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Colonial Representations, Post-Colonial Aspirations

French Cultural Policy in the Final Decade of the Tunisian Protectorate

1946-1956

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ABSTRACT

Colonial Representations, Post-Colonial Aspirations

In his seminal critique of the colonial situation, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the Tunisian writer and philosopher, Albert Memmi, makes the following observation about the colonizer‟s projection of his cultural identity:

> The eulogizing of oneself and one‟s fellows, the repeated, even earnest, affirmation of the excellence of one‟s ways and institutions, one‟s cultural and technical superiority do not erase the fundamental condemnation which every colonialist carries within his heart….He will…call attention to the qualities of his native land—extolling them, exaggerating them—stressing its special traditions, its cultural originality. Thus, at the same time, he establishes his own share in that prosperous world, his natural tie to his homeland. Likewise, he is assured of the impossibility of the colonized sharing in its magnificence.[1]

Writing on the eve of Tunisian independence, Memmi recognized that the portrayal of the colonizer‟s culture played a crucial role in justifying his status

included attempts to reshape France‟s image as a “solicitous and accommodating empire.”[6]

Though actual changes in policy were limited, the redefinition of the colonial relationship under the French Union in 1946 marked the beginning of a gradual shift in France‟s understanding of its international role. In this new order, Tunisia and Morocco were designated as “associated states,” a phrase which appeared to

Shortly afterward, the escalating revolution in Algeria prompted the French to officially dissolve the Protectorate. Tunisia achieved full independence on March 20, 1956.

During this period, a veritable war of the arts was taking place as Tunisian artists, writers, and playwrights championed a "Tunisian cultural identity" closely linked to political nationalism.[11] The relatively small artistic and literary community of Tunisian Muslims maintained close ties to the Neo-Destour, echoing the party"s emphasis on reviving Arab-Islamic cultural traditions.[12] French authorities connected the intensification of Tunisian demands for independence to a growing hostility toward French language and culture in the Arabic-language press.[13] At the same time, the last decade of the Protectorate saw a sharp rise in the number of academic conferences, literary competitions, and artistic exhibitions sponsored by the Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Particularly after 1950, officials frequently touted such events for their value as *propagande française* [French propaganda] and as a form of opposition to Tunisian nationalism. With a firm sense of the challenges that nationalism posed to French influence in an independent Tunisia, organiza[(propag)-.onalignt Tunct

This study will examine these expositions, conferences, and competitions supported by the French government in Tunisia from 1946 to 1956 in an effort to understand the representation of the colonizer‟s cultural identity at the end of the colonial period. The following questions have guided my research: What was the image of French culture presented to the Tunisian public in the final decade of the Protectorate? In what ways did this image reflect attempts by Protectorate officials to adapt to the slow dismantling of the colonial state? How might the vision presented in these events reveal a shift in the understanding of French cultural identity and a changing sense of France‟s international role among Frenchmen in the Tunisia? What was the relationship between the depictions of French culture promoted in activities sponsored by colonial authorities and events that focused on so-called "Indigenous Arts" or Tunisia‟s Arab-Islamic heritage? The ultimate goal has been to understand the political dynamics behind the official representation of the colonizer‟s culture, that is to say, how this image created by the colonial state responded to changing political conditions (such as the Tunisian nationalist movement and the push for internal autonomy). More generally, this study addresses the coherent (if at times contradictory) discourse on what it meant to be culturally French in the colonies and what this discourse tells us about the nature of French colonialism, particularly once decolonization appeared on the horizon.

In adopting a workable definition of "culture," it is necessary to distinguish between "culture" in the unconscious and lived sense and "Culture" as a construct, a project explicitly employed for political purposes. In order to navigate between these two related meanings, let us begin by considering two understandings of culture, one proposed by Clifford Geertz in his *The Interpretation of Culture* and the other by Edward

Saïd in *Culture and Imperialism.* Outlining both a definition of and an approach to analyzing culture, Geertz writes:

> The concept of culture I espouse…is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative science in search of meaning. [16]

A historical approach based on Geertz‟s conception should focus on deriving meaning from the ways in which individuals make sense of certain events and actions in addition to the events and actions themselves. Addressing the question of whether we are to consider culture a form of practice or the mental framework which governs that practice Geertz points out:

> Once human behavior is seen as symbolic action—action which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies—the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses sense.[17]

A central focus of this project will be examining how members of the Bureau of Public Instruction were in the unique position of choosing which elements of metropolitan culture would be presented to the Tunisian public and of formulating a vision of French culture as part of a post-colonial project. This vision nevertheless constituted a system of symbols, a relatively coherent text that can be analyzed and interpreted. Geertz‟s description of culture as "webs of significance" as well as his method of isolating specific elements within this web and examining their connections and relationships can be applied to this study of the construction of French culture in colonial discourse. Since the object of this study is not metropolitan French culture itself, but rather how it was

[16] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.
[17] Ibid., 10.

represented, reflected, and reinterpreted in the discourse produced by Protectorate

In the Tunisian Protectorate, the phrase "cultural activities" referred to events such as artistic expositions, academic conferences, and literary competitions organized by a variety of associations which received backing from the colonial administration in Tunisia. By examining in detail these cultural activities, sponsored primarily by the Bureau of Public Instruction in the decade before independence, I will argue that through such events the government of the resident general sought to propagate and promote a particular image of French culture among Tunisian elites with the intention of securing a dominant position for French art, language and literature in a post-colonial Tunisia. This image, which presented French culture as both unified and diverse, continuous and dynamic, universal and superior emerged principally as a response to the new political realities created by the growing strength of Tunisian nationalism. While an implicit cultural policy that involved a consciously political projection of French arts, language, and literature had existed since the foundation of the Tunisian Protectorate, the increasing sense that direct French political control in the colony was coming to an end changed the frame of reference and the goals of this policy. The period after 1946 until the end of the Protectorate in 1956 saw an intensification of cultural activities, now targeted explicitly at an elite Tunisian audience and carried out with the intention of shaping the post-colonial relationship between the two nations.[21] Many of these elites, a majority of whom had passed through the French educational system, participated in the nationalist

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to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the word and everything that inhabits it." Based on this definition, the representations of French culture found in records of expositions, conferences, and prizes cannot be considered hegemonic in the Tunisian context. They were by no means accepted by the majority of the Tunisian population. Even thoroughly assimilated Tunisian elites as a group, while a few may have shared the prejudices of French officials regarding culture, did not adopt the entire "cultural field" of the colonizing minority. Ibid., 23.

[21] The purpose of this study is not, however, to determine how successful French authorities ultimately were at preserving the status of French culture in the former colony. The goal is rather to understand how the end of colonialism in Tunisia and by extension the end of colonialism in general brought to the forefront the question of the lasting cultural dominance of the soon-to-be former colonizer.

movement and would move to occupy leadership positions formerly held by the French after independence.[22] Official concern over French culture‟s role in an autonomous Tunisia reflected a shifting understanding of French identity and France‟s position as a rapidly disintegrating empire during the period following the Second World War. On one level, preserving the status of French language and arts in former colonies was part of a strategy to maintain cultural links to the new national bourgeoisie, creating a channel through which to exert political and economic influence. [23] More profoundly, however, assuring this privileged position for French civilization in areas where direct political control was being curtailed or abandoned altogether was a process directly related to Frenchmen‟s negotiation of their own cultural identity in relation the rest of the world during the post-

colonies after independence. At the same time, the preservation of French culture‟s dominant status in Tunisia was a question of French national prestige. For colonial officials, continuing to claim the universality and international importance of French civilization depended in large part on the future of French influence in former colonies. Members of the colonial government and others involved in the Regency‟s cultural policy thus projected a particular image of their own cultural identity, formed by the colonial context and in reference to their hopes for the post-colonial future.

