

Transnational Ties and Local Involvement: North African Musicians In and Beyond London

MARIE-PIERRE GIBERT

Faculté d'Anthropologie, de Sociologie et de Science Politique
Université Lumière-Lyon 2 | France*

ABSTRACT

By following the life trajectories and networks of various North African artists principally based in the United Kingdom and in France, it becomes apparent that a common phenomenon amongst migrant musicians is that they can become trapped in a matrix which simultaneously articulates three potentially conflicting dimensions: the artists' own musical pleasure and desires; their professional constraints and opportunities; and the social, historical and personal context of their migration experiences. However, artists have developed strategies which permit them not only to overcome such tensions arising from this matrix, but to use them as a strength.

The aim of this paper is to explore a particular aspect of the above-mentioned strategies: the use of local politics to pursue their own cultural, social and political agendas within a multi-scalar perspective (local-national-transnational). Whilst musicians and/or musical promoters are well aware of the ambiguous ways in which local policies often conceive of arts as a means to promote both multiculturalism and community cohesion rather than to support artistic creation per se, some of them have also understood the strategic potential of their involvement in such activities. This will be demonstrated through the activities of a recently-established association (North African Arts W10) based in Ladbroke Grove, London, UK. This case-study is also an attempt to approach transnationalism through its quadruple dimension: mobility, networks, local anchorage, and imagined communities.

* Campus Porte des Alpes. 5 avenue Pierre Mendès. 69676 BRON Cedex, France

INTRODUCTION

By the 1950s already, Howard Becker was highlighting strong discrepancies and conflicts between musicians' artistic desires and their professional constraints.¹ Since then, several authors (Buscatto, 2004, 2008a, 2008b; Faulkner, 1983; Jouvenet, 2006, 2007; Perrenoud, 2007) have shown that this conflict is a common figure for professional musicians who often need to water down their artistic standards to satisfy those (audience and producers) who will provide salary and career opportunities.² What recent fieldwork shows, is that when transnational mobility enters the mix, it transforms this two-dimensional conflict into a fascinating situation, which I propose to analyse through the prism of a tri-dimensional matrix of constraints and opportunities. Indeed, empirical data emerging from our research brought to light the centrality of an interconnection between three dimensions: artistic, professional, and migratory.³ While an ever-growing literature exists which articulates these dimensions in pairs (*i.e.*, issues concerning artistic professions,⁴ migration and work,⁵ or music and migration⁶), the triple relationship is less frequently addressed as such, and an effort to theorize it seems to be needed.

Following the trajectories and networks of various African artists based in Europe (mainly in the United Kingdom and in France), it became apparent that a common phenomenon of migrant musicians is that they can become trapped in what can be called the “matrix”, which simultaneously articulates three dimensions in tension: (1) the artists' subjectivity, musical expertise, artistic pleasure(s) and desire(s); (2) their professional/economic constraints and opportunities; and (3) the social, political, historical and personal context of their migration/mobility experience. The articulation between these three dimensions is complex, and can be analysed as a continuum of relations ranging from desperately contradictory and constraining, to perfectly complementary and synergetic. Artists have therefore developed strategies, consciously or not, which permit them not only to overcome such tensions arising from this tri-dimensional matrix, but to use them as a strength. Based on an in-depth ethnography of a grassroots association of artists in London, this article is an attempt to investigate this situation further by exploring a particular aspect of the above-mentioned strategies: the use of local politics by the actors to pursue their own cultural, social and political agendas within a multi-scalar perspective (local-national-transnational).

¹ See Becker (1951, 1963). See also Cameron (1954).

² As several informal discussions with dancers or documentary filmmakers have shown, it seems that this situation could be widened to several categories of artists and cultural practitioners.

³ The entire research was based on multi-site ethnography conducted in 2006-2009 in the United Kingdom, France and briefly in Morocco and Madagascar. It primarily concerned musicians originating or whose parents originate from North Africa and Madagascar (see Acknowledgements' section). As a social anthropologist, I have privileged an inductive approach based on ethnographic work involving long term participant-observation and extensive semi-directive interviews.

⁴ See previously cited references from Becker, Buscatto, Perrenoud, Faulkner. On other artistic disciplines, see for instance Sorignet (2010) on dancers, and the special issue “L'art au travail” of *Ethnologie Française* (2008).

⁵ References here are numerous and span over the last four decades. Authors are also tackling very different issues. For a variety of them, see for instance Castles and Kosack (1973), Meillassoux (1975), Peraldi (2002), Portes, *et al.* (2002), Sassen (2000), Waldinger (1994) and Ward and Jenkins (1984).

⁶ As this special issue shows. For synthetic overviews, see for instance Baily and Collyer (2006) and Martiniello, *et al.* (2009). See also Aubert (2005), Bohlmann (1996), Bohlmann and Keller (2008), Ramnarine (2010, 2007) and Reyes (2001).

Prior to the tragic attacks of various targets in the USA in September 11, 2001 (also known as 9/11), North Africans living in the United Kingdom (either born in North Africa or in France⁷) enjoyed a relatively anonymous position largely freed from the post-colonial ties that span their trajectories and everyday lives in France. At the same time, they were nonetheless, and still are, sometimes subject to the exotic and orientalist gaze of British society (Cherti, 2005; Kiwan and Gibert, 2008;⁸ Gibert 2008b⁹). Since the events of 9/11 however, and even more so after the London bomb attacks of July 2005 (also known as 7/7), North African migrants in the UK have started to be more and more associated, in the British imaginary, with the so-called “Muslim community”, object of growing fears within British society, and hence more and more subject to racial tensions. This situation relates in turn to the last decade’s growing emphasis on the notion of “social cohesion”, today often described in political discourses as *the* solution against what used to be positively called “multiculturalism” and is today considered as a dangerous “segregation” (McGhee, 2009; Modood and Werbner, 1997). In this context, cultural activities and events of every kind are often displayed and supported by local authorities as proof that a specific “community” is well on their way to the supposedly ideal path of “social cohesion” (according to current discourse in the UK) or “integration” (according to French terminology). On the other hand, if it is felt that social cohesion/integration needs further enhancement, then certain forms of cultural production are encouraged as means to guarantee such processes and enter what Taylor (1994) has called the “politics of recognition”. Whilst musicians or cultural activists are well aware of the ambiguous ways in which local politics therefore often regard arts as a mean to promote such discourses rather than to support artistic creativity *per se*, some of the artists and organizers have also understood the strategic potential of their involvement in such actions. Therefore, to look at North African musicians’ networks and artists’ experiences in the UK is fascinating, and allows us to shed light on the ways in which migration experience, political context, professional constraints and individual subjectivities and agency intermingle.

The present article will focus on the activities of the recently established association “*North African Arts W10*” (NAA) based in the neighbourhood of Ladbroke Grove-Portobello, London, and the strategies developed by its members to make use of the triple matrix rather than to be subjected to it.¹⁰ The first part of this article will concentrate on the intricate and somehow ambiguous relationships between artistic, social and political aims and actions of the NAA association through an analysis of

⁷ According to M. Cherti, migration from Morocco to the UK goes back to the 19th century, but a more recent wave of immigration started in the early 1960s (2008: 73-88). The Moroccan population in the UK can today be estimated at 50,000 members (though according to Cherti, “unofficial sources suggest the figure of 65,000 to 70,000” - 2008: 73). Algerian immigration is smaller -around 30,000 Algerian-born residents (Collyer 2004)- and is primarily linked to the political events which occurred in Algeria in the 1990s. In addition, although it is impossible to estimate their number, a fair number of French nationals living in Britain consider themselves as of North African origin.

⁸ Joint paper “Using and Abusing ‘Ethnic Identity Labels’: Francophone Musicians in France and Britain” given at the ASMCF Conference 2008, *Constructing French Identity / Identities*. A joint article based on this communication is currently in preparation.

⁹ “Migrant and artist. Moroccan musicians in the UK between professional aims and personal experiences” at the “Moroccan Migration in Europe: Identity Formation, Representation and Memory” Conference, The University of Sussex, UK, October 2008. An article based on this communication is in preparation.

¹⁰ Fieldwork conducted has primarily focused on the contexts of production and performance of music rather than on the receiver end. For work adopting a reception perspective, see for instance Brown and Volgsten’s work on *Music and Manipulation* (2006) and Street, *et al.* (2007).

various activities. Subsequently, the focus will widen to take into account the articulation between local and transnational levels of this association's activities and networks, showing how this articulation does not only contribute to the association's activities, but is inherent to its very existence.

