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# Emerging Identities in Colonial Tunisia: "Alliancist" and Zionist Representations in Tunis prior to World War I

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“Emerging Identities in Colonial Tunisia: ‘Alliancist’ and Zionist  
Representations in the Valensi Family of Tunis prior to World War I”\*

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### **Joy A. Land**

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Jewish community of Tunis witnessed  
the emergence of new competing identities. On the one hand were the advocates of the  
*Alliance Israélite Universelle*’s program<sup>1</sup> to advance emancipation and promote the

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defense of my dissertation, and for guiding me to the literature on post-colonialism.

<sup>1</sup> The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was established in Paris in 1860. For the statutes of the AIU, see  
André Chouraqui, Cent ans d’histoire: l’Alliance Israélite Universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine,  
1860-1960 (Paris : Presse Universitaires de France, 1965), *Annexe no. 4*, 412-415.

language, culture, and civilization of France through education, the “Alliancists;”<sup>2</sup> on the other hand were the proponents of Theodor Herzl’s plan to create a Jewish state, the Zionists. The First Zionist Congress held in Basle, Switzerland in 1897 formalized the Zionist position. With the rise of the Zionist movement, Alliancists and Zionists came into increasing conflict, not only in Tunisia or North Africa,<sup>3</sup> but in France,<sup>4</sup> and in the Ottoman and Persian realms<sup>5</sup> as well. Strikingly, two members of the Valensi family, Raymond and Alfred, led the struggle for their separate causes, Alliancist and Zionist, in colonial<sup>6</sup> Tunisia.

In his discussion of identity in the modern world, the critic Homi Bhabha asks:

How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical,

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<sup>2</sup> For use of the term “Alliancist,” see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2000) 124-125.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Abitbol, “Zionist Activity in the Maghreb,” The Jerusalem Quarterly 21 (Fall 1981): 61-84; Michael M. Laskier, “The Evolution of Zionist Activity in the Jewish Communities of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria: 1897-1947,” Studies in Zionism 8 (1983): 205-236.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Abitbol, Les deux terres promises: Les juifs de France et le sionisme, 1897-1945 (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1989); Michel Abitbol, “The Encounter between French Jewry and the Jews of North Africa: 1830-1914,” The Jews of Modern France, eds. Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein, translation by Jonathan Mandelbaum (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985) 31-53.

<sup>5</sup> On the situation in the Ottoman Empire, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, Sephardi Jewry... 124-125.; see also Aron Rodrigue French Jews, Turkish Jews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 126-131, 137-144. For reports from Alliance principals and schoolteachers on this issue in their communities, see Aron Rodrigue, Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times (Seattle: U of Washington Press) 245-262.

<sup>6</sup> The term “colonial” is used in its literary, rather than political, sense. Here it signifies any form of domination or subjugation. However, for this early period, Tunisian Jewry hoped for improvement of their lives under French rule.

but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?<sup>7</sup>

It is in this context that Alliancist and Zionist representations will be discussed. The tensions over the tendency of the Alliance to propound “assimilation” to French culture versus the position of the Zionists to promote the use of modern Hebrew and to encourage immigration to a Jewish homeland persisted until the outbreak of World War II.<sup>8</sup> But their sources can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century as the French speaking Jews of Tunisia sought to define their individual and collective identities.

The statements of Raymond Valensi, President of the Alliance Regional Committee and of Alfred Valensi, President of the Tunisian Zionist Association, will be examined as two spokesmen of “competing claims” within the Jewish community of Tunis. Primary sources include: the handwritten correspondence in French to the Chief Rabbi of France from an anonymous group of Tunisian Jews who represent an emerging Zionism; the correspondence of Raymond Valensi of the Alliance to Zadok-Kahn, as found in the Archives of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*; published pamphlets such as *Le Sionisme*, by Alfred Valensi; and documents in French and Hebrew published in the

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<sup>7</sup> Homi K. Bhaba, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge Classics, 2004) 2.

