

**MUSIC OF THE GNAWA OF MOROCCO:
EVOLVING SPACES AND TIMES**

by

Maisie Sum

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Abstract

The Gnawa are a sub-Saharan-Berber-Islamic society found throughout Morocco with origins in sub-Saharan Africa and slavery. Their music invokes supernatural entities during an all-night ritual for purposes such as healing. Despite being marginalized for their ritual beliefs and practices, Gnawa music has become popular and is increasingly performed in secular contexts alongside sacred rituals. The aims of my dissertation are threefold: to analyze the Gnawa ritual with regard to structure, process and function; to investigate how Gnawa music is context-sensitive; and building on the first two points, to assess the impact of global forces on Gnawa ritual and music, and on its practitioners. My research imparts a musical dimension to the study of the Gnawa sacred ritual and to its secularized form, and engages in comparative analysis of improvised musical practices which articulate a dialogue with an evolving tradition.

The inquiry draws primarily from my affiliation with a hereditary Gnawa family. In the first part I examine the world of the Gnawa and their music. This elucidates the habitus that informs the perception of social situations and gives meaning to the musical expression of ritual musicians. The second part investigates patterns and behaviors embedded in sonic structures of varied performances and correlates subtle differences in musical variations to performative intent. By first investigating the interaction between music and dance in a sacred ritual, then analyzing contrasting performances, I demonstrate how the Gnawa musical system operates as a referent to context and to mental activity (cognitive processes). Drawing on discourse of the African diaspora, I challenge the notion that the shift from the

practice of ritual music for the local community to the performance of ritual music in festivals worldwide supports a concurrent shift towards desecration. Instead, Gnawa ritual musicians establish distinct spheres of practice which delineate the sacred from the secular.

Preface

A version of Chapter 7 appears in an article titled “Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa *Lila* in Morocco,” in *Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology*, Volume 55 (1), Winter 2011. I am the sole author of the publication. Passages from the article have also been incorporated throughout the dissertation. Permission to reprint has been granted by the Society for Ethnomusicology.

My research was conducted with the approval of the *Behavioural Research Ethics* Board, Certificate Number H07-00490.

All photos and recordings (audio and video), unless otherwise noted, were taken and made by the author. Original and modified versions of figures published in the journal are indicated in the caption.

I use a minimum of Arabic terms and have simplified their usage. I employ mainly the singular form, add a hyphenated ‘s’ for plural forms in most cases, and drop the use of articles entirely for stand alone words. I modify Harrell’s (2006) system of transliteration. I use ‘gh’ in place of ‘x,’ drop the use of all symbols including dots and lines below and above letters, and substitute ‘a for ξ . Conventional uses (written and spoken) of place names and proper names are followed, and I am faithful to the transliterations in cited passages. I have translated sources written in the French language and conversations conducted in French and Moroccan Arabic, and bear full responsibility of any errors.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Initial Encounters

Squeezed between two Moroccan ladies with my back up against the wall, I sat among other guests lined along the perimeter of the square room with our shoes removed. I was mesmerized and engulfed by the intense and frenetic activity around me. The music—comprising a single gut-string lute (*guembri*) and six,¹ maybe ten pairs, of heavy metal double-castanets (*qraqab*) accompanying call-and-response singing—continued for hours on end, without any breaks (Figure 1.1). In turn the musicians got up, danced, sat down; then the audience got up, sat down, danced, screamed, moaned, collapsed. Before the musicians was a pile of colored veils, a brazier, a tray of small containers, and another tray of bottles. A group of women surveyed the scene, shouting commands, moving in and out of view, placing more things before the musicians, taking things away, draping veils over the dancers' heads with the same color, changing to a new color, holding on to women, sprinkling them with fragrant water. I watched, fascinated and entranced as the dancers with their backs to me facing the musicians bobbed up and down, their arms flailing in synchrony to the music. My whole body resonated from the overpowering sound of the qraqab, entrained by their repeating rhythm, my mind set adrift by the subtle, warm, alluring melodies of the guembri and impassioned cries of the musicians. As the night wore on, intoxication set in. By the time we left, the sun had already spilled over the medina walls. Thus I was initiated, as it were, into

¹ Alternate spellings include *guinbri*, *guenbri*, *guinbre*, *gumbri*, and *gunbri*. Alternate names include *hajhuj* (also spelled *hajhouj* or *hajuj*) and *sentir* (*sintir*).



Figure 1.1 Medina wall in Essaouira. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

the world of the Gnawa.²

My introduction to Gnawa music, however, was far removed from the sacred context of the *lila* (all-night spirit possession ritual).³ I met M'Allem Mahmoud Gania and his family ensemble at the 2001 *World Sacred Music Festival* in Japan a few weeks before my “initiation” (Figure 1.2). Unlike the intimacy of a ritual setting, the audience numbered thousands, the sound was amplified, and the music was performed on a large, elevated stage where the master stood center with his accompanying musicians sitting on chairs, getting up

² *Gnawa* is the plural of *Gnawi* (masculine singular form) and *Gnawiyya* (feminine singular form). The plural form of Gnawa is most frequently used as an adjective: for example, Gnawa music and the Gnawa festival, rather than Gnawiyya music and Gnawi festival. For this reason I primarily employ the plural form. Alternate spellings are Gnaoua, Gnaoui, and Gnaouiyya.

³ *Lila* is the feminine form of *lil*, which literally means night in Arabic. Gnawa often use this term to refer to a night-long event involving the performance of ritual music associated with spirit possession.



a)



b)

Figure 1.2 a) M'alleem Mahmoud (center, with blazer) and his family in Mie Jima. b) Backstage at the *World Sacred Music Festival* with M'alleem Mahmoud (in red), his son on his left, his brother-in-law behind, and a family friend in the foreground. (Photographs by Maisie Sum)

to dance when signaled by the music. A spectacular procession opened the show, not unlike the one I witnessed at the ceremony. From the back of the stage, enrobed in red, the master led his family out onto the audience platform playing the largest of three cylindrical drums (*tbel*). Donning *sheshiat* (caps) and blue satin *kaftan-s* (belted tunics) decorated with cowry shells, the rest of the musicians played the smaller *tbel* and *qraqab*. Full of vivacity, they smiled as they paraded towards the stage, parting the crowd and stopping en route to perform acrobatic dances. As the sun sank beneath the sea behind us the Gnawa emerged on stage.

M'alleem Mahmoud's manager told me that the music performed on stage had its origins in healing rituals, which they continued to perform in Morocco alongside secular events such as festivals. Though the musicians themselves did not tell me much about their music—which, incidentally, would change little during the course of my research—their performance revealed a magical power and energy. The bass melodies played on the *guembri* supported by an intense ostinato of over a dozen *qraqab*, combined with an evocative performance of acrobatic dances by the Gania family, had a profound impact. Some were moved to buy their CD, others to procure the three-stringed lute. After the festival, I found myself walking into a travel agency requesting an immediate flight to Morocco.

The earliest option was via Spain. From the port city of Algeciras I took a ferry across glistening blue waters of the Gibraltar strait to begin what would be the first of a series of journeys to Morocco. Docking in Tangiers, a half day's journey away from my point of destination of Essaouira, I took a train south to Marrakesh, stayed the evening, and bussed with the locals through the dusty roads, baggage on the roof, packed like sardines, to take part in the fourth annual *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* (hereafter *Gnaoua*

Festival).⁴ Upon arrival I was immersed in the musical world of the Ganas, a sub-Saharan family with Gnawa lineage. In addition to the festival performances, I had the privilege to go to their rehearsals, exclusive jam sessions, participate in sacred lila-s, and attend a range of private events organized by political leaders and local patrons in hotels, restaurants, rented apartments, and homes.

Bewildered and intrigued by the sacred occasion and divergent presentations of Gnawa music, I set out to investigate its musical codes, the evolving spaces and times of their musical practice, and how Gnawa ritual musicians negotiate contrasting social experiences. As fascinated as I was with the ritual proceedings, I was particularly curious about how the musicians felt, despite the stage energy and seriousness—that is, the level of ritualness displayed on secular occasions. It was not so much that they engaged in divergent performance contexts, but that the material used in secular shows drew from the same repertoire intended for spirit possession rituals. In each space and time, however, the function and meaning of music differed. Rather than antagonize each other, I had the impression that contextual distinctions engendered a harmonious co-existence between the sacred and secular. But how did the experience of musicking differ for the musicians and the participating audience? How was this expressed by the practitioners? Were contextual distinctions manifested in musical practice, and if so, how? Investigating the cognitive processes of Gnawa masters through the analysis of music performance became the focus in my search to reconcile secularized versions of the sacred.

Because of the largely improvisatory nature of variation in Gnawa musical practices, observable from the highest structural level of the ritual repertoire to the micro-structural

⁴ *Gnaoua* is a transliteration used in festival brochures and commonly adopted in manuscripts written in the French language.

level of musical units, I consider it a symbolic form of un verbalized (and perhaps non-verbalizable) emotions and by extension of the Gnawa subconscious. I use the terms un verbalized and subconscious because the Gania masters spoke about their music with few details and owed their variations to *hal*, rather than particular social situations. Kapchan defines *hal* as “a state of heightened emotion... mentation... of transcendence” (2007:26).

According to ethnomusicologist Jean During, Kapchan explains:

“Taken in the strictly religious sense, it can be understood as the equivalent of ‘communication with the divine’... transcendental grace that penetrates the heart of an individual without their volition”... During goes on to say that the term ‘*hal*’ is used in many different ways—by Sufis, by musicians, and by listeners. In the context of musical aesthetics, the *hal* produces a kind of contemplation in which a distance between two levels of being is perceived and transcendence attained” (Kapchan 2007:267).⁵

It resembles what musicians call “magic” (Berliner 1994:217, 387) or what athletes might call “being in the zone;” a state of wonder or enhanced performance that one gives oneself up to rather than controls. These states, as we know, are rarely attained by the amateur whether a musician, athlete, or mystic. The gift of *hal* is intimately linked to our habitus in that its accessibility depends on one’s disposition, experiences, and skills. How do *hal*, the habitus of ritual musicians, and their musical choices in different contexts correlate? Analysis of musical processes seeks to explain how Gnawa relate their music to non-music events, and one kind of music to another, and suggests ways in which they integrate and use different

⁵ Crapanzano writes: “*Hal*, which means temperature, condition or state, and is in general use in Moroccan Arabic, has... a specific meaning in the Sufi lexicon. It refers to one of the psycho-gnostic states (*ahawal*), such as nearness to God or divine intimacy, over which the mystic has no control. These states are descended from God. In at least the popular brotherhoods of Morocco; *hal* refers to the entranced state which in the Sufi lexicon is known as *wajd*, or ecstasy. Insofar as the Moroccan trancer has no control over his *hal*—it is descended from a saint or a jinn and ultimately from God—the *hal* resembles the *ahwal* of the Sufis” (1973:195). Kapchan explains that it is “a phenomenological condition that, in Sufi usage, originates from God, bestowing grace or *baraka* on its recipient” (2007:108).

kinds of social and musical experience.⁶

Music is too deeply concerned with human feelings and experiences in society, and its patterns are too often generated by surprising outbursts of unconscious cerebration, for it to be subject to arbitrary rules, like the rules of games. Many, if not all, of music's essential processes may be found in the constitution of the human body and in patterns of interaction of human bodies in society. (Blacking 1973:x)

A governing question in my research, particularly with respect to the impact of global forces on non-verbalized, oral/aural music traditions, is: If music is human expression, what does the music suggest to us that the musicians cannot or do not? What is the connection between cognitive and musical processes? How are rules of engagement observed with regard to context? Musical analysis demonstrates its relevance when it helps to correlate structure, expression, and meaning.

The aims of my dissertation are threefold: to analyze the Gnawa ritual with regard to structure, process, function and meaning; to investigate whether, and how, Gnawa music is context-sensitive; and building on the first two points, to assess the impact of global forces on ritual and music traditions and on its practitioners. My interest in ritual, what Geertz (1973) considers a window of meaning in cultural phenomena, and Bell (1992) conceives as a strategic mode of action, intends to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of little studied collective musical practices in the world. By investigating the musical idiom and its use in ritual practices, I hope to elucidate the habitus that informs the perception of social

⁶ The Gnawa have an oral tradition in which practitioners learn passively and through careful observation and imitation (personal communication, A. Gania, M. Gania, M. Outanine, Z. Gania, 2009). Given the secrecy of their ritual (and musical) practice, the hereditary Gnawa masters are guardians of their tradition, and like the Shona elders, “give only the amount of information they believe to be appropriate to the situation and to the persons involved” (Berliner 1981:7). This, however, does not rule out the possibility that the Gnawa musical system is non-verbalizable or not formally verbalized. More work is needed to identify the metaphors they may use for discussing music.

situations and gives meaning to musical expression. By conducting comparative musical analysis between sacred performances in which different types of possession trance occur, and between sacred and secular renditions of the same musical piece, I establish how the Gnawa musical system, given its variation form, operates as a referent to context. Through a special focus on musical analysis, I hope to shed light on patterns and behaviors embedded in sonic structure. I propose that music as human expression offers insight into the cognitive processes of performance in both traditional and new global context, and demonstrates the resilience and agency of the marginalized.

1.2 *Gnawa* Preliminaries

The presence of a black population in the Maghreb [the Arabic name for Morocco, may also connote Northwest Africa] has been known since antiquity.⁷ It developed further with the great Maghrebi empires. From the eleventh century, the Almoravids overthrew the pagan prince of Ghana [the empire]; the ruling classes were Islamized and exchange intensified between Morocco and the country of the Blacks.⁸ In the fifteenth century, the Maghrebian civilization settled in Timbuktu, Gao, and other Soudanese [i.e., West African] cities. In the sixteenth century, [Sultan] Ahmed El Mansour carried out the systematic conquest of Soudan [Songhay Empire]. In the seventeenth century, Mulay Ismaïl formed the first Black army in Morocco.⁹ (Lapassade 1999:25)

⁷ Although Maghreb refers to Morocco in the above citation, the term also refers to Northwest Africa including Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

⁸ Arabic sources also indicate that during the Almoravid dynasty in the eleventh century, there was an army of 4,000 black slaves from Jnawa [i.e., Gnawa] that increased to 30,000 under the succeeding Almohad dynasty (El Hamel 2008:246, 248).

⁹ Though early sultans had black slave-soldiers, it was during Mulay Ismaïl's reign that black soldiers formed the bulk of the army, numbering 150,000 at the time of his death—the largest black army in Moroccan history. “Beginning in 1580, the sultan Mulay Ismaïl bought back or confiscated all the black slaves he could procure and created black colonies where male children were trained by the sultan and enrolled in the army at age sixteen” (Kamian 2001:39). Meyers (1977) denies evidence of any large-scale Sudanese migration and says that MulayIsmaïl's army was recruited from blacks in Morocco; that is, those brought previously from the sub-Saharan and the “free” indigenous blacks. Delafosse (1924) writes of ongoing trading and intimate relations between Morocco and Sudan for



Figure 1.3 Map of Morocco.¹⁰

Slightly larger than California, Morocco is one of four countries in the Maghreb. It borders the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, and Spain to the northwest, and Algeria and the Western Sahara to the southeast (Figure 1.3).¹¹ Of the 32 million inhabitants, the ethnic majority is Arab-Berber and the dominant religion is Islam.¹² Although French is often the

nearly five centuries until the reign of El Mansour in the sixteenth century, whose hunger for power and wealth drove him to overthrow the Mali Empire in the hopes of gaining control of the salt and gold trade. Furthermore, Delafosse emphasizes El Mansour's exportation of Spanish troops to Sudan to secure control of the mines rather than his interest in transporting slaves. In the seventeenth century, however, Delafosse mentions the rounding up of sub-Saharanans to build Mulay Ismail's army.

¹⁰ These two images are in the public domain as they have been reproduced from the *Central Intelligence Agency Web* site. The image on the left has been modified to include Essaouira and Tamgrout.

¹¹ *Maghreb* literally means "west." The term connotes the Northwest region of Africa that encompasses Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Maghreb is also the Arabic name for Morocco. An alternate spelling is Maghrib.

¹² Ethnic groups include a 1% other, and religions mentioned are Christian 1% and Jewish 6,000 (2010 estimate). Data is from the Central Intelligence Agency Internet resource

language of business and government, the official language is Arabic. Most people speak either Arabic or Berber dialects and some have a functional command of French. Just over fifty percent of the population is literate.¹³

1.2.1 Who are the *Gnawa*?

According to El Hamel, “[a]fter many generations... freed black slaves eventually formed their own families and communities, such as those of the Gnawa mystic order” (2008:249). Though not all Gnawa have sub-Saharan roots or a history in slavery (and not all sub-Saharans are Gnawa),¹⁴ their concentrated distribution along (and near) the trade routes of caravans coming from the sub-Sahara by land or sea at the end of the sixteenth century (e.g., Essaouira, Marrakech, and Tangiers),¹⁵ not to mention in the imperial cities where a black slave army guarded the sultan from as early as the eleventh century (e.g., Marrakech, Fez, Meknes, and Rabat), suggests a significant percentage did at some time in history.¹⁶

Hale writes:

(<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>. Accessed January 7, 2012).

¹³ Defined as those fifteen years of age and over who can read and write (Central Intelligence Agency Internet resource).

¹⁴ “It seems certain that black and white populations mixed, perhaps there was even a predominance of blacks in the southern oasis. These black farmers were not slaves: they lived in symbiosis with the great Berber tribes [dating back to at least the 3rd century]” (Pâques 1991:24). In nineteenth and early twentieth century writings, Westermarck, an anthropologist from England who spent seven years (between 1898-1926) studying the cultural traditions of Morocco, had already noted that the Gnawa were “usually, but not always, blacks from the Sudan” (1899:258).

¹⁵ Some caravans from the sub-Sahara stopped in Marrakesh at the city gate Bab Agenou (built by El Mansour in 1185), “which can be understood as ‘the door of the Blacks’ or ‘the door of the Slaves’” (Hale 1998:332–336), while others continued northward reaching Spain. Essaouira also served as a port for goods (gold, textiles, and humans) coming from the south, some of which were shipped abroad by boat (Pâques 1991).

¹⁶ In addition to the old trading ports and imperial cities, today Gnawa live in various regions of Morocco including the modern port cities and economic centres of Agadir in the south (Lakhdar

The *agenaou*—the people from Black Africa—who passed through the Bab Agenaou to serve as soldiers, laborers, and servants were accompanied not only by gold and ivory but also by their traditions... Although we do not know if the origin of the term *agenaou* originated in Ghana... any visitor to Marrakesh today quickly encounters a living clue to the cultures of these slaves in a group of musicians known as *Gnawas*. (Hale 1997:257)

In the past, the majority of Gnawa belonged to the “nearly 1% other” ethnicity, and spoke the native tongue of their sub-Saharan homeland. In the last few decades, however, there has been a shift in demographics, not to mention language. Expatriate Paul Bowles who spent fifty-three years of his life in Morocco writes:

Sixty years ago when I first came to Morocco [1930s], the Gnawa were almost uniformly black, and many still spoke their native tongue, Bambara. Today most of them are considerably lighter in color, and have replaced Bambara with Darija Arabic [Moroccan dialect of Arabic]. (Bowles 1990 in Goodman-Singh 2002:87)

At the festival and on compact disc labels, the faces of the Gnawa musician span a spectrum of complexions and recall the evolving ethnic diversity of the blues artist.

Gnawa is a polyvalent term that signifies a particular organization or community of people, and may also be used to identify their beliefs and practices, or their music. It refers collectively to a sub-Saharan-Islamic society (*taifa*) of Morocco with roots in slavery, whose followers practice rituals of spirit possession in which music plays a fundamental role; Claisse describes the realities of different historical periods encompassed in the term Gnawa:

First, the black captives who arrived in Morocco at the époque of the Saharan slave trade (16th century); second, a body of royal servants that of ‘the army and the black guard’ (end of the 17th century); third, a network of musicians

2006) and Casablanca in the north; along the Atlantic coastline in Safi and Asilah; and at the eastern border to Algeria in Oujda (Langlois 1998). Gnawa may be found in other areas of Morocco that remain unknown. Gnawa are also scattered between Europe and North America. A small population exists in France and some Gnawa reside in England, the United States and Canada.

vested with magico-religious powers which expanded rapidly at the end of the 19th century; fourth, in its most contemporary sense, some inner city youth, somewhat marginalized, claiming the Gnawa culture. (Claisse 2003:17-18)

French ethnologists Pâques (1991) and Claisse (2003) differentiate between two groups of Gnawa: the Gnawa of *ganga* (also called ‘*abid* Lalla Mimuna or Lalla Krima) who were “part of the slave trade” (Claisse 2003:29) in Berber country, and Gnawa of the imperial cities (devoted to Sidi Bilal) who were the “personal servants of the sultan” (ibid.). Pâques considers the Gnawa of Lalla Mimuna a “sort of complementary brotherhood to the Gnawa of Bilal... the feminine part” (1991:62, 65). With the exception of the *guembri*, they use the same instruments. The former plays the *tbel* accompanied by *qraqab* for the “sacrificial procession” (Claisse 2003:29) during daylight hours until dusk, and “cannot ‘enter into the night’” (Pâques 1978:320). That is to say, unlike the Gnawa of Bilal, they do not animate night rituals for possession trance that require the *guembri*. Not only do these two groups have distinct geographies, functions, and music, they also have separate *zawiya*-s (lodge or sanctuary). M’allem Abdallah says there are Gnawa who specialize in the *ganga*, “African for drum” (personal communication, 2009), but did not make any distinction between groups. My research focuses on the music and practitioners of spirit possession rituals, who, in addition to the *guembri*, play the *tbel* during the procession portion.

Pâques specifies four main points with regard to Gnawa identity: 1) not all blacks are slaves, 2) not all slaves are Gnawa, 3) not all possessed are slaves or Gnawa, and 4) all Gnawa are slaves and possessed (1991:62). “Once an adept sacrifices two chickens, provides four meters of cloth the color of their spirit, they enter into the company of the Gnawa, no matter their social origin they become ontologically slaves” (ibid.). She writes: “We are the

pure race of slavery’, they [the Gnawa] say, even and especially though this condition does not correspond to a factual situation but to a kind of ontological status” (ibid.:23). Gnawa claim ancestral affiliation with Bilal, an Ethiopian born into slavery in Medina around 580 CE who converted to Islam,¹⁷ was freed by the Prophet, and became the first caller to prayer.¹⁸ This connection strengthens their identification with the construction of their past as one of slavery and displacement from south of the Sahara;¹⁹ that is, their ontological past, while simultaneously establishing their allegiance to Islam.

Etymological theories of the term Gnawa also point to a similar identity. They suggest it is transmuted from words including Guinée, “a Berber expression derived from *akal-n-iguinaouen*, which signifies ‘the country of the Blacks’, just as ‘Soudan’ comes from the Arabic expression *bilâd-es-soûdân*, which has exactly the same meaning” (Delafosse 1924:155-156);²⁰ Djinawa, a term used in the 12th century to refer to the citizens of the kingdom of Ghana (Chlyeh 1999:17); and *igri ignawan*, a Berber phrase which means “‘the field of the cloudy sky,’ an expression implying a turbulent wind...²¹ Moreover, ‘field of the sky’ is a circumlocution for the star Aldebaran, which is found at the center of Gnawa cosmological representations” (Pâques 1978:319). According to the linguist Taïfi (1992), the term could have been derived from the root *gnw*, which in the dialects of Central Morocco

¹⁷ Pâques points out that this is “evidently not a biological [affiliation] since the saint [Bilal] was a eunuch” (1991:60).

¹⁸ Some say that Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, “a very close friend to the Prophet” (El Hamel 2008:250), heard about his conversion, “bought him and set him free in the name of Islam” (ibid.).

¹⁹ For more details, see El Hamel (2008), Goodman-Singh (2002), and Kapchan 2007.

²⁰ According to Delafosse, the Libyan Berbers gave the name Guinée to the land of the black race well before the Arabs invented the synonymous term Soudan. Trade between the Berbers and the *Iguinaouen* is documented as early as the 11th century. Slaves and gold powder were traded for textiles, jewelry and sticks of copper. “The influence of Phoenician and Punic colonies positioned on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Morocco intensified trading and the commercial relations between Maghreb and Soudan” (Delafosse 1924:156). Dermenghem says that “[m]ost of the imported Blacks now seem to originate from regions south and east of Timbuktu... which would explain the predominance of Songhay and Hausa songs” (1953:318).

²¹ Paques writes: “In fact, the Gnawa do call themselves ‘the people of turbulence’” (1978:319).

“evokes ‘the darkening sky’ and ‘thunder’ that follows... suggesting a clapping sound and perhaps, more generally, qualifying the incomprehensible language of an unrecognized populace or civilization, that of the slaves who came from the Northern bend of Niger via the caravan routes” (in Claisse 2003:32).²²

1.2.2 Beliefs and Practices

According to French sociologist Lapassade, “[Gnawa] culture belongs in the largest category of rituals of the negro diaspora that can be further classified into two large groups” (1998:6)—Afro-American and the Negro-Maghrebian.²³ Like their diasporic counterparts in North Africa and across the Atlantic, Gnawa beliefs and practices integrate those of the dominant culture (religion and language) and local indigenous customs with those of their homeland (sub-Saharan animism and rituals of spirit possession) to form a unique system—“the religion of slaves” (Pâques 1991).²⁴ Common to spirit possession rituals in general (Becker 2004; Rouget 1985) and African diasporic practices in particular, music is crucial. During the lila, Gnawa venerate Allah and the Prophet Mohammed and salute and call on Islamic, regional and local saints, and supernatural forces of the sub-Sahara by using vocal

²² For more discussion on the etymology of Gnawa, see Pâques (1991), Hale (1998), Hell (2002), Claisse (2003), and Kapchan (2007).

²³ Sub-Saharan populations were brought to North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, where they formed similar cultural communities and practices which go by different names, such as Gnawa, Bilali (Dermenghem 1953), and Stambeli (Jankowsky 2010). “Religious phenomena characterized by the words *zar* and *bori* (genies, possession by genies), *diwan* (reunion, assembly, society) are spread throughout the Abyssinia, North Africa, Haussa, Songhay and Bambara. Analogues having roots further south than Soudan have been observed in the Antilles and Brazil. Under the symbolism of genies, the profound goals, aside from the social effects, are a *catharsis*, a purification of energies, healing of nervous illnesses or pacification of the soul by ecstasy. It’s the form that the mystic of displaced, oppressed, exiled minority most easily take, and which has been accommodated by Islam in Africa like Christianity in the Americas” (Dermenghem 1953:320).

²⁴ In Brazil, for example, the Umbanda incorporates African, European, and native Indian religions (Bastide 1978; Wafer 1991).

and instrumental techniques. Although the vocal portion contains African words peppered among a predominantly Arabic text, the music evokes a characteristically African sonority with respect to instrumentation, vocal style, pitch, rhythm, structure and form.

Gnawa live according to a philosophy of life governed by the co-existence and interaction of temporal and supernatural realms that share resemblances to the cultural beliefs and practices of other trancing traditions. Similar to the Bilali in Algeria, the Candomblé in Brazil, Hindu in Bali, and Santería in Cuba, among others,²⁵ their worldview is based on a trinity in which the existence of dualism and a third intermediary element—a codified metalanguage of music, dance, olfaction, sacrifice, ritual objects—works to equilibrate and unite opposite yet complementary worlds of the universe. A practice of adorcism—that is, spirit accommodation (Heusch 1962)—the *lila* as embodying the Gnawa worldview is an offering that propitiates and pleases the supernatural entities of the Gnawa pantheon and serves to cultivate a symbiotic relationship with them (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2006).²⁶

Multiple threads of religious beliefs and activities are woven into the fabric of Gnawa daily life. Despite, or rather in addition to, their animistic beliefs and practices in spirit possession, Gnawa are devout Muslims. They recognize the importance of and practice the five pillars of Islam—profession of faith, prayer (five times a day), almsgiving, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca—and perform ritual offerings to appease their sub-Saharan spirits on a regular basis throughout their lifetime.²⁷ On canonical days such *Mulid al-Nabi* (the

²⁵ Works that focus on particular trancing cultures include Belo (1949, 1960), Bastide (1978), Crapanzano (1973), Friedson (1996), Hagedorn (2001). For studies on trance consult Rouget (1985) and Becker (2004).

²⁶ Distinct from exorcism, adorcism is a practice of spirit accommodation rather than spirit expulsion.

²⁷ Like any religious practitioner, the degree of devotion varies from person to person (e.g., not everyone, Gnawa or non-Gnawa, abstains from eating pork or drinking alcohol).

Prophet's birthday) and *'Id al-Kbir* (the Great Sacrifice),²⁸ Gnawa may hold a lila in celebration. They participate in the Maghrebian Berber tradition of maraboutism which involves ritual visits to the tombs of saints scattered throughout Morocco,²⁹ sometimes performing lila in their honor. On the last day of the Gnawa's annual obligatory lila, which takes place during the month of Sha'ban,³⁰ they may invite *ulema* (Muslim scholars) to recite Quranic verses. In the following month of Ramadan, they fast and abstain from invoking the *mluk* (supernatural entities).³¹ "We must lock up everything. No lila during Ramadan. The mluk need to rest" (personal communications, Z. Gania and Saida, 2007) (cf. Dermenghem 1953).³² With the exception of Ramadan, a lila may take place at any time of

²⁸ The Prophet's anniversary, Mulid al-Nabi, or simply Mulid, takes place on the 12th of Rabi'. The Great Sacrifice ('Id al-Kbir or 'Id al-Adha) is celebrated after the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijja.

²⁹ The practice of venerating saints with annual visits to their tombs and holy sites is said to be assimilated from Berber tradition. Marabout from *marabit* "describes a man attached to God... used for any of the warrior-saints who brought Islam to Morocco. 'Maraboutisme' has become in French the catch-all expression for all sorts of activities associated with the worship of saints" (Crapanzano 1973:1–2). Maraboutism is popular among Moroccan Muslims.

³⁰ Sha'ban precedes Ramadan. To the Gnawa, Sha'ban celebrates the old and welcomes in a new year of human and spiritual interaction.

³¹ The Gnawa term *mluk* signifies supernatural entities, spirits, and saint-genies belonging to the Gnawa pantheon—that is, the spirit possessors. It is the plural form of *melk* (masculine singular form) or *melka* (feminine singular form). Alternate spellings include *malk* or *malka*. *Mluk* may generally be referred to as *jnun* (plural form), *jinn* (masculine singular form) or *jinnya* (feminine singular) in standard Arabic. Alternate spellings include *djunun* or *gnun* in the plural, and *djinn* or *ginn* in the singular. Kapchan writes: "from the verb *ma-la-ka*, to own [...] may also be translated as 'kings' or 'angels'... The term *mluk* is used in the ritual ceremonies to refer to the spirits, *jnun* being the more colloquial nonritual term" (2007:18, 244 [fn.4]). Like the literal meaning of *mluk*, Westermarck (1899) also refers to the Arabic *jnun* as owners. Chlyeh considers the *mluk* and *djunun* as different entities (1999:33–40); that is, the *jinn* are Muslim spirits whereas *mluk* are reserved for African entities. The Ganiyas use these terms interchangeably. A friend once said: "Mluk is the Gnawa word for *jnun*. They don't know this word outside of Morocco" (personal communication, Aisha, 2007). According to Lapassade, the *mluk* are supernatural entities specific to the Gnawa pantheon, whereas *jnun* are of the genie-spirit category (1998:81). Kapchan uses *mluk* synonymously with *jnun* (2004:30), "genies that in Islamic belief are born of fire... humans are born of earth, while angels are creatures of light" (ibid.:31). In the Quran, *djunun* are supernatural forces or spirits created from smokeless fire (Sura 7:11, 38:76). See Chlyeh (1998:38–40) and others (such as Pâques 1991 and Hell 1999) for more discussion on the distinction between these terms.

³² Dermenghem writes with regard to the diwan of Algeria, "It is the end of that month that 'Those people,' 'Those other people'—the spirits—are shut up in their mysterious retreats until the end of

the year if deemed necessary for the sick, and if desirable and affordable by an adept, patron, or researcher.

The lila is the main ritual activity of the Gnawa and its social organization reflects the hierarchy of the community. At the top are the two main actors: the *moqaddema* (or *moqaddem*),³³ and the *m'Allem*.³⁴ As leaders of the society and guardians of their tradition, they have a deep knowledge of all sensory symbols associated with the mluk, the ritual structure and process, and their mythical and mystical meanings. Moqaddema-s and m'Allem-s are chosen by the community (seen and unseen) and endowed with *baraka*, a divine grace or miraculous force.³⁵ The rest of the Gnawa community comprises their followers: assistants, children of Gnawa masters, and clients or patients of the moqaddema. Their status depends upon a number of factors, such as their affiliation with the mluk,

the fasting. This fortnight continuously resounds with the noise of the great iron castanets and the drums” (Dermenghem 1953, translated by Hunwick and Powell 2002:154).

³³ *Moqaddema* is the feminine singular form of *moqaddem* (masculine singular form) that refers to a ritual officiant who is often a seer-therapist and/or medium. This role, however, is not gender specific. Pâques worked with male seer-officiants (1991:28; personal communication, Z. Gania, 2009), and although I only ever attended lila-s run by moqaddema-s, I was told moqaddem-s existed. Nevertheless, the Gania m'Allem-s and other Gnawa with whom I worked often employed the feminine form—moqaddema—which suggests that the role is often fulfilled by women (at least in recent times), or that their relationships are predominantly with female seers and officiants. In what follows, only the feminine term is employed. Moreover, while all moqaddema-s can officiate at lila-s, not all are seer-therapists or mediums.

³⁴ The term *m'Allem* (masculine singular form) or *m'Allema* (feminine singular form) is used to refer to an expert of their trade (e.g., a master carpenter). Unlike the role of the moqaddema, the master musician is always male and designated by the masculine term alone. To date, there have not been any m'Allema who specialize in playing the guembri (personal communication, Gania family, 2006).

³⁵ Geertz writes: “literally ‘baraka’ means blessing, in the sense of divine favor... it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world... More exactly, it is a mode of construing—emotionally, morally, intellectually—human experience, a cultural gloss on life... [which] comes down to... the proposition... that the sacred appears most directly in the world as an endowment—a talent and a capacity, a special ability—of particular individuals. Rather than electricity, the best (but still not very good) analogue for ‘baraka’ is personal presence, force of character, moral vividness” (1968:44). Crapanzano defines baraka as the “saint’s blessing or holiness... a miraculous force or power... [which] is not only transmissible to his progeny but has in certain special circumstances a contagious quality” (1973:2, 19). Kapchan adds: “Baraka is also the euphemistic term used to refer to the money given to the Gnawa in exchange for their more literal conference of blessing” (2007:142). See also Chlyeh (1998:125). The way in which the term is used depends upon context.

musical skills, and knowledge. During a given ritual occasion, the majority of assistants belong to a single Gnawa family who play supporting roles as helpers to the moqaddema or accompanists to the m' allem,³⁶ and otherwise undergo a continuous, informal training, throughout their lifetime.

The process of the lila serves not only human participants who sponsor and attend the ceremony, but also supernatural entities. Accordingly, the musical performance adheres to a structure and sequential ordering designated by a pantheon of spirit possessors. In this manner, Gnawa work to restore order and maintain harmonious relations between the various planes of existence with which they live their daily lives—seen by the unseen, heard by the unheard, touched by intangible beings from the heavens, waters and the forest. During such occasions, an outsider can sense a complete transformation of the daily and get a glimpse of the unseen, so to speak. The usual roles of Gnawa as carpenters, hairdressers, or students, and the house as a domestic quarter, take on new functions and identities.

1.2.3 Music Basics

Music and other sensory stimulants (i.e., colors, fragrances, food) are integral to lila-s, which are held for reasons including healing, annual renewal of ties with the mluk, initiation ceremonies, life cycle celebrations, expressions of gratitude to the mluk, requests for blessings, and celebrations of Islamic holidays. A sacred lila typically involves three parts which may be distinguished by instrumentation, repertoire, dance, and function that

³⁶ These roles are often distinguished by gender. The moqaddema's entourage are female and the m' allem's accompanists male.

culminates with the focal act—possession dance (*jedba*).³⁷ The overall procedure is a progressive event intended for adorcism to serve as social medicine for the (seen) community, and at a deeper level, to restore and maintain balance and order between the temporal and spiritual dimensions of the world and enact the co-existence of humans and supernatural entities.

The earlier parts of the lila are performed for the seen world of the living, and the latter is dedicated to the unseen world of *mluk*. In the former, music accompanies pre-possession dances performed by the music ensemble, often referred to as the entertainment portion. In the latter, a special repertoire honors and invokes *mluk* to engender possession trance among patients and adepts. The music ritual is often performed in intimate settings with musicians and audience seated on the ground. During possession, members of the audience get up to dance when moved by their affiliated or afflicting spirits. Music, which initiates dance,³⁸ is essential for community entrainment and particularly crucial for processing and facilitating trance in the possession portion of the ritual process. It is the key to ritual success; that is, to “mastering communication with the *spirits* who enter the body and induce trance” (Kapchan 2007:34).

The Gnawa musical world extends significantly into popular spheres. Gnawa perform in myriad contexts of sacred and secular spheres ranging from private lila-s to highly publicized and lucrative music festivals, to Islamic celebrations, television and studio

³⁷ Crapanzano writes: “*Jidba*, which is a... frenetic trance is derived from the Arabic for attraction. It is used by the Sufis for the mystical attraction to God. Although the transition from... to *jidba* is always abrupt and dramatic, *jidba* does not altogether correspond to such ‘strong seizures’ as are described for trance in Bali (Belo 1960:213). It is... a structured experience in which the performer carries out relatively complex behavior” (1973:195–196).

³⁸ Arom writes: “for an African from a traditional milieu, simply to hear music gives rise almost immediately to a movement of the body. It is the dance, the ‘plastic music’ of which Senghor speaks (1958, rev. edn 1964: 240), that music, speech and movement find their fullest expression” (1991:10–11).

recordings. Compared to similar musics found in North Africa and music of popular Sufi brotherhoods in Morocco, Gnawa is by far the most popular, nationally and internationally (Jankowsky 2010). Music performed for the purposes of festivals, parties, or recording sessions bears an aural resemblance to the sacred occasion; however, because they are intended for entertainment, other ritual necessities are normally absent. M'allems engage in fusion collaborations with local and international artists, and some may form alternative bands (on the side) that blend local ethnic (usually Berber) and Euro-American traditions with respect to instrumentation and musical style.³⁹ Gnawa women who do not usually play music in the traditional ritual setting form their own ensembles and similarly participate in musical activity of a sacred and secular nature.

Traditional musical practice withstands the encroachment of global cultural flows and remains a living force. Though exposed to secular occasions of performance, and immersed in myriad music cultures of Morocco and constantly surrounded by musics of other worlds (at festivals, on national television and radio),⁴⁰ children of hereditary families continue to grow up in a rich environment of sacred music practice. Going to school during the week, they may join in a lila over the weekend as active participants. Boys play music accompanying their fathers or uncles and perform acrobatic dances. Girls assist their mothers or aunts with ritual preparations and sometimes enter into trance. Gnawa children absorb

³⁹ The Gania masters formed an ethnic folk group with their friends when they were in their early twenties (personal communication, A. Gania and M. Outanine, 2009). Some of them continue to experiment with blending musical styles and sounds.

⁴⁰ Moroccan musics include communal Berber traditions of the Atlas mountains (ahwash, ahidus), specialist musics (Andalusian music, malhoun, and shikhat), music of religious associations (Heddawa, Jilala, 'Aissawa, and Hamadsha), popular mass mediated musics (Sh'abi and alternative folk pop). See also Cherqi (1981) and Schuyler (2008.). Sounds from the United States, Egypt and Turkey are also broadcasted locally, while internet access renders numerous more musics available with a single click. Two large annual festivals, held in Fez and Essaouira, also bring musics from around the world to the Moroccan population.

their traditional knowledge by listening, watching and doing. Like children of the Central African Republic, they learn music “just as [they] learn how to speak... the acquisition of the musical language peculiar to his or her own cultural community [which includes dance] runs parallel to the acquisition of language; one could even argue that, in a certain sense, it precedes it” (Arom 1991:13–14).

Performances typically open with the thunderous sound of two or three large *tbel-s* (drums) accompanied by the dense metallic clacking of numerous *qraqab*. Voices of the instrumentalists soar above the intense, “dizzying rhythms of [their] drums and castanets” (Dermenghem 1953:347) as they process through the streets of Morocco or onto the elevated stages of international music festivals.⁴¹ Subsequently, the *tbel-s* are put away and the *guembri* (a three stringed lute), the principal melodic instrument of the ensemble, animates the remainder of the evening accompanied by handclaps or *qraqab*.⁴² The combination of the subtle warm sonority of the gut-strings juxtaposed with the intense cool timbre of thick steel dominates the musical texture. Male voices add another timbral layer characterized by call-and-response, overlapping solo and choral parts, raw soulful delivery contrasted with a nasal understated one, and a degree of independence from the instrumental melody and rhythm.⁴³

Gnawa melodies are usually pentatonic. The *guembri* has a one octave range with the tuning of its lowest note varying between B1 and D2#. *Guembri* motives two to sixteen beats long supported by *ostinati* played on the *qraqab* create a rich polyrhythmic texture. A musical performance consists of varying one or more motives defined by a cyclic concept of time. It

⁴¹ Dermenghem’s general description of the *diwan* in Algeria resembles Gnawa instrumentation.

⁴² This is the typical instrumentation of a sacred *lila*; however, other instruments such as the *ghita* (Moroccan oboe) may be added in other regions (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009).

⁴³ Some *m’allem*, particularly of non-sub-Saharan descent, sing with clear diction, “the ideal Arabic aesthetic of [vocal] delivery” (Danielson 1997:138–141 in Jankowsky 2010:110) in contrast to the “not clearly enunciated” (ibid.) words of the *Gania* masters. A distinction in vocal delivery may be made between Gnawa *m’allem-s* of sub-Saharan and non-sub-Saharan ancestry.

comprises three main sections: an instrumental prelude that introduces the motives, vocal invocation, and a final instrumental section. The tempo of a piece differs slightly between m'Allem-s and contexts. Increase in tempo is gradual during the vocal section and becomes more dramatic when the singing stops, usually reaching a peak as the music comes to a close.

Gnawa music is traditional in the sense that it was produced for internal use for and by the members; there are no known composers or dates of inception. Pieces are passed on orally through ritual ceremonies and a collective responsibility for preservation. Virtually all the same pieces exist throughout Morocco, with some exceptions such as regional specialties or items belonging to particular m'Allem-s (or families), to which others are not privy. Two main types of repertoire exist and may be categorized by function (i.e., pre-possession or entertainment, and possession), or by thematic referential content (i.e., ontological past and supernatural entities). The first of each pair signifies “nostalgia for a home... forgotten in living memory” (Kapchan 2007:184); in the second of each pair, “the lyrics in the invocations to the spirits provide indexical and iconical links to Africa, but also referential indexes to Islam and, by extension, to the Arab East” (ibid.), the birthplace of Bilal. All musical performances—sacred or secular—draw from the same repertoire intended for possession rituals. Though rare, some m'Allem-s compose original pieces which they perform on secular occasions (personal communications, A. Gania and M. Outanine, 2009).

Gnawa musical practice allows for and necessitates flexibility. A variation form, the repertoire selection for a given lila, and its prescribed order of invocation are subject to change due to social and contextual factors. On a micro-level, the shape and duration of an individual piece also differs between performances and may be as brief as a few minutes or last upward of ten minutes. The improvised musical practice is governed by implicit rules of

performance that are predicated by trance phenomena and new social situations, which are a central focus of my study.

1.3 *Gnawa* Scholarship and Beyond

Despite the strength of Gnawa tradition, when my interest in Gnawa music began in 2001, there were scarcely any publications on the music or ritual tradition, and fewer still in the English language: two out of three journal articles (Schuyler 1981; Langlois 1998); three out of less than a dozen contributions to edited books (Akharraz and Damgaard 1998; Kapchan 2000; Pâques 1978); and zero out of the seven monographs written in French, German, and Arabic. Since then the numbers have slightly increased in both French- and English-language publications. These writings, though few in number, have been significant and responsible for putting the Moroccan Gnawa and their music on the scholar's map, tipping the scale slightly from the overwhelming popularity among festival goers in Morocco and Europe.⁴⁴

Important studies which I have consulted throughout my research (including Pâques 1991; Chlyeh 1999; Lesage 1999; Lapassade 1998; Hell 2002; Claisse 2003; and Kapchan 2007) each have their own perspective: social, religious, historical, linguistic, semiotic, phenomenological, and/or mythical. Pâques' seminal study distinguishes itself from others in its focus on Gnawa cosmogony and its links to the sub-Sahara.⁴⁵ Her book *La Religion des*

⁴⁴ The increase in scholarship at the end and beginning of the twentieth and twenty-first century parallels the growing international popularity of Gnawa music since the inception of the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* in 1998.

⁴⁵ Pâques spent several years in sub-Saharan Africa before living in Morocco and devoting her life to Gnawa beliefs and practices.

Esclaves (1991) considers the philosophical and religious system that dictates ritual practice. According to Claisse, ““For Pâques, the *lila* ceremony is an entire cosmology lived in one night. Every aspect of the ceremony is symbolic of the soul’s journey from life to death and back to life”” (in Kapchan 2007:136). The music, which communicates the belief system in a concrete procedure—that is, it structures and enables ritual activity—is discussed little beyond the mythical and mystical meaning of the instruments and thematic content of pieces. Pâques offers brief semiotic explanations of musical phenomena associated with animals, gender and supernatural entities;⁴⁶ however, the terminology is not sufficiently defined to derive any musical significance that could be related to vocal or instrumental parts.

To complement my fieldwork, scholarship concerned with possession, globalization, and music has been singled out. Two important monographs dedicated largely to possession among the Gnawa include: Hell’s (1999) *Possession et Chamanisme: Les Maîtres de Désordre* and Kapchan’s (2007) *Traveling Spirit Masters*. Hell’s comprehensive anthropological study of the fundamental characteristics of shamanism and possession takes into account context, meaning, behavior and philosophy of the Gnawa society in addition to other trancing cultures. Kapchan explores the power of trance in and beyond the ritual, associated emotions, memory and the gesturing body in possession. Other studies on Gnawa include single chapters or brief discussions of the initiatory itinerary of possession, trance behavior, biographical accounts, and possession as therapy with general descriptions about music limited to instruments and timbre, and changes in tempo, dynamics and texture.

Rouget (1985) and Becker (2004) have contributed to my understanding of trance and the

⁴⁶ ““We hit three strokes for the goat rhythm, four for the ram and five for the cow.’ The first rhythm is male, the second female, the third . . . symbolizes copulation . . . For the white spirits, five strokes for the first Whites, two times three strokes for the hajjaj (pilgrims), four strokes for the bu derbala . . . and the Jilala [spirits]” (Pâques 1991:259).

role of music in it.

The impact of the global marketplace is the subject of the second half of Kapchan's monograph and Majdouli's (2007) monograph. In addition to possession of the body (trance), Kapchan explores the "possession of culture," namely, the culture of trance, from the perspectives of Gnawa and their non-Gnawa collaborators. She captures the impact of Euro-American discourse (text and practice), contact, and tourism on Gnawa, and the "contemporary fascination with trance experience" on non-Gnawa. Kapchan says that "dichotomies like that of the sacred and the secular (marketplace) are not... 'mutually exclusive features of musical globalization... but... integral constituents of musical aesthetics under late capitalism'" (2007:130). Majdouli's monograph focuses on the festival as a globalizing force that transforms sacred to profane and the marginalized to the legitimized. She investigates the relation between the theatricality of the ritual and its performance on stage; liminality; and the Gnawa trajectory from ritual to national festival to the international arena. Their works reveal the cognitive processes of m'Allem-s with respect to their divergent performance contexts, but not the music per se.

Until Fuson's (2009) dissertation on the interaction of musical processes and the gesturing body, music itself had been given attention in only two short articles (Aydoun 1999 and Baldassarre 1999) and otherwise limited to brief, often aesthetic descriptions about the instruments, melody, and percussion. After describing the ritual and musical idioms, Fuson maps the interaction between musician and dancer at distinct phases of the ritual process and examines how the exchange of sonic and gestural knowledge of both actors may be characterized as an expressive genre he calls "co-enunciation" — that is, the dancer must master his or her own gestures and decipher those of the musician just as the musician's

expertise must co-exist with his cognizance of dance gestures in order to achieve effective communication.

Beyond Gnawa studies, scholars have struck a balance between the age old dichotomy of musicological and anthropological approaches to ethnomusicology. Some have also assessed the impact of global forces on traditional practices. Qureshi (1995) and Friedson (1996) focus on musical and ritual practices associated with trance. The former employs a rigorous systematic analysis of the Qawwali performance idiom, context and process; the latter, at the other extreme, takes a phenomenological approach to the music and dance of Tumbuka healing ceremonies. Both, however, remain within the realm of “traditional” performance. While Hagedorn (2001) examines the sacred performances of Santería ceremonies and their secularization, and her reflexive ethnographic approach details the social and musical experiences of performers, the music itself is not crucial to her study. More recently, Jankowsky’s (2010) book investigates music as a pragmatic force in Stambeli healing rituals and considers its secularization. Emoff (2002) is among the few who engage in musical analysis of “traditional” and current globally influenced spirit possession practices in his study of maresaka in Madagascar.

The performance of cultural musics in “urban festivals internationally, whether as ‘traditional’ moments... or as highly orchestrated mega-events” (Waite 2008:513) is a growing phenomenon, particularly among countries whose economies depend largely on tourist dollars. Although the production of festivals is not new, “[t]his remarkable rise can in part be attributed to the almost worldwide deployment of festivals as a contemporary urban regeneration tool of neoliberal governance through the conjunction of business, play and fantasy” (ibid.). The staging of sacred performances, such as Santería practices of Cuba,

Barong and Rangda of Bali, and Whirling Dervish dances of the Mawlawi order, to name but a few, has also coincided with the growing quest for spirituality and enterprise of “sacred tourism” (Kapchan 2008). While there is no dearth of studies on societies of trance traditions, more music-centered studies, not to mention ones that consider changing musical practices, would be welcome.

My research imparts a musical dimension not only to the study of the Gnawa sacred ritual but to its secularized form, and contributes to the modest publications on the Gnawa and the music of the sub-Saharan diaspora in North Africa.

1.4 Approaches to *Gnawa* Music

1.4.1 Conceptual Tools

My concern with the evolving spaces and times of Gnawa music necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theories and methods derived from anthropology and Western analytical concepts. It takes inspiration from scholars (including Blacking 1967, 1973; Berliner 1981, 1994; Arom 1991; Nattiez 1995, 1999; Monson 1996; Tenzer 2000) whose works have demonstrated that the union between anthropology and musical analysis is not only complementary to the musical study of human cultures, but enriching. My research addresses one major question: In what way can we analyze music that is relevant to the culture bearers and their tradition? I take a synchronic approach, “observing how [music] works and determining the laws imposed on it by its own structure at a given historical stage and in a specific cultural context independently of its prior evolution... the only sound

methodological foundation for the study of the music of societies with no written tradition” (Arom 1991:xxiii). Adopting Blacking’s concept that music cannot be “detached from its context and regarded as ‘sonic objects’” (in Byron 1995:55), since “[e]very musical performance is a patterned event in a system of social interaction, whose meaning cannot be understood or analyzed in isolation from other events in the system” (ibid.:227), I consider Gnawa music with regard to “the context of its social uses and the cultural system of which it is a part” (ibid.).

Transcriptions of field and commercial recordings focus on the instrumental part of Gnawa music. “The guembri is a crucial instrument in Gnawa rituals. It is through this device that the trance occurs. [...] If there is no guembri there will be no trance” (M’allem Boubeker Gania in El Hamel 2008:254). Scholars of other trancing cultures have also noted the centrality of instrumental melody and rhythm for attracting spirits (Besmer 1983; Jankowsky 2010). Accordingly, the guembri part contains all the parameters for describing the structure of Gnawa music; that is, the organization of “*itches* into [sets], and *durations* into rhythmic values and periodicity” (Arom 1991:226, emphases in original) that supports vocal invocation and sustains trance.

Musical motives are determined by applying an overarching framework of periodicity, defined as “repetition or re-statement, literal or transformed, of all kinds—of beats, rhythms, motives, melodies, structures, timbres” (Tenzer 2006:22) such as “time line, cycle, riff, ostinato... call-and-response, twelve-bar blues progression, tala” (ibid.:23). Because “[p]eriodicity structures and measures musical time” (ibid.:24), it serves as an optimal framework for unraveling the multiple layers of time, understanding the foundation of musical form and structure (how music is organized), musical processes (what is

happening in performance), and categorizing variations (what music signifies). With respect to Gnawa music, such an analytical approach helps us appreciate music's correlation with ritual and trance phenomena, and distinguish subtleties between the sacred and secular. Throughout the study, I investigate Gnawa music (and ritual) in consideration of temporal hierarchy, "from the smallest rhythmic units (individual tones, durations, accents, and pulsations) to intermediate levels of structure (patterns, phrases, motives, poetic lines) to the larger, higher structural levels (formal sections, entire compositions and performances)" (Rowell in Tenzer 2006:25), including "those aspects of temporal hierarchy that outlast the duration of the individual musical event: musical seasons, creative lifetimes, the understandings that are handed down from teacher to student" (ibid.).

Since my analysis compares renditions of the same pieces, and given that a single performance is based on the repetition of one or more motives, I adopt the principle of seriation which "invokes the idea that any investigator, in order to assign some plausible meaning to a given phenomenon, must integrate it within a *series* of comparable phenomena" (Nattiez 1990:230, emphasis in original). I use paradigmatic charts "not only indispensable for establishing the emic-ness of constitutive units of a corpus, but for *interpreting*, with respect to this corpus, the observed characteristics of a limited number of pieces" (Nattiez 1995:311, emphasis in original). Furthermore, these approaches bring to attention details concealed by repetition which I argue signify distinct mental activity. According to Meyer, "this 'search attitude' is important because small differences, which may be very important in the understanding of a work, may pass unnoticed if one is not set to perceive them" (1956:78), and in the case of Gnawa music, not armed with the appropriate tools.⁴⁷

In the context of oral/aural, unwritten traditions, applying the above approach enables

⁴⁷ See Perlman for a discussion on "the significance of small differences" (1993:11).

the researcher to identify and understand vernacular modes of musical organization and categorization and provides insight to how cognitive processes of master ritual musicians may be musically manifested. It should be kept in mind that Gnawa music is never performed the same way twice. Transcriptions of guembri motives are, as Amira and Cornelius write with regard to drumming patterns in Santería performances, paradigms at best:

There is no single correct way to play the batá salutes. Batá drumming is an oral tradition. It lives in the performers' minds rather than on the printed page. Therefore, despite the fact that the rhythms are highly formalized, they are also undergoing constant transformation, and although every authentic performance must conform to basic traditional models, each ensemble will develop its own individual performance style and rhythmic feel... In short, a study of the New York tradition reveals that while there are definitely correct and incorrect ways to play the salute rhythms, to a certain extent each generation, ensemble, and individual performer will internalize and recreate the tradition in his own musical voice. Due to the above factors it is unlikely that any performance would ever conform exactly with the transcriptions in this book... Therefore, the transcriptions act as paradigms. (Amira and Cornelius 1992:1–2)

1.4.2 Fieldwork

The information on which this study is based was gathered through a preliminary study of scholarly discourses on Gnawa ritual at the University of British Columbia (2004–2006) and the library of the Dar Souiri Association in Essaouira,⁴⁸ and through fieldwork in Morocco. The inquiry draws largely on my affiliation with the Gantias (a hereditary Gnawa family) that began in 2001, and visits to Morocco between 2006 and 2009. Due to the few studies dedicated to the music itself at the time, I began my research with initial

⁴⁸ Souiri is the adjectival form of Essaouira; for example, Dar Souiri, literally means “house of Essaouira.” A person from Essaouira is also referred to as a Souiri.

interpretations and descriptions of the music made possible through transcription and analysis of studio recordings bought during my first visit to Morocco in 2001. Subsequently, this included a collection of field recordings made between 2006 and 2009. Although few studies on Gnawa music were available, given my repeated exposure to the music in the field over a span of eight years, additional transcriptions and comparisons of the vast repertoire and my discussions with the Gania family, I began to feel the power of their music and of the embodied musical knowledge of hereditary masters. The difference between the imaginary and real became clear.

When I first asked musicians about performances of the same pieces in different contexts, aside from the apparent differences (i.e., setting, participants, accessories) they would always respond that it was the same. Given that Gnawa music is a variation form, the overall sound is the same, and differences concealed. In reality, however, performances were not the same and musical analysis revealed the subtle yet meaningful distinctions in musical processes not verbalized by the cultural practitioners (Chapter 7). On a return visit, I discussed my “discovery” with M‘allem Abdallah. Calmly nodding, he responded, “It’s not the same thing.”

Perhaps as Jones says with regard to his research in Northern Rhodesia, “[T]he African is totally unconscious that there *is* a system at all. He cannot describe it: he cannot help the investigator. He just makes delightful music in his own way and lets it go at that” (1949:295, emphasis in original). Or as Arom writes about his work with the Aka of the Central African Republic: “not only are abstract concepts such as *scale*, *degree*, and *interval* not objects of verbal commentary, they are practically *non-verbalizable*. There is *conception* but not *conceptualization*” (2007a:37, emphases in original). While these assertions may

describe the reality of Jones' and Arom's field experiences and they may be true of other oral/aural traditions, I am careful not to privilege verbal over non-verbal language, and bear in mind that cultural practitioners may simply choose not to divulge information requested by the researcher.

Gnawa music is an oral/aural tradition that is lived. Transmission takes place through repeated exposure, listening, watching, and imitating. Similar to the way we speak our native tongue, Gnawa know their music, understand the structure, and play by the rules intuitively. Learning in a procedural and imitative rather than declarative manner may pose a challenge for both the Gnawi confronted with questions about their music and the researcher who desires to understand it. A master of his music tradition, the m'Allem embodies knowledge of the system that he does not or cannot articulate, or may not wish to articulate (to an outsider). After all, he has no need for a formal exegesis.

In addition to being a participant-observer, my time in the field was a process of learning how to learn about the music. I wonder how our interaction, contributed, if at all, to contemplation of their own music, or to developing a form of articulation. I also wonder if, like Berliner's opening story in *The Soul of Mbira* (1981), I needed to prove my sincerity, my appreciation, and my dedication, and whether this was accomplished by my multiple visits and continual loyalty. Berliner writes, "I will long remember the lesson that Bandambira and the members of his village taught me about field research technique and about the nature of knowledge as privileged information... the elders who are the guardians of an oral tradition do not treat their knowledge lightly. Rather, 'they give what they like'" (1981:7). Whatever access I was granted, it became evident that only over a long period of time, through consistent exposure, could I fully acquire the knowledge, get the concepts, and learn the



Figure 1.4 Moqaddema Zaida’s (center) daughters and nieces with husband Si Mohammed (far right). (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

secrets of Gnawa beliefs and practices. As M’allem Mokhtar once told me, “School is the lila. I learned the guembri by going to lila-s as a boy” (personal communication, 2006).

My relationship with the Gania masters that began in 2001 and extended through repeated visits engendered a trust among us that afforded me much freedom (to attend and record rituals and concerts), and contact with many family members who were castanet players, dancers, ritual assistants, and adepts. Despite the power dynamics present throughout, as is common in ethnographic work, I was embraced by the Gania masters, particularly Moqaddema Zaida, her husband Si Mohammed Outanine, and her daughter Saida (Figure 1.4). Various family members openly shared grievances and hardships, which sometimes left me in difficult situations. Suffice it to say that any challenges I faced did not

impede the aim of my study, and the familial bond we shared allowed me certain privileges into their ritual and musical world and daily lives. Thanks to our connection and their support, they generously invited me to various events and granted permission to record sacred lila-s when possible.⁴⁹ I had the opportunity to witness the unfolding of sacred ritual events and observe the ways in which master musicians improvised variations. Field recordings of entire and partial lila-s enabled the rendering of transcriptions and detailed analysis. Despite being the African melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, donning traditional attire did little to help me blend in on the streets of Morocco, let alone at the intimate sacred ceremonies, and I felt particularly fortunate to be a friend of the Gantias. While their parents were engaged in ceremonial proceedings, in the early days of my research the spunky Gania children acted like my bodyguards, surrounding me as if to intentionally protect me from wondering, critical eyes. Following the novelty of my presence, it was not unusual to enter into conversations with other ritual participants.

I attended over fifty events and recorded more than thirty performances by over a dozen musicians from four regions of Morocco;⁵⁰ however, in this dissertation I decided to focus on masters from the same region and family. By limiting my musical data to that coming from a single (family) source, I reasoned that I could get a better picture of what improvisations were based on, since variables such as regional style and individual expression would be kept constant. Although I worked principally with M'alle Abdallah Gania, my study includes all three masters to get an idea of variation within a single family and to have a larger sample of material for later comparative studies across regions, families,

⁴⁹ Some sponsors held private invitation-only ceremonies and were partial to the Gnawa community. Although they agreed to let me attend, recording was forbidden. In other cases, the dancer in trance signaled me to turn off recording devices.

⁵⁰ These include sacred lila-s, staged lila-s, and secular performances at festivals, restaurants, hotels and private parties.

styles, and generations. M'Allem Mahmoud Gania and M'Allem Abdallah Gania are about five years apart and were directly “trained” by their father, the late M'Allem Boubeker Gania, a m'Allem well respected for his mastery among the community. M'Allem Mokhtar, more than twenty years younger than his brothers, learned mainly from M'Allem Mahmoud, and represents in many ways the next generation coming on the scene as the popularity and secularization of Gnawa music was taking hold. Their hometown of Essaouira is ideal for investigating and assessing the impact of globalization on Gnawa beliefs and practices. It is a former slave port, tourist destination, and home of the Gnawa sanctuary (Zaouia Sidna Bilal) and popular *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*. Being the most lucrative and popular occasions, national and international music festivals are the largest venues for Gnawa music—the festival in Essaouira leads all others and gives rise to a host of other performance occasions. Situated at the intersection of the sacred and secular, Essaouira and the Ganias epitomize their conflicting yet harmonious co-existence.

1.5 Dissertation Overview

My dissertation is organized into two main parts: the contextual background and musical analysis. I investigate the embodied knowledge and cognitive processes of hereditary Gnawa musicians and demonstrate how they may correlate with performance. The improvisatory nature of Gnawa music renders it ideal for mapping mental activity to social situations. The background section discusses the Gnawa and their musical world: what the sound references (Chapter 2), who makes the sounds (Chapter 3), and how sound is conveyed (Chapters 4–5). Since all motor behavior is a product of mental activity (Meyer

1956:81), “music is best examined in terms of mental behavior” (ibid.:82). This mental activity is vital to understanding the choices of Gnawa musicians, and perhaps all musicians. “These dispositions and habits are learned by constant practice in listening and performing, practice which should, and usually does, begin in early childhood... Understanding music is not a matter of dictionary definitions, of knowing this, that, or the other rule of musical syntax and grammar, rather it is a matter of habits correctly acquired in one’s self and properly presumed in the particular work” (ibid.:61). Like the listener in Meyer’s study who has an “instinctive mental and motor response, a felt urgency, before its meaning can be truly comprehended” (ibid.), the musician has “an ingrained habit” (ibid.) to execute music in a way that corresponds to his perception of sense data (e.g., the social situation), giving meaning to his every expression.

The second part (Chapters 6–7) examines how cognitive processes bear on musical expression from repertoire to pitch selection. While performances exhibit an overall sameness, small differences are significant in understanding intention and reveal a correlation between embodied knowledge, mental activity and musical choices which the analysis aims to demonstrate. While the traditional musician does not seem to speculate upon what he does, nor verbalize it, what he does on his guembri reveals an instinct or habit that naturally organizes perception. “What we know and hence expect [or do not expect] influences what we perceive, that is, the way in which the mind groups and organizes the sense data presented to it” (Meyer 1956:77), which thus determines appropriateness of musical expression, its intent. By mapping patterns to specific situations, the research may explicate the meaning of particular musical performances.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the world of the Gnawa and the ideological

framework that governs the sacred occasion. Employing the musical repertoire and its macro-structure as a representation of this framework, I discuss the worldview which the ceremony enacts and encodes, and the signification of its two common names: *lila* and *derdeba*—the former of which prescribes the time for the sacred event, the latter the importance of dance. Subsequently, I investigate the function of music in the lila, its message, and how it effectuates possession trance. Chapter 3 describes the socio-cultural and historical background in two sections: the social structure and identity of the Gnawa community, and the social context of the Gnawa and their music in Morocco.

The following two chapters analyze the structures of Gnawa musical performance. In Chapter 4, the musical idiom with regard to tuning, pitch, time organization, and motivic structure and form are abstracted. After an overview of performance occasions and settings for Gnawa music in the first section of Chapter 5, section two describes a normative structure of a sacred occasion that is juxtaposed with the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*. Distinctions made between leadership, audience, duration and location, arrangement and performance structure, together with the cultural and musical background, set up the detailed analysis of performance.

Chapters 6 and 7 investigate how instrumental music processes correlate to the larger scale structures such as setting, repertoire selection and sequencing. Chapter 6 examines the interactive processes between the m'alleem and moqaddema in a mimetic performance of Sidi Musa. Here I map musical processes to trance progression, including dance gestures, and identify variation types. In Chapter 7, I unveil subtle differences in musical choices that potentially signify intent; that is, music played for spirit possession or for aesthetic pleasure. I focus on a single piece titled *Ghumami* performed in a sacred and secular context by the

same ritual master. Key differences between the two come to light.

My conclusions reassemble what has been fragmented into discrete chapters. Within a broader context, I re-examine the impact of global forces on the identity of Gnawa music and its practitioners, and changes in musical practices. Finally, I consider how music constructs meaning and how meaning is constructed through music and the agency of its performers.

Chapter 2

Gnawa Beliefs, Symbols, and Meaning

Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding... It reflects the manufacture of society; it constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society. *An instrument of understanding, it prompts us to decipher a sound form of knowledge.* (Attali 1985:4)

2.1 Introduction

Like other trancing cultures in the world, music is fundamental to Gnawa spirit possession rituals. Music tells a story, reveals the perceptions of a society, and has symbolic associations. For music to do what it does on a psychological and physiological level it must hold a meaning specific to the culture. The performance of Gnawa music during the lila serves as a lens into a diasporic past, and of the socio-cultural and religious blending resulting from centuries of domination over the sub-Saharan people. The music alone signifies and recalls many things: syncretism of sub-Saharan animism and Islam, a history of displacement and slavery, a hierarchy of supernatural entities, specific supernatural entities, a progression of events (ritual process, dynamics of trance), a social structure, political hierarchy, and more. Though music in ritual constitutes an organic process, analysis enables one to decode metaphors and gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge embodied by practitioners of unwritten, lived music cultures. Geertz writes: “The sort of symbols (or symbol complexes) regarded by a people as sacred varies widely... all these patterns [of ritual practice] sum up most powerfully what it knows about living” (1957:427). Along similar lines, Hell writes:

I doubt the existence of an intellectualized cosmological system is imposed upon all members of a culture. I think that the key to symbolic efficacy rather is to research the existence of a common substrate of representations, a baggage of shared images that the rites are capable of mobilizing into concrete and pragmatic acts. The ritual [and music] in this regard is creator of meaning. (Hell 1999:15)

This chapter analyzes the worldview of the Gnawa through music and ritual, and subjects the lila to a brief analysis of mythical structure and ritual process. In the next chapter, I investigate the socio-cultural and historical background of the Gnawa with respect to its evolving practices. Together, this first part provides the context for the subsequent analysis.

