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Re-Thinking the Silenced Past of Black Slaves in Morocco through Gnawa

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CONTENT

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Introduction

After few weeks since my arrival in Fes, walking in the streets of the New City, I happened to pass by several cafés and restaurants in which I could see small groups of men, playing to entertain an audience intent in eating, drinking tea or coffee and enjoying the evening. Week after week such events capture always more my attention and I started looking for more information. The posters on the wall of the places and their Instagram pages presented those musicians as *Gnawa*. I was already familiar with such term, having read some articles that addressed more or less directly the culture. Those academic works, though, were mainly focused on the past and roots of Gnawa. It was generally presented as a tradition that locals inherited from black slaves brought from the Sahel region through the sub-Saharan trade in the past centuries. In order to trace back their stories, scholars often look with attention to their music. Such slaves, indeed, developed a series of songs, in which spirits and God are recalled to help them face and withstand the pain and the sufferings due to the forced displacement from their people and family and to the hard living conditions under their masters. These songs were performed in night rituals, said *lila* ("night" in Arabic), and were believed to have trance-healing functions that could help all suffering people, believed to be in pain because possessed by jnun (pl. of *jinn*, spirit). Not exactly aware of the time in which such tradition developed, it however survived along the centuries until the present days, with adaptations and new uses. Today, indeed, festivals and concerts are dedicated to the Gnawa culture, international tours and collaborations with musicians from other musical genres are planned, Gnawa events are organised weekly in cafés and restaurants and new, younger, non-black adepts emerge increasingly in the tradition.

Asking around, young Moroccan friends were whether fans or terrorised by such culture. The former, usually, got excited when aware of my interest in the field. They used to share with me their Spotify albums with Gnawa songs, YouTube links or website interviews and academic papers on the topic. The others, on the other hand, suggested me not to get to much involved and to keep distance

from them. *Gnawi* (Gnawa adept), indeed, were said by them to be very scary people, who work with spirits and who could do weird and dangerous stuff, such as walk in the fire without getting burned or drink boiling water. One of these guys told me that, once, he was in a house with some friends to celebrate a birthday party. Among them, there were some fans of Gnawa, so that they add one of their music too to the playlist they were listening. Eventually, one of the guest started talking with a different gloomy voice. He had been possessed by some spirit my friend told me, just by listening to Gnawa music. Such worries are well rooted in the Moroccan society. About this, indeed, M'allem Amine told me that "l*ong time ago, when a Gnawi was going on the street, parents used to scare their children with it. Sometimes they say "don't cry or i will call uncle Mbara!*", the latter being the short version for "Bambara", with which people used to refer to slaves and thus, more generally, to Gnawi people.

Both the academic works and the people's reactions increased my interest in Gnawa culture, especially considering that such scary slaves' music is so frequently performed in public places, for which Gnawa groups are hired and families, with their kids, called to participate. I had already witnessed, at the time, a passive racism existing toward black people, listening to some comments from the young Moroccans I could meet and get to known during my year in Fes. Those same stories about scary Gnawi could have been expressions of such attitude spread in the society. However, Gnawa culture was celebrated and old black M'allemin (M'allem sing.), the male masters of such tradition, were looked with respect and admiration. Thus, I begun wondering if the slavery origins of the tradition had still some impact on present adepts and their perception from outsiders, how their past marginalised position has been reversed and how slaves' history was re-negotiated and re-read today. Morocco is, literally, a post-slavery society, in the sense that slavery was once a deeply rooted practice, while now it has extinguished. However, the term is academically used to refer to those contexts in which, despite slavery is not anymore practiced, signs of its past existence can be still perceived in the every-day reality, meaning in the contemporary role

divisions, power-dynamics and cultural and traditional perceptions and interpretations spread among people, as well as in the ways and degree past memories and history are proposed and, thus, in the said and in the unsaid.[1] Among the most important studies in the field, those of Bellagamba, with her special focus on the Sahel regions, such as Senegal[2] and mainly Gambia[3], and who collaborated also with Klein and Greene[4], of Scaglioni concerning Tunisia[5], of Rossi interested in Niger[6], or McDougall researching in Mauritania[7] are worth to be mentioned.

[1] Baz Lecocq, *Awad El Djouh and the Dynamics of Post-Slavery*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 193-194, 207-208; Lotte Pelckmans, *Stereotypes of Past-Slavery and 'Stereo-Styles' in Post-Slavery: A Multidimensional, Interactionist Perspective on Contemporary Hierarchies*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 281, 286-287, 292; Benedetta Rossi, *African Post-Slavery: A History of the Future*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 303-304, 306-307, 413, 422-423; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 7-23; Sandra E. Greene, *Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History*, "Africa Today", 50, no. 2 (2003), pp. 42–43, 50.

[2] For example, Alice Bellagamba, *Legacies of Slavery and Popular Traditions of Freedom in Southern Senegal (1860–1960)*, "Journal of Global Slavery", 2 (2017), pp. 72–99.

[3] For example, Alice Bellagamba, *After Abolition: Metaphors of Slavery in the Political History of the Gambia*, in B. Rossi, *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, 1st ed., Liverpool University Press, 2009; Alice Bellagamba, *The Postslavery Gambia River: Silences, Memories, Signposts*, in A. Bellagamba, S.E Greene, M.A. Klein, *African Slaves, African Masters. Politics, Memories, Social Life*, Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ, 2017.

[4] See, Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, Martin A, Klein, *The Bitter Legacy: African Slavery Past and Present*, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2013.

[5] For example, Marta Scaglioni, *"She is not an ʿAbid": Meanings of Race and Blackness in a Community of Slave Descendants in Southern Tunisia*, "Antropologia", 7, no. 1 n.s. (2020), pp. 117-139; Marta Scaglioni, *Emancipation and music: post-slavery among black Tunisians*, in Bellagamba A., Gardini M., and Menin L., *Shadows of slavery: Refractions of the past, challenges of the present*, openDemocracy, 2018; Marta Scaglioni, Storia e significati della Nerezza nel Sud della Tunisia: per una nuova prospettiva, "Archivio antropologico mediterraneo" [Online], Anno XXVII, n. 26 (2)(2024), pp. 1-19.

[6] For example, Benedetta Rossi, *Without History? Interrogating Slave Memories in Ader (Niger),* in M. Klein, C. Brown, S. Greene, and A. Bellagamba (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013; Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800-2000*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

[7] For example, E. Ann McDougall, *Living the Legacy of Slavery: Between Discourse and Reality (Les Ayants Droit de l'esclavage. Entre Discours et Réalité)*, "Cahiers d'Études Africaines", 45, no. 179/180 (2005), pp. 957–986; E. Ann McDougall, *Hidden in Plain Sight: 'Haratine' in Nouakchott's 'Niche-Settlements'*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 251–279.

About Morocco, El Hamel[8] and Menin[9] have been important scholars who have deeply analysed matters of slavery and race in the past and present days of the nation.

The present thesis intent is to contribute in such debate and, in this regard, in addition to an extended academic reading I went through, with the help of my Moroccan friend and colleague, here referred to as Rashid, I contacted and met some adepts of the field, in order to confront their points of view, their understandings of the essence of such culture and of who its members are or should be, the extent of their awareness concerning the origins of Gnawa, their position in front of the present changes and the nowadays use of the tradition and their voicing of a past so generally silenced and neglected.[10]

Given that scholars usually point at the South of Morocco, mainly Essaouira and Marrakesh, as the original place for such culture, where its roots are still more evident, I preferred to use my permanence in the Northern city of Fes to analyse the present re-invention of such culture and its development in less "traditional ways". Moreover, Fes-Meknes is the region in which Moulay Ismail, who, as it will be better explained later on, had been particularly important for the history of black slaves in Morocco, used to have his palace and enact its policies. The city, thus, despite far from Essaouira, the cradle of culture, could have been an interesting place to research the memory of slavery and its present negotiation. For this reason, all the Gnawi I met were from Fes or were for years living in Fes, with the only exception of Yousuf and Abdellah. Concerning the former, Yousuf is

[8] Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), pp. 29-52; Chouki El Hamel, *Surviving Slavery: Sexuality and Female Agency in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Morocco*, "Historical Reflections" / "Réflexions Historiques", 34, no. 1 (2008), pp. 73–88; Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), pp. 89–98; Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

[9] Laura Menin Laura, *"Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2(2016), Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in Menin L, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 7-31.

[10] Martin A. Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery*, "History in Africa", 16 (1989), p. 212.

nevertheless from Meknes, the city close to Fes, under the same administrational region and the real actual seat of Moulay Ismail's palace. On the other hand, Abdellah is from Marrakesh. His inclusion in my work, thus, could seem out of place. However, being this an anthropological research, I decided not to limit my study and use the travels and the occasional journeys to extend my experience in the field. Thus, while in other cities, I have always attended Gnawi events, despite generally without a real possibility to exchange deep conversations with them given the absent of my colleague, as well as I tried to remain informed on the Gnawa smaller and bigger events that would have been organised around the nation, mainly using socials, such as Instagram. Indeed, being interested in the recent development of Gnawa culture, social media could have been important platforms for my field research. Thus, I decided not to neglect Abdellah's words, after having got in touched with him exactly via some online chats. Abdellah is a young Gnawi, who performs in cafés, without really considering the self as a M'allem and who shares his works on socials, in order to be better known and increase his hiring occasions and profits. Thus, him too is under several aspects a disruptive Gnawi, despite his permanence in the city of Marrakesh. At the same time, among the M'allemin I met in Fes, some are elder men in their fifties. Despite their approach to Gnawa is more "traditional", I felt that their ideas too would reveal important in the understanding of the recent evolvements of such culture and of the different dynamics they involve, so that I promptly spent some time with them and eventually report their considerations.

In the following pages, the first chapter proposes an historical overview of the history of blacks in Morocco. In doing so, the chapter describes the figure of the slave, the ways of their enslavements, their capture in the Sahel regions and their transportation through the trans-Sahara trade as well as the religious and political management of such social institution along the centuries. Indeed, as it is later on further analysed, despite slavery in Morocco saw mainly the acquisition of female for domestic services or as concubines, male too had been enslaved in order to strengthened the military force of the sultanate, as evident especially with

the reigns of al-Mansur and Moulay Ismail. Under their rule, being black became synonymous of being slave, overlapping the two dimensions with consequences on the perception of blackness, evident in the stereotypes and in the racism still spread today. Indeed, the past involvement of the nation in the enslavement of men, mostly already converted to Islam, had been an ambiguous fact, officially silenced. If slavery is not anymore practiced today in Morocco, such institution had been formerly unsuccessfully fought by Europeans and then it had gradually vanished during the first half of the twentieth century, by the time become obsolete, without though a formal ban, a religious legal sanction or a social mobilisation of the slaves.

The second chapter is more directly devoted to the Gnawa culture. It analyses the history known about such tradition and its present diffusion in Morocco, especially, but also Algeria, where Gnawa are known under the name of *Dīwān of Sīdī Bilāl*, and Tunisia, where they are called *Stambeli*. The chapter focuses on the two main aspects of the Gnawa culture, meaning its night ritual and its music. The night-long ceremony is called *lila*, meaning indeed night in Arabic, during which sacrifices are done and the whole set of jnun, spirits and religious figures are invoked under a specific order and with the participation of both the M'allem with his Gnawi players and the Muqaddema, the female religious expert and director of the ritual. Concerning the music, the Gnawa songs are said "tarh" (pl. troha) in Darija (the Moroccan dialect) and they are believed to induce healing trances. The moment in which a person starts dancing is indeed considered as the testimony of his/her possession. Being each tarh dedicated to a specific jnin or spirit, the music during which the possession happens helps to understand which spirit has inhabited the body, so to then know the rituals and the behaviour the person will have to enact in order to calm and please the spirit and stop suffering. Because of such use of music, Gnawa are by someone considered a Sufi brotherhood, however such definition is not completely correct and easily accepted considering the different influences that the African homeland cultures, the spread

of Islam and the impact of the diaspora had, all maintained and combined in the tradition.

Moving to the third chapter, this section takes into consideration the nowadays perception and practice of Gnawa culture. If originally seen as a scary tradition coming from black people considered almost primitive and pagan, since the second half of the twentieth century local musical groups started using such music, mixed with other regional and local genres, as a political instrument to fight the monopoly of the Middle East cultural influence in their nation. From here, Gnawa music has attracted always more the tourists' attention and it has spread abroad, where foreign singers started wondering for fusion collaborations with Gnawa M'allemin. With the terroristic attacks that hit America, Europe and even Morocco in 2003, the state itself worked to distance the image of the nation from that of Middle East, from which the nation had been up to the moment influenced economically, politically and culturally. Thus, the state turned is gaze toward the own culture and inner groups, that could be revalued and exploited to develop the touristic industry. Since then, Gnawa has entered the Moroccan stage, with concerts and festivals to them dedicated, among which the most important is the Essaouira festival, it became a brand for tourists and it has spread internationally through tours and fusion collaborations. This has translated the Gnawa culture into a valuable profession and thus has attracted always more new adepts among the Moroccan youths. The emergence of young non-black M'allemin has generated feelings of loss, frustration and fears of dispossession among the elders, causing internal divisions, mutual discrediting and debates about taGnawit, meaning the essence and the legitimate protagonists of Gnawa culture.

The last chapter is more strictly devoted to the analysis of my field research. In those pages, Gnawi and M'allemin's words are reported to express their insights concerning their idea of taGnawit and thus, according to them, who should be considered a real Gnawa M'allem or whether the impact of fusion and of the Essaouira festival was positive or negative. The two categories of "real" M'allem or just "Gnawa lover" are brought up by all the Gnawi I could talk with, despite

judging differently those who fit those sets. The Gnawi look at each other with mutual doubts and considerations and turn to different values and prerequisites to justify their argumentations and their own legitimation at the expense of the other. Skin colour, family adherence to the culture, educational path, age and years of experiences are all factors recalled. Rarely, though, direct references are done to slavery, that instead seems to remain a far and confused memory of the past.

Gnawa has been a complex and porous culture since its origins and this has become even more evident today, in front of the national and international acknowledgment and adaptation of such tradition. However, despite non-exhaustive, through my field research I could face myself the question of identity and the denounces of cultural appropriation already pointed out by other scholars and compare such feelings and the degree with which elder M'allemin adhere to them with the younger M'allemin's responses, justifications and re-negotiations of traditional form of legitimation and affirmation in the field. From the M'allemin's words, though, traces of the role and of the understanding of the past slavery institution and of the culture of silence with which it has been hide emerge.

Chapter 1: A Forgotten History

For centuries now, the African continent has been thought as markedly divided by the Saharan desert. Different factors contributed in the categorisations of the Northern part of the continent as *Daar al-Islam*, the land of Islam, opposed to the *Bilad al-Sudan*, the land of black people, corresponding to the today Sahel region. Similar ideas found their roots in ancient time and have been developed throughout the centuries by Arab Muslim people on the basis of previous interpretations and biases of Greeks, Jews and Christians. As a result, though, the persistent historical connections on the social, economic and cultural level between the two shores of the Sahara Desert has gone unnoticed.[11]

However, such interactions did exist. The Sahara Desert has been a central field for a long-lasting trade, through which ideas and values have also been continuously exchanged. Among the most important goods, the slave trade played a crucial role along the centuries. This is especially true concerning Morocco[12], where the history of slavery has been marked by three important event: the diversion of the trade routes toward Morocco with the arrival of Europeans in Africa, the invasion of the Songhai Empire under the reign of al-Mansur and the conscription for the new army of the Sultan Ismail. Such trade, indeed, arose and mixed with important religious and political questions, that contributed in the present "culture of silence"[13] around such historical and social institution and in the nowadays perception of black people and migrants in Morocco.

1.1. The Trans-Saharan Trade

With the term "trans-Saharan trade", scholars refer to the commercial relations and interchanges that used to connect the two sides of the Sahara Desert,

[11] Ghislaine Lydon, *Saharan Oceans and Bridges, Barriers and Divides in Africa's Historiographical Landscape,* "Journal of African History", 56, (2015), pp. 4-11; Baz Lecocq, *Distant Shores: A Historiographic View on Trans-Saharan Space*, "Journal of African History", 56, no. 1(2015), p. 35; Ann McDougall, *Discourse and distortion: critical reflections on studying the Saharan slave trade*, "Outre-mers", 89, no. 336-337 (2002), p. 196.
[12] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7 no. 3(2002), p. 55.
[13] Yasmine El Geressi, *Racism in the Arab World: An Open Secret: A Region in Denial Reflects Ignorance of History*, Majalla, issue 1804, June 12, 2020, pp. 10-13.

meaning the North African populations and those of the so-called Sahel. Despite the absence of certainty concerning the origins of these interactions, there seems to be agreement on its existence as early as the first centuries B.C., probably as the result of the introduction of camels in the Northern regions of the continent by the Romans. Throughout the centuries, Amazigh people, the indigenous inhabitants, directed the caravans and developed several channels, ending up for translating the Sahara Desert into a dense and busy crossroads able to provide both the shores of the requested assets. These necessities were different in places and times, according to the changing current socio-political circumstances.[14] Gold, silver, dates, as well as black slaves had been among the most important ones. Particularly, in the Western side, if up to the seventeenth and nineteenth century gold remained the most demanded good, generally taken from Ancient Ghana and exchanged for salt and manufactured products coming from the North, the interest in slaves, then, overcame.[15]

About this, the key role played by Morocco is particularly interesting. Before this turning, Morocco used to be one of the main purchaser of black slaves in the Western side, despite the slave market was more developed in the Eastern one. Even if few happened to be further sold to other Muslim countries or to Europe, slaves were imported mainly to respond to the internal demands. Regarding Morocco, the need for slaves concerned mostly female slaves, that could then be hired as maids or concubines.[16] In 1830s, Morocco inaugurated the Mogador port, that facilitated the importations and exportations of slaves.[17] At the same time, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the availability of black

[14] Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.112.
[15] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7, no. 3(2002), p. 55; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, pp. 25-26; Ann McDougall, *Discourse and distortion: critical reflections on studying the Saharan slave trade*, "Outre-mers", 89, no. 336-337 (2002), pp. 196, 208-209
[16] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7, no. 3(2002), pp. 55, 60; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 186-187, 194, 200.
[17] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7 no. 3(2002), p. 59.

slaves from the Sahel increased. This was the result of the Islamic *jihads* (holy war) initiated for religious reasons and indirectly sources of slaves, despite sometimes the religious justification covered the actual intention to collect captives to sold.[18] In addition to the increasing number of slaves deriving from such political instability in the Southern areas, the decreasing slave trade, on the other hand, in the other routes under the influence of Europeans intent in abolishing slavery, contributed too in such result.[19] Morocco, thus, started to attract all the caravans selling slaves and export them toward those countries, like French Algeria, Tunisia or Libya, in which the trade had already been banned. In so doing, Morocco became the main actor in the field, hosting a flourishing slave market until the end of the nineteenth century.[20]

Morocco, in fact, resisted more the European pressure to banish slavery and the slave trade. This was the result of different factors. The late development of coastal ports in Morocco led to a later opening of the country to both European influence on its economy and policy and to European presence in the inner lands, acknowledging a first consistent decline in slave market just at the end of the nineteenth century, the onset of the French and Spanish colonialism. This was especially true for the Southern cities, closer to the caravans arrival points and more distant from the *Makhzen*, the political seat of the king. Indeed, because of the new European presence in the coasts and the consequent appearance of anti-slavery missionaries and organisations, slave markets in such areas survived in more clandestine ways, even though never formally abolished. In the interior, on

[18] Abdullahi Mahadi, *The aftermath of the jihād in the central sudan as a major factor in the volume of the Trans-Saharan slave trade in the nineteenth century*, "Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies", 13, no. 1(1992), p. 114; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), p. 202; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, pp. 70-75.
[19] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7 no. 3(2002), pp. 57-59; Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), p. 68; Paul Lovejoy, Igor Kopytoff, and Frederick Cooper, *Indigenous African Slavery [with Commentary]*, "Historical Reflections" / "Réflexions Historiques" 6, no. 1 (1979), pp. 39-41.
[20] John Wright, *Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?*, "The Journal of North African Studies" 7 no. 3(2002), pp. 59-63; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 186, 190, 192-193; Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, *Arab Center for Research & Policy Studie*s, 4, no. 2(2021), p. 64.

the other hand, those slave markets kept flourishing publicly[21], as for the case of Marrakesh, the major Moroccan slave market.[22]

Throughout the centuries, slaves in Morocco could have ended up in such condition as the result of different circumstances. Slaves could be renegades, mostly prisoners of corsairs' activities in the Mediterranean Sea, waiting for their liberation and exchange with corresponding Moroccan captives in European hands.[23] Generally, however, they were black people from Central and Western Africa, the regions of the Sahel. These slaves were brought by sea from Senegal to Mogador or by caravans through the desert, mostly as war captives or, captured, sometimes even in North Africa and Morocco, through raids and kidnappings or as poor person who offered their services or were sold by their families during moment of instability or famine. Moreover, slaves were then spread throughout the Moroccan marketplaces and there sold with formal contracts written by notaries or judges, reporting all the information about the slave, including the name of his/her present and past owners and a warranty period. As a result, not only the slavery condition was legalised, but also inherit by slaves' children, especially in cases of slave paternity.[24]

Except for the white slaves or for those Moroccans who had sold themselves or their children in order to face economic limitations, slaves were thus taken from the Sahel regions, involving in these economic practices several cultural and religious dynamics. Indeed, the today Sahel corresponds to what was, and to a certain point still is, considered the *Sudan*, from *Bilad al-Sudan* (the land of blacks). Therefore, they were mostly black people whose enslavement was

[21] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 65-68.
[22] Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 186, 188, 191-192; Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 67, 69.
[23] Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), p. 260.
[24] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 68-74; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, pp. 3-4.

perceived as legitimate, according to the Quran, as blacks and the "Sudan" were at the time thought to be the land of the infidels, out and in opposition of the *Daar al-Islam*.[25]

The several overlapping ideas that these labels condensate are particularly analysed by El Hamel (2013). In his book, El Hamel explains how racial prejudices precede the rise of Islam and are actually in contradiction with the Quranic prescriptions. Indeed, even if Greeks in ancient era had been probably the first to refer to black Africans as *Ethiopians*, literally meaning "burnt-faced people"[26], the racial negative connotations originated mainly from Jews' religious texts. Where, in fact, Greeks used climate diversity as justification for different skin colours, the Hamitic myth developed the association of blacks to inferior humans, thus possible legitimate slaves. Different are the known versions of this story. According to the main ones, however, Ham son of Nuh or had sexual intercourse with his wife on an arc or he saw his father's nudity while asleep and informed of this his brothers. The result, however, was that Nuh cursed him, condemning him and his descendants or, according to some other versions, just his descendants to have black skin (Ham indeed means hot or heat in Hebrew and Arabic languages, ending up for being used in different declinations to indicate black people), short hair, no longer than ears, and to be slaves of the descendants of Ham's brothers.[27]

Because of the historical contacts, this story was then adopted by Christians and Arabs and elaborated in different ways by religious people and scholars, especially in the Middle Age. Those blacks, in this way, became the *Ethiopians* and the *Sudani* (inhabitants of the Bilad al-Sudan), those so who then spread in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, their black complexion became synonymous of inferiority, even among those scholars as Ibn Khaldum, who actually dismissed the myth and recovered the climatic Greeks' explanation of blackness. Blacks, thus, were those people characterised by sexual freedom, bad manners and simple

[25] Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 82, 84.
[26] Ibid., p. 75.
[27] Ibid., pp. 65-66, 68-71, 73.

socio-political structures. Blacks were the savage and the infidels. Specific ahadith and words in the Quran testify the existence of these prejudices since the time of the Prophet.[28] Despite the fact that the Islam insists on people's equality and on the condemnation of these racial biases[29], the precedent ideas remained part of the shared common sense, anchored to people ideas and interpretations of the reality until more recent days. From here, it has developed ambiguity and tensions around the categories of blacks, infidels and slaves that turned out to be overlapped in the Muslim societies, giving rise to important scholars' debates.[30]

This is especially true for the enslavement of those black people, capture through raids or as war captives, then sold as goods in the trans-Saharan trade, coming from countries geographically part of the "Sudan", but actually Muslim, as a result of the spread of Islam.[31] Indeed, the only condition in which Islam allows the enslavement of other persons is when these last ones are not neither *dhimmi*, the People of the Book, meaning Christians or Jews, neither Muslims.[32] Considering the centrality of the slave market and the economic profits coming from this, theories, justifications and interpretations of religious texts, about slave, legitimate slavery and *jihad* thus started to proliferate in order to validate and allow similar exchanges. Particularly, in two historical moments these tensions arose important debate on such issues: the aftermath of the collapse of the Songhai Empire under the Sa'adian invasion in 1591 and the reign of Moulay Ismail (1672-1727).

1.2. Slavery and the Sa'adi Sultans: The Conquest of Songhai Empire

In the sixteenth century, one of the most important spot of the trans-Saharan trade, especially if considering gold, was Timbuktu, a still very important

[28] Ibid., pp. 64-67, 72-73, 75.
[29] Ibid., pp. 43, 62-63, 77.
[30] Ibid., pp. 70, 76, 78, 80.
[31] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 73, 75; Ibid. pp. 78-81.
[32] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 82; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, pp. 16-17.

economic but also cultural and religious centre, while back then significant city of the Songhai Empire.[33]

At the time, Morocco was living a period of profound instability. Indeed, the Europeans were advancing always more in the kingdom. In particular, the Portuguese had started taking control over some ports on both the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, while the Spanish were interested too in acquiring influence on the Mediterranean shore corresponding to the today coasts of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. On the other hand, the Eastern side was seeing the increasing expansion attempts of the Ottoman Empire, extended up to the Algerian lands, and thus putting pressure on the Moroccan borders.[34] In order to face these threatens and re-establish power and security in Morocco, Mohammed al-Shaikh, the first Sultan of the Sa'adi dynasty, declared holy war against the Portuguese. Following the heavy defeat inflicted on them, al-Shaikh turned toward the weak Moroccan ruling Wattasid dynasty. With the subsequent conquest of Fez, the Sa'adi dynasty took the power, substituted the old rulers and moved the capital from Fes to Marrakesh, intent now in facing the other enemy, the Ottomans.

It was in 1578 that Ahmad al-Mansur, the sixth Sa'adian Sultan, ascended to the throne. Under his reign, Morocco invaded the Songhai Empire. There is no complete agreement among the scholars concerning his motivations. Some point at the crucial position of the Empire in the trans-Saharan gold trade, others to the Sultan's intention to revive the caliphate institution in the West so to counterbalance and oppose the Ottomans' one. However, it is sure that, despite the stronger position of Morocco under the recent rulers, the reign was still in an unstable situation, especially if compared with the power that it used to have under the precedent dynasties of the Almoravid and of the Almohad. Whatever the

[33] Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 105.
[34] Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), pp. 259-260; Stephen Cory, *The Man Who Would Be Caliph: A Sixteenth-Century Sultan's Bid for an African Empire*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 42, no. 2 (2009), pp. 179-181.

reason, the first aim of al-Mansur was the strengthening of the Moroccan power, both securing the internal stability and reinforcing the borders. Moreover, however, only through victorious wars that would have guaranteed the extension of the lands under the reign, Morocco could have gained back its glorious past image. Stressing his descendant from the Prophet, the Sultan wrote formal letters to different rulers of the black people of the Sahel, by now converted to Islam, claiming their submission in order to unify the Muslim lands of the West and in this way be stronger in facing and defeating in the *jihad* the advance of the Europeans. In response to the refusal of the Songhai ruler to comply with the request, in 1591 al-Mansur proceeded in invading the Empire, despite the known past adherence to Islam of its people, dating back to around the eleventh century.[35]

The expedition ended with a great victory for the Moroccan army, presented by the Sultan as a feat of which all previous rulers had been incapable of. In the words of the Sultan, the desired unification of the people of Sham and the people of Ham, recalling the past myth, finally realised.[36] Big celebrations were organised in Marrakesh upon their return, displaying also the rich spoil reported, meaning giant amount of gold, so much that al-Mansur was also denominated "The Golden"[37], and of captives, condemned to slavery. Several efforts have been done by scholars to calculate the approximate possible number of slaves brought. Some sources did mention an amount of ten thousands, however there is no absolute certainty, if not that the number of enslaved people was high, reaching thousands of slaves imported. Indeed, in the records of the Sultan's scribe al-Fishtali, the defeated Songhai King Askia Ishaq was referred to as "al-'abd Askia" (Askia the Slave). Most of these slaves were then divided among the Moroccan army and

[35] Ibid., pp. 181-194.
[36] Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), pp. 262-263.
[37] Stephen Cory, *The Man Who Would Be Caliph: A Sixteenth-Century Sultan's Bid for an African Empire*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 42, no. 2 (2009), p. 180; Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), p. 259.

navy, in order to strengthen the military force and fleet, so to face any possible threat, especially those coming from the advancing Europeans.

This last event became the source for important oppositions from the famous scholar Ahmad Baba, settled in Timbuktu at the time of the Moroccan invasion. For this, the scholar was exiled to Marrakesh and imprisoned. Indeed, those captives were actually Muslims, thus formally illegitimate slaves.[38]

If the recruitment of black people is a tradition inaugurated in the Muslim lands by the Almoravid, it is also important to remember that, back then the Islamisation of the so-called Sudan was still in process and that actually the military expedition of their rulers played an important role in its accomplishment. This tradition was then inherited by the following dynasty of the Almohad. Despite the fact that lots of the black slaves in their army were those previously enrolled by the Almorad, several others had been added.[39]

However, according to the Muslim law, the only condition through which the institution of slavery is legitimate is if imposed on infidels, mostly in case of defensive wars and thus directly link to the *jihad.* [40] In the case in which, moreover, the non-Muslim people are attacked and invaded by a Muslim army, the former should been given the possibility to adhere voluntarily to Islam, to submit to the Muslim political government, even though non to its religion by paying a fee, or, when both the previous options happened to be rejected, to be enslaved[41]. In fact, although the Qur'an and the Islamic sources acknowledge the fact that the Prophet himself used to have slaves, they also strengthen the concept of equality and underline the duty to free people and to offer slaves the right to convert, so to have access to the consequent benefits coming from being Muslim. Moreover, in the

[38] Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 145-152; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 30.
[39]Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, in "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 248; Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 121-124.
[40] John PR Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1 (2017), pp. 81-82.
[41] Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 82, 155.

