Moroccan Multiplicities

Performing Transnationalism and Alternative Nationalism in the Contemporary Urban Music Scene

Multiplicité marocaine : la performance du transnationalisme et du nationalisme alternatif dans la scène contemporaine des musiques urbaines

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This article examines the multiple forms of identification which characterise the creative practices of urban musicians in contemporary Morocco¹. It explores their cultural and linguistic repertoires and argues that they adopt a performative stance which simultaneously emphasises a transnational identity and a “*marocanité*”. The empirical research which is the main premise for this article was undertaken over a seven year period, first of all as part of a European Union 5th Framework project entitled *Changing City Spaces* (2002-2005) and subsequently, under the aegis of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project *Diaspora as Social and Cultural Practice: A Study of Transnational Networks across Europe and Africa* or “TNMUNDI” for short (2006-2010). The research undertaken during the *Changing City Spaces* project focused on creative practices and cultural policy in Europe, taking as its focus, a metropolitan and urban approach to cultural policy and cultural complexity. As a member of the *City Spaces* project team, I conducted interviews and participant observation amongst Paris-based North African musicians from 2003-2005 and focused on their professional and transnational links with other European cities such as London, Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Ljubljana and Belgrade. However, it became clear that if one wanted to study the transnational lives of migrant artists based in Europe, it would be necessary to broaden the geographical focus of our research and this led to the establishment of a further research project, namely TNMUNDI, co-directed by N. Kiwan and Ulrike H. Meinhof. The TNMUNDI project focused on the ways in which (post)migrant artists and cultural practitioners originating from North-Africa and Madagascar are able to use complex networks across African, European and wider global spaces. The project demonstrated that artists who enter such networks make use of, but go far beyond the ethnically and spatially defined communities that link originating and sending countries, as studied in much diaspora research.

1. Some parts of this article have previously been published in KIWAN & MEINHOF (2011). I am grateful to Palgrave Macmillan for granting me permission to reproduce material here.

The empirical research which will be discussed draws on interviews and participant observation conducted in Morocco from 2007-2008. The theoretical framework for the article emerges from and extends Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic and double consciousness. It shall be argued that whilst key features of Gilroy's Black Atlantic model are extremely salient, the paradigmatic shift towards a post-national framework of analysis is not a straightforward one within the Moroccan musical context.

The first part of the article outlines some of the key features of Gilroy's model and discusses how they are pertinent for the analysis of certain music scenes and genres in contemporary Morocco. The second and main part of the article will then move onto to show how some aspects of the alternative urban music scene in Morocco resonate with Gilroy's model, whilst others are less clearly part of a Black Atlantic framework.

From Black Atlantic to "Transmarocanité"?

Over twenty years after its publication in 1993, Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) still provides a number of useful entry points for thinking about Moroccan musical creativity in general and Morocco's contemporary urban music scene in particular². Gilroy's model provides an approach which encourages researchers to think beyond the nation-state. He is highly critical of English and African-American cultural studies, which according to him produce a sort of "cultural nationalism" through the use of "overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences" (*ibid.*: 2). Instead, Gilroy proposes an alternative: to theorise the concepts of creolisation, *métissage*, *mestizaje* and hybridity in an attempt to counter what he calls "cultural insiderism" where "ideas of nation, nationality, national belonging and nationalism are paramount" (*ibid.*: 3). His approach resonates with those sociological and anthropological approaches, which a decade after the publication of *The Black Atlantic* would go on to critique the methodological nationalism of much of the social sciences and humanities (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). In place of the boundedness of the nation-state and the ethnic absolutism of cultural insiderism, Gilroy (1993: 4) offers the image of the ship or rather, ships "in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean". This nautical metaphor is Gilroy's starting point. It creates a focus on the middle passage and plantation slavery as well as enabling

2. Gilroy's work continues to inspire a wide range of intellectual endeavours and authors, which cannot be explored in this article due to lack of space, but see, for example, AGUDELO *ET AL.* (2009), CHUDE-SOKEI (1996), CLARKE (1996), EVANS (2009), GOEBEL & SCHABIO (2006) or PIOT (2001).

him to develop a concept of “the Atlantic as a system of cultural exchanges” (*ibid.*: 14) which captures the circulation of ideas, activists, cultural and political artefacts such as books or music amongst the peoples of the Atlantic. This cultural exchange is expressed through the “unashamedly hybrid character of these black Atlantic cultures [which] continually confounds any simplistic (essentialist or anti-essentialist) understanding [...]” (*ibid.*: 99). This hybridity is also reflected in the “montage” which Gilroy argues is characteristic of hip hop culture with its mixture of electric and acoustic instrumentation, rhythms and sampling techniques. The notions of a system of cultural exchange and montage are relevant when studying the contemporary Moroccan music scene, since this is one which is marked by the synthesis of cultural and linguistic influences which are simultaneously drawn from Mediterranean and Northern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, North America and the Arab Middle East. We can see this hybridity through the use of western, Black Atlantic, and sub-Saharan forms of instrumentation and rhythmic structures or the self-conscious “fusion” identities of Casablanca groups such as Darga or Haoussa. The hybridity of what Gilroy (*ibid.*: 105) calls “black diaspora styles” also speaks to their “radically unfinished forms” whereby what counts is the performance of these musics and their “practice of [...] politics” to such an extent that the notion of event in Baudrillard’s sense of the term becomes more appropriate rather than the notion of (cultural) object. Here Gilroy is critiquing the linear concept of cultural consumption whereby audiences, listeners, spectators are assumed to passively consume cultural products or objects. In its place, Gilroy seizes on the notion of the event because of all its attendant political consequences and supposedly because he sees it as a conduit for the re-articulation of aesthetics and ethics, culture and politics.

