Abstract

The construction of stories about identity, origins, history and community is central in the process of national identity formation: to mould a national identity – a sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation – it is necessary to have an understanding of oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative which can be remembered and recalled. Amid the “memory boom” of recent decades, “memory” is used to cover a variety of social practices, sometimes at the expense of the nuance and texture of history and politics. The result can be an elision of the ways in which memories are constructed through acts of manipulation and the play of power. This dissertation examines practices and practitioners of nostalgia in a particular context, that of Tunisia and the Mediterranean region during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Using a variety of historical and ethnographical sources I show how multifaceted nostalgia was a feature of the colonial situation in Tunisia notably in the period after the First World War. In the postcolonial period I explore continuities with the colonial period and the uses of nostalgia as a means of contestation when other possibilities are limited. An ethnographic engagement with nostalgia requires that we acknowledge and seek to account for multiple strands of remembrance, seeing how they coexist,
combine, and/or conflict. Nostalgia is shaped by specific cultural concerns and struggles; and as with other forms of memory practice, it can only be understood in particular historical and spatial contexts.
Dedication

تونس تز نس من جاهها و تدركه حسرة حيث سار
لم حلّ عنها لأرض العراق حنّ إليها حنين الحوار

Σιπές "θα παγω σ’άλλη γη, θα παγω σ’άλλη θαλάσσα.
Μια πόλη άλλη θα σρεθεί καλλιτερή απο αυτη....
Καινούριος τοπους δεν θα σρει, δεν θα σρεις άλλες θαλασσες
ή πολις θα σε ακολούθει
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
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Chapter 1: Introduction

It’s a familiar scene from early in Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*: a French police inspector is dictating a report on a series of attacks carried out in Algiers by the nationalist Front de Libération Nationale. On the wall behind him is a large street map of Algiers which bears the name of the publisher, Pierre Vrillon. One of his colleagues reads out a list of the localities where the attacks have taken place. Later, following the random detention of an Algerian “suspected” of involvement in the attacks, the French inspector localizes his address on the same map as rue de Thèbes, in the Casbah and later places a bomb in this street as reprisal for FLN attacks.¹

The very same map, perhaps eighteen square feet in size, hangs in the White Fathers’ house in Rue des Fusillés in Algiers near the Jardin d’Essai (Botanic Gardens) and was one of the first things that struck me when I arrived there in autumn 1993. The curved sweep of the Bay of Algiers recalled Le Corbusier’s feminization of Algiers in his *Plan Obus*.² Evocation of a map of this kind may seem an unusual way to begin a dissertation entitled *Images of the Past: Nostalgias in Modern Tunisia*. However in Brian Friel’s play

¹ This incident in the film is based on a bombing carried out in August 1956 by André Achiary (1909-1983), former policeman and sous-préfet at Guelma (eastern Algeria) in 1945 during the brutal repression of nationalist demonstrations. See Chapter 4.
The British officer in charge of a mapmaking project in nineteenth-century Ireland describes the map as “a representation on paper… a paper picture showing, representing this country…showing your country in miniature–a scaled drawing on paper.” The study of the way that States picture and imagine themselves has undergone a renaissance in recent years, sustained by the proliferation of visible and intensely bitter ethnic conflicts spanning the globe, as well as the rise to prominence of centrifugal tendencies within a number of Western countries. Recent events confirm this, be it the narrowly-defeated vote for Scottish independence on 18 September 2014 just before I began my field work for this dissertation or the Brexit vote of 23 June 2016.

The construction of stories about identity, origins, history and community is central in the process of national identity formation: to mould a national identity – a sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation – it is necessary to have an understanding of oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative which can be remembered and recalled. Amid the “memory boom” of recent decades, “memory” is a concept that is often employed and over-employed to represent a variety of social practices, cognitive processes and representational strategies at the expense of the nuance and texture of history and politics. The result can be an elision of the ways in which memories are constructed through acts of manipulation and the play of power.

Within the wider field of memory, nostalgia is a cultural practice which generates meaning in the present through selective visions of the past. Nostalgia maps and

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4 Duncan S.A. Bell, *British Journal of Sociology* 54 /1 (March 2003) : 63–81
reconstructs the past, not the past in a pure form but a selective and partial formulation, subject to the points of view of contemporary actors. Quoting Friel again, “it is not the literal past, the “facts” of history that shape us but images of the past embodied in language.”

This dissertation examines practices and practitioners of nostalgia in a particular context, that of Tunisia during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As a country under French occupation from 1881 until 1956, Tunisia constituted a “colonial situation,” to use the late Georges Balandier’s term, which he understood as a historically specific process, involving relationships and antagonisms between colonial peoples and powers and between the cultures of each of them. Nostalgias can therefore be studied in relation to and in competition with one another. In the latter part of the dissertation, I go on to discuss how practices of nostalgia in Tunisia are situated within the wider world of memory practices in the Mediterranean in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Before going on to map out the chapters of the dissertation, I can map out my own itinerary in the White Fathers (Society of Missionaries of Africa) that led me to spend an almost continuous period of seventeen years between 1993 and 2010, firstly in Algeria and then in Tunisia, between 1995 and 2010. This was preceded by a period of training extending from late 1985 to 1993 in a variety of locations including London, northern Zambia (1987-1988), two years in Gao (Mali, 1988-1990) and three years’ study in the Catholic Institute in Toulouse (1990-1993). I therefore spent time in two countries which

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5 Ibid.
had recently emerged from colonial rule: one year in Zambia, in 1964 (twenty-one years
before my sojourn there) and a sojourn of two uninterrupted years in Mali, where French
rule had formally ended in 1960. I was given an initial exposure to memories of the
colonial period recounted by members of White Father communities and by the people of
Gao in northern Mali. My sojourn in Toulouse (France) between 1990 and 1993
corresponded to a period when the Front national consolidated its position on the political
scene in France, laying the groundwork for debates on national identity and “decline”
which would characterise the 2000s in France.. Between 1984 and 1992 Pierre Nora’s
Les Lieux de Mémoire was published, an inventory of all those realms of remembrance
where French identity could be said to have symbolically crystallised. Although Nora had
been a critic of the Algerian War, Les Lieux de Mémoire omits the entire imperial history
of the country, from the Napoleonic conquests, through the plunder of Algeria under the
July Monarchy, to the seizure of Indochina in the Second Empire and the African booty
of the Third Republic.7 Although I was engaged in a variety of theological and pastoral
activities, I can conclude that my itinerary in France and in regions which had formerly
been part of its colonial empire gave me some sensibility of the interplay between
history, myth, memory, and forgetting.

The framed map to which I alluded at the beginning of this Introduction
represents the controlling gaze of the colonial power. Arabic was absent from the map
and the majority of the street names evoked figures of the French occupation. Rue des
Fusillés, where I encountered the map, commemorates a massacre of Algerian civilians

carried out by French paratroopers in May 1957. The street appears on the map as Rue de Polignac, after Jules de Polignac (1780-1847), Foreign Minister at the time of the French invasion of Algiers in 1830.

Other mappings of Algiers and later Tunis opened up to me as I learned more Arabic and inhabitants of these cities shared their memories with me. In 2009-2010 I took part in the work of a research group coordinated by the late Fanny Colonna (1934-2014). The group was composed of participants from the Maghreb, France and Italy. The collected volume Traces, désir de savoir et volonté d’être studied aspects of the colonial period which are tangential in relation to the dominant narratives. The term of Traces, as Colonna mentions, is drawn from Carlo Ginzburg’s Myths, emblems, clues originally published in Italian in 1986 under the title Miti emblem spie: morfologi e storia. Ginzburg’s essay “Clues: roots of an evidential paradigm” studies the emergence of this epistemological model at the end of the nineteenth century, notably at the hands of the Italian art critic Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891). Attribution of paintings to particular artists should not depend in the most conspicuous characteristics but on the most trivial details. Infinitesimal traces permit the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality. Intriguingly Ginzburg makes a parallel with the Arabo-Islamic learning, that of firāsa, a technique of inductive divination which permits the foretelling of moral

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8 Traces, désir de savoir et volonté d’être, éd. Fanny Colonna and Loic Le Pape (Aix: Actes Sud, 2010).
10 Ibid., 102.
conditions and psychological behaviour from external indications and physical states. As I explored Algiers and Tunis I was able to draw on observation informed by local memories. Michel de Certeau’s places-as-palimpsests of stories and memories open up historical and personal associations, giving meanings and directions hitherto unforeseen by official narratives. I shall draw on these “traces” in the latter part of the dissertation.

Returning to the dissertation itself, Chapter 2 seeks to map nostalgia by identifying different ways that nostalgia can be practiced. I seek in this chapter to situate restorative, prospective and reflective nostalgias in in Arabic literary culture and more specifically in the Maghreb. I chose two Algerian songs, one from the nineteenth century and one from the latter part of the twentieth century. *Chant des Arabes* dates from the period of the French conquest of Algiers in 1830, while *Djezāir al-‘āsima*, composed and sung by Abdelmadjid Meskoud, dates from the 1990s when Algeria was sliding into a civil war. Both these songs are rooted in place, and the chapter also explores how *al-hanīn* expresses the centrality in Arabic literary culture of land to ideas about physical, political, or spiritual belonging. The chapter also discusses how different nostalgias can overlap: the nostalgia of *Djezāir al-‘āsima*, composed and sung by Abdelmadjid Meskoud, is part of the Andalusian musical heritage which had both Jewish and Muslim practitioners. In the context of the *El Gusto* project it therefore acquires contemporary

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11 Ibid. 113.

relevance in a world in quest of cross-cultural understanding. *Looking for Habiba* reflects the quest of a Western visitor to Tunisia for authentic intercultural encounter as well as Tunisian nostalgia for a world seen as simpler and rich in possibility.

After this mapping of the terrain of nostalgia in Chapter 2, with particular attention to the power of place, Chapter 3 considers a specific terrain, that of Tunisia under the French protectorate regime which was imposed in 1881. The map of Algiers to which I alluded earlier expresses the point of view of French colonial authority but it is itself incorporated into the wider narrative of the film *Battle of Algiers* which articulates Algerian aspirations.

Chapter 3 studies the sense of estrangement experienced by indigenous Tunisians under the protectorate, an estrangement underpinning Tha’ālbi’s *La Tunisie martyre*. As Jacques Berque puts it, two peoples sought legitimacy in the land, the settler communities and the indigenous population. In this chapter I seek two nostalgic maps superimposed on one another. While the colonial map of Algiers with its frame and mass of detail, gives an impression of control and omniscience the settler communities of North Africa, notably after the First World War, felt increasingly vulnerable. In Tunisia French domination was exposed to Italian competition, both in political and demographic terms, while Tunisian nationalism, although only incipient, was gathering strength. There were 43,000 Italians in Tunis alone and only 27,000 French nationals.\(^\text{13}\) In addition European population growth was faltering across North Africa, whereas the native population had “pullulated,”

in the words of one commentator, since the colonial rule began. Narratives of Latin North Africa and reminiscences of the heroic pioneering days of the protectorate were symptoms of this malaise. As well as Tha‘ālbi’s evocations of Tunisia’s prosperity prior to the French occupation, I also devote part of Chapter 3 to an examination of practices of nostalgia in the controversy surrounding the olive-trees of Tebourba.

Chapter 4 remains in interwar Tunisia and studies the role of the Institut des belles-lettres arabes (IBLA), founded by the Society of Missionaries of Africa in 1926, as a would-be intermediary between communities and cultures. IBLA shared the prevailing sense in colonial circles that the early days of the protectorate in Tunisia had allowed cordial contact between cultures and communities and sought to develop a code of settler conduct which would enable such contact to be perpetuated.” 15 IBLA developed in the context of a widespread sense of French decline going back to the end of the nineteenth century.16 The postwar rappel à l’ordre [call to order] involved a quest for forms of artistic expression that foregrounded rural and regional styles. Nostalgia has to be seen in the context not merely of post-First World War weariness in French society but also against the background of perceived Western decline exemplified by works such as Oswald Spengler’s Decline of the West.

Chapter 5 studies the place of nostalgia(s) in the post-independence period in Tunisia, notably between 1987 and 2011, with some excursions into the post-

14 Ibid. XXXIV.
15 See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
16 Robert Paxton, Vichy France Old Guard and New Order (New York: Columbia University, 1972), 146.
revolutionary period after 2011. I draw on the work of Brian Friel to reflect on perceptions of places as events, reconstituted imaginatively even while thought of as rooted in the past. Official nostalgic practices in Tunisia sought to restore a continuum of national history based on national individuality, expressed by Habib Bourguiba in terms of a Tunisian “personality” with a particular narrative to be defended.

The post-1987 regime of Zīn al-ʿAbidīn Ben ʿAli sought to integrate classical Antiquity and notably Carthage into this continuum, underpinned by a view of time which postulates a historical subject which is self-identical and essentially continuous. The 1990s saw a developing interest in Tunisia, as elsewhere, in culturally diverse societies in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Some Tunisian historians involved in research on the Tunisian “mosaic” of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have metaphorically mined Tunisia’s past for examples of diversity – personified in figures such as the Tunisian Jewish Socialist Georges Adda.

The dissertation began with an evocation of a particular personal memory of Algiers, one associated with a map of the city as it was before the transformations of the colonial period. As Brian Friel’s play Translations suggests a map is a picture, a selective vision, and nostalgia too can be seen as a selective vision, a mapping of a locality’s past. Chapter 6 is centred on depictions of the city of Tunis, drawing on a polyphony of voices including conservationists, politicians, and travellers. While the recovery and reconstruction of a “Mediterranean” Tunis came to dominate certain strands of commentary in urban conservation circles in Tunis, it also emerged in a regional context where the European Union used the image of the Mediterranean and particularly a shared
Mediterranean history as an element of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership programme of the mid-1990s. While some strands of European discourse highlighted Mediterranean open-ness others, notably in France, associated the Mediterranean with evocations of the colonial past. Chapter 6 also compares and contrasts personal and official mappings of the centre of Tunis. This enables us to appreciate how nostalgia can use the past to critically and prospectively frame the present. An ethnographic engagement with nostalgia requires that we acknowledge and seek to account for multiple strands of remembrance, seeing how they coexist, combine, and/or conflict. Nostalgia is shaped by specific cultural concerns and struggles; and as with other forms of memory practice, it can only be understood in particular historical and spatial contexts.
Chapter 2 Nostalgia(s): An Overview

Abodes, in our hearts you abide.
You stand deserted,
While our hearts are inhabited by you.\(^1\)

يا لك منازل في القلوب منازل
أقدر أنت
وهن منك أواهل

Nostalgia has been defined as a cultural practice that generates meaning in the present through selective visions of the past.\(^2\) This definition puts nostalgia in relation to culture which, as Edward Casey has argued, is inherently emplaced, since the very word culture meant “place tilled” in Middle English. The word also goes back to the Latin term *colere*, “to inhabit or care for.” To be cultural, Casey continues, is to inhabit a place and cultivate


The term “nostalgia” is also linked to place, deriving as it does from the Greek terms of *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain) to denote a longing for home.

Home however is not outside history; Arjun Appadurai has observed that as “local subjects carry on the continuing task of reproducing their neighbourhood, the contingencies of history, environment and imagination contain the potential for new contexts (material, social, and imaginative) to be produced.” Nostalgia can be seen as part of this imaginative context, extending beyond imagination as a structure of feeling into the realm of action or practice. Shaped by specific cultural concerns and struggle; nostalgia and other forms of memory practice can only be understood in particular historical and spatial contexts in which the forms and meaning of nostalgia shift.

The late Svetlana Boym distinguished between restorative and reflective nostalgia, not as absolute types but as ways of giving shape and meaning to longing. *Restorative* nostalgia emphasizes the *nostos* and proposes a rebuilding of the lost home.

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Restorative nostalgia does not appear as nostalgia per se, that is, as a longing, but instead as tradition, heritage, and the truth. Reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, amid the dreams of another time and another place, and is aware of distance and irrevocability.\(^8\) It emphasizes the algia, the pain of longing, and defers the return home in lieu of an ironic attachment to a lost past.\(^9\)

In al-Mutanabbi’s poem quoted above, “Abodes, in our hearts you abide,” the “abodes,” addressed as a person, are “deserted.” Aqfarti anṭi, “you are deserted”\(^{10}\) suggesting that the poet’s task is to reconstruct them through evocation of happier days.

The term of reconstruction reminds us of Maurice Halbwach’s insight that memory is a process, a dynamic ensemble, whose task is not so much to provide faithful images of the past as to reconstruct events, drawing out of the past elements that guarantee to individuals and groups the sense of their own continuity. The past as it is present in the act of remembering is not a return of the past in a pure form but a selective and partial formulation, a reconstruction subject to the points of view of contemporary actors.\(^{11}\) To Svetlana Boym’s restorative and reflective nostalgia can be added what Ray

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\(^{10}\) Qafar: “Infertilité.” Qifār, “Désert sans eau ni vegetation”. See Marcelin Beaussier, *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français* (La Maison des Livres, Algiers: 1958), 818. The term abodes” manāzil is defined by Beaussier as “logement, cantonnement, bivouac, camp.” Ibid., 971.

Cashman describes as critical nostalgia, with a *prospective* dimension, instantiating informed criticism of the present through contrast with the past, and inspring action that may effect a better future.¹²

Nostalgia, as we have seen, is connected to a home or a place and culture in turn, as Edward Casey writes, is emplaced. In this chapter I examine how the term nostalgia can be understood firstly in Arabic literary culture over millenia and then more specifically in the Maghreb. I identify some of the terms associated with the term of nostalgia and go on to explore literary examples which bring together place and evocation of the past. Nostalgia has come to be identified as a practice and response to a wide variety of personal and collective needs, and, from the point of view of the outside observer, this requires careful attention to the context in which this practice is enacted.

I have chosen two Algerian songs whose setting is Algiers in the early nineteenth and later twentieth centuries. In the later part of the chapter I discuss the memory-mapping work in Tunis of Kimbal Quist, a London-based visual artist, who creates situation-specific work exploring the state of “being in-between.”¹³

*al-hanīn*: Land and Longing

In literary Arabic, to be nostalgic is usually translated by *hanna ilā*. Edward William Lane gives the example of *حنَّ إلى وطنه* *hanna ilā watanihi,* “he longed for his home,” quoting from the *Tāj al-‘arūs* of the Bengal-born al-Murtada al-Husaynī al-


¹³ http://nomadicartsfestival.com/kimbal-quist-bumstead/
Zabīdī (1732-1790). One therefore longs for a place and land is central to discourse of place shaped in the world of Arabic adab, a term which can be translated as “belles-lettres,” although adab sensibility was underpinned by an omnivorous intellectual appetite, encompassing fields of study from philology to philosophy to religion to etiquette. The peripatetic life led by most members of elites in an era of Islamic territorial expansion and decentralization made the experience of leaving home or establishing a new home a preoccupation for literary patrons. Like most other themes in Arabic poetry, al-hanîn traces its origins to the pre-Islamic qasida from its pre-Islamic Bedouin beginnings, where it undergoes numerous iterations.

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16 Ibid.
One can see this as a sign of alienation and nostalgia caused by the rapid change of the first two centuries after the coming of Islam, as well as continuing pressures to travel to fulfill religious and political obligations or to search for patronage. However, *al-hanīn* must also be seen as an expression of the centrality of land to ideas about physical, political, or spiritual belonging.\(^{17}\)

The sentiment of longing for the homeland (*al-hanīn ilā al awṭān*) is the title of one of the anthologies of al-Džāḥiẓ (776-869 CE). The *waṭan* is a source of physical and social nurture and emphasizes an inextricable link between land and body.\(^{18}\) Itinerant nomads in the steppes in spite of or even because of their lifestyle felt strongly attached to their home sites.\(^{19}\) “The country of a man is his wet nurse and his house is his cradle,”\(^{20}\) “The nature of man is kneaded from love for one’s homeland,”\(^{21}\) are some of al-Džāḥiẓ’s sayings on natural attachment to home, also associated with a nurturing mother.\(^{22}\)

Historical circumstances could give added poignancy: ‘Abd el Jabbār ibn Hamdīs’s *sīqillīyas* fuse together the political present and literary past in new, cohesive statements of *al-hanīn ilā waṭan*, in his case Muslim Sicily occupied by the Normans in

\(^{17}\) Ibid.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 387, 1. 5. *Fiṭrat ar-rajul maʾjūna bi hubb al waṭan* فطرة الوطن بحب معجونة الرجل

the late eleventh century. Fragmentation and decline of cities such as Baghdad produced a genre of poetry known as “elegies for cities” (rithāʾ al-mudun). Ibn al-Rūmī’s elegy for Basra after the rebellion of East African slaves who seized control over southern Iraq in the ninth century includes elegaic ubi sunt -style questioning: “Where are her jostling markets, where is the clamour of them that dwelt in her? Where are the mansions that were in her? Nostalgia need not simply be a passive reverie, as Ibn al Rumi concludes his poem with a call for authority to be reasserted. Ruins reflect failures of a city’s stewards, and demand a return to vigilance, in their administration of the city and its inhabitants.24

Paradoxically, as the Islamic world fragmented in the eleventh and twelfth centuries regional discourses of place developed, often in an elegiac register. Geographers such as Yāqūt al Hamawi in Mu’jam al-buldān (“Compendium of countries”) took a universalist rather than local view of the world: “The world is a place of visitation and an abode of transition. Be you then travellers in it, and take warning from what remains of the traces (āthār) of the early ones.”25 Despite the fragmentation of the Islamic world, place was a site of reflection and interpellation.

The most enduring and emblematic place of loss was Granada, under siege for most of its 250-year independent existence as though built to “monumentalize the

24 Antrim, Routes and realms, 76.
inevitability of loss” in María Rosa Menocal’s words.\textsuperscript{26} We mentioned earlier that nostalgia is a “site-specific” practice and we can note that post-Reconquista references to al-Andalus in terms of longing are usually in the context of the loss of Andalusia as a territory of Islam, rather than the loss of the cultural or natural treasures therein or of interreligious convivencia which may fit well with contemporary nostalgia, remembrance and cultural consumption.\textsuperscript{27}

Discourse on place in the modern ear has underlined territorial nationalism in a way that differs from the interconnected Islamic world, which, even as it later fragmented retained a universalist view of place and its power as exemplified by al-Yaqut’s \textit{mu’jam al buldān}.

The present chapter will consider two Algerian songs, which both have the city of Algiers as their subject. I remain in the urban context later in the concluding part of this chapter to discuss how a non-Tunisian artist engages with the theme of nostalgia in a production destined for a Tunisian audience. I shall put these “site-specific” nostalgias in the context of the types of nostalgia – restorative, prospective, reflective – which I discussed earlier.

Mourning lost cities: Algiers

1830, the year of the conquest of Algiers, was an “end of the world.” The Ottoman province of Algiers was the first of the caliph’s Mediterranean Muslim

\textsuperscript{26} Literature of al-Andalus., 7.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 32..
domains to fall to a European power.\textsuperscript{28} Algiers had been bombarded on numerous previous occasions: an eighteenth century Algerian commentator recalled the number of shells fired at his city by the French in 1682; three hundred in January 1682, seven hundred in December of the same year.\textsuperscript{29} In 1770 a popular song attributed the city’s resistance in the face of Danish bombardment to the medieval holy man Sidi Tha’albi Abderrahmane, “Sword and Rampart of the City.”\textsuperscript{30} When the British traveller Captain J. Clark Kennedy arrived in Algiers in 1845 he recalled the 1816 bombardment by an Anglo-Dutch fleet.\textsuperscript{31} Kennedy mentions in passing how the French assault and occupation of 1830 damaged the gardens for which Algiers was famous and seems impressed with the French “violent rage for construction.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28} James McDougall, \textit{History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28.


\textsuperscript{30} French translation attributed to Edmond Fagnan , \textit{Revue Africaine} , 1894. Quoted by McDougall, \textit{History and the culture of nationalism in Algeria} ,145.

\textsuperscript{31} J. Clark Kennedy, \textit{Algeria and Tunis in 1845: An Account of a Journey Made Through the Two Regencies by Viscount Feilding and Capt. Kennedy} (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), 4. Traces of a cannon-ball and grape-shot fired by the British squadron in 1816 were still visible on the façade of the British Consul-General’s house in Algiers. Ibid., 25.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 15.
Eight years after Kennedy’s visit a volume was published in 1853 entitled *Mœurs et coutumes de l’Algérie. Tell, Kabylie, Sahara.* The author was General Eugène Daumas (1803-1871) who had served as officer in a spahi regiment and in the Arab Bureau, responsible for relations with the indigenous population after the French invasion of 1830. *Mœurs et coutumes* contains a song called by Daumas, “Chant des Arabes sur la prise d’Alger”[“Arab song on the capture of Algiers”]. His book is intended for a cultivated audience without knowledge of Arabic, as all Arabic terms are translated or transcribed. The book was by published by the generalist publisher Hachette and Company in the “histoire et voyages”[history and travel] section of its series “La bibliothèque du chemin de fer”[Railway Library]in a collection of five hundred books destined for the edification of travellers:

“This collection is especially destined for travellers. Occuper agréablement leurs loisirs forcés pendant le trajet, leur fournir des renseignements exacts et complets sur tout ce qui peut les intéresser en route et dans les lieux où ils séjournent ; LES AMUSER HONNETEMENT ET LEUR ÊTRE UTILE, voilà le but qu’elle se propose” [This collection is intended for travellers. It will occupy the leisure that travel imposes on them, and provide exact and complete information on everything that can interest them in their journey and in their places of sojourn. Honest amusement and utility: such is the collection’s aim.]

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36 https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Biblioth%C3%A8que_des_chemins_de_fer
Utility for Daumas has particular meaning. The preface reads: “faire connaître un people dont les mœurs disparaîtront peut-être parmi les nôtres, mais en laissant dans notre mémoire, de vifs et profonds souvenirs, voilà ce que j’ai entrepris”[“making known a people whose customs will disappear, absorbed by our own, while leaving clearly-inscribed traces in our memory: this is the task I have undertaken.”]37

Daumas was writing at a time when the term indigène – first used as a substantive noun in 1770 to designate Native Americans – had come to designate in Algeria an archaic Arab society destined to disappear.39 Fenimore Cooper’s elegiac Last of the Mohicans was a highly popular work in France, with George Sand commenting that America had recognized that it had been necessary to eliminate a great race (the Native Americans) in the case of national self-realization.40 Cooper’s work was frequently quoted by colonial authors, including Daumas himself.41

Daumas sees the collection and preservation of the song as a salvage operation amid the shipwreck of indigenous defeat in Algeria at the hands of the French. “La prise d’Alger frappa de stupeur les musulmans. Elle retentit douleureusement dans le cœur des Arabes et cette douleur devait inévitablement s’exhaler. J’ai été assez heureux pour receuillir les lamentations des vaincus. On jugera par la valeur poétique du chant que je

37 Daumas, Mœurs et coutumes, avant-propos.
39 Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal (1713-1796) used the term of “indigènes” in his Histoire philosophe et politique des établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes.
40 Ibid., 19, 20. George Sand commented “l’Amérique a laissé échapper de son sein ce cri de la conscience. Pour être ce que nous sommes, il nous a fallu tuer une grande race et ravager urie grande nature.” George Sand, Autour de la table (Paris : Calmann Levy, 1882), 270.
reproduit, s’il n’y a pas un intérêt véritable à sauver ces souvenirs du naufrage.” [The capture of Algiers stunned the Muslims. It echoed painfully in the hearts of the Arabs and this pain had to find release. I was fortunate enough to be able to collect the lamentations of the defeated. One can judge by the poetic value of the song which I reproduce here, if there is a real interest in saving these memories of the shipwreck.]

One can recall that, historically, anthropology has been associated with the preservation of indigenous worlds overtaken by the very modernity from which anthropology emerges. Daumas adopts the controlling attitude of one preserving a fast-vanishing past. We shall see that fifty years later French commentators had themselves begun to search in the past for models of conduct and practice to reinforce flagging colonial rule faced with naufrage [shipwreck] to use Daumas’ term, which he had applied to indigenous society in Algeria.

The poem is attributed to a religious scholar called Si-Abd-Elkader who witnessed the French entry into Algiers and thereafter retreated to a zāwiya in Mazouna, west of Algiers, where according to Daumas, Si-Abd-Elkader died of a broken heart. Julia Clancy-Smith has noted that migration to Tunisia out of French-held lands could be

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44 See Chapter 2.
a survival strategy as well as *inkimāsh*, a form of inward religio-spiritual withdrawal if leaving Algerian territory was not an option.\(^{45}\)

*Chant des Arabes*, after formulas of praise to God and his Prophet, briefly evokes the past glories of Algiers:

For years victory followed the banners of the warlike *El Bahadja*,

Nations gave her hostages, trembled before her, obeyed and paid tributes,

Let us regret times past.\(^{46}\)

Daumas comments that the name of Algiers “*El Bahadja*”(*al-Bahja*), which we encountered in the song by Abdelmajid Meskoud earlier, reflects the visual spendour of the Kasbah of Algiers when seen from the sea. Even today the approach to Algiers by sea is spectacular, with the white terraces of the Casbah on the hills rising up from the sea and Charles-Frédéric Chasseriau’s ramp dating from the 1860s between the port and the *front de mer* boulevard gives an undulating rhythm to the seafront. Nevertheless French conquest of the city had been followed by demolition of one of the finest buildings in Algiers, the Sayyida Mosque, in 1831 while the Ketchaoua mosque was consecrated as a

\(^{45}\) Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Popular Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria-Tunisian 1800–1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7. By the 1870s there were 16,000 Algerians, most of whom had migrated without the assent of the colonial authorities. McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria*, 36.

church in 1832. In the lower Casbah engineers had carved out a parade ground to remedy the lack of open space for the manoeuvring of troops.48

The dominant tone of Chant des Arabes is one of lamentation and sadness at the French occupation. While the city had been subjected to attack before by foreign fleets, al Djezāir al Mahrūsa, “Algiers the Well-Guarded”, had managed to survive. Chant des Arabes evokes Algiers’ past spendours: silk banners flying in the wind, corsair fleets anchored in the Bay of Algiers while Christian Europe trembled, marble-floored buildings, a city of holy men and scholars.

Let us regret the passing of the port

Embellished by its redoubts and its fleets

Where are the captains, these silk flags flying in the wind?

The corsairs coming into port with their haul of captives or of coffee

The Christians were like women in face of them.49

There are wistful evocations of classes of officials with Ottoman-Turkish names such as the kasbadjya and noubadjya with their broad scimitars.50 A number of

48 See James McDougall, History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 217.
49 Daumas, Mœurs et coutumes, 122.
Toponymes are mentioned such as Sidi Ferreudj where the French invasion force landed in 1830, Staouali, to the west of Algiers where in the words of the song the Muslims resisted sword in hand, until they took flight, and the “Kaysarya”, which the French transformed into Place du Gouvernement, called “Placa” in the song.51

Descriptions of vanished glories are matched by detailed evocations of the demolitions of the French, notably in the lower Casbah area, to allow the passage of the “karretas” (carts) brought by the settlers into the Placa where religious literature had previously been sold.52 Horses are tethered in mosques and tombs profaned, closely echoing Ibn Abī Dīnār’s reports of the Spanish occupation of Tunis in 1573-1574: “I heard some of the people of the city say that the Nasāra tethered their horses to the Great Mosque (in Tunis) and violated the tomb of the holy patron Sidi Mahrez Ibn Khalaf.”53 Ibn Abī Dīnār also mentioned the loss of literary heritage: “stores of books In the Great Mosque were plundered and were obliterated by feet of the kafara (unbelievers) and the learned volumes gathered in

50 kasbadjya and noubadjya were Turkish guards armed with the yataghan a single-edged blade with a marked forward curve. The town of Yataghan in southwest Turkey was famous for its smiths and in folklore is considered to be the birthplace of yataghans.

