

MUSIC FOR THE UNSEEN: INTERACTION BETWEEN TWO REALMS DURING A GNAWA *LILA*

by

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Introduction

Moroccan Gnawa¹ music is intended for sacred spirit possession rituals called *lila*.² During a *lila*, sequential performances of possession dance take place.³ In the oral tradition of Gnawa practice, no explicit discourse seems to exist for these interactions. This paper investigates how variation in musical processes and possession dance correlate during a single performance of trance. My governing questions are: 1) how does music occur in the various stages of trance, and 2) what do musical processes tell us about the abstract phenomenon of trance?⁴ 3) Does a transitional phase exist that is expressed in a musical phrase? Following from Rouget's concept that music is a technique of communication of the human world in order to facilitate trance and validate ritual beliefs, my interest lies in deciphering what music communicates about trance and how music (and dance) communicates the interaction between the temporal and supernatural in Gnawa rituals.

By mapping dynamic processes of music and trance phenomena at the macro-level of formal scheme and progression, and at the micro-level of specific music and dance gestures executed in the process of performance, I investigate the nature and meaning of variations during possession rituals. Beyond Gnawa studies, my analysis also aims to strike a balance between the age old dichotomy of musicological and anthropological approaches to ethnomusicology alongside other scholars who have focused on musical and ritual practices associated with trance (including Qureshi 1995; Friedson 1996; Emoff 2002; and Jankowsky 2010).

Documenting trance is challenging, owing to the subjectivity of interpretation, trance amnesia, sleeplessness associated with all-night ceremonies, and also to the

¹ Gnawa is the plural of *Gnawi* (masculine singular form) and *Gnawiyya* (feminine singular form). The plural form of Gnawa is most frequently used as an adjective: for example, Gnawa music and the Gnawa festival, rather than Gnawiyya music and Gnawi festival. For this reason I primarily employ the plural form. Alternate spellings are Gnaoua, Gnaoui, and Gnaouiyya.

² *Lila* is the feminine form of *lil*, which literally means night in Arabic. Gnawa often use this term to refer to a night-long event involving the performance of ritual music associated with spirit possession.

³ Similar to Rouget (1985), "trance" is used as a generic term; "possession" is a subset of trance.

⁴ Employing Rouget's three-phase dynamics of trance - initial, second, and final phase - I examine what happens in the music at the borderlands between the seen and unseen worlds.

embodied and performed, rather than verbalized nature of trance societies like the Gnawa; however, my analysis attempts to minimize this. This study aims to illuminate how music facilitates, expresses, and gives structure to and is structured by the journey between seen and unseen worlds in its use of variations (rhythmic, melodic, temporal, and textural). At the same time, I hope to show how sound and movement, time and space, capture the embodied knowledge of the Gnawa masters - in essence, their mastery of 'working' the spirits.

Methodology

Important studies, consulted throughout, (including Pâques 1991; Chlyeh 1999; Lesage 1999; Lapassade 1998; Hell 2002; Claisse 2003; and Kapchan 2007) each have their own perspective: social, religious, historical, linguistic, semiotic, phenomenological, and/or mythical. Two important monographs dedicated largely to possession among the Gnawa include: Hell's (1999) *Possession et Chamanisme: Les Maîtres de Désordre* and Kapchan's (2007) *Traveling Spirit Masters*. Hell's comprehensive anthropological study of the fundamental characteristics of shamanism and possession takes into account context, meaning, behavior and philosophy of Gnawa society in addition to other trancing cultures. Kapchan explores the power of trance in and beyond the ritual, associated emotions, memory and the gesturing body in possession. In addition, Fuson's (2009) dissertation informs this study as his investigation of musical processes and the gesturing body maps the interaction between music and movement associated with animal sacrifice, pre-possession dance, and generic trance during *lila*-s. My research extends Fuson's analysis to mastered trance.⁵ More generally, Rouget (1985) and Becker (2004) have contributed to my understanding of trance and the role of music in it; and scholars including Geertz (1957, 1968, 1973), Turner (1969, 1982), Levi-Strauss (1963, 1966, 1979), and Bell (1992, 1997) have provided invaluable insights about ritual practice, process and meaning.

The inquiry draws largely from my affiliation with the Gania family begun in 2001, and extended through repeated visits to Morocco between 2006 and 2009. The Ganias are descendants of sub-Saharan slaves and a hereditary Gnawa family living in Essaouira, a former slave port that has become a popular tourist destination and home of the Gnawa sanctuary (Zaouia Sidna Bilal) and the *Gnaoua and World Music Festival*. In addition to sacred rituals, the Ganias, like other Gnawa, perform their music for festivals, in hotel restaurants to tourists, during jam sessions, and a range of private events organized by political figures and local patrons.

During my fieldwork, I was fortunate to witness rare events during which "abstract dance" transformed to "mimetic performance" demonstrated by heightened abilities and mediumship.⁶ In 2007, an even rarer opportunity to capture mimetic dance on video

⁵ Distinct from "generic trance" in which initiates perform an "abstract dance" on the spot, a "mastered trance" is a theatrical dance in which an experienced initiate mimics the character of the spirit, or conversely, their body is taken over by the spirit.

⁶ The term mimetic is derived from mimesis, "[the] basic theoretical principle in the creation of art.

made the following detailed analysis of interactive processes that reveals a framework of music and possession in Gnawa rituals that may be mapped onto similar phenomena possible. As usual, *Moqaddema* Haja Brika, a former patient of the Ganas and now a close family friend, hired the Gania masters for her annual ceremony.⁷ The *lila* began at around midnight and by the time Sidi Musa (a powerful spirit) was invoked it was already dawn. *M'allem* Mokhtar played the *guembri* supporting the possession dance of his older sister, *Moqaddema* Zaida (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Sidi Musa performed by *M'allem* Mokhtar Gania (left, on *guembri*) and *Moqaddema* Zaida Gania (right). Snapshot from video by author.

Transcriptions focus on the instrumental component of Gnawa music. *M'allem* Boubeker Gania in El Hamel (2008: 254) says, “The *guembri* [a three-stringed lute] is a crucial instrument in Gnawa rituals. It is through this device that the trance occurs. [...] If there is no *guembri* there will be no trance”⁸. During a *lila*, singing stops at heightened moments giving way to the *guembri*. Motivic variations escalate to a new level and may be directly correlated with the social stimuli associated with particular contexts. Scholars of other trancing cultures have also noted the centrality of instrumental

The word is Greek and means “imitation” (though in the sense of re-presentation’ rather than of ‘copying’) (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/383233/mimesis>). Like “abstract dance”, “mimetic performance” (or “mimetic dance”) is a subset of possession dance. During mastered trance, an experienced adept incarnated by the supernatural entity effectively becomes the entity. Rather than employing mimetic in the sense of imitation, or representation of the spirit, I use it to contrast and distinguish it from abstract dance during generic trance (*cf* Rouget 1985: 27).

⁷ Because of their connection with the supernatural entities, Gnawa are seen as efficacious healers in the community. In some cases, *lila-s* are held as therapeutic sessions for specific patients, that is, people who have been struck ill by supernatural entities and call upon them for therapy. Some patients may develop an alliance with their afflicting entities and become healers in their own right and work as musicians, seer-therapists or officiants of a ceremony.

⁸ The correct spelling for the instrument is *guembri*, not *guembri* as it appears in this quote.

melody and rhythm for attracting spirits (Besmer 1983; Jankowsky 2010). The *guembri* part contains all the parameters for describing the structure of Gnawa music; that is, the organization of “*pitches* into [sets], and *durations* into rhythmic values and periodicity” (Arom 1991: 226, *emph. in original*) that supports vocal invocation and sustains trance.

Musical motives are determined by applying an overarching framework of periodicity, defined as “repetition or re-statement, literal or transformed, of all kinds - of beats, rhythms, motives, melodies, structures, timbres” (Tenzer 2006: 22), such as “time line, cycle, riff, ostinato... call-and-response, twelve-bar blues progression, tala” (*ibid.*: 23). Because “[p]eriodicity structures and measures musical time” (*ibid.*: 24), it serves as an optimal framework for unraveling the multiple layers of time, understanding the musical form and structure (how music is organized), musical processes (what is happening in performance), and categorizing variations (what music signifies). With respect to Gnawa music, such an analytical approach helps us appreciate music’s correlation with ritual and trance phenomena.

It should be kept in mind that Gnawa music and ritual is never performed the same way twice. Transcriptions of *guembri* motives are, as Amira and Cornelius (1992: 1–2) write of drumming patterns in *Santería* performances, paradigms at best. Gnawa music (and dance) is an oral tradition that is lived and thus acquired. Transmission takes place through repeated exposure, listening, watching, and imitating. Masters of the music and ritual tradition, the *m’allem*⁹ (master ritual musician) and *moqaddema* (or *moqaddem*)¹⁰ (officiant and/or seer-therapist) embody knowledge of a system that they do not, cannot, or may not wish to articulate to an outsider. In this context, my analysis enables me to identify and understand vernacular modes of musical organization and categorization and provides insight to how cognitive processes of master ritual musicians may be musically manifested.

