

The Impact of Nazi and Fascist anti-Semitism on the Jewish Press in Tunisia in the Years 1938–1940

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Abstract

Ten Tunisian Jewish newspapers declaredly involved in discussing Jewish political affairs stopped publication in 1939 or 1940, before the Vichy regime (from December 1940) and the Nazis (from November 1942 to May 1943) suspended all Jewish papers. Half of these titles were avowedly Zionist-oriented, four politically moderate, while one favored a Judeo-Arab league. The decisions of their editorial boards to withdraw from the journalistic market were not based on factors of personal health or economic viability, and neither were they the result of anything as mundane as loss of interest. In actuality, they stemmed from the deep-rooted conviction of the papers' owners and journalists that terrible things lay in store for Tunisian Jews, and that the Nazi-backed Vichy regime that functioned in the country would not spare them the ordeal of their co-religionists in Europe.

The present article examines both the reactions of the various Tunisian Jewish papers to Nazi and Fascist anti-Semitism in Europe prior to and following the onset of the Second World War, and also the way in which anti-Semitism in Europe upset the relationship between Tunisian and Italian Jews in Tunisia.

In the 1930s, the division of Tunisian Jewry into Assimilationists, Traditionalists (anti-Assimilationists, for whom naturalization was tantamount to de-Judaization), Zionists,¹ Revisionists (or right wing Zionists), and promoters of a Judeo-Arab league (in whose eyes naturalization prevented Tunisian Jews from linking their fate with that of their Muslim compatriots (Hamli, 2010, p. 133; Sebag, 1991, pp. 182–183) led to the development of three distinct groups of newspapers: Zionist or Revisionist papers, general information papers defending the rights of North African Jewry to engage in assimilation or naturalization, and a single paper that advocated a Judeo-Arab league.

The category of Zionist or Zionist Revisionist papers comprised *Cahiers du Betar* (1937–1939),² *La Gazette d’Israel* (1938–1939),³ *Al-Yahudi* (The Jew, 1939–1940),⁴ *La Semaine Juive* (1937–1939),⁵ and *Tel Aviv* (1936–1939).⁶ “Pro-Israelite” papers with an assimilationist orientation included *La Griffé* (1938–1939),⁷ *L’Homme Libre* (1939),⁸ *La Vérité* (1938–1939),⁹ and *Tunis Passe* (1936–1939).¹⁰ Finally, the traditionalist *La Cravache* (1934–1939) promoted a Judeo-Arab league.¹¹ It should be added that *Cahiers du Betar* was

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- 1 The six Zionist currents in Tunisia – Revisionist, general, left wing, Mizrahi, socialist (Labor, Hashomer Hatzair, Socialist Democrats), and philanthropist – had more than 30 associations in the country.
 - 2 *Cahiers du Bétar: Organe mensuel d’éducation Juive* (April 1937 – 14 July 1939), at 13 rue d’Isly and 5 rue Ben Senour, Tunis; Zionist Revisionist; Director: Alfred Louzon; Manager: Joseph Berrebbi; Editor: Jacques Silvera (in 1939); 2 to 4 pages; circulation 1,200.
 - 3 *La Gazette d’Israel: Hebdomadaire d’informations et d’action Juive paraissant le Vendredi* (21 October 1938 – 28 July 1939; 20 December 1945 – 27 September 1951); rue d’Athenes, Tunis; Zionist; Directors: David Boccara, Raymond Cohen, Victor Haouzi, and André Scemama; Managers: M. E. Ganem, Abraham Bismuth, and Albert Mimoun; circulation 2,000 to 3,000.
 - 4 *Al-Yahudi (Le Juif, 22 September 1936–1940)*, Director-Manager: Mardocheé Uzan; rue des Maltais, Tunis; Zionist; circulation 1,500.
 - 5 *La Semaine Juive: Organe hebdomadaire d’éducation et de défense Juive* (3 December 1937 – 4 August 1939); Zionist; Director & Manager: Jacques Nahmias; 4 pages.
 - 6 *Tel Aviv: Hebdomadaire d’action sociale et d’informations Juives paraissant le Vendredi* (7 June 1936 – 2 June 1939); avenue de Londres; Zionist Revisionist; Director: Henri Emmanuel; Manager: Victor Nataf; Editor-in-Chief: Felix Belhassen; 2 to 4 pages.
 - 7 *La Griffé: Pamphlet hebdomadaire* (14 October 1938 – 28 July 1939); Director: M. C. Sfez; Managers: Haim Bittan and Simon Baroukh.
 - 8 *L’Homme Libre: Hebdomadaire politique et de libre critique paraissant le Samedi* (on 1 & 29 July 1939); Manager: Haim Bittan; 2 pages; circulation 1,000.
 - 9 *La Vérité: Organe hebdomadaire de combat politique et de critique* (28 January 1938 – 31 May 1939); Director & Manager: William M. Haddad; 2 pages; circulation 500 to 1,000.
 - 10 *Tunis Passe: Journal hebdomadaire satirique – humoristique – théâtral* (26 October 1926 – 8 April 1939); Directors & Managers: Maurice Meimoun, Victor Meimoun (brother of Maurice), and Max Zatlouai; rue des Tanneurs then Place Garibaldi (Cité Boulakia); 2 to 8 pages.
 - 11 *La Cravache: Hebdomadaire de critique paraissant tous les samedis* (1934–1939); Orientation: Judeo-Arab league; Director & Founder: Jacques Abitbol, rue des Tanneurs; Manager: Victor Cohen; 2 to 12 pages.