Islamic tradition, being black is not synonymous with infidelity. Many of the Prophet's early allies were black and the figure of Bilal ibn Rabah is central in the Islamic tradition, as the freed black slave becoming one of the first responsible for the call of the Muslim prayer.[42] In light of this, the opposition of Ahmad Baba were both against the violent unprovoked invasion of a strong and well-known Muslim land by another Muslim reign and, mostly, against the enslavement of its people. Despite, in fact, the conquest had been overall easy for the Moroccan army, considering that the majority of the Songhai soldiers had already left at their entrance, Moroccan soldiers looted and settled the cities as well as arrested and killed scholars and civilians.[43]

Concerning the scholars arrested, Ahmad Baba was among those imprisoned in Marrakesh. However, thanks to his education, he was noted by the Moroccan scholars and given a special treatment and various privileges. As a result, he maintained the possibility of studying, meeting and discussing with other scholars and even teaching. Despite such concessions, Baba used this time and these opportunities to denounce and oppose the Sultan invasion and enslavements of the civilians, as he kept doing once freed and back in Timbuktu, in 1608. Throughout this whole time, Baba claimed and continuously reminded the long-lasting adherence of Songhai and its people to the Muslim religion, a condition that was not the result of the Arab-Muslim past invasion and forced imposition, but of the local free-will. Therefore, quoting and referring to other scholars, Baba firmly supported the idea that the enslavement of Muslims by Muslims is illegitimate. In the same way, Baba dismissed the myth of Ham, nullifying the difference between races and skin colours, rather due just to diverse environments, and underlined how the only important categorisation of people is through the dichotomy of believers and non-believers, even thou recognising the liminal but legitimate position of the *dhimmi*. Being black or white, coming from the so-called

[42] Stephen J. King, *Black Arabs and African migrants: between slavery and racism in North Africa*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 26, no. 1(2021), pp. 11-12; Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 40-41.
[43] Timothy Cleaveland, *Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti and his Islamic critique of racial slavery in the Maghrib*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 20, no. 1(2015), pp. 43, 47-48.

Sudan or from North Africa, being a descendant of Ham or of his brothers do not change the position of those included in the same of those two categories. Despite Baba himself, however, was not immune from racial biases, he strongly rejected the association of blackness and slavery.[44] What Baba fully pointed out and condemned was thus the new use of racial basis, rather than religious models, as the principle for recruiting.[45] In doing so, Ahmed al-Mansur's policy emerges in a disruptive way. If, in fact, previous rulers did not try to conquest the "Sudani" lands, this was not really because of their insufficient military possibilities or abilities, but due to the well-known Muslim identity of the people in there. Indeed, as previously explained, before the Songhai invasion, the majority of slaves were predominantly blacks coming from non-Muslim Western and Central African regions or captives victims of war, as well as Europeans captured by pirates. With al-Mansur, slaves became black people, regardless of their possible Muslim faith. Under his reign, thus, the concept of Otherness started to change. If up to that moment people used to be classified mainly on religious bases, since now on races are going to become the major distinctive trait.[46]

1.3. Sultan Moulay Ismail's Reform

Similar circumstances led, later on, to similar or even major consequences for black people in Morocco. Indeed, the political stability of the Moroccan reign was again threatened during the following years, characterised by the fragmentation of the population and of the political power among the hands of the leaders of the different groups that composed the kingdom. Heads of Sufi orders or of tribal groups as well as people claiming their Sharifian lineage (descent from the Prophet) took control over some local areas and communities. Moreover, considering the articulation of the Moroccan population around different

[44] Timothy Cleaveland, *Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti and his Islamic critique of racial slavery in the Maghrib*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 20, no. 1(2015), pp. 42-56.
[45] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, pp. 31-32.
[46] Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), pp. 260-266.

geographical, religious or ethnic divisions[47], even several soldiers left the army, returning to be loyal to their tribes, people or religious orders instead of the Sultan. In addition to this internal anarchy, borders were still under the pressure of external forces. Larache, Ceuta and Melilla were under the control of Spain, Mogador under that of Portuguese and the Ottomans, in the Easter side, had not renounced to their expansion at the expenses of Moroccan lands.[48]

As it happened before, the Sa'adi dynasty had been supplanted from below. Moulay ash-Sharif, from the 'Alawi family settled in the oasis of Tafilalt since the thirteenth century, when they came from Arabia, can be considered the first member of the following dynasty. Starting to take control on the Southern area and on the trans-Saharan routes, it was in 1666 that Moulay as-Rashid conquered Fes and proclaimed himself Sultan. His brother, Moulay Ismail, completed the pacification of all the past Sa'adi territories, moved the *makhzen* from Fes to Meknes and became one of the most famous member of the dynasty. Indeed, his efforts did not end with the conquest of the remaining lands, but he went on trying to secure the country and to centralise the political and military power in his hands. In doing so, collecting a strong, loyal and trustful army was the primary condition, both to unify the country and to secure the borders. Under such circumstances, Moulay Ismail found the solution in the conscription of an entirely black army.[49]

Different factors led him to take this decision. As underlined before, the enrolment of black soldiers was not a new trend. Moreover, many black people were present in the kingdom at the time. Several of those who came and became soldiers after the Songhai invasion, during the recent years of instability, left the army, claimed their freedom and spread throughout Morocco. They started to work in the agricultural or market field, mostly remaining part of a minority and marginalised group, even though few were able to elevate their socio-economic

[47] Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 31.
[48] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 156-158.
[49] Ibid., pp. 157-159; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 1.

position. In addition to them, many blacks kept coming from West Africa both through the trans-Sahara trade or looking for better living conditions or for working opportunities, as well as to study and become educated in Islamic knowledge. Finally, some blacks were autochthonous inhabitants. Indeed, despite the consequent racial attitudes and misrepresentations, Haratin[50] have always been part of Morocco. Apart from this last category, coming from outside as war captives or through the trans-Saharan trade, blacks were thought not to have social ties, differently from local Arabs and Amazighs, avoiding so possible forms of religious or ethnic affiliations and loyalties that could undermine the supreme one toward the Sultan and the kingdom. In fact, tribal relations could imply the constant risk for the soldier to be needed at home, as well as they could be evoked by the latter against his superiors and the Sultan himself. Finally, in their everyday life, the Arab and Amazigh soldiers were usually hunters or farmers, who thus were available for their military service according to the commitments related to the seasonal cycles. As a result, when al-'Ayyashi, the Muslim scholar serving the Sultan, suggested to rely on the former black soldiers enrolled after the Songhai invasion, Moulay Ismail supported the idea.[51]

Starting to gather those who were thought to have left the Sa'adi army, the first five thousands men answered mostly voluntary, considering that the enrolment, at the end, appeared as a socio-economic opportunity.[52] According to scholars' calculations, moreover, during the reign of Moulay Ismail the importation itself of other black slaves from the so-called Sudan increased. Indeed, the trans-Saharan slave trade, as explained in the prior section, not only survived, but also remained of high proportions until the beginning of the twentieth century.

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[50] For more information see Allan R. Meyers, *Class, Ethnicity, and Slavery: The Origins of the Moroccan 'Abid*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 10, no. 3(1977), pp. 435-436; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), pp. 38-39; Hsain Ilahiane, *The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Saharan Frontier, Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 103, no. 2(2001), pp. 382–383.

[51] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 158-160; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, pp. 1-2.

[52] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 161.

Despite through the years it fulfilled sometimes the necessities also of the neighbouring populations, the Moroccan self-internal consummation under Moulay Ismail rule particularly increased and diversified from the past major request of men mainly for the need of eunuchs.[53] The voluntary black soldiers, however, were not sufficient, while it seems that the number of imported slaves from the *Sudan* used in the army remained altogether low. Indeed, even though the slave trade persisted, the majority of slaves reserved for internal uses were still especially female, acquired to cover roles of domestics or concubines.[54]

The following efforts of the Sultan and his collaborators focused thus mostly on the involvement of all blacks from within the Moroccan lands. The research started from Marrakesh and the Dir tribes, where there were thought to be the majority of those soldiers who had spread after the decline of the Sa'adi dynasty to the further areas, but that had not voluntary answered to the Sultan's call. These, however, and few others were probably almost all the effective black male slaves already present in the country. The majority of the blacks subsequently found were, on the other hand, presumably Haratin, thus local free Muslim inhabitants or descendants of those who had previously come from the Sudan, but that happened to be freed in legal ways through manumission in the centuries, thus being at the time fully integrated in the society, where they were known to be free for long time by its inhabitants.[55]

Local Moroccans, as slaves or especially freed ex-slaves and Haratin, appear so to have been of first interest for the realisation of the Sultan's army. Because of this, the Sultan's project was particularly disruptive. If blacks or specific categories of people had been already enrolled in a royal army, these were

[53] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4:2(2021), pp. 66-67.
[54] Ibid p.72; Allan R. Meyers, *Class, Ethnicity, and Slavery: The Origins of the Moroccan 'Abid*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 10, no. 3(1977), p. 435.
[55] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 161-162; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 4; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 39.

however usually imported slaves or war captives, not local inhabitants. Such turn, though, could offer important advantages. Indeed, from an economic point of view, the purchasing costs of the slaves from their masters would have been certainly lower than those of importing new ones, while, if considered freed slaves and Haratin, these latter could have even been taken for free.[56] Moreover, their selection was based on the only physical trait of the skin colour. As a result, on one hand, this allowed to evoke racial existing biases and to take advantages from their already current marginalisation due to their socio-economic conditions, being Haratin, slaves or freed slaves usually landless or not wealthy persons. On the other, in addition to the general lack of strong ethnic and tribal affiliations that had revealed so troublesome in the recent time, they did know the local culture, language and society, making easier their training and usage.[57]

In front of all these gains, the project went on, carried out in formal and precise ways. All the people collected were indeed reported in a register send to the Sultan; female slaves were bought to guarantee wives for the black soldiers; payments from the *Makhzen* to the former masters, in case of slaves and not Haratin, were provided and all those recruited were transferred to Mashra‘ ar-Ramla, the military camp built in Meknes. The army so collected was known with different names, all referring to the slave condition of the recruited. Among these, for example, *‘Abid ad-Diwan* (slaves of the royal court) or *‘Abid as-Sultan* (the Sultan’s slaves), but the most famous one remains *‘Abid al-Bukhari*. Indeed, the soldiers were trained in the camp and told to bring always with them a copy of al-Bukhari’s book *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a basic source of the Islamic law. This was done so to give them the idea that they were the Sultan’s slaves for the higher aim of being actually of service of God and the Prophet, ready to fight in the *jihad*, in the

[56] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 162.
[57] Allan R. Meyers, *Class, Ethnicity, and Slavery: The Origins of the Moroccan ’Abid*, “The International Journal of African Historical Studies”, 10, no. 3(1977), pp. 438-441; Chouki El Hamel, *‘Race’, slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, “The Journal of North African Studies”, 7, no. 3(2002), p. 441.

intent to unify them and their loyalty around this religious discourse and thus reduce the opposition toward the Sultan.[58]

In fact, protests and complaints came out from different sides. Among those that were actually *'abid* (slaves), some would have preferred to remain with their masters, as well as these latter too were not ready to renounce to all their workers, both needing them and having developed bonds with them. Among the others, for both Haratin and freed slaves, this racial enrolment was unbelievable and, especially, unacceptable. As before explained, only non-Muslim people can be enslaved, so that, as Jassus, one of the principal opponents among the scholars of Fes, underlined, not only their forced enrolment was against the law, but also a voluntary one would have been so, considering their free current conditions and their Muslim adherence. Because of this, in fact, also the *'ulama*, the religious scholars expert of Islam, opposed Moulay Ismail's project.[59]

This was especially true for those of Fes, particularly important for the centrality of the al-Qarawiyyin mosque and school situated there. Given their legitimizing role toward the Sultan and his actions, Moulay Ismail had to acknowledge their position.[60] Moreover, their support was particularly important, considering the local amount of Haratin in Fes. Indeed, because of the instability and the droughts that hit Morocco in the previous years, several Haratin moved from the Southern region looking for job opportunities and better living conditions. In doing so, they spread in the several Central and Northern cities of the kingdom, including Fes. Here, the Haratin had been included and urbanised, some keeping working in the lands of important local persons, others reaching elevated socio-

[58] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 162-163; Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), pp. 90-91.

[59] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 162, 167-169; ; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), pp. 44-45; Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), p. 92; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 7.

[60] Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 46.

economic positions.[61] As a result, the Sultan summoned the 'ulama and had several confrontations with them trying to obtain their approval, so to keep recruiting and strengthening the army, with initially little success. Like in the case of Baba[62], here too it was not the institution of slavery that was discussed. Scholars like al-Fasi, one of the major opponents, did actually underline how those that were slaves at the time of the enrolment could be bought and sold, as already in the condition of slavery. The same could not, however, be done for the others.[63]

The Sultan knew the correctness of their counter responses and, being impossible for him to answer on that field, he built a specific racial discourse that ended up, later on, for having a crucial role in shaping the perception of blacks in Morocco in the following centuries. Indeed, Moulay Ismail stressed the necessity for a strong, loyal and reliable army in order to be ready for the *jihad* against the Ottomans and especially the Europeans that were advancing in the Moroccan lands. Being this the higher purpose, what he would have done to make it possible should have been considered secondary. This also because Arabs and Berbers, the Sultan explained, had local bonds and links and were used to put these in front of the loyalty toward the kingdom, often escaping in case of difficulties or after being paid. Moreover, they were lazy and not physically strong, differently from the blacks. These latter were mentioned by the sultan equally as slaves or blacks. Indeed, his entire justification was based on the idea that all those blacks, despite some were at the time living as free persons, were originally pagan slaves, that came to Morocco as war captives or through the trans-Saharan trade. This primary condition was presented as sufficient to legitimise their re-enslavement, also

[61] Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 4.
[62] Timothy Cleaveland, *Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti and his Islamic critique of racial slavery in the Maghrib*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 20 no.1(2015), pp. 42-56.
[63] Fatima Harrak, *'Abid al- Bukhari and the Development of the Makhzen System in Seventeenth- Century Morocco*, Project MUSE, Trans- African Slaveries, "Comparatives Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East", 38, no. 2(2018), pp. 288-289; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 46; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 165; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 6.

because Moulay Ismail repeatedly underlined how those who presented themselves as free, actually obtained their freedom or illegally, by escaping, or as a result of the inevitable abandonment by their masters during the time of anarchy and disorder under the previous reign.[64]

Decided to win the approval of his project, Moulay Ismail also repeated this same version of the history to the 'ulama of al-Azhar in Cairo, another important centre of Islamic studies. Being far from the Maghreb and not directly knowing the situation, if not through the Sultan's words, they were not able to recognise the avoided or misrepresented details, particularly those related to the blacks' unstable and momentarily conversion to Islam. In front of the repeated reassurances of the certified slavery condition of those blacks and of the support his project had already got from the 'ulama of Fes, the scholars of Cairo approved his intentions.[65]

This being the situation, in 1698 the Sultan claimed that the 'ulama of Fez would have had to sign the register of the Haratin of the city, so to allow their recruitment. Threatens of fines, torture, prison or death were sent by the Sultan to those who kept opposing the project and indeed some of them faced these consequences. Because of the *fatwa* Jassus issued against the enslavement of the Haratin of the town, he was arrested, tortured, his family harassed, all their properties confiscated and eventually condemned to death by strangulation. Following this and other examples, several scholars had been then forced to agree and signe the documents requested. Other decided to hide in the mountains, followed by some Haratin. In 1705, Moulay Ismail was thus eventually able to obtain the legitimation so desired. The *Jany al-Azhar wa Nur al-Abhar* (The Gathering of Flowers and the Dazzling Light) document included eighty-one

[64] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 165-167, 170-172; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, p. 2; Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), p. 93; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 47.

[65] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 170-172; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 47.

scholars, who with their signatures approved the idea that the enslavement of all those black people was done following the Islamic law, was agreed by both the former masters and the slaves themselves and that, concerning the Haratin, it was necessary to re-educate them.[66]

Despite few slaves found the enrolment an equal or, in case of violent masters, a better condition, the official proclaim did not silence the discontent from below. In certain circumstances, thus, the Sultan was eventually obliged to stop the recruitment in specific cities. This, as a result of local protests, happened in Fes at the hands of the Haratin, as well as in Tetouan.[67]

In all-over the kingdom, though, the 'ulama's signatures meant the enslavement and enrolment of all the blacks in the territory, being them male or female, young or elder, free or former slaves, people and descendant of those imported through the trans-Saharan trade or autochthonous inhabitants, Muslim or not. This forced conscription was reported in details in official registers called *Daftar*. Here all the slaves acquired by the Sultan were listed, each in a specific section under the name of the former owner, with tribal affiliation and a biographical, physical and genealogical description. Looking at the slaves' names, it is also interesting to see how, with the exception of the few, the majority had typical Muslim names, further prove of their original or by now long-lasting free conditions. The economic transactions through which the slave had gone were also reported, finally signed by the witnesses, the notaries and the judges.[68]

Together with the ideological conceptualisation at the base of the project, this register particularly contributed in a general reconfiguration of the perception of blacks, destined to last and to influence the following generations until recent

[66] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 167-169, 173-175; Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2: *The servile estate*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, pp. 5-6, 8.
[67] Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 45; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 175.
[68] Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), pp. 94-95, 97; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 175-178.

times. Indeed, the slaves in the *Daftar* were categorised, in the section of the physical description, through different degree of skin black-colour as well as through several names that reveal different shades of their condition of slavery. As a result, more than in the previous centuries, being black became synonymous of being slave. The uncertainty around the original free condition of the Haratin and the racial attitude against them, probably lacking before, could find their roots in these events. As a consequence of Moulay Ismail's project and his largest Black army ever gathered[69], all black people, being them Muslim, free and Moroccan or not, entered since the moment an unified single category of inferior people and became definitely the physical embodiment of the conceptualised Otherness.[70]

1.4. Blackness in the Recent Years

At the end of Moulay Ismail reign, the majority of blacks in Morocco were, thus, either African people brought through the Trans-Saharan trade and sold in the markets mostly to become concubines or house servants or soldiers enrolled in the royal army.

Considering the first group, the trans-Saharan slave trade did survive in Morocco until the middle of the twentieth century, despite overall the importation of slaves started decreasing after the peak during the Moulay Ismail's reign, especially in the markets of the Northern cities rather than the ones in the Southern regions, like Marrakesh. In fact, slaves were imported by sea, mainly from Senegal to Mogador, or by caravans and then spread in the different areas of Morocco. One of the closest shore to both the port and those caravan arrival points was, indeed, Marrakesh.[71] A proof of this is one of the access point to its old *medina* (city), built

[69] Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 240.
[70] Ibid. p. 243; Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 173, 178-181, 183; Chouki El Hamel, *'Race', slavery and Islam in Maghribi Mediterranean thought: the question of the Haratin in Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 3(2002), p. 46, 48; Chouki El Hamel, *The register of the slaves of sultan Mawlay Isma'il of Morocco at the turn of the eighteenth century*, "The Journal of African History", 51, no. 1(2010), pp. 96-98.
[71] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 69, 70-71; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 187-188, 191-192.

on the orders of al-Mansur and still called *Bab Agenaou*, where *bab* means "door", while *Agenaou* could refer to blacks or slaves, underling the importance of this gate and of the city for the slave trans-Saharan trade.[72] The survival of the trade had been made possible also by the late beginning of the colonial era. Indeed, differently from the neighbour Algeria, where the French imposed their control during the nineteenth century, in Morocco the European powers took control a century later. As a result, Morocco suffered later and less intensively the British and French fights against the slave trade and slavery itself. After the internal abolition of the slave trade in Denmark in 1802 and in the United States in 1807, Great Britain, with the inauguration of its Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, expanded the campaign all over the world, meaning also in the colonies.[73] Despite Morocco was not yet part of them, Europeans were though present on its soil, especially in the coastal areas, engaged in commercial and missionary activities. British authorities so tried to pressure the Sultan to collaborate, with a first anti-slavery campaign launched in 1842. However, the Sultan Abd al-Rahman bin Hisham answered negatively in front of the requests for the abolition of the public slave trade. Indeed, the Sultan and the other political authorities under him underlined how slavery was not in contrast with the Muslim religion and the Islamic law. After ongoing negotiations and confrontations, the Sultan only agreed in 1856 to grant some reforms, while, concerning the problem of slavery, only to ban the public slave trade in those cities in which Europeans and their political and economic headquarters were actually present.[74]

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[72] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, no. 64(2002), p. 87.
[73] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), p. 74; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 185, 202-203; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Documents on Slavery in West Africa: An Introduction*, "African Economic History", 40 (2012), pp. 1–6; Paul Lovejoy, Igor Kopytoff, and Frederick Cooper, *Indigenous African Slavery [with Commentary]*, "Historical Reflections" / "Réflexions Historiques" 6, no. 1 (1979), pp. 51-53; E. Ann McDougall, *Discourse and distortion: critical reflections on studying the Saharan slave trade*, "Outre-mers", 89, no. 336-337 (2002), pp. 196-206.
[74] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 74-75; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 185, 202-203.

Once again, following the European efforts, some local men and scholars emerged too, like Al-Nasiri, pointing out the wrong and sinful enslavement of blacks as Muslim people and as people in general, thus born to be free. With the developing French interest over Morocco, these pressures kept being exercised on the Sultan and the Moroccan authorities by both the European nations, despite with moderation, especially from France, paying attention not to irrevocably damage the own relations with the Sultan, necessary to remain in the competition for the control over Morocco.[75] Despite thus France engaged in the campaign in a less invasive manner, al-Nasiri's words were used to support the ban to the institution of slavery and the slave trade. However, the only condition obtained was the protection offered by the Sultan Abd al-Rahman in 1863 to all those slaves who would have escaped from their masters and search for help in the Makhzen. The Sultan, indeed, would have welcomed them and repaid the due compensations for their loss to the former owners. As a result, though, in so doing he ended up for keeping alive and further institutionalise the slavery institution and the slave trade, in this way the slaves being practically bought by the Sultan. Even if starting decreasing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, thus, the slave market persisted. An official ban of the slave trade in public markets was obtained only in 1885 concerning coastal cities and further confirmed in 1905, under the reign of Moulay Abdelaziz, imposed on all the urban areas, still excluding though the more internal and desert regions.[76]

Despite France continued to exercise pressure on the Sultanate to bring the slavery system to an end, the colonial era in Morocco started late, officially only in 1912, organised in the form of an indirect rule. As a result, the French authorities fought the institution and the market less insistently in Morocco than in other colonies also because the officials here were not allowed to interfere in the private domestic affairs. As a result, Morocco remained the main protagonist in the field

[75] Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), pp. 203-204.
[76] Ibid., pp. 204-205; Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 75-76.

during the era of the Protectorate, mostly thanks to a clandestine market and to its predominantly domestic application of slavery, actually well acknowledge both by the Sultan and the colonial powers. Indeed, despite slavery was proclaimed ended through the French colonial "Muslim policy" and some royal statements and decrees, the ban was always partial and generally theoretical.[77]

The courts records and family documentations collected in the archives testify some reformulations of the laws that regulated slavery. However, the oral tradition reports that the main result was an increase in the amount of people enslaved from within the kingdom over those imported from outside,[78] despite these lighter-skinned slaves remained socially distinguished by former official black ones and overall in minority in comparison to blacks. This change was due to the fact that the traditional routes were now directly controlled by Europeans, as well as to the internal disorder caused by the transition of power into French hands and to the initial penetration of capitalism that followed this shift, causing internal migration from rural and poorer areas toward major cities. The situation further worsen following the Great Depression, the demographic growth and the consequent increasing urbanisation. Indeed, as in the city of Fes, former slave owners maintained and actually increased their properties, guaranteeing a clandestine continuity for the slave trade and for the slavery institution, despite the closure of the formal market. This appear particularly evident from the silenced and occasional references to slaves in the Islamic legal practices. Indeed, we can see how legal practices related to immediate manumission or manumission on the death of the former master kept persisting along the years in low amount. On the other hand, low but more numerous references to slaves can be found in documents related to inheritance and child custody, which despite non-lineal numbers

[77] Chouki El Hamel, *Surviving Slavery: Sexuality and Female Agency in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Morocco*, "Historical Reflections" / "Réflexions Historiques", 34, no. 1 (2008), pp. 84-85; Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), p. 205; R. David Goodman, *Demystifying 'Islamic Slavery': Using Legal Practices to Reconstruct the End of Slavery in Fes, Morocco*, "History in Africa", 39(2012), pp. 144, 152, 154.
[78] Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), p. 205.

remained more or less the same at the time of the end of the colonial era in comparison to its beginning. Considering references to female slaves and concubines, numbers testify a decline of this institution and an increase of their family assimilation through marriages, implying a reduced social acceptation of the idea of the sexual use of female slaves.[79]

If the trans-Saharan slave trade eventually ended in the middle of the twentieth century, this did not happened thus as a result of an official decree, of increasing manumissions or of social protests and religious contestations, which remained sporadic and unorganised. Indeed, there is not a precise time that signs its end. Recently, some scholars devolved their efforts in the attempt to study the reasons that led to this change. What they found is that, with the fight against colonialism and the need to reconstruct the new independent nation, the former slave owners were now busy with new commitments. Their life-style changed and they could not anymore afford to spend time and money in slaves purchase and maintenance.[80] In line with this change, since the nineteenth century, little by little, the exportations of products sought after by Europeans, such as ostrich feathers or ivory, became a more convenient trade.[81] Consequently, the institution of slavery and the market based on it gradually vanished due to more general social and historical changes. With the reconfiguration of the socio-political background, new lifestyles and values developed, making slavery obsolete[82]. As a result, even today, the only law officially opposing slavery, yet in indirect way, is the fifth section of the constitution promulgated in 1962, in the aftermath of the independence, establishing the equality of all Moroccans before the law and the national joint of the international agreements against slavery.[83]

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[79] R. David Goodman, *Demystifying 'Islamic Slavery': Using Legal Practices to Reconstruct the End of Slavery in Fes, Morocco*, "History in Africa", 39(2012), pp. 144, 147.149, 153-167.
[80] Maha Marouan, *Incomplete Forgetting: Race and Slavery in Morocco*, "Islamic Africa", 7, no. 2 (2016), p. 269.
[81] Daniel J. Schroeter, *Slave markets and slavery in Moroccan Urban society*, "Slavery & Abolition", 13, no. 1(1992), p. 199.
[82] R. David Goodman, *Demystifying 'Islamic Slavery': Using Legal Practices to Reconstruct the End of Slavery in Fes, Morocco*, "History in Africa", 39(2012), pp. 144-145, 170.
[83] Rahal Boubrik, *Nineteenth Century Slave Markets: The Moroccan slave trade*, Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 4, no. 2(2021), pp. 76-77; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of*

Indeed, looking at the second group of slaves, gathered in the army, the tendency to enrol black soldiers survived the reign of Moulay Ismail. The army so composed became since the time the symbol of the Sultans' power and prestige, at the point that in the nineteenth century it started to be shown in public processions.[84] Even today, this historic heritage is visible in the *Tuarga*. The latter term, indicating the commune in which it is set the royal palace in Rabat, is also the name used to refer to the palace staff, still comprehending only or almost only black people.[85]

This reality can be considered a consequence of the failure in reaching a real formal ban and condemnation to slavery, at the point that, having always been a controversial theme, since the time of al-Mansur and Ahmad Baba, it is still avoided also in the school books and programs. As a result, a real social, academic and religious discourse never developed, translating slavery, as time goes by, in a social taboo.[86] Consequently, the racial biases and prejudices have persisted, reinforced further by the independence and the consequent construction on pan-Arab basis of the new nation-state[87].

Similar conceptions and representations have thus remained part of the shared social imaginary of black people, being they both Moroccans or migrants. In fact, racial attitude have been recently re-evoked, even resulting sometimes in violent behaviours, in response to the increasing inflows of migrants in the country. Indeed, migrants are coming from the Central and Southern regions of Africa, including those areas from which slaves used to be taken in the past at the time of

Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), p. 15.

[84] Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, pp. 240-241.

[85] Samia Errazzouki, *Between the 'yellow-skinned enemy' and the 'black-skinned slave': early modern genealogies of race and slavery in Sa`dian Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 2(2023), p. 266.

[86] Maha Marouan, *Incomplete Forgetting: Race and Slavery in Morocco*, "Islamic Africa", 7, no. 2 (2016), p. 268.

