

AZAWAN: PRECOLONIAL MUSICAL CULTURE AND SAHARAWI NATIONALISM IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS OF THE HAMADA DESERT IN ALGERIA

by

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Since 1975, more than half of the Saharawi population have been living in refugee camps in Algeria (Fynn 2011: 40). This article analyses Saharawi music as performed for the refugee community in the camps. I argue that the construction and evolution of Saharawi music in the camps is divided into two main areas: nationalism in relation to the decolonisation of Western Sahara, and maintenance of cultural values in Saharawi music found in the historical retention of the *Haul* modal system originating in precolonial Saharawi culture. Local audiences use the term *Azawan* to define the combination of nationalist sentiments and retention of their precolonial musical culture in Saharawi music.

This article is based on my research on Saharawi music in the refugee camps in Algeria during November–December 2004. The data collected during this research includes interviews with poets and musicians and musical transcriptions based on my study of the scales and rhythms used in Saharawi music. This research became the foundation for the production of the documentary DVD on Saharawi music entitled *Los mares del desierto* (Gimenez 2006). I have also analysed Saharawi music from the camps recorded by the Spanish record label *Nubenegra* from 1998 to 2012 (see discography) and distributed in the global market (these albums are also available in the camps). Another factor that extended my musical analysis for this research was my first-hand involvement in Mariem Hassan's music as the composer and arranger of the compositions for her album, *El Aaiun egdat* (December 2011), as a performer in the recording studio (January 2012), and through performing with her international live performances in Finland, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, Senegal, Germany, Italy, France and Belgium during 2012–2013.¹ The experiences with Saharawi music described above have provided me with a solid basis from which to carry out the present analysis, not only because of the different contexts in which the music was performed (in the camps and internationally outside the camps), but also because of the compositional and instrumental techniques of the music that I learned.

Refugee studies in ethnomusicology in relation to Saharawi music

Publications in refugee studies (Hakovirta 1993; Zolderg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1986) serve to contextualise the situation with Saharawi music in Algeria. In general terms,

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Mariem Hassan (1958–2015), the musicians and poets that continue performing Saharawi music either in the camps or internationally and the *Nubenegra* recording company.

refugee studies implies the examination of a community of immigrants residing in another temporal or permanent location (Zoldeger, Suhrke and Aguayo 1986: 153). The migration of a community to another country can be optional for the search for other, better, living conditions; or forced for socio-political reasons. The forced migration of Saharawi people to Algeria occurred, in this case, due to the invasion of Western Sahara by Morocco in 1975, which was followed by the migration of Saharawi people to the refugee camps in Algeria.² In this specific case, the forced migration of Saharawi people to Algeria implies a temporary residence in the camps until the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara by the United Nations International Justice Tribunal. Therefore, in theory, the refugee formations are temporary rather than permanent residence. In practice however, the case of the Saharawis, who have been in the Hamada desert in Algeria for forty years, illustrates how non-transitory refugee status can often be.

Approximately 180,000 Saharawi people have taken shelter in the refugee camps in Algeria since 1975. Spread over 180 kilometres in this arid terrain, the Saharawi refugee camps are divided into four different *wilayas* (camp provinces): *Auserd*, *Smara*, *Dajla*, and *Aaiun*. Each *wilaya* has between two and four *dairas* (towns). In addition, there are two diplomatic *wilayas*: *February 27* (where the president resides and the main hospital is based) and *Rabuni* (the diplomatic *wilaya*, 20 kilometres from Tindouf, Algeria). My research on Saharawi music in the camps took place in all the *wilayas* (except *Dajla*) and included *February 27* and *Rabuni*. In this refugee context, Saharawi music represents the struggle for the decolonisation of Western Sahara, but it is also used to enhance political activities in the refugee camps. This article therefore discusses both the social and musical context of the Saharawi musicians of the Algerian refugee camps.

Ethnomusicological studies of refugee and immigrant communities, such as

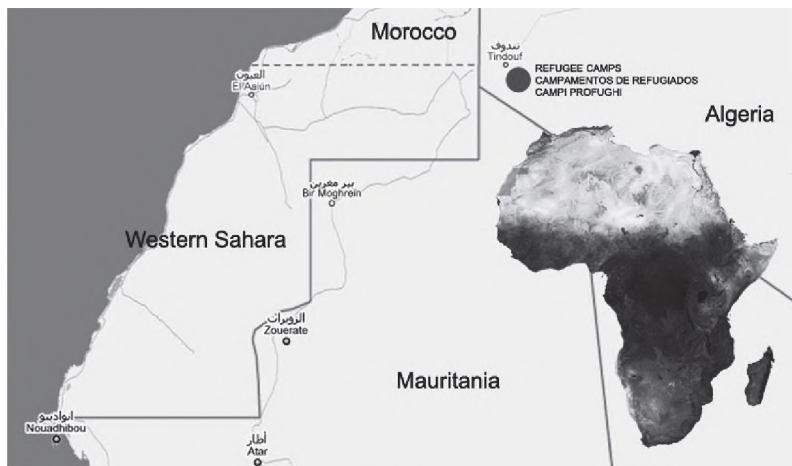


Figure 1. Western Sahara and the refugee camps in Algeria. <http://www.saharamarathon.org/aboutus>. [accessed 5 May 2015]

² For more information about the colonisation of Western Sahara by Morocco consult the United Nations Security Council resolution 379 of November 2, 1975.