My analysis focuses on a three-piece sub-suite collectively referred to as *Sidi Musa* belonging to the *Musawiyin* cohort. The selection is exemplary because the sub-suite supports a mastered trance that is manifested in the final piece. The structure of *Sidi Musa* unfolds in several ways in response to the ritual context. Among the salient factors are the mastery of the musician and dancer, the purpose of the *lila*, the sponsor of the *lila*, the officiant, the ritual participants, and trance phenomena (mastered or generic). In all cases, a formal structure is maintained. My aim is threefold: 1) to elucidate the structured processes of music and dance during ritual, 2) to investigate the significance and signification of the interaction of music and dance during possession trance leading to mimetic dance, and 3) to suggest that an abstraction and interpretation of musical

⁹ The term *m’allem* (masculine singular form) or *m’allema* (feminine singular form) is used to refer to an expert of their trade (e.g., a master carpenter). A Gnawa master musician is always male and designated by the masculine term alone. To date, there have not been any *m’allema* who specialize in playing the *guembri* (Gania family pers. comm. 2006).

¹⁰ *Moqaddema* is the feminine singular form of *moqaddem* (masculine singular form) that refers to a ritual officiant who is often a seer-therapist and/or medium. Unlike the *m’allem*, this role is not gender specific.

events and dance gestures formulated from transcriptions and observations of *lila-s*, conversations with hereditary masters, and Gnawa discourse renders an embodied, holistic practice accessible to outsiders. By separating out its parts I decode metaphors and eventually modelize musical and spiritual knowledge embodied by trancing cultures like the Gnawa.

In the first part, large scale events (i.e., formal musical structures and theatrical choreography) are mapped to Rouget's dynamics of trance. In the micro-analysis of the second part, variations in pitch and duration are correlated with instances in the onset of full possession. By isolating specific moments of possession, I examine how music and dance signify changes in trance progression, and what is being signified to the actors (musician and dancer) and the seasoned public.

Gnawa preliminaries

The term Gnawa refers collectively to a Moroccan sub-Saharan-Berber-Muslim society (*taifa*) that has roots in slavery and whose followers practice an all-night spirit possession ceremony (*lila*).¹¹ Music and other sensory stimulants (i.e., colors, fragrances, food) are integral to *lila-s*, which are held for explicit reasons including healing, annual renewal of ties with the *mluk* (supernatural entities; masc. sing. *melk*),¹² initiation ceremonies, life cycle celebrations, expressions of gratitude to the *mluk*, requests for blessings, and celebrations of Islamic holidays. Implicitly, the *lila* enacts the co-existence of temporal and supernatural realms and serves to restore or maintain harmony between them by propitiating and pleasuring the *mluk* through music and possession dance.

The music ritual is often performed in intimate settings with musicians and audience seated on the ground. The *m'alle*m sings the solo calls and plays the *guembri* (Figure 2 a). His accompanists sing the choral response and play percussive support on large metal castanets called *qraqab*.¹³ During possession, members of the audience get up to dance when moved by their afflicting or affiliated spirits (Figure 2 b).¹⁴ Though less prominent than the *m'alle*m, the *moqaddema* plays a key role in Gnawa society as an intermediary between humans and spirits, and between patients or adepts and the *m'alle*m through embodiment by supernatural entities.

¹¹ The term Gnawa may also be used to identify their beliefs and practices, or their music.

¹² The Gnawa term *mluk* signifies supernatural entities, spirits, and saint-genies belonging to the Gnawa pantheon—that is, the spirit possessors. It is the plural form of *melk* (masculine singular form) or *melka* (feminine singular form). *Mluk* may generally be referred to as *jnun* (plural form), *jinn* (masculine singular form) or *jinnya* (feminine singular) in standard Arabic.

¹³ This is the typical instrumentation of a sacred *lila* in Essaouira and Marrakesh; however, other instruments such as the *ghita* (Moroccan oboe) may be added in other regions (M. Outanine pers. comm. 2009).

¹⁴ Gnawa believe in the existence of unseen beings mingling among humans. “They [the spirits] may live inside us but we do not know... they are like people, they may be good and bad, they may hurt you, they may help you... they desire things and we must give them what they want” (Z. Gania pers. comm. 2006). While in some cases afflictions are caused by careless conduct, neglect or transgression that incites the wrath of the *mluk*, why some people are afflicted and others affiliated is not always known.

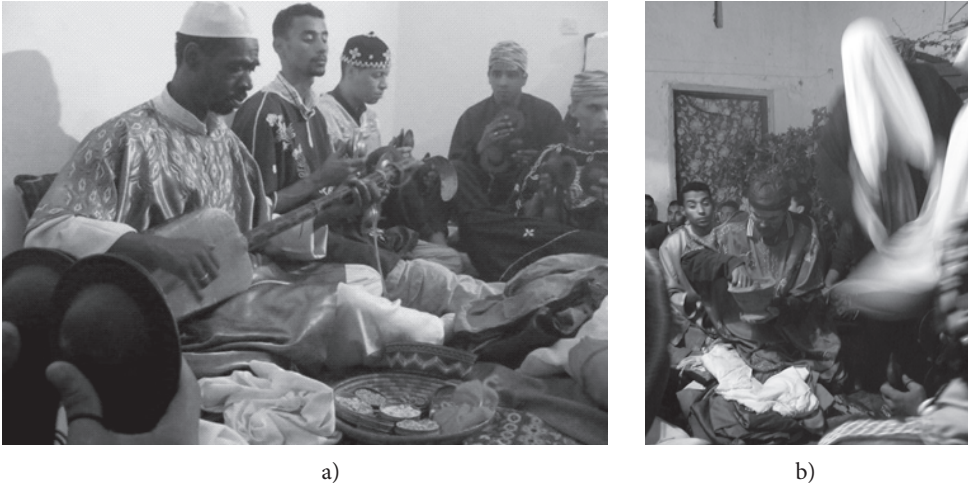


Figure 2. a) *M'allem* Abdallah Gania plays the *guembri* while his accompanists provide percussive support on the *qraqab*. Ritual items are placed before the *m'allem*. b) Moved participants get up to dance/trance before the *m'allem*. Photos by author.

A music-ritual drama

The ritual structure of a *lila* is dictated by a prescribed order of invocation of supernatural entities and requirements of the dynamics of spirit possession. The drama may be conceived as a three-act progression (Figure 3):¹⁵ Act 1, the procession (*'ada*);¹⁶ Act 2, entertainment dances (*koyo* and *nugsha*);¹⁷ and Act 3, spirit possession (*mluk*).¹⁸ Each act has a distinct musical texture, repertoire topic, and dance; and each fulfills specific functions for the sacred occasion.¹⁹ Modifications to the structure are permitted around a fixed core and depend on a number of contextual factors such as regional and individual interpretations and the needs of the ritual community. In general terms the *lila* comprises a pre-possession portion (Acts 1 and 2) and possession portion (Act 3). Here I focus on Act 3, the possession portion, always the final and longest act of the *lila*. During this act that sensory stimulants are used such as incense, colored-veils, objects and food. Codified gestures and theatrical scenes may also be performed. As the focal point of the ritual, all other acts are prerequisite to its execution and realization.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the *dbiha* (animal sacrifice) and *mida* are essential acts that respectively open and close a sacred occasion; however, in conversation with the musicians, the *aada*, *koyo*, *nugsha*, and *mluk* are usually discussed as a single event on its own.

¹⁶ The term *'ada* literally means "custom."

¹⁷ The literal meanings of *koyo* and *nugsha* have been forgotten and varied interpretations exist.

¹⁸ *Mluk*, which signifies the supernatural entities of the Gnawa pantheon, is used in reference to this portion because it invokes their presence.

¹⁹ See Chlyeh's (1998) annex for an exhaustive list of the repertoire and Fuson (2009) for the interaction and significance of music and dance during these acts.