2.2 Ideological Framework

Early in my research, I recall a Gnawa friend saying: “There are jinn-s everywhere. They are among us right now. They are like you and me. We cannot see them but they can see us” (personal communication, Abderrahim, 2006). Not so long after, Moqaddema Zaida told me a story where one of her clients started hearing voices because he unknowingly mistreated a spirit that had taken the form of an animal. Throughout my research Gnawa belief in the existence of unseen beings mingling among humans on earth would be reiterated by the Gania family. “The mluk are always around. They hear everything” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2006); “They [the spirits] may live inside us but we do not know... they are like people, they may be good and bad, they may hurt you, they may help you... they desire things and we must give them what they want” (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2006). Hell explains: “the spirits eat, drink, they are jealous, there are leaders, they work, sleep, they get married, have children and die. Unlike humans, however, they are

polymorphic and possess the gift of ubiquity and hold occult powers that can alter the course of events and the destiny of man” (1999:115).

Harmony must therefore be maintained between the temporal and supernatural worlds. This is achieved through ritual offerings (e.g., fragrances, foods, spirit possession), which propitiate the spirits, and appropriate daily conduct that avoids the risk of inciting their wrath. Neglect or transgression could have severe repercussions, particularly for initiates and their family members. Uttering Islamic phrases is believed to ward off any unintentional wrongdoing, such as accidentally slamming a door or spilling boiling water. Si Mohammed cautioned me not to spill hot water at night and wrote down an Islamic verse to recite if I were to be so careless (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009). Furthermore, they believe that spirits reside in or near water such as drains. “You always have to be careful when you pour boiling water down the drain... because a jinn might be there, and you don’t want to accidentally scald him or her. You say ‘Bismillah,’ ‘in the name of God,’ first” (Kapchan in Byre 2009). Over a century ago, Westermarck noted that “as soon as it gets dark... a Moor will carefully abstain from pouring out hot water on the ground” (1899:253).

The belief in jinn-s, however, is not limited to Gnawa. Westermarck contends:

[It] forms a very important part of the actual creed of the Muhammedan population of Morocco, Arab and Berber alike. It pervades all classes, and though some of the more enlightened Moors are inclined to represent it as a superstition of the ignorant, I doubt whether there is anyone who does not practically adhere to it. (Westermarck 1899:252)

The difference between Gnawa and non-Gnawa lies in their behavior and attitudes towards jinn-s. A “simple and fundamental congruence” (Geertz 1957:424) between the Gnawa ethos and Gnawa worldview “complete one another and lend one another meaning” (ibid.). Geertz

continues:

The force of a religion in supporting social values rests, then, on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients. It represents the power of the human imagination to construct an image of reality in which, to quote Max Weber, “events are not just there and happen, but they have a meaning and happen because of that meaning.” The need for such a metaphysical grounding for values seems to vary quite widely in intensity from culture to culture and from individual to individual, but the tendency to desire some sort of factual basis for one’s commitments seems practically universal; mere conventionalism satisfies few people in any culture. However its role may differ at various times, for various individuals, and in various cultures, religion, by fusing ethos and world-view, gives to a set of social values what they perhaps most need to be coercive: an appearance of objectivity. (Geertz 1957:426–27)

2.2.1 Islamic Reverence and Reference

Islam and the omnipotence of Allah form a significant part of the Gnawa worldview. Despite believing in their African spirits and practicing rituals of spirit possession, Gnawa consider themselves devout Muslims, no different from their neighbors. Music of the lila embodies the blending of beliefs and practices and delineates the hierarchy of the unseen world (Figure 2.1). In every ritual occasion Allah and the Prophet Mohammed are honored first before the invocation of supernatural entities. Panegyric songs for their patron saint Bilal are also sung in the early portion of the lila. Although invocation of the African spirits are the climax of the lila, this foremost veneration of Allah, his Prophet, and other Islamic saints affirms their unequivocal authority and influence over the forces of the pantheon and over the Gnawa themselves. According to Dermenghem, “Sidi Bilal [was] the muezzin of the Prophet, the Abyssinian slave freed by Mohammed from the persecutors of Mecca, one of the first five Muslims, one of the most revered Companions. There is no more venerable an

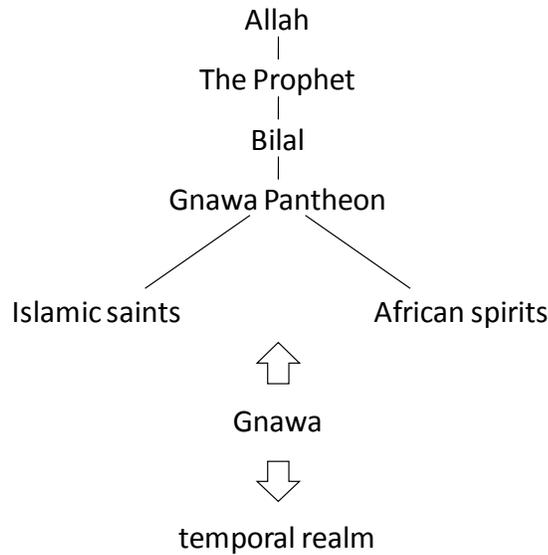


Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of the supernatural and its relation with the temporal realm enacted by the Gnawa belief system.

Islamic reference” (1953:320-21). And Schuyler writes: “The multiplicity of their beliefs is resolved in the character of their patron saint, Bilāl” (Grove Music Online, 2008).

The names of Allah and the Prophet are heard repeatedly throughout the course of the lila, and their presence alongside African spirits suggests both the omnipresence of Allah and the syncretism of their beliefs and practices as illustrated by the excerpt below:¹

M’allem: *Ahel bab Allah* (People of the door of God)
 Chorus: *Ya la ilaha illa Allah l-Ghumami*
 (There is no God but Allah, Ghumami)
Ya la ilaha illa Allah l-Ghumami
 M’allem: *Ahel lnuba ya l-Ghumami* (People are waiting their turn, Oh Ghumami)
 Chorus: *Ahel lnuba ya l-Ghumami*
Ya la ilaha illa Allah l-Ghumami
 (There is no God but Allah, Ghumami)
Ah la ilaha illa Allah l-Ghumami

¹ An excerpt of “Ghumami” as performed by M’allem Abdallah. This piece was translated with the help of Si Mohammed Outanine.

The phrase “People of the door of Allah” references both African spirits and Islam in a single line. The people (i.e., the guardians) signify the African cohort of supernatural entities *Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna*, and Allah is the Islamic referent for God. In the next line of the chorus, the profession of faith to Islam (*shahada*), “There is no God but Allah,” is followed by an invocation of Ghumami, the name of an African supernatural entity. Just as in the Americas, elements of West African culture entered Morocco and its North African neighbors through slavery.² Dermenghem writes of the sub-Saharan brotherhoods in Algeria:³

In North Africa, the genies of Sudan [i.e., West Africa] found Arab and Berber genies with whom they were compatible. They all became the *rijal Allah*, men of God, and the brotherhoods that cultivated their presence placed them under the aegis of Sidi Bilal. (Dermenghem 1953:320)

Unlike the Sufi who “strives to bridge the gulf between... [God and man] through the dynamic force of love... leading ultimately to union (*wisal*) with God” (Qureshi 1995:79-80), the Gnawa’s reiteration of Allah’s names and their faith in Islam, however, does not serve this end (see Chapter 3). Adorcism is the central concept of the Gnawa ritual; that is, accommodating the supernatural entities of their pantheon through possession of the human body. Indeed, personal effort and baraka determine one’s alliance with the mluk; however, all happens under the protection and will of Allah.

² Centuries earlier sub-Saharans in their homeland made Islam (and the religions of their conquerors) their own by incorporating it into their indigenous practices.

³ Sub-Saharan populations were brought to various regions in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia where they formed similar communities and took on distinct names such as the Gnawa, Bilali, and Stambeli, respectively.

2.2.2 Gnawa Pantheon

The Gnawa pantheon comprises Islamic and local saints, “entities of a secret identity” (Hell 1999:117) associated with the sub-Saharan forest, and “classic spirits whose ‘characters’ are known by all” (ibid.).⁴ They live in the air, water, and in particular places like the slaughterhouse, and have chromatic, olfactory, and musical identities. These supernatural entities are categorized into two main groups: *salihin* and *mluk*.⁵ *Salihin* means holy ones or saints,⁶ men whose deeds and miraculous powers on earth rendered them spiritual beings after their death. The *salihin* comprise Islamic and Berber saints whose holy sites are found around Morocco.⁷ The Gnawa term, *mluk*, generally refers to the powerful and dangerous entities of the sub-Sahara. While distinct in their meaning, these terms are somewhat ambiguous as entities may have qualities and capabilities of the other.⁸ Saints, like *mluk* (sub-Saharan spirits), “have the *baraka* and supernatural powers... according to Gnawa beliefs, to intervene in visible and invisible worlds” (Chlyeh 1999:43) and possess adepts in a way that leads to miraculous performances which may require the use of accessories. *Mluk* are not saints yet some, like Islamic saints, have holy sites in Morocco. The totality of the pantheon is often referred to as “*mluk*,” as is the possession phase of the ritual devoted to their invocation.

A hierarchy exists among the *salihin* and *mluk*. At the highest level, they correspond chromatically to the Whites and Blacks (Hell 2002:118, 141), similar to the Stambeli saints

⁴ Genies belonging to the Algerian Bilali bear resemblance to the Gnawa supernatural entities (Dermenghem 1953:323).

⁵ Other supernatural entities are believed to exist that are not associated with the Gnawa pantheon. Some spirits are considered to be evil and only do harm (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2007).

⁶ Hell refers to the saints by the Arabic term *wali* (2001:171).

⁷ Berber entities include Lalla Meryem, Lalla Batoûl Sayssi, Lalla Jouhra, and Lalla Mira.

⁸ Gnawa do not always draw a fine line between *salihin* or *mluk*.

SALIHIN (saints)		MLUK (possessors)	
Whites	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Blacks	Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna
Blues	Sidi Musa (water)	Reds	Sidi Hamu (abattoir)
Greens	Shorfa (descendants of the Prophet)	Blacks	Ulad Agh-Ghaba (sons of the Forest)
Yellows: Lalla Mira (sugar/pleasure, female)			

Figure 2.2 Colors, leaders, domain and affiliation of the *salihin* and *mluk*.

and spirits of Tunisia (Jankowsky 2010). They are respectively governed by Mulay Abdelqader Jilali,⁹ the powerful protector saint and bearer of the way, and Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna, guardians to the door of ancient Sudan—home of the powerful and dangerous sub-Saharan spirits. The Gnawa conceive of the *salihin* and *mluk* as organized into *mhallat* (cohorts) identified by leadership, affiliation or domain, and color (Figure 2.2). Falling under the “Whites” are the multi-colored *Bu Hala*, the vagabonds of God led by Buderabela;¹⁰ Sidi Musa, master of the water spirits, associated with blue; and the *Shorfa*, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed and other saints symbolized by green or white. The “Blacks” comprise Sidi Hamu, master of the abattoir, dressed in red; and *Ulad Agh-Ghaba* (Sons of the Forest), symbolized by black. *L’Ayalet*, the female spirits generically associated with yellow which is the color of their leader Lalla Mira, is a cohort unlike the others with regard to gender, the light atmosphere, and function (Pâques 1991; Hell 2002; and Claisse 2003).¹¹ Their invocations end the lila and signify procreation (rather than death); that is, rebirth of the

⁹ Alternate spelling and names include Mulay Abdel Qadir Jilali and Mulay Abdelqader Jilani.

¹⁰ Although multi-colored, the *Bu Hala* are usually considered part of the same cohort as *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali*.

¹¹ Other colors corresponding to other female spirits are present during the invocation of *L’ayalet*, such as red, white, and black.

adepts following the symbolic deaths associated with each possession (see Section 2.4).¹² For these reasons I have categorized them as neither salihin nor mluk, but spirits “who steer souls towards the land of light... using coquetry, theft and sugar as bait” (Pâques 1991:307).

Music of the lila, therefore, is music of and for the mluk. A suite consists of individual pieces that call upon different spirits belonging to a single mhalla. Together the suites constitute the possession repertoire. Spiritual hierarchy dictates the order and is realized in the structure of the music performance (Chapter 5).¹³ Although regional variations exist, a balance of forces is generally observed in the regular oscillation between salihin and mluk.

2.2.3 Significance of *Lila* and *Derdeba*

The lila is also commonly referred to as *derdeba*.¹⁴ These two terms are used interchangeably by scholars and Gnawa, and though synonymous in their reference they have distinct meanings. Lila literally signifies “night.” This term may be construed as the time of day when the ritual occasion is to take place, since ceremonies begin after sundown and end at or soon after dawn. Among dancing cultures, the cycle of day and night within a twenty-four hour period circumscribes the time for the seen and unseen. Among the Yoruba, for

¹² Details of the Gnawa pantheon have been covered by Gnawa scholars including Pâques (1991), Chlyeh (1999), Lapassade (1999), Hell (2002), and Claisse (2003).

¹³ Possession trance rituals of American counterparts such as Afro-Cuban Santería (Hagedorn 2001), Haitian Vodou (Métraux 1972; Wilcken 1992), and Brazilian Candomblé (Bastide 1978; Wafer 1991); and of Africa including the Bori of Nigeria (Besmer 1983), Stambeli of Tunisia (Jankowsky 2010) and Bilali of Algeria (Dermenghem 1953) also invoke a pantheon of supernatural entities or deities according to a prescribed order.

¹⁴ On the one hand, Pâques explains that a lila is composed of three parts, one of which is the *derdeba*; on the other, the *derdeba* is divided into three parts, one of which is the lila (1991:259). Chlyeh employs the terms together as in “*lila of derdeba*” which signifies the night (lila) of the possession ritual (*derdeba*) (1999:96).

example, “occasions involving the interpenetration of realms are most appropriate at night, when spirits are thought to be most attentive” (Drewal and Drewal 1983:11).¹⁵ M‘allem Mohammed Chaouqi says, “The *jnun* come out at night, not during the day” (in Kapchan 2007:125). Westermarck asserts that “the chief abode of the *ġinn* is the under-world... a corollary from the belief that they live in the dark and disappear at daybreak” (1899:260), while in the Quran (Sura 113, The Daybreak) it is recorded: “I betake me for refuge to the Lord of the DAYBREAK... against the mischief of the night when it overtaketh me” (Jones 1999:430).¹⁶ The belief that the night is the time of the jinn-s and the Muslim’s fear of them runs so deep that “a man... moved out from his house [believed to be inhabited by the *ġnûn*] regularly every night” (Westermarck 1899:253).

A defining factor between the Gnawa devoted to Lalla Mimuna and the Gnawa devoted to Sidna Bilal is the time of day for their musical activity, which is also symbolically associated with the instruments they use. The former perform their rituals during daylight hours and, unlike the latter, do not engage in nights of spirit possession. Their main instrument is the *tbel*; the *guembri*, considered the instrument of the *mluk* (and of the night), does not figure in their ceremonies. Though *guembri* motives resound in the medina at all hours today, traditionally it was only played after dark because of its sonorous ability to attract the *mluk*. The calling of spirits and their manifestation at night has also been noted in a number of other trancing cultures.

¹⁵ For example, the Balinese Hindu believe that the day is the time for humans and the night the time for the unseen. This may be observed by their usually limited evening activities and quiet streets, particularly in the villages. Unless there are preparations for a ceremony or special annual activities, people generally remain at home lest one risks crossing a spirit’s path. This reluctance and wariness to go out at night seems to have diminished in the cities and among the younger generations. Even in the villages and among the older generations there are those who disregard potential dangers.

¹⁶ Westermarck writes: “a Moor’s fear of the *ġnûn* practically commences with the twilight... he will not venture to walk at night... Everywhere [Egypt, Mecca, in the East, Morocco, Arabian desert] the *ġinn* are feared chiefly in the dark” (1899:253, 260).



Figure 2.3 Proportion of ritual dedicated to the *mluk*. While the possession portion is shown here to be twice as long as the pre-possession, it may last three or four times longer depending on the ritual situation. The three textured blocks correspond to the three acts of the ceremony that are distinguished by instrumentation, repertoire, dance and function. Note that the pre-possession portion comprises two acts.

Naming the ceremony “night,” therefore, suggests that the occasion not only takes place at night but that it serves the *mluk*. Effectively, Gnawa musical activity is centered on an official request for their presence which begins by inviting them (and us) during the procession, entertaining them (and us) with pre-possession dances, before finally calling on them to communicate and interact with the human world. Like in the Yoruba ritual where “[t]he principle focus and a substantial portion of the musical content are the oriki of the divinities... description of his/her attributes, characteristics, temperament and supernatural powers” (Euba 1988:11), during the *lila* the largest proportion of ritual time is devoted to the *mluk* (Figure 2.3).¹⁷

The experiential nature of the ritual is addressed by the term *derdeba*. It signifies the “loud sound of stamping of feet” (Hell 2002:79),¹⁸ or, derived from the verb *derdeb*, “the action of ‘throwing’ or ‘falling’— which, in this case, refers to another plane of reality” (in

¹⁷ Comprising over one hundred pieces, musical icons of the *mluk* form the majority of the entire Gnawa repertoire. Other pieces belong to the pre-possession repertoire of the *lila*. At Dar Gnawa in Tangiers, M’allem Abdellah El Gourad charts 243 songs (Kapchan 2007).

¹⁸ Other interpretations include Goodman-Singh, who writes that “*derdaba*... has often been translated as ‘big noise’” (2002:78); Majdouli writes: “*Derdeba* literally signifies a regular, steady noise of human steps on the ground. The *derdeba* makes reference to the dance of the *kouyou* where the Gnawa execute codified steps by stamping their feet on the ground” (2007:20 [fn.1]).

Del Giudice et al. 2005:81).¹⁹ Both terms are related to possession and describe the actions of participants stamping to the rhythm of the music or being taken by the spirit. A stationary stepping motion of bare feet is, in fact, characteristic of Gnawa trance gestures. To be sure, adepts are already possessed by a spirit who remains dormant in the host's body outside of the sacred occasion (cf. Friedson 1996:29). Music triggers *ritual* possession and facilitates it through dance, which again serves the mluk. The repetitive movement engenders possession and with increasing intensity may express the arrival of a spirit. Parallels may be drawn with Drewal and Drewal's explanation of the significance of dance with regard to the Yoruba ritual:

[V]oicing words... invokes vital force, bringing it into actual existence... Dance makes vital force visible. Carried further—into the Yoruba context [and Gnawa context]—dance *is* virtual power and is no less instrumental than the spoken word; it brings dynamic qualities into actual existence. (Drewal and Drewal 1983:105)

Taken together, lila and derdeba, or night and dance, signify the supernatural realm and possession—fundamental to the Gnawa religion in which music is the medium.

2.3 Music's Affective and Effective Code

“Music is the condition *sine qua non* of the trance experience” (Rouget 1985:324).

Like other trancing cultures, music is indispensable to the success of the lila. In the Afro-Cuban Santería ritual, the singer directs songs to a practitioner on the verge of being

¹⁹ During the Hamadsha hadra Crapanzano writes: “The patient is encouraged to fall into jidba...[‘Aisha’s] presence [a djinnya said to be under the ground]... explains why some dancers fall to the ground and kiss the dance floor” (1973:203). (cf. Westermarck who asserts: “the chief abode of the *ginn* is the under-world” (1899:260)).

possessed, the “[*batá*] drums intensif[y] responses, playing loudly and quickly [...] These praise songs and *batá* rhythms are meant to bring the *oricha* to earth, so that it may speak through the body of the possessed devotee” (Hagedorn 2001:78, 80). In Sufi ceremonies such as Qawwali, “The singer’s aim is always to move, to arouse, to draw a listener toward his Sheikh, the saint, to God, and into the ecstasy of mystical union” (Qureshi 1995:4).

Crapanzano defines *rih*-s played during the Hamadsha ceremony as the “highly ornamented musical phrases which drive the participants into trance” (1973:204). During the Gnawa lila, melodies played on the guembri are musical codes for supernatural entities who respond by taking possession of initiates. Pâques writes that “following the melody of the *gumbri*... is the best way for the soul of the adept to be caught in a veritable lack of allusions that induces him to fall” (1991:81).

In his study of the relations between music and trance, Rouget looks at two aspects of music: the signifying side and the signified side. On the signified side, “when [the music] is specific to a particular deity, melodies played on an instrument have the same function as sung mottoes: they are call-signs. Indeed, these melodies often are mere instrumental versions of the sung mottoes which are deprived of their text; but, when they hear them, ‘men and gods also hear the words that relate to them’” (Rouch 1960: 135-36)” (1985:99).²⁰ The musical motto, which varies across cultures ““for each needs the airs of a melody known to him and phrases that he understands”” (Rousseau in *ibid.*:167-68), can thus be defined as a sign whose ‘signified’ is the supernatural entity to which it refers and whose ‘signifier’ has three facets: linguistic, musical (or instrumental), and choreographic.

²⁰ Fuson writes: “The emotional component of the groove is sustained through the links between *guinbri* phrases and lyrics of the vocal section. Although no human voice continues to sing these lyrics, the *guinbri*’s melodies recall them and keep them sounding” (2009:432).

Similar to the distinctive sound patterns for the *orishas* of Cuban Yoruba, *orixás* of Bahian Candomblé, *iwás* of Haitian Vodou, and *vimbuzá* of Malawi Tumbuka, which act as a type of “‘speech surrogacy’ [and] serve as the imagined ‘voices’” (Henry 2008:66) of and for specific spirits, the motives are symbolic of the *mluk* in a dual sense—as musical identities and as the “voice of the *mluk*” (Fuson 2009). On one hand, the *guembri* attracts the *mluk* by sounding their musical identities, effectively calling their names; on the other, these patterns function as *musemes* (Tagg 2004) calling on the adepts.²¹ Upon hearing the motto of their spirit possessor, adepts exhibit emotional responses (intense feelings, tears, horripilation) which engender a physical response in the form of the desire to get up and dance. The combined texture of the *guembri*, voice, and *qraqab* facilitates the dynamics of trance (Chapter 6).²² Sung text in the early portion of the invocation process renders the identity of the *melk* explicit to the ritual community, regardless of experience and knowledge. Aside from the choral response and refrain, words sung by the *m’allem* tend to be obscure (cf. Jankowsky 2010). Pâques (1991) suggests an intentionality to obscure and allude, which plays a part in affective response and the onset of possession. The increasing tempo and dynamics and the musical cues of the instrumental portion sustain possession leading to transformation of the willing Gnawa adept. Upon arrival of the spirit, the *guembri*, like the

²¹ *Museme* was first coined by Seeger to signify a “unit of three components — three tone beats — [which] can constitute two progressions and meet the requirements for a complete, independent unit of music-logical form or mood” (in Tagg 2004:1). According to Tagg, despite the problems associated with Seeger’s notion, “it at least focuses attention on musical-structural detail and on the relation of such detail to life ‘outside’ music” (ibid.:19).

²² Becker (2004) takes a neurophysiological approach to the study of trance and suggests that music/participant interactions are culturally determined. She borrows the term of “‘structural coupling’ ... used to describe [the] enactive, biological perspective on music, trance, and emotion.. [which claims that we are constantly changed by our interactions with the world while simultaneously changing that world.] Rhythmic entrainment is re-presented as an enactment of social structural coupling” (2004: 11).

adept, becomes possessed and “speaks with the voice of the *mluk*” (Fuson 2009:111),²³ directing and supporting the movements of the dancer. Fuson observes:

The lynchpin of Gnawa music is the expression of the *guinbri*, which speaks with the voice of the *mluk*. While the rhythmic accompaniment of clapping or *graqeb* and the antiphonal strains of Gnawa singing are essential to the flow and feel of *tagnawit*,²⁴ their importance is ultimately secondary to that of the *guinbri* in terms of achieving the desired expression of *jadba*. Indeed, in climactic moments of trances, both singing and even rhythmic accompaniment are often abandoned to yield the entire musical texture to the *guinbri* and the trancing body in co-enunciative expression. (Fuson 2009:111)

Rouget points out that as a general rule “in cults in which the music for possession dance is both instrumental and vocal, the instrumental music always prevails and is always more continuous than the vocal” (1985:104).

The sonic atmosphere is crucial to the ritual and may even suffice to trigger possession trance;²⁵ however, the proper procedure for bringing the supernatural world into the human realm requires an immersion of all senses—smell, sight, taste, touch, and sound—which correspond to the *mluk* and signify their sensory preferences (Chapter 5). Engendering trance by way of appropriate offerings has a dual function: preparation of the adept and propitiation of the *mluk*. Ritual success, however, depends foremost on the musical offering

²³ Fuson says that the *guembri* “undergoes an ontological change from its status during the *Fraja* [when it begins to speak in the *Mluk* phase]” (2009:433).

²⁴ According to Kapchan, “Gnawa-ness is an awkward translation of the word *tagnawit* [or *tagnaouite*], which may be more loosely translated as ‘Gnawa authenticity,’ ‘Gnawa identity,’ or even ‘Gnawa culture.’ It stands for *Gnawa knowledge as practiced*, its epistemology” (2007:22, emphasis in original). For Fuson, “an appropriate translation... is Gnawa ritual practice... [or] the craft of the Gnawi” (2009:17-18). The latter of which is similar to M’allem Abdallah’s use of the term to reference the practice (or style) particular to a region, as in *tagnawit Souiri* (of Essaouira) (personal communication, 2009).

²⁵ Kapchan (2007:49) writes about a woman who fell when she heard her spirit’s tune play on the television. Pâques, however, has never observed incidents where possession arises in such mediated forms (1991:286).

in the form of appropriate musical codes executed on the guembri and the psychology of listening. Pâques relates:

[T]here are two manners of listening to music: one normally, with the ears, and the other, mystically, with the ears of the spirit allowing oneself to be carried by the horses gallop. A young adept asked one day: “What is music?” and gave the definition he had learned in the Larousse Encyclopedia at college: “Music is a collection of sounds pleasing to the ear.” Stupefied the *meallam* ironically said, “nice,” and corrected: “music is what brings the soul into the body of man.” (Pâques 1991:221)

2.4 Mythical Structure, Ritual Process, and Ritualization

To shed some light on the meaning and function of the lila, I employ the theories of Levi-Strauss (1963) and Victor Turner (1969). While contemporary concepts of ritual study exist, such as Kapferer’s (2005) “ritual dynamics” which de-emphasizes macro-structure in favor of micro-forces and processes building on Turner’s “ritual process,” and Bloch’s (1992) theory of a “rebounding violence” structure of ritual that functions to overcome and resolve a paradoxical transience/permanence dichotomy intrinsic to the human condition, I find that combining the classic modern perspectives of Levi-Strauss’s mythical structure and Turner’s ritual process aptly explicates the ideology of the Gnawa lila for the purpose of this chapter. Finally, I touch upon Pâques’ cosmogonic perspective and the pertinence of Bell’s (1992) “ritualization of activity” approach, which integrates practice theory and concepts of power for understanding human actions (i.e., what rituals do and how they are used to construct power relations).

According to Levi-Strauss, the socio-cultural phenomenon of ritual may be understood through the deep structure of myths. He contends “that mythical thought always

works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation” (1955:440) and that “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction” (ibid.:443). In essence, the deep structure comprises a provocation-mediation-metaphor sequence, within which “underlying paradigms, typically binary in nature” (Dundes 1997:43) exist. Levi-Strauss proposes triadic relationships associated with all myths—that is, binary structures (e.g., natural categories of raw/cooked) and intermediary elements (e.g., cultural agents such as the cook) that function as links to the two poles in a process of socialization. In the following, I consider three versions of Gnawa mythical origins, in which the characters are the Prophet Mohammed, his daughter Lalla Fatima Zohra, his son-in-law (and nephew) Sidi Ali (i.e., Lalla Fatima’s husband), and Bilal.²⁶

Version 1: Lalla Fatima, irritated by the way her father dealt with a situation (see Pâques 1991:52–53 for details), locks herself in her room. Bilal intervenes. He adorns himself with similar ritual paraphernalia used by the Gnawa today, “cowry shells worn across his chest... [and] a red checia embroidered with cowry shells to which he attaches the tail of a bull” (Pâques 1991:53). Dancing as he plays the qraqab all the way to her room, he succeeds in making her laugh. Her grudge assuaged, Bilal brings Lalla Fatima to see her father who happily says to Bilal, “Your bones (your children) will never be thrown to hell” (ibid.).

Version 2: Lalla Fatima, after having fought with her husband Sidi Ali, takes refuge in a grotto enclosed by seven magical doors. The Prophet sends Bilal to reconcile the relationship between his daughter and nephew. “Bilal equipped with the instrument [qraqab] he just invented, started dancing while turning and making funny faces... Fatima Zohra laughed and opened the seven doors. Thus Bilal having reconciled the couple, invented the ‘game’ of

²⁶ For symbolic associations of Bilal, see Pâques (1991:52–55).

dance belonging to the Gnawa” (M‘allem Si-Mohamed in Claisse 2003:96).

Version 3: Lalla Fatima, having fought with her husband, refuses to leave her room (Dermenghem 1953:331). Bilal invents the qraqab and dances. “Lalla Fatima *laughs*, leaves her room and follows Bilal until she finds herself before her husband” (ibid.).

In all versions, the provocation is associated with someone close that leads to anger, pain, and isolation. This emotional disturbance may be conceived as an internal imbalance which takes the external form of disharmony between daughter/father and wife/husband. The mediation is music and dance performed by an emancipated sub-Saharan Muslim man (a convert) that resolves anger to laughter, pain to relief, and isolation to unity. The metaphor is that music (and dance) performed by Gnawa (sub-Saharan Muslims) who are endowed with baraka (like Bilal) combat the action and emotions of negative forces by healing or alleviating the body (within) and cultivating harmony and serenity among the community (without) (Figure 2.4). According to Pâques, “the *gumbri* is the sultan, or Allah, and the player [m‘allem] is Bilal, his slave. [...] Bilal... makes Lalla Fatima Zohra laugh and which, according to legend acts as a connection... between her and the Prophet [with whom she was angry]” (1991:220), or in Version 2 and 3, between her and her husband. Furthermore, Bilal’s intervention, upon the request of the Prophet, overcomes the contradiction between music as healing and “music as dangerous and unlawful” (Qureshi 1995:82) and between sub-Saharan and Islamic practices. According to Attali:

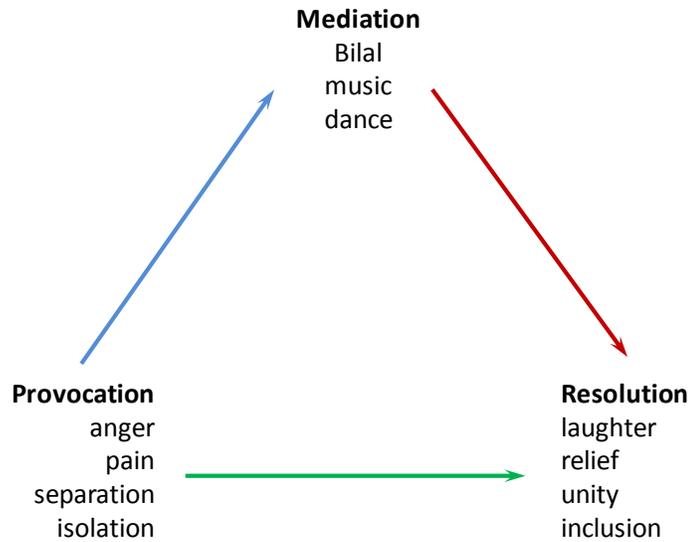


Figure 2.4 Mythical structure.

The musician, like music, is ambiguous. He plays a double game. He is simultaneously *musicus* and *cantor*, reproducer and prophet. [...] the primal identity *magic-music-sacrifice-rite* expresses the musician's position in the majority of civilizations: simultaneously *excluded* (relegated to a place near the bottom of the social hierarchy) and *superhuman* (the genius, the adored and deified star). Simultaneously a separator and an integrator [...] mythology endowed musicians with supernatural and civilizing powers... The medicinal powers of music made musicians into therapists: Pythagoras and Empedocles cured the possessed, and Ismenias cured sciatica. David cured Saul's madness by playing the harp. (Attali 1985:12–13, emphases in original)

A ritual process, according to Levi-Strauss (1963), is but a mirror of a mythical structure; the former delimited by time (horizontal relationships) and the latter by space (vertical relationships). Employing Levi-Strauss's notion of binary oppositions, I extract metaphoric, static dyads and metonymic dynamic dyads plotted on longitudinal (spatial) and latitudinal (temporal) axes (Figure 2.5)—for example, heaven/earth and nature/culture, and anger → laughter, pain → relief, separation → unity, isolation → inclusion, sick → healthy.

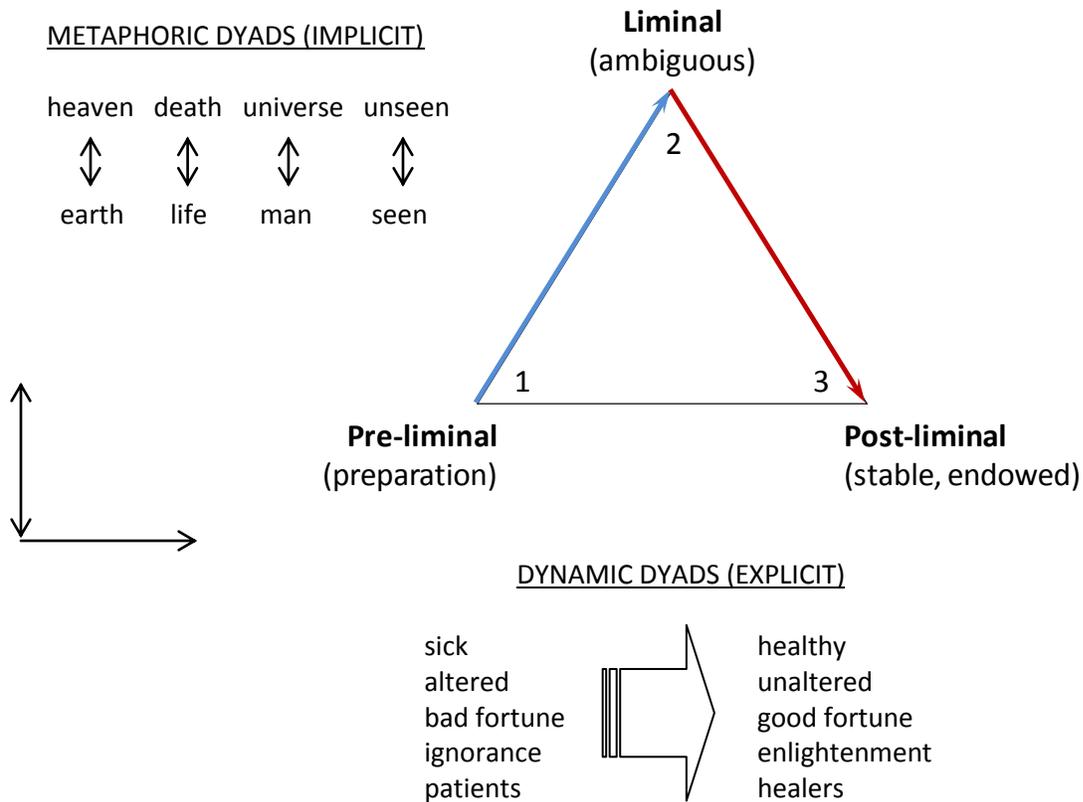


Figure 2.5 Binary oppositions extracted from the mythical structure (Levi-Strauss 1963) and ritual process (Turner 1969) of the Gnawa lila. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

Ritual, music, and trance, under the guidance of Gnawa practitioners form the intermediary element that bridges binary oppositions on the one hand, and resolves them on the other. Implicitly, the ritual performance enacts and validates the metaphoric dyads that are lived daily among the Gnawa. Explicitly, they treat metonymic dyads.

The explicit goals of a lila are accomplished through a threefold progression of successive ritual stages classified by Turner (1969) as pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. For example, in a lila held for the purposes of healing, the sick person traverses the three stages, processed by music and enacted in trance, to arrive at good health (Figure 2.5). How

	Pre-Liminal	Liminal	Post-Liminal
	PREPARATION	AMBIGUOUS	NON-AMBIGUOUS/ STABLE
Entire lila	pre-possession - of ceremony	possession - situation	post possession - rebirth
Possession portion	ftuh ar-rahba - of sacred space	salihin and mluk - situation	l'ayalet - rebirth
Individual piece	prelude/vocal invocation - of adept	instrumental music - state	cadence - return/rebirth

Figure 2.6 Macro- and micro- level of Turner's ritual stages as embodied in the lila.

this works may be analyzed at different levels of the ritual process as shown in Figure 2.6.

The first phase serves as preparation at macro- and micro-levels; that is, to prepare the ceremonial event through invitation of the unseen and seen, the sacred space by consecrating the floor, and the adepts with musemes. In creating a space for the invisible world to enter, the performance can be seen as an act of detachment from the temporal world. In the second ritual stage, spirit possession takes place in the form of abstract and figurative dances. Here, the human and spirit realms interact and merge, and adepts take on the identities of the mluk. Pâques refers to this stage as the invocation of genies who “cut throats” (1991:259), bringing (temporary) death upon the adept, as they take over the body, now but an empty vessel. This disavowal of one's body is seen as a kind of sacrifice. Participants enter an ambiguous situation and state which Turner designates the liminal phase. Floating between invisible and visible worlds, between spirit and human, adepts enact liminality in their dance, evoked and subdued by the music and musicians and overseen by the moqaddema and her assistants. Finally, in the post-liminal phase—that is, the end of the entire ceremony, possession portion

or individual dance—participants re-enter a stable, non-ambiguous state endowed with baraka. At the end of the possession portion, entities who guide procreation (the feminine spirits) are invoked.

The function of the Gnawa lila is two-fold: to communicate with the mluk, and to propitiate them in the hopes of securing or restoring equilibrium between visible and invisible realms. A practice of adorcism, the lila serves as an offering to the supernatural entities and simultaneously enacts and affirms the duality lived daily among the Gnawa. Lilas, performed for different reasons such as calendrical rites, festivals, and therapy (see Chapter 5), are structured to serve the mluk as well as the participants. While the ritual sequence maintains a degree of invariance, there is flexibility which permits modification should special social situations arise (Chapter 5).

The various triadic and dyadic relationships that have emerged from this brief exercise suggest that the lila is a mirror of the Gnawa myth in which Bilal, music, and dance constitute the mediator of underlying binary structures and in which entities are grouped and arranged with regard to their place in the cosmos.

For Pâques, who takes a cosmogonic approach, the lila is “a dramatization of the vicissitudes of heaven and earth, which are also those of man” (1991:255). She explains that “[the] function [of the possession portion] is to give present form to the cosmic events that made the world break into seven parts parallel to the seven colors” (1978:328). The adept (Levi-Strauss’s intermediary element) is the dynamic mediator of the ritual, one who mediates the dichotomy of life and death. Struggling to survive, he/she kills the self (symbolic sacrifice of possession trance) in order to achieve such a goal. Zempléni writes: “in order to let oneself be invested by, then fused with, one’s double... one must erase the

foundations of one's own identity, one must die" (in Rouget 1985:89). A dynamic transformation results over the course of several "static" transformations (possessions or lila-s) through which elements acquire characteristics that are opposites of their initial ones; that is, aggressive becomes passive, sick becomes healthy. During possession dance, androgynous God (represented by the adept) is sacrificed in order to separate the masculine and feminine element and cut them into seven fragments, purified with each successive possession, and finally reconstituted—resurrected at the end of the ritual through (smaller) successive cycles of deaths and rebirths, and transformed to "luminous gold" (Pâques 1991:255).²⁷ As such, the lila is an "alchemic operation... Simply formulated, the Gnawa say: 'the derdeba is the birth of a soul'" (ibid.). At the end of the ritual (or after many rituals), the adept attains baraka which is manifested by good health, refinement, enlightenment, and freedom. During the lila, depending on the experience of the possessed and their relationship with the spirits, baraka may take the form of temporary recovery from an illness such as paralysis, mimetic dance, miraculous performance, or mediumship.

According to Bell's framework of ritualization, the lila is a highly ritualized activity. It contains all the key elements of ritualization—formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governed, sacral symbolism, and performance—"setting some activities off from others... creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane,' and... ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors" (Bell 1992:74). The foregoing has focused on sacral symbolism, with a mention of the other elements in passing, which are treated in subsequent chapters. Moving beyond the Geertzian

²⁷ The seven fragments are "parallel to the seven types of genies subdivided according to the seven colors which are representative of the seven categories of the universe" (Pâques 1978:328). Pâques explains that "the man possessed by all the genies splits into sixty four fragments... the *gumbri* reassembles all the scattered fragments and it is 'as if man has just been born'" (1991:284). For a more detailed semiotic analysis of the lila including the earlier portions see Pâques (1991:255–311)

window on the Gnawa worldview, we see that ritual, rather than a separate category or type of activity, is a “flexible and strategic way of acting” (Bell 1997:138).

Bound by the common fate of captivity and displacement, Gnawa society emerged to unify sub-Saharan in Morocco, construct a new community, and to heal the pain of slavery, loss, and exile through rituals of music and dance. The early phase of the lila (Act 2, see Chapter 5) is itself a highly ritualized act of re-telling, re-constructing, and re-living an imagined past common to all Gnawa. Empowered in their solidarity, the final phase (Act 3) works to communicate, interact, explain, alleviate, and heal through ritualized acts of bodily possession. Ritual efficacy, achieved through music and manifested by the presence of supernatural entities, validates the Gnawa society by affirming beliefs, practices, authority and power, and community relations. It contributes to the integration of society (solidarity; social well-being) and to the continuity and stability of their culture—human and spirit bonds are re-affirmed, balance maintained and restored, beliefs and actions preserved and passed on to younger generation. Furthermore, the success of a lila re-negotiates and re-orchestrates existing social-cultural situations leading to empowerment; for example, from low to higher social status and from denigrated to appreciated). Hell writes:

One important function of divination rituals is to clearly express the opposition between the established order of humans... and world harmony which depends largely on the mysterious will of the spirits... Denouncing individual faults is a means to avoid the harm and misfortune that may come upon the entire community. [...] The Gnawa are not simple healers but the truly possessed, that is, messengers of the invisible: like shamans, their social function is primarily to make any misfortune conceivable, whatever the particular form it takes. Cataclysm, social disorder or a simple domestic incident, no matter! In all cases, men want to understand and to act. And here, only the logic of the committed fault, voluntary or not, gives meaning and re-establishes man as the actor of his destiny. (Hell 1999:99,102–103)

In Chapters 3 and 5, I discuss how ritual and ritualization constructs and is constructed by power relations.

Chapter 3

***Gnawa* Social Structure, Identity, and Context**

3.1 Social Structure and Identity

No different from other Moroccans, the majority of Moroccan Gnawa hold jobs outside of their ritual sphere, while only a few live as professional musicians. The men may be carpenters, artists, instrument makers, boutique owners, clerks at the bus station, or fishermen, while the women may work as hairdressers, massage therapists, or in housekeeping. The current generation of Gnawa children attends school with the goal of acquiring college diplomas or university degrees, their parents hoping that education will give their children a brighter future than their own, granting them more opportunities and stability in an increasingly economically demanding society.¹ Talented Gnawa men and women may moonlight as musicians for secular occasions, their children often in tow. On a regular day, the social structure of the Gnawa society is obscure to the outside observer. During sacred occasions, however, distinctions among members, beyond the gender differences already observed in Moroccan society, are illuminated. This section examines social structure and identity, and considers recent changes with regard to status and roles of the m'alle and moqaddema, kinship ties, membership, transmission, training, and obligations. Roles specific to the sacred lila are discussed in Chapter 5.

¹ Unemployment among Morocco youth (15-24 years old) is at 22% (Central Intelligence Agency Internet resource. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>. Accessed January 7, 2012)).

3.1.1 Leaders and Assistants

The leaders of the society and guardians of the tradition are the moqaddema and the m'Allem. As ritual masters and mediators between the human and spirit realms, their presence is vital to ritual practice. The moqaddema, as seer-therapist, mediates through embodiment by supernatural entities. The m'Allem as master musician does so through music, specifically through his musical skills on the guembri. In addition to being a seer-therapist, the moqaddema officiates at the ceremony, which includes initiating and organizing the event—preparing all ritual necessities (incense, colored-veils, foods, accessories, objects) and contacting the m'Allem who possesses the musical instruments for the ritual and has access to musicians. Though less prominent than the m'Allem, she plays a key role in Gnawa society as an intermediary between humans and spirits, and between patients or adepts and the m'Allem (Figure 3.1). M'Allem Mokhtar once told me that so long as there are moqaddema-s there would continue to be lila-s and a need for m'Allem-s.

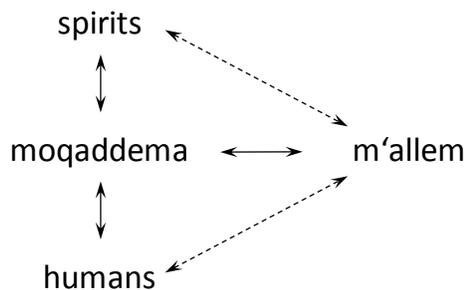


Figure 3.1 Moqaddema as mediator between spirits and humans, and patients and m'Allem-s.

The ritual masters each head their own groups which function as independent units that come together during sacred lila-s to perform specific duties for the occasion (Chapter 5). At the moqaddema's disposal are ritual assistants (*'arifat*) who function as an organization and management crew. The m' allem leads an ensemble of six or more musicians collectively referred to as *qarqabiya*.²

A lila is considered effective when many trances take place, which depend largely upon the baraka of the mediators. The m' allem and moqaddema are mutually dependent. Good m' allem-s and moqaddema-s are said to possess baraka, which is demonstrated in two ways: by the number of spirit possessions that take place under their guidance and by their own performance of magical feats—the active and manifested aspect of divine grace. Engendering the suprahuman body depends on the dynamic interactive network of music, dance, and trance, and between the m' allem and dancer/spirit who is often the moqaddema. The moqaddema initiates the lila which requires the musical skills of the m' allem for ritual success. Each relies on the other to highlight and consolidate their abilities: the moqaddema's mimetic dance displays the m' allem's musical skills to call on and tame the spirits, and the m' allem's musical skills engender the mastered trance of the moqaddema displaying her deep knowledge and alliance with the mluk. A moqaddema often works with the same m' allem or m' allem-s with whom she has established a rapport conducive to spirit possession, often a family member (husband or sibling) or someone who worked during their course of treatment toward becoming a moqaddema. The significance of these roles is captured by Pâques:

² Theoretically, in association with the symbolic meanings of the number seven (Pâques 1991), a Gnawa ensemble consists of seven people, the m' allem and his six accompanying musicians. In reality, ensembles number from five to more than ten musicians, usually larger in the lila and smaller in secular venues such as the festival.

The entire *derdeba* [lila] rests on the *gumbri* that evokes the genies and directs them on a fantastic cavalcade marked by the *qarqab*. The genies come at the call of the instrument and the bared feet of the moqaddem when he dances. A good maalem and a good moqaddem are “hot” people that “induce ascent.”³ Their quality is measured by the number of adepts that fall in trance and are possessed as soon as they begin. A lila without sacrifice and without a good moqaddem is “cold”: possessions are rare. (Pâques 1991:284, italics in original)

It is the combined baraka of both Gnawa masters, their synergy that bestows them with a higher social status and value, not to mention economic worth, among the ritual community and renders them in great demand for lila-s. This reputation spills over into the secular sphere where event organizers seek top master musicians of the trade.

In Gnawa families such as the Gantias, it is common to find a husband-and-wife team. Gnawa scholar Chlyeh says that such teams are ideal. In addition to the mutual benefits, their union may be “interpreted as a demand by the *mlouk* and hence a source of *baraka*, the therapeutic effects of which are sought after by patients” (1999:48). M’allem Boubeker and Moqaddema ‘Aisha, the parents of the Gantias recognized for their miraculous powers, were frequently called upon to work regular lila-s but also to invoke mluk others dared not (i.e., the Jewish cohort) and to perform the perilous act of exorcism—an extreme measure reserved for dire situations that only few masters are capable of undertaking (personal communications, Z. Gania, 2007, 2009 and A. Gania, 2009) (discussed in Section 3.2.2). M’allem Mahmoud and Moqaddema Malika, as well as M’allem Abdallah and Moqaddema Fadna, also form husband-and-wife teams. In the case of Moqaddema Zaida, she conducts

³ Supernatural entities are said to rise up in the bodies of the adepts. Footwear is removed before entering the sacred dance space, usually at the start of the possession phase. Pâques writes: “It is said that the genies are ants that rise from the earth” (1991:256). Among the Hamadsha, Crapanzano writes: “‘Aïsha Qandisha is said to be under the ground... [her] presence... accounts for the fact that the Hamadsha must dance barefoot and that they become enraged and tear at anyone who wears new slippers and walks in them across the stage” (1973:203).

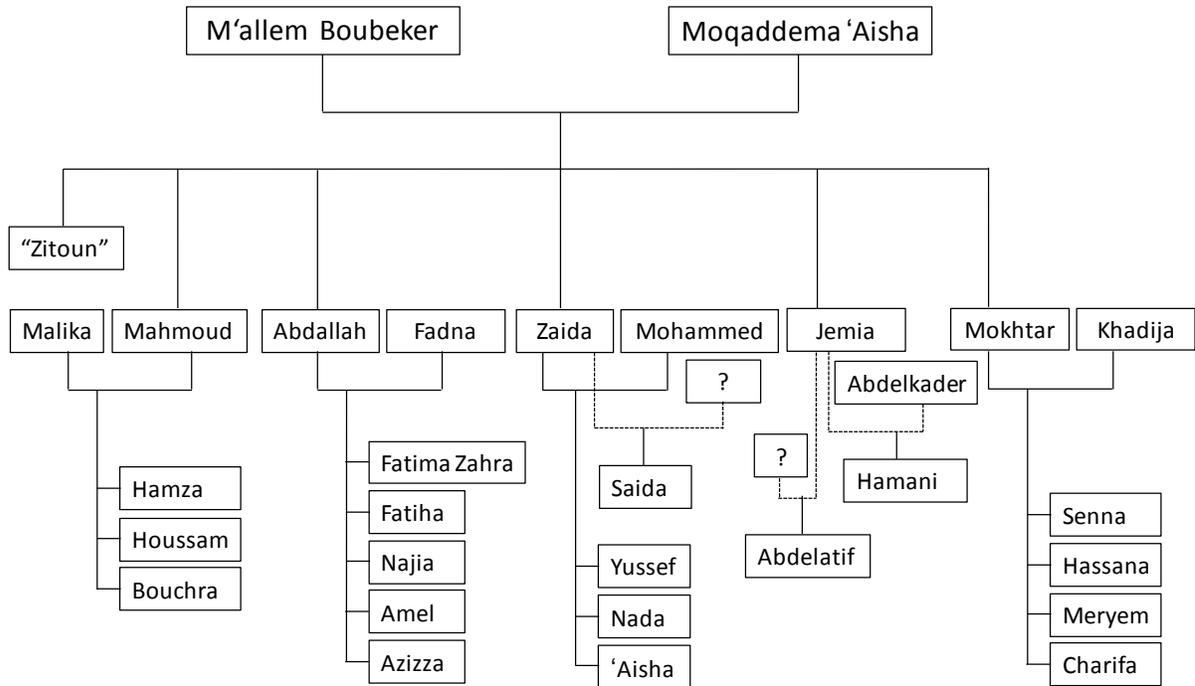


Figure 3.2 The Gania family tree.

lila-s with one of her brothers, most often M'Allem Mokhtar. The Gania children and in-laws take on the roles as ritual assistants and accompanists during lila-s (Figure 3.2).⁴

3.1.2 A Loosely Centralized Organization

The Zaouia Sidna Bilal (Sanctuary of Our Lord Bilal) located in Essaouira is considered a centre of the Gnawa (Figure 3.3). In the past, Gnawa families and members were closely connected to the lodge. It was a special space where Gnawa gathered for meetings, to initiate new m'Allem-s, and to hold lila-s. In addition to the space, ritual items

⁴ The *'arifat* and *qarqabiya* are generally all Gnawa and respectively comprise the daughters and sons, nieces and nephews, female and male cousins and in-laws of the masters. Apprentices and those elected by the mluk may also take on these roles during a lila.



Figure 3.3 Zaouia Sidna Bilal. (Photographs by Maisie Sum)

such as musical instruments, colored veils and so forth, were available for use by any Gnawa, if necessary (personal communication, Z.Gania, 2007). The m' allem and moqaddema in charge of the zawiya were elected by the Gnawa community who possessed Gnawa lineage and sub-Saharan origins. In recent years, Zaouia Sidna Bilal as a centre of Gnawa activity and of the community, not only in Morocco, but in Essaouira, wanes. Fewer m' allem-s participate in the annual celebration or religious festival (*mussem*) of Zaouia Sidna Bilal, where once the great masters, traveling great distances from various regions of Morocco, congregated. A similar phenomenon has arisen at other important centers for the Gnawa. In 2009, I accompanied Moqaddema Zaida Gania and her family on their annual visit, two weeks following the Prophet's anniversary, to the holy sites of Mulay Brahim in Kik and Mulay Abdallah ben Hsein in Tamesloht. She remarked on the dwindling participation and

diminishing baraka: “When I was a child there were countless Gnawa groups. They came from everywhere. The baraka was very strong. I saw incredible things, but now it’s been scraped away. There are only a few groups” (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2009). My fieldwork and discussions with the Gantias imply a dilution of the Gnawa tradition due to appropriation, secularization, and popularization of their ritual practice.

Gnawa groups function independently; however, they operate according to a set of rules embodied, observed, and preserved by hereditary practitioners. Of foremost importance is the invocation of all the cohorts during a given sacred occasion, each characterized by specific sounds, colors, fragrances, flavors, feelings, and actions. While there exists a ritual structure and prescribed sequence of invocation (*treq*) to which all Gnawa groups adhere,⁵ regional, local, and individual variation occur around an identical core (Chapter 5). Most prevalent is regional variation of the lila macro-structure and the *treq*, and individual interpretation of musical motives (Chapter 4) and their arrangement (Chapters 6 and 7). The instrumentation usually remains unchanged during sacred events (*tbel*, *guembri*, *qraqab*).⁶

3.1.3 Membership, Transmission, and Training

The Gania masters belong to a hereditary Gnawa family with putative origins in Senegal and Mali (discussed in Section 3.2.1). When I first met the M’allem Mahmoud Gania Group in 2001, with the exception of a friend, all of the ten members were family: the m’allem’s son, his brothers (M’allem Abdallah and M’allem Mokhtar), and brother-in-laws

⁵ *Treq* signifies the way, path or sequential order of invoking the *mluk* during the lila.

⁶ Regions in central and northern Morocco may include the *ghita* (Moroccan oboe) (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009). At one lila I attended in Essaouira, bagpipes accompanied the *tbel* during the procession phase.

(Figure 1.2). Although the brothers may play together as a group for international performances, each are m' allem-s in their own right and head their own ensembles when called on to do lila-s and gigs in Morocco (Figure 3.4). They do, however, share many of the same accompanists in addition to their sons, nephews, and in-laws. When performing together, the eldest is due greatest respect by default and takes the lead position. Before M' allem Boubeker passed away, the three Gania masters would accompany their father at lila-s. They would only play the guembri if their father passed it to them, and would return it to him when signaled to, or if he had left the room, when he came back.

Becoming a Gnawa initiate or ritual master, however, is not limited to a Gnawa lineage, sub-Saharan roots, or a past in slavery. Some fell into the Gnawa way of life after having been struck ill by the mluk, been nursed by a Gnawa housekeeper, had a connection with a sick person healed by Gnawa, or having lived in close proximity to a Gnawa family. Regardless of the circumstances, they were introduced to a new set of values and orientation, and eventually adopted a new identity as a member of the Gnawa society and apprenticed with the masters.⁷

In all cases, members acquire a knowledge that is embodied and actively lived. Transmission takes place through repeated exposure, listening, watching, and imitating. For those with Gnawa lineage like the Gantias, through years of absorption and exposure beginning in the womb of their mothers and lila-s held regularly in their homes, masters

⁷ Moqaddema Zaida once told me: “We all have mluk inside us. You, me, everyone. But we don’t know. When we get sick or when we attend a lila we learn about it” (personal communication, 2007). Similarly, Pâques writes: “Everybody has genies within them. Each child takes a color at birth. Those who live in harmony with their genie are not conscious of their existence, and it is said that they do not have *mluk*. But others are their victims, that is to say, they are subjected to disorders... manifested in multiple ways... [such as] sterility, or miscarriages... epilepsy, paralysis” (1991:232–33).



a)



b) (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)



c)

Figure 3.4 The Gania family and instruments of Gnawa music. a) M'alleme Mahmoud playing the *guembri*, a 3-stringed bass lute with his sons Hamza (left) and Houssam (right) on *qraqab*, b) M'alleme Abdallah (behind, on *tbel*) and (from left to right) his nephews Abdelatif and Hamani, and his brother-in-law Si Mohammed, c) Moqaddema Zaida (center) behind the *seniya* (main instrument of female Gnawa ensemble) with daughters Saida (on her right), Nada (to her left, in the corner), 'Aisha (to her far left, with elbow on cousin's lap) and her nieces. (Photographs by Maisie Sum)

acquire knowledge of all sensory symbols associated with the mluk, mythical meanings, and ritual procedure. As they become able, daughters assist their mothers in the ritual preparations of a lila, and sons accompany their fathers. Through a gradual process they embody the principles of performance (i.e., the art of musicking and trancing) that form their habitus. Arom's discussion of early kinetic transmission of music in the Central African Republic applies to many oral cultures including the Gnawa children, with respect to ritual and musical apprenticeship, and is worth quoting in full:

Indeed, from the very first days of its life, the child can do no other than participate, albeit involuntarily, in the social life of the group. Wrapped in a carrying cloth, the infant is fixed on to its mother's back, where it remains perched all day long, participating in the various activities in which the mother participates, including of course the different ceremonies and dances in which she takes part. Finding itself thus thrust into the musical activities of its milieu, taking part in the dance, since it is 'being danced' by its mother, long before it can stand on its own feet, the infant absorbs and assimilates in the most organic and natural manner possible the rudiments of the music of its own community. The child may be said, in fact, to store up, in a subconscious fashion, the characteristics of this music. This is the 'passive' stage, the first step in its pragmatic apprenticeship, 'on-the-job'. But this is also the stage which marks out the future musician, even it is not the most important one. The second stage begins when the child, able to speak and to walk, i.e., to master the movements of his body, of his legs *and of his hands*, feels the need to act, in imitation of the adults and the older children. To this end he is constantly solicited and stimulated socially. (Arom 1991:14)

The vocation of the moqaddema depends on election by the mluk and is manifested differently depending on one's disposition. Lapassade differentiates between two initiatory paths: by election in which one is first struck ill by a melk, and by lineage in which one is inhabited at birth (1998:35-36). Coming from Gnawa lineage, Moqaddema Zaida falls into the second category. Inhabited by the mluk as a child, her alliance with them has developed over five decades, and Gnawa beliefs and ritual knowledge (symbolism, process, trance

choreography) run through her veins. Being one of two daughters, the inheritance of her mother's ritual items and established role as seer-therapist revealed itself after a period of time. When Moqaddema 'Aisha passed, it remained undecided which of the two daughters would continue her work. "My father did not know what to do after my mother died. We can't leave her things for the mluk unattended. Then one day he had a dream and a voice told him what to do. After the dream he came to me and said, 'Zaida, your mother's things are yours'" (personal communication, 2006). From then on Moqaddema Zaida, like her mother, was required to perform special obligations for the mluk (discussed below). She says that her children will continue the Gnawa heritage and learn the family secrets as she did from her mother; it is in their blood. "I was pregnant with 'Aisha [my youngest daughter] during my Sha'ban lila. I danced Sidi Musa [i.e., while possessed by him] until I was ready to give birth. Si Mohammed [my husband] had to take me to the hospital right after" (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2009).

Growing up with lila-s, Moqaddema Zaida's daughters live every lila alongside their mother (Figure 3.5), much like Moqaddema Zaida and her sister did in the past. In addition to helping their mother with ritual preparations and organization, from a very young age most of her daughters (and of her brothers) had already engaged in possession dances.⁸

An uninitiated person (male or female), chosen later in life, often undergoes a painful and difficult initiatory path under the therapy and tutelage of a moqaddema. While transgression (unknowingly stomping on a spirit, saying their name) or sorcery may cause Gnawa to say that individuals are "struck" by the spirits (*madrub* or *masru*) resulting in

⁸ Similarly in Bali, "trance is a cultural form accessible to most people... even the smallest children. Belo reports an incident in which children as young as three years old were possessed in imitation of their elders" (Walker 1972:59).



Figure 3.5 Moqaddema Zaida (second from the left) with her daughters and nieces ready to perform. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

physical or psychological ailments such as paralysis or delirium,⁹ others irrespective of what they have or have not done are simply chosen without any known reason. The latter “initiator illness” is seen as the first stage to establishing a lifelong alliance with the spirit (Kapchan 2007; Hell 1999).¹⁰ Refusal to accept and submit to the spirits results in continual suffering. In the earliest stages, possession manifests as afflictions which may be overcome with compliance. Regular offerings lead to an eventual physical and physiological transformation from being “struck” to being “inhabited” (*maskun*) to eventually being “connected” (*rbet*), if the spirits accept (Hell 1999:52-54). Being connected implies an alliance, rather than a dependency or submission seen in the initial stages. One gains

⁹ In some instances, family members, instead of or in addition to the transgressor, may suffer the consequences of their actions (Hell 1999:112).

¹⁰ To be sure, alliance with a melk is not a necessary consequence of an affliction when the result of a transgression or victim of sorcery.

protection from sorcery, illness, and misfortune, and acquires abilities for therapy (as seer or medium) and miraculous possession dances during a lila. The power to divine and heal is determined by the relationship an adept cultivates with their affiliated spirits. “After being an adept for thirty years, Zineb finally attained the status of therapist and seer. Her vocation was affirmed in a trance ritual during which the *mluk* had demanded that she dedicate herself to a calling of therapy according to the *Gnaoui* model” (Chlyeh 1999:10).

Along with the benefits, the chosen one incurs burdens and dangers associated with the spirits. A moqaddema from Casablanca said: “the problem with the mlouk [mluk] is that they do not have any memory. They change quickly. One day they give you everything, the next day they strike you!” (Hell 1999:141). The unpredictable and uncompromising character of mluk renders them dangerous and accounts for the reason “few people dare to cross the line and become a chief of the cult” (ibid.).

The m‘allem mediates between the seen and unseen worlds through music. Like the moqaddema, he may also be elected by the mluk; however, his ability is not judged by an alliance with the most powerful spirits (demonstrated in bodily manifestation) but by his mastery of the guembri used to communicate with the spirits. Becoming a m‘allem requires apprenticeship with a m‘allem recognized by the ritual community. The trajectory typically begins with accompanying the m‘allem and leads to mastery for the talented, diligent, and chosen. In their youth, M‘allem Abdallah and his older brother participated in annual ritual visits and celebrations around Morocco with their father, performing lila-s with other Gnawa families. These venues were the traditional breeding grounds of the ritual m‘allem-s. The young Gania brothers supported their father and other masters playing qraqab, singing in choral response alongside other more experienced musicians, and participating in group

dances (Chapter 5), effectively learning the trade through repetition, immersion, and absorption of different styles. M' allem Abdallah said he always paid attention to the m' allem-s. He listened closely to their interpretations and watched their guembri techniques. A lila was where a young Gnawi could begin his schooling by playing live as an accompanist; however, it was no place for guembri practice. At home, M' allem Abdallah would pick up the guembri and imitate what he had seen and heard, receiving advice and correction as required through demonstration from his father who was always in earshot (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009). This tradition continues with the families of M' allem Mahmoud and Moqaddema Zaida, whose respective sons accompany any one of the three Gania m' allem-s doing lila-s and performing on stage.

As the Gania brothers grew older and more proficient on the guembri, M' allem Boubeker would pass the guembri to his sons (usually the eldest) to animate portions of the lila. Only many years after consistent exposure and experience as accompanists, learning and mastering the repertoire, were they given the opportunity to officially earn the title of m' allem before the entire ritual community—particularly the m' allem-s and moqaddema-s. When M' allem Mokhtar Gania was deemed ready, a special feast (*gaç 'a*) was held by his mother and father to initiate him as m' allem.¹¹ “All the Gnawa were invited. Maman, Moqaddema 'Aisha, prepared the large plate of coucous... M' allem Boubeker started the lila and then he handed the guembri to Mokhtar” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009). The local Gnawa community was invited to celebrate, witness, and to judge the success of the m' allem's first lila. His worthiness was established by a number of criteria: his mastery of over one hundred songs; his knowledge of the ritual path, the repertoire and dances

¹¹ *Gaç 'a* literally means “a large earthen or wooden dish” (Chlyeh 1999:126). For more about the ceremony see Pâques (1991:300), Chlyeh (1999:25), and Hell (2002:352).

associated with the mluk, and of symbolic associations including the gestural language of possession dances; his mastery of the guembri, his knowledge of and skills to execute the musical cues and transitions required to facilitate, sustain and guide possession; and his ability to call the mluk to earth and coax them effectively. In essence, it was the final examination that tested not only his musical competence, but his musical and ritual knowledge and ability to mediate between the human and spirit world—to call the spirits to earth and to propitiate them during their visit. Only m'Allem-s who could harness the guembri's power are deemed worthy by the ritual community to work a lila.

3.1.4 Obligations and Ritual Roles

As guardians of a sacred and secret tradition, both the m'Allem and moqaddema have a duty to protect, preserve, and pass on their ritual beliefs and practices to their children, elected members, and apprentices. As ritual masters they each have specific duties that must be performed outside of and during a sacred ritual. Accompanists and assistants, on the other hand, have few obligations outside of the lila aside from loyalty, availability, submissiveness, and subordination to their teachers.

