The Space of Africanness:
Using Gnawa Music in Morocco as Evidence of North African Slavery and Slave Culture

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This article is dedicated to developing a working orientation to facilitate the use of Gnawa music and other Afro-Maghribi cultural expressions as historical evidence. After a brief discussion of the Gnawa form, a three part model of real, representational and imaginary spaces is advanced as a conceptual means to organize the evaluation of various aspects of the form, focusing particularly on slavery and slave culture. This spatial theory is elaborated in a comparison between the Gnawa and Sudanic griots, followed by consideration of the various meanings of the ethno-category ‘Bambara.’ Then, the space of Africanness as reflected in Gnawa music, is discussed in two distinct contexts. The first looks at social control mechanisms, specifically at how dominant social interests have been expressed through defining and ordering spaces of Africanness. The second, considers subaltern agency, interpreting how the Gnawa form represents and enables spaces for the socialization of understandings, values and actions of West African (and greater Maghribi) slaves and their descendants. The piece concludes with a brief mention of further possibilities for comparative diasporic spatial analysis, intended to contribute both to the incubation of Afro-Maghribi studies and to our ongoing inquiries into the African diaspora. It is suggested that the study of complex diasporic dynamics, often lacking adequate descriptive and conceptual vocabularies, may benefit from spatial theory.

Traditional Contexts
A Working Theory of Spatial-Temporal Structures and Experiences
A Regional Comparison
Rethinking “Bambara” as a Continuum of Interplaying Identity Spaces
Spaces of Africanness: Social Control
Spaces of Africanness: Meaning Making
Conclusions and Ways Forward: Space and Diasporic Reflections

Across the Maghrib there have long been what are often referred to as ‘black brotherhoods’ of musicians, traditionally believed to be descendents of ‘African’ slaves.1)

Keywords: Gnawa, slave cultures, space, African Diaspora, North Africa

1) African descendents in the Maghrib may be regarded among the other neglected areas of African diaspora. The 2001 African Studies Association was themed around the African Diaspora, reflecting the present expansion of this inquiry, for a recent overview see African Studies Review special issue on Africa’s Diaspora, Vol. 43, Num. 1 April 2000.
In Algeria such associations have been described as devotees to Sidi Bilal (also referred to there as ‘Usfan’, an Arabic word meaning slaves); in Libya and Tunisia they have been known as ‘Bori cult’ musicians (as well as being known as the ‘Stambali’ or ‘Sudani’ in Tunisia). The largest, most active, and most internationally recognized of these associations are the Gnawa of Morocco. Despite the fact that these associations and their musical forms are popularly known in the Maghrib and by generations of Western academics, travelers, and musicians, at present they have received scant scholarly attention from the social sciences and ethnomusicology, and only indirect historical research. In fact, sustained critical consideration of Gnawa music as a form of evidence of North African slavery and slave culture has not yet begun.

It seems that there are three overlapping periods, each with its own principal concerns, through which we can address the role played by West African slaves and their descendents in the history of North Africa. The first of these considers the longue durée of inter-regional migration and interaction with particular attention to the slave trade, forms of exchange, the approximation of populations, and the origins of these populations. The next nexus of related questions might address how practices of slavery functioned within societies of the Maghrib, what socio-economic patterns there were, what possibilities of communal life existed, as well as questions of agency, such as how Maghribi slaves made meaningful lives and worlds for themselves, and the ways in which they might have resisted social control mechanisms. A final period and area of interest is concerned with relationships beyond slavery, including the historical contexts in which freedom and slavery were expressed, how slavery ended, and what legacies and power relations endured beyond these forms of domination and inequality. This article is dedicated to developing a working orientation to facilitate the use of Gnawa music and other West African derived religious associations of North Africa, as historical evidence. Of these periods and areas of inquiry that have been suggested, the first two will be given dominant attention here. Although the post-slavery social order and contemporary historical concerns, such as the widespread and remarkable commodification and travels of the Gnawa music, offer important and fascinating areas of research, the focus here will be on the ways in which Gnawa music can inform the historical background of slavery in Morocco. Following a cursory description of the form and its traditional contexts of audition, a theoretical framework will be introduced and illustrated through the critical discussion of a series of relevant examples. In the brief conclusion, we will look ahead to the potential applications emerging from this orientation, and the ends to which such work might contribute.

3) With the rise of commercial success and recognition of “Gnawa” music, usage of this term has increased in Algeria. Several scholars working on various dimensions of Gnawa music are Tim Abdellah Fuson, Deborah Kapchan, Abdelhafid Chlyeh, and Bertrand Hell. I am particularly grateful to Tim Abdellah Fuson for sharing many insights and for access to his unpublished writings.
Traditional Contexts

An initial working conception of Gnawa history has been advanced in a brief ethnomusicological article by Philip Schuyler, who writes that “(t)he beliefs and practices of the Gnawa religious brotherhood represent a fusion of Islamic and West African ideas.”\(^4\) While not precluding consideration of the presence of enslaved West African Muslims in the trans-Saharan trade, or the slave trade internal to the Maghrib, it is nonetheless reasonable to speculate that indigenous West African sacred beliefs and practices were given “practical and ecumenical” integration into the practices of Islam within Moroccan communities.\(^5\) Gnawa musicians consistently consider themselves devout Muslims, claiming as their patron saint Sidi Bilal al-Habashi.\(^6\) Bilal, an Ethiopian freed from slavery by the Prophet Mohammed, became the first muezzin of Islam. In many of the Moroccan cities in which the Gnawa are most active there are xaouia (temples or sanctuaries) including at least one in Sidi Bilal’s honor.\(^7\)

In organizational respects the Gnawa musicians are often considered a tariqa or ‘brotherhood,’ related to organizational practices of Sufism. However as Philip Schuyler notes,

> While it is true that women rarely if ever play instruments in Gnawa ceremonies, a large percentage (perhaps even a majority) of the devotees are women, female spirits figure prominently in the pantheon, and, most importantly, many of the most respected officiates, mqaddem or mqaddema, are women.\(^8\)

Thus, ‘brotherhood’ is actually a misleading and lacking term, given that women are intimately involved in this religious association.