a monthly, while the rest were weeklies, and that apart from *Al-Yahudi*, which was in Judeo-Arabic, the rest were in French.¹²

Since the different Jewish milieus in Tunisia reacted differently to each piece of news about the ordeal of Jews in Europe in the months preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, the present paper attempts to answer the following questions: To what extent did news about the ongoing persecution of Jews in Europe impact the Jews of Tunisia, and how did it find reflection in the journalistic effort and focus of their newspapers? How did the organs of individual Jewish groupings respond to the dangers of Nazism and the terrible fate planned for Jews? How did the sudden surge of anti-Semitism in Europe upset the relationship between Tunisian and Italian Jews in Tunisia? And, finally, which fundamental topics or issues, if any, managed to transcend the differences existing between the various Jewish groups and bring them together in unity?

Reaction of the Zionist/Revisionist Papers

The intense persecution of Jews in Germany and the German protectorates in the year preceding the Second World War was widely commented upon in Tunisian Zionist newspapers. Journalists focused on the vast numbers of Jews forced to go into exile, presenting Hitler as the Torquemada of the 20th century – a figure of horror and cruelty. In 1939, the papers reported that 320,000 German Jews (as opposed to 520,000 in 1933) had become virtually stateless, but could go nowhere without passports (*Que vont devenir...*, 1939); among this number were 160,000 residents of Berlin who were forced to change their names (from “Israel” or “Sarah”) or surnames (from “Deutschmann,” “Press” (a linguistic distortion of “Peres”), or “Berliner”).¹³ Quoting Alfred Duff Cooper from *La Bourse Egyptienne*, *Cahiers du Betar* wrote that “a regime that burns books, persecutes religion, and seeks to exterminate a race [...] can only be the enemy of civilization” (*Le Nazisme: Ennemi de la civilisation*, 1939).¹⁴ The Nazi’s threats and unpredictable attacks drove Jews in Germany and its dependencies to avoid synagogues and instead, when the situation permitted, to meet in cellars to celebrate the Sabbath; these

12 The five Jewish newspapers not included in this work are: *L’Echo de Tunis* (weekly, 2 May 1935 – 1 June 1940; 12 April 1948 – 30 September 1963); *L’Egalité* (bimonthly, later weekly, 22 April 1919 – 25 May 1940); *Le Petit Matin* (daily, 8 March 1923 – 14 November 1942); *La Presse de Tunisie* (daily, 12 March 1936 – 1940); and *Es-Sabah* (in Judeo-Arabic, daily, 1904 – 14 May 1940).

13 *La Semaine Juive*, 24 March 1939.

