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Tunis's Archival Situation: a study of organisations of sound, music and bodies in the post-revolutionary capital

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Tunis's Archival Situation

A study on organisations of sound, music and bodies in the
post-revolutionary capital

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Music, King's College London

Supervisor: Professor Martin Stokes

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Abstract

Following the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, there have been many attempts to understand societal and political shifts which manifest in a ‘redistribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2013). Approaches looking at the ‘aesthetic’ element of these political moments have tended to focus on overtly political or engaged music of rappers, or manifestations of ‘art’ in public space. This thesis takes a different approach, focusing instead on the complex constellation of sonic archives that mediate sound and music in their multiple ontologies throughout the capital, underpinning sonic encounters in everyday lives. It asks: what is the nature of sonic archives in Tunis, how are they layered in the city, and how do they work to *order*: to order music’s ontologies, and to order listeners and bodies? How might a turn towards sonic archives complicate our notions of shifts in time, space and social organisation in Tunis following the revolution, bringing other temporalities to the fore? In this, I follow the approaches of Mbembe and Ochoa to archives: the assertion that archives are material and imaginary, foundational to the power of the state which constructs its ‘communities of time’ around its ‘fragments’ (Mbembe, 2002); and the assertion that sonic archives may be dispersed over multiple materials and spaces, their organisations contributing to and reflective of projects of ‘modernity’ that grapple over an ‘aural public sphere’ (Ochoa Gautier, 2006).

This thesis is thus constructed as a journey around several different archival structures, all of which were formed and maintained at specific historical junctures, and all of which continue to act in the capital to organise sound and music. It takes an approach of media archaeology, following mediations of sound as they form ‘a narrative of jagged histories of encounter’ (Sykes & Steingo, 2019). We start in the state sonic archives, dispersed over multiple materials between radio stations, books and online *Phonothèque* lists, maintaining a power over senses of ‘original’ recordings which were foundational to national mythmaking around senses of *tunisianité*; we offset this archive with that of YouTube, access to which was opened by the revolution, to find that YouTube both troubles the workings of the state archive with tricky fragments, and can be pressed to use for the extension of a previous politics of classing and organising. We then move through the more hidden archives of

cassette and CD shops, the Mp3 compilation makers of Galerie 7, and disparate shop and digital archives of vinyls, finding that many of their aesthetic forms, archival techniques and structures continue to be dispersed throughout the city, mediated by radio stations and the aesthetic workers of semi-public spaces to underpin communities and senses of 'mass' in a variety of ways. We'll emerge with a picture of what we'll call Tunis's 'archival situation': an ever-evolving situation of corresponding musical and social mediation that happens through these archives and their infrastructures, which have nevertheless been formed from various historical junctures, political decisions, sensory habits, technologies, and stories. Throughout the thesis, we find that this archival situation is used to explore tensions between 'culture' and '*jaww*', to lay claims to 'music' and to open up the possibilities of 'curation', and in attempts to understand the changing nature of publics and time in the post-revolutionary environment.

My hope is both that a focus on music, media and listeners might add something to conversations about aesthetics and politics in contemporary Tunis, and also that the specific case of Tunis might speak to understandings of the interrelationships between listening bodies, musical organisations and politics which currently animate questions in many areas of the world. The work joins calls particularly for a reorientation of work on sound and music toward the global South.

Acknowledgements

This thesis exists as a point in the midst of multiple journeys. It is a decade since I bought a one-way ticket to Tunis, and since new sound worlds and the people who participated in them started to change my world. It is 5 years since I embarked on this PhD journey. In that time the project has shape shifted and turned around in many directions, sometimes in response to new questions and fieldwork experiences which have changed it from within, other times weathering pandemics and the unexpected workings of life which have changed it from the outside. The fact that it now exists as a point – from which to pivot and explore further, whatever the direction – is entirely thanks to the people who have supported me throughout.

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A note on translation and transliteration

French and Arabic quotations from texts and interviews have been translated into English in the text by the author. Short key phrases and terms in the original French or Arabic are often included in the text – these are followed by the English translation. This is to ensure ease of reading whilst keeping some of the original language. Original quotations from texts will be displayed in a footnote, so that the reader can see the original.

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0. Introduction

0.1 The Avenue Bourguiba, 14th January 2019

It was getting to that time of year again: the anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution, this one the 8th. It's always possible to sense this time of year in Tunis. It brings with it renewed questioning over whether the aims of the revolution are being achieved, debate pouring out of radios and television sets, humming over tables in cafés. It brings renewed protests – the UGTT, the *Union Générale de Travailleurs Tunisiens*, called a nationwide strike over the government's refusal to raise wages a few days later on the 17th January. But on the Avenue Bourguiba, the central artery running through the capital, there is also a sense of excitement that accompanies this period, as multiple stages start to appear, lining the central esplanade between the rows of trees.¹ By the time the 14th January arrives, the Avenue has fully morphed from space of passage into space of spectacle and event.² Around 4 stages and multiple tents, each one representing a different political party or civil society group, line the street. Its entrances are closed off with metal railings from all angles, set up with police checkpoints. People have to queue at these checkpoints to get onto the Avenue. In their passage through these policed checkpoints and onto the Avenue, individuals thus inadvertently move into crowds which are widely mediatised as 'The Tunisian People' – a national, political community. This is a policed and contested community, and certain

¹ The Avenue Bourguiba has been highlighted by geographer Paul Signoles as being the 'hypercentre' of the capital – the one place which connects all parts of the city whose transport links run towards it (Signoles & URBAMA, 1985). Originally Avenue Jules Ferry, built by the French in the 1880s, it was reclaimed as the Avenue Bourguiba upon independence. It is a highly symbolic space – home of seats of power such as the Ministry of the Interior and the French Embassy, seats of 'culture' such as the Municipal Theatre, and the site of the most mediatised protests during the Tunisian revolution. Many have written on the Avenue Bourguiba and its urban significance (Ammar, 2010; Ben Becher, 2003; Mouhli & McGuinness, 2006; Sebag, 1998; Signoles & URBAMA (France), 1985); and as a site of politics (Khatib & Lust, 2014; Zemni, 2017).

² Indeed, a day of transformation between 'ordinary', 'extraordinary', 'passage' and 'ritual' urban modes as described by Agier (Agier, 2015).

groups, at this point the 'Ansar al-Charia' group, congregated outside the checkpoints rather than trying to negotiate the police checkpoints.³

I attended the festivities on the Avenue with friends Wiem and Tarak. It was the first month of my PhD fieldwork and I was interested at the time in the ways in which sound and music would be used to organise bodies throughout the space, and might enter into some kind of sonic construction of 'The People'. It was indeed a cacophony. Queuing up outside the Avenue, politically engaged Lebanese singer Marcel Khalife's voice was booming out of speakers by a screen showing images of the army: '*manṭsibal qamati 'mshi!*', 'I walk with my back held straight!'. Once through the barriers, rhythms from the military band, marching against the flow of bodies streaming in, messed with the speed of my steps. Up to the crowds of the central esplanade, amplified, singing voices echoed all around: Lebanese star Fairouz singing for Palestine as a boy stood with a Palestinian flag aloft, Tunisian singer-songwriter Sabri Mosbah's voice singing '*mri mā nsīt*' 'I never forgot', singer Mortadha, there in the flesh on the stage, launching into '*rakab 'lā ḥamra*'. Ennahdha, the Islamist party, had brought over a singer from Kuwait. His amplified voice echoed in the background as a man surrounded by a crowd of listeners shouted in protest about the lack of change. Milling around the Ministry of Culture stage, voice of American singer The Weeknd echoed out around the street, bringing some into dance. There was a concert of rapper Akram Mag, and then opera singer Hassen Dos, who belled various classics from the Phantom of the Opera to Bella Ciao against flashing backgrounds: first, icons flying onto the screen, from Nelson Mandela to Habib Bourguiba, ending with Hassen Dos himself – and then the cosmos. Crowds waved flags, filmed, and sang along.

³ At this point, in the wake of certain extremist attacks on beach resorts and museums that were claimed by ISIS, the Tunisian government responded by clamping down on certain manifestations of political Islam – this group Ansar al-Charia, with their version of Salafism, was considered too extreme and thus not recognised as an official party. See the report of Attia (Kunreuther, 2018; O'Brien, 2013).



Fig. 1: Watching a military band outside the Municipal Theatre, Tunis, 14th January 2019

It would be possible to read into this scene the construction of a soundscape which is crucial to the simultaneous dividing and unifying of ‘The People’, in a plural, yet unified, mass – a performance of ‘democracy’.⁴ After all, we have here multiple musical styles, voices, and languages, which in many ways could be seen to ‘represent’ the political stage that they are animating – a religious Kuwati singer for the Ennahdha stage, an opera singer for the Ministry of Culture stage, a military band for the space in between.⁵ And, these different parts, in this soundscape and in these crowds, meld together as sounds and bodies mix. Even the exclusion is operating along sonic as well as bodily lines; there is a clear disparity

⁴ Such an approach has been applied to the streets of Kathmandu by Kunreuther, and of Wisconsin by O’Brien (Kunreuther, 2018; O’Brien, 2013).

⁵ This is an angle that comes through in journalism covering the event: journalist Benoit Dalmas, writing for *Le Point*, described the switching between the music of Daft Punk and Eurythmics as a playlist which would ‘habiller’, ‘dress’, the centre of Tunis (Delmas, 2019).

between the booming amplified music of the Avenue and the chants of the Ansar Al-Charia group.

But in this thesis, I am interested in something else. These sounds and this music don't just appear, and then disappear again into thin air – they come from somewhere, and they go somewhere. They are maintained and mediated as fragments which populate multiple sonic archives at once: their meanings in this scene are contingent on the fact that they will already have been heard multiple times mediated by state and private radio stations, on personal Mp3 compilations, on YouTube, in the background during taxi journeys. Indeed, what is the importance here of the 'archive'? In this scene, sonic archives appear in a double sense: there are the material archives, infrastructures which store and mediate the music which we hear – and there is the 'imaginary' of the archive, the way in which the fragments of the archive might be strung together into a political 'community of time' (Mbembe, 2002). What is the nature of sonic archives in Tunis, how are they layered in the city, and how do they work to *order*: to order music's ontologies, and to order listeners and bodies? How might a turn towards sonic archives complicate our notions of shifts in time, space and social organisation in Tunis following the revolution, bringing other temporalities to the fore?

0.2 The Revolution, the people, the sensible

When the Tunisian Revolution happened it took everyone by surprise. Following the French colonisation (1881-1956), the country had seen two periods of dictatorship: the regime of Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987) and that of Ben Ali (1987-2011). Although we might not have seen it at the time, social sciences have turned increasingly in recent years to the struggles and discord that these regimes were wrought with.⁶ Bourguiba's regime, which he himself painted as a great period of modernisation and nation building following independence from the French, is now recognised in more nuanced terms: despite the very real investment in public infrastructures (particularly in education and health), the president's enforced sense of 'unity' and 'homogeneity' involved a violent oppression of certain differences, notably

⁶ For 'general histories' or accounts of the revolution which take into account both periods, see Chomiak, 2011; Chouikha & Gobe, 2013; CHOUIKHA & GOBE, 2015; Kerrou, 2018; Perkins, 2014.

Islamism, left-wing militantism, and racial minorities.⁷ The regime of Ben Ali, portrayed by him as a time of economic liberalisation and a booming middle class, was blatantly propped up by a violent disciplining: a police apparatus seeped into every aspect of daily life, Islamism and political opposition were further stifled, and the ruling family operated like a corrupt mafia.⁸ But to repeat the words of Dakhliya, 'there's no point in pretending, retrospectively, that it was a predicted event' (Dakhliya 2011, 7).⁹ The West, she suggests, remained largely duped by the image of Tunisia as stable, docile, peaceful, and '*moins*', 'less' (10): less extreme than its neighbours, with supposedly less Islamism; and less authoritarian, with its seemingly more emancipated women. Certain directives were scattered around the place for tourists to see: '*tolérance*', '*environnement*', '*dialogue de civilisations*', '*société de l'information*', drawing their attention away, perhaps, from the portraits of the dictators adorning entire buildings. Tunisia was placed in a position of similarity and alterity to Europe, an 'intermediary piece, median' (13)¹⁰. Its population was considered either incapable of democracy, in keeping with many readings of populations across the Arab world; undesiring of democracy; or indeed, already living in some sort of democracy.¹¹

The protests which led to the ousting of the dictator completely changed this picture. First, they highlighted that the population had been living in a situation that was untenable on several levels. As crowds of protesters filled streets between 17th December 2010 and 14th January 2011, the key demands were for economic stability, dignity and freedom: economic stability which would reduce inequalities between the 'interior' regions and the urban centres and would provide work for the unemployed; dignity away from police oppression and corruption in every aspect of daily life; freedom to speak, to express plurality, to choose

⁷ Important for understanding the regime of Bourguiba have been *Habib Bourguiba, Entre la trace et l'héritage* and *Le Syndrome Autoritaire* (Camau & Geisser, 2003; Geisser & Camau, 2004) and Driss Abbassi's *Entre Bourguiba et Hannibal: identité tunisienne et histoire depuis l'indépendance* (Abbassi, 2005). They in turn were building upon rare critiques from Tunisian intellectuals that made it into publishing – notably the work of Hélé Béji published in 1982, entitled *Le Désenchantement Nationale: essai sur la décolonisation*. (Béji, 1982).

⁸ The work of Béatrice Hibou, *La Force de l'Obeissance* has been vital for understanding the workings of Ben Ali's police state, and the ways in which it sought to discipline the population (Hibou, 2006). See also (Hibou, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2013). See Beau and Graciet on the mafia-like workings of the Trabelsi family and the figure of Leila Ben Ali, the dictator's unpopular wife (Tuquoi & Beau, 1999).

⁹ '*Il n'y a donc pas de sens à prétendre, rétrospectivement, l'événement prévisible*'

¹⁰ '*Une pièce intermédiaire, médiane*'

¹¹ Parallels can be drawn between Dakhliya's arguments here and those of Talal Asad in *Formations of the Secular*, in which he discusses the consequences of our elision of 'modernity' with Western, secular modernity, arguing instead that we see modernity as 'series of interlinked projects' (Asad, 2003: p.13).

leaders.¹² Second, they revealed a plurality which already existed amongst the population. As Dakhliya describes, the revolution revealed that underneath this gauze of stability and submission was in fact ‘not a sluggish, submissive people, incapable of politics, as was commonly thought, but on the contrary, and to the amazement of everyone, a society which was incredibly concerned with politics and able to speak a political language’ (16).¹³ In the moments after the uprisings, she describes how a multitude of languages melded together, the newfound freedom ‘exploding in the cacophony’ (16).¹⁴ Third, the protests forced a reckoning with ‘democracy’ as a concept and a practice, not only on the part of the Tunisian population, but across many parts of the world. The democracy desired here was a direct democracy, an expression of and instrumentalization of the fundamental equality between parts of the population; the challenge became how to achieve this with the institutions of states, global economic systems and global politics, which maintain inequalities.¹⁵

The ‘achieving this’ part in Tunis has been fraught. Zemni talked in 2012 about the country entering into a phase of ‘extraordinary politics’, one which is characterised by ‘a politicisation of *the people* outside the constituted order of ‘routine politics’, a tension between the legality, the governmental power and the revolutionary legitimacy of *the people* as well as by rising tensions and emerging differences between the *parts of the people*’ (Zemni, 2016a). There have been major events and shifts which have seen a constant dialectic between ‘the people’ coming together as a political force in public spaces and institutional change: the negotiation of the first elections and National Constituent Assembly, the formation and the dissolution of the Ennahdha government in response to continued protest movements taking place around major nodes of Tunis of the Kasbah between 2012 and 2014; the appearance and disintegration of ISIS and its influence in Tunisia both as a force drawing

¹² For reflections on the revolutionary demands, see also Gana (Gana, 2013).

¹³ ‘*non pas un peuple atone, soumis, inapte au politique, comme on le pensait communément, mais bien au contraire, et à la stupéfaction de tous, une société incroyablement soucieuse du politique et apte à parler une langue politique*’

¹⁴ ‘*Explose dans la cacophonie*’. Several researchers have looked at the ways in which insurrection and plurality were already at work before the revolution: see Allal on the 2008 protest movements in Gafsa phosphate mines, (Allal, 2010); Zederman for links in opposition between Islamist and left-wing militants throughout the Ben Ali regime (Zederman, 2015); and Saidi for an account of differences between interior and coastal regions (H. Saidi, 2019).

¹⁵ This idea of the universalism of these movements in Tunisia has been particularly highlighted by Dakhliya, and has been discussed from a ‘regional’ perspective by Asaf Bayat in *Life as Politics and Revolution without Revolutionaries*, and from a ‘global’ perspective by Laugier and Ogien in *Le Principe Démocratie*, and Graeber in *The Democracy Project* (Bayat, 2013, 2017; Graeber, 2014; LAUGIER & OGIEN, 2014).

young people to it, and a motor behind violent acts in Tunisian tourist resorts, with subsequent impacts on the tourism sector and international relations; and the election of Kais Saied, with his dissolution of parliament, passing of a new constitution, inciting of racial hatred, and grappling with an IMF and steadily worsening economic situation. In amongst these major events there have been societal shifts and debates: on the role of Islam in society, on the representation of marginalised groups such as religious and Black minority communities as well as discussions on feminisms and LGBT+ groups; on the tensions between identity politics and economic-based movements and claims; on the ongoing role of longstanding civil society groups such as the UGTT trade union and human rights groups; on the roles of the media; and on ways to understand and to combat the discriminatory migration politics of the European union, IMF, and other international configurations of institutions.¹⁶ Zemni details how, in efforts to ‘unify’ and to project a national narrative onto the people, Bourguiba’s notion of ‘Tunisianité’ is often redeployed: this ambiguous notion of Tunisia as a ‘nation of the middle’, conveying notions of ‘moderation’ and ‘consensus’, but also ‘a homogenous nation embedded in Arab-Islamic history as well in a pre-Islamic Mediterranean past and open to elements of Western civilization and modernity’ (Zemni, 2017). As Zemni suggests, it remains to be seen whether ‘Tunisianité’ will be employed by political classes to close down real plurality, as Bourguiba did, or to create a symbolic space which might allow different meanings, groups and political sensibilities to emerge.¹⁷

But if the revolution has taught us anything, it’s that politics, democracy and power, are also about more than institutional shifts and labels, or even verbal discussion and debate. There is a ‘sensible’ aspect to these movements and changes, which has been highlighted by Bayat, Dakhli, and Dakhli, who also suggest that the revolutions demand us to think about ‘politics’ in different ways, to spot it at work in different places. This is to follow Rancière’s

¹⁶ There has been an enormous amount of work that has interrogated this decade from all these angles. There has been discussion on emergent ‘civil society’ (Grami, 2016); on ‘the media’ and shifts in its institutionalisation (Auffray, 2013; Chouikha, 2013); on roles of internet and social media, including roles in protests and post-revolutionary building (Lecomte, 2011); on Amazigh identity movements (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012); on anti-black racism, race in Tunisia and the activism of the Black community (Inès, 2015; Ltifi, 2020; Pouessel, 2012); on the instrumentalization of identity politics (Omri, 2013, 2016), on questions of language of ‘participation’ and ‘cultural diversity’ (Boutieri, 2018; Pouessel, 2012); on questions of environment and waste (Darwish, 2018), on questions of police reform (Pluta, 2020); on histories and involvement of the UGTT workers union (Niazi, 2021); on questions of agriculture (Ayebe, 2011; Ayebe & Bush, 2019a).

¹⁷ On notions of ‘Tunisianité’ see Saidi, Pierrepont-Le-Cock, Brondino, Hibou, and for its redeployment by Kais Saied see also Mezrioui (Brondino, 2004; Hibou, 2009; Mezrioui, 2021; Pierrepont-de Cock, 2004; H. Saidi, 2011; M. H. Saidi, 2009).

assertion that politics is fundamentally about the ‘redistribution of the sensible’; about ‘what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.’ (Rancière 2013, 13).

There has thus been a call that we see the spatial ways that politics operates, particularly in cities, where politics is so often about the occupying of space and the funnelling of bodies around that space – about who has the ‘right to the city’. Bayat has discussed how the occupying of public space was a key way through which people could bring a ‘public sphere’ into being from within situations of authoritarianism: ‘streets represent the modern urban theatre of contention par excellence’ (Bayat 2013, 184), and the ways in which marginalised populations occupy them on a daily basis – young people, for instance, who have ‘fun’ publicly. These, for him, amount to a ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ (33), which creates sensible changes to city space which become the basis for protest and institutional change. Butler has added that bodies coming together in public spaces in protest are not laying claim to a public space which already exists – they are creating ‘the public’ itself, a public which did not previously exist for them (Butler, 2011). Ben Yakoub shares this approach, but, thinking about negotiations around public space after the revolution in Tunis, suggests we move beyond the ‘mesmerizing’ spectacles of peaceful occupations of places such as the Kasbah Square and to think about the nodes of authoritarian power that rather continually work to fragment space. For him, these include ‘police stations, the presidential personality cult and the private estate of the authoritarian regime’ (Ben Yakoub, 2022); he notes a ‘re-bourguibisation’ of public space as statues and images of the former dictator multiply in the streets of the capital.

There has also been a suggestion that we think more deliberately about ‘temporality’: about the temporalities of the revolution, the shifts in temporality that have come about as a result, and about people’s occupation of time. Historian Dakhli describes how the Revolution caused a tangible temporal change to life: she suggests that the ‘quality of time itself was modified by the uprisings’,¹⁸ noting that the temporalities of the revolution were in some senses accelerated, involve a rush of ‘*prise de parole*’ the ‘taking up of speech’, but also that the surging event gave way to ‘another temporality, less diluted, more difficult to master,

¹⁸ ‘*la qualité du temps elle-même a été modifiée par le soulèvement*’

often more anxiety-inducing' (Dakhli, 2015).¹⁹ She noted that the differences in the temporalities that different parts of the populations move through were key parts of their movement: the disparity between the temporalities of the interior regions where things are felt to stand still, stagnate and never change; and those of the cyberactivists of the Revolution, stationed often outside of the country, perceived as mobile. For all of them, however, the revolution stood as an 'opening to new historical potentialities',²⁰ whether the potential for mobility, or to use their mobility. But, just as Ben Yakoub draws our attention to ways in which remnants of previous spatial distribution continue to fragment urban space, Dakhli dwells on the maintenance of certain temporal divisions: the technocratic government in place at the time of writing (in 2015), for instance, was made up of elites who, mobile and circulating abroad through international organisations, had not experienced the 'temporal and spatial confinement of the dictatorship'²¹ – and so their politics, far from neutral, didn't take up calls for radical change, opting for a continuation of a politics of economic reform which had marked previous regimes.²²

One area which particularly combines the spatial, temporal and bodily aspects of politics is that which thinks deliberately about the aesthetics of politics – and the politics of aesthetics. This work takes more deliberate leave from Rancière, and his assertions that it is the 'delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience', and that artistic practices specifically are 'ways of doing and making' that 'intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making' (Rancière 2013, 13). This work focuses on multisensory changes to environments, the ways in which politics can work through the engaging of the whole sensorium, and the role here particularly of artists. Referencing the panoply of songs, chants, slogans, movements and banners which came together in public places during the protests, the authors of *The Aesthetics of Global Protest* suggest that these explosive aesthetic moments served to realign spaces and times in an effort to create new senses of the possible, according to different, horizontal power structures (Werbner et al., 2014). And, as Boutieri suggested recently in her article on the 'Democratic Grotesque',

¹⁹ 'une autre temporalité, moins diluée, plus difficile à maîtriser, souvent plus anxieuse'

²⁰ 'l'ouverture de potentialités historiques nouvelles'

²¹ 'l'enfermement temporel et spatial de la dictature'

²² For another interesting account of the separateness of 'elites' in the country see Kchouk (Kchouk, 2017).

aesthetics continue to form experiences which push and test the limits of democracy. Talking about the case of grotesque imagery and performances of banners during carnivalesque school *dakhla* events, she suggests that these objects and their performances articulated and enabled ‘unsettling feelings and attitudes’, which parsed out generational differences and produced spaces of ‘dissensus’ – they rendered visible ‘types of sociality and the ethical imaginations that render visible the palimpsest of intellectual, deliberational, affective, and phantasmatic dimensions of people’s engagement with democracy’ (Boutieri 2021, 74). As we will return to, a great deal of attention has been paid to the ‘rap music’ of the revolution: songs which are considered to have been particularly effective in galvanizing protestors with their politically engaged lyrics.²³

From this work, then, we understand that the Revolution and its aftermath have been sensible and aesthetic, and that the period has produced a great deal of sensible changes in space and time, as well as aesthetic production. Protestors, artists, politicians, the relatively immobile and the relatively mobile, have all sought to take up and to shape public space, to struggle over its distribution. But there is another layer to all this. It is not as if these moves, changes, productions and materials appear from nothing and then vanish back into thin air. As highlighted by Dakhli, ‘the archive’ is central here: as the place from which the materials of history come, the archive is the thing which enables history, as well as the imaginary of future possibility.

0.3 The importance of the archive

Achille Mbembe has theorised the archive as being central to the maintenance of the state, as well as a threat to its legitimacy. His text, *The Power of the Archive and its Limits*, was written in the aftermath of post-colonial struggles in Cameroon, and post-apartheid South

²³ There has been a great deal on rap (Barone, 2019; Gabsi, 2020a, 2020b; Gana, 2012; Golpushnezhad et al., 2016; Mekki, 2018; Ovshieva, 2013); on underground music scenes (Barone, 2016; Bouzouita, 2013, 2020), including in a regional view (LeVine, 2015); on use of song and art in protest in a longer temporality (Omri, 2016); on street and graffiti art (Boissier, 2017; Georgeon, 2012; Miladi, 2015); on roles and discussions of visual arts (Ben Cheikh, 2013; Demerdash, 2012; Shilton, 2013; Triki, 2013); on arts and aesthetics in public space (Machghoul, 2013; Tripp, 2013, 2016; Yakoub, n.d.); on cinema (Lang, 2014; Mannone, 2015).

Africa (Mbembe, 2002).²⁴ But his theorisation of the archive as both a set of ‘materials’, and as a ‘status’ – in which the materiality and sensate nature of fragments, the story-making of historians, and the instituting imaginary of political communities are all intertwined – can be fruitfully applied to the context of post-revolutionary Tunisia. After all, ours is another post-colonial context currently engaged in struggles of nation building, and in which, as we have seen, the ‘sensible’ distribution of the material world has been underlined as central to political shifts and engagement. It is worth here examining his arguments at some length, before bringing them into dialectic with archival engagement in Tunis.

There is a temporal and material element to Mbembe’s conception of the archive which is inseparable from the ways in which its status and importance are generated. Most important, he points out, is the dialectic between the fragments in the archive and the building which encases them – the building bestows archival ‘status’ upon the fragments, and the fragments upon the building. The archive is ‘primarily the product of a judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority’ (20), during which fragments are selected and others discarded. But selection alone is not enough; there is a temporal process according to which fragments which enter the archive are ordered, coded and classified, and recede for some time into secrecy – this is part of the ritual of the archive: ‘for several years, these fragments of lives and pieces of time are concealed in the half-light, set back from the visible world’, describes Mbembe, and it is this which ‘renders the contents of these documents even more mysterious’ (20). As this happens, there is a ‘process of despoilment and dispossession at work’ through which the fragments, through their selection but also their time spent in this building, become part of the archive.

Dwelling on this idea of the ‘status’ of the archive, Mbembe describes this status as dually ‘material’ and ‘imaginary.’ These two things are interconnected in the way that they employ and shape the ‘debris’, the ‘fragments’. The material status of the archive means that, as

²⁴ Mbembe’s work was published alongside that of Hamilton (Hamilton et al., 2002; Hamilton & McNulty, 2022). It comes as part of his broader thinking on inequalities of post-colonial worlds (Mbembe, 2001, 2019). This work on the post-colonial archive tends to build on the thinking of the archive by Foucault, who sees it as a political apparatus which legitimizes historical knowledge and discourse (Foucault, 1982) and Derrida, who also claims ‘there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory’ (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995). As suggested by Simon in his study of cassette archives in Egypt, there have been recent claims of an ‘archival turn,’ following Ann Stoler, in which scholars are undergoing a ‘theoretical shift from treating archives as “sources” for producing scholarship to positioning archives as “subjects” of scholarship’ (Simon, 2022). See Stoler (Stoler, 2002, 2010, 2018).

Mbembe suggests, 'it is inscribed in the universe of the senses: a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded' (20). Because it is there, the archive is 'something that does away with doubt, exerting a debilitating power over such doubt' (20), before it acquires a status of 'proof' – proof of a life, of an event. This proof-potential links it with the second status, the imaginary status: 'the final destination of the archive is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible.' The stories are thus made through the putting together of these pieces of time and fragments of the archive. They acquire coherence 'through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end', they are the 'product of a composition' but they create an 'illusion of totality and continuity'. This 'time' of the archive is political: it is supposed to belong to everyone. 'The community of time, the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership: this is the imaginary that the archive seeks to disseminate' (20).

Based on this specific materiality and trajectories of these fragments, this time of co-ownership rests fundamentally on 'death'. This is because, for Mbembe, the archived document is something whose author is dead, and has itself essentially died in the 'closure' of the archive that it goes through before it is 'woken from sleep and returned to life' (21), at which point it may be 'consulted'. It seems to be this very process which creates and distinguishes the 'past' from the 'present' – the 'past' is created from this 'dead time' as it exists in the 'instituting imaginary' that is made from it, against the 'living time' of the present. But this dying is something that can be tricky – things which are deceased often leave traces, and these traces threaten to 'stir up disorder in the present' (21). Archives attempt to resemble these traces, to ensure that these debris don't cause disorder through their burying. Through placing these remains and traces in the physical space of the archive, they are as if placed in a 'sepulchre' – 'assigning them to this place makes it possible to establish an unquestionable authority over them and to tame the violence and cruelty of which the 'remains' are capable, especially when these are abandoned to their own devices' (22).

Mbembe suggests that the power of the archive may be limited by the 'subjective experience' of it. He claims that archives have no meaning outside subjective experience,

and that this is shaped by several factors: 'who owns them; on whose authority they depend; the political context in which they are visited; the conditions under which they are accessed; the distance between what is sought and what is found; the manner in which they are decoded and how what is found there is presented and made public' (23). The relationship between the state and the archive is also complex: for Mbembe, it 'rests on a paradox': 'On the one hand, there is no state without archives – without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state' (23). The state's power rests on its ability to destroy the archive, and thus to commit an act of 'chronophagy', a consuming of time, through which it may think that it is erasing or anaesthetising the past. Some states have actually done this, thinking that they might thus control the past. But, Mbembe suggests, they actually just work to reinscribe the archive in a 'double register' – they might get rid of its materials, but not its 'instituting imaginary', which only grows in both strength and fantasy – 'the receptacle of all utopian ideals and of all anger, the authority of a future judgement' (24). Or, some states try to 'civilise' the archive by shaping the way it is consumed – through 'commemoration', which actually marks a desire to forget, to not repeat. This works through the passing of the fragments also into folklore, or into mass consumption. He suggests that 'democratising the act of chronography' serves to reduce the desire for a repetition of the original act (like with a murder etc), or to transform it into a talisman (in the form of a museum).

Mbembe ends with a note on the writing of history, and the historian. His claim is that 'writing history merely involves manipulating archives. Following tracks, putting back together scraps and debris, and reassembling remains, is to be implicated in a ritual which results in the resuscitation of life, in bringing the dead back to life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time, in such a way that they find, in a text, in an artefact or in a monument, a place to inhabit, from where they may continue to express themselves' (25). Historians, for Mbembe, battle the world of 'spectres'. They create the 'public domain' through the sharing of these fragments. This means that 'the historian and the archivist occupy a strategic position in the production of an instituting imaginary' (25).

There are many archives in Tunis which resemble Mbembe's image of buildings with fragments set back in a 'half-light' – and the treatment of these archives during the dictatorships and the revolution is very much in keeping with his claims for the threat posed

by archives to state authority, the power of the state over them, and the limited use of the state's own chronophagy. It is well known that the Tunisian National Archives, a large, intimidating building just off the Kasbah square, were the site of a harbouring of state secrets during regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Ben Hamouda describes how researchers could access Ottoman or Colonial-era archives, but those working on periods post-independence were told that the available archives were rare (Hamouda, 2014). Access to them was closed or heavily censored. During the revolution, as Dakhli reports, many supposedly public archives disappeared or were destroyed. As she describes, some of this destruction was filmed: people in charge of public bodies burning papers, setting fire to offices. The archives of the RCD (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*, the political party founded in 1988 by Ben Ali) were discovered in a cultural centre, and a message appeared on the Tunisian National Archives website urging civil servants to 'protect and conserve' documents in the midst of disappearances (Dakhli, 2011). Others, including Ben Hamouda, as well as Combe and Saidi whom she cites, suggest that democracy actually depends on an opening up of the regime's archives, which is the only thing that would enable a reappropriation by the people of the mechanisms of police violence and oppression used against them by the regime.²⁵

But against these building-encased state archives, there are others in Tunis; archives enter into life in other ways, collect in different places. Dakhli suggests that the archive itself became a revolutionary tool, as shown particularly by the 'hacktivists' and the role of the Wikileaks release of diplomatic cables in the months leading up to the 14th of January, in which the fall of the regime was entertained as a possibility. She claims that 'holding information, broadcasting it, even "propagating" it, is one of the modalities of this revolution, which expanded by contagion. Archives moved to the center of revolutionary activity' (Dakhli 2011, 3). Related to this, she describes how archives of the revolution are made, and make themselves, from the stream of online activity through which the materials of dissent travel. They are principally kept and made available via the Internet, through social networking sites. 'The Wikipedia page devoted to the Tunisian revolution has abundant notes, numerous websites and blogs have put together dossiers and archives on those revolutionary days' she describes (1). There is a 'cacophony of available evidence' for

²⁵ See also Bendana on the national archives in the aftermath of the revolution (Bendana, 2014b)

the revolutions, in forms of online material: songs, speeches, videos, blogs, articles, posts. People made films which were spread and held on certain sites, such as YouTube, ‘forming a reservoir of information and eyewitness testimony’ (8), before recirculating elsewhere, some of them recirculating around satellite television channels.

These archives that Dakhli describes have a different flavour to those described by Mbembe, and to the Tunisian National Archives. These online archives seem to have a different relationship with time: rather than their fragments being kept back in the half light of the archives, they travel around almost instantaneously, as they are made. ‘Access’ works differently: these archives are consulted from nodes of phones and computers, from across vast geographical spaces. They are curated differently, and the creators and sharers of the fragments become, in a sense, the archivists. And as such, these archives are positioned by Dakhli to have a different potential relationship to the historian, and to the instituting imaginary. Dakhli situates her role as a historian as something different from taming the world of spectres. She talks about how the revolution forced her to confront her ‘ignorance as a historian,’ as it challenged the very ways in which history is written; ‘the writing of this history became writing the history of increasing involvement,’ she says, ‘of an accumulation of people into a self-aware mass, but one which, thanks to social networks, retained the kaleidoscopic nature of its component, publicly declared, individual subjectivities’ (Dakhli, 2011a).²⁶ And she, along with a team of social scientists, have taken on the task of nurturing a ‘revolutionary archive’ in which they have sought to collect together into a publication and a database many of the fragments that circulated on the internet during the uprisings, in an attempt to maintain and to protect the imaginary of the revolution, against its potential co-option or erasure. In keeping with the unruly temporal nature of its fragments, Dakhli frames these efforts as ‘letting the archive speak’ (Dakhli & Collectif, 2020).

Despite differences in the material and temporal qualities of their fragments and archives, it seems that there are three key claims that remain intact between Mbembe and Dakhli’s conception of archives. First, as Mbembe claims, and as Dakhli’s engagement shows, archives are all about the creation of an ‘instituting imaginary’, or of its possibility, and

²⁶ See also Bendana for questions relating to historians and methods: in response to the question of how the historian might both embrace and comprehend the dizzying flux of events following a revolution, she has compared the task to that of a geologist, who traces the temporalities of events such as earthquakes using various fragments in hindsight (Bendana, 2014a).

‘communities of time’ – and this comes hand in hand with archiving, historicising, and story-telling, whatever form that may take. Second, the fragments of the archive are material: whether they be burnable papers or digital memes. Third, and importantly, they move through, and are supported by, infrastructures; whether they be Mbembe’s buildings, or Dakhli’s internet, and indeed, internet-based publication.²⁷ The power of the archive, and its limits, come from the ways that these three things combine in public life.

Importantly, also, engaging with these two discussions of archives brings to light something else: multiple archives may exist in a single space. In Tunis, as we’ve seen, the National Archives, the online archives of revolution, and the publication resulting from the curation of these online archives, all exist as separate but interlinked archival efforts, all with their own histories and politics of accumulation. They are all, as archives, layered; to be sensed in space and time. They all thus work to shape social and urban environments, not only through their different stories, but also through their different kinds of sensory presence.²⁸

But Mbembe and Dakhli have another thing in common: in concentrating on the written document, or on the spoken or sung word, they have largely left out sound. Where is the ‘sonic’ in these archives? Indeed, what about sonic archives? It is striking that, in his description of the ways in which archival materials are inscribed into the world of the senses, Mbembe omits sound: his universe of the senses is, to repeat, ‘a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded,’ – but not an audible universe because it can be heard, or listened to. Dakhli and her team do include songs in their archives, but they are thought to be notable principally as a vehicle for words: ‘the media revolution, which accompanied the political revolution, was from the outset a linguistic revolution. This language, freed from the conventions of register (spoken, written, TV language), blended everything together, as in the most politically engaged songs, rap in particular, or phone

²⁷ Neither author uses the term ‘infrastructure’. However, their descriptions of archives, as things which carry meaning through both their ‘contents’ and their own material occupation of space, chime strongly with notions of ‘infrastructure’ espoused by anthropologists and media theorists such as Durham Peters and Larkin. Durham-Peters paints infrastructures as ‘civilisational ordering devices’ – both vessels and environments (Durham-Peters, 2015). Larkin discusses the ‘poetics of infrastructure’, noting that media infrastructures can carry political desires and meanings which might be quite different from those evoked by the ‘contents’ that they mediate (Larkin, 2013). Most recently, Fahmy has thought about the importance of infrastructure in sonic mediation in Egypt (Fahmy, 2020).

²⁸ This has recently been termed ‘archival ambience’ by Cram (Cram, 2016).

messages.’ What about the sounds of these words – and the sounds that surround them, and indeed frame them as words?

What happens to our vision of archives in Tunis if we take the sonic into account? How might sonic archives move in public space; what kinds of stories and instituting imaginaries might their fragments and infrastructures allow?

0.4 Approaching the sonic archive

The discipline of ethnomusicology has had a close yet shifting relationship with sonic archives. Early ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, their practice and their politics, were bound up in making field recordings and creating archives – the archives of musics of the ‘other’, which were intended as the material ‘proof’, to use Mbembe’s term, of musical practices of people engaged in the ‘traditional’ or ‘popular’ considered non-Western or indigenous.²⁹ Post-colonial ethnomusicology started to shine a more critical light on the sonic archives maintained by states, and the ways in which they might be used to create and to maintain national imaginaries, and to ‘invent traditions’ – indeed, to hold a critical lens on these previous archival attempts.³⁰ This was accompanied by a conceptual shift away from the documents of the archive, to the notion that state archives neglected oral traditions, as well as practices of the mass media, both of which circulated kinds of archive outside the official state collections.³¹ Work here has, more recently, been accompanied by an intent to differently represent, conserve, or record these oral traditions, and to experiment with ways of archiving them which would enact the politics of archiving differently.³² And for several

²⁹ For a discussions of the role of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists in the formation of archives see Bohlman (P. V. Bohlman, 1993, 2017)

³⁰ Centrally important here is the work of Ruth Davis in Tunisia, which we will return to. Also important has been the work of Ali Jihad Racy in Egypt (Racy, 1981, 2004)

³¹ Attention towards the ‘oral’, the ‘popular’ and the ‘traditional’ traditions has occurred within a branches of scholarship interested in ‘intangible cultural heritage’: see Branderello (Brandellero & Janssen, 2014). Attention towards collections of mass mediated music is clear in volumes such as *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey* (Manuel, 1988), which states as its aim the study of ‘all major non-Western urban music styles’.

³² Particularly in light of the ‘digital’; see particularly the work of Noel Lobley, who asks of online audio recordings of music practices, ‘how might scholars and activists develop ecological and ethical methods to best sustain the continuity of expressive audible traditions, and how might music and sound manage to sustain

decades there has been some concern with the role of the discipline of ethnomusicology in the creation of sonic archives themselves.³³

Current approaches to archives within the discipline of ethnomusicology thus differ widely in use and questions asked of them. Some scholars are interested in archives as representative phenomena – containers for documents or recordings which encapsulate a practice and represent the people engaging in that practice. These archives are often therefore imbricated in the politics of identity and representation, and discussed as such. Others are interested in the political boundaries of the container itself.

A recent strand of work at the intersection of anthropology, ethnomusicology and sound studies has taken an approach to archives which thinks about their construction, their materials, and the ways in which they, themselves, are constructed and act politically – an approach to the archive which indeed more resembles that of Mbembe.

0.4.1 Archives and music's ontologies

Particularly key has been the work of Ana Maria Ochoa, and it can be usefully complimented by that of Devine and Born. Ochoa looks at sonic archives in Latin America during the colonial and post-colonial eras (Ochoa Gautier, 2006; Ochoa Gautier, 2014). But, as she points out, there aren't single, clearly defined sonic archives; rather, the archiving of sound was actually distributed and scattered across many different kinds of material, recordings, textual representations and images – and this process was shared between colonial figures, folklorists, musicians, and later recording industry professionals, and figures working in areas of 'culture'.³⁴ For Devine, also, archives are notable for their materials; he is particularly interested in the recording objects as things which are fundamentally material, and places

people?' (N. Lobley, 2014) see other work by Lobley, Titon, Trloyn and Emberly in this vein (N. Lobley, 2012, 2018; N. J. Lobley, 2010; Titon, 2009; Treloyn & Emberly, 2013).

³³ Anthony Seeger has discussed ways in which sonic archives are an 'integral part of the development of theory' in the discipline, noting that fragments of the ethnomusicological archive might go on to live multiple lives within political movements and further research. He suggests attending to the ethics of repatriation (Seeger 1996; Seeger and Chaudhuri 2015), joining other scholars who discuss the politics of repatriation including Shelemay who discusses creation of Ethiopian archives (Shelemay, 2009) and Landau and Fargion who address the discipline more generally (Landau and Fargion, 2012).

³⁴ Ochoa builds on the work of Feld, who talks about archives as things which are distributed across bodies and environments (Feld, 2012, 2015)

his work in a recent trend of ‘thinking about *things*’ (Devine 2017, 70).³⁵ Devine’s *things* are made of shellac and plastic – and indeed, ‘the digitalization of music is not the dematerialization of music. Rather, the digitalization of music represents a splintering and proliferation of music’s commodity forms – and therefore a massification of music’s material bases...’ (Devine 2019, 37).³⁶ This work chimes with that of Born on music and its material and social mediations; she suggests that ‘musical assemblages’ are made up of ‘sonic, discursive, corporeal, material and social mediations’ (Born & Barry 2018, 446).³⁷

What all these scholars share is an assertion that ‘music’ is something that emerges from archives, objects and assemblages which are material, social, sonic and discursive. ‘Music’ is thus an ontological category amongst others. It is a multiply *mediated* notion, not an essential category; it can mean different things to different people, and emerge differently from mediating materials. And these mediating things can be multiple, and encapsulate many aspects of a situation. Born, for instance, suggests we pay attention to ‘musical sounds themselves composed of multiple human and nonhuman mediations’ (Born 2018, 193-6), as they mediate and are mediated by embodied practices, instruments and technologies, certainly, but also aesthetic, critical and philosophical discourses, socialities, visual inscriptions, physical venues and virtual locations and so on’ (Born 2022, 26). From this, she suggests that music emerges from this as a ‘more complex and distributed object – an assemblage’ (Born 2022, 22). For Devine, this focus on the materials of recordings enables an important distinction to be made between ‘music’ and the materials of recordings, the supporting infrastructures, the sounds and the listeners. ‘Music,’ from this perspective, becomes a ‘performative category – a meta-generic political apparatus that upholds ideological distinctions between obviously musical things and practices, on the one hand, and seemingly nonmusical things and practices, on the other’ (Devine 2019, 21). And

³⁵ Scholars interested in *things* often follow the work of Ingold and Appadurai, situated in a phenomenological vein (Appadurai, 1988; Ingold, 2000, 2016).

³⁶ Devine situates his work in a material turn. Key discussions on this turn include those of Sterne, Straw and Jasen (Jasen, 2016; Sterne, 2014; Straw, 2011). Work here includes that of Bull, Bergh and DeNora and others on technologies and modes of listening (Bergh & DeNora, 2009; Berland, 2012; Bijsterveld et al., 2014; Bijsterveld & Dijck, 2009; Bull, 2012; Bull et al., 2015; Chion, 2012; Cottrell, 2010; P. D. Greene & Porcello, 2004; Krause et al., 2015; Lysloff & Gay, 2003; Meintjes, 2004; Sterne, 2014).

³⁷ Born is a key proponent of mediation theory which also includes the important work of DeNora (DeNora, 2000, 2014) and Hennion (Hennion, 2003; Hennion & Meadel, 1986). All work from Latour’s ideas of mediation in actor-network theory: the idea that the social is mediated by assembles of actors in complex networks (Latour, 2007). See other work by Born in this area (Born, 2011a, 2011b, 2015a, 2015b; Born & Barry, 2018).

indeed, his suggestion is the need for a ‘musicology without “music” – which would require the researcher to ‘not be so sure that they know in advance what counts as a “properly” musical practice or a “properly” musicological object of study.’ (Devine 2019, 21).³⁸

The *use* of being able to do this – to separate ‘music’ as a category from others, to see it as something emerging from the materials of social and cultural constructions – is more than just theoretical: for these scholars it is a question of understanding the ways in which the delineating of ontological categories enter into plays of power and politics, on several levels. For Devine, it allows us to think more about music industries’ participation in global capitalist exploitation, as, in the name of ‘music’, its materials are mined and put together through exploitative labour practices. For Born, it allows us to think about the politics at play in the struggles over different meanings of music: proposing an ‘*analytical*’ ontology of music’, she suggests that in any given situation we can infer through discourses and practices how mediations are ‘marked or valorised ontologically’, for different local actors, which is shown by their ‘relative primacy, prominence or, on the contrary, insignificance or denial in the way the assemblage is enacted and experienced by those subjects (Born 2005; 2013)’ (Born 2022, 26).³⁹ This allows us, Born suggests, to ‘attest to when an ontology has become heightened or politicised among our interlocutors’, which might relate to threat, erasure, but also the creative affordances. It allows us to ‘pursue the quite different politics arising from dramatic if slow-motion historical clashes between contending ontologies of music, clashes suffused with differences of social and/or cultural power (Born 2022, 26). Their work chimes with a kind of ‘media archaeology’ centred on musical objects: it shares the assertion of media archaeology that links may be drawn between different media which don’t necessary follow chronologies, but rather ‘topoi’ (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011), seeing media as ‘spaces of action for constructed attempts to connect what is separated’ (Zielinski 2008, 7). It also chimes with recent media anthropology which claims that the ‘new’ is not something

³⁸ This is to build on thinking from Sound Studies which has long seen music as a constructed category amongst others (Battesti & Puig, 2016; Behrendt, 2014; Meizel & Daughtry, 2019; Ouzounian et al., 2017; Puig, 2017; Schafer, 1994; Thibaud, 2014).

³⁹ This chimes with Mazzarella’s claims for ethnographic practices which study the multiple mediations of ‘culture’ within situations of globalisation – he suggests that ethnography should be an ‘inquiry that is attentive to the specific social conditions of mediations out of which particular representations (including “culture” emerge in our informants’ lives and work’ (Mazzarella, 2004, p.348).

sequential, embedded in 'new' media, but structural, mediating 'a form of expectation oriented towards the future,' (Hirschkind et al., 2017).⁴⁰

Ochoa takes the potential of thinking about the politics breathing through music's multiple mediations and ontologies a step further. The different local actors that Ochoa describes in Latin America are all working, through their archiving efforts, to form and negotiate the 'aural public sphere', the public sphere through which projects of modernity are negotiated through a shaping and negotiation of the 'aural' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006). Ochoa points our attention to the ways in which the archive is dynamic and in constant circulation; the sonic is inscribed and reinscribed, by these varying actors, in materials, from which they continue to circulate. There is constant cycle at play: there is 'entextualisation' – the 'capturing' of sound, whether that be in text, notation, or recording; and a subsequent or simultaneous 'recontextualization' of those sounds into different contexts by the actors seeking to use them. This process often reveals, and indeed creates, a clash of 'epistemologies' surrounding sound: there is a tension between 'epistemologies of purification', through which certain actors seek to fix and mediate sounds as things which can be 'provincialised,' attached to notions of the 'local', and 'an ascribed sense of deeply felt identification' (Ochoa Gautier 2006, 390); and those which don't fit in with any of the 'parameters of canonic validation' (390), which are often considered to be 'vulgar' or 'bad taste', the practices which seemingly disregard any link between sound, place and time, and whose sounds are felt to thus hover temporally. At stake here are questions of 'modernity', and the constitution of the 'aural public sphere' as 'modern': for Ochoa, entextualisers' practices of sonic purification, whether they be folklorists or music industry professionals, are all about seeking to place sound within the 'modern ecumene'. The tensions between different practices are revealing of, and contributing to, the inequalities of a public sphere which is fundamentally 'aural'.

I want to dwell for a moment longer on the way that Ochoa links projects of 'modernity,' and treatments of the sound and the sonic: important here is the distinction that she highlights between actors' politics or representation, and the ways in which a certain modernity through sound is sought. People who enact these processes of sonic entextualisation and

⁴⁰ For accounts of media archaeology's engagement with archives see Parikka, Ernst and Natale (Ernst, 2012, 2015; Natale, 2012; Parikka, 2012, 2012). See McMurray for an account of the ways in which media archaeology can be usefully applied as a methodology to sound in cities (McMurray, 2012).

recontextualisation – the ‘sonic transculturators’, as she calls them – do so for a variety of purposes: sometimes they might even be seeking to make opposing claims for certain sounds, and the people that they are associating with those sounds, ‘promoting’ them or newly ‘representing’ those considered marginalised. She joins Feld and Stokes in noting how, over the course of the 20th century, with the intensification of technologies of sound reproduction and listening, many of these practices have resulted in sonic, musical assemblages which have been considered ‘hybrid’ – a mix between several ‘styles’ of music.⁴¹ But the point here is that to render and hear something as ‘hybrid’ necessarily involves epistemologies of purification which keep the mixed sounds separate parts. What is fascinating here, for Ochoa, is that these practices of recontextualization, of musical schizophonia and sonic disaggregation and reconfiguration ‘seem to be seen, again and again, as a profound innovation, as going against the grain, as a practice deeply based in the idea of discovering something new for the first time, each time they are enacted, even when following previously set models’ (398). The division here, for Ochoa, ‘is not between the traditional and the popular but rather between transculturations epistemologically validated through practices of purification and those that are not’ (398).

Ochoa’s work is particularly important for us because we too are working in a post-colonial context in which we have to recognise the ways in which ‘music’, as a contested ontological category, has been constructed and negotiated by the various elites of the colonial and post-colonial generations, all with their projects of modernity. Her approach, along with that of Born and Devine with their focus particularly on the materials of technological assemblages, sit intriguingly alongside the Mbembéan conception of the archive, and the idea that the ‘instituting imaginaries’ and ‘communities of time’ that underpin the nation, are drawn together by the ‘fragments of the archive’.

0.4.2 Sound, environment and listening

A key component of these ‘assemblages’ of musical mediation is the *listener*, and the relationship between the listening, sensing body and the sonic environment. This is

⁴¹ She builds here on the work of Feld and Stokes on notions of hybridity and cosmopolitanism (Feld et al., 1995; Stokes, 2004, 2008).

important: the sonic archives that we are envisaging here shape listeners, and themselves bear on the spaces of social and material environments. Listeners have been theorised by Sterne and Devine in a way which draws attention to the mutual construction of the materials and technologies of listening with the listener; and by Labelle, Kassabian and Riedel et al. in a way which thinks about the interrelationships between sound, environment, and listening.⁴²

Sterne highlights that listeners, and listening, are shaped by the materials of listening; and that these in turn respond to social and political desires for a certain shaping of the sensing subject. In *The Audible Past*, he highlights that the technologies of listening are not things which develop in a social and cultural vacuum, but that they respond to, and help generate, 'listening techniques' that respond to social and political needs. His notion of 'audile technique' is of a type of 'attentive' and 'discrete' listening that was central to notions of modernity stemming from Western Enlightenment, and was generated in correspondence with instruments of listening used in 'modern' medicine such as the stethoscope (Sterne 2003, 95). Devine talks in turn about the 'listening formations' that grow around different technological formats of music as 'the whole context of audition for historically specific audiences, taking account of expectations formed for them by the whole culture and technology of speech and hearing of which they are a part' (Devine 2017, 73). Listening formations for him 'encompass the modes of thought, means of identification, principles of social action, technological objects and systems, and institutional arrangements that shape both the personal (ontogenetic) and sociohistorical (phylogenetic) evolution of acoustic subjectivities' (73). Important here, for the shaping of listeners, are the sonic objects used to mediate sounds, and the ways in which people come into interaction with them.

But it's not only 'objects' which shape listeners – whole environments shape, and are shaped by, listening and sound. For Labelle, also, sound 'locates us within an extremely animate and energetic environment that, like auditory phenomena, often exceeds the conventional parameters and possibilities of representation' (LaBelle 2010, p.xvii). And in line with this thinking, Kassabian's listening – to 'ubiquitous music' – is also something that 'engages us in sensual and sensory affective processes to situate us in fields of distributed subjectivities'

⁴² Listeners have long been a concern of ethnomusicology and sound studies (Back, 2007; Chion, 2012; Erlmann, 2004).

(Kassabian 2013, xxiv). She discusses ways in which ‘music’ has become a ubiquitous part of sonic environments, and the ways in which our relationships with music have fundamentally changed as ‘background music *has become* foreground music’ (Kassabian 2013, 5). Key in all of this work is the idea that sound and listening work to blur the boundaries between subject and object, between listener and environment. The authors of the *Music as Atmosphere* volume bring these strands of thinking together to theorise music and sound primarily as ‘atmosphere’, which they define, following the philosophy of Gernot Bohme, as the kind of *feeling* that exists between things, ‘tinctures’ spaces with mood. Whilst atmospheres are ‘multimedial’ and synaesthetic, the authors note that music and the acoustic are critical for most atmospheres, and indeed could be theorised primarily *as* atmosphere (Riedel & Torvinen, 2019). This is an approach adopted by scholars who apply it even to the materiality of recordings, and the atmospheres which may arise from these: Bates deems vinyls ‘vibrant matter’, following Bennett’s theorisation of ‘things’ as ‘actants’ (Bates, 2020); Tragaki thinks about recordings as ‘ecstatic beings’, following Bohme’s theorisation of material ‘things’ tincturing surroundings (Tragaki, 2019).⁴³

Similarly here to in the previous strand of work on music’s ontologies, the purpose of these conceptualisations of sound as atmosphere is more than theoretical: it enables us to think in interesting ways about the workings of music and sound’s power, and the politics inherent in this. For Labelle, this comes through in the ways in which sound works to connect and push apart bodies through a constant and productive tension between efforts to *territorialise* through sound – to create acoustic territories and communities – and to occupy and make claims for that territory and community. As it circulates through everyday life, sound itself acts as ‘a medium for personal and social transformation’ (LaBelle 2010, xv), as something that can be ‘occupied’ by people, whose occupation amounts to a ‘project’. But the success of these projects of territory and community are always ambiguous when they operate through sound; they cannot be ‘owned’ – they ‘belong to no single public and yet which impart a feeling for intimacy.’ (xix). They thus blur notions of public and private space. For Kassabian, the power of sound comes through in the ways in which listeners emerge as ‘musically constituted as subjects’ in ways which they are not always in control of. She

⁴³ For Bohme’s philosophy of atmospheres, including ‘ecstatic things’ and ‘tincturing’, see selected Böhme (Böhme, 1993, 2013a, 2013b, 2016).

highlights how, whereas a large amount of scholarship revolves around the notion of the 'attentive' listener, the ways in which music now moves through the complex technological and social spaces that we live in demands or leads to a kind of engagement which is often the opposite of attentive – but that the very power of this music comes from the fact that it still affects us, just under the surface consciousness, in the 'grey zone between consciousness and unconsciousness (Quiñones et al. 2016, 8).

For all of these thinkers, then, sound is notable for its location somewhere between the objective and the subjective, between listeners and materials. Sound and music are seen as forces which can be attempted to be organised by people, but which equally generate their own momentum, their own action. All think about 'people' as bodies which come together in community and social formation, rather than as things with inherent 'identities'; 'identity', across this work, is treated as an ambiguous formation which is distributed, comes into being through bodies swimming in and out of sound, or forming and dissolving in atmospheres. 'Public' and 'private' space is also usefully problematised by this work, and sound and music are a key part of this blurring. Combining this thinking with thinking about archives allows us to think about the archive as something which might structure experiences of time and space through being generative of atmosphere, engaging listeners in vibrant, sonic environments.

0.4.3 Reorienting towards the Global South

The thinking that we have engaged with to this point will help us to think about sonic archives – but it needs to be reoriented in ways which will enable us to think about them specifically in Tunis. Tunis is, after all, a post-colonial city in the Global South which is emerging from decades of authoritarianism and global economic and political marginalisation. It is very different from the kind of generalised Global North city of buskers described in the work of Labelle, or the world of ubiquitous ipod listening described by Kassabian.⁴⁴ In their recent volume *Remapping Sound Studies*, Steingo and Sykes take issue

⁴⁴ Labelle, for instance, describes 'busking' as if it is a generalisable and relatively apolitical phenomenon. But in Tunis, street music is a specifically post-revolutionary phenomenon through which conflicting claims are made for a public space which is constantly under negotiation. The phenomena are not completely equivalent in these two contexts, and as such, the Global North version should not be taken as the norm.

with the Global North bias inherent in sound studies – indeed, inherent in much of the work that we have seen. They suggest that this bias has led to a theorisation of sound which in many ways excludes the Global South – which they define as ‘a set of global externalities’ produced through colonialism and neoliberalism. They suggest reorienting our thinking along three axes (Sykes & Steingo, 2019).

First, we should think more about the specific ways in which technologies and infrastructures work and are politically shaped in the Global South. Much of sound studies – particularly work which talks about the ubiquity of music, as well as circulation of sounds – imagines technologies and infrastructures which are themselves apolitical, and also work perfectly. On the contrary, Steingo and Sykes suggest, infrastructures and technologies in the Global South are often marked by precisely the opposite qualities to those which are assumed to underpin modern life: interruption, failure, obduration. Steingo in particular develops these critiques, suggesting that technology in his contexts of Cameroon and South Africa does not create increasingly isolated listening subjects but rather is social; and does not increase the smooth ubiquity of music but rather participates in situations in which music ‘hops’ and ‘creeps’ through online and offline spaces (Steingo, 2019). They draw on work by Brian Larkin which looks at the ways in which media infrastructures in Nigeria themselves carry the political desires of the colonial and post-colonial nation, and at the ways in which that nation is felt and lived by subjects in part through those infrastructures (Larkin 2008; 2015).⁴⁵ They suggest that we switch focus to the ‘technicity’ which is inherent in the ‘infinite series of objects and techniques through which “culture” is always already constituted’ (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 11).⁴⁶

Second, we should take more seriously the idea of an ontological multiplicity to sound. The sound of sound studies is essentialised and naturalised as secular, and the ‘other’ to the visual.⁴⁷ The authors point out that in many areas of the world, including many areas in the

⁴⁵ There are many others that have worked the social and cultural meanings of media infrastructures in post-colonial contexts, particularly on television (Abu-Lughod, 2004), and radio and recording studios (Ahiska, 2010; P. D. Greene & Porcello, 2004; Kaplan, 2012; Meintjes, 2004; Mrazek, 2002; Vidali-Spitulnik, 2012).

⁴⁶ Born et al. critiqued this point in the MusDig volume, suggesting ‘a rolling back, equally, of any tendency to equate the South unilaterally with Larkin’s pirate infrastructures as they generate a ‘sensorial experience of media marked by poor transmission, interference, and noise’ (Larkin 2004, 291)’, advising ‘ethnographic vigilance to combat any ‘empirical shortsightedness’ (Steingo 2019, 53) towards the distinctive material and sensorial properties of sound practices in the South (and North):’ (Born 2022, 23).

⁴⁷ They point this out as happening in Sterne’s audiovisual litany, for instance, in *The Audible Past*, 2003

Global South, sounds have different meanings – they *are* different things, and they are also considered to exist separately from listeners. Drawing particularly on anthropology's ontological turn led by Vivieros de Castro, they argue that sounds can be all sorts of things: they can be spirits and gods, as well as part of secular imaginations. They suggest viewing sound studies as 'an experiment with the thresholds or limits of audibility rather than simply a consideration of sound as a historically contingent "social construction"' (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 12).⁴⁸ Ochoa, in recent work on 'aurality', builds on this idea, furthering her thinking on colonial encounters and the construction of sonic knowledge in Latin America's 'highly unequal modernity'. She rearranges the concept of the 'acoustic assemblage' to be the transformative relationship through which listening entities understand the sonorous producing entities through theorizing about sound; and she takes Sterne's concept of 'audile technique' to again make it multiple, suggesting that many different 'audile techniques' may gather together and clash as different groups attempt to listen.⁴⁹

Third, they suggest that sonic history should be conceptualized as 'nonlinear and saturated with friction'. They propose that this history be conceived as 'a narrative of jagged histories of encounter, including friction, antagonism, surveillance, mitigation, navigation, negotiation, and nonlinear feedbacks, rather than as efficiency, inexhaustibility, increasing isolation of the listening subject, and increasing circulation' (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 21). The plea for a nonlinear history brings us back around to the media archaeology and anthropology which also suggests that 'the goal is to uncover dynamic moments in the media-archaeological record that are about and revel in heterogeneity and, in this way, to enter into a relationship of tension with various present-day moments, relativize them, and render them more decisive.' (Zielinski 2008, 11).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ This chimes with much thinking on the 'senses' and the 'sensorium' which sees it as a culturally constructed thing (Feld, 2015; Hirschkind, 2009; Howes, 2006; Porcello et al., 2010; Seremetakis, 1996).

⁴⁹ In her discussion of the interactions between colonialists and bogas people of the Magdalena River basin in the 19th century, for instance, she explores how 'natives' howls seemed to be the limit against which Western ideas of music took form in the nineteenth century'; and how these perceptions of 'acoustic difference' became integral to the acoustic knowledge making of various groups; but also how sound, once it is described and inscribed into writing, 'becomes a discursive formation that has the potential of creating and mobilizing an acoustic regime of truths, a power-knowledge nexus in which some modes of perception, description, and inscription of sound are more valid than others in the context of unequal power relations.' (Ochoa Gautier, 2014, p.33).

⁵⁰ In this way, these approaches depart slightly from some recent uses of the archive in sound studies to retell 'acoustic histories' of places: Zied Fahmy's recent work on sonic histories of Egypt, for instance, has been valuable for thinking about the ways that sound tells different stories, particularly of the rise of consumer.

The exclusion of the Global South from sound studies hasn't just served to reduce the epistemological validity of the discipline for the authors – it has also contributed to the maintenance of the Global South, and 'sound', together as the 'others' of Western modernity. They ask what it would mean to think of these terms together in a way that does not reproduce colonial logic, and argue that rethinking Sound Studies *from* the Global South might open up possibilities of realigning our knowledge of sound and the world in general. One of their suggestions is indeed that we take up an 'orientation toward ethnography and archives in diverse languages (including non-European languages) as ways to recognise that everyone – not only professional scholars – theorise sound.

A turn to sonic archives of Tunis in this thesis – theorised in light of Ochoa, Born, and Devine as material assemblages which incorporate the materials of recordings, as well as bodies, texts and voices – and in light of Riedel et al., Labelle and Kassabian as things which have the potential to themselves sound and to create atmospheres, drawing together and pushing apart bodies in the process – thus requires another step, inspired by this recent work by Steingo, Sykes and Ochoa: that through ethnographic fieldwork and archival engagement in the global South, we nurture openings that they might give us onto different ideas of sounds, their relationships with politics and history, and the specific conditions embedded in their technological, legal, political and economic infrastructures. It opens up questions on legacies of the colonial and post-colonial regimes, and the ways in which their projects may themselves be sensed and enacted *through* sonic archives.

0.4.4 Questions

If we think back to the conceptions of Mbembe and Dakhli on the archive in light of this thinking on the 'sonic', we find that many intriguing lines of questioning open up. We have here a change in the nature of the fragments of the archive, as well as the encasing structures (the building). We have moved from 'materials' of paper, and from song lyrics and memes, to 'sonic objects' which are multiple: themselves

culture and the middle class; but what is being called for here is a more critical evaluation of the ways in which the archive comes into our processes of story construction and chronology itself (Fahmy, 2016, 2020).

composite, assemblages, themselves potentially archives, omitting and bringing people into relationships with sound. We have moved from 'the building' to multiple technological infrastructures, buildings, shops, homes, which have, like Mbembe's buildings, been crafted with political desires - but which are structured differently, which don't all contain the ritual process that sends fragments through half-lights and a kind of 'death' before they are re-awoken.

How do these changes therefore change the processes of story-making through which, Mbembe suggests, the archive acquires its coherence? Mbembe suggests instituting imaginaries are usually built from the 'dead time' of the past – but how might the 'past' and 'present' be blurred by these sonic fragments and their archives, and what does that do to potentials for an 'instituting imaginary'? How might people come together in a 'community of time' of the archive through sound and music, itself temporal?⁵¹

And how do people attempt to hone in and to gather these fragments into stories? Indeed, by which curatorial processes are stories generated here? Indeed, how might the fragments themselves generate stories, their own compositions? And what is the importance here of the ways in which 'music' emerges as an ontology amongst others?

Lastly, how is the archive experienced subjectively, if its fragments might create 'atmospheres', or are experienced below the boundaries of consciousness? How are multiple sonic archives layered in public space, inviting different kinds of engagement with time and history?

All of this is questioning, therefore, what the sonic archives do to the communities of time, the instituting imaginaries. We'll remind ourselves that the 'instituting imaginary' is all about the imaginary nature of 'the people' and 'parts of the people'; and 'communities of time' are also political, because they are about the time which is

⁵¹ We are strongly reminded here of thinking from Schutz who defines music itself as 'inner time' through which a community forms (SCHÜTZ, 1951).

shared by the 'public'. We've seen that, at this post-revolutionary time, many claims are made over times and spaces through which people come together and are pushed apart, and that archives come into this heavily. So to repeat our opening questions, what is the nature of sonic archives in Tunis, how are they layered in the city, and how do they work to *order*: to order music's ontologies, and to order listeners and bodies? How might a turn towards sonic archives complicate our notions of shifts in time, space and social organisation in Tunis following the revolution, bringing other temporalities to the fore? What is the power of sonic archives, and what are their limits, in post-revolutionary Tunis?

0.5 Methods – from style to infrastructure

When I arrived in Tunis for my doctoral fieldwork in January 2019, it was with a project rendered in different language. I was still interested in music and politics. But I was going into it in a different way: looking at the distribution of social groups around the city, particularly around the socially complex *centreville*, and the ways in which music came into this distribution of bodies. I imagined that these spatial negotiations would be working along stylistic lines; that social groups would map onto, and be mapped out by, musical styles, which would be reflected in other aspects of their lives. I thought that, through looking and listening closely enough, I'd be able to spot these groups, how they are defined, and how they move. I planned indeed to document this, in part audio-visually. I was interested in post-revolutionary negotiations over public space, social reorganisations, and their relationships with sound and music – and I assumed that if they would happen through sound and music, they would thus materialise through clashes of *style* – and that territory would be marked out by styles and social groups.

With a project like this, I already felt a step ahead. Having spent lengthy periods of time in Tunis from 2012, I had already committed many of the missteps that people from the global North with a burgeoning interest in the Arab Spring, yet little knowledge of the region, tend to commit (and get away with); and I had also learned of the vital importance of musical style in the ways that people are sorted, organised and reacted to.

