitably to growing pains. To be fair, in addition to turning stars like Messika into superstars, Messaoud Habib identified up-and-coming talent in a way that was not dissimilar to his predecessor Edmond Nathan Yafil.¹¹² The manner in which Habib pressed emerging artists to record and then paid them per series of records — rather than arranging copyright and then royalties — harked back to the days when the labels were still staking out new territory. But the system Habib inherited was coming under attack. To understand both the old process and then the new, we turn first to Tunisian Jewish rising star Raoul Journo before parsing the words of Mahieddine Bachetarzi, the inheritor of both Yafil and his portfolio at the Gramophone company.

Raoul Journo, born in Tunis in 1911, stormed onto the Tunisian recording scene in 1932. Like Messika, Journo was raised on the very music he made into a career. That musical upbringing, again like Messika, was thoroughly Jewish. At his family's synagogue, for example, Journo was introduced to the chanting of Pathé recording artists Babi Bismuth and Messaoud Chelly.¹¹³ At his school, the *Alliance israélite* on Rue Malta Sghira in the Hafsia neighborhood, his music teacher Gaston Bsiri — also a recording artist of renown — instructed him in all manner of Tunisian and Tripolitanian song.¹¹⁴ As for the phonograph and its potential, his

¹¹² For Yafil's discovery of Mahieddine Bachetarzi, "the Caruso of the Desert," see: Jonathan Glasser, "Genealogies of Al-Andalus Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), especially Chapter Five.

¹¹³ Bismuth and Chelly were *paytanim* (singers of *piyyut*) at the El Fassi synagogue in Tunis. See Raoul Journo, *Ma vie*, Paris: Biblieurope, 2002, p. 44-45.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

neighbor Mr. Cohen, who owned such a device and a large assortment of records, was responsible for what Journo described as his fascination with the medium.¹¹⁵

Messaoud Habib had clearly heard of Journo before the two formally met in 1932. That year, Habib and Journo had their first encounter when Habib's eldest daughter agreed to marry Journo's uncle. Habib then invited an untested Journo to perform at the pre-wedding ceremony.¹¹⁶ Habib was impressed by Journo. "I would like you to come to the Hôtel Moderne tomorrow, on Rue de Constantine," Habib informed him following the bridal henna, "we are going to make a recording for Pathé-Marconi, it is an absolute necessity that you come make a record."¹¹⁷ Journo — unbeknownst to him at the time — had successfully auditioned for Pathé. When Journo showed up at the Hôtel Moderne the following morning at the appointed time — as instructed by Habib — he found the master musicians of Tunis already there and "already ready for battle."¹¹⁸ Despite their readiness, the all-Jewish orchestra, which included Khailou Esseghir on violin, Bichi Slama on *'ud*, Lilli Fratti on *tar*, and Sion Bissana on *darbuka* — was soon dismissed by Habib.¹¹⁹ This was not the sound he wanted. Journo's debut record would be a solo effort.

¹¹⁵ Journo, *Ma vie*, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 125. Traditionally, Tunisian weddings – Jewish and Muslim – were preceded by parties in which the bride and the bridal party were adorned with henna tattoos. Pre-wedding ceremonies were usually gender segregated with one notable exception: blind Jewish male musicians often performed at female gatherings.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

Messaoud Habib instead marched Journo to the flagship Bembaron location, which had a studio on premises.¹²⁰ “I’m having him make a record [...] he will sing solo with his ‘ud,” Habib apparently announced to everyone and no one as he entered the store.¹²¹ After making a far more satisfactory recording, Journo recalled Habib narrating next steps in the process to an employee. The master recording would be sent to Paris and then pressed “as soon as possible.” Less than three weeks later, the record was available for sale in Tunisia and across the Maghrib.¹²² Given shipping distances involved, the turnaround was remarkable.

As for payment, Habib maintained the system utilized by Yafil.¹²³ Journo was paid the paltry sum of fifty francs per double-sided record but only after first rejecting Habib’s offer.¹²⁴ Journo objected not because of the amount but because he was still unsure at that point as to whether he desired a career in music. “Stubbornly I did not want to earn my living in this fashion,” Journo reflected in his memoir. But Habib was a force. When the artistic director “appeared vexed” following the young musician’s refusal, Journo recalled that he simply “yielded and took it.” Besides, for the twenty one year old, fifty francs was something. “For the first time in my life,” Journo noted, “I felt ‘rich.’” And Journo was soon rewarded. Habib paid him more than double the initial sum for his follow-up recordings.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Journo, *Ma vie*, p. 126.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ As much as this was the system used by Yafil, we will recall that it was also the global industry standard. Oscar C. Preus, head of Parlophone in the UK, recalled paying Um Kulthum, “£750 for fifteen records, according to the rate of exchange that month.” She was “paid spot cash after every third record.”

¹²⁴ Journo, *Ma vie*, p. 126.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

In his memoir, Journo reflected on Habib positively. In Mahieddine Bachetarzi's multi-volume personal history, he did not. Like any industry, this one was riven by rifts. By the time Bachetarzi inherited the artistic director position at the Gramophone company, Edmond Nathan Yafil's protégé and heir, knew the industry well. The tenor, like Messika and Journo, was reared on music. One difference, of course, was that Bachetarzi was Muslim. This meant that when Yafil discovered Bachetarzi it was not in the synagogue but at the mosque — the *Mosquée de la Pêcherie* — a short distance from the lower Casbah. This also meant that Bachetarzi required permission from the mosque's rector to record professionally.¹²⁶ In 1921, two years after first meeting Yafil, Bachetarzi began recording for Pathé. In 1923, when Yafil assumed the chair in Arab Music at the Algiers Conservatory, Bachetarzi was entrusted with the day-to-day direction of the El Moutribia orchestra. Three years later, Parisian journalist Géo London could write on the front page of the daily *Le Journal* that, "Mahieddine is already considered the Caruso of the Desert."¹²⁷ Following Yafil's death at the end of 1928, Bachetarzi, "the Caruso of the Desert," was named the Gramophone label's artistic director for North Africa.¹²⁸ Perhaps because he had been on the other side of the equation, Bachetarzi felt it was time for a change in how artists were paid.

Bachetarzi's change in attitude can be dated to 1929, the year he led his first recording expedition as artistic director for Gramophone. Over the course of three-months of recording

¹²⁶ Bachetarzi and Yafil negotiated directly with the mufti Boukandoura, the mosque's rector and leading authority on the Hanifi rite in Algiers. See: Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires, 1919-1939; suivis de Étude sur le théâtre dans les pays islamiques*, Alger: Éditions nationales algériennes, 1968, p. 28-30. Also cited in Glasser, "Genealogies of Al-Andalus Music and Patrimony in the Modern Maghreb," p. 136.

¹²⁷ Géo London, "Chanteurs arabes et chansonniers nègres s'apprêtent à envahir le Paris de 1927," *Le Journal*, December 31, 1926, p. 1, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7624844k/fl.item.r>.

¹²⁸ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 110.

sessions across Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, Bachetarzi found himself feeling particular animus toward the labels and their agents. As he saw it, the situation in Tunisia was especially distressing. While there, he made it his mission to move artists away from relying solely on per record payment and toward the royalty system. To do so, Bachetarzi attempted to explain what French copyright offered: long-term accrual of royalties but with lower gain per record in the short-term. To benefit from royalties, Bachetarzi rightfully argued, musicians needed to register their compositions with the Paris-based *Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique* (SACEM), which oversaw and enforced copyright in France and throughout the colonies. “I again made the most of that trip by introducing my Tunisian colleagues to the society of authors [SACEM],” Bachetarzi wrote in the first volume of his memoir.¹²⁹ “Until then,” he noted, “they held it in great suspicion.” But calm soon turned to diatribe. On the musicians and what he perceived to be their victimization by the labels, he wrote:

They preferred to kow-tow to the blood sucking labels, who recorded their songs, than to address the matter themselves. It must be said that the agents of these firms had launched a very active propaganda campaign against these societies [like SACEM]. Good Lord! They demonstrated to these unfortunate song-writers and composers that it would be better to immediately earn a recording fee — (a sorry one and one that usually came with the entitlement to exclusivity for several years) — than to wait for rights, which were problematic (according to them) — from a society run by thieves and crooks — (according to them). Our good-natured Tunisians gobbled up all of these lies, spread with the same ardor by the French, English, and German companies, who quarreled bitterly over the market. They believed it wholeheartedly. In vain, I used [all of] my saliva as I made my [best] arguments. I had to make a stand in order to convince them not to be scandalously cleaned out by the robbers they venerated. I declared some of their works to S.A.C.E.M. as co-collaborations, naturally pledging to return to them the share that would accrue to me. At the end of a year, those who dared to risk the experiment were astounded by the sums they received. And they no longer objected to registering with the societies. One would think that the record companies did not hold a special place for me in their hearts! I also signed up my friends Mohamed TRIKI, Gaston BESIRI [sic], Maurice BENAIS, Acher MIZRAHI, Bechir FEHMI, CHIKLY [sic], among others.¹³⁰

To be sure, some of Mahieddine Bachetarzi’s words can be read as anti-Semitic. But it is also possible that in his attempt to grasp for language to signal his utter disdain for the state of the

¹²⁹ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 124.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124-125.

record industry, he landed on classic anti-Jewish motifs without actually subscribing to their intent. After all, at the same time that he referred to “the blood sucking labels,” he also claimed that the Jewish label representatives castigated the French non-Jewish executives at SACEM as “thieves and crooks.” Additionally, four of the six artists (“my friends”) who were first victims of the labels and then convinced by Bachetarzi to register their compositions — Gaston Bsiri (Raoul Journo’s music instructor at the *Alliance israélite*), Maurice Benais, Acher Mizrahi, and Lilou Chekly — were Jews themselves.

If we can move past what reads as implicit anti-Semitism, there is much to glean from Bachetarzi’s fierce criticism directed squarely at figures like Messaoud Habib. In fact, Bachetarzi explicitly took Habib to task for preventing musicians from reaping the benefits of royalty-based revenue. Unlike Bsiri, Benais, Mizrahi, and Chekly, Bachetarzi claimed that, “a group of young musicians was prevented from that route by the all-powerful Messaoud HABIB.”¹³¹ He achieved that “all-powerful” status, according to Bachetarzi, thanks to his leadership of his “grand orchestra, which was extraordinarily popular,” and in general, due to “his uncontestable talent.” Still, Bachetarzi lamented that, “he did not intend to share even the smallest of crumbs with anyone else, and the record companies — so cruel to the others — bent to his every demand.”¹³²

Bachetarzi’s portrayal of Habib as “all-powerful” and as unwilling to “share even the smallest of crumbs,” was no doubt over the top and rooted in competition. It also points to the fact that anti-Jewish sentiment or language could be strategically utilized at moments of need. While Journo depicted Habib as driven in his memoir — an artistic director who knew talent, pursued his artists with equal vigor, and paid them according to an older remuneration system —

¹³¹ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 125.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

it is clear that he did not see him as a tyrant. Bachetarzi, on the other hand, plainly saw Habib as a competitor. As a result, Bachetarzi attempted to sideline Habib, who was apparently serving in some sort of official capacity with Gramophone in Tunisia at the time as well. “Through my role as artistic director at Gramophone,” Bachetarzi wrote, “I was able to give the young team a chance [over Messaoud Habib]. I entrusted Kiki ATTAL with the direction of a new Tunisian team.”¹³³ In Bachetarzi’s estimation, Attal — another Tunisian Jewish artistic director and musician — soon surpassed Habib. Under Attal, “the recordings made by Gramophone quickly made known the names of these new musicians, and in the following years this allowed them to be applauded in Algiers and in all of North Africa.”¹³⁴ Presumably these musicians had also registered their compositions with SACEM.

Baidaphon is encouraged to enter the market; Habiba Messika goes to Germany

As the new artistic director for Gramophone, Bachetarzi was forced to contend not only with Messaoud Habib, his empire, and an entrenched fear of copyright among artists, but also with a relative newcomer to the region: Baidaphon.¹³⁵ Established in Beirut as early as 1906 by five members of the Baida family, the Baidaphon record label rapidly shifted their headquarters to Berlin, where cousin Dr. Michel Baida had been resident since the beginning of the twentieth century. By the outbreak of World War I, Pierre (Butrus) and Gabriel (Jibran) Baida also relocated to Germany. Together with Michel, these three Baida cousins handled most of the

¹³³ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 125.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ For more on Baidaphon, see: Ali Jihad Racy, “Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music: 1904-1932,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1976); and Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

company's operations for the first few decades of its existence.¹³⁶ After first operating in Cairo and Beirut in 1907, Baidaphon opened branches and expanded their recording activities over the years to include Jaffa, Mosul, Baghdad, Basra, Kermanshah, Tehran, and elsewhere.¹³⁷

Baidaphon entered the North African record market in the early 1920s.¹³⁸ Like other labels during that period, the record outfit arrived there thanks to French encouragement. According to a letter sent by Theodore Khayat, Baidaphon's artistic director for the Maghrib, to Yves Sicot, Director of Native Affairs in Morocco, the label initially touched down in Tunis in 1922. There, Baidaphon rendered its "services to the native arts in Tunisia [...] and recorded, at the request of the government, classical 'Maalouf' [sic] records in order to revive this ancient music."¹³⁹ For French officials, record labels like Baidaphon provided two necessary services. First, the recording of "traditional" music was believed to showcase French colonial commitment to the "preservation" and "revival" of artisanal production, much as with the investment in handicrafts like carpet-weaving and pottery.¹⁴⁰ In 1929, for example, Prosper Ricard, head of the Service of Native Arts in Morocco (*Service des arts indigènes au Maroc*), "tasked the labels 'Columbia' and 'Odéon' with making a number of recordings conforming more to our aspirations" — by which he meant the Andalusian repertoire and not the ever more in demand

¹³⁶ "The German 78rpm Record Label Book," Rainer E. Lotz, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.recordingpioneers.com/docs/BAIDA-TheGerman78rpmRecordLabelBook.pdf>.

¹³⁷ "Baidaphon," accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.sephardicmusic.org/labels/Baidaphon/Baidaphon.htm>.

¹³⁸ Letter from Theodore Khayat to Director of Political Affairs in Rabat. CADN/MA/200/193, May 5, 1937.

¹³⁹ Ibid. "Maalouf" is a reference to "*ma'luf*," the Tunisian Andalusian repertoire.

¹⁴⁰ For more on the "revival" of artisanal production, see: James Mokhiber, "'Le protectorat dans la peau': Prosper Ricard and the 'native arts' in French colonial Morocco, 1899-1952," in Driss Maghraoui, *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco*, Routledge, 2013.

popular genres.¹⁴¹ Second, music was useful in as much as it was thought to distract from the political. In 1930, Alexis Chottin, French ethnomusicologist and Director of the Conservatory of Moroccan Music in Rabat, oversaw a series of Pathé recordings bound for the Moroccan public.¹⁴² “You will see,” the Director General of the Office of *Instruction Publiques des Beaux Arts* wrote to the Director General of Native Affairs in Rabat, “that the effort [of Alexis Chottin] provides for musical distraction for the natives which pleases them and which does not degenerate into a means for political action.”¹⁴³ Years later, Theodore Khayat referenced the same two benefits. “I don’t believe you will be able to find an objection to my business,” Khayat wrote to Sicot, “since my merchandise is a Moroccan product, and I have no doubt that just as the government promotes Moroccan products, it will also aide this branch of music which is also a Moroccan product.”¹⁴⁴ Baidaphon records, he wrote in another letter, serve as a “distraction” for Moroccans, especially those who labored in metropolitan France. Records kept their minds focused on “their beautiful country” and not politics.¹⁴⁵

In 1928, Baidaphon operations moved into full swing in the Maghrib. At the beginning of that year, the firm installed the above-mentioned Theodore Khayat, one of their nephews, in Casablanca. In Morocco, Khayat worked with Raoul Hazan to distribute Baidaphon records

¹⁴¹ Prosper, Ricard, “The Conservatory of Moroccan Music,” *l’Afrique du Nord Illustrée*, December 7, 1935, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583757j/f49.image.r=prosper%20ricard?rk=42918;4>.

¹⁴² “Le Disque Pathe, Le Miroir de la Voix, 2me Supplément au Répertoire Marocain,” July 1930, CADN/MA/200/193.

¹⁴³ “Objet: chants arabes.” CADN/MA/200/193, September 26, 1931.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Theodore Khayat to Director of Political Affairs in Rabat. CADN/MA/200/193, May 5, 1937.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

through Bembaron et Hazan branches.¹⁴⁶ In Tunisia, Bachir Rsaissi served as sole representative.¹⁴⁷ In Algeria, Zuppiger and Company, headed by the Swiss-born Jean Zuppiger, held exclusive Baidaphon concessionaire.¹⁴⁸ By the end of the year, Baidaphon operated three stores in Tunis alone — two in close proximity to the Bembaron locations on Rue de la Casbah and Rue Bab Souika — as well as additional outlets in Sousse and Sfax.¹⁴⁹ In the midst of Baidaphon's growth, Khayat made contact with Habiba Messika. In April 1928, after completing a recording session with Gramophone in Tunis, the Tunisian superstar headed to Berlin.

That Baidaphon brought artists to Germany was a notable departure from the in-country recording practices of Pathé and Gramophone. It also coincided with the rise of a crop of nationalist parties in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, which in each case demanded increased autonomy but not yet full independence from French empire. That distance and the lack of French supervision allowed artists, including Messika, to record material that was markedly different. In Berlin, alongside the classical, folkloric, and popular, Messika veered headlong into the political.¹⁵⁰

Among the records that emanated from those Baidaphon sessions, Messika's "*Ala sirir el nom*" ("On my bed, spoil me," Baidaphon B 86.406) and "*Baladi ya baladi*" ("My country, O

¹⁴⁶ "a/s SAISIE DU DISQUE 'Qacidat Ait Baha.'" CADN/MA/200/193, May 8, 1939.

¹⁴⁷ For more on Rsaissi and their "subversive sounds," see Rebecca P. Scales, "Subversive Sound: Transnational Radio, Arabic Recordings, and the Dangers of Listening in French Colonial Algeria, 1934–1939," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2010; 52 (2).

¹⁴⁸ "Baidaphon-Record, Catalogue 1936," CADN/MA/200/193, 1936.

¹⁴⁹ As gleaned from a Baidaphon record sleeve in my personal possession.

¹⁵⁰ This was far from the first time that Messika engaged in the political. See her December 28, 1921 letter of complaint to the French authorities after shutting down one of her plays in Muhammad Mas'ud Idris, *Fi tarikh al-masrah al-Tunisi: nusus wa-watha'iq*, Tunis: Dar Sahar lil-Nashr (al-Ma'had al-'Ali lil-Fann al-Masrahi, 2007, p. 102. Tellingly she signed the letter with her French name "Marguerite" and not "Habiba." As Habib Bourguiba recalled, Messika was also set to star in an adaptation of *Patrie* (Fatherland) by Victorien Sardou, which in the Arabic version, carried the title, "the Martyrs of Liberty." See: Bourguiba, *Ma vie, mes idées, mon combat*, p. 169.

my country,” Baidaphon B 86.405) stand out. That double-sided disc, recorded electrically, with Messika singing into a microphone, was equal parts salacious and political but all of it was liable to shock. In typical fashion, “On my bed, spoil me,” — technically the B-side of the recording — began with a spoken announcement: “*Istawanat Baydafun, al-Anissa Habiba Msika*” (“Baidaphon records [presents] Mademoiselle Habiba Messika”). Then, as her instrumentalists warmed up — only to slow down — Messika started as she often did — with a piece of vocal seduction known as the *mawwal*. “*Ya lay—, hay hay hay, ya layl, ya—, ya—a—a—layl, ya lay—l,*” (“O nigh—, hey hey hey, o night, o—, o—o—o—night, o nigh—t”) she sang liltingly while one of her instrumentalists shouted an unscripted, “*Allah, Allah*” (“Lord, O Lord”) in testament to her greatness. And just as she reached her vocal climax, she unhurriedly voiced the titular line, “*Ala siri al-nawm, dal’ani,*” (“On my bed, spoil me”) four times before adding, “Bring me sweets and honey, and come to me with beer and champagne.” The song surely energized her “soldiers of the night.”

But it was the A-side — “*Baladi ya baladi*” (My country, O my country”) — that was the truly provocative. Here, Messika, in Egyptian accent, sang mostly of Egypt — “her far away country.” But she meant Tunisia — as she did with her half dozen other songs extolling the Egyptians, their leadership, and that of Greater Syria and Iraq. Some were marches, such as “*Marsh al-Malik Fu’ad*” (“King Fuad’s March,” Baidaphon B 86.473) and still others, anthems, such as “*al-Nashid al-Watani al-Masri*” (“the Egyptian National Anthem,” Baidaphon B 86.520) and “*al-Nashid Jilala Malik Faysal*” (“His Majesty King Faysal’s Anthem,” Baidaphon B 86.530) — but all sounded the same nationalist rallying cry. When paired with her explicitly Tunisian anthems and marches — as with, “*Salam Sidna Bay Tunis Habib al-Sha’ab*” (“Peace Upon Our Liege, the Bey of Tunis, Beloved by the People,” Baidaphon B 86.622) and “*Marsh*

Bay Tunis” (“the Tunisian Bey’s March,” Baidaphon B 86.241) — Messika’s message was more than intelligible to her audience, even if performed in Egyptian Arabic.¹⁵¹ And for those listening closely to “*Baladi ya baladi*,” Messika sang not just implicitly of Tunisia but explicitly too. A minute and a half into the song, Messika intones her “*baladi tunsiiyya*” – her country, her land, her Tunisia — before an emphatic, almost straining, “*WA-ana ‘aisha fil ḥurriya*” (“AND I live in freedom”) — to which the approving shout of “*Allah*” (“Lord”) could again be heard.

With her signature voice and iconic look, Habiba Messika helped establish Baidaphon among North Africans. That Baidaphon’s 1928 catalogue featured a radiating image of Messika nearly inseparable from their masthead and logo was surely symbolic, if not intentional. Indeed, the catalogue was mostly about her. Messika’s handwritten letter — thanking them “for the fine electrical recordings” — graced page one of the catalogue. On the first page that featured records — her records, an even larger photo of “Mademoiselle Habiba Messika,” could be found. Here, wearing a strapless dress, Messika looked past the camera and to her audience. That audience was now global, reaching the far reaches of the Arab diaspora, including locals like Detroit, Michigan. There Saleeh Farroh, for example, clamoring for music about his native Greater Syria, purchased a Habiba Messika record on Baidaphon called, “*Anti Souriya Biladi*” (“Syria, you are my country” Baidaphon B 86596) and placed an address label on it lest it be lost.¹⁵²

But how had Messika recorded with Baidaphon? Was she not under contract with Gramophone? Or Pathé? To be sure, North African musicians were known to switch from other labels to Baidaphon precisely because the German-Lebanese firm offered far more lucrative

¹⁵¹ Baidaphon Records, June 1928 catalogue. “Istwanat Baydafun, Katalawg haziran 1928.” This catalogue is held at Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis.

¹⁵² Decades later Farroh’s fragile record survives in my possession. Habiba Messika records have turned up in the other locations in the United States, as well as in places like Brazil, Lebanon, and Kuwait.

contracts.¹⁵³ Wisely, those contracts were exclusive ones. That exclusivity clause, in turn, was promoted by Baidaphon to signal that the label had a product found nowhere else. The backside of Theodore Khayat's business card, for instance, listed "some of Baidaphon's stars [...] all under exclusive contract." Habiba Messika's name was among the select group.¹⁵⁴ But it seems Messika was not actually under exclusive contract with Baidaphon. While many musicians were forced to choose — between the exposure that came with Baidaphon and the concomitant restraints of the label — Messika was not among them.¹⁵⁵ By maneuvering between labels, she bucked emerging recording industry norms. In fact, according to one account, she received royalties in addition to her standard recording fee — almost unheard of at the time outside of the handful of (male) artists registered with SACEM. "For recording her voice for Pathé, Gramophone, Baïdaphone, etc.," Albert Arrouas wrote in his *Livre d'Or: Figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* in 1932, Messika, "received 'royalties,' that is to say, an additional payment for every record sold."¹⁵⁶ Arrouas added excitedly, "her records enjoyed a well-deserved success and were sold by the thousands."¹⁵⁷ So too were others.

In the wake of Habiba Messika's Baidaphon sessions, the record industry expanded even more dramatically in the Maghrib. By 1929, record sales for Gramophone had multiplied by a

¹⁵³ "Objet: Société Beidaphone." CADN/MA/200/193, July 6, 1935.

¹⁵⁴ "Theodore Khayat, Baidaphon." CADN/MA/200/193.

¹⁵⁵ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, for example, recorded with Baidaphon in 1930 but under a pseudonym—"El Mahjoub *Di-Djazairi*" ("the Masked Algerian") — due to his contract with Gramophone. In his memoir, he wrote, "Already being the artistic director for Gramophone, I could not record for another label. But...the natural desire to see the country [Germany]...the legitimate interest in spreading Arab music...finally, the very nice sum offered to me by Mr. Théodore KHAYAT [...] all of this together meant I accepted." He also masked his voice, attempting to sound like the artist Mouzino. See Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 115-116.

¹⁵⁶ Albert Abraham Arrouas, *Livre d'or: figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, p. 132.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

factor of four. “The ‘names’ of the era,” Bachetarzi marveled, “[...] were spread across North Africa by the more than 200,000 records that were sold before the end of the year.”¹⁵⁸ “Before 1929,” Bachetarzi wrote, “when we would sell 50,000 records, we believed it to be a banner year.”¹⁵⁹

To capitalize on the expanding market, other international record companies moved in. Columbia and Polyphon were among them. As in the past, indigenous Jews served as their representatives and artistic directors. In Algeria, a Mr. Dukan represented Columbia.¹⁶⁰ The Polyphon label hired Emmanuel Saada and Mardoché Léon Sasportas in Algeria, Messaoud Habib in Tunisia, and Jules Toledano in Morocco.¹⁶¹ In 1930, the French branch of the German Parlophone label began recording in the Maghrib. The Algerian Jewish artist Lili Labassi (born Elie Moyal in 1897), who had previously recorded extensively for Gramophone, was charged with directing their on the ground efforts in Algeria and across the rest of the Maghrib.¹⁶² Gabriel Audisio, founding member of the literary group “*l'Ecole d'Alger*,” and son of Victor Audisio, director of the Algiers Opera, quickly praised Parlophone and Lili Labassi, “its local

¹⁵⁸ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 110. Among those names, Bachetarzi mentions that, “In Tunisia, I recorded: ISSERENE EL-AFRITE [Cheikh El Afrite], DALILA, FLIFLA, La SOULAMIA of Nabuel, ELLOUZ, and others. In Algeria: Rachid KSENTINI naturally, Marie SOUSSAN, Lili LABASSI, REDOUANE, Abdelkrim DALI, Khira GUNDIL [sic, Kheira Guendil], Cheikh HAMMADA, Cheikh MENOUAR. In Morocco: Zorah EL-FASSIA [sic, Zohra El Fassia], the most renowned of Moroccan female vocalists, and also Chleuh singers: RAIS El-Aïd, RAIS ABdelkader and RAIS Abdellah.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Delahaye, “La propagande en pays musulman.” AN/CHEAM/20000002/18, 1941. I thank Sam Anderson (UCLA) for passing this along to me.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. See also: “Object: Propagande par disques phonographiques.” CADN/MA/200/193, November 2, 1938.

¹⁶² “Parlophone: Enregistrements Algériens.” ANOM/9x/24, 1930-1931.

representative.”¹⁶³ “The label Parlophone has released a new collection,” Audisio wrote in July 1930 for the journal *La Revue Musicale*, “[...] this is the result of a mission sent to Algeria this winter and which, through the consultation of its local representative, has issued an appeal to the musicians of the country. This initiative merits highlighting.” After approving of Parlophone’s effort to court the best Algerian professional musicians, “who are, moreover, for the most part, the Jews of the country,” Audisio commended the label for giving Algerians “their Charleston or their Marseillaise,” much as Baidaphon had done in the latter case with Messika politically charged recordings.¹⁶⁴

In 1930, the Maghrib’s first locally-born label appeared. Others followed. On May 20, 1930, Mardoché Léon Sasportas, still in the employ of Columbia, registered the trademark for his Algériaphone label.¹⁶⁵ That year, Bachir Rsaissi, Baidaphon’s concessionaire in Tunisia, formally split with the German-Lebanese label and launched B. Rsaissi and Oum-El-Hassen.¹⁶⁶ Bembaron joined in as well. By the early 1930s, their Bembarophone imprint was made available in all of their Tunisian branches.¹⁶⁷

“Moute Habiba Messika” (“The Death of Habiba Messika,” Mademoiselle Fifla, Gramophone K 4355, recorded December 2, 1930)

¹⁶³ Gabriel Audisio, “Algerian Recordings,” *La Revue Musicale*, July 1930, 11th year, number 106, p. 57.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ See: Hadj Miliani, “Le cheikh et le phonographe: Notes de recherche pour un corpus des phonogrammes et des vidéogrammes des musiques et des chansons algériennes,” *Turath* 8 (2004): 44, n. 5. Henri Chamoux, “DÉPÔTS DE MARQUES PHONOGRAPHIQUES FRANÇAISES DE 1893 à 1940: Documents tirés des bulletins de l’INPI,” 2015, http://www.archeophone.org/rtf_pdf/Marques_phonographiques_inpi.pdf.

¹⁶⁶ “A/S DE LA FAMILLE RSAISSI.” ANOM/15h/32, November 11, 1940. Rsaissi’s records were first pressed by Pathé in Chatou, just outside of Paris, and then by Cristal records, also in Paris.

¹⁶⁷ A number of Bembarophone (also Bembarophone-Rekord) records are held at Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes (CMAM) in Tunis.

In early February 1930, Baidaphon once again brought dozens of musicians to Berlin to record. This time the French security services were watching. Among the artists who made the journey were veterans and newcomers. The group included Mahieddine Bachetarzi, Gramophone's artistic director for North Africa; Joseph Kespi, the Jewish conductor of Bachetarzi's El Moutribia; a small contingent of Moroccans; an unknown number of Tunisians, and twenty-two Egyptians.¹⁶⁸ The mechanics of travel to Berlin was complicated for a number of reasons but especially because of French security restrictions. Abdelkrim El Gharbi, Baidaphon representative in Morocco's Marrakesh region, escorted Moroccan musicians Abdelatif Mouline and Thami Ben Aomar overland to Tunis. There the three met Bachir Rsaissi and the twenty-two Egyptian musicians he had assembled for the journey.¹⁶⁹ From Tunis, the thirty or so musicians and their Baidaphon representatives traveled to Marseille and then to Berlin via Hamburg. Their sojourn in Berlin lasted two weeks.¹⁷⁰ Surprisingly, Habiba Messika was not among them.

There are two possible, inter-related reasons Baidaphon's biggest star did not travel to Berlin in February 1930 to record with the label again. The first was the fact that Messika was scheduled to appear in the theatrical adaptation of Paul Féval's *Le Bossu* (The Hunchback) at the Palace Théâtre in Tunis at the same time.¹⁷¹ The second was due to her automobile accident on January 28, 1930.¹⁷² Although she suffered only minor injuries, she could not travel. As a result, the staging of *Le Bossu* was delayed until February 18, 1930.

¹⁶⁸ "a/s. du séjour en Allemagne de trois indigènes marocains de Rabat." CADN/MA/200/193, June 5, 1930.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Machado, "Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível," p. 104.

¹⁷² Mohamed Larbi Snoussi, "La fin tragique de la Diva," *La Presse* (Tunis), February 24, 1995. Cited in Machado, "Habiba Messika: uma biografia (im)possível," p. 104.

On the evening of February 19, 1930, Habiba Messika performed at an engagement party held at the villa of the Livornese Jewish Lumbroso family in La Goulette. What Messika performed that night is not known. Thanks to the memoir of Haydée Tamzali, however, we can draw upon a comparable event with Messika to get a sense of the revelry of that night. On May 8, 1927, some three years earlier, Messika was hired by the Feddaoui family to perform at an engagement party. That night, Messika arrived at the family estate with six musicians and two dancers.¹⁷³ There, she was placed on a divan on a raised platform with her musicians. On the platform was a harmonium — atop which sat a collection jar — and a round table covered with pastries and sweet drinks. The musicians — two violinists, a flutist, and three ‘udists and percussionists — were all blind, Jewish men. Habiba Messika was on the harmonium. “The musicians played with a fire,” Tamzali reminisced. “Suddenly,” Tamzali recalled, “the ‘udist began a prelude that was the talk of the town, as it was the tune of one of Habiba’s famous dance numbers.”¹⁷⁴ Messika then got up, “in a single graceful movement, her thick black hair enveloping her like a sumptuous cloak, then, her hands rose toward the sky in a gesture of prayer.”¹⁷⁵ Tamzali continued:

Calm, her eyelids lowered, her slightly open lips revealing a subdued smile, she moved ever so slightly, gradually, with her legs almost motionless, her hips undulating, rolling, oscillating...There was an astonishing contrast between this profoundly sensual movement of the pelvis and the chaste expression on that beautiful face. Then the rhythm accelerated and Habiba continued her extraordinary dance, at times, sensual, at other times, pure, almost religious, sometimes primitive, sometimes deep and mysterious.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Haydée Tamzali, *Images retrouvées*, Tunis: Maison tunisienne de l’édition, 1992, p. 72. Haydée Tamzali was Tunisia’s first screen actress as well as the daughter of Albert Samama Chikly, Tunisia’s first cinematographer. She was also Habiba Messika’s neighbor.

¹⁷⁴ Tamzali, *Images retrouvées*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 73-74.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 74.

The night of February 19, 1930 — which extended into the morning of February 20 — was no doubt similar to that of May 8, 1927. Unfortunately, not all was the same.

Sometime between the start of the Lumbroso engagement on February 19 and her return home in the wee hours of February 20, a trespasser entered Messika's apartment building.¹⁷⁷ In testimony later given to the police, the man in question was recognized as Eliaou Mimouni, a seventy-seven year old Jew from the city of Testour. According to neighbors — including Haydée Tamzali — Mimouni entered Messika's building with an oil canister in hand.¹⁷⁸ But Mimouni had been at 22 Rue Durand-Claye before.¹⁷⁹ His presence was not necessarily cause for alarm. In fact, he may have even been part of her extended entourage — a “soldier of the night” — although whatever his relationship was to Messika it clearly meant more to him than to her.

Mimouni re-entered Messika's building between eight and eight thirty on the morning of February 20, 1930. Moments later, her apartment went up in flames.¹⁸⁰ Shortly thereafter, Messika's anguished screams could be heard by the residents of 22 Rue Durand-Claye.¹⁸¹ When policemen and firefighters arrived on the scene, they found Habiba Messika burned alive. Messika was first rushed to Dr. Jacques Guez and then transferred to a Dr. Ganem.¹⁸² From her

¹⁷⁷ “Habiba Messika ‘Chikhat’ réputée victime d'une vengeance, meurt après avoir été afreusement brûlée,” *L'Echo d'Alger*, p. 6, February 22, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75852128/f6.item.r>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Henry Bordeaux, “La Terre Africaine,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, May 1, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4319480/f71.image.r>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ “La grande vedette tunisienne Habiba Messika a été assassinée,” *L'Afrique du Nord Illustrée*, p. 7, March 8, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5791286p/f19.item.r>.

¹⁸² “Habiba Messika ‘Chikhat’ réputée victime d'une vengeance, meurt après avoir été afreusement brûlée,” *L'Echo d'Alger*, p. 6, February 22, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75852128/f6.item.r>.

hospital bed, the superstar identified Mimouni as the assailant.¹⁸³ He was the one who had lit fire to her bed, she told police. He was the one who had held her down so that she could not escape. As a result, Mimouni was injured as well. Police later recovered an oil canister from the scene. So, too, did they find Mimouni's fez.¹⁸⁴

On February 21, 1930, Habiba Messika succumbed to her injuries. At twenty-seven, North Africa's first superstar was dead. Less than a month later, her assassin was as well.¹⁸⁵

On February 24, 1930, a public procession of five thousand accompanied Habiba Messika to her final resting place at the Bourgel Jewish cemetery.¹⁸⁶ The Protectorate's Director of Public Security reported to the Resident General's office that, "by 12:30 pm, the crowd which was considerable in the area around l'Avenue de Londres, was growing minute by minute."¹⁸⁷ He marveled at the size and diversity of those assembled — which included, "Jewish, European, and Muslim elements belonging to all classes of the population." Members of the nationalist Destour party mingled among the mourners as well.¹⁸⁸ "Never before in Tunisia," he remarked, "has such a funeral taken place."¹⁸⁹ Bechir Methenni, director of the theatrical troupe to which Messika belonged, was among the few chosen to deliver final remarks. "On February 20, 1930,"

¹⁸³ "Habiba Messika 'Chikhat' réputée victime d'une vengeance, meurt après avoir été afreusement brûlée," *L'Echo d'Alger*, p. 6, February 22, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75852128/f6.item.r>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Eliaou Mimouni died on March 15, 1930.

¹⁸⁶ Henry Bordeaux, "La Terre Africaine," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, May 1, 1930, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4319480/f71.image.r>.

¹⁸⁷ "A/S des obsèques de HABIBA MESSIKA," February 24, 1930, as cited in *Watha'iq*, Tunis: Centre national universitaire de documentation scientifique et technique, no. 24-25, 1994, p. 122-123.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Methenni began, “the rumor of this attempted murder — stupid and sadistic — spread like a wildfire through all of Tunis.”¹⁹⁰ Methenni then invoked Alfred de Musset’s “Pale Star of Even” (“*Le Saule*”).¹⁹¹ “Of the Tunisian star who sees from afar, as Musset said,” Methenni pronounced, “like the shepherd who walks, while step by step, his long flock follows him.” Methenni had rendered Messika the superstar into a celestial star, who leads before disappearing into the night’s sky. “The herd in this case,” Methenni made clear, “is the entire Tunisian population who cries for Habiba Messika — not the woman but the artistic genius who reached her zenith across Africa and Europe, across the theatrical arts and Tunisian song.” Methenni lamented that Messika as a, “natural-born artist has known the most deserved success at an age when others are but beginners.” Referring to Messika as a “second Sarah Bernhardt,” he concluded:

Let us weep my dear friends, weep O you who knew Habiba Messika, because with her, the artistic culture of Tunisia has been set back some twenty years.

Alas dear comrade, your voice will not be heard anymore, but rest assured that its memory will remain engraved in our minds and when our children hear some of your records, it will be with tears in our eyes that we will tell them about your life, about your generous spirit, and we will instill in them the idea that no one was ever the equal of your genius.

¹⁹⁰ “A/S des obsèques de HABIBA MESSIKA,” February 24, 1930, as cited in *Watha’iq*, p. 122-123.

¹⁹¹ Methenni referenced the following lines of Alfred de Musset’s “Pale Star of Even”:

“Slow gliding downward to the verdant steep,
The shepherd sees thee, as across the down
He homeward leads his lingering flock of sheep.
Star, at this silent hour so strangely fair,
Through boundless night, oh, whither dost thou go?
To seek beside the shore a reedy lair,
Or like a pearl, sink in the gulf below?”

Translation taken from: Alfred de Musset, *Selections from the Prose and Poetry of Alfred de Musset*. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870, p. 223.

Farewell Habiba, rest in peace, sister, you have earned it.

