Modern Moroccan Music is a Westernized Version

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Abstract

With the advancement of means of communication especially in the modern era, we have become more aware of the scope where nations constitute an ineluctable part system of the world at large. In fact, what is nowadays called individual societies and considered as independent entities do not exist any more for their local distinctive standard can be recognized only within the global framework. Hence, besieged and governed by mass media, the world at large has been transformed into what McLuhan cogently termed "Global Village", paving the way for the expansion of foreign powers over the poor societies. In order to gain insight into an individual society, we would consider it as an integrated part of the global whole together with the external, say Western, factors that forcibly influence its fundamental principles. The scope of the impact is so wide and its nature is so various that it encompasses all nations together with their institutions. This paper is an attempt to investigate the way the cultural framework of Moroccan society is "Westernized", drawing on the popular music and the changes that have shaped both its content and form. In the same vein, scholars of different interest and aim, chiefly Moroccan ones, underline the process of transformation that has been incessantly happening in popular music, pointing especially to the integration and assimilation of Western characteristics. Such a situation leads to a crucial question why Moroccan popular music has made room for external influences while sloughing off its originality and its essence. As a case study, the focus will concern a comparative analysis of traditional popular singers and what is termed "modern" popular singers.

*Key word*s: nation, globality, tradition values, assimilation, individual societies.

Introduction

It is unanimously agreed that culture is a superordinate concept which is so wide and so diverse that it encompasses different areas of human activities and practices which are as various as the different social groups are. In his essay "Is There Really a Relationship Between Culture and Development?" Ifeyinwa Annastasia Mbakogu (2004) stressed the multifaceted concern of culture and assumed that

> *Culture embraces all the material and nonmaterial expressions of a people as well as the processes with which the expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic, and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethically and/ or nationally or supra-nationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous area; what they pass on to their successors and how these are passed on,* (Mbakogu,2004 Mbakogu: *1).*

In this paper, I narrow the scope of focalization, and I will concentrate only on Moroccan culture and more particularly on Moroccan popular music and its alteration or rather re-adaptation in relation to education and media. I will try to answer the following questions: What function do the new media and communication technologies play in the construction and restructuration of people's social and cultural identities? Does the globalization of media and communication contribute to the integration of poor countries into the information age to make use of technology and speed up their development? Or does it simply damage the reputation of the home-grown cultures and impose on them alien cultures? My paper, then is an attempt to outline the different agents that set in motion the process of change in Moroccan culture.

Evolution of Modern Moroccan Music

Morocco is ethnically and culturally a kaleidoscopic country which hosts a heterogeneous popular music covering a considerable geographical area ranging from the north to the main plains down to the south via the Atlas Mountains. Culturally speaking, Morocco has succeeded to draw together different cultures namely Arabic, Berber and Jewish, but lately he has added to his cultural heritage French, Spanish and recently he embarked also on Anglo-American lifestyles.

The diversity of areas paves the way for a multifarious popular music performance, giving each region a specific genre nationally known as "chaabi" and recognized by its rhythm, instruments, language and staff.

> *"Chaabi is probably considered pop music since it is indeed the most popular music listened to in Morocco. It is another form of Moroccan music that is widely listened to because it is sung in Darija, Moroccan Arabic." (Music from Morocco, 1995:.1).*

It was the era of what is called 'Ayta' 'Gnawa' 'taqtuqa' to name but a few. These types, though slightly modify their traditional standard, their music maintained the monotony of the rhythmic verses and the static refrain.

| Gnawa | taqtuqa | ayta |

Moroccans, it is also true for any other part of the globe, always cherish and vindicate the preservation of their culture, making it the driving force and the crucial prerogative of self-esteem. As early as the thirties of the last century "chaabi" – the Arabic term for pop music – has long survived as a fixed musical heritage both in form and content.

The historical demarcation of Moroccan pop music is traced back to the thirties under the name of "chaabi". After having created this type, Moroccan pop singers dismantled relatively the dominance of Egyptian and Syrian pop music. Such independence offered Moroccan artists the opportunity to establish an original type based on local instruments, rhythm, language, and staff.

As the term connotes, Chaabi refers to Moroccan folk music, echoing the norms, lifestyles and traditions of the miscellaneous social groups and their different regions. Central to this issue, the term denotes that chaabi originally emanates from what is popular and performs the inveterate traditions and norms of the different regions together with their various dialect. It is a music consisting of numerous varieties which are descended from the different forms of Moroccan folk music.