51 Daumas, Mœurs et coutumes de l’Algérie, 141.

52 Ibid. For the British traveller J. Clark Kennedy, the “Placa” afforded a scene of the picturesque confusion admired by Victorian travellers in North Africa: cafes blazing with light and thronged with French soldiers, Jews, Arabs and settlers.

the mosque were scattered and it was said that people passing the eastern side of the mosque…walked over books thrown on the ground”\textsuperscript{54}

Where European travellers saw urban improvements \textit{Chant des Arabes} details theft and plunder of marble and wrought-iron.\textsuperscript{55} The \textit{Chant des Arabes} affirms that “the end of time” has come.\textsuperscript{56} At the same time the song looks forward prospectively to a future in which the victory of the French will be reversed. This is an eschatological future, a day when God will re-establish order, and send a righteous ruler. The Christians will fade away and God will punish those who have corrupted the city:

\begin{quote}
God will have pity on suffering believers

He will reestablish order

The Christians will fade away

And God will chase away our corruptors.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

However the only help to be expected is of a divine nature. The Turks have fled definitively, defeated by the French at Staoueli, their \textit{agha} has panicked, the janissaries’ barracks are occupied by the Christian invaders.\textsuperscript{58} Ibn Abī Dīnār, writing just under two centuries earlier, was able to give a poetic description of the Ottoman fleet \textit{en route} to expel the Spanish from Tunis, the ships sweeping

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{54} Ib\textit{id.}
\textsuperscript{55} Daumas, \textit{Mœurs et coutumes}, 122.
\textsuperscript{56} Ib\textit{id.}, 116.
\textsuperscript{57} Ib\textit{id.}, 143.
\textsuperscript{58} Daumas, \textit{Mœurs et coutumes}, 137-138.
\end{flushleft}
across the Mediterranean like “birds with two, three, or four wings….though the sea may have chilled the bodies of their crews, the ships’ flame-filled guns roasted their enemies.” For Algiers, no help would come of this kind. The queen of all cities had fallen into Christian hands.

It is a world however that *Chant des Arabes* restores by constructing a landscape of loss which evoked that elaborated by early chroniclers such as Ibn Abī Dīnār in Tunis which had also undergone invasion and profanation. In the disjunction between the world as it should be and the disorder of colonial fragmentation one might wonder if “evil, surely, was too ferocious in the world for it not to imply some eschatological meaning. It will be enough to wait until God changes his mind.”

Jacques Berque translated *inkimāsh* (spiritual retreat) as “sauvegarde” and as one reads *Chant des Arabes* one enters a space where even battered memories are safeguarded. The artist Gustave Guillaumet (1840-1887), whose works depict the harshness of Algerian life, noted that the inhabitants of a locality near Bou Saada sought to “to avoid the detested European. The inhabitants evaluate the *mœurs* of their conquerors through stories told in the evenings, legends that

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61 Ibid., 419, quoted by Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 216.
inspire in the young a distrust of the Christians and in the old, a nostalgia for happier times.”

Contemporary commemorations: Algiers

“Djezair al-‘āsimā” (“Algiers, capital city”) was composed and sung by Abdelmadjid Meskoud. This hitherto-little known performer of sha‘abi music came to prominence in 1989, four years before I arrived in Algiers in September 1993 in a context of mounting instability.

Following a military coup d’état in January 1992, the second round of elections were cancelled after the first round victory of the Islamist Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). This was followed by violence which led to the proclamation of a curfew in seven Algerian regions, including Algiers, in November 1992.

As well as the targeting of foreigners, 1993 and early 1994 saw the assassination of numerous Algerian intellectuals and journalists by the GIA (Groupe islamiste armée al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah al-Musallaha) faction. In May 1994 I attended the funeral of a Catholic priest and a religious sister assassinated in a library in the Kasbah. In December 1994 four “White Fathers’ were assassinated at Tizi Ouzou.

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63 http://alger-republicain.com/El-Anka-et-la-tradition-Chaabi.html
65 Ibid.,
Abdelmadjid Meskoud was a practicioner of Sha‘bi music. This developed in Algeria after the First World War and its most renowned representative was M’hamed El Anka (1907–1978). In 1925, Mustapha Nador, a meddāh (singer of praise songs) who was highly esteemed in Algiers, admitted M’hamed El Anka into his band. After Nador’s death in 1926, M’hamed El Anka took over as the group’s director. From 1927 to 1932, he attended the mosque Sidi Abderrahmane al-Thaʿālibī, where songs of praise and hymns were performed twice a week. Sidi Abderrahmane al-Thaʿālibī was the wali who reputedly defended Algiers in 1770. In 1929, M’hamed El Anka al-ʿl 192 founded his own orchestra, and created the music that is associated with his name. In 1946, he was appointed head of Algerian Radio’s newly created department for popular music, and later served as an instructor of the shaʿabi genre at the Algiers Conservatory. His sources were medh, popular genres of Andalusian music, jazz, and Western dance music.

Andalusian musical tradition after the fall of Granada in 1492 had spread to North Africa with regional variations in urban centres producing genres such as hawzi and gharnati. While there are allusions to a specifically “Andalusian” music in eighteenth century texts, contemporary research inclines to see the term “Andalusian” as referring to a loose category that includes the urban musics of North Africa and the Levant,

66 See note 35.
Sephardic musics, flamenco, and a variety of fusions of these and other musical genres and styles.\(^68\)

It seems that Meskoud’s “Djezair al-āsim” was prompted by the demolition of older areas of the Hamma district in south Algiers in the late 1980s. The song has a broad historical sweep, evoking medieval religious notables such as Sidi Th’albi Abderrahmane. A timeless Algiers is overtaken by change and notably by the zahf er-rifi, the exodus from the interior of Algeria into Algiers depicted a city of Muslim awliyā’, part of what Julia Clancy-Smith called the North African “baraka belt.”\(^69\)

Algiers, capital city, your value is immense
Your love is eternal in my heart until the Last Judgement
The worthless have profaned you; may God give them their just reward
They have profaned the city of Sidi Th’albi Abderrahmane\(^70\)

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\(^69\) In Algerian Arabic the term захф zahf denotes the action of crawling as performed by an animal or reptile. Beaussier, *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français*, 427. Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 33.

\(^70\) Sidi Th’albi Abderrahmane (1384-1471): spiritual figure closely associated with the city of Algiers where his mausoleum is situated. He was born in to the Th’albiyya nobility who dominated Algiers and the Mitidja, the city’s rural hinterland. He studied in Tunis and Cairo, and returned thereafter to the Maghreb. His asceticism gave him a place of choice in Algerian hagiography. Among other exploits he was able to float on water while meditating on his prayer map. See McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism in Algeria*, 144.
The city of the holy awliyā’, the city of

Of Barberousse71 Oh my companions and Sidi M’hamed Bou Qobrine72

Say, oh you who listen, where is the perfume of the Beauty?73

Say, oh you who listen, where are the children of Algiers?

In the song the term of the al-Bahja, “the beloved,” “the beauty”, “the joyous one” is applied to Algiers as a whole. The architect Jean-Jacques Deluz (1930-2009), who lived in Algiers between 1956 and 2009, notes that the inhabitants of the Kasbah of Algiers, the nucleus of the pre-colonial city of Algiers, used the term al-Bahja to designate this particular area.” La Casbah est une ville obsolète, on n’y circule pas en voiture, il faut des ânes pour transporter les ordures... il n’y a pas d’arbres, pas de jardins. Et pourtant elle vit, ceux qui l’aiment l’appellent comme une personne, ma bien aimée, el Bahdja ; il y a dans les rapports avec elle de la sensualité, des sortes de relations personnelles.” [The Kasbah is an obsolete city, with no vehicle traffic. Donkeys are needed to transport rubbish and there are no trees or gardens. Nevertheless the Kasbah is alive. Those who


72 Sidi M’hamed Bou Qobrine: eighteenth century Sufi and founder of the Rahmaniyya order. Originally from Kabylia and later settled in the El Hamma quarter of Algiers where he founded a zāwiya.

love it address it as though it were a person, my Beloved. One’s relationship with the Kasbah is marked by sensuality, a kind of personal relationship.]

The song continues:

From all directions new people arrive, the rural exodus has drawn in crowds

Modesty and the respect for women have vanished, faith and religion are weak

Where are the *mramma* (veil) and the chechias with their dangling silk tassels?

The special savour of Ramadan has faded and festivals are no longer what they were.

They have been stifled by the imitation of foreign practices and new habits have been invented

Basil has been replaced by myrtle and what can be said about jasmin?

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75 مرممة type of *haïk* : See Marcelin Beaussier, *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français* (La Maison des Livres, Algiers: 1958), 251, 413.
Where are the kaftans of the women and their silver-threaded decoration?76

The embroiderers of silk cannot be found

Where are the makers of leather slippers77 and the sculptors?

The luth-players and the artists?

Say, oh you who listen, where is the perfume of the Beauty?

Say, oh you who listen, where are the children of Algiers?

Where are the fine dishes and the evening celebration? Where are the masters of music and the female singers of hawzi?78 The announcements greeted by ululations and by the discharge of muskets79?

Where are the poems and the tales, the poets reciting verses of praise to God and his Prophet?

Where are the zarnadjiya?80 They have all been forgotten

Those years had a sweet taste, but those marvellous times are over.

Say, oh you who listen, where is the perfume of the Beauty?

Say, oh you who listen, where are the children of Algiers?

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76 مجبود majboud : silver thread. See Beaussier, *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français*, 128.
77 خراحز kharraz : artisan specialised in the production of leather slippers. Ibid., 276.
79 مكحلة makhala rifle, arquebus. The root k-h-l means to blacken (black gunpowder) and is the origin of the cosmetic kohl. Beaussier, *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français*, 855.
80 زرنة hautboy. (Eastern Algeria). Ibid., 432. Zarnadjiya are hautboy players.
You recognize nobody in El Harrach, the son of Hussein Dey has gone

Even in Koubba it is scarcely better. You will not even see anyone you know.

In El Annasser you will not linger, don’t cry, unfortunate one

El Hamma is crumbling, Salembier and Laakiba

In the heart of my beloved Belcourt the fragrance of my parents has vanished

In Bab el Oued and the Kasbah the savour has taken to the wing

Bab Djdid and Soustara, El Biar et Skala et Tagarins

Bouzaréah et Zghara et the beautiful Beau Fraisier

Everything has crumbled…ask the older generation

Say, oh you who listen, where is the perfume of the joyous Beauty?

Say, oh you who listen, where are the children of Algiers?

The beautiful one (Algiers) is angry and her walls are pale

Draw a lesson from what happened to the crow.

81 El Harrach, El Annasser, Belcourt and Hussein Dey are districts in the south of Algiers. The outlying areas of Beau Fraisier and El Biar were formerly famous for their elegance and calm. The Kasbah is the historic core of Algiers. El Hamma: a district of south Algiers. The composer of the song *Djezair al-‘āsima*, Abdelmajid Meskoud (1953- ) is from the Hamma district. On the importance of the urban quarter as a place to which one identifies in an city perceived as overwhelming, see Jacques Berque, *Le Maghreb entre Deux Guerres* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1962), 193.
When it sought to mimic the black-eyed dove, its plan failed

Our predecessors transmitted to us the meaning of this proverb

Pray for our Prophet, the beloved of God, the best of men

The son of Abdallah and father of Fatma, mother of the two Husseins

He will pardon us and our parents on the day of Judgement.

I mentioned earlier that I listened to this song while studying Algerian Arabic in Algiers at the Centre d’études diocésain in the Mustapha district in the early 1990s, at the beginning of the conflict which would last into the early 2000s. Ambulance and police sirens could be heard frequently and occasional gunshots and the crackling radios of police patrols in the humid Algiers nights. It was difficult not to see the song as a lament for Algeria itself.

For Algerians listening to the song when it became popular in the late 1980s in less violent context could the Algiers evoked have been that of the late 1960s and 1970s? The singer, Abdelmadjid Meskoud, would have been in his early twenties in the early 1970s and would have been only nine years old at independence from France in 1962. The song contains no direct allusion to the period of French occupation (1830-1962) other than the names of localities such as Beau Fraisier. The “they” who have disfigured the city are not explicitly identified. Are rural migrants from the hinterland responsible? The Casbah is described as “disfigured” yet as Jean-Jacques Deluz observed in 2001 the Casbah had deteriorated since the early 1980s and the colonial period had already
undermined its prestige and fabric. Napoleon III did manage to restrain the settlers’ appetite for destruction and construction and salvage much of the Casbah:

The high town must stay as it is, because it is appropriate to the customs and habits of the indigenous; cutting through grand arteries may result in causing them great suffering, and all these improvements may impose hardships to the indigenous population, which does not have the same lifestyle as the Europeans. The Emperor thinks that the lower town should be reserved for the latter and it is in that part that all works of improvement and beautification should be made.

Although Meskoud’s landscape of Algiers has a timeless Algerian Islamic dimension, the Algerian landscape of nostalgia has a special place for the Algiers of the 1970s. Ed

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82 Deluz, Alger chronique urbaine, 225. See Zeynep Çelik, Urban forms and Colonial Confrontations, Algiers under French Rule (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 186. “Densities in the casbah remain very high; houses rented out room by room are occupied in patterns they were not designed for; services are few, hygienic provisions poor, and lack of maintenance rampant—all adding to the ever-growing fragility of the built fabric. The majority of the old residents have left for “better” parts of Algiers, turning the casbah increasingly into a concentration of the subproletariat and an antechamber of the city for waves of rural immigrants. This situation shows a major deviation from the socioeconomic structure of the casbah in precolonial and colonial times, when a mixture of all income levels resided there.”

83 René Lespès, Alger, étude de géographie et d'histoire urbaines (Paris, 1930), 305, quoted by Çelik, Urban forms and colonial confrontations, 38.

During my sojourn in Algiers (1993-1995) I was expressly requested not to go to the Casbah for my security.
McAllister noted while conducting research in the Bab-el-Oued quarter of Algiers in 2012 that 1970s postcards of Algiers (like those of Tunis from the same period) show “a well-maintained city with bright white buildings and old Peugeots and Renaults trundling down spotlessly clean streets, men with moustaches and oversized shirt collars and women in gleaming white haiks, neatly-trimmed trees and manicured green spaces” before the changes of the late 1980s which saw the city expand in a rapid and uncontrolled fashion. McAllister’s Algerian interlocutors, as they looked at these scenes, echoed Meskoud’s disarray in a city which has lost its former savour and personal dimension.

Algiers in 1969 hosted the Pan-African Festival which brought together performers such as Archie Shepp, Miriam Makeba, the Black Panthers Stokely Carmichael and Eldrige Cleaver, and liberation activists from across Africa in an atmosphere of fiesta in which the Algiers population shared spontaneously. It was also a period in which the Algerian state enjoyed the support of Algerian public opinion, and also had a clear and ambitious programme. Unlike Nasserism, Algerian nationalism was far from exhausted and the retreat from Third World economic prescriptions begun in Tunisia at the end of the 1960s was given a “last exhilarating lease of life” in Algeria.

85 Ibid.
86 Deluz, Alger chronique urbaine, 105.
Another dimension of nostalgia was added to Meskoud’s work by his association with the “El Gusto” project. *El Gusto* (a term from Algerian Arabic denoting pleasure or shared taste) is the title of a 2012 film directed by Safinaz Bousbia, described by the American press as an Algiers-born “child of privilege who had been educated at Swiss boarding schools and studied architecture at Oxford.”

In Algiers in 2003 she met former pupils of M’hamed El Anka, whom we discussed earlier, and managed to reconstitute an orchestra of Jewish and Muslim Algerians who had played together in the 1950s and 1960s until the Algerian War (from 1954 onwards) and independence in 1962 dispersed them.

The reconstituted orchestra, of which Abdelmadjid Meskoud was part, has made a number of successful world tours. “To modern ears, *El Gusto* sounds like a Middle-Eastern fusion act. They mix Berber, jazz and chanson vocal styles over a sturdy backdrop of Andalusian rhythms and melodies. For the older generation, however, *El Gusto* represents the old Algeria, “where community trumped politics and sectarianism.”

Given that *El Gusto* is closely associated with the “Andalusian” brand of music it can be seen in the context of particularly European evocations of al-Andalus as a proxy for a project of managing difference.


\[89\] Ibid.
Underpinning this production is therefore a sort of restorative nostalgia with a prospective dimension in the post-11 September 2001 world. The notion of *convivencia* between religions in Andalusian before 1492 and the trope of the cultures of the Mediterranean have increasingly been invoked to promote mutual understanding and tolerance in Europe, while at the same time European leaders have tightened immigration quotas and secured their borders. *El Gusto* and its associated nostalgia becomes part of a program of domesticating difference at home while at the same time enforcing border maintenance policies externally.

Discussions of nostalgia frequently differentiate as we have noted between “restorative nostalgia” to describe the recovery and reconstruction of the past, a rebuilding of the lost home, while “reflective nostalgia” is aware of distance and cherishes shattered fragments of memory. A future-oriented nostalgia stands in contrast to the critics of nostalgia’s supposed melancholy fixation on the irretrievable past. Both *Chant des Arabes* and Meskoud’s “Djezāīr al-‘āsim” possess a dimension of restoration of a fragmented past, if only by the naming of elements of the urban fabric as if they were repairing its damaged texture. The “where are the silk flags/the *zarnadjīyya*/the *m’ramma*‘…?” which punctuates both songs is a recognition of loss while an act of naming and commemoration of things and people which had fallen into oblivion.

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93 Ibid.

In this final section of Chapter 2 I shift focus to Tunis, commencing with the evocation of a personal exploration of memory and place. I situate this in the context of wider national narratives and move on to a more sustained examination in Chapter 3 of the kind of names, nostalgias and understandings related to Tunisia that circulated in the early part of the twentieth century.

Contemporary commemorations : Tunis

On 12 February 2015 I attended the projection of a film entitled *Looking for Habiba* shot in December and January 2015 by Kimbal Quist, a British visual artist. It was organized by an Italo-Tunisian association called “Twiza” in its locale in Rue Sidi Essourdou. Twiza cultivates a youthful, edgy style, describing itself on its Facebook page as a “new space, open to everyone in the heart of the Medina, in an inspiring zewiya, a historic Sufi monument. We have decided to call it “Twiza,” a Berber word meaning “a lifestyle based on sharing and collective participation.” Although the term “Twiza” is an unfamiliar term in Tunis I had encountered it in Algiers.⁹⁵

Rue Sidi Essourdou is a narrow residential street off the tourist track between the main Tunis medina artery of Rue de la Zitouna and Bab Djedid. Rue Sidi Essourdou is

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⁹⁵ The term twiza or “Touiza,” is defined by Robin Bidwell in *Morocco Under Colonial Rule. French Administration in Tribal Areas* as a system of common labour by which a widow’s fields could be ploughed or those of a marabout or a mosque constructed. During the French occupation of Morocco (1912-1956) French officers of the “Affaires Indigènes” (Native Affairs) department used the touiza system to confer legitimacy on the four days annual labour which inhabitants, unless they belonged to exempted classes such as army veterans or religious scholars, owed to the “State.” See Bidwell, *Morocco Under Colonial Rule. French Administration in Tribal Areas* (Oxford: Frank Cass, 1973), 137, 187, 232.
animated in the daytime but after dark is ill-lit and deserted. Just round the corner is Rue du Riche, site of the Djellouli Palace, residence of the late Ahmed Djellouli (1930-2011), an emblematic figure of the medina. Descended from a family of the pre-independence Beylical establishment, Djellouli was the very last *Tunisois* notable to appear in the medina wearing the *madjidi*-style scarlet chechia and a *burnous* with multiple folds. A trained eye would notice the *rosette* of the French *Légion d’honneur*. Not far from Twiza’s locale a hairdresser had black-and-white pictures of Habib Bourguiba on display outside his premises next to towels hung out to dry. Rue Sidi Essourdou is a street where different Tunisias converge.

Kimbal Quist describes *Looking for Habiba* thus:

> In 1975, my father went to Tunisia with a group of friends in a campervan. Their van broke down on the outskirts of Tunis when a local mechanic invited him and his friends to stay with his family while he fixed their van. My father later returned to Tunisia to visit the same family for a few weeks and vowed to remain in contact, but over the years lost the connection and also their contacts. As a child, I remember my father telling this story and had seen the photographs of this trip many times, wishing one day to travel like that too. After being invited to Tunis to be artist-in-residence at Twiza, I decided to see if I could find the family that my father had stayed with 40 years before. I knew some of the first names from a handful of photographs, and a vague address which no longer
existed. I enlisted the help of some Tunisian friends to see if I could track
down this family by asking around. 97

Quist managed to locate his father’s old friend and a reunion eventually took place in Ain
Zeghouan, near Carthage. Much of the film depicted Quist criss-crossing on foot the
areas of Salammbo and Carthage. With photographs taken in 1975 he and his Tunisian
entourage sought to identify the people and places depicted. How can we situate the film
in the wider landscape of nostalgia in Tunisia?

We noted earlier that the 1970s have generated in Algeria a particular type of
nostalgia associated with pride in Algeria’s place in the world, rapid improvements in
living standards, perception of unity and a palpable optimism for the future. Tunisia in
the early 1970s had moved away from a programme of experimental cooperative
economic planning. High oil prices and remittances from overseas workers in the context
of the oil boom of the 1970s sustained the economy. 98 Social media has allowed the
1970s to be revived in Tunisia, particularly the coastal suburbs of Carthage. Citroen 2Cvs
putter down eucalyptus-shaded avenues and modern hotels nestle in the greenery of
Carthage and Salammbo.

While the nostalgia studied by Ed McAllister in Bab-el-Oued avoided the political
sphere, we can note that in Tunisia 2014-2015 saw the re-emergence on to the scene of

was also shown at La Java Theatre, Paris. Counterpoints Arts London, and The Museum of
Forgetting, Norrkoping Sweden.

the former president Habib Bourguiba, notably through Raja Ferhat’s two one-man shows entitled *Bourguiba le dernier exil* and *Bourguiba au palmarium* which were performed in a number of Tunis venues. When I attended *Bourguiba le dernier exil* at the Théâtre municipal in Tunis in May 2015 the more senior members of the audience joined in the singing of *Khallidi* the national anthem of Tunisia between 1958 and 1987.

*Looking for Habiba*, shown in Twiza on 12 February 2015, was attended by an audience composed of around 70 Tunisians and Europeans, the majority of whom were probably under thirty. In the context I have described, I had the impression that those attending – and perhaps the film-maker himself - were nostalgic, even if they could not recall it personally, for Bourguiba’s Tunisia of the 1970s where foreigners could travel in a Volkswagen camper van untrammelled by constraints of time or security, happenstance encounters seemingly blossomed into lasting friendships, and economic disparities did not trouble the harmony of interpersonal relationships and “contact.”

As a first-time visitor to Tunis Kimbal Quist was struck by the personal flavour to daily interactions:

I think that for sure there is something about the young generation of Tunisians who wish Tunisia to become again the kind of open hospitable place that it was in the 70s, especially in light of all recent political upheavals, and the more recent terrorist threats etc. But what I would say in contrary, is that this kind of hospitality still does exist, and perhaps even to some extent in the same way that it did back then. For example the people I met while in Tunis, of the younger generation, were super
hospitable and open and wanted to share things. And even those people that I met while making that video were also really willing to help and open minded.\textsuperscript{99}

The visitor may want to believe that such hospitality, rarely encountered in the “West,” can persist in Tunis even when, as in the case of \textit{Looking for Habiba} local participants sought financial remuneration, creating an “uneasy side, which I did not represent in the film, which created this kind of barrier, or a layer of ‘us’ and ‘them’ rather than interested people meeting each other and making a kind of link.”\textsuperscript{100}

A film such as \textit{Looking for Habiba} is site where different nostalgic quests converge. A Western “millennial” artist may look for authentic interactions, even if these prove elusive, while a local audience, at a delicate moment in their country’s history, can seek inspiration in a Tunisia that once was and may be again. Kimbal Quist also produced a film on African migrants on the southern Tunisian border at Choucha which he described about being “in-between, about how fantasy and dreams keep you alive.”\textsuperscript{101} I noted earlier that Rue Sidi Essourdou is a place where different Tunisias seem to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{99} Kimbal Quist, 13 March 2016.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 15 March 2016.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{The Horizon is Far Away} : a short abstract documentary about a group of rejected asylum seekers who continue to live in the remains of an officially ‘closed’ refugee camp on the Tunisia/Libyan border. “Choucha” camp was established by the UNHCR to temporarily house those that were fleeing from Libya during 2011. In 2013 the camp was officially closed, and those who had been rejected asylum, mostly from sub-Saharan African countries, were advised to return to their countries of origin. Many attempted to cross the Mediterranean sea reach Europe via Lampedusa, and the rest stayed living in the desert waiting for a solution.
\end{flushleft}
converge; *Looking for Habiba* can be seen as a place where an imagined Tunisia of the past encounters the Tunisia of the precarious present and the unknown future.

The nostalgia characterizing *Looking for Habiba* can be seen as part of a wider nostalgia in a Tunisia searching for its past. During an earlier sojourn in Tunisia between 1995 and 2010 I observed a growing interest in the history of Tunisia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as an attention to the urban fabric of the city of Tunis from that period.

This chapter began with a discussion of the etymology of the term nostalgia and then sought to highlight understandings of the term in the wider Maghrebi and Arabic literary context. Nostalgia is multiform – reflective, restorative, reflective – and practitioners have different aims and agendas, as we have seen in the case of *Looking for Habiba*. The *El Gusto* project highlighted the ways that nostalgia can be used for commercial consumption and also as a part of a “soft power” approach to conflict in the Mediterranean. The next chapter will take us to Tunisia in the early twentieth century and the contests over meaning and representation.

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Chapter 3: Exile and home: past and present in interwar Tunisia

The previous chapter was informed by the themes of place and longing. In *Reflections on Exile* Edward Said has written that “all nationalisms in their early stages develop from a sense of estrangement. The struggles to win Algerian independence, to unify Germany or Italy, to liberate Algeria, were those of national groups separated – exiled – from what was construed to be their rightful way of life. Triumphant, achieved nationalism then justifies, retrospectively a history strung together in narrative form.”¹

One might add that estrangement can also be from place. The language of the *waṭan* in particular has marked the intellectual production of nationalist movements in the Arab world. This interest contrasts with a tendency to underestimate the role of land in conceptions of community among Arabs and Muslims and to over-determine the roles played by kinship and religion.² The present chapter is therefore part of a wider enquiry into the changing ways in which people have looked to the land over centuries, and the ways in which they have expressed the power of place.

This chapter explores Tunisian articulations of a sense of estrangement from what they saw as their rightful place in the world and their attempts to counter this in the period after the First World War. Tunisia as we shall see had been a French “protectorate” since 1881. This produced a centralized regime with no freely elected Tunisian representatives, effectively isolating the majority of the population from decision-making. Tunisians attempted to reconnect with and build on the constitutional experiments of the mid-nineteenth century which had seen the Fundamental Pact of 1859 guarantee liberty of treatment for all the Bey’s subjects.

I focus in this chapter on *La Tunisie martyr ses revendications* by Abd el ‘Aziz Tha’albi (1876-1940) which was published in Paris in 1919 and later in the chapter consider how restoration of the past was used in a Tunisian attempt to formulate local claims in the agricultural locality of Tebourba west of Tunis. This will enable us to appreciate the power of place and narrative at a national and at a local level. We noted earlier that there are many dimensions to nostalgia and one of these is the intended audience. How did ‘Abdel ‘Aziz Tha’albi, as a public intellectual, take account of the audiences- hostile or sympathetic - who would be receiving his work? How did these audiences mould and influence his narrative?

Tha’albi was writing in the context of colonial North Africa and the wider Mediterranean. When one thinks of estrangement and place, one can recall that Tha’albi’s family had left Algeria after the French invasion. Resistance can include “transgressive
itineraries” of avoidance and self-exile. Estrangement is multiform: Camus’ *L’Étranger* (1942) has as a settler protagonist – Meursault – for whom the nameless “Arab” is a stranger. Meursault is part of a community without ancestors and without memory. The period after the First World War saw a transfer to North Africa of French longing for foundations and permanence, as well as nostalgic evocations of the pioneering early days of the French occupation. Every locality had its *Monumen aux morts* and official visits began with the laying of a wreath at the 1914-1918 war memorial. In Tunisia rival narratives of legitimacy developed as indigenous Tunisians began to challenge the foundations of the Protectorate and members of the settler communities articulated their sense of belonging.

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6 Much of the idea of the “absurd” often seen in abstract philosophical terms can be seen as an expression by Camus of the importance for him of place and sensation. In Camus’ *Le Premier Homme*, published posthumously in 1994, the middle-aged “Jacques Cormery” (from the family name of Camus’ grandmother) goes in quest of his father killed at the Battle of the Marne in 1914. The book is organized around two intersecting narratives: the quest of Jacques, now entering middle age, for the father he never knew, and the story of his childhood in a world dominated by his mother and grandmother. His quest for his own family memory is also a quest for that of the wider settler society to which he belonged.


8 Such as that of the Resident-General to localities such as the Tunisian agricultural town of Tebourba in May 1937. See *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée* 828 (1937) :10.
“Deux peoples recherchaient dans la terre une légitimité. L’un parce qu’il sort épuisé de la Grande Guerre et qu’il reporte de l’autre côté sa nostalgie de bases et de permanences. Quant à l’autre people, il a perdu et redoute de perdre davantage encore, de la Chaouïa marocaine au Cap Bon, une part énorme de sa propriété” [Two peoples sought legitimacy in the land. One of them because it had emerged exhausted from the Great War and transferred to North Africa its nostalgia of foundations and permanence. As for the other people, it had lost an enormous part of its property, and feared that it would lose even more, from the Chaouïa in Morocco to Cap Bon in Tunisia].

The cities of North Africa echoed with different accents and languages; one might also say that they echoed with rival evocations and imaginings of the past. In this chapter I focus firstly on Tha’albi’s attempt to articulate a sense of a homeland lost and found and go on to study settler uses of nostalgia. The chapter concludes by considering how in the Tunisian locality of Tebourba nostalgia was used prospectively in the context of ongoing crisis. Initially I set the context of Tunisia after the First World War and then consider two texts: Tha’albi’s 1920 *La Tunisie martyre ses revendications*, and Charles-Félix Monchicourt’s *La Tunisie après la guerre* from the same period and finally the question of the olive trees of Tebourba as presented in the Tunisian press of spring 1937. This will serve as a bridge to Chapter 4 which is centred on the Institut des

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10 Ibid., 367.
belles-lettres arabes (IBLA) and its quest for an inclusive narrative of past and present with which Tunisian and settler communities would identify.

Context : Tunisia 1920

In order to begin to understand how the past was used as a resource to engage with a problematic present, some attention to the context in Tunisia after the First World War is required.