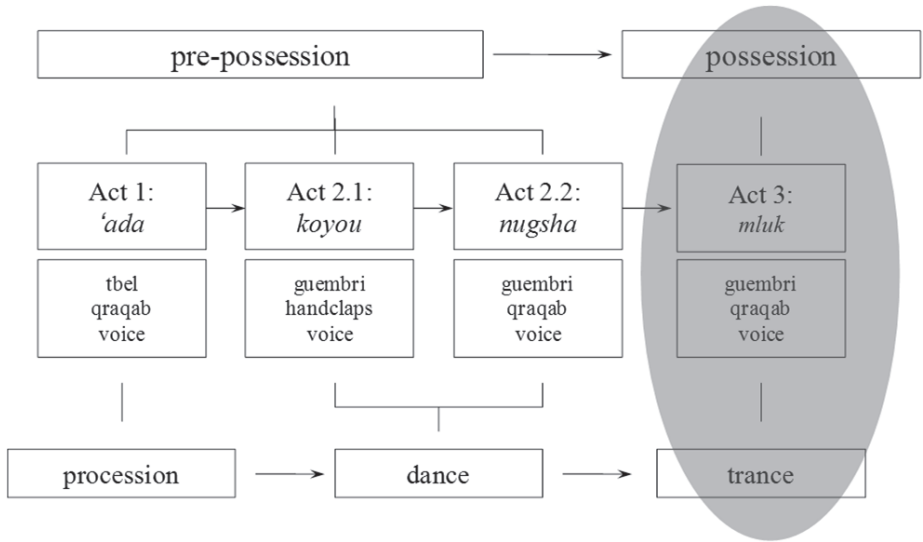


Figure 3. Ritual structure of the Gnawa *lila*.

Music

Crucial to the musical environment for possession is the *guembri-raqaqab* texture, which dominates all Gnawa music performances. The *guembri* has a one octave range with the tuning of its lowest note varying between B1 and D2# (Figure 4). Pitches are approximate representations. Because they are tuned relative to each other, cipher notation renders a more meaningful discussion of pitch. Despite having a range of eight identifiable pitches, Gnawa melodies are basically pentatonic with the fifth note being pitch 7 or pitch 6 (as shown by the shaded blocks in Figure 4, Rows 3 and 4, respectively).²⁰

Pitch Range	B1–D2#	C2#–E2	[D2–F2]	E2–G2	F2#–a2	(G2#–B2)	(A2–C3#)	B2–D3#
Cipher Equivalent	1	2	[3]	4	5	(6)	(7)	8
Pentatonic 7								
Pentatonic 6								

Figure 4. Pitch, tuning and rhythmic support.

²⁰ Fuson suggests that Gnawa music has two basic scales: the “D-scale” and “G-scale” (2009: 161). The former uses pitch 7, and the latter pitch 6. Some pieces are tetratonic, hexatonic, or heptatonic.

Two *qraqab* patterns exist: Q1 ta - ke ta ke - and Q2 ta - ke ta ke - ta ke (Figure 5). Individual pieces are uniquely accompanied by one of the two patterns, never by both.



Figure 5 a. Q1 pattern



Figure 5b. Q2 pattern.

Setting the tactus equivalent to a quarter-note pulse, *guembri* motives are usually two, four, eight, or sixteen pulses long. The standard repeat unit in a piece is distinguished by bar lines.²¹ Performance of an individual piece consists of varying one or more motives for many cycles over a steady ostinato creating a rich polyrhythmic texture. There are two main sections: vocal invocation (V) and instrumental music for dance (D). A piece usually begins with a brief instrumental introduction (I) that introduces the motives and ends in three ways: when the next piece begins, with a transition section (T) into the next piece, or with a cadential motive (C). An individual piece then follows an I-V-D-(T/C) progression.

Following a brief instrumental prelude, the voices of the instrumentalists form an initial part of the musical sound. Explicit communication of sung text gives way to abstract instrumental voices that effectively guide and support spectacular performances. During the possession act, vocals may re-enter briefly and the *guembri* may also be heard alone. The tempo and dynamics of a piece differ slightly between *m'allems* and contexts. Generally, they progress according to the I-V-D-(T/C) form. For example, increase is gradual during the instrumental prelude (I) and vocal section (V) and becomes more dramatic when the singing stops (D). This sectional periodicity is replicated in the entire Gnawa repertoire.

Possession dance

Possession dance (*jedba*),²² the climax of the sacred occasion, is associated with the invocation of every *melk* and performed by all but the music ensemble: *moqaddema*-s, sponsors, adepts, and neophytes; however, adherents only dance to their afflicting

²¹ Measures and time signatures are adopted as tools for grouping and do not suggest strong or weak pulses.

²² Fuson uses the terms "*jadba*" (derived from, 'attract') and "*khadma*" (derived from, 'work') to distinguish between generic and mastered trances, respectively (2009: 548). In spite of the differences in experience, behavior, and choreography, the Gania family used the single term *jedba* for possession dance.

or affiliated *mluk*. Trancers may be male or female; however, the dance space is most often populated by women and girls. As each piece begins, participants who are moved to dance get up and enter the sacred space. Possession, however, is not guaranteed and involves what Rouget calls a “double submission: to the will of the gods, on the one hand, and to the effects of music on the other” (1985: 111). At the same time, the possessed must submit to the will of the musician suggesting that a trust must be established between the two actors. As such, the dance floor may be empty, graced with an individual dancer, or with several dancers.

Possession dance may be characterized as abstract or mimetic of a particular supernatural entity; however, it always begins with abstract gestures. Depending on the supernatural entity being invoked and the experience of the possessed, the dance may remain a non-figurative “generic trance” (Fuson 2009: 548) or evolve into a figurative or mimetic performance called a “mastered trance” (ibid.), that requires the use of accessories such as knives, candles or glass. The majority of dances, however, are abstract and fall under the category of generic trance.

A *lila* is considered effective when many trances take place, which depend largely upon the *baraka* (a divine grace or miraculous force) of the mediators.²³ The *m’allem* and *moqaddema* are mutually dependent. Good *m’allem-s* and *moqaddema-s* are said to possess *baraka*, which is demonstrated in two ways: by the number of spirit possessions that take place under their guidance and by their own performance of magical feats - the active and manifested aspect of divine grace. Engendering the “suprahuman body” (Daniel 2005) depends on the dynamic interactive network of music, dance, and trance, and between the *m’allem* and dancer/spirit who is often the *moqaddema*.

Sidi Musa

The *Musawiyin* suite

Suites of the possession repertoire (Act 3) correspond to cohorts of supernatural entities and are associated with specific sensory elements and actions. Each suite comprises a repertoire of five or more individual pieces which are iconic of independent spirits and manifestations of a particular cohort. The spirits of *Musawiyin* are associated with the color blue, the fragrance of white benzoin (*jawi*), and water. One of the dominant spirits invoked is Sidi Musa, master and protector of the water spirits of the sea and sky. He is involved in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, but particularly life. Kapchan specifies that “[his] powers are thought to heal sterility... [he] parted [the waters] for the Israelites... [and he] protects fishermen but [he] also represents the source, the wellspring of life” (2007: 182–83). In addition to being “the patron saint of the seas, [he is] the master of magicians alongside the Prophet Abraham” (Claisse 2003: 145). Sidi Musa is a saint who does not afflict but blesses and is considered a *melk* who possesses participants during his invocation (Gania family pers. comm. 2009).

²³ See Geertz (1968: 44); Crapanzano (1973: 2, 19); Kapchan (2007: 142) and Chlyeh (1998: 125) for more detailed explanations of *baraka*.

All the pieces belonging to the *Musawiyin* suite are listed in Figure 6. As with other suites, pieces supporting mastered trance may be observed in two or three sub-suites associated with the master spirits of a cohort; in this case, Sidi Musa (Sequence 1) and Kubayli Bala (Sequence 3).²⁴

SEQ.	MUSAWIYIN SUITE
1 a	Waiye Leye
b	Waiye Ye
c	Ya Rasul Allah (Mohammedi)
2 a	Waiye Bala Batimba
b	Sidi Musa Bala
3 a	Kubayli Bala
b	Kubayli Bala Kubayli
4 a	Ya Allah Bala Batimba
b	Allah Allah Baba Musa
c	U Allah Khdem Sidi Musa
5 a	Irfa Baba Musa
b	Irfa Irfa Briye Sidi Musa
6	Beherawi Moul Al Ma Sidi Musa Moul Al Ma
7 a	Kuma Ya Kuma
b	Kuma Kuma Baba Musaya
8 a	Baba Musaka 1
b	Baba Musaka 2
c	Baba Musaka 3

Figure 6. Individual pieces and sequencing of *Musawiyin*.

If the possessed is an experienced adept or *moqaddema*, the nonfigurative dance may lead to a theatrical performance. Accessories such as a blue-colored stick (symbolic of a paddle), a bowl of water, or a knife may be used for the *Musawiyin* cohort.²⁵

²⁴ The term “sub-suite” refers to a subset of two or more pieces within a suite (see Fuson 2009: 120). For example, as shown in Figure 6, the *Musawiyin* Suite has seven sub-suites (i.e., Seq. 1 to 5, Seq. 7, 8).

²⁵ The blue-colored stick represents the oar that Moses used to part the seas and guide his people to the eastern shore. According to Pâques (1991), it is also a symbol of the seven planets. The bowl of water signifies sea water. Often it is said that there are three categories of *Musawiyin*: those who row, those who cast the net (to gather souls), and those who perform ablutions of purification (Bu Yandi spirit). Kubayli Bala (throat-cutter) is the most powerful of the sequence (Hell 2002: 206); he is the water *melk* associated with the knives of sacrifice.

