

# Contemplating musical life in Tunisia under the French protectorate—the society and challenges

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## Introduction

Musical life in Tunisia under the rule of the French (1881-1956), despite its vitality and diversity, has been the object of much speculation. Only a few musicologists and ethnomusicologists dedicated themselves to studying its developments and making a deep account of “music in culture.” (Merriam 1964: 3f) Most of what is known today stems from historical documentation and fieldwork that were undertaken only in some historical periods. For example, eminent figures such as Baron D’Erlanger, Robert Lachmann, and Erich von Hornbostel, among others, began to research music traditions in Tunisia starting in 1910. They established a vital arena of academic discourse surrounding the musical life conducted at the ground level, which contributed to planting a seed of research in an attempt to improve comprehension with regards to musical culture in Tunisia, the musical landscape that makes up the musical culture from the ground up. Nonetheless, fieldwork undertaken in ethnomusicology on Tunisian music has unfortunately ceased to dig for alternative issues of Tunisian music for decades, meaning the field enjoys little focus. Only rare traces of scholarship remain, so that there is a gap in Tunisian musical scholarship.

The present essay brings the state of music in Tunisia under the rule of the French (1881-1956) into focus. During this period, francophone culture was a central element in Tunisian society. Music had been an integral cultural component well before the French occupation, when the land was under Husainid rule, which witnessed the establishment of a music department within the military academy of Bardo in 1837, along with the formation of a symphonic orchestra in 1872, in order to preserve Tunisian musical her-

itage. However, music commenced to alter its state in 1881 under the rule of the French, who established laws to abolish any musical practice among the Tunisians. Tunisian intellectuals opposed this move and committed to establishing a movement to emphasize the values of Tunisian identity. Then, the 1930s witnessed the Rachidia's foundation, which played a central role in preserving Tunisian musical heritage. The movement contributed to the emergence of an eminent cultural life, which witnessed the purpose of the element of music in the daily mood; music, therefore, became part of society.

In order to shed some light on the role played by music in Tunisian culture in this specific historical period, this essay engages with a review of historical studies and points out the impacts of politics on the Tunisian musical life as well as turning points that changed music practices. Methodologically, the instrument of ethnomusicology as the study of music in culture guides the investigation, a method paradigm that allows the issue of music traditions in non-Western cultures to be covered in depth. By rethinking the status of music in Tunisia during the French protectorate, we expect to offer some paths for further ethnomusicological reflection on Tunisian music.

This essay is structured in three parts. First, several influences on music in Tunisian territory will be discussed. Tunisia depicts a crossroads of different cultures such as Maghreb, Andalusian, Arab, Mediterranean, and Ottoman and sub-Saharan, among others, that outline the country's cultural extent. The music culture resulting from the exchange between these cultures is transnational in essence and has caught the attention of researchers interested in cultures of the orient at the beginning of the 20th century. In the second part, the pre-colonial musical life in Tunisia will be brought into focus. The efforts to preserve musical traditions and enhance musical life during Husainid rule will be discussed in more detail. The third part concentrates on musical life under the French protectorate, which will be analyzed in three steps. First, the effects of the abolition of music from cultural life is discussed, when Tunisian culture witnessed a threat from the French rule, which imposed a strategy for purposes of blurring any autochthone culture emblem. Second, a new way to evaluate Tunisian music through the ethnomusicological work of Baron D'Erlanger will be discussed, who was a pioneer with regard the study of music traditions in Tunisia, and who left traces of written sources. Third, the popular reaction in the form of a cultural movement around the Rachidia, an association of traditional Tunisian music, and role-playing in musical life will be discussed. In this context, Tunisian so-

ciety formed a cohabitation milieu under the French protectorate and witnessed the presence of many foreign communities, who played a central role in moderating the cultural life of the Tunisians and improved the context of cultural discourse in society.

### **Sketching the music in the Tunisian territory**

Though a small African land, Tunisia has cultural history marked by continuous exchange. The land's geographic position played a central role in making it a suitable target for conquest by many civilizations since the antique era. Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Spanish, and Ottomans, among others, attempted expeditions to the land. The land was coveted so much so that there was a persistent threat to its sovereignty. Nonetheless, that not only contributed to establishing an exuberant cultural atmosphere, but also outlined a cultural pattern, which witnessed a reshaping whenever a conquest occurred at the ground level. Different cultures resided in the land and played a role in establishing a vital cultural life, which contributed towards inaugurating an enthusiastic cultural discourse, and which encompassed different features of the culture's components that crossed borders and resided at ground level, hence sketching the cultural landscape. Tunisia has been a warm host to foreign influences, which assimilated and then became integral elements of its cultural diversity.