In the north of the country Tangier, Rabat, Meknes, and Casablanca are important locations for Gnawi performances. However, the most active centers in Morocco, are toward the south in Essaouira, Marrakesh, Tamsloht (a village near Marrakesh and the site of an annual Gnawa pilgrimage), and Tafilalet.\(^9\) In cities such as Essaouira and Marrakech, where the tradition is often held to be most ‘African’, there have been several

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6) In the context of Manding oral tradition in what is present day Mali, David Conrad has noted an interesting “adoption” of collective ancestors “borrowed directly from Arab tradition,” including “a character named Bilali Bounama.” However, the survival of “the essence of certain elements of pre-Islamic West African culture,” needs further examination. See Conrad 1985.
8) Schuyler 1997. Hasna EL Becharia is an exceptional example of a female gembri player. See her recording Djarazt Jokara Indigo/Harmonia B00005SBFO.
9) Concerning the limitations of the category and identity “Gnawa,” it should be noted for further research that musical practices resembling the Gnawa are active in rural settings and small towns in the High Atlas mountains, “but they apparently do not use the sintir/hajhuj, may not practice the leila/derdeba, and may not even use the name Gnawa.” (Communication with P. Schuyler 12/6/96).
notable ‘houses’ and families involved in perpetuating the form.\textsuperscript{10} In public performance Gnawa musicians have long appeared as buskers, itinerant street musicians playing for contributions in informal settings, such as a particular niche of a medina, in or near a suq, or in public areas including the widely known Djemaa el fna in Marrakech. At Djemaa el fna Gnawa performances can be found daily, with singing, gembri and qraeb playing, and dancers whirling the long black tassels atop their caps by rapidly turning their heads around and around.\textsuperscript{11} More acrobatic dancing accompanies the t’bel t’boela, which is often played with qraeb and without gembri. Throughout such Djemaa el fna performances a collector walks among the audience seeking contributions. In another common setting, a gembri player seated in a calm public area (often an urban or town center), may or may not be joined by qraeb players, and aside from a costume (or elements of costume), minimal visual attention is involved. In what is actually the most common public setting for Gnawi, often a single qraeb player will wander across an urban center or residential area, and after having captured a prospective contributor’s attention, may follow him and play, sing and dance.

The moussemes (religious festivals) held at various times and places throughout the country provide a more formalized public forum for Gnawa performance. While several moussemes are shared with other associations of musicians, during the month prior to Ramadan the feast of Sidi Bilal is particularly important for the Gnawa. Gnawa music’s most personal performances and experiences during festivals and in private functions, take the form of the highly structured Lila (Arabic for night) or Derdeba (which has often been translated as ‘big noise’).

For a Lila several arrangements are required. A suitable house will have to be chosen for the performance, which generally begins several hours into the night and can last upward of eight hours. At the house, an animal (typically a sheep) must be available for sacrifice and eating as well as additional food and drink for guests, many of whom may be

\textsuperscript{10} The Guinia and Akharraz families in Essouria are two examples.

\textsuperscript{11} To Western audiences a gembri may resemble a small square form of guitar or lute. It has a frame with skin from a camel’s neck stretched across it, out of the frame box extends a two foot long neck onto which three strings made of goat intestine are fastened with cloth or leather straps. At the top of the neck is a removable piece of metal onto which numerous metal rings are hung. The gembri is actually three components of instrument at once, a membraphone, in that its frame is played for accent as a drum by the figures of their strumming hand; a stringed instrument, in its use of one sympathetic and two active strings, as well as another form of percussion, in the sympathetic distortion provided by the resonating sistrum-like metal piece at the end of the neck. To a jazz listener a gembri sounds like a slapped double-bass with more elasticity and rhythmic range. There is an interesting parallel to research between the development of the gembri and the banjo, for which Cecilia Conway’s African Banjo Echos in Appalachia (1995) is valuable. Another signature component of Gnawa instrumentation is the qraeb (or karkabou in Algeria), once described by a Marakeshi salesman as the ‘African mother of castanets’. Qraeb are two pairs of approximately foot-long twin concave metal segments each joined with a metal ring at one of their ends. They are brought together by opening and closing the thumbs and fingers, one hand following the other, and produce a very full and distinct metallic rhythm. An additional form of percussion used by the Gnawa are T’bel t’boela. These are large two sided goat-skin bass drums. They are struck with a firm curved stick (sahla) to play deep notes, and a flexible stick (tarrach) for rapid snare sounds.
unexpected. From the musical end, the right number and caliber of musicians must be chosen and gathered to fit the performance and its funding. Arrangements and alterations being made, the general procession gradually begins after a sacrifice, with t'bel t'boela and qraqeb playing in the street or environs of the house or property. This announces the occasion to both the human and djinn communities within its audible range. Between the sacrifice and the meal, the Fraja (or entertainments) are performed, these include music, games, “dances, mimés and songs,” which are called “Bambara” songs. It has been suggested that the words and gestures of these commemorative performances refer to ancestral life and enslavement. Of particular present interest is the suggestion that the words to these songs involve more than “Bambara” origins, “including Songhai, Sokole, Haussa and Fulbe” languages. Following a meal the component seven dances and colors of a full form of Lila are performed.

A Working Theory of Spatial-Temporal Structures and Experiences

This study’s principal object of analysis is the historical reconstitution of enslaved West Africans in the Maghrib. A working theory will have to be developed and employed in order to use the unit of analysis of the Gnawa form as historical evidence which might address a full range of questions such as where are Afro-Maghribis from, who are they within society, and what worlds did they create and reproduce. This working theory should allow for a clear, integrated consideration of the possibilities of this evidence. Again, this study is concerned not only with the structure and function of this heterogeneous group or its expressive culture, but with reconstructing processes of historical transition by calling on their cultural practices and artifacts.

In a broad sense, historical diffusionism is a counterpoint from which this study will critically-borrow. It is precisely not any a priori essence of pure continuity which is being sought here, but rather evidence of patterns of change and continuity within and among the structures and strictures of the diasporic background of this history.

