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Contemporary Legacies of Morocco's Gnawa Music Communities

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Contemporary Legacies of Morocco's Gnawa Music Communities

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Locations of Study: Africa, Morocco, Khamlia, Tangier

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Abstract

Despite existing literature about Gnawa music and culture, there remains many discrepancies and holes a part of current understandings about the subject. This paper examines the existing literature in comparison with two site visits to different Gnawa music houses in Tangier and Khamlia Morocco. These visits including three interviews with musicians inform an understanding of the history, tourism, spirituality, performance aspects, and changing culture among the two distinct communities. The paper will draw upon these findings to evaluate what it currently means to be Gnawa, perform Gnawa, and spectate Gnawa performance in Morocco. Additionally, Gnawa music within the black Moroccan communities it is played is evidenced as the potential for music performance to become a mechanism for recording history and self-preservation in the face of persecution.

Acknowledgments

I have so many incredible people to thank for helping me along this process. It was an entirely new experience to come to Morocco and complete field work towards a project of this magnitude. I would like to thank my professor and academic advisor Et-Tibari Bousla for his warm welcome, insightful wisdom, and patience with me as I found my way through my time in Morocco. Secondly, I am indebted to my advisor Professor Mourad Mkinsi who offered advice and helpful critique during the creation of my ISP. Finally, I will be forever grateful for the people I met and conversations I had during my field visits in Khamlia and Tangier. The people of Khamlia offered me such a warm welcome while I learned about their special music. My first interviewee Oujaa Abdelaziz was tremendously helpful during my time in Khamlia and is someone I now consider a friend. I would also like to extend my honor and gratitude for being able to speak with El Gour and visit Dar Gnawa in Tangier.

Introduction

A few months before departing for Morocco I stumbled upon a genre of music I now know as Gnawa music. Despite little knowledge of the country of Morocco or this enchanting music, I could feel that the music was special. I quickly learned upon arriving in Morocco that Gnawa music wasn't an unknown sub-genre but instead an integral and loved part of Moroccan culture. During my programs trip to northern Morocco, my professor gave us an instruction for the visit with Dar Gnawa that speaks to the amazing qualities of the genre. He spiritedly instructed us “you may feel the urge to move your body or dance... Gnawa music is intended to be felt through the body.” His words helped our group open up our perspectives and bodies to the experience with Tangier Gnawa artists. This of course ended us in dancing and sweating the night away while the artists encouragingly provided the provoking rhythms.

I choose to study further Gnawa music to uncover how it came to be and to understand the high regard that it was held by those who spoke of it. I set out with several questions in mind to build a knowledge of the world of Gnawa today. This topic was of interest to me because of previous course work relating to the African diaspora. I had previously completed a term project on Haiti and the Haitian revolution, so after studying the process of culture mixing that occurred among the African diaspora in Haiti, I immediately saw similarities to the Gnawa community in Morocco. Additionally, Gnawa people share very similar circumstances with the Moroccan migrant population that study abroad program focused heavily on. There remain extreme difficulties to being a black person in Morocco, and I wanted to uncover how the Gnawa community traversed this persecution. To set out on my study I prioritized thoughtful

conversations with Gnawa musicians. I set my findings from these interviewees in comparison to what literature I found on the topic of Gnawa.

Literature Review

Gnawa music and its complexities have been investigated by several academic writers starting near the end of the 20th century. The rich rhythms of Gnawa have been performed by its musicians for centuries in Morocco. During the recent decades of Gnawa literature, writers have attempted to uncover the unknown origins of the music while equally exploring the aspect of ritual and more present commercialization. In the time Gnawa literature has existed, several changes have taken place to the genre particularly in regards to performance and audience. The amount of thorough dedication to the subject intimated me when I began my dip into Gnawa. Hearing the sounds of Gnawa after arriving in Morocco I knew the music was something unique, so I was surprised to find much existing scholarly work. Nevertheless, my perspective on the existing literature undertook a critical shift after having completed my own primary research. I then felt that I could now add my own unique contextualization to Gnawa and could pose legitimate criticism of previous writing. In my writing, I have attempted to create a body of work that tends to the lived realities of Gnawa people. Despite the music of the Gnawa drawing my attention to the communities, I want to honor the complexities of their experience beyond the supernatural domain, culture of trance, and healing that has been over-fixated and interpreted by anthropological analysis (Montenegro, 2022). Additionally, I heard from Gnawa musicians that they felt the existing writing only described a specific regional Gnawa and that so much mystery remained. These comments from my interviewees shaped my process as I tried to understand and record my conclusions. Because the history of Gnawa remains somewhat obscure and debated, I will start there in evaluating what has been written to date.

