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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

SEEKING A PLACE IN A NATION: THE EXODUS OF THE TUNISIAN JEWISH
POPULATION 1954-1967

A Thesis Submitted to:

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Sean Haley

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Introduction

In the eleven years after the independence and creation of the Republic of Tunisia, the population of the Jewish community declined by approximately 88.7% because of emigration to France, Israel, and other countries. This period, as will be shown, was critical in shaping the ethno-religious arrangement of peoples in Tunisia today. This occurred because a centralizing newly-independent state created a nation through identity based upon citizenship. Tunisia is a particularly good case study of homogenizing post-colonial nation-states because the government never sought to exclude any part of the population through direct action. Instead, domestic and international events that shook the nation and had an impact on the Jewish minority, such as independence, the reorganization of the Jewish community of 1958, the 1961 Bizerte Crisis and the Six Day War, made a solution such as exile palatable for the Jews.

Tunisian nationalism, at this time, was more in line with the nationalism of the Muslim majority. Thus, the citizenship espoused by the Tunisian state, which claimed to be inclusive of all citizens regardless of religion or ethnicity, became closer to an 'Arab-Muslim' identity than one that was more accepting of the Jewish minority. The centralizing state worked to domestically install this citizenship through its policies within Tunisia. The Tunisian nation, both Muslim and Jewish, however, was also influenced by outside nationalisms such as Zionism and pan-Arabism.

Background

On 14 September 1857, Muhammad II ibn Husayn (r. 1855-1859), the ruling *Bey* (Lord) of Tunisia,¹ assembled an audience in his palace at the Bardo, just outside of the city of Tunis. The audience for this event, a reading of a new law, consisted of government officials, foreign consuls and representatives of the non-Muslim communities of Tunisia. What was read out on this date was the *'Ahd al-Aman* (Pact of Security). The *'Ahd al-Aman*, couched in Islamic language, is divided into eleven parts, each of which gives attention to its main goal: the equality of all subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim, within the *Beylik* (Regency) of Tunisia. Thus, beginning in 1857, we see the first piece of legislation in Beylical Tunisian officialdom guaranteeing equal rights to all Tunisian subjects of the Bey. This legislative status of equal rights continued through the French Protectorate, established in 1881, and until independence in 1956. During this period, Tunisia was becoming (and still is) a state for the Tunisians, regardless of “religion, language or ethnicity”.²

At least since Roman times, the largest religious minority group in the country has been, and still remains, Jews. Their numbers, however, have dropped most markedly from the granting of autonomy in 1954 and independence in 1956 to the Six Day War of 1967.³ In 1948, there were about 95,000 Tunisian Jews in the country, 70,900 of which were solely Beylical subjects⁴. By 1956, the year of independence, approximately 57,000 of the Beylical subjects remained and

¹ Tunisia was an Ottoman province since 1581, and from 1640 was ruled by a local governor known as the *Bey*. Many sources cite the *Beylik* (Regency) of Tunisia as being semi-independent, especially after the ascension of the Husyanid Dynasty in 1705. The Beys of Tunis, however, still owed their loyalties to the Ottoman Sultan until the end of the Empire in 1918.

² In the *'Ahd al-Aman*, the phrasing used is “ikhtilaf al-adiyan, wa al-alsana wa al-alwan” (lit. differences of religions, tongues and colors). I have interpreted al-Alwan as meaning ‘ethnicity’ as “colors” might not have referred to a racial indication as thought of today. Ethnicity may also be an anachronism, but is possibly more accurate to the actual implied meaning of “al-alwan” than today’s racial use of color. For the original text see: Ibn Abi al-Diyaf, Ahmed. *Ithaf ahl al-Zaman bi-Akhbar Melouk Tunis wa 'Ahd al-Aman*. (A Summary of the People of our Times with News of the Kings of Tunisia) Vol 3-4. (Tunis: al-Dar al-'Arabiyah lil-Kitab, 1999) 242

³ In fact, while seemingly large number (approx 12,000) left the country at Israel’s founding in 1948, the most precipitous drop was seen in the years 1954-1967. Thus, this thesis is centered around these years – the largest period of exodus begins six years *after* the founding of the state of Israel.

⁴ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George. “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

after the 1967 Six Day War, only 8,000 Jews remained.⁵ In order to understand the reasons why those 49,000 Jews left the country, this research project investigates the factors that led to an 88.4% reduction in the Jewish population in the first eleven years of Tunisia's independence. The aim of this study is to understand the processes of Jewish emigration and the consequences from the implementation of a "modern" regime in Tunisia. There is, therefore an inherent contradiction implicit in a process whereby a series of legal reforms intending to create a republican regime granting *citizens* equal rights regardless of confession led to the dissolution of a historic religious minority.

This study seeks to answer the question of to why the Tunisian Jews left their country en masse during the period 1954-1967. The scope of the project, as well, addresses the issues of all Tunisian Jews and Jews of various socioeconomic strata.⁶ The main aim of this study is to focus upon the question of identity as it related to the Tunisian Jews and the Tunisian nation. In other words, did the Jewish population identify not wholly as Tunisian? Did they not identify themselves as Arabs? How strong was the religious nature of their identity as Jewish vis-à-vis a secular nationalist-based Tunisian identity? Also, we must ask, how did the Tunisian state seek to identify itself after independence? Did outside nationalisms such as Zionism and Arabism have a role in shaping this identity?

The argument of this thesis is that in a centralizing state where identity was based upon citizenship, the nationalism and identity of the Arab-Muslim majority population formed the

⁵ "500 Jews Leaving Tunisia in Month" in *The New York Times*, 25 March 1956 and Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 166-174.

⁶ Historically, Tunisian Jewry has been divided into three main groups: The Twensa, Sephardi and Grana Jews. The Twensa are considered the most indigenous of the Jewish population, tracing their existence in Tunisia back to, at least, Roman times. The Sephardi are considered the ancestors of the Jews that fled medieval Spain after the *reconquista*. The Grana are seen as the newcomers, and trace their history to Livorno in Italy. Socioeconomically, although there is some overlap, these three groups are divided into lower, middle and upper classes respectively. It is difficult, however, to conduct a true social history of the Jewish population as sources often indicate those of middle-upper socioeconomic strata.

basis of citizenship and played a defining role in making the Tunisian Jews identify not wholly as Tunisian. Outside nationalisms, such as Zionism and pan-Arabism also played a role in shifting the identity of the Tunisian Jews. Within this project, Arabism will be defined as the secular-nationalist ideology rooted in an ‘Arab’ identity that was most famously promoted by Egyptian President Gamal Abdelnasser (r. 1956-1970).⁷ This thesis seeks to answer specific questions regarding the formation of an Arab identity of Tunisia and the state’s relation to its Arab neighbors. As the Tunisian state embarked on ‘Tunisification’ (largely Arabization policies) after independence, centralized and took a greater role for itself in Arabism and joined the Arab League,⁸ did it appear to the Jews that Tunisia was emphasizing its ‘Arab-ness’ over its ‘Tunisian-ness’? Did Arab also imply Muslim, as the politics of the conflict over Israel/Palestine increasingly became perceived within the media of the time as a Muslim-Jewish conflict? How did Zionist organizations within the country shape Jewish identity? Ironically, we also have to ask ourselves if these state policies had the exact opposite intention – to be inclusive of all Tunisians (Jewish, Muslim or Christian) instead of creating divisions among the nation.

What all of these questions seek to identify is the interplay and competition between various identities, Arab, Muslim, Jewish and to understand how the contemporary ‘secular’ Tunisian identity was formed. Theoretically, this project builds on studies of nationalism, such as Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* and Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. This project shows how two different nationalisms were imagined by the Tunisian Jewish population and how they

⁷ For a history of 19th-20th century Arabism, see C. Earnest Dawn. *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) and Tauber, Eliezer. *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London: F. Cass, 1993).

⁸ 1 October 1958 after Bourguiba argues for limits on Egypt’s primacy in the organization, and largely fails. Some concessions were made to him, such as the discussion of a seat of the League outside of Cairo in order to persuade him to join.

“shift in time”.⁹ It is this particular shift with which I am concerned. Why did the Jews leave immediately after Tunisian independence en masse and seemingly not share a certain “Tunisian” or “Arab” nationalism with their co-citizens? It is important as well, using the theories of Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm, to consider what implications being a religious minority had on the development of a Tunisian national identity. Does the experience of the Tunisian Jews speak to the need of an ethno-religious homogeneity in new post-colonial states?

Finally, the periodization of this thesis is important because it includes the key events that had profound effects on both the Jewish population in the country, and Tunisia as a whole. I have chosen 1954 as the starting date as it is at the year in which autonomy was granted to Tunisia by France and chosen 1967 as the end date, the year in which the largest percentage of Jews emigrated from the country. Included within this periodization are the major events domestically and internationally that affected Tunisia and its Jewish minority. Significantly, the period of 1954 to 1967 is the focus of this thesis because it is the era in which 88.4% of the Jewish population emigrated from Tunisia. Therefore, this period is crucial to understanding the modern history of Tunisian Jewry.

Chapter Breakdown

Each chapter within this project focuses on events of crucial significance not just for the Jewish population of Tunisia but for Tunisian *citizens* as a whole. The first chapter covers both autonomy in 1954 and independence in 1956. Political power within Tunisia at this time was divided between the more pro-Nasser Salah ben Youssef¹⁰ and the largely anti-Nasser Habib

⁹ Hobsbawm, E.J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

¹⁰ Salah Ben Youssef (1907-1961) emerged as Bourguiba’s chief competitor for control of the new Tunisian state. Ben Youssef was condemned to death in 1957 and 1958 and fled from Tunisia in 1956. [fled in 1956 and was condemned in absentia in 1957 and 58?] Ben Youssef found refuge in Nasser’s Egypt. From his exile, he still wielded influence and his partisans were known as *Youssefistes*. He was assassinated in 1961, which some believe was carried out by Bourguiba’s administration.

Bourguiba. I also investigate whether or not the Jewish population supported and/or feared Tunisian independence.

The second chapter focuses on the events of 1958: namely, the dismissal of the traditional Jewish councils. This example shows, in greater detail, how the state centralization process was implemented and how they affected notions of Tunisian Jewish identity. I argue that by dismissing the old Jewish council and bringing the new one under the auspices of the state, the Tunisian government attempted to influence Tunisian Jewish identity in its favor; the impacts of these maneuvers will be analyzed .

The third chapter focuses on the 1961 Bizerte Crisis. This was a crisis in which Tunisian nationalists rallied to fight the final battle against French occupying forces. The Jewish communities were often caught in the middle of this conflict and sometimes thought of as French-colonial and/or Zionist sympathizers. This chapter discusses the effects of this conflict and argues that these effects contributed to the ‘othering’¹¹ of the Jewish population in their own eyes and within the eyes of their countrymen during the process of decolonization.

The fourth chapter focuses on the 1967 Six Day War and the subsequent riots that took place in Tunis. This was a major turning point since many Jews chose to emigrate. An international event had severe domestic consequences for the Jewish population. The chapter seeks to address why this event precipitated this major outflux.

The conclusion further deconstructs the results of the Six Day War, discusses contemporary Tunisian Jewry briefly and ends with a discussion of Memmi, Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson and how identity interacts with the nature of the post-colonial state and its definition of the ‘nation’.

Literature Review

¹¹ To use Edward Said’s term – viewing the ‘other’ as someone who is inherently not like one’s self (2003).

This study challenges the official narrative of post-independent Tunisian history. Most scholars of modern Tunisian history are interested in subjects outside of the Jewish minority. The state and its development are popular topics and, thus, integral to my study. The state professes its own story through the anthology *Histoire du Mouvement National Tunisien* (1969-1983), which focuses upon the attempts of Bourguiba and other high-ranking Neo-Destour officials (Noueira, Mzali, Ben Salah, etc.) to build a unified nation, defined as secular and encompassing every Tunisian citizen. Bourguiba himself is a character that is often studied through a ‘political science’ lens that focuses upon his long rule and the absence of democracy¹² or on his relation to Islam¹³. The policy lens continues in studies of the early Tunisian state and the primacy of the Neo-Destour.¹⁴ The narrative of modern Tunisian historiography is, centered upon the personage of Habib Bourguiba, the Destour and Neo-Destour parties, lack of democracy and neo-liberal economic development.¹⁵

Studies of Zionism, a form of Jewish nationalism, and Arab Nationalism also abound. Perhaps the best work on Nasser and Pan-Arab nationalism remains James Jankowski’s *Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic*¹⁶. Jankowski, as one of the premier scholars of Arab nationalism has also edited a volume with Israel Gershoni¹⁷ containing articles from various scholars on the subject of Arab nationalism. Zionism is well defined in the collection of essays (and an informative introduction) by Arthur Hertzberg in *The Zionist Idea*¹⁸.

¹² See Borowiec, Andrew. *Modern Tunisia: A Democratic Apprenticeship*. (Praeger: Westport, 1998). and Hopwood, Derek. *Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia: The Tragedy of Longevity*. (London: Macmillan, 1992).

¹³ See Salem, Norma. *Habib Bourguiba, Islam, and the Creation of Tunisia*. (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

¹⁴ Moore, 1965

¹⁵ Perkins, Kenneth J. *A History of Modern Tunisia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Jankowski, James. *Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2002).

¹⁷ Jankowski, James, and Israel Gershoni, eds. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*. (Temple: Atheneum, 1975).

Also, Gideon Shimoni in *The Zionist Ideology*¹⁹ does well in applying Zionism within the frameworks of Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm. Hedi al-Taymumi more specifically covers Zionism in Tunisia in its strongest period, the 1920's and 30's, in his work *Nishat al-Şioniyya fi Tunis*.²⁰ My study will seek to analyze these ideologies and how they interacted with Tunisian Jews.

The post-independent history of Tunisian Jews is thoroughly explored by Michael Laskier in *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*²¹, in which he provides a well-written narrative account of the history of the Tunisian Jews and their government in two chapters. Also, in a recent work, *Israel and the Maghreb*²², Laskier provides the political background for Bourguiba's outreach to Israel in the 1960s. Both of his works build upon the monumental tome of H.Z. Hirschberg's *A History of the Jews of North Africa*²³, which argued that economics and government centralization policies made emigration the only feasible option for Tunisian Jews.

I depart from the political and economic-centered historical narrative by focusing on a religious minority group, and its identity and relationship to the state-building process. I am not looking at Bourguiba and the Tunisian state as a modern-era version of '*L'etat c'est moi*' but as one that was dynamic and exposed to a multitude of influences. Countering this, I examine the reasons why, despite various overtures by Bourguiba and others, the Jewish community sought to emigrate from Tunisia. Here, I focus on a singular minority group instead of just one political process of development. I build on the works of Laskier and Hirschberg and depart from them, by focusing upon the subject of identity. Whereas Laskier and Hirschberg take emigration to

¹⁹ Shimoni, Gideon. *The Zionist Ideology*. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1995).

²⁰ al-Taymumi, al-Hedi. *Al-Nishat al-Şihyouni bi Tunis, 1897-1948*. (Tunis: Dar Moħamed 'Ali lilNushr, 1983).

²¹ Laskier, Michael M. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

²² Laskier, Michael M. *Israel and the Maghreb*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

²³ Hirschberg, H.Z. *A History of the Jews of North Africa*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981).

France or Israel as a given, my analysis of the effects of the development of a certain ‘Tunisian’ identity on Tunisian Jewish identity questions whether emigration from Tunisia was always a given and in the minds of the Jewish population. Thus, I will also be building upon the recent work of Joy Land, who argues that the Tunisian Jews were divided amongst themselves in terms of identity even in the time of World War I.²⁴

Sources and Methodology

For this research, it was necessary to utilize several sources. The archival sources necessary to conduct this research are located in both France and Tunisia. Within France, the Centre d’Archives Diplomatique Nantes (CADN) houses French diplomatic documents and the collection on the Tunisian protectorate. Also, in Paris, the archive of the Alliance Israélite Universelle contains meticulous records and letters kept by teachers of the Alliance schools throughout Tunisia on the Jewish communities from an earlier era but contains many primary source memoirs of prominent Tunisian Jews. Finally, the National Archives in Tunis house a number of articles on the Tunisian independence movement and state-building procedures, as well as rare secondary source materials. I have spent significant research time in all three places. These Arabic and French-language sources have provided insights into the workings and organization of the Jewish community from 1954 to 1967 and illustrate how its leaders carried out their responsibilities articulated personal ideologies. Other archived primary sources were accessed at the American University in Cairo in archive collections such as *Minorities in the Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries*, largely comprised of British and American declassified documents.

²⁴ Land, Joy A. “Emerging Identities in Colonial Tunisia: ‘Alliancist’ and Zionist Representations in Tunis prior to World War I.” *Revue du Centre des Etudes des literatures et des Artes d’Afrique du Nord* (Spring 2009): 37-50.

The non-archival primary sources that I used are the speeches of Habib Bourguiba in his *Discours* (Speeches) and various anthologies, such as *Tunis wa Qadiyat Filasteen* (*Tunisia and the Palestine Issue*) In addition, the Tunisian government has published the *Histoire du Mouvement National Tunisien* (History of the Tunisian National Movement), which is a multi-volume governmental publication that is comprised of many letters and speeches of Tunisian politicians, including Bourguiba, Ahmed Mestiri, Bahi Ladgham, Hedi Nouiera and Mohamed Masmoudi²⁵. Also, I use biographies such as Albert Memmi's *The Pillar of Salt* and Irene Awret's *Days of Honey: The Tunisian Boyhood of Rafael Uzan* to gain a more intimate understanding of the Jewish community of Tunisia. Finally, I have examined newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *The Times* (London), and *La Presse de Tunisie* in a search for articles about Tunisian Jews, and Arab Nationalism in Tunisia from 1954 to 1967. I have analyzed the newspaper sources at intervals beginning three months prior to and three months after the key dates stated in the chapter breakdown.

There is an overwhelming preponderance within the utilized sources of documents reflecting the voice of the state and elite Jewish actors. This is no mistake. The documents needed to engage in a more representative study of Jewish Tunisians either do not exist, have yet to be declassified or were not found within the sources used for the thesis. This, however, does not discredit the work as there would have been several shared opinions between Jewish elites and ordinary members of Jewish society within Tunisia. Also, as the boundaries between state and society are quite unclear, it is reasonable to think that certain elements of society penetrated the state and that their opinions would have been reflected within the actions of the state.

Theoretical Framework

²⁵ Ladgham, Nouira and Masmoudi were all Prime Ministers of Tunisia and high ranking officials within the Neo-Destour.

The development of an independent Tunisia and the impact of the new Tunisian identity formed through the state-building process calls into question the way in which states relate to societies and vice versa. The state reflects ongoing identity formation in this period through changes within it due to an unclear boundary between itself and society. The evolution of Bourguiba's speeches and his government's actions or inactions regarding certain incidents show this trend occurred within Tunisia. Therefore, the establishment of not who, but what the state is, is integral to this piece. My investigation deals with the matter of the definition and understanding of the state found as discussed in Timothy Mitchell's influential article: "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics".²⁶ Working within the paradigm of nationalism and nations, I utilize three major works, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*,²⁷ E.J. Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*²⁸ and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.²⁹ With an understanding of the theories used by these works, we are able to understand more the intricacies and processes in forming identity.