Gilroy’s discussion of modernity is illuminating when considered in connection to the theme of musical creativity in contemporary Morocco. Indeed, Gilroy (*ibid.*: 17) argues that modernity in the West (Europe, the Americas) should be seen as arising from the encounter between Europeans and Africans: “[...] modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper a self-conscious sense of western civilisation.” That encounter, which for millions of Africans was a brutal one has of course had a lasting impact on post-slave populations and Gilroy’s appropriation of W. E. B. Du Bois’s term “double consciousness” is part of an attempt to understand the specific difficulties that blacks in America experienced in their internalisation of American identity. Gilroy cites Du Bois and his discussion of twoness or split identification: “One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 2007 quoted by Gilroy 1993: 126). So in effect, double consciousness is a troubled state or “internal conflict in the African American individual between what was ‘African’ and what was ‘American’” (Bruce Jr 1992: 301). Du Bois’s use

of the term double consciousness referred to the racism experienced by African Americans at the hands of whites but it also referred to an African American distinctiveness. Here Du Bois drew on Romantic ideas and images to argue that “the essence of a distinctive African consciousness was its spirituality, a spirituality based in Africa but revealed among African Americans in their folklore, their history of patient suffering, and their faith” (*ibid.*). The notion of double consciousness in its spiritual or transcendental sense might be a fruitful way for thinking through certain aspects of musical creativity in contemporary Morocco. I am referring here in particular to the possession trance ceremonies which certain Moroccan Gnawa musicians engage in during the all-night *lilat* in order to heal those afflicted with spirit possession³. So here, double consciousness does not simply refer to dual cultural affiliations or identifications of musicians but also to dual states of consciousness or awareness which are reflected within the music and musical “performance” itself. The concept of double consciousness also gives rise to the question of what Deborah Kapchan calls culture possession or possessing culture. In her study of the Gnawa in contemporary Morocco, she articulates various meanings of the notion of possession, one of which pertains to the idea of possessing culture. She writes: “In order to possess culture—to really ‘own’ it, to own up to it—one must ‘come to terms’ with it; that is, one must debate and create the terms of culture, to define it, to be self-possessed, to be possessed by an idea of culture” (Kapchan 2007: 3). So the notion of possessing culture in the sense of owning up to it—interrogating it, being self-reflexive about it, re-moulding it and re-casting it—practices which some of our Moroccan interlocutors engage with—is relevant here for our study of Moroccan multiplicity in the field of musical creativity and performance. The notion of doubleness also allows Gilroy to move beyond the arid binary of nation versus diaspora when discussing the processes and modalities of cultural production. Indeed, one of the main premises of Gilroy’s argument is to move beyond the opposition between discourses which either celebrate a certain essentialism and those discourses which privilege a more pluralistic perspective. Gilroy (1993: 31) qualifies the “ontological essentialist view” as “brute pan-Africanism”, whereas the pluralist position “affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of black particularity that is *internally* divided [...]” (*ibid.*: 32). Gilroy articulates a third position, what he calls an “anti-anti-essentialist” position and here he adopts the concept of diaspora in order to articulate a response to the essentialist-pluralist dichotomy which characterises black

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3. This relates to Gnawa music as it is performed in sacred as opposed to secular performative contexts *i.e.* Gnawa music is now a well-known world music phenomenon and as such is celebrated in a number of transnational festivals, such as the Festival Essaouira Gnaoua Musiques du Monde (MAJDOULI 2007) ; for more on trance and Gnawa music in contemporary Morocco, see KAPCHAN (2007). *Lilat* denotes the plural of the word *lila* (the all-night gnawa ceremonies).

cultural studies. Gilroy makes the argument for the concept of diaspora because, according to him, it can be used to describe the “richness of black cultures” thus taking into account the cultures of the African point of origin as well as the cultures which developed in the new world. So Gilroy’s dismissal of the essentialist-pluralistic dichotomy also entails a rejection of the well-worn but omnipresent opposition between tradition and modernity. This is why he argues that black expressive culture and music in particular should be regarded as a counterculture of modernity. This is a cultural form which adopts a politics of transfiguration and in so doing, exposes the “internal fissures in the concept of modernity” (*ibid.*: 38). So for Gilroy, black artistic expression and above all, black music interrogates and challenges the grand narrative of western modernity and progress because via its formal and especially its moral features, it becomes a space “which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics” (*ibid.*: 38-39). This concern for a re-articulation of ethics and aesthetics and culture and politics is a useful framework for understanding some of the dynamics of the contemporary urban Moroccan music scene. Indeed, what emerged from our fieldwork in Morocco is the fairly prevalent notion amongst contemporary urban artists that their music should engage with the political.

Similarly, it is possible to use Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model to think further about some of the formal aspects of contemporary Moroccan music, in particular some of its traditions of performance. Gilroy argues that one of the distinctive aspects of black music is its “dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture—the pre- and anti-discursive constituents of black metacommunication” (*ibid.*: 75). Gilroy’s interest in gesture as a form of communication is related to his interest in the expressive cultures of post-slave populations, where art is used to express experiences which are unspeakable—so horrific that they exhaust the possibilities of language. The memories (lived and prosthetic [Landsberg 2004]) of slavery and post-slavery as the creative context are relevant for our discussion of the multiplicities of contemporary Moroccan music, especially music performed by Gnawa musicians, who are the descendants of sub-Saharan African slaves. Indeed, as Wright (2002) points out, Morocco was one of the largest markets for the trans-Saharan slave trade until the twentieth century. Although statistics are unreliable Ennaji claims that the trans-Saharan slave trade brought hundreds of thousands of slaves to Morocco (Ennaji 1994, 1999, cited in Kapchan 2007: 17). The slave trade in Morocco began during the 8th century and saw influxes of slaves from modern-day Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, Guinea, Mali and Senegal. The trans-Saharan origins of the Gnawa musicians is remarked upon by Deborah Kapchan (2007: 18) in her study of Gnawa and trance: “Words—and especially names—in Bambara, the language of modern-day Mali and part of the Manding family of West African languages, still sprinkle the songs of the Gnawa, as do invocations to the spirits of