Central to the framed pattern in which Moroccan popular music was entangled, different factors contributed effectively to the establishment of this framework chiefly education and media. To outline the framework of this postulation, this paper opens a pathway in this pattern.

Originally the institutionalization of Moroccan popular music can be historically determined on account of education network. The majority of the early pop singers – say those of the first half of twentieth century – were assigned a very limited education if not at all. As early as 1920 schooling, or rather modern schooling had been proffered to few privileged citizens while the mainstream population was contented with traditional learning. Such a situation entailed a wide scope of illiteracy chiefly among the lower class of workers and farmers who in fact constituted the substance of the popular music in Morocco. Their limited education framed the parameters of their songs, structuring its language and rhythm in accordance with the local environment. In this vein, colloquial languages together with the local maxims and intonations became a common practice among the pop singers.

Likewise, in dealing with the issue of alteration of Moroccan popular music, we must take into account the relevance of media. Along the first half of the twentieth century media had not been technologically advanced, on the contrary it was limited in nature and scope. Radio and record-player, the first tools of communication, were not at the disposal of the majority of Moroccan population. As such they did not lend a hand to the pop singers to have a close and ever contact with other types of music outside their local areas. Notably this context was positive in the sense that Moroccan pop music had been canonized within the surrounding substance of its original mainstream. In this respect, norms such as the use of simple and local musical instruments of all sorts Idiophones (qarqaba) Membranophones (Darbûka, târ, bender) Chordophones ('ûd or lute, 'genbri, hajhûj, kamanja) Aerophones (nay flute, lira) colloquial language, and monotonous rhythm had been maintained.

| Tamtam | lute | bendir |

Guembri

flute

The seventies marked an advancement in both education and media in Morocco though their scope did not cover the whole country; put differently,

> ***In the 70s it was the music that was used to express people's overall political views and feelings via groups such as Jil Jilala and Nas El Ghiwane" (Music from Morocco, 1995).***

Hence, modern schooling, especially in urban sides, covers all cities such a situation paves the way for the generation of the seventies to be on a par with what is going on the Western countries. Similarly, media chiefly television, newspapers, cinemas and other sources of entertainments are largely confined to the urban areas while radio remained the only effective communication medium in the rural areas. In this vein, on account of being in touch with the Western culture, though in a limited way, including music, the urban areas have known the birth of unprecedented pop music style.

Framing Moroccan popular music in its historical development, the seventies knew a wave of pop music annotated as band singers. To name but the most prominent groups, 'Nass El Ghiwane' (Men Singers), 'Jil Jilala' (Jilala Generation), 'Lemchaheb' (Flames), and the Imazigh band 'Izenzaren' (Sun Rays) were the bands which enticed the majority of pop fans.
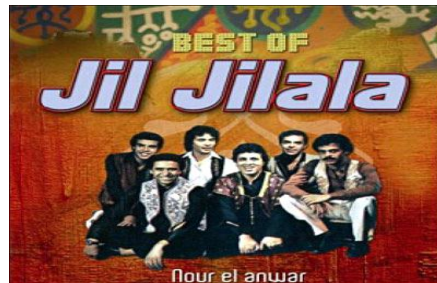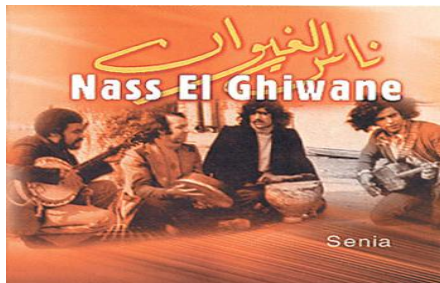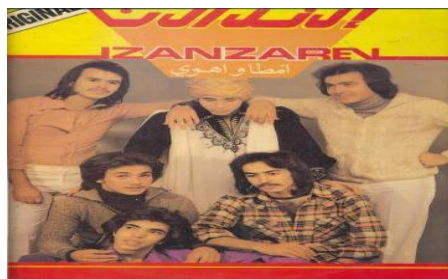
Despite these pop bands were inspired by their counterpart in the West in group-forming, their newness did not astray away from the local context, deriving their style from Moroccan legacy. Apart from a seemingly Western influence seen in adopting the fashion of the seventies like having long hair, wearing tight clothes, and putting high heels, the promotion of Moroccan popular music originality has been touched in the parameters upon which their songs were based. Relying on the same traditional musical instruments as their predecessors did, their modernization of pop music lies in the first place in music composition, giving each song a new rhythm. In this way they freed Moroccan pop music from the monotonous tone which had been persisted for generations.