<sup>8</sup> For a Muslim Tunisian point of view on the Alliancist-Zionist issue in the thirties, see Ahmed Kassab, “La communauté israélite de Tunisie entre la francisation et le sionisme (1930-1940)” in Les mouvements politiques et sociaux dans la Tunisie des années 1930 : actes du IIIème Séminaire sur l’histoire du mouvement national, 17, 18, et 19 Mai 1985 (Tunis: n.p., 1987) 525-548. For a primary source which discusses three different points of view current in Jewish Tunisia of the 1930’s, that of a Zionist (*un Sioniste*), a person assimilated to French culture (*un assimilé*), and a “de-Judaized” Jew (*un déjudaisé*), see the Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* I G 2, Reel 6, Sousse, A. Ben-Meir, 2 March 1939.

appendices of *Le Mouvement Sioniste en Tunisie* by Shlomo Barad.<sup>9</sup> As a secondary source, the work of the late Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie*, is indispensable.<sup>10</sup>

The correspondence of an AIU school principal in Tunisia in the early twentieth century, provides evidence of “deprivation and discrimination,” in the words of Homi Bhabha, based on law and practice. A letter from Clément Ouziel, *directeur* of the AIU School for Boys in Tunis, attests to the continued administration of the poll tax and the drastic punishment invoked against accused tax evaders in 1902 on the island of Djerba (Jerba).<sup>11</sup> Even though the French Protectorate had been in force for some two decades, indigenous Tunisian Jews away from the main urban centers were still required to pay the *jizya*, (called the *mejba* [*majba*] in Tunisia) or poll tax, to the local Arab Muslim authorities.<sup>12</sup> It had been exacted in the Islamic world from non-Muslims and applied to

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<sup>9</sup> Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), *Tunisie* I G 1-3, Reel 6, Sionisme et l'Alliance, Tunis, 1900-1938, Sionisme {1900}, Tunis, Raymond Valensi, 26 October 1900 ; Alfred Valensi, *Le Sionisme* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tunis, 1913) 1-11; Shlomo Barad, *Le Mouvement Sioniste en Tunisie* [ Hebrew ; with introduction in French] (Tel Aviv: Yad Tabenkin-Ef'al, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie : Des origines à nos jours* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> « ...Comme tous les sujets du Bey, les Israélites de Djerba sont soumis à un impôt capital de 22 fr. par an ; ne sont dispensés de cet impôt que les Rabbins, les infirmes et les pauvres. La loi autorise le gouvernement à jeter en prison sans autre forme de procès, quiconque refuse de payer cet impôt appelé Mejba et à le faire travailler à la corvée sur les routes pendant quelques jours. [L]a durée de l'emprisonnement n'est limitée par aucune loi et tout dépend du bon plaisir des autorités ; en général les récalcitrants ne sont emprisonnés que pendant dix à quinze jours après quoi ils sont relâchés. Mais rien n'empêche le gouvernement de leur réclamer la « Mejba » après deux ou trois mois et de les jeter de nouveau en prison, en cas de refus.

*On comprend aisément qu'une telle loi devient facilement vexatoire entre les mains d'un gouverneur mal disposé envers les israélites. Ceux de Djerba se plaignent de ce que le Contrôleur Civil actuel se montre très sévère et même injuste dans l'application de cette loi. Ils lui reprochent notamment :*

1 –L'inscription abusive sur les listes de la *Mejba* des jeunes gens se trouvant encore sur les bancs du T. Torah [Talmud Torah= school for the study of religious texts] et d'une centaine de pauvres, connus comme tels puisqu'ils reçoivent des secours de la communauté.

2 –D'avoir fait travailler à la corvée trois israélites, le samedi, [i.e., the Sabbath], 10 Mai 1902.

3 - D'avoir fait mettre en prison douze notables israélites lesquels se refusaient à payer une amende qui leur était injustement réclamée et les y avoir laissés pendant trois jours jusqu'à ce qu'ils se soient exécutés.... » Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* II C 5-6 I D 1, Reel 6, Clément Ouziel, 30 May 1902.