In addition, the discourse on the superiority of French civilization as reflected in the activities of the Bureau was developed in opposition to local culture. For example, exhibitions featuring artistic production that corresponded to the Western definition of fine arts were presented differently from expositions of Tunisian arts and crafts, the latter assigned a reduced, primarily economic role in the cultural life of the Regency. The colonial government celebrated contemporary Tunisian artists, writers, and performers when and only when their works embraced the values and language of the colonizer.[24] They largely ignored or criticized the significant number of young Tunisian artists becoming increasingly active in the post-war period who sought to go beyond Western models, often drawing inspiration from traditional North African styles and themes. It is then essential to consider how local artistic production served as an oppositional point of reference for defining French culture in the colonial context.

[24] This practice recalls Herman Lebovics discussion of "wrapping" in the context of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. According to Lebovics, "wrapping native cultures within the high culture of European France…set the aesthetic and political guidelines for the creation of an imperial culture, one neither purely metropolitan French nor devoid of nativeness." In the Tunisian context, wrapping the artistic production of local artists and writers meant relating their works to French models. This assured that the works of these Tunisians did not present a threat to the cultural hierarchies of the colonial situation. Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 57.

By privileging particular artistic and literary styles in specific contexts, culture activities contributed to the construction of a multi-faceted image of French political power. [25] For example, exhibitions featuring French cubist paintings might suggest the dynamic and modern character of French culture. In a different context, a more classical, academic style of painting elicited references to French *grandeur* or the eternal, unified nature of the French *génie*. Representations of different styles created an adaptable discourse on French cultural superiority and justified the need for French influence in an independent Tunisia.[26] However, in discussing this discourse, it is also necessary to define concepts such as universality, superiority, dynamism, continuity, unity, and diversity as they related the image of French culture presented in the Regency. Borrowing from a long tradition of French thought linking the ideals of the Enlightenment to the colonial project, public events in Tunisia characterized French culture as *universal* in the sense that it was both theoretheoh theorethheitheo

states.[27] Portraying French culture as *dynamic* meant highlighting its adaptability to the changing conditions of the modern world as well as its emphasis on scientific and technological advancement. This dynamism did not preclude references to a *continuous* national cultural tradition which had its roots in the Middle Ages with the emergence of the French nation itself. The term *diverse* suggested that a variety of styles, schools, techniques, and themes characterized French cultural production, but these were nonetheless *unified* by a more abstract set of concepts and values (those belonging to the French *genie*) such as a devotion to progress or a notion formal beauty. In post-WWII Tunisia, these aspects combined to create a multi-faceted image of French power. This colonial expression of cultural identity thus served the political needs of the Protectorate administration while revealing officials‟ hopes regarding France‟s post-colonial stature.

This study will focus primarily on artistic exposition, conferences, and prizes rather than cinema, musical performances, museums or other activities, which because of their association with fine arts also fell under the authority of the Bureau. While these other types of events undoubtedly contained portrayals of French cultural identity, the Bureau itself did not explicitly acknowledge their value as cultural propaganda and with the exception of cinema does not appear to have concentrated on attracting Tunisian audiences. Protectorate officials did express concern with maintaining French films‟ share of the Tunisian market in light of competition not only from the growing Egyptian film industry but more importantly from American films.[28] This concern, however, was

[27] As Gary Wilder has pointed out, "intersecting national and colonial politics were shaped by an underlying antimony between universality and particularity," in the French empire. The interplay between these two contradictory concepts is one of the defining features of French colonial discourse. Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19.

[28] Marc Blancpain to Remond, Feb. 11, 1948, Sous-dossier 2, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

for the most part economically motivated. Musical performances organized in Tunis served mainly to entertain the European population, and officials typically did not consider concerts a form of cultural propaganda. There are few references either to Muslim attendance or to efforts at drawing a larger number of Tunisian elites to concerts in the Regency.

To understand how the promotion of French culture in the colony reflected larger concerns about France‟s post-war role as a diminished world power, we must also consider the relationship between the Regency‟s policy and attempts to propagate French language and culture internationally. In July 1950, the Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d‟Instuts outlined France‟s basic international aims with regard to culture. The officials attending came to the conclusion that "the War has provoked a general receding of French culture abroad" and that in many countries members of the ruling class with affinities for this culture had fallen out of power.[29] According to the attendees, the most viable strategy for combating this trend was to concentrate attention on new elites using the Alliance Française and centers for cultural diffusion as intermediaries.[30] The overarching principal governing policy in Mexico as well as Egypt and Turkey was to encourage the use of French as a

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policy was the emerging notion that organizations responsible for the promotion of French language and culture should address local issues in the countries where they

Gosnell in his study of the attempted *francisation* of Algeria emphasized how

was a conceivable possibility as early as the late 1940‟s, the civilian government in Algeria flatly rejected the notion that an integral part of France might one day become in independent Muslim nation. Taking a far more moderate stance, Protectorate officials openly discussed and took measures to shape the post-colonial relationship between France and Tunisia. In comparison to the situation in Morocco, the primary differences in Tunisia were in the size and influence of the Muslim elite *de culture française.* Yahia

incorporate traditional religious education for Muslims and Jews into the public education system.[43] Modern Qur‟anic schools eventually emerged as the state-supervised alternative to the *kuttabs* (traditional Qur‟anic schools), which nevertheless continued to operate as private institutions. The Franco-Arab school soon became the principal form of state-sponsored, primary education. As the name implies, these were bilingual institutions with French curricula that included courses on Islamic and North African History.

With the strengthening of a *colon* lobby, determined to keep power in the hands of Tunisia‟s European population, around the turn of the century, the government-sponsored educational system became gradually less accessible for Muslims, frequently pushing Tunisian students from non-elite families into technical schools.[44] Tunisia‟s rapid demographic expansion following WWI meant that the Bureau‟s size and importance would increase steadily during the interwar period. A larger budget and the building of new schools and professional centers reflected in particular the growing importance of technical education to the Protectorate‟s economic policy in the colony. Before WWII, the Bureau‟s primary responsibilities were in the domain of education with particular attention given to the role of instruction in economic development. The post-war Protectorate witnessed an expansion of the education system while the Bureau simultaneously intensified its oversight of cultural associations in the Regency. In 1950 alone, the Bureau opened twenty five new public institutions bringing the total number in the Protectorate to 343 Franco-Arab primary schools and 232 French primary schools (exact copies of metropolitan institutions attended overwhelmingly by Europeans and a

[43] Perkins, 26.
[44] Ibid., 67.

well as the general public. With its emphasis on transmitting language, values, concepts, and culture to students, the Protectorate‟s educational system was designed to spread the French *génie* to Tunisia‟s upper classes. However, the goals of educational policy from 1946 to 1956 reflected

budget had swelled to nearly three billion francs.[51] In addition, while in 1945, funding set apart for public education and fine arts constituted only 8.95% of the total budget, in 1951 the Bureau‟s share had grown to 13.78%.[52] These increases reflected the steadily mounting support for academic conferences, artistic exhibitions, and literary prizes which received subventions from the Regency‟s government.