“Mousiqa”, the Tunisian expression for music, occupies a prominent status in the Tunisian culture and is a vital component in the life of Tunisians. Tunisian music depicts a miscegenation of different cultural strata, which marks its musical culture by a significant trademark (Davila 2012: 785) and distinguishes it from twin music cultures such as the Arabian music culture, Andalusian, Mediterranean, and Sub-Saharan music culture. Tunisian music owns a proper expression and entertains itself as idiosyncratic. Indeed, music traditions in Tunisia depict the land's musical culture, which encompasses the multicultural factor in the music repertoire, and which brings a hybridity of different music expressions into play vis-à-vis the cultural context — either the integral context such as Maghreb, sub-Saharan, Arab, and Mediterranean among others, or local-urban, rural, mountain, Bedouin, and Saharan (Guettat 1982: 227).

The Tunisian music repertoire is usually classified in three main branches, according to the nature of music and its role in society: traditional, folk and religious. Although this classification is commonly used in Tunisia, these different genres were not well analyzed in their different dynamics in history, especially regarding their relevance as a cultural backdrop during French occupation. We consider that their study offers a path to deepen ethnomusicological research on Tunisian music practices.

### **A glimpse into the pre-colonial musical life of Tunisia**

Tunisia witnessed significant events during the 19th century that challenged the land, which led to a turning point in Tunisia's modern history. Indeed, the land had been under the rule of the Husainid dynasty since 1705, after which it became autonomous and split off from the Ottoman Empire that had reigned over Tunisia's territory for more than two centuries. The dynasty survived significant occurrences vis-à-vis the unsettling political atmosphere, which threatened its sovereignty. However, eminent decisions taken by main political figures in the dynasty brought about vital reforms in order to establish the Husainid's modern state while following a Western tendency within states under the Ottoman Empire apropos the society's lifestyle.

In 1837, Ahmed Bey ascended the Husainid rule's throne as the tenth "Bey", a Turkish military title. His governance was marked with vital reforms intended to establish the Husainid modern state and is especially linked to the abolition of slavery in Tunisia in 1846. Husainid rule witnessed the inauguration of a military academy known as Madrasat Bardo Al-Harbeya to establish the state's military so as to reassure the land and guard its boundaries from any external danger. Actually, the academy didn't focus on military training alone, i.e. military science, but consisted of an additional curriculum of music education as per Ahmed Bey's decision. He is known as a music-lover, his palace was stage to music performances and had a special music ambience, in which concerts took place every night throughout the year. He ordered the establishment of the academy's music department for the purpose of founding a military music ensemble. This became a vital component in the military's hierarchy to perform in the dynasty's official ceremonies in accordance with the music-Westernizing tendency in the Ottoman states (Shiloah

1995: 243), and although the Husainid rule split off from the Ottoman Empire, it kept up a close relationship with the Ottoman government of Istanbul.

The academy's music department worked to tend to music traditions at the ground level—indigenous music and local musical practices. The paradigm of oral tradition marked the music teaching, which was a transmission method in order to save the music tradition and was conducted by music masters in the society. The department undertook fieldwork in the form of music performed at the ground level, which was then turned into transcriptions to guard the written sources of music in Tunisia (Ministry of Culture 2005: 1–10). In 1872, the department published its first musicological treatise on traditional Tunisian music entitled *Ghayet Al- Mouna Wa Sourour*. It consists of the 13 masterpieces of the “Nouba” (Tunisian music repertoire) and the “Malouf” (Tunisian old chants). While the “Nouba” is a term linked with Maghreb music as a musical suite, built as a succession of vocal and instrumental musical pieces, the “Malouf” is a genre of Maghreb music. Additionally, the department conducted a study on a musical instrument used to perform local music, as well as a demonstration regarding the musical life conducted in society. Thus, what we could call an ethnomusicological interest in traditional Tunisian music has been part of the academy's assignment. Meanwhile, music had a vital status in Tunisian society (Rezgui 1965: 62–63), in particular in the Arab-Andalusian music culture, which depicted eminent illustrations of musical life at the ground level, and which spread over rural and urban areas. In fact, the Arab-Andalusian music tradition is the descendant of the Moorish communities who found refuge in Maghreb countries after Grenada's fall at the hands of Catholic monarchs in 1492. These communities brought in their autochthone music, which influenced the Maghreb societies, forming transcultural music practices.