<sup>12</sup> According to a decree of 14 June 1902, the “indigenous” Jews of Tunis, Sousse, Monastir, Sfax, and Kairoun were exempt from this tax. They constituted some 50,000 people or about two-thirds of the Jewish

People of the Book (Cl. Ar. *ahl al-kitāb*), Christians and Jews, and others, at least since the eighth century, with varying degrees of frequency and severity.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from challenges of Arab Muslim domination, there was inherent conflict within the Jewish community, notably in Tunis. In addition to the cleavage between Alliancists and Zionists, the community was subject to other, older, internal divisions, such as those based on points of geographical origin. Dissension prevailed between the *Grana* or Livornese, Jews stemming from Leghorn (*Livorno*), Italy, and the *Tuansa* (Cl. Ar. *tawānisa*), indigenous Tunisian Jews who had lived in the area at least since Roman times. (In the ancient world the urban center was known as Carthage.) Furthermore, two sub-communities of the Livornese also existed. The first one, the “old Livornese,” traced its descent from the Iberian Peninsula and held surnames based on Spanish or Portuguese cities, such as the Spanish name Valensi (Valencia). Many of the descendants of the Jewish refugees expelled from Catholic Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497, later settled in Leghorn. The reigning member of the Medici family of Tuscany welcomed them by decree to reside in Leghorn in 1593,<sup>14</sup> thus summoning the *Sephardim*<sup>15</sup> to migrate there. The second sub-community, the “new Livornese,” hailed from Tuscany or other parts of

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population. See Jacques Chalom, Les Israélites de la Tunisie: leur condition civile & politique, diss. Université de Paris, Faculté de Droit (Paris: A. Rousseau 1908)...193.

<sup>13</sup> For Tunisia, see J. Chalom, Les Israélites de la Tunisie; Paul Sebag, Histoire ...49-50; Norman A. Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times ( Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003) 50, n.8. On the status of non-Muslims and payment of the poll tax in the Islamic realm, see Antoine Fattal, Le statut legal des non-musulmans en pays d’Islam 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Sarl, 1958.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, “*La Costituzione ‘Lovornina’ del 1593*” as quoted by Minna Rozen, “The Leghorn Merchants in Tunis and Their Trade with Marseilles at the End of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century,” Les relations intercommunautaires juives en méditerranée occidentale, XIIIe-XXe siècles, ed. J. L. Miège (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984) 51.

<sup>15</sup> The term *Sephardim* applies to the Jews from Spain (Hebrew: *Sepharad*), and by extension, the Iberian Peninsula. For the role of the Sephardim in the Jewish community of Tunisia, see Sebag, Histoire...75.

Italy, arriving in Tunis during the course of the nineteenth century, and held surnames based on Italian cities.<sup>16</sup> Members of the Valensi family, of the “old Livornese” and Francophone, were in positions of influence in the late nineteenth century, even though the “new Livornese” were rapidly gaining ascendance over the community.<sup>17</sup>

The leaders the Jewish population in Tunisia first sought the assistance of the Alliance in the 1860’s, in response to anti-Jewish outbursts.<sup>18</sup> In Tunis the Jewish community established an AIU Regional Committee in 1864 but it suffered from internal disagreements and other difficulties. It was only in 1877 that the Alliance renewed its interest in Tunisia for the purpose of extending “modern” education.<sup>19</sup> An AIU School for Boys opened in 1878 and one for girls began operation in 1882.<sup>20</sup> France, meanwhile, invaded Tunisia in 1881 and made it a French Protectorate in 1883.

Schools of the AIU educational network were established in co-operation with local Jewish leadership. Furthermore, the AIU in Paris relied on each Jewish community

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Sebag, Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie... 111.

<sup>17</sup> On the role of the “new Livornese,” their use of the Italian language and their adoption of European dress and customs, see Paul Sebag, Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie ... 112.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, a tribal rebellion against the Tunisian Bey Muhammad al-Sadiq (reign: 1859-1882) triggered widespread anti-Jewish riots in 1864. H. Z.(J.W.)Hirschberg discusses the origins of this incident and its aftermath in A History of the Jews of North Africa II (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1981) 114-115. For accounts of these “disorders,” see Narcisse Leven, Cinquante Ans d’Histoire: L’Alliance Israélite Universelle (1860-1910), vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1911) 103-104. ; See also Archives of the AIU, Tunisie I C 1-4, Reel 5, for correspondence from Solomon Garsin of the AIU Tunis Committee to the President of the AIU in Paris, 4 September 1864, where Garsin cries out for assistance from the AIU. For documentation of pillage, which was first directed against Muslims and then against Jews, on the island of Jerba, see Archives of the AIU, Tunisie I C 3, letter of Solomon Garsin of Tunis to the President of the AIU in Paris, 28 October 1864, found in translation in Norman Stillman’s The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979) 410.