During this period and particularly after 1948, Protectorate officials began to take a greater and more direct responsibility for the representation of French culture in the public space than had been the case in previous decades. Since the increasingly vocal anti-colonial press had transformed the question of Tunisia‟s cultural orientation into a subject of public debate, Protectorate officials realized the need to counter nationalists‟ criticism of French culture outside of the closed environment of the classroom. The Bureau‟s goal to "*defend* French language and culture" through "all possible means of expressing French thought" was a development of this period and suggested that officials now understood the importance of countering nationalist attacks.[53] While primary and secondary education remained the focus of the Bureau during the period following World War II in terms of the concentration of financial resources, increasing attention was given to promoting cultural events that took place outside of s

Another of the Bureau‟s new responsibilities during the post-war era was to address what were known as the “cultural problems” existing in Tunisia at the time. This phrase referred primarily to what one Protectorate official described in a 1950 letter as the desire of nationalist-leaning Tunisian elites “to develop a national culture…Arabization programs, [and] the spread of modern Qur‟anic schools.”[57] This tendency represented a break from earlier incarnations of Tunisian nationalism such as the Young Tunisians in the early twentieth century who emphasized the need to work within the French educational system to obtain the skills and expertise necessary to modernize the country.[58] In the group‟s newspaper *Le Tunisien*, articles identified the cultural dilemma facing Tunisians as a question of reconciling modern Western culture with traditional Arab-Islamic culture.[59] By the 1930‟s and particularly after WWII, however, nationalist parties such as the Neo-Destour had become more vocal in their identification with Arab-Islamic culture. The party‟s mouthpiece, *L'Action*, a French-language newspaper founded by a young Habib Bourguiba, criticized French efforts to stamp out traditional ways of life and portrayed the Neo-Destour as the defender of Tunisia‟s Arab-Islamic heritage.[60] These challenges to the colonial state‟s cultural policy from the nationalist movement help to explain the growing number of expositions and conferences as well as the new understanding of their political role.

The increased attention payed to cultural events in the post-war period also reflected a realization on the part of Protectorate officials who began to treat the possibilityrate offi on the pa8265(y)20u[(si80Ben4 Tc[(to)] TJET5)-6(ga)4(n to t)-3(re)7ovemon

to the Rector of the University of Paris in 1950, the Director of Public Instruction, recognized that the desire of Tunisian elites to create a "national culture" constituted the main threat to "the future of French culture in Tunisia."[61] In the likely event that Tunisia would soon become independent, the Director believed that, "it would be necessary to firmly plant the seeds of the French language in this country, to accustom [the people] to French concepts."[62] In an example of this policy, one official in Sfax encouraged French professors to give literary conferences at a local Muslim association know for its political radicalism. In this case, the *contrôleur* saw defending French culture as a w1.18 0464 32/fl

in the post-war international order, forced such officials to seriously consider the possibility of independence and to develop strategies for ensuring some form of dominance in a post-colonial future. In other words, the architects of the Protectorate‟s cultural policy began to envision the type of post-colonial relationship that they desired as well as to take steps to assure the possibility of this vision. After 1954, even as the newly formed Tunisian administration took over nearly all domestic affairs, the French government tried to maintain some direct control over education and cultural activities through the Mission Culturelle et Universitaire de la France en Tunisie.[66] During the transitional period of internal autonomy from 1954 to 1956, the Mission Culturelle (jointly funded by the French and Tunisian governments) continued

concerts, and expositions, working to bring artists and academics with international reputations to the Protectorate.[70]

Early in his term, Paye also acknowledged the likelihood that Tunisian independence was fast approaching and the importance of assuring France‟s cultural role in the future nation. Following his departure from Tunisia, Paye published a number of academic studies such as "Physiognomy of Moroccan Teaching at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" and "France‟s Hopes for the Instruction and Education of the African Citizen." The latter encouraged African former colonies to continue to use French curricula and identified the "cultural formation of the citizenry" as a primary developmental concern for these new nations.[71] Through the direct and indirect influence of the Bureau, Paye‟s understanding of France‟s long-term cultural goals in the colonies shaped the character of expositions, conferences, and prizes in the Regency during the Protectorate‟s final years.

Another important figure of the Bureau‟s last decade, Abed Mzali, the sub-director of public instruction under both Gaston and Paye, was a professor of Arabic literature who would play an important role in the negotiation of the post-independence cultural convention between France and Tunisia.[72] Mzali would also go on to serve in the newly independent nation‟s Ministry of Education. While his actual position in the Bureau involved only limited decision-making, Mzali had a hand in drafting a number of influential policy statements issued during this period.

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[70] Lucien Paye to Rouillon, Feb. 15, 1951, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[71] Lucien Paye, "France's Hopes for the Instruction and Education of the African Citizen," trans. Joel A. Hunt, *The Phi Delta Kappan* 41, no. 4 (Jan. 1960): 186-188.
[72] Mokhtar Ayachi, *Ecoles et société en Tunisie, 1930-1958* (Tunis: Centres de CERES, 2003), 100.

Each of these officials held significant sway in deciding which expositions and conferences would be allowed to take place in Tunisia and which would be financially encouraged. As long-term residents of the colonies, Paye and Gaston betrayed a decidedly colonialist viewpoint in their selection events and their discussions of the significance of cultural propaganda. A Tunisian national and an expert in Arabic literature, Mzali served an intermediary role in the Bureau. After independence he would go on to champion a Tunisian national culture, promoting the very ideology he had helped oppose during the Protectorate.

In 1952, the French Fine Arts Under-Secretary of State announced a plan to send an envoy, André David, to Tunisia and Morocco to study cultural activities, offer suggestions, and disperse funding for new cultural projects.[73] Officials in the Bureau of Public Instruction openly regretted the metropolitan government‟s treading on their prerogative. Their reactions to David‟s proposed voyage revealed how essential a cultural policy designed by the colonial administration was the larger aims of the Tunisian Protectorate. Defending the Bureau‟s territory, Resident General Jean de Hauteclocque reversed his early enthusiasm for the project, reportedly due to assertions that the Regency‟s cultural apparatus was already functioning at full capacity.[74] According to one of the Resident General‟s aids, the Alliance Française of Tunis held on average two academic conferences per week, and additional conferences were sponsored throughout the year by the Bureau through associations like “Jeunesses Musicales.”[75]

The size of the Tunisian public for such events apparently did not justify David‟s mission, which would have doubled the Bureau‟s functions. As the debate continued, however, it became clear that the Resident General sought to avoid above all the usurping of the Bureau of Public Instruction‟s authority by attempts of the metropolitan French government to intervene in the Regency cultural policy. Citing the Under-Secretary‟s hesitation to work through "existing local cultural institutions," (such as the Alliance Française of Tunis) de Hauteclocque otherwise welcomed increased financial support from the metropole, which would allow for a continued expansion of the Regency‟s cultural apparatus, as long as this apparatus remained under the Bureau‟s control.[76] The Resident General‟s intervention to protect the Bureau‟s monopoly of cultural events indicates the extent to which these activities were incorporated into local colonial policy. The representation of French culture was too essential a feature of the colonial government‟s plans for the Tunisian future to be left in the hands of an outside group, even if this group was backed by the French state. De Hauteclocque‟s decision to resist metropolitan interference sent a clear message to cultural associations inside and outside of the Protectorate. During colonialism‟s slow unraveling in Tunisia, the official right to represent France‟s cultural patrimony belonged solely

When the colonialist bourgeoisie realizes that it is impossible to maintain its domination over the colonies, it decides to wage a rearguard campaign in the fields of culture, values, and technology, etc.[77]

Fanon realized that under colonialism the loss of one form of dominance sparked attempts to salvage other forms. The fact that he places this practice in "the period of Liberation" reveals that he considers it part of the decolonization process. In Tunisia, conferences put on by a variety of government-sponsored cultural associations represented one of the central means that the Bureau used to wage its own "rearguard campaign." During the post-WWII period as Tunisian nationalists demanded greater autonomy, members of the colonial administration expressed a great deal of concern over the value of such events as "cultural propaganda" and over their potential appeal to Muslim notables. In a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schumann, the Resident General Louis Periller discussed the possibility of financially backing a recently proposed concert given by the blind pianist, Jacques Mary.[78] The Resident General justified declining direct financial support to such an event, referring to the fact that "our