that of John Baily (2005) around musical identity as a form of resistance and/or new musical influences in a new location and the incorporation of electric instruments have informed this study of developments in Saharawi music in the camps. In particular, Baily pays attention to how music coming from a refugee camp or any other form of transnational formation outside its country of origin provides an interaction between tradition (or the way in which music is performed at home) and innovation provoked by the encounter with a new musical culture in the new location. Baily draws a comparative study between two Afghani communities, one in refugee camps in Peshawar, Pakistan and the other in Fremont, California in the United States. In the case of the Peshawar refugee community, musicians only use acoustic instruments while Qader Esphary, an Afghani musician in the Fremont, California community, performs for his transnational community with programmed rhythms and keyboards. Baily's study informs my discussion of the use of both acoustic and electronic instruments during live performances in the Saharawi camps.

In the case of the Saharawis, Algerian people do not inhabit the refugee camps of the Hamada desert and Algerian music does not influence the Saharawi musical tradition through direct interaction with the locals. However, in the Algerian camps, electronic instruments such as electric guitars or keyboards have been introduced in Saharawi music. The use of electronic instruments in Saharawi music is linked to the current innovation, possible through use of music technology provided by the Algerian government. Saharawi musical tradition and innovation appear as a dialogue between acoustic Saharawi music and the incorporation of electronic instruments which occurred in the context of the refugee camps of Algeria.

This article examines how Saharawi music is constructed in the refugee camps for its Saharawi audience. My research reveals how a new distinct musical culture has developed through the emergence of nationalism (sentiment in favour of the resolution of self-independence in Western Sahara) interacting with cultural values based on traditional Hassanya musical culture. Hassanya is the language and musical culture in Mauritania and Western Sahara. Hassanya is also spoken in south-western Algeria, southern Morocco, and north-eastern Mali in a precolonial territory known as *Trabel Bidan*. As mentioned above, the combination of nationalist values and traditional musical culture in Saharawi music is popularly defined by Saharawi people as *Azawan*.

In its retention of precolonial musical culture in Saharawi music, *Azawan* embraces knowledge of the precolonial *Haul* modal system, its rhythms, and the Saharawi national consciousness. In addition, the notion of *Azawan* provides a vehicle for cultural interaction between Saharawi musicians, the Polisario Front and local audiences.³ Saharawi people in the camps tend to apply the concept of *Azawan* to the

³ The Polisario Front (PF) was formed in 1973 by the Saharawi activist, Bassiri. The PF is the conglomerate of different Saharawi national movements – such as *Movimiento de liberación del Sahara* (MLS) founded in 1969 (also by Bassiri) – in the fight for the decolonisation of Western Sahara (Sayeh 1998: 15). Thus, the PF is not a political party but a group of political associations that share the same goal of eradicating colonialism.

local guitarists and singers who are able to demonstrate both musical skills in the *Haul* modal system and who represent the national values of the Saharawi to their audience.

The relationship between Saharawi music and nationalism is shown by the fact that most Saharawi lyrics written in the camps are protest songs against the Moroccan colonisation of Western Sahara, nationalist songs supporting the Polisario Front (PF), or songs dedicated to the martyrs who died during the war against Morocco (1975–1991). Under these circumstances, Saharawi music in the camps is sustained and transformed by the remembrance of heroic events related to the national consciousness. The sustainable relationship or social structure of communication between the PF and Saharawi musicians is based on the creation of nationalist songs that address the national consciousness of local people. In the study of nationalist lyrics in Saharawi music it is useful to examine – from the reactions of audience members to performance of Saharawi songs – attitudes towards the conflict of Western Sahara. As O’Connell states, “music as practise serves to liberate interpretation according to the multiple views of audience reception” (2010: 2).

Cultural values of *Azawan*

Cultural values found in *Azawan* are presented through an introduction of its musical elements based on the *Haul* modal system, its traditional rhythms and its instruments that originated in sub-Saharan Africa. Later, I examine the interaction between the musicians and the poets during the process of composing a song. Equally important is an explanation of how these musical and cultural values were introduced into the refugee camps by resident poets and musicians.

Haul is a musical style of Hassanya speakers, the language spoken in the Western Sahara and in the Saharawi refugee camps. The *Haul* musical system is based on eight musical modes dating back to at least the sixteenth century (S. De la Courbe, 1913). The eight melodic modes are: *entamas*, *seinicar*, *fagu*, *sgaller*, *leboer*, *lyen*, *lebeit* and *chawada* (or *leharar*). Saharawi music in the camps is formed through the use of these modes which are shown in Figure 2(a–h). The *Haul* modes are taught through melodic motifs rather than by the notion of scale with a number of notes.⁴

Each mode is characterised by melodic motifs. The most popular melodic motifs in the *Haul* modal system are in *fagu* from which there are three distinctive melodies called *lebleida*, *charha* and *serbet* (Figures 3, 4, and 5). In addition to *fagu*, another popular melodic motif is in *chawada* (Figure 6).⁵

⁴ The *Haul* modes shown are a reference to the main notes used of each mode. In addition, I have included the quarter tones with an arrow at the sharp notes in order to indicate a quarter tone up or down depending on the direction of the arrow. The quarter tones are indicated with an arrow pointing above or below the sharp sign.

⁵ The popularity of *fagu* and *chawada* is due to its connection with the dance during traditional events such as weddings. For more information about the *Haul* modal system and its different melodic motifs see Gimenez (2012).