<sup>19</sup> Leven, v. 1, p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> On the AIU School for Girls in Tunis, see Joy A. Land, “Corresponding Lives: Women Educators of the Alliance Israélite School for Girls in the City of Tunis, 1882-1914,” Ph.D. diss., UCLA (2006). Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies Paper 4. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/international/cnes/4>

to contribute toward the financial support of its schools. To enhance this effort, each community formed a regional committee. In Tunis, Raymond Valensi (1847-1920),<sup>21</sup> an engineer-architect, served as President of the AIU Regional Committee for several years, including the pre-World War I era.<sup>22</sup> Raymond Valensi often used his training as an architect to assist in the design, construction or renovation of Alliance properties.<sup>23</sup> He corresponded with the Alliance in Paris, including M. Zadok-Kahn, the AIU honorary President and Chief Rabbi of France. An anonymous letter sent to Zadok -Kahn<sup>24</sup> by members of the Jewish community of Tunis, and Raymond Valensi's advisory response, illuminate an early controversy between Alliancists and Zionists.

In 1900 a group of Jews of the “Portuguese and Tunisian rites” send an irate letter to the Chief Rabbi of France. They protest against the “assimilationist education” of the AIU and claim that Alliance graduates are neither Jewish nor French. Moreover, its alumni are not seriously steeped in Judaism.<sup>25</sup> A partial translation of the letter follows:

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<sup>21</sup> For his dates, see the Encyclopedia Judaica v. 16 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., 1972) 58.

<sup>22</sup> The following documents indicate the span of Raymond Valensi's communal activity. They demonstrate the length and breadth of his involvement: Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* I C 1-4, Reel 5, Raymond Valensi, 31 May 1883, signed letter as President of the Regional Committee for Tunisia; Central Zionist Archives Z4/2087/I, signed letter as former Vice-President of the Municipality of Tunis, 17 November 1918, as quoted in Shlomo Barad, Le Mouvement Sioniste..., *Annexe Numéro 6* ... 101.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* I B 11, letter of R. Valensi to the President of the AIU, 31 October 1884, or a letter of R. Valensi to the Secretary of the AIU Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* I B 11, 21 December 1900; or, Archives of the AIU, *Tunisie* I N, Reel 83, Djedaïda, Raymond Valensi, 1894.

<sup>24</sup> Although Zadok-Kahn distanced himself from Herzl's ideology, the Chief Rabbi had cordial relations with Herzl, who often visited him in Paris after 1896. See M.Abitbol, Les Deux Terres Promises ... 39.

<sup>25</sup> “...L'idée directrice de l'enseignement de l'Alliance Israélite en Tunisie, comme partout ailleurs, est l'assimilation de la population juive. L'Alliance fait de son mieux pour « franciser » cette population.... on prend comme professeurs d'hébreu de vieux rabbins indigènes, ignorants et rétrogrades, ne sachant enseigner avec aucune méthode.... La population juive tunisienne a vécu jusqu'ici dans un isolement complet de tout contact français ... Il ne faut pas oublier que les Juifs de Tunisie sont non seulement des Juifs ...mais encore des Juifs orientaux, des Juifs arabes, ce qui les fait doublement distinguer des français.... Or la jeunesse juive de la Tunisie est française à l'école et juive – et juive arabe, ne l'oublions pas – dans la famille...ils ne reçoivent pas une instruction française fondamentale, mais une instruction



The Alliance Israélite...in violations of the most basic rules of conduct, is seeking to impose the French spirit, embodied by the French national educational system, on the Jewish population of Tunisia....In order to enlighten this [Tunisian Jewish] population, to introduce it to modern life, one must not replace its traditions and historical memories by other traditions and other memories.... On the contrary, the ingredients of a nation's progress must be drawn from its historical past. It is in one's own intellectual and national field that one must sow the seeds of civilization and progress that belong to all nations and do not bear the stamp of any particular nation.<sup>26</sup>

This letter reads as an explicit denunciation of Alliance goals and as an implicit affirmation of Zionist aspirations. So as early as 1900 a group of Tunisian Jews, of the *Grana* and *Tuansa* communities, express a competing narrative, among many, to the Francophile discourse of the Alliance. This represents an emerging conflict of views within the Francophone Jewish community, a conflict based on differing “values, meanings and priorities,” in the phrase of Homi Bhabhi.