14 Alfred Duff Cooper, former First Lord of the Admiralty (1937), was interviewed by *La Bourse Egyptienne*.

were scenes reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century (Où Hitler imite Torquemada, 1939).¹⁵

The politics of Germany, wrote *La Gazette d'Israel* in March 1939, were that of pure murder, looting, madness, and terror (Meutre – Pillage – Démence..., 1939). Hitler's Germany, stated Henri Emmanuel, "has become a concentration camp where Jews, who had been the linchpin of Germany's wealth, agonize of hunger, cold, and the feeling of being abandoned by all" (Emmanuel, 1938b; Contre la barbarie..., 1938). What is more, Hitler did not spare even the assimilated Jews. But the papers agreed that Hitler's approach to the Jews did not necessarily mirror that of all Germans. In an article titled "The Hitlerian Hell," *La Gazette d'Israel* cited a Swiss journalist's report on a pogrom in Frankfurt during which Jews were beaten, humiliated, and basically deprived of all human dignity. Whereas a journalist of *Al-Yahudi* insisted that Hitler's anti-Jewish policies had provoked some Germans – Gestapo officers among them – to outrage against a country in which children and the sick were pulled out of their beds at night and arrested (Dans l'enfer Hitlérien..., 1939; La Violence des persécutions hitlériennes..., 1938; The Politics of Germany..., 1939).

European racists, the Jewish papers in Tunisia concurred, had never been seen so incredibly jubilant. Their journalists referenced Central Europe, an area which they viewed as traditionally anti-Jewish, while at the same time recognizing that Hitlerism (or Nazism) had gained a strong foothold in Holland. Obviously, Fascist Italy was seen as a prominent hotbed of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. And like any political doctrine, *La Griffé* wrote, Nazism needed martyrs to additionally motivate the Gestapo and goad the populace on the unfortunate German Jews. Further on, *La Griffé* presented the story of the "true" Nazi martyr – the diplomat Ernst vom Rath, shot at point-blank at the German Embassy in Paris on 9 November 1938 by Herschel Greenspan (or Herschel Grynszpan, 1921–1945), who believed the act would put an end to the tortuous plight of his parents and brothers in Germany (De la barbarie germanique..., 1938). Tragically, the immediate result of his action was the *Reichskristallnacht* (Crystal Night), the infamous pogrom of 9 and 10 November 1938.

The reports of the Zionist *La Semaine Juive* and *La Gazette d'Israel* on the persecution of Jews in Hungary, Slovakia, and Holland (called "German protectorates" by the newspapers) revealed another dark side of the anti-Semitic terror. Following the introduction of anti-Jewish laws in Hungary, the consternation was such that "suicides among the Jewish community are said to have multiplied and some among them are finding

15 The reference is to Tomas de Torquemada, a figure of horror and cruelty during the Spanish Inquisition. The Betar (or Brit Trumpledor) movement was officially recognized in Tunisia on 26 February 1932 (Une Jeunesse..., 1939).

help in emigration” (Editorial, 1939; L. B., 1939). The Slovakian anti-Jewish decree of 4 May 1939, which struck not only at persons naturalized since 1918, but also against entire families that had been living in the country for generations, resulted in some 30,000 Jews losing their nationality (*La terreur anti-Juive...*, 1939). Further, the papers reported that 400,000 Czechoslovakian Jews were forced to go into exile (*Hitler en Tchecoslovaquie...*, 1939) to avoid persecution from the Hlinka Guard, the Slovak militia. Being “tired of killing, the Hitlerites organize pogroms” (*Hitler en Tchecoslovaquie...*, 1939).¹⁶ And in June 1939, the “Nazi Dutch hooligans started their calls for kicking out the Jews” (*Les Nazis Hollandais...*, 1939).

But the persecution of Jews in Italy, whose Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, did not hide his intention, in December 1938, to renounce the Franco-Italian Agreement of 7 January 1935 (also known as the Mussolini-Laval Accord) and annex Tunisia, also made the headlines of Tunisian newspapers, revealing the Jews’ bitterness (*Les Rapports franco-italiens...*, 1939; Negus, 1938).¹⁷ In 1939, Italy commenced what it called the “purification” of universities and the Navy of Jews (*L’Italie et les Juifs*, 1939; Ben Khalifa, 2011, pp. 165–176). As a result, in March 1939 some 15,000 Italian Jews were forced to remove themselves from the Apennine Peninsula via the French border, all the while being intimidated and jostled by the Italian border guards (*L’Italie anti-Sémite...*, 1939; *France and the Jews*, 1939).