Caring for supernatural entities is the primary concern of the moqaddema. Throughout the year she is obligated to carry out a number of rituals that includes nourishing the mluk regularly with offerings of food and incense, and renewing ties annually with the highest and obligatory offering of a lila during the month of Sha'ban in order to maintain a harmonious relationship and strengthen the bond with the mluk. The Sh'aban lila is an important event because its success validates the moqaddema's affiliation with the mluk to the invited guests and predicts her future success. While shopping for her annual offering



Figure 3.6 Moqaddema Zaida buying her bull for Sha‘ban at the Heddera market (2007). (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

(Figure 3.6), Moqaddema Zaida told me: “My melk is grand. He must receive a great sacrifice. Last year I didn’t have a lot of money so I offered him a calf. It wasn’t good. My work didn’t go well and I got very sick” (personal communication, 2007). The year in question, Moqaddema Zaida had to go into the hospital for surgery. Associated with the endowment of her supernatural powers is her duty to heal those struck ill by the mluk; in effect, she is appointed to mediate between the seen and unseen worlds, maintaining and restoring equilibrium for the individual in particular and for the overall good (and safety) of the society at large. “These things were given to me. They chose me. I must oblige” (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2007).

The moqaddema reserves a space in her home where she keeps ritual items hidden from plain sight. She has a special altar for the mluk called *mida* which becomes visible to others once a year during the obligatory lila; otherwise it remains in its special place where only the moqaddema enters to give offerings and for divination when clients or patients

(male or female) visit for consultation. Diagnosis begins with a careful distinction between “the harmful actions caused by malevolent spirits and possession that is [due to a transgression or] desired and sought after by the master spirits” (Hell 1999:64) who demand a lifelong service. The prognosis always demands human action in the form of offerings and actions, such as particular foods or animal sacrifice, to propitiate the afflicting spirit. If necessary, a lila is prescribed as a therapeutic session that must be sponsored by the ill-stricken. A lila is not limited to therapy through spirit possession of the afflicted but may take the form of a public reprimand when the trance of the moqaddema evolves into a mediumship.

When a lila is held the moqaddema takes on the additional role as ritual officiant. She possesses the necessary ritual accessories, prepares the ritual foods, and has an entourage of female assistants who help as the ceremony unfolds. While the smooth running of events requires a special level of ritual knowledge and experience, the reputation and respect of a moqaddema is based on evidence of a strong alliance with her spirits. The possession portion of the lila displays her powers in dramatic, mimetic, and sometimes miraculous dance (Chapter 5).

In addition to providing offerings to the supernatural entities, healing, and officiating lila-s, the moqaddema must comply with the rules of conduct during a lila, such as having all the necessary and appropriate ritual offerings and following proper procedure for invocation. Moqaddema Zaida stresses the importance of invoking every cohort of supernatural entities, which means playing all the musical suites. She expressed concern over a lila she was invited to attend (not officiate) where the m‘allem did not play one of the cohorts: “I was scared. It was dangerous for me to be there” (personal communication, 2009). Because of her

affiliation with the mluk, the wrath upon her for neglecting or disrespecting them could be fatal. While the omission of pieces within a musical suite is acceptable, common (often due to the lack of time, money or absence of affiliated adepts), and harmless, excluding an entire suite (i.e., a cohort of spirits) is risky. She confronted the musician who responded, “You have your way of doing the lila and we have ours” (ibid.).¹² Moqaddema Zaida expressed, “If they want to do that they should not call it a lila but a party... You cannot invite some [mluk] and not others when they are right beside each other. They will be angry” (ibid.).

Moqaddema Zaida’s fear corroborates Hell’s statement: “For those who work with the supernatural, the most minor sin may lead to serious consequences” (1999:181). This situation demonstrates a fundamental philosophical difference between Gnawa m’allem-s. For the hereditary and chosen ones, “values [in sacred rituals and myths] are portrayed not as subjective human preferences but as the imposed condition for life implicit in a world with a particular structure” (Geertz 1957:427).

The duties of the m’allem throughout the year with regard to the supernatural entities are light in comparison to the moqaddema; aside from his role of doing lila-s in an appropriate manner and leading the music ensemble, he must give weekly offerings to his guembri (Figure 3.7). While the moqaddema’s initiatory path may be a painful and demanding one that requires total submission to the spirits, the m’allem’s demands much practice, skill, and talent. “For a Gnawi the *gumbri* is the most valuable asset. All his life he seeks to improve his playing, that is to say, to better make the mluk ‘rise’ and to better lead them” (Pâques 1991:221).

¹² Based on my conversation with Moqaddema Zaida, “your” is taken to refer to the masters of sub-Saharan Gnawa lineage and “ours” to those without Gnawa lineage, or sub-Saharan ancestry, who learned later in life and have their own interpretation. There are many non-hereditary Gnawa that fit the “our” description; however, they differ in that following their apprenticeship they were selected by the ritual community.



Figure 3.7 Nourishing the guembri with incense. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

As a ritual musician, the m'Allem is responsible for a preparatory ritual referred to as *dbiha* and creating an environment conducive to possession dances. The *dbiha* involves animal sacrifice that is necessary for spiritual invocation and possession.¹³ This pre-lila ceremony is what distinguishes the sacred practice of a lila from the more recent staged lila (discussed in Section II) requested by non-Gnawa wishing to witness its proceedings as a performance alone (personal communication, A. Gania, 2007). The m'Allem hired for the sacred occasion must participate in this activity before the lila. In the evening during the lila, his duty is to first announce the ceremony, gather together the Gnawa community and the *mluk*, and create a unitary feeling through rhythmic entrainment. Afterwards, he must invoke

¹³ The blood of a sacrificed animal is also significant in Balinese ceremonies and other trance rituals such as performed by the Tumbuka (Friedson 1996).

and appease the mluk with their respective musical codes and favorable variations in order to tame their unpredictable nature. Like the moqaddema, he effectively heals the sick and restores harmony within and without.

The title of m' allem carries a burden of responsibility. At heightened moments, possession dances may take the form of a dramatic display that only a powerful m' allem can support and control. Hell captures the severity of this role in a story told by a Gnawa from Essaouira: "Tragic circumstances drove the first m' allem with whom I ever worked to definitively leave the possession cult... ritual hammering always accompanies the presence of the formidable Sons of the Forest. But that day, the extreme violence of the blows led to a fatal outcome... it was not a fear of trouble that motivated the irreversible decision of the master musician but fear of a different nature, namely, the heavy, terribly distressing apprehension of no longer being able to control the fury associated with the arrival of the spirits" (1999:179).

The m' allem's accompanists have less at stake and a limited number of obligations. They perform the same musical activity at any given time in the form of percussive support—clapping or on qraqab—and singing in choral response to the m' allem's impassioned calls.¹⁴ Musicians are expected to be familiar with the qraqab patterns, choral response and refrain, repertoire, and dance during the pre-possession portions, in addition to understanding the m' allem-s' cues. They must also practice preparatory rituals of animal sacrifice. Apprentices are expected to be loyal to their teacher throughout their lifetime. They must be available to work lila-s with the m' allem at anytime regardless of how much notice

¹⁴ With the exception of the procession phase where one or two may play the tbel (Chapter 5).

they may have been given.¹⁵ They must also be ready to play the guembri or sing the lead for “lighter” pieces if asked. As such, it is their duty to know all the musical icons, the calls associated with the mluk, and the sequential order. This master-disciple relationship continues even when an apprentice becomes a m‘allem in his own right.

As masters and leaders, the m‘allem and moqaddema are conferred a high social status in the Gnawa community; however, doing a sacred lila is a social and spiritual obligation with little financial reward. In the past their service was provided in exchange for a meal. Though generally paid in cash these days, keeping with tradition, they do not charge a fixed fee and leave it to the sponsor to decide based on their judgment of the lila’s efficacy, not to mention their financial standing. Although the moqaddema chooses and contacts the m‘allem to animate the sacred event, the m‘allem is the one who collects the monetary offerings from the possessed during the musical performance and the sponsor at the end of the ceremony, and divvies up the proceeds to his musicians and the moqaddema (who then shares it with her assistants). When the moqaddema sponsors her own lila during Sha‘ban , the m‘allem keeps the baraka (i.e., the divine benefice, donations collected during the ceremony) for himself and his group, and, depending on his relationship with the moqaddema, may not receive additional remuneration.

¹⁵ Some musicians show up to lila-s through hearsay using it as “rehearsal,” an opportunity to be recognized, while also hoping to get a share of the earnings.

3.1.5 Recent Changes

3.1.5.1 Status, Role and Obligations

Since the inception of the *Gnaoua Festival*, the m' allem has been catapulted into the limelight. This has created a new professional “superstar” identity among local ritual masters who previously performed a service for the local community with little or no financial reward. Today, a handful of m' allem-s reputable for their mystic powers, along with others who are well-promoted, reap the economic benefits of national and international festival contracts and wealthy patrons. Lesser known performers, some equal or superior in mastery, settle for less lucrative secular affairs such as restaurant gigs and private parties, and may continue to hold jobs outside the musical sphere. M' allem Mahmoud has been given an identity that differentiates him from other m' allem-s, dubbed the “real thing” by a number of local Moroccans. In a magazine spread advertising the 2006 *Gnaoua Festival*, a candid picture of him singing was juxtaposed with one captured of B.B. King exhibiting strikingly similar poses and soulful expressions.

Traditionally, work for the m' allem relied heavily on his relationship with various moqaddema-s, since they were the ones who prescribed the need for a lila and contacted him. This remains true to a certain extent, though the aging and shrinking moqaddema population, not to mention the costliness of a lila these days,¹⁶ has resulted in a lower demand for lila-s throughout the year (personal communication, M. Gania, 2007; M. Outanine, 2009).

Popularity of Gnawa music has also given rise to patronage by the elite and attracted

¹⁶ Although masters do not charge a fixed fee for their services, the sponsor is required to provide the animals for sacrifice, hire helpers to prepare the ritual foods, arrange transport for the masters (if necessary), and rent a space if his/her home is not large enough.

organizers and managers interested in the musical aspects of the lila. Instead of going through the moqaddema who normally liaises between the m' allem and sponsor, patrons and promoters approach the m' allem directly for his services as a musician, abolishing the moqaddema's role as intermediary to the music event. Unlike sacred rituals, Gnawa expect and demand a contract for their secular services. They negotiate a fee based on the duration of the performance, their reputation, and the income and social status of the person (or company) hiring them. Furthermore, the informality of showing up to play at lila-s has been replaced by a fixed list of accompanists, selected and notified in advance. The m' allem has become his own business manager, particularly for small secular gigs, and may hire a manager for negotiating international contracts.

Being strictly musical affairs, the moqaddema gets eliminated from the equation as intermediary, but also as ritual master and officiant in secular contexts of performance. Receding into the background, spectators are unaware of her existence, let alone her prominence in the Gnawa community. To the outsider, however, the setting of a sacred lila similarly places the musicians at the centre of the action. With the exception of miraculous dances that may occur during important lila-s, the moqaddema retreats "behind the scenes" while the m' allem animates the occasion in plain sight. The m' allem is the aurally and visually prominent leader of the society during the ritual occasion, as they are in secular performances. Similarly, unlike the popularity of Gnawa music, the sacred lila for which it is intended gets little attention. In secular venues, the music is given emphasis and is rarely accompanied by mock possession trance; even when such "trance" is present, the moqaddema's role remains unknown,¹⁷ not to mention the m' allem's role as mediator of

¹⁷ The 2006 *Gnaoua Festival* was dedicated to Moqaddadem 'Aisha, the mother of the Gania masters. Although such a dedication is evidence of her importance among the ritual community, and



Figure 3.8 Haddarat Zaida Gania performing at the 2009 *Chrib Attay* Festival in Essaouira. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

human and spirit realms. On the other hand, secular occasions have given female Gnawa opportunities to perform as musicians on the same stage as the m' allem, in the normally all-male ensemble (Chapter 5). Furthermore, if they have their own music ensemble, these venues provide potential spaces for all-female performances (Figure 3.8).¹⁸

In spite of their high social status among the Gnawa community, their professionalism in secular spheres and the star status of some m' allem-s, the majority of

consideration on the part of the event organizers there was little information about her status and role to non-Gnawa participants at the festival.

¹⁸ Talented children growing up surrounded by Gnawa music and dance successfully acquire the art. The daughters of the Gania masters are musicians and dancers in their own right. Moqaddema Zaida has her own group of female musicians and has been offered gigs during the festival and throughout the year. She performs a female Sufi genre called *haddarat*. A master of the Gnawa tradition, she may also be hired for women only sacred occasions of the *lila*—that is, the musicians and audience are all women. The instrumentation differs from the all-male ensemble: the main instrument is the *seniya*, a metal tea tray played with two metal rods, accompanied by frame drums (*bendir*) and small goblet drums (*ta'rija*). Similar to the m' allem, the m' allema plays the main instrument and sings the calls. Her accompanists play hand drums that are usually paired. It is uncertain whether an all-female music ensemble that performed exclusive women-only *lila*-s was always a part of Gnawa tradition or whether it has recently sprung up. Research in this area has yet to be pursued.

Gnawa musicians (and Gnawa, in general) maintain a relatively low socio-economic and political status in the Moroccan national context. Perhaps as Waitt suggests with regard to festival spaces as “geographies of helplessness” (2008:513):¹⁹

[U]rban festivals managed by the social elite [are a] mechanism that constrains, disadvantages and oppresses marginalized socio-economic groups... Allowing the ‘masses’ to party, in the Roman mode of ‘bread and circuses’,²⁰ while taken-for-granted as fun does nothing to undermine the economic relationships that maintain social injustices... social hierarchies and normative ideas are reinforced rather than inverted. (Waitt 2008:515)

While moqaddema-s continue to uphold their responsibilities and obligations to Gnawa culture (and have little choice in the matter given their relationships with the mluk), m‘allem-s and musicians do so to varying degrees. Due to the increasing need and desire for financial gain in order to meet a higher standard of living, accompanying musicians are no longer loyal to one m‘allem but play for a number of different ensembles. A Gnawi voices his concern on the potential loss of cultural tradition: “there are fewer and fewer apprentices interested in learning the actual rites. Many of the younger Gnawa hire themselves out for weddings and other celebrations” (Kapchan 2007:146). Due to shorter hours and more lucrative rewards, m‘allem-s have become selective, choosing to do lila-s with higher potential return (i.e., for the more affluent), some sacrificing their obligations for more

¹⁹ Geographer Gordon Waitt (2008) also explores two other themes of urban festival spaces: geographies of hype and geographies of hope.

²⁰ This concept of “bread and circuses” refers to the “pacifying role of spectacle... how historically [it] has been frequently deployed by the social elite as a form of social control. Very simply, the socially disadvantaged are provided a ‘taste of bread’ and a day of entertainment, in the belief they will forget their troubles and believe in the authority’s benefits. Festivals become conceptualized as public relations exercises in which particular ideologies of who belongs in the collective imaginary are circulated and passively received rather than contested” (Waitt 2008:522).

lucrative opportunities.²¹ Rules may also be neglected and pieces deemed secret performed for a secular occasion if the price is right.

The changing values and cognitive orientation of Gnawa practitioners attributed to the repercussions of global forces such as festivals and tourism have impacted the conduct of sacred occasions, pushing boundaries demarcated by obligations and rules. Moqaddema Zaida says: “Today, people add different things to a lila and forget other things that are essential. They are scraping away the baraka” (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2007, 2009). In Essaouira, the demand for sacred lila-s has decreased in the last decade, which equates to a decline in offerings to the mluk on the part of Gnawa adepts. Si Mohammed explains that “a lila is expensive. One must provide for the entire ceremony—the food, the drinks—everything, and everything is expensive now” (personal communication, 2009). Similarly, Kapchan also recorded that “when one’s money runs out, so do their blessings” (2007:144). Moqaddema Zaida remarks: “In the past, the zawiya [of Mulay Brahim] shared the sacrificed animal with all who made the annual visit during the mussem. They prepared large dishes of coucous and gave some to everybody. It’s not like that anymore. Now everybody keeps everything for themselves” (personal communication, 2009).²²

²¹ Kapchan writes: “Whereas *lilas* to propitiate spirits in Morocco are often held in humble households whose rooms hold a limited number of people, the Gnawa know their earnings, which come largely through the offerings made by the guests in exchange for blessings, are increased in more bourgeois contexts, especially those where foreigners are present” (2007:146).

²² In addition to food, the sacrificed animal signifies baraka (i.e., money and mana). “Money is baraka is mana—a substance with power, that is power-endowing, that is active, contagious” (Mauss (1972[1902]:135) in Kapchan 2007:138). From the Polynesian, mana is “a concept of a life force, believed to be seated in the head, and associated with high social status and ritual power” (Accessed December 2011, www.freedictionary.com).

3.1.5.2 Membership, Transmission, and Training

Gnawa life has attracted a number of young local Moroccans who love the music and the potential opportunities it offers (national festivals, tours abroad). Some of them, however, may not subscribe to Gnawa ideology or practices or identify with Gnawa ways, which may account for the change of attitude remarked on by the Gania masters with regard to loyalty, respect, and seriousness. Unlike non-Gnawa women who become involved in Gnawa rituals due to an election by the mluk and have no monetary gain, membership into the music ensemble opens a new world of possibilities. No initiation or test of *tagnawit* is required to be an accompanying musician; the only criteria are familiarity with the repertoire, musical and dance skills, and the male gender. In Essaouira today, music ensembles comprise as many family members as hired musicians, the latter often free-lancers whose loyalty and identity are uncertain (cf. Jones 1977:28). Kapchan explains:

The entry of the Gnawa onto the world music scene and the accompanying commoditization of the Gnawa ‘sound,’ has both weakened the local traditions (which perform healing and social cohesion but are not very lucrative) and strengthened international recognition, aligning and codifying a musical style with a Morocco-African identity in the process. Young Gnawa now have their sights set on record companies and international tours rather than on healing the possessed in their local neighborhoods. The effervescence of the local ceremonies has not disappeared, however; rather it has been transferred to the global stage. Ironically, the very musical groups whose members have no *tagnawit* are those for whom the discourse of spirit possession, and trance, become most salient. They have learned that “the sacred” sells. (Kapchan 2008:56)

Transmission, learning, and training have changed significantly in the last two decades since the advent of digital technology, the secularization of Gnawa music, and the decline in sacred lila-s. The nature of public performances and absence of copyright laws in

Morocco allows anyone with a video camera, audio recorder, or cell phone to copy the renditions of songs for themselves, upload them on the internet, or even re-produce them for sale at the local music store. This has rendered learning Gnawa music highly accessible, enabling anyone to learn the music and individual styles without the obligations previously required as an apprentice or the necessity of entry into a master-disciple relationship.²³

Gnawa and non-Gnawa pay homage to the “cassette” (personal communication, M. Gania, M. Outanine, 2007). Moqaddema Zaida’s son, Youssef, combines the two: participating in lila-s and listening to recordings of other great m’allem-s, the latter replacing the distances once travelled by M’allem Abdallah and his brothers to learn regional styles, no longer affordable by some.

Traditionally, there were no rehearsals because the abundance of lila-s served this purpose and the closeness of the family brought a unified spiritual energy. In spite of the decline in ritual activity and engagement of non-family members, the groups remain rather informal and unstructured. Carried over from traditional practices, new members are not required to rehearse for lila-s though “some don’t know the music well, and don’t know how to listen to the guembri” (personal communication, A. Gania and M. Outanine, 2009).

Collaborative projects with international artists, however, have created a need for rehearsals. This may require a few hours of rehearsal before the show (Figure 3.9), or consist of a one- or two-week long “residence.” In 2009, a Gnawa group lived in residence for two weeks in Germany working on the first ever collaboration with a classical music ensemble.

²³ The accessibility of digital technology has led to the filming of sacred lila-s. In some cases these are done without the permission of the Gnawa, while in others Gnawa may hire someone to render a DVD of their ceremony. As much as possible, the Gnawa make their own recordings in order to minimize the risk of appropriation and publicizing their private rituals without their permission and knowledge.



Figure 3.9 M'alleme Mahmoud and group members rehearsing for their collaborative performance at the 2001 *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

Despite these recent changes, the number of Gnawa m'alleme-s is on the rise (and, naturally, a demand for accompanying musicians). A consequence of the popularity and accessibility of Gnawa music has been the self-proclaimed m'alleme. Official statistics on the number of m'alleme-s are not available, however, Si Mohammed expressed his belief in an excess, particularly, of unworthy ones. “There are 2000 m'alleme-s in Essaouira” (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2007). “How do you know?” I asked. “There are a lot... many of them don't know anything, they do whatever” (ibid.). Furthermore, with the inception of the Young Gnawa Talents Festival in 2005, the initiation ceremony of the gaça has all but disappeared, replaced by a secular event that selects the number one “m'alleme” of the year and judges the aspiring “m'alleme” according to musical criteria alone. While musical competence and knowledge of the repertoire are essential, the title of m'alleme should only be granted to those who attain ritual mastery—the true test of which requires doing a lila before

the Gnawa elders (see previous section). Kapchan stresses the importance of being given the title of *m'alle*m by the community:

Until recently, Gnawa musicians underwent an apprenticeship, often from father to son. The title of *m'alle*m was conferred, not appropriated, and demanded a deep and time-consuming study of both the spirit realm and music... Today there are many people who call themselves Gnawa who do *not* have *tagnawit* [(literally Gnawa-ness), a qualifier that denotes an advanced stage of ritual mastery]. They learn the music (often through apprenticeship) but do not learn the secrets of the spirit realm. (Kapchan 2008:55-56)

Lacking a corpus of knowledge that cannot be digitally acquired, and never having sponsored and performed a *lila* before the Gnawa masters, such musicians deserve recognition as talented *guembri* players with good voices but do not warrant the prominent, and these days, popularized, socially elevated and potentially economically promising status of a Gnawa *m'alle*m identity (personal communication, Gania masters, M. Outanine, 2006-2009). The liberal use of the term has created a need to distinguish between those who are authentic and those who are not. In a number of conversations, the adjective “true” was used to modify the terms Gnawa or *m'alle*m.²⁴

3.2 Social Context of *Gnawa* and Their Music in Morocco

I once met a Congolese filmmaker named Balufu Bakupo Kanyinda who insisted that the Gnawa story is the most important story in Africa to have been revealed to the rest of the world in the twentieth century... “the story of

²⁴ Debates among the Gnawa continue over the matter of authenticity. Kapchan tells of her experience when she asked about Hassan Hakmoun, “a Gnawi that had migrated to the United States” (2007:138). Someone in the room said, “‘He’s not a [true] Gnawi... he doesn’t have Gnawa-ness’ or, more aptly, he’s not authentic Gnawa. Hakmoun left Morocco as a young adolescent, knowing the repertoire of the Gnawa, but not having attained the status of *m'alle*m” (ibid. 139).

the Gnawa migration to Morocco proves that black institutions, black civilizations were so powerful that even if we were taken away from our homeland, taken away as slaves, we created new civilizations.” (Weston 2010:172)²⁵

Like other diasporic civilizations, the Gnawa ancestors met with disapproval from their new host communities and were marginalized. When Weston first went to Morocco in the 1960s “the Gnawa were viewed as street beggars, undesirables. Some Moroccans initially tried to discourage me from having anything to do with Gnawa” (2010:172). Majdouli, a Moroccan anthropologist born in Casablanca and raised in a middle-class family who followed Islamic precepts, says: “In spite of their allegiance to Allah and Mohammed, [the Gnawa] community always lived at the margins of a dominant socio-religious system. Their history, ritual activities and members inspired fear and sometimes contempt [...] the word ‘Gnawa’ alone made one shiver” (2007:12, 22). It was taboo to utter the word Gnawa, let alone play their music. Similarly, African historian El Hamel writes, “Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist, in her book on the Moroccan harem during the 1940s, reported that Moroccan nationalists looked down on these trance rituals and considered them to be un-Islamic” (2008:252). In essence, “the rituals of animal sacrifice, spirit possession and mystical trances... were considered heretical and a deviation from the *Sunna* (the right path of the Prophet Muhammed) and therefore dismissed” (ibid.). While Gnawa music has become mainstream and the social status of Gnawa somewhat elevated among Moroccan society at large, Gnawa ritual practices remain at the margins and are carefully guarded and preserved by the culture bearers. The following section investigates the social context of Gnawa and their music in Morocco.

²⁵ Randy Weston (jazz pianist/composer) settled in Morocco between 1967 and 1972. His autobiography includes a chapter dedicated to his encounters with the Gnawa (2010:171-182).

3.2.1 Origins: Real, Imagined, and Constructed

As discussed in the introduction, a number of etymological theories exist for the term Gnawa; however, as El Hamel writes, “all these meanings have one thing in common: a dark coloring” (2008:246). The history of Gnawa as a people, religious order, or musical style is obscure. Aside from the consistent findings in the field and in discourse that the Moroccan Gnawa likely originated with the sub-Saharan slaves, there is no evidence of precisely where they came, when, how, and why they came together. Unlike the Santería and Candomblé who can trace their ancestry to the Yoruba people based on their ritual and musical practices and the large numbers that were taken during the slave trades (Parker and Rathbone 2007), the origins of the Gnawa cannot be traced to a major source. Although Pâques writes that “[t]he Gnawa order is found, with identical beliefs and rituals, throughout northern Africa, from the Mediterranean to Timbuktu, from Libya to Chad and the Sudan” (1978:320), there is no single source with which they identify—cultural or language group, musically or historically.

Firstly, the names of different sub-Saharan groups heard in song, such as Bambara, Fulbé, and Hausa,²⁶ convey a multi-ethnic union at some point in history, and the “thin metal plate with rings” (Host 1781 in Charry 1996:22) inserted at the end of the guembri neck is “consistent with a widespread [sub-Saharan] African practice rooted in an aesthetic that values a buzzing or jingling sound” (Charry 1996:5). Specific correlations to particular ethnic groups and practices have also been made. For example, Brunel (1988:181) in the

²⁶ Fuson explains, “For the Gnawa, these three ethnic groups, whose homelands stretch across Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, fall under the category of the ‘Sudanese’” (2009:282). El Hamel includes the Soninke as well (2008:247).

1920s heard songs in the Bambara language,²⁷ and Bowles in the 1930s observed the majority of Gnawa speaking Bambara.²⁸ Furthermore, a repertoire of the Gnawa lila is titled *Ulad Bambara* (Sons of Bambara). The Gnawa's affiliation with Bilal echoes that of the thirteenth century Manding founders of the Mali empire who claimed descent from Bilal "in order to legitimize their power in Islamic terms" (El Hamel 2008:251). Of all *griot* lutes, the size and morphology of the guembri most resembles the Bambara *ngoni*.²⁹ African and Moroccan scholars, however, also draw linguistic, geographic, and ethnic associations of the term guembri with the *gambare* (lute) of the Soninke griots.³⁰ Hale (1997), a scholar of African literature, on the other hand, makes a connection between the words Gnawa and griot and their populations.³¹ While a strong influence by the larger Mandé group to which Bambara, Soninke, and Mandinka are related may be acknowledged, it remains uncertain whether one was predominant.

²⁷ René Brunel was in Morocco studying the 'Aissawa in the 1920s. During that time he also observed Gnawa rituals that resembled those performed today (El Hamel 2008).

²⁸ Bambara was a term used to refer to slaves belonging to local sub-Saharan elites and the French in the eighteenth century. The usage implies two things: that the slaves were mostly Bambara, or that regardless of ethnicity, culture, or language they were grouped under a general term. According to Bathily, "the slaves in the provenance of Galam [Senegal] were presented as being all of the *Bambara race* or *Bambara nation*. In truth, these slaves were captured in all the countries of Upper-Senegal-Niger [...] historical studies on the Bambara... remain insufficient" (1989:264, 319).

²⁹ *Griot* or *jeli* refers to master musicians, praise singers, and storytellers who are also cultural guardians of an oral tradition. Similarities between the guembri and Bambara *ngoni* become evident when comparing photos and descriptions of other griot lutes. Charry notes that a drawing of the shape of the guembri by Host in 1781 "resembles the large Bambara *ngnoni*, rather than the modern day rectangular box" (Charry 1996:22).

³⁰ Charry writes: "It seems reasonably clear that there is a linguistic relationship between the terms *ginbri*... which denotes the North African Gnawa lute, and *gambare*, the lute of Soninke griots that may date back to the time of ancient Ghana [9th–13th century CE]. The possibility that the North African Gnawa term *ginbri* comes from the West African Soninke term *gambare* is quite plausible, particularly given the ancient associations that the *gambare* has, and the probable Soninke origin of at least some of the North African Gnawa" (1996:13–14).

³¹ According to Hale, "The word *agenaou*, so deeply imbedded in the intertwined cultures of the North West African region, was most likely a step in the process of linguistic change that began with *ghana* and went on to *gnawa*, *agenaou*, *guinea*, and *guirot* to produce *griot*" (1997:258).

Secondly, in contrast to the Atlantic slave trade, “far less is known about [the ‘Muslim’ trade]” (Parker and Rathbone 2007:78), which brought captives across the Sahara to North Africa, as well as over the Red Sea to the Middle East and from the East African coast across the Indian Ocean.³² El Hamel (2008) writes “one finds a reluctance to discuss issues of slavery and race in Morocco as a result of Islamic pride about the absence of prejudice and outright oppression in Islam” (2008:242). He also says that “the obscurity involving the history of the blacks in Morocco is mainly a consequence of the increased number of slaves imported from West Africa especially at the end of the sixteenth century, when purchased slaves and captives of war from areas of Europe started to decline” (ibid.:247). Historical accounts and Gnawa discourse generally agree that a large number of people from the ancient African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay—the northern part of present day West Africa³³—were brought as slaves to Morocco between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries, but give few details with respect to ethnicity, language, or culture. Instead, they were grouped together under a single geographical or physical term: “Janawa (or Kanawa...) [which] designated the land of the ‘blacks’, whose capital was Ghana” (El Hamel 2008:246), or “Janawi or Kanawi (i.e., ‘Gnawi’)... a generic term to designate a

³² Despite the dearth of research on the trans-Saharan trade, Parker and Rathbone write: “Yet historians estimate that over more than 1000 years, these combined trades may have involved a similar number of victims: perhaps another 12 million Africans. The ‘Muslim’ trades differed from the Atlantic trade in one important respect: whereas the victims of the latter were bound overwhelmingly for productive labor in the plantations and mines of the Americas, most victims of the former were destined for some form of domestic servitude, including concubinage. Twice as many African men as women were therefore transported across the Atlantic, whereas it is estimated that twice as many women as men were carried to the Muslim world” (2007:78–79).

³³ The Ghana Empire (c. 830–1235) occupied present day South-Eastern Mauritania and North-Western Mali. The Mali Empire (c. 1230–1600) included an extensive geographical area extending from present day Senegal to the Western edge of Niger, South Mali including the Southern edge of Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea, and parts of Burkina Faso. One of the largest African-Islamic empires, Songhay (c. 1340–1591) covered most of present day Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, and the northern edges of Benin and Nigeria.

‘black’ from West Africa” (ibid.:248).³⁴

Despite the “interdependent or clientele relationships with [indigenous] blacks” (2008:244) in the south of present-day Morocco since antiquity, El Hamel writes that “no sources... indicate that the Gnawa were indigenous blacks of the south of Morocco” (ibid.). This is further affirmed by their songs that tell of their forced displacement:³⁵

They brought us from Sudan [West Africa]³⁶
The nobles of this country brought us
They brought us to serve them
They brought us to bow to them
They brought us
Oh there is no God but God [Islamic profession of faith]
We believe in God’s justice.³⁷

Furthermore, as early as the twelfth century an Islamic legal scholar “wrote a legal document in the form of a model contract of manumission of an enslaved person: ‘A person so and so manumitted his slave so and so al-Janawi [i.e., Gnawi]’” (El Hamel 2008:246). Because the indigenous blacks, referred to as *haratin*,³⁸ were considered “culturally and historically

³⁴ Janawa (or Jnawa) and Kanawa (or Knawa) were used interchangeably as transliterations of Gnawa because the hard ‘g’ does not exist in Arabic. El Hamel notes that “the oldest evidence that indicates the origin of the term ‘Gnawa’ comes from the Arab historian az-Zuhri, who wrote in the 1140s” (2008:246).

³⁵ Meyers (1977) suggests that it is possible that some of these indigenous “free” blacks may have had a part in forging the Gnawa identity as it is known today, particularly those who were recruited as soldiers for the sultan’s army.

³⁶ Sudan is referred to in the text of many Gnawa songs. It refers to the region known today as West Africa.

³⁷ Translation from al-Asiri in El Hamel (2008:256).

³⁸ According to Meyers, the Haratin were “bound to free patrons [rather than masters] because of their social and political vulnerability and their economic need” (1977:435-36). *Haratin* is the plural form; *hartani* the masculine singular, and *hartaniyya* the feminine singular. “The etymology of the word Hartani, the singular of Haratin, is obscure, but a Moroccan source suggests that it derives from the two Arabic words *al-Hurr* (‘free man’) and *al-Thani* (‘second’). Thus, a Hartani is a second-class free man” (ibid.:436 [fn.34]). Similarly, El Hamel writes: “Some scholars argue that some of the indigenous blacks of the south of Morocco were referred to as ‘Haratin’, a sedentary agricultural group who inhabited the region, but these blacks are culturally and historically distinct from the Gnawa” (2008:244-45). El Hamel contends that “Haratin” is “a problematic term that encompasses

distinct from Gnawa” (El Hamel 2008:245) and legally free, the twelfth century reference to an enslaved Gnawi implies a person of “dark coloring” with sub-Saharan origins.

In nineteenth and early twentieth century writings observations were already being made that identified Gnawa as “usually, but not always, blacks from the Sudan” (Westermarck 1899:258). It should also be kept in mind that female domestic slaves from sub-Saharan Africa served as concubines to their fair-skinned masters for many centuries and gave birth to a population with blended ethnicity and skin color. In any case, according to Pâques, “the Gnawa form a religious order which does not include only blacks, or even only former slaves, but also adepts from the white race—Arabs, Berbers, Jews—who all call themselves ‘sons of Sidna Bilal,’ ... Because of this, every Gnawa considers himself a slave and a black, no matter what his ethnic and social origins may be” (1978:319–20).

Despite the dearth of resources on Gnawa history, assembling fragments of written and oral discourses suggests that Gnawa as a people, religious order, and musical genre was born in Morocco from an amalgamation of the peoples and cultures originating in the south of the Sahara.³⁹ Lesage singles out the circumstances of sixteenth century Morocco as being significant to the emergence of what would become Gnawa society. “[A] degradation of the economic and social situation... this crisis situation... [led to] a popular revival of religiosity... [and] the appearance of a new social hierarchy with the noble lineage, that of the chorfa, at the top and the slaves—the large majority of whom were Blacks brought by traders via the Sahara—at the bottom of the scale. It is likely the first relations between the

different meanings or categories such as free blacks and freed ex-slaves; their common trait, however, was freedom” (2010:90 [fn.3]).

³⁹ In casual conversations with Moroccan friends and strangers in Fez, Asilah, Rabat, Marrakech, and Essaouira, the term Gnawa always vaguely referenced Africa and (trance) music, and more specifically, the guembri, qraqab, and the annual festival in Essaouira. See Pâques 1991, Goodman-Singh 2002, Kapchan 2007, El Hamel 2008, and Fuson 2009, among others.

small black slave communities would be established in these precise historic circumstances which would give birth to the Gnawa brotherhood” (1999:47).

A family friend of the Gantias once said matter-of-factly, “The Gnawa are people from Senegal, Guinea, Mali, different places in Africa.”⁴⁰ They came together to form a society. They are the Gnawa” (personal communication, ‘Aisha, 2009). In a casual dinner conversation with Si Mohammed, he correlated the sonic texture of the qraqab to the chained slaves crossing the Sahara (personal communication, 2009). The Gania masters with whom I work have a sub-Saharan ancestry. Their paternal and maternal grandparents were brought from Mali or Guinea, and Senegal, respectively (personal communication, Gania family, 2006–2009). Their father “M’allem... Boubker Gania... was himself a son of an enslaved father in Essaouira. His father (although Muslim) was kidnapped from Mali or Guinea, taken to the Sahara and then sold as a slave in Morocco” (El Hamel 2008:256-57). M’allem Abdallah told me that his paternal grandfather was originally from Mali (personal communication, 2009). Moqaddema Zaida said her maternal grandfather was a healer from Senegal who was brought to Morocco to work in the French army. He possessed a power to heal by writing on the ground and was noted for his baraka. Although I have tried to learn more about the history of the Gantias, having no lived experience and memory of events, the masters recall little beyond brief and vague descriptions. For the Gania masters, Gnawa (the people and practices) have always existed. They are second generation sub-Saharan born in Morocco, and following in the footsteps of their parents, continue the culture with which they were raised.

⁴⁰ General reference to Africa by Moroccans normally signifies sub-Saharan Africa.

3.2.2 Efficacious Healers

Because of their connection with the supernatural entities, Gnawa are seen as efficacious healers, albeit marginalized—non-Gnawa call on the Gnawa as a last resort, driven by desperation after the tragedy of successive failures of other orthodox therapies such as those administered by doctors or *fqih*-s (expert in the Quran who may serve as exorcist and healer). This is a therapeutic itinerary Hell considers typical of patients for a number of societies who call on the extraordinary intervention of a shaman or possessed out of necessity (1999:167); that is, if the afflicting spirit does not leave or returns to torment the human host after a more orthodox therapy. A Moroccan man told me a story that affirms the hesitation to seek the assistance of the Gnawa: “My sister came home from school one day and was struck by a *jinn* [spirit]. She went to see the *fqih*... who was able to help her get rid of the spirit... The problem was solved so there was no need to call on the Gnawa” (personal communication, Khalid, 2009). Hell says, “For the [non-Gnawa] Muslim, to go to the Gnawa crosses a barrier: the fear of transgression, of having to establish a lasting connection with unpredictable spirits, humiliation of having to mix with the *haratin* (freed black slaves)” (1999:167).⁴¹

According to Kapchan, healing ceremonies are not unique to the Gnawa:

[T]he practice of Islam in Morocco is very Sufi-influenced, which means that they are used to devotion through chanting, through movement, through ecstatic forms of worship. This is not foreign to Moroccan society in general. It’s not just the Gnawa. Invoking the Prophet Muhammed and asking for forgiveness and healing is common to all or most Sufi groups in Morocco, including the Gnawa, so while the Gnawa are not Sufis per se, they are Sufi influenced. (in Byre 2009)

⁴¹ Unlike El Hamel and Meyers, Hell uses *haratin* to signify freed Gnawa.

The Gnawa concept of adoricism differs from the tenets of Islam. In Islam, “spirit possession is perceived as a harmful irruption” (Hell 1999:35), so the ill-stricken non-Gnawa Muslim seeks exorcism. Gnawa practice spirit accommodation, however, because they regard spirit possession as potentially beneficial to the initiate. According to Heusch (1962), the two ways in which possession is treated represent diametrically opposed concepts. Instead of expulsion, Gnawa placate spirits with a temporary ritual possession or over a longer period of time, cultivating a symbiotic relationship with the spirits which inhabit them (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2006–2009). Gnawa perform exorcism if absolutely required,⁴² but rather than being “experts in expelling *jnūn* from persons who are troubled with them” (Westermarck 1926:379) as described in earlier writings,⁴³ they are masters in “working the spirits” (Kapchan 2007:39) and able to “serve others in the capacity of an adept” (ibid.). Moqaddema Zaida told me, “There is exorcism but I don’t do it. My mother was powerful and she would do it when necessary. My father would play the guembri but he didn’t like participating in these ceremonies. I am not as strong as my mother. She was great. I am afraid” (personal communication, 2009). While the Gnawa may perform exorcism, the very nature and function of their ritual activities—for example, commensality (with the spirits) following animal sacrifice—suggests that “The curative principle is... not to expel the spirits but, unlike the goal of exorcism, to restore harmony through their presence” (Hell 1999:286). “For the ignoramus the Gnawa are exorcists, ‘hunters of devils’; for the initiates, alliance with these same entities represents the true finality of their rituals” (Hell 2002:118).

⁴² Exorcism may be called for by the Gnawa for inflicting *jnun* who do not belong to the Gnawa pantheon and “resist” propitiation (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2007).

⁴³ Brunel said, “The Gnawa are experts in exorcism” (1988[1926]:186).

3.2.3 A Marginalized Practice: Contrasts with Sufi and Other Trance Rituals

Gnawa share Muslim beliefs and the use of music and movement in ritual practices with Sufi orders in general;⁴⁴ however, absence of a lineage that traces back to the Prophet, a founding saint, or shaykh,⁴⁵ and their fundamental concept for musical practice set them apart from the brotherhoods. This and other reasons partially explain their social marginalization. The origins of Sufi orders are made explicit, usually through a named founding father (generally the name of the order), his birthplace, the date of inception, and a written hagiography. Furthermore, Sufi practitioners participate in an annual celebration (*mussem*) that entails ritual visits to their saint's tomb, those affiliated with him, and holy sites nearby. For example, it is known that the 'Aissawa brotherhood was founded in the sixteenth century by Sidi ben 'Aissa, a Sufi adept from Meknes, and the Hamadsha brotherhood was founded in the eighteenth century by two Moroccan saints near the city of Meknes, Sidi 'Ali ben Hamdush and [his servant] Sidi Ahmed Dghughi.⁴⁶ The Gnawa, on

⁴⁴ According to Nasser, among the goals of Sufism is to "lead man from the world of form to the world of the spirit" (1972:66). For more discussion on Sufi practices, see Westermarck (1926), Crapanzano (1973), Jones (1977), and Qureshi (1995). For introductory readings Jones (1977) recommends Anwari and Gardet (1961), Arberry (1950), and Trimmingham (1971).

⁴⁵ Although Kapchan says, "It is important to say that the Gnawa are not Sufis in the sense that they don't have a shaykh, and they don't have a hagiography, writings left by that shaykh" (in Byre 2009), when I asked Moqaddema Zaida whether the Gnawa are Sufi, she responded: "Yes, we are Sufi." "I've read that you're not Sufi," I said. She asserted, "Gnawa is Sufi. It's the same thing" (personal communication, Z.Gania, 2007). Fuson suggests that some Gnawa musicians, knowing that Sufism is "a world music buzzword... will tell you they play Sufi music" (2009:16). Though this could be the case with Moqaddema Zaida, her response seemed genuine as the word "Sufi" never came up until I asked. Moreover, it was my second research trip and she knew there was no need to sell Gnawa to me.

⁴⁶ The Hamadsha brotherhood "traces its spiritual heritage back to two Moroccan saints of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Sidi 'Ali ben Hamdush and [his servant] Sidi Ahmed Dghughi... buried and venerated [near] the city of Meknes... Sidi 'Ali... in ... the wealthy city village of Beni Rachid, and Sidi Ahmed... in the much poorer village of Beni Ouarad" (Crapanzano 1973:1, 3). See Jones 1977 and Crapanzano 1973 for detailed information on the 'Aissawa and Hamadsha brotherhoods.

the other hand, “[have no] writings, not even any oral hagiography that is passed on from generation to generation... of all the mystic cults in Morocco that employ trance... the Gnawa are the least understood” (Kapchan 2002:n.pag.). Perhaps as Bourdieu says: “[in] non-literate societies [...] inherited knowledge can only survive in the incorporated state” (1990:73).⁴⁷

The Gnawa settle the matter of genealogical absence by claiming descent from Bilal. Not only was he the first sub-Saharan convert to Islam and an emancipated slave, he was among the first Muslims (Dermenghem 1953). Gnawa discourse reiterates that in addition to being the first caller to prayer, Bilal was the Prophet’s “word, his spittle” (Pâques 1978:326),⁴⁸ and one of his closest companions. His special relationship with the Prophet is said to have brought him baraka. In spite of their affiliation to Bilal, how or when the Gnawa community came into being remains unclear, only that it originated with the sub-Saharans in Morocco. The place of death and burial of Bilal is not known rendering it impossible to venerate the body of their patron saint with an annual visit. Instead, Gnawa visit the tombs of other “saint slaves... [such as that of] Sidi Mimun” (1991:60). Furthermore, Zaouia Sidna Bilal has been erected in the city of Essaouira in his honor. Though fewer in number today, Gnawa, joined by Hamadsha and ‘Aissawa groups, continue to partake in the mussem of Bilal during the month of Sha‘ban , “at the time when Bilal rises to the heavens and dies” (1978:326). A second canonical feast, Mulid (the Prophet’s anniversary), celebrates “the time when he comes back to earth” (ibid.). During this time the Gnawa near Marrakech, along

⁴⁷ Like the Gnawa, the Hamadsha also attract a large number of the illiterate population. According to Crapanzano, French scholars classify Hamadsha as a *confrérie populaire* (popular brotherhood), “a sort of degenerate form of the Sufi brotherhoods of the Muslim high tradition, corrupted by the base imagination of *le peuple*, by survivals from the ancient religions of the circum-Mediterranean culture area, and by pagan influences from sub-Saharan Africa” (Crapanzano 1973:1).

⁴⁸ See El Hamel (2008:250 [fn.49]) and Hell (2002), among other Gnawa scholars.

	SUFI PRACTICES	GNAWA PRACTICE
FUNCTION	nearness to Allah mystical union with Allah	attract, invoke, interact with mluk
TRANCE TYPE	ecstatic	possession
MUSICAL ELEMENTS	vocal may be instrumental	vocal instrumental

Figure 3.10 Sufi and Gnawa practices. Contrasts between function, type of trance and musical elements.

with ‘Aissawa and Hamadsha, make ritual visits to three holy sites in the Marrakech area,⁴⁹ two of which are associated with the shrines of the Hamadsha and ‘Aissawa.⁵⁰

Music, while a shared element in Gnawa and many Sufi practices, also serves as a point of distinction with respect to its function, the type of trance it engenders, and the musical material (Figure 3.10). Sufi and Sufi-influenced rituals are based on the concept of *sama‘* (literally “listening”) that functions to connect man to God offering “the possibility of relief through music and trance” (Fuson 2009:293).⁵¹ It consists of the reiteration of Islamic verses, continual reference to Allah and the Prophet, and the singing of poetic texts.

Depending on the listener’s spiritual capacity, emotional arousal, and God’s will, the participant may reach a nearness to and eventually mystical union with Allah “exteriorized

⁴⁹ Pâques describes the symbolic images of the three holy sites found on the Atlas mountain range in the South of Marrakech: “Sidi Fars, an image of the foreskin (the head of the male organ), a shrine of the Hamača [Hamadsha] order; Mulay Brahim, an image of the body (and thus of the sex organ), a shrine of the ‘Aissawa; and finally, in the plains, the Tamesloth boulder, an image of the tree root and a shrine of the Gnawa” (1978:323–24).

⁵⁰ In 2009, I accompanied Moqaddema Zaida and her family to visit the holy sites of Mulay Brahim and Mulay Abdallah ben Hsein (Mulay Brahim’s grandfather) during Mulid. We did not visit the Hamadsha shrine, but looking at Sidi Fars from Mulay Brahim’s shrine, Moqaddema Zaida spoke of how she used to accompany her father and other Gnawa to the top of the mountain.

⁵¹ *Sama‘* literally means listening or audition. In Sufism, *sama‘* refers to the listening of spiritual music. Becker’s idea of emotional arousal made possible by deep listeners of music derives from an age-old concept believed by Sufis who for centuries have practised a ceremony called *sama‘* that is “focussed on the listener... and on his spiritual capacity for receiving what he hears, including all the implications of an ecstatic response” (Qureshi 1995:82).

by means of dance” (Rouget 1985:270). Music in such rituals mediates a voyage that brings devotees towards Allah; in essence, a journey whose destination can only be attained by few, and approached through careful listening and the ability to decipher Sufi poetry.

The Gnawa, like their Sufi siblings, repeatedly chant and recollect God’s name throughout the lila, invoke the protection and forgiveness of the Prophet Mohammed, and venerate Islamic saints; however, they also believe in the power and influence of supernatural entities and have a repertoire dedicated to them (Chapter 2). Music, rather than used to approach Allah, functions to invoke, attract, and interact with the mluk. While listening is fundamental to the lila, other sensory stimulants and symbols, such as colors and fragrances, complement sound. The immersion and intoxication of the senses sends adepts (and even unseasoned participants) adrift on a veritable lake of illusions fully preparing them for possession trance. Furthermore, Gnawa believe the appropriate combination of these elements constitutes an offering that propitiates and pleases the spirit who responds by presenting itself in human form during the lila. As its name suggests, possession trance, unlike ecstatic trance, involves ownership. Music mediates a voyage between supernatural and temporal realms. It functions as a pathway through which humans can communicate and interact with the unseen, and through which the unseen communicates their presence in bodily manifestation—dancing, displaying gestures characteristic of their respective personalities (Chapter 6), or speaking through the possessed. In essence, music engenders a visit from another realm that involves interaction and incorporation through deep listening and the ability to decode musical events, primarily instrumental ones.

According to Kapchan, Gnawa are “a *ta’ifa* (a community) rather than a *tariqa* (Sufi path)” (2008:55 [fn.1]), though they share elements of Sufi practices.⁵² Within the ritual frame, music serves as an offering fundamental to achieving the goals of the Gnawa lila mentioned in Chapter 2 by venerating Allah and His messenger, the Prophet Mohammed, and by invoking the *mluk*. Music in Sufi rituals facilitates a mystical union with Allah and enacts the distinction between the Creator (Allah) and the created (man), not to mention a social hierarchy based on lineage (Qureshi 1995). Sufi practitioners believe in the existence of supernatural entities, but not in an alliance. “They don’t want to traffic with the spirits. It’s a dangerous place to be. The Gnawa, they are specialists in the spirit world... the realm in which they live” (Kapchan in Byre 2009).⁵³

Although enacting their connection and relationship with supernatural entities through music distinguishes the Gnawa from Sufi practitioners, and aligns them more closely with sub-Saharan cultures and their diaspora, the way in which music accomplishes its goal bears some resemblance. Music is essential for inciting movement in order to facilitate trance in both Gnawa and Sufi ceremonies; however, the material (i.e., the signifying facet) differs. Having no written tradition, the lila contrasts with the poetically-inspired texts heard in the *sama’*. Unlike Sufi rituals, some of which have purely vocal music,⁵⁴ the abstract sound of instruments is meaningful and has primacy in the lila. Sufi music communicates with the human world (Figure 3.11) such that the *sama’* is focused on the practitioner, on his capacity to listen deeply and decipher the text in order to effectuate trance. The lila, on the other hand,

⁵² Pâques (1991) and Hell (2002), on the other hand, consider the Gnawa as a brotherhood and hence Sufis.

⁵³ For a discussion of differences between Gnawa and other Moroccan groups with respect to the status of ritual actors, performance roles, and sonic and kinaesthetic textures, see Fuson (2009).

⁵⁴ I attended some of these during the *Fes Sacred Music Festival* in 2006. Qureshi writes: “[Sufi] orders with a more orthodox orientation... prohibit[s] [the] use [of music] altogether or compromise by permitting mystical songs unaccompanied by instruments” (1995:82).

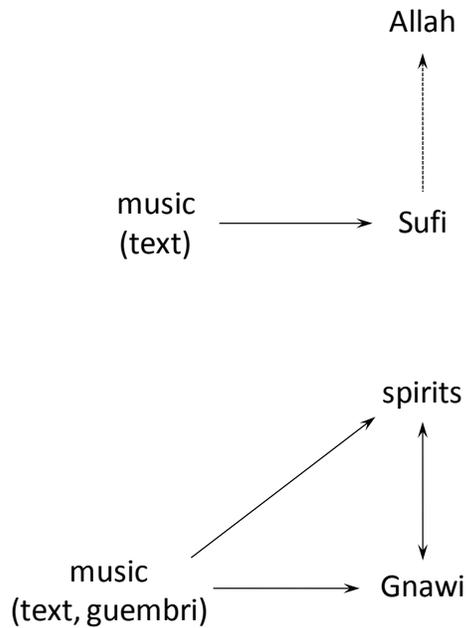


Figure 3.11 Communicative goal of music in Sufi and Gnawa practices.

is centered on the mluk, therefore communication with the mluk is the fundamental purpose of musical practice. During the ritual, singing always stops as moments intensify giving way to the guembri. This has also been observed in Candomblé rituals: “Once [the initiates] reached possession, the singing often ceased. Only the vibrant sounds of the atabaques [drums] and agogô rhythms continued” (Henry 2008:68). Perhaps, as Daniel writes, “some gestures and movement sequences signal a literal meaning, but more often the social circumstances of performers have created a deep reliance on the abstracted expressiveness of the dancing body and on nonverbal communication procedures” (2005:63). Parallels seem to exist with the practice of syncretic religions in Africa and the Americas in which the abstract medium of music accommodates the majority.

The vocal section of Gnawa music, like in the sama‘, is directed toward the practitioner as well as the supernatural entities, though it functions in a different way.

According to Pâques (1991), “[the songs of the derdeba] are never clear and explicit. Allusion is the rule. It relies on a play on words or the exclusive choice of the initial word of a verse, the other words having no importance. The effect on the listener is everything but discourse: he receives a series of small shocks that arouse his attention and provoke a symbolic puzzle that causes him to fall [into trance]” (1991:81). Coded like the guembri motives, these puzzles may only be deciphered by initiates.⁵⁵ Perhaps in the case of African words, the familiarity of the “vocables” and knowledge of their origins work to trigger an emotional response, even though their meanings have been forgotten today (personal communication, Gania family, 2006–2009).⁵⁶ Conversely, the clear and frequent reiteration of the spirit’s name functions to explicitly communicate the identity of the supernatural entity being invoked at any given moment of the lila. Participants moved by the utterance of their melk’s name get up to dance. The power attached to a name alone is affirmed in *zīkr*, “the rhythmic repetition of God’s name or a short phrase in his praise” (Qureshi 1995:246).

In possession rituals, patterned sounds accommodate the presence of its guests using both the textual language of humans and instrumental language of spirits. While instrumental music is significant to possession trance, all these rituals begin with song, which leads to dance and then to possession. Euba writes that the Yoruba priest in Nigeria, “in order to initiate dancing... did not address the drummers (who would eventually play a major role in

⁵⁵ In my experience with Si Mohammed, a Gnawi who has played qraqab and sung for the Gania for most of his life, it was a challenge for him to transcribe the words for performances, particularly those that were not amplified, which is usual for lila-s. This was partly due to the understated and low volume of the solo voice after the initial word of the phrase, the overlapping of the choral part at the end of a phrase and the overpowering sonority of multiple pairs of qraqab. Si Mohammed conveyed that it is not always clear what the Gania masters are saying and that even when it is, what is being said may not be understood because it is codified and/or African.

⁵⁶ A loss of meaning in certain words has also been noted by practitioners of Candomblé: “although many... are able to sing or speak some phrases in Yoruba, many are not able to give a literal translation of song lyrics... simply aware of symbolic and liturgical contexts of the specific texts and phrases as they relate to a particular orixá or musical repertoire” (Henry 2008:68).

the dance [during trance]) but rather requested a song from the chanter... song may be regarded as being synonymous with dance or at least something that automatically leads to dance” (1988:13). Duration and complexity of the music increase when the spirit arrives and interacts with an experienced adept. A wordless conversation becomes observable between the gestures of the dancer and motives of the musician (Chapter 6).

In addition to the contrast in function, trance type, and signifying facet of Gnawa musical practice, perhaps the marginality of the Gnawa lila may be further explained by its aesthetic otherness, as described by Jankowsky with regard to the *Stambeli*:

The lyrics, which are sung mostly in dialectical Arabic, are nevertheless considered ‘ajmi (non-Arabic) due to the occasional appearance of words from sub-Saharan languages and the nasal, understated delivery of the lyrics, which, in contrast to the ideals of enunciation in Arabic music, is not explicitly concerned with the (human) listener’s comprehension of the words. *Stambeli* aesthetics are not common components of the Tunisian public sphere; they are not readily available, or even recognizable, to many Tunisians. They are radically other. (2010:4)

Some Moroccan Sufi orders have incorporated aspects of Gnawa into their own rituals. For example, the *hadra* (literally presence) ceremony of the Hamadsha “is divided into three principal parts: the hot part... the cold part... and the *hadra gnawiyya*, which uses the instruments of the cold part [nira or ganbri] but is derived from the ceremonies of the Gnawa” (Crapanzano 1973:192). There is also the ‘Aissawa’s use of ritual sacrifice to “contact the spirit world... a Sudanese... practice borrowed from the Gnawa” (Brunel 1988:11). The power of mortification rituals during the *hadra* ceremonies of these brotherhoods, however, is attributed to the presence of Allah rather than spirit possession as believed by the Gnawa. Although the lila lays bare the pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, and evinces the resilience of indigenous cultures, the frequent utterance of the names and epithets

of Allah and the Prophet throughout invocations of the mluk, as mentioned in Chapter 2, suggests that everything, including possession, happens under Allah's will, or at the very least under the protection of His almighty power. Still, as El Hamel writes, "the Gnawa receive little attention in Islamic scholarship, presumably because they are not a mystic order proper, as they do not seek the conventional personal union with the divine. Instead, their contact with the spirit world acts as an intermediary through which divine communion may be accomplished" (2008:255).

3.2.4 Secularization and Popularity

Sonic textures of the Gnawa began entering the Moroccan consciousness outside of the ritual sphere by the 1960s. In 1959 the Moroccan government initiated the National Festival of Popular Arts in order to "contribute to the conservation of the national heritage of oral traditions" (Festival National des Arts Populaires website). Much of this was motivated by a national interest to gain international recognition and to boost tourism by marketing culture through the arts. Cherqi explains that there was an incentive to "create popular groups... We must refer to the efforts made by the Ministry of Tourism in his action in favour to our national patrimony since it organizes annual festivals in order to make known our folklore and our human values... to make our characteristics appreciable to the other nations" (1981:27).⁵⁷ This optimistic tone resonates with Waitt's investigation of festival spaces as geographies of hope. "When conceptualized as spaces of hope [rather than spaces of helplessness], opportunities to regenerate the social life of local communities are still present,

⁵⁷ Reproduced from the original translation of the French text.

even when local municipal authorities deploy festivals as civic spectacle to attract mobile capital and affluent tourists. (2008:515–16).

During this period and the following decades, Gnawa tunes reached the western shores of the Atlantic in newly composed forms via visits by African-American artists such as Randy Weston and Jimi Hendrix (Ham et al. 2007; Kapchan 2007; Kirchgabner 2007; Weston 2010). In the 1970s, popular (*sha'bi*) folk music groups in Morocco such as Nass El-Ghiwan played tunes inspired by the Gnawa tradition using the guembri among other traditional instruments. In the 1980s the Moroccan playwright Tayyeb Seddiki, in collaboration with André Azoulay (counselor to the King) and the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism, organized the first world music festival in Essaouira that featured musics of the Gnawa and of other countries (Ross et al. 2002:39-40). A second Gnawa music session, “not called a ‘festival’” (ibid.:40), due to its small size, was organized in 1986 with the support of the President of the Municipal Council. Now over a decade after the inception of the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* in 1998, popularization, commercialization, and secularization of a once sacred and secret repertoire has been achieved.

My Gnawa friends recall the first festival in 1998 with fondness. Previously called the *Gnaoua Festival*, the locally organized event was an intimate gathering of Gnawa masters from various parts of Morocco. Its purpose was to celebrate the music tradition of the Gnawa and featured their performances alone (personal communication, Gania family, 2001).⁵⁸ In those days the masters drew from the pre-possession phase of the lila that

⁵⁸ Rather than being locally organized, El Hamel writes: “With... their appeal to tourists, the Moroccan government in 1997 established The Gnawa and World Music Festival in Essaouira” (2008:260). According to Kapchan, it was “The brain-child of several professionals, including Moroccan ethnopsychiatrist and scholar of the Gnawa, Abdelhafid Chlyeh, as well as Neïla Tazi, Jane Lovelace, Abdessallam Alikane, and Pascal Amel, the festival began with only the music of the Gnawa and a few European artists that had collaborated with them” (2008:59).

comprises the skilled dances performed by the music ensemble (Chapter 5). Music for possession dance was off-limits on stage and reserved for sacred occasions (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009).⁵⁹ The success of the first festival prompted the Essaouira-Mogador Association,⁶⁰ who was involved in its inauguration, to make it an annual event. Since then it has been contracted to a communication and event planning firm. In 2001, “and World Music” was added to the *Gnaoua Festival*. Ross et al. write that Gnawa m‘allem-s consider the first festival “the only ‘successful’ festival, and the only one they would call ‘Gnaoua’... those who came to listen were those they called ‘friends’ of the Brotherhood... who have an interest in and an understanding of Gnaoua culture... this first festival was the last time they were consulted and felt like they were included” (2002:41). For the Gania masters the first *Gnaoua Festival* was “different from the rest” (personal communication, 2006–2009). Since then the festival has grown dramatically and a social hierarchy has gradually developed, both elevating the status of Gnawa music and the Gnawa m‘allem, and simultaneously distancing him from the people (Figure 3.12).

Secularization of music traditions in the era of globalization is neither new nor unique to Gnawa. It is a common phenomenon and behavior adopted by religious cultures associated with music that has rendered a set of complex consequences both beneficial and deleterious to the culture in general and to music and music-making in particular. Among the Afro-

⁵⁹ In contrast, Kapchan describes: “In the first several years of the Gnawa festival, the ceremonies were performed in venues open to the public. The enactments included the public sacrifice of a sheep, as well as the burning of ritual incense to placate the spirits of the possessed” (2008:59).

⁶⁰ Essaouira-Mogador Association is a branch of the Association for the Preservation of the City of Essaouira. The association was initiated in the 1990s by prominent families in Essaouira. Membership includes people in government, university, and other professions who may still live in Essaouira, or who moved to other cities but have a vested interest in its success. Other branches are established in Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, and Agadir. André Azoulay (counsellor to the King) is an important member. He is considered “‘the locomotive, the engineer, and the strategist’ of the new developments in the city” (Ross et al. 2002:32), playing an influential role in the “recent tourism boom in Essaouira” (ibid.).



Figure 3.12 Sound check at Place Moulay Hassan during the 2009 *Gnaoua Festival*. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

Cuban Santería, the “regime [chose] to support selectively some of Cuba’s African-based religious traditions, legalizing certain practitioners and mainstreaming these religions and their adherents into the tourist trade” (Hagedorn 2001: 9).⁶¹ Majdouli says in her recent study of Gnawa musicians in domestic ceremonies and world music festivals that “the [Gnawa] festival was created to celebrate their musical tradition but has functioned like an operator of legitimacy. It is no longer a taboo to talk about the Gnawa like it was decades ago and the word ‘Gnawa’ has lost more and more of its negative attributes. [...] Gnawa music, in the context of international recognition, is no longer considered only as folklore in Morocco but has acquired a status of musical art” (2007:143). M’allem Mustapha Bakbou, among the most successful and respected Gnawa masters, expresses gratitude, “Thanks to the Gnaoua Festival, ‘tagnaouite’ has become an international music. It has been given a global value”

⁶¹ It should be noted that the Gnawa did not suffer the same fate of persecution as Santería practitioners in its early history “under the auspices of [Cuba’s] policy of scientific atheism” (Hagedorn 2001:9). The legitimatization of their music through the Gnawa festival, however, resembles the path of legalization, secularization, and popularization of Afro-Cuban Santería.

(A3 Communication 2007:17). Perhaps, as American anthropologist McKean observed of tourism in Bali in the 1970s, the secularization of Gnawa music has provided Gnawa “with an opportunity to preserve their social fabric while revitalizing their cultural traditions” (Picard 1990:38), or, in this case, legitimizing them.

Despite objectifying their music culture and reducing its holistic practice to a purely musical event, national and international festivals provide the Gnawa with new artistic and lucrative opportunities. Unlike the lila, whose remuneration is unclear and dependent on spiritual fulfillment, not to mention the financial position of the sponsor, the festival provides a contract to the m‘allem—his pay and work schedule are fixed. Furthermore, by situating them in the presence of other world artists and before a mixed crowd of national and international tourists including researchers, tour organizers, wealthy (non-Gnawa) locals, and producers, m‘allem-s are exposed to additional opportunities for work. The festival meets with approval from the Gania masters. In addition to playing in festivals and government affairs, and appearing on public television, the Gania family has travelled abroad to Japan, Canada, France, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, and Mali, to name just a few places. M‘allem Abdallah finds inspiration in African American artists (e.g., Jimi Hendrix and Bob Marley) and values the artistic exchange with other musicians during collaborative projects.

With new globescapes, Hell has noted progressive change with regard to the Gnawa’s fear of the mluk. He says that at the time of his initial investigations in the 1980s,⁶² it was “impossible to find an initiate susceptible to recite a chant or draw up the list of genies” (2002:346) for fear of invoking the sudden arrival of a genie that could bring insurmountable danger without the proper ritual barriers. In the 1990s, Gnawa ensembles

⁶² The year he began his initial investigations is not clear, though deduced from his monograph in which chapters are dated as journal entries, it is likely this was observed somewhere between the early 1980s and 1990s, when he held his first lila.

began performing in local festivals and touring abroad, initially playing pieces from the “entertainment” pre-possession portion of the lila, during which “genies are not provoked to possession among the participants” (ibid.) (see Chapter 5). By 1998, in contrast, “formidable genies [*mluk* from the possession portion] such as the first Blacks [the Mimun cohort] were invoked in a theatre in France” (ibid.), and by 2002 a compact disc featured “two invocations of Sebtinyin...⁶³ a step no initiate had ever dared to cross before... the ultimate barrier collapsed: Every genie, without exception, from now on could be invoked in a profane context” (ibid.:347). Hell refers to this as “the process of desecration” (ibid.:345). Kapchan conveys concern that “the ‘jadba beat,’ ... is being emptied of its ritual significance and its healing power in order to be circulated on the world music market” (2007:141). Similar to the Santería, “an inward-directed, noncommodified religious tradition becomes outward-directed, commodified, staged, and secularized” (Hagedorn 2001:9), “re-contextualized in order to satisfy more fully their new... function: the uplifting, informing, and dignifying entertainment of the... people” (ibid.:67).

An offshoot of festival programs is a new-found interest in marketing popular traditional music in the private sector. This has contributed to an increase in secular activities for Gnawa musicians and new social experiences for consumers. Hotels offer regular seasonal employment to Gnawa m‘allem-s: performing in the hotel restaurant, in the lobby, for private parties, and for specially organized events. Restaurants also hire Gnawa m‘allem-s to entertain their clientele during the summer months. These “modern” contexts of performance and consumption—including recording studios, research, and film production—have become a part of standard cultural practice among the Gnawa. Qraqab may be pared

⁶³ Sebtinyin is a powerful and dangerous spirit of the Gnawa pantheon belonging to the cohort of Jewish Spirits.



Figure 3.13 M'alle Mokhtar performing at Sofitel with two qarqabiya. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

down to one or two pairs to suit the atmosphere of a particular occasion (Figure 3.13).

In recent years a new social event has emerged, the “sacred” lila performed for a secular gathering. In essence this is a party held by the elite and middle-class society. Lila-s have always been held for festive celebrations such as birthdays, however, these were no different from other lila-s in that they were essentially offerings to the spirits. The issue with these events, according to Moqaddema Zaida, is not that they perform the ritual for a festive occasion but that important rules of conduct are broken: exclusion of invocations, inappropriate use of fragrances, and oversight of other important ritual items. Such transgressions are believed to have had repercussions on Gnawa members (e.g., illness, paralysis) and Gnawa society in general; specifically, the diminution of baraka manifested by an absence of miraculous performances and adepts capable of supporting some of the most powerful mluk. Moqaddema Zaida believes this wrath and loss will continue, and possibly intensify, if they are not careful. “Things are okay for the time being” (personal

communication, 2007, 2009), but there is no telling what can happen and when given the unpredictable nature of the mluk.