the Fulani and the Hausa.” Given the history of Gnawa enslavement in Morocco, Kapchan draws links between the trope of spirit possession which characterises their ritual *lila* performances and the notion of being possessed by a master/owner: “The spirit possession ceremonies of the Gnawa are metonymic performances in which somatic memories of slavery are invoked and symbolically mastered” (*ibid.*: 20-21). She then goes on to draw an explicit link to Gilroy’s discussion of the aesthetics of black cultural expression in the Black Atlantic context by arguing that the spirit possession ceremonies of the Gnawa are “an example of ‘the ways in which closeness to the ineffable terrors of slavery was kept alive—carefully cultivated—in ritualized, social forms’ (Gilroy 1993: 73)” (Kapchan 2007: 21). Kapchan further argues that of course, the process of being liberated from spirit possession via the healing music of the Gnawa can be seen as a metaphor for emancipation from slavery. In terms of Gnawa music and the popular imagination in contemporary Morocco, Kapchan demonstrates how it is possible to evoke a sort of Black Atlantic or diasporic imaginary, which became increasingly popular in post-independence Morocco where Gnawa musicians were part of hugely popular music groups Nass El Ghiwane and Jil Jilala. The contribution of the Gnawa added “an African aesthetic to the music” and created a “particularly Moroccan sound” (*ibid.*: 21). Kapchan goes on to demonstrate how the 1960s and 1970s was a period during which the Moroccan *intelligentsia* was particularly sympathetic to discourses about international struggles for racial equality and consequently the Gnawa came to symbolise “African culture” and Morocco’s links with the African diaspora. The struggles of African Americans resonated with Moroccan intellectuals at the time and in turn Gnawa musicians were approached by high profile African Americans such as Jimi Hendrix, Randy Weston, Pharoah Saunders and Archie Shepp. Although not all Gnawa musicians are descendants of slaves, this history (or double consciousness, to use Gilroy’s term) is emphasised both in marketing and performative strategies. For example, liner notes on CDs often refer to Gnawa music as Morocco’s blues music. When performing in secularised contexts (in festivals or world music settings), Kapchan notes that the Gnawa often wear dreadlocks which associates them with the black liberation struggles as expressed through reggae music.

Moroccan Multiplicities and Alternative Nationalism

The following section draws on fieldwork which was undertaken in Morocco between 2007 and 2008⁴. The research which informed the fieldwork was premised on the question of transnational networks amongst Moroccan

4. Fieldwork was conducted in Morocco by Nadia Kiwan and Marie-Pierre Gibert.

musicians and cultural practitioners in the urban “nouvelle scène marocaine”, as it refers to itself. Central to this new urban music scene is the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens festival, which is the largest urban music festival in Africa. As such, many of the groups and musicians we encountered during the fieldwork were part of what one might want to refer to as the Boulevard “movement”. We interviewed and undertook participant observation with musicians and cultural actors based in Rabat, Casablanca, Fes, Meknes, Agadir and Marrakesh, in addition to interviewing and undertaking participant observation with musicians and cultural actors of Moroccan origin who were based in France, the UK, the Netherlands and Switzerland. However, in this article, I will focus on just a few examples which illustrate the ways in which we might want to adapt and develop Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model, whilst still considering it as a useful conceptual tool. I will therefore focus on the following acts: Haoussa, Darga, Oum, Khansa Batma, Bigg and HKayne. The new music scene in Morocco must first of all be contextualised and in order to do this, I will first discuss the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens Festival, which takes place in Casablanca every summer, and which formed the entry point and continuing backdrop to our empirical research in Morocco.

La Nouvelle Scène marocaine and the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens

Established in 1999, the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens Festival is the result of a number of young friends and cultural activists based in Casablanca whose aim is to give a platform for “alternative” urban music—in Morocco this encompasses hip-hop, metal and fusion/electro⁵. In addition to organising a professional musicians’ stage with headlining acts from Morocco, Europe and the United States, the originality of the Boulevard is its Tremplin (springboard) competition. In effect, the Boulevard has developed into much more than a three-day cultural event and has become a motor for musical and artistic creativity across the country (groups from all over Morocco aspire to take part in the Tremplin event and winning the competition opens the gateway to national and international career opportunities). However the ultimate aim is to develop the cultural scene and infrastructure *inside* Morocco. As such, a career abroad is not seen as the ultimate and defining objective of the Moroccan up and coming groups we studied—rather it is Casablanca and access to the growing cultural network there. Here, we concentrate on the work of two people—Momo Merhari and Hicham

5. In the Moroccan context, “alternative” or “underground” music (terms are used interchangeably by the actors concerned) generally includes rap, rock, heavy metal and “fusion” and implies music which is not part of an established “pop” circuit, perhaps because the musicians concerned are not signed to any record label, and/or are do not receive any regular media exposure via the mainstream radio, television channels.

Bahou—founders and directors of the Boulevard and its association EAC-L’Boulevard. Momo and Hicham are two friends who are passionate about underground Moroccan music and it is this enthusiasm which led them to start organising the annual festival. The festival was first held in 1999 at the FOL (Fédération des œuvres laïques) a 400-seat theatre belonging to the French organisation of the same name in Casablanca’s Maârif district, where Momo was employed as the stage manager and youth worker. In the years running up to the launching of the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens, Momo and Hicham had encouraged numerous amateur rock and metal groups from Casablanca to rehearse and perform at the FOL. From 2003 onwards, the growing popularity of the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens Festival meant that the organisers had to move it to the open air. Today, the Festival attracts about 150,000 spectators over a four day period and it is held in the open-air C.O.C. stadium. It is thus no exaggeration to claim that a whole generation has now grown up with the Boulevard and indeed thinks of itself quite self-consciously as “la génération Boulevard” (as indicated in the 2010 edition of *L’Kounache*, the magazine which is published during the annual festival)⁶. The popularity of the Boulevard is due to several factors, not least the fact that at the time it emerged, Moroccan public and private sources of funding or support for *musiques actuelles alternatives* in Morocco was virtually inexistent. The fact that the event is conceived and organised by young people who are close to musicians, and indeed the fact that many of the Boulevard team are successful musicians themselves also adds to its appeal. The festival entrance ticket is also very reasonable (40 Dirhams for 4 days in 2007 and free in 2013)⁷, which means that is a popular event in the true sense of the word—something which I observed first hand during the 2007 edition of the Festival. Public and private sponsors soon realised this and what started off as a virtually unfunded Festival now attracts sponsorship from partners such as the Ville de Casablanca, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, the CCME (Conseil consultatif des Marocains résidents à l’étranger), the Institut français and the Instituto Cervantes.