[87] Laura Menin, "*Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2, (2016), pp. 9-10; Ziad Bentahar, *Continental Drift: The Disjunction of North and Sub-Saharan Africa*, "Research in African Literatures", 42, no. 1 (2011), p. 2.

the trans-Saharan trade. Their intentions are either to look for job opportunities or better living conditions in Morocco or, transiting in here, to reach Europe. Thus, being both a destination and a transit country, in the aftermath of the terroristic attacks of 2003, Morocco introduced restricted criteria for incoming migrants, as well as, in the years, it has developed agreements with European organs and states to collaborate against illegal crossings and to restrict and diminish arrivals.[88]

Only in the recent years an initial attention in starting to arise on these issues. From a social point of view, media and public debate are unveiling the current social realities, mainly concerning racism toward migrants and their racial roots in the past slavery. Indeed, racism and socio-political tensions have translated nowadays into arbitrary police raids, abuses, arrests, deportation and violation of human rights, as well as migrant's job exploitations and difficulties in finding and renting apartments. Moreover, social tensions and violent physical and verbal behaviours increased, with migrants being hit and referred to as *'abd* or *azzi* (slaves), revealing their social perception as inferiors and the persisting influences of the past.[89]

In front of these situations, in 2005 the *Conseil des Migrants Subsahariens au Maroc* was funded in order to defend migrants' rights. Other associations and campaigns have been launched by black Moroccan people, who started to share their experiences through media to fight racism, and both by migrants themselves and international organisations, to support migrants. Especially following the protests and contestations during the Arab Spring, black racism and unequal treatments were particularly condemned, so that in 2013, a more inclusive migration policy was introduced by the king Mohammed VI. Structural forms of

[88] Anthony Dworkin, *A RETURN TO AFRICA: WHY NORTH AFRICAN STATES ARE LOOKING SOUTH*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, p. 8; Laura Menin, "*Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2, (2016), pp. 3, 5-6, 9, 10, 13; Stephen J. King, *Ending Denial: Anti-Black Racism in Morocco*, Arab Reform Initiative, 2020, p. 5.
[89] Laura Menin, *"Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2, (2016), pp. 2-3, 5-9, 11-15, 17; Stephen J. King, *Ending Denial: Anti-Black Racism in Morocco*, Arab Reform Initiative, 2020, p. 9.

violence and discrimination, though, remained, emerging in the 2017-2018 new social campaigns.[90]

On the other side, scholars too are increasing devolving their attention to the history of blacks in Morocco. Among these, important studies are those of El Hamel[91] or Gross-Wyrtzen[92], despite also out of the academia, articles, journals and magazines are starting to deal with these issues. An example, *Pourquoi nous sommes racists* by the francophone and Arab-speaking Moroccan magazine "*Zamane*" was published in 2016, reporting an interview with the scholar El Hamel[93]. Again, also the magazine *Majalla*[94], in one of its edition, dealt with the topic of racism in North Africa. The article talked about different countries, among which Morocco, with the intention to point out the Black-Arab relations in the current time, both including the police incidents and the verbal language used toward blacks. These episodes are presented by the writer as social realities related to the long-lasting culture of silence around blackness, racism and its links with the past institution of slavery.

With the beginning of the new millennium and especially thanks to the 2011 uprisings, thus, the marginality and subordination of Black people in Morocco is starting to change. For the first time, black people took to the streets to demand an end of their racialisation and to denounce the injustices they had suffered for centuries. As a result, the issue of blackness was introduced into the public sphere, leading to political reforms, guaranteeing the emergence of important organisations in their support, opening a social debate and stimulating academia awareness. Even though important steps have yet to be taken, and an official legal

[90] Laura Menin, *"Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2, 2016, pp. 4, 6-8, 12; Stephen J. King, *Ending Denial: Anti-Black Racism in Morocco*, Arab Reform Initiative, 2020, pp. 5, 12.
[91] Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit.
[92] Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen, *'There is no race here': on blackness, slavery, and disavowal in North Africa and North African studies*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 28, no. 3(2022), pp. 635–665.
[93] Laura Menin, *"Anti-black racism": debating racial prejudices and the legacies of slavery in Morocco*, SWAB-WPS, 2, (2016), pp. 2, 4;,6, 8-9 Stephen J. King, *Ending Denial: Anti-Black Racism in Morocco*, Arab Reform Initiative, 2020, pp. 8-9.
[94] Yasmine El Geressi, *Racism in the Arab World: An Open Secret: A Region in Denial Reflects Ignorance of History*, Majalla, issue 1804, June 12, 2020, pp. 10-13.

recognition of the past events is still lacking, the centuries-old culture of silence is starting to fall, leaving space for new voices and for other pages of the history. In this regard, a first important step in unveiling this past would be to look for its traces, not only in the archives, but also in the society. The history of slaves, if not preserved institutionally, is though kept alive by the descendants of its protagonists, thanks to the oral tradition but also to a vivid sub-culture, formally known under the name of Gnawa.

Chapter 2: Gnawa and their Testimony of the Past

Slaves are usually deprived of a legacy, they have no lineage, no patrimony and even no history.[95] Such common destiny has reached Morocco, where the events that affected black people, narrated in the previous chapter, had gone missed behind a culture of silence. No law, monuments or museums unveil this phase of the past and very few academic studies have analysed the topic, if not in the recent decades.[96] Arab-Muslim scholars, in fact, preferred to avoid this specific topic, controversial and ambiguous, that could have brought into light and awareness the not so legitimate behaviour of their ancestors.[97] However, it has left some traces still visible and audible today. Despite difficult to study because of their non-written nature[98], little but significant pieces of memories have been kept alive both in the group culture and oral tradition and in the more personal "oral data", as defined by the scholar Klein[99], developed by its protagonists, also known in Morocco as Gnawa.[100]

Scholars have introduced the concept of "post-slavery" to address such legacy. It was originally born as an academic instrument to analyse the American realities while then it has been extended to larger contexts. It was coined to refer to the legal emancipation of the former slaves and to the persistent evidences and influences of such past institution and of its abolition in the present ex-slavery societies. Thus, the concept of "post" serves both to differentiate and connect the

[95] Martin A. Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery*, "History in Africa", 16 (1989), pp. 212-213.
[96] Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 6.
[97] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, no. 64(2002), p.83.
[98] Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., p. 281; Maha Marouan, *Incomplete Forgetting: Race and Slavery in Morocco*, "Islamic Africa", 7, no. 2(2016), p. 268; Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 19.
[99] Martin A. Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery*, "History in Africa", 16 (1989), pp. 209–210.
[100] Cynthia J. Becker, *Blackness in Morocco: Gnawa identity through music and visual culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 4, 6; Cynthia J. Becker, *'We are real slaves, real Ismkhan': memories of the trans-Saharan slave trade in the Tafilalet of South-Eastern Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 4(2002), p. 100; Deborah A. Kapchan, *Travelling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 2007, pp. 217-218.

past and the presence. Even though slavery does not exist anymore in the forms in which it was formerly known and legalised, indeed, the same power dynamics or the previous racial divisions and subjugations are sometimes indirectly but yet nevertheless enacted today. Old patterns can still shape work positions, rights-access and social dynamics as well as past social inequalities and slavery can still be seen in a persistent diffused racism and in the political control of history.[101] The common disintegration of the slavery system that touched almost all the African and American countries was achieved in different ways. In some occasions formal legal bans had been introduced, in other it just extinguished, some societies witnessed slaves fighting for it, sometimes it was abolished from outside. Consequently, it neither imposed the same outcomes. Each nation and each society dealt with such change in a different way, depending on the time, the local circumstances, how invasive and profoundly insert the institution was in the social system and the presence and the type of an external colonial intervention.[102] For these reasons, new terms and concepts have been introduced alongside post-slavery, such as "modern slavery"[103], "stereo-styles"[104], "racial legacies" or "neo-abolitionism" and "neo-slavery", so to provide new inclusive analysis tools, necessary in order to consider the multiple aspects of the social life and the

[101] Baz Lecocq, *Awad El Djouh and the Dynamics of Post-Slavery*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 193-194, 207-208; Lotte Pelckmans, *Stereotypes of Past-Slavery and 'Stereo-Styles' in Post-Slavery: A Multidimensional, Interactionist Perspective on Contemporary Hierarchies*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 281,286-287, 292; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 7-10, 17-23.

[102] Alice Bellagamba and Marco Gardini. *What Is a 'Slave'? Neo-Abolitionism and the Shifting Meanings of Slavery in Two African Contexts (Highlands of Madagascar, Southern Senegal)*, "Africa: Rivista Semestrale Di Studi e Ricerche" 2, no. 1(2020), p. 86; Marco Gardini, *Dove naufragano i futuri passati: Tombe di famiglia e desideri di emancipazione sugli altipiani del Madagascar*, Lares, 88, no. 2(2022), p. 309; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 15-16.

[103] Alice Bellagamba and Marco Gardini. *What Is a 'Slave'? Neo-Abolitionism and the Shifting Meanings of Slavery in Two African Contexts (Highlands of Madagascar, Southern Senegal)*, "Africa: Rivista Semestrale Di Studi e Ricerche" 2, no. 1(2020), p. 68.

[104] Lotte Pelckmans, *Stereotypes of Past-Slavery and 'Stereo-Styles' in Post-Slavery: A Multidimensional, Interactionist Perspective on Contemporary Hierarchies*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 283, 288-289.

different possible realities that could have developed since and from the abolition, differently in each context.[105]

The following paragraphs, thus, propose to contribute in this prospective, offering an analysis and a description of the different components and aspects of the Gnawa tradition, thanks both to the already published academic studies available and to my field encounters. This chapter focus on presenting who Gnawa are and how, through their religious rituals and their trance music, they do not only present a Moroccan sub-group and minority culture, but they also are important characters in the post-slavery field and in the re-construction of the history of the nation.

2.1. Gnawa and its Components

Since 1960s, Gnawa have started attracting scholars' attention, who have been debating on the origins of this term and of the group it labels. Particularly, El Hamel[106] investigated the roots of this name using both precedent scholars' studies and the few historical documents available in the archives. As a result, in his research, he found out that one possibility is the derivation of the term from the Amazigh *guinwi*, "black", or *gnawi*, meaning "black man", probably linked to the nowadays term *Guinea*, in turn originated from the Amazigh expression *akal n-iguinamen*, meaning the "Land of Blacks". Indeed, among the eldest references, in 1130 the Moroccan historian al-Qattan reported that three thousand blacks coming from *Jnawa* were killed in the battle between the Almohads and the Almoravids, probably referring to the blacks enrolled in the Amoravids' army. Moreover, in 1140s, the Arab historian az-Zuhri confirmed that the term *janawa* or *kanawa* indicated the land of blacks, centred in the Ancient Ghana, the Southern term of the trans-Saharan caravans. Similarly, the word *ignwi*, with the same root *gnw*, in

[105] Benedetta Rossi, *African Post-Slavery: A History of the Future*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 303-304, 306-307, 413, 422-423; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), p. 8.
[106] Chouki El Hamel 2013, op. cit., pp. 273-277.

Zenega language is used to refer to the two Senegalese ethnic groups of Serere and Wolof, while in the Tuareg language that root in the word *iguinawin* refers to "a mass dark clouds". Finally, Thomas Hale, an African scholar, raised the hypothesis of the origin of the term as linked to the word *agenaou* used by Mande people to designate the griots. The latter were oral scholars responsible for the preservation and transmission of the events and the great deeds of historical figures in the Mali Empire, since the thirteenth century under the Keita reign, the first imperial dynasty.[107] Indeed, Gnawa do maintain, transmit and thus teach through their rituals and music their memory, despite, differently from griots, this is not their direct aim, they do not recount their lineages and neither work for prestigious positions or events. Such differences, however, could be the result of how such tradition persisted after and shaped by slavery.[108] Eventually, Portuguese too started using the word "Guinea", as evident from the European maps since the fourteenth century, to refer to that geographical area. Despite thus there is no certainty concerning the precise origins of the term *Gnawa*, all these different hypotheses are linked in a way or another to the concept of blackness, ending up for being used to refer to black people and their lands in West Africa. "*People started associating the slaves with Ghana, so it became Gnawa*" M'allem Akram too recalled. More indirectly, however, according to some scholars, the term "Gnawa" is related to the word *ignaw*, meaning "mute" in the Tamazigh, the Amazigh language. Indeed, coming from far lands, slaves used to speak their languages and thus they did not understand Tamazigh or Arabic and neither were understood by the locals.[109]

Even today, the term "Gnawa" remains an ambiguous word, used to designate, though, a specific group, its rituals, culture, music, "*craft*", as often

[107] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 251.
[108] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture, Journal of Asian and African Studies*, no. 64 (2002), p. 82.
[109] Santiago Espinosa García, *Gnawa Culture in Morocco: An Historical and Contemporary Approach*, "African Ethnography", 4 (2022), p. 10.

defined by its adepts, its spiritual practices and people[110], who are considered to be the descendants of those slaves brought to Morocco from "Africa", meaning mostly West Africa and the Sahel region. Among such societies, despite references to Fulani or Hausa culture and religion are frequent, a particular attention is paid by the Gnawa tradition to the Bambara people.[111]

The term *Bambara* is actually usually used to label an imprecise group from West Africa, mainly located in the current region of Mali. West Africa was used to be inhabited by several people with important economic, cultural and linguistic connections and thus not always easily distinguishable and separable from one another for an outsider. Despite the hybridity of the people in these areas, Bambara can be considered as a sub-group of the Mande family, together with Soninke, Dan, Malinke and others. Bambara themselves, however, were an ethnolinguistic group that included several other ethnic groups. Among the others, they emerged with a more separated and specific identity as a result of the fall of the Songhai Empire, after which its people oved internally, giving rise to an own new Empire. Indeed, the term "Bambara" was probably coined by the French from the Arab word *Banmana*, used by the Arabs who lived there at the time to refer to the heterogeneous farmers of the rural areas close to Timbuktu and Djenne, considered by them as believers of an un-orthodox and pagan Islam.[112] Maintaining from the Mande group the centrality of the oral tradition and of the musical culture associated with it, the Bambara particularly developed a complex system of belief in spirits and of medicinal and healing practices. Traces of both these elements can be found, despite mixed with the Muslim faith, in the nowadays Gnawa culture. Indeed, despite not all Gnawa slaves were members of the Bambara family, one of the main important trans-Saharan route for gold and slaves was the one that, from Ghana to Sijilmassa, a crucial oasis city in Morocco, passed through the city of

[110] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p.3.
[111] Deborah A. Kapchan, *Travelling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 2007, p. 18.
[112] Cynthia J. Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 132.

Timbuktu.[113] Eventually, however, the term started to be used to refer to African slaves more in general, even with different origins, who though had been forcibly brought to Morocco. From this, probably, derives the frequent use of such term in the Gnawa context.[114]

Gnawa, thus, unifies under a same category people originally coming from different areas, yet all part of the so-called Bilad as-Sudan, who found themselves experiencing similar destinies and living conditions once brought in Morocco, where they lived in marginal positions. From Africa, those slaves would have imported their culture, characterised by their belief in spirit possession and by the inducement into trance, during night rituals and throughout a specific kind of music, that reminds about this forced migration and participation in the institution of slavery and the pain and sufferings to this related.[115] Coming from "Sudan", being black, speaking other languages and performing other rituals and practices, slaves were perceived as inferior, primitive and practitioners of some kind of unorthodox Islam or pagan religions and for this avoided by local people. On the other hand, however, their music and their ability to deal with spirits allowed them to maintain their reputation as healers, feared but also for that accepted and almost respected by Moroccans.[116]

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, in order to respond to the collapsing institution of slavery, ex-slaves started to perform in the streets in the form of *halqa*. The halqa, literally meaning the link of a chain, originally referred to the performances of the *shikhat*, female Moroccan singers and dancer, surrounded by the public of spectators[117]. Ex-slaves who had found themselves freed, under the different circumstances previously described, but now jobless and landless as well as without education or social

[113] Santiago Espinosa García, *Gnawa Culture in Morocco: An Historical and Contemporary Approach*, "African Ethnography", 4 (2022), pp. 3-15.
[114] David R. Goodman, *The Space of Africanness: Gnawa Music and Slave Culture in North Africa*, "Journal of Cultural Studies", 5, no. 1(2003), pp. 48-51.
[115] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 270-273.
[116] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 4, 13, 17.
[117] Deborah A. Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and The Revoicing of Tradition*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996, pp. 38-39.

networks, moved indeed from the Southern and rural areas toward the Northern and urban ones. Here, they gathered in groups and communities thanks to their common background, meaning their blackness, their foreign origins, their past painful condition of slavery and their African spiritual and healing traditions. Their cultural vicinity and their similar marginality allowed them to develop a new sense of belonging and identity.[118] Once in the cities, they found themselves able to collect money singing, playing the *guimbri*, the *qraqet* and the *tbel* and dancing in the streets for a public composed mainly of Westerners. French and Americans especially, indeed, were always more present since the first half of the twelfth century, both for political reasons and for the new-born touristic industry, settling in the New City that started to began to take shape with the beginning of the French Protectorate. As such, they interestingly attended and documented blacks' performances, which they used to look at as the personification of the exotic and primitive. Making Gnawa members the main protagonists of the postcards sent back home to their families and beloved, Gnawa images started in this way to circulate all over the world.[119]

Despite these were usually caricatures, product of Western-centric gazes and stereotypes, Gnawa people had not been passive in front of their commodification. On the contrary, ex-slaves took advantages from this Western perception, deciding to show themselves up to European settlers, tourists and photographers in particular clothes, such as coloured dresses, hanging tresses and shell-decorated heads, that could attract them and their money. Gnawa, thus, chose a self-representation and played an active role in the process of self-fashioning and self-branding. In this way, by the hands of the slaves themselves, Gnawa culture was objectified and materialised in a same identity and category. It was thus a result of and thanks to the construction of a fruitful Gnawa market that the lives, histories and traditions of those slaves gradually ended up unified and

[118] Santiago Espinosa García, *Gnawa Culture in Morocco: An Historical and Contemporary Approach*, "African Ethnography", 4 (2022), p. 12.
[119] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 17-27, 57.

homogenised under a common narration and image. Indeed, looking at the postcards circulating in those years, it is possible to see how the designation under the term "Gnawa" gradually appeared, substituting the precedent descriptions of these people as blacks, Sudani or Africans. This process further contributed in the association of Gnawa to Otherness, that is in contraposition with the local Moroccan population composed of Arabs and Amazighs.[120] Eventually, even the poor Harratin abandoned the countryside[121] and, together with the blacks form the palace, who found their military role and their position in decline too at the beginning of the Protectorate, joint the Gnawa community, given the economic opportunities resulting from entering the Gnawa market.[122]

However, not the entire Gnawa culture was sold to the foreigners and the international market. Indeed, postcards only represented this minority group of poor black men intent in their performances as buskers for economic and survival reasons. The dances and the songs witnessed were perceived and reported as secular expressions of primitive and far lifestyles. The spiritual and healing core of the Gnawa culture and the crucial role played by women in those circumstances went overlooked.[123]

In my comprehension of the past of such culture, the narrations of the M'allemin (pl. of M'allem) I had the chance to talk with have been very interesting. Indeed, despite the M'allem in the Gnawa tradition is, as already said, the musical master, his high position implies also a deep knowledge of the whole Gnawa culture, including together with the musical repertoire, the religious and historical sides.[124] Thus, despite the different versions received, their words have been crucial to understand not only the roots of this culture, but also the level of the

[120] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 27-63
[121] Aziz Abdalla Batran, *The 'Ulama' of Fas, M.Isma'il and the Issue of the Haratin of Fas*, in John Ralph Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, The servile estate, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2, (2005), p. 4.
[122] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 51-60, 96.
[123] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 40-51.
[124] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, Antrocom Journal of Anthropology, 11, no. 2(2015), p. 138.

internal awareness and the process of oral transmission of the historical facts and memories from one generation to the other.

"*TaGnawit is old, but none can tell you when it started exactly […]. It is a big history, that is why it is said that taGnawit is like a sea"* M'allem Amine told my colleague and me. He explained to us about how he became M'allem. He received his education from different M'allemin, who taught him about Gnawa and from who he collected details and information. As a result, even though there was never a specific direct narration, sporadic references to Gnawa history and roots have been transmitted, too. "*A long time ago, it was said that Gnawa belonged to the slaves. My M'allemin used to say so".* Concerning this past, M'allem Amine explained how Gnawi were slaves, who, under the reign of Moulay Ismail, were used to arrived in Morocco mainly through the Essaouira port, to be then brought to Meknes, where they worked at the palace. Thus, Meknes and, closed to it, Fes had been important centres where lot of slaves could have been found. As a result, together with other cities, like Essaouira and Marrakesh, central spots of the trans-Saharan trade, Meknes and Fes remain still today crucial cities for the Gnawa culture.[125]

Similarly, M'allem Akram explained: "*It is originally from the Sudan, Mali, Nigeria and Ghana. When they came here, some of them got married and worked as freemen, but most of them entered the palace as slaves. They were all slaves*". He told us that the original place was Agadir, as it was full of slaves probably because of its vicinity with the Essaouira port. From here, however, slaves started to be employed in the royal palaces, as the one in Fes or Marrakesh, as well as in cities like Tangier. In Agadir, however, they were not referred to with the term "Gnawa" initially, but simply as "slaves". *"They only started to call them Gnawa recently. Gnawi in Agadir will not associate themselves with the name Gnawa, they only call themselves the slaves*."

[125] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, no. 64 (2002), p. 87.

Talking with other M'allemin, this same pattern was repeated. However, some other pieces and versions sometimes were added. Indeed, for example, in another conversation, M'allem Youssef specified how this culture preceded the arrival of Islam in Africa and was brought to Morocco through slaves coming from such areas. These men, he explained, were already slaves when still in Africa. Then, some of them had come by their choice looking for better conditions, but still remaining slaves in Morocco, while other had been brought, requested by Moulay Ismail to build the palace and the Qara prison in Meknes. Soufiane explained how Gnawa culture originated thanks to M'allem Mhmood Ghiniaw, the first who actually went to Essaouira, after the first time he heard the guimbri, and to which slaves started to narrate their lives. Later on, they begun to sing their own stories, gaining some money thanks to the Moroccans' zakat and, with their families, Gnawa tradition spread. That same name recurred in several conversations with different M'allemin, often presented as the slave founder of the Gnawa tradition and music. Others referred, on the contrary, to Bambara as a single man, one of the slaves arrived from Africa, who started to sing about his story, his path to Morocco and the family who hosted him. From him, Gnawa originated. Bambara, however, came too by himself, like the others he was a slave in Africa, who chose to migrate because of the war and who found freedom once in Morocco.

Despite some inconsistencies in the details, the M'allemin seemed to agree on the idea that Gnawa is the culture inherited from former black slaves, who for a reason or another, ended up in Morocco, where or their cultures were brought and mixed or a same tradition originated from their common experience. The M'allemin underlined how this culture moved and spread following the slaves. As a result, it had not just achieved all the several Moroccan cities, but considering the historical economic connections, Gnawa reached also Algeria, Tunisia and according to some even Egypt. As M'allem Amine further explains, "*Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco? TaGnawit is everywhere*". Indeed, even in Algeria and Tunisia we can find a specific declination of the Gnawa group.

Looking at Algeria, the Gnawa culture here is generally known as *Dīwān* (assembly) or *Dīwān of Sīdī Bilāl*, because of their recognition of this latter as the original father. This tradition too, orally transmitted from one generation to another, indeed, derives from the slaves came through the Trans-Saharan trade, so that its members are also known as *usfan*, meaning "slaves" in Arabic.[126] The term *ūlād dīwān* (literally "children of *Diwan*") unified the descendants of what are believed to be seven African original groups. Despite the absence of certainty and agreement, references are mainly done about Hausa, Songhai, Bambara, Fulani, Bornu, Boussou, Gurma and Zozo as the fondant people. Indeed, being the traditions and cultures of these people intermixed and in interaction since the time, it is difficult to select the progenitors among these and other groups. The language itself associated to Diwan is the Kuria, an extinct language probably developed by slaves from different families to speak among each other and thus characterised by words from the different languages of origin. Despite the awareness about the multiple influences, Hausa are probably the most certain, given the major impact of their language and tradition on Diwan. However, if the internal components are not that obvious, Diwan culture can be easily distinguished from other cultures and traditions for its trance-healing musical rituals, in which connections to its origins can be found. These include references to the far lands and their people, to slavery and the caravans, to spirits coming from "Sudani" belief systems, as well as the use of foreign words, mostly incomprehensible today, and of "African" musical instruments and aesthetics. Responsible for the religious and spiritual side of the ritual, the presence of the Muqaddim is crucial. Being introduced in the North African context through the centuries, though, the Diwan culture mixed and adopted also elements from the local people and their religion and tradition. Already converted to Islam before being brought in Algeria as slaves, the Muslim religion had been previously integrated with the local system of beliefs, maintaining former spirits and rituals but re-read in light of the Quran predications.

[126] David R. Goodman, *The Space of Africanness: Gnawa Music and Slave Culture in North Africa*, "Journal of Cultural Studies", 5, no. 1(2003), p. 36.

However, once in Algeria, interactions with the Sufi orders further influenced this tradition. The spirits, the jnun, and the saints to which Diwan rituals refer to are thus the result of these encounters. Despite this, however, the "*ūlād dīwān*" and their culture are still nowadays considered to be African and, even though purified and cleaned from non-Islamic elements once reached North Africa, still in its origins associated to animism. About this, the Hausawiyyn and, especially, the Migzawiyyn *braj* (songs) are considered to be the oldest and thus, at the same time, the most authentic and "Sudani" ones, at the point that, especially the latter, they are associated to the colour black and often not performed anymore. The lila, the ceremony celebrated even by the Diwan, happens mostly at night and last for hours, during which several of these figures are recalled and honoured. Each of them is associated to specific moves, colours, incenses and braj. The ritual intention is to evoke the spirits. Being they considered to be made of energy, these entities can thus live and appear in the music, used thus so to recall, communicate and deal with them. About the instruments and the musical part, Diwan members are mainly the M'allem, in the role of musical master and player of the guimbri, the *kuyu bungu* (a Songhai term), who is the main voice, and, finally, six to ten singers, responsible for the chorus, being the music a kind of call-and-response one, and players of the qraqeb.[127]

Considering the Stambeli, they are a similar spirit possession musical group derived from ex-slaves arrived though in Tunisia. The history of those past slaves is a story of kidnappings and trans-Saharan trade. As Jankowsky reports, the founding myth of the group narrates about an old man known as Busa'diyya, meaning the father of Sa'diyya, whose child was kidnapped in a slave-raid while he was hunting. Looking for his daughter, he ended up in Tunis, following the trans-Saharan routs, and, once here, he started singing his story and his pain in the streets, accompanied by the sound of the *shqashiq* (iron castanets), hoping to attract the attention of someone who could have had any information about her.

[127] Tamara D. Turner, *Hausa Songs in Algeria: sounds of trans-Saharan continuity and rupture*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 27, no. 5 (2022), pp. 999–1017.

Speaking an African, non-defined, language, nobody could understand. Instead, he appeared to the local Arab and Amazigh population as a weird person, since then used by parents to scare the children in case of bad behaviours. In the years, though, these songs have become part of the repertoire collected by the slaves coming from the different areas of West Africa, still sang today by the Stambeli groups. The latter, indeed, are actually organised in communal houses, each of which with its own spirits, songs and practices and correspondent of a particular ethnic or geographical original group. However, throughout the years, all these branches have been gathered in a whole culture, particularly based on the costumes of Hausa bori. Mostly composed by blacks, the participation and membership is though opened also to non-black or non-African people, especially recently. Stambeli have been perceived as African non-Muslim primitives, even though the majority, if not all of them, had already converted to Islam before their enslavement and had learnt the Arabic language once in Tunisia. Their indigenous cult of saints and spirits, considered pagan or non in accordance with the orthodox Islam, was though also a reason for considering those blacks as with protecting powers. As a result, their culture and spiritual-healing rituals have survived until today, when they are achieving more attention, attracting new people and reaching bigger stages. These songs, still believed to have healing powers, play a crucial role in the spirit possession ceremonies organised by them, mostly by women (*'arifa*, she who knows), in people houses or *shrines* (sanctuaries). Stambeli music is a call-sing type of music, full of Arabic or *'ajmi* (foreign) words and based on the use of the guimbri and the *shqashiq*. The *yinna*, the master, is the main voice and the player of the guimbri, while the *suna'a* (workers) are the members of the chorus and players of the shqashiq. Such music too recalls the slaves' past culture and journey and is full of references to God, the Prophet and a pantheon of Muslim, Christian and African spirits adopted through the centuries. However, jnun are not evoked or celebrated here, being these believed to be at the service of Satan and thus not useful to heal people. These songs are gathered in several *nuba* (tune), linked to specific spirits or saints and, because of this, are used to identify and deal

with the spirit responsible for the sick person's condition, combined with incenses, religious offerings, dances intercessions and sacrifices.[128]

Despite non completely equal, Gnawa present a pattern similar to that of the Algerian Diwan and the Tunisian Stambeli, as it is better pointed out in the following paragraphs of the chapter. It is not clear if Gnawa culture developed in one of these countries and then reached the others thanks to historical connections or if similar circumstances led to its appearance separately in the different areas of North Africa more or less simultaneously. Gnawa, however, is generally thought by the Moroccan M'allemin to have originated in Morocco and from here spread. Soufiane, for example, told me that "*Gnawa became popular in Morocco, so I can put it in the heritage of Morocco […] with the slaves that became free in the era of Moulay Ismail, Gnawa culture began, so it's from Moroccan culture*". "*Algeria and also Egypt, they have Gnawa, also Tunisia, but not like Morocco*" specified M'allem Amine. Then, along the years, slaves have been absorbed in the local society, but they have maintained the memory of their history and their original cultures, eventually influencing even the Moroccan society.[129] Indeed, M'allem Abdellah said that "*they were just slaves; they used to work for the Moroccan shurfa as slaves and when they finished their daily work, they used to do their music, afterwards it got mixed with the Moroccan culture, they incorporated the shrines and the saints*". The idea, thus, is that, despite introduced by African slaves, such slaves were then integrated in the Moroccan society and, with them, Moroccans adopted the culture they brought. As a result, Morocco developed it and saved it from its extinction.