I first went to Tunis in 2012 in order simply to get out of the UK, and to learn French and Arabic. From my own activities as a singer and participant in a Tunisian theatre group between 2012 and 2014, worlds of music making opened up to me which did seem to be directly responding to the political moment, with many groups writing politically engaged songs, forming DIY collectives, and exploring a growing nightlife scene. In this heady atmosphere, in which music was frequently framed as a tool for social change, by participants in the 'scene' and by international onlookers alike, I teamed up with a journalist friend from the UK to make a radio documentary about post-revolutionary art and music-making.⁵² But in the process of researching and making the documentary, cracks started to appear in our aligning of music with 'revolutionaries'. Many of the musicians that we were 'interviewing' had been interviewed many times already for similar projects, and had developed narratives which were slick, identical, and performative; after all, this kind of international research and journalism had become a tool also for them in their generation of capital (Mannone, 2012). I felt during the documentary that we were deliberately bringing out a revolutionary narrative whilst ignoring others: during an interview with a religious rapper, for instance, we were unable to put his lyrics into any meaningful context that did justice to their complexity. And I witnessed the discomfort that the activity gave to friends as they witnessed this wilful construction of a narrative by Europeans who all too often use their context as an opportunity to live an 'experience', to produce something which would further careers that would develop outside of Tunis, and then leave.

Meanwhile, during this time, as well as during subsequent Master's research, it became clear to me that all styles, not only the ones that were usually brought out for their revolutionary potential, were political. It was something that I could *feel* before reading about it. Particularly intriguing to me were the styles of *fann sh'abi*, (styles described as 'popular' or 'traditional'), the rhythms of the *mezoued*, the *gasba* and *zokra*, and the ways in which they both brought bodies to movement and even trance during festivities, and also provoked a very public distain and ire. The distain and ire were directed towards certain public performances of these musics and dances, the *bodies*, not only at the styles themselves – which, often, those same people enjoyed in other settings. Musical styles

⁵² *What Does A Revolution Sound Like?* By Ben Weisz on PRX: the documentary can still be accessed here: <https://beta.prx.org/stories/123879>

clearly participated in constructions and negotiations of class and gender, and the ways that that these played out in public space. As I discussed in my Master's thesis on street music, public space was created and contented using music. The importance of style and place was confirmed and explained in great depth by works of ethnomusicology and anthropology, which I subsequently found. Particularly enlightening throughout has been the work of Ruth Davis, Rich Jankowsky and Ali Saidane, which we will return to in more depth in the first chapter. Their work rang in my ears as I read an article published in *Le Monde* by journalist Mekki, in which, during a discussion of post-revolutionary rap scenes, he described other styles as '*apolitique*' (Mekki, 2018). If ethnomusicology and media studies of the post-colonial world have taught us anything, it's that apolitical styles don't exist – that all music might provide a 'means by which people position themselves, and can be positioned in temporal and spatial schemes' (Stokes 2002, 122).⁵³

So it was armed with (at least slightly) better awareness of my position in the field, what my position *did* in the field, and insights from anthropology and ethnomusicology on the political importance of musical style, that I arrived for my fieldwork in Tunis in 2019. This was the moment of the 8th anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution, described in the opening vignette of this introduction. Béji Caid Essebsi was president, concerns were growing daily over economic woes, conversation revolved around prices in the markets; and in the midst of this, music continued to spill around public spaces, and I was drawn to the stages of the Avenue Bourguiba and their musicians.

But from this point, things started to appear, and sound, much more complicated. They started in my flat. By a miraculous stroke of luck, a friend put me in touch with a musician called Radhi who was also looking to move into a flat in the La Goulette area of Tunis, around the same time – he ended up changing my perspective on music making in Tunis.⁵⁴ It was immediately clear that Radhi's relationship with music, as a musician and a listener, just

⁵³ I have particularly benefitted from, and am continually influenced by, thinking in post-colonial ethnomusicology and popular music studies, which has thrashed out questions of style, power, music industries, tastes, social groups, in great detail. Ethnomusicological work discussing such issues has been important, (Armbrust, 1996; Danielson, c1997; Dave, 2019; Doubleday, 2006; Frishkopf, 2010; Langlois, 2009; Nieuwkerk et al., 2016; Nooshin, 2013; Racy, 2004; Schade-Poulsen, 1995; Stokes, 2010, 2016; Stokes & Stokes, 2021) as has that in popular music studies (Cohen, 1991, 2017; Finnegan, 2009; Frith, 1998; Hebdige, 2012; Hesmondhalgh, 2012). Important fundamentals here have been Bourdieu on taste and style (Bourdieu, 2016), and Hall on identity, culture and the state (Hall, 1993, 1997, 2005).

⁵⁴ He's recently released his first album: see his website <https://www.radhichawaly.com/>

didn't seem to work primarily according to 'style' – or at least, his crossing of styles was as things that circulate in complex 'multi-media terms' (Stokes 2008, 8). He wouldn't seek out certain styles, stay occupying them, and become defined by them. Instead he seemed to move through vast plethora of sounds, daily, which participated in moments of communication and sociality in a huge variety of ways. He built up different and changing relationships with them. He went from practicing the *maqām bayātī* with his classmates from the conservatoire, to singing the 'Parting Glass' and showing me various versions on YouTube, to thinking about how one would input a *stambāli* rhythm into music notation software, within a day. His own music making skipped easily through playing phrases of Scarborough Fair on the violin, playing phrases of Om Kalthoum, tapping a rhythm on the table, layering harmonies on logic pro. Music and sound was part of the background and the foreground of daily life, in the flat, in the car, outside in urban space.

Radhi's friends and my entourage also moved through music and sound in this way: searching out names and songs, singing them, humming them, ignoring them, changing ideas – though it was my relationships particularly with flatmate Radhi, and later also Rania, which alerted me to the extent to which things change, and are performed differently in public and in private.⁵⁵ Almost as soon as I arrived, the idea of pinning people to styles felt like a slippery and impossible affair. This impression only increased as, over the years that we knew each other, musical habits, ideas, tastes and styles of my friends would shift and change, sometimes radically. We were all growing through music and sound, worldmaking as the world changed around us.⁵⁶

The thing that became increasingly clear, however, was that this worldmaking happened *always* in conjunction with other things, notably, *infrastructures*. It happened in conjunction with materials of listening, media infrastructures, economies, and discourses, all of which moved music, sound and bodies around the place, creating the encounters from which our worlds were being made. Listening in our flat was reliant on computers, phones, and

⁵⁵ Rania is an oud player – she started teaching herself the oud to get through the latter stages of her PhD in physics, and now teaches others the oud, with an interest and understanding particularly of the various different styles of oud playing across the Arab and Turkish worlds.

⁵⁶ In thinking about this sort of experience I have been helped by writing by ethnomusicologists who question what we can learn from the complexity of mutual moments of listening and sharing: Stokes and Orhan sharing a cassette of Mehmet Emin Ay (Stokes, 2015); Steingo and Sizwe sharing moments of Kwaito (Steingo, 2016). Both use these moments to advise care when seeking to read meanings into such 'aesthetic experiences'.

speakers. Listening in urban space happened in conjunction with the radios of taxis, the speakers in bakeries, the acoustics of urban space. Musicians and their sounds were mediated by radio stations and TV channels, which probably made up the bulk of musical sound in public space. When we were listening in bars – and when Radhi was making music in bars – it was always in an economic configuration, which seemed to make use both of ‘live’ musicians and also of recorded sound. The sounds of the music, and the ways in which they were brought into relief in the situation, always depended on the nature of the space, its clientele, the time of evening, the specific, sometimes spontaneous, circumstance. I noticed, also, how these infrastructures affected people differently, and seemed to mean different things for different people. Infrastructures were differently distributed around the city. Some of them, such as YouTube, were omnipresent and highly visible; others, such as the Mp3 compilation structures of Galerie 7, I directed my attention to only after several years, despite walking past the building thousands of times. There seemed to be a different temporal treatment of different places. My body was affected by, and moved through these places and infrastructures, quite differently.

The longer I stayed in Tunis, the more sonic patterns started to emerge from this, which inspired myriad affective responses in me and in others. I started to notice that certain songs, sounds, and rhythms were more ubiquitous than others. I caught myself suddenly knowing songs and sounds that I’d never deliberately listened to – and having an affective response to this. I started to notice the ways in which I *stopped noticing* sound and its shifts – and also became increasingly attuned to a painful boredom which affected many of my friends, a boredom which was shaped by the repetitive nature of sensory surroundings, sound and music included, combined with their physical stagnation. It started to become clear which sounds and songs would provoke responses of disdain and of excitement in different contexts; and I started to actually feel this myself, to find myself having gendered and classed responses to things according to how I had tried to learn them, and the habits of the people that I had tried to align myself with.

Against all this, people talked about music. People made claims for this or that genre, for musicians, for the natures of music, its industries and legal frameworks, the Tunisian listener, and corresponding social groups – indeed, the things that I had been interested, also, in pinning down at the start of my project. This happened across all sorts of social circles: with

musicians, in social science seminars, in taxis, in cafés with friends. And it became clear that ‘music’, as a category, was something that was far from clear, and was struggled over by multiple parties who all had different ideas about what it was and what it should be in the post-revolutionary nation. Very often, I had the distinct impression of constant cycles of claim-making which were wishful, desiring of a particular social reality, drumming it into existence through discourse, which didn’t quite seem to exist elsewhere. This was particularly the case with the ways in which people talked about social groups, which were far more ambiguously formed than was made out.

So it became clear that there were *things* that were structuring all of this flow of material and encounter – and that these structuring things were both material, but also efforts born of political ideas and social desires. I wasn’t calling them archives at the time; but I realise in hindsight that after several months in the city, it was the archival structuring work that I was drawn to, and which I tried to actively seek out. I went about more actively attempting to understand these structuring logics which were underlying social movements, definitions and organisations around music – but because of the highly disparate and dispersed nature of archives and infrastructures in Tunis, this process took a number of forms.⁵⁷

The most important thing that I did was listen: and to experiment with different techniques of listening as a ‘technique of the body’ (Kapchan 2017b, 4), and of ‘sensory participation’ (Howes, 2021), on a daily basis.⁵⁸ Upon reflection, I think it makes sense to think about this as three interlinked ‘modes’ of listening and sensing the city and its archives. These are three different stances, three different ways of being, but which all interlink.

In the first mode, I used the mobility and means that I had in Tunis to actively explore different layers of space, to attempt to enter into social configurations with a range of people, and to experiment with what it felt like to cross thresholds. I noted, in particular, the ways in which my senses would respond to crossings between various spatial and temporal

⁵⁷ Journeys through Tunis were also shaped and determined by linguistic capacities, which changed throughout. My French, good by the time I finished my Master’s in France, got more rusty yet remained proficient; my Tunisian Arabic, with the help of friends (particularly Aymen and Rania) ended fluent enough to engage in long interviews in Tunisian, albeit still lacking for the expression of complex ideas; my modern standard Arabic started basic and got worse as I concentrated on Tunisian dialect.

⁵⁸ I was inspired in this by others who have encouraged fieldwork through listening and sensitivity to aesthetic surroundings, using one’s body to understand surroundings, particularly Kapchan and Ossman (Kapchan, 2017a, 2017b; Ossman, 1991, 1994, 2002).

thresholds; different spaces in the city, between domestic and public space, between the fast and the breaking of the fast in Ramadan, between the Tunisian border and the airport. I would deliberately move through spaces in a way that was ‘unnatural’: circulating around the nightlife spaces of Gammarth, for instance, on my own; moving across different areas of the city, rich and poor. Use of language in this mode was far more tailored to the space; I would attempt to change like a chameleon into whatever person was most befitting of the situation, and would note how this happened. I wrote about this extensively in fieldnotes, which served as a space of exploration of these feelings and different spaces. This mode enabled thinking on the ways in which archival structures of organisation are sensed differently depending on perspective, background, and journey.

In the second mode, I made use of my phone very extensively to record moments in sound and image. I took thousands of clips and snippets – I would take these clips and snippets whenever I entered into an encounter with sounds that could be considered music, as well as other sounds which might not be.⁵⁹ I went through phases with this; on a night out I would map changes in atmosphere; in taxis I would map changes in playlist; in cafés I would do the same. At the time, I was doing this in order to note what was happening, where, when, so that I would be able to spot patterns in the future. In hindsight, I realise that the purpose of this was actually to sharpen listening and seeing in certain ways in the moment, as a ‘prosthesis’ (McLuhan, 2001), and to act as a counterpoint to memory in ways which would allow me to understand processes of remembering and forgetting.⁶⁰

In the third mode, I allowed myself to explore what it was to be ‘myself’ in Tunis. This was a very important mode, because it allowed a connection to the place and certain people which extended far beyond my project; but at the same time, it allowed a deep reflection on

⁵⁹ I was inspired here by the audio recording methods of Puig and Battesti as they used microphones to track people’s journeys through Cairo (Battesti & Puig, 2016).

⁶⁰ There are ethical dimensions to a constant phone-based documentation. First, the process of filming, photographing and recording is something which often, and particularly in situations of musical performance in Tunis, blends in with a wide-spread use of phones to document and disseminate experiences in the city; it was not always clear to onlookers that I was a researcher rather than someone using their phone to document their day for personal reasons – and indeed, the two positions frequently overlapped for me. Second, I gathered a vast amount of data on a portable device which could easily get lost or stolen. I ensured that the data was backed up on cloud storage and external hard drives which would be password protected. I allowed my use of the phone to be guided by local frameworks of use, refraining from filming or recording sensitive moments or material (for instance, female dancers in restaurant spectacles). And I considered carefully the choice of media which would go on to be included in this thesis, verifying permissions to use it with individuals involved where I could.

what it was to become ‘acculturated’, how my body was becoming imbued with class and gender in different ways – including the ways in which I myself was selecting places and people to be around. I became increasingly reflective of what I was hearing on a daily basis and how my body was reacting to it, in mood, physical response, and feeling; but I accepted that the point of comparison for these feelings was my own previous experience. My use of language in this mode was specific: it involved friendships in which there was a mixture, always, of Tunisian, English and French to the point that it was no longer a mixture. I developed my own tastes in this mode, I developed into a listener who would privately select certain things to listen to. Sometimes I would write about this part of my experience, and sometimes I would choose not to, trusting that certain knowledge becomes deeply embedded without recourse to words. This was a mode in which, sometimes, I would choose not to ‘do research’, preferring instead to settle back into things. What this mode thus enabled was a far more deep connection with certain issues of archival organisation: the beginnings of an appreciation for what it means to be unequally organised through space and time.

The first round of ‘interviews’ that I did was with my friends, around 6 months after arriving in Tunis. I still wasn’t sure what objects I was looking at or for at this point, but was interested in the depth of people’s listening experiences, and trusted that my friends would be sympathetic and patient people for me to practice interviewing. As I suspected it might be, the framework of the interview was almost useless for learning about my friends’ present lives in the city; but it brought up some very interesting details about their past listening experiences with cassettes, CDs and Mp3s, and with the media that circulated around their homes. It was fascinating to learn about how these people, with whom I felt I shared a lot in the present, had their musical journeys constructed through routes of media, sound, music and movement which were very specific to times, places, politics and technological constructions in the past.

From this point, I gravitated increasingly to these structures that had been brought up: radio stations and industries of music on supports. Over the next two years of fieldwork – which happened in stops and starts through Covid – I did lengthy interviews with people in these spaces, and spent a lot of time hanging around the spaces of shops which were still around in the city. The radio stations that I focused on were Mosaïque FM, Misk FM and Panorama;

for each station I spent time with several technicians and musical programmers, and interviewed current and former employees inside and outside the radio studios. The industries I focused on were those of cassettes and CDs, Mp3s and Vinyl – in each case I interviewed at least one or several people who had been involved in the development of the industries in their boom periods, as well as several people who continue to work with the objects in the present city, in the shops that continue to sell them. I also met and attempted to engage with attendant institutions: HAICA (*Haute Autorité Indépendante de la Communication Audiovisuelle*), the new media watchdog, and OTDAV (*Organisme Tunisien des Droits d'Auteur et des Droits Voisins*), the copyright association; and attended seminars and conferences organised within state and educational spaces on copyright and 'culture'. I was interested in the histories of these places, but also their current meanings in lives which continue to be shaped by their activities. As such I also made use of the National Media Archives for finding press articles relating to media industries. I engaged with key texts by scholars and cultural figures, particularly those of M'barek Rais and Sakli, both of whom are musicologists and musicians and have been Ministers for Culture in post-revolutionary governments; their works have thus been important both for understanding contours of musical domains – particularly that of M'barek Rais, *Le Statut du Musicien en Tunisie* (Rais, 2018), which amounts to an extremely detailed account of the legal infrastructures of the music domain – and also for understanding particular attitudes towards 'culture'. Encounters with personnel varied from the very formal, as in the OTDAV rights association, and the very informal, as in the cassette and CD shops, where I would sometimes hang around for hours chatting and taking selfies. Casual conversations would not be recorded, and more formal interviews would be recorded; but I treat the interviews as moments of locution which, similarly to any conversation, were a response to a specific time and encounter, processes of spontaneous narrative construction on demand, rather than accounts of truths or things to be taken uncritically. They were opportunities for me to attempt to understand 'actors' ontologies' (Born, 2022) as they described to me their relationships with music and sound.⁶¹

I entered into the process of writing this thesis with vast amounts of written fieldnotes documenting my daily experiences, pictures and sound recordings, and transcriptions and

⁶¹ Most people will be referred to by their first names in this thesis, as was generally requested. Public figures, whose names already circulate in the public domain, will be referred to also with surnames.

recordings of hours of interviews. I organised my notes according to moments. The eventual construction of the chapters amounts to an opposite movement to the one that I underwent during fieldwork: the principle objects in each chapter were the last things, places and people that I landed on; but I describe their work as being precisely the subtle and often imperceptible organisation of the months, years, of previous experience that I'd had.

I used ethics forms when I recorded interviews, but I don't believe my ethical responsibility starts or ends with this form: there are many things that people told me whilst the phone recorder was on which I have decided, from understanding the political context of the remarks, not to use; and there were many things that were said either side of interviews which I judge it fine to use. Indeed, this whole thesis journey has in many ways been an exploration in ethical responsibility, and has raised difficult and at times painful ethical questions, on how it could ever be possible for someone with my level of privilege to act ethically and usefully in a post-colonial place like Tunisia, on how it could ever be possible for me to shake off white colonial baggage. In the process of acculturating and finding what felt in many moments like a kind of hybrid, Tunisian-speaking self, I was reminded again and again how little I could ever understand what authoritarianism and economic and visa marginalisation does to a person. With this thesis, I have attempted to use the privilege, time and capacity I have to simply notice things that often go unnoticed, and to ask questions of the subtle workings of power, politics and aesthetics which affect us all, unequally.

0.6 Explanation of key terms and chapters

This thesis is not a media history – it is not a chronological account of the ways in which media have shaped listening in Tunis; it is also not a study of formats and technologies and the ways in which cultures form around them, though it does contain aspects of both of these things. It is a study of layers of archives, as they exist within a constantly evolving urban 'situation'. My use of the terms 'archive' and 'situation' require some further explanation.

Inspired by Ochoa and Mbembe, the term ‘archive’ is taken in an expanded sense to mean structures which mediate and order objects, or fragments. However, I use the term to describe an even wider variety of phenomena in this thesis. Each chapter thinks from and through a different kind of archive: the state archives, YouTube, cassette and CD shops, a technology centre of Mp3 compilations, and vinyl online and shop archives. But I also apply the term ‘archive’ to compilations of tracks on single recording objects, collections of recordings within buildings or virtual repositories, urban spaces and ambiances, and the bodies that move through them. The phenomena that I group under the term may seem at times disparate, but they are linked by the fact of being spaces, times, or objects which receive a kind of archival *effort* with particular intensity – an effort to draw together a range of fragments and to order, organise or arrange them within a single space. This effort is performed on them with agency, and amounts to acts of worldmaking which transforms whatever segment of time, space or thing into a site of worldmaking. Archives, archival efforts and worldmaking are inextricably bound.

As such, the limits of the archive are inherently ambiguous. Rather than trying to fix the term down to a finite set of phenomena, I’m interested in seeing sonic archives in Tunis as *kaleidoscopic*: as things that expand outwards and into each other in multiple, often contradictory motions, shaping lives on a daily basis.

The picture we emerge with is what I will call Tunis’s ‘archival situation’: a situation in which city life is mediated by multiple layers of archival infrastructures from which people make sense of music and sound. In this use of the term ‘situation’, I am inspired by the approach of Lefebvre to the city, and the way in which his thinking runs through the urban anthropology of Agier. Lefebvre sees cities as a dense tangle of ‘moments’ which come together in ‘situations’ (Lefebvre 1999; 2004); Agier suggests that anthropologists adopt a ‘situational approach’ to cities, taking the ‘situation’ as a unit of analysis which best encapsulates the ever evolving and moving nature of urban social life, in which categories and groups form and dissipate (Agier 2013; 2015). Our archives were created in specific political and technological moments, with political and social projects of organisation and story-making breathing through them in the ways in which they organise sound, music, and listening, and in their own sensate presences in urban space. But within the urban ‘situation’, their infrastructures may be further used for different projects or processes. I’m

thus interested in thinking of this swirl of archives as a knot of infrastructures, techniques, objects, bodies and movements which animate urban life, and which at any moment can be generative of a certain set of possibilities for action.

The chapters make use of a few key terms which require a brief explanation before launching into a description of the chapter layout: ‘ontological multiplicity’ or things which are ‘ontologically multiple’, *jaww*, and ‘cocktails’.

First, I will refer to many of the archival objects and structures as being ‘ontologically multiple’. Here, I am particularly inspired by the work of Bates on vinyl objects as things which he describes as ‘ontologically multiple’; ‘able to be multiple things to multiple people’ (Bates 2020, 697).⁶² Bates in turn uses Gell’s theory of ontological multiplicity, who describes art objects as things with no ‘essence’ but an ‘indefinite range of potentials’ (Gell 1999, 234). Seeing archives and archival objects as ontologically multiple allows us to question as deeply as possible how ontologies and epistemologies are formed through interactions between humans and archives.

Second, *jaww* is a key theme and concept of this thesis. As we will explore, *jaww* can be translated with the terms ‘ambience’ or ‘atmosphere’, which allude to it as something value-neutral; but it is also something that can be elided with senses of positivity and fun. It is something that can be felt to exist and to be experienced passively, as in ‘ambience’ or ‘atmosphere’; but it is also something that can be made actively, as encapsulated in the phrase *n’amelu jaww*, ‘let’s have fun’, ‘let’s make fun’ or ‘ambience’. And, stylistically, it is often elided with particular musical sounds, such as those of *fann sh’abi* (Racy, 1991; Stapley, 2006). Its ontological multiplicity, and the political implications of its various manifestations, will be explored throughout this thesis.

Lastly, ‘cocktails’ are discussed throughout. ‘Cocktail’ is a term that I learned through noting its repeated use with regards to certain objects and sonic structures in Tunis. The word is used to describe a particular kind of playlist structure, in which notions of a ‘mix’ are evoked through the combining of several elements considered different to each other, resulting in a structure which is considered to offer a certain kind of variety. But as we’ll find, the precise kind of ‘variety’ on offer, and the way in which it is constructed, has a long and political

⁶²See also Born’s discussion of Gell’s work (Born 2005).

legacy. We will examine this, looking at how 'cocktails' are mediated through a variety of media – radios, YouTube playlists, live music playlists, and cassettes, as both particular kinds of archive, and single archival fragments.

We will start our journey at the state archives, in chapter 1. Tracing a history of the formations of these archives through the colonial and post-colonial periods, we will find that they were made to mediate a certain Bourguibian politics of modernisation through the ways that they organised voices and styles. But we'll also find ambiguous attitudes towards *jaww* in relation to 'culture', as well as a certain importance bestowed upon technical and legal qualities of infrastructures encasing 'music', which also seemed to enter into projects of modernity. Moving to the post-revolutionary city, we'll find the archive dispersed over multiple materials – books, buildings and websites – and that it continues to mediate certain stylised sonic areas in unequal ways. We'll find that the archive's power is limited through its own opaqueness, dispersal, and the sorts of listening and discourses that this inspires; but that it is maintained through the way that it keeps a hold over mythical materials of story-making: the imagined 'original' records of key voices at the centre of the archives.

Another way that the state archive's power might be limited is through the simultaneous existence of other archival structures in the city. Chapter 2 will turn to one of these structures, which has become particularly present and widely used in the city: YouTube. YouTube was censored pre-revolution, and burst onto the scene during the revolutionary uprisings of 2011; since then, as we'll trace, one of its uses has been as an archive for the work of a variety of musicians working across many different practices and sounds, which appear to challenge the inclusions, exclusions and ontologies of the state archive through its different organising and formatting logics. However, we'll find that YouTube is ontologically multiple: it is used, also, as a listening technology which enters into ecologies of listening across the city, as well as a platform that enters into musical economies in a variety of ways. In its ontological multiplicity, it is used to a variety of ends by multiple other mediators: to create spaces which continue to delineate their publics along distinctions of 'culture' and '*jaww*', and to determine and organise senses and sounds of the 'mass' through 'viral' songs. In this sense, caution is advised against notions that YouTube necessarily 'democratises'.

YouTube's eating of sonic supports of the past has led to the assertion that 'everything is on YouTube', and that this is where everyone goes for music. One can indeed find many videos

which bear traces of cassette and CD covers. But cassette and CD shops do still exist in Tunis – chapter 3 turns to them to think about the stories that form around their archives and their legacies. Through the stories of industry professionals, we learn that these objects were widely disseminated through the 1980s and 1990s, changing the aural public sphere through their mediations of ostracised voices, as well as their new arrangements of *fann sh'abi* and their 'cocktail' innovations – all attempts to find and to form a Tunisian 'mass'. In the contemporary city, traces of this industry have become split: sounds with similar sonic ontologies nurtured by these objects seem to have become codified and continued to be mediated by many important mediators, including in the leading private radio station Mosaïque FM, as a key 'instituting imaginary'; and the physical remnants of cassettes and CDs are fading, and occupy a strange invisible position in the *centreville* of Tunis.

Another archive which doesn't attract attention, but which has an impact on people's participation in aural public sphere, is that of the Mp3. In chapter 4, we'll learn about the significance of Mp3 archives from Galerie 7, a hub for pirated technology, in which there is still a shop which sells vast compilations of Mp3s. We'll learn that, during the pre-revolutionary time of the dictatorship of Ben Ali, tech hubs of Mp3s and their compilations served as a kind of 'internet' through which people could access the 'outside'. We'll find that the sonic forms mediated through these spaces in many ways mirrored those of the surrounding state and private media – but that, importantly, it was the kind of agency to manipulate the archive which was enabled by these objects. In the post-revolutionary city, it is the archival technique of Mp3 piracy itself which serves as its key legacy: in the semi-public spaces of taxis and cafés, as well as in Galerie 7 itself, Mp3 playlisting, listening and exchange are used to construct worlds of *jaww* and a familiar kind of 'everything' in a YouTube world.

Finally, in chapter 5, we'll turn back to vinyl, which formed many of the fragments of the state archive that we started with in chapter 1. In chapter 5, we'll take another direction: we'll think about how, simultaneously to the formation of the state archive, vinyl also formed other kinds of archives: the shop archives which were used to find objects for animating all sorts of other kinds of space, from cafés to tourist spots. In the contemporary city, we'll find that vinyl archives are particularly dispersed, ontologically multiple, coalescing in spaces from Discogs to scholarship, from a shop to the *phonothèque*. We'll look at two

engagements in particular with this archive – that of Hédi of the vinyl shop, and the mediators of Misk FM – to look at ways in which vinyl objects and archives are used in different ways to construct and maintain feelings of ‘togetherness’ around senses of listening to ‘music’; and how, within Tunis’s archival situation, these projects can be tricky to maintain.

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Moving in this way through archives will enable us to think about the ways in which, as Steingo and Sykes note, histories of sound are made from jagged encounters, uneven bursts and starts. It will also enable us to move beyond the idea that the political import of sound since the Tunisian Revolution has been through the sole vector of ‘political music’; its import is far more expansive and deeply embedded than that.

1. State Archives

1.1 Introduction

The Tunisian Revolution and its aftermath have reified the importance of the framework of the 'state', as something that continues to be a dominant force in structuring people's lives. As anthropologists looking at 'the state' have pointed out, 'globalisation', with its accompanying liberalisation of global economies, intensification of transnational exchange, and circulation of people and goods, has led to a questioning of the presumed association between nation-states, sovereignty, and territory (Sharma & Gupta, 2009). But, they say, 'it would be wrong to assume that national laws and conventional forms of regulation based in nation-states are now irrelevant.' (Sharma & Gupta 2009, 7). The state, as both a 'conceptual framework and a material reality' (7), remains central. Protestors during the Tunisian Revolution made this clear: the supposedly liberal, globalised economy was doing little to improve lives under the corrupt and unequal institutions of Ben Ali's regime; international discourses on human rights did little to improve conditions for people living under the reality of severe police repression; and the 'mobility' conferred to some populations was not extended to members of the Tunisian nation, who are maintained by international visa regulations – indeed, the policies of other states – in situations of stagnation.⁶³ Despite what Saskia Sassen has called an 'unbundling of sovereignty' (Sassen, 1998) – the process through which political power and regulatory mechanisms are, in a globalised world, distributed over

⁶³ For more on the issues of mobility and migration, always connected to relationships with the European Union, see the work of Pouessel, Garelli and Tazzioli (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016; Pouessel, 2017).

several kinds of international organisation of which the state is one – the Tunisian state continues to be an important one, shaping people's lives in almost every area.

But, there is a constant struggle over what the state is, what it means to people, and what it comes to represent – struggles which play out in daily lives, as people come into contact with, and reproduce these representations; or as they enter into 'statist encounters' (Sharma & Gupta 2009, 17) with the bureaucracies and institutions of the state. States rely on myths, the 'national' coming together as an 'imagined community' in order to be held together (Anderson, 2006). In Tunisia, as we have seen, negotiations over what the 'state' is, and what this 'imagined community' should be, have played out in the negotiation of democratic institutions, and in the discourse surrounding Tunisian identity. They have been performed across every scale, from the 'national conversations' on national media platforms, to the conversations across generations within the same families.⁶⁴ And negotiations manifest in shifts to sensible and aesthetic surroundings, as people struggle over the nature of public space.

To return to Mbembe, and the central idea of this thesis, *archives* are a key part of this myth-making process, upon which the legitimacy of the state relies. According to Mbembe, through putting together stories around the fragments of archives, there is a construction of an 'instituting imaginary' and a political 'community of time'. Do the sonic archives of the state function in Tunisia to extend an instituting imaginary, a community of time? How might they do this? How are the state archives constructed and maintained, how do their fragments circulate, and how are stories woven around them? What is the power of the state sonic archive, and what are its limits?

This chapter will progress as follows: we'll start by thinking about how the sonic archives of the Tunisian state have been constructed, tracing the politics of modernisation central to their inclusions and exclusions of sounds and voices, but noting, also, key ambiguities resulting from a long-standing dispersal of the archive over various different structures and objects of sound reproduction and mediation. Indeed, an exploration of the panoply of radio stations associated with the state and, in the 1970s and 1980s, the activities of the national

⁶⁴ As shown by Boutieri in her study on the ways in which discussions and complex intergenerational feelings inspired by the banners of the *dakhla* celebrations played out in homes, between families as they gathered together (Boutieri, 2021).

vinyl company *En'nagham*, show that ambiguous attitudes towards *jaww* in relation to 'culture', as well as a certain importance bestowed upon technical and legal qualities of infrastructures encasing 'music', might have also been central to projects of 'modernity' in the post-colonial era. Bringing this exploration to the post-revolutionary city, we'll note the extent to which the archive is now dispersed over multiple spaces and objects, resulting in a continually unequal presence of stylised sonic areas, which swim through the city as differently dispersed, sensate things and spaces. We'll suggest finally that the archive's power is limited through its own opaqueness, dispersal, and the sorts of listening and discourses that this inspires; but that it is maintained through the way that it keeps a hold over mythical materials of story-making: the imagined records at the centre of the archives.

1.2 Forming the State Archive in the colonial and post-colonial periods

Tunisia was under French colonial rule from 1881 to 1956, during which time it was French ideas which structured lives, manifest through reorganisation of the urban space and industry, and the controlling of flows of capital and bodies.⁶⁵ From the work of ethnomusicologists who have worked on the colonial and post-colonial periods, we understand that the building blocks of a 'Tunisian' sonic archive swam into being along with the very notions of an independent Tunisian state; which seems to have been, in the colonial period, widely dispersed across the materials of texts, spaces, bodies and sounds.⁶⁶ Indeed, in order to understand the post-colonial 'national' archive, we thus first need to think about what it grew out of: multiple acts of entextualisation and recontextualisation that took place during the colonial era, which sought to generate a national imaginary. We know from the work of Davis about the efforts of the *Rachideyya* institute: founded by around 70 Tunisian intellectuals and artists in 1934 on the 'rising tide of the nationalist movement', they deemed it their mission to develop a 'national' kind of music: they took the *ma'lūf* musical tradition and systematically 'classified, studied, and documented' it (Davis 1997, 3), intent on

⁶⁵ For work on French colonisation's impact on the distribution of urban and rural space see Ammar, 2010, 2010; Ayeb & Bush, 2019; Signoles & URBAMA (France), 1985.

⁶⁶ In this sense it is highly indicative in this dispersed nature of Ochoa's archives in colonial and post-colonial Latin America (Ochoa Gautier, 2006).

counteracting the increasing influence of Egyptian music promoted by the commercial record market.⁶⁷ Davis also discusses the activities of French orientalist and ethnomusicologist Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger, perched in his Sidi Bou Said Palace, who enlisted the assistance of Tunisian musicologist Manoubi Snoussi to go through the process of transcribing and notating the practices of Tunisian musicians, organising also the first International Congress of Arab music in Cairo in 1932, to which they sent a delegation of musicians from the *Rachideyya*.⁶⁸ And, around this time, impresarios such as Béchir Ressaissi worked within the booming vinyl industry to record popular voices of rising stars, particularly Jewish artists, such as Louisa Tounisia and Habiba Msika.⁶⁹

These people might have been working across the different worlds of 'cultural' institutions and the 'commercial' entertainment industry – but, despite these differences, they have all been situated by commentators as nurturing a nationalist sentiment within a situation of French colonisation through their work with the 'sonic'. Seen through the lens of Ochoa's work, we could suggest that these were all 'sonic transculturators': people who seek to structure the 'practices, modes of signification and circulation of the sonic' (Ochoa Gautier 2006, 396), differently creating notions of 'genre' and 'music' through variously textually inscribing, performing, and recording voices and sounds, in efforts to intervene in an 'aural public sphere'. Whilst the *ma'lūf* might have been hoped to do this through its *tba'* progressions being recognised as specifically 'Tunisian' as opposed to the maqam of other Arabic music (R. F. Davis, 2004), the stars of the vinyl industry are said to have been expressing desires for independence through their lyrics (Silver, 2022).⁷⁰ So it seems that,

⁶⁷ Davis worked extensively on *ma'lūf* during the colonial and post-colonial periods, exploring in detail its journey from sufi practice to national genre par excellence, and then its decline in popularity through the post-independence decades (R. Davis, 1996a, 1996c, 1997b; R. F. Davis, 1986, 2004). Colwell, in a recent article, also described treatments of *ma'lūf* during this period within the joint logics of building a national imaginary and also colonial discipline: 'In 'fixing' the *ma'lūf*, colonial authorities were disciplining sensory experience and dissociating Tunisian listeners from their own bodies, from their familiar senses of self' (Colwell 2022, 10).

⁶⁸ Davis also describes how d'Erlanger was effectively mentored by composer Ahmad Al-Wafi and oud player Khemais Tarnane, who also provided him with transcriptions which he contributed to the Cairo Congress (Davis 1997, 101). For more on the Cairo congress, see Bensignor, 2015; R. F. Davis, 2004.

⁶⁹ See Christopher Silver's recent book on the workings of the vinyl industries in this period, particularly their work with Jewish musicians, and their links with colonial-era nationalist sentiment (Silver, 2022). See also Abassi *Tunis Chant et Danse* on the vinyl industry in Tunis (Abassi, 2000).

⁷⁰ And indeed, many influential individuals moved across these different scenes, via intellectual collective such as the 'taht essour' group of artists and intellectuals, who would strategize resistance against the French from the Taht Essour café in Bab Souika. See Abassi and Silver on the Taht Essour group, and on social interlinks between these different efforts in areas of 'culture' and 'music'.

already during the colonial era, the ‘national imaginary’ was something that operated sonically in multiple ways.

Following struggles for Independence throughout the 1950s, Habib Bourguiba, who had been a key figure in the Neo-Destour nationalist party in the colonial decades, came to power (Geisser & Camau, 2004). The government that grew around Bourguiba had certain notions at its core. The state needed to become ‘modern’, which involved sweeping reforms and institutional structures which were meant to touch every part of public and private life.⁷¹ As has been noted by many commentators, the material and legal construction of the state’s institutions was something which came hand in hand with ideologies and discourses of *tunisianité*, and this was built on several paradoxes. The Tunisian people were to be thought of as a ‘mix’ existing at a ‘crossroad of civilisations’: to repeat the formulation of Zemni, ‘a homogenous nation embedded in Arab-Islamic history as well in a pre-Islamic Mediterranean past and open to elements of Western civilization and modernity’ (Zemni, 2016b).⁷² But commentators also talk of the president’s fear of discord, and his obsession with unity; he thought that tribal and regional ties should become secondary to people’s relationship with a single nation – to be thought of as a ‘single body’. As noted by historian Pierrepont Le-Cock, ‘an obsession with homogeneity permeated all the speeches of Bourguiba. The nation became the figure of unity *par excellence*; it was a form of communion, it was also a body within which people are in state of reciprocal dependence’ (Pierrepont-de Cock 2004, 33)⁷³. She notes that Bourguiba describes the nation in one of his speeches as a living being, whose organs each have a specific role. Another paradox is that

⁷¹ Indeed, many laws were created with certain ideas of modernity in mind: the Code de Statut Personnel in 1957 gave women rights to abortion and to family planning, as well as equal rights in law; the 1958 education makeover sought to overcome illiteracy and to provide primary education across the country; the Islamic schools were recalibrated within state structures which would be able to control the discourses spread through them; a central economy was instated which heavily controlled prices and exports, and the agricultural sector was subsumed into the state economy (CHOUIKHA & GOBE, 2015; Hibou, 2009). This period thus comes through from works of history as a period during which, to use the phrase of Hall, ‘a whole set of patterns and relations is drastically reshaped or transformed’ (Hall, 2009).

⁷² Anthropologist Saidi likens this identity to the building of a fricassé sandwich: ‘une identité tunisienne plurielle composée d’ingrédients historiques de toutes les époques(...)aromatisée par une multitude de condiments berbères, phéniciens, romains, arabes et autres(...)pensons au sandwich traditionnel mêlant oeufs, thon, olives, piments, petits morceaux de patate, quelques pincées de sel et d’épices, etc., si petit qu’on en fait trois ou quatre bouchées.’ (Saidi & Kilani 2017, 136).

⁷³ « Une obsession de l’homogène va imprégner tous les discours de Bourguiba. La nation devient la figure de l’unité *par excellence* ; elle est une forme de communion; elle est un corps aussi au sien duquel les hommes sont dans un état de dépendance réciproque »

authoritarianism was seen as necessary to impose this sweeping makeover, even while notions of individual liberty and a levelling of society, often openly called a ‘democratization’, were at the core of reforms and discourses.⁷⁴ As Chouikha and Gobe explain, ‘political pluralism as an expression of the divergence of interests is impossible, because it is in contradiction to the unity of the social body’ (Chouikha & Gobe 2015, 15).⁷⁵

‘Culture’ was clearly an area through which questions of identity – here with its simultaneous focus on plurality *and* homogeneity – were thought to be particularly effectively organised.⁷⁶ This comes through in texts written by elites of the time, through which they explain the importance of cultural policy. Rafik Saïd, Tunisian attaché to UNESCO in the Bourguiban era, explains that ‘culture’ is something which both already exists in a sort of natural state (‘the knowledge accumulated by the human mind over the ages’), but which must also be actively acquired through being organised, and then applied in an effort to ‘liberate’ the individual. It is this ‘application’ which ‘constitutes a prime factor in modern prosperity’ (Saïd 1970, 10). Saïd tells us that the Ministry of Culture was born to extend the work of the Ministry of Education in creating a ‘national education’ and culture, and aims to fulfil its role by setting up a system, requiring ‘a coherent organizational framework, specific laws and regulations, the creation of machinery, in a word an institutional structure which forms part of a comprehensive legislative or juridical system and is therefore subject to the political authority’ (Saïd 1970, 16). As he explains, in keeping with what we have heard of *tunisianité*, Tunisians were to focus on the *ma'louf*, but were also to be open to ‘world’ culture. And we are shown, visually with an ‘organigramme’, just how ‘culture’ is broken up into various departments and ideas: the main subsections of ‘cinema’, ‘libraries’, ‘folk and traditional music’ and ‘information’ are further broken down. A whole network of institutions thus worked alongside the central Ministry of Culture: the new branch the R.T.T. (*Radio et Télévision Tunisienne*), the ‘national’ radio, and network of culture centres that were built up and down the country, controlled by the ‘*committees culturelles*’. These were

⁷⁴ Hélé Béji’s text *Le Désenchantement Nationale : essai sur le décolonisation* was a rare critique of the period, published in 1982. She describes how the Bourguiban regime was untenable because, through its authoritarian imposition of a national identity, it contradicted its very own philosophy of emancipation (Béji 1982, 20).

⁷⁵ ‘...le pluralisme politique comme expression de la divergence des intérêts est impossible car en contradiction avec l’unité du corps social »

⁷⁶ As was the case in other nations emerging from colonialism: see Mondal for an account of the Egyptian and Indian post-colonial cultural policy, Park for the South Korean institutions of culture following independence from the Japanese (Mondal, 2004; Park, 2010).

accompanied by changes in education and legislation. There was a Professional Artist Card system through which people had to audition in front of a Ministry of Culture-nominated jury in order to be granted the 'status' of musician and permission to practice 'professionally'.⁷⁷ There was also renewed legislation surrounding copyright, and the creation of the rights organisation SODACT (*Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Tunisiens*).⁷⁸

From the various texts that describe this post-independence period, we understand that the post-colonial state was creating a sense of a musical, sonic archive which would be in keeping with notions of '*tunisianité*', this ambiguous sense of identity around a simultaneous 'purifying' of a specifically Tunisian core, combined with an openness to outside influences. This seems to have involved an exclusion and inclusion of musical bodies traced along divisions of race, gender, and class. Davis describes how the *ma'lūf* was brought into use as an 'invented tradition' which could act as a vehicle for post-colonial Tunisian identity; it was 'relatively well-qualified to fulfil its newly designated role as national musical heritage' because, as an urban repertory, it was already relatively well known, was genuinely popular, crossed religious and class boundaries, and had a certain sense of prestige from the Andalusian association. This practice of centralising certain sounds and practices to become an archive operated in conjunction with a peripheralization of others. The practices of the Sufi masters from whom the *ma'lūf* was taken and transcribed were hitherto ostracised from the 'official' version of the *ma'lūf* (R. Davis 1997a, 7). We know from the work of Jankowsky that the *stambāli* was also excluded; he describes how, during the 1960s, Tunisian blacks were 'targeted for their supposedly primitive, pre-modern beliefs and practices' (Jankowsky 2006, 376), and that there was an 'informal ban' on its broadcast up until the 1990s.⁷⁹ It also excluded the many varied oral and ceremonial practices of populations up and down the country, brought under the umbrella term of *fann sh'abi* by Saidane, which, he details, vary between the musical forms of the *melhan* poetic forms, the *nūbāt* which extend beyond their usage in 'official' *ma'lūf*, the various practices around the

⁷⁷ See Rais (2018) and El Kahla for more information about the colonial legislation, and the ways that it aimed to control Tunisian music-making. El Kahla describes a musical life which was split spatially between the European populations, who were served by the concert halls, theatres and conservatoires which they built in the new city, and the Tunisian population, whose listening occurred within the sufi lodges around the medina (El Kahla, 2019, 159).

⁷⁸ See Rais (2018) for details; they will also be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Jankowsky's important study on the *stambāli* traces its set of practices, spiritual significances and the ways in which it has rubbed shoulders uncomfortably with projects of modernity (R. C. Jankowsky, 2010).

instruments of the *zokra*, *gasba*, *tambour* and *bendir*. The *mezoued* is described as a practice which was particularly censured by state institutions; this music, which grew around the *mezoued* bagpipe instrument in the faubourgs surrounding the capital during the colonial period, was considered particularly ‘vulgar’ by post-independence elites for its lyrics, but also the way in which it would enable trance in masculine, alcohol-fuelled environments.⁸⁰

To reuse the language of Mbembe and Ochoa, it seems not that fragments for a post-independence state sonic archive were being created anew – but rather that the archives themselves were being built and formalised around certain pre-existing fragments, as ‘culture’ was institutionalised. It seems that this was extended even over bodies. The process of musicians having to audition for the *Carte Professionnelle d’artiste*, thus being accorded the ‘status’ of musician which would allow them official recognition in a state system, is particularly evocative of the way in which a ‘status’ is accorded to the debris of the Mbembian archive through processes of selection and judgement. In the process, the aural public sphere was being further negotiated around the ‘purification’ of styles such as *ma’lūf*, and the selective exclusion of sounds considered vulgar, such as the *mezoued*. Reading between the lines of this work, we imagine that the bodies included here were considered middle-class, and exhibiting a certain level of formal musical education – and if they were female bodies, they were the ones which were ‘emancipated’ according to ideas of ‘state feminism’; excluded were those considered *sh’abi*, regional, black, exhibiting religious or spiritual leanings which were not state-sanctioned, and uneducated through official means.⁸¹

But, importantly, this exclusion and inclusion, and the negotiation of an ‘aural public sphere’, was something which couldn’t only operate within the institutions of ‘culture’. Institutions and infrastructures which came under the umbrella of ‘information’ and ‘media’ were also layered around the cultural institutions, affecting the ways in which sounds would circulate. The television, the radio, and the recording industries all came into this process: this included not one but *two* key channels of the R.T.T. – the National Radio and the RTCI, the *Radio Tunis Chaîne Internationale*, and the state vinyl company *En’nagham*. I was lucky

⁸⁰ See Saidane for a detailed account of this (Saidane, 2015)

⁸¹ For this idea that the state policies affecting women amounted to a kind of ‘state feminism’, see Yacoubi (Yacoubi, 2016).

enough to meet the ex-director of *En'nagham*, Héchmi Ben Frej, on several occasions; and also to meet ex-RTCI presenters and DJs, including Habib Belaid, the now-director of the HAICA media watchdog. How do their stories of mediating efforts complicate our picture of sounds and feelings of 'modernity' in this 'aural public sphere'?

1.3 Recording infrastructures and ambiguous archival boundaries

The state radio – the R.T.T. or *Radio et Télévision Tunisienne*, and the state vinyl company – *En'nagham*, were key to both the construction and the dissemination of the state sonic archive.⁸² Central to this was the constant mediation of the voice of Bourguiba himself, who would perform daily speeches on the radio after independence, disseminating his ideologies to radio sets across the country.⁸³ *En'nagham*, according to Ben Frej, was initially set up to reproduce these very speeches, so that they could be sent to administrations across the country.⁸⁴ Whilst Bourguiba's voice was apparently at the centre of these sonic mediations, music was brought out around it. We learn from the work of Davis that the R.T.T. frequently disseminated the *ma'lūf* recordings that had been taken in the *Rachideyya*, and that a national radio troupe was initially formed using musicians and repertoires of the *Rachideyya*. I learned from Ben Frej that *En'nagham* had also, in the 1970s, reproduced what he called the '*patrimoine très important*', 'very important heritage', of the national radio archive, including the records of the *ma'lūf* and the colonial-era generation of radio stars: Hédi Jouini, Saliha, Ali Riahi and others. And, importantly, the National Radio broadcasts and *En'nagham* were interlinked by the fact that both of these state institutions used, and commanded control over, the one proper recording studio in the country, which was stationed inside the R.T.T. building. 'Regional' radio stations were gradually added throughout the Bourguiban and Ben Ali periods – eventually numbering five, in other major

⁸² In this sense there is a similar layering of national media and culture efforts in the Tunisian Nationalist movements to that which was present in many other postcolonial nations. See Bessire and Fisher for an overview of radio's role in several contexts, Anisha for the Istanbul radio, Anisha for an account of radio imaginaries in Istanbul, Mrazek for the same in Indonesia (Ahiska, 2003, 2010; Bessire & Fisher, 2012; Mrazek, 2002).

⁸³ This is detailed at length by Pierrepont Le-Cock (Pierrepont-de Cock, 2004).

⁸⁴ *En'nagham* has received little attention from scholars: only a few mentions by Davis in relation to its reproduction of the *Ma'lūf*, and a few mentions from M'barek Rais.

cities and regions of Sfax, Tataouine, Gafsa, Kef and Monastir – but from the work of Smati we understand that these worked to delineate the specificities of ‘regions’, rather than necessarily decentre the importance of Tunis and its recording studio.⁸⁵

But media infrastructures are tricky, and as Larkin suggests, ‘none can finally control what is at stake’ (Larkin 2008, 4).⁸⁶ It seems that throughout the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the question was not about a straightforward censorship of sounds that would make it into a Tunisian national imaginary, but rather of trying to keep a control over a plethora of sonic mediations through different areas of entertainment and tourism, as well as that of ‘culture’. Within this situation, it seems that sounds and voices from the ‘excluded’, as well as many ‘foreign’ forms, came through in multiple ways, in some ways challenging state archival boundaries.

First, there wasn’t a total censorship of the sounds of *fann sh’abi*, but rather, the construction and mediation of ‘folklore’, as well as unexpected mediations of *mezoued* from the centre of *En’nagham* itself. Saidane and Jankowsky discuss times at which sufi, *stambāli* and *fann sh’abi* practices were sometimes enacted within state institutions; but how this was always in the context of a mediation of the notion of ‘folklore’ which seems to have included what was considered a ‘purification’ of its sounds, pressed into structures which would take away trance elements. Saidane talks of how the sounds of *fann sh’abi* from the state sponsored groups of the ‘troupes nationales ou regionales des arts populaires’ were ‘those that the elites had selected, exhumed, purged, diverted and made consistent with the vision that they had of the people, or of what they were meant to be,’ (Saidane 2015, 151).⁸⁷

⁸⁵ This is something that I also gathered from interlocutors around the radio. The importance of these regional radio stations should not be underestimated – the radio at Sfax seems to have been particularly active in promoting certain forms of *fann sha’bi*. But my point is that their power was limited against the central force of the Tunis-based radio. See Smati (Smati, 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

⁸⁶ The elites of the independence period understood radio and television as necessary, yet threatening. Said describes how the radio was used frequently for ‘educational teaching’: ‘The educational role of the radio, television and cinema can no longer be ignored today, particularly in the developing countries where there are still a large number of illiterate people. Nevertheless, one must ‘beware lest these all-powerful media’ which allow of a wide dissemination of culture, become either “a form of plebeian barbarity” as feared by certain intellectuals or, in the words of the sociologist Adorno, “a mass illusion” the result of which will be to prevent the growth of self-reliant independent individuals capable of conscious judgement and decision.’ (Saïd 1970, 48).

⁸⁷ ‘celle que les élites avaient sélectionnée, exhumée, expurgée, détournée et rendue conforme à la vision qu’ils avaient du peuple ou de ce qu’il devrait être.’ Also on folklorisation of culture see Saidi’s work on tourist spaces: he describes the extent of the disparity between ‘interior’ regions and ‘coastal’, tourist regions, where regional workers were required to adopt different ‘bodies’ in order to extend the façade of modernity contained in the

Jankowsky also suggests that public interest in the *stambāli* revolved around an intent to turn it into ‘another “slave” music’ like American jazz, or to orientalise its performances in the media (R. C. Jankowsky, 2006). We see this very clearly in certain disks that were produced by *En’nagham*, particularly the *multiple* editions of ‘*Sidi Mansour*’ (see fig. 2).⁸⁸ Ben Frej told me that this disk of *Sidi Mansour* was particularly popular with tourists – the disks were played to them in their hotels and on tourist buses on record players, and multiple versions were made. These disks are notable for their illustrations, many of which were done by the famed artist Zoubeir Turki, who is responsible for the statue of Bourguiba on the Avenue Bourguiba. But whilst the disks of stars of the *Chanson Tunisienne* harbour photographic images of their stars, (and the statue of Bourguiba clearly aimed for as close a likeness as possible), these disks are adorned with simple line drawings of figures in traditional dress on an undetermined background of palm trees and mosques – arguably orientalising the bodies and voices that have been recorded.

tourist complexes, including allowing a certain exoticisation of themselves as they wore ‘traditional’ costumes and performed certain folklorised dances for tourists (Saidi & Kilani 2017, 131).

⁸⁸ As detailed by Jankowsky, *Sīdī Maṣṣūr* is the name of a sufi saint; Jankowsky details that the nuba *baba bahri* was written in honour of this saint, using a 6/8 rhythm ‘*zindala*’ rhythm often used in *mezoued* (Jankowsky 2021, 160)



Fig. 2: My vinyl record of *Sidi Mansour*, July 2022

And there is another intriguing instance of the mediation of *fann sh'abi* at the centre of a state institution. The most surprising thing about *En'nagham* was the activities of Ben Frej himself. Ben Frej was a left-wing militant; he had learned the art of recording in Paris as an exile, and it was he who recorded discs of the Egyptian politically engaged singer Cheikh Imam which were then disseminated in Tunisia. Our conversations took place within the offices of *Perspectives*, a left-wing activist group which seek to gather archives of opposition activity during the regimes.⁸⁹ Even within *En'nagham*, Ben Frej tells me that he continued to record artists who are thought to have been ostracised from the State. He told me that he was the first to record *mezoued*, even, in the form of the now famed singer Hédi Habbouba;

⁸⁹ For more on the activities of *Perspectives* see Chouikha and Gobe (CHOUIKHA & GOBE, 2015).

that he invited him to record in the National Radio, and that the singer had been touched to be invited, finally, to cross the threshold of a state institution. He also recorded a poet whose poetry openly commented on the wife of Bourguiba, resulting in Ben Frej having to defend himself in a press conference.⁹⁰ So, it seems that *En'nagham* recorded and sold the very music which was considered to be so contrary to the state national project. Clearly, the controlling of bodies and voices of *fann sh'abi* which were mediated through this archive wasn't only about a simple exclusion and inclusion, but about the specific times and places of mediation; about the selective 'epistemological validation' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006) of practices as they crossed thresholds between the various infrastructures of 'culture', 'music industry', 'media', and 'entertainment'.

Second, it wasn't only 'Tunisian' music which was mediated by state institutions, but there was an exploration of the 'foreign' in many state spaces. This is an ambiguity that has been pointed out by others: Davis describes divisions in state institutions as the head of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs Salah El Mehdi, for instance, desired a 'pure' form of Tunisian music to be promoted, whilst the R.T.T. of the 1960s, including the Radio Troupe, was open to Egyptian influences entering into their practices (R. Davis, 1997b). When we bring the activities of *En'nagham* and the RTCI into the picture, we emerge with an even greater sense of this constant play between 'foreign' and 'national'. Both the RTCI and *En'nagham*, despite their mediation of things which would be heard as 'Tunisian', also championed recordings that were not made in Tunis, and which are generally understood as 'foreign'.

For the RTCI, this was very much in keeping with its editorial line. The RTCI was what emerged from the colonial radio – throughout the post-colonial time it existed as a counterpart to the National Radio, continuing to broadcast in French.⁹¹ As I was told by ex-

⁹⁰ Wallis and Malm ran a study in 1984 entitled 'Big Sounds from Small Peoples', in which they compare music industries of Tunisia with those of Jamaica and Trinidad, Tanzania and Kenya, Sri Lanka, the Nordic nations, Chile and Wales, with the idea of looking at how smaller countries dealt with music industries in an age of globalisation (Wallis & Malm, 1984). They describe someone who sounds like it could very well be Héchmi Ben Frej: 'musicians and technicians returning home after a sojourn in France found that the pressing plant which was originally constructed to produce recordings of President Bourguiba's speeches was semi-idle. Engineers got the machines working again and these resources, coupled with the current liberalization in the cultural climate, enable them to produce records of a style known as *musique engagée* or *la nouvelle chanson arabe*. Some of these phonograms, notably those by artists such as Heddi Gueller, sold over 10,000 copies. Bear in mind that these songs had lyrics which only a few years earlier would have guaranteed a severe prison sentence!' (p.151).

⁹¹ For work on the Tunisian radio during the colonial and post-colonial times see Corriou, Smati, El Kahla, Cherffedine; for work on colonial radio in North Africa see Fanon. (Corriou, 2010; El Kahla, 2019; Fanon, 1994;

DJs and presenters, records were brought into the country from Europe to be played on the radio – gathered by the personnel themselves during trips, or brought over by friends and family members when they came back to Tunis. Their programming was described to me by some presenters and DJs that I spoke to who had worked for the radio in the 80s and 90s, as well as by friends who used to listen to the channel, as ‘eclectic’. There was a focus particularly on ‘western’ music and ‘world music’. I spoke to one ex-director, Habib Belaid, who told me about a programme that he had promoted, ‘*musiques sans frontières*’, which had included, in his words, ‘everything’: he listed styles including ‘rock’, ‘blues’, ‘chanson française’, ‘*tarab*’. It had even included songs by more politically engaged singers, including Cheikh Imam – indeed, Ben Frej suggests that these had been obtained partly from him. The channel is cited by many listeners for its programme Zanzana, a show during the 90s animated by Kerim Ben Amor which featured rock music during the Ben Ali era.

En’nagham, also, reproduced recordings from foreign industries. In fact, as Ben Frej tells me, *En’nagham*’s move into music was inspired not by Tunisian artists, but by a visit of Egyptian singer Om Kalthoum to Tunis. Apparently, when the Egyptian diva came to perform a concert in El Menzah in 1978, *En’nagham* sought out permission to reproduce her voice on disk from Sonocairo, her record label – and indeed, Om Kalthoum was reproduced again and again by *En’nagham*.⁹² Alongside Om Kalthoum, *En’nagham* reproduced and sold the records of other Egyptian stars such as Abdel Wahab and Abdel Halim Hafedh, as well as records of blues and funk recorded by Sony and Philips.

Ben Frej underlined a particular relationship between *En’nagham* and the RTCI; and also radio Sfax, the regional radio at the time which promoted a certain amount of *fann sh’abi*. He describes how the animateur Habib Belaid at RTCI would buy disks of Cheikh Imam at the FNAC Paris, and would subsequently buy disks from Ben Frej: ‘He had an important listenership amongst youth, at universities and schools, weekly meetings that were highly anticipated.’ Also on the RTCI, he tells me, were popular programs which saw listeners write to the station with requests, a kind of popular jukebox called *ughnaīatun li kuli majtam’a*, ‘songs for everyone’, with a famous presenter Faika. ‘It exists in French radios, and English,

Moncef Charfeddine, *une des mémoires de la culture et du sport en Tunisie*, 2017; Saddem, 2011; Smati, 2009a).

⁹² For more on Sonocairo, see Frishkopf (Frishkopf, 2008).

no? It's international,' Ben Frej added. Regarding radio Sfax, he suggested that 'Jemmoussi, Hamza – they took old songs, they adapted them, modernised them, Boudeya played an important role in that. Musician and musicologist, he recorded all that at radio Sfax'.

How do we understand this quite wide-reaching, and seemingly actively contradictory, inclusion of certain actively subversive voices – those of Cheikh Imam and Hédi Habbouba for instance – as well as foreign ones – within state institutions which are known for their roles in generating the Tunisian national imaginary? On one hand, it may seem as if there was a strange amount of room within the national institutions of the authoritarian state for slightly more plurality than is often imagined. Ben Frej did mention to me that the period around the end of the 1970s is considered to have allowed for slightly more freedoms, a slightly more democratic organisation, as the Bourguibian regime temporarily loosened its grip.⁹³ But it would also be possible to read these activities as nurturing notions of national modernity in a slightly different way: a way which honed in on the 'universalist' part of the *tunisianité* mix and directed it towards specific parts of the population, maintaining divisions; and the desire for an institutionalising of culture which would work according to international industrial norms. There is an intriguing tension between notions and uses of 'culture' and of *jaww* which emerges from this.

We'll remind ourselves that *tunisianité* wasn't supposed to exclude the 'foreign', but that foreign 'culture', particularly that of the west, was central to the notion: Tunisians were supposed to understand and to be open to the outside, whilst continuing to retain a sense of tunisianness. This comes through particularly in a part of Said's text in which he discusses the typical manifestations of culture in one of the new culture centres. He says:

'The local cultural committees have been asked, in particular, to seek out people with knowledge of *ma'lūf*, to record the tunes of the different regions and to interest young Tunisian men and women in them. // But the concern for the promotion of national culture goes hand in hand with the desire to acquaint Tunisians with world culture. Thus, at the Tunis Cultural Centre, for example, Tchaikovsky concerts alternate with concerts of *ma'lūf* and the drama group of the Cultural Centre has

⁹³ This is in keeping with Choukha and Gobe's account of this time, though they term it 'une ouverture politique sous contrôle', a 'political opening under control' (CHOUKHA & GOBE 2015, 33)

performed successively Ionesco in the original text, Taoufik El Hakim in an adaptation and a play by a young Tunisian author, Saada wa Saada. The works of Ibn Khaldun have been analysed by a French professor from the Sorbonne following commentaries by a Tunisian professor from the University of Tunis; and Shakespeare, Dante, Baudelaire and Goethe have been introduced to the Tunisian public by British, Italian, French and German lecturers.’ (Saïd 1970, 39).

This kind of listing of the things of culture from a variety of places, a ‘mix’ coming together as a single thing, was similar to the kinds of descriptions of RTCI programming in the programme *musiques sans frontières* given to me by Habib Belaid. In this sense, ‘foreign’ has a place in the ‘national’. But also, when I asked how the radio had got away with the broadcasting of something as political as Cheikh Imam during this time, I was informed that the listeners to RTCI were not considered to pose a threat to the regime. There is thus ambiguity here surrounding the extent to which broadcasts of the RTCI work to informing senses of a Tunisian mass, and the extent to which they serve to maintain a certain separateness of a French speaking ‘elite’.

Ben Frej told me that he got away with the recordings of these potentially subversive singers because it was considered a work of ‘culture, not politics.’ And this production of ‘culture, not politics’, seemed to be linked with a certain treatment of sonic objects which would place them within systems of ‘culture’ and ‘music’, taking them away from other sonic epistemologies, such as that of *jaww*. *Jaww*, as we mentioned, can mean ‘ambience’, but was also being linked with the specific kinds of ambience required for ritual festivities which involve trance and dance, and which would often involve the sounds of *mezoued*. The sounds of Hédi Habbouba whom Ben Frej recorded could, in other contexts, easily be considered *jaww*. But Ben Frej tells me that he didn’t tend to deal with *jaww*. There seems here to have been a ‘recontextualisation’ of these sounds within systems of music industries: systems of stylistic categorisation and of copyright. It seemed that, in a similar sense to that described by Larkin, these infrastructures – those of recording and of copyright – would come to ‘represent the promise of independent rule rather than colonial supremacy’ (Larkin 2008, 10). Ben Frej told me proudly about the lengths he went to to pay copyright to Tunisian and foreign artists – even Mohamed Jerari of the *Sidi Mansour* recording – and spoke of his disgust at the subsequent piracy of the cassette companies, which was the thing

that had forced him to leave the domain. There was a certain performance of *labelling* musical things, recognising them as separate objects. Throughout this there seemed almost to be a desire for a kind of ‘correct’ recording process itself, with its attendant materials of records marked ‘correctly’ with logos, serial numbers and copyright information.⁹⁴ So, through recording Hédi Habbouba, was Ben Frej subverting the state sonic archive, or incorporating Habbouba’s voice into the systems of ‘culture’ and ‘copyright’ on which part of the archive’s sense of ‘modernity’ depended, detaching it from any trance-based contexts?⁹⁵

The issue, however, is that these sonic mediations are ontologically multiple; they are vehicles for their various projects of modernity in fundamentally ambiguous ways. Following Bates in his description of vinyl records, we might describe them as objects that are ‘ontologically multiple’ – able to ‘be multiple things to multiple people’ (Bates 2020, 697). Is the owner of an object of a recording of American funk carrying an *En’nagham* logo having a ‘statist encounter’ (Sharma & Gupta, 2009), or an encounter with ‘the international’, ‘world culture’? Does a moment of listening to a disk of *Sidi Mansour* create a sense of festive *jaww*, or does one notice the copyright marks on the recording and align it with ‘culture’? Does the listener to a playlist of the RTCI hear alignments with foreign music industries, or do they hear in it their own sense of *jaww* – *jaww* here in the sense of ‘fun’ and ‘ambience’ which isn’t only attached to ritual festivities? There seems to be a fundamental ambiguity here, as these objects and mediations could be considered simultaneously foreign and national, ‘culture’ and *jaww*, depending on how they are encountered.

The view of the state sonic archive that we have, then, going into the post-revolutionary period, is of one which is already complex. Its power and legitimacy didn’t only rely, throughout the post-colonial period, on the styles and voices that are allowed in to the recording studio – though this was important, and clearly, styles such as the *ma’lūf* and the *Chanson Tunisienne* were promoted above the *fann sh’abi* and the *mezoued*. But also

⁹⁴ This is in keeping with stories of other ‘desires’ and ‘fantasies’ of modernity played out through the materials and aesthetics of infrastructures; as suggested by Larkin, ‘many infrastructural projects are copies, funded and constructed so that cities or nations can take part in a contemporaneous modernity by repeating infrastructural projects from elsewhere to participate in a common visual and conceptual paradigm of what it means to be modern’. (Larkin 2013, 333)

⁹⁵ Jankowsky has talked at length about the ways in which ‘modernity’ was enacted through the recontextualization of sufi sounds and practices between spiritual, trance settings, and secular spheres of performance and listening: see R. Jankowsky, 2017; R. C. Jankowsky, 2021)

important was the ways in which these voices would be rendered as ‘culture’ and as ‘music’, as separate parts of ‘musical heritage’, which would come together to produce an ambiguous ensemble. The question now is how the revolution, with its calls for a ‘recalibration of the relationship between state and society’ (Boutieri, 2018), might have affected the workings of this sonic archive; and indeed, how this post-revolutionary time might be felt through the archive in the contemporary city. How does the archive currently manifest in the city, and what are the stories that are drawn from it? Does it still work to extend ideas of ‘modernity’ based on an ambiguous combination of a desire for the infrastructures and systems of recording themselves, and the styles that are promoted through them?

1.4 The archive in the post-revolutionary city: fragments and stories dispersed across buildings, books, radios, and bodies

In pursuing the state archives during my fieldwork, I was presented with a collection of objects, places and experiences which look, feel and sound different from the archives that come through in Mbembe’s text. In his text on archives Mbembe describes a ‘physical space’, in which ‘motifs and columns’, the ‘arrangement of the rooms’, ‘half-light and austerity’ all give the place the feel of a ‘temple or a cemetery’ (Mbembe, 2002). He describes ‘documents’ which are felt and seen – the ‘fragments’ which are woven into a story – there is therefore a difference for Mbembe between the materiality of the ‘fragments’ and the immateriality of the stories. As we’ll see, I *did* find some texts on paper that might resemble ‘documents’, as well as some columns, in the Palace of Sidi Bou Said, where the national *Phonothèque* is now housed. And it was certainly only half-light in the National Radio building, where there is said to be an archive of important recordings that were made during the colonial and post-colonial eras. But I found that the status of this archive was dispersed also over many materials and spaces: books, multiple CDs, my bedroom, taxi rides, conversations, various lists on variously situated computer screens, some of which refer to previous material formats, and hyperlinks. I heard the archive in my bedroom, in the taxi, in the radio studio – I even heard parts of it being sung by flatmates Radhi and Rania from the kitchen. In this dispersed archive, the boundaries between ‘fragment’, ‘story’, and ‘building’,

are blurred, and there is not always a difference between material fragments and immaterial stories, both of which hover somewhere in between, in the atmospheres that the objects and sounds create. They are, as Bohme would say, 'ecstatic objects', their surfaces creating 'ecstasies' which 'tincture' spaces (Böhme, 1993).