One hybrid possibility toward this end is to critically-borrow from structural

12) Fuso has noted that the Fraja is comprised of two sections, the Ouled Bambara (Sons of Bambara), and Negsha a term of uncertain meaning. Fuso 2001, p.1.
14) Schuyler has described Lila as “a choreutic-musical liturgy” of healing. See Schuyler 1997. The musical performance of gembri, qraqeb, sometimes derabuka, clapping and song singing is ordered around seven mluk or ‘melodic-rhythmic cells,’ for each of which there is a specific incense burned and an associated color of fabric (often in the form of veils) displayed on those present and dancing. A Ma’leem (or master musician) plays the gembri and sings throughout Lila guiding the song selections, improvisations, overall tempo and timing with the aim of bringing listeners through trance to mental, physical and spiritual responses to their predisposed affinities. There is similarity to be noted here between Santeria liturgy or ‘orú’ in which the specific bata drum patterns or ‘toques’ which comprise the order of the service and are readily distinguishable ‘calls’ addressing specific deities.
15) ‘Critical-borrowing’ is used here to refer to conceptual and theoretical borrowing predominantly through opposition and fundamental re-working, while retaining an interest in and commitment to the question(s) understood to be driving a theoretical orientation toward knowledge.
functionalist attention to the workings of ‘groups’ and ‘functions.’ Edmund Leach’s 1954 *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* challenged functionalism from within its assumptions and premises, suggesting an unstable equilibrium and a dynamic flux between ideal models and lived realities. The present critical-borrowing from this theoretical orientation proposes to shift altogether away from efforts to describe a complex equilibrium in group identities in relatively limited spaces and times, to attention to trans-regional possibilities of continuity and change without presupposing any variety of model group identity. The ‘functions’ which define ‘groups’ might be deconstructed as loose patterns of values and related practices, while simultaneously exploding across the scope of this diaspora the tendency toward atemporal, singular, strict, equilibriums and ideals. Structure in this case can be understood in its widest sense as the structural limitations of slavery, and ethnic-based inequality. The patterns of values and practices in consideration can be seen in the analysis of a variety of musical and cultural objects within and surrounding Gnawa music which seem to have been derived from West African musical contexts; these include: an holistic understanding of music as spiritual communication, use of a pentatonic scale, interdependent polyrhythmic overlapping and clapping patterns, call and response structures, variations of rhythmic groupings and ‘playing around the beat,’ acrobatic dance soloing, and the material culture of decoration and instruments.¹⁶) Rather than objects in themselves, an examination of these elements might under-gird a comparative project aimed at historically analyzing expressions and values in different diasporic spaces and times. This would compel us to consider what people think within, and perhaps in subversion of structures without reifying a sealed, overarching culture object.

In order to proceed with the proposed aims (or counter-aims) of analysis, an overall organization or mapping is needed. The beginnings of such a theoretical apparatus can be drawn from the work of several scholars who have attempted to explain the ways in which social relationships occur in, and reproduce space and time.¹⁷) Such efforts, consciously or not, owe a great deal to Albert Einstein’s mandate to rethink these dimensions, not as discrete absolutes but as partners in continuum, an inextricable interrelation of space and time. Perhaps our understandings in the social sciences and humanities have only begun to assimilate such considerations. A focal point in elaborating the present theoretical mapping is a distinction drawn in Henri Lefebvre’s work *The Production of Space* between a social and representational space, a mental, conceived representational space and a spatial

¹⁶) Elements of West African aesthetics are recalled in the plentiful use of cowry shells which appears on musician’s clothing and instruments. Of the musical instruments played by Gnawa, the principle instrument, the gembri, also known with various transliterations as hag ‘hough or sintir (a term apparently related to the Persian santur), has clear antecedents among West African instruments. The khalem and hajhouj are used extensively by West African griots, and appear as smaller, curved versions of the gembri.

¹⁷) Of particular stimulation in this undertaken has been the interdisciplinary work of geographers and social and aesthetic theorists Yi-Fu Tuan 1977, David Harvey 1990, Henri Lefebvre 1991, and Gaston Bachelard 1964.
practice which is performative, sensory, and tactile.18)

The following theoretical outline picks up with and extends David Harvey’s usage of Lefebvre’s spatial distinctions:

*Real space-time*, centrally material, concerning spatial-temporal practices and experiences, interactions with the physical constructions of spaces and places.

*Representational space-time*, centrally social and symbolic, concerning organized perceptions and the interactions between perceptions and signs, signifiers, knowledge and values.

*Conceived or Imaginary space-time*, centrally mental, concerning the interaction with and transcendence of the limitations imposed by material and symbolic practices.19)

This critical-borrowing from Harvey’s project of describing the condition of postmodernity, ironically returns us to the bountiful complexities of a pre-modern history rooted on the fringes the modernity he signals a shift in. Where Harvey has used Lefebvre to suggest a bridge between cultural change and political economy, this study entails no massive background of capitalism with which to fuse cultural expression. It should be noted that these spaces are not isolated, discrete, fixed categories to impose upon historical structures and experience, but considerably fluid points of emphasis, useful towards charting complex historical interactions. These abstract working-distinctions in themselves are not the present object of discussion, rather their potential to contribute to this area of study, and what we may learn from this. To see this more clearly, we turn to several specific contexts.

**A Regional Comparison**

A spatial-temporal analysis is of great use for reconstructing a diaspora culture, because it allows for clarification and suggestive consideration of multiple dimensions of historical processes and experience across greatly unequal power relations. To illustrate this capacity, we turn to an interregional comparison of functions and values. The expressive spaces20) of Gnawa music compare and depart from West African griotic traditions in numerous significant ways, which upon consideration reveal a loose pattern.21) It seems that the greatest degree of departure between Gnawa music and West African griotic traditions is found in precisely those functions and identities challenged by slavery,

20) From here forward ‘space’ or ‘spatial’ will refer to the various space-times in consideration.
21) In a recent work Thomas Hale has considered some twenty-one functions and sub-functions of griots, these provide the fulcrum for the present consideration. See Hale 1998.
as well as by Islam (although in less clear ways).

In addition to being musicians and composers, the Gnawa are keepers of a discreet knowledge and a very particular historical repertoire. This role necessarily entails teaching, though not as extensively as has been portrayed for griots. While not naming children as griots might, the Gnawa are commonly on hand in the initiation rite of circumcision. Also they are praise singers in a narrow sense, limited to exalting Allah, various saints and earlier Gnawa musicians, but nevertheless similar to praise singers in the wider sense of audience manipulation. Through the use of Muslim saints the Gnawa are genealogists to a limited extent, yet they differ from griotic practices in that they do not maintain a tradition of recounting elite lineages. Furthermore, underscoring the limits imposed by slavery, they are not advisors, spokesmen, diplomats, human oral-historical libraries, translators, warriors, and they do not perform frequent griotic functions with regard to marriage, political installations or funerals. These broad, broken parallels are not noted to suggest any specific historical links between griots and the Gnawa, but rather to trace the contours and limits of expressive spaces and possible historical processes in the North African context, as well as to refer to values identifiable both North and South of the Sahara.