Figure 2a: *Entamas*Figure 2b: *Seimicar*Figure 2c: *Fagu*Figure 2d: *Sgaller*Figure 2e: *Leboer*Figure 2f: *Lyen*Figure 2g: *Lebteit*Figure 2h: *Chawada or Leharar*

Figure 2. The eight modes of Haul music. Transcriptions by author.



Figure 3. Traditional melody in *Lebleida* in binary 4/4 rhythm (2-11-2004) by Sweta, Salma and Ahmed Zein (transcription by author).



Figure 4. Traditional melody in *Charha* (2-11-2004) by Sweta, Salma and Ahmed Zein (transcription by author).



Figure 5. Traditional melody in *Serbet* (2-11-2004) by Sweta, Salma and Ahmed Zein (transcription by author).



Figure 6. Traditional melody in *Chawada* (2-11-2004) by Sweta, Salma and Ahmed Zein (transcription by author).

Rhythms in *Haul* music are based on each particular musical mode, although modern Saharawi music is flexible and can adapt any rhythm to whichever mode without restriction. Rhythms can be in 6/8 or 4/4, except for religious songs (*medej*) which are in 12/8. Percussion is provided by clapping and playing of a frame drum called *tbal*.⁶ Clapping is generally off beat, on the second beat in 6/8 or 4/4. According to Saharawis, the rich array of rhythms in *Haul* is mostly based on the influences of Arabic and sub-Saharan music. Examples of modal rhythms include:



Figure 7a: *Medha* rhythm

⁶ The *tbal* is a percussion instrument from the *Trab el Bidan* made out of camel's skin and acacia tree. *Tbal* is tied with camel's tendons. It is a rounded instrument of no more than 50 cm in length. It is played by women who sit on the ground. The hand technique on *tbal* consists of two sounds: bass and treble. Depending on the mode, the rhythm can be binary or ternary.

Figure 7b: *Lebleida* rhythmFigure 7c: *Charha* rhythmFigure 7d: *Serbet* rhythmFigure 7e: *Chawada* rhythmFigure 7. Rhythms for *Haul* modes (transcriptions by author).

The main instruments played in *Haul* are: *tidinit*, *tbal*, *ardin* and electric guitar. *Haul* music inherited instruments from the Mande Empire in sub-Saharan Africa which was founded by Sunjata Keita in 1230 A.D. (Charry 1996: 19), three centuries earlier than any historical evidence of Hassanya culture. According to the some Saharawi musicians such as Ahmed Zein (interview 2 November 2004), the *tbal* (Figure 8) is related to the *djembe* and the *ardin*⁷ is related to the *kora*. However, the *tidinit* (Figure 9) is rooted in ancient Egyptian lutes. Charry attests, “there is a remarkable resemblance between West Africa and ancient Egyptian lutes, but the historical significance of this resemblance is still unclear” (*ibid*). Although the origin of the lutes is uncertain, they are popular amongst the Hassanya (*tidinit*) and in North Africa (*gumbri*), as well as in most West African countries influenced by the Mande Empire (*ngoni*) in addition to Egypt.

The electric guitar represents the transition from tradition to musical innovation in Saharawi music and the electric guitar is played in the same way as the *tidinit*.⁸ The guitar has been the bridge between old *Haul* and modern *Haul* music. It is tuned D-A-

⁷ The *ardin* is a harp made out of a calabash for resonance, a goat-skin and twelve nylon strings. It is a drone instrument used for accompaniment and only played by women. The strings are tuned in a constant repetition of fifths: D-A-D-A-G-D-A-D-A-G-D-A. Sometimes they tune some of the strings to a note related to the mode they are playing. The *ardin* is not often played in the camps but is popularly performed in Mauritanian *Haul* music.

⁸ This transition from traditional instruments to electric guitar has occurred in many parts of Africa. For instance, Thomas Mapfumo from Zimbabwe is influenced by the *mbira dzavadzimu* in order to create the *chimurenga* guitar style. In Madagascar, D’Gary is a virtuoso guitarist who has found his musical inspiration in traditional instruments such as the *marobany* or the *valiha*.



Figure 8. Tarba Bibo playing the *tbal*.
(Photo courtesy of Nubenegra)



Figure 9. Mahfud Azman playing the *tidinit*.
(Photo courtesy of Nubenegra)

D-D-A-D (*entamas* and *seinicar*). Although, depending on the mode, the third string can generally be tuned to F (*leboer*, *lyen*, *lebteit* and *chawada*) or E (*fagu*, *sgaller*). The Saharawi electric guitar has two extra frets between the second and fourth fret in order to play quarter-tones. The guitar technique is based on the *tidinit* traditional way of playing. The main elements in playing Saharawi guitar are based on *tidinit* techniques in the right hand. Nevertheless, the guitar brings in new elements with chords. The terms for guitar and *tidinit* techniques in *Haul* music are:

- *Barm*: a rapid tremolo played with thumb and index.
- *Barmasaba*: same tremolo as *barm* but with only the index finger.
- *Lefguea*: same tremolo as *barm* but with index and middle finger.
- *Elmenfaga*: a way to strum backwards with the index finger, concluding with the thumb.
- *Jeri*: a ternary rhythm played on the guitar with thumb and index fingers.
- *Medra*: the basic guitar accompaniment when a poem is recited.