The state archive is said to revolve around two poles: the R.T.T., and the National Phonothèque. Both are state institutions which are governed by the Ministries of Culture and of Information. I went on some quests to 'discover' these archival buildings, with mixed success.

The *phonothèque* is nestled in part of the Palais Ennejma Ezzahra, the iconic blue and white building that the Baron d'Erlanger designed to be an orientalist mash-up of various different architectural styles from across the Arab World (see fig. 3). The palace building itself is now home to CMAM (*Centre de Musiques Arabes et Méditerranées*). Founded in 1991, CMAM presides over a variety of spaces and activities. Within the palace, in which the Baron's living quarters have been preserved, there is also a museum of musical instruments and gramophones, and a collection of the Baron's paintings. The centre organises concert series and annual festivals – featuring many kinds of music from jazz to *malouf* – as well as academic conferences on music, organised and attended by musicologists from Tunisia's public universities and visiting scholars from abroad.⁹⁶ Visitors may pay a small fee to wander around the ornate rooms of the palace, to gaze at the exhibits of instruments or to hear a concert.

The *phonothèque* part was made to keep and protect 'heritage', galvanised by the 1994 law passed by the Ben Ali government which stipulated the need for such a material heritage to be stored in buildings of the state.⁹⁷ This part was not as easy for me to enter as the palace and museum. Upon being brandished a paper form which was asking me to define my research interests, I suggested that I was interested in 'music in Tunis'. 'Tunisian music?' the secretary asked me. I made gestures to being interested in music of any type that had just been 'present' in Tunis over the years, at which point the secretary gave me a withering

⁹⁶ For a timeline of the *Centre de Musiques Arabes et Méditerranées*, and more details of its activities, see its website: [cmam.tn](http://www.cmam.tn)

⁹⁷ See its website: <http://www.cmam.nat.tn/content/fr/14/Phonothèque-Nationale.html> and M'barek Rais on politics of the promotion of 'patrimoine musicale' that coloured Ben Ali's cultural policy (Rais 2018, 79)

look, and told me that I needed to define my project better. She pointed me to the partial archive available online, on the *phonothèque* website. She also sold me a book: *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne*, a 2003 republication and curation by musicologist Mourad Sakli of the 1963 radio documentaries of Manoubi Snoussi, Baron d'Erlanger's collaborator and assistant, which had attempted at the time to educate the listener on the *ma'lūf* musical genre. (Snoussi et al., 2003) (Fig. 4). So I came away from this archival building with a book, and a website reference.



Fig. 3: The *Palais Ennejma Ezzahra* on a rainy day, Sidi Bou Said, January 2019

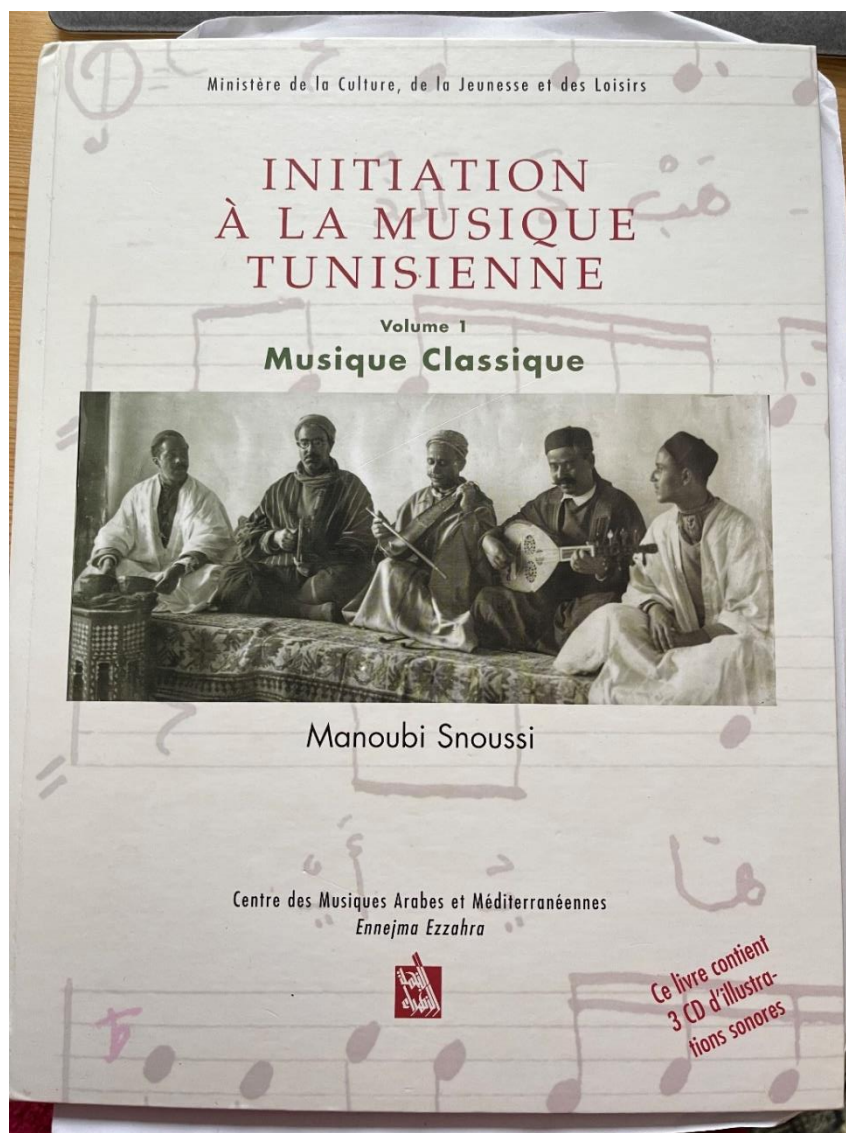


Fig. 4: My copy of *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne*, January 2019

The R.T.T. is stationed in a large cream fortress-like building in the Lafayette district of Tunis's *centreville*. It has an imposing presence, is encircled with barbed wire, and is something of a landmark. Through a mixture of persistently showing up at the entrance, making use of contacts, and waiting for clearance from higher powers, I was eventually let into the building on a couple of occasions to meet with people from one of the radio stations, 'Panorama', as well as a technician who had worked in part with 'the archive'. As we walked through the building, the technician gestured towards the door of Studio 8 where, he told me, the great singers – Ali Riahi, Tahar Gharsa, Soulef, and many others such as Hédi Jouini – made their recordings and broadcasts. He also showed me an enormous mural in the foyer, painted by artist Zoubeir Turki – the very same who had painted vinyl covers of *Sidi Mansour*. Here, he

has painted greats of Tunisian music: the group of musicians sent by the Baron d'Erlanger to the Cairo Congress including oud player Cheikh El Afrit in the centre, , the dancing duo Zina and Aziza on the right (fig. 5).



Fig. 5: The mural of the R.T.T., painted by Zoubeir Turki, Tunis, October 2020

The National Radio building still contains the studios from the radio stations that broadcast before the revolution: the National channel, the RTCI, Radio Jeune and Radio Culture, which were added into the mix by Ben Ali. But personnel of the National Radio recounted to me how the institution has recently been attempting to acknowledge the needs of the post-revolutionary moment through the addition of a new radio station: Panorama. Panorama is framed to me by director Jihene Khouni and technician Faisel as being a post-revolutionary response to the marginalisation of people and sounds from ‘the regions’, including historically by the state radio institution itself. Jihene elaborated on the post-revolutionary situation: as we sat together in her office, she told me how, although one of the revolutionary aims had been to ‘make balance’ between regions, the poor regional areas have remained just as poor and just as marginalised.⁹⁸ She situated the radio as an effort to support regional representation in the capital: ‘there is this radio to spread the voice of the

⁹⁸ This has a personal element for Jihene, who also described how she herself came from the poorest part of the poorest region of Tunisia: the village of Ayoun in the governorat of Kasserine, in the Central-West.

regions, not only to say help us, but to say we are here, we exist.’ The programming is supposed to reflect this: there are daily broadcasts that come directly from one of the network of regional radios from Sfax, Tataouine, Gafsa, Monastir and Kef; and music ‘from the regions’ is showcased, which Jihene describes as containing melodies, words and ‘images’ which are closely linked to customs specific to each region. Importantly, it is presented as really making use of the radio archive – Jihene points out that the archive is extensive and full of an important ‘national heritage’, which should be heard by people rather than sitting there silently. I spent time with the musical programmer and technician of the channel, Faisal, in a repurposed studio in a corner of the building. He frequently referenced the breadth of the R.T.T. archive and showed me radio playlists that he had constructed in large part from these recordings. The archive is now mediated through the studios of the various different radio stations through the software suite ‘Zenone’ that the radio DJs use to access the recordings, and line them up for broadcast. It echoed around us as we sat chatting.

But despite all this, I still never actually *saw* the place in the radio which was considered to be *the archive*. It is rumoured to be difficult to enter, because of the value of its objects. Instead, we talked about it. From the office of one of the technicians I was shown technologies used for archiving; they were brought out and laid on a table in front of me to illustrate the changing formats (Fig. 6). Employees told me how, in 1994, with the requirement to develop their archiving processes, the radio started to transfer things ‘of value’ from *bande* to cassette. In 2005, I was told, there was a big, coordinated to transfer all of these things onto CDs, all branded with the R.T.T. logos, led by a new department and two extra people employed for the job. This was placed in the context of efforts to ‘*sauver la patrimoine*,’ ‘save the heritage’ which included, for the employees that I spoke to, the speeches of Bourguiba, the *ma’lūf* recordings from Testour, and certain programmes ‘of value’. Then, in 2008, an ‘aide European’ is mentioned as having aided the final digitalisation process to move all of the contents of these CDs onto servers. I was told that the digitalisation process at the radio occurred in conjunction with efforts of digitalisation at the *phonothèque*. One of the technicians gave me a souvenir blank CD with the golden branding of the radio, as well as a CD that he thought might be useful to me. Lo and behold it was ‘Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne’, again, this time a single CD marked with pen. So I came

away from *this* archival building with a blank CD, another CD of *Initiation à la musique Tunisienne*, and ears full of the sounds of the *fann sh'abi* of the Panorama studio.



Fig. 6: Changing supports of recording and archiving, laid out for me in the R.T.T., Tunis, October 2020

We spoke in the last section of the ways in which a desire for ‘correct’ recording processes and constructions of recording objects might have entered into projects of ‘modernity’. These two state institutions are different in the ways in which their archives are composed and treated: whilst the radio administers its recordings to the public through its broadcasts, the *phonothèque*, as part of the CMAM, attempts to widen some access to its database of recordings, which are continually in the process of being digitalised and uploaded onto an online platform. However, I came away from both of these archival buildings with the feeling that projects of modernity had extended into a desire to develop and preside over the *processes of archiving* themselves – where archiving means the storing of things on different technological formats, always in the same state buildings. In both, there was a certain amount of pride displayed not only in the contents of the archive, but in the very fact of

having the archive, and in maintaining a control over its format, in keeping it stored on materials.

But, simultaneously, ‘the archive’ was presenting itself on several ontological planes, as several different things which were located in different spaces. It was also all around us, in the objects that I was sold, and in the sounds that we were hearing broadcast from the radio studios. This feeling of the ontological multiplicity of the archive continued as I explored the objects that I was directed towards, from different spaces throughout the city.

From home, from my computer in my bedroom in La Goulette, I dutifully went about trying to learn about the contents of the *phonothèque* through reading the book, listening to its accompanying CDs, and consulting the *phonothèque* archive online. On the first page of the book, a preface by Dr Abdelbaki Hermassi, Minister for Culture in 2003, and an *Avant-Propos* by Mourad Sakli, musicologist and musician, give the explanation and justification for this publication: Hermassi suggests that it reflects ‘the continued interest of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport for the *ma’lūf*, genre of reference in the Tunisian musical identity’ (Snoussi et al. 2003, 5).⁹⁹ Sakli explains that the radio programmes were part of an effort to educate the 1960s listener through series of documentaries formed around 5 themes (‘folklore musicale’, ‘musique classique’, ‘liturgie islamique’, ‘liturgie populaire’, and ‘musique militaire’), and that this current republication of the ‘musique classique’ part participates in efforts of the CMAM to contribute to ‘a more profound knowledge of our Tunisian musical material’ (Snoussi et al. 2003, 10). The rest of the book is composed of the textual transcriptions, in French, of around 188 weekly radio programmes all about *ma’lūf*, each one 20 minutes long. The transcriptions of the radio programmes posit *ma’lūf* as Tunisia’s ‘Musique Classique’ that revolves around a specifically Tunisian musical language of the ‘*tba*’ – which it describes as ‘*modes mélodiques*’ – on which a suite of *nubat*, or ‘programme’ of pieces, is built. Its accompanying CDs contain sonic examples for points made in the book – whether *tba*’ examples, rhythmic examples, or examples from the *nubat*, interpreted by such musicians as Tahar Gharsa and Saliha, which demonstrate how the *tba*’ and its system

⁹⁹ ‘le continuel intérêt du Ministre de la Culture de la Jeunesse et des Loisirs pour le *mâlûf*, genre de référence dans l’identité musicale tunisienne.

is used. As a reader and a listener, I was directed to the right example at the right time through footnotes.

As for the online *phonothèque*, I could access this through its website. Similarly to the book, there was an initial text on the screen which served as an introduction and a justification: it informs us that the archive was made to ‘collect, treat, conserve, restore, valorise and diffuse’ the ‘*ensemble du patrimoine phonographique tunisien*’, ‘all of the Tunisian phonographic heritage’. It amounts, we are told, to a collation of collections from a number of other national archives (including the Institut Supérieur de Music, the R.T.T., the archives of the Rachideyya and the International Festival of Testour), and personal collections, including those of important figures in histories of Tunisian music: Salah El Mehdi, musicologist and Minister of Culture under Bourguiba, as well as German ethnomusicologist Wolfgang Laade and other ethnomusicologists who conducted field recordings in the country. The University of Paris Nanterre logo adorns the webpage, suggesting a partnership in the construction of the online archive, and we are told indeed that the software ‘Telemata’ is specifically intended for research and open access archives. Next to all this text is a search bar where you can type what you want to find, and entries corresponding to your search are listed in an orderly row, in Arabic or French, with the following information: title, whether it’s been digitised, location, Year of Recording, Code.

When I accessed the online *phonothèque* archive from my bedroom, I scrolled through a few field recordings by the collector mentioned on the site, Laade. I also scrolled through their list of 45 tour vinyl records – it shows a list of recordings by such singers and musicians as Mohammed Jrari, Mohammed Jamoussi, Soulef, Ali Riahi, Naama, with ‘*En’nagham*’ often cited as the producer of these recordings. There was a recording in the list by Tahar Gharsa which was the same as one used in the book *Initiation à la musique tunisienne*: his interpretation of the song *El Washima*. The items are listed as textual entries with hyperlinks to the sounds of the recording; upon clicking upon the link, the sounds of these recordings would suddenly be emitted from my computer – those of Laade would crackle, giving impressions of age, whilst those of *En’nagham* were more smooth. I also found recordings of the radio documentaries themselves that had been transcribed in the *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne* book. It became possible to click on episodes and to hear the text of the book in front of me narrated in the slightly gravelly French drawl of Manoubi Snoussi

himself, replete with the musical examples that had been peeled off in the accompanying CDs. And, I heard Manoubi Snoussi's voice again on the golden disk that I'd been given by the radio technicians; when I put it in my computer I opened it to find the same recordings that I had heard on the Phonothèque site, organised this time in Windows files, labelled in a gesture, I presume, to the vinyl labelling, with 'Face A' and 'Face B' in different folders.

This kind of searching and listening, using the Phonothèque, could be complimented by a seeking out of these names on other platforms: particularly YouTube and Discogs.¹⁰⁰ Upon typing in the names 'Hédi Jouini' or 'Saliha' into the YouTube search bar, for instance, I was faced with a plethora of entries, from 'cocktails' with a background of cliffs and waves, to Karoke versions of Saliha classics, to versions with a single still image of a vinyl or CD cover. On Discogs, I could see images of the *ma'lūf* recordings that were listed on the *phonothèque* site: bright illustrations of instruments in Sidi bou Said adorning sleeves which carried the logo 'En'nagham'.

The sound being emitted from my computer as I engaged with the books and websites had another effect: my usually quite private process of going through bits of fieldwork expanded outwards to take up spaces of the rest of the flat that I shared with Radhi and Rania, who could hear these sounds coming out of my room. The archive became an atmosphere, an 'arc of sound' interlinking us (LaBelle). As we noted in the introduction to this thesis, Radhi and Rania are both musicians, and at the time were both inscribed at the *Institut Supérieur de Musique*. As I was going through the book *Initiation à la musique tunisienne*, I heard them singing along with the progressions of the melodies from the kitchen, reproducing them with their own voices.

And the space of the home wasn't the only place where the state archive might suddenly emerge as an atmosphere. Occasionally, during a taxi ride, I'd see and hear 'Panorama' being played on the radio, or one of the other channels of the National Radio. I remember one time coming home late at night and hearing the song *nasma kefiya*, 'the breeze of Kef' cracking out of the dashboard, the blinking lights of the radio spelling out 'Panorama' as a woman's voice sang, '*sgħar w rīgū sheħ...*', 'young and parched...'. The driver asked me if I

¹⁰⁰ We will come back to both in more detail. YouTube is frequently described as a social media, video sharing platform; Discogs is devoted to the circulation of second-hand vinyls.

knew it, saying ‘it’s from Kef, my country. You know Kef? It’s the most beautiful region.’

Other times, Panorama would be on and there would be no conversation, just the sound of the car melding with the sounds of the radio as we sped over the highway from the centreville to La Marsa, or sat in traffic in the centreville. A man who stationed himself at the entrance of the souk of La Goulette, selling clay pots, also used to listen to Panorama: on a little radio set perched on one of the pots. Entering into the souk thus involved walking through a brief cloud of the rhythms of whatever *fann sh’abi* was playing at the time.

So this archive is ontologically multiple, but at the same time, differently and unequally ‘accessed’. It was difficult to access the archival buildings – and when I did, there was a deliberate directing of attention towards the materials of the archive, and the idea that the archive was kept, stored and controlled by these institutions. But the archive was also something that expanded outwards, cropping up in all sorts of ways and demanding different sorts of bodily engagement. One could actively search for the archive, at which point it came up on websites connected with the state institutions such as the *phonothèque*, but also YouTube and Discogs. But it could also work its way into sonic environments sometimes uninvited as it was omitted from radios and filled the spaces of taxis and souks, curated by all sorts of people as they sought to tincture their own spaces with *jaww*. It was even reproduced by people as they hummed to it, and sang along with its tunes.

What was this ontological multiplicity, and uneven access and mediation, doing in the contemporary city? We saw that the pre-revolutionary sonic archive was constructed and maintained in order to create a certain ‘imaginary’ of *tunisianité*, but also that its materials and sounds could have mediated notions of ‘modernity’ in multiple ways. What does this dispersed archive do to senses of an ‘imaginary’?

1.5 The unequal sensory mediation of musical ‘clumps’: from the textual and iconic to the audible and invisible

We described a situation above in which the archive is mediated through a variety of materials, objects, moments and spaces. But through my efforts to experience it, I found that there was a gradual emergence of what I’ll call ‘stylised sonic areas’ which themselves

take form as differently sensate collations of *things*, or indeed, multisensory and multimedia ‘clumps’ (whether sounds, words, pictures, music, texts, lists, etc), which demand different sorts of attention (or not) and sensory engagement. This is to follow Born and Drott, who think about the ways in which notions of musical ‘genre’ are something which emerge from assemblages of mediation (Born, 2011b; Drott, 2013). Here, however, I am using the term ‘areas’ because these assemblages are not necessarily equivalent in their ontologies. Central to this is an uneven distinction between ‘fragment’ and ‘story’, animating different parts of this archive.¹⁰¹ And in this unequal mediation of musical clumps, the state archive arguably maintains spaces for the formation of the similar sorts of ‘communities of time’ which were desired in the pre-revolutionary time; despite ostensible innovations in the form of Panorama, we might question whether there is a clear sonic break with the past coming from this state archive.

‘*Ma’lūf*’ swims into being as a ‘stylised sonic area’ which continues to loom large in connection to the state archives. ‘*Ma’lūf*’, the word, is uttered often in connection with the state archives. Its centrality was shown to me by the very fact that I was directed towards the book *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne*, and subsequently came across recordings connected with this book, and with the archival efforts of the Baron d’Erlanger and Manoubi Snoussi that it was mediating, on multiple separate occasions. *Ma’lūf*, and names associated with it, was listed on the Phonothèque site several times. In the radio, it was mentioned as one of the key things ‘of value’ by the technicians, the thing worth preserving. The figures adorning the wall of the radio in the painting of Zoubeir Turki sit in poses which are evocative of the picture that adorns the cover of the *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne* book – it is through the repetition of these visual forms that the bodies of the *ma’lūf* are mediated. The melodies were taken up and it was sounded and vocalised again by flatmates who themselves are being educated in state institutions. These instances came together in my experience to make of *ma’lūf* something that is firm, codified, with a clear set of figures and sounds, and clearly present and connected to state archives. Key to this was the book,

¹⁰¹ The feeling that different parts of an archive are not equivalent to each other came across particularly strongly in the state archive in comparison to the other archives examined in this thesis, because the state archives are composed with a particularly large number of different materials, objects, texts and recording types (as opposed to the YouTube archive which is all digital uploads, or the cassette archive which is all cassettes). As such, ‘stylised sonic area’ is used here to absorb material differences in a way which becomes less necessary in subsequent chapters.

Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne, which was to be read in French and Arabic, verbal explanations to be listened to in French, notation which entered into these stories, and a repetition of sounds which could be elided to this notation. This book hovers between story and fragment of the archive: it is both a remediation by Sakli of the story of Manoubi Snoussi which was put together involving sonic fragments, and also a story by Sakli, woven around the recordings of Manoubi Snoussi, themselves fragments of the archive.

It could easily feel as if these mediations of *ma'lūf* were reproducing the sorts of efforts of the Bourguiban regime to form modern, cultured citizens through their engagements with *ma'lūf*. We know from the text of Said that 'culture' was supposed to be discussed within the context of 'culture centres', and studied. *Ma'lūf*, here also, is not only heard, but is read. My engagement with this part of the archive involved careful reading, searching, switching between footnotes and audio examples, and wading through dense theory. My learning process at home was not entirely dissimilar to that of Radhi and Rania in the Institute of Music, where they too would learn about *ma'lūf* not only through listening to it but through texts and verbal explanations that described it, picked it apart, and ensured a level of theoretical understanding. Sometimes it felt as if the ultimate end of this process is the learner being able to, themselves, vocalise not only the melodies of the *ma'lūf* but *theories about the ma'lūf, explanations of the ma'lūf* – and this is something which also seeped into all sorts of spaces. I remember a car journey, for instance, during which I was told all about theories of *ma'lūf*, in all of their intricacies, by a particularly zealous student. It is considered to be something that any ethnomusicologist interested in Tunis, or musician in Tunis, should know about – in the sense of being able to reproduce theories and names of the *tba'*. So, the mediation of *ma'lūf* that we found in the archive could be framed as creating sonic spaces and sensorial learning experiences which are supposed to hone the ear and the body in ways that echo and extend the experience of post-independence citizens 'becoming cultured'.

Chanson Tunisienne is another 'stylised sonic area' that looms large in connection with state archives as I experienced them. The name '*chanson tunisienne*' actually comes up less often than the names of its stars, which are often brought together in a list, when they are

referenced: 'Hédi Jouini, Ali Riahi, Saliha' as they were mentioned to me by technicians.¹⁰²

These 'lists' of names which are uttered verbally can also be found in texts: that of cultural commentator of the Bourguiban era Mustapha Chelbi, for instance, who writes the list 'Tarnane, Ifrit, Saliha, Messika, Ali Riyahi, Hédi Jouini, etc.' as an illustration of moments 'when Tunisian music held itself well and was able to make elegant and refined contributions' (Chelbi 1985, 159)¹⁰³. They are also known as the 'radio stars' or the 'old generation.' Names of these stars adorned the phonothèque list, their voices resounded as I clicked on the links, their names were uttered frequently in the Radio building, we listened to the voice of Hédi Jouini in the Panorama studio. These lists of names took on a sensuous quality in their repetition, reminiscent of the assertion of Porcello et al. that 'grammatical, morpho-syntactic, intonation contour(...)and other sensory organizational aspects of discourse are all orchestrated for the purposes of presenting multi-layered messages to the senses' (Porcello et al. 2010, 60). There was no readily available lengthy textual explanations of *chanson tunisienne*, as there was of *ma'lūf* in the *Initiation* book – but there are other textual stories that illuminated it and contributed to maintaining its sensuous shapes. These include another book by Hamadi Abassi called 'Tunis Chant et Danse' which makes use of the R.T.T. recordings as it tells vibrant anecdotes of the *Chanson Tunisienne* stars as they wandered around Tunis in the colonial period, singing for adoring fans and going on tours to Europe and the Middle East (Abassi, 2000). Names were often accompanied by iconic headshots, particularly on vinyl covers. Tunes and melodies from these artists were hummed and sung constantly throughout the city. It thus felt that engagement with this area required less of the searching through 'music theory', and more of a reeling off of names, a sensitivity to iconic images and melodies, a capacity to *recognise* these icons.

So far, then, we have identified *ma'lūf* as an area which, in the ways in which it is currently mediated through various materials of the state sonic archive, involves engagement with text and theory, and *Chanson Tunisienne* which involves an engagement with individual names, iconic images and voices. As we saw previously, the imaginary of the state archive also hinged on specific 'sonic transculturations' of styles connected with *fann sh'abi*; its voices were often excluded, or included in orientalist versions which enacted sonic

¹⁰² It is through the thesis of Sakli that the name 'Chanson Tunisienne' is used with firmness, a thesis which is accessed in the library of the Institut Supérieur de Music (Sakli, 1995).

¹⁰³ *où la musique tunisienne se portait bien et était capable de faire des propositions élégantes et raffinées*

purifications and orientalisising illustrations. Was the addition of the Panorama radio station serving to decentre the archive's heavy focus on *ma'lūf* and *Chanson Tunisienne*, to 'redistribute the sensible' (Rancière, 2013)? We'll remind ourselves that the very existence of Panorama was supposed to be righting a wrong that was performed by the radio itself – the pre-revolutionary marginalisation of the regions, as an extension and tool of the modernist politics of the state.¹⁰⁴

With a closer look at other areas of Panorama's activity, and other kinds of language that were used by Jihene in our conversation, the idea that Panorama might be enacting a post-revolutionary politics of regional emancipation could be questioned. Elsewhere in our discussion, the items showcased on Panorama were described as being things which were all about 'cultural specificities' that were frequently elided with '*authenticité*,' things that were 'traditional', and which engaged with a certain 'nostalgia'. And the archive wasn't only to be shared with people, intended to return to them what was rightfully theirs – the word '*injecté*' was used to describe the motions of mediating this music to people's bodies. Descriptions of the radio became not only about regional representation, but about a '*héritage nationale*' that was composed of these elements. This was highlighted particularly in a few programming choices: the regional radios, when they are being broadcast live with Panorama, apparently have to change their own programming to be more 'regional' sounding, otherwise, Jihene suggested, they risk playing what they like – '*sharqī, gharbī, musique commerciale*', 'eastern, western, commercial music'.¹⁰⁵ And this 'regional' sound desired by the radio is elided with sounds that evoke a certain pastness – rap, for instance, despite generally being considered 'popular', is not allowed; whilst '*mezoued*', despite hailing from the capital, is. When these things are taken into account there is suddenly less of a post-revolutionary feel about this, and something which is more similar to post-independence politics of national identity and modernisation, in which the regional sounds have to be controlled; to reuse the phrase of Saidane, 'those that the elites had selected,

¹⁰⁴ Jihene also explained that regional accents had generally been outcast from the national media, and music and culture from the regions has been rarely celebrated.

¹⁰⁵ These terms will come up throughout: *sharqi* can also be started with the French '*orientale*', and tends to refer to sounds thought of as Middle Eastern; *gharbi* can be stated as '*occidentale*' and tends to refer to Western Europe and the U.S.

exhumed, purged, diverted and made consistent with the vision that they had of the people, or of what they were meant to be,' (Saidane 2015, 151).

Indeed, whilst Panorama might have been adding a certain mediation of sounds to the 'aural public sphere' which had not previously been widely disseminated from state media, these sounds are maintained within playlists which use them as beads for a general 'regional' sound. Songs were not textually and theoretically explored in the same way as the *ma'lūf*, and artists were not 'iconicised' in the same ways as those of the *Chanson Tunisienne*. Its sounds were rarely named as a single clear genre or as a set of iconic names, but rather as styles and geographical areas: *mezoued*, *gasba*, *zokra* are three often uttered styles, each taking their name after the central instrument featured; Tatouine, Gafsa, Kasserine the regions mentioned. Although I know that plentiful texts and recordings on *fann sh'abi* have been generated in state spaces, it was not these that were sold to me in the *phonothèque*, or given to me in the radio. So *fann sh'abi* came across as audible in rhythms, in style names, and less visible than either *ma'lūf* or *Chanson Tunisienne*, as text or as image. As a 'stylised sonic area', it thus worked in conjunction with those of the *ma'lūf* and the *Chanson Tunisienne* to create spaces of an unequal engagement with different kinds of sound.

As for the kinds of sounds associated with the RTCI, these also seem to exist as audible presences which were mediated through the channels of the state archive, but which were rarely explicitly remarked upon as being connected with the state. I was never directed to the archive of the RTCI when I was looking for 'state archives' – its material was not placed in proximity to notions of state *explicitly*. It was gestured towards, but it wasn't present. I heard it on in taxis multiple times, but can't remember the specifics of these encounters. The only conversations that I had about it were ones that I dug up opportunities to have. This 'stylised sonic area', then, is something that has very faint, hazy lines, audible in public space, but only audible and visible *in connection with the state* with a deliberate changing in the direction of attention. Here, we have a situation which is almost opposite to the two we just described. We have been told that there is an archive of this music in existence in the state radio, but there is a near total lack of story-telling around it, especially story-telling which connects it with either the state or with Tunisian people. Its existence becomes something which is audible, but not remarkable.

From the texts that describe *tunisianité*, we understand that ‘ambivalence’ and ‘mix’ are key parts of this ideology: the Tunisian political subject must be both open to everything and sure of their own national identity; they must be able to engage with different aspects of ‘national’ and ‘world’ culture. Despite their current distribution across multiple materials and spaces – despite the ontological multiplicity of the archive – it feels as if the multiple infrastructures of the state archive still come together to form ‘stylised sonic areas’ which work to divide sound into differently shaped areas, requiring different kinds of sensory engagement – and that these still work to the hierarchies of *tunisianité*.

But do people move through these spaces in the ways which are intended? Do these differently mediated sonic areas end up creating the desired communities of time? How might ‘subjective experiences’ interact with the power of this archive?

1.6 Power and limits: maintaining the myth of the ‘original’ despite issues of infrastructure

The power of the archive to form and maintain the ‘instituting imaginary’ seemed limited by a couple of things in particular: stops and starts in experiences of listening to it, and people’s challenging of the ways in which it is constructed and presented. Indeed, as detailed by Mbembe, subjective experience of the archive depends on a number of things: ‘who owns them; on whose authority they depend; the political context in which they are visited; the conditions under which they are accessed; the distance between what is sought and what is found; the manner in which they are decoded and how what is found there is presented and made public’ (Mbembe 2002, 23).

Despite the ostensible connectedness of these institutions, the experience of moving between them and around them felt strikingly disconnected, made of stops and starts. Quite a distance separates the *phonothèque* at Sidi Bou Said and the R.T.T.. But also, many of these stops and starts were generated by infrastructures which were not working as they were intended. When browsing the lists of the *phonothèque* website, sometimes the hyper-link connecting entries to sounds worked, sometimes it didn’t. Sporadically over the years, and at the time of writing this chapter, I went back to the site, and found that it wasn’t working at all. In place of the list there was a blank screen, or a ‘502 Bad Gateway’ error page. I was

left with books, memories and screenshots of the archival lists, but couldn't verify anything or reconsult the archive online. When I asked employees at the *phonothèque* about this, they rolled their eyes and told me to try again later. The experience was indicative of many of the reported faults in state digital systems, which generally result in feelings of frustration towards the state, feelings that it is 'stuck in the past', as many of my friends would put it. In this sense, the kinds of fantasies of progress and modernity which infrastructures of sonic mediation and reproduction were shaped to entertain are being undone and frustrated by those very same infrastructures.¹⁰⁶

Also, the ideas that the archive is seen to mediate don't always land with those who attempt to experience it. I initially leafed through the '*Initiation à la musique Tunisienne*' book with considerable difficulty – much of it is an extremely technical and goes into many details on such minutiae as distances between tones in each *tba'*, correct usage of modes, and correct instrumental and social use. Radhi and Rania questioned its legitimacy; not just the book, but the radio broadcasts that it was centred around. Radhi came and flicked through the book and immediately raised his eyebrows at the notions of 'rhythms *arabes*' – he questioned the need to racialize these rhythms in that way. He also frowned at the way that the '*tba*' were described by Snoussi as 'modes' – because, as he described, this was to imagine that there was somehow a template or model – the 'mode' – and a variation on this – the *tba'* – whilst for him in fact the *tba'* is its own thing, with different relationships between the notes that are not equivalent to other (Western) systems. As for Rania, she was more attuned to the choice of musical examples – she was surprised to hear a '*rast*' example in a style that she felt was more '*sharqi*' than '*tunisi*' – she explained that there was a different *jaww* between the two. Both were surprised that the episodes had been played on the radio in the 1960s, and we all wondered together who on earth would have been able to understand the rather dense theory explained verbally on the radio. And they didn't just question the terms and the choice of fragments for the story told in *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne*, with critiques of the language and concepts involved and also the type of example chosen – they challenged the entire usefulness of the original exercise as they questioned how any member of the general public would have been able to understand the

¹⁰⁶ This is always the risk with infrastructural desires: see Larkin (Larkin, 2013).

thing. So this archive was having its legitimacy challenged on several levels by Radhi and Rania.

But against these limits, the key power of the state sonic archive was in its capacity to maintain a hold over notions of the originality of certain objects at the sources of its important musical areas. There was also an effective directing of *attention* towards certain areas and sounds, to guide a certain *connection* between those areas, state and people. Regardless of how much or how little people engaged with the sounds and texts of this archive, this part of its power seemed intact – and I even felt it reflected in, and effecting, the ways in which I went about my research.

It is precisely the ‘lack of access’ to these buildings which maintains senses of the ‘true’ spaces of the archives (such as those in the *phonothèque* and the R.T.T.). Stories, sounds, and images of the different musical areas cloud around not only to give the materials of musical areas a certain imagined proximity or distance from the state, but to actually *create feelings of the materials themselves* which are differently encapsulated by the buildings of the state – differently contained within them or felt to belong to them. When I told people in Tunis that my PhD was on ‘*mūsiqa fi tūnis*’, ‘music in Tunis’ they would often respond by directing me the R.T.T. and the *phonothèque*. One person working in a cassette shop, who I was asking about the cassettes, told me that I would get more information on music in Tunis if I went and asked in the radio. A coach at my kickboxing gym, whom I was asking about the rap music that was on around us, told me that I should be interested in the ‘real music’, and directed me towards the ‘*ma’lūf*’ and the Palais Ennejma Ezzahra at Sidi Bou Said. These were widely considered to be the important spaces – the ones which were *believed* to contain all of the important recordings that amounted to a Tunisian musical ‘heritage’. Certain styles of music were often mentioned as participating in this heritage, and important recordings of these styles were thought to be housed in these places: *ma’lūf*, Hédi Jouini, Saliha, Ali Riahi.

The multiplicity of these moments, and the ways in which they are located in proximity to the state archives, arguably created a firm mythical presence of these musical things ‘in’ the archive – at the heart of the state. This was illuminated to me in a couple of moments in particular: a moment in the Panorama studio, listening to Hédi Jouini, and a moment of listening to Panorama in the taxi.

When I was with Faisel in the Panorama studio, he played a Hédi Jouini track on Zenone, pointing out the 'Studio 8' label in the column which details where the track was recorded and taken from. We listened to the familiar sounds of '*taħt al yismīna fī līl*', 'under the jasmine at night,' a favourite song of his which is widely known. 'You hear the quality?' Faisel said – 'this is the original recording!' We sat there listening. It did feel exciting – there was a shared excitement at the idea that we were listening to 'the original', and the idea that the sound was of better 'quality' as a result. But it seems that, perhaps, it was the weight of the story-telling behind 'Hédi Jouini' himself, specifically in connection with the place where we were sitting, and the already iconic nature of the man and the song, which might have created notions, or even sounds, of 'quality'. Although I'm not sure I heard a change in quality, I *believed*, in the moment, both that I was listening to an original recording, and that the original recording was somewhere right underneath my feet.

And when I think back to the moment that I described earlier, listening to Panorama in the taxi with the driver from Kef, I wonder whether I *remember* this moment because of the weight of story-telling which was connecting it to the state archive. From my recordings, I realise that there were hundreds of other moments of shared listening in taxis, including to Panorama, which were entirely forgettable – including, incidentally, a moment of listening to Panorama during which it was actually broadcasting something outside of its own narrative: some Tahar Gharsa song which is usually connected to the capital, not the regions.

So it seemed that, despite (or perhaps because of) the opaque nature of the state archival buildings and infrastructures which created broken experiences of listening, combined with the weight of story-telling connecting certain stylised sonic areas to the state in certain ways, the archive retained a key power: the power of maintaining control over material fragments – of 'originals' – mythical presences of key voices at the centre of the institution.

1.7 Conclusion

We started this chapter by asking whether, and how, the Tunisian state uses sonic archives to try and construct its national imaginaries and communities of time, questioning the power of this archive and its limits.

The picture we've emerged with is of a state sonic archive which has always been complicated, and ontologically multiple. Relying on the work of ethnomusicologists of the colonial and post-colonial eras, we started by thinking again about this time – in light of Mbembe and Ochoa's theorisations of the archive, we've framed the sonic archive as being constructed by a variety of entextualisations and recontextualisations of sound which placed certain stylistic areas and bodies at the centre of a national imaginary, particularly the *ma'luf*. But we've seen also, particularly through discussions with certain media and industry workers working in the radio station RTCI and the vinyl company *En'nagham* throughout the post-independence eras, that a certain 'modern' imaginary could also play out through the programming and mediation of certain forms of *fann sh'abi*, Western and foreign music, as long as they were rendered 'modern' through 'correct' industrial processes, replete with copyright, imbuing them with senses of 'culture', even if they might in other contexts come into senses of '*jaww*'.

Moving into the post-revolutionary city, we found a state sonic archive which is even more dispersed over many materials. It is ontologically multiple and unequally accessible; its key buildings of the R.T.T. and the *phonothèque* are difficult to access, but its archive is mediated through publications such as *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne* and radio broadcasts. We found that certain stylistic areas swim through this collection of materials, as spaces of imaginary which are arguably similar to those desired by the post-independent state archive: *ma'luf*, to be understood and sensed as text, theory and sound; *chanson tunisienne* to be recognised as a set of iconic voices and faces; *fann sh'abi* and the styles of the RTCI which would continue to have audible presences, without necessarily moving beyond mediations which would continue to situate them on the periphery. But we noted, also, that the power of the archive is limited by subjective experiences – it is undermined by faulty infrastructures and shifting conceptualisations of the musical areas and their meanings. We ended with the idea that a key power of this archive is its capacity to maintain a hold over the very idea of 'original' recordings, attached to key voices of the state archive, which have a mythical presence at the centre of the archive.

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As we've also seen, objects and sounds thrown up by the state archives don't circulate in isolation; they circulate along with myriad other sounds and objects that are thrown up by

other infrastructures of musical circulation and listening, including, of course, other kinds of archive. Sounds and objects from digital archives may well mediate sounds that are easily connected with the state archives, as we've seen in the examples of Hédi Jouini and Saliha on YouTube.¹⁰⁷ But they mediate vast quantities of other things besides, and have themselves been made with different kinds of power. YouTube, Facebook, or music on different kinds of support can all arguably come together to interrupt flows of material from the state archives. For instance, moments before I started to play the CD from the book *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne* at home, there had been other things going on: all sorts of sounds were being played on YouTube that morning, from the Lord of the Rings soundtrack to the songs of a Swedish friend of Rahdi. The moments of radio listening that we touched on in this chapter were also enframed by myriad other moments – a simple switching of the radio channel was enough to move us onto a different archive, a different logic. Far more popular than any of the state radio stations, for instance, was Mosaique FM, the principle private radio station. Ultimately, the power of the state archive also rests on the extent to which these other archival structures interrupt or consolidate its sonic divisions and hold over senses of 'original' recordings, which are necessary for its instituting imaginary. This is what we will explore in the rest of this thesis, and we'll start with a particularly widely present digital archive: YouTube.

¹⁰⁷ An ironic example of this: as I came to the end of writing this chapter I checked the lyrics of *nesma keffiya*, the song we heard in the taxi, with a friend: he sent me a YouTube link, and the channel 'Tunisian Lyrics', the same karaoke channel mentioned earlier, popped up on my phone, lyrics displayed on the screen to be mediated by me into this chapter.

2. YouTube

2.1 Introduction

YouTube isn't primarily discussed as an archive. It tends to be thought of as an online video platform which amounts to a 'social media' or a 'participatory media' (Burgess et al., 2009), defined by the fact that its content is generated by users, who upload videos which are shared and accessed directly by others.¹⁰⁸ As such, it has been widely equated with a kind of technology led 'democratisation', seen as a platform which flattens hierarchies between creators, gatekeepers and users of media objects, and which bypasses boundaries between states.¹⁰⁹ The ways in which YouTube has been discussed in connection to Tunisia has served both to reinforce this narrative that YouTube is inherently a kind of 'democratic' media, and to maintain the idea that one of YouTube's key roles or status *in* Tunisia is as a democratising force in society. During the revolutionary uprisings, YouTube, which had been censored by the regime of Ben Ali and his Internet Agency of '2000 online police officers' (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011), was used widely by activists and protestors to spread media, songs, videos and news.¹¹⁰ It was thus initially cast by many observers as a place of 'free political expression' (Wall & El Zahed, 2011), a 'virtual public sphere' (Arafa & Armstrong, 2016), in which people could appear as political subjects in new ways, bypassing authoritarian regimes.¹¹¹ It has since been considered with more nuance: as a tool which was used in varied ways to create spaces of dissensus in conjunction with other online and offline spaces, from Facebook, Daily Motion and Twitter to the street.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ See Burgess et al. for an 'overview' of the platform, as well as Snickars and Vonderau's 'reader' (Burgess et al., 2009; Snickars & Vonderau, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ The equating of digital technologies with democratisation and 'participation' is discussed critically in Hirschkind et al. *New Media New Publics*, especially by Kelty (Hirschkind et al., 2017; Kelty, 2016).

¹¹⁰ For descriptions of censorship and circumventing this censorship on the part of youth, see particularly Honwara (Honwana, 2013).

¹¹¹ Work which gave a big 'role' to social media and the internet as actors during the revolutions in Tunisia and across the Arab world has been plentiful. See also AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015; Comunello & Anzera, 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Wagner, 2011.

¹¹² The aforementioned work has been critiqued for an often simplified view of social media and the Arab Revolutions; for more detailed analyses of the circulations of specific media forms across online and offline spaces, see the following: Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Bayat, 2017; Dakhli & Collectif, 2020; Hawkins, 2022;

But, a strand of media theory has asserted since YouTube's arrival that it is also an archive. Likening it to a space of exhibition, media theorist Gehl suggested in 2009 that YouTube is an archive 'awaiting curators'; it is a 'sort of digital Wunderkammer, a place where many of the artifacts of digital empire sit on shelves, waiting either to overwhelm a visitor or to be utilized by savvy new entrepreneurs' (Gehl 2009, 45).¹¹³ It is also an archive in the ways in which it is structured: there are 'central servers which hold the video content that users have uploaded' (Gehl 2009, 45), themselves situated in Google's data centres across several countries.¹¹⁴ We've seen YouTube likened to an archive before, in the Tunisian context: Dakhli suggested that YouTube amounted in parts to an 'archive of the revolution' as media from activists coalesced on its online spaces, allowing a space for the imaginary of the revolution to breathe; and in her collective work 'L'esprit de la révolte', itself an archive, many YouTube 'fragments' appear (Dakhli & Collectif, 2020b). But for Gehl, YouTube's status as an archive serves also as a challenge to its equation with democracy: he reminds us that labour is required to maintain the platform and provide the content, and that this labour is 'exploited by those who mine the archive in order to display objects' (Gehl 2009, 46): often, curators and gatekeepers which use their capital to use YouTube for commercial and political advantage.

Gehl's museum analogy has one problem: it assumes that YouTube is mainly notable for its visual aspect. But YouTube is also a mediator of sound. And in the years following the Revolution, it was held up by musicians and listeners as a centrally important archive of music in Tunisia – as well as being the most accessible, visible and audible – apparently disrupting the centrality of the state archive. How does YouTube work as a sonic archive – and as an archive which, alongside dealing with images, organises an 'aural public sphere'? When we focus on the sonic, do we find that the platform indeed works to 'democratise', as much of the commentary on it suggests? What's more, it is not a mediator of sound which exists in a vacuum. We have already seen the ways in which the power of the state sonic archive works as it shapes mediations of sound and music around continuing sonic conceptions of *tunisianité*, and maintains a sense of 'originals' at the centre of the state,

Werbner et al., 2014. Lecomte, in particular, argues against the 'myth of the revolution' and offers a detailed account of the way that social media was used specifically in Tunisian Revolution (Lecomte, 2011).

¹¹³ See also Beer for a critical appraisal of online archives (Beer, 2013).

¹¹⁴ Google's website locates these across multiple sites, mainly in the global North
<https://www.google.com/about/datacenters/locations/>

carrying key voices. How might YouTube challenge or reinforce these particular workings of the state archive? To take up again the question of Mbembe, what is its power as a sonic archive operating in the city of Tunis, and what are its limits?

This chapter will proceed as follows. We'll firstly look at how YouTube burst onto the scene in Tunis as a sonic archive – and something which would be used as such particularly by musicians – during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary moments. We'll note that, more than a platform for new 'rap' music, it has been widely used by musicians working across many different practices and sounds – and indeed, that its first challenge to the state archival organisations of the sonic is its seemingly indiscriminate archiving of many previously and continuously ostracised sounds and practices, which it renders equal to their surrounding fragments through its formatting. However, YouTube is not only an archive in format, but is ontologically multiple: it becomes an actor in musical economies as well as ecologies of listening, participating therefore in already unequal divisions of sound and labour in many situations across the capital at once – in this sense, it works alongside many state institutions, as well as international regimes of capital and culture. I'll suggest finally that it would be a mistake either to claim that YouTube 'democratises' or maintains state power, and that its workings are complex and change according to musical worlds and their economies. YouTube's power works in the way in which it centralises certain sounds of 'virals', with high numbers of views, allowing them to be framed as 'mainstream'; as well as its 'eating' of sonic materials of the past. Ironically, despite its ubiquitous presence, it doesn't seem to offset the state archive's hold over senses of 'originals'.

2.2 The YouTube archive bursts onto the scene

Radhi described the way in which YouTube suddenly burst onto the scene, unblocked for the first time, the day after the 14th January 2011: 'YouTube was open, *ça y est*, the Revolution is achieved.' It was a joke – but we can imagine that one of the most sudden sensory changes to the environments of daily life upon the fleeing of the dictator came would have come from the voices, images and sounds emitted from the plethora of internet sites which suddenly became available and accessible on phones and computers. YouTube, and other

censored sites which were judged to contain anything overtly political, religious or sexual, such as news sites and porn sites, hadn't been completely impossible to access before the revolution – but one needed VPNs to bypass state controls, and the operation was never without risk. Radhi described how he, and many others, spent the days after the Revolution finally browsing music and online content, now so easy to open on one's phone or laptop.

During the revolutionary uprisings, YouTube was already being used as an archive for the storing and mediation of new songs: particularly rap songs, which were openly criticising Ben Ali's regime in their lyrics. The most famous example of this is the song *Rais Lebled* by Ben Hamouda, who went by the name of El Général. In a video that appeared on the platform on the 19th December 2010, a shady figure raps into a microphone with an eerie beat: '*Ra'is lablād*', the voice says, 'President of the country,' '*2011, mazāl shkūn yamūt bi ju'a*', '2011 and there are still those who die of hunger.' The rapper was briefly imprisoned, but the song continued to circulate widely, apparently copied and subtitled in different languages by different users.¹¹⁵ It became one of the most famous songs of the Tunisian Revolution.¹¹⁶ After the 14th January, the platform continued to be used by rappers, who would upload videos of songs which widely continued to contain overtly political lyrics. These included the likes of Weld 15 *boulícia kelb*, in which the rapper stands in front of crumbling buildings, showing images of the police, and calling the police 'dogs' whilst describing the neighbourhood continuing to burn; as well as *Psycho M* who would rap controversially about the role of Islam in society.¹¹⁷

But in the years following the revolution, YouTube would be used by many others, mediating different kinds of sound and voice. These included both people who would record their own

¹¹⁵ For instance, in the videos uploaded by different users are subtitled differently in English from the French translation. (2011freetunisia, 2011; tfi9ou, 2011).

¹¹⁶ It appears as a foundational moment in nearly all of the work which deals with 'rap' and the revolution, particularly in that by Gana and LeVine (Gana, 2012, 2013; LeVine, 2015; LeVine & Reynolds, 2016) and received a lot of media attention – indeed, El Général went on to be named on the Time magazine top 100 people of 2011 (Walt, 2011). This journalism, particularly, has been criticised by scholars for its sensationalism and orientalism as it divorces rappers from their daily contexts (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2013; Moreno Almeida et al., 2017; Sprengel, 2020).

¹¹⁷ For Weld 15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_VYwkZmGIQ (Weld El 15, 2015). For Psycho M: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPZiVuWdBpY>. (buzztubefrnf, 2011). Many other names can be linked with this strand: Klay BBJ, Emino, Amarda Binzerte, and others with similarly politically engaged work that are not called rappers such as Si Lemhaf. For debates on the cooption of rap by political classes, see Mekki (Mekki, 2018).

voices and sounds and ‘released’ their recordings onto the platform; and also those who would seemingly mediate already existing recordings from personal collections.

The former category contains sonic videos from people working across many styles, in many different ways. Directly after the Revolution this included many different sorts of style labelled as ‘alternative’: Nouveau Systeme’s reggae inspired songs such as ‘*meskina ya bledi*’, ‘My Poor Country’, which talks about social change against a reggae beat, video shot in Tunis’s medina (fig. 7); Bendir Man’s songs such as *Ghneya Lik*, ‘A Song for You’, which gathers singers and musicians from across the ‘alternative’ scene in a kind of love song to the country; and singer-songwriter Yasser Jradi’s moving tribute to assassinated left-wing politician Chokri Belaid.¹¹⁸ YouTube became a place for ‘covers’ of songs by a number of groups. Black Chords is a group that was composed of well-known musicians who are members of the black community and each have their own solo musical careers – Achref Chargui as an oud player and Sabri Mosbah as a singer songwriter – but here they come together to cover Daft Punk’s ‘Get Lucky’, which they meld with a *mezoued* song sung by *mezoued* singer Fehmi Riahi at the end.¹¹⁹ And covers appeared from hitherto unknown musicians who became known through the upload, such as the cover of Tunisian song ‘*Aman Aman Yel Mani*’, recorded apparently by Ghada Maatouk in her bedroom.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ All were uploaded between 2012 and 2014. For Nouveau System’s *meskina ya bledi*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhJ8eVrGVn8> (Wassup AV, 2012); for Bendir Man and co.’s *Ghneya Lik*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjYROsY85Bc> (Anis Aayed, 2013); for Yasser Jradi’s ‘Baba Hayek’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uljEQN1hrrc> (ROOTS TV, 2020). All of these artists were active before the regime in ways which challenged authority: Bendir Man was stationed abroad and wrote openly critical songs. Goultrah South Systeme is another very important and influential name in this strand, frequently linked with Moroccan group Gnawa Diffusion and Algerian group Labess for the ways in which they are heard to meld styles: rock, reggae and the specific North African sufi influences of *gnawa*, *diwan* and *stambali*.

¹¹⁹ For Black Chords: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0-1USu2F8> (nheb elmousica, 2013). This also amounted to a coming together of people working across different musical worlds; Achref Chargui has taught the oud in state institutions and has a career as an international oud player; Sabri Mosbah is a singer-songwriter working between Tunisia and Europe; and Fehmi Riahi is a *mezoued* singer.

¹²⁰ For Ghada Maatouk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnNGXvHGMPA> (Ghada Maatouk, 2014). I was recently told by a friend that this song name literally translates as ‘please, please ya German’, and refers to a relationship with a German soldier during WW2 – I have not yet been able to confirm this.

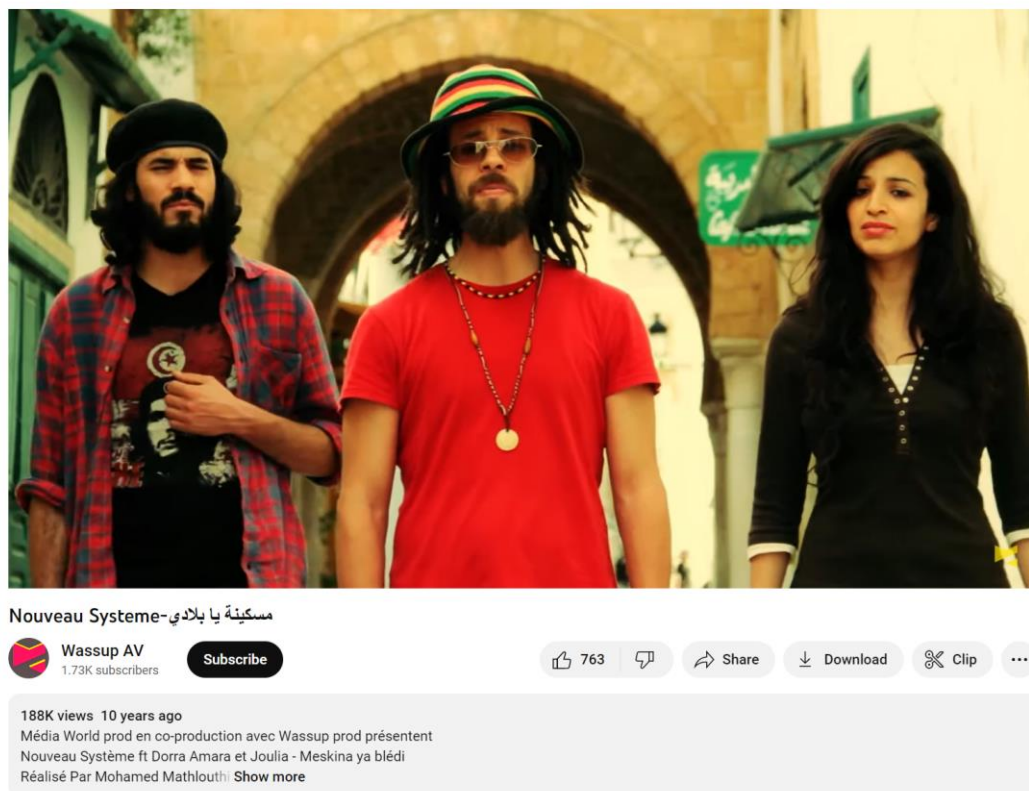


Fig. 7: A screenshot from the YouTube video of Nouveau Systeme's '*miskīna ya blādi*', taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhJ8eVrGVn8> 26/04/2023

The latter category contains sonic videos, also, of a vast range of sounds. Some of these are presented as single songs, or artists. There are recordings by the *mezoued* singer Samir Loussif, such as that labelled '*mezoued – Samir Loussif – Ya Mimti L8aliya*' – upon clicking, the sounds of the *mezoued* emerge, with a still picture of a Samir Loussif collage and 'mp3' written bottom right (fig. 8).¹²¹ There are sounds of Salah Farzit singing '*galūli rawah 'al barāni*', 'they told me go home', whose youthful image comes up against a background of green.¹²² There is an entire channel devoted to *ma'lūf*, 'Le Maluf Tunisien', which provides long recordings of *ma'lūf* with album sleeves that also look like they might have been lifted from previous supports.¹²³ There is a recording called 'Tunisia Mariage', which, upon listening, turns out to be a cocktail album which was made by the cassette company of the 80s and 90s, Africa Cassette – you can hear the sonic jingle that the company used to stamp

¹²¹ For Samir Loussif: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnPPcSo9NLA> (MrBou3ali, 2012).

¹²² For Salah Farzit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8dX_BpKUJ8 (Salah Farzit - Topic, 2016).

¹²³ For instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47ZAFHtS7zo&t=2049s> (Le maluf Tunisien, التونسي المالوف, 2012).

their cassettes and CDs '*aḥla cocktail, li aḥla mustem'ain, bi amra*' Africa Cassette' 'the sweetest cocktail, for the sweetest listeners, by the company Africa Cassette', is the announcement at the start.¹²⁴ Others are presented as 'cocktails' or 'montages'. There is a YouTube channel called 'Dr Mag' which creates hour-long compilations of singers such as Hédi Jouini which are paired with montages of images of natural scenery, labelled 'hour-long relaxing music'.¹²⁵ The channel 'Tunisian Lyrics', which cropped up in the last chapter, has seemingly turned old recordings into potential karaoke experiences through pairing the recording with the lyrics that flash across the screen in time with the words – one can sing along with the hits of Saliha and Tahar Gharsa.¹²⁶ Another uploader has uploaded a 19 minute long recording of *Baba Bahri* and *Sidi Mansour*, which is labelled as being from Sfax, and is paired with images of the sea, coastlines and fishermen.¹²⁷



¹²⁴ For 'Tunisia Mariage': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Qrwbzqr3wU&t=13s (MLP MUSIC, 2016).

¹²⁵ For the Hédi Jouini 'relaxing cocktail': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LurPR2gmpol&t=665s> (bouchkara, 2019).

¹²⁶ For the 'Tunisian Lyrics' channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNRa8xM2_Z8 (Tunisian Lyrics, 2018).

¹²⁷ For the *baba bahri / sidi mansour* compilation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M_pUwX8P4s (Mohamed Boukattaya, 2012).

Fig. 8: A screenshot from a YouTube video of Samir Loussif's *Ya Mimti L8aliya*, taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnPPcSo9NLA> 26/04/2023

By the time I got back to Tunis in 2019, YouTube's implications with the sonic, music, and artists, had wound in many directions. There were multiple 'rap' directions. In 2015, YouTube had become the online home of an artist widely considered to be the first to 'go viral' on the platform: Kafon, with his song *Houmani*, described conditions in the poor neighbourhoods of Tunis against a reggae style backing.¹²⁸ This trajectory of artists becoming 'viral' was continued by the rapper Balti, particularly with his song *Ya lili*, which touches on themes of domestic abuse and depression.¹²⁹ Whilst Kafon made headlines in 2015 when his video gained over a million views, Balti's now has over 760 million. Rappers release whole albums onto YouTube, including the likes of Samara and Jenjoon, their sounds characterised perhaps by autotuned melodic lines.¹³⁰ Along with the newer names, the 'older guard' continue: Klay BBJ for instance, a long-time critic of politics and oppressive systems, continuing to produce his more explicitly politically engaged lyrics onto his YouTube channel.¹³¹ There were also videos exhibiting a 'revisiting' of songs considered to be Tunisian '*turath*' ('heritage' or 'traditional'), such as Zaza's *Zaweli*, Asma's *Ya Hamma*, and Iman Cherif's *Baba Bahri* – songs from various spots of the 'traditional' or 'popular' repertoires that are heard particularly in celebration and wedding situations.¹³² Even the stars of *ma'lūf* such as Zied Gharsa use YouTube, spreading new recordings of *ma'lūf* performances or recordings of live performances.¹³³

Not only was YouTube used across many different styles and sounds; YouTube fragmented and diversified presences of single individuals. I was able to observe the ins and outs of this particularly closely through Radhi. Between 2019 and 2021, Radhi was 'present' on YouTube in several ways, in several different musical and social configurations at once. His violin

¹²⁸ For Kafon and Hamzaoui Med Amine's *Houmani*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlYZPm9TOEo> (Walid Sammoud, 2013).

¹²⁹ For Balti's *Ya Lili*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJHPpTYtlqk> (Thisiz Balti, 2017).

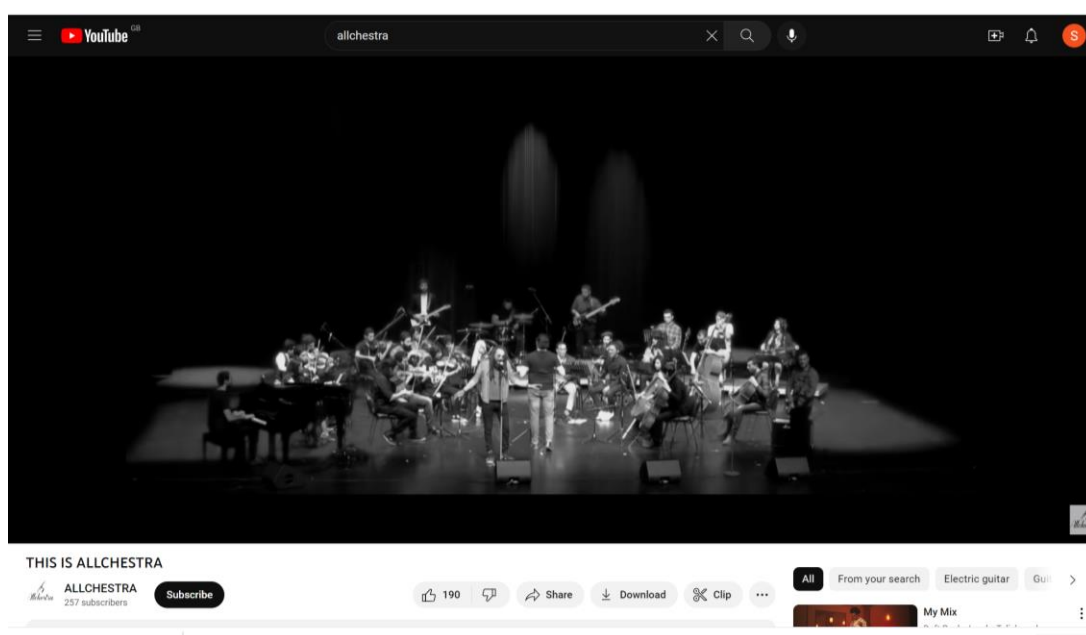
¹³⁰ For Samara *El Mondo*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq1OacHX4Gcy> (Samara, 2019); for Jenjoon' Hayala: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLvoQEbfSjl> (JenJoon, 2020). Many names can be added here, including Sanfara, Algerino, A.L.A.

¹³¹ For Klay BBJ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drPFhBmgYXw> (Klay, 2021).

¹³² For Zaza: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxSKsN2RJUA> (ZAZA SHOW, 2016); for Asma 'ya hamma': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHDGICnsZTc> (Asma Ben Ahmed, 2017); for Iman Cherif 'baba bahri': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrRJN0vdsPM> (Imen Cherif, 2016).

¹³³ For Zied Gharsa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2E0FVtIRsE> (Zied Gharsa 2021, زياد غرسة).

playing can be heard on tracks by other artists, such as Mortadha, or an entry in the YouTube based 'Ryan Leach Composing Competition' by a Dutch composer, in which he recorded Celtic inspired melodies and phrases to improve the otherwise midi-sound audio.¹³⁴ In 2019 he started an alternative orchestra, Allchestra, and started to use YouTube as a way of spreading its presence with an 'Allchestra' YouTube channel. In 'clips' such as 'This is Allchestra', we see Radhi conducting, and a montage of shots of the orchestra, as well as various members of the rock cover group 'Zanzana' singing songs by Led Zeppelin, Cranberries, and Pink Floyd (fig. 9).¹³⁵ During the first covid lockdown, Radhi used YouTube to upload mini projects that were recorded at home with his sound set-up, sometimes in collaboration with musician friends of his that were based in the U.S. and the U.K: an arrangement of the theme tune of Radhi's favourite animé, Hunter x Hunter; another arrangement of a video game tune which he synced with his friend Aymen who was recording it from Brighton, the U.K. In both cases Radhi would arrange the parts, memorise them, and record them directly into Logic Pro whilst simultaneously filming himself (fig. 10).¹³⁶



¹³⁴ For Mortadha's *Rayda* see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giovp0bCEiM> (Mortadha Ftiti, 2020); for the Ryan Leach composing competition see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsrkP0jKF8A> (Ryan Leach, 2022). Radhi's part comes during the entry by Jacob de Graaf at 1:14:00.

¹³⁵ This rock group named itself after the RTCI radio programme 'Zanzana' which we saw in the last chapter. For Allchestra, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQY8kYlnZZs> (ALLCHESTRA, 2019).

¹³⁶ For Radhi's hunter x hunter cover: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndsSvg2BN5g> (Radhi Chawaly, 2020).

Fig. 9: A screenshot taken from the YouTube video entitled THIS IS ALLCHESTRA, taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQY8kYlnZZs> 30/12/2022

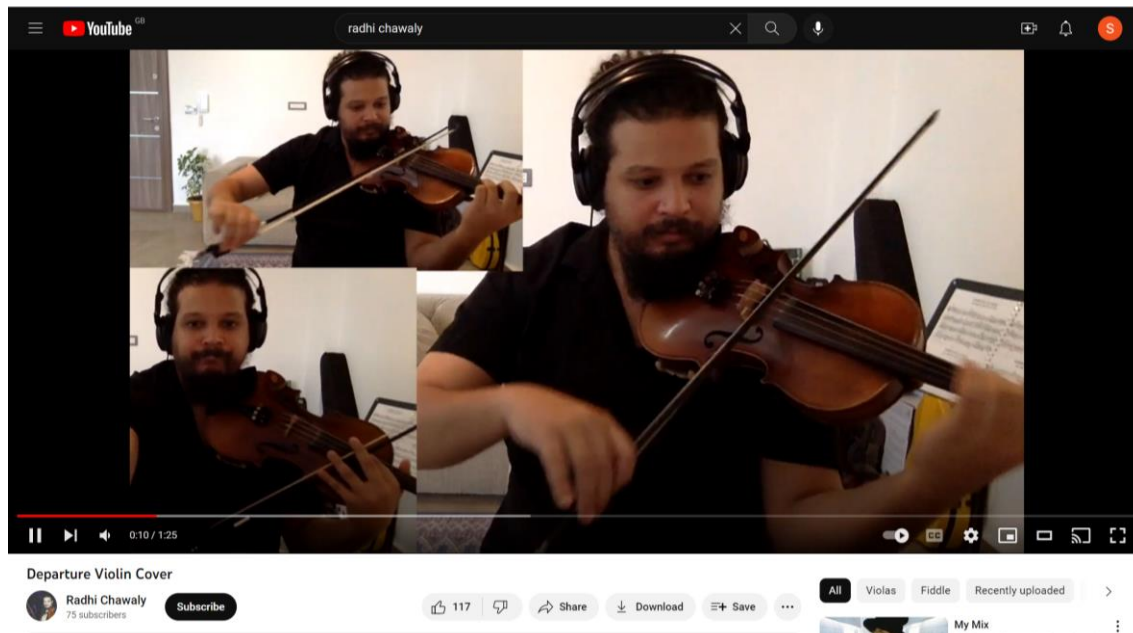


Fig. 10: A screenshot from a YouTube video showing 'Departure Violin Cover' by Radhi Chawaly, taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndsSvg2BN5g> 30/12/2022

YouTube is thus clearly an important archive of sound and music, which has been used by many actors in myriad ways since it was unblocked in 2011. YouTube does not seem characterised by lack of access and secrecy, as Mbembe's archives were, or as the state archival buildings of the last chapter were. It seems characterised on the contrary by wide levels of participation in the creation of its fragments, and a very public circulation of these fragments. As a private enterprise based in the US. and an organiser of data across the world, including in the 'datafied societies in the fringes of the neoliberal system' (Milan & Treré 2022, 77), there is cause to question who it is that has power over YouTube, and the implications that these large social media companies are so heavily embedded in social processes happening elsewhere, particularly away from the 'epistemic and economic centres of power' (77) which are the Global North and the U.S.¹³⁷ But as is also pointed out by Milan

¹³⁷ For more on inequalities between those who control data and those whom data collection targets, see also the work of Andrejevic and Casilli (Andrejevic, 2014; Casilli, 2017).

and Tréré, populations across the world use their agencies to adapt and use these technologies in all sorts of ways.