The 1860s witnessed the nomination of a prominent personality in the Husainid rule: Kheredine Pacha, who occupied the post of government head, and contributed juridical reforms in order to improve the state's governing pattern (El Moussaoui 2013: 1–3). In this period, Tunisia was undergoing a financial crisis and needed to strengthen its trading activities in order to boost its economy while also consolidating friendly diplomatic relations. Under Kheredine's reforms, the Husainid rule established a foreign policy for the purpose of bridging diplomatic relations with Western countries, such as France, Great Britain and Italy, and also with neighbors and close cultural lands such as the Maghreb and Ottoman states. It followed that some for-

eign communities established in Tunisia, such as Italians, French and British-Maltese, contributed to reshaping the country's lifestyle and demography (Ganiage 1966: 867). They brought their cultures into Tunisia, causing an eminent cultural shift in local music practices. Thus, it is of high relevance that prior to the French protectorate, Tunisian music practices were greatly influenced by multiple music traditions.

Yet, during the 19th century, Andalusian music practices in particular spread throughout Tunisian territory, becoming part of local customs and traditional ceremonies, such as weddings, circumcisions, religious feasts and rituals. With the arrival of the foreign communities, who attempted to gain a foothold in the musical life, new musical elements were introduced and started to play a central role in Tunisian life and received a scope in Tunisian society (Cleveland 1978: 33). Indeed, Tunis City—the capital—meanwhile exhibited a cosmopolitan atmosphere, as most foreign communities were concentrated here, and it witnessed the emergence of the phenomenon of “Cafichanta”—a local idiom that means “café-chantant”. Though café halls were mainly used for business by foreign communities to improve their economic activities, they were also vital spots as they acted as a host to Western music/theatre/dance shows, which was an unfamiliar art context for the Tunisians. Foreign communities also played a central role in introducing Western musical practices by staging theaters to host musical concerts and theater masterpieces, including a symphonic orchestra in 1872 in Tunis City, whose membership was comprised of Tunisians and non-Tunisians (Darmon 1951a: 88–90). The aim was to assemble both cultures, Western and Tunisian, proposing a cultural model of good integration that stood out as a cultural discourse among other cultures in the society.

Kheredine Pacha's reforms continued at the ground level, and included the education domain—the inauguration of the “Sadikia” school, which is a high school in Tunis City, was a key event—to provide Tunisian students with modern education (Katz 2012: 695–697), focusing on academic training in languages such as French, Italian, and English in addition to humanities, natural sciences and exact sciences, a counterpoint to the “Zaytouna” education connected to the famous Zaytouna mosque in Tunis City that focused mainly on religious education, i.e. Islamic teachings. However, these reforms did not materialize on account of the resignation of Kheredine Pacha from the post of government head. The Husainid rule was faced with a predicament of authority, which led the state to an economic crisis and wors-

ened the political atmosphere at the ground level. As a result, the dynasty had to borrow credits and became indebted. This led to a famous occurrence in Tunisian modern history: The Treaty of Bardo was signed in 1881. This treaty allowed France to extend control over the Husainid's soil. In addition, France attempted to take advantage and profited from the weak Husainid state that led to another treaty known as the Treaty of La Marsa in 1883. This treaty stripped the dynasty of its sovereignty (Dewhurst Lewis 2009: 107–109), establishing what we call the French protectorate that showed quite a different face considering music practices in Tunisia.

Looking at these notes on pre-colonial music practices in Tunisian society, we see that here fascinating transnational entanglements pop up, entanglements that would greatly benefit from ethnomusicological consideration. While the official national music department at the academy was interested in developing a canon of Tunisian music, multiple music practices from diverse parts of the world melted in the thriving atmosphere of Tunisia. Thus, questions of transnational significance arise when music practices are exercised between local Tunisian traditions and foreign communities, and they become more and more localized like in the example of the “café-chantant” or as we see regarding Andalusian music practices. Indeed, this is still a blank area in need of further research.

## Musical life under the French protectorate

The French protectorate represents a difficult stage in Tunisia's modern history, wherein the French colonial presence played a central role in deepening the predicaments in Tunisian society. The French government took advantage of the dynasty's wealth in natural resources and avoided resistance, since the general public refused the protectorate's military forces on Tunisian soil (Cohen 1972: 369–372). Therefore, the French authorities employed a strategy that would create predicaments among Tunisians, especially utilizing religious conflicts among citizens, since from a religious perspective Tunisian society was split in two, with Muslim Tunisians in the majority and Jewish Tunisians, a minority, emphasizing the Jewish-Arab conflict within the society. Regarding cultural participation, it is important to note that the number of illiterates among Tunisian increased, since they were excluded from schools (Tarifa 1971: 150–151). As a result, Tunisians were treated as sec-

ond-class citizens in relation to Western citizens, who were privileged and had many advantages.