In modern Saharawi music the *tidinit* inspires the way of playing the electric guitar. In addition, the Saharawi electric guitar incorporates two extra frets (frets two and three) in order to reach quarter tones because such melodic intervals are essential in the *Haul* modal system. (Gimenez Amoros 2012: 76). The historical transition from the *tidinit* to the electric guitar demonstrates the non-static evolution of traditional music. Charry defines this musical process as the “imitation-assimilation and transformation” of a musical style through the inclusion of electric instruments or electronic music (2012: 300). However, the contemporary innovation of Saharawi music not only occurs in the instrumentation or the music, but also in the traditional forms of poetry used to compose a song.

The process of making songs in *Haul* music is firstly the responsibility of the poet. Secondly, a song in *Haul* depends upon the vocalist singing what the poet has written. Finally, the instrumentalists are instructed on the mode of the song by the singer. This form of making songs still prevails in contemporary Saharawi music. Thus, the traditional process of composing a song in Saharawi music using the *Haul* modal system is as follows: the poet writes the poem in a *Haul* mode, the singer sings the lyrics, and the instrumentalists play in the mode and rhythm of the poem.

Haul is a musical system which consists of innumerable ways of writing poetry in each of the eight modes. Each mode or *bohr* (literally meaning 'sea') has its own significance in poetic and musical terms. For instance, the mode *fagu* expresses epic stories mostly related to war between different communities. The mode *lyen* is related to love songs; and the mode *sgaller* is related to nostalgic feelings. One of the first academic references to the *Haul* modes is by the musicologist Nikiprowetzky (1962: 54), who says: "Moorish scholars are content to define four different modes: 1. *Kar* (similar to *seinicar*) for joy and for religious purposes; 2. *Fagu* provoking anger; 3. *Signim* (similar to *lyen*) exciting sensibility; 4. *Beigi* (similar to *sgaller*) bringing sadness."⁹

Nikiprowetzky refers to the poetic forms and themes involved in the writing of the *Haul* modes. Nikiprowetzky, one of the first musicologists studying *Haul* music in Mauritania, analysed the *Haul* modes and its instruments in 1962. Nevertheless, there was no study of how to construct a song through the interactions between poets and musicians. In contrast, this article demonstrates that the social interaction between poets and musicians is central to the traditional process of composing a song in Saharawi music.

The *Haul* modal system and its poetic forms was introduced into the camps by a local musician and a poet (Hassan interview 1 December 2011). For instance, the singer Mariem Hassan learnt the poetic forms of the *Haul* modal system through the Saharawi poet Beibuh. However, mentorship for the musical introduction of the *Haul* modal system in the camps is attributed to the guitarist, Kaziza.¹⁰ Both artists were responsible for the creation of the first Saharawi band in the camps. The band was named "*El Hafed*" and later called "*El Ualy*" in 1976. Equally noteworthy, Beibuh and Kaziza contributed to maintaining the social structure of communication between the poets and the musicians in the camps that was consistent to the way in which music used to be created (Hassan interview 1 December 2011). By creating musical and poetic interaction in Saharawi music based on the *Haul* modal system, Beibuh and Kaziza created generational continuity enabling this historically rich musical process to be inherited by younger generations of musicians in the camps, such as Hadhoum, Teita, Mariem Hassan, Mahfoud, Nayim Alal, Baba Salama or Boika Hassan.

The type of artistic relationship between the poet and musician basic to song

⁹ Nikiprowetzky's use of colonial language like "Moorish" is a direct quote, and is used to refer to local Mauritanian scholars. It is quoted here, because it is the first reference to *Haul* modal system.

¹⁰ Hassan also mentioned other poets and musicians that were important in pioneering Saharawi music in the camps such as Badi Mohamed Salem, Bachir Ali and Lamin Alal (see Gimenez 2012).

creation in *Haul* is in use by Mariem Hassan. According to Mariem, the “*Haul* song formula” (*ibid.*) prevails in her compositional process and the revitalization of the *Haul* modal system through Saharawi music means that the poetic forms as applied to the musical modes also remain intact.

Poetry in the *Haul* modal system is based on two types of rhymes: *gaaf* “a-b-a-b” or *talaa* “a-a-a-b”. In Mariem Hassan’s album, *El Aaiun egdat* (2012), one finds *gaafs* as a form of rhyming in the song *Gdeim Izik* in *seinicar* mode. This example is shown in Arabic, which reads from right to left and is also translated into English.¹¹

Gdeim Izik (Mariem Hassan-Beibuh)

1. كان لعدو حاصر لنا لم وكل عام ازيدو تعنيم
غير بعدا فهاذوليام و ضحو مخيم لكنيم
2. مثلت القواة التبات خا يفى من لهب الجحيم
لا يجيها من لخويات وكطى وامات امرجيم
3. لا مضوا السيعات السات ماتخلى عن الا قا ليم
جا يا تو بعدا كلاشات وجيش راقى يرحل واكيم
4. عاش مخيم الاستقلال وكل يوم احكم تنظيم
ذاك هو خوض النضال اوداك هو حال التصميم

English translation

1. When the Saharawi people of El Aaiun put up hundreds of tents in Gdeim Izik,
The invader blocked all communication channels
2. And encircled the peacefully protesting men, women and children.
And after having razed the camp to ground,
3. The Moroccan offender cannot sleep thinking that
If he continues to occupy Western Sahara
4. One day a brave army of young men will restore the freedom
And the independence of the Saharawi
(translated from *El Aaiun egdat*, Nubenegra, 2012)

Mauritania and the introduction of the *Haul* modal system in Saharawi music

During the 1970s, Beibuh and Kaziza introduced the *Haul* modal system into Saharawi music in the camps. In the 1960s and 1970s, in Western Sahara, Beibuh and Kaziza frequently heard Mauritanian music—where the *Haul* modal system originated—on the radio and were influenced by artists such as Dime Mint Abba and other families of musicians or *igagwen* (*griots*). As a result, when Beibuh and Kaziza were forced into exile in the camps, they introduced the *Haul* modal system to other Saharawi artists as a result of their musical influences from Mauritanian music (Kaziza interview 23 December 2013).