When Abd el ‘Aziz Tha’albi’s *La Tunisie martyre* was published in 1920, forty years had passed since the French occupation of Tunisia, hitherto an autonomous province or “regency” (eyālet) of the Ottoman Empire ruled by a bey. Tunisia’s population in 1881 was estimated at 1,300,000 in addition to 11,000 Italians and a small French community of about 700, rising to 10,000 by the early 1890s. By 1926, six years after *La Tunisie martyre ses revendications* was published, the population of Tunisia was

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12 A title of Turkish origin employed by the rulers of Tunis since the late sixteenth century. The term himāya, the usual Arabic translation of “protectorate” is used of practices and institutions of “protection” which were important in classical Islamic society. In Tunisia before the French occupation of 1881 the himāya denoted legal protection accorded to certain Muslim and Jewish Tunisians by European governments. See Fatma Ben Slimane, “Définir ce qu’est être Tunisien. Litiges autour de la nationalité de Nessim Scemama (1873-1881),” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 137 (2015). The term himāya also had a variety of diplomatic uses before 1881 including France’s self-assigned role as “protector” of all Catholics in the Levant. Cahen, Cl., P. J. Vatikiotis and G. S. Colin, “Ḥimāya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 June 2016.

over 2,000,000: 1,865,000 Tunisian Muslims, 50,000 Jews, and the remainder French (50,000) and Italian (90,000).\textsuperscript{15} Tunisian Muslims and Jews were subjects of the Bey whereas Algerians were French nationals without voting rights.\textsuperscript{16} In both Tunisia and Algeria, French rule was “premised on the notion that ‘Europeans’ and ‘natives’ constituted distinct classes of people with corresponding differences in rights.”\textsuperscript{17} This disparity will be one of the focuses of \textit{La Tunisie martyre} which contains an undercurrent of deep unease that a small settler minority will render the indigenous minority strangers in their own land.

The Marsa Convention of 8 June mentions the term “protectorate,” mentioning in its first article that “Afin de faciliter au Gouvernement Francais l’accomplissement de son Protectorat, S.A. le bey de Tunis s’engage à procéder aux réformes administratives, judiciaires et financières que le Gouvernement Français jugera utiles.”\textsuperscript{18} [in order to facilitate the French Government’s implementation of its Protectorate, His Highness the Bey of Tunis undertakes to proceed with the administrative, judicial and financial reforms judged useful by the French Government.] A central claim of the “protectorate” was that Tunisia remained a sovereign state, separated by an international border from neighbouring Algeria, which had been declared an integral part of France since 1848.\textsuperscript{19}

As even French observers recognized, the sovereignty of the Tunisian government

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{16} Mary Dewhurst Lewis, \textit{Divided rule : sovereignty and empire in French Tunisia} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 62.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

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became scarcely more than a fiction in the face of French administrative oversight of key ministries: “la souveraineté beylicale s’est affaiblie au point de n’être plus guère qu’une fiction.” 20 Most Tunisian ministries became “technical directorates” headed by French officials and by 1914 there were nearly 4,000 French civil servants in Tunis.21 The lower ranks of this cohort were described in 1906 by the Tunisian reformist Muhammad Lasram as a “proletariat administratif” disinclined to engage with Tunisians as colleagues.22 Overall control was exercised by a French Secretary-General described by Tha’ālbi as the absolute master of the country’s administration.23 The term of “fiction” used by Henri de Montety recurs in Tha’ālbi’s description of the role of the Tunisian Prime Minister as a rubber-stamp for the Secretary-General. This fiction was sustained by choreographed displays of ceremonial amity between French and Tunisian officials with underlings whispering like deacons addressing a bishop at High Mass.24

20 Henri de Montety, *Enquête sur les vieilles familles et les nouvelles élites en Tunisie* (1939), manuscript consulted at the Institut des belles-lettres arabes (IBLA), Tunis (Dossier T.13/1), 23.


22 *Questions tunisiennes: communications présentées au Congrès colonial de Marseilles 5-9 septembre 1906*, 49.


24 See *Tunisie 1910-1960 Victor Sebag:un photographe dans le siècle* (Tunis : Ceres, 2011), 44, 235. Daniel Rivet compares the opaque working of the protectorate bureaucracies at their upper levels to “a religious service with a personnel of liturgists skilled at scrupulous observance of the rubrics.” Rivet, *Le Maghreb à l’épreuve de la colonisation*, 214. In Tunisia, the French Resident-General actually attended Mass four times a year (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption), a ceremony which lingered on until 1961 as a relic of France’s role as “protector” of Catholics in Tunisia under the 1685 Capitulations. See Philippe Delisle
publications such as the *Livre d’Or* displayed photographs of Tunisian “Ministers of His Highness the Bey” next to French “Chefs de service” but this latter group held the reins of power.\(^\text{25}\)

Meanwhile beyond the fiction and theatre of official Tunis, in the rural interior of Tunisia radical change was underway. From the 1890s onwards French settlers were able to appropriate state lands, collective tribal lands and *habūs* lands.\(^\text{26}\) As Tha‘ālbi explains, fewer than 100 absentee landowners owned 500,000 hectares out of a total of 700,000 hectares in French hands.\(^\text{27}\) Only one out of forty of the active French population of around 50,000 were agricultural *colons*. Agricultural machines replaced agricultural workers, swelling the ranks of paupers who gravitated towards urban centres. Mendacity and destitution were established as features of the colonial streetscape. “Avec la colonisation est né le paupérisme indigène. Jadis on ne voyait pas comme de nos jours,

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26 *Habus*: inalienable property set aside a pious trust with any revenue generated either used for charitable purposes or for the sustenance of the legatee’s descendants. In 1874 a Habous Administration *jam‘iyat al hubus* was founded in Tunis. In 1896 protectorate officials forced this entity to hand over land for settlement. As Tha‘albi mentions, the Habous Administration was under the control of the Secretary-General. See Tha‘albi, *La Tunisie Martyre* ….37.

27 Ibid., 190.
The pauperization of the native population developed along with colonization. In the past one did not see as one does today at certain times of the year, swarms of beggars of all ages and both sexes invading the street and café terraces of the towns of the Regency.”]²⁸

Tha’ālbi’s response in *La Tunisie martyre*

Tha’ālbi was a graduate of the Zeitouna mosque-university, and his modernist views – in 1905 he had co-authored with Hedi Sebaï and César Benattar *L’Esprit libéral du Coran* - together with his defence of core cultural values aligned him with the Young Tunisian movement. This was composed mostly of members of urban baldiya families and its highly-educated 1,500 members had difficulty connecting with the wider population particularly in rural areas.²⁹ Tha’ālbi was exiled from Tunis in 1912 after demonstrations provoked by rumoured French encroachment on the Jallāz cemetery in Tunis. Having gone to Versailles to petition the Allies for concessions he wrote *La Tunisie martyre* in Paris, and it was published in late 1919. In 1920 he participated in the foundation of the Dustūr (Constitution) party but left Tunis in 1923. By the time he returned to Tunis in 1937, the neo-Dustūr party with its secular and dynamic character

²⁸ *Questions tunisiennes: communications présentées au Congrès colonial de Marseilles*, 44.

had marginalized Tha‘ālbi. The issue of a postage stamp in 1999 commemorating
Tha‘ālbi brought him back, to some limited degree, into public awareness.³⁰

Along with a call for constitutional autonomy, Tha‘ālbi seeks to summon up pre-
1881 Tunisia, reminding his Tunisian readers of the contours of the homeland from
which colonialism has exiled them. In comparison with the measured tones adopted by
the Young Tunisians before the First World War, La Tunisie Martyre represents a change
of tone and content.³¹ He affirms that the “Tunisians live in their own country like
undesirable foreigners among citizens.”³² [Le Tunisien vit dans son propre pays en
eétranger indésirable parmi des citoyens.] A similar sense of estrangement is found in a
Tunisian Arabic-language newspaper report from spring 1937 discussing the
appropriation by settlers of the olive trees at Tebourba, a question to which we shall
return.³³ In Chapter 13 of La Tunisie martyre he uses terms such “conquering caste” (to
describe European settlers) while Tunisians are “the vanquished people, the inferior

³⁰Abdelaziz Thaalbi Naissance du mouvement national tunisien (Tunis: Éditions Cartaginoiseries,
Press, 2003), 78.
³¹Sraieb, “Note sur les dirigeants politiques et syndicalistes tunisiens de 1920 à 1924, 96-97.
³²Abd el ‘Aziz et-Tha‘albi, La Tunisie Martyre (Paris : 1920, 20), quoted by Sraieb, “Note sur
les dirigeants politiques et syndicalistes tunisiens de 1920 à 1924…100. Although Tha‘albi
was presumed to be the author of the book it did not bear his name. Tha‘albi’s text was
probably initially drafted in Arabic and translated by Ahmad Sakka. See Kenneth Perkins, A
History Of Modern Tunisia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77. Sakka,
originally from Monastir, had studied at the Lycée Carnot in Tunis and obtained a law degree
in France in 1917. He was a close associate of André Berthon, a Communist deputy and
advocate for Tunisian nationalists.
³³Ez-Zahra, 5 May 1937.
race.” Key to Tha’albi’s vision for Tunisia was common citizenship for every person born in Tunisia or continually resident there for ten years. As we noted earlier, Muslim and Jewish Tunisians were subjects of the Bey while French settlers held French citizenship. Since June 1914 the Tunisian subjects of the Bey had been recognized as Tunisian nationals but Tha’albi is calling for a common citizenship for Muslim and Jewish Tunisians as well as the European communities of French and Italian citizens present in the country.

What are some of the resonances of this term “exile” in Arabic? Definitions of الغربة can include “the state or condition of a foreigner,” “exile in metaphysical or mystical terms,” while the غريب is the person who is isolated, disorientated, without family. Marcelin Beaussier’s colonial-era dictionary gives the example of a curse: “May God afflict you through the absence of your loved ones.” Allah ibalîk bil-ghurba. Daniel Rivet suggests that in the context of Morocco in the interwar period ghurba meant emigration to Europe in quest of shurba (“soup” - ‘subsistence’) while the

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34 Dellagi, Abdelaziz Thaalbi Naissance du movement national tunisien, 125.
35 Sraieb, “Note sur les dirigeants politiques et syndicalistes tunisiens de 1920 à 1924, 102. See too A. Durand-Anglieviel, Ce que la Tunisie demande à la France (Tunis, 1928), 41.
36 Dewhurst-Lewis, Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 116. Algerians had been recognized by jurists as French nationals since 1834 and this status as “nationals” (not citizens) was formalized in 1865. Ibid., 70.
hijra denoted the Pilgrimage eastwards to Mecca. Ightirāb was the risk of loss of self and identity in the labyrinth of Western (gharbī) society.

While Tha’ālbi foregrounds the terms of exile and exclusion, he does not promote a narrow nationalism, seeking to avoid accusations from the colon lobby of “xenophobia,” a term also used by European spokespersons for the Socialist Party in Tunisia. In a confident historical tableau he lists the multiple contributions of the successive cultures which have existed in Tunisia:

Le people prenait seulement à ses maîtres d’un moment les qualités compatibles avec sa propre nature: l’activité maritime aux Carthaginois; l’activité agricole aux Romains, aux Arabes, la religion, la justice, l’égalité démocratique, les sciences et les arts; aux Turcs l’organisation politique et la solidarité sociale l’assistance et la bienfaisance. [The people took from their temporary masters the qualities which were compatible with its nature: maritime skills from the Carthaginians, agriculture from the Romans, from the Arabs they acquired religion, justice, democratic equality, science and the arts, and from the Turks, political organization and solidarity through pious foundations.]

This historical trajectory marked by “amalgams successifs” produced “une race à caractère tout particulier” strongly reticent to any foreign attempt to absorb it or

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assimilate it. This is strongly reminiscent of the theses developed fifty years later by Béchir Ben Slama in his *Al-shakhsiyya al-tūnisiyya, khasā’isuha wa muqawwimātuha* (1974) which developed Bourguiba’s notion of a Tunisian personality open to the wider world.\(^{43}\)

Tha’ālbi does not in his glowing portrayal of Tunisian history highlight the dangers facing Tunisia in an interconnected world. The statesman Kheireddine Pasha in his *Aqwam al-Masālik fi Ma’rifat Aḥwāl al-Mamālik* [*The Surest Path to Knowledge regarding the Condition of Countries*] written in 1867 apprehended the spread of European influence, overwhelming weaker nations in its path like a torrent in full flow.\(^{44}\) Tha’ālbi revives memories of Tunisia as a Mediterranean crossroads of cultures: the presence of the Jewish community part of which fled “European fanaticism” in the Middle Ages is foregrounded as well as the construction of a church in Tunis by Ramdan Bey in 1697. European traders are seen as “facteurs intéressants de la prospérité

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 37.


\(^{44}\) “I heard from some European statesmen words to the effect that European civilization is a torrent flowing across the face of the earth, and anything resisting it is uprooted; one may fear for the nations neighbouring Europe unless they go with the flow of the current through their reforming programmes and thus they may be saved from drowning.”
économique” [interesting vectors of economic prosperity] while the rights granted to Europeans by the 1861 “Law of the Tunisian state” Qanūn al-dawla et-tūnisiyya (usually translated as “Constitution”) are seen as evidence of innate Tunisian tolerance rather than as concessions resulting from foreign pressure. Thaʿālbi was writing for a Franco-Tunisian audience and the book was favourably reviewed by the Socialist press in France. His foregrounding of the Mediterranean recalls the writings of the Tunis Socialist activist André Duran-Angliviel although Thaʿālbi diverges radically from secular Socialist aspirations for the creation of a multicultural North Africa working class composed of Mediterranean peoples.

Later in the 1930s Thaʿālbi would return to the theme of Carthage which he saw as representing the Semitic “East” made up of wisdom and spirituality while Rome was one of the forms of Aryan materialism. Thaʿālbi by this point had travelled widely in the Middle East, southern Europe, and Asia between 1923 and 1937. Can he have been aware of the quest undertaken, notably in Egypt, for the possible foundations of a Mediterranean identity based on Eastern spiritual values? One can note similarities

45 Thaʿālbi, La Tunisie Martyre ….37.
46 Ibid., 183. See Rivet, Le Maghreb à l’épreuve de la colonisation, 144.
47 Dellagi, Abdelaziz Thaalbi Naissance du movement national tunisien
48 See for example Charles Lareyne’s article “Est ce qu’il y a une nation tunisienne?” Tunis Socialiste (1924) : n 711 or “Pas de Confusion” by Duran-Angliviel, Tunis Socialiste (1924) : n 712. Both articles blend Socialist internationalism with an aspiration for a multiracial worker-friendly society in Tunisia without “chauvinism.”
between Tha’ālbi’s vision of a spiritual Semitic world and the musings of the
Alexandrian writer Gaston Zananiri in his *L’esprit méditerranéen dans le Proche-Orient*
which discerned a common spirituality uniting Jews, Christians and Muslims, with roots
in the Semitic Fertile Crescent.\(^5^0\)

Tha’ālbi’s foregrounding of the Mediterranean also marks a departure from
Tunisian historiography. Tunisian chroniclers associated the Mediterranean with the
frontier between the Muslim and Christian worlds.\(^5^1\) The *Muqadimma* of Ibn Khaldoun
presents the Mediterranean, termed the *Bahr al Rūm* or the *Bahr al Shām*, as being
composed of an eastern and a southern shore dominated by Islamic rulers while the north,
west of Byzantium, is Christian. Sixteenth and seventeenth-century Muslim
commentators portrayed the European outposts dotting the Maghrebi coast as dangerous
enclaves inhabited by “the evil infidels who are settled in the coasts of the sea,” to quote
a letter of the Ottoman Sultan Selim II dating from 1573.\(^5^2\) The heterogeneous collection
of Christianized Arabs and roguish European malefactors inhabiting the presidios were as

\(^{50}\) Gaston Zananiri, *L’esprit méditerranéen dans le Proche Orient* (Marseille: Les Cahiers du Sud,
1939). Zananiri (1903-1996) was descended from a Syrian Greek Catholic family which had
settled in Alexandria in 1610. In later life he became a Catholic priest in the Dominican Order.
152-154, 221-222, 254-256.

June 2016.)

\(^{52}\) Abël Jelil Temimi, ed. *الأندلوسيين قضية المرسكيين لدولة الأثمانية* (Zaghouan: Publications du Centre
d’études et de Recherches, 1989), 104, quoted by Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes,
1578 -1727* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 16.
welcome, as Nabil Matar has said, as an Algerian corsair outpost in Portsmouth would have been among the populations of southwest England and Wales.\(^53\)

Tha’ālbi’s memorialising of the Mediterranean owes much to the work of French historians in the same way that Jugurtha, like other Berber monarchs of antiquity, returned to historical imaginations in the Maghreb when French classicists brought him in to the school curriculum in Kabylia in northern Algeria by the intermediary of teachers trained at the École Normale in Bouzareah (Algiers) founded in 1865.\(^54\)

A second departure from the established canon is the way that the term “people” is employed by Tha’ālbi. Tha’ālbi was trained in classical Arabic while his Paris-based translator Ahmed Sakka expressed himself in Tunisian spoken Arabic. We may suppose that during the composition of *La Tunisie martyre* the Arabic term *sha’ab* – “people” as in “the Tunisian people” suggesting a self-aware collectivity – was employed. However this term (*sha’ab*) was not employed by the Tunisian writers of the latter part of the nineteenth century such as Kheirredine Pasha.\(^55\) The rulers of the country thought of the inhabitants of the country as subjects (*ra’iyya*) while the term of *ikhwān* (“brothers”) is used by the chronicler Ahmad ibn Abi Dhiyaf (1802-1874) when he defines the Tunisian

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) James McDougall, *History and Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150.

Jews as “our brothers in the homeland.” Demeerseman suggests it would be naïve to imagine that such inclusive sentiments, reflecting the spirit of the 1861 Constitution, were generally shared at the time of Ahmad ibn Abi Dhiyaf. We noted earlier the way that the French authorities sought to differentiate between different communities and jurisdictions, notably “French” and “Tunisian.” A term such as “Tunisian people” therefore becomes a discursive site of contest, acquiring the signification of a political community and infusing new meaning into a differentiated status created by the colonial “mapping” of post-1881 Tunisia.

The use of the Mediterranean and the presence of the term “people” in Tha‘ālbi’s text shed light on the innovative and creative dimension of his undertaking in La Tunisie martyre. We noted in the previous chapter in our remarks on “restorative nostalgia” that the quest for the nostos or home involves restoring what is perceived as having been lost. This can be understood as positing a changeless self or personality of the people, a self which awaits reposssession and recovery. If we dispense with terms such as “personality” and “character” as explanatory categories and see them as figures of representation, another dimension to restoration becomes visible in which Tha‘ālbi’s work is one of creative imagination. To criticize Tha‘ālbi, as many commentators at the time did, for factual inaccuracy or over-embellishing the situation of pre-1881 Tunisia, is


57 Ibid.

58 See note 15 above.

59 McDougall, History and Culture of Nationalism in Algeria, 144-183.
to underestimate the invented dimension of Tha’âlbi’s narrative of a past pointing the way to a future. We noted in a previous the insight of Maurice Halbwachs that memory is a reconstruction rather than a restoration. This is equally true of the historical imagination in the colonial Maghreb which, rather than being a restitution of a sovereign national past, was a reordering of events in a way that sought to “make sense.”

*La Tunisie après la guerre*

*La Tunisie martyre* was well received by the metropolitan Socialist press and diffused clandestinely in Tunisia. An Arabic translation apparently circulated although it has since disappeared. *La Tunisie Martyre* was taken seriously by the French authorities and Charles-Félix Monchicourt (1873-1937) was tasked with writing a refutation. Monchicourt served in the Tunisian administration for over thirty years, becoming in his declining years a seaside sage in a villa -cum- museum at La Goulette. Spurred into action by the publication of Tha’âlbi’s *La Tunisie Martyre. Ses revendications* Monchicourt assembled under the title of *La Tunisie après la guerre : problèmes politiques* a number of essays previously published between 1919 and 1921 in *L’Afrique française*, organ of the colonial pressure group Comité de l’Afrique française. As a serving government official – one of the twenty French “Civil Controllers” monitoring

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Ibid., 237. “The return to the past is either the return to something so remote that it has to be reconstructed, a ‘rebirth’ or ‘renaissance’ or more likely, a return to something that had never existed at all, but has been invented for the purpose. Nationalism could not be the return to a lost past… It had, in effect, to invent the tradition it claimed to bring to fruition.” Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 34-35, quoted by McDougall, *History and Culture of Nationalism*, 237.
the activities of the Tunisian qa’ids who collected taxes at a local level – Monchicourt wrote under the pseudonym Rodd balek (“look out!”) taking up the familiar settler refrain of latent insecurity.63

Tha’ālbi made a creative excursus into Tunisia’s past in order to highlight the desolation caused by the protectorate regime. Monchicourt deploys counter-nostalgia of his own, developing two main narratives and some supporting narratives. They show the enduring features of the colonial imaginative landscape, and - inadvertently - reveal the impact of world war and colonialism on Tunisia.64 The title of Monchicourt’s collection of essays - La Tunisie après la guerre suggests some awareness on his part that the post-war situation has novel features, yet it quickly become evident that he sees his task as one of recalling realities obscured by upheavals within and outside Tunisia.

Firstly he underlines the persistent enmity between Tunisian Muslims and foreigners, whatever the prevailing political conjuncture. The “superficial observer” cannot see perceive this “ethnico-religious intolerance,” the implication being that only the expert – Monchicourt – can perceive it.65 Clarity and resolution however can keep


this animosity in check and transient events such as the Djellaz riots in 1911 are epiphenomena.\textsuperscript{66} He goes on to affirm that Tha‘albi and his fellow-activists do not represent the mass of the people who, Monchicourt maintains, have a lack of interest in politics.\textsuperscript{67} He seeks to isolate the Young Tunisians – who were mainly from families of urban notables – from the rest of the population by underlining their distance from the rural masses, adding sarcastically that none of Tha‘albi’s associates served in the French army although they called for political reform as a reward for the war service of rural Tunisians.\textsuperscript{68}

These narratives frame Monchicourt’s first exercise in restorative nostalgia when he constructs a Latin lineage for the French presence in North Africa. When the first French military contingent arrived in Tunisia in 1881 they were able to read classical inscriptions and so have returned to their ancient home from which they had been separated over the centuries. “They have accomplished a restoration” [Nous avons accompli une restauration]. Having returned “home” after centuries of separation, France will not leave, contradicting Tha‘álbi’s depiction of transient settlers preoccupied by quick profits:

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} 79.

\textsuperscript{68} “Les jeunes bourgeois tunisiens, si ardents en ce moment à monnayer en faveur de leurs propres ambitions le sang verse par leurs corréligionnaires, se gardent bien d’exposer aux balles aveugles leurs précieuses personnes” [The young Tunisian bourgeois, so keen at this time to trade for their own ambitions the blood spilled by their co-religionists are careful not to expose their own precious persons to bullets fired blindly.] Monchicour, \textit{La Tunisie après la guerre}, 86.
Répétons-le à satiété. Nous ne sommes pas en Tunisie en touristes. Nous n’y faisons pas une partie de camping politique comme l’Angleterre en Égypte ou l’Italie en Tripolitaine. La France tient par toutes ses fibres au Maroc, à l’Algérie, et à la Tunisie [Reiterate this constantly. We are not in Tunisia as tourists. We are not on an extended camping party like England in Egypt or Italy in Tripolitania.]

This Latin heritage or return of the French to their North African nostos was a well-worn theme by the time Monchicourt deployed it. In Algeria in the nineteenth century the French conquest was accompanied by archaeologists who identified Latin continuities and traces. Monchicourt’s second exercise in nostalgia is for the “good old days” of pioneering colonials such as Bernard Roy, secretary-general of the Tunisian government between 1889 and 1919, whom he compares unfavourably with desk-bound bureaucrats unable, in Monchicourt’s expression, to “step into Roy’s babouches.” Roy knew “the language of the Prophet like one of his disciples, collected ancient Arabic inscriptions, and knew thoroughly native history and mentalities”[Il savait la langue du Prophète

69 Ibid., 83.
70 Rivet, Le Maghreb `à l’épreuve de la colonisation , 246. In the early 1950s photographs in the Bulletin économique et social de Tunisie show the Roman ruins at Dougga being used by the French military as a setting for ceremonies including induction of recruits and the dedication of new regimental colours.
71 Monchicourt, La Tunisie après la guerre, 319.
comme un de ses disciples, recueillait les anciennes inscriptions arabes, connaissait à
fond l’histoire et les habitudes indigènes."

Roy had arrived in Tunis in 1867 as part of a telegraphic mission and became
civil controller (district officer) in Le Kef in 1884, and in 1889 Secretary-General of the
Tunisian government. He died in May 1919 after thirty years’ service. The Secretary
General and the civil controller are presented by Monchicourt as moral tutors for the local
staff, easing reforms into effect by their knowledge of local mentalities and culture.

The departure of Bernard Roy left Tunisians, according to Monchicourt, with no
alternative other than to rally to the Young Tunisian party. Roy’s successors “do not have
the time or the aptitude to mix with the local population and pay attention to its needs and
desires… they are no longer the French leaders of native society, they merely supervise
Tunisian office staff. Contact and confidence have been lost.”

Similarly the civil
controllers were losing their taste for action, according to Monchicourt, as central

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72 Ibid. 92

73 Ibid., 92. This therapeutic understanding of administration was shared by British agents of
“Indirect Rule” through local notables in Nigeria at the time Monchicourt was writing: “The
successful Resident must possess an inborn sympathy for the native and his affairs…next after
this the most important qualification is a sense of proportion, more important than special
industry or special facility in acquiring native languages. So subtle are the bases on which he
arrives at a decision that he may sometimes have difficulty in making a case on paper for
action he may have taken, even though he feels , and subsequently may prove, that action to
have been perfectly correct.” C.L. Temple, Native Races and Their Rulers; Sketches and
Studies of Official Life and Administrative Problems in Nigeria (Cape Town: 1918), 68-70,
quoted by Kathryn Tidrick, Empire and the English Character, 207.

74 Monchicourt, La Tunisie après la guerre. 67, 70.

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administration in Tunis intervened directly in local affairs without producing solutions, recruitment was in crisis, and civil controllers spent their time dealing with veterans’ pension payments instead of mingling with the locals.  

Civil controllers and the Secretary-General were no longer the “French leaders of native society,” simply the administrative superiors of Tunisian civil servants. Monchicourt, ever the bureaucrat, proposed creating another directorate, a “Directorate of Native Affairs” with an experienced African hand who could re-establish the links existing in the past. In 1914 there was, he claims, no “native problem.” Respectful and welcoming towards authority, the natives obeyed even before orders were given. Roy’s guiding principle had been to touch as little as possible local laws and moral codes. The role he proposes is that of the older brother who respects ancestral tradition and continue to arbitrate between races ever-inclined in North Africa to oppress one another.

It is striking that Monchicourt’s nostalgic evocation of Roy’s stabilizing prowess seems to be recalling a distant, vanished age. In reality Roy died about a year and half before the publication of La Tunisie après la guerre and barely ten years had passed since what Monchicourt sees as a period of perfect equilibrium in Tunisian affairs. In a sense,  


77 Monchicourt, La Tunisie après la guerre, 95.

78 Ibid., 447.

79 Ibid. 449.

80 Ibid.
Monchicourt unwittingly acknowledges that colonialism has been an experience of creative destruction over a short time-period. A second more general point one might make is that nostalgia for the recent past, one overtaken by the acceleration of history, is a modern experience. Nostalgia was once for a distant past, but this is no longer the case.\(^8\)

**Tebourba: reading the context**

Remaining in the context of interwar Tunisia, I mentioned earlier the situation at Tebourba in 1937 as reported by the Arab-language press in 1937.\(^8\) Although this episode came to prominence in the press we shall see that the situation at Tebourba had dragged on since the early 1920s. At a local level Tunisians facing marginalisation used restorative nostalgia in order to engage with an ongoing crisis and with a specific audience.

The context in Tunisia had changed since Tha’ālbi’s publication in 1920 of *La Tunisie martyre*. Following the election of the Popular Front in France in 1936 and the appointment of Armand Guillon as Resident-General in the French protectorate of Tunisia, hopes were high that social reforms applied in France would be implemented in Tunisia, although by 1937 unease was expressed in the Tunis press about the dilatory

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\(^8\) “Today, nostalgia threatens to engulf all of past time and much of the present landscape. Antique dealers have jettisoned the hundred-year barrier, treat 1930s Art Deco with the reverence accorded Queen Anne.” David Lowenthal, “Past time, present place: landscape and memory,” *The Geographical Review* 65 (1975), 1-36.

\(^8\) See page 12, note 26.
pace of reform. The Destour had by this time split, with the secession of the Neo-Destour party in 1934. This brought together younger, more dynamic members. In 1930 a quarter of Tunisia’s population was under twenty-five years old with an overall growth in the Tunisian Muslim population of one-third (634,000) between 1911 and 1936.

Members of the Neo-Destour such as Tahar Sfar and Habib Bourguiba, both around thirty years younger than Tha‘ālbi, had studied in France and had also been adept at mobilizing Tunisian public opinion around identity-related issues such as the campaign against the Eucharistic Congress at Carthage in 1930.

On the economic front, in a context of overproduction caused by the Great Depression the authorities sought to support primarily export crops cultivated by settlers. Locusts, drought, and depression caused mass rural unemployment. In April 1937 the Rashidiyya Institute organized a charity concert in the Municipal Theatre in Tunis. Press advertising for this event called on Tunisians to “think about your poverty-stricken brothers.”

Tebourba is an agricultural locality in the environs of Tunis, in the Medjerda valley, one of the most fertile regions of Tunisia. The Medjerda river traverses northern Tunisia from west to east. From November to April the river is in flood, deep and muddy.

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Allied soldiers advancing towards Tunis in late 1942 were struck by the geometrical olive groves around Tebourba and the landscape which recalled the Central Valley of California. French settlers had occupied the terrain by the early 1890s. L’Association des Colons Français de la région de Tèbourba [The Tebourba Region Association of French Settlers], founded in 1898 was the oldest in Tunisia. The population of the town in the mid-1920s was 2,500 of whom 230 were settlers. In the early 1920s the total European population of this north-western area of Tunisia, which included towns such as Beja and Mateur, was just under 5,000 at a time when, according to Tha’albi’s calculations, there around 1,600 active settlers in Tunisia. The town’s distant origins went back to classical antiquity and the Roman foundation of Thuburbo Minus. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the arrival of Andalusian Moriscos turned the locality into a thriving agricultural area with olives and fruit trees as well three zāwiyas

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richly decorated with tiles. Tebourba is therefore a site where different strands of memory converge: French authors highlighting classical antiquity while Tunisian commentators have foregrounded the locality’s Andalusian connections.

Maps of the locality from the 1920s indicate the presence of numerous French farms with names such as St Michel, St. Georges, Les Closeraies and a dense road and rail network with the rail line from Tunis to Souk Ahras in Algeria following the course of the Medjerda river. Roads cutting westwards across the landscape are designated by their Algerian destinations such as “Route de La Calle” and Route n° 5, Route de Souk Ahras. The locality was integrated into a wider framework of colonial communication. In 1884 the Algerian-based Compagnie de Bône-Guelma completed the Tunis-Algiers railway. The line expedited the movement of agricultural and mineral products to market but also bound the new protectorate to the French departments in Algeria. The Tunisian government covered the costs of extending the network in Tunisia and the revenue for this came from Tunisian taxpayers even though settlers benefited from the railways far

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more than Tunisians. Railway lines and roads cutting across the landscape, French nomenclatures and map grids all constitute overlays which obscure indigenous ways of looking at and naming the landscape and its history.