Methenni hardly had to wait for his children to hear Messika's records or to tell the next generation her story. The details of Habiba Messika's life and tragic death were rendered into commercial recordings within months.¹⁹² On Parlophone, for example, Acher Mizrahi, the Palestine-born, Tunisian cantor, released "*Keset Habiba*" ("The Tale of Habiba," Parlophone B 81009) in ode to the slain supertstar. For Gramophone, the Algerian Redouane Ben Sari, scion of Tlemcen-based Andalusian master musician Larbi Ben Sari, recorded a song simply titled, "*Hbiba Msika*" ("Habiba Messika," Gramophone K 4412).¹⁹³ And on the same label, on December 2, 1930, Flifla Chamia, Tunisian Jewish recording artist and dancer, recorded "*Moute Habiba Messika*" ("The Death of Habiba Messika," Gramophone K 4355) — which was soon after repressed on the Victor label and sold as far as the United States.¹⁹⁴

Habiba Messika lives on (and Baidaphon comes under the spotlight)

In spring 1930, Baidaphon sent yet another large shipment of records to Morocco from Germany. Among those discs was "the National Hymn of Moroccan Youth," recorded in Berlin by the Moroccan artist Thami Ben Aomar.¹⁹⁵ In early May, reports on Ben Aomar's hymn began flooding the Office of Civil Control in Rabat. Days later, on May 16, 1930, the Civil Controller

¹⁹² In addition, the National Library of Israel holds a half-dozen Judeo-Arabic songbooks related to the death of Habiba Messika.

¹⁹³ Ahmed Hachlaf and Mohamed Elhabib Hachlaf, *Anthologie de la musique arabe, 1906-1960*, Éditions Anep, 2001, p. 290.

¹⁹⁴ The Victor version of Flifla Chamia's "*Moute Habiba Messika*," erroneously and confusingly labeled the record, "Syrian-Arabian." See: "Syrian Arabic Moute Habiba Messika Vic V-25004 78 rpm," popsike.com, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.popsike.com/Syrian-Arabic-Moute-Habiba-Messika-Vic-V25004-78-rpm/330468306961.html>. Tunisian Jewish artist Bichi Slama also recorded a song about Habiba Messika ("*Souret Habiba Messika*," Pathé, X 65068).

¹⁹⁵ "ACTIVITE DES JEUNES MAROCAINES." CADN/MA/200/193, May 16, 1930.

of the Oued Zem region sent a desperate, confidential letter to the head of Civil Control with regard to the record. That same day, the Resident General promulgated what became known as the “Berber Dahir,” a decree which attempted to legally separate Moroccan Berbers from Moroccan Arabs.¹⁹⁶ In his letter of May 16, the Civil Controller of Oued Zem referred to Ben Aomar’s Baidaphon disc evocatively as a “Moroccan Marseillaise.”¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile, the “Berber Dahir,” which was seen by many Moroccans as a violation of Islamic law, set off months of protest and formed the seed of a growing nationalist movement. “The National Hymn of Moroccan Youth,” which contained ambiguous language that nonetheless seemed to speak directly to the protestors, certainly fanned the flames of discontent.¹⁹⁸ Civil Controllers across Morocco thus launched an effort to recover and then destroy copies of Thami’s anthem before it could do further harm.

But the search quickly shifted away from Thami Ben Aomar and toward Habiba Messika. In the hunt for *his* records, security officials, intelligence officers, and police found *her* records time and again — although Messika was seldom identified by name. On May 5, 1930, for example, hot on the trail of Baidaphon records made by Thami Ben Aomar, intelligence agents zeroed in on a merchant in Fez by the name of Mustapha Lemcharfi.¹⁹⁹ Lemcharfi was found to

¹⁹⁶ On the “Berber Dahir,” see: Jonathan Wyrzten, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity*, Cornell University Press, 2016; and Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ben Aomar’s song contained the words, “*Ya latif*,” which is also a prayer recited in times of distress. That prayer became a rallying cry after the enactment of the “Berber Dahir.” Security services saw collusion in Ben Aomar’s song although given the timing it was certainly little more than a coincidence. See: “A/S de disques arabes.” CADN/MA/200/193, February 27, 1931.

¹⁹⁹ “Propagande anglaise.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 5, 1930.

be renting phonographs for the small sum of 10-15 francs per day.²⁰⁰ Rental included a stack of approximately twenty records, which, according to the author of the intelligence report on the matter, had the effect of, “stir[ring] up Arab feelings.” An informant passed on a sample list of the records included with Lemcharfi’s phonograph rental. On that list were “the Egyptian National Anthem,” referred to by its catalogue number of “B 86.520” and “His Majesty King Faysal’s Anthem,” or “B 86.530.” Both titles and catalogue numbers matched the records of the same title made by Messika in 1928.

On May 30, 1930, the Civil Controller of the Doukkala region sent an urgent message on the subject of “foreign propaganda on records” to Civil Control headquarters.²⁰¹ “It has been signaled to me,” the Civil Controller wrote, “that a record label in Berlin has sent phonograph records to Morocco reproducing, in the Arabic language, songs in favor of Egyptian independence, which are prone to provoke unrest in the Muslim milieu.” The Civil Controller’s message identified the main sonic culprit as “El Nachid El Mousri” (“record number B 86.520”) — which was in actuality Habiba Messika’s “*al-Nashid al-Watani al-Masri*” (“the Egyptian National Anthem”) rendered in creative French orthography. But the characterization of her records as “prone” to wreak havoc was too little, too late. According to the same report, Messika’s anthem was already a, “huge success among the natives of Mazagan [El Jadida].” Residents of Mazagan were “excited by the rousing music and words hailing liberty,” he reported. “They sing it in groups, full of energy, in-sync with the phonograph, and accompany themselves on guitar [*‘ud*] and mandolin.”

While regional civil controllers chased individual Habiba Messika records in Morocco, the Resident General, head of the Military, and Bureau of Native Affairs simultaneously

²⁰⁰ “Propagande anglaise.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 5, 1930.

²⁰¹ “Propaganda étrangère par les phonographes.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 30, 1930.

considered a more robust response to the problem of records as embodied by Baidaphon and Messika. On May 1, 1930, the Secretary General of the Protectorate wrote to the Director General of the Military Cabinet and that of the Bureau of Native Affairs on the subject of “the introduction to and sale of phonograph records in Morocco.”²⁰² The Secretary General proposed that a committee be established to explore control mechanisms for records of a “seditious character.” As with cinema, he mused, phonograph records could be controlled as well. He suggested, for example, restricting entry points for record shipments to Casablanca and Oujda. So too that French translation be appended to a file for every record arriving in Morocco. On May 6, 1930, Resident General Charles Noguès wrote back to the Secretary General. He was on board.

Six months later, Noguès wrote again to the Secretary General.²⁰³ The phonograph record problem was worse than he could have even imagined. “I have been told that many natives record on blank discs, in the course of private concerts, analogous hymns [to those of Ben Aomar and Habiba Messika] and sometimes [more] subversive ones.” He continued, “the necessity of instituting control over phonograph record production is therefore necessary.” Furthermore, he argued, control should be made law and publicized as such, “as soon as possible.” On January 26, 1931, following a gathering of representatives of the governments of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia at the sixth annual North African Conference, the Director of General Security in Algeria wrote energetically to his Director of Native Affairs.²⁰⁴ When it came to control of records, he reported, Morocco should serve as a guide. The Director of General Security thought that in the

²⁰² “A/s introduction et vente au Maroc, de disques phonographiques.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 1, 1930.

²⁰³ “Disques phonographiques.” CADN/MA/200/193, December 6, 1930.

²⁰⁴ “Note.” ANOM/15h/32, January 26, 1931.

near future the three governments would gather information related to phonograph records cooperatively and share intelligence on the discs in a similar manner. The Director even envisioned producing a catalogue — designed for security services and not the consumer — that would contain a list of all records that entered the Maghrib. Unfortunately for the historian, such a document was never produced.

Between 1931 and 1932, a legislative committee attached to the Resident General of Morocco met three times in an attempt to decide the fate of phonograph records there.²⁰⁵ If successful, the legislation would be turned into a “dahir,” which like the “Berber Dahir,” emanated from the Moroccan sultan himself. During the last of their three meetings on October 14, 1932, members of the committee sounded an optimistic note.²⁰⁶ If and when it moved forward, their “dahir project related to the monitoring of sound recordings,” would be nothing less than a model for Algeria and Tunisia. But the committee quickly ran into problems. The more repressive the control mechanism, some members observed, the more burdensome it would be on the already overtaxed bureaucracy of the Protectorate. And then there was what the president of the legislative committee referred to as, “the delicate.” The first article of the proposed dahir, for example, read, “Every sound recording, instrumental, vocal, or spoken, in whichever dialect, known or traditional, which presents a character contrary to the public order, can be denied entry to the French zone of our Empire [...]” But members worried the phrase “contrary to the public order” would be read by Moroccans as a direct attack on “nationalist sentiment.” Could the Moroccan sultan issue such a dahir and maintain his legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects, especially in the aftermath of the “Berber Dahir”? By the time, the committee

²⁰⁵ “AU SUJET DE L'ETAT ACTUEL DE LA QUESTION DU CONTROLE DES DISQUES ET ENREGISTREMENTS SONORES.” CADN/MA/200/193, January 13, 1938.

²⁰⁶ “PROCES-VERBAL DE LA SEANCE DU 14 OCTOBRE 1932.” CADN/MA/200/193, October 1932.

president suggested adding, “and against good morals” to “contrary to the public order” — so that conservative religious leadership might support the dahir — the committee recessed. That recess lasted approximately seven years.

For the French, the problem with phonograph records was not just that their message was in a language (or languages) little understood by authorities or that their content was declared “seditious,” but also that “sound recordings” often traveled imperceptibly and paid little mind to borders. With Baidaphon’s Habiba Messika records and the diffuse means by which those records were distributed, the label typified both problems. And yet, in most cases, Baidaphon records were not stolen across frontiers in the dark of night. The company usually operated transparently — shipping large two hundred and fifty record parcels from Europe to regional distributors in the Maghrib. Even when those shipments did include musical contraband, the records in question could be easily identified given the circumstances. For example, when two such Baidaphon crates arrived in Constantine, Algeria in January 1934 for record impresario Taieb Ben Amor, customs officials quickly recognized the shipment and found the Habiba Messika records among the bunch.²⁰⁷ In other cases, merchants — again acting in accordance with the law (mostly) — ordered records in smaller, more precise numbers directly from Baidaphon. On October 26, 1933, for instance, one hundred and sixty-eight records were seized from Benaouda Bouayad of Tlemcen, Algeria.²⁰⁸ Of the one hundred and sixty-eight, Bouayad had ordered exactly five Habiba Messika records.

But Baidaphon executives were also known to hand-deliver particular records to influencers and taste-makers. This proved infuriating for the security establishment. In March

²⁰⁷ “Disques phonographiques - Contrôle.” ANOM/15/32, January 13, 1934.

²⁰⁸ “Disques phonographiques.” ANOM/15h/32, October 26, 1933.

1935, the Sub-Director of the Bureau of Native Affairs in Algeria reported to the Director of General Security that (moderate) nationalist Dr. Mohammed Bendjelloul, head of the *Fédération des Élus Musulmans d'Algérie*, had been given a collection of Baidaphon records by Gabriel Baida himself during his stay in Algeria.²⁰⁹

But a few years earlier, some thought that Baidaphon might be contained. On May 27, 1931, the Director General of the Military Cabinet in Morocco sent a confidential letter to the Bureau of Native Affairs and to the Secretary General of the Protectorate, boasting that, “it is relatively easy to control the importation of records made by the large and medium-sized firms.”²¹⁰ Instead, his concern was the mushrooming of independent labels that seemed to appear out of nowhere.²¹¹ “It is more difficult,” he emphasized, “to prevent the clandestine fabrication [of records] which is [now] within reach of individuals.”²¹² One of those independent labels — “Arabic Record,” which curiously carried an English language name — was particularly vexing to the Director General. So too to Lieutenant Colonel Margot, head of the Protectorate’s *Service de la Presse Musulmane* and director of *Es-Saâda*, the official Arabic-language journal of the government. Some of the releases on Arabic Record, according to Margot, had “whet the appetite of our Moroccans.”²¹³ Among the records on Arabic Record causing a stir were those that listed the performer on the label as “*malikat al-tarab*” (“the queen of musical ecstasy”). That

²⁰⁹ “A.S du nommé BAIDA.” ANOM/15h/32, April 5, 1935.

²¹⁰ “Contrôle des enregistrements sonores.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 27, 1931.

²¹¹ On home recording, see “Contrôle des enregistrements sonores.” CADN/MA/200/193, May 27, 1931. “We note on the one hand the foreign installations (Phonomaton and other similar things) which are operating currently in Europe and on the other hand, which are already sold in Morocco apparatus that allow for the recording, at home, of the human voice.”

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ “A/S. de disques arabes.” CADN/MA/200/193, February 27, 1931.

name, we recall, was among the many honorifics Habiba Messika had once enjoyed. Now, in the aftermath of her assassination, it seemed to operate as her *nom de guerre*. That Arabic Record, a minor label of unknown origin, could sell Habiba Messika records in the years after her murder without inscribing her actual name anywhere on the disc, signaled at once, the enduring popularity of the departed artist, and at the same time, the scale of record proliferation in Morocco, which reached well beyond Baidaphon.²¹⁴ Indeed, as the industry continued to grow in power, the state increasingly saw it as a threat.

Conclusion: The Record Industry Spins Out of Control

Behind the sustained growth of the record industry into the 1930s were a group of Jewish middlemen spread across Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Their presence proved ever more menacing to French authorities. Indeed, in addition to acting as artistic directors and concessionaires at the highest levels of the record industry, Jews — as regional representatives for labels, daring entrepreneurs, distributors of the occasional disc, and connoisseurs who purchased and then passed on records — aided and abetted a host of sonic activities deemed both nationalist and anti-French at the time. On November 15, 1930 in Marrakesh, for example, the head of Regional Security found the Jewish Mardoché Essiminy trading in Habiba Messika's Baidaphon records from his shop adjacent to the *mellah* (the Jewish quarter).²¹⁵ By June 1935, the enterprising Mardoché Essiminy, sometimes referred to by his Arabic patronym of “Ould

²¹⁴ It may have also signaled an attempt on the part of Arabic Record to withhold royalties to her estate.

²¹⁵ “A/S. Disques arabes ‘Baidaphon.’” CADN/MA/200/193, November 15, 1930. Essiminy did more than trade in Baidaphon records. A record sleeve in my personal collection lists “M. Essiminy” as the exclusive concessionaire for “Disques Flortone,” while an envelope in my personal collection names Mardoché Essiminy as concessionaire for Parlophone.

Essminy,” had even started to branch out on his own — soliciting artists already under contract with Baidaphon to record for his label on the sly.²¹⁶

When three years later Moroccan security services turned on the Algerian Jewish musician Lili Labassi — also the artistic director for Parlophone — the extent of Jewish involvement in the movement of “nationalist” records was laid bare. In October 1938, Yves Sicot, Director of Political Affairs in Morocco, caught wind of a Labassi record made for the Polyphon label — “*Lellah yal ghadi lessahra*” (“For the sake of God, O you who is going to the Sahara,” Polyphon 46.117) — that was purported to champion the cause of the recently exiled Moroccan nationalist Allal al-Fasi. Sicot asked political and military regional heads to commence an investigation into the origins of the al-Fasi-themed record and the mechanics of its distribution. At every stage of the record-hunt, Sicot’s men found Jews dealing in that particular record and others like it. On October 26, 1938, the Brigadier General of the Meknes region sent word to Sicot, Director of Political affairs, that his men had found the Labassi record at the shop of Albert Azuelos.²¹⁷ According to his statement given to the police, the record in question had been sent to him by Simon Maimeran, a Jewish record-distributor, based in Casabalanca. One November 1938 report from the Civil Controller of Rabat found Ruben Sabbah, Jewish record store owner and possible progenitor of the N. Sabbah label, to be in possession of sixty copies of the Labassi record, which he in turn supplied at least one copy to Radio Maroc.²¹⁸ During another search and seizure effort in Meknes in November 1938, an unnamed proprietor reported that he had bought the Labassi record at Art et Industrie — the latest venture of Raoul Hazan,

²¹⁶ “DECLARATIONS de MOHAMED BOUAFZIOU et MOHAMED GABBO, tous deux chargés par le Khalifa SI AHMED EL BIAZ, du Contrôle les ‘Cheikhat’ à MARRAKECH.” CADN/MA/200/193, June 4, 1935.

²¹⁷ “Disque ‘Ya Moslimine.’” CADN/MA/200/193, October 26, 1938.

²¹⁸ “Propagande par disques phonographiques.” CADN/MA/200/193, November 2, 1938.

formerly of Bembaron et Hazan — in Casablanca.²¹⁹ In Essaouira that same month, the Lili Labassi record was found in the possession of a few Jewish residents — Moise Kedouchim, who operated a store owned by a Mr. Brami, and David Kakon. Kedouchim reported that he first saw the record in Jules Toledano's Polyphon record catalogue and Kakon declared that he had purchased the record from Bembaron et Hazan in Casablanca, by which he may have meant Art et Industrie.²²⁰ Again in November 1938, Lili Labassi records were seized from Jews in Agadir, including J. Hayoun, Maurice Sebag, Haim Lusqui, Joseph Davila, Emile Bensimon, and David "Baba" ben Haim Amar.²²¹ Half of those questioned told officers that the Labassi records had been purchased at the local record shop of Jewish merchant Salem Bensoussan while the other half reported that they had bought the records at Maison Salama, a Jewish-owned record store in Casablanca.²²²

Whatever commercial recording had looked like before 1928 had vanished shortly thereafter. If Habiba Messika's Baidaphon sessions that year — recorded electrically in Berlin — represented the moment commercial recording came of age in the Maghrib, then her murder, the growing presence of international and home-grown record labels, and the insatiable appetite for records among North Africans meant that the industry had long lost any semblance of its innocence. Quite simply, it was spinning out of control. With that loss and that loss of control, came increased attention from colonial authorities across North Africa. In February 1937, Bachagha Smati, Muslim officer of Algeria's Bureau of Native Affairs, attempted to make sense

²¹⁹ "Disque subversif relatif à ALLAL EL FASSI." CADN/MA/200/193, November 10, 1938.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ "Propagande par disques phonographiques --- disque subversif relatif à ALLAL EL FASSI." CADN/MA/200/193, November 18, 1938.

²²² Ibid.

of it all in an address entitled, “the Arabic-Language Record.”²²³ Speaking to fellow officers about the situation in Algeria — although he could have easily delivered his remarks about Morocco or Tunisia — Smati began with a truism. “You know, sirs,” he said, “of the increasingly important role that the record has played for the last fifteen years or so in the lives of the Muslim population.” He continued, “to convince oneself of this fact, one need only pass through the native quarters of any city — large or small.” Deriding the Algerian soundscape, he announced, “everywhere, at every hour of the day, you will hear nothing but laments and monotonous chants typical of the music called ‘oriental.’” With the exception of the Arabian Peninsula, he noted, this was as true in Algeria as it was in the rest of North Africa and the Middle East.²²⁴

Smati then teased out the history of commercial recording in North Africa, beginning with the entrance of the international labels at the beginning of the twentieth century and the earliest days of acoustic recording. But it was only after World War I, he argued, that the record industry experienced its “first period of prosperity, attended by a veritable and sudden invasion of the native milieu by the record.” And he blamed Jews for the invasion. “It is, in particular, Jewish elements,” Smati announced, “who were the artisans of this vogue for records.” He went on:

Operating generally in their capacity as agent-resellers of the large labels: Gramophone, Pathé, Columbia, Odéon, Polyphon, etc....they have been responsible for, in just a few years, thanks to their well-known business acumen, to create in the country, a complete network of retailers, who offer their merchandise at lower and lower prices, with increasingly elaborate payment schemes. Thanks as well to their knowledge of native languages; they record, locally or in studios in the metropole, a considerable repertoire today in which new compositions are added without stop.²²⁵

²²³ “Le Disque de Lange Arabe.” ANOM/15h/32, February 1, 1937.

²²⁴ It should be noted that commercial recording was occurring in the Arabian Peninsula too.

²²⁵ Parts of this translation and the large block quote that follows is taken from Rebecca P. Scales, “Subversive Sound: Transnational Radio, Arabic Recordings, and the Dangers of Listening in French Colonial Algeria, 1934–1939,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2010; 52(2), p. 401; and Hadj Miliani, “Crosscurrents:

For Smati, this would not have been a problem in and of itself, if not for the “flooding of the market with Middle Eastern records,” especially “Tunisian, Egyptian, and Syrian discs,” after 1926. Among the records he would cite as emblematic of the problem was Habiba Messika’s “*al-Nashid Jilala Malik Faysal*” (“His Majesty King Faysal’s Anthem”), recorded for Baidaphon, although again she was not mentioned by name. Smati once more found Jews culpable:

In effect, after this period, Jewish merchants, under the double pressure of their own competitiveness and the new demands of their native clientele more and more partial to foreign music, became auxiliaries, most of the time unwittingly, of a form of anti-French propaganda, which is all the more dangerous in that it is exercised in a new terrain and by insidious means; I mean propaganda by way of the disc, in favor of nationalist and pan-Arabist ideas, of Middle Eastern importation.

If Jews had become “auxiliaries [...] of a form of anti-French propaganda,” as Smati claimed, so too were Jews using French language and song to fashion new genres of Arab popular music across the Maghrib. As the next chapter will reveal, that music was both the delight of the masses and the disdain of an influential few.

Trajectories of Algerian Jewish Artists and Men of Culture since the End of the Nineteenth Century,” p. 181-182, in Emily Gottreich and Daniel Schroeter, *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010.

Chapter 2

Popular Music Comes of Age

On Laylat al-Qadr²²⁶ 1934, the Algiers Opera hosted what journalist Lucienne Jean-Darrouy described in the pages of *l'Echo d'Alger* as a “*grand soirée Orientale*.”²²⁷ Jean-Darrouy, who covered the event marking the near-end of Ramadan, gushed that, “the concert was ‘grand’ in the sense that the crowd filled the vast hall beyond capacity and also due to the duration of the program and the high esteem with which the artists were held.” That the entrance to the theater was impassable was a good sign. In her estimation, “a public concert can have no better proof of success.”

Those artists, Algerians and Tunisians, were among the most popular of the era. “After [the performance] of the El Moutribia orchestra and choir,” she wrote, “the soloists, already highly appreciated by their coreligionists, were applauded one after the other: Mr. Lili L’Abassi [sic] and Sassi, accompanied themselves on the vertical violin and a mandolin with melodies of a popular flavor.” Their audience — “their coreligionists” — were mostly Muslim. Lili Labassi and Alfred “Sassi” Lebrati were both Jews. But Jean-Darrouy could be forgiven for the slip. The record companies and others tended to promote these very same Jewish musicians as “Arab” or “Muslim.”

As for their popular music, Jean-Darrouy noted that, “the public loves [...] these melodies; there is a developing taste for this and every chorus is listened to or performed with

²²⁶ Laylat al-Qadr tends to fall on the 27th night of Ramadan and commemorates the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad.

²²⁷ Lucienne Jean-Darrouy, “Grande Soirée Orientale,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, p. 4, January 14, 1934, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7583576m/f4.item.r>.

more enthusiasm.²²⁸ One would go as far to describe a fascination and dizziness [with the genre] [...].” Among the mostly Jewish musicians, the performance of Mahieddine Bachetarzi, a Muslim, stood out. “He brings with him varied songs,” she reported, “some of pure Oriental inspiration, others adapted to Western tastes, which have, as we know, a large Arab clientele.” One song in particular caught her attention. Perhaps it was because she understood every other line. Or perhaps it was because the audience could hardly contain their excitement. “It was more than apparent,” she informed her readers, “that they enjoyed a mixed song where the Arabic and French languages blended, in which a lover vows his passion [for a woman] and gives her his ‘word of honor’ [“*parole d’honneur*”]. The song, never mentioned by name in the article, was the wildly popular, trans-national song, “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” (“Where have you been, mademoiselle”). In a *metissage* of French and Arabic, its refrain contained the following lyrics:

<i>Où vous étiez mademoiselle</i>	Where were you, mademoiselle
<i>Kul yawm asal ‘alayki</i>	Everyday I ask about you
<i>Je vous aime, oh ma belle</i>	I love you, my beauty
<i>Je deviens fou ma bayn yadiki</i>	I go crazy in your arms
<i>Ma parole d’honneur mademoiselle</i>	My word of honor, mademoiselle ²²⁹

While Jean-Darrouy had indeed listened carefully, there was much she had not pieced together. “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” for example, had first been recorded some three years earlier by Tunisian Jewish artist Dalila Taliana and composed by the Palestine-born, Tunisian cantor Acher

²²⁸ I define popular music broadly in this chapter. In general, I mean music of recent, known authorship in the Maghrib, and lighter in form than the heaviest movements of the nuba complex. In this way, it stands in contrast to Andalusian music.

²²⁹ Dalila Taliana, “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” Gramophone K 4680. The lyrics are gleaned from two different pressings of the record found in my personal collection. That there were two pressings, one on “Disque Gramophone,” and its later incarnation, “La Voix de Son Maître” (released as late as 1951), speak to the song’s enduring popularity. Ruth F. Davis first wrote about “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” in “Jews, Women, and the Power to be Heard,” *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin, Routledge, 2016. She heard the song performed in Djerba and Tunis during her fieldwork there in the 1970s and 1980s. Incredibly, her informants described “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” to her as a “traditional Jewish” song (p. 188). Davis provides a slightly different translation of the song’s last line.

Mizrahi. Although both performed that night in Algiers alongside El Moutribia orchestra, Lili Labassi, Sassi, and Mahieddine Bachetarzi, that particular detail never appeared in her reporting.

The larger point that Jean-Darrouy did seem to understand, however, was that popular music was “having a certain effect on the ‘modern public’ of Muslim music.” In the Algerian case, as in the Moroccan and Tunisian ones too, it brought together a new type of civic community. “It is a matter of interest to note,” Jean-Darrouy explained:

that the evolution of taste in theater under the influence of the ‘El Moutribia’ company. The young musicians wear their tuxedos effortlessly, sporting or not the chéchia [fez]; and, more and more, the practice of going to concerts with the family is spreading. The women, generally veiled, attend in large numbers with their husbands nearby. It should be noted that with the female presence, the appearance of the concert hall always improves considerably.²³⁰

In Jean-Darrouy’s narration of the musical events of January 13, 1934, she had managed at once to “hum” the first bar of the era’s most iconic song and at the same time, allude to the contours of a transnational popular music then shaping a number of publics in the Maghrib.

This is a chapter about a single song and others like it. In the following pages, I will fill out the lyrics of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” paraphrased by Jean-Darrouy above. But more than just microhistory, this chapter also traces the variegated paths of a shifting music scene between the wars. During that period, Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian Jews experimented with and then popularized music that was mixed in genre, language, and gender. That music — almost all of it recorded to disc — included *istikhbar sahli*-cum-fox-trot, the Charleston in a local tongue, French rhymed with Arabic, and women performing the most indecent of “male” subject matter (and making explicit what the Andalusian repertoire had long kept implicit).²³¹ Like “*Où*

²³⁰ Among many things, Jean-Darrouy was also a feminist.

²³¹ The Algerian artist Mourjean recorded “*Mamak*” for Parlophone (46.523). The “A” side was listed as an “*istikhbar sahli*” (an instrumental prelude in the Andalusian mode of *sahli*) and the “B” side as a fox-trot. The Tunisian musician Joseph “Sosso” Cherki recorded “*Charleston*” for Columbia (17006). As for music combining French and Arabic, and women recording the “indecent,” see any number of titles, including Mahieddine

vous étiez mademoiselle,” much of this music moved between stylistic and linguistic registers and so too across physical borders of state and metaphorical boundaries. Popular music of recent vintage, for example, not only traveled from Tunis to Algiers but was also incorporated into the synagogue and nationalist song. This meant that North Africans of various national, political, and religious persuasions were quite literally singing the same tune, even as the context differed dramatically. Those musical crosscurrents emanated from unlikely figures, like the above-mentioned Acher Mizrahi. Mizrahi, a non-native of Tunisia, an Ottoman Jew from Jerusalem — described alternately in the press as “Palestinian,” “Egyptian,” “Tunisian,” and the catch all “Arab” — operated between spaces like the music-hall stage and the religious pulpit, and navigated both Tunisian nationalism and Zionism through song. He was far from the only one.

If historians have depicted the interwar years in North Africa as a moment of Jewish-Muslim unraveling, Jewish artists of popular music seemed to have little trouble bringing together Muslim fans alongside Jewish ones, even as communal tensions boiled over.²³² In fact, their music helped to carve out a national public sphere, what Jean-Darrouy called a “‘modern public’ of Muslim music.” Contemporary observers described audiences diverse in confession, class, and gender coalescing around Jewish musicians like Dalila Taliana or the artist Louisa Tounsia, who were wont to perform “mixed song” that often veered headlong into the salacious.

Bachetarzi’s “*Lebnat ferramla*” (a cover of “*J’ai Deux Amours*,” Gramophone K) and Louisa Tounsia’s “*Ma fiche flous*” (“If you don’t have money,” Polyphon 45.673).

²³² For opposing perspectives on North African Jewish-Muslim relations during the interwar years, especially in Algeria, see Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2014; and Ethan B. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North African to France*, Harvard University Press, 2015. See also Maud S. Mandel in “The Politics of Street Riots: Anti-Jewish Violence in Tunisia before Decolonization,” in *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed. Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, Indiana University Press, 2017; and Sung-eun Choi, “From Colonial Citizen to Postcolonial Repatriate: The Politics of National Belonging and the Integration of the French from Algeria after Decolonization” (PhD Diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007); Jonathan Wrytzen, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity*, Cornell University Press, 2016. For the specific context in Constantine, Algeria, see Joshua Cole, “Constantine before the riots of August 1934: civil status, anti-Semitism, and the politics of assimilation in interwar French Algeria,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 5, December 2012.

After attending one such concert in 1930, Pierre Mac Orlan, a contemporary of Jean-Darrouy, commented in detail on the “complete fusion of all of the classes of native society of Tunis who have come out to applaud Louisa la Tounsia.”²³³ In the concert hall, municipal theater, and similar venues then, a rather fluid vision of the nation took shape.

Not all were happy with that vision. Popular music provoked an influential minority of French officials and Muslim elites who were bent on installing Andalusian music, with its illustrious past, as the exclusive sound of the “modern public.” In parallel to the rise of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” — which one such elite later described as among, “the most imminent dangers to Tunisian music” — indigenous and colonial reformers sought to curb what was termed musical “decadence,” a phenomenon increasingly conflated with Jews themselves.²³⁴ As new Andalusian orchestras and conservatories were formed and international music conferences convened, Jews were often absent.

But when it came to the era’s most popular sounds, Jews were omnipresent. Indeed, a decade or so after its release, Dalila Taliana’s “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” had sold in excess of half a million copies for the Gramophone company.²³⁵ Not only did the public embrace such a “mixed song” as a wholly indigenous product but so too were Jewish musicians — like Lili Labassi and Sassi — accepted as “Muslim” or “Arab” and certainly as national icons, even if their legal status as French citizens (or, indeed, their Jewishness) suggested otherwise. To date, scholars have focused their attention on Andalusian music, and the creation of institutions aimed

²³³ Pierre MacOrlan, *Villes: Memoires*, Gallimard, 1966, p. 293.

²³⁴ As Edwin Seroussi reminded me, this sentiment is not dissimilar to Richard Wagner’s accusation against the Jewish musicians of his era.

²³⁵ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II: Première partie de 1939 à 1946, deuxième partie de 1947 à 1951*, Alger: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1984, p. 164.

at safeguarding those traditions.²³⁶ In contrast, this chapter concerns itself with returning the transnational popular music of the interwar Maghrib and its practitioners to center stage. This exercise allows us to draw surprising connections between songs, singers, and spaces much as we did in the “Prelude.” As much as Maghribi popular music between the wars was Jewish, then, the composers at the center of that genre also reveal the inner lives of Jews themselves including the sonic encounter with Zionism.

At the core of this chapter are questions of liminality and limits, borders and borderlands, and of course, mixing and music. In the following pages, I will wade in record catalogues, identify popular songs that moved from country to country and from singer to singer, take note of concert accounts, and parse memoirs and memories in order to catch a glimpse of what was musically possible and permissible in North Africa between the world wars. Those musical possibilities speak to the ways in which Jews could participate in and actively shape a modern musical public in and across the Maghrib before World War II.

Setting the Stage: Record Catalogues and their Contents

In 1929, North African record sales exploded. Much of the credit for the boom could be given to the exceptionally popular Tunisian Jewish superstar Habiba Messika. The Baidaphon label, based in Germany, could also claim credit, as could the pioneering Mahieddine Bachetarzi, the newly minted artistic director for the Gramophone label’s activities in North Africa. By 1929, the Gramophone label alone sold 200,000 Arabic-, Kabyle-, and Hebrew-language records in the

²³⁶ See Ruth Frances Davis, *Ma’lūf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*, Scarecrow Press, 2004; Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusian Music in Urban North Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 2016; Carl Davila, *The Andalusian Music of Morocco: Al-Āla : History, Society and Text*, Reichert, 2013; 1. Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Performing Al-Andalus: Music and Nostalgia across the Mediterranean*, Indiana University Press, 2015.

Maghrib.²³⁷ Gramophone's sales numbers had quadrupled since the previous year.²³⁸ Alongside records pressed on the Gramophone label, Morocco and Tunisia imported an additional 250,000 records from France and tens of thousands more from Germany.²³⁹ By 1930, 500,000 records were pouring into Algeria from France annually.²⁴⁰ We do not know how many Baidaphon records were sold; nor do we have figures for Algériaphone, Bembarophone, Rsaissi, or any of the other indigenous outfits. But that these records existed, were passed around or rented, and listened to in communal settings speaks to a burgeoning trade across Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia that the extant numbers only begin to capture.

The hundreds of thousands of records sold annually across the Maghrib were promoted through record catalogues catering to a local clientele. Record catalogues proved especially resistant to the colonial binaries that later became entrenched in the historiography.²⁴¹ If French Protectorate authorities in Morocco and Tunisia and the Governor General of Algeria acted in various ways to separate Jews from Muslims, Arabic-speakers from Berber-speakers, and religious institutions from secular ones, those distinctions were blurred in the pages of Gramophone's "General Catalogue of Arabic Records" (1931)²⁴² and Parlophone's catalogue of

²³⁷ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 110.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Pekka Gronow, "The Record Industry Comes to the Orient," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May 1981), p. 282.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁴¹ I draw heavily here on Nancy Y. Reynold's work on commerce and fashion in early twentieth century Egypt. See: Nancy Y. Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*, Stanford, 2012.

²⁴² Gramophone, "Catalogue Général de Disques Arabes," (1931), ANOM/9x/24.

“Algerian Recordings” (1930).²⁴³ Likewise, the colonial-cum-historiographic notion of inherent Jewish-Muslim difference or the perception among some scholars that Jews had shed autochthonous language and culture by the interwar period, melt away in the catalogues of Gramophone, Parlophone, and other labels.²⁴⁴ Not only did North African Jews make up a staggering percentage of the total musicians on offer in catalogues bound for the Maghrib — 44% for Gramophone in 1931 and 37% for Parlophone in 1930 — but the same artists were almost always referred to as “Arab” and rarely as “Jewish.”²⁴⁵ This becomes all the more striking in the Algerian context when we recall that a Jewish musician like Lili Labassi, whom Gramophone identified as, “the famous Arab popular singer,” was French by citizenship.²⁴⁶

In the rare cases that Jews were expressly identified as “Jews” in record catalogues it was because the size and diversity of the market allowed for labels to record and then sell a range of ethno-religious facing music. In 1930, for example, the Parlophone catalogue featured a series of “Jewish songs” by the tenor Moïse Bensiano and Yaqoub Mimran El Fassi. In the accompanying photo, El Fassi could be seen wearing a suit and tie, donning a fez, and holding a Hebrew prayer book. Records aimed specifically at North African Jews, however, were not necessarily of the religious variety. The 1931 Gramophone catalogue, for instance, carried listings for the “Jewish comedy records” of Méaaâlem Kaoutou Dziri, including titles like, “The Return from a Jewish Pilgrimage” (Gramophone K 4611) and “The Marriage Proposal” (Gramophone K 4612).²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Parlophone, “Enregistrements Algériens,” (1930), ANOM, 9x/24.

²⁴⁴ This is a surprisingly widespread claim extending across the North African and Jewish historiographic traditions.

²⁴⁵ The percentage of Jewish artists on offer in North African record catalogues climbs when factoring out Kabyle- or Chleuh-language records as Jews, with few exceptions, did not sing professionally in these languages.

²⁴⁶ Gramophone, “Catalogue Général de Disques Arabes,” (1931), ANOM/9x/24.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Finally, at least one artist even adopted (or was bestowed) a stage name that spoke directly to her Jewishness. According to Gramophone's own promotional language, the vocalist Louisa al-Isra'iliyya (Louisa the Jewess) flourished as "the most famous 'meââlma' [master musician] in Algeria."²⁴⁸ Despite the confessional marker, Louisa al-Isra'iliyya, along with the music of Yaqoub Mimran El Fassi and Méaâlem Kaouitou Dziri, were all embraced as Algerian, at least as far as the record companies were concerned.

That wide embrace at the national level was captured in the unlikely pairings marking the pages of Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan record catalogues. Here, seemingly incongruous musical genres were listed side by side under the emerging umbrella categories of "Algerian," "Tunisian," and "Moroccan" music. In the "Algerian Records" section of Gramophone's "General Catalogue of Arabic Records," for example, Mahieddine Bachetarzi's "*Mademoiselle Simone*" (Gramophone K 4340), a popular song mixed in French and Arabic, occupied the same page as his Quranic chanting (Gramophone K 4182).²⁴⁹ On the final page of the "Tunisian Records" section of the same catalogue, the Beylical hymn (Gramophone K 4427) — the Tunisian national hymn — rested just above a double-sided recording of "*Hattikva*" (Gramophone K 4362), the Zionist anthem, recorded by a Mr. Cohen and a Jewish youth choir from Tunis.²⁵⁰

While interwar North African record catalogues carried no shortage of Andalusian music and related genres, the printed offerings of Gramophone, Parlophone, and Baidaphon more often burst with popular music of recent vintage. That music was represented by a range of musical styles, languages, and subjects. In Arabic dialect or in a mélange of Arabic dialect and French,

²⁴⁸ Gramophone, "Catalogue Général de Disques Arabes," (1931), ANOM/9x/24.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

North African musicians, both male and female but overwhelmingly Jewish, sang of love and marriage (and its discontents), the changing role of women, and all things modern (including fashion, professional sports, and drugs). In addition to the topical, catalogues abounded with local takes on the Charleston, fox-trot, waltz, tango, paso-doble, flamenco, and jazz performed on instruments traditional and new. Much of this was noted at the time. In the July 1930 issue of *La Revue Musicale*, the literary figure Gabriel Audisio wrote glowingly of the Parlophone label's entrée into the Algerian market that winter. After observing that their catalogue was filled with the preeminent "professional natives in Alger, who are, moreover, for the most part, the Jews of the country," he continued:

[...] Their repertoire feels the effect of it. Of course, they continue to perform the traditional melodies of the Maghrib and of Moorish Andalusia, but there is no doubt that their playing and their singing is influenced by European styles. Suffice it to say, this is assured, when listening to their *Charleston* or their *Marseillaise*, or even to state that there is often accompaniment on the piano.²⁵¹

But rather than recoil from the Algerian turn to the Charleston or the piano, Audisio heaped praise on Parlophone for capturing, "the actual state of native music, which reveals the nature of the transition which concerns all of Muslim life in Algeria, balanced between two civilizations. The latest Parlophone recordings mark that better than the [recordings of the] others." If Andalusian music captured a particular musical past rooted elsewhere in medieval Iberia, popular records were providing a broader soundtrack for the present.