Symbolically the word Gnawa traces some of the history of the people who play it and their relationship to Morocco and greater Africa. The word is used in varying ways to describe a specific section of music, people, and culture residing in Morocco but having roots in Sub Saharan Africa. Historical linguistic analysis traces the meaning of Gnawa to come from Amazigh languages to mean "black people " and people coming from regions in south of Morocco and farther south into West Africa (Hamel, 2008). The Amazigh people had many encounters with darker skinned African people well before Arabization in North Africa. Historically the use of the word Gnawa by Amazigh people far predates the familiarization of the term with a specific cultural group. Today, Gnawa is not a colloquial term known to mean blackness but instead refers to the unique group in Morocco. The slave trade and forceful inscription of black Africans by Maghrebi dynasties eventually resulted in large amounts of black people living in North Africa. The prohibition of slavery in Morocco was a sluggish process with the last slaves being freed as recent as the 20th century. European powers are accredited with helping to end slavery in Morocco but the French's colonial presence casts a more complex history. Although France had outlawed slavery in the country and in their Algerian Colony, their response to slavery in Morocco constituted more of a blind eye. The French severely compromised on their abolitionist rhetoric in order to aid in their quest gaining favor with certain groups towards French colonial rule (Hamel 2013). Meanwhile their remained great dissonance between Moroccan governance and the ethicacy of slavery under Islam. Despite modern Islamic understanding clearly outlying slavery as non permissible, the Moroccan rulers insisted on its permittance in the time before the 20th century. Amid the middle 19th century a letter was sent on behalf of England encouraging Morocco to abolish the practice, yet the Moroccan Sultan found the letter insulting of his religion which he saw clearly permissible

(Hamel 2013). Slavery under Islam remained an important context during my research findings. Gnawa people are themselves Muslim and adopted the religion alongside Amazigh during Arabization of the region. Thus the relationship between Gnawa people and Islam is complex and its history is sometimes misquoted among Moroccan discourse as I found in my findings.

It is difficult to draw an accurate history of the Gnawa partially because of being overlooked by scholars. Despite recording in recent history, Gnawa recognition has only recently come out from under the shadow of racial prejudice and distrust from more standard Islamic practices. The Gnawa adopted Islam, yet there are no mentions of them or their practices by Arab Islamic scholars or in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Hamel, 2008). Their spiritual practices and beliefs were not given credibility among the leaders of Islam meaning that Gnawa existed on the fringes of Islamic religious sects. Gnawa differ from fellow Muslim sect Sufism despite the two using musically inspired rituals to praise God. Gnawa differs by intending to move the body and connect to beings invisible to the eye. These spiritual aspects of Gnawa made it marginalized from Islam and ignored by Islamic scholars who saw trance and spirit worship as unislamic. This is also in part due to the fact that Gnawa religiosity takes from West Africa making its proximity to blackness a compounding area of prejudice by Arabs. The Gnawa's west african origins are carried on by recounting the names of Sub-Saharan spirits and ancestors as well as habitual rituals recounting slave ancestor's stories (Kapchan 2007). These practices help the Gnawa's history live on while others have chosen to forget it. The music created by the Gnawa serves as a history and celebration; despite subjugation they have created a unique heritage that takes from ancestral legacies as well as more recent history. The spiritual practices are well known amongst Gnawa communities and greater Morocco. Gnawa artists are often employed to practice their spiritual art of invoking jnun, Islamic spirits (Kapchan 2004). The spirits cannot be removed

instead the Gnawa music attempts to move the spirits hoping to harness their wisdom and ease ailments of dissonance between the spirits. There still lies an instant connection between Gnawa music and their ancestral spiritual practices, but Gnawa has been adopted and secularized to reach large audiences. Employed healing rituals, secularization, international visibility, and debates of authenticity all make up the growing world of Gnawa today.

The performance of Gnawa music is integrally connected to its audience and how the musicians can adapt to the setting. This relationship between musician and listener has musical effects heard in the rhythm, pace, and chants, but additionally this relationship speaks to varying Gnawa cultural practices amid new audiences. There emerged a dichotomy between Gnawa played for tradition verses for spectacle that I noticed both in my literature review as well as field work. Balancing spectacle and tradition has become a debate among differing Gnawa groups. In favor of creating unique performances some Gnawa groups today perform rites or songs traditionally only used for personal or community uses (Witulski, 2018). Bringing these rituals out of traditional settings may bring a sense of authenticity to viewers. Nevertheless this change epitomizes the popularization of Gnawa music and how it informs the practices of Gnawa communities. The reason for debate amongst Gnawa communities is not in response to popularization itself. Rather, some see changes like performing special rituals for outsiders as dismissive of the Gnawa people's history with slavery. The farther temporally and spatially Gnawa moves from its origins, the more diversified modes of performance have become. Progression of time accentuates not only differentiation but also forgetfulness. Because of the lack of written Gnawa history, communities rely on oral history passed onto generations which over time strains the ability to keep distinct traditions at their core.