CULTURAL ACTORS AND LOCAL SOCIO-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT: A FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP

THE NORTH AFRICAN ARTS W10 ASSOCIATION (NAA)

The very name of this association encapsulates the two-fold aim of it: "to promote artists living in the area of Ladbroke Grove-Portobello" ("W10" being this area's post code) and "to introduce the richness of North African arts to the wider society".¹¹ This community-based association exists in a quasi-formal way since its public launch in July 2008. A management committee has been elected, a website and various pages of social networks have been launched, and it has a name and a logo which are officially mentioned in the various projects in which the association is involved. The association is based in one of Ladbroke Grove's main meeting points, café and cultural venue, *The Inn on the Green*, whose manager, a former social worker, is the NAA's Treasurer. Ultimately aiming at the promotion of various arts, the association is currently mainly dealing with activities linked to music.¹² These activities range from providing young artists with opportunities to perform and record, to what the association calls "Information Advice & Guidance" on the music industry in a larger sense.¹³ According to the NAA's managing director Mounir Saidoune, the central idea is to help people move towards some kind of professionalism (*i.e.*, making a living out of musical matters):¹⁴ "*we would notice a promising talent and accompany him/her until he/she can become independent*".¹⁵ The association's philosophy rests therefore on a strong involvement in locally rooted social activism which aspires to "*get the young out of the streets*" (M.) by helping them to develop some kind of professional skills. In turn, those actions are framed in a wider integrationist discourse:

In view of the situation in the ghettos [in France], we have to do something, to change the situation and keep the youth busy. Burning cars is not the solution!¹⁶

¹¹ Many informal discussions have taken place with the managing director of this grassroots association, but only a few of them were recorded. I am therefore quoting myself here from a text written at the demand of this managing director, and fully validated by him. The text has been published in the *Newsletter of Race and Equality Partnership Kensington & Chelsea*, Issue 7, December 2008. It is also partly reproduced on the homepage of the association's Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=362038741930>) and website (www.naarts.org.uk).

¹² Food is also represented, mainly through a partnership developed with a Youth Inclusion Programme of the Kensington & Chelsea borough in order to offer a programme on multicultural Healthy Cooking Cuisine.

¹³ "Information Advice & Guidance" is one of the NAA's managing director's most recurrent expressions during our various discussions; it is also used in web presentations of the association.

¹⁴ The terms "professional/professionalism/professionalization" can refer to very diverse criteria culturally and socially defined (social status, economic independence, technical expertise, etc.) so their use can therefore be problematic, and even more so regarding the sphere of music. In this case, it is primarily a mix of economic independence and development of musical expertise which is aimed for, though the gain of a better social status is also perceived as important. For general discussion, see Cottrell (2004), Finnegan (1989) and Merriam (1964).

¹⁵ Fieldwork notes from informal discussions with Mounir Saidoune. In the rest of this article, I will simply use the initial "(M.)" to refer to notes taken during various informal discussions with Mounir.

¹⁶ The original quote is in French: "*Face à la situation des ghettos, il faut changer les choses, occuper les jeunes, pas brûler les voitures!*" (Mounir, Fieldwork notes October 2007). Unless mentioned otherwise, all the translations provided in this article are mine. Mounir's strong and multifaceted relation to France will be investigated further later in this article, but

What comes to light already, is that although the label “community cohesion” itself is usually not used by the association’s representatives, this is clearly what is at stake here, with the notion of “community” relating to both the space-defined area of the North London neighbourhood of Portobello-Ladbroke Grove, and the “ethnically”-defined group of people originating from North Africa (or more generally from Arab-Muslim countries), therefore not always overlapping.¹⁷ As we will see later on, to improve the internal dimension of this double “community cohesion” (*i.e.*, locally and “ethnically” defined) is an important facet of the NAA association’s unofficial aims. The external dimension is also central as the association clearly advocates the creation of a showcase for North African/minority arts which would demonstrate the positive dimensions of Muslim culture in the post 9/11 and 7/7 UK context. Therefore, whilst the association’s managing director often makes clear that “*what we are doing is artistic, not political*”,¹⁸ it remains apparent that *politics* with a small *p* are at stake here.

WHO ARE THE ARTISTS?

Members of the NAA can have very different profiles in terms of musical genre, expertise, or musical career advancement, but also in terms of life histories (migratory trajectory and current way of life). Though a majority of the artists participating in the association are either at the beginning of their professional career or even at a stage where one cannot yet talk about “professional career” (several had written a few tracks and enjoyed singing/playing amongst friends but had never been on stage before joining the NAA), a few artists are more experienced and some of them do make some kind of living out of their musical work. As the notion of “membership” is also rather elastic in this association, it often happens that more experienced North African artists based in London, though not really belonging to the association, are in contact with it and play under its name once in a while. This can be seen as an exchange of good practices: the association offers gig opportunities while the experienced artists are bringing more legitimacy to the newly-established NAA. An exhaustive list of the artists, their trajectories and musical specialities is neither desirable nor possible here, but an Appendix situated at the end of this article proposes to sketch the profile of a few of them to give the reader a sense of this variety.

AN INTRICATE COMBINATION OF ACTIVITIES, PEOPLE, PLACES AND ISSUES

The first suggestion given to the would-be musicians is to record a few tracks in a professional studio, hence providing them with a professional-quality product that

we can already note how the French socio-political context influences his way of perceiving the necessity of an organisation such as the NAA.

¹⁷ I voluntarily use this large and somehow fuzzy category of “Arab-Muslim” because the position of the association is not strict by any means. Although the name of the association clearly indicates a focus on North Africa, artists from Mali, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, but also the Caribbean, Mexico, etc. are part of the association. This decision to welcome artists from other geographical areas is directly linked to the space-defined meaning given here to the notion of “community”, *i.e.*, encompassing any artists who live in Ladbroke Grove. Like several other scholars (Amselle, 2001; Amselle and M'Bokolo, 1985), I am not in favour of any kind of categorisation using the notions of “ethnicity” and its associated terms (ethnic, etc.). However, actors in the field (institutionally or not) are using such categories. Therefore wherever the term “ethnic” will appear in this article, it will be as a category of practice, not of analysis.

¹⁸ “Ce qu'on fait c'est de l'artistique, pas de la politique” (M.).

they can give to potential cultural producers. For the NAA, this is not only sound advice, but an area in which the association has chosen to contribute. Since its two artistic directors are both the owners of a home recording studio, the association has made an arrangement with them, which allows NAA's members to record for cheaper rates. According to Mounir, this agreement helps both the young musicians and the studios' owners, yet teaches the aspiring artists that "*nothing is free in the music business*".

Other ways of encouraging professionalization are to sponsor the artists to attend seminars on the music industry (currently a project which is being developed), or to develop specific schemes in cooperation with one artist in particular (*e.g.*, the creation of a music school for economically deprived children). Although quite different, these various projects share a common characteristic: they all articulate artistic professionalization and social concern for, and involvement with, both the musicians and the local population of Ladbroke Grove-Portobello.

This specific feature is even more prominent within the association's most developed area of actions: its participation in projects led by various organisations often situated at the interface between civic and social organizations and local authorities (most of the associations involved consider themselves as "community-oriented"). Indeed, the main method adopted by the NAA to achieve its professionalizing aims (artistic and technical experience, economic independence, contacts in the music industry, *etc.*) is to provide young and/or new artists with opportunities to perform via the association's partnership in various projects. From an external point of view, this participation consists mainly of providing a line-up of artists for events planned and staged by an organization other than the NAA. However this situation is more complex than it may seem and involves an intricate combination of activities, people, places and issues which needs to be unpacked. A case in point is the relationship which has developed between the NAA and the "*1958 Remembered: 50 Years On*" project. Emanating from the "user-led, independent organisation" *Race and Equality Partnership Kensington & Chelsea (REPKC)*,¹⁹ partly driven by three local Councillors, and in partnership with the Social Council of this London borough (Kensington & Chelsea), the "*1958 Remembered: 50 Years On*" project aimed at commemorating the 1958 Notting Hill's riots and racial tensions by a "*proactive celebration of arts, cultural diversity and heritage initiatives in Kensington and Chelsea*".²⁰ The following comment from one of the Councillors involved in the sponsoring of this project makes explicit the intimate links between cultural activities and local politics at stake here:

We are delighted to be making a contribution to this most worthwhile venture. The riots of 1958 were a new beginning in the borough's determination to build good and positive community relations. I know the events planned by '1958 Remembered' will reflect our positive community relations, the modern diversity of the Royal Borough and the reality of its past.²¹

¹⁹ <http://www.repkc.org.uk/> last accessed October 30, 2010.

