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Tunisian Music and Musicians on Radio-Tunis P.T.T: Promoting National Distinction amid Colonial Agendas

Jann Pasler

Radio broadcasts across North Africa during the colonial period included not just news, lectures, and music addressing western tastes, but also programs in local languages with local music. If the former provided escape, connection to Europe, and entertainment for westerners, the latter enticed master musicians to share their traditions beyond the private salons of local elites and provided local performers with stable jobs and unprecedented professionalism. Whether referred to as Arab classical or as Andalusian, in reference to music brought back by Arabs from Andalusia in the 15th century, this genre, from Morocco to Tunisia, became a major part of this new public sphere, with significant impact on emerging national and post-colonial identities.

This article examines music and musicians on live and recorded radio performances in colonial Tunisia. Unlike in Morocco and Algeria, four private stations provided the first broadcasts in Tunisia, each with little reach. That run by André Costa in Sfax, another by Georges Solet in Bizerte, started in 1935, and later one in Sousse (Belaid, 1997). Radio-Bizerte preceded the news by its “official refrain,” the *Marche Lorraine*, and then recorded music, drawing on the station’s substantial discotheque. The largest, Radio-Tunis (215m), a private, politically neutral “experimental” station created in 1937 by Henry de Matteis, could only be heard 70km, but offered live music. By 1938, there was also Radio Liberté in Tunis, with socialist, Marxist leanings, and Radio Famille Empire in Bizerte, promoting France and family values. Seeking more

influence in the Arab world amid the “War of the Waves,” (Soulier-Valbert, 1938), the P.T.T. in Paris, to great expense, created Radio-Tunis P.T.T., in 1938, a new public station with 100kw of power, far exceeding those of Radio-Maroc (25 kw since 1935) and Radio-Alger (12kw). Radio-Tunis P.T.T.’s distinction emerges in comparisons with earlier stations in Tunisia as well as Radio-Alger and Radio-Maroc. Its music programming allows us to trace how, under various pressures, local and North African identities were promoted and evolved from 1928 to independence, with increasing polyvocality and interconnectedness¹.

¹ This article draws on and expands my article, “Live and Local: Making Sense of Musical Categories and Polyphonic Identities on Colonial Radio in North Africa,” forthcoming. I am grateful to the directors of the five National Archives, here cited, and to the Mayor of Tunis for access in 2022 to the Archives Municipales de Tunis. The research was funded, in part, by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program for my work as principal investigator of the advanced project, The Sound of Empire in 20th-century Colonial Cultures: Rethinking History through Music (grant agreement no. 834195).

Four intertwined themes point to radio’s complex role under French colonialism. Despite this context, colonial radio gave voice and salaries to many Tunisian musicians representing a wide range of interests and styles. This article seeks not only to open new areas of research for Tunisian scholars, but also to draw attention to Tunisian musicians, most ignored since then.

1. Oriental music vs. Arabic music

First, building on the extensive community of local musicians from different backgrounds, including Italian, Jewish, Egyptian, Turkish, and Tripolitaine, early radio in Tunisia often marketed its non-European concerts as “*musique orientale*.” Local Tunisian radio rarely picked up French stations, but did receive Italian ones and Radio-Caire, which broadcast three to four hours of music and recordings daily. Perhaps responding to Tunisians’ taste for Egyptian “*concerts orientaux*,” besides dance music, live performances by local singers and the pianist Marguerite Rouanet, and retransmission of the Orchestra de la Rotonde, Radio-Tunis broadcast unnamed recordings of “*musique orientale*,” often at 6:30pm (on March 23, 1937 with commentary by Chabby). Broadcasts often ended with a local orchestra’s “*Concert de musique orientale*” several times weekly at 8:30, 9, or 10pm (Illustration 1). This could also include such a concert from the Grand Café d’Alger. As elsewhere on North African radio, these were followed with news in Arabic. In January 1937, for example, the

Ill. 1 — Program of Radio Tunis (215m), Radio et Cinéma (1938)

RADIO TUNIS - 215 m
Programme Arabe de la semaine

LUNDI

18 h. 30 : Disques du film arabe " Derrière le rideau "

19 h. : Dernières nouvelles - Cours des changes

20 h. 30 : Grand concert de musique orientale avec le concours du célèbre chanteur Raoul Journou, musique de Maurice Benais

22 h. : Fin d'émission

MARDI

18 h. 30 : Disques de Hassiba Rochdy et de Fathia Khairi

19 h. : Dernières nouvelles - Cours des changes

MERCREDI

18 h. 30 : Morceaux de musique militaire

19 h. : Compte rendu de la fête du 14 Juillet

20 h. 30 : Concert spécial à l'occasion de l'accord Franco-Turc
 1) Causerie de M. Takali sur l'histoire des relations politiques franco-turques

20 h. 45 : Nouvelles chansons turques

21 h. : Causerie par une jeune turque adressée aux jeunes Tunisiennes

24 h. 40 : Chansons Turques Antiques

24 h. 30 : Causerie sur l'accord Franco-Turc

24 h. 40 : Disques Turcs choisis

22 h. : Fin d'émission

Chanson Tunisienne
Paroles et Musique de Maurice Benais qui sera chantée par Raoul Journou
 Lundi à 20 h, 30 à

RADIO TUNIS

La habbit kablek
 La habbit kablek ya Jella el beya
 Ma nadehek bahdek moshal ya bsaya
 Kbal ma ritek kane kalbi khali
 Ouel youm illi choufouk ya zahonet bali
 Temanittek leya rizki oua hlali
 Laon akhsar omri alk chouaya
 Meliktini bzinec ah ya moursara
 Shirtini binec ain el hbara
 Illi bini ou binec ma flehe khsara
 Iriham binec ma tkhalli biya
 Iriham babek ah ya labibha
 hobbek fi kalbi khaif filha
 Hadhi aouel achka ya nasa saiba
 Harakte kalsibi hnar kouya
 Akli khdtihouli ou ballaghti jrahi
 Khallitni hayem ou khour nouahi
 Lach hakka brabek tkassar jnahi
 Ouasitni khorkoc ya khammouria