The popularity and acceptance of Gnawa music, however, does not extend to the ritual practices for which it is intended or the worldview it enacts—the ‘bread and circus’ formula concealing underlying issues of marginality and social inequalities. A stigma remains attached to Gnawa rituals of spirit possession, particularly among more orthodox Muslims. My Moroccan Arabic language teacher was very outspoken about her opinion about the Gnawa. When I told her about the animal sacrifice at the mussem of Mulay Brahim, her reaction was one of condemnation: “They are disbelievers!” (personal communication, Zohr, 2009). She was passionate in her conviction that what I had seen was a violation of the Quran.⁶⁴

My friends in Fez enjoyed Gnawa music; however, they drew a line between attending festival performances and going to sacred ceremonies. For example, my host sister in Fez, raised by conservative parents from the Moroccan countryside, was supportive of my research and active in helping me make connections. When I asked her to accompany me to a lila she had found out about, she was apprehensive. “I don’t like seeing what happens during trance. I cannot. I am scared. I can help you find a lila but I cannot go” (personal communication, Zineb, 2006). Despite the outward appreciation for the music, evident in its popularity among the younger male population at festivals and among the middle-aged

⁶⁴ She told me the story of Abraham’s sacrifice (Quran 37:101–109). Just when he was about to perform the sacrificial act, a voice stopped him and his son was “ransomed ... with a costly victim” (ibid.:107). She explained to me that sacrifice was only ever made for Allah, never for a human (dead saint or otherwise), and only one time a year on the day of ‘Id al-Kbir (the Great Sacrifice) to re-enact Abraham’s submission to God.

female population at rituals,⁶⁵ Gnawa practices remain little understood, illicit, and feared by the society at large.

Nonetheless, the power and significance of their music warrants recognition, for because of it “the Gnawa as a distinct ethnic group in modern-day Morocco [gradually] turned their marginalized status into a collective identity” (El Hamel 2008:247). The role of the m‘allem as a cultural ambassador of Morocco in local and international events has contributed to legitimization of a once marginalized (and secret society), in addition to creating potential for social and economic benefits once unimaginable. Within a social system stratified along saintly lines, however, their political status—like the perception of the more conservative Islamic society which continues to fear and condemn their ritual practices—has changed little, if at all. Even though it has become trendy for upper echelons of society to patronize the services of high profile Gnawa m‘allem-s, the interest of disenchanted youth eager to adopt the Gnawa identity testifies and contributes to their continued marginality.⁶⁶ Gnawa today straddle two realities: accepted, even revered, as musicians, and feared and condemned for their ritual practices and affiliation with the unseen.

3.2.5 A Secret Society

Inasmuch as the Gnawa are still marginalized for their ritual beliefs and practices, they also remain a secret society. Some Gnawa observe a strict code of conduct and forbid

⁶⁵ During the mussem of Sidi Bilal I met some women who attended the celebration like any other social event, in spite of its sacred context and meaning; and other women who were reluctant to admit their presence at a Gnawa lila to their friends.

⁶⁶ Claisse makes a similar observation (2003:25).

the presence of non-Gnawa, while others permit their attendance and participation.

According to Weston's experience in the 1960s, he was initially refused attendance for his own protection.

My first experience with a Gnawa spiritual ceremony, an actual Lila, came in 1969. As I said, at first they wouldn't let me experience a Lila. It was not permitted to attend one if you were not part of that society, because they always said people have gotten physically harmed if their spirit wasn't right when they were in the room during a Lila. (Weston 2010:175)

In a conversation with Moqaddema Zaida she alluded not to protection but secrecy: "The past was not like now. The lila was only for the Gnawa. My mother [the late Moqaddema 'Aisha] locked the doors. Some people listened from outside the door. My mother didn't let them in" (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2009). When I asked her about Pâques who spent forty years (beginning in the 1960s) learning the Gnawa way of life and becoming a moqaddema herself,⁶⁷ she said: "My mother knew about Madame Pâques [she used to wonder]... 'Why was the moqaddem telling a stranger our things? These are our things'" (ibid.). In a low voice, as if in response to her mother's question, Moqaddema Zaida said, "They [the mluk] chose her. She was chosen" (ibid.).

The Gania masters are committed to safeguarding their tradition. Moqaddema Zaida's inherited responsibility to safeguard their culture, pass it on to her daughters, and maintain a level of secrecy or code of conduct may be noted in Lapassade's field experience with two moqaddema-s, one of Gnawa lineage (Moqaddema Zaida Gania), the other chosen by the spirits later in life (Fatima): "Zeida [Gania] does not reveal her *mida* [platter of sacred items for the mluk]. It is only visible one time a year during the moussem [annual celebration] of the seer when present at the place of sacrifice... But I could see the *mida* of Fatima in her

⁶⁷ Pâques bought a house in Tamesloht where she would hold lila-s.

alcove where it is covered with a green veil” (1999:37).⁶⁸ I experienced and observed the secrecy of the Ganas on a few different occasions. One particularly memorable incident took place during Moqaddema Zaida’s Sha‘ban lila. The Gania family possesses an exclusive repertoire that they perform once a year during this important time in the presence of family and close friends. As Moqaddema Zaida was preparing for the upcoming sequence, she suddenly screamed and fell to the ground. The melk had arrived. Looking grand and fearsome, “Zaida” sprung up and pointed to a few spectators signaling them to leave. I was in close proximity to one of them. Her nephew must have seen the compliance in my eyes and before I could move he said, “Not you.”

Despite the secularization and popularity of their music culture, safeguarding their tradition remains a priority to hereditary practitioners and their older apprentices. Though the society is decentralized, Gnawa ensembles adhere to regional or familial rules of conduct. Some groups limit themselves to playing pieces from the pre-possession repertoire, while others play possession pieces but stipulate which should or should not be performed determined by the power and importance of the supernatural entity. A decentralized body, however, runs the risk of loss and complete desecration, since no authority exists to enforce global rules—in essence, Gnawa may do as they wish. An unwritten rule that seems to be adhered to is the playing of possession pieces in random order for big stage performances; that is, re-arranging the order of musical suites and stringing together pieces from different suites. Defying such rules may result in severe repercussions and stories abound of m‘allem-s (and moqaddema-s) who have gotten sick because they dared to ignore regulation—perhaps it is the spirits who hold the authority to govern and sanction all Gnawa branches.

⁶⁸ *Mousseem* is an alternate spelling of *mussem*.

On stage, the Gantias, like the majority of m' allem-s, perform in the musical style called tagnawit Gharbaoui, or Gharbaoui style—a mix of different styles from Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakesh (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009). Region-specific interpretations and family-owned repertoire exist, however, their performance is restricted to select contexts and participants, such as for the purpose of a lila,⁶⁹ the needs of a patient, and tours abroad (to a crowd unlikely to bootleg or imitate). Nowadays, affordable digital technology allows the public to capture Gnawa performances and the proliferation of CDs and DVDs, produced cheaply, easily, and quickly—virtually overnight—has rendered music that was once limited to private (secret) sacred lila-s and annual celebrations highly accessible (see Section 3.1.5.2). The Gania masters guard tagnawit Souiri, not to mention their own interpretation of it, wary of the enterprising who are eager to copy, imitate, exploit, and “take what does not belong to them” (personal communication, Gania masters, 2007). Though the Gantias have knowledge of different styles, they restrict themselves to playing tagnawit Gharbaoui, effectively standardizing the performance of the sacred repertoire to preserve their culture.

While the overall popularity and familiarity of their music contrasts with the infamy of their spirit possession ceremonies, not to mention the lack of knowledge of the ritual occasion, one may wonder whether maintaining a degree of obscurity is convenient for the organizers as much as it is deliberate for the culture bearers. Kapchan writes:

Anthropologist Bertrand Hell notes that the Gnawa have even cultivated a reputation as charlatans and tricksters to deflect attention away from more serious aspects of their rituals and to thus preserve them (Hell 2002). In this scenario, the line between commercialism and mysticism is ambiguous, and

⁶⁹ M' allem Abdallah performs either tagnawit Gharbaoui or Souiri. He may vary between them from suite to suite depending on the demands of the sponsors, moqaddema, and the needs of the possessed.

the Gnawa play on this ambiguity fully, claiming both ritual secrecy and market mastery. (Kapchan 2008:60)

Despite the marginalization still faced by Gnawa and the secrecy of their practices, there is doubtless an increased public acceptance and knowledge. New social contexts and experiences have given a voice to the Gnawa. Their music has been awarded global currency—from the use of the guembri in alternative folk-pop groups, to albums and songs inspired by Gnawa rhythms, to fusion collaborations and invitations worldwide. In Morocco, the word “Gnawa” and their music are heard on public radio and television, seen in journals and newspapers, grace the walls of CD shops, and blare from medina speakers. Far from being taboo, Gnawa music has given rise to one of the most popular festivals in Morocco and has acquired a mainstream identity in the world music/world beat scene comparable to the trajectory of other African and African-derived traditions such as the Afro-Cuban Santería. Weston says, “Moroccans are all touched by Gnawa [nowadays]; all the young, educated Moroccans are all influenced by Gnawa culture—black culture” (2009:172). With both praise and critique by the Gania masters, popularity has now rendered commercial, commodified, and extra-ordinary what was once marginalized, secret, and routine. In the process, new rules of conduct have developed to accommodate new contexts that preserve yet present their culture and give them a voice throughout Morocco and beyond.

Chapter 4

Musical Structure

4.1 Instruments, Timbre, and Strings

There are five timbral layers in Gnawa music produced from three main instruments introduced in earlier chapters: the guembri, qraqab, and voice.¹ The guembri is a fretless, three-string, percussive bass-lute made from wood, camel skin, and goat intestines (Figure 4.1). It produces three timbres: deep melodic tones of strings made from braided goat intestines, attached to the neck with leather laces, that are plucked, strummed, or struck with the fingernails; high and low pitches produced by using fingertips to tap percussive rhythms on the camel skin face; and the sympathetic jingle of a *sersera* attached to the neck,² audible during solo moments.

The fourth timbre is the dense continuous rhythmic pattern produced by the qraqab (Figure 4.2). Ostinati are played in successive alternation between the right and left hands; players stress that the resulting sound should be unaccented (personal communication, A. Gania, May 2009). Historically made of iron, but now using a steel alloy, the instrument produces a sonic texture that “imitates the sound of a horse’s gallop” (Pâques 1991:217),

¹ The analyses in this and following chapters are based mainly on transcribed field recordings of performances by M’allem Abdallah. These include an entire lila (August 2007) and multiple recordings of some suites and pieces from both lila-s and secular occasions (June 2006, July–August 2007, March–June 2009). Transcribed performances by M’allem Mahmoud (August 2007), M’allem Mokhtar (June 2006, August 2007), in addition to commercial recordings of M’allem Hamida Boussou and Hamid El-Kasri, not to mention conversations with the Gania family have also contributed to my understanding.

² The *sersera* is a percussion instrument that consists of metal loops or rings attached around the edges of a metal sheet. A similar instrument is used as an attachment to other African and African-derived instruments, such as the West African djembe or Stambeli guinbri of Tunisia.



sersera

Figure 4.1 Guembri. (Photograph by Maisie Sum) (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)



Figure 4.2 Qraqab. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

referring to the horse that carries the possessed during mystical trances.³ While my teacher, Si Mohammed, also notes a resemblance to the gait of a horse (details in Time I section below), he also says that the qraqab evoke memories of slavery, associated with images of sub-Saharanans crossing the Sahara to Morocco in chains (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009). The fifth layer consists of two timbres of male voices: the solo voice of the m'alleem who sings out impassioned calls to the genies, and the denser sonority of the qarqabiya who respond in chorus. While the voice holds a significant place as explicit linguistic identifier of a melk warranting analysis (Chapter 2), this chapter focuses on the part which is vital to the dynamics of possession trance.⁴ On the one hand, ritual participants groove to the riffs and repeating motives; on the other, the unseen are called by their iconic motives. Based on her observations of a lila, anthropologist Majdouli writes (see Section 3.2):

The most coveted place is exactly in front of the guembri. The instrument is the master of the game. It is the guembri that attracts the mlouk [mluk] in the dance space and drives trance. The qraqab maintain a regular strident sound but it is the plucking of the bass notes and the changing melody that effectively signify the call of the motto of the Blacks and that invariably attracts the dancers. (Majdouli 2007:46)

The musical stature of the guembri was also iterated by a Gnawi friend who said, “the guembri captures everything” (personal communication, Abderrahim, 2006), with reference to the fusion performances during the *Gnaoua Festival*.

Of all the Gnawa instruments, the guembri is “[a]t the heart of the order itself” (Pâques 1978:326). It is “the sultan, or Allah... the receptacle of the genies... ‘like someone

³ Besmer’s (1983) equestrian idiom delineates the relationships during spirit possession between gods, chosen adepts (or vessels), and ritual assistants as “divine horsemen,” “mounts,” and “grooms,” respectively.

⁴ Analysis of the vocal part shall be addressed in future projects. See Fuson (2009:162–176).

who knocks on the door (of the mluk)” (1991:221), and “a living genie” (Claisse 2003:99). The polyvalence of the guembri attests to its significance among the Gnawa community, which is further demonstrated in ritual action. During a sacred ritual, it is brought offerings before all other instruments; it is also first to be thurified, sprinkled with milk and orange blossom water, presented with dates, and given blood after sacrifice. On a weekly basis the guembri is nourished with incense and given special care. Held directly above the brazier, the incense wafts directly into the guembri’s mouth, after which the m‘allem plays it for a short while (Figure 3.8). When not being used, the guembri is placed upright, standing on a cushion or sofa “like a scepter, or better, like a companion” (Claisse 2003:99). “For a Gnawi the *gumbri* is the most valuable asset... One day we asked a *m‘allam* in jest what he would do if he suddenly became a billionaire. He immediately replied: ‘I would make a *gumbri* out of gold’” (Pâques 1991:221).⁵

Gnawa melodies played on the guembri are produced by three strings typically named *zir*, *tahtiya*, and *ntoi* (personal communication, M‘allem Abdallah, 2006–2009) (Figure 4.3).⁶ M‘allem Abdallah and Si Mohammed liken these to a string family; that is, father, mother, and child, respectively. *Zir*/father is the low bass string positioned on the top; *tahtiya*/mother is the middle string, approximately a fourth higher, positioned on the bottom; and *ntoi*/child is the high string, an octave above the bass string, positioned in the center between the father and mother (personal communication, 2006–2009).⁷

⁵ For a semiotic analysis of the instruments see Pâques (1991:216–221).

⁶ Variations on the string names are, respectively, *raghoul*, *lotra*, and *loustiya* (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009); and *zir*, *dhar* (back), and *n’tiwa* (virgin) (Amara 2008:32).

⁷ The *batá* drums of the Afro-Cuban *Santería* tradition and the Balinese drums and gongs also name high and low pitches; however, in contrast, the lowest pitch drum is the mother rather than the father (Hagedorn 2001), and only gender references (i.e., female and male) apply to the Balinese instruments. There is no correlation with a family or that of a child. Instruments are often played in pairs.



Figure 4.3 Guembri illustrating string number, name and fingerings.

4.2 Tuning, Pitch, and Scale

4.2.1 Tuning

The guembri is tuned to a gamut of relative pitches that vary by a semitone (or more) depending on a m‘allem’s vocal range. In order to facilitate discussion and comparison with other performances, I use cipher notation to represent scale degrees. As shown in Figure 4.4, the numbers 1–8 denote the single octave range of the guembri and the doubling of the lowest pitch. The open strings zir, tahtiya, and ntoi are tuned to pitches 1, 4, and 8, respectively. The ntoi is always played open, while the zir has two fingerings: position A (closest to the end of the neck) and B produce pitches 2 and 3,⁸ respectively. The tahtiya may have three fingerings: positions A, B, and C produce pitches 5, 6, and 7, respectively. The low-pitched string is usually tuned within the range of B1 and D2#, the mid-pitch between

⁸ Pitch 3 was introduced with the ‘Aisha Hamdushiya (discussed below).

String number	1			2			3	
String position	top			bottom			middle	
String name	<i>zir</i> (father)			<i>tahtiya</i> (mother)			<i>ntoi</i> (child)	
Finger position	open	1-A	[1-B]	open	2-A	(2-B)	(2-C)	open
Pitch range	B1-D2#	C2#-E2	[D2-F2]	E2-G2	F2#-A2	(G2#-B2)	(A2-C3#)	B2-D3#
Avg. interval (cents) * interval between 'extra' note								
Cipher equivalent	1	2	[3]	4	5	(6)	(7)	8

Figure 4.4 Correlation between strings, fingerings, pitches, and cipher equivalents. Pitches were measured using an electronic tuner. Note that the octave interval may not add up to 1200 cents, because of the relative tuning, pitches may be slightly flatter or sharper and result in a smaller or larger value. Based on the average intervallic spacing above, the octave is equivalent to 1212 cents. N.B. Finger position 1-A is situated closest to the end of the neck. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

E2 and G2, and the highest pitch, an octave above the first, between B2 and D3#, “variants of a singular toneme” (Kubik 1985:55). The intervallic spacing between pitches is more or less preserved (Row 6). The same m‘allem, however, may vary his tuning from performance to performance (Figure 4.5, Rows 2, 5 and 8). For example, M‘allem Abdallah may tune the open strings to the low extreme of approximately B1↓,⁹ E2↓, and B2↑, referred to as *msawi Abdellaoui* (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009), which yields the gamut of eight possible pitches shown in Row 2. Deviations from the tempered pitch are denoted in +/- cents, where ‘0’ represents no deviation from the norm (Rows 3, 6, and 9). The intervals between successive pitches are also indicated in cents (Rows 4, 7, and 10). Like his brothers

⁹ The downward and upward arrows following the pitch symbols signify slightly flat or sharp pitches, respectively.

Cipher Equivalent	1	2	[3]	4	5	(6)	(7)	8
Low extreme (AG 2009)	B1↓	C2↑	D	E2↓	F2#	G2↑	A2	B2↑
Deviation from tempered pitch (cents)	-30	+15	0	-20	0	+10	0	+10
Interval (cents) * interval between 'extra' note	145	185*	365	180*	220	110*	300	190*
High extreme (AG 2009)	C2#↑	D2#↓	E2↑	F2#↑	G2#↑	A2#↓	B2↑	C3#↑
Deviation from tempered pitch (cents)	+5	-30	+20	+5	+5	-30	+35	+5
Interval (cents) * interval between 'extra' note	165	150*	335	185*	200	165*	330	165*
Average (AG 2009)	C2↑	D2↑	E2↓	F2↑	G2↑	A2↓	B2↓	C3↑
Deviation from tempered pitch (cents)	+20	+20	-20	+10	+20	-20	-20	+20
Interval (cents) * interval between 'extra' note	200	160*	290	130*	210	160*	360	200*
							140	340

Figure 4.5 Guembri tunings of M'allelem Abdallah. Pitches were measured using an electronic tuner.

M'allelem-s Mahmoud and Mokhtar who tend toward the higher range,¹⁰ M'allelem Abdallah may also tune the open strings more than a step higher to C2#↑, F2#↑, and C3#↑ (Rows 5–7).

A typical tuning of the Gnawa repertoire (*msawi 'alamiya*), represented by M'allelem Abdallah's average tuning (i.e., not low or high), consists of pitches ranging from C2↑ to C3↑ (Rows 8–10).

According to Mensah (1970), a Western music-influenced Ghanaian observing

¹⁰ In conversation with M'allelem Abdallah, he referred to the higher tuning as *msawi tal'a*, the low tuning as *msawi Abdallaoui*, and the universal tuning as *msawi 'alamiya*.

xylophone makers:

It is “a virtue by which... a note [is experienced], not as an individuality, but as a member of a group, occupying some place in a tone-region where it belongs. This virtue provides no absolute guarantee for obtaining pitch accuracy, but its usefulness as a general guide cannot be over-stressed... their constant reference to other notes, was the relativity of a note to other members of the keyboard” (in Kubik 1985:31).

Kubik writes: “An inner *tuning model* once learned and gradually internalized by the carrier of a tradition—and which may be either relative or absolute in its pitches—is projected on the ‘chaotic stimuli’ emerging from an untuned instrument” (ibid. 45).

Kubik’s assessment of African tone-systems largely applies to Gnawa music.

4.2.2 Pitch

The inventory of Gnawa pitches can be observed at the beginning of a performance when the m‘allem checks the tuning of his guembri by playing the gamut of pitches, referred to as *msawi*,¹¹ in a prescribed fashion resembling a tuning formula (Figure 4.6, Audio 4.1 and 4.2). When a guembri is newly stringed, however, the m‘allem checks the open strings, making larger adjustments if necessary, before entering the performance space. The coarse tuning is performed with the guembri placed lengthwise in front of the m‘allem, with the neck pointing towards him so he is able to push or pull the leather laces a greater degree. This requires the dexterity of both hands and feet to support the guembri body as he pulls on the straps. The open strings are sounded in an order similar to the following: a) the tahtiya (bottom position) [pitch 4], b) zir (top position) [pitch 1], c) ntoi (middle position) and zir (an

¹¹ *Msawi* also used to refer to a key, scale, or mode in general.

octave apart) are strummed together from middle to top [pitches 8 and 1], followed by d) tahtiya [pitch 4], e) ntoi [pitch 8], f) *tahtiya* [pitch 4], and g) ntoi-zir [pitches 8 and 1].

In the presence of the audience the m' allem plays the msawi and makes minor adjustments by gingerly nudging the leather laces with his left hand, shortening or lengthening the strings as needed, while strumming them with his right hand until he gets the desired sound.¹² He then plays the msawi again. If he deems the instrument to be in tune, he may choose to delight in the sonority of the guembri for a few moments longer and display his virtuosity. In cases where this lasts as long as ten minutes, the m' allem begins to gradually introduce the upcoming melody—exploring its mode in an improvised manner like an Indian alap—until finally the piece emerges and the qraqab join in, as a tabla might, regulating the previously unmeasured melody.¹³ In the audio examples M' allem Mahmoud (Audio 4.2) plays a more elaborated version than M' allem Abdallah (Audio 4.1). Although similar variations on the same phrases are recognizable, M' allem Mahmoud also tunes for pitch 6 by substituting it for pitch 7 (Figure 4. 6 b, Systems 2 and 4) and adds new phrases (Systems 5–9) that M' allem Abdallah does not play (Figure 4.6 a).¹⁴

Verifying pitches by playing the msawi resembles “the *verbal mnemonic pattern* used for tuning various instruments” (Kubik 1985:38, emphasis in original) among the Zande

¹² More than eighty years after Farmer commented on the “persistence of this primitive method [of tuning rings] in spite of the existence of the peg system” (1928:26 [fn.1]), the Gnawa m' allem-s have begun to adopt the “mechanism” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009), metal tuning pegs resembling those used for acoustic guitars. Rather than being designed for sacred rituals, the modification was motivated by secular engagements (Chapter 5).

¹³ Fuson refers to this as the “*tsiyyisa* [borrowed from Schuyler]: an unmeasured improvisation, which is played to indicate that a new song is about to start after a pause or break” (2009:189). He writes that “while it does expose the melodic scale... its primay function appears to be to signal the assembly that the *guinbri* player is ready to begin” (ibid.:205).

¹⁴ These phrases are not unique to M' allem Mahmoud and heard in other versions of M' allem Abdallah's msawi, which suggests they form part of the standard tuning formula, at least as played by the Gania masters.

people of Central African Republic and “reveal[s] the nature of [an] inner tuning model” (ibid.:45).¹⁵ Significantly, an examination of the tuning formulas by two m‘allem-s suggest the basic point of reference occurs on the open zir, the father string (pitch 1), and ntoi, the child (pitch 8) (Figure 4.6). Pitch 1 or 8 begins and ends the msawi pattern and is consistently reiterated. The other point of reference is the open string of the tahtiya (pitch 4). Kubik writes: “As is the case in numerous other musical cultures of Africa the tuning of the *mendzan* [xylophone] reflects the idea of a hierarchical order of tones corresponding with a social pattern” (ibid.:32). Similar to Kubik’s assertion, tuning of the guembri embodies a triadic social structure of the father (or m‘allem), his offspring, and the mother (or moqaddema). Furthermore, the zir (father) acts as a subtle drone produced by sympathetic vibrations that can be heard in solo parts of performances and by the thumb consistently and rhythmically “dropping” on it as other pitches are struck, while the ntoi (child) is the *lahsor* in many pieces—that is, the resting note often heard at the end of a motive (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009) and hence a significant boundary point. The concept of a Gnawa scale also emerges. In tuning the guembri, the m‘allem-s are concerned to adjust the sound produced at five different fretboard positions in a given phrase, thus creating a pentatonic framework comprising pitches 12457(8) (Figure 4.6a, Systems 1 and 2; Figure 4.6b, Systems 1, 3, 7–9) or 12456(8) (Figure 4.6b, Systems 2, 4–6).

¹⁵ After coarse tuning the open strings in “silence” Si Mohammed explained how the guembri was tuned by humming pitched mnemonics aloud (personal communication, 2009). Similarly, Kubik writes that the “Zande harp player... tunes his harp while singing a tuning formula and simultaneously sounding the five strings to each syllable... split up melodically in a sequence... ‘I am thinking like playing. I hear the tune’” (1985:38–39).

8 4 1... 1 (2 5) 8... (7 8) 7 5 (4 2) 2 [2 1 7] 1 8 1 8 1... 1
 (2 4) 4... 5 (7 8) 7 5 (4 2) 4 4 7 5 [4 2 1] 2 2 [4 1 2] 1 [7 7 7] 8 1 4 8 4 8 4 8...

a)

(1 4) 1 1 (1 4) 1 5 8... (7 8) 7 5 (4 4) 4 4 5 (7 8) 7 5 (4 4) 4 2 2 2 1 [7 7 7] 8
 4 8 4 8 [2 2 4] 4 4 4 4 5 (6 8) [6 5 4] 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1
 2 (4 4) (5 5) (7 8) 7 (5 5) (4 4) (2 2) [2 1 7] [7 7 7] 8 8
 [1 1 2] (5 5) (6 8) 6 5 [6 5 4] 8 4 8 4 8 4 8
 2 5 8... 5 8 [6 5 4] 1 4 1 (5 5) [5 4 2] 4 4 (5 5) (6 8) [6 5 4] (5 5) [5 4 2] 4 4 (5 5)
 (6 8) [6 5 4] 1 (5 5) [5 4 2] (4 4) [4 2 1] 2 2 2 1 [7 7 7] 8 8
 4 1 1 2 5 2 4 1 1 2 5 2 4 1 2 5 2 4 1 1 7 8
 1 2 5 (8 8) (7 8) 7 5 1 1 2 5 2 4 2 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1
 1 2 5 (8 8) [8 8] (7 8) 7 5 1 1 2 5 2 4 2 4 1 1 2 5 2 4 2 4 1 2 5 2 4 2 4 1 2 5 2 4 2 4 1 [7 7 7] 8 8

b)

Figure 4.6 Msawi played by a) M'alleem Abdallah (Audio 4.1), and b) M'alleem Mahmoud (Audio 4.2, half a step higher than notation). Pitches (in cipher notation) placed in brackets signify a shorter time span between notes. Like shaded boxes represent same pitches or similar melodic phrases.

4.2.3 Scale

Despite having a range of eight identifiable pitches, Gnawa melodies are basically pentatonic; however, a sixth tone arises in special situations (Section 4.4). “Ghumami,” a piece that belongs to the *Mimun* suite analyzed in Chapter 7, serves as an example (Figure 4.7). In M’allem Abdallah’s 2007 performance, the piece was played with the tuning C2#, D2#↓, F2#, G2#, (A2↓), B2↑, and C3# (Row 2); in 2006, it was D2, E2↓, G2, A2, (B2↓), C3, and D3 (Row 3), both of which are equivalent to pitches 1, 2, 4, 5, (6), 7, and 8, respectively. Pitch 6 in parentheses, notated as A2↓ and B2↓, represents the “extra” pitch. The relative tuning of pitches suggests that adopting cipher notation is warranted for comparative analyses. In this way the relationship between pitches, rather than the actual value of individual pitches, is highlighted.

As shown in Figure 4.8, the fifth note in pentatonic pieces may either be pitch 7 or pitch 6 (Rows 3–5).¹⁶ While most melodies of the repertoire are pentatonic, some pieces are tetratonic, hexatonic, or heptatonic. Pieces from the *Aisha* suite serve as examples (Figure 4.8, Rows 6 and 7). Two of the pieces comprise only four tones; pitches 2, 3 and 7 are excluded and pitch 6 (instead of the usual pitch 7) plays a structural role in the motive (Row 6). With the addition of two “new” *Aisha* pieces from the Hamadsha brotherhood a seventh note (pitch 3) and the heptatonic scale entered the Gnawa musical syntax (Row 7) from cross-cultural borrowing.¹⁷

¹⁶ Fuson suggests that Gnawa music has two basic scales: the “D-scale” and “G-scale” (2009:161). The former uses pitch 7, and the latter pitch 6.

¹⁷ Fuson writes: “According to a *m’allem* in Rabat, it was introduced into the Gnawa repertoire not earlier than the 1970’s. The songs of the suite are taken from the repertoire of the Hamadsha brotherhood and feature musical structures alien to the Gnawa repertoire, such as heptatonic melodic modes and 5/4 meter” (2009:117) (see Section 3.4.1). Although the Gania family spoke to me of the

Cipher Equivalent	1	2	[3]	4	5	(6)	7	8
Sidi Mimun Pitches (AG 2007)	C2#	D2#↓		F2#	G2#	(A2↓)	B2↑	C3#
Sidi Mimun Pitches (AG 2006)	D2	E2↓		G2	A2	(B2↓)	C3	D3

Figure 4.7 Ghumami pitch set in two performances by M‘allem Abdallah.

Cipher Notation	1	2	[3]	4	5	(6)	7	8
Pitch	C2#	D2#↓	[E2]	F2#	G2#	(A2↓)	B2↑	C3#
Pentatonic (e.g., Mimun1-3, 5)								
Pentatonic (e.g., Mimun 4)								
Pentatonic (e.g., Mimun 6)								
Tetratonic ("original" 'Aisha)								
Heptatonic ("new" 'Aisha)								

Figure 4.8 The Gnawa scale (shaded block illustrates the pitch set of respective pieces).

According to Kubik, “Innovations or changes in the tone system at the level of a culture as a whole only occur at the pace of generations. In Africa, as probably elsewhere, it is youths and children who pick up a new tone system (often of foreign introduction)

Mekkawi origins of Aisha Hamdushiya and its use among the Hamadsha, it is uncertain when these pieces became a regular part of the Gnawa repertoire. M‘allem Abdallah (in his fifties) remembers the ‘Aisha pieces always being a part of lila-s. The Gnawa repertoire comprises “traditional” pieces dedicated to ‘Aisha, two of which are referred to as “‘Aisha Qandisha,” and the other “Lalla ‘Aisha” (cf. Fuson below); and more recently pieces for ‘Aisha Hamdushiya associated from the region of Meknes, and the Hamadsha brotherhood (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009). Besides Lalla ‘Aisha, this collection of pieces has now become an independent suite. Fuson writes: “It was my understanding that before the Hamdushiya suite was introduced into Gnawa practice in Marrakesh, the *tagnawit* song dedicated to Lalla ‘Aisha (also known as ‘Aisha Qandisha) fell at the beginning or end of the *L‘Ayalet* suite” (2009:117). Although Pâques similarly writes that if she is invoked it happens before the *L‘Ayalet*, she asserts that “for the majority of Gnawa, ‘Aisha Qandisha does not have a place in a *derdeba*” (1991:310). In Chlyeh, Aisha Qandisha is invoked after the female spirits (1999:102). The Gania masters usually perform the ‘Aisha suite separately while Lalla ‘Aisha (of the sea) is grouped with *mhalla L‘Ayalet*.

relatively quickly and then carry it on as a novel tradition” (1985:46). Interestingly, however, over half a century (or more) later pitch 3 (or “E2”) is absent from the inner tuning model of the Gnawa (see Figure 4.6).

4.3 Time I: General Features

Time organization in Gnawa music may be conceived using terms such as minimal value, pulsation, pulse, tactus, group(ing), cycle, and periodicity, already employed by a number of scholars devoted to sub-Saharan music and rhythm in the broad sense (including Agawu 2003, Arom 1991, and Tenzer 2006). Minimal value refers to the smallest continuous pulsation; pulse or tactus refers to isochronous values at the next level; group(ing) refers to a distinctive rhythmic period with content that may be repeated or varied; and cycles consist of one or more groups subject to repetition. Periodicity, as defined in Chapter 2, is used to describe cyclic repetition at numerous levels of the structure.

There are two rhythmic strata: one articulated percussively by the qraqab, the other articulated melodically by the guembri and voices (Figure 4.9). The former is composed in brief cell-like ostinati, and is thus minimally hierarchical in organization. The latter groups hierarchically into motives that may be two to sixteen pulses in duration; these combine into successively larger formations from motivic to cyclic to sectional levels. In the transcriptions I elected to set the tactus equivalent to a quarter note pulse which divides into binary and ternary time in quarter-, eighth-, and sixteenth-note combinations (Figure 4.9, Row 2, Column 2). On the right (Column 3), I show how a dotted-quarter note tactus may also be appropriate. Although some pieces exhibit a ternary character that would be better

1. qraqab - regulating pulse - strict ostinati	Q1 	Q2 
2. guembri - motives usually 2, 4, 8, or 16 pulses long - varying motives	E.g. 4-pulse period simple $\frac{4}{4}$  frequent:  rare: 	E.g. 4-pulse period compound $\frac{12}{8}$ 

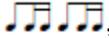
Figure 4.9 Overview of rhythmic elements.

transcribed with the latter, I stay with a quarter-note pulse throughout for simplicity and comparative purposes. This allows me to maintain a common quarter-note referent, even when the subdivision changes in the course of a performance.

4.3.1 Regulating Pulse

As young boys, Gnawa first learn to play rhythmic support: “I started with qraqab made from wooden crates that transported fish. My hands were too small and they didn’t used to make the small [metal] qraqab like you find in the medina today. I played with M’allem Boubeker” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009).¹⁸ Two strict ostinati support

¹⁸ In an earlier portion of the lila (i.e., *koyo*) the qraqab are not played, however, the same rhythmic patterns as those of the qraqab are performed with hands. Young musicians learn by clapping along,

the motives executed on the guembri: Q1 , a rhythm said to resemble a galloping horse, and Q2 , a trotting horse pattern (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009).¹⁹ These patterns materialize the beat of Gnawa music and punctuate the quarter-note tactus.

The qraqab figure Q1 can be felt as a hemiola.²⁰ Vocalized in mnemonics as “ta- ke ta ke-,” Q1 is the composite of a three against two (or two against three) rhythm. The right and left hands play binary and ternary subdivisions, respectively (Figure 4.10). Note that the tactus is only marked by the right hand, so the first beat of the left hand (LH) is empty.²¹

Q2 may be expressed in duple time as “ta- ke ta ke- ta ke.”²² Pulsations coincide alternately between the right hand on the first “ta” and the left hand on the second “ke.” The mnemonic suggests that the emic conception of Q2 is a double rather than single iteration of  since two units are required to complete a cycle; that is, to return to the initial “ta” and the initial pulse played by the right hand (Figure 4.11). Both figures Q1 and Q2 are characterized by rhythmic features such as alternating durations, unequal duration, a unitary morphology, and regular commetricity; however, Q1 subdivides pulses in three, while Q2

providing percussive support for the guembri: first in unison with the pulse, then in a more complex manner of interlocking handclaps which combine to yield a polyrhythmic texture that resembles one of the two qraqab patterns depending on the piece. See Fuson for more details (2009:137–39).

¹⁹ Fuson refers to Q1 and Q2 as “the 4-stroke or the 3-stroke pattern” (2009:121).

²⁰ Gnawa musicians consider this a single rhythmic pattern (personal communications, Gania family, 2006–2009)—that is, there is no independence of a 2-, 3-, or 4-pulse rhythm. The concepts of polyrhythm, hemiola, composite, and cross-rhythm are constructs used for the purpose of musical analysis.

²¹ Fuson (2009:122) has derived the same composite pattern from Baldassarre’s transcription (1999:93–94).

²² Fuson gives two versions of this pattern: the first is what he calls the 6/8 version (2009:122) that consists of two iterations of a dotted-eighth-note, sixteenth- and eighth-note, or 312312; and the second is the 2/4 version (ibid.:123) resembling the one I have described as 211211. Without making metric distinctions in my own interpretation of Q2, I have found it problematic to notate due to an ambiguity in how it subdivides, falling somewhere between two and three.

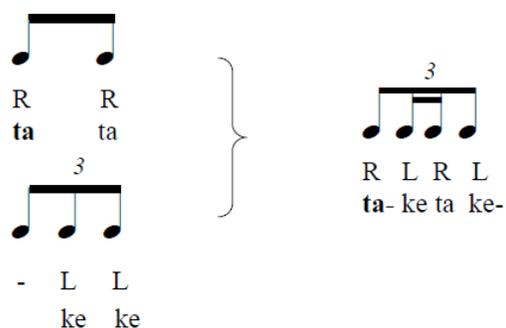


Figure 4.10 Q1 pattern.



Figure 4.11 Q2 pattern.

does it in two.²³

While qarqabiya generally play these patterns unaccented,²⁴ during moments of excitement in the singing or when the energy increases, accentual variations and visual displays could arise. M^ʿallem Abdallah and Si Mohammed stress, however, the discretion

²³ Arom writes that “rhythmic figures are characterized by clusters of features drawn from different categories or order” (1991:233), of which there are five: mark, durations, morphology, metricity, and structure. Morphology of a rhythmic figure is “unitary when it contains only one configuration. In this case, *no distinction is possible between cell and figure*” (Arom 1991:238, emphases in original); “A figure has a *commetric* organisation when the accents, the changes of tone colour, or... the attacks tend to coincide with the pulsations. [It] is *regular* if *all* the accents, or *more than half* the changes of tone colour or attacks fall on the pulsation; *no offbeat sound overlaps the following pulsation*... It is irregular if any sound is accented on the offbeat; and/or *less than half* of the sounds on the offbeat overlap the following pulsation (ibid.:241–42, emphases in original).

²⁴ Fuson suggests that the right and left hand “sound different, as a result of different hands pulling in different ways, and of the complex, white-noise frequencies produced by each individual *qarqaba*” (2009:122).

and rhythmic integrity expected from the accompanists:²⁵

One player does this [gestures with hands, and emphasizes last two strokes] ‘ta - ke ta ke - TA KE’, another does this [gestures] ‘TA KE TA KE’ [shakes his head]. They should listen and follow. When I was little I followed calmly. I listened to the others, to the *guembri*. (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009, emphasis in original)

We have to play the same thing from start to finish. We cannot follow the *m’allem*’s rhythm. There can only be one driver. (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009)

As with the “addition” of pitch 3 when new ‘*Aisha*’ pieces entered the Gnawa repertoire, a third pattern (Q3) entered the Gnawa lexicon. Q3,  (“ta ke”) is played to support pieces imported from the Hamadsha brotherhood, collectively named ‘*Aisha Hamdushiya*’ or ‘*Aisha Dghoughiya*’.²⁶ Similar to the exclusion of pitch 3 in the Gnawa’s musical conception, whenever I asked about the number of *qarqaba* figures, the Gania *m’allem*-s and *qarqabiya* would always respond “*juj* [two]” and proceed to demonstrate Q1 and Q2 (personal communications, 2006–2009). Though the generation of the current Gania masters recognizes the adoption of additional ‘*Aisha*’ pieces, despite the uncertainty of when they became an official part of the *lila*, the omission of Q3 (and pitch 3) testifies to its foreign origin. Of course, one could argue that Q3, rather than a rhythmic pattern, is merely a *metric continuum*, “a sequence of equal values with no accentuation or difference in tone color” (Arom 1991: 238) since it is played unaccented.

²⁵ Fuson describes: “the accompanists always follow either the *guinbri* player or the lead singer... attend of the *qarqaba* players is directed toward the *guinbri* [who normally gives musical cues]” (2009:93–94).

²⁶ Fuson refers to Q3 as the “2-stroke *qarqaba* pattern in 5/4” (2009:121 [fn.15]). Similar to the current discussion, he says that “these songs [that use the pattern] are imported... [and] not considered to be part of *tagnawit*” (ibid.).

SEQ. #	COHORTS OF SPIRITS	Q-PATTERNS
1a	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q1-Q2
1b	Bu Hala	Q2
2	Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna	Q2-Q1-Q2
3a	Musawiyin	Q1-Q2-Q1
3b	Samawiyin	Q1-Q2
4	Houmar	Q1-Q2
5	Ulad Agh-Ghaba	Q1
6	Shorfa	Q1-Q2-Q1
7	L'Ayalet	Q2-Q1-Q2
x	'Aisha	Q1-Q3-Q2

Figure 4.12 Qarqaba patterns in the Gnawa possession repertoire and their succession in each suite (based on my research with the Gania family and several other recordings). For example, Q2-Q1-Q2 signifies that a group of pieces are supported by Q2, followed by another group accompanied by Q1, and a final group with Q2. Note that sequential variations may arise due to regional interpretations and other factors associated with a particular ritual situation.

As shown in Figure 4.12, with the exception of *Bu Hala* (Number 1b) and *Ulad Agh-Ghaba* (Number 5) in which the respective pieces are exclusively supported by Q2 and Q1,²⁷ and the *'Aisha* suite by Q1, Q3, and Q2 (Figure 4.12, last row), both Q1 and Q2 are played during the sacred performance of a single suite, although one pattern may be predominant among some suites. Individual pieces are uniquely accompanied by one of the two patterns and never by both (Figure 4.13). In suites such as *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali* (hereafter, *Jilali*) and *Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna* (hereafter, *Mimun*) the majority of pieces are supported

²⁷ In the Marrakesh version of the suites, Fuson notes that four out of the twenty-three pieces of the Rijal Agh-Ghaba were supported by Q2 (or the 3-stroke) (2009:136, 142–43, 177) and that the last three pieces of *Bu Hala* are supported by Q1 (or the 4-stroke) (ibid.:177, 588). The pieces to which he refers are “attached” to this suite in that they are often performed in immediate succession to the *Bu Hala* suite. I have also heard these pieces played at the end of *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali* (Number 1a). M' allem Abdallah explained that these pieces came from Meknes (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009).

SEQ. #	JILALI SUITE	Q-PATTERN
1	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q1
2	Jilali Rasul Allah	Q1
3	Jilali Bou 'Alem	Q2
4	Dawi Hali	Q2
5	Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q2
6	Allah Allah Ya Mulay Jilali	Q2
7	Sadi Bula Wali Jali	Q1

a)

SEQ. #	SIDI MIMUN & LALLA MIMUNA	Q-PATTERN
1a	Lalla Mimuna	Q2
1b	Mimuna Rabi L'afu	Q2
2	Ghumami	Q1
3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba	Q1
4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun	Q2
4b	Mimun Ganga	Q2
5	Kiriya	Q2
6	Fufu Dinba	Q2

b)

Figure 4.13 Succession of Q-patterns in the suites a) Mulay Abdelqader Jilali and b) Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna.

by Q2 (Figure 4.13 a, b); however, the total duration of pieces supported by each pattern may be comparable. For example, at a sacred lila I attended in August 2007, the first two pieces of *Jilali* supported by Q1 lasted nine minutes, and the last four supported by Q2 were a total of eleven minutes; in another sacred performance that month, they were 7'28" and 7'44", respectively.

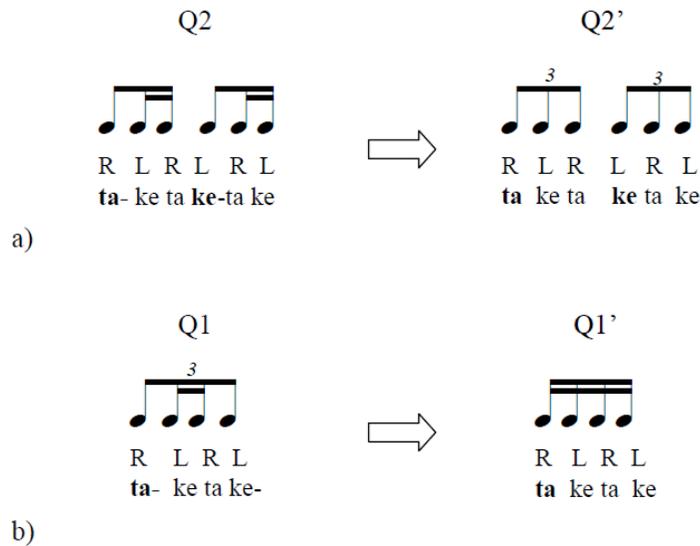


Figure 4.14 Mutation of a) Q2 to Q2' and b) Q1 to Q1'.

In some pieces, particularly those with higher polyrhythmics (and pieces immediately following them), Q2 resembles a triplet pattern (Q2')—that is, it transforms from along a continuum and approaches (Figure 4.14 a, b).²⁸ When the tempo increases Q2 similarly mutates toward an even Q2'. Similarly, Q1 transforms from a ternary to approximate an evenly spaced (Q1') as the music intensifies.²⁹

Gnawa musicians consider Q1 and Q1', and Q2 and Q2', as the same; in other words, they are culturally equivalent. I tested this hypothesis on several occasions. I would play recordings of their music at heightened moments of intensification when Q1 would have already mutated to Q1' (or Q2 to Q2'). Each time after listening, I would ask: Could you play me the pattern you just heard? Is that a different pattern? How many patterns are there in

²⁸ That is, 111 instead of 211. Note that the integers 1 and 2 represent the durational values of a 16th-note and 8th-note, respectively.

²⁹ Similarly, Jankowsky writes of *stambeli* rhythmic system: “The *nuba* begins at a moderate tempo, with the relative spacing between articulations unequally distributed. But as the *nuba* progresses it undergoes a gradual increase in tempo and compression of the rhythmic cell. As the cells compress, the notes of the cell become increasingly equidistant” (2010:115).

Gnawa music? In every instant they would clearly demonstrate the standard version, reply it belongs to one of the two patterns (Q1 or Q2), ensure the existence of only two ostinati, and reiterate that the pattern played throughout the piece, from beginning to end, is the same.

Nevertheless, Gnawa musicians are quick to shake their heads when the inappropriate version of the figure is played for a particular piece or at a particular moment (personal communications, M. Outanine, A. Gania, 2009). On a few different occasions, I would intentionally accompany M'allelem Abdallah with the prime version of the qraqab pattern (say Q1') at the beginning of a piece when the tempo was moderate. Every time I would receive a gentle head sway of disapproval as he continued to play. Switching to the standard version (i.e., Q1), he would nod in approval. As the tempo increased and I transformed Q1 to Q1' the m'allelem nodded, satisfied with my accompaniment. This signified a perceived difference between the unequal durations of the standard figure and the equal durations of the prime figure, at least at longer time spans between qraqab onsets when the ternary and binary quantities are more easily perceptible. At shorter time spans the standard and prime versions become blurred. Like the “‘standard pattern’ of West African rhythm” (Agawu 2006), Q1 and Q2 are “repeated literally; it does not admit variations at the conceptual or intentional level. This says nothing about the way it is actually perceived... because perception is shaped by the range of activity within a fuller rhythmic texture” (ibid. 7).

4.3.2 Durational Framework, Values, and Rhythmic Features

Single motives or their combinations constitute a structural set defined by a cyclic concept of time. Here, the structural set refers to the pitches and rhythmic units that make up the motives. Individual pieces are derived from these structural sets that are varied for many



a) Marhaba: 4-pulse, 16 minimal values



b) Sidi 'Arabi 1: 4-pulse, 12 minimal values



c) Gnawa Baba Mimun: 4-pulse, mixture of binary and ternary



d) Buderabela: 8-pulse, triplet 16th note

Figure 4.15 Standard repeat unit of guembri motives illustrating binary and ternary subdivisions.

cycles over a steady ostinato. Setting the tactus equivalent to a quarter-note pulse, guembri motives are usually two, four, eight, or sixteen pulses long—the standard repeat unit in a piece distinguished by bar lines.³⁰ Like the percussive rhythm of the qraqab, the governing quarter-note tactus of motives may have binary or ternary subdivisions, or a mixture of both. For example, a 4-pulse motive may have sixteen subdivisions, and maximal and minimal values of a quarter- and sixteenth-note, respectively (Figure 4.15 a), or twelve subdivisions with a maximal value of a (triplet) quarter-note and minimal value of a (triplet) eighth-note (Figure 4.15 b), or a mixture of both (Figure 4.15 c) (see Section 4.4.4). Though rare, thirty-

³⁰ Measures and time signatures are adopted as tools for grouping and do not suggest strong or weak pulses.

SEQ. #	JILALI SUITE	Q-PATTERN	MOTIVIC STRUCTURE	PERIODICITY
1	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q1	binary	2-, 4-pulse
2	Jilali Rasul Allah	Q1	binary	8-, 4-pulse
3	Jilali Bou 'Alem	Q2	ternary	8- 2-pulse
4	Dawi Hali	Q2	binary	8-, 2-pulse
5	Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q2	binary/ternary*	8-pulse
6	Allah Allah Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Q2	ternary	8-, 4-pulse
7	Sadi Bula Wali Jali	Q1	binary	8-, 2-pulse

a)

SEQ. #	SIDI MIMUN & LALLA MIMUNA	Q-PATTERN	MOTIVIC STRUCTURE	PERIODICITY
1a	Lalla Mimuna	Q2	binary	8-, 2-pulse
1b	Mimuna Rabi L'afu	Q2	binary/ternary*	8-, 4-pulse
2	Ghumami	Q1	binary	8-, 4-pulse
3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba	Q1	binary	8-, 4-pulse
4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun	Q2	ternary	8-, 4-, 2-pulse
4b	Mimun Ganga	Q2	ternary	2
5	Kiriya	Q2	ternary	8-, 4-pulse
6	Fufu Dinba	Q2	ternary	8-, 4-pulse

b)

Figure 4.16 Temporal frameworks in the suites a) Mulay Abdelqader Jilali and b) Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna.

second and triplet sixteenth notes may be played in certain pieces or during particular sections of a piece (Figure 4.15 d).

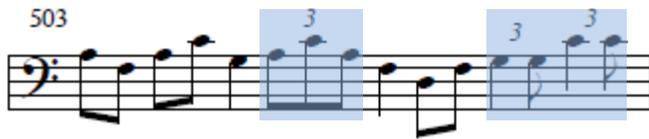
Motivic structures, however, are predominantly binary or ternary. For example, in the *Jilali* and *Mimun* suites all pieces have one of the two frameworks except for Number 5 (Figure 4.16 a) and Number 1b (Figure 4.16 b), respectively, which have both. Note that the juxtaposition of binary and ternary quantities may be balanced throughout the piece or

motive, such as in the case of *Jilali* (Number 5) (see Figure 4.17 a); or as in the *Mimun* suite (Number 1b), begin in binary time and transform to a predominantly ternary one in the instrumental section (Figure 4.17 b). Comparing the two columns of the qarqaba pattern and motivic structure (Figure 4.16), we can see that while some qarqaba patterns subdivide the same way, many do not. The polyrhythmic texture created by the two instruments is discussed in Section 4.5.

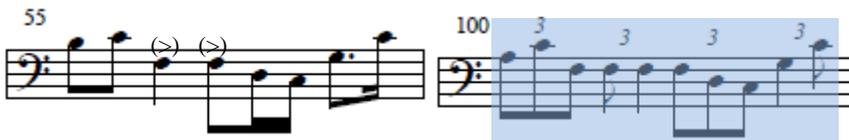
Motives are characterized by binary and ternary time (see Section 4.4.4); recall the hemiola of Q1. It is not uncommon to find triplets within a binary framework or vice-versa, particularly as the intensity of a piece increases with its progression. In some cases, as mentioned above, these are balanced throughout an individual piece (Figure 4.17 a, b). In others, new quantities are rare and momentary (Figure 4.17 c), or recur at specific moments of a motive (Figure 4.17 d). M' allem-s also tend to “swing” the eighth notes of binary patterns defying the constraints of musical time and blurring distinctions between different temporal organizations (Figure 4.17 e). Perhaps the ambiguity of time organization has its analogue in the liminal character of the passage between the mundane and ethereal.

The examples in Figure 4.17 illustrate that the rhythmic features of guembri motives include marks by dynamic or durational accents and change in tone color, unequal durations, a multiform morphology (Figure 4.17 a-e), irregular commetricity (Figure 4.17 a, c) or mixed relationship to the pulse (Figure 4.17 d), symmetry (Figure 4.17 b, c, e; m.432), and irregular asymmetry (Figure 4.17 a, c, d, e; m.433).³¹

³¹ I adopt Arom's following definitions: “A figure is *multiform* when it includes *two or more different configurations*” (1991:240, emphases in original); “The relationship of a rhythmic figure to the pulsation is *contrametric* when accents, changes of tone colour, or... attacks occur *predominantly on the offbeat*. Contrametricity is said to be *regular* when *the position of the marked element with respect to the pulsation is always the same...* [and] conversely... *irregular* when the marked element is *not always in the same position* with respect to the pulsation... The relationship to the pulsation is



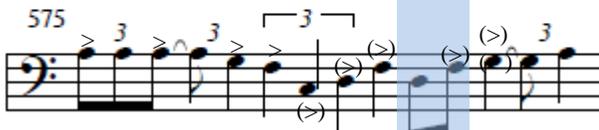
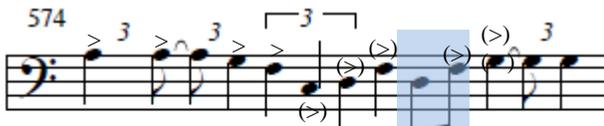
a) Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali: duo framework (irregularly balanced)



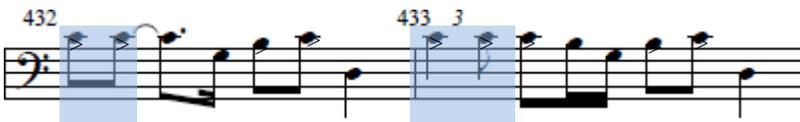
b) Mimuna Rabi L'afu: duo framework (balance between sections)



c) Lalla Mimuna: triplets in a binary framework (rare)



d) Allah Allah Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali: binary quantities in ternary framework (recurring)



e) Dawi Hali: "swinging" eighth-note

Figure 4.17 Rhythmic values and features.

mixed when *commetric* and *contrametric* elements are present in equal numbers in a rhythmic figure” (1991:242-43, emphases in original); “Asymmetry is *irregular* when the figure contains two or more configurations which cannot be segmented into equal parts” (ibid.:246).

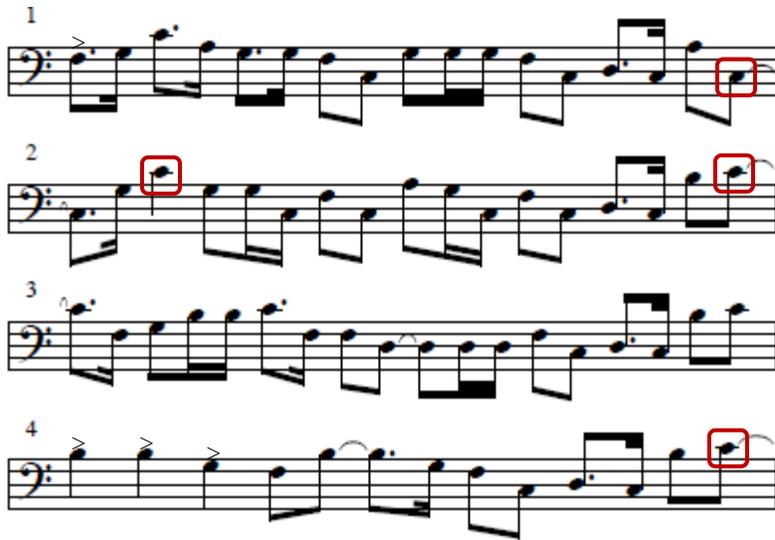


Figure 4.18 Accentuations on Lalla Mimuna: Dynamic accents on the initial onset of Lalla Mimuna (mm. 1, 4), and durational accents (*lahsor*, marked by boxes) (m.1, 2) which delay the usual dynamic accent of pulse 1 to pulse 2 (m.2).

Gania masters do not refer to a strong and weak pulse, although initial onsets of a motive may have a dynamic accent (Figure 4.18, m.1, 4). Characteristic of all pieces is a durational accent on the final attack of a motive called *lahsor* (personal communication, A.Gania, M. Outanine, Y. Outanine, 2009). The *lahsor* falls on the upbeat and prolongs into the first pulse of the next motive, shifting the dynamic accent to the next pulse (Figure 4.18, m.1-3). In measure 2, pulse 2 is marked by a change in tone color (i.e., pitch and timbre) and quarter-note value following a shorter duration.³²

In addition to the different kinds of marks, “Lalla Mimuna’s” iconic motive in Figure 4.18 exhibits unequal durations, multiform morphology, irregular commetricity, and symmetry. Motives shorter in duration such as “Lalla Mimuna’s” *oum* (Section 4.4.2) tend to

³² After sustaining pitch 1 the upper octave is marked by a durational and phenomenal accent. Although it is played in measure 1 on the same pulse, the timbre of pitch 8 in measure 2 differs from that heard in measure 1 because of the technique used to make the sound. Rather than hitting the string directly with the top of the nail, the gentler sound is produced by strumming upward with the edge of the finger.



Figure 4.19 Unitary morphology in shorter guembri motives such as Lalla Mimuna’s oum.

exhibit unitary morphology (Figure 4.19). The accent below the second attack on pulse 2 is subtle and produced by a simultaneous tap on the guembri skin as the m’allem sounds pitch 2. He does not, however, accentuate the rhythm every iteration. Ostinati like the one above (Figure 4.19), played to support singing, are less strict than the qarqaba pattern and structural variations may arise (see Section 4.4.4).

4.4 Motivic Structures

Motivic structures are identified by their pitch content, durational values, and function and are established by their repetition. I use the term *icon* to refer to a motive that corresponds to the supernatural entity being invoked and which identifies him (or her) to Gnawa adepts and friends.³³ The *icon* supports the choral refrain during vocal invocation and

³³ Fuson uses the term “statement” (2009:185) for what I refer to as the icon. I have named the main motive the *icon* because it is iconic of a particular supernatural entity. Fuson (2009), whose study centers on the repertoire performed in Marrakech and Rabat, has noted melodic resemblance in a number of songs that bear “identical or nearly identical melodies” (2009:186). In my work with the Gania m’allem-s of Essaouira, however, only a few pieces share similar *icons* and no two are “identical,” though perhaps the degree of similarity (or difference) could be argued. Regional variations may account for these differences and further research required. The last motive is referred to as the *dance* motive because it is played after vocal invocation ends and when possession dances intensify.

the increasing intensity of possession dance when the vocals end.³⁴ The *oum*, the only type of motive that has been named by Gnawa musicians (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009; M. Outanine, 2009; Y. Outanine, 2009), primarily supports the call-and-response phrases between the m'ellem and qarqabiya and functions much like an ostinato.³⁵ A third motive may be introduced in the instrumental section for possession dance. Because it functions as accompaniment for possession dance, I refer to this as the *dance* motive. In pieces where these functions are fulfilled by only one or two motives, a special *dance* motive does not exist, and the *icon* or *oum* takes on the function of the other.

4.4.1. *Icon*

A motivic structure of eight pulses comprising all five pitches of the scale is commonly observed as an *icon* (Figures 4.18, 4.20 a–c). Though more rare, an 8-pulse *icon* may have four pitches such as 2, 4, 5, and 8 (Figure 4.20 c). Pieces may have shorter 2- or 4-pulse *icons* (Figure 4.20 d, e), often characterized by lower pitch content (Figure 4.20 d), though this is not always the case (Figure 4.20 e) (see Section 4.4.2). In addition to a new qarqaba pattern and pitch with the adoption of “Aisha Hamdushiya” is an asymmetrical 5-pulse period not observed in other pieces of the repertoire (Figure 4.20 f).

Generally, *icons* comprise pitches 1 or 8, 4, and 7 rather than 6 (Figure 4.21, Columns 4 and 5). Although 5 is a frequently played pitch in the majority of *icons*, it may be absent from the basic motive and reserved as an “extra” pitch for embellishing the motive in the

³⁴ The dance section may include a vocal interlude if a signal is given to the m'ellem (discussed in Section 4.6 and Chapter 6).

³⁵ Fuson similarly offers a local term for melodic groupings: *mwima* (literally “little mother”; 2009:189). In many ways, his description of *mwima* resembles what my teachers refer to as the *oum*. Regional variation and interpretation may account for the difference in terminology.

264

a) Jilali Rasul Allah: 8-pulse (pentatonic 124578)

13

b) Buderabela: 8-pulse (pentatonic 24578)

515

c) Fufu Dinba: 8-pulse (tetratonic 2458)

31

d) Mulay Abdelqader Jilali: 2-pulse (tetratonic 1247)

87

e) Sergou Buleji: 4-pulse (pentatonic 12478)³⁶

50

55

f) 'Aisha Hamdushiya: 5-pulse (heptatonic 34567, 12345)

Figure 4.20 The structure of *icon*-motives illustrated in pieces of the Gnawa possession repertoire.

instrumental section (Figure 4.21 a, Number 1). As mentioned in Section 4.2.3, a sixth tone (i.e., finger position on the guembri) may arise in the pentatonic context. Depending on a motive's pitch set, this may either be pitch 6 or 7; that is, the "extra" pitch for the 1 2 4 5 7 8

³⁶ Pitch 5 is introduced later as a new pitch but is not part of the icon.

SEQ. #	JILALI SUITE	SCALE	ICON/OUM pitch set	EXTRA PITCH
1	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	tetratonic	1247	5 (I, V, D)
2	Jilali Rasul Allah	pentatonic (7)	124578	6 (D)
3	Jilali Bou 'Alem	pentatonic (7)	124578 / 1245	
4	Dawi Hali	pentatonic (7)	(1)2578 / 48	6 (D)
5	Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	pentatonic (6, -1)	24568	7 (I, D)
6	Allah Allah Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	pentatonic (6)	124568	7 (D)
7	Sadi Bula Wali Jali	pentatonic (7)	124578 / 2478	

a)

SEQ. #	SIDI MIMUN & LALLA MIMUNA	SCALE	ICON/OUM pitch set	EXTRA PITCH
1a	Lalla Mimuna	pentatonic (7)	124578 / (1)2478	6 (I, D)
1b	Mimuna Rabi L'afu	hexatonic	1245(6)78	6 (V [ChR], D)
2	Ghumami	pentatonic (7)	124578 / 124578	6 (D)
3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba	pentatonic (7)	12457(8) / 12(4)78	6 (D)
4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun	pentatonic (6)	124568 / 124 / 2468	7 (D)
4b	Mimun Ganga	pentatonic (6)	(2)4568	
5	Kiriya	pentatonic (7)	124578	6 (D)
6	Fufu Dinba	pentatonic (6)	245(6)8	

b)

Figure 4.21 Scales in select possession repertoire illustrating the presence of an “extra” pitch: a) Mulay Abdelqader Jilali, b) Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna. Note that the numbers in parentheses next to “pentatonic” indicate the presence or absence of pitches. For example, (6, -1) signifies the presence of pitch 6 rather than pitch 7, and the “absence” of the lowest pitch.³⁷

³⁷ The (-1) symbol suggests that the pitch may not be deliberately played although it may be sounded sympathetically.

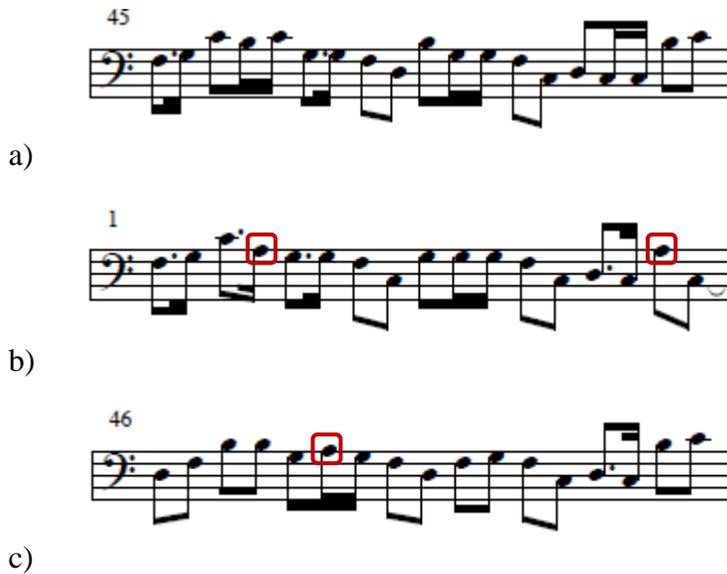


Figure 4.22 An “extra” pitch in Lalla Mimuna’s *icon*: a) pitch set, b) pitch 6 as passing tone (pulse 2) and substitute for pitch 7 (pulse 8), and c) as a neighbor tone (pulse 3).

set would be 6 (Figure 4.21 a, Numbers 2, 4; b, Numbers 1-3, 5), and for the 1 2 4 5 6 8 set, which is more rare, it would be 7 (Figure 4.21 a, Number 6; b, Number 4a).

Extra pitches ordinarily appear less often than those in the prevailing pentatonic set. In Lalla Mimuna, pitch 6 is apparently ornamental. Lalla Mimuna’s *icon* comprises pitches 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8, denoted here as C#2, D#2↓, F#2, G#2, B2↑, and C#3 (Figure 4.25 a). Pitch 6 (A2↓) functions as an upper neighbor tone in Figure 4.22 b, and as a passing tone (Figure 4.22 c) in the instrumental sections of the piece. This type of ornamentation is used sparingly. In one rendition of Lalla Mimuna, pitch 6 was observed five times out of 319 pitch onsets, and in another, only two times out of 706 onsets. More often a m’allem introduces a sixth pitch during the final instrumental section as the intensity of the performance peaks (see Section 4.4.4).

4.4.2 *Oum*

The *oum* is a short melodic idea with a 2- or 4-pulse period that contains a minimal content of two pitches (Figure 4.23).