In Tunis, there are many ways in which YouTube could be framed as a space through which state structures which we saw in the last chapter might be challenged. As we noted in the introduction, historian Dakhli suggested that YouTube was one of the platforms through which ‘language’ could be ‘freed from conventions of register (spoken written, TV language)’, and would have contributed to a ‘blending of everything together, as in the most politically engaged songs, rap in particular, or phone messages’ (Dakhli, 2011). But I think that YouTube was also used in a way which posed a particular challenge to a few processes of defining and categorising music and sound as they operate in state and private institutions. Its use has challenged notions of who has the right to be labelled ‘musician’; what ‘Tunisian music’ is; the difference between ‘originals’ and ‘copies’, and the extent to which the ‘cocktail’ or ‘montage’ is a legitimate musical object.

2.3 Troubling fragments: musicians and uploaders, covers and cocktails

The aforementioned processes of defining and categorising have all been ongoing for many decades. They have been intertwined with the values of the various regimes since the colonial period, the legislation with which they have attempted to make material reality of these values, and the ways in which this legislation has been undermined. In order to understand YouTube’s challenge to the status quo – already one in which there is an uneasy relationship between state and other actors – I’ll briefly describe some of these processes.

The process of defining and categorising people as ‘musicians’ – at least in the eyes of the state – still happens through the state apparatus of professionalisation. We learn from M’barek Rais that this system was designed and legislated by the post-independence government in 1969 (*loi numéro 32-69* of 9th May 1969), an initiative organised by Salah El Mehdi, the then-director of the *Sécretariat des arts populaires*, based on a previous colonial law called ‘l’arrêté de Cheikh el Médina’ in 1950 which attempted to control which Tunisians were performing music. Applicants would be judged by a panel consisting of

10 members, who would set exams in several disciplines: 'chant, instrument, danse, arts populaires, musique occidentale' (Rais 2018, 124).

The current process of administering the *carte professionnelle* is still aligned with the 1969 legislation. The musician has to audition before a jury nominated by the Ministry of Culture, and has to be judged 'professional' and 'competent' in their particular genre, in order to acquire the 'artist' status on their identity cards, enabling inclusion in the fiscal system. Auditions are held once a year in the Sidi Sabr music school in Tunis's medina. I went with Radhi to his audition to find a crowd of people carrying all sorts of instruments, from violins to darboukas; as well as clowns and magicians. The different groups were invited in one by one to audition before their panels.

And this particular legitimizing institution is tied up with many of the other state institutions. Without the professional artist card, the musician is technically unable to perform at any of the state festivals. Until recently, 'rap', 'urban' or 'street' music was not included on the list of genres available for audition. Several times, I heard elites connected to state institutions express open disregard for the idea that the genre is 'music', and that the people creating it are 'musicians'. Following Mbembe we likened this process in the last chapter to a creation of a state archive of musicians as bodies were awarded 'status' by those with the authority to categorise them as such.

The process of defining a 'work' of 'music' follows a different system, which is not directly connected to that which defines musicians, but is still organised by the state. 'Works' are legally defined through copyright legislation. M'barek Rais details the following: law no. 66-12 of 14 February 1966 legislated that copyright must be obeyed, and the SODACT rights organisation (*Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Tunisiens*) created in 1968 was to abide over this domain. In 1994, this was renamed the OTPDA (*Organisme Tunisien de Protection des Droits d'Auteurs*) (Rais 2018, 154-155).¹³⁸ The procedure has remained the same: composers 'deposit' the work with the rights organisation, whose official role is to demand copyright when that work is played. Pieces which are considered national heritage are not

¹³⁸ The legislation is presented as being inkeeping with international norms – in 1970, Tunisia joined the CISAC (*Confédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Auteurs et Compositeurs*), in 1975 the OMPI (*Organisation Mondiale de la Propriété Intellectuelle*) (Rais 2018, 154-155).

technically in the public domain; they are rather owned by the state, and musicians must acquire permission from the state association in order to use them.

Despite the legislation existing around the categorising of both people as musicians and sound and music as ‘works’, these definitions and methods of categorisation are frequently challenged, and are not accepted as the only routes to legitimacy by musicians or listeners. That which constitutes the ‘original’ to be covered, and the difference between ‘author’ and ‘cover’ artist, are far from clear and change across different styles of music. Whilst some kinds of music, such as *malouf*, are claimed as national heritage despite having a more specific local provenance, other kinds follow clear patterns of commercial authorship but are never registered as ‘works’.¹³⁹ Additionally, the rights organisation is largely mistrusted by Tunisian musicians, many of whom instead use SACEM, the French organisation, and many of whom don’t engage with copyright infrastructures at all. Many people carry the label of ‘musician’ in a way which is accepted within their community of musicians and listeners, and are even programmed into festivals and venues without carrying the professional artist card as organisers themselves bypass the official system.

Within this situation – in which definitions of ‘musician’ and ‘music’ are caught between various different legitimising discourses – there is a certain ambiguity to distinctions between ‘originals’ and ‘covers’, as well as between ‘cocktails’ or ‘montages’ and ‘works’. During my fieldwork, this ambiguity was used by performing musicians, and there seemed to be growing trends of ‘covering’ and ‘cocktailing’ which flourished across live and recorded music. At weekends it would be possible to find live musicians playing sets of covers, strung together into cocktails, in multiple parts of the centreville, Soukra, La Goulette and Gammarth areas – they included, at this time, ‘Ouled el Bey’, ‘Fehmi Riahi Trio’, ‘Knefess’, ‘Mortadha’ – and these same musicians would upload their covers and cocktails onto YouTube and other social media sites.

The trend of covering attracted different interpretations, and debates would play out across media, social media, in bars and in car journeys to and from gigs. Some considered it process

¹³⁹ The process in Tunisia is similar to those in neighbouring countries, whose post-colonial governments had to respond to colonial era legislation in ways: Jane Goodman describes how Kabyles in Algeria, for instance, reshaped Western legal discourses through which songs circulate to produce ‘a markedly different understanding of the relationship between authorship and the public domain’ (Goodman 2002, 88). See also Schade-Poulsen’s discussion of ownership in Rai (Schade-Poulsen, 1999).

by which musicians might be said to be enacting a kind of creative ‘schizophonic mimesis’ (Feld, 1996), in which they are imitating something that is not usually considered ‘theirs’.¹⁴⁰ As I witnessed the creative process of covering and cocktailing, I heard something more subversive: I felt that musicians were playing with notions of original and copy in a way which challenged the very notions themselves, and which particularly challenged any claim of ownership extended by the West towards ‘Western’ musics. This was particularly evident to me in Radhi’s practice; his musical languages melded together in ways that challenged the listener to question their own distinctions and categorisations.¹⁴¹ But many people around me considered it unoriginal and boring. One world music producer that I spoke to thought that the propensity for cover bands in the live music circuits was actually ‘dangerous’, as it removed any possibility for creativity or an authentic ‘Tunisian’ product.

Equally, the aesthetic practice of creating ‘cocktails’ or ‘montages’ attracted different interpretations. I felt that it was also challenging the boundaries and ontologies of ‘music’ and its relationship with a material ‘recording’: this time, the notion that ‘music’ must be in the form of a single ‘work’, with clear beginnings and ends, owned by a ‘rights holder.’ Tying many musical things together into a whole, the creator of a ‘montage’ is essentially undoing the work of the recording industry to render music ‘stockpileable’ (Attali, 1985).¹⁴² They are experimenting with undoing beginnings and ends, and creating something from them. But it

¹⁴⁰ Many have discussed covers in popular music studies and ethnomusicology. Many of the approaches, in ethnomusicology for instance, talk about this in a nuanced and positive way – they see it as a way of making the global local, of participating in global phenomena, and blurring distinctions between the two: see for instance Feld (Feld, 1996), Weintraub on Beatles covers in Indonesia (Weintraub, 2022), and Dent for covers of a country music song in Brazil, where he argues that ‘cross-cultural cover songs create spaces in which culturally located notions of time and place are laminated together in performance’ (Dent 2005, 207). See also Plasketes et al. for a recent collection of reflections on covers in pop music (Plasketes, 2016), and Mosser who talks about systematic ambiguity around the term ‘cover’ (Mosser, 2008).

¹⁴¹ This interpretation chimes with Judith Butler’s approaches to ‘drag’ – she suggests that drag performers are not imitating an ‘original’ gender which they desire, but rather that they perform imitations which ‘effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself’ (Butler 1999, 418) – and they do so through a ‘stylised repetition of acts’, or ‘styles of the flesh’, through which the body is shown to be a site of unstable contestation. Seen this way, Tunisian musicians who ‘cover’ mediated music from foreign music industries are not in the business of taking something that is not theirs and making it theirs – but rather in performing an imitation they are revealing the very constructed nature of the fixed notion itself. This thinking is relevant also to physical responses to music, and to the styles in which people respond to music – when people switch between dance styles, I don’t think they are making conscious decisions to ‘cover’ various styles of dancing, or that they have various ‘different’ styles embedded within them, but that it is more complicated than that.

¹⁴² Cocktailing, as we will see in the next chapter, was particularly championed in the construction of cassettes and CDs, as their materials afforded a mixing of tracks into a single object.

was also seen as a practice which undermined copyright regimes, as material was taken from a wide variety of sources and strung together with disregard to paying copyright.

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YouTube, in the way that it is used in Tunis, does not posit challenges to state infrastructures anew – as we’ve seen, there are long and complex histories of tension surrounding definitions and categories of music. But YouTube does arguably exist as a platform which enables these challenges to exist with a new kind of force.

The people who upload clips to YouTube as ‘music’, particularly in those styles which are *not* protected or promoted in state structures, are arguably laying claim to making ‘music’, and to being ‘artists’, within a social and legal situation where they are not necessarily recognised as doing or being either. It is primarily through their uses of YouTube that rappers in particular use the infrastructures available to them, with their radically lower bars of entry, to trouble this distinction. Indeed, following Rancière, we could suggest that these rappers were turning to YouTube to actively create their ‘sensory world’ – a world which was not adding already audible voices to the public sphere, but one which was actually making those voices audible in the first place (Rancière, 2013).¹⁴³

And arguably, many of the aforementioned artists of new music, as well as the uploaders of old recordings, were troubling the usual state definitions of ‘music’, ‘artist’, as well as the usual contents of a sonic archive created by people in Tunis. We find other marginalised voices on YouTube, too – the plethora of *mezoued* and *fann sh’abi* recordings by the likes of Samir Loussif, for instance. Others were able to use YouTube to become recognised socially as musicians before engaging with state institutions of legitimisation.¹⁴⁴ And, YouTube has enabled artists to engage creatively with styles that are not usually given space in Tunisia, and indeed, to do so across borders. We saw this in Radhi’s project with the Dutch composer: through this project, Radhi was able to explore his ‘Celtic’ musical language with

¹⁴³ Rappers have also had their post-revolutionary politics located in their words, in their ‘controversial content’ which was considered by many to be ‘crucial to the revival of the public sphere as a whole’, whether this was ‘through informed and constructive debate or dismissive diatribes and rage’ (Gana, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ This use of the internet as a route into legitimisation was used by Radhi, as well as a group of street music musicians that I came into contact with, who called themselves ‘Art is an Arm’. They made YouTube to create a ‘clip’ based on their street activities and were subsequently invited to perform in television studios. See this *Nawaat* report on the group (Nawaat, 2016).

musicians based in Europe, and to participate in an online moment which seemed to hover internationally, an ‘international collaboration(s) of virtual music making’ (Cayari 2016, 481), the judges themselves pictured apart from each other in ambiguous places, separately from any clear territory (fig. 11).

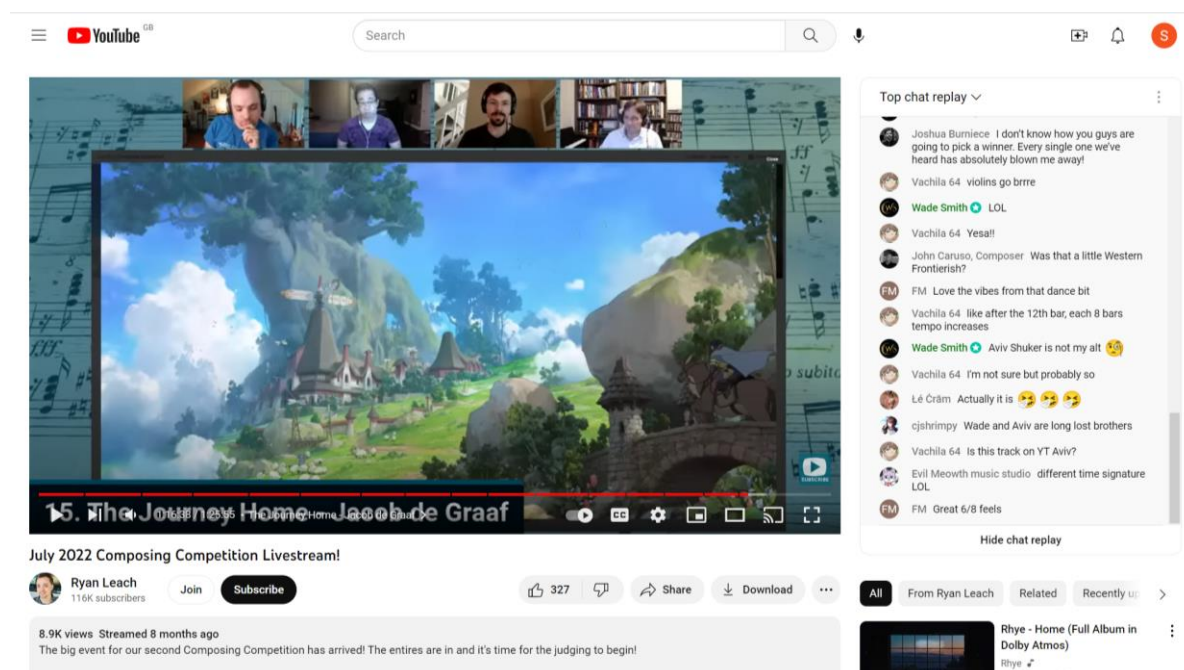


Fig. 11: A screenshot from a YouTube video showing the ‘July 2022 Composing Competition Livestream’ from Ryan Leach, taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsrkP0jKF8A> 26/04/2023

YouTube also enters into the tension between ‘originals’ and ‘copies’, as distinctions between music, sound and image, and living and dead voices, are blurred.

We’ve seen several examples of ‘covers’ in the YouTube archive: the Black Chords ‘Daft Punk’ and mezoued cover, Radhi’s Allchestra version of Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd, as well as his experiments with various video game tunes, and Ghada’s version of Aman Aman yel mani. YouTube clearly gives covering another space to breathe – and as a platform, it enables the challenges posed by covering practices to exist with particular force. It does so in a couple of ways. First, YouTube, through its formal formatting qualities, can be read as proof that the difference between original and copy is a matter of perception. Afterall, every single upload is materially exactly the same – the Allchestra video of Led Zeppelin is the same size and shape as the Led Zeppelin video of Led Zeppelin. The ‘Black Chords’ version of daft punk is

there in a video with a name, the same size and weight as the Daft Punk video. ‘Originality’ is something that has to be worked into an ‘impression’ through a certain arrangement of formal formatting elements. So YouTube in many ways offers itself up as a media avenue for proving the notion that it doesn’t matter which bodies are playing what. It can thus be used as part of the musical avenue for coverers, who are able to broadcast their covers in a variety of ways of the platform, and to posit themselves as musicians through doing so. And the proof of this ‘working’ is the way in which reproductions of supposed originals often become more popular on YouTube – they *become* the original – as was the case perhaps with the Maatouk version of Aman Aman yel Mani, which was the version that I heard in many places and was actively referred to when I wanted to learn the song.¹⁴⁵

YouTube also enables a blurring of the idea of the single bounded work. The ‘Hédi Jouini relaxing hour cocktail’, for instance, is an ambiguous object – it is at once a string of things and a single atmosphere, a single chunk of time and set of images. Its title refers to this simultaneous plurality and singularity: it is a cocktail, but it is a single person, a single hour. Again, my suggestion is not that YouTube has created this process, but rather that it enables it, in a couple of different ways. First, it enables the uploading of any length of sound, any sonic creation or audio-visual montage, by pretty much anyone with the know-how and the technology. And, it allows it to be displayed as a single, and perhaps visual, *thing*; indeed, it lists it as a single thing alongside all of the other single things – it allows the very object which has undone stockpiling to be stockpiled. Similarly to with covers, it is the platform’s formatting, and the lack of any obvious curation on the sounds of the content, which mean that it *proves* that things can be interlinked in all sorts of ways and still be considered ‘music’ – the musical work, or creative result, doesn’t have to start and end with musical phrases as they are usually considered.

Lastly, YouTube enables confusion and blurring in distinctions between living and dead voices and bodies, and an uprooting of the importance of the connection between body, territory and sound. When we think carefully about YouTube uploads, we see that all fragments, whether an upload of Saliha, or Balti’s ‘Ya Lili’, offer up voices which circulate and move with equal vibrancy – with equal life. Impressions of life and death are thus things that

¹⁴⁵ Maatouk indeed achieved the ‘sorcery’ over the copy discussed by Taussig (Taussig 1993, 16).

are worked into their images and titles; the black and white still image of Saliha against the crisply produced moving image of Balti. And, it's never completely possible to trace fragments to origins, to owners. When I went back and really looked at the recording of Baba Bahri and Sidi Mansour, I realised that I had been listening for years to something that I *believed* to be the 'original' remastered recording from the Sfaxian sufi groups – but when I looked closer at the upload I found that uploader is called Mohamed Bouttakaya, and on his channel are three videos: this one, a video of Coldplay live in Abu Dhabi, and a clip from a football match between Tunisia and Nigeria. On the Baba Bahri video the credit given is 'Pablo Ferrari, Tunisian Mix'. But when one searches for this, one ends up at a different version of Baba Bahri, more audibly mixed. I realised that I had no idea what this recording was or where it was from – but more importantly, that my ears and understanding of 'originality' had already been formed by these sounds. This occurred again regarding the recording of 'Tunisia Mariage' – I had planted it in Tunisia and I had assumed the uploader behind it to be Tunisian, but the channel is MLP Music, a channel based in France.

So YouTube, as an archive, enables the blurring of distinctions between bodies, sounds and things, challenging the fundamental differences between 'copy' and 'original', between 'single thing' and 'montage'. As a platform, it nurtures the 'magic of mimesis' (Taussig, 1993) particularly strongly. It also enables a range of sounds and voices to be mediated; from those recorded in bedrooms such as Ghada's, to those recorded in high-tech recording studios. And, the 'dead' circulate on YouTube with the living. To retake the idea of Mbembe, the dead come back to 'stir up disorder in the present' (Mbembe 2002, 21) – with particular force, here, as their voices circulate on YouTube with as much vibrancy as the 'living' (and indeed, 'living' and 'dead' also become qualities worked into impressions of sounds and images), mediated by archivists themselves present on the platform ambiguously as their chosen names and icons.

These are all things which could have the potential to seriously challenge the fundamental principles of the state sonic archive. The power of the state archive, as we saw in the last section, is dependent the idea that a state should have collections of 'music' that are fixed to material things, stored in inaccessible rooms, whose value comes from their rarity; it is dependent on the idea that certain people have more of a right and a capacity than others to practice these sounds considered music. But here is a platform which challenges these

hierarchies. Suddenly there is no reason not only why Black Chords shouldn't cover Daft Punk, but why this should be considered any *less* of a *thing* to Daft Punk. There is an emancipatory potential for the body here – bodies that are routinely stuck on the Tunisian territory and are marked by discourses of '*Tunisianité*' and various other forms of identity and place are able here to engage in a practice which reveals the futility of these claims – and which does so publicly, for all to see and hear. These forms speak to the Rancièrian idea that 'equality is not a common measure between individuals, it is a capacity through which individuals act as the holders of a common power, a power belonging to anyone.' And it is arguably through YouTube that creators can activate this common power, here is allowed to breathe through various forms of sonic expression. Acts of uploading to YouTube are the actions which verify this equality – they 'enact equality as a process' (Ranciere, 2017). We might imagine that all this could have some quite radical consequences for the Tunisian musician.

But does it? Do these challenges that YouTube allows translate into shifts in an 'aural public sphere'? So far, these descriptions of YouTube activity have hovered in an ambiguous space of analysis; I have somewhat divorced these YouTube uploads from the urban and social environments in which they are encountered – environments which already participate in an unequal 'aural public sphere' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006), and which are shaped by ecologies of listening, and economies underpinning musical worlds, in all sorts of ways. It may be very well that these forms can be read as enacting a kind of theoretical equality, imagined to participate in a 'democratization' of music making, but how is it that they are felt and sensed in different moments in city environments?

2.4 In the city: atmospheres and listening moments in the background and foreground

As we suggested previously regarding vinyl records, YouTube in Tunis is 'ontologically multiple' – 'able to be multiple things to multiple people' (Bates, 2020) – it is an 'elastic technology' which has a materiality which is 'multifaceted and complexly overlaid' (Vidali-Spitulnik, 2012). In daily life, it operated not only as an archive but as something with which, and through which, people listen: a playlisting technology, a provider of atmosphere, and a

place from which to take music, to sift it into different formats. Sterne talks about the ways in which listening techniques both grow out of listening technologies and also inform them – if media extend the senses, they ‘do so as crystallized versions and elaborations of people’s prior practices’ (Sterne 2003, 92). Here, it is more the case that an ontologically multiple media is pressed into the service of listening and sensing techniques – and that both the techniques, and the technology, are in constant and dialectical processes of ‘becoming’ through their encounters, their ‘correspondence’ (Ingold, 2013). This happens in multiple different ways throughout the city. The platform would be opened up on a device, items are found through searches and arranged into playlists, and sounds would fill and create the sociality of the space. In this sense, it was part of technology which would be ‘material culture that people use and experience in ways meaningful to their particular needs and circumstance’ (Lysloff & Gay, 2003, 7). Listening, and watching, happened in places where phones, computers and TVs could provide direct access to YouTube: homes, cafés, bars, anywhere with screens and internet connections.

The domestic spaces of homes were very often sonically and visually ‘tinctured’ (Böhme, 1993) by YouTube. In the flat that I shared with Radhi and Rania, YouTube was constantly on – used to listen to musical playlists that had been deliberately constructed and saved, left on and to the whims of the algorithm as a background to other activities.¹⁴⁶ Some of these moments stand out in particular. I remember when Radhi invested in some expensive new speakers, and in the gloaming as the sun set we plugged them into YouTube and took it in turns to suggest things whose already dense harmonic textures would become very beautiful with the new sound set up – Jacob Collier, bits of choral music by Eric Whitacre, the oud playing of Dhafer Youssef. Rania used YouTube often to teach me things on the oud – and if she wasn’t teaching me, she’d be teaching herself, and I’d be able to hear her, and then the YouTube oud player, going over the same phrases one after the other. And it wasn’t just music that would be on. Radhi went down YouTube ‘rabbit holes’ constantly – how to use logic pro here, how to make furniture out of crates there, how to play the trumpet here, how to make successful YouTube and market yourself on social media there. He used it to

¹⁴⁶ The algorithm is a centrally important part of YouTube, which I have unfortunately neglected here in favour of focusing on ways in which YouTube is manipulated by people in a variety of circumstances. It has been talked about importantly by Hodgson and Werner in relation to Spotify (Hodgson, 2021; Werner, 2020).

expand his interest in the philosophies of alternate universes and existence, and our ensuing discussions would often shape themselves around encounters with YouTube videos.

A family that I was close to, living at the opposite end of the city in the popular neighbourhood of Mohammedeya, also used YouTube in their domestic space. The living-room would be awash with sounds and images emitted from the various phone and TV screens around, and I remember one time, after they had just bought an enormous new TV monitor, it was flicked between the National TV channels showing the *Taraji* football match, and YouTube – with a video entitled '*jaww jirbi*', 'Djerban ambiance', selected and left on as people came and went from the room. A video showing images of the island of Djerba (which half of the family originates from) was accompanied with the piercing sounds of the *zokra*. The algorithm shifted us through various related videos after that as people came and went from the room, including the recently released Zaza cover of 'Ya Layli', and the Asma cover of 'Ya Hamma', (both of which we saw earlier). During Ramadan, also, YouTube was used – interchanged again with the TV, to find appropriate koranic recitation, leading up to the breaking of the fast.

And, facilitated by an access to YouTube that many people had on their phones, spaces of YouTube listening could be easily created within others, spaces in which the boundaries of the moment were defined by attention and 'arcs of sound' (Labelle) more than architecture. In a bar one time, an oud player who had been playing told me enthusiastically that his favourite was Western classical music and that he always put it on in the mornings to relax – he whipped his phone out and, leaning against the bar, he opened YouTube and found a compilation of 'Beethoven greatest hits' and held it up to my ear so that I could hear it amongst the din of the surrounding crowds. A few weeks later there was another similar conversation, a similar moment of sharing, this time the other side of the city in the popular neighbourhood Hay Ettadhamen: in my friend's beauty salon her younger sister wanted to play me some music that she liked, so she got her phone out and found Soolking's *Parolé*. As she held the phone up and we listened she even gave me a running commentary – 'it starts slowly', she said, holding out the phone screen but not looking at it, 'and then it builds up, then the music comes in, the energy.' In the radio studio of Panorama, that we visited in the previous chapter, the sounds of the radio broadcast drumming overhead didn't stop Faisel from creating other, different spaces with YouTube: stationed in front of a different monitor

in the studio, he used a series of YouTube videos to explain to me exactly what the difference is between 'commercial' and 'revisité' music, and to share with me other things that he liked. We were immersed in these spaces of YouTube sharing which felt slightly separate from the background drum of the radio broadcast.

There are other situations in which images and sounds were actively divorced from one another: situations in which songs are extracted from YouTube for conversion and uses on other devices. There are several situations in which downloading music from YouTube is preferable to attempting to play it on a phone or computer – situations in which there was no need for the image, or in which inconsistent internet connections would interrupt the flow of the sound. These included a few places: the semi-public yet intimate spaces of taxis and collective taxis, the radio (in another way), and certain café spaces.

YouTube was used by the drivers of taxis and collective taxis as a repository from which they might download music, converting it into Mp3 files and making their own playlists on USB sticks and CDs, listened to as an alternative to the radio. I remember one time speeding down the highway in a collective taxi as we listened to something resembling a house remix of a Tunisian song such as those by Tunisian star Lotfi Bouchnak, followed by American singer Camilla Cabello, USB stick pointing out of the radio. Another time, as I was coming back from Decathlon in the middle of a hot afternoon, a driver was telling me in great detail about how he structured his listening throughout the day with music that he got from YouTube and put on his USB: Nana or Tupac are good for the afternoon because of the energy, George Wassouf and the older ones better for the evening, Koran in the morning, around 11am Fairouz '*w hadhuma*' 'and that lot', American rap in the afternoon (rather than Tunisian because the clients won't understand the swearing). Then in the evening there would be 'old' ones, Tracy Chapman for instance. Another time later that month, I was coming home from the nightclub Yuka late one night, and noticed the little CD icon on the radio. There was some rap: Sanfara. The driver pressed the 'next track' button and we were on to Samara, '*ooh, ya 'alam!*' 'oh, world!' the voice drifted out. I asked about the CD and he told me that he made it at home, using YouTube.

Back in the Panorama radio studio, it became clear after a few hours that YouTube wasn't only entering into our space through the shared spaces of exploring and listening that were being guided by Faisel showing me videos on the computer. At a different point, as he was

scrolling through the radio archive on the Zenone platform, I noticed a song title which is new: '*la3riba*', a song that supposedly mixes mezoued and hiphop by the collective Debo. The song was recorded in a 'live' version that was performed in a café culturel, Liberthé, in 2019, put on YouTube, and got popular very quickly – and here, it seems that a technician from Panorama had downloaded and converted the audio for use in the radio playlists, to be programmed alongside other songs from the radio archives.

And lastly, in many cafés, YouTube wasn't played directly – particularly if the screens were occupied by other things. In a café near my house where I went frequently, a playlist was constructed from downloading files from YouTube, to be played alongside Bein Sport on the TVs which was mostly muted. There would be Soolking's '*Parolé*', then Despacito (song by Puerto Rican singer Luis Fonsi), and Mortadha's Aman Aman – with the football on in the background. This was something that I noticed happening in many of the 'mixed' *centreville* cafés – TVs showing sport or even music videos, with other playlists that had been constructed using YouTube in the background.

There is a last way in which YouTube engaged listeners: or indeed, didn't. It seemed to be a technology that helped generate a certain 'ubiquitous' circulation of sound, and its attendant 'ubiquitous listening' of the type that seemed to occur often in the 'grey zone between consciousness and unconsciousness' (Quiñones et al. 2016, 8).

This kind of listening seemed to occur alongside the circulation of particular sets of songs and sounds, many of which were considered 'viral'. I was in Tunis in 2019, these were Soolking's songs, particularly songs like *Parolé* and *Guerrilla*, Samara's songs, particularly *Me Deyem Welou* and *El Mondo*. The songs felt like they were everywhere. In March 2019 I heard Soolking's song *Parolé* in a nightclub featuring a female DJ collective, then a few days later as it played to me by my friend's sister in a *Hay Ettadhaman* hairdresser, and twice the following week: in a nightclub with my friend Aymen, who hated it; and in the aforementioned local café Amarena with Radhi. The songs of these rappers existed alongside other songs that were also considered 'viral', from other singers that we have already heard more than once: along with Camilla Cabello's *Havana*, this list could include Ed Sheeran's *Shape of You* (a hit from 2016), Adele's *Hello*, Elissa and Nancy Ajram, Zina by Algerian duo '*Babylone*', and many more. '*Havana*' would be played in a taxi, as well as in a café *and* in the break between songs in a restaurant spectacle. '*Shape of You*' would be on between sets at

the *restaurant spectacle*; it also cropped up when sung to me by some children as we get ready for a wedding when I ask if they know any English songs. And as I went about my fieldwork I noted that there were quite a few other songs which would come up again and again – and many of these are from repertoires which are older and had been remediated on YouTube in several ways since the opening of the platform. They included, but are not limited to, the following: *Rakab 'lā ḥamra, ya lili, 'ayrūni bik ya ḥamma, sīdī mansūr, baba bahri*, all songs from sufi and *turath* repertoires; *Anta 'amri*, of Om Kalthoum; *taḥt al yismīna fī līl* by Hédi Jouini. I heard these songs in taxis and cars, at friends' houses when they put them on their phones. I heard friends teach them to their children, their children singing the choruses as a kind of call and response. They were played in clubs, cafés, cabarets and restaurant spectacles, in breaks between sets played by the live bands. Melodies, rhythms and voices from all of these songs circulated widely, felt like they cropped up everywhere, and were seemingly absorbed and reproduced in humming or tapping on subconscious levels. Indeed, it felt like these songs gathered a momentum on YouTube which ricocheted around urban spaces in Tunis and elsewhere, in a way which I'm not sure anyone was completely in control of or understood.

So YouTube, as an infrastructure in the city, is used as a listening technology to bring sound to backgrounds and foregrounds of social situations in many ways; it generates atmospheres; and it participates in a sense of 'virality' around particular sounds. There is little distinction between archival fragment, surrounding infrastructure, and city. We saw previously that the fragments of this archive are made in a way which might trouble state sonic divisions – does the way in which they are listened to and mediated in public space also trouble divisions?

2.5 Between spaces of 'audible commons', 'culture' and 'jaww '

In order to think about what YouTube might do to social organisations in the city, it's necessary to think briefly about social structures and patterns animating Tunis as a city. Cities such as Tunis were not built on the supposition of equality of which Rancière speaks. Tunis is a highly unequal capital, whose populations have been organised and dispersed

through the politics of the colonial and the post-independence periods. For anthropologists and sociologists studying cities, inequality is part and parcel of the urban experience. French theorist Henri Lefebvre described urban spaces as phenomena reminiscent of a ‘millefeuille’ pastry, the coming together of many layers of social and temporal planes, all operating to their own rhythms. Anthropologist Michel Agier develops thinking on this complexity: a city’s spaces are structured by movements of inhabitants, layers of social networks, taking on feelings of familiarity and strangeness, centrality and marginality; and from this emerges other senses of the city, as an arena for politics, a multiple ‘hologram’ of representations.¹⁴⁷

In Tunis, the ‘millefeuille’ of the city is created by cyclical processes of world-making that come from several directions: the layers of urban design and development that have transformed it throughout the last century; the transport systems and circulations of people which work in tandem with these urban developments; and in the ways that individuals, families, social groups and other networks seek and make worlds within this. In the previous descriptions I was winding particularly through La Goulette, the seaside suburb where I lived, between friends in Mohammedeya, the *centreville* and La Marsa, as well as nightlife in the *centreville* and Gammarth. In the ways in which they are usually discussed, these places are positioned at opposite ends of extremes. Mohammedeya is notorious for being a marginalised, popular neighbourhood – it is talked about in academic work which focuses on social problems, marginalisation, and poverty.¹⁴⁸ La Goulette attracts a certain nostalgic discourse as a place where Jewish, Christian and Muslim populations lived throughout the independence decades.¹⁴⁹ The *centreville* is

¹⁴⁷ For German theorist Georg Simmel, writing as the first metropolises started to grow in Germany in the 1930s, the city is notable as a space which, in its overwhelming complexity, accelerated speeds and mechanisation, demands a different kind of sensorial engagement from the inhabitant – and indeed shapes the sensoria of urban dwellers in new ways, changing social practices and forms (Simmel & Simay, 2013). For geographer Iris Marion Young, the city is characterised by the idea of strangers coming together, existing alongside each other despite differences (Young, 1990). For anthropologist Rao, the city itself constitutes a ‘very messy kind of archive’ (Rao 2009, 371) – one which is made of the layering of infrastructures which shape it. At this level, she suggests, ‘infrastructures literally constitute an archive in the etymological sense or arche, or the founding principle, of urban form as well as a condition of possibility of a modern, democratic public’ (376).

¹⁴⁸ In this sense it is grouped with other neighbourhoods placed in a similar category such as Hay Ettadhamen. See the work of Cordova, Frische on the political marginalisation and peripheralization of these neighbourhoods (Cordova, 2021; Frische, 2015).

¹⁴⁹ Exemplified in the film *Un été à la Goulette* by director Férid Boughadir, and this critique by Brozgal (Brozgal, 2013).

the central hub of the city which connects and draws its disparate parts inward, the home of government administrations, culture centres, an educational establishments.¹⁵⁰ But in recent years, even the centreville has increasingly been described as undergoing a certain '*sh'abi*-isation', becoming 'more popular', by those who reside in the old wealthier suburbs by the sea, and the new wealthy ones by the lake: Lac, La Marsa, Gammarth.¹⁵¹ The city is frequently talked about by people who reside in it in terms of a '*gamme*', a scale of social hierarchies which sort people through spaces.

In the ways in which it was spread around the city, listened to, it could often feel as if YouTube was used to mediate sound in such a way which would *connect* and *bring together* people from and around these disparate spaces. It seemed to do this through the mediation of a kind of bed of common sound – a sort of 'audible commons'; as well as the ways that it existed as a common infrastructure for listening between disparate social groups. But, simultaneously, it could be pressed into the formation of 'acoustic territories' which would mobilise distinctions between 'modernity' and 'culture' on one hand, and '*jaww*' on the other.

The ubiquitous musical snippets that we referenced earlier did seem to connect parts of the city, and people, that are often kept apart. When I heard 'Parolé' played by women in the nightclub, and then the girl in the hairdresser, the example struck me because they both concern young women in Tunis – but young women in circumstances which are considered, and talked about, as being really very different. These women, when they enter into narratives, are different characters in those narratives. On one hand we have women who are out in Gammarth – the wealthiest suburb in Tunis – on a weeknight, DJing, exhibiting the kind of being a woman associated with emancipation from patriarchal structures. On the other, we have women working and hanging out in a traditionally female space, in one of the poorest areas of the city. The two groups are frequently talked about as having nothing in common – and yet here they have an appreciation of this song in common. In the other

¹⁵⁰ For work on the centreville and its developments, see Signoles, Ammar, and Mouhli and McGuinness (Ammar, 2010; Mouhli & McGuinness, 2006; Signoles & Urbama, 1985).

¹⁵¹ For the developments of 'new wealth' that have been built around the lake, see the work of Barthel (Barthel, 2003, 2006).

examples, including friends Aymen and Radhi, we might not be able to say that they were participating in the viral phenomenon in the same way as the women in the first example, because they were *subjected* to the song being played overhead – in neither case had they gone to those places because they were attracted by the atmosphere of the place, as fans. But was there still not some kind of commonality created by this song? Was it not giving all of the people who heard it listening infrastructures which were in some ways similar? Was it bringing disparate groups together in some way, in some kind of similar *participation* in something? Sociologists Varis and Blommaert have suggested that viral phenomena should be understood as bringing people together by means of a ‘joint ‘phatic’ focus on recognizable form or shape’ which offers possibilities for a certain ‘*structural* level of conviviality, i.e. a sharing at one level of meaningful interaction by means of a joint feature, which is superficial but in real ways translates a number of individuals into a focused collective’ (Varis & Blommaert 2015, 43).¹⁵² The thing that the collective shares, for them, is the ‘sheer act of phatic communion (the ‘sharing’ itself, so to speak’.)’ (43). We could argue that this is exactly what songs such as Soolking’s ‘Parolé’ seemed to be doing – creating a common aesthetic, at least, existing amongst disparate individuals and groups.

Sharing was also enabled by YouTube in another sense: in the ways in which people could spontaneously share and curate their experiences of music, sometimes in unexpected places. In both the bar in Gammarth with the oud player who played me Beethoven, and in the hairdresser in Hay Ettadhamen with my friend’s sister, YouTube was being used to arrange sensory surroundings, but also as a basis through which a certain verbal curation was being shared; and in the process, the interlocutors were aligning themselves with sounds, which are rarely considered theirs to curate. In fact, YouTube itself often seemed like a connecting infrastructure, connecting people through the very fact of being commonly used. Friends who were spread across Mohammedeya and La Marsa, the richest and the poorest areas, all used YouTube. Regardless of repertoires and choices, the very fact of it being the common infrastructure seemed to align listening – it made of YouTube a common thing, at least in its use.

¹⁵² Their work joins a spate of recent work on virality and memes.

However, YouTube's elasticity has another effect: it can be used in many ways to differentiate spaces, and to maintain the kind of sonic work of division that we saw in the last chapter. I'm going to draw on three examples to think about various ways in which YouTube listening was organised to maintain divisions between 'cultural' spaces and *jaww*, between spaces considered 'modern', and their 'others'.

Let's start back in the Panorama studio. This was the scene: after putting the finishing touches to the afternoon's broadcast, Faisel spent several hours explaining to me the difference between music that is 'commercial' (to be avoided by Panorama, and anyone with good taste) and that which is 'revisit  ' (to be embraced). As well as being used as a repository for new music to be taken from, YouTube also served as the primary explanatory tool in our discussions. Music that was considered as being 'good revisit  ' music was shown to me, and I was guided in the listening: we dwelt on the work of Bargou 08, whom we had both seen at various points. Faisel explained to me that in songs such as '*la min yjina*', the important thing was that Bargou were seen to be 'elevating' that which already existed, the core of the song – they were thought to be doing this by adding bass and percussion into a rhythmic structure whose core, melody and vocal style were the things that were kept the same. And this was thought to be good because it both kept an 'essence', and 'modernised' it, thereby allowing it to be 'updated' but also to be able to be heard by 'people in France' – Tunisians and foreigners. The 'essence' or 'source' was also something that Faisel used YouTube to show me – in the form of a video of a wedding in the North Western region in which '*la min yjina*' was being sung and filmed by a local band. And this process engaged by Bargou 08 was something that he opposed with processes by singers such as Ramzi Abdelwaheb, who Faisel considered to be 'commercial' – because of the ways in which he perceived the only change being brought through Abdelwaheb's vocal style and an 'orgue' accompaniment – something that struck of bad taste, noisiness and a certain laziness or disrespect for the idea that the song has origins.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ For Bargou 08 *La Min Yjina*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69WG2kuHpgw> (BARGOU 08, 2015); for the version being performed during a wedding, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVsKq40_PQM (hammami chedi, 2014); for a 'cocktail' of Ramzi Abdelwaheb, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UQt7CRaIFs> (mezwed tounsi, 2016).



Fig. 12: Faisal in the Panorama Studio, Tunis, October 2020

Faisal's distinction between 'revisit  ' and 'commercial' relates exactly to the distinction that Ochoa identified between 'transculturations epistemologically validated through practices of purification, and those that are not'. Here was a state worker working within a division of sonic labour in which 'entextualisations rely on people who represent the local without deviation' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006). We thought, earlier, about the ways in which YouTube enabled a blurring of notions of time and place attached to bodies in videos – but here we find that this ambiguity is allowing temporalities to be read into videos which would allow them to be inserted into narratives and causal processes which would enable an 'epistemological purification'. The video taken of the band in the wedding in the North Western region, for instance, looked sufficiently amateur and spontaneous when up against the finished product sheen of the Bargou video to be considered a 'local source'.

Elsewhere, also, YouTube was pressed to use in creating sonic distinctions between 'modern' and 'good taste', and '*sh'abi*'; between sounds (and people) 'epistemologically validated, and

those that are not' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006). This could be seen at work in both nightlife spaces, and the spaces of cafés. Let's start with nightlife.

Nightlife spaces are clearly very separate from public state institutions such as that of the radio studio – different worlds. However, that is not to say that they have don't have a relationship with the state – indeed, they have a complicated relationship with various different arms of state power. The post-colonial state brought all alcohol consumption under the rubric of 'tourism', so all of the bar spaces exist in the '*zones touristiques*', in spaces that are designated as hotels or tourist restaurants. Since the revolution and the decrease of actual tourists into these spaces, many of them have been refashioned for Tunisian clientele, and reworked as spaces for a variety of purposes, with one of those being 'culture'. Yuka, particularly, and the other spaces in the Ardjan hotel complex, use 'culture' terminology in their descriptions, Facebook pages, and across their events.

Let's compare three of these spaces: Canal 11, Daizy Joe, and Yuka. In keeping with legal norms, they are ostensibly the same type of space: Ministry of Tourism designated bars. But they strongly differentiate themselves through discourse, atmosphere, and flow of clientele. Yuka and Daizy Joe are spaces that in many ways have tried to present themselves as 'cultural'. Yuka now has a big stage that it uses for live events, with live music almost every day. Daizy Joe does this too, but on a smaller scale – it had certain nights, for instance that it called 'listening sessions,' in which a 'bon gout' could be displayed. Canal 11 has no public social media face whatsoever, it simply exists for a returning clientele – nothing is presented as an 'event' or as 'culture', but rather as *jaww*. And I think that if we look carefully at YouTube use as it seeps into these spaces, we'll see that rather than flattening things out, it actually gets to the heart of sonic classing through spaces such as these – and if anything it exaggerates this.

In the Yuka and Daizy Joe spaces, YouTube was used to provide a voice in amongst the sets of musicians or performers. In Yuka, there was a *Kitsch Arbi* event in which recordings of stars of the Egyptian golden age were being played as performers mimed along. See Media 1: the video shows the scene in Yuka on the *Kitsch Arbi* night, with the voice of Om Kalthoum overhead, two people dressed as Om Kalthoum and Abdelwaheb miming, and others filming. In Daizy Joe, a set by Radhi's band Celtica melded into a recording of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody. Media 2 shows part of Celtica's set, a rendition of the song 'What Shall

We Do With The Drunken Sailor’; Media 3 as an audio recording of Queen’s Bohemian Rhapsody, a recording of which was played after the set. Now, in the ways that Tunisian listening might normatively be considered, these songs played in Yuka and in Daizy Joe exist at opposite ends of the ‘style’ scale – Western and Middle Eastern, tempered scale and maqam based, binary rhythms and the *iq‘a* (rhythms) of *tarab*. But in both of these cases, it felt as if the sounds entered into moments that were to be understood with the same ‘epistemologies of purification’ required for feelings of the ‘modern’. In both, homage was being paid to the *recording*, to the notion of the ‘original’ recording as being tied to the authority of an original voice – but also, that voice was equal in importance to the voices of the musicians or bodies of performers that were covering recordings or miming to them. There was a separation between the ‘original’ and the ‘copy’ which was being explored and challenged but not threatened, not diminished. The audience was required to understand the difference, for instance, between Freddie Mercury and Celtica, even whilst they challenged this difference with their similarly enthusiastic reactions and singing along with each.

This is the opposite to what was happening in Canal 11, at the restaurant spectacle. The evening was composed of sets by the live band of Troupe Nabil, whom a friend, Abdullah, played the *darbouka* for. In their breaks, one of the members of the band would whip a phone out, and YouTube would be played as background music in a filler time. Media 4 is an example of this: we hear the end of the live set, followed by a moment of pause, some clapping, and then Samara’s *El Mondo*, played from a phone. YouTube and its recordings here were being used in a way that brought a certain *jaww* into relief – recordings *as opposed* to live music, not *as* live music – filler sound, as opposed to the main event. Intriguingly, Om Kalthoum’s songs were coming up in these live sets also, very frequently – but they were incorporated into cocktails in which they made sense not as separate bounded objects or the voice of Om Kalthoum *herself*, but as a maqamic flow which was brought out rather through the ways that the musicians would link the songs with others, thereby diminishing the starts and ends of the song. Of central importance in the restaurant spectacle and the cabarets, with these sorts of live music set, is the *jaww* and the way that it works with the dancing and listening body, which performs in specific ways and according to the musical frameworks laid out. The frameworks enable a gendered division in dancing

which echoes that of weddings, where there is a very similar sonic make-up – but in taking place in nightlife spaces, the usual segregation of the dancing and its symbolism of pre-marital courtship may be subverted, and often women’s escort or dancing services are actively paid-for. The sounds produced by the live bands are at the heart of this – their unbroken cocktails and highly amplified sounds exist in the genealogy of urban music manifestations and weddings which are intended not to be listened to as such, but to engulf the body in dance and transe through which gender is performed.¹⁵⁴ YouTube was used to sonically enframe this experience, rather than disrupt it.



Fig. 13: Yuka from the outside, Gammarth, March 2019

¹⁵⁴ See Saidane for details of these *mezoued* rituals and their implications for gendered bodies (Saidane, 2015)



Fig. 14: Canal 11 from the inside, La Goulette, March 2019

YouTube here, then, was not used in a way that lessened any differences between these spaces, but in a way which arguably exaggerated them. We could suggest that the atmospheres of the so-called ‘cultural’ nightlife spaces do follow the kinds of epistemologies at play in the state archives, with their emphasis on the recording *itself* – and we can see that those present in places such as Canal 11 are those which have always been excluded.

YouTube was also pressed to the construction of class divisions in cafés, in a way which was more connected to the way in which it would be used as a sensory element in multisensory surroundings. Cafés punctuate and shape city life in every neighbourhood, in every direction. Café spaces are theoretically open, maintain a certain fluid relationship with the outside street, and are highly visible presences – but, as has been covered widely, they are also places that include some and exclude others. The *ambiance* of a café space is central to creating senses of comfort and sociality – their specific senses of *jaww* work both to include and exclude through making some people feel comfortable, and others feel uncomfortable.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ The café for many decades was an extension of masculine space in domestic neighbourhoods – rather than these disappearing, café spaces in Tunis seem rather to be layered up in different systems of inclusion and

Let's compare two cafés: Mokasin in the centreville, and Amerena in La Goulette. They are not radically different from each other – they both cater largely to young people, and to a mixed crowd. But through going to them regularly I started to notice certain differences. The interesting thing about Amerena was that I was teased for having 'bad taste' for going there so frequently by certain friends – whereas Mokasin seemed to cater for people who thought they had 'good taste'. And there seemed to be certain ways in which atmosphere was created, the role of sound in that atmosphere, and the role of YouTube in creating that atmosphere, which carved out or defined these differences.

It is significant that in Mokasin, as a cultural café, clients would only *hear* music from YouTube, that it was used for listening, and that this listening happened in a space where icons of musicians and their names were featured on the wall. This was happening in the moment that I recorded, see Media 5: a moment of a song by Tunisian artist El Ghostman, influenced by the rhythms of the Moroccan Sufi practice *gnawa*, as a friend and I try to work out what it is. As we have seen, the 'cultural' in the Tunisia of the post-independence decades was achieved through the active participation of the citizen in listening and also reading and looking, through a correct identification of certain sounds with certain bodies, through an openness to multiple styles which they would be able to fix down. This is arguably what was reproduced in Mokasin. The styles of the playlist are important – rap, gnawa, reggae – but it was their recontextualization as sounds in a space of words and images which was also important. The clientele of Mokasin often go to another café, 'Liberthé', and here this tendency is even more apparent. In Liberthé, the walls are covered with names of artists, in Latin and Arabic script, and its playlists often contain the voices of these artists. I was told in Liberthé that there had been a turn away from YouTube all together, and that Spotify is rather used because of a greater facility and liberty of choice that it affords.

exclusion. There are cafés around education establishments which cater for a young, mixed crowd, cafés in wealthy areas which have become places of distinction, cafés in the centreville which are known for their nurturing of certain political groups.



Fig. 15: Café Culturel Liberthé from the inside, Tunis, February 2019

The 'style' of these two places exists in marked contrast to those of Amarena. This space is considered 'bad taste' by the Liberthé and Mokasin clientele. In Amarena, there is not the audio-visual coherence expected of a 'cultural' space; I wonder whether the accusations of 'bad taste' came from what is seen by outsiders to the café as a jarring between the muted images of football on Bein Sport and the repetitive sounds of the playlist which included such viral songs of Soolking the Algerian rapper, Puerto Rican Luis Fonsi with Despacito, and Tunisian singer Mortadha. See Media 6: Bein Sport on the screen, the sounds of Despacito.

So despite the openness and the variation of cafés, YouTube, in its elasticity, was used in each of these spaces to produce the ambiance felt to be befitting of the space – in this, it

was pressed into the reproduction of sonic divisions that are encompassed in the state music archives and previous musical material cultures, reproducing a binary between ‘cultural’ and ‘not cultural’, between, indeed, the *jaww* of the ‘cultural’, and the *jaww* more associated with the ‘popular’.

So YouTube, despite its troubling fragments, has an ambiguous impact on the organisation of the aural public sphere. In a sense, songs such as Soolking’s *Parolé* may be forming part of a kind of ‘audible commons’; and YouTube itself seems to exist as a ‘common’ thing, a way of listening which connects people in disconnected parts of the city. But in another sense, even songs from YouTube’s ‘audible commons’ are constantly recontextualised into listening experiences and acoustic territories which could mean multiple other things, maintaining divisions between classes and social groups. In this context, I’d suggest that YouTube’s power comes less from the ways in which the platform reorganises city spaces, but rather the ways in which it reorganises and disrupts other processes: those of musical production within already existing economies, and the ways in which this becomes imbricated with senses of virality, the ‘mass’, and time.

2.6 YouTube’s power: imbricating production, virals, and masses; eating time

We’ve looked at YouTube as an archive, and as a listening technology; but it is another important thing too: an infrastructure to be used in economies of music circulation, which were both generated by clips that were put on YouTube, and which also worked in conjunction with already existing live music worlds and their modalities of exchange, as well as the ecologies of listening which we have seen. YouTube’s multiplicity in this area has led to its imbrication in the production of several things at once: a viral presence of *certain sounds in particular*; the attaching of senses of ‘mass’ to those sounds; and the subsequent (and simultaneous) sonic morphing and changing of surrounding musical productions and economies. This process is deeply connected with the whereabouts of capital, which is more often than not located abroad; it is also therefore connected with mobility. This may well not be a new process; but YouTube is also thought to have eaten many of the material remains

that might tell us otherwise, thereby also playing with senses of history. And, all the while, the power of the state archive over senses of 'original' seems to remain largely intact.

As detailed by Barone, rap is largely a 'YouTube' phenomenon; so YouTube is also the ways that rappers make money, providing the framework for its longevity. Rap has not developed many 'live' performance infrastructures – this puts a greater onus on the recording and its circulation for the generating of capital. He describes a situation in which, despite the fame of rappers, it is quite difficult for this to be converted into a livelihood, for several reasons: in order for money to come from 'clips' rappers needed to prove some kind of copyright status for the work, which rappers couldn't do unless they had registered with the Tunisian rights association; rappers had to be based abroad in order to access this capital easily. Focus was on finding the 'viral' hit, and this was all about the 'numbers of views' that could be generated by the video (Barone 2016; 2019). Meanwhile, artists in other scenes with live music infrastructures, such as the 'alternative' scenes and those which see cover bands playing in bars, already have a certain possibility for generation of capital from this work; for them, the YouTube clip can be about spreading a presence in order to get this work. For artists working in areas of *fenn sh'abi*, with the most developed live music economic spanning weddings but also the spaces of restaurant spectacle and cabarets, the production of YouTube clips is less pressing; YouTube is used, I'm told by one, as a place from which to learn new repertoire, not to upload 'clips'.

This situation seems to have created several things at once, simultaneously. There is an intensification of the ubiquity of certain sounds, as we have seen, in part through the ways in which YouTube is used so widely as a listening technology, on in cafés, bars, taxis, streets. 'Viral' songs, particularly rap songs, change – but throughout 2019 there seemed to be certain sounds which are repeated. The rap music which was most likely to go 'viral' when I was in Tunis were those which include a certain rhythm in its backing trap indicative of those used in afrobeat, as well as those used by certain American RnB artists such as Cardi B. They include a certain smoothly autotuned vocal line. This is the sound which was reproduced by the likes of Samara, Jenjoon, Soolking and Sanfara.

But this sound, and its 'virality', is imbricated with another thing: its sense of popularity and mass, the sense that this is the 'mainstream'. This is in part given by its ubiquity, but in part also by the YouTube view-counter, and the ways in which it is instrumentalised by culture

workers in Tunis who have a stake in finding and mediating the 'mass.' 'Views' were celebrated, highlighted and mediated by private media channels in particular which dealt with the 'mainstream': El Hiwar Ettounisi and Mosaique FM, the main private media stations of the country. On El Hiwar Ettounisi, celebrity journalist Hédi Zaiem presented the official Tunisian charts based on numbers of YouTube views that the videos received. DJs at Mosaique FM, as I realised through interviews with them (which we will return to), would also sometimes base their notions of popularity around view counts, and would programme accordingly. These television and radio programmes were thus mediating a sense of mass that had been gleaned from the combination of YouTube's viewcounter and also the sounds of the songs; and in 'redistributing' (Rancière) them through widely heard private media they were, in turn, consolidating their centrality. In turn, these sounds also become that which is considered 'vulgar' in other areas, with 'neither heritage nor youth nor revolutionary aesthetics' (Ochoa Gautier 2004, 390) by other sonic transculturators – they are actively avoided, for instance, by the DJs of Misk FM.

And something else is being consolidated through such recontextualisations: the connecting of viral songs with capital, and thus the connecting of these particular sounds and the aesthetics of these videos with possibilities of capital. This, I think, has affected the very musical sounds and productions of the various different economies in which YouTube intervenes. It has created a situation in which the visual element of the clip is extremely important. I witnessed, through Radhi, the need to produce a slick, well filmed 'clip', even in the projects of his alternative orchestra, Allchestra; sometimes this video was the most important part of the project, and the final sounds of the video were determined by the ratios of time spent filming to recording. We saw in the first section that there has been a recent turn to producing '*turath*' in slick music videos, also, in which there seems to be a borrowing of visual elements from the professionalism of rap videos. And some artists, such as Mortadha, seem to change sonic style depending on the 'trending' style of the time. It has also created a situation where musicians increasingly need to be based abroad in order to create such popular songs, or at least to have recourse to streams of capital coming from abroad.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ This situation can leave musicians in a baffling situation. For musicians like Radhi, I got the sense that YouTube created a set of spaces and notions which interlink in complex and contradictory ways. YouTube was

If we think back to the ‘fragments’ of the YouTube that we described at the start of this chapter, we realise that, whilst they might reveal the fundamental equalities that exists between different instances of aesthetic creation, they are not equal in the ways that they circulate in the ‘aural public sphere’ – they do not have an equal weight in the formation of this sphere.

Now we might imagine that the construction of senses of ‘mass’ and ‘mainstream’ around sound is not something that was born with YouTube, and that previous industrial practices underpin this – the industries of music on supports, from vinyl, through cassettes and CDs to the circulation of Mp3s. But YouTube does something else: it makes these histories difficult to trace. I was told frequently that ‘all music’ was on YouTube, that this was where ‘everyone’ would listen to music. It seemed that cassettes and CDs, circulations of Mp3s, was all something that had been subsumed by YouTube. We saw a cocktail called ‘Tunisie Mariage’ at the start of this chapter – it’s been uploaded to YouTube by a channel called MLP music. One might not know of its physical past through clicking on the YouTube link – in many ways it’s a YouTube upload like any other, and it also seems to have been linked up with iTunes. There are clues which suggest that it had a past life in another form: the clearest indicator is this sonic stamp, *‘ahla cocktail, li ahla mustem‘ain, bi amra’ Africa Cassette* ‘the sweetest cocktail, for the sweetest listeners, by the company Africa Cassette’ – a clear sign that this was recorded by cassette and CD production company Africa Cassette, thus rendering this upload a clear mediation of something that had a life as a plastic thing.¹⁵⁷ But these are just clues – the important point here is that one gets the distinct impression that music made and heard in Tunisia is all just located on YouTube now, that various strands of music and recording spanning decades have all been absorbed by YouTube in sonic and image form, and that this is the way in which it now exists in public space in Tunis. It seems a good example of McLuhan’s dictum that ‘one medium’s content is always another medium’

something which simultaneously peddled the very myth of the glorious music industry and was a source of inspiration and important ‘aesthetic experience’ in videos which he watched; it was something that he felt that he had to add to in order to maintain a career; it was something that he added to creatively during situations of stagnation; it was a platform which maintained a trend of ‘covering’ which he was expected to add to in live performance, as well as a *voice* which was brought into situations of his own live performance; and it was the thing through which he would be judged and selected to manifest musically in different spaces by gatekeepers. It was all of these things at once.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Ahla’ is somewhere between ‘sweetest’, ‘loveliest’, ‘nicest’.

(McLuhan 2009, 107). Meanwhile, the materials of the objects, the plastic and tape and vinyl with their paper covers, are relegated to the mythical private collections behind the uploads, removed from public space. This impression is compounded by the explicit vocalising of this belief; very often, people suggested to me during my research that YouTube was where I could go to find ‘everything’, from the most obscure to the most common of musical sounds – and if I brought up the industries of music on supports and their objects, the most frequent response would be ‘*m’adsh*’, they are no more.

So YouTube mediated senses of ‘everything’, and, particularly around certain sounds which would correspond with millions of views, ‘everyone’, or a ‘mass’ of listeners. And yet, intriguingly, it was still the state archives that I was directed to when I introduced myself as a ‘researcher’ looking at ‘music’. When I was attempting to research the contents of the state archive, I indeed had to use YouTube; but the plethora of recordings of *ma’lūf* and Hédi Jouini that had been uploaded arguably serve to increase the force of their mythical centre in the state archive.

2.7 Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, we asked how YouTube works in Tunis as a sonic archive: how it organises sound around the capital within an aural public sphere already shaped in part by state archival organisations of sound; and whether its presences and organisation might amount to a kind of ‘democratisation’, as much of the literature on the subject suggests.

Throughout the chapter, we’ve found that thinking about the power and limits of YouTube as a sonic archive in Tunis is a very complex affair. YouTube works on many ontological ‘planes’ at once, through which it is pressed to different kinds of organisational work. The ways in which it suddenly appeared on the scene after the revolution – and the low entry points to being able to use it as an archive, to upload work – meant that it very quickly became an expansive archive of both new sonic work and remediations of old recordings. These activities and uploads didn’t only challenge who had the right to be termed ‘musician’, and which sounds deemed ‘music’ – a legitimising process previously monopolised by the state – but they can also be seen as productive of ‘fragments’ which pose a fundamental challenge

to what music and musicians *are*, particularly the cocktails and montages which creatively explore the boundaries between the musical and the sonic, and nationality. In this sense, YouTube exists as a very different kind of archival proposal to the structures of the State Archive.

However, this YouTube archive doesn't exist in a vacuum – it is spread across the city as a listening technology, a creator of atmosphere, and a repository from which things may be taken. In a sense, this expands the archive further: suddenly, the archivists are the listeners who may organise theirs and others' listening experiences across unexpected times and places, in domestic spaces of homes, in taxis, in bars. They do so within a pool of ubiquitous sound which YouTube encourages, replete with certain viral and ubiquitous songs in particular, which could be posited as a kind of 'audible commons'. But the platform's elasticity means that it is also pressed to the service of aesthetic work which operates according to previous sonic divisions at the centre of state archival conceptions of 'modernity': in the radio studio Panorama, in the nightclubs of Gammarth and La Goulette, and the cafés of the centreville, YouTube listening is organised to create spaces of 'culture' that are to be experienced differently from those of *'jawn'* – and which harbour similar divisions between atmospheres which are to be perceived as a series of recordings, and a series of recordings which come together to frame atmosphere.

Because of this multiple use, it becomes difficult to suggest with certainty that YouTube, as a sonic archive, either participates in or hinders, 'democratisation', either of music making, or of society through its distributing of sound. But its power seems to move particularly through the ways in which it alters loops of production of certain sounds and styles. As an infrastructure participating in Tunis's 'aural public sphere', its key contribution is that it melds senses of 'dominance' and 'mass' around certain sounds, complicates others, and shrouds histories.

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The histories that YouTube shrouds are those which revolve around the materials of supports, the contribution of their industries and their circulations to the shaping of the aural public sphere, and their continued participation to the present moment. Cassettes and CDs, Mp3 compilations and vinyl records are all things which appear to have been swallowed

by YouTube. But there are spaces in the capital where they still exist. The next three chapters will think about what these spaces and their objects can tell us: we'll start with cassette and CD shops and their archives.

3. Cassette and CD shops

3.1 Introduction

Cassettes and CDs haven't made it into discussions of music, media and political and social environments in Tunis in the same way as either the state archives or YouTube. As remarked by Simon in his recent book looking at cassette cultures in Egypt, *Media of the Masses*, these every day technologies of listening have been a generally overlooked area in Middle East Studies and other studies looking at the Global South. Cassettes and CDs, mundane, plastic supports for sound recordings, are objects that have often only selectively been housed in official archives of 'music' and 'culture'; when they offer windows onto past listening in these contexts it is a 'carefully curated one' (Simon, 2022) – something akin, perhaps, to the CD in the *Initiation à la Tunisienne* book which we listened to in Chapter 1. Equally, the influx of attention paid to social media throughout the uprisings across the Arab World 'lend the impression that only the most recent media matter in Middle East studies' (Simon 2022), leading us to constantly find the 'new' in the 'digital'. In Tunisia, even less attention has been paid to this area than in Egypt.¹⁵⁸ When cassettes and CDs have entered into discourses on 'music', it has been in the context of detailing their restricted interactions with musical worlds of *ma'lūf* (R. Davis, 1996b), or in discussions on their piracy (Rais, 2018). To my knowledge, they have not been discussed by media theorists, who, when discussing the 1980s and 1990s in Tunis, have focused instead on the boom of satellite television and the challenges that it posed to state media.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Egypt has comparatively generated quite a lot of attention paid to cassettes; see Hirschkind's work on cassette listening and the honing of the spiritual ear, and Castelo-Branco's work on the music industries (Castelo-Branco, 1987; Hirschkind, 2005; 2009).

¹⁵⁹ See Chouikha on the role of satellite television in building 'pan-arab' publics as it brought together audiences from across the Arab World for programmes such as 'Arab Idol' (Chouikha, 2007b); as well as Fitouri

And yet, cassettes and CDs have not completely disappeared from Tunis's urban spaces: they surface in reminiscences about the past from listeners, through which their huge importance for the shaping of qualities of time and listening for entire generations becomes clear; and they are around physically, scattered throughout markets, and most importantly, still housed in the few cassette and CD shops that still exist. As Simon suggests, employing the term Allman used to describe the scattered fragments of Ghanaian post-colonial archives, these are a 'shadow archive': part of a 'constellation of visual, textual and audio materials' that exist outside of the 'official' archives.¹⁶⁰ As Simon suggests, this 'shadow archive' can be used to weave richer histories of the listening and media activities of those routinely excluded from official stories, and to think particularly about how these formats widened participation in 'culture' and the circulation of sounds and music, rubbing against the monopolies of the state, long before satellite television.¹⁶¹ But for us, they are not only archives which might nuance our readings of the past through their representations: following Tragaki's recent work on recordings, the recordings and their shops are things which sensuously shape feelings of time and space in the present (Tragaki, 2019). The shops in Tunis, and their archives, still act on public space, shaping senses of time around their presences and collections. And they do not exist in isolation: they are present in a city whose 'aural public sphere' is also continuously being shaped, as we have seen, by other archival structures such as the State archives and YouTube, working to organise bodies and groups as 'modern', 'Tunisian', and 'mainstream' in various ways.

So my questions here are multiple. Through diving into cassette and CD histories, I'm interested in what their stories can add to our view of the construction of the Tunisian aural public sphere, how the activities of cassette and CD companies might have interacted with

on the 'parabolisation' and makeshift satellite TV structures which would bypass state controls (Fitouri, 2008; 2012); and Malchiodi for the reception of Italian television in Tunisia (Malchiodi, 2018).

¹⁶⁰ Allman, of this archive of fragment scattered outside of Ghana's national archive, suggests that these fragments might be used to 'destabilize a "high modernist" narrative and points toward new history-writing possibilities – possibilities far less anchored in, far less dependent upon, and thus far less likely to be overdetermined by the archiving apparatus of the postcolonial nation-state' (Allman 2013, 112)

¹⁶¹ Cassettes have received increasing amounts of attention for this purpose: see particularly Bohlman, who asserts that cassettes in Poland 'offer a window into networked epistemologies of sound under State Socialism', (A. F. Bohlman, 2017); Bohlman and McMurray ask, along the media archaeological of Wolfgang Ernst, how cassettes, particularly their function of 'rewind', might be used to ask how 'time is sounded in media' (A. F. Bohlman & McMurray, 2017). There has been other important ethnomusicological work on the social and political roles of cassettes in other contexts: see Manuel's work on India (Manuel, 1993; Manuel, 2014); Wallach on Indonesia (Wallach, 2002)

state politics and social configurations throughout the 1980s and 1990s, what sorts of challenges were posed by their sonic organisations, and what sorts of meanings are drawn from their activities and objects. But also, I'm interested in what remains of this legacy. What remains of these objects and their sites in the present city? How might they continue to shape senses of time and space?

The story I will trace goes as follows: drawing on interviews with industry professionals, newspaper articles and anecdotes from various interlocutors, I'll think about the boom of the cassette and CD industries in the 1980s and 1990s, attending particularly to the ways in which these activities expanded and changed the inclusions of ostracised voices, created new forms and sounds which were considered to be indicative of what the 'mass' wanted, created hubs of activity around the *centreville*, and caused all sorts of problems to the normative conceptions of 'copyright'. We'll see that the industries focused particularly on objects which are thought mediate senses of *jaww*, through the forms of their cocktails and arrangements of *fann sh'abi*. I'll then trace a dual, contradictory motion: whilst sounds with similar sonic ontologies nurtured by these objects seem to have become codified and continued to be mediated by many important mediators, including in radio station Mosaique FM, the physical remnants of cassettes and CDs are fading, and occupy a strange invisible position in the *centreville* of Tunis. Mediations are thus splintered between the presence of the audible cocktail and *jaww* sounds, and the fading of the physical cassette and CD objects. In this situation, contradictory discourses on the Tunisian listener abound: they are understood as being 'open to everything', as well as exhibiting a lack of 'understanding' of music.

3.2 Between cassettes and CDs, shops and offices, pasts and presents

There was a little CD and cassette shop just off the square where I lived with my flatmate Judith in 2013. We knew it was there, because it blasted music out of its speakers and onto the road whenever it was open, and some of the sounds wafted up to our windows. During the summer of 2013, the sounds which travelled particularly well were certain synthesised pops and beats which signal the chorus of rapper Kafon's hit song *houmani*, (which we saw

in Chapter 2's YouTube archive), which the shop seemed have put onto a CD to be played on loop. We got used to it, and the sounds, and the shop, blended into everything else – the car horns, the rumble of engines, the voices yelling up from the market stalls lining the square.