Mitchell and the State

Mitchell's short but influential article "The Limits of the State" plays a significant role in how I define the state within this piece. For one, I agree with Mitchell that "the distinction between a conceptual realm and an empirical one needs to be placed in question if we are to understand the nature of a phenomenon like the state".³⁰ This is part of a broad summary of his argument referring to the tangible and intangible things that make up a state. Put simply, there are no clear borders between state and society – what we have is a very fluid mixing of

²⁶ Mitchell, Timothy. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics". *The American Political Science Review*, 85, 1 (Mar. 1991). 77-96.

²⁷ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

²⁸ Hobsbawm, E.J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Publishing, 1983.

³⁰ Mitchell, 81.

government, institutions and organizations that can all be a part of what we refer to as “the state”. Mitchell adds that “the edges of the state are uncertain; societal elements seem to penetrate it on all sides, and the resulting boundary between state and society is difficult to determine”,³¹ cementing the fluidity of borders in his analysis. This means, that there is constant interplay between state and society – a complicated relationship with neither side following or leading the other at any given moment. The state can shape society and society can equally shape the state.

The state, conceived of in this fashion, allows one to circumvent arguments of authoritarianism in the Tunisian case as well. President Habib Bourguiba, therefore, was not the absolutist portrayed in various works³² but the most visible, and arguably, most important decision maker in the Tunisian government. The state was not only him and he was not the state. Related to this concept, Mitchell states, “The line between state and society is not the perimeter of an intrinsic entity, which can be thought of as a freestanding object or actor. It is a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained”.³³ Therefore, it is useless to ask “who” the state is or “what” the state is as the state is not a monolithic entity dominated by one person or a non-changing, static set of institutions. Given the fact that societal pressures enter into the organizations and individuals who make up the state disproves the idea that “the state” is a clearly defined entity that can be expected to act in one particular way.

³¹ Mitchell, 88.

³² See Borowiec, Andrew. *Modern Tunisia: A Democratic Apprenticeship*. (Praeger: Westport, 1998), Hopwood, Derek. *Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia: The Tragedy of Longevity*. (London: Macmillan, 1992)

³³ Mitchell, 90.

Mitchell also goes on at length to discuss the organization of 20th century bureaucratic governments (he refers to them as ‘modern’³⁴ states, a problematic term in itself) as a domain of power and discipline. Mitchell writes from a Foucauldian perspective on discipline and the state:

As Foucault has shown, similar methods of enclosing and partitioning space, systemizing surveillance and inspection, breaking down complex tasks into carefully drilled movements and coordinating separate functions into larger combinations...the spread of such measures in the 18th and 19th centuries represented a new, localized, yet enormously productive technology of power.³⁵

Therefore, given the Tunisian case, the streamlining of the state and the subsuming of its institutions within the post-independence republican framework increased the power of the state itself to create and insert itself into spaces that were left to other devices in times past. The process begun by Ahmed Bey’s reforms in 1844³⁶ grew the power of the state vis-à-vis the individual and sought to create a disciplined society and self-disciplined individuals, the results of which can be seen not only in the post-independence period of Tunisia but to the present day. The further streamlining of the *nation*, however, is what this thesis calls into question. Do the same power dynamics that apply to the formation of the bureaucratic state apply to the formation of the nation? Mitchell goes on to state that the bureaucratic state’s organizational structure lends itself to create external structures that are seen as an “apparatus that stands apart from the rest of the social world”.³⁷ He cites the idea of a modern army, seemingly made up of many parts but organized and synchronized to appear as one single machine. Mitchell writes: “There was nothing new in the power of the army except this distributing, arranging and moving. But the order and precision of such processes created the effect of an apparatus apart from them men themselves, whose structure orders, contains and controls them.”³⁸

³⁴ Mitchell, 93.

³⁵ Mitchell, 92.

³⁶ See Brown, Leon Carl. *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey: 1837-1855*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974)

³⁷ Mitchell, 94.

³⁸ Mitchell, 94.

I believe that this idea, of the creation of an apparatus out of disciplined individuals could also be enlarged to include nations. The idea of nations existing comes out of a certain disciplined individual mindset (believing I am similar to my neighbor in a certain way) that carries organizational weight and power seemingly greater than the individual. Therefore, the symbols and organizations employed by the state are of importance in constructing the nation. The state, having power over the control of borders ties itself in with the nation in a way that make both seem real³⁹. The nation is now defined on a map because of state control of borders, thus giving us the idea of the nation-state. How to theoretically conceptualize the nation as individuals that add up to a greater whole is to be discussed below.

Nations, Nationalism, Tunisia

In attempting to define a nation, all three of the major theoretical thinkers employed in this piece offer differing, yet similar definition as to what a nation is. Gellner writes that “Any definition of nations in terms of shared culture brings in far too rich a catch”,⁴⁰ problematizing any simplistic definition of what a nation is based on a “shared culture” between peoples. Anderson offers the most complete and elastic definition, that nations are “an imagined political community, and imagined as both limited and sovereign”.⁴¹ Anderson goes on to state that a nation is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”,⁴² thus echoing the idea that nations are formed where people believe nations are formed. Simply put, someone from Tunis might have never traveled to Sfax or met a single Sfaxien but he has an idea that both are “Tunisian” and thus have a shared image of one another. This analysis of imagining

³⁹ Mitchell, 94.

⁴⁰ Gellner, 53.

⁴¹ Anderson, 6.

⁴² Anderson, 6.

the nation is not, as well, limited simply to country variables. A Jewish man in La Goulette could imagine himself as sharing a “Tunisian” nation with a Jewish man in Djerba who may, at the same time, imagine himself as being part of an “Arab” nation with a man in Cairo while this same man from La Goulette might also imagine himself as part of a “Jewish” nation with other Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel. Therefore, who or what comprises a nation, and which nation one speaks of is a heavily matter. Hobsbawm expands on this situation when he states that:

First, official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters. Second, and more specifically, we cannot assume that for most people national identification- when it exists- excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them. Thirdly, national identifications and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods.”⁴³

For the purposes of this thesis and our investigation into Tunisian Jewish identity, we will operate within Anderson’s framework of “imagined” national communities, limited and sovereign for all layers of nation-ness and nationalism. Hobsbawm’s quote above that there are various combinations of nationalism and the fluidity of identification will also be key to discussing this thesis.

Hobsbawm writes: “In short...nationalism comes before nations”.⁴⁴ Nationalism, defined by Gellner (and the broad definition utilized in this study) is “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent”.⁴⁵ Thus, according to Hobsbawm, the wish that the political and national unit should be congruent comes before the development of nations. While I disagree with this base assumption at face value, it is my interpretation that nationalism comes before nations then, if one sees the development of a nation as a *process* instead of a line that goes from point A to point B. Nationalism is constantly seeking

⁴³ Hobsbawm, 11.

⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, 10.

⁴⁵ Gellner, 1.

to change the political unit into one that reflects a certain imagining of what the nation could be. This imagining, as well, is something that is fluid. Events such as a war (in the case of 1967) can and have affected nationalisms to change the perception of what the nation is.

Central to this argument is the question of whether or not post-colonial nations and states utilize nationalism to homogenize their definition of the nation. The same organization and power from disciplines spoken of by Foucault and Mitchell for the state can have taken place within the nation. In fact, Gellner writes that “the Agrarian world could not have been so neat. The industrial world tends to become so, or at least to approximate such simplicity”.⁴⁶ The streamlining and organizations of nations, so that the nation itself becomes a machine greater than the sum of its parts, has greater power over those political organizations in the past that were not centralized and organized in this way. Gellner contrasts the pluralism of the past,⁴⁷ with his description of the streamlined society in a post-nationalist age:

Rather, when general social conditions make for standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be repositories of political legitimacy. Only then does it come to appear that any defiance of their boundaries by political units constitutes a scandal.⁴⁸

His assumption that national identity comes from a standardized, homogenous culture is influential in explaining how the Six Day War, fought between Israel and some Arab states, becomes perceived in Tunisia as a Muslim-Jewish conflict leading to riots and the largest Jewish exodus proportionally in Tunisian history. The organization of the nation from a patchwork mosaic in the past to an efficiently organized and readily definable entity ensures that it can project power as a cohesive unit, greater than its individual components. Hobsbawm echoes Gellner’s statement by saying “Most of it [nationalist fervor] has been directed not at foreign

⁴⁶ Gellner, 53.

⁴⁷ Gellner 54.

⁴⁸ Gellner, 54.

imperialists but against a newly emancipated state claiming a national homogeneity which they [members of the nation] did not possess. In other words, they protested against the ‘national’, i.e. ethnic or cultural unreality of the territories into which the imperial world had partitioned the dependent world...”⁴⁹

The fact that this desire exists within theories of nationalism indicates that this homogenization is not unique to the Tunisian experience. On the contrary, Tunisia is chosen as a test to these theories given the official nationalism of the state that encompasses Tunisian nationality and identity to all citizens despite their ethno-religious affiliation.⁵⁰ Edith Haddad Shaked, in a study on Tunisian Jewish identity concludes that “Tunisian Jews were not just members of a religious minority community. Deeply embedded in Tunisia, they had to deal first with a Tunisian Muslim Arab kind of anti-Semitism or anti-Jewish racism even as they culturally became quite like Tunisian Muslim Arabs”.⁵¹ These two details make Tunisia an excellent case study into the theories of nationalism as it seems there was somewhat of a struggle to maintain a diverse society. Events like the Six Day war, however, did shift the tides of nationalism and aided in the process of national homogenization as the Jews themselves chose to quit the country. Perhaps Hobsbawm was correct when he wrote that “the nationalism of small nations was just as impatient of minorities as what Lenin called ‘Great Nation Chauvinism’”.⁵²

Concluding Comments

⁴⁹ Hobsbawm, 153.

⁵⁰ See Brady, Thomas F. “Jews Reassured in North Africa” *The New York Times* 5 Jul 1957. Found online at *The New York Times Digital Archive*, <www.nytimes.com> Last Accessed on 1 Mar 2010. Also see Bourguiba’s speech in Jericho on 3 Mar 1965 calling for discussions with Israel: Bourguiba, Habib. “Qiyadat Mawfiqa wa Khitat Hakima Naji’a” Speech Given 3 March 1965, Jericho. Found in *Tunis wa Qadhiyat Filasteen*. (Tunis: Kitaba ad-Dawla lilAkhbar wa al-Ishar, 1966). 65-71

⁵¹ Shaked, Edith Haddad. “On the State of Being (Jewish) between “Orient” and “Occident”. in Bat-Ami Bar On and Tessman, Lisa, eds. *Jewish Locations: Traversing Racialized Landscapes*. (City: Rowan & Littlefield 2002). 196.

⁵² Hobsbawm, 134.

The study of identity is always inherently imperfect. Identities of individuals, states, and nations tend to change over time as different events impact them. This thesis' argument that a centralizing, newly-independent state created a centralized nation through identity based upon citizenship, can also be applied to other countries.⁵³ The events described in each of these chapters had a critical effect on creating the modern Tunisian nation. From independence to the Six-Day War, the new Tunisian nation-state was being formed. The results of this era are visible and still being felt within Tunisia today.

⁵³ An interesting parallel is with the Dönme of Turkey in the transition from being governed by the Islamic Ottoman Empire to the secular Turkish Republic. Their experience regarding citizenship in the new republic shows how a minority religious group can be portrayed as not part of the nation. See Baer, Marc David. *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, Secular Turks*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Chapter One: Tunisian Jewry and the Birth of a Nation-State: The Independence of Tunisia 1954-1957

Introduction

On 20 March 1956, the state of Tunisia was declared independent from its colonial master, France. Its protectorate, having lasted for 75 years was dissolved as the result of ongoing talks between the French government and Tunisian premier Habib Bourguiba⁵⁴. This momentous event was preceded as well by the granting of official autonomy in 1955 and the right to autonomy in principle granted by Pierre Mendès-France on 31 July 1954.⁵⁵ This two-year period marked a turning point in modern Tunisian history as the newly independent nation sought to establish a state that could represent itself. The newly independent nation-state faced many challenges in establishing itself. Also, the Tunisian nation at independence was not a homogenous entity; although majority Muslim, the Tunisian population in 1956 counted amongst its numbers Jews and various Europeans.⁵⁶ Many Jews (especially elites) in Tunisia in the colonial era acted as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the local population, thus becoming trapped in both worlds.⁵⁷ Some during that time also received, as protégés, protection from foreign powers and immunity towards local laws. The question after independence, therefore, was how to govern this heterogeneous population? If the nation-state is formulated so that the nation matches the state, how does this take place within the Tunisian context?

⁵⁴ “France Accepts Tunisia Status of Independence”. 18 March 1956, *The New York Times*. Found Online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last Accessed on 25 Feb 2010.

⁵⁵ Sayah, Mohammed, ed. *Histoire du Mouvement National Tunisien, Le Neo-Destour a L’Epreuve du Pouvoir : Le Nouvel Etat, 1956-1958*. (Tunis : Dar al-Amal, 1982), 273.

⁵⁶ Laskier, Michael M. “From Hafsia to Bizerte: Tunisia’s National Struggle and Tunisian History 1952-1961” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 2 (Dec. 1987). 191.

⁵⁷ Laskier, “Hafsia” 194-196.

Beginning with independence, the Tunisian state centralized and projected its power, thus working to define the new nation. Independence symbolically breaks with the past and the French colonial authority over Tunisia. Thus, this period, 1954-1957, can be viewed as more of a *transitional* period than one that provides any definitive answers regarding questions about nations. Distinctive trends, however, do start to appear heralding the mass immigration of Tunisian Jews.

This transitional period is one of introspection for the Jewish community of Tunisia as it is exposed to a nebulous form of Tunisian nationalism. This introspection, it will be seen in later chapters through later events, led to the emigration of most of Tunisia's Jewish population.

Sources and Demographics of the Tunisian Jewish Community, 1954-1956

There are some discrepancies within various sources pertaining to the number of Jewish Tunisians in the early 1950s. According to Michael Laskier, there were 95,000 Jews in Tunisia in the early 1950s, 72,000 of which were Tunisian Beylical subjects who were mostly living in the main cities of Tunis, Sfax, and Sousse, where they worked as artisans, shopkeepers, merchants and as a small, but growing "white-collar elite".⁵⁸ The French Ambassador to Tunisia in 1974 stated that "more than some 100,000 persons [Jews] in 1956 were of Tunisian nationality".⁵⁹ It is most likely safe to assume that the number of Tunisian Jews in 1954-1956 was around 100,000. It is also important to consider that these were a diverse group of people as Laskier points out, ranging a variety of economic and social statuses.

In the cultural field, however, the Jewish elite dominated. Within the historiography of this era, the sources are lacking in information when it comes to the cultural affinities of subaltern Jews. What we do have, and can investigate, are the autobiographies of men like

⁵⁸ Laskier, "Hafsia" 191-192.

⁵⁹ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George. "Jews in Tunisia" Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

Georges Cohen, Charles Haddad de Paz and Albert Memmi who explain the situation of the Jewish community at this time within their works. All three were highly educated and relatively politically active: Cohen was a professor, Haddad the head of the Jewish council of Tunis, and Memmi a famous writer. All three emigrated to France post independence

The State and the Jews

During this period, the new state wished to pursue a policy of reconciliation with the Jews and expressed a desire for the Jews to play a role in the new state.⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Latif al-Hannachi states that Bourguiba from the start wished to include the Jews in his National Front and the Neo-Destour to have a “diversity of affiliation of national activists”.⁶¹ Two actions, however, in this transitional period put the state at odds with its Jewish population: the dissolving of the old confessionally based court system and the promulgation of the first article of the constitution. As it will be shown, these two acts caused outrage from prominent members of the Jewish community and led to questioning whether the Jews had a place within the Tunisian nation, as the state sought to shape its own particular place within it as well.

The integrationist measures taken by the state had gone over rather well. Following the first proclamation of autonomy, the nationalists stressed that Jews would be equal citizens in the soon to be independent state.⁶² Upon the return of Habib Bourguiba from his exile in France on 1 June 1955, at his welcome parade in Tunis, young Jews and Muslims helped the police force maintain order to “keep the peace”.⁶³ This was not a mistake. It was a symbolic representation of the state that the nationalists and Bourguiba wanted to establish. The future of Tunisia included

⁶⁰ Laskier, Michael. “North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century” New York: New York University Press, 1994. 262.

⁶¹ ‘Abd al-Latif al-Hannachi. *Taṭawwur al-Khiṭab al-Siyasi fi Tunis Iza’ al-Qaḍiya al-Filasṭīniya: 1920-1955*. (Tunis: First Press, 2006).

⁶² Stillman, Norman. *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Society for Publication, 1991), 171.

⁶³ “Exiled Tunisian Leader Receives Tumultuous Welcome on Return” *New York Times* 2 Jun 1955. Found online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last Accessed on 1 Mar 2010.

Jews and Muslims working together for the benefit of the country as equals, as Tunisians. The choice of Jewish Boy Scouts and young Muslims reflects the imagined future of Tunisia as well. It is also important to see this as a message of an early form of state supremacy – this event shows the Jews and Muslims working to *protect* the head of the state – the reward reaped from its efforts of appealing to the broad swath of the Tunisian nation.

The government continuously worked to address Jewish worries concerning discrimination after independence. In an interview on the 23 April, 1956, the Secretary of State for Information, Bechir Ben Yahmed, stated that “we [the Tunisian government] are interested in our Jews remaining in Tunisia. But it is clear that all citizens are free to leave the country”.⁶⁴ In addition, President Bourguiba conferred with the chiefs of the Jewish community on 21 April 1956 in a publicized visit to the Jewish quarter in the old Medina in Tunis. About this conference, Ben Yahmed states on 24 April 1956 that

In Tunisia, in any case, President Bourguiba has reiterated Saturday with the chiefs of the Jewish community that we have gone beyond the confessional and racial in order to guarantee all Tunisian nationals, whatever their origins or their confessions, against all formulas of discrimination. It is highly desirable, however that they do not have their bodies here and their hearts elsewhere.⁶⁵

Generally speaking, these statements give the idea that in the immediate post-independence period the Tunisian state was seeking to maintain national unity. This is confirmed and re-confirmed. However, it came at a cost to the Jewish population – identifying with Tunisia and Tunisia only. They should “not have their bodies here and hearts elsewhere” presumably indicating Israel or France – both disliked by the Tunisian population. France was the former colonial master and now the violent subjugator of the Algerians and Israel had, just a few years

⁶⁴ Haddad de Paz, Charles. *Juifs et Arabes au Pays de Bourguiba*. (Aix en Provence : Imprimerie Paul Roubaud, 1977), 51.

⁶⁵ Haddad, 51.

prior, violently expelled Palestinians from their lands. Colonial and Zionist sympathies were to be eschewed in the narrative of the new Tunisia.