Some pieces may have more than one *oum* (Figure 4.24). In some instances, additional *oum*-s are variants of the first; in others they are new configurations. Despite its similarities, I consider the variants separately because each version is maintained, with minimal variation, throughout one vocal cycle. For example, in “Sadi Bula Wali Jali,” the first *oum* (m. 6) repeats twelve times consecutively until the vocal cycle culminates with the *icon* supporting the choral refrain. The next vocal cycle begins with the second *oum* (m. 21), again played consecutively until arriving at the *icon*. This applies to “Jilali Bou ‘Alem” and “Gnawa Baba Mimun,” among other pieces of the repertoire. Because the *m’allem* transitions from the *icon* back to the *oum*, the first few iterations and last iteration may differ from the rest of the cycle, such as in “Gnawa Baba Mimun” (Section 4.4.4). I label the rhythmic figure in measure 355 a transition *oum* (a variant of the first *oum* in m. 325) because it is played immediately following the *icon* for three repetitions before settling into the next vocal cycle with the third *oum* (m. 358). While the second *oum*-s for “Sadi Bula Wali Jali” and “Jilali Bou ‘Alem” are variants (mm. 21, 360), the second and fourth *oum*-s in M’allem Abdallah’s version of “Gnawa Baba Mimun” are new ideas (mm. 346, 358).

Unlike *icons* which are unique to a supernatural entity in that no two *icons* are identical, the same *oum* may be played across the possession repertoire. Figure 4.25 illustrates two common *oum*-s and an example of their variants. Interchanging binary and ternary quantities (Figure 4.25, Column 2; Column 3, mm. 386, 358) and manipulating the rhythmic density (Column 3, m. 386, 21) are common ways in which a *m’allem* varies an *oum* to suit the feel of a particular piece.

Name	Oum	Pitch Set	Comments
Sadi Bula Wali Jali	6 Vocals 	478	vocal cycle 1
	21 	2478	vocal cycle 2 (variant)
Jilali Bou 'Alem	326 	124	vocal cycle 1
	360 	124	vocal cycle 2 (variant)
Gnawa Baba Mimun	325 	124	vocal cycle 1
	346 	12468	vocal cycle 2 ("new")
	355 	124	transition oum (variant of 1)
	358 	48	vocal cycle 3 ("new")

Figure 4.24 Multiple oum-s.

Jilali Bou 'Alem		
Dawi Hali		
Gnawa Baba Mimun		
Sadi Bula Wali Jali		

Figure 4.25 Oum-s common to the Gnawa possession repertoire.

M'allelem Abdallah explained that different oum-s exist for the same piece; however, not all m'allelem know the same ones due to regional and familial styles. A m'allelem may choose which oum(-s) he wishes to play or decide not to play one at all. Instead, he may play a shortened version of the *icon* (discussed below) in its place. Because of its function to support the call-and-response, I consider these abridged *icons* as oum-s. For example, in "Jilali Rasul Allah," the *icon* can be divided into A + B (Figure 4.26 a, m. 273). In this case, B, the second half of the 8-pulse *icon*, becomes the oum (mm. 274, 275). Figure 4.26 b illustrates a derivation of the oum (m. 14) from the first half of the *icon* (m. 1) in *Bu Hala*.

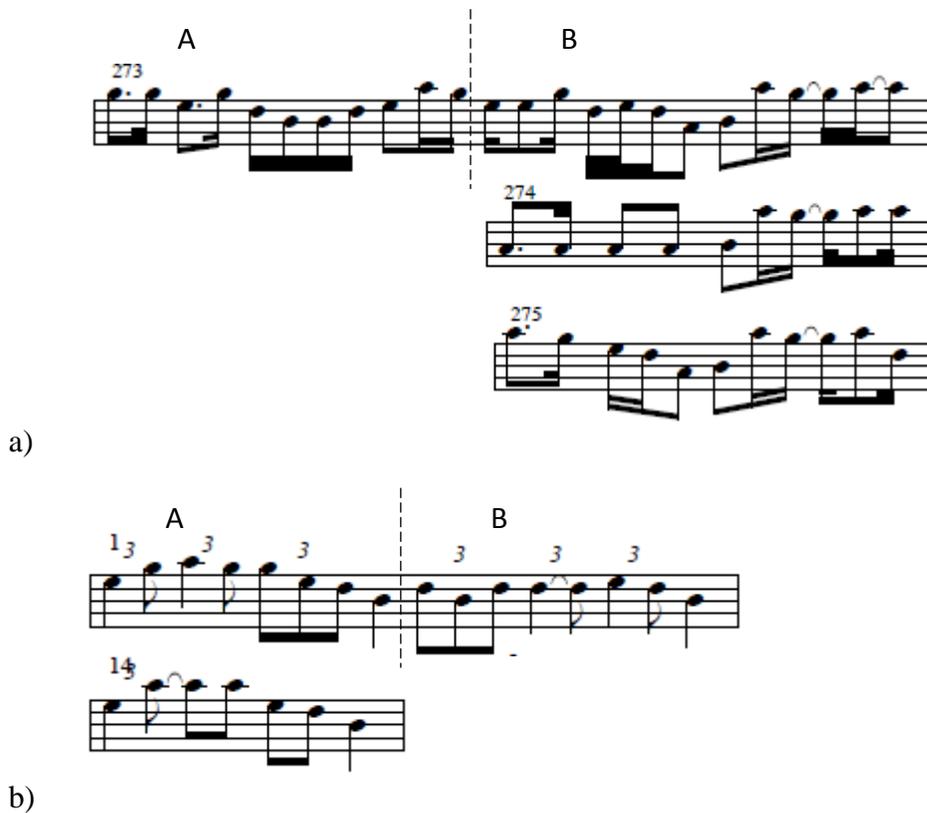


Figure 4.26 Derivation of the *oum* from the *icon*. a) The B portion of the *icon* becomes the *oum* in *Jilali Rasul Allah*, and b) The A portion of the *icon* becomes the *oum* in *Bu Hala*.

4.4.3 *Dance and Cadence*

A *dance* motive is usually two to four pulses long (Figure 4.27). Though many pieces do not have a *dance* motive those that support mimetic performances usually do, as in the cases of “*Ghumami*” and “*Ya Rasul Allah*” (Chapter 6).

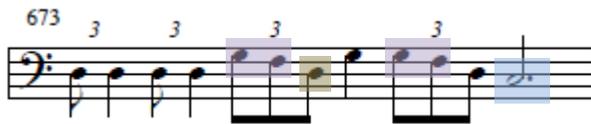
Pieces do not always end on a cadence (see Section 4.6); however, when they do a cadential motive is executed in more or less the same way for every piece following a general 5-4-(2)-5-4-1 contour (Figure 4.28 a–d). As shown in the figures, the motive varies depending on the musician (Figure 4.28 d, e) and on the music, such as the use of ternary (Figure 4.28 a, b) or binary (Figure 4.28 c–e) quantities associated with the temporal



Figure 4.27 The *dance* motives of a) Ghumami and b) Ya Rasul Allah.

structure of a piece. Often coming at the end of heightened trance phenomena, the cadential motive brings the adept home, back into his or her body, and returns the spirit to his or her space beyond (Chapter 6). On the level of social structure, it signifies resolution, equilibrium, and stability in the mother-father dyad.³⁸ Resembling the tuning formula of the msawi, the tahtiya is most frequently sounded though it is the open zir—the primary and final pitch, and symbol of the father—that equilibrates the universe and life within Gnawa society.

³⁸ In an unpublished manuscript, a Cameroonian musician and theatre expert Jean-Baptiste Obama writes of the curious organization of notes according to a familial system of grand parents, mother, son, grandson, and so forth, which “proves that music in African tradition is something more than simple aesthetics: it’s the ethical philosophy of the African people” (in Kubik 1985:32) .



a) Allah Allah Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali (AG)



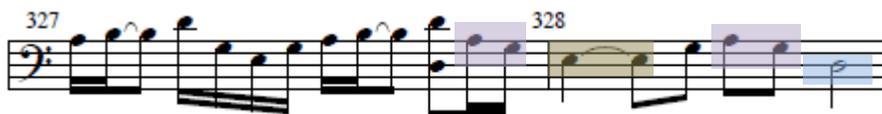
b) Fufu Dinba (AG)



c) 'Aisha Qandisha (AG)



d) Ya Rasul Allah (AG) (pitch 1=B1)



e) Ya Rasul Allah (MoG) (pitch 1=D2)

Figure 4.28 Cadential motive and its variants performed by M'allem Abdallah (AG) and M'allem Mokhtar (MoG). N.B. In d) pitch 1 is B1, and in e) it is D2.

4.4.4 Variations and Sequencing Rules

Guembri motives are rarely exactly repeated and are subject to frequent rhythmic and melodic manipulations. As mentioned above, however, during vocal invocation variations are minimal, particularly where the *oum* is concerned. Instead, variation takes place in the calls of the *m'Allem* while the parameters of the choral response and refrain remain fixed.³⁹ At the level of instrumental sound organization, the overall pitch contour and periodicity of motivic structures are unchanging. So long as these are maintained, the *m'Allem* is free to improvise, varying the melody and rhythm, and embellishing or simplifying cellular units (Figure 4.29). Juxtaposing *M'Allem*-s Abdallah and Mahmoud's versions of Lalla Mimuna's *icon* in the vocal section reveals that the motives of the former consistently undergo new variations, particularly pulses 1–3 and 5, and exhibit a greater overall rhythmic density (Figure 4.29 a), while the latter's exhibit rhythmic regularity and sparser structures (eighth notes) (Figure 4.29 b). In both renditions, the last three pulses are rhythmically and melodically consistent while the first pulse is variable.⁴⁰ Unlike the *icon*, the *oum* varies little maintaining its role as vocal accompaniment. In the same two performances there was only 7% and 22% permutation of respective realizations (Figure 4.30). When the vocals end a greater level of flexibility in the motivic structure becomes possible (discussed below).

³⁹ While the call may vary particularly with regard to vocal content, the response and choral refrain are usually sung in unison and the words unchanging.

⁴⁰ I am currently revising a paper dedicated to developing an approach to modeling sonic structures in Gnawa music.

The image displays a musical score for a bass clef instrument, consisting of eight staves. The staves are numbered 16, 17, 18, 33, 34, 35, 69, and 70. The score includes performance markings such as 'Ch: A' and 'M: B'. The music is annotated with various colored boxes and vertical bars: brown, blue, green, red, cyan, purple, grey, and dark blue. Measure 34 features a triplet of eighth notes. The annotations highlight specific rhythmic patterns and melodic lines throughout the piece.

a) Frequent use of sixteenth-notes in M'alle Abdallah's rendition.

6 Vocals

7

12.

105

106

107

108

113

b) Frequent use of eighth notes in M'alleem Mahmoud's rendition.

Figure 4.29 Variants on Lalla Mimuna's *icon* during vocal invocation maintain the overall contour and periodicity of the structure. Recurring pitches and their combinations are shaded in like colors.

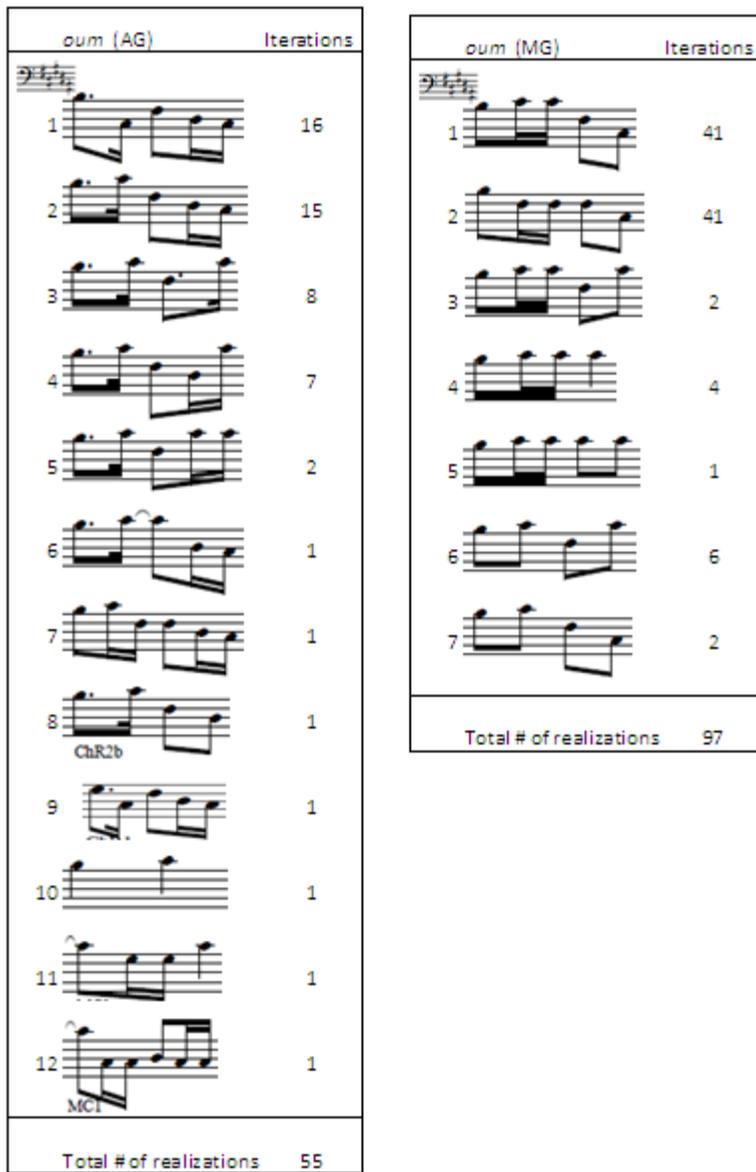


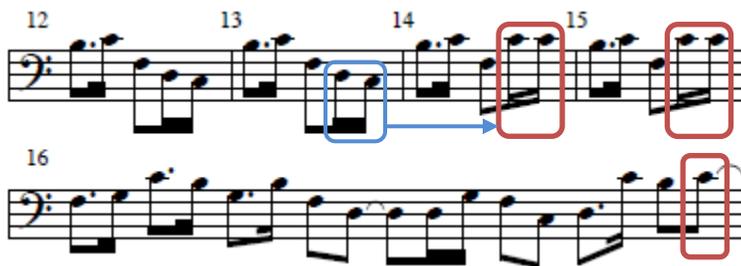
Figure 4.30 Paradigmatic plots of Lalla Mimuna's oum illustrating the number of iterations of each variant as performed by M'alle Abdallah (AG) and M'alle Mahmoud (MG).

4.4.4.1 Alternative Endings and Beginnings

Amidst variation, motivic endings remain virtually unchanged during consecutive repetition. Beginnings, however, may undergo variations that are for the most part commutative (involving pitch substitution). In cases where one motive leads to another motive (i.e., *icon* to *oum*, or *oum* to *icon*), the ending and/or the beginning pulse unit is melodically and sometimes rhythmically adjusted, undergoing a structural variation. For example, pulse 8 of the *icon* (Figure 4.31 a, m. 6) has been modified (cf. m. 5, pulse 8) with the same ending as the upcoming 2-pulse *oum* in measure 7. Similarly, when moving from *oum* to *icon*, the final onsets are adjusted. Here, the *oum*'s usual last pitches are substituted with pitch 8 (the final pitch of the *icon*). The substitution two measures before anticipates the change (m. 14), while the one on measure 15 prepares a seamless arrival (Figure 4.31 b, mm. 14-16). In Figure 4.31c the ending of the *icon* is not modified before moving to the *oum*; instead, the first pulse of the *oum* undergoes a structural variation to accommodate transformation from the *icon* (m. 19). Permutations in the *oum* are due largely to structural aesthetics.



a)



b)



c)

Figure 4.31 Alternative endings and beginnings in Lalla Mimuna's motives: a) *icon-icon*: same ending (mm. 5–6), *icon-oum*: *icon* ending (m. 6, pulse 8) modified to the *oum* ending (m. 7, pulse 2)/*oum* unchanged (m. 7); b) *oum-oum*: same ending (mm. 12–14), *oum-icon*: *oum* ending (mm. 14–15) modified melodically to *icon* ending (m. 16, pulse 8)/*icon* unchanged (m. 16); c) *icon-oum*: *icon* ending unchanged (m. 18, pulse 8)/*oum* beginning modified (m. 19, pulse 1).

4.4.4.2 In Between

Despite the motives' isoperiodicity, when the vocals end Gnawa musicians take pleasure in improvising variations that play with the established temporal framework.⁴¹

M'ellem Abdallah does this in four distinct ways:

1. inserting triplets in a binary framework or vice versa (e.g., 4+3+4+4, 3+3+2+3; Figure 4.32 a, b)
2. mixing binary and ternary quantities equally. In mixture, binary and ternary quantities may:
 - a. split the motive into two halves (e.g., (4+4)+(3+3); Figure 4.32 c)
 - b. alternate (e.g., (3+4)+(3+4); Figure 4.32 d), or
 - c. frame each another (e.g., 4+(3+3)+4 or 3+(4+4)+3; Figure 4.32 e)
3. juxtaposing a ternary period over an established binary one (e.g., within the same time span 2-pulse → 3-pulse period with the same time span; Figure 4.32 f).
4. amplification of the original motive (below, Figure 4.33-4.35).

Procedures 1, 2a, and 3 are asymmetrical while 2b and 2c are symmetrical.

A motivic structure may also be varied by manipulating its periodicity through amplification. The Gania masters do this by keeping the incipit and final cells constant and employing four main techniques which I call *extraction*, *addition*, *truncation*, and *contraction* with regard to how figures are derived from the original structure. In the first

⁴¹ In some pieces like Gnawa Baba Mimun, the juxtaposition of binary and ternary quantities may take place in the instrumental prelude and during the choral refrain of the vocal section.



a) ternary quantities in a binary framework [4+4+4+4+(3+3)+4+4] (Lalla Mimuna)



b) binary quantities in a ternary framework [3+2+3+3] (Gnawa Baba Mimun)



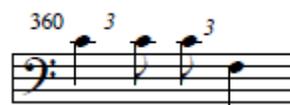
c) binary and ternary clusters [(2+2)+(3+3)] (Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali)



d) alternating quantities [(3+4)+(3+4)] (Gnawa Baba Mimun)



e) framing foreign quantities [4+(3 +3)+4] (Baba Hamu)



f) juxtaposition of binary period with a ternary one (Gnawa Baba Mimun)

Figure 4.32 Polyrhythmic variation within a single periodic structure (a–f).



Figure 4.33 Amplification by extraction in the performance of Mimuna Rabi L'afu by M'allem Abdallah.

case, cells *between* the first and last pulse are extracted and repeated in their same order between the first and last pulse, or *combined elements* extracted from original cells are duplicated between the first and last pulse. For example, the amplification of a 4-pulse motive to eight pulses entails the extraction and repetition of pulse 2 and 3 cells between the first and last positions such that each pulse of the amplified motive contains the cells belonging to the original 4-pulse motive in the following order: 1 [2 3 2 3 2 3] 4. To illustrate, let us consider an excerpt from one of M'allem Abdallah's renditions of "Mimuna Rabi L'afu" (Figure 4.33). The original 4-pulse motive (m. 69) is amplified to eight pulses (mm. 70, 72). In the first amplification (m. 70), pulses 2 and 3 are exactly repeated three times between the initial and final cells of the original motive. After a return to the original motive (m. 71), the new amplified motive is varied by employing the more conservative techniques discussed earlier; that is, change in rhythmic density and melodic variation of individual cells. In measure 72, the original cell of pulse 2 is progressively elaborated through diminution. First by dividing the quarter note into a dotted-eighth and sixteenth and

playing pitch 1 (pulse 4), then by dividing it into an eighth and two sixteenth notes and adding pitches 2 and 4 (pulse 6). Note that the initial onset of the cell remains constant (pitch 5).

Another example of extraction is shown in Figure 4.34. In a version of “Mulay Abdelqader Jilali” by M‘allem Abdallah (Figure 4.34), the 2-pulse *icon* (mm. 22, 31) is amplified to four pulses after the vocal section (mm. 176, 213). In both cases the cells of the first and last pulse of the original motive maintain their initial and final position (shaded in blue and lavender, respectively). In the first amplification Ax1 (m. 176), a new figure is created by extracting and combining aspects of the original cells and realized on pulse 2, then repeated exactly on pulse 3.

Amplification by addition, in which *new elements* are added to the original motive, is illustrated by Ax2 (m. 213). Here, the original pulse 1 is modified by substituting pitch 4 with 5 (new to the current pitch set of 1 2 4 7) in the last subdivision and increasing its rhythmic value by prolonging the final onset to the next pulse. Pulse 2 is syncopated and M‘allem Abdallah introduces another new rhythmic duration of a dotted-eighth. Rather than a repetition of the new cell on the next pulse as we saw in Ax1 (m. 176), an embellishment of the original cell in the final pulse of the *icon* (A) is played. Pitch 6 is introduced as an upper neighbor tone and the rhythmic density increased with two thirty-second notes. These rhythmic and melodic changes are not executed in variants of the *icon* during the vocal section.

In amplification by truncation *half* of the original motive is truncated and the remainder successively repeated. For 2- and 4-pulse motives, structures amplified one time contain cells from the original pulses; for example, 1 1 1 2 and 1 2 1 2 1 2 3 4, respectively.

The diagram illustrates musical amplification techniques across several staves of a score. The staves are numbered 22, 31, 176, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 225, 226, and 227. A vertical blue shaded area covers staves 22 through 217. A purple shaded area covers staves 176 through 227. Annotations include:

- A : icon**: A horizontal line pointing to the first staff (22).
- A : icon (variant)**: A horizontal line pointing to the second staff (31).
- Ax1 : amplification 1x (extraction)**: A horizontal line pointing to a circled note on staff 176.
- Ax2 : amplification 1x (addition)**: A horizontal line pointing to a circled note on staff 213.
- Ax2' : amplification 13x (truncation)**: A large bracket on the right side of the score, spanning from staff 213 down to staff 227, indicating a series of amplifications.

Other annotations include yellow, red, and green boxes highlighting specific notes or groups of notes across various staves, and a green arrow pointing from staff 31 to staff 176.

Figure 4.34 Amplification by extraction (Ax1), addition (Ax2) and truncation (Ax2') in the performance of Mulay Abdelqader Jilali by M'allem Abdallah.

69

81

82 B_c 83 84 85 86 87

88 B_{cx}

89 B_{cx}' 90

91 92

93

B: original motive

B (variant)

Figure 4.35 Amplification by contraction (B_c) and truncation (B_{cx}) in the performance of Mimuna Rabi L'afu by M'allem Abdallah.

Immediately following Ax2 the *icon* is amplified thirteen times to twenty-eight pulses (Figure 4.34, m. 217–227). Ax2', as suggested by the label, is a variation of Ax2. The last two pulses are truncated and the first two pulses repeated eleven times with minimal variations (mm. 217–225). Ax2' ends with two iterations of the original Ax2 ending (mm. 226–227).

Amplification by contraction involves *removal* of the interior cells of the original motive, effectively shortening it to the initial and final pulses, and successive iteration of the new “contracted” figure. Like the other techniques, the amplified structure culminates with

AMPLIFICATION TECHNIQUE	Cells corresponding to original 4-pulse motive							
extraction	1	[2	3	2	3	2	3]	4
addition	1'	2	[n	n	n	n]	3	4
truncation	[1'	2	1'	2	1'	2]	3	4
contraction	[1	4	1	4	1	4]	3	4

Figure 4.36 Amplification techniques for a 4-pulse motive. Note that the numerical values 1 to 4 correspond to the pulse number of the original motive and its respective cells. For example, pulse 6 of the new 8-pulse motive amplified by extraction comprises the same cell as that of the original motive's pulse 2. "n" represents new cells.

the "original" cell of the final pulse. Returning to "Mimuna Rabi L'afu", we can see that as the instrumental section progresses, M'allem Abdallah amplifies the motive eight times by repeating the contracted figure (B_c), a 2-pulse period that comprises the original cells of pulse 1 and 4 (Figure 4.35, mm. 69, 82), minimally varied with pitch substitution, and characterized by alternating durations (mm. 82–87). B_c is exactly reiterated five times; however, before completing the structure with a version of the final cell as in the above examples (Figures 4.33, 4.34), the m'allem amplifies the new 2-pulse figure by truncation and two successive reiterations of the first cell ($B_{c,x}$, m. 88), varies the new 4-pulse figure ($B_{c,x}$) with triplets ($B_{c,x}'$) followed by its repetition (mm. 89–90), and plays two additional $B_{c,x}$ -s (mm. 91–92). He completes this variation with a rhythmic elaboration of the original motive (m. 93).

Figure 4.36 summarizes the amplification techniques. Although the discussion focused on their combined usage in the variation of 2- and 4-pulse *icons*, these techniques

may be employed individually (or in combination) to motives with longer periods during the instrumental section.

A motive may also be varied in the final measures with an “extra” pitch; that is, one that is not part of its pitch content. If the new pitch is introduced at the end of the dance section and forms part of the pitch content of the upcoming piece, it has a structural function and serves as anticipation of the new *icon*. For example, the pitch content for “Dawi Hali’s” *icon* is 1 2 4 5 7 8 (Figure 4.37, mm. 473, 474), while for the subsequent piece (“Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali”) it is 2 4 5 6 8. “Dawi Hali’s” *icon* is always preceded by the transitional phrase in measure 472 (a suffix attached to the second half of the *icon* [m.471] when repeated consecutively). Measures 471 to 474 form an independent group that is reiterated to support the choral refrain as a cycle of call-and-response culminates. If we compare measures 471, 472, and 474 to 494, 495, and 497, respectively, we see that during the instrumental section these configurations are increasingly varied melodically and rhythmically. The same is observed in the first half of the *icon* (m. 473) played at the start of the instrumental section and its later realizations (mm. 491-493, 496). As the m‘allem approaches the next piece, he substitutes pitch 6 for the usual pitch 7 (compare m. 473, pulses 2, 3 [marked by thick circles] with mm. 491–493, marked by squares) nine measures (m. 489, not shown) before the next piece begins. Introduction of a substitute pitch (and “extra” pitch in the original pentatonic framework) in the final moments of a piece anticipates the new mode of the upcoming piece, and signals the ensuing transformation. As “Dawi Hali” segues directly into “Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali,” the new motive initially undergoes a structural variation (m. 499). Pitch 7 (marked by thin circles), which is absent in the rest of the piece, temporarily substitutes the usual pitch 6 (mm. 500–

471

472

473

474

475 3

491

492

493

494

495

496

497

498 3

499

500

501

502

icon

oum

icon of new piece

Figure 4.37 Transition section in which melodic variation plays a structural role. (Dawi Hali → Ydir Allah Axir Ya Mulay Abdelqader Jilali)

502, marked by squares) on pulses 1 and 2. As we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, musical variations are not random but rather closely tied to dance gestures associated with trance phenomena and the context of performance.

4.5 Time II: Polyrhythm and Periodicity

The guembri is played solo and to accompany voice; however, the guembri-qraqab texture is quintessential to Gnawa music. Together, they combine to produce a rich polyrhythmic texture. As we saw in Figure 4.16, it is not uncommon to find binary motivic structures supported by ternary rhythmic patterns and vice versa. In pieces such as “Mulay Abdelqader Jilali” and “Ghumami,” which are supported by the ternary Q1 ostinato , motivic structures constrained by a binary framework with eight or sixteen subdivisions are supported by two or four pulses of Q1 having six or twelve subdivisions, respectively. A single pulse (or rhythmic unit) of the motive and ostinato figure creates a four against three cross-rhythm, in addition to the 3:2 inherent in Q1 (Figure 4.38). Similarly, a three against two cross-rhythm is created between a ternary motivic structure and binary Q2 pattern (Figure 4.39).

The rhythmic relationship in performance depicted in the “polyrhythmic block” (Arom 1991:277) illustrates how the vocal lines, guembri motives, and qraqab pattern “partially interweave” (ibid.:278) (Figure 4.40). The rhythm of the call-and-response verse, in contrast, is independent of both the guembri and castanet rhythms (Figure 4.40 a). In the 8-pulse verse there are fourteen onsets of the call-and-response line, eighteen onsets of the oum, and thirty-two of Q1. The voice and guembri coincide five times (pulses 2, 5, 6 and 7),

Pulse	1	2	3	4
Motive (binary)	x x x x	x x x x	x x x x	x x x x
Q1 composite	o - o o o -	o - o o o -	o - o o o -	o - o o o -
Right hand (binary)	R R	R R	R R	R R
Left hand (ternary)	- L L	- L L	- L L	- L L

Figure 4.38 Polyrhythmic block illustrating the 4:3 cross-rhythm between the respective binary and ternary subdivisions of the motivic structure and Q1, and the 3:2 (or 2:3) hemiola of Q1. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

Pulse	1		3	4
Motive (ternary)	x - x - x -	x - x - x -	x - x - x -	x - x - x -
Q2 composite	o - o o	o - o o	o - o o	o - o o
Right hand (binary)	R R	- R	R R	- R
Left hand (binary)	- L	L L	- L	L L

Figure 4.39 Polyrhythmic block illustrating the 3:2 cross-rhythm between the respective ternary and binary subdivisions of the motivic structure and Q2.

the voice and qraqab share eight positions, and the guembri and qraqab have ten common onsets. All three parts coincide only three times: twice on the third subdivision of pulse 2 and pulse 6, and one time on an accent—that is, on the first subdivision of the response (pulse 7). In the choral refrain (Figure 4.40 b), however, out of seventeen, nineteen, and thirty-two respective onsets of the voice, guembri, and qraqab, eight positions are shared by all three instruments, five of which occur on an accent (pulses 2-6). Twelve positions are shared by the voice and guembri, eleven by the voice and qraqab, and ten by the guembri and qraqab. Unlike the call-and-response verse, the rhythm of the choral refrain exhibits similarities with the *icon* motive and qarqaba pattern (Figure 4.40 b).

Pulse	4				1				2				3						
Subdivision	1	3	14	15	16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
Call (m'allem)	*								* * * *										
Oum (vocal support)	x	x				x	x	x			x				x	x		x	
Q1 composite	o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o

Pulse	4				5				6				7				8							
Subdivision	1	3	14	15	16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16			
Response (qarqabiya)	*								* * * *				* * * *				*							
Oum (vocal support)	x	x		x		x	x	x			x				x	x		x		x				
Q1 composite	o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o

a)

Pulse	1				2				3				4						
Subdivision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16			
Choral refrain (all)	* *				* * *				* *				*						
Icon		x			x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x				
Q1 composite	o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	o	o

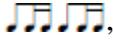
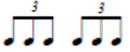
5				6				7				8			
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
* *				* * *				* *				* *			
x x x				x x				x x x				x			
o o o o				o o o o				o o o o				o o o o			

b)

Figure 4.40 Polyrhythmic blocks illustrating how the vocal lines, guembri motives, and qarqaba pattern “partially interweave” in the a) call-and-response, and b) choral refrain during vocal invocation. N.B. The call begins one pulse before the 4-pulse grouping of the oum and Q1. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

1 Regulating Pulse	1			2			3			4		
2 GBM Motive	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Internal Grouping	1			2			3					
3 GBM Motive	x x			x			x x			x		
Internal Grouping	1						2					
4 Q2' composite	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
5 Right hand	R		R		R		R		R		R	
Left hand		L		L		L		L		L		L

Figure 4.41 Polyrhythmic block illustrating a macro 4:3 cross-rhythm between the 4-pulse period and internal ternary grouping of a motive in Gnawa Baba Mimun.

Such rhythmic layers are commonplace in Gnawa music. As possession trance progresses, some pieces exhibit a more complex polyrhythm through additional rhythmic strata. For example, “Gnawa Baba Mimun,” supported by Q2 , reveals a 3:2 (or 2:3) at the cellular-level of a single regulating pulse, and 3:2 and 3:4 at the levels of half (i.e., two pulses) and full 4-pulse groupings, respectively (Figure 4.41). The motive follows the same 4-pulse period set out from the beginning of the piece and is subdivided into a total of twelve minimal values (Row 2), punctuated by the prime version of Q2, Q2'  (Row 4). Here, however, the motive is organized into three groups with four subdivisions each (Row 2), thereby producing a 3:4 hemiola on a higher level with the steady 4-pulse period (Rows 1 and 2) and a 4:3 hemiola with the castanet pattern (Rows 2 and 4). Further examination of the motive reveals that there exists yet another temporal layer. The 4-pulse period can be grouped into a larger 2-pulse motive (Row 3). Rather than the binary feel, this perception yields a ternary feel, each pulse subdivided into quarter-note triplets resulting in a 3:2 hemiola within the 4-pulse framework (Rows 1 and 3) (see Figure 4.32 f).

Despite the interweaving depicted in the figures, the polyrhythm between the guembri and qraqab is subtle, obscured by the periodicity of the guembri motives and quick tempo. For example, at the beginning of “Ghumami” the binary subdivisions may influence the perception of the Q1 pattern as an even “ta ke ta ke.” At the end, the quarter-note tempo increases from about 96 bpm to 140 bpm, equivalent to an intensification from 384 to 560 clacks (of the qraqab) per minute, or six to almost ten clacks per second. At such high tempi, the castanets phase out of the hemiola, merging with the 16-subdivision periodicity of the guembri motive.

Polyrhythmic textures have been observed in other dancing musics, such as the *tromba* performance of the Malagasy ceremony in Madagascar (Emoff 2002) and music of the Tumbuka in Malawi (Friedson 1996), where “musical structure itself is conducive to the blurring of distinctions between subject and object—and between inner and outer time. *Vimbuza* drumming is seductive in this way, and it is structured to be so through its shifting rhythmic perspectives. Spirit and Tumbuka meet in the music of *vimbuza*, and both are transformed as a result” (1996:158).

At the motivic level, layers of periodicities and rhythms common in other types of African and African-based musics co-exist within a governing isoperiodic structure—the macro-period. Hence, the durations of the periodic structures in each layer are always related by simple ratio to those in other layers, such as 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, 1:4 and so forth (Arom 1991). Since the periodic structures of the initial solo calls of the *m’allem* and the choral response of the *qarqabiya* in “Ghumami” are each approximately four pulses long (i.e., 4+4) as illustrated in Figure 4.40, a single call-and-response line (A) is supported by two iterations of the 4-pulse *oum* (Figure 4.42 a, top). Another shorter (2+2) call-and-response line (B), sung later during the vocal invocation, is supported by a single *oum*. The choral refrain has an approximate length of eight pulses supported by the 8-pulse *icon* (Figure 4.42 b). We can see that the ratios of the call-and-response (c-r) lines (A and B) to *oum* to Q1 are 1:2:8 and 1:1:4, respectively, and that of the choral refrain to *icon* to Q1 is 1:1:8. “Lalla Mimuna” and others exhibit similar ratios. From top to the bottom of Figure 4.43, the call-and-response ratios are 1:2:4, 1:4:8, and 1:16; and the choral refrain ratio is 1:1:8. Some pieces have longer and irregular call-and-response lines, such as “Mulay Abdelqader Jilali,” where a single line may be sixty pulses long (i.e., 48+12) and another twelve pulses (i.e., 6+6). Still the ratios

MACRO-PERIOD							
A: c-r (4 + 4)							
oum				oum			
Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1

MACRO-PERIOD			
B: c-r (2+2)			
oum			
Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1

a)

MACRO-PERIOD							
choral refrain							
icon							
Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q1

b)

Figure 4.42 Macro-periodic structures in Ghumami: a) call-and-response, and b) choral refrain. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

MACRO-PERIOD			
A: c-r (2+2)			
oum		oum	
Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2

MACRO-PERIOD							
call (2)		response (6)					
call (4)				response (4)			
oum		oum		oum		oum	
Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2

MACRO-PERIOD														
call (8)								response (8) = choral refrain						
oum		oum		oum		oum		icon						
Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2

a)

MACRO-PERIOD							
choral refrain							
icon							
Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2	Q2

b)

Figure 4.43 Macro-periodic structures in Lalla Mimuna: a) call-and-response, and b) choral refrain.

are 1:30:60 and 1:6:12. The macro-periodic structure encompassing the vocal line, guembri motive, and ostinato regulates their internal periodic and rhythmic independence.

4.6 Formal Structure: Macro-Periodicities

4.6.1 Sections

The entraining rhythm of the qraqab supports the evocative melodies of the guembri that continue in an unending series of pieces for up to an hour (sometimes longer). When I first attended a lila, individual pieces were not immediately recognizable because of how the m' allem seamlessly transformed the melodies of one into the next, much like a DJ who gradually adds the grooves of the next song into the current tune, craftily mixing them until a new song emerges. Upon repeated listening, formal sections become apparent.

Individual pieces, between two to over ten minutes long, are based on invocation of a particular supernatural entity leading to his (or her) possession dance, and comprise two main sections: vocal invocation (V) and instrumental music for dance (D). A piece usually begins with a brief instrumental prelude (I) and ends in three ways: when the next piece begins, with a transition section (T) into the next piece, or with a cadential motive (C). An individual piece then follows an I-V-D-(T/C) progression (Figure 4.44). The duration of a piece depends on the performance context (Chapter 5). For example, M' allem Abdallah's version of *Lalla Mimuna* (Figure 4.44 a) is significantly shorter than M' allem Mahmoud's (Figure 4.44 b) because it was performed for a recording. During a lila, if there are no dancers, similar temporal durations and proportions may be observed. If one or more adepts

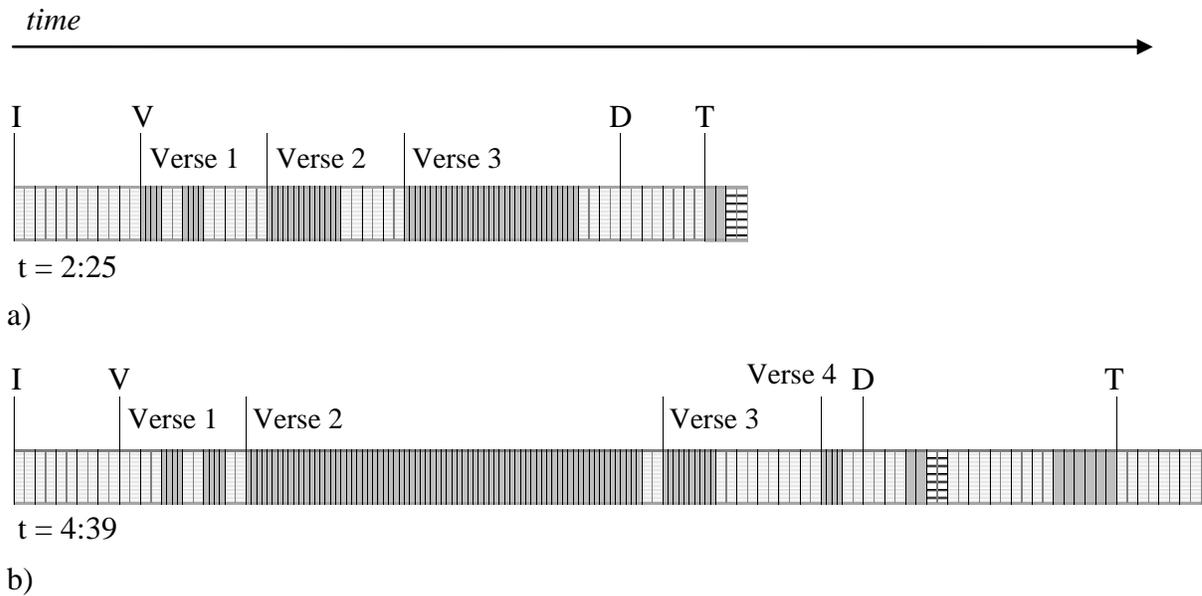


Figure 4.44 Progression of Lalla Mimuna illustrating the I-V-D-T sectional periodicity: a) performed by M'alle Abdallah during a formal recording session, b) performed by M'alle Mahmoud during a sacred lila. The lighter and shaded blocks correspond to the *icon* and *oum* (and their variants), respectively.

participate in possession dance a piece lasts longer. In addition to V being longer, the temporal proportion of D to V also increases to equal, or almost equal, duration (Figure 4.44 b). The respective duration of V and D are 2'31" and 2'08", compared to 2'02" and 23" when performed in the secular context (Figure 4.44 a). In some cases, as we shall see in Chapter 6, D may be longer than V. Pieces are frequently played consecutively without a pause, so preceding pieces end as soon as the motive of the subsequent piece begins with or without a transition section (T). Only stand-alone pieces, final pieces of a continuous sequence, and those in which spiritual enactment (i.e., mimetic dance) takes place come to a final cadence (C). This sectional periodicity is replicated in the entire Gnawa repertoire.

The governing principle of the Gnawa musical form, like many kinds of sub-Saharan musics and its diasporic counterparts, is repetition of structural units—motives, cycles, and sections. For example:

$$\begin{aligned}
 I: & \quad s \text{ (N) or } s \text{ (O)} \\
 V_m: & \quad u \begin{pmatrix} \text{c - r} \\ \text{O O} \end{pmatrix} w \begin{pmatrix} \text{ChR} \\ \text{N} \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \text{voice} \\ \text{guembri} \end{pmatrix} \\
 D_p: & \quad x [y \text{ (N) (O) }] z \text{ (P)} \\
 & \quad \text{T/C}
 \end{aligned}$$

Figure 4.45 An abstract model of the musical form of an individual piece.

where s represents the number of repetitions; u , w , x , y , and z the number of repetitions that varies with m and p number of cycles;⁴² N, O and P the variable *icon*, *oum* and *dance* motives; and c-r and ChR the call-and-response and choral refrain phrases, respectively.⁴³ Repetition may take the form of exact reiteration, most frequently observed in the *oum*, not to mention the vocal content in the response portion of the call-and-response verse and the choral refrain; ornamented reiteration, observed in the *oum*, the *icon*, and the vocal content; and structurally varied reiteration upon recurrence of another motive—that is, the transition from *icon* to *oum* or *oum* to *icon*, often characterized by alternative beginnings and endings (see Section 4.4.4).

Some performances comprise a series of two or three pieces forming a sub-suite (Chapter 6). Members of the Gania family have described such pieces following a strict

⁴² The arrangement of motives is variable and depends upon the *m'alem* and ritual occasion.

⁴³ Note that the two rows for V_m represent two vertical relationships corresponding to the voice and guembri part.

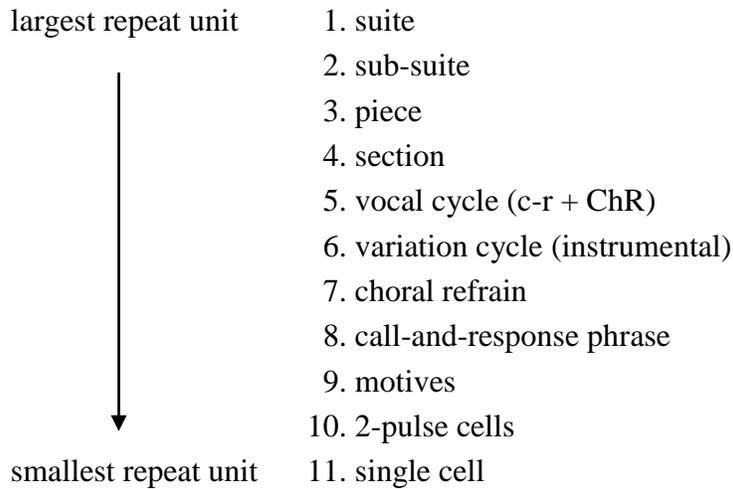


Figure 4.46 Repeat units in Gnawa music.

sequence as “brothers” (personal communication, A. Gania and M. Outanine, 2009).⁴⁴ The sub-suite is the largest repeat unit, or periodic structure, within a suite (Figure 4.46). In a sub-suite of three pieces, the first two pieces often end with a transition section (T), and the final piece with a characteristic cadential motive (Section 4.4.3):

I1-V1-D1-(T1) → I2-V2-D2-(T2) → I3-V3-D3-C

The numeric suffixes 1, 2, and 3 correspond to the first, second, and third piece. Every suite includes at least one consecutive execution of pieces that may be correlated to the ritual process (Chapter 6).

⁴⁴ Fuson uses the term “sub-suite” (2009:120), which I adopt in my discussion.

4.6.2 Grouping and Cycles

Each section repeats one or more motivic structures over larger cycles; that is, vocal cycles and variation cycles (Figure 4.46, Numbers 5 and 6; Chapter 7). A piece usually begins with its *icon* accompanied by the qraqab for a few measures before the vocals enter. In this early portion, m'Allem may improvise lightly, playing with the temporal framework or ornamenting with an extra pitch (Figure 4.22). The duration of the instrumental prelude varies with the performance occasion and can be as brief as a few repetitions or last upward of two minutes.

The vocal section may be described as a varied strophic form supported by specific motivic structures played on the guembri (Figure 4.46, Numbers 5, 7 and 8). It may be categorized into two distinct repeatable parts: call-and-response (c-r) and choral refrain (ChR). After several reiterations of call-and-response phrases sung between the m'Allem and his qarqabiya, the vocal verse, or cycle, culminates with a choral refrain sung by all musicians, marking its completeness and closure at a mid architectonic level.

Generally, as discussed in Section V, the vocal periodicity comprises a 4- or 8-pulse call-and-response phrase (e.g., 2+2 or 4+4), though it may be asymmetrical and longer (e.g., 1+3, 2+6, 5+3), and a 4- to 8-pulse choral refrain (Figures 4.42, 4.43). Vocal phrases may be characterized by “rudimentary polyphony, sporadic but *systematic*” (Arom et al.

2007b:1091). They are never an exact number of pulses as they tend to overlap with one another, beginning before the other ends, and always in the same way.⁴⁵ The 2- or 4-pulse

⁴⁵ An overlapping of voices is often observed at the beginning and ending of vocal phrases. Note that both the m'Allem's call and the choral response of the qarqabiya begin half a pulse before the downbeat of the 4-pulse *oum*. Similar observations were made by Gide (1928) during his travels: “As

oum repeated on the guembri supports the call-and-response (Figure 4.45). Verses comprise several repetitions of the call-and-response unit, each supported by usually one or two iterations of the oum (O) depending on the piece and often rhythmically independent (Figure 4.40). If an *icon* (N) accompanies the choral refrain, it is usually of equal duration to the latter (Figures 4.42, 4.43). In some cases, like “Mulay Abdelqader Jilali,” the 2-pulse *icon* is shorter than the 8-pulse choral refrain. The vocal cycles group the smaller repeatable unit of guembri motives into a larger unit; that is, $u(O) w(N)$ or $u(OO) w(N)$ as shown above (Figure 4.45). A single vocal cycle, or verse, is repeated and varied in duration and content while supporting motives change little. An individual piece usually comprises three or more vocal cycles, before giving way to the abstract language of instrumental music for jedba in section D (Figure 4.44).

During the instrumental dance section, the tempo increases dramatically, the qraqab get louder, and the m‘allem executes a flourish of variations increasing in level, diversity, and frequency compared to the vocal section as discussed in Section 4.4.4. Variation is not random and depends on a number of contextual factors. Nevertheless, it involves a sequencing of motives that forms a larger grouping period, or variation cycle (Figure 4.46, Number 6); for example, $x [y (N)O] z (P)$ or $z (P) x [y(N) O] N$ (Chapter 7). While larger grouping structures are observed in this section, cells as small as one pulse in length may be extracted and iterated (Figure 4.46, Numbers 10 and 11). As mentioned in Section 4.4.4, amplification is a common variation technique. Motives may be truncated, contracted, embellished, and so forth in the same or different way with each repetition. In a sacred context, if a dancer is present, the number of cycles is reiterated for as long as the spirit

always in French Equatorial Africa, the chorus did not wait for the soloist’s phrase to finish, but struck in on the last, and sometimes even on the penultimate note” (in Arom 1991:21).

Section	I	V	D	T / C
Name	Instrumental prelude	Vocal invocation	Instrumental dance	Transition / Cadence
Motives	N/O	N O	N O (P)	N O (P) / C
Pitch Content (# of pitches)	4-5	4-5	4-5	4-5 (+ extra pitch) / 3-4
Standard Periodicity of Motives (pulses)	2-8	2-8	2- >16	2- >16 / 4-5
Texture	G/GQ	GQV	GQ (GQV, G, GV)	GQ, G
Sub-Texture	sersera camel skin	sersera camel skin	sersera camel skin	sersera camel skin
Avg Low/High Tempo Range (bpm)	87-170	87-173	95-190	105-190 / same to -70
Dynamics Range (1=m, 6=ff)	1-4	4-6	1-6	2-6 / 1-3

Figure 4.47 An abstract model of the musical form illustrating the progression of musical parameters. N.B. N, O, P and C correspond to the *icon*, *oum*, *dance*, and *cadential* motives; and G, Q, and V to the *guembri*, *qraqab* and *voice*.

desires, otherwise the m'allelem executes a brief cycle or two and moves on to the next piece.

Although there is no possession dance during secular performances, a m'allelem takes this opportunity for virtuosic display performing several cycles of variations. How the musical processes are differentiated is discussed in Chapter 7.

In addition to melody, rhythm, and time organization (summarized in Figure 4.47, Rows 4 and 5), other musical parameters such as texture, tempo, and dynamics also play a fundamental part in possession trance rituals. As an individual piece progresses from I-V-D-T/C, the texture and dynamics evolve from G/GQ–GQV–GQ (G, GV, G)–GQ(G) and m/f–ff–ff/f–f(ff)/mf (Figure 4.47, Rows 6 and 9). The m'allelem establishes a moderate tempo during the vocal section (V) and maintains it until the instrumental dance section (D), when it quickly and steadily increases until its peak (Row 8; Chapter 6). During section (D),

variability in the texture and dynamics—a solo guembri, hits on the camel skin, enhanced sonority of the sersera (flat metal rattle), a vocal interlude, lower dynamics—accommodates the dialogue between the music and dance, and the musician and dancer (Column 4; discussed in Chapter 6).

Although the Gnawa musicians with whom I worked did not tend to talk about their music, much less conceive of it in binary and ternary frameworks, or as motivic structures, groupings, cycles, and sections, they did identify two distinctive parts of a musical performance. During one of my lessons, while M‘allem Abdallah was demonstrating a piece, he momentarily stopped singing to say, “It’s the *oum* for when the m‘allem sings” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009), referring to the accompanying 2-pulse guembri motive. After a few minutes he stopped singing altogether and continued to play the guembri solo, executing and varying the *icon*. He looked at me and said, “It’s [instrumental] music for *jedba*” (ibid.). Sections may not be explicitly delineated, but specific functions of the music—and, in this case, of the two motives—are identified.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that as a variation form, my analysis of Gnawa musical structure is an abstraction of the performance process based on my work with the Gania m‘allem-s, primarily M‘allem Abdallah and other members of the Gania family. Furthermore, a more extensive analysis of these parameters, specifically variation of motivic structures, that includes performances from other regions and masters, would be required to arrive at a cross-regional model for rules of variation and sequencing. The aim of the current chapter was to provide a general understanding of Gnawa music as preparation for the upcoming comparative analysis which focuses on specific pieces and the flexibility and

manipulability of their structure with respect to each other and their distinct performance contexts.

In Gnawa music, variations in pitch and duration are commonplace, in one sense as expression of artistry and mastery, in another as ritual expectation. Performance and social factors play a role in shaping musical realizations, such as how a m' allem decides to prolong or shorten a cycle, play an extra iteration, change the tone color, and so forth. As Qureshi writes about Qawwali, "each performance of the same song invariably takes its own shape, unique to the occasion" (1995:4). The next chapter examines occasions for Gnawa music performance and investigates their structures in divergent contexts of the sacred and secular. In Chapters 6 and 7, I consider the significance and signification of variations by examining how they may be differentiated and categorized within the same sacred context and across contexts of the sacred and secular.

Chapter 5

Gnawa Music Performance: Sacred and Secular Structures

Gnawa music is traditionally performed in the sacred sphere of spirit possession rituals for different occasions, such as healing, mussem-s, life-cycle celebrations, and as obligatory offerings. Although music is fundamental to ritual success, other phenomena—animal sacrifice, the burning of resins, donning of colored-veils and costumes, ingestion of foods, use of objects, participants, time, and space—are also vital to the ritual process. In the last few decades, new secular occasions have arisen where m'allem-s are hired to play for weddings, parties, and festivals. These performances draw from the same repertoire; however, they differ in intent, as evinced by the absence of non-musical ritual phenomena and paraphernalia, and in their setting and procedure.

Regardless of the differences between sacred and secular contexts, the structure and content of the performance does not vary appreciably with the occasion; that is, all sacred occasions (e.g., healing ceremonies and life-cycle celebrations) are equivalent but differ from secular occasions, which share a common structure with each other. This consistency allows for an abstraction of structures and contents associated with each context. In the first section I introduce performance occasions and focus on the setting with regard to the personage, place, duration, layout, and arrangement. The second section investigates the performance procedure and socio-economic dimensions. To realize the impact of secular occasions, and the ways in which Gnawa negotiate secularization into their worldview, the structure of the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* performances is juxtaposed with that of the sacred ceremony throughout the analysis.

5.1 Performance Occasions

Of prime importance to Gnawa performances are the mussem-s of their patron saint Sidi Bilal and the death days of saints adopted into the Gnawa pantheon including Mulay Brahim and Mulay Abdallah ben Hsein. These occasions are held in public at or near the holy sites and usually attract the largest number of devotees, including Gnawa masters from various regions of Morocco who come for their annual visit, transporting their ritual accessories from one holy site to the next. Adepts and moqaddema-s invite reputable m' allem-s (and other moqaddema-s) from around Morocco to transmit their baraka in performances of spirit possession ceremonies. Smaller private lila-s may also be held nearby.

During the month of Sha'ban, moqaddema-s sponsor a ceremony of their own to honor the Gnawa pantheon and, more specifically, their affiliated mluk. The location of their mussem-s is not fixed. One year Moqaddema Zaida rented a large hall, another year she put up a large tent outside her house, while sometimes she uses the intimacy of her own home. Unlike the mussem-s of the saints, these are private occasions, not usually open to the uninitiated. These occasions require the performance of lila-s that last over several days, a vast amount of preparation and expenditure, and feature miraculous performances rarely witnessed during the rest of the year. Commemoration of saints and spirits and renewal of ties constitute the main reasons for holding full-scale lila-s.

In addition to these annual celebrations specific to Gnawa are those governed by the Islamic calendar, such as the birth anniversary of the Prophet Mohammed, the Great Sacrifice, and the Small Sacrifice as mentioned in the introductory chapter. Unlike the full-scale events of the holy sites, Gnawa masters join in the procession, performing only one portion of the ritual.

Outside of these canonical days Gnawa masters hold lila-s at the request of their devotees, primarily for therapy. The more affluent sponsor lila-s as a show of gratitude (i.e., an offering) and to gain baraka during life cycle celebrations such as birthdays and weddings, and other special events. These are usually smaller scale occasions that last a single evening. In the past, a special gathering called gaç'a was held in the Zaouia Sidna Bilal to initiate a new m'allem. During this event he would be required to perform a complete lila under the scrutiny of invited Gnawa masters. Nowadays, the gaç'a seems to have been replaced by the annual *Young Gnawa Talents' Festival* (Chapter 3).

Large public lila-s held for annual celebrations may be animated by one or more m'allem-s, while only a single m'allem is hired for private ceremonies. Busiest times of the year are the weeks following the Prophet's anniversary and the month of Sha'ban . Reputable m'allem-s are in high demand and work for days on end going from one household to the next, sometimes between cities. With the exception of Ramadan, Gnawa musicians work small-scale lila-s throughout the year with varying regularity. Regardless of the performance occasion, a standard ritual structure and repertoire is adhered to in sacred lila-s. If more than one m'allem is performing, the parts are simply divided among them.

Gnawa musicians may engage in a variety of secular activities depending on their popularity and their interests. They may be hired to perform in life-cycle celebrations, such as weddings and birthdays,¹ where they play for a specified fee and pre-determined duration. Festivals form the largest and most lucrative market for m'allem-s. In Morocco, the summer months are the most active time. World music festivals throughout the year provide Gnawa

¹ Birthday celebrations also fall within the sacred domain because Gnawa may hold lila-s as an offering to the mluk in exchange for good fortune, health, and so forth. As professional musicians, they may be hired by non-Gnawa to perform for a birthday in the secular context (i.e., playing the pre-possession repertoire only). Gnawa do not, however, conduct lila-s for their weddings.

musicians with opportunities for international gigs. Outside of festivals, m' allem-s may have regular shows at restaurants or hotels, playing several times during the week, and sometimes daily during high season. Some may get special contracts performing on television, doing interviews, working with researchers, doing documentaries, and so forth. More recently, secular versions of lila-s have been requested purely for entertainment where the interest of the sponsors, usually non-Gnawa, lies in the music performance alone.

5.1.1 Essaouira and the Gania Family

Governed by Gnawa occasions, the Islamic calendar, and the tourism industry, sacred and secular occasions now form a part of the Gnawa master's annual routine. The range of Gnawa performances is exemplified in Essaouira where the most spectacular and important occasions of both the sacred and secular are held—the mussem of Sidi Bilal and the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*. Annual celebration for their patron saint takes place during the month of Sha'ban at Zaouia Sidna Bilal.² Located in the southwestern part of the medina called Bani Antar (Figure 5.1), it is considered the only Gnawa zawiya in Morocco (Ross et al. 2002). M' allem Abdallah Gania has been charged with the obligation to work this lila every year.

² With regard to the Diwan (Gnawa's Algerian counterpart), Dermenghem writes: "The most interesting rituals take place in the more restricted festivals inside the house, during the second fortnight of Cha'abane [Sha'ban] and principle dates of the Muslim lunar calendar" (Dermenghem 1953:321).

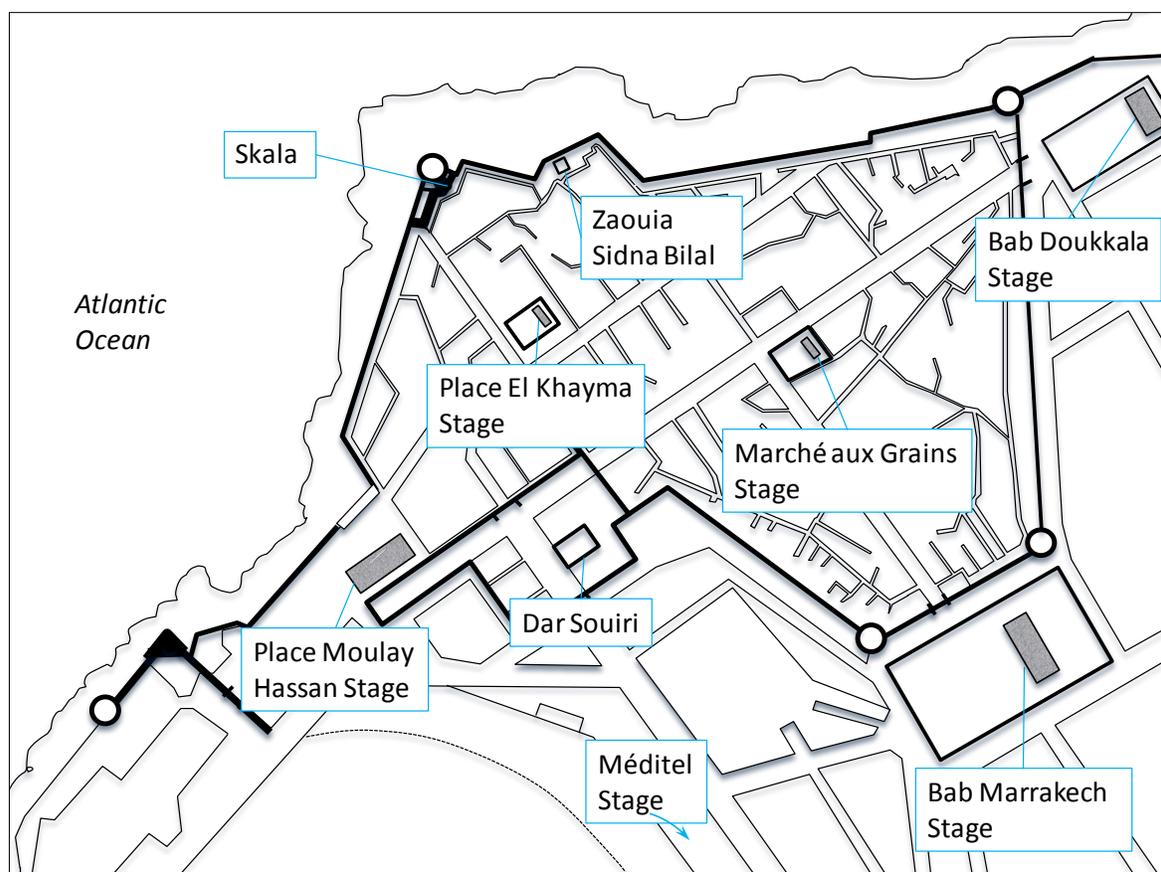


Figure 5.1 Map of the Essaouira medina illustrating venues of the *Gnaoua Festival*.

Since its inception in 1998, the *Gnaoua Festival* has become one of the most popular festivals of Morocco.³ For the occasion, two main outdoor stages are erected: one at Place Moulay Hassan, a big square situated within the ramparts of the medina near the port; and the other at Bab Marrakech, the southern gate of the medina (Figure 5.1).⁴ The exact location of smaller outdoor stages varies from year to year, although a few are generally set up just beyond the walls near the sea and on the beach. Other intimate indoor venues are scattered at

³ The other popular festival is the *Fez Festival of World Sacred Music* “held annually since 1994... [it] was... launched in the wake of the first Gulf War as an interfaith initiative and was conceived with a European and American audience in mind” (Curtis 2007:vii).

⁴ At the time of writing in 2011, this main venue (for the last ten years) was removed from the festival program.

various places in the medina and may include the Zaouia Sidna Bilal, the Hamadsha zawiya, Dar Souiri and other local riads (Figure 5.1).⁵ Every year in June, the event brings together a large number of Gnawa m' allem-s from around Morocco and engages them in a virtuoso display of their ritual music and fusion collaborations with international artists. Majdouli (2007) likens the ritualization of the *Gnaoua Festival* to one of many ritual visits made by Gnawa throughout the year.

In addition to these two major Gnawa events, Moqaddema Zaida holds a full-scale lila during Sha'ban . During this month, the Gania m' allem-s work their sister's obligatory lila, and travel to other cities to work the lila-s of other moqaddema-s. Throughout the year they are hired for a number of smaller scale lila-s. Essaouira hosts one other important festival for the Gnawa: *Young Gnawa Talents' Festival*, a competition that selects the top new Gnawa m' allem of the year (Chapter 3). Well-established troupes animate the opening and closing acts of the festival and reputable m' allem-s, including M' allem Mahmoud, serve as judges. Local music festivals may also present opportunities for Gnawa music performances. The mastery of the Gania family has given them further opportunities for secular work in other domains, such as film and television, the recording industry, and research; and at least one or two times a year they are hired to perform in festivals abroad.

⁵ The building was once the seat of the Provincial Authority of colonial forces during the protectorate. Today, the *riad* (a traditional Moroccan house or palace with an interior garden or courtyard) named *Dar Souiri* (House of Essaouira) is used as the cultural center of Essaouira operated by the Association Essaouira-Mogador.

5.2 Setting for the Sacred *Lila* and *Gnaoua Festival*

Factors that are fixed or pre-requisite to the setting of a lila include personages, time, and occasion. These factors distinguish ritual occasions from one another, and corresponding expectations with regard to the procedure. In conversation with the Gania family, they often discussed the setting of a lila with respect to the occasion, place, and reputation of the masters (moqaddema and m' allem) animating an event, and the presence of certain participants. Similarities and differences between participants in a sacred lila and at the *Gnaoua Festival*, and the setting and layout of common performance occasions, are summarized in Figures 5.2 to 5.4.

5.2.1 Personages

5.2.1.1 Leadership

The moqaddema and the m' allem enable the ritual occasion and establish its character (Figure 5.2). The moqaddema performs her double-duty as ritual officiant of the proceedings, which include caring for the spiritual welfare of the participants, and as seer-therapist to embody and be embodied by the spirits, leading to mediumship. The m' allem has the responsibility to call the mluk with specific musical motives, and to propitiate and tame them with his variations. Conditions for ritual success ultimately rest upon their partnership; that is, the smooth running of events based upon their knowledge and experience of the idiom and context, access to ritual assistants ('arifat and qarqabiya) contingent on their lineage and reputation, their competence to work the supernatural forces, and their baraka which grants

Personages	Role	Function	Activity
m'ellem qarqabiya (male)	musical leader accompanists	musical ensemble	plays lead instrument, sings calls play percussive support, sing chorus, dance
moqaddema 'arifat	spiritual leader, officiant, medium assistants	ritual organizers and management team	mastered trance support initiates, mastered/generic trance
sponsor moqaddema (guest) 'arifat, adept initiate non-devotee non-Moroccan	member member, assistant member, assistant member spectator spectator	audience	mastered/generic trance, ululate mastered/generic trance, ululate mastered/generic trance, ululate mastered/generic trance generic trance, ululate generic trance, ululate

Figure 5.2 Personages in a sacred lila.

Personages	Role	Function	Activity
m'ellem qarqabiya (male)	musical leader accompanists	musical ensemble	plays lead instrument, sings calls play percussive support, sing chorus, dance ('ada, koyo, nugsha)
female Gnawa (moqaddema, 'arifat)	accompanists		sing chorus, dance (mock trance)
organizers Gnawa press managers tourists	spectators spectators spectators, PR talent scouts spectators	audience	all members of audience may: dance, sing, clap, record, shout requests, make notes, take photos, talk

Figure 5.3 Personages at the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*.

them musicality and alliance with the unseen. To a large extent the moqaddema contributes to the overall character (and expectations) of a lila since she is the one who initiates, organizes, and officiates at it. This entails choosing and contacting the m'Allem. Lila-s may be identified by the moqaddema in charge; however, the m'Allem's connection with her—his crucial role to the unfolding of the ritual, not to mention his visibility—underscores the significance of his contribution to the proceedings.

Musical leadership belongs first and foremost to the m'Allem during performance. He is the leader of the ensemble, plays the lead instrument, and sings the lead.⁶ Only he has the privileged role of improvising the motives and sung text, establishing and changing the tempo, and determining the repertoire and duration of a given piece. Restricted to playing a fixed rhythm and responding in choral unison throughout, the qarqabiya provide accompaniment in standard rhythms and follow the cues of the m'Allem increasing the tempo and dynamics, stopping, and resuming after a pause.

While the m'Allem reigns over the musical process, during the possession portion of the lila his choices are shaped by the participants and their spiritual affiliations and afflictions which provoke and desire dance. Because his role is to facilitate and sustain possession, the m'Allem subtly scans the audience for familiar adepts so he knows what he will need to play as the evening progresses. He also watches the participants and dancers, prepared to respond to unexpected situations.⁷ A m'Allem is familiar with the requirements of moqaddema-s he works with on a regular basis and tends to adapt the basic repertoire according to each of their spiritual alliances, adding pieces or changing the order before the ritual begins and

⁶ Though another m'Allem or apprentice on qraqab may sing the lead part, the Gania m'Allem-s usually sang and played the guembri.

⁷ Due to the unpredictability of the supernatural entities, m'Allem must be ready to adapt to sudden events during a ceremony.

during its progression if necessary. When a moqaddema officiates at a lila for a client, she has the authority to ask the m'Allem to adapt the repertoire at the outset to suit the needs of the sponsor (see Section 5.3.2).