Française as part of attempts to encourage "French propaganda and Franco-Tunisian rapprochement."[80] In a single year, government aid accorded to the Alliance Française in Tunis rose from 18,000 francs to 300,000 francs, an increase paid for in part by the Algeria Lottery.[81] The connection between the colonial government and the AF was direct enough for the French administration to recognize the organization as a "public utility, whose goal is to spread the love for the French language and culture and at the same time to create links of mutual respect between French and Muslim intellectuals."[82] Others within the organization understood the AF‟s role in broader, more spiritual terms. As Maitre Eyquem, the president of the association, observed, "the Alliance Française in Tunisia…is no more or less than the alliance of the French soul with the Tunisian soul and of French civilization with Muslim civilization."[83] Members of the AF purportedly came from "Tunis‟s most fortunate *milieux*" and included large numbers of young teachers employed by the Bureau.[84] The AF also competed for an upper class Tunisian audience with other associations in the Regency such as the Alliance Littéraire de la Jeunesse Tunisienne made up of students at the Great Mosque in Tunis, the Association de Culture et d‟Entraide Scolaire, and El Asria. Many of these Tunisian-led groups maintained close ties with political nationalism; there officers were commonly members of the Neo-Destour party. Competition between the AF and these Muslim-run cultural organizations thus took on a political dimension. Drawing elite Tunisians to government-

[80] Lucien Paye to Jean Mons, Feb. 28, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[81] The Directeur des Finances en Tunisie to Charles Mast, Aug. 2, 1946, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[82] M. Eyquem to Levy Lebhar, Octobre 24, 1946, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[83] "Le But de l‟Alliance Française: servir : discours de M. Eyquem à la récpetion du Résident Général," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 23, 1953.
[84] Jean Mons to Robert Schumann, Feb. 28, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

sponsored events represented a means of counteracting their exposure to political nationalism. Other groups such as the Société Dante Alighieri, an organization founded to promote Italian language and culture and funded by the Italian Consulate, mounted conferences and expositions similar to those taking place at the AF.[85] Unlike the AF, such associations (who were not involved i

library and exposition spaces.[88] Sections of the center were decorated with floor mosaics, murals, and French and Tunisian flags.[89] These embellishments supposedly added "a certain indispensible architectural character to the representation of Alliance Française in Tunisia" by incorporating styles and motifs suggestive of a Tunisian influence.[90] By all accounts, the new AF building was meant to reflect the position of French culture in the colony, as not only particular and superior but also universal and therefore inclusive of local influences.[91] The restaurant at the Alliance Française of Tunis was a gathering places for European and Tunisian elites of the city alike. One incident at the restaurant involving a Tunisian delegate, M. Djaballah illustrated the types of tensions existing within the Regency‟s associations involved in promoting French culture. Asked by one of the establishment‟s waiters to present an invitation card, a demand not typically made of the restaurants European patrons, Djaballah reportedly retorted that "the Alliance Française was created to spread French thought. And yet, it seems to me that they refuse this thought precisely to those who are in need of it."[92] Djaballah‟s remark reflected the situation of many Tunisian elites involved in the Regency‟s associations who were expected celebrate French culture but not as equal partners.

In Tunis the AF‟s primary activity was the organization of conferences typically open to the public. While a substantial number of these addressed practical or explicitly

[88] Letter, Jean Mons to Robert Schumann, Feb. 28, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[89] Untitled report on the Alliance Française of Tunis, May 19, 1959, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[90] Joss Ellul to Maître Eyquem, Jan. 13, 1948, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[91] For a discussion of how the political dynamics of French imperialism were aesthetically inscribed in a blend of modern French and local architectural styles see Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[92]Note from the Cabinet Civil,

progressive reduction of French influence" in Tunisia as a result of nationalist encroachment.[98] France"s reputation, tarnished by surrender during WWII, could (organizers hoped)0t3(g)10(a)4(niz)-7(e)4(rs)7

Belles Lettres Arabs centered on "Contemporary French Poetry."[103] Highlighting the progressive, humanistic aspects of French modernism, the speaker, André Rousseaux, considered how the works of Paul Eluard, Saint John Perse, René Char, and Henri Michaux reflected a "mission…to establish a more intense communication between men."[104] Grouping together the works of disparate poets, Rousseaux spoke of all contemporary French poetry as sharing this same "mission." He asserted that their literary production "is not poetry in retreat. It is dedicated to the great renovation of the world, which is today a necessity….It [contemporary French poetry] announces this renaissance that it

issue of morality in contemporary French literature addressing the fascination with the immoral in the works of Proust and Gide, the glorification of heroism by Saint-Exupéry and Monterlant, and the importance of total acceptance among the existentialists.[110] Picon portrayed a diverse group of French authors writing over the course of the past half century as a part of continuous process of development, a unified movement taking place in "stages."[111] This notion that all literature in French constituted a constantly evolving whole was an essential part of the image of French culture presented to elite Muslim audiences. Once again, this trait suggested the essential unity of the French

"visionary" within the French literary tradition and drew large crowds to the AF.[113] These academics approached the question of Balzac‟s legacy by emphasizing his contributions as the father of French realism in shaping the national literary tradition. The festival also included iconographic material, portraits of the writer, and collections of his works.[114] Another lecture by Maurice Garçon, a French lawyer, novelist, and historian elected to the Academie Française in 1946, on "the history of melodrama" concentrated on the new genre‟s role as an expression of the Revolutionary period and a bridge between classicism and the romantic tragedy.[115] Events in the Regency, tended to highlight the works of individual authors or particular movements as be

the French in the colonial relationship. The notion of an existing canon, a diverse collection of writers and poets who somehow came to represent French literary production and the nation itself took on a unique importance in the Tunisian context. Numerous studies of the formation of literary canons during periods of nation-building have revealed that defining canonicity plays a role in the construction of national identity.[116] In the French context, Margret Cohen and Carolyn Dever discuss how the definition of a French literary canon in the late eighteenth century contributed to the "Revolutionary-Napoleonic invention of modern cultural nationalism."[117] Canonical literacy history was intended to aid in the "cultural education of the citizen" and to

self-doubt and uncertainty that preoccupied Frenchmen in the immediate aftermath of WWII.[123] In the post-war Protectorate, Tharaud‟s affirmation that French literary production assured national greatness took on a different meaning than in the metropole. His statement suggested not only the importance of national pride in a country shaken by wartime defeats, but also France‟s fitness to rule her empire in spite of growing international and internal criticism of imperialism. Without fail, the arrival of an *immortel* on Tunisian soil generated a great deal of political fan-fare, attracting the attention of the highest ranking members of the colonial government. For example, the audience of a 1948 presentation given by the academician Emile Henriot on Flaubert, "the uncontested master of French prose," included M. de la Chauvinière the plenipotentiary Minister, the wife of then Resident General Jean Mons, and other leading personalities of the Regency.[124] During this period, public celebrations of French cultural identity embodied by members of the Academie Française remained linked to the idea of the nation and legitimatized France‟s role in the colony at a time when her future position and influence in Tunisia were in question.

Perhaps ironically, France‟s recent war experience was another popular topic for conference speakers who incorporated martial themes into discussions of literature. References to the war invoked the unifying values of patriotism and shared struggle in a context where Protectorate officials sought to inspire loyalty among colonial subjects. In a conference entitled "Writers in Combat," Pierre Paraf, himself an author and member of the Resistance, explained how active patriotism and the experience of war helped shape

[123] Ibid.
[124] "A l‟Alliance Française M. Emile Henriot parle de Gustave Flaubert," *La Dépêche Tunisienne,* Dec. 14, 1948.