2.2. Gnawa's Religiosity and Rituals

As previously anticipated, Gnawa are believed to have an important healing ability. As the M'allemin explained to me, people afflicted by persistent physical or psychological pain and sufferings, victims of misfortune or conditions such as

[128] Richard C. Jankowsky, *Black Spirits, White Saints: Music, Spirit Possession, and Sub-Saharans in Tunisia*, "Ethnomusicology", 50, no. 3 (2006), pp. 373–397.
[129] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 271, 282.

depression, infertility or others to which doctors are not able to find a solution or to correctly understand the causes, eventually resolve addressing a Gnawa Muqaddema or M'allem. "*TaGgnawit is like a psychiatrist*", in case of a "*sickness that cannot be healed, they do Gnawa*" explained Mouhcine. Gnawa medicine, indeed, works in a different level. Each sickness is understood as the consequence of the unhappiness or the offence of one or more saints or jnun. This term, which finds its origins from the Arabic word *jenn*, meaning something hidden or shrouded in darkness, can be used to refer to good or evil, Muslim or non-Muslim spirits, each with its own gender and personality and able to assume different forms. Jnun are believed to inhabit the same human world, despite emerging especially at night and occupying marginal places in which thus human should pay more attention in dark hours. Here, they work as intermediaries among people and God[130]. Such spiritual beings, obling the person into a specific unpleasant condition, are thus punishing him/her and asking for recognition, regret and compensatory devote attitude and lifestyle.[131] In doing so, jnun and spirits take control and rule on a person's body and mind and, thus, inhabit it (*maskun*). Such result can be caused by different circumstances, despite some appear to be more probable, as for example the beginning of the puberty, a laughter or the loss of a beloved. Indeed, together with the belief that body of waters are inhabited by spirits, blood as well as tears are transitional elements, able to connect the inside and the outside of the body, thus opening the way for the spirits to enter.[132] Once described the sufferings, the Muqaddim/a is then able to identify the responsible spirit and its requests, thus, prescribing to the patient the adequate ritual and behaviours necessary to deal with the spirit and control it so to, eventually, stop

[130] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 135; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini,* Antrocom Journal of Anthropology, 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 134-135; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 249-250.
[131] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 128.
[132] Deborah A. Kapchan, *Travelling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 2007, pp. 39, 48, 78.

suffering.[133] Each spirit, in fact, demands specific sacrifices, food, colours to be worn and incenses and can be evoked and identified through specific songs.[134]

The Muqaddem/a indeed is the spiritual master, a role that, in the Gnawa culture, is usually covered by women. Despite supported and helped in her functions by several figures, such as, among the others, the 'arifa, the Muqaddema is the responsible for the religious aspects and rituals.[135] Such position is due to the personal experience of possession and the consequent achieved ability to master, meaning control, the spirits from which she has been inhabited, that even makes her a clairvoyant. *Muqaddema* indeed means "diver" or "seer"[136], due to his or her ability to communicate, via dreams or in other ways, with the spirits. For this reason, thus, affected people ask to her for help and explanations and, where her advices do not turn out to be enough, for the organisation of the *lila*.[137] It is thus her responsibility to prepare and oversee the ceremony arrangements. It is her duty to bring all the incenses and the clothes, as well as milk, dates candles and henna paste that will be used during the ritual[138] and, finally, she is the one who hires the Gnawa musicians.[139] About these latter, as underlined by M'allem Amine, for the musical side, together with the M'allem, who is the musical master, the main voice and the player of the guimbri, other players are always present, called *Awlad Bambara* ("sons of Bambara") or *Kouyou*, who compose the chorus and are responsible for playing the qraqeb and performing the dance, called *fraja.*[140]

Lila, "night" in Arabic, or *derdeba,* a term that literally means "big noise" and that refers to the musical type of event and to the elements of trance and

[133] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 249-250.
[134] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 54, 73, 78.
[135] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 138.
[136] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 138.
[137] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 144.
[138] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, p. 11, 57-59.
[139] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 99.
[140] Alessandra Turchetti*, Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, Antrocom Journal of Anthropology, 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 128; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 100.

possession, are the names used for the main Gnawa ritual. As suggested by the labels, it is celebrated during the night, the best moment to get in contact with the jnun, and it consists of a healing ritual that works through a trance-music performance. It is usually organised in an inside place, being this a house or a shrine and it follows a long and well-structured sequence.[141] Indeed, it starts with an animal sacrifice in the days before the night ritual or in the previous early afternoon, which is then followed by the *al-'ada* (the custom), the warming-up phase, settled instead in the late afternoon. Such moment is characterised by the gathering of all the Gnawa musical and religious figures, the sick person and all the external people interested by the event, being the ritual usually open to the public. Indeed, Gnawa start to perform by reaching the house designated for the ritual, with the M'allem playing the *tbel* (drum) and the other musicians dancing along the way and in front of the place as to inform possible interested people. In the main time, the Muqaddema sprinkle them with drops of orange blossom water, while once inside the house, she distributes the milk and wets the musical instruments with it.[142] During the *al-'ada,* milk and dates are served and candles and incenses settled, mostly by the Muqaddema and the other women. Once all gathered, the lila starts. The first hours are characterised by less serious moments, organised into two phases: the *Awlad Bambara* (literally "sons of Bambara") and the *Kuyu*. Here, the first term refers to the moment in which spirits such as Sidi Mimoun, Ighmani, Lalla Mimouna and others are invoked. These spirits are the black sub-Saharan ones, whose knowledge and cult was brought by slaves from their motherlands. To recall these origins, it is not just their categorisation or their African names, but also the dances that accompany them, re-evoking the hunting tradition of these people, the slavery and the memories of such ancestors. Because

[141] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), pp. 90, 100.
[142] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), pp. 78-79; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, Antrocom Journal of Anthropology, 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 131-133.

of this, they cover a section considered more about entertainment.[143] The *Kuyu* phase, on the other hand, is characterised by blessings adressed to God, the Prophet and his family, in preparation for the real deeper entrance into the lila.[144] Indeed, only at this point, a meal is consumed collectively[145] and, around midnight, the religious ritual starts. The tbel is set aside, incenses are burnt around the guimbri, now in the M'allem's hands, and it starts the series of troha dedicated to all the different mluk, meaning the spiritual owners or kings of the families of spirits (*mhalla*), in which jnun similar to one another for personality are grouped together.[146] Since now on, the carnival moment gives way to the more serious and solemn moment of the trance and of the healing possession dance, the jedba.[147] As M'allem Amine explained to me, the evocation of the mluk is divided in seven sections, each of which includes seven troha, meaning seven songs dedicated to that saint or ancestral spirits and to those under it. The first family recalled is the *al-salahin*, the white Muslim saints, being white the colour of purity in Islam, gathered under the pillar Sufi figure of Moulay Abdelkader Jilaliare. The white spirits are followed, immediately after and in contrast with them, by the black ones, as spirits of African origins which belong to the Sidi Mimoun's family. Going on in the night, the *al-moussaouwiyin*, the blue spirits descendants of Sidi Moussa and owners of the sea, the water and the sky precede the *al-gourna*, the red spirits, like Hammou and Moula Koumiya. This order, again, is not casual. Blue and red, indeed, are the colours symbol of water and blood, both crucial elements for the life itself and important for the purification and the catharsis. What follows are the troha dedicated to Moulay Brahim, associated to the colour green, the colour of

[143] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 79.
[144] Deborah Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 13; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 133-134.
[145] David R. Goodman, *The Space of Africanness: Gnawa Music and Slave Culture in North Africa*, "Journal of Cultural Studies", 5, no. 1(2003), p. 40.
[146] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 254; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p.133.
[147] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 134; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 10.

Islam, which spirits are considered to be *shurfa* (descendant of the Prophet)[148] and then the *al-ghaba*, the spirits owners of the forest, again associated to the colour black and of African origins. These latter, however, are considered the be the most dangerous, as evident from the repertoire of behaviours to them associated, such as the consumption of raw meat and the acts of self-harming enacted by those possessed by them. Finally, the lila concludes with a last moment dedicated to feminine spirits, a multicolour section, despite mostly related to the colour yellow, which includes several Muslim figures as well as jnun, among which Lalla Mira[149], Lalla Malika, Lalla Fatima and, evoked just in conclusion, Lalla Aicha Kandicha. Aicha Kandicha is the most dangerous among the feminine spirits, considered responsible for the seduction of several men, and she is the one that generally inhabits the Muqaddema.[150]

During all these sections, the lila is characterised by the continuous exchange of money. Economic compensation for the musicians are left on the ritual tray, since the beginning, by the hosts, who also provide the incenses, the cloths and all the other necessary items then prepared by the Muqaddema and the food for all the participants. In addiction, Gnawi receive an official payment for their job and, during the night, they collect money also from the guests, spreading back blessing. Moreover, guests and inhabited people offer money also to the Muqaddema, in the occasions in which she enters into trance and becomes clairvoyant, allowing them to ask for advices, to read their future or to interpret their dreams. These, again, are then added by her in the ritual tray. As a result, money acquire a symbolic power.[151]

Eventually a last playful and festive moment signs the conclusion of the ritual. By the end of this long performance, several hours have passed and the ceremony, started some hours before midnight, comes to its end in the early hours

[148] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 136.
[149] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), pp. 136-137.
[150] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 135-137.
[151] Ibid., p. 137; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 141-144.

of sunshine, with the call to the prayer of the muezzin, for a total of seven or eight hours, despite the flexible duration.[152] As for the beginning, the M'allem leaves the guimbri and comes back to the tbel, while walks the way back, together with the chorus, playing the qraqeb.[153]

The identification of the jinn that is inhabiting the body is thus necessary in order to dispose the ritual according to its preferences and specific demands. Indeed, the lila starts with the sacrifice of a cow, a chicken or a goat, requested as an act of veneration and respect toward the spirit, as well as a way, to start a relations with it. The animal, in fact, will not be just shared among the present, but also between the spirit, to which it is offered, and the possessed person, who will then eat it and who will also drink usually the first spatters of blood produced by the slaughtering of the animal. This practice, highly criticised as unorthodox, has been officially removed, but sometimes unofficially maintained because of the *baraka* (blessing) that those drops are supposed to contain.[154] Equally, the specific food of that spirit is eaten by the person during the ritual and the trance, being the food a crucial item to enforce the relation with the spirit. Food, indeed, is not just a gift and, when sacrificed, an act of veneration, but also one of the few elements able to connect the external and internal sides of the body. This characteristic is shared with blood, tears, incenses and sounds such as laughter or music. All these, thus, play a crucial role, being them not only responsible for opening the way to enter for a spirit, but also important instruments through which better reach and work the jnin by which one is already inhabited. When this happens, the trance takes place and he/she, once fallen into trance, is clothed and covered with fabrics corresponding to that spirit's favourite colour, previously prepared and brought by the Muqaddema.[155]

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[152] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 78.
[153] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 134-137.
[154] Ibid., p. 132.
[155] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 36-38, 68-78, 90-91.

The possessed, usually women, starts "dancing" and moving in front of the other people. The trance dance caused by such music is characterised by gesture of what looks like a body out of control. The trance-dance, in particular, depending on the song, can include moves and mimics of, for example, hunting or wild animals' gestures or even self-mortification acts. Usually, however, it starts with the movement of the head of the possessed in different direction, with the eyes closed. Such movements can increase involving different parts of the body, with the risk of losing the headscarves, leading eventually to the falling of the person at the end of the tarh, in front of the M'allem and the other players.[156] For this reason, the possessed are sometimes made to wear a cloth around the waist, in order for the present to be able to hold and help them in case of necessity.[157]

Despite such movements would appear incontrollable for an outsider, they are actually similar among those inhabited by the same jnin. Thus, they are actually learnt as proper of that spirit[158] and so socially codified and taken from a precise repertoire, internalised while growing up in such communities.[159] With the participation and repetition of this ceremony, thus, social bond and memory are strengthened.[160] Indeed, the scholar Deborah Kapchan analysed this phenomenon using the concept of performance to interpret it.[161] This academic instrument consists on the idea that, for each sector and context of the social life, there are specific sets of behaviours, either verbal or not, put into action in the public arena. As such, these words, movements and expressions become performances because of the more or less aware spectator eyes of the other people on them. These behaviours, however, despite embodied and observed in a mostly unconscious way, are actually learnt by both the performer and the spectators from the society

[156] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), pp. 137-138.
[157] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco, "The World of Music"*, 40, no. 1(1998), pp. 137-138, 140; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007,op. cit., p. 74.
[158] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 139.
[159] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 53, 60, 64-65, 68.
[160] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 143.
[161] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 54, 62.

by which they are surrounded. Such repertoires, indeed, are transmitted from one generation to another and shaped, so, by the socio-historical time. As a result, however, the performer in not a passive actor, because he or she is the one able to adjust and adapt the inherit performances to the present time, values and ideas, at the same time reproducing and re-interpreting that tradition.[162]

Indeed, if the first trances appear, however, as chaotic, uncontrollable and even violent, with the experience and the repetition of such rituals, the afflicted person will increasingly control these events, eventually making them less painful, despite the tendency to be inhabited by new spirits after the first possession, that imply new sufferings and new trainings for the person involved.[163] Such repetitions are due to the fact that the body cannot be freed by the spirit once inhabited. The identity of the possessed is by it re-shaped, founded with the one of spirit. The characteristics, the qualities and the preferences of the spirit are transferred to the inhabited, at the point that sometimes, during the trance, the possessed is heard talking with another voice, not its own and thus probably the one of the spirit. The only option for the person is thus to accept it, appease it with the rituals required and develop the ability to master the spirit, instead of being mastered by it.[164]

This relation between the spirit and the possessed re-proposes on another level the analogous past historical relation between the master and the slave. Indeed, the spirts are called "mluk", owner, and the inhabited is supposed to submit the self, at the point of sacrificing the own identity, and to work for it. The condition of being inhabited implies suffering, pain, self-mortification practices, continuous devotion and efforts from the subjected person toward his/her master that recall the pattern of an enslaved person. Despite, thus, probably the majority of the nowadays Gnawi have not direct experience of slavery or even memory of it, Gnawa rituals make it familiar for the younger or new adepts. Narrations of this history have been passed from parents and grandparents and physically transmitted

[162] Deborah A. Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and The Revoicing of Tradition*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996, pp. 3-8.
[163] Deborah Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 41, 51-52, 116.
[164] Ibid., pp. 18, 34, 63, 72-74, 77.

precisely through such practices, gestures and physical pain, which embody and repeat the past sufferings. In this way, new generations are educated and can learn about their culture. By re-evoking and experiencing it on their own body, the historical trauma is inherited, a share tradition is incorporated and a common identity is further constructed and perpetuated.[165]

However, the submission to a mluk offers a more active and positive position for the possessed than actual slavery. Despite obliged to welcome the spirit and accept this condition, the spirits are always powerful and this would actually empower the same person.[166] This appears evident already in the lila, during which acts of self-mortification can be tolerated by a maskun because of the powers of the spirits transferred on him/her[167]. Moreover, along the years, the possessed has the possibility to learn to master it and increase the own psycho-physical situation but also the own social and economic position, given that the ability to master the spirit comes with the corresponding access to the role of the *Muqaddem/a* and the social and economic prestige it brings. The relations of power are thus inverted and what previously caused oppression, captivity and victimisation now becomes an instrument of liberation and empowerment.[168] The agency subtracted to slaves on a political stage in the past is now recover on a social, symbolical and religious level by the successors.[169] The lila is thus a somatic commemoration of the slavery institution and an embodiment of the collective memory and the experience shared among all those people that ended up mixed in the present category of Gnawa. Instead of only remembering this tradition, indeed, the ceremony performs it, in the sense used by Kapchan, re-reading and re-interpreting it. The ritual, in so doing, becomes a way to remedy to those past

[165] Chouki El Hamel., 2013, op. cit., p. 284; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 18, 34-35, 56, 180.
[166] Deborah Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 18.
[167] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 142.
[168] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), pp. 138-139; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 66, 180.
[169] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 82; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 20.

injustices and inequalities. Mastering the jnun means mastering the slavery and healing the possessed means healing the ancient slaves and their present descendants. The Gnawa practices do not aim at revenge as an inversion of the ancient social positions, where the Arab and the Amazigh population should suffer and be subjected to the African ex-slaves' descendants in order to recover and find justice for the past pain. On the contrary, Gnawa rituals and trances aimed internally, to the own members, in order to heal the collective share wound, that consists in the past slavery condition and in the patriarchal sexual exploitation, in the case of female slaves, suffered. Keeping alive the awareness about this past, despite in a very indirect and unconscious way, Gnawa fight the present silence upon which inequalities and racism are based. However, precisely because it was not healed in the original time, dealing with it now implies the impossibility for the possessed to be definitely freed by its consequences. The impossibility to remove the jnun, thus. indirectly underlines the impossibility to completely recover from the historical wound of slavery, not healed in the right time, from which comes the possessed duty to keep repeating these ceremonies and devotional practices in order to stop suffering.[170]

This said, Gnawa are considered a religious order that, because of their musical rituals, their mystic beliefs in and practices with spirits, are sometimes confused and associated with Sufi brotherhoods, despite not properly part of these orders. Indeed, as above pointed out, Gnawa culture, like Sufism, includes musical performances, dances and trances, spirit possessions, healing practices together with self-mortification acts, animal sacrifices and cult of saints. Despite such elements shape the entire Gnawa rituals, Sufi influences appear even more evident in the white spirits section of the lila, during which dances and gestures follow a more Sufi kind of perform, differently from the stronger and more extreme expressions that takes place in the previous phase and during the evocation of the

[170] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 18-21, 34-36, 56.

African spirits.[171] These white saints, as for Sufi, are men descendants of the Prophet, founders of religious orders or important religious, social or political figures, commemorated and venerated in sanctuaries (called *zawiya*) through ceremonies and rituals by their followers, who consider them as their masters and intermediators between men and God. However, such practices find similar versions also in some ceremonies of Songhai people as well as the Ttambura, the Zar and the Hausa bori, inhabitants of the different areas of West Africa and the Sahel.[172] Furthermore, salihin figures, those Sufi saints recognised as properly Muslim, in the Gnawa context are rather presented as mluk or jnun. One example is the case of Sidi Musa, the prophet Moses from the Old Testament recognised by Muslims, but by Gnawa translated into a mluk and associated to water and the colour blue and considered the protectors of fishermen.[173]

Gnawa did not have, since the origins, a spiritual founder and a sanctuary to him dedicated. As a result, the introduction of holy places and of some saints had been the result of historical contacts with and influences from these orders, while the adoption of a founder father individuated in Sidi Bilal, emerged from the efforts of obtaining a major and better consideration and legitimation. Considered as infidels because of their blackness and strong connections to Africa, despite already converted, the choice of Bilal is profoundly significant. Indeed, not only Bilal was a slave of Ethiopian origins that lived at the time of the Prophet, but he had been one of his first followers and supporters, even before the conversion of the same Prophet's tribe of Quraysh, not to mention the first Black Muslim and the first muezzin in the history of Islam. According to the tradition, Bilal was mistreated by his master because of his conversion from Christianity to Islam and, for this, brought by the Prophet's close friend Abu Bakr to him, who eventually freed Bilal. Thanks to his history and friendship with the Prophet, Bilal is known for having Baraka. The figure of Bilal, thus, more than as a founder father like in

[171] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 136.
[172] Ibid., p. 135.
[173] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

Sufi orders, has a crucial symbolic power in linking the black condition of Africans and of slaves to their early religious conversion, their vicinity to the Prophet and the baraka.[174] It was in order to strengthen this idea that Gnawa constructed their only own zawiya to him dedicated in Essaouira, while in the other cities continued venerating local Sufi saints during the *moussem*, the religious ceremony dedicated to the saints[175]. Finally, differently from Sufism, in Gnawa culture, female play important roles in the religious side, considering the prevalence of the Muqaddemat over their male correspondents and the important amount of female spirits in the Gnawa pantheon and being women the majority of the devotes.[176]

Another important aspect to be taken into consideration is that, among the Gnawa spirits, some are recognised as black and pagan, whose belief must have been brought from Sudan. Despite this, however, those Sudani lands from which Gnawa are supposed to come from were mostly already converted to Islam when the black slaves, fathers of this culture, had been brought to Morocco throughout the trans-Saharan trade. Islam too thus left important traces on this culture, both before the emigration as during the centuries spent in Morocco, a long-lasting Arab Muslim land. This is evident from several sides, such as the importance of the number seven, number of the stages of the lila, of the mluk or spirit families associated to each stage and of the jnun subjected to each mluk. Moreover, it has been also this latter historical moment the responsible for the impact that Sufism and its cult of saints had on Gnawa.[177]

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[174] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 93.
[175] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 130; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini,* "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 128, 130, 132; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 278-279; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 249-250.
[176] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 77.
[177] Deborah Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 26; Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 136.

However, it should be taken in mind that North Africa and Morocco themselves present elements from the pre-Islamic era, then adapted and adjusted with the introduction of Islam. Those pagan elements of the Gnawa culture, thus, can be both remnants of the Sudani tradition from which Gnawa originated as well as further influences from the North African pagan era.[178] As a result, Islamic idea, values, practices and belief did not substituted the precedent traditions neither at the time of the spread of Islam in North Africa, neither in West Africa and nor with the arrival of black slaves in Morocco. On the contrary, Muslim elements, including Sufi tendencies, had all been integrated and made to coexist with those former components, later on judged as African, animist, non-Muslim and un-orthodox or sometimes even heretical. As a result, taGnawit became a syncretic culture.[179] The several components of the Gnawa pantheon have come from infinite places and times. All this different pieces ended up mixing and overlapping through the institution of slavery[180], eventually assuming new meanings and interpretations in the Gnawa tradition.[181]

From this derives the confusion and the different opinions about what Gnawa is, that I could verify in my conversations with some of the Gnawi. Indeed, concerning the Gnawa geo-political adherence, almost all of them face the ambiguity of its origins repeating the idea that Gnawa culture finds its roots in "Africa" and in slavery, but it has been in Morocco that it developed and clarified, so that it could have been said to be Moroccan by now. On the other hand, different versions came out about its religious position. Some, indeed, positioned Gnawa closer to Sufism, while the majority underlined how Gnawa, more than religious,

[178] Hélène Tissières and Marjolijn de Jager, *Maghreb: Sub-Saharan Connections*, "Research in African Literatures", 33, no. 3 (2002), p. 38.
[179] Meryem Madili, *Gnawa: Spiritual Sounds of Healing Slavery, Rituals, Music*, "Special Treatment Interdisciplinary Journal" [Különleges Bánásmód Interdiszciplináris folyóirat], 9, no. 1(2023), pp. 128-130; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p.128; El Hamel C., 2013, op. cit., p. 277.
[180] David R. Goodman, *The Space of Africanness: Gnawa Music and Slave Culture in North Africa*, "Journal of Cultural Studies", 5, no. 1(2003), p. 44.
[181] Santiago Espinosa García, *Gnawa Culture in Morocco: An Historical and Contemporary Approach*, "African Ethnography", 4 (2022), pp. 14-15; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 228; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 254.

is something spiritual. The difficulty in defining taGnawit emerges from M'allemin's own contradictions in their explanations. While talking with Soufiane, indeed, for example, he categorised Gnawa as Sufi and later on he said "*It is not something religious, it is something with spiritual. We make some sins with God, but I hope God will forgive us*". Indeed, he explained, "*music is Haram in Islam, but Gnawa has nothing to do with the magic and sorcery, as people say, it actually talk about the mercy of God and his forgiveness, because it talks about how everything was created*". "*You share the word of God in a different way*" as said by Zouhir.

Equally, on the other side, the persistence of such a diasporic culture and its negotiation eventually influenced itself, once in Morocco, the local traditions. Orders such as the 'Issawiyya or the Hamdushyia, indeed, adopted some religious elements from Gnawa, such as aspects of the colour system and members of the spirits pantheon.[182]

Such mutual influences happened to be possible thanks to the compatibility of the Sudani elements and their interpretations and adaptations of Islam with at least some elements of the local traditions and their religious perceptions. Indeed, the belief in spiritual beings, called jnun, is not excluded by the Quran and in fact, people who think to be possessed usually consult a fiqh. This one, however, differently from Gnawa, whose practices aim at interact and control the spirits, work to exorcise them, again through incenses and the repetition of Quranic verses similarly to Gnawa.[183] Equally, spirit possession, trance, musical and healing practices together with animal sacrifices and the cult of saints were elements of the already well-established Sufi orders, despite under some aspects conceptualise differently. Sacrifices, for example, are expected in Islam, despite accepted only

[182] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 252-253.
[183] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 135; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 123.

when they happen to be acts of devotion directed only toward God, and thus judged as unorthodox if addressed to the jnun.[184]

Maintaining all these different aspects, Gnawa are a Muslim religious order, close to but different from Sufi brotherhoods and, yet, because of past biases and the survival of rituals and traditions that date back to the West Africa pagan era, in a position of major marginality and inferiority if compared with other realities.[185]

2.3. History Through the Music

As above explained, the religious aspects are crucial in the Gnawa culture. Nevertheless, their "working the spirits" could not be possible without the music. These two sides of the Gnawa culture cannot exist without one another. Indeed, thanks to the property that, as above described, music shares with other sounds, incenses and food[186], it becomes thus a communication tool not only of the M'allem toward the jnun and the spectators, but also between the spirits and the inhabited persons. Indeed, being each tarh associated to a specific spirit and being the name of that spirit reported and invoked by its lyrics, when the music recalls a jinn, this latter is immediately known and evident to the inhabited and to all the present and it can express itself, allowing the Muqaddema to interpret its request to the maskun.[187] Music indeed allows the revelation of the jnun and, thus, their identification. As a result, music is the first item through which spirits are awaken and the inhabited initiated to the path toward the knowledge of the own masters, in order to, eventually, learn to work them.[188] If the lila is the occasion in which the two realms of humanity and extra-humanity become visible and evident to one another, the sensorial perception of the spirits by the possessed is only possible

[184] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p.102.
[185] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 252.
[186] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit. p. 68.
[187] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 90.
[188] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 125.

through the auditory performance.[189] Given that, the music plays the most important role, even more that the M'allem. Indeed, despite the M'allem is the master of the music and the way in which he does so influence the functionality of the lila, he is indeed only its producer. The very responsible for the work on the spirits is the music.[190] Thus, more than the M'allem, the performance is enacted by the music, which has its own agency.[191]

The importance of the music becomes comprehensible looking to its components. In this regard, Gnawa music is mainly characterised by the voice of the M'allem, accompanied by the chorus, where, while the number of the members of the chorus is not fixed, the M'allem and the chorus are always necessarily male.[192] In addition to their presence, however, equally important are the two main instruments, meaning the guimbri and the qraqeb[193], sometimes accompanied by the tbel. These elements are the only components of the music during the lila. Here, the passage from one tarh to another is gradual, at the point that for an outsider it is initially difficult to understand when one ends and the other begins.[194] When the voices stop, leaving space to the instruments, meaning mainly the guimbri, the qraqeb-players's dance starts.[195]

The guimbri or *hajhouj* is the main Gnawa instrument, a musical tool that identifies the group by which it is played. Indeed, despite some M'allemin agreed on the fact that initially slaves played just the qraqeb and the tbel, in 1844, a French settler already noted it, referring to such instrument with the word *ghanawe*, which traced the association between the two.[196] The guimbri consists of a kind of lute, similar to a small guitar, but with a rectangular wooden body, usually decorated with beads and shells, covered with camel skin and characterised by three strings

[189] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), pp. 82-83.
[190] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 205, 207.
[191] Ibid., p. 215.
[192] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 100.
[193] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 86.
[194] Ibid., p. 90.
[195] Ibid., pp. 90-91.
[196] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, pp. 188, 207.

made of goat intestines.[197] The connection of such instrument with the Sudani world is evident from the name itself, which seems to derive from the Soninké word *Gambare*, used for the lute.[198] Moreover, despite no certainty concerning the precise origins of such instrument, it was already used by griots in Senegal, as well as Mali and Niger.[199] M'allem Amine himself told me how it originated in Mali, where the majority of first Gnawi came from and where shops can be still found. Indeed, the Soninke lute could again be an evolution of the previous Mali instrument, already described by Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century with the term *gumburi*, as played for the Sultan at its court.[200] Other possible origins or influences could also come from the Fulani's *hoddu*, the Songhai's *godji* or the Hausa's *goge* or *molo*[201], being these again lutes, despite some just with one string and used, rather than for the celebration of historical figures or ancestors, to evoke the spirits and cause possession and a Gnawa-similar possessed dance. If a similar version had been photographed in Algeria and Tunisian in past times, no document of an ancient guimbri are available in Morocco, limiting the knowledge of the firsts local versions to the few preserved and collected by museums or privates, which though testify a non-standardised shape and size.[202]

Some different variations does exists about the guimbri, indeed, given that it is also used in the countryside and Amazigh areas or in other musical occasions, where generally it appears with more rounded shapes.[203] In such non-urban area, moreover, despite the strong described association between the Gnawa music and the guimbri, the latter sometimes had not even spread and its role is substituted by the used of the tbel. Such is the case of the Ismkhan, an Amazigh term for "slave"

[197] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 86; Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 141.
[198] Ziad Bentahar, *The Visibility of African Identity in Moroccan Music: From Gnawa to Ghiwane and Back*, "Wasafiri", 25, no. 1(2010), p. 42.
[199] Ibid., p. 43.
[200] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 192.
[201] Tamara D. Turner, *Hausa Songs in Algeria: sounds of trans-Saharan continuity and rupture*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 27, no. 5 (2022), p. 1001.
[202] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 193-194, 197.
[203] Ibid., p. 192.

maintained and used by outsiders but also by the members themselves of this kind of Gnawa sub-group. Differently from the larger Gnawa group, however, they dress in white and use white turbans during their rituals, they have been more influenced by the local Amazigh culture and their lilat last just few hours, despite they also organize an annual festival that lasts three days, like the Gnawa Essaouira festival, better described in the following chapter. In such rituals, Ismkhan's aim, however, is not to cooperate and master the spirits, but to exorcise them. Such spirits, moreover, are believed to possess only black people, leaning thus further on a racial construction. A distinctive trait is also the fact that, at the end of the annual religious celebration, the performance of a slave market is re-created, with children of the community sold to and bought by the Ismikhan, in the symbolic act of putting those children under their protection. From this and from their name, it is evident the proud for the own origins. Indeed, despite the social condition it implies, it also underlines the connection to the "Sudan", blackness and, thus, to Bilal and the baraka from him inherited. From a musical point of view, moreover, their music, called *aheydus*, recalls typical Amazigh performances and their main instruments are just the tbel and the qraqeb, without the guimbri. Indeed, the Amazigh term for the Arabic tbel is *ginga* or *ganga*, with which such groups are often referred.[204]

Back to the larger group of Gnawa, the importance attributed to the guimbri is due to the belief of it as alive.[205] Indeed, as explained by M'allem Oussama "*it is made of wood and the wood is alive and of the leather, which is also alive, and the intestine of goat, which is alive, too*" and, thus, it is able to communicate both with the M'allem and its spectators, as with the spirits.[206] "*The guimbri has jnun inside*" M'allem Amine told me. For this, at the beginning of the lila, incenses used

[204] Ibid., pp. 203-208; Cynthia Becker, '*We are real slaves, real Ismkhan': memories of the trans-Saharan slave trade in the Tafilalet of South-Eastern Morocco*, "The Journal of North African Studies", 7, no. 4(2002), pp. 103-117.
[205] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 195.
[206] Philip D. Schuyler, *Music and Meaning among the Gnawa Religious Brotherhood of Morocco*, "The World of Music", 23, no. 1(1981), p. 10.

to evoke the spirits and to feed the instrument are burnt around it and it is wetted with milk.[207]

Precisely because of such responsibility, just the M'allem is allowed to play the guimbri and only after a long path of education, through the apprenticeship with various masters, often starting from the own father. As M'allem Yousuf told us "*if your father is a Gnawi, you will be inclined to be one*". Indeed, speaking with the different M'allemin, it turned out that, despite not always, often the participation in the Gnawa community is something hereditary and familiar.[208] The training of the future M'allemin is not something predetermined, however, but it depends on their ability and tenacity. M'allem Amine, in line with the narration of others, explained how "*this profession makes you do many travels*". "*Traveling is the main way to learn*" confirmed by M'allem Hamza. As they underlined, the education depends on the encounters and studies with several M'allemin, who in turn will talk about their teachers and the lessons they received from them. At the beginning, the student is not allowed to touch the instruments and just after years he will have the possibility first to deal with the tbel and the qraqeb and only eventually with the guimbri. The access to such instrument, indeed, is also subordinated to the learning of the vast Gnawa music repertoire and the ability to craft the own guimbri,[209] *"[...] because he cannot play the guimbri without knowing how to make it"* M'allem Amine told us. The education of the M'allem is hierarchical, "*the first thing they teach you is the respect, when the old people talk, you have to listen*", he continues. At the beginning, it is more a matter of observation and of demonstration of devotion, to the masters and to the discipline, taking care and working for the M'allem. The qualification to the status of M'allem, thus, comes only after years and ends if the student, performing in a lila at the presence of other M'allemin, is judged by them as ready. Only at that point,

[207] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 134; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 196.
[208] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 138.
[209] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 185-187.

he will be able to create his own group, otherwise a longer period of education will be requested.