Social leadership of the music ensemble normally falls to the m'Allem who chooses his musicians for a performance, makes arrangements for transport, and sets the time and place to meet, much like a manager. Usually the qarqabiya gather at the house of the m'Allem before any event. Qarqabiya frequently visit the homes of various m'Allem-s in search of opportunities to work. New and younger players hope to gain experience and recognition by playing for m'Allem during lila-s. Ensembles are generally all male, especially for sacred occasions (Figure 5.2).

During a ritual evening, the m'Allem and his musicians are most prominent: they energize the seen and unseen community in the procession ('ada) with music and dance, and sit "centre stage" on cushions, performing with few breaks over the course of the ceremony. Not only are they always in plain sight, they are awarded a privileged position before the audience. In contrast, with the exception of the moqaddema's miraculous possession dance(s) which sets her apart from the rest, she blends in with the seated audience when in view, but otherwise works behind the scenes surveying the progression of events. Her assistants may be seated among the participants but move around as required carrying out a number of tasks: assisting in the kitchen, watching over the initiates, bringing out accessories, engaging in possession dances, or tending to the moqaddema.

The *Gnaoua Festival* is produced and organized by A3 Communication, a consulting agency based in Casablanca.⁸ They take on the roles as sponsor and moqaddema, putting up

⁸ A3 communication is a consulting agency in communication, event management and marketing, and press relations.

the money, mediating between the m'Allem and the client (i.e., audience members), and overseeing the operation. When Kapchan asked the festival director Neila Taizi “what they were trying to create at the... festival” (2008:59), she replied: ““It’s a very personal state. It’s a space where one forgets everything. One is cut off from everything. That’s the mystical side of it—to create the void. It’s hard to liberate the spirit. Here, they are seeking humanity, peace, harmony”” (ibid.). At the festival, Gnawa m'Allem-s are one of three categories of performers, the other two being international musicians and (non-Gnawa) Moroccan artists. As an example, the 2008 program included twenty-eight Gnawa masters—twelve locals (i.e., from Essaouira), seven from Marrakech, and nine from other parts of Morocco (Rabat, Casablanca, Meknes, Tangiers, Safi); the participation of twenty-one international “world artists” and “invited groups” from various countries such as France, Algeria, U.S.A., Argentina, Mali, Palestine, and Korea; four “Moroccan groups” of popular, folk-ethnic ensembles; and five “off site” groups featuring other ethnic and religious musics of Morocco, such as Hamadsha, Haddarat, and ‘Aissawa (A3 Communication, 2008).⁹ Although the program varies from year to year, there is a handful of Gnawa m'Allem-s who are the mainstay of the festival.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the leadership of the moqaddema recedes into the background for secular occasions. Female Gnawa (*Gnawiyya*-s) are rarely seen on the *Gnaoua Festival* stage, and when they are, there are usually no more than one or two (Figures 5.3, 5.8 b). As accompanists to the m'Allem, they are limited to singing in unison with the qarqabiya, and may be asked to perform mock possession dances (Figure 5.3, Row 2). Moqaddema-s who have their own female music ensembles have better opportunities to

⁹ In “11^e Edition Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde D’Essaouira” program.

perform as leaders in smaller venues at the *Gnaoua Festival* and elsewhere,¹⁰ however, their ritual role is eliminated from the secular program, and their prominence among Gnawa society likely unknown to the non-Gnawa audience (Chapter 3).

5.2.1.2 Audience

In his seminal work on the relations between music and trance, Rouget writes: “the possessed person... must have an audience” (1985:129). Like the trance rituals of the Hamadsha in Morocco, Calonarang in Bali, and Santería in Cuba,¹¹ the Gnawa lila is a social event, a music-ritual drama performed in the presence of an audience (seen and unseen). A lila audience ranges from a small homogeneous group of Gnawa in small-scale and private events, to a large heterogeneous crowd of Gnawa and non-Gnawa (including devotees of the various Moroccan Sufi orders, friends, and tourists) in public ceremonies such as mussem-s (Figure 5.2, Row 4). Women, men, adolescent boys and girls, and children partake in ritual ceremonies. They may sponsor the event, participate in possession dance, give monetary offerings, receive blessings, or simply sit and observe. Gender segregation is exercised to varying degrees at different points of the proceedings. Women and men eat in separate rooms during ritual meals and sit apart in informally designated areas of the room during the performance. No gender segregation, however, is observed among participants engaging in possession dance, though women often outnumber the men. Children are free to wander and

¹⁰ Moqaddema Zaida has an all-female music ensemble called Haddarat Zaida Gania. They play a mixed repertoire belonging to Gnawa and Sufi ritual practices and have performed in smaller venues at the *Gnaoua Festival* and other festivals in and around Essaouira.

¹¹ See Crapanzano (1973), Belo (1949, 1960), and Hagedorn (2001), respectively. Other monographs include Bastide (1978), Metraux (1977), During (1988), Wafer (1991), Friedson (1996), and Emoff (2002). For general studies see Rouget (1985) and Becker (2004).

sit where they wish.

A status hierarchy exists among the Gnawa members in the audience. The event sponsor and the moqaddema in charge have priority with respect to ritual progression insofar as it adheres to an overall structure (see Section 5.3). The sponsor, a client or patient of the moqaddema, requests a lila and provides the location. He or she is either affiliated with or afflicted by the mluk, or is an adept or novice holding a routine lila. Among the rest of the audience, hierarchy is based on alliance with the mluk, seniority of Gnawa adepts, affiliation with the moqaddema (and to a certain extent the m' allem), and the social and economic status of the invited guests. 'Arifat also make up a part of the audience who become possessed, or moved by the mluk to dance (Figure 5.2, Rows 3 and 4). Other Gnawa and non-Gnawa alike, whose capacity to be possessed (and dance) are unknown, play a minor role if at all in ritual progression, since they do not alter the chronological order of events. The stature of the moqaddema and m' allem determines the character of the audience through the presence of their personal following of clients, patients, apprentices, family, and friends. For private events where guests are invited, they form the entire audience; in large public lila-s such as mussem-s that require no invitation, they constitute the core. Because a major portion of the ritual happens behind closed doors, unless one is in earshot of the procession, going to a sacred lila remains an exclusive affair and the privilege of the invited or lucky passerby permitted to enter.¹²

Every summer since 1998, the *Gnaoua Festival* attracts a sea of national and international tourists to the calm coastal city of Essaouira. Beginning with 20,000 visitors the

¹² The doors were mostly closed to non-Gnawa up until the mid-twentieth century. Although this is still practiced by more orthodox Gnawa today, non-Gnawa (Moroccans and foreigners) are no longer restricted from attendance. Nonetheless, their numbers remain low at the important annual lila-s of the moqaddema-s and Sidi Bilal mussem. The former remains an invitation-only ritual, and the latter, though open to the public, is not formally advertised.

first year, since 2004 the numbers have grown to 400,000 and more.¹³ In recent years, there have been a reported 500,000 people, increasing the population of 70,000 more than seven-fold over a four-day period. The kite- and wind-surfing beach take on new roles, transforming into concert venues sponsored by Pepsi and Meditel,¹⁴ not to mention the accommodation of choice—convenient, available, and financially viable for the schools of national tourists, many of whom comprise Moroccan students. Taxi drivers shift gears to accommodate the snail’s pace traffic caused by the over-abundance of cars, narrowed streets, and barricades converting two-ways into one-ways and roadways into walkways. Compared to the dozens of festivals that take place throughout the year (Ross, et al. 2002), the *Gnaoua Festival*, held in the third week of June, attracts the largest number of visitors and has become, as Hagedorn says in her study of the Afro-Cuban Santería, “one of the cultural institutions that constitutes a big draw for [the] tourist industry” (2001:8).¹⁵ Despite its initial conception being independent of a political agenda (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009),¹⁶ the *Gnaoua Festival* is now at the helm of cultural and sacred tourism in Essaouira, playing its part towards the ten million visitor target by 2010.¹⁷

When I first attended the *Gnaoua Festival* in 2001, all venues were free and equally accessible to the public—Gnawa, non-Gnawa, and Moroccan and international tourists

¹³ In “Dix Ans Gnaoua,” a brochure specially produced to celebrate the tenth edition of the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*.

¹⁴ Meditel is a large telecommunications company in Morocco.

¹⁵ Kapchan refers to festivals focused on sacred music traditions that “bring income to the ... tourist industry [as] the creation of sacred tourism” (2008:58).

¹⁶ The festival was initially created to celebrate the Gnawa music tradition, and named “The Gnaoua Festival of Essaouira.” Due to its popularity, the concept was usurped and transformed by a commercial organizing firm. World artists were added to the program and “World Music” added to the name.

¹⁷ In travel brochures, Moroccan real estate websites (e.g., www.moroccoproperty1.com) and “Vision 2010 for tourism in Morocco” Department of Tourism, Morocco report from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) website (www.oecd.org).

(Figure 5.3, Row 3). At that time there were only two main stages and two smaller venues, with the number of visitors reported at 200,000.¹⁸ Due to the increasing popularity of Gnawa music, the number of stages and visitors has more than doubled over the years. During this time a social hierarchy was established, which continues to govern the organization and movement of people at the festival. First was the creation of a VIP section designated for Gnawa families and friends, performing artists, the elite, managers, and so on; then came the VIP pass which allowed access into this privileged section, given to Gnawa musicians and their families (not all Gnawa), other performing artists, registered press who apply beforehand, members of the elite, managers, event organizers, and their staff. The rest of the audience standing behind the VIPs are comprised largely of young Moroccan adults and students, and international tourists. Between 2001 and my next visit in 2006, I also noticed the addition of paid venues for smaller intimate shows held in special spaces, such as Dar Souiri. The majority of concerts, however, remained socially and economically accessible to the public. With the exception of smaller indoor venues, the audience stands (including those in the VIP section). In 2011, the number of venues decreased to five, three of which required paid entry. And for the first time, a “Pass Festival” was being sold that permitted access to the VIP sections of the free open air stages, but not to other concerts. On one hand, changes in the festival have created a social, political, and economic hierarchy among festival goers that was, until recently, largely absent; on the other, they have progressively commodified and isolated the musicians from the audience.¹⁹ This recalls Attali’s assessment of music and

¹⁸ In the 2008 *Gnaoua Festival* brochure, “Dix Ans Gnaoua.”

¹⁹ These differences, which mark a significant change to the concept of the *Gnaoua Festival*, took place after my fieldwork in 2009, hence the reasons for them could only be the subject of speculation. Perhaps it is due to a financial loss in the running of the festival mentioned by Ross et al. (2002) and/or the overwhelming flood of people which has been difficult for the Souiri infrastructure to

AUDIENCE ACTIVITY & BEHAVIOR	SACRED (possession portion)	SECULAR
dance	- in possession portion - enters dance space before the m' allem	- anytime - in their own space
sing	no	yes
clap	no	yes
scream	ululations when appropriate	cheers, requests
talk	minimal, if any	yes
standing / seated	seated	standing/seated
eat	no*	yes
drink water	no*	yes

* not permitted unless part of trance activity

Figure 5.4 Appropriate audience activity and behavior during sacred and secular performances.

the musician's trajectory from ritual to theatre:

The attitude of music then changed profoundly: in ritual, it was one element in the totality of life... In contrast, in representation [on stage] there was a gulf between the musicians and the audience; the most perfect silence reigned in the concerts of the bourgeoisie... The trap closed: the silence greeting the musicians was what created music and gave it autonomous existence, a reality. Instead of being a relation, it was no longer anything more than a monologue of specialists competing in front of consumers. The artist was born, at the same time that his work went on sale.... (Attali 1985:46-47)

Audience behavior and expectation differ markedly between sacred and secular occasions (Figure 5.4). During a sacred lila, possession trance is desired and members of the audience are expected to get up and dance directly before the m' allem when moved by their mluk. In secular contexts, the performance space is off-limits to spectators who risk removal

support (or perhaps other reasons). On a return visit to Morocco, it would be interesting to investigate the nature of this change and how it was received by festival goers, locals, and Gnawa.

should they attempt entry. Generally, if an onset of trance occurs security promptly removes the individual from the venue. In stark contrast to the lila, where trance is not only hoped for but carried out to its end, trance is strongly discouraged during the festival.²⁰ Similar to the folkloric performances of Afro-Cuban Santería, however, “it [is] always possible that people could become mounted by their *orichas* in a theater, but they should not—because the theater is a public, rather than a sacred, place” (Hagedorn 2001:108).

On the other hand, spectators may dance in their own space, scream, clap, sing along, and shout out requests governed by the norms of festival behavior (Figure 5.4, Column 3). During a sacred lila, aside from the women in the audience who might briefly chant a phrase followed by ululations to support transitions at heightened moments, not to mention the intermittent audible expressions of the trancers (gulps, burps, screams), the audience remains silent so as not to disrupt its progression (Figure 5.4, Column 2).

According to Kapchan, the *Gnaoua Festival* is “a festival in the strict definition of the term: it is carnivalesque” (2008:61). She writes:

Fit four hundred thousand people into an old medina that has a radius of only a few miles and a carnival is produced—bodies overflowing into other bodies as the crowds surge down narrow streets toward the music, the smoke of grilled sardines at street stands hitting pedestrians in the face, the salty ocean wind blowing open scarves and sweaters and, once out in the open plazas, thousands upon thousands of people, young and not-so-young, thronging around the stage... The audience stands. They move. They dance. (Kapchan 2008:61)

²⁰ Despite its non-ceremonial context, spirit possession does arise during staged lila-s, even big stage venues, for that matter. “The *mluk* (spirits) are always present though we cannot see them.” This was iterated by Gnawa friends on several occasions during my visits between 2006 and 2009, who also said that it “should not happen” suggesting a degree of control over possession, at least among more experienced adepts.

5.2.2 Duration and Location

The Gnawa perform their music in a variety of spaces and times. The specific occasion for holding a lila designates its duration, location (private or public), and place (house or zawiya) (Figure 5.5, Column 1). As suggested by its name, a lila (literally “night”) always begins after sunset, and lasts over the entire evening until the first light of dawn (sometimes beyond).²¹ The musical performance takes place over four to six hours with a few breaks inserted at designated points throughout a single evening, or may continue over four days. Due to the amount of work, time, and cost, a full-scale lila is normally reserved for the special annual occasions of the mussem of Bilal and the Sha‘ban lila-s of Gnawa moqaddema-s (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009). Regular healing sessions and routine ceremonies are allotted the minimal time necessary. According to Pâques, “all other *lila* are but simplifications of the [annual] chaabane rituals [that progress over a seven-day period]” (1991:243-44).²² Possession rituals, like the lila, always imply a liturgy, held with the intention to commemorate the mluk in accordance with “a certain ritual order, namely the

	SACRED	SECULAR (“lilas”)	SECULAR (big stage)
DURATION	> 4 hours	2 hours	1 hour
LOCATION	private / public	public	public
PLACE	hall zawiya house / apartment	hall zawiya small squares	hall zawiya beach, square (stage)
START TIME	~ 10 p.m.	midnight	~7 p.m.

Figure 5.5 Duration and location of sacred and secular occasions.

²¹ Lila-s performed by the Gania family typically start between 10 p.m. and midnight and may last until three to eight in the morning.

²² Chaabane is an alternate spelling of Sha‘ban .

prescribed sequence of musical mottoes by which supernatural entities are invoked, possession dances, and the usage of cult accessories” (Lapassade 1999:34). Regardless of its duration, a lila is considered sacred when it adheres to a set of rules and follows a formal structure that leads to spirit possession.

Celebrations of a saint’s anniversary are held in a space open to the public, such as the courtyard of a zawiya, a square near the saint’s tomb, or a spacious tent erected for the occasion. Smaller, private celebrations may go on in the homes of the local community or in rented apartments. Annual obligatory lila-s of the moqaddema-s are private affairs and held in the cozy sitting room of their home (if sufficiently large), or in a space especially rented or erected for the occasion, such as a farmhouse, hall, apartment, or tent.

The *Gnaoua Festival* takes place in the old walled city of Essaouira and its periphery (Figure 5.1 a). Given its history as “the port of Timbuktu” (Lakhdar 2006:176) and a place where a number of sub-Saharan slaves worked on its constructions and fortifications, Essaouira serves as a suitable backdrop. Over a four-day period, the program features two main types of Gnawa performances: “sur les grandes scenes” (on the big stages) and “dans les lilas” (in the lilas) (Figure 5.5, Columns 3, 4), which are distinguished by their respective venues—large open air stages and smaller intimate spaces. For the former (Figure 5.5, Column 4), concurrent shows are usually scheduled on the two main stages at Place Moulay Hassan and Bab Marrakesh which begin between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. and run well past midnight.²³ Three or four concerts are performed in succession. After a non-Gnawa opening act, Gnawa musicians grace the stage for the rest of the evening. Following the initial hour dedicated to Gnawa music alone, m’allem-s collaborate with international artists. In the past,

²³ In the summer of 2011, the main stage erected at Bab Marrakech was moved to a location on the beach and renamed, after its sponsor, the Scène Méditel.

all of these fusion performances were presented after a short rehearsal scheduled during the festival. In 2009, a new concept called “les résidences d’artistes” (artists-in-residence) was introduced. Four fusion projects, each created during a period of residency, were presented on the main stages, in addition to the usual performances. These “résidences” collaborations are referred to as the “heart of the festival” on the 2011 *Gnaoua Festival* website.

In the second type of venue (Figure 5.5, Column 3), three or more staged lila-s, each two to three hours long,²⁴ are simultaneously held around the old city. In an attempt to reproduce an authentic lila during the festival, the performances are scheduled at midnight and take place within the walls of the old city in sacred spaces such as the Zaouia Sidna Bilal. Until recently, historic squares of the medina—the grain market and Place El-Khayma—were included among the venues.²⁵ Given the time constraint, not to mention the absence of key personages and non-musical phenomena, lila-s of the *Gnaoua Festival* are, in essence, abridged versions of the musical portion of the sacred ritual.

5.2.3 Spatial, Visual, and Audio Arrangements

A ritual decorum constitutes a part of the setting and is similarly reproduced for all occasions. The spatial layout, the seating arrangement, the dress of ritual participants (performers and audience), and audio setup are summarized in Figure 5.6. For all performances, sacred or secular, musicians wear a custom-designed kaftan or *jellaba* (robe), and *sheshia* (cap) (Figures 5.7 and 5.9). The m’allem’s apparel is distinct, in color or design,

²⁴ Gnawa are scheduled to perform from midnight to 2 a.m.; however, in their efforts to satisfy the audience, some m’allem-s attempt to go on for longer until finally the sound system is shut down.

²⁵ In 2009, two venues located in spaces related to the history of the Gnawa in Essaouira—the grain market and Place El-Khayma—were removed from the regular program due to newly established safety regulations.

rest. Immediately next to him are his most accomplished apprentices who may already be deemed m' allem-s in their own right (Figure 5.6, Rows 3 and 4; Figure 5.7 b). During the lila, one of them may sing the calls for him and be passed the guembri. From here the musicians mediate between the human and spirit realms sitting cross-legged against the wall. While the m' allem always plays the guembri while seated, depending on the portion of the ritual, the qraqab are played while processing, dancing, and seated (Figure 5.7 a, b).

The audience sits on the ground along the other three walls, crowding in as the room fills, but always leaving an empty space before the musicians for dancing (Figure 5.6, Row 4, Column 2). Like the musicians, they remove their shoes and sit cross-legged, though a few chairs may be set up for older participants. Dermenghem's description of the ritual setting of ceremonies in Algeria bears similarities to the possession portion of the lila.

[A] rectangle of earth which can only be penetrated with bare feet, closed on three sides by mats where the musicians take their place: a dozen qaraqabou players and a gumbri player—an old negro keeper of all secrets of rhythms and airs, each of which correspond to a genie or a family of genies—before whom we bring a brazier, [and ritual objects such as a] basket of knives and a string of belts or whips. (Dermenghem 1953:340)

While the moqaddema stays behind the scenes, overseeing operations, and appearing at key moments for her patients and affiliated mluk, the m' allem and his ensemble remain fixed and the focus of attention, both aural and visual. The spatial organization, set in a square or rectangular room, takes on a radial arrangement. With the m' allem at the core, rows of people fan outward around the sacred dance space they create, their bodies directed towards the m' allem who mediates between the human and spirit worlds, and the dancers who embody them. Community entrainment through music produces a cyclic flow of energies between the m' allem—who channels his energies outward, triggering adepts to



a)



b)

Figure 5.7 Physical positioning of musicians at sacred lila: a) M' allem standing playing the tbel and qaraqabiya during procession (Act 1); b) seated position of m' allem playing guembri and qaraqabiya next to him (Acts 2 and 3). (Photographs by Maisie Sum)

dance and attracting mluk to manifest—and the participants, seen and unseen, whose energies converge towards the m' allem and shared core of trancing bodies. The proximity of reciprocating power between the m' allem and dancer-spirits create a particularly powerful energy field, intensifying psychophysical states that lead to transformation upon access to and intersection between two realms.

The seating, though informal, is significant. Trance phenomena dictate the arrangement that may already be observed during the prerequisite pre-possession dances leading to this final phase of the lila. Participants come and go, arrive at different times, continuously shifting their seats throughout a performance, only settling down as possession begins. There is a familiarity among the community, and members convey respect to their elders and special guests, naturally taking appropriate seats. Figure 5.6 illustrates a typical arrangement (Row 4, Column 2). Invited moqaddema-s, Gnawa adepts, and clients of the officiating moqaddema sit along the perimeter of the dance space gaining quick access to the privileged position directly before the m' allem when moved to dance. Those sitting further away may move closer to the m' allem when their mluk are to be invoked. The 'arifat sit among the audience, scattered near three main areas: the music ensemble, kitchen, and moqaddema's alcove, ready to provide assistance when needed. Before the possession portion, however, they may be seen crowded around the m' allem taking in the spectacular pre-possession dances of their brothers, cousins, uncles, and fathers.

At the festival Gnawa troupes perform sets using “traditional” instrumentation on one of two main stages that are equipped with quality sound, bright lights, artistic backdrops, and professional engineers. Though less common at the *Gnaoua Festival*, in some performances the m' allem and his accompanists may use chairs (Figure 5.8 a). The musicians are elevated



a)



b)



c)

Figure 5.8 Physical positioning on secular occasions: a) M'alleem Mahmoud standing on stage (2001, Mie Jima), qaraqabiya seated on chairs with microphones; b) qaraqabiya standing on stage and dancing in foreground, Gnawiyya (third from left) (2009, Essaouira); c) seated position at a staged lila (2006, Essaouira). (Photographs by Maisie Sum)

one to two meters above the audience who stand on the ground below. With a microphone attached near the mouth of the guembri, the m'Allem often uses a shoulder strap to allow for greater movement and interaction with the audience (and other musicians) (Figures 5.8 a, b). More than eighty years after Farmer commented on the “persistence of [the] primitive method [of tuning rings] in spite of the existence of the peg system” (1928:26 [fn.1]), the Gnawa m'Allem-s have begun to adopt the “mechanism” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009)—metal tuning pegs resembling those used for acoustic guitars. The modification facilitates collaboration with international artists and performances at outdoor venues (in Morocco and abroad) that subject strings to variable weather conditions (ibid.). Subtly positioned in a space carved out of the nape of the guembri's neck, the tuning pegs are not easily visible during performance on a large festival stage, particularly since m'Allem-s continue to tie leather laces around the neck.

Unlike the main stages, the venues for “lilas” are more intimate and relatively low-tech: a minimal number of lights are used and the sound system is basic. During these performances, the m'Allem normally sits cross-legged on the ground (in smaller venues), or on a slightly elevated stage, resembling his posture in sacred occasions (Figure 5.8 c). Similarly, he is flanked by his qarqabiya, this time without the support of any female musicians (Figure 5.6, Row 4, Column 3). Distinct from sacred occasions, the sound is amplified (Figure 5.6, Row 5).²⁷

²⁷ In 2007, M'Allem Abdallah found himself working the important lila for the mussem of Sidi Bilal with stage lights and a free standing microphone placed directly in front of his guembri: “This is the first time they use microphones... It's not good for a lila” (personal communication, 2007).

5.3 Performance Structure and Procedure

The Gnawa lila is a performance, a music-ritual drama that takes place in the presence of a participating audience. The ritual structure is dictated by a prescribed order of invocation of supernatural entities and requirements of the dynamics of spirit possession. The drama may be conceived as a three-act progression (Figure 5.9):²⁸ Act 1, the procession (*'ada*);²⁹ Act 2, entertainment dances (*koyo* and *nugsha*);³⁰ and Act 3, spirit possession (*mluk*).³¹ Each act comprises a distinct musical texture, repertoire topic, and dance; and each

²⁸ It should be noted that the *dbiha* (animal sacrifice) and *mida* are essential acts that respectively open and close a sacred occasion; however, in conversation with the musicians, the *aada*, *koyo*, *nugsha*, and *mluk* are usually discussed as a single event on its own. The *dbiha* takes place earlier in the afternoon, temporally separate from the rest of the lila that begins at sunset. Unlike the three acts that follow, participation is limited to a few necessary and important members, such as the m'allem and his musicians, the moqaddema and her assistants, and the sponsor and their family members. Similarly, the sacrifice ceremony among the Muslim Negroes in Brazil is usually "secret; no stranger was allowed to witness it" (Bastide 1978:148). The banquet and dances was when "the whole neighborhood was invited" (ibid.). See Gnawa discourse for more information concerning the sacrifice (including Pâques 1991; Claisse 2003; Majdouli 2007; and Fuson 2009). Depending on the context and money available for a lila, sacrifices (of a goat or dove) may also take place at specific moments of the *mluk* phase. In some lila-s, Quranic recitation and consultation with *ulema* is attached to the last part of the lila.

²⁹ The term *'ada* literally means "custom."

³⁰ Alternate spellings of *koyo* and *nugsha* include *koyou*, *kouyou*, and *negsha*, *nuksha*, *nuqsha*, respectively. The literal meanings of *koyo* and *nugsha* have been forgotten and varied interpretations exist. The Gania family uses the term *koyo* to refer to the dance accompanied by handclaps and differentiate *nugsha* by qraqab accompaniment. Fuson (2009) refers to the professional dancers as the *koyo* (2009:95), and like Lapassade (1998) and Majdouli (2007), he calls the first set of dances *Ulad Bambara* (the Sons of Bambara). M'allem Abdallah usage of *Ulad Bambara* signifies the group of pieces played during the *koyo*. Lapassade and Majdouli's definitions of *koyo* resemble what the Gantias refer to as *nugsha*: "The Koyou (guembri and castanets). Many dancers" (Lapassade 1998:12), and "the kouyou, where the castanets are used" (Majdouli 2007:38). Together the dances are generally considered the "entertainment" phase of the lila. Although the term *fraja* (entertainment) has been used in discourse, the Gantias did not make such a reference. Sometimes *koyo* would also infer the *nugsha* since its performance naturally followed. Possession trance does not take place during this portion. The dances, characterized by acrobatic gestures, are performed by the hired ensemble and always precede the heavier, unpredictable possession dances of the *mluk*.

³¹ *Mluk*, which signifies the supernatural entities of the Gnawa pantheon, is used in reference to this portion because it invokes their presence.

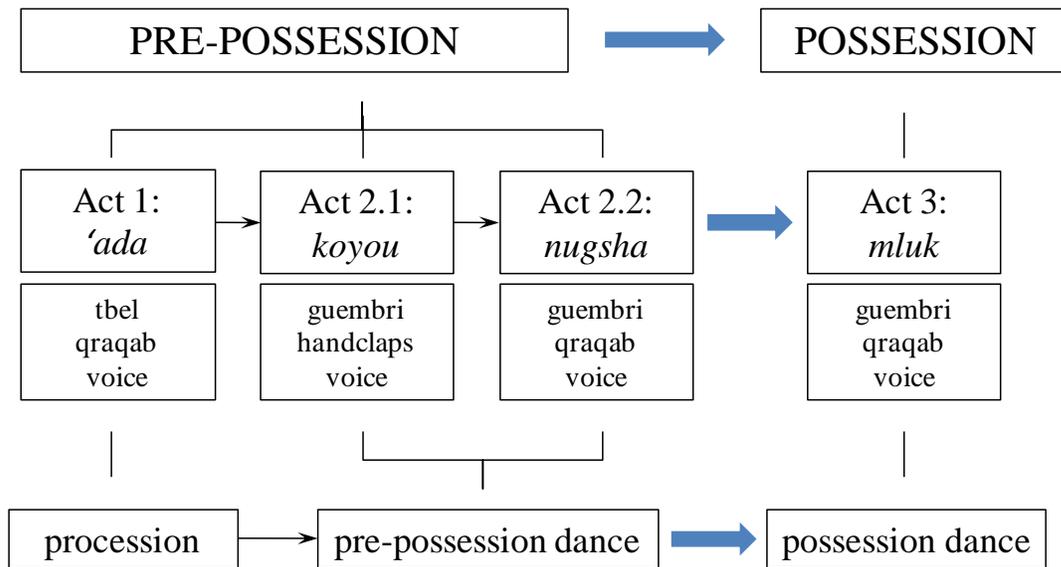


Figure 5.9 Ritual structure of the Gnawa lila.

fulfills specific functions for the sacred occasion (Figure 5.10).³² Modifications to the structure are permitted around a fixed core and depend on a number of contextual factors—such as regional and individual interpretations—and the needs of the ritual community. In more general terms the lila comprises a pre-possession portion (Acts 1 and 2) and possession portion (Act 3). At the macro level, the first two pre-possession acts are interchangeable.³³

The internal order of the entertainment dances from koyo to nugsha, however, must be preserved. Possession is always the final and longest act of the lila. Being the focal point

³² See Chlyeh's (1998) annex for an exhaustive list of the repertoire and Fuson (2009) for the interaction and significance of music and dance during these acts.

³³ The procession-entertainment-possession sequence is typical of Gnawa practices in southern Morocco. Gnawa branches in the north may alternate the progression of ritual events in the pre-possession part, such that the entertainment dances may come before the procession (personal communication, Gania family, 2006–2009; Pâques 1991; Chlyeh 1998; Hell 1999; Fuson 2009; etc.). Nonetheless, the overall progression from pre-possession to possession is always maintained.

PROGRESSION	MUSICAL TEXTURE	REPERTOIRE TOPIC	DANCE/ DANCERS	FUNCTION
Act 1: ‘Ada	T-Q-V → T-Q	saints spirits	pre-possession / musicians	publicize invite attract venerate
Act 2: Koyo & Nugsha	G-H-V → G-H G-Q-V → G-Q	history slavery Bilal saints spirits	pre-possession / musicians	remember re-construct re-enact unite
Act 3: Mluk	G-Q-V → G-Q GV G	saints spirits	possession / moqaddema ‘arifat audience	invoke mluk possession communication

Figure 5.10 Progression of the Gnawa lila illustrating structure, musical texture, repertoire, functions, and dancers (musicians or possessed participants). T, Q, V, G, and H correspond to tbel, qraqab, voice, guembri and hands.

of the ritual, it has been referred to as the “derdeba proper” (Pâques 1991), all other acts prerequisite to its execution and realization. Secular performances at festivals include repertoire from all three acts and are similarly performed according to the ritual progression at the macro-level of procession-entertainment-possession. Their internal order, however, is randomized; for example, individual pieces belonging to the possession act are not performed in their prescribed sequence though they chronologically follow the entertainment pieces (Figure 5.12).

The tbel (T) features as the main instrument in the procession (Figure 5.10, Row 2, Column 2). Subsequently, the tbel remains silent giving way to the guembri in the entertainment and possession acts.³⁴ No performance of Gnawa music, however, is without

³⁴ In similar ritual practices of Algeria, the *qarqabou*, *guinbri*, and drums seem to play together during the possession dance, though at some point “the drums stop and the guinbri plays alone, nostalgic and soft” (Dermenghem 1953:354).

the dense, overpowering sonority of multiple qraqab playing ostinato.³⁵ With the exception of the koyo, where handclaps provide rhythmic support, they resound throughout any performance occasion accompanying the main instrument. In secular contexts, however, qraqab may also be played during the koyo. Following a brief instrumental prelude, the voices of the instrumentalists form an initial part of the musical sound (Chapter 4). Explicit communication of sung text gives way to abstract instrumental voices that effectively guide and support spectacular and miraculous performances. Crucial to the musical environment for possession is the guembri-raqaqab texture, which dominates all Gnawa music performances, sacred or secular (Figure 5.10, Row 4, Column 2). During the possession act, the guembri may also be heard alone.

The repertoire belonging to each act may be categorized according to topic (Figure 5.10, Column 3). The hierarchy of spiritual authority informs the unfolding of the sacred ceremony dictating the sequence of each suite and the pieces within. Of primary significance is praise to Allah, his Prophet Mohammed, and recognition of his almighty power to protect and forgive. These vocal phrases open the sacred occasion, are heard in every act and suite, and are reiterated throughout the entire repertoire alongside invocations of sub-Saharan ancestors and mluk.

A performance always involves two types of dance that follow ritual progression: pre-possession (during ‘ada, koyo and nugsha) and possession. Pre-possession dances are restricted to the music ensemble and are performed by the musicians in sacred and secular

³⁵ In smaller secular venues two or four qraqab are used to reduce their sonic intensity. Sometimes one or two musicians play ostinato by placing the qraqab on the ground and tapping the convex disc with their fingertips for an even softer sound.

contexts.³⁶ Possession dance, the climax of the sacred occasion, on the other hand, is performed by all but the music ensemble: moqaddema-s, sponsors, adepts, neophytes, and non-Gnawa.³⁷ Generally these dances are not intended for secular performances.³⁸ Pre-possession dances contribute to energizing and unifying the ritual community in preparation for the potential dangers associated with spirit possession. Prior to the lila the moqaddema purifies and thurifies the sacred space using incense and perfumed water and readies all ritual paraphernalia.

5.3.1 Pre-Possession Acts

5.3.1.1 Act 1, the *'ada*

Typical of Gnawa procession music is the overpowering sonority produced by the large drums (tbel)—the main instrument of Act 1 (Figure 5.10, Row 2). Led by flag bearers, the moqaddema and her ritual assistants carry milk, dates, and candles out the narrow doorway of the house. The musicians follow with the tbel, qraqab, and cries of “*al 'afo*” (literally “deliverance”). The rest of the participants file out of the house and join in the

³⁶ I once held a party where the daughters of the Gania masters danced pieces from the koyo in an informal adlib music performance initiated by M'Allem Mahmoud. Moqaddema Zaida told me later that they were entertaining the idea of performing on stage at the next Gnawa and World Music Festival.

³⁷ Moqaddema Zaida has told me stories about people getting up to dance unaware of their connection to Gnawa spirits. Fuson mentions “a teenage American girl who had never tranced before with the Gnawa” (2009:474) getting up to dance. After Kapchan’s first experience dancing at a lila, M'Allem Mohammed Chaouqi said to her: ““They [the *jnun*] rose up in you”” (2007:50).

³⁸ Secular spaces are not properly consecrated for the presence of the mluk and hence spirit possession is undesirable. Nevertheless, as the Gantias have told me on several occasions, the mluk are everywhere and hear and see everything; if they wish to dance, they will. If possessions arise during these occasions, they usually do so among the inexperienced or non-initiates and are deemed “light.” Spirits taking possession of audience members in such contexts may not be associated with the Gnawa pantheon.

parade through the streets of the surrounding neighborhood. All are welcome to join in the street procession, though the musical activity is left to the hired music ensemble for private ceremonies, and to all participating Gnawa ensembles for larger events such as *mussem-s*. Depending on the route and the number of sanctuaries along the way where Gnawa stop to honor their local saints with acrobatic dances,³⁹ the *‘ada* may last between thirty minutes to an hour. The musicians play their way back into the ritual space bringing the energy and tempo to a peak with a final performance of dances before Act 2. The *m‘allem* (on the large *tbel*) may enter into a duel with his most accomplished apprentice who is playing either the small *tbel* or *qraqab*. Encircled by the other musicians and audience, they put on a challenge for all to enjoy. Trying their best to outdo the other with a varied combination of movements while maintaining the *ostinato*, they perform effortlessly as if their legs were rubber bands and their instruments an extension of their bodies.

In Essaouira, the *‘ada* normally begins all Gnawa musical activity. The social function of the *‘ada* is not only to publicize the event and attract the ritual community, but to do so with importance (cf. Fuson 2009:100).⁴⁰ Mystically it serves to venerate Allah and his Prophet, and to honor the Gnawa pantheon that is organized into cohorts (*mhalla-s*) resembling a military battalion. The drums, not unlike those observed in the fourteenth century, appropriately announce the arrival of the supernatural entities: “Ibn Fadallāh al-‘Umarī (d. 1348) speaks of the royal entourage of the ruler of Mālli [in West Africa] being preceded by drums (*tabl*)... [which] heralded the royal audience... [In t]he same century... Ibn

³⁹ Like the ceremonies of Algeria, the animal to be sacrificed is “taken through the streets by the drummers and *qraqabou* players, jumping, twirling, squatting on their heels, pirouetting... Before the ecstatic dances as such, we begin with dances that could be profane on unconsecrated ground” (Dermenghem 1953:339-40).

⁴⁰ Fuson says: “Its [the *‘ada*’s] goal is to announce the arrival of the *mluk* to the event to the public and to invite the *mluk* back into the house for the beginning of their [possession] phase” (2009:100). In his study, the *lila* is structured according to an entertainment-procession-possession progression.

Battūta travelled, via Morocco, to the Western Sūdān visiting Mālli... he heard the military band of the sultān... which consisted of drums” (Farmer 1939b:571-572). Recall that the term mluk may also be translated as “kings” (Introduction).

The grandeur of the annual *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* is likewise announced with the Gnawa tbel. Performing the ‘ada on the opening day is a ritual part of the festival. All the invited Gnawa troupes parade through the Essaouira medina in a spectacular three-hour presentation of music and acrobatic dance. Over the four days of the festival the “‘ada” may be choreographed into their shows, m‘allem-s leading their ensemble on stage with the rhythms of the tbel as they begin their one- or two-hour performance.

5.3.1.2 Act 2, the *koyo* and *nugsha*

In sacred ceremonies a short break usually follows the procession. The musicians retire to their private room and the m‘allem prepares the guembri making large tuning adjustments, if necessary. For the rest of the evening, the guembri features as the main instrument, leaving the drums to rest until the next occasion. Divided into two scenes, the *koyo* and *nugsha* each have their own repertoire differentiated by musical texture, dance, and vocal content (Figure 5.10, Row 3). Act 2 usually lasts between one to two hours; however, as with all other acts, it is subject to the ritual occasion. Essential to Scene 1 is a suite called *Ulad Bambara* (literally, “the children of Bambara”), which honors the Prophet while evoking ancient Sudan (Gnawa homeland) and Gnawa ancestors. As the m‘allem recounts the story of an African hunter in the piece *Berma Sultanbi*, a solo dancer enacts it by loading his weapon and firing at the four cardinal points. Scene 2 comprises a group of pieces referred to collectively as *nugsha* which venerate Allah, the Prophet, and Islamic saints

(including Lalla Fatima [Chapter 2]), and serve as prayers for the ancient Gnawa masters. The nugsha marks a transition in the ceremonial proceedings. In sonic contrast to the handclaps during the koyo, the qraqab return to support the guembri. All pieces in Act 2 are performed according to a prescribed sequence and function on various physiological, social, and mystical levels: to energize and entrain the audience; to entertain, recount, remember, and re-enact the ontological past of Gnawa and affirm their allegiance to Islam; and to venerate Allah, his Prophet, Lalla Fatima, Bilal, and the Gnawa pantheon. Despite the energy and excitement that brings the pre-possession acts to an end, heaviness fills the room as the final scene completes the preparatory measures for spirit possession. An intermission takes place before the m'ellem animates the longest and most arduous act of the lila.

5.3.1.3 Pre-possession dance

The pre-possession dances of the procession and entertainment acts are loosely choreographed acrobatic dances characterized by nimble movements of the dancers that combine jumping, squatting, kicking, standing, whirling, and rhythmic feet stamping. Depending on the piece, dances are performed either individually taking turns one after the other, or with a group of four dancers forming a row or in a circle.⁴¹ While the movements of the group dances are initially synchronized, solo sections may take place during its progression where each dancer has an opportunity to display his talent. The m'ellem improvises, leading and synchronizing to the gestures of an individual dancer. A playful, yet serious, dialogue between the m'ellem and one of his performers may arise during this interaction. In one instance, the m'ellem watches the dancer, accompanying his gestures. In

⁴¹ For details on the kinaesthetic textures of entertainment dances, see Fuson (2009).



Figure 5.11 Qarqabi on bended knee honoring the m'Allem and the unseen entities. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

the other, the m'Allem cues his next move and the dancer synchronizes his moves to the m'Allem's musical gesture. With the exception of the round dances where performers face each other, they generally dance facing the m'Allem. Even in individual dances, where they may face the audience, the dancers will focus most of their attention on the m'Allem. Rather than the m'Allem playing for the dancer, the dancer is in the subordinate position, performing for the m'Allem and for the entertainment of the entities.⁴² This is further exemplified as the dance comes to an end and they salute the m'Allem and four corners of the room on bended knee (Figure 5.11).

The pre-possession acts are prerequisite to spirit possession and build towards the ultimate goal of possession. Their performance helps participants “to forget the tiredness of

⁴² See Fuson (2009) for a detailed analysis of music-dance interaction.

the day”” (Boussou quoted in Baldassarre 1992), “to ease [them] from the workaday world into the ritual world... [making an] opening in a person’s spirit for relief” (Fuson 2009:95, 275). Furthermore, the resemblance of the pre-possession dance to the mythical descriptions of Bilal, who “equipped... with qraqab... swirl[s] sometimes standing, sometimes squatting” (Pâques 1991:53), also signifies and affirms the Gnawa’s allegiance to Islam, their ontological past as slaves displaced from their sub-Saharan homeland, and their capacity (and goal) to attract, heal and equilibrate the community through music and dance (see Chapter 2). Together music and dance provide a sonic and kinesthetic environment that activates the shared memories, ontology, and realities of participants, unifying their energy and imagination through physiological, psychological, social, and mystical means.

In the past, m‘allem-s would only play pieces selected from the pre-possession repertoire for secular events. Although imbued with sacred meaning and intent, because these pieces did not invoke the mluk, performing them out of ritual context was deemed “safe” since there was no risk of transgression. Though possession pieces are performed on stage today, there is dispute over which pieces should or should not be permitted for reasons of secrecy, protection, preservation, and ownership, not to mention repercussions (personal communication, Gania family, 2006–2009). Nevertheless, in the majority of festivals and other secular occasions, the greatest amount of time is allotted to performing pieces from the entertainment act where performers have the opportunity to exert and display their talents (Figures 5.12, 5.13).

STRUCTURE	SACRED	SECULAR ("lilas")	SECULAR (big stage)
Act 1: 'Ada	30 min - 1 hour	10 min	10 min
Act 2: Koyo & Nugsha	1-2 hours	~1 hour	30 min
Act 3: Mluk	3-6 hours or longer (all the mhallat)	~1 hour (one or two mhallat)	15-20 min (select pieces)
TOTAL TIME	4.5 - 9 hours +	~2 hours	1 hour

Figure 5.12 The structure and duration of sacred and secular occasions.



Figure 5.13 Pre-possession dances on stage performed by M'alleem Mahmoud and his ensemble. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

5.3.2 Possession Act

5.3.2.1 Act 3, the *Mluk*

Act 3 requires the use of “props.” During the intermission ritual assistants prepare the space for possession dance, placing the *hmal* (bundle of colored veils and tunics), *tboqa* (wicker tray containing boxes of powder and incense), a vaporizer of orange blossom water, brazier, and other ritual objects on the ground in front of the musicians’ cushions (Figure 5.14). *Ftuh Ar-Rahba*, which signifies “opening the grain market,” begins the possession act. “The marketplace is a metaphor for the world... [it] is a liminal place, where spirits intermingle with human beings... a transient place” (Drewal and Drewal 1983:10).⁴³



Figure 5.14 Props placed before musicians. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

⁴³ See Drewal and Drewal (1983:10) for more on the significance of the market with respect to the encounter of temporal and supernatural realms. Also see Pâques (1978:325, 1991:34–37) and El Hamel (2008) for connections specific to the Gnawa.

SEQ. #	COHORT/SUITE OF SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES	DESCRIPTION	COLOR
1 a 1 b	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali Bu Hala	Sultan of the Saints, protector Vagabonds of God	white multi-colored
2	Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna	Guardian to the door of Sudan	black
3 a 3 b	Musawiyin Samawiyin	Sea Spirits Sky Spirits	dark blue light blue
4	Houmar	Spirits of the Abattoir	red
5	Ulad Agh-Ghaba	Spirits of the Forest	black
6	Shorfa	Descendants of the Prophet	green, white
7	L' Ayalet	Female Spirits	yellow, various
x	'Aisha	Ravishing Spirits	black

Figure 5.15 The eight ritual suites of the Gnawa repertoire.

Lapassade writes: “[an] introduction to possession dances... *Ftough el rahba*... serves as a transition” (1998:13). This repertoire venerates Allah, his Prophet, and God’s men (*Rijal Allah*) and falls under the category of the *salihin* (saints) represented by the color white (Chapter 2). The last piece segues into the first *mhalla* (cohort), *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali*, who are called upon for their protection as the transition to the spiritual world is completed and the communication with the *mluk* officially opened.

Suites of the possession repertoire correspond to cohorts and are associated with specific sensory elements and actions (Figure 5.15). Each suite comprises a repertoire of five or more individual pieces, which corresponds to independent spirits and manifestations of a particular cohort. Foods, elements, objects, and animal sacrifices may also correspond to individual pieces, which are offered to the *mluk* during their invocation. Performance of each cohort may be thought of as individual scenes set to a specific musical suite that ranges from

fifteen minutes to an hour in duration. The entire act lasts upward of three hours, depending on the purpose and context of the occasion which dictates the number of pieces performed in each suite and shapes the number and kind of possessions that take place. So long as the minimal requirement of pieces are played (that is, the core *mluk* honored), Gnawa may shorten a *lila* without repercussions (Chapter 3).

As a variation form, permutations at various temporal strata allow for diverse performances of a single piece, not to mention a single ritual event and depend on the region, family, and context.⁴⁴ My observations of ceremonial and secular practices performed by three *m' allem*-s of the same family, and by the same *m' allem* on different occasions, revealed that variations occur on multiple levels around the fixed core; that is, in terms of the repertoire selection, the sequencing of ritual suites, the number and order of saints and spirits invoked per cohort, sung text, formal sections, and melodies executed on the *guembri* (Chapters 4, 7). Although variations in the setting and procedure exist, the ritual structure, content, and social organization and distinction do not vary appreciably with the occasion. Furthermore, regions (and families) preserve a set ritual sequence and corresponding symbols.⁴⁵

Spiritual hierarchy dictates sequence at the level of the cohort (musical suites), individual manifestations within each cohort (individual pieces), and their selection when time constraints are established. A typical sequence performed by the *Gania* masters during a sacred *lila* is shown in Figure 5.15. Column 1 illustrates the possible order in which they are invoked, while Columns 2 and 3 designate the eight main cohorts (which correspond to the

⁴⁴ See Pâques (1991:283-311), Lapassade (1998:33-63), Chlyeh (1999:134-38), Hell (2002:166) and Majdouli (2007:44-50).

⁴⁵ For example, in Fez the color brown (rather than black Figure 5.15) corresponds to the *Ulad Agh-Ghaba* and a sequence associated with purple is played (personal communication, *M' allem* Mohammed Bouj'a, 2006). Also see Chlyeh (1999:98-106), Hell (2002:166) and Claisse (2003).

musical suites) and a brief description of their domain or element. Corresponding fragrance and colors (Column 4) are signified by the veils and tunics donned during possession dances.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali* (Number 1) and *Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna* (Number 2) are leaders of the Whites and Blacks. Considered polar opposites (i.e., protector saints and formidable spirits), they balance the two opposing and complementary forces of Gnawa cosmogony (Hell 2002:118, 140-141; Pâques 1991) and must first be appeased and propitiated in order to gain their protection against later invocations of the powerful, terrifying mluk of the *Forest* (Number 5). The Gania m'allem-s always begins with *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali*, the protector saint and bearer of the way who, like *Elegba* and *Exu* in the respective ritual practices of the Yoruba and Candomblé, guides travel between the seen and unseen worlds. He invokes *Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna* second, and ends with *L'Ayalet*, the lighter (less intense) female spirits who represent re-birth and fertility (Number 7). The *'Aisha* suite is designated with an 'x' because her sequence in the lila is not fixed (last row). Two criteria for her invocation, however, must be met: it takes place after the Whites (Number 1) and Blacks (Number 2), and before sunrise. Similarly, each suite comprises a number of individual pieces that are performed in sequential order (Chapters 6, 7). In a staged lila, such as the one I observed at the 2006 *Gnaoua Festival*, only a limited selection of the repertoire is played and its order is flexible (Chapter 7).

Lapassade has suggested that “the integral repertoire is only sung at the Gnawa moussem during the month of Chaâbane, which precedes Ramadan” (1998:23). It should be noted that the progression of the lila, particularly of the possession act, is not readily observable to unseasoned guests. Majdouli writes: “The ritual structure that I propose here is totally invisible during the evening as the themes proceed without any interruption. It is

difficult for an outsider to guess which melk each piece invokes. But this order exists indeed and is rendered visible above all by the change of colors” (2007:44).

Secular performances have appropriated the musical portion and, to a lesser degree, the accompanying dances of the ritual. New versions of the sacred are featured in three main kinds of practice: performance of a random selection of pieces that traditionally adhere to a sequential order; collaboration with international artists (and instruments); and, since the festival, the staged lila. The first two are performed on the big stages. Unlike the staged lila, these performances are governed by an unspoken rule that forbids any kind of sequential ordering of pieces, regardless of the secularity of both events. M’allem-s who transgress the rule become subjected to and the subject of critique and disapproval by the Gnawa community. In 2006, a Gnawi friend and I watched a well-reputed m’allem perform on the main stage. After a few pieces, he objected repeatedly, “He’s doing a lila, playing the pieces one after the other. We don’t do a lila on stage. We should not do a lila on stage. No, no, no, we cannot do a lila on stage” (personal communication, Hamani, 2006). According to Si Mohammed, a m’allem never has to play the mluk. “There are many koyo and nugsha pieces. The m’allem has a lot to choose from” (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009).⁴⁶

In staged lila-s, however, the m’allem is expected to perform, to varying extents, an “authentic” lila. According to Kapchan:

After much discussion by the Gnawa masters and the festival organizers [in the initial years of the festival], the *lila* was transformed into what is called a *fraja* (a show, a spectacle) in Gnawa terminology, a term that distinguishes the sacred from the profane for Gnawa who perform for foreign audiences. Still billed as ‘lila,’ the shows no longer invoke the entire pantheon of spirits (each with their own color, music and incense). A public sacrifice is not enacted and the ‘lila’ lasts only a few hours. The music, in other words, has

⁴⁶ The majority of M’allem Mahmoud’s stage show draws from the koyo repertoire.

been separated from its ritual function incrementally—at least as it is performed for foreigners and Moroccan tourists. (Kapchan 2008:60)

5.3.2.2 Possession Dance

Possession dance is associated with the invocation of every melk; however, adherents only dance to their afflicting or affiliated mluk. As each piece begins, participants who are moved to dance get up and enter the sacred space. Possession, however, is not guaranteed and involves what Rouget calls a “double submission: to the will of the gods, on the one hand, and to the effects of music on the other” (1985:111). At the same time, the possessed must submit to the will of the musician suggesting that a trust must be established between the two actors. “Communication is established between them, not only at the level of the code involved (words of the songs, dance movements), but also at the personal level, the emotional level of direct person-to-person relationships” (ibid.:113). Perhaps this explains why moqaddema-s have a preferred m‘allem with whom they work, especially for the important lila during Sha‘ban where they must participate in intense and sometimes dangerous possessions.

Possession dance may be characterized as abstract or mimetic of a particular supernatural entity. Jankowsky notes that in the Stambeli ritual of Tunisia “ontological differences between the Blacks [spirits] and Whites [saints]... [are] perceptible to the local observer in the modes of interaction with their human hosts... Blacks [have their] own distinctive dance movements, as well as certain attire and other ritual paraphernalia... [and] are ‘figurative’ or ‘mimetic’ while those of the Whites, in contrast, are ‘abstract’”

(2010:76).⁴⁷ The dances of the Gnawa exhibit a similar contrast; however, they are not categorized in relation to their ontology. Possession dance always begins with abstract gestures. Depending on the supernatural entity being invoked and the experience of the possessed, it may remain a non-figurative “generic trance” (Fuson 2009:548) or evolve into a figurative or mimetic performance, a “mastered trance” (ibid.).⁴⁸ For example, possession by *salihin* like Mulay Abdelqader Jilali or Sidi Hadjej, or by *mluk* like Ghumami, Fufu Dinba or Sidi Komei, may transform from an abstract to powerful, mimetic performance that requires the use of accessories such as knives, glass, or candles (Figure 5.16).

Mimetic dance (or mastered trance) is rare. First, there are a limited number of spirits from each cohort that fully possess adepts such that they take over the body and manifest their presence in human form through the performance of miraculous feats before the ritual community. There are fifteen dramatic scenes listed in Figure 5.16, each associated with an individual piece which is most often performed as part of a sub-suite of two or three pieces (see Chapter 4); however, not all scenes are enacted during a single *lila*. Second, few adepts possess the affiliation and experience to enact a mastered trance which requires a negation of the self. In her neurophysiological approach to trance phenomena, Becker writes:

⁴⁷ The Stambeli of Tunisia have similar historical origins, beliefs, and practices as the Gnawa of Morocco.

⁴⁸ Distinct from “generic trance” in which initiates perform an abstract dance on the spot, a “mastered trance” is a theatrical dance in which an experienced initiate mimics the character of the spirit, or conversely, their body is taken over by the spirit. Fuson uses the terms “*jadba*” (derived from, ‘attract’) and “*khadma*” (derived from, ‘work’) to distinguish between generic and mastered trances, respectively (2009:548). In the former, trancers are “compelled to trance, attracted to the *rahba* [dance space] not of their own volition” (ibid.); in the latter, “*khadma* trancers ‘work’ with their *mluk*, implying an act of volition.... Performed by *muqqadema*-s, *muqqadem*-s or their followers... in training” (ibid.). In spite of the differences in experience, behavior, and choreography, the Gania family used the single term *jedba* for possession dance.

SEQ. #	COHORT/SUITE OF SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES	PIECE	ACCESSORIES /ACTION
1 a 1 b	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali Bu Hala	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali Buderabela	knife bag with bread and sugar staff patchwork tunic
2	Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna	Ghumami Fufu Dinba	knife candles
3 a	Musawiyin (Sidi Musa)	Waiye Ye-Ya Rasul Allah Kubayli Bala	bowl, water knife
4	Houmar (Sidi Hamu)	Sidi Komei	knife
5	Ulad Agh-Ghaba	Sergou Buleji Joujou Nema Goubani Bala Dayma (white)	zemita on all fours raw meat qraqab white cloth, raw egg
6	Shorfa	Budani Ya Bughada Sidi Hadjej	boiling water glass
7	L'Ayalet	Lalla Mira	sweets perfume
x	'Aisha	'Aisha Qandisha	black olives lights out

Figure 5.16 A list of individual pieces during which mimetic dance may arise.

One of the salient features of possession trance is the apparent absence of, or inactivity of, or substitution for the autobiographical self. Trancers temporarily lose the sense of their private, autobiographical self in favour of the sense of the special self of trance possession... While the experience of the trance self lasts, the autobiographical self may be forgotten... Trance amnesia... may be a result of the absence or inactivity of the autobiographical self during the trance period.⁴⁹ (Becker 2004:144)

A mastered trance is performed by one adept at any given time.⁵⁰ It often requires a prolonged musical sequence (such as a sub-suite) and an expansive space (Chapter 6). While

⁴⁹ Moqaddema Zaida says that she knows she is doing something (e.g., dancing or talking); however, she does not recall what she actually performs in the mimetic dance or says during mediumship.

⁵⁰ The mastered trance of Sidi Hejaj, however, I have seen performed in a duo with the same two moqaddema-s, as if working together to harness the power of this saint.

there are a number of like-colored veils and tunics for generic trances, the moqaddema prepares only one of every special object required should a transformation arise, such as a bowl for the dance of Sidi Musa.⁵¹ Moqaddema Zaida once told me that Sidi Musa was one of her mluk. I remarked on a time when a young Gnawa (from another city) performed the dance while Moqaddema Zaida was present. She told me, “Sidi Musa is my melk, but I gave it to him [to dance]” (personal communication, 2007). Although only one person performs the mimetic dance, the initial piece(s) may move several people to dance who later clear the area should a mastered trance begin in the subsequent piece.

Not all adepts have the same degree of alliance or baraka, not to mention mastery, to effectuate a mastered trance, which is attributed partly to God’s will and partly to experience. Extreme balance, imperviousness to sharp objects, insensitivity to pain, and mediumship all become manifest: “[s]uch feats, which seem to defy nature, are signs of being in a state of grace, *baraka*” (Kapchan 2007:33). Kapchan elaborates:

In such states spirit is not embodied so much as the body takes on the attributes of the spirit—it becomes invulnerable and protected. Acts such as slashing oneself with knives, exposing the skin to flames... are common elements of Gnawa ritual and testify to what we might call the ‘alchemical transformation’ of the body as it supercedes itself in altered states of consciousness. The realization of such states is a primary experience of ritual life for the Gnawa; however achieving these states is less dependent upon the desire of the practitioner to extinguish herself in divine than upon mastering communication with the *spirits* who enter the body and induce trance. (Kapchan 2007:33–34)

Just as a moqaddema who has acquired mastery working the spirits and an alliance with them is capable of such embodiment and control of supernatural powers, the expertise of the m’allem plays an equally important role in his ability to process the dynamics of mastered

⁵¹ These items belong to the officiating moqaddema and are often the ones she uses during mastered trance. Adepts may bring their own personal objects for trance.

trance (Chapter 6). In addition to facilitating and sustaining possession, the m' allem must also be able to control the possession by taming the spirit (as discussed in Chapter 2).

The majority of possession dances are abstract and fall under the category of generic trance. Depending on the number of participants who are moved to dance, the dance floor may be empty, graced with an individual dancer, or crowded with up to twenty dancers.⁵² With their eyes closed and their heads covered, initiates perform repetitive combinations of stock gestures: stepping on the spot, bobbing or swinging the head, bending forward and up at the waist, and up-down movement of the arms. The more experienced may dance with their shoulders and limbs shifting calmly from right to left, their head lowered and their arms crossed behind their backs. While all dancers synchronize to the music, their dance is not choreographed and each dancer develops their own individual style and combination of gestures. As the performance progresses, the tempo increases and the movements intensify. In every circumstance, the dynamics of trance must be taken to their end. The m' allem monitors all the dancers, reading their body language so as to play in a conducive manner. Though “[t]he [moqaddema’s] movements contrast with the ambient frenzy and distinguish [her] from the other guests” (Majdouli 2007:46), overall the abstract gestures differ little from one supernatural entity to the next. Instead, the identity of the spirit relies on the color of the veils, fragrance of the incense, and sung text and motives—a focus on the chromatic, olfactory, and musical symbols rather than the dance itself.

Variation in gesture manifests in the behavioral patterns observed during the initial and final phase of trance, in “gestures of transit... that bring the subject from one realm of subjective experience to another” (Kapchan 2007:53). These entrances and departures

⁵² ‘Aisha Qandisha is a “popular” piece where a large number of women get up to dance. At Moqaddema Zaida’s lila the dance floor was crowded with over twenty people.

STAGES OF TRANCE	EXPERIENCED / AFFILIATED	LESS EXPERIENCED / AFFLICTED
ONSET	get up deliberately touch ground symbolic hand gesture	thrown on floor twitching screaming crying
INITIAL	eyes closed stationary movements - step, arms behind back, head bobs well-balanced (controlled)	eyes closed stationary movements - step, arms swing, head bobs loss of balance (need assistance)
SECOND	eyes closed stationary movements - intense - deliberate transforms to mastered trance - dramatic/theatrical/mimetic - use of accessories - miraculous (self obliterated) speak (mediumship) hand signs	eyes closed stationary movements - intense - frenetic generic trance gasps
DEPARTURE	gives signal touch ground / kneel symbolic hand gesture gradual exit burp (controlled but may need assistance)	collapse (need assistance)

Figure 5.17 Gestures and behaviors between experienced and inexperienced.

communicate the experience level of Gnawa members and are indicative of the stage and type of relationship established with their mluk (Figure 5.17). A novice or non-initiate may hurl themselves toward the m'ellem or fall to their knees at the sound of the guembri and require assistance to “facilitate a change of state... ‘allow passage from one code or subcode to another, interrupting the one so as to open the way to the other’” (Lefebvre in Kapchan 2007:53), just as they might collapse at the end of the trance and require sprinkles of orange-blossom water to awake them. As the intensity of the experience enters a new level, the

novice may be supported by a piece of cloth held around the waist by an assistant to help their balance.

“At more advanced stages of initiation, Gnawa practitioners may ‘work the spirits,’ that is, control their interactions with the spirits rather than be their victims” (Kapchan 2008:55). A moqaddema normally enters and leaves the dance space with composure requiring little or no help (Chapter 6). This sequence often includes deliberately getting up, breathing in the incense, donning a colored veil, maintaining their balance, ending the trance with a ritual bow directed toward the m‘allem with hand on the ground or kneeling before him, walking off the dance space, and returning to their place. The more experienced devotees (and thus more controlled dancers), like in religious festivals of Algeria, “enter [the space,] touch the ground with their right hand, place it to their chest to salute the ‘people of the earth’ ... They advance towards the brazier [breathing in the fragrance of their melk and], cross their hands behind their back in a gesture of servitude” (Dermenghem 1953:344).

Although possession dances are fairly informal, and the inexperienced are not reprimanded for their lack of composure during trance phenomenon, dancing the mluk requires etiquette. This has not been formally verbalized by the Gnawa, however; when things go awry, rules of conduct reveal themselves, such as how and when to enter the dance space, dance behavior associated with specific mluk, and the m‘allem’s reaction to unexpected events. At one lila, when the first few notes of “‘Aisha Qandisha” were heard, a swarm of female participants took to the dance space in a frenzy, screaming, crying, and pulling their hair. The moqaddema shouted for them to behave themselves because their response did not befit the ravishing female spirit. In another incident, a young child woke from her slumber at the first notes of her affiliated spirit and walked onto the dance space

with her sneakers still on. Her eyes remained closed as she began her graceful movements. Alerted by the moqaddema, the ritual assistants quickly removed her shoes, taking care not to interrupt her dance.

Normally the m'Allem is obliged to execute pieces according to the pre-established order; however, when he sees that a spirit has unexpectedly taken hold of a participant, he has the duty to respond by executing the appropriate piece.⁵³ M'Allem Abdallah explains: "I'm always watching the participants. One time I saw a man get up. At first the man was like this [gesturing his contorted and tense body] so I started to play the melk [']s tune] and he [the man/spirit] started dancing. Sometimes the mluk don't wait for their turn. If they come we play for them, but sometimes the moqaddema doesn't want it yet" (personal communication, A.Gania, 2009). The mluk are known for their capricious nature and may choose to show up before their turn (i.e., before their music is played), especially in the bodies of young girls, the less experienced, or the weak who, regardless of their knowledge of their place within the ritual framework, lack control over possession. As such the m'Allem must be flexible. Modifications may be made depending on the spiritual status of the melk in question, the social status of the afflicted, and the overall social setting.

To accommodate the specific needs of the sponsor, the moqaddema may instruct the m'Allem to modify the ritual progression before the ceremony, such as invoking a mhalla or melk out of standard sequence, or notify him on the spot if the sudden arrival of an impatient melk occurs. Once a teenage girl sitting upright talking to her mother suddenly sank to the ground and started twitching. The moqaddema, knowing the affiliated melk of the girl and that it was not its turn, nonetheless shouted over to the m'Allem to play its piece and he

⁵³ When no one dances a piece may be played for a short time, or may be skipped (depending on the status of the melk).

obliged. At another lila, perhaps because of the social status of the afflicted, the social setting, and absence of the moqaddema, sudden convulsions were ignored by the m' allem (a different one) and the teenage girl suffered until her spirit was invoked several pieces later. Experienced adherents are expected not only to know their place, but to exercise restraint in order to prevent disruption of the ritual structure. Aside from unexpected arrivals of the mluk, as a general rule the m' allem does not accept personal requests during a performance; he upholds the treq and follows special directions from the moqaddema. Due to these and other contextual factors, a sacred lila is by necessity subject to variation.

Unlike Act 1 and 2, possession dance is not performed professionally by the music ensemble but by the audience. The qarqabiya rarely partake in possession dance, some leaving before invocation of their affiliated spirit so as not to be moved by the music since their role is to assist the m' allem in facilitating and sustaining possession for others. Trancers may be male or female; however, the dance space is most often populated by women and girls. If non-Gnawa are present, they may also be moved to participate. Although they do not possess the adequate emotional or expressive response to effectuate possession trance, they often learn about their connection with the mluk in this manner (personal communication, Gania family, 2001, 2006).

At the end of a mastered trance, or completion of a suite, the musicians give benedictions (*fatha*) and receive monetary offerings from the ritual participants. These offerings, referred to by the Gnawa as baraka, after experiencing the divine force or holy grace of the m' allem or moqaddema (also referred to as baraka, Chapter 3), are given in hopes of blessings and beneficence (baraka) from the spirits in return. In short, baraka is offered for the baraka experienced and for the acquisition of baraka (see Chapter 2 [fn. 34]).

Coins or bills are handed to one of the musicians charged with the task of collecting baraka from the audience, who after reciting a blessing to the donor, places it in the wicker tray in front of the m' allem. A few participants may choose to approach the m' allem individually, tuck a bill under his sheshiat, and kiss him on the forehead. If a mastered trance has taken place, at the end of her performance members of the audience approach the moqaddema/spirit, still with eyes closed, and put the monetary offering into her hand while kneeling before her. The moqaddema/spirit then offers advice and blessings to the devotee. When this is completed, the moqaddema places the baraka on the wicker tray before the m' allem—baraka for his service. After the monetary offering, the m' allem begins anew. Moments later the warm, earthly sonority of the guembri is joined by the intense sonority of metal castanets. Thus begins the vocal invocation of the subsequent melk or cohort. In the latter, a new color is taken up and a new fragrance fills the air.

Secular performance of the possession repertoire has become acceptable within the Gnawa community, albeit within the aforementioned restrictions (random order, select pieces). Gnawa conceal their meanings, and safeguard their tradition by intentionally limiting the presentation to the music alone. Theatricalized possession dance is rare on the big stage or staged lila and deemed inappropriate by the Gania masters.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, some m' allem-s choose to enact generic trance on the big stage, bringing with them one or two female performers to imitate the movements. For staged lila-s troupes may burn incense and perform loosely choreographed displays of mimetic trance involving ritual objects (Figure 5.18).⁵⁵ Secular performances of the possession repertoire, however, are mostly musical presentations

⁵⁴ This contrasts with the artistic theatrical displays of mock possessions by performers of Afro-Cuban Santería (Hagedorn 2001).