Raymond Valensi of the AIU provides an insider's response for Zadok-Kahn to consider. R. Valensi raises the following issues: 1) Why did the author(s) of the letter write it anonymously? Why did they not have the courage of their convictions? 2) The author(s) of this letter plead for Jewish nationalism. They are intelligent people, students

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*française superficielle..... Que sont les jeunes gens sortis de l'Ecole de l'Alliance Israélite ? Ils sont naturellement et forcément ce que les fait cette éducation assimilatrice. Par l'effet de cette éducation, ces jeunes gens ne sont ni Juifs ni Français....si l'éducation assimilatrice arriver à atténuer considérablement, voir même effacer, l'esprit national juif, elle est impuissante à le remplacer pour un esprit national nouveau.... » Archives of the AIU, Tunisie I G 3, Reel 6, Tunis-Sionisme [1900], Lettre envoyée par des sionistes ( ?), 2 October 1900.*

<sup>26</sup> Michel Abitbol, “The Encounter between French Jewry and the Jews of North Africa” ... 53.

of law in the South of France (*le Midi*), imbued with Zionist ideas. But it is necessary to respond to criticism formulated by the Zionists: it does not seem opportune to separate the Jews of Tunisia from the people who protect them (i.e. the French). Isolation would be their ruin. Experience demonstrates: 1. the new educated Jewish generation occupies an honorable place in society; sons of peddlers now head businesses, thanks to the schools of the Alliance. 2. Education in the family is “defective,” but progress will be realized through instruction to young girls in Alliance schools. 3. One must push the younger generation toward handiwork and workshops, under the auspices of the Alliance. As for religious instruction it is urgent to add a French Hebrew teacher (to the AIU School for Boys). Finally, it would be advisable for AIU teachers to teach moral education, combat fanaticism, preach tolerance, fight against fear, superstition and cowardice, and above all, against egotism. To conclude, R. Valensi reiterates that there is no point in isolating Tunisian Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *“Ci-inclus j’ai l’honneur de vous retourner la lettre que vous avez bien voulu me transmettre en communication.*

*Voici les critiques et les réflexions qu’elle m’inspire :*

1. *Pourquoi l’auteur ou les auteurs ont-ils écrit sa forme de lettre « anonyme » ?-pourquoi n’ont-ils pas le courage de leurs opinions ?...*
2. *Les idées exprimées par l’auteur ou les auteurs de la lettre, le plaidoyer en forme en faveur de la constitution d’un nationalisme juif- ne permettent de reconnaître les rédacteurs de cette missive...Ce sont q.q [quelques] jeunes gens intelligents – étudiants en droit, dans le midi de la France-qui sont imbus des idées Sionistes et qui exaltés par des théories émises dans des divers congrès....*

*Nous avons donc à répondre à des critiques formulés par les Sionistes-...il ne me semble pas qu’il soit opportun d’isoler les juifs de Tunisie du peuple protecteur, il faut l’initier à la civilisation Européenne. L’isolement serait leur ruine. L’expérience démontre*

1. *que la nouvelle génération israélite instruite occupe une place honorable dans la nouvelle société nous voyons les fils de colporteurs devenir aujourd’hui chefs des maisons importantes- occupant faisant travailler des jeunes gens élevés dans les écoles de l’Alliance.*
2. *nous ne \_\_\_ pas que l’on trouve aussi parmi nos coreligionnaires, ayant fréquenté des écoles des déclassés... - l’éducation dans la famille est défectueuse – mais je suis persuadé que des progrès seront réalisés de ce côté – grâce à l’instruction donnée aux jeunes filles – dans les Ecoles de l’Alliance.*
3. *...qu’il faut pousser la jeune génération vers les travaux manuels... ; il est de toute nécessité ... que l’enfant\_\_\_ à l’âge de 13 ou 14 ans et possédant leur instruction élémentaire – soit dirigé vers l’atelier...qu’il apprenne un métier...sous les auspices de l’Alliance.*

This letter expresses the values of the author, Raymond Valensi. But it does not refute Zionist principles; rather, it extols Alliance virtues. In defense of his two main points, (1) that the authors of the first letter seek anonymity and (2) that they want to isolate the Jewish community from French protection, Valensi promotes the education of the Alliance school network. Moreover, his letter reads as a veiled attack on the moral education of the authors and implies the need for more, not less, instruction by the AIU.