Sometimes, when walking past the shop, I would glance in to see rows of shelves of CDs which receded back into shadow, and one or two people manning a till, looking bored. The road outside was bustling – people with makeshift stalls selling underwear and children's toys, a café and people milling around with their coffees. The threshold of the shop participated in this bustle; it was completely open onto the street, and the sounds from the outward facing speakers actively animated the space. Light would stream in from outside and people would often loiter in these front few meters, chatting. But beyond the threshold, the shop always felt curiously still – and towards the back of the shop it was quite dark and quiet. CDs which lined the first part of the shop gave way to cassettes which lined the back, and had collected thick layers of dust.

When I eventually made it into the CD and cassette shops, I was faced with row upon row of plastic objects, all stacked in identical piles. In all of the shops, CDs were positioned on the front stands, their thin squares creating a chequerboard sheen. Towards the backs of the shops, the CDs gave way to cassettes, wrapped in plastic and a thin layer of dust, giving the whole thing a faint dullness. There seemed to be a few different varieties of plastic: some of the CDs were encased in thick transparent plastic cases that clicked open and closed, whilst others were in more malleable, flimsy cases of dark grey plastic. Cassette cases were more uniform, thicker boxes with a smaller surface area but more depth, and opened and closed with a bigger 'click'. The tapes themselves differ slightly from each other, not in shape, but in the transparency or opaqueness of the plastic. Paper covers tucked behind the plastic surfaces gave clues about what one might hear when these things were made to sound. On both CDs and cassettes, there was an overwhelming variety of pictorial styles, with lots of different combinations of images and words – indeed, the difference between an image and a word was fundamentally challenged here, and words have a 'sensuous' presence (Porcello et al., 2010). CDs and cassettes were covered with words in French, words in Arabic, and in English, Tunisian words written in Arabic script and in Latin script, and all sorts of faces, some of the faces alone on the covers, others collaged on with a crowd of other faces.



Fig. 16: In the cassette and CD shop of *nahj zarkoun*, July 2022

Most of the objects bore the signs of a whole host of labels and companies, given away by their logos stamped on the outside. On cassettes, I found logos of Africa Cassette, Phonie, Daiziphone, SOCA, SOPROCA, Noveca, and TK7. On CDs, I found Africa Cassette, Phonie, Daiziphone, Top Music and Star Music. There were a few cassettes with no clear brand name, and many CDs which bore no brand at all. The companies appear to have had various other ways of marking their objects, carrying marks referring to certain industrial processes. There is the SODACT logo, which became OTDAV on the presumably more recent objects – this is the name of the Tunisian copyright organisation – *Organisation Tunisienne des Droits d'Auteur et de Voisin*. Next to these logos there are serial numbers and barcodes.



Fig. 17: Rows of cassettes and Michael Jackson in the cassette and CD shop of *nahj zarkoun*

Pictures and plasticky sheens extended in many of the shops above the stands of CDs and cassettes and onto the walls, where posters adorned the bricks. Princess Diana, Michael Jackson, Nancy Ajram, Elvis, and framed copies of the Koran all tintured the space. Hand-painted signs that said 'CD *original* 2 dinar' hung amongst the stands and the posters. Quite often, towards the backs of certain shops in particular, the clumps got increasingly chaotic, and extended into actual piles of cassettes, whose order could no longer be clearly spotted in the jagged patterns and dust created by the pile up.

There were no 'style' or 'genre' labels on the stands in the shops, just row upon row of little plastic cases. But this didn't mean that the things were not organised – indeed, there was something of the Mbembean archive in the ways that objects were 'coded and classified

according to chronological, thematic or geographical criteria' in a 'matter of creating order' (Mbembe, 2002). This happened through the combination of 'clumps' – visually distinct areas in the shops signifying different themes and types – and roughly corresponding discursive markers. Patterns can be easily seen on the surfaces of objects which appear to group them. The most clearly defined CDs would be on the front stand – the '*nouveautés*', which were covered with faces frequently seen on the TV or internet at any given moment. In every shop there would be a shelf on which there would be multiple CDs with a large headshot of Om Kalthoum on every cover. These would create visually distinct zones of *tarab* because, despite the portraits being of different times, they were nearly always the same stance: Om Kalthoum's head slightly to the side, looking up slightly, slight smile through her glasses, very Mona Lisa-esque. It would create a pattern on the shelf of slower tempo between dark and light on the covers. In contrast, areas of cocktails signalled themselves through the busyness of covers which would be very full of different heads and words, the mass effect being one of a very dense patterning. The Koranic sections would be different again: often white silhouettes against a dark background, the Kaaba of Mecca strewn across surfaces. *Sharqi* sections were characterised by slightly different visual modalities – crisper fonts and shining photography of glamorous stars. There was *rboukh* and *mezoued* in other sections, mid-way down the shop, patterns of men with the *mezoued* instrument lined up next to each other.

The people who work in these shops clearly had certain mental maps of layouts, which they used to guide visitors around. There were certain words and terms which would come up frequently – names of styles, names of artists. The cocktails were differentiated by a few signifiers: '*mt'a arass*,' 'for weddings'; '*jaww*,' '*kul shay*,' 'everything', '*jdod*' 'new', '*sharqi*,' '*gharbi*,' '*tunisi laqadim*,' 'old tunisi'. The albums were signified by names of the major artists and styles: 'Om Kalthoum', 'Abdel Halim', 'Michael Jackson', 'Walid Ettounisi', 'Fairouz', for instance – and '*tarab*,' '*rap*,' '*rboukh*,' '*mezoued*'.

CD players on the tills were used to play CDs throughout the day. In this sense, part of the shop's archive would be mediated sonically as well as visually; certain sounds were amplified through the speakers hanging up on the shops' entrances. Much of what would be played would be the '*nouveautés*,' 'new things', – but sounds were also chosen to be in keeping with other things: times and places. Someone once told me in one of these shops that they

would change the CD according to the time of day – Koran in the morning, then a bit of something lighter to pick the mood up in the afternoon, like *fann sh'abi*, and then some *tarab* in the evening. The shops also, apparently, change their choices according to geographic location. I was told that the shop on Rue de Marseille, for instance, plays more Libyan music, because there are more Libyans that frequent the bars and restaurants of the Rue de Marseille.



Fig. 18: Piles of cassettes in the CD and cassette shop of *nahj zarkoun*, July 2022

These sorts of shop spaces have been described by ethnomusicologists before, in different contexts. Their piles of objects resemble descriptions of a Cairo shop described by Simon, as well as those in Indonesia that we hear about from Wallach: in each case attention is drawn

to the expanse of the objects, and to the ways that their organisations might speak to industrial and organising logics underpinning listening habits, tastes, and musical cultures.¹⁶² Here, I'm not only interested in their contents; these shops offered entries into the exploration of several different spatial and temporal schemes at once.

First, the shops gradually revealed themselves as parts of spatial networks which spanned other shops, and the spaces of production behind them, which were much more difficult to see. During my more deliberate explorations of these spaces between 2019 and 2022, I realised that many of the shops that I was coming across in the *centreville* exist in a network, which is run by the same organisation. The network of these shops revealed itself gradually – not through anyone actually telling me that they exist in a network, despite numerous conversations, but because on my walks around the centreville I happened to see the same employees pop up in multiple spaces – as well as the same objects, the same 'new releases'. The shops tended to be nestled in buildings on the seam between the medina and the part of the city that had been built by the French in a 'gridiron pattern' (Mouhli & McGuinness, 2006): they were stationed on Place de la Monnaie, Bab Jazira, Nahj Zarkoun, Avenue de Londres, Rue de Marseille (see the map at fig. 19).¹⁶³ I went from being kept at arm's length by shop employees to being offered a chair, and invited to stay for a coffee, a laugh, and a listen. I managed to trace stories and histories through various previous employees of other cassette and CD companies, notably Phonie, which took me to the industrial zone of Charguia.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Simon describes a shop in Massara which sounds similar in many ways: 'Rather unremarkable from the outside, the one-room store contains thousands of audiocassettes. Stacked in colorful columns from floor to ceiling, the recordings engulf an entire wall, which, with the exception of a few miscellaneous items, appears to be composed of audiotapes entirely.' (Simon, 2022). Wallach focuses on the spatial categorisations of objects, similarly unlabelled: 'cassettes for sale in the stall are not labelled alphabetically, but are usually separated into unlabelled categories' (Wallach 2002, 90).

¹⁶³ Since starting this research, the shops on Rue de Marseille, and one in Kram, have been repurposed into other kinds of business.

¹⁶⁴ In these shops, my interest in their products and activities was met with ambivalence and some suspicion, and information about the industries was not forthcoming. As we'll come to, these spaces have had almost no relationship with researchers and people who try to construct 'official' stories about music – and antagonistic relationships with the 'official' in general. Much of the 'information' shared with me has had to be kept back, and some locations are talked about only vaguely.

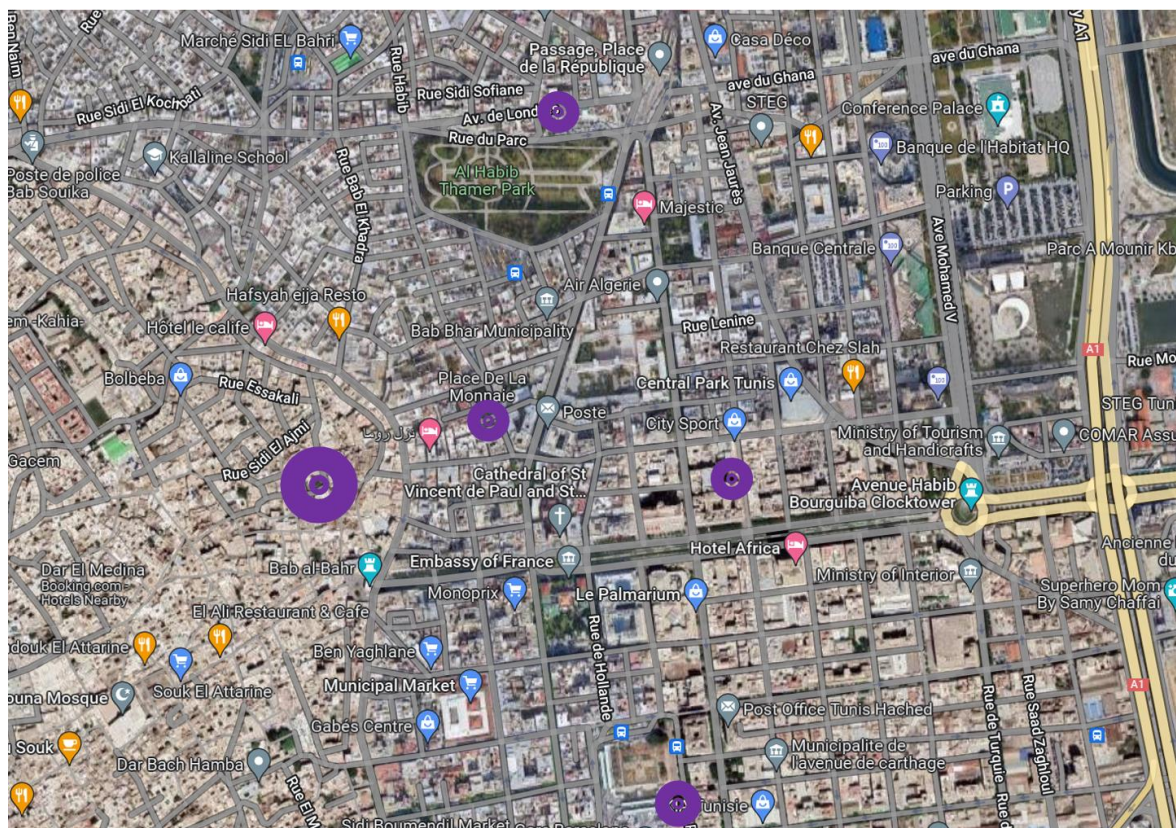


Fig. 19: Map showing the *medina* on the left giving way to the colonial city on the right, shaped around the main avenues of the Avenue Bourguiba and Mohamed V. Purple CD icons mark the CD and cassette shops. Map taken from [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps), 27/04/2023

The shops also existed in tensions between pasts and presents. ‘Time’ came across differently throughout interviews, listening sessions, shop visits; the ‘present’ could feel both stuck in the past and reaching towards the future depending on the interaction. The shops enabled the construction of my own archive through their objects – and this also took me on many temporal journeys as a listener and a co-listener. In part to make up for the lack of information I was getting from people, I built up my own collection of objects, to see what they had to say. With cassettes priced at 1 dinar and CDs at 2, this was a lucky possibility for me with my pounds.¹⁶⁵ The cassettes and CDs of these shops and industries are brought under the umbrella of the same sonic, political and industrial projects; it makes little sense

¹⁶⁵ It shouldn’t go unremarked that despite the seemingly cheap price, it might not be possible for a Tunisian PhD student to build up such a collection – with almost no funding, and university teaching paid at around 8 dinars per hour, it would be an unrealistic expense for most. This is therefore another way in which economic capital impacts research of this type, and shapes disparities between types of research conducted from institutions in the Global North and the Global South.

to separate them, although attention should be paid to their different material affordances and properties.

The shops, their objects and histories exist between these multiple planes, traced throughout the city. In this chapter, they will overlap – I will use recent objects for a kind of ‘historical listening’ (Tragaki, 2019); I will listen to present city sounds from the basis of reminiscences about the past; and we will move between several spaces in the city, as we think about the significance of these spaces, industries, and objects for the ‘aural public sphere’ of Tunis. First, a trip back to the 1980s.

3.3 The boom of cassettes and CDs in Tunis

Sitting across from me in his office in the industrial zone of Charguia, Niez told me his stories of Phonie over several hours. Niez is a middle-aged man who is still the director of Phonie. His stories intermingle here with those of other Phonie employees, one of which showed me around the bare rooms where there were once hundreds of machines and employees producing CDs and cassettes, and one of which, Anis, now has his own live music business and greeted me in his office in Lac. Other voices here are those who worked for other cassette and CD businesses, whose identities will remain anonymous, as well as the voices of journalists writing on these industries in the 80s and 90s, academics, and friends whose family homes were replete with their own cassette and CD archives. Coming together, these voices tell an (incomplete) story of the boom and bust of cassettes and CDs in Tunis, and the ways in which they attempted to form, articulate and represent a sense of ‘mass’; a Tunisian ‘everyone’.¹⁶⁶

Cassette companies started to be set up at the beginning of the 1980s. When we read about this period in histories of Tunisia, it tends to be told as a period of economic liberalisation which was paired with constant crisis. Up to this point, the Bourguiban government had

¹⁶⁶ There is a huge amount more work to do in this area. Over several months I tried to track down the owners of the other major cassette and CD player, Africa Cassette – but when I finally managed to enter into contact with someone, it was too late for this current project. There will be many people in Tunis with fascinating accounts of these industries and this period, whose stories will no doubt nuance and perhaps change the picture that I am painting out here – my work is to be seen as but a start for further explorations.

been engaged in a kind of 'state socialism', led by Ahmed Ben Salah; but it resulted in widespread economic crisis, and the first ever nation-wide strike was organised by the UGTT labour union in 1978 in response to plans of economic 'structural adjustment'. As we learn from Chouikha and Gobe, from 1980 there was a general rearrangement of working structures in the country which saw a large growth of industry, from 9% to 19%, with 217 state companies privatised between 1987 and 2008 (Chouikha & Gobe, 2015). Whilst this led to an increase in purchasing power, it deepened inequalities and led to the 1983 'emeutes de pain', with protests continuing throughout the 1980s. In 1985, the government got the IMF involved, which only fuelled the problems. In 1987, Ben Ali took over from Bourguiba in a coup, and throughout the 90s continued a policy of liberalisation. So despite the economic woes of the time, there was an increase in the circulation of entertainment and 'luxury' products, such as cars and consumer electronics (Chouikha & Gobe, 2015).

In keeping with this view, Niez confirmed that it was 'easy' to set up a cassette company at this time. Phonie obtained a license from the state, imported equipment from Germany for the production of cassettes, as well as the blank cassettes themselves, set up factories in Charguia and employed up to a hundred workers. Niez was one of three brothers who founded Phonie, originating from Sfax – and for them, it was a continuation of a family trade: their uncle had been Mallouli, the owner of *Mallouliphone*, the only private vinyl company of the 1970s existing alongside the state company *En'nagham*. They were joined by other companies. Africa Cassette was also set up by three brothers, from Gabes. SOCA, Société de la Cassette, was another big company, based out of Tunis. And over time many others joined, the number reaching 47, according to Niez, by the mid-80s. They included Noveca, Soproca, Star Music, Top Music, and many more. Phonie, along with SOCA and Africa Cassette, was one of the market leaders throughout the 1980s, right up until the 2010s.

Phonie, and the other companies, produced a range of different kinds of cassette; and when CD technology appeared, they made both cassettes and CDs together. Some of the other companies focused on one or the other (Tunis K7 was solely a cassette company, and Top Music was solely a CD company, for instance). Phonie made cassettes and CDs which involved a production of the music and the artist, recorded and sometimes written by the company. Whilst Phonie initially used the state radio studios to record artists, as their uncle

had done, they eventually built their own studios next to their factories.¹⁶⁷ Alongside these were the cassettes that would be brought in and reproduced from foreign companies, as well as older recordings that would be reproduced on cassette. Niez told me how he had struck a deal with Lebanese company Rotana to reproduce their catalogue of Middle Eastern stars in Tunis, as well as the companies working across Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World. With the advent of CDs, it seems that the economic and industrial process remained similar: the companies changed their materials, and imported different, newer machinery from Germany, but continued to sign artists in a similar way, and to reproduce others.

As well as 'albums' of single artists, they would produce 'cocktails': mix-tape type structures which would involve a combination of songs and artists. Niez told me that the single artists were signed to Phonie, like a roster, and that Phonie would thus control their rights, signed with the state rights organisation SODACT (now OTDAV). A former Phonie employee informed me that the cocktail structure actually became embedded into the economic model of the company – he told me that newer artists would actually pay Phonie for the honour of having their song listed alongside the songs of better known artists. For them, he explained, presence on a cocktail would serve to increase their renown, a bit like a business card, which would lead to more gigs in the economies of live music which were where the majority of artists made their money. Others, associated with other organisations, were rumoured not to have recorded their own artists but rather to have copied and reproduced the objects that had been released by other companies, Tunisian or foreign, creating their cocktail objects through a splicing together of bits and pieces of other objects.

Cassettes and CDs were reportedly sold in outlets throughout the country, as well as in neighbouring Libya and Algeria. According to Niez, Phonie and Africa Cassette split the market of Tunisia, Libya and Algeria; the initial agreement was that Africa Cassette would deal with the South of the country and Libya, and Phonie would deal with the North and Algeria. Over time, the companies would also supply their wares to petrol stations and supermarkets, the *grands surfaces* such as French conglomeration *Carrefour*. The objects from these outlets circulated very widely around cars and households throughout the country. A friend of mine, Wiem, described a situation in which new cassettes and CDs

¹⁶⁷More is needed on how this use of the state radio studio would have been negotiated.

would ‘just appear’ at her family home in Akouda, picked up by her brother and father from across multiple places in the centre of Sousse and petrol stations.

The *centreville* of Tunis contained a particularly large concentration of these shops, with many of them stationed around the seam between the medina and the colonial town. As pointed out by friend Lotfi, the location of these shops in the centreville is notable; they are clearly geared towards large publics and swathes of people passing through. The *Rue de Marseille* and the *Nahj Zarkoun*, where one finds some of the biggest shops, are places known for their commerce during the day, and their bars and brothels during the night.¹⁶⁸ They are both spaces of passage between the various nodes of the city, and spaces of leisure and entertainment. Many friends describe going to these shops and rifling through their contents when they were younger: my friend Aymen for instance showed me a group of Disco cassettes that he had found in the *Nahj Zarkoun* shop, 20 years previously. At their peak, these companies report selling hundreds of thousands of cassettes and CDs every day from these shops, turning over large profits.

The shops of the 1980s and 1990s come through in these stories as places which in some ways resemble Mbembe’s archives: buildings with stacks of objects that are sorted and ordered through space, existing as public fragments. But there is a different temporal order at play here, and different structures of power animating these shop archives. Mbembe’s archived fragments are set back from the public for a certain amount of time; these fragments are rather thrust into the public sphere as soon as they are released, circulating as widely as possible into archives in homes, cars and personal collections within commercial logics. What are the meanings of these commercial archives, as they circulated through the industrial complexes of the cassette and CD companies, through shops, and into homes? What are the stories that are made of their fragments? How did they come into contact with infrastructures and archives of the state?

3.4 Shops and cocktails of ‘everything’ for ‘everyone’

¹⁶⁸ *Nahj Zarkoun* is listed as one of the sites of brothels dating to the colonial times in a study by Larbi Snoussi (Larbi Snoussi, 2020).

As is the case with discourse on cassettes and CDs in other parts of the world, these industrial and cultural worlds have been equated with a kind of ‘democratisation’ of culture and a widening of the remits of culture outside of state institutions.¹⁶⁹ Different kinds of ‘democratisation’ have been discussed by commentators in Tunis. There is the widening of choice, which expanded people’s access to musical fragments that they couldn’t reach through state archival structures. Journalist Borhane Ben Milad, writing a series of articles on these industries in the 1980s, honed in on the idea that these industries were offering the Tunisian listener things which they couldn’t find on the radio and the television (Ben Milad, 1985). He notes how many different voices and artists one can find in the shops, that are not available elsewhere. He described the range of material it was possible to find in these shops: older, reappearing voices of Sayyid Darwich, Zakariya Amed, Marie Jibrane, Hbibba Msika, Risha Kalai; as well as those of Najat Atabou, Zina Tounsia, Mohammed Khairi, Cheikh Imam, Marcel Khalifa or Ahmad Adawiya, actively excluded from state radio. He notes also the representation of the *mzaoudiya*, the mezoued musicians, whose voices are also excluded by the radio but amply present in the shops.¹⁷⁰ There is also the widening of possibilities for musicians, for whom barriers to recording are reduced. M’barek Rais, in her book on musicians in Tunisia, noted that these industries offered a kind of ‘democratisation’ for musicians who found themselves ‘faced with a movement of the uniformization of economic, technological and industrial means through globalisation’ (Rais 2018, 190)¹⁷¹ – creating increasing opportunities for them to record and disseminate their recordings. And there is the widening of participation in the recording processes themselves. The increasing

¹⁶⁹ See for instance Manuel discussing the impact of cassette technology in India: ‘cassettes have served to decentralise and democratise both production and consumption’ (Manuel 1993, 189).

¹⁷⁰ I found quite a few of the aforementioned voices and many others besides in the shops. It is difficult to date the objects; many of them don’t carry dates. My archive includes the following voices: Amal Hijazi, the Lebanese singer big in the 00s; Mounira Mahdiya, one of the leading Egyptian singers of the 1920s; Zina Gasriniya, a Tunisian singer of *fann sh’abi*; Cheikh Imam, the politically engaged Egyptian singer active in the 1970s; Habiba Msika, the 1920s Tunisian diva; Abdel Halim Hafeedh and Moharram Fouad, both Egyptian singers active throughout the middle of the 20th century; Dalida, the Italian-French singer active in the 1970s; Cheb Otmane the Algerian Rai artist; Anouar Brahem the Tunisian oud player circling largely in world music/jazz scenes; Vangelis, the Greek electronic music composer; Hédi Tounisi, the Tunisian mezoued singer active in the 80s; Dire Straits, the British rock band also active in the 80s; Tunisian Mezoued singers Lotfi Jormana and Abdel Karim Benzarti; Tunisian rock band from the 90s Ouled Jouini; mezoued-turned-religious-turned-mezoued-again singer and TV personality Fawzi Ben Gamra; star of Chanson Tunisienne Mohammed el Jammousi and Egyptian singer Warda; French 19th century composer Chopin; and the mezoued singer Salah Farzit.

¹⁷¹ ‘confronté à un mouvement d’uniformisation des moyens économiques, technologies et industriels à travers la mondialisation’

availability of recording equipment expanded possibilities for recording outside of these industries, as individuals were able to start taping over things at home. I learned about this from friends: Aymen showed me the way that he would use the cassettes that he bought from *Nahj Zarkoun*, for instance, to tape over with broadcasts from DJ Danger on Mosaïque FM, just after the station had been launched in 2004. From this perspective, we seem to be witnessing a three-pronged expansion of participation in ‘culture’.

However, the industries also come up in scholarship in the context of a supposed ‘denigration’ of culture. This, also, supposedly occurred on multiple levels. The widening of the remit of voices included in these commercial archives meant, for some, a replacing and usurping of other more ‘authentic’ or more ‘cultural’ forms, through both the ‘invasion’ of foreign forms, and the commercialisation of certain Tunisian genres. After mentioning the ‘democratisation’ at play in the 1980s, M’barek Rais goes on to say that these industries mean that ‘the artistic work would henceforth renounce aesthetic considerations, giving way to mercantile considerations’ (Rais 2018, 195).¹⁷² Commentator Mustapha Chelbi’s book *Musique et société en Tunisie* is pitched as an effort to conserve traces of authentic culture against the ‘pulverisation’ (Chelbi 1985, 6) of ‘traditions’ at the hands of the mass media. Saidane suggests that the mezoued musicians changed their practices and sounds, geared increasingly to commercial success, through contact with these industries (Saidane, 2015).

But the problem wasn’t only what was produced, it was how it was produced. M’barek Rais details the extent to which these industries pirated music – from abroad, and from each other (including, incidentally, Phonie, who she claims has had an ongoing dispute with the rights association since 2001 (Rais 2018, 330)). She describes the following: ‘an almost systematic violation of copyright at the level of production and fixing, of reproduction and dissemination of the work and a generalised piracy.’¹⁷³ In their 1984 study entitled ‘*Big Sounds from Small Peoples*’, the authors Wallis and Malm come to the same conclusion regarding Tunisian production: ‘Exact copies of any new pre-recorded cassette, printed matter and all, are available in the bazaar areas within three hours of its release on the

¹⁷² ‘l’oeuvre artistique échappe, dorénavant, aux considérations esthétiques, cedant la place à des considérations mercantiles’

¹⁷³ une violation presque systématique des droits de l’auteur au niveau de la production de la fixation, de la reproduction et diffusion de l’œuvre et la généralisation du piratage

market!’ (Wallis & Malm 1984, 84).¹⁷⁴ Many others that I spoke with talked about the industries primarily in these terms – they are widely convicted of destroying the means to have a working music industry, displaying a disdain for artists and ‘culture’.¹⁷⁵ For M’barek Rais, it was a question of the livelihood of musicians, who weren’t able to make a living in a way that is considered to be ‘normal’. So, in these discourses, the cassette and CD industries occupied an ambiguous place between the ‘democratisation’ of culture, the widening of participation in its circulations, and also its ‘denigration’ through the promotion of foreign and commercial forms, and rampant piracy.

However, for many of those working in the shops, and the ex-industry professionals, activities weren’t described against this binary of a democratisation or denigration of ‘culture’. Their projects seemed rather to be pitched at an ambiguous join between ‘industry’, and a kind of construction of a Tunisian ‘mass’, in which discourses on piracy were ambivalent. Sometimes, materials were brought into accounts of activities which did place them as vehicles for the work of ‘promoting art’, or *fann*, of doing ‘cultural’ work – but this mainly happened if I pressed the idea forward in interviews, rather than being suggested by my interlocutors. More often, in the ways that it was described to me initially by many of the workers, this was a work of industry and of business, rather than of ‘culture’. When I asked about relationships with the Ministry of Culture, I would be told that there had been ‘no relationship’. Industry workers often drew my attention rather to materials and their commercial potential: the importing and exporting of different kinds of plastic cases as their specific materials and prices shifted over the years; the investing in newer, better German machinery; the kinds of machines which would enable a more secure ‘fixing’ of the sounds onto the CDs to stave off pirates; and indeed, from some sources which will remain anonymous, the sorts of machines and process which would enable the piracy of cassettes. When I took cassettes and CDs with me into conversations, workers would often tap them and handle the plastic as part of their story telling: one worker tapped the thick plastic of a

¹⁷⁴ Much of Wallis and Malm’s discussion on Tunisia revolves around piracy. They note that there were three factories making blank tapes at this time, and suggest that the music played on these was ‘mainly popular folk music which is rarely played on the official radio station’ (39) – we imagine this was *mezoued*. They note that EMI was active for a short while in Tunis, but that generally international companies avoided Tunis because of the piracy. They trace the story of Mounir Ghattas, an individual attempting to produce cassettes in the 1980s, who continued to produce cassettes despite the piracy driven by his ‘ambitious plans for discovering and encouraging the unknown sides of Tunisian music’ (Wallis & Malm 1984, 139).

¹⁷⁵ This was also the attitude of Ben Frej, as we saw in Chapter 1, and as we will return to in Chapter 5.

Habiba Msika CD to show me the sturdiness of the material revealed through the tinny thud, comparing it with disdain to the bend in later forms of cheaper plastic; another took a cassette, took it apart, and told me with glee how easy it was to disassemble these materials for copy. In many ways these people presented themselves as crafts people; plastic was their medium.

But if it wasn't for 'culture', what was the plastic a medium *for*? When artists, musical styles and sounds did come into conversation, they were often used to impress upon me the idea that these industries were representing, and responding to, a sense of 'mass', or the desires and tastes of 'everyone': and that this was achieved with a sonic construction of 'everything'. When I asked Niez about Phonie's output, he didn't emphasise an inclusion of the previously excluded, or any 'democratisation' working outside state structures; he rather simply framed their activities as having recorded and produced the work of 'all' of the Tunisian musicians: 'everything', he said, 'all types of music'. 'Who is known today, for example', he said, wracking his brains for lists of names that Phonie produced. He landed on a plethora of names, and throughout our interviews more emerged. In the category '*watari*', which he defined further as '*orchestrale*', he put Lotfi Bouchnak, Sabr Rba'i, Zied Gharsa. In the category *sh'abi* he put Dhekra Mohammed, Latifa Arefaoui, Nebila Qaraouli, Amina Fakhet, Kacem Kefi, Safoua, Mounira Hamdi, Fawzi Ben Gamra, Hédi Habbouba. He told me that he had found, himself, now-famed singers Nour Chiba and Walid Ettounisi, plucked them from obscurity and made them into stars. Sometimes he would divide his lists of names rather according to generation. Phonie had reproduced the recordings of the 'old generation' that had been stored in the RTT: the singers of the RTT such as Habiba Msika, Hédi Jouini, Ali Riyahi, Saliha, for instance. And sometimes he would offset all of these names, placed in the '*tunisi*' 'tunisian' category, with '*gharbi*' 'western' and '*sharqi*' 'eastern'. Through deals with foreign companies, he told me he brought the voice of George Wassouf to Tunis. And in the *gharbi* category were names such as Michael Jackson.¹⁷⁶ Again and again, it was 'everyone' and 'everything'.

¹⁷⁶ A favourite of Tunisians, particularly since his concert in El Menzah in 1996.

Besides an 'inclusion' of all these different voices, Phonie created certain kinds of object in particular which were described as responding to the desires of a 'mass', of 'Tunisians': certain 'evolved' kind of *fann sh'abi*, and 'cocktail' objects.

Niez impressed upon me that whilst Phonie had dealt with 'everything', there was a particular emphasis on *fann sh'abi*, which he described as including the styles of *zokra*, *gasba* and *mezoued*. He himself was a fan of *fann sh'abi*, he told me – but more than this, it was something that was in the 'blood' of all Tunisians. He told me that you might see someone driving a Mercedes and think they are *labess 'alih* (doing well), but then when they wind their window down they'll be listening to *mezoued* – because in the end, everyone's origins are *sh'abi*. So he describes how, throughout the 80s and 90s, he would find and promote *fann sh'abi* musicians – but that, more than that, he would '*yṭawr*', 'evolve' it. This 'evolving' involved the ways in which it was sonically put together. Mezoued musicians, described by Niez as 'uneducated', would be spotted for their voices; a team of writers employed by the cassette companies would write a song for them; and then, most importantly, there would be a new combination of instruments brought in at the time of recording. It wasn't only the sounds of the *mezoued* and the percussion instruments on the recording; there were instruments that Niez first described as '*sharqi*', then as '*gharbi*': the electric guitar and bass, the *orgue*, and a drum kit. Niez describes how the musicians of these instruments were, at first, unused to playing in these configurations with the *mezoued* genre – but they got used to it.

The 'cocktail' was described as another important innovation of these industries – and it is something that everyone I spoke to working in these industries claimed for themselves. A 'cocktail' is a kind of 'mix tape' – a tape which is constructed from multiple tracks, brought together under a single curating idea. People suggested to me that cocktails came about with cassettes, and continued through into CDs and even DVDs (which stored Mp3s rather than audio tracks). As has been pointed out to me, cocktails are not exclusive to these industries, and their 'origins' are ambiguous – a friend suggested the structure came from the 'billboard' recordings, tapes of hits that were imported from the U.S. But Niez claims a particular trajectory for the cocktail in Tunis. He told me that he got the idea from a Lebanese tape that had combined several of its stars on a single object – he told me that he did the same for Tunisians, then mixing them with other artists from the Arab world, and

eventually combining ‘*arbi*’ and ‘*gharbi*’ on the same object.¹⁷⁷ The cocktail came across in two ways through conversations with industry workers: as an expanding object, which would bring in gradually wider geographical areas into a single object, and also as an object of *jaww*, focusing on *fann sh’abi*, which would be played by people during festivities and before weddings. Cocktails are sonic mixes but also visual collages: their playlists are mirrored by, and interact with, the visual collage mix on the paper sleeve.¹⁷⁸ Niez told me that these objects were the most popular ones because they were what the Tunisian listener wanted – after all, he describes, the Tunisian listener is ‘open to everything’, and has the potential to enjoy music from ‘everywhere’.

¹⁷⁷ Versions of this history differ widely and are doubted by others. Héchmi Ben Frej didn’t seem to think that Tunisian artists would have accepted to be featured on cocktails because they are too guarded of their products. He thought it was something that came about primarily with radios, rather than with cassettes. But I found many cassette cocktails in the shops, suggesting that these industries were widely involved in cocktails.

¹⁷⁸ These collages could spark quite vivid anecdotes from certain people involved in their construction. This happened when I brandished a number of ‘cocktail’ albums in front of someone with experience in one of the companies. He first assumed that I might want my own picture to be put on one of them – and proceeded to tell me that they used images of ‘beautiful women’ to adorn certain cassettes and CDs of *fann sh’abi*, because ‘that’s what people like.’ It struck me, looking through my collection, that many women, particularly those wearing wedding dresses, were white. The same person told me about a time when he needed to shroud the identity of a poet whose poetry was critical of the Bourguiban regime – he did so using the image of a random Sudanese musician that he had found on another record, using a derogatory term for a Black person in his description. These exchanges made me think about the iconographic logics at play on other covers. Baffling, for instance, is the use of camels on an album about Jendouba – an area of Tunis in the North renowned for its green, and devoid of camels. Is this a lazy, clichéd representation of a ‘region’? What is it serving to do? Clearly, here, a racist and regionalist hierarchisation of identities was used to generate and sell many of these collage covers – and whilst we don’t know how this would have been received, what impression this may or may not have made on people, we wonder whether this racial messaging might have been particularly pernicious precisely because it was carried by seemingly mundane objects with unclear temporal trajectories. Histories of these individual objects and their effects are difficult to trace and perhaps need an ‘object-centred’ approach.



Fig. 20: An example of a recent 'cocktail': *Cocktail mouch normal*, October 2020

Extending Mbembe's thinking on the relationships between 'fragments' of the archive and the 'stories' created around them, we could posit that there is something intriguing happening with these cocktail objects. Mbembe suggested that fragments of the archive could be put together into stories which would acquire coherence as a 'product of composition', creating an 'illusion of totality and continuity'; it is around this that a 'community of time' could be formed around the archive (Mbembe 2002, 20). In the case of these cocktail objects, it seems that it is exactly this which was desired; but these 'communities of time' are imagined to come together through the composition of tracks and images, which are the things which give an 'illusion of totality and continuity' on single objects.

And the shops scattered around Tunis, particularly the ones around the *centreville* of Tunis, became actors in this discourse on 'everything'; in the 1980s and 1990s, I am told, they were

there to serve ‘everyone’, and where ‘everyone’ thus congregated. All shop workers and previous employees tell me that ‘everyone’ had bought items from these shops: young, old, rich, poor, men, women. Indeed, the ‘everything’ of the shop, coming together in crowds of plastic objects, and the ‘everyone’ of the *centreville*, coming together in crowds of bodies, seem to mediate each other as they come together as masses of bodies and objects.

Archives of objects mediating archives of people, perhaps, and vice versa.

Was the ‘everyone’ and ‘everything’ of Niez and the shop workers the same sort of ‘everyone’ of the Bourguiban regime’s conception of a homogenous, unified nation? The discourses of Niez sat in an intriguing and ambiguous place alongside the sorts of discourses of ‘*tunisianité*’ and the Tunisian listener that we heard about in the first chapter. Much of what Niez told me seemed to be very much in keeping with a Bourguiban sense of culture and *tunisianité*: the idea that Tunisians are open to ‘everything’, particularly a mixture of ‘*tunisi*, *gharbi* and *sharqi*’. Niez’s ‘everything’ was also defined against sounds which he considered too vulgar to be included: those of the rappers and rap songs which contained too many immoral themes and vulgar language. When he was talking to me about these styles, he seemed indeed to be performing to me a certain desire for an ‘epistemological purification’ of the sonic which was similar to that which came across to me in interviews with Héchmi Ben Frej. But the ‘epistemologically pure’, for Niez, seemed to include different sounds and structures – indeed, many sounds of his aesthetic innovations were the same that were rejected from state and more official conceptions of the ‘cultural’.

3.5 Hearing ‘vulgarity’ and the ‘modern’, feeling ‘*jaww*’

I went and listened to the things that came up in conversation with Niez, the things which for him were innovative and indicative of a general Tunisian listener – the desires of the mass. I listened to the song ‘*El Hob S3ib*’, ‘Love is hard’, by Nour Chiba, one of the singers particularly prized by Phonie.¹⁷⁹ The YouTube video is a still image of the singer with a

¹⁷⁹ See here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=717p7ylz_xs (Nour Chiba 2021, نور شيبه)

Phonie logo to the side.¹⁸⁰ The song's structure is carried by the *mezoued* rhythm which loops on, and its cleanly clipped sound betrays a potential loop on a keyboard, its texture 'embellished' also by motifs with a synthesised *orgue* sound, as well as those of synthesised strings. Chiba's voice reigns over these backing sounds, as well as those of backing singers which interject periodically.

I also found, in one of the cassette shops, a cassette which had been explicitly referenced by Niez as being innovative. He referenced the sounds of Mourad Al Boraai, who, in the 90s, mixed *mezoued* with beats and phrases from Michael Jackson's 'Beat It' on a tape called 'Cocktail Michael Jackson'. I listened to it at home, back in the UK, with my old cassette player. You can listen too at Media 7, which I shot whilst listening. The tracks contain mixes of the macarena, Michael Jackson lyric phrases, and phrases of Borai singing. Throughout the tape, there is a consistent *mezoued* rhythm in the background, a *mezoued* instrument which comes in, a chorus, as well as a bass riff which jumps back and forth between a tonic and a dominant.

And I found many cocktail objects in the *centreville* shops, and I bought lots of them. My collection includes a cassette labelled '*min hna w hnek*', 'From here and there', adorned with Shakira, Jilana and Ziram, Mounira El Sahaliya, Haifa Wahbi, 50 Cent and others. Putting the cassette in my cassette player and pressing play, I was greeted by a sonic 'intro' at the start of the mixes, listed on the playlist as '*muqadama Remix Tunis Cassette*' 'Introduction remix Tunis Cassette', which amounted to a splicing together of a few phrases of each of the songs that would be featured on the rest of the cocktail, with a little sonic jingle of a woman's voice saying '*Tunis Cassette, tuqadam*', 'Tunis Cassette introduces'. The splicing is unmixed in the sense of an overlapping of the sounds of each separate part, but it is continuous. There is an example of this in Media 8, taken from the cassette '*min hna w hnek*' as I played it at home – we are taken through snippets of several of the songs on the cassette, phrases of which are joined together in the breaks between the phrases. The sounds correspond to the images of people and the words of their song titles. A song begins and ends, and we're on to the next one.

¹⁸⁰ This is intriguing considering that, as we will come to, I was assured that Phonie is no longer involved with music production, and this was uploaded only one year ago. Another example perhaps of Tunis's archival situation coming together to blur histories?

As I listened to these recordings, alone and also with others, it was possible to hear in them many things. Indeed, my descriptions are not neutral. These '*fann sh'abi*' recordings, 'cocktail' and '*jaww*' objects, seemed to generate many meanings – but more than that, their ontologies shift for different people; they seem to *be* several different things at once, 'assemblages' which would be 'enacted and experienced by subjects' in different ways (Born 2022, 25). As such, they slot differently into stories of Tunisian listening and listeners, depending on whose ears are hearing them, and how.

For Niez, these cocktail sounds, and the sounds of this 'evolved' *mezoued*, are the sounds which are specifically 'modern'; Niez described them to me the things that the modern Tunisian would want. But it struck me that the sorts of sonic divisions in the recordings of *fenn sh'abi* and *mezoued* of Nour Chiba and Mourad Borai were exactly those that went against the epistemologies of purification so desired by Faisal and Jihane of the National Radio in their version of sonic modernity: these were the sounds that were considered 'commercial' and 'vulgar' rather than the 'revisité'. Ramzi Abdelwaheb himself, the *mezoued* artist whom Faisal uses as his example of 'commercial' rather than *revisité*, was recorded by Phonie. In his recordings, and those of Nour Chiba, we note the ways in which the rhythmic logic continues to work according to a kind of *jaww*, rather than a more specific recognising and separating out of sonic strands; the ways that bass lines are rooted more in Western harmonic structures; the ways that sounds that could be recognised as amplified acoustic or electronic rather than synthesised: these were the sounds of 'bad taste' by Faisal, thus not remediated by Panorama. And I realised that it was this approach to sound which required a separating out of sounds in ways which allowed them to be placed within a 'modern ecumene', which I personally was absorbing in my efforts to be close to certain people. I noticed this during my filming of the Mourad Al Boraai cassette that we saw just now – at the time, I hadn't been filming this for the thesis, but to send to Radhi and Rania, so that we could have a laugh at the ways that the *mezoued*, Michael Jackson and macarena phrases are mixed together.

The recording objects invited a certain disdain as I was listening through them with another friend, Aymen. We sat with my collection as well as his family's collection and a cassette player in his mother's dance studio, and listened through a number of our cassettes. It was the style of the cocktail which we heard above that made him cringe – the joins between the

songs were considered to be incoherent, and the whole object was taken as a kind of endorsement of a wrong treatment of sound, bad taste and actively damaging. The styles of the pictorial collages on the front of one of the CDs was also jarring – something which was taken to scream ‘amateur’ and ‘bad quality’.

Indeed, it felt like the problem was with more than just the sounds – it was the sounds in conjunction with their industrial processes. For Aymen, there were ‘originals’ and there were ‘copies’ – and it seemed to be the qualities of the textual marks that generated feelings of ‘originality.’ There were certain cassettes in his collection which he suggested were definitely original – these included a Ridha Diki cassette¹⁸¹, a well-loved object which took pride of place in his family’s collection with its nice illustrations and visual coherence. For Aymen, these were of different status to the cassettes which I had bought recently from the shops, which for him were clearly copies, unoriginal. To make matters worse, these ‘clearly pirated’ objects have a ‘CD original’ icon scattered over them. So the issue was not that only that things were pirated – it was that things were pirated whilst *masquerading* as being original in a way which wasn’t even trying to be particularly convincing. In their constructions of these objects, the companies can be seen to work both against the type of epistemological purification required by state cultural workers, and *also* against their desire for correct industrial process, for the generation and protection of ‘originals’ which would work according to copyright.

¹⁸¹ Ridha Diki is a celebrated figure on the ‘alternative’ scene.



Fig. 21: Mulling over cassettes with Aymen, El Menzah, November 2020

Things get even more complicated on this point of copyright. We've seen that the cultural workers of the state have a stake in notions of 'original' music, linked with copyright. M'barek Rais attempts in her text to paint an image of a plethora of copyright laws and a working rights association, OTDAV, whose work is curtailed by the rights violations of the pirates. But the extent to which this is true is widely challenged. Many artists claim never to have received any reimbursements from the OTDAV, which is itself convicted of being corrupt.¹⁸² When I went to OTDAV to ask about the rights situation, the director reeled off the list of conventions and laws that I had already read about on the website, and referred me on to the person who works with radios, who promised to email me some information – this never came. So I wondered whether the cassette and CD industries evoked such disdain

¹⁸² This attitude was on display particularly during a copyright event held at the IHEC business school by the French rights organisation SACEM in March 2019. The event came within SACEM's efforts to expand into 'Africa', where they considered there to be a lot of 'potential' but underdeveloped rights infrastructures. The Tunisian artists and musicians present at the event seemed to be both highly critical of the state copyright systems, which they suggested were not operational, and also sceptical of SACEM's efforts of expansion into 'Africa'.

also because they essentially proved the extent to which copyright doesn't function. The objects are flagrant proof of this.

But for the shop assistant that was helping me find the cassettes and CDs with *jaww* written on them in one of the CD and cassette shops, the objects that we were gathering in our arms were not things that entered into discussions of copyright or industry. They *were jaww*, and the *jaww* was the rhythms that were vibrating through the objects, the specific lists of things on the cassettes, the collages. I put it to her that I was looking for 'things with the word *jaww* written on the covers' – but she didn't understand this as a construction, but rather as thing with its own specific sonic and visual qualities: 'like what we're hearing now?', she said, gesturing to the speakers at the front of the shop. *Jaww* was the atmosphere of celebration, of weddings, the atmosphere which would move the body into dance in specific social contexts. These cassettes *were jaww*; there wasn't any necessary distinction between the materials, their sounds, and the sorts of atmosphere that they transported the listener to. She handed me objects such as the following: the CD '*jaww rbou5at 2*' adorned with pictures of various *mzawedi* and *fann sh'abi* artists; '*Lemma w jaww*' (gathering and *jaww*); '*jaww el a3ress*', wedding *jaww*.

The majority of these covers making explicit reference to *jaww* seemed to have a kind of *fann sh'abi* anchor to the communities gathered on them. And many of these *jaww* and cocktail recordings, when I came to play them, would amount to a continuous stream of songs and rhythms which were not separated clearly into tracks; some of the *jaww* recordings amounted to 40 minutes of a single track, which contained the sonic ebbs and flows of various unnamed songs and voices. But not all of them. Many of them also included figures from across the Middle Eastern and Western industries, including one called 'Ajwaa Charkia' denoting things with a more Middle Eastern vibe; several things labelled '*mella jaww*' (what fun, what *jaww*) with no explicit reference to *fann sh'abi*, '*jawwek ahla jaww*' 'your *jaww* is the best *jaww*', and *jaww* CDs making reference to places, such as Jendouba, and Bou Salem. So in another sense, the collection of cocktails seemed to be challenging the remit of *jaww*, or alluding to, playing on, its ontological multiplicity.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ My collection included many others: Cocktails expand across CDs. These include 'cocktail mouch normal' ('mouch normal', literally 'not normal', is a phrase used to express exclamation, a bit like 'wow') – a CD cover which is populated with a collage of the various figures featured on the CD, names of their songs, and other



Fig. 22: A CD of *jaww*, entitled *jaww fi jandouba*, ‘*jaww* in Jendouba’, October 2020¹⁸⁴

I experienced *jaww* from a CD in the hours of preparation leading up to a wedding celebration in the Southern Suburb of Hammam Lif. The living room of the little house of some of my friends’ cousins was packed full of relatives from all corners of the city. We sat and sat and chatted, and in the lulls of conversation there were regular calls for *shwaya*

decorative pictures and words: a blue studded door, the ‘mechmoum’ flowers that people tuck behind their ears when out in the summer. The people featured include Zaza, Asma, Hédi Donia – we’ve seen all of these before on YouTube, and here they are on the same surface. Some cocktails seem to be more explicitly shaped around times – they have times or seasons marked on them, the word posed as the organising theme for this particular curation of images and songs. This is the case for the mp3 compilation of ‘deep hits’ around the Summer of 2019, another ‘Summer Playlist’, and a ‘Spécial Rentrée 2020’ which seems themed around the September return to school and work following the summer. Others were shaped explicitly around ‘moods’ – 7ozen, sadness, was a theme on some, such as this ‘a7zen hawa’, and another with more mezuoued. The most plentiful cocktail type were those formed under the bracket of the word ‘*jaww*’. These included CDs such as ‘*jaww rbou5at 2*’, adorned with pictures of various *mzawedi* and *fann sh’abi* artists; ‘*Lemma w jaww*’ (gathering and *jaww*); ‘*jaww el a3ress*’, wedding *jaww*. They also included a TK7 cassette with ‘*jaww 100%*’ and the pictures of people from David Guetta, Crazy Frog and Jamila; ‘*Ajwaa Charkia*’ denoting things with a more Middle Eastern vibe; several things labelled ‘*mella jaww*’ (what fun, what *jaww*), ‘*jaww ek ahla jaww*’; and *jaww* CDs making reference to places, such as Jendouba, and Bou Salem.

¹⁸⁴ Jandouba is a city and region in the North West.

jaww, 'a bit of *jaww*', at which point 'play' would be pressed on the CD player perched on the threshold of the room, and sounds of *mezoued* rhythms would swim around the room. Certain family members would get up and dance, others would clap. Clearly, even in a YouTube age, these CDs are still good at providing *shwaya jaww* in certain situations.

So these cassettes and CDs are tricky objects. They can be offset with various different ways of listening to become different things: proof of a failed music industry, of a corruption of 'correct' process and of bad taste; of modernity, *jaww*, the sounds of the Tunisian mass.

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The time of the cassette and the CD is largely considered to be over. This is something that most people who work in the industries seemed to agree on. '*M'adsh*', 'it's no more', the shop workers would say to me – no one buys cassettes and CDs anymore. As I spoke to Niez in the Phonie offices, a faint whirring of machines signalled in one of the corners of the factor behind us signalled Phonie's change in direction – towards packaging, boardgames, and children's books.

People have different ideas about the precise causes of the demise of the industry. For Niez, as well as many others that I spoke to, the Revolution killed the industry: with the opening of YouTube, as well as societal changes in taste and listening habit, no one wanted to buy cassettes and CDs anymore. For another Phonie employee, the problem was that these companies couldn't update their infrastructures to move into a digital era. 'It has nothing to do with the Revolution', he told me, 'if it hadn't been YouTube it would have been something else'. He told me that the companies should have developed to include live music economies in their remit of control, and to offer their artists deals for an online presence. But they didn't, and now the industries are no more.

I'd suggest, however, that the cassette and CD mediations are still present in Tunis, in multiple and different ways. Besides instances of mediation in domestic space such as that just described, I think that their legacies can be heard in public and semi-public space, mediated sonically all over the city, in the arrangements of *fann sh'abi* in weddings, cabarets and nightclubs; but also, most importantly, in the cocktail structures that underpin live performance and the algorithm of the most important radio station, Mosaique FM. Through this, use of the cocktail structure to mediate a sonic 'mass' continues. Meanwhile, the shops,

also, are still present, with organising logics that still inform listeners; but their layers of dust, the presence of the digital in the form of YouTube, and the success of their cocktails all contribute to a dwindling visibility.

3.6 Sounds of mixes and masses – audible mediations across the city

Many of the musical and sonic elements which were identified by Niez and others as having been championed *first* by the cassette and CD industries continue to wield a very strong presence in Tunis. Regardless of the precise causal logics, which remain unclear and difficult to trace, there is cause to suggest that the *logics* underpinning the archives of these cassette and CD shops are spread sonically throughout the public spaces of the city on a daily basis – and that they continue to mediate particular senses of ‘mass’ which constantly rub in tension against efforts to purify in conflicting projects of modernity animating the ‘aural public sphere’.

The innovation that Niez was describing to me in *fann sh‘abi* – which saw him add ‘bass’, ‘*orgue*’ and ‘percussion’ to mezoued – is something which one hears across the city constantly. It now has quite a long legacy in live performance: large manifestations of *fann sh‘abi* such as the ‘*nouba*’ spectacles in the 1990s, as well as the subsequent, more recent, *El-Hadhra* and *Ziara* have all made use of various forms of arrangement which would be considered to be combinations of the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ through their combinations of instruments.¹⁸⁵ But these sorts of sounds can be heard also in smaller, more condensed versions, which retain this same sense of mix. They can be heard, for instance, in the activities of single ‘*orgue*’ players who animate proceedings at weddings as well as in the restaurant spectacle and the cabarets of the *centreville*: these musicians use their instruments to superimpose many sonic layers of backing, percussion, bass, voice, and even

¹⁸⁵ This has been discussed by Jankowsky in reference to the Hadhra spectacle directed by Fadhel Jaziri. He talks about how, indeed, ‘*El-Hadhra* was described by many as a product of Jaziri’s artistry, a modernized spectacle, adhering not to the cultural expectations of Sufism but rather to those of the artistic “cocktail” or *shakshuka* (lit. “mixture,” referring to a breakfast stew), the cut-and-paste theatrical approach that commonly animates institutionalized musical performances in Tunisia’. (Jankowsky 2021, 196-197). It is intriguing to think of this ‘cut-and-paste’ in light of cocktail tape and CD objects which, literally, cut and paste. It has also been discussed by Saidi in relation to the 1990s Nouba event, in which he reads into this ‘mix’ an attempt at ‘*tunisianité*’. (H. Saidi & Kilani, 2017)

recorded ululation which are stored as a sample on the instruments. The precise relationship of these practices and sounds with the sorts of sonic shizophonia and assemblages of the cassette and CD industries requires more attention – it would be a mistake to read a clear causal relationship without more research. But it is possible to postulate that these sounds existed, and continue to exist, in relationship to each other as similar sorts of sonic generation of *jaww*.

But it's the cocktail innovation which is the really notable structure that underpins so much listening in the contemporary city. As we have seen, many bands that play live sets in cafés, bars and nightclubs, identify and are identified as 'cocktail' bands. Groups such as Mortadha, The Brothers and Fehmi Riahi and others that we saw in the YouTube chapter all engage with this constant rolling through various different kinds of song, which come together to create the *jaww* of the evening. In one of Mortadha's sets in nightclub The Roof, the set rolled through the following: a song by Ridha Diki, Nabila Karaouli song *Hiz Eyounik*, *Tesher 'ainik* by *mezoued* singer Samir Loussif, *Aman Aman* by Mortadha himself, *Lachatemi Cantare* by Italian singer-songwriter Toto Cutugno, *Kan Anna Tahoun* by Lebanese Fairouz, *Yanjoum Ellil* by Hicham Salem, and many more. Radhi, who worked in Mortadha's band, gave me some clues as to the construction of the set: songs that are currently popular in various ways are brought together into musical logics that string them together according to key and rhythm, the aim being to roll through the cocktail in a way that hits various climatic points throughout the evening. I was struck by the similarities here not in repertoire or style, but in the similar kinds of logic that seem to glue together the live cocktails of Mortadha and the kinds of cocktails that we see in cassettes and CDs: an intention to bring parts together into something resembling a whole – but a whole which is still based on the variety of its parts. The potential link between the activities of these groups, and the sorts of epistemologies espoused by the construction of cassette and CD cocktails, was highlighted to me by Niez: in our interview, he explicitly mentioned the activities of Mourad Boraai and his Michael Jackson cocktail with Fehmi Riahi: after bemoaning the current state of music scenes, he said 'who's the one who does *mezoued* and fusion in the bars? Fehmi Riahi. It's good, what he's doing, it's innovative.'

The cocktail phenomenon is most clear, and perhaps most important, as it manifests in Mosaïque FM, a private radio station and the most widely listened-to radio station in the

country. Started up in 2004, it was the first private radio station allowed under Ben Ali – though it reportedly had close links with the regime at the time. Afterall, as Chouikha details, Bel Ali maintained a firm grip on the media domain, using private media channels to feign liberalisation whilst continuing to control them (Chouikha, 2007a).¹⁸⁶ But it was very popular, especially with youth, and was well known for its music choices and its use of Tunisian dialect rather than French or the Arabic of the national radio. Musical programming was always a key part of its success, and Niez told me that when Mosaïque was started up in 2004, he gave them his full catalogue to be played on the radio, so that he would have publicity.

These days, Mosaïque continually retains its spot as the ‘number one radio’, and, as I am told by the DJs, music is still a key part of this success, with long musical ‘corridors’ programmed in alongside programmes.¹⁸⁷ As a listener, I’d already noted that Mosaïque FM seemed to constantly exhibit a switching between the various popular sounds of the Tunisian, Middle Eastern and Western repertoires. But it wasn’t until I started to talk to people involved in radio, eventually getting the chance to observe Mosaïque FM DJs at work, that I realised that the ‘cocktail’ between ‘*tunisi*, *sharqi* and *gharbi*’, as well as between things with different degrees of ‘newness’ (divided into Hit, Hot Now, Gold, *Rassurant*, and *Nostaglie*), is something that is embedded at the centre of Mosaïque’s curatorial line. The ‘aesthetic work’ of constructing playlists is now performed by DJs in conjunction with the algorithm that they have built into the software suite Nettia. As one DJ put it, the material that they bring into Mosaïque is ‘divided so that after it can be combined’. Each item that sits in the database is categorised according to the major categories of ‘*tunisi*’, ‘*sharqi*’ and ‘*gharbi*’, as well as stylistic subcategories, and labelled according to age and speed. Then, things are combined together in playlists which *insist* on a constant switching between these

¹⁸⁶ See Chouikha for details of the private media relationships with the regime (Chouikha, 2007a), Achour Kallel for a discussion of use of language and linguistic ‘code-switching’ on Mosaïque FM (Achour Kallel, 2011).

¹⁸⁷ In this, it uses techniques that resemble those of private radios in other situations – see the work of Berland on private radio and ‘industrial time’; she suggests that music is part of the ‘productive apparatus reconstructing both space and time’ (Berland 1990, 181), though we could perhaps disagree here with her assertion that music is also a ‘primary instrument of commercial radio’s delocalisation’; this is about the construction of a local and national space. See also Lindsay, Kaplan and Hilmes on private radio roles in other settings (Hilmes, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Lindsay, 1997).

different poles of the pool: I was told that in each set of three songs, there had to be at least two *sharqi* and one *gharbi*, or vice versa.

When I asked directly in the radio whether there was a link here with the cassette and CD industries – whether the idea of the cocktail had come from there – the DJs didn't know, and one told me simply that it had 'always been like this'. It is this formula which is considered to be what the Tunisian listener wants, what will 'stop them from zapping', as the DJs told me. It seems difficult for anyone to put a finger on *why* it's like this...DJs suggest simply that it's because 'that's what Tunisians like' – or 'Tunisians like the two, oriental and occidental'.

But what was once a new conception of radio has stuck, and has become a norm which others followed – and Mosaïque has gone from being the first radio of its kind to the quintessential example of 'generalist' radio amongst a sea of others, including Shems FM, IFM, Jawhara FM, which all follow this same formula of a constant switch between 'oriental' and 'occidental'. We can hear an example of this, played in a taxi that I took in January 2019: Media 9 is a snippet of a broadcast by IFM, taken as we rolled along, in which the end of Egyptian singer Mohamed Fouad's song '*El Hob El Ha2e2y*' is played, there's an IFM jingle, and the beginning of American singer LeAnn Rimes's 'How Do I Live'. This switching between styles is something which is so ubiquitous that it is unremarkable; and indeed the extent to which it is heard as a cocktail could be questioned.

Whether or not there is a direct causal link between cassette and CD cocktails and these cocktails of the 'généraliste' radios, there is clearly a similar logic to that which we find in cassette and CD cocktails: an intention to bring parts together into something resembling a whole – but a whole which is still based on the variety of its parts – and a sound in which a certain *jaww* of the mix can be felt. We suggested in the last chapter that Mosaïque structures its sense of the 'mainstream' from YouTube view counters, mediating certain sounds which are *visibly* popular such as the viral songs of Soolking – but here we see that its sense of a mainstream sound, and its mediation of a mainstream in Tunis, might also find resonance with an older assemblage, that of the cassette. Indeed, as we were listening to the cocktails in Aymen's mother's dance studio, Aymen made a face and said: 'you can see where Mosaïque gets it from.'

The implications of this are actually very significant. Borrowing from Kaplan's work on radio, we can suggest that playlisters work to 'encode' a 'national imaginary' (Kaplan, 2012); and this one is specific. The suggestion is that the listener of Mosaïque, or of any *généraliste* radio station – which, let's not forget, is considered the *general* Tunisian listener, the *mainstream* listener – is someone whose sense of reassurance, of winding down, of relaxing, of comfortable distraction, is something which is thought to *depend* on the popular and familiar *gharbi* and *sharqi* being *close together but not mixed*. It's as if the Tunisian listener is considered fundamentally composite, and with the radio, or with any playlist, that composition is temporal as well as spatial – indeed, they are still someone who occupies the 'community of time' spun through this specific *tunisi, sharqi, gharbi* 'composition of fragments' which give an 'illusion of coherence and totality' (Mbembe, 2002).

And there's another link between the shops and Mosaïque FM. Until recently, Mosaïque FM would also get a sense of who this 'everyone' actually was from the *centreville* – similarly to the shops, stationed in the *centreville*. Mosaïque FM uses media survey companies such as Media Scan and SIGMA conseil to 'understand' their publics – or indeed to construct them as statistics. When I spoke to representatives from both SIGMA conseil and Media Scan, they told me that, until relatively recently, they would go to the *centreville* spaces such as the Avenue Bourguiba to carry out their surveys – they would stop people on their way through the space in order to ask them about their radio listening habits. So there is a curious affinity here; in each case, it seems that there is an attempt to mediate a 'mass' through cocktails; that senses of this 'mass' came from the *centreville* spaces; and that these spaces themselves were animated by the shops and their cocktails. There seems to be a certain ecology of senses of the 'mass' here, which both Mosaïque FM and the cassette CD shops participate in, but which still have a spatial centre in the streets of the *centreville*.

But *do* the shops still participate in this mediation of 'mass'? Simultaneous to this potential widening and embedding of these sonic structures as they are mediated across the city by the radio, the shops, their time and their objects, appear to be dwindling.

3.7 The shops, their dust and their time

There is a high level of open distain directed towards the people who work in these shops, as well as the shops themselves and their wider *centreville* urban environments, on the part of certain groups; particularly younger people, cultural workers, and middle classes. In fact, I was warned many times not to go near them. One person described them as 'like mafia', another person as 'uneducated', another as 'not polite', or 'not interested in culture.' The industries are considered by many to have been aligned in some way with the regime of Ben Ali, indicative of the kind of industrial dominance which could only come through bribes and corruption. To my knowledge, there have been no attempts to siphon objects into the national *phonothèque*. The monumental piles of cassettes are growing in the shops, and the last I heard the shop owners were wondering how best to completely dispose of 1 million plastic objects. I was told that the reason why the remaining shops contain so many different objects from so many different branches of the cassette and CD industry is because when all of the companies folded, one by one, they would offload their produce onto this one network of shops. Since my research started in this area, nearly half of these last standing shops that I used to go to have been closed down, or turned into something else.

The back parts of the shops, the parts which feel more like disorganised warehouses, resemble what William Straw has termed 'cultural waste.' Straw, in his discussion of second hand vinyl stores and flea markets in Canada, describes the piling up of old, unwanted records as amounting to a kind of 'museum of failure' that achieves a certain 'monumentality', in the way that objects collect in spaces. (Straw, 2000). This is the 'ballast' – these recordings 'stand as a public record or display of cultural production'. This is very much the sense that we get at the back of the shops: the piles of cassettes have a monumental quality to their heaps, and feelings of 'waste' are exacerbated by the thick layers of dust coating the objects. Indeed, after rifling through these piles the shop assistant would offer me a bottle of water and a bar of soap that they kept by the till, so that I could wash my hands – further situating the objects as a site of waste that one needed to be cleansed of.

The front parts of the shop are still...shop. People go to them, albeit occasionally. There are paths which thread through the shops between requests, guidance, and the patterns luring people in. And, these objects are *not* second hand. They are the same things traded in the same shops that have been working right through the last three decades, and they possibly

haven't majorly changed since the 80s and 90s. There are even relatively new items at the front – things that carry dates of the 2010s. This makes the shop spaces in Tunis fundamentally different from Straw's spaces – Straw remarks upon the 'similarities in the ways that different national cultures cast off the same sorts of cultural waste' (Straw, 2000), but here we have a 'national' context in which cultural waste does not need spaces of second hand economies to collect in. It rather sediments alongside other identical objects which are still actively moving, determined as waste more by its treatment in these places than by any institutional separation.

But against this continued presence there is a kind of invisibilisation operating on several levels. Despite the fact that there was even the occasional new release, everyone spoke as if the shops had completely disappeared – even from inside them. This temporal clash was also present, and most pronounced, in this set of shops where most of my collection comes from. Workers would frequently tell me that the industry was 'no longer', that people no longer bought CDs and cassettes. One time, in exasperation at a shop assistant who consistently changed the subject whenever I tried to ask him about objects surrounding us, I exclaimed, gesturing at the cassettes, that 'this stuff is important!' 'This is important?' he asked, thoroughly unimpressed – 'no, people here don't think that this is important.'

From these shops, the post-revolutionary moment seemed to amount to a temporal rupture, which could lead to feelings of pastness. I got the distinct impression that these shops and industries had previously afforded the people working for them the feeling that they knew how society worked – and that with the changes in the post-revolutionary social and media landscape, this possibility had shifted. Previously, they had witnessed and participated in the 'masses' of objects mediating the 'masses' of people. One person told me how he sold so many cassettes because he 'understood' what people liked, he 'knows Tunisians.' With YouTube, the capacity to understand the public has changed. Niez spent much of our interview in diatribe on this subject: 'I'm sorry but Youtube isn't a *repère* (bearing). Everything that's electronic...it works on numbers of views. So I'm sorry but now I'm browsing in Youtube, something comes in front of me, I don't know if I'll like it or not, I could listen to it and not like it and stop it, but it's still a view. So the number of views...when

does it turn into a true *repère*? When it's downloaded. But if you come and tell me you have 1 million views...with CDs, if you sell 100,000, it means 100,000 like it. You see what I mean? So the Youtube thing... *aḥkeya fargha* (useless).' There was a certain attitude of 'pastness' and unimportance thus attributed to the cassette and CD objects; and this was extended to the people who would come into the shops to buy them. Once a space for 'everyone', the only people still using the shops, one person told me, were those who are 'uneducated,' from the '*reef*' (rural areas), and 'old'.

YouTube, also, had seemed to participate in a consumption of the stories of CD objects, and the human work behind them. When I asked in the shop about a new product that had suddenly appeared – about who made them, and why, and how they decided what to put on them – someone took the album from my hands and pointed out that these are easy to make, and people just make them from YouTube. They work out what people like from YouTube and they turn this into a CD – and they assured me that it had always been like that.

And there is a last, more ironic possibility for the dwindling attention: the cocktail form itself, and the ways in which it circulates around the shop and the surrounding urban area.

After a while of going and sitting in the shops, I started to write things in my notes such as: 'I can't remember anything about any of the music that was played.' It was almost always a cocktail – but it was the very fact that it was almost always a cocktail, and that the beads of this cocktail, the individual songs, were so widely repeated, that rendered them so unremarkable as to be completely unmemorable. And this was exacerbated, I think, by the situation of the shops. I mentioned earlier that the shop playlists were engineered to be in keeping with the times of day – *Koran* in the morning, *fann sh'abi* in the afternoon, and *tarab* in the evening. I suggested that, in this way, the playlists were animating the streets. But the temporalizing work of the shop was easily lost, or blended in, to the same sonic temporalizing which is carried out across several mediating spaces in the urban areas surrounding the shops. The *Koran* in the morning seeps out of the shop as it does the café a few doors along, and bakeries on the next street. The *fann sh'abi* and the *tarab* do the same, refracted also around the tobacco stalls, the market stalls and the mattress stalls lining Place de la Monnaie. The irony here is that the very same shops that will have, in the 1980s and 1990s, provided the sonic material to surrounding commercial spaces for their own senses

of animation and *jaww*, are now fading into invisibility and inaudibility underneath the repetition of these sounds. In this sense, we might imagine that they are, at least in part, victims of their own success.