During this period, there were Zionist organizations operating within Tunisia. The more vocal Zionist organizations and Zionist newspapers operated in the 1920's and 30's and were mostly shut down during the German occupation of Tunisia during World War II.⁶⁶ After the war, many Zionist organizations operated within Tunisia such as *Mossad Le-Aliyah* (Organization for Emigration to Israel, open in Tunisia from 1949-1952), the Jewish Agency for Palestine, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) and sections of the World Jewish Congress, which mostly provided aid to the Jewish communities.⁶⁷ Political Zionism, however, did not attract a mass following.⁶⁸ Interestingly enough, the numbers of emigrants to Israel drops sharply only one year after independence from France.⁶⁹ The Tunisian Zionist Federation closed in April of 1956 but the Jewish Agency's office in Tunis continued to operate. During this time, however, most Zionist organizations were more concerned with charitable work for Jewish youth than overt emigration activities.⁷⁰ Whatever work was done by these groups in encouraging *aliyah* must have been done clandestinely in order to not raise any suspicions. Records of this type of work are, unfortunately, unavailable.

The Tunisian government, however, did not exclude Jewish Tunisians from its ranks. On the first election to the National Assembly on 25 March 1956, twelve-thousand Jews were eligible to vote. Two Jewish candidates ran with the Neo-Destour, Albert Bessis and Andre Barouch. Barouch was later appointed minister of Urbanism and Housing in the first Bourguiba

⁶⁶ Taymumi, Hedi.

⁶⁷ Laskier, Michael. "From Hafsia to Bizerte: Tunisia's Nationalist Struggle and Tunisian Jewry, 1952-61" *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 2 (December 1987)196.

⁶⁸ Laskier, 199.

⁶⁹ Laskier, 209.

⁷⁰ Laskier 210.

government. Being Jewish did not bar access to the state nor to positions within it, even at the highest levels. For the Jewish population, “the gesture was appreciated”.⁷¹

Further shaping the definition of the new Tunisian was the government decree ending the Rabbinical courts. This move did not affect the Jewish community alone. The decree eliminated all confessional tribunals, including courts based on *Sharia*’ law (which had adjudicated matters of personal status) and instituted a civil court system on 3 August 1956⁷². This decree made sense to the “modernizing” officials of the state; it ensured that justice would be equally applied to all citizens based on unified and equally applicable laws. It organized the judiciary a more efficient way, making it more responsive to control by central authorities. The government’s history describes this move as “the definition of the strategy of the reformist movement to put with much efficacy a Muslim country into the contemporary age”,⁷³ in line with the centralizing tendencies of bureaucratic government described by Mitchell. It is interesting to note, however, that the government history does not mention abolishing the rabbinical court but only the *Sharia*’ courts.

The Jewish community, on the other hand, saw the abolishment of the confessional courts as a curtailment of their autonomy. Charles Haddad describes this decision as a “regrettable restriction, in my opinion, to the extent that, the replacement law imposed upon the Jews contained dispositions of a Qur’anic essence”.⁷⁴ This was a fear that permeated the community; not only was the Jewish community forced to accept a loss of communal autonomy but they would be tried according to laws that were foreign to their heritage. According to Laskier,

⁷¹ Cohen, Georges. *De L’Ariana a Galata: Itinéraire d’un Juif de Tunisie*. (Vincennes : Editions Racines, 1993), 158.

⁷² Sayah, Mohammed, ed. *Histoire du Mouvement National Tunisien, Le Neo-Destour a L’Epreuve du Pouvoir : Le Nouvel Etat, 1956-1958*. Vol 2. Tunis : Dar al-Amal, 1982. 101

⁷³ *Le Nouvel Etat* 2. 101.

⁷⁴ Haddad, 27.

“Tunisian Jews were thus brought under the jurisdiction of a code as outmoded as the Judaic law that some had complained of, but lacking the merit of being their own”.⁷⁵ Haddad adds that “The Tunisian people, the most tolerant of the land, have broken, without immediate need, an instrument of peace that only needed to be painted anew. A loss for my native country”.⁷⁶ While it is difficult to see how a communal court could be an “instrument of peace”, it is important to consider Haddad’s position within the community – the President of the Jewish council of Tunis. With the end of the rabbinical courts, he in fact, cedes some of his power over to the state. The expansion of the state judiciary into matters of personal status is, in a way, an attempt to place on every citizen a “Tunisian” identity. Personal status law, previously the realm of religion, is a control method (in the Foucauldian sense) that the state used in organizing and categorizing its citizens by keeping records of things such as marriage. As such, without the curtailment of confessional courts, it is doubtful that the Bourguiba government would have been able to have passed the famed Personal Status code of 1957 which gave Tunisian women unparalleled rights in the Arab world at that time. Nonetheless, for the Jews this was a loss of communal autonomy and an ominous portent of how the new state would operate.

Possibly the government action seen as most detrimental to the Jewish population in the 1954-1957 period was the promulgation of the first article of the Tunisian constitution. The constitution was not to be adopted until 1959, but the first article was leaked to the press on 14 April 1956. It contains four main points:

- 1) The affirmation of the plain sovereignty of Tunisia
- 2) The consecration of Islam as the official religion
- 3) The democratic character of the state giving sovereignty to the people

⁷⁵ Laskier, “Hafsia” 210.

⁷⁶ Haddad, 165.

- 4) The tolerance that manifests itself for the general respect of all beliefs and the protection of exercising all religions⁷⁷

This version, though not official, is the one that was leaked to the press and forms a basis of the constitution that is adopted in 1959. The idea that Islam was to be the official religion of the Tunisian republic posed problems for many Jews. Their hopes for a secular state (impossible under the Beylical regime) were dashed. Georges Cohen wrote “sometime later, the constitutional convention unanimously passes the first article of the Tunisian constitution...and therefore the Jews, not Muslims nor Arabophones are marginalized in their country and go unnoticed. As if there was a very rude shock that no one could have foreseen, point blank, a catastrophic situation”.⁷⁸ The implementation of Islam as the official religion of the state did placate conservative factions such as the Youssefistes who demanded a greater inclusion of “Islamic-Arab” ideals.⁷⁹

The state’s definition of itself as ‘Islamic’ undoubtedly placed it within the dominant religious sphere and more able to extend its control over the Tunisian population. For the Jews however, this was the realization of a fear: living under an ‘Islamic’ government. Although simple nomenclature, the state defining as ‘Islamic’ radically opened up a fear for the future, which is the “shock” that Cohen speaks of. The State, despite stressing freedom of belief, seemed to bow to pressure to define itself as “Islamic” in the constitution. This had repercussions on the perception of the Tunisian nation. If the state and the nation were to be congruent, then the state, bowing to popular pressure and/or some members of the government pushing their own ideas in

⁷⁷ Quoted from *Le Petit Matin*, 14 Apr 1956. Found in *Le Nouvel Etat*, 1. 432.

⁷⁸ Cohen. 159.

⁷⁹ The Youssefistes were a group loyal to Salah Ben Youssef (1907-1961) who was a high ranking Neo-Destour official and competitor to Bourguiba. Ben Youssef wished Tunisia to be closer to Nasser’s Cairo albeit with more of an Islamic context. According to the government, gangs of Youssefistes committed terror acts throughout the country. Bourguiba had ben Youssef condemned to death while Ben Youssef was in exile in 1956 in Cairo. He was eventually assassinated in Frankfurt in 1961 and Bourguiba is believed to have ordered the assassination. For the government’s view on the “Youssefist Sedition” see *Le Nouvel Etat*. 1. 332.

defining the state as Islamic, then the nation should be defined as Islamic (or, has already been defined as Islamic) as well. Instead of a secular state, what was taking shape in Tunisia fell in line with other Arab countries, such as Egypt. Giving official status to one religion is one way that the state can shape the nation. Muslims were thereby privileged, their religion becoming part of the state, making them more “Tunisian”. Jews, however, are left outside of the definition of what it meant to be fully “Tunisian”.

The Bourguiba government did, however, continuously work to reassure the Jews of their safe and equal position within Tunisian society. A shining moment of this took place during the Suez Crisis of 1956. The French Consul in Bizerte was worried that the Jews would suffer repercussions in Tunisia for sympathizing with Israel and “accelerate their decision to depart”. Some were apprehended but released.⁸⁰ Instead, Bourguiba came out publicly against Nasser’s treatment of the Jews within Egypt. Bourguiba was outraged by the treatment of Tunisian Jewish citizens in Egypt and called on the Egyptian ambassador to halt discriminatory actions saying that the Tunisian government does not discriminate between citizens on the basis of religion.⁸¹ Measures such as confirmed that the Jews were a concern of the government. They were equal to the Muslims in the eye of the state and did not deserve to be discriminated against. Their place in the nation, however, remained in question.

Jewish-Muslim Relations 1954-1957

While the day-to-day experience of individual Jews as members of a minority is difficult to assess, the autobiographies gathered for this thesis and the documents from the French Diplomatic Archives do shed some light on the interactions of the Muslims and Jews at this time.

⁸⁰ Embassy of France in Tunis, Series A Carton 6: “Questions Religiuses”. Consulate General of France in Bizerte. “Report Bi-Mensuel” 15-31 October 1956. C: “Public Opinion”. CADN.

⁸¹ “Tunisia Defends Jews” 25 December 1956. *The New York Times*. Found Online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last Accessed on 1 Mar 2010.

From what we can tell, there was significant goodwill between the communities at this time. The *Annuaire Israelite de Tunisie* for 1955 includes a photo of Taieb Siala, the Maleki *Qadhi* (judge) visiting the grand opening of a Rabbinical Court and posing with Rabbi Meis Cohen, president of the Rabbinical Court of Tunis.⁸² Two men of differing religions and different religious laws came together for a ceremony without knowing that within a year their respective institutions would be dissolved. There was also an event in the *hara* on 27 February 1954, before autonomy, in which there was a Muslim-Jewish fight when some young men insulted Jewish girls that resulted in minor injuries and minor vandalism to Jewish shops.⁸³ This however quickly blew over due to two letters published in the Tunisian press by then Neo-Destour member Mohamed Masmoudi and Charles Haddad which lead the French Civil Controller to write that “there is, in general, a felicity of good relations actually existing between the Arabs and the Jews, due to the concern of the nationalists for world opinion and the amity between certain Jewish personalities and the Neo-Destour.”⁸⁴ These public letters solved the crisis by easing the tensions within the two groups. The speed with which this event blew over and the fact that it did not escalate pointed to generally cordial relations between the two groups, if not even friendly at the elite level.

Georges Cohen gives a rather enlightening description of inter-communal relations during the autonomy period:

We can remember this small society, certainly cohabiting harmoniously but living within known and invisible frontiers. The French, the Arabs and the Jews. Mixing was rare, in the sense that the amities, without exception, were formed within group membership. However, rapports were cordial between us, although they remained superficial. At least there was not ostracism. The volley ball team of the house was,

⁸² *Annuaire Israelite De Tunisie*, 4eme Edition. (Tunis : Imprimerie de Strasbourg, 1955), 27. Found in Résidence Générale de Tunisie, Carton PER400 “Périodiques Tunisiennes”. CADN.

⁸³ Fonds Protectorat Tunisie. 2eme Versement, Carton 313, E4D, “Relations Judeo-Arabes”. Letter 115, 2 March 1954. “Incidents Between Muslims and Jews”.

⁸⁴ Fonds Protectorat Tunisie. 2eme Versement, Carton 313, E4D, “Relations Judeo-Arabes”. Letter 3188, 24 Sept 1954. “Jewish Population”.

if I could say, multiethnic. For Bridge, for baby-foot de Roblin, we played “without distinction to race and religion”. But the events that agitated the Regency did have effects on our communal life.⁸⁵

Deconstructing this, we are given a picture of almost “separate but equal” societies. Relations seemed cordial, if superficial and at least for Cohen, deep friendships sprouted within the confessional context. It is, however, difficult to imagine this being the norm. At Cohen’s elite level of society the interactions between different groups seems limited to competitive sports. A lower class Jew in the *hara*, however, having everyday interaction with Muslims in a variety of fields could have had more Muslim friends in a different way than described by Cohen. It is worthy of note that politics and news affecting Tunisia had an effect on relations: Israel’s actions during the Suez Crisis, for instance, could have damaged friendships at the bridge-club for some time.

How did Tunisian Jews view the desire for independence? Cohen argues that there was much Arab/French hostility in those days and that the “Jews found themselves in an ambiguous position...to take a position was to betray someone. And nobody wanted that. To the status quo, we would have agreed”.⁸⁶ Cohen also adds in the same passage, “Personally, I understood the desire of independence of the Arabs...This is not the first tragedy to affect the Jews. But at that moment, the things were not so clear and precise. The dominant sentiment was...perplexity”.⁸⁷ Albert Memmi as well was attached to the nationalist cause⁸⁸ owing to his interpretation that “the colonized’s liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity”.⁸⁹ These two intellectual Jews understood thoroughly the desire of independence of the Tunisian population. Although beneficiaries of the colonial system, they were able to see its dark

⁸⁵ Cohen, 151.

⁸⁶ Cohen, 151.

⁸⁷ Cohen 152.

⁸⁸ Shaked, Edith Haddad, 192.

⁸⁹ Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 128.

sides and sympathise with the nationalists. Cohen's position that the Jews did not want to "betray" someone also implies the relatively calm and cordial relations between the Jews and both the Muslim and the French population.

Conclusion: Identities for the Future

The Jews of Tunisia have often been painted as staunch Francophiles who availed themselves of the opportunities provided by French education and lived in a Francophone environment.⁹⁰ These conditions prevailed within a small elite, however. Charles Haddad writes:

The Jews of Tunisia are very loyal to their native soil, to their country and its prestigious chief for we can imagine, among them a spirit of separatism. They are attached to their institutions and their community organization because they are a part of the balance that they achieved and any barrier to their operation may seem like an unthinkable regression. They are no less free and conscious citizens than anyone else that preserves the status of minorities, the rights of the individual, the free circulation of men and the equality of all under the law.⁹¹

This quote is telling. What the Jews identified with was, in fact, "their native soil", not French colonial domination or mass Zionist exodus for Israel. It is important here to notice that, according to Haddad, the Jews were attached to *their* institutions (such as the Rabbinical courts) and *their* community as a whole. This is the statement of a group of people who want to preserve a notion of Jewish identity. With the expansion of the state in the autonomy and independence period, this became increasingly difficult.

Autonomy and independence was the beginning of a process of emigration for the Tunisian Jews. It was a difficult decision: "How do you want some people, who have the conviction that Tunisia is their country, who were born in Tunisia, who live and die here, as did their father, their grandfather and their great grandfather, to be able to envisage a solution as

⁹⁰ Shaked, Edith Haddad. 198.

⁹¹ Haddad, 29.

radical as exile?” asks Georges Cohen.⁹² The numbers for emigration during this period are not as large as those on 1961 or 1967. According to French statistics for 1954-1957, however, 25,000 Jews chose to emigrate from Tunisia from a total of approximately 100,000⁹³. This is not an insignificant number, and it can be inferred that some of those emigrating held French or European nationality and thus had an easier time emigrating. The numbers of Jews going to Israel at this time was approximately 15,000 (of the total 25,000 emigrants).⁹⁴ French records indicate that many of these came from the poor communities of the Tunisian interior⁹⁵ and were aided by Zionist organizations.⁹⁶ Laskier confirms this but asserts that after 1956 there was a substantial drop in the number of Tunisian Jews who emigrated to Israel “usually not in an atmosphere of panic”.⁹⁷

As for their inclusion within the nation, many Tunisian Jews chose to opt out of the nationalist project by emigrating from the country. They saw for themselves no place within the new nation, constantly being defined within these years of inception by the state. For the majority, approximately 75%, the reassurances of the government, the difficulties of emigrating and a strong attachment to the land of their birth appeared to assuage their fears and for better or worse they remained within the country. Inter-communal relations at this time were cordial and of mutual respect and Tunisian Jews were able to work within the state.

What happened during the independence era is that many of the Jews became alienated from the government as it defined itself as more “Arab-Islamic” and sought to centralize its

⁹² Cohen, 159.

⁹³ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George. “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

⁹⁴ Laskier, “Hafsia”. 198.

⁹⁵ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A, Carton 6 “Questions Religieuses” Consulate of France in Djerba “Rapport Bi-Mensuel” 1-15 Sept 1956. “Jewish Population” and see Consulate of France in Kasserine “Rapport Bi-Mensuel” 16-31 August 1956 and Delegation to Sfax of the High Commissioner of France in Tunis. “Rapport Bi-Mensuel” 16-30 Sept 1956.

⁹⁶ Laskier, “Hafsia” 205-206.

⁹⁷ Laskier, “Hafsia” 207.

authority. The promotion of “Tunisian” over all other identities by the state, shown by the shedding of confessional courts stifled the sense of autonomy that the Jews had engendered in the past. It should not be interpreted that this was a fault of the government – all “modern” bureaucratic states have worked to centralize themselves and entrench their power. The Tunisian government and its population was part of the trend of de-colonizing states in the mid-tentieth century. Georges Cohen states that “we were the victims of a historical process called decolonization”,⁹⁸ summing up the issues at stake for the Jewish community in this era. A “grand political and identity confusion” was shared by Jews during the independence era, those living through decolonization.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Cohen, 179.

⁹⁹ Abitol, Michael *Le Passé d'une discord: Juifs et Arabes du VII Siècle à nos jours*. (Paris : Perrin, 1999), 443.

Chapter Two: The State Takes Shape: The Reordering of the Jewish Community and Tunisian Constitution 1958-1959

In the July 11, 1958 edition of the *Official Journal of the Republic of Tunisia: Laws and Regulations*, the Tunisian President, Habib Bourgriba published public Law No. 58-78. This law dealt exclusively with the Jewish community. It made official the dissolution of the previously elected Jewish Community Council of Tunis, of which Mr. Charles Haddad de Paz was president, and the other Jewish councils in the country.¹⁰⁰ This was the first decree-law that directly impacted the Jewish community and it was put into effect two years after Tunisian independence. The Jewish community leaders were shocked. With the theory regarding the centralization of states discussed by Mitchell, however, the dissolution of this council appears to be the obvious choice for the Tunisian government..

In addition, it is important to take into consideration that Tunisia was freshly recovering from the bonds of colonialism and occupation by a foreign power. Waleed Hazbun's introduction to the paper "Rethinking Anti-Colonial Movements and the Political Economy of Decolonization: The Case of Tunisia" rings true for this moment in time:

Arab political elites came to see the development of a centrally organized state apparatus with extensive powers of regulation and control as the best means for advancing to the next stage of self-determination. By promoting modern organizations, education and industrial development, as well as protecting against external economic and political influences, these interventionist states were to provide Arab society with the organizational integrity and protected environment needed to modernize and flourish.¹⁰¹

'Modernization', whether real or imagined, of the state motivated a myriad of policies in newly independent states within the Arab world. Hazbun's quote above is notable for this chapter. The 'modernizing' Tunisian state, in seeking to promote 'modern organizations' used its "extensive

¹⁰⁰ Law No. 58-78 in *Official Journal of the Republic of Tunisia: Laws and Regulations*. 11 July 1958. Found in Haddad de Paz, Charles. 283.

¹⁰¹ Hazbun, Waleed. "Rethinking Anti-Colonial Movements and the Political Economy of Decolonization: The Case of Tunisia" in *Arab Studies Quarterly*. 16, 1, (Winter 1994): 77

powers of regulation and control” to dissolve the longstanding Jewish councils of the country, which would point to the noncompliance with ‘modernity’ of the Jewish councils.