Along this period, the promotion of Moroccan popular music originality is touched in the ingredients integrated in their songs. As a starting point, language is predominantly confined in Moroccan dialect, Arabic or Berber. Yet unlike the plain and straightforward language which had been used by their predecessors, the bands of the seventies had recourse to implicit expressions that some of them become maxims such "*horses know their knights*", "*a subpart cannot be subdivided*", "*a fish needs no soap*", to state but a few sayings. Secondly, the social context became the focal axis around which most of the songs revolved, criticizing mainly the ignorance of people who endured wholeheartedly their grievances. Some songs encroached upon the frontiers of social problems and attained political areas a process which drove some groups to prison. To close the file of this period, I see that the musical instruments and composition are of important relevance. The two are complementary constituents, in the sense that the traditional instruments such as "bindir", "tamtam", "guimbri", and banjo moulded the composition of the songs in the matrix of Moroccan tradition.

Different relevant factors played a major role in the shift that took place in Moroccan popular music along the seventies onward. Education constituted the pillar of change in that the members of the bands were equipped with modern learning and they were knowledgeable enough to pour new blood in popular music. The use of Moroccan colloquial language does not indeed represent an obstruction to stressing the social problem or revealing their political standpoints. Likewise, along the seventies technology has known a shy progress which was mirrored in the slow propagation of the means of communication, namely radio, television, cinema. Hence their influence remains quite insignificant as well, an opportunity given for both the popular singers and audience to satisfactorily be content with the local artistic production.

However, from the nineties onward, technology has extensively widened its scope and diversified its nature that it has spread its roots through all directions, encompassing the world at large and transforming it into 'a global village'. Such a rapid and diverse advance paves the way for the audience all over the world to be in touch with different cultures without moving an inch from their rooms. The interaction ignites the appetite for new tastes, ranging from lifestyle to the very minute details of norms. Like the other constituents, Western music gains amply its own share, conquering even the far-remote frontiers of the globe.

Being an inescapable part of the technologized world, Morocco or rather Moroccan popular music, especially among the young generation, drops its hands before its Western counterpart. Unlike the generation of the seventies which advocated national popular legacy, the very late generation of the recent century divorces the standard of local popular music and adopts the Western style. Lately the majority of Moroccan popular bands, if not all of them, opt for rap, rock, hip-hop and reggae. Just like snakes that slough off their old skins, so does Moroccan recent generation, substituting local names by Western ones, playing on Western musical instruments instead of original ones, adapt Western rhythm, dancing in Western mode, and dressing in Western style. Latifa al Arousni (2007) points out that:

> *But is it not only the music that reflects the Western influence as their choice of clothes, loose cotton t-shirts printed with certain phrases and baggy jeans worn low on their hips, is also a sign of Western influence .*

They emulate American artists especially, and often wear sports caps, gold and silver chains and even earrings. (Aroussi, 2007:.1)

To begin with, the names of the bands are an indication which reflects the Western influence upon the recent generation and stresses its disposition towards the latter artistic legacy. Apart from 'Fnaïre' (Oil Lamps), 'Hnouz', among a few others which give themselves Arabic names, once one hears or reads the names of the bands such as 'Zanka Flow' (Street Flow), 'H-Kayne', 'Kanka', 'Bigg', and 'Ma Yara Fusion', the first impression that comes to one's mind is that they are Western musical groups.

In an article titled "Travel The World of Moroccan Rap Music" it was stated that "Since 2001, representatives of Moroccan Rap include: Bigg, H-kayne, Zanka flow, Hoba Hoba Spirit, DJ Key, Put Crew, Smoufey, Style Under, Aminoffice solo of salted, Rass Derb, Fnaïre, The Author' S, Marocologues, Derb Funk. DS Crew, H-Name, Kachela, Hell-Ouaf, UnDer MiC , Hell Lemkane, Professorz (Reduction/H.N), Fes City Clan, RAIRAP, and Mobydick" (p.5)

HAKMIN

H-KAYNE'
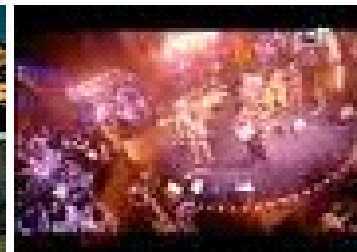
MAYARA BAND

FNAIRE

ZANKA FLOW

The other constituent which shows the Western relevance in Moroccan popular music is the instruments. The new technologies have sparked new blood in the young generation and coerced it to internalize Western pop music chiefly hip-hop and rap. The adoption of the latter genre necessitates the tunes of adequate instruments namely an electric guitar, synthesizer, saxophone among sophisticated others, and hence Moroccan pop singers turn their backs to local traditional instruments. In a related vein, by virtue of making use of Western instruments, Moroccan bands emulate Western rhythm.