Mbembe talks about the ‘chronography’ enacted by the state when the past is consumed into the archive, ordered and created – here there is something different going on, because the state doesn’t judge these objects important or threatening enough to be consumed. The cassettes and CDs are left to collect dust, and there is a different power being exercised over them – the power of attention removal, a situation in which objects and people are so removed from certain areas of public sphere that they are considered to pose no threat. It is presumed that these things – particularly the cocktails – have no power on their own. And yet, at the same time, their ‘compositions’, through which the fragments are drawn together into ‘communities of time’ are things which sonically mediate their own ‘communities of time’, across the city on a daily basis.

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In the absence of specific histories about the circulation of things, contradictory discourses about ‘*Tunisianité*’ or about a certain ‘Tunisian’ nature of ‘openness to everything’ on the one hand, and about the denigration of ‘Tunisian taste’ or ‘Tunisian mentality’ – are very easily perpetuated and plaqued on to these shop archives and their dealings. I witnessed this in several spaces. We saw how, in both the shops and in Mosaïque FM, the ‘cocktail’ mix is justified by suggesting that this is simply ‘what Tunisians like.’ And it seems that this attitude was mediated in the pre-revolutionary time, including by official sources that were close to the regime at the time; it was thus instrumentalised into a claim for the nature of the Tunisian listener; for the nature of the archive’s ‘community of time’. In an article published in *La Presse* in 1997, the TAP (*Tunisien Agence Presse*) authors remark: ‘recordings of songs and music distributed in Tunisia are very varied and they illustrate the climate of liberty that characterises the sector of creation and cultural activity. They embrace, effectively, all genres of music, and of Tunisian, Eastern and Western songs in the context of respecting the continual values of Tunisian society’ (TAP, 1997). This is clearly a mediation of the kind of *Tunisianité* that we saw described in the text of Saïd, reliant on this specific openness between these geographic poles (Saïd, 1970); and it is used here to suggest a kind of ‘openness’ to the regime. At the other end of this scale, the cocktails are described in a

negative way, as being proof of a certain ‘Tunisian mentality’ regarding music. An oud player once tried to explain to me that CDs were only priced at 2 dinars because ‘Tunisians don’t value music’. In the absence of convincing stories otherwise, these dual notions – that Tunisians are open to everything, and also that they lack correct tastes and judgements – continue to shape understandings of Tunisians as listeners. In this sense, it is as if the ‘cocktail’ structure has *become* the ‘instituting imaginary’ (Mbembe, 2002); but one which is reacted to in very different ways.

3.8 Conclusion

We started this chapter by asking how the CD and cassette industries of the 1980s and 1990s might have contributed to the construction of an ‘aural public sphere’, and how their archives, housed in shops and fragments throughout the city, might contribute to this organisation. Clearly, these industries had a huge impact on musicians and listeners of the 1980s and 1990s; whether this was through the circulation of musical material which they couldn’t find elsewhere, or providing an avenue for the recording of material for previously ostracised musicians such as the *mzaoudia*. However, we’ve traced one of their key imports as being the ways in which they attempted to construct, and work with, notions of a ‘Tunisian mass’ which would be mediated, in particular, through objects that would focus on senses of *jaww* : the cocktail objects which would draw together fragments from disparate sources, themselves kinds of archive; or the arrangements of *fann sh’abi* which would construct a ‘modern’ sound through the uses of electronic instruments. These objects indeed come together as promoting the sorts of ontologies around sound which antagonise the version of Tunisian ‘modernity’ through which listeners form around epistemological purification and a fetishization of ‘correct’ industry; they present a sonic fundament for another version of the modern ‘Tunisian listener’, as someone who enjoys a connection with *jaww* and festivity.

Perhaps because of this, it seems that much of this aesthetic innovation has been algorithmed into official notions of the mass promoted by Mosaique FM and other spaces of ‘everyone’ in the contemporary city. Meanwhile, the mediations on cassettes and CDs, still

housed in the last few shops around the centre-ville, fade into 'cultural waste' (Straw, 2000), caught in senses of pastness projected onto them by those who consider them unimportant, and generated inside them through the clear dominance and temporal swallowing of their objects and aesthetic work by YouTube.

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We opened this chapter with an anecdote about the playing of Kafon's Houmani, a YouTube fragment, on a CD which blasted its rhythms onto the square Place de la Monnaie. It was reminiscent, in fact, of several instances that we saw in Chapter 2, of things being taken from YouTube to be played on CDs and USB sticks in taxis and cafés. An important corner of the story here is the ways in which sonic things are mediated through online and offline spaces, 'creeping and hopping' (Steingo, 2019). It is to this part of the story that we'll now turn – let's walk out of the Place de Monnaie, and turn left towards the Galerie 7 centre of pirated technology...

4. Galerie 7

4.1 Introduction

Mp3 files, Mp3 compilations, and the sonic legacies of Mp3 collection and dissemination, circulated under the radar of my research in Tunis for several years. Mp3s are good at circulating under radars: as Sterne details, the MP3 moves so much, and so well, because it is small – and it is small because it amounts to data which has been compressed: it is a ‘container technology’ which holds only the necessary sounds (Sterne 2012, 193).¹⁸⁸ And yet, they are incredibly common: ‘more recordings exist and circulate in Mp3 format than in all other audio formats combined’ (Sterne 2012, 1). In Tunis, Mp3s disguise themselves around urban space; one doesn’t necessarily know when one is listening to an Mp3. It was friends who alerted me to the importance of Mp3s, and specifically the compilation albums of groups of pirates, particularly those stationed in the large concrete building of Galerie 7. ‘This was our internet before’ was a frequent refrain.

Mp3s have attracted increasing amounts of scholarly attention in recent years. They have become a poster-format of sound studies, referenced widely for the ways in which they are thought to have both increased the ubiquity of music in public and private space, and also privatised the experiences of listening to this sound. Mp3s are claimed to have increased the ‘pervasiveness’ of music (Quiñones et al. 2016, 3), but also, in conjunction with their listening technologies, things such as walkmans, ipods and phones, are felt to allow individuals to have ‘unprecedented control’ over their daily listening experiences – which are

¹⁸⁸ In his extensive study of Mp3s, Sterne brings them into a ‘format theory’; he traces the evolution of the format through various projects of listening and technology which is a story of compression starting with the advent of telephony. The MP3 encoder works by ‘guessing that its imagined auditor is an imperfect listener, listening in imperfect conditions – and it ‘often guesses right.’ He considers the development of, and traffic in, MP3 as a ‘massive, collective mediation on the mediality of sound and especially hearing, music and speech.’ (Sterne 2012, 9).

now considered by these scholars and many others to be ‘mobile’.¹⁸⁹ Against these claims for Mp3s, Steingo has recently launched a convincing critique: he points out that nearly all of this work, which has been fundamental for the ways in which sound studies has theorised the link between technology, music and modernity, are based in ethnographic contexts in the global North. In countries of the global South, with their specific different forms of political and technological infrastructure, Mp3s don’t necessarily travel in the same way (Steingo, 2019; Sykes & Steingo, 2019). At the sites of Mp3 circulation in Soweto, South Africa, or the nodes of the ‘*téléchargeurs*’ in Mali or in Cameroon which he references, music distribution ‘oscillates between online and offline infrastructures, variously hopping or creeping, depending on the technology employed’ (Steingo 2019, 40).¹⁹⁰ My work here is situated in the spirit of this work of Steingo, building from his claims that Mp3 infrastructures, and archives, as they manifest in Global South situations, fundamentally destabilise our normative linking of digital technologies with ubiquity and privatised listening experiences.

But my questions here, following Mbembe’s theorisation of the archive, are specifically about the sonic archival work of these Mp3s, their ‘fragments’, their ‘stories’, and the sorts of ‘communities of time’ they might have enabled throughout their organisation of music and sound from the 2000s to now in the city of Tunis (Mbembe, 2002). We have already built up a picture of Tunis as a city in which different, layered sonic infrastructures organise bodies, sound and music through an ‘aural public sphere’ (Ochoa Gautier, 2006) in complex ways: we’ve seen the ways that state archival objects and structures both disperse styles and maintain myths of ‘originals’; the ways that YouTube both creates new kinds of fragment, an audible ‘commons’, and is pressed to the service of maintaining previous divisions; the ways

¹⁸⁹ See for instance the work of Bull on ipod listening, Pinch and Bijsterveld as well as DeNora and Bergh who include Mp3s within the bracket of ‘new technologies’ mediating music, Simun who looks at how Mp3 listening shapes experiences of London, Krause who associates Mp3 listening with increased ‘choice’ shaping musical listening (Bergh & DeNora, 2009; Bull, 2012; Krause et al., 2015; Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2004; Simun, 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Steingo discusses an article by Lydia Polgreen in the New York Times about the *téléchargeurs* in Mali, whom she describes as operating as an ‘offline version of iTunes, Spotify and Pandora all rolled into one’ (As quoted in Steingo 2019, 40). He compares the uneven flow of music stored as digital information to the uneven flow of capital, as he paraphrases Ferguson: ‘Instead of an unlimited availability and ubiquity of music, one finds an uneven topography with “jagged edges” (Ferguson 2006, 48)’ (p.48). Others who have discussed Mp3 and pirated media in global South situations, some of which will be referenced in later in this chapter, are Sundaram in his work on Pirate Modernity in India, Astley and Humphreys in their respective work on Mp3 compilations in Cuba, Larkin in his work on media piracy infrastructures in Nigeria, and Ramos et al. in their work on music piracy in Brazil (Astley, 2016; Humphreys, 2022; Larkin, 2004; Ramos et al., 2016; Sundaram, 2009).

that the cassette and CD industries might be linked with the construction of a specific, *jaww* and cocktail which posits a rival 'Tunisian' to that espoused by state cultural policy. Where do Mp3 archives and their circulations fit into this aural public sphere? Within this sonic archival situation, what is it that Mp3s do? What is the nature of their 'communities of time' and instituting imaginaries, and what are the stories which bring these fragments together?

I'll trace a story in this chapter which suggests that the 'communities of time' formed by and around the Mp3, its spaces and circulations, have changed throughout the last two decades, as surrounding archival structures and political situations have also shifted. In pre-revolutionary time, the tech hubs of Mp3s and their compilations amounted to a coveted access to the outside world, claimed by certain users of their services to be enabling 'possibility' for social progress and change. Now, the advent of YouTube has decreased the traffic of Mp3 music through these hubs, but Mp3 piracy continues to enable a certain agency in the organisation of sensory surroundings. It is the 'archiving technique' espoused by, and developed in, these spaces, which continues to spread throughout the city, and indeed to tame the infinity of YouTube as playlists are constructed. And, the Galerie 7 sites of Mp3s also continue to exist as worlds of *jaww* and a familiar kind of 'everything' in a YouTube world.

4.2 Galerie 7: an archive of archives of archives

If you walk up to the Avenue Habib Thameur from the cassette and CD shop on Place de la Monnaie, and walk along the Avenue towards the Passage tram station, you'll pass a large and unremarkable grey concrete building on the right, after just a few minutes (Fig. 23). You might note a few cafés in its alcoves opening onto the street, or the *khamas* in a little shack, but you probably won't notice the concrete building itself, or indeed imagine that there might be anything inside – you probably won't notice the metal letters arranged in a circular design, fixed above the entrance, blending into the grey of the building, reading 'Galerie 7'.



Fig. 23: Galerie 7 from Avenue Habib Thameur, April 2021

You might instead notice the traces of French colonialism and its urban projects of organisation, scattered all around this part of the city. Galerie 7 opens onto a large avenue on either side: Avenue Habib Thameur to the west, Avenue de Paris to the east (fig. 24). Both were central axes in the French design of this part of the city, which involved a draining of the lagoon and a building of a 'gridiron pattern' of streets (Mouhli & McGuinness 2006, 22), a 'hypercentre' around the Avenue Bourguiba (Signoles & Urbama (France), 1985). Both avenues are still lined with the same kinds of trees that the French considered so important for providing shade to pedestrians walking down their Haussmanian streets:

purple hibiscus on Avenue de Paris, plane trees on Hédi Chaker (Mouhli & McGuinness 2006, 22). Its neighbouring building is the Hotel Majestique, a centrepiece of art nouveau design, the most prestigious place to stay for tourists of the colonial era.¹⁹¹

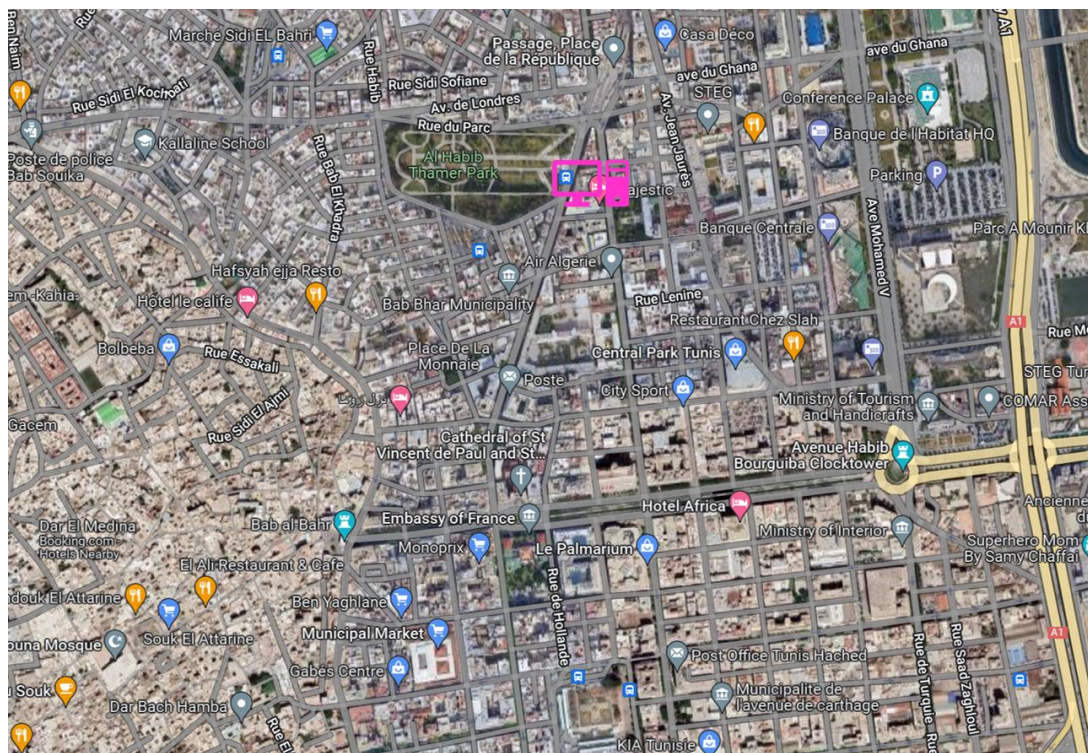


Fig. 24: Map showing the *medina* on the left giving way to the colonial city on the right, shaped around the main avenues of the Avenue Bourguiba and Mohamed V. Pink computer icon marks Galerie 7. Map taken from [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps), 27/04/2023

From its contrasting concrete blocks, the façade of Galerie 7 looks like it might rather fit in with what geographer Bounouh has deemed a '*réflexe du bulldozer*,' a 'bulldozer reflex': the uncontrolled transformations of this part of the city during the 60s, which saw old buildings destroyed and replaced with a 'so-called international style' (Bounouh, 2003) of glass and concrete in logics of low-cost transformation. For Bounouh these are '*aberrations architecturales*,' 'architectural aberrations,' signalled here and there by their grey-brown colour. But on the inside of the building, the world of Galerie 7 feels suspended between several different architectural and infrastructural logics and times. Upon entering through

¹⁹¹ See Mouhli and McGuinness for a concise and beautifully illustrated account of the ways in which the French sought to project their colonial projects through architecture and urban design in Tunis.

the threshold of the concrete building, you'll find yourself in a large space topped with an ornate floral stain glass window, with a gallery of little shops on two floors, connected by a frozen escalator, their glass windows and doorways facing onto the central space (fig. 25). This ornate window, as well as the '*galerie*' structure, strikes of French Art Nouveau: the '*galerie*' layout is found also in the Palmarium, a French-built space of shopping and leisure on the Avenue Bourguiba; and it is indicative of the famous Parisian *galeries* described by Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project* (Benjamin, 2002)¹⁹²; but whether this is a French-built window interior that has been maintained whilst the surrounding shell has changed, or a later pastiche, is unclear.¹⁹³

¹⁹² For instance, he quotes the 1852 *Illustrated Guide to Paris* arcades saying that these *Galleries* and *arcades*, 'a recent invention of industrial luxury', are 'glass-roofed, marble-panelled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises...the arcade is a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need' (Benjamin 2002, 31)

¹⁹³ I have not yet been able to find any mention of this precise building in any work on urbanism and architecture in Tunis. Work on architecture tends to focus on the media and the colonial period architecture (Ammar, 2010; Mouhli & McGuinness, 2006); whilst work on the post-colonial era tends to discuss demographic changes and the addition of new neighbourhoods which change senses of 'centrality' in the city (Amara et al., 2010; Oueslati-Hammami, 2010); less attention has apparently been paid to the architectural changes in the *centreville* in the post-colonial era outside of discussions on the protection of heritage (Bounouh, 2003).



Fig. 25: Galerie 7 from the inside, April 2021

The ins and outs of its pasts don't seem to be dwelt on by the people who move through the space. One of the centre's workers, a man in his 40s, became my central interlocutor: Pakito HM, a work name short for 'Pakito House Music'. He responded to my question about the 'history' of Galerie 7 by telling me that 'Galerie 7 doesn't have history'. He later told me that Galerie 7 was originally built as a shopping centre to sell clothes, and that in the 1990s it was repurposed somehow as a centre for the selling and distribution of pirated technologies. This is how it is currently known, and what it currently does.¹⁹⁴ In its central space is an array of stalls selling children's books and backpacks. The warmth of the light from the roof is met

¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Galerie 7 first came to my attention when I cracked my laptop screen in 2014 and needed it fixed. After failing to locate a shop where I could get this done, a friend suggested that I try my luck at Galerie 7, but insisted on coming with me to watch over proceedings – according to him, one never quite knows what will happen at Galerie 7, and whilst it's possible that magic will be worked on broken machines, it's also possible that one will be *arnaqué*, 'ripped off'. My laptop was handed over in a dingy stall on the upper floor, in which the insides of laptops were strewn everywhere, and when I went back a few days later, there it was with a new screen, I handed over cash, and that was it.

with a bluey white LED sheen that emanates from most of the shops. There is a faint whirring, buzzing sound in the air, melding with voices and footsteps echoing off the marble and glass surfaces. Shop windows are crammed full of plastic and metal objects, their technologies and machines: laptops, phones, phone cases, headphones, hard drives, video game consoles, wires, plugs, and many more. Most of the people working in the shops are young men, but the people moving through the spaces are mixed; young and old Tunisian women and men, from school age students right up to the elderly, possibly a larger proportion of the sub-Saharan African community than one sees in the cassette and CD shops, or indeed the surrounding streets, and a smaller proportion of the Western community, despite the prevalence of institutions such as the French Institute on the same street.

Each *hanūt* (shop) is specialised in a different thing, or combination of things: video games and laptop repair here; software and headphones there. The spaces are connected by circulations of workers and objects: the workers seemed to know each other, and would transfer parts and materials to each other. On my search for Mp3 music, a couple of men loitering by the broken escalator pointed to one *hanūt*, in a corner of the ground floor: named *Planète Technologie*. I frequented this *hanūt* over the next couple of years, and learned huge amounts from Pakito HM, one of the workers in the *hanūt* who dealt with music throughout the 2000s, and still now specialises in the selling of Mp3 music.

From the outside, the *hanūt* looked like any other: glass cabinets full of objects in rows, posters plastered around the doorway. But on the inside, it had its own unique feel. I entered through the plastic door hangings and found myself in a little space not bigger than 4 by 3 meters, which was simultaneously very full of objects and activities, organised, quite bright, and very nice smelling, a little incense oil burner perched on the counter. Media 10 mini-video tour of the space, 'directed' by Pakito HM.

The space was organised into several sections which seemed to be geared around different work. On the counter running the length of the shop are two computer monitors which are used to sell and discuss music and media (films, video games, software) that is downloaded or transferred either to the support brought in by the customer – a USB stick or disk – or sold on a support that is also bought from behind the counter. This part is the domain of Pakito. In the left hand corner another person sits at a little space with laptop innards strewn

across it, fixing laptops. By the left wall, there are pictures of a 'Middle Eastern Troupe' on the wall, and underneath their manager sits and answers phone calls about bookings for nightclubs and weddings.¹⁹⁵ The three people working in the shop have their spots, but deal with the other services as well.

This little *hanūt Planète Technologie* functions as a sonic archive in multiple ways. The shop itself can be seen as a material archive which houses many different material archives, which are spread out across different supports and formats (USB sticks, CDs, DVDs). These coalesce around the space in patches of similar objects. Then, each 'disk' or 'USB' object in these archives acts as another archive: a collection of Mp3 files which have been organised according to the organisational thrust behind the particular moment. This is a techno-mediatic milieu in which 'content no longer simply exists in order to be circulated, but where it is the evidence of circulation itself which endows content with value' (Hirschkind et al., 2017); value here is expressed less in monetary terms (much of this material now has very little monetary value), and more in the fact of archives, and their archives, being kept in certain spots.

On the right by the desk are rows of CDs whose spines, clothed in blue paper, are marked with their names and ordered with numbers (fig. 26). There is 'Musculation 1', 'Musculation 2', 'Iran', 'Brazilian Jiu Jitsu 1', 'Brazilian Jiu Jitsu 2', '*Sharqi* Romance'. These are in amongst others whose names signal software – this is the selection between 2227 and 2237: 'Lumion 6', 'Corel Draw X6 Ang (32-64 Bit)', 'Formation Wordpress 3.4 (CMS)', 'Registry Booster 2010 – SpeedUp My Pc 2010', 'Corel Painter Sketch Padkega', 'Adorage 10 HD', 'Stata S', 'Office 2007 Full Allemand', 'Endnote X7', 'Office 2016 Fr', 'Office 2010 Italien'. These blue spines become orange spines in a mass of disks behind the desk, but these are covered with faded film and video game posters. Beneath these is a slightly different disk archive: disks laid out horizontally and labelled in red pen: 'Pakito Office 2019', 'Pakito Office 2021'.

¹⁹⁵ He plays me a clip of them on his ipad and I tell him I swear I've seen them before – at a 'Kitsch Arbi' themed night at a nightclub-lounge, during which this troupe suddenly burst in at around 3am, replete with flame torches and drums. It's most likely, he tells me.



Fig. 26: Part of *Planete Technologie*'s CD archive, Galerie 7, July 2022

Great hard drives blinking away under the desk contain, I'm told, the majority of the music on Mp3s which is burned onto supports – they apparently contain five terabytes, and are rigged up to the monitor on the desk which is turned away from the customer. As well as this hard drive, there are others, apparently in the home of the person who works with the music. I asked if they keep anything in cloud storage and I'm told wryly that this is their '*nuage*', 'cloud' – '*andna le vieux nuage*', 'we have the old cloud'.

This hard drive is connected to a monitor, which Pakito allows me to photograph (fig.27). There does indeed seem to be an absolutely vast number of folders and files. A first page lays out what is on the 'Disque Local'. Nearly every subfolder starts with 'music' and then adds another label – to take just a few examples: '100% Achref', '100% Arabesque', '100% Jazz', 'Album Mix Collection', 'Arabe Tradiette Nojom', 'Bob Marley', 'Chansons Francaise',

several RNB collections, 'House Music', 'HITS SELECTION', 'Indo', 'Latinous', 'Mezwid', 'Morocan's', 'Rai', 'Reggaeton', 'The Funky'; and a whole list of folders labelled 'MP3 collection'. There are a few 'Special Pakito', and lastly, the only folder on this first page written in Arabic script, '*quran al karim*' 'the noble Koran'. Each of these folders opens onto another archive, another world. In the 'Discography Occidental' folder there are things from the Rolling Stones to Louis Armstrong and Nirvana. In 'Music Pakito' there are files listed according to the mix of styles, from 'Deep-Tech-House' to 'Rai-Hits-irlandaise' to 'Afro-Deep-Fat Freddy's'. In 'Music Mezwid' there's Samir Loussif, Lotfi Ben Zina, Ramzi Abdelwaheb; In 'Music Rai' people from Cheb Salem to DJ Mot.

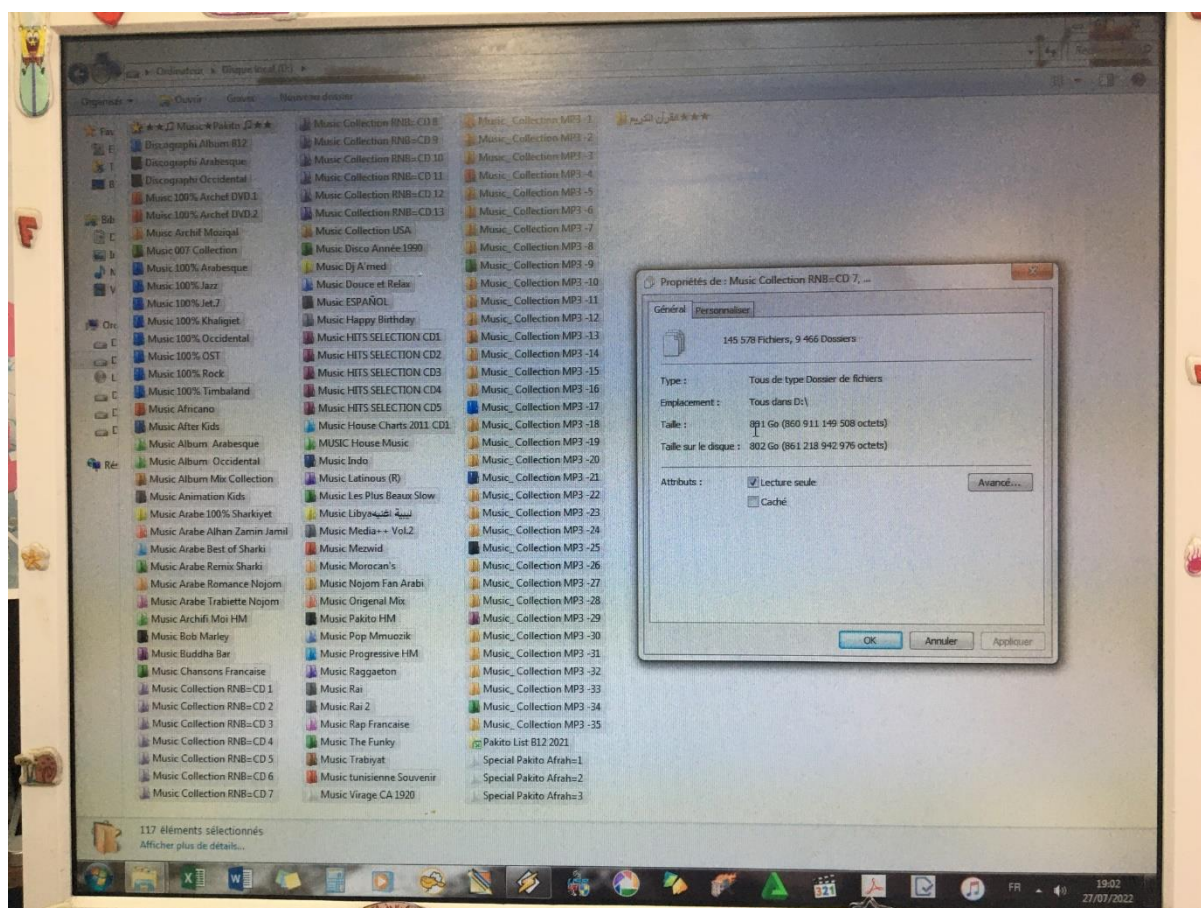


Fig. 27: Pakito HM's 'Local Drive', Galerie 7, July 2023

It's not only the figures and the songs that seem to be plentiful in this archive – multiple layers of actual thrusts of organisation themselves are also mediated here. Waves of categorisation efforts haven't only put artists and songs into subsections of styles, but they have also put collections into subsections of collections. The collection can be bound by all sorts of unifying logics – some collections seem to have things to do with style, others

revolve around the collector (as evidenced by the extent of the Pakito or 'Achref' collections), or the format type, like 'Collection MP3'. In 'Music 100% Occidental', each subfolder is labelled with 'MP3 CD' before the titles; things ranging from Bee Gees CD1 to 'Indie'. In part of the 'Musique Tunisienne' folder there is a whole collection of Cheikh Afrit, which all has the label 'YouTube' at the end of it, suggesting that it was all taken from YouTube and collected here at a certain point, during a certain act of collecting. The USB collection in the Pakito HM folder marks a particular difference – as objects, these feel like they speak to a different logic, not individual objects or 'fragments' of the archive, but themselves whole archives made of the combination of such things as 'Rai-Hits-irlandaise'. The 'Music Mezwed' (Fig. 28) folder seems to include a particularly large number of different kinds of subsection, with lots of subsidiary collections like 'Rbou5 Africa 2009', 'Cha3bi', and individual artists.

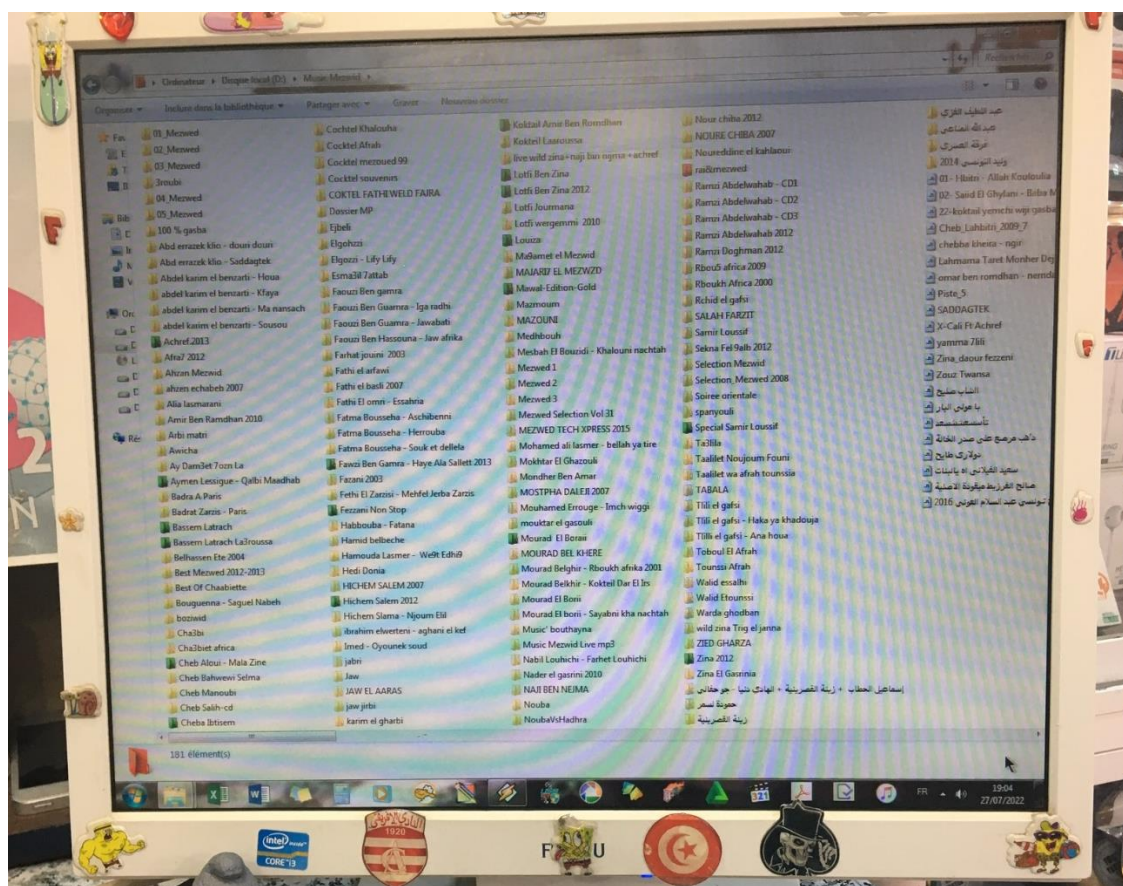


Fig. 28: Pakito HM's 'Music Mizwid' folder, *Planete Technologie*, Galerie 7, July 2022

And this kind of feeling of multiple lists was something that carried over onto USB objects of people who bought musical material from the shop. I bought a selection of music once; I

asked for a bit of '*kul shay*', 'everything'. Upon getting the USB stick home and opening the newly added folders, I was faced with long lists of files, distinguished by names – names in a mixture of formats, some in Arabic script and others in Latin script, some named with indeterminate titles such as 'piste 01', others named with the artists and song names. I opened the folder 'Pakito HM'. There is a whole list of other folders, some named according to style and time (Mezwid, Rap Fr 2020, Gasba-10), others artist (Fkj – A COLORS SHOW – Red Bull Music), others according to mediating platform (TikTok, SnapTube Audio. Clicking on these different folders opens onto lists of files which give off slightly different kinds of thing and textual pattern. 2020 S-1 (fig. 29), and 2020 S-2, are lists of songs labelled according to artist: there is Ahmed Kamel, Aqua, BLACKPINK, Habib Chinkaoui, JenJoon ft 4LFA, Trio Fehmi Riahi, Mortadha. The 'Mezwid' folder leads onto another, shorter list of names and song names. 'TikTok' opens into lists of names with a few more styles, such as 'AFRO DANCE VOL. 1 MIX BY LB'. Under the 'date modified' column, various dates between 2012 and 2016 come up. Upon opening the JenJoon there are only 12 variously titled tracks of the rapper, all with 'JenJoon' somewhere in the title.

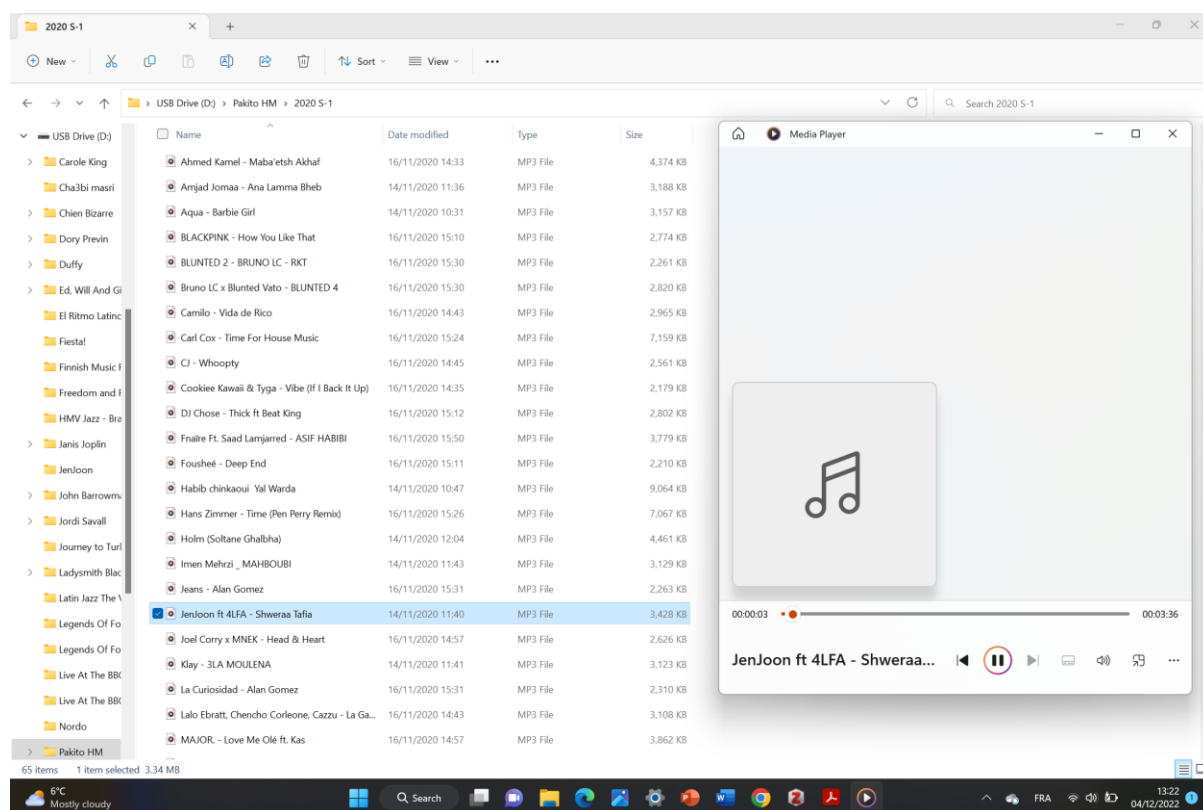


Fig. 29: Folder '2020 S-1' of my USB compilation, December 2022

But the thing that was described to me by the shop workers as their ‘archive’ was situated under the desk. A slightly more dusty CD sheath was brought out and unzipped to reveal layers of the old MP3 compilations which were made by the compilation-makers throughout the 2000s, sheathed in little plastic cases. These included several ‘types’ – all with names scrawled across the disks in black marker pen: ‘MSI’, ‘Revolution’, ‘007’, ‘Planète’. The younger laptop-fixer looked over in wonder when they unzipped it and exclaimed ‘*tarīkh*’, ‘history’.

The shop, as it currently exists in Galerie 7, and expands outwards mediated through USB objects, is thus a kaleidoscope of archives. These archives challenge notions from media archaeologists that digital archives take the ‘deep’ archive and make them ‘flat’ as the archive ‘dissolves into electronic circuits, data flow’ (Ernst 2012, 100); or that textual forms of the typewriter might limit ‘philosophical dreams of infinity’ (Kittler 1999, 15); looking through the archives on the desktop, and between the different spaces of the shop, we find them rather collapsing in and out of online and offline spaces in all sorts of different forms, and we find that a vast range of labelling techniques overcomes limits to create limitless layers. This is arguably language at its most ‘sensuous’ (Porcello et al., 2010); labels work to collect the mp3 files of the lists together in patterns, gives them a feel of archaeological layers – layers which speak to different times, but which have coalesced together here. They make blocks and clumps. On the first page, for instance, the identical labelling of the ‘Music Collection MP3’ folders makes them into a large column. We also detect areas of more singular intention, and areas of more of a random collection: the ‘Discography Occidental’ is laid out in a very orderly and consistent way, with a consistency even in capitalisation of names and ‘Discography’, whilst in ‘Music The Funky’ there is more of a difference, with ‘cat stevens’, ‘Collection Fank’, ‘Daft Punk – Alive 2007’, and ‘SIMPLY RED’, not quite matching up to one another as textual equivalents. The ‘Mezwid’ folder, we notice, is particularly thickly patterned with different modalities of labels – capitals, lowercase, artist names as well as labels such as ‘piste 01’ (fig. 28).

In a strange way, we are suddenly reminded of the sorts of patterning that we found in the cassette and CD shops – the ways in which the objects were spread around the shop in ways that made patterns alluding to the comparative strength, importance and industrial organisation of certain musical areas, and the different sorts of logics running through them.

Here, the same thing is happening – but the words themselves are the main part of the patterning image. Modalities of labellings are the thing suggesting kinds of ‘monumentality’ to different parts of the collection, of the sort discussed by Straw regarding vinyl record piles (Straw, 2000). Here, there is a sense of ‘cocktail’ coming through in folders such as the ‘mezwed’ folder with its large range of textual styles; this is offset by the cohesive monumentality of files from *gharbi* and *sharqi* music industries. There is a division between the *quran* and the ‘music’, ontological differences alluded to by the different alphabets. There is even a familiar kind of iconisation of certain figures. Cheikh Afrit, the staple of the state archive (we saw his picture painted on the wall of the national radio in the first chapter), has songs here in two different collections in the ‘Music tunisien souvenir’ folder: ‘chikh el afrit’ which seems to contain the ‘YouTube’ collection, as well as ‘CHIKH EL AFRIT’, with all the files in capitals. Other prevalent figures emerge – artists such as Wael Kfoury, Sleh Farzit, Nancy Ajram, Madonna, and the recently famous JenJoon. So funnily enough, certain divisions that we saw on the cassette and CD objects still come through here, mediated this time not through pictures of faces but through the textual clumps and patterns of files.

There are several different temporal threads running through the space, even as it continues to operate for people who come into the shop: whilst some corners, such as the material CD holder, seemed to garner archival ‘status’ from its being ‘set back from light’ (Mbembe 2002, 21), (particularly for the younger employee who equated this sense of age with ‘history’), other parts of it are in constant flow and use. Anecdotes from the employees of Galerie 7, as well as from users of the technologies and commentators, come together to suggest that the communities of time that have been spun around this space and its archival work have changed over the two decades of its existence. We’ll start with pre-revolutionary time: we find that stories of Galerie 7’s archives are described in various ways, as part and parcel of a kind of natural technological progression, as ruining ‘culture’, and as expanding horizons of ‘possibility’.

4.3 Pre-revolution Galerie 7: technology and compilation

Tunisia of the 2000s is described as a place which was increasingly politically closed, and economically stifled. Hibou describes how Ben Ali exercised his authoritarianism through both direct oppression – media censorship, limits on freedom of speech, police crackdowns on activists and Islamists – and through a political economy which enabled control over the banal, the everyday. A closed currency continued to limit the streams of goods that could leave and enter the country, and this was heavily controlled. A rhetoric of ‘reformism’ painted the country out as the ‘*bon élève*’, ‘good student’, of the international neo-liberal financial system, whilst enabling the maintenance of an opaque and corrupt system which exercised power through constant regulation, control, bureaucracy, and surveillance of all kinds of economic exchange (Hibou 2006; 2009).

Within this situation, the media landscape is described as being paradoxical. On one hand, there was an opening and multiplication of media channels: satellite TV started to become available, and private media channels started to be instigated. On the other hand, these were heavily controlled, and there was increasing censorship. The private media was still reportedly close to the regime, including the likes of Mosaïque FM, which we saw in the last chapter (Chouikha, 2007b). The internet in Tunisia, whilst initially uncensored yet largely inaccessible, went through phases of increasing censorship as it was funnelled through the infrastructures of state company Tunisie Telecom throughout the 2000s, and controlled by the Tunisian Internet Agency (Wagner, 2012).¹⁹⁶ Media piracy abounded in this situation. We know from Fitouri that, whilst access to satellite television was controlled through the giving out of licenses, Tunisians would bypass this censorship through the fabrication of satellite antenna which they positioned on their roofs, as well as the purchase of pirated satellite dishes (Fitouri, 2012).

Judging by the stories of the Galerie 7 workers, it sounds as if their activities of internet piracy operated in a similar vein: a bypassing of state-controlled media infrastructures which would enable a wider access to international media content and products, whether this be in the form of software or hardware.¹⁹⁷ Many of the Galerie 7 pirates initially worked from a

¹⁹⁶ Wagner has written a very detailed article about this precise kind of censorship: he traces how the internet in Tunisia was technically and politically organised through six different phases (Wagner, 2012).

¹⁹⁷ Similar, indeed, to other stories of media piracy in the global South: Larkin describes how in Kano, the economic centre of northern Nigeria, media piracy is ‘part of the “organisational architecture” of globalization (Sassen 2002), providing the infrastructure that allows media goods to circulate (Larkin 2004, 289)

different centre a few blocks away in Lafayette. By the time they moved to Galerie 7 in the early 2000s, it was one of several similar areas of media piracy in the capital: other places include Moncef Bey, Sidi Boumendil, and Rue d'Athènes. But Galerie 7 is described as 'central'. Its centrality is increased by the sense that it was situated at the centre of the capital, right next to one of the biggest nodes of the tram network, the terminus of tram lines connecting Mourouj in the South, Ettadhamen in the West and Manar to the North.

Pakito described the workings of Galerie 7 of the 2000s. For him, the temporalities of the space seemed to work to what was described to me as a constant evolution of technologies. It was the shifts in technology which seemed to be the things that marked the time – and his was a story of how things constantly '*yṭawwaru, ybaddalu*' ('evolve, change'), changing principally according to the flow of '*m'alumat*' ('information') which moves at different '*vitesse*s' (speeds). The story that he recounted to me was built around these shifts, and it goes as follows.

Music used to be a key part of the commercial activities of Galerie 7. The kinds of music sold, and the kinds of format, shifted along with technological innovations. Pakito told me that Galerie 7 had started to deal with music around the time of the first Nokia phones in the mid-90s – pirates found ways to put a few songs on the simcards, and people would pay a surprising amount of money to have around 20 songs contained on their phones.

Gradually, he detailed, supports emerged which could carry songs in a different way: Walkmans for instance, able to carry CDs with about 5-7 songs. He told me how cars, and the ways in which they could take disks, also changed. So Galerie 7 started to deal with the '*gravure*', 'ripping', of songs onto DVDs and audio CDs, made to measure so that the client could use them with whatever machine they had. At first, CDs could only take a few songs, but over time, they grew in capacity.

When the *graveurs* were still working in the Lafayette centre commercial at the start of the 2000s, they started to make MP3 compilations. These amounted to collections of music which had been gathered and curated over several disks, sold from Galerie 7, and copied throughout the country. The collections carry names, indicative of 'brands'. According to Pakito, the 'Planet' albums were the first: the first was released in 2001. At first they were made to contain folders of music – divided into '*orientale, occidentale, w house*,' collected

there on a single disk.¹⁹⁸ Over time, they evolved, got bigger and more expansive, and their different categories became separate disks which were all part of the same bundle. They attracted rivals. MSI came along and offered a bigger package: 2 '*orientale*' disks, 2 '*occidentale*', and 2 'house'. They would be created and released around every 4 months. Others, such as MSI, Revolution, and 007 all had their own uniqueness, their own slight changes. The compilations would also include other things, like 'softs,' bits of software like Skype. And the bigger they got, the more accompanying information would be included: word documents, for instance, with lists of the included musical material. (Fig. 29 is a screenshot taken from a word document attached to Planete 39, showing thumbnails of the included albums. A copy of this compilation was sold to me by Pakito from the 'archive'. It would have been made around 2010). Pakito told me that the core of these compilations stayed the same – '*gharbi*, '*sharqi*, house' – but that some might lean more towards different kinds of house, or might include a few more niche genres like 'rock' or 'blues.' So around the mid-2000s there was a situation of a buzzing trade in these compilation albums, which were released at a quick rate.

Pakito sold me copies of several of the Planete compilation albums which would have been made throughout the 2000s, as well as the MSI albums. They came on DVDs in yellow pockets, their names written on the disks in black marker pen: 'MSI U24', 'Planet 29', 'Planet U46', 'Planet 39 music mp3', the latter also with 'Pakito HM' scrawled across it (fig. 30).

¹⁹⁸ Volumes 1-12/13 of the Planet albums were produced in Lafayette, before the producers moved to Galerie 7 and made the rest. The last one was volume 45, released in 2012.



Fig. 30: My copy of 'Planet 39', at home in La Goulette, July 2022

When I put the albums in my computer, I was indeed faced with something of an expanse: thousands of songs separated into folders and categorised over various places. There was material from across the Western and Middle Eastern industries, as well as more surprising things, including material from a Tunisian rapper.¹⁹⁹ From the 4 folders of Planete 29, there are 9 included in volume 39, and they are separated into the following labels: 'Affiche et Listes', 'Albums', 'Albums Arabe', 'Albums Fr', 'Albums Live', 'Best Ofs', 'Dj Dark MiX', 'House Music Box', 'Planet39Hits'. Clicking on the first folder – '*Affiches et Listes*', 'posters and lists' – opens onto several word documents which amount to contents pages, apparently for the entire compilation, with songs divided into categories denoted in chunky green fonts, standing out from the page with a little shadow behind: Arabesque, Pop, Urban, French, Rock, Deutsch, Dance, all of them 'Hits'. At the bottom of this document are many album

¹⁹⁹ I haven't found this rapper or his activities mentioned in the literature dealing with rap and revolution, and it was interesting to hear rap songs dealing with similar themes to the post-revolutionary songs, already in 2010.

cover pictures that are tiled onto the documents in neat rows, as well as pictures of games, ebooks (ranging from 'Adobe Photoshop for Photographers' to the 'colour Atlas of Immunology', and lists of 'softs' (Fig. 31). Then, the rest of the compilation folders open out through albums. The range is large: things from Daft Punk to an album entitled 'D.K.F. – Vision (Rap Tn)', which sounds like a Tunisian rap album, with lyrics talking about themes of '*rashwa*' 'bribes', and lines such as '*min fouchana win kbirt taht el hit, hedheka 'alesh t'aref waji haddid*' 'From Fouchana where I grew up in misery, that's how I know my face is iron'.²⁰⁰ On Planete 29 there are a couple of separate files: 'King Planet Release' and 'Read Me'. 'King Planet Release' is an image: a dragon lit with blue beams of light, with a 'King Planet' scroll clutched in its claws, 'Release' stamped over in white (Fig 32). 'Read Me' opens onto a Notepad file with a short written message: 'King Planet Music Volume 39 / Release 8 December 2007 / Thank you for your support and your patience / A lot of thanks to all who participate to make it possible / King Planet – Your friend forever / Just email us at king_planet@lycos.com' (Fig 33).

²⁰⁰ Fouchana is a popular neighbourhood and industrial area in the Southern suburbs of Tunis, next to Mohammedeya where we went in the YouTube chapter.

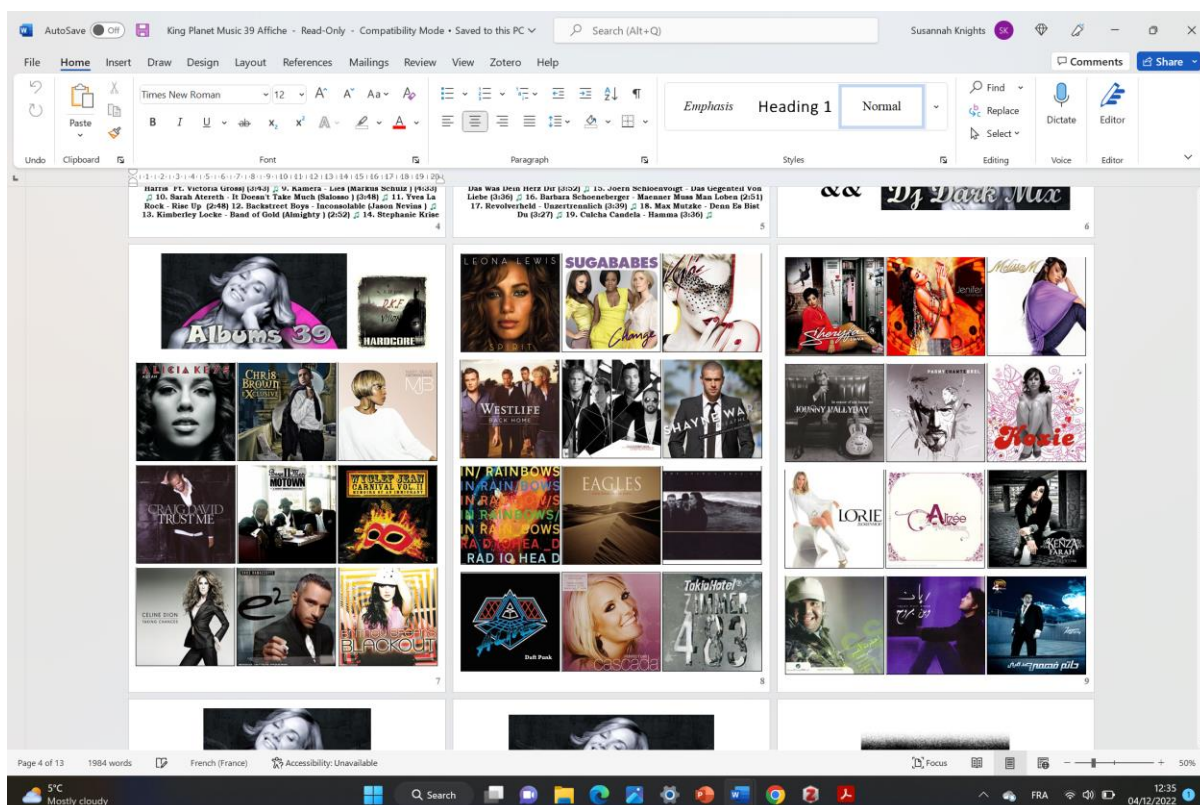


Fig. 31: A screenshot taken from a word document attached to Planete Album 39, showing thumbnails of the included albums, December 2022

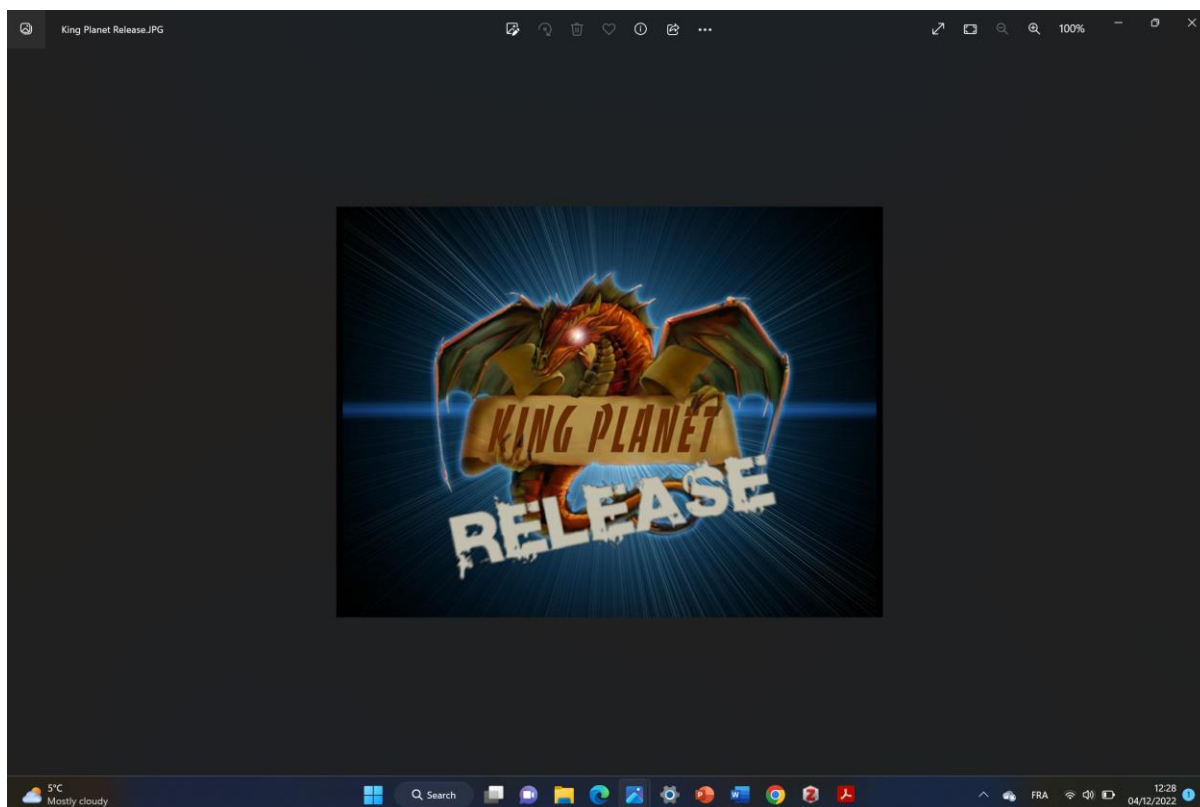


Fig. 32: A screenshot taken of the 'King Planet RELEASE' page of the Planet compilation album 39, December 2022

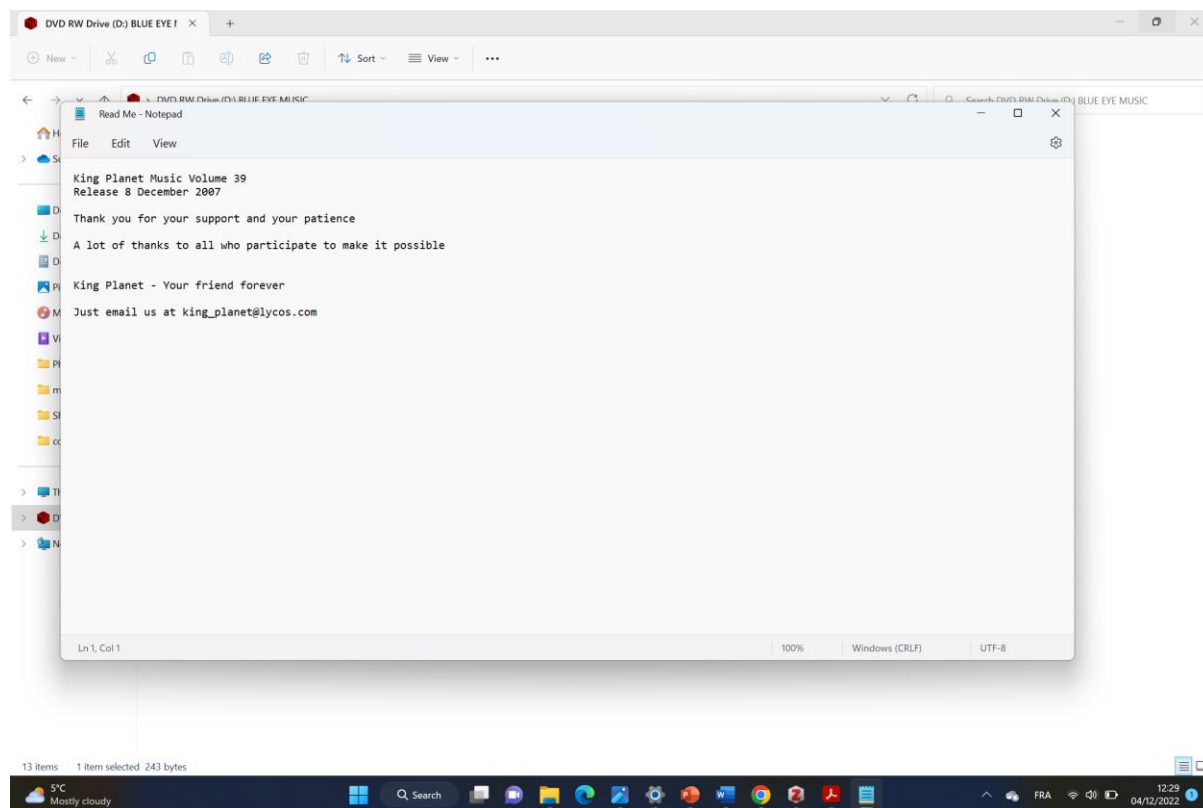


Fig. 33: A screenshot taken of the 'Read Me' file in the Planet compilation album 39, December 2022

Pakito himself didn't trade in these compilation albums, but rather specialised at the time in audio CDs. He told me how he would take the material that was on the big MP3 compilations, and, combining it with other material from other sources, would make more focused, smaller playlists on audio CDs. These CDs offered several advantages to the customer: they could be played in certain cars and CD players that could only take CDs; it could be ensured that the labelling of the albums would correspond with a CD player that could read '1-10', for instance; and they gave people a constant stream of music so that they wouldn't have to wait for the releases of the compilations to get new music. Pakito also told me that he could add in some extra music onto the audio CD to compliment parts of the compilation collections.

The key characters of this story came across in particular ways in Pakito's recounting. The *Galerie 7 graveurs* are actually rarely described within the space as 'pirates' whose defining

characteristic is the taking of things which aren't theirs; nor were they described as people whose main intention is to bypass the regime on political grounds. When Pakito was describing the work and the skills of those who worked in the centre, he said simply that 'not everyone is able to sit in front of a computer, searching, for the whole day', and when I asked how he had learned everything that he knew, he said simply: '*pratique*', 'practice'. It was these qualities of patience, practice, the capacity to remain physically still and mentally engaged, which were the things that were highlighted as being remarkable – the piracy here was like a 'technique of the body' (Mauss, 1973).

'Music' was something which wasn't owned by anyone in particular. Although I just described the compilation makers as 'rivals', it is also not in this language that they were discussed by Pakito; they were dealing with a shared substance. When I asked whether the MP3 makers got annoyed with his recycling of their material for his audio CDs, he found the question odd – 'why would they?' he asked. The musical material is painted out as something which flows around like rivers – it is akin to the '*m'aloumet*' (information) which travels at different '*vitesses*', belonging to no one, just being directed through various technological infrastructures by the pirates at Galerie 7 before it moves through the different *hawanet* in the centre in different forms, and out of the centre to listeners.²⁰¹

The repertoires and songs that were dealt with were described in a couple of ways. There was a certain expectation that the people working in Galerie 7 would be able get 'everything' – including the most obscure things from across the world. But mainly, they were described as focusing on the most popular repertoires – the ones which were already being mediated by Mosaïque FM and the RTCI which, Pakito told me, were the most widely listened to stations amongst young people.²⁰² The difference between the Galerie 7 mediations and the radio mediations was rather speed at which things could be accessed, and the sort of relationship that the listener would be able to build up with their collection. Indeed, the 'listener' was someone who came across as using the services of Galerie 7 to quench their thirst for music. This was the view that was communicated by Pakito; he told me: *t'araf al kalima 'atush? Soif? Famma l'abad 'andhum 'atush, lazimhum yashrabu musiqa*

²⁰¹ This kind of ambivalence towards music ownership chimes with that discussed by Sterne in his discussion of the activities of Mp3 pirates (Sterne, 2012).

²⁰² When I asked Pakito about the rap song, and whether there were relationships with Tunisian artists, he didn't seem to know.

jadida.’ (you know the word thirst? There are people who are thirsty, they have to drink new music).

Pakito described the position of Galerie 7 to the state in ambiguous terms. He actually speculated that Ben Ali had allowed Galerie 7 to continue for so long because he knew that people needed a certain amount of access to things. He also told me a story about how, when Windows was first released, the pirates at Galerie 7 had managed to pirate it at an extraordinarily fast rate; and the queue of people waiting to purchase it stretched right through the centre and onto the street. Bill Gates decided not to open a research centre in Tunis as a result, Pakito added with a certain amount of pride.

So the archival objects here – from the Mp3s to the compilation albums and CDs – come across as things which were part of the commercial activities of Galerie 7. They seem to have mediated quite similar sonic archives to Mosaïque and RTCI, and thus also possibly the cocktails of the shops that we already saw in the last chapter. They may not therefore have been making radical changes in the aural public sphere through the *styles* of sounds. However, it is rather the style of the relationship between mediator, sound, object and listener which is different here. In Pakito’s version of events, activities in Galerie 7 were about diverting flows of information using bodily techniques of sitting still and searching, in order to quench the ‘thirst’ of listeners, with ever expanding objects. But for others, the activities and objects are described as carrying other potentials.

4.4 Internets and possibilities

For some commentators, it was objects like these compilations which contributed to the lack to a working music industry in Tunis. I would often come across the idea that the Galerie 7 workers were the worst kind of pirate, who bore absolutely no respect for notions of copyright or legality, and that they were therefore something of a social threat. This attitude came from the cassette and CD shops – Niez put them in a similar category to the cassette and CD pirates, suggesting that they had consistently pirated the material of Phonie and some of the other CD and cassette companies. He told me that he had attempted to officially complain about their activities several times – complaints which had resulted in police

clampdowns – but that they had simply evaded justice and continued their activities. M'barek Rais, in her book, alludes to MP3s as a problem alongside cassettes and CDs, placing pirates from the two worlds in the same category: people who, through pirating the products of Tunisian musicians, have contributed to the woes of the Tunisian music industry, crippling the capacity of musicians to profit from recorded music. She lays out the maths: 'Tunisia today has more than 70,000 spaces of commerce specialised in ripping and selling DVDs, MP3s, MP4s and other pirated audiovisual supports. Tunis alone has half of these centres. The phenomenon creates an enormous loss for producers and artists, all categories together.' She estimates the loss to be between 210,000 and 300,000 dinars (Rais 2018, 204).

But for many people, the spaces and their objects had a different significance. When I mentioned to Radhi that I'd been to Galerie 7 to ask them about the Planet albums, he said: 'Oh! This was our internet before!'.²⁰³ He told me that when he was growing up in Bousalem as a teenager, compilation albums from Galerie 7 would trickle through the country, copied and recopied by people, and that he would spend hours going through them searching for songs – even if he would only find two or three that he liked. He reminisced about the time that he found the song 'Hey there Delilah', for instance, by the Plain White Ts; and another when, on other pirated objects, he came across some videos of the live concerts of Greek musician Yanni, which he watched on loop. Wiem, also, describes how her brother would share the Planet albums between friends; and how she would take songs from them. Another friend, Taha, placed these objects of Galerie 7 in the same logic as 'Tunisia-Sat', another internet platform which he explained in the following way: 'Habib, our friend, was an admin...because in Tunis before, even now, we don't have access to software, we can't buy Windows, we can't buy anything from internet like abroad...so he put everything on it, like Windows, like video games, like programs from TV. Lots, lots of things you find there.'²⁰⁴

It was clear that for these friends, and for others of this generation, the piracy of Galerie 7 is thus described as being a means to 'access' foreign media which was otherwise inaccessible.

²⁰³ This is reminiscent of the ways in which large Mp3 albums in Cuba, also, have been referenced as the 'People's Internet' for the ways that they enable access to media which they are otherwise unable to reach (Astley, 2016).

²⁰⁴ I missed the opportunity to speak to more people about these objects – a proper study on their circulations through listeners at this time is needed.

This attitude is exemplified in a blog-post that was uploaded by blogger and activist Azyz Amami on the 11th October 2010, to his blog 'A7ki Tunisi', entitled '*touche pas à ma galerie 7!*' 'Don't touch my Galerie 7!' (Catcher, 2010). Amami is a hacker who became well known for his activities both during the revolution, during which he coordinated circulations of social media and protest, and after the revolution, when he was continually targeted by authorities and briefly imprisoned (Honwana, 2013). In this post, Amami defends the pirates of Galerie 7 against a spate of raids that had been attempting to close them down. He describes the *graveurs* – he names 'Lass3ad', 'Lorde', 'SBS' 'le King' and 'Parnasse' – as '*connu*' (known), '*prestigieux*' (prestigious), and '*influençant*' (influential): they are the '*alchimistes des temps modernes*', (alchemists of modern times) and Galerie 7 is 'notre petit Eden' (our little Eden). Much of his post locates their importance in the vastness of the 'culture' that they provide access to: 'you can expect to find everything: from the films of Sammama Chikli to the latest successes of the US box office, to the different online lessons of maths/physics/info/English, to the 'Tunisia-Mexico' match of 1978, to an old recording of Nejib Khattab etc ... etc ... all of it for 1 dinar for a CD, 5 dinars for a DVD!!! I even found rare recordings of Iranian Music!'²⁰⁵ (Catcher, 2010).

But the particularly interesting thing about Amami's post is the way in which he links this need for access with a kind of social 'possibility', linked to a right to *knowledge*. He says: 'it's more easy and more comfortable to talk about copyright, to talk about the rights of the rich to be even more rich, than to think fundamentally about the RIGHT to access new technologies, the right to Knowledge. This right concerns THE POSSIBILITY' (Catcher, 2010).²⁰⁶ He explains further the need to be able to 'access' as being fundamental for what comes across as an 'inclusion' of Tunisian society in the digital:

'I repeat that we have to support and defend our dear pirates, who guarantee us the pinnacle of the information society at minimal cost. Their existence is a necessary condition for a society like ours to find its way on the digital highway. The information society, even if it's just a slogan for many, is a necessity, even a

²⁰⁵ *tu peux t'attendre à tout trouver : des films de Sammama Chikli aux derniers succès du box office américain, aux différents cours numérisés de maths/physique/info/anglais, à la partie 'Tunisie-Mexique' de 1978, à un ancien enregistrement de Nejib Sattab etc ... etc ... le tout à 1 DT le CD, 1,5 DT le DVD!!! J'y ai même trouvé des enregistrements rares de musique irannienne!*

²⁰⁶ *Il est plus facile est plus aisé de parler du copyright, du droit es riches à l'être encore plus, que de penser à fond au DROIT d'accès aux nouvelles technologies, le droit à la Connaissance. Ce droit implique LA POSSIBILITE'*

determinism...to access it *en masse*, at least to keep the possibility open, is more important than any other issue...' (Catcher, 2010)²⁰⁷

The enemies here, for Aziz, are both the multinational corporations such as 'Micro\$oft' and the Tunisian state – the two parties mentioned by Aziz as recently having signed an agreement with each other which referred to a cracking down on copyright abuses, despite the already overinflated profits, prices, and tax evasion of the former.