In ancient Hassanya society, it was believed that music was inherited through the genes; thus, *igagwen* families possessed the art of music (Fadel interview 2 November 2004). Thus, there was a belief that music passed from one generation to the next in every

¹¹ *Gdeim Izik* was the name of the Saharawi camps outside *El Aaiun* (Western Sahara) during the protests against the Moroccan government in November 2011.

igagwen family. A similar concept to *igagwen* is found the West African term *jeli* (or *griot*). Duran (1999: 542) notes that *jelis* “entertained the nobility with their epic songs and stories about the major events in Mande history” and refers to the *jelis* as the keepers of history and epic stories occurring in some local kingdoms (*Mansa*) in the Mande Empire in north-western Africa (*ibid*). However, the concept of *jeli* as a reporter and oral historian is more related to the Mande Empire in Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Gambia than to the *igagwen* in *Trab el Bidan*. In the *Hassani* society, the *igagwen* were only musicians. The responsibility of preserving the oral history through music was conceded to the *Chorfa* or *Zuaia* who were the poets dedicated to the study of the Koran and Hassanya history.

Social hierarchies were formed during the gradual formation of Hassanya culture. According to Cleaveland (1998: 367), the social structure of the Hassanya was based on a stratified society divided into four levels:

- Level 1: *Chorfa* (direct descendants of the Prophet) at the top of the pyramid. They were the Arab Yemenites’ communities of Banu Hassan and Banu Hilal.
- Level 2: *Arab* (warriors) and *Zuaia* who were people dedicated to religious studies and meditation.
- Level 3: Pastoralists, farmers, fishermen and Berber descendants. They had to pay taxes to the higher classes.
- Level 4: Black slaves, *igagwen* (musician castes), blacksmiths and Berber-Jewish or Christian descendants.

The social engagement between musicians and poets became a form of cultural and musical interaction for the *Hassani* society. Therefore, the common role of the *igagwen* and *jelis* was to entertain and to preserve a historical memory in its social context; but the *igagwen* needed a poet to write the lyrics of the songs.

In Western Sahara, there were not many historical records of *igagwen* families, but there were *lailas*. The *lailas* were groups of women playing *tbal* and singing traditional songs. During my research, the Saharawi singer Mariem Hassan told me that she and her mother were *lailas* and that they sang at weddings and other cultural festivities (Hassan interview 1 August 2012). Mercer reports,

There are two classes of professional singers: the *igagwen* and the *lailas*... [T]hey accompany themselves on lutes and *tbals*. Their wives may sing and play too. The *igagwen* are hired by the richer people, being well-paid so that they will sing their patrons’ praises in other parts of the desert. The second group is the *lailas*, travelling troupes of female singers, also hired by important families (1976: 158).

As observed above, there is little reference to the *igagwen* in Western Sahara; either in academic literature or in my interviews with the Saharawi historians and musicians. According to the Saharawi historian, Ahmed Fadel, Mauritania was where the *igagwen* lived as part of a stratified Hassanya social hierarchy. Fadel affirmed that the musical castes known as *igagwen* settled in Nouakchott, Nouhaidou, and other areas in the desert mostly found in Mauritania (Fadel interview 2 November 2004).¹² The only

¹² Ahmed Fadel was my research assistant during my fieldwork in the Saharawi refugee camps of the Hamada desert in 2004.

academic reference to the *igagwen* in Western Sahara was in Baroja's "Saharan Studies" (1990). The author described a poetry recital by *igagwen* in the 1950s in Smara, a town in Western Sahara.

La poesía épica ocupa un lugar de honoren los recitales de los igagwen. El 13 de Enero de 1953 asistimos a un recital en Smara hecho por Mohammed Uld Adelqaber y Habeyabi Uld Alamin (1990: 413).

Translation: Epic poetry takes honorific place in the *igagwen* recitals. On January 13 of 1953, we participated in a recital in Smara performed by Mohammed Uld Adelqaber and Habeyabi Uld Alamin.

Baroja says that the majority of the Saharawi people were nomads dedicated to pastoral activities and religious life (1990: 130). He also alludes to the fact that the majority of Saharawi people were from the Rgeibat patrilineage; there are around 200,000 people related to this family lineage (placed in level 1/2 in the stratified Hassanya society). The Rgeibat, as most Hassanya speakers, "are a mixture of Berber and Yemenite Arab" (*ibid*). This community dedicated their lives to the search for rain and fertile land to provide pasture for their animals. For that reason, most of the Saharawis—the Rgeibat—called themselves "the children of the clouds". Different Rgeibat communities coexisting in Western Sahara practiced this type of nomadic life. This form of mobile society was called *djema* (*djema* refers to a Saharawi community); and became regionally centralised through the *Eid arbain* (an assembly of forty *djema*s). Given that until the 1960s there was no Saharawi national consciousness, Western Sahara was formed by *Hassani* nomad *djema*s or communities.