The record companies actively promoted that present in their catalogues. For the labels, popular records embodied a certain gloss on modernity, "balanced between two civilizations," in which the old and the new blended. That vision was captured vividly in the pages of Columbia's 1931 Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian supplementary record catalogues. While their supplements were awash in Orientalist language and imagery, the label did seem to be

²⁵¹ Gabriel Audisio, "Algerian Recordings," *La Revue Musicale*, July 1930, 11th year, number 106, p. 57.

responding to the local market, where patrons demanded popular music and the genre's premier Jewish exponents. Columbia's Moroccan catalogue, for example, gave "homage to Marshal Lyautey," the first Resident General of Morocco, whom, the catalogue claimed, successfully "promoted the ancestral traditions of the Orient" alongside the "new ways of Western life."²⁵² Perhaps to satisfy the current Resident General and those in the Bureau of Native Arts — who had earlier commissioned Columbia to record "traditional" music — the catalogue begrudgingly announced that:

The varied and curious musical arts of Morocco have not escaped study by intellectuals in France: through the recordings made by Columbia, we have come to know a purely indigenous music, often rough and harsh, but always possessing all of the nostalgia and mystery of Oriental melodies.

And yet, the text continued, "we could not remain indifferent to the popular songs of the orchestras of the artists CHLOUMOU SOURI accompanied by violin and 'ud or the CHALOUM BENHAÏM troupe accompanied by violin and guitar, who we have made known via their records." This was true even if these Moroccan Jewish musicians in particular were not engaging in the same brand of popular pioneered by their counterparts in neighboring countries.²⁵³

With regard to that brand of popular music — what Audisio called "the actual state of native music" — Columbia's 1931 Algerian and Tunisian catalogues represented it well. Columbia's Algerian supplement, for example, announced that it had created a division within the label that specifically catered to the emerging genre.²⁵⁴ Among the artists represented by that division was Lili Labassi, the same Algerian Jewish popular musician Lucienne Jean-Darrouy

²⁵² See: "Columbia au Maroc" held in the Collection phonographique du CNRS - Musée de l'Homme, Le Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie (CREM), Paris, France.

²⁵³ The popular, in this case, is a reference to the lighter, colloquially-inflected repertoires of the nuba complex.

²⁵⁴ "Columbia en Algérie," held in the Collection phonographique du CNRS - Musée de l'Homme, Le Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie (CREM), Paris, France.

saw in concert on Laylat al-Qadr 1934. In their catalogue, Columbia boasted that, “Western influence clearly can be detected in the interpretations of Mr. LILI LAABASSI [sic], who is incorporating French words into his songs.” Those songs included his original creation “*Mamak*” (“[Don’t Tell] Your Mother,” Columbia GF 262), which not only included a smattering of French words but was also in the musical style of a fox-trot and in the Andalusian mode of *sahli*.

The very cover of Columbia’s Tunisian supplement, which was graced by popular Tunisian Jewish artist Louisa Tounsia, put a fine point on the image the record labels were keen to promote.²⁵⁵ Here, Tounsia stares directly at the camera, a whisp of bangs peeking out from under her headband and her neck draped in waist-length pearls. But upon closer inspection, Tounsia is, in fact, not wearing a headband at all but an unwrapped *hayik*, a traditional garment intended to cover head and body in a single cloak. In her photo, Louisa Tounsia has extended the cloak to the tips of her fingers. At its edges, she grasps castanets. With traditional garment unfurled, she reveals her inner modern: a sleeveless blouse, harem pants, and high heels. As her mixed dress seemed to symbolize, Louisa Tounsia embodied the present of Tunisian music and so too its future. In the person of Tounsia, we find the incarnation of the record companies’ ambition to record “the actual state” of North African music, “balanced,” as it was, “between two civilizations.”

“Where were you, Mademoiselle?”: Dalila Taliana Finds Her Place

As the image of Louisa Tounsia makes evident, women had a prominent role to play in this balancing act. In the wake of Habiba Messika’s death, a number of mostly Jewish, female artists rose to the fore of popular music in Tunisia. Among them was Dalila Taliana. Taliana was born in Tunis in 1912. While her given last name remains unknown, her stage name, “Taliana”

²⁵⁵ “Columbia en Tunisie,” held in the Collection phonographique du CNRS - Musée de l’Homme, Le Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie (CREM), Paris, France.

(“the Italian”), signaled her descent from the Livornese Jews who had long made Tunisia home.²⁵⁶ Dalila, as she was commonly called, made her first stage appearance at the age of ten, debuting in March 1922 at the Rossini Theater on Avenue Jules Ferry in the capital.²⁵⁷ She played the title role of Judith in a four-act play in literary Arabic by the same title. Among her co-stars were Tunisia’s premier composer-musicians including Maurice Attoun and Gaston Bsiri, both of whom were Jewish. Sometime in the late 1920s, Dalila cut her first records for Pathé. By 1930, French modernist composer Darius Milhaud hailed Dalila in the pages of the journal *Art et décoration*, as “a star of this very moving music,” and the rightful heir to Habiba Messika.²⁵⁸ In addition to recording some of the repertoire made famous by Messika, Dalila even resembled the late superstar. The proximity to Messika can be seen in a 1931 Pathé catalogue produced for the French Colonial Exhibition held in Paris that year.²⁵⁹ In her photo, Dalila, described as one of “the two biggest Tunisian stars,” was captured in profile, her face framed by finger-wave bob and her neck adorned in a choker of pearls.

Dalila began recording for Gramophone in 1932. Among the Tunisian and Egyptian records she released that year was a mixed French-Arabic song that was a world apart from Andalusian music. But with a rapidity little seen before in the history of the North African record industry, “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” became a runaway hit.

As with all other North African records of the era, an announcer signaled the start of “*Où*

²⁵⁶ Tunisian Jews were divided into two major groups: the *Grana* and the *Twansa*. The *Grana* were Jews with origins in Livorno, Italy, while the *Twansa* were the autochthonous Jews of Tunisia.

²⁵⁷ Hamadi Ben Halima, *Un demi siècle de théâtre arabe en Tunisie, 1907-1957*, Tunis: Université de Tunis, 1974, p. 86.

²⁵⁸ Milhaud was also Jewish. Darius Milhaud, “Chronique des Disques,” *Art et décoration: revue mensuelle d’art moderne*, October 1930, p. 8, accessed May 21, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6106726z/f55>.

²⁵⁹ “Exposition Coloniale Internationale,” Disques Pathé, 1931. Personal collection of Claude Fihman in Paris, France.

vous étiez mademoiselle.” So too did he make clear its intended audience, despite its French title. “*Istwanat Gramafun,*” (“The Gramophone Company [presents]”), a member of her orchestra announced in rapid Arabic, “*Sit Dalila*” (“Mademoiselle Dalila”).²⁶⁰ Violin and ‘ud quickly set a playful mood. In French that was at once perfect and at the same time overwrought, Dalila chirped out the first line: “*Où vous étiez mademoise–LLE.*” In quick succession and in equally fluent Levantine Arabic, she next crooned, “*Kul yawm asal ‘alayki*” (“Everyday I ask about you”). She then completed the chorus:

<i>Je vous aime, oh ma be–LLE</i>	I love you, my BEAU–ty
<i>Je deviens fou ma bayn yadiki</i>	I go crazy in your arms
<i>Ma parole d’honneur MA—demoise–LLE</i>	My word of honor, MA—demoise–LLE ²⁶¹

Afterward her all-male choir (the orchestra) repeated the chorus. “*Où vous éti—ez,*” the male voices rang — again drawing out the last syllable. Dalila herself then cut back into the chorus, belting out “*Mademoise—LLE!*” over her male counterparts. That Dalila had vocal range was more than apparent on the recording. But it was also obvious that she possessed a range of expression. In the first verse, after asking why her lover never asked about her — in a line that began in French and ended in Arabic — she practically pouted and winked when she followed up slowly with, “Not knowing that I love you” (“*Mish ‘arifti illi ḥabbtik*”).

But with “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle,*” Dalila winked in other ways as well. On occasion, in a song that could be mistaken for French, she revealed her indigeneity, rolling her French “r” as if it were Arabic. So too did she signal other, equally important matters to her audience, like the changing role of women. Popular music could do that. In “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle,*” for example, Dalila not only sang the part of a male suitor longing for a female love interest but did so as a woman while singing over her male choir. The Andalusian traditions

²⁶⁰ Dalila Taliana, “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle,*” Gramophone K 4680. Personal collection.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

by contrast, the benchmark against which such popular music would be compared, were almost exclusively the domain of men, with lyrics, entirely in formal Arabic, that tended to communicate longing from the perspective of one man to another, and with the allegorical where Dalila had been literal. Given this, Dalila's performance of "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*" was bold if not audacious.

But it was also instantly appealing. Part of that appeal was due to its form. Indeed, from the perspective of structure and rhyme, "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*" resembled much of early twentieth century popular music around the globe. To begin with, the song alternated between chorus and verse. In addition, the chorus contained the song's message while the verses tapped out its narrative. And the end rhymes employed by "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*" were not "AAABB," as with Andalusian music, but the "ABAB" of commercial popular music, as seen, here, in bold.²⁶²

<i>Où vous étiez mademoiselle</i> (A)	Where were you, mademoiselle
<i>Kul yawm asal 'alayki</i> (B)	Everyday I ask about you
<i>Je vous aime, oh ma belle</i> (A)	I love you, my beauty
<i>Je deviens fou ma bayn yadiki</i> (B)	I go crazy in your arms
<i>Ma parole d'honneur mademoiselle</i> (A)	My word of honor, mademoiselle

The sonic scheme of "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*" was at once accessible, lending the song to memorization and to cover, and at the same time, met the demands and limitations of the new medium — the record — then proliferating. In general, the song's success could be pinned on what Mahieddine Bachetarzi called "the vogue" for "French-Arabic songs" and on Dalila Taliana herself, whose look, voice, and lyrical content helped push popular music over the edge.²⁶³

²⁶² As both Jonathan Glasser and Ruth Davis have shown, the sung Andalusian repertoires in Algiers, Tlemcen, and Tunis do not necessarily from the outset. Instead, Andalusian music has tended to employ an "AAABB" rhyme pattern toward the middle of a piece. See Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusian Music in Urban North Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 89; and Ruth Davis, *Ma'luf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*, Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 5.

²⁶³ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p.165.

In the immediate aftermath of its release in 1932 by Gramophone, “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” was well on its way to becoming a standard — not just in Tunisia but in Algeria as well. In the coming months and years, the song was recorded time and again by Dalila Taliana’s erstwhile colleagues and competitors, including the Jewish stars Ratiba Tounsia and Louisa Tounsia (no relation).²⁶⁴ It was performed in concert too. When Dalila visited Algiers for the first time in July 1933, she sang “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” before a crowd of 8,000 at Bresson Square, one of the largest gathering places in the city.²⁶⁵ One journalist remarked that the mere announcement of Dalila’s visit “aroused an excited curiosity” among the Algerian public, as did that of “her partner Acher Mazrahi [sic], the acclaimed Tunisian singer,” who also happened to be the song’s composer.²⁶⁶ To be sure, that curiosity was aroused by the fact that “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” could be heard nearly everywhere in Algiers in the early-to-mid-1930s.

This iconic song even received mention in the literature of the period. In Lucienne Favre’s anthropological-ethnographic *Tout l’Inconnu de la Casbah d’Alger*, for instance, published in 1933, the Parisian-born novelist dwelled on what she called the “nocturnal Casbah” and so too on its music.²⁶⁷ In the lower Casbah, she observed, “the phonograph is large and has

²⁶⁴ Ratiba Tounsia recorded “*Où étiez-vous mademoiselle*” for the Oum-El-Hassan label (55.052) and Louisa Tounsia recorded “*Mademoiselle*” for the Polyphon label (45.634). For the Ratiba Tounsia disc in question, see “Expo Phono: Catalogue de l’exposition d’anciens appareils de lecture de phonogrammes (cylinders, disques, fils et bandes magnetiques) en circulation en Tunisie du début du XX ème siècle jusqu’aux années 60: Collection privée de Habib Boughrara,” Tunis: Palais Ennejma Ezzahra, 2006, p. 9.

²⁶⁵ “Gala oriental d’“El-Moutribia” à l’Opera d’Alger,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, 3 January 1934, p. 7, Accessed May 21, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7583565t/f7.

²⁶⁶ “Grand concert oriental de bienfaisance donné par l’orchestre d’été et la société El-Moutribia,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, 24 July 1933, p. 3, gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75834946/f3.

²⁶⁷ Lucienne Favre, *Tout l’inconnu de la Casbah d’Alger*, Baconnier Frères, 1933, p. 209.

an excellent sound. Tunisian music resonates on it with a vigor, which together with anisette raises the morale of men for a while.”²⁶⁸ Just a few pages later, she continued, “the phonograph sings gaily...Ah...Mademoi...z...è...è...lle.”²⁶⁹ It was, in her rendering, as if the city itself breathed the song.

Like Lucienne Jean-Darrouy, who took note of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” a few months later, Favre picked up on the song’s chorus. Responding to Mahieddine Bachetarzi’s interpretation of the song in January 1934, Jean-Darrouy could write of the audience that, “it was more than apparent that they enjoyed a mixed song where the Arabic and French languages blended, in which a lover vows his passion [for a woman] and gives her his ‘word of honor’ [*parole d’honneur*]. The song offered a soundtrack for the day, somehow weaving together the spirit of the interwar moment, the boldness of modern women, and the lure of popular music in North Africa.

Building A National Audience through Popular Music

“For the first time, in the winter 1932-33,” the journalist L.V. wrote in the journal *Revue des Études Islamiques*, “the native Tunisian public has been able to appreciate the mounting of very modern stagecraft.”²⁷⁰ He continued, “concerts of Arab music, interspersed with lyrical, satirical, or simply, light-hearted songs, are very much flourishing in Tunis and bring together every night, in one or another of the city’s theaters (Ben Slama, Mondial Alhambra, Idéal, and various music-halls), a native public very fond of this sort of entertainment.”²⁷¹ Among those

²⁶⁸ Lucienne Favre, *Tout l’inconnu de la Casbah d’Alger*, p. 210.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁷⁰ L.V., “Le théâtre arabe à Tunis,” *Revue des Études Islamiques*, Cahier IV, 1932, p. 537.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 542.

bringing together “the native Tunisian public,” L.V. observed, was Ratiba Chamia, the Jewish artist who he argued “seems superior even to her brilliant companions.” She was also one of the many who recorded a rendition of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*.”²⁷² L.V. pointed out that despite her stage name “Chamia,” meaning “Levantine” or “Syrian” in Arabic, Ratiba (also a stage name) had actually been born in Casablanca, albeit to a rather illustrious Tunisian musical pedigree. Ratiba was niece to Pathé artists Rafoul and Bahia, the latter of whom had first appended “Chamia” to her name. Ratiba’s other aunt — Flifla Chamia (sometimes rendered as Echamia) — who had recorded “*Moute Habiba Messika*” for Gramophone in the wake of the superstar’s death, was widely regarded as the Maghrib’s best dancer at the time.²⁷³

Among her other qualities, L.V. found that it was Ratiba Chamia’s “charming physique” and “perfect diction” that helped her achieve “quick success.” It also landed her recording contracts, first with the Bembaron firm and then with Baidaphon.²⁷⁴ But her popularity was also due to the transnational geographic depth of her catalogue, which spanned the Maghrib across to Egypt, and her embrace of popular music, what L.V. referred to as her, “more amusing or charming songs, of a new genre, I want to say, mixed in French and Arabic.”²⁷⁵ It was the same genre that had catapulted Dalila Taliana and “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” to fame.²⁷⁶

²⁷² L.V., “Le théâtre arabe à Tunis,” *Revue des Études Islamiques*, Cahier IV, 1932, p. 543.

²⁷³ Flifla, whose name was a diminutive of the Arabic *filfil*, meaning “pepper”, was often referred to in the French press as “the little spicy pepper” (“*le petit poivron-poivronette*”). On the subject of Flifla Chamia’s as dancer, see “Théâtre arabe,” *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée: journal hebdomadaire d’actualités nord-africaines: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc*, January 16, 1932, p. 9, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5586887z/f17.item>.

²⁷⁴ L.V., “Le théâtre arabe à Tunis,” *Revue des Études Islamiques*, Cahier IV, 1932, p. 543. It should be noted that Ratiba Chamia, a Jewish artist, traveled to Nazi Berlin to record with Baidaphon.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 544.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Ratiba Chamia helped produce her diverse public – the “phonograph lovers” -- through an equally diverse repertoire. Of those styles she recorded, L.V. spoke of her “taqtuqas [Egyptian light-hearted songs], qasidas [Egyptian neoclassical music], etc., Egyptian songs, Tripolitanian songs, Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan songs of

As the embodiment of what L.V. called “modern stagecraft,” Ratiba Chamia, a woman who was Moroccan by origin but carried a Syrian stage name, helped produce a new modern Tunisian public. So too did a number of other Jewish female vocalists. That public, cross-confessional and cross-class, were identified as “phonograph lovers” and “fans” — and so too Tunisian. “All phonograph lovers have Ratiba’s records,” reported L.V. on a grouping that gave nod to neither religion or demographic. “Her fans guarantee,” L.V. added, “that one day she will be the equal of the famous Egyptian singer Oum Kolthoum [sic].”²⁷⁷

Alongside Dalila Taliania and Ratiba Chamia, the artist Louisa Tounsia was instrumental in carving out a modern Tunisian public. Born Louisa Saadoun in Tunis in 1905, the Jewish singer began her professional career in the mid-1920s. Her earliest recording sessions — as “Louisa Tounsia” (“Louisa the Tunisian”) — appear to have been with the Columbia label toward the end of the decade. Shortly thereafter, she graced the cover of their 1931 catalogue. Like Habiba Messika, her popularity enabled her to record for multiple labels at once, despite the preference for exclusive contracts among record executives. In 1931, for example, the year she served as Columbia’s cover girl, she also recorded for Pathé. In the years that followed, she would add Baidaphon, Perfectaphone, and Polyphon to her roster.²⁷⁸ In early 1931, Bembaron publicity began to refer to Louisa Tounsia as a “Tunisian superstar,” the designation earlier earned by Messika.²⁷⁹ The newspaper *l’Echo d’Alger* employed a matching epithet. After her

the Arab classical genre [Andalusian], and other more amusing or charming songs, of a new genre, I want to say, mixed in French and Arabic.”

²⁷⁷ Um Kulthum was without a doubt the most celebrated female Arab vocalist of the modern era. For detailed treatment of Um Kulthum, see Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

²⁷⁸ For some of her Baidaphon recordings, see “Baidaphon-Record, Catalogue 1936,” CADN/MA/200/193, 1936.

²⁷⁹ See “DEMANDEZ A ECOUTER les disques «POLYPHON» enregistrés par la première **super-vedette** tunisienne LOUISA TOUNSSIA chez Bembaron & Cie, Agents exclusifs,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, March 25, 1931, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7581666z/f8.item.r>.

1931 tour in Morocco, which the paper described as “a triumph of unprecedented proportions,” the Algerian daily announced that “the reputation of Louisa Ettounsia [sic] has for a longtime reached us, and the public has been charged with a current of curiosity.”²⁸⁰ As she performed between North African capitals and Paris, like many Jewish artists of the era, she grabbed hold of her fans.²⁸¹ But it was in Tunisia that she built a national audience. She accomplished that feat not through Andalusian music but through the most salacious of popular songs.

“It is in the grand hall of the Palmarium,” French literary figure Pierre Mac Orlan inserted into his realist fiction *Le Bataillon de la mauvaise chance*, “so full that the parquet floor and ceiling buckle under the weight of a marvelous, colorful crowd, that Tunis offers me, for 10 francs a ticket, a spectacle that I could only dream of.”²⁸² But the Louisa Tounsia concert of popular music that Mac Orlan observed in 1930 was no fiction. Indeed, the French novelist, a friend to Lucienne Favre — the novelist who had heard “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” in the lower Casbah of Algiers — later included the section on Louisa Tounsia in his memoiristic travel writing. Long fascinated by the popular classes, Mac Orlan not only found himself in Tunis in 1930 but so too had the good fortune of attending a Louisa Tounsia concert at La Palmarium in the port of La Goulette while there. At the Palmarium, he marveled as much at the artist as at her

²⁸⁰ “Un Grand Gala Artistique Arabe A l'Alhambra,” *L'Echo d'Alger*, February 12, 1931, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75816251/f5.item.r>.

²⁸¹ See listings for “Les Provinces à Paris,” in *Le Temps*, 9 March 1939, p. 6, accessed May 23, 2017 <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k263870j/f6>; and “Une 'diffa' en plein Paris,” *Paris-Soir*, May 21, 1939, p. 6, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7644450g/f6..> Louisa Tounsia mainly operated out of the North African restaurants-turned-music venues dotting the Latin quarter. One such concert of hers took place at “l’Oasis,” alternately “El Djazair,” on 27 Rue de la Huchette. Among the crowd was the celebrated Moroccan boxer Jo El-Houssine and his entourage. “El Djazair” also used Louisa Tounsia’s likeness in their own promotional materials. I thank Les Cook (Glossop, United Kingdom) for sharing one such piece of ephemera with me.

²⁸² This account of Louisa Tounsia originally appeared in Pierre Mac Orlan, *Le Bataillon de la Mauvaise chance: Un civil chez les ‘Joyeux,’* Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1933, p. 43-45 but was then reproduced in Pierre Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, p. 293.

audience. “In a complete fusion of all of the native social classes of Tunis,” Mac Orlan noted with vivid detail:

who have come together to applaud Louisa Tounsia, one can see heavy-set, Jewish old maids in long, harem pants (*pantalon long demi-bouffant*), held up at their waists with gold-embroidered bolero jackets; Muslim women in white, faces covered by black veils; veiled Muslim women, but dressed a bit European; in-the-know Tunisian women dressed according to the dictates of the most recent fashion catalogues; musicians of the Beylical guard dressed all in red with bolero jackets decorated in the yellow wool of military trim; the “tramway workers;” the well-dressed in pearl gray, donning the fez made of wool (*astrakan*) or red cloth; the fortunate-to-be-born-on-Friday, and for that reason, wear the green turban; the hunchbacked topped with the red fez; the thoroughly maimed and crippled; the young *zouaves* of a semitic type; the *baharias*, the native seamen who have replaced their red-tasseled sailor caps with the national fez; the little girls already anxious to please; the bleary-eyed children; the young men without hats and with square shoulder pads and loose-fitting pants; the audacious and troublesome *ragabouches*, the aggressive dwarfs...²⁸³

If at the Palmarium, Mac Orlan witnessed what seemed like a representative sample of the whole of Tunis, he found that her performance of Andalusian music, which occupied the “rest of the week,” was confined “to intimate settings at the homes of rich men who invite some of their friends to come and listen.” At the Palmarium, however, Louisa Tounsia did something different, at least when it came to music. And it worked. “Louisa’s real place,” Mac Orlan wrote, in contradistinction to the homes of the wealthy, “is in front of her people, on the grand stage of the Palmarium.”²⁸⁴ “Her people,” as he made clear, was as inclusive a definition as it was a Tunisian one.

As much as the crowd appreciated the virtuosity of her orchestra, it was Louisa Tounsia and her music that made Tunisians applaud. “When the curtain is raised,” Mac Orlan witnessed, “one takes in the orchestra on stage: a virtuoso pianist²⁸⁵, ‘ud and cymbal players, a violinist, a darbuka player, and a young man who rattles iron castanets. This group resembles, with its hint

²⁸³ Pierre Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, p. 293.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ The “virtuoso pianist” was Messaoud Habib.

of solemnity, a council of ministers.”²⁸⁶ But, “when Louisa appears, the entire concert hall cheers for her; the clapping of hands never ceases.”²⁸⁷ Others noticed that warm embrace as well. In 1932, *Le Petit Matin* journalist Abdelaziz Laroui reported that Louisa Tounsia “was welcomed [at one of her concerts] by such thunderous applause,” that one could be forgiven for thinking there was a group of hired fans among the crowd, as “if clagues existed in Tunis and as if Louisa had needed such subterfuge to arouse admiration.”²⁸⁸ The rolling applause for Louisa Tounsia that Mac Orlan experienced in 1930 ended only when, “the little brunette singer, graceful yet soft, wearing an apple green silk robe adorned with sewn scarlet roses, signaled for silence.”²⁸⁹

After the artist calmed the crowd, he noted that, “the orchestra struck up and the sultry voice of this mischievous, impish young woman projected Arabic lyrics, full of sexual and romantic innuendo, to the farthest reaches of this immense hall.”²⁹⁰ Louisa Tounsia, it appeared, was the voice of an emerging popular music, as sensational as it was national.

While Mac Orlan provided no set list for the concert he covered, he was correct about Louisa Tounsia’s music. Almost all of it was “full of sexual and romantic innuendo.” If Dalila Taliana demonstrated — implicitly — a certain audacity with “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” Louisa Tounsia’s mixed French and Arabic numbers, like “*Viens chez moi*” (“Come on over to my place”), were downright scandalous. In fact, in “*Viens chez moi*” (recorded for Polyphon), the Tunisian Jewish Maurice Benaïs — her composer of choice — often saved her most indecent of

²⁸⁶ Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, p. 293.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Abdelaziz Laroui, “Au Palmarium,” *Le Petit Matin*, October 30, 1932, p. 3. Cited in Mohamed Turki, *Abdelaziz Laroui: témoin de son temps*, Editions Turki, 1988, p. 234.

²⁸⁹ Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, p. 293.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 293-294.

lines for the Arabic. This may have been why Mac Orlan could claim that he, “did not understand a single word” of Louisa Tounsia’s music, even though her songs were replete with French.²⁹¹

As the piano backing by Messaoud Habib slowed on the original recording, Louisa Tounsia sang, “*Ché-rie, com-bien je t’aim-e!*” (“Dar-ling, how much I lo-ve you”) at full volume. She accompanied herself on castanets. Over music that sounded suspiciously like the French fox-trot-shimmy, “*Je cherche après Titine*,” Louisa Tounsia narrated the tale of a man lusting for a young woman.²⁹² Where Dalila Taliana was playful, Louisa Tounsia was ribald. Where “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” employed “*mademoiselle*” (“an unmarried woman”) and “*vous*” (the formal “you”), Louisa Tounsia used “*chérie*” (“darling”) and “*tú*” (the informal “you.”) to beckon her “*belle*” (“beauty”). And where Dalila Taliana waited, Louisa Tounsia stalked.

Like “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” however, the rhyme scheme of “*Viens chez moi*” was the pure popular “ABAB.” Following that formula, the chorus moved effortlessly between French and Arabic.

<i>Chérie, combien je t’aime</i> (A)	Darling, how much I love you (A)
<i>Natakalamlik bikalam</i> (B)	I am seriously speaking to you (B)
<i>‘Omri, combien je t’aime</i> (A)	My love, how much I love you (A)
<i>Kif tukhrij mil-ḥammam</i> (B)	When [I see] you leave the hammam (B) ²⁹³

That her Arabic lyrics were spicier than her French ones is perhaps most evident in the penultimate verse, transcribed below.

<i>Viens chez moi un moment</i> (French)	Come on over to my place for a moment
<i>Wahdi fi dar</i> (Arabic)	I’m alone in the house

²⁹¹ Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, 294.

²⁹² Thank you to Cormac O’Donoghue for bringing that to my attention. Charlie Chaplin performed a gibberish version of “*Je cherche après Titine*” in the film *Modern Times* (1936).

²⁹³ I am indebted to Professor Lamia Benyoussef for her help with this translation.

<i>Tu verras comment</i> (French)	You will see how
<i>Natfiyu hadhik en-naar</i> (Arabic)	We will quench that fire
<i>J'oublierai mes tourments</i> (French)	I will forget all my suffering
<i>Ana bi 'ayunik lkbar</i> (Arabic)	In your big eyes

This was the music, mixed in French and Arabic, indecent, and above all, popular, for which the “complete fusion of all of the native social classes of Tunis” were coming together at venues like the Palmarium. And just as Louisa Tounsia had “her people,” the people had her. “Louisa Tounsia,” Mac Orlan accurately assessed, “is the idol of her city.”²⁹⁴ Andalusian music might have been the ideal of the elite, but Tounsia’s music belonged to the people.

Composing the Popular in the Maghrib

Behind the music of Dalila Taliana and Louisa Tounsia, labored a set of Jewish composers. The same was true for much of the other popular music then emerging in and across the Maghrib. In Algeria, for example, Lili Labassi’s composition “*Mamak*” (“[Don’t Tell] Your Mother”), a fox-trot in Algerian dialect recorded for Columbia, quickly became a standard in country before spreading to the east and west as well. Throughout the early 1930s, Algerian newspapers regularly reported on Lili Labassi performing his fox-trot in concert, while Algerian and Moroccan record catalogues spoke to its popularity. In Algeria, versions of “*Mamak*” were released by Mourjean (Parlophone 46.523), “who gained popularity for his interpretation of the song,” by Madame Ghazala (Columbia GF 200), by Louisa al-Isra’iliya (Gramophone K 4421), by Mealem Touati el-Ouah’rani (Gramophone K 4213), and by Jojo, son of Oran-born master musician Saoud l’Oranais (Polydor 550067). In Morocco, the duo Simon Ohayan and Hazar Cohen (Pathé X 38069) and female artist Cheikha Aicha La Hebrea recorded renditions of “*Mamak*” (Pathé X 38019) as well.

The contribution of certain Jewish composers to the interwar music scene was hailed at

²⁹⁴ Pierre Mac Orlan, *Villes: Mémoires*, p. 294.

the time and later — but seldom was their Jewishness named. In Baidaphon’s 1936 North African catalogue, for example, which featured thirty-three pages of “sensational recordings of the best Egyptian, Syrian, Tunisian, Tripolitanian, and Algerian artists,” the label boasted that it employed “the most important of the renowned professors [composers]: Gaston Bsiri, Acher Mizrahi, Bachir Fahmy, Maurice Attoun, and the famous poet Mahmoud Bayrem Ettounsi.”²⁹⁵ Of the five composers cited, Gaston Bsiri, Acher Mizrahi, and Maurice Attoun were Jewish but — characteristic of the interwar period — none were identified as such. “Each of them has their song, which is known by everyone,” Baidaphon proudly announced.²⁹⁶ For Acher Mizrahi, who performed at the Laylat al-Qadr concert in 1934, one of those songs was “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle.*”

In their memoirs, Raoul Journo and Mahieddine Bachetarzi both reflect fondly on the same group of mostly Jewish, Tunisian composers. “There were four composers [at that time],” Journo, Messaoud Habib’s protégé, wrote in his personal history, “Acher Mizrahi, Gaston Bsiri, Maurice Benaïs, [and] Maurice Attoun.”²⁹⁷ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, for his part, recognized “Gaston BESIRI [sic], Maurice BENAIS, Acher MIZRAHI, [and] Bechir FEHMI [sic]” as the preeminent composers of their day.

The paths of men like Acher Mizrahi, Gaston Bsiri, and Maurice Benaïs, the last of which composed Louisa Tounsia’s titillating “*Viens chez moi,*” offer us two insights. The first insight is that in the interwar Maghrib (and beyond), variegated and overlapping soundscapes co-mingled easily. The second point is that those soundscapes make audible Jewish daily life as it was lived

²⁹⁵ “Istawanat Baydafun: Aghani Masriyya, Suriyya, Tunsiiyya, Trablusiyya, Jazairiyya” Katalog jadid l’sana 1936 / “Baidaphon-Record, Enregistrement Sensationnel des Meilleurs Artistes Egyptiens, Syriens, Tunisiens, Tripolitains et Algériens,” Catalogue 1936, ANOM, 15h/32/.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Raoul Journo, *Ma vie*, p. 129.

across North Africa.

Three arresting tales from these three men's lives illustrate these points well. Raoul Journo's 1935 commercial success "*Ana Targui*" ("I'm a Tuareg," Polyphon 46.294), for example, a popular composition by Maurice Benaïs, was almost immediately adapted for Jewish paraliturgical use. A Judeo-Arabic song sheet for "*Ana nzurik bil farḥa qawiya*" ("I visit you with great joy"), printed shortly thereafter, noted that the Jewish pilgrimage song in honor Rabbi Yossef al-Maarabi was to be sung "to the tune of *Ana Targui*."²⁹⁸ A little over a decade later, the Algerian Muslim musician Amraoui Missoum released his nationalist anthem "*Ana Elarbi*" ("I'm an Arab") to the same melody.²⁹⁹ The movement of "*Ana Targui*" meant that the Tunisian public, Tunisian Jewish religious pilgrims, the Algerian public, and Algerian nationalists and their supporters were all singing to the tune of the same Maurice Benaïs composition dating to the interwar period. A North African Jew singing in Arabic and announcing himself a Tuareg, thus became the soundtrack for the extraordinary diversity of the 1930s Maghrib.

Between the wars, Jewish composers moved between popular, nationalist, paraliturgical, and even Zionist music without (or so it seems) second-guessing their identity as Tunisians—and with little push-back from their Muslim peers.

The case of Acher Mizrahi drives the point home. Mizrahi, to whom Dalila Taliana gave tribute on her 1932 recording of "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*," was not born in Tunisia but in

²⁹⁸ See "Piyyut likhvod rabaynu al-sayyid Rabbi Yusif al-Ma'arabi," NLI, accessed May 23, 2017, http://primo.nli.org.il/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=NLI&docId=NNL_ALEPH002801484. The tomb of Rabbi Youcef al-Ma'arabi, the Moroccan-born disciple of sixteenth century kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, in Gabes remains a pilgrimage site for Tunisian Jews to this day.

²⁹⁹ Naïma Yahî, "L'aventure artistique du catalogue arabe Pathé Marconi: 1950-1970," in *Ecarts d'identité*, N° Spécial: La chanson maghrébine de l'exil en France (1950-1970), p. 12.

Ottoman Jerusalem, to parents originally from the island of Rhodes.³⁰⁰ In Jerusalem, Mizrahi was raised on Ladino as much as Levantine Arabic. So too did he speak Hebrew. As the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) erupted, Mizrahi, fearing conscription, fled Palestine for Tunisia.³⁰¹ In Tunis, the twenty-two year old took up musical residency at the Guittit synagogue (*Slat Guittit*), where he performed Egyptian popular and Jewish paraliturgical music for congregants.³⁰² At the end of World War I, Mizrahi returned to Jerusalem. There, he became a sensation among both the Palestinian Arab and Sephardi Jewish communities, the latter of which adoringly referred to him by “Ashriko,” a diminutive of “Acher.”³⁰³ In 1926, Mizrahi was invited to become the cantor at the Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue of Alexandria, Egypt in 1926, but declined the offer. He remained in Palestine until 1929, at which point, he returned to Tunis. In Tunis, he took up a position as a music teacher and cantor at the Jewish Or-Thora school (*Ecole Franco-Hebraïque ‘Or-Thora’*). Within a year, at the age of forty, the Palestine-born teacher and cantor began his recording career for Parlophone.³⁰⁴ His recordings, which included an elegy to Habiba Messika, made up part of the catalogue’s “Tunisian repertoire.” Gramophone categorized him similarly. As for Decca, the label’s catalogue featured a group photo showcasing, “the best Tunisian artists.”³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Yaacov Asal, “Bayn `Evar le-`arev: Hayav ve yatzirato shel Asher Mizrahi,” (MA thesis, Hebrew University, under direction of Professor Edwin Seroussi), p. 11.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁰² See “Biographie Par Jo Uzan et Jacques Taïeb,” *achermizrahi*, accessed June 9, 2017, <http://achermizrahi.centerblog.net/5.html>.

³⁰³ Jacob Yehoshua, *Yaldut bi-Yerushalayim ha-yeshanah pirke hayai mi-yamim `avaru*, 1966, p. 212.

³⁰⁴ “Parlophone: Enregistrements Algériens.” ANOM/9x/24, 1930-1931.

³⁰⁵ See “Artistes Tunisiens,” Acher Mizrahi archives familiales, posted December 4, 2014, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/1507212486195416/photos/a.1528659574050707.1073741831.1507212486195416/15286600717271/?type=3&theater>.

Mizrahi, in suit and fez, stood at the far left. As a composer and an arranger, Mizrahi's handwork became attached to some of the most iconic Tunisian songs of the period: "*Tesfar we tghib*," ("When you leave, you will know the taste of exile,") "*Ya hasra kif kont sghira*," ("Lost youth and love"), and of course, "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*."³⁰⁶ Journeying as he did from Ottoman Jerusalem to Tunis and religious and secular spheres, Mizrahi was well placed to produce a Tunisian music that moved in-between registers.

The same could be said for Gaston Bsiri. Hayyim "Gaston" Bsiri was born in 1888 in Tunis to Ottoman Jewish parents from the Anatolian port city of Izmir.³⁰⁷ Bsiri, like Mizrahi, was also a professional polymath. By the early 1920s, Bsiri, for instance, worked in theater alongside Dalila Taliana and composer Maurice Attoun.³⁰⁸ He was also a recording artist. He began recording and composing Egyptian and Tunisian songs for Pathé in 1925 and for Gramophone in 1927.³⁰⁹ Both labels, just like Baidaphon, considered him to be among their "renowned professors" of Tunisian music.³¹⁰ So too did most Tunisians. Like Mizrahi, Bsiri was

³⁰⁶ All of the above-mentioned songs, with the exception for "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*," were recorded by the Tunisian Jewish musician Cheikh El Afrite (né Israel Rozio). The above translations are interpretative more than literal. Finally, those compositions are all still registered with SACEM under the name of [Acher] Simon Mizrahi. See "Répertoire des oeuvres", SACEM, accessed May 23, 2017, <https://repertoire.sacem.fr/resultats?filters=parties&query=simon%20mizrahi#searchBtn>.

³⁰⁷ Ethnomusicologist Ruth Davis, along with her informant Yaacov Bsiri, Gaston Bsiri's nephew, can largely be credited with keeping the memory of Bsiri alive through her work. Intriguingly, while she ascribes an Ottoman Rhodes origin to the Bsiri family, others place his roots in Ottoman Tripolitania (see Ali Jandoubi, "Coin de la musique et du Théâtre," *Échos de Tunis*, December 25, 1960. Cited in Amnon Shiloah, "Réflexions sur les rapports entre musique juive et musique arabe en Tunisie," in *Entre Orient et Occident: juifs et musulmans en Tunisie*, ed. Denis Cohen-Tannoudji, Paris: Éclat, 2007. For more on Gaston Bsiri, see Ruth Davis, "Time, Place, and Memory: Songs for a North African Jewish Pilgrimage," in *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities, and Dislocations in Europe*, ed., Erik Levi and Florian Scheduling, 2010, p. 73.

³⁰⁸ Hamadi Ben Halima, *Un demi siècle de théâtre arabe en Tunisie, 1907-1957*, p. 86.

³⁰⁹ "Supplément au Répertoire Tunisien," Pathé, 1925, held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), Département de l'Audiovisuel, Service des documents sonores.