The Tunisian Jewish papers did not fail to maintain, however, that in Italy, a country “officially” racist under Mussolini, there was no racist movement. The Italians had never been racist. They were deeply Catholic and followed the Vatican line rather than that imposed by Mussolini. And the Duce himself, or the “Duce of misfortune” as some Tunisian Jewish papers dubbed him, had turned racist under the influence of Nazism and become “the vassal of Germany” (*De la barbarie germanique...*, 1938; *La Tunisie tombeau...*, 1939).

But to the Zionist papers in Tunisia, Hitler in Europe was one thing, while Hitler (or his agents) in Palestine or the Arab world was something else entirely. Driven by the fight against Zionism, nationalists in Syria, Palestine and Tunisia were seen enthusiastically welcoming Hitler’s representatives and making parallels in their correspondence between Arabism

16 The Hlinka Guard (Slovak: *Hlinkova Garda*) was the militia of the Slovak People’s Party from 1938 to 1945.

17 According to the Mussolini-Laval Accord of 1935, *L’Homme Libre* wrote, quoting *L’Orient Arabe*, “the Italians of Tunisia would return to a common French system of law between 1945 and 1965.” The time frame was long, but the principle was admitted. All Franco-Italian disputes were considered settled. In fact, the potential Italian peril had dissipated already by 1931, in which year there were 91,427 French and 91,178 Italian residents in Tunisia (Hamli, 2010, p. 134).

and Nazism. Did not the Nazis promise the surgent Tunisian nationalists self-rule and independence from France, thus leading Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destour Party to encourage some elements to collaborate with the Nazis? Had not Rashid Driss, a Neo-Destour politician and, in later years, a diplomat and minister in independent Tunisia, been in charge of the Jeunesse Musulmane, a pro-Nazi Muslim youth, that was quite extreme in its methods – just as was the Nazi Youth? (Hamli, 2010, pp. 140–142). It was an evil game, this kind of collaboration, and the fact that it seemed to have succeeded worried the Zionists to the extreme (Gdoud, 1939).¹⁸ Furthermore, the activities of Franz Reichert, DNB¹⁹ correspondent in Jerusalem, undertaken less than three months before the onset of war with the objective of organizing a campaign against the British in Palestine, added fuel to the Zionists' fire (Les Mesures allemandes..., 1939).

Two Offensives: Nazi versus Zionist

There was no denying the fact, Jewish papers in Tunisia believed, that Nazi anti-Semitism served to resuscitate Zionism – at the time almost weakened to the point of collapse – in Tunisia and elsewhere.²⁰ To Hitler's Nazi offensive, the Jews replied with the Zionist offensive, the cornerstone of which was the demand to have a recognized country where the rejected stateless Jews of Europe and elsewhere could go. This resulted in the most oft-repeated titles of the period: "Zionism is the Solution" and "Zionism and Nothing but Zionism." By Zionism, the Jews meant not what was known as the "small Zionism" of Chaim Weizmann, which "thwarts the Jewish legitimate aspirations" (Zabotinsky, 1939), but the Revisionist Zionism of Vladimir Zabolinsky. Assimilation, which had not served the Jews of Europe at all, was therefore strongly denounced (Chalom, 1939; Les méfaits de l'assimilation..., 1938).

This "political offensive," as the Zionist papers of Tunisia call it, was based on three prerequisites: (1) demonstrating why the Zionists had to be helped; (2) rejecting the 1939 London Conference; and (3) maintaining that Islamism (not Arabism) had nothing to do with Nazism or Hitlerism.

The Jews, the Zionist newspapers agreed, had not only fought on the side of the Allies during the First World War, and therefore deserved compensation for having contributed to their victory, but had also steadfastly linked their fate with that of England even before the 1917 Balfour Declaration, offering to sacrifice themselves for the British Empire in

18 The article refers in particular to the visit of Baldur von Schirach (1907–1974), Head of the Hitler Youth, in Damascus.

