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A Companion to “Soulaliyate”

Form Justification and Artistic Explanation

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Subject Background

According to the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior, collective land—or *soulaliyate* land—accounts for as much as 33 percent of all land in Morocco. In practice, collective land has existed across Morocco for many centuries. However, as a legal concept, it dates to the early years of the French protectorate.

In 1919, the protectorate defined collective land as land belonging to neither the state nor individuals, but to “tribes, factions, villages or other ethnic groups” (decree of 1919, Article 1). Since then, collective land has retained its original legal status, which gives local delegates the responsibility of deciding how to allocate the land and how, in the event of its acquisition by outside actors, to distribute compensation (Bouderbala 1996). Based on common local customs, this system has largely resulted in the exclusion of women from compensation distribution in many communities (Berriane 2016).

Over the past two decades, intensified land commodification in Morocco has exacerbated the described situation (AitMous et al. 2016). Although the original decree called collective land “inalienable,” a series of modifications made to the law over the 20th century now allow for the rental or transfer of collective lands by the state to private actors. As a result, many rural communities have been ousted from their collective lands to make room for beach resorts, suburban housing projects, commercial agricultural ventures, and other burgeoning development projects. In many such cases, female community members are excluded from receiving often already-meager compensation for lost land.

One might say that the so-called “soulaliyate movement” began in 2004, when women from a community in the province of Kenitra began to demonstrate against their exclusion from collective land compensation. In 2007, a few of these women approached the *Association*

démocratique des femmes du Maroc(henceforth ADFM), one of the most well-established Moroccan women’s rights organizations, for assistance. ADFM quickly assumed an organizing role by providing feminist terminology; establishing a legal framework; using media and political connections for public leverage; securing funding from international donors; and teaching soulaliyatewomenactivist strategies in workshops (Berriane 2016).Perhaps most significantly, ADFM defined legislative reform as soulaliyate women’s overarching primary goal. Thus, ADFM essentially wrote the narrative of the national “soulaliyate movement.”

Yet soulaliyate activism is fundamentally based in local struggles. That is, soulaliyate women from various communities must navigate different local customs and face different private and public developers. Oftentimes, their immediate goals are not law reform, as ADFM has asserted, but timely financial compensation (ibid). Soulaliyate activism, then, is inherently diverse and localized.

If one considers soulaliyate experiences only as they are subsumed under the national “movement,” one risks overlooking powerful individual narratives. This podcast segment aims to counter the idea that soulaliyate stories can be homogenized by highlighting the specificities of two soulaliyate activists’ personal stories.

Form Justification

The Intellectual Journey to the Podcast

For my Independent Study Project, I initially intended to write a research paper on tensions and disagreements between ADFM employees and soulaliyate activists concerning the soulaliyate movement. Over the first two weeks of the research period, I conducted five interviews total—one with an ADFM board member and four with soulaliyate activists.

While speaking with the ADFM board member, I was struck by my interviewee's use of teaching-centric vocabulary. She explained to me that the soulaliyate movement emerged in 2007, when a soulaliyate woman approached ADFM, although soulaliyate activists had told me that they'd begun demonstrating in 2004. The board member repeatedly indicated that the organization had "shown" soulaliyate women their rights. Many times, she said, she had "cried" with women in rural communities after "teaching them their rights." She also declared confidently that all soulaliyate women share the same primary goal: to achieve national legislative reform.

A week later, during an interview with a soulaliyate woman, my translator's behavior similarly shocked me. The translator was a middle-aged male professor who had researched the soulaliyate movement. Having organized the interview meeting for me, he kindly offered to accompany me for lingual purposes. (The soulaliyate woman only spoke Darija, which I speak minimally at best.)

I had imagined that the professor would directly translate my questions and the woman's answers without interjection. Instead, he actually tended to argue over and expand upon my interviewee's responses. Each answer that she gave was inevitably followed by a professorial fact-check. I may not speak Darija, but I could easily recognize the tone in the professor's

debating voice. The tone said: “No, that’s not right. Let me correct you.” By the end of the interview, I had no way of distinguishing my interviewee’s genuine beliefs from my translator’s commentary.

As I mulled over these two interactions, I was overwhelmed by discomfort. This discomfort originated in my perception that both the ADFM representative and the professor had assumed an authority role that wasn’t rightfully either of theirs. The ADFM representative seemed to draw a sense of authority from an understanding of women’s rights law and from her organizational work in the movement; the professor, from a self-assurance in his knowledge about soulaliyate women.

Yet, it seemed so obvious to me that the true authority figures in this domain were precisely those to whom the ADFM board member and the professor condescended. The soulaliyate activists I had met were all more than capable of organizing and educating themselves.

Where I saw error in the ADFM representative’s and professor’s apparent attitudes, I also saw error in my own approach to the subject. After all, I, too, worked under the assumption that I could quickly become an authority on soulaliyate issues. With five interviews under my belt, I thought, I would draw a conclusion about incompatibilities within the soulaliyate movement.

I was suddenly painfully aware of the presumptuousness of my undertaking. The soulaliyate women with whom I had spoken didn’t need anyone to teach them their rights. They didn’t need anyone to correct their ideas. Finally, they didn’t need anyone appropriating their stories. Overall, I was unable to shake the feeling that various actors habitually told soulaliyate women’s stories for them, and that my research project would fit into that trend.

In desperately searching for a way to avoid this outcome, I landed upon an entirely different project form: the podcast.