It wasn’t modernity, however, that these councils were incompatible with. Instead they were incompatible with being a citizen in a post-colonial nation-state. In this sense, the dissolution of the Jewish community councils was a move that was designed to impose more government control on the Jewish community by subsuming them within the state structure. As citizens, their loyalty should be first and foremost to Tunisia. Therefore, this takeover of an autonomous realm was not incompatible with the idea of freedom of belief, found within the first article of the Tunisian constitution.¹⁰²

By working within a framework where nation and state are supposed to be congruent, the subsuming of the Jewish councils by the Tunisian state sought to make the Jews part of the Tunisian nation, where identity is theoretically based in citizenship. Ironically for the state, the opposite effect took place: not only did the Jews feel they had lost control over their community but international organizations such as the World Jewish Congress were called to investigate the actions of the Tunisian government.¹⁰³ This law did not result in a mass exodus of Jews from the country, although it is remembered as playing a part in later decisions to emigrate.

The Text of the Law

Law No. 58-78 of 11 July 1958 explicitly calls for the dissolution of the Jewish Council of Tunis and the other councils representing other Tunisian cities. The text of the law begins with

¹⁰² “The Tunisian Constitution” *Middle East Journal*, 13, 4, (Autumn 1959): 443-448.

¹⁰³ Easterman, A.L. “Report on Visit to Tunisia 26th September – 3rd October 1958”. British Foreign Ministry, African Department. Letter JN1571/4. Found in Destani, B. ed. *Minorities in The Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries, 1841-1974*. Vol 5. (London: Slough Archive Editions, 2005). 149-165.

a succession of two laws (one from 1888 and the other from 1947) that dealt with reorganizing religious associations and the Jewish community of Tunis at those times. This part is important to show a historical continuity between the new law being put into action and those that had already taken place.

Once the historical continuity between this and past laws relating to the Jewish minority was established, the next part of the text attempts to show that the law is appropriate given the time and circumstances. The key phrase reads as follows: “considering that the current structures and the bodies governing the Jewish religion no longer correspond to the statute of the state which guarantees to all citizens, without discrimination, equal rights and duties”.¹⁰⁴ What this implied is that the structures governing the Jewish community are unequal with those found in the state that the Tunisian government was trying to create. It was the state that was to define rights and duties on the basis of citizenship instead of the religious community on the basis of membership.

The first articles of the law discuss the dissolution of the council and set the limits of the future Jewish religious association.¹⁰⁵ These limits, according to the British Ambassador, A.C. Malcolm, meant that the community is only allowed to teach the religion “and thus by implication inhibits the Jews from teaching the Hebrew Language or the wider aspects of Jewish culture.”¹⁰⁶ Another important prohibition in this law is that the Jewish councils are denied the right to engage in charitable works for the community that have, in the past, served as a social safety net for poorer members of the Jewish community.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the Jewish poor, like the

¹⁰⁴ Law No. 58-78 found in Haddad, 283.

¹⁰⁵ Law No. 58-78, found in Destani, B. ed. *Minorities in The Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries, 1841-1974*. Vol 5. (London: Slough Archive Editions, 2005). 131-132.

¹⁰⁶ Malcolm, A.C. Letter No. 65, British Embassy in Tunis. 24 July 1958. found in Destani, B. ed. *Minorities in The Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries, 1841-1974*. Vol 5. (London: Slough Archive Editions, 2005). 138.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm, A.C. Letter No. 65. Found in Destani, Vol 5. 138.

Muslim poor, were to be incorporated as equals within the welfare structure of the state without having the benefit of being born into one community or the other.

Of significance as well is Article 13 of the law, which states that only international Jewish charitable groups found “agreeable” to the government would be allowed to dispense gifts to the Jewish community. Article 13 as well leaves unanswered the question as to whether or not the Jewish community will be funded through a state grant.¹⁰⁸

The rest of the articles of the law explain that the government will appoint an interim council whose job it is to dissolve the sitting councils and operate within the bounds already spelled out. Article 18 “dissolves all of the charitable funds of the Jewish community in all of the territory of the republic” and states that the interests they manage are entrusted to the new interim councils,¹⁰⁹ and is the last article of significance (out of 19 total).

Selling the Law Part 1– Ahmed Mestiri, Minister of Justice

Although Law No. 58-78 was signed by President Bourguiba, the person who was responsible for the law was Mr. Ahmed Mestiri, then the Minister of Justice.¹¹⁰ In a note regarding his visit to Tunisia from September 26 – October 3, 1958, Alex Easterman, a British representative to the World Jewish Congress describes Mestiri in somewhat oppositional terms to Bourguiba. Easterman writes:

He [Mestiri] is considered to be one of the leaders in the group of younger members of the government who oppose some of Bourguiba’s policies. There was sharp contrast between the content, as well as the manner of Mestiri’s [sic] attitude on Jewish matters, to those of Bourguiba. It is, therefore, an open question how far individual Ministers carry out administratively the broad policies laid down by the President and how far the President can keep track of and control the actual execution of his policies...It is generally conceded by political observers in Tunis that Bourguiba’s position is less strong than it was a year ago, and that he is

¹⁰⁸ Law No. 58-78. Found in Destani, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Law No. 58-78. Found in Haddad, 238.

¹¹⁰ Easterman, 157.

being subjected to pressure by extremist elements whose attitudes are slanted towards the Middle East States and towards Nasser.¹¹¹

Here, in 1958, we already have an indication that the post-independence Tunisian government, though dominated by Habib Bourguiba, was not entirely within his hands. Mestiri served as an ambassador and as minister of commerce, defense and the interior before eventually falling out with Bourguiba in 1972, which saw him expelled from both the ruling party and the national assembly in 1973¹¹². This lengthy span of time in which Mestiri is a high-ranking official shows that the Tunisian government was comprised of people that had different opinions than the President and that Bourguiba was unable to keep track of everyone and everything in the government. Nevertheless, Mestiri played a key role as Minister of Justice at this time and served as the main interlocutor between the government and the Jewish community in the second half of 1958.

The first people that Mestiri had to sell the law to were the members of the Jewish Councils themselves. On July 17, 1958, Mestiri gave a speech to high ranking Jewish officials in Tunis as the government's representative to answer their questions about the law. His speech was insightful into the thinking behind the law reorganizing the Jewish community and its placement under state control.

Mestiri begins his speech by addressing the Jewish officials as "my dear compatriots"¹¹³. This in itself is significant as he addressed the Jews as people of a shared nation and citizenship – compatriots. The next highlight in the speech is his mention that "The old organisms, in particular the Jewish Community in Tunis, in their composition, in the missions that they are known to undertake or are given, reflect...the Protectorate and the Old Regime that have been

¹¹¹ Easterman, 159-160

¹¹² "Ahmed Mestiri" Ahmed Mestiri, accessed on 9 November 2011, http://216.183.87.220/m2/ahmed_mestiri.html.

¹¹³ Mestiri, Ahmed. "Discours 17 July 1958, in Haddad de Paz, Charles. 277.

tolerated for a while in the Tunisia of today”.¹¹⁴ By stating that the communities are structurally anachronistic, Mestiri equated them of being both backwards and the result of colonialism.

Invoking the protectorate also had the implication that the Jewish communities were close with the French colonial administration and that there is a need in the independent state to end the system of patronage that divided the nation.

Among the most important points brought up in favor of this reform by Mestiri is that it is designed to “limit the scope of action of cultural associations and ban their activities that could, in one way or another, accentuate the differences in the nation”.¹¹⁵ That is, organizations that would evoke a “Jewish-ness” amongst a community that is supposed to be part of the Tunisian nation. He continued, “What we do not want is to allow the creation of veritable castes in Tunisian society where citizens live in an isolated vacuum trapped in a middle that closes in on them on all sides”.¹¹⁶ What is meant by this statement is that the unity of the nation is of the utmost importance and that one should not be part of a Jewish “caste” identifying the Jew as a different but as part of larger Tunisian society.

Mestiri further reinforced this point: “Whichever way he turns, in any area where he carries on his business, the Jewish citizen would be facing organizations of all kinds...making him feel at every moment that he is different from his Muslim compatriot. It is precisely this which tended the activities of the former community”.¹¹⁷ Here it is notable that it is the “Jewish citizen” and his “Muslim compatriot”, giving the conception that national unity based on the concept of citizenship was the driving factor behind this law and reorganization. In order to

¹¹⁴ Mestiri, 277.

¹¹⁵ Mestiri, 278.

¹¹⁶ Mestiri, 278.

¹¹⁷ Mestiri, 278.

uphold this idea, it was therefore the role of the state to intervene and disband the former community council as a perpetrator in sowing discord within the nation.

In the speech, Mestiri continued to highlight the equality between Jewish and Muslim citizens of Tunisia. He adds, “outside the spiritual realm, nothing should now distinguish Jewish citizens from other citizens. He is a citizen like the others, no more, no less, under the same obligations and enjoying the same rights”.¹¹⁸ This, however, is before he launches his final and most poignant critique of the Jewish community in Tunisia. Mestiri invoked two bogeymen, colonialism and Zionism, in the government’s decision to allow Jewish emigration from Tunisia which necessitates being quoted in full. Mestiri states that:

If, despite this, there are still people who keep a certain nostalgia for the Protectorate... who are considering leaving because they feel more French than Tunisian or more French than the French themselves, who are also staying here but transfer their capital and enterprises abroad, if there are other people who dream of the Promised Land living in the country but turn their attention towards Israel, consciously or unconsciously playing the game of Zionism... well, we tell each other that it is better – for themselves and Tunisia- that they leave and we do not prevent them to leave to any destination¹¹⁹.

Thusly, Mestiri stirred the issue of Jewish disloyalty to the Tunisian nation-state, which was an accusation that has been popularly floated around since independence¹²⁰. The Jews are seemingly agents of France and/or Israel who are not part of the Tunisian nation. Mestiri acknowledged this belief and incorporates it into his speech in a vitriolic, yet dismissive way essentially stating that Tunisia does not need people disloyal to the government and the nation. Instead of damaging the country for foreign interests, they should just leave.

Mestiri goes further in his speech and states that “the government will take action itself against all who dare to reach out, more or less hidden, with Zionist organizations in the country

¹¹⁸ Mestiri, 279.

¹¹⁹ Mestiri, 279.

¹²⁰ Michael Abitol discusses how “it has often happened, to the Jews in the large cities, to find some graffiti and murals denouncing with the same ardor French colonialism, Zionism and Judaism”. See Abitol, Michael *Le Passé d’une discord: Juifs et Arabes du VII Siècle à nos jours*. (Paris : Perrin, 1999), 443

to sow discord and destroy the peace. It will not tolerate elements...that strive to stir up racial hatred and bring citizens against each other and mislead respectable foreign or international organizations about Tunisia".¹²¹ Mestiri essentially created a role for the government in stating that it will punish those who collaborated with Zionist organizations, which he sees as instruments of sowing discord within the nation. There are also no known records of persons arrested for aiding in Jewish emigration to Israel – Bourguiba sought to not interfere with those who wished to leave for Israel¹²². What we see here, however, are the politics of one particular minister. Mestiri, as Easterman stated, was part of a cadre inclined towards the harsher politics of Egypt towards Israel¹²³ than the relatively lenient politics of Tunisia.

Mestiri ends his speech with the issue of the Jewish cemetery that was to be moved away from downtown Tunis for the creation of a park (today's Jardin Habib Thameur). It was clear, however, that Mestiri's interest behind this law and his speech lay in the creation of a Tunisian nationality based on citizenship and loyalty to one state, the state of Tunisia. The British ambassador at the time stated that "the Minister's thesis is, as you will see, a compound of nationalist *Gleichschaltung* [making the same] and what in England might be called "Whitehall interference" [excessive centralization]".¹²⁴ The nationalism of a newly independent post-colonial nation paired with an interventionist and centralizing state rationalized the imposition of a new Tunisian identity based upon citizenship in the modern state.

Selling the Law Part 2 – The World Jewish Congress

¹²¹ Mestiri, 279-280.

¹²² Easterman, 153.

¹²³ For Egyptian Jews, See Beinun, Joel. *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹²⁴ Malcolm, 140.

Law No. 58-78 did not just attract attention from people within Tunisia, but from those outside who were alarmed at the prospect of a government takeover of the Jewish community. Notably, the World Jewish Congress sent two representatives to Tunisia in 1958 to investigate. The two men sent to Tunisia on the behalf of the World Jewish Congress were Dr. Maurice Perlzweig, head of the international affairs department of the World Jewish Congress and Mr. Alex Easterman, a member of the political department of the World Jewish Congress.

Dr. Perlzweig's visit came first, arriving on the 15th and leaving the 19th of July 1958.¹²⁵ His reports reflected positively upon the situation in Tunisia. During his trip, he met with several leaders of the Jewish community including the newly appointed Grand Rabbi, Meiss Cohen, and the Minister of Justice, Ahmed Mestiri.¹²⁶ In his meetings with the Minister of Justice, Dr. Perlzweig seems to have accepted Mestiri's answers to the majority of his questions – Dr. Perlzweig told the *New York Times* on July 20, 1958 that talks were “very friendly” and that Mestiri remains open to aid from international Jewish organizations coming into Tunisia but distributed by an independent body which is “yet to be set up here”.¹²⁷ Mestiri also stated to Dr. Perlzweig that the new council would not be able to send delegates to international Jewish meetings but that “means should be found to name such representatives of Tunisian Jewry”¹²⁸ – meaning that the government should either name directly, or review the naming of these representatives.

Dr. Perlzweig's acceptance of the aftermath of Law No. 58-78 is documented. The *New York Times* has him stating that “far from being repression, the new Tunisian regulations are an

¹²⁵ James, Michael. “Tunisia is Found Unbiased on Jews”, *New York Times*, July 20, 1958, accessed February 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

¹²⁶ James, “Tunisia is Found Unbiased on Jews”.

¹²⁷ James, “Tunisia is Found Unbiased on Jews”.

¹²⁸ James, “Tunisia is Found Unbiased on Jews”.

effort to integrate the Jewish community more completely into Tunisian life”.¹²⁹ The British Embassy in Tunis informed the Anglo-Jewish Association when it asked about the reorganization of the Jewish council that “Dr. Perlzweig has gone away satisfied that there is nothing sinister in this reorganization, although there are some important aspects on which local Jewish leaders are dissatisfied”.¹³⁰ Dr. Perlzweig later retracted his statements made to the *New York Times* on July 20th and on July 24th, at the meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva. Dr. Perlzweig seemingly retracted his previous ebullience and adds, “While we appreciate the Tunisian Government’s policy of equality for all citizens, I reported to the Minister [Mestiri] in unequivocal terms the grave disquiet created in the Jewish World by the legislation”¹³¹. He then continued in his statement: “What is important, and what the dispatch leaves unsaid is that organized Jewish life in Tunisia has not yet received its final forms and that the problems we raised are now under examination in a spirit of mutual goodwill”,¹³² returning to his optimism about the situation.

Dr. Perlzweig’s initial impressions of the situation was that this was nothing to be alarmed about as he saw it as an effort to integrate the Jews into Tunisian life, by placing them more firmly within the nation. While he has some concerns that the Jewish councils now only had power over public worship and purely religious activities,¹³³ it would appear that he is in agreement with the assessment of the British Ambassador of Mestiri’s thesis – this is an episode of nationalist ‘making the same’ and excessive government centralization. The problems with this process were not mentioned by Dr. Perlzweig.

¹²⁹ James, “Tunisia is Found Unbiased on Jews”.

¹³⁰ Malcolm, A.C. Telegram No. 64, British Embassy in Tunis, July 25, 1958, in Destani, B. ed. *Minorities in The Middle East: Jewish Communities in Arab Countries, 1841-1974*. Vol. 5. (London: Slough Archive Editions, 2005) 135.

¹³¹ “Goldmann Advises Jews to Seek New Challenge as Bias Declines”, *New York Times*, July 24, 1958, accessed March 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

¹³² “Goldmann”.

¹³³ “Goldmann”.

On the 28th of September, Alex Easterman of the World Jewish Congress began his trip to Tunisia at the behest of the organization and spoke with President Bourguiba, the Minister of Justice and some high ranking ex- and current members of the Jewish Community Council of Tunis. He left a very detailed report of his meetings with Bourguiba and Mestiri, the main targets of his visit.

Easterman met with Bourguiba on the 29th of September. They discussed several salient issues, including foreign policy. When asked about impeding Jewish emigration to Israel, Bourguiba confirmed he had no plans to stop it but added “Naturally, I am not anxious for [sic] Jews to leave Tunisia, and we want them as full Tunisian citizens to help us build and consolidate our new state”.¹³⁴ This stands in stark contrast to the harsher words used by Mestiri in his speech. It is also significant though, that Bourguiba even referred to the concept of citizenship in describing the Jews – the state wants citizens that are loyal to it and not to religion.

Easterman then asked Bourguiba about the law reorganizing the Jewish community. According to Easterman, Bourguiba reacted to his enquiry in “a most agitated manner”¹³⁵ and blamed the local and international uproar on the machinations of Charles Haddad, ex-President of the Jewish Council of Tunis¹³⁶. The implication of Haddad is also found in the British Ambassador’s report after the visit of Dr. Perlzweig, stating that “almost all the Jews concur” that a motivating factor of this law is to be rid of Haddad.¹³⁷ These internal intrigues, however, amounted to little as Easterman’s opinion of Haddad is quite positive¹³⁸ and it is difficult to prove what role Haddad had in Law No. 58-78, although dislike of him did seem to be rife in some areas.

¹³⁴ Easterman, 153.

¹³⁵ Easterman, 154.

¹³⁶ Easterman, 154.

¹³⁷ Malcolm, 139.

¹³⁸ Easterman, 154.

Bourguiba then moved on to fierce opposition to the intervention of “foreign Jewish organizations” in Tunisia’s affairs, and his stance is befitting of a President of a post-colonial state – highly jealous of any threats to national sovereignty. Bourguiba added “I do not like the constant presence and interventions of Jewish emissaries from outside, and I see no reason why they should come constantly to Tunisia to interfere”.¹³⁹ These external emissaries threatened to undermine state sovereignty and it makes sense, according to Hazbun’s quote, that this pressure would have been seen as a threat.

On communal organization, Bourguiba stated that the replacement of the council was to remove “undesirable political elements” and that they can now proceed with elections for the new council and stated there would be “neither interference nor control by the Government of the internal affairs and activities of the committee”.¹⁴⁰ This was contrary to the fact that the government appointed the interim council and by law was able to choose which international organizations can operate charities in Tunisia.

Easterman’s interview showed that Bourguiba, as one man, was unable to handle each and every duty of the government. Easterman told Bourguiba that on multiple occasions Jewish leaders had asked for an audience with both Ministers and himself and had received no reply. Bourguiba responds by acting as if he was not aware of this request and “turned to his Directeur du Cabinet [sic] with a gesture indicating that he should take note of what I had said”¹⁴¹. Easterman then noted that during the previous two weeks Bourguiba had been recovering from an operation and had to deal with accumulated work¹⁴², showing that one man does not make a government, no matter how powerful he appears.