Of primary concern to this study is Sequence 1 of *Musawiyin* referred to simply as Sidi Musa (Gania family pers. comm. 2009).²⁶ The pieces “Waiye Leye,” “Waiye Ye,” and “Ya Rasul Allah” must be played in all ritual performances, in the specified order and continuously in immediate succession (Figure 6, Nos. 1a–c). In the following, I introduce their respective musical mottoes and analyze the musical progression in terms of the dynamics of trance. The first two pieces are discussed briefly with respect to the preparation and onset of trance and early stages of sustenance. In the third piece, the dance evolves to a mimetic display, and a more detailed analysis of the interaction between musical and dance events is provided.

Musical mottoes

Within a framework of periodicity, I arrive at seven motivic structures for each of the three pieces (Figure 7). Each piece has a relative pitch set of 1 2 4 5 7 (8); however, a sixth note (pitch 6) is played in “Ya Rasul Allah” (Row 4, circled). The main pulses of the motives belonging to the *Sidi Musa* sub-suite are supported by Q1, the four-stroke ostinato.

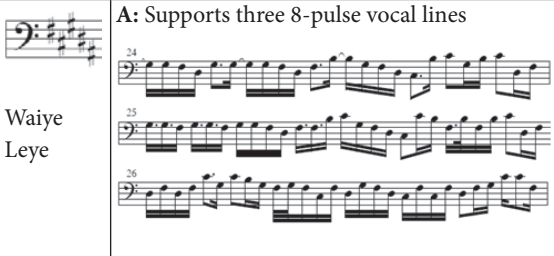

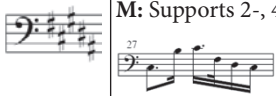



Pieces	Refrain/Dance	Call-Response/Dance	Dance only
Waiye Leye	<p>A: Supports three 8-pulse vocal lines</p> 	<p>B: Supports 5-pulse call & 3-pulse response</p> 	
Waiye Ye	<p>M: Supports 2-, 4-, or 6-pulse lines</p> 	<p>N: Same as B above</p> 	
Ya Rasul Allah*	<p>X: Supports 4-pulse vocal lines</p>	<p>Y: Supports 4-pulse vocal lines</p> 	<p>Z</p> 

Figure 7. Melodic motives of “Waiye Leye,” “Waiye Ye,” and “Ya Rasul Allah.” (*Tuning is approximately one step higher than in “Waiye Leye” and “Waiye Ye.” Pitch 1 = C2# for the first two pieces, and D2# for the last piece.)

Each piece comprises two motives that support both song and dance. One motive supports the choral refrain (Figure 7, Column 2, Motives A, M, X), the other the

²⁶ Although Sidi Musa is always invoked first (Sequence Number 1a–c), the order of successive pieces may vary.

call-and-response verse (Figure 7, Column 3, Motives B, N, Y). Four iterations of the 2-pulse motives of B and N support a single 8-pulse call-and-response phrase 5 and 3 pulses long, respectively. Y accompanies a vocal phrase of an equal period. The 24-pulse A motive supports 3 vocal lines that are each 8 pulses long; the 2-pulse M motive accompanies a varying refrain that may have a 2-, 4-, or 6- pulse period; and the 4-pulse X shares the same period as the vocal phrase. The *m'âllem* continues to play these motives (A, B, M, N, X, Y) after the singing stops, increasing the variations to support the intensification of the dance. In the final piece, "Ya Rasul Allah" (Row 4), a third motive is introduced after the singing stops, played solely for *jedba* (Column 4).

Trance and Music Progression

To fully grasp the relationship between music and trance, I shall first turn to a brief discussion of Rouget's threefold dynamics of possession: 1) the dynamics of trance; 2) the dynamics of behavior; and 3) the dynamics of the ceremony. In the first, the modification of the state of consciousness characteristic of trance follows a process that undergoes a specific sequential order of distinct successive phases which obeys an internal logic – initial (preparation, onset), second (climax), and final phase (resolution).

The dynamics of behavior depends on the experience of the initiate and ranges from imperceptible to brutal in the initial phase, from abstract to mimetic in the second phase, and from sudden (collapse) to deliberate and calm in the final phase. Rouget explains:

If, in possession, dance oscillated between two poles, the figurative and nonfigurative, the one being dance as identificatory behavior, the other dance as trance behavior, this is because it provides the adept with the means of assuming his new personality and living intensely at the motor level. Depending on the cult, one or the other of these aspects will predominate, but both usually seem to be present; either simultaneously, if the trance takes on both aspects at once... or else alternately. (Rouget 1985: 117)

In Gnawa rituals, if non-figurative and figurative dance occurs, it does so progressively in each dancer and simultaneously among more than one dancer, though the floor is usually reserved for the mimetic performance alone.

Large scale events with the formal structure I-V-D-T/C, may be mapped onto Rouget's dynamics of trance and the ritual process (Turner 1969), and correlated with the overall dynamics and tempo, variations, and motivic structures, alongside an increasing intensity of the abstract dance. Small scale events, such as variations in pitch and time organization may be correlated with instances of possession. For the *Sidi Musa* sub-suite (and others like it), a generic trance may take place for any one of the pieces, such that an initiate may enter the sacred space at the start of any of the three pieces, dance for only that piece, then leave when it ends.

Embodying Sidi Musa

Macro-Analysis: Musical form, dance progression, and dynamics of trance

Houara 2007 – “Waiye Leye” opens the invocation to Sidi Musa. The instrumental prelude and vocal invocation of “Waiye Leye” labeled as I1 and V1, respectively (Figure 8, Row 1), signify the initial trance stage of preparation and onset. Upon hearing the first few notes of the A motive, initiates enter the sacred dance space (I1). Covering their heads with a blue-colored veil, they begin a stationary dance, stepping in place with their eyes closed (Figure 9 a). Others remain seated for a while longer before getting up; some exhibit outward emotional responses (tears, yelps), while others put their heads down signifying their attraction. Donning a blue kaftan with her head wrapped in a blue scarf, *Moqaddema* Zaida had prepared for the trance of Sidi Musa ahead of time (Figure 10 b, c). Hearing the tune of her *melk* (CD 1), she enters the sacred dance space and begins the dance of three scenes. In the first, she dances with her eyes closed, hands joined behind her back, her demeanor controlled. Her bared feet step to the rhythm of the *guembri* as her body follows along entraining to the groove.

The onset of trance takes place during the vocal invocation (V1) when the *m’allem* plays B after one or two repetitions of A. The ensuing repetitions of A and B support the overlapping endings and beginnings of the call-and-response phrases, which blur and temporarily unite opposing and complementary forces, mirroring the interaction of seen and unseen realms. *Moqaddema* Zaida continues her dance as before with her eyes closed, adding a gentle head bob and slight body bend.

These initial moments communicate the imminent onset of possession trance. While the musical motto heard in the instrumental prelude (I1) may be deciphered by Gnawa initiates, the identity of the spirit is explicit and reinforced by the musicians in the vocal section (V1). Minimal variations on the accompanying melody implicate the significance of the divine utterances. Here, linguistic and musical signifiers identify the supernatural entity.

Seq. #	Piece	Section	Motive	Dance	Choreography	Rouget's Phase	Texture	Tempo	Duration																					
1	Waiye Leye	I1	A B	abstract	blue veil	Initial: prep./onset	GQ	87	0:41																					
		V1								eyes closed	onset	VGQ	85	2:17																
		D1								stock gestures	possession SC1	GQ	91-98	0:30																
		T1								+	prep. for SC2	GQ	100-104	0:32																
2	Waiye Ye	I2	M N	miraculous	bowl on head	Second: SC2	GQ	87	0:11																					
		V2								sustenance SC2	GQV	87	2:11																	
		D2								+	SC3	GQ	92-99	0:24																
		T2								+	prep. for SC4	GQ	99-103	0:35																
3	Ya Rasul Allah	I3	X Y	mimetic	new moves	Third: SC4	GQ	103	0:05																					
		V3								+	sustenance SC4	GQV	100-105	0:46																
		D3	Z							mediumship	Sidi Musa gestures	+	FINAL	GQ	107-119	3:55														
																	+	signing	G	118	0:11									
																						+	touch earth	GV	110-117	0:52				
																											+	G	115-124	4:46
C		codified		Third: resolution/departure	G	to 0	0:05																							

Figure 8. Macro-processes of music, dance progression, and Rouget's phases of trance illustrating texture, tempo, and duration of each portion. I, V, D, T and C represent the instrumental prelude, vocal invocation, instrumental dance, transition and cadence, respectively; SC corresponds to sub-climax; G, Q and V represent the *guembri*, *qraqab* and voice, respectively.