The relationship between the Boulevard and the Moroccan political authorities has been an interesting one. Momo explains that as organisers they are often caught up between the conflict which opposes Islamist *intégristes* and the government:

“[...] the problem with the authorities, it’s that before they didn’t understand at all what we were doing, [...] and now they’re scared of the Islamists, [...] so in other words, if they authorise us they’re scared about the reaction of the Islamists [...] and we’re in the middle [...]”⁸.

6. L’Kounache means “the notebook” in Moroccan Arabic.

7. 40 Moroccan Dirhams is equivalent to 3.5 Euros (14/02/2014).

8. Kiwan’s and Gibert’s interview with Momo, April 2008, Casablanca.

In 2003, the Boulevard team were drawn into an overtly political affair, when fourteen heavy metal musicians were arrested and detained on suspicion of Satanism. The musicians who were arrested were part of the Boulevard scene and although they were all released after weeks of mobilisation, this affair (“l’affaire des 14”) which was shortly followed by the 16 May terrorist attacks in Casablanca, led the Moroccan government to alter its stance on the Boulevard. From then on, it is arguable that the “nouvelle scène musicale” was regarded in a more benevolent manner, since the movement was seen by some as a potentially useful counter to mounting Islamic home-grown fundamentalism, rather than representing an attack on the moral fabric of Moroccan society.

The political significance of the Boulevard cannot be overstated in a context where the country’s youth are demographically the majority of the population—55% of Morocco’s 30 millions population is under the age of twenty-five⁹. By offering musicians and artists a space for self-expression, the Boulevard organisers and many of the musicians from the “nouvelle scène” claim that they have reconnected with the 1970s music protest tradition associated with bands such as Nass El Ghiwane or Jil Jilala or that they can be seen as the twenty-first century version of this sort of cultural and political spirit of engagement and resistance.

So Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic resonates with *la nouvelle scène marocaine* in a number of ways. First, we can see that Gilroy’s concern for a post-national framing of culture and hybrid multiplicity is central to the work and ethos of the *Boulevard* movement. This is a transnational movement, which, through a “double consciousness”, draws on links with artists, publics, expertise and sponsors both within and outside Morocco. It is also a culturally hybrid scene, with musical influences ranging from Africa and the Middle East to Europe and the Americas. Finally, Gilroy’s fundamental interest in how creative practices become a counter-culture of modernity where ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics are conjoined finds expression in the *Boulevard* music scene, which foregrounds an alternative and subaltern aesthetic and which is a youth-led political force for socio-cultural change in Morocco.

However, where we might find that Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model sits less comfortably with our empirical research on the *nouvelle scène marocaine* is the consistent framing of cultural activities in terms of what I call “alternative nationalism”. Indeed, what emerged from the Moroccan musicians’ and cultural actors’ stories is a strong sense that they inscribe their work within a transnational frame whilst simultaneously subscribing to a groundedness and attachment to a culturally-inflected sense of place. By alternative nationalism, I am not suggesting that these musicians engage in any exclusionist or culturally purist discourse of identification. Rather

9. See <<http://www.ambafrance-ma.org/maroc/population.cfm>>, accessed 12 August 2010.

I would like to suggest the very opposite, that is, it is precisely *through* the references to Moroccan multiplicities (*transmarocanité*) and to Morocco as “*un carrefour*” of musical and linguistic influences that certain artists project and perform a sort of national pride—a nationalism which is premised on celebrating Morocco’s cultural multiplicity. This celebration of multiplicity can be seen to be an alternative nationalism because precisely it can be viewed as an ethical nationalism—one which does not place Rabat and Casablanca or Arab Morocco in a hierarchy above Amazigh or African Morocco. In addition, we could argue that alternative nationalism may facilitate social, cultural and political critique of one’s own national society, thus offering a platform for counter-cultural dissent.

Nouvelle Scène Artists in Morocco

I will now look more closely at specific musicians within Morocco, who can all be described as having emerged from the *Boulevard* movement and I will demonstrate how certain aspects of their trajectories can all be read in conjunction with some aspects of Gilroy’s model, whilst others seem to require a critical departure from Gilroy’s post-national frame. I am referring here to the performed “alternative nationalism”, which exists in tension with an acknowledged transnational “multiplicity”—what we have called *transmarocanité*. We will first consider the case of Haoussa, a Casablanca-based group which came together in 2002 and whose members are in their twenties and thirties. Some are still students, whilst others work in various jobs ranging from night club DJ to market researcher and teacher. On its website, Haoussa describes itself in the following manner:

“Not easily labelled, furtive, creative and resolutely punk, the five angry members of Haoussa unsettle the musical landscape of North Africa. [...] Haoussa navigates between the irreverent tradition of popular language and a devastatingly ‘rock’ sonic assault. Inspired by the Aissawa (brotherhood of mystical musicians), these precursors of Moroccan punk evoke the problems of the street and a reality torn between madness and chaos”¹⁰.

Haoussa illustrates a *transmarocanité* or multiplicity in a number of ways. Firstly, its very name is worthy of further comment and indeed, lead singer and band founder, Khalid makes a point of discussing the significance of the band’s name when talking about the group’s trajectory and how the name Houssa reflects the sense that the group has, that as Moroccans, they share cultural links with Niger, Mauritania, Senegal or Nigeria: “In dialect, Haoussa means whim [...] which is to say, madness, but a joyful madness,

10. <http://www.haoussa.com/Bio_Haoussa_fr-en.pdf>, accessed 28/3/2013.

this madness is good, and Houssa is also a language and a region, like Bambara [...]"¹¹.

So as Khalid points out, the band's name already indexes a multiple and fractal history, which straddles multiple geographical locations (Morocco, Casablanca, sub-Saharan Africa). What Khalid believes is a further commonality between the Moroccan group and the Haoussa populations of sub-Saharan Africa is their dual Muslim and pre-Islamic heritage¹².

Another manner in which Haoussa illustrates a certain *transmarocanité* or to use Gilroy's terms, a hybrid multiplicity is through its use of language. The group's songs are written and sung in Moroccan Arabic (*darija*), classical Arabic and English. Khalid explains that *darija* lends itself well to multiple meanings and interpretations: "Dialect is good, [...] the same sentence, you hear it from two different people, and you'll get two different understandings"¹³. So the resulting polysemy of Haoussa's lyrics resonates with Gilroy's position.