³¹⁰ He was also responsible for the blended Algerian music of a young Jewish upstart by the name of Salim Halali.

inextricably linked to the Tunisian popular music of the era. His mixed French-Arabic, “*Bonsoir Madame*” (“Good Evening, Madame”), for example, in the Andalusian mode of *rasd*, quickly became a standard. The song, which featured the following lyrics:

<i>Bonsoir madame, ya ḥilwa al-qawam, tihik ou ḥarramni al-manam.</i>	Good evening, madame, with the beautiful physique You taunted me and robbed me of my sleep.
--	--

was recorded by a number of artists in the interwar period.³¹¹ But Gaston Bsiri’s steadiest employment was found at the *Alliance israélite* school in the Tunis’ Hafsia neighborhood where he served as Hebrew and music teacher. In 1923, the quarterly bulletin of the *Alliance israélite* lauded their star teacher’s modern Hebrew language skills. “Mr. Bsiri,” the report read, “is possibly the only person in Tunis who has proper knowledge of modern Hebrew and who speaks it as easily as if it was his mother tongue.”³¹² He displayed his knowledge of modern Hebrew in at least two settings: in the synagogue, where he taught Zionist folksong, and in his published songbooks, which included Judeo-Arabic translations of that same repertoire alongside Egyptian and Tunisian popular fare.

There was little that was peculiar about Tunisia’s best composers moving between Egyptian and Tunisian musical styles during the interwar period. If we consider the published Judeo-Arabic songbooks of the era too, the same could be said for their promotion of Zionist folksong. One such songbook, from “the mouth of the famous singer Mr. Acher Mizrahi,” included sections of Tunisian music (‘*arubi*), “new Egyptian song” (“*Dom ya zaman*”³¹³), and

³¹¹ Those artists included Mademoiselle Aziza (Gramophone K 3728).

³¹² “Bulletin Trimestriel des Ecoles de Tunis,” *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, number 6, January-March 1923, accessed June 3, 2016, http://sifrix3.sdv.fr/F/7SAK7VRB7E7A816RFRHAKY1E1REMHFVS5RNETI2A9XN1V5C6MI-37574?func=full-set-set&set_number=088552&set_entry=000003&format=999.

³¹³ The most famous version of “Dom ya zaman,” was recorded by the Egyptian artist Mohamed Abdel Aziz (Baidaphon B 96760).

“Songs of Zion” (“*shirei tsion*”).³¹⁴ That last section, which was marked by a six-pointed star, included the Hebrew-language “*Po be-eretz hemdat avot*” (“Here in the land of our forefathers”), an early twentieth century Zionist composition.³¹⁵ In one of Gaston Bsiri’s publications, “*al-qism al-awwal min: Shiray Siyyon, Piyyutim Bi-Tafsirihim*” (“Songs of Zion, Piyyutim and their Meanings, Part I”), he included paraliturgical music (*piyyutim*) alongside Zionist folksong (*shir tsioni*).³¹⁶

In the “*al-qism al-awwal min: Shiray Siyyon, Piyyutim Bi-Tafsirihim*,” published around 1934, Bsiri noted in his introduction that he had taught what he described as a blend of new and old “songs of Zion” to his students at the *Alliance israélite* and that this same mixed repertoire was performed every Sabbath at the New Synagogue (*Slat Jadid*) in the Bab Souika neighborhood.³¹⁷ According to Bsiri, he published this work, “at the behest of a number of people,” who demanded not only the original Hebrew lyrics but so too their translation into Judeo-Arabic. Dutifully Bsiri decoded the lyrics but so too altered them somewhat. In the Zionist folksong “*Hovi eres moledet*” (“O, Cradle of our Homeland”), for example, Bsiri rendered the Hebrew word “*eres*” (“cradle”) as “*eretz*” (meaning, “land”). He repeated the permutation in the Judeo-Arabic. Bsiri therefore translated the Hebrew “*Hovi eretz moledet*” into “*Ya ard, ya watan*,” (“O Land, O Homeland”) in the Judeo-Arabic. For those reading along, the translated lyrics looked not dissimilar to “*Hamda lirab el-Alamine: en l’honneur de S. A. le Bey*,” another

³¹⁴ Asher Mizrahi, “Ghnaït Galbi memhoun gajdek,” held at NLI.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Gaston Bsiri, “Shirei Zion,” held at NLI.

³¹⁷ For a slightly different translation of Bsiri’s songbook, see Yosef Tobi and Tsivia Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature in Tunisia, 1850-1950*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014, p. 72.

songbook of Acher Mizrahi, which featured music honoring the Tunisian monarch and the Tunisian people.³¹⁸ The Tunisian people, of course, included Mizrahi and Bsiri.

Even as Bsiri and Mizrahi engaged with music identified with the Jewish and Zionist particular, the Tunisian composers, it seemed, were most concerned with the broad Tunisian public then coalescing. In Bsiri's case, "the phonograph lovers" were his target audience. In another one of his Judeo-Arabic songbooks, which featured Bsiri's "latest [Tunisian] creations and 25 other Egyptian songs," he saved his most important announcement for an Arabic-reading public.³¹⁹ On the last page of his songbook, he announced, in Arabic (not Judeo-Arabic), that he had opened a store at 56 Rue d'Alfa, which stocked new and used instruments in addition to "phonograph records of a multitude of genres at modest prices."³²⁰ The patronage of customers of any ethno-religious and political persuasion was clearly encouraged.

As for Mizrahi, referred to in the press in any number of ways — as "the great Arab composer of Jerusalem," "the well-known Tunisian singer," and "the singer from Tunis and Palestine," but never as Jewish, "the phonograph lovers" may have again had the last word.³²¹ Despite engaging in Egyptian, Jewish paraliturgical, and Zionist song, Mizrahi's records were never distributed in Egypt nor among Jews in Palestine. Instead, Mizrahi's records, alongside

³¹⁸ Asher Mizrahi, "Hamda lirab el-Alamine : en l'honneur de S. A. le Bey," held at NLI.

³¹⁹ Gaston Bsiri, "Ya'hmati: H'oubbak Yamçrya; H'abibi da h'abibi; Allemni el ood; Foulle oulyassmine; Enchallah taachaq et 25 autres chansons égyptiennes," held at NLI.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ See any combination of editions of *l'Echo d'Alger* and *Le Petit Matin* from the early 1930s.

Bsiri's, were sold and consumed exclusively in the Maghrib and among North Africans in metropolitan France.³²²

Preserving an Imagined Andalusian Past: The Pushback to the Popular

“Among the most imminent dangers to Tunisian music,” wrote Tunisian scholar and musician Salah El Mahdi in 1981, “was the rise of a small group of artists and cultural figures who mixed Arabic lyrics with French lyrics, as with, ‘Où vous étiez mademoiselle’ — ‘!’ — ‘Kul yawm asal ‘alayki.’”³²³ El Mahdi's exclamation mark put a fine point on the disdain with which the composer, who came of age well after the song had become a standard, regarded the popular music of Dalila Taliana and Acher Mizrahi. “It is no secret,” he claimed, “that the most prominent Tunisian cultural figures [of the time] considered this insolence to be the gravest danger to Arab song.”³²⁴ If “the most prominent Tunisian cultural figures” indeed felt this way, the masses did not. Still, El Mahdi was not alone in feeling that “Arab song,” by which he meant Andalusian music, was in danger. Like others, including many Jewish musicians before him, Salah El Mahdi was concerned with preserving the Andalusian past for the future.

As popular music reached a fever pitch across the Maghrib, European musicologists, French administrators, and a minority of indigenous elites pushed back. In all cases, the goal, as Algerian journalist Manoubi El Meknassi described Tunisian efforts, was the “restoration” of

³²² Egyptian and Levantine record catalogues from the period in question did not include North African artists — even if those artists were originally Egyptian like the Egyptian-born Tunisian Jewish artist Simon Amiel.

³²³ Salah el Mahdi and Muhammad al-Marzuqi, *Al-ma'had al-rashidi lil-musiqa: (ta'sisuhu, idaratuhu, firqatuhu, a'maluhu, turaṭuhu al-fanni*, Tunis: Al-sharikat al-tunisiyat li-funun al-rasm, 1981, p. 25.

³²⁴ Ibid.

Andalusian music.³²⁵ In the estimation of El Meknassi and others, Andalusian music had been “totally lost for the last 20 years.” This was due to the rise of commercial recording and what he called, “decadence.” Andalusian music thus needed rescue from its current state of lethargy. Increasingly, “restoration” was to be taken up by Muslims and “decadence” conflated with Jews.

The drive to restore Andalusian art music took a number of forms in the late 1920s and 1930s. In Morocco, for example, Protectorate officials, together with French musicologist Alexis Chottin, established the country’s first Andalusian conservatory in 1930.³²⁶ That same year, Algerian musicians Mohammed Ben Teffahi, Mohammed Fakhardji, and Mahieddine Lakehal formed El Djazaïria, an all-Muslim Andalusian orchestra that rivaled the Jewish El Moutribia in word and deed. Other entirely- or mostly-Muslim Andalusian orchestras followed in the coming years.³²⁷ In Tunisia, the Andalusian revival effort was led by the London-born Baron Rodolphe d’Erlanger from his palace in Sidi Bou Said, in the gulf of Tunis.³²⁸ His work led directly to the

³²⁵ Manoubi El Meknassi, “La rénovation de la musique Tunisienne,” *Alger-Radio*, 2, no. 56, January 31, 1937, p. 7, held in Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF).

³²⁶ In 1929, Prosper Ricard, director of the *Service des Arts indigènes du Maroc*, opened a predecessor to the Conservatory of Moroccan Music, known by as the *Dar al-Tarab* in the Oudaïas neighborhood of Rabat. In 1930, the palace of Moulay Rachid was secured for the conservatory. See Prosper Ricard, “Le Conservatoire du Musique Marocaine,” *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée: journal hebdomadaire d’actualités nordafricaines: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc*, October 25, 1935, p. 18-19, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583757j/f49.image.r=prosper%20ricard?rk=42918;4>.

³²⁷ This included Ghernata, which debuted in September 1933. Ghernata and El Djezairia would merge in 1935. El Andalousia, a new all-Jewish orchestra, formed as well. For a sense of the Jewish pushback to the popular, see the speech of El Andalousia president Mardochee Krief delivered on February 9, 1929.

“We aim to spread the *true*, ancient Andalusian music [...] music that of all the riches of Algerian art, remains the most neglected, music that, in certain milieus, has been deformed by the introduction of foreign tunes [...] to prevent the disappearance of this music and to protect its character [...] We hope to address not only the Jewish and Muslim intellectual elite, but also personalities in the European world which have always been fascinated by oriental beauty.” Cited in “El Andalousia,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, March 1, 1929, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75845083/f4>.

³²⁸ For more on d’Erlanger, see Ruth F. Davis, *Ma’lūf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*, Scarecrow Press, 2004.

establishment of the mostly-Muslim La Rachidia, an Andalusian orchestra founded in November 1934 by Mustapha Sfar, the mayor of Tunis at the time.

Even when not explicitly identified, Jews became the unwitting victims of the movement to “restore” Andalusian music and to do away with musical “decadence.” Much of the criticism had to do with the notion that Jews had somehow corrupted the original Andalusian song texts or more broadly, the Arabic language. “If only our fine Arab Algerian music had the luck to be taken up by someone like Baron d’Erlanger,” Algerian nationalist Ahmad Tawfiq Madani, founding member of the reformist Association of Algerian Ulama, lamented in his landmark 1932 publication *Kitab al-Jaza’ir* — as shown by Jonathan Glasser.³²⁹ Madani contrasted the brilliance of d’Erlanger with Edmond Nathan Yafil, the individual who had actually “taken up” Algerian Andalusian music. While admitting that Yafil was a “great artist,” and referring to him by his honorific of “*mu’allim*,” Madani argued that his *Majmu’*, his 1904 publication, “did contain many large errors.”³³⁰ He lamented that, “the Arab music of Algiers is among the most brilliant and beautiful pages of Andalusian art, but it is one that will disappear with the new civilization. Who will extend his hand to conserve it and save it from shipwreck?”

For Madani, the peculiar form of Arabic spoken by Jews could hardly save Andalusian music “from shipwreck.” Nor could it save Algeria from the French.³³¹ For many Algerian nationalists and their counterparts in Morocco and Tunisia, Arabic dialect, the miscegenated tongue favored by Jews, especially in their popular music, had corrupted a pure national past.

³²⁹ Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusian Music in Urban North Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 109. I use Glasser’s translation for this quote and the Madani quotes that follow.

³³⁰ Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusian Music in Urban North Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 109.

³³¹ Madani’s *Kitab al-Jaza’ir* was best known for the nationalist slogan on its frontispiece: “Islam is our religion, Algeria is our homeland, Arabic is our language.”

The linguistic embodiment of that past, in Madani's view, was the literary form of Arabic known as *fusha*. In addition to the sidelining of Jews from Andalusian conservatories and orchestras then, tolerance of Jewish linguistic difference waned among a subset of elites. In his seminal *al-Aghani al-Tunsiyya* (*Tunisian Song*), musicologist Sadiq al-Rizqi, who was also a founding member of La Rachidia, described Jewish musicians, for example, as "not very good at pronouncing many of the Arabic letters."³³² He went as far to assert that since Jews "transpose the [letter] *sin* for *shin* and the [letter] *ha* for an *alif* [...] and mumble [...] one can hardly understand [their words]."³³³ As a result, he claimed, Muslims were refusing to listen to their music. That reality was quite simply an alternative one. Muslims listened to Jews and their music with great frequency, especially via phonograph records and on radio. Still something had shifted. On February 7, 1936, for example, a Moroccan group calling itself, "El Fateh El Maghrebi," penned an opinion piece entitled, "The Radio: A Calamity and Danger to Our Values," in the pages of *El Bassaïr*, the newspaper of Ahmad Tawfiq Madani's reformist-nationalist movement.³³⁴ It was far more extreme than anything al-Rizqi had written. In the editorial, the group called "for the total eviction of Jewish artists [from radio], [and] the employment of the pure literary [Arabic] language during broadcasts."³³⁵

³³² Muhammad as-Sadiq al-Rizqi, *al-Aghani al-Tunisiyyah*, Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah lil-Nashr, 1967, p. 72. *al-Aghani al-Tunisiyyah* was written sometime in the 1930s but not published until 1967. Rizqi died in 1939.

³³³ Ibid, p. 72. There was indeed a Jewish accent in Tunisia. The same was true for Morocco and Algeria. However, Jewish musicians often performed in accents that did not belie their heritage. al-Rizqi might have also confused the tendency of some musicians to "mumble" or leave out words as related to dialect rather than as a method for protecting ownership of a repertoire.

³³⁴ "La radiodiffusion et les populations indigènes d'Algerie," ANOM 15h/31, June 29, 1937.

³³⁵ Ibid.

Popular music, mixed in French and Arabic, heavy on dialect, and promiscuous in genre, sat even more uncomfortably with Algerian nationalists like Madani, Moroccan groups like El Fateh El Maghrebi, and French musicologists. When it came to language and music, the interests of these disparate groupings dovetailed. While all admitted to the esteem with which the masses held popular music, the parties lamented that it came at the expense of Andalusian music. In an April 1935 address to the Cercle des Jeunes Algériens, a reformist-nationalist organization, Algerian music-scholar Mohamed Zerrouki was careful to distinguish Andalusian music from the popular music that was the domain of the phonograph, as Glasser has again exposed. “At the café,” Zerrouki observed:

[...] the phonograph, whose horn has become a modern cornucopia, lavishes us with a ringing, scratchy glimpse of Turkish folklore, Egyptian, Tunisian, and Tlemcenian. The two- or three-octave harmonium³³⁶ used in Tunisia follows the ghaita from the south of the Constantine region, which gives way in its turn to the piano, the flute, the violin of some “famous” artist from the Algerian capital. The Andalusian lute (Kouitra), so timid, so discreet, with its exquisite whispers, finds itself formidably amplified by this barbarous servant that is the loudspeaker....I am careful not to include all of our musical productions in the same observations. The dozen or so Andalusian modes offer a thoroughly dilapidated sight [...]

Popular music, exemplified by “the two- or three-octave harmonium used in Tunisia,” “the piano,” and the “famous artist from the Algerian capital” — all which came to signal Jews — was not even to be mentioned in the same breath as the Andalusian tradition, which despite its efflorescence, he regarded as “dilapidated.”³³⁷

In fact, as Malcolm Théoleyre has made clear, well after the close of the interwar period, French figures no less than Gontran Dessagnes, head of the Algiers Conservatory, and the composer Léo-Louis Barbès still wrote with disdain about the popular music of a decade earlier. In the April 25, 1946 issue of the Algerian Communist Party (PCA) publication *Liberté*, for instance, Dessagnes severely critiqued “the Arab music societies” of the interwar years in his article, “Muslim Popular

³³⁶ Another reference to Messaoud Habib.

³³⁷ Glasser, *The Lost Paradise*, p. 109.

Music in North Africa.” Naming only Jewish orchestral societies, “like El Moutribia, El Andaloussia, the orchestra of Saoud [l’Oranais] in Oran [...]” Dessagnes argued that, “far from preserving, in all of its purity, their national tradition, these elements pursued entertainment and profit over educational or social goals; They lost their originality, forgetting in large part from whence their value derived: the richness accumulated from centuries of popular inspiration.”³³⁸ Without naming Jews, he alluded to them. Then, he came to focus his ire on Lili Labassi and his song “*Mamak*”, among the most covered of songs between the wars. “Thus, under foreign influence,” he contended, “they can be seen creating new songs that are only modern dances issuing forth from jazz, on which are added words mixed in French and Arabic ([like] the fox-trot *Mamak*, [and the records] *La Moda*, *Tiré Poum*).” One year later, the French Léo-Louis Barbès, who was described by his Parisian colleagues as “the first truly Algerian composer,” penned an article entitled, “Muslim Music in Algeria” for the publication of the *Centre d’Information et Etudes*, an agency attached to the Governor General of Algeria. In a section called, “The Decadence of this Music,” Barbès despaired that Andalusian music was “on the verge of extinction.”³³⁹ “Its irresistible replacement,” he wrote, “is found in another thing, only possibly of interest, but really very different, and this has been born of influences combining jazz, music-hall, and the lowest oompahs and boompahs of European ‘dancing’ music.” He continued, “certain indigenous ‘composers,’ very adapted to their times, and certain societies of the new style, were propagandists of this music through record and radio.” Again, it was Lili Labassi and “*Mamak*” that came to represent Algerian popular music. He despaired:

³³⁸ “La musique populaire musulmane en Afrique du Nord,” *Liberté*, April 25, 1946. Cited in Malcolm Théoleyre, “Musique arabe, folklore de France?” (PhD diss., Sciences Po, 2016), p. 573.

³³⁹ Louis Léo-Louis Barbès, “La musique musulmane en Algérie,” *Documents algériens*, n°15, April 10, 1947. Cited in Malcolm Théoleyre, “Musique arabe, folklore de France?” (PhD diss., Sciences Po, 2016), p. 540.

The success of numbers like Mamak, (Ma tqoulech a l'mamak!³⁴⁰), this fox-trot that not a shoe-shine boy from Souk Ahras [in Algeria] to Oujda [in Morocco] did not know by heart and sing daily during a certain period [...] All of this is trotted out all night long in the cafés of the petited, repeated over and over again by an audience that is easy to please, their enthusiasm marked by lack of critical thought, all of this has somehow become 'Arab music.'

In their screed against Lili Labassi and “*Mamak*,” both Dessagnes and Barbès had proven just how popular the mixed music of the interwar years was. No official or unofficial effort to “preserve” Andalusian music could dislodge the music that seemed to be on the lips of everyone in the nation and across the border. Decades later, Salah El Mahdi echoed Dessagne and Barbès. He spared little when writing about “pretenders to the art, such as: Gaston Bsiri, Maurice Benaïs,” the Jewish composers who “composed at a tasteless level,” through “the spread of trivial words in songs and in addition, phrases and intimations with vile words.”³⁴¹ In his own way, El Mahdi reminded us to give their music its proper due.

The conflation of Jews and their popular music and the conflict between formal and informal Arabic played out at the most important North African and Middle Eastern musical gathering of the decade: the Cairo Congress of Arab Music in 1932.³⁴² Indeed, while other

³⁴⁰ “*Ma tqoulech a l'mamak*” (“Don’t tell your mother”) was the second line of Lili Labassi’s “*Mamak*.” Barbès references a printed songbook from whence he took the lyrics in yet another testament to the song’s popularity.

³⁴¹ Ruth F. Davis engages in a dialogue with El Mahdi on Gaston Bsiri and the place of Jewish composers in Tunisian music in, “Time, Place, and Jewish Music: Mapping the Multiple Journeys of “Andik bahriyya, ya ra’is,” in *Antropologia della musica nelle culture mediterranee: interpretazione, performance, identità: alla memoria di Tullia Magrini*, ed., Philip V. Bohlman and Marcello Soce Keller, 2009, Bologna: CLUEB, p. 50.

³⁴² At the time, the Cairo Congress was promoted as the most significant musical assembly of its kind. In large part that understanding derived from the presence of the European figures in attendance, among which were some of the most renowned musicologists of the twentieth century. In addition to the British Henry George Farmer, the most prolific English-language specialist of Arabic music of the period and past scholarly collaborator with Edmond Nathan Yafil, and the Hungarian composer and folklorist Béla Bartók, Erich M. von Hornbostel, Curt Sachs, and Robert Lachmann -- all associated with the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology and the Society for the Research of Oriental Music -- played prominent roles at the Congress.

For quite a few of the attendees, European musicologists and indigenous musicians alike, the Congress did indeed constitute a historical turning point, albeit not for the reasons originally envisioned by the organizers. For Robert Lachmann, who oversaw the phonograph recordings produced at the Congress and released commercially on the His Master’s Voice (Gramophone) label, the conference would be among his last prominent international adventures. Lachmann, along with Sachs and Hornbostel, all of German Jewish origin, would soon be dismissed from their posts in Nazi Germany, with the former finding exile in Palestine and the latter two settling in the United

countries in the region fielded Jewish musicians to the monumental conference, the North Africa delegations, shockingly, sent none. Their absence was tied directly to the argument then raging among indigenous elites and French officials-turned-musicologists over the state of Andalusian music.

While the idea for the Cairo Congress of Arab Music had first germinated around 1930, the Egyptian proposal did not gather steam until the following year. In April 1931, the Egyptian ambassador to France formally approached the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the Cairo Congress.³⁴³ The two-week gathering, the Egyptian ambassador explained, under the patronage of King Fuad of Egypt, would bring together the most accomplished musicians from across North Africa and the Middle East. The musicians would come together alongside European musicologists, including Henry George Farmer and Béla Bartók, for a series of performances. The aims of the Cairo Congress were two-fold: to reform Arab music through European tutelage and to preserve Arab music through a series of phonograph recordings. Through the ambassador, Egypt requested the participation of delegates from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, although neither the embassy nor any other office made specific requests for particular musicians. This would be decided upon by the French themselves. The Egyptian government, however, did make an appeal for the participation of a “delegation of notables,” preferably of those who held French citizenship, including Kaddour Benghabrit, the rector of the

States. In Palestine, Lachmann, who came to head the Archive of Oriental Music at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and who played a pivotal part in the nascent Palestine Broadcasting Service, reunited with the Jewish head of the Iraqi delegation to the Cairo Congress: Azouri Effendi Haroun. For more on the Cairo Congress, see Israel Katz, *Henry George Farmer and the First International Congress of Arab Music (Cairo 1932)*, Brill, 2015; and A.J. Racy, “Comparative Musicologists in the Field: Reflections on the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, 1932,” in *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl*, ed. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

³⁴³ “a/s d’un congrès de la Musique Arabe.” CADN/MA/200/193, 4/30/1931.

Grand Mosque of Paris, and Mustapha Sfar, later to found the first Tunisian Andalusian orchestra La Rachidia.

For French officialdom, deciding which musicians could and should attend the Cairo Congress of Arab Music was a nearly ten-month affair. For some in Algeria, like Governor General Marcel Peyrouton, the overwhelming number of Jewish artists made the task that much more difficult — despite their French citizenship. In a February 1932 letter to the French Ministry of the Interior, Governor General Peyrouton wrote that, “the decision has not been, by the way, an easy one.”³⁴⁴ Peyrouton explained that, “in Algeria the pure Arabic music has for a longtime been replaced by the Hispano-Moorish genres practiced principally by musicians of Jewish origin.” What Peyrouton meant by Hispano-Moorish music was unclear. What became increasingly evident, however, was that Jews, deemed to practice an impure music, would discredit the French mission at the Cairo Congress of Arab Music. In Algeria, this meant that two of the most prominent Andalusian orchestras of the period, El Moutribia and El Andalousia, both of which were predominantly Jewish, fielded zero delegates to the Cairo Congress of Arab Music. In Morocco and Tunisia, whose delegations were led by Prosper Ricard and Mustapha Sfar, respectively, the same disinclination toward Jewish musicians seemed to play out.

But a month and a half before the official start of the Cairo Congress of Arab Music on March 14, 1932, French officials quietly selected musicians to lead the small ensembles from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. All were Muslim. To be sure, Morocco’s Mohammad Mbirko, Algeria’s Larbi Bensari, and Tunisia’s Khemaïs Tarnane were all deserving participants. But so were many others, like Muslim and Jewish women and prominent Jewish men.³⁴⁵ Iraq, for

³⁴⁴ “A.S. de la participation de l’Algérie au Congrès de la Musique Arab du Caire.” ANOM/14h/41, February 1, 1932.

³⁴⁵ No women were represented at the official proceedings of Cairo Congress of Arab Music.

example, was represented by an entirely Jewish delegation with the notable exception of the vocalist Mohamad al-Qubbanji.³⁴⁶

While some scholars have explained the choice to exclude certain musicians from the Cairo Congress of Arab Music as emanating from a “lack of interest in celebrities,” there is little evidence that this was the motivating factor for French officials.³⁴⁷ Almost all of the North African musicians who participated were celebrities and recording artists who at some point had dabbled in the popular. Two years before the Cairo Congress, for example, Tunisia’s Khemaïs Tarnane recorded a tango record for the Parlophone label, which was then under Lili Labassi’s direction.³⁴⁸ A year before the Cairo Congress, Algeria’s Redouane Bensari recorded a popular dirge to the slain Habiba Messika for Gramophone. His father, Algeria’s lead delegate Larbi Bensari, was even known to perform an Arabic-language version of the Spanish pasodoble “Valencia” on occasion.³⁴⁹

So quiet was the French selection process that North African musicians continued to request inclusion at the Cairo Congress as late as early March 1932, mere weeks before the opening sessions and after final decisions had been made. Despite the fact that the French authorities had already chosen representatives for Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, prominent figures like Mahieddine Bachetarzi were given the bureaucratic run around until the very end. In

³⁴⁶ *Recueil des travaux du Congrès de musique arabe*, Le Caire: Impr. nationale, Boulac, 1934.

³⁴⁷ A.J. Racy, “Comparative Musicologists in the Field: Reflections on the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, 1932,” in *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl*, ed. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, p. 145. Um Kulthum, the same Egyptian female vocalist to whom Ratiba Chamia was once compared, performed for Congress participants in the evening after formal sessions had concluded. The same was true for celebrity recording artists Sami al-Shawa, Fatima Rushdi, and Yousef Wahbi.

³⁴⁸ Parlophone, “Enregistrements Algériens.” ANOM, 9x/24, 1930-1931.

³⁴⁹ “PROGRAMME EXECUTE par Cheik Larbi Ben Sari et sa Troupe.” CADN/MA/200/193, July 8, 1938.

fact, well through February 1932, Bachetarzi requested a series of meetings with the Algerian Bureau of Native Affairs on the subject of the Cairo Congress but was rebuffed time and again. If the disinclination toward celebrity was at all real, then the fact that Bachetarzi, “the Caruso of the Desert,” penned all of his letters on Gramophone stationery may not have helped.³⁵⁰ On February 11, 1932, Bachetarzi wrote a final appeal to the Bureau of Native Affairs. The Cairo Congress was fast approaching, he reminded the director, and as he was traveling in March, he would like to have an answer about his participation as soon as possible.³⁵¹ His answer never arrived. In his memoir, Bachetarzi provides for an interesting twist to the saga, revealing that the Director of the Bureau of Native Affairs had originally chosen him to attend the Cairo Congress.³⁵² He even notes that he presented a list of musicians — long lost and likely including Jewish members of El Moutribia — that were to join him.³⁵³ According to Bachetarzi, he was told with some finality at some point that he was too young to attend the Cairo Congress.³⁵⁴ Bachetarzi must have seen through this duplicitous politesse. After all, Bachetarzi was thirty-five at the time of the Cairo Congress, whereas Redouane Bensari, the Algerian delegate who had recorded a song about Habiba Messika the year prior, was but eighteen. It was thus that no North African Jews attended the Cairo Congress of Arab Music.

³⁵⁰ See, for example, the letter to “Monsieur MIRANTE, Directeur des Affaires Endigènes au Gouvernement Général de L’Algerie,” from “B. Mahieddine.” ANOM/14h/41, February 11, 1932.

³⁵¹ “Monsieur MIRANTE, Directeur des Affaires Endigènes au Gouvernement Général de L’Algerie,” from “B. Mahieddine.” ANOM/14h/41, February 11, 1932.

³⁵² Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p. 147.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

On March 1, 1932, two weeks before the opening of the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, the orchestra El Mizhar El Bouni requested permission to represent Algeria at the Cairo Congress.³⁵⁵ The Bône-based orchestra justified its potential inclusion by writing that it was “second only to El Moutribia of Algiers,” Mahieddine Bachetarzi’s mostly Jewish orchestra.³⁵⁶ Two days after the Congress opened, El Mizhar El Bouni received its official notice of rejection.

In spite of the bias that kept the mostly Jewish orchestras El Moutribia and El Andalousia from attending the Cairo Congress, their contribution to Algerian Andalusian music was invoked throughout the gathering. In a speech given during the Cairo Congress, Mohammad Benabdellah, the Algerian delegation’s financial delegate, seemed to not only conjure Edmond Nathan Yafil, the great Jewish redactor of the Algiers-Tlemcen Andalusian tradition, but so too the very type of music denigrated by Peyrouton and which precluded Jewish participation. After thanking the Egyptian king for his generosity, Benabdellah uttered the following words:

In Algeria, local music, which is mainly of the Hispano-Moorish type, has not been neglected by the administration. Thus, it has given a mission to specialists to collect and record all of the popular [classical Andalusian] melodies, which today constitutes an imposing corpus. Now more than a few Algiers-based [orchestral] societies, among them l’Andalousia [sic], El Moutribia, El Djezairia [sic], give periodic concerts, teach music, the art of singing, and twice a week [...] broadcast on the radio station of the GGA [Governor General of Algeria].³⁵⁷

Benabdellah’s lip service to El Andalousia and El Moutribia might have been better put to use in actually bringing members of these orchestras to Cairo. In truth, the Cairo Congress of Arab Music was largely a failure. The promised reform of Arab music never took place. Nor could it, given popular music’s appeal. While the jury of the Cairo Congress of Arab Music succeeded in removing popular elements from performances during the proceedings, including certain types of

³⁵⁵ Letter from El Mizhar el Bouni to “Monseur le Gouverneur Général de l’Algerie.” ANOM/14h/41, 3/1/1932.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ “Projet de Discours.” ANOM/14h/41, no date.

instrumental improvisations and the violin, it had stripped the music it was attempting to keep alive of life itself. As A.J. Racy has demonstrated, reform efforts like the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, “appear to have left little impact on Egypt’s contemporary musical scene.”³⁵⁸ At the time, as Israel Katz has written of the Cairo Congress, “local press coverage, often polemical and, at times, downright contemptuous of its creation, controversial topics, activities, and especially foreign intrusion, appeared primarily in Arabic and French-Egyptian periodicals.”³⁵⁹ Finally, we should recall that at the exact moment that the Cairo Congress of Arab Music was sputtering with sounds that failed to capture the region’s true musical flavor, Dalila Taliana’s “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” was electrifying audiences across the Maghrib. The pushback to the popular, it seemed, was coming from the elite, not the masses.

Jewish-Muslim Tension in Constantine: A Musical Approach

In the drive to refashion Andalusian music and so too the nation along ethno-religious lines, Jewish artists, once embraced as Arab or Muslim (or both), were identified as Jews with increased frequency. That transformation was accelerated, at least temporarily, by a spasm of Jewish-Muslim communal violence in the eastern Algerian city of Constantine on August 3-6, 1934.³⁶⁰ The spark that ignited the rioting occurred on Friday, August 3, 1934, when a Jew (almost certainly intoxicated) by the name of Elie Khalifa insulted a group of Muslims and

³⁵⁸ A.J. Racy, “Historical Worldviews of Early Ethnomusicologists: An East-West Encounter in Cairo, 1932,” in *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, ed., Stephen Blum, Philip V Bohlman, and Daniel M Neuman, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991, p. 87-90.

³⁵⁹ Israel J. Katz, *Henry George Farmer and the First International Congress of Arab Music (Cairo 1932)*, Brill, 2015, p. 251.

³⁶⁰ For more on Constantine, see Joshua Cole, “Anti-Semitism and the Colonial Situation in Interwar Algeria: the Anti-Jewish Riots in Constantine, August 1934,” in *The French Colonial Mind*, ed., Martin Thomas, ed., Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2012, vol. 2.

defiled the exterior of the Sidi Lakhdar mosque. Over the next three days and as a result of all manner of rumor, Muslims descended on Constantine's Jewish quarter with knives in tow. Twenty-five Jews and three Muslims were killed. As anti-Jewish violence spread to other cities and towns in the area, Mahieddine Bachetarzi's first thoughts were of his orchestra. "El Moutribia," he wrote in his memoir, "composed largely of Jews, would suffer the consequences [of the Constantine Riots]." ³⁶¹

Three weeks later, on Saturday, August 25, 1934, El Moutribia orchestra took the stage at Le Petit Journal hall in Paris for the first of a series of three concerts. The Algerian Muslim organizers, based in Paris, agreed to attend the first concert but expressed to Bachetarzi that, "in the current situation [post-Constantine] it would be impossible for them to come applaud the Jewish musicians of El Moutribia." ³⁶² No such promises were made for the following nights. On Sunday, 26 August 1934, a trickle of Algerian workers filed into the nearly empty concert hall on 21 Rue Cadet in Paris. As Algerian Jewish musicians Alfred "Sassi" Lebrati and Lili Labassi took the stage, "a din of whistles and boos" replaced their normal, welcoming reception. ³⁶³ This was a stunning departure from the Dalila Taliana concert some eight months earlier, where journalist Lucienne Jean-Darrouy witnessed Sassi and Lili Labassi take their place as the musicians "were applauded, one after the other." While the concert organizers remunerated Mahieddine Bachetarzi for El Moutribia's losses, the show of disdain for Jewish artists as Jews had had an impact on the "Caruso of the Desert," who heard the audience loud and clear. When he returned to Paris the following year for a series of concerts to benefit L'Étoile Nord-Africaine,

³⁶¹ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires, 1919-1939; suivis de Étude sur le théâtre dans les pays islamiques*, Alger: Éditions nationales algériennes, 1968, p. 200-201.

³⁶² Ibid. Ethan Katz writes about these same concerts in *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North African to France*, Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 89.

³⁶³ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 200-201.

the nationalist organization of Algerian Messali Hadj, he did so without the Jewish members of El Moutribia.³⁶⁴

In the weeks after Constantine, other North African musicians were similarly reduced to their Jewishness. During a concert in Mostaganem, Algeria, El Hadj M'hamed El-Anka, whom one intelligence officer described as “possessing the beautiful voice of a tenor,” the popular artist dismissed his pianist — Messaoud Habib — at the request of the organizers.³⁶⁵ In fact, El Anka, who, according to the same intelligence report, “got his start around 1933-1934 as a singer and popular composer of parody in the [Muslim] ‘milieu,’” made an additional name for himself after Constantine by peddling in anti-Jewish song.³⁶⁶

It is with some irony, then, that in the flurry of Jewish exclusion post-Constantine, we can also point to the persistence of Jewish-Muslim inseparability in the Maghrib past the events of Constantine. That we know of anti-Jewish song which took the Constantine Riots as their subject — none were ever recorded — is largely thanks to complaints made by indigenous, Arabophone Jews who attended joint Jewish-Muslim celebrations where such pieces were performed. On 24 September 1935, for example, a year after the Constantine Riots, a self-described “group of Jews” from the Bab el Oued neighborhood of Algiers informed the prefect of Algiers of one such troubling episode.³⁶⁷ “We were attending a native celebration on Boulevard de Champagne,” the group wrote, “and in the course of a concert given by the singer named Cheikh Merizek [Hadj

³⁶⁴ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 200-201.

³⁶⁵ Rabah Saadallah, *El-Hadj M'hamed El-Anka: Maître et Renouvateur de la Musique “Chaabi,”* La Maison des Livres, Algiers, 1981, p. 80.

³⁶⁶ “Fiche de Renseignements: HALO Mohamed Iddir ben Mohammed, dit ‘El Hadj M'Hamed el Onka.’” ANOM/15h/32, December 6, 1939.

³⁶⁷ Handwritten letter to “Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d'Alger.” ANOM/2i/41, September 24, 1935.

M'rizek] he performed a song about the events of Constantine in which the words are seditious, not just anti-Jewish but which harm the French authorities.”³⁶⁸ The group continued, “this song is in vogue at native celebrations,” which they could attest to as Jews and Muslims continued to attend life cycle events together well past Constantine. That same month, El Anka sang yet another variant of the Constantine chant at a baby naming in Algiers.³⁶⁹ Not only did his lyrics invoke individual Jews by name — “*Mushi wa Shim'un*” [“Moses and Simon”] — hinting at familiarity, but the rhyme scheme itself — ABAB — followed the popular pattern then being perfected by Jewish composers.³⁷⁰

On September 17, 1934, less than a month after the Constantine Riots, a twenty-three year old Muslim musician by the name of Mohamed Amri was arrested for spreading rumors in the wake of the tragic events.³⁷¹ According to the police report, Amri declared during his interrogation, “that he had been drinking that evening in a number of different cafes on Rue de France in the company of someone named Raymond, a Jew, and a musician like him.”³⁷² Raymond was most likely Raymond Leyris. Leyris, the future Cheikh Raymond, had already been understood a symbol of Jewish-Muslim inseparability. The report continued, “Raymond had counseled the native to stay home for the next few days since the French, he said, were itching to shoot Arabs.” Two and half decades later, Raymond himself would be shot.

³⁶⁸ Handwritten letter to “Monsieur Le Préfet du Département d'Alger.” ANOM/2i/41, September 24, 1935.

³⁶⁹ “A/S de Chansons indigènes.” ANOM/2i/41, November 11, 1935.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ “Rapport.” ANOM/GGA/2CAB/5, September, 18, 1934. I owe a debt of gratitude to Joshua Cole for bringing this reference to Raymond Leyris to my attention and for sharing with me the related documents.

³⁷² Ibid.

Conclusion: Ramadan at Bar Sassi

In 1933, in the year before the Constantine Riots, Lucienne Favre delved into the lower Casbah of Algiers. “At the bottom of the casbah,” she wrote in *Tout l’Inconnu de la Casbah d’Alger*, “the bar Sassi, on rue de la Lyre, brings together music lovers and kebabs.”³⁷³ “Sassi is a Jew from Tlemcen,” she announced, misidentifying his place of birth, “who possesses a beautiful baritone voice, a repertoire that ranges from the Andalusian battle song to the Tunisian satirical, light-hearted song.”³⁷⁴ That mixed repertoire, pioneered by Jews like Sassi and which, in this case, may have included “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” was exactly the range of music which attracted Algerian “music lovers” — regardless of ethno-religious or class markers — during the interwar period. Favre continued, “One finds chez Sassi, starting at six in the evening, Jewish women bedecked in headscarves set in turbans, in embroidered silk or cashmere shawls...young soldiers, Arab livestock traders, the Negro stevedores making their port of call, individuals of all other races in the most varied costumes.” The mixing that was possible at chez Sassi — confessionally, ethnically, and sartorially — would not have been out of place at a Louisa Tounisa concert. In fact, both Louisa Tounisa and Bar Sassi would continue to draw diverse, Jewish-Muslim crowds in the coming years, even after events of Jewish-Muslim tension.