After about three vocal cycles, the singing stops and the music for *jedba* begins (D1). At this point, the spirit has taken possession of the initiates and the music signals progression to the second phase of trance (Figure 8, Row 2). In the first sub-climax (SC1) (Row 2, Column 7), participants enter an ambiguous situation and state, floating between invisible and visible worlds, neither spirit nor human. No longer accompanying song, the room fills with the subtle voice of the *guembri* (Row 2, Column 8). Motivic structures A and B are varied at increasing tempo and dynamics, continuously supported by the *qraqab* (Row 2, Columns 4, 8, 9). The dance continues with greater intensity. Initiates step harder to the beat, their arms swing with greater force, and their heads bob vigorously, the veil sometimes falling to the ground. *Moqaddema* Zaida releases her hands, swinging them in alternation from front to back as she steps with purpose. As “Waiye Leye” approaches the next piece, it enters transitional section T1 (CD 2). The tempo by now has increased from 87 bpm to 100 bpm (Figure 8, Column 8), and the *qraqab* grow even louder. Maintaining her composure, *Moqaddema* Zaida accelerates her movements to accompany the quicker beat, preparing her body for the next sub-climax (SC2) of trance.

In a sub-suite the continuation of pieces may be mapped onto the second phase of trance (i.e., full possession) by dividing it into sub-climactic (SC) stages that successively increase in intensity from sub-climax 1 to the final climax (Figure 8, Column 7). Adepts may continue the same abstract dance from one piece to the next, uninterrupted. Some may leave the sacred space after one or two pieces and return to their seat among the participants. If an experienced initiate like *Moqaddema* Zaida is dancing, however, choreographic signifiers of Sidi Musa beyond the blue-colored veil may be observed.



Figure 9. Dance progression in the first sequence of Sidi Musa: a) Scene 1, an adept covers her head with a blue-colored veil and dances facing the *m'allem*; b) Scene 2, *Moqaddema* Zaida balances a bowl of water on top; c) Scene 3, *Moqaddema* Zaida performs the mimetic dance of Sidi Musa. Snapshots from video by author.

Dropping from 104 bpm at the end of T1 to 87 bpm (Figure 8, Rows 2 and 3, Column 9), “Waiye Ye” begins with a brief instrumental prelude (I2) of M and N. At this moment *Moqaddema* Zaida places a blue bowl filled with water on top of her

head - scene 2 of the dance drama (Figure 9b). Gestures change little throughout the piece. Sustaining sub-climax 2 and progressing to sub-climax 3, *Moqaddema* Zaida steps in place and swings her arms keeping to the tempo of the music while effortlessly balancing the bowl on her head.

Like the first piece, “Waiye Ye” has a moderate tempo and is characterized by independent melodic and rhythmic lines between the voice and a 2-pulse ostinato-like figure. N supports the soothing call-and-response phrases that end with a loud cry for *Rabi Mulay* (Lord God) supported by M, immediately returning to the contrastingly soft call of the *m’allem* accompanied by N. As “Waiye Ye” proceeds to the instrumental section (D2), the initiate intensifies her movements of sub-climax 3 in preparation for sub-climax 4. At the moment of resolution, after a stream of variations on M, a new pitch belonging to the pitch content of the upcoming piece is introduced, signaling its ensuing arrival (Figure 10, mm. 20–22 [t=12s] and mm. 30–31; CD3).

During T2, the basic motives of “Waiye Ye” transform from two to four pulses or longer by addition and successive repetition of fragments (mm. 23–25, 28, 29). Before segueing into “Ya Rasul Allah”, the *m’allem* returns to two iterations of an embellished variant of M (mm. 32, 33). In the next measure, the first pulse of M becomes the anacrusis to “Ya Rasul Allah” (m. 34). A new intensity is reached as the performance edges closer towards the final climax (Figure 8, Rows 2, 3), all the while the participants sit, watching, listening, and entraining to the music as they wait in anticipation for what is to come.

In “Ya Rasul Allah”, the interaction between the *m’allem* and dancer is most perceptible. The *m’allem* gives his undivided attention to the master trancer, decoding gestures and responding with appropriate motives and ornamentations aimed to propitiate the *melk*. He demonstrates his spiritual power to bring the trance to the final climax while the adept makes known to others, and to herself/himself, her/his special affiliation with the given supernatural entity. It is at this moment that the *melk* explicitly communicates his presence to the ritual community through the heightened abilities of the adept.

At the beginning of the final piece (I3) (Figure 8, Row 4), scene three of the dance begins (Figure 9c). Musical indicators that contrast with the two previous pieces signify a potentially transformative event. “Ya Rasul Allah” has the shortest vocal section of the sequence and the longest instrumental section (over nine minutes); the tempo, instead of decreasing, is maintained at approximately 100 bpm and hits the peak of the sub-suite (124 bpm) (Figure 8, Rows 3 and 4, Column 9). The *guembri* and sung text have a shared melody, rhythm, and 4-pulse duration (Figure 10, mm. 28–32), while D3 exhibits diversity in texture with vocal interlude and *guembri* solo (Figure 8, Row 3, Column 7), pitch (hexatonic), and rhythmic content (triplets, 32nd notes). The heightened climax of D3 is further signified by the introduction of motive Z (Figure 8, Row 4, Columns 3, 4, and 7). Relative to the preceding pieces, the distinctiveness of this portion suggests the full physical embodiment of Sidi Musa, or its potential.

Gestures characteristic of the spirit are gradually choreographed into the dance. In the final climax of D3, *Moqaddema* Zaida's incorporation of Sidi Musa is fully manifested.

V₂ Motive M

13 14 15 16

17 18 19 20

21 22 23

24 25 26 27 28 29

30 31 32 33 34

Motive N

Motive X

38

Ra-sul 'lah Mu-hamm-di

Motive Y YA RA- SU- LA- LLAH HA- BI- BA- LLAH RA-

40

SUL 'LLAH MU- HA- ME-DI Oh yeah

Figure 10. Transition from “Waiye Ye” (mm. 13–34) to “Ya Rasul Allah” (mm. 35–40). Circled notes correspond to the “extra” pitch (6) introduced as anticipation to the upcoming piece. N.B. Small and capitalized letters correspond to the solo calls and the choral response. Light and dark gray shaded rectangles represent Motives M and N, and the light and dark gray shaded ovals represent Motives X and Y, respectively. (CD 3 begins with m. 13)

Micro-Analysis: Mapping musical motives to mimetic dance gestures

When “Ya Rasul Allah” begins, the dance takes on a new form. The dancer/spirit, instead of maintaining the spatially limited dance of stepping to the rhythm while facing the *m’allem*, adds special arm and leg movements such as hands touching front and back, foot taps, and knee raises while balancing a bowl of water on the head (Figure 11).

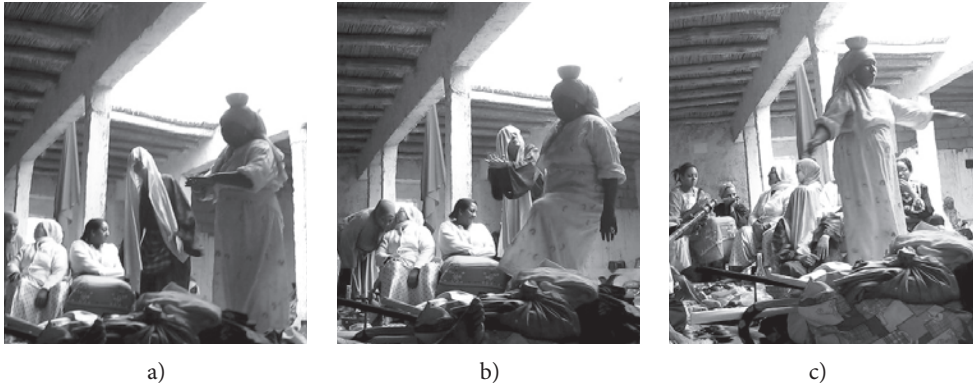


Figure 11. Dance movements during “Ya Rasul Allah” performed by *Moqaddema* Zaida: a) hands to front; b) knee raise; c) turn on the spot. Snapshots from video by author.

When the vocals end, the dancer occupies the horizontal (top-bottom), vertical (right-left), and frontal (front-back) planes of the sacred space by traveling backward and forward, turning on the spot (Figure 11 c); dancing in various directions from the *m’allem*; and lunging, leaning on the backside, leaning on the pelvis, and kneeling (Figure 12). Furthermore, the usual swinging arms evolve into codified gestures associated with Sidi Musa (A. Gania pers. comm. 2009), some of which I have named, such as paddling, breast stroke, shoulder shimmy, and other divinatory gestures - messages that are decipherable among knowledgeable and experienced Gnawa (Figure 13).