The reputation and the fame of the M'allem derives from the importance of the guimbri and the M'allem ability to master it.[210] Moreover, a M'allem and his potentiality are judged by his ability to induce the higher number of people into trance, guiding with his music the interaction between the person and the spirits and directing the music in order to respond to the present local needs.[211] Indeed, the musical structure of the lila follows a precise order.[212] Variation at the musical level during a lila are generally few and minimal, regarding mostly the duration of the song, rather than the order, done with the intent to please the spirits, allow the communication between them and the possessed and, in this regard, meet the suggestions of the Muqaddema.[213]

Qraqeb (pl. qaqarbat) is the second most important Gnawa instrument, despite it can be found in other groups. Gnawa music, indeed, has influenced other Moroccan musical genres, such as the Andalusian Moroccan music and more recent genres, both religious and not.[214] The qaqarbat accompany the guimbri and they consist of two attached iron or steel castanets,[215] with the aspect of metallic cymbals. Despite the again non-sure origins, it seems to be the most ancient instrument played by Gnawa, at the point that, an old legend narrates that Bilal already played them.[216] According to some scholars, they used to be made of wood and bones, while lately converted into iron versions. Despite the reason for such changes are not known, such last material, with its low status, represents the socio-economic position covered by ex-slaves and Gnawa members. Moreover, iron is

[210] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 185.
[211] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 105.
[212] Ibid., pp. 90, 100.
[213] Ibid., p. 104.
[214] Ziad Bentahar, *The Visibility of African Identity in Moroccan Music: From Gnawa to Ghiwane and Back*, "Wasafiri", 25, no. 1(2010), p. 43.
[215] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), pp. 142.
[216] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 139.

also associated to healing powers and blacksmiths are considered to have mediation skills in West Africa.[217] Indeed, similar instruments have been found by scholars and researchers for example in Ghana and Nigeria. While in the first case they are there referred to as *sabanni* and played in occasion of funerals, in the second case such instruments are called *sambani*, a Hausa term that derives from the expression *ba-sambani*, meaning "a slave of the Arab traders".[218] Indeed, the sound of the qraqeb is said to reproduce and remind the sound of the chains with which African slaves were bound while crossing the Sahara.[219] It is probably that from this sound derives too the onomatopoeic name of such instrument.[220] Moreover, similarly to the belief on the communicative ability of the guimbri, the fire used to craft such instruments and the resulting iron qraqeb are considered able to attract the jnun. As a result, those too are wetted with sacrificial blood during the lila, in order to feed the spirits.[221]

Finally, the drum, called tbel in Darija, is occasionally used by the Gnawa M'allemin. However, such instrument is not used during the celebration of the lila, but it is played by the M'allem only during the procession toward to and back from the place in which the ritual will take place, with the purpose to reach the place and inform, call and gather interested people.[222] Talking about such instrument, Youness explained "*the qraqeb were the chains and the walls were the tbel*". Only later on, when the slaves had been freed, the instruments has been craft and developed to reach the nowadays shape. Today, the tbel is played with wooden chopsticks and it is decorated in different ways on its body.[223]

According to the narrations of the M'allemin that I had the occasion to meet, Gnawa music was or brought from Africa or developed by the slaves once in

[217] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 113.
[218] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 130.
[219] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 87.
[220] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., 203.
[221] Ibid., p. 114.
[222] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 132, 136.
[223] Ibid., p. 139.

Morocco, in order to denounce their situation and find some comfort through it. The version that is available today, however, is not entirely the same of the past. Indeed, over the time, some parts of the lyrics have been changed. This appears evident by the presence of modern terms in them[224], especially from the language used. The majority of the lyrics, indeed, have been translated into Arabic or Darija, in order to make them more comprehensible and accessible to the public and the new members of the group. Some words in Tamazigh are present, too, in the troha.[225] Such phenomenon has been stressed by almost all the M'allemin, explaining to me that, in Morocco, the lyrics and the music had been clarified, not, however, by the slaves themselves, but by the local Moroccans, who little by little started to be attracted by such music. As M'allem Abdellah said "*Moroccans have developed it. The M'allemin before us made it detailed and intelligible*". Despite this, however, some words and expressions in the original versions have been preserved, probably for the impossibility to understand and translate their meaning. Frequently, in fact, M'allem Akram explained how former and old M'allemin tried to keep their religious and musical knowledge, a family cultural patrimony, secret from the outsiders, as a niche thing about which, thus, only Gnawi could be the specialists.[226] With the spread of Gnawi men and the creation of their family, often result of intermix with the local population, though, always more Moroccans entered the field. Such words, thus, have remained and can be still heard today in their musical performances, even if not understood neither by the spectators, neither by the players.[227] In particular, the predominance of such foreign terms is especially true for the songs dedicated to the black spirits.[228] Usually, the origins themselves of such words are not known, so that they are simply classified as

[224] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 257.
[225] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 150.
[226] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 148.
[227] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 125.
[228] Ibid., pp. 137-138.

"Sudani"[229], despite, according to some scholars' studies and to the oral tradition, such expressions are likely to be influences of Bambara, Songhai, Hausa and other related languages.[230]

Such origins are indeed referred to even directly in the lyrics themselves. The Gnawa music too, indeed, gives voice and eternity to the ex-slaves and their descendants' shared roots and identity. Such memories are preserved in the troha performed, disseminated among the prayers and the invocations to God, the Prophet and His family and the several jnun, that cover the majority of the lyrics.[231] Listening to them, several references can be found about the experienced displacement and exile, the nostalgia for the homeland and the sufferings and traumas due to both the forced departure from their land and family, as for the as well recalled terrible conditions of the past slavery[232].

Despite the impossibility to find some written lyrics and the reluctance of the M'allemin to recite entirely the troha, during our conversations on such topics, some of them offered, though, few examples. Soufiane recalled the tarh *Bambara*, of which a verse sings "*they brought us and they sold us and they divided us and our children*". M'allem Abdellah referred instead to the tarh *Bongouro*, in the middle of which it is sung "*they brought us from the Sudan, passing by Guinea and separated us from our loved ones and they separated us from our brothers and sisters*" (*jabuna min sudan, dawzona 3la guinia, farqona 3la hbabna, farqona 'ala khotna*). Equally, the tarh dedicated to *Hammu* recites:

may God have mercy on him
oh they brought us

[229] Ibid., p. 131; Ziad Bentahar, *The Visibility of African Identity in Moroccan Music: From Gnawa to Ghiwane and Back*, "Wasafiri", 25, no. 1(2010), p. 43.
[230] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), pp. 79, 85.
[231] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 255-257; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 218.
[232] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 138; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 289-291.

oh they brought us
they brought us from the Sudan
[…]
they brought us in bags
[…]

Eventually, some references can also be found in the tarh called *Sandiya*:
look what I have been through, oh my lord, my master,
alienation burns me like fire, oh my lord, my protector
it took the beloved one from me, oh Sandiya,
the pleasure of the parents right? oh Sandiya,
gnawiya servant, oh my dear lord,
work for your old man (sheikhk) with purity and good intention, oh my Lord

As, moreover, the tarh dedicated to Lalla Mira says:
They brought us, and by God, they brought us
They brought us from the Sudanese market, the Gnawa
They brought us, and they sold us

References to people to which they belonged to are equally frequent.[233] Similarly, allusions to the city of Timbuktu are often present. Such references recall the al-Mansur historical conquest and the consequent wages of kidnappings and enslavements of the local people by the Arab-Muslims, as well as the related debate on the Muslim faith of the enslaved and thus the inappropriateness of those events.[234] Moreover, the songs do also recall the difficulties encountered by slaves once arrived in Morocco, in their new everyday lives.[235]

[233] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 125; David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 91.
[234] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 105-106.
[235] Ibid., p. 111.

Together with the traces still present in the lyrics of the texts, however, the African origins of such music is evident from several other sides. Starting from the rhythm itself, different from those of Moroccan and Arab influences[236], the call-and-response structure of the troha, accompanied by the musical instruments and the players' coloured look, both adorned with shells, as well as the style of the dances reveal too such roots.[237] The same name "Sons of Bambara" or "children of Bambara" or the designation as "slaves", with which the players used to call themselves, as underlined by M'allem Akram, keep alive the history of Gnawa and the connection to the undefined Sudani original land.[238] Even the dance of the qraqeb-players, that takes place in the entertainment moment of the lila, contributes in the maintenance of the memory of the past. The fraja, indeed, during some songs, includes the mimics of hunters' gestures, while hunting or shooting, in the memory of the powerful life and activities of the ancient populations from which Gnawa should descent.[239] Similarly, the use of music as the human way to communicate with spirits and with other men is also typical of such areas.[240]

On the other hand, once again, these elements overlap with and express the influence played also by Sufism on Gnawa culture. Indeed, the call-and-response genre characterises also the Sufi use of music, aimed at getting closer to God.[241] Such music prioritizes the importance of listening and actively listening, meaning both to pay attention to the lyrics and the players and to be emotionally involved. Thus, this is shown in the Gnawa context by the verbal participation of the spectators of the lila, by the maskun's entrance into the possessed condition and his/her related involvement in the jedba, in the form of a trance-dance.[242] Indeed,

[236] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 197.
[237] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 80.
[238] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 108.
[239] Ibid., pp. 107-111.
[240] Philip D. Schuyler, *Music and Meaning among the Gnawa Religious Brotherhood of Morocco,* "The World of Music", 23, no. 1(1981), p. 5.
[241] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 278.
[242] Kendra Salois, *Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop*, "Anthropological Quarterly", 87, no. 4 (2014), pp. 1022-1023, 1025.

each music is usually linked to specific sets of emotions and behaviours, part of the repertoire shared among its members.[243]

Gnawa music and dance, with all their components, thus, have an important historical value, especially if taken into consideration the few studies and findings existing on such topics.[244] Indeed, its lyrics remain one of the few available sources that testify the past institution of slavery and give access to some information about it.[245] These latter, together with all the languages and the influences mixed in them, reveal the traces of all those that participated into such culture, making possible to reconstruct Gnawa history and interactions[246], both in Morocco and throughout the Sahara Desert. Far from being hermetically separated, an idea until recently supported by scholars, the Northern and Southern shores have indeed been always connected. The religious overlapping previously analysed as well as those evident from the musical and performative level are an indelible prove.[247] As a result, Gnawa music is evidently and consciously a diasporic music[248], product of the encounter between the memories of the past life in the Southern shore of the desert and the consequent new life in the Northern lands above the Sahara. From such interactions, the today Gnawa culture and identity flourished[249].

Music, its imagination and interpretation, has been thus a key component in the construction of the Gnawa identity, being it a narration, commemoration and a performance of the common historical experience.[250] This was evident since the beginning, when it was performed in the streets by the slaves, in order to look for and find some possible beloved or companion of misfortune.[251] About this, according to Kapchan (2007), Gnawa music reflects the Negritude movement use

[243] Philip D. Schuyler, *Music and Meaning among the Gnawa Religious Brotherhood of Morocco*, "*The* World of Music", 23, no. 1(1981), p. 3.
[244] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 217-218; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 273.
[245] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 76.
[246] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 150.
[247] Hélène Tissières and Marjolijn de Jager, *Maghreb: Sub-Saharan Connections*, "Research in African Literatures", 33, no. 3 (2002), pp. 32, 36-44.
[248] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 213.
[249] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 188.
[250] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 292, 294; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 209.
[251] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

of arts to express the own history and tradition as connected to self-pride and authenticity, thus actively and positively differentiating the self from the other local and dominant cultures.[252]

Looking back at the time of its appearance in the Maghreb area, Gnawa music was thus associated to the socio-economic low status of slaves and Africans and, on the other side, to spirits, magic and non-completely orthodox versions of Islam.[253] Despite the colonial efforts of the French to marginalise the Arabs, elevating the Amazigh, Sufi and Gnawa members to the position of authentic natives and promoting thus their culture at the expense of the Arab tradition, with the independence and the exaltation of the Arab identity, the pre-colonial conceptualisation persisted. As a result, on the contrary of other realities, such as the Andalusian music, Gnawa culture has been once again marginalised and relegated to a minority level.[254] Now, however, Gnawa instruments can be even bought in the shops and the meanings to them associated have begun to change in the last decades, influencing also the image and the understanding of the Gnawa members and culture.[255] Following the ancient path, indeed, along the years, Gnawa performances have not just been reserved to religious or healing rituals, but have spread in the streets and in the public places, where Gnawa have been playing in the role of buskers[256], displaying their music in a less precise and schematic way than in the lila.[257] Today, these Gnawa performances continue to exist and have even increased drastically, especially if compared to the religious ones, with Gnawa groups being called to perform in cafés and restaurants in occasions such as weddings and birthdays as well as for private parties, popular or musical

[252] Ibid., pp. 202-203.
[253] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 185; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 218.
[254] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 188-190.
[255] Ibid., pp. 187-188, 101.
[256] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 135; David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 78.
[257] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 77.

celebrations, concerts and festivals.[258] The healing power of Gnawa as well as their music are usually pointed by the M'allemin as the main reasons for which not only this culture has survived but even flourished in the recent decades. Today, thus, Gnawa culture is not only still alive, but it is living his revival, despite changing and adapting to the modern time.

[258] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 147; El Hamel C., 2013, op. cit., p. 286.

Chapter 3: Gnawa on the Stage

Foreigners have always found interesting Gnawa and their music, since the colonial era, when Gnawa already exploited their attention working as buskers.[259] However, such appreciation has recently escalated thanks to the new technologic opportunities, through which their music has been spread internationally.[260] In the last decades, Gnawa, indeed, has reached a larger public[261] and entered the public space, with their music becoming the protagonist of important mass events, mostly aimed at entertainment. Today, indeed, Gnawa music is not performed just in occasion of the lila, but concerts, cafés and festivals host events highly attended by both Moroccans and tourists,[262] where Gnawa M'allemin perform with other Moroccan groups and with international singers from other musical genres.[263]

Gnawa music has entered the popular music industry. As a result of such evolution, entertaining has become the main way to attract larger crowds and fans, that in turn would buy expensive tickets, CDs and so on. Looking for fans, thus, has become now the priority over looking for ritual clients.[264]

3.1. Gnawa Fusion

In the post-independence, the Moroccan state supported musical and cultural expressions of Andalusian and Arab origins and tendencies, at the expenses of the local Amazigh, Sufi and Gnawa culture, in order to strengthen an

[259] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64(2002), p. 78.
[260] Ziad Bentahar, *The Visibility of African Identity in Moroccan Music: From Gnawa to Ghiwane and Back*, Wasafiri, 25, no. 1(2010), p. 43; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 79.
[261] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 120.
[262] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 212; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11, 74.
[263] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 73; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 99.
[264] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11, 74, 77, 98, 105, 112-113, 151, 167.

Arab identity closer to Middle East then to the Southern African regions.[265] Thus, in 1970s, the current cultural influences and popular music were the ones coming from Middle East. However, since the group Nass al Ghiwane in particular, Moroccan musicians tried to invert such tendencies, looking inside the own possibilities. Turning into the Moroccan context, the group Nass al-Ghiwane adopted and elevated at a national level the several existing rural, regional and local musical traditions. Nass al-Ghiwane and similarly the Jil Jilala group, mixed elements from the Gnawa, Amazigh and Sufi culture. In doing so, they introduced for the first time a national popular music genre,[266] which put an end to the previous musical regional fragmentation.[267]

Nass al Ghiwane musicians, though, were not motivated just by cultural interest or personal passion. Indeed, the members of the group were both musicians and political activists that, together with other Islamists and Amazigh activists, were protesting against the last king Hassan II, during his later years of governance, known as "Years of Lead"[268], risking being arrested. With such intent, they used their music as a protest and political tool.[269] In this context, Gnawa had been re-read as a testimony of the black history of slavery and of the African diaspora and as a denounce of the consequent racism. Gnawa music thus started to be seen and adopted as a form of political activism.[270] Indeed, in the development of a Moroccan popular and protest music that would counter the Arab-Andalusian culture with local and youth expressions, the Gnawa culture in particular played an important role. The group Nass el Ghiwane, in fact, adopted the Gnawa

[265] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 188-190, 213.
[266] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 295; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 178; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 71, 81, 83-84, 88, 98.
[267] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 84.
[268] Kendra Salois, *Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop*, "Anthropological Quarterly", 87, no. 4(2014), p. 1031.
[269] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 178.
[270] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 233- 234; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 84.

guimbri[271] and, with the entrance in the band of Abder-Rahman Paco, a Gnawa M'allem coming from Essaouira, the group included in their music even Gnawa lyrics.[272]

Since the moment, thanks to them and other groups, Gnawa became more popular and known.[273] With the entrance of the Gnawa music onto the national stage, the range of its public increased, attracting always more both locals and Westerners, who, visiting Morocco, discovered and exported it.[274] Gnawa, thus, has then spread even internationally, with musicians abroad adopting the guimbri, the Gnawa music and the North African dialects, without though the Moroccans' negative perception of Gnawa, not shared in Europe.[275] Moreover, at the same time, Americans and especially Afro-American artists, because of the general new attention for Africa and its culture in the Occidental world, started wondering about collaborations with Gnawa Moroccan musicians. Indeed, as scholars underline nowadays, they started to see parallelisms between the histories and the racism of the two Atlantic sides. For those singers, such as Randy Weston, Gnawa tradition was the expression of the African heritage and a manifestation of a shared history of sufferings and diaspora.[276] Such foreigner musicians came from different backgrounds, as jazz in the case of Weston[277], Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp, as well as rock, funk, reggae, blues, and so on. Eventually, Gnawa music entered

[271] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 190-191.
[272] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 77; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 178; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 84.
[273] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), pp. 259-260.
[274] Ibid., p. 260; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 120; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 80.
[275] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 192, 210; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 77.
[276] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 21-22, 149, 233-234, 236, 238; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 142.
[277] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., pp. 295-296.

the world music.[278] In this way, clear divisions between traditional and popular music and sacred and secular music have been put into discussion.[279]

Also Gnawa players have found interesting to try new possibilities through collaborations with musicians and other musical genres, both from within the nation and from abroad. Some of them eventually became famous on the national level and even reached the international stages, where they performed with important stars. M'allemin accompanied by their students and players have started to perform in European and American concerts and even go on tours, followed by large crowd of fans.[280] Gnawa masters, with their success, made new others to follow and be inspired by them, influencing even local Gnawa performs, as it happened with Hamid al-Qasri.[281] The latter, indeed, participated in several fusion projects with foreigner singers coming mostly from jazz background, turning out to be one of the most famous contemporary Gnawa M'allem. In his career, Hamid al-Qasri even worked for the palace and today his performance are transmitted by television and media and his music is sold in cassette tapes in which Gnawa music is performed in several regional versions. Differently from the street or cafés performances, indeed, his music uses different technological supports and tools,

[278] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 147; Nadia Kiwan, *Moroccan Multiplicities: Performing Transnationalism and Alternative Nationalism in the Contemporary Urban Music Scene*, "Cahiers d'Études Africaines", 54, no. 216(2014), p. 980; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 205; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 190; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 85.

[279] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 148; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 2, 78, 80, 82, 90-91, 96-98.

[280] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 148; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 73; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 234-235; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 158; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 99.

[281] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 73; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 56.

such as amplifier and studio recordings, like Western stars.[282] In fact, new M'allemin along the last decades have got access to microphones, studios, technologies, CDs, MP3s and social media to modify and spread their music nationally and internationally.[283] Such progress shows how Gnawa musicians are going through a process of professionalization[284], in which answering the new requests of the public plays always a more important role.[285]

M'allemin's incorporations from different international and regional genres and traditions, including local religious or secular groups, such as Sufi, 'Issawa or Hamadsha[286], answer indeed to the desire to widen the public.[287] The resulting Gnawa fusion is in the different situations shaped by the M'allem own taste and by that of his spectators.[288] On the other hand, though, with the success of the Gnawa music market, the competition among its musicians has increased[289], leading to the specialisation of some of them on certain repertoire or to the exaltation of specific attitude and tendencies, in order to make them distinctive features. Others strive to appease and follow the public tastes or, on the contrary, avoid external non-traditional influences in order to appear more authentic.

[282] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11-12, 56, 62, 98-100, 117.
[283] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 77; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 73, 88, 98, 156.
[284] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 259; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 74, 83, 161.
[285] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11, 74, 97, 105, 112-113, 151, 167.
[286] Ibid., pp. 78, 98.
[287] Ibid., pp. 83, 88; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 296.
[288] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 104; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 2, 74, 97, 120.
[289] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 70; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 2.

Finally, instead, some M'allemin lower the price requested for the own performances.[290]

With this new goal in mind, the same figure of the M'allem, his role and his education have changed. Thanks to the use of phones, internet and social media, new generation M'allemin can sell and share their album and performance in their YouTube, Spotify, Facebook or Instagram pages. If before becoming a M'allem was a long and difficult path, that implied several travelling, steps and examinations to pass, now, on the other hand, musicians interested in becoming M'allem can buy or make their instruments and use CDs and online performances of their favourite stars to learn and improve. The aim is to study selected number of troha, the popular ones, from famous masters with the hope to reach their same success and replicate the same economic and social gain.[291] In this way, thus, thanks to the shorter and autonomous apprenticeship, one most evident consequence is the opening of the access to such culture to always more younger M'allemin, often not black-skinned or with no slave ancestry, with thus the Gnawa identity becoming less exclusive.[292]

Indeed, with the alteration of the figure and of the role of the M'allem, the entire Gnawa culture has been affected. New interpretations of the guimbri, formerly almost a taboo, while now a symbol of power and success[293], and of the Gnawa tradition and sacred music have been brought by younger M'allemin.[294] New meanings and understandings of the Gnawa culture are the product of the

[290] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 8, 97, 109, 149, 163.
[291] Ibid., pp. 12, 22, 56, 62-64, 68-70, 73, 88, 101, 163-164-167; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 201.
[292] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), pp. 259-260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 295; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1 (2017), p. 95; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 94, 97, 120, 165, 171, 176, 215; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 59.
[293] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 187, 191-192, 221.
[294] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 295; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 239; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 187-188, 201, 220-221; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 9, 43, 90-91, 164.

need to attract always more tourists, of the proliferation of guimbri and Gnawa instruments in the market[295] and of Gnawa music entering new arenas. Indeed, as a result of the use of the new technologies and of the Gnawa music fusion and success, M'allemin now detach in different degree the religious value from their music, so to make it enter new contexts and larger range of public.[296] In fact, at the same time, fusion music has originally found the support and the appreciation of those coming from the marginal social classes, thus confirming the idea of Gnawa as a minority subculture, but, on the other hand, it has brought such music on the stage, arising it and making it heard by hundreds of spectators, until the moment used to Middle East music. In this way, Gnawa music has entered the dominant Moroccan culture and the negative perception, to it before associated, has started to fall apart.[297]

However, once produced and shared through the media, M'allemin do not have any more full control on their music, that thus can be equally used and proposed in new, different contexts and ways, far from the Gnawa ones.[298] Indeed, Gnawa music and religiosity are now performed, debated and analysed internationally, influencing and shaping also local interpretations.[299] Eventually, in fact, even the religious ritual and their understanding has been shaped.[300]

In this regard, considering the appreciation of the Gnawa music nationally and internationally, musical success has become more important than the participation in religious events. As a result, the musical preparation becomes more important and usually the main or almost only focus of attention of the younger

[295] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 187, 201, 220-221; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 2.
[296] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 141, 150; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 81.
[297] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 178, 183; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 74, 77-78.
[298] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 2, 79.
[299] Ibid., pp. 80, 165.
[300] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 131, 146, 234-235; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 117, 161.

M'allemin.[301] New M'allemin often sacrifice the participation in lilat and religious performances, despite generally no one can afford to avoid them completely, in order to maintain the credibility of their role and a religious legitimisation, which remain a crucial element of a M'allem identity even today.[302] As a result, new influences and tendencies have entered also the rituals, brought from the stage by such new younger M'allemin, who have reduced but not completely abandoned religious events.[303] Indeed, as underlined by the M'allemin in our conversations, those songs more appreciate by fans become those more requested and participated even in the lila. Moreover, as the lila is increasingly organised in accordance with the clients requests, some spirits happen to not be evoked anymore, while fusion elements taken from external musical and religious traditions or songs are sometimes added to the traditional Gnawa repertoire, with also the introduction of new spirits that belong to other Moroccan brotherhoods. Finally, lila rituals have become shorter and the traditional repertoire order have been altered. Such changes testify how guests increasingly perceive the ritual too as an entertainment moment.[304] Moreover, the increasing presence of tourists and reporters in sacred places such as the shrines further demonstrate how the commercialisation of the Gnawa culture eventually included also the religious aspects.[305]

As a result, in order to keep the own clients and attract new ones, M'allemin now have to be able to satisfy simultaneously both the secular and the spiritual needs of their public.[306] Responding to such tastes, in fact, increase also the

[301] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 141; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 69, 71, 74.
[302] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 9, 62, 83.
[303] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 148; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 149, 152.
[304] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 131, 146, 234-235; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 2, 9, 97-99, 109, 149, 161, 167.
[305] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 146; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 157-159; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 97, 150.
[306] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 97-98, 167-168.

probability of trancing among the public of both secular and religious events.[307] Indeed, despite the absence of the incenses, candles and required food, even performances in festival or on television can sometime cause the possession of the spectators.[308] This is so because, notwithstanding the secular spectacularisation of what the traditional Gnawa ritual worship, the two level are not exclusive.[309]

From another point of you, besides, the musical success of Gnawa music and its fusion is also a testimony of a changing national policy. Up to recent years, cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities that compose the Moroccan population had been hide, devalued and considered negatively. The suspiciousness toward such people was due to several factors. In general, minorities were associated to the colonial power and their French strategic use against the Arabs.[310] Concerning Gnawa, more specifically, the main reasons were their profession of an ambiguous Islam, their backwardness and their African roots.[311] In such past perception, Gnawa were rather a source of shame for the nation, as pagan, primitive and generally from poor and marginalised sections of the population. This idea, however, quickly vanished in the last decades of the twentieth century in response to the new European approach toward Morocco, not anymore a colonial goal but rather an exotic place ideal for tourism. As it eventually was the case for Gnawa, ethnic and linguistic minorities started thus to be included in and celebrated as part of the national heritage, in order to economically exploit such Westerner

[307] Ibid., p. 161.
[308] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 500; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 235; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 12, 82, 111.
[309] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), pp. 78, 106; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 147-148; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 85, 90-91, 167-168.
[310] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 150; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 188.
[311] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1 (2017), p. 78; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 27; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 95, 188.

interest.[312] "*Now Gnawa became more about heritage of our country*" as said by Soufiane.