The Lila remains an integral part of many Gnawa communities. The Lila is a special celebration of food, music, dance, and community gatherings. Lila holds connection to ancestral sub-saharan spirits while predicating on a time for spiritual healing. As well the celebration is meant as a celebration of freedom from bondage. While the celebration derives from Gnawa's shared history, the event today is attended by non Gnawa both as participants of healing and spectators. The presence of white people in the Lila complicates its ties to a history where white people in North Africa enslaved the Gnawa's ancestors (Witlowski, 2018). Importantly, the appearance of white people at the Lila is often to seek ritual healing because of belief in Gnawa player's unique connection to the supernatural. The Gnawa show willingness to provide this service to those who seek it but in doing so have shared a sacred practice traditionally held in the community. If measured by the perceived power of such rituals, then the appeal of outsiders to the Lila notes its successfulness in spiritual healing. Yet, the question of who receives such healing points to power dynamics not in favor of Gnawa communities. Performing Gnawa music is one way Gnawa communities can earn income. Thus, the need for economic subsistence might inform a community's decision to favor spectacle. Maise Sum in her evaluation of the musical complexities behind Gnawa, mentions how commercialization and spectacle affected even subtle musical elements in what groups choose to perform. Her analysis evidences these structural changes but states that some interviewees saw them as new opportunities for Gnawa masters to insert their own creative agency (Sum, 2011). Agency has emerged as a point of interest when examining Gnawa music's spread to national and international audiences. I will continue a discussion of the globalization of Gnawa, examining El Maarouf article on the Essaouira Gnawa Festival.

El Maarouf explored the spread of Gnawa music among theoretical frameworks of authenticity, agency, and globalization through the case of the Essaouira Gnawa Music Festival. The festival is meant to commemorate Gnawa music in Morocco while providing a space for Gnawa to collaborate with other world music. In discussion of commodified authenticity versus that of lived authenticity, Maarouf suggests the festival occupies a third space between the two. Commodified authenticity is used similarly to the question of spectacle. Certain Gnawa performances may be categorized as commodified authenticity because they attempt to use some elements of authentic tradition but focus on creating a performance best suited for commercial success. Examples of this are opting out of traditional clothing, using musical elements historically only used within Gnawa communities or commodifying healing practices to outsiders. Maarouf in contrast uses lived authenticity as a category of performance closer to Gnawa historical use of the music for personal healing and celebration. The Essaouira festival in his eyes fulfills a third category because it attempts to showcase Gnawa music to Morocco and to the world. Musicians may modify their performances from traditional use, but rather than shape them toward commercial success they are allowed a space to showcase their musical identity. The festival provides musicians with this space for personal expression while positioning them alongside other world music like jazz, blues, and rock. Maarouf argues the festival allows for Gnawa cultural self-awareness to be highlighted through the unique performance space. He adds to this argument by mentioning the intentional visibility of Gnawa artists like the festival's musician parade through Essaouira. The festival undoubtedly provides a well recognizable vessel for Gnawa music visibility. Yet, the idea of self-awareness within the Gnawa community is not as easily deduced. Initially the argument seems to add much weight to external forces in the process of self-actualization for the Gnawa community. If identity is meant to mean how Gnawa

fits amongst global music, then the festival is an external force that aids Gnawa in this process of identification. Yet, the successfulness of the festival in terms of cultural awareness needs to gauge the agency of Gnawa artists in the creation of the festival. In my findings section, I will discuss comments from Gnawa musicians that suggest a counter point of view towards the festival.

As part of the global distribution of Gnawa, many have noted the similarities between the Moroccan music and African American music. Much scholarly work has noted the parallels between the Gnawa in Morocco and African American experience in the United States. When the Gnawa people earned their freedom, they created their own communities and identities including carrying on their legacy of playing Gnawa music. For black people in the United States there exists similar music styles such as jazz and blues which emerged from former slave communities and was informed by remembrance of their past. Black people in the United States were similarly stripped of their individual or regional identities in favor of simplified solely black identity by white enslavers. Yet, interestingly both black people in the United States and Gnawa would see their reduced identities transform into unique collective cultures for themselves. African American music and Gnawa represent the similarities in African diaspora cultural practices. Both forms simultaneously lament a remembrance of the trauma of slavery while celebrating freedom (Hamel 2013). Gnawa music carries on aspects of their ancestral history in Sub-Saharan Africa while their music and performance practices include symbols of freedom. Later my findings explore Gnawa expanding onto an international scene. Gnawa music has recently seen collaborations with other worldwide genres including African American music. The collaboration speaks to fellowship between the artists but also to the compatibility of their collective African diasporic legacies. I had the privilege of speaking with a Gnawa Master who

collaborated with famous American jazz artist Randy Weston. His experience speaks to collaboration amongst the African diaspora as well as the experience of Gnawa who have reached the international scene.

Methodology

New friendships in Morocco afforded me the exciting chance to engage in cultural exchange; a process I learned the most from by being attentive, inquiring to others while simultaneously being open to share my culture and identity with them. Upon deciding to undertake a study of Gnawa for my ISP project I knew that I needed to engage in this kind of meaningful exchange with Gnawa musicians. Music thankfully provides a wonderful vessel for cultural exchange and an opportunity to engage with amazing people. To set my approach for field work, I used my initial research and experience to direct me toward physical locations where Gnawa music was prevalent. My professor Et-Tibari Bouasla, after hearing of my interest in Gnawa, almost immediately recommended I go to the south of Morocco where he said I would find the origins of Gnawa music. Other Moroccans shared a similar sentiment that Gnawa was played among desert villages in south Morocco. The village of Merzouga was mentioned many times, so I had initially set my sights on landing there to hear Gnawa music performed. That was until one conversation when a man suggested don't go to Merzouga because it was too touristy. Not only did this comment redirect my search for a location, but it raised a question as to why so many had suggested Merzouga. I did not at the time, but I would come to understand this question after my findings revealed insight into the tourism industry in the area. I was eventually able to find Gnawa musicians by using the network of connections in Morocco I had built up thus far. My research partner connected us through a friend of an advisor to the village of Khamlia where most residents are black Moroccan Gnawa musicians.