Moqaddema Zaida’s enactment of Sidi Musa combines over fifty movements, which I have grouped into two main types: dance gestures and signals. The former may be categorized into seven basic gestures (Figure 14): 1) stationary dance, elaborated with foot taps, arm movements, and knee raises; 2) travel moves, such as shuffling, gliding, or stepping; 3) turns on the spot; 4) paddle; 5) breast stroke; 6) shoulder shimmy, and 7) gathering arms. As shown movements such as the breast stroke may be performed in any of the seven possible vertical orientations associated with a high (H), middle (M), or low position (L); and in any of the three directions from the *m’allem* (Figure 14, Row 5). While Gnawa terminology for these movements might exist, they may be secret or specialized knowledge not yet accessible to me, despite efforts to discover them.²⁷

²⁷ When *M’allem* Abdallah had finished playing a brief version of “Ya Rasul Allah” in my living room, he said in reference to Motive Z, “That was the last part, for the dance [of Sidi Musa],” and imitated the breast stroke.

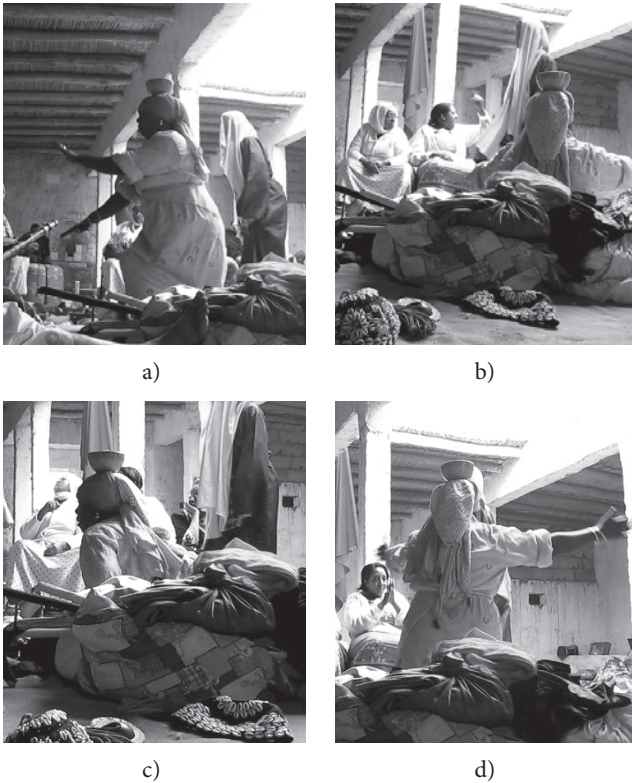


Figure 12. Vertical positions and other spatial dimensions of *Sidi Musa* gestures: a) lunge and paddle arms, high position, 0 degrees from *m'alle*m; b) lean on backside, low position, 135 degrees from *m'alle*m; c) lean on pelvis, low position, 45 degrees from *m'alle*m; and d) kneel, mid position, 135 degrees from *m'alle*m. Snapshots from video by author.

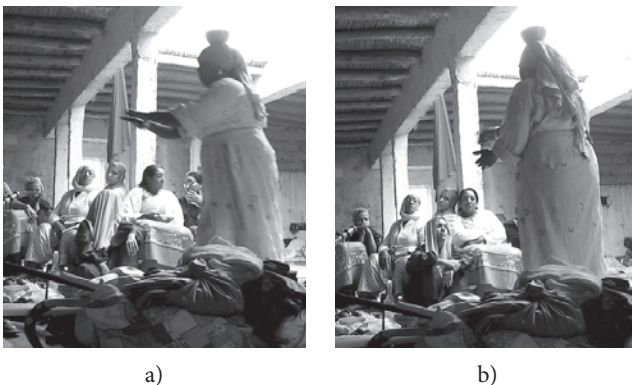


Figure 13. Gestures associated with the dance of *Sidi Musa*: a) breast stroke, and b) divinatory signs. Snapshots from video by author.

DANCE MOVES & GESTURES	VERTICAL POSITION	DIRECTION (degrees)
1. Stationary + feet tap behind/front + arms, knee raises, etc.	H: stand M: kneel	0, 45R
2. Travel (forward/backward) shuffle, glide, step	H: stand M: kneel	0
3. Turn on spot (left/right) + arm movements	H: stand	360
4. Paddle	H: stand H: lunge M: kneel L: thunderbolt*	0
5. Breast stroke	H: stand H: lunge/lean back M: kneel (1 or 2) L: on backside L: on pelvis	0, 45R, 135R
6. Shoulder shimmy	H: lunge H: lean back M: kneel L: thunderbolt L: on pelvis	0,45R
7. Gathering arms	H: lunge M: kneel	0, 45R 90R, 135R

Figure 14. Categorization of dance gestures derived from *Moqaddema* Zaida's performance of Sidi Musa. (H = high, M = middle, L = low; R = right.) *The thunderbolt posture (from the Sanskrit *Vajrasana*) is a sitting position in which one sits on the heels with the calves beneath the thighs.

The dance gestures are supported by over one hundred variations of the three basic *guembri* motives associated with “Ya Rasul Allah” (Figure 7). For the most part, the periodicities of music and dance gestures are aligned in simple ratio to one another. Different gestures have similar motivic accompaniment; for example, Y and its variants support all gestures except the last one (gathering arms). Some gestures may be supported by only one motive, such as the turn, while others like the travelling moves are supported by both X and Y. Z only supports gestures specifically associated with Sidi Musa; that is, the paddle, breast stroke, shoulder shimmy, and gathering arms. Sidi Musa gestures may also be supported by X or Y if performed immediately following the end of the vocal invocation, or in combination with a turn or a travel move, such as observed in the paddle, breast stroke, and shoulder shimmy. Given the room for

individual (and regional) interpretation of ritual events, variations on these mappings arise. For example, if one of the Sidi Musa gestures is performed in combination with a turn or a travel move, the *m'allem* may choose to support it with X, Y, or Z.

The rarity of mimetic dance, exclusivity of obligatory *lila-s*, and privacy of sacred rituals means recording opportunities, necessary for transcription and analysis of motive-gesture interaction, are rare. Comparison with other performances was beyond the scope of the present fieldwork. In order to get some idea of whether these music-dance mappings are consistent, I asked *M'allem* Abdallah to play while watching the video of *Moqaddema* Zaida's dance with the volume off. *M'allem* Abdallah always supported Sidi Musa's gestures with Z, unless there was singing. *M'allem* Mokhtar, on the other hand, played Y when paddling was combined with the turn, suggesting perhaps that one saw precedence in the paddle gesture (supported by Z), while the other chose to accompany the abstract gesture of a turn (supported by Y). It is possible that the opposite may happen in another performance.²⁸ Though the second scenario is far from a ritual situation, not accounting for stylistic differences between *m'allem-s*, how music structures and is structured by trance progression (i.e., the dancer or spirit) becomes clear. A general consistency between the motives and dance gestures suggests that the *m'allem*, guiding and supporting trance, improvises within a set of unspoken rules. Deriving these rules, however, requires further evidence.

Musical motives communicate and support a specific gesture, but how are changes from one motive to another or from one gesture to another effectuated? Like solo drummers who accompany improvised dances in the Balinese tradition, and "the creation of 'unique musical utterances'" (Hagedorn 2001:118) in religious Santería performances, the *m'allem* executes a musical response to a gestural change. In addition to playing the appropriate motive essential to successful invocation, the *m'allem* signifies upcoming change or prolongation of a gesture by manipulating its durational framework, varying the rhythmic density, accent, texture, and so forth.

The final part of this analysis investigates the dynamic interaction between *M'allem* Mokhtar and *Moqaddema* Zaida throughout Sidi Musa's dance and offers a glimpse of the cognitive processes associated with musical choices that are not verbalized by either the *m'allem* or *moqaddema* but are embodied through a lifetime of exposure. In the interest of space, a single example serves to demonstrate this interactive network. *M'allem* Mokhtar performs a combination of variations as he signals and supports a turn (Figure 15, Videos 1–4). Basic Y is shown on the top right. He signals a turn by varying Y in four different ways (Figure 15a, m. 299). He changes the rhythm of the first pulse by playing two thirty-second notes followed by a dotted-eighth, decreases the rhythmic density and structure of pulses 2 and 3 from eighth and sixteenth notes to a quarter-note triplet, plays a triplet on the last pulse, and accentuates ternary quantities

²⁸ It would be interesting to compare the live performance with those of additional *m'allem-s*, including *M'allem* Mokhtar, while watching the same video muted.

on the camel skin of the *guembri*. Variants characterized by any combination of these are observed as signals during the course of D3 (Figure 9).