¹³⁹ Easterman, 155.

¹⁴⁰ Easterman, 155.

¹⁴¹ Easterman, 156.

¹⁴² Easterman, 156.

Bourguiba ends his meeting with Easterman by repeating that “it was his firm policy to integrate Tunisian Jews into the new Tunisian State” and that “as long as he was in authority and the Jews fulfilled their obligations as citizens, there would not be any interference in Jewish affairs”.¹⁴³ This reinforces the idea of an identity shift between religion to a nation-state, which in turn was the desire of the government.

Ahmed Mestiri met with Easterman on the 2nd of October. Mestiri was somewhat dismissive of the meeting, calling the agitation in the Jewish community a “tempest in a tea cup”¹⁴⁴, but affirmed that the government had no desire to interfere or control the Jewish community. Mestiri also said that “they [Jews] would be completely free to perform their activities within the framework of their religion, but beyond that it was the duty and right of the state to deal with the welfare of all its citizens. The Tunisian government could not accept the concept of a national minority, a ‘state within a state’”.¹⁴⁵ Easterman then informed Mestiri about the Jewish communities in other countries, where people are citizens and Jewish religious life functions without any conflict to the state’s interest. Mestiri’s rebuttal was that “Tunisia is in a different position from both Western and Eastern European countries. Tunisia has its own ‘national imperative’ and everything in the state had to conform to this overall purpose. This meant full integration of all citizens and...the right of the state to provide for the welfare of all sections of the population”.¹⁴⁶

Mestiri went further in his explanation relating to the ‘national imperative’. He said it was necessary, with regards to associations, for Tunisia to “put its house in order”.¹⁴⁷ He added that “there were about 4,000 organizations of one kind or another operating in Tunisia, and it was

¹⁴³ Easterman, 157.

¹⁴⁴ Easterman, 158.

¹⁴⁵ Easterman, 158.

¹⁴⁶ Easterman, 158.

¹⁴⁷ Easterman, 159.

necessary for the Government to know who they were and what they were doing. He [Mestiri] regarded this as a normal necessity for any orderly state”.¹⁴⁸ Mestiri ended his meeting stating that there will be no obstacles to Jewish emigration but that it must be done with “discretion”.¹⁴⁹ Before Mestiri leaves Easterman, he stated, “if you want to know what is the policy of the Government, read my speech to the Jewish Community on the occasion of the installation of the Chief Rabbi”,¹⁵⁰ given on July 17th.

Mestiri’s words to Easterman almost match the theoretical description of the post-independence Arab state given by Hazbun. Mestiri expressed the desire to not have a “state within a state”, which would have been susceptible to foreign interference, indicating he has, like Bourguiba, a strict regard for sovereignty of the Tunisian state. The adherence to citizenship through the methods of a centralizing and expansionist state is the way to guarantee that this “state within a state” does not develop. Even more intriguing is Mestiri’s mention of a “national imperative”, which undoubtedly is the expansion of the state in order to establish itself as a powerful entity. It was the imperative of the nation to create a structure in which it is a single machine, akin to Mitchell’s concept of the modern army¹⁵¹ and the idea that the centralization of the state and nation represents “a new, localized, yet enormously productive technology of power”.¹⁵² The “national imperative” is to centralize, streamline, localize and create a body that has power to be called a ‘nation-state’ so that we are able to conceptualize a Tunisia that is real and not just lines on a map.

Jewish Reaction

¹⁴⁸ Easterman 159.

¹⁴⁹ Easterman, 159.

¹⁵⁰ Easterman, 159.

¹⁵¹ Mitchell, 94.

¹⁵² Mitchell, 92.

The Jewish reaction to Law No.58-78 was rather muted. Malcolm, the British Ambassador receives information from a certain Jew, Samuel Benattar that “the Jewish community is not unduly worried” and that “he [Benattar] is one who does not think it at all a good idea that the Community should appeal to foreign governments to help”.¹⁵³ Benattar also adds that “the leaders of the Jewish community have no doubt at all of the Tunisian government’s goodwill towards them”.¹⁵⁴ What Benattar gets across to the Jewish ambassador is that this is disconcerting to the elites and average Jews, but not a cause for alarm.

The records of Easterman’s meetings with members of the Jewish community during his visit are slightly more detailed. His findings are organized into three separate conclusions:

Their [Jews] common opinion was (1) there was cause for disquiet, but no actual danger, (2) the present situation was not due to governmental policy and was not specifically anti-Jewish in intention, but rooted in the necessity of “integrating” the Jews, (3) there was some direct or indirect pressure from Middle East Arab States¹⁵⁵

This conclusion echoes what Benattar told the British ambassador and reinforces the “integrating” theme of including the Jews within a Tunisian nation. The pressure spoken of from Middle East states remains undocumented, but strongly felt nonetheless. The politics of some individual members of government, seeking to be closer to the Middle East, however, may have influenced the law and made it seem as though there was outside interference from other Arab states. It was possible that certain members of the government had inclinations towards Pan-Arabism and these feelings from society permeated up through the state structure.

Easterman continued and gave the impressions of several high-ranking members of the Jewish community. He qualifies two, Albert Bessis (Bourguiba’s first Minister of Public

¹⁵³ Malcolm, 141.

¹⁵⁴ Malcolm, 138.

¹⁵⁵ Easterman, 162.

Health)¹⁵⁶ and Elie Nataf (a former President of the Jewish community)¹⁵⁷ with the former being “non-committal and not very helpful” and the latter “a spectator”.¹⁵⁸ Gaston Smadja, on the other hand was “not opposed to integration, even if it should go beyond certain limits” and Easterman states that “he [Smadja] is one of the very few Jews who have close social and personal relations with Moslem [sic] Tunisians and Government officials”.¹⁵⁹ Finally, Roger Cohen who was then president of “various Jewish youth organizations” believed that “they [Jewish youth] are confronted with the fact that Tunisia is a Moslem [sic] and Arab country, and they believe that the process of “Tunisification” and “Arabization” is inevitable”. Cohen’s own opinion was that the future lied outside of Tunisia.¹⁶⁰

Here we see the politics of various high-ranking Jewish officials. Two are essentially spectators within the community. One favored working with the government and the system being in place. The last sees emigration as the only option for Jews in Tunisia. Jewish leaders remained divided on the issue of integration, and Cohen’s opinion gives insight into one segment of the population that was convinced that emigration was the only solution. If the elites had a variety of opinions regarding the law, then it was possible that average members of the Jewish community would have been equally as split in their assessments and opinions.

Charles Haddad, ex-President of the Jewish council, was obviously upset by this decision. On the day of the dissolution of the Jewish community council, he wrote an article attacking the decision but it “could not find hospitality in the press of Tunis as they were cautious and worried”.¹⁶¹ Haddad also asks a poignant question in his retelling of the events:

¹⁵⁶ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George . “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

¹⁵⁷ Laskier, “Hafsia” 195.

¹⁵⁸ Easterman, 163.

¹⁵⁹ Easterman, 163-164.

¹⁶⁰ Easterman, 164

¹⁶¹ Haddad, 239.

The different types of problems of the Jewish population...that worked turn by turn on the suppression of Rabbinical jurisdiction, the replacement of the elected community to a designated one, the promulgation of the law dissolving the community, the titling of a Grand Rabbi not elected by the Jews constitutes, for this population, a stable and acceptable solution so that the domain of citizenship now becomes the spiritual domain?¹⁶²

Integration, for Haddad, meant that citizenship in the nation-state had become the new spirituality. While that might have been an exaggeration, what we do see is a system in which identity was becoming ever more associated with citizenship and less with religious groups.

Conclusion

Law No. 58-78 had a lasting psychological impact on the Jewish community of Tunisia, who “saw their traditional structures under siege”¹⁶³. This, however, did not translate to a rush of emigrants fleeing the country. According to Stillman, it “remained steady” with no strong changes until the Bizerte crisis of 1961.¹⁶⁴ Michael Laskier writes that fears of many Jews abroad (with regards to restrictions on Jewish emigration) “were unfounded”.¹⁶⁵

It is important to keep in mind when discussing the issue of national integration that the Jews were not specifically targeted by the centralizing policies of the Tunisian government. The majority Muslim population also witnessed changes to its jurisdiction earlier, in 1956. The *habus* (*waqf*, or land/property owned by religious organizations) council was dissolved and the government confiscated public *habus* land and ordered the distribution of private *habus* land to individuals as private property.¹⁶⁶ In August of 1956 the two *Sharia* (Islamic Religious law)

¹⁶² Haddad, 233.

¹⁶³ Stillman, 173.

¹⁶⁴ Stillman, 173.

¹⁶⁵ Laskier, “Hafsia” 211.

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, 135.

courts were absorbed into the state judicial system.¹⁶⁷ Thus, for Muslims as well, their identity and spiritual domains were becoming more associated with the idea of citizenship – although this citizenship certainly had to acknowledge its “Muslim” character as they formed the majority of the population.

Nevertheless, for the Jews, Law No. 58-78 is further a continuation of the “Tunisification” of the Tunisian state begun at independence. The first constitution of independent Tunisia was passed in 1959,¹⁶⁸ although the article that caused the most consternation amongst the Jewish community was the first article, identifying Tunisia as a “free independent, sovereign state whose religion is Islam, its official language Arabic and its form of government republican” which was leaked to the public in 1956.¹⁶⁹ Freedom of religion is given by article five and expression in article 8.¹⁷⁰ The constitution also unsurprisingly stated that the President must be a Muslim.¹⁷¹

Although known since 1956, this spurred Georges Cohen to take French nationality and refuse Tunisian nationality after the passage of the constitution.¹⁷² He said “some of my friends refused my action. They sincerely thought I had a role to play and a service to do for the new country. This is a good sentiment but I did not see things the way they did...like all the others who left Tunisia, except perhaps I had a little more resentment for myself”.¹⁷³ Small things can force people to change their identity. Nations themselves can change their identities as well:

Every day there was something new. The Tunisian authorities had, naturally, instituted national exams. Therefore, there were now two baccaluaeureates, the French bac and the Tunisian bac. The students had the

¹⁶⁷ Perkins, 135.

¹⁶⁸ The Tunisian Constitution, Preamble. 443.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted from *Le Petit Matin*, 14 Apr 1956. Found in *Le Nouvel Etat*, 1. 432.

¹⁷⁰ The Tunisian Constitution, 443.

¹⁷¹ The Tunisian Constitution, Article 39, 446.

¹⁷² Cohen, 165.

¹⁷³ Cohen, 165.

right to pass both! They did not deprive them of this double chance. The names of the roads had changed as well. La Rue de Corse became rue Mokhtar Attia, Avenue Roustan Avenue Habib Thameur, la Rue du Portugal rue Farhat Hached, la rue Thiers rue Ibn Khaldoun etc. The license plates of cars and road signs became written in Arabic. The names of stores had become written in the two languages. Administrative forms as well. All of this was natural...The physiognomy of the city was transformed immensely. The little nothings, the habits that we lost. We see emerging a country ...a Tunisian Tunisia¹⁷⁴

Law No. 58-78 aided in making a “Tunisian” Tunisia – one where a centralizing, expanding state ensured its presence and power by seeking a “national imperative” based on policies of ‘integration’.

¹⁷⁴ Cohen, 167.

Introduction

Frantz Fanon entitled his chronicle of the Algerian War for Independence *A Dying Colonialism*. But what is, exactly, a dying colonialism? Does Colonialism die, or is it further entrenched into the collective memory and identities of the peoples that it affects, both colonizer and colonized? The narrative in *A Dying Colonialism* provides the colonial ‘de-counter’ to the colonial ‘encounter’ in Algeria written about by scholars such as Eric Wolf¹⁷⁵. The war for independence could be seen as the first step towards the decolonization of Algeria and the establishment of an independent nation-state.

Achieving independence from the French in Tunisia took a remarkably different trajectory. Through a step-by-step negotiating method, Tunisia was granted autonomy from France in 1954¹⁷⁶ and full independence in 1956¹⁷⁷ and led by Habib Bourguiba (1903-2000), first president of the Tunisian Republic (1957-1987) and leader of the Neo-Destour (New Constitutional) party which agitated for independence. There was remarkably little bloodshed in the ending of direct colonial control within Tunisia. This granted Bourguiba a certain fame and his methodology of step-by-step negotiations came to be known as ‘Bourguibism’.¹⁷⁸ There was, however, one problematic aspect of colonialism that remained in Tunisia after the independence of the country – French sovereignty over the port of Bizerte. The base of the French Mediterranean fleet since the late 19th century, Bizerte has the advantage of a strategic location

¹⁷⁵ Wolf, Eric R. *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968) Chapter 5, “Algeria”. 211-251.

¹⁷⁶ Perkins, Kenneth. *A History of Modern Tunisia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 125.

¹⁷⁷ Perkins, *A History*, 135.

¹⁷⁸ Bourguiba himself elaborates on this in Bourguiba, Habib. “The Tunisian Way” in *Foreign Affairs*. 44,3. (April 1966), 480-488. Many ‘Western’ news sources also credited Bourguiba heavily in his negotiation style – often contrasted with the confrontational style of other leaders, such as Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser. For example see Doty, Robert C. “Tunisia Turning to Neutralism” *The New York Times* 30 Jul 1961. Found online at <www.nytimes.com> Last Accessed on 30 Nov 2010.

and a phenomenal natural harbor,¹⁷⁹ something that France was reluctant to give up. Bourguiba had been pushing France for a timeline for evacuation of the Bizerte base since independence and after not receiving anything resembling a tangible answer, Bourguiba sought to raise a ‘people’s army’ in order to blockade the French base at Bizerte¹⁸⁰ and on 19 July 1961 fighting between Tunisian and French forces began¹⁸¹ which cost approximately 670 Tunisian lives and 25 French lives in under a week of fighting.¹⁸² Thus, the Bizerte Crisis of 1961 showed colonialism closest to its ‘Dying’ form – the angry last breaths of a beast discussed by Fanon in relation to Algeria.

Decolonization had been taking place within Tunisia for five years prior to the Bizerte Crisis. The direction of the new state and its relation to its citizens had begun to be charted. Decolonization, however, was not as smooth as a process as it appears on the surface. On the contrary, colonialism lingered long after independence through certain cultural and economic concessions. This directly threatened the sovereignty of a newly-independent state that continued to centralize and was ever fearful of its borders and territorial integrity. On the negotiations for independence, Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* writes:

During the Franco-Tunisian negotiations, a few naïve persons were astonished by the relative good will shown by the French government, particularly in the cultural field, then by the prompt acquiescence of the leaders of the colony. The reason is that the intelligent members of the bourgeoisie and colony had understood that the essence of colonization was not the prestige of the flag, nor cultural expansion, nor even governmental supervision and the preservation of a staff of government employees.¹⁸³

Memmi’s understanding of the end of colonialism was that it had not particularly ended with independence and decolonization – instead it was simply ongoing through economic channels

¹⁷⁹ Perkins, *A History*, 102.

¹⁸⁰ Perkins, *A History*, 142.

¹⁸¹ “Tunisian Troops Besiege French at Bizerte” *The New York Times* 19 Jul 1961. Found online at <www.nytimes.com> Last Accessed on 21 Nov 2010.

¹⁸² “700 Dead in Bizerta Fighting” *The Times*, London. 24 July 1961. Found online at The Times Digital Archive, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>> . Last Accessed on 27 November 2010.

¹⁸³ Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 6.

but simply with a different name. Of course, it would be the goal for most nationalist leaders to efface these residual aspects of colonialism after independence. Their methods, however, are as varied as they come. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes that:

In sum, decolonization is a very complex battle over the course of different political destinies, different histories and geographies, and it is replete with works of the imagination, scholarship and counter-scholarship. The struggle took the form of strikes, marches, violent attack, retribution and counter-retribution.¹⁸⁴

Thusly, for Said, decolonization is a field for intellectual battle to answer such difficult and fundamental questions about identity, history and, who and what constitute the nation. Rather than being simply ‘French vs. Tunisian’ decolonization is an opportunity to explore what exactly was *Tunisian* about Tunisia and who would be accepted as Tunisian. It is my intention in this chapter, therefore, to argue that the colonial experience had a profound and lasting effect on the formation of identity, for both the Tunisian people and the Tunisian state. Colonialism and nationalism are not dichotomies – they are intertwined. This will be proven in this chapter by using the Jews of Tunisia¹⁸⁵ during the 1961 Bizerte Crisis as a case study. The 1961 Bizerte Crisis was an episode of decolonization that took the form of violence of a newly-independent state against its old colonial master.

As the Bizerte Crisis was the primary episode of anti-French violence it could also be viewed as an episode that had a substantial impact on how the Jews of Tunisia perceived their place within the country. The colonial encounter strongly left its legacy on the Tunisian Jews and, as we have seen, there was the potential for them to be seen as a fifth column existing within the country during its struggle to evict the French from Bizerte. Whether this threat was real or imagined, the Bizerte crisis led to an increase in the number of Jews who emigrated from Tunisia

¹⁸⁴ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Vintage Books 1994) 219.

¹⁸⁵ Perkins, *A History*, 144.

to France or Israel.¹⁸⁶ Through an analysis of the events surrounding the Bizerte Crisis, both inside and outside of Tunisia, it will be shown how some of the Tunisian Jews, because of a cultural attachment to France garnered during colonialism, felt impelled to leave the country during this violent incident of decolonization out of fear of being seen as pro-France and anti-Tunisian. Also, it will be seen how this violent process of decolonization had an effect on the identity of the majority Muslim population and the Tunisian state itself.

French Jews, Tunisian Jews?

The reasons why the Jewish population of Tunisia could be perceived as having Francophile leanings dates back to the period before independence, while Tunisia still existed as a French protectorate (1881-1956). During the protectorate era, some of the Jews of Tunisia played roles as intermediaries between the French occupiers and the Muslim majority population. This was known as the ‘protégé’ system, in which a colonized person would work on behalf of the colonizer and receive protection from a foreign state and be exempt from local laws as any complaints filed against the protégé would be tried in courts (or consulates) representing the state offering its protection. The Jews were in an excellent position to play this role and perhaps work towards emancipating themselves from the colonial experience as the majority of the Tunisian Jews were, to the colonizers, “undeniably natives...as near as possible to the Muslims in poverty, language, sensibilities, customs, taste in music, odors and cooking”.¹⁸⁷ Thus, during the protectorate, there was little that separated the Jewish and Muslim populations, outside of religious differences. These differences, however, were played upon when the French needed

¹⁸⁶ Laskier, Michael. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 299.

¹⁸⁷ Memmi, *Colonizer*. xiii

intermediaries in a kind of ‘divide and conquer’ method to governing the colony.¹⁸⁸ What happens over time is that part of the Jewish population (mostly of the upper-middle and upper classes) begins to identify more with the colonial occupier and a certain level of *permissible* assimilation takes place¹⁸⁹ – the majority of the Tunisian Jews did not receive French citizenship¹⁹⁰, and it was next to impossible for protégés to receive benefits after independence for services rendered during the colonial era¹⁹¹ Culturally, this class of Jews was allowed to adapt to the ways of the colonizers but they were never fully accepted as Frenchmen. The colonial hierarchy had to be upheld.