²⁰ "Project Plan presented to 1958 Remembered: 50 Years On - Steering Group." (Unpublished internal document).

²¹ Councillor David Campion, Chairman of the Council's Working Party, quoted in the 1958 Remembered Festival's presentation on REPKC's website (www.repkc.org.uk/ourcommunity/bme_arts.asp - last accessed on April 23, 2010).

In this project, the Inn of the Green served both as a meeting-place for the “1958 Remembered” project’s steering committee, and as a venue for some of its public events. Due to his frequent presence in this café/cultural venue (it is also the physical base of the NAA association), and his previous personal or professional connections with some of the members of the 1958’s committee, the NAA’s managing director began to be invited to the “1958 Remembered” committee meetings.²² Inversely, one of the main actors of the “1958 Remembered” project, who specialises in social welfare law and advocacy, became very interested in the NAA, expressed an interest to join and is now the Vice-Chair of the association. Consequently, it was also during one of the “1958 Remembered” project’s activities, called the “Festival of Diversity”, that the NAA was officially launched. On this occasion, artists from the association contributed to the show, and one of the NAA’s artistic co-directors organised the artistic logistics and presentation of the entire evening.

This interlocking relationship of professional, artistic and political aims also comes to light in a striking manner through other NAA operations, which ingeniously combine socio-political involvement, transnational mobility and artistic promotion. One example of such a combination is the visit of two artists based in France, in support of a solidarity event organized in March 2009.²³ This event brought together the NAA, a newly UK-based association “Algerian together” (at which point Mounir was involved, although this is no longer the case), and various associations, charities or institutional actors mentioned throughout this article.²⁴ A short video featuring the two invited artists, Tife and Akeem,²⁵ has been produced by Mounir and uploaded onto Youtube.²⁶ Akeem presents here the reasons of their visit as follows:

We came, first of all, to support the current project for Maya (...) We will come tomorrow to Hyde Park to show our support for her parents, for her relatives, to everyone who is fighting for the cause, so that the project succeeds and the girl gets all the healthcare she needs. Algerian solidarity, we are djazaiiri [Algerians], we have a little sister who needs something or is sick, so if we can do something, even symbolically (...) we’ll do it bro, we’re here, we’ve come. That’s it. Apart from that, we are in the music business, so we also have a bit of news ourselves in terms of music, with Tife and the BLK. Tife has his own stuff; as for myself, my own solo project has just came out, [called] Bitumes & Beat durs. 10 tracks, everything independent, we make do with what is at hand. And if I have succeeded in this project, it’s because I was fortunate enough to have brothers around me (...) who helped me. So if we can try to do something for Maya, well...

[Here the “interview” stops and a few video extracts of Tife and Akeem’s previous gig in London in July 2008 are shown].

²² A further example of the overlapping of networks is the fact that the ‘1958 Remembered’ steering committee also included members of the Octavia Foundation with which the NAA has also a partnership.

²³ This event aimed to provide help to sick Algerian children suffering from *spina bifida* disease and not being properly cared for in Algeria, and in particular here, to a young girl called Maya whom they managed to bring to the UK.

²⁴ For instance, Isis Amlak from the “1958 Remembered” project and the “Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum” of the North Kensington Law Center; Mohsin Abbas from the “Ramadan Festival UK” (see below); some institutional actors from the Kensington and Chelsea borough etc. See a clip made by Mounir, in which various actors of these institutions, associations or networks are briefly interviewed: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eadwokVoMU0&feature=related> - last accessed October 30, 2010).

²⁵ Akeem is Mounir’s young brother. I will come back to this French connection in the following section.

²⁶ See “Maya you are not alone” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTnFb8NFzRc> (last accessed April 23, 2010). Clip in French, translation from the author.

And if we came, if we travelled from Paris to London this weekend, it is above all for my brother's association, North African Art, an association based in London, very well rooted, with artists who have lots of potential, big talent like John James, Tayeb, and some others... Discover them on the website.... And once again, via North African Arts, we are supporting Maya, so here we are, no problem! (author's translation, French original)

This brief extract highlights the reciprocal exchange process set in motion in the name of the NAA, between a charity event and a professional promotion of musicians. In a 7 minutes' clip, the two artists have quickly scanned the entire spectrum: starting from charity concerns and solidarity ("*We came for Maya*"), they then move to the promotion of their artistic work and new releases ("*we are in the music business, so we also have a bit of news ourselves in terms of music*"), yet explicitly linking it with the notion of solidarity and the "socially concerned" main reason of their visit ("*I was fortunate enough to have brothers around me (...) who helped me. So if we can try to do something for Maya, well...*"), then move to a promotional presentation of the NAA's actors and work, and finally conclude with a formulation which encompasses the above various dimensions.

This conjunction of activities and networks brings to light the ways in which distinct actors and objectives are not only overlapping, but intersecting, merging, and finally generating common actions in which the interconnection between music/art, social activism and a sense of local community is constantly constructed and reinforced, each of the three dimensions being at the same time a tool and an output of the activities of the NAA association and of its partners. "Cultural diversity", "heritage" or "community" are incantatory buzz words efficient in receiving funding which in turn allows the organization of musical events. The very existence of such gigs does indeed contribute towards bringing life into the neighbourhood, and also provides a formal opportunity for local youth to perform on stage. This positive collusion of arts, local actors' networks and politics - referring to the local level but in reality addressing national political issues such as the current debate on multiculturalism and community cohesion concerns - is therefore mobilized by the NAA to both provide professionalizing opportunities for would-be artists and to enhance the image of the rich cultural diversity of this urban area, consequently bringing symbolic and financial support to the association.

QUESTION OF AGENCY: A ONE-MAN-PROJECT

The various episodes described above also hint at the ways in which Mounir is acting more informally on an everyday basis, both with potential partners and with artists. A regular of the Inn on the Green and of other public places in the neighbourhood, constantly ready to network and to branch out, Mounir seizes every opportunity to encourage a young artist to join the NAA, or to find new partners to include the association in an on-going project. Building on his previous experiences and connections in the local area and in the various professional, artistic and social activist spheres he is acquainted with, he slowly and carefully builds up a large network of people and organizations likely to be interested in each other's work, skills, ideas or connections. Extremely proactive, he often records brief video clips which somehow

present these various potentialities, uploading the clips almost immediately on video-hosting internet platforms, and sending the links to his entire list of contacts via emails or facebook invitations and wall posts.²⁷ Mounir's central role of "human hub" (Kiwani and Meinhof, 2011) thus urges us to focus on the question of agency, which appears central in this case. As this might have already become clear through the above paragraphs, although the NAA is an "association", and therefore implies collective activities and management, it is very much *a one-man-project*, a brain-child still directed by the person who has created it: Mounir Saidoune. To look at Mounir's trajectory will therefore take us a step further towards the understanding of this association's modes of action. Born in Algeria, Mounir has been living and working in the area of Ladbroke Grove and Portobello for more than 20 years. He has also spent long periods in France where his mother and his younger brother still live. Since his arrival in the UK, Mounir has always been very involved in local projects bringing together neighbourhood concern, social development and youth. Trained as an information advice and guidance (IAG) worker and constantly attending additional training sessions in related domains ("*Community leadership*", etc.), he has worked in various youth clubs of the neighbourhood, offers freelance interventions in youth inclusion projects, has recently been elected as one of the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council trustees as well as a member of the monitoring Community Police Engagement Group (CPEG) of this London borough. From an artistic point of view, though not considering himself as an artist, he enjoys singing and playing the *darbuka*²⁸ with friends and family and has even composed a few songs with Tayeb F. (see Appendix). Finally, an additional information seems relevant here to understand the situation of the association: the link with Politics with a capital P. In Ladbroke Grove, Mounir makes no secret of his long-term participation in the UK Labour Party, yet this is precisely the type of direct political partnership that he does not want to develop with the association. However, this relation might play an indirect role in the sense that, as he is willing to obtain a local political position, each of the association's activities could also be a way to indirectly raise his profile in view of this personal political agenda.

