Technology in Modern Moroccan Musical Practices

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The proliferation of technologies in use for popular music in Morocco points to cultural interactions beyond the most local or national influences that inform musical practices there. Examining the integration of technologies from outside Morocco—including musical instruments, recording media, and distribution systems—sheds light on negotiations of novelty and difference in contemporary Moroccan social and political life and thus on multiple facets of how late modernity has played out there. Among other broad areas of significance that musical practices help illuminate are the social and economic effects of colonial and postcolonial interactions, including the development of cash economies, globalized exchange, and cultural tourism; nationalist initiatives to define culture; and large-scale migration to Europe and elsewhere in recent decades, following a longer population shift in 20th-century Morocco from primarily rural locales to burgeoning urban centers.

The developing technological elements of Moroccan musical practice are driving increasing spectacularization in the presentation of music along with fundamental amplifications, attenuations, and/or distortions in the reception of musical products. For example, many Moroccan listeners perceive customary musical genres, at least in part, through the filter of self-consciously folklorized initiatives impelled by scholars, governmental officials, and cultural brokers. These are effected through broadcast media and other large-scale public presentation milieus, such as music and culture festivals.[1] Though he addresses music only tangentially, Emilio Spadola points to related transformations in reception of the messages of spiritual practitioners in Morocco in the modern era.[2] He suggests that the emergence of modern audiovisual media ruptured the paradigm of prior chains of authoritative production of religious messages, in the process dispersing, decentering, and diffusing the social understandings and cohesion impelled through such communication.

One might understand earlier 20th-century incorporations of Western musical instruments such as the banjo partly as a means to increase the amplitude and reach of live musical sound production in Morocco in comparison to previously established acoustic instruments such as the *ʿūd* or *swīsdi* (also known as the *swīsin*). Later, electronically based audio-reinforcement technology imported from overseas enabled much higher volumes for live musical performance and thus extended the sizes and ranges of potential audiences. Previously the scale of audiences was mostly limited to how far the sound of the human voice and acoustic instruments could carry on their own—which meant groups with an effective maximum size of perhaps a few hundred mostly local individuals gathered together in marketplaces and at weddings and other lifecycle and ceremonial events.[3] With the new imported technologies, the capacity to address live audiences grew through the course of the second half of the 20th century, enabling the number of attendees at public events to swell to hundreds of thousands of individuals congregated temporarily from nationally and internationally far-flung locales—a recent

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example is the Gnawa Festival, in the southern Moroccan port town of Essaouira, which has taken place annually since the 1990s.

These newer technologies did not simply increase the quantity of listeners but also shifted the demographics of understanding for different genre practices. Music previously performed for initiated devotees was altered in format and mode of reception. For instance, the hours-long *nawbāt* (musical suites) in the genre of *al-āla* (also known as *al-mūsīqā al-andalusiyya*) might be truncated to accommodate European concert-style settings. In a similar vein, music previously performed in intimate and lengthy celebratory, devotional, or healing rituals, and targeting specifics types of listeners (such as music associated with the Gnawa, Hamadsha, or Jilali Sufi brotherhoods), was now staged in large-scale venues before diverse audiences with often disparate understandings of the cultural contexts from which the music was derived.

Formats of distribution have also altered Moroccan musical practice. The earliest mass transmission technology seems to have been the 78 rpm disk, produced and distributed by European-controlled record companies such as Odeon, Pathé, and HMV.[4] These recordings helped extend the market for existing genres—which previously may have been understood as narrowly relevant to specific ethnicities or religious sects (e.g., the Shilha or Gnawa)—to new regions and communities. Mass recording and distribution technologies also introduced new musical influences from farther afield, such as rhythms and instruments from Latin and North America. In the 1930s and 1940s, the iconic Moroccan musical performer Houcine Slaoui (Husayn al-Salawi) somewhat famously recorded in Paris, where he integrated new instrumental arrangements and musical elements into his practice, including clave, clarinet, and piano, even while decrying in his songs' lyrics the entry of foreign cultural influences.[5] This dynamic tension of nationalism and cosmopolitanism—sometimes competing with and sometimes supporting one another—that was channeled and promoted through Moroccan musical practices continues to be impelled through technological systems of production and distribution today.