In order to reach our destination, my colleague and I traveled by taxi, train, bus, and finally car to reach Khamlia. We had the chance to see the weekly market in the nearby town of Rissani when we arrived, but we spent the majority of our three days in Khamlia. I entered Khamlia with the goal of hearing and seeing Gnawa music performances, talking with musicians about the music, as well as building an understanding of the life and culture of people in Khamlia. My time in the village was spent primarily with Oujaa Abdelaziz, who I will refer to as Aziz. Aziz was an extraordinary host and translator. I was able to interview him, and he helped as a translator so that I could interview two other Gnawa Mallam in the village. I spent much time discussing with Aziz so that we could learn from each other, and so I could inform him of my research interests to best allow him to direct me to potential answers. Additionally, Aziz directed me towards HN, a former mallam who now runs a restaurant in the village while occasionally joining back in to play Gnawa. HN was a very important source of information because he had previously taken on writing about Gnawa. With the permission of participants, I recorded all our conversations in Khamlia to review later. This aided tremendously as our conversations went on very long and sometimes took on the form of roundtable discussions. Such was the conversation with HN, when we were joined by Aziz and another man for a roundtable discussion of Gnawa that allowed my research partner and I to hear their differing perspectives.

The second aspect of research was meeting with Abdellah El Gourd and his Gnawa musician group, Dar Gnawa. I had the privilege of hearing Dar Gnawa perform as part of an excursion with my SIT study abroad program. During our visit to the northern city of Tangier, our group visited Dar Gnawa hearing songs led by El Gourd himself as well as his daughter. Fortunately, I had the chance to go back to Dar Gnawa during my research period to speak with

El Gourd and hear some of his repertoire. My conversation with El Gourd took from my time in Khamlia helping me to identify the differences in their performance and experience. Because of El Gourd's experience collaborating with Randy Weston and performing around the world, I catered my questions to investigate the globalization of Gnawa I previously discovered in literature. Upon meeting with Dar Gnawa I spent a couple of hours chatting, taking tea breaks, as well as hearing some music by a few members of the group who joined us. Once again, I recorded my time at Dar Gnawa allowing me to go back and transcribe the interview as well as compare the music. Unfortunately, I had planned on interviewing El Gourd's daughter as well but she was unable to attend the meeting. I was able to ask El Gourd about his daughter and her relationship with Gnawa, but I would have liked to include her opinions to inform my paper from a Gnawa women perspective. Additionally, I had planned to meet with an academic professor familiar with Gnawa who was helping to organize a Tangier music event. This meeting did not come about although I attempted to substitute by including in my interview's questions about music festivals as well as El Maarouf's writing on the Essaouira Gnawa festival. By qualitatively collecting the information from my interviews with El Gourd and musicians in Khamlia, I hope to share their responses and how they informed my contextualization of Gnawa.

Limitations

As listed above I was unfortunately not able to interview any women as part of my research. This was a considerable gap in my research and did not allow me to deeply include any discussions of gender into my paper. Correspondingly, my findings are all informed by men which must be taken into consideration. I will go on to use my participants' words in order to form an understanding of the communities they represent, so my findings are limited in that they

may not appropriately speak for the women in the respective communities. There remains a gendered difference among all the Gnawa musicians. In my findings I will describe two interactions where I saw women as a part of Gnawa performance, but my interviewees were only men not allowing me a better look into this discrepancy. I did get a chance to interact with women in the village of Khamlia during my time, but these interactions were more of informal gatherings. These interactions expanded my understanding of the social structure in the village rather than an understanding of women as pertaining to Gnawa music.

One important note my participants told me was just how diverse Gnawa music and culture is across different regions in Morocco and even between each specific Gnawa house. Because of this diversity, my research lacks the larger sample size needed to make thorough comparisons that span across the different groups. To counteract this limitation I attempted to make note of the context for my argument. Nevertheless, my paper draws on the samples to make arguments about topics that pertain to all Gnawa communities. Had my research been expanded to include interviews with more Gnawa groups than my overarching proposition may have been able to better represent the broader community. This inevitably means that my findings are biased towards the opinions pertaining to the two Gnawa houses I spoke with. I do my best to balance consideration for this bias while also giving validity to their experience.