Following the cue, *Moqaddema* Zaida executes three and a quarter turns to the right accompanied by six subsequent repetitions of Y (Figure 15 b, mm. 300–302). In the first two realizations, two 4-pulse variants are played (mm. 300–301). In the last four, the motive is contracted to pulses 1 and 4. The 2-pulse variant is iterated four times (as seen in the 8-pulse grouping of m. 302). A percussive tap at the beginning of the next Y signals a change in direction (Figure 15c, m. 303). Following the initial signal, the continuous percussive accents on the *guembri* skin (mm. 303–305) communicate the heightened state of trance. Two turns to the left are supported by two Ys (mm. 303, 304), then a subsequent turn to the right by 2-pulse repetitions (m. 305) similar to measure 302. Manipulation of the durational framework - that is, the period of a motive - is a variation technique often used to accompany a gesture that lasts for more than two repetitions of the motive. “Swinging” eighth notes (notated by triplets) is a common way to vary select motives during the instrumental section of a piece.

When *Moqaddema* Zaida finally comes out of the turn (Figure 15 d, mm. 306–307), the 2-pulse variant of Y is re-expanded to its usual four pulses (m. 306) and, in contrast, the percussive accents temporarily suspended. *M’allem* Mokhtar then signals an upcoming change in gesture with accents beginning on the last pulse of Y (m. 306), subsequently playing X to support the forward shuffle (m. 307). Re-expansion of the accompanying motive and textural variation (on the *guembri* skin) signals the end of a prolonged gesture and change to a new one. At this moment, the *m’allem* has stopped “swinging” the notes. Similar musical events occur as *Moqaddema* Zaida mimics a breast stroke, shifts into a shoulder shimmy, and flows into a paddle.

Synthesis

Musical progression

During the performance of Sidi Musa, musical changes on varying hierarchical levels readily distinguish the dynamics of trance possession (Figure 16). Sectional periodicities established by texture and tempo changes signify the progression of one phase to the next (Rows 3 and 4). In the first piece, the change in texture from the instrumental prelude (I1) to the vocal invocation (V1) implies the progression from the preparation to onset in the initial phase while the tempo remains stable (Column 2, Rows 1 and 4). Changes in texture, tempo, and dynamics from V1 to D1 signify progression to the second phase of full possession (Rows 3–5, Columns 2 and 3). When a sub-suite is played (marked by new motivic structures), transition sections T1 and T2 characterized by an increase in tempo and new variations (e.g., A”, B”, M”, N” in Row 6) anticipate upcoming pieces and prepare adepts for successive climactic stages during the second phase of full possession. Although the tempo in the second piece returns to the same tempo as the first after peaking, the newly added bowl of water requiring extreme balance from the dancer suggests a new level of possession. When sub-climax 4 (SC4) begins (Row 1, Column 5), the tempo remains at the peak of “Waiye Ye” and

steadily increases to 124 bpm (Row 4, Columns 4 and 5). The function of tempo in ritual music is iterated by Frishkopf:

Once the participating social group has been engaged, an accelerating tempo tends to gather them together, driving towards a state that is at once affectively heightened, and socially unified [...] extremely valuable for corporate rituals that aim to produce individual affective energy (for catharsis, personal transformation, or validation of metaphysical belief), which is also channelled towards social unity (ensuring group solidarity, as well as feeding back to enhance individual affect). (Frishkopf 2002: 5)

The possession dance, like the music, maps onto trance progression (Figure 16, Row 7). From an abstract dance performed with a blue-colored veil that intensifies with the addition of a bowl of water on top of the head, it transforms to a theatrical dance of mimetic gestures and expansive movements. The increasing feats of balance demanded of the dancer suggest new levels of possession, and a strong and positive affiliation with the supernatural entity.

Motivic considerations

Trance progression is most easily recognized by vocal and non-vocal sections, and changes in tempo, dynamics, and texture. Motivic changes, however, are subtler signposts of this progression but recognizable as markers of specific events. Gnawa musicians identify specific motives and types of variations for singing. These are often two pulses long as shown in “Waiye Leye” and “Waiye Ye,” or four pulses in the case of “Ya Rasul Allah” (Figure 7). In the first section, singing is the most significant part of the music. Maintaining their structural integrity for accompaniment, motives are minimally varied. The end of the vocal invocation signifies the spirit’s arrival or embodiment. At this moment, when the music progresses to support *jedba*, modification of the basic motives is readily discernible.

Iterations can be identified as belonging to particular moments of trance by the way in which they are varied with regard to time organization, position within the motive, and frequency of embellishments. *M’allem* Mokhtar employs three transformational techniques:

- 1) manipulation of periodicity by: a) amplification (truncation, contraction and addition), or b) juxtaposition of binary and ternary quantities;
- 2) modification of rhythmic density;
- 3) melodic variation of successive reiteration over many cycles.

For example, in “Ya Rasul Allah,” Y is always four pulses long when it accompanies singing. In the next stage, a structural change is signified when Y is contracted to two pulses (Technique 1a, Figure 15, mm. 302, 305), or the 4-pulse motive is melodically ornamented

(Technique 3, Figure 15, mm. 299–301, 303, 304, 306) and rhythmically modified on pulses 2, 3, or 4 (Technique 2, Figure 15, mm. 299–301, 303, 304, 306). In both 2- and 4-pulse motives the successive use of triplets (Technique 1b) often takes place when accompanying a turn or travel move (Figure 15, mm. 299, 300, 302, 305, 306).





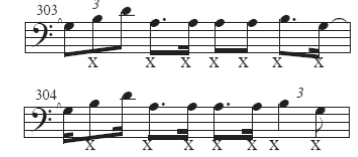



<p>Basic Y</p>	<p>Pulse : 1 2 3 4</p> 
<p>a) Signal for upcoming gesture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ rhythmic change ➤ percussive accents 	<p>Pulse : 1 2 3 4</p>  <p>Camel skin: X X X X X X</p>
<p>b) Support for prolonged gesture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ contraction (first and last pulse of Y_o) ➤ multiple iterations 	 <p>Y_{cntr}</p> 
<p>c) Signal change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ percussive accent at onset <p>Communicate heightened state of trance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ percussive accents continuous 	 <p>Y_{cntr}</p> 
<p>d) Signal end of prolonged gesture to new gesture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ re-expansion ➤ percussive accents ➤ new motive 	<p>End of turn Travel forward</p>  <p>Y'</p>  <p>X X</p>

Figure 15. A correlation of Y and its variations to the dance of Sidi Musa. *M'alle*m Mokhtar signals and supports a turn performed by *Moqaddema* Zaida. (DVD 1 begins five pulses before m. 299 at $t \approx 3s$; DVD 2 begins one pulse before m. 303); DVD 3 begins with m. 306; Video 4 shows the complete sequence (mm. 298–307), begins five pulses before m. 299)

The presence of percussive taps on the camel skin signals a climactic moment in a performance, often absent during singing. “Ya Rasul Allah” has a motive especially reserved for the possession dance (i.e. Motive Z). Its amplification from two to four pulses and variation streams comprising thirty-second and sixteenth note ornamentations track the divinatory gestures of Sidi Musa.

The differences between variations are not serendipitous but expressive of ritual moments. In the final climactic phase, signifying takes on a micro-dimension. Motive

Z is amplified to four pulses, and rhythmic and melodic elaborations are frequent on pulses 2–4. Introduction of the *dance* motive (Z) and the use of specific rhythmic variations on X, Y and Z - such as thirty-second and sixteenth notes in the case of Z, triplets in X and Y, and amplification - are reserved for particular stages of a performance and are rarely heard at the start of *jedba*. Analysis of motivic choices, types of variation, and dance gestures has been essential to understanding the logic behind improvised musical progressions.

Contextual considerations

The first sequence of the *Musawiyin* cohort serves as exemplar of the “musical process-trance progression” dynamic in Gnawa *lila*-s. By correlating musical events to the dynamics of trance and specific dance moves, I have attempted to grasp what is being communicated to the ritual community in the simultaneous dialogue between the *m’allem* in his music and the *moqaddema* in her dance. But, what happens when the generic trance does not transform into a mimetic performance? Depending on the situation, the *m’allem* may focus on one, more, or all adepts on the floor. In her study of *Qawwali*, Qureshi categorizes types of selective focus as collective, plural, priority, or single focus where the first has “no individual catering,” the second “cater[s] to several listeners by turn [with] equal attention,” the third “cater[s] to plural needs but give[s] priority to one,” and the last “cater[s] to [a] single listener, disregarding all others (audience usually focussed on single person)” (1995: 224). The *m’allem*’s selection depends on the status of participants and on the intensity of spiritual arousal. In the foregoing, the progression from priority focus in the first two pieces to single focus in the final climax of the last piece when all other dancers had left the floor is observed. The *m’allem* has prior knowledge of which mimetic dances are likely to be performed based on the presence of the ritual community and location of the event.