The new open and positive position of the state toward Gnawa in particular, but also youth and musical and cultural expressions in general, though, is also due to recent political events. Among these, the end of the reign of the King Hassan II and the terroristic attacks that hit the United States on the 11th September 2001 and Morocco in 2003 played a great influence on the Moroccan internal and external political strategies. Since those moments, in fact, the Middle East and the Arabic world, until then main influencers of the internal economy, culture and policy, have become symbols of terrorism and extremism, from which it was important to discern the national image under the international gaze. As a result, thus, the state re-valued the moderate role and the pacifist function of Sufi brotherhoods[313], as well as the connection with the South and such pluralist internal expressions not anymore seen as threats for the unity and the morality of the nation. The cultural diversity was not going to weak the society but rather could have been an important way to counteract the internal spread of religious fundamentalism. Multiplicity, in this way, was not to be negated but celebrated, because the staging of the national different components would have increase the encounters and the debate, reduce the internal conflicts and resentments and spread an image of Morocco as an authentic, inclusive and tolerant nation, eventually favouring the tourism too.[314]

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[312]John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1 (2017), p. 78; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 234; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 162, 178; Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3 (2000), pp. 494-495,498.

[313] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), pp. 472, 477, 480; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 150.

[314] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), pp. 467, 471-473, 477, 480-481; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 234; Nadia Kiwan, *Moroccan Multiplicities: Performing Transnationalism and Alternative Nationalism in the Contemporary Urban Music Scene*, "Cahiers d'Études Africaines", 54, no. 216(2014), pp. 982-984; Kendra Salois, *Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop*, "Anthropological Quarterly", 87, no. 4(2014), p. 1018; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 70, 72; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 162, 164, 178-179, 183-184, 190-192, 200-201; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11, 23, 43, 59, 83, 145, 150, 152.

Equally, Moroccans abroad, on the other hand, adopt Gnawa music to give voice to and vent their feelings of marginalisation, otherness and distance from home, while, a Gnawa identity become also a way to distance the self from extremist Islam and Middle East.[315]

If the Africans roots have revealed crucial for Gnawa entering the international stage[316], Gnawi though, even aware of the origins of the culture, do consider themselves Moroccans by now, with no intention to, one day, come back in the own fathers' homelands. Exactly this approach allow the government to be able to integrate them in the national identity and national stage, taking advantages from the international interest for them.[317] Thus, despite Gnawi have not been protagonists of any social or political movements asking for recognitions, for compensations or for better treatments and, thus, despite their persistent marginality, they have eventually got their legitimation.[318]

The different minorities could have been presented and sold as original native national components through moussems, concerts and festivals. Putting on the stage the musical and cultural specificities of the nation, festivals particularly have turned out to be the perfect tool to attract and match the European and foreign interest for the sacred and the exotic. Moreover, they could be used to stage and spread specific images and interpretations of the Moroccan culture, which could serve strategically the political and economic aim of the nation.[319] As a result, the

[315] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 210-211, 213, 221.
[316] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 147; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 11.
[317] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 258.
[318] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64(2002), p. 95; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2 (2008), p. 255.
[319] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 471; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 70, 72; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 162; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 152; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 234; El Maarouf Moulay Driss, *World Cultural Nomadictates - Les « Nomadictâtes » Culturels et Mondialisés: An Inquiry into the Trans-Local Dynamics of Music Festivals in Morocco*, "Études Caribéennes", no. 22 (2012), pp. 147, 150, 152.

recognition of the Gnawa culture has been further materialised with the introduction and extension of the artist card to its members, required to be provided to the police in case of streets performances and to get access to the public events.[320] Indeed, since the moment, the king and state have supported the proliferation of the music events and cultural festivals, self-patronizing or encouraging private association in this direction.[321] Among these, in 1994, with the intention of facing the recent political instability in the Gulf and favouring cultural interaction, the "Fes Festival of World Sacred Music" was founded by Faouzi Skali, a Moroccan Sufi anthropologist. Such festival celebrates the sacred music of different religions, such us Judaism, Christianity and Islam, despite a particular attention is given to Sufism and others spiritual expressions have recently been added.[322] Subsequently, in 1999 already the previous king Hassan II visited France in order to inaugurate the celebration and performance of Moroccan culture in the European nation with several public events.[323] Finally, 1999 the "Boulevard des jeunes musiciens festival"[324] and the Essaouira festival have been inaugurated as well as, in 2018, the festival "Mama Africa" was organised in Merzouga.[325]

3.2. Cafés and Gnawa Music Events

"*Working in the cafés in the New City started recently, but working in the cafés started earlier in the old medina. Cafés did not used to do entertaining events*

[320] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 150.
[321] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 70, 77; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 83; Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 471; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 164.
[322] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 467-469, 472-474, 477, 480.
[323] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 151.
[324] Said Graiouid and Taieb Belghazi, *Cultural Production and Cultural Patronage in Morocco: The State, the Islamists, and the Field of Culture*, "Journal of African Cultural Studies", 25, no. 3(2013), pp. 261–274; Nadia Kiwan, *Moroccan Multiplicities: Performing Transnationalism and Alternative Nationalism in the Contemporary Urban Music Scene*, "Cahiers d'Études Africaines", 54, no. 216(2014), pp. 975–997; Kendra Salois, *Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop*, "Anthropological Quarterly", 87, no. 4(2014), pp. 1017–1048.
[325] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

before that, then it spread to other cafés" M'allem Hamza explained me once. Indeed, walking in the medina of the different Moroccan cities, several cafés used to host Gnawa in the early evening, as well as riads. Often, however, it is also possible to hear single or small groups of Gnawa playing in the hotels, streets, parks and other public places of the New City. Here, the dozens of cafés and restaurants that line the streets call Gnawa groups, even once a week, for periodic night performances, occasional weddings or birthday parties.[326] Differently from the possession rituals, where the news is spread by word of mouth, such events are publicised through leaflets on the walls and, especially, via social by each group and the owners of the places, so to reach always more people. The fans and the groups eventually share photos and videos of the events on their Instagram pages, with appreciations from the formers and acknowledgments from the latter.[327]

After having attended several of these events, mostly in Fes, I can say that a similar performance usually lasts around two or three hours, more in the cases of multiple-group event. The players are set in a stage arranged for them in a spot where everybody can hear and see. The qraqeb players, along the songs, engage in the fraja acrobatic dance, jumping and turning while keeping playing. Despite a different number of players can be involved, they are usually from two to five or six. In the events I attended, the fraja generally took one by one, or sometimes a couple of players, even though not all of them do always participate in it, depending on their level of preparation and education.[328] Those who do not dance continue playing the qraqeb, accompanying the M'allem and his guimbri. After the performance, the player walks among the public, while still playing, giving the

[326] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64(2002), p. 78; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), p. 147; Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 472; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 212; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 98, 201; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 2, 163.

[327] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 166.

[328] Ibid., p. 59.

change to the spectators to show their appreciations with money donations, collected by the player in a hat or put directly on his pockets or stuck in his clothes by the spectators. Eventually, thus, the talent of the player will be evident from the amount of money with which he comes back to the group on the stage, ready for the following song.

"*It is just for fun and also to earn money for the family and children*" explained Soufiane. Maintaining and adapting the past role of buskers[329], in the present days too Gnawa keep performing also in order to economically sustain themselves and the own families. Indeed, such contexts are not intended for the evocation of the spirits and the celebration of the lila. In cafés, all the items requested in the religious ritual are absent. There are no coloured clothes, nor incenses or food, there is no sacrifice or Muqaddema. Just the fraja, being it at entertainment moment, is still performed.[330] In such events, only the M'allem with the other players participate. The performance in the cafés avoids all the sacred and more serious elements, reducing itself to a spectacular and fun moment. Thus, differently from a sacred context, the café does not impose rules such as the prohibition to talk, drink or smoke. The "*lila is a serious thing, there is no laughs, but in the bar it is different, we can take a coffee, talk and everything*" added Soufiane. Similarly, M'allem Amine said: "*the place of a lila is like a mosque, there must be respect, and if you want to smoke you have to leave the place, unlike cafés or shisha cafés,* [there] *they are just having fun*". Sometimes it is even possible to see women participate in the musical group.[331] Indeed M'allem Akram noted: "[Now] *you find a girl playing the guinbri, what else worse than that, she should not play it. It is forbidden for a woman*". Despite the presence of women is still rare, especially in the role of M'allema (f.), their new appearance testify the less serious and strict atmosphere of such events, too.

[329] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64(2002), p. 78.
[330] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 212.
[331] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 217-220; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 131.

However, such performances, so popular today, spread with initial discomfort considering the previous belief that, if not sung in its sacred context, such music could actually cause the anger of the spirits. Because of this, discourses about the intention (*niya*) and the necessity to avoid specific troha, despite not always respected, spread. For example, M'allem Amine stressed the fact that not all the troha usually played in the lila should be performed in such not-sacred places. "*We can play Bambara because they are just for fun, they just warm up and you do not include the incense, they are used for training only*".

Concerning the music, the protagonists here are the guimbri, always played by the M'allem, and the qraqeb, played by the chorus. However, sometimes, also the tbel is brought and used especially about the end of the performance, again played by the M'allem, just for few songs. Moreover, such events are sometimes attended by groups whose members come from both Gnawa and 'Issawa culture and that, thus, happen to mix the repertoire and the kind of music of the two. Indeed, differently from the lila, in the cafés there is not a precise and predefined sequence to follow.[332] It often happened to me to listen to troha such as Lalla Mira, Lalla Amina, lalla Malika, Sidi Mimoun, Sidi Musa and so on. Despite such troha are not different, concerning the lyrics, from those played during the night ritual, and neither are the musical instruments, what changes is their perception. Here, the performance is not thought heal, but to entertain the public[333], catch up their attention and thus respect their taste. Indeed Soufiane told me "[between the events in the cafés and the lila] *it is the same work, but there are big differences*". "*In cafés we play troha that are popular and engage the audience. In the lila, the tarh follows a structure and even if the audience want a specific tarh, they should wait till its turn arrives*" specified M'allem Hamza. As a result, in these public events, not the entire mhalla are performed. The group plays just some troha dedicated to that mluk and the song is not always played from the beginning to the end, while,

[332] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), pp. 77-78, 83-85, 103-106.
[333] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 146; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 44.

in the case in which the public responds positively to one, singing and participating in the call-and-response kind of music, the troha can be sang further and repeated. "*We call them echoing tarh*" the M'allem added. In cafés, thus, the group usually performs those songs more known and appreciated, given that same groups often play in same places, thus eventually getting to know the own public. As M'allem Mouhcine said, "*in a lila you have to follow an order, in a café it is random, whatever you like or what people like*".

The reasons that brings people to participate in such events are different. Several M'allemin underlined the appreciation for the music, as one of the main factors that have kept this culture alive, attracting always more spectators.[334] Indeed, at least in my experience, the public is, like for the lila, mostly composed by women, but it is also frequent to see entire family participate, with also children or grandparents. This is true for Moroccans, but also for tourists. In fact, as underlined by M'allem Akram "*Westerners love it, in hotels*". However, on the other hand, looking at Moroccans, the M'allemin also explained how people are interested in such music because it speaks to those who are suffering. Narrating the pain of the slaves and their prays to God, the Prophet and the spirits, this music is able to reach people who find themselves in difficult moments. "*If a Westerner comes, he/she would only go with the rhythm, but Moroccans*" explained M'allem Yousuf "*many come and listen to Gnawa so as to get rid of their depression. They stand and dance, until they feel better. Its lyrics touch people deeply because they are about themes of parents, and death…even in cafés intended for entertainment, if someone is really in great sorrow, when they listen to the music, they start crying*". "*It helps you to go out from your sadness*" similarly said Soufiane. Also M'allem Mouhcine underlined such aspect: "*most people who go to taGnawit are the one suffering, like orphans or those who don't have parents*" or even those who find themselves in marginalised or poor conditions and difficult social or political

[334] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 205.

situations. Talking about suffering, Gnawa music speaks to all those who suffer, for a reason or another.[335]

Because of this, however, despite the entertaining nature of the performance, it happens to see some women from the public enter into trance[336]. In such moments, like in the occasion of possession during the lila described by the M'allemin, the woman, would start moving and shaking her head. Depending on the intense and violence of the trance, she could also stand up, starting moving all her body, until, eventually, at the end of the tarh, falling back, sit in her chair or on the floor. However, Soufiane dismissed such episodes. "*The mulk do not participate* [in cafés] *because there is no incense. It is like adrenaline for the* girl [who nevertheless seem to enter into trance] *and maybe there is a lover jnin inside her*" he said, recalling the frequent differentiation among those who adhere to the Gnawa culture just for the love of the music and those that are real, authentic members.

3.3. The Essaouira Festival

Musical events were not new in Morocco. Indeed, spiritual and religious music are well-rooted in the Moroccan society and the origins of the contemporary touristic and commercialised festivals can be linked to the moussems, sort of religious sanctuaries where, still today, people gather in order to honour a saint through religious rituals during which such music is performed.[337] Since the second half of the twentieth century, this kind of religious festival have though been overcome by secular celebrations. The product of such non-religious festival are the today sacred music festival, meaning secular festival about, though, mystical and possession types of music proposed for economic consumption and for the related new tourism of the sacred.[338] Among such festivals, it should be

[335] Cynthia J. Becker, op. cit, 2020, pp. 98, 120-121.
[336] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 235.
[337] Kendra Salois, *Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop*, "Anthropological Quarterly", 87, no. 4 (2014), p. 1023.
[338] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), pp. 467-468, 470-471; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage*

reminded the Gnawa Festival of Essaouira, one of the most important[339], which brings in town every years hundreds of fans and more tourists than any other celebration in Morocco. The number of foreign among the tourists increases every year, revealing the high appreciation of the Gnawa music as world music.[340] Moreover, however, also Moroccans who live and work abroad but come back regularly every summer to join their families or Moroccans from within the nation, but who live in other cities, attend too in high number such event.[341]

The attention that Gnawa music got in the twentieth century and the adaptations and transformations it has gone through in such last decades have revealed fundamental in the translation of such music in a cultural product. Only this gradual evolvement allowed to reach such biggest celebration of the Gnawa culture. Firstly organised on a small scale between 1997 and 1998 by the King's advisor André Azoulay and the Essaouira-Modagor association, its success made the festival into the hand of the event-management company A3 Group the year after. The company translated it in a huge celebration, under the name of "Festival d'Essaouira Gnaoua Musiques du Monde", or in English "The Gnawa and World Music Festival", organised every June since 1999, when it took place on the 24th-27th.[342] Since the moment, the city has become synonymous with the festival and the Gnawa culture[343], as it is evident from the conversations with Moroccans and

Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 70, 77; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 164.

[339] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 150-151.

[340] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 191.

[341] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), p. 125; Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 497; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 72-73, 75, 77.

[342] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), pp. 125, 142, 144; Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 493; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 70-71, 85; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 162, 164, 190.

[343] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 84.

as it is further confirmed by the murals disseminated in the streets of its medina, representing Gnawa in their performances, almost substituting the old colonial postcards and photography.[344]

Despite today Gnawa events are available almost everywhere in Morocco, the cities in which the culture is mostly affirmed are those in which historically Gnawi have been more present because of their past, such as Marrakesh, Fes-Meknes, the desert and, especially, Essaouira.[345] The choice of the city, in fact, was not casual, but strictly linked to the role Essaouira played both in the trans-Sahara slave trade and in the history of slavery in Morocco, as well as in the historical relations between Morocco and the European powers. Indeed, M'allem Amine explained: "*the festival was done in Essaoura because it was the place where the slaves came the first time. Then they were spread to other places in Morocco, some were taken to Tangier, other to Fes, other to Moulay Ismail in Meknes, but Essaouira was the source*". Before the beginning of the colonial rule, for a short time, the city was controlled by the Portuguese, who momentarily changed its name in Mogador and whose intentions were to get direct access on the trans-Saharan trade. Indeed, several slaves had been imported from here by both Portuguese and Moroccan Sultans, such as al-Mansur. Under the reign of the Sultan Ismail too, several others had been brought in here, at the point that the quartier of the city in which their barracks were set started to be called al-Bawakhir, the plural of Bukhari, the label with which, as said, the royal black army was called. Later on, the city was renovated by French architects at the end of the eighteenth century, when Europeans increased always more their presence in the coastal towns, among which Essaouira. In this way, the city used to be also the main access to the international market for Moroccans who lived in the closed city of Marrakesh.[346]

[344] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 164.
[345] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64(2002), pp. 77-78.
[346] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 69, 80-83, 85.

Because of its importance and centrality in the slave history, in the medina of Essaouira it was also built, in a Sufi typical structure, the only one zawiya proper of Gnawa, the zawiya of Sidna Bilal, as suggested by the name dedicated to Sidi Bilal. Its construction dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century under the concession of the Ait El Moukh family, grate for the blacks' healing work. Since then, the place has been used by Gnawa for their lilat, so that its rooms have been reserved for the night ritual organised for tourists during the festival, too.[347] Indeed, during the three days of the festival, night reproductions of the lila, in shorter version but with quite all the typical elements, are made accessible to the tourists who pay for the ticket.[348]

However, the activities of the days of the festival are not limited to such tourist-opened rituals, but offer a full program, presented through billboards, posters and leaflets. Here, maps of the city, timetables and the locations of each activity are reported. Among these, art galleries[349] and expositions, as well as conferences and academic meetings occupy the mornings and the early afternoons.[350] The scholars, their research studies and the main themes debated by them in each encounter are briefly summarized in the flyers and booklets in French, English and Arabic, as well as live translation are made accessible for those who choose to participate.

Despite the festival is dedicated and is a celebration of the Gnawa culture, such round tables do not exclusively concern Gnawa or gather experts of this unique field, but rather matters of tolerance, inclusion, diversity and hybridity are

[347] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 164-166.
[348] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), p. 126; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 152; Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), pp. 493-497, 502; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 72.
[349] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), p. 144.
[350] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), pp. 493-495.

crucial themes debated during the festival.[351] This year, the debates and the conferences I could myself attend focused on topics such as policies about migration; the spread of racism and violence against ethnic minorities in line with the increasing of far right populist parties in Europe; the Schengen and visa regulation of mobility; how the experience of migration and the idea of distance has changed because of recent technologies and the role of biometric at the frontiers. After these, in the afternoon meetings, however, the focus moved more strictly onto Gnawa. Scholars shared their studies and their experiences with the M'allemin during their field research. In the conference of Saturday afternoon, those invited were from Morocco, France, United States and even Japan. Together with them, however, a group of M'allemin coming from Marrakesh, Safi, Rabat, Meknes and Casablanca occupied half of the room. They opened the discussion with a group musical performance, but they further remained to share their inside views and experiences in the debate.

Different aspects emerged from such conversations. The M'allemin thanked the founders and organisers of the festival for their efforts and for giving them the possibility to gather. Indeed, the festival is an important and unique occasion for several masters to meet, confront and socialise and thus create contacts and opportunities, otherwise impossible given the distance, the work and the daily commitments.[352] Moreover, they also underlined the crucial role of such festival in making them visible, not only in the literal sense, despite though anyway important, but also as a legitimate and official part of the national heritage, that deserve to be studied. In line with the new political position of the state, such conferences, indeed, in which foreign scholars are invited to participate and share their researches on the topic, help in the process of formalisation and legitimation of the Gnawa culture as a national institution worth of recognition and academic attention, contributing in changing the internal social judgement toward such

[351] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 145, 150.
[352] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 73, 91-92.

group.[353] In these conversations, where the positive side of multiculturalism, cultural encounters and hybridity are stressed and underlined, the Gnawa tradition is elected as a good example.

Such attitude is thus further expressed through music. Being internationally known especially for their music, indeed, the majority of the space and of the time is generally directed toward late afternoon and night musical concerts, with the main stage set in the biggest city square, Place Moulay Hassan, while others spread both in other places in the old medina or at the beach, close to it.[354] As for cafés and other public events, here too the M'allemin on the stages have the tendency not to play the entire set of troha, but just a selection of few and not even entirely, and they can even propose modifications of both the lyrics and the rhythm. Indeed, in a context such as the festival, it is the ability to offer good variations and to improvise that reveals the talent of the M'allem.[355] Thus, the concerts leave space for Gnawa more traditional music as well as fusion experimentations, improvisations and collaborations among Moroccan M'allemin and important Jazz, Folk, Samba, Hip Hop and other musical genres singers, coming from the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asian and African countries, such as India, Mali and Senegal, so to stress positively the connection with the South.[356] Despite this less traditional context, it is not that rare to witness trances among the crowd.[357]

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[353] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 495.
[354] Ibid., pp. 493-494, 497; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 72; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 152; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 164.
[355] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), pp. 77-78, 83-85, 103-106.
[356] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), p. 125; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 183; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 110, 152; Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), pp. 497-498; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 72.
[357] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 500; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 146, 235; Christopher Witulski,

Gnawa music, originally sacred music[358], has thus entered the category of popular music[359] and festivals, offering an arena for their exposition, play a crucial role in the in the growth of the touristic sector, now among the most developed of the nation.[360] Exactly, the possibility to re-read and re-interpret the Gnawa culture and music in this way and its adequacy for mass audiences have made possible the introduction of the Essaouira festival and guaranteed its big success, confirmed by the number of fans.[361]

This high concentration of national and international tourists, though, raises some critiques about the festival, particularly concerning the fear of the more conservative sides of the population that it could undermine the religious and social morality of the Moroccan people. In those days, indeed, it is frequent to see young Moroccan unmarried couples, tends on the beach as well as a high consumption of alcohol, cigarettes or even drugs by both foreigners and locals. Moreover, the festival is seen by some people as a potential occasion of Zionist propaganda. This latter preoccupation is probably due to the elevate number of Jews that used to live in the town and for the role played by Andre Azoulay, the Jew king counsellor, who was fundamental for the promotion and foundation of the festival.[362]

Notwithstanding, the festival is supported by the state[363], more than other brotherhoods and cultural traditions, because "*Gnawa could evolve and fit with our time and align with what is traditional and what is modern*" according to Yousuf.

The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 22, 96.

[358] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 468; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 131.

[359] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 191.

[360] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), p. 506; Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 471.

[361] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 75, 77.

[362] Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco*, "American Anthropologist", 110, no. 4(2008), p. 471; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 85; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 179, 191.

[363] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 70.

As a result, Gnawa has become a brand.[364] Along the streets and in the proximity of the concert places, it is possible to see several shops selling Gnawa instruments, as well as posters, t-shirts and canvas bags with drawings and representations of Gnawa musicians and of the festival annual logo.

Moreover, the same artists and musicians always more frequently appear with flashy costumes and headdresses[365], such as dreadlocks, symbol of protest and liberation, as well as calls to the African roots.[366] Such aesthetical expressions, indeed, usually evoke an African style, even in the case of singers of non-African (meaning South-Saharan) origins, because the African element and the element of Blackness have become validating components to sell the own culture, especially in these festive circumstances.[367] For Gnawi, it is a way to exploit the own appearance in order to convey the idea of a major vicinity to Africa and thus of a major exoticism in front of the touristic gaze. Being perceived in this way as more authentic, the singers will be able to attract more fans and increase the own social position and, with that, the own economic gains.[368] In so doing, Gnawa maintain the element of "Otherness" and mysteriousness. Despite the recent changings, Gnawi players remain mostly poor, or nevertheless not rich people, who keeps the reputation of ambiguous and scary persons because of their ability to work the spirits.[369] However, at the same time, being a M'allem has become a profession

[364] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 160.
[365] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60(2011), p. 142.
[366] Nadia Kiwan, *Moroccan Multiplicities: Performing Transnationalism and Alternative Nationalism in the Contemporary Urban Music Scene*, "Cahiers d'Études Africaines", 54, no. 216(2014), p. 980; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), p. 72; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 23; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 152; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 216.
[367] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 158, 183; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 43.
[368] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 138; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 158-159, 179, 183; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 9, 11, 43.
[369] Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 130-131, 142-143, 146-147; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 190; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 11, 22, 59.

that enables to sustain the self and the own family, without the necessity, like in the past, to carry other jobs[370] as well as Gnawi have now entered the national identity and stage, achieving fame in the country and internationally.[371] Thus, Gnawa themselves, together with media and the external actors and experts, are contributing in their own spectacularisation, stereotyping and commercialisation.[372] While the spiritual aspect is what attracts the foreigners, the economic side is increasingly entering the Gnawa religiosity, both the players being respectively fascinated by the element less evident in the own tradition.[373]

However, if Gnawa groups have been taking part in such changes, they have though agreed to demystify their music for the tourists and the staged spectacles, while keeping faith in its spiritual power and healing function once performed in private context, during the lila.[374] Moreover, even if the touristic industry converge the interests and the profits of both the organisers and the M'allemin themselves,[375] Gnawa members have lost control on their own culture and production in favour of external academic, social, political and economic new actors, who are taking advantages from the Gnawa success.[376] This expropriation has not gone unnoticed among the Gnawa members, rising several complains. Denounces of unequal gains and economic exploitations from above have started to increase and denounces of Gnawi exclusion from the process of decision-making spread, as when, without

[370] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, p. 213; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 149.
[371] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Alessandra Turchetti, *Un rituale sincretico e polisemico: la lila degli Gnawa marocchini*, "Antrocom Journal of Anthropology", 11, no. 2(2015), pp. 147-148; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 73, 78; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 234-235.
[372] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, no. 64(2002), pp. 84, 88, 95; John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 95-96; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 143, 150, 177, 233-237; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 160, 164, 183-184, 190, 215.
[373] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 143, 147-150, 237.
[374] Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), p. 260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 295.
[375] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 158.
[376] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3(2000), pp. 506-507.

any consultations, the festival organisers added the label "World Music" in the title of the event, at the expenses of the focus on the Gnawa culture, or when the former Association Dar Gnaoui invited Sufi members to participate in the annual ritual at the Essaouira shrine and privately debate about its possible modifications.[377]

Thus, feelings of ambiguity and perplexity have spread among the Gnawa participants. The festival has translated the M'allemin into famous people, even though not really known or recognised personally by their fans, if not as stereotyped exponents of the Gnawa culture and thus only in the role of M'allem. As a cult around magical objects, Gnawa culture, music and masters have been fetishized.[378] Appearing on the stages and on televisions, Gnawa have become folkloristic icons.[379] Gnawa people become expressions of authenticity under a foreign gaze.[380] At the same time, as a result of the commercialisation of their identity, the new educational path, the changings in the ritual and the increasing participation of younger members with no slaves origins, concepts of taGnawit, authenticity and niya and dichotomies between real Gnawi as opposed to just Gnawa lovers have started to be always more frequent in the Gnawa discourse.[381]

[377] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 164, 171-175.
[378] Ibid., p. 183. Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 143, 146, 150, 203-204, 135, 235-236.
[379] John PR. Schaefer, *Frontstage Backstage: Participatory Music and the Festive Sacred in Essaouira, Morocco*, "Western Folklore", 76, no. 1(2017), pp. 75, 91, 93-96; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 85.
[380] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., p. 131.
[381] Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Chouki El Hamel, *Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco*, "The Journal of African History", 49, no. 2(2008), pp. 259-260; Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit. p. 295; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 141-142, 150; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 164-165; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 9, 22, 62-64, 71, 149, 153, 156.

Chapter 4: Negotiating Gnawa

With the national and international recognition of Gnawa, Gnawa tradition ended up for becoming a brand and a professional occupation.[382] Being a M'allem has increased its value, both economically and socially, and this has attracted new adepts. If historically Gnawa have already included external members, such as Arabs and Amazigh through marriages[383], as well as Haratin, this process further exploded with the institution of the Essaouira Festival. Since then, especially, the Gnawa culture has been able to attract always more people, even among the public. However, differently from the past, such new masters are mostly young people, given the different and, especially, faster, educational path. Sharing their work on social media, attending cafés or restaurants events as well as participating in concerts or festivals, the majority of the M'allemin performing are now in their twenties. In front of such porosity[384] and of the recent commercialisation of Gnawa culture, a matter of displaying authenticity has emerged.[385]

Scholars, indeed, have discussed the effects of the branding of Gnawa culture for tourists and of the fusion experimentations as a result of collaborations and tours. Some of them have stressed the idea of the existence of an original pure Gnawa culture, while others have opposed such interpretation, with the argumentation that, that of Gnawa, as any other culture, it is a culture that since its origins and all along its history has been interacting with external influences, before, during and after the slaves' migration to North Africa. From this debate, concepts of authenticity, diaspora and cultural hybridisation spread in the academia.[386]

Similar matters, though, proliferate also and even more in Gnawi conversations and interactions, appearing both in the form of self-justifications or

[382] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 149, 154.
[383] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 176.
[384] Ibid., pp. 95-98, 120-121, 131.
[385] Ibid., pp. 127, 215.
[386] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), pp. 156-167.

in that of critiques and accusations. M'allemin' debates are the place in which the Gnawa identity is reconstructed.[387] The way of being, enacting and understanding Gnawa identity, tradition and history is changing.[388] Such debates and the M'allemin's personal position and interpretations are staged in and through these events. Rituals and music performances are the materialisation of such questions about authenticity, heritage, history and identity.[389]

The following pages, thus, are dedicated to the personal point of view of my interlocutors, with the limits and the implications imposed by the language barrier and by the specific position of each of them.

Concerning the first matter, in my encounters with my interlocutors, I had never been alone, but a Moroccan colleague of mine, in here called Rashid, helped the conversations. The process of translation was organised in two phases. At first, Rashid was used to shortly translate the main points of the Gnawi's speeches to me and my wonderings and questions to them during our encounters. Later on, though, he proceeded to translate precisely their words, one by one, in the days after the encounters. Indeed, all those Gnawi understood the language problem and agreed on my Moroccan friend presence and help as well as to record the conversations. Despite their prompt agreement on the matter, I did stress to them, all the times, that such records would have remained private and immediately deleted after the translations and that their names would have been changed in my thesis, so to respect their privacy. Thus, the names with which the Gnawi are reported through the chapters are of my own invention.