Language posed a limitation to my research because of my lack of Arabic speaking skills. During one of my interviews in Khamlia, I depended on Aziz translating back to me in English because the older man MB did not speak English. This conversation therefore could very well reflect Aziz's own biases as well as aspects of conversation that were not easily translated. At some points in our conversations Aziz pointed out that he had trouble describing the colors and jyn effectively in English. Additionally, during our round table discussion with HN there were

moments where the men would continue debating in their language. The people in Khamlia spoke both a dialect of Tamazight as well as an Arabic dialect Hassaniya. Upon going back to the audio recordings, I was unable to translate these sections due to unavailability of speakers of this language. With more time I may have been able to gain insight from understanding these sections.

Findings

Les Pigeons du Sable: Uncovering History

When crafting my research questions toward Gnawa, I decided to focus part of attentiveness to the history of the people and it lives on. Furthermore, as a result of reading about the Gnawa ancestors' history of enslavement, I developed a hypothesis that the Gnawa music developing out of this experience must then act as a tool of perseverance. I wanted to see what history lived on inside the music and to what degree it aided in the preservation or transformation of oral history. My conversations with Aziz helped shed light on the components of their Gnawa culture that derived from their history. I had previously known that the castanet played in Gnawa was reminiscent of the chains tied to former slaves. In reflection of a performance we saw, Aziz shared that not only the castanet but the bodily motions while performing were inspired by remembrance of ancestral enslavement. In performance, the players of Khamlia's Gnawa house bob and walk in motion evocative of sub-saharan slaves walking in caravans along Africa's historical trade routes north. Aziz shared that they imagine this atmosphere and what their ancestors were going through as they perform. Thus, demonstrating that the history of the people in Khamlia still resonates with the members despite the time that has passed. The musical performance acts as a practice of remembrance allowing the players to engage with this history. I

wanted to understand on a more personal level for the players how they deal with the difficult history evoked by their acts of remembrance.

When describing what this complex process means to the players themselves, Aziz used a useful reference to the African American experience. The evocation of past enslavement takes on a legacy of hardship and suffering, so I wondered how the players managed to balance the importance of remembrance with the trauma associated with such memories. Once again Aziz referenced the caravan to understand how Gnawa players today live with this legacy. He described how the long journey of slave caravans transformed the body and mind of his ancestors. Without freedom, these ancestors developed strong abled bodies and transformed minds that despite suffering, held onto preservice. By evoking this concept, Aziz explained how the Gnawa experience is one of strength in spite of suffering. Therefore, as the musicians perform Gnawa, they are embodying this act of perseverance in the face of hardship. It is an embodiment that manages an internal suffering with outward strength. Aziz related to the idea of black comedy which takes from the difficulty of the African American experience and uses this as both a way of uniting force but also a positive coping mechanism. A black comedian uses comedy that pulls from difficult experiences as a way to communicate a message to others. Aziz described this as being happy while unhappy. The Gnawa music is an essential tool for coping with their traumatic history of enslavement. I understood their music then as not only a vessel for history but as a century's old mechanism of defiance. Aziz and I discussed how this is similar to how black people in the United States used gospel music lament their experience with slavery and find solace within their community. With this comparison, I was able to further understand the parallels of these two different African diaspora communities. While their music may sound different it operates in a similar way. This conversation with Aziz also demonstrated to me how

their community sees solidarity across the African diaspora. When performing their music, the Gnawa artists play and move in a way that embodies not only their experience of defiance of the black experience in the Maghreb but all those across the diaspora.

Yet I discovered this legacy of slavery contained more layers that demonstrated a complex relationship to the traumatic memories. Through my interview with the former mallam HN, I identified a distinction between how the Gnawa's history of enslavement is confronted in their performance versus their communal discourse. HN was very knowledgeable on the process of historiography within their community in Khamlia. I discussed with him his knowledge of the village's history to uncover aspects that I maybe could not find in literature. He shared that collecting and understanding their history was a difficult process. In his own process, HN had asked his father about his family's history, but his father showed an aversion to this discussion. HN said he understood his father's response as wanting to shield his son from the weight carried by their difficult history. I recognized through HN sentiment how recency to the trauma of slavery may affect a person's willingness to discuss. HN graciously went in depth to the extent of his knowledge exemplifying a generational divide in the ability to confront trauma in discussion. HN described to me a strong desire to carry his own culture and history, so a transformation has occurred between his father's generation and his. I concluded that the translation and verbalization of ancestral hardship is a process that changes over time. I had access to a collection of knowledge from the community in Khamlia that may not have been accessible a generation prior. This phenomenon in Khamlia informs a theory of how a population's experience with trauma affects how collective memory is formed and passed down. Extending from this, the existence of Gnawa performance, which has managed to preserve its ancestral roots, displays a distinction in its transferability between generations. From this

distinction, this mechanism of music in Khamlia can be seen as a way to preserve history when it cannot be passed down orally. The act of performing Gnawa music carries with it a physical act of defiance, an instrument of endurance, and also a vessel for otherwise non-transferable history.