⁵⁵ A staff is most commonly used that represents the walking stick of *Bu Hala* or the paddle of the Musawi.



Figure 5.18 Mimicking possession trance for a staged lila. (Photograph by Maisie Sum)

unaccompanied by ritual paraphernalia or dance, which designates a fundamental distinction between the divergent contexts. For M'alleem Abdallah, the absence of incense in the festival lila signifies its secularity.⁵⁶

Perhaps similar to performing sacred pieces abroad that are kept secret from Moroccan audiences (Chapter 3), some m'alleem-s opt to “choreograph” or “permit” trance into their shows abroad. In a performance resembling a staged lila at the *Gnaoua Festival*, Kapchan describes a situation where trance was affected as part of the show, something the Gnawa dancers (female and male) of the troupe said they “would never do... outside of a sacred ceremony in Morocco” (2004:35). The m'alleem did not have any reservations saying, “with the spirits, it’s all a matter of intention” (ibid.:37), which recalls Hagedorn’s (2001) concept of sacred intent in her study of the Afro-Cuban Santería.

During a staged lila performed by M'alleem Mokhtar and Moqaddema Zaida for the

⁵⁶ Incense is considered essential for spirit possession as it helps the spirits rise in the adepts.

	SACRED	SECULAR ("lilas")	SECULAR(?) (Dar Souiri)	SECULAR (big stage)
MUSICIANS - m' allem - qarqabiya - gnawiyya	Y Y N	Y Y N	Y Y Y	Y Y rare
MOQADDEMA - officiate - organize	Y Y	N N	Y played a part	N N
AUDIENCE	majority: Gnawa	some Gnawa tourists	some Gnawa tourists	majority: Moroccan tourists
DURATION	> 4 hours	~ 2 hours	~ 2hours	1 hour
STAGE	N	sometimes (slightly elevated)	stage (15 cm high)	Y (meters high)
POSITION - musician - audience	seated seated	seated no stage - seated stage - standing	seated seated	standing standing
MUSICAL ORDER - macro - micro	Y Y	Y Y (loose)	Y Y (incomplete)	Y (flexible) N
DANCE - tbel - koyo & nugsha - possession dance	Y Y Y	Y Y mock / rare	Y Y Y	Y Y mock / rare

Figure 5.19 Overall structure for sacred and secular occasions.

Young Gnawa Talents' Festival, spirit possession was enacted. When I asked them about the suitability of the dances given the context, M' allem Mokhtar said: "We had the colors, the incense... all the appropriate items for the mluk. That was a real lila" (personal communication, 2007). Moqaddema Zaida remarked on the musical skills and baraka of her younger brother. Despite the secular nature of the event, it was held in the hall at Dar Souiri (literally "House of Essaouira") which Moqaddema Zaida had rented the year before to conduct her annual obligatory lila. The performance took place on a slightly elevated platform (10–15 cm), the musicians and audience were seated on the ground as is customary

for sacred lila-s, and Moqaddema Zaida brought the essential ritual items including a brazier, colored veils, and rosewater (Figure 5.19, Columns 1 and 4). Throughout the performance I had been recording as the Gania family had asked me to do. The organizers did not pay me much attention; however, the moment members of the audience engaged in trance phenomena, a couple of them moved about nervously, one of them signaling me to stop filming. Not long after, the performance came to an end. Perhaps the intention of the Ganias had been to invoke the mluk for spirit possession, to validate and differentiate their identity as true Gnawa, and to subvert convention with a performance of their marginalized sacred practice.

The foregoing chapter has abstracted the structure and organization of sacred and secular occasions in order to examine social and musical distinctions with regard to occasion, setting, and procedure. It also completes my exploration of the m' allem's habitus, which is fundamental to understanding his cognitive processes during musical performance. Despite established rules, and even before festivalization of their music, the Gnawa tradition has always been, as Rees says of Dongjing music "wonderfully variegated and [an] active medium in the creation, maintenance, and affirmation of social networks among its bearers" (2000:117). In the next chapter, I investigate how this is manifested in the process of possession trance.

Chapter 6

Music for the Unseen: Interaction between Two Realms

6.1 Introduction

Given that Gnawa music is intended for sacred spirit possession rituals, it stands to reason that variations arise to support and communicate specific ritual events. As mentioned in Chapter 5, variation in the sequencing of suites and pieces within suites may be understood with respect to context. This chapter examines variation during a single performance of trance. My governing questions include: how does music act in the various stages of trance, and what do musical processes tell us about the abstract phenomenon of trance? Employing Rouget's three-phase dynamics of trance—initial, second, and final phase—I examine what happens in the music at the borderlands between the seen and unseen worlds. Does a transitional phase exist that is expressed in a musical phrase? Lifting off from Rouget's concept that music is a technique of communication directed toward the human world in order to facilitate trance and validate ritual beliefs, my interest lies in deciphering what music communicates about the abstract phenomenon of trance and how music (and dance) communicates the interaction between the temporal and supernatural in Gnawa rituals. Where Fuson (2009) focused on interactive processes of music and movement during animal sacrifice, pre-possession dance, and generic trance, this chapter extends his analysis to mastered trance. By mapping dynamic processes of music and trance phenomena at the macro-level of formal scheme and progression, and at the micro-level of specific music and dance gestures executed in the process of performance, I investigate the meaning of variations during possession rituals.

During annual obligatory lila-s, I was fortunate to witness rare events during which adepts transformed an abstract dance (or generic trance) to a mimetic performance demonstrated by heightened abilities and mediumship (mastered trance). A detailed analysis of interactive processes reveals a framework of music and possession in Gnawa rituals that may be mapped onto similar phenomena. In 2007, a rare opportunity to capture mimetic dance on video made the following analysis possible. As usual, Moqaddema Haja Brika, a former patient of the Ganas and now a close family friend, hired the Gania masters for her annual ceremony. That year she rented a farmhouse in the outskirts of Agadir (Figure 6.1 a). The lila began at around midnight and by the time *Musawiyin* cohort was invoked, it was already dawn. M' allem Mokhtar played the guembri supporting the possession dance of Moqaddema Zaida (Figure 6.1 b).¹

With no written tradition or formal verbalization, Gnawa beliefs are acquired (Chapter 2). The Gania m' allem-s owe their improvisations to hal, a heightened state they reach in performance. Whenever I asked details about their variations, they would often respond: "It's hal" (personal communication, A. Gania, M. Gania, 2007, 2009). Although they did not seem to take full credit for their musical choices, this response suggested possession of a certain spiritual power. Moqaddema Zaida experiences trance amnesia. She is conscious of her surroundings at a given moment, but is "deprived of the records that have been recently added to the autobiographical memory" (Damasio in Becker 2004:140). When I showed the video of her Sidi Musa dance, she expressed surprise and was impressed by the dance: "I know that I'm doing something, dancing, but I don't know what I do. It's very beautiful" (personal communication, Z. Gania, 2007). Furthermore, trance is an abstract

¹ See Kapchan (2007:184) and Claisse (2003:144) for descriptions of Sidi Musa's dance.



a)



b)

Figure 6.1 a) Farmhouse rented by Moqaddema Haja Brika's (left) for her lila. b) Sidi Musa performed by M'allem Mokhtar Gania (left, on guembri) and Moqaddema Zaida Gania (right). Moqaddema Haja Brika (center). (Photograph and snapshot of video by Maisie Sum)

phenomenon that resists objectification. How then can one pinpoint when a spirit arrives, when it is fully embodying the dancer, or when it leaves?

6.2 Methodology

I focus on a three-piece sub-suite referred to as *Sidi Musa* (details below). The selection is exemplary because the sub-suite supports a mastered trance that is manifested in the final piece. I suggest that the structure of *Sidi Musa* can unfold in several ways in response to the ritual context. Among the salient factors are the mastery of the musician and dancer, the purpose of the lila, the sponsor of the lila, the officiant, the ritual participants, and trance phenomena (mastered or generic). In all cases, the formal structure discussed in Chapter 4 is maintained. My aim is threefold: 1) to elucidate the structured processes of music and dance during ritual, 2) to investigate the significance and signification of their interaction during possession trance leading to mimetic dance, and 3) to suggest that an abstraction and interpretation of musical events and dance gestures formulated from transcriptions and observations of lila, conversations with hereditary masters, and Gnawa discourse renders an embodied, holistic practice accessible. By separating out its parts we are able to decode metaphors and eventually modelize musical and spiritual knowledge embodied by trancing cultures like the Gnawa.

In the first part, large scale events (i.e., formal musical structures and theatrical choreography) are mapped to Rouget's dynamics of trance. In the micro-level analysis of the second part, variations in pitch and duration are correlated with instances in the onset of full possession. By isolating specific moments of possession, I examine how music and dance

signify changes in trance progression, and what is being signified to the actors (musician and dancer) and the seasoned public. Documenting trance is challenging, owing to the subjectivity of interpretation, but my analysis attempts to minimize this. This chapter hopes to illuminate how music facilitates, expresses, and gives structure to and is structured by the journey between seen and unseen worlds in its use of variations (rhythmic, melodic, temporal, and textural). At the same time, I hope to show how sound and movement, time and space, capture the embodied knowledge of the Gnawa masters—in essence, their mastery of working the spirits.

6.3 *Sidi Musa*

6.3.1 The *Musawiyin* Suite

In Chapter 4, the concept of structural set and the identity of Gnawa compositions were established. As described in Chapter 2, each piece of the *mluk* phase is iconic of a spirit that belongs to a cohort of supernatural entities in the Gnawa pantheon and is associated with a specific fragrance and color. Foods, elements, or objects may also correspond to an individual piece—that is, the spirit being invoked. This chapter focuses on the first sub-suite of the *Musawiyin* cohort, which is invoked third in sequential order (see Figure 5.15, Chapter 5).

Spirits of *Musawiyin* are associated with the color blue, the fragrance of white benzoin (*jawi*), and water (Chapter 2). One of the dominant spirits invoked is Sidi Musa, master and protector of the water spirits of the sea and sky. Kapchan specifies that:

He was (and is) a living saint of the thirteenth century, whose sanctuary exists... on the coast... whose powers are thought to heal sterility and other feminine complaints. He is the patron saint of travel. [...] the Prophet Moses of the Old Testament, who was set upon the waters as a child and who parted them for the Israelites as an adult. [...] He protects fishermen but also represents the source, the wellspring of life. (Kapchan 2007:182–83)

Sidi Musa is involved in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, but particularly life (ibid.), and in addition to being “the patron saint of the seas, [he is] the master of magicians alongside the Prophet Abraham” (Claisse 2003:145). Sidi Musa is a saint who does not afflict but blesses and is considered a melk who possesses participants during his invocation (personal communication, Gania family, 2009).

All the pieces belonging to *Musawiyin* are listed in Figure 6.2. As with other suites, pieces supporting mastered trance may be observed in two or three sub-suites associated with the master spirits of a cohort; in this case, Sequence Numbers 1 and 3.² If the possessed is an experienced adept or moqaddema, the nonfigurative dance may lead to a theatrical performance. Accessories such as a blue-colored stick (symbolic of a paddle), a bowl of water, or a knife may be used for the *Musawiyin* cohort.³

Of primary concern to this study is the first sub-suite of *Musawiyin* referred to simply as *Sidi Musa* (personal communication, Gania family, 2009).⁴ The pieces “Waiye Leye,”

² As mentioned in Chapter 5, a sub-suite is required to support mastered trance; however, this does not suggest that a mimetic performance is necessarily associated with a sub-suite.

³ The blue-colored stick represents the oar that Moses used to part the seas and guide his people to the eastern shore. According to Pâques (1991), it is also a symbol of the seven planets. The bowl of water signifies sea water. Often it is said that there are three categories of *Musawiyin*: those who row, those who cast the net (to gather souls), and those who perform ablutions of purification (Bu Yandi spirit). Kubayli Bala (throat-cutter) is the most powerful of the sequence (Hell 2002:206); he is the water melk associated with the knives of sacrifice.

⁴ Although Sidi Musa is always invoked first (Sequence Number 1a-c), the order of successive pieces may vary.

SEQ.	MUSAWIYIN SUITE
1 a b c	Waiye Leye Waiye Ye Ya Rasul Allah (Mohammedi)
2 a b	Waiye Bala Batimba Sidi Musa Bala
3 a b	Kubayli Bala Kubayli Bala Kubayli
4 a b c	Ya Allah Bala Batimba Allah Allah Baba Musa U Allah Khdem Sidi Musa
5 a b	Irfa Baba Musa Irfa Irfa Briye Sidi Musa
6	Beherawi Moul Al Ma Sidi Musa Moul Al Ma
7 a b	Kuma Ya Kuma Kuma Kuma Baba Musaya
8 a b c	Baba Musaka 1 Baba Musaka 2 Baba Musaka 3

Figure 6.2 Musical pieces and sequencing of Musawiyin.

“Waiye Ye,” and “Ya Rasul Allah” must be played in all ritual performances, in the specified order and continuously in immediate succession (Figure 6.2, Numbers 1a-c). In the following, I shall introduce their respective musical mottoes and analyze the musical progression in terms of the dynamics of trance. The first two pieces are discussed briefly with respect to the preparation and onset of trance, and early stages of sustenance. In the third piece, the dance evolves to a mimetic display, and I provide a more detailed analysis of the interaction between musical and dance events.

6.3.2 Musical Mottoes

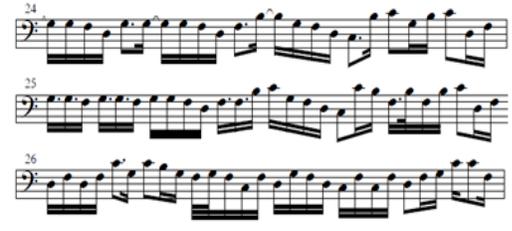
Pieces	Refrain/Dance	Call-Response/ Dance	Dance only
Waiye Leye	A: supports three 8-pulse vocal lines 	B: supports 5-pulse call & 3-pulse response 	
Waiye Ye	M: supports 2-, 4-, or 6-pulse lines 	N: same as B above 	
Ya Rasul Allah*	X: supports 4-pulse vocal lines 	Y: supports 4-pulse vocal lines 	Z 

Figure 6.3 Melodic motives of Waiye Leye, Waiye Ye, and Ya Rasul Allah. (*Tuning is approximately one step higher than in Waiye Leye and Waiye Ye. Pitch 1 = C2# for the first two pieces, and D2# for the last piece.)

Within a framework of periodicity, I arrive at seven paradigms which I refer to as motivic structures for each of the three pieces (Figure 6.3). As discussed in Chapter 4, pitches are approximate representations, and because they are tuned relative to each other cipher notation renders a more meaningful discussion of pitch. Each piece has a relative pitch set of 1 2 4 5 7 (8); however, a sixth note (pitch 6) is played in “Ya Rasul Allah” (Row 4, circled). The main pulses of the motives belonging to the *Sidi Musa* sub-suite are supported

by Q1, the four-stroke ostinato .⁵

Each piece comprises two motives that support both song and dance. One motive supports the choral refrain (Figure 6.3, Column 2, Motives A, M, X), the other (the *oum*) the call-and-response verse (Figure 6.3, Column 3, Motives B, N, Y). Four iterations of the 2-pulse motives of B and N support a single 8-pulse call-and-response phrase five and three pulses long, respectively. Y accompanies a vocal phrase of an equal period. The 24-pulse A motive supports three vocal lines that are each eight pulses long; the 2-pulse M motive accompanies a varying refrain that may have a two-, four-, or six-pulse period; and the 4-pulse X, like the *oum*, shares the same period as the vocal phrase. The *m'alle*m continues to play these motives (A, B, M, N, X, Y) after the singing stops, increasing the variations to support the intensification of the dance (discussed below). In the final piece, “Ya Rasul Allah” (Row 4), a third motive is introduced after the singing stops, played solely for *jedba* (Column 4).

6.3.3 Trance and Music Progression

Spirit possession is facilitated and processed by music and dance. Rouget theorizes that “[m]usic... appears as the principal means of socializing trance” (1985:323). On an individual and collective level, music enables trance to attain its full development. In the former, it functions as a trigger creating the necessary emotional setting for the participants (cf. Becker 2004), and together with bodily movement modifies the individual in several

⁵ Note that the transcription of the first two pieces are based on a performance by *M'alle*m Abdallah. Although *M'alle*m Mokhtar had played the first two pieces (as required), I do not have their recordings. Based on my observations during *Moqaddema Haja Brika's lila* and others performed by the *Gania* family, I have reconstructed the music and dance of those portions. The gestures remain abstract and intensified, and the motives and their progression similar despite stylistic variations.

dimensions (physiologically, psychologically, affectively and aesthetically), preparing them for the dynamics of trance.⁶ On the collective level, music and dance functions as an identificatory device to all participants—ritual overseers, musicians, assistants, adepts, neophytes, seasoned spectators, and the unseen—communicating the identity of the possessed to the entire group and enabling recognition and manifestation. “Music is the instrument of communication” (ibid.:325) and dance is a “representation of the gods, in other words theater—sacred theater, but also theater that one enacts not only for oneself... but also for others... it is esthetic activity and play. But in all of its aspects it is, above all, communication—with oneself and with others” (ibid.:117). Becker suspects that “the power of music to stimulate emotion, to create an imaginary world, to invoke the presence of denizens of heaven or hell, while entraining the minds and bodies of the trancers helps propel the trancers into an alternate extended consciousness” (2004:147) effectuating communication with the spirit world that is manifested by the “suprahuman body” (Daniel 2005).

Engendering the suprahuman body depends on the dynamic interactive network of music, dance, and trance, and between the m'alleem and dancer/spirit. Under the right circumstances the supernatural entities take possession of the human body, rising up through the bare feet of the dancers and manifesting their personalities and power in dramatic, theatrical, or magical displays that a true master is capable of initiating, reading, facilitating, supporting, sustaining, and controlling. The greatest number of mastered trances takes place during the moqaddema-s' obligatory lila-s and mussem-s.

⁶ Rouget (1985) stresses that music must be combined with the cultural-religious beliefs of a community for trance to take place, often as a form of healing either individual, collective, or universal in nature, which effectively re-balances or maintains the balance of positive and negative forces.

To fully grasp the relationship between music and trance, we shall first turn to a brief discussion of Rouget's threefold dynamics of possession: 1) the dynamics of trance; 2) the dynamics of behavior; and 3) the dynamics of the ceremony (Figure 6.4). In the first, the modification of the state of consciousness characteristic of trance follows a process that undergoes a specific sequential order of distinct successive phases which obeys an internal logic—initial (preparation, onset), second (climax), and final phase (resolution). The dynamics of behavior depends on the experience of the initiate, as discussed in Chapter 5, and ranges from imperceptible to brutal in the initial phase, from abstract to mimetic in the second phase, and from sudden (collapse) to deliberate and calm in the final phase:

If, in possession, dance oscillated between two poles, the figurative and nonfigurative, the one being dance as identificatory behavior, the other dance as trance behavior, this is because it provides the adept with the means of assuming his new personality and living intensely at the motor level. Depending on the cult, one or the other of these aspects will predominate, but both usually seem to be present; either simultaneously, if the trance takes on both aspects at once... or else alternately. (Rouget 1985:117)

In Gnawa rituals, if non-figurative and figurative dance occurs, it does so progressively in each dancer and simultaneously among more than one dancer, though the floor is usually reserved for the mimetic performance alone (Chapter 5).

“A possession ritual is an architecture of time also composed of different phases connected with different kinds of music” (Rouget 1985:32-33). Possession does not occur at any time but follows the successive stages of the ceremony. To ensure protection against formidable, unpredictable spirits, invocation of the Gnawa pantheon must adhere to a particular sequential order which is associated with the sequencing of suites and songs within each suite in any given ritual occasion. In essence, the mluk must “wait in line,” so to

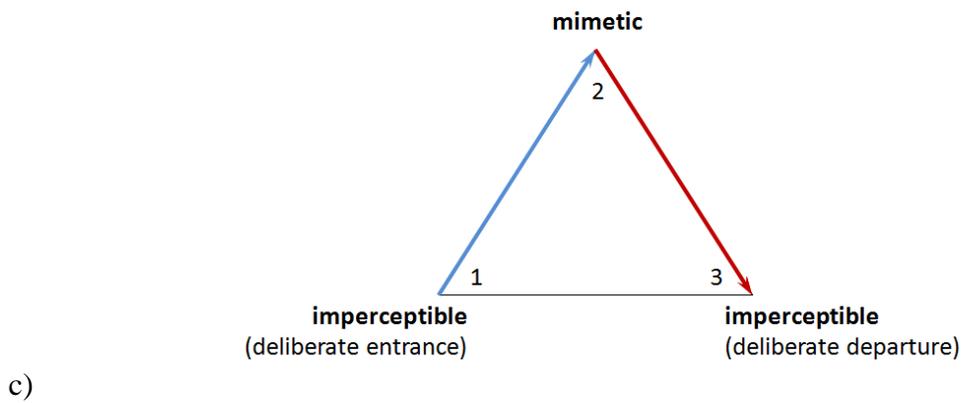
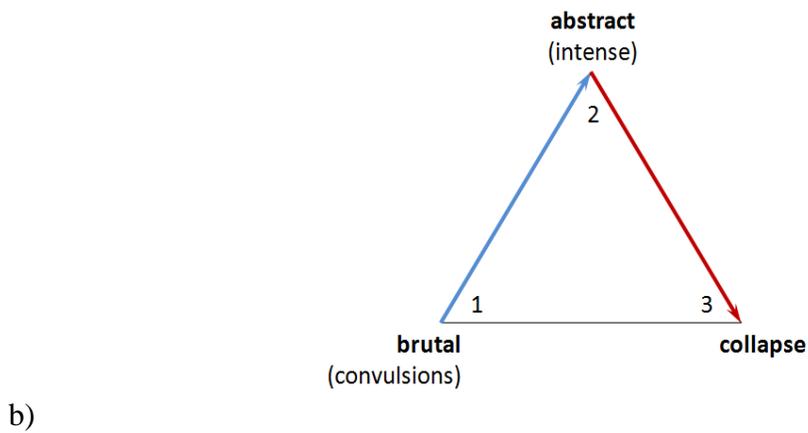
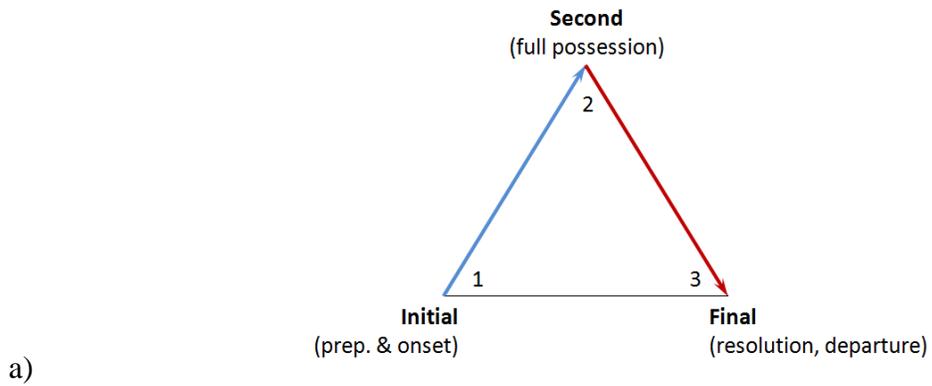
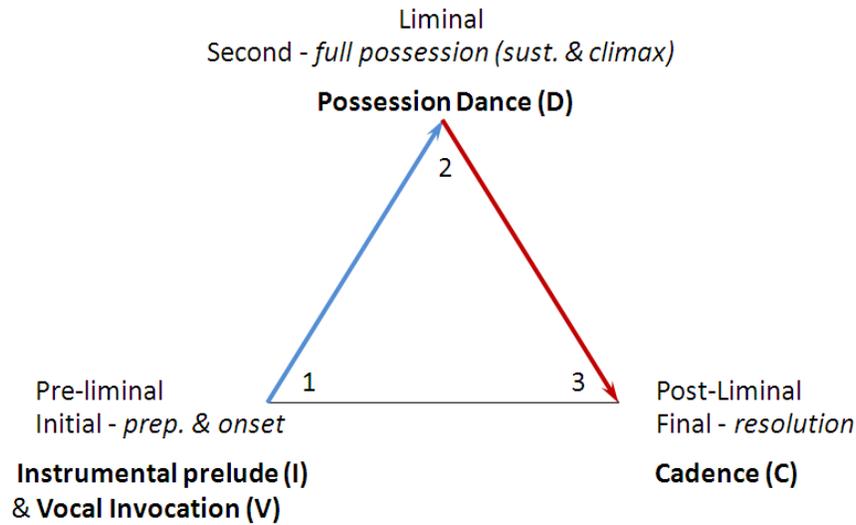


Figure 6.4 Rouget's dynamics of possession mapped to response: a) stages of trance, b) behavior of a neophyte, and c) behavior of an experienced adept.

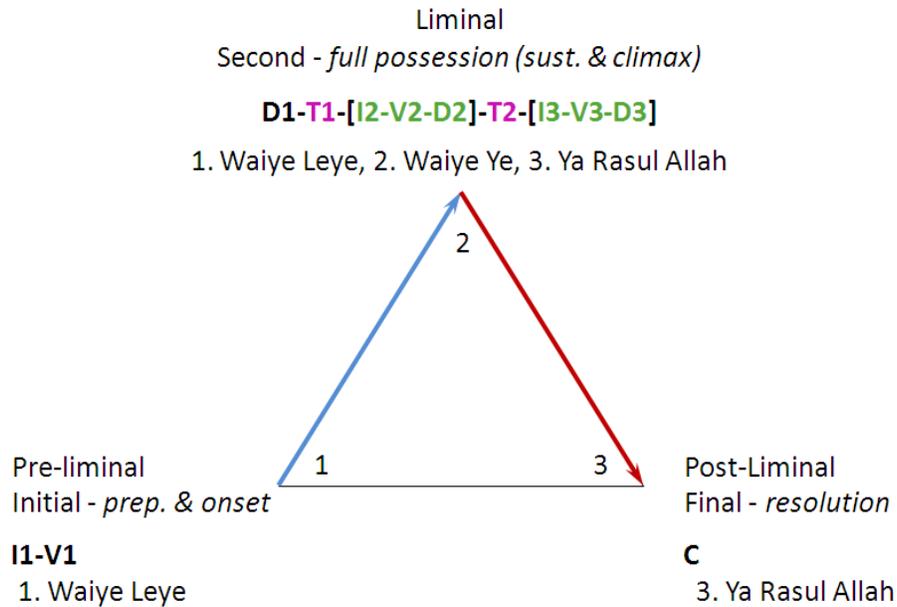
speak, to be invoked. While the behavior and ceremony may be observable, the dynamics of trance remains allusive/elusive.

In Chapter 4, the formal structure of individual pieces was described as beginning with an instrumental prelude (I), followed by vocal invocation (V), instrumental music for possession dance (D), and ending with either a transition (T) or cadence (C). Pieces belonging to the *Musawiyin* suite are no exception. Large scale events, such as the formal structure I-V-D-T/C, may be mapped onto Rouget's dynamics of trance and correlated with the overall dynamics and tempo, variations, and motivic structures (Chapter 4), alongside an increasing intensity of the abstract dance (Figure 6.5 a). Small scale events, such as variations in pitch and time organization, may be correlated with instances of possession (discussed below). For the *Sidi Musa* sub-suite (and others like it), a generic trance may take place for any one of the pieces, such that an initiate may enter the sacred space at the start of any of the three pieces, dance for only that piece, then leave when it ends. How can we map the musical progression of an entire sub-suite to a mastered trance? What does the sub-suite signify in terms of facilitating the dynamics of the mastered trance?

While not all sub-suites support mastered trances, all mastered trances are supported by a sub-suite. Music accommodates and modifies trance phenomena in different ways, preparing adepts for the potential mimetic dance (or enactment) of the spirit possessor. Pieces of the *Sidi Musa* sub-suite are seamlessly bridged by transitional phrases (T) as discussed in Chapter 4. For a continuous sequence of three pieces, an expansion of two I-V-D cycles, linked by two T's, would then be necessary to correlate all phases of trance: (I1-



a)



b)

Figure 6.5 a) A mapping of the formal I-V-D-C scheme of Gnawa music to phases of trance progression and the ritual process; b) Expanded formal I-V-D-C scheme of Gnawa music in a sub-suite of three pieces. (N.B. I=instrumental prelude; V=vocal invocation; D=music for possession dance; T=transition; C=cadence; numerical suffixes (1, 2, 3) correspond to the number of pieces in a sub-suite and their order of performance.)

V1-D1-T1)-(I2-V2-D2-T2)-(I3-V3-D3-C) (Figure 6.5 b). The numerical suffixes 1, 2, and 3 correspond to each of the three pieces, their order of performance, and the three scenes associated with the dance of Sidi Musa. The pre-requisite of one or two pieces before a mimetic dance suggests that a prolonged entrainment may be necessary for the dancer and spirit to attain the full potential of their performance. In physiological terms, the prolonged sonic intensity increases arousal of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) leading to corporeal modification (Becker 2004). The adept effectively becomes a human vessel for the melk. From the perspective of the supernatural entity, the prolonged entrainment allows the melk to settle in. The (experienced) trancer's comportment conforms to the spirit's personality and capabilities, exhibiting elevated mental and emotional concentration and identificatory behavior in the temporary suprahuman body that may also take on the form of speech. These acts implicate the mythological system of the culture. The musical sections and evolving dance serve as musical, linguistic, and choreographic signifiers communicating the progressive phases of trance.

6.4 Embodying Sidi Musa

6.4.1 Macro-Analysis: Musical Form, Dance Progression, and Dynamics of Trance

Houara 2007

“Waiye Leye” opens the invocation to Sidi Musa. The instrumental prelude and vocal invocation of “Waiye Leye” labeled as I1 and V1, respectively (Figure 6.6, Row 1), signify the initial trance stage of preparation and onset. Upon hearing the first few notes of the A

Seq. #	Piece	Section	Motive	Dance	Choreography	Rouget's Phase	Texture	Tempo	Duration	
1	Waiye Leye	I1	A B	abstract	blue veil eyes closed	Initial: prep./onset onset	GQ	87	0:41	
		V1					VGQ	85	2:17	
		D1	+	stock gestures +	Second: possession SC1 prep. for SC2	GQ	91-98	0:30		
		T1				GQ	100-104	0:32		
2	Waiye Ye	I2	M N	miraculous	bowl on head	SC2	GQ	87	0:11	
		V2					sustenance SC2	GQV	87	2:11
		D2	+	+	prep. for SC4	SC3	GQ	92-99	0:24	
		T2				GQ	99-103	0:35		
3	Ya Rasul Allah	I3	X Y	+	new moves +	SC4	GQ	103	0:05	
		V3	+				sustenance SC4	GQV	100-105	0:46
		D3	Z	mimetic +	Sidi Musa gestures +	FINAL	GQ	107-119	3:55	
							mediumship signing	G	118	0:11
			C		codified	touch earth	Third: resolution/departure	G	110-117	0:52
								G	115-124	4:46
						G	to 0	0:05		

Figure 6.6 Macro-processes of music, dance progression, and Rouget's phases of trance illustrating texture, tempo, and duration of each portion. I, V, D, T and C represent the instrumental prelude, vocal invocation, instrumental dance, transition and cadence, respectively; SC corresponds to sub-climax; G, Q and V represent the guembri, qraqab and voice, respectively.

motive, initiates enter the sacred dance space (I1). Covering their heads with a blue-colored veil, they begin a stationary dance, stepping in place with their eyes closed (Figure 6.7 a).

Others remain seated for a while longer before getting up; some exhibit outward emotional responses (tears, yelps), while others put their heads down signifying their attraction.

Donning a blue kaftan with her head wrapped in a blue scarf, Moqaddema Zaida had prepared for the trance of Sidi Musa ahead of time (Figure 6.7 b, c). Hearing the tune of her melk (Figure 6.8, mm. 1-15), she enters the sacred dance space and begins the dance of three scenes. In the first, she dances with her eyes closed, hands joined behind her back and her demeanor controlled. Her bared feet step to the rhythm of the guembri as her body follows along entraining to the groove (Audio 6.1: Waiye Leye).

The onset of trance takes place during the vocal invocation (V1) when the m'allelem plays B after one or two repetitions of A. The ensuing repetitions of A and B support the



a)



b)



c)

Figure 6.7 Dance progression in the first sequence of Sidi Musa: a) an adept covers her head with a blue-colored veil and dances facing the m'allems; b) Moqaddema Zaida balances a bowl of water on top; c) Moqaddema Zaida performs the mimetic dance of Sidi Musa. (Snapshots of video by Maisie Sum)

I₁

Motive A

Motive B

V₁

12 13 14 15

Ah le- ye Ah le- ye Wai- ye le- ye AH WAI- YE LE- YE

16 17 18 19

Wai- ye le- ye wai- ye wai- ye le- y- e AH WAI- YE LE- YE A-

The image displays a musical score for 'Waiye Leye'. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and an instrumental line. The systems are numbered 20, 24, 25, and 26. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines. The first system (m. 20-23) has a purple background. The second system (m. 24) has a green background. The third system (m. 25) has a green background. The fourth system (m. 26) has a green background. The lyrics are: 'llah A- llah A- llah A- llah Wa Mou- lay Abd- llah Ah sa- la wa na- bi- na AHWAI YE LE- YE EH YE LE- YE EH E WA- I- YA LA- I- YE YA LAI- YE WAI- YE LE- YE AH A- LLAHA-LLAH A- LLAH WA MOU- LAY ABDA- LLAHAH SA- LA WANA- BI- NA'.

Figure 6.8 Instrumental prelude (I1) and vocal section (V1) of Waiye Leye. The overlapping call-and-response phrases of the first vocal cycle are similarly repeated throughout. N.B. Small and capitalized letters correspond to the solo calls and the choral response. (Audio 6.1 begins with m. 1)

overlapping endings and beginnings of the call-and-response phrases (Figure 6.8, m. 14, 18, 19, 23), which blurs and temporarily unites opposing and complementary forces, mirroring the interaction of seen and unseen realms. Moqaddema Zaida continues her dance as before with her eyes closed, adding a gentle head bob and slight body bend.

These initial moments communicate the imminent onset of possession trance. While the musical motto heard in the instrumental prelude (I1) may be deciphered by Gnawa

Figure 6.9 Transition from Waiye Leye (T1) to Waiye Ye (I2). (Audio 6.2 begins with m. 1)

initiates, the identity of the spirit is explicit and reinforced by the musicians in V1. Minimal variations on the accompanying melody implicate the significance of the divine utterances. Here, linguistic and musical signifiers identify the supernatural entity.

After about three vocal cycles, the singing stops and the music for jedba begins. At this point, the spirit has taken possession of the initiates and the music (D1) signals progression to the second phase of trance (Figure 6.6, Row 2). In the first sub-climax (SC1) (Row 2, Column 7), participants enter an ambiguous situation and state, floating between invisible and visible worlds, neither spirit nor human—Turner’s liminal phase (Chapter 2).

No longer accompanying song, the room fills with the subtle voice of the guembri (Row 2, Column 8). Motivic structures A and B are varied at increasing tempo and dynamics, continuously supported by the qraqab (Row 2, Columns 4, 8, 9). The dance continues with greater intensity. Initiates step harder to the beat, their arms swing with greater force, and their heads bob vigorously, the veil sometimes falling to the ground. Moqaddema Zaida releases her hands, swinging them in alternation from front to back as she steps with purpose.

As “Waiye Leye” approaches the next piece, it enters transitional section T1 (Figure 6.9, mm. 1-5). The tempo by now has increased from 87 bpm to 100 bpm (Figure 6.6, Column 8), and the qraqab grow even louder. Maintaining her composure, Moqaddema Zaida accelerates her movements to accompany the quicker beat, preparing her body for the next sub-climax (SC2) of trance.

In a sub-suite the continuation of pieces may be mapped onto the second phase of trance (i.e., full possession) by dividing it into sub-climactic (SC) stages that successively increase in intensity from sub-climax 1 to the final climax (Figure 6.6, Column 7). Adepts may continue the same abstract dance from one piece to the next, uninterrupted. Some may leave the sacred space after one or two pieces and return to their seat among the participants. If an experienced initiate like Moqaddema Zaida is dancing, however, choreographic signifiers of Sidi Musa beyond the blue-colored veil may be observed.

Dropping from 104 bpm at the end of T1 to 87 bpm (Figure 6.6, Rows 2 and 3, Column 9), “Waiye Ye” begins with a brief instrumental prelude (I2) of M and N (Figure 6.9, mm. 6–13; Audio 6.2, M begins at t=16 s). At this moment Moqaddema Zaida places a blue bowl filled with water on top of her head—scene 2 of the dance drama (Figure 6.7 b). Gestures change little throughout the piece. Sustaining sub-climax 2 and progressing to sub-

climax 3, Moqaddema Zaida steps in place and swings her arms keeping to the tempo of the music while effortlessly balancing the bowl on her head.

Like the first piece, “Waiye Ye” has a moderate tempo and is characterized by independent melodic and rhythmic lines between the voice and a 2-pulse ostinato-like figure (Figure 6.9, mm. 14–21). N supports the soothing call-and-response phrases that end with a loud cry for *Rabi Mulay* (Lord God) supported by M, immediately returning to the contrastingly soft call of the m‘allem accompanied by N. As “Waiye Ye” proceeds to the instrumental section (D2), the initiate intensifies her movements of sub-climax 3 in preparation for sub-climax 4. At the moment of resolution, after a stream of variations on M, a new pitch belonging to the pitch content of the upcoming piece is introduced, signaling its ensuing arrival (Figure 6.10 and Audio 6.3, mm. 20–22 [t=12s] and mm. 30–31 [t=37s]). During T2, the basic motives of “Waiye Ye” transform from two to four pulses or longer by addition and successive repetition of fragments (mm. 23, 25, 28, 29). Before segueing into “Ya Rasul Allah”, the m‘allem returns to two iterations of an embellished variant of M (mm. 32, 33). In the next measure, the first pulse of M becomes the anacrusis to “Ya Rasul Allah” (m. 34). A new intensity is reached as the performance edges closer towards the final climax (Figure 6.6, Rows 2 and 3), all the while the participants sit, watching, listening, and entraining to the music as they wait in anticipation for what is to come.

In “Ya Rasul Allah”, the interaction between the m‘allem and dancer is most perceptible. The m‘allem gives his undivided attention to the master trancer, decoding gestures and responding with appropriate motives and ornamentations aimed to propitiate the melk. He demonstrates his spiritual power to bring the trance to the final climax while the adept makes known to others, and to herself/himself, her/his special affiliation with the given

The image displays a musical score in bass clef, divided into two main sections: Waiye Ye (measures 13-34) and Ya Rasul Allah (measures 35-40). The score is annotated with several motives and intervals:

- Motive M14:** Measures 13-16, marked with V_2 .
- Motive N:** Measures 24-29, marked with T_2 .
- Motive X:** Measures 35-36, marked with I_3 .
- Motive Y:** Measures 38-39.

Red circles highlight specific notes in measures 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, and 40, which serve as anticipations for the upcoming piece. The lyrics for the Ya Rasul Allah section are: "Ra-sul 'lah Mu-hamm-di YA RA-SU-LA-LLAH HA-BI-BA-LLAH RA-SUL 'LLAH MU-HA-ME-DI Oh yeah".

Figure 6.10 Transition from Waiye Ye (mm. 13–34) to Ya Rasul Allah (mm. 35–40). Notes circled in red correspond to the “extra” pitch (6) introduced as anticipation to the upcoming piece. (Audio 6.3 begins with m. 13)

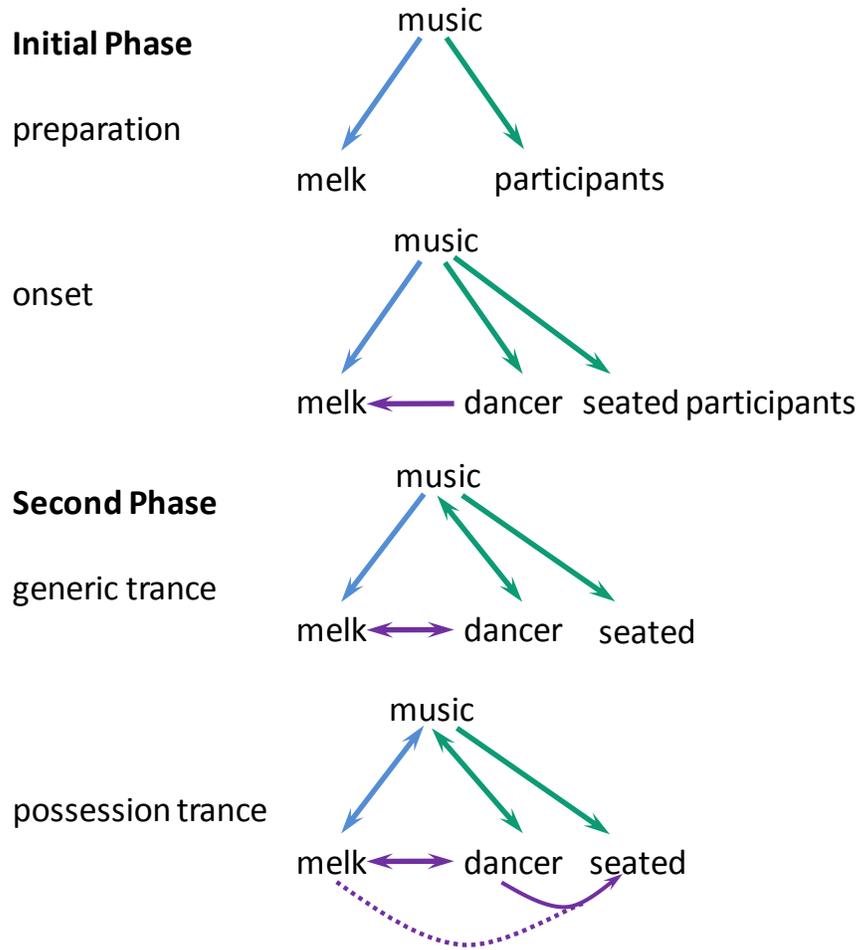


Figure 6.11 Communication in the initial and second phase of possession trance.

supernatural entity. It is at this moment that the melk explicitly communicates his presence to the ritual community through the heightened abilities of the adept (Figure 6.11).

At the beginning of the final piece (I3) (Figure 6.6, Row 4), scene three of the dance begins. A potentially transformative event is signified by musical indicators that contrast with the two previous pieces. “Ya Rasul Allah” has the shortest vocal section of the sequence and the longest instrumental section (over nine minutes); the tempo, instead of decreasing, is maintained at 100 bpm and hits the peak of the sub-suite (Figure 6.6, Rows 3 and 4, Column 9). The guembri and sung text have a shared melody, rhythm, and 4-pulse duration (Figure

6.10, mm. 28–32), while D3 exhibits a diversity in texture (vocal interlude and guembri solo) (Figure 6.6, Row 3, Column 7), pitch (hexatonic), and rhythmic content (triplets, 32nd notes) (see next sub-section). The heightened climax of D3 is further signified by the introduction of motive Z (Figure 6.6, Row 4, Columns 3, 4, and 7). We can speculate that relative to the preceding music, the distinctiveness of this portion suggests the full physical embodiment of Sidi Musa, or at least its potential. Gestures characteristic of the spirit are gradually choreographed into the dance. In the final climax of D3, Moqaddema Zaida's incorporation and mimicry of Sidi Musa is fully manifested.

6.4.2 Micro-Analysis: Musical Motives to Mimetic Dance Gestures

When “Ya Rasul Allah” begins, the dance takes on a new form. The dancer/spirit, instead of maintaining the spatially limited dance of stepping to the rhythm while facing the m'alem, adds special arm and leg movements such as hands touching front and back, foot taps, and knee raises (Figure 6.12) while balancing a bowl of water on the head. When the vocals end, the dancer occupies the horizontal (top-bottom), vertical (right-left), and frontal (front-back) planes of the sacred space by traveling backward and forward, turning on the spot (Figure 6.13); dancing in various directions from the m'alem; and lunging, leaning on the backside, leaning on the pelvis, and kneeling (Figure 6.14). Furthermore, the usual swinging arms evolve into codified gestures associated with Sidi Musa (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009) (Figure 6.15), some of which I have named, such as paddling, breast stroke, shoulder shimmy, and other divinatory gestures—messages that are decipherable among knowledgeable and experienced Gnawa.



Figure 6.12 Dance movements during Ya Rasul Allah performed by Moqaddema Zaida: a) hands to front; b) hands to back, leg up; c) front foot tap; and d) knee raise. (Snapshots of video by Maisie Sum)



Figure 6.13 Movements in the horizontal dimension: a) travel backward, b) travel forward, and c) turn on the spot. (Snapshots of video by Maisie Sum)



a)



b)



c)



d)

Figure 6.14 Vertical positions and other spatial dimensions of *Sidi Musa* gestures: a) lunge, high position, 0 degrees from m'alle; b) lean on backside, low position, 135 degrees from m'alle; c) lean on pelvis, low position, 45 degrees from m'alle; and d) kneel, mid position, 135 degrees from m'alle. (Snapshots of video by Maisie Sum)



a)



b)



c)



d)

Figure 6.15 Gestures associated with the dance of Sidi Musa: a) paddle arms, b) breast stroke, c) shoulder shimmy, and d) divinatory signs. (Snapshots of video by Maisie Sum)

DANCE MOVES & GESTURES	VERTICAL POSITION	DIRECTION (degrees)
Stationary + feet tap behind/front + arms, knee raises, etc.	H: stand M: kneel	0, 45R
Travel (forward/backward) shuffle, glide, step	H: stand M: kneel	0
Turn on spot (left/right) + arm movements	H: stand	360
Paddle	H: stand H: lunge M: kneel L: thunderbolt*	0
Breast stroke	H: stand H: lunge/lean back M: kneel (1 or 2) L: on backside L: on pelvis	0, 45R, 135R
Shoulder shimmy	H: lunge H: lean back M: kneel L: thunderbolt L: on pelvis	0,45R
Gathering arms	H: lunge M: kneel	0, 45R 90R, 135R

Figure 6.16 Categorization of dance gestures derived from Moqaddema Zaida’s performance of Sidi Musa. (H=high, M=middle, L=low; R=right.) *The thunderbolt posture (from the Sanskrit Vajrasana) is a sitting position in which one sits on the heels with the calves beneath the thighs.

Moqaddema Zaida’s enactment of Sidi Musa combines over fifty movements, which I have grouped into two main types: dance gestures and signals. The former may be categorized into seven basic gestures (Figure 6.16): 1) stationary dance, which may be elaborated with foot taps, arm movements, and knee raises; 2) travel moves, such as shuffling, gliding, or stepping; 3) turns on the spot; 4) paddle; 5) breast stroke; 6) shoulder shimmy; and 7) gathering arms. As shown in the video captures, movements such as the

breast stroke may be performed in any of the seven possible vertical orientations associated with a high, middle, or low position; and in any of the three directions from the m' allem (Figure 6.16, Row 6). While Gnawa terminology for these movements might exist, they may be secret or specialized knowledge not yet accessible to me, despite efforts to discover them.⁷

The dance gestures are supported by over one hundred variations of the three basic X, Y, and Z guembri motives associated with “Ya Rasul Allah” (Figure 6.3). For the most part, the periodicities of music and dance gestures are aligned in simple ratio to one another. In Figure 6.17, we can see that different gestures have similar motivic accompaniment; for example, Y and its variants support all gestures except the last one (gathering arms). Some gestures may be supported by only one motive, such as the turn (Row 4), while others like the travelling moves are supported by both X and Y. Z only supports gestures specifically associated with Sidi Musa; that is, the paddle, breast stroke, shoulder shimmy, and gathering arms (Rows 5–8). Sidi Musa gestures may also be supported by X or Y if performed immediately following the end of the vocal invocation, or in combination with a turn or a travel move, such as observed in the paddle, breast stroke, and shoulder shimmy (Rows 5–7). Given the room for individual (and regional) interpretation of ritual events, variations on these mappings arise. For example, if one of the Sidi Musa gestures is performed in combination with a turn or a travel move, the m' allem can choose to support it with X, Y, or Z.

⁷ On the other hand, the gestures may not be verbalized. When M' allem Abdallah had finished playing a brief version of Ya Rasul Allah in my living room, he said in reference to Motive Z, “That was the last part, for the dance [of Sidi Musa],” and imitated the breast broke.

DANCE MOVES & GESTURES	MOTIVIC CORRELATION
Stationary + feet tap behind/front + arms, knee raises, etc.	X Y
Travel (forward/backward) shuffle, glide, step	X Y
Turn on spot (left/right) + arm movements	Y
Paddle	X Y Z
Breast stroke	Y Z
Shoulder shimmy	Y Z
Gathering arms	Z

Figure 6.17 A correlation between the dance gestures of Sidi Musa and Ya Rasul Allah motives observed in a performance by M'Allem Mokhtar and Moqaddema Zaida.

The rarity of mimetic dance, exclusivity of obligatory lila-s, and privacy of sacred rituals renders recording opportunities challenging, which are necessary for transcription and analysis of motive-gesture interaction. Comparison and confirmation with other performances were beyond the scope of the present fieldwork. In order to get some idea of whether these music-dance mappings exhibit consistency, I asked M'Allem Abdallah to play while watching the video of Moqaddema Zaida's dance with the volume turned off. M'Allem Abdallah always supported Sidi Musa's gestures with Z, unless there was singing. M'Allem Mokhtar, on the other hand, played Y when paddling was combined with the turn, suggesting

perhaps that one saw precedence in the paddle gesture (supported by Z), while the other chose to accompany the abstract gesture of a turn (supported by Y). It is possible that the opposite may happen in another performance.⁸ Though the second scenario is far from a ritual situation, not accounting for stylistic differences between m' allem-s, how music structures and is structured by trance progression (i.e., the dancer or spirit) becomes clear. A general consistency between the motives and dance gestures suggests that the m' allem, guiding and supporting trance, improvises within a set of unspoken rules. Deriving these rules, however, requires further evidence.

Musical motives communicate and support a specific gesture, but how are changes from one motive to another or from one gesture to another effectuated? Like solo drummers who accompany improvised dances in the Balinese tradition, and “the creation of ‘unique musical utterances’” (Hagedorn 2001:118) in religious Santería performances, the m' allem executes a musical response to a gestural change. Hagedorn writes:

[D]ivine utterances are created from models or archetypes during moments of religious obligation and inspiration—obligation because the participants in a *toque de santo* are bound to bring down an *oricha*, and inspiration because seeing a *creyente* begin to become possessed typically inspires a series of creative musical and gestural utterances to complete the process. These improvisations on the archetypes or “divine standards” enhance the *aché*, or divine potential, of the performance, and thus of the ceremony in general. (Hagedorn 2001:118)

In addition to playing the appropriate motive essential to successful invocation, the m' allem signifies upcoming change or prolongation of a gesture by manipulating its durational framework, varying the rhythmic density, accent, texture, and so forth (Chapter 4). Using specific examples, the final part of the analysis investigates the dynamic interaction between

⁸ It would be interesting to compare the live performance with those of additional m' allem-s, including M' allem Mokhtar, while watching the same video muted.

M'Allem Mokhtar and Moqaddema Zaida throughout Sidi Musa's dance and offers a glimpse of the cognitive processes associated with musical choices that are not verbalized by either the m'Allem or moqaddema but are embodied through a lifetime of exposure.

In the first video excerpt (Video 6.1, mm. 8–19), one measure of Y (Figure 6.18, m. 8) supports the end of the vocals while the dancer prepares her next move. The new gesture of paddling is supported by X for two measures (mm. 9–10). As the gesture is combined with a shoulder shimmy, the m'Allem plays a Y to accompany each of the two movements—the forward-lunge-paddle and sit-back-shoulder-shimmy—by varying the rhythm on pulses 2 and 3, and by playing the first of the two Ys basic (i.e., commetric) and the second syncopated on pulse 3 (mm. 11–14). After four measures, the m'Allem plays a truncated version of the same motive (Y) three times to support the change to a left leg lunge (m. 15). He varies the second iteration by prolonging the last note and syncopating the next pulse, and signals a change as he returns to X and the spirit dances in place. After two repetitions (mm. 16–17), the 4-pulse motive (X) is reduced to its 2-pulse variant, reiterated five times (m. 18) before re-expanding (m. 19). Although Z usually supports Sidi Musa gestures (as mentioned above), the structure of the piece must first be upheld; that is, in performances of the same piece by different m'Allem-s, the instrumental dance section (D) begins with a combination of X and Y variations for several measures before Z is introduced.

Signals often take place on the last pulse of a 2- or 4-pulse motive and may lead to a syncopation of the subsequent downbeat on pulse 1 (Figure 6.18, m. 15). If the change is signaled by a decrease in rhythmic density in a 4-pulse motive, this often occurs on pulses 2 and 3 and may be accented by hitting the camel skin. When a gesture supported by a 4-pulse motive lasts over two or more repetitions (such as a turn), variations often take place on

Motive X



Motive Y



Figure 6.18 Variations on X and Y at the start of the instrumental dance section (D3) of Ya Rasul Allah. (Video 6.1 begins with m. 8)

pulse 3. Additionally, the motive may be reduced to a 2-pulse variant. On the other hand, when a new gesture is initially accompanied by a 2-pulse motive, the motive is amplified after a few reiterations.

Video excerpt 2 (mm. 298–302) begins with an expanded variant of Z accompanying arm movements that began two measures before. M' allem Mokhtar performs a combination of the above variations as he signals and supports a turn (Figure 6.19). Basic Y is shown on the top right. He signals a turn by varying Y in four different ways (Figure 6.19, m. 299). He changes the rhythm of the first pulse by playing two thirty-second notes followed by a dotted-eighth, decreases the rhythmic density and structure of pulses 2 and 3 from eighth and sixteenth notes to a quarter-note triplet, plays a triplet on the last pulse, and accentuates ternary quantities on the camel skin of the guembri. Variants characterized by any combination of these are observed as signals during the course of D3.

Following the cue, Moqaddema Zaida executes three and a quarter turns to the right accompanied by six subsequent repetitions of Y (mm. 300–302). In the first two realizations, two 4-pulse variants are played (mm. 300–301). In the last four, the motive is contracted to pulses 1 and 4. The 2-pulse variant is iterated four times (as seen in the 8-pulse grouping of m. 302). A percussive tap at the beginning of the next Y signals a change in direction (m. 303). Following the initial signal, the continuous percussive accents on the guembri skin (mm. 303–305) communicate the heightened state of trance. Two turns to the left are supported by two Ys (mm. 303, 304), then a subsequent turn to the right by 2-pulse repetitions (m. 305) similar to measure 302 (Video 6.3, mm. 303–305). Manipulation of the durational framework—that is, the period of a motive—is a variation technique often used to accompany a gesture that lasts for more than two repetitions of the motive. “Swinging”

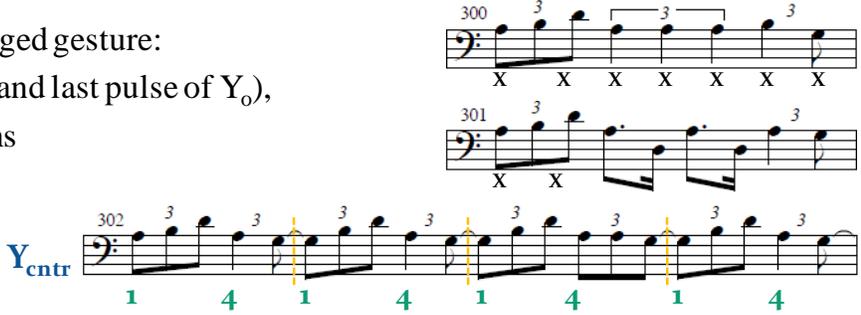
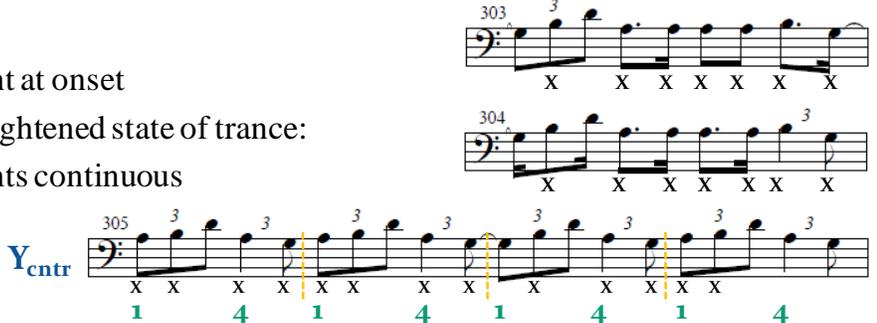
<p>Basic Y</p>	<p>Pulse: 1 2 3 4</p>  <p>Y_o</p>
<p>a) Signal for upcoming gesture: rhythmic change, percussive accents</p>	<p>Pulse: 1 2 3 4</p>  <p>Camel skin: X X X X X X</p>
<p>b) Support for prolonged gesture: contraction (first and last pulse of Y_o), multiple iterations</p>	 <p>Y_{cntr}</p>
<p>c) Signal change: percussive accent at onset Communicate heightened state of trance: percussive accents continuous</p>	 <p>Y_{cntr}</p>
<p>d) Signal end of prolonged gesture to new gesture: re-expansion percussive accents new motive</p>	<p>End of turn Travel forward</p>  <p>Y'</p> <p>X'</p>

Figure 6.19 A correlation of Y and its variations to the dance of Sidi Musa. (Video 6.2 begins five pulses before m. 299 at t≈3s; Video 6.3 begins one pulse before m. 303); Video 6.4 begins with m. 306; Video 6.5 shows the complete sequence (mm. 298–307), begins five pulses before m. 299)

eighth notes (notated by triplets) is a common way to vary select motives during the instrumental section of a piece.

When Moqaddema Zaida finally comes out of the turn (Video 6.4, mm. 306–307), the 2-pulse variant of Y is re-expanded to its usual four pulses (Figure 6.19 c, m.306) and, in contrast, the percussive accents temporarily suspended. M' allem Mokhtar then signals an upcoming change in gesture with accents beginning on the last pulse of Y (m. 306), subsequently playing X to support the forward shuffle (m. 307). Re-expansion of the accompanying motive and textural variation (on the guembri skin) signals the end of a prolonged gesture and change to a new one (see Video 6.5 for the complete turn sequence, mm. 298–307). At this moment, the m' allem has stopped “swinging” the notes. Similar musical events occur as Moqaddema Zaida mimics a breast stroke, shifts into a shoulder shimmy, and flows into a paddle.

Sidi Musa gestures, such as the paddle and breast stroke, are shown on video excerpts 6.6 (mm. 39–45) and 6.7 (mm. 210–223). These gestures are frequently characterized by the 2-pulse Z motive which is amplified at the start of its execution (Figure 6.20 a, m. 39), or preceded by Y (Figure 6.20 b, m. 219) and amplified at the end (mm. 45, 219). M' allem Mokhtar plays the standard 2-pulse version (mm. 40–44) and its variants, which are melodically elaborated and rhythmically diversified with respect to density (mm. 213–216), and/or amplified to four pulses (mm. 217–220), during gestural accompaniment. Similarly, percussive taps on pulses 2–4 of measure 217 signal an upcoming change and are continuously played to support the new gesture—in this case, modification of the breast stroke to include a back kick (Video 6.7).

Figure 6.20a shows six musical staves in bass clef, each representing a variant of Motive Z. The staves are labeled as follows: Z_{X1} (measure 39), Z_o (measure 40), Z_o (measure 41), Z_o (measure 42), Z_o (measure 43), and Z_{X2} (measure 45). Each staff contains a sequence of notes with stems pointing up, and some notes have accents or slurs above them.

a)

Figure 6.20b shows six musical staves in bass clef, each representing a variant of Motive Z. The staves are labeled as follows: Y_1 (measure 211), Y_{trans} (measure 212), Z_1 (measure 213), Z_2 (measure 214), Z_2 (measure 215), Z_2 (measure 216), Z_{X3} (measure 217), Z_{X4} (measure 218), Z_{X5} (measure 219), and Z_{X6} (measure 220). The notation includes triplets (indicated by '3' above the notes) and 'X' marks below the notes, likely representing specific gestures or accents.

b)

Figure 6.20 Motive Z and its variants with Sidi Musa gestures: a) paddle (Video 6.6 begins one pulse before m. 39), and b) breast stroke (Video 6.7 begins three pulses before m. 211).

After two and a half measures, M'allem Mokhtar plays a rare triplet on pulse 3 of Z to support a new gesture directed at Moqaddema Haja Brika and her family (m. 220), as if calling for their attention. Moqaddema Zaida/Sidi Musa begins a divinatory message (end of Video 6.7, mm. 221–223, not notated), signing to Moqaddema Haja who gestures in response

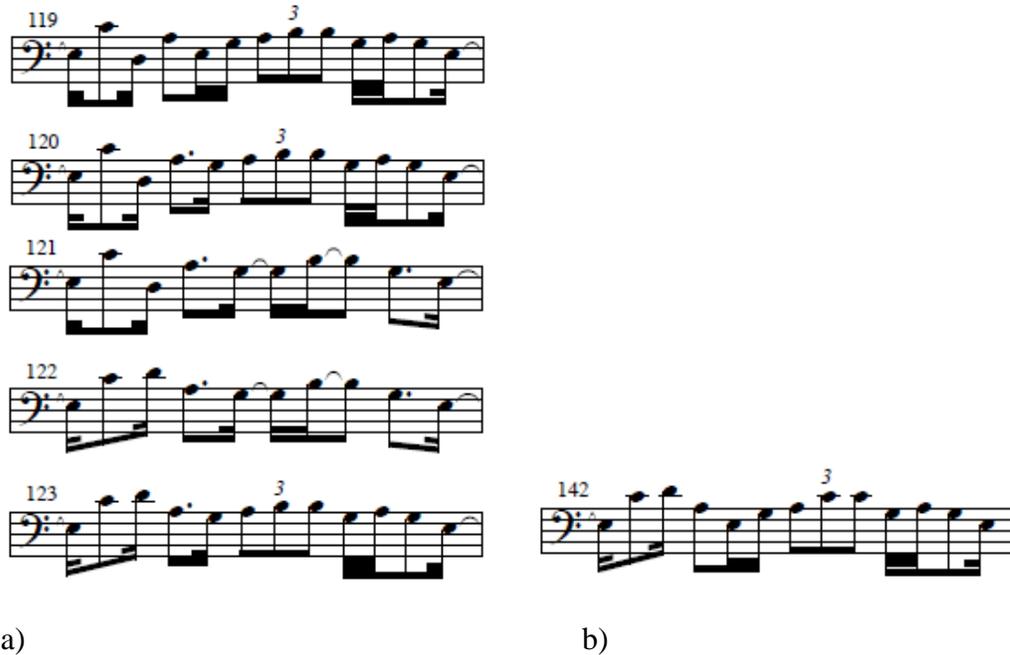


Figure 6.21 Rare use of triplets in motive Z to support special gestures: a) movement from pelvis to backside (mm. 119, 120), and initial breast stroke (m. 123); b) hand signal for the qraqab to stop (m. 142).

(mm. 221–283, not notated; mm. 221–223 shown on Video 6.7). Unlike the frequent use of ternary quantities in Y, out of 154 realizations of Z, M‘allem Mokhtar plays a triplet four times and always on the third pulse of its amplified 4-pulse period. Each time it signals and supports a special gesture as above; that is, the only movement onto the backside (Figure 6.14 b; Figure 6.21, mm. 119, 120) followed by the start of the breast stroke (in that position) two measures later (m. 123), and Moqaddema Zaida’s signal to stop the qraqab (m. 142).

After the final climax, the dance comes to a gradual end. M‘allem Mokhtar receives a signal from Moqaddema Zaida/Sidi Musa (Video 6.8, mm. 321–328). In response, he drastically decreases the tempo and returns to motive X after a stream of variations on Y (Figure 6.22, mm.325-327). As the spirit lowers itself to the ground (Figure 6.23), taking in a few breaths of the incense, the m‘allem plays the typical 4-pulse cadential motive accented

321
Y₁

322
Y₂

323
Y₃

324
Y₃

325
X₁

326
X₂

327
X₃

328
Cadential motive

X X X X

Figure 6.22 Progression to the cadential motive. (Video 6.8 begins with m. 321)



Figure 6.23 M' allem Mokhtar executes the cadential motive as the spirit lowers itself to the ground, signifying the final phase of possession trance. (Snapshot of video by Maisie Sum)

with deep percussive taps on the last four onsets (Figure 6.22, m. 328). This signifies the final phase of possession trance—resolution and departure of the supernatural entity (Rouget 1985:32, 116, 337).

6.5 Synthesis

6.5.1 Musical Progression

During the performance of Sidi Musa, musical changes on varying hierarchical levels readily distinguish the dynamics of trance possession (Figure 6.24). Sectional periodicities established by texture and tempo changes signify the progression of one phase to the next (Rows 3 and 4). In the first piece, the change in texture from the instrumental prelude (I1) to

the vocal invocation (V1) implies the progression from the preparation to onset in the initial phase while the tempo remains stable (Column 2, Rows 1 and 4). Changes in texture, tempo, and dynamics from V1 to D1 signify progression to the second phase of full possession (Rows 3–5, Columns 2 and 3). When a sub-suite is played (marked by new motivic structures), transition sections T1 and T2 characterized by an increase in tempo and new variations (e.g., A", B", M", N" in Row 6) anticipate upcoming pieces and prepare adepts for successive climactic stages during the second phase of full possession. Although the tempo in the second piece returns to the same tempo as the first after peaking, the newly added bowl of water requiring extreme balance from the dancer suggests a new level of possession. When sub-climax 4 (SC4) begins (Row 1, Column 5), the tempo remains at the peak of “Waiye Ye” and steadily increases to 124 bpm (Row 4, Columns 4 and 5). The function of tempo in ritual music is iterated by Frishkopf:

Once the participating social group has been engaged, an accelerating tempo tends to gather them together, driving towards a state that is at once affectively heightened, and socially unified [...] extremely valuable for corporate rituals that aim to produce individual affective energy (for catharsis, personal transformation, or validation of metaphysical belief), which is also channelled towards social unity (ensuring group solidarity, as well as feeding back to enhance individual affect). (Frishkopf 2002:5)

The possession dance, like the music, maps onto trance progression (Figure 6.24, Row 7). It develops from the blue-colored veil to a bowl of water to a theatrical dance of mimetic gestures and expansive movements. The increasing feats of balance demanded of the dancer suggest new levels of possession, and a strong and positive affiliation with the supernatural entity.