VENDREDI

18 h. 30 : Disques de Chafia Rochdy et de Mohamed El Jamoussi

19 h. : Dernières nouvelles - Cours des changes

20 h. 30 : Grand concert de musique orientale avec le concours de Gaston Beiri, orchestre de Bramino

22 h. : Fin d'émission

SAMEDI

18 h. 30 : Disques égyptiens de Badia Masabni

19 h. : Dernières nouvelles - Cours des changes

اغنية

تونسية ترداد يوم الاثنين بمذباح تونس

لا حيميت قبلك « حجاز »
 نظم وتلحين موديس بنيس
 يتنبا راوول جورنو

لا حيميت قبلك يا الله البية
 ما نعتق بمدك محال يا بنية
 قبل ما ريتك كان قلبي خال
 واليوم الي شفك يا زهوة مالي
 تمنيتك لي رزقي وحلاي
 او اخر عمري عليك شوية
 * * *

ملكيتني بزك
 سحر تني بينك عين الحبارة
 الي بيني وينك ما فيش خسارة
 ارحم بدينك ما تخلي بيه
 ارحم حبيك اذ يا طيبه
 جيك في قلبي خلف لييا
 هذ اول عشقه يا ناس صعيه
 حرقت قلبي بنار قوره
 * * *

عقلي خذ يهولي رلفت جراحي
 خليتني هيام وكسر نواحي
 لاش هكك بربك تكسر جناحي
 واصلني قربك يا خمسوره

الحزب العلماني .. اليسراضية الصيف
 معتمدا على توجيهات
 اللجنة التنفيذية
 لجمعية الصيف
 في الفترة من 19 إلى 21
 تموز 1938
 في مقر الجمعية
 بشارتة المظفرية
 في تونس
 في مقر الجمعية
 بشارتة المظفرية
 في تونس

متمملا لجمعية
 الاحادية المصنوعة
 من الفعاليات
 الكارنتونات
 المحفلة واللينة

نسخ المهرية عدد فون تلفون
 ٧٣١٩

متمملا لجمعية
 الاحادية المصنوعة
 من الفعاليات
 الكارنتونات
 المحفلة واللينة

متمملا لجمعية
 الاحادية المصنوعة
 من الفعاليات
 الكارنتونات
 المحفلة واللينة

متمملا لجمعية
 الاحادية المصنوعة
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 المحفلة واللينة

متمملا لجمعية
 الاحادية المصنوعة
 من الفعاليات
 الكارنتونات
 المحفلة واللينة

daily concerts at 6:30pm featured Louisa Tounsia, Fellous, Berdah, Julie la Marseillaise, Fathia Khairy, Chaby Ben Aissa, Yana, and others. These were followed by jazz —their Jazz Radio Orchestra or the Collegium Rhythm Orchestra— and sometimes the humorous sketches of singer-humorist Kaddour Ben Nitram. Occasionally one could hear the 10pm "Concert oriental" broadcast from Radio-Alger. Other featured musicians in 1937-1938 were among the most renown Tunisian musicians of the period: the orchestras of the Bey's musician Ali Riahi, Mohamed Noury,

Bramino, Moktar Triqui, and Mlle Narjess, the singers Chafia and Hassiba Rochdy, Béchir Fehmi, and five Jewish musicians — Raoul Journo, Cheikh El Afrit, the composers Maurice Benais and Gaston Bsiri, and the popular tenor Albert Moatti. When in February 1937 Radio-Alger, possibly under pressure from Paris, changed the name of their evening “*Concert oriental*” to “*Heure arabe, Concert varié,*” or “*Musique arabe,*” Radio-Tunis, a private station, continued to stick by the category that worked best for them, “*musique orientale*” and their evening “*Grand Concert Oriental.*” In summer 1938, the station added more “*musique orientale*” at 6:30-7pm daily except Sunday, and each evening a concert of “*musique orientale*” or “*musique tunisienne*”, which suggests an emerging differentiation between the two. In June 1939, Radio-Tunis was renamed Radio-Carthage. This context provides a window onto the meaning of “*musique orientale*” in Tunisia and calls out for examination of the meaning and practices of musicians on early radio.

In contrast, the equally broad category of “*musique arabe*” was used to refer to local music on Radio-Tunis P.T.T. and a recurring section of recorded Arabic music. This not only replaced “*musique orientale*” as the salient category for North African music, it became associated with Andalusian music, perhaps reaching out to Andalusian-identified elites, the earliest radio listeners in Morocco. Radio producers and local musicians alike did much to promote it on Radio Tunis P.T.T., as earlier on Radio-Maroc beginning in 1932 and, to a lesser extent, Radio-Alger.

From its beginning, Radio-Tunis P.T.T. featured Andalusian repertoire performed live by the musical ensemble Rachidia, sometimes daily. Rachidia was founded in 1934 with support of the Bey and the Resident to “preserve, regenerate, and develop Tunisian music,” in practice, the Tunisian tradition of Andalusian music. As in Morocco and Algeria, such concerts were part of educating the public with a tradition both French and North Africans wished to “protect” and encourage. It was also found-

² Statutes signed December 15, 1934. <http://www.rashidiyya.tn/2/universal/>

ed to “encourage the study and spread of this art among all classes of the population,” to which their performances on radio contributed². Typically, Rachidia performed daily a late night, hour-long “concert.” This nomenclature, avoiding both “oriental” and “arabe,” was mostly likely a conscious choice, allowing the ensemble and its music to occupy a space separate from any specific tradition or presumptions and to signal distinction through its name only. As on broadcasts the week on November 11-17, 1938, Rachidia’s “concert” took place from 11pm to midnight or midnight to 1am, preceding and following the news in Arabic, most likely aimed to attract Arab audiences near and far.