In fact, the colonial presence in Tunisia worsened the dynastic situation and created a social crisis. The Tunisians experienced difficult circumstances as penury was widespread among the population, and attempts were made by the protectorate to disrupt cohabitation in a society which had long known different cultures and communities. Nonetheless, Tunisians' cultural life contributed to enlivening their daily life.

### **The music scene in the first years of the French protectorate**

Tunisia's music tradition was a vital component of its cultural life and provided an escape from the state of disruption brought upon them by the French authorities. At the same time, the protectorate gave privileges to the foreign communities of Europe. This led to a split in musical life into two different patterns: the Western music tradition and the Tunisian music traditions. European communities improved the music spectacles performed in café halls and attempted to expand Western cultural life. Therefore, they established associations dedicated to Western culture for the purpose of bridging a network with European communities that resided within Tunisian society by organizing events such as music concerts/recitals and theater performances that were dedicated only to the European audience. The music scene observed a vibrant movement, from which emerged music ensembles/orchestras, instrument factories of Western musical instruments, and leading to the establishment of the first musical training institution in 1897, which is now the Conservatoire National de Tunis (Darmon 1951b: 62–66).

In parallel, Tunisians had their own musical life, which did not cease to animate their daily, albeit poor, life conditions. The musical life had two main music patterns: religious and secular, which took root mainly in the Andalusian music traditions that split into two principal branches— “Malouf al jad” (religious musical repertoire) and “Malouf al hazl” (secular musical repertoire) (Rezgui 1965:72–77). Tunisians got accustomed to heading to Sufi lodges, which played a central cultural role in moderating the musical traditions of the Tunisians. The “Zawia” (i.e. “Sufi”) lodges emerged as a vital spot where Tunisians started to conduct such religious rituals. They noticed a growth in musical activities where Tunisians assembled for em-

inent occasions in opposition to the French protectorate. Tunisian society saw an emergence of 12 different Sufi lodges including Chadouleya, Tijaneya, Issawiya, Azouzia, and Soulameya. The Sufi lodges witnessed an exuberant music movement, where music was a crucial factor in moderating the rituals conducted in each lodge, and which differed from one school to another (Davis 1996: 316). Besides, they were vital spots to host Tunisians' traditional ceremonies and feasts. At the same time, secular music traditions were timid compared to the Sufi lodges. Its followers were mainly Tunisian Jews, who were in a minority in the Muslim-majority Tunisia. Their music practices occurred mainly in private spots and had a small audience (Taieb 1982: 953–954).

To sum up, musical life in Tunisia witnessed significant traces of different music genres, which contributed to the music scene of the Tunisian society. Tunisians' music traditions did not disappear, although they were marginalized as compared to foreign communities' music activities. Still, there are many gaps in this history that an ethnomusicological approach could help fill. For example, little is known about the relationship between Western and Tunisian music practices, if there was some form of exchange or indirect transfers that influenced both sides. It would also be interesting to investigate whether this clear separation between Western and Tunisian music traditions led to a homogenization of music practices in Tunisian territory, diminishing its diversity.

## **A new form to evaluate Tunisian music**

The 20th century observed a turning point, which contributed to shedding light on Tunisians' musical life and allowing user to evaluate it from a different perspective. Scholars became interested in the Arab world, attempted to grasp Arab cultures through many narrative accounts and depicted the Arab world as a spot of exotic atmosphere. As a result, the Arab world witnessed a wave of scholars, researchers, and explorers, who aimed to survey the cultural life of the Arab societies. This tempted studies in different disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, history, and musicology, among others. In this context, the musical element is stated as a paradigm by studies conducted for grasping music as a component in Arab societies, and therefore, to bear witness to musical life.

Tunisian musical scholarship includes the name Rodolphe D'Erlanger, an Arab music connoisseur (1872–1932), who emerged as a leading figure with regards to studying the music of Tunisia and conducted a seminal study on Tunisian music. Indeed, D'Erlanger was a successor of the British-French bourgeoisie, who supported the Husainid state during the economic crisis and offered a loan to the dynasty. In 1910, D'Erlanger opted to sojourn to Tunisia and study the society's music traditions. D'Erlanger built a palace in the region of Sidi bou Said in Tunis City's northern suburbs, which is now Tunisia's Centre for Arab and Mediterranean Music with the National Sound Archive, and has observed the establishment of a workshop dedicated to improving the grasp on Tunisian music (D'Erlanger 1917: 91–95).