French literary production.[125] Another French author and resistance fighter, Pierre Nord, otherwise known as Colonel Brouillard (Colonel Fog), held a conference at the AF entitled "The Adventure Novel to the Realities of War." Praising war adventure literature written in the aftermath of the Second World War, Nord claimed that such novels "do not destroy households" and "always show the true face of France, a country of efficient intelligence."[126] These conferences dramatized the war experience linking it to France‟s literary heritage. By establishing the connection between verbal art and patriotic struggle, these events also sought to capitalize on the shared memory of French and Tunisian soldiers, brandishing themes of self-sacrifice and loyalty to the mother country. At the same time, these conferences provided opportunities for speakers to suggest France‟s willingness and capacity to

these entitled “Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*” is representative of the types of academic events held in the Protectorate during this period. According to an issue of *Tunisie-France* the conference speaker “highlighted above all the grandeur of the work, the grandiloquence of its *prospectus*, the perseverance and enthusiasm of its promoters, intellectuals, and artists.”[127] This conference followed to a large degree the standard interpretation of the *Encyclopédie*"s importance as a foundational text for compiling the values of the Enlightenment. According to the speaker, the collection of these tomes constituted both a “moment in our [French] intellectual history” and a “crisis of human thought.”[128] Highlighting the *Encyclopédie's* status as a particularly French project served to bridge the gap between the universal and particular representation of French culture by associating the values of universal humanism with the specific historical, intellectual, and political context of 18th

students, was an example of how conferences connected topics relating to North African or Arab Islamic culture to the overall vision and values of the French

Later, citing Ibn Khaldoun‟s interest in the economic life of the country, he referred to him as "a good communist."[136] This treatment of singular figures associated with Tunisia‟s Arab-Islamic heritage served the interests of Protectorate officials in a number of ways. On one level, making Muslim thinkers from the classical period the subject of academic conferences was part of a strategy to appeal to the tastes of Muslim elites. At the same time, these conferences, even those sponsored by Tunisian-led organizations, portrayed these figures through a Western lens, identifying their importance primarily in relation to Western thought and values. Finally, by focusing on works from Islam‟s Golden Age, these conferences relegated Arab-Islamic cultural achievements to the distant past. A lecture given by Robert Montagne in 1948 on Bedouin poetry functioned in a similar way. Montagne mentioned the fact that these nomadic tribes in North Africa, generally considered "barbarians," were indeed "ignorant of the arts" with the exception of oral poetry.[137] He emphasized above all the social function of nomadic epic poetry speaking more in the mode of an anthropologist than a literary critic. Still, a large number of Tunisian Muslims apparently attended and applauded Montagne‟s presentation.[138]

Speaking at the 1951 inauguration of the Alliance Française‟s new center, the organization‟s president, Georges Duhamel made a point of demonstrating that "our intellectuals, our Arabists are highly thought of by the Islamic literati. They passionately love the object of their studies; it is the French who have defended with the greatest

[136] Ibid.
[137] "A l‟Alliance Française: Une Conférence du Professeur Montagne sur la Poésie Bédouine," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 14, 1948.
[138] Ibid.

warmth and the most intransigence, the cult of Arabic literature."[139] Duhamel, a celebrated French writer and poet devoted to the Alliance"s cause of spreading French civilization, went on to propose that French serve as "the second language of Islam"

official objective of the prize commission was always to identify and recognize literary and academic talent, the particular propaganda value of the Prix de Carthage depended on a selected work‟s ability to address topics of relevant to Tunisia through a lens based on French values and culture. Submissions which did not contain some reflection on the nature of the Tunisian, North African, or so-called Oriental experience went largely ignored. For example, one year‟s jury criticized *Sous le ciel de Tunis,* by Olivier Toreau for presenting no particularly North African qualities aside from the fact that the story happened to take place in Tunis.[146] The novel was described as lacking "a local and oriental character," which would have otherwise justified Toreau‟s selection.[147] The prize commission sought out more than a superficial engagement with North African themes in the literary and academic works they considered. That said, assuring that French culture served as the dominant framework for an author‟s work remained essential. The prize encouraged intellectual or literary works that mediated between French and local culture, while the perspective, values and expression of this production remained thoroughly French. As a result, the prize commission headed by the Director of Public Instruction reinforced the image of French civilization as universal and inclusive.

In 1951 and 1952, Abd al-Majid Tlatli and Albert Memmi respectively became the first two Tunisian nationals to be awarded the prize. While Tlatli, the first Muslim recipient of the Prix de Carthage, wrote florid verse celebrating Tunisia‟s Carthaginian past and claimed to believe firmly in the vitality of the civilizing mission, Memmi openly contradicted much of the Bureau‟s discourse on French culture in his autobiographical novel *La Statue de Sel.* The prize commission singled out these two Tunisian literary

[146] Notes of the Jury of the Prix de Carthage, 1945, Article 2081, Tunisie Premier Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.
[147] Ibid.

figures at a time when opposition to colonial rule had led to the outbreak of violence across the country. Their selection compels us to consider the implications of the Bureau‟s supporting artists and writers of Tunisian origin whose primary interests lay within the Regency.

The following is an excerpt from a poem by Abd al-Majid Tlatli, entitled “Tunis, Rhythm of Africa” from the volume *On the Ashes of Carthage*:

Architecture de génie
Scintillant sourire des masses et des races;
Synagogues, églises, mosquées!

Two aspects of Tlatli‟s letter in particular make clear why members of French colonial government who sat on the Prix de Carthage‟s jury singled him out as an ideal candidate. First of all, his aspirations to enter the ranks of metropolitan French poets and his “love” for the French language illustrate an acceptance of the cultural hierarchies that Protectorate officials were interested in preserving in the face of challenges from Tunisian nationalists. While in the excerpt above, he speaks of a “fraternity” between the inhabitants of the colony, in his letter Tlatli implicitly acknowledges French culture with its basis in universalism and humanism as the model. He thus supported the view of a colonial state in Tunisia which regarded French culture as categorically superior to Arab-Islamic.

Secondly, his affirmation of France‟s colonial project came at time when the vitality of the civilizing mission had been called into question in the context of burgeoning nationalist movements throughout the uœ l

Politically innocuous and grounded in a French literary tradition, Tlatli‟s work exemplified the cultural relationship envisioned by Protectorate officials. He acknowledged French culture as his model and adopted French language and values in his poetry.

Albert Memmi‟s selection, however, demands a more nuanced interpretation. A Tunisian Jew from modest origins, Memmi had attended the Lycée Carnot in Tunis where he would go on to teach in 1953. His first novel, the semi-autobiographical *La*

encouraged by colonial authorities claims the life of a Jewish friend, Alexandre concludes that "European philosophers construct the most rigorous and virtuous moral systems and politicians, educated by these same professors, foment assassinations as a means of governing."[154] This critique of the fundamental contradiction between the images of a universal culture presented to colonial subjects and the brutal realities of French rule reflect a challenge to the discourse on French culture promoted by Protectorate officials.