In addition, the identity of Haoussa as part of the alternative urban music scene in Morocco must be commented on in relation to the category of "fusion". In the contemporary Moroccan context, "fusion" is at once a musical and social category. It arguably became a way for groups to identify and self-identify in the wake of the Boulevard phenomenon, which through its national Tremplin competition, contributed to the establishment of a category referring to music which is neither heavy metal nor rap, nor commercial pop music. Fusion in this context evokes music which mixes rhythms, instrumentation and vocal styles from local, national and transnational localities. In the case of Haoussa, one of the main musical inspirations for this group is the Aïssawi Sufi musical tradition—founded by Muhammad Ben Aïssâ in Meknes in the 16th century. The first Aïssawa musical groups (*tâ`ifa-s*) came together in the 17th century and continue to this day to officiate *lila Aïssâwiyya* which consists of the recital of mystical litanies (*dhikr*), spiritual songs and poetry (*qasâ'id*), a ritual of exorcism (*mluk*) and a collective dance (*hadra*) (Nabti 2010). However, Khalid points out that he is not motivated by a nostalgic revivalism ("it's better to leave your own mark")¹⁴ and perhaps this is why his music marries the Aïssawa tradition with other musical forms such as ska, folk, reggae, rap

11. Kiwan and Gibert's interview with Khalid, 12/04/2008, Casablanca.

12. Khalid's comments recall what Veit ERLMANN (2004) refers to as "sonic haunting" whereby he makes the case for an anthropology of the senses which pays more attention to auditory culture's place within modernity. Sonic haunting or a return of the repressed is particularly salient when exploring the idea of Moroccan multiplicities and multiple consciousnesses which materialise through sound or music. This idea is obviously relevant for Gnawa music and its sub-Saharan origins as explored by KAPCHAN (2007) and as detailed in the documentary film by Bella Le Nestour and John ALLEN (2000), *Wijdan* which looks at links between the contemporary Gnawa of Marrakesh and Bambara musicians from Mali.

13. Kiwan and Gibert's interview with Khalid, 12/04/2008, Casablanca.

14. Kiwan and Gibert's interview with Khalid, 12/04/2008, Casablanca.

and funk. However, what is crucial to note here is that the fusion which Haoussa's music has come to be known for in Morocco should not be seen as an instrumentalised strategy on the part of the musicians. As Khalid explains, the notion of fusion, which he himself uses with some caution, has arisen from an organic process of creative practice which expresses what Gilroy would call multiplicity, hybridity or montage:

"[...] the music which I listened to before, was Oum Kalthoum, Abdel Halim with my Mum and Dad, I loved it, whereas up until now, there was also Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Janis Joplin and Bob Marley, reggae, ska, dub, punk with the Sex Pistols until [...] not hip hop, but nearly, the beginnings of hip hop, a mix of funk, hip hop, there are all those types of music [...] in the end, this all came out on its own [...] we started to do fusion, in inverted commas, a little bit, and we based it on Aissawa music. A simple example is the rhythm, it's toc, toc mm. And we play it with the bendir. And we realised that technically, this rhythm is easily and agreeably predisposed to marry with quite a lot of other types of music. Whether that is hip hop, funk, and it's great, it gives something extra, and in terms of vocals, that too, that too, [...] you've already got three or four composition methods"¹⁵.

A final way in which we might see Haoussa as resonating with some of Gilroy's work is in relation to the question of culture and politics. Haoussa is a group which engages with political and social issues, particularly those which they claim affect Morocco's youth, namely unemployment. Khalid emphasises the fact that the group's lyrics contain sharp critiques of Moroccan politics and society:

"I sort of started by criticizing what goes on, in political terms, political because I saw that there was a certain distancing on the part of young people from everything which is political, [...] I felt that we should say so [...] with your friends, it's one thing, its OK, no problem, but saying that on stage, that makes it a little bit more official [...]"¹⁶.

This concern for political issues seems to exemplify some of Gilroy's ideas about black expressive cultures as a counter-culture of modernity, whereby culture and politics are seen as inextricably linked. Moreover, Khalid's critique of the commercial pop music scene in Morocco demonstrates a deep concern for the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Khalid explicitly uses the term "*l'éthique*" in this context, whereby he argues that appropriate ethical language should be used by musicians in their lyrics in order to engage effectively with socio-political questions:

"I've noticed that there are people who engage in terrorism through art. [...] terrorists blow us up with their bombs and they too blow our ears off with their bombs! [...] you've got to have arguments, and you've got to know how to explain things

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

as they are. With ethics too. You have to know how to choose the right adjectives. You shouldn't come across as uncultured"¹⁷.

So it would be appropriate to view Haoussa as a music group which embodies some of the features of Gilroy's Black Atlantic model because of the group's acknowledged aesthetic and linguistic multiplicities and their taking up of politico-ethical questions through music. It can also be seen to resonate with Gilroy's post-national framing of culture—most clearly though its invocation of a trans-sub-Saharan repertoire. Nevertheless, just as in our discussion of the Boulevard movement above, we argue that this Moroccan multiplicity does not exist at the expense of a national agenda. Rather, such a *transmarocanité* can be seen as existing in tension with a national framing of culture. For all his critiques of Moroccan society and politics and his espousal of a trans-Saharan identity, Khalid is nevertheless quite keen for Morocco to be able to compete on a world stage as a defined national entity. He rejects the notion of holding onto a normative notion of the national self, *e.g. via* the revivalism of the Amazigh movement, so in that sense he is espousing a post-national outlook, yet on the other hand, his refusal to be seduced by the potential identity politics or revivalism of the Amazigh movement is motivated by a national sentiment:

"[...] the searching for one's roots, [...] an American [...] they've got an advantage over us so they can do that, ask themselves who they are [...] but we don't have time for that, we've been overtaken by events, we can't allow ourselves to [...] those are secondary concerns [...]"¹⁸.