The power relations operative in slavery seem to register in this loose pattern as follows: although arguably encompassing West African agency, the expressive spaces of the real (i.e. controlling labor to use land and build cities) and of representation (i.e. establishing and maintaining symbols of the dominant social standards of piety), are far less approachable spaces within which to direct claims and exert authority, than the marginal spaces of the imaginary (i.e. the subaltern creation and reproduction of an influential ritual form). Recall, the larger working conception relevant here is that the history of this religious association of musicians entails an ecumenical fusion between the cultures of North African Islam and West African traditions, within and surrounding the contexts of slavery. Unable to acquire and hold overt forms of political power, imaginary forms envisioning a nebulous spiritual world became a domain of identity articulation, representational assertion and real expertise. This creation, stemming from vital diasporic imaginary space, allowed for symbolic and even physical spaces to be claimed and made subject to authority. In fact, the Gnawa are most famed in Morocco as spiritual workers, using their music to heal illness and infertility, to appease spirits and to celebrate.22) Although not valued or sanctioned as diplomats or political advisors, the Gnawa can be seen among mediators of the metaphysical for Moroccans, in an interpretive role at the spatial boundaries of Islam.

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22) Barbour notes Gnawa performances at the opening of a new house or a child’s birth. Barbour 1965, p.109. West African cultural and religious influences are often ascribed to the healing trances induced through Lila. For an interesting parallel in the West African context see Stoller (1987) and (1989).
Rethinking “Bambara” as a Continuum of Interplaying Identity Spaces

Spatial-temporal analysis allows for critical rethinking of the received historical categories concerning the Gnawa form. In what follows, a working theory of the interaction, or continuum, among the spaces presented above will be used to suggest a new conceptual consideration in this field. Spatial theory will be developed to clarify the complex dynamics of slavery and identity apparent in the Gnawa form, including spatial limitations imposed by the dominant society, and their possible re-appropriation.

Although slavery in North African predates the introduction of Islam, the trans-Saharan system, which dispersed enslaved West Africans, was expanded and enhanced with the movement of Islam into West Africa. There is no academic consensus about the volume of slaves in the trans-Saharan slave trade. Ralph Austen’s range of tentative calculations are the most frequently referred to, initially suggesting over six million slaves crossing the desert from the seventh-century until the nineteenth-century. In a recent ground-breaking study of nineteenth-century slavery in Morocco Mohammed Ennaji estimates the very provocative figures of seven to eight thousand slaves being sold annually in Morocco in the 1890’s. Though Ennaji focuses much attention on domestics, concubines and soldiers in his characterization of the role of slaves in this society, he does concede briefly that,

These figures offer indirect proof that slave purchases, reputedly a luxury, were not limited to the rich but were linked to overall production levels. These figures cover only the official market; other sales took place elsewhere, under the table.

Reconstruction of the extent of this history remains to be undertaken, amid practical difficulties that include the reluctance of the dominant class in Morocco to confront a politically sensitive topic, “the lack of a constituency within such societies that would press for an investigation of its past history and present condition,” as well as a shortage of scholars capable of and interested in such work.

General and uncircumspect notions about this history are widespread among Moroccans; Gnawa musicians often represent an innate ‘Africanness’ emerging from a hazy past of slavery. Much of the existing scholarship of some relevance or directly

23) These figures refer to Austen (1979), the author’s later work reduces the estimate to “somewhere in the region of 3.5 to 4 million slaves... across the twelve-century history of the trade.” See Austen 1997, p.103. Paul Lovejoy works with the initial figures, and has discussed the tenuous nature of Austen’s estimate. See Lovejoy 2000, pp.25-26.


27) Ennaji contends that slavery was legally abolished in Morocco prior to French ‘protectorate colonialism.’ However it continued in practice to some extent for several decades. Ennaji suggests that ultimately slavery was ended by circumstances causing scarcity rather than law and enforcement. Indeed, the colonial protectorate initiated legal reinforcement of the 1922 Circulaire de L’Administration Francaise, allowing slaves to sue their owners. This is supporting evidence of the endurance of both institutional slavery and ‘individual’ (non-institutional) practices of slavery.
related to the Gnawa has echoed this loose understanding, occasionally suggesting regional parallels and possible African origins.\(^{28}\) As this music has been commodified and prepared for travel through the world market in the last decades, a range of contemporary forms of information and marketing describe the Gnawa’s past with recurrent references to Bambara people, slavery, and a specific historical event in the late sixteenth century.\(^{29}\)

The core account runs as follows: in 1591, Moroccan Monarch Ahmad Al-Mansur Billahi Al-Dhahabi of the Al-Sa’di line of rulers (Reigning from 30.5.986/4.8.1578-Death 12.3.1012/20.8.1603) ordered a military expedition south through the Sahara. They are held to have conquered the Songhai Empire, tumbling the famed West African intellectual and economic center, Timbuktu. This victory is believed to have initiated a significant northward migration of West Africans, including the ‘Abid (a slave army), comprised of peoples from the ‘conquered’ Songhai empire.\(^{30}\) Several long-standing challenges have been made to this widely accepted episode in the history of West Africans in North Africa. The scale and significance of this ‘capture,’ has been called into question, with at least one historian suggesting that the battle was a great economic and strategic loss for the Sa’dian dynasty, initiating its decline.\(^{31}\) Of particular interest is a questioning of ‘Abid origins which has been forwarded, suggesting that the ‘Abid army was drawn from within Morocco rather than from Songhay migrants.\(^{32}\) Alan Meyers has further underscored the doubtfulness of a single sweeping moment of migration by drawing attention to Morocco’s marginal Haratin population.\(^{33}\)

Lila performance lyrics throw light on the 1591 military campaign and the received historical concepts of what is ‘African,’ and ‘Bambara.’ Recurrent references within Lila performances are given to the Bambara, for instance, this small excerpt from the *Uled Bambara* (children of Bambara) section of Lila:

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Kamana barigo shajiyat Bambara
Kamana barigo shajiyat Bambara
Allah manigo shajiyat Bambara

Salamu alaykum Sudani Bambara
Salamu alaykum Sudani Bambara
Kamana barigo Sudani Bambara\(^{34}\)
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\(^{28}\) It is interesting that among several Western scholars uncertainty concerning the history of the Gnawa is coupled with a wide agreement as to their influence on the music and ritual of religious orders throughout the country. See Crapanzano 1973, Rouget 1985, and Vulsteke 1993.