Othman Kaak, Rachidia collaborator and highly-educated director of Tunis-P.T.T.’s *émissions arabes* (1938-1943), himself descending from Andalusians, represented the interests of elites, like the Fassi and their music in Morocco. Under his leadership, for which Kaak was well-paid, Radio-Tunis-P.T.T. programmed not only Rachidia’s concerts, but also lectures (e.g. on “singers and their influence on *musique arabe*” [DT, October 22, 1938]) and other music. In mid-November came hour-long concerts by Professor Khadri, Boudhina, and the Jewish composer-performer Maurice Attoun, lute solos by Bouchoucha, the Tunisian windband Naceuria, and *danses et chants arabes*. In 1939, Ali Riahi, the Bey’s musician, performed bimonthly. The participation of such musicians insured high quality performances and undoubtedly attracted local elites.

Repertoire and its role differed substantially on Radio-Tunis and Radio-Tunis-P.T.T.. On the former, audiences could hear popular, even “modern,” trends on its “*Concert de musique orientale*”. The October 15, 1937 broadcast presented *musique orientale moderne* by Mlle Fadila and her Boys. Some of it bore Egyptian influence, particularly through Egyptian singers living in Tunisia: Sayed Chatta, Amine Hassanein, and his brother Yassine. Included were recordings of Sayed Darwish and Oum

Kaltoum. Unlike on Radio-Alger, *musique orientale* on Radio-Tunis had strong associations with Egyptian music, which the French considered politically dangerous for the “unifying role” it might play among Arab audiences (Corriou, 2005, p. 216). In contrast, from the beginning Tunis-P.T.T. avoided this category, programming instead “*danses et chants arabes*”, “*disques arabes*”, and “*concert arabe*” (DT, RC). Although Rachidia director Triki’s Andalusian transcriptions into western notation were influenced by both western and contemporary Egyptian ensembles, in principle Rachidia moved away from orientalist hybrids, pursuing a return to traditional genres, (Davis, 2004, p. 54), part of the cultural protection program of the protectorate. Radio-Tunis P.T.T. thus helped Rachidia build its reputation for Andalusian music, its repertoire reach a broad audience, and the ensemble establish itself as a major musical force in Tunisia.

2. Religious Music

Second, given French administrators’ intention of using this station to reach audiences across the Arab world, religious music was also important on Radio-Tunis, earlier and far more extensively than on Radio-Maroc or Radio-Alger. Appointed by the P.T.T., Philippe Soupault, a respected Surrealist poet and first director of broadcasts (1937-40), decided that the station would concentrate on broadcasts for Muslims. In fall 1938, besides its performance of Islamic songs, Radio-Tunis P.T.T. featured lectures on religion by Raoul Darmon, including one on Judaism, “Noah and the religion of humanity” (DT, October 26, 1938). But rare elsewhere on North African radio, from April 1939 through spring 1940, Radio-Tunis P.T.T. broadcast a regular “Hebrew hour (*heure hébraïque*)” with music and chant (Silver, 2017, p. 142-145).

Particularly important were Tunisian religious lectures, broadcasts of the Koran, and music. Besides these lectures needing pre-approval, the Secretary General of the Tunisian government considered them important enough to propose a competition to recruit professors to deliver them on Radio-Tunis P.T.T.

(ANT 1939b). When broadcasts of the Koran began on Radio-Cairo, then Tripoli in February, the Tunisian Bey removed his prior objection (Corriou, 2005, p. 336-337). From February 1939 through the 1950s, the Koran was recited daily at 6/6:30am and 9:45/11:15pm, the Bey registering his approval for these “*recitations et psalmodies*” in April, and with a competition for “*psalmodistes*” already in place (ANT 1939c). In its attempts to reach Muslims across the Arab world, such religious broadcasts brought additional distinction to Tunisian radio.

During Ramadan, not surprisingly, religious programs intensified. Radio-Alger’s religious programming was still limited, but broadcasts ended with the Koran at 10:30pm; Radio-Maroc received permission from the Sultan to “chant” the Koran each night that month, 11:30-12 midnight. But on Tunis-P.T.T. the Koran was recited five times daily in addition to many religious programs, probably organized by Fadhel Ben Achour, professor at the Grande Mosquée, who served on its broadcast committee. Tunis-P.T.T. stayed on air until 2:30am, with 30-minute readings of the Koran before and after Islamic songs by members of La Soulamyia and Tidjanya, alternating with news. As with Rachidia, the Sufi brotherhood La Soulamyia had pride of place on Tunis-P.T.T.. Its musical ensemble returned to these broadcasts every two weeks from November through March and for years thereafter (RC), dominating religious broadcasts and not only during Ramadan.

These religious programs should be understood in the larger context. Algiers’s Muslim Congress in 1936 had created substantial controversy. Focus in Paris turned to “efficient action regarding the Muslim populations” of North Africa, the “object of intense work by foreign agents” (ANOM, 1936b). Along with the growing number of broadcasts “destined for Muslims” in Europe, *Radio-Alger* reported that many Algerian Jews followed “with interest broadcasts for Muslims” (ANOM, 1938a). Such action brought a new category to radio broadcasts based on religion, particularly in Algeria. Reference to *émissions musulmanes*

first appeared in June 1938, when *Alger-Radio* began to publish programming in Arabic as well as French. Beginning in March 1940, the newspaper *L'Echo d'Alger* daily reproduced all Radio-Alger programs oriented to “indigenous” people, assumed to be Muslim, as *émissions musulmanes* on one list, and *émissions européennes* on a second list—this division based on mixed criteria: the first religion, the second geography. What is salient is the reference to two populations, as if linked to taste differences between North Africans and European settlers. *Emissions musulmanes* remained in place during the war, with *émissions européennes* renamed *émissions françaises* in 1943.