It is worthwhile to compare the experience of Haoussa with fellow fusion group Darga. Darga is composed of nine members and came together in Casablanca in 2001. It came second place after Haoussa in the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens Tremplin competition and from there went onto perform at the Essaouira Festival and abroad (touring in Spain, France, Italy, Belgium and Sweden). Darga, which means "cactus"—a plant which survives in harsh conditions—proposes a mix of reggae, Gnawa, rock, chaâbi, ragga and raï music in its original compositions which are mainly sung in *darija* with some French and English. My comments here will focus on their second studio album, released in 2008 and entitled *Stop Baraka*. This album includes some tracks which demonstrate how we might want to think about Moroccan multiplicities and translocality. For example, the track entitled "Africa", which is dedicated to Senegalese musician Cheikh Lô and includes sound extracts of Martin Luther King is a case in point. Guitarist and vocalist, Badre explained to me some of the background to this track:

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

“The problem which is addressed in ‘Africa’—every time we talk about Moroccans, we forget that we’re on African soil. It’s a big problem. It’s the problem of practically the whole of the Maghreb [...] we’re Africans as well. We’re Arab too, we’re Muslim, African, we’re Mediterranean, we’re all of those things. We’re Amazigh, we’re [...] and all of that is valuable [...] so we’re trying via this track to say that we’re Africans [...] we’d like Moroccans to be able to recognise that [...]. Every time we want to work with someone—we’d like to develop networks—that we want to do things, we always think in Morocco, of the north, whereas there are lots of things which can be done from the south”¹⁹.

It is of course necessary to highlight the fact that this discursive embrace of “African identity” could in fact reflect a professional strategy to promote one’s art. Nevertheless, it is arguable that behind this reference to Africa lies a political project which motivates the group in its desire to offer a critique of what it sees as some of the problems afflicting contemporary Moroccan society—namely youth unemployment, the desire to emigrate, corruption and an official history which silences as much as it celebrates. The questioning of this “official history” surfaces, in particular, in two further tracks on the *Stop Baraka* album: “Résissance” and “El Khattabi”. With regards to “Résissance”, Badre explains the context for the composition of this track:

“Résissance [...] talks a little bit about young Moroccans, who are between east and west. And who don’t know what they should do. There are those [...] half of them [...] who have tried to emigrate abroad, and half of them who are here and who are not satisfied with the situation. And at the same time, we throw out a message of hope, we’re telling them that we resist, but at the same time, we dance”²⁰.

And as far as the “El-Khattabi” track is concerned, the liner notes in the CD explain:

“This track pays homage to Abdelkrim El Khattabi (1882-1963), Rif nationalist leader and initiator of the Rif Republic’ project, as well as to those who have been forgotten by official history and who nevertheless sacrificed their lives for their ideals and the future of their country.”

AbdelKrim El Khattabi has been referred to as the “Che Guevara maghrébin” (Hamadi 2013) because of how he has come to symbolise anti-colonialist struggle in the 20th century, leading the Moroccan resistance against the Spanish and French colonial powers during the *Guerre du Rif* (Lugan 2001). This concern that Darga have with Morocco’s history and sense of self resonates with Gilroy’s understanding of black expressive cultures as a counter-culture of modernity in the sense that such cultures seek to re-articulate what has been dis-articulated in the name of modernity: aesthetics and ethics, culture and politics. Indeed, as Badre opines about the El-Khattabi track:

19. Kiwan’s interview with Badre, 2/04/2008, Rabat.

20. *Ibid.*

“[It’s] a message of recognition regarding people in Morocco. To someone who was forgotten by official history and to give...to try to give some hope, to say that young people need this greater Maghreb to come into existence [...]”²¹.

The reference to “*ce grand Maghreb*” is not anodyne and this trope comes up several times in the discussion that we had: “The main thing is to make our musical Maghreb. We’re trying to build our Arabic music Maghreb”²². Here Badre is referring to efforts being made by the group and their associated label “AB Sawt” which works to promote greater links between artists in the global south *i.e.* across the Maghreb and Africa as well as to facilitate greater distribution of music made by artists based in Africa (Badre also explained to me that the name of the association AB Sawt is a play on words signifying south—as in the global South; south if pronounced *à la française* *i.e.* without sounding the “th”, gives “sawt” which in Arabic means “sound”, a byword for music).

So it could be argued that underpinning the fusion, multiplicity and translocality of Darga’s music is a broader political project which aims to articulate a non-essentialist *marocanité*, or even a non-essentialist pan-Africanism. These positions can be regarded as non-essentialist because it is the very multiplicity of the cultural signifiers which Darga refers to through their music which facilitates the articulation of an *alternative*, non-foundational, non-exclusivist nationalism. Indeed, since Badre moved to Montreal to study in 2009, he has continued working on the distribution of Moroccan musicians in Canada and so the original project has taken on a trans-Atlantic dimension which resonates very clearly with Gilroy’s concept of cultural exchange.

The co-existence of a transnational outlook, premised on a Gilroy-type conception of hybrid cultural exchange and a more grounded, nationally-inflected self-understanding is also evident when we consider the trajectories of two female musicians, who both had left their native Casablanca for France and Turkey respectively and then, decided to return in order to develop their artistic careers in the wake of the emerging *nouvelle scène*. We shall now therefore discuss Oum and Khansa Batma.

Oum is a soul and nu-jazz²³ singer-songwriter who was born in Casablanca but brought up in Marrakesh. In 1997, she moved to Rabat to pursue a degree in architecture in at the École nationale d’architecture but then decided to focus on a musical career and moved back to Casablanca in order to pursue this objective. She was subsequently approached by a French music producer who invited her to Paris and introduced her to various other music producers. Oum explains that after two years of to-ing and fro-ing between France and Morocco, she decided that she would return

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. Nu jazz refers to jazz music which is mixed with other genres such as electronic dance music and funk.

definitively to Morocco to pursue her musical career. For her, the 16 May 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca and Morocco's success in the African Cup of Nations football tournament were linked to her decision to re-settle in Casablanca permanently.

"I already had a name [in France] [...] and then one day, when I was coming back from France, it was a strange year [...] so many things were happening [...] well, there were the 16th May attacks [...] there was the African Cup of Nations where Morocco got to the final I think [...] or semi-final [...] well, basically, there were lots of feelings of Morocanness if you like [...] and [...] I told myself, [...] it would be good if I did some things here now [...]"²⁴.