The first letter highlights the multiple identities of Tunisian Jewry; the second, the identity of an individual author, defending an institution. Together the letters suggest a community in flux, on the verge of modernity. The author, Ania Loomba, queries: “What frameworks can we adopt for locating the complex restructuring of individual and collective identities during colonialism?”<sup>28</sup> The framework of Alliancist/Zionist conflict as expressed in the writings of the two Valensis, Raymond and Alfred, may provide that answer. The claims of the two sub-communities, as embodied in the different texts, foreshadow a new division within the Jewish community, an emerging rift between “the two promised lands, France and Zionism,”<sup>29</sup> - a rift that was not clear-cut in the life of Alfred Valensi, a Tunisian Zionist who studied and later settled in France. His life, after 1925, represents an overlapping of identities, both French and Zionist.

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*...Quant à l'instruction religieuse, il serait aussi urgent d'adjoindre à M. Arditi un professeur d'hébreu français enseignant méthodiquement et utilement.*

*Enfin il y aurait bien d'inviter tous les professeurs de l'Alliance à s'occuper tout spécialement de la partie morale – de la partie éducation – de combattre le fanatisme – de prêcher [sic] la tolérance – de lutter contre la peur – la superstition et la lâcheté - surtout contre l'egoïsme.*

*En résumé...Je ne vois aucun avantage à isoler le judaïsme Tunisien comme le demandent les auteurs de la lettre en question –*

*Vous pouvez faire de mes appréciations l'image qu'il vous plaira - j'ai toujours eu le courage de mes opinions..... » Archives of the AIU, Tunisie I G 3, Reel 6, Raymond Valensi, 20 October 1900.*

<sup>28</sup> Ania Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism (London; Routledge, 2005) 5.

<sup>29</sup> See the title of Abitbol's book, Les deux terres promises: Les juifs de France et le sionisme, 1897-1945.

Alfred Valensi was born in Tunis (1878) and educated at the *lycée* Carnot in the capital. He received his degree from the Faculty of Law, Montpellier (1900) and his doctor of law from the same Faculty (1905). He also served as secretary of the Student Zionists of Montpellier.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, he may have been one of the authors of the anonymous letter sent to Zadok-Kahn in 1900, as a close reading of R. Valensi's letter implies.

Upon his return to Tunis, Alfred Valensi practiced law, was active in Jewish communal affairs and authored several publications. His pamphlet on "Le Sionisme" was published in the *Revue Politique et Parliamantaire* (Paris, 1906) and translated into Judaeo-Arabic (Tunis, 1906). A second edition in French appeared in Tunis (1913). Meanwhile, in 1910, A. Valensi, helped establish the first Zionist association in Tunisia, *Agudat Zion (Association Sioniste Tunisienne)*. It was recognized by the Tunisian government in 1911 and gained adherents largely from the middle class and the masses. In 1920 A. Valensi was instrumental in organizing the Zionist Federation, an umbrella organization of Zionist groups in Tunisia. He also served as the Tunisian delegate to the Twelfth Zionist Congress in Carlsbad (1921). His immigration to France in 1925 weakened the Zionist cause in Tunisia, but bolstered Zionist activity in the metropole. Ultimately, however, the French model proved hollow. Alfred Valensi was deported by the Nazis and died in transit to a concentration camp in 1944.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Holocaust led to another shift in individual and collective identities; the focus of activity became directed to the Land of Israel as never before, for Alliancists and Zionists alike.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Lambert, *Dictionnaire illustré de la Tunisie* (Tunis : Librairie du Phénix, 1912) 418.

<sup>31</sup> Abitbol, *Les deux promesses*...119; Abitbol, « Zionist Activity in the Maghreb »...63, 65, 71,74 ; Barad,...135, "Valensi," *Encyclopedia Judaica* , v. 16, p. 58; Lambert ...418-419 ; Laskier...216-218; Sebag...168-169 , 204-205 ;Alfred Valensi, "Le Sionisme," 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Tunis, 1913...5,6,9.