By fall 1935, a year after the Constantine Riots and a year since the booing of El Moutribia’s Jewish members at Le Petit Journal hall in Paris, the orchestra returned to the venue. In his memoir, Mahieddine Bachetarzi boasted that the, “Algerians unreservedly applauded our Jewish musicians.”³⁷⁵ The Jewish-Muslim fallout from Constantine, it seemed, had not only

³⁷³ Favre, *Tout l’Inconnu de la Casbah d’Alger*, p. 83.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. According to Bachetarzi, Alfred “Sassi” Lebrati was born in Algiers to a family of Moroccan Jewish origin. See Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 55.

³⁷⁵ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 238.

subsided for the time being but reversed course. For now, the public embraced Jewish musicians like Lili Labassi and Sassi. Musically speaking then, the Constantine Riots did not seem to constitute a moment of Jewish-Muslim rupture.

Another year on, on the final night of Ramadan 1936, André Hugues, broadcaster for Radio Alger, “reproduced the sonic ambiance” of the Muslim holiday for his listeners and readers of the *Alger-Radio* magazine.³⁷⁶ Inadvertently, he retraced Favre’s steps. He landed at what some called, “*Le Café de la Joie*” (“The Joy Café”) and what others called “*Bar Sassi*.” He found that, “every night, when evening descends on the city,” the Jewish music venue on the corner of Rue Blandon and Rue de la Lyre “becomes illuminated.”³⁷⁷ Hugues applauded Sassi for his affability, his business sense, and his virtuosity as tenor and mandolinist. But what really fascinated him was the diversity of the public that Sassi and his music had brought together throughout the course of the Ramadan holiday. “I observe the Arabs here who belong to different social classes,” wrote Hugues. He could not, it seemed, divide Jews from Muslims among the crowd. In part, that was because Jews and Muslims had little issue gathering in the years after the Constantine Riots.

Hugues did, however, attempt to split Sassi’s Ramadan patrons in two: the *mélomanes* (music-lovers) and the card players. And yet, in the sonic shadow of Sassi and his mixed repertoire, that division — like class and confession — held little weight. “When the master

³⁷⁶ André Hugues with Georges Martin, “Un soir de Ramadan à la Casbah,” *Alger-radio. Le premier magazine de T.S.F. de l’Afrique du Nord*, no. 51, December 27, 1936, p. 7-8, held in Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF).

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

plucks the strings of his instrument,” Hugues marveled, “even the card players fall silent.”³⁷⁸ Sassi continued to pluck the strings of his mandolin for the rest of the interwar period.

Postscript: The Afterlife of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*”

Acher Mizrahi has long been absent from Tunisian historiography — despite his importance to the interwar music scene and his claim to one of its most important songs — “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*.”³⁷⁹ The omission of Mizrahi, despite his rootedness in local culture, is not surprising. His biography, which ranged geographically and linguistically, fits awkwardly, if at all, into the nationalist reckoning of the past which was coalescing in earnestness in the late 1940s.³⁸⁰

Indeed, it was already at that postwar moment that the memory of his contribution began to fade. Until World War II, Acher Mizrahi, together with Mahieddine Bachetarzi, held the songwriting credit for Dalila Taliana’s “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*,” with the *Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique* (SACEM).³⁸¹ On the original recording, Dalila Taliana even shouted out, “*Ya Ashir Mizrahi*,” (“O Acher Mizrahi!”) toward the end of the song. But following World War II, Egyptian composer Farid Ghosn approached SACEM, contested

³⁷⁸ André Hugues with Georges Martin, “Un soir de Ramadan à la Casbah,” *Alger-radio. Le premier magazine de T.S.F. de l’Afrique du Nord*, no. 51, December 27, 1936, p. 7-8, held in Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF).

³⁷⁹ In 1981, when Salah El Mahdi wrote about “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” as constituting one of “the most imminent dangers to Tunisian music,” and laid blame for the song and others like it “on the rise of a small group of artists and cultural figures who mixed Arabic lyrics with French lyrics,” he did not, for example, mention Mizrahi by name. Salah El Mahdi and Muhammad al-Marzuqi, *Al-ma’had al-rashidi lil-musiqqa*, p. 25.

³⁸⁰ There are many possible reasons why Mizrahi could have been disinherited from “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*.” The conflict in Palestine, then boiling over, may have had something to do with it.

³⁸¹ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p. 165.

Mizrahi's copyright, and laid claim to "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*."³⁸² According to Bachetarzi, SACEM investigated and issued rights to the Egyptian Ghosn. Bachetarzi did not seem to protest. Mizrahi may not have objected to the legal maneuver, either. It is entirely possible that a decade and a half on and as a pillar of Jewish religious life, he may have wanted to distance himself from the ribald tune.

As of today, the SACEM website credits, "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*," to the Egyptian Elias Ghosn Chelala (Farid Ghosn), Tunisian pianist Mohamed Effendi Kadri, and the Algerian Mahieddine Bachetarzi — but not Acher Mizrahi.³⁸³ Although embraced as Tunisian at the time of its release, a change of copyright had rendered "*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*" foreign. It has also quite literally erased Mizrahi and his contribution from the historical record.

³⁸² Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p. 165.

³⁸³ See "OU VOUS ETIEZ MADEMOISELL," SACEM, accessed May 23, 2017, <https://repertoire.sacem.fr/en/work-detail/9427965111/OU%20VOUS%20ETIEZ%20MADEMOISELL?query=o%C3%B9vous%20%C3%A9tiez&filters=titles#searchBtn>.

Chapter Three

Sounds and Silences in the Shadow of the Second World War

On August 25, 1944, Mahieddine Bachetarzi treated Algerians to an outdoor concert by “the most gallant of Muslim artists in North Africa.”³⁸⁴ *L’Echo d’Alger*, as usual, promoted the event. That the concert coincided with the liberation of Paris was pure coincidence. In fact, the cause for celebration was not German surrender but rather the re-dedication of Chez Mahieddine, Bachetarzi’s wartime music hall, now moved to a toney outdoor beach space behind the Majestic cinema.

Opening night featured a constellation of stars at the height of their fame. Those stars included Abdelhamid Ababsa, composer, actor, and pianist; Djamila, the Tripolitanian singer-cum-dancer; “Arab jazz” musician Slimane Blidi, the “prodigious little Aouaouèche, known as the Arab ‘Scherly Temple [sic],’” and Lili Boniche³⁸⁵, the lone Jewish musician among “the most gallant of Muslim artists.”³⁸⁶ That evening, Aziz, a young Tunisian composer, who the paper described as best known for “leading Mohammed El Kamal’s Paris orchestra,” took his place at the helm of Blidi’s “Arab jazz orchestra.” One star in particular, however, was missing. At Chez Mahieddine that night, Salim Halali, “the Oriental Tino Rossi,” was nowhere to be

³⁸⁴ “Le Cabaret Oriental Chez Mahieddine sera transféré à partir de demain aux Bains Nelson,” *L’Echo d’Alger: journal républicain du matin*, August 24, 1944, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7600693k>.

³⁸⁵ “CABARET ORIENTAL, CHEZ MAHIEDDINE,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, August 25, 1944, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k76006940/f2.item.r>.

³⁸⁶ “Le Cabaret Oriental Chez Mahieddine sera transféré à partir de demain aux Bains Nelson,” *L’Echo d’Alger: journal républicain du matin*, August 24, 1944, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7600693k>.

found.³⁸⁷ That the war had touched and even taken North African lives was widely known. It was thus that *L'Echo d'Alger* could refer readers to “the recordings of the late Salim Hilali [sic].”

The “late” Salim Halali was one of the many prominent North African Jewish musicians who had established themselves in metropolitan France in the years just before the war.³⁸⁸ Like Tunisian Jewish composer Gaston Bsiri, he had gone missing since the German occupation of northern France in 1940. As of August 25, 1944, others were absent as well. El Moutribia, which normally would have headlined such a gathering, was among them. The predominantly Jewish orchestra had been disbanded four years earlier with the rise of the collaborationist Vichy regime in southern France and its North Africa colonies.

Just as Jewish musicians like Salim Halali were silenced by the war, the voices of their Muslim counterparts were amplified. Mohammed El Kamal, “heard on all of the late Salim Halali’s recordings,” spent the war years in Paris animating the pro-German, Arabic-language broadcasts of Radio Paris-Mondial.³⁸⁹ At Radio Paris-Mondial, El Kamal was joined by the Algerian pianist and arranger Mohammed Iguebouchène, who as one “secret” report described it, “had changed camps.”³⁹⁰ Iguebouchène, another former musical collaborator of Halali, had been turned a collaborator of a different sort by the Second World War. As the entangled trajectories of three Algerian musicians, one Jewish and two Muslim, begin to lay bare, the

³⁸⁷ For one of the many references to Salim Halali as “the Oriental Tino Rossi,” see “Confidence d’une Turquie,” *Paris Soir*, March 9, 1940, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7644065j/f4.item.r>.

³⁸⁸ As noted in Chapter Two, North African Jewish artists frequently performed in the Latin Quarter of Paris where a number of Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian cabaret-restaurants once existed.

³⁸⁹ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II: Première partie de 1939 à 1946, deuxième partie de 1947 à 1951*, Alger: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1984, p. 49.

³⁹⁰ “A/s d’une suggestions du Président de la Région Economique d’Algérie et Chef de la Mission Economique du Gouvernement Général dans la Métropole, tendant à la création d’un Service des Affaires Indigènes, à Paris.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/1h/40, October 1942.

events of World War II and so too the Holocaust were hardly marginal to North Africans in metropolitan France.³⁹¹ In North Africa, long cast as the quiet edge of the main European stage, all the more so.³⁹²

Even before the formal commencement of the Second World War, North Africans were subjected to its sounds. Throughout the 1930s, for example, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy inundated the Maghrib with Arabic-language radio broadcasts of political propaganda. In cities like Oran and Constantine, indigenous Algerians and French settlers composed songs hailing and assailing France's "Popular Front" Prime Minister Léon Blum. Intelligence officers took note of all with growing trepidation.

With the fall of France's Third Republic to Nazi Germany in June 1940, the Maghrib's Jews and Muslims were brought further into the orbit of the war. So too was their soundscape. The war affected what North Africans could hear and determined who could be heard as well. Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian musicians themselves faded, flourished, and in rare but devastating cases, perished. Whether careers bloomed, withered, or were cut tragically short followed Muslim-Jewish confessional lines. Jewish musicians, for example, were subjected to the Vichy regime's anti-Jewish racial laws as applied to performance in public theaters and on radio. Farther north, the brutal reality of life under German rule forced artists like Salim Halali to

³⁹¹ Historians dealing with the Holocaust have, until recently, tended to neglect regions outside of Europe, including North Africa. The Maghrib has long been considered marginal to the main events of the Holocaust. The conference, "On the Margins of the Holocaust: Jews, Muslims, and Colonialism in North Africa During the Second World War," held on November 15-16, 2015 at University of California, Los Angeles brought senior and junior scholars together to address just that.

³⁹² Scholars of North Africa, for example, have long cast aside the messiness of the war years, relegating much of what does not follow a neat nationalist narrative to parenthetical asides and footnotes. For those who deal in the cultural history of the Maghrib, those asides have manifested themselves in historiographic periodization schemes that stop before the war and pick up soon after. Historian Susan Gilson Miller has therefore called for a "filling" of the "historical parenthesis" to address the lacuna. See Susan Gilson Miller, "Filling a historical parenthesis: an introduction to 'Morocco from World War II to Independence,'" *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2014).

go missing. The quieting of Jewish musicians, who, as the two previous chapters have detailed, largely dominated the North African music scene, created openings and opportunities for their Muslim peers. Some, including Bachetarzi, soon stepped in with musical material that was particularly troubling. When Jewish musicians emerged again as the war in the Maghrib came to a close, they sang in a markedly different key.

This chapter is a musical history of the Second World War as it played out in North Africa and among North Africans in France. But it is also much more than that. Capturing the sounds and the silences of the war helps scholars make sense of a period in North Africa for which more straightforward political history still escapes.³⁹³ In listening for what could and could not be heard as a result of wartime decision, policy, and contingency, I also point to the uneven experiences of Jews and Muslims during the war years. Those experiences, as others have begun to show, shaped Jewish and Muslim attitudes toward France and the specter of political independence in the years immediately following World War II.³⁹⁴

One last point must be reiterated. Before the physical start of World War II, a sonic battle known as “*la guerre des ondes*” (“the War of the Airwaves”) was already well underway.³⁹⁵ The radio war, waged in Arabic between Germany and Italy, on the one hand, and France, on the

³⁹³ Historians, for example, are still largely unsure as to how many Moroccan Jews were forced to move from their homes in the French *villes nouvelles* into the historic Jewish quarters known as the *mellah* under Vichy rule.

³⁹⁴ See Alma Heckman, “Radical Nationalists: Moroccan Jewish Communists 1925-1975,” (PhD Diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2015).

³⁹⁵ Much scholarship has touched on or come to focus on the Arabic-language broadcasts pertaining to *la guerre des ondes*. 1. Daniel-Jacques Grange, *La Propagande arabe de Radio Bari* (1937-1939), Paris: Relations internationales, 1976; 1. Charles-Robert Ageron, “LES POPULATIONS DU MAGHREB FACE A LA PROPAGANDE ALLEMANDE,” *Revue d’histoire de La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 29, no. 114 (April 1, 1979): 1–39., Jamaâ Baïda, “Maroc et la propagande du IIIème Reich,” *Hesperis Tamuda*, 1990, Vol. 28, Number 1, Morgan Corriou, Radio and society in Tunisia during World War II, Heike Liebau, *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden, the Netherlands; Boston: Brill, 2010), 1. Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste: la propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-43)*, 2015. and 1. Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

other, set in motion a series of initiatives undertaken by the French authorities in North Africa. So too, did the sustained popularity of the Baidaphon label. The counter-initiatives of the Third Republic, which included the expansion of radio programming and a concomitant increase in both censorship and surveillance of indigenous music-making, found new meaning under Vichy rule. We thus begin our chapter on the Second World War with a moment just before it.

The Sounds of a Coming War

Radio Bari's Arabic broadcast (*Radio Araba di Bari*) debuted in March 1934. It lasted all of fifteen minutes. But that quarter hour Italian program launched the decade-long, trans-Mediterranean *guerre des ondes*. With designs on Tunisia and a colony in Libya, the Italians sought to win Tunisians over to their cause through *Radio Araba di Bari*. By decade's end, Radio Bari could claim a radiophonic victory. Their broadcast was by far the most popular in Tunisia and Algeria³⁹⁶

Radio Bari attracted North African listeners on account of its music, not its political commentary. In addition to its in-house Middle Eastern orchestra, *Radio Araba di Bari* dedicated significant broadcast time to the popular records of North African artists Ratiba Chamia, Louisa Tounisa, and others.³⁹⁷ It was, however, Radio Bari's hostile attitude toward "the Muslim politics of France," as one report on the spread of radio in Algeria framed it, which first galvanized the

³⁹⁶ As for Radio Bari's popularity, see "Propagande chez les indigènes." ANOM/GGA/15h/32, November 22, 1934. Decades later, in an interview with historian Morgan Corriou, well known Tunisian film critic Tahar Cheriaa, named Radio Bari -- along with Radio Berlin and the BBC -- as his favorite war-time radio stations. See Morgan Corriou, "Radio and Society in Tunisia during World War II," in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, et al., Leiden: BRILL, 2010, p. 394.

³⁹⁷ See copies of "*Radio Araba di Bari: Pubblicazione mensile della Stazione Radio di Bari*" in Archives Nationales (France)/F/60/710.

French into defensive action.³⁹⁸ While other reports suggested that countering Radio Bari and its fascist agenda required Radio Maroc and Radio Alger, the official stations of Morocco and Algeria, to expand their sparse discotheques, the French instead opted for monitoring radio dials and jamming radio signals.³⁹⁹ Indeed, throughout *la guerre des ondes*, the French and the Italians operated on drastically different playing fields. At the very moment that the Italians fine-tuned the mechanisms for a sonic war, waged by radio wave at a distance, the French attempted to fight a physical war against radio. This was similar to the approach employed by colonial officials against the music of Habiba Messika in a prior moment. But as the spread of her records across the Maghrib had proved, sound cared little for borders.

In order to combat the influence of Radio Bari, France established Tunis-PTT in 1938. Soon renamed Radio Tunis, the station was headquartered in the heart of Jewish Tunis at 1 Place d'Ecole Israélite. As Radio Tunis went live, French administrators in Morocco and Algeria retooled Radio Maroc and Radio Alger to increase indigenous listenership. None of the three official French stations, however, could compete with their Italian rival. By 1939, Radio Bari began shipment of its new monthly magazine, "*Radio Araba di Bari*," to prominent Tunisians and Algerians.⁴⁰⁰ The Italian-Arabic publication featured articles on Mussolini, the glories of Rome, fascism, and a program guide. One year later, Radio Berlin commenced broadcasting in Arabic. Among the records played on the German broadcast were those of Tunisian Jewish

³⁹⁸ "Note sur LA RADIODIFFUSION ET LES POPULATIONS INDIGENES D'ALGERIE." ANOM/15h/32, February 25, 1938.

³⁹⁹ Numerous reports made this suggestion including through the Vichy period. For an example, see "Organes d'information indigènes (Radio, cinéma, etc...)." ANOM/15h/32, February 22, 1938.

⁴⁰⁰ "A/S-Propagande italienne." ANOM/2i/41, April 29, 1939.

artists Ratiba Chamia and Habiba Messika.⁴⁰¹ Police across the Maghrib soon found North Africans tuning in.

Alongside the growing popularity of Radio Bari and now Radio Berlin, the French continued to contend with the Baidaphon label, based in Berlin. With the rise of the Nazi party to power in 1933, Baidaphon's German connections constituted an additional cause for French alarm. Throughout *la guerre des ondes*, Baidaphon, for instance, brought North African artists to the heart of Nazi Germany to record. The label also sent German recording engineers with checkered histories to record musicians in the Maghrib. One such Baidaphon engineer, the German national Max Prinz, who arrived in Tunis at the end of 1934 and then suddenly appeared again in Tlemcen, Algeria in spring 1935, was accused by French officials in Algeria and in the Levant of being "totally in the service of Germans interests."⁴⁰² To boot, Baidaphon's concessionaire in Algeria, the Swiss-born Jean Zuppiger, was known to frequent the German embassy in Algiers as late as 1939.⁴⁰³ The Baida cousins, the labels' namesakes, were themselves accused of being close to German leadership past and present. Bachagha Smata, indigenous officer in the Algerian Bureau of Native Affairs, informed his colleagues that Georges Baida maintained relationships with politicians ranging, "from [Gustav] Stresemann to [Joseph] Goebbels."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ On July 9, 1939, Radio Berlin broadcast Habiba Messika's "*al-Nashid Jilala Malik Faysal*" ("His Majesty King Faysal's Anthem," Baidaphon B 86530), which had long been banned in Morocco. See "EMISSION DE BERLIN DE 17 H 30," CADN/2MI/791, July 9, 1939.

⁴⁰² "Société BAIDAPHONE." CADN/MA/200/193, June 14, 1935.

⁴⁰³ "Zuppiger JEAN," ANOM/GGA/15h/32, November 16, 1939.

⁴⁰⁴ "Le Disque du Langue Arabe," ANOM/GGA/15h/32, February 1937.

In order to combat Baidaphon, the Governor General of Algeria and Resident Generals of Morocco and Tunisia constructed censorship regimes designed to regulate and control the unfettered flow of their records. In this way, the three governments completed their failed legislative work of 1932. On February 14, 1938, the Governor General of Algeria instituted an order severely restricting the entry of records in “foreign languages” into Algeria.⁴⁰⁵ Of course, the “foreign languages” specified — Arabic, Kabyle, and Hebrew — were hardly foreign at all. The February 1938 order further required that all records in languages “other than French” be subjected to an inspection regime supervised by the Algerian Director of General Security. Under the new regime, records were to be submitted to a special commission for review before permitted entry into Algeria. That review process required a full accounting for of the record in question including transcription of its lyrics and their translation into French. For tracking purposes, the catalogue or issue numbers, which were printed on the labels at the center of records, were also to be provided. Failure to supply any of this information would result in the seizure and destruction of records. Compliance could, of course, produce the same outcome.

On September 30, 1939, a year and half after the Algerian order, the Moroccan Sultan Mohammad V promulgated a parallel dahir, a royal decree, related “to the control of records and other phonograph recordings.”⁴⁰⁶ Under the dahir, records “of a character contrary to the public order and moral decency,” were heretofore banned. In cases of the “circulation, peddling, possession, display for sale, notice of sale, sale, rental, and playing of banned records,” the military was to intervene. Tunisia soon followed suit.

⁴⁰⁵ “Arrête instituant une commission de contrôle des disques phonographiques en langue autre que la langue française,” CADN/MA/200/193, February 14, 1938.

⁴⁰⁶ “Extrait du Bulletin Officiel No. 1414 du 1er Décembre 1939,” CADN/MA/200/193, December 1, 1939.

If the sounds of a coming war were captured by the competition over radio, ordinary citizens and subjects also weighed in. Behind closed doors, in bars and cafés, and sometimes publically, songs about figures like French Prime Minister Léon Blum, a socialist and Jew, and his Popular Front government proliferated. On May 28, 1937, departmental security in Oran, Algeria reported that French supporters of the Parti Populaire Français were known to sing a song entitled, “Blum-Blum.” Sung to the tune of Tino Rossi’s “Tchi-tchi,” which originally borrowed from Mexican ranchera music, members of the Parti Populaire Français, a French fascist and anti-Semitic party, disparaged Blum’s Jewishness in “Blum-Blum.” The first verse made clear the level of vitriol.

You're a dirty Jew and disgust every man,
It's your dirty race that angers and
your communist regime that annoys.

And the refrain laid out their agenda.

You should be sacked
Blum-Blum [in place of the original lyrics, “Tchi-Tchi”]
‘Cause you don't please anyone
Blum-Blum [“Tchi-Tchi”]
We've had enough
Lé...on [“Tchi-Tchi”]
You're nothing but a dirty communist
Blum-Blum [“Tchi-Tchi”]
In the pocket of crooks
Blum-Blum [“Tchi-Tchi”]
If you don't want to go
Blum-Blum [“Tchi-Tchi”]
You'll be pointed in the right direction.

One month later, Constantine police discovered soccer players from the neighboring city of Djidjelli singing positively of Prime Minister Léon Blum and Dr. Mohamed Bendjelloul, the nationalist-reformist leader of the Fédération des élus musulmanes, at the Tony-Bar on Rue Massenet. Sung to the tune of “the International,” the Communist anthem, the Arabic lyrics

extolled both the Popular Front and the local working class.⁴⁰⁷ So too did the song take aim at François de La Rocque, head of Croix-de-Feu, another far-right French party:

When France was wailing on us
A man emerged from Constantine
Told us to be patient
His name was Bendjelloul
Long live Bendjelloul

From here to Istanbul
There is no one like Bendjelloul
We are the Popular Front
We don't want the war
We want to live on our land
We are with the working class
Comrade Blum is with us
Long live Blum

Let La Rocque and his friends be
like barking dogs
Comrade Blum is with us
Long live Blum

Mahieddine Bachetarzi, artistic director for Gramophone and president of El Moutribia orchestra, also celebrated Popular Front Prime Minister Léon Blum in the years just before the war. In “*Sawt al-Jaza'ir*” (“the Voice of Algeria”), the closing lines of the otherwise Arabic-language song praised Blum — in French — for bestowing additional rights upon the Algerian people.⁴⁰⁸ “It is really thanks to Léon Blum,” Bachetarzi sang, “that I have been able to speak.” Bachetarzi’s “*Sawt al-Jaza'ir*” was printed in his songbook “*Recueil des Chansons Mahieddine*,” published in 1937. That same songbook included a song entitled, “*Littihade*” (“unity”). In “*Littihade*,” Bachetarzi sang of unity of countries (*al-bilad*), of men (*al-'abad*), and of its salutary effects on future generations (*al-awlad*).⁴⁰⁹ In the song, he declared, “in our country

⁴⁰⁷ “Surveillance Politique des Indigènes,” ANOM/9h/37, June 2, 1937.

⁴⁰⁸ “Recueil des Chansons Mahieddine, 1937.” ANOM ALG/GGA/9h/37.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

[Algeria], we [Muslims] live as brothers, along with Jews and Christians.” Despite the message, the songbook was banned by order of the Governor General of Algeria shortly after its release.⁴¹⁰

Other Sounds, the Eve of War

At the same time that *la guerre des ondes* was fought across the southern Mediterranean, a number of prominent North African Jewish musicians made their way north to metropolitan France. Some like, Louisa Tounsia or Messaoud Habib came and went to Paris for shorter or longer periods of time but always on a temporary basis.⁴¹¹ Others, settled there semi-permanently or at least thought their stay might be passing. The Tunisian Jewish composer Gaston Bsiri was among them. So too was a young Algerian Jewish vocalist by the name of Simon “Salim” Halali, whose talent was quickly recognized.

By the mid-1930s, Salim Halali, an Algerian Jewish teenager in Paris, signed with the Pathé label. Alongside his professional partnership with Algerian Muslim musicians Mohammed El Kamal, a partisan of the nationalist Parti du Peuple Algerien (PPA), and Mohammed Iguebouchène, Halali was paired with the Tunisian Bsiri. All three helped craft Halali’s distinct Spanish sound around his even more distinctive, almost feminine voice. Their music defined a generation. On “*La Sevillane*” (“The Girl from Seville,” Pathé CPT 5951), for example, written by El Kamal, Halali introduced Algerians to paso-doble in their own language. On “*Ton doux regard*” (“Your sweet look,” Pathé CPT 5920), written by Bsiri, Halali did the same for flamenco. Halali also got political. In “*Arjaâ Lebladek*” (“Return to your country,” Pathé CPT

⁴¹⁰ Early reference to the ban can be seen in a letter from the head of the Blida police to the Governor General of Algeria. ANOM/9h/37, November 10, 1937.

⁴¹¹ Among those who appeared in Paris in the 1930s included Louisa Tounsia, Acher Mizrahi, Dalila Taliana, and Messaoud Habib. Habib even opened a kosher restaurant, “Chez Messaoud,” at 11 Rue Montyon in the Paris ninth arrondissement. Private collection of Paulette Habib. Today, that space is occupied by a Senagalese restaurant which sits next to a kosher restaurant named “Chez David.”

4602), written by Mohamed El Kamel and Mohammed Iguebouchène, Halali urged his compatriots in France to return to their country (Algeria). In the chorus, he lent his lilting voice to the lyrics, “why do you remain estranged?” Algerians, of course, “remained estranged” for various reasons but usually to earn money in France. This was as true for the Algerian workers Halali addressed, as it was for Algerian Jewish recording artist Saoud l’Oranais, who moved to Marseille in 1937.⁴¹²

On the eve of war, in April 1939, “the Jewish Hour” premiered on Radio Tunis. The half-hour program, broadcast weekly after the close of the Sabbath, included stories of Jewish interest and music. By refraining from discussion of Palestine, it also kept the sensibilities of its Muslim listeners in mind.⁴¹³ Alongside announcer Felix Allouche, Acher Mizrahi directed the broadcast’s musical program.⁴¹⁴ The programming reflected Mizrahi’s varied interests. It thus included live performance of Andalusian music, Hebrew paraliturgical prayer, modern Hebrew folksong, and anthems as diverse as the *Marseillaise* and the Beylical hymn.

“The Jewish Hour” also devoted considerable broadcast time to the worsening condition of European Jews. It was quite possibly the only radio program in the interwar Maghrib to do so. Although Allied stations, like the BBC and Radio Paris-Mondial, reported on the war itself, and Axis stations, such as Radio Bari, Radio Berlin, and Radio Tripoli in Italian-occupied Libya, broadcast fascist and anti-Semitic propaganda, neither provided anything approaching specificity on Jewish life under siege. On “the Jewish Hour,” however, Tunisians and those with a strong enough signal in Algeria, were able to hear German Jewish voices for themselves. Recordings of

⁴¹² Maurice El Médioni, *Maurice El Médioni: A Memoir (From Oran to Marseilles, 1935-1990)*, edited by Max Reinhardt, Repeater Books, 2017.

⁴¹³ “Projet d’organisation d’une heure hébraïque à Tunis-PTT,” Central Zionist Archives (CZA)/A397/20.

⁴¹⁴ “Heure hébraïque du samed 3 juin 1939.” CZA/A397/20.

choral music made in German synagogues, for instance, were played with regularity on “the Jewish Hour.” Felix Allouche, the program’s announcer, helped bring those records to life. On April 29, 1939, for instance, Allouch informed listeners that the synagogue where one such disc was recorded “has been destroyed, as you know, by the Nazis.”⁴¹⁵

For Tunisians, the threat facing the Jews of Europe was brought into stark, audible relief during the Purim 1940 broadcast of “the Jewish Hour.” On March 23, 1940, Allouche connected the ancient Jewish holiday, which marked Jewish survival in the face of impending annihilation, to his present. “In every generation -- *bekhol dor ve dor* -- we say,” Allouche announced on Radio Tunis, “‘in every generation,’ an adversary arises but in the end, justice always triumphs.”⁴¹⁶ He continued:

Today again...France, England are justly fighting the essence of evil in order to render justice to the weak. Haman has taken the form of Hitler but like the Persian minister, the Fuhrer will also buckle under the weight of his own evil. Dear listeners, I would like you, during this Purim in the year 5700, this Purim 1940, to realize all of your dreams and that in the next year, will see the defeat of the new Haman and the total victory of the Allies.

Acher Mizrahi followed Allouche. He chanted from the Book of Esther, the text traditionally read on Purim. Then, the recording artist Babi Bismuth, a regular on “the Jewish Hour,” chanted the solemn Hebrew *piyyut* “*Mi kamokha vein kamokha*” (Who is like you, God? No one is like you.).⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ “Heure Hébraïque du samedi 29 avril 1939.” CZA/A397/20.

⁴¹⁶ “HEURE HEBRAIQUE DE RADIO-TUNIS, Samedi 23 Mars 1940.” CZA/A397/20. “*Bekhol dor ve dor*,” means, “in every generation,” in Hebrew and draws on Passover maxim and Jewish idiom. During the Passover holiday, Jews are supposed to imagine themselves as having personally left Egypt.

⁴¹⁷ “*Mi kamokha vein kamokha*,” written by the medieval Hebrew poet Yehudah Halevy, is traditionally chanted by North African Jews on the Sabbath before Purim. Thank you to Edwin Seroussi for pointing out this out.

That same month, on March 16, 1940, Salim Halali performed alongside Mohamed El Kamal at the Bouffes-Parisiens on Rue Montigny in Paris.⁴¹⁸ Two months later, German soldiers bypassed the Maginot line, the last line of French defense. In June 1940, the Germans occupied Paris. Shortly afterward, the Third Republic signed an armistice agreement with Nazi Germany. Marshal Philippe Pétain, French hero of the First World War, led the accommodationist French State (*l'État Français*), the entity which replaced the Third Republic, from the resort town of Vichy in southern France. Halali and El Kamal, of course, were still in Paris, which was now German controlled. Gaston Bsiri was there too. Saoud l'Oranais found himself residing in territory controlled by a new regime more commonly referred to as Vichy. Those in the Maghrib did as well. Some three months after Felix Allouche and “the Jewish Hour” predicted the “total” victory of the Allies, their prophecy proved devastatingly false.

Radio silence for some: What one could not hear during the war in North Africa

Following the formal surrender of the Third Republic to Nazi Germany, the music and musicians once heard on radio and in public spaces in the Maghrib were ever more difficult to hear. The Vichy regime, which rose in the wake of the Third Republic, put an end to the musical inclusivity and permissibility that had characterized the interwar period. Marshal Philippe Pétain accomplished this feat, in part, by extending his government's conservative ideological program (*la révolution nationale*) to North Africa. On November 10, 1940, for example, Resident General of Morocco Charles Noguès issued a decree banning all phonograph records other than those containing “classical music or music of patriotic inspiration” from cafés, bars, restaurants, and

⁴¹⁸ See theater listings in *Les Temps*, March 15, 1940, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k264242p/f3.item.r>.

cinemas.⁴¹⁹ One year later, an updated version of the order clarified that classical and patriotic music were “of the highest quality [...] in contrast to everything that is trivial,” such as “jazz and dance music.”⁴²⁰

Under Vichy rule in North Africa, radio was also targeted. So too, were Jews. “The Jewish Hour,” for example, was pulled from Radio Tunis by the summer of 1940.⁴²¹ In October 1940, Vichy-era legislation in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia made Jewish employment in radio illegal and made Jewish performance in municipal and other public venues unlawful but not impossible.⁴²² On October 3, 1940, the Vichy regime applied the first of a series of anti-Jewish statutes (*Statut des Juifs*) to the French territory under its control, including Algeria, and then extended them to Morocco and Tunisia.⁴²³ The statutes included a prohibition on Jews serving in the public sector, which included radio, and specifically barred Jews from managerial positions on radio stations like Radio Maroc, Radio Alger, and Radio Tunis.⁴²⁴ On October 7, 1940, Pétain’s government abrogated the Crémieux Decree in Algeria, thereby removing the French

⁴¹⁹ “Ordre.” CADN/MA/200/193, April 10, 1941.

⁴²⁰ “Ordre.” CADN/MA/200/193, August 26, 1941.

⁴²¹ The last “Jewish Hour” broadcasts in the CZA archives (A397/20) from before the war date to April 1940. The program seems to have continued through the summer, however.

⁴²² Fascinatingly, Louisa Tounsia continued to perform in Tunis in public at least through March 1941. And yet, reviews of her performances in the women’s journal *Lëila*, took on an increasingly negative and anti-Semitic tone. Copies of *Leïla: revue illustrée de la femme* were generously shared with me by Dr. Morgan Corriou. For more on *Leïla*, see Hafedh Boujmil, *Leïla: revue illustrée de la femme, 1936-1941*, Tunis: Editions Nirvana, 2007.

⁴²³ For more the on the Vichy Jewish statutes as applied to North Africa, see Susan Slyomovics, “French restitution, German compensation: Algerian Jews and Vichy’s financial legacy,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 17:5, 2012; Daniel Schroeter, “Vichy in Morocco: the residency, Mohammed V, and his indigenous Jewish subjects,” *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed., Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, Indiana University Press, 2017.

⁴²⁴ “DECRET du 30 November 1940 portant status des Juifs en Tunisie.” Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (AMAE)/Vichy/ P –Tunisie/8GMII, November 30, 1940.

citizenship held by the overwhelming majority of Algerian Jews since 1870. The move returned musicians like Lili Labassi and Salim Halali to legal indigeneity and Jewishness. For Algerian Jews living in Paris or Marseille, like Halali or Saoud l'Oranais, the abrogation of Crémieux rendered them stateless at a moment when papers of state meant everything. On October 13, 1940, all radio stations in North Africa, which previously operated with a degree of independence, were placed under the direct control of Vichy France's national broadcasting authority.⁴²⁵ On October 31, 1940, a dahir officially applied the Jewish statutes to Morocco.⁴²⁶ On November 30, 1940, Beylical decree extended similar laws to Tunisia.⁴²⁷

Under the Jewish statutes, the most high profile orchestras dedicated to Arab music could no longer perform in North Africa. In Algeria, this included El Andaloussia and Mahieddine Bachetarzi's El Moutribia, both of which were barred from municipal theaters, public squares, and on radio. Intriguingly, Bachetarzi dismantled El Moutribia before the Governor General of Algeria could do so. "Personally," he later wrote, "I preferred to dissolve El Moutribia rather than having to remove the Jewish members with whom I had worked for almost twenty years."⁴²⁸ On December 10, 1940, an ominous announcement appeared in *L'Echo d'Alger*. Members of El Moutribia were slated to gather the following day to discuss "the reorganization of the

⁴²⁵ "La réorganisation de la radio nord-africaine," *La Dépêche Algérienne*, October 21, 1940. ANOM/GGA/15h/32.

⁴²⁶ As Daniel Schroeter demonstrates, Sultan Mohammad V of Morocco modified the Jewish statutes to be in accordance with his commander of the faithful. See Daniel Schroeter, "Vichy in Morocco: the residency, Mohammed V, and his indigenous Jewish subjects," *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed., Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, Indiana University Press, 2017.

⁴²⁷ "Decret du 30 Novembre 1940 portant statut des Juifs en Tunisie." AMAE/Vichy/ P –Tunisie/8GMII/18, November 30, 1940.

⁴²⁸ Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p. 29.

society.”⁴²⁹ From that date moving forward, El Moutribia disappeared not only from the pages of *L’Echo d’Alger* but so too from the stage.

The individual musicians responsible for crafting a modern public across the Maghrib were also forced from the stage and radio under Vichy rule. For some, like Algerian Jewish artist Lili Labassi, this move came at the height of his career. “My father,” Lili Labassi’s son Robert Castel wrote in his personal history *Je pose soixante-quinze, mais je retiens tout: soixante-quinze ans de souvenirs*, “musician-singer-author-composer of Andalusian music, was banned from Radio Alger to the great satisfaction of the director of the station who could not accept that Lili Labassi was superior to his Algerian Muslim protégés.”⁴³⁰ For Castel, whose anger is evident, the treatment of his father under Vichy rule has maintained its sting, in part, because it remains unacknowledged. “Apparently, my father’s records were not broadcast,” Castel bemoans in his memoir. “He was the most important author-composer of his age but he was a JEW.” For his father, Robert Castel explained, these were the “dark years.”

Alongside acts like disbanding El Moutribia, Mahieddine Bachetarzi claims to have sought to ameliorate the situation faced by artists like Lili Labassi. In his memoir, he writes that he provided Algerian Jews with Muslim pseudonyms so that the artists could continue to perform on Radio Alger.⁴³¹ If this was in fact the case, such a maneuver would have been impossible to apply to Labassi. As we recall from the last chapter, Labassi was not only famous among indigenous Algerians but so too recognizable by figures like Lucienne Jean-Darrouy. Indeed, Jean-Darrouy served on the board of Radio Alger throughout the war.

⁴²⁹ See “Communications diverses,” *L’Echo d’Alger*, December 10, 1940, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7586894h/f2.item.r>.

⁴³⁰ Robert Castel, *Je pose soixante-quinze, mais je retiens tout: soixante-quinze ans de souvenirs*, Paris: Ramsay, 2008, p. 17.

⁴³¹ Bachetarzi, *Mémoires II*, p. 29.

If in North Africa, the music careers of Jewish artists like Lili Labassi were put on hold, in metropolitan France, the lives of North African musicians were seriously compromised or worse yet, extinguished. In German-occupied Paris, it seemed that some, like Salim Halali and Gaston Bsiri, were attempting to survive the war by passing as Muslims. This was at the very moment that some Muslims musicians, like El Kamal and Iguebouchène, joined the German war effort by animating their radio broadcasts. So too did they continue to record for Pathé. As for the ultimate fate of Bsiri and Halali, the initial details of their stories would only emerge at war's end. In the meantime, both went deafeningly silent. As I explore in the next section, however, this did not mean that North Africans could no longer hear them.