Understanding why then the commission awarded Memmi a prestigious literary prize during a period of particular tension between Tunisian nationalists and the colonial state requires a degree of speculation. In an unsigned note marked "confidential," one member of the Bureau provided an account of a public debate that Memmi held at the Lycée Carnot on the subject of his newly released novel.[155] The event was sponsored by the Université Nouvelle and attended by more than eight hundred individuals among them "numerous members of the Tunisian Communist Party and „progressive‟ intellectuals."[156] Introducing Memmi‟s work to the audience, a philosophy professor, M. Chatelet, praised the *Statue de Sel* for its unveiling of many of the country‟s prevalent economic and social problems. Another philosophy professor and member of the Communist Party, Paul Sebag then spoke, criticizing Memmi‟s novel for its lack of a coherent ideological message to "orient the youth and give them hope in the future."[157] Indeed, the fact that Memmi avoided aligning himself with a specific political project

[154] Ibid., 290.
[155]Note from the Cabinet Civil, "Conférence à l‟Université Nouvelle," May 21, 1953, Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

Representing French Artistic Production: Colonial Fine Arts, Post-War Orientalism, and the Role Indigenous

Herman Lebovics in his study of the tensions and debates relating to French identity in early 1900‟s, has pointed out that:

> French political practice interpreted the logic of the nation-state as requiring that political boundaries approximate cultural ones, or more precisely, that all of the nation that counted, that is participated in public life, share a national culture….Conversely, cultural concerns such as language, art styles, and ways of living, indeed, even what was credited as common sense, had political weight and meaning.[160]

In the colonial context this same practice of requiring that political boundaries resemble cultural ones, can be applied to the approach of the French administration to the cultural education of Tunisian notables. Muslim elites, who had limited influence under the Protectorate, gradually gained more and more political sway as colonialism neared its end in Tunisia. Their growing power proved less threatening to colonial officials if these elites appeared to share the same cultural orbit. In this scenario with local, French-educated elites in control, the politico-cultural boundaries of the Protectorate would remain intact. Muslim notables‟ shared cultural affinities with the French then appeared as the basis of a new political relationship. This quotation from Lebovics also highlights how the representation of a unified and unique national culture became essential to French national identity in the early 1900‟s. For Protectorate officials in late 1940‟s and early 1950‟s, representing the quality, unity, and uniqueness of their nation‟s artistic production was directly tied to the image of French civilization as culturally and politically dynamic. Through this image, the nation‟s status as a declining empire and a

[160] Herman Lebovics, “Creating the Authentic France: Struggles over French Identity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1944), 240.

its aegis used expositions to wage their own war of the arts for the of taste and appreciation of Muslim elites.

The Bureau showed particular concern with the quality of artistic expositions presented to a Tunisian public described as “exigent” in terms of its expectations of metropolitan artists.[164] Expositions were expected “to favor the propagation of French art in Tunisia,” unlike one art show put on by the Cercle Littéraire et Artistique de Nice in 1950 whose works according to Protectorate officials “did not surpass nor even equal the works of local painters.”[165] Another association, the Union Féminine Artistique d"Afrique du Nord founded in 1948 to provide financial support to artists living and working in Tunisia, arranged occasional exhibitions in the capital typically considered of

With ever larger numbers of Eastern European and Jewish artists joining the Paris artistic community, "the question of the status of French culture *vis-à-vis* foreign elements living in its fold" led to "measures…taken by curators in order to separate things French from things foreign."[172] An understanding of French art‟s particularity compelled Waldemar George, a French art critic and devoted nationalist, to declare in 1931, "French art is neither cosmopolitan, nor universal, nor international. Whatever its roots and ramifications, it releases a perfume that betrays its place of birth."[173] In the colonial context, however, assertions of French art‟s uniqueness coexisted with discourse on the universality and inclusiveness of the metropole‟s artistic production. Once again, this fundamental tension reflected the particular political needs of Protectorate officials as Tunisia moved toward internal autonomy. They sought to prop up the image of the French nation by asserting the superiority of her culture while simultaneously convincing Muslim elites that this culture remained accessible to all.

Regardless of their various styles and influences, artists who chose to exhibit in the Regency saw their works placed in relation to a continuous French artistic tradition. In a review of the 1946 exposition of the works of Charles Guerin, for example, *La Dépêche Tunisienne's* art critic S. Choley described the painter as "one of these masters who honors French Art, one of those who connect [*sic*] so closely with the beautiful traditions of the great impressionists."[174] Clement Serveau, a post-cubist painter and graduate of Paris‟s École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, encountered a similar success in Tunis‟s galleries by situating himself within the French academic tradition. Praising the artist‟s work, the same reviewer remarked that, „the painting of Clement

[172] Ibid., 137-139.
[173] Waldemar George, "Défense et illustration de l‟art français," *Formes*, no. 20 (December 1931): 162.
[174] S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Jan. 10, 1946.

Serveau is balanced and new…it is quite French."[175] He also described the works of Leo Nardus as "connected…to the most beautiful traditions of French art."[176] The notion that these artists represented a national artistic tradition linked their works to the image French culture in colonial discourse. By reducing artistic production to its place in a unified national tradition, this particular critic transformed celebrations of artistic talent into affirmations of French cultural superiority.

The Bureau considered the exhibition of French tapestries which took place in the winter of 1950 as a particularly successful event, primarily due to its apparent popularity among Muslim notables.[177] This exhibit, which was held at the Alliance Française of Tunis, included a range of works from medieval tapestries to modern productions by France‟s most celebrated weavers.[178] In a letter to Robert Schumann, the Resident General Jean Mons who personally inaugurated the exposition attested to the positive effect of the exposition on "the Muslim notability whose artistic education prepared them to appreciate the art of the tapestry, even the most modern."[179] This "artistic education" (*formation artistique*) that Mons refers to was a product of both the Protectorate‟s education system, which encouraged affinities for French art of all periods, and similar types of events, which took place more and more frequently in the Regency‟s public space. The presence of the Resident General and other leading officials at the inauguration indicated the highly political character of this particular exhibition. Also, by including both modern and ancient works, the exposition of French tapestries presented

[175] S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, June 7, 1946.
[176] S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 6, 1946.
[177] Jean Mons to Robert Schuman, Avril 19, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

an image of France‟s national artistic production as continuous and unified. In the exhibition space provided at the Alliance Française of Tunis, the tapestries were arranged chronologically with the most ancient grouped together in the large hall on the ground floor. As visitors climbed the stairway to the second floor of the AF center, the works on display gradually became more modern, representing "the masterpieces of our national manufacturers."[180] This exhibition presented an art form, which although typically considered a craft, took on the role of representing French artistic production in this context. Among the works featured were seven creations of Jean Lurçat, an internationally renowned French weaver whose tapestries had been exhibited alongside paintings by Matisse, Georges Braque, and Picasso, thus assuring the exposition‟s "fine arts" character.[181] Lurçat‟s modernist works claimed to represent the pinnacle of French aesthetic achievement in a display that traced the development of a continuous artistic production across a long and glorious national history. The Resident General confirmed that this type of exposition enabled "France…to present in this country [Tunisia] an interesting aspect of her art, ancient or modern," and reiterated that "everything must be done to strengthen each day the cultural links between the metropole and the Regency."[182] Lucien Paye also described the exposition as "well conceived propaganda of French art in Tunisia."[183] In addition, Claude Choley, writing for the right-wing *La Dépêche Tunisienne,* highlighted what these French artists "had accomplished for

[180] "Un Evénement Artistique: M. Jean Mons a Inauguré hier l‟Exposition de la Tapisserie Française," *La Dépêche Tunisienne,* Feb. 19, 1950.
[181] Undated report from the Direction de l‟Instruction Publique et de Beaux Arts, "Exposition Circulante de Tapisseries Françaises," Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.
[182] Jean Mons to M. Salles, Dec. 20, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.
[183] Lucien Paye to M. Salles, Dec. 20, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

France‟s legitimate grandeur.”[184] These judgments were based on the event‟s power to transmit to Muslim elite visitors the vision of a continuous, unique, and unified French artistic tradition. Encouraging Tunisian tastes for French art during a period when the dominant position of this production in Tunisian society appeared under siege constituted a thoroughly political activity.