The assimilation of this class of Jews took a very visible form. Memmi, perhaps the most influential Tunisian Jewish author, writes that the Jews “unlike the Muslims...passionately endeavored to identify themselves with the French...turned their back happily on the East, chose the French language, dressed in the Italian style, and joyfully adopted every idiosyncrasy of the Europeans”.¹⁹² The experience of the change in language in which these groups adopted (from Judeo-Arabic closely resembling the Tunisian dialect of Arabic to French) is also another form of a visible attempt at assimilation: “Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participation in two physical and cultural realms. Here, the two worlds symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the

¹⁸⁸ Shaked, Edith Haddad. “On the State of being (Jewish) between ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’” in Bat-Ami Bar On and Tessman, Lisa, eds. *Jewish Locations: Traversing Racialized Landscapes*. (City: Rowan & Littlefield 2002). 190.

¹⁸⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer*. 15. This is a pivotal passage on the colonized Jews and their attempts to assimilate: “But if the colonizer does not always openly discourage these candidates to develop that resemblance, he never permits them to attain it either. Thus, they [Jews] live in painful and constant ambiguity. Rejected by the colonizer, they share in part the physical conditions of the colonized and have a communion of interests with him; on the other hand, they reject the values of the colonized as belonging to a decayed world from which they eventually wish to escape”

¹⁹⁰ Shaked, 190.

¹⁹¹ According to a letter written by the French Ambassador in Tel Aviv, M. Bourdiellette for the French Foreign Minister M. Couve de Murville, the only service rendered to “our old protégés” is the payment of worker’s compensation to 57 Moroccans and 14 Tunisians and civil pensions to a single Moroccan and Tunisian. See Embassy of France in Tel Aviv 5/AL-604. “Rapports avec la Tunisie 1960-1964” Letter 350, 29 March 1960.

¹⁹² Memmi, *Colonizer* xiv.

colonizer and colonized”.¹⁹³ To speak in French was to participate in the world of the colonizer, whereas in Arabic, the colonized. The use of the French language and the rejection of Arabic, according to Memmi, was more than a rejection of language – it was a rejection of Arab culture and colonized society in total. Memmi does argue that this rejection of language was not wholesale – it was problematic and difficult. The “middle class suffers most...the intellectual lives in cultural anguish and the illiterate is simply walled into his language”.¹⁹⁴ So while some members of the middle/upper class of the Jewish community desired to assimilate and became like the colonizer, it was not as simple as it would have appeared to an outside observer – the difficult internal battle for identity was being waged. This identification of some of the Jewish elite to French culture during the colonial encounter would be a key factor that spurred a fear amongst their population during the violent struggle in Bizerte in 1961.

The Bizerte Crisis and Anti-French Measures

Decolonization is not always an easy process. Like Said said in *Culture and Imperialism*, it is a “complex battle”.¹⁹⁵ In addition, he states that:

To become aware of one’s self as belonging to a subject people is the founding insight of anti-imperialist nationalism...nationalist consciousness can very easily lead to frozen rigidity; merely to replace white officers and bureaucrats with colored equivalents... is no guarantee that the nationalist functionaries will not replicate the old dispensation. The dangers of chauvinism and xenophobia (“Africa for Africans”) are very real.¹⁹⁶

Hence, the danger inherent in decolonization is the nationalists enacting the same or similar xenophobic policies that were enacted by the colonizers. He also describes, rightly, that the “slow and bitter recovery of geographic territory” is at the “heart of decolonization”.¹⁹⁷ A nation can not exist without a semblance of territorial integrity. Thus, full decolonization is begun by

¹⁹³ Memmi, *Colonizer*, 107.

¹⁹⁴ Memmi, *Colonizer* 119-120.

¹⁹⁵ Said, *Culture* 219.

¹⁹⁶ Said, *Culture* 214.

¹⁹⁷ Said, *Culture*, 209.

the recovery of the geographic territory claimed by a nation for its own. The Bizerte Crisis was an episode of a recovery of geographic territory that saw an enactment of anti-French measures from the government. While these measures were directed mainly at the French, non-Jewish population still residing in Bizerte (and Tunisia) as a whole, some members of the Jewish community felt threatened enough that the United Hebrew Immigration Aid Service (UHS) stated that Tunisian Jewry had suffered a significant setback.¹⁹⁸

The measures enacted by the Tunisian government (and those that it were rumored to do) against French citizens during the struggle for Bizerte were reported by the foreign press. On the 1st of August, 1961, the *Washington Post* enumerates that expulsions (60), arrests (300-400), economic restrictions (“a small number of French firms have already been nationalized), and travel restrictions were in place and it was rumored that the government was going to deport French teachers and end the technical assistance that was received from France in diverse fields.¹⁹⁹ The *Times* of London, on the same day, reported that the ‘refugees’ from Bizerte arriving in Paris stated that a “Frenchman could be spat on one-hundred times”.²⁰⁰ The *New York Times* on 5 August 1961 reports that Tunisians had become cool to “Westerners” and also raised the fear of the deportation of the French teachers.²⁰¹

How these measures effected the Jewish population of Tunisia is debatable. In *Rebel and Saint*, Julia Clancy Smith shows how the power of *rumor* of actions is enough to compel people

¹⁹⁸ Paraphrased from Laskier, Michael. “From Hafsia to Bizerte: Tunisia’s Nationalist Struggle and Tunisian Jewry, 1952-61” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 2 (December 1987) 212.

¹⁹⁹ De Gramont, Sanche. “Tunis Plans New Squeeze on France” *The Washington Post* 1 Aug 1961. Found online at ProQuest Historical Newspapers <<http://proquest.umi.com>> Last Accessed on 7 Dec 2010.

²⁰⁰ “Refugees from Tunisia Reach France” *The Times* 1 August 1961, p. 9. Found online at The Times Digital Archive <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>>. Last Accessed on 7 Dec 2010.

²⁰¹ Brady, Thomas F. “Shock Over Bizerte: Urbane Tunisians Turn Politely Cool as Westerners Bemoan Paradise Lost” *The New York Times* 5 Aug 1961. Found online at The New York Times Archive <www.nytimes.com> Last Accessed on 6 December 2010.

who would not normally act to take a political stand and fight in battle.²⁰² It is noted, however, that the vast majority of Jews remained uninhibited by these restrictions placed on the French.²⁰³ The way in which the restrictions were perceived by the Jewish communities, and the rumor of those to come, however, was a factor in the decision to emigrate from Tunisia for a large number of Jews.

The number of Jews that left Tunisia from July-September of 1961 (during the peak of the fighting) for France was 3,500, (compared to a total of 1,800 for the entire year of 1960) with about 500-600 additional Jews who were in transit to Israel “many of whom were evacuees from Bizerte and nearby Menzil [Bourguiba]” who were rumored to be aided by unknown Zionist organizations.²⁰⁴ French documents confirm that the Crisis of 1961 had a severe impact on the Jewish community of Bizerte: “The clashes of 1961 and their counter-demonstrations precipitated the departures of the remaining persons [Jews in Bizerte]”.²⁰⁵ Another French document stresses that it was only “after the events of Bizerte in 1961 that the [Jewish] community emigrated quickly”.²⁰⁶ The same document brings to our attention an anti-Jewish riot that occurred in Ariana, a suburb north of Tunis, during the fighting at Bizerte.²⁰⁷

In fact, the report of the American Jewish Distribution Committee (AJDC) highlights the worry over a shut down of French education as one of the leading factors that compelled some of the emigrants to leave.²⁰⁸ Georges Cohen echoes the AJDC’s worries in his retelling of events.²⁰⁹

²⁰² Clancy-Smith, Julia. *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Popular Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia: 1800-1914)*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 134.

²⁰³ Laskier, “From Hafsia to Bizerte”, 213.

²⁰⁴ Laskier, Michael. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 299.

²⁰⁵ Note “Description of the Jewish Community of Bizerte”. Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A, Carton 79, Folder T(I) K3 “Israelites”, CADN.

²⁰⁶ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George . “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), 11.

²⁰⁷ Gaucher, 12.

²⁰⁸ Paraphrased in Laskier, “From Hafsia to Bizerte”, 213.

This fits in to what has been discussed earlier as the *visible* cultural connection to France that some members of the Jewish community had. Given the history of this cultural attachment, it is possible that the UHS report on Bizerte was correct in stating that “the Jews of Bizerte were accused of active collaboration with France against Tunisian military forces”.²¹⁰ The perception, held by some, of a pro-French fifth column based on cultural attachments and some members of the Jewish population perceiving anti-French political action and popular feeling as affecting them in their daily lives led some to evacuate the country during the Bizerte Crisis. The French-Tunisian dichotomy, however, was not the only identity at play during this crisis. Outside factors, such as support from Egypt and other Arab League states for Tunisia, further worked towards some Jews feeling excluded from the national consciousness.

Jewish authors writing about the time confirmed the worries and feelings found in the rumors. Michael Abitol writes about how “a panic took hold of all Tunisian Jews”²¹¹ during this time in relation to the measures passed and positions taken by the Tunisian government. He adds as well that many Jews chose to leave Tunisia at this time with “20 kilograms of bags and one Dinar in pocket” destined for Marseille.²¹²

Georges Cohen, in his initial mention of the Bizerte Crisis in his book stated that “I had friends who did their military service in Bizerte. I think a lot about them”²¹³. This statement shows that the thought of there being a strict separation between French and Tunisians with the Jews on one side simply did not exist on the ground. Cohen, even as a French citizen at this point, still mourns the loss of his friends who fought for Tunisia in Bizerte. This is important to

²⁰⁹ Cohen, 182.

²¹⁰ Laskier, “From Hafsia to Bizerte”, 213.

²¹¹ Abitol, 447.

²¹² Abitol, 447.

²¹³ Cohen, 181.

consider as it proves that identity, loyalty to a nation and loyalty to a state are three very different things.

Cohen, nonetheless, was worried by the expulsions of French citizens in this era. He listed the name of several Jews (holders of French passports) who were expelled from the country during the Bizerte Crisis. Included among his list are three “lawyers of great fame”, the President of the Tunisian Bar Association, a farmer and a professor.²¹⁴ Cohen said that the Bizerte Crisis “accelerated the departure of the Jews” but dismisses the rumors circulating that were casting doubt on the Jewish community as “absurd”.²¹⁵ Jacques Taieb, a prominent historian, called the rumor that Tunisian Jews were serving on the side of the French at Bizerte as “unfounded”²¹⁶ which seems to have calmed some nerves. Cohen’s writing does provide evidence of the complexity and fear that took hold of the Jewish community at that time.

Bizerte and the Encroaching Arab World

Analyses relating to identity need not only be applied to the Jewish population of Tunisia, but can also be applied to the Muslim Arab majority as well. The era of decolonization and its violent outbreak at Bizerte had a profound effect of shaping an identity that was fashioned during the colonial encounter. When discussing the decolonizing state, and the majority that did not assimilate to colonial norms, Memmi states that “the colonized’s liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity”.²¹⁷ Said, likewise states that there is “ideological resistance when efforts are made to reconstitute a ‘shattered community’ ... against all pressures of the colonial system”.²¹⁸ Therefore, what occurs during decolonization is a reaction to the colonial encounter – a chance to disconnect from colonization and search for

²¹⁴ Cohen, 182.

²¹⁵ Cohen, 186.

²¹⁶ Cohen, 186.

²¹⁷ Memmi, *Colonizer* 128.

²¹⁸ Said, 209.

one's own identity. This identity is often rooted in a mythical past connected with tradition different from that of the colonizer²¹⁹ and this creates a certain kind of nationalism inherent in the de-colonizing population.²²⁰ In Tunisia, the episode of the Bizerte Crisis strengthened its Arab and Islamic character which was contrasted with the secular and European identity left by French colonization.

Within Tunisia, there were a number of popular riots that took place in support of the Tunisian nationalism. Nationalist and anti-colonialist demonstrations were held in both Tunis and Bizerte that were attended by a multitude of people. The first of which was a general strike held on 20 July 1961 in Tunis against French 'aggression' in Bizerte. Tunisian men and women cheered for Bourguiba, discussed their willingness to sacrifice themselves and chanted "*al-ikhla*" – the word for evacuation in Arabic.²²¹ The use of Arabic, and not French in these demonstrations was significant. This was an example of the majority population cognizant in choosing to speak *their* language instead of that of the colonizer in confrontation. Arabic belonged to them, French belonged to someone else and they were going to recover it for their use and identity. Weeks later, on 18 August 1961, the Tunisian government organized demonstrations in Bizerte that it called the "Battle for Bizerte"; 50,000 were reported to have attended.²²² According to *The Times* of London, the "situation was tense as thousands of Tunisians –all men- apparently waving flags, singing patriotic songs and shouting "Vive Bourguiba!" and "Adieu Français!".²²³ This use of French, however, served nationalistic means. Instead, as stated by Memmi earlier, it was used to show that the protestors could and did exist in

²¹⁹ Memmi, *Colonizer*. 132.

²²⁰ Memmi, *Colonizer*. 135.

²²¹ "Tunis Paraders Back Bourguiba" in *The New York Times* 21 Jul 1961. Found online at New York Times Archive. Last accessed on 27 Nov 2010.

²²² "50,000 Open 3-Day Battle for Bizerte" in *The Washington Post* 19 August 1961. Found online at ProQuest. Last Accessed on 7 December 2010.

²²³ "Demonstrations by Bizerta Crowds" in *The Times* 19 Aug 1961. Found Online at Times Digital Archive.

the same cultural sphere as the colonizers. They did not need their tutelage on how to participate in their cultural sphere – their language was mastered. The use of French as well had a more pragmatic sense in these demonstrations; the French troops stationed in Bizerte that they were protesting against did not speak Arabic.

Interestingly, in an article dated 18 February 1962, almost seven months after the fighting of Bizerte, *New York Times* reporter Thomas Brady writes about a popular increase in the Ramadan fast within Tunisia. He stated that “public observance is the rule” and that the Tunisian Government had passed and is enforcing a law barring Muslims from buying alcoholic beverages. He also cited a Tunisian women’s magazine that published a “spate of letters...denouncing mixed [French and Tunisian] marriages”.²²⁴ In his analysis of this increase in religiosity, Brady states “most observers attribute it to the shock of the Bizerte crisis last summer”²²⁵. This analysis directly coincides with Memmi’s statement about the colonized in revolt that

Now, the young intellectual who had broken with religion, internally at least, and ate during Ramadan, begins to fast with ostentation. He who considered the rites as inevitable family drudgery, reintroduces them into his social life, gives them a place in his conception of the world. To use them better, he explains the forgotten messages and adapts them to present-day needs.²²⁶

Thus, the Bizerte Crisis spurred a slight shift in identity for the Tunisian Muslim majority. The colonized people were in direct conflict with a colonial force and some found an identity in an increasing Muslim religiosity. This identity eschewed the culture of the colonizer as much as it was a product in reaction to it. Perhaps the most tangible shift in identity at this time could be seen in the letters published against mixed marriages. Mixed marriage represents fluidity with identity – dedicating one’s life to someone of a different culture. Now, however, certain boundaries were beginning to be hardened. Because of the violence, some people now saw this

²²⁴ Brady, Thomas F. “Tunisia, Disillusioned by West is Reverting to Religious Ways” in *The New York Times* 18 Feb 1962.

²²⁵ Brady, “Tunisia, Disillusioned”

²²⁶ Memmi, *Colonizer* 132.

fluidity as inherently wrong as the letters claimed “foreign women take our best men”, indicating that the men best able to build and strengthen the nation were being influenced by the culture of the colonizer. The crisis in Bizerte seems to have had a profound effect on hardening the definition of a ‘Tunisian’ that comprised of Arab, Muslim and by nature of being anti-colonial, anti-French. The status of Jews was perceived as tenuous because of the colonial encounter between them and the French, being outside of the Islamic sphere, and the Arab-Israeli conflict ongoing in the Middle East.

While most of the fighting in Bizerte was complete by August, 1961, the French did not hand over the base to Tunisia until 15 October 1963.²²⁷ During this time, the Tunisian government was in a flurry of activity, seeking to bring France to the negotiating table and to enlist support for its plans to expel the French from Bizerte. This also had an implication for how the Tunisian state identified itself. While the Tunisian government felt neglected by their allies, the United States and Great Britain (and of course, their patron, France), their non-committal nature to the issue forced them to turn to other nations for support. One of the first governmental organizations to offer “support without reserve” was the Arab League²²⁸ - a group of states that President Bourguiba often distanced himself from since joining the League in 1959 because of his dislike for Nasserist policies.²²⁹ What happened during these negotiations is a reconciliation between President Nasser and President Bourguiba and Tunisia’s further integration into Arab politics.²³⁰ This worried many of the Jews of Tunisia, who saw the anti-Israel rhetoric of Nasser and other Arab politicians, incensed from Israeli occupation of Arab lands, defeat in 1948 and

²²⁷ “France to Quit Bizerte Base by Oct. 15” *The New York Times* 5 Oct 1963. Found online at New York Times Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last accessed on 7 December 2010.

²²⁸ “Arab Group Vows Help for Tunisia” *The New York Times* 30 Jul 1961. Found online at New York Times Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last accessed on 30 Nov 2010.

²²⁹ Laskier, “From Hafsia to Bizerte” 212. Also, Tunisia broke diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1960 over a supposed assassination attempt on Bourguiba, see Doty, Robert C. “Tunisia Turning to Neutralism” *The New York Times*, 30 Jul 1961. Found online at New York Times Archive. Last Accessed on 30 11 2010.

²³⁰ Doty, “Tunisia Turning to Neutralism”.

the in Suez Crisis of 1956, as threatening their continued existence in Tunisia. It is not that many of the Jews particularly identified with Israel (as their low numbers of immigration there show)²³¹ or did not identify as Arab but it is more that they did not identify with the definition of ‘Arab’ as polarized against ‘the Jews’. Bourguiba entering the ‘Arab’ fold was perceived as a threat to the *Tunisian* part of the Jews’ identity. The decolonizing state, seemingly had set itself on a course that hardened its Arab identity during the years of the Bizerte Crisis. In fact, at the celebrations of France’s evacuation from Bizerte on 14 Dec 1963, three prominent Arab leaders shared the stage – Bourguiba, Nasser and Ahmad Ben Bella of newly independent Algeria. Ben Bella and Nasser spent their speeches denouncing colonialism and Israel.²³² The crowd “roared with approval” at their speeches.²³³ Bourguiba, on the other hand, did not. He did, however, stress the need for pan-Arab unity and when asked by Nasser to discuss Arabism his response was “Of course, we are all Arabs”.²³⁴

Thus, what can be seen as a result of the violent form of decolonization taking place during the Bizerte Crisis is a slight shift in the identity in the Tunisian state. Pragmatism decreed that there needed to be allies to support the government’s decision to sacrifice lives for this cause. When the support was not coming from the newly independent state’s usual allies, it was enough to force the state to ally itself with the neutral and Arab states that were willing to back its actions. By re-establishing bonds of Arab culture and Arabic language, the state hardened its ‘Arab’ identity at this time simply through a stronger association with the Arab League and men like Nasser who had long championed pan-Arabism and anti-colonialism. It is significant,

²³¹ Bourdeillette, Jean. “Tunisian Immigrants” Letter 1020, Tel Aviv, December 17 1964. Fonds Tel Aviv Carton 5 AL-604 “Rapports avec la Tunisie 1960-1964”, CADN.