The olives of Tebourba

In early May 1937 the Arabic-language newspaper Ez-Zahra published an article entitled “Effects of colonization on the town of Tebourba. Āthar al-ist‘imār fī baldat Tebourba”

This had originally been presented by Resident-General Guillon during his visit by Muhammad Ibn Hussein, member of the Executive Committee of the Free Destour Party, during Guillon’s visit to Tebourba some weeks earlier. A war memorial was inaugurated by Guillon who heard glowing reports of how well settlers and Tunisians coexisted and more importantly how much progress had been made in agricultural development. Such

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97 See Perkins, A History Of Modern Tunisia, 57.

98 Ez-Zahra, 5 May 1937. The term in Tunisian Arabic for European settler (colon) is mu‘ammir. See Berque, Le Maghreb entre deux guerres, 333. ‘Ammara is defined by Marcelin Beaussier as “peupler,” “civiliser.” See Beaussier, Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français, 678.

The term al-ist‘imār employed by Ez-Zahra is absent from Beaussier’s late nineteenth-century dictionary and one senses that it already had a more totalizing sense going beyond the cultivation of the land, corresponding to contemporary uses of the term al-ist‘imār to denote colonialism and colonization. The term for Tunisians working the land was jīb fellāh. Beaussier’s definition of this term is: “labourer, cultiver” Beaussier, Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français, 760. However these boundaries between the initiative of the dynamic settler and the labour of the subaltern fellah were changing. Ez-Zahra called for the Tunisian fellah to be involved in ta‘mīr –cultivation of land in the sense of improving or civilizing – and not be marginalized by the European settler or mu‘ammir. (Ez-Zahra 24/5/37).

claims had been made almost verbatim from the early years of the Protectorate. René Millet, one of Guillon’s predecessors, had claimed that the locality had been overgrown with weeds prior to the settlers’ arrival.\textsuperscript{100} Ez-Zahra’s article presents a different view of the past:

The town of Tebourba formerly enjoyed a reputation for its wide and fertile fields, its rich and fruitful olive trees, its fruitful gardens and vineyards, all of which led to its prosperity. This is hardly surprising since the largest river in the country, the Medjerda, passes through the region, irrigating the country. In the last century Tebourba enjoyed prosperity. Its economic progress was steady and its people were in a state of well-being. The plantations of olive trees were the source of its prosperity and the abundant agricultural land. There was no dispute over agricultural land and the inhabitants cultivated and harvested abundantly. The colonization of the area by settlers despoiled the people of the large henshīrs around the city; the settlers used these for their own ends. Finally settlers took over the olive trees.

The olive trees, belonging to Muslim waqfs were made over at a very low price to one particular person who made a large profit. Because of this the mosques and zaouias in Tebourba have fallen into state of disrepair and in

\textsuperscript{100}\textit{Ibid.} Millet is sometimes described as “liberal” and sympathetic to reform (Perkins, \textit{A History Of Modern Tunisia}, 56-57), but with regard to Tebourba his reading of the situation seems heavily influenced by the settler narratives of “making a wilderness bloom.”
addition to these results, which must be painful for the spirits of our ancestors who are in their graves, the inhabitants in general have been deprived from cultivating these olive trees and benefiting from the sale of their fruit by the Forestry Directorate.”

The article summed up the situation at Tebourba in the Arabic phrase طبربة، الغربة والشرر “Tebourba ash-sharr (“hunger, famine”) wa‘l ghurba”(exile) recalling Tha‘albi’s depiction of Tunisians as exiles in their own land. This article was originally a report was originally addressed to the Resident-General himself and it goes on to name the above-mentioned “one particular person” as Vincent, a local settler, the principal beneficiary from the sale of the waqf property. Vincent’s decade-long manoeuvres had been mentioned in an article published in Tunis Socialiste in 1924. The article highlighted the support he had received from his influential friend Pelletier, president of the Chamber of Agriculture. 101 In December 1931 the police and the spāhis arrested “several natives” who had sought to harvest olives on land ceded to settlers. 102

One may wonder to what extent an evocation of Tebourba’s past prosperity was audible above the official settler narrative which for a generation had imposed itself and which the article in Ez-Zahra directly contradicts. Nevertheless it is evidence of how after

101 Tunis Socialiste (1924) : n 432 “Le scandale de Tebourba.” Pelletier was later vice-president of the Grand Council. L’Afrique du Nord illustrée 255 (1926): 5. The Grand Council consisted of separate French and Tunisian chambers weighted in favour of the settler population: The forty-four French members were elected by Tunisia’s French population while the eighteen Tunisian members were chosen by elected councils with a limited franchise in the Civil Control sectors.

102 See L’Echo d’Alger, 10 December 9131. “Des incidents a Tebourba.”
nearly sixty years of “protection” nostalgic evocations of an idyllic past were deployed to counter the advance of colonial capitalism. As we noted earlier, quoting Jacques Berque, the land had become in the Maghreb a site where communities of settlers and indigenous peoples sought to map out and express their sense of belonging and rootedness.\(^\text{103}\) This nostalgia also had a prospective forward-looking dimension in that it was part of an initiative intended to change the situation for the better. It is striking however that this change is seen as taking place within the framework of the protectorate:

> We thought it our duty to reveal to your Excellency the injustice occasioned by what has become known as the Affair of the olive trees of Tebourba. The inhabitants of Tebourba place high hopes in you (the Resident General) and the fulfilment of your government’s promise to help the local population in the face of the prejudice and wrong they have suffered. You have taken upon yourself the mission of advancing this weak yet tranquil people on the path of happiness and civilization, serving the interests of France, and treating those under her flag equally.\(^\text{104}\)

Nostalgia for pre-protectorate Tebourba does not therefore translate into a direct challenge to the Resident-General and the system he represented. The longing for the Tebourba of the past is integrated into a longing for an ideal moral landscape, embodied in a France of republican values which implicitly challenged the mercantile values of the settlers.

\(^{103}\) See note 7 above.

\(^{104}\) *Ez-Zahra*, 5 May 1937.
The French defeat in 1940 and above all the Allied landings in North Africa in 1942 would transform the psychological climate. For the moment however and despite flare-ups of violence at Metlaoui in southern Tunisia in 1937 and in Tunis itself in April 1938, the protectorate and its local apparatchiks rather than “France” itself remained the target of nationalists. A present-day observer is aware of the acceleration of subsequent events but good historical practice is aware of the disjuncture between the frameworks of past actors and those of contemporary observers.105

In this chapter we have sought to understand the continuing power of the past and place in the shaping of narratives of self-understanding in the Maghreb between the two world wars. Beyond lofty ideals of intercommunal friendship, on the terrain an impasse was developing. In the next chapter we shall see how an initiative situated on the frontiers between cultures and communities in 1930s Tunisia sought to construct “fraternal understanding between North Africans.” Future chapters will explore how in independent Tunisia the ideal of contact between cultures and communities in Tunisia has continued to shape national narratives.

Chapter 4: IBLA: From nostalgia to realism

The previous chapter studied the confrontation between rival nostalgias and re-readings of the past in ʿAbdelazīz Thaʿālbi’s *La Tunisie Martyre* (1919) and Charles Monchicourt’s *La Tunisie après la guerre* (1920).

This chapter will examine the use of prospective nostalgia by the Institut des belles-lettres arabes (IBLA) with the aim of bridging the confrontation between settlers and indigenous populations in interwar Tunisia. Founded in Tunis in 1926 by the Society of Missionaries of Africa, generally known as the “White Fathers”.¹ IBLA sought to be an intermediary between communities and cultures. Its journal, founded in 1937, published articles resulting from the observation and collection of data concerning Tunisia. These, it was hoped, would underpin an informed conversation between Europeans and Tunisians. In the previous chapter I studied how *La Tunisie Martyre* and *La Tunisie après la guerre* used nostalgias, notably a prospective evocation of the past.

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¹ The term “White Fathers” (derived from their white religious habit not from their racial origin) has been replaced for official purposes by “Missionaries of Africa” but I shall use the term of White Fathers, employed throughout most of the twentieth century, or simply “the Society.” IBLA designates both the Institution and its journal and I differentiate where necessary. *Revue de l’Institut des belles-lettres arabes* is used for direct quotations from the IBLA journal. The abbreviation A.G. Mafr. refers to the Archives générales of the Missionaries of Africa in Rome.
designed to shed light on present realities and suggest models of conduct for the future.

This chapter will study one aspect of the IBLA enterprise, namely how the IBLA journal used the past as a resource in its attempt to engage with the Tunisia of the late 1930s, and in particular to delineate the character of the “colon” [settler]. Beforehand I examine how IBLA has been studied and situate the review in its context.

Since independence in 1956 in Tunisia commentary on IBLA and its journal has tended to highlight their local “Tunisian-ness” and specificity. Tunisian scholars such as Dorra Mahfoudh, Imed Melliti, and Kmar Bendana-Kchir classify IBLA under the category of “indigénophile” seen retrospectively as sympathetic to Tunisian aspirations. Study of IBLA has also emphasized the role of the “White Fathers” as precursors of the renewal of Catholic understanding of dialogue with Muslims in the early 1960s. These

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views are reiterated in the most recent biography of the founder of the journal, Fr André Demeerseman (1901-1993). IBLA and Demeerseman are portrayed as prescient observers of Tunisian society, aware from the 1930s onwards of Tunisian aspirations to autonomy. The tendency to seek the seeds of the present in the past can lead to “leapfrogging” from the past to the present. As Frederick Cooper has noted, good historical practice is equally attentive to “paths explored and ultimately not taken.”

An additional reason for IBLA’s mixed historiographical fortunes has been its status: a largely French-staffed institution founded by a community of missionaries established in Tunisia over several decades; a community outside formal colonial structures although attuned to knowledge production in North Africa and in the wider White Father world beyond. As Tunisian (and French) historians have tended to study primarily their own countries, perhaps IBLA in its wider context has been an elusive subject for study. This tendency has been attenuated by a return to thinking of North


Ibid. 97.


Interest in networks and movement of people and ideas have meant that groups such as the White Fathers, their female counterparts the White Sisters, and other missionary communities in North Africa have reemerged onto the scene.

I have mentioned that nostalgia, seen as a practice, emerges from a context which requires scrutiny in order to measure the qualities of the nostalgia under examination. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) has rightly occupied a commanding place in the

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empire of theory and in the way that colonial contexts are studied. However, while compelling, *Orientalism* is under-historicised, and its view of colonial power and knowledge as monolithic can marginalise actors such as IBLA who navigated between “the French” and “the Tunisians.”

More recently historians have begun to study uncertainty in colonial forms of knowledge, implicitly challenging the supposed omniscience of colonial knowledge discourse. The late Christopher Bayly noted, for example, that British information-gathering in India failed to predict the 1857 Indian Mutiny.

IBLA, as an exercise in knowledge-collection, reflects, albeit implicitly, a sense that after fifty years of French control of Tunisia, ignorance prevails in wide sections of settler society. Part of its approach to Tunisian society employed prospective nostalgic practices. These practices reflected wider uncertainties and tensions within a colonial society exhausted by the First World War. Chapter 3 evoked Charles Monchicourt’s sense of a decline of knowledge and awareness of Tunisian “realities” among the French community. Research on IBLA’s use of nostalgia can therefore be a way of exploring uncertainties behind the ornamentalism and ceremony that were part of the protectorate’s façade.

IBLA was founded as a place of study of language and empirical study of Tunisian society. However given its contact with some elements of the French settler

community and its ideal of “fraternal understanding between North Africans,” under a protectorate regime IBLA implicitly occupied a political field in Tunisia of the 1930s. Although marginal to metropolitan science knowledge production in North Africa was close to the French political arena. Thus, for example, the study of the nature of the system of landholding in rural Algeria was a highly charged political question for French settlers, and the literature reflects this fact. This overall situation caused misleading questions to be raised and inhibited the asking of urgent ones.

To what extent did IBLA avoid this fate? How distinctive was its use of nostalgia? What factors explained its IBLA’s change of direction after the Second World War? Before answering these questions and exploring the IBLA project of prospective nostalgia in relation to the wider fields of knowledge and politics, I first examine the role of the “White Fathers” in setting up IBLA, its place in their wider world and in the intellectual landscape of interwar Tunisia.

The White Fathers and IBLA

Before addressing the specific situation of IBLA in 1930s Tunis, we can recall that the period after the First World War saw a transfer to North Africa of a French longing for foundations and permanence along with a quest for inspiration and models of conduct drawn from the “pioneering period of colonization.” This should be seen in the context of a widespread sense of French decline going back to the end of the nineteenth

15 Ibid., 5.
16 See Chapter 2, page 3.
century.\textsuperscript{17} The postwar \textit{rappel à l’ordre} [call to order] involved a quest for forms of artistic expression that foregrounded, as I noted earlier rural and regional styles.\textsuperscript{18}

The Vichy regime which controlled France after its defeat in 1940 would mobilise similar themes. The post-war quest for origins was not merely a French, settler-colonial, or European phenomenon: as Michael Goebel has recently shown, Oscar Spengler’s \textit{Der Untergang des Abendlandes}, published between 1918 and 1922, found an enthusiastic response among Asian, African and Latin American intellectuals.\textsuperscript{19} The crisis of Western values led non-Western people to seek sustenance in their own past and traditions. Liang Qichao (1873-1929) in his \textit{Self-Awakening of the Chinese People} thought non-Europeans should learn from Europe’s post-1918 decline.\textsuperscript{20} Gandhi visited the Latin Quarter in Paris

\textsuperscript{17} Robert Paxton, \textit{Vichy France Old Guard and New Order} (New York: Columbia University, 1972), 146.

\textsuperscript{18} See Romy Golan, \textit{Modernity and Nostalgia : Art and Politics in France Between the Wars} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 64. The idiom of regionalism and rural themes prevailed in in the work of, for example, André Gleizes and Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac. In Great Britain the post-war period saw a revival of the landscape tradition with Vorticists such as Bomberg and Wadsworth turning to rural themes. Frances Spalding, \textit{British Art since 1900} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 61-70.

\textsuperscript{19} Michael Goebel, \textit{Anti-imperial Metropolis Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 256-258.

in 1931 and advised the French to learn from the spiritual dimension of Indian struggles for liberation.\footnote{Unnamed note, December 6, 1931, CAOM (Centre d’Archives d’Outre-Mer, Aix –en-Provence),\textit{8SLOTFOM14 “Service de liaison avec les originaires des territoires français d’outre-mer,”} quoted by Goebel, \textit{Anti-imperial metropolis}, 259.}

IBLA in its Tunis setting

Today the Place du Leader, named after Habib Bourguiba, is a tree-lined square in the residential Tunis area of Bab Menara just outside the medina. The Place, formerly known as the Place aux Moutons, looks out over the suburbs of Manouba and Bardo and one can see the rocky outcrop of Djebel Rassas rising to an altitude of 1000 metres over the Mornag plain south of Tunis. Here French settlers developed large vineyards in the 1880s, benefiting from the \textit{phylloxera} crisis which devastated French viticulture.\footnote{Perkins, \textit{A History Of Modern Tunisia}, 95. IBLA is situated at the end of \textit{zenqat al qarādishiyya}, the “lane of the woolcarders.”} The railway line from Tunis to the Algerian border passes nearby.\footnote{Association française pour l’Avancement, \textit{La Tunisie : industrie, agriculture, commerce}, vol.1 (Paris :Berger-Levreault et C°, 1896), 245.}

It was in this locality that IBLA became a study centre for the Society of Missionaries of Africa in 1932, having been located for the previous four years at the Rue des Glacières in the lower medina area. The area, like much of the urban landscape of Tunis at that time, was heteroclite in nature. Camels and their drivers pitched camp in the Place on warm summer nights, while the quarter included a number of residences of local Tunisian notables: as the local saying had it: \textit{ashrāf fil atrāf}: “(the) notables (live) in...
outlying areas.” In the 1920s today’s Place du Leader was on the city outskirts, with the European suburb of Montfleury, where settlers with property outside Tunis had urban pied-à-terres, was less than half a mile away within bugle-range of a Zouave barracks (Caserne Saussier).

Founded in 1868 in Algiers, by 1939 the 1500 members of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (“White Fathers”) staffed missions in Central Africa, East and West Africa, the Sahara, and Kabylia in Northern Algeria as well as training houses in Europe, Canada, and North Africa. In the interwar period no more than 10% of the Society’s manpower was assigned to Algeria and Tunisia. The Society’s founder, Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825-1892) stressed language skills and scientific observation at a time when Catholic missionary societies were disinclined to engage with

24 Henri de Montety, Enquête sur les vieilles familles et les nouvelles élites en Tunisie (1939), typed manuscript consulted at the Institut des belles-lettres arabyes (IBLA), Tunis (Dossier T.13/1), 10. See André Gide, Amyntas (Paris : Gallimard, 1925), 26 for a description of encampments of camels and cameleers.

25 Félix-Gustave Saussier (1825-1905) commanded the French forces which occupied Tunisia in 1881. The term “Zouave” is derived from zewāwa, a member of the Zouaoua tribe in northern Algeria which formed the nucleus of the original Zouave regiment raised in 1830. By the early 1840s, zouaves recruits were exclusively Europeans, a policy which continued thereafter. Marcelin Beaussier, Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français (Alger : La Maison du Livre, 1958), 448.

26 The Society was of international composition although the French element was dominant particularly in North Africa. See Aylward Shorter, African Recruits and Missionary Conscripts: the White Fathers and the Great War (London: Missionaries of Africa History Project, 2007), 12, 13, 16.

Out of the 842 members of the Society in 1914, 75% were French, with Belgians and Dutch accounting for just over 16%. Germans composed around 5% of the total. Ibid., 20.
While White Fathers tended to have a proto-scientific, enthusiastic approach, this did not produce necessarily insignificant results.\(^{28}\)

With regard to Muslims the approach adopted was to avoid overt proselytism, and to develop the mission in Muslim areas through what was termed a “dialogue of life,” an approach devised by Fr. Henri Marchal (1875-1957), a veteran of the Sahara and Kabylia. Instead of preparing individuals for baptism, missionaries should promote essential religious truths in terms comprehensible to a local audience.\(^{29}\) Indigenous society in Tunisia and Algeria was nevertheless seen as religious, cohesive, and resistant to outside influence.\(^{30}\)

Training for White Father candidates in the Carthage seminary consisted of classes in theology and Scripture, with some candidates acquiring a smattering of Arabic

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\(^{28}\) “Scientific collection and observations, made with the help of instruction and instruments supplied by learned societies in Paris should be sent in regularly.” (to the PB mother-house in Algiers). Ibid., 187. Fr Herman Melssen (1883-1963) spent twenty years in Tanganyika Vicariate and as mission diarist he added notes on botany and zoology as well as speculation on the origin of the place names along the route while on a train journey to Dar es Salaam. Aylward Shorter saw these diaries at Kipalapala 28 December 1964 so his recall of them 40 years later suggests that the notes were more than mere jottings.


and medicine. One of these candidates was André Demeerseman (1901-1993). He began his clerical training in Algiers in 1921 after two years study of philosophy in Angers. Following studies at Carthage outside Tunis, he was ordained priest in 1928. He joined the incipient IBLA in autumn 1928, remaining until 1988 and was associated with the IBLA journal for much of that time. Until the 1950s the majority of the missionaries involved in IBLA did not undertake formal academic study beyond their seminary training. Missionaries destined for North Africa were however given intensive preparation although IBLA’s financial resources like those of many White Father establishments were exiguous. The study programme – a total of nine hours a day over three years – included sociology (defined as “an objective description in Arabic of the life and customs of the natives”), understandings of the “Muslim soul” as well as classes in


32 Prior to the First World War there was a single European province. Students for the missionary priesthood completed two years of philosophical studies in Europe, a year of novitiate in Algiers, and then three years of theology at Carthage and Thibar in north-western Tunisia. Shorter, *African Recruits and Missionary Conscripts*, 14.


literary and spoken Arabic, Koran and *hadith*. A White Father and a Tunisian *cheikh* dispensed this instruction. Around fifty members of the Society were trained at IBLA between 1926 and 1946 although the resident community was never more than ten.

The above use of the term “soul” reflects Catholic theology which saw the soul as a spiritual principle within each person. In the 1930s and 1940s Catholic theology, particularly in France, was beginning to question traditional ideas about the primacy of the visible institutional Church.

While to a contemporary reader the term “soul,” applied to collectivities, may have connotations of “Othering,” for a Franco-Tunisian audience in the 1920s and 1930s it had variety of meanings.

Beyond the world of Catholic theology, the distinction between an outer material domain and inner spiritual essence was a hallmark of anti-colonial thought after the First World War. The term “soul” was widely employed by indigenous nationalist thinkers in Africa and Asia; Ferhat Abbas in 1931 wrote *Le jeune Algérien* in 1931 and described the book’s title as translating his faith in new times and a “new soul” for his country.

Notions of *Kulturkreise* and *Kulturseele* (distinctive cultural soul) as elaborated by the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius also informed the thinking of figures such as

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Leopold Senghor who had searched with other members of the négritude movement for an African “soul.”

The Institute had the role of promoting understanding between Europeans and Tunisians with particular attention to the dispositions and practices associated with the role of the rural colon (settler) in contact with the local population. In fact reality: 88% of the French population in Tunisia was concentrated in the coastal cities and by 1945 two-thirds were located in Tunis itself. European agricultural settlement in Tunisia had virtually halted after the Great Depression of 1930 and a similar pattern had been noted in Algeria from the 1920s onwards.

Demeerseman’s Algerian-based mentor Henri Marchal, along with other missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa, had criticized the avarice and irreligiousness of settlers and colonial administrators alike as well as the aberrations of positivism. In a

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sense therefore IBLA scrutinised the European settler community as well as wider Tunisian society.  

Tunisia 1937

Following the election of the Popular Front government in France in 1936 and the appointment of Armand Guillon as Resident-General in Tunisia, hopes were high that social reforms applied in France would be implemented in Tunisia, although by 1937 unease was expressed in the Tunis press about the dilatory pace of reform. When Guillon visited the agricultural region of Tebourba (discussed in Chapter 3) in April 1937 the Tunisian daily Ez-Zahra reported Guillon’s declaration that development of the region’s natural resources would be accompanied by a continuing effort by France to win the hearts of Tunisians by a policy of justice and fairness.

In this section of the chapter I present the first text published in the review in 1937. I then briefly review the content of the first issues of the review and attempt to situate the review in the network of relations between the various academic and para-academic institutions which existed in Tunis and the wider region, finally taking up the question of nostalgia against this wider background.

The IBLA journal’s first issue was dated 1 April 1937. It began thus:

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45 Rivet, Le Maghreb à l’épreuve de la colonisation, 27.
47 Ez-Zahra, 26 April 1937. See too L’Afrique du Nord illustrée 828 (1937): 10, for a mention of the “close association between French colonisation and the Tunisian cultivator, in a spirit of fruitful collaboration,” and a description of the Resident-General’s Tebourba visit.
What is *Ibla*? Yet another review? It is a modest bulletin containing direct observations of Muslim society in Tunisia. We wish in particular to rely on direct observation, without recourse to any intermediary, in order to become acquainted with the people with whom we enter into friendly contact… The object of this bulletin will therefore be to collect exact and authentic documentation, a photograph of Muslim society in Tunisia as we see it and as the Tunisians perceive this society in which they live.  

IBLA is a simple bulletin, a means of contact between the *Institut des belles-lettres arabes* and those inspired by its ideals. It is not intended for the general public, but is reserved for the students of the Institute, the (religious) Sisters in Tunisia who work in a Muslim setting and our Tunisian and French friends and sympathisers. The review is a practical instrument: it makes no claim to address in a learned manner the grave problems posed by Islam, through study of their distant origins or their salient features.

We make our own the principle enunciated by Monsieur Montagne, who is at this moment engaged on a large-scale collection of data on the evolution of the Arab countries: “Without neglecting the written sources, let us above all set about studying men and the institutions in which they are implicated.” We could translate this through the proverb which former students of the Institute know well: “the knowledge of men is a treasure” (*ma’arifat ar-rijāl kunūz*). Our Institute is indebted to Monsieur Wilbois, who has made a major contribution to

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determining our present orientation. His questionnaire will be for us a precious
guide and we are confident that we can rely on his expert advice. As well as the
results of these organised efforts to collect information, each issue of the bulletin
will contain an analysis of a particular point of sociology, religion, or literature.
The collaboration of some Tunisian friends is already guaranteed. We shall thus
avoid an artificial, uniquely French enterprise. May these modest pages help, in a
small way, to realise our ideal of “fraternal understanding between North
Africans.”

This forward-looking programme is borne out by a survey of the content of the four 1937
issues of the IBLA journal. The first issue contains notes by an “authentic Tunisian
Muslim” on the role of mothers in Tunisian families in the Sahel.\textsuperscript{49} Although the article is
unsigned it is accompanied by a note saying that the text had been delivered at a meeting
of the Cercle des amitiés tunisiennes [Tunisian Friendship Circle].\textsuperscript{50} This association was
founded in 1934 with the aim of bringing together Tunisians and Europeans in a quest for
mutual understanding.\textsuperscript{51} In addition there are three pages of Tunisian proverbs (in Arabic

\textsuperscript{49} Revue de l’Institut des belles-lettres arabes 1 (1937) : 7-17.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{51} Cuoq, Lavigerie, les Pères Blancs, 151. The IBLA diary for March 1934 mentions the first
meeting of the Cercle, with the aim of “fusion” and “interpenetration” of different mentalities.
On the Cercle d’amitiés tunisiennes, see the White Fathers’ Rapports Annuels, vol. XXXII,
1936-1937, 44-45. Lectures were given on subjects such as archaeology, the incompatibility of
Islam and Marxism, and social outreach among the workforce of the Penarroya Company’s
iron foundry at Megrine in the southern suburbs of Tunis. Dominique Tommy-Martin, son of
one of the senior staff members of the Penarroya company, became a Catholic priest in the
diocese of Tunis where he remains today.
and transcription) and an article by André Demeerseman on the use of proverbs in conversations. There are two articles on “Islam in Yugoslavia” and “Islam in India” and an article signed “P.M.” on Jewish and Christian communities in Arabia at the time of Muhammad.\(^{52}\)

IBLA was not, as the Introduction of 1 April 1938 suggests, published in a void of knowledge production: “What is Ibla? (Yet) another review?”

Journals of varying calibre existed such as the *Revue Tunisienne* published since 1893 by the Institut de Carthage. This was oriented towards Roman Antiquity in Tunisia. Its founder, Dr. Lucien Bertholon (1854-1914) was a sometime army doctor and anthropologist whose interests included craniometry.\(^{53}\) There were no university institutions in Tunis affiliated to the French university system until after the Second World War.\(^{54}\) A number of scientific establishments existed including the Institut Pasteur (1893) and the École coloniale d’agriculture (1898).\(^{55}\)

In 1938 180 Tunisian students were enrolled in French universities. Arabophone students also studied in Damacus and Cairo.\(^{56}\) The population of Tunis at this time was

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\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Bendana-Kchir, “Aux origines…” See Henri de Montéty, *Enquête sur les vieilles familles et les nouvelles élites en Tunisie* (1939), 27. (Manuscript consulted at IBLA (Tunis), March 2015). The first North African Muslim woman doctor was Tunisian, Tawhida Ben Cheikh
around 216,000 and of Tunisia itself around 2,300,000. 57 In Algeria, by way of comparison, there were 94 Algerian Muslims enrolled in higher education in 1938 out of a Muslim population of over 6 million. 58 In France under the Third Republic around 2.5% of French pupils passed through the secondary school system. 59

Institutions teaching in Arabic affiliated to the Zitouna mosque had sought since 1875 to reform their teaching methods and in 1933 had introduced a qualification equivalent to the baccalaureat. In 1911 an École Supérieure de langue et littérature arabes (Advanced School of Arabic Language and Literature) located in Souk el ‘Attařīn in the Tunis medina had been set up. By 1937 it had 421 students and was affiliated to the University of Algiers. 60

A careful reading of the first issues of the IBLA journal gives an indication of how the journal made itself known in this fragmented world of scattered scholars and amateur chroniclers. In December 1936, several White Fathers attended a lecture given

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58 Kadri, Instituteurs et enseignante en Algérie, 57. See too Noureddine Sraieb, “L'idéologie de l'école en Tunisie coloniale (1881-1945),” Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée 68-69 (1993) : 239-254. By 1931 Tunisian school enrolments were 1.25% of the total population and 6.6 % of the children of school age. This had risen to 12% in 1949.

59 Paxton, Vichy France Old Guard and New Order, 154.

60 Tunisia: Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook, 181.
by Georges-Henri Bousquet (1900-1978) on the theme of “Islam across the world.” Bousquet was a specialist in Islamic jurisprudence at the University of Algiers. The lecture took place at the Palais des Sociétés Françaises in Avenue de Paris, in the heart of the “European” city about an hour’s walk from IBLA on the other side of the medina.

As well as a being a lecture venue, the Palais hosted festivities including the end-of-year ball of the settler-dominated Colonial Agriculture School – which as late as 1957 had the grand total of one Tunisian student – or meetings of the Union des Travailleurs Français. This lobby group-cum-social club was presided over by leading members of the settler “community” who used it as a means to muster support at a local level. In the heart of “settler Tunis,” Bousquet’s lecture could have been a networking opportunity for IBLA, as an Algiers-based scholar such as Bousquet would have been able to publicise the review more widely. His colleague Henri Pérès (1890-1983) of the Institut des Études Orientales in Algiers agreed to exchange publications and documents with IBLA.

In January 1937 two members of the IBLA community attended a two-hour “homage” in “pure Arabic” organised by the Association des Jeunes Musulmans to the Muslim reformist thinker Rashīd Reda (1865-1935). The White Fathers found themselves in an “areopage of Sheikhs from the Zitouna Mosque.” This was not the White Fathers’ first venture into the world of Arabic intellectual life: in 1928 members of IBLA had

62 It was founded in 1892 by Victor de Carnières (1849-1917), reactionary settler spokesman and landowner in the region of Soliman in Cap Bon. Ibid., 253.
64 Ibid., 56.
attended lectures at the Khaldouniya, an educational society founded by Tunisian notables with the aim of giving Zitouna religious scholars an insight into modern approaches to history and economics.65

In addition to IBLA’s positioning of itself in these Tunisian and French intellectual circles scrutiny of the initials “PM” after the article on Jews and Christians in Arabia mentioned above sheds light on another world of colonial knowledge, one not without potential pitfalls.

It is probable that “PM” were the initials of Colonel Paul Marty (1882-1938). Born into a pious settler family at Boufarik near Algiers, Marty served in French West Africa, Morocco, and Tunisia, and his writings constitute an important source on West African Islam in the period between 1913 and 1925. As Edmund Burke III recently observed, Marty’s sympathy for the plight of Muslim elites caught in the undertow of history made him a sensitive observer of African society.66 Between 1922 and 1925 Marty was in charge of the Collège musulman in Fez (Morocco) and between 1925 and 1930 he was head of the Native Affairs service in Rabat.