D'Erlanger established a new form to evaluate the Tunisian musical tradition. The fieldwork was proposed to study the musical life of Tunisian society in order to improve the perceptions held of it. The work dissected the music traditions in different regions in Tunisia, which included ethnographic fieldwork at the ground level to collect a repertoire of folk songs and old chants, and which was then followed up by data transcription. Tunisian music thus began to be researched by scholars in the musicology field through D'Erlanger's contributions, which played a pivotal role in providing testimony on the status of music in Tunisian society:

[D'Erlanger] published his first article in the *Revue Tunisienne* in 1917: "De la musique arabe en Tunisie". It is a long painful cry, the spleen of a bored man, the complaint of an individual who feels invested with a mission to accomplish. It is also a kind of working plan that the Baron set himself to fix (Poché 2001: 8; author's translation).

With this quote, D'Erlanger intended to diagnose the state of Tunisian music as painful and in need of aid. Hence, D'Erlanger created a network of connoisseurs, i.e. musicians, performers, "Cheikhs"—meaning a Tunisian music master—and Tunisian intellectuals among others, who planted a seed in the fieldwork. In addition, D'Erlanger attempted to improve the perception regarding Tunisian musical scholarship vis-à-vis the field of musicology by bridging the theory gap and supporting the study of music from non-Western cultures. His main aim was to find out the typical features of Tunisian traditional music, to document the Tunisian music repertoire and to transcribe it in scores, since they depended on oral transmission. Additionally,

D'Erlanger translated oeuvres of Arab music such as the treatise *Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir*, the Great Book of Music, written by the philosopher Al-Farabi, from the Arabic into the French (D'Erlanger 1930: 3–4), a work conducted with the assistance of Manoubi Snoussi (1901–1966), a Tunisian musicologist and historian (Sahhab 1997: 147).

To boot, D'Erlanger attempted to improve a transcription's additional phase in Tunisian music that marked the achievements of the music department of the military academy of Bardo: the 20th century transcription's paradigm performed by Ahmed Alwafi (1850–1921), a musician and composer of traditional Tunisia music (El Mahdi and Ka'ak 1982: 20–21). Ahmed Alwafi was tasked with collecting the musical repertoire on the ground and performing the musical transcription following the written tradition of Western music. In addition, D'Erlanger decided to discuss his experience with other scholars such as the British musicologist Henry George Pharmer (1882–1965), the French orientalist Cara de Vaux (1867–1953) and the Austrian ethnomusicologist Erich von Hornbostel (1877–1935), so as to get additional ideas in order to accomplish the project. D'Erlanger's name is recognized vis-à-vis contributions to Tunisia's music, for which he was given the title of baron. He also contributed to a collection of ethnographic fieldwork, realized in south Tunisia in 1929 and performed by the Tuareg community of the sub-Saharan region (Brandes 2000). This work became part of the collection of the Berliner Phonogram-Archive, mainly because of D'Erlanger's friendship with von Hornbostel, who was the head of the institution.

In this period, D'Erlanger planned to organize a summit that would bring the question of the musical state of Arab cultures to the forefront and pinpointed the argument of modernization vis-à-vis Arab music. This event was the Arab Music Congress in Cairo in 1932. D'Erlanger was not only a vital contributor to this discourse, taking part in the committee of the organization, but he also played a central role in assembling the members of the Tunisian delegation, who performed at the Arab music summit. However, he couldn't attend the congress due to his critical health status (Louati 1995). D'Erlanger wasn't only a leading figure in the field of Tunisian music but also was a man of vision whose work has become a fundamental instrument. Nevertheless, he was a foreigner in Tunisian culture; his fieldwork contribution brought the musical life in Tunisia into focus, there were regular concerts at his palace, and so he opened the possibility for other musicians to engage with the tradition and for musicologist to study it.

It would be interesting to follow up these studies and build ethnomusical research on Tunisian music from this tradition. One focus should be not only the figure of D'Erlanger, but also the content of the material he collected and archived in order to know more about the way musical traditions managed to survive in a period in which they were expressed only as subaltern culture.