Beyond its religious signification, *émissions musulmanes* had important implications. They enabled radio’s pursuit of rural listeners, those not identifying as Arab or understanding literary Arabic, and Muslims confined to the home, including women and children. Ever-expanding target audiences contributed to legitimizing these categories, albeit political in nature.

3. National Identity

Third, in the late 1930s, broadcasts across North Africa began to reflect an emerging preoccupation with national identity, associated principally with geography rather than ethnicity (*arabe*) or musical style (*oriental*). Tunisian music, live and recorded, had long been heard on Radio-Alger and Radio-Maroc. The former broadcast “*Prage-Gzali, romance tunisienne (Rennih)*” on November 6, 1928 and, on October 3, 1931, the famous Tunisian star Mme Dalila took part in a “*concert de musique tunisienne et égyptienne,*” presented on Radio-Alger by Omar Guendouze, this replacing the evening “*concert de musique orientale*” (EA). In 1936, Mille Nouria and her ensemble too presented a “*concert de musique tunisienne*” on Radio-Alger. Increasingly, repertoire was identified by its geographic origins—“*constantin, oranais, marocain, tunisien,*” and “*algérien,*” as programmed by the Algerian musician Sassi on Radio-Alger’s evening concert (EA, November 24, 1931), without listing genre or musicians.

Moving to impose their voice, P.T.T. administrators in Paris demanded more coordination and exchanges among the stations (ANOM, 1938b). In 1936, Radio-Maroc presented its first “*Concert nord-africain*,” including news from Algiers, Oran, Rabat, and Tunis. The next year, Rabati officials called for regularly including Algerian, Tunisian, and Egyptian music on radio (CAND, 1937a, 1938a). Only days after Radio-Tunis P.T.T. was inaugurated, Moroccan administrators, asked to evaluate whether they could pick up the station, expressed their interest in reciprocity and mutual education—an “*heure marocaine*” on that station that could include “true Arabic music” collected locally (AMT, 1938b).

Radio-Maroc did not refer to *musique marocaine* until 1938 when Mbirko’s orchestra performed “*musique tunisienne et marocaine*.” In fall 1938, with its first reference to “*musique marocaine*,” Radio-Alger began to broadcast recordings from all three countries in their “*Concert arabe*” at 11:15am and 5:30pm. At the same time, in 1939 alone, they put on nineteen broadcasts of Tunisian recordings on the 5:30pm series, “*Concert arabe*” (EA). Following the example of these counterparts and first suggested by the Tunisian Resident, programs like “*heure marocaine*” and “*heure algérienne*” were soon broadcast on Radio-Tunis-P.T.T.

Musical categories referring to the nation often functioned to evoke comparisons, exploring links across francophone North Africa. Some hoped radio could lead to a “synthesis of oriental literary and artistic values” (OR, February 17, 1939). Others understood these comparisons as essential to France’s imperial power. Radio programmers increasingly understood that the Andalusian tradition could bridge North African differences, especially among certain elites. Edmond Yafil, Jules Rouanet, and Alexis Chottin had each earlier referred to Andalusian nubas as “*musique classique*.” For French radio listeners, this reference to its age, quality, and status recalled western “*musique classique*” that French orchestras frequently played on colonial radio. On Radio-Maroc, the notion of Moroccan classi-

cal music first appeared with the opening of the new studios in 1936: Fez's "*musique classique par excellence*" and Marrakech's "*concert de musique classique arabe*." Soon this genre became associated with a national musical style: Marrakech presented its concerts as "*musique andalouse marocaine*," as did the orchestras of Salé and M'Tiri in Fez.

Although it was known that the Moroccan public "little appreciated Algerian and Tunisian airs" (ANOM, 1933b), in 1938 Radio-Maroc began such juxtapositions one day a week, with MBirko's orchestra performing "*musique andalouse marocaine, algérienne, et tunisienne*," identified and encouraging comparison explicitly through their musical modes. In May 1939, it broadcast the concerts of the Fez Congress, originally called *Congrès de musique andalouse*, featuring Andalusian traditions from across francophone North Africa, including Tunisia. In the similarities and differences of its Andalusian music, each country's distinction acquired more clarity and significance.

For French administrators, this tradition signaled connection to not only the rest of North Africa, but also Europe's past. Its broad dissemination on the radio across the region could be used to suggest, perhaps even to imbue, both national distinction and North African unity as well as connection to France via Spain. At the same time, the Parisian P.T.T. committee advocated recording the *musique classique andalouse* of Morocco, Tlemcen, and Tunisia to combat the "almost exclusive use" of *disques égyptiens* on Paris' Radio-Colonial (CADN, 1938a), which broadcast to the entire French empire. Did it thus hope to shape perception of this tradition across this empire, perhaps as a model of music's potential political significance and importance?

North African identity, associated with the Andalusian tradition, also emerged in the call for renovating each national style. In a March 1938 report, the Haut Comité Méditerranéen noted that, besides reaching Muslims long beyond the reach of private radio stations, radio should have a "new role": to serve

³ That July, *La Dépêche tunisienne* concurred: “in music, radio should improve existing Arabic orchestras in creating ‘music classes’” (Belaid, 1997, 53).

as a “catalyst for literary, artistic, and theatrical production”³. In *Alger-Radio*, criticizing Tunisians’ taste for *musique orientale*, some called for restoration of Tunisian music, pointing with praise to Rachidia’s work (Meknassi, 1937). On October 28, 1938 at Radio-Tunis-P.T.T., Rachidia’s founder, Mustapha Sfar, mayor of Tunis, formerly chief of protocol for the Bey, and member of the station’s broadcasting committee, also addressed the need for the renovation of Tunisian music (Sfar, 1937), his lecture followed with a concert by Rachidia. With French support, would understanding the colonizer’s and the colonized’s shared past help them envisage a shared future?