Many different facilitators participate in the hystorography of Gnawa. The people in Khamlia are very much aware of the different parties participating in this process. HN someone who had investigated and wrote about Gnawa previously shared that he ultimately decided to stop in fear of making a mistake. He went to say how varied the many stories of Gnawa can be including acknowledging the understandings he has about Gnawa history might conflict with other groups. This complexity was revealed amongst our discussion when a debate emerged as to the validity of several Gnawa historical stories we were told. Following this up, HN contrasted his perspective with other Gnawa or academics who he thought didn't care about making mistakes. In his description others hear stories then share or write about them as if they are truth. Correspondingly, I was present to statements from a local tour guide which confirmed this carelessness or ignorance to historical accuracy. During a pause in one of the many performances in the Khamlia music house, a local tour guide stood up to explain Gnawa history to his group of Americans. One detail he chose to share was that Gnawa people used to be slaves but were freed after Muslims, whose religion prohibited slavery, came to Morocco. Through my reading of *Black Morocco* by Chouki El Hamel, I clearly understood that slavery was not ended by the entrance of Islam but rather continued under many Muslim rulers. I breached this event later with Aziz who shared that many times tour guides will attempt to teach their groups about Gnawa; yet, Aziz said he or others do not bother to correct them even when they may know their statements are false. I began to see the delicate relationship between tour guides who bring business for the musicians in Khamlia. I conclude that the tour guides or others are not sharing

false accounts in bad faith but rather helpless ignorance. Additionally, Aziz remarked a level of respect for tour guides who value teaching tourists about Gnawa's history. This further revealed the lack of clarity and education regarding Gnawa but also black history in Morocco. The older generations in Khamlia were not formally taught of their history nor do many fully understand. For Arab or Amazigh communities who are further detached from the Gnawa's culture they have even less ability to learn accurate depictions. One of the features of the community in Khamlia is a school for young kids that functions in addition to or in substitute to the public school in the village. One reason for this school's existence Aziz explained was the lack of attention to Gnawa or black Moroccan history in public schools. Throughout my time in Morocco, there emerged a consistent appearance of disconnect where most black people felt marginalized in society, but most white Moroccans denied or were unaware of any presence of racial prejudice in their country. The Gnawa are very much a part of this reality, and the lack of Gnawa history may be further accentuated by prejudicial negligence.

Les Pigeons du Sable: Solidarity and Resisting Change

Gnawa musicianship in Khamlia is part of a structured, communal economy that allows residents of the village to earn income for their families. A reality that became soon apparent when I arrived in Khamlia was the necessity for musicians to be performing around the clock for visiting tourist groups. I had understood previously Gnawa could mean lifestyle or culture, but ignorantly I hadn't thought to the fact that Gnawa is an economic way of life for the people who play it and their communities. Bearing witness to the labor of performance allowed me to see an authentic reality that was not visible in my reading that often focused on the mystical or spiritual aspects of Gnawa music. When explaining how this reality came to be, Aziz described how after being freed Gnawa people didn't have an economic way to survive. Their transition into full

musicianship Aziz explained, started as simply going to other people's houses and asking for money to play Gnawa for them. This origin story added more evidence to help understand the relationship between the intended audience and the performers.

Another moment where this dynamic appears in Khamlia is during their Lila celebration, or Sadaka as it called in Khamlia. The Sadaka celebration embodies a community approach to celebration for the people of the village but also residents of other villages who may not be Gnawa in origin. As described by Aziz the dates of the celebration are decided by elders in Khamlia and word will be spread in the village and out to surrounding villages. Once commenced, the three daylong celebration is accompanied by 24/7 Gnawa music performance as well as many communal feasts provided by those coming to see the performances. In addition, it is commonplace for spectators and participants to contribute financially toward the village ahead of the Sadaka. Sadaka is special celebration of the freedom from slavery for the ancestors of Khamlia. All musicians in the village participate in playing and march in circles reminiscent of the bondage in slave caravans. Non Gnawa people are present during the Sadaka, and there is presence of outsiders specifically for the ritual healing aspects of the Lila. A major aspect of the Lila involves participants seeking healing who come and sit in the middle of the encircling musicians. The goal of the musicians is then to invoke a trance for those participants that will please the spirits thus allowing spiritual cleansing or healing for the participants. The presence of outsiders coming to seek healing did not seem unordinary but rather commonplace when speaking to Aziz.

Through my reading, I had heard of other Gnawa groups who are employed for the ritual healing powers of the Lila celebration. I did not hear from Aziz that Khamlia musicians specifically perform healing rituals outside of Sadaka, so their group differs from others I read in

literature who are often paid to come perform the ritual in the homes of their participants. Remaining consistent among Khamlia's Sadaka celebration and their normal performances was an audience of outsiders of the community. This presence is integrally linked to economic survival because the residents depend on money earned from the many outsiders coming to participate in their music. In consideration of the debate between whether Gnawa groups favor spectacle or authenticity, these historical findings suggest Khamlia performance has always included outside spectators. As well, the economic factor argues that commerciality has always been a part of their performance process at least as far as earning an income. This is not to suggest that there is not a debate between spectacle and authenticity. Rather, to add consideration that an aspect of Gnawa music performance and ritual is its trait as an income earning activity. This value should not take away validity from authenticity neither does it make Gnawa performing groups immune to hyper commercialization.