Uneven playing field: what one could *sometimes* hear during the war

As Salim Halali went quiet in Paris, his records were still played and even broadcast across the Maghrib. This was one of the great ironies of the Second World War. In North Africa, Jewish musicians could sometimes be heard in public but no longer seen. Whether Halali's music could be heard depended on a number of factors but never on the Algerian Jewish musician himself. Those factors were mostly related to uneven censorship policies and antenna strength but above all capture the dissonance of the period in question.

On May 26, 1939, a year before the fall of the Third Republic, a Salim Halali record by the title of "*Arjaâ Lebladek*" ("Return to your country," Pathé CPT 4602) first came to the attention of the sub-prefect of Mostaganem, Algeria.⁴³² While the sub-prefect was unfamiliar with the artist, the Bureau of Native Affairs made clear the danger that Halali and the music — arranged and written by Mohamed El Kamal and Mohammed Iguebouchène — posed. As was mandated by the February 1938 censorship order, French translation of the Arabic lyrics was

⁴³² Salim Halali's "*Arjaâ Lebladek*," Pathé, CPT 4602 was pressed in Paris in January 1939.

provided to the sub-prefect. The translation noted that significant wear to the copy obtained by the Bureau of Native Affairs rendered some of Halali's words difficult to understand. Presumably this was from repeated play. Nonetheless, Halali's chorus — "Return, man, to your country! Why do you remain estranged?" — made him quickly known to the sub-prefect.⁴³³ In short order, he declared "*Arjaâ Lebladek*" to be nationalist propaganda and ordered its distribution prevented at all costs.⁴³⁴

That particular Salim Halali record, however, was never officially censored in Algeria. Nor was any of his other music. At the height of Vichy rule and with the artist presumably hiding in German-occupied Paris, Radio Alger continued to play Salim Halali with regularity.⁴³⁵ Why that record in particular, an explicitly nationalist one sung by a known, Jewish artist, was not subjected to ban in Vichy-ruled Algeria remains an open question. In fact, the Governor General of Algeria was well aware of the existence of "*Arjaâ Lebladek*" and possessed the legal tools necessary to censor it.

In 1941, both Salim Halali and the record in question appeared in the report, "Propaganda in Muslim Countries: Cinema and Records," written by Mr. Delahaye for the Centre des Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane (CHEAM).⁴³⁶ "I will note, to finish with Iguebouchen," wrote Delahaye of Halali's musical collaborator, "one record by this artist: "Ardjaa elbladek" [sic], which could seem to some to be seditious but which, in reality, does not comport to

⁴³³ "A/S.-d'un disque phonographique." ANOM/ALG/GGA/15h/32, May 26, 1939.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ "Radio-P.T.T. Alger, Emissions-Musulmanes, Programme du mois de Fevrier 1942." ALG/GGA/15H/31, February 6, 1942.

⁴³⁶ M. Delahaye, "La Propagande en pays Musulman: Le cinéma et le disque de langue arabe," Exposé no. 47. AN/CHEAM/20000002/18, December 22, 1941.

anything other than the longing for one's homeland."⁴³⁷ He continued, "this record was recorded with Hamel [Mohamed El Kamal] by the young Jew Selim Halali [sic], his student." Like others throughout the report, Delahaye, in the fashion typical of the Vichy regime, identified Halali in ethnic terms, as a young "*juif*" ("Jew"), and not by the confessional marker of "*israélite*" ("of the Jewish religion"), typical of the Third Republic. Delahaye did the same for others in the report, like "the Jews Sassi, Saoud Medioni, known as Saoud l'Oranais, [Cheikh] Zouzou, and the majority of singers of the period."⁴³⁸ But Delahaye seemed convinced there was little need to worry about Halali, who, he wrote, "had become a star, very much in vogue, until the war broke out." For Delahaye then, the war had solved the Halali problem.

In July 1942, Morocco officially censored Salim Halali's *Arjaâ Lebladek*.⁴³⁹ Four months later, the Vichy regime collapsed in North Africa but the ban stayed in place for years to come.

Say it with me, 'Long Live the *Maréchal*': What one could *always* hear

Under Vichy rule, a novel genre of patriotic song surfaced in the Maghrib. It differed dramatically from Salim Halali's "*Arjaâ Lebladek*" in both sentiment and reach. If Halali's nationalist record could sometimes be heard, pro-Vichy popular tracts could always be heard across North Africa's concert halls and on radio. The near-absence of Jewish artists had left a

⁴³⁷ M. Delahaye, "La Propagande en pays Musulman: Le cinéma et le disque de langue arabe," Exposé no. 47. AN/CHEAM/20000002/18, December 22, 1941. Delahaye calls Salim Halali a "*jeune juif*" instead of the more common French term, "*jeune israélite*." While both essentially mean, "young Jew," the Vichy regime preferred to use the term "*juif*" as it was connotative of an ethno-religious identity and not merely a confessional one and thus, fit into a certain racial ideology.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ "Ordre." CADN/1MA/200/193, July 1, 1942.

sizable void and a mix of established, emerging, and itinerant Muslim musicians quickly filled it. The result was particularly disquieting.

Throughout fall 1940, just as the anti-Jewish racial laws were put into place, high profile North African musicians began to offer their paid services to Vichy officials in North Africa. Those services included composing and performing original music that not only praised Marshal Philippe Pétain and French leadership across North Africa but also frequently dipped into anti-Semitism. Among the first to volunteer was the unlikely figure of Mahieddine Bachetarzi.

If in his memoir Mahieddine Bachetarzi prided himself on the steps he took to protect Jewish musicians, the archives tell a dramatically different story. Indeed, far from the center of European action, Bachetarzi provides a case study for how artists responded to fascism during the Second World War. His response was far from exemplary. On October 13, 1940, for example, mere days after the Vichy regime's application of the Jewish statutes, which restricted Jews from public stage, and shortly after the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree, which left Algerian Jews denuded of French citizenship, Mahieddine Bachetarzi took the stage at the Majestic cinema in Algiers with an all-Muslim troupe.⁴⁴⁰ Before a crowd of close to 5,000, he sang in praise of Vichy leadership.

Throughout 1941, Mahieddine Bachetarzi's collaboration with the Vichy regime deepened. Already in January 1941, for example, Bachetarzi departed for his first full concert tour of Algeria since the Vichy regime had come to power. The multi-city tour was supported by the Press and Propaganda Services office and the Centre d'Information et d'Etudes (CIE) of the

⁴⁴⁰ The Majestic cinema was among the ten largest in the world and could accommodate up to 5,000 spectators. Intelligence officers estimated attendance at that concert somewhere between 3,500 and 5,000 people. "SOIREE DE LA TROUPE MAHIEDDINE, AU MAJESTIC, LE DIMANCHE 13 OCTOBRE." ALG/GGA/9h/37, October 18, 1940.

Governor General of Algeria.⁴⁴¹ On a Radio Alger with no Jews, Bachetarzi's concert and theater series was promoted widely on the station. In his early correspondence with officials in the Governor General of Algeria, Bachetarzi offered to perform his original compositions in praise of Marshal Pétain throughout his tour.⁴⁴² So too did he make clear that he would perform his recently completed Arabic-language adaptation of Molière's *The Miser*.⁴⁴³ Proceeds were earmarked for the French national relief fund and a fund for Algerian Muslim prisoners of war.

Bachetarzi's intensive touring schedule over the next year brought him and his troupe to the far reaches of all three Algerian departments. In this way, a pro-Vichy ideological program, which sometimes veered into blatant anti-Semitism, reached thousand-plus seat halls in Algeria's larger cities and smaller municipal venues in the interior. Performances typically began with a staging of *al-Mashḥaḥ* (*The Miser*) and concluded with a concert. Dance was interspersed throughout.

On February 12, 1941, Bachetarzi and his troupe performed before 900 at the Alhambra cinema in Bougie (Béjaïa) on Algeria's Mediterranean coast.⁴⁴⁴ The performance was as illustrative as it was typical. As usual, for example, *al-Mashḥaḥ* was staged and comedian Rachid Ksentini, who played the role of "the miser," acted opposite Bachetarzi. In the years before the war, Ksentini had acted opposite his partner, the Algerian Jewish artist Marie Soussan,

⁴⁴¹ "Mahieddine Bachtarzi à Monsieur le Sous-Prefet de Bougie." ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, January 31, 1941.

⁴⁴² "Note, A/S Chanson de Mahieddine." ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, December 26, 1940.

⁴⁴³ Joshua Cole has argued that Bachtarzi's choice of "*l'Avare*" was no accident but rather a calculated attempt to curry favor with the Vichy administration. See Joshua Cole and Stéphane Bouquet Stéphane, "À chacun son public, Politique et culture dans l'Algérie des années 1930," *Sociétés & Représentations*, 2014/2 N° 38, p. 46.

⁴⁴⁴ "Rapport Special." ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, February 13, 1941.

who was described at the time as “the Sophie Tucker of North Africa.”⁴⁴⁵ By 1941, Soussan was no longer in Ksentini’s good graces and vanished from the theater scene.⁴⁴⁶ Ksentini, however, stayed the course and went on with the show. In fact, his performance of the miser character was even more explicitly anti-Jewish than Molière’s original. On concert bills and tour ephemera for *al-Mashḥaḥ*, photographs captured Ksentini dressed in Jewish minstrel, complete with exaggerated putty nose.⁴⁴⁷

Following the performance of *al-Mashḥaḥ* on February 12, 1941, Bachetarzi, as usual, launched into a medley of songs extolling the Vichy regime. This included his hit “*Qoulou maaya*” (“Say it with me”), an Arabic-language panegyric to Marshal Philippe Pétain. “*Qoulou maaya*,” not unlike the popular music of the interwar period, was written to be at once accessible and memorable. In “*Qoulou maaya*,” Bachetarzi achieved both of those aims through a recurring chorus and the repetition of the name Pétain, as seen below.

Chorus:

Say it with me, ‘Long live the *Maréchal*,’
Yes, say it with me, ‘Long live the *Maréchal*.’

Verse:

Pétain who knows the value of duty; Pétain whom God has chosen,
Pétain the honest man, who recognizes Muslim honor,
Frenchmen and Arabs, we are all children of France.

Chorus:

Say it with me, ‘Long live the *Maréchal*,’

⁴⁴⁵ Lucienne Favre, *Dans la Casbah*, Paris, Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1937, p. 160. Sophie Tucker, “the last of the Red Hot Mommas,” was an incredibly popular American singer and actress (of Ukranian Jewish origin) who rose to prominence in the 1920 and 1930s.

⁴⁴⁶ In his memoir, Mahieddine Bachetarzi describes Rachid Ksentini as changing tone toward his Jewish partner Marie Soussan after the Constantine Riots of August 1934. At the same time that the two separated, Ksentini apparently accused Lili Labassi of trying to kill him. See Mahieddine Bachetarzi, *Mémoires, 1919-1939: suivis de Étude sur le théâtre dans les pays islamiques*, Alger: Éditions nationales algériennes, 1968, p. 219. According to Bachetarzi, the two reunited in 1935 to record with Baidaphon in Berlin. See Bachetarzi, *Mémoires*, p. 257. When the final separation between Ksentini and Soussan occurred is unclear.

⁴⁴⁷ “El-Mechehah, Une adaptation arabe de L'AVARE de MOLIERE.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37.

Yes, say it with me, ‘Long live the *Maréchal*.’⁴⁴⁸

With other lyrics extolling Pétain’s reign as an “era of glory” and vitriolic attacks against the Third Republic in lines like, “God has confounded the liars”, “*Qoulou maaya*” was a notable departure from Bachetarzi’s interwar praise of Prime Minister Léon Blum or his anthem “*Littihade*” (“Unity”).⁴⁴⁹ In “*Qoulou maaya*,” unity was now decidedly circumscribed. It was a unity of “Frenchman and Arabs” but no longer Jews.

Before bringing the evening to a close in Bougie on February 12, 1941, Bachetarzi took to the microphone with an additional message. “Be wary of the schemes of the Jews,” he warned the mostly Muslim crowd of nine hundred, “who have acted like our masters and continued to strike at us.”⁴⁵⁰ Then making reference to the Jewish statutes, the Crémieux Decree, or both, he intoned, “until they were knocked down a peg.”⁴⁵¹ Almost all erupted in applause. For the minority of Jews in the audience that night, their reaction was decidedly muted.⁴⁵²

It is difficult to make sense of Bachetarzi’s wartime behavior outside of considering him a political opportunist. Throughout the war, Bachetarzi circumvented anti-Jewish racial laws, pandered to the Vichy Regime, and voluntarily engaged in anti-Semitism. Not all in his position followed the same path. Radio Tunis announcer Abdelaziz Laroui, for example, was censured repeatedly under Vichy rule for failing to toe the party line.⁴⁵³ Laroui’s intransigence meant that

⁴⁴⁸ While the lyrics have survived, the music unfortunately has not. “Ditez avec moi: Vive le maréchal, oui, dites avec moi: ‘Vive le maréchal.’” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37.

⁴⁴⁹ “Recueil des Chansons Mahieddine, 1937.” ANOM ALG/GGA/9h/37.

⁴⁵⁰ “Rapport Special.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, February 13, 1941.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ See Mohamed Turki, *Abdelaziz Laroui: témoin de son temps*, Tunis: Editions Turki, 1988, p. 129.

he was even removed from Radio Tunis for extended bouts under Vichy order. In a similar fashion, other North African Muslim musicians abstained from praising the Vichy regime during the war and their audiences were known to reject all things French. On March 8, 1941, for instance, the Habib musical troupe appeared at the Majestic cinema in Algiers before a crowd of 2,000.⁴⁵⁴ No songs of Marshal Pétain were heard that night. When the troupe transitioned from Arabic to French, however, the crowd was thrown into a rage. According to the police report on the incident, the audience was displeased by the very use of the colonial tongue.

Bachetarzi then is better compared to Mohamed El Kamal and Mohammed Iguebouchène, Salim Halali's former musical collaborators. In Paris, both went to work for Radio Paris-Mondial, then under German control. This was at the very moment that their friend and colleague Halali was at his most vulnerable. This, of course, makes their political opportunism all the more glaring.

Bachetarzi was not alone in amplifying the Vichy regime through song but he was likely its highest profile bard. Alongside pro-Vichy song heard in formal spaces like the Alhambra cinema in Bougie, so too could the genre be found in the weekly markets where itinerant musicians made their stage. By early 1941, these roaming musicians, who attracted large, paying crowds not likely to frequent venues like the Alhambra, were brought to the attention of the Algerian Centre d'Information et d'Etudes (CIE) and soon onto the payroll of the Bureau for Muslim Affairs. Itinerant musicians helped extend Vichy's reach. By the end of March 1941, for example, musicians in the hamlet of Touggourt, deep in the Algerian Sahara, were recruited to

⁴⁵⁴ "Rapport: A/S-Représentation théâtrale Troupe 'Habib.'" ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, March 8, 1941.

spread the Vichy message through song. These musicians were paid hefty sums for their services.⁴⁵⁵

Although much of that music of the period was ephemeral, not all of it was. One such song, “Hymn to the Marshal” (in Arabic, “*Anshuda al-marishal*”; in French, “*Hymne au Maréchal*”), performed regularly throughout 1941, was printed and sold in the form of a pocket-sized songbook.⁴⁵⁶ With a French flag adorning its upper left corner, the songbook contained a short, rhyming song in formal Arabic, which hailed, “the heroic Marshal...Pétain the gallant.” Its vague authorship, attributed to “M.B. (the poet of Constantine),” was intended to add a sense of folkloric authenticity to the piece. The author, however, a Mr. Boulbina, was far from an unknown entity. Not only was his “Hymn to the Marshal” brought to the attention of Governor General of Algeria Maxime Weygand but so too was Boulbina surveilled years earlier on account of his relationship to the Baidaphon label.⁴⁵⁷

By the end of 1941, Mahieddine Bachetarzi concluded his first tour for the Vichy regime. After fifty-six performances, at the pace of more than one a week, he had raised tens of thousands of francs for the national relief fund and brought *al-Mashḥaḥ* and “*Qoulou maaya*” to tens of thousands around Algeria. Despite his success, there were some setbacks. Some had grown tired of Bachetarzi’s habit of auctioning off a portrait of Pétain to the highest bidder in the course of every performance.⁴⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the practice continued. On November 24, 1941,

⁴⁵⁵ “Propagande par conteurs.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/50, April 22, 1941.

⁴⁵⁶ “L’hymne au Maréchal PETAIN.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ “Soirée Mahieddine.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, February 7, 1942.

Bachetarzi penned a letter to the Governor General of Algeria proposing another tour of the country.⁴⁵⁹ It was soon approved.

***El Maricane* Exceptionalism: What one could *always* hear as the Vichy years came to a close**

Ayayayay! Nothing good is going to come of this. The Americans were here.

-Houcine Slaoui, recorded as “*Azin oualain*” (later known as “*El Maricane*”) for Pathé in 1949, written c. end of 1942, Morocco

The worst age is upon us, the Americans have arrived here.

- Hamed Ben Ali Bel Abbes, transcribed on April 27, 1943 but performed earlier, Algeria

The Allies have come and removed the Germans from our midst.

- Simon de Yacoub Cohen, “*Khamous Zana*,” c. 1943, published by Imprimerie Uzan, Tunisia

On November 8, 1942, over one hundred thousand mostly American soldiers, along with their British allies, landed in Morocco and Algeria. Three days later, Operation Torch, which aimed to open a second front in the war, came to an end with the surrender of the Vichy regime in North Africa. The operation, a stunning success, had devastating consequences. The Allied victory prompted a German takeover of the southern half of France and direct occupation of Tunisia. Six months later, the war took another dramatic turn. In May 1943, the Allies pushed German and Italian forces out of Tunisia and from there launched their invasion of Europe through Sicily. The events of Operation Torch and its aftermath engendered a number of immediate musical responses from North Africans. In the musical narrative that emerged in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, Americans were front and center.

One sonic consequence of the American presence across the Maghrib was the direct transmission of American music to North African musicians. In cities like Casablanca and Oran, American soldiers sought out pianos at local cafés and cabarets in order to tap out the sounds of home. Not only did this bring American GIs face to face with Algerian artists like Mahieddine

⁴⁵⁹ “Les Tournées Mahieddine.” ALG/GGA/9h/37, 24 November 24, 1941.

Bachetarzi but so too brought Moroccans and Algerians fully into the orbit of the American soundscape.⁴⁶⁰ For two such Algerian musicians, Maurice El Médioni and Blaoui Houari, the American presence in Oran was largely responsible for launching their careers. The Jewish El Médioni, for example, the nephew of Saoud l’Oranais (who was still stranded in metropolitan France), was a teenager when he was first exposed to American music. Forced out of school by the Vichy regime in 1941, the young El Médioni started working odd jobs for the Americans in the aftermath of Operation Torch and for the next several years. Among those jobs was entertaining them on piano. In turn, American soldiers exposed El Médioni to American popular and folk music standards and to genres like bebop, boogie-woogie, and swing.⁴⁶¹ For the Muslim Blaoui Houari, the story was similar.⁴⁶² In time, El Médioni and Houari started performing together at Café Salva, also in Oran’s Jewish quarter, crafting a sound — which drew on swing as much as it did on regional Bedouin music — that would become emblematic of the postwar period⁴⁶³

Not all, however, were pleased with the Americans. With his song, “*Azin oulaïn*” (“The handsome and blue-eyed”), Houcine Slaoui captured the emerging negative attitude toward “*almirikan*” (in Moroccan Arabic, “the Americans”). “Ayayayay!” the twenty-something Slaoui strained at the outset of the song, “nothing good is going to come of this. The Americans were

⁴⁶⁰ “Renseignements.” ALG/GGA/9h/37, 29 September 29, 1943.

⁴⁶¹ “Notes of Exile - Maurice El Medioni documentary movie,” last modified 14 December 2009, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2daUi2Ym05M>. Accessed 15 October 2015.

⁴⁶² Ibid. See also the recently published Maurice El Médioni, *Maurice El Médioni: A Memoir (From Oran to Marseilles, 1935-1990)*, edited by Max Reinhardt, Repeater Books, 2017.

⁴⁶³ Bouziane Daoudi and Hadj Miliani, *L’aventure du raï: Musique et société*, Paris: Seuil, 1996, p. 59.

here.”⁴⁶⁴ Penned sometime immediately following Operation Torch, “*Azin oulaïn*” was rebranded “*El Maricane*,” (“*almirikan*” rendered in French transliteration) as Moroccans adopted the song as the soundtrack for the Second World War.⁴⁶⁵

Lyrically and musically, Slaoui connected to his audience with “*El Maricane*.” For Slaoui, the Americans had not just vanquished the Vichy government, a regime to which most Moroccans Muslims may have felt ambivalent, but had also brought with them a way of life at odds with local custom. In the fourth verse of “*El Maricane*,” Slaoui thus laments that dystopian American present. As with the other verses of “*El Maricane*,” he ends with a hook brilliantly peppered with Moroccan approximations of American English:

They gave candy today and gum tomorrow.
The girls covered their faces
With powder made from chickpeas,
And they ate bonbons.
And even the hags sat drinking rum
With the Americans.

And you heard: *Hokay* [Ok], *hokay* [Ok]! *Come on!* *Bye bye!*⁴⁶⁶

According to Slaoui, whose vocals are punctuated with emerging “*chaabi*” (“popular”) sounds on ‘ud and violin, the influx of American goods, which take the form of candy, gum, cosmetics, and alcohol, represent corrupting forces. His major critique, however, is reserved for Moroccan woman who have taken to face powder, taken up drinking, and flocked to the Americans.

While scholars have long listened to Slaoui’s lyrical gloss on Americans in isolation, even as exceptional, Moroccans and others across North Africa did not. Songs about Americans

⁴⁶⁴ I use Paul Bowles translation of Houcine Slaoui’s “*Azin oulaïn*” in *Points in Time*, New York: the Ecco Press, 1982, p. 68-69. For the most in-depth treatment of Houcine Slaoui (but without reference to the other music of the era), see Jamila Bargach, “Liberatory, nationalising and moralising by ellipsis: reading and listening to Lhussein Slaoui’s song *Lmirikan*,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 4:4, 1999, p. 61-88.

⁴⁶⁵ When Pathé released Slaoui’s “*Azin oulaïn*” on 45 rpm record, the song started carrying the parenthetical title, “*El Maricane*.”

⁴⁶⁶ Bowles, *Points in Time*, p. 68-69.

proliferated not just across Morocco but in Algeria and Tunisia as well. On April 27, 1943, Oran police filed a report on Hamed Ben Ali Bel Abbès, who was found singing an anti-American song in front of the Jewish cemetery in the Algerian city for an audience of one hundred and fifty. Whether the location was intentional is unclear. The song, immediately evocative of “*El Maricane*,” began with the following line, “The worst age is upon us, the Americans have arrived here.”⁴⁶⁷ Ben Ali Bel Abbès’ dirge, which like “*El Maricane*” picked up on creative American uses of chickpeas (“their coffee, made from chickpeas, causes one to go blind”) had little of the satire found in Slaoui’s song. Taking a sharper turn, Ben Ali Bel Abbès, for example, sang of Americans filling the streets of Oran like “cockroaches.” “We pray to God,” Ben Ali Bel Abbès belted out at a moment when German troops were still occupying neighboring Tunisia, “to send us Hitler so that we can be happy.” In the fall of 1943, Mahieddine Bachetarzi even joined the fray. The Centre d’Information et d’Etudes (CIE), the very office which had previously sponsored his pro-Vichy concert and theater tour, observed Bachetarzi singing anti-American songs at the social hall of El Moutribia.⁴⁶⁸ He did so, of course, without the mostly Jewish orchestra that once occupied the space.

North African Jews also sang of Americans but in decidedly valorizing verse. Far from fleeting, the songbooks on the topic, written in Judeo-Arabic, were printed, sold, and even submitted to the French censor.⁴⁶⁹ Their music dealt not only with the presence of Americans and the changes wrought by Allied victory but so too took up Jewish suffering under Vichy rule and the Holocaust. These songs utilized traditional Jewish liturgical and paraliturgical forms as with

⁴⁶⁷ “Rapport: Propos défaitistes.” ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, April 27, 1943.

⁴⁶⁸ “Renseignements.” ALG/GGA/9h/37, September 29, 1943.

⁴⁶⁹ Michal Saraf references the censor’s stamp in her monograph, *The Hitler Scroll of North Africa: Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish Literature on the Fall of the Nazis*, Lod: Haberman Institute, 1988.

Nissim Ben Shimon's "*Haggada di Hitler*" ("the Hitler Haggada") and Prosper Hassine's "*Megillat Hitler*" ("the Hitler Megilla"), both printed in Casablanca in the mid-1940s, as well as the form of more popular genres.⁴⁷⁰ Lyricists of this diverse body of work were professional and amateur musicians alike, including at least one student of the silenced Acher Mizrahi.⁴⁷¹

More than any other Judeo-Arabic composition of the era, Simon di Yacoub Cohen's "*Khamous Zana*" ("the Allies have come to us"), best captures the divergent and varied experiences of North African Jews and Muslims during the Second World War. Written in Tunis following the country's liberation from Germany in May 1943, "*Khamous Zana*" can be read — or listened to — against Houcine Slaoui's "*El Maricane*." Unlike the Moroccan composition "*El Maricane*," which takes the American landing in November 1942 as its starting point, "*Khamous Zana*" begins with the arrival of the Germans in Tunisia. In couplet after couplet, di Yacoub Cohen details the deprivations faced by Tunisian Jews under Nazi occupation. That included, as di Yacoub Cohen already detailed in 1943, the German requisitioning of radios from Tunis' Jews, ("*khudth lna al-radiola*"), a detail which would only emerge in 2015.⁴⁷² In di Yacoub Cohen's "*Khamous Zana*," the Americans enter not to defile, as in Slaoui's take, but instead "enter like a bride" ("*dakhil kif al-l'arusa*"). Just as in "*El Maricane*," the Americans present chocolate and chewing gum to locals. But in "*Khamous Zana*," chewing gum and the like are regarded as mere treats after years of rationing and are mixed together with much needed staples

⁴⁷⁰ For the most complete treatment of the Judeo-Arabic songs of World War II and the Holocaust, again see Michal Saraf, *The Hitler scroll of North Africa: Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish literature on the fall of the nazis*, Lod: Haberman Institute, 1988.

⁴⁷¹ The twelve-year old composer Allouche Trabelsy, author of "*Ghnaïet Elmedlumine*" ("Song of the Oppressed"), was a disciple of Acher Mizrahi, the mainstay behind Radio Tunis' cancelled "Jewish Hour." This was noted on the cover of the songbook. See "Ghnaïet elmedlounine: sur l'air: Aâla ma zrali âal elkhamssine" held by the National Library of Israel (NLI)/002221251.

⁴⁷² Nir Cohen, "Inside the Diary of SS Officer Known as Gas Chamber 'Mastermind,'" *Ynetnews*, April 17, 2015, accessed May 31, 2017, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4647858,00.html>.

like “soap and sugar, sweet milk, chewing gum and cigarettes” (“*sabon wa sukr / wa halib m‘atr / wa shwingum wa sigar*). If “nothing good is to come of” the Americans in “*El Maricane*,” “*Khamous Zana*” ends then with near messianic fervor.

<i>Farhana wa-zahayna</i>	Happy and proud
<i>Rabi yukamil ‘alayna</i>	the Lord provides for us
<i>Fi Falastin y‘atina</i>	In Palestine, he will give us
<i>Dawla Yahudiyya</i>	a Jewish state ⁴⁷³

For di Yacoub Cohen, God’s work had not ended with entrance of the Americans to Tunisia but continued apace with the likely establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Like “*El Maricane*” in Morocco (and Algeria), “*Khamous Zana*” was heard widely in Tunisia at the time of its composition. Raoul Journo, who survived the war after a harrowing encounter with German soldiers in the city of Ariana, recalled that when he performed, “the American[-themed] song ‘khamous jènè’ [sic],” following liberation, “the dollars rained [down upon him].”⁴⁷⁴

In 2000, Maurice El Médioni, the young Jewish pianist from Oran influenced by American music, released a version of Houcine Slaoui’s “*El Maricane*” on his CD “*Samaï Andalou*.”⁴⁷⁵ In 2012, video appeared of Tunisian Jews singing “*Khamous Zana*” during the annual pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba.⁴⁷⁶ That both songs still resonate over half a century later provide initial evidence of a North African soundscape indelibly altered by the Second World War.

Conclusion: Salim Halali is Found

⁴⁷³ “Khamous Zana.” NLI/001986728.

⁴⁷⁴ Raoul Journo, *Ma vie*, Paris: Biblieurope, 2002, p. 171.

⁴⁷⁵ Maurice El Medioni, “Samaï Andalou,” Magda Records, 2000.

⁴⁷⁶ See “Les djerbiens font la fête ‘Khamous Jana,’” posted May 13, 2012, accessed March 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/elghriba/videos/10150893785192148/>.

All of today's singers have reconnected to the film screen. Tino Rossi is filming "Le Chanteur Inconnu," George Guétary is filming, "Casanova 1946" (released as *Les Aventures de Casanova*), Luis Mariano is the hero of "Histoire du Chanteur."

North Africa has its singer, Salim Halali, who is considered the Maurice Chevalier of the Maghreb. He now joins the ranks of the lords of film.

-- M.N., "The Angel of Rhythm: His Debut on Screen," *La France au Combat*, October 17, 1946⁴⁷⁷

Two years after Mahieddine Bachetarzi delighted Algerians at a concert that happened to coincide with the liberation of Paris, Algerian Jewish musician Salim Halali, presumed dead, emerged alive in the metropolitan capital. In Paris, sometime in October 1946, Halali sat down for an interview with the weekly *La France au Combat* and its journalist M.N. for a story about his debut on the big screen. "The war interrupted his first film, 'La complainte de l'esclave,'" M.N. wrote. But it did much more than just interrupt, as the journalist explained.

The Germans attempted to enlist him to transmit their orders to his compatriots. He refused, was arrested, roughed up by the Gestapo, and went into hiding, spending the occupation years in a state of terror. His younger sister, 17 years old, already married, was shot. His brother-in-law had his eyes gauged out by the occupiers.

None of these details — that Nazi German attempted to enlist Halali for their radio propaganda, that he spent "the occupation years in a state of terror," that his sister was murdered and his brother-in-law blinded — would surface until two years after Mahieddine Bachetarzi's concert in Algiers. Since then, these details have mostly been buried. The same can be said for other details that became known, at best, at the end of war.

Under German occupation in northern France, North African Jewish artists, like Salim Halali, found themselves ever more vulnerable as the reality of life under Nazi rule set in. Nonetheless, some, such as the Tunisian Jewish composer Gaston Bsiri, continued to perform publically in Paris. He did so by passing as Muslim. Between June 1940 and early spring 1942,

⁴⁷⁷ M.N., "L'ANGE DU RYTHME, débute à l'écran," *La France au Combat*, October 17, 1946. Held at the Bibliothèque Nationale du France (BNF), département Arts du spectacle, 8-RK-18493. Maurice Chevalier was another giant of the French cabaret and film scene.

for instance, Bsiri pursued this route with success. Sometime in early 1942, however, he was arrested by the Gestapo. According to Tunisian Jewish musician Raoul Journo, a former student of Bsiri, “it was an Arab, a musician, who denounced him.”⁴⁷⁸ On April 8, 1942, Gaston Bsiri met his end in Auschwitz. In January 1943, with the Germans firmly in control of the entirety of metropolitan France following Operation Torch, a massive German-French roundup of Jews at the old Port in Marseille netted hundreds of Jews including Saoud l’Oranais and his thirteen year old son Joseph El Médioni. Along with hundreds of others, many of whom were Algerian born, father and son El Médioni were deported to the Drancy internment camp just outside of Paris.⁴⁷⁹ On March 23, 1943, Saoud l’Oranais and Joseph El Médioni were murdered at the Sobibor extermination camp.⁴⁸⁰ As with Bsiri, the reverberations of Saoud l’Oranais’ death were felt well beyond the confines of continental Europe.

Following Operation Torch in November 1942 and the liberation of Tunisia in May 1943, Jewish musicians once again emerged on the North African music scene. When Jews returned to concert halls and municipal theaters, many sang of the Second World War and their postwar reality. By 1944, Lili Boniche, for example, the lone Jewish artist to appear at Mahieddine Bachetarzi’s concert at the end of summer that year, entertained Algerian audiences with his original composition “*Give my Chouwin-Gomm*” (“Give me chewing gum”), whose imagery

⁴⁷⁸ Lucette Valensi, “Une conversation entre Raoul Journo, Jacques Taïeb et Lucette Valensis (juin 1999),” in *Juifs au Maghreb: mélanges à la mémoire de Jacques Taïeb*, ed. Ariel Danan and Claude Nataf, Paris: Éditions de l’Éclat, 2013, p. 215.

⁴⁷⁹ Jean-Luc Allouche and Jean Laloum. *Les Juifs d’algérie: Images & Textes*. Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1987, p. 278.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

paralleled Houcine Slaoui's "*El Maricane*."⁴⁸¹ Boniche went on to record "*Marché Noir*" ("the Black Market"), which chronicled the shortages of the war years, for the Pacific label (CO 7010). In due time, an emerging Jewish artist in Morocco by the name of Samy Elmaghribi would cover the same song for Pathé. After the war, Lili Labassi again took the stage in Algeria, as did Raoul Journo in Tunisia. The ground, however, had shifted under them. The post-war soundscape in the Maghrib included far fewer Jews.

Under Vichy rule, Muslims came to dominate a North African musical landscape once largely the domain of indigenous Jews. The all-Muslim orchestra El Djazaïria, for instance, had taken El Moutribia's place as the in-house orchestra at Radio Alger. In fact, El Moutribia, just barely survived the war as an institution. In 1943, El Moutribia toured Algeria one last time. Lili Labassi and Lili Boniche served as headliners. By 1944, however, El Moutribia disappeared once and for all from the historical record.⁴⁸² To be sure, tastes had changed as a result of the war. So too had El Moutribia's former president Mahieddine Bachetarzi.

In fall 1943, Mahieddine Bachetarzi wrote to the prefect of Algiers on El Moutribia letterhead. He requested permission to re-open the orchestra's social hall. With seemingly little thought of his Jewish colleagues, Bachetarzi stressed that authorities could not "ignore the difficulties faced by Muslim artists attempting to perform their craft."⁴⁸³ Appealing to their pragmatism, Bachetarzi added that, "it is good politics to allow a Muslim to have an oriental music hall." In time, Bachetarzi's "oriental music hall" became known as Chez Mahieddine. By

⁴⁸¹ "Lili Boniche," *L'Echo d'Alger: la journal républicain du matin*, February 26, 1944, in ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37.

⁴⁸² The Jewish orchestra El Andaloussia would reemerge again only on 14 April 1944. "Société Musicale 'El Andaloussia,'" *Alger Républicain*, ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, April 14, 1944.

⁴⁸³ "Mon colonel." ANOM/ALG/GGA/9h/37, 9 November 1943.

August 25, 1944, Chez Mahieddine moved to its outdoor location behind the Majestic. No one yet knew the fate of Salim Halali but it was presumed that he had not survived the war.

That Salim Halali, “the late” Algerian Jewish musician with whom this chapter began, spoke of the war years soon after the conclusion of the Second World War is a revelation. His survival has long been a subject of interest among scholars and the public but details have remained murky. One of the first textual accounts of the mechanics of Halali’s survival appeared in 1993, half a century after the war. In *L’Anthologie de la Musique Arabe*, a discography and biographical dictionary, the Algerian Ahmad Hachlaf, the mid-century artistic director for Pathé in North Africa, first outlined a story in which Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, saved Halali by hiding him at the institution during the war.⁴⁸⁴ According to Hachlaf, Ben Ghabrit saved Halali by providing the Algerian Jewish star with a Muslim pseudonym, back-story, and legal papers, all of which seemed to have passed German muster. Since 1993, this narrative, nearly unchanged, has found a home in academic monographs, popular accounts, films, and even illustrated children’s books.⁴⁸⁵

Hachlaf’s account has long rested on the premise that Salim Halali was not yet famous enough to merit German attention. It has also positioned Halali and the Maghrib as peripheral to the events of the war instead of being directly affected by its horrors. Finally, the details that

⁴⁸⁴ Ahmed Hachlaf and Mohamed Elhabib Hachlaf, *Anthologie de la musique arabe, 1906-1960*, Paris: Centre culturel algérien, Publisud, 1993, p. 215.

⁴⁸⁵ For scholarly works that have drawn on the Hachlaf narrative, Fawzi Saadallah, *Yahud al-jaza'ir: Majalis al-tarab wa-l-ghina*, Algiers: Dar Qurtuba, 2010; Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2014; and Ethan B. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North African to France*, Harvard University Press, 2015. The film *Les Hommes Libres* (Free Men, 2011), directed by Ismaël Ferroukhi, portrayed the Halali story along Hachlaf lines. For children’s books, see Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix *La Grande Mosquée de Paris: Comment des Musulmans ont sauvé des Juifs de la Shoah* (2010).

Halali provided soon after the war and his omission of the Paris Mosque dimension need be considered in completing a historical accounting of the Halali miracle.

That Halali drifted into an ever-more private life in the 1960s, eventually retiring into the obscurity of Cannes, France, has helped to enshrine the Hachlaf narrative. So too has the fact that the archives of the Grand Mosque of Paris remain inaccessible.⁴⁸⁶ But as this chapter has made loud and clear, there is more to the story of North Africans and the Second World War.

In his article, “The Angel of Rhythm: His Debut on Screen,” M.N. filled in Salim Halali’s triumphant post-war return. “At the time of liberation, his records became popular in France as well as in his country,” M.N. declared. Returning from a recent tour of Algeria, his countrymen stood in line for three days just to catch him in concert. Then the journalist pointed out that despite the war and despite Halali’s actual silence, the multi-talented artist had been heard throughout the war. “For 10 years,” he wrote, “he has been heard in the cafés, just like Maurice Chevalier.” As for Halali’s post-war existence, he wrote:

He’ll compose anywhere but will only work at night. He records at Pathé from 6 pm to midnight.

[...] In Paris, he lives in an oriental apartment. Thick rugs, prized darbukas, ancient costumes. He wears a gandurah [traditional robe] made of the finest wool.

In the city, this is a young, sporty man who hikes in the woods every morning, practices boxing and jui-jitsu, and drives a big American car.

The East and the West meet in this being, who has been baptized, poetically, the Angel of Rhythm.

In 1946, Salim Halali, “the Angel of Rhythm,” emerged a saved man in Paris. By the end of the decade, as I explore in the next chapter, he would make his triumphant return to the Maghrib.

⁴⁸⁶ Ethan Katz, “Did the Paris Mosque Save Jews?: A Mystery and Its Memory,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 102 (2), Spring 2012, p. 259.

Chapter Four

Marching and Waltzing toward Independence

On August 17, 1956, four months after Morocco had gained its formal independence from France, musical icon Samy Elmaghribi wrote his brother Simon Amzallag in Marseille.⁴⁸⁷ Simon, watching the shifting Moroccan political climate from afar, had grown concerned about how his brother was faring as the country's best-known Jewish artist in the immediate aftermath of the country's independence. The brothers Amzallag were usually punctilious about their correspondence. After all, the two had a transnational business to run. The affairs of Samyphone, Samy Elmaghribi's independent record label, required near daily back and forth between Casablanca, Morocco, and Marseilles, France, where Simon and his family now permanently dwelled. But Samy had grown quiet of late.