\(^{29}\) See Goodman, 1998.

\(^{30}\) For a statement of this long standard historical view see Babour 1965, and Abun-Nasr 1987, p.179.

\(^{31}\) See Kaba 1977.


\(^{33}\) Meyers 1977.

\(^{34}\) Excerpted from Tim Abdellah Fuson transcription of “Sudani Bambara/Sudan Minitara” from the recording *World of the Gnawa*, ROUN5080 (2001). Fuson notes the following translations: Shashiyat Bambara (the cap of the Bambara), Salamu alaykum (Peace be upon you), and Sudani Bambara (The Sudanese Bambara).
Though many of the words in the Gnawa repertoire are not Arabic, and the meaning of such terms are not always understood by musicians or practitioners of the form (ex. kamana, barigo, manigo), it is clear that 'Bambara' is emphatically repeated, reinforcing associations between Gnawi and Bambara. However, also in Lila performances, in the opening Fraja, references are made to numerous other peoples and identifications as well, for example:

Mallem: ...Aye lalla yumma  
Chorus: Sudani lalla yumma  
Mallem: Fulani lalla yumma Bambari lalla yumma...  
Mallem: ...Uled Sudan Uled Kuyu  
Chorus: A sidi rasul Allah...

Mallem: ...Oh saint mother  
Chorus: Its the Sudanese oh saint mother  
Mallem: Its the Fulani oh saint mother  
Chorus: Its the Bambara oh saint mother...  
Mallem: ...Children of the Sudan children of Kuyu  
Chorus: Oh master messenger of Allah...  

This variety of references, including Islam and multiple African peoples, calls into question the feeble, ideologically-driven notion that the Gnawa are the descendents of captives from the Sa'dian Empire's “campaign” of 1591. If the Gnawa were simply descendents of Bambara ancestors somehow brought into slavery and perhaps military service with the fall of Timbuktu, why would their repertory - overtly concerned with commemoration - contain references to peoples of the enormous region of the Sudan, and the nomadic Fulani people? In fact the need to rethink the received categories concerning slavery in Morocco is made resounding clear when we consider pre-Songhai Moroccan historical references to slaves of the Almoravids and Almohads, dating from the eleventh century, as well as the déjà vu of another contested conquest in West Africa, that of the Almoravids defeating Ghana. The 1591 'conquest' remains a widely perceived central marker in the relations between the Maghrib and West Africa, yet in itself offers little compelling explanatory force concerning the history of 'sub-Saharan Africans' in North Africa.

36) It is fitting that Abun-Nasr (1987) has suggested this period as the consolidation of Moroccan nationalism.
37) The mention of Kuyu, a name for dancers in Lila, is an uncertain term (highly unlikely to refer to the name of a subgroup of central African forest dwellers), and has been mistranslated as "rememberance." See Vuyaitseke 1993, p.9. In fact, the identities and categorization of various Sudanic peoples deserve further scrutiny. See Amselle 1998.
An alternative spatial explanation for the consistent use of ‘Bambara’ seems to be that the term is an artifact of a sort of multifunctional historical category and identity. In addition to referring to real Bambara people, ‘Bambara’ seems to have been a widely and variously used designation for multiple peoples, ranging from an externally imposed category legitimizing bondage through playing-up and projecting pagan, non-Muslim status, to possible self-identification within Maghribi societies. Rather than a true/false dichotomy too often employed in history, ‘Bambara’ might be understood as a spatial continuum of interacting realities, representations and identities.

Adding a fascinating dimension to this suggestion, Meyer's analysis of European sources asserts that eighteenth and nineteenth century writers embellished earlier sources, and provide our first record of the claim that the slaves of the Moroccan ‘Abid army were originally “Bambareens”’ or from “the Coasts of Guinea.” Such an embellishment would coincide with the prevalence of these and other terms and categories of the trans-Atlantic system. In fact clear historical parallels, if not potential connections, can be drawn from work considering the multiple uses of ‘Bambara’ in West Africa and in the New World. Peter Caron has developed a series of possible readings of ‘Bambara’ functioning as an ‘Ethno-label’ across contexts from Senegambian to colonial Louisiana. These continuums include multiple factions, encompassing various raiders, traders, owners and slaves themselves, who re-appropriated the term for distinct purposes within the slave trade and in life beyond. Key to the unraveling and usage of historical evidence referring to such spatial categories, including the similar examples of “Igbo, Mina, and Congo,” is our recognition of widespread diasporic transformations in which what are on some level historical misrepresentations in imaginary space, enter into the spaces of histories as very real and representational identities.

It has been suggested here that ‘Bambara’ associated with and employed within the Gnawa form is misleading if read as a reference to a single heritage, but warrants further ethnographic and historical consideration, as a received category, perhaps in interplay with the Atlantic system. By the same token, the common descriptions of ‘African’ or ‘sub-Saharan African’ origins are needlessly vague, as present evidence suggests concentration on West Africa. The usage of a spatial continuum to examine the recurrence of generalized and essentialized identity in this context, points us very rapidly to the complications and ambiguities concerning the Haratin population across Morocco and concentrated in communities throughout its southern region. It has been noted that,

41) Caron 1997.
43) These shortcomings suggest that further wide-scale linguistic research, perhaps modeled along the lines of Winifred Vass’s The Bantu speaking heritage of the United States (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1979) stands to contribute greatly to this area.
44) See Sundaïata 1978. Also Madia Thompson of Boston University is working on blacks in Southern Moroccan history.
(they)... are associated with slavery and have been characterized as relatively dark skinned and relatively endogamous; they were either landless farmers or specialists in such crafts and trades as metal-smithing, butchering, and mule driving; they had no ethnic affiliations; and were scorned by the free, lighter-skinned peoples among whom they lived.\(^{45}\)

In short, the working concept of a spatial continuum required by Afro-Maghribi history must stretch across space, time, power, culture and color.