### **The political and cultural challenges of the 1930s**

The thirties were a critical period in Tunisia owing to disturbing circumstances. Tunisian society witnessed a political tension which led to a national eminent movement, wherein a demand for a Tunisian autonomous state and sovereignty was put forward, signaling independence from France. Indeed, Tunisian intellectuals led the movement (Moore 1962: 465), and established the “neo-Doustour” party, the New Constitutional Liberal Party, to raise awareness in Tunisian society about their rights so as to gain independence. Therefore, Tunisian society witnessed the springtime of a vibrant cultural movement, which had stepped out of shadows. The party believed in a path of diplomacy to negotiate an independence treaty and also raised awareness among Tunisian about their indigenous culture as a national emblem, working to improve the notion of culture within the society. Musical life witnessed a springtime, as well; Tunisian music practices commenced to step out of the shadows. This contributed to giving Tunisian music a new value and status.

In fact, the cultural scene saw the establishment of the Rachidia, an artistic and cultural association specializing in Tunisian music, created on November 3, 1934, with the aim of preserving music traditions and emphasizing indigenous culture in society. In addition, the Rachidia played a central role in continuing the work of D'Erlanger and his collection of local music repertoires and their transcription, paying homage to him (Davis 1997: 2–4). The Rachidia hence inaugurated an arena among different music genres present in the society, a step which brought schools of different musical traditions together. Additionally, it transformed into a vital field to debate the status of Tunisian music vis-à-vis identity. The Rachidia committed to improving the work on musical heritage; however, the work didn't encompass the academic perspective and only focused on musical practices, establishing a teaching method in the Tunisian music repertoire for amateur musicians, with a sig-

nificant number of students. There, students could also learn Western instruments using the Western method.

On the other hand, the music scene was enriched with the Jewish migration, resulting in the formation of a community known as the Jews of Tripoli, Libya, referring to their roots. The Jews of Tripoli influenced Tunisian music, joining the larger groups of Tunisian Jews, who were eminent players and enlivened the musical life in Tunisia. Tunisian Jewish musicians played a central role in enriching traditional music practices, which was observed during their splendid and popular performances in musical circles. Tunisian Jewish musicians occupied a prominent position in Tunisian society and played a central role in moderating Tunisian customs and feasts, becoming the musicians most preferred by audiences to enliven their events (Jones 2012: 779).

To sum up, musical life in the 1930s witnessed an elevated status, after coming out of a shadowed state. Through new forms of valuing local musical traditions, new musical practices emerged. Tunisian musical traditions were rather timid, and were accustomed to close spots, such as Sufi lodges and private spots, but had now gained access to larger public spaces. The musical component encompassed the cultural movement, which played a central role in Tunisians' daily life. What is more, Tunisian music witnessed a reconciliation of the different music patterns in society, which depicted a cohabitation context beyond Tunisians' music tastes in order to shore up the emblematic Tunisian musical identity despite its diversity. Ethnomusicological research on this period would shed more light on how these different musical traditions coexisted and merged to form a national canon, revealing how musical exchanges in the transnational space of Tunisia constantly created new practices.

## Conclusion

This essay presented a review of historical studies on the period of the French protectorate in Tunisia, exploring the references made to musical practices during this time and attempting to point out the impacts of politics on Tunisian musical life. Revealing pivotal transitions in the musical life of Tunisia under the French protectorate, we identified four historical moments in which there were changes in musical practices. The first was the creation of the military academy with the music department, where music was written

in Western notation and performed by orchestras, and the creation of “Cafichanta” in the pre-colonial time. The second concerns the beginning of colonial time, an era in which music became a private practice, strongly related to religious contexts. The third is related to a seminal ethnomusicological account of Tunisian musical traditions around D’Erlanger, which were collected and transcribed following Western methods. The fourth was the new valorization of Tunisian music traditions in the independence movement around the Rachidia, in which music once again became a public practice. In all these moments, music was evaluated differently, leading to adjustments in its practices.

An ethnomusicological analysis of these periods would shed light on the ways music was made, performed, experienced and transformed. The different exchanges that took place in Tunisian territory still have to be investigated in depth. The relations between oriental and Western practices, the concrete exchanges occurring in Tunisian territory, the tensions between public and private spaces, written and oral traditions, and forbidden and privileged music practices compose a dense field for ethnomusicological research. Both musical practices in Tunisian territory and by Tunisians themselves reveal a diversity characteristic of transnational spaces, which blur borders between nations and cultures and construct them anew with new evaluation forms. All these aspects still represent a gap in the analysis of Tunisian music and offer some paths for further ethnomusicological reflection.

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