With the advancement of means of communication especially in the modern era, we have become more aware of the scope where nations constitute an ineluctable part of the larger world system. In fact, what is termed individual societies as independent entities does not exist any more, and their domestic distinguishing criterion can be recognized only within the global framework. Hence besieged and governed by mass media, the world at large has been transformed into what McLuhan cogently termed "Global Village", paving the way for the expansion of foreign powers over the poor societies. Soon, in order to gain insight into an individual society, we would consider it as an integrated part of the global whole, together with the external, say Western, factors that forcibly influence its fundamental principles. The scope of the impact is so wide and its nature is so various that it encompasses all nations together with their institutions and culture. To tackle the issue from a close perspective, Moroccan popular bands are not the only ones who internalize Western music, but it is the question of a wider scope

comprising a considerable number of the young generation. According to Latifa Al Arousni(2007), the members of the bands come up with contradictory argumentations so as to substantiate their disposition to implement Western musical genres. She points out that rap for the members of Hakmin becomes a world wide phenomenon as

> *they insisted that they learnt music through 'perseverance and expertise' and absolutely reject the notion that they are merely imitating American rap groups. In their opinion, 'rap' is a rhythmic genre that exists in all languages. (p.2)*

The problem, however, is not so much issued from the term chaabi, as it is raised from its modernization. It is a question of terminology in the sense that the term "chaabi" persists even if this genre has known, in some cases, a radical changes. It is undeniably true that whatever exists in the world has been changing along history, responding either to local development or adopting external or rather alien aspects. Though both sides are considered modifying processes, they operate differently from one another. While internal change incites the operation of socialization, external and borrowed components ignite acculturation. In the same vein, the former aspect preserves the fundamental components of its original foundation hence, warranting the continuation of its identity; on the other hand, the imported constituents lead either to mixture of what is original with what is foreign, or to the complete adaptation of what is alien.

Moroccan younger generation behaves in accordance with what media offer them through miscellaneous factors. They find themselves besieged by unlimited number of channels that offer all types of Western music. On the other hand, local channels, besides being very limited, grudgingly present intermittently a few programs to the Moroccan spectators. Added to this is that the percentage of viewers of the local channels is maximized in 30%. Incidentally, being an inescapable part of this generation, Moroccan bands, to go hand in hand with such a context, harmoniously appeal to the proclivity of "the voices of the country's younger generation". It is the influential impact of media that galvanizes the turning point of Moroccan younger generation to appreciate, rap, hip-hop, Hard Rock, among other Western musical types.

Others, however, tackle the question from a globalized premise and argue that music or the arts in general is not constrained within specific geographical borders. Just

as painters, for example, all over the world and irrespective of their nationality, are inspired by trends such as realism, surrealism and impressionism, so do pop singers. The members of Hakmin maintained that their music is not simply a 'blind' reproduction of American rap, but they become skilled at music through 'perseverance and expertise'. However, they admitted that they amalgamated Moroccan musical pieces with Western ones and came up with a 'new style'. However, some, in an attempt to hide their entire assimilation of Western pop music, claim that the only borrowed constituent is music whereas language and subject matters spring from Moroccan context. Contrary to the foregoing 'Ma Yara Fusion' admitted that "their music is a blend between traditional Moroccan and Western sounds." (Arousni, 2007: 1)

Moroccan popular music, on this basis, is a two-pronged dimension: a local raw material molded in Western matrix. The amalgamation of the two cultures brings about a hybrid product which is neither Moroccan nor is it Western. The advocates of a mixed version are, in fact, neglect the impending danger that threatens to obliterate Moroccan original music norms. An optimistic standpoint, however, is affirmed by the 'Bnan' band as

> *Zacharia Bnan… believes that the rap phenomenon in Morocco is a short-lived one that will soon disappear. He predicts that the people will get bored with such groups and ultimately seek tradition, which is embodied in the Moroccan music culture ....Moroccan youth do not rush to imitate the Western tradition and that they were attached to their Moroccan identity. (Arousni, 2007)*

Rose Schelis tackled the issue in the same way, seeing that the Western influence is the primary cause of Moroccan's divert and propensity towards American style of music. She stated that "Originally people didn't believe it like rap. They say rap is American music. After 2005, they found young artists tried to pass messages with rap. Always, we rap about the government, problems, poverty … .In 2005 people started believing there is the art of the street."(pp.1-2)

It is noticeable that the rate of influence and change in societies is related to the results of the interactions between the original/interior factors and incoming/exterior issues. It is also remarked that societies have recently known an unprecedented change

both in scope and speed. The latter characteristics are so considerable that it becomes impossible to envision them, in the sense that what is used to be performed in centuries, it is carried out in decades and what is habitually achieved in decades it is done in a few years and later on we may speak about change in terms of months and days.