²³² “Tunisia Celebrates end of Occupation by French” *The Washington Post* 14 Dec 1963. Found online at ProQuest. Last Accessed on 7 December 2010.

²³³ Braestrup, Peter. “3 Arab Leaders ask Unity Effort” *The New York Times* 14 Dec 1963. Found Online at New York Times Archive. Last accessed on 7 Dec 2010.

²³⁴ Braestrup, “3 Arab Leaders”

however, that Bourguiba did not denounce Israel or colonialism in his speech – it shows that there were limits to how far he and the Tunisian state were willing to change its own identity. Crisis or not, the identity of the Tunisian state (and Bourguiba himself) was influenced by the colonial encounter with France and the “recovery of self and dignity”²³⁵ described by Memmi need not entail a full blown shift in identity or a strict adherence to pan-Arabism. The state changed during this episode, yes, but it did not undergo a total renovation.

Conclusion

Decolonization is a messy process. It can often take years and many lives before it is over. Identities, however, remain shaped by the colonial encounter even during the process of decolonization. Whether it is a cultural attachment to the colonizer or a nationalistic reaction of the colonized it can not be argued that these identities were not in one way or the other shaped by the colonial experience. If colonization is taken out of the equation, perhaps we see different identities today than those that emerged out of Africa, Asia and the Arab world in the last century. The colonial experience creates nationalistic radicals, just as it creates admirers, sympathizers and those wishing to assimilate.

The episode of the 1961 Bizerte Crisis viewed through the Jewish communities of Tunisia provides an excellent case study for the changes in identity brought about by decolonization. The Jews, thought of as being a highly assimilationist population during the colonial era, show how their identity was acted upon (increasing focus on Arab identity, religiosity, less focus upon France, the state’s shift in foreign policy) and how they acted upon what they felt to be their identity (immigration). Violent episodes of decolonization bring out divisions that can easily be interpreted as dichotomies, but in reality are much more complex when viewed over time. Many Jews remained within the country after 1961, enough that after

²³⁵ Memmi, *Colonizer*, 128.

the large uptick in Jewish immigration spurred on by the Crisis, Michael Laskier writes that “the situation gradually returned to normal”,²³⁶ that is Jewish emigrant numbers dwindled back down to levels seen in the past. Bourguiba even publicly drank during Ramadan, showing his own response to the growing religiosity described above.²³⁷

Perhaps, it is better to think of identity as a fluid and changing thing. Profoundly influenced by colonialism, identities change during periods of decolonization, especially violent ones such as the Bizerte Crisis. Boundaries between groups are hardened and traditions are recalled. This, however, does not mean that things cannot change in a different direction. Identity is not something that one is simply born with but is historically constructed; and if part of that historical construct is the colonial encounter, it seems that it’s residual effects last longer than colonization itself.

²³⁶ Laskier *North African Jewry* 302.

²³⁷ Find the article.

Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer questions about nations, and whether or not newly-independent nations homogenize their imagined populations. The argument in this chapter is that 1967 serves as a definitive rupture in the minds of many Tunisian Jews about their future in the Tunisian nation. This is particularly striking, given that Tunisia was not a combatant against Israel in the Six Day War. International events, therefore, led to domestic discord. A far away conflict and the ideologies at play within it took part in shaping the Tunisian nation. These ideologies, however, have been known by the Tunisian population for quite some time. For many, the events of 1967 were enough to prove that their future lay outside of a land that had been their place of residence for years. Thus, the events of the Six Day War affected those far removed from the fight and were part of a process of streamlining Tunisian society and defining “Tunisian-ness”. Although Tunisia was geographically far from the conflict of the Six Day War, many people saw the events not as an attack on Tunisia but on the Arab nation. This competing nationalism of “Arabness” further complicates the arguments put forward by Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson. As we shall see, the idea that the enemy was a state self-described as “Jewish” further blurs the lines between state and society within Tunisia..

Demographics

According to French sources, In 1962, after the Bizerte Crisis of the previous year, there were 35,000 Jews within the country, down from a population of about 95,000 at independence in 1956 (including those holding Tunisian and foreign nationality).²³⁸ By June 1967, before the

²³⁸ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George . “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

beginning of the Six Day War, that number dwindled to about 23,000²³⁹, while within a year of the Six Day War, approximately 7500 Jews remained within Tunisia.²⁴⁰ In percentage terms, this means that approximately 67% of all Tunisian Jews remaining in the country decided to emigrate after the Six Day War. This was the largest percentage drop of the population of Tunisian Jews since independence. In fact, what we see after the Six Day War is, for the first time, a *majority* of Tunisian Jews opting for emigration. This high number indicates a defining change in the religious makeup of the Tunisian nation. For many Jews, the events surrounding the Six Day War cemented the decision for emigration – their place within the nation was not secure, despite many reassurances from the state. In order to analyze the events in Tunisia, and the state’s actions during the Six Day War, an interesting date to return to is 1965, the year of President Bourguiba’s outreach to Israel.

The 1965 Jericho Speech and the attack on Pan-Arabism

In 1965, it seemed that the Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba began to assert himself in the Arab world with a peculiar foreign policy. On 3 March 1965, on a state visit to Jericho (controlled by Jordan at that time), he decided to give a speech later entitled “Agreeable Leadership and a Successful Plan”.²⁴¹ In this speech he came out as a leader of an Arab country who was for negotiations with the Israeli state on the basis of partition. Bourguiba compared the plight of the Palestinians to the plight of the Tunisians under French colonialism; he seemed to be asking where the Tunisians would be at the time without negotiating with the French when the opportunity presented itself. He stated that:

As for the policy of ‘all or nothing’ it has brought us to defeat in Palestine and reduced us to the sad situation that we are struggling with today... In Palestine, the Arabs pushed away compromising, refusing

²³⁹ Stillman, 173.

²⁴⁰ Stillman, 174.

²⁴¹ For full text of speech see Bourguiba, Habib. “Qiyadat Mawfiqa wa Khitat Hakima Naji’a” Speech Given 3 March 1965, Jericho. Found in *Tunis wa Qadhiyat Filasteen*. Tunis: Kitaba ad-Dawla lilAkhbar wa al-Ishar, 1966. P. 65-71.

the divisions and clauses of the White Paper [of 1939] which they regretted doing. If Tunisia had refused, in 1954, the internal autonomy as a compromise solution, the country would today remain under French domination.²⁴²

This approach of *realpolitik*, accepting the situation on the ground as is, came two years before the Arab defeat of 1967. This stance angered some Arabs who had thought that Bourguiba betrayed the Arab position on Israel.²⁴³ *The New York Times* wrote that “every Arab state but Morocco and Libya has taken up the cudgels against Mr. Bourguiba”.²⁴⁴ This position also put him at direct odds with Egyptian President Gamal Abdelnasser, the politician most associated with “revolutionary Arab socialism” who stated that Bourguiba “sells all of the Arabs and makes himself a servant of Colonialism and Zionism”.²⁴⁵ Bourguiba was portrayed pejoratively, according to Nasser, in the “revolutionary Arab nation”.²⁴⁶

This speech, however negative it made Bourguiba appear in the eyes of some Arabs, could have only been reassuring to the Jewish population in Tunisia. The Tunisian Jews, displeased with Nasser due to his government’s position regarding Egyptian Jews since 1956 and confrontational stance towards Israel²⁴⁷, most likely appreciated their leader taking such a brave stance in world affairs. Undoubtedly, it would have reassured them that the Tunisian state had no intention of adopting anti-Jewish rhetoric. The fact that the two leaders were constantly at odds

²⁴² Bourguiba, Habib “Qiyadat Mawfiqa wa Khitat Hakima Naji’a” *Tunis wa Qadhiyat Filasteen* P. 69

²⁴³ See “Tunisian Hint at Accord with Israel” in *The Times* 8 March 1965, London. P. 9 Found online at <www.thetimes.co.uk> and “Arab Press Indignant” in *The New York Times* 12 March 1965. Found online at <www.nytimes.com> . Last accessed on 01 Mar 2010

²⁴⁴ Smith, Hedrick. “Disarray in Arab World” *The New York Times*. 30 Jun 1965. Found Online at The New York Times Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last accessed on 19 May 2010.

²⁴⁵ ‘Abd el-Nasser, Gamal. “Address by President Gamal ‘Abd el-Nasser at the Palestinian National Congress” Speech given in Cairo 31 May 1965. Cairo, U.A.R. Information Department: National Publication House, 1965. 7

²⁴⁶ ‘Abd el-Nasser, Gamal. 33-35.

²⁴⁷ The policies of Nasser were more diverse than they seemed. From 1952-1956 Egypt labored to maintain its Jewish population, much like Tunisia did. The 1954 Lavon affair, in which Israeli agents deliberately blew up Western targets in Egypt to discredit Nasser and the tripartite attack of the 1956 Suez Crisis, for example, made his government take a harder tone towards Israel and Egypt’s Jewish population. It is only after 1956 that it begins to be impossible to be both Egyptian and Jewish in Egypt. According to a news report, Tunisian Jews in Egypt after the 1956 Suez Crisis were subject to “confiscation of property, requiring persons to leave Egypt and to surrender passports”. See “Tunisia Defends Jews” *The New York Times* 25 Dec 1956. Found online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> Last Accessed on 8 March 2010. For more detailed information on Egyptian Jews, see Beinun, Joel. *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

over a methodology of solving the Middle East conflict and that their leader was the one who advocated negotiations with the Jewish state could have erased the thoughts of a “disinclusion” from the Tunisian nation had the Tunisian state sought better relations with the “Arab” world. The willingness to end the conflict at the expense of an “Arab” identity showed that the state was fully invested in promoting a different kind of Arab-ness that was not altogether hostile to Jews.

Bourguiba further sought to back up this notion that his government was in no way hostile to the Jewish population. On 28 November 1966, the President delivered an address in the al-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, one of the oldest bastions of Judaism within North Africa. He reiterated that “Our state is for all Tunisians without distinction of race or religion. Its concern is helping all Tunisian sons, whatever their faith. In return it asks for sincerity in their words and devotion in their acts”.²⁴⁸ The asking for “sincerity in their words and devotion in their acts” is quite astounding as it implies that not everyone is sincere in their desire to be part of the nation. The reassurances of the state being for all are followed by a need for loyalty to the state. The plea for loyalty puts into question whether or not at this time the government saw the Jews as “Tunisian” enough - as it would seemingly be logical that those who are “Tunisian” would not have their loyalties in question. The thought could have lingered that the Jews might be a fifth column loyal to Israel and/or France. In fact, the author of this news story adds that:

There was no policy of discrimination, but little administrative traps or individual ones that run their course (which, does not happen frequently)...The Jews, who have familial attachments in France and Israel, leave the country in a slow, inexorable movement. In a measure where this is de-solidarity and refusing to live in difficult times (for some more than others), the Tunisians estimate that they are not loyal citizens devoted to the country and they seek to leave.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Ben Brahem, J. “Notre État est Celui de tous les Tunisiens sans Distinction de Religion – déclare M. Bourguiba” *Le Monde*, 29 Nov 1966. Found in Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79 Folder T(I)K3 “Israelites”.

CADN

²⁴⁹ Ben Brahem, J. “Notre”

This is a strong indictment of Tunisian society coming from the author of the *Le Monde* article on Bourguiba's speech. In his speech, Bourguiba stated that all need to be "sincere" in words and deeds when talking with the Jews which possibly provided an example of how the disloyal sentiment described by the *Le Monde* author had entered its way into the highest levels of the state. If, as Gellner states, the goal of nationalism is so that the political and national unit should be congruent, then this could be an example of the political becoming congruent with the national.

The Events of the Six Day War in Tunisia

The questions of loyalty of the Jews were never really acted upon by the Tunisian population. There is not an incident in the sources of anti-Jewish manifestations within the streets of Tunisia during its first eleven years of independence. The Jews, instead, chose to leave the country themselves and that is what lay behind the questions of loyalty to the nation and the state. The Six Day War, however, changed the tenuous status quo. On the 5th of June, 1967, the day of the Israeli attack a riot erupted on the streets of Tunis. A crowd was shouting on the streets "Down with the Jews", "Into the Sea with the Jews" and "Let's burn the Jews" on the streets of downtown Tunis.²⁵⁰ The mob attacked the Great Synagogue of Tunis, burned the unleavened bread factory and pillaged stores owned by Jews.²⁵¹ The unleavened bread factory was thus rendered unusable.²⁵² The Bokobza winery and Boukha²⁵³ factory in the suburbs were also looted and many Jews were attacked and beaten.²⁵⁴ Groups also attacked the American and

²⁵⁰ Laskier, Michael. "North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century" New York: New York University Press, 1994. 306.

²⁵¹ Cohen, Georges. *De L'Ariana a Galata: Itinéraire d'un Juif de Tunisie*. Vincennes : Editions Racines, 1993. 188.

²⁵² Haddad de Paz, Charles. *Juifs et Arabes au Pays de Bourguiba*. Aix en Provence : Imprimerie Paul Roubaud, 1977. 252

²⁵³ Liquor distilled from figs.

²⁵⁴ Laskier, 306.

British Embassies while “little attempt was made by the police to stop the looting and pillage. In most instances police calmly continued to direct traffic while the mobs were running riot”.²⁵⁵

The response of the state came soon after. President Bourguiba did not learn of the events until the evening and was thus late to clear up the demonstrations. According to French sources, he condemned the attacks in “severe terms” and his secretary, Bahi Ladgham had sent his regrets to the Grand Rabbi of Tunis.²⁵⁶ In a televised speech the next day, Bourguiba called the demonstrators “irresponsible fanatics who deserve the gallows”²⁵⁷ and threatened severe punishment for those who touched “a hair of the Jews”.²⁵⁸ No further attacks on Jews in the country followed, although chants of “Jew Bourguiba” could be heard on the streets²⁵⁹. On 31 July 1967, the government eventually sentenced fifty-four individuals for their actions during the riot. They were tried before a military tribunal and received sentences ranging from one to twenty years of imprisonment and labor.²⁶⁰ Bourguiba then announced that he was giving support for the Arab side in the Six Day War that night.²⁶¹

Jewish reactions to the events were mixed. Charles Haddad, ex-president of the Jewish Council of Tunis, praised Bourguiba’s reactions. He stated that on “the 6th of June 1967...Bourguiba found himself and had courageously taken a stand against Nasser as he did in the expulsion of the Jews from Egypt in 1956. He served against the perpetrators [of the looting of Jewish businesses] and now must compensate those who lost their property... The Jews, who

²⁵⁵ American Jewish Distribution Committee (AJDC) Memo 245A.13. “An Eyewitness Account of the Anti-Jewish Riots in Tunis at the Outbreak of the Six Day War” Reprinted in Stillman, 550-551.

²⁵⁶ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George . “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

²⁵⁷ Laskier, 306.

²⁵⁸ Haddad, Charles. 232.

²⁵⁹ AJDC Memo. Stillman, 551.

²⁶⁰ “Tunis Sentences 54 in Anti-Jewish Riot during Mideast War” 1 Aug 1967. *The New York Times*. Found online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last accessed on 1 Mar 2010.

²⁶¹ “The Arabs Unite to Support War” 6 Jun 1967. *The New York Times*. Found Online at NYTimes Digital Archive <www.nytimes.com> . Last Accessed on 1 Mar 2010.

have always lived in this country, live in peace.”²⁶² Haddad continues his praise of Bourguiba: “President Bourguiba, with his breadth of sight, love of men, with the suffering that he has endured and the good he has lavished with his affection for the Jews, appears as a tireless defender of man”.²⁶³

Another Tunisian Jew, Professor Georges Cohen disagreed with Haddad. Cohen wrote “Bourguiba condemned these events that evening on television. But it is not enough.”²⁶⁴ Rumors spread within the Jewish community that these demonstrations were not spontaneous, but planned within the highest echelons of the government. There were also fears that Bourguiba was facing staunch opposition in his policies from his Minister of Planning, Ahmed Ben Salah, known for being a staunch pro-Arab hard-liner in the government.²⁶⁵ An eyewitness was convinced that “certain activist members of the *Destour* party were involved as well”.²⁶⁶ A Jewish observer referred to the events as a “veritable pogrom” and the government issued a decree stating the demonstrations were not planned and replaced the head of the national police for his failure in stopping the demonstrations sooner.²⁶⁷

The Six Day War marked a turning point for the Jews in Tunisia. Cohen notes that “the most entrenched now did not hesitate to do it: leave. That was the last of the large groups of emigrants. We consider the Six Day War to mark the end of the presence of a vibrant and organized Jewish Community in Tunisia”.²⁶⁸ Cohen’s sentiments reflect the numbers of emigrants – 67% of Jews remaining in Tunisia leave the country within a year of the Six Day War. The sheer numbers of emigration and rapid spread of rumors among the Jewish community

²⁶² Haddad, Charles. 232.

²⁶³ Haddad, Charles, 232.

²⁶⁴ Cohen, 188.

²⁶⁵ Laskier, 306-307.

²⁶⁶ AJDC Memo, Stillman, 550.

²⁶⁷ Laskier, 306.

²⁶⁸ Cohen, 188.

not only indicate the tenuous existence of the Jews as a minority group within Tunisia but the fear that came about the community after the riots. Physical violence and rumor worked to spread this fear. It is important not to forget the role that rumors can play in hardening views – rumors can compel people who would not normally act to take a political stand.²⁶⁹ That political stand was, for 67% of Jews, to quit the country and to abandon the project that was “Tunisia”.

We should also not forget to stress the aspect that identity and nationalism played in these events. The Six Day War was a struggle in which Israel attacked the Arab states and soon became simplified as “Arabs” versus “Jews”. The Tunisian government openly sided with the “Arab” states in this conflict, as was to be expected. What this means is that the state firmly identified as “Arab”. The war also more firmly established the identity of the nation as “Arab”. According to French diplomatic sources, the Tunisian press was running editorials describing the Israeli actions before the Six Day War in harsh terms such as “atrocities” and “genocide” and spoke of the need to “relieve the trauma inflicted on the Arab people (which include the Tunisian people).²⁷⁰ This dichotomization of the conflict and the picking of sides left Tunisian Jews in an awkward position.

Also, the legacy of Zionist activity in Tunisia provided another ideological force working to shape the identity of Tunisian Jews. Many people alive at this time remember the vibrant Zionist press of the 1920s-30s and the multitude of Zionist organizations that operated in Tunisia. Many Tunisian Jewish youth who grew up in the 1950s also received some education and/or charity through Zionist youth organizations like *Nos Petits*.²⁷¹ The Jewish Agency for Palestine

²⁶⁹ An excellent book showcasing the power of rumor is: Clancy-Smith, Julia. *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Popular Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia: 1800-1914)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

²⁷⁰ Embassy of France in Tunis. Series A, Carton 193/ANL II-A4. “Relations avec L’Egypte”. Telegram No.1172/1177, Tunis, 13 Jun 1967.