Another significant feature of Oum's "return" was her meeting with fellow Casablanca soul singer Barry. Oum explains that Barry's teaming of *darija* lyrics and non-Arab, western-influenced rhythms and instrumentation was linked to a broader realisation on her part of the aesthetic possibilities available to her in a Moroccan context. So in Oum's case, her return to Morocco after a two-year period of to-ing and fro-ing between Casablanca, Rabat and Paris, is bound up in her desire to be part of an innovative and somewhat tumultuous cultural and political context in the post-2003 period. Her performative stance which suggests a clear sense of attachment to a certain "*marocanité*" (a term she uses) is nonetheless inscribed within a broader frame which draws on her varied and transnational influences and relationships.

Rock musician, Khansa Batma also spent a significant length of time outside of Morocco. In Khansa's case, after releasing two albums in Morocco she spent three years in Istanbul working in television and like Oum, made frequent trips back and forth between Turkey and Morocco during this time. In 2005/2006, Khansa, who is the daughter of the Mohamed Batma, founder of the well-known 1970s group Lemchaheb and niece of Larbi Batma, leader of well-known group Nass El Ghiwane, decided to make a "return" to music and to Casablanca and started working with her composer brother, Tarik Batma on her third album. In a similar manner to Oum, the emergent cultural effervescence in Morocco is clearly tied up with Khansa's return and her sense of optimism regarding the future. It can be argued that her enthusiasm is couched in somewhat patriotic terms, although she rejects any nationalist motivations. Nevertheless, it is fairly striking that Khansa, like Oum, articulates a highly transnational existence (in 2008, at the time of interview, Khansa was still moving back and forth between Istanbul and Casablanca) with a more grounded attachment to Morocco, to the extent that one is tempted to argue that these musicians can also be seen as part of the broader "alternative nationalism" current within the new Moroccan music scene. The nature of Khansa's attachment to Morocco is hinted at in the following extract:

24. Kiwan's and Gibert's interview with Oum, April 2008, Casablanca.

"I've understood something that no matter what success you can have elsewhere, success at home is priceless. It's priceless. And then everything's to be done in Morocco. There's a whole public to bring in behind [...] you see, to come. There's everything to be done. It's hard. It's difficult. It demands a lot of determination. Lots of patience [...] strong nerves [...]. There's a system [...] a whole cultural system which has to be changed. Which has to be re-adapted, to be re-written. We're in the process of writing the cultural history of Morocco. Young people, us, our generation, we're writing the history of Moroccan musical culture. I'm talking about Moroccan music"²⁵.

We may reflect further on the relationship between culture and politics, transnational multiplicity and alternative nationalism *via* a discussion of two prominent rap acts in Morocco. Taoufik Hazeb, otherwise known by his stage name Don Bigg is a Moroccan rapper from Casablanca. He is one of the pioneers of the rap genre in Morocco and recorded his first solo album in 2006²⁶. The title of this album *Mgharba til mout (Moroccans until we die)* was a commercial success and established him on the new Moroccan scene. His music and music videos suggest that he is heavily influenced by US gangsta-style rap and when interviewed, he acknowledged that black American music is a key source of inspiration for him in terms of sampling and the material and visual features of US rap²⁷. However, Bigg's insistence that Moroccan rap should use the Moroccan vernacular, *darija* has made his genre of rap clearly Moroccan. Bigg occupies an interesting terrain in the contemporary Moroccan scene. His lyrics are sharply critical of Moroccan society but he nevertheless seems to express a rather nationalist or regionalist outlook, reflected in the very title of his first album, *Moroccans until we die*. Moreover, Bigg's aspirations are very much focused on Morocco and the Arab world: "[...] I want to become well-known in the Arab world"²⁸. Bigg's focus on Morocco is also expressed in one of his songs which deals with an omnipresent theme affecting Moroccan youth, namely emigration. It is arguable that his stance on those who emigrate is fairly critical: "The title [...] means 'leave us here' and I am talking more to those who believe that [...] going abroad is the dream and everything [...] I say to them 'go on then, leave' [...] we're staying here [...]"²⁹. Bigg has been criticized for his use of provocative language and imagery so in one sense, he certainly appears to adopt an alternative, subversive performative identity. On the other hand, he, like many other Moroccan rappers who make social critique the bedrock of their lyrics, has refused to become involved with the *Mouvement du 20 février*, a protest movement which

25. Kiwan's interview with Khansa Batma, April 2008, Casablanca.

26. Taoufik Hazeb had been involved in various groups from 1998-2006, notably as Mafia C, before taking on the stage name and persona of Bigg or Don Bigg in 2006.

27. Kiwan and Gibert's interview with Bigg, 13/4/2008, Casablanca.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

developed in Morocco in the wake of the Arab Spring and which demanded more social justice and political democracy. Bigg claims that he is against all forms of “recuperation” and this seems to explain his distance from this movement (Slimani 2012). However, another explanation may be that many Moroccan rappers are not prepared to cross “the red lines” and criticize the king. Indeed, Hatim, from Meknes-based HKayne is reported as stating: “We’re Royalists and we acknowledge that [...] I am not saying this because I am afraid or want to look to good. If I had a criticism to make, I would make it” (*ibid.*).