BACK TO THE MATRIX...

For Mounir, this combination of arts, local knowledge and familiarity, social involvement and politics is almost mandatory to achieve the aims of the NAA. Indeed, referring to someone who had previously tried, as Mounir puts it, to "*unify the Ladbroke Grove North African artists and community*", he remarks: "*It didn't work because he is an artist; what we need is a politician!*"²⁹ For him, it is precisely the complementarities of different agendas and repertoires of actions, which will allow him to meet the goals he/the association have set. However, if this principle seems evident for Mounir himself, some episodes have shown that this is not always the case for every member of the NAA, and this complex situation has sometimes brought out

²⁷ The instrumental role played by internet facilities in this networking process and exchange of information would deserve an article in itself.

²⁸ Middle-Eastern goblet drum.

²⁹ "*ça n'a pas marché parce-que c'est un artiste; il faut un politique!*" (Fieldnotes 19/09/08).

some tensions.³⁰ On the contrary, some members feel at ease with it, as shown in the comment below:

[to add videos of us on YouTube] that's Mounir's job. [In North African Arts] we don't deal with the organization. But for the artistic side of things, yes, that's us, we're in. They need us and we need them! That's the way it goes, as long as it is artistic, politico-artistic. [...] the political dimension is... in the fact that we live here, we don't live in Algeria, that's what I mean. [...] Mounir has offered us something. And we thought it was interesting so we said yes, no problem... if it works, yes, very good. [...] He himself he wants... *He wants to settle here, he wants to settle the organization here [in] this place here*³¹. He needs... he needs summits, conferences, and blablabla, and we can help him with that! As for him, he can help us with... for instance, when there is a day for the Western Sahara, we are here. If he needs... I don't know, a day for... whatever fight, we are here. (Malik, 15/01/08)

Hence, for this artist, it seems clear that the relation is on two levels: first, a reciprocal exchange between the artists (in need of gigs) and the association (in need of recognition); second, a shared perspective on the interlocking relationship between artistic dimensions and political concerns.

The participation of local artists from what are called “ethnic minorities” in the UK context, offers both community organizations and public institutions a way to raise their profile vis-à-vis local institutions or potential electors. Indeed, such participation can be interpreted as the “good will” of these “ethnic minorities” to maintain or achieve so-called social cohesion. Reciprocally, the staged events organized by the various organizations partnering with the NAA provide young artists with opportunities to perform, hence to gain experience towards professionalization, or for more “advanced” musicians, to get some paid gigs. Meanwhile, this public exposure is also an opportunity for the cultural actors to promote their own political or social engagements (*e.g.*, supporting the Saharawi cause;³² providing healthcare to Algerian children *etc.*). What we see here can be read as a dynamic negotiation between the three dimensions of the matrix. First, artistic and professional-economic dimensions are counterbalancing each other: the artistic desires can be satisfied as most of these civic and social organizations' events do not have the same commercial expectations, thus permitting the artists to play what they want; at the same time these events do constitute proper gig opportunities and therefore legitimate the artists as professionals. Yet, the political social discourse underpinning such events brings in the third dimension of the matrix: the link with migration experiences which can be rather ambiguous. On one hand, the NAA aims at going beyond stigmatized and reifying images of cultural differences or exoticism, for instance by encouraging the artists to develop whatever musical genre they want. But on the other hand, it fully embraces political discourses on positive

³⁰ For instance, the deal made by the NAA for the young artists to record in the artistic directors' private recording studios for cheaper rates. As this might seem like a sensible scheme in theory, in practice this specific configuration has brought some discontent, as it has been seen by some of the artists as a way for the artistic directors to have their private business make a profit from other members of the association.

³¹ This sentence was in English in the original interview conducted in French (author's translation).

³² The Western Sahara is a North African disputed territory. Since the relinquishing of this territory by Spain in 1975, it is controlled by Morocco. This control is disputed by the *Saharawi national liberation movement Polisario Front* and the *Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic*, whose exiled government is currently based in Algeria.

multiculturalism,³³ epitomized by the post-1958 riots attempts to reconcile the various inhabitants of the area of Portobello and Ladbroke Grove through “cultural activities”. In that case, it implies to some extent a call for “cultural heritage” showcase, which is often charged with positive essentialized expectations of the artists’ performances, thus resulting in a resurgence of tensions between artistic and professional dimensions, in particular if the artist does not wish to accept what the reifying images of “North African music” might be. From a broader perspective, it is therefore the entire debate on multiculturalism and community cohesion which is at stake here, and can fuel in turn some “cultural heritage” issues. Though the expression “cultural heritage” is not directly mobilized by the NAA, discourses and activities surrounding it are leading towards -yet not fully embracing- what Rowlands, and before him Lowenthal (1985) identify as “the invention of ‘cultural heritage’ [bounded] to powerful mythologies which seek to reclaim and possess lost pasts, return to imagined homelands and redeem the wisdom of ancient golden ages” (Rowlands, 2002, p.106). It is therefore the political use of cultural practices in this debate which comes to light here, and the ways in which politicians, artists, and activists’ activities and discourses are crossing paths, clashing or merging. In this case, the question of “music in action” does therefore not only address the role of music and musicians in political participation,³⁴ but also inversely the role of politics in musical practices and musicians’ careers. This is even more so when artists are embedded within transnational trajectories.

LOCAL ANCHORAGE AND GLOBAL NETWORKS

While the first part of this article has primarily focused on the strong local anchorage of the NAA in the London neighbourhoods of Ladbroke Grove and Portobello, it has also provided us with glimpses of the existence of various transnational connections, real or imagined, which intrinsically contribute to the association’s and the artists’ lives and modes of action. It is this dimension that we will now explore further.

A TRANSNATIONAL ARTISTIC, SOCIALLY ENGAGED AND FAMILY-RELATED NETWORK

The North African Arts W10 stems from a similar French initiative called “BLK93”, an informal collective of artists developed more than a decade ago in Paris’ northern suburbs (Villeparizy, Mitry, Aulnay-sous-Bois). This collective’s aims and activities are very similar to the NAA’s ones: members of the BLK93 try to bring support to young artists in-the-making by helping them to produce mixtapes (compilations of songs from various artists), to find opportunities to perform, and so on³⁵. Since one of the main actors of the BLK93 is Akeem, Mounir’s youngest brother, Mounir was already involved in the BLK93 before he created its British counterpart the NAA. Now that the NAA is established, this involvement has developed into regular

³³ As S. Sharma (2009) puts it, “the national imaginary intends to manage and contain the postcolonial subject, whether through erasure, or racialized differential inclusion or banal celebration of diversity. This is the violence of both popular and state multicultural representation”.

³⁴ The reciprocal yet sometimes ambivalent relationship between arts and politics is not new, and a large literature is devoted to it, and to music and politics in particular. To name but a few, see Bennett, *et al.* (1993), Huq (2006), Hutnyk (2000), Langlois (2009), Lebrun (2009), Nooshin (2009), Qureishi (2002), Sharma, *et al.* (1996), Street, *et al.* (2007), as well as issues of the electronic journal *Music and Politics*.

³⁵ Interview with Akeem, conducted by M-P. Gibert and N. Kiwan (Paris, 18/02/2008). I would like to take this opportunity to thank Nadia Kiwan for allowing me to use this shared material.

invitations of artists from the BLK93 to perform in London (as seen above) and into various symbolic links (*e.g.*, part of the BLK's logo is used in one of the NAA visuals). Three superimposed dimensions are therefore connecting the two artists' collectives: similar artistic views, kinship relations, and a common political concern and social engagement for young artists in-the-making.³⁶ This artistic/family-related/socially engaged network also takes us further south, to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, to the Algiers suburb Al Harash, where Mounir grew up and still has some family. There, one of Mounir's and Akeem's brother is also involved in similar local activities through music.³⁷ Despite the current complicated political situation of Algeria, Mounir has been planning for a few years now to organize a three location festival, based on an exchange of artists between the three capital cities (Algiers-London-Paris), and relying on the three brothers' own social, artistic and professional networks in each location.