His departure from Rabat for Tunis was accompanied by rumours of Christian proselytism, unsubstantiated according to his then-colleague Jacques Berque, who commented that Marty’s Moroccan friends considered him mazlûm or unjustly treated.67

65 Demeerseman, André Demeerseman (1901-1993), 43.
66 Edmund Burke III, The Ethnographic State, 12.
Another reason for his departure from Fez may have been Marty’s role in the controversial French “Berber” policy in Morocco. In his *Le Maroc de demain* (1925) Marty had evoked the assimilation of the Berber population through a network of Franco-Berber schools in which neither Arabic nor Islam would be taught.

The IBLA community diaries for 2 February 1931 and 5 May 1931 mention that Marty and his family attended Mass in the IBLA chapel. Marty’s military background would have facilitated contacts with the White Fathers. 367 French “White Fathers” had been mobilised in 1914, and the missionary ideal was couched in military metaphors of discipline and esprit de corps. Relations between missionaries and French army officers were often cordial.

A recent chronicler has asserted that the mere fact of Marty’s being a high-ranking French officer led to the end of his collaboration with the journal. This seems a misapprehension. While correspondance between Demeerseman and his mentor Henri Marchal does suggest that Marchal advised that Marty’s participation in the IBLA journal be discontinued, IBLA attracted numerous subscribers and collaborators closely

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70 Ibid., 143-144.
connected to the French authorities in Tunisia. A more likely hypothesis is that Marty’s participation was discontinued to avoid IBLA attracting unfavourable attention on account of his rumoured activities in Morocco, whether promoting Berber secessionism or Christian proselytism. Rumours of proselytism were potentially damaging in the context of 1930s Tunisia where memories of the controversy surrounding the 1930 Carthage Eucharistic Congress were still fresh. André Demeerseman had reported to the White Fathers’ Superior-General the criticism voiced in the Tunisian press of triumphalist aspects of the Eucharistic Congress

As for Colonel Marty, his exclusion from the pages of IBLA was only temporary: in the January 1939 issue he received a full-page obituary from the essayist, sometime trade-unionist, and future admirer of the Vichy regime Arthur Pellegrin (1891-1956).

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71 One example is William Marcais (1872-1956), director of the Advanced School of Arabic Language and Literature. He had attracted controversy in Tunis for his views about the inadaptability of Arabic to the modern world. He nevertheless presided at the Congress of Arab Language, Literature and Art organised in Tunis in December 1931 as part of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the French Protectorate in Tunisia. Berque, Le Maghreb entre deux guerres, 386. See L’Afrique du Nord illustrée, 20 January 1932: 2-3.

72 Demeerseman, André Demeerseman (1901-1993), 143.


74 See Morgan Corriou, “Arthur Pellegrin,” in François Pouillon, ed., Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française (Paris: IISSM-Karthala, 2012), 788-789. Pellegrin imagined a French North Africa built on the collaboration of local elites. His Aventures de Ragabouche was intended as a work of Mediterranean settler folklore. An odd bedfellow for IBLA perhaps, but as president of the Société des Écrivains de l’Afrique du Nord (which published La Kahéna) he was doubtless a useful ally for IBLA which had until the 2010 fire a complete collection of La Kahéna, now sadly lost.
The preceding pages have placed IBLA in the wider world of the Society of Missionaries of Africa and situated the journal in the variegated North African world of knowledge production.

How central or marginal was IBLA in this world? Given that the contours of this “world” stretched from Tunis to Tangiers and France, as well as the Near East where IBLA did acquire some subscribers, this is a question too broad to be fully addressed in this chapter. The review had a print-run of 2,000 in early 1942, which was not insignificant given the Lilliputian scale of the academic community detailed above.

Decolonisation in North Africa led to the disappearance or transformation of many institutions and reviews (such as the Revue Africaine) and the return of an armada of scholars to France. Discontinuities in the rhythms of scholarly life were accompanied by a move, notably in Tunisia, to what Imed Melliti has called “developmentist sociology” concentrating on modernisation and a questioning of the empirical study of societies as undertaken before independence in 1956. These factors make the task of measuring IBLA’s immediate “impact” a challenging one.

Thinking about marginality does however lead to a larger question which is linked to IBLA’s quest for alternatives to the status quo and thus its prospective nostalgizing. When one thinks of academic social sciences in France in the late nineteenth century and

75 Outside of a community at the Basilica of Saint Anne in Jerusalem and a Greek-Melkite seminary staffed by the White Fathers the Society had no presence in the eastern Mediterranean.
76 Demeerseman, André Demeerseman (1901-1993), 176.
77 Melliti, “Une anthropologie ““indigène” est-elle possible ?...”
first half of the twentieth century, major names include Emile Durkheim, Gustave Le Play, Marcel Mauss, and Claude Lévi-Strausse. None took much if any interest in North Africa or Islamic societies. Even if one challenges the use of the term “sociology” by Jacques Berque in his 1956 article “Cent vingt-cinq ans de sociologie maghrébine” it is difficult to argue with his conclusions: with a few exceptions scriveners obsessed with tribes and Berber myths had neglected serious consideration of the society in North Africa produced amid the upheavals of colonisation since 1830. European settler communities had, Berque suggests, by 1900 collectively turned away from the indigenous populations except as a source of exotic spectacle. In addition Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were studied separately from the wider Islamic world.

Even on the basis of the a limited survey of the journal, it is possible to see that IBLA sought a distinctive place in this variegated field of knowledge production, one marginal to developments elsewhere. Far from ignoring the relations between communities in Tunisia, the journal’s aim, perhaps over-optimistically, was to construct “unity among North Africans” which can be taken to mean the communities of the Maghreb as a

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79 Ibid.
whole. Academic sociologists such as the late Georges Balandier (1920-2016) would after the Second World War go on to study the “colonial situation” as the totality of relationships between colonial powers and colonial peoples and their respective cultures. IBLA had some awareness of this web of relations as well as of the wider Islamic world, as the presence of articles on Yugoslavia and the Dutch East Indies show. In addition the journal observed social change through articles such as “L’évolution féminine en Tunisie ” and “La jeunesse tunisienne.” There is also a striking absence in the IBLA journal of articles on classical Antiquity in contrast to journals such as the Revue Tunisienne. Speeches given by settler spokesmen referred untiringly to the continuity between Antiquity and the colonial enterprise and the presence of Roman vestiges next to settler farms was a way of emphasising this continuity.

Exploring pathways of understanding between different communities of “North Africans,” while scrutinising the society in which it found itself: such were the main elements of the IBLA project. The next section of this chapter seeks to focus on the place

81 Lucas and Vatin, L’Algérie des anthropologues ... 60.
85 In late 2008 I recall locating such vestiges next to an abandoned settler property near Borj Toum, a locality near Tebourba, discussed in Chapter 2.
of nostalgia in this project. While Antiquity was largely absent from the pages of the IBLA journal other forms of nostalgia emerge.

Forward into the past

As I mentioned earlier, drawing on a comment of Jacques Berque, the post-1918 period saw a longing for security and the transfer to North Africa of French nostalgia for stability and permanence. A close reading of the “What is Ibla? Yet another review?” editorial of 1 April 1937 which I quoted earlier in the chapter can show how this nostalgia was a feature of the intellectual climate in which IBLA emerged.

The unsourced quotation attributed in the passage from the 1937 first issue of the IBLA journal to “Monsieur Montagne” – “without neglecting the written sources, let us above all set about studying men and the institutions in which they are implicated” – is from an article entitled “L’évolution moderne des pays arabes,” published in 1936 by Robert Montagne (1893-1954) in Annales sociologiques. Montagne had joined the staff of the French Residency in Rabat in 1921. In 1930 he completed his doctorate on the leffs (pacts of allegiance and protection) of the High Atlas. In 1936 Montagne founded the Centre des hautes études d’administration musulmane (CHEAM) which trained colonial administrators and studied the evolution of Muslim societies. In 1946 André

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Demeerseman would address trainee administrators, at Montagne’s invitation, an event to which I shall return later in this chapter.\(^{151}\)

A key point made by Montagne in his 1936 *Annales sociologiques* and which echoes Ibla’s aspiration to “fraternal understanding between North Africans” is that of “La curiosité ou la sympathie qu’avaient les pionniers pour la société indigène… et qui avaient fait naître des amitiés entre les hommes des deux races en présence.” [The curiosity or sympathy of the first (settler) pioneers towards native society which was at the origin of friendships between members of the two races which were present.\(^{152}\)]

Montagne asserts that such friendships had become rare by the 1930s, due among other things to the development of separate quarters for the growing European population in urban French North Africa.

What “pioneers,” real or imaginary, did Montagne have in mind? In Morocco and Tunisia before the protectorate regimes had been set up (1881 in Tunisia, 1912 in Morocco) there had however been small French communities, often active in commerce. In Tunisia these pre-colonial residents had since 1681 elected two representatives of the French “nation” from what was in fact a closed “club” of trading families of southern French origin.\(^{155}\)


\(^{152}\) Montagne, “L’évolution moderne des pays arabes.. ” 54.

As Montagne mentions such families tended to live in proximity to indigenous Tunisians, in the lower medina area of Tunis near Bab al Bahr before the development of the new “European” town after 1881. When the British traveller Captain Clark Kennedy met Ahmad Bey, the ruler of Tunis in 1845, the conversation took place in Arabic and Italian and the interpreter was Giuseppe Raffo. Of Sardinian descent though born in Tunis in 1795, Raffo held, as Kennedy notes, one of the “highest and most confidential” posts in the Regency from the 1820s until 1862. Montagne’s own experiences in Morocco, rather than the experience of particular pre-colonial settler communities, may have been at the origin of his nostalgia for an era of more cordial relations.

Montagne’s entry into official circles in Morocco was due to the intervention of the French Resident-General Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934) who, intrigued by this “sailor-sociologist,” plucked Montagne from the naval airbase of Kenitra where he had been posted in 1920. Lyautey was not only an image of the past but the nearest thing the French administrative class in North Africa had produced to an “icon” to use contemporary parlance. He also spoke Montagne’s

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language of friendship with indigenous peoples. As one of Lyautey’s staff during his last years in Morocco, Montagne is likely to have had Layutey’s example in mind when recalling earlier periods of understanding between communities in North Africa. In 1924, at the inauguration of a monument in Rabat to “Victory and Peace,” Lyautey noted that “fusion” between different populations could only take place on the basis of the friendliness typical of the pioneering settler.\(^\text{159}\) His attitude to settlers in general was however hostile, describing them privately in 1923 as “boors.”\(^\text{160}\) During his period as Resident-General in Morocco he sought to hinder the emergence of Tunisian-style structured settler lobbies.\(^\text{161}\) It was nevertheless a settler, Jean Ferreri, who raised the funds to pay for the monument to “Victory and Peace.”\(^\text{162}\) Beyond Lyautey’s Moroccan experience, his itinerary brought him into contact with Catholic circles through his involvement in the Cercles Catholiques d’Ouvriers founded by the enlightened conservative thinkers Count Albert de Mun and Marquis René de la Tour du Pin. The Cercles promoted social reform guided by the principle of hierarchical community in opposition to bourgeois individualism.

Although the White Fathers had no missions in Morocco and Lyautey had little contact with Tunisia, IBLA drew on posthumous hagiographies of Lyautey such as

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\(^{161}\) Lambert, *Notables des colonies*…97-100.

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 255.
Robert Garric’s *Le Message de Lyautey* (1935) and Fr. Patrick Hiedseick’s *Rayonnement de Lyautey* (1941), both popular in Catholic circles. They portrayed Lyautey as emerging from a rural elite and a hierarchical world, that of monarchist officers in the French Army who found in military service a lingering trace of the values of the *Ancien Régime* : “Ne froisser aucune habitude, ne changer aucune tradition…dans toute société il ya une classe dirigeante” [Do not perturb any habits, or change any tradition.. in every society there is a governing class.]

Conveniently dead and thus distant from controversy, Lyautey was the only political figure mentioned specifically in the IBLA journal. In April 1942 Demeerseman described Lyautey as “the very model of the Tunisian ideal of *es-siyyāsa*, an Arabic term meaning ‘courtesy, urbanity, good manners… a prince of delicacy, a rare type of leader, which explains his enduring prestige among the Muslims of this country.”

Demeerseman continues: “Between Lyautey and those who approached him, contact was immediate. His greatness shone through even his simple manner and approach to people.”

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163 Hiedseick was chaplain from 1940 to 1942 of Jeunesse et Montagne, a youth movement in the orbit of the École nationale des Cadres d’Uriage. *Rayonnement de Lyautey* is prefaced by Georges Lamirand (1899-1994), a devout Catholic enginee appointed to head the Youth Secretariat in the Vichy government in 1940.


166 Ibid., : 18. The journal also quoted manly aphorisms attributed to Lyautey: “When you reach one instead of being stuck at zero you’re a damn sight further on!” [“On est bougrement plus avancé quand on est à un que lorsqu’on reste sempiternellement à zéro.”] See issue 2/2
IBLA was only one part of Lyautey’s eclectic circle of disciples which included Jacques de Lattre de Tassigny (1889-1952), future commander of French forces in the Indochina war of the early 1950s, and also Simone de Beauvoir.\(^{169}\) Her philosophy teacher, Robert Garric (1896-1967)) drew inspiration from Lyautey for his Équipes sociales in the Belleville area of Paris after the First World War. The Équipes sought to bring bourgeois students and workers together in study circles, cutting across French class divisions. In 1924 de Beauvoir heard Garric nostalgically recalling wartime camaraderie between classes and citing one of Lyautey’s Moroccan speeches: “beyond all differences there is a common denominator which links all men.”\(^{170}\) Garric’s Équipes sociales would later influence the pedagogy of the École nationale des Cadres d’Uriage founded near Grenoble as the leadership school of Vichy France, promoting community and leadership over the individualism of the decadent Third Republic.\(^{171}\) Lyautey was

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\(^{170}\) Robert Garric’s Le message de Lyautey (Paris: Éditions Spes, 1935), 157. On Garric, see Simone de Beauvoir, Memoirs of a dutiful daughter, trans. James Kirkup (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 179-180: “Garric lived the life of an ascetic in a working-class area of Belleville… at the age of twenty he had discovered a comradeship which overcome all social barriers. When after the First World War he became a student again, he was determined not to be deprived of that comradeship.” De Beauvoir says of Garric’s lecture: “To loud applause Garric stated that it is impossible for any kind of progress to emerge from a conflict whose motive was class hatred. Progress would only come through friendship.”

therefore a useful role-model for IBLA, and we shall see later in this chapter how IBLA as a moral project drew on other more ambiguous currents of French social thought. The recourse to Lyautey, essentially a figure of the late nineteenth century, also confirms the colonial tendency to search, after 1918, in the past for models and legitimacy.

Lyautey was depicted as an intuitive master of contact and engagement. IBLA, as we noted earlier, was situated in a quarter of Tunis with a population of indigenous notables, and in October 1941 an article entitled “Lettre à un jeune Français de France qui désire se fixer en Tunisie.” [Letter to a metropolitan Frenchman seeking to settle in Tunisia] explains how moral integrity and local knowledge will enable the settler to assume his place in Tunisian society as a true Frenchman whose word can be trusted. The “Français de France” is implicitly seen as occupying the summit of the social pyramid. This recalls Charles’ Monchicourt’s quest for the lost ideal of the French settler or administrator with personal charisma as well as technical competence.

The gentlemanly scholar-settler will navigate with ease among the intricacies of the social hierarchy, careful especially to avoid confusion between the urban notable (beldi) with the “bedouin” néo-citadin newly arrived from the rural “interior.”

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178 The British scholars who produced *Tunisia: Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945) describes the “true French elements” as forming the “aristocracy” of the population. The Italians, in whom IBLA took little if any interest, are seen by the handbook as lacking prestige and “unpopular with the Moslems” as they competed with small native farmers.

179 See my comments on Monchicourt’s *La Tunisie après la guerre*. Chapter 2, note 74.

This ideal of “contact” with the population was an enduring one, shared by missionaries and administrators alike. The newly-appointed Contrôleur civil Pierre Bardin, found that he spent much of his time in his post at Gafsa conferring with local notables or travelling by car and thus unable, as he sped by, to “prendre directement contact” [engage directly with] with nomads camped by the roadside. \(^{181}\) Despite the pressures of modernity and centralisation, colonial officials – as well as the White Fathers – believed in the virtues of the tournée [tour] in rural areas, seen as the quintessential activity of the administrator, engaging man-to-man with “his” population in the field. \(^{182}\)

The deleterious effect of the motor car in the Sahara is one of the themes of Joseph Peyré’s nostalgic Croix du Sud (1942): the clatter of mechanization drowns out the heroic echoes of the pioneering past on the southern desert frontiers of French North Africa.

The IBLA journal editorial of 1937 also mentions Joseph Wilbois (1874-1952): “Our Institute is indebted to Monsieur Wilbois, who has made a major contribution to determining our present orientation.” \(^{183}\) Wilbois took a particular interest


\(^{182}\) C’est par la tournée que le Commandant pratique l’art de la politique indigène”[It is through the tour that the district commissioner practices the art of native administration.] Robert Delavignette, Service Africain (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 86.

\(^{183}\) Revue de l’Institut des belles-lettres arabes 1 (1937).
in the role of psychology and labour relations. His sources of inspiration included Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882). Le Play sought an alternative to liberal individualism amid the changes brought by industrialization in nineteenth-century France. An elite of the wise and informed would ensure reform and social harmony. Le Play’s conservative analysis of the crisis of modern society concluded that authority and stability had to be restored in the family and workplace although he realised that an accommodation was necessary with the Republic which emerged after the French defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War.

Wilbois’ research extended to France’s African territories: his 1934 work *Le Cameroun: les indigènes, les colons, les missions, l’administration française* depicted colonisation as “a school for humanity.” His *Questionnaire pour guider les observations sociologiques sur la famille chez les indigènes d’Afrique* was published in 1935 by the White Fathers’ press at the Society’s headquarters at Maison Carrée near Algiers. The introduction stated that “this questionnaire has a purely scientific aim.” The IBLA diaries for February 1935 mention enthusiastically a three week-long visit by Wilbois to Tunisia as part of a tour of Catholic missions in North and West Africa, during which he observed native life and lectured the White Fathers on his methods of

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Among his collaborators in his “Club Action Pensée” and École d’humanités contemporaines was the Catholic philosopher Jacques Chevalier who would become Minister of Education under the Vichy regime. Wilbois’ vision of the transcending of social conflict and the role of an enlightened hierarchy corresponded to the IBLA journal’s vision of “la comprehension fraternelle entre Nord Africains” [fraternal understanding between North Africans] guided by enlightened elites.

Wilbois was also familiar to Jeanne Ballet, one of the early women contributors to the journal. Ballet was a resident of Bordj Toum, an area of agricultural colonisation near Tebourba, thirty-four kilometres west of Tunis. The IBLA community diary mentions that her husband, with other settlers from Bordj Toum, was on occasion a dinner guest at the Institute. In an article dealing with the question of the

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189 According to the Archives of the diocese of Tunis Jeanne Trouillet was baptised at the Cathedral of Tunis on 4 June 1896. She was born in Tunis on May 15 1896, daughter of Albert Trouillet and Jeanne Bernandof. On 31 August 1920 she married Pierre Ballet at Velars-sur-Ouche (Dijon). Dr. Daniela Melfa (University of Catania) has kindly provided these details.

191 IBLA diary, 8 December 1935.

For her part, Jeanne Ballet thought that the transformation of the Tunisian agricultural labourer into a small farmer would ensure not only the happiness of individuals but also moral uplift.\footnote{Ibid., 99: “Faire faire au journalier un pas de plus vers le “paysannat,” c’est travailler non seulement à le rendre plus heureux, mais aussi à le moraliser. Tout ce qui contribue à fixer l’homme à la terre contribue du même coup à le grandir ” [Taking the hired labourer a step closer to the status of peasant does not only make him happier, but builds him up in a moral sense. Everything that contributes to establishing men as small farmers contributes to their moral advancement.]} *Ez-Zahra* called for the Tunisian fellah to be involved in *ta‘mīr*, cultivation of land in the sense of improving or civilizing, along with European settlers or *mu‘ammirs*.\footnote{*Ez-Zahra*, 24/5/37.} These discussions would have been keenly followed by the “White Fathers” given the interest of the Society in what Aylward Shorter has called “the dream of a rural idyll”: stable African societies built on proprietor-cultivators.\footnote{Shorter, *Cross and Flag in Africa*, 176-178.}

Although Henri Marchal, Demeerseman’s Algiers-based mentor had advised against baptisms in Muslim settings, a small Christian village originally populated by orphans from famine in Algeria, existed at the White Fathers’ seminary and model farm at Thibar in north-western Tunisia.\footnote{Ibid., 178.}
Ballet, in a later issue of the review *Ibla*, suggests that the *Maisons familiales*, of which the first was founded in 1937 in Lauzun in south-west France, could be a model for similar experiments which would be financed by *colons* in Tunisia.\(^{197}\) The *Maisons familiales* (which still exist today) were local initiatives to give agricultural training to young people. *Colons* had hitherto been able to train Tunisians “at most,” in Ballet’s words “as tractor-drivers” but skilled artisans were in short supply, as were apprentice training schools.\(^{198}\) The Émile Loubet vocational school founded in Tunis in 1898 catered mostly for Europeans while Tunisians who did attend were orientated towards traditional crafts rather than modern skills, such as those recommended by by Jeanne Ballet forty years later: carpentry, forging, and gardening.\(^{199}\)

The strong moral message that Ballet sought to communicate is also present in one of her earlier contributions to the review, “Questions rurales: l’eau.” The settler and his wife were engaged in an enterprise of *moralisation* by encouraging the creation of small landholdings: tenacity and perseverance would ultimately triumph over the leisurely carelessness of the “poor Bedouin women.”\(^{200}\) We noted earlier how the journal proposed a model of conduct for the settler; here Ballet proposes a set of practices of the self for native rural women, who, through direct personal contact with an agent of


moralisation in the form of the colon’s wife, would absorb new patterns of domestic behaviour.

One can find in Ballet’s reflection some echoes of French agrarian commentators of the post-1918 period such as Pierre Caziot (1876-1953) that stable rural populations would ensure social harmony as they had done in the past.201 In his 1919 book Une solution du problème agraire: la terre à la famille paysanne, Caziot voiced his opposition to the agrarian collectivism proposed by the Left as well as to the gathering of land or large-scale mechanized exploitation recommended by technocrats, both of which would turn the peasantry into an agrarian proletariat.202 The “internal colonization” of rural France would stem the peasant exodus. Caziot would later be Secretary of State for Agriculture under the regime of Philippe Pétain, le maréchal paysan, between April and September 1942.203

This kind of rural character-building promoted by IBLA writers such as Jeanne Ballet is therefore part of a wider reflection on the construction of a “moral” society undertaken by Joseph Wilbois. Wilbois’ project was part of a wider challenge to modernism in France after 1918 emanating from anti-urban and agrarian currents.204 As I have noted, a number of figures associated with the early issues of IBLA such as Arthur Pellegrin would go on to be associated to various degrees with the Vichy regime’s project

202 Golan, Modernity and nostalgia, 51.
204 Ibid., ix.
of “national revolution” after the French defeat of 1940. Joseph Wilbois’ work would appear on the reading list for the trainee-cadres of the Vichy leadership school at Uriage.  

The rural idyll of Caziot, which seems to have echoes in Jeanne Ballet’s rural resettlement plan, was part of the antimodernist rebellion which characterised Vichy discourse particularly in its early period, although industrial rationalization was also part of the complex Vichy phenomenon, which was both profoundly nostalgic and forward-looking.  IBLA’s vision of enlightened leaders who could transcend social conflicts and restore unity converges with certain currents of the variegated Vichy project.

More broadly, the White Fathers of IBLA, together with their confrères in French territories in West Africa, were more inclined to support Petain’s collaborationist regime at Vichy with its programme of promoting Catholic values than Charles de Gaulle’s “Free French” exiles in London. Following the armistice in June 1940, the government of Marshal Pétain installed a new Resident-General in Tunis, Admiral Esteva. The IBLA journal echoed the agenda of national renovation undertaken by the

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206 Paxton, *Vichy France Old Guard and New Order*, 139-143, 268-273.

207 Aylward Shorter, *The White Fathers and the Second World War 1936-1947* (London: White Fathers History Project, 2008), 5-7. Fr Patrick Donnelly (1915-1997) was trained in Algiers and Tunis between 1936 and 1941. He recounted to me how a French colleague, incensed at the Royal Navy’s bombardment of the French Mediterranean Fleet at Mers-el-Kebir near Oran on 3 July 1940, brusquely unplugged a radio with which Donnelly, then in Tunis, was trying to listen to a BBC broadcast from London. 1,267 French sailors were killed at Mers-el-Kebir, sending a “hot spasm of anger through France.” Paxton, *Vichy France Old Guard and New Order*, 56.
Vichy regime, affirming in October 1941 that “France does not need the morally enfeebled whose conscience is anaesthetised in the face of corruption and injustice.”

The IBLA community diary in November 1940 noted that the “National Revolution has given an official seal of approval to hitherto absent values such as effort and honesty… may the designs of Providence be advanced in the rapprochement between the French and the Tunisians. Admiral Esteva impresses our Muslims, who are struck to see that France can call on deeply religious men.”

**Gone with the Wind**

Nostalgia, as I noted earlier, emerges from a particular context and while the colonial situation in Tunisia of the 1930s may have encouraged a search for models of conviviality in the past, the wider sense of French decadence and decline also created an atmosphere in which nostalgia could thrive. April 1942 saw one of the last and quirkiest developments of a nostalgic type in the IBLA journal. Ellen O’Hara, mother of Scarlett in Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* is presented as an example of elegance and refinement, her voice “never raised in command to a servant or reproof to a child,” always busy with embroidery or making “garments for the slaves.” André Demeerseman explains that the fictional Ellen O’Hara is the daughter of a French refugee

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from Haiti following the slave insurrection of 1791. She is a link to the polite traditions of *la vieille France*, traditions similar to the practices of the *beldi* of the medina of Tunis.

Demeerseman had only the haziest of ideas about the antebellum American South but had he read *Gone with the Wind* he would perhaps have realised that the past is situated as an object of impossible longing. A capitalist entrepreneurial spirit drives Scarlett O’Hara to become part of the enterprising southern bourgeoisie. Unwittingly Demeerseman is drawing on a source, namely *Gone with the Wind*, which is articulated around unattainable dimensions of nostalgia, generating desires as futile as they are vivid.

These musings on *Gone with the Wind* were published in spring 1942. By May 1943 the German forces that occupied Tunisia in November 1942 had been defeated by Allied forces advancing from Algeria and Libya. Admiral Esteva, the Vichy regime’s Resident-General, was evacuated to France by German forces. Moncef Bey, virtually the only bey during the protectorate to assert himself on the political scene by appointing a truly Tunisian government, was exiled to Algeria by the Free French after the German defeat in 1943 and replaced as Bey by his more pliable cousin Amin.

Elsewhere the White Fathers had had to temper their initial enthusiasm for the Vichy regime. When General and Madame de Gaulle visited the White Fathers at

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214 Ibid.

Maison-Carrée near Algiers in early 1944 a portrait of Marshal Pétain had to be hastily removed from the visitors’ parlour.\(^{216}\) In July 1946 Demeerseman was invited by Robert Montagne, whom we last encountered in the first issue of the IBLA journal, to present a lecture on Muslim civilisation to an audience of French colonial administrators.

Montagne, addressed by Demeerseman with his naval aviator’s rank of commandant, was by this time director of the Centre des hautes études d’administration musulmane (CHEAM). Among considerations on the urban dimension of Tunisian history one finds in Demeerseman’s lecture a series of pessimistic statements on the loss of trust by Tunisians in the French they encountered in North Africa, be they officials, settlers, clerics, and businessmen. In all these individuals and in the institutions of which they were members, the Tunisians, according to Demeerseman, detected a sense of Western superiority.\(^{217}\) The desire of Tunisians for political freedom is also stressed by Demeerseman, described as the dominant preoccupation of the Tunisians.\(^{218}\) The impression of being “strangers in one’s own land,” the image used by Abd el ‘Aziz Tha’albi over twenty years earlier in La Tunisie martyre recurs in Demeerseman’s lecture.\(^{219}\)

Political developments in Tunisia itself overshadowed the lecture at CHEAM: the right-wing Rassemblement Français de Tunisie led by Antoine Colonna had won 52


\(^{218}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{219}\) Ibid.
per cent of the votes in elections in 1945 for the Constitutive Assembly. A former trade union leader of French public employees in Tunisia and thereafter Senator, he would continue to oppose concessions to Tunisian nationalists until independence in 1956.\textsuperscript{220} For their part, Tunisian nationalists such as Habib Bourguiba and Salah ben Youssef envisaged that France, henceforth junior partner of Britain and the United States, would be less able to oppose nationalist demands.\textsuperscript{221} In August 1946, a month after Demeerseman’s lecture, representatives of a broad array of Tunisian forces opposed to the French rejected proposed Tunisian membership of the French Union and called for the return of the exiled Moncef Bey and full independence.\textsuperscript{222}

In neighbouring Algeria, May 1945 had seen clashes in Sétif in eastern Algeria between settlers and Algerian nationalists. The ensuing violent repression whose victims numbered in the thousands sent shock waves across North Africa. Although the White Fathers’ presence in eastern Algeria was limited, at a meeting in Algiers in December 1945 there was a recognition on the part of the missionaries participating that “North African nationalism” was henceforth a reality of which they would have to take account, as well as the “desire of the inhabitants to seek, as they see fit, to assure their country’s future.”\textsuperscript{223}

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{footnote}Serge La Barbera, Les Français de Tunisie. 1930-1950, (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2006), 344-346.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}Perkins, A History of Modern Tunisia, 109.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}Ibid.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}Joseph Cuoq, Lavigerie, les Pères Blancs et les musulmans maghrébins (Rome : Pères Blancs, 1986).\end{footnote}
\end{footnotes}
Further afield in French Indochina, confusion reigned: the nationalist Vietminh had seized control of northern Vietnam in summer 1945 and by summer 1946 Franco-Vietnamese negotiations were still continuing although war was looming.

Much had indeed “gone with the wind” since the early years of the IBLA journal. In the years preceding Tunisian independence in 1956, as previous research has shown, the journal maintained a strong moral tone and continued to call for Franco-Tunisian concord.\textsuperscript{224} It ceased however to evoke figures such as Hubert Lyautey while the figure of the rural settler rooted in the aristocratic values of \textit{vieille France}, values given renewed visibility during the Vichy regime, also disappeared. I quoted earlier the observation of Frederick Cooper that good historical practice is equally attentive to paths explored and ultimately not taken.\textsuperscript{225} On might also say that some varieties of nostalgia are explored and ultimately set aside as contexts change. This chapter and the preceding chapter have examined the place of nostalgia (s) in Tunisia prior to independence in 1956, with a concentration in this chapter on the role of the IBLA journal. Within the world of the journal there were in fact many voices: evocations of Lyautey, echoes of wider social debates in France, the wider world of the White Fathers, the grievances and aspirations of Tunisians as relayed by Demeerseman in his lecture in July 1946. The next chapter will also be attentive to a variety of voices and viewpoints although in the wider setting of public discourse and comment. Discussion of nostalgia involves homecoming


\textsuperscript{225} Cooper, \textit{Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History}, 18.
and longing for home. Home and its mappings, are, as we shall see, ongoing events, a journey home as the term nostos reminds us, exposed to history and its contingencies.
Chapter 5: “Maps” of Tunisian history

Chapter 4 situated the IBLA journal in the context of nostalgia for past models of coexistence which would inspire those seeking to promote intercultural contact in Tunisia in the period after the First World War. IBLA has been depicted as occupying a frontier between the European and indigenous communities in Tunisia, seeking to move beyond confrontations involving figures such as ‘Abdelazīz Tha’ālbi and Charles Monchicourt whose views and understandings of the past we discussed in Chapter 3. Overall I have been studying the uses of the past during the period of the French occupation of Tunisia, not so much events in themselves as the ways these events are reinterpreted over time.