The Bureau‟s eagerness to present modern and even experimental works of art to the Tunisian public can be understood in terms of a need to characterize French culture as dynamic, that is to say adaptable and capable of responding to the challenges of modernity. As Gwendolyn Wright has noted, early twentieth-century artists invoked the term “modernism” to “[proclaim] their affinity with the process of modernization, which they saw as an inevitable and progressive force; architects and other artists appropriated images of standardization, speed, and simple, unadorned volumes from machine technology,” while at the same time, “they condemned both historical styles and commercially oriented industrial design as sentimental compromise, pandering to an undeveloped bourgeois taste.”[185] Protectorate officials sought to isolate the positive/progressive connotations of modernism while avoiding modernist works that contained overt cultural critiques. The image of modernism that expositions promoted in the Regency reflected above all a notion of technological progress and confidence in Western civilization

an exposition organized by Evrard de Rouvre, an art dealer who proposed to exhibit reproductions of French modernism‟s masterpieces.[186] De Rouvre‟s exposition presented colonial officials with “the chance to show…a complete collection of modern French painting in Tunis.”[187]

France‟s initial resistance in the face of the German invasion in 1940. In an exposition brochure, Brusset‟s vision of wartime France is described as “leaning toward courage and distress at the same time, toward what is human, in single a word which never separates the authenticity and the original patriotism of all that is word contains in terms of grandeur and sincerity.”[191] Such portrayals sought to recover a sense of patriotism and national grandeur in the aftermath of the France‟s WWII defeat. One French critic described Brusset‟s work as “an authentic hope for French painting,” confirming the perceived nationalistic themes of his art.[192] This exposition addressed the major goals of the Residency‟s cultural policy in several ways. First, Brusset‟s status as an internationally celebrated painter situated in a French artistic tradition lent legitimacy to the national idea and reinforced notions of French cultural superiority. At the same time, his portrayal of France at war, at least according to the exposition‟s organizers, salvaged some of the nation‟s grandeur presenting French defiance and suffering in the campaign against the Germans.

Another painter, Roger Jouanneau-Irriera, who had accompanied French troops on campaign in Tunisia, Corsica and Italy, offered approximately six hundred of his sketches and watercolors for exhibition in the Protectorate.[193] According to Jouanneau-Irriera this collection represented for “Tunisia, a sort of history told through images, of its participation in the war of liberation” as well as “excellent French propaganda.” [194] His collection focused not only on images of the war in Tunisia, but also featured images of

[191]Brochure from the Exposition of Jean Paul Brusset in Tunis January 7-30 1944, Article 2604, Tunisie Supplément au Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[192] Brochure from the Exposition of Jean Paul Brusset in Tunis January 7-30 1944, Article 2604, Tunisie Supplément au Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[193]General Koenig to Louis Periller, Dec. 29, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.
[194] Roger Jouanneau-Irriera to Louis Periller, Fed. 23, 1951, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

Tunisian soldiers fighting for France in the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division (DIA) while on campaign in Europe.[195] While concerns over the price of Jouanneau-Irriera‟s collection led to disagreements between protectorate officials and the artist, Lucien Paye acknowledged the quality of the works and the potential interest that they represented.[196] Artistic portrayals of the war, dramatized the experience of many French and Tunisian soldiers, helping to reinforce the notion that the two nations were bound by the blood of common struggle. These events addressed post-war dilemmas of French national identity in public spaces through artistic visions of patriotic struggle and Franco-Tunisian unity. For elite audiences, they provided powerful images of national pride while serving as reminders of the French military might.

The Bureau of Public Instruction‟s efforts to organize expositions of French art were frequently met with less than enthusiastic responses from metropolitan artists and museum directors. In 1952, Marcel Aubert, the Director of French Museums, rebuffed Lucien Paye‟s efforts to bring an exhibit of “One Hundred Drawings and Watercolors of Rodin” to the Regency. [197] Fears over recent outbreaks of violence in Tunisia influenced the decisions of museum directors such as Jean Cassou of the Musée National d‟Art

European artists who had chosen to depict scenes of Tunisian life, the local population, Tunisian landscapes, etc. Hélène Farey, who won the prize for painting at the Salon Tunisien of 1945, was one of the most well-connected members of Tunis‟s artistic community.[201] One of her works, *Marché à Djerba*, which won the biennial prize of the Société de la France d‟Outre-Mer, offers an example of the type of exoticism that characterized the visions of European artists during this period. The painting features a number of locals in traditional dress standing or sitting in small groups in front of the market‟s arcades, their dark faces blurred and indistinct. The brightly colored contents of baskets on the ground draw the spectator‟s attention to the center of the image, and the branches of a large olive tree in the background twist above the inhabitant‟s heads. This portrayal presents a mild exoticism, depersonalizing the Tunisian subjects while calling attention to their brightly colored clothing and food in the setting of a stereotypical oriental *souk*.

In her other works, Farey‟s visions of the Tunisian *paysage* supposedly "evoked the typical exoticism of the „bled‟" while her portrayals of Provence created a sense of nostalgia for the mother country.[202] By far the most popular subject among artists selected for the Salons were Tunisian landscapes, vast, unpopulated, relatively neutral portrayals of the conquered countryside. In official publications as in the Regency‟s

Peyre who placed paintings of Sidi Bou Saïd and Sidi Driff side by side with portrayals of the French Alps in one 1948 exhibition.[204] Depictions of Sidi-Bou-Saïd, an iconic sea-side town to north of Tunis, appeared in the works of countless European artists during this period. The village‟s picturesque Arabo-Andalusian architecture and emblematic blue and white colors made it an instantly recognizable symbol of Tunisia‟s oriental character. Local European landscape painters produced nonthreatening visions of the colony, celebrating natural beauty and harmony in "a Tunisia where the sun is without violence"[205] while continuing to emphasize the oriental qualities of their works. Expositions that placed side-by-

aesthetic and at times political goals. After Roubtzoff death in 1949, his work continued to be exhibited for several years at the Salons Tunisiens and in the metropole. As one of the most frequently exhibited “local” painters in the Regency, his artistic approach is an example of the subtler Orientalism that characterized

colonial dominance could bring order and civilization to a variety of peoples. While these works represent in part calculated appeals to Muslim elite audiences, they also constitute historical-situated assertions of French cultural identity.

The notion of French culture‟s capacity to accommodate the lived experiences of diverse colonial subjects was both a foundational precept of French Union ideology and an expression of the worldview held by officials and artists. Choosing among works by contemporary French painters those best suited to both the larger political aims of Protectorate officials and the tastes of the Tunisian public required a constant balancing act on the part of organizers. Reflecting upon the value artistic expositions, Jean Mons stressed that "everything ought to be implemented to strengthen the cultural links between the metropole and the Regency; the taste [sic] of Tunisian elites are particularly directed toward plastic arts."[213] These tastes, whether real or imagined by colonial authorities, led to a number of exhibitions of ceramics and sculpture that used local artisanal production as a point of reference. A 1946 exposition by Elot (Ray Langelot), the then director of glassmaking facilities in Saouaf, stressed the local character of artist‟s

establishing standardized models for the production of Tunisian crafts, including pottery, weaving, marquetry, and embroidery.[215] At a 1950 conference on arts and technical education, the Minister of Commerce emphasized the need "to seek out appropriate artistic themes for the artisan and to guide him toward their realization."[216] Centers for Tunisia Arts provided training to upcoming generations of Tunisian artisans, imposing a policy of strict adherence to these fixed models. Throughout the post-war period, public expositions featuring the works of Tunisian artisans from these centers served as a counterpoint for fine arts expositions. By displaying examples of pottery, embroidery, or weaving based on standardized prototypes established by the Office of Tunisian arts, these expositions reinforced the French administration‟s claim to have renewed local artistic styles, making their production more efficient while maintaining their traditional character.[217] The annual Expositions of Modern Tunisian Arts were important political events, attended by the Resident General and other high-ranking colonial officials. Organized directly by the Bureau of Public Instruction, these exhibitions displayed updated models for the "classical Tunisian arts" of weaving, pottery, and embroidery, naming the individual whose work best corresponded to the standards as the "Best Tunisian Artisan."[218] When M. Vergnolle, the president of the National Work