The first (published) expression of Zionism in Tunisia, according to Paul Sebag,<sup>32</sup> was A. Valensi's study on Zionism. In "Le Sionisme," A. Valensi reaffirms Herzl's message that emigration is not obligatory for all Jews. Moreover, Valensi approvingly quotes the principles adopted by the First Zionist Congress at Basle.<sup>33</sup> In his article A. Valensi also recognizes adversaries of Zionism, for instance, the Alliance.<sup>34</sup> To conclude, he states that every just cause can augur an eminently democratic and popular movement and give a homeland and liberty to a most oppressed people.<sup>35</sup> His Zionism does not envision mass migration of Tunisian Jewry to a future state of Israel. At this stage, Zionism is a movement to provide a homeland and support oppressed Jewry.

Zionism was also in open conflict with the Alliance. Even before the First World War, each side had its spokesmen in the Jewish press. Mardochee Smaja, a former AIU student, presented his opinions in the paper he founded, *La Justice* (1907-1914). During the inter-war period he resumed publication of his "assimilationist" views in *La Justice* (1923-1934).<sup>36</sup> For the Zionist position there was *Qol Zion* (The Voice of Zion), a

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<sup>32</sup> *Historie...* 168.

<sup>33</sup> In a quotation from Theodor Herzl's book, *The Jewish State* (1896), Valensi notes : « 'L'émigration des Juifs...s'effectuera... Cette émigration, qui se produit, déjà, ne saurait être obligatoire pour tous les Juifs : ceux-là, seuls émigreront en Palestine qui ne peuvent ou ne veulent rester dans les pays de persécution, de misère et d'esclavage.' » A. Valensi... 5  
The Basle Programme states : « 'Le Sionisme a pour but la création en Palestine, pour le peuple juif, d'une patrie garantie par le droit public. » Valensi includes the full Basle Programme in « *Le Sionisme..* » 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> « Néanmoins, il est à prévoir que le Sionisme aura à lutter encore pour gagner à sa cause la haute bourgeoisie juive d'Occident qui déteint la direction des grandes associations philanthropiques juives, telles L'Alliance israélite universelle et les autres sociétés similaires. » A. Valensi...10.

<sup>35</sup> « ...si l'on n'oublie pas, enfin, que toute cause juste renferme toujours une force triomphatrice, on peut bien augurer d'un mouvement éminemment démocratique et populaire qui, par des voies pacifiques, veut donner la patrie et la liberté au peuple le plus opprimé, mais qui en dépit de la misère physiologique et sociale dans laquelle le plonge l'iniquité des moeurs et des lois, est encore plein de vitalité. » Valensi 11.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire* ...153, 202-203.

monthly review in Judaeo-Arabic created by Alfred Valensi's adherents in 1913.<sup>37</sup> After World War I several Zionist newspapers were in circulation (*La Voix juive*, *La Voix d'Israël*, and *LeRéveil juif*), gaining supporters primarily from the "traditionalists," the Tuansa, not the newly educated intelligentsia. To the "indigenous" Tunisian Jews, the appeals of the Zionists were reminiscent of traditional calls for charity. Furthermore, the Tuansa retained their religious identity, with its evocations of Zion, largely unaware of the secular side of the new Zionist movement.<sup>38</sup>

Historical evidence presented here indicates, that while the Jewish community as a whole suffered discrimination, either as a "tolerated" non-Muslim minority or as a subaltern (non-elite) group during the colonial period, priorities within the community were not always "collaborative," but often "antagonistic" and "conflictual." The texts reveal contestation between Alliancists and Zionists. The identity of the Tunisian Jewish community was no longer based simply on geography but on a plurality of interests. It is in this context that Homi Bhabha discusses "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity..."<sup>39</sup> The documents suggest that Alliancist and Zionist representations in the Valensi family are, indeed, that terrain where new identities emerge, individual and collective, in the formation of a modern society.

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire...*169.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire...*204-206; Michel Abitbol, "Zionist Activity in the Maghreb," 68-69.

<sup>39</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* ...2.

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