It's important to note here that 'access' to media, for Radhi, Wiem, Taha, and Amami, seems specifically to have meant an access to the tools and infrastructures of software and music themselves – rather than 'only' the sounds as things which are heard mediated by others. (Afterall, as we've seen, many of these styles *were* things which were heard mediated on radios such as Mosaique FM and RTCI). It seems to have meant an encounter with media which would enable a particular sense of 'discovery', which was about physically looking at something, scrolling through it, going through it, repeating it, and a sense of ownership over it. This is what comes through particularly from Radhi, who told me that he would spend hours 'searching'. It was about a control over the shaping of aural public spheres itself; a sense of choice of when and how sounds would be mediated.

And it is this, also, which would have been enabled by these cocktail compilations – not only in the quantity of their media, but in the ways in which they have been aesthetically organised. They may have been compendiums of pirated Mp3s, but these objects seem to do their best to reconstruct the legitimate, industrial object, through formatting which is neat, careful, and organised, with coherence between the words, images and sounds. If we look back at the images from Planet 39, we note that care has clearly been taken over curatorial messages written in English, a language associated at this time heavily with younger generations – not the language of cassettes, CDs or the Tunisian culture industries, but rather the language of international music industries. Each compilation maintains its own way of formatting tracks, down to the placing of dashes and capital letters. 'Albums' in

²⁰⁷ 'je répète qu'il faut soutenir et défendre nos chers pirates, qui nous garantissent le summum de la société d'info avec un minimum de coûts. Leur existence est une condition préalable pour qu'une société comme la notre, trouve son chemin sur l'autoroute numérique. La société d'information, bien qu'elle ne soit qu'un slogan pour beaucoup, est une nécessité, un déterminisme même ... Y accéder en masse, du moins garder la possibilité, est plus important que toute autre problématique ...'

the MSI compilation, for instance, leads to 12 more folders, all labelled consistently with the name of the artist and album – ‘Sami_Yusuf_My_Ummah’; ‘Westlife_Face_to_Face’, ‘Wael_Kafoury_Bahebak_Ana_Kteer’. Opening an album name would come up with a list of audio files with the artist name followed by song name, as well as a gif of the album cover that one can see upon clicking. It is the clarity of this formatting, also, which would have enabled paths through this material – it was this, also, which would have enabled paths to the ‘outside’. So the objects feel notable not only because they are large pirated objects, but for the ways that they managed to garner feelings of brand and industry – they arguably *masqueraded* as the official music industry which Tunisia didn’t have.²⁰⁸

Clearly, the pirated archives of Galerie 7 meant very different things during this time – but more than this, there seems to have been a struggle over the ‘sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization’ (Rancière 2013, 18). For Radhi, Wiem, Taha and Amami, the ‘everything’ of the cassette and CD cocktails which we saw in the last chapter clearly wasn’t enough throughout the 2000s. It is rather these expansive compilation albums and spaces of Galerie 7 that are described as the things which expanded sensible horizons, which enabled participation in sensory worlds which was otherwise impossible. Indeed, the difference between their discourse and that of M’barek Rais and Niez is reminiscent of the generational divides described by Dakhli, Dakhli and Honwara as having fuelled frustrations leading eventually to the revolution (Dakhli & Collectif, 2020; Dakhli, 2011; Honwana, 2013); and indeed, it seems notable that this post from Amami was published online just a couple of months before the sparking of revolutionary protests on the 17th December 2010 – protests which he himself appears to have had a key role in progressing as a hacker. These compilation objects, then, which Pakito described as a natural progression through technologies, come across here as things were more important: which might have contributed to an expansion of aesthetic horizons which contained senses of ‘*la possibilité*’.

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²⁰⁸ It reminds us of Sundaram’s case in Delhi: these are the objects which pull into question the ‘lines between the surface and the inside, original and copy, which transfixed the Western modernist archive and its postmodern reformulations’ (Sundaram 2009, 112); he suggests that they participate in a ‘pirate modernity’.

Similarly to with the cassette and CD shops, it can feel as if the time of the MP3 compilation has faded. There is undoubtedly less musical traffic through the *hanut* at Galerie 7. Whilst these objects were felt to expand worlds before the revolution, what is their significance in a post-revolutionary world, so often described as ‘open’, and where it is now YouTube which seems to contain ‘everything’? I’ll suggest over the next two parts of this chapter that the role of Mp3 piracy, and of the *hanut* at Galerie 7, has changed; once about expanding worlds, it now seems to be about taming the infinities of YouTube in order to maintain unique and tailored senses of *jaww*. We see this both in public and semi-public spaces of cafés and taxis, and also back in the Galerie 7 *hanūt* itself.

4.5 Scattered archival techniques through taxis and cafés

Whilst media piracy was once the particular speciality of places such as Galerie 7, it is now in the hands of the user; even piracy has been ‘democratised’. And whilst it was once the dictatorship, in conjunction with an international economic situation, which limited access to media, it is now primarily the financial situation which is seen as the problem.²⁰⁹ Tunisians still cannot have international bank accounts with which to circulate currency abroad. Media, even online, cannot be bought. This includes Spotify subscriptions, software subscriptions, anything to do with Apple or Microsoft. (Indeed, my question about whether the Galerie 7 pirates use cloud storage was a stupid one). The situation means that even people who have little interest in the ins and outs of technology and access – who do not have Pakito’s interest or talent for sitting still for several hours – find ways to pirate. Lists of sites for pirated movies are common knowledge. Everyone has a friend who knows where to find the football matches. Even specialist terminology of pirated media sites is relatively common knowledge. Musicians are used to the idea that in order to work with certain parts of software suites such as Logic Pro, they will have to put time into finding creative solutions; which might involve rigging up several different hard drives in order to get past firewalls.

²⁰⁹ See the work of Murphey on the ways that the precarious financial situation has affected youth (Murphy, 2017).

So it is arguably the ‘archiving techniques’ themselves which are the key legacy of hubs such as Galerie 7. The skill to find and download Mp3 converters, and to use them to convert material from YouTube for use on USB sticks, is particularly widespread, and talked about as if it is obvious and simple. And the process leaves particular sonic traces in the semi-public spaces of taxis and cafés, as it enables people to hone their *jaww* with their playlists.

I was sure to come across Mp3 playlists in taxis. Taxi drivers would often listen to the radio – but sometimes they would have a little USB stick poking out of the dashboard, and the little digital word on the radio would read ‘MP3’ or ‘DVD’. As I previously described in the YouTube chapter, sounds in taxis were various: Lotfi Bouchnak or Camilla Cabello in a collective taxi; carefully timed selections of Nana, Tupac, Fairouz and George Wassouf to be in keeping with the appropriate times of day; rappers Sanfara and Samara animating a late night taxi. I suggested in this chapter that these instances show us how YouTube’s archive is spread across the city, and used as a repository by those who seek to create their own musical objects for use in situations like taxis. Now, it looks a little different. We realise that, in converting YouTube files into MP3s and putting them on listening technologies, the people in the taxis were participating in a collective act of MP3 downloading which has quite specific historical roots, that may well be traced back to places like Galerie 7. And whilst some of them were explicitly declared to have been constructed by the taxi drivers themselves, others were possibly purchased somewhere like Galerie 7, or another *publinet* (public internet point). We now see and hear in these playlists particular histories of piracy, and the spreading of their techniques.

Another place where this technique was widespread was cafés. We saw one of these, also, in the YouTube chapter: Amarena, the little café in my neighbourhood where I would go to write my notes. After noticing time and time again their particularly repetitive playlist, which drummed the songs of Soolking, Samara and others into my memory, I eventually asked about it: the waiter said that he made it himself, that he downloaded the material from YouTube.

It was a similar story in a centreville café where I would meet my friend Mohammed, ‘Laussane’. It is a little square space with an awning and a couple of little tables and chairs on the outside, and a few tables on the inside. The café was largely undecorated save a few canvases with printed images of Laussane, and a part of the wall with graffiti style writing on

it. A little television screen in the top corner by the door flashed, and emitted strings of rhythms and melodies. A USB stick was visibly poking out of a box just below the screen, and the sounds around us were accompanied by the visual playlist written on the screen (fig. 34). Once, I tried to pay attention to these sounds, and noted the following progression: a regular “oom ch oom ch” beat, in 4, with some synth melodic lines over the top, and a little circle with the word “NOCOPYRIGHTMUSIC” on the screen; the chilled out “*Aicha, aicha*” from Cheb Khaled; “this is the rhythm of the night! Ah ah! Ah yeah! The rhythm of the night...this is the rhythm of the night!”; a sharp backing beat that I nodded my head to, and sang along with; “Had a bad daaayyy. Had a bad day”; ‘Wadii el saffiii el dhraahh”, Fairouz’s voice drifted over us for a while. But generally, the sounds would meld in and out of the background and the foreground as we chatted. Sometimes we would remark on them, sometimes we would ignore them completely. Mohamed told me after several months of going there with him that he didn’t even like the *jaww* of the café, and that he just went there because it belonged to his friends, and his friends hung out there.

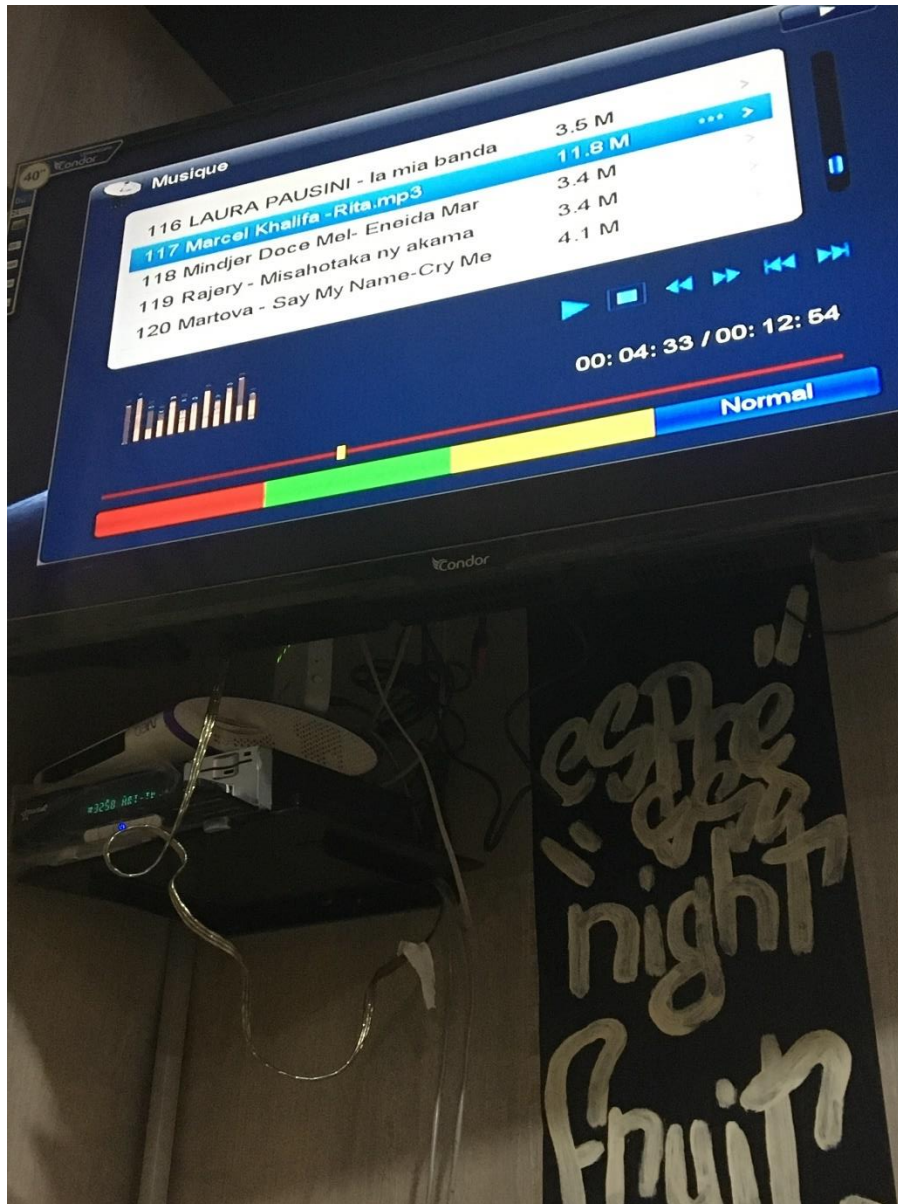


Fig. 34: A screen showing Mp3 compilations in the corner of Laussane café, Lafayette, May 2021

As we saw with the ways in which Mp3 compilations of the 2000s would sonically borrow from the kinds of cocktail structure of Mosaïque FM and other surrounding mediations, the Mp3 playlists in taxis and cafés would often be in keeping with the sounds of the very media that they seemed intent on escaping. Something that I found intriguing in these taxis was that despite these claims, there seemed also to be a great sonic and discursive similarity in their MP3 structures to the very archives that were being escaped from. When Om Kalthoum was on in the collective taxi, followed by Camilla Cabello, in the middle of the day, this could very easily have been Mosaïque FM. The taxi driver who described the ways in

which he changed the mood throughout the day – Koran in the morning, American rap in the afternoon, George Wassouf and ‘les veilles’ in the evening – could easily have been describing the ‘generalist’ radio playlist, or indeed the workings of the cassette and CD shops that we saw in the last chapter. The only playlists which could really be said to be escaping the radio were those with rap that was replete with *klem Zayed*, ‘bad words’ – but even in the rap playlist that was on, the rappers were Samara, Soolking and Algerino, generally radio friendly rappers.

But, again, it seemed that the important thing here was the capacity to create one’s own playlist, to have more control over their *jaww*. Perhaps the distinguishing feature of these taxi and café spaces which are animated by Mp3 playlists is that they are spaces for a familiar *jaww* to be built up between friends – and the Mp3 playlist participates in that. In Amarena this was achieved through the repetition of songs, and in the *centreville* café it was the repeated selection of styles. The sounds on the Mp3 playlists are more malleable than YouTube playlists; the playlisters can select what they like, and they don’t require a good internet connection to be played, easily shuffled around as desired. They are comfortable; and they provide a certain comfort to the space.

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Despite the apparent democratisation of this archival technique, Pakito’s *hanūt* in Galerie 7 is still going strong. Just as Mp3 playlists in the city seemed about taming the infinity of YouTube for the production of a kind of malleable comfort, so the activities of *Planète technologie* seemed to be maintaining a sense of expanse which was nonetheless familiar, and through which knowledge was being exchanged, and worlds were being built.

4.6 The discursive archive and curatorial *jaww* in *Planète technologie*

It seemed undeniable that the opening of YouTube had reduced trade in music at Galerie 7. But Pakito maintains that his business is still economically successful. He suggested that the other music businesses had folded because they hadn’t ‘adapted’. He prided himself on being able to offer a service which was particularly centred around understanding people’s

musical desires, and pre-empting them. '*Lazimak t'araf tahki m'a les clients*', 'you have to know how to speak to clients', he told me.

When people enter the shop they are asked '*tfadhal*' 'please'.²¹⁰ This wasn't a 'browsing' situation as in the cassette and CD shops, where objects would be silently contemplated through looking, and then bought. In this space, the visitors to the shop are required to imagine what is in the archive and to ask for the parts they might want, which they do with key terms signalling musical areas – their words are then returned with others by Pakito, who throws his own terms out – a playlist, or collection, is thus conjured into existence first through this discursive interaction. The words of the customer would send Pakito into a sharp burst of clicking through which he would find bits and pieces that they might like, select them, copy and paste them. The collection was moved through at incredible speed, with the little search bar also brought into the mix. And throughout the copying and pasting of this material onto a USB, CD or DVD, some of it is selected to be played from the speakers, thereby animating the shop with sound. Musical sounds shifted social dynamics slightly, before everyone collectively got used to the new sonic *jaww*. When the download is complete, the object is returned and cash is handed over. Music is traded in megabytes - for 3.5 dinars one gets around 100 to 200 songs. When there are other people in the shop, the interaction feels quite public, and often shared as several people jump in to participate.

It struck me that Pakito was almost situating himself as doing the work of an algorithm – something which would react to data being received by pre-empting desires and programme accordingly. He told me that when people came into the shop, they would ask for certain things – 'rap', '*mezoued*' – but that most of the time these words didn't cover everything that they really wanted, so he engaged in a process of trying to understand their desires further, which was what was being achieved with the return questions and words thrown back at the customers. When people are disappointed with a CD, he told me, it's the fault of the graveur. He gives me an example. 'If a client says they want "rihanna", "celine dion", "pop", you might understand that they want pop, so you'll give them a CD full of pop. But then actually maybe they want other stuff as well, and you have to ask them. Maybe they want a bit of reggae for example, you just didn't ask.' At another time, he gave me a different

²¹⁰ Used for 'can I help you', 'after you'.

example, based more around categories of Arabic music. He told me that often when people come into the shop asking for '*sharqi*', they actually mean '*musri*' (Egyptian). When they say 'Lebanese', they can also mean 'Palestinian' and 'Syrian'. When they say 'Khaliji', they can mean 'Saudi, Quatari', and all the gulf states.

It seemed that, when people went into the shop, and even when they downloaded things themselves in a similar way, part of the draw was the access to a known, familiar world and archive in amongst the perceived potential for infinity brought on by YouTube. This algorithmic, archival work was very social, and it seemed to be enjoyable, often for both parties. There was a vastness to the MP3 collection in Galerie 7, but people could trust that it would be situated within a known world. People would come in and ask for '*mezoued*', '*rap*', '*rai*', '*hajat jdod*' ('new things'). The archive might have been conjured into the air, but this was done based on a materiality that people already shared by virtue of being in the same city at the same moment. When the customer came in and asked for '*hajat jdod*' (new things), it was like he was trusting that this would be found because it was in a world that was, in a sense, curated and gathered together for Tunisians who move through the centreville. And Pakito HM, by asking customers if sounds lined up with '*jawwak*', was acknowledging this pre-existing relationship between the customer and the archive.²¹¹

This work took place against a collection which Pakito took pride in, and in a space whose atmosphere was carefully managed. The work of the archive here was one which was shared in a kind of ritual of knowledge production, through which people could move without a lot of interaction, or could try to get to know each other. There was a certain *jaww* in the process itself, as it circulated around each corner of the *hanūt* and the process of constructing and exchanging objects and sounds.

²¹¹ I noticed this happening through my own choices – the idea of asking for 'fenn chaabi mtaa les années 90' was a split decision which inevitably came from the current craze that was built around the 'nouba' series by director Abdelhamid Bouchnaq, son of singer Lotfi Bouchnaq. On that Ramadan, it had caused a resurgence in young people's interest in mezoued, particularly certain mezoued sounds which had actually been stripped of their orgue and bass accompaniment in the series. My 'conjuring' was thus based on mediations in the city: the watching the series with Rania on a phone propped up against a speaker as we ate; the dancing bodies around me during the Ramadan soirées put on by dancer Rochdi Belgasmi. I could trust that Galerie 7 would provide, because this was its world.

Pakito himself described interactions with his own archive as *'jaww'*. He talked about the archive with pride, describing it as containing 'everything', an 'everything' that was constantly being added to.²¹² The aesthetic arrangements of these files, whilst they might seem generic to an outsider, are deeply familiar to Pakito and to others who use the computer. There were several features to the desktop which seemed to have been developed for purposes of a kind of atmosphere. When I asked Pakito about the colours of the folders on the collection, for instance, he told me that there wasn't any particular significance, and that it was *'al jaww'* ('for the atmosphere'). And there were certain other things on the desktop which he'd grown attached to. Whenever he played music from the collection, he used a little music player called 'WinAmp', which would pop up and sit next to the folders. On a couple of occasions, Pakito told me how it was a very old programme, but that he loved it – *'sahabi'*, he said, fondly, 'my friend' (fig.35)



Fig. 35: Pakito's 'friend': Winamp. Galerie 7, July 2022

And this kind of care in aesthetic arrangements extended around the shop. Little plastic souvenirs and ornaments that are stationed around the desktop: smurfs, spongebob, Minnie Mouse and more. These, incidentally, also have layers to them – different collections at

²¹² This is inkeeping with Sterne and Benjamin: despite the ostensible obliteration of usual monetary 'values' of musical exchange, Sterne details how there is 'a sense in which the concept of the collection persists, along with the bourgeois sense of ownership that subtends it. Users may be able to handle mp3s quite differently than the recordings they possess in larger physical forms like records or CDs, but they still talk about MP3s as things – things that are owned, and which offer affordances to their users.' He quotes Walter Benjamin: 'For a collector, ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects' (Sterne 2012, 67) – 'This appears to be the case even when people do not pay for the objects they collect'.

different times, many gifts from people. And despite the mass of things in the shop, it was all intensely organised. Pakito would dust the ‘archive’ before opening it, organise things into their correct spots. The smell and the temperature were carefully controlled with the oil burner and various air conditioners and fans. Even malfunctioning technologies were brought into the overall *jaww* of the space – for instance, there is a monitor which constantly plays a film – I am told that this is so that the thing doesn’t fall asleep, but it also adds to the feel of the whole shop (Fig. 36). And even the objects which would once have mediated senses of expanse, such as the Planet album, now mediate warm memories: when Pakito put the disks into his computer and saw the picture of the dragon, as well as the list of Microsoft files, he exclaimed ‘*ya hasra!*’²¹³

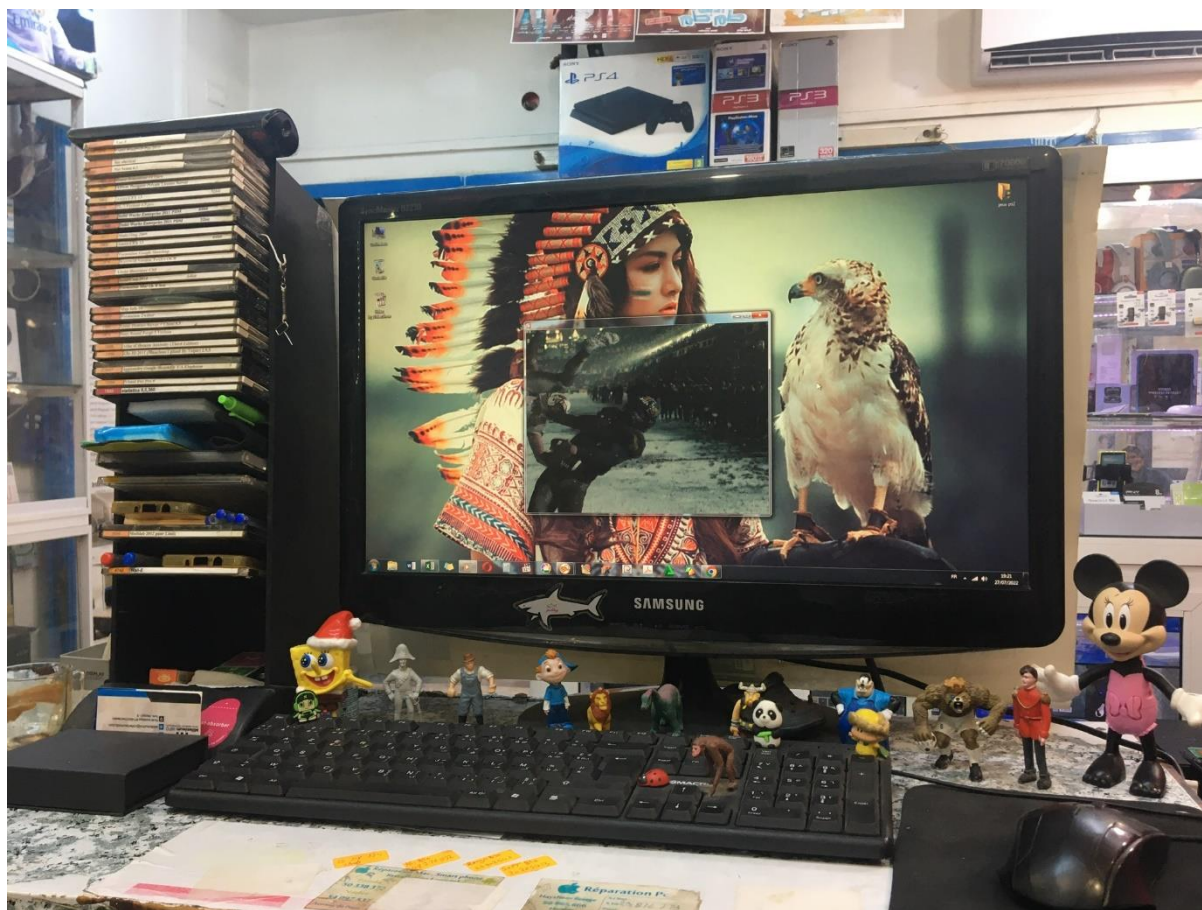


Fig. 36: *Jaww* across objects in Galerie 7, July 2022

Musical sounds added to the sociability of the shop in several ways. Musical snippets were widely used in the shop by Pakito to extend his musical theories to me as we stood behind

²¹³ An expression of nostalgia, like ‘what a time!’

the desk – theories that other people would often chip into. Segments of conversation and segments of listening would roll together. I learned that Pakito HM thought about and differentiated music through the *iq'a* (rhythms) and through the notion of generations. He told me that he would show me the difference between all the different styles of house music, and went through several different styles, playing them in snippets, and directing my attention towards the precise rhythms which were, for him, the main differentiating factor. Another time, he told me that there was an 'African rhythm taking over the world', and he played a series of afrobeat inspired things which he situated for me across the world, particularly Latin America, and songs made big in the American industries like 'Taki taki'. 'What is the difference between the styles of music in Tunis?' he would ask me, before answering – '*m'andhumsh nafs al iq'a*' 'they don't have the same rhythm', and he illustrated this through playing several different kinds of *fann sh'abi*. It was a process of sharing and learning through which it felt as if the outside world was being ordered, as its rhythms were discussed and listed and heard, from within the familiar surroundings of the shop. Indeed, the 'rhythm taking over the world' was the same that we identified in Chapter 2 as being brought into the mainstream through YouTube; here, there is a certain curation of this process by Pakito, taking it from the realm of the algorithm and bringing it to the realm of the shop.²¹⁴

And musical sounds also provided a sonic framework upon which people were brought into relationships with each other. I was alerted to this the first time I bought music from the *hanout*. When asked '*tfadhal*' the first time I said '*fann sh'abi mt'a les 90ete*': '*fann sh'abi* from the 90s'. The employee checked with me a few times with his own terms – '*kan l 90ete*?' – 'only the 90s?' 'folklore?'. He played one of the songs as I was waiting, and *fazzani* rhythms suddenly burst into the shop.²¹⁵ The social dynamic in the shop changed suddenly as the sounds entered. I had been standing by the back cabinets and there were two

²¹⁴ It was interesting also how these musics were 'chunked' – in conversation, Pakito would double click on the icon so that it would open in WinAmp, and would very often play the first few seconds and then the middle few seconds. I was reminded of a similar method of listening which occurred in the radio studios, as playlisters were checking their playlists – getting what they clearly thought to be a representative taste of the song through listening only to the first part, and a few seconds somewhere in the middle. It struck me that this had become a listening technique which was developed by, and in order to engage with, vast quantities of songs which were being playlisted together – and it says something about how songs and musics might be characterised by a sort of 'mesh' which is thought to exist roughly throughout.

²¹⁵ One of the key rhythms played in *mezoued*.

Tunisian women sitting on the chairs, waiting for a different service – one older, one younger. As soon as the rhythms flooded in they suddenly looked up, a little surprised, one of them smiled a little, I felt myself wince and my face redden slightly. None of us said anything for a while, we just sat there, stationary despite the fact that the music usually urges bodies into dance. Against the awkwardness, one of the women struck up a conversation with the playlister, and with me: '*c'est très connu ça*', 'it's very known, that' she said in French, and asked the man what it was: '*man'arafsh, mūsh maktūb jamla*', 'I don't know, it's not written at all', he replied. We got chatting, she told me that she works with Germans and that I resemble them. The track is changed and I'm surprised that such a heavily autotuned sound would have come from the 90s, and I ask the man about it, who said: '*ça n'a pas vraiment change*', 'it's not really changed.' The sounds created a bed of sociality which blended into the space, became normal.

In another instance, I was standing behind the desk discussing *mezoued* with Pakito when a group of people came in who looked like they might be from Subsaharan Africa. There was a man, a woman and a younger woman, possibly in her early 20s, who sat on the chair, waiting for her friends to finish talking to one of the other employees about a broken laptop. Pakito tried to involve the girl in our discussion. He explained to her in French that we were listening to *mezoued*, '*la musique traditionnelle*', and she smiled shyly. Whilst it was on, he quickly searched through his computer entering into folders marked 'Africain' and 'Afrobeat', clicked on a song, and the *mezoued* gave way to some Afrobeat. We watched the girl as she looked up, seeming slightly surprised, and gave another little smile – Pakito HM asked her if she knew what it is, and she nodded. The group finished their dealings with the laptop and left.

In both of these situations, the sounds quite suddenly brought into question our relationships with each other, with the worlds that the sounds brought into question, and with the gendered and racial power dynamics existing in the shops. I was struck by a certain shyness which ran through both, as well as the ways in which these recorded sounds were being performed by men for women. In the first 'mezoued' situation, the *mezoued* rhythms felt like they were bounding into space as if there was a very sudden imposition of a different context in which we all have different roles: that of weddings and festivities where women dance in certain ways. At the same time, it was also entirely ambiguous, clearly still a

shop, not a wedding, and the sound was after all a request from one of the women – the white one. In the second situation, it felt like Pakito HM was lining up the presence of the girl with the presence of a certain sound which was attributed to her, and was doing so performatively. In-so-doing, he was marking these things ambiguously in relation to each other, as well as to him and his collection. Was it an affectionate act of sharing and welcome within an environment so often hostile to sub-saharan Africans, or was it a controlling fixing of African identities to Black bodies in an act of othering? Was the smile a sign of acceptance of a gesture perceived as welcoming, or did it come from a place of defence, of responding to perceived social pressure? Indeed, there was a fundamental ambiguity to these moments.

Sterne connects MP3 file sharing within a sort of urban condition as it was described by sociologist Simmel as characterized by large and impersonal institutions and interactions, which people deal with by developing a ‘blazé’ attitude out of protection against the overwhelmingness of the urban landscape; he describes things like ‘BitTorrent’ as akin to the urban non-place (Sterne 2012, 218). What’s interesting here is that despite this, and against the backdrop of these systems, there is a surprising amount of connection built up through the sharing of sounds from MP3s with concrete connections to people and bodies. Indeed, they resemble the acoustic territories described by LaBelle as being ‘shared spaces that belong to no single public and yet which impart a feeling for intimacy’ (LaBelle 2010, xvii). Despite the sounds being collected and organised through these vast, often impersonal systems of MP3 traffic, they culminate, at least in the space of this shop, in a desire to know people which is carried out and practiced through a carefully timed double click. The sounds brought into the shop for certain customers linger there even after the customer has left the space, leaving traces of interaction.²¹⁶

4.7 Conclusion

We started this chapter by asking how Mp3 archives fit into our picture of the ways in which archives organise sound, music and bodies through urban space. We asked how their

²¹⁶ This is inkeeping with Steingo’s claim for Mp3 listening as something which can be variously social and antisocial depending on the situation, rather than the ‘privatised’ listening experiences that we are used to hearing about from the global North (Steingo, 2019).

fragments are organised and brought together in stories and communities of time, which necessarily interact with the other archival structures that we have already seen – the state sonic archives, YouTube, and cassette and CD objects and shops. What is the contribution of Mp3 organisation to Tunis's aural public sphere?

The sonic effects of Mp3 circulation, particularly from Galerie 7, on the aural public sphere remain ambiguous. We've seen that a vast amount of material which has been mediated over the years by Galerie 7, in Mp3 compilations or in swathes of folders transferred to a USB stick, in many ways mirror the mediations of surrounding archives: the cocktails and the *sharqi, gharbi, tunisi* divisions of Mosaïque FM and the cassette and CD shops; the rock music of the RTCI radio station and even figures of the state archive such as Cheikh Afrit. Mp3 compilations, when they are heard in public space, also often repeat these repertoires and sonic patterns: from the Soolking repeated in the café Amarena, to the cocktails in the café Laussane, to Om Kalthoum in the collective taxi.

But Mp3s, and the activities of Galerie 7, have arguably served to change the modes of engagement with this aural public sphere, and its underpinning archives. In pre-revolutionary times, compilation albums are described as having been vital for allowing a kind of 'access' to the 'outside', which was achieved through the motions of piracy. The large, neatly formatted and curated compilations such as the Planete albums seem to have been about affording users the right to explore and design one's own 'instituting imaginary' and 'communities of time', in amongst the more powerful mediators of the state and private media (even if this included the sonic reproducing of their archives). In post-revolutionary times, there has been a democratisation of the 'archival techniques' of piracy and playlist compilation. The space of Galerie 7, and the spaces tintured by Mp3 playlists and compilations in cafés and taxis, offer an almost opposite mode of engagement with the aural public sphere: the infinity of YouTube might be honed, and 'music' might be discussed and theorised in ways which link it to local circulations of sounds and bodies – with the familiar. Mp3 archives, then, in both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary times, have contributed to the aural public sphere not only (or even most significantly) through the choice and arrangements of their fragments, but through the ways in which they afford the act of arranging itself, and a spreading of their 'archival technique'.

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The ways in which Mp3 files require a kind of deliberate 'double click' in order to be heard is arguably oddly reminiscent of the kind of deliberate movement needed to play a vinyl record. Both objects arguably mediate feelings of the single fragment. But what of vinyls? For our final chapter, we'll move into several kinds of vinyl archive as they are mediated around Tunis and beyond.

5. Vinyl

5.1 Introduction

Vinyl comes across in scholarly work and media discourse as an opposite kind of media character to the Mp3: glamorous, valuable, painstakingly produced, and big. It is also placed at the opposite end of the temporal spectrum: not the container technology of archives that the Mp3 is described as, but the foundational sound recording object. Along with typewriters and films, the gramophone was, for Kittler, one of the ‘early and seemingly harmless machines capable of storing and therefore separating sounds, sights, and writing’, which ‘ushered in a technologizing of information that, in retrospect, paved the way for today’s self-recursive stream of numbers’ (Kittler 1999, xl). Vinyl, and its predecessor shellac, is discussed for its role in the formation of entire genres of music which coalesced around the format throughout the 20th century (Frith & Zagorski-Thomas, 2012; Straw, 2011; Walker et al., 2012). We know from historical work on the colonial era that vinyl recording had a primary role in the formation of certain genres and industries across the Arab World.²¹⁷ Indeed, our journey through Tunis’s archives started with vinyl: in our discussions of the state archives, we saw how the post-independent national archive was built around vinyl materials that had been used to record voices contextualised as mobilising a ‘national sentiment’, such as those recorded by Habiba Msika and the stars of *Chanson Tunisienne* and *Ma’lūf*. We saw how the records were kept back from the public eye in the buildings of the RTT and the *phonothèque* to increase their status, whilst being mediated as sounds across the radio, in efforts to maintain an aural public sphere which would be imbued with the sounds of industry and nationalism.

²¹⁷ See for instance Goodman for vinyl industry’s interlinks with Kabyle song in Algeria, and Racy and Danielson for the Egyptian record industry (Danielson, 2008; Goodman, 2003; Racy, 2004).

Recently, vinyl has attracted a lot of attention from scholars who have traced the stories of a 'vinyl revival' taking place across the Global North. Scholars have traced the resurgence of interest in the format in a digital age, through which they have discussed how value is constructed around its materialities, its feelings of uniqueness, and a certain nostalgia for past music cultures and listening moments which the format enabled.²¹⁸ Particularly interesting here has been the work of Bates, who has suggested that vinyl becomes an 'event' as it is used to perform selves during big revival events such as 'Record Store Day' (Bates, 2020); and Osborne, who suggests that the vinyl object and its labels allows people to play with 'auras' for mass produced goods (Osborne, 2007). For these scholars, these movements of revival are indicative of a certain nostalgia, which they link, to differing degrees, to the ways in which the capitalist economy takes mundane objects and repackages them as nostalgic and valuable.²¹⁹ But what of vinyl in contemporary Tunis? There has not yet been talk of a similar kind of nostalgic 'revival' in scholarly work looking at music and listening in Tunis.²²⁰

Do vinyl archives in Tunis continue to shape an aural public sphere? Do they continue to shape communities of time? How do their fragments, stories, and communities of time

²¹⁸ There has been a huge amount of this work: Osborne and Shuker have provided extensive overviews of vinyl histories up to the so-called revival (Osborne, 2007; 2016; Shuker, 2017); Dartmasnki and Woodward have highlighted the tensions between the 'analogue' nature of the record and the 'digital' age (Bartmasnki & Woodward, 2015); Hracs and Jansson think about the significance of the record shop; (Hracs & Jansson, 2020); Bates and . think about the significance of Record Store Day (Bates, 2020; Harvey, 2017).

²¹⁹ For instance, whilst Cross puts vinyl in a category of objects which is all about companies within a capitalist economy rendering nostalgia a commodity and trading in its objects (Cross, 2015), others such as Palm take a less critical view and think instead about the consequences on popular culture and music scenes of combining 'digital' and 'analogue' (Palm, 2019).

²²⁰ There has been work on a musical evocation of 'nostalgia', but it has centred on the sentiments evoked through the practice of Ma'lūf repertoires using the Tunisian 'ud arbi: see Morra (Morra, 2019). Indeed, in the process of writing this chapter, I have been alerted to the disparity between the quantity of work looking at contemporary vinyl listening habits in the global North, within this context of a 'revival', and the dearth of similar work looking at contemporary vinyl consumption in the global South. When the global South comes into this work it is referenced as the spaces of the factories for the production of materials fuelling the Northern trend (Devine, 2019). Exceptions have been the work of Schoop on the Philippines, in which she highlights similar trends of the transforming of the vinyl object as an object of distinction (Schoop, 2018). Greene interestingly pointed out, during work in Peru on punk scenes, that vinyl revival was seen as something operating within a "'gringo" logic'; 'Vinyl represents a musical format that was not commonly consumed in an impoverished country like Peru, where historically it has been largely inaccessible to all but the most elite sectors of the society.' (S. Greene, 2016). Whilst not the principle aim of this chapter, (whose thematic, in keeping with the thesis, is the archive), my work in this area could be seen also as an attempt to shift focus on this contemporary vinyl meanings, in keeping with projects 'remapping' of sound studies, following Steigno and Sykes (Sykes & Steigno, 2019). More work is needed here.

participate alongside the other archival structures we have seen in the shaping of Tunis's post-revolutionary aural public sphere?

This chapter will start with a necessary excursion back through various archival efforts surrounding vinyl throughout the post-independence decades, through which we'll see the ways that they were mediated in other archives besides the state archives: those of tourism, and shops geared towards mass consumption. Moving into the contemporary city, we'll find spots which suggest that fragments have gone on other journeys, and have coalesced into other a constellation of archives which expand beyond state buildings. I found them in the online marketplace Discogs; in a little unnamed *hanout* tucked away on a street just off the *nahj* Zarkoun; and in the shadows of mediations across multiple radio stations and spaces of leisure. We'll hone in on two different ways in which vinyl archives shape sonic worlds: as things which afford a certain engagement with desires for modern industry and 'culture' from a group of aesthetic workers around 'culture' spaces; and as things which afford a certain kind of deep listening in the vinyl shop run in Hafsia. We'll think about the ways in which vinyl's materialities and imaginaries afford moments of 'togetherness' through listening in both of these situations; but also how, in the midst of Tunis's archival situation, their projects can be easily undermined.

5.2 Histories of vinyl archives: radios, outlets, ubiquity

As we already covered in chapter 1, vinyl records were being produced in Tunis throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. We saw how they formed the basis of the state archives in the RTT and the Phonothèque, where they stored important voices which would shape the national imaginary: the Ma'lūf, the stars of the Chanson Tunisienne, the voice of Bourguiba (R. F. Davis, 2004; Pierrepont-de Cock, 2004). And we saw how this archive was arguably diffracted and disseminated outside these buildings through the circulation of vinyl records from *En'nagham*, the state vinyl company. However, the idea that vinyl objects, even the objects of *En'nagham*, were solely doing the work of spreading the 'official' national imaginary can be questioned. In both the colonial and post-colonial periods, vinyl archives were ontologically multiple, worked hand in hand with radio to mediate recordings, and

arguably served to extend multiple imaginaries and to generate different kinds of communities of time.²²¹ We know as much from the work of Corriou on radio, and Silver and Abassi on record industries (Abassi, 2000; Corriou, 2010; Silver, 2022): their important historical work gives us a rich picture of the sorts of movements of recording and listening during this time, which I will detail in order to then build on with the descriptions given to me of the post-colonial era by Héchmi Ben Frej.

Both scholars paint a picture of media infrastructures during the colonial period which were multiple and complicated, and worked to mediate senses of nation just as they usurped those same notions. Silver traces the histories of multiple record enterprises that had outlets across the country: for instance, he details how in 1903, the Bembaron brothers, impresarios based in Tunis, set up a store dedicated to musical instruments and sheet music – before starting to stock phonographs and records, and French pianos. By the late 1920s, there were independent labels run by Béchir Rssaissi, the French branch of German Polyphon label began recording in Tunisia, and by the decade's end there was Columbia, Parlophone, Pholyphon – 'Jews served as their representatives and were, like Mezzaoud Habib, sometimes themselves high-profile recording artists' (Silver, 2022). By the end of the 1920s, he tells us, 'hundreds of thousands of acoustically and electrically made records were circulating across North Africa' (Silver, 2022). This coincided with the colonial radio, which would also mediate recordings from artists that were made famous through the recording industries, both Tunisian and international (Corriou, 2010).

The descriptions from these authors paint this recording activity, through both the radio and the record industry, as resulting in a certain 'intensification of the aural' (Ochoa Gautier, 2006), which worked in several directions. Silver tells us that the interwar period was known by many as the 'age of decadence', shaped by the voices of divas: Habiba Messika, her heiress Ratiba Chamia, Louisa Tounsia, Dalila Taliana, and the male composers behind the

²²¹ Confluences between record industries and radio has been much covered in the west (see for instance Gibson and Connell who talk about links between record industries and radio in the west in the early 20th century) 'Records were a cheap form of programming for radio, and radio exposure was the most effective means of advertising and promoting records' (Connell & Gibson 2003, 54). They have been less covered in the Arab World, though the work of Fahmy has recently been enlightening in this area. He suggests that, at the turn of the 20th century, combinations of media including print but also the productions of record companies, radio and theatre troupes, have come together to create a 'media-capitalism' which would help 'shape the "modern" identities of Egypt's new cultural consumers' (Fahmy, 2010).

female icons – Gaston Bsiri, Acher Mizrahi. Musical influences were Egyptian, as well as the foxtrot and the Charleston (Silver, 2022). As Corriou details, it was also a time of soaring popularity of Egyptian records imported from Egypt, causing a radio reviewer, writing in Tunis based magazine *Ez-Zohra*, to apparently criticise the radio for playing so much Egyptian music rather than Tunisian, suggesting it was like being in the Nile Valley (Corriou 2010, 377). At the same time, these vinyl archives were mediated outwards, often with unexpected results. Corriou also details how even listeners from France, for instance, would come to form a bond with the Tunisian archive, and would express as much through letters written to the radio: ‘During the darkest hours of the Occupation, listeners from France discovered concerts by the Rachidia or Tunisian singers such as Fadhila Khati and Chafia Rochdi’ (374). Indeed, Silver suggests that the popular sounds of this generation of musicians ‘transcended the national, even while shaping a Tunisian national culture in the making’ (Silver, 2022).

We also understand from this work that the ‘communities of time’ of the vinyl listening publics formed across multiple spaces, notably the semi-public spaces of cafés. From the descriptions of Hamadi Abassi in the book *Tunis Chant et Danse*, we get a picture of a musical public space in which sounds from gramophones spilled out of cafés: he paints a colourful picture of Khemais Tarnane strolling down the canal in Bizerte as the voice of Om Kalthoum drifts from the cafés (Abassi, 2000). Silver asserts that records were ‘consumed in cafés, bars, restaurants, cabarets, theaters, and even brothels as well as in private homes, record sales exploded in the interwar period.’ (Silver, 2022). And these would have interlinked with the sounds of radio, which was also present in the spaces of cafés, often offering avenues of subversion as listeners, particularly in the interwar period, would listen to Radio Bari, the Italian station which peddled an anti-French sentiment (Corriou, 2010). Judging by the writing of Silver, certain songs achieved ubiquity in colonial North African cities in ways that sound reminiscent of today’s muscscapes – of 1920s Algeria, he says: ‘whether in concert, on radio, by way of record, or merely hummed in marketplaces, the sounds of Halali and Elmaghribi were everywhere’ (Silver, 2022). We would only need to swap ‘Halali’ and ‘Elmaghribi’ with ‘Samara’ and ‘Soolking’ to find ourselves a whole century later in contemporary Tunis.

So we understand these vinyl archives as things which moved through outlets, homes, and cafés: manifestations of record collecting and a tailoring of *jaww* of the kind that we now see

continued with the Mp3 playlist. In chapter 1 of this thesis, we saw how Héchmi Ben Frej discussed the role of the vinyl industry in relation to the state – as a producer of the speeches of Bourguiba – and how he had subverted the usual contents of the state archive with his recording of artists such as *mezoued* singer Hédi Habbouba. Here, we turn to another part of the story as he painted it out: *En'nagham's* role as a provider of records for the consumption of the Tunisian listener, to be collected from shops throughout the country and listened to in various spaces of leisure. During the 1960s and 1970s, also, as we saw in the first chapter, there seems to have been a confluence between radio and vinyl listening, with its own specificities in reflection of the era. His stories of a mass of production and consumption align with certain news articles of the day which tackled the subject of vinyl consumption.

Ben Frej describes the clients of *En'nagham* as diverse. They included café owners, who would position a record player next to the radio in order to participate in the ambiance creation of their spaces. Ben Frej suggests that they would differ in their chosen *jaww*, though 'some would *only* play Om Kalthoum', he added with a chuckle – as they do today. They included mosques: to whom they would provide the recordings of Koranic recitation and *Soulamiya*.²²² Hotels and hotel workers would purchase multiple kinds of recording: the *animateurs* would buy disks of 'folklore' to play on tourist buses who 'enjoyed dancing to the rhythms of *Sidi Mansour*'; the DJs would animate the discotheques attached to hotel complexes and situated in tourist zones with records of funk and soul.²²³ Records were quite simply '*partout*', 'everywhere', Ben Frej said. They existed in outlets throughout the country for people to buy and use to create their own collections. These shop spaces were arranged differently according to the seller, and stocked different things depending on where they were positioned: those in more touristy areas for instance, or the souks which sold the

²²² Abdul Smut was an Imam; Soulamiya is a form of religious song.

²²³ Indeed, Ben Frej suggested to me the following: 'Western song started when there was animation in the hotels, so there were young people who learned the Western songs, so that's how there was an émergence of singers who sang in French and English...linked to animation in hotels.' This was a sentiment that was echoed by several other people throughout my research. The links between the evolutions of music and of tourism came through as an important area, highly indicative of the reformulation of post-colonial relationships as discussed by Saidi in his ethnography on tourism, which needs future attention (H. Saidi & Kilani, 2017).

products of *artisanat*, would only stock the recordings of *Sidi Mansour* and ‘folklore’ for the tourist market. Records in general were not expensive, ‘*en fonctionne du pouvoir d’achat de la tunisie*’, ‘according to Tunisian spending power’; they were bought by ‘*tout le peuple*’, ‘all the people’.

And the radio, and media, was seemed to connect Tunisian spaces to the ‘international’. Ben Frej described a specific moment of alignment : the death of Jacques Brel. ‘I remember for example, the first disc of Jacques Brel after his death, the release date for the disc in the world, was also the release date for the disc in Tunis. That is to say that they sent a representative from the record label of Jacques Brel, there was a representative who had a shop in the *Colisée*, he had the stock, and he only started to sell when they started to sell them in the rest of the world’. The sense of ‘event’ seems to have been created through the coming together of mediations from several different sources on the channel France 2 which was accessible from Tunis, as well as RAI uno, an Italian channel.²²⁴

The extent of these commercial selling activities – and their shop archives – is confirmed in an article published by the journalist R. Ben Fadhel in *Le Temps* in 1978, in which he focused especially on the buying habits of the consumers of vinyls (Ben Fadhel, 1978).²²⁵ The article is a study on the sorts of discs on the market, and the ways in which ‘Tunisians’ buy and choose discs. He starts by noting the repetitive nature of the vinyl soundscape: ‘*Poum Poum Poum - O baby yes – O baby no – que tu es belle – non je ne t’oublierai jamais*, the same drum beats, the same words. It’s become an obsession by virtue of always hearing the same song from record shops, nightclubs and radios.’ He looked into some figures provided by a couple of the distributors open at the time (he estimated there were around 80 in total in Tunisia, of which 20 were in the capital). His findings were listed as follows: in a shop that specialises in the selling of classical records, he notes 1000 33rpm vinyls of ‘*Chanson arabe*’ sold per year, 3000 of ‘*classique*’, and 15000 of ‘*variété*’, which includes ‘*les classiques français*’. With another seller, he notes that ‘the 45 tour of *Sidi Mansour*, during the summer season, sells 10 to 15 discs daily. Fairouz, Idir and Megri are also very in demand because they are often played in the *discothèques*. The clients of this kind of disk are mainly

²²⁴ Lots of my friends have anecdotes about Rai Uno – some of them even developed a basic level of Italian as children watching cartoons on the channel.

²²⁵ This article was kindly supplied to me in photographic form by Ali Saidane. As such I am missing an exact date.

composed of tourists' (Ben Fadhel, 1978). This leads him to the following conclusion: 'the Tunisian disc seems to be an exotic product whose clientele is essentially foreign...the Tunisian public doesn't buy Tunisian discs.' Elsewhere in the study, he gives two explanations for this: first, there is a lack of Tunisian musicians with 'talent', 'imagination' or 'initiative', meaning that 'Tunisian music is in perpetual construction', constantly revising repertoire from '*la chanson populaire, le Ma'lūf et la vieille variété*'; second, and in part because of this, the Tunisian youth are enamoured with Western or Middle Eastern music, which they come across in discos, on the radio, and in magazines.

Clearly, then, the post-colonial vinyl archive was about more than the national radio; it was also about spaces of leisure and tourism, which saw a vast amount of material move through them. And, just as we saw in the commercial spaces of the last two chapters – the cassette and CD shops of chapter 3, and the Mp3 space of chapter 4 – it seems that these vinyl archives as they existed in shop-form became spaces which mediated several things at once. As well as mediating large repertoires of recordings, the shops and soundscapes connected with them seem to have mediated, for journalists like Ben Fadhel, senses of who the Tunisian people were, what they liked, indeed, what sorts of 'musical subjects' they were (Kassabian, 2013). And this seemed to rub up in constant tension with the 'outside', represented by the tourists, as tourist spaces and archives were places that Tunisians moved through, but were also defined against.

But what of the journeys of these fragments? Where is this part of the vinyl archive currently being mediated?

5.3 Splintered archiving: Discogs, shop, texts, rejections

Vinyls have coalesced into several different archives, which mediate them as different things, and use them to tell different stories. Their journeys into and out of these archives carry traces of varied political organisation and projects. Before looking more carefully at engagements with these archives, we'll trace some of these journeys: the offloading of *En'nagham* objects into archives by Ben Frej; the circulation of objects around Discogs; the

crowding of objects in a little vinyl shop, and the remediation of vinyls and histories into books and works of scholarship.

First, certain archiving motions seem to have come in the logic of rejection. When I asked Ben Frej if he had kept any of the disks that he had made at *En'nagham*, he told me that he had been so disgusted with the domain by the end of his work that he hadn't kept any of the recording material and had only kept a few disks. We saw in Chapter 1 that vinyl objects, for him, seemed to represent everything that had been right with the domain as it existed in this Bourguiban era: correct industrial procedure, correct copyright practice, and orderly relationships with international industries. But this isn't where his story ends. Ben Frej actually set up his own small record label – 'Africa Voice' – through which he would try to encourage 'alternative' singers: artists such as Hédi Guella, *Bahath al Gabes* in Tunis, and Marcel Khalife and Cheikh Imam from Lebanon and Egypt. He had planned to continue his work in the domain; with the shift to cassettes, he told me, he had drawn up plans for an entire state industry which would see each phase of the cassette manufacture procedure stationed in Tunisia. But the government rejected the plans, preferring to enable a widespread and cheaper importation of cassette objects from abroad. He suggested to me that the cassette companies of the 1980s actually came together to lobby the central bank to make exemptions for the importation of copyright, opening the way to widespread piracy. They pirated all of his work, including that with the politically engaged artists that he had worked with; as a result he experienced '*la pire période de ma vie*', 'the worst time of my life'. In his disgust, he told me he gave all of his recording equipment away to artists that he had supported; and he gave the majority of his vinyls away, keeping only a few. Most of the *En'nagham* produce was given at some point into the state *phonothèque*, where it has currently coalesced, as we saw, on the online *phonothèque* list.

It is the lack of desire to keep a personal archive here which is remarkable: this is made even more remarkable by the fact that Ben Frej, in the context of his current work with the political organisation *Perspectives*, told me he has the nickname 'Monsieur Archives', for his energy in bringing together archives of left-wing resistance. We know from Mbembe that the desire to archive is politically shaped, with a view to construct stories around fragments (Mbembe, 2002) – Ben Frej's actions, on the contrary, come across as a 'chronophagy' of his own archive, in a desire to forget the time associated with the failure of the archive itself.

In contrast to this simultaneous rejection of archiving, and channelling of objects into the state archive, there exists Discogs. Discogs is an online marketplace and database for used vinyls, founded in Portland, Oregon, and used across countries plugged into the international banking system.²²⁶ Sitting in my room in La Goulette, I had a look through Discogs.

Companies that we have come across in the stories of Silver and Ben Frej all have a presence here: 'les Artistes Arabes Associés' leads to a large number of sublabels.²²⁷ 'Mellouli Phone', the company of the Niez's uncle (who we met in Chapter 3), came up with a list of 31 pages including many thumbnails of Hedi Habbouba, Souad Mahasen, Troupe Toufik Zouari, and Abdel Wahab El Doukali. When one types in '*En'nagham*', the following information appears, unreferenced and hanging there as fact: 'En'nagham is a Tunisian Public Sector publishing house established in 1963. The company also produced / distributed sound recordings through its own label *En'nagham*' (Fig. 37). The first 'artist' that comes up on the En'nagham list is none other than 'Habib Bourguiba'. He is joined by Nana Mouskouri, Michel Sardou, Mohsen Rais, Saliha, Mohamed Jerari, Soulaf. Lists are riddled with hyperlinks. Artist names and titles of records are hyperlinked; clicking on them leads you into a different web, the web of the artist or record title. Clicking on Sidi Mansour comes up with '35 versions': a list of many different colourfully illustrated covers with the same title next to it, and occasionally different format information or catalogue numbers. Clicking on Om Kalthoum leads to 3,460 versions spread across numerous companies, including Cairophon, Parlophon and Philips. Individual entries contain information as it has been added into the frameworks by uploaders, including, sometimes, pictures of the disks themselves, and different parts of the sleeve. Occasionally there is some interaction around a disk in a comments section. One user has written underneath the 'Sidi Mansour' entries: 'Sidi Mansour is the title of a Tunesian folkloric song. Frank Farian's assistant Hans-Jorg Mayer (aka Reyam) had discovered this popular Tunisian folkloric song while on holiday, and rewrote the song into a disco track for Boney M = Ma Baker'.²²⁸

²²⁶ Discogs has been labelled by Bates as the 'largest international marketplace for used and collectible recordings', which, along with Ebay, he situates as part of the 'robust online used record economy'. (Bates, 2020). It was founded by programmer, DJ, and 'music fan' Kevin Lewandowski.

²²⁷ 20 Années de Succès, Le Chaâbi, Le Rai en Algerie, etc), and thumbs of artists such as 'Ahmed Wahby', 'Saloua', Lamari, Mohamed Jerrari', with various album titles in French and Arabic, in a list which contained around 900 items in total. Dates span from 'unknown' to '1983' and '1990'

²²⁸ Accessed at <https://www.discogs.com/master/360868-Mohammed-Hanesh-Sidi-Mansour>, 12/03/2023

Societe Tunisienne De Diffusion
 Profile: الشركة التونسية للتوزيع (self-identified as *Societe Tunisienne De Diffusion* in French) is a Tunisian public sector publishing house established in 1963. The company also produced / distributed sound recordings through its own label *En'nagham*.
 Sublabel: *En'nagham*

Label
 Edit Label
 Data Quality Rating: Needs Vote
 55 submissions pending
 Share

Marketplace
 161 For Sale
 Vinyl and CD

1 – 58 of 58 Prev 1 Next Jump to 1

Genre All Show 100

Artist	Title (Format)	Catalog Number	Year
الحبيب بورقيبة	الرائس الحبيب بورقيبة يخطبكم (12")	2STD37D	Unknown
Nana Mouskouri	The Lily The West (7", Single)	260 209	1969
Nana Mouskouri	Mon Enfant (7", Single)	260.250 MF	1969
Michel Sardou	América, América (7", Single)	336.243 BF	1969
محسن الرايس = Mohsen Rais*	محسن الرايس = Mohsen Rais (LP)	MP 22	1978
محسن الرايس = Mohsen Rais*	محسن الرايس = Mohsen Rais (LP)	MP 27	1978
أم كلثوم = Om Kalsoum*	فكاروني = Fakkarouni (Album) 4 2 versions	STD 004 SC	Unknown
مجموعة صوتية	داني داني يا بنت المعالي 4 2 versions	STD 07 G	Unknown

Fig. 37: A screenshot taken of the Discogs *Société Tunisienne de Diffusion* page, January 2023

The Discogs archive was something that was browsed and ‘discovered’, at least in my experience, in conjunction with YouTube. YouTube provided the sounds which were absent on Discogs; but also, of course, other kinds of mediation of its objects, which all wove together to form digitally mediated stories. Occasionally, I’d find a similar or identical image to the one on Discogs repeated on a YouTube upload. Searching for Tunisian funk singer Gharbie Sadok came up with a YouTube upload with the same image as that shown on an En’nagham vinyl on Discogs.²²⁹ The YouTube upload, labelled similarly ‘Gharbie Sadok – Lili Twil’, was uploaded in 2020 by an uploader going by the name of ‘Mr. Upduff’. A commentary is offered which goes as follows: ‘A wonderful cover from the tunesian singer Gharbie Sadok of the famous song ‘Lili Twil’, written by Megri. Is was released only as a b-side of one of his Singles. Label: En’nagham – 05099. Release decade: 1970s. It is such a beautiful song, that it would be a shame, if the world could not hear it today. The song is

²²⁹ I listened to it and a reverbed voice echoed out of my laptop with a slow melody in Tunisian, backed with a guitar, bass, drums, piano, and a saxophone solo segment – a sound which reminded me a little of some of the new Tunisian groups performing at the JMC, or of the saxophone segment in the Nouveau Systeme video that we saw in Chapter 2, just with a somehow more 70s vibe.

unfortunately only available as a second-hand vinyl single. In the run-up to the update, I tried unsuccessfully to contact the label and the composer. Unfortunately I didn't succeed. If there are any problems with the rights or copyrights, I would like to ask to contact me immediately' (Mr. Upduff, 2020) (Fig. 38). Often, I would find on YouTube still images or compilations of images which would accompany a sonic upload which was labelled in a similar way to Discogs – the same artist and song name. This was the case with the Om Kalthoum records, for instance, and the Sidi Mansour records. In the case of Om Kalthoum, the same song name is accompanied by a silhouette of Om Kalthoum, with a picture of a gramophone, the record player animated and turning whilst the YouTube song plays.

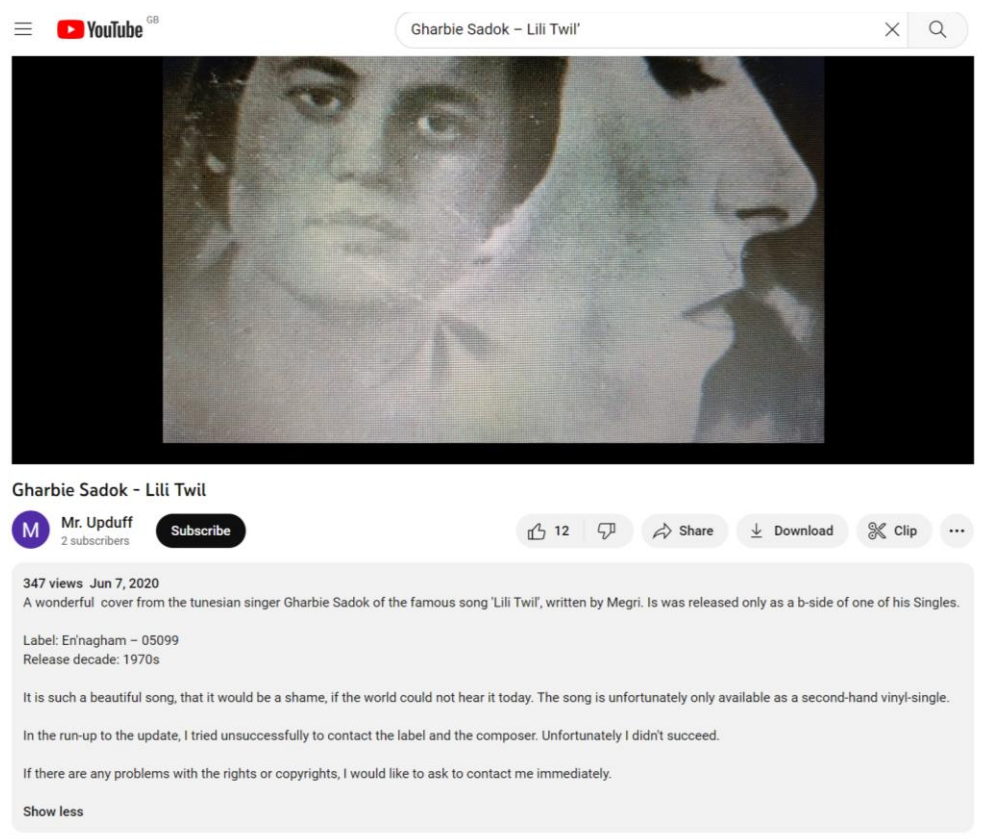


Fig. 38: A screenshot of the YouTube upload 'Gharbie Sadok – Lili Twil', April 2023

This archive is thus something which seems to have been built from fragments that travelled out of Tunisia through the archives of the tourist shops; and they are mediated here as part of a digital archive which attempts to double as a database, and has been built in the context of the vinyl revival of the global North, geared towards collectors. But it has a strange shape from Tunisia: whilst this platform can be accessed from Tunis, and used as a database through which materialities can be sensed, the promise of its fragments cannot be easily

realised, as the objects can't be bought back into Tunis. The platform thus mediates its archives to Tunis-based screens as images with promises of materials behind them that are difficult to realise.

In contrast, there does exist a shop space in Tunis which amounts to an archive of vinyl objects.²³⁰ There is a little shop just off the *Nahj Zarkoun* tucked away in a quiet corner of Hafsia.²³¹ The shell of the old *Rachideyya* sits opposite, now empty. The shop is crammed full of vinyl records, safes, and decorations (fig. 39). Records are stacked on the safes, in cupboards and drawers, and line the walls. They act as product and decoration. They clump together in certain patterns, as we have seen objects doing in both the cassette and CD shops and on MP3 compilations. Similarly, there is a recognisable corner of Om Kalthoum, where vinyl covers of her face at different ages are lined next to each other (fig. 40), and opposite her there seems to be a coalescing of funk and soul albums. Indeed, there were reams of funk, rock and pop from the 70s and 80s: Billie Holliday, Otis Reading, James Brown, Temptations, Rare bird, Rika Zarai, Kamal Raouf. As well as these objects that were on display, whether adorning the walls or stacked up on safes, there was another layer of objects which were hidden – the rarer records. I never saw behind the screen, and visitors were not invited into that part of the shop. But the owner would occasionally disappear behind the screen and emerge with rare, older shellac records from the older companies, discussed in the work of Silver: Om el Hassen, Baidaphon, recordings of the generation of radio stars or the Ma'lūf. These records tended to be covered in flimsy, dusty paper sheathes with faded pictures of their stars. Besides these clumps, reams of disks seem to work also

²³⁰ It's a marker of the separateness between the different sorts of shop which sell music on supports that I was never directed to the vinyl shop by anyone, despite the fact that it is a mere 20 metres away from one of the cassette and CD shops, just around a bend and down an alley that I'd never had reason to go down, and had been previously warned was dangerous. One day in the summer of 2022 I took a friend to the cassette shop and afterwards he showed me the vinyl shop.

²³¹ This shop perhaps exists in a genealogy of second hand shops described in its early forms by Silver: he suggests that, the shift in format between the 78 and 45rpm records towards the 1960s, second hand archives started to coalesce in urban space. This was a time, he describes, when shellac discs of Labassi, Journo, El Fassia, Halali and Elmaghribi were facing competition from 45rpm LPs and the genres which they enabled, notably Algerian Rai. Most of the older generation of artists 'never made the technological jump to the new medium', and in the transition, 'only extant copies of certain discs remained on bookshelves and in basements or lingered on the platters of aging phonographs in foyers and flea markets' (Silver, 2022).

according to label – a clump of Mellouliphone records, a clump of Sar records there – or they seem to be quite mixed up, whole collections from elsewhere that have found a place here. Many label logos scattered over the objects betrayed a variety of journeys and origins: AAA, Philips, Sony, Polydor, Atco, Sono Cairo. On the wall opposite Om Kalthoum there was a variety of items: funk, Oulaya, *Sidi Mansour*. There was also Hédi Habbouba, Sidi Mansour, Hédi Jouini, variously labelled *ma'lūf* records, and records labelled 'Souvenir de la Tunisie'. Many of the disks carried marks not only of the recording companies, but also of sales outlets in Paris, with stickers saying 'Boulevard de la Chappelle' fixed onto them.



Fig. 39: Hédi's vinyl shop in Hafsia, July 2022



Fig. 40: The Om Kalthoum corner in Hédi's vinyl shop, July 2022

This archive exists as an interesting counterpoint to Discogs: these are also mediations which are caught in logics of second-hand resale of previous collections, but here they exist as paper and plastic materials that one can touch, clumped together in a space in Tunis. They are arranged in logics of clumps and piles which are indicative of the cassette and CD shops just around the corner, but their labels and stickers betray lives which have seen them circulate out of Tunisia and through Europe before arriving back here.

Lastly, vinyl objects have been mediated into archives by scholars who have maintained an interest in these objects and their histories. There has been a range of these activities, which have varied in repertoire and type: I'll focus on those of Silver and Abassi, which we have

already used for our histories. As Christopher Silver details in his book, he maintains an online archive, Gharamophone, through which he mediates rare disks from the early 20th century North African industries, as the website reads, ‘preserving North Africa’s Jewish musical past, one record at a time’ (‘About’, 2017)²³². In the book, he details finding the records on on Ebay, Discogs, flea markets and bric-a-brac shops – ‘a process which has allowed me to build a new type of archive filled with old media from the bottom up’. Through the website and book, he is able to ‘return these records to the circulation’ – to ‘excavate(s) the sounds embedded in the grooves of a forgotten musical medium. My goal is to render audible a Jewish-Muslim past which has been quieted for far too long.’ (Silver, 2022). His archive mediates the recordings of 78rpm disks featuring the voices of the likes of Habiba Msika, Louisa Tunisia, and many others. Another archive, comparable but different to this, is that mediated by Hamadi Abassi through the book and accompanying CD: *Tunis Chant et Danse*. The book opens with an imagined anecdote of a listener moving through the urban spaces of Tunis, before the author introduces a different star which was made famous through their recordings and radio broadcasts: Louisa Tunisia, Frita Darnon, Habiba Msika, Raoul Journo, Cheikh El Afrit, Khamais Tarnane are all covered. They are portrayed as drawing inspiration from the sounds and atmospheres of the surrounding city, including the sounds of gramophones – a presumably imagined ‘anecdote’ about Khemais Tarnane, for instance, sees him wandering down the canal in Bizerte, hearing the sounds of Om Kalthoum fill the air from the gramophones of the cafés – and there is an accompanying CD which serves as an archive of these vinyl sounds. In these accounts, the recording impresarios, and the fact of recording vinyls, always takes centre stage.