The language barrier and the translation from Darija to English, where the latter is neither mine nor Ahmed's mother-tongue as well as a complete translation done days after the encounters have certainly caused the missing of some aspects and details. Moreover, the presence of both me as a European girl and of a

[387] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 34.
[388] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 231, 233.
[389] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 144, 148, 153.

Moroccan boy has too obviously impacted the way and the amount of information shared by the Gnawi. However, all of them agreed and seemed positive in front of my interest in the field, and, given the multiplicity of the Gnawi I met, different aspects and dynamics did come out from our conversations.

About my interlocutors, on the other hand, it needs to be pointed out that the M'allemin and the Koyos (a title often used for young Gnawi not yet M'allemin) I met were all men. Despite this is in line with the Gnawa traditional gender-division of roles, where men are M'allemin and women are Muqaddemat, it was not possible for me to get in touch with these latter. Indeed, if the M'allemin have always publically performed their music even in non-sacred contexts, such as in the streets, where they have historically played as buskers[390], the role of the Muqaddema is reserved to spiritual and sacred functions. Thus, even if the masters I met usually concluded our conversations promising to invite me in their next lila, I could never attend one, remaining this a more serious and sacred sphere. So, notwithstanding the existence of lilat organised or opened to tourists nowadays, it though remains mainly a private moment, in which outsiders' presence is not generally well seen, when not in festive circumstances. As previously pointed out, it is possible sometimes to see female in the role of musical masters. This, though, is still a young phenomenon, that has mainly flourished in big, touristic and modern cities, such as Casablanca, rather than in more ancient and conservative ones, as Fes. However, I did attended an event in a café in which a woman was performing. She was not the M'allem of the group, but her role was nevertheless important, given that her face was always in the announces of the group's events and that she used to sit and perform close to the M'allem. I tried to talk with her and arrange a meeting for a tea, but, despite her initial acceptation, we never met and, after few attempts, I decided to avoid insisting. Thus, all the conversations reported in the following pages offer only a male prospective.

[390] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 135; David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, "Journal of Asian and African Studies", no. 64 (2002), p. 78.

Despite all men, the Gnawi I could talk with could offer important insights, given their diverse position on different aspects. If only three of them were grown men, over their fifties, the other seven ones were youths, mainly in their twenties. Some of them recognise the self as "M'allem", other just as players, using generally the title of "Koyo". Another important aspect for this research was their skin-colour. Differently from the three elders, who were all black men, none of the youths I think it was, despite not always that easy to understand the local classification. However, some of them wanted to underline their black origins, explaining how, though, because of past intermarriages between Moroccans and slaves, today, local Moroccans like themselves were not black-skinned anymore. Finally, again, if all the elders came from a Gnawa tradition, just some among the youths did, while others entered the Gnawa culture at different times and under different circumstances.

This said, among the youths, we met M'allem Hamza and Zouhir during one of their performances in a café in one of the main streets of the New City of Fes. We attended some of their events, actually, and little by little we started talking with them and eventually we arranged a coffee together. Similarly, we could spend some time with M'allem Oussama after one of his event in a café, in the old medina, though, this time, known for hosting such kind of groups. Finished his performance, we shared some words and he agreed to better talk the afternoon after, before his following event in the same café. Yousuf and Abdellah are Gnawi respectively from Meknes and Marrakesh. While Meknes is next to Fes, Marrakesh is four-hours far from it by bus. However, he did sometimes come in Fes to work. I fund them while looking for Gnawa events on Instagram and thus we started sharing information via chat. They both said to be extremely busy, but happy though to share their point of view and their experience in the field, so that we organised some online calls. Finally, a colleague of my Moroccan friend gave us the contacts of Soufiane and Youness, two Gnawi with which he himself had worked some years ago and that he said would have been certainly happy to meet us too. Thus, Soufiane invited us to attend one of his performance, in a shisha bar,

while Youness agreed to meet on a Thursday evening, when he would have been free from his job.

Instead, about the three black elders I have above mentioned, they are reported under the name of M'allem Akram, M'allem Amine and Mouhcine. M'allem Akram was mentioned to us by the owner of a place inside the Fes old medina, known for hosting Gnawa groups, in which we went once. He gave us M'allem Akram's phone number, so that we could call and arrange a coffee with him. Similarly, we could meet M'allem Amine thanks to M'allem Hamza, the first M'allem we met, who after one of his performances at a café in which he used to play, gave us his number. Concerning Mouhcine, we walked into him casually, while wondering in the streets of the old medina. He was performing on the step of a wall in front of a shop, we stopped to listen to him and then we waited to see if he had some time for us.

4.1. Young M'allemin

In line with what pointed out in the previous chapter, today younger masters are not necessarily from a Gnawa family, but rather have joint the tradition later on, in different moment of their life and for different reasons. Despite their histories and the ways in which they entered the Gnawa culture are different, though, their opinions and ideas on such "craft", how it should be performed, by who and so on were generally expressed in similar models by those who did not come from a Gnawa family and those who did.

Youness's family was not Gnawa and he explained how, despite he tried the traditional way of learning, he was not satisfied with the masters he met and studied with, so he left. "*You may not study Gnawa directly, but when you love Gnawa you become able to master it*." He told me about how he was working as 'Issawa, when one day happened to be noticed by a foreign artist, who then invited him to go with him on tour. Despite later on he did explain to me the "correct" traditional way to become M'allem, that of Youness appears as a reverse route: "*I worked in festivals and there my journey in Gnawa started, I became obsessed with*

Gnawa". He spent months among Paris, Hong Kong and Taiwan and when he came back to Morocco, he started working in cafés. "*You can find my videos on TikTok*". Youness has been discovered as a musical talent and abandoned 'Issawa for the love for the Gnawa music. Youness is not the only one that went through such process. M'allem Hamza and his friend and colleague Zouhir came too from 'Issawa. According to their narrations, they changed "*for the comfort and relief they found from the music*". Talking in behalf of both of them, M'allem Hamza explained "*We started at first as a love for the Gnawa music, I was first an 'Issawi and I fell in love with the Gnawa rhythm, unlike Gnawa families who inherit that. […] We have learnt some tarhs from famous M'allemin, like Hamid el Kasri, other troha you cannot find them on YouTube, so we had to sit with respected M'allemin and listen to them. You should travel for them, this is the main way to learn, because M'allemin teach it to their disciples*". M'allem Hamza theoretically recognised that, from a traditional prospective, his own was not the right way to be a Gnawi, but, in his case, he further specified "*within only a year during Covid, I mastered it* [the guimbri]."

The recognition offered autonomously by both Youness and M'allem Hamza of the way they should have joined Gnawa, even though they did not, immediately accompanied by a compensation found in their talent, talks about the difficulties and obstacles of entering as outsiders such tradition. Despite the recognition of the importance of the traditional path, such learning method is presented in both the cases as something that, if missing, does not exclude the own legitimation and authority. Moreover, as said by Youness, older M'allemin "*might be a bit arrogant*".

In this regard, when asked about what makes a man become a M'allem, Youness answered that a M'allem "*is when you have a lot of fans and you play the guimbri beautifully and you know how to negotiate with people*." However, he then added "*You should know everything about the lila, so if you do, you are a M'allem*". family connections or blackness were not mentioned among the elements that give legitimation to a Gnawi and when I asked directly he answered

that at the time "*slaves mingled with Moroccan white women, so there are no real authentic ones*". Despite this, however, there are some blacks well known, he stressed, but even several women groups are well known too now. "*Tagnawit is not anymore limited to men, but also to women and women have more audiences, because they just offer entertainment*". To the same question, M'allem Hamza immediately answer that mastering the guimbri is what makes a M'allem. M'allem Hamza underlined "*there are many black people in the Sahara, there everyone is black, so you cannot say who is Gnawa and who is not, otherwise everyone is Gnawa. There are not real Gnawa anymore, there are only some M'allemin who learn few things from previous masters and you cannot say that they are the real M'allemin just because they are black*". Concerning the connection with Blackness, non-black M'allemin, such as Youness and M'allem Hamza dismissed the contemporary adequacy of such criteria.

Some young M'allemin, on the other hand, could trace back their roots into Gnawa and, those who could, stressed the influence between their position and their origins. This, for example, was the case for Soufiane. He told us to be from a Gnawa family, his grandmother used to be a Muqaddema, and his education was done under the guide of a M'allem from Fes, step by step. According to him too, a real Gnawi has not necessarily to be black, because, as in his own case, slaves at the time got married with Moroccans. "*I am Gnawi but I am not black*". However, in order to be a M'allem, he has to grow up in the Gnawa culture, otherwise, "*even if the muhib* (lover) *will learn everything about Gnawa, he will never become M'allem, he will stay muhib or we call them musicians*". Similarly, roots are important for M'allem Oussama. According to him, on the contrary of M'allem Hamza, "*the M'allem does not become M'allem only mastering the guimbri or knowing how to perform the fraja*". M'allem Oussama explained that, being the instruments alive, the M'allem should be able to connect with them. This will be possible only in the case in which the M'allem is spiritual, meaning in contact with the jnun, because grown in a Gnawa family or because touched by them. Also for Abdellah, though, Gnawa is first of all spiritual and this is what differentiate the

real M'allem, namely, according to his words, those who followed the traditional path and eventually got the approval of the eldest, from those that are just "musicians", meaning those who "*do fusion or those who memorize two troha, with which they can get famous on social media. They miss the spiritual side that can heal people*". Despite he did not tell us about his education, he himself did not probably follow the traditional way. Later on, he indeed revealed "*I call myself only a musician, although many M'allemin recognised me*". Moreover, if Abdellah underlined the importance of the music in the initial moment, when he approached Gnawa for the first time, however, to explain the comfort that such music was able to offer him, he stressed the importance of his origins. "*I asked about my origins and I found that I belong to the South of Africa and my ancestors were slaves for the king and this is how I knew I was ought to be Gnawa*", he told us.

A similar history was narrated by M'allem Yousuf. He too wanted to stress his Gnawa heritage. "*We were born in this atmosphere, if your father is a Gnawi, you will be inclined to be one*". However, differently from the others above, M'allem Yousuf expressed how the recent changings are influencing the importance of coming from Gnawa traditions. Even those few M'allemin that have the possibility to affirm their Gnawa roots, indeed, have though to acknowledge that the authority that comes from being part of the tradition is now weakening. M'allem Yousuf, thus, seemed to recognised the limits of such source of legitimation and resorted to media to corroborate his authority. He indeed told us how he was used to go with his father to festivals since when he was four years old. "*He* [his father] *worked in many festivals, like the Essaouira festival and other one*" adding "*you can check them on YouTube. I have documents to prove that I was the first kid to participate in the Essaouira festival*", as well as he then suggested us to check on Google to have more information about the Gnawa history. Moreover, while talking, he explained how, to become a real M'allem, you should go through the long traveling and the exam in front of the other elder masters. Notwithstanding, he also admitted that such path is by now almost impossible. There are left few old M'allemin who can offer their approval and even

if their validation, together with the ability to "*master the craft*", to be a respectful leader and to achieve a complete musical and spiritual education are the elements that make a man a real M'allem, "*the recognition nowadays means performing at a festival. On that specific day, there, you will be the M'allem. The traditional lila, and such stuff does not matter anymore to be recognised*."

All these younger M'allemin testify the transition period of the Gnawa culture that they are living. Those who do not had the chance to have a Gnawa family mainly underlined their connection to and the importance of the music both in their perception of taGnawit and in their path into such tradition. They tried to compensate their lacking roots with a musical talent, thus mostly overlapping the idea of Gnawa with the stage and avoiding mentioning or neglecting the importance of the Blackness or African component while talking about the essence of a M'allem. Here, matters of public, spectators and ability to attract fans are listed firstly. On the opposite, those who had the fortune to inherit the tradition did not miss the opportunity to point that out, to stress the impact of a family background and to minimize those who had not. Such latter younger M'allemin offered interpretations closer to those of the eldest. "*TaGnawit changes from one generation to another. Tagnawit in the old days was not like now, it is changing through generations*" directly said M'allem Oussama, but such changings are reported with a more negative attitude than their non-Gnawa-family peers.

In their understanding of the tradition, new and younger M'allemin could not avoid to mention the spread of Gnawa music, nationally, in cafés and restaurants, and internationally, with references to the role of the Essaouira festival. None of them directly participated, if not M'allem Yousuf, who though did attend it when he was still a child, accompanying his father. Nevertheless, the role that the fusion and the festival had did not pass unnoticed, being exactly these events that made possible the professionalization of this "craft" and thus the widening of the spots among its adepts, eventually taken by them themselves.

Fusion is not something wrong for Youness, because "*Gnawa is illimited*" and as long as the other instruments and incorporations do not alter the Gnawa

rhythm, they can be added, because they just "*give a better look, they do not change the Gnawa essence*". Also for M'allem Hamza and Zouhir the changes incorporated are good. According to M'allem Hamza "*back in the days, if you have seen Gnawa or 'Issawa, you would not like them. There were only normal qraqab and the guimbri*". Now, on the other hands, "*whoever is in love with something can*" pass from Issawa to Gnawa, they said. You can add stuff from other traditions, like they themselves do, and change lyrics, even though, again, "*the rhythm stays the same*" explained Zouhir and "*if you add something, it should rhyme. The rhythm doesn't change*" specified M'allem Hamza "*fusion, it is all Gnawa. As long as the incorporated music goes with the Gnawa rhythm, then it is Gnawa*". Overall, even Abdellah's opinion about fusion was positive. Gnawa has been "*civilised, because they fused it with other music, which is why it became developed and famous*", he said. Soufiane, though, blamed such recent experimentations "*it* [Gnawa] *was known in Morocco and after it became more popular and they started merge it with other instruments, but for me it is not something that they have to do because it has to stay original*".

Independently from their background, the younger Gnawi I met, being them M'allem o Koyo, coming or not from a Gnawa family and performing more or less Gnawa fusion, they seemed though to be on the same page when it came to talk about the Essaouira Festival. Despite this is not the only one in which Gnawa are called to perform and despite we were in Fes, where the other important festival is celebrated too, only the Gnawa Festival of Essaouira was mentioned at least once by all of them and the words shared by them on the subject almost always rephrased the same concepts. All these younger masters and musicians decanted the positive effects of the festival for the tradition. "*It* [Gnawa] *became in a higher position* [thanks to the Festival]", Yousuf said. According to Youness, Gnawa survived until today thanks to the festival and it is the festival the reason way Gnawa reaches a larger European public today, despite also Moroccan national stars, such as Hamid el Kasri, and the state played an important role too. However, Youness underlined how the festival brings high gains to the state, compared to

the compensations that are then directed toward the M'allemin and the guesses, and that this is the main reason for its collaboration. Money and also the heritage competition with Algeria and Tunisia, which have Gnawa too, Yousuf specified, made the state participate. The same idea was shared by M'allem Hamza, when he explained that while the "*heritage was about to get extinct, Gnawa has recently become well known as something valuable. It is recently that Andrew Azoulay made it recognised by the UNESCO as an intangible heritage*." The role of the festival was recognised too even by Soufiane. According to him, indeed, if the UNESCO recognition made Gnawa known around the world, on the other hand, it did not change that much inside the nation, where Gnawa was already "*popular because of the festival, even though also the social media played a big role*". His time, a little bit different was the position of Abdellah. In his opinion, Gnawa tradition survived thanks to its healing function, but "*it* [the festival] *has contributed greatly, to the extent that it is very well known around the world and it was recognised by the UNESCO in 2019*." However, he added "the *developments that fusion brought are good for one side, that it became well known and easier to learn, also thanks to YouTube, but on the other side, the origins disappear. The authentic Gnawa is different in tone and feelings and spirituality, but when it is fused, you only hear the music. It is like a tree that its leaves are withered, because the roots have died*". Among such young Gnawi, Abdellah was the only one that found some negative consequences of the festival, despite though not condemning or denouncing it entirely.

4.2. Elder M'allemin

Differently from the masters of the above paragraph, I could not come to meet elder M'allemin through social media or attending events in cafés. Such elder masters do not spend time in the New City, but in the old medina or its proximities and mostly walk away from restaurants or riads that host Gnawa performances. Moreover, the younger M'allemin I met, not only mostly never refused to share some time or to arrange a moment to talk, but they generally showed up more

enthusiastic and more evidently looking for some personal gains from that encounters. Eldest, on the other hand, did not oppose neither, but they usually keep a more severe and authoritarian attitude. We could meet the first time M'allem Amine at his place, as agreed on the phone. When we arrived, he was playing his guimbri from inside a house with the frontal door opened. He did see us stopping and trying to figure out how to approach him, but he did not stop playing to come to us, as youths were more promptly used to do. Concerning M'allem Mouhcine, we run into him, while he was performing. In that occasion, we stopped to take a look and try to talk with him. Like for M'allem Amine, despite he immediately noticed us, given that we were in a narrow and empty alley, he neither stopped performing, neither tried himself to talk to us, not even only to get some money for his talent. The organisation for a meeting with M'allem Akram, despite done telephonically, was easier and more precise than with youngers, who usually changed last minute the place or the time of the encounter or showed up late. When we reached the café closed to the old medina where M'allem Akram arranged to meet us, he arrived very punctual, if not before the moment scheduled. Furthermore, differently from the youths, the conversations with such M'allemin were more fluid. The Gnawi of the previous paragraph were more used to wait for some questions and answer more concisely. Elders, on the other hand, usually started talking by themselves, narrating about their life, their family and their history with Gnawa.

Right after we entered the room and had the chance to present ourselves better than on the phone call and thank him for having found dome time to meet us, M'allem Amine, indeed, started talking about his firsts steps in the field. "*Tgnawit is old and historical*" he prepared us, "*our gran-grandparents were this way. For example, taGnawit is a part of my family, my uncle was a Gnawi M'allem*" and he told us how his path started following his uncle. Then he "*travelled a lot, because this profession makes you do many travels*". By the time we met him, it had been forty years for him in the field. "*And now we are teaching the youths like you*" he said and he showed us some wooden simples of a guimbri

leaning on the floor of the room. As M'allem Amine previously said to us, indeed, one of the first steps of the learning process is to learn how to build the own guimbri and those he pointed at were those made by his students. "*TaGnawit is like school, you have to start learning since you are young, because the ones that do not learn from taGnawit school, they are just getting involved into it, you can find them today playing an instrument and tomorrow doing other thing. Because they did not grow up in a Gnawa environment. They know just how to do few things and play in some troha and that is it, but when the big thing, dardba, which means lila, comes, they cannot do it*". After explaining to us all the steps a man should go through in order to become a M'allem, he added, "*the guimbri is the last thing, you do not just jump to the guimbri, like TikTokers do. They do not know the rules that our ancestors put. They do not even know how to sit and put the guimbri together. You cannot just become a M'allem like that*". Despite M'allem Amine did recognise that some recent Gnawa musicians do not name themselves as M'allem, however, he said, "*the problem is that they use the label Gnawa, it can confuse people who do not know who the real Gnawa are, because they do not know if they had gone through the training stages or not. So, even if someone can play the guimbri, it does not make him a M'allem. The M'allem is the one who can perform the mhalla, from the beginning to the end. The others are limited to the cafés*". In several occasion during our long conversation, M'allem Akram repeated the differences between real M'allemin and those that could be heard in cafés. If the former were authorised and legitimate professionals able to perform during the lila, the others were just lovers, who can maybe play the guimbri, but not in important and sacred occasion such as the ritual, because "*they just do that for living […] Do not they dare to come to me! They know that they are just amateurs. taGnawit is just the joula (traveling). If you go to Marrakesh and mention my name, they would know that I am in Fes, they will not know the others*". M'allem Amine went on by mocking them, telling us some recurrent Gnawa expressions, that such Gnawa lovers, who present themselves in cafés as M'allem, would never get. However, M'allem Amine was positive reflecting on the fact that people will be soon able to

distinguish real M'allemin from not real ones, "*they have started differentiating even now*".

M'allem Amine condemned the performances in shisha bar or cafés, "*it is not a good thing, although I know that they are just trying to make a living, this does not end up well. When I go to the medina and I pass by cafés and I hear a Gnawi playing troha which we were not used to play in the streets, I say "la hawla wa la 9owwaata illa billah"* (there is no power and no strength except through Allah) *and I just wish to get out of there quickly*". Only some tarh can be performed in these places, the Bambara ones, intended just for fun and training, he explained.

M'allem Amine's opinion about fusion was not completely negative, though. He did affirm that the real Gnawa does not mix with other instruments, but he also said that, actually, "*it is heritage and you cannot add something more on it, because it is original and back then the M'allem was black, talked Sudanian language. But now it is mixed, you can find also the white people. […] And when the guitar is mixed with the guimbri, it is the guitar that follows the guimbri, it is the other musician who follows the M'allem, not the opposite. Thus, it is okay, this is recent because they like taGnawit and they want to play with it and this contributes to the appearance of Gnawa widely*". If even before there had been some occasions for Gnawi masters to perform abroad, those were just rare exceptions, while "*now wherever you go there are Gnawa*". M'allem Amine considered a positive thing that Gnawa now spread "*thanks God, everyone loves it, Spain, France, Belgium*" and he himself had the possibility to perform in foreign stages. He indeed promptly showed us some newspaper pages and posters that he decided to preserve and expose in the walls of the room where we were talking and from where, thus, all his students could admire. "*I worked in Belgium and I came back and also in Spain fans call us from everywhere. We did lila in France. I went to France, Belgium and even Mali, but this after Gnawa became more popular and they started to invite us to go to work with them in Europe*". Moreover, he also participated once to the Essaouira Festival and shared a good memory of that moment. He recognised the role of the Essaouira Festival. "*At some point, Gnawi*

started getting fewer" because, he explained, Gnawi before frightened people *"but now, with the Festival of Essaouira, it is popular and the guimbri becomes known internationally. Without the festival, Gnawa would have died, but now it is in safe hands*". Indeed, he said that the organisers, among which André Azoulay, introduced the festival in order to save the heritage and attract the tourists. Thus, they would have contacted just important and professional M'allemin, not those of the cafés, and they did contacted him. "*Of course I went. They offered us where to live, the residency, and the living expense and they distribute us in different places to perform*".

M'allem Mouhcine comes from a Gnawa family, he told us "*I inherited it from my family, they are all Gnawa, My uncle, my mother, my father, my brothers were all Gnawa, I am the youngest one"*, and he told us that, together with his brothers, he studied with an elder M'allem in Essaouira. After he died, they all continued their formation with other M'allemin. According to M'allem Mouhcine, the family plays a crucial role if one wants to be a Gnawi. "*Gnawa is in the blood, you cannot become a Gnawi if it is not in your blood. You should inherit it from your grandparents, so that you would know its rituals and its nature*". However, roots are not enough. To become a M'allem, a Gnawi has to travel from a master to another and eventually invite them to judge the self in a lila, because "*you are just a superficial M'allem if you do not do it*". Thus, those Gnawi that we could hear performing in cafés, they were M'allemin, if they were studying from elder ones, but just not complete masters yet. M'allem Mouhcine had not a negative opinion about the cafés or the Festival. He talked with us about the origins and the history of Gnawa and told us how such tradition passed through one generation to another. However, at one point, it was about to get extinct, "*may God bless people like Andrea Azoulay because he advanced taGnawit, we should not forget Azoulay and Mahmoud Guinea, peace be upon him, also the M'allem Mustafa Baqbu and M'allem Aziz Pako, my God have mercy of their soul*". André Azoulay is the one that "*showed Gnawa to all Morocco at the time*" while these M'allemin were the ones who, while Gnawa was living its crisis, spread the school of taGnawit and

opened it to new generations, he explained. "*The work in cafés is like that in Essaouira, but just in a smaller scale*". Such works are for tourists, "*it is normal, they do folklore and energise people who come from Europe and they make people happy, it is not a problem.*" If such people contributed in the survival of Gnawa culture, it had to be adjusted, though, in order to be saved. "*Now Gnawa evolved*" indeed explained M'allem Mouhcine and "*this is because of Hamid el Kasri. He used to record cassettes in the 90s until 2000s. He used to bring Africans and record with them what is called fusion. They developed taGnawit and made it in an elevated place. Now taGnawit is international, not only in Morocco, it is all over the world. Now they do lilat and work in cafés because of tourists. When they come, they like the music of Gnawa, also in funduq (hotels). Wherever you go you find them* [the tourists]". Such people, according to M'allem Mouhcine, "*found in it* [Gnawa] *a folklore that does not exist in other musical traditions. That is why they developed it*". Despite this "*I would rather work in lila than in cafés, because when you mix things something gets lost*", he said and he specified that "*the authenticity of Gnawa is only during the lila*".

I am not sure about how deeply M'allem Akram and M'allem Amine knew each other, however, M'allem Akram opened the conversation by saying: "*There were only two M'allemin in this city, which were my grandfather and another one in the medina. M'allem Amine is also an experienced one here, but he can't tell you much about Gnawa, his father was not from Gnawa*". Indeed, later on, he underlined how, in order to be a "real" Gnawi, you have to "*inherit the guimbri from your father and, if it is not your father to give it to you, you have nothing. My father inherited it from his father and it went like that*". He told us how it was his grandfather that brought Gnawa in Fes for the first time, while before we could have found just 'Issawa in the city. His grandfather was from Marrakesh, but he had worked in the Rabat palace under the rule of the father of the king Mohamed V as well as with the latter. The following king, Hassan II took him back to Marrakesh and from there he then came to Fes and founded his own zawyia. "*My grandfather did not learn Arabic at all. When we were home with him and when*

he talked to us, no one would understand, except his sister, who came before him here. She was the one who explained to us". However, taking about M'allem Amine, he added "*but his uncle was from Gnawa, nevertheless his uncle was in the North. The M'allemin that now exist are in Marrakesh and Essaouira. There you can find the roots of Gnawa. You should start from Agadir, because the authentic taGnawit … taGnawit is not even Moroccan or Algerian or Tunisian, it is until the Africans came and spread it across these three countries. It is originally from Africa, but when it entered Morocco it changed. If you go there you will find a different Gnawa*".

That day we spent two hours or more together and he stressed several time this idea, despite, after suggested me to go in the South, he also admitted that having some information it would not be an easy task. In the past, the Malemin there would have just reveal their origins, "*that it is all they would share*", nothing more according to him and "*they were illiterate, thus what they have shared is unknown, there were no recorders back then*". Now, however, I would have found M'allemin more "*flexible, at the time they could not had imagined that Gnawa would have reached what it is nowadays*". He added, "*that was during the best time of taGnawit, […] Now what is happening to Gnawa is the worst, but 'Issawa and Gnawa will never get extinct. Although all the real M'allemin in Fes died and only the youth are left, they are still performing it a lot. But the way they do it is different, depending on the time. They are ruining Gnawa now.*"

About this, M'allem Akram contemned both fusion experiments and the festival. *"Now they are saying in the festival that Gnawa fits with reggae music. These new groups are just making up and mixing stuff and improvising. The way they do it today is called the Marsawyyia, but the old one was the Marrakeshyyia. Look to the ones from Algeria, they have not changed the way Gnawa was originally done and they still perform in the streets*". Essaouira, despite previously exalted as the heart of the culture, was then described by M'allem Akram as the place par excellence of perdition and corruption. Here, people and Gnawi who before did not used to drink or use drugs now do, because, in Essaouira, locals mix

with Westerners, "*who are crazy and take them far from religion*". Moreover, according to M'allem Akram, fusion as well as the Essaouira festival are just ways to exploit Gnawi. "*A musician come and ask to perform with a M'allem for a certain amount of money and he would accept, but then they record and you will not see them anymore*". He himself was once asked to perform in the festival. "*When they called me for Essaouira, they asked me to perform the traditional way, so I told them I will not do it on the stage and they offered me Daar Essaouiri. Then I said that I had one condition, that no one should film. They said no, so I refused […] The Algerian Gnawa refused, too*". Even from an economic point of view, "*the only ones benefiting are the organizers of the festival and the foreign artists who come there. They film with Gnawa and benefit from it*". To the M'allemin, indeed, M'allem Akram told us that, while Americans and foreigners called to participate are given five hundred thousand dirhams, just twenty or thirty thousand dirhams are given to Moroccan masters, that though have to be split among all the group members and used to face the costs of the clothes, transportation and other needs. Or such M'allemin accept, or the organisers will find others that will. M'allem Akram said "*I call them Gniwat* (a term to minimize their status) *because they accept to do that*".

He indeed could talk by experience, being there on of the first years of the festival. M'allem Akram told us, in fact, that the idea of the Festival came originally to some local women. One of them revealed the plan to M'allem Akram who supported the idea and even suggested to extend it to Marrakesh too. That former idea, however, was to call several local Gnawi groups to attend and be paid a certain sufficient and right amount and, especially, M'allem Akram himself suggested to find some other Gnawi that would have been responsible for the organisation and the mediation among the groups. However, "*when I went I found out that the organizers have nothing to do with the Gnawa, they are simply brokers. The Festival of Gnawa should be organized by Gnawa themselves. They tell us that Gnawa are illiterate so they cannot, but there are educated ones better than they are*". Such brokers bring foreigners musicians and fake M'allemin. "*Why would*

they bring the Americans in the first place to a Gnawa festival. They do not play guinbri, they play totally different instruments that cannot fit with taGnawit" he said. Concerning the youths called to participate, according to M'allem Akram, such Gnawi are invited only because real ones would not go, like in his own case. "*They cannot bring real Gnawa like us anymore, they* [the youths] *just memorize some stuff, wear the qashaba and call themselves Gnawa*".