In an apparent paradox, this trans-local dimension, which is constantly claimed in discourses and frequently reactivated in practice (*e.g.*, BLK93's artists brought over to London), is reinforced by a strong emphasis on the local. In both cases of the NAA and the BLK93, locality does not only play a role in the empirical dimension (through the actors' real involvement in the neighbourhood activities or, in the London case, through the place of the Inn on the Green as "*spatial hub*" (Kiwana and Meinhof, 2011)), one can also note a strong reference to the location as a symbolic space: local postcodes are fundamental in both associations' names (NAA W10 / BLK 93³⁸); symbolic urban visuals are used in the logo's distorted image of the Ladbroke Grove's tube station sign for the NAA / skyscrapers for the BLK93), and so on. What also emerges from both Mounir's and Akeem's discourses is a constant emphasis on the similarities between the three large urban settings (London-Paris-Algiers), of their associations and local engagement. They highlight the image of socially and economically deprived and often stigmatized neighbourhoods,³⁹ yet which are full of people who are ready to work hard in order to "make it". In turn, they are indirectly presenting themselves as one of the "role models" working through their associations to overcome such a situation.

Be that as it may, the perception of the transnational connection (UK-France) appears as being central to the actors, and is in turn widening in two directions. First, a North African sense of belonging – sometimes narrowed down to its Algerian component – is often re-affirmed.⁴⁰ Second, a reference to a rather enigmatic larger "BLK community", which would go far beyond the artistic collective based in the northern Parisian suburbs, is regularly made by some of the two associations'

³⁶ On the multilayered nature of networks, see Hilly and Berthomière (2004) and Kiwana and Meinhof (2011).

³⁷ Data regarding the Algerian counterpart remains unclear as my information is reliant on formal and informal discussions with Mounir and Akeem only.

³⁸ France is administratively composed of 100 "départments" and a number is associated to each one and used in the postcode. The department 93, the Seine-Saint-Denis, is situated to the North East of Paris.

³⁹ In various informal discussions held in French, Mounir uses the word "ghetto" to designate Al Harash, or the French suburbs in general, hence involuntarily borrowing from discourses found in the media and political circles which draw erroneous links between the "suburbs" and "socio-economic difficult conditions+immigration+violence", though this is precisely what Mounir is trying to fight against.

⁴⁰ See the sentence '*We are Algerians*' in the video extract previously analysed, as well as the presence of the Muslim crescent and the star (reminiscent of the Algerian flag?) on the BLK93 logo, or various other clips posted on the NAA's facebook group which often express an Algerian nationalist touch.

members. The real meaning(s) of this acronym remains difficult to pinpoint in Mounir's or other involved actors' discourses, yet it seems to refer, for them, both to a local entity (the artists' collective) and to a wider and somehow fuzzy sense of belonging to a global "black" (BLK) community. This wider "BLK community", present all around the world, would include in the category of "black" everyone who is not perceived as "white" (and therefore susceptible to be on the "wrong side" of power inequalities), therefore also encompassing North Africans, Middle-Eastern or South Asians with a darker skin complexion.⁴¹

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: ARTS VERSA AND THE RAMADAN FESTIVAL

While ties between the BLK93 and the NAA stem from a historical and common family origin articulated around different local and transnational trajectories, what links the NAA with another organization, the Ramadan Festival UK, questions transnationalism and its articulation with the local in different ways.

The "*Ramadan Festival UK*" is the British component of a larger initiative created a few years ago in the Netherlands, which aims at organising a "*month of Arts & Intercultural events, which will highlight the diversity of British mainstream and Muslim cultural engagement that exists in the UK*".⁴² According to its website, this transnational programme aims at "*rais[ing] the standard of dialogue on extremism to a more nuanced and sophisticated level in order to promote greater mutual understanding and provide a chance for Muslim communities to shout out a clear message against the extremists through the cultural initiatives*".⁴³ Similar schemes also take place in Norway, Poland, and are in discussion for France and the USA. Within the United Kingdom, the not-for-profit organization *Arts Versa* and its director, Mohsin Abbas, leads this initiative through the label "*Ramadan Festival UK*". Since the encounter of the two associations' directors (NAA/Arts Versa), the two men who share similar preoccupations not only regularly contribute to each other's events, but also share lists of contacts, networks, and projects. For instance, NAA's artists participate regularly in the yearly *Eid Mela* event organized by Ramadan Festival UK at the Kensington Town Hall, and subsequently, the 2008 version of this event was partly sponsored by the "1958 Remembered" project's budget. More recently, the NAA steering committee was invited to the Ramadan Festival UK's official launch at the House of Commons in August 2009 in the presence of various officials, including MPs, the City of London Youth Services' representative and US Embassy cultural attaché. Both organisations also regularly participate in the large Mayor of London's *Eid in the Square* event on Trafalgar Square,⁴⁴ both by participating in its steering committee, and by providing a line-up of artists. Such collaboration brings forward two interrelated directions that began to be explored earlier in this article: (1)

⁴¹ Further investigation in this direction would be worthwhile, in particular linked with work on panafricanism and Black/Afro-American transnational social movements (Geiss, 1974; Guedj, 2004, 2009).

⁴²Homepage of the *Ramadan Festival UK*'s Facebook group.

⁴³See www.ramadanfestival.co.uk (accessed 18 May 2011).The same ideas have also regularly come up at various times during fieldwork, both in formal meetings (e.g., Official Launch at the Chamber of Commons, 19/08/09) and informal discussions with the director.

⁴⁴ In partnership with the Greater London Authority. See for instance <http://www.london.gov.uk/trafalgarsquare/events/eid.jsp> - Last accessed October 30, 2010).

Exchanging cultural practices and political solutions; (2) Moving from a cultural heritage showcase to the promotion of a dynamic and positive global Muslim image.

(1) EXCHANGING CULTURAL PRACTICES AND POLITICAL SOLUTIONS

The development of strong ties and cooperation between the two associations and various political actors takes here the form of a rather straight forward “exchange” between two types of partners: the former (*i.e.*, policy makers, local and governmental representatives, etc.⁴⁵) are looking for local or/and national political solutions against a supposed “lack of community cohesion”,⁴⁶ “extremism” or even “risk of terror”; and the second (*i.e.*, the grassroots associations) are looking for financial and symbolic support for their cultural activities, while advocating the real power of such “*creative cultural education [...] as a tool for dialogue*”.⁴⁷ The Ramadan Festival UK hence presents itself as a:

Western Muslim initiative to develop a platform for faith inspired cultural narratives about Muslim diaspora. It is an international creative cultural education program focused on shared human values of generosity, hospitality and celebration. (website’s home page; accessed 18 May 2011)

North African artists in the UK had, to some extent at least, managed to release themselves from French post-colonial ties thanks to their relocation in Britain, but had then been trapped in the post 9/11 and 7/7 context of fear and suspicion of Muslims. Ironically this very situation seems at the same time to contribute to offering a new space of empowerment to these artists, as it is through budgets allocated to “social cohesion” (re)enhancement or even “anti-terror” policies that some of them are able to develop their artistic activities. For the two associations, therefore, it becomes relevant and not so antonymic to attract local, national or international budgets dedicated to fight against violence and (religious) extremism to fund their cultural activities as they promote a positive image of North African/Muslim multifaceted culture while providing funding for their own association’s aims and objectives.

(2) MOVING FROM A CULTURAL HERITAGE SHOWCASE TO THE PROMOTION OF A POSITIVE GLOBAL MUSLIM IMAGE

The collaboration between the NAA and the Ramadan Festival UK/Arts Versa can also be seen as an attempt to merge two so far distinct self-defined “ethnic groups” (South Asians / North Africans-Middle Easterns), who are to some extent part of a

⁴⁵ See NAA, Ramadan Festival UK, Arts Versa or “1958 Remembered”’s sponsors and supporters in their respective websites or communication documents.

⁴⁶ “Let me emphasize: This festival is not a religious festival but it is meant to be a social cohesion festival” – comment by the creator of the Ramadan Festival in the Netherlands (<http://www.bridgizz.com/en/cases/ramadan-festival-stavanger-norway>) - last accessed October 30, 2010.

⁴⁷ Extract from Mohsin Abbas’ speech during the official Launch at the House of Commons (29/08/09); similar formulations can also be found on Arts Versa’s website.

“common” British Muslim population,⁴⁸ yet not always self-conscious of the possibilities offered by a participation in a common imagined Muslim community.

According to various informal discussions with NAA’s members and fieldwork observations, the original idea of this association was not to focus on the “Muslim” dimension of “North African arts”, but to promote a “culture” in a wider perspective (including music, dance, poetry, food, material culture, etc.), thus blurring their use of the word “art” with their definition of “culture”. In this context, the idea that this culture’s diversity and richness has to be shown and transmitted is often brought forward:

“We have to get the message of North African arts through. Some people are doing things here and there, but it isn’t exactly the way it should be, where is the message? North African arts are a lot more rich than that!” (M.)