Broadcast radio also helped distribute knowledge and experience of musical genres throughout Morocco beginning in the early decades of the 20th century, extending understandings that were previously more localized and regional to a national audience. The phenomenon of performers such as Slaoui rising to national prominence starting in the 1930s was abetted by both radio and recording technology. Without these technologies, his recognition might have been constrained to a regional wedding circuit, or even to his hometown of Salé through his performance there in *ḥalaqāt*, the free-forming rings of audiences that often congregated in impromptu fashion at the instigation of a performer or performers in or near outdoor marketplaces and other large public gathering spots.[6]

Not only new audio technologies but also a range of media from video CDs to satellite television and the internet have introduced new cultural influences from overseas, strongly contributing to local networks of cultural circulation—that is, to the direct exchange of aesthetic judgments that comes out of shared broadcast viewing or listening in private homes, as well as those exchanges shared among friends and acquaintances in neighborhood shops, cafes, and bars. As one example, the "classical" folklore genre of *al-āla* became exalted as national patrimony over many generations through regular television broadcast.[7] Other popularized musical styles and individual performers also received the benefit of semi-official promotional support through their selection for

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national broadcast starting in the 1950s. Alessandra Ciucci has examined the influence in the 1980s and 1990s of the two national Moroccan television networks, 2M and Medi, on the perception of the musical genre of *ʿaiṭa*.[8]

Today, a combination of word of mouth communication and exposure to mass-mediated systems often work together to generate awareness of Moroccan musical performers at the national level.[9] On an international level, music videos transmitted via satellite technology have connected hip hop from the U.S. West Coast and vocal music from the Arab Gulf region to listeners and musical producers in Morocco. An earlier connection to South Asian cultural production ensured that downloaded Bollywood soundtracks would end up on Moroccan cellphones long after movie houses had dwindled in the early 2000s to mere handfuls in even the largest Moroccan cities.

The availability of consumer videorecording technology (including cellphones) to attendees at live performances beginning in the early 2000s further shifted the reception of different musical styles. The recordings that audience members make on the spot enable easy storage of and access to music as well as to sometimes ambiguous memory. The mediated perceptions of events generated through such practices may occur during live performances themselves (when they are experienced through the small screen of a handheld device) or in the confines of more private spaces after the fact. The installation of large-scale video projection screens at live concerts signals another shift in the presentation of music, further enabling it to address larger audiences. The use by performers (such as at the Fez Festival of Sacred Music) of projected video slides with French translations of formerly more extemporaneous lyrics sung in the Moroccan Arabic dialect of *dārija* by Gnawa and other Sufi groups affects not only performance practice but also social relations.

Along with the spectacle-creating effects produced by large-scale stage shows designed for mass audiences, modes of monetary compensation have been altered: from the *gharāmāt*, or "offerings," handed directly from listeners to performers in earlier generations to the more recent, and more distancing, methods of monetary exchange such as government subvention or fees paid by concert sponsors or producers. At the same time, efforts to promote Moroccan musical performance and make it more accessible to foreign audiences have brought quite disparate listeners into close proximity. Some, especially local, listeners might respond to musical prompts by chanting along and engaging in extreme bodily movements—such as falling to their knees, breast beating, or entering trancelike states of possession. In a sort of parallel play, these listeners' responses take place alongside those of nonnative attendees, for whom the cultural cues of music and text are circumscribed by understandings imported from different backgrounds even as they help impel a cross-cultural shift in the production and presentation of the actual musical content.

NOTES

[1]See Alessandra Ciucci, "Poems of Honor, Voices of Shame: The ʿAiṭa and the Moroccan Shikhat" (PhD diss., The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2008); Philip D. Schuyler, "'Giving Soul to Globalization': The Fes Festival of World Sacred Music," in *Tradition and Change in Religious Music*, ed. Tsung-Te Tsai et al. (Taipei: National Taiwan University of the Arts, 2004); and Deborah Kapchan, *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

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[2]Emilio Spadola, "The Mass Sacred in Morocco" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007).

[3]Philip D. Schuyler, "A Repertory of Ideas: The Music of the Western 'Rwais,' Berber Professional Musicians from Southwestern Morocco" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1979).

[4]Pekka Gronow, "The Record Industry Comes to the Orient," in *Ethnomusicology* 25 (1981): 251–84. See also Ahmed Hachlaf and Mohamed Elhabib Hachlaf, *Anthologie de la musique arabe, 1906–1960* (Paris: Publisud, 1993).

[5]Jamila Bargach, "Liberatory, Nationalising, and Moralising by Ellipsis: Reading and Listening to Lhussein Slaoui's Song *Lmirikan*," in *Journal of North African Studies* 4 (1999): 61–88; Brian Karl, "Across a Divide: Mediations of Contemporary Popular Music in Morocco and Spain" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012).

[6]See Khalid Amine, "Crossing Borders: Al-Halqa Performance in Morocco from the Open Space to the Theater Building," http://depot.vti.be:80/dspace/handle/2147/321 (2004); and Philip D. Schuyler, "Entertainment in the Marketplace," in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1993).

[7]Carl Davila, "*Al-Musiqa Al-Andalusiyya* in Fez: The Preservation of a Mixed-Oral Tradition" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006).

[8]Ciucci, "Poems of Honor," 245, 249.

[9]Brian Karl, "Across a Divide."

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