²⁷¹ Laskier, “Hafsia”, 210.

in Tunis did not stop its youth programs (the only ones at that time allowed by the government) until 1962.²⁷² While the battles of the conflict took place overseas, there was an element of the same ideological forces at work domestically within Tunisia. Some Tunisian Jews would have had Zionist leanings that put them directly at odds with the events surrounding the Six Day War and likely ceased identifying themselves at some point as “Arab” or even “Tunisian” while waiting to emigrate.

The riots themselves showcased a manifestation of the suspicion that the Jews might not be loyal citizens to the nation. This event showed a certain disconnect that existed between the state and the citizens – the riots indicate a certain attachment to an “Arab” identity that Bourguiba was working towards centralizing and secularizing. It is not out of the ordinary to think that there existed a mass of Tunisians who shared the same opinion of their leader as Nasser and/or his beliefs in pan-Arabism. While Bourguiba was reassuring the Jews that they had a place within the nation and that “Arab” can include “Jewish,” the Middle East conflict over Palestine worked against this goal. Most Jews also felt the tensions of the conflict and left the country “despite Bourguiba’s declarations, the imprisonment of some of the demonstrators; the official apologies to the Chief Rabbi; the manifesto signed by a number of Tunisian intellectuals expressing ‘solidarity with their Jewish fellow citizens’”.²⁷³ The Middle East conflict thus shifted their identity away from “Arab” and “Tunisian”. The climax of this cementing of identities was the riots in Tunis in 1967 and the subsequent mass emigration of Jews from Tunisia. The rumor of the challenge of power from Ben Salah also indicated that certain elements of the state had become fed up with Bourguiba’s policies towards the Jews. According to Mitchell’s theory, the idea that a hard-liner could replace Bourguiba indicates that some elements of society with

²⁷² Laskier, “Hafsia” 213.

²⁷³ Laskier, 307.

particular desires manifested themselves within the political system. Also, the eyewitness account that stated some “members of the Destourian party” were involved in the riots is not altogether implausible – the Neo-Destour had many members at this time.

Conclusion: After the Six Day War

After the Six Day War, the Tunisian government sent envoys to the Arab capitals to discuss the post-war situation of the Arab World. On the 13th of June, Sadok Mokaddem, then President of the National Assembly, visited with Nasser and re-establishes official relations with Egypt while Mongi Slim, Bourguiba’s Minister of Justice visited Damascus and Amman. Also, Bourguiba received messages of thanks from the King of Jordan, President of Sudan and President of Iraq for the “attitude” of the Tunisians.²⁷⁴ This diplomatic frenzy extended past the summer into an attempt of the Tunisian state to place itself at the forefront of Arab affairs vis-à-vis Nasser.²⁷⁵ The foreign relations of Tunisia were now solely focused upon Middle Eastern issues. This, however, died down over time. A Tunisian, Chedli Klibi, became head of the Arab League in 1979 and the PLO relocated to Tunis in 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. A drive for “Arab” in foreign affairs came to a climax with the Six Day War and then slowly died down until those events.

Georges Cohen writes that the Six Day War “marked the end of a vibrant and organized Jewish community in Tunisia”. He adds that “the Tunisian Jews, on the contrary, felt alone in the face of difficulties”,²⁷⁶ indicating the perceived abandonment from the state during and after the

²⁷⁴ Embassy of France in Tunis. Serie A, Carton 193/ANL II-A4. “Relations with Egypt”. Telegram No1168/1170, Tunis, 13 Jun 1967

²⁷⁵ Embassy of France in Tunis. Serie A, Carton 193/ANL II-A4. “Relations with Egypt”. Telegram No180-182, Cairo, 23 Sept 1967 indicates that Bourguiba sent a document to Nasser explaining the need for a united Arab position and that the Khartoum Conference had not achieved this. Telegram No1832, Tunis, 27 Sept 1967 shows Tunisian efforts to moderate Algerian “extremism towards the problems of the Middle East”.

²⁷⁶ Cohen, 187.

Six Day War. All the existential questions about leaving the country after the violent riots and dichotomization of identities during this period seemed to be answered for many – leave. The anonymous eyewitness states that “as for those who did not leave immediately following the riots, a large proportion say that they will be leaving in the months to come” as well as that community institutions have “lost considerable personnel and will continue to do so.” Our source ends on a somber note that “it is the unanimous opinion of the Jews one talks to that if there was any doubt about the question previously, it is quite clear now that there is no future for them in Tunisia”.²⁷⁷ Many of the Jews themselves perceived that they did not have a place within the nation after these events, which would explain the 67% decline in the Jewish population of Tunisia after one year. Whether or not the rest of the Tunisian population thought that the Jews were not a part of the nation is debatable, but the sharp numbers of Jewish emigration show that the Six Day War was a major turning point in formulating how the Jews perceived themselves within the Tunisian nation. Internal and external pressures and ideologies, that had been building up for years, eventually shaped the majority of their decisions to emigrate.

Charles Haddad, however, finds the Tunisian nation in contradiction. He writes that “The Muslim generation of today, ... in cultivating Arab solidarity, has found itself some contradictions: contradictions between the sincere desire to live in co-existence with the Jews, their constant companions, and the Middle Eastern Question that wishes to see the supporters of Israel as the infidels to the nation that is their home”.²⁷⁸ The Six Day War was a period of strong feelings of “Arab” solidarity and it was this notion that led to riots during Israel’s attack on the imagined “Arab” nation of which Tunisia was a part. By focusing on the creation of identities, we arrive at a new analysis and answer to the question of why such a large percentage of the

²⁷⁷ AJDC Memo, in Stillman, 551.

²⁷⁸ Haddad, Charles. 262.

Jewish community emigrated during and shortly after the Six Day War. Their place in the nation was questionable as was the state's relationship with the Jews. It is important to remember that existential questions about identity can force many people to "envisage a solution as radical as exile".²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Cohen, 159.

Conclusion: Nations, States, Identity and Jews and Arabs of the Future

In the introduction of Charles Haddad's book *Juifs et Arabes au Pays de Bourguiba*, written in 1977²⁸⁰ he includes what he termed "a message of hope", in which he addresses both Jews and Arabs on their relations with one another. "To my Jewish brothers" he states, "In your relations with the Arabs, put less suspicion and more heart forward. Never forget that in the course of the centuries we had many adversaries and at that time the Arabs opened their arms".²⁸¹ He then says "to the Arabs, my brothers as well: The Jews are your family. Whether they live in the countries of the Orient or the Occident...you have heard their voices for centuries from within or from another land".²⁸² With this "message of hope" Haddad himself is making an attempt to breach the wide divide that has developed over the last decades between Jews and Arabs, who, according to him, should see themselves as "brothers".

This brotherly relationship existed in Tunisia for many individuals in both populations. Tobi Tsivia writes about how "In Tunisia, where Jews and Muslims have lived side by side for centuries, similar popular beliefs developed in relation with every domain of daily life",²⁸³ thus indicating that popular religious belief was the same amongst Muslims and Jews resident in Tunisia. In a 1960 edition of *L'Echo de Tunis*, a Muslim Tunisian named Ali Jandubi published an article entitled "Corner of Music and Theater" in which his goal was "to better know the importance of Jewish musical activity in Tunisian music".²⁸⁴ Indeed, the article covers three major Jewish musicians spread over epochs of Tunisian history and contains many instances of

²⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, this is the same year of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's diplomatic visit to Israel.

²⁸¹ Haddad, 11.

²⁸² Haddad, 12.

²⁸³ Tsivia, Tobi. "Le tamis et la chouette comme forces magiques contradictoires dans le folklore tunisien juif et musulman" in *Entre Orient et Occident : Juifs et Musulman en Tunisie*, (Paris : éditions de l'éclat, 2007), 159.

²⁸⁴ Jandubi, Ali. "Corner of Music and Theater", *L'Echo de Tunis*, December 25 1960, in Shiloah, Amnon, "Reflections on the Rappports between Jewish and Arab Music in Tunisia", in *Entre Orient et Occident : Juifs et Musulman en Tunisie*, (Paris : éditions de l'éclat, 2007), 177.

cooperation between Jews and Muslims in the field of music.²⁸⁵ Irene Arwet's biography of Rafael Uzan, a Tunisian Jew who immigrated to Israel after the state's founding, shows that in the early pre-World War II days of his life, Uzan and the Jewish community of Nabeul intermingled cordially on a day to day basis.²⁸⁶

Of course, it would be wrong to state that for millennia the Jews of Tunisia lived in perfect harmony with all of the inhabitants of the country since they have been there. If, however, one were to notice the significant drop in population from the years 1954-1967 and were to ask why this is, I believe the answer is simple: the creation of a "modern"²⁸⁷ post-colonial state changed the definition of what it meant to be a part of the nation. The state, because of its centralization that increased its ability to project power, which, to some extent, paradoxically rested upon popular legitimacy, created a new Tunisian identity. This was accomplished through independence, establishing definitions (Tunisia is a sovereign country whose language is Arabic and religion is Islam), dissolving and creating new institutions under its control (both the dissolution of the *habus* in 1956 and Law No. 58-78 of 1958 dissolving the Jewish community council), using the military to enforce borders and national sovereignty (Bizerte Crisis) and seeking to establish its place in the foreign affairs arena (Bizerte and the Six Day War).

The Jews were not the majority population in Tunisia. Thus, when discussing Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm's theories of nationalism in relation to the Jews, it is easy to see how not only states, but nations seek to become streamlined in order to project power based upon nationalism. Let's revisit Anderson's definition of a nation – "an imagined political community, and imagined as both limited and sovereign".²⁸⁸ The impact of this definition relating to Tunisian

²⁸⁵ Shiloah, 177.

²⁸⁶ Arwet, Irene. *Days of Honey: The Tunisian Boyhood of Rafael Uzan*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 1-41.

²⁸⁷ as described by Mitchell

²⁸⁸ Anderson, 6.

Jews was that the Tunisian nation imagined itself in this period as *limited* – limited to the feelings of the majority population. Anti-Jewish riots in 1967 and the rumors circulating about the Jewish population having pro-French sympathies during the Bizerte Crisis of 1961 provide examples that the Jews came to be perceived as outside of the Tunisian nation. Instead they needed to prove their loyalty and were seen as a fifth column.

Gellner’s definition of nationalism, that it is “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent”,²⁸⁹ provides a theoretical basis for showing why the Jews were excluded from the nation. As the national unit was majority Muslim Tunisian, then the state had to reflect this in order to garner popular legitimacy to rule. This leads to the passage of the first article of the Tunisian constitution that occurred in 1956 indicating that the state had a set language and a religion. The fact that this article was passed unanimously and early in the career of the First Constituent Assembly of Tunisia shows the popular support placed upon these words.

Decolonization also served to make this nationalism more limited. As there was still a power structure (socially, culturally and educationally) left behind by the French colonizers in the country, Tunisian nationalism had to be formed to be in opposition to these remnants of a previous era; one in which the political and the national unit were not congruent. Edward Said’s comment that “In sum, decolonization is a very complex battle over the course of different political destinies, different histories and geographies, and it is replete with works of the imagination, scholarship and counter-scholarship” demonstrates the long and hard battle of decolonization.²⁹⁰ This battle made itself evident within the Jewish population of Tunisia, especially those who as Memmi describes received a certain level of *permissible* assimilation

²⁸⁹ Gellner, 1.

²⁹⁰ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Vintage Books 1994) 219

from their French colonial masters.²⁹¹ Memmi's description of the colonized in revolt who returns to his traditions and adapts them to present day needs²⁹² shows how the majority population chose to battle against lingering elements of colonialism. Unfortunately for the Jews, the few who had assimilated to some degree to the life of the colonizer brought disdain upon them as whole for not being "Tunisian" enough and too "French" – this theme coming up in Ahmed Mestiri's speech in 1958 and during the Bizerte Crisis of 1961. For the battle of decolonization to be won by the colonized, all elements of the colonial order had to be removed from the nation.

If the political and national unit needed to be congruent, then it is through the efforts of the state itself that this congruency could be attained. States seek to physically embody what the nation, and the nationalism from it, wants to be. In setting up his argument in "The Limits of the State" Timothy Mitchell writes that:

A construct like the state occurs not merely as a subjected belief, incorporated in the thinking and action of individuals. It is represented and reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers. The cultural forms of the state are an empirical phenomenon, as solid and discernible a structure as a legal structure or a party system.²⁹³

Therefore, from Mitchell's perspective, the interplay between state and society is very real, with the state reproducing itself physically in various spaces. The state is not a free-standing apparatus separate from society. It is, in fact, the exact opposite. I would argue that any state takes legitimacy from its nation and uses this legitimacy to form a government to rule over the society. Military uniforms, frontiers, national architecture and national art all stem from an imagined idea of what the "national" is. Government buildings in China will be designed in a different way than those in Morocco and vice versa. The state, therefore, attempts to be congruent with the

²⁹¹ Memmi, *Colonizer*, 15.

²⁹² Memmi, *Colonizer*, 132.

²⁹³ Mitchell, 81.

nation, more than the nation attempts to be congruent with the state. When the legitimacy of the state is not given by and derived from the nation, one can reasonably expect there to be some kind of change in the system – be it a confidence vote in a leader, general elections, a coup or even a revolution.

There can be no doubt that in these early years, the Tunisian government took moves to represent the majority population of the nation. The first article of the constitution, the Bizerte Crisis, and the foray into Arab politics after 1967 could, in one way or another, be explained by Mitchell's quote above. The interplay between society and state partly compelled the state to enact the policies that it did during this period.. The state, however, as did most other post-colonial states at the time, sought to centralize and organize itself in a way that could project power over society. Law No. 58-78 of 1958 best represents this in the Tunisian context. With this law, and the abolishing of the *habus*, prior, the state placed under its control the religious affairs of society. The preferable identity, therefore, became one that was based on the idea of 'citizenship', in which one belonged to a nation that was governed by a congruent state. This re-packaging and re-organization of identity belonging to this particular era no doubt helped to homogenize nations and help them lose their national minorities. States are impelled to govern based on the will of the majority of the nation or risk losing legitimacy to rule. This is not to say that these risks were never taken; in fact, the Tunisian state under Bourguiba took significant risks in trying to safeguard the Jewish population. There was, however, only so much the state could do. The Tunisian national identity changed with the currents of time and place (decolonization, Arab nationalism, Israel-Palestine), and is still changing today. The idea of citizenship in the nation-state, thusly, impelled the Jews to leave en masse at this time in Tunisia's history.

This is not to say that Tunisian Jews were passive actors in not identifying with the Tunisian nation building project. On the contrary, many labored in the past to gain citizenship from a foreign state and reaped the economic benefits working on their behalf. Many also believed in a number of types of Zionism cause where religious identity is congruent with a national ‘Jewish’ identity and a desire to stop living in the Diaspora. Zionist organizations work within the Jewish community in Tunisia at this time. Most Jews waited to see what shape the newly independent nation-state would shape and left after a series of unpalatable and unwelcoming events in their home country. It is also important to take into consideration that this is a population that had an *opportunity* to leave – if Tunisian Muslims had the chance to become French citizens, how many of them would have left their native land? Nevertheless, according to the majority of Jews in Tunisia, there was not a place for them in the Tunisian nation and chose to identify with another citizenship instead of the Tunisian one. They voted with their feet.

The Future of Tunisian Jews

Laribi Chouikha’s study “Manners of Perceiving the Other and Affirmation of Self”, published in 2007 is one in which residents of La Goulette, a suburb of Tunis once known for its Jewish community, are asked their opinion on Tunisian Jews. His study, published in 2007, finds that 1967 was the key year in Jewish-Muslim relations in the community: “Our interviewees have frequently stated that in their adolescence they knew Jewish families, until 1967, the date of the ‘grand rupture’ coinciding with the Six Day War”.²⁹⁴ Chouikha’s article comes to some very negative conclusions. For instance he finds that La Goulette’s Muslim population believe that “the Jews of Tunisia sought to assimilate to all that is ‘the West’, and they were seen by a large majority of Tunisian Muslims as the couriers of transmission in the diffusion and propagation of

²⁹⁴ Chouikha, Larbi. “Manners of Perceiving the Other and Affirmation of Self: The Regard of the Muslims of La Goulette Towards the Jews of their Commune and Jews in General”, in *Entre Orient et Occident : Juifs et Musulman en Tunisie*, (Paris : éditions de l’éclat, 2007), 391.

Western and French culture in the country”,²⁹⁵ thus showing the notion of the Jewish population as a fifth column, loyal to other nations especially seen during the Bizerte Crisis. Chouikha’s piece continues, “that’s the image of the Jew – perceived by our group as negative... The images are generally reactive when shown on television... of scenes of Palestinian protestors repressed by Israeli soldiers, the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians”²⁹⁶ showing the damage done to the reputations of the Jews by the harsh nature of events in Israel.. One could imagine the same images being shown during the Six Day War that many people reacted to by rioting in the streets of Tunis against the Jews.

Michael Laskier informs us, however, that after the 1967 wave of emigration the numbers stabilized again. He adds that “After the late 1960s the remaining communities lived in peace”. This is shown by the emigration numbers: in 1974 the community remained largely at the approximately 7500 person number after the wave of emigrations after the Six Day War.²⁹⁷ Today, after the 2011 Revolution that threw out Ben Ali there remain about 1,700 Jews within the country, 1,000 in Djerba and 700 in Tunis²⁹⁸. The current head of the Jewish community, Roger Bismuth stated that “Jews of Tunisia are very attached to this Revolution, which we applaud. The Revolution concerns all Tunisians, and we should do our best to ensure its success”.²⁹⁹ In the Constituent Assembly elections of October 23, 2011, a Jewish candidate, Jacob Lellouche, campaigned for a seat with the Popular Republic Union party. Although he lost, he stated he achieved his goal by showing that non-Muslims can run for office in democratic

²⁹⁵ Chouikha, 393.

²⁹⁶ Chouikha, 395.

²⁹⁷ Embassy of France in Tunis, Serie A Carton 79, Folder T(I)K3. Gaucher, George . “Jews in Tunisia” Letter 340/ANL Tunis, 9 Apr 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

²⁹⁸ Ettinger, Yair. “Sociologist Claude Sitbon: Do The Jews of Tunisia have Reason to be Afraid?” *Haaretz*, 17 Jan 2011. Found Online at Haaretz <www.haaretz.com> . Last Accessed on 20 May 2011.

²⁹⁹ “Tunisia: Roger Bismuth ‘I Call upon Jewish Community not to Panic Needlessly” *Tunis-Afrique Press* 17 Feb 2011. Found online at allAfrica.com <www.allafrica.com> . Last Accessed on 3 May 2011.

elections in Tunisia³⁰⁰. The persistence of Jews within the country indicates that there are those who did feel significantly “Tunisian” enough to want to remain and also of there remaining a place for them within the Tunisian nation. For this group, “Arab”, “Tunisian” and “Jewish” are all part of their identity and as they have not left during the 2011 Revolution are significantly invested in and secure of their places within the Tunisian nation, thus indicating the individuality and fluidity of identity.

³⁰⁰ Shefler, Gil. “Jewish Candidate in Tunisia finds Victory in Defeat”, *The Jerusalem Post*, October 26, 2011, online at www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=243180, last accessed on November 21, 2011.

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