Vergnolle."[219] Expositions emphasized both the traditional character of the works on display and the efforts of Protectorate agencies, such as the Office of Tunisian Arts, to carry out "a broad renovation of artisanal professions."[220] Through standardized models, official expositions, and award ceremonies, French officials appropriated local artistic production, defining which works and styles could be considered "Tunisian." In the process, they assigned Tunisian artisans a reduced role in the cultural life of the Regency, emphasizing above all the need to make the Tunisian craft industry economically viable. Constrained by a series of French-defined standards, Tunisian traditional arts occupied a subordinate position in relation to European fine arts. They also furnished an oppositional point of reference for French artistic production, defined not by its economic value but in terms of its aesthetic contributions and elevating potential for the Regency"s inhabitants. The name alone of the Office of Tunisian Arts reinforced the tendency to associate France with progress and Tunisia with stagnation suggesting that the "Tunisian Arts" were limited to traditional crafts, themselves outmoded and in need of standardization.

In the final decade of the Protectorate, artistic expositions provided a space for the negotiation and representation of French cultural identity in the light of wartime humiliation, challenges from anti-colonial movements, and the envisioning of a post-colonial relationship by colonial officials. Political goals that involved portraying French culture as dynamic, universal, continuous, unified and superior shaped official decisions to support certain artistic showings. At the same time, numerous expositions cultivated an "Oriental" aesthetic or focused on Tunisian subject matter, reflecting attempts to

[219] "A Gabès, M. Vergnolle remet leur decoration à six artisans," *La Dépêche Tunisienne,* Oct. 21, 1949.
[220] "L"Exposition des Arts Tunisiens a été inaugurée hier," *La Dépêche Tunisienne,* Dec. 14, 1948.

attract larger Muslim elite audiences. To encourage the attachment of elites to French civilization, they proposed reaching out to the "Oriental tastes" of this group while making clear the hierarchical relationship between French and local culture. Muslim notables were given a pivotal role in preserving the "cultural linkages" between France and an independent Tunisia. As one government report confirmed, "Tunisia is concerned with developing elites (whose importance is already far greater than in neighboring countries) who unite Arab and Muslim culture with French and Western culture."[221] Expositions played an essential role in the Bureau‟s policy to maintain the status of French culture among Tunisian elites. Moreover, officials‟ notions that French fine arts could serve as the basis for the continued influence of the colonizing power in the affairs of the new nation depended on a conception of French artistic production as inexorably linked to the idea of the French nation itself, indeed, as an expression of the *French génie.*

Conclusion

In 1957, officials at the French Embassy in Tunis began discussing plans for the construction of a cultural center in one of the city‟s suburbs. Only months after Tunisians had succeeded in throwing off seventy-five years of French colonial rule, members of the embassy described this center as the key to unlocking a new period of "Franco-Tunisian exchange."[222] According to the embassy‟s records, the center was to be, "above all an

[221]Report from the Direction de l‟Instruction Publique en Tunisie, "Plan Theorique de mise en valeur de la Tunisie, Developpement de l‟instruction Publique," 1950, p. 14, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

[222] French Embassy in Tunisia, "Perspectives pour la Création d‟un Centre = m‘ oms ’

instrument for the propagation and maintenance of French culture in Tunisia."[223] This meant taking responsibility for "spread[ing] French Thought and Culture through all art forms, as modes of expression for the French people, under any guise, from ancient times until today."[224] In practical terms, officials working at the cultural center would address these aims by organizing conferences, expositions, and performances featuring portrayals of French art and literature. The "means of expression" that they chose had to accurately represent the French *génie*. As the goals set out for Tunis‟s cultural center implied, the kind of "exchange" that French officials envisioned with their former colonial subjects would continue to be largely one-sided. Founded immediately after decolonization in Tunisia, this new center‟s mission represented a continuation of the cultural policy of the post-WWII period. [225]

The multi-faceted image of French culture presented to Tunisian elites during this period through expositions, conferences, and competitions revealed colonial officials‟ particular understanding of contemporary political tensions in the Protectorate, the desirable post-colonial role of the French nation, and their own contextual-based cultural identities. The Bureau of Public Instruction‟s cultural strategy aimed at making Tunisian elite‟s affinity for French language, art, and literature the basis for continued French

highlighting the universal, superior, dynamic, continuous, diverse, and unified characteristics of the French artistic and literary production, officials formulated a precise and coherent (if contradictory) discourse on what it meant to be culturally French in the colonies and on the advantages offered to Tunisians on the verge of independence. While compelling Muslim elites to assure French culture‟s place at the heart of national, public life, officials also portrayed Tunisia‟s Arab-Islamic heritage as belonging to a distant past and incapable of responding to the challenges of modernity. They thus undercut the primary component of the national culture that the Tunisian anti-colonial movement was promoting. Moreover, the representation of French culture in government-sponsored events in Tunisia was tied to a newly developing understanding of France‟s international status. The French defeat in WWII and the rapid disintegration of France‟s empire gave rise to the notion that France‟s international influence could be based on establishing "cultural linkages" both with former colonies and other developing nations. This involved representing French cultural production with all of the abovementioned characteristics while at the same time "wrapping" French propaganda in discussions of local themes to make it more palatable to elites.

It has not been the intention of this study to examine the lasting effects of the Bureau‟s culture policy on the post-colonial Tunisian elite or the nation in general. However, the long-term impact of this policy on Tunisia constitutes an important subject for future inquiry. The imagining of a post-colonial relationship based on the preservation of colonialism‟s cultural hierarchies represented a first step in the construction of a cultural neo-colonialism. The following quotation from the Macbride

Commission report, *Many Voices, One World,* serves to put this question into a global perspective:

> It has become increasingly clear that the effects of intellectual and cultural dependence are as serious as those of political subjection or economic dependence. There can be no genuine, effective independence without the communication researches needed to safeguard it. The argument has been made that a nation whose mass media are under foreign domination cannot claim to be a nation.[226]

The Macbride Commission‟s observation suggests

> dignity, which began over a month ago, is also a cultural revolutionary process; and accordingly we call for:
> 1. A democratic and national culture
> 2. The refusal of a culture of „folklorization"
> 3. The protection and promotion of cultural heritage
> 4. The transparency and visibility of cultural and institutional decisions and projects, especially those of the Ministry of Culture
> 5. The support and encouragement of free and independent art criticism
> 6. The encouragement of creation of art journals
> 7. The abolition of privileges of a minority of cultural actors and the promotion of young artists
> 8. The support of and listening to cultural and scientific NGOs whose objective is the promotion of artistic creation and culture
> 9. The sustainable vigilance of civil society for the success of the democratic process.[234]

These demands speak to the ongoing intersection of culture and politics in Tunisian life. Whatever government manages to take root in Tunisia will undoubtedly be faced with the task of representing a national cultural identity and with the inevitable political implications of the image that it fashions.

[234] "Tunisia's Cultural Revolution," Nafas Art Magazine, last modified January 2011, http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2011/tunisia_cultural_revolution.

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