Most likely in response to metropolitan requests, 1938 marked a turning point across North Africa. Recognizing the important role of recordings among the Muslim populations, especially in the home, in February Radio-Alger ordered 250 recordings of Moroccan and Tunisian music (ANOM, 1938a). In response to the request for reinforcement of “*émissions arabes*” by both Kabyle Berbers and Arabs (ANOM, 1937a), earlier neglected, each week Radio-Alger promised a regional concert for Kabyles or Bedouins, albeit at first in programs of *musique arabe*. Popular Kabyle songs by Noureddine and his flutist Darbane first aired on a “*concert arabe*” on 5 August 1938. To feature *musique berbère* regularly, in July 1938 Mar-rakech’s broadcasts began to include a third ensemble. Thereafter, songs of various Berbers—Chleuh, Glaoua, Haha, and Souktana appeared on Radio-Maroc. As the Andalusian tradition bridged North-African differences, so too Berber music, given Berber language similarities. Although recorded Tunisian Berber music might have been included on broadcasts of “*musique tunisienne*”, I have yet to find this specific category on radio in Tunisia until much later.

These programming decisions had a felicitous impact. By 1939, while European radio owners increased proportionately less, Tunisian radio-owners grew to 6200, compared with 8300

⁴ According to Belaid (1997, 55-56), between 1936 and 1939, the increase in radios owned by Europeans grew proportionately less than those owned by North Africans, increasing use 40% in Algeria to 97,000, 22% to 13,400 in Tunisia, and 17% to 34,000 in Morocco.

Moroccans, but only 5000 Algerians. Moreover, this does not account for the many more who listened to radio in local cafes⁴.

4. Hybrid Concerts and Polyphonic Identities

Fourth, hybrid concerts on the radio also addressed the national imagination, one that included settlers. Tunisians, like other North Africans, were long accustomed to musico-cultural juxtapositions. As I have shown with specific examples in my recent article, French concert organizers often placed not only Italian and French music on the same programs, but also Italian and French musical ensembles (Pasler, 2020). It was hoped that conflicts between these populations would be mitigated by such collaborations.

In Algiers, collaborations were far more ambitious and challenging. Anticipating the juxtaposition of North African and western music on colonial radio, as early as 1912 the “*Grand concert franco-oriental*,” “*Grand festival oriental*,” and “*Grand gala oriental*” spectacles of the musical ensemble El-Moutribia featured their famous tenor Mohieddine, in an Andalusian “*Nouba Remel Maïa*” between airs from such operas as *Faust* and *Rigoletto*. In July 1928, El-Moutribia’s outdoor concert at the Square near the Opéra presented humorous works alongside “*pure musique antique*.” Mohieddine, accompanied on the piano, sang “*Habiba*” on a popular air from *Valencia*, showing “the possibilities of adapting Arabic texts to French music,” and performed *Ah Mine el Djahli*, an “adaptation” of French and Tunisian music, and the *Hymne d’El-Moutribia*, with its Turkish rhythm. Included also were “*quelques grivoiseries modernes*” of Tunisian music, such as *Ya Rebbi Ya Rebbi*, *Ya Halilo*, and *Ya Habibi*.

Such concerts, embodying musical-cultural juxtapositions and sometimes intercultural collaboration, gave aural form to hybrid identities, reflective of assimilationist ambitions and French desire for ongoing influence. On the inaugural concert of its new symphonic orchestra in February 1937, Radio-Maroc offered a model for this. Audiences could hear orientalist approaches representing French North Africa—Mény de Marangue’s *Maroc Suite*, Chottin’s

Scènes marocaines, Borda-Visciano's *Esquisses Tunisiennes*, and Saint-Saëns's *Suite Algérienne*—along with “Arab-Andalusian songs” in their “original form performed by MBirko's Moroccan orchestra” followed by these same songs in French accompanied by the symphonic orchestra. As such, the concert attracted “a half-European, half-Muslim audience” to contemplate what each brought to Moroccan identity (Chottin, 1937). For Morocco's day-long 1938 Festival of the Throne honoring the Sultan-- the first “civic celebration at the level of the nation” (Miller, 2013, 131)--collaborative hybridity went beyond mere juxtapositions. Before Andalusian music from Tunisia, conducted by MBirko, and from Tlemcen, led by Mohammed Ben Ghabrit, the evening concert, introduced by Chottin in French and Arabic, began with Andalusian music performed by a French orchestra. Chottin and Mlle G.V. [Aline Gouget-Valière] conducted transcriptions, likely their own, of Moroccan masters' performances.. Similarly in 1940, soon after its *émissions musulmanes* began, Radio-Alger presented its own collaborative concerts, with Europeans and Arabs “working together to modernize Arabic music.” With support from the colonial government and in collaboration with local Muslim musicians, Jacqueline Maire, composer and violinist from the Paris Conservatoire, like Chottin, collected Algerian “folk music” and transcribed it into modern notation. Through radio, it was hoped that making this music known to Europeans would facilitate “intellectual rapprochement” (ANOM, 1941e ; Pasler, 2022, p. 33-35).

A similar spirit of intercultural collaboration permeated Soupault's appointment of a radio administrative with Europeans and Tunisians (CADN, 1938b)⁵ as well as Radio-Tunis-P.T.T's inauguration on October 14, 1938 at Tunis's Théâtre Municipal. Here, attended by the P.T.T. minister from Paris, the Resident general, and the Bey's Prime Minister, Tunis's *Orchestre Symphonique Municipal* (OSM) framed the performances and speeches. It began with national anthems and the orchestra's rendition of a 16th-c. classical Tunisian air and ended with Berlioz and Dukas. Tunisian music dominated, with most pieces performed by Rachidia. Included

⁵ Conseil d'Administration: S.E.Hadi Lakhoua, premier ministre, Antoine Gaudiani, Tahar Ben Amar, Directeur des finances, directeur de l'Office postal; Conseil des Emissions: Saumagne, Lamotte,