Indeed, together with fusion and the festival, several innovations have been condemned by M'allem Akram. "*Gnawa should be as black as me or even more. Because the Sudan people were blacks from Ghana and Mali. They were only old people back then, not the young girls you see now. Nowadays a girl who is only twenty-four says that she is also a muqaddima. The Gnawi himself was not allowed to be a M'allem until he turned over forty, because then his minds would have been mature*", only then he would have taken the exams in front of his father and the other M'allemin. But, "*old M'allemin left from here, such young ones only buy a guimbri from the market in the medina and start calling themselves M'allemin. They would be afraid if they had to play in front of me and I would never sit among them*". M'allem Akram made clear the these younger M'allemin should be ashamed by themselves and so should be those who hire them, because if you do, it means that you want something cheap or you like the music, but you do not really know anything about taGnawit. "*This was a long time ago. Now it is all messed up, mainly because of the Essaouira festival, it ruined everything. Gnawa did not used to be performed on the stage and even if they would have performed on a stage, they would have done it without the guimbri, only with the qraqeb or the tbel. The guimbri does not get out of the house*". "*Now it is all messed up*", he repeated later, "*now, they are talking on the phone during the lila and you can find a girl playing the guinbri. What else worse than that. She should not play the guinbri. If they would have seen back in days, they would have broken it on her head. Gnawa before were not white, there were no girls as well. The guimbri is only for males, a girl can be a singer or a shikha, but taGnawit is for men*". Then,

as he opened the conversation, he concluded "*you should talk to the real Gnawa I told you about*".

4.3. TaGnawit and Matters of Cultural Appropriation

Gnawa M'allemin have always had to prove their taGnawit, meaning their legitimacy and authenticity and, with that, their correct preparation. If, though, once Gnawi always came from Gnawa families and the recognition of the own adequacy was achieved through the long process of education and the final exam in front of other known and respected M'allemin, now times have changed, Gnawi have diversified and the past system is no longer the more spread or the only one in use.[391]

The word "taGnawit" is ambiguous, both in its meaning and in its use. It could refer to the Gnawa culture, to the Gnawi identity or to the idea of authenticity. Generally, it includes all of these concepts, being used to evoke the idea of the essence of Gnawa. However, it also implies something that is or is not possessed, thanks to the addition of the Amazigh prefix "*ta*". TaGnawit, thus, is something that a Gnawi has or does not have[392] and, particularly, what older black M'allemin usually point out to be the thing that they have, in contraposition with the youths.[393]

In the conversations with both younger and elder M'allemin such concept came out under different circumstances. In the company of the first, it was usually in response to some of my wonderings about the path to become a master and the difference between the performances in the cafés and those in the lilat. These ideas, thus, sometimes jumped out during our talking, in other cases I had to ask more directly. On the contrary, my questions on the topic generally followed some autonomous considerations, when I found myself to confront elder M'allemin.

[391] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 31-32, 34.
[392] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 22-23.
[393] Cynthia Becker, *Hunters, Sufis, Soldiers, and Minstrels: The Diaspora Aesthetics of the Moroccan Gnawa*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics", no. 59/60 (2011), p. 130.

Indeed, as said, recent changes have raised in elders frustration[394], doubts, perplexities, and fear of being dispossessed of their own culture[395], leading them to argue upon matters of authenticity[396], heritage and identity[397] in order to recover control on the own culture.[398] Despite this was a matter familiar to and promptly discuss by youths too, in elders' reflections, the word "taGnawit" used to appear more spontaneously and frequently, in response to the new participation of Arabs and Amazighs, the higher importance attributed by the latter to staged non-sacred performance rather than to the spiritual lila and the growing competition in the field they brought.[399]

In front of such situation, elder M'allemin favour staticity and lack of historical change, turning to the tradition and clinging to the past. Indeed, scholars who have done their researches on the topic have pointed out that, on one hand, discourses about authenticity are accompanied in older M'allemin by a sense of nostalgia for a past in which the tradition was considered to be respected, without all the deviations and the innovations brought by the recent changes.[400] Elders, thus, make efforts in the attempt to move in the opposite direction of the youths, trying to strengthen the tradition and to nullify and avoid any innovation, despite this testify as, actually, they themselves and their performances have been somehow shaped by such recent changes and debates, too.[401] On the other, the element of Africanity becomes crucial to face the challenge related to the participation of non-Black outsiders in the culture.[402] Elder M'allemin, indeed, stress the African roots, as a legitimation of authenticity. As a result, some

[394] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 149.
[395] Chouki El Hamel, 2013, op. cit., p. 295.
[396] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 112-113.
[397] Ibid., pp. 146, 153, 156; Maisie Sum, *Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco*, "Ethnomusicology", 55, no. 1(2011), p. 78; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 164.
[398] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 158, 178.
[399] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 33.
[400] Ibid., pp. 22-23, 64,138, 143, 147-148, 153, 156.
[401] Ibid., pp. 138, 142.
[402] David R. Goodman-Singh, *The Space of Africanness: Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, no. 64 (2002), p. 90.

historical figures are elevated to become pillars of the Gnawa culture and, equally, cities historically linked to the trans-Saharan slave trade, such as Marrakesh and Essaouira, and, by extension, the M'allemin from there coming, are given a special authority.[403] In this regard, some names of past black M'allemin were recurrent in the conversations with M'allem Amine, M'allem Mouhcine and M'allem Akram, as well as their references to those Southern cities, as those in which Gnawa originated, where their families came from, where they could study and, especially, where I could have found real M'allemin and information. There I should have focused my research, repeated especially M'allem Akram, there I would have found the taGnawit.

For such M'allemin, indeed, taGnawit is something that has to be developed through education, but cannot be learnt from zero. It has firstly to be inherited.[404] Consequently, bad judgements are directed to those younger ones that do not satisfy one or both of these criteria. Older M'allemin who grow up in a Gnawa family differentiate the self from the new, younger M'allemin with no Gnawa origins[405] and who did not follow the traditional educational path.[406] The latter are accused to had joined Gnawa with the only intention of monetarise from it and create an own reputation, which sometimes find the agreement also of some elder clients, who, in front of the increasing costs requested by such M'allemin to perform a lila, accuse them of being exploiters interested just in money rather than in healing. In such circumstances, indeed, authentic become synonym with non-capitalistic.[407] Youngers are said to be only able to perform Gnawa, to be just entertainers, but of lacking the ability to practice its rituals and the necessary deep and pure knowledge of Gnawa history and culture, of which though those same

[403] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 45, 47, 52.
[404] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 176, 178.
[405] Ibid., p. 158.
[406] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 62-64.
[407] Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 142, 144.

elders often reported different versions.[408] From here, it derives the desire to keep secret such knowledge from outsiders or those non-considered real Gnawi[409] and the accusation directed to such youths of non-possessing the taGnawit[410] and of being disrespectful toward the sacredness of Gnawa rituals.[411] Indeed, because of younger adepts are less interested in being hired for lilat and ritual performances, they are negatively defined *fnan* by elders or *muhibbin*, meaning the (music) lovers.[412]

The opinions of the three elder M'allemin I met were different in the degree of condemnation of the youths. The younger they were, the less they opposed recent changes. Indeed, the eldest among them was M'allem Akram, who strongly opposed fusion experiments, women participation and Gnawa festivals. "*Now what is happening to Gnawa is the worst"* he affirmed. Less negative was the position of M'allem Amine and even less that of the youngest among them, M'allem Mouhcine. M'allem Amine did himself participate in some performances abroad and in the Essaouira Festival, as well as he did not completely neglect fusion, though he shared the diminutive judgement of the youths, "*they are just amateurs*". Eventually, M'allem Mouhcine recognised that such younger Gnawi performing in cafés were M'allemin, despite, actually, not entirely and only if they were studying from elders. All of them, though, in a way or another agreed in differentiating the selves from new M'allemin, described somehow differently, but yet unfavourably.

The scholar James O. Jung, in this regard, underlines how cultural appropriation brings with it the offence of the members whose cultural has been taken from.[413] Moreover, he breaks down the components of cultural

[408] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 165, 179; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 23, 144, 214-215, 233; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 17, 62.
[409] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 182.
[410] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 33.
[411] Ibid., p. 90.
[412] Ibid., pp. 62, 73.
[413] James O. Young, *Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation*, "*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*" 63, no. 2(2005), p. 138.

appropriation. Among these, the content appropriation is the one that seems to be more adequate to describe what is going on about Gnawa culture. The author, in fact, describes such phenomenon as "*an artist* [which] *uses the cultural products of another culture in the production of his or her own art*".[414] Generally speaking, indeed, fusions with South African types of music are among the main examples of contemporary cultural appropriation around the world.[415]

However, in order to talk about cultural appropriation, it is necessary to be able to distinguish the insiders from the outsiders. This task is always difficult, considering the specificities of every single member of a community and the overlapping belongings of each person and group of people.[416] This is particularly true if considered Gnawa. Indeed, as described in the second and third chapters, several elements have been melt in the Gnawa tradition. Theoretically, Gnawa are defined as descendants of former slaves coming from the "Sudan" regions, and thus black people. Despite this, though, not all blacks are Gnawi[417] and with the slaves settling and getting married in Morocco, the heirs of the culture happened to lose the initial black completion and, little by little, what was once a "Sudani" tradition became Moroccan. At the same time, moreover, Gnawa songs and rituals stress the adherence to the Muslim religion, including another category to the Gnawa identity, almost in opposition to the former, at least according to the initial local Moroccan perception.[418] Thus, given the complexity of the history that such culture has gone through and the multiplicity of the components that the several interactions brought into it, different actors can see the selves as possible protagonists of its scene and legitimate their presence focusing on certain moments and aspects of the Gnawa history and tradition. TaGnawit is not something static. The perception of authenticity responds to the different interpretations and

[414] Ibid., p. 136.
[415] Ibid., p. 139.
[416] Ibid., p. 136.
[417] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 94.
[418] Ibid., pp. 95, 121.

adaptations to the changing times and societies.[419] Thus, with the Gnawa music entering the world music and the national and international stage, being a Gnawa M'allem became a source of gain. As a result, younger M'allemin have been attracted, the participation has been opened to further outsiders[420] and the same narration and performance of taGnawit has changed.

In a circular way, the escalation of the Gnawa success captured the foreign professional and tourist attention, that in turn eventually contributed in the process of self-regulation and self-adaptation of new Gnawi people.[421] With the extension of the Gnawa culture to new contexts, the proliferation of fusion collaborations and of audiences of different origins, musical tastes and of different experiences, knowledge and relation with such culture, the value and the interpretation of taGnawit multiplied.[422] Different elements could be presented as expressions of authenticity by both Gnawi and their clients, such as age, ritual preparation, years of experience, city of belonging and so on. However, these options are derivations of two principal sources of authority, meaning the African roots and the Muslim faith. Nevertheless, since the recent success of Gnawa, the ability to meet people tastes arose and mostly overcome those former sources among younger adepts.[423] The appreciation achieved through the satisfaction of the clients' tastes and expectations encourage the M'allem to perform in line with the new music trends and industy, rather than with the tradition and thus the own legitimation eventually turn to correspond to the degree of the national and international success of the M'allem.[424] For the M'allemin who chose such taGnawit, authenticity and authority goes hand in hand with the own ability to display virtuosity.[425] Among such M'allemin, thus, the definition of Gnawi as a black African descendant has

[419] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 52. 143.
[420] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3 (2000), p. 499.
[421] Cynthia J. Becker, op. cit, 2020, p. 101.
[422] Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 31-33, 58, 60-61. 147.
[423] Ibid., pp. 4, 13, 32-35, 50, 53, 57, 73, 97, 141, 143-144, 146-149, 167.
[424] Ibid., pp. 4, 57, 74.
[425] Ibid., p. 78.

got devaluated. Being this one of the main characteristic of such culture, though, such turn has introduced, spread and extended new meanings and interpretations to the entire culture and group. In this way, the Gnawa ritual and the Gnawa identity are being renew[426] and are becoming the place of the re-negotiations of the values and the meanings upon which such tradition is built.[427]

However, this is not an easy and coherent process. If indeed neglecting the importance of African origins is inevitable for those who do not have such roots and who thus could had not entered the tradition in the past, it is also true that Africanity has still an important value. In fact, those festivals and concerts, as seen for the Essaouira one, have brought scholars on the field and conferences and debates on these occasions. As a result, information about the Gnawa tradition and its origins have spread, especially among foreigners, matching their interest for the exotic. Thus, even for those younger M'allemin who work exclusively or mainly in these occasions, appearing of African origins becomes important to create and maintain an own public.[428] Moreover, excluded the festivals contexts, young M'allemin find themselves, in the everyday life, to work in cities in which elders are still present, have authority and a strong reputation, so that having them on the own side is always useful. Thus, some of the young M'allemin I have talked with, when they could, did underline their familiarity with the culture and adopted models of interpretation and explanation closer to the elders' ones. If with their work and performances they were embodying a more transgressive attitude, their theoretical interpretation remained more traditional.

The ways of approaching such Africanity in my conversations with the M'allemin, though, appeared particularly interesting under one specific aspect. Despite a non-precise and confused knowledge of the slavery history in Morocco,

[426] Bruce Lincoln, *On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 68, no. 3 (2000), p. 492.
[427] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., p. 95.
[428] Tony Langlois, *The Gnawa of Oujda: Music at the Margins in Morocco*, "The World of Music", 40, no. 1(1998), p. 138; Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 158-159, 179, 183; Christopher Witulski, *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*, Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 9, 11, 43.

all the Gnawi, young or old, Koyo or M'allem, were aware of the slave origins of the culture and told me what they knew about it. However, this latter point was mostly never addressed while talking about the selves. Despite not that far history, it surprised me that a connection to slavery was almost never pointed out. M'allem Akram, the eldest among my interlocutors, by recalling how his grandfather worked at the palace and did not talk Arabic, was the closest reference to it. Other ones just referred to members of the family in the field, as for M'allem Amine's uncle and M'allem Mouhcine's brothers or Soufiane's grandmother and so on. Family connections were promptly and positively pointed out because of the authority they imply. The respect that a Gnawa family suggest, though, is due to the fact that it presupposes a genealogy that brings back to previous slaves and thus to those origins of the tradition, which, nevertheless, were quite always avoided in such encounters. Moreover, Gnawa culture was in any conversation classified to me as Moroccan, even by those M'allemin who actually stressed its historical African origins, given that the African slaves had been brought in Morocco, hired by the palace and included in the society. Even M'allem Akram, when asked about how he would have defined the culture, told us, almost surprised by the question, "*it is Moroccan, what are you talking about!*". Such ideas, thus, open a gap and a point of disconnection in the historical line of events and in a coherent construction of taGnawit.

Slavery remains an ambiguous historic piece. It was a condition that implied submission, poverty, exploitation, as well as sufferings and pain, as recalled by the Gnawa music, and for this African origins and blackness are generally a source of social and economic marginalisation even today. On the opposite, though, they have become valuable elements and a source of authority rather than of inferiority in the context of Gnawa, from which derives the M'allemin's efforts to express the own familiarity within the culture and the display of Africanity, at least through costumes, for those with no biological link to it. However, in order to guarantee such change in the value of slavery, connections to such institution had to be blurred. Thus, troha directly reminding about slavery terrible conditions have been

softened by reserving them to training or entertainment moments, the slaves' permanence for centuries in the country has been used in the recent decades to re-read such culture as national heritage and, in this way, to re-valuate it positively as well as, most importantly, family lineage in the culture has becomes the substitute way to express the own links to the institution, allowing to just hint the matter, rather than addressing it directly. In this way, differently from being a black migrant, being a Gnawi has become a position admired and wished and slavery has turned out to be an instrument of empowerment[429], if restricted to such context and proposed in such terms.

[429] Cynthia J. Becker, 2020, op. cit., pp. 158, 183, 202; Deborah A. Kapchan, 2007, op. cit., pp. 220, 230.

Conclusion

"*TaGnawit is like a sea*" M'allem Hamza told me. Since the beginning, indeed, Gnawa culture has shown its porosity and openness, its ability to adapt to the changing realities and its persistency in reinventing the self.

As seen in the previous chapters, on a historical level, Gnawi are descendants of black slaves, brought for centuries from the "Sudani" areas to North Africa, through the long-lasting trans-Saharan trade roads. Even though they had found themselves experiencing the same destine and eventually be part of a same culture, such slaves came from different political groups and societies, with different cultures, languages and religions, they had been captured under different circumstances and eventually ended up in different reigns. Gnawi masters can be found even today in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, despite the former is the place in which such tradition seems to have mainly rooted. All over such regions, slaves' presence has been diversely tolerated and their culture differently preserved.

This thesis has focused onto the Gnawa culture in the Moroccan reality. In here, black people went from being poor, landless slaves, with no rights, bought and sold in the markets, to be soldiers at the service of the Palace under the two main rulers known as al-Mansur and Ismail. Under their reigns, the two categories of blacks and slaves overlapped. From the sixteenth century on, Europeans had expanded always more their presence in the region and eventually translated it into a colony. Despite the Westerners', mainly British, fight against slavery, such institution, strongly affirmed in Morocco, was never completely banned in here, but just limited, making the kingdom the last actor in the trans-Saharan slave trade. However, with the arrival of the twentieth century, slavery became always more obsolete and it gradually vanished by itself, in front of a new more prominent capitalistic economy. Slaves became a non-convenient labour force, who thus moved to the cities and started working and living with locals.

All along this path, independently from where they came from, when and how they were forced to leave their land, the language they spoke and the religion or the Islam they believed in, slaves, once in the North, have somehow maintained

their traditions and fused them into a unique culture, eventually known in Morocco as Gnawa, passed from one generation to another and characterised by the use of trance-music for spiritual-healing purposes. With the increasing assimilation of slaves in the Moroccan society, though, local spiritual believes have been adopted and in turned influenced, the music language has been translated into Moroccan Darija and its adepts have became always less evidently black-skinned, because of intermarriages and family-creation between slaves and locals. Things got even more complicated when, in response to the colonial settlers' former interest in slaves' music and its later adoption by musical groups, since the sixties and the seventies, for both economic and political reasons, such tradition has entered the national and the international stage, it has become national heritage, a commercial brand and a touristic industry and it has been including always more youths, not necessarily anymore black and of slave-roots. Gnawa music was once sung to invoke jnun, spirits and God in front of the sufferings and the pain due to the forced displacement and the difficulties of the slaves' everyday lives. It was sung especially during nightlong rituals and occasionally on the streets, as buskers. Today, private rituals are more rarely performed, while, on the other hand, Gnawa music is broadcasted by radio and television, sold in CDs, performed in cafés, shisha bars, restaurants and riads all over Morocco, staged on concerts and festivals as well as spread in international tours.

Such path has been compared with the similar success of blues and jazz music in the United States. Indeed, American musicians from these backgrounds have been collaborating with Gnawa masters and scholars have written about the parallelism between these two black traditions. I could myself attend such discussions during the conferences and the round tables organised in the days of the last Essaouira festival, the biggest celebration of Gnawa culture. However, despite the outcome of slavery in America was not the focus of my research, what I could understand from my encounters with the M'allemin is that the Afro-American tradition in the United States and the Gnawa culture in Morocco seem to be different under one specific point. In the New Continent slavery was

formally, theoretically and politically articulated on the racial division between blacks and whites. The American societies had been strongly constructed for decades upon such "colour line"[430]. On the other hand, despite the slavery institution was also understood and justified according to ancient racial ideas that negatively considered black-skin people, as biologically, socially and religiously inferior, such line has not been clearly institutionalised in Morocco. In here, if being black eventually become synonymous of being slave, religion had been the key through which such subjugation had been regulated. The Quran predications have always made impossible the legalisation of slaves' inferiority by skin colour. In Islam, slavery is permitted, but only if imposed on infidels, under specific circumstances and after they would have rejected conversion, and, anyway, it remains discouraged. Thus, slaves had been strategically accused of being less civilised or of professing a pagan faith, and such ideas had been instrumentalised in order to use them both economically, to sustain the fruitful trans-Saharan slave trade, and politically, mainly to enrol them in the army. However, those slaves, who eventually moved in the cities to face the challenges introduced by the changing economy, were already Muslim at the moment of their capture, given the expansion of Islam by the time, and indeed they had been included and accepted in the Moroccan society. Several locals and religious experts did considered their enslavement unjust and fought to save from the enrolment those who by the moment had become their neighbours, friends and family members. Differently from America, in Morocco no formal law has never recognised the enslavement as right under the only condition of blackness, but each policy had always had to refer to blacks as infidels, as seen with Moulay 'Ismail and his letters to the 'ulama of Fes and Cairo. Rather than proving their equality despite their skin colour, slaves had to prove their Muslim faith despite their skin colour.

[430] William E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in slavery: a history of slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK; New York, 2000, p. 8.

Consequently, racial issues and the slavery system have been addressed from a religious rather than political prospective and, with the vanishing of the slavery system, they have been shelved. Thus, taGnawit was defined first of all as spiritual by the M'allemin I talked with. Gnawi do consider slaves as the ancient fathers of such tradition, but do not really refer to this past while talking about its essence. Indeed, when the M'allemin I met narrated to me the origins of the culture, they reported different and confused pieces of that history. Several of the younger masters told me that those ancient men were slaves, but just until they came in Morocco, where they had finally been freed by Moulay 'Ismail. Among them, Abdellah told me "*you are just scratching the surface* [asking about such past], *you have not ask me the deep questions about the hadra and the lila and other things*". Despite, at first, I thought this could have been due to their theoretical externality from the tradition, given that they were young non-black Gnawi, not always neither with family lineage into slavery, elders' words surprised me. They strongly pointed out the role of the slaves and the terrible conditions they endorsed. However, even among elders, M'allem Amine kept repeating "*this at least is what I was told*", not completely sure of his words, and M'allem Akram affirmed about Gnawa culture "*it is Moroccan, what are you talking about!*", almost neglecting his previous celebration of Gnawa culture in the Sahel original lands and in Algeria as more traditional than the ruined version now proposed in his own nation.

Despite the different definitions offered by each M'allem, while blues or jazz are often reminded as black culture[431], Gnawa has been always defined as "spiritual" in its essence and "Moroccan" in its belonging. This does not mean that Africanity and blackness do not have a value, otherwise Gnawi would not make efforts to display "Sudani" tendencies on the stage and matters of black skin or Gnawa lineage would not emerge so frequently in the conversations with the M'allemin. Their words and ideas, though, presented contradictions and two main points emerged as particularly incongruent. On one hand, cities closer to the

[431] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

ancient trans-Saharan routs and M'allemin from there coming are still generally considered worth of higher respect and with higher authority; having a Gnawa family is a point never forgotten by those who could share such legacy, independently from their skin-colour, their age and their experience; Africanity is actively staged during concerts and festivals and black old M'allemin see the selves as more legitimate in the field, given their major vicinity to the tradition than youths. On the other, being Gnawa Moroccan, the participation should be theoretically, at least, opened to multiple actors. From here derives the confusion about what taGnawit is and the different patterns of self-legitimation taken by my interlocutors.

My conversations with the M'allemin were full of efforts of definition of taGnawit and of the M'allem's role and identity. Each M'allem brought up concepts of identity, authenticity and legitimation, questioning the own authority or that of the others. Younger masters tried to prove the adequacy of their position, underling their talent when they could not rely on family roots, turning to their inheritance when they could not display their skin blackness, reporting the recognition they got from respected M'allemin when they had to admit that they did not pursue a traditional education. Even for those who had on their side both a Gnawa family and a traditional education, though, the path was not complete. They themselves had to face and recognise the new realities and the new challenges that have come from these. Havening a master as a father or having travelled from a M'allem to another does not mean that they could ignore the requests and the need of recognition from the public, so that they indeed mainly worked in cafés and restaurants. Among the eldest, all the three black adult M'allemin presented their belonging to the tradition by inheritance and, on the other hand, displayed different degrees of disrespect toward the recent changes, accompanied by proportional shades of nostalgia, frustration and denial. The two categories of "real M'allemin" and of simpler "lovers" or "musicians" have been filled in with diverse members by all the Gnawi I met, with mutual accusations and self-praise, according to personal interpretations of the pillars of the culture. In the Moroccan Gnawa

context the relation with the slavery past remained though always blurred, addressed but not touched, said but not articulated. As a result, other factors are set in motion to fill suxh gap. Thus, despite Gnawa is not said to be of "old Moroccan" or of "black Moroccan" and of "Moroccan descendants of slaves", age, skin-colour, lineage and soon were continuously recalled in the effort to face the vacuum generated by the silencing of slavery.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, an increasing attention has been directed to the concept of slavery. Indeed, despite the long fight started under the European direction for the abolishment of such social institution, politicians and scholars have come to realize that slavery had not extinguished. In some societies it still persist, in others it has evolved in new terms. Even where abolished, indeed, the slavery past has often kept shaping the societies on different level, in more or less subtle ways, or it has emerged, adapting to the changing times, in different forms of subjugation.[432] From a political and legal point of view, thus, socio-political movements and international organisations have developed as well as laws and regulations concerning matters of work and rights have been implemented.[433] Academically, the concept of "post-slavery" has been introduced and the debate has been attracting always more attentions, with important scholars devoting their research to such matters and to the specific and singular versions they embody in the different societies, given the particularity and diversity of each context and the way in which it can shape a common phenomenon.[434]

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[432] Baz Lecocq, *Awad El Djouh and the Dynamics of Post-Slavery*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 193-194, 207-208; Lotte Pelckmans, *Stereotypes of Past-Slavery and 'Stereo-Styles' in Post-Slavery: A Multidimensional, Interactionist Perspective on Contemporary Hierarchies*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 286-287, 292; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 7-10, 16, 19-20, 21-23.

[433] Suzanne Miers, *Contemporary Forms of Slavery*, "Canadian Journal of African Studies" / "Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines", 34, no. 3 (2000), pp. 714–47; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 17-19.

[434] Alice Bellagamba and Marco Gardini. *What Is a 'Slave'? Neo-Abolitionism and the Shifting Meanings of Slavery in Two African Contexts (Highlands of Madagascar, Southern Senegal)*, "Africa: Rivista Semestrale Di Studi e Ricerche" 2, no. 1(2020), pp. 68, 86; Marco Gardini, *Dove naufragano i futuri passati: Tombe di famiglia e desideri di emancipazione sugli altipiani del Madagascar*, Lares, 88, no.

Concerning Morocco, the perception of blackness, the recent management of the slavery past and its influence in the present society is what I intended to research with my thesis. Different traces of the past slavery institution are still visible nowadays. Black migrants coming from the Sahel regions, almost repeating slaves' steps, often experience verbal and physical violence both from citizens, being called *'abd* or *'azzi* (slaves) by them, and from the police, with unjust arrests or deportation, as well as economic and labour exploitation and social exclusion are also frequent.[435] Similar treatments can be reserved to black inhabitants of Moroccan origins, too. Among these, however, there are respected and appreciated Gnawa M'allemin. The contraposition is strictly evident. While comments or jokes are often referred to blacks casually met in the streets, black old M'allemin walk with a solemn attitude and are not mocked, but welcomed and searched. The Gnawa slaves' culture, rather than being silenced, is celebrated, enthusiastically proposed also by non-black young adepts or by those with no family connection with it, who though try to perform their Africanity, even when not biologically possible, and make efforts to display their ability and authority in the field. Gnawa, thus, has been an interesting case to analyse the present understanding of slavery. Gnawa culture was born with slaves and in a slavery society, this was not a marginal aspect but a crucial element in its constitution. When slavery extinguished, the culture survived and, entering a new society and a new époque, it has adjusted to the new system, as it has kept doing in the recent years too, assuming new meanings and interpretations.

The recent success of the Gnawa music has led to a new positive understanding of Africanity and of a slavery lineage, limited, though, to the Gnawa

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2(2022), p. 309; Lotte Pelckmans, *Stereotypes of Past-Slavery and 'Stereo-Styles' in Post-Slavery: A Multidimensional, Interactionist Perspective on Contemporary Hierarchies*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2(2015), pp. 283, 288-289; Benedetta Rossi, *African Post-Slavery: A History of the Future*, "The International Journal of African Historical Studies", 48, no. 2 (2015), pp. 303-304, 306-307, 413, 422-423; Laura Menin, *Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis*, in L. Menin, *Racial Legacies: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East*, "Antropologia", 7, no.1 n.s. (2020), pp. 20-21.

[435] Laura Menin, 2016, *"Anti-black racism" as a slavery's afterlife? Sub-Saharan African migrants in the marginalized neighbourhoods of Rabat*, Anuac, 13, no. 2(2024), pp. 3, 5-8, 11-17.

context, because in here they assume a closer position to the origins of the culture and thus a higher authority and legitimation in the field. However, the proudness that evokes from such roots cannot be decanted directly, differently from the American societies.[436] In Morocco, indeed, the changing society brought tacitly to the disintegration of the slavery system. Thus, racial biases and sufferings imposed by slavery have never been discussed, overcome and healed. Hence, instead of addressing the issue openly, slavery is just alluded by Gnawi with such lineage by expressing the own familiarity within the tradition. In this way, despite maybe unconsciously, Gnawi recognise and affirm their past, gaining the authority and the respect that derives from it, while avoiding the negative connotations and judgements it has historically brought. Silences and half-truths have as much values and meanings as spoken facts.[437] The ways in which memories are preserved, proposed or avoided reveal the historical trauma, shame or dignity to them associated.[438] Having a parent or a grandparent previously M'allem or Muqaddema is the present way to hint to slavery, to half-speak about it, so to evoke only the empowering function it has got in the exclusive Gnawa context. On the other hand, Gnawi without a slavery lineage can relate to such culture, given that the slave roots can be only mentioned and not pointed out as essence and assumption of the tradition. Such adepts adopt Africanity in their stage performances and use other ways to display and legitimate the own taGnawit. The confusion around such term, embodied in the youths' fight for recognition and in the eldest' frustration about their entrance in the culture, is the materialisation of a neglected social and political reflection on and recognition of the past institution of slavery and of the gap it opened in the Gnawa identity.

[436] Martin A. Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery*, "History in Africa", 16 (1989), p. 211.
[437] Sandra E. Greene, *Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History*, "Africa Today", 50, no. 2 (2003), pp. 42-43, 50.
[438] Martin A. Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery*, "History in Africa", 16 (1989), p. 210.

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