The culture of in Khamlia seems to have a stronger interest in holding onto tradition and simplicity than other Gnawa groups. Both of my interviewees in Khamlia described differences in how their Gnawa house had held onto tradition versus that of other houses. One of the more visible aspects of Les Pigeons du Sable is their all white dress. Having seen the musicians in Tangier's Dar Gnawa wear much different clothing, I asked Aziz about the significance of their dress in Khamlia. He described to me the intentionality behind each aspect. The white robe symbolizing freedom from slavery, the black belt symbolizing the remembrance of bondage, and a red cord across the body symbolizing those lost. When speaking with HN later, he expressed that many other Gnawa groups used to wear the same dress of significance. HN in a disappointed tone, said over the years he saw musician groups change their clothes in favor of more colorful vibrant dress. When questioning a nearby village of Zagoura's musicians, the only answer he

found was that colorful outfits were more popular. Musically, HN described the music in Khamlia as slow and rhythmic alluding to a sense of sacredness. The music in Khamlia he said makes people feel calm and relaxed. In contrast he described Gnawa in big Moroccan cities as upbeat and as trying to make a big spectacle. He saw these contrasting musicians as trying to rile up their audience in favor of an eye-catching performance. Discussing this matter with HN, revealed a sense of pride among the Khamlia musicians who intentionally held onto traditional aspects of their Gnawa music. When I visited Marrakech and witnessed Gnawa performance in Jamaa el-Fnaa, I saw the differences he was alluding to. In Marrakech's grand square various musician groups vie for tourists' attention hoping to bring them in and collect donations. The context of this performance varies much with Les Pigeons who invite groups into their music house. In Khamlia although they are performing for tourists and play for donations, there performance is structured like an invitation into their culture. Inversely, the musicians in Jamaa el-Fnaa are meeting tourists where they are. Both sides attempt to use the Gnawa tradition as an income earning activity, but in Khamlia there exists a pride in resisting the urge to stray from tradition. Although there exists bias in the comments made by my participants, there argument was not to suggest their performance is the original or superior version. Instead, they express disappointment in real change they have perceived around them.

Dar Gnawa and El Gourd: Creating Legacies

I am very grateful to have gotten a chance to follow up with Dar Gnawa and speak with El Gourd who is a legend in respect to the music world. I wanted to understand El Gourd's history and how it might intersect with that I learned in Khamlia. The Dar Gnawa music house in Tangier is a creation of El Gourd's work. El Gourd was born into Tangier into a what he

described as also a Gnawa house. Through his description, he made the distinction between where he grew up versus the definition of a Gnawa house I understood. El Gourd grew up in a house of many families all of them black Moroccans who similar to Khamlia, ended up in Tangier because of the routes of slave trade caravans. This geographical detail evidences a visual map that could relate the historical slave trade routes to the modern day locations of Gnawa music houses. Not all the people El Gourd grew up around played Gnawa music. El Gourd explained he learned how to play specifically from his mother. This confirmed that there was more to understand about women's role in Gnawa. The far majority of Gnawa players I'd witnessed were men, and in Khamlia there seemed a distinct split deeming the men's roles as musicians. The passing onto El Gourd by his mother suggests different customs than Khamlia and could evidence women having a role passing onto musicianship in some Gnawa communities.

When I asked El Gourd about further history, he made not to a similar sentiment as my interviewee HN regarding the difficulty of learning history from his parents' generation. El Gourd described only having learned a little from his family and most of his knowledge coming from his own discovery. He used the emotion shame to describe a reasoning for why his parents were unable to talk about their past. Their history as descents of slaves or former slaves themselves had, as El Gourd described, left a deep feeling preventing them from discussing this history. This emotion made sense from what I had heard from HN, and it added a means to understand the complexity of emotion in response to extreme hardship. The evils of slavery had imparted onto the previous generations of Gnawa people the feeling of shame. Then to protect themselves and their children from these feelings, they chose to not pass on the history associated with that feeling. If story telling was a medium that Gnawa ancestors had to protect

themselves from, then Gnawa music is instead a medium that allows a multitude of emotions to coexist. Because Gnawa music celebrates freedom and community while also remembering the hardships of slavery, it exists as a vital medium for remembrance and survival. Bridging the gap between these similar stories from interviewees, illuminated the generational trauma of slavery within Gnawa communities while also illuminating Gnawa music to combat this. There is certainly no coincidence that Gnawa music is still played today and that Gnawa communities persist despite past hardship and the continuing presence of prejudice in Morocco.