In Tangier in April, 1990 the late American novelist, composer and ‘cultural intermediary’ Paul Bowles wrote a brief introduction for what became the first successful (by the dominant industry standards and interests) international release of recorded Gnawa music. He begins-

Sixty years ago, when I first came to Morocco, 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. Fortunately, the music remains the same...\(^{46}\)

Quite contrary to Bowles’ orientalist description, Gnawa music certainly has changed, and the form of historical transformation he suggests is misconceived. In the southern Moroccan city of Marrakech there is a city gate named Bab Agenaou, which was ordered to be built by Almohad Sultan el Mansour in 1185. This name, Bab Agenaou, which can be understood as ‘the door of the Blacks’ or ‘the door of the Slaves,’ signifies Marrakech’s bond not only with the Bambara and Timbuktu but with the trans-Saharan system and its human commodities drawn from various peoples and areas of the Sudan.\(^{47}\) Again, it is clear that some continuum of enslavement, forced migration and assimilation coincided with this network, leaving an elusive and vast background against which to reconstruct slave lives and cultures. A spatial theory applied to Gnawa music allows for a rethinking of the ethno-category ‘Bambara’ which supports the suggestion that rather than 1591, or any other specific large-scale population moments from West Africa to the greater region of Morocco, it is necessary to conceptualize and elaborate the dynamics of regional interaction over a long-term of migration and forced migration.

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\(^{46}\) Bowles 1990.

\(^{47}\) Hale 1998, pp.332–336. Bab is Arabic for door, Agenaou is a Berber derived term for ‘black Africans’, or ‘slaves.’ This ‘door of the slaves’ reveals a fascinating parallel to Goree Island’s subsequent Porte Sans Retour. Hale proposes an ambitious linguistic theory, in which the term African term Ghana travels through a Berber language(s) as agenaou, then into guinea in Spanish, and gueriot in French, thus giving the term griot an African cognate. While this etymology is provocative, similarly to Hale’s postulation of the etymology of the term Gnawa, entailing Berber and Arab and West African interaction, the transition from Ghana to agenaou to gnawa is inconclusive.
Spaces of Africanness: Social Control

It can be hypothesized that this form, and the authority in spiritual healing it brought, have responded to the conditions of Afro-Maghribi life, and that the historical shifts through which Moroccans have commonly turned to a West African syncretic religious form for spiritual assistance have taken place within a spatial tension. At the core of the history of West African descendents in the Maghrib, from slavery to the contemporary commodification of Gnawa music, is the charged spatial conflict defining and maintaining Africanness, an identification transcribed upon the lived realities, imaginations and bodies emerging from slavery. Here the space of Africanness is reproduced in the tension of interests at play between what the dominant society will sanction and consume and what strategic use of limited spaces can be made by musicians through cultural production. On the one end of this continuum the Gnawa reveal the history of West African slaves’ agency and ‘cultural production,’ through creating associations and cultural identities for themselves within the dominate Islamic social order, a prime example of which would be identification with the core Islamic figure of Bilal the Ethiopian. On the extreme opposite of the continuum, there loom the restrictions of the dominant society’s spatial control mechanisms, expressing interests in defining and ordering Africanness within society. These controls can be seen both in the realm of the real, as well as through proclivities of cultural consumption in the realm of representation. Illustrative of this tension, a European traveler to Tangiers in the 1890’s took note of,

...an old Negro in rags from Timbuctoo, with hair plaited with fine leather thongs adorned with shells, is beating cymbals, making hideous grimaces, twisting his body into every shape and form.

More likely than this street musician having journeyed from the real space of Timbuktu to represent its performance arts, the musician had become attuned to the representational space of received notions and local stereotypes of his origins and character, so that he might play upon these for what remuneration they might bring him.

Thomas Hale notes a fascinating instance of strategic use of the limited spaces of Africanness sanctioned for consumption by ‘the Moors,’ in which an eighteenth century European administrator named M. de Brisson, who was shipwrecked, kidnapped and enslaved in West Africa, began imitating griots in order to improve his station. Brisson

48) Lovejoy has suggested that a slave mode of production had developed, but notes the scarcity of sources for analyzing such a transformation. See Lovejoy 2000, p.24. It has long been assumed that North African slavery operated in contrast to plantation centered modes of the New World, thus suggesting an historical paucity of slave and West African-descendent only audiences for forms such as Gnawa music. However slave trade estimates for the end of the nineteenth-century present different possibilities. Further work on slave lives and work cultures would help us to reconstruct the possible spaces of Afro-Maghribi performance and community.

49) Monthbard 1894, p.6.
I faked these clowns that are called Egeums. This kind of farce had pleased my master so much that he used to have me repeat it whenever he found it appropriate... No sooner had he realized my talent for imitation of Egeums than I was surrounded by men, women and children who repeated to me "ganne," "sing on." As soon as I finished, they made me start all over again, and I was obliged to do it as much to amuse them as to obtain for myself (why shouldn't I admit it) a few drops of camel milk, the reward for this bad clowning.\footnote{Brisson 1984, p.36 cited in Hale 1998, p.98.}

Aside from the historical uniqueness of this public caricature and crude imitation of a griot and of Africanness, what is most important here is the social and representational space within which such performances occurred and were given meaning by outsiders. Another European traveler's account notes "public entertainers" for hire,

Of these, none amused us more than the itinerant half-Negro half-Arab musicians from Sus and the desert. These generally go about in pairs, got up in the most fantastic fashion, with rags, skins, bands of cowries, and iron bells about heir legs and ankles. One performs with a drum, the other with curious species of iron double cymbals. There antics are of the most absurd description, and sometimes irresistibly comic. Their appearance and performance, however, had an added interest to me in bringing vividly to my memory entertainments of a similar character in the Sudan, where I had first formed the idea of visiting Morocco.\footnote{Thompson's 1889, p.380. The consideration of Africanness here mentions a 'half-Negro half-Arab' identity which raises the question of assimilation patterns as well as prefiguring the rise of hybrid adaptations of Gnawa music in recent decades.}

What these audiences, presumably including North African and Saharan people, recognized and responded to recalls the limited social, conceptual and tactile spaces in the dominant social order. Practitioners of Gnawa music and Maghribi slave culture were forced into severe restrictions, but nonetheless endured and managed beyond mere functioning, to reproduce spaces and meanings not determined solely by the limitations imposed on their existence.