This chapter moves forward into the post-independence period in order to study the place of these varied nostalgia(s) notably in the period between 1987 and 2011, with some excursions into the post-revolutionary period after 2011. Ramzi Rouighi, in his recent The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis, 1200–1400

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1 On IBLA and other actors on intercommunal frontiers see Daniel Rivet, Le Maghreb à l’épreuve de la colonisation (Paris : Hachette Littératures, 2002), 27-30. Fr. Jean Fontaine, who succeeded André Demeerseman as director of the Ibla journal in 1979 has used the image of the passeur (a guide across a border situated in challenging terrain) to describe his role as a Catholic priest in Tunisia. (Personal communication to the author, July 2011.)

suggests that contemporary scholars be aware of the political and ideological contexts that gave rise to the historiographic consensuses on which they rely.  

I shall firstly outline the “images of the past” constructed by historians and activists in the period before and after independence in 1956 before moving on to the period after 1987. In addition to the official version of history a degree of pluralism characterised historical discussion in Tunisia of the 1990s as conducted by commentators and researchers inside and outside the Tunisian academic community. This chapter will conclude with a comparison between nostalgias which existed during the colonial period and contemporary nostalgias associated with the colonial period.

Translating Translations

A map of colonial Algiers figured in the Introduction to this dissertation. The first part of this chapter discusses Brian Friel’s play Translations, a play concerned with the ways place is made and unmade, notably through maps. Maps, as we shall later see, can be historical as well as topographical. Friel wrote in 1970 that times of upheaval, “spiritual and material flux,” should provoke the writing of plays that would capture such moments in history. “This has got to be done … at a local, parochial level, and hopefully this will have meaning for other people on other countries.”

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What meanings can be “translated” from Friel’s play *Translations* into the context of Tunisia? Richard Rankin Russell, in his study *Modernity, Community and Place in Brian Friel’s Drama* suggests that place should be thought of as being exposed to contingencies of history and environment. Places are not static, but in flux, and thus reconstituted imaginatively even as they are also thought of as rooted in the past. Friel has spoken of the way that rural terrain can seem solid and familiar, yet “when I move across it the ground moves under me.” Thus Tunisia as home could be seen as a moving terrain, where people must, as in *Translations*, look at themselves, recognize and identify themselves and make themselves at home in the new “languages” brought by times of change. Place as an event, more than as a thing to be assimilated to known categories.

*Translations* is set during the mapping of Ireland undertaken by the British Ordnance Survey in 1833 that published in that year its first maps at a scale of six inches to one mile. *Translations* “became the play about material and spiritual flux in a parochial milieu that Friel had longed to write.”

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7 Ibid., 192.


9 Ibid., 160.

10 Ibid.,161.
Mapping, as I noted in the case of the agricultural town of Tebourba in Chapter 3, was an important aspect of the colonial incursion in terms of spatial reorganisation. During the Second World War the colonial 1:50 000 maps of Tebourba and Tunis were reprinted by the US Army Map Service. The scale of the maps, originally in kilometres, was transposed into yards by the US Army Map Service and on the Greater Tunis map (Sheet 20) French conventional signs such as “chemin de fer,” and “autres sentiers” are translated into English. In addition, a purple grid for the localisation of military targets and terrain features is superimposed on the map, accompanied by an indication: “The purple grid is the British N.W.African grid.”\textsuperscript{11} Such maps, when consulted in an archive such as that of the Imperial War Museum in London which holds maps actually used in combat, carry in addition tactical overprints and manuscript markings relating to the operations in which they were used.\textsuperscript{12} The terrain of Tebourba is therefore burdened with French, British, and American representations, and is “translated” into military language and representation. Local toponymes are transcribed from Arabic and this language therefore constitutes a flickering presence, one masked by other languages. In Friel’s\textit{Translations}, the British Survey mission in the locality of Ballybeg in Donegal is presented in terms of comprehensiveness and accuracy.\textsuperscript{13} This contrasts with the way in

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Peter Chasseaud, \textit{Mapping the Second World War} (Glasgow: HarperCollins/Imperial War Museum, 2015), 10.
\item Friel, \textit{Translations}, 35 : “His Majesty’s government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country—a general triangulation which will embrace detailed
\end{enumerate}
which local Irish people saturate space with meanings which are dislocated by the colonial map. The late Benedict Anderson employed the term of “historical map” in his discussion of colonial and post-colonial states’ imaginings of history and power, a mapping of history, or the creation of an “image of the past” which accompanied the surveillance of space represented by the geographical map. These imaginings can seek, like the military surveyors’ maps, to be comprehensive and all-embracing. Anderson comments in the revised 2006 edition of *Imagined Communities* on the continuities between colonial and official nationalist ideologies and the “grammar” of the map, the census and the museum in which these ideologies were deployed.

Official history remains however only one possible “mapping” of history and one can identify, in the case of Tunisia, uses of the past which contain the seeds of contestation. In the words of the writer and cartographer Tim Robinson, “we personally, cumulatively, communally create and recreate landscapes—a landscape being not just the terrain but also the human perspective on it, the land plus its overburden of meanings.”

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16 Ibid., 163.
His one-inch map of Connemara in western Ireland contains, for example, indications of children’s burial grounds, holy wells, and Mass rocks. Robinson, in *Setting foot on the shores of Connemara* describes his mapmaking as a “one to one to encounter between a person and a terrain…myself writing the land.” In literary Arabic, the term for map is *kharīta*. The root letters “kh,r,t “ mean “to cut” or to “shape”. In Tunisian Arabic the *kharrāt* can mean a wood carver or a craftsman incising intricate forms into plaster. The Arabic term thus highlights the creative dimension of map-making mentioned above by Tim Robinson.

In the same way that the *kharīta* of landscape can be “read” and “named” in different ways so too the *kharīta* of history which has unfolded can be read and named in different ways by official and non-official historical topographers. In Tunisian slang “*kharīta*” can also mean a scar, as in “nsawwer kharīta fiwajhek” “I’ll draw a scar on your face.” Are there names in the naming of the map of history which, when examined more closely are traces of conflict or loss? Nostalgia has its roots not only in the term of *nostos*, the return home, but also, *algia*, longing, loss and displacement. In the context of Tunisia before 2011, with an imaginary landscape shared by government and national (and foreign) political actors, the lines (and “scars”) on the map of history require careful examination. The following pages sketch in elements of the historical background in

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18 A Mass rock was a rock used as an altar in seventeenth-century Ireland as an outdoor location for Roman Catholic Mass in the context of anti-Catholic persecution.


20 Marcelin Beaussier’s *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français* (Algiers :Jules Carbonel, 1931), 277, gives the following definition:. خرطّ (khat) tourner au tour, creuser une ravine”.
early to mid-twentieth century Tunisia, leading up to Habib Bourguiba’s exit from the political scene in 1987. This will provide a context for the discussion of how “official” Tunisia understood and reconstructed its history from 1987 onwards and how other, potentially dissenting scripts found their way on to the *kharīta* (mapping) of nostalgia in restorative, prospective and critical dimensions.

**From Tha’ālbi to Ben Ali: “the story of ancient days”**

As I noted in Chapter 3, the period of the French protectorate saw Tunisian articulations of a sense of estrangement from what they saw as their rightful place in the world and their attempts to counter this by a reconstruction of a narrative of national history. ‘Abd-el Azīz Tha’ālbi’s inclusive tableau of Tunisian history which figured in Chapter 3 was underpinned by such a narrative. Tha’ālbi attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and encountered a range of anti-imperialists from across the then-French Empire, many of whom spoke of the innate individuality of each people. ‘Abd el Azīz Tha’ālbi, it seems, used the term “moral person” to describe a people with language, history and traditions in a *Mémoire* presented at the Paris Peace Conference by a Algero-Tunisian committee to which Tha’ālbi belonged.21 Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), spiritual father of the future Pakistan, had in 1908 been consumed with nostalgia for the lost Muslim culture of Sicily (part of the Muslim world from the ninth to the eleventh

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centuries) as he caught sight of the island’s coast during his return to India after studies in Britain, and addressed this lost heritage as a person: “What story is hidden in your ruins? …Make me suffer by telling the story of ancient days.”

After the success of *La Tunisie Martyre*, which was published in 1919, the fortunes of ‘ Abd-el Azîz Tha‘âlbi and the Parti Liberal Constitutionnel Tunisien (*al-Hizb al-Dustûrî al-Hurr al Tûnisi*) declined, particularly after 1926. In addition to the hostility of the French Resident-general Lucien Saint, Tha‘âlbi and the mainly older members of the *Dustûr* party were confronted by a younger generation mobilised by Habib Bourguiba, then a twenty-seven year old Paris-trained lawyer who had returned to Tunisia in 1927. This ultimately led to the secession in 1934 of a Neo-Destour party led by Bourguiba, leaving the original party with its core drawn from urban Tunis families and scholars from the prestigious Zitouna mosque.

The theme of a continuum of national history based on national individuality was expressed by Bourguiba in terms of a Tunisian “personality” with a particular narrative to be defended. Bourguiba used the term “Tunisian personality” in a polemic in 1929 with the journal *Tunis-Socialiste* which advocated a fusion between European and Tunisian workers around an internationalist, rather than nationalist programme. The immediate question was that of the veil worn by Tunisian women that Socialist activists in Tunis sought to abolish. Bourguiba, in the colonial context, saw the veil as one of the

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manifestations of the "Tunisian personality." The term "personality" was used, it has been suggested, by Habib Bourguiba in a sense derived from French legal terminology with a meaning of a juridical actor capable of participating in judicial life. He was not however a pioneer in its use. Tha’albi employed the term at the Paris Peace Conference while one of the most influential popular histories of Tunisia, Hassan Husni ‘Abdelwahāb’s khulāsat ta’rīkh Tunis, published in 1918, commences by affirming that “every nation has its own life and personality derived from the events it experiences through the ages as persons pass through the stages of their lives.”

While in the 1930s Bourguiba used concepts of historical identity and personality by late 1956 he spoke of a Tunisian desire to live in “close communion with the modern world…. [and] to open windows on to other cultures, particular French culture.” Tunisian post-independence school manuals underlined the positive aspect of the French colonial presence as well as its injustices. While Tunisian chroniclers had historically associated


25 Ibid., 117.


the Mediterranean with the frontier between the Muslim and Christian worlds, school textbooks in the mid-1960s described Tunisia’s Mediterranean location in terms which underlined the proximity of Tunisia to France within the Mediterranean area.\textsuperscript{28} Hassan Husni ‘Abdelwahāb’s classic \textit{khulāsat ta’rīkh Tunis} also foregrounds the Mediterranean region and Tunisia’s place therein: “the events of the Ancient World unfolded, for the most part, on the shores of the Mediterranean, source of religions and origin of history….if one looks at the map one sees among the regions surrounding the sea a small country which divides the sea in two halves and whose shores form the dividing line between East and West…”\textsuperscript{29}

Tunisia’s Islamic heritage was not neglected: in July 1978 a statue of Ibn Khaldoun was inaugurated in a site in the centre of Tunis between the French embassy and the Catholic Cathedral, in the same axis as an equestrian statue of Bourguiba –dating from 1977 - at the other end of the Avenue Bourguiba.\textsuperscript{30} Press reports associated Ibn Khaldoun with all those who “give their insight and intellectual power in the service of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{29}] Hassan Husni ‘Abdelwahāb, \textit{khulāsat ta’rīkh Tunis}, 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{30}] Allen Fromherz, \textit{Ibn Khaldun: life and times} (Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 152-154. This statue was removed by Ben Ali in 1988 and banished to La Goulette. It was replaced on 13 August 2016. \url{http://lapresse.tn/14082016/118628/inauguration-de-la-statue-equestre-de-bourguiba.html} (accessed 19 October 2016).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the fatherland.” This strong symbolic gesture came six months after the ruthless repression of a general strike called by the Union générale de travailleurs tunisiens (UGTT).

By 1979 a fifteen-volume *Histoire du Mouvement National Tunisien* presented the history of the Tunisian national movement as the history of Bourguiba himself. Other nationalists were disqualified: Tha’ālbi’s Dustūr party was described by Bourguiba in a speech in 1966 as composed of Tunis-based urban elites out of touch with the Tunisian people whom he, Bourguiba, had mobilised around the Neo- Dustūr party in 1934. A sense of a *fin de règne* was compounded by demonstrations in January 1984 after food subsidies were withdrawn. Recession in the petroleum industry caused the return of thousands of workers from Libya while tourism suffered in the aftermath of the Israeli bombing of a PLO compound in the Tunis suburb of Hammam Lif in 1985 and the US air raid on Tripoli in April 1986. The Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique led by Rāshid Ghannouchi was winning increasing support and Tunisia was rife with rumours about the president’s mental and physical fitness.

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33 Ibid.
In November 1987, the senescent Habib Bourguiba was deftly eased from power by his Prime Minister, Zīne El ʿAbidīne Ben ʿAli. In autumn 1988, a variety of figures from across the political spectrum were invited to formulate a statement of political philosophy and objectives on which all could agree in advance of elections in 1989. Part of this statement included the following historical section:

Our people’s identity is specifically Arabo-Islamic, rooted in an ancient and glorious past. We aspire to confront today’s challenges. The situation of our country, in a region which was the cradle of great human civilisations, has enabled our people through the centuries to contribute to human civilisation and given us an aptitude for renewal and creativity. Carthage was one of the two greatest powers of Antiquity. Tunisians are proud of the genius of Hannibal (247-181 BCE) as well as of the heroism of Jugurtha (160-104 BCE). Tunisia is equally proud to have been the starting point of the conquests which brought the message of Arabo-Islamic civilisation to the Arab Maghreb, to the north of the Mediterranean and Africa as well as of the great figures the country has produced such as Imam Sahnoun (776-854 CE), Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) and the reformer Khéreddine. (1822-1890)

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36 Ibid., 187.
Jugurtha was ruler of Numidia, corresponding roughly to modern Algeria. Contemporary portrayals present him as a proto-nationalist adversary of Rome. French colonial archaeologists, notably Stephane Gsell (1864-1932) located Jugurtha’s capital in the eastern Algerian city of Constantine. This was contested by André Berthier from 1950 onwards who extended the frontiers of Numidia eastwards towards Tunisia and situated Cirta in the environs of the present-day Tunisian city of El Kef. In 2008 the Tunisian scholar Muhammad Tlili developed Berthier’s theses in his Étendue et limites de la Numidie archaïque : esquisse d’une nouvelle géographie historique des royaumes autochtones. In the Tunisian media there are multiple allusions to the western Tunisian city of El Kef as the ancient capital of Numidia. Alix Martin’s 2015 article on the Qala’ a (fortress) of Mahjouba to the south of El Kef associates Jugurtha with other North African resistance leaders such as the nebulous female figure of Kahena who led Berber resistance to the Muslim invaders in the seventh century. Martin even mentions the French aerial attack on the western Tunisian town of Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef on 8 February 1958 during the Algerian War, an attack commemorated in Tunisia and Algeria each year.

The 1988 National Pact’s reconstruction of a Tunisian historical trajectory sweeps aside archaeological controversy (in the case of Jugurtha) and gives national coloration to an Ottoman figure such as Kheireddine Pasha originally a Circassian orphan from the Caucasus traded in to the household of an Ottoman notable. The notion of “our country” traversing the centuries blurs the differences between modern borders and states and the

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39 (Université de France-Comté, Besançon, 2008).
North African medieval micro-regions studied by Ramzi Rouighi. The allusion to the “Arab Maghreb” recalls how Tunisian nationalist authors such as Ali Belhaouane in his 1944 essay *Nahnu Umma* underline the unity of the Maghreb in the face of foreign invaders, most recently the French whose historians sought to minimise the historical cohesion of Tunisia.

As Rouighi has shown, this kind of affirmation or mapping of regional unity is based on the medieval writings of “city-centric” intellectuals favourable to “Emirism”, the ideology that supported the control of a single, Tunis-centred Hafsid emir over a broader region extending westwards.

The Ben ‘Ali regime tended to downplay the achievements of the period before 1987, underlining the Change (*at-tahawwul*) Ben ‘Ali claimed to represent after the twilight years of Bourguiba. A familiar element of the pre-2011 Tunis streetscape were banners acclaining Ben ‘Ali as the “Architect of Change” *sāni’ et-tahawwwal*, a change sometimes sacralised as the “Blessed Change”, *et-tahawwal al-mubārak*. The “Arabo-Islamic” allusions to figures such as Imam Sahnoun are an early indication of the Ben ‘Ali regime’s attempts to monopolise the production of a religious norm, attempts which

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41 Ali Belhaouane, *Nahnu Umma* (Tunis: undated), 58-62. From a family of urban notables, Belhaouane (1909-1958) was a Paris-trained professor of philosophy and Arabic literature and participated in demonstrations in 1924 against the erection of statue in Tunis of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (founder of the “White Fathers”) as well as the 9 April 1938 nationalist demonstration in Tunis which was violently repressed by French security forces.

continued through initiatives such as the creation of the Quranic radio station “Radio Zitouna” in 2007.\textsuperscript{43}

This “innovation” was however aligned with previous generations of Tunisian discourse. Hannibal and Ibn Khaldoun were ingredients of Habib Bourguiba’s treatment of the continuum of Tunisian history. The “Change” of 1987 becomes part of an older narrative of reform through the presence of the figure of Kheireddine Pasha. This “map” of Tunisian history bearing the salient names of providential Great Men is underpinned by a view of time which postulates a historical subject which is self-identical and essentially continuous.\textsuperscript{44} Historical events and names are in themselves contingent, serving to reassert an enduring historical subjectivity in the face of dislocation.\textsuperscript{45} The words of the pre-1987 Tunisian National Anthem Alā Khallidi (لا خلّدي) are an example of this: “khallidī dimā’ na jihād al waṭan” / “may our blood make eternal the struggle of the homeland.”\textsuperscript{46} 47 The term of “national personality” discussed earlier in this chapter

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] Vincent Geisser et Éric Gobe, “Un si long règne… Le régime de Ben Ali vingt ans après”, 
\item[45] Ibid., 83.
\item[46] Written by Jalaleddine Naccache Alā Khallidi replaced the Hymne beylical in 1958. After 1987 Alā Khallidi with its allusion to the “za‘īm Habib” (Bourguiba) was replaced in 1987 by Ḥumāt al-Ḥimā (“defenders of the homeland”) which dates from the 1930s.
\item[47] Aziz al Azmeh studies the genealogy of this vitalist current which was present in the early doctrine of the Syrian and Iraqi Baath (resurrection) parties. Ibid., 95. Despite this convergence Bourguiba was an avowed opponent of the pan-Arab vision of early Baathism as well as the current represented by Gamāl ‘Abdelnasser. See Adnan Mansar, “La personnalité nationale” L’approche de l’identité et de l’appartenance civilisationnelle chez l’élite
\end{footnotes}
reappeared in the work of Hasan Hanafi, architect of a so-called Islamic Left. Adherence to the authenticity of the cultural self endows it with “historical continuity and temporal homogeneity and the unity of the national personality.”

While Hanafi’s language may appear arid and abstract he is alluding to place, belonging and wholeness amid disruption. Brian Friel, whose work *Translations* we discussed earlier in this chapter engages in his 1990 play *Dancing at Lughnasa* with place and its capacity to hold together disparate experiences and histories, even as they are exposed to dislocation. Richard Rankin Russell comments on this play that the widening circles of place present in the play “whirl us into the play’s eternal present” as recreated and memorialized in the play’s final monologue.

Maps, as I noted earlier in this chapter are overlaid with grids of nomenclature and authority; in the same way historical maps, to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, seek to tell a particular story about a particular place. The *kharīta* as map-and-wound reminds us that the wholeness of such stories is associated with dislocation however much they may seek to be seamless.

This section has therefore sought to give a basic historical outline of the period between the 1920s and the political demise of Habib Bourguiba in 1987. The quotation from Brian Friel’s *Translations* “It is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history that shape

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us but images of the past embodied in language “ has underpinned this section: the anti-imperialist nostalgia of Tha’albi and other “colonial” participants at the Paris Peace Conference is associated with a quest – in times of spiritual and material flux - for a national “personality” unfolding in history through mahattāt associated with great figures of the past. The Ben ‘Ali regime after 1987 adopted and modified Bourguiba’s kharīta exemplified, as we noted, in the names of the railway stations between Tunis and its northern suburbs.

The next section of this chapter will look more closely at mappings of Tunisian history which were undertaken during the 1990s and in particular the renewed attention given to the Mediterranean. What are some of the meanings with which landscape, particularly urban landscape, is “burdened and overburdened”? Mediterranean mosaics: Ben Ali and others

The mid to late 1990s, in retrospect, were a period of relative stability for the Ben’Ali régime. Tunisia was the first North African country to sign a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement in July 1995. 1995 also saw the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference and between 1998 and 2013 the Euromed heritage programme financed a number of conservation projects in Tunis, including the restoration of the Église Sainte-Croix in Rue de la Zitouna. In October 1995 Jacques Chirac made an official visit to Tunis, and attended Mass in the Cathedral opposite the French embassy. Ben ‘Ali faced

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51 Robinson, Setting foot on the shore of Connemara..1996), 171. See note 23 supra.
52 Abbassi, Quand la Tunisie s’invente, 94.
uninspiring opposition in the 1999 presidential elections, winning 99.44% of the votes cast. European investment was at high levels and access to consumer goods was enhanced for Tunisia’s middle class.\textsuperscript{53} By the turn of the century the country attracted five million tourists from Europe and the Arab world.\textsuperscript{54} In 2008 Nicolas Sarkozy would visit Tunis and declare: that “Tunisia is at the heart of the Mediterranean, where East and West converge. Tunis is as close to Nice as Nice is to Dunkirk.” His Tunisian counterparts reiterated that Tunisia unfailingly supports “every initiative aimed at building dialogue and understanding between civilisations and religions, in a context of tolerance and moderation.”\textsuperscript{55}

For the foreign visitor to central Tunis in the late 1990s and early 2000s the city centre had a toy-town feel, with manicured \textit{ficus} trees lining the Avenue Bourguiba and little overt security around the British embassy at Bab Bhar or the Prime Minister’s office at the Kasbah. Red and white banners with the reassuring message \textit{Tunis bilād al-aman} (“Tunis, land of security”) bedecked public space. After nightfall police sentries in front of the French embassy would fix bayonets but there were no sandbags or barbed wire or warnings to pedestrians to keep clear. Once a year on 24 June, the anniversary of the founding of the Tunisian Army in 1956, the ground floor lobby of the Ministry of Information next to the Cathedral would be draped for a few days in camouflage netting and an audio-visual display of the country’s military resources exhibited. Occasionally

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{53} Perkins, \textit{A history of modern Tunisia}, 202-203.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Tunisia:Basic Data} (Tunis:Tunisian External Communications Agency, 1993), 79, 82-83, quoted by Perkins, \textit{A history of modern Tunisia}, 225.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{55} See \textit{Tunisie Plus} 1 (2008): 6.}
\end{footnotesize}
uniformed French and Italian sailors would disembark from training vessels such as the *Jeanne d’Arc* and the *Amerigo Vespucci*. The main medina thoroughfare of Rue de la Zitouna was clogged by columns of German tourists with occasional patrols by the Police Secours unit in black imitation-leather jackets, their belts festooned with stubby truncheons and crackling radios.

It was in this context of a Tunisia re-situating itself in the Mediterranean of the mid-1990s that Tunisian historians began to study the communities composed of nineteenth century migrants to Tunisia from the northern shores of the Mediterranean, although the Tunisian Jewish community was generally included among the “communities.” This coincided with the formalisation of relations between Tunisia and Israel. In April 1996 Tunisia and Israel established “interest sections” in each other’s country. Israeli and Tunisian Jewish historians were invited by their Tunisian colleagues to participate in renewed study of Tunisia’s Mediterranean communities:

**Convinced that the history we are writing should be the synthesis and expression of diverse sensibilities we are favourable to the idea that Israeli University colleagues should join us in our research. Many Jews originally**

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from Tunisia are now in Israel: around 20,000 Jews left Tunisia for Israel between 1948 and 1955.\textsuperscript{57}

Returning to Tunis, in 1998 the “History and memory” research unit based at the University of Manouba organised a colloquium to study relations between Jews and Muslims in Tunisia. Habib Kazdaghli, in his presentation of the research unit “Histoire et mémoire,” commented that: “the reaffirmation of the rights of the Arab and Muslim majority and the post-1956 conception of national unity meant that it was inopportune to highlight the presence or the numerical strength of other communities or groups living in the country.\textsuperscript{58} For his part, the Minister of Higher Education, Dali Jazi, evoked “a national history and a collective memory resplendent in all its dimensions and specificities though the centuries.”\textsuperscript{59}

Jazi went on to say that members of the Tunisian Jewish community had the right to serve their \textit{patrie} even though in reality the majority of the Tunisian Jewish population had left Tunisia between 1956 and 1970 and dwindled further by the end of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{60} An example of form prevailing over substance? One can make a parallel

\textsuperscript{57} Habib Kazdaghli, presentation of the research unit \textit{Histoire et mémoire}, faculté des lettres de Manouba (Université de Tunis I), February 1998.


\textsuperscript{60} The February 1956 census recorded a Jewish population in Tunisia of 57,786. By 1970 due to emigration this had fallen to 10,000. See Paul Sebag, \textit{Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie des origines}
between this enveloping of Tunisia’s minority communities in a reassuring common
history and more overt attempts by the Ben ‘Ali regime at inclusion and control: in 1997
subventions were given to opposition parties based on their representation in the National
Assembly where nineteen seats were set aside for opposition parties.⁶¹

The study of Tunisia’s “communities” also involved Tunisians of Italian descent
such as Silvia Finzi, member of a Jewish family (originally from Livorno) which had
remained in Tunisia after independence in 1956.⁶² Benefiting from official Italian support
for its publications, largely in Italian despite the limited readership for this language in
Tunisia, the Finzi publishing company’s Progetto della memoria tended to perpetuate a
tendency in Italian historiography to depict benevolent Italians building the foundations
of modern Tunisia.⁶³

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Ibid., 310.


The Finzi publishing company was founded by a Jewish family from Leghorn (Livorno) who
settled in Tunis in the early nineteenth century. Their Progetto della Memoria consisted of a
series of publications which sought to reconstruct the memory of the Italian collectivity.
Colloquia such as the ‘Week of intercultural dialogue’ in 2008 (with the participation of
Tunisian scholars and Italian artists, diplomats and politicians) explored themes such as
‘Italian emigration in Tunisia: its role as a vector in Tunisio-Italian encounter.’

The publications of the ‘Memory Project’ comprise S. Finzi, (ed.), Pittori italiani di Tunisia,
Tunis, Finzi, 2000; S. Finzi, (ed.), Memorie italiane di Tunisia (Tunis: Finzi, 2000); S. Finzi,
(ed.), Architetture italiane di Tunisia (Tunis, Finzi, 2002); S. Finzi, (ed.), Mestieri e
professioni degli Italiani di Tunisia (Tunis, Finzi, 2003). M. Pendola (ed.), L’alimentazione
degli Italiani di Tunisia, Tunis, Finzi, 2005; S. Finzi and Daniele Laguillon Hentati (eds.),
Écrivains et poètes italiens de Tunisie Scrittori e poeti italiani di Tunis (Tunis, 2009.)
Italian ambassadors in Tunis contributed complacent prefaces to publications of the Progetto della memoria, praising the conviviality which prevailed between Italians and Tunisians.\textsuperscript{64} The Italian presence in Tunisia had however generated conflicts and these went unmentioned by the Progetto. In the early twentieth century Italians and other immigrants were recruited in preference to Tunisians for work on French farms.\textsuperscript{65} The resulting animosity exploded into violence in 1911 Tunisians clashed with Italian residents of a Tunis suburb. The settler journal \textit{Le Colon français} attributed the blame for the disturbance to Turkish agents-provocateurs stirring up Tunisian opposition to the Italian offensive in neighbouring Tripolitania which had begun on 5 October 1911. The same issue of \textit{Le Colon français} also criticised the “insolence of the Italian lower classes” who were involved in daily scuffles with Tunisians in front of the offices in central Tunis of \textit{La Dépêche Tunisienne} which posted up news of Italian victories in Tripolitania.

Despite the Progetto della memoria’s interest in social micro-history with monographs on literature, art, kitchen recipes, and architecture, it has a broader aim of presenting what its sees as a balanced portrait of the Italian community. The Progetto della memoria tends to emphasise the contribution of Italians to the development of

\textsuperscript{64} See for example the remarks of Armando Sanguini, Italian ambassador in Tunis, in his preface to \textit{Memorie italiane di Tunisia} (Tunis, Finzi), 2000: ‘The promoters of the Memory Project see the past as providing a model of co-existence between different peoples. The Italian community showed a constant capacity to engage with the Tunisians in an atmosphere of openness and fruitful conviviality, which was not always the case of other communities at the time.’

\textsuperscript{65} Perkins, \textit{A history of modern Tunisia}, 55, 70.
Tunisian infrastructure, notably in the architectural domain. While seeking to diversify Tunisian historiography, the Progetto della memoria remains confined within the paradigm of modernisation and progress espoused by earlier Italian scholars such as Angelo Sammarco. 1883-1948) in works such as Gli Italiani in Egitto, il contributo italiano alla formazione dell’Egitto moderno published in 1937 sought to highlight the participation of Italians in the development of Egypt.

Framing the present

After the Revolution of 2010-2011 Tunisia’s leaders projected an image of tolerance, notably with regard to the country’s Jewish community. Ten years after the bombing of the Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba in 2002 the Tunisian prime minister Hamadi Jebali, speaking at a World Tourism Organisation meeting in Djerba in April 2012 evoked a “tolerant and welcoming” Tunisia.

Beyond such generalities, the re-emergence of the figure of Georges Adda (1916-2008) is an example of a more critical framing of Tunisia’s present through evocation of the past. In 2016 Adda’s was given to a reading room in the National Library of

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66 Sanguini, Architectures italiennes. See also Finzi, “Il Progetto della Memoria: obiettivi e risultati.”


68 http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/100-juifs-100-tunisiens?id=8355
Defining himself as an anti-Zionist, Judaized Berber, Adda was a member of the Tunisian Communist Party from 1934 onwards. He was detained repeatedly by the French authorities, notably between 1952 and 1954 at camps in southern Tunisia. In 2006 he recalled a scene reminiscent of Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* when the walls of the prison where he was detained trembled as hundreds of detainees sang *Ḥumāt al-Ḥimā* (defenders of the homeland) while three condemned prisoners were led to their execution: “C’est ça, le people tunisien” Adda would later declare. Adda and Bourguiba had been detained together in the 1930s and in 1997 Adda wrote an open letter to Ben Ali calling for freedom of movement for the ailing Habib Bourguiba, by this time confined in a form of house-arrest at Monastir.