Trance Progression sub-stages	1 Initial (prep & onset)	2 Second (possession)				3 Final
Piece Sections	WAIYE LEYE I1 V1	SC1 D1 T1	SC2 WAIYE YE I2 V2	SC3 D2 T2	SC4 YA RASUL ALLAH I3 V3 D3	Final Climax C
Texture	GQ GQV	GQ GQ	GQ GQV	GQ GQ	GQ GQV GQ	G GV G G
Tempo						
Dynamics						
Motives	A AB	A' B' A"B"	M MN	M'N' M"N"	X XY X'Y'Z X"Y"Z'	
Dance	abstract blue veil dance on the spot	abstract > intensity	abstract / theatrical + bowl on head > intensity	mimetic + Sidi Musa gestures expansive space	+ mediumship divinatory message	sign

Figure 6.24 Mapping musical processes and dance progression to the dynamics of trance.

6.5.2 Motivic Considerations

Trance progression is most easily recognized by vocal and non-vocal sections, and changes in tempo, dynamics, and texture. Motivic changes, however, are subtler signposts of this progression but recognizable as markers of specific events outside the ritual context. Gnawa musicians identify specific *oum-s* and types of variations for singing. These are often 2-pulse motives such as seen in “Waiye Leye” and “Waiye Ye,” or four pulses long in the case of “Ya Rasul Allah” (Figure 6.3). In the first section, singing is the most significant part of the music. Maintaining their structural integrity for accompaniment, motives are minimally varied. The end of the vocal invocation signifies the spirit’s arrival or embodiment. At this moment, when the music progresses to support *jedba*, modification of the basic motives is readily discernible.

Iterations can be identified as belonging to particular moments of trance by the way in which they are varied with regard to time organization, position within the motive, and frequency of embellishments. M’allem Mokhtar employs three transformational techniques (discussed in Chapter 4):

1. manipulation of periodicity by:
 - a. amplification (truncation, contraction and addition), or
 - b. juxtaposition of binary and ternary quantities
2. modification of rhythmic density, and
3. melodic variation over successive reiteration over many cycles.

In “Ya Rasul Allah”, Y is always four pulses long when it accompanies singing. In the next stage, a structural change is signified when Y is contracted to two pulses, or the 4-pulse motive is melodically ornamented and rhythmically modified on pulses 2, 3, or 4. In both 2-

and 4-pulse motives the successive use of triplets often takes place when accompanying a turn or travel move. The presence of percussive taps on the camel skin signals a climactic moment in a performance, often absent during singing. When a piece such as “Ya Rasul Allah” has a motive especially reserved for the possession dance, moments of enactment performed in ritual may be vividly imagined at a festival. Its amplification from two to four pulses and variation streams comprising thirty-second- and sixteenth-note ornamentations frequently resolved by long durational accents on pulses 2 and 3 of Y may conjure, or be derived from, images of divinatory gestures of Sidi Musa.

In the final climactic phase, signifying takes on a micro-dimension. The differences between variations are not serendipitous but expressive of ritual moments and suggest an implicit set of rules that structure the improvisations of the m‘allem. Examples include introduction of the *dance* motive (Z) and the use of ternary quantities in the final climax. Melodic changes on the first sub-division of pulse 2 are structural as they alter the identity of a motive, its function, and place in the ritual process. In 4-pulse motives, the first subdivisions of pulses 3 and 4 usually have the same pitch as pulse 2, although pulse 3 may be syncopated by prolonging the last note of pulse 2, or feature triplets (Y). Pulses 2 and 4 are never syncopated (Figure 6.25, Number 4). When variations arise on the structural points of pulses 1 and 4 (Number 1), they usually occur on subdivisions 1, 3, and 4, and 2, 3, 4, respectively. Pitches 1 and 8 are commutative on pulse 1 of motives Y and Z (Number 2).

Rhythmic variations occur most frequently on pulses 2 and 3 (X and Y), and to a lesser degree on pulse 4 (Number 3). When motive Z is amplified to four pulses, rhythmic and melodic elaborations are frequent on pulses 2–4. Ornamental changes usually take place on subdivisions 2, 3, and 4 of pulses 2, 3, and 4 (Number 6). Introduction of the *dance*

No.	MOTIVE	X				Y				Z		
	Pulse	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	
1	Structural points	*			*	*			*	*	*	
2	Pitch variations	*			*	*		*			*	
3	Frequent rhythmic variations		*	*			*	*	*		*	
4	Syncopation					*		*		*		
5	Least frequent variations	*				*				*		
6	Ornamental variations		*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	
7	Structural variations	*				*			*	*	*	
8	Commutative pitches					1~8				1~8		
9	Ornamental pitches	1 (pulse 1) 2 (pulse 4) RARE				6 (pulse 4) 2 (pulse 4) RARE				6 (pulse 3) 5 (pulse 2-4) 1 (pulse 4) RARE		
10	Operational values	max:	quarter note			max:	quarter note			max:	quarter note	
		min:	32nd note (rare)			min:	32nd note (rare)			min:	32nd note	
		triplets:	rare			triplets:	frequent			triplets:	rare	

Figure 6.25 Principles of variation for Ya Rasul Allah in the instrumental dance section.

motive (Z) and the use of specific rhythmic variations—such as thirty-second and sixteenth notes in the case of Z, triplets in X and Y, and amplification—are reserved for particular stages of a performance and are rarely heard at the start of jedba (Number 10).

The m‘allem embodies knowledge of the music and dance required to propitiate the supernatural entities in a satisfactory way. He follows and drives the intensity of the performance according to a set of implicit rules on which he bases his musical choices.⁹

Analysis of motivic choices, types of variation, and dance gestures has been essential to understanding the logic behind musical progressions.

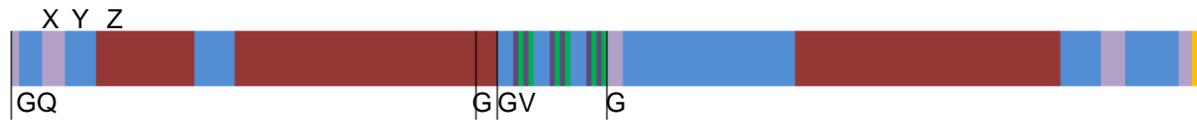
⁹ Investigating implicit rules of variation is the subject of a future study.

6.5.3 Contextual Considerations

The first sequence of the *Musawiyin* cohort serves as exemplar of the “musical process-trance progression” dynamic in Gnawa lila-s. By correlating musical events to the dynamics of trance and specific dance moves, I have attempted to grasp what is being communicated in the simultaneous dialogue between the m‘allem in his music and the moqaddema in her dance, to the ritual community. But what happens when the generic trance does not transform into a mimetic performance? Depending on the situation, the m‘allem may focus on one, more, or all adepts on the floor. Qureshi categorizes types of selective focus as collective, plural, priority, or single focus where the first has “no individual catering,” the second “cater[s] to several listeners by turn [with] equal attention,” the third “cater[s] to plural needs but give[s] priority to one,” and the last “cater[s] to [a] single listener, disregarding all others (audience usually focussed on single person)” (1995:224). The m‘allem’s selection depends on the status of participants as discussed in Chapter 5, and on the intensity of spiritual arousal. In the foregoing, we observed the progression from priority focus in the first two pieces to single focus in the final climax of the last piece when all other dancers had returned to their seats. Rather than happenstance, the m‘allem has prior knowledge of which mimetic dances will be performed based on the moqaddema, sponsor, and location of the event.

When there is no mastered trance, the duration and diversity of variations in the instrumental dance section (D3) are limited. In the final cadence, initiates may similarly touch the ground—either calmly or by a sudden collapse (Chapter 5). Instead of being signaled, however, the m‘allem watches the dancers to gage when to execute the cadential motive. In these cases of collective or plural focus, the guembri is supported by the qraqab

t= 9:34



a)

t= 1:42



b)

Figure 6.26 Progression and duration of Ya Rasul Allah's instrumental dance section (D3) during: a) a mastered trance that lasted 9 minutes and 34 seconds (performed by M'alleem Mokhtar), and b) a generic trance that lasted 1 minute and 42 seconds (performed by M'alleem Mahmoud). The lavender (light), blue (medium), and red (dark) colors (shadings) correspond to the X, Y, and Z motives, respectively.

and the tempo peaks just before the end. A cadence for sub-suites always follows an intense trance, generic or mastered; however, the absence of a cadence and direct transition to the next piece often takes place when no participants dance. In this case, D3, rather than communicating what we have discussed in the foregoing, is performed to maintain the structural integrity of the performance and played for less than a minute. In another lila, the performance of "Ya Rasul Allah" was the shortest piece of the sub-suite. Variations were limited, texture changed little, and there was no final cadence (Figure 6.26). Despite these structural clues, which would suggest the absence of trance, the solo guembri communicates that an adept is engaged in an intense generic trance and that the m'alleem interacting with the specific dancer has given them priority focus (or single focus if there are no other dancers). The brevity of the performance, however, rules out the possibility of mimetic dance.

Modifications such as these suggest that “Ya Rasul Allah” is performed specifically for the manifestation and dance of Sidi Musa.

Questions remain, however: How similar, with regard to motive-gesture correlations and types of variations, would multiple performances by the same m‘allem be? What are the principles of equivalence, the limits of varied interpretations of the same pieces? And, more broadly, to what degree do hereditary m‘allem-s from different families and regions share the same musical knowledge? With a few exceptions, pieces associated with the same supernatural entity have similar motives bearing the same functions. Gnawa music being an oral tradition, however, leaves much room for interpretation. Just as the relationship between adepts and mluk is unique, every m‘allem develops his personal style and technique of improvising. Furthermore, the relationship between the m‘allem and moqaddema, or experienced adept, may also influence performance choices.

In this chapter, I hope to have elucidated how musical processes communicate what is not verbalized by the Gnawa musicians or remembered by the possessed during moments of trance at multiple levels of temporal hierarchy in a single performance. Analysis helps to decode the language and gain a deeper appreciation for Gnawa musical signification, which, complemented by my presence at rituals and relationship with the Gania family, offers a glimpse of what may be a cognitive framework that governs musical performances during sacred rituals. It seems that a template guiding the music’s unfolding tracks the characteristic stages of trance possession, whether directly and interactively as in a ritual, or internally and imaginatively in a festival. The next chapter investigates how meaning constructs and is constructed by secular spaces.

Chapter 7

Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes

7.1 Introduction

Variation in sacred performance guides, tracks, and maps onto the dynamics of trance at macro- and micro-levels. This chapter investigates how ritual musicians shape music performances in new secular contexts that generate new social experiences. Distinctions may be easily traced in perceptible musical features, such as modified instrumentation (technological advances), performance practices (female accompanists in traditionally all-male ritual ensembles, use of microphones, standing instead of sitting), and sequencing of events. In the staging of sacred ceremonies, however, deeper social and musical distinctions become elusive. Sacred pieces are played with little apparent change in the sounds produced.¹ Music, however, obeys the laws of nature that “require... an organism... to constantly adapt to its changing environment” in order to survive, and “has to be re-made at every performance and... felt anew inside each individual body” (Blacking in Byron 1995:153). I posit that contextual distinctions among the Gnawa are conveyed through subtle differences in musical choices. The m‘allem, no longer tied to rules, allows himself a greater freedom of musical expression, displaying virtuosity in a less ritual-bound space. In the following discussion, I correlate musical variations and important social distinctions between

¹ These are drawn from field observations and studio recordings of Gnawa music (distinct from recordings made during a sacred lila ceremony) and include collaborations between m‘allem-s and international artists in improvised and rehearsed fusion creations during the Gnawa festival. I do not account for the use of the guembri as one of many ethnic Moroccan instruments in folk-pop groups, such as Nass El-Ghiwan and Ganga Fusion, that take inspiration from Gnawa music and may or may not have a m‘allem as one of its members.

the sacred and secular. I argue that differing sound patterns arise from specific social interactions—that is, between the m‘allem and those who engage in his services, and between the m‘allem and the ritual and festival participants—and reflect the musical meaning behind respective approaches to performance.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, despite the expansion of secular performance contexts, Gnawa continue to hold ritual ceremonies as required. The co-existence of the sacred and staged, however, has not come about without dissonance among Gnawa masters. Although these changes have had legitimizing effects on a once marginalized sub-Saharan community (Majdouli 2007), concerns over social and cultural destruction have arisen from the proliferation of festivals, government initiatives to promote cultural tourism (Ross et al. 2002), and the growing trans-global desires among ritual musicians in pursuit of greater financial gain to meet the rising economic demands of society (personal communications, Gania family, 2007 and 2009; Ross et al. 2002). How then do Gnawa musicians negotiate between being cultural ambassadors on the one hand, and ritual masters on the other? Since the origins of Gnawa music are imbued with very specific meanings and performances structured according to given ritual occasions, how might musical processes vary in order to accommodate secular environments?

Like Afro-Cuban Santería religious and folkloric performances, sacred and secular renditions of a Gnawa piece may “sound the same because the space between the sacred and secular is inaudible” (Hagedorn 2001:111).² Although a piece is newly interpreted and

² This notion of musical sameness at the level of local cultures extends globally, particularly among oral/aural traditions, and is not limited to sacred and secular performances. For example, performances of ‘Aisha (on the ghita) differ between Hamadsha ensembles but are considered the same; Ciucci in her study of *shikhat* (professional female singer-dancers) performances of ‘*aita* (sung poetry) remarked on the sameness expressed by performers despite differences (personal communication, 2011). In Bali, the elaboration of melodies or phrases often differs but is considered

improvised upon by m' allem-s in every performance (sacred or secular), it is considered the “same” and sounds the “same” because it retains a recognizable structure; that is, variation in the representation of a piece is commonplace (and expected). While it may be judged emically to be the same, a close listening reveals a lesser *degree of sameness* between the sacred and secular, which I intend to show in this chapter. Furthermore, the hereditary m' allem-s with whom I work make a distinction between playing for a real lila and a staged one, analogous to the sacred intent referred to by Hagedorn in her work with Santería musicians. Despite the sameness in the *overall sound* of a piece, I argue that performative intent is manifested in the *specifics* of musical performance among the hereditary Gnawa, particularly in social situations as divergent as the sacred and secular. A comparative analysis of the same pieces at multiple levels of periodicity and the micro-level of cellular units reveals patterns embedded in behavior and sonic structure that potentially shed light on meaning and social interaction.

7.2 Methodology

I focus on a single piece and the performances of a single m' allem in order to limit variables insignificant to the study, such as differing motivic structures and individual style. Furthermore, because “[t]he body is where ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ meet, where the boundaries are blurred, and it is this liminal space that is both powerful and disruptive” (Hagedorn 2001:77), the performances of a hereditary m' allem are analyzed. Belonging to a lineage of Gnawa masters, and having a lifelong experience performing sacred rituals, a hereditary

the same. What is distinct and interesting is how and why musical performances differ and what these subtle differences signify.

master inexorably embodies a sacred intent that would be uncertain with a non-hereditary one. Thrust into this new environment, the hereditary master cannot help but “call into question the performative categories implied by the terms ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ and... renegotiate their respective ‘rules of engagement’” (ibid.), resulting in distinct musical performances.

During my fieldwork, I observed a number of sacred and secular performances by the Gania masters. Making recordings performed by the same m‘allem, however, proved more challenging, particularly of sacred rituals. Typical of the Gania masters’ performance itineraries in the days leading up to the *Gnaoua Festival*, sacred lila-s and secular events are in demand. During this period, in June 2006, I was able to make recordings, upon which the current analysis is based, of M‘allem Abdallah’s performances in his hometown of Essaouira: 1) at a sacred lila held in a house within the old walled city; and 2) a few days later at a staged lila held in the medina’s Place El Khayma, an intimate outdoor venue of the *Gnaoua Festival* that has recently been taken off the program as mentioned in Chapter 5 (Figure 7.1a and b).³ Both events began after 11:00 p.m.

Data is generated from two renditions of a piece titled “Ghumami”. Based on the sacred ritual, I first identify the core structure of the guembri part. Variation in motivic structures is subsequently examined and the two performances compared. The comparison reveals that although the macro-structures are quite similar, the internal details vary significantly. This variance is the key to my hypothesis that there is meaningful difference between sacred and secular musical practice; this difference could only be confirmed with

³ In 2006 there were four large outdoor stages, and six smaller venues located outdoors and indoors.



a) (Photograph by Maisie Sum)



b) (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

Figure 7.1 a) A sacred lila performed by M'alleu Abdallah (left, with guembri), b) staged lila performed at the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival* (June 2006, Essaouira). M'alleu Abdallah (tuning guembri) is sitting in the center with his qraqbiya on either side of him.

further research.⁴

Given the paucity of written sources for the study of Gnawa musical processes, and that Gnawa have an intuitive and operational understanding, my preliminary musical “model” of the sacred context is necessarily tentative.⁵ Nevertheless, comparative study of the performance idioms in two divergent contexts is of interest for the potential it holds in locating improvisational practices in social space.

7.3 Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna

The mhalla *Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna*, also referred to simply as *Mimun* or the Blacks, are invoked second in ritual sequence after *Mulay Abdelqader Jilali* and before *Musawiyin* (Figure 7.2a). The sequence invokes mysterious entities that are semi-angelic and semi-demonic (Figure 7.2c). Black benzoin (*jawi*) is burned and accessories include cowry shells for Lalla Mimuna, a knife for Ghumami, and candles during Gnawa Baba Mimun.⁶ In addition to gender and sex organs represented by prominent Mimun characters (Pâques 1991:290), the four black slaves—Lalla Mimuna, Ghumami, Marhaba and Sidi Mimun—represent the four holy books: Mimuna is the Quran, Ghumami the gospel of Jesus, Marhaba the Psalms of Moses, and Sidi Mimun the Genesis of Abraham, “father of the Light” (ibid.:292). The integration of prophets belonging to Judaism and Christianity in Gnawa cosmology align with the standard practices of Islam.

⁴ Similar observations were made of other performances of the same piece by M‘allem Abdallah at the mussem of Sidi Bilal (2007) and a recording session (2007).

⁵ More recent research involves developing an approach to model the motivic structures of Gnawa pieces.

⁶ For more information, see Pâques (1991:290–92); Lapassade (1998:43–46); Hell (2002:173–93); and Claisse (2003:140–44).

Sacred SEQ.#	COHORTS OF SPIRITS	DESCRIPTION	COLOR	Secular SEQ.#	Festival 2006
1a	Mulay Abdelqader Jilali	Sultan of the saints, protector	White	1a	Select Pieces (Jilali)
1b	Bu Hala	Vagabonds of God	Multi-colored		
2	Sidi Mimun & Lalla Mimuna	Guardian to the door of Sudan	Black	2	Mimun
3a	Musawiyin	Sea spirits	Light blue	One piece from preceding entertainment suites	
3b	Samawiyin	Sky spirits	Dark blue		
4	Houmar	Spirits of the abattoir	Red		
5	Ulad Agh-Ghaba	Spirits of the forest	Black		
6	Shorfa	Descendants of the Prophet	Green, white		
7	L'ayalet	Female spirits	Yellow, various		
x	'Aisha	Ravishing spirits	Black		

a)

b)

Sacred SEQ. #	MIMUN SUITE (Zawiya 2007)	Sacred SEQ.#	MIMUN SUITE (House 2006)	Secular SEQ.#	MIMUN SUITE (Festival 2006)
1a	Lalla Mimuna 1			1a	Lalla Mimuna 1
1b	Lalla Mimuna 2	1b	Lalla Mimuna 2	1b	Lalla Mimuna 2
1c	Mimuna Rabi L'afu	1c	Mimuna Rabi L'afu	1c	Mimuna Rabi L'afu
2	Ghumami	2	Ghumami	2	Ghumami
3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba	3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba	3	Sidi Mimun Marhaba
4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun	4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun	4a	Gnawa Baba Mimun
4b	Mimun Ganga	4b	Mimun Ganga	4b	Mimun Ganga
5	Kiriya	5	Kiriya	5 (7)	Marhaba Baba Mimun
6	Fufu Dinba	6	Fufu Dinba	6 (5')	Kukriya Makesima
7	Marhaba Baba Mimun			7 (6)	Fufu Dinba
8	Baba L-Ghumami				
9	Hadik Lalla Mimuna				
10	Sidi Mimun Sudani				

c)

d)

Musical Analysis

Figure 7.2 a) The Gnawa pantheon of supernatural entities and possible sequence of invocation during a sacred lila; b) repertoire of a staged lila performed by M'alle Abdallah at the 2006 *Gnaoua Festival*; performance of the Mimun suite at c) two sacred lila-s, and at d) the staged lila of the 2006 *Gnaoua Festival*. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, adapted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

Gnawi Baba Mimun (Father Mimun) is the powerful tutelary melk of the Gnawa (Figure 7.2 c, Number 4a), the gate-keeper (*bwab*) who opens the ritual door to all the mluk. He is also considered “the great blacksmith...[and] the master of the telluric fire” (Hell 2002:169, 187).⁷ King of the genies (or supernatural entities) and the Seventh Zouhal (Saturn, the seventh planet) said to govern the foundation of the universe, Baba Mimun presides over the actualization of the potential of the underworld, and over the transmutation of primitive material (Hell 2002:191). According to Hell, Sidi Mimun and Lalla Mimuna “correspond to the single reality of the invisible (Gnawi Baba Mimun) reproduced in two sexual forms” (ibid.:183).

Lalla Mimuna (Lady Mimuna) opens the suite. A black female slave brought from Sudan, she is considered to be both Mimun’s mother and sometimes his wife; more specifically, she is the mother of Ghumami (the manifestation of Mimun). Conferred a special status within the Gnawa pantheon, her motto “God knows Mimuna and Mimuna knows God” (Pâques 1991:64) suggests an intimate link with the divine. Furthermore, she is a female entity appearing in an otherwise all-male cohort.⁸ According to Pâques, “her cenotaph is situated near the ramparts of Marrakesh... [and] [h]er tomb... [is] in the zauiya [zawiya] of Tamgrout” (ibid.:62), a Saharan oasis in the south of Morocco (Figure 1.3).

Sidi Mimun (Lord Mimun) is considered both a melk and a saleh. For the Gnawa of Marrakech, he has “the status of a saint warrior... and may even be integrated into the pantheon of the *hajaj* (the enlightened, luminous, and pure)” (Claisse 2003:140). His tomb is located in Marrakech near the gates through which the caravans once entered from Timbuktu

⁷ According to Pâques, the blacksmith is the primary symbol of Gnawa beliefs (1978:321–24, 1991:149–54)

⁸ According to Pâques, Marhaba is a female spirit of the Black Suite. She writes: “Marhaba ([literally] welcome), the one who invites you to enter, is the slave wife of Ghumami” (1991:290).

(i.e., *Bab Agenaou* and *Bab Rob*) (ibid). Pâques writes that Sidi Mimun was “‘the guardian of the doors,’ a black slave that did not permit anyone to enter or leave by the door of Bab Rob” (1991:60). Sidi Mimun, manifested by Ghumami, is invoked second after Lalla Mimuna.

Ghumami, literally “stormy,” refers to the dark sky filled with heavy clouds soon to be torn open with lightning (Hell 2002:173). A formidable melk, he is master of the knife and demands blood from those he possesses.⁹ Because of his tumultuous nature, he is believed to be harmful by others. According to Hell, the impetus of Ghumami, however, is neither uncontrollable aggression nor suffering nor a morbid drive to voluntarily draw blood. Rather, subjection to the knife (and flame) signifies undergoing “the double burn of the ‘taste’ of knowledge” (2002:192).

At a lila in Safi, Majdouli remarks that during Ghumami’s invocation, the dance space filled up, in contrast to the almost empty floor in the two previous suites (2007:44–45). During my fieldwork, the number of dancers differed from lila to lila.¹⁰ At the height of Ghumami’s dance, however, as we saw in the case of Sidi Musa (Chapter 6), the space would free up for his miraculous performance.

7.3.1 Flexibility of a Prescribed Order

The comparative analysis of Ghumami’s musical details is best situated with a discussion of the flexibility in the prescribed order of invocation during the secular performance. Similar to the *Musawiyin* cohort, *Mimun* comprises a number of individual pieces performed in sequential order. Figure 7.2 illustrates the selection of repertoire and

⁹ In the mimetic dances I witnessed, however, there was never any bloodshed.

¹⁰ At the majority of lila-s I attended, however, it was usual to have a full “dance floor” during the Aisha Suite.

sequence of invocation performed by M'allelem Abdallah at two sacred ceremonies (Figure 7.2 c) and one secular performance (Figure 7.2 d): the annual obligatory lila of the Zaouia Sidna Bilal (August 2007, Essaouira) (left box) and a smaller lila held in a house (June 2006, Essaouira) (right box); and at the staged lila of the 2006 *Gnaoua Festival* (June 2006, Essaouira). Our study focuses on the two renditions outlined on the figure.

During the course of a lila, the repertoire of ten pieces may be played for *Mimun* in a sequence similar to the one shown for Zawiya 2007 (Figure 7.2 c, left box). The first six pieces from “Lalla Mimuna” to “Fufu Dinba,” however, are most frequently performed (Figure 7.2 c, right box).¹¹ In terms of ritual order, there is a degree of freedom in positioning for some pieces (as for some suites) and not for others. For example, “Lalla Mimuna” must always open the *Mimun* suite (Figures 7.2 c–d). In contrast, “Marhaba Baba Mimun” immediately follows “Sidi Mimun Marhaba” in some rituals, “Fufu Dinba” in others (Figure 7.2 c, left box, Number 7), or may be omitted altogether (Figure 7.2 c, right box). I have only witnessed the last three pieces (Figure 7.2 c, left box, Numbers 8–10) one time when M'allelem Abdallah played for the mussem of Bilal in 2007. At the sacred lila in 2006 (Figure 7.2 c, right box, Numbers 1b–6), he only played the first six pieces, albeit in the same sequential order.

Due to the time limit of staged lila-s at the *Gnaoua Festival*, only a select number of suites and pieces are performed. In 2006, M'allelem Abdallah played select pieces from Mulay Abdelqader Jilali (Figure 7.2 b, Number 1a), then entered directly into the *Mimun* cohort (Figure 7.2 b, Number 2), skipping *Bu Hala* (Number 1b). He finished the evening with a

¹¹ Note that Lalla Mimuna comprises a sequence of three pieces labeled as Sequence Number 1a, b, c, what Si Mohammed and M'allelem Abdallah described as “brothers” (see Section 4.6), in the sense that they are inseparable and follow a chronological order (eldest to youngest). While 1a is not always performed by the Gania masters, 1b and 1c are always played in the same order and in immediate succession without any breaks. The same may be observed with 4a and 4b.

single piece from the entertainment dances. In his performance of the Mimun suite, seven pieces were executed in the following sequential order (refer to Figure 2 c, left box): 1a–4b, 7, 5', and 6, re-ordered in Figure 7.2d. The prime in sequence number 5 refers to Kukriya Makesima (Figure 7.2 d, Number 6) which refers to “African woman of fire” (personal communication, A. Gania, 2009), a piece composed by M‘allem Abdallah and henceforth not listed among the sacred repertoire. Instead of playing the traditional Kiriya (Figure 7.2 c, left and right box, Number 5), he embedded his own piece among the ritual songs of the Mimun group, substituting the sacred with the secular. How are these variations at the level of the repertoire replicated at the level of an individual piece?

7.4 Musical Processes of “Ghumami”

7.4.1 Motivic Structures



Figure 7.3 Motives of Ghumami based on sacred performance (House 2006). (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

The current selections of “Ghumami” have a tuning that corresponds to the pitch content of D2, E2↓, G2, A2, (B2↓), C3↑, and D3, hereafter referred to as pitches 1, 3, 4, 5, (6), 7, and 8. Pitch 6 is in parentheses because it is used as ornamentation in the series of variations that follow vocal invocation. Four motivic structures A–D (Figure 7.3) comprise a combination of these pitches. Motives A and B each contain five pitches (124578), C has four (1 2 4 7), and D has only three pitches (4 5 7). The A–D motives are illustrated in transcription excerpts of the sacred lila in 2006 (Figures 7.4 and 7.5). Motives A, B, and C function as both vocal and instrumental dance accompaniment to invoke Ghumami and to provide music for his dance upon arrival (Figure 7.4). A and its variants are usually preceded by B (Figure 7.4, Systems 2 and 4), suggesting an 8-pulse musical idea. The BA motive constitutes Ghumami’s *icon*. In addition to supporting possession dance, it acts as a cadential phrase and provides accompaniment to the 8-pulse refrain that professes faith to Allah while invoking the spirit:

Yeh la ilaha illa Allah, Ah la ilaha illa Allah l-Ghumami
 There is no God but Allah, There is no God but Allah l-Ghumami

The primary function of C is to support the call-and-response verse—it is the *oum*. D is the *dance* motive (Figure 7.5, Systems 2 and 3). Unlike A–C, D is introduced in the instrumental section and serves only as accompaniment for Ghumami’s dance and potential enactment (like Z in “Ya Rasul Allah”, Chapter 6).

A 0:02 **A** **A** 0:07 **A** **A**
 6 0:12 **B** **A** 0:17 **B'** **A**
 10 0:24 **A1** 0:26 **B** **A3**
 14 **C** 0:33 **C1** **B** **A3**
Vocals begin

Figure 7.4 Excerpt of Ghumami from a sacred lila (House; August 2006) illustrating the A–C motives and their variants. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

111 **B5** **A** **A4 expansion**
 115 4:51 **D** **D1** **D** **D2** **D2**
 120 **D3** **D3** **D4** **D3**

Figure 7.5 Excerpt of Ghumami from a sacred lila (House; August 2006) illustrating the D motive and its variants. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

7.4.2 Micro-Analysis of Motivic Structures

In any given context of performance of an individual piece, the formal scheme (I-V-D-T/C) and corresponding melodic motives remain constant, albeit varied. Versions of the melodies shown in Figure 7.2 are observed in all performances of “Ghumami.” As expected of variation forms (and performance in general), exact repetition is rare. The excerpt of the sacred lila serves as testimony (Figures 7.4 and 7.5). M‘allem Abdallah does not wait to begin his variations; in the first forty seconds of “Ghumami” there are already two variants of A and one of C. The following analysis investigates how the m‘allem varies motivic structures and the role context plays in his musical choices.

Figure 7.6 illustrates variations observed on A in both sacred and secular performances, unless otherwise indicated. A1 to A3 reveal that pulses 3 and 4 vary slightly in rhythm; to borrow Pressing’s terms,¹² pulse 4 of A2 undergoes a transformation of element fission, and pulse 3 and 4 of A3 element fusion (cited in Agawu 2006:29). In A4, pulse 2 is a step higher. The secular performance exhibits all the variations just mentioned in addition to A5, A6, and A7, which are rhythmically denser. Notice that element fission on pulse 1 is only observed in the secular context of the festival. Expansions of A (A1x, A4x, A5x) are observed in both sacred and secular contexts: a fragment of A, either pulse 1 or a

¹² Element fission and fusion is the process of division and conflation, respectively, of previously separate elements, “while maintaining their spans or temporal extents” (Pressing in Agawu 2006:29).



Sacred and Secular Variants (A1-A4x)



Only Secular Variants



Figure 7.6 Variants of Motive A observed in both sacred (House 2006) and secular contexts, unless otherwise indicated. “Standard” A is illustrated at the top. Note that “only secular variants” exhibit a greater rhythmic density and diversity (triplets). (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

combination of pulse 1 and 2, is repeated four (or two) times, thereby doubling the duration of the motive to eight pulses. All sacred variants (A1–A4) and expansions (A1x, A4x) tend towards equilibrium between fission and fusion processes, as illustrated by the respective variations on pulses 3 and 4, and pulses 7 and 8. Similar to the variants observed in the secular context only (A5–A7), the expansion (A5x) is rhythmically denser, undergoing a transformation of element fission.

Figures 7.7 and 7.8 focus on a continuous sequence of variations—what I refer to as a stream of variations on the instrumental B-motive. M‘allem Abdallah executes eleven B-variants in the ceremony (Figure 7.7); melodic and rhythmic variations are observed on all pulses except pulse 4. In the staged lila, there are a total of sixteen B-variants, with melodic and rhythmic changes observed on any three out of four pulses (Figure 7.8). Similar to the analysis of A shown above, element fission is the chosen derivational technique in the secular context, and results in a greater rhythmic density.

In general, the staged lila exhibits a larger number of sixteenth notes per 4-pulse motive and a higher frequency of occurrence. In the sacred context, B9 has ten sixteenth notes, variants B1 and B3 have as few as two, and the rest have an average of about six sixteenth notes per 4-pulse motive. The opposite is true in the festival performance. Figure 7.8 shows that two variants (B20 and B22) have as many as thirteen sixteenth notes per motive, B12 has twelve, and the majority of the variants have an average of nine sixteenth notes.



Only Secular Variants

B12

B13 m. 96

B14 3-59

B15 (B4')

B16 9-11

B17

B18 (B8')

B19

B20 (B12')

B21 (B2')

B22

B23

B24

B25

B26

B27

Figure 7.8 Sixteen variants of Motive B observed in the secular context only. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

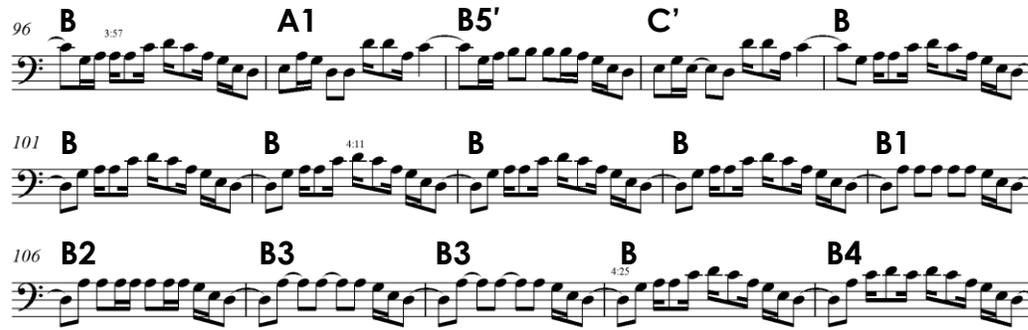


Figure 7.9 Excerpt of Ghumami from a sacred lila (House 2006) illustrating the first stream of B-variations. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.) (Audio 7.1 starts one pulse before m. 96)

In the sacred lila, the eleven variants are executed over four continuous streams of B-variations observed at 4'06" (Figure 7.9, Audio 7.1), 5'17", 5'51", and 6'28", nearly all less than one minute apart. In the festival, the sixteen B-variants are performed in only two continuous streams, at 3'54" (Figure 7.10, Audio 7.2) and 6'07". Notice that with regard to the number of 4-pulse motives, the B-stream is over two times longer in the staged lila: twenty-eight motives compared to twelve in the sacred lila. What does the increase in rhythmic density, frequency, and prolonged period of variations in the secular context suggest about M'alle Abdallah's cognitive processes and social experience? How are elemental variations such as these replicated at intermediate levels of structure across contexts? A greater degree (or freedom) of variation at the elemental (or cellular) level, also expected at higher levels of temporal hierarchy, suggests that the m'alle conceives of the performances as distinct.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Ghumami'. It consists of eight staves of music, each starting with a measure number and a label for a B-variation. The variations are labeled as follows: Staff 1 (91) contains B', A2, B12 (with a 3:51 annotation), and A2'. Staff 2 (95) contains B12, B13, B14, and B14. Staff 3 (99) contains B14, B15, B16, and B16. Staff 4 (103) contains B14, B17, B18 (with a 4:18 annotation), and B19. Staff 5 (107) contains B19 (with a :22 annotation), B14, B14, and B20. Staff 6 (111) contains B15, B21, B21, and B21. Staff 7 (115) contains B22 (with a 4:40 annotation), B23, B24, and B25. Staff 8 (119) contains B26, B27, B21, and B21. The music is written in a bass clef with a complex rhythmic pattern.

Figure 7.10 Excerpt of Ghumami from a staged lila illustrating the first stream of B-variations performed by M'alleem Abdallah Gania. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.) (Audio 7.2)

7.4.3 Macro-Analysis of Motivic Structures

A juxtaposition of Figures 7.11 and 7.12 shows that the overall structure of “Ghumami” exhibits a sectional periodicity (Columns 1): Section 1 is dedicated to the instrumental prelude (I), Section 2 to vocal invocation (V), and Section 3 to instrumental music for dance accompaniment (D) (Column 1). Section 3 may be divided into sub-sections

Section	Sub-Section	Cycle	4-pulse motives	Motives and Groups	Avg. Tempo	Time
1 (I)		1	13	AAAAA(BA)(BA)(Ax)(BA)	96	0:30
2 (V)		1	4	[CC-(BA)]	96	3:24
		2	4	[CC-(BA)]		
		3	15	[CC-AC-AC-AC-CCCC-C-(BA)]		
		4	8	[CC-CA-CC-(BA)]		
		5	15	[CC-AC-AC-AC-AC-AA-C-(BA)]		
		6	8	[CACA-CC-(BA)]		
		7	18	[CC-AC-AC-AC-AACCCCC-(BA)]		
		8	10	[CA-CA-CA-CA-CA]		
3 (D)	1)	1	19	(BA)(BC)(BBBBB-4Bv-B-2Bv)-(AAx) B-stream proportion: 6Bv / 12Btotal	114	0:40
	2)	1	29	[(3D-D1-D1-DD-D2-D-D3-D3-D3-D3-D2x-D)(AAx)(BA)(BB-6Bv)] 8Dv / 16D 6Bv / 8B	127	0:55
		2	25	[(6D-D3-D3-D3-D3)(2B-2Bv)-(CCAxAx)(CCCCx)] 4Dv / 10D 2Bv / 4B	135	0:43
		3	16	[(2D-D1-D1-D1-D3-D3)(4Bv)(CCCCx)] 5Dv / 7D	144	0:28
		4	24	[(2D-D3-D3-D3-D3-D3-D2-2D)-(CCAxAx)(BC)(BA)(CCCx)] 6Dv / 10D	140	0:41

Figure 7.11 Musical structure and events in a sacred lila performed by M'allem Abdallah. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

Section	Sub-Section	Cycle	4-pulse motives	Motives and Groups	Avg. Tempo	Time
1 (I)		1	15	AAAAX-BBB(BA)(AAx)(BA)	104	0:34
2 (V)		1	4	[AA-(BA)]	95	3:10
		2	5	[AAA-(BA)]		
		3	28	[AA-AA-AA-AC-CC-AC-CCAA-CCCCAAACAA-(BA)]		
		4	12	[AA-AA-AAAAAA-(BA)]		
		5	4	[AC-(BA)]		
		6	4	[AA-(BA)]		
		7	7	[CAAA-C-(BA)]		
		8	11	[CA-AA-CC-BC-A-(BA)]		
3 (D)	1)	1	44	(BA)(BA)(2Bv-BBB-3Bv-B-4Bv-BB-14Bv)-(AAAxAxAx)(BA) B-stream proportion: 23Bv / 29B total	111	1:37
	2)	1	56	[(2D-17Dv)(AxAx)(8B-4Bv-2B-BA)(2CA2CAx)(2CCxAxAxAx)] 17Dv / 19D 14Bv / 15B	126	1:48
		2	26	[(13Dv)(4CAAxAx)(BA)(BA)]	139	0:43
		3	4	4Dv - transition to next piece	139	0:08

Figure 7.12 Musical structure and events in a staged lila performed by M'allem Abdallah. (© *Ethnomusicology*, 2010, reprinted with permission of the Society for Ethnomusicology.)

(Columns 2). Sub-section 3.1 serves as a bridge from Section 2. The stream of B-variations, performed at an increasing tempo in Section 3.1, signals a progression in trance phenomena and heightened intensity in the dance performance. As in the case of “Sidi Musa,” it normally precedes the introduction of a *dance* motive in the next section 3.2.

Column 3 reveals another stratum of periodicities labeled as cycles. In Section 2 of the sacred lila (Figure 7.11), there are eight cycles comprising combinations of two or more motivic groups that begin with a call-and-response line supported by two *oum* (CC), and end with a choral refrain accompanied by the *icon* (BA). Column 4 illustrates the number of 4-pulse motives that occur in each sub-section or cycle. The numbers indicate the length of sub-sectional or cyclical periodicities and degree of regularity. This column serves as a quick reference to the internal structuring of musical processes in a given performance and comparison between many performances. Column 5 illustrates the motives (A–D) that are observed in each section and suggests a grouping structure.

In Figure 7.11, Section 2, eight cycles are observed in Column 3. Column 5 shows that seven out of eight cycles begin with C and end with BA. In the staged lila (Figure 7.12), there are also eight cycles in Section 2. The first six cycles begin with A, while Cycles 7 and 8 begin with C (Column 5). All eight cycles end with BA and its variants. Structural irregularity in the festival performance is further exemplified by varying cycle length (Figure 7.12, Column 4).

A comparison of the fourth column suggests that the sacred lila exhibits more regularity in its internal structuring. In the sacred context, after the initial repetition of the shortest cycle (Figure 7.11, Cycles 1 and 2), longer and shorter cycles alternate: two times between fifteen- and eight-motive groups (Cycles 3–6), then between eighteen- and ten-

motive groups (Cycles 7 and 8). This delineates the manner of spiritual invocation with regular verses of call-and-response, followed by a cadential chorus professing faith to Allah as the musicians invoke Ghumami.

Upon arrival of the spirit, the vocals end and give way to the melodic flourishes of the guembri entirely dedicated to the possession dances (Figure 7.11, Section 3). This part is divided into two sub-sections (3.1 and 3.2), the latter introducing a new musical idea (D) (Column 5). M'alle Abdallah begins Section 3 with BA in both contexts (Figures 7.11 and 7.12, Columns 5). After the next eight pulses, however, something new happens (Figures 7.11 and 7.12, Sections 3.1). Up until this point, there have not been any continuous streams of variations in either context. Here, the m'alle strategically shifts the energy of the performance in two ways, by increasing both the tempo and the rhythmic and melodic density. He transforms the relatively calm, mesmerizing space to one of intensity with a flurry of variations on B (Figures 7.11 and 7.12, Sections 3.1).

In the sacred rendition, an initial rapid increase in tempo of almost 20 bpm from 96 bpm (Figure 7.11, Column 6) takes place in the vocal to instrumental transition. The tempo progressively increases by about 10 bpm every forty to sixty seconds (Columns 6 and 7), reaching a peak tempo of 144 bpm. In the festival, the initial increase is slightly smaller; however, the subsequent leaps are larger and last over longer durations (Figure 7.12, Columns 6 and 7). If we juxtapose the number of B-motives (Figures 7.11 and 7.12, Sections 3.1, Columns 5), we see that the staged lila not only exhibits a greater density (Figure 7.12)—that is, twenty-nine B compared to twelve B in the sacred lila (Figure 7.11)—but also has a higher frequency of B-variants (Bv), numbering twenty-three (23Bv) to six (6Bv), equivalent to occupying 79% and 50% of each respective B-stream.

A new motive (D) and, correspondingly, a new stream of D-variations are introduced in Section 3.2. In the sacred lila, the m'allelem riffs over four cycles (Figure 7.11, Column 3) of the new motive. In the staged lila, he executes two full cycles (Figure 7.12, Column 3). Cycle 3 is a brief D-stream that segues to the next piece; there are only four 4-pulse motives (Figure 7.12, Column 4). The periodicities in the sacred lila are shorter (Figure 7.11, Column 4): the longest has twenty-nine 4-pulse motives, compared to fifty-six in the festival (Figure 7.12, Column 4).

A closer examination of Column 5 suggests a higher level of organization in each cycle of the sacred context (Figure 7.11): all cycles begin with a D-stream, the first cycle ends with a short B-stream of eight 4-pulse motives, and the last three cycles (2–4) end with a C-expansion. In the festival (Figure 7.12), however, the first cycle suggests that the m'allelem takes advantage of his freedom to improvise. In the first thirty-four motives, which consist of a stream of nineteen D followed by fifteen B (Column 5), 88% of the motives are variations—nearly 40% more than in the sacred context.

While the current comparative analysis (at the micro- and macro-level) has relied on the juxtaposition of two versions of a “Ghumami”, my transcriptions of the entire Mimun Suite performed by M'allelem Abdallah on two sacred occasions (Zawiya 2007 and House 2006, Figure 7.2) and two secular occasions (Festival 2006, Figure 7.2 and a recording session I set up in 2007) suggest that the overall findings (synthesized in the following section) are representative. My attendance at a number of sacred and secular performances, lessons with M'allelem Abdallah, and discussions with other members of the Gania family (particularly, M'allelem Mokhtar, Moqaddema Zaida, and Si Mohammed) further support the musical constraints imposed on sacred lila performances. As a ritual master and mediator

between supernatural and temporal realms, the m' allem naturally assumes his duty, adhering to ritual rules and requirements of a given sacred occasion, which tend to limit the frequency and diversity of variations. In the future, I hope to corroborate these findings with a more detailed analysis of M' allem Abdallah's other sacred and secular versions, not to mention a comparative study of performances by other m' allem-s.

7.5 Synthesis

As discussed earlier in the formal scheme of Gnawa music in Chapter 4, "Ghumami" exhibits three main sections: the instrumental prelude (I), vocal (V), and instrumental dance (D). In addition, the analysis reveals that internal structures exist at multiple hierarchic levels—that is, sections, sub-sections, cycles, phrases, motivic groups, and motives. The vocal section, associated with spiritual invocation, consists of cycles of call-and-response verses accompanied by guembri phrases of C and C-A groups, and choral repetition supported by BA. The instrumental section signifies that the spirit has gained full possession of the adepts. M' allem Abdallah responds by increasing the tempo and dynamics, and playing cycles of varying length that feature two to three phrases of single motive variations (e.g., 16D, 2A, and 8B), intensely driving the dances to a climax. All possession pieces of the lila obey the hierarchic structures observed in "Ghumami."

At higher levels of structure, the sacred and staged lila-s are very similar: each has two main sections that are divided into two sub-sections. The internal structure—the grouping of musical motives of each sub-section into cycles—is where the differences lie (Figure 7.13). When I juxtaposed the performances, distinctions in variation processes

	SACRED	SECULAR (Staged Lila)
Tempo (V→D) Tempo (during D)	initial rapid increase progressive	initial slow increase larger leaps
Motivic Level - diversity of variations - frequency of new variations - internal structure	17 variants 50% cyclic & sequential regularity	34 variants 80-90% cyclic & sequential freedom
Cellular Level - rhythmic variations - rhythmic density of 4-pulse motive (% 16 th notes)	element fission & fusion range 13-63% avg. 38%	element fission range 31-81% avg. 56%

Figure 7.13 Typology of variations based on observations of A and B.

evoked a categorization into two possible types—motivic and cellular. The first type includes any modification related to the musical motives such as duration, frequency, repetition, or groupings, while the latter encompasses changes particular to quarter-pulse units. A summary is listed below:

Motivic Variations

- a. The staged lila exhibits a greater diversity of variations. There were two times as many kinds of variants on the basic melodic motives examined in this study (A and B only).
- b. The staged lila exhibits a higher frequency of variations in the instrumental section, between 80-90%, compared to 50% of the motives being varied in the sacred ceremony.
- c. The staged lila has a less ordered internal structure. The vocal and instrumental cycles do not adhere to formal rules in terms of arrangement, sequence, and number of

motives. The instrumental section in particular enjoys structural freedom, perhaps a consequence of not being constrained by a dancer, not to mention ritual rules. In contrast, the cycles in both the vocal and instrumental sections of the sacred ceremony exhibit regularity in terms of the number of motives per cycle, and in the arrangement and sequence of motives within each cycle, repeated with only slight variations.

Cellular Variations

- a. Rhythmic variations in the staged lila are mostly derived by element fission (subdividing pulses). In the sacred lila, however, the m' allem balances his variations between fission and fusion (based on observations of A and B).
- b. Variations in the secular context exhibit a greater rhythmic density. Effectively, with a possibility of sixteen sixteenth notes per 4-pulse motive, sixteenth notes make up an average of 56% of the motive, sometimes up to 81% in the staged lila, compared to a range of 13-63% and an average of 38% in the sacred performance.

The analysis suggests that the sacred ceremony requires the m' allem to adhere to structural constraints that are not present in the festival. Given his role as a mediator, and the function of the sacred event to serve as an offering to the saints and spirits, this demonstrates his sacred intent as ritual master. In the festival, no such rules are in place, hence the m' allem, consciously aware of this freedom, improvises at will, executing more elaborate and lengthier variations over longer periods of time. In a conversation with M' allem Abdallah about performing for a sacred and staged lila, he said: "I don't play what I want in

the lila. I do what the moqaddema wants, for her, for the dancers, for the mluk. [In the festival] I do as I want” (personal communication, 2009). In the sacred lila, he affirms his identity as a master ritual musician in the Gnawa community whose duty is to the supernatural entities and the adepts who require his musical powers to heal guided by the moqaddema; in the second, he explores and celebrates his identity as a popular, creative, professional musician in the larger Moroccan context. The co-existence of these divergent performance contexts is a kind of “ideal society” (Small 1987:74) in which he participates, and which his musical performance models and differentiates. These contextually distinct improvisations, however, may be due to M‘allem Abdallah’s particular musicality and desire to display virtuosity.¹³

Musical performances vary in a manner delimited by the Gnawa belief system and knowledge of the m‘allem. With regard to repertoire, Pâques says “a complete derdeba passes through the seven colors which follows ten sequences: white, multi-colored, black, blue, red, white, green black, white, yellow...[and] to call the genies, there are (theoretically) seven songs per color” (1991:284). As mentioned in the earlier discussion of the Gnawa possession repertoire (Chapter 5), and as we saw in the performance of the *Mimun* suite (Section 7.3), this calculation is theoretical and the sequence and number of pieces are modified by contextual factors such as setting, purpose, and participants. For the important lila of the Zaouia Sidna Bilal, M‘allem Abdallah played ten pieces; for the smaller lila, however, only six were played. His way of shaping performances to suit a given ritual occasion may also be observed on stage. In the festival, he played select pieces from only two possession suites (Figure 7.2 b, Numbers 1a and 2), skipping over an entire sub-group

¹³ I have the impression that few non-hereditary m‘allem-s perform variations to the same degree in festival performances, but only further analysis will reveal if they express their own differences between sacred and secular contexts.

(Figure 7.2 a, Number 1b), ended the lila with a pre-possession piece, and varied the repertoire in a rare and unusual way by substituting a sacred piece with his own composition (Figure 7.2 d, Number 6).

At intermediate levels, pieces may vary in duration and periodicities, uniquely developed for the possessed dancer/spirit to unite with the guembri, such as observed in the more regular cycles and variation streams of “Ghumami” in the sacred lila. Performances develop similarly in the secular sphere, but with social distinctions in mind. In the sacred ritual, variations serve the supernatural entities and are improvised in a manner to please them: the possessed bob quicker to the beat, their arms swing purposefully in time, and their feet stomp harder and faster as Ghumami dances with their bodies to the increasing musical intensity. On the festival stage, M‘allem Abdallah improvises freely in a less structured form, executing a greater degree, diversity, and frequency of variations. The packed audience hangs on every note he plays, cheering at his unique virtuosity, hands clapping and bodies grooving to Ghumami’s tune.

In spite of these distinctions, conversations with members of the Gania family, ritual participants, and seasoned festival goers suggest that the caliber of a m‘allem—setting social meanings aside—is judged on his ability to create a soundscape capable of transporting his listeners to another dimension, whether the goal is to facilitate possession dance or to give aesthetic pleasure. “The m‘allem is like a pilot. He drives, guides, and directs us up into the air and through the clouds that we cannot see past” (personal communication, M. Outanine, 2009). M‘allem Abdallah’s technique of improvising demonstrates his performative intent (sacred or secular) and sensitivity to the needs of his different passengers. The comparative analysis serves as a starting point to reveal the nature and degree of variations in

performances of ritual music and suggest rules or principles that govern the dynamic nature of Gnawa music.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

When I first visited Essaouira in 2001, there had already been a 250% increase in the number of registered hotel beds between 1996 and 2001 (Ross et al. 2002:59–61). In 1996 there was only one five-star hotel, and “[b]y mid-2001 there were nine ‘starred’ hotels” (ibid.:61). When I returned in 2006 a new real estate crop—the vacation condo targeted at long-term and returning travelers—was already in full swing. In 2009, I returned to see the development of a golf course in a nearby city that has replaced the forestland, leaving donkeys and goats to graze the fence perimeter on remaining bits of vegetation. What would Jimi Hendrix say about his “hippie fling” (Ham et al. 2007) now? If the globalizing effects of capitalism have left such marked imprints on the landscape, what is the cultural imprint of new secular festivals on the musical aesthetics and processes of the sacred Gnawa ritual? How may we understand what the Gnawa have experienced in relationship to what ethnomusicologists have learned about other cultures in similar situations?

These effects are only evident in the context of the evolution of Gnawa culture. This includes movement from and between old and new identities, practices, contexts, and meaning. I approached my fundamental question of how ritual master musicians negotiate performing their music in sacred rituals and in secular performances by investigating how cognitive processes of musicians (Chapters 2–4) could be evinced in the musical practices of a variation form (Chapters 5–7). On one hand, the external spaces of homes and squares and routine time juxtapose and superimpose the mundane with the sacred and secular (festive) (Chapter 5); on the other, internal spaces and times within performers and musical events

evolve with respect to context. Chapter 6 provided an example of how the unfolding of musical events lends a temporality to supernatural phenomena as the space of the body becomes a site of intersection between human and spiritual realms, and the consecrated dance floor an expanding space for its enactment. Juxtaposing musical processes of sacred and secular renditions of the same piece performed “back to back” in Chapter 7 demonstrated how the flexibility of time organization in Gnawa music may be manipulated in a way that conveys contextual distinction and signifies performative intent.

Music festivals in Morocco, in addition to increasing tourism and gaining international recognition with cultural artistic displays, may be looked upon, as noted by Rice with regard to prestigious state festivals in Bulgaria, as attempts to “dictate the aesthetics of performing groups more in line with the government’s vision” (Rice 1994:247–55). According to Rees:

At a microlevel, looking at how individual musicians and groups act within and against the constraints and opportunities of their environment offers useful case studies of the degree of individual agency instrumental in musical change, and of the active roles music may play as its meaning is interpreted in its social setting—for example, as a validating element (revolutionary songs and model operas in China), a subversive metaphor (Bulgarian wedding music), or an expression of identity and means of economically advantageous communication with the outside world. (Rees 2000:195)

As with Rees’s assertion of musicians of Naxi (a minority group in China), the last two factors pertain particularly well to the Gnawa who have taken advantage of tourist policy. Cultivation of Gnawa identity has been in tune with the national agenda which grants identity cards that designate one as a professional musician. The card is highly valued, for it equates to “economically advantageous” opportunities—visas to perform abroad. In addition, despite the lack of ritual knowledge among the public, which I have suggested works favorably for

both parties (Chapter 3), performing on the world stage has been a validating element of Gnawa as an important ritual tradition. Among Moroccan musics and beyond, it also confirms their identity as master musicians and of their music as an art form. Interpreted as a subversive metaphor, despite being continually marginalized for their ritual beliefs and practices, the space of their once taboo music has expanded well beyond the closed doors of the lila to the living quarters of the larger Moroccan public, including the humble abodes of the disenchanting youth who find connection with the Gnawa's past and struggles, and the prestigious homes of the elite who patronize renowned m'ellem-s and revel in their mastery.

While certain regional and familial styles and repertoire remain carefully guarded and reserved for sacred occasions, the guembri serves as an artifact of change. Although initially fabricated to invoke the supernatural entities during possession ceremonies, the same guembri was later played in secular contexts of performance. More recently, "traditional" guembri have been modified and new ones specially designed for large outdoor stages and collaborative performances (Chapter 5). The modified stage guembri has now become an instrument of the sacred ritual. A similar sacred-secular-sacred trajectory has also been noted in Picard's study on cultural tourism in Bali:

It was originally a temple dance, called the **Pendet**, performed by dancers presenting welcoming offerings of flowers, food, and incense to the visiting gods installed on their shrines. During the 1950s, it became the rule to greet President Sukarno and important state guests with a large-scale **Pendet**... then... as a welcome dance for [the] guests [at the Bali Beach Hotel]. This caused great distress to the Balinese religious authorities, shocked that the tourists were being treated in the same way as the gods, and worried about the desecration of ritual dance. Thus, in the late 1960s, they ordered the composition of a new dance inspired by the **Pendet**... Entitled **Panyembrama** (literally "that which is offered to the guests") or else *Tari Selamat Datang* ("welcome dance"), this new creation from then on replaced the **Pendet** [temple dance] as a curtain-raiser to the tourist performances. Later on, this tourist version of a temple dance was brought

back to the temple, as dancers who had learned the **Panyembrama**... began to perform it instead of the **Pendet** during temple festivals. (Picard 1990:52, italics and bold in original)

Desecration or loss of tradition, however, has not been conveyed by the Gania family. Rather, their demeanor, actions, and words exude resilience. The Gania masters, including Moqaddema Zaida, participate in and create new opportunities to perform their art with a seriousness that parallels yet differs from their sacred practices (Chapter 7). Despite the disrespect shown by some practitioners with regard to ritual conduct, the proliferation of self-identified Gnawa, and the recent loss of baraka noted by Moqaddema Zaida, she asserts: “There will always be Gnawa. It will continue. As always it shall be passed on. The festival is something else. We keep our things” (personal communication, 2007) (Chapter 3). With reference to increasing secularity, M‘allem Mokhtar says: “Things are changing. Things are always changing. We can’t stay the same. We must change” (personal communication, 2006). This recalls Blacking’s words about “the nature of culture . . . and of music and music-making in particular... unchanging cultural tradition is dead and of no use to people... and music without social situations, which by definition can never be identical, ceases to be music as a performing art” (in Byron 1995:156). Considered “other,” secular events co-exist within boundaries that, although constantly re-defined as new social experiences arise, function to integrate change within established cultural and spiritual values.

Kapchan points out that “the impact of the marketplace on its ritual life is subtle and complex [...] the changes that are created by performing in new contexts—changes such as shortening of the ritual songs, as well as alterations in the progression of a ceremony that was once sacred—are circling back to influence the ritual practices in Morocco” (2007:131,146). Repercussions of the local-global-local schismogenesis (Feld 1995) include a loss of ritual

repertoire when before “the pantheon of spirits was more expansive” (Kapchan 2007:146).¹ Hell says that “at the level of musical science, the simplification of rituals leads to the extinction of the ‘voice of the mluk.’ The rhythmic formulas will be reduced and the melodic subtlety will wither. Certain songs will disappear and entire sections of the ceremonial repertoire will sink into oblivion” (2002:352). Nevertheless, he concludes that “for the future nothing can be decidedly written. For now among the Gnawa the spiritual and therapy are not yet dissociated” (ibid.:361).

The study of M‘allem Abdallah’s sacred and secular performances in Chapter 7 echoes the sentiments and caveats of Kapchan and Hell in part. When I asked M‘allem Abdallah about his different performances vis-à-vis the duration, ordering, and content of the Mimun suite, he explained saying “There are a lot of pieces. Some have to be skipped. A lila is a lot of work. [But] for the zawiya [Sidna Bilal], I play everything” (personal communication, 2009). The sequential order of suites lends itself to a bricolage as long as the core sequence and musical relations are obeyed. M‘allem Abdallah says that “sometimes a spirit arrives [before his/her turn] and the moqaddema wants the piece right away” (ibid.). When I mentioned his performance of Kukriya Makesima at the festival, he proudly responded, “It’s a piece of Abdallah’s. I played it in place of Kiriya. It’s only for the festival” (ibid.). A modification of Hell’s concluding remarks seem to aptly describe M‘allem Abdallah’s position: “there are still... initiates who follow ritual laws [and troupes who] don’t take liberties in their ritual work” (2002:360), at least not uncalculated ones. Despite the evolving spaces and times, my research with the Ganias still indicates that for

¹ “Schismogenesis” was a term first coined by Gregory Bateson in the 1930s to “discuss patterns of progressive differentiation through cumulative interaction and reaction” (Feld 1994:265). Feld employs this word, alongside Schafers “schizophonia,” in thinking about the recombination and recontextualization of “sounds split from sources” (ibid.:259).

important ceremonies everything happens in full.

Along similar lines, the analysis of “Ghumami” suggests that the music itself maintains its integrity. This can be measured not by what M‘allem Abdallah does in the festival, but by what he does not do in the lila. A display of his “disciplined rehearsal of ‘right attitudes’” (Tambiah 1981:126 in Rees 2000:132), he adheres to a set of rules as a ritual musician performing for spirit propitiation and possession, demonstrated in the more regular musical structure and more modest rhythmic and melodic elaborations. On the festival stage, free from ritual constraints and demands, M‘allem Abdallah takes pleasure in improvising, whether it is adorning the ritual suite with his own composition or deriving an infinite diversity of variations on melodic motives, “characteristic of aesthetic response in many African communities” (Agawu 2006:30). Perhaps, as Agawu writes about the variation procedure of Northern Ewe Song, “The idea that music is more concerned with ‘breaking’ rules rather than normatively enacting them” (1990:226) underlies M‘allem Abdallah’s secular interpretations of the sacred repertoire. Yet, irrespective of context, large- and small-scale variations take place within the bounds of a formal scheme.

If, as Monson argues, that “improvisational music... is a form of social action, as well as a symbolic system; that one learns how to feel through music as well as to play...; that musicians articulate cultural commentary with sound itself; and that the aesthetic of interaction embodies very powerfully an ethos that binds its participants into something larger than the individual but less totalizing and ahistorical than ‘Culture’ with a capital C” (1994:313), then perhaps the secular lila has become more than “a simulacrum of itself” (Kapchan 2008:60). M‘allem Abdallah delivers what could be considered an ironic performance by deliberately inverting and re-contextualizing the sacred he is expected to

reproduce. Not only does he embed the secular, human reference of Kukriya (Makesima)—a transformation of the sacred, spiritual invocation of Kiriya—in an ostensibly sacred matrix, his improvised variations on “Ghumami” are a “transformation of the tune [which] simultaneously communicates the *resemblance* between the two versions and the vast *difference* [between them]” (Monson 1994:307, emphases in original). There is irony in M’allem Abdallah’s performance, because he knowingly juxtaposes the different sacred and secular musical elements at his disposal, mixing and recombining them—intracultural examples of “Gates’s ironic, Signifyin(g), ‘repetition with a signal difference’ [...] conveyed through primarily instrumental means, that is, without words” (ibid.).²

A likeness to black American music, as noted by El Hamel (2008), and to the spirituals and blues, in this case, sacred and secular, may be drawn from Small’s following description:

[Black American music] is, to put it crudely, a tool for survival; whether we call it “sacred” or “secular” its function is fundamentally the same; to preserve the community and to enable the individual to affirm, to explore and to celebrate his or her place in that community. Between sacred and secular there is in fact not opposition at all, but continuity. “The affirmation of self in the blues,” writes James Cone, “is the emphasis that connects them theologically to the spirituals. Like the spirituals, the blues affirms the somebodiness of black people, and they preserve the worth of humanity through ritual and drama... They symbolize the solidarity, the attitudes and

² Monson writes: “Central to Gates notion of Signifyin(g) are the ideas of transformation and intertextuality. African-American literary aesthetics, in his opinion, transform and frequently invert mainstream literary and linguistic conventions: ‘Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation... I find it an ideal metaphor for black literary criticism, for the formal manner in which texts seem concerned to address their antecedents. Repetition, with a signal difference, is fundamental to the natural of Signifyin(g), as we shall see’... Signifyin(g) for Gates is about the valorization of figurative modes of expression that mark the ‘two discursive universes’ of black and white (*SM*, p. 75). It is not so much a matter of what is said but of how it is said” (1994:290). See Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York 1988). Although Gates focuses on African-American speech and Monson’s argument pertains largely to cross-cultural musical references, she says that “references need not be cross-cultural to be ironic” (1994:303).

the identity of the black community and thus create the emotional forms of reference for endurance and for artistic appreciation. In a sense the blues are that stoic feeling that recognizes the painfulness of the present but refuses to surrender to its historical contradictions.” (Small 1987:102, 197–98)

Similarly, the secular audience is not “there in order to take part in a lament for their lot; they are there for a good night out, to dance and enjoy themselves. As with all participants in all musical performances, that enjoyment comes from the affirmation and celebration of an identity, and from the feeling of having that identity reinforced by those in whose company one is experiencing the performance” (Small 1987:211). Like the blues performer who “is not just playing the blues, but playing *with* the blues” (ibid.), M‘allem Abdallah is not only playing Gnawa music but playing *with* it.

Small suggests that “[a]ll of this... takes place beneath the surface of consciousness; as Lomax says, it is the power of the performing arts that these messages are transmitted and received in a way that is not necessarily conscious” (1987:74). Monson, however, argues that “improvising musicians articulate worldviews, identities, and aesthetics through manipulation of musical resources that signal matters of cultural significance” (1994:292). In my discussions with the Gania masters, they spoke of *hal* (Chapter 2) to describe their improvised variations. Resembling what jazz musicians might call magic, *hal* similarly endows m‘allem-s with the ability to “hypnotize you and cast a spell on you” (Pate in Berliner 1994:387), or like the Ewe, to “[create something new] using the known as point of departure” (Agawu 2006:30).³ In the case of M‘allem Abdallah’s secular performance, I suggest that it has elements of both. After all, what Monson writes is equally applicable to

³ Just as “there is no constant magic” (Pate in Berliner 1994:387), not all m‘allem-s have, receive, or attain *hal*—there is no guarantee. “Sometimes I don’t have the feeling. There’s nothing so I call up another m‘allem or pass the *guembri* to one of the *qarqabiya*” (personal communication M. Gania, 2009).

the Gnawa:

Theoretically almost any musical detail or composite thereof could convey a reference, so long as a community of interpreters can recognize the continuity. The key here is “community of interpreters” (which includes both performers and audience), for a sonic detail becomes socially meaningful and actionable only in an at least partially shared context of use. [...] What is crucial in the examples of irony in jazz improvisation presented here is that the iconic moment is not simply resemblance but a transformation of the thing resembled. (Monson 1994:305)

Staged lila-s, like the choreographed divine utterances of the Afro-Cuban Santería, “have not replaced [sacred ritual] events; rather they have developed as a separate kind of phenomenon” (Sweet in Hagedorn 2001:66), “[though] aspects of sacred and theatrical performance may overlap” (ibid.:67). Despite many similarities between the music performed in the ritual and festival, and the intuitive nature of the Gnawa, multi-level analysis has revealed that M‘allem Abdallah adapts his performances to a given context. For him, the ritual and festival are clearly separate realms. Although he owes his musical choices to hal (personal communication, A. Gania, 2007, 2009), his habitus of musicking conceives the meanings of each performance as distinct social events. However subtle his variations, they are remarkable, evinced at all temporal hierarchies from suite to repertoire to formal sections to motives to cells—nothing is fortuitous in his musical expression. The question remains as to whether similar kinds of observations would be made in performances “sur les grandes scenes” or by other hereditary m‘allem-s. If so, would they extend to other secularized ritual music traditions such as the Afro-Cuban Santería? If not, how are differing contexts of performance musically manifested by other musicians and by other trancing cultures? For M‘allem Abdallah, the schismogenesis seems not to have silenced the “voice of the mluk,” but instead opened a new pathway for his own ingenuity.

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