Beyond the realm of public parody, the intimate sphere of spiritual work also functions within the tensions of Africanness. In her short story "Mina the Rootless," Fatmia Mernissi recounts a childhood relationship with a woman who was taken from the Sudan as young girl and began her life in Morocco as a slave. She writes of an annual event at which she would observe Mina dance:

Sometimes, someone would spot a white drummer in Sidi Belal's supposedly all-
Gnawa black orchestra, and then the honorable ladies who had paid for the
ceremony would complain. ‘How can you perform Gnawa music, and sing genuine
Gnawa songs, when you are white like an aspirin tablet!’ they would shout, furious
at the lousy organization. Sidi Belal would try to explain to them that sometimes,
even if you were white, Gnawa culture could rub off on you and could learn its
music and songs. But the women were adamant: the orchestra had to be all black
and foreign. The blacks in the orchestra had better speak Arabic with an accent
too, otherwise they might be nothing more than local blacks who could play drums.
Thanks to centuries of travel and trade across the desert, there were hundreds of
local blacks living in the Fez medina who could have posed as distinguished foreign
visitors from the prestigious Empire of Ghana. Local blacks simply would not do,
either, because if they could fool the women, they surely could not fool the foreign
djinnis. And that would have defeated the entire ceremony’s goal, which was to
communicate with the djinnis in their mysterious language.52)

This passage highlights the aesthetic and political assumptions of the dominant social order
and demonstrates a way in which the assimilation of Lila is blocked by the categorical and
spatial expectations and interests of the dominant society. In spite of the force of Islamic
ideological principles of universality, as the form gains a wider base of practitioners across
Moroccan society it loses its authenticity and spiritual efficacy from the dominant
perspective.53) Thus we can discern a convergence between the interests in reestablishing
the hierarchical spaces of a rigid social order and the maintenance of these mystifications
and representational spaces rooted in projected expectations of ‘Africanness,’
‘Bambaraness’ etc...

**Spaces of Africanness: Meaning Making**

While it is crucial to locate imagined and marginalized spaces in relation to the
dominant social order, spatial analysis can be used to conceptualize not only how these
historical subjects are understood and acted upon, but also to consider possibilities of the
Gnawa form reflecting West African (and greater Maghribi) slaves and their descendents’
understandings, values and actions. In striving to get closer to the historical perspectives
of the West African descendents in community with this form, within and among the

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52) Mernissi 1994 p.174. The context of this passage appears against the background of nationalists
opposing hadra dancing in the nineteen-forties. J. Spencer Trimingham mentions in his The Sufi Orders of
Islam, “The French had encouraged the orders in Morocco, recognizing their leaders and festivals, as part
of their attempt to maintain a balance between the different forces in the country, especially opposing
them to the orthodox, reformist, and progressive. Muhammad V (reg. 1927–61) supported the Salafis
and prohibited the processions and mawasim of the isawiyya and hamdaushiya, as well as sacrifices
(naha’ir) offered to saints and other prohibited practices.” (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)
p.255. The relationship between Moroccan religious associations and state power throughout the
transitions of colonialism and thereafter deserve further attention.

notions and practices of the dominant society, several themes related to slave and Afro-Maghribi culture can be outlined. These include memories of separation and of the trans-Saharan slave system, references to the conditions of slavery and beyond, and reverence for ancestors.\footnote{Several of these themes are advanced in Fuson 2001.}

In *Ya Sudan Ya Imma*, we find the following oral history,

\begin{quote}
*Ah Sudan ya Sudan  
Ah jabuni jabuni  
Ah jabuna min as-Sudan  
Ah duwzuni ‘ala Bambara  
Ah duwzuni ‘ala Timbuktu  
Wa min Sudan l-Fes l-Bali*
\end{quote}

Oh Sudan, Oh Sudan  
They brought me, they brought me  
They brought me from the Sudan  
They brought me by way of Bambara  
They brought me by way of Timbuktu  
From Sudan to Old Fez\footnote{Fuson 2001, p.2.}

The piece clearly refers to certain historical places, the Moroccan city of Fez, and Timbuktu, respectively at the Northern and Southern ends of the trans-Saharan system. But it also reveals a deeper historical knowledge in the other two less clear references. Here the entire broad space of the Bilad al-Sudan (Arabic for ‘land of the Blacks’) is referred to as an area of historical origin, preserving a geographical and cultural referent beyond Bambara and Timbuktu. Behind this small referent stands an enormous loose end, a ‘cultural riddle’ or latent historical question of diaspora.\footnote{A fascinating and promising recognition of the multiple uses of diasporic ‘cultural riddles’ buried within and surrounding songs can be seen in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977) and in Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), which represent in fiction, journeys from diasporic memories and imaginary space into present and future representational and lived realities. Consideration of this continuum of interaction between spaces is vital for moving scholarship further beyond an over-simplistic acceptance or rejection of survivals. Clearly the history of the ongoing reinvention of identity is an historical topic vital toward a fuller understanding of the dynamics of diasporic cultural change and continuity.} Critically, this journey is remembered to have taken place “by way of” Bambara and Timbuktu. Perhaps another subtle historical artifact is evidenced in this instance of ambiguous reference to Bambara as a place, people and/or a language through which one travels.

In another song *Khali Mbara Meskin*, two common names associated with black slaves Khali Mbara (Uncle Mbara), and Khalti Mbarka (Aunt Mbarka) are referred to in a song
depicting inequality.\textsuperscript{57})

\begin{quote}
Ye Sidi yakul l-hayma  
Lalla takul ash-shayma  
Mbara igeddad l-`adima  
Khali Mbara mahboul,  
Hada wa`do meskin

Sidi sherbu shororo  
Lalla sherbu shororo  
Mbara yakul l-`iqama  
Hada wa`do meskin  
Hada wa`do meskin

Ye Sidi lebsu belgha  
U Lalla lebsu belgha  
Mbarka telbes hengara  
Rja f-Llah Ta`ala  
Hada wa`do meskin
\end{quote}

My Lord is eating meat  
My Lady is eating fat  
Mbara is gnawing on a bone  
Uncle Mbara is crazy  
That's his lot, poor guy

My Lord is drinking tea  
My Lady is drinking tea  
Mbara is eating a mint leaf  
That's his lot, poor guy  
That's his lot, poor guy

My Lord is wearing slippers  
My Lady is wearing slippers  
Mbarka is wearing old sandals  
Hope is God most High  
That's his lot, poor guy\textsuperscript{58})

\textsuperscript{57}) These two widely appear as folk characters, for another example see Ennaji 1999, p.68.  
\textsuperscript{58}) Fuson 2001, p.3.
If we consider these names to be historical pivots, the memories of the past in this song can be seen as an ongoing, even contemporary critique of the conditions of poverty and the overall social order during or after slavery. In this case humor is used, God is appealed to, sympathy with fate is recognized, but what propels the piece is the social critique, the clever, persistent return to images of inequality rather than an acceptance of the answers, or justifications provided in the song itself. Performance of this song opens real, critical space for reflection, pointing to the condition of those represented by Mbara and Mbarka.