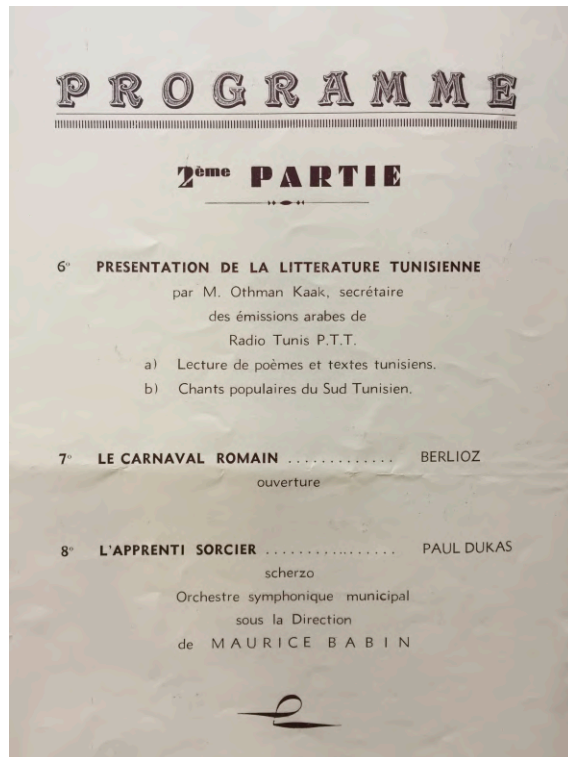
Jann Pasler

Cheffaud, Laignelot,
Cabautous, Eyquem,
Laurent-Chat, Si Aziz
Djelouli, General Sfar,
Hassen Abdul Wahab,
Albert Bessis, Materi,
Kstally, Fadhel ben
Achour, and Kaak.

were works (perhaps transcriptions) by its director Mohamed Triki, a Bedouin epic, and, after Othman Kaak presented Tunisian literature, “folk song” from southern Tunisia (ANT, 1938b) (Illustration 2). As in Rabat’s 1928 festival, “Three Days of Moroccan Music,” this portrait of Tunisia, consistent with the Protectorate’s agendas, included both urban and rural music, art and folk genres.

Ill. 2 : Program, Inauguration of the station Radio Tunis-P.T.T., October 14, 1938. Archives Nationales de Tunisie





Two weeks later, this mixed committee agreed to a 100,000 subsidy for Radio-Tunis P.T.T. (PT, November 2, 1938). For performances sometimes on air for two hours, Rachidia's large ensemble was paid 16,000 francs per month, 1000 for "small concerts" and 2800 for "large concerts" with 30 musicians (two fewer than Fez's radio orchestra, but paid more than double) (ANT, 1938a). The high fees paid to Rachidia's musicians granted them economic sustenance as well as high status. They also supported the important role the ensemble and its repertoire played on this station, used, in part, to advance agendas shared among European and Tunisian elites. Rachidia's presence on this station remained strong for over two decades.

At the same time, this subsidy documents a turning point for the overseeing committee and the station's projected programming. Originally the station had little funding and the committee felt that "the European musical part should not, and cannot, be particularly developed at the station of Tunis P.T.T., which must concern itself specially with broadcasts for Muslims" (AMT 1939d). The subsidy changed this. It allowed for the promotion of another political agenda related to impending war: the performance of French music, thereby eliciting respect for French traditions in the region.

Already in September 1938, a group of performers, led by the Conservatoire director, began to assemble an "*Orchestre de Tunis P.T.T.*" with nine musicians (PT, September 29, 1938). A proposal was also made in October 1938 to convert the OSM, founded in 1936, into the "*Grand Orchestre Symphonique de Tunis P.T.T.*" (AMT, 1938a). In November, French musicians in this orchestra pointed to a recent campaign directed against them in *La Presse de Tunisie* and pleaded that the organization risked folding, their salaries being so low (ANT, 1938c). The proposed subsidy could support two weekly rehearsals and 52 weekly concerts of largely French music on the radio as well as purchase of musical scores. Given local awareness of the work difficulties of musicians (PT, 1 December 1938), the

⁶ During the Vichy period that followed, we learn that this orchestra had 24 Italian members, as they asked for dispensation from the order to leave Tunisia.

subsidy would cover not only the costs of their 46 orchestral musicians, but also salary increases for 28 symphonic concerts and hiring an additional 19 to increase the orchestra to 65 musicians for 22 more concerts, some lyrical in nature⁶. An additional weekly chamber music concert would also be funded for radio broadcasts. With this in place, the OSM gave its first concert on Tunis P.T.T on 5 December. But this did not prevent local musicians from proposing a separate radio orchestra in May 1939, conceived for 9 musicians—five French and four Italians (ANT, 1939a). The OSM’s connection to Tunisian radio deserves its own history.

5. War-time, Post-war Developments, and Expanded Careers for Tunisian Musicians

The coexistence of OSM’s largely French repertoire and Tunisian music, performed by a wide range of Tunisian musicians, continued on Radio-Tunis P.T.T., as did comparisons with other North African music across the region. In November 1940, Radio-Alger broadcast on Mondays Moroccan and urban records from Constantine, on Tuesdays Tunisian and Bedouin records from Oran, and on Wednesdays Tlemcen and Bedouin records from Constantine (ANOM, 1940d). Beginning in 1941 and with 1000 francs for improvements, two such programs per week were also broadcast on short wave (ANOM, 1941b). Through comparative listening, audiences would have been able to hear their rich interconnections and reflect on their intertwined histories.

But Radio-Tunis-P.T.T.’s wartime history was complicated, with Soupault removed by Vichy in 1940, German occupation (1942-43), and Tunis’s large Italian population, some supporting Mussolini, exacerbating internal conflicts. As in Algeria, Vichy valued local folklore and building audiences. *Emissions arabes* on Tunis-P.T.T. offered news in three languages — *arabe classique*, *arabe dialectal*, and *arabe parlé* — with recordings and live music by orchestras of Boudhina, Nourri, Badri, Baramino, and Rachidia. In 1941, some called for the creation of a Tunisian radio orchestra (Corriou, 2005, p. 378). Meanwhile, in April, as the “official orches-

tra of the Bey” and now with Othman Kaak’s brother Mustapha as president, Rachidia performed in Algiers at a “Franco-Muslim” benefit concert with Mohieddine and Jacqueline Maire.