On Adda’s death in 2008, Cherfi Ferjani, a Tunisian academic based in France and former member of the left-wing Perspectives movement founded in 1963, described Adda as “a departed symbol of resistance to the contemporary regression known as the reconciliation of the country with its Arabo-Muslim identity.” Striking a less polemical note yet one significant in the context of the Ben ‘Ali regime, Ahmed Brahim (1946-

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70 Since the 1930s a number of Jewish Communists had sided with the Neo-Destour Tunisian nationalists. Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie*, 208.


72 Bendana, “Georges Adda parmi nous…”

leader of the Tadjdīd (formerly Communist) Party, in his 2008 funeral panegyric for Adda called him “an element of this plural Tunisia which draws its unity from its diversity as it struggles for liberty, justice and fraternity.”

A more recent appreciation has been that of the historian Kmar Bendana who described Adda as an internationalist, opposed to the “Sirens of nationalism,” while supporting liberation struggles from Algeria to Vietnam. She continued: “when one sees that Tunisia can produce generous patriots and militants, one remains hopeful that, through celebrating the memory of one such person, one can contribute to the building of a better future.”

The relationship between the Left in Tunisia and nationalism is a complex one, as one realises through the study of articles from the 1920s in Tunis-Socialiste with its by-line “for the brotherhood of the races.” Tunis-Socialiste called for the fusion of all Tunisian workers, irrespective of race or religion, into a single movement and saw the nascent Tunisian nationalist movement as undermining internationalism. In the meantime Western capitalism, allied with reactionary forces in Tunisia, was the real adversary. In


75 Bendana, “Georges Adda parmi nous ...”

76 Ibid.

77 See “Parti Socialiste: Déclaration”: in Tunis-Socialiste (1926) :781. « The Tunisian people is not any particular group among the Muslims, Jews, French or Italians which individually constitute an incoherent mass, but rather the homogeneous bloc animated by a new and fraternal spirit which will emerge one day from the interpenetration of these groups which are today separated and hostile. The Socialist Party believes that this fusion of races and cultures in the crucible of a higher civilization is desirable and possible…we refuse our support to any
1956, however, the Tunisian Communist Party moved to exclude “European” activists (possessing French citizenship) while opening its membership to Algerians and Libyans present in Tunisia. This exclusion contrasts with the image of a “plural Tunisia” of a multicultural character often evoked in the Ben ‘Ali years by those, such as Habib Kazdaghli, working on the role of minority communities in culture and politics.79

Reflections on the past are therefore inflected by multiple and shifting lines of power. As a plural phenomenon nostalgia takes on many forms and involved a variety of agents and

movement of a confessional and nationalist character because nationalist movements provoke regression and servitude.” André Duran-Anglieviel (1877-1964) denounced the Tunisois notables and their “feudal” traditions, their allies in colonial big-business circles as well as the Tunisian nationalists. They (the nationalists) undermined workers’ internationalism by encouraging chauvinistic patriotism. See “Pas de confusion,” Tunis-Socialiste (1924) : n.712, 7 November and “Les dernières nouvelles de Strasbourg,” 22 October 1924.


During the French protectorate (1881-1956) Muslim and Jewish Tunisians remained subjects of the Bey of Tunis while French settlers were French citizens. After the First World War a law passed in December 1923 facilitated the acquisition of French nationality and 6,667 Tunisian Jews obtained French nationality. Tunisian Jewish Communists, according to Paul Sebag, refused this démarche out of solidarity with the rest of the Tunisian population. Sebag, Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie, 183.

79 “By assembling the scattered fragments of their memory the Italians contribute not only to the writing of the history of their own collectivity, but also the history of Tunisia, for this memory is also that of plural Tunisia.” Kazdaghli was alluding here to a volume entitled Écrivains et poètes italiens de Tunisie Scrittori e poeti italiani di Tunisi published in 2009 as part of the Finzi publishing company’s omnivorous Memory Project. See note 66.
locations. Specific geographies and histories of discourse and practices are organized around longing and loss. Practice rather than content, therefore, whose forms and meanings shift from context to context.

This plasticity means that a figure such as Georges Adda can be an inspiration from a vanished Tunisia for resistance to the regime of Ben’ Ali, or, as a Jewish Tunisian, an implicit challenge to restrictive understandings of Tunisian identity. In the changed landscape of post-revolutionary Tunisia a celebration of the absent Adda highlights his role as activist in the political arena. The naming of a reading-room in the National Library after Georges and his wife Gladys Adda in a sense normalises them and makes them part of the Tunis urban landscape.80

This chapter began with a discussion of Brian Friel’s play Translations and has we have concluded with a discussion of how Tunisia’s past can be “translated” and rendered meaningful in the present. We used the image of the map or kharīta with the undertone in Arabic of “scar” or “wound,” and Friel’s drama of competing ideologies can help us to perceive some of the tensions, occlusions, and binding-up of wounds (kharīta-s) that accompany the practice of naming of place in times of dislocation, the present “time of torments” in the words of the Tunis-based historian Kmar Bendana quoted earlier.81

81 Bendana, “Georges Adda parmi nous ..”
Nostalgias compared

The final part of this chapter compares the nostalgias which existed during the colonial period, studied in chapters 3 and 4, and the contemporary types of nostalgia associated with the colonial period. In his discussion of “Census, map, and museum” in *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson highlights what he came to see as the direct ideological lineage between the colonial state and the new post-independence states in terms, for example, of mapping territory and implanting the map as a infinitely-reproducible logo in popular imagination.  

He also considers the use of the “museumizing” of Antiquity as part of what he terms the “historical map.” Anderson’s discussion is centred on South-East Asia but his schema can be a starting point for the present discussion which compares practices of nostalgia across time in Tunisia.

Chapter 3 discussed how French projects of restorative nostalgia foregrounded references from classical Antiquity and notably Roman Africa, linking colonial rule to North Africa’s “Latin” past. Charles Monchicourt presented a harmonious picture of relations between French administrators, natural “aristocrats” in Monchicourt’s view, and indigenous Tunisians. This was echoed in Chapter 4 where, as I noted, IBLA drew on a variety of nostalgic references to the archaizing courtliness of Hubert Lyautey and even ventured into the ante-bellum South of *Gone with the Wind*.

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82 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 175. See note 13 supra.

83 Ibid., 181.

Bourguiba and other first-generation nationalist leaders adopted the schema of classical antiquity although they shifted focus from Rome to Carthage. Tha‘ālbi in *La Tunisie Martyre* alludes to Carthage while the character of Jugurtha was claimed as ancestor by both Algerians and Tunisians. The Algerian scholar Tawfiq al Madani (1899-1983), born in Tunis to an Algerian family who had performed *hijra* after the failed 1871 insurrection against French rule, also saw Phoenicians, founders of Carthage, as the bearers of a civilising force from the East, preparing the way for the Islamic conquest, *al fath al islāmi*.  

Madani contrasts the fraternity between the North Africans and the Phoenicians with the violence accompanying colonial occupation. The Tunisian historian Husayn Husni ‘Abd el Wahāb identified the seeds of democracy in Carthaginian practices of governance and gives lyrical descriptions of the city itself. Interestingly he describes Roman colonisation (*ist‘imār*, the term used for European colonialism) after Carthaginian defeat as a *himāya* (protectorate) adding in a post-1956 edition of his history (originally published in 1918) an overt allusion to similarities between Roman rule and the French occupation of Tunisia.

The nationalist Ali Belhaouane in *Nahnu Umma* (1946) describes Carthage as “mistress of the Mediterranean” with its maritime explorations extending as far as Britain and the Gulf of Guinea, at the mouth of the River Congo. Hannibal, Carthage’s great hero, almost managed to defeat Rome, Belhaouane recalls, and Carthage’s eight hundred-

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86 Ibid.,
88 Belhaouane, *Nahnu Umma*, 57.
year existence is one of the ingredients of Tunisian national consciousness. Just off the Avenue de France near Bab Bhar in Tunis Rue Hannon (dating from the protectorate period) commemorates the Carthaginian explorer who, according to Pliny the Elder, managed to circumnavigate Africa. Under Ben ‘Ali the “Carthaginian state” and Hannibal as military genius are given prominence in school text books.

Husayn Husni ‘Abd el Wahāb also mentions the contribution of the Carthaginian agricultural scholar Magon. The Punic text of Magon’s agricultural treatise has been lost, but some fragments of Greek and Latin translations survive. Wine is still produced in Tunisia today with Magon’s depiction on the label imparting an air of tradition lost in the mists of antiquity.

91 Abbassi, Quand la Tunisie s’invente, 89 : Without Carthage and the role of its maritime commerce which facilitated the movement and diffusion of civilisational (sic) influence, without Magon and the manuals which caused agricultural sciences to progress, without Hannibal’s genius, the mosaics of the African provinces, the thought of Tertullian and Saint Augustin, Mediterranean culture and Christian culture in Europe would not be what they are today.
93 A contemporary Tunisian wine producer takes up the theme of Magon: “The first vines planted in Tunisia date back to the Punic period. The Carthaginians built on this fine heritage and were the first to carry out scientific studies in oenology, as demonstrated by the ‘Treatise on agronomy and winegrowing’ written by Magon in the eighth century BC. This long-standing love affair between the Carthaginians and wine is being continued today by Les Vignerons de Carthage, whose great wines bring to mind Tunisia’s fine sandy beaches, its charming oases and its magnificent landscapes.”

With regard to French colonialism, the gentlemen-farmers and administrators evoked extensively by Monchicourt and the *Ibla* journal of the 1930s have sunk without trace. Hubert Lyautey remains a rhetorical resource for French politicians in Morocco, most recently Francois Hollande in April 2013. In Tunisia it would difficult to evoke a protectorate panjandrum whose name would be familiar today with the exception of Charles Nicolle (1866-1936), director of the Pasteur Institute in Tunis (1903-1936) and winner of a Nobel Prize for his research on typhus. One of Tunis’ principal hospitals still bears his name.

What one does find however, in volumes such as Habib Bourguiba’s *La Tunisie et la France : vingt-cinq ans de lutte pour une coopération libre* (1954) is an ideal France,

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95 As Richard C. Keller mentions in *Colonial Madness: psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), accusations were made in 1948 by the psychiatrist and nationalist activist Dr. Salem ben Ahmed Esch-Chadely (1896-1954) that Nicolle was employing North Africans as guinea pigs in drug trials for typhus at the Pasteur Institute in Tunis. A nurse who worked at the Hôpital pour les Maladies Mentales at Manouba (just outside Tunis) confirmed that patients were being used as unwilling test subjects. Ibid., 173-181. Nicolle’s portait appears in *Tunisie 1910-1960 : Victor Sebag un photographe dans le siècle*, ed. Gérard Sebag (Tunis : Cérès, 2011), Ceres is an ancient Roman goddess of agriculture and fertility.
held up as a lofty example, and contrasting with the land-grabbers such as the *colon* Vincent at Tebourba who figured in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Such sentiments were also voiced by Tunisian nationalists under the protectorate: the settlers, notably the *prépondérants* ensconced in the Grand Conseil, did not represent the “real France” and that consequently their legitimacy was undermined.96

Ici on parle français !

Turning now to independent non-governmental commentators, I noted earlier the activity of Tunis-born Italians in the field of their community’s historiography. As mentioned in Chapter 3 the Italians in Tunisia had long outnumbered the French and naturalization of Italians was a priority for French officialdom in the 1920s.97 “Ici on parle français !” one Italian resident of Tunis recalled being told towards the end of the 1940s by a member of the personnel of the Catholic Pro-Cathedral in central Tunis.98 Ironically descendants of the French community of Tunisia – the “aristocrats of the population” are today largely

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97 Given the decline after 1918 of French settlement in Tunisia naturalization provisions were introduced in 1923 and 1924. *Tunisia: Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 140-143.

98 M.B., Tunis, July 2010. 23,000 Italians were interned when Italy declared war on France in June 1940. *Tunisia: Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook*, 143. François Dornier (1913-2008), a White Father based at the agricultural domain of Thibar in western Tunisia was mobilized as a reserve officer at an internment centre for Italians. A future member of the diocesan clergy, Victor San Giorgio, was one of the internees. (M.P., Tunis, July 2010.)
absent from endeavours to reconstruct the history of pre-independence Tunisia. It is Italians, notably the Finzi family (originally part of the Livorno Jewish community) who have been active, seeking to rehabilitate the Italian contribution to modern Tunisia, obscured (in their eyes) firstly by the French colonial establishment and then by post-independence nationalist history.

More surprising is the prominence recently acquired by members of what were disdainfully termed under the protectorate “les races comparses.” In Tunisia this designated groups such as the Greeks, too small to be mentioned in the Guide Bleu’s enumeration above, numbering around 450 in 1936, and engaged mainly in fishing and sponge-fishing. Equally minuscule was the White Russian contingent numbering around 700. After the defeat of the White armies in the Crimea by the Bolsheviks the Black Sea Fleet of the Imperial Russian Navy sailed for Constantinople. In December 1920 part of this fleet with around 3,000 refugees arrived at the Tunisian poet of Bizerta. Around 700 remained in Tunisia, one of whom, Anastasia Chirinski (1912-2009), became a mathematics teacher and in 2000 published her memoirs. When a correspondent of the French magazine Le Point visited her in 1997, the resulting article was entitled “Anastasia of Bizerta, orphan of the Great Russia” with nostalgic allusions to her lost

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100 Tunisia: Naval Intelligence Division Geographical Handbook, 203.

101 Anastasia Manstein-Chirinsky, La Dernière Escale. Le siècle d’une exilée russe à Bizerte (Tunis: Sud Editions, 2000).
family estate in the Ukraine. Holder of a Nanssen passport (a refugee travel document issued by the League of Nations) until 1997, she nevertheless visited Russia in 1990. Treated by Aeroflot like a “returning princess”, in her words she managed to locate her former family home.

In her The Future of Nostalgia the late Svetlana Boym discusses the post-Communist refashioning of Russian tradition and reconnection with the grandeur of the imperial era. Anastasia’s return to Russia can be seen as an act of national reconciliation and a healing of a wounded Russia. For a Tunisian such as filmmaker Mahmoud ben Mahmoud, author of Anastasia de Bizerte (1996) her life in the port-city of Bizerte symbolised a Tunisia open to the wider world, at ease with difference.

Though numerically insignificant in pre-independence (ie pre-1956) Tunisia and even more so today, the Greeks of Tunisia possess a small Cathedral dedicated to St George dating from 1862 in Rue de Rome in central Tunis. Both this Greek Orthodox Cathedral and Russian Orthodox churches were refurbished in the late 1990s. Small plaques outside these latter buildings describe as them as centres of the Greek and Russian “communities” of Tunisia.

103 Ibid.
On 9 June 2014 the Greek Orthodox Pope Theodore II visited the Orthodox cathedral. The then-President of Tunisia Moncef Marzouki received the Papal decoration of the Golden Lion of Alexandria and recalled Tunisia’s métissage culturel and 3,000 year history, consecrated in the evocation of the pageant of Tunisian history. The title given by the on-line magazine *Leaders* in its description of the event is less conciliatory: “Redonner la parole à la pluralité identitaire usurpée.” Allusions to the “usurpation” of plural understandings of identity are to be understood in the context of debates in Tunisia about Article 39 of the Constitution with its references to Arabo-Muslim identity and the importance of Arabic.

Even though these points have been conceded in the Constitution of 26 January 2016 the visit of Theodore II was used as an opportunity to remind the Islamist En-Nahda party and its leader Râshid Ghannouchi, in the period preceding the legislative and presidential elections (23 October and 26 November 2014) that this area of discord remained.

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106 “The state guarantees the right to free public education at all levels and ensures provisions of the necessary resources to achieve a high quality of education, teaching, and training. It shall also work to consolidate the Arab-Muslim identity and national belonging in the young generations, and to strengthen, promote and generalize the use of the Arabic language and to openness to foreign languages, human civilizations and diffusion of the culture of human rights.”
Conclusion

In Chapter 3’s discussion of ‘Abdelaziz Tha’albi I noted his sentiment that Tunisians had been rendered strangers in their own lands. The Guide Bleu for 1927 comes to mind here, with its division of the population of Tunis into categories of “French,” “foreigners” (mostly Italians and Maltese), “Jews” and the “indigenous Muslim surplus.” This sentiment of one’s place in the world underlies Kheireddine Pasha’s use of the image of the modern world that, like a current, carries away kingdoms (mamālik) unable, in his words, to “take the current and go with its course.” Kheireddine seems to be voicing a sense of a kingdom, located in a particular place, caught up in wider current of change. “Place as event,” as seen by Brian Friel and his commentators. In this chapter we have sought to understand how Tunisians in government and in wider society have navigated between home and exile in times of flux and sought ways of evoking the homeland or nostos. If place can be seen as event, nostalgia too can be seen in such terms, a changing practice with changing actors depending on the context. Tunisia, as we have seen, become a site where different nostalgias converge, including, as I noted, a final echo of “White Russia” reunited with the homeland.

There are elements of continuity, as Benedict Anderson suggested, between the types of nostalgia that one encounters before and after independence – the use of classical Antiquity for example – but with a shift of focus from Rome to Carthage. With Rome

108 أقوم المسالك في معرفة أحوال الممالك لخير الدين الشنوفي، بيت البحت، تونس، بيت الحكمة، 2000.
109 Richard Rankin Russell, Modernity, Continuity and Place, 10.
have also disappeared the *colons* who constantly referred to it, yet we have seen that the Tunisians who have revisited colonial society of the early twentieth century have in a sense “Tunisified” this other country that was the past, foregrounding elements such as the Georges Adda narrative which serve the image of a diverse and inclusive Tunisia.

The introduction to this dissertation was written against the background of my experiences in Algiers; the next and final chapter will study the practices of nostalgia associated with the urban landscape of Tunis.
Chapter 6: Picturing Tunis

This dissertation began with a description of a map of Algiers, from the period of French occupation. Subsequent chapters explored broader understandings of the term map, notably the “historical map,” to use Benedict Anderson’s term.¹ This “historical map” has included the uses of nostalgia by a variety of actors in Tunisian contexts during the twentieth century. If we think of a map in terms of a picture or a drawing, nostalgia, a cultural practice which generates meaning in the present through selective visions or pictures of the past, can be seen as mapping a locality’s past.

This final chapter will focus on the place of nostalgia in representations of Tunis with particular attention to Tunis as a “Mediterranean” city. Nostalgia, as I have noted earlier, is practiced in a context, and this chapter will study this context in terms of those involved: heritage practitioners, tourist guides, and Tunisia’s international partners involved in the drawing up of the particular imaginative geography which is encapsulated in the term “Mediterranean.” I also engage with nostalgia of a more personal and reflective nature, aware of loss and the irrecoverable “pastness” of the past.

Since the work of Maurice Halbwachs before the Second World War, memory studies have generally recognize the constructivist and selective dimension of collective memory and the ways that different groups use the past for specific purposes. The past, as present in the act of remembering is not a return of the past in a “pure” form but a selective and partial formulation, a reconstruction reshaped and re-enacted by contemporary actors and the social frameworks of memory. Cultural memory is always changing, transmutable and renewable not fixed in repositories but activated through acts of collective remembering.

A theoretical line of enquiry particularly relevant to this chapter is that of frameworks for memory. Families, peer groups, religious communities, have in the past provided such frameworks. In Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire, Pierre Nora argued that the compulsion to remember (almost everything) in our time is a consequence of our society’s amnesia, which is due to the obsession with the future and with change. We have lost touch with “real” memory, and there are lieux de mémoire such as archives, flags, monuments, libraries and museums because there are no longer milieux de mémoire: real environments (or frameworks) of memory. Traditional frameworks have been replaced by a memory underpinned by memorials, monuments,

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4 Ibid., 34
museums, and archives and it is through these media that cultural memory is communicated and appropriated. Memory is inherently “tangled” with mediation. Urban refurbishment, for example, is accompanied by a moment when everything previously non-narrated is “suddenly explained, overemphasised, brochured.”

With regard to cities, such media or mediations “script” particular places, that is to say, layer them with meaning. A tourist “performance” entails following a route that is shaped by a powerful imaginative geography which shapes, without completely determining the experiences of travellers. A city, the particular kind of nostalgia which is generated around the city and the forms of mediation involved are co-constitutive, as are script and performance. It is through continuous processes of mediation that memories are shared across time and space and become collective and communal.

The next part of this chapter examines how the term “Mediterranean” has emerged in discussion of the city of Tunis and compare this with previous “scriptings” of the city in the early and mid-twentieth century. I commence at Bab Bhar (“Porte de France”), where the medina of Tunis and the modern post-1881 city of Tunis converge.

In 2013 the Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis (ASM), founded in 1967, published a volume entitled Tunis: patrimoine vivant. On the front cover of this weighty coffee-table book, the ochre façade of Palais Cardoso rises into a clear blue sky. The Palais, associated with a Tunisian Jewish family, stands at the entrance to the medina

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7 Lagerkvist, Media and memory in new Shanghai, 37-40

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of Tunis, where Rue de la Zitouna opens out onto Place de la Victoire and Bab Bhar. No trailing wires or satellite dishes break up the smooth lines of the façade which, with its pointed pediments and tall green shutters recalls Palermo or Catania. The Palais is built over an archway above the Rue de la Zitouna, one of the principal streets of the medina of Tunis, leading to the historic Zitouna mosque.

Rue de la Zitouna has been the favourite destination of foreign tourists seeking a dash of “eastern promise” before retreating to their hotels in Hammamet or Sousse. Few would have noticed the Cardoso residence, as they negotiated the noisy surroundings at the entrance to the medina of Tunis, surroundings omitted from the carefully-crafted picture of the shuttered palazzo on the cover of *Tunis: patrimoine vivant*.

“The main souk street, rue de la Zitouna, is hung with less authentic trophies: T-shirts stamped with Nike, Chanel and Hard Rock Cafe Tunis logos. From tiny stalls, certain tourist shops have become large-scale commercial ventures targeting the coach-tour trade. The whole setting, however, the general texture of the souks is still exotic enough to disorient the Westerner. The cheerful buffoonery of the salesmen is convincing enough for certain tourists to allow themselves to be togged up in mock Arab head-dress; Lawrence of Deutschland, with ersatz Bedouin head-cloth and sunburned legs returns to the tour bus waiting up on the boulevard Bab Menara.”

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Beyond Palais Cardoso further up Rue de la Zitouna is the neo classical façade of the former Église Sainte-Croix. The church was constructed in 1837 on the site of a hospital for Christian captives of Tunisian corsairs, founded in the early eighteenth century by the Catholic religious order of the Trinitarians.\textsuperscript{10} In 2002 a sign announced the future opening of a Mediterranean Centre for Applied Arts in the former presbytery adjoining the church. The church gave its name to the street– Rue de l’Église – which became Rue de la Zitouna after independence in 1956. The church was closed in 1964 under the Modus Vivendi signed between the Vatican and the Tunisian government which scaled back the presence and activities of the Catholic Church in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{11}

The project (“phase one 2002-2004”) was supported financially by the Italian government and preliminary studies and execution of the plan were entrusted to the

\textsuperscript{10} The Order of the Most Holy Trinity and the Captives was founded in 1198 and among its original activities were works of mercy and notably the ransoming of captives of the corsairs operating out of North African ports.

\textsuperscript{11} The violent confrontation between Tunisia and France over the French aero-naval base at Bizerta in June 1961, the “Tunisification” of government and administration after independence and the nationalization of agricultural land in May 1964 led to a diminution of the Catholic population of Tunisia. From 50,000 in 1962 it dwindled to around 8,000 in late 1964. The 1964 Modus Vivendi signed on 9 July between the Vatican and the Tunisian government formalized the status of the Catholic diocese in independent Tunisia. See Pierre Soumille, “L’Église catholique et l’État tunisien après l’indépendance,” in Philippe Delisle and Marc Spindler, eds., Les relations Église-État en situation postcoloniale : Amérique, Afrique, Asie XIX-XX\textsuperscript{e} siècles (Paris :Karthala, 2003), 155-201, 172, 189.
The Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina (ASM)\textsuperscript{12}. The ASM described the Église Sainte-Croix in the following way:

The building is an architectural entity capable of assuming a cultural role of great significance: a cultural hub linking the central Medina to what is termed “the European city” via the Quartier Franc (the immediate environs of the Bab Bhar gate) with its rich history of conviviality among people from different Mediterranean countries. In the Quartier Franc are situated the former British embassy and Italian consulate, the French *fondouk*, and the Garibaldi house.\textsuperscript{13} The planned conversion of the Église Sainte-Croix (today the town hall of the Medina district) as well as the adjacent presbytery into a Mediterranean Centre of Applied Arts will reinforce the values of tolerance which have characterised the history of the Medina and highlight the Mediterranean identity of the city of Tunis.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} The Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina was founded in 1967 by the Municipality of Tunis to work for the preservation of the old town. It now functions chiefly as design offices and works unit undertaking restoration projects for the Municipality and government institutions. Managed a major Medina slum-clearance and rehousing operation in the 1990s. Focus point for all those interested in the conservation of the old town.


To use Dean MacCannell’s schema, the presence of a sign in the rue de la Zitouna and the ASM commentary quoted above are the first stages in “sight sacralisation” with a marker distinguishing the Sainte-Croix complex of buildings as worthy of preservation.\textsuperscript{15}

This is part of the modern ritual of sightseeing. Erving Goffman defines ritual as a “conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value to its stand-in.”\textsuperscript{16} Sainte-Croix was intended to become a “sight,” part of the modern ritual by which certain “sights” become invested with meaning and have to be visited. The “ultimate values” in the case of Sainte-Croix include “tolerance,” and “Mediterranean identity.”

The highlighting of a “Mediterranean identity” associated with the nineteenth century European quarter or “Quartier Franc” with its rich history of conviviality is an example of a restorative nostalgic practice, the rebuilding of a “home” lost or obscured, in this case the sites (and “sights”) of Mediterranean conviviality represented by Sainte-Croix and the surrounding area, including the Palais Cardoso. The foregrounding of the Palais and the sign-posting or “site sacralization” of the former Église Sainte-Croix introduce Mediterranean tonalities into discussions of this part of the city of Tunis. What significance can be attached to this?

The area of Bab Bhar has frequently been described by travellers and commentators. However the area has typically been “scripted” as the frontier between the

\textsuperscript{15} Dean MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist: a new theory of the leisure class} (University of California Press: 1999), 41.

modern quarter of Tunis constructed after 1881 and the “traditional” medina. It has also been as an observation point for exotic spectacle. Captain J. Clark Kennedy stayed in the British consulate (adjacent to the Cardoso Palace) in 1845 and noted that “the scene from the balcony affords constant amusement . . . a continued stream of passers-by is flowing through the gate consisting of Moors, Turks, Bedoueens from the interior, country people from the villages, soldiers, porters and negroes.”

In the early twentieth century the British author Norma Lorimer stayed at the Hotel Eymon, on the other side of the Rue de la Zitouna from Palais Cardoso. As she looked out from her balcony of the Hotel Eymon at Bab Bhar she saw the “biblical” streetscape below full, she says, of exotically-dressed Tunisians. Only when she contrasts the courteous manners of the French officers of the Chasseurs d’Afrique in the hotel restaurant —“they never let their eyes light on strangers”— with “the wandering eye of the unreserved Italian” is there an allusion to a non-Tunisian population, namely the Italians present in the area since the early nineteenth century.

This concentration on exotic local colour and difference reflects a more general “scripting” of Tunis as a double city, an old medina and a new modern city. Prosper Ricard’s 1927 Guide Bleu : Algérie, Tunisie, Tripolitaine, Malte is typical in this respect:

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18 Norma Lorimer, By the waters of Carthage (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1906), 62. “Outside that gate (Bab Bhar) Tunis is so French and modern only sprinkled here and there with touches of the Orient; the whole Orient seems to pour through the gate unceasingly.” Ibid., 10.
Tunis: two juxtaposed cities which do not merge with one another. The old native city extends across the gently rolling hillside. At some distance from the Lake the new European city develops in draught-board shape in the low-lying flat ground between the old city of Tunis and the Lake.”

Ricard was writing at a time when Western scholars were formalizing a definition of the medina as an essentially Islamic urban form with mosques and markets as its features. He therefore excludes from his description of the medina its variegated French, Italian, and Maltese populations. These communities, with their cafes owned by figures such as Paul Tizio, Picorello Zerafa, Papayani, Badalucco and Attard were as numerous as Tunisian Muslims in the lower medina around Bab al Bahr.

Archive film and postcards from the early 1920s depict a colonial mêlée: shoe-shiners, schoolgirls from the convent school of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in the rue Sidi Saber, Maltese carriage drivers waiting for customers in front of Bab Bhar,

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Tunisian Jewish women in voluminous white pantaloons. On either side of Bab Bhar are wooden constructions housing shops with names such as “La Valencienne” and “François Ripoll.” Over the arch of the gateway is a plinth with the letters R.F. (République française). A tramway line curves round in front of Bab Bhar into Rue al-Djazira or “Dziza” as Sicilians pronounce it. A vendor pushing a barrow of emerald-green bunches of fresh mint cries out “Ena’na! Ena’na!” while a cry of “V-e-e-e-e-ecchia! Roba v-e-e-e-e-ec-chia!” indicates the presence of a rag-and-bone man. In the distance are audible the deep tones of ‘Marie’, ‘Pia’, ‘Pauline’, ‘Carmela’, and Rose, the bells of the Cathedral of St Vincent de Paul.

Near Bab Bahr was the childhood home (4, rue de la Vallette) of the pseudonymous impersonator Kaddour ben Nitram (in reality Eugène-Edmond Martin) who mastered fifteen varieties of Franco-Arab patois as spoken by Corsican policemen, alcoholic ex-tirailleurs, Sicilian plumbers and other figures of the streetscape.

Ricard does make a brief allusion to the hara (Jewish quarter), noting “nothing of interest,” except the voluminous traditional dress of Jewish women. In 1930 a plan of urban renewal was prepared and in 1933 Marcel Peyrouton, the French Resident, wielded

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a pick to ceremonially knock down the first brick of the decaying hara, making a
sententious declaration that only voyeuristic tourists with a bizarre sense of the
picturesque would find anything attractive in the hara.\textsuperscript{27} The Afrique du Nord illustrée commented that “of course the hovels of the hara do not merit the attention of those enthusiastic orientalists who strive to maintain the artistic cachet of the old Arab city.”\textsuperscript{28}

Ricard, along with Robert Montagne who figured in the last chapter, was a
member of the entourage of Hubert Lyautey in Morocco in the early 1920s. Lyautey praised Ricard’s efforts in commercializing arts and crafts.\textsuperscript{29} Lyautey sought to preserve traditional elites and the “traditional” urban forms of cities such as Fez and Rabat, separating native areas and European cities. This, he thought, would permit harmonious co-existence, or what he termed: “the spectacle of a congregation of humanity where men so unalike in origin and race…continue their search for a common ideal.”\textsuperscript{30} This policy of conserving what Lyautey termed the ‘vestiges of a great past’ would also help to balance the Moroccan protectorate’s budget, as Lyautey realised that since the development of tourism on a large scale, ‘the preservation of the beauty of the country has taken on an economic interest of the first order.’\textsuperscript{31}

It is not surprising, therefore, in the light of Ricard’s Moroccan experience, to
find him praising the separation of the modern city from the medina:

\textsuperscript{27} See L’Afrique du Nord illustrée, 29/2/36 : 10.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Georges Cirot, Bulletin Hispanique 23 (1921): 353-354.
\textsuperscript{30} Hubert Lyautey, Paroles d’Action 1900-1926 (Paris : 1927), 340-341.
\textsuperscript{31} Abu-Lughod, Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco , 143.
Il faut louer sans réserve l’heureuse idée qu’a eue l’administration du protectorat de tracer la nouvelle ville en dehors de la ville arabe et en respectant les quartiers indigènes. À côté d’une ville moderne, spacieuse et commode où le voyageur européen retrouvera ses habitudes et ses aises, le vieux Tunis a gardé ainsi le charme et l’originalité d’une ville orientale. Tunis offre à cet égard une grande supériorité sur Alger dont l’aspect primitif a été si profondément altéré par les constructions modernes [One should praise the fortunate choice of the protectorate administration to plan the new city outside the Arab city and respect the native districts. Beside a modern, spacious and comfortable city where the European traveller can rest in a familiar setting, old Tunis has retained the charm and originality of an oriental city. Tunis is in this respect superior to Algiers whose original aspect has been profoundly altered by modern constructions.] 32

Lyautey saw urban form as inherently expressive: the European quarter of a Moroccan city such as Rabat was a sign of French proportion and reasoning while the native quarter would be picturesque and oriental. Cityscapes were didactic, with the visitor as awed and curious spectator, in need of guide and a map. 33 The medina was to be conserved and where necessary restored to its “original” Islamic form.