Therefore, the “*message*” to which Mounir refers here, brings us implicitly to the suggestion of a positive “heritage”, which is important to transmit, not only to North African descendants but also to a wider audience.⁴⁹ However this question of “cultural heritage” places the actors in tension between two opposite perspectives. On the one hand, a fixing and reifying tendency made apparent by the use of the problematic vocabulary of “tradition” which takes place both internally through a call for cultural heritage maintenance, and externally under the pressure of an exoticising gaze.⁵⁰ On the other hand, some of the artists attempt to move away from this essentialist approach and wish to pursue creativity, yet partly using at least some specific North African cultural codes. This second direction, which I have called “creative memory” elsewhere (Gibert, 2008b), is obviously more dynamic and could also be what the Ramadan Festival UK’s director is referring to when he advocates the development of an “*hybrid form between Islamic art and British culture*” (Official Launch of the Ramadan Festival UK, House of Commons, 19/08/2009).⁵¹ Yet, for the Ramadan Festival, it is the Muslim/Islamic dimension which is central in their work in order to re-enchant its existence rather than to erase it: “*we need to find a middle way between extremism and no Islam*” (M. Abbas, 19/08/09). To do so, they have adopted a perspective based on an extremely wide definition of what can be “Muslim/Islamic references”: here this definition encompasses music, dance, literature, painting, etc., and is therefore quite similar to the definition of “arts” used by the NAA.⁵² They also place a strong emphasis on the sufi “idea” (via videos,

⁴⁸ I am aware of the enormous risk of simplification that this sentence might convey. Islam is not the only religion in South Asia, North Africa nor the Middle East. However, this way of presenting is referring to both one of the aspects promoted by these two associations, and external misconceptions often heard within the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) by non-Muslims and/or individuals unaware of the South Asian, North African or Middle Eastern complex realities.

⁴⁹ On the importance of looking at transmission issues from an anthropological point of view, see Berliner (2010).

⁵⁰ See Connell and Gibson (2004), Décoret-Ahiha (2004), Dimitrijevic (2004), Gibert (2007, 2008a) and Pouillon (1975, 1993).

⁵¹ The celebration of “cultural hybridity” (Werbner and Modood, 1997) has often been seen as a potential third-way by both academics (starting from P. Gilroy) and politicians. However, along with other authors (Capone, 2002; Hutnyk, 1997, 2000, 2005; Kiwan and Gibert, 2008), I argue that “*hybridity*” is a problematic and counter-productive analytical category since it implicitly conveys essentialism and the reification of politically-loaded dichotomies such as “pure/impure”, “authentic/inauthentic”, “traditional/modern”, “the West/the rest of the world”, “us/them”, “artistic/popular”, and so on.

⁵² For a discussion on the complex relations between Islam and art/music, see Al Faruqi (1985), Ernst (2005), Otterbeck (2008) and Van Nieuwkerk (2008).

participating artists, discourses, etc.) of a peaceful practice of Islam. Consequently, although various NAA's artists have mentioned to me that being non-Muslim or not practising any religion, they felt slightly uneasy with the focus on Islam adopted by Ramadan Festival UK and the call on a Muslim image as a unifying factor for both associations, they are nonetheless willing to participate as they feel that this reference to Islam is not directly religious. They are also perfectly aware of the potential of such an emphasis on a positive global image of, and sense of belonging to Islam, in terms of the fight against stigmatization, as well as recognition by, and funding from, various institutional actors and members of civil society.

Could this articulation between, on one hand, a multiple (symbolic and real) anchorage in the local; and on the other hand, a global –or at least trans-national– multilayered sense of belonging, be seen as a way for migrants to satisfy “their desire to reterritorialise as a collective response to displacement and deterritorialisation”, as Smith would suggest (1994, p.19)? Rather, I would argue that this is a form of “glocal”⁵³ specificity and pride, through which the NAA and its partners are backing up their work. Identification and claims for recognition of the actors are taking place at local and global level as two complementary levels rather than opposing ones. From this perspective, the global is a succession of several “locals” linked together, producing something new, rather than being the mere product of their sum. Such articulation also allows accommodation of the multiple migratory trajectories of the various actors. Looking at this situation permits us to follow the suggestion made by Featherstone to go beyond a “binary logic which seeks to comprehend culture via the mutually exclusive terms of homogeneity/heterogeneity, integration/desintegration, unity/diversity” (1990, p.1) when working within a context of globalization. The positive perspective adopted here by the actors to fight against local/national/international stigmas about Muslims offers a global image of Islam which partly blurs the actual diversity and heterogeneity which characterizes cultural practices elaborated in connection - close or indirect - to the numerous Muslim social and cultural entities around the world and partly represented in the UK. These associations' discourses also advocate cultural creativity that is not the reproduction of fixed essentialized cultural products, but on the contrary, the possibility to develop a diversified cultural production as *the* “tool” for dialogue, integration and the construction of a global sense of belonging. This situation however does not avoid a “re-nationalization” process coming from individuals who feel deterritorialized (even though they might have not been born in what they consider to be their “country of origin”), but this reterritorializing process is counterbalanced both by the artistic and socially concerned nature of the networks, and by the construction of this common Muslim/Arab/North African imagined community which transcends – partially at least – the nationalistic tendency, both at the local and at the trans-national level.

⁵³ As a situation which “[brings] the global, in the sense of the macroscopic aspect of contemporary life, into conjunction with the local, in the sense of the microscopic side of life in the late twentieth century” (Robertson, 1992, p. 173)

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Throughout this case-study I hope to have conveyed the ways in which artists' professional development, musical expertise, desires, and transnational mobility are woven together with social and political involvement, which answers each other's needs, expectations or limits. Artistic practices, professional expectations and constraints, social activism, glocal multilayered senses of belonging, and politics are so entangled here, their relations are built in such reciprocal ways, that it becomes impossible to distinguish the aims from the means.

What comes to light with the fine-grained ethnography of this association's actors, activities and networks, is that the relative success (*i.e.*, its participation in various events; the possibilities offered to emerging artists to experience stage performances and to receive what one has called "a success of esteem";⁵⁴ etc.) of the situation analyzed in this article arises from the superimposing of four levels:

- an acute and detailed insider knowledge of the local context in terms of people, local/governmental institutions, grassroots initiatives and community organizations, etc.; but also users' expectations and issues, existing offers, needs, and pitfalls;
- a multiplication and intersection of mobilized networks of different natures (family-oriented; artistic; professional; religious; "ethnic", etc.);
- a diversification of activities which often blur formal and informal modes of organization and action;
- an ability to make use of narratives, using current buzz words such as "community cohesion", "awareness raising", "cultural heritage", or "knowledge transfer",⁵⁵ likely to attract local/governmental fundings, private sponsors, and actors of various civic and social organizations.

In such a context, it seems that the "one-man-project dimension" is particularly instrumental and efficient in the articulation of these four levels. Ideas, energy and actions are concentrated in one single individual, therefore making him/her at the same time very powerful and yet somehow elusive. This central agent plays a role of interface or "human hub" (Kiwana and Meinhof, 2011) between very different types of actors, precisely creating and fuelling the fluidity which blurs the edges between activities, groups of people, and so on. This person (Mounir in this case) knows how to gain access to the interstices by offering services that the public institutions do not provide; yet he finds an indirect way to secure funding from these institutions. Having said that, such advantages have their own limits: hyper-centralized information and useful blurriness for one individual can become opacity for the other. Beyond a certain point, the human hub also reaches its quantitative and qualitative limits in terms of knowledge and networking capacities, thus if this

⁵⁴ Expression often used by Akeem (BLK93).

⁵⁵ Used for instance in the "Project Plan presented to 1958 Remembered: 50 Years On - Steering Group" (Unpublished internal document).

configuration seems useful for artists in-the-making, it becomes more limited for artists already further in their career.

The conceptualisation through a tri-dimensional matrix of constraints and opportunities between the artistic, economic/professional and migratory spheres has therefore allowed us to disentangle various points which would otherwise seem paradoxical, and to shed light on transnationalism through a quadruple dimension: mobility, networks, local anchorage, and imagined communities.