After wartime liberation of Tunis, Tunis-National increased its Arab programs to 5 hours/45minutes, significantly 30 minutes more than French ones (Corriou, 2005, 607-608). By fall 1949, they did three such broadcasts daily, 30 minutes of recordings and 1h/40 minutes of live music. Two orchestras framed lectures in the early evening, including those of Rachidia, Chafia Rochdy, Laure Daccache, Ali Riahi, and La Soulamy (HR, September 15, 1949), with Othman Kaak speaking on Tunisian history before Rachidia’s concert (HR, September 26, 1949). Daily from January through March 1950, its second studio, Tunis-Arabe, or “Tunis in the Arabic language,” produced three hours of North African music—an hour of recordings, without details, and two hours of live music, interspersed across the day with news and lectures in spoken Arabic (PT, January-March 1950).

Increasingly came the need to traverse differences—essential and circumstantial; local, national, and regional; between North Africans and westerners—without losing the capacity for meaningful associations that make programming cohere and bring consensus. To do this, new broadcasting categories emerged, no longer signaling race, ethnicity, region, nation, or orientalist hybridity. Music programming began to be structured according to genre—unspecified film music weekly, chamber music weekly (indicating soloists, duos, and trios), and orchestras daily (often three or four Tunisian ensembles). But the most powerful means of creating and shaping musical taste were the categories of classical, popular, and modern. With post-war agendas, Radio-Maroc, Radio-Algérie, and Radio-Tunis-P.T.T. revisited these categories, incorporating them in various ways, including naming their musical ensembles. The classical, popular, and modern provided radio with means for educating and disseminating cultural competence broadly, not necessarily dependent on class or ethnic origins. Like recordings, they allowed tastes to be performative, in-

volving listeners' discovery and personal choice. Arguably, their purpose was to build taste publics and new identities among people who'd never before known they might share something.

In March 1950, Radio-Tunis began to associate performers with these taste categories. *La Presse de Tunisie* pointed to Journou's "*orchestre classique*," to Raja Sabri's "*orchestre et chants populaires*" and Jemail's "*chant populaire*," and to "*musique moderne*" by El Bech's and Hedi Mokrani's orchestras and "*chant tunisien modern*" by Ben Nacef. All these musicians had earlier performed on radio without such delimitations. Many returned in the years ahead, including Rachidia and La Soulama. That year, Rachidia, whose program was introduced by Mahmoud Bourguiba, sometimes invited outsiders to perform with them. Saliha, Fathia Khairi, and Choubaila Rached sang Bedouin airs on their March concert.

To market its richly diverse programs, as on Radio-Alger since the 1930s, Tunis-National increasingly included musicians' names. So too, Tunis-Arabe. From January through March 1950, for example, it featured an extraordinary number of musicians—over sixty groups in these first three months. This suggests an effort to support the musical careers of substantial numbers of Tunisians. As in 1949, three orchestras dominated evening concerts: those of Rachidia, Ali Riahi, and the brotherhood La Soulama (one directed by Ben Mahmoud, plus a "provincial" branch). Rachidia's concerts were often preceded by related lectures, again on history by Othman Kaak (PT, January 23, 1950) or the "renaissance of Arabic literature" (January 30, March 13, March 27), suggesting that the music Rachidia performed was integrally tied to Tunisia's heritage. Women's ensembles also participated, likewise accompanied by related lectures. On January 25, a lecture on the "feminine world" served as interlude between performances by the orchestras of Leila Tounsia and Dalila Rochdy; they and other women performed regularly. Some musicians appeared in multiple genres, such as the chamber music and orchestral concerts of Hedi Chenoufi and Mohamed Triki, the latter formerly with Rachidia.

This commitment to giving airtime to the greatest number of Tunisian musicians accelerated in 1951. Consider Tunis-Arab's April programming of live Tunisian music. Not surprisingly, La Rachidia and La Soulamya (Mohamed ben Mahmoud) were again given pride of place, each broadcasting at 8:15pm, the former weekly, the latter twice a month. In the first two weeks of the month, Tunis-Arab featured thirty-three different "orchestras," as named by their directors--two to three per day:

Mohamed Ahmed, Tijani El Bech, Hedi Chenoufi, Habib Cherif, Abdelaziz Djemail, Lalou Fellous, Mouldi Gammar, Hassen Guella, Mohamed Haddad, Jamila Hanem, Nadia Hassan, Yassine Hassanine, Abdelaziz Jemali, Raoul Journo, Hedi Kalia, Mustapha Kamel, Afifa Khairi, Hedi Kallel, Salah Khemissi, Mohamed Lasram, Adberahman Mahdi, Salah Mahdi, Maurice Meimoun, Hedi Mokrani, Sadek Ben Nacef, Kakino de Paz, Albert Perez, Hana Rached, Salwa Riadh, Ali Riahi, Safia, Mohamed Sassi, Thouraya Sedki, Kaddour Srarfi, Youssef Temimi, Habiba Tounsia, Leila Tounsia, Mohamed Zghounda (PT, 1-15 April 1951).

To make space for other Tunisian musicians, the few well-known favorites, such as Raoul Journo and Ali Riahi, were only given one appearance. In the second half of April, twenty-eight of these orchestras returned for another performance, with three new ones. Significantly, we also find here five references to an "orchestra of the station" that occasionally ended the ending broadcasts. Each was directed by a different musician (Fathia Khairi, Mohamed Ahmed, Hana Rached, Hedi Mokrani, and Asmahan). In May, these same musicians returned and reference is given to the station orchestra without mention of a director. One wonders whether radio administrators paid its musicians a regular salary, independent of its range of revolving directors.