That HKayne, another key rap group of the new musical scene in Morocco should be royalist and assert this may be surprising on one level, given that the fundamental characteristics of rap is that it developed as a subaltern genre, at least if we consider its beginnings in 1970s New York. The fact that rap occupies a rather ambiguous political position in Morocco reflects what Eric Charry (2012) writes about in their cultural history of the development of hip hop in West Africa. That is, it would seem that rap in Morocco is an expressive form of socio-cultural critique yet that critique remains within certain parameters, perhaps due to the fact that this “alternative” musical form is imbued with some sort of overarching nationalism. In this regard, the case of H-Kayne is an interesting one. This group has been one of the most prominent groups of the Boulevard generation, and this since its revelation and subsequent consecration via the Boulevard des jeunes musiciens Tremplin competition in 2003. Its first major success and signature track “Issawa Style” very much emphasised the band’s Meknassi origins (the Aïssawwa Sufi brotherhood was founded and is till this day based in Meknes; see Nabti 2010) and the group made a point of describing itself as representatives of “le rap vert et rouge” in explicit reference to the Moroccan flag³⁰. The group’s members rap in *darija*, with Hatim rapping in French as well. Although they point out that they are influenced by American rap and reference socially and politically-engaged US rappers such as KRS1 and Talib Kweli-Hatim of HKayne points out that rapping in *darija* is important for engaging their Moroccan audience. Indeed, he explains with some satisfaction that the fact that the group were invited in 2008 to close a national, state-sponsored festival in Fes which celebrated 1,200 years of Moroccan cultural history was highly significant and signalled a process of acceptance of rap music as having become a Moroccan, rather than alien cultural form: “this music [rap] is part of Moroccan culture [...] so for us it’s a great satisfaction”³¹.

30. See <<http://www.campagnedumillenaire.ma/campagnedumillenaire/index.php?page=actualite>>, accessed 29/03/2013.

31. Kivan and Gibert’s interview with Hatim, HKayne, 17/4/2008, Meknes.

The above discussion of The Boulevard des jeunes musiciens, Darga, Haoussa, Oum, Khansa Batma, Bigg and HKayne can simultaneously be seen to confirm and problematise some aspects of Gilroy's Black Atlantic model. On the one hand, Gilroy clearly had a point when he asserted that it is necessary to move beyond the nation-state frame of analysis when it comes to expressive cultures and take into account double or multiple consciousness. We see this multiplicity in the work of the Boulevard, Haoussa, Darga, Oum, Khansa Batma, Bigg or HKayne who all engage with Moroccan, African, Black Atlantic cultural influences and localities. Furthermore, Gilroy's concern with how black musical expression might be viewed as a counterculture of modernity because of its desire to re-articulate aesthetics and ethics as well as culture and politics clearly resonates with the political and social critiques which the Moroccan acts discussed in this article develop. Yet on the other hand, where Gilroy's model ceases to be useful with regards to the Moroccan case is concerning the question of nationalism. Gilroy does try to navigate a conceptual space or third way between essentialism and politically naive pluralism by developing what he calls his anti-antiessentialist position but nevertheless, he wants to sideline the national frame of reference. In a similar manner to Laura Chrisman (2003) who found this rejection of the utility of the national frame problematic because of the potentially politically complacent consequences of such a stance, it is also arguably problematic when trying to understand some of the dynamics of the contemporary urban Moroccan music scene as they are illustrated by the cases discussed herein. In other words, these cultural actors and musicians who are part of an alternative public sphere and who critique Moroccan politics and society cannot be seen as complicit with a reductive Moroccan nationalism and yet they nevertheless express, to varying degrees, some form of *alternative* nationalism. That alternative nationalism is one which facilitates social, cultural and political critique of their own society and offers a platform for counter-cultural dissent. So the concept of alternative nationalism extends Gilroy's Black Atlantic model because it addresses some of the critiques which have been made of "hybridity talk", namely that it evacuates potentialities for a subaltern politics based on a principle of universal socio-economic equality. That neutralisation of politics is seen to be a consequence of "hybridity talk's celebratory stance on difference and its over-focus on culture" (Hutnyk 2000).

In addition, Gilroy's model is also problematic when we try to analyse the question of the Arab, Amazigh and African components of Moroccan narratives of the collective self. Here, we need not only to look west towards the Atlantic, we need to take into account the Mediterranean space which connects Morocco, not only to Spain and Europe, but to the wider near and middle east. The Moroccan cultural actors and musicians discussed in this article are all fairly secular in that their music is not characterised by religious concerns or aesthetics. Nevertheless, these groups all exist in a broader context which is one of a Muslim-majority society and so it

becomes difficult to transplant Gilroy's model to Morocco if one wants to think further about the links between the contemporary Moroccan music scene and broader questions about Islam and religiosity³².

Nevertheless, despite its limitations Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic model remains a valuable cognitive tool for thinking about Moroccan cultural multiplicity and its relationship to post-slavery black expressive cultures across the Atlantic. As with any model its value should be calculated according to whether it provokes and encourages further critical questions and debates. If one uses this as one's yardstick, then it is certainly the case that Gilroy's Black Atlantic should continue to be regarded as a fundamental paradigm for contemporary transnational cultural studies.

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32. On the question of Islam and rap, see SWEDENBURG (2001).

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ABSTRACT

Over twenty years after its publication in 1993, Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* still provides a number of useful entry points for thinking about Moroccan musical creativity in general and Morocco's contemporary urban music scene in particular. This article examines the cultural and linguistic

repertoires of urban musicians in contemporary Morocco and explores their performative stances which simultaneously emphasise a transnational identity and a “*marocanité*”. It shall be argued that whilst key features of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model are extremely salient, Gilroy’s move towards a post-national framework of analysis is not a straightforward one within the Moroccan musical context.

RÉSUMÉ

Multiplicité marocaine : la performance du transnationalisme et du nationalisme alternatif dans la scène contemporaine des musiques urbaines. — Plus de vingt ans après la publication de l’ouvrage de Paul Gilroy (1993), *L’Atlantique noir : modernité et double conscience*, continue à fournir plusieurs points d’entrée utiles concernant le thème de la créativité musicale en général et la scène urbaine des musiques actuelles en particulier. Cet article examine les répertoires culturels et linguistiques des musiciens contemporains au Maroc et explore leurs positions performatives qui privilégient, à la fois, une identité transnationale et une « marocanité » ancrée dans le contexte national. Par le biais d’une discussion de la théorie de Gilroy, et d’une enquête de terrain menée au Maroc en 2007-2008, nous allons suggérer que, tandis que certains éléments du modèle de l’Atlantique noir sont extrêmement pertinents, la tendance de Gilroy de privilégier un cadre d’analyse post-national n’est pas une démarche intellectuelle dépourvue de problèmes dans le contexte musical marocain.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Morocco, Black Atlantic, nationalism, transnationalism, urban music/Maroc, *Atlantique noir*, *nationalisme*, *transnationalisme*, *musique urbaine*.