In his letter to Simon, Samy apologized for the delay. "Three times in [the last] three weeks, his highness has needed me and my orchestra in three different places in which Salim Halali and his orchestra were also working," Samy explained while making reference to the Algerian Jewish artist now settled in Morocco.⁴⁸⁸ The royal family had been keeping him so busy that he could barely find the time to write. "My song Allah Ouatani oua Soultani," Samy wrote of "God, My Country, and My Sultan," his nationalist, marching music recently released on his own Samyphone label, "was happily danced to by the princes and their guests" at their recent gatherings. There was no need to worry, Samy assured his brother. He and his music were very much in demand. "The [Royal] Guard and Royal Army are learning [to play] it as well," he

⁴⁸⁷ Correspondence, August 17, 1956. Private collection of Amzallag family (Couresty of Yolande Amzallag in Montréal, France). Hereafter referred to as, "Amzallag archive."

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

added. Besides, Samy revealed, “his highness Moulay Hassan,” the Moroccan crown prince, “likes my [performance of] Andalusian music (ALA) and bitaïne — and also qassida.”⁴⁸⁹

In 1956, the year Morocco gained independence, the country had no bigger star than Samy Elmaghribi. The peak of his stardom came just as his brother and tens of thousands of other Jews left Morocco for good.⁴⁹⁰ Many, like Simon, found new lives in France. Others started afresh in the recently founded State of Israel.⁴⁹¹ Jewish departure was driven by a political climate that was uncertain on the best of days and proved menacing on the worst.⁴⁹² In the age of decolonization, the Jewish place in the Arab world, once sacrosanct, was no longer a given.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ ALA here refers to *al-ala*, Morocco’s variant of Andalusian music. Bitaïne is a reference to *bitayn*, the sung improvisations between verses in *al-ala*. *Qasida* is part of the *nuba* complex, but with origins in the Maghrib as opposed to medieval Andalusia.

⁴⁹⁰ Mohammed Kenbib estimates that some 90,000 Jews, out of a total Jewish population of approximately 250,000, emigrated between 1948 and 1956. Jamaâ Baïda has proposed that same number (90,000) but over a longer twelve-year stretch lasting until 1960. See Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948*, Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines-Rabat, 1994, p. 595; and Jamaâ Baïda, “The Emigration of Moroccan Jews, 1948-1956,” in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010, p. 321.

⁴⁹¹ Whether Moroccan or Tunisian Jews emigrated to France or Israel largely depended on class and levels of religiosity. See Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*, NYU Press, 1997; for close study, see also Aomar Boum, “From ‘Little Jerusalems’ to the Promised Land: Zionism, Moroccan nationalism, and rural Jewish emigration,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 15:1, 2010, 51-69.

⁴⁹² As Michael Laskier has observed with reference to the final years of the French Protectorate in Morocco, “Moroccan Jews thought [...] their future was most uncertain” Given the large numbers of departing Jews and attitudes of Moroccan nationalist parties like the Istiqlal, this is not without its logic. On statements and attitudes of the Istiqlal, see again Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948*, Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines-Rabat, 1994; and Jamaâ Baïda, “The Emigration of Moroccan Jews, 1948-1956,” in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010.

⁴⁹³ For more on Middle Eastern and North African Jewry and decolonization at mid-century, see Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq*, Stanford University Press, 2012; Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, American Univ in Cairo Press, 2005; and I. Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*, University of Chicago Press, 2014.

In 1956, which marked Tunisian independence as well, hundreds of thousands of Jews also stayed in place in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.⁴⁹⁴ Their lives and those of their compatriots were filled with the music of Samy Elmaghribi and a host of other Jewish musicians, who found their firmest footing and enjoyed their greatest prestige in the Maghrib during the transition from colonial rule to independence and beyond. It was thus that the newspaper *Maroc-Presse* claimed the Jewish artist was poised to “become a star of the entire Arab world,” in the years just prior to French exit.⁴⁹⁵ As far as the Maghrib was concerned, it was true. By the end of 1954, Samy Elmaghribi was nearly as popular in neighboring Algeria as he was in his native Morocco. After a tour of Algeria, the star proclaimed in an interview that, “I have never received a welcome like the one I received in Algiers and Oran.”⁴⁹⁶ In Morocco, it was his repertoire, a mix of nationalist song and popular *faïre*, and his showmanship that earned him fawning adulation from the palace to the people. The same combination ingratiated him among Algerians. But he was more than a musician. He was also the voice of the nation, associated with not only with the era’s most popular national songs but so too its most entertaining commercial jingles. In Morocco, for example, his voice graced radio campaigns for Coca-Cola, Angel Chewing Gum, and other commercial products so often the stuff of nostalgia.

Like other Jewish musicians, most notably Raymond Leyris in Algeria, Samy Elmaghribi was also a symbol of what was possible at mid-century. As he mentioned to his brother Simon in

⁴⁹⁴ In Morocco, for example, 160,000 Jews -- roughly two thirds of the original population of 250,000 -- still lived in Morocco upon its independence in 1956. And in any given year between 1948 and 1956, that number was higher. In Tunisia, approximately 58,000 Jews – more than two thirds of the original population – remained in country through the 1960s. In 1956, most of the country’s 140,000 Jews remained. On the Tunisian Jewish population, see Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴⁹⁵ S.O., “LES EMISSIONS ARABES DE LA TELEVISION MAROCAINE: SAMY EL MAGHRIBI a enthousiasmé son public,” *Maroc Presse*, March 15, 1954. Amzallag archive.

⁴⁹⁶ El Bouchra, “AU THEATRE MUNICIPAL: Samy el Moghrebi et Omar el Tantawy (que les Oranais ne connaissaient pas) et Abd el Wahab Agoumi (que les Oranais connaissaient bien) ont été éblouissants...,” *Echo Soir*, December 27, 1954. Amzallag archive.

August 1956, “*Allah, ouatani, oua-soultani*” (“God, My Country, and My Sultan,” Samyphone no. 8, ACP 4149), a nationalist march of his own composition, released on his own record label, was danced to by the royal family and performed by the military. In another letter, Simon informed Samy that he could barely keep that particular release nor his waltz, “*Fi Aid Archek Ya Soultane*” (“On Your Throne Day, O Sultan,” Samyphone no. 7, ACP 3956), in stock. Not only did Jews have a place in North Africa at the dawn of a new political era, it seemed, but they were actively shaping the sounds of the region from center stage.

This is a chapter about the meteoric ascent of Moroccan Jewish artist Samy Elmaghribi at the moment of national liberation in North Africa. That his career path ran in parallel to the gains of nationalist parties and corresponded to a period of increased Jewish-Muslim violence, I argue, should only seem improbable in hindsight — that is, if we assume that the outcome of this chaotic moment was known and predictable.⁴⁹⁷ In the trans-Mediterranean correspondence between Samy Elmaghribi (né Salomon Amzallag) and Simon Amzallag then, two narratives — one new and one old — emerge around two brothers. The new, which speaks to the possibility of Jewish celebrity and rootedness in the Maghrib post independence, has long been muted by the large-scale departure of Jews in the shadow of independence. Of course, this is not to say that Samy’s narrative diminishes Simon’s experience. Simon’s exile in Marseilles, his worry for his brother still in Casablanca, and his sense of distance from daily life in Morocco were very real. Many Moroccan Jews who left and were never to return shared similar sentiments.⁴⁹⁸ Rather, this

⁴⁹⁷ Istiqlal, meaning “Independence” and Morocco’s main nationalist party in the post-war period, was formally founded in 1943 but had roots stretching back to the efforts of Allal al-Fasi in the late 1930s. The Istiqlal aligned itself with Sultan Mohammad V in the final years of the French Protectorate in Morocco.

⁴⁹⁸ Indeed, much of Moroccan Jewish history concerning this period has focused on those who left, not on those who remained. One need only look at periodization schemes that frame the “final chapter” of Jewish history in Morocco as starting in 1948, which marks the creation of the State of Israel,” and 1956, which marks the Moroccan

chapter gives voice to the experience of his brother Samy Elmaghribi, his stunning career, and those who remained. In fact, in considering Samy and his trajectory in light of that of his brother Simon, we are reminded that the decision to stay and leave was a personal and intimate one, and is therefore perhaps best evaluated at the level of microhistory.

In coming to a focus on Samy Elmaghribi, whose music provided the soundtrack for a Morocco marching and waltzing toward independence, I consider anew the dynamics of Jewish life in the Maghrib at mid-century. To do so, I follow a musical timeline forged by Samy Elmaghribi, Algerian Jewish musicians Salim Halali and Raymond Leyris, and Tunisian Jewish musician Raoul Journo, who established or re-established themselves and a set of generation-definition institutions. Operating along their musical timeline transforms a period remembered primarily as a moment of Jewish-Muslim unraveling into an era when Jewish voices could still unite the nation in Morocco, as in Algeria and Tunisia. In a similar fashion, music allows us to rethink a period that has been cast as one of Jewish disengagement into an era when Jewish creativity was on full display.

Both Elmaghribi's existence and his success stand in glaring contrast to a number of overlapping historiographical traditions, all of which have served to silence a robust post-war Maghribi Jewish history.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, in cities like Casablanca, Oran, Algiers, Constantine, and Tunis, Jewish musicians — veterans of the industry, like Salim Halali, and rising stars, like Samy Elmaghribi — set down ever-deeper roots well past events like the partition of Palestine in

independence from France. Mohammed Kenbib's majestic *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948*, tellingly concludes with the year 1948.

⁴⁹⁹ As already mentioned, this includes Kenbib's work, which can be considered part of the Moroccan historiographical canon, but so too works of Jewish history. For the latter, see Andre N. Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968. Chouraqui's final chapter, for example, is entitled, "Independence and Exodus."

1947 and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.⁵⁰⁰ In fact, those dates, having long been understood as marking an end point for Jews in North Africa, often represented a beginning for Jewish music-makers who during those years established music venues and started record labels in-country, embarked on pan-Maghrib concert tours, and delighted multi-confessional audiences of Jews and Muslims with songs extolling nation despite Jewish-Muslim discord in the Middle East and violence closer to home.

In this chapter I pursue the question of Jewish place in the Maghrib at a moment typically written about from the perspective of displacement or from the vantage point of elsewhere. I do so despite a stunning lack of archival sources related to some of the era's most iconic musicians and musical institutions. This lacuna is not only due to the turmoil and movement associated with the years in question. It also connected to the fact that while musicians *make* records, they do not tend to keep them. To interrogate Jewish belonging then, we head to the city of Safi on Morocco's Atlantic coast, and to the story of a Jewish musical prodigy who over decades and continents held on to nearly everything, including his reputation.

Forging their own timeline: Jewish musical acts establish themselves postwar

"Samy Elmaghribi" was born Salomon Amzallag to a Jewish family of modest means in the coastal city of Safi, Morocco on March 7, 1922. Four years later, his father Amram Amzallag moved the family to Rabat.⁵⁰¹ In the Moroccan capital, the young Amzallag began to sing. He soon showed musical promise. By the age of ten, his voice was already in demand at the Slat

⁵⁰⁰ Israel and Zionism similarly loom large in the above-mentioned scholarship. Intriguingly, when it comes to the music scene in North Africa at mid-century, both Israel and Zionism seem to fall to the background. That does not mean, however, that Jewish musicians were not sympathetic to Zionism. In his memoir, for example, Raoul Journo recalls celebrating the birth of Israel and performing its anthem "*Hatikvah*" in front of a mixed Jewish-Muslim audience in Tunis. See Raoul Journo, *Ma Vie*, p. 199.

⁵⁰¹ Untitled short biography. Amzallag archive.

Aflalo synagogue in Rabat.⁵⁰² According to his own reckoning, his talent was first recognized there when a visiting delegation of the Moroccan government happened upon him chanting and took note. Samy, as family and friends called him, marked that encounter as the launch of his career in music.⁵⁰³

Amzallag's passion for music was fueled by artists close to home, across the border, and around the globe. He was first and foremost a pupil of his father Amram, himself a devotee of the Hebrew paraliturgical poetry known as *piyyut*. As Samy recalled on a number of occasions, the elder Amzallag filled the family home with music every Sabbath and on all of the festival holidays.⁵⁰⁴ Samy was further exposed to such music while attending the local *Talmud Torah* (Jewish religious primary school). At the *Alliance israélite* school in Rabat, Samy was introduced to French *chanson* and Zionist folksong. His enthusiasm for music led him to skip school on occasion in order to catch a gathering of musicians playing at the local, Jewish-owned haunt Chez Cohen.⁵⁰⁵ Passing by any of the myriad cafés of Rabat and their street-facing radios and phonographs, he was also exposed to Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, and Egyptian voices, along with jazz, rumba, and other forms of popular music. American literary figure Paul Bowles noted as much when he wrote to Australian composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks from Fez in spring of 1948. "And I can sit up here on the terrace of the hotel," Bowles observed, "leaning against the loud scratchy sound of the café phonograph that plays [Mohamed] Abd el Wahab [sic],

⁵⁰² Charles Lugassy, "SAMY EL-MAGRIBI A LA PLACE DES ARTS," *Communauté Sepharade du Québec*, August-September 1977, p. 4. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Raphael Levy, "EL MAGHRIBI A LA PLACE DES ARTS," *La Voix Sepharade-Montréal*, June-July 1978, p. 11. Amzallag archive.

Louisa Tounsia, Oum Khalsoum [sic], and Salim Hillali [sic].”⁵⁰⁶ Amzallag would later cite the Egyptians Mohamed Abdel Wahab and Um Kulthum, along with Algerian Jewish artists Lili Labassi, Cheikh Zouzou, and Reinette l’Oranaise, as inspiration.⁵⁰⁷ As for Salim Halali, that relationship was more fraught.

Samy Amzallag came of age during the Second World War. How his family fared under the Vichy regime remains unclear but he later sang of the black market that marked the war years. Upon war’s end in Morocco, Amzallag found work as an accountant at a commercial firm.⁵⁰⁸ Over the next few years and after a short time spent at the Conservatory of Moroccan Music, he drew closer to the thought of a career as a musician. In 1947, he made the necessary leap. In January of that year, he entered a star-search competition run by the Camérafrrique company in Casablanca.⁵⁰⁹ The stakes for the “European candidates” contest were especially high. First place, selected by a jury of cinematographers and celebrities, carried with it a contract to star in a European film. For the “North African candidates,” which included Amzallag alongside other Jews and Muslims, top placement landed the winner a role in an Arab film. As a finalist, his photo was circulated widely in the press. That photo identified his profession as that of an “*artiste*” but did not yet identify him by his stage name of “Samy Elmaghribi.” For now, as the caption read, he was still, “Salomon Amzallag, 21 years old.”

⁵⁰⁶ Mohamed Abdel Wahab (“Abd El Wahab”) and Um Kulthum (“Oum Khalsoum”) were Egyptian musicians, Louisa Tounsia, discussed in Chapter Two was Tunisian, and Salim Halali (“Salim Hillali”) was Algerian. Paul Bowles and Jeffrey Miller, *In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994, p. 198.

⁵⁰⁷ Raphael Levy, “EL MAGHRIBI A LA PLACE DES ARTS,” *La Voix Sepharade-Montréal*, June-July 1978, p. 11. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁰⁸ Interview with Yolande Amzallag. May 9, 2016.

⁵⁰⁹ “Grand Concours Camerafrrique,” January 6, 1947. Amzallag archive.

In 1947, as Salomon Amzallag ventured into the Moroccan music business, nationalist parties across the Maghrib took decisive steps toward defining their independence projects. Political figures like the Moroccan Sultan Muhammad V and political parties like the Istiqlal in Morocco, the Neo-Dustur in Tunisia, and the Parti du Peuple Algerien (PPA) and later the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) in Algeria did so in decidedly Arab and Muslim terms. On April 9, 1947, for example, Sultan Muhammad V, the Moroccan sovereign, gave a defiant speech in Tangier in which he “affirmed his belief in the country’s ‘Arabo-Islamic’ destiny.”⁵¹⁰ Where Jews fit into the “Arabo-Islamic” configuration was unclear. For the Istiqlal and the Parti Démocratique de l’Indépendance (PDI), the two most influential Moroccan nationalist parties of the era, the fit was awkward. In an independent Morocco, the groups argued, Jewish citizenship would be contingent on their rejection of foreign citizenship and Zionism.⁵¹¹ The distinction between Judaism and Zionism, however, was vague. By the end of 1947, for example, the Istiqlal party began a country-wide anti-Zionist campaign which culminated in a boycott of Jewish businesses.⁵¹² The year, which also marked the partition of Palestine, could have been considered an inauspicious time to begin a career as a Jewish musician in Morocco or anywhere else in North Africa. Nor was it necessarily a moment when already established Jewish acts could have been expected to flourish. But the timeline plotted by artists across the Maghrib proved otherwise.

⁵¹⁰ Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 148.

⁵¹¹ Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948*, p. 664.

⁵¹² Jonathan Wirtzen, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity*, Cornell University Press, 2016, p. 213.

If North African national movements began to question the Jewish place in the region, Jewish musicians placed themselves along a timeline seemingly independent of politics.⁵¹³ Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Algerian city of Constantine, where the Jewish master musician Raymond Leyris reigned supreme. In 1947, as political and confessional lines were being drawn almost everywhere in the region, the high profile Raymond Leyris transcended them, at least at the symbolic level. For many, his personal story confounded. Leyris, for example, was born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. After his father Jacob Lévi fell in battle in the course of the First World War, his mother Céline Leyris, now a widow, arranged for his adoption.⁵¹⁴ Leyris was placed with Maïma Halimi, the young Jewish nurse who delivered him, and raised by the Halimi family as a Jew.⁵¹⁵ As a teenager, Leyris, a gifted *'ud* player, apprenticed himself to Constantine's most celebrated Muslim performers of Andalusian music: Omar Chakleb, Abdelkrim Bestandji, and Si Tahar Benkartoussa.⁵¹⁶ In that way, he joined a princely Muslim musical lineage. And when we first met Raymond Leyris in Chapter Two, he was sharing a drink with a young Muslim musician by the name of Mohamed Amri.⁵¹⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the 1934 Constantine Riots, we may recall, Raymond cautioned Amri to maintain a low profile. Amri mostly took his advice. In this way, Leyris may have saved his life.

⁵¹³ The Jewish place in the countries of the Middle East also came into focus during this period. On the Egyptian case, see Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, American University in Cairo Press, 2005.

⁵¹⁴ Bertrand Dicale. *Cheikh Raymond: Une Histoire Algérienne*. Paris: First, 2011, p. 53.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 101-103.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

In 1947, Raymond Leyris sat down for an interview with Chérif Attouche of *Liberté*, the weekly journal of the Algerian Communist party (PCA). As usual, Leyris was surrounded by the Jewish and Muslim members of his orchestra. “Of all the Constantine orchestras which devote themselves to classical Arab music,” Attouche wrote, “the most renowned — deservedly — on account of the virtuosity of its performers, its precision and taste in [musical] phrasing, its fidelity to the exigency of the real art which has spread its reputation all over Algeria, is without doubt the ensemble of the famous Raymond.”⁵¹⁸ If Algerian nationalists were looking ahead to an imagined, homogenous “Arab” and “Muslim” future (of uncertain political program), Constantine’s “most renowned” orchestra of “classical Arab music,” led by a Jewish musician of French citizenship with communist sympathies, complicated their vision.

Members of *Orchestre Raymond*, as Leyris’ ensemble was known, believed their music even possessed a power over the political — or, at least, salvation from it. When a colleague of Attouche asked Leyris’ musicians, “To what degree do you consider music as a bridge between the diverse ethnic elements that people Algeria and the harmony for which we communists have struggled for and continue to struggle for more and better than anyone else?” — Jewish violinist Sylvain Ghrenassia had a ready answer. “There is, in my opinion, no better bond than music,” Ghrenassia stated. “The evidence [...] is in the very composition of our ensemble: we are here, Jews and Muslims, tangled up in the same love of the art for which we serve.” Leyris concurred. Andalusian music, Leyris told the interviewer, “constitutes one of the cornerstones of ‘originality’ in our country.” For Leyris, as with Ghrenassia, his country, his Algeria, was still Jewish and Muslim despite the legal regimes separating the two. Leyris even lodged a complaint

⁵¹⁸ Interview is reproduced in Abdelmajid Merdaci, *Dictionnaire des musiques citadines de Constantine*, Paris: Champs libre, 2008, p. 41.

against the government, which he referred to in the interview as “the authorities.” “The authorities,” he warned (on record), were not doing enough to safeguard “classical Arab music.”

To safeguard “classical Arab music,” Raymond Leyris and Sylvain Ghrenassia established a number of institutions in Algeria at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s. Neither had any intention of leaving their country. 1948, for example, the two founded their signature record label Hes el Moknine.⁵¹⁹ Not only did Raymond Leyris and his orchestra record exclusively for their own Hes el Moknine imprint but those records were also distributed exclusively at their recently established Raymond-Sylvain Disques, his joint enterprise with Sylvain Ghrenassia, which was located at 3 Rue Zevaco in the Jewish quarter of Constantine. Over the next few years, Raymond Leyris and his orchestra also installed themselves on Algerian radio. Every Friday, for instance, Radio Alger carried a broadcast out of Constantine. Among the orchestras featured on those broadcasts were Orchestre Raymond and Orchestra Judas, the latter representing the ensemble of fellow Jewish musician Alexandre Judas Nakkache.

In 1948, just as Raymond Leyris established his Hes el Mokine label in Constantine, Salomon Amzallag received an invitation from L.A. Vadrot, head of Pathé-Marconi EMI (Pathé) in Morocco, to record with the label in Paris.⁵²⁰ For both Vadrot and Pathé, Amzallag was in many ways a tremendous gamble. Not only had he never recorded before but he was also Jewish. This at a moment when Jewishness was becoming a liability in the very region Vadrot hoped to market his records. Yet, the Pathé representative did not just intend for Amzallag to be one artist among many. Rather, he believed him to be the future of the Pathé enterprise both in North Africa and among the burgeoning North African diaspora in metropolitan France. In his April 30,

⁵¹⁹ Hes el Moknine records were pressed by Pathé starting in 1948.

⁵²⁰ In 1931, Pathé merged with a series large labels to form Electric and Musical Industries (EMI). Letter from L.A. Vadrot to Monsieur le Chef de Bataillon Perrony, Contrôleur du Secteur Ancienne Médina. Amzallag archive.

1948 letter to the Civil Controller of Casablanca requesting permission for Amzallag to travel, Vadrot made that clear. “In my capacity as the General Agent for Morocco of PATHE-MARCONI EMI,” Vadrot wrote, “I have the honor of informing you that we intend to carry out in our studios in Paris recordings of native records with a view to revitalizing our Arab catalogue.” He described “Mr. Salomon Amzallag” as “indispensible,” to the effort. In 1948, the future of Pathé’s Arab catalogue, it seemed, rested with a young Jewish artist.

On September 13 and 14, 1948, Salomon Amzallag entered Pathé studios on 5 Rue Pelouze in Paris. When he exited, he did so as “Samy Elmoghrabi” (“Samy the Moroccan”). In time, the spelling would change to the more familiar “Samy Elmaghribi.” In the studio with him in September 1948 was an almost all-Jewish orchestra, which included “Wanono” on darbuka, Raoul Tibi on the qanun⁵²¹, and “Zouzou” on the violin.⁵²² The notable exception was pianist Ahmed Ben Hadj Bouchaib Boudroi, the composer behind some of Samy’s earliest material. Together, Samy and his orchestra recorded sixteen sides of music over two days. Among those eight records were “*Marché Noir*” (Pathé CPT 6863), a song about the black market economy during the Second World War; a mixed French-Arabic light-hearted piece entitled, “*Oh Ma Belle*” (Pathé CPT 6874); and an ode to the fortitude and sportiness of Moroccan youth entitled, “*Chebban Erryada*” (Pathé CPT 6873).⁵²³

Beginning in late 1949, Samy Elmaghribi could be heard with increasing frequency in both metropolitan France and Morocco. On September 11, 1949, for example, Elmaghribi

⁵²¹ The qanun is common to many parts of the world including North Africa and the Middle East. The instrument is a type of zither that is trapezoidal in shape.

⁵²² Not to be confused with the Algerian Jewish artist Cheikh Zouzou (né Joseph Benganoun).

⁵²³ Algerian Jewish artist Lili Boniche also recorded a version of “*Marché Noir*” for the Pacific label. “Enregistrement chez Pathé.” Amzallag archive.

premiered on the French evening program “*La Gazette de Paris*,” during which he performed one of the original songs that he had recorded for Pathé.⁵²⁴ By mid-October 1949, Samy Elmaghribi, a nearly unknown entity the year before, had appeared three-times that month on Radio Maroc in a series of concerts described by the station head as “very much appreciated by the Moroccans.”⁵²⁵ By the end of October 1949, Elmaghribi found himself back in Paris for a second recording session with Pathé in as many years.⁵²⁶ While there, Samy Elmaghribi and his orchestra performed for the first time on Radio France’s “Arab broadcast.” In doing so, he expanded his audience in cities like Paris and Marseilles to those more inclined to tune into the Arab broadcasts of Radio France than to the program, “*La Gazette de Paris*.”⁵²⁷ Indeed, by the end of 1949, Elmaghribi already laid claim to a diverse fan base of Moroccans at home and abroad. So much so that the Jewish artist had even found devotees among the Moroccan stevedores of Marseilles. In December 1949, Elmaghribi was hired by the Marseille-based Paquet company to give a Mediterranean-traversing concert aboard the vessel “Koutoubia” for dockworkers returning home to Morocco.⁵²⁸

When Elmaghribi returned home in 1949, he made a necessary stop at Le Coq d’Or, the Algerian Jewish artist Salim Halali’s newly minted Moroccan cabaret. In the year that Samy Elmaghribi burst onto the Moroccan music scene, Salim Halali, who we last found having survived the horrors of the Second World War in Paris, established himself and a cabaret in the

⁵²⁴ “A Monsieur Samy El Moghrabi.” September 11, 1949, Amzallag archive.

⁵²⁵ Note from Radio Maroc. October 19, 1949. Amzallag archive.

⁵²⁶ Note from L.A. Vadrot. October 20, 1949. Amzallag archive.

⁵²⁷ “Emissions Arabes.” November 29, 1949, Amzallag archive.

⁵²⁸ “Koutoubia.” December 4, 1949, Amzallag archive.

heart of Casablanca's Jewish quarter. Since then, Le Coq d'Or, located on Rue du Consulat d'Angleterre, had become the talk of the town. Its sumptuous and extravagant décor, its first class entertainment, its Friday couscous, and its flamboyant host all earned it that distinction.⁵²⁹ So too, however, had it drawn the attention of Protectorate authorities, who were growing increasingly frustrated with Halali as a nationalist movement gained ground in Morocco.

That frustration began to mount again in September 1948, months before Le Coq d'Or had even opened. On September 18, 1948, the head of the Diplomatic Cabinet of the Residence General sent a report to the Director of the Interior regarding Salim Halali's nationalist record "*Arjaâ Lebladek*," ("Return to your country"), the very disc that had previously been banned under Vichy rule.⁵³⁰ According to reports, Radio Tangier International, a radio station founded by an intrepid American by the name of Herbert Southworth, had taken to playing Salim Halali's "*Arjaâ Lebladek*" multiple times a day at the request of its listeners. The issue was raised with U.S. diplomats and then with Southworth himself. Southworth was reminded that the particular Salim Halali record in question was banned by official decree. Under pressure, Southworth agreed that, "that incriminated disc would no longer be played on his station." Months later, Salim Halali established Le Coq d'Or. How or why the Protectorate authorities allowed such a move is unclear.

Le Coq d'Or's own promotional material depicted the venue as "the most beautiful oriental cabaret in Morocco" and by all accounts it was.⁵³¹ The cabaret, located in a decidedly poor neighborhood, gathered Moroccans of all social classes eager to catch a performance of

⁵²⁹ For a sense of Le Coq d'Or's splendor, see, "IL ETAIT UNE FOIS LE MAARIF," *VH Magazine*, November 2011, p. 84, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://copains-maarif.com/ecritsmaarif-cas/maarif-histoire.pdf>.

⁵³⁰ "Disques interdits." CADN/MA/200/193, September 18, 1948.

⁵³¹ Business card for "Coq d'Or." Personal collection of author.

Halali, described as “the famous international artist with his large orchestra and traditional Arab show.” It also served as a space for new talent. It was at Le Coq d’Or after all that Samy Elmaghribi formally debuted in Morocco. He soon, however, outgrew the venue. Like other Jewish musicians, Samy Elmaghribi was making the postwar period his own.

“A Sensational Revolution in Oriental Music”

Alongside the nationalist revolution afoot in Morocco at mid-century, Samy Elmaghribi ushered in a musical revolution. In whatever form Moroccans imagined their future (without France), Samy Elmaghribi (Samy the Moroccan) cleaved closely to that vision. In more ways than one, he appeared to embody their destiny. To start, he was fiercely independent. He was also confident. His music paid homage to an illustrious past while also incorporating a distinctly modern sound. And he was inescapable. Throughout the 1950s, Samy Elmaghribi appeared in concert, on radio, and eventually on television with the regularity of a politician. Along the way, he came to represent the voice of the nation.

In late summer and early fall 1950, Samy Elmaghribi embarked on his first concert tour of Morocco. Among other stops in August and September 1950, Samy Elmaghribi and his orchestra “*Les Samy Boys*” appeared at the Cinéma Vox in Rabat, the Palais de la Verdure in Fez, and the Municipal Theater in Mazagan (El Jadida). His independent style, sartorial confidence, and his fidelity to the musical past and present were on full display in the promotional materials for the tour. The poster for his September 9, 1950 concert at the Municipal Theater in Mazagan (El Jadida), for example, which adorned kiosks throughout the city, promised spectators that Samy Elmaghribi constituted nothing less than “a sensational revolution

in oriental music.”⁵³² In addition to his headshot, which now listed the artist as “Samy Elmaghribi, singer-composer,” the poster included a large photo of a dapper, perfectly coiffed Elmaghribi, bespoke in white suit at the microphone surrounded by “*Les Samy Boys*.” With all eyes fixed on their bandleader, “*Les Samy Boys*” practically swooned. “For the first time in Morocco,” the poster announced, “Samy Elmaghribi and his dynamic ensemble, ‘Les Samy Boys’ (before their departure for Paris),” were to appear at the Municipal Theater in Mazagan (El Jadida) on September 9, 1950. Catch Samy Elmaghribi for a hometown show, the marketing suggested, before Europe grabbed hold of him. And with tickets priced at 150-250 francs per person, Moroccan audiences could afford Samy Elmaghribi’s revolutionary music. His “modern music and song,” the poster announced in cascading text, included styles like, “Franco-Arabe, flamenco, Egyptian, Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan.”

Samy Elmaghribi’s concerts, varied in repertoire and heavy on showmanship, spoke to his diverse audiences. Those spectators included Muslims and Jews, the political establishment, the well-healed, and the working class. Among the five hundred or so who attended that September 9, 1950 concert in Mazagan (El Jadida), a full range of personalities were found in attendance. Those personalities included al-Khalifa Bin Tibari, the pasha of Mazagan (El Jadida), Mr. Benaroch, director of the local *Alliance israélite* alumni association, the Consul of Spain, and the police chief.⁵³³ Hundreds of the Moroccan everyman — Jewish and Muslim — were also there.

As his promotional posters promised, Samy Elmaghribi’s early concert set lists included music that ranged across the Maghrib, across styles, and across languages. Typical were songs like “*Bousset El Fomm*” (“Kiss on the Mouth”), “an Algerian tango;” “*Luna Lunera*,” a bolero

⁵³² “SENSATIONNEL REVOLUTION dans la Musique Orientale!” September 9, 1950, Amzallag archive.

⁵³³ “Personalités invitées à Mazagan le 9/9/50.” September 9, 1950, Amzallag archive.

by Cuban artist Tony Fergo, which Elmaghribi translated into Arabic; and “*Omri Ma Nenssek*” (“My love, I will never forget you”), a song he wrote about his late mother and which he classified as “Tunisian.”⁵³⁴ All of these songs and others were also sold in songbook form.⁵³⁵

As Elmaghribi began to tour steadily in 1950 and then even more seriously in 1951, he found audiences clamoring for one of his songs in particular. Throughout the early 1950s and for the next several years, his original composition “*Le Swing des Petits Taxis*” (“The Swing of the Petits Taxis”) was requested and performed at concert after concert. It was part and parcel of his “sensational revolution in oriental music.” Cloaked in swing and big-band music, “*Le Swing des Petits Taxis*” spoke to Moroccan hopes and Moroccan dreams in vivid allegory at a moment of political revolution. In the song, for example, Elmaghribi transformed the recently introduced intra-city taxi system known as the “petit taxi” into a symbol of the spirit, might, and ingenuity of the Moroccan people. That he did so to swing, complete with rhythm sections and climactic crescendos, was all the more remarkable. The chorus was innocent enough. Perhaps that was how it passed French muster. “Petit Taxi, small and great,” Elmaghribi saluted the transportation innovation, “ride and zip around in safety!”⁵³⁶ In the second verse, however, his signature velvety voice cut to the chase.

*Petit taxi yimshi kif al-akbar
Da'iz fi kul zanga wa darub sghar
Yal'ab fihim - huwa jannhum
Ruḥna wa ruḥu fil ḍaman*

The Petit Taxi moves like the most powerful
It advances in the smallest of alleyways and passes
It plays in them – that's its heaven
We go and it goes safely

His musical revolution was not just musical. It was lyrical and political as well. In “*Les Swing des Petits Taxis*,” the Moroccan people were the petit taxi personified. After all, it was

⁵³⁴ “Enregisrement chez Pathé.” Amzallag archive.

⁵³⁵ Songbook. Private collection of David Kornblum in Los Angeles, California.

⁵³⁶ “Enregisrement chez Pathé.” Amzallag archive.

Moroccans who seemed to be moving “like the most powerful” as nationalist parties like the Istiqlal gained ground and advanced “in the smallest of alleyways and passes” and whose final destination, when reached “safely,” assured a certain future.

With the success of songs like “*Le Swing des Petits Taxis*,” a dozen Pathé records to his name, and a performative style seldom seen before, Samy Elmaghribi’s star was now rising with unbelievable speed. In May 1951, Samy Elmaghribi again ventured out on a multi-city tour of Morocco. Stops took him to a half dozen cities including Agadir, Mogador (Essaouira), and Settat. In September 1951, Elmaghribi appeared, among other places, at the Cervantes Theater in Tangier and at Le Bolero in Casablanca with Tunisian Jewish artist Nagat Tounsia (née Fortunée Zeitoune).⁵³⁷

In 1952, in the midst of planning for an April-May tour, Samy Elmaghribi transformed himself from a rising star into the sound of his era. He did so, in part, by making his voice omnipresent. In February 1952, for example, Samy Elmaghribi became the official spokesperson for Coca-Cola in Morocco. His Coca-Cola dialogues and jingles were played in heavy rotation on Radio Tanger International over the next several years.⁵³⁸ Elmaghribi became associated with other brands during this period as well. So too did his family. On Radio Maroc, for example, ads for Angel Chewing Gum not only featured original music by Elmaghribi but the voices of his wife and children as well. In one such ad, Samy Elmaghribi and a small orchestra performed ‘*asiri*’ music, a popular mid-century style which borrowed heavily from contemporaneous Egyptian sounds, while extolling the virtues of a chewing gum brand of local origin that had appended “American” to its name. In 1952, with the near universal sound of the mid-century

⁵³⁷ “GALA ORIENTAL le populaire SAMY ELMAHGRIBI et son ensemble: «LES SAMY BOYS» et la célèbre chanteuse danseuse tunisienne de retour de Paris NAGAT TOUNSIA,” *Le Petit Marocain*, October 20, 1951. Amzallag archive.

⁵³⁸ “Attestation,” February 28, 1952. Amzallag archive.

radio jingle, Samy Elmaghribi could be heard on Radio Maroc singing, “I sweeten my palate with Angel Chewing Gum.”⁵³⁹ His wife and children then responded in vocal harmony with, “Angel Chewing Gum, A–mer–i–can.” His son Amram followed by enumerating the Angel Chewing Gum flavors one by one in French-accented English. His father translated them back into Arabic for listeners. “Angel Chewing Gum *Meent*,” Amram Amzallag sang. “Mint flavored,” Samy Elmaghribi cut back in with a smirk. After their exchange, Amram brought the forty-five second spot to a near end as he swooned, “Mmm!” Then, the entire family joined together in harmony once more to sing, “How sweet is Angel Chewing Gum!” as Samy Elmaghribi brought the jingle to a close with a lilting repetition of “how swe—et!” As Elmaghribi grew ever more popular and his voice ever more iconic, the press took notice as well.

“One fan has wisely called the singer Samy Elmaghribi, ‘the Antonio Machín of the Jews,” reported *Maroc-Presse* on April 30, 1953. Machín was one of the world’s most famous Cuban musicians. “The full house on Saturday, April 26,” the unnamed journalist reported, “where the popular recording and radio artist Samy Elmaghribi gave a concert, could justify that comparison.”⁵⁴⁰ The *Maroc-Presse* review articulated the electric atmosphere that was part and parcel of Elmaghribi’s concerts. “As for the singer himself,” the author stated, “he put together a program only he could.” He continued, “first of all, the composer, so full of emotion, with his Algerian tangos, his pasodobles, his flamenco numbers or his Tunisian songs, so fanciful in his cheerful refrains, such as the one in ‘the Song of the Millions’ [“*Loucane Elmlaine*”], causes the

⁵³⁹ Samy Elmaghribi, “Angel Chewing Gum.” Amzallag archive.

⁵⁴⁰ Antonio Machín was a giant among Cuban musicians both in his native country and around the world. “UNE SALLE COMBLE POUR ECOUTER SAMY ELMAGHRIBI,” *Maroc-Presse*, April 30, 1953. Amzallag archive.

crowd, already warmed up, to explode.”⁵⁴¹ According to the reviewer, audience members only left when the venue and the police forced them to.

On March 15, 1954, another piece in *Maroc-Presse*, this time penned by journalist “S.O.,” praised Samy Elmaghribi’s appearances on the recently launched “Arab broadcast” on Moroccan television.⁵⁴² “The camera loves him,” S.O. reported to his readers. But it was not just his visage that made him a star. “His magnificent voice,” S.O. wrote, “is the most beautiful instrument in his orchestra. It flows from his throat like clear water from a spring.” Without hesitation, S.O. wrote, “Samy el Maghribi [sic] is a brilliant Moroccan star, who one day could well be a star of the entire Arab world.” Two months later, Ruiz de Luna, writing in the Spanish language *Tanger Deportivo*, raised the stakes. De Luna referred to Samy Elmaghribi as nothing less than the, “the greatest Arab attraction of all time.”⁵⁴³

If Samy Elmaghribi was “the greatest Arab attraction of all time,” other Jewish artists also enjoyed success in the years just before independence. “I can’t thank you enough dear Samy for your proposal,” Tunisian Jewish musician Raoul Journo wrote to Elmaghribi in March 1954, “but I’m doing very well in Tunis.”⁵⁴⁴ Journo was doing so well that he could afford to politely decline Samy Elmaghribi’s invitation to join him on tour in Morocco. “I have work every night,” Journo informed Elmaghribi, “and I am supposed to leave for Paris to record with Decca.”

⁵⁴¹ Samy Elmaghribi recorded “*Loucane Elmlaine*,” (“If I had millions”), for Pathé in 1951. In the song, he articulated a Moroccan present, in which his compatriots deftly navigated the impossible with what little they had, and a vision for the possible future — all laid over a finger-snapping arrangement grounded in malhun. “Ay ay ay, if I had millions,” Elmaghribi sang in the refrain, “I know what I would do with my time.” He would lavish the love of his life with gifts and travel, he sang. If only he had millions.