The Podcast Form: Strengths and Limitations

The form of podcast segment has the potential to counteract outsiders' appropriation of soulaliyate stories. Hypothetically, it will do so by centering not only soulaliyate women's candid ideas, presented in their own words, but their literal voices, too. Listeners hear the activists' account of their achievements, frustrations, and hopes preserved as truthfully as possible.

A secondary strength of the podcast form is the relative ease with which it can be disseminated to an interested audience via online media. Given this particular characteristic, the choice of podcast as project form addresses a request that one of my interviewees made to me. After generously speaking with me for almost an hour, this interviewee asked if I had access to any media platforms through which to share her story. She explained that media exposure had proven to be the most effective strategy in her battle to protect her community's collective lands. If I could use media to call attention to her struggle, it might help her.

Therefore, my decision to make a podcast segment was made partly in homage to this woman's comment. Now that the podcast has been posted on SoundCloud, I can easily share it with my social media networks. Moreover, the podcast is a very accessible and appealing mode of education on this topic. That is, it is much more likely that my friends and family will listen to the podcast segment on soulaliyate issues than that they would have read my research paper on them.

That said, the podcast form also encompasses significant weaknesses. First and foremost, my role as narrator of the podcast diminishes the attempted centering of soulaliyate voices.

Though I tried to minimize the presence of my own voice in the segment, I felt that some narration was necessary for the sake of coherency and flow. Unfortunately, an unintended effect of said narration is the general impression that my voice is as important to the segment as the soulaliyate activists'. I tried to mitigate this effect through a few stylistic twists, which I will discuss in the next section of this paper.

Another, more basic, shortcoming of the podcast form in this situation is my personal lack of podcast-editing expertise. I leaped into this project having only ever made one five-minute podcast episode two years ago. As a result, the time that I spent re-learning the basics of the audio editing software detracted from the time that I would have liked to spend perfecting edits and smoothing the final product. I have no regrets about my decision to make a podcast segment, but I do wish that my editing skills were advanced enough to truly do the subject justice. In coming months, I hope to return to the project with more sophisticated editing techniques than I was able to acquire within the four-week Independent Study period.

Explanation of Artistic Decisions

Chanting as Introduction, Transition, and Conclusion

The repeated chanting clips are perhaps my piece's most obvious stylistic device. These clips act as introductory, closing, and transitory material. That is, the segment both opens and closes to the sound of chanting, and transitions between distinct speakers to this same sound.

I recorded these chants on Sunday, December 3rd, at one of the weekly road-side protests in Ouled Sbata. To capture the sound, I walked with the crowd of villagers as they marched down the highway and waved signs toward passing cars. Likewise, the recurrent clips of chanting in the podcast segment convey movement. As the chanting carried me along the highway for over a mile with the protesters, so too does it drive the listener through the segment with a sense of urgency and action.

Furthermore, I chose to place the chanting throughout the podcast as one might more typically place instrumental music. Much like a soundtrack, the voices of the protesters are omnipresent. Activists' voices fill the segment's cracks in addition to composing its bulk. By thus making the chants the podcast's "soundtrack," I further accentuated soulaliyate voices.

Translations

Listeners will likely notice that translations make up a large fraction of the episode's runtime. This is a result of my editing decision to entirely separate recordings of translations from recordings of soulaliyate speakers (as opposed to using an overlapping technique).

An overlapping technique might have joined the soulaliyate women's statements with their given translations more smoothly and efficiently. However, I ultimately decided that such a method would have contradicted the stated goal of my project: to highlight soulaliyate voices.

An overlapping editing technique would have necessitated that translations override the soulaliyate women's actual statements. In this case, I felt that the project's vision outweighed simple auditory slickness.

Professor's Statement

When I first interviewed Professor Eddouada, I wasn't sure if I would include her statement in the final edited podcast. I wanted to be careful to maintain the centrality of the soulaliyate interviewees' statements.

After speaking with Professor Eddouada, I added her comments to the episode. Since her remarks focused on specificities of local soulaliyate movements, I felt that her statement would accentuate rather than distract from the two soulaliyate activists' distinct stories.

Personal Introduction

My personal introduction as narrator is one of the segment's stranger quirks. Instead of introducing myself to listeners in the beginning of the segment, I don't share my name—or any personal information, for that matter—until the last two minutes of the episode.

The unusually late placement of narrator introduction is intended to mitigate the dominance of my own voice throughout the segment. As I mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, the sheer amount of time filled by my narration challenges the expressed goal of centering soulaliyate voices. Therefore, to contradict any impression that my voice is as strong as the soulaliyate women's, I remain a nameless narrator. I intentionally avoid establishing myself as an authority on the subject at hand. When I finally do introduce myself, I only say my name. I include no credentials that might label me as anything but a simple guide.

Final Moments

My podcast narration closes thus: "...[soulaliyate activists] will keep telling their stories. The question now is who will tune in." Underlying this line is a muted clip of chanting protestors. Immediately following it, overlapping clips of the two featured soulaliyate activists—without translations—carry on for about 15 seconds, after which point the continued chanting grows louder and then fades out completely.

The closing narration line frames a challenge for English-speaking listeners. Up until this point in the episode, listeners have been able to learn about the soulaliyate struggle passively. They've received neatly packaged information, all translated into their first language.

From here on out, though, the process must be active. The crucial moment comes when listeners decide whether to take the action necessary to continue to educate themselves. They must choose to "tune in"—and the first test of this is deciphering the soulaliyate women's final words without the instant gratification of a translator.

The last chanting clip echoes this challenge to listeners. The chants louden and then begin to fade. The effect is as if the chanters are marching past on the street. Listeners, then, are left with an option. They stand still and watch the protest pass, or they can walk along with it.

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