An overarching contrast between the Gnawa and other religious associations in Morocco reveals another important space of agency and identity. The ‘Aissawa and Hamdasha are modeled on traditions after a spiritual founder, similar to Sufi orders variously found across the Islamic world. Each of these Moroccan musical practices induces trance and healing; and for the Hamdasha and ‘Aissawa this is structured around references to their patron saints, and respective namesakes and founders, Sidi ‘Ali ben Hamdush and Sidi Mohammed ben ‘Aisa. Tim Abdellah Fuson has succinctly analyzed the contrast concerning the Gnawa,

Although Gnawa practitioners claim Sidna Bilal as a spiritual leader, they do so as an act of spiritual identification, not because he was the historical founder of the Gnawa as a Sufi order. In the opening section of the *lila*, where sung text is most prominent, it is not Bilal that the Gnawa recall to express their identity and their relationship to spiritual authority. Rather, they recall the slave forbears of the Gnawa tradition. Bilal is not mentioned at all in this section. Moroccan slaves were disempowered, displaced and dispossessed, and many of them were unlettered, having no direct recourse to the usual sources of Islamic spiritual authority, namely the lettered traditions of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Although Gnawa practitioners do not dispute these sources of authority, they situate themselves in relation to them not by identifying with learned, spiritually empowered predecessors and their poetic texts, but rather by recalling the lived experience of their own disempowered slave forbears.59

In distinction to other Moroccan sufi orders, the Gnawa form of Lila, is structured to facilitate and reinforce a spatial-practice socializing the familiar African diasporic values of commemoration and reverence for ancestors. Lila can be historically understood as a generative site for multigenerational spatial interaction drawing on various recollections of Maghribi slavery, while simultaneously maintaining a powerful space for the healing of slaves and non-slaves. Spatial analysis might aid our inquiries into deep and subtle continuities of values, as well as the general conceptual development of our investigations into Afro-Maghribi agency and processes of meaning making.

Conclusions and Ways Forward: Space and Diasporic Reflections

An attempt has been made here to illustrate this working theory as a useful tool for an historical analysis of the evidence of a diaspora within a form of music and its related association. The practical uses of this spatial orientation, and the possible ends to which such work might contribute, can be understood within a reworking of the historical use of cultural evidence in studying contexts of West African and African diaspora. It has been suggested that this working tool contributes to our ability to conceptualize and trace multiple dimensions of change in contexts of unequal power relations, to rethink the complex historical interaction of diasporic identities and social controls, and to better understand spaces of Africanness. It seems that a working theory of space and specifically an analytical space of Africanness may be a promising organizational tool in helping to reconstruct the complexities of subaltern historical identities within North Africa, the New World and beyond.

In order to move beyond our present limited historical knowledge of West Africans in Morocco and the Maghrib, a series of practical, conceptual and theoretical problems must be addressed. These will entail examining and sorting through received academic, as well as local historical knowledge constructs, and forming new questions. Spatial thinking raises new questions through integration and synthesis, and shifts questions away from a fixation on the truth or falsehood of cultural identity. Rather than reproducing the Frazier-Herskovits debate in the North African context, this discussion has proposed examining three spaces and their interactions to inquire into the span of Afro-Maghribi history.

If we can consider the Atlantic middle passage and New World slavery a womb through which Africans traveled into forms of reconstituted nationhood in a process which transcribed 'blackness' into social and physical realities, the diasporic continuum into North Africa offers other models, rich with similarities and differences, and perhaps certain connections. In addition to parallels concerning the long-term, widespread absorption of Gnawa music among Arabs and Berbers, the assimilation of these peoples among Gnawa musicians, and the degrees of assimilation across the fabric of larger Moroccan history, this research suggests the following study objects within a methodology of comparative diasporic spatial analysis: the historical dynamics at play in the creation and maintenance of ethno-organizational 'houses', forms of subaltern religious and musical authority (with attention to what spaces are sanctioned by dominant societies), the evidence entailed in the re/constructions of African-inspired national identities, linguistic work intent to reconstruct various spaces at play (such as has been suggested for the history of the ethno-category 'Bambara'), material cultural examinations which could encompass instruments, decorative arts and beyond, as well as the processes of marginalization within nationalizing projects (perhaps via state and/or commercial inclusion), and the commodification of Afro-Maghribi cultural production, particularly following abolitions.

In present day Morocco, the visible agents of the state and economy reveal widespread
asymmetrical power relations involving color— it can be generally observed that darker Moroccans are more consistently found in positions of low social status and income than lighter compatriots. In contrast with many contexts of the New World African diaspora, there has been a notable lack of socio-cultural organization and the articulation of political interests among African descendants in the Maghrib. National and international population statistics have intermittently featured categories for ‘Jews’ and ‘Berbers’ (arguably reflective of their respective national assertions), yet despite its widespread historical recognition in daily life, no ‘African’ or ‘Afro-Maghribi’ category represents an ethnic identity of West African decent or heritage in Morocco or elsewhere in North Africa. In understanding this lack of formal recognition and the inadequate descriptive and conceptual vocabulary within which the various recreations of the Africanness of Gnawa musicians and music have taken place, further comparative attention must be given to power relations and the endurance of cultural constructions which recreate ethnic inequality for African descendants in the Maghrib and beyond.

It is for this purpose that a working theory of the space of Africanness has been elaborated here. Regardless of whether the concepts and lexicon of racism are unwelcome Western imports, this history of ethnic inequality waits to be named and accurately described. We should not be satisfied with the insistence that Maghribi contexts of slavery and ethnic relations differ beyond any fruitful comparison with those of the New World. Rather, comparative scholarship and critical-borrowing stand to extend our understanding of unique features of Maghribi history now cloaked in obscurity.

If this theoretical discussion has proposed a series of daunting tasks, we should recall the brick-by-brick legacy across which our curiosities about the African diaspora now travel. The recent publication of a teaching source book titled *the African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, edited by John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell is an effort and invitation to expand our path. Certainly the explosive commodification of Gnawa music over the last decade has extended recognition of a black cultural presence in North African, perhaps this superficial familiarity can be enriched by borrowings and critical-borrowings from the twentieth-century’s prolific and forceful historical recovery across the New World diaspora and within Africa itself. Surely this intellectual ancestry is an indication that lengthy journeys into what are ironically ‘new’ historical areas begin with initial steps, and much importance can be placed in the matter and manner of beginning.

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