While Tunis-National began each day with the news, featuring retransmissions of Catholic and Protestant services only on Sunday, Tunis-Arabe made aural its commitment to Islam. Each day started with readings from the Koran and most evenings as well,

with occasional mid-day readings and a “religious hour.” It also featured a weekly program, the “Voice of Muslim scouts [*Eclaireurs*].” At the same time, Tunis-Arabe was open to “light music,” featuring trios led by Mahjoub Chakroun, Mohamed Gharbi, and Ahmed Sabahi, as well as film music, alongside practical programs on the culinary arts, medical advice, and social concerns. During Ramadan that June, Tunis-Arab broadcast until 2am, featuring “humorous sketches” and retransmissions from the Café du Casino and Café d’Alger, ending with the Koran.

By early 1954, Radio-Tunis moved to new quarters, with multiple studios and a theater. Live music broadcasts remained on Tunis-Arabe, with audience favorites like the orchestras of Rachidia, Raoul Journon, Ali Riahi, and La Soulamya (Ben Mahmoud), often given almost an hour as the closing concert of the evening before the Koran. Other orchestras too thrived, some already there since 1950 (see above):

Mohamed Ahmed, Ben Aissa, Chedhli Anouar, Ahmed Cherif, Habib Cherif, Samiha Habib, Abdelaziz Jemail, Hedi Jouini, Hedi Kallel, Mustapha Kamel, Sadok Ben Nacef, Choubaila Rached, David Riahi, Hassiba Rochdy and Dalila Rochdy as well as lesser-known ensembles, directed by Daidou M’Sika and Aida Nacim (PT, 1954).

A new genre—songs by various singers—could be heard daily by Chadia, Laure Daccache, Nour El Houada, Leila Mourad, Scham Refki, Sabah, and other singers as well as Mohamed Abdelwahab, Farid Latrache, and Oum Kalthoum—a return to the taste for Egyptian music earlier addressed by Radio-Tunis. In January, Tunis-Arab also began a series of Bedouin songs, at first by Ali Bouguerra, later Bedouin poems. Film and variety music moved to the evening, suggesting an increase in its popularity. With Tunisian Independence on March 20, 1956, the francophone newspaper *La Presse de Tunisie* stopped printing the programs of Tunis-Arabe for three months, before resuming in July, but without the same level of detail. While maintaining two Tunisian orchestra performances

per day, recordings began to take over, with up to seven daily programs of recordings, unnamed in *La Presse de Tunisie*. Without French control, interestingly, on July 17, came a return to *musique orientale* at 1pm.

After independence, Rachidia continued to perform on Radio-Tunis-P.T.T. with European instruments added. Scholars have assumed that the station's first full-time radio orchestra was founded in 1958 (Davis, 2004, p. 99). But, as we have seen, "Tunis in Arabic language" had its own Tunisian orchestra in early 1951. By January 1960, programs of the "Arab station" came to resemble the "French station," with few details other than a regular evening program, "cocktail of Tunisian songs," such as on January 5, "Andalusian music" on January 8, as well as a return at 8:15pm to "the voice of Rachidia" on January 25 and La Soulamya.

* * *

From Matheis's Radio-Tunis to Radio-Tunis P.T.T., radio, with its local, live performances, was an important venue of musical life and embodiment of musical values in Tunisia and its presence across North Africa during the colonial period. Needing flexibility to accommodate a wide range of musicians, the most common programming structures on North African radio, *musique arabe* and *musique orientale*, were "lenient" categories--fluid, porous, and interactive rather than fixed, stable, and predictable ones (Pontikes ; Barnett, 2015, p. 1415). Their meanings were variable across North Africa serving different purposes and locally contingent. At the same time, to promote understanding of their neighbors, all three North-African stations used them in juxtaposing Andalusian or Berber musical traditions across the region, perhaps hoping to fuel French aspirations for an integrated empire. Through the comparisons they generated, radio helped listeners come to know themselves and their neighbors, contemplate the known and the unknown, the close and the distant. In the 1950s, as the "popular" and the "modern" gave rise to taste publics not constrained by social or cultural differences, radio took part in the

transformation of traditional identities. Thus, in traversing discrete periods of emergence and achieving legitimacy on North African radio, these musical categories, thanks to their fluid meanings, exemplified the dynamic nature of the colonial relations and the agendas in which they took part.

Still, radio programming can only go so far in shedding light on Tunisian musical developments under the Protectorate. It is only when musicians' names appear on broadcast programs, accessible through the press, that we can study the music and musical tastes that this medium presented. Importantly, radio allows us to trace the many Tunisian musicians who performed live on air and how their numbers grew over time, especially in the 1950s even before Independence. As we have seen, each station had its local favorites as well as openness to many others. Radio also created regular employment, beginning with M'Birko's *Orchestre de Radio-Maroc* in 1937, *Rachidia* on Radio-Tunis-P.T.T. in 1938, *Fakhardji's Orchestre classique des émissions musulmanes de Radio-Alger* in 1944, and later other Andalusian, Berber, popular, and modern radio ensembles. Radio thereby fueled the careers of radio musicians, North-African alongside western, helping them survive unemployment during the war, reach ever-growing audiences, and build a public.

Although largely left out in studies of individuals, associations, schools, and recordings, radio contributed significantly to the norms, practices, and categories associated with Tunisian music and its evolution. This article aims to give voice to long-forgotten musicians who built careers performing live on Tunisian radio—most left out of history. At the same time, important questions remain: how did audiences understand this music? What were individual radio listeners and communities drawn to and why? And what was the role of those cafes and other public spaces where audiences encountered it? In collaboration with the radio, musicians and their audiences, near and far, established the tastes and musical contexts in which colonial co-existence was negotiated and the transformations from which post-colonial identities evolved.