Besides the aforementioned institutions, the incredible rapid advance of technology amplifies the Western hegemony over the rest of the world or rather the less developed countries, and this impact constitutes a potential threat to their identity. Indeed, it is enough to consider the significant discrepancy between the developed countries and the underdeveloped ones in relation to media, radio, television, satellites, film-making and Internet. The situation is critically paradoxical, in that no society nowadays can shrink within its own shell and live detached from the rest of the world. International "sociability" imposes itself on all nations whether they want it or not.

Media is considered to be a dynamic mechanism which is capable of manipulating the established political, social and cultural institutions on account of its influential means of communication and its overspread scope to the extent that it can reach as much social groups as possible. Far from being a conscious process, its effect is permeable and muffled, in the sense that it structures or rather restructures the inner essence of the targeted societies without the latter's awareness. Such a process is set in motion via the interaction between the sender and the receiver who is eager to accept all sorts of amusements that can substitute the social, family and personal problems. In this way, the viewer/receiver integrates involuntarily the ideological framework hidden in the different programmes that are presented to him/her and becomes, thus, victim of an alien ideology.

Conclusion

By highlighting such cultural development, I stress the strong connection between the new media and communication technologies and the configuration of people's cultural identities and their sense of belonging. But what is strikingly interesting is the insistence on the fact that culture shared standard which is transmitted from generation to generation through learning process. The fact that the individual is exposed to environmental context together with the interaction with a specific mores and ethos allow him the chance to adopt and adapt the characteristics of that specific local territory.

Learning then is strictly confined within a limited tempo-spatial dimension which does not exceed the border lines of environment. In this relation, the process of socialization plays a major role in familiarizing the individuals with the norms of their societies' cultures.

On the other hand, with the strikingly technological advance, with the alarming acceleration invention of gadgets of means of communication and transmission force the researchers to reconsider the conception of the process of learning as regards culture. If the individual used to be exposed only to his confined environment in the far-gone centuries where learning norms is limited, the technological boom in twentieth century allocates the individual to be exposed to other cultures. In this process, the technological advance, however, brings with new means of communication and substitutes the process of local contact with mass interaction. The different means of transmission – TV, DVD, Internet to name but a few – transform the world and restructure its fundamental basis which is based on *territorilization* and localization.

The media audience, be it heavy or light, is no more exposed only to the local environment; on the contrary, mass media miniaturize the universe and transform it into a small global village. The compression of spacio-temporal dimension of the globe helps in the widening of the scope of exposure of the individuals, and hence the learning process becomes no more confined within a specific territorial framework.

Media and communication technologies that have known a boom in the last decade of the twentieth century make the aforementioned definition of culture quite contested. In this regard, individuals are no more restrained within the matrix of their socialized practices, but they become open to other alien ones. The learning process thus changes its scope as well as its nature. The same as the individuals learn from their local environment, so they adapt other new cultures by means of mass media. Such operation creates an intimate interaction between the viewer-consumer and alien transmitted cultures. In this interactional context, the audience becomes the target of two diametrically opposed processes of learning: enculturation and acculturation.

To preserve Moroccan culture and its fundamental basis and framework that has lasted persistently among centuries, Moroccan responsible opt for different festivals

based in the first place on reviving the inveterate popular music. Alecia Cohen in "Your Morocco Travel Guide" highlights that "Celebration is an important aspect of Moroccan culture. Morocco is an exciting and entertaining country that lays claim to cultural, historical and religious holidays and festivals. At any given point of the year there is a Moroccan city or Berber community hosting glorious festivities. Moroccan celebrations can last anywhere from a few days up to two weeks" (2010: 5). in fact festivals are very numerous but I state but a few: Fes Festival of World Sacred Music in Fes which takes place in June each year, Gnaoua Music Festival in Essaouira which takes place in June each year, Timitar Music Festival in Agadir which takes place in July each year, Rose Festival- El Kelaa De Mgouna which takes place the first week in May each year, and Sufi Festival, which takes place in June each year. By and large, these festivals, traditional in their performance and style, give homage to Moroccan popular music and revive its parameters.

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