As mentioned above, the social and musical use of the *Haul* modal system in Saharawi music was introduced by a musician (Kaziza) and a poet (Beibuh). According to Kaziza, although the Saharawi artists were aware of Mauritanian musical culture during colonial times in Western Sahara, by the 1970s, the *Haul* modal system was used to express their national ideology based on the break of the stratified Hassanya society and the aim to decolonise Western Sahara (Kaziza interview 23 December 2013). This is what is meant when Franz Fanon speaks of a fighting culture, in which storytellers, native poets, native musicians are transformed through a liberation struggle; culture becomes the platform for the reinvigoration of old traditions that come to be given new meaning through which people forge a national consciousness. The nation, according to Fanon (1963: 244) "is not only the condition of culture, its fruitfulness, its continuous renewal, and its deepening. It is also a necessity. It is the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation". This creation informs the political and *vice-versa*; the innovation within the musical culture is mirrored by the innovation within the political sphere of the *djema*s that transform race and gender relations in a newly united Saharawi identity. As a result, the social interaction between Saharawi musicians, the PF and the local audience is reflected in the stage line-up and musical representation of Saharawi musical values. This point is consistent with Baily's views on how musical innovation in a refugee or transnational context is conditioned by the interaction between the musicians and their community (2005: 217).

The nationalist side of *Azawan*

The urbanisation of Western Sahara and the rise of Saharawi nationalism are reflected in the music and the lyrics written by the local poets in the refugee camps. In this section, I examine the local poets' lyrics as a means to connect the PF, Saharawi musicians and the local audience. In Saharawi songs composed in the camps, the local structure of communication refers to the decision to compose music and lyrics for the representation of the *Republica Arabe Saharaui Democratica* (RASD).¹³ I further examine the social communication between musicians, poets and the poets' lyrics. Such lyrics circulate along the local habitus expressing the national ideology in their texts.

The construction of Saharawi nationalism started in the 1960s. During that time, the sedentarisation and urbanisation of the Saharawi people was rapid; specifically in the main towns of Western Sahara such as Smara, El Aaiun, Dajla and Auserd. The Saharawis living in these urban spaces started to work in the phosphate mines of Western Sahara where the mineral resources were being exploited by the colonial state. Martin describes this transition from nomad to sedentary urban life for the Saharawis:

The turning point in the history of Western Sahara took place in the 1960s, with the discovery of the rich phosphates mines in Bu Craá, the development of the fishing industry and also the militarisation of the territory, especially after the Moroccan independence in 1956..... [T]his changing context coincided with a series of droughts which forced many Saharawi nomads to settle in the emerging cities and villages: Villa Cisneros/Dajla, El Aaiun, Smara, Bojador, La Guera, Auserd, and others (2009: 251).

This "changing context" provoked the creation of the first national Saharawi movement called *Movimiento de liberación del Sahara* (MLS)[trans. Liberation Movement for the Sahara] in 1969. MLS was officially established by El Bassiri, the same founder of the Polisario Front (PF) (Lopez 1999: 22). The MLS was inspired by the national movements of other decolonised countries in the Arab world and in Africa. In 1974, El Bassiri was assassinated by the Spanish legion in Western Sahara—one year after he founded the PF—and the PF came to be represented by El-Uali Mustafa Sayyid. The bibliographical references from El Ualy prove that he was part of the Moroccan communist party (MCP) before his affiliation with the PF (*ibid*). The Moroccan government expelled El Ualy from Morocco in 1970 and he went into exile, first to Mauritania—with the Mauritanian Communist Party—and then to Algeria (to the refugee camps) in 1975. In 1976, El Ualy died at the age of 27 during the decolonising war in Mauritania.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, young Saharawis such as El Ualy were instructed in the Socialist-Arab political ideology and they were influenced by revolutionaries such

¹³ During the Saharaui exile in the Hamada desert of Algeria, the PF officially founded the *Republica Arabe Saharaui Democratica* (RASD) on February 27, 1976. The RASD created a national constitution with social, political and legislative courts placed in the camps. This constitution includes equal rights regarding gender and race in Saharawi society (I. Sayeh 1998: 14). Since the foundation of the RASD in Bir Lehlu in 1976 the Saharawi Republic has been recognised by more than 80 countries around the world. Most of the countries that recognised the RASD are from sub-Sahara Africa and South America, not from Europe or North America (M. Lopez 2006: 8).

as Che Guevara in Cuba, Lumumba in Congo and Nasser in Egypt. During the 1960s, the political awakening in Africa and the struggle for independence and liberation from colonialism had a galvanising influence on the people of Western Sahara. As Martin states:

Guevara, Nasser, Fanon and the experiences of the wars in Algeria and Vietnam fostered the initial contours of the Saharawi revolution triggered by Mohamed Bassiri's movement in 1968. Six years later, and three after the assassination of Bassiri by the Spanish Legion, the Frente Por la Liberacion de Saquia el Harma y Rio de Oro (Frente POLISARIO [Front for the Liberation of Saquia el Harma and Rio de Oro]) emerged to launch an anti-colonial liberation war against the decadent Spanish Francoist administration (2009: 251).