⁵⁴² S.O., “LES EMISSIONS ARABES DE LA TELEVISION MAROCAINE: SAMY EL MAGHRIBI a son enthousiasmé son public,” *Maroc-Presse*, March 15, 1954. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁴³ Ruiz de Luna, “Desfile artistico por el Cervantes,” *Tanger Deportivo*, May 4, 1954. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁴⁴ Correspondence, March 31, 1954. Amzallag archive.

Making oblique reference to Jewish-Muslim tension in his native Tunisia, Journo happily reported that, “the situation has calmed down and we have started working again like normal.” Journo was not only “working again” but was overworked. “I’m flush with Jewish and Arab events and weddings,” he informed Elmaghribi.

However, the attention enjoyed by Journo and Elmaghribi brought a different type of spectator into the fold. Beginning in 1953 and moving forward, security services began monitoring the activities of Elmaghribi and others closely. On April 11, 1953, Samy Elmaghribi performed once again at the Municipal Theater in Mazagan (El Jadida). Local police were now among the crowd not as guests but as intelligence agents. Their attention was not unwarranted. Elmaghribi had grown close to Sultan Mohammad V and the palace of recent. This at a moment when Protectorate authorities were growing tired of the Moroccan sovereign. In Moroccan music venues large and small, musicians had taken to invoking the Sultan in song and speech, to wearing the national colors, and to entertaining revolutionary cries from the audience. But the April 11, 1953 was a false alarm as far as the police commissioner of Mazagan (El Jadida) was concerned. While the “hall was packed with an audience composed exclusively of Moroccans, Muslims and Jews,” there was little cause for panic, he reasoned, as no known nationalists were among the crowd.⁵⁴⁵ Sometime later, a handwritten note of anonymous authorship was slipped into an expanding file on “Arab and Jewish theater.” The note listed Moroccan musical acts and theatrical troupes and their political allegiances. Elmaghribi’s name was on it.⁵⁴⁶

That file on “Arab and Jewish theater” continued to expand in the aftermath of the exile of Sultan Mohammad V in August 1953. Other files pertaining to nationalist activity did as well.

⁵⁴⁵ “Tournée de la troupe SAMY ELMAGHRIBI.” CADN/MA/200/193, April 12, 1953.

⁵⁴⁶ “Troupes theaters.” CADN/MA/200/193.

The move by French Protectorate authorities to silence the increasingly outspoken Sultan had only emboldened parties like the Istiqlal while amplifying their calls for independence. Jewish musicians, even if not official members of the party, answered the same call for independence explicitly and implicitly in song. Samy Elmaghribi was among them, even as he toured abroad in Algeria.

In 1954, Samy Elmaghribi embarked on his first concert tour of Algeria. On December 26, 1954, alongside Mahieddine Bachetarzi and pianist Mustapha Skandrani, the young Jewish artist debuted at the Algiers Opera. Writing in the Algerian newspaper *La Depeche Quotidienne*, H. Abdel Kader could barely hold back his praise for Samy Elmaghribi whom he referred to as a “superstar of song.”⁵⁴⁷ Abdel Kader reported that Elmaghribi had “made the strongest of impressions,” on the mostly Muslim audience. He also made note of the large contingent of Algerian Jews in the crowd who “came to applaud their idol.” It was Elmaghribi’s “varied compositions [which] include the modern and the classic,” that so delighted listeners, Abdel Kader argued. Among the “modern and classic” was the fan favorite “*Le Swing des Petits Taxis*” and others songs now standards of Elmaghribi repertoire. But Abdel Kadir mentioned a new song — “*Habibi diyali, fin huwwa*,” (“My love, where is he?”) — that Elmaghribi appeared to have added only when at a distance from Morocco. With that song and others, Abdel Kader beamed, “Samy El Maghribi [sic] has conquered the Algerois public. His reputation is unsurpassed.” The following evening, Samy Elmaghribi played the Municipal Theater in Oran. Again he performed “*Le Swing des Petits Taxis*” and again it was reported, this time by *Oran*

⁵⁴⁷ H. Abdel Kader, “Un triomphal succès a été réservé à Samy el Maghribi, grande vedette de la chanson,” *La Depeche Quotidienne*, December 28, 1954. Amzallag archive.

Republicain, that Elmaghribi ended with the song, “*Habibi diyali, fin huwwa*.” “The crowd,” the review noted, “could hardly hold back their applause.”⁵⁴⁸

Since the launch of his career, Samy Elmaghribi had been composing, arranging, and performing music with a message. At the moment that Morocco’s Resident General sent Sultan Mohammad V and his family into exile at the end of 1953, his message became more explicitly political, even if deftly cloaked in metaphor. In the years preceding the Sultan’s exile, Elmaghribi had developed a relationship with the increasingly outspoken sovereign. In the years hence, he had become — like a number of other Jewish musicians, including Zohra El Fassia (née Zohra Hamou) — a regular performer at the palace. Elmaghribi and musicians like El Fassia felt the Sultan’s disappearance acutely. Many of them, including Elmaghribi, committed the fidelity to their sultan to song.

Chief among those tunes was a folksong revived of late by Moroccan Jewish musicians like Zohra El Fassia and Albert Suissa. That song, “*Habibi diyali, fin huwwa*,” (“My love, where is he?”), was recorded a half dozen times in late 1953 and in 1954. The French spelling and even the full Arabic title of the song varied. Thus, during that period, Zohra El Fassia recorded “*Ayli Ayli Habibi Diali*” for the Philips label while Albert Suissa recorded the same song simply as “*Ayli Ayli*” for the Olympia label. The song’s renewed popularity was largely derived from the refrain. The music, of course, which practically begged audiences to sign along, did not hurt either.

In the refrain, Moroccans, as well as Algerians just over the border, had come to understand the titular line, “*Habibi diyali, fin huwwa*,” (“My love, where is he?”) as making reference to the exiled sultan. Already in January 1954, the qaid of the Moroccan city of Settat

⁵⁴⁸ “Magnifique succès de Sami el Moghribi et de Abdelwahab Agoumi,” *Oran Republicain*, December 29, 1954. Amzallag archive.

informed the Civil Controller of the region that the song, which could be heard with regularity on Radio Maroc, “makes allusion to the exile of the ex-sultan.”⁵⁴⁹ A short while later an anonymously authored note from the Office of Information Control passed on to the Ministry of Interior stated with alarm that, “the record ‘Ayli Ayli, Hbib dyali’ [*“Habibi diyali, fin huwwa”*] has been recorded by three different singers in three different manners.” The note continued, “that of Albert Suissa (Olympia [label], 1.005-1.006) contains political allusions.”⁵⁵⁰ If the Office of Information Control was to do something about Suissa and his sultan-invoking song, the note made clear that the Protectorate authorities needed to act quickly. The Jewish Azoulay-Elmaleh firm, which had recently created their flagship Olympia label, had just received shipment of another 935 copies of the record in question. Just like the version recorded by Albert Suissa, Samy Elmaghribi’s *“Habibi diyali, fin huwwa”* contained the same “political allusions” as well. As political events took an ever more dramatic turn, however, Elmaghribi moved from the world of allusion to the world of full-throated, express support for the sultan and so too for independence.

⁵⁴⁹ “Emissions arabes de Radio-Maroc.” CADN/MA/200/193, January 14, 1954.

⁵⁵⁰ “Disques Arabes.” CADN/MA/200/193, February 15, 1955.

Marching and Waltzing Toward Independence

In the fall of 1955, French authorities relocated Sultan Mohammad V and his family from their exile in Madagascar to Paris. The continued absence of the sultan was no longer politically tenable. Neither was the Protectorate. With Sultan Mohammad V installed in Paris, negotiations on ending French rule in Morocco commenced. As the Sultan took up residence at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, just outside of Paris, Samy Elmaghribi and his family joined him there. In fact, the Sultan had recruited Elmaghribi to take up temporary residence among his entourage. There, Elmaghribi entertained the royal family as the details of their return to Morocco were finalized. So important was Elmaghribi's act of devotion that the Sultan memorialized it with a widely circulated press photo published on November 6, 1955.⁵⁵¹ In the photo, Samy Elmaghribi could be seen paying allegiance and deference to the sultan by grasping his hand and bending at the knees ever so slightly. Tellingly, however, Samy Elmaghribi's name appeared above that of Sultan Mohammad V in the caption. The former was the real celebrity.

Two days before the photo was taken, on November 4, 1955, Samy Elmaghribi recorded a waltz entitled, "*Fi Aid Archek ya Sultan*" ("On Your Throne Day, O Sultan") at the Hotel Derby in Paris for his own Samyphone label. It was a song befitting the Sultan's imminent homecoming and very much in line with Samy Elmaghribi's persona. The "Moroccan anthem," as Elmaghribi called it, drew on *barwali*, a local 6/8 rhythm, as much as it leaned on waltz, in order to express an unequivocal national pride. That pride was easily detectible in the song's chorus.

Fi 'id 'archik ya sultan
Kul Maghribi al-yawm farhan
Al sha'ab yujadid al-tahaani

On your throne day, O Sultan
Today every Moroccan is happy
The people extend their congratulations

⁵⁵¹ "Samy Elmaghribi reçu par SA MAJESTE SIDI MOHAMMED V á St-Germain-en-Laye le 6 novembre 1955," November 6, 1955. Amzallag archive.

Like the music of “*Fi Aid Archek ya Sultan*,” Elmaghribi’s lyrics were remarkably inclusive as well. In the verses that followed, Elmaghribi invoked “the brave of the Rif and the Atlas [regions],” citizens “from Agadir to Fez,” and those who “come from the cities and the hinterland to delight in your throne day, O my Sultan.”

On January 21, 1956, Samy Elmaghribi returned briefly to Morocco from his temporary residence in France. He did so in order to perform at the El Wifaq inaugural gala, a Jewish-Muslim fraternal-political association presided over by Moroccan crown Prince Moulay Hassan.⁵⁵³ During his visit, a reporter asked, “Is your return to Morocco permanent?”⁵⁵⁴ Elmaghribi responded positively. “I have returned to my country to see his Majesty again,” Elmaghribi said, “and after a few days here, I need to go back to the French capital, gather my family, and then return to Morocco for good.”

While Samy Elmaghribi returned to Morocco “for good,” his brother Simon Amzallag and his family were settling in Marseilles along with thousands of other Moroccan Jews. On April 7, 1956, Morocco formally gained independence from France, heralding another large wave of emigration. On May 25, 1956, Samy Elmaghribi, arguably Morocco’s most important celebrity, entered a Casablanca studio. During that session, he recorded, “*Allah, Ouatani, oua-Soultani*” (“God, My Country, and My Sultan”), the song he described as “happily danced to by their princes and their guests,” in the letter to his brother Simon which opened this chapter. Why the royal family was moved to dance by Samy Elmaghribi’s eighth title on his Samyphone label

⁵⁵² “Enregistrement chez Pathé.” Amzallag archive.

⁵⁵³ “Retour de Samy El Maghribi,” January 21, 1956. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

had much to do with the chorus and the first verse. In addition to the marching music itself, the lyrics to “*Allah, Ouatani, oua-Soultani*” (“God, My Country, and My Sultan”), were a ringing and booming endorsement of Sultan Mohammad V, the Moroccan people, and the cause of independence:

Chorus:

<i>Allah watani wa Sultani</i>	God, my Country, and my Sultan
<i>Ya maqsud kul ‘askri maghribi</i>	The goal of every Moroccan soldier
<i>Wa maqsud kul ‘askri maghribi</i>	O goal of every Moroccan soldier
<i>Allah watani wa Sultani</i>	God, my Country, and my Sultan

First verse:

<i>Bi amrik ya rubna al-rahman</i>	Under your command, O Merciful Lord
<i>Wa bi fadlik ya sidna Sultan</i>	And thanks to our leige the Sultan
<i>Wa bi jawd zu‘ama wa l-watan</i>	And with the generosity of our leaders and the nation
<i>Maghribna mistaqil wa hani</i>	Our Morocco is independent and tranquil ⁵⁵⁵

It was music like “*Allah, Ouatani, oua-Soultani*” (“God, My Country, and My Sultan”) that was keeping Samy Elmaghribi busy. He said as much in his August 17, 1956 letter to his brother Simon in Marseilles. And he continued to say as much for the next few years.

Conclusion: “An unnatural hour”

On August 28, 1956, Simon Amzallag sent a letter back to his brother from Marseilles.⁵⁵⁶ Referring to the song, “*Allah, ouatani, oua-Soultani*” (“God, My Country, and My Sultan,” Samyphone no. 8, ACP 4149), Simon wrote, “your no. 8 is all the rage here too, as it is in the Arab world.” While Simon spoke optimistically of new markets for their trans-Mediterranean business Samyphone, he cautioned Samy not to engage in politics back in Morocco. “I

⁵⁵⁵ I thank Professor Yigal Nizri and Yassine Touati for sharing with me their translation of this song so many years ago. I made some slight changes based on lyrics found in “Enregistrements chez Pathé.” Amzallag archive.

⁵⁵⁶ Correspondence, August 28, 1956. Amzallag archive.

understand your concern with regard to your little brother,” Samy responded some days later, “but I assure you that I am not engaging in any political activity.”⁵⁵⁷

Of course, as his letters reveal, Samy Elmaghribi was engaging in political activity. But perhaps it is not here that the letters’ import may be found. Their intimate, personal correspondence point to what Simon Amzallag described in an October 4, 1956 letter as “an unnatural hour.” In using the phrase, he was making reference to the current political moment, in which brothers and extended families were being torn apart by the possibilities and limits afforded by Moroccan independence. That “unnatural hour” was just as unnatural to the roughly ninety thousand Moroccan Jews who had emigrated en masse since 1948 and the approximately one hundred and sixty thousand who remained. That “unnatural hour” meant that Samy Elmaghribi’s staggering success came at the very moment that his brother, unsure of his future in country, was forced to start anew in an adopted country.⁵⁵⁸ “What is going on?” Simon wrote to Samy Elmaghribi on November 14, 1956, after a gap in the brothers’ correspondence.⁵⁵⁹ “To what can I contribute this singular silence?” he added, “You are busy with many things I’m sure but even still!” He then scolded his little brother, “in this period of troubles, your silence or delay of news is intolerable.” That “unnatural hour” had set the closest of kin adrift on very different timelines.

Samy Elmaghribi could hardly avoid politics in the “unnatural hour” that faced North African Jews. His music was political and nationalist and with a liberation movement raging in neighboring Algeria, it was adopted there as well. But both his perspective and his reality were

⁵⁵⁷ Correspondence, August 29, 1956. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁵⁸ Correspondence, October 4, 1956. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁵⁹ Correspondence, November 14, 1956. Amzallag archive.

remarkably different from that of his brother. What he regarded as his livelihood, for example, his brother Simon understood as a liability. As French police cracked down on Algerian nationalist activity in cities like Marseilles, Simon grew concerned for himself and his brother.

On February 26, 1957, Simon Amzallag sent Samy a cautionary letter.⁵⁶⁰ “Records no. 7 and no. 8 are to be avoided in Algeria,” Simon wrote in reference to the performance of and sale of “*Fi Aid Archek ya Sultan*” and “*Allah, ouatani, oua-Soultani*,” “the political situation there is such that they could attract the attention of the authorities.” Samy’s nationalist waltzes and marches were even making waves in metropolitan France. “In fact, almost two months ago,” Simon alerted Samy, “my client, the Armenian, was summoned by the police in Marseilles and was warned against the circulation of or sale of music that could excite the nationalist sentiments of the Arabs.” Simon was referring to Jacques Derderian, owner of the Marseilles-based Tam Tam label and among the many who were stocking Samyphone records. He added, “I do not have to tell you that as a result, records no. 7 and no. 8 have been removed from sale by the client.”

Samy Elmaghribi’s reality at mid-century was not that of his brother Simon. Nor was it that of the droves of Moroccan Jews leaving for other shores. But for the roughly two thirds of Moroccan Jews who remained in place during that period, Samy Elmaghribi was very real, and, perhaps, evocative of a wider reality. Post-independence, Samy Elmaghribi remained a star and retained his fans — Jewish and Muslim. For Jews, he may have even represented their hope and their future. On April 5, 1957, Samy wrote to his brother in Marseilles, almost speaking past him.⁵⁶¹ “I am swamped by my occupation,” he complained, “composing and recording,

⁵⁶⁰ Correspondence, February 26, 1957. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁶¹ Correspondence, April 5, 1957. Amzallag archive.

rehearing, preparing for my concert tour (April 23 – May 12), business related to the store in Casa.” To be sure, he was busy. In the midst of a brutal concert tour across Morocco (and during Ramadan), Samy Elmaghribi made an extra stop in Oujda to perform “Moroccan patriotic songs” for a sold-out Jewish and Muslim crowd in honor of ‘Id al-Fitr.⁵⁶² On May 31, 1957, Simon wrote to Samy in distress.⁵⁶³ “You don’t know how much we long for you, Denise and I,” Simon wrote of himself and their sister. “I can’t speak of our separation without tears nor can Denise do so without crying.”

Over the next two years, Samy Elmaghribi toured regularly in Morocco. He did so with his mostly Jewish orchestra. In a similar fashion, Salim Halali continued to operate his cabaret Coq d’Or in Casablanca, Raoul Journo continued to perform in Tunis and did so even for the Algerian FLN’s armed wing, and Raymond Leyris continued to grace the airwaves of Radio Alger out of Constantine.⁵⁶⁴ In the poswar Maghrib, Jews had found firm footing, expressed nationalist sentiment and patriotism in song, and established themselves and institutions like record labels and record stores. All of this indicated that Jews had a place in North Africa at the dawn of a new political era. By focusing almost exclusively on Jewish departure then, scholars have inadvertantly silenced the rather robust life of figures like Samy Elmaghribi, who came to embody Jewish life and its possibilites in the Maghrib at mid-century.

Postscript: Rumors Swirl; Samy Elmaghribi and Salim Halali Leave Morocco

⁵⁶² ‘Id al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan. “SAMY EL MAGHRIBI et la troupe de BOUCHAIB EL BIDAOUI au Paris,” *L’Echo du Maroc*, May 6, 1957. Private collection of Amzallag family.

⁵⁶³ Correspondence, May 31, 1957. Amzallag archive.

⁵⁶⁴ For Journo’s connections to the FLN, see Mehenna Mahfoufi, *Chants kabyles de la guerre d’indépendance Algérie 1954-1962: étude d’ethnomusicologie, textes kabyles, traduction française et notations musicales*, Paris: Séguier, 2002, Appendix I.

All the while, Simon Amzallag watched from afar in Marseilles. On March 1, 1959, after discussing business related to Samyphone, Samy wrote to his brother with a jarring update. “In order to tamp down on the rumors that some jealous and envious people are spreading,” Samy announced with little context, “even going as far as to speak of my final departure following an expulsion order (some say that I am on the run because of so-called bad behavior), I am repainting my apartment and redecorating it with new furniture.” The apartment upgrade, it seemed, was intended to demonstrate that he did not have plans to leave Morocco. “I have already responded to these rumors with an energetic counter-campaign,” he continued, “which my friends, who are many, thank God, have suddenly taken charge of.” To dispel the misinformation campaign, he informed his brother, he would hold a press conference at his apartment the following day.

Before Simon could respond, Samy sent a letter again on March 2, 1959.⁵⁶⁵ He was relieved, somewhat. “Following up on my letter yesterday,” he wrote, “it has become clear that the noise bubbling up around me is due to an erroneous interpretation of the truth: my name was simply confused with that of Salim Halali.” He added, “indeed, it is he who left Morocco the day before yesterday by order of the authorities due to his insolence with regard to a raid by the police of his cabaret.” Samy then asked his brother to keep all of this to himself. Halali did not take kindly to people talking about him — positively or negatively. Whatever calm had come over Samy Elmaghribi in that letter to his brother had dissipated by the end of the year. Toward the end of 1959, Samy Elmaghribi left Morocco. Salim Halali was gone too.

Like those rumors, questions pertaining to the men’s departure swirl still today. Why exactly was Salim Halali expelled? Was it because of his foreignness, either as an Algerian or a

⁵⁶⁵ Correspondence, March 2, 1959. Amzallag archive.

French citizen? Or was it that his music tended toward political subversion and his cabaret toward the libertine? Whatever the reason, it was not because Halali was Jewish. At the same time, Salim Halali and Samy Elmaghribi were confused for one another precisely because the two were Jewish. With far fewer Jews and far fewer Jewish musicians, Moroccan independence had exposed Samy Elmaghribi's Jewishness in a way that it had not been exposed previously. Still, why Samy Elmaghribi chose to leave Morocco at that moment is unclear. Whatever the reason, he would not quickly be forgotten.

Conclusion: Ends and Beginnings

In May 1961, *Droit et Liberté*, the journal of the French anti-racism organization Le Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP), published an unsolicited letter from a group identifying themselves as “Algerian Jewish patriots.”⁵⁶⁶ In their letter, the group from Constantine demanded Algerian independence, called for Jewish solidarity with their Muslim neighbors, and condemned both colonialism and Zionism. Their letter appeared at a pivotal moment. Since the end of 1954, others, like the militant nationalist organization the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), had made similar calls. But after more than six years of violent conflict, which brought the collapse of France’s Fourth Republic in 1958 and which would eventually claim hundreds of thousands of lives in Algeria, the French government and the FLN had entered negotiations without preconditions in the Alpine city of Evian on the Swiss border. The end of the war, even as it grew bloodier, was in sight. What the end of the war meant for Algeria’s 140,000 Jews, however, was not yet clear.

In their prescient letter, the “vanguard,” as this group of Algerian Jewish patriots also referred to themselves, issued a “solemn appeal to their Jewish brothers” to reflect upon their outsized role in shaping indigenous Algerian culture. In doing so, the “vanguard” situated Algerian Jews as compatriots of the FLN-led Algerian revolution and an integral part of the Algerian nation. This was what the FLN had long demanded of Algerian Jews, as historian Ethan Katz has demonstrated, even as deadly attacks against Jews proliferated throughout the war.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁶ “Lettre de Constantine,” *Droits et Liberté*, May 1961, no. 200, p. 5, accessed June 13, 2017, http://archives.mrap.fr/images/6/69/Dl61_200opt.pdf.

⁵⁶⁷ In *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North African to France*, Ethan Katz writes, “One [FLN] appeal of November 1959 declared, ‘You are an integral part of the Algerian people. It is not a matter for you of choosing between France and Algeria but of becoming effective citizens of your true country.’ The same document warned, however, ‘Those [Jews] who have [been] zealous servants of the colonialist regime and its army

In that solemn appeal, the Algerian Jewish patriots made their case through the figure of Cheikh Raymond Leyris, the individual we have met in starts and fits throughout the dissertation. Leyris, we may recall, was the storied practitioner of *ma'luf* (the Andalusian music straddling Constantine and Tunis), born of a Jewish father and Catholic mother but raised as a Jew, adopted by the Muslim master musicians of his city, who may have saved a Muslim musician's life during the 1934 Constantine Riots, who had established a record store and record label of renown just a few years prior, who appeared on Algerian radio with regularity, and whose voice could be heard almost everywhere in 1961. "Look at how many of you who have enriched Algerian cultural heritage are held in high esteem!" the letter exclaimed. "Is the Constantine singer and musician Raymond not dear to the hearts of Muslims?" the vanguard asked rhetorically. "They love him," the Algerian Jewish patriots reminded, "because he has helped to preserve and enrich the very Algerian folklore that the colonialists wanted to suppress." Raymond Leyris had once again been rendered into a symbol of the Jewish and Jewish-Muslim possible in mid-century North Africa.

One month later, on June 22, 1961, two bullets struck Leyris in the neck as he strolled through central Constantine with his young daughter in tow. The city's best-known Jewish musician had been assassinated in murky circumstances. Word quickly spread throughout the Jewish community. He was buried in Constantine's new Jewish cemetery the following day. Like Habiba Messika thirty years before him, Raymond Leyris' tomb recorded that he had been "cowardly murdered."

In July 1961, Raymond Leyris' family fled to Marseilles and then Paris, France. So too did Sylvain Ghrenassia, the slain musician's violinist, and his son Gaston Ghrenassia, who had

are irrevocably excluded from the national community" (p. 174). That many Algerian Jews felt ambivalent about the FLN then is not surprising.

married Leyris' daughter Suzy. There, Ghrenassia and his son, who now went by the stage name of Enrico Macias, mingled with the likes of Samy Elmaghribi and other musical exiles who had established themselves among the tens of thousands of recently arrived North African Jews in metropolitan France. In July 1961, hundreds of other Jews from Constantine left Algeria well. At the time, the French *Le Monde* identified the month following Leyris' murder as a turning point for the Jews of Constantine, although the paper never mentioned the event by name.⁵⁶⁸ It was at that moment, that the exodus of the 18,000-strong Jewish community, known for its conservative religious sensibilities and fidelity to indigenous Algerian culture, had begun. On August 11, 1961, *Le Monde* correspondent Alain Jacob reported on an "accelerating movement" of Jews out of Constantine. Between January 1, 1961 and July 1, 1961, he noted, 420 Jews had departed.⁵⁶⁹ Between July 1, 1961 and July 19, 1961 alone — the weeks immediately after Leyris' assassination — 345 had done so. By February 1962, fully two-thirds of Constantine Jewry had quit the only home most had ever known.

In 1962, the American Jewish Yearbook, the annual publication of the American Jewish Committee, identified the cause of the increased pace of Algerian Jewish departure from Constantine by name. "Strong feeling," the American Jewish Yearbook reported, "was aroused by the assassination on June 22 [1961], in the Jewish quarter of Constantine, of Raymond Leyris, one of the masters of oriental music, a man universally admired by both the Jewish and Moslem

⁵⁶⁸ See Christian Mouly, "L'exode des familles israélites d'Algérie est particulièrement sensible à Constantine," *Le Monde*, February 17, 1962, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/02/17/l-exode-des-familles-israelites-d-algerie-est-particulierement-sensible-a-constantine_2349844_1819218.html.

⁵⁶⁹ Alain Jacob, "Actions d'urgence...au jour le jour," *Le Monde*, August 11, 1961, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1961/08/11/iii-actions-d-urgence-au-jour-le-jour_2284068_1819218.html?xtmc=constantine_et_juifs&xtcr=11.

communities.”⁵⁷⁰ The following year, the *American Jewish Yearbook* provided additional details. “In Constantine,” Arnold Mandel wrote, “panic and precipitate rush to ship and plane had already begun after the murder in June 1961 of Raymond Leyris, an oriental singer popular among Jews and Moslems.”⁵⁷¹ Mandel described Leyris as, “an Arab Christian converted to Judaism, he was also a thoroughly loyal partisan of FLN who had signed a manifesto disavowing any Jewish need or desire for guarantees in an independent Algeria.” While Mandel had confused Leyris’ early biography, he may have been correct about the musician’s political allegiances. He continued:

Many Constantine Jews had counted on Leyris and the few other FLN-aligned Jews to protect them. Yet Leyris was murdered by Moslems, not by OAS. It was the signal for the Jews to flee.⁵⁷²

That the murder of an Algerian Jewish musician was the signal for “Jews to flee” Algeria has given few historians of the region and North African Jewry pause.⁵⁷³ Music, which loomed so large in the lives of so many for so long, has rarely figured into the relevant historiography. That the murder occurred so late in the Algerian war should give us pause again. Indeed, the mere presence of an Arabophone Jew, who was also an Algerian national icon, and so too a possible partisan of the FLN, sits uncomfortably with much of the extant scholarly literature on Maghribi Jewish history. That such a figure existed as late as June 1961 and was “counted on” by Jews but a year before Algerian independence is all the more remarkable given the political

⁵⁷⁰ “Algeria,” country-by-country reports, *American Jewish Yearbook* (AJYB), 1962, p. 452-453.

⁵⁷¹ Arnold Mandel, “Algeria,” country-by-country reports, *American Jewish Yearbook* (AJYB), 1963, p. 406.

⁵⁷² For a different take on Leyris’ political allegiances, see Ted Swedenburg, “Against Hybridity: The Case of Enrico Macias/Gaston Chrenassia,” p. 238-239, in *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Rebecca L Stein and Ted Swedenburg, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

⁵⁷³ One notable exception, of course, is Algerian historian Benjamin Stora, himself an Algerian Jew from Constantine. He will be discussed below.

timelines historians usually employ to render Jewish antipathy to the FLN and Jewish departure from Algeria faits accomplis.

Whether Leyris was murdered by Muslims, as Mandel claimed, or more specifically by the FLN, as others have asserted, is unclear.⁵⁷⁴ In the drive toward Algerian independence in June 1962, much was forgotten or swept under the rug. But not the loss of Leyris itself, it seemed. On June 12, 1966, the news magazine *Jeune Afrique* profiled Leyris' son-in-law Enrico Macias (né Gaston Ghrenassia).⁵⁷⁵ Since 1962 and the release of his breakout hit “*Adieu mon pays*” (“Goodbye, my country”) on Pathé, Macias had ridden a wave of unprecedented popularity across France and the Francophone world. In some ways, he was the latest in a line of North African Jewish superstars. But Macias sang exclusively in French and became a bard, of sorts, of the repatriated French settlers known as the *pieds-noirs*.⁵⁷⁶ The *Jeune Afrique* reporter Gerald Messadie referred to Enrico Macias accurately as one of the “record holders for French record sales: eight million records sold.” But Messadie also felt it important to refer to him by his birth name and birthplace before his celebrity. “This is Gaston Ghrenassia,” Messadie announced, “from Constantine, twenty-eight years old.”

Ghrenassia's interview appeared in *Jeune Afrique* nearly five years to the day after Raymond Leyris' assassination. “Gaston lives in the shadow of Raymond,” Messadie reminded readers at the outset of his profile of the artist. As for Leyris himself, Messadie noted:

⁵⁷⁴ That claim — the most common one — is found in almost all of the literature that touches on Raymond Leyris. For two examples, see Bertrand Dicale, *Cheikh Raymond: une histoire algérienne*, Paris: First, 2011, and Ethan B. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North African to France*, Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 204.

⁵⁷⁵ Gerald Messadie, “Enrico Macias ou David à la guitare,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 12, 1966, no 285, p. 57.

⁵⁷⁶ The *pieds-noirs* (literally, “black feet”) was the name given to the French settler population in Algeria. By the end of the Algerian war (1954-1962), some considered indigenous Algerian Jews to belong to that category as well. Hundreds of thousands of *pieds-noirs* were repatriated to France — a country they had never lived in — in 1962.

Raymond, it was Raymond Leyris, a reviver of Algerian music, a Constantine personality, respected by the Algerians as well as the French there at a time when respect was still practiced. When he was on the radio, there was silence in homes and at cafés, much like nowadays with Cairo radio and Mohamed Abdel Wahab or Feirouz in Lebanon. Gaston accompanied Raymond on guitar and he was very proud of it.

Messadie then confirmed what Arnold Mandel had written a few years prior in the American Jewish Yearbook. Messadie wrote:

When in the djebels other music was heard and the moving companies began to thrive by bringing family furniture from Oran, Bone, Setif to the metropole, eyes were turned to Raymond. Was he staying? Was he leaving? He was a symbol. He remained [in Algeria] for good: one beautiful day in 1962, two bullets struck his throat, interrupting, symbolically, his voice and his life. Panic.

Constantine Jews were counting on Leyris even as “other music” (presumably American and European popular) filled some of their homes in the “djebels” (“the mountains” — not the city) and at the same time that many made preparations for departure. Of course, Messadie had confused the year — the assassination was in 1961 not 1962 — but he perfectly captured the sentiment of Constantine Jews in the aftermath of Leyris’ murder. Panic.

In the memoiristic literature of Algerian Jews, Raymond Leyris’ death has loomed especially large and has remained especially vivid. The varied accounts, in fact, not only resemble each other but also the events as they actually happened. The Constantine-born historian of Algeria Benjamin Stora recalls learning of Leyris’ murder from his uncle shortly after it took place. Looking toward the heavens, his uncle spoke the following words, “Raymond has been killed.” Then, he added, “Even God is weeping.”⁵⁷⁷ “That was the turning point,” Stora has written, “the moment when what remained of the Jewish community of Constantine in 1961, chose to leave for France.” He continued, “the question was no longer whether to leave or not but: ‘What is going to become of us over there?’”⁵⁷⁸ In a similar fashion, Enrico Macias, Leyris’

⁵⁷⁷ Benjamin Stora, “Une enfance à Constantine,” in *La Méditerranée des Juifs: Exodes et enracinements*, ed. Paul Balta, Catherine Dana, and Régine Dhoquois-Cohen, Editions Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003, p. 243. Benjamin Stora has also discussed the significance of Leyris’ murder in his seminal *Les trois exils juifs d’Algérie*, Paris: Stock, 2006, p. 159.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 243-244.

son-in-law, has recalled being jostled from a mid-day nap by his grandfather screaming, “They killed Raymond! They killed Raymond! They killed Raymond!”⁵⁷⁹ One month later, he and his family left Constantine. Leyris’ murder clearly was a turning point.

For some there were no memories of Constantine without Raymond Leyris and without music. This was certainly true for Sylvain Ghrenassia, Leyris’ violinist and Macias’ father. “I speak about Raymond every hour,” he noted in *Mon Algérie* (“My Algeria”), a collection of personal essays written by Algerian “*pieds-noirs*” personalities.⁵⁸⁰ “With regard to Algeria,” he wrote, “it is mainly music that I would like to talk about.”⁵⁸¹ He refused to discuss anything else related to his home country. In addition, Jean-Luc Allouche, the former Editor-in-Chief of France’s *Libération* newspaper, has offered a short but moving reflection in which Constantine, Leyris, and music lay at the very center of his own complex memory:

But, for me, until my last breath, Constantine remains the foundation of my memory. Of my Jewish memory. I dare blaspheme: at the hour that I write these lines, more than Jerusalem. I still have this music: this *ma'luf*, inherited from Andalusia and more distantly, perhaps, from Byzantium. Raymond Leyris’ records or those of Tahar Fergani, the rare cassettes of Simone Tamar, the few evenings when I let myself be gripped by the violin of Sylvain Ghrenassia [...]”⁵⁸²

Other musical memories abound from all corners of the Maghrib and from the well-known and unknown. Those memories tend to touch, variously, on the sobering and the extraordinary — as with Raymond Leryis — and on the light and the quotidian. In *Tunis-La Juive raconte* (2000), for example, Tunisian Jewish writer and radio personality André Nahum, for example, recalled the lyrics of “*Où vous étiez mademoiselle*” — the Dalila Taliana’s hit

⁵⁷⁹ Enrico Macias and Florence Assouline, *Mon Algérie*, Paris: Plon, 2001, p. 165.

⁵⁸⁰ Sylvain Ghrenassia, “L’Algérie: une musique,” in *Mon Algérie: 65 personnalités témoignent*, ed., Monique Ayoun and Jean-Pierre Stora, Paris: Hugo & Cie, 2012, p. 94.

⁵⁸¹ Sylvain Ghrenassia, *Mon Algérie: 65 personnalités témoignent*, p. 93.

⁵⁸² Jean-Luc Allouche, “L’Algérie ne m’est rien...,” in *Mon Algérie: 65 personnalités témoignent*, ed., Monique Ayoun and Jean-Pierre Stora, Paris: Hugo & Cie, 2012, p. 52.

discussed in Chapter Two — by heart.⁵⁸³ On November 29, 2012, a user on “*Dafina*,” a Moroccan Jewish message board, wrote about “the company ANGEL [Chewing Gum], which we all heard on Radio Rabat [Radio Maroc] during the 1960s. Does someone have a recording of this song? I’m 62 years old and this is a song that remains perfectly preserved in my memory and that I still hum often but I would love to hear the original.”⁵⁸⁴ She was referring to the mid-century jingle crafted by Samy Elmaghribi discussed in the last chapter. In the 1999 documentary *D’ailleurs, Derrida (Derrida’s Elsewhere)*, Francophone Algerian Jewish philosopher Jacques Derrida, who famously said, “I have but one language — yet that language is not mine,”⁵⁸⁵ can be seen on film describing himself as a bearer of secrets, as a “Marrano’s Marrano,” a twice-occluded Jew, before becoming transfixed by music he theoretically should not have known as a “civilized” French citizen: that of Lili Labassi.⁵⁸⁶ The approach to the École normale supérieure, Derrida tells his interviewer in one scene, with the Arabic-singing Lili Labassi serving as soundtrack in his car, is “*pas mal*,” is not bad at all.

It is striking that music and the Jewish artists behind it have almost entirely escaped historical scholarship on North Africa given both the outsized role by Jewish music-makers and music-purveyors for much of the twentieth century and the memories of them that have persisted into the current century. We might explain this absence by pointing to the popular and scholarly notion that music is at once peripheral and ephemeral — or in any case, difficult to pin down. Or

⁵⁸³ André Nahum, *Tunis-La-Juive raconte*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2000, p. 118.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Popol62,’ “CHEWING GUM ANGEL, LA CHANSON,” *Dafina.net*, posted November 29, 2012, accessed June 13, 2017, <http://dafina.net/forums/read.php?50,321325>.

⁵⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the other, or, The prosthesis of origin*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 21.

⁵⁸⁶ Safaa Fathy, Laurent Lavolé, and Isabelle Pragier, *D’ailleurs, Derrida (Derrida’s elsewhere)*, Gloria Films, and Sept/Arte, 1999.

perhaps the lack of interest is due to the fact that penning a musical history of the Maghrib has seemed daunting — requiring the use of traditional archives spread across continents, private archives difficult to access, and novel types of documents — like fragile original recordings — long thought lost to time. Or maybe music has been neglected because the musical timeline is so different from the political one. Political ends and beginnings, for example, differ greatly from musical ones.

In the shadow of Raymond Leyris' assassination musicians like Samy Elmaghribi and fellow exiled artists established themselves once again, this time in metropolitan France. Others headed for Israel where the specter of a career in Arab music in the Jewish state was difficult but not impossible. In Paris, Elmaghribi opened at least two branches of his Samyphone record store. One of them was located at 5 Rue des Ecouffles in Le Marais, the city's historic (and historically Ashkenazi) Jewish quarter. From Paris, Samy Elmaghribi recorded new and old material of home and other places. Meanwhile, his records continued to pour into the Maghrib.

Ever the impresario, Samy Elmaghribi sought out emerging markets as well. In Jaffa, Israel, for instance, Samy Elmaghribi's records were soon distributed by Raphael Azoulay's R. Zaky label, which was granted exclusive concession for Samyphone in the Jewish state.⁵⁸⁷ Thanks to the Azoulays, Moroccan Jews in Israel, eager for a taste of home, could now once again listen to the voice of their nation.

Nearly a decade ago, I happened upon some of those Samyphone-R. Zaky (and later Zakiphon) records during a visit to Israel. It was those records — North African music produced in Israel in the second half of the twentieth century — that first grabbed my attention and inspired this project. Their existence in the unlikely settings of Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv

⁵⁸⁷ Contract, August 17, 1960. Amzallag archive.

and their survival to the present compelled me to ask questions of their North African past. From a sonic trace in a location most historians have thought not to look (or better yet, listen) for the Maghrib, a whisper turned into a world of sound. This dissertation is the result.

Bibliography

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AN — Archives nationales, Paris, France

ANOM — Archives nationales d'outre mer (ANOM); Aix En Provence, France

ANT— Les Archives Nationales de Tunisie (ANT)

BNF — Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France

BNT — Bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie (BNT)

CADN — Centre des Archives Politiques de Nantes, Nantes, France

CMAM — Le Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes, Tunis, Tunisia.

CZA — Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, Israel

NLI — National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel

Wilalay archives of Algiers — Les Archives Wilayales d'Alger

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