19 DNB (Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro), the official German News Service.

20 *La Semaine Juive*, 3 November 1938.

deadly secret missions (such as those undertaken by Sarah Aaronshon and her botanist brother, Aaron Aaronshon). Hence their “legitimate aspirations” for Palestine to become the “salvation of the entire Jewish people” (Harosin, 1939b; Buschmil, 1936).²¹ But Weizmann’s view that “the Jewish sufferings are a drop in the ocean of tears of the Arab protests” demonstrated that he had still not understood, wrote *Cahiers du Betar*, the extent of the Jewish tragedy. Rather, such “small Zionists” were considered “sowers of hatred” (*Les semeurs de la haine*) and agents of disunion (*Les Semeurs...*, 1939; Zabolinsky, 1939).²² That was why E. Richard Haddad of *La Gazette d’Israel* had been calling for “a chief” (Haddad, 1939b), for someone, to quote from Maurice Jaoui’s 1936 article in *Tel Aviv*, who would “purge Palestine of any person whose sole purpose is not the reconstruction of our State” (Jaoui, 1936) and, more generally, who remained insensible to the sufferings of the German Jews.²³ Denise Haddad urged Jewish mothers to tell their children about the repressions and the Jewish exodus, about the fundamental work of Theodor Herzl, the courage of Vladimir Zabolinsky, and the dream of seeing the flag of Israel flying on both banks of the Jordan (Haddad, 1939b).

It is interesting to note the pressure that the Zionists brought to bear shortly after the Bedouins (or nomads), as they called them, stormed Jerusalem in October 1938 with the help of Italian and German officers. They insisted that the intrusion of a “third party” was “a lese-majesty that compromised [both] British prestige” and hegemony, and that the British contingents sent to Palestine were primarily tasked with defending England, not the Jews. “This is where Zionism has to come into play,” wrote Elie Levy in *La Gazette d’Israel*, “to build the Jewish State as the best solution to the Jewish problem. A State that would put an end to the Axis presence in the Middle East and to Mussolini’s irredentist aspirations” (Levy, 1938), the latter centered on the concepts of ‘Mare Nostrum,’ ‘Roman Italy,’ and the ‘Roman Empire.’

Thus, the organization by the Colonial Office of a Judeo-Arab Conference in London (7 February – 17 March 1939) was viewed by and large as “a call for terrorism,” either Nazi or Arabian. The meeting was considered “a comedy,” and its opening the victory of the pro-Nazi “anti-Semitic” Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin Al-Husseini. England was seen as being “ridiculously dedicated to executing the wishes of the Palestinian terrorists” (Abrams, 1939; Emmanuel, 1939a; Emmanuel, 1939b; Emmanuel, 1939c). Peel’s partition plan was viewed as the Grand Mufti’s partition plan

21 Harosin published *La Palestine et les Etats Unis arabes: sionisme, panarabisme, panislamisme, antisémitisme* (Harosin, 1939a).

22 The French text is as follows: *Les souffrances Juives sont une goutte d'eau dans une mer de larmes des protestations arabes.*

23 Golda Meir’s words at the 19th Zionist Congress in Luzern on 2 September 1935.

– a dream that was, however, to remain just that. No one would allow this to happen, declared *La Gazette d'Israel*: neither France (which would not give up parts of Syria), Turkey (which would not tolerate seeing the Arabs united), Great Lebanon (which could not forget the Iraqi massacres), nor the Jews themselves, who opined that an Arab State as recommended by Peel would look like a vast concentration camp with brutal warders duly prepared by Hitler (Emmanuel, 1939c). And Zabotinsky's call not to attend a conference concerned with discussing a plan he considered already dead – which pleased his followers in Tunisia immensely – swayed the Jewish delegates and brought about the failure of the meeting. In any case, it would have been almost impossible for the Grand Mufti's dream to come to fruition, for the Jews' objective was the creation of their own sovereign state that would exist alongside the Arab polities (Emmanuel, 1939d). Zabotinsky's prediction "that the committee going to Palestine is going there only to bury [Peel's] disputed partition plan" was, unfortunately for the Palestinians, correct (Emmanuel, 1938a).

Islam versus Nazism

The Tunisian Zionist papers did not fail to point out that Nazi propaganda flourished amongst the dregs of society. The elite understood what Hitlerism and Fascism entailed for the Muslim world, and that the collaboration which they offered would be based on a relationship between slave and master. What could one expect from a regime of violence and misery? "We have always proclaimed," wrote Simon Slama in *La Semaine Juive*, "that what divides the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine cannot be an inexpiable hatred. Arabs are Semites as much as we are. What divides us are cases of machine guns, rifles, and grenades which the agents of the totalitarian countries supply to the naïve Arabs to attack their Jewish neighbors" (Slama, 1939). This was a machine of lies and hatred constructed in the Arab Orient by regimes founded in brutality. But the mask had fallen, Simon Slama continued, quoting a Muslim paper that recognized the wrongdoings of Nazi Germany, while the fate of the Czechoslovakians, whose country was dismembered through the Munich Agreement of September 1938, had served as a lesson to the Arabs, who had simply been exploited and duped (Le Racisme, 1939).²⁴