The stories of these two authors, importantly, bring together different fragments, collected in different places: Silver’s records were excavated from a great number of online sources, whereas Abassi’s come largely from the RTT and Phonothèque archives. As such, they offer different imaginaries: an alternative imaginary of the colonial era relationships between Jews and Muslims, between state and industry; and an imaginary more inkeeping with the romance surrounding the stars of national sentiment from Abassi.

²³² Accessed here: <https://gharamophone.com/about/>, 25/03/2023

These archival efforts – and indeed the archival offloading of Ben Frej – are grouped here to show how multiple vinyl's archives are; how disparate their curation is; and how unevenly accessed they are from Tunis. Bates talks about vinyl as being 'ontologically multiple'; 'able to be multiple things to multiple people' (Bates 2020, 697). Here it is the archives themselves which are ontologically multiple, and they require different engagement from the person searching them out from Tunis. The Discogs archive is a series of lists, hyperlinks and pictures, which require an active searching, listening and looking; but whilst the site generates a sense of fantasy of the material disk behind the pictures, this materiality can't be realised from Tunis. Meanwhile, the materials of vinyls can be reached in a shop, many of the same faces that can be found in Discogs scattered through different organisations. Throughout these archives, histories and stories of individual vinyls are told differently: in scholarly prose, in comments on a YouTube video, and indeed, in stories of demise and ruin from Ben Frej. Throughout these mediations, there is perhaps a linked sense of 'history'; a sense that these objects garner a certain amount of value or interest from their age, which is something expressed differently: as dates on websites and books; as locations behind the screen in the shop.

Objects crop up again and again in these different archives in multiple mediations, which makes of them *things* which are both the same and different. We saw recordings of Om Kalthoum as images and labels on Discogs, as a voice and an animated gramophone on YouTube, and as wall decorations in the shop. We saw recordings of Gharbie Sadok as anecdotes written in a YouTube label, as records in piles in the shop. Habiba Msika records turn up mediated through Silver's Gharamophone, through Abassi's anecdotes of the diva performing in Tunis, and as thumbnails on Discogs. Vinyl seems to have become synonymous with a certain generation of stars, shown particularly by the way that, in general histories of Tunisian music, certain musics are always illustrated with pictures of records rather than people or things. In Sakli's book chapter '*La Tunisianité en musique*', there are three illustrations: a group celebrating a popular fête in a colonial era village, the artist Hassen Dos, and a picture of a 'disc sleeve of a 33rpm disc carrying three pieces of the classic *tunisio-andalouse* music '*Ma'lūf*' (Sakli 2014, 87). In Louati's book '*Musiques de Tunisie*', the sections discussing the aforementioned stars of the colonial period contain headshots opposite a scattering of vinyl sleeves and disks, 'sleeves and labels of 78rpm discs.' (Louati

2013, 114) In both cases, it is the records themselves which are being held up as illustrations of the figures and voices of Ma'lūf and the generation of colonial-era stars, themselves taking the place of performers – as such, the auras of artists are arguably imbued with a specific kind of materiality, and the vinyl records themselves become synonymous with their voices. Notably, later periods are not illustrated widely with pictures of cassettes or CDs, and certainly not with MP3 files. Vinyl is unique here: it is the only material format which has been taken on as a real material for 'Music'.

And it is arguably 'music' which is at stake in a couple of archival engagements in particular. We'll look now to two contrasting engagements with vinyl, that of Hédi, the propriétaire of the vinyl shop that we have just seen, and that of a group of young aesthetic workers who revolve around the radio station 'Misk'. We'll then think of them as two ways in which 'vinyl' and 'music' are mediated alongside each other; and how they come up against the complexities of Tunis's archival situation.

5.4 In Hédi's vinyl shop: vinyls performing and deep listening

In the shop, the archive surrounds the visitor. Upon entering the shop, the visitor is aware of their body being physically present within a configuration of a number of *things*: a mass of record objects which line the shop, the shop owner, chairs, and a record player. Words and images jump out, amongst other sensory like feelings of dust and a smell of slight damp, mustiness. The eye is drawn to a machine which has been placed 'centre stage', which works as both a vinyl record player and also a cassette player, and is rigged up to speakers behind it. It is framed by a whole display, altar-like almost, including a bike and a load of hanging cameras, a sign saying that the bike wasn't for sale (fig 41). When I entered into this archive, I was invited to sit with the owner. It was from this position of *q'ada* that we would explore the vinyl objects around the shop.²³³

²³³ *q'ada* is the noun of *qad* – to stay. It is used to refer to a kind of deliberate 'sitting' which is linked often to sociality – it will often be referred to as what happens in cafés or homes.



Fig. 41: The record player and the vinyl shop, July 2022

Between playing discs, and before and after the listening sessions, we would exchange things about ourselves. The owner introduced himself as Hédi. He had been a DJ in the 70s and 80s, and started trading vinyls in the 70s. He told me that he had worked in Slimane, a town just north of the capital, and that he used to play music for tourists that came from all over the world – Italians, French, English, Russian, Portuguese.²³⁴ He didn't seem to want to sell me anything without us first listening to it together, at length. I made it clear from the start that I wanted to buy some records, but every time I suggested it the owner would say 'no no not like that. *Mezel*. (still).

²³⁴ He was full of fascinating snippets from this time. Once, he met the sister of the guitarist of The Who. And they used to love him, he told me, they used to chant his name. He told me about how he would start with calm things, tangos and salsa, for the more elderly people, and would progress on to the 'deg deg deg', doing an impression of the sound. By the end there would be sweat on the walls, and he would carry on until 8am if people wanted him to. He was 'hippy', he said. He showed me some pictures, and recently sent me a picture of him as a DJ.

Come back tomorrow.' When I would go back, we would pick up the record listening where we'd left off, and by the end he would still be saying '*stanna. bishwaya bishwaya. Kul shay mawjūd.*' 'Wait. Little by little. Everything's here'. So the shop archive was something that was shaped in large part through the selection of sounds and listening moments that it afforded, things that were heavily curated by Hédi.

We started with Om Kalthoum. In 42 degree heat, we listened to almost the entirety of her song '*Enta al Hob*', interrupted only in the middle so that Hédi could turn the record over. Hédi guided my attention to the lengths and shapes of phrases with waves of his hands as we listened, we sang along, and nodded to each other in approval as long vocal phrases erupted into applause on the record, and instrumental segments filled the space. We listened to another Egyptian record whose details I can't remember, '*musri hadhaya*', 'Egyptian, this one', was the presentation, and he would say things like '*haw tawa tadkhal al musiqa*', 'there now the music comes in', before the entrance of a new rhythm or a new instrumental texture. It guided my attention towards the instrumental qualities of the sound, which were indeed very full, very luscious, and we clicked and clapped along. This led to Abdelhalim Hafez, which led to Habiba Rochdi and Khemais Tarnane. The song by Khemais Tarnane that we listened to is 'Fatima', a song in which he is singing about the pain of love. Hédi reenacted the words with much drama, relishing them, repeating them to make sure that I understood the Tunisian words – the singer compares heartbreak to going to the doctor and finding no medicine. Hédi thought that my name sounded a bit like 'Chouchana', the title of a Taha Gharsa song, so we listened to that. I hadn't heard it before but the *ma'lūf* flourishes were familiar. He reminisced about how he used to see this musician play live in a café just off the Avenue Bourguiba, back in the day.

When I went in the next day, I asked about 'Western' music. He started talking about Hédi Jouini, saying that he used the Tango rhythm and instruments, and he put on a tape of Hédi Jouini which we listened to all the way through as it wound through several songs: '*illi t'ada w fa*' 'that which is past and done' and '*tab'ani*' 'follow me', very familiar now through their intense mediatization. In Hédi Jouini's '*illi t'ada w fa*' there is an instrumental bit which people tend to sing along with to the sounds: 'de ne ne ne ne ne ne'; so we do too. Then there was Hotel California, and a round of '*ne me quitte pas!*' There was one record which he held to his chest, said he'd never sell it and that he had looked everywhere for it for 25

years, and started to play it – it is ‘Sympathy’ by Rare Bird. Despite it being in English, Hédi still translated the sentiment into Tunisian for me as he gave me a parallel commentary – it’s a discussion between a man and a woman, both of their voices represented on the disc, one of them telling the other they will leave, the other trying to stop them.

The final time I saw him we ended with some *fann sh‘abi* – I wanted to at least hear this oft discussed Sidi Mansour record, and also a bit of *mezoued*, before leaving. We put on ‘*Souvenirs de la Tunisie*’ before I bought it, and he told me that it is *fann sh‘abi* which is ‘enchainé’. When I asked him about *mezoued* he handed me a collection of colourful 33’ discs which seem to come as a group, and he told me ‘*Bourguiba q‘ad ydour bihom*’, Bourguiba would ‘travel around with them’. I asked about Hédi Habbouba and he told me that’s going to cost me – it’s rare. We enjoyed listening though. We moved onto Ismael Hattab. The sound of the gasba pierces out of the record player and we shook our shoulders and moved our hips slightly, even from a sitting position. When the *fann sh‘abi* sounds were emerging from the shop, one of the men from the *hooma* who regularly passes the shop and waves to Hédi paused in the street and started dancing to the music, making us laugh, before moving on.

Our listening sessions extended even to when I was back in the UK: one time I spoke to Hédi on a video call, and he spent the time playing a record of Gharbie Sadok to me, holding the record up to the camera, but mainly playing the funk sounds so that we could listen to it together, bobbing our heads (fig. 41).

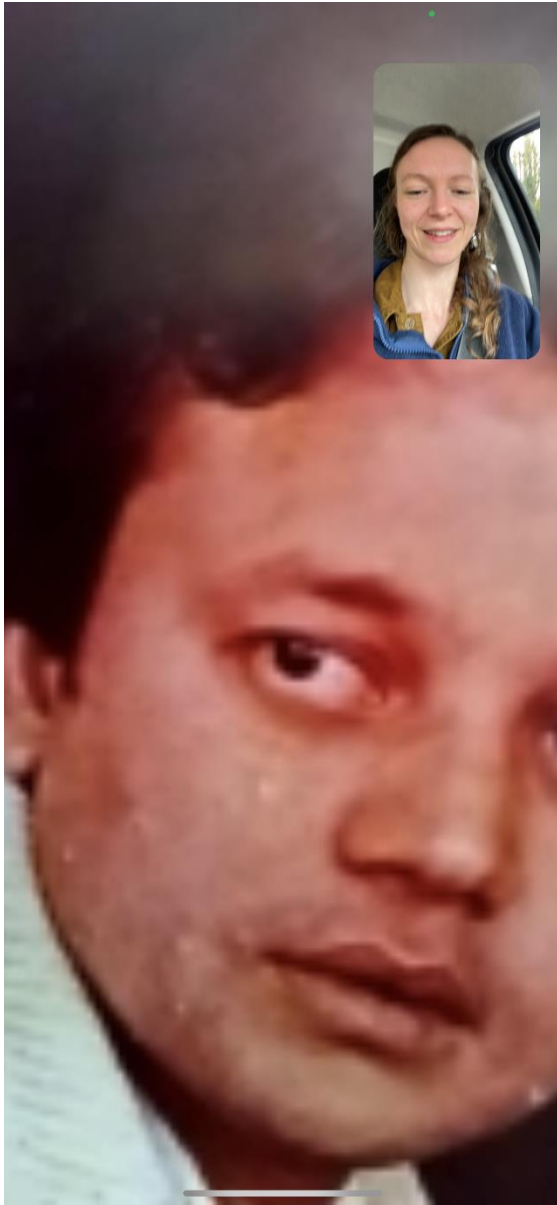


Fig. 42: A phone screenshot of Hédi and I listening to Gharbie Sadok on a video call (and the vinyl sleeve showing Sadok's face being held up to the camera), April 2023

This is by now a familiar sonic archive. The songs of Om Kalthoum, Zied Gharsa, funk songs, *Sidi Mansour* and the songs of Khemais Tarnane and Hédi Jouini were all things that I had heard before – and that we have seen in this thesis – many times. Many of them – as alluded to by Hédi as he suggested that the *fann sh'abi* was that which Bourguiba endorsed – were sounds and figures that had been mediated by the state archives, their championed styles such as *ma'lūf*, or their championed foreigners such as Om Kalthoum. And in some ways, listening to it in this shop with Hédi felt like a nostalgic listening for a Bourguiban time. Through these records and Hédi's anecdotes it felt like something reminiscent of his time as

a DJ in Slimane; indeed, in our listening sessions he was continuing to entertain a tourist. For Hédi, the vinyls were not a source for new and different repertoires to be discovered – they were a source for a continuation of a certain ‘music’ and listening, which revolved around, indeed was probably developed in tandem with, records of *tarab* and *Ma’lūf*. Before I left for the final time, we listened once more to Om Kalthoum. Hédi was someone who supplied records to DJs and people involved in something resembling a kind of ‘vinyl revival’, as we’ll come to – and yet, Hédi told me that he himself didn’t engage with this music that they produced, and that everything being produced today, in comparison to songs such as this Om Kalthoum, is *ahkeya faragha*, ‘nothing’.²³⁵

But in other ways, it wasn’t only a sense of ‘nostalgia’ and ‘pastness’ being generated by our listening together. Rather, we were hovering between pasts and presents in ways which collapsed both into each other; and this seemed to be achieved by the length of time that we spent together, and the depth of our listening. When I think back now to this day, I don’t remember the switching between objects, or the record sleeves, or the entirety, beginnings or ends of songs, but rather patches of deep listening in the middle of records which felt like they were enveloping in all sorts of ways, and Hédi’s animated direction towards certain parts of the sounds, certain words. The sounds felt like they were bringing us together in a ‘community of time’ which we were also shaping through our listening – indeed, this time something resembling the ‘inner time’ of sonic experience described by Schutz, as we were inhabiting a ‘flux of tones unrolling in inner time’ which ‘evokes in the stream of consciousness participating in it an interplay of recollections, retentions, protentions, and anticipations which interrelate the successive elements’ (SCHÜTZ 1951, 88). The extended moments of listening were strangely freeing. Sometimes the curation would jog me away from my assumptions about these objects: the categorisation of Hédi Jouini as ‘western’; the translations of English lyrics into Tunisian. But also, there was time within this

²³⁵ It was a certain ‘nostalgia’ that was indeed picked up on by Journalist Hatem Bouriel recently (13th March 2023). He featured Hédi in his Facebook based project of ‘365 Tunisiens’, where he was named ‘#141. Khemais, *le roi du vinyle*’, ‘the king of vinyl’. In the post he suggests that he is ‘good humour personified! And in two languages, if you please ! At the Rue de Glacières, that leads from Bab Bhar to Hafsia...always welcoming, he’ll take you around the cha cha cha, twist and Om Kalthoum. He retains a bit of the spirit of *Rue Zarkoun* of the 1970s, when the *bouquinistes* were numerous(...)he cultivates both the spirit of yesteryear and the cult of pop music’.

ritual – replete with the turning over of the disc in the middle of the song – to get lost in the phrases and the sounds, or to daydream about something else, to get lost in thought, and to be brought back. I found that I listened to the things differently, with more relish, because there wasn't anything else happening, no other movement, nothing else expected of me. I remarked that I found Khemais Tarnane's voice very nice – and that that despite the number of times I'd read about the man I'd never really properly listened to it before. The time with Hédi was less about a self-reflexive appraisal of the sounds, and more about a joint physical response which would be appropriate to the *jaww* but also playful, not fixed but guided by the sounds.

But the point was the sociality of this. This can't be claimed to be the kind of 'deep listening' as discussed in work by Becker as a listening which is able to evoke trance, or the 'attentive listening' described by Kapchan as honing sufi spirituality – but there was perhaps a similar sense of 'literacy' to the listening and a desire to share that literacy within situations of coming together in community (Becker, 2004; Kapchan, 2009). I had the feeling that the owner was using the vinyls to teach me about *music* – and not just Tunisian music, music *in general*. This was exemplified by his explanations of English lyrics, in Tunisian; his descriptions of all of the songs. This was another similarity with the experience of MP3s with Pakito, who also used the files to teach me about music *in general*. But in the vinyl shop, it was based far more on a certain depth of listening, rather than being able to quantify the world in rhythms. In the vinyl shop, the owner would look at me as a doctor would a patient, and ask: '*shnowa nesem'ak*' – a formulation of the verb which isn't exactly 'what do you want to listen to,' but rather what shall I listen you' – the listening here an act which is joint. We wound paths of listening through clumps of objects which took us through deep realms of sonic experience. Vinyls would lead on to one another, but we did tend to listen to the whole thing – there was clearly no interrupting this process.

In this situation, there seemed to be an odd ambivalence towards the objects themselves. They were treated as a collection: Hédi didn't always want to sell them or part with them. The collection was valuable to an extent because of the rarity of records; but *this* was valuable *because of* the sounds that they carried, the kinds of possibilities of listening they

enabled; not separately from the sounds. I felt this particularly when faced with Hédi's lack of interest in answering questions about the trajectories of these objects; despite their plentiful labels signalling lives in France and elsewhere across the Arab World in Europe, this wasn't the interesting thing about them, and questions about their industrial lives were often batted away, their details not worried over. It was reminded to me again when we listened to Gharbie Sadok over the phone. The important thing here was the fact of itself of listening at length.

So the vinyl archive here was something that afforded a kind of togetherness – it afforded this because moments of deep listening were structured through vinyl's materialities: through the ways in which the sonic objects would be made to perform on the record player, the collection surrounding us taking centre stage. Elsewhere in the city, also, a certain togetherness was being sought through mediations of vinyl materialities – but in a slightly different way. We'll turn to this now.

5.5 The 'scene', Misk, and vinyl impressions of 'music'

One of the people that Hédi told me he sold records to was Habibi Funk, who, he tells me, sought him out whenever he came to Tunis so that he could purchase some rare funk records. Habibi Funk is a German DJ who has become well known across Europe and the Arab world and tours widely and frequently. A DJ set of Habibi Funk on YouTube shows him mixing a list of Tunisian funk vinyl records from a rooftop in Sidi Bou Said: the DJ is centre screen as the sun sets over the sea in the background, throughout the set (Habibi Funk, 2020). The playlist is written underneath: it contains records by funk groups such as Mazouni, Dalton and KB Negati, entitled 'Sidi Bou', with such lyrics as 'Take me back to Sidi Bou, come with me to Sidi, ah Habibi, Sidi Bou, *je deviens fou* (I become mad) Sidi Bou'. The viewer of the video finds themselves in the public of this performance of the vinyl objects.

The scene is reminiscent of one that I experienced in Tunis with the same set-up. It was the Dream City festival of 'culture' in the Medina in 2019, and Marwa Jaziri, one of the DJs of Misk FM, a new radio station started up in 2017, was animating a 'listening session'. The session involved the DJ playing a number of records which she would unsheathe from their

paper sleeves as we sat around her on the floor, cross legged, listening. She played a number of funk and soul records, curating them in between and taking comments and questions from an interested crowd. She ended the session with a *fenn chaabi* addition, during which the crowd rose into dance.

The scenes are in some way similar to those experienced with Hédi in the vinyl shop: vinyl materials centre stage, with listening curated around them.²³⁶ However, there are differences between the two spaces: whilst Hédi's spaces of listening were contingent on vinyl being there as a material *thing*, the constellation of social spaces around these two DJs have a looser relationship with 'vinyl' materials, which in other situations serve as an inspiration, but which may also be splintered into sonic, visual and symbolic mediations. This is seen most strongly in certain bars such as Wax, and the radio station Misk FM.

As well as the aforementioned moments, there were other spaces that were supposedly dedicated to vinyl in Tunis. In 2015, part of the boom in Gammarth nightclubs saw the opening of Wax – a bar and club whose Facebook page described it as a 'bar à vinyls'.²³⁷ There was another one of these 'bar à vinyls' called 'Chez l'ami' that popped up a few years later on the Rue de Marseille, in the top floor of a hotel complex which has seen a frequent change in its multiple nightlife spaces over the last decade. Vinyl records aren't only played in this space – they decorate the walls and hang from the ceiling.

But there were two notable things about these spaces. First, there weren't *always* vinyl objects in the space. In fact, I wasn't even aware that Wax was a 'bar à vinyls' until reading an article about it online; I had been to Wax many times, and had heard DJs, live bands and records, but had never seen any vinyls. Second, the linking factor seemed rather to be the people, and the kinds of styles and sonic divisions purported by the spaces. They seem to be interconnected by a social network of overlapping individuals and styles. Many of the same faces crop up, or the same styles of faces, with similar clothes, hair and makeup, and similar performed gender relations of comparative equality. These are the spaces with aspirations to be 'cultural', a few of which we saw in Chapter 2 in the cafés Mokasin and the nightclub Yuka – and which did so, we argued, through a certain sonic 'epistemological purification'

²³⁶ I have unfortunately not yet been able to discuss these activities of vinyl curation with either DJ, so it is not these activities as such which I will dwell on here.

²³⁷ This bar has now gone, and has been replaced with a different bar apparently called 'Pazuzu'.

(Ochoa Gautier, 2006). Here we'll take this argument further to suggest that vinyl's multiple ontologies could serve as an inspiration in these efforts of 'epistemological purification'.

The place where this was displayed most clearly was the radio station Misk. Misk was founded by musicologist Mourad Sakli and radio presenter Mehdi Ahmedi in 2017. It is described to me as '*purement musical*', 'purely musical', but '*à vocation Culturelle*', 'with a cultural vocation'. I visited the station's headquarters in Montplaisir: a gleaming white space with state of the art recording equipment in studios, a far cry from the dark building of the RTT. Misk is described to me as a radio '*prescripteur*', 'prescriptive' – the idea is that it informs the tastes of a social group which is all about pushing trends and 'discovering' new things: it is opposed both the 'commercial' logics of 'pop'; and also to the '*généraliste*' logics of the Tunisian mainstream, represented most strongly for them by Mosaïque and its cocktail structure. Indeed, Ahmedi describes how this Mosaïque logic has become the 'norm' – and that this is a problem, because it isn't what all Tunisians are after. Misk's editorial line is rather described as a kind of 'spirit' which all of the Misk employs have and understand: there is a '*va et vient*' 'coming and going' between Misk and its surrounding milieu, which makes up spaces of nightlife, DJs, musicians, which they mediate through the station.

Vinyl is something that breathes through Misk's world in multiple ways, but seems to swim in and out of focus as a sensory ingredient among others. I learned this through time spent with Ahmedi, the director, as well as Meriem – the channel's musical programmer – as well as Ossama, its technician. I sat for hours with Meriem behind her desktop as she tweaked the station's playlists.

First, vinyl records entered into discussion as playlisted ingredients, or as things that inform the playlist. Meriem mentioned spaces of vinyl within the logics of the collect of the channel, where it appears as a collectable object that other media emulate. Spaces of the international vinyl revival such as Discogs are described as important sources of knowledge for Misk. And Meriem is plugged into a vast array of channels to source a very diverse range of musical material: as well as Discogs, she mentions Bandcamp, as well as YouTube, to which she jokes she is subscribed to '36,000 chaînes', and other radio stations like the French station FIP. She is going out with a 'collector', she tells me, from whom she gleaned a lot of information about music. One of the other ex-programmers suggested to me that Misk's

ambition at the start was to develop its own collection of records, collected from the artists which they would champion on the station.

But it's not just the ingredients which are indicative of the 'record'. The 'rotation' logic of the channels something that seems to have the materialities of the 'disk' running through it. The channel is described as following a '*logic du mixe*', a 'logic of the mix'. This seems to have been inspired in part by director Ahmedi's experience as a presenter and DJ on RTCI, when he would use his own records from his collection. He describes this experience to me in the following terms: 'even if it wasn't really a radio logic at the time, I tried to pass records and to move between one record to another in harmony (...) I wanted there to be *cohérence* in the musical sections. So I'd arrive in the morning, *voilà* it's a bit rhythmic and everything, if it finishes with percussion I'll start with a piece that starts with an instrument without drums, as such it links perfectly, sometimes I pay attention even to the notes or to the harmony so that it's harmonious. So it's not at all a radio magic, it's rather a mix magic.' This 'mix magic' is now achieved with the algorithm used by the radio channel via their software suite 'WinMedia'. WinMedia allows a complex programming of material which animate programmes that follow Ahmedi's idea of coherence: creating moments, indeed, akin to listening sessions: 'If you like jazz you listen to 'Birth of the Cool', if you like RnB it's 'Soul on Top', if it's French music it's 'French Kiss'.' This is achieved by organising vast swathes of musical material painstakingly into many different categories, and then entering it into an algorithm which is complex – but there is still the logic of the 'mix' that runs through the algorithm: 'and this is based on the logic of discovery, *branché* and elegant, together, where we depart from musical genres, but the musical genres we have to include in the categories, and after those categories we adjust the rotation so that there's a minimum of harmony between genres that don't resemble each other.' Here, then, the 'mix' logic is described as something different from the 'cocktail' logic; rather than attempting to bring parts together which are knowingly disparate, here it's more about finding the musically similar, the coherent, across records.



Fig. 43: Inside the studio of Misk FM, Montplaisir, November 2020

Another kind of ‘vinyl’ style running through the channel is the kind of verbal ‘curation’ which seems to so often accompany its listening sessions, such as the one by Jaziri that we saw in Dream City. I sat in on a recording of the programme ‘French Kiss’, and watched as the presenter, Ines, offered snippets of information about the French and Italian classics in between songs, speaking in a smooth French voice, connecting the records with specific times, places and industrial networks. This was particularly exemplified, also, in a programme thought up by Meriem, which she calls her ‘baby’: a weekend show which would take a single, well known song, and would investigate all of the different versions which had been made, of that song, delving into the different paths taken by different artists. In this sense, there is a certain celebration of the cover, but it is one that is knowing – which requires a certain knowledge of its place, and a certain breadth of knowledge across its various different mediations.

Lastly, a kind of ‘coherence’ indicative of the record is something which was also achieved in another way. The technician Ossama told me about how the channel worked to make an app for the listener, on which they would be able to see, as well as hear, the radio station. The album sleeve would be displayed on this app along with the song that is being listened to. This, he described, was in keeping with the ethos of Misk: it would create a ‘coherence’. It is something which would give the listener a full, multisensory experience of ‘music’.

It felt in these situations that, rather than vinyl archives being mediated through a performative use of the objects of vinyl (as in the shops), they were rather being conjured up *as an imaginary* working behind these sounds. The thing being mediated was the sense of the vinyl archive itself. This was an imaginary archive which would be expansive, mixed, would allow a certain curation, a certain sense of ‘quality’ behind the listening experience. These imaginary archives were, as we’ve seen in other spaces such as the listening sessions of Jaziri, in part created with objects; but the point is that they could also be mediated to explore the materialities and sensory engagements of vinyl even when vinyl materials are absent. It’s not that fragments were being brought together; it is rather that their senses were being created through mediations.

What was being created here? The mediators of the radio seemed, like Hédi of the vinyl shop, to be seeking a kind of ‘togetherness’. But this was a larger scale togetherness, with a more ambitious political project behind it. It was all about creating this ‘*prescripteur*’ group, maintaining a certain public which had a certain sensibility to listening to music as ‘culture’. The radio clearly aimed to have a wide impact on Tunis’s public sphere.

In many ways, it seems that Misk was acting in the same genealogy of finding the ‘cultural’ and the ‘modern’ that we’ve seen in the state archival practices. But the precise flavours of this have changed over time. When Misk was started up by Mourad Sakli, the aim was apparently to play more Tunisian music, as well as international music; he describes it in a language which is highly indicative of the sorts of descriptions of *tunisianité* that we saw expressed in the Bourguibian era. In an interview that Mourad Sakli did with Business News in which he talked about Misk’s formation, he described it as follows: ‘with this radio we aim for a cultural reunification of Tunisia, by bringing Tunisians closer together through culture’. (*Mourad Sakli à l’Open Sigma 2017*). He justifies this by saying that, since independence, Tunisians ‘don’t know well our heritage, our culture, our arts, our culinary arts, our poetry,

our musics and all our riches, which creates psychological barriers on which some can take advantage.’ He adds that Tunisian youth He only has ‘superficial knowledge of universal culture of the history of humanity’. Since Sakli’s departure there seems to be less of an emphasis on Tunisian culture in the Misk editorial line. But in drumming up senses of vinyl, they did seem to be playing on a desire for a ‘correct’ industry which is the same that we saw in many of the state spaces, including that of the state vinyl company *En’nagham*. Indeed, we note institutional links between the two: the director Ahmadi worked for the RTCI. There seems to be a similar emphasis on the performance of verbal knowledge alongside music, and on a kind of multisensory coherence, which we saw in other places across the capital, such as the café *Liberté* and the nightclub Yuka.

But at other points, Misk employees that I spoke with didn’t reproduce this language or this justification for Misk. A slightly different kind of thing came through in my sessions particularly watching Meriem. The depth of listening engaged by Meriem seemed most similar to that which I experienced in the vinyl shop with Hédi. For Meriem, the playlisting was more than about finding a coherence which would be technically proficient or ‘correct’; she seemed to care deeply about her listeners, and would actively work to imagine what they were doing at each point of the day. She imagined what people would want to listen to as they sipped their coffee in the morning; as they relaxed after work. Even after the algorithm had formed a playlist, Meriem would still listen back and forth through and over the lists very carefully. She would comb through the sounds that had been thrown up by the algorithm, listening to all the top and tail ends of the songs that were in place, allowing herself frequently to be swept away in a song, to enjoy it. There are similarities in the ways that Meriem in the radio studio, and Hédi in the vinyl shop, would allow songs to lead on to one another. Similarly, she would talk to me about her choices, sharing her enthusiasm for specific musical details of each song. Meriem’s programming was careful and imaginative. And there was a strong sense of an imagined proximity to her listeners, whom she imagined to be in various situations in the city as she listened.²³⁸

²³⁸ This kind of communal, deep listening was sought at other moments which can be loosely located within this community. In many ways the *qaada* with Hédi reminded me of similar to moments with musician friends my own age, Hosni and Sara, in which we spent our time in their Aouina apartment drinking beers and taking it in turns to play Youtube videos of music that we’d recently found and wanted to share, all enthusiastically

So Misk, it seemed, is curiously positioned in relation to the vinyl archives in two quite distinct and even separate ways. On one hand, there is the kind of treatment of music which is similar to that of Discogs – a development of a topography which is focused on multiple details of the records themselves. On the other, there is also a desire for a kind of depth of listening which is displayed in the vinyl shop, despite the fact that, in the vinyl shop, the archive is full of many different kinds of record that wouldn't be played on Misk. In Misk, it was put to me that the radio was providing moments of escape from the social and political realities of the day for their listeners, in the logic of an 'ostrich', burying its head in the sand. For Ahmadi, this itself was a kind of politics: one in which 'music' was allowed to take centre stage.²³⁹

5.6 Mediations within Tunis's 'archival situation'

In both cases, Hédi's and Misk's projects of listening and mediation were inescapably linked to Tunis's surrounding archival structures, which shaped, enhanced and undermined their projects.

The two spaces were themselves intertwined. Hédi's shop is reliant upon, and in other ways invites, custom from the kinds of collectors and DJs who might be considered to participate

embracing the *jaww* of whatever anyone else suggested as it filled their living room, gesturing and commenting where appropriate. Another time, I went to a 'listening session' which was very similar to that run by Marwa Jaziri at Dream Session, but this one was a 'Sofar' session, a live acoustic music session which was run out of a living room in the wealthy area of Carthage. Similarly, everyone was seated on the floor, cross legged with knees hugged to chests, not filming with phones but rather listening quietly, whilst the musicians at the front talked about their work and played their songs. There were no vinyl records in these moments, but they were similar to the moments of *qaada shared* with Hédi, as we listened at length and shared worlds.

²³⁹ If we are to respond to the 'vinyl revival' literature, we might suggest that this is not the kind of 'revival' of vinyl happening in Europe, described by Bates and others (Bates, 2020); the Tunisian mediators of vinyl don't have ready access to these materials, even the ones produced originally in Tunisia. The Misk work has a larger element of fantasy, as the kinds of vinyl sounds and aesthetics desired are indicative of a music industry that Tunisia never had. But, nor is it considered a 'gringo logic' of vinyl revival described by Greene in Peru (S. Greene, 2016); it plays on specifically Tunisian notions of the 'modern', similar to those espoused by Ben Frej and others involved in vinyl industries.

in the sort of vinyl ‘revival’ discussed in Europe: as something that ‘uncovers’ a past, rather than continues to hear it. DJs from across the world flocked to his shop, including well known ones: someone from Turkey, from Columbia, and Habibi Funk, the German DJ whose project is the ‘revival’ of funk records from across the Arab World. This is the kind of music which Hédi considered to be *‘ahkeya feregha’*, ‘nothing’, in comparison to the depth of the voices on the vinyls. And yet, he seemed to also relish his position as gatekeeper of these objects, with their continued relevance for ‘culture’. He was able to provide the objects which people in Tunis couldn’t get through Discogs, to enable their circumventing of an international financial system that they couldn’t participate in.

In both Misk and Hédi’s shop, depth of listening and projects of ‘music’ still occurred within limits and ‘clumps’, which are by now familiar. When searching through Discogs, and when sitting with Hédi in the vinyl shop, I was struck by the extent to which my listening experiences were being guided and informed by the bed of previous listening experiences that I had previously had across Tunis: and particularly the gravitation in the orders of each space towards maintaining and separating sonic listening experiences into the *‘occidental’*, *‘oriental’*, *‘tunisi’* configuration. In the shop, these categories were brought out through the placing of objects around the space, and the ways in which things would be strung together. In Misk, it is something that emerged through it’s the ways in which its categories are arranged on the screen. There is a continued split in its rotation, between the *‘rouh el misk’* Arabic music repertoires, and the ‘western’ repertoires. There was some interruption of these categories – for instance, the ways in which Hédi linked Hédi Jouini with *‘occidental’* because of the perceived Latin rhythms in his songs. But generally, there were these three realms of sound which were connected with and brought into being as realms by these major geographical terms: *sharqi*, *gharbi*, *tunisi*.

Other aspects of Tunis’s archival situation seemed to more explicitly extend and limit the work of the spaces. The Misk generation, let’s not forget, are those who grew up with Galerie 7 pirates. One of the ex-programmers of Misk directly referenced a Galerie 7 compilation maker as informing the tastes and collective habits of him and his friends *à l’époque*. And they are the ones who have benefited from its democratised archival technique of Mp3 piracy and collation. This, also, came into Misk’s programming, and in many ways would bypass the fact of not having easy access to other sources – including,

incidentally, sites such as Discogs. Meriem used Mp3 sites, indicative of the sorts of places in constellation with Galerie 7 and the other pirates.

But on the other hand, Tunis's archival situation was also the thing that undermined Misk's project of coherence. The station has to concur with certain listening norms: the structure of moods throughout the day, quotas of 'Tunisian' music, and the use of certain well known songs (I am told, to 'fulfil the need that everyone has to sing in their car). There are long sections in the afternoon that are called '*le grand misk*', a logic which, despite its intentions as 'mix' *rather than* 'cocktail', could seemingly easily become 'cocktail'. This was highlighted to me with my friend Aymen who we met when we were listening to cassettes in his mother's dance studio. We were driving to eat in a little restaurant in Montplaisir, and Misk was on in the car. It must have been the segment: '*le grand misk*', because it was shuffling to and fro between the Beachboys and some *chanson tunisienne*, without any kind of verbal labelling of the artists or curation which is found on some of the other Misk programmes. Aymen made a face and said: '*makhalat comme même*, Misk'. 'It's still mixed, Misk' – with the emphasis on *makhalat* here alluding to an uncomfortable rather than coherent mixing. In this sound, he had heard a cocktail structure: the structure of Mosaique FM, the mainstream.

It felt that there was a desire for a particular sonic arrangement, which would mean 'correctness', which wasn't coming through – and this was compounded by the fact that it was always *supposed* to be Misk that would be able to achieve that. Clearly, the difference between 'cocktail' and 'mix' is subtle. It is also in the ear of the listener; one that shapes, and is shaped by, a complex, multi-layered archival situation in which feelings of 'modern', '*jaww*', 'culture' and 'music' constantly meld in and out from each other in the midst of efforts to organise and make sense of the world.

5.7 Conclusion

We started this chapter by asking whether vinyl archives, clearly so important for the building of state archives that we have already seen in the colonial and post-colonial periods, continue to shape aural public spheres in Tunis – whether their fragments and stories come into the organisation of sound alongside Tunis's other archival structures.

Through the chapter we have found that vinyl archives are perhaps the most ontologically 'multiple' of all our archives. They are rendered very differently in the contemporary city: as online platforms such as Discogs built on materialities which are inaccessible from the city; as a shop with material fragments crowding its walls; as books and phonothèque lists. These contemporary archives are mediations reflective of the different journeys that vinyl has taken; starting at the colonial period and moving through the post-colonial periods, when recordings were already forming archives and communities of time in all sorts of commercial, domestic and tourist spaces, in Tunis and abroad. In the contemporary city, vinyl archives and fragments are brought into projects to form 'communities of time' in different ways: from Hédi's shaping of listening moments which lean into a deep listening, through which Bourguiban pasts and newly curated presents can be formed; to the radio station Misk's formation of playlists and musical experiences which use and inspire feelings of the 'coherence' of vinyl objects, part of their attempts to form a cultured elite. But these projects are also shaped by other aspects of Tunis's archival situation: Hédi's listening moments by state archival divisions; the Misk playlists by the prevalence of the cocktail structure and the Mp3 archival technique. This lends a fundamental ambiguity to listening experiences, which can hover between different organisational logics, even as curators attempt to hone them.

6. Conclusion

We started this thesis with a description of a day: the 8th anniversary of the revolution on the Avenue Bourguiba. The cacophony of sound and the diversity of music animating the festivities that day seemed to be contributing to the sense that the crowds coming together on the Avenue were ‘The Tunisian People’. As detailed by Zemni, since the revolution, there has been ‘a politicisation of *the people* outside the constituted order of ‘routine politics’, a tension between the legality, the governmental power and the revolutionary legitimacy of *the people* as well as by rising tensions and emerging differences between the *parts of the people*’ (Zemni, 2016b). Wandering around the Avenue, I wondered whether I was witnessing a sonic representation of this: musical styles shaping social groups in their plurality, as parts of the people, and in their combination as *the people*. Thinking in this way would be in keeping with approaches to aesthetics since the revolution, thinking about aesthetics as something which reorganises space, comes into the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2013).

But we noted, also, that another story needs to be investigated here: the ways in which sonic moments such as these are created and curated by the mediation of sound and music through multiple archives. Through my fieldwork, I realised that there is a whole jumble of technological infrastructures and archival efforts that mediate music through space; that these have been created and maintained by a variety of political projects; and that part of these projects involves an organisation not only of ‘musical style’ and the whereabouts of different ‘styles’, but also the very ontologies of ‘sound’ and ‘music’. This is important, because it opens onto the idea that sonic encounters might carry with them stories of multiple mediations, which create a variety of significations depending on their trajectories. From the work of Mbembe and Dakhli, we understood that archives are foundational to the power of the state: it is with the fragments of archives that ‘instituting imaginaries’ and ‘communities of time’ underpinning senses of ‘nation’ may be created; as well as counter-currents which seek to tell rival stories of people and who they are. But we noted also that there hasn’t been any attempt to think about the political work of sonic archives in

contemporary Tunis. From the work of Ochoa, Born, Devine, LaBelle, Steingo and Sykes, we understood sonic archives as being things whose power can work in several ways: they mediate the presence of fragments and store ‘items’, as in the archives of Mbembe, but their very construction is also something which mediates an ‘aural public sphere’ (Ochoa Gautier, 2006) – the public sphere in which projects of modernity are enacted through the entextualisation and recontextualization of sound, which can take the form of recordings, texts, sounds, bodies, and all manner of differently organised materials. Sonic archives are things that can be seen and felt, but they can also be listened to attentively, and heard subconsciously. They bring people together in ‘communities of time’ (Mbembe, 2002) which are not only about the imaginary time of the public, but also about the temporal qualities of sound and rhythm as are felt by, and move, bodies (LaBelle, 2010). They themselves are created within political environments, and carry political meanings (Sykes & Steingo, 2019).

So we asked, at the start of this thesis, the following questions: what is the nature of Tunis’s sonic archives, how are they layered in the city, and how do they work to *order*: to order music’s ontologies, and to order listeners and bodies? We asked how a turn towards sonic archives might complicate our notions of shifts in time, space and social organisation in Tunis following the revolution – we asked whether other temporalities might be brought to the fore.

In order to think about these questions, we journeyed through five different archival configurations. It has been an effort of media archaeology rather than chronology, which has seen us jumping back and forth through different times, guided by the archives, their objects and the people curating them. I felt it important to acknowledge the multiple nature of time that these archives animate; interlocutors revolving around each configuration painted pictures of time and chronology in different terms to each other, and to work to in some ways ‘standardise’ their stories into a single chronology would have felt like their differences weren’t being heard. Indeed, I follow here the assertion of Steingo and Sykes that sonic histories, particularly those in the post-colonial social and political environments of the global South, should be conceptualized as ‘nonlinear and saturated with friction’; narratives of ‘jagged histories of encounter’ (Sykes & Steingo 2019, 21). Each archival configuration carries with it histories which overlap; and in many cases, these histories were unknown and hadn’t been brought to the fore in research before. It has been challenging to negotiate the

different stances that I occupy in a project like this; between historian, media archaeologist, anthropologist, and also listener; between being someone trying to work out what happened, but also to honour subjective experiences of time which are different, and to think about what it all means for people in the present. The space of the interview, in particular, was a space which hovered between history, performance of ontology and creation of meaning in ways whose complexity was constantly challenging.

Nevertheless, there are some key ideas that come through in response to our questions. In response to the question about the ‘nature’ of Tunis’s sonic archives, we understand the following: there isn’t a single ‘nature’, but rather Tunis’s sonic archives take different forms. Sonic archives in Tunis are mediated by material infrastructures which are contingent on the political projects which are behind their construction and maintenance; but they can also be mediated through each other’s forms, overlapping. Together, they come together to form an ‘archival situation’: a situation in which there is a jumble of sonic archives existing all at once, each one impinging and borrowing from the materials and imaginaries of the archives which surround them. These archives are made, maintained and curated by a variety of people with differing amounts of power and influence, from state radio employees to YouTube uploaders, from café workers to taxi drivers, from cocktail makers to *graveurs*. Aesthetic workers and listeners alike use them to mediate their sensory worlds, skipping between them and negotiating the affordances and limits of this ‘archival situation’ to create their ‘communities of time’ and ‘instituting imaginaries’.

6.1 Tunis’s archival situation

We started our journey in Tunis’s State archive. We saw this archive is something that is mediated through multiple sites and materials: through the radio broadcasts of the channels of the RTT, including that of the new, post-revolutionary channel ‘Panorama’; through publications such as *Initiation à la musique tunisienne* which curate radio programmes surrounding the delineation of the *Ma’lūf* genre; through the lists of recordings on the website of the Phonothèque. These material manifestations all come as a result of political projects of ‘modernity’ and ‘*tunisianité*’, which require both a stylistic openness, and a

certain desire for a 'correct' industrial process behind the mediatisation of music; as such, the sonic qualities of mediations through the contemporary city purport certain epistemologies of purification which work to separate styles and voices, to maintain key sonic areas of *ma'lūf* and *Chanson Tunisienne*, as well as a certain audibility but less textual engagement with *fann sh'abi* and the 'occidental' styles of the RTCI. Key to the power of the state archive is the way in which it encourages encounters with these material and limits entrance into its key buildings: this creates senses of 'originals' at a mythical centre of the state, which harbour the important voices of the post-independence period. This archive is a different shape to the YouTube archive. A readily accessible digital platform created in the US and spread across the world, YouTube exists as an archive of consistently formatted fragments sound and image which allows users a certain new freedom over production and fragments, and senses of 'music', particularly through activities of 'cocktailing' and 'covers' which arguably challenge the industrial underpinnings sonic archives. But we also saw that YouTube, as it is used as a listening technology to create ambiance and *jaww* in spaces throughout the city, can easily have its sounds divided and organised according to the sorts of epistemologies of purification which consolidate previous divisions between 'culture' and 'jaww'. YouTube's power against the state archive is ambiguous: both can be used to mediate each other's fragments according to a variety of logics, and YouTube offers only limited structural change to the production of 'music', enabling a wide continuation of state control and a certain power to industrial activity situated abroad.

The two archival structures of the state archive and YouTube can come together to give the impression that that's all there is in Tunis: they are the places that one is directed towards when looking for 'music in Tunis'. It is considered that YouTube has 'eaten' previous mediations of music on supports; and this impression is confounded by the ways that many YouTube fragments bear the imagery of their former selves. But it's not true that these are the only archives in operation: shops of cassettes and CDs still nestle around the *centreville*; a *hanout* in Galerie 7 still trades Mp3 compilations of music; and vinyl shops and online platform Discogs still maintain spaces of vinyl. These spaces exist as archival structures that continue to act on urban space; and also as nodes or remnants of their various organisational projects. Often, these are projects whose aesthetic forms, sensory qualities and affordances can be heard and sensed mediated around the city in the curations of

radios, taxi drivers and café workers, interacting with the work of the state archive and YouTube in a variety of ways.

The cassette and CD shops are evidence of a former glory: the glory of large scale industrial production of cassettes and CDs from the 1980s which provided new sounds and senses of 'mass'. Its objects and stories suggest that this was achieved particularly through cocktail objects which would bring together fragments in logics of 'cocktail' and arrangements of *fann sh'abi* also seeking to layer sounds and timbres, both sounds supposedly responding to the desires of the Tunisian consumer. We suggested that these objects brought fragments together in 'compositions' which created 'illusion of totality and continuity' (Mbembe, 2002) around their sonic forms, in response to notions that the Tunisian 'listener' was desiring of a '*kul shay*', 'everything'. Whilst their objects are dwindling, their cocktail structures are arguably embedded in the mediations of the leading radio station Mosaique FM, as well as many manifestations of live music across the capital; digital and algorithmic arrangements of music are still arguably organised by the logics of these sonic arrangements and cocktail structures, which continue to purport similar notions of the Tunisian listener as desiring of a composite *jaww*. The Mp3 hanout is also evidence of a former glory: that of circumventing media channels to produce pirated music and compilations that would fuel world-making desires of a generation of youth whose materials were limited by state censorship and economic policy. With their mediations of sounds and senses of music which in many ways mirror the commercial and state media archives, the legacy of these spaces exists through the very technique of archiving which they promoted: the piracy and download of online material, which can be seen and heard across spaces of taxis and cafés as groups continue to hone their *jaww*. The vinyl hanout, and Discogs, display the array of vinyl materials which arguably created senses of 'mass' and the cosmopolitan Tunisian consumer, and indeed the tourist consumer, long before the arrival of cassettes, in stories which work against the idea that vinyl was the sole domain of the state archive. Vinyl's materialities and affordances continue to be used to create moments of 'togetherness', whether through sessions of deep listening which open up worlds from the space of the vinyl shop, or through a multimedia construction of its imaginary which attempts to mediate a social group around notions of 'music' from the broadcasters of Misk FM.

So we understand that the sonic archives of Tunis don't have a single 'nature'. These archival spaces are diverse, complex, and ontologically multiple: they form an 'archival situation', a situation in which multiple archives, each with their own specific histories, imaginaries and technological infrastructures, nevertheless overlap and exist together in the city. With this in mind, we move to the second part of our question: what is it that this archival situation in contemporary Tunis does to *order* and to *organise*: sound, music and bodies? There are a couple of things I will reflect on here in response. There are constant attempts to enact projects of modernity and worldmaking as people use the archives to create different spaces of 'music', *jaww*, and 'culture', thus attempting to organise bodies through these spaces; and yet, as they occur in the midst of Tunis's 'archival situation', these attempts can often result in spaces of ambiguity, which blur the lines between these distinctions. We also note an emergence of repetitive 'clumps' and *topoi* mediated through this archival situation which structure, and are structured by, multiple interactions around music and sound; whilst they enable a creative expansion of aesthetic worlds, they can also be used as a basis discourses which describe the Tunisian listener in contradictory ways: as exhibiting a kind of *tunisianité*, an 'openness to everything', and also a kind of 'lack' of understanding about 'music'.

The archival situation is negotiated by people engaging in the curation of spaces – the aesthetic workers – to mediate sound according to various projects of 'modernity' and worldmaking. Through these efforts, there is a grappling over the sonic shapes of the 'aural public sphere' – and behind all of these mediations and uses of archives, there are desires for the body: for how the 'Tunisian' body should be formed as listening, sensing thing, for how bodies should come together as a 'national' body. These projects are expressed in different kinds of aesthetic form. Some, such as the state workers of *En'nagham* and Panorama, the DJs of Misk and the clientele of Liberthé, express desires for both a kind of 'epistemological purification' of sound which allows sounds to be sorted within a 'moderne ecumene', involving sounds of a 'mix' rather than a cocktail; and also a working and 'correct' infrastructure of production, to be expressed in mediations that adhere to notions of 'originals' and 'copyright'. These projects can be seen to be enacted in uses of archives: from publications of books such as *Initiation à la Musique Tunisienne* which train the sensing body to become 'cultivated' through understanding *Ma'louf* as sounds and theories; to the creation of 'mixes' using Winmedia in Misk's studios to create senses of 'good music' for

listeners; to the sonic division of spaces where YouTube might be used to pay homage to senses of 'original' recordings. Others, such as Niez and the DJs of Mosaïque, seek to create spaces for the 'modern' Tunisian listener which they understand as fundamentally composite, desiring of a 'cocktail' structure which will fulfil their desires for 'everything', or of certain *fann sh'abi* sounds which will be heard as mixing 'modern' and 'traditional'. These projects can also be seen and heard through many archival structures: through the cocktails of Mosaïque FM and the other generalist radio stations; through the cassette and CD objects mediating *jaww* for use before wedding preparations; through the spaces of the restaurant spectacle as YouTube is used to delineate moments with the potential for creating senses of trance.

But complexities of Tunis's archival situation can also enter into a disruption of the separations between these spaces and notions of modernity, blurring distinctions between the different feelings of 'culture', 'music', and *jaww*. The 'cocktail' and the 'mix', '*jaww*', 'music' and 'culture', are indeed never far away from each other, as the archival fragments used to construct them have multiple ontological qualities which can lead in different directions at once. Desires for 'correctness' and 'officiality' in Tunis are complicated by the fact that the 'official' state systems themselves are often perceived to be the very things that work against these notions – as displayed in widespread perceptions of an ambiguous attitude towards copyright. Many objects and spaces therefore play on different aesthetics of modernity in the fragments and archives that they produce – and this can be both deliberate or inadvertent. The compilations of Galerie 7 with their careful formatting and neat lists appear play on the aesthetics of 'originality', as do the cassette and CD objects which display 'CD originale' logos; they make use of ambiguities to *masquerade* as 'modern' objects, but they do so against a certain 'officiality' whose presence is also doubted. The situation is more complicated for Misk, whose 'mix' structures still have to be formatted in ways that risk them being perceived as 'cocktails' by listeners, thereby undermining their own attempts at a 'purification'. Moments of listening to Om Kalthoum in Yuka may be encased by a space which calls itself 'cultural', but their sounds can easily resemble that of the *jaww* of the restaurant spectacle. So distinctions between 'music', 'culture' and *jaww* can always be blurred by the very same archival structures with which people attempt to form and shape them.

Throughout the chapters, we have also seen the emergence of certain repeated *things*: lists, names, images, icons, sounds, discursive formations. These things are sometimes distinct, sometimes blurred together. Central to these has been a discursive division between central categories of '*gharbi*', '*sharqi*' and '*tunisi*'. This came up in each radio station that I was in, where the divisions are organised on monitors and in categories. It came up in conversation about music constantly; it was a key way in which music was understood and categorised. We found 'clumps' of things that were often organised roughly according to this division; in the shop archives of cassettes and CDs and vinyl, and even in the layers of files in the screens and USB sticks of Mp3s from Galerie 7. Along with this central division, there were subdivisions. *Mezoued*, *zokra* and *gasba* are the three words that are brought together very often to form *fann sh'abi*; lists of icons make up *chanson tunisienne* which often goes something like 'Hédi Jouini, Ali Riahi, Saliha'. Om Kalthoum, Fairouz, Abdelwaheb, Abdelhalim Hafez, loom very large as presences in the shops, on the air waves, hummed throughout space.

What is the significance of this? Mbembe talked about the 'democratising' of the act of chronophagy and a 'returning to an order where the consumption of the archive becomes a communal tool of the state and of society' – in so doing, the archive might be transformed into a 'talisman' (Mbembe, 2002). Is this what is happening here? It is unclear, and it seems that the presence of these clumps is itself something that leads to a variety of responses. Discourses would link these forms with 'Tunisians' in contradictory ways. As things which were mediated in sound, the repetition of the forms and their entrenched nature could lead to feelings of boredom and repetition. This was often linked to an expression of the attendant idea that this is the fault of Tunisian listeners, that the limitations are linked with a lack of taste, and with a lack of 'understanding' of culture. Also, however, this is a panoply of forms onto which discourses of *tunisianité* can be easily plaqued: specifically the form of *tunisianité* which require senses of a diversity between 'east' and 'west', between popular, elite and traditional forms, between the stars of various places, leading to the frequent refrain that 'Tunisians are open to everything'. Underneath both of these generalising ideas, for curators, the categories were used to structure discussions of music and creative playlisting which nonetheless use them to think outside of them, to expand: we saw this in many instances of curation, those of Pakito in Galerie 7 and Meriem in Misk for instance, in

which these were the limits upon which other categories could be pitched, new worlds could open up and could be explored.

So Tunis's sonic archives are diverse, and their ordering of music, sounds and bodies is something that occurs through several ways. The situation is engaged with by aesthetic workers, who deliberately use the archives to explore divisions of *jaww* and culture, and whose work is also shaped by the archival situation. It also seems to throw up *topoi* which are engaged in different discourses about the Tunisian people, but also used to expand acts of curation. This alludes to our second question, which we will now deal with more explicitly: how has this turn towards sonic archives complicated our notions of shifts in time, space and social organisation in Tunis following the revolution?

6.2 Knowing the 'public' of the aural public sphere

The picture painted by this thesis very much runs against the idea that the revolution caused a shift in aesthetic forms and musical productions which produced clear senses of a 'break' with pasts; or a public space or public sphere which would be 'new', of the type described in work that talks of an emergence of a post-revolutionary public sphere which is formed through the use of social media and politically engaged rap music. The 'aural' public sphere tells different stories of the relationships between authority and subversion, and between pasts and presents.

Pasts of various descriptions can be heard, indeed are deliberately curated, through contemporary archives. Particularly strong amongst these pasts is the Bourguiban past, for which there is a huge amount of nostalgia. Despite the inclusion of the new radio station Panorama, we saw that its organising structures run more in line with a post-independence sense of *Tunisianité*; that the material which it mediates from the radio archive, and incorporates from YouTube, runs to the same sonic divisions. YouTube channels such as 'Malouf Tunisien' and those enabling a karaoke experience of the stars of Chanson Tunisienne also appear to be engaging pasts in the present. Hédi's vinyl listening took us to the hotels of Slimane, to the relationships between tourists and aesthetic workers. Another continually strong presence is the past of the 2000s when Ben Ali was in power, which saw

the growth of both a private media domain led by Mosaique FM, and a flourishing of piracy which sought to circumvent senses of closure. Forms from this time continue to mediate the present, from the arrangements of *fann sh'abi* animating weddings and restaurant spectacle, to the cocktail playlists of Mosaique FM, which haven't changed their formula since 2004, to the widespread mastery of the 'archival technique' of Mp3 download as it was honed in spaces such as Galerie 7 during this time.

At the same time, we also see that the sorts of spaces of dissensus claimed for post-revolutionary aesthetic work were present well before the revolution; indeed, date back to the aural public spheres of the colonial period. The spaces of subversion formed by the vinyl records of this time morphed indeed into subversive activity within the state institutions themselves, in the form of the likes of Ben Frej, recording *mezoued* and controversial poetry within state structures. Galerie 7 and its compilation albums mediated subversive rappers, discussing the kinds of life in the *houma*, before the revolution and the swathes of rap music produced since; it also produced objects which would enable and entrain an active searching and world making, nurturing a certain sense of agency and 'possibility' on exactly the generation which would go on to actively seek a change in regime.

But more than this, we've seen how thin the line is between sonic moments of subversion and authority, of feelings of past and present. For instance, a vinyl record of Cheikh Imam could be perceived as running against state authority through the spaces of its lyrics, whilst carrying its authority on its logos, copyright details and material rendering. A rap song of Samara could be felt to run against state authority with its lyrics and stylistic forms which aren't acknowledged strongly as 'music' within state systems, whilst it develops into a different kind of authority: that of the contemporary commercial circulations of music, the YouTube mediated sounds of the 'mainstream', increasingly reliant on foreign capital. Whilst listening to vinyl records with Hédi, we were both travelling to the past, but also negotiating the sounds of the present through curations and explanations that sought to share senses of 'music' for the current moment. All of these fragments and moments, mediated through multiple archives, can come into temporal, spatial and social organisations in a number of ways, depending on how they are mediated and perceived.

If something has changed since the revolution, it is arguably the way in which music mediated through the archival situation, in conjunction with the political moment, both

throws into question who the 'public' is, and also contributes new tools and materials to understandings of publics, which work in several directions at once.

We saw in the chapters how sonic archival spaces and structures are things that are used as ways in which to understand the publics themselves, and time, as it forms around them. We've seen that music archives don't just serve to mediate senses of music and recordings, but that along with this, they are used as space of mediation of certain groups of people, kinds of people, and the natures of the Tunisian 'mass' – they are used to make sense of worlds through experiences of each other's experiences of those worlds. In this, collections of recording objects work as tools, as measuring sticks. We saw this in the shop spaces of vinyls, cassettes and CDs, and Galerie 7, where shop workers would understand notions of the Tunisian 'mass' and public specifically through their interactions with the record objects; and this was something that was heavily connected with the whereabouts of these spaces in the *centreville* of Tunis, a space which is considered to be animated by *everyone*. We suggested that this ways of mediating and coming to understand 'masses' and 'publics' was something that was already happening in the vinyl shops of the colonial and post-colonial eras.

The post-revolutionary moment has brought about shifts in the ways in which the 'mass' might be mediated through arrangements of music and sound, and thus shifts in the ways that people attempt to 'know' this 'mass', this 'public'. Key to this has been the opening of YouTube. Whilst the 'public' might once have been felt to be understood through witnessing the bodies congregating around shops, through sales figures of the recordings of different genres, it is now frequently understood from YouTube view counts. Knowing the public is an exercise which has become more tense, more vital, as it becomes increasingly difficult in such an intensified aural public sphere, in which sonic moments are so disparate and diverse – radios employ increasingly sophisticated statistic generating techniques, and rely increasingly on YouTube. In this situation, certain songs, certain beds of sound, we have seen, themselves carry senses of 'mass', shadows of masses of bodies; but these are always ambiguous, impossible to fully grasp, and it is ambiguous where this public *is*.

We've seen a variety of moments in which, within this situation, curation of sound and music, and a sharing of this curation, can be a means for people to continue to create worlds and relationships which they can feel like they *know*, and to be 'connecting things kept

apart' (Zielinski, 2008). I felt this in Galerie 7 and the vinyl shop, as Pakito and Hédi shared long moments of listening and curation through which the world could be spatially and temporally organised. And indeed, YouTube itself could also be manipulated on phones to be brought into shared moment of listening, directed in surprising and new ways. I found this particularly in moments shared with the oud player who played Beethoven to my on his phone in the Gammarth bar; in Hay Ettadhamen as Soolking was being narrated by my friend's sister; and during the many hours spent listening with Radhi. These were moments of a change in direction, an experimentation with the sensible and its curation, a use of the archival situation to make worlds. These acts of sharing weren't leading to explosive aesthetic interventions in the aural public sphere such as those described as a kind of 'democratic grotesque' (Boutieri, 2021); but they were still about negotiating the sensible, producing and reproducing the everyday through rhythms of objects and sounds which aimed to create something, to keep a track of time.

6.3 Areas of continued questioning and opening

In this thesis I have attempted to bring together many different sites, media infrastructures, archives and spaces in Tunis. As such, at each corner, it is also revealed how little I, and we as an academic community, continue to be able to say about them. In prioritising the act of bringing these spaces together and bringing out links between them, I wasn't able to go into any of them in as much depth as they deserve.

Far more research is needed on the post-independence vinyl activities, particularly those of *En'nagham* but also *Mellouliphone*, which was mentioned here in passing, but whose oeuvre is partially mediated through Discogs and which was clearly an important producer of *fann sh'abi*. Research into different cassette and CD companies, expanding beyond Phonie and especially to other key players including Africa Cassette, SOCA, Noveca and others is sorely needed, and would undoubtedly change the picture that I have composed here. The Mp3 compilation makers of Galerie 7 deserve to be heard. Activities of radio stations, but particularly the RTCI, and other private channels such as Shems FM, need to be looked into more carefully. In short, each of these institutions and archival efforts needs far more

attention. Also, despite a focus on listening and listeners in this thesis, I ended up focusing largely on the organisers and the curators in these chapters; more space in the future should be left to the listeners, and to the dialectic between listening and organising.

Beyond this, amongst the many areas that have been bypassed and the infinite areas of questions that this thesis could open onto, there are three of particular importance which have not been addressed.

Gender has hovered in the background of the thesis, never properly addressed, but always important. It will have been glaringly obvious to the reader that nearly all of the primary interlocutors have been men: and that media worlds, the worlds of curation, and of archival efforts and infrastructures, are overwhelmingly male. Gender dynamics in Tunisia, particularly since the revolution, have been a hot topic of contention and have attracted a range of strong opinions and stances; going about fieldwork within this discursive environment, I was reluctant to engage with it head on. This was perhaps a mistake, especially considering the extent to which notions and performances of gender are central to notions of Bourguiban and other 'modernities'. This area clearly speaks to ways in which male power might work in musical worlds; not only through the prioritising of male musicians in public space, but in the actions of male recording engineers and technicians, the dynamic of power which exists between the man recording the woman's voice and mediating it through archives. How does gender come into the creation and maintenance of the archives that make up Tunis's archival situation? How might the infrastructures mediate senses of gender, gender roles and possibilities of gender performance? These questions need to be addressed.

Mobilities, and questions surrounding the movements of bodies, is another shadowy undercurrent of this thesis. We have looked at how music and sound move around, and how they move and shape bodies; we have not paid enough attention to the mobility of bodies, and how these unequal mobilities are integral to any organising work that they might be able to do. Unequal mobilities of bodies have been in this story from the start: from the colonial period, with its sorting of French and Tunisian bodies throughout the city of Tunis and beyond; through the post-independence period, when the unequal circulation of tourist bodies in relation to Tunisian bodies of the coastal and interior regions was clearly such a key generator of power dynamics; to the current period, in which there is a chronic stagnation

affecting Tunisians who can't leave the country through visa policies, combined with a free circulation of tourist – particularly white – bodies. How do these uneven circulations of bodies, these unequal mobilities, affect the archival work that is done? How do sonic archives mediate unequal mobilities? We alluded to this area when talking about YouTube economies, but it needs to be addressed in more depth. Particularly intriguing, I think, is the role and evolution of the 'tourist' domain, its relationship with production and spaces of music and musicians on imaginary and material levels, and the morphing and splitting of this domain in the current city into spaces of 'culture' for Tunisians in repurposed hotels, a growth in south-south tourism, and a blurring between tourism and work – often 'cultural' work – for northern visitors working short term NGO contracts in Tunis.

Lastly, although we highlighted that a key area of 'remapping sound studies' is taking seriously multiple ontologies of sound (Sykes & Steingo, 2019), we have failed to do this in a key area: spiritual and religious sounds. This is a major oversight: we know from the work of Jankowsky that spiritual and religious sounds are key to the formation of the aural public sphere in Tunisia (R. C. Jankowsky 2010; 2021), and in not addressing them, I have inadvertently maintained an erasure. An issue here has been my lack of expertise in such questions of Islam and Sufism, as well as a poor level of classical or modern standard Arabic that is required for understanding much of the discourse in this domain. But I think that the two areas can be brought together fruitfully, and indeed there are key questions. How might Islamic media, particularly in the form of cassettes and the very important station Zitouna FM, interact with this archival situation? How might media industries have participated in the 'modularity' of sound, which Jankowsky has recently suggested characterises the mediation of Sufi practices in certain performance situations (R. C. Jankowsky, 2021)? How might our senses of a cassette and radio *jaww* discussed here be brought into contact with other forms and senses of *jaww*, more aligned with spiritual sounds?

This thesis has been an attempt to think about music, media infrastructures and archives together, using thinking from Mbembe and Ochoa, and methods from sensory anthropology and media archaeology. It has enabled us to look beyond reductive notions of 'post-revolutionary music' operating in Tunis and to seriously explore the extent to which mediations of sound and music enter into the organisation of worlds in the post-revolutionary city. Despite its inevitable shortcomings, I hope it is something on which to

build deeper understandings of the ways that aesthetics and politics can work together in Tunis to shape lives, and to jog questions on ‘archival situations’ and their political work elsewhere.

6.4 Back to the Avenue Bourguiba

If we go back to the Avenue Bourguiba anecdote in light of the work in this thesis, we see that the plurality here is something working not just through styles; but also through the fact that each of these sonic moments exists in a whole huge network of archives, mediating them in multiple ways at different junctures.

We noted the voice of Lebanese singer Marcel Khalife, projected onto a screen as people queue up to enter the avenue. We have seen in this thesis that Marcel Khalife’s songs were mediated through the archives of *En’nagham* and Africa Voice by Héchmi Ben Frej, a surprisingly militant technician working at the heart of the state vinyl company, and that the recordings they might have carried senses of modernity as well as subversion through their rendering within the copyright systems of the music industry. We noted the voice of Fairouz animating a tent as a Palestinian flag was being waved. We have seen how Fairouz’s albums were bought and disseminated by cassette companies in attempts to mediate Middle Eastern catalogues in Tunis in the 1980s, and also how YouTube cocktails have been made of Fairouz’s songs by the creators of new kinds of archival fragment, circulating around digital worlds. We heard the voice of Sabri Mosbah and saw the performance of Mortadha. We’ve seen how both artists have made use of the new YouTube archive to bypass state grips over musical production; but also their work might be slotted into different archival projects, as Mosbah’s acoustic sounds achieve a sort of cultured ‘epistemological purification’ which Mortadha’s gravitation towards a kind of nightclub *jaww* might be felt to undermine. We noted the sound of a recording of The Weeknd; we’ve seen how sounds like this became ‘viral’ in recent years in the capital, forming a kind of ‘audible commons’ which is also indicative of the inequalities in music industries, affecting who might contribute to this ‘commons’.

So we now understand that these fragments and moments are kaleidoscopic: they have all been brought, at several different junctures, into projects which have sought to form publics within an aural public sphere – these projects have themselves changed the forms of the fragments – and this process is cyclical. Their multiple ontologies might be perceived to enable different and sometimes contradictory projects of modernity. The listeners on the Avenue will have experienced many of these sounds mediated in different constellations of ways, and, depending on their own relationships with the various archives in Tunis's archival situation, might have used them to carve worlds in a number of ways as they themselves negotiate spaces of *jaww*, 'music' and 'culture' of Tunis's 'aural public sphere.'

The 14th January anniversary day has recently been removed by president Kais Saied. He is claiming that the real revolution anniversary should be the 17th December: the day of the auto-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi; the day after which, for him, the project of the revolution was confiscated. To return to the terms of Mbembe, this act comes across, here, as an act of 'chronophagy', a consuming of the past (Mbembe, 2002). But here, it is about more than eating the fragments of the archive in order to erase a past; here, it is about eating a moment in which a whole messy archival situation is on display, a moment of reckoning and exploring with multiple mediations of multiple pasts, even if that wasn't the intention of organisers. As Mbembe suggests, acts of 'chronophagy' such as these fail to remove the instituting imaginary of the archive, which tends to find other ways to come out (Mbembe, 2002). It remains to be seen how Tunis's sonic archival structures will continue to shape the aural public sphere, where in the capital they will be allowed to breathe, and where they will continue to breathe anyway.



Fig. 44: Tunis, looking towards the Avenue Bourguiba, October 2019

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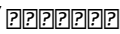
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