The PF has historically claimed its only aim is for the decolonisation of Western Sahara and there is no other political principle apart from the application of the RASD constitution (Zunes 1987:33) and that the Saharawis, as a whole community, are unified by the same principle of decolonisation. Saharawi songs composed in the camps attempt to engage with the refugee community as a form of expressing their anticolonial sentiments and nationalism.

The social and political identification of the Saharawis in the camps is represented by the RASD as a nation. The songs composed by the poets and musicians in the camps address the musical and cultural capital of the RASD. In this section, I discuss two different songs composed by local artists that apply to the identification of the RASD. *Uargueziz* is a song in *leboermode* and *medha* rhythm that expresses local bravery in their determination to decolonise Western Sahara; *RASD* is a song in *entamas* mode and *medha* rhythm directed at the PF and about the principles of the Saharawi constitution. Since 1976, these songs are performed by the group *El Ualy* (named for their hero), the first musical band representing the Saharawi people in exile.

Uargueziz (*El Ualy*) [DVD track 2]

[translation from *El Ualy: Polisario Vencerá* (Nubenegra, 1998)]

The fighting power of the people's army,
The high morale,
The justice
And the level of consciousness of the masses,
Are the secrets of our victory.

RASD (*El Ualy*) [DVD track 3]

[translation from *El Ualy: Polisario Vencerá* (Nubenegra, 1998)]

The proclamation of our new state is a great feat for humanity.
It embodies the choice of a people and the respect for its free will.
Blood and tears of the people, as well its ancestral ground
Its costume and its yearning and the hope that the republic affords them shelter.

The song *Uargueziz* reflects the message of many other Saharawi nationalist songs of bravery and fighting. *Uargueziz* is meant to unite and to reinforce the nationalist struggle of the Saharawis. Through songs such as *Uargueziz*, performers and local audiences are drawn to the same cultural values and national ideology. Thus, political homogeneity between the PF, music makers, and their audience in the camps is the main pillar for Saharawi musical expression. Equally noteworthy, is the role of musicians and

poets to serve the RASD in this refugee context. For that reason, *Uargueziz* reaches out to the three different social structures of communicational reciprocity between the PF, Saharawi musicians and the local audience. Saharawi music acts as a social, nationalist, and cultural value and never serves as mere entertainment. In reference to the role of performers as individuals whose function is to express people's cultural values, the ethnomusicologist Oloo's comment is particularly apt for the situation with Saharawi performers:

Performers do not only entertain, they are also able to raise social awareness in their audience by arousing in them the imaginative and emotional experiences toward social re-engagement through collective identity (2007: 178).

In the construction of the Saharawi national ideology, other songs celebrate the historical dates of the Saharawi revolution. The song "RASD" commemorates the proclamation of the Saharawi revolution on February 27, 1976. As Moore says, "government promotes songs with overtly political lyrics and creates musical festivals commemorating events of the socialist revolution" (2003: 3) such as *February 27* (the day that the RASD was officially founded). The Saharawi government in exile also uses music as a "means of inspiring nationalist sentiment, unity, and greater dedication to political goals" (*ibid*). Musical performance to enhance the political cause is essential in maintaining the strength of their refugee status. As a tool of resistance and identity, Saharawi music is based on commemorating significant days throughout the year, and the song *RASD* is dedicated to the independence and recognition of the new Saharawi state.

In general, lyrics written by the poets are a reflection of the political values in Saharawi music and, in addition, these lyrics offer a possible resolution for the conflict of Western Sahara. As O'Connell notes, "music also provides an excellent medium for conflict resolution, since conflict itself embodies the seeds of its own resolution" (2010: 5). In accordance with O'Connell's statement, Saharawi poets living in the camps have written about Saharawi ideology based on the situation of being permanent refugees; and politically, to describe the social lives of Saharawi people in the camps. This further shows that the music originating in the Saharawi refugee camps moves between the local audience, the PF and the local musicians.

Nevertheless, in the last five years, Saharawi poets have written about other events occurring in Western Sahara. Although related to the conception of RASD, the types of lyrics associated with events occurring outside the refugee environment create a new form of Saharawi, artistic expression. This results in the circulation of information in the Saharawi community residing in different locations and being articulated in musical expression in the local culture in the camps. For instance, the song *GdeimIzik* (in *seinicar* and *serbet* rhythm) describes the brutal assault by Moroccan forces on the refugee camps inhabited by the Saharawis outside El Aaiun, the capital of Western Sahara, in November 2010. Revolutionary political ideology, in this case, is the decision of the poet to report on the dramatic events experienced by his compatriots in Western Sahara.

This point coheres with Mphande's observation that "song is an inside creation of art

because, beyond the rhythm, the lyrics are directed to people who understand and share the values articulated in the song” (2007: 382). The popular Saharawi poet Beibuh has commented on the event of *GdeimIzik* in El Aaiun as the germinating seed of both the national consciousness of the Saharawis in Western Sahara as well as the Arab Spring. Furthermore, the idea of the popular poet who informs the public of the struggle is illustrative of SékouTouré’s famous words that “to take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves” (<http://africanhistory.about.com/od/panafricanists/a/qts-SekouToure.htm> [accessed 6 November 2013]). The song *GdeimIzik* proves that in Saharawi refugee culture, music and poetry provide a “medium for interrogating the character of conflict; and for evaluating the quality of conflict resolution” (O’ Connell 2010: 2).