Months before the outbreak of the Second World War, Jews and informed Arabs knew on which side their bread was buttered, which choice they had to make: side with the Nazis and Fascists, or with the democracies. "We are very sure now," insisted Simon Slama of *La Semaine Juive*,

24 The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stipulated that only Aryans could be German citizens.

“that to honor Islam is to desire the victory of thought, loyalty, and superiority of mind over matter, and defeat Germany and Hitlerism” (Slama, 1939). In short, collaboration with the Nazis or Fascists was portrayed as an apostasy, a cardinal sin in Islam.

Reaction of the Jewish Moderate Papers

In the months preceding the war, which saw an unprecedented intensification of the persecution of Jews, the Tunisian moderates and Judeo-Arab promoters made no reference to either Aliyah, Zionism, or a Jewish State in Palestine. Their articles focused rather on the disastrous effects of Fascism, the insidiousness of the Italian paper *L'Unione*, the flow of Nazi and Fascist goods into the country, the problems of the Hara of Tunis, and the conflict between the Rabbinical Council and the Municipality of Tunis over the Passage Jewish cemetery (Nahum, 1939). And if ever the Zionist or Revisionist newspapers agreed on anything with the moderate papers, it was on the vehemence of *L'Unione*, organ of the Italian bourgeoisie in Tunis and representative of Mussolini's Fascism.²⁵

To protest against the growing anti-Semitism in Germany and Italy, the Jewish moderate papers of Tunisia suggested boycotting imported German and Italian merchandise (which accounted for two-thirds of goods handled by Jewish importers), as was done in France and other countries (an issue which the Zionist papers did not raise, as their focus was Israel, not Tunisia). Already in 1938, *La Cravache*, the organ of the Judeo-Arab league, had promised “to hunt down and name the Jewish and non-Jewish merchants trading with the Bosch,” with the Nazi anti-Semites (Juifs et allemands, 1938). These obstinate and greedy traders, wrote *La Cravache*, “are the sad representatives of a race robbed and martyred.” They were traitors and they ought to be treated as such. “In what other way can we name those who, at the very hour when their co-religionists are tracked down and hunted like wild beasts,” continued *La Cravache*, “find the means and a certain voluptuousness to extend their hands to their executioners and trade with them?” (Sus à la camelote..., 1938; *La Camelote Fasciste*, 1939).

It was believed that 50% of the Italian colony in Tunisia, including the rich usurer Grana, who had always looked with derision upon the Twansa Jews (i.e., the Tunisian-born Jews), belonged to the Fascist party – “a party of mud and blood.” They were considered “doubly guilty,

²⁵ Founded by César Fabbri, *L'Unione* (21 March 1886 – 7 March 1943) was a twice-weekly, then daily, and then twice-daily (from 15 December 1935 to 31 July 1936) organ of the Italian colony in Tunisia. It was suspended on 10 June 1940, reappeared on 21 January 1943, and remained in print until 7 May 1943.

doubly despicable for clinging to a party that scorns them, persecutes them, and betrays them” (Triste mentalité, 1938). In addition, *L’Unione*’s director, Von Santamaria, started posing as a “small Mussolini,” signing incendiary articles calling for insurrection against France and the Jews. The paper’s distinct editorial line was criticized, among others, by *La Cravache*, whose journalists chose to call it *La Bonniche* – the maid-servant (*La Bonniche*, 1938).

But the “sad methods” employed by *L’Unione*, these being its anti-French and anti-Semitic campaigns that were aimed to please the Duce, failed to move the public. Moreover, the “Fascist bluffs” – exposing a Tunisian loaf of bread in a shop-window in Rome or the “Protocols of the Sages of Zion” in a shop-window in Tunis (both intended to deride the Twansa Jews), or claiming the Italianity of Tunisia – were simply ridiculous amphigories (*Malgré les rodomontades...*, 1939). Ever since the mid-1920s, Fascist propaganda among the Italian colony in Tunisia had as its goal the development of a public opinion that would be totally devoted to Rome and sensitive to the Fascist interpretation that the difficult economic situation of a number of Italian nationals in Tunisia was the result not of local economic conditions, but of a specific French ill-will towards the Italians, who refused to be recognized as naturalized Frenchmen (Rainero, 1977, p. 500). Rather than help win the hearts of its readers, however, *L’Unione*’s insidious propaganda scared off the various ethnic groups and, in a sense, encouraged them to create a united front of opposition (*La Scandaleuse attitude...*, 1939).