APPENDIX: SNAPSHOTS OF A FEW NAA ARTISTS

Tayeb F. grew up in France and arrived in London twenty years ago, attracted both by the British music scene and by the feeling that in the UK he was finally released from the insidious racism he felt in France. He was until recently one of the two NAA's artistic directors. Guitarist and bass player since his childhood, playing regular paid gigs in various bands first in France and later on in the UK (pop and rock), he is also a prolific composer and for the last few years has become-interested in "Arabic music".⁵⁶ He currently writes songs one would categorize as *chanson*,⁵⁷ but has also co-founded an instrumental band *Noqta* ("full stop" in Arabic) which improvises music which they qualify as "North African groove".⁵⁸ His lyrics are mainly in French and address themes as diverse as political issues in France (1961 events against Algerians;⁵⁹ 2005 riots in French suburbs, *etc.*) and in Algeria (politically motivated abductions - "*disparus politiques*"⁶⁰) or love songs. He makes a living out of various music-related activities: commissioned pieces, gigs, guitar classes, music recording studio business, etc.

Boujmaa Bouboul was born in Morocco within a Gnawa brotherhood.⁶¹ He arrived in the UK in the early 2000s as part of a Gnawa performing group visiting from Morocco. With three other musicians he decided to stay in the UK in order to develop his musical career (as a gnawa singer and a musician of guembri⁶² and drums) and started the band *Gnawa UK*. Since the spring of 2007, the band has also adopted another configuration (which is called *Resonate Gnawa UK*) to incorporate other kinds of sounds to gnawa music (brass, electro, etc.) and to welcome new musicians. Therefore, albeit rather precariously, Boujmaa manages to make a living out of his musical skills.

⁵⁶ In his own words (Interview held in London, 28/07/08).

⁵⁷ French music genre characterized by a solo singer, the use of acoustic music instruments, and often politically (left-wing) concerned lyrics. See B. Lebrun (2009).

⁵⁸ According to one of the other co-founders, Karim Dellali, percussionist. Other members of *Noqta* are: Yazid Fentazi (oud), Jason Emberton (drums) and Khaled Dellali (mandole; an instrument which is part of the mandolin family).

⁵⁹ In the midst of the "Guerre d'Algérie" which preceded the decolonisation of Algeria by the French, the violent repression of a demonstration held in Paris on October 17, 1961 led to the death of 200 Algerian demonstrators.

⁶⁰ During the political events which took place in Algeria in the 1990s, thousands of individuals were kidnapped by State security services or paramilitary militias without further information given about them until today.

⁶¹ Fraternity specialized in the healing of "those afflicted with spirit possession through all-night ceremonies (lilat, pl.) that placate the spirits with of music, incense, colors, and animal sacrifices" (Kapchan, 2007, p. 2).

⁶² One of the gnawa typical musical instrument: three-stringed long-necked lute, without fret, which box is covered with animal skin.

Milo also arrived in the UK from Algeria at the end of the 1990s, following the violent political events which consumed that decade. Although music was of interest for him since his childhood, he had never really played an instrument nor considered himself a musician in Algeria. On the other hand, he has been writing poetry and prose (both in classical and Algerian Arabic) for several years. Having known Mounir for years, he has recently started to declaim his texts to music at various gigs via the NAA.

Chara is a young R'n'B singer born in Oxford to Moroccan parents. After a recent meeting with the NAA's managing director, she began to perform as a singer, and organize musical events through the association network.

REFERENCES

- Al Faruqi, L.I. (1985) "Music, musicians and Muslim Law". *Asian Music*, 17(1): 3-36.
- Amselle, J.-L. and E. M'Bokolo. (1985) *Au Coeur de l'Ethnie: Ethnies, Tribalisme et Etat en Afrique*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Amselle, J.-L. (2001) *Branchements: Anthropologie de l'Universalité des Cultures*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Armbruster, H. and A. Laerke. (2008) *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*. Berghahn Book.
- Aubert, L. (2005) *Musiques Migrantes*. Genève: Musée d'ethnographie (meg).
- Baily, J. and M. Collyer. (2006) "Introduction: Music and migration". *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies*, 32(2): 167-182.
- Baumann, M.-P., K. Malm, M. Slobin and K. Tamas (eds). (1995) *Aspects on Music and Multiculturalism*. Stockholm: The Royal Swedish Academy of Music.
- Baumann, M.-P. (2000) "The local and the global: Traditional musical instruments and modernization". *The World of Music: Local Musical Traditions in the Globalization Process*, 42(3): 121-144.
- Becker, H. (1951) "The professional dance musician and his audience". *The American Journal of Sociology*, 57(2): 136-144.
- Becker, H. (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Becker, H. (1982) *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Becker, H. (2004) "Jazz places". In A. Bennett and R.A. Peterson (eds), *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 17-27.
- Bennett, T. (et al.). (1993) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*. London: Routledge.
- Berliner, D. (ed). (2010) "Anthropologie et transmission". *Terrain*, 55: 4-19.
- Bohlmann, P. and M.S. Keller. (2008) *The Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean: Interpretation, Performance, Identity*. Bologna: Clueb.
- Bohlmann, P. (1996) "Music, myth, and history in the Mediterranean: Diaspora and the return to modernity". *Ethnomusicology on Line—EOL 3* [Peer-reviewed multimedia web journal]. Available at: <http://research.umbc.edu/eol/3/bohlman/index.html>
- Brown, S. and U. Volgsten (eds). (2006) *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Buscatto, M. (2004) "De la vocation artistique au travail musical: Tensions, compromis et ambivalences chez les musiciens". *Sociologie de l'Art/Opus*, 5: 35-56.
- Buscatto, M. (ed). (2008a) *Ethnologie Française*, Issue "L'art au travail", vol. 38.
- Buscatto, M. (2008b) "L'art et la manière: Ethnographies du travail artistique". *Ethnologie Française*, 38(1): 5-15.
- Cameron, W.B. (1954) "Sociological notes on the jam session". *Social Forces*, 33(2): 177-182.
- Capone, S. (2002) "A propos des notions de globalisation et de transnationalisation". *Civilisations*, 51(2): 9-22.
- Caratini, S. (2004) *Les Non-Dits de l'Anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Castles, S. and G. Kosack. (1973) *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cherti, M. (2008) *Paradoxes of Social Capital. A Multi-Generational Study of Moroccans in London*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

- Collyer, M. (2004) "Profile of the Algerian population in the UK". *The Information Centre about asylum and refugees in the UK*.
- Connell, J. and C. Gibson. (2004) "World music: Deterritorializing place and identity". *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(3): 342-361.
- Cooke, M. and B.B. Lawrence. (2005) *Muslim Networks: From Hajj to Hip Hop*. Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Cottrell, S. (2004) *Professional Music-Making in London: Ethnography and Experience*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Décoret-Ahiha, A. (2004) *Les Danses Exotiques en France: 1880-1940*. Paris: Centre National de la Danse.
- Dimitrijevic, D. (ed). (2004) *Fabrication des Traditions. Invention des Modernités*. Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Ernst, J. (2005) "The problem of Islamic art". In M. Cooke and B.L. Bruce (eds), *Muslim Networks: From Hajj to Hip Hop*. Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press, 107-131.
- Faulkner, R.R. (1983) *Music on Demand: Composers and Careers in the Hollywood Film Industry*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc.
- Featherstone, M. (ed). (1990) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Finnegan, R. (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making in an English Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geiss, I. (1974) *The Panafrican Movement : A History of Panafricanism in America, Europe and Africa*. New York: Africana publishing.
- Gibert, M.-P. (2007) "The intricacies of being Israeli and Yemenite: An ethnographic study of Yemenite "ethnic" dance companies in Israel". *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 3(3): 100-112.
- Gibert, M.-P. (2008a) "Le henné est-il encore efficace? Faux mariés et vrais Yéménites dans les spectacles des troupes de danse 'ethniques' en Israël." In M.-L. Gélard (ed), *Les Usages du Henné : Pratiques, Rites et Représentations Symboliques*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 21-52.
- Gibert, M.-P. (2008b) "Migrant and artist: Moroccan musicians in the UK between professional aims and personal experiences". Unpublished paper given at the "Moroccan Migration in Europe: Identity Formation, Representation and Memory" Conference, The University of Sussex, UK, October 2008.
- Guedj, P. (2004) "'A nation within nations': Nationalisme afro-américain et réafricanisation aux Etats-Unis". *Civilisations*, 51(1): 23-38.
- Guedj, P. (ed). (2009) *Civilisations*. Issue "American Afrocentrism(e)s américains", 58(1).
- Huq, R. (2006) *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*. London: Routledge.
- Hilly, M.-A. and W. Berthomière. (2004) "La notion de 'réseaux sociaux' en migration". *Hommes & Migrations*, 1250: 6-12.
- Hutnyk, J. (1997) "Adorno at Womad: South Asian crossover music and the limits of hybridity-talk". In Werbner and Modood (eds), *Debating Cultural Hybridity, Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books.
- Hutnyk, J. (2000) *Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry*. London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press.
- Hutnyk, J. (2005) "Hybridity". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1): 79-102.
- Jouvenet, M. (2006) *Rap, Techno, Electro... Le Musicien entre Travail Artistique et Critique Sociale*.

- Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Jouvenet, M. (2007) "La carrière des artistes et les transformations de la production musicale: Relation de travail et relations au travail dans le monde des musiques rap et électroniques". *Sociologie du travail*, 49(2): 145-161.
- Kapchan, D.A. (2007) *Travelling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Kiwan, N. and M.-P. Gibert. (2008) "Using and abusing 'ethnic identity labels': Francophone musicians in France and Britain". Unpublished joint paper, ASMCF Conference 2008, *Constructing French Identity / Identities*, University of Manchester.
- Kiwan, N. and U.H. Meinhof. (2011) *Cultural Globalization and Music: African Artists in Transnational Networks*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Langlois, T. (2009) "Music and politics in North Africa". In L. Nooshin (ed), *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.
- Lebrun, B. (2009) *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences*. London: Ashgate.
- Levitt, P. (2010) "Transnationalism". In K. Knott and S. McLoughlin (eds), *Diasporas. Concepts, Intersections, Identities*. London, New York: Zed Books.
- Lowenthal, D. (1985) *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mallet, J. (2002) "'World music': Une question d'ethnomusicologie?". *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 168(4): 831-852.
- Martiniello, M., N. Puig and G. Suzanne (eds). (2009) *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*. Issue "Créations en migration: Parcours, déplacements, racinements", 25(2).
- McGhee, D. (2009) *The End of Multiculturalism? Terrorism, Integration and Human Rights*. Maidenhead, New York: Open University Press.
- Meillassoux, C. (1975) *Femmes, Greniers et Capitaux*. Paris: Maspéro.
- Merriam, A.P. (1964) *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Milliot, V. (2000) "Culture, cultures et redéfinition de l'espace commun: Approche anthropologique des déclinaisons contemporaines de l'action culturelle". In J. Métral (ed), *Cultures en Ville, ou de l'Art et du Citadin*. Paris: édition de l'Aube, 143-168.
- Modood, T. and P. Werbner (eds). (1997) *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*. London, New York: Zed Books.
- Nooshin, L. (2009) *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.
- Otterbeck, J. (2008) "Battling over the public sphere: Islamic reactions to the music today". *Contemporary Islam*, 2(3): 211-228.
- Peraldi, M. (2002) *La Fin des Norias? Réseaux Migrants dans les Economies Marchandes en Méditerranée*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Perrenoud, M. (2007) *Les Musicos: Enquête sur des Musiciens Ordinaires*. Paris: Editions La Découverte.
- Portes, A., W. Haller and L. Guarnizo. (2002) "Transnational entrepreneurs: An alternative form of immigrant economic adaptation". *American Sociological Review*, 67: 278-298.
- Pouillon, J. (1975) "Tradition: Transmission ou reconstruction?". In J. Pouillon (ed), *Fétiches sans Fétichisme*. Paris: Maspéro.
- Pouillon, J. (1993) "Plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change". In J. Pouillon (ed), *Le Cru et le Su*. Paris: Seuil.
- Qureshi, R.B. (ed). (2002) *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*. New York: Routledge.

- Ramnarine, T.K. (2010) "Beyond borders: Memory and creativity in the diaspora". In S. Chaudhuri and A. Seeger (eds), *Remembered Rhythms: Issues of Diaspora and Music in India*. Seagull Press.
- Ramnarine, T.K. (2007) *Musical Performance in the Diaspora*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Reyes, A. (2001) "Music, migration and minorities: Reciprocal relations". In S. Pettan, A. Reyes and M. Komavec (eds), *Glasba in Manjšine: Music and Minorities*. Proceedings of the 1st International Meeting of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) Study Group "Music and Minorities", Ljubljana, Slovenia, June 25-30, 2000. Ljubljana: ZRC.
- Robertson, R. (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage.
- Rowlands, M. (2002) "Heritage and cultural property". In V. Buchli (ed), *Material Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 105-133.
- Sassen, S. (2000) *Guests and Aliens*. New York: New Press.
- Sharma, S., J. Hutnyk and A. Sharma. (1996) *Dis-Orienting Rhythms. The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books.
- Sharma, S. (2009) "'All is (not) war': Racial antagonisms and British-Asian culture". Unpublished paper presented at the Conference "Nation, Immigration and Identity Across the Atlantic: France, Great Britain and the United States in Comparative Perspective", University Charles de Gaulle-Lille III, 19-20 June 2009.
- Smith, M.P. (1994) "Can you imagine? Transnational migration and the globalization of grassroots politics". *Social Text*, 39: 15-33.
- Sorignet, P.-E. (2010) *Danser: Enquête dans les Coulisses d'une Vocation*. Paris: Editions La Découverte.
- Street, J., S. Hague and H. Savigny. (2007) "Playing the crowd: The role of music and musicians in political participation". *Political Studies Association, BJPIR*, 1-17.
- Swedenburg, T. (2002) "The post-September 11 Arab wave in world music". *Middle East Report*, 224: 44-48.
- Tagg, J. (1988) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Taylor, C. (1994) *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Van Nieuwkerk, K. (2008) "Creating an Islamic cultural sphere: Contested notions of art, leisure and entertainment. An introduction". *Contemporary Islam*, 2(3): 169-176.
- Waldinger, R.D. (1994) "The making of an immigrant niche". *International Migration Review*, 28(1): 3-30.
- Ward, R. and R. Jenkins. (1984) *Ethnic Communities in Business*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Werbner, P. and T. Modood (eds). (1997) *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London, New Jersey: Zed Books.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marie-Pierre Gibert is Lecturer in Social Anthropology and researcher at the Centre de Recherches et d'Études en Anthropologie (CREA) at the Université Lumière-Lyon 2, France. She is currently working on the interplay between cultural practices, transnational mobilities and work. Publications include: "Transnational musicians' networks across Africa and Europe" (co-authored with U.H. Meinhof and N. Kiwan, In Knott and McLoughlin (eds.), *Diasporas: Concepts, Identities, Intersections*. Zed Books 2011), "Inspiration triangulaire: musique, tourisme et développement à Madagascar" (co-authored with U.H. Meinhof, *Cahiers d'études Africaines*. n193-194, 2009), "The intricacies of being Israeli and Yemenite. An Ethnographic Study of Yemenite "Ethnic" Dance Companies in Israel" (*Qualitative Sociology Review*, III, 3, 2007), and "La construction d'un 'Yéménite israélien' par la danse" (in M.-C. Bornes Varol (ed.), *Chocs de langues et de cultures? Un discours de la méthode*. Presses Universitaire de Vincennes, 2011).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based from individual research conducted within a wider collective project designed by U.H Meinhof and N. Kiwan, called "*Diaspora as Social and Cultural Practice: A Study of Transnational Networks across Europe and Africa*" (www.TNMundi.com) (2006-2010). I would like to thank the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council which has funded the project, both U. H. Meinhof and N. Kiwan for their stimulating direction, and the University of Southampton and the University of Aberdeen in which we were based. The present text is a revised and combined version of papers presented at the Conference "Nation, Immigration and Identity Across the Atlantic: France, Great Britain and the United States in Comparative Perspective" held at the University Charles de Gaulle – Lille III (June 2009) and at the 2009 ASA Conference's panel "Heritage and Art between State Ideology and Grassroots Activism" held in Bristol in April 2009. This revised version has therefore benefited from the comments and suggestions of conference delegates and colleagues whom I would like to thank warmly: to name but a few, N. Kiwan, U. Meinhof, H. Armbruster, S. Soo, A. Grau, C. De Cesari, P. Vervaecke, B. Lebrun and S. Sharma have all contributed one way or another to this article.