Following the analysis of lyrics depicting the events occurring outside the camps, the idea of “not forgetting the enemy” in relation to Spain and the process of decolonisation of Western Sahara is essential in the construction of Saharawinationalism. Moreover, the approval and support of the RASD by representatives of Spanish political parties has always been rejected by the central government in Spain. For that reason, the song *Shouka*¹⁴ (the thorn) reflects the ignominy of the Spanish president, Felipe Gonzalez (1982 to 1996), who promised independence to the Saharawis in exile in 1976. As Vaquer states:

España está directamente implicada en el conflicto desde su génesis, y por poderosas razones (de responsabilidad de decolonización, de proximidad geográfica, de implicación de la opinión pública, de las relaciones con las partes contendientes, etc.) no puede ignorar su existencia o desentenderse de su solución (2007: 126).

Translation: Spain is directly involved with the conflict of Western Sahara from its genesis (responsibility of decolonisation, geographical proximity, implication of public opinion in favour of the independence of Western Sahara). Spain cannot ignore the existence of the Saharawi problem or to disassociate it from a solution in this conflict.

The poet of the song *Shouka*, Lamin Alal, responds to Felipe Gonzalez’ (FG) speech in the camps.

Shouka [DVD track 4]

(Mariem Hassan (MH); Lamin Alal and Manuel Dominguez)

FG: We came here today on November 14th of 1976 to show our rejection and condemnation of the Madrid Accords of 1975.

MH: Gonzalez, we listen to you with respect and great affection, and we readily grant you entry in our tents.

FG: Saharawi people will win their fight. They will win, not just because the law is on their side, but also because they have the will to fight for their freedom.

MH: You are a lawyer, you have a silver pen, and you are the leader of a great party. You are refined, but your words sometimes cause great damage.

FG: I want you to know, that the majority of the Spanish people, the best and the most noble of the Spanish people, stand in solidarity with you.

MH: There are people, my people, who give their lives for freedom. I drank the blood of my

¹⁴ *Shouka* is an experimental song that contains the eight different modes in the *Hawl* modal system.

three brothers who fought against the deadly weapons.

Translation from the album *Shouka* (Nubenegra, 2010).

The decision to not forget Felipe Gonzalez' speech is another type of nationalist action that reinforces dignity and honesty in the Saharawi struggle. The poet's decision is based on historical memory of the conflict in Western Sahara. Lohman (2010: 8) affirms that another type of artistic agency different to political and cultural representation could result in the poet being criticised for not serving his/her country. But, since 1975, the development of socio-historical memory is essential in the construction of Saharawi music. The Saharawi poet denounces the Spanish government as being the main party responsible for the lack of progress in decolonising Western Sahara. Other forms of non-political songs written by Saharawi poets are accepted by their local audiences, but nationalist lyrics are predominant in this refugee context.

Songs based on the decolonising issue of Western Sahara are mostly in the form of reports to a listener. In the political content of Saharawi songs, one perceives the popular excitement and consistency of Saharawis in resolving the referendum and completing the process of decolonisation of Western Sahara. With regard to their mobilising content, it resonates with Katumanga who states that:

To understand the role of songs in the mobilization process, an analysis of the music (sounds), the behaviour (performance), the ideas and the meaning carried by the two is required (2007: 132).

Saharawi music is formed by the cultural significance of *Haul* music in conjunction with the political exaltation described above. In fact, nationalist songs are determined by the lyrics and not by the cultural value of the "*Haul* song formula." But, the music is both: "cultural" through use of the *Haul* musical system and the forms of interacting between musicians and poets; and "political" through the content of the lyrics that foments the nationalist sentiments. Fanonian scholar, Nigel Gibson (2003: 143), refers to this process as "radical mutations" which lead to the emergence of a "fighting culture," where, "rather than valorise tradition, a fighting culture seeks to forge new relations between people... [I]n a way it breaks down former barriers and traditional and cultural walls between people, and "everything becomes and invitation for reinvention."

I argue that Saharawi nationalism uses cultural memory (*Haul* music) in order to construct the nationalist ideology. The application of the *Haul* modal system in Saharawi music is due to its roots in the Saharawi people's cultural past in the *Trab el Bidan*. The reinterpretation of the *Haul* musical system in accordance with Saharawi nationalism is the foundation of the music occurring in the camps. In Saharawi music, *Azawan* defines the reinvention of the '*Haul* song formula' and its interaction with nationalist lyrics.

Conclusion

The cultural and nationalist content in Saharawi musical creativity represents a constant negotiation between older forms and modes of Hassanya culture and the

decolonisation process of Western Sahara, delayed since 1975. Thus, Saharawi music in the camps is the result of cultural values and the nationalism now reflected in its music. One word—“*Azawan*”—embraces both past cultural and current nationalist aspects of modern Saharawi music and thus is a reflection of the social structures of communication among the PF, the Saharawi audience and the representation of the RASD in this musical culture.

In this article I have sought to contribute to the understanding of Saharawi music in the refugee camps in Algeria by analysing the Saharawi use of their precolonial musical culture, *Haul*, to acknowledge the desire of the local population to return to their homeland. As a result, the musical culture in this Saharawi refugee context has led to emergence of a new syncretic form known as *Azawan* that is performed and directed to local audiences and features nationalist lyrics, but has also been carried to international audiences by visionary Saharawis such as the late Mariem Hassan (1958–2015).

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