There was no escaping the feeling that Tunisia would become the burial-ground of the Duce’s Fascism (*Tristes méthodes Fascistes*, 1938; *Le Bluff Fasciste*, 1938; *La Tunisie tombeau...*, 1939; Cattan, 1939; A Von Santamaria, 1939; *Nous demandons...*, 1938; *Injures gratuites*, 1939). A large number of Fascists abandoned the Fascist party, as despite the threats published in *L’Unione* they preferred to disassociate themselves from a regime that was leading them to ruin and rapidly turning Tunis into the most active center of Italian anti-Fascism outside Italy (*De la barbarie germanique...*, 1938; Sebag, 1991, pp. 210–211). They had solid reasons to do so. After all, had not the memo (from 6 August 1936) of the Italian Minister of Colonies, Alessandro Lessona, in which he stated that “given its claimed superiority, the white race must prevail,” become the basis of colonial Fascist legislation and thereby tarnished the image of Italians everywhere? How could the Duce’s Arabophile statements, made during his visit to Tripoli in March 1937, be considered sincere in light of his Fascist racism? And how could the Duce, who was offered the Sword of Islam (a weapon of Florentine manufacture) while in Tripoli, brag about being the “Protector of Islam” when Libyan landowners were being stripped of their fertile lands – earmarked for the “white” Italians – and Tunisians were refused treatment at the Italian Hospital of Tunis (Rainero, 1977, pp. 504–505; *Malgré les rodomontades...*, 1939; *Hôpital ou instrument...*,

1939)²⁶? In short, what the mass of anti-Fascist Italians were saying, as expressed in the anti-Fascist *Il Giornale*, which was steadily gaining popularity, was more significant than all the lies that Mussolini shouted from balconies (*Les italiens...*, 1939).²⁷

Interestingly, in the months leading up to the war, Tunisian Jewish newspapers of various orientations engaged in journalism bordering on propheticism and wizardry. These articles gained a wide readership; some predicted that given his political activity in the year 1938, the Führer would live until 9 June 1941, although he would be the star of 1939 alongside Mussolini, while others foresaw that imperial regimes were fortunately not known for their longevity, and that, therefore, the Duce's innate stupidity – his racism – would bring about his end (*Fakirs – Fumistes...*, 1939; *Vivement...*, 1939; *De la barbarie germanique...*, 1938).²⁸ Whether they believed these prophecies or not, the Jews were nonetheless convinced that they would soon be faced with a period of prolonged and terrible persecution, with the only comfort being that their tormentors were eventually bound to fall.

An examination of the reaction of Tunisian Jewish newspapers to Nazi and Fascist anti-Semitism in Europe in the months preceding the outbreak of the Second World War reveals, therefore, how the persecution of Jews motivated an Israeli nationalism, allowed Revisionism to win the hearts of the Zionists and even the vacillating Jews, exposed the damaging effects of assimilation and de-Judaization (since assimilated Jews were not spared persecution in Europe), reaffirmed the stance of traditionalist Jews and led them to join the Tunisian nationalists, widened the gap between those who saw Tunisia as their country and those who looked to Palestine for the fulfilment of Jewish hopes, and, finally, festered the historical antagonisms existing between the Twansa Jews and the Italian Jews, and non-Jews turned loyal to Mussolini.

26 Allowing people to be admitted (or not) to the Italian Hospital, from which Mussolini's secret police – the O.V.R.A. – operated, was used as an instrument of political pressure.

27 *Il Giornale* (5 March 1939 – 14 September 1939); daily, then weekly, first published in August 1939; Orientation: anti-Fascist; Director: Giorgio Amendola; Manager: J. Lo Cascio; Editor-in-Chief: Velio Spano; 4 pages; circulation 3,000.

28 These “prophetic” articles were derived from what the French called the “Sufi” or maraboutic *fakirisme* or *fumisterie*.

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