La médina de Tunis est universellement réputée pour ses souks qu’une administration prévoyante cherche à conserver intacts. Bien que dans leur ensemble les souks aient pu garder leur allure ancienne l’Administration cependant ne saurait

veiller assez attentivement pour éviter que soient effectuées des transformations souvent malencontreuses, souvent hideuses [Tunis medina is universally known for the souks that a careful administration strives to preserve. Although in general the souks have been able to retain their former appearance, the Administration should carefully avoid any transformations being carried out, which can often be unfortunate or even ugly.]\(^{34}\)

Ricard’s vision of Tunis echoes that outlined by Victor Valensi’s *Projet d’aménagements, d’embellissements et d’extension de la ville de Tunis, 1920*. While Valensi’s plan foresaw radical changes in the new colonial city, the medina is seen as “a picturesque old city, a jewel which will also generate wealth for the country. The medina makes our city distinctive and attracts tourists and artists, and should therefore remain as it is.”\(^{35}\)

For the Tunis Municipality, and for Prosper Ricard, conservation rather than renovation was the priority and official decrees of 3 March 1920 and 13 September 1921 stated that traditional building norms were to be respected in three central zones of the medina of Tunis, designated “preservation zones of the souks in the Arab city and adjacent areas.”\(^{36}\) Fines, demolition, or imprisonment could in theory result if these regulations were infringed. As in the case of the Moroccan urban planning *dahir* (decree)

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 78.
of 16 April 1914 these regulations were based on administrative decree, with little possibility of appeal to a higher authority, such as the courts.\textsuperscript{37}

In practice it seems that enforcement was difficult to implement although the decrees did succeed in generating conflict between the Department of Antiquities (which functioned as a kind of urban planning gendarme) and the inhabitants of the medina.\textsuperscript{38} The Department of Antiquities had been originally set up as an archaeological service in 1886 and was ill-prepared for the complex task of urban conservation.\textsuperscript{39} The inhabitants were displeased by these attempts to prevent them modernising their commercial premises by installing metal blinds and shutters instead of the ‘traditional’ wooden doors that closed up shop fronts.\textsuperscript{40} Members of the conservation lobby wrote articles urging the municipal authorities to be vigilant in their preservation of “authentic” architectural practice, adding pictures of the offending metal blinds.\textsuperscript{41}

It is noteworthy that while writers such as Ricard and René d’Orgeval are firmly in the camp of preservation, they do give indications of a more untidy and problematic reality: Ricard, for example, voices alarm at the amount of cheap imitations from Algeria, Europe, and the Middle East flooding the local craft market.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} Abdelkafi, \textit{La Medina de Tunis}, 85.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.: 231.
\textsuperscript{41} D’Orgeval, “Ed-dār et-Tounisiyya,” 1-17.
\textsuperscript{42} Ricard, \textit{Guide Bleu : Algérie, Tunisie, Tripolitaine}, LVIII.
Ricard’s description of the modern city of Tunis is lukewarm, notably its architecture: “Le Tunis européen est construit sur un plan d’une régularité un peu monotone et ses ilôts de maisons sont délimités par des voies rectilignes [The European quarter is built in a rather monotonous style with its constructions delimitated by rectilinear avenues.] 43

Nevertheless the modern city can also be, according to Ricard, an object for contemplation in so far as it enables the visitor to perceive the new European settler community formed from the immigrants from France and other Mediterranean countries, notably Italy (in the case of Tunisia) Spain and Malta. This community also represents continuity with Antiquity: in Pour comprendre l’art musulmane dans l’Afrique du Nord et en Espagne Ricard affirmed that Roman Africa was revived by the presence of one million Europeans in Algeria and Tunisia. 44 However, in general, foreign travellers to North Africa tended to find the modern quarters and the souks of cities such as Tangiers, Tunis and Sfax tawdry and increasingly overrun with cheap imported gimcracks. 45

43 Ibid., 341.
45 See for example Nina Epton’s Under the Sickle Moon (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949), 157. 175 and Ethel Mannin’s Moroccan Mosaic (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1953), 22, 49. Both writers mention “mass produced European junk” and “Western imported vulgarities.” Mannin comments that “Tangiers assumes a romantic aspect, with all its Western imported vulgarities veiled by the swift dusk.” Ibid., 49.
Writing in 1961, Jacques Berque commented that Europe brought with it into North Africa a gallimaufry of utensils, dress, ways of speech and behaviour.\textsuperscript{46} A flood of imports drove local craftsmen into insolvency.\textsuperscript{47} The texture of life seemed a patchwork of rags and tatters, a shabby hybrid echoing to a cacophony of voices: Arabic, French, Maltese, Italian, all spoken with a strong local accent.\textsuperscript{48}

How then can we understand the apparent desire to revive and reconstruct the Mediterranean composite identity of the area around Bab Bhar during the colonial period? In order to answer this question a broader consideration of the term “Mediterranean” is required. I noted earlier the European financial support which had been given to the initial stage of the Sainte-Croix restoration project. Culture became for the European Union one of the central elements of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, a tool for stimulating dialogue and understanding. Until the 1970s relations between Europe and the Mediterranean South were bilateral and constituted a series of ad-hoc measures derived from older colonial ties. The 1995 Barcelona Declaration, and the accompanying Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) marked a movement towards a multilateral approach. The EMP had three “pillars,” economy, security, and cultural heritage, seen as a tool of regional economic development.

In the context of the mid-1990s with mounting concerns about instability in North Africa, the image of Mediterranean conviviality conferred a comforting sense of

\textsuperscript{46} Berque, \textit{Le Maghreb entre deux guerres}, 369-372.


\textsuperscript{48} Berque, \textit{Le Maghreb entre deux guerres}, 367.
consensus. The “Mediterranean” is mined metaphorically in the same way as the convivencia of medieval “Al-Andalus” in order to promote understandings of the present, “conscripted,” in Jonathan Shannon’s words, into narratives of multiculturalism.\(^49\)

Writing in the *New York Times* in March 2002, the Spanish medievalist Maria Rosa Menocal affirmed that “the enemies of cultural openness have always existed within each of our monotheistic religions, and often enough their visions of those faiths have triumphed. But at this time of year, and at this point in history, we should remember those moments when it was tolerance that won the day.”\(^50\)

This is an example of what we have elsewhere called “prospective nostalgia” evoking the same values of tolerance as those mentioned by the ASM in its delineation of the Mediterranean “identity” of the city of Tunis.\(^51\) Shannon suggests that the rhetoric of al-Andalus has become one means of “managing difference.”\(^52\) At the same time as difference is celebrated, the early twenty-first century saw a reinforcement of surveillance and control in the Mediterranean with the creation of FRONTEX or “la coopération opérationnelle aux frontières extérieures des États membres de l’Union européenne”[Operational cooperation at the external borders of the member states of the European Union.]\(^53\) Projects devoted to promoting mutual tolerance and understanding should


\(^{51}\) See note 14 in this chapter.

\(^{52}\) Shannon, *Performing al-Andalus*, 169.

\(^{53}\) Frontex.europa.eu/about.frontex/origin/, accessed 30/11/16.
be understood as soft power counterparts to European hard power manifested in immigration and border enforcement.

Another paradox of the “Mediterranean” as symbol of partnership between North and South is that its use by Tunisia’s European interlocutors and their Tunisian partners coincided with a period when, notably, in France, the Mediterranean was associated with a revalorization of France’s colonial past during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012). As presidential candidate in 2007 Sarkozy, in a controversial speech at Toulon on 7 February 2007 had associated the Mediterranean with French openness to the wider world, which for him meant the Crusades, Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1799, and Lyautey’s activity in Morocco, all part of a “dream of civilisation” rather than a “dream of conquest.”54 While France’s Mediterranean coast is dotted with monuments to past military expeditions and the “repatriated” settlers of Algeria in 1962, Toulon has made a reputation for itself as a capital of nostalgia for empire.55 The “Mediterranean” is therefore a term freighted with different associations. Tunisian urbanists of the Association


55 Notably by naming a street after Raoul Salan, leader of the OAS. See Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, “Une impossible politique muséale pour l’histoire coloniale?” in Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, eds., Vers la guerre des identités? (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2016). In Marseille, for example, among the
de Sauvegarde de la Médina (ASM) working on books such as *Tunis : patrimoine vivant* have used the term “Mediterranean” to avoid terms which evoke past conflict, such as the “colonial city”, and designated central Tunis outside the Medina as “the twentieth-century city,” product of a period of urban growth around the Mediterranean from Tangiers to Latakia, via Marseille and Alexandria.\(^{56}\) This is a break with previous depictions of the city: at the period of decolonisation, scholars placed Tunis in the category of “villes d’économie sous-développée” highlighting the problems of integration between the European city, the slums constructed by rural migrants (*bidonvilles*) and the old city or medina.\(^ {57}\) This perception of the city persisted until the 1980s.\(^ {58}\)

At the beginning of this dissertation I evoked a colonial map of Algiers as an example of an official framing of a city. The present chapter has studied the different ways a city can be layered with meaning or scripted, scriptings which change and reflect changes in taste and perception as well as, in the case of the “Mediterranean,” a wider political context. Restorative nostalgia, as part of the wider panoply of memory practices, is evolving, constantly shaped and reshaped, re-enacted and renegotiated.\(^ {59}\) Memory is inherently “tangled” with mediation, in the form of guides and maps. These contribute to forming an imaginative geography which in turn preforms the experience and expectation of visitors following for example a “tourist trail.” Audiences are agents of meaning,\(^ {59}\)

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possessing the possibility to resist, negotiate, or make alternative readings. In the introduction to this dissertation I noted Michel de Certeau’s meanings and directions hitherto unforeseen by official narratives. De Certeau also observes that the map, as scientific discourse developed, between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century, “disengaged itself from the itineraries that were the conditions of its possibility.” The itineraries make it possible to move place from one to another but these itineraries, and their pictural representations, such as the miniature ships one finds on Renaissance maps, gradually disappear.

Having evoked the colonial map of Algiers I concentrate in the conclusion of this chapter on a more recent map of Tunis, one produced by the ASM in 2013, entitled “A walk through the nineteenth and twentieth century architecture in the downtown area of Tunis.” I compare the way that the modern city of Tunis, and around the Ste Croix area, is presented in this map with memories of the city which I collected in a series of interviews between 2013 and 2015. Their stories can be seen as ‘delinquent” to use de Certeau’s term, in relation to the official Mediterranean mapping we have hitherto discussed.

The map depicts a collection of residential and commercial properties in the centre of Tunis, in an area bordered by Rue Farhat Hached in the south and by Rue Garibaldi in the north. Research included interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014 as well as explorations of the city on foot, sometimes accompanied by one or more of my

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60 Ibid., 40.
interviewees. The area of the city which figures in the interview narratives corresponds to that covered by “A walk through the nineteenth and twentieth century architecture in the downtown area of Tunis.” The southern boundary is roughly Avenue Farhat Hached (ex-Rue de Portugal) and Rue Garibaldi to the north.

The individuals I interviewed belonged for the most part to Tunis families which were formerly part of the urban bourgeoisie before the 1950s. It seems significant that some of the interviews were conducted while walking in the city. Michel de Certeau reminds us that “narration is called “diegesis”: it establishes an itinerary (it “guides”), and it passes through.”

Every story is a travel story, with a spatial dimension, producing a geography of action. Stories, on the other hand, as the Greek term diegesis suggests, guides and transgresses. It can be seen as “delinquent” in relation to the map which exhibits the fixed state of geographical knowledge.

The late Michael Sheringham has written eloquently of the Surrealist imaginative encounter with the city of Paris, where the individual pursuing his or her errance responds to the physical or historical texture of the city. Walter Benjamin’s flâneur draws sustenance from bits of local lore or legend that take on the character of lived experience. These interviewees were however

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63 Ibid., 117.
64 Ibid, 129.
66 Ibid. 100.
recognising the echoes of their own past as we circulated on foot amid the hubbub of central Tunis.

An element which interviewees foregrounded in their memories from the 1950s and early 1960s, notably of the Avenue Bourguiba (Avenue Jules-Ferry before independence in 1956) was the existence of numerous bars and restaurants which have now disappeared. These included the Brasserie Suisse at the corner of Rue de Marseille and the Avenue Jules Ferry. It existed until around 1959 or 1960 and has since been converted into commercial premises. Also mentioned were the Café de la Rotonde in the Colisée building, the Cercle militaire (Officers’ Club) at the corner of the Avenue de France and the Rue de Rome, the Bar de l’Aviation, (until recently a Tunisair agency at the corner of Avenue Bourguiba and the Rue du 18 Janvier), and the Café de Paris which still exists today.

The Bar de l’Aviation included among its clientele the solicitor and landowner Ahmed Riahi and Hachemi Bey, Bey du Camp, resident at Hammam Lif. It seems that the French female owner of the Bar de l’Aviation constituted an attraction for her male clientele. In interviews there is an insistence on the conviviality and urbanity prevailing in establishments such as the Brasserie Suisse and the Cercle militaire, transcending boundaries of religion: “There may have been a separation between generations but never between different races. an elite. French, Italians, Jews, big landowners, caïds, civil

67 Ezzedine Riahi, Tunis, 15/06/14.
servants, even sheikhs in *burnous* and *jebba* and *turban* who did not consider alcohol as something forbidden.”

Similar conviviality characterised “Le Kilt” located in the mezzanine of the Rotonde located in the Colisée building in Avenue Bourguiba. This was a *dancing* reserved on Saturday afternoon for young people: “During the week it was for adults. On Saturday afternoon only it was reserved for young people. Everyone used to go there. Italians, Jews, French. I used to go, and I am a Muslim Tunisian. It wasn’t a cabaret, but a *dancing*.”

The Rotonde was also a meeting place for pupils of the Lycée Carnot in the Avenue Habib Thameur (ex-Avenue Roustan) and the Armand Faillière girls’ school in Rue d’Angleterre. The Cercle militaire at the entrance to Avenue de France in the vicinity of the Cathedral and the French Embassy, although primarily intended for French officers, was also open to Tunisian notables.

There were not, according to the narratives emerging from interviews, in the mid to late 1950s clubs or *cercles* reserved for particular national minorities or professions with the exception of the Cercle militaire and a club for Tunisian notables in the Rue de la Commission. After independence in 1956 the Union des Français de l’Étranger was based at 12, rue de Hollande, moving to the Belvedere area in the early 1970s. The founding of the UFE with its national identity is an indication of the undoing of a cosmopolitan urban elite with a shared code of *citadinité*.

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68 E.R., 15/06/14.
69 F.L., Tunis, 8/11/14..
70 E.R 15/06/14.
A point underlined in a number of interviews was the absence of any segregation between races in settings such as the Brasserie Suisse. At the same time there was a spatial order of precedence reflecting social segregation, with poorer Jews, for example, remaining in the Hafsia relatively distant from the Avenue. It was suggested that Tunisians of modest origin “would not have felt at ease” in the Casino, on the corner of the Avenue Jules-Ferry and Avenue de Carthage, a venue patronised by wealthy Tunisian and European landowners. The police would dissuade those whose sartorial “profile” did not correspond to the criteria of the Avenue: “‘If the police found someone of poor appearance in the Avenue they would ask how much money he had with him. If the sum was insufficient he would be threatened with prosecution for vagabondage.’” 71

One perceives here, through the use of terms such as afāqi (a term used by the urban elite for those from the “horizon” or rural interior of Tunisia) traces of the hierarchy of colonial sarcasm in which the lower classes became the target of humour on the part of those few who had secured a precarious social status amid general upheaval. Only those at the summit of the pyramid, according to Jacques Berque, could allow themselves to indulge in humour at their own expense, while everyone took pleasure in the decline of their inferiors.72

Beyond particular places of sociability, the Avenue and adjoining areas are recalled as zones where familiar figures would be encountered. This ambience persisted into the 1960s:

71 E.R 15/06/14.
“In the course of family excursions to Tunis I recall that my father, in the Avenue Bourguiba or the Avenue de Paris, would meet an enormous number of people, stopping every five minutes because he would meet a friend or a group of friends. It was very convivial, with a few foreigners still around. There was a particular atmosphere in the city, really cool… a good place to be.”

This Franco –Tunisian female observer underlined the presence in the city-centre of a population familiar with the codes of urban life. This Tunisian elite perpetuated the practices of sociability which had developed with the city after 1881. By the early-1970s, this same observer recalls the “invasion” of the city by rural populations from the countryside which changed the physiognomy of the city.

Moving away from the Avenue, the western fringe of the area under discussion (corresponding to the eastern fringe of the lower Medina around Bab Bhar and rue Zarkoun) is also part of our memory map, the scene of more interloper and fugitive forms of encounter. Jacques Berque emphasises the dearth of interracial contact and the absence of a creole community. This meant, according to Berque, that relations were possible “only on the horrible fringes of the two worlds. The Casbah of Algiers combined African brutality with the prostitution of Marseilles.”

N.B.S., Tunis, 28/6/14.


Berque, French North Africa, 304.
I conducted is somewhat at odds with Berque’s sombre tableau. While the abject nature of the brothel of *Hawmet Djraba*, situated between Sidi Mehrez and the Hafsia was recognised, establishments such as the Chabanais and the Grande Maison in the Rue al-Maktar seemed to be remembered with a degree of roguish affection.\(^7\) In the Grande Maison the women were described as being of “European” origin with the majority of the clientele Tunisian. Both the Sphinx, in the Rue Zarkoun, and the Grand Maison in the Rue al-Maktar, were renowned for their elegance, contributing to the cachet of their respective quarters.\(^7\) Outside Tunis segregation between communities is recalled as being more pronounced with in Djendouba (ex-Souk-el-Arbaa) separate establishments for Europeans and Arabs.\(^7\) “There was a European female proprietor, a bar, a piano. This was frequented by large landowners in the evening, for reasons of discretion. The *bordel arabe* was situated near the weekly market.

Virtually all those I interviewed stated that they generally avoided the city-centre area and when they did venture they found themselves disorientated by the increase in the number of people to be found there and by the changed social composition. The bars and restaurants evoke above have mostly disappeared or cater to an almost exclusively male clientele.

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Abdelhamid Larguèche records that the President of the Municipal Council in 1882 protested to the Prime Minister that a “maison de tolérance” had been established by a French national in the Rue al Maqtar. This was the first European-style brothel in the Medina. Larguèche suggests it was the ancestor of the Grande Maison. See *Les Ombres de Tunis. Pauvres, marginaux et minorités au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, (Paris, Arcantères : 2000), 300.

\(^7\) E.R., Tunis, 15/6/14.
Between 2000 and 2001 major work was undertaken to improve the Avenue Bourguiba, from the Bab al-Bahr on the eastern edge of the Medina to the end of the Avenue Bourguiba on the bank of the lake separating Tunis from the Mediterranean. In Avenue de France pavements were widened and café terraces spilled across the widened pavements. Facades of nineteenth-century buildings were cleared of trailing wires and garish plastic signs. In the Avenue Bourguiba workmen laboured round-the-clock, removing some of the *ficus* trees (and all the florists) from the central Ramblas-like esplanade. The facades of buildings such as the former Maltese Club in Rue de Grèce and the former Politeama Rossini were restored, while next to the Municipal Theatre a commercial centre was constructed in a pastiche Art Nouveau style on the site of the demolished Tunisia Palace Hotel. Street furniture on period models recalling Haussmann’s Paris was installed.

While facades of buildings can be renovated, the webs of signification spun by urban notables fifty years ago, in which these buildings were suspended, have been undone following the changes Tunis has witnessed in the intervening period and buildings such as the Palais Cardoso which we discussed earlier in this chapter are stranded amid the bustle of streets such as the Rue de la Zitouna. Books such as *Tunis patrimoine vivant* concentrate on restoration and renovation of façades and evoked in passing the desirability of retaining a “spirit of place”. The reflective nostalgia which characterises the memories of urban conviviality is perhaps more realistic with regard to the fragility of such a spirit of place in a fast-changing city.
This dissertation has sought to show that nostalgia, often thought of as a contemporary phenomenon also characterised colonial societies which themselves became objects of nostalgia in the 1990s. Although I have concentrated almost exclusively on Tunisia future research could compare Tunisia with other countries in the Maghreb. As I noted at the beginning we live in nostalgic times and the attention that this dissertation has sought to give to context will find many other applications. It is in the eliciting of contradictions rather than in producing stories of coherence that projects of ethnography can make a distinctive contribution
Chapter 7: Conclusion

I evoked a colonial-era map of Algiers in the introduction to this dissertation, a map that was itself “framed” in the wider narrative of Gillo Pontecorvos’s *Battle of Algiers* when the map can be seen in the office of a French police inspector early in the film. The map, in the words of the British cartographer Captain Lancey in Brian Friel’s play *Translations* is “a representation on paper…a picture showing your country in miniature,” and in the same play, history is described as an “image of the past embodied in language.”¹ Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* discusses how colonial and postcolonial maps were used to craft history and legitimacy. This dissertation has used maps as starting points for discussions of how nostalgia, linked to place as the word’s etymology suggests, can be used in different ways and by different actors to develop place-centred historical narratives. The first section of this conclusion provides an overview of the dissertation’s content and then discusses the dissertation in the light of an article by Benedict Anderson entitled “Frameworks of comparison” published posthumously in the *London Review of Books* in January 2016.²

Chapter 2 discussed land and longing in Arabic literature where the sense of longing for (literally “to”) a place is closely associated with the verb *hanna ilā*, to yearn

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for somewhere or someone. The seventeenth-century commentator Ibn Abi Dinār depicts Tunis as a place which welcomes and inspires a yearning which pursues visitors after their departure.³ The city of Algiers becomes a site of nostalgia in “Chant des Arabes” dating from the French occupation in 1830, and during a sojourn in Algiers in the early 1990s I encountered the work of Abdelmadjid Meskoud whose “Jazā‘īr al‘āsima” (“Algiers, the capital”) also evokes a disappearing past as a way of critically framing the present.

Chapter 3 focused on the situation in Tunisia after the First World War at a time when, as Jacques Berque highlighted, French colonial society was marked by a quest for roots and belonging. Tunisian commentators such as ‘Abedelazīz Tha‘ālbi developed rival articulations of belonging and legitimacy and these took on a particular and local form in the controversy over the olive trees of Tebourba described in Chapter Two. My reading of the Tebourba situation was informed by the late George Balandier’s 1951 article “La situation coloniale,” which studies how Africans, faced with external coercion, manoeuvred within the colonial situation and sought to transform it.⁴ Tha‘ālbi was in Paris at the time of the Versailles Peace Treaty and, as Michael Goebel’s Anti-imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism (2015) shows, the postwar crisis of Western values saw non-Western peoples seeking sustenance in their own pasts and traditions.

Chapter 4 remains in Tunisia in the interwar period and follows the early development of the IBLA journal founded in 1937 by the Society of Missionaries of Africa (‘White Fathers’). Frederick Cooper’s *Colonialism in Question: theory, knowledge* (2005) highlights the place of missionary movements in the connections and linkages of empire. IBLA emerged in the wider context of a quest among French intellectuals for social models which would transcend conflict between classes. The *rappel à l’ordre* in French artistic circles after the First World War involved a search for forms of artistic expression that foregrounded rural and regional styles. In the context of Tunisia IBLA sought inspiration in the figure of Hubert Lyautey as a model for a French elite while the settlement of Tunisian small farmers on the land was seen as a means of stability and moral uplift.

The “community of sentiment” (to use Frederick Cooper’s phrase) that IBLA sought to promote between French and Tunisians therefore drew on currents of social thought in France, giving this community a transcontinental dimension. Jacques Berque underlined the tension arising in North Africa as settlers and indigenous peoples sought legitimacy in the land. The colonial climate of nostalgia and quest for roots highlighted by Jacques Berque was one facet of a global challenge to modernity expressed in a variety of currents ranging from Southern Agrarianism in the United States to the traditionalist turn in artistic expression after the First World War in France and elsewhere. This could produce a landscape of the ecological as in the case of Scottish

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6 Ibid., 199.
authors such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon (1901-1935) and Edwin Muir (1887-1959), a balance between people, creatures, crops and landscape. In the case of France, interest in land and agriculture would become part of the Vichy project promoted by figures such as Paul Caziot and IBLA and the “White Fathers” more generally were attracted to some aspects of Vichy in its early days. The immediate postwar period saw a reevaluation of the situation in Tunisia by IBLA and a foregrounding of Tunisian national aspirations.

At the beginning of Chapter 5 I returned to the image of the map, recalling that in Arabic the term for map is kharīta which in Tunisian slang can also mean a scar, as in “nsawwer kharīta fī wajhek”: “I’ll draw a scar on your face.” In Tunisian Arabic the kharrāt can mean a wood carver or a craftsman incising intricate forms into plaster. The Arabic term thus highlights the creative dimension of map-making, interpreting the landscape according to particular perceptions. Chapter 5 also identifies some of the actors involving in “mapping” the history of Tunisia, with its elisions and hidden tensions. I drew on my own work with Tunisian historians in the 2000s prior to the 2011 revolution in order to highlight how history can become a means of contesting dominant narratives.

The dissertation begins and ends in cities, evoking Algiers in its initial chapter while central Tunis is the focus of Chapter 6. The attempted “branding” of the modern city as a “Mediterranean” city took place in the context of European Union initiatives in the 1990s to cast the Mediterranean as a zone of intercultural contact while at the same time increasing surveillance of maritime frontiers. I compare the mapping of the modern city

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by the Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina with the memories of city-centre residents who were familiar with the city before the social changes of the post-independence period.

The map of Algiers from the late 1950s frames the city from the point of view of French cartographers and urbanists and the map, as I noted is itself placed into the wider frame of the film *Battle of Algiers*. The dissertation can also be placed in a wider frame of reference, one opened up by the above-mentioned article by Benedict Anderson entitled “Frameworks of comparison.” Anderson evokes his experience as a graduate teaching assistant at Cornell University in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For the benefit of the undergraduates he was teaching in the Political Science department he began making comparisons between the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. In his own area of Southeast Asia Anderson began to think across the region in a comparative sense, as well across disciplines including history and anthropology. In his early work he used the nation and the nation-state as the basic units of analysis in his 1972 article “The idea of power in Javanese culture” and *Imagined Communities* (1983) although in the latter work Anderson compared tsarist Russia and British India, Vietnam and French West Africa and compared the early United States with the new nationalisms in Spanish America. In *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2005) the emphasis is on communication and simultaneity in the areas of ideology and political activism. Nations are tied together by such cross-currents.

My own dissertation emerges from a particular experience of Tunisia, notably of the city of Tunis, but I have sought to situate Tunisia in an interconnected regional and
global context. In a sense therefore I have followed Anderson’s own intellectual trajectory as outlined in the latter part of the previous paragraph.

‘Abedelazīz Tha‘ālbi, for example, was active in Paris in 1920, the “anticolonial metropolis” where activists from territories then under French control were learning from one another. Abedelazīz Tha‘ālbi’s *La Tunisie Martyre* was written at a time when colonized peoples were rediscovering their heritage. Notions such as the national “personality” and “soul” employed by figures such as Habib Bourguiba were part of a lexicon shared across national boundaries.

Chapter 4’s discussion of the IBLA journal in its early years highlighted how a religious community based in Tunis was part of a wider network of ideas and ideologies circulating between France and North Africa. Anderson’s insights converge with those of Frederick Cooper in *Colonialism in Question: theory, knowledge* (2005) where the varied spatial imagination of intellectuals, missionaries, and political activists between the early nineteenth to mid twentieth century involved regional and transcontinental affinities. Such affinities could expand and narrow: the IBLA journal, for example, after the Second World War became increasingly centred on Tunisia whereas previously the journal had also navigated in the world of “French North Africa” represented by figures such as Robert Montagne and Hubert Lyautey.

A dissertation such as this, studying nostalgias in modern Tunisia, has sought to be attentive to the variety of contexts in which nostalgia, whether restorative, prospective, or reflective can exist. Colonial and postcolonial nostalgias, as I noted in the latter part of

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Chapter 5 converge and differ. Chapter 5 highlighted the paradox of the “Mediterranean,” used by Tunisian commentators in the 2000s as a way of picturing a cosmopolitan Tunis while Nicholas Sarkozy used the same term in his call for a reinvention of France as an actor in the Mediterranean. Benedict Anderson noted the simultaneity and similarity of intellectual currents but they can also diverge as the above example shows.

While this dissertation has been centred on the city of Tunis, notably in its last two chapters, possible future research could include localities outside Tunis, in areas such as Tebourba, a centre of interest for the review IBLA in the 1930s. Tunisian readings of history continue to evolve with a renewed attention to the early nineteenth century as a period of national open-ness to the wider world. The exhibition *L’éveil d’une nation, L’art à l’aube de la Tunisie moderne 1837-1881* currently underway at the palace of Kasr-es-Saïd, scene of the signing of the treaty between France and Tunisia in May 1881 after the French occupation of Tunisia. The organisers see the exhibition as restoring the precolonial period of Tunisian history to public awareness. The exhibition included framed portraits of Beylical figures as well as documents rarely, if ever, shown in public such as the Kasr-es-Saïd treaty and the ‘ahd al amān of 1859. This “framing” of Tunisian history is placed by the organisers in the context (or frame) of the sixtieth anniversary of Tunisian independence and the fifth anniversary of the Revolution of 2011. This image of the past is intended to remind Tunisians of their country’s earlier attempts to situate itself in a changing world.⁹

Benedict Anderson in the conclusion of his article “Frameworks of comparison” observes that one should think about one’s own circumstances, class position, gender and education when making comparisons across history and culture. After living in Tunis as part of my experience with the “White Fathers” and completing this dissertation in the United States I was struck by Anderson’s remarks as well as by his description of crossing the language wall of another country and finding oneself in another world. Moving between North Africa, France, and the United States I have shared Anderson’s itinerant experience as well as his Irish and Scottish antecedents. Scholars who have lived in other places and cultures can subsequently yearn for them. Given that this dissertation has been written in Columbus, at some distance from Tunis, I was particularly sensitive to the final sentence of “Frameworks of comparison,” where Anderson concludes that “good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absence.”
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