Dar Gnawa and El Gourd: Interpreting the evolving world of Gnawa

The dress worn by Dar Gnawa differs from that of Les Pigeons du Sable, and although I had lumped this together with other strays from traditional Gnawa culture, I found in discussion with El Gourd that their dress had new meaning. I saw in photos of Dar Gnawa performing in the white dress similarly seen in Khamlia, but over the years their dress changed to include a red overhead hanging sash beaded with shells. El Gourd brought over one sash and explained to me how its shape resembles that of a fish. The fish he explained symbolizes references a fish following a slave ship and the sash a symbol of the slaves would unfortunately were lost at sea during the horrific slave trade. Because of what I learned speaking to HN in Khamlia, I was tempted to lump together Dar Gnawa with other groups who changed their performance aspects in favor of their audience. Instead, Dar Gnawa's dress is representative of creating new meaning. Their dress still contains the elements of the outfit in Khamlia but contains slightly different meaning. Although this was not shared by El Gourd, there may be meaning behind the representation of the fish and Tangier's position as a port on the Mediterranean Sea and near the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, changes to what may be considered traditional can still have intention of

historical meaning. The meaning of Dar Gnawa's dress was not known to me the first time I visited and saw them perform, so it is very possible that many spectators are not aware of this meaning either. Whether or not this is intentional on their part does not take away from the meaning to the internal group. The change therefor allows Dar Gnawa to individualize themselves in a way that remembers their past in a new way.

Lastly, I asked El Gourd about his feelings about the international spread of Gnawa to inform my understanding on what it means for the musicians and tradition. After spending a lifetime playing Gnawa and achieving great success along the way, El Gourd described how his has changed during this period. An important part of El Gourd's musical career is his collaboration with Randy Weston, famous American jazz artists. The two made music together and did several tours throughout the US. Dar Gnawa was even nominated for a Grammy award for a collaborative album with Weston. El Gourd described how after this international recognition he received special attention from the King of Morocco. Since then, El Gourd has worked with the King on special tours and events and is compensated well. The Dar Gnawa music house was bought out and gifted to the group as well El Gourd had his house paid for by the King. I found particular interest in the correlation between Dar Gnawa's Grammy recognition and corresponding generosity of the King. El Maarouf discusses in his article the relationship between the west and westernization and the spread of Gnawa. Dar Gnawa success points at least to the amplification possible by Western recognition of Gnawa. This could be due a lack of avenues for Gnawa to be recognized in Morocco while also pointing to power in balances between the US and Morocco. Overall, this result sheds light onto an aspect of being a musician in Morocco.

The Essaouira Gnawa Music Festival is an event created to spotlight Gnawa music and gather differing musician groups. Before starting my research, many had mentioned the festival to me in discussion of my interest in Gnawa. The festival is a way many in Morocco can be exposed to the genre. I questioned El Gour on what he thought of the festival and particularly how he thought it effected the community of Gnawa as a whole. El Gour did not share a positive opinion of the festival choosing to describe it as only for publicity and commerciality. He made attention to the say the festival was about money and that they didn't talk about Gnawa. If the festival was meant to make visible Gnawa music to the country and world, I found it surprising that it did not include some element of discussion or learning opportunity to go along with it for those spectators who may not know the history or culture of the musicians. His answers also revealed the festival may not give agency to the players themselves. Gnawa music as I have seen it in the two groups, contains a lot of intentionality. In contrast the festival according to El Gour's answer does not have intentionality that is representative of Gnawa culture. Instead, the festival is geared toward publicity and commerciality. In the way he used publicity, I understood him to mean the publicity was for the Moroccan government or for organizers and was not gaining authentic publicity for Gnawa musicians.

Conclusions

When I set out to learn about Gnawa, I paid particular attention to understandings its history. My findings completed this understanding although made aware the real gaps that exist when seeking for a conducive collective history for Gnawa people. There emerged a significant generation gap in knowledge about Gnawa history because of the shame and trauma resulted by

slavery in Morocco. Because of the gaps in history, many different Gnawa communities hold onto different stories and versions.

While searching for the contemporary relationship between Gnawa performers and their audience, I found that the presence of outside spectators has always been the case for musicians in Khamlia. This was important context to deliberate how tourism has affected Gnawa performances. I found that in Khamlia Les Pigeons du Sable have attempted to resist conforming to pressure from tourists and spectators. Other Gnawa groups have let go of certain traditions, but I found that Gnawa groups change culture at varied paces according to environment. Les Pigeons du Sable have been able to maintain tradition by inviting audiences to meet them where they are. In Tangier, El Gourd has created a legacy with his music house Dar Gnawa. Dar Gnawa has created unique meaning by crafting their dress to the Gnawa's history of enslavement.

Despite ritual and spirituality being a main focus of Gnawa literature, I instead choose to focus on the most apparent realities for the musicians. One important reality revealed to me was the consideration of Gnawa has an income earning activity. I witnessed the musicians in Khamlia work tirelessly to perform much the day, and I heard of the importance of the musicians and their Sadaka festival in supporting the whole village. Meanwhile, El Gourd described for me this transformation from humble beginnings to now being financially supported by the King. The focus of this finding should be to add consideration for the material reality that exists for musicians. This is an important note for consideration of broader events for Gnawa like the Essaouira Gnawa music festival which El Gourd described to me as lacking the appropriate voice of Gnawa people.

Finally, this project helped to draw parallels across the African diaspora and identify music as a tool for overcoming the hardships of the experience being a black person. The

experience of Gnawa people in Morocco is similar to that of other African diaspora communities who have carried generations of trauma from slavery while also having to assimilate into a new culture. The Gnawa community in Morocco's use of music and performance highlighted the power of music to record history that may otherwise be forgotten as well as to build community that celebrates its lived experience.

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Interviews

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