When there is no mastered trance, the duration and diversity of variations in the instrumental dance section (D3) are limited. In the final cadence, initiates may similarly touch the ground either calmly or by a sudden collapse. Instead of being signaled, however, the *m’allem* watches the dancers to gauge when to execute the cadential motive. In these cases of collective or plural focus, the *guembri* is supported by the *qraqab* and the tempo peaks just before the end. A cadence for sub-suites always follows an intense trance, generic or mastered; however, the absence of a cadence and direct transition to the next piece often takes place when no participants dance. In this case, rather than communicating what we have discussed in the foregoing, D3 is executed to maintain the structural integrity of the performance and played for a brief duration. In another *lila*, the performance of “Ya Rasul Allah” was the shortest piece of the sub-suite. Variations were limited, texture changed little, and there was no final cadence (Figure 17). Despite these structural clues, which would suggest the absence of trance, the solo *guembri* communicates that an adept is engaged in an intense generic trance and that the *m’allem* interacting with the specific dancer has given them priority focus (or single focus if there are no other dancers). The brevity of the performance, however, rules out the possibility

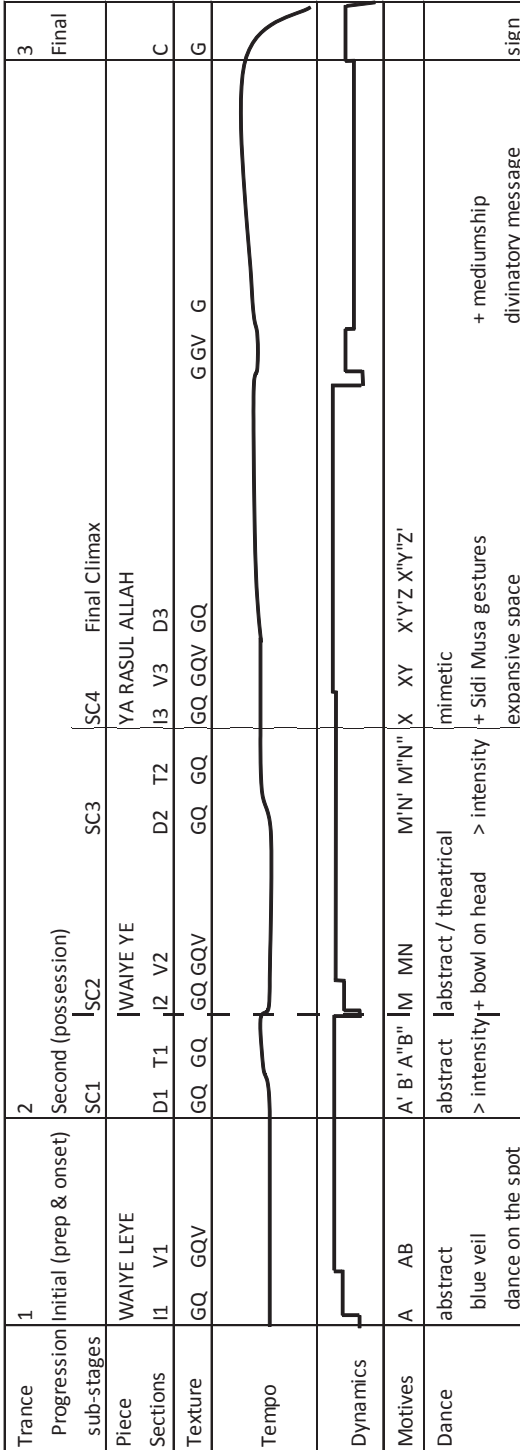


Figure 16 Mapping musical processes and dance progression to the dynamics of trance.

of mimetic dance. Modifications such as these suggest that “Ya Rasul Allah” is performed specifically for the manifestation and dance of Sidi Musa.

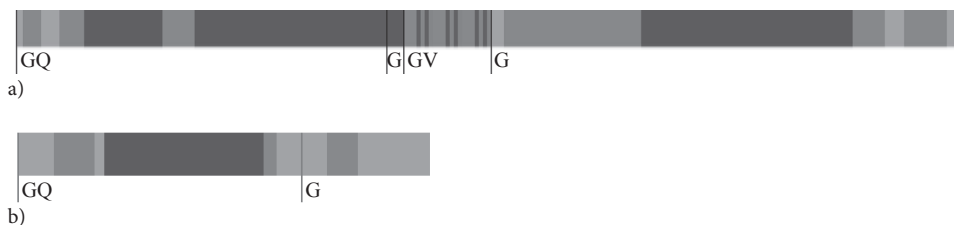


Figure 17. Progression and duration of “Ya Rasul Allah’s” instrumental dance section (D3) during: a) a mastered trance that lasted 9:34 (performed by *M’allem* Mokhtar), and b) a generic trance that lasted 1:42 (performed by *M’allem* Mahmoud). The light, medium, and dark shadings correspond to the X, Y, and Z motives, respectively.

Conclusions

Investigation of the dynamic interactive network of music, dance, and trance reveals the ways in which music is indispensable to the success of the Gnawa *lila*. Melodies played on the *guembri* are musical codes for supernatural entities who respond by taking possession of adepts, and adepts who respond through physical and emotional submission. *Guembri* motives are symbolic of the *mluk*. On one hand, the *guembri* attracts the *mluk* by sounding their musical identities, effectively calling their names; on the other, these patterns function as *musemes* (Tagg 2004) calling on the adepts.²⁹ Upon hearing the motto of their spirit possessor, adepts exhibit emotional responses (e.g., intense feelings, tears, horripilation) that engender a physical response - the desire to get up and dance. The combined texture of the *guembri*, voice, and *qraqab* facilitates the dynamics of trance. Sung text in the early portion of the invocation process renders the identity of the *melk* explicit to the ritual community. The increasing tempo and dynamics and the musical cues of the instrumental portion sustain possession leading to transformation of the adept. Upon arrival of the spirit, the *guembri*, like the adept, becomes possessed and “speaks with the voice of the *mluk*” (Fuson 2009: 111),³⁰ directing and supporting the movements of the dancer with specific motivic variations.

Fundamental to music’s effective and affective code is entrainment and deep listening. Becker ponders: “If speech rhythms can entrain, if rhythmically flashing lights can entrain, if bodily gestures can entrain, how much more powerful is musical ritual entrainment with a pulse that penetrates to our bones, with melodies that thrill,

²⁹ *Museme* was first coined by Seeger to signify a “unit of three components — three tone beats — [which] can constitute two progressions and meet the requirements for a complete, independent unit of music-logical form or mood” (in Tagg 2004: 1). According to Tagg, despite the problems associated with Seeger’s notion, “it at least focuses attention on musical-structural detail and on the relation of such detail to life ‘outside’ music” (ibid.: 19).

³⁰ Fuson says that the *guembri* “undergoes an ontological change from its status during the Fraja [when it begins to speak in the *Mluk* phase]” (2009: 433).

and a cosmology that gives life meaning and purpose?” (2004: 129). During a *lila*, the *guembri* and *qraqab* regulate the pulse and provide the sound environment necessary for the dancer (in this case, *Moqaddema Zaida*) to establish a groove and get “caught in a veritable lake of allusions that induces [her] to fall” (Pâques 1991: 81). As events intensify, continued entrainment enables profound changes leading to corporeal modification - incarnation of the *melk* - displayed as what Daniel (2005) refers to as the “suprahuman body” or Becker (2004) describes as a “trance persona”.

Entrainment, however, does not necessarily engender possession. Even within the same culture manifestations of trance are variable. The psychology of listening, or “*habitus of listening*... [which] involve[s] a scripted sequence of actions, emotions, and interpretations... habits of mind and body in response to specific musical events... acquired throughout our life experiences of interaction with others in similar situations” (Becker 2004: 85–6), is vital, particularly for mastered trance. Experienced adepts, like *Moqaddema Zaida*, capable of spirit accommodation, listen deeply (Becker 2004), or as Pâques describes, “mystically, with the ears of the spirit allowing oneself to be carried by the horse’s gallop” (1991: 221)³¹ as the *m’allem* drives (and follows) the intensity of the performance according to a set of implicit rules that structures his musical choices.³²

The oral tradition of Gnawa practice leaves much room for the interpretation of musical and ritual processes and events. Just as the relationship between adepts and *mluk* is unique, every *m’allem* develops his personal style and technique of improvising. Furthermore, the relationship between the *m’allem* and *moqaddema*, or experienced adept, may also influence performance choices. The Gania *m’allem-s* say they watch the dancers during a *lila*; however, they also owe their improvisations to *hal*, a heightened state they reach in performance. Whenever I asked details about their variations, they would often respond: “It’s *hal*” (A. Gania, M. Gania pers. comm. 2007, 2009). Although they do not seem to take full credit for their musical choices, this response suggests possession of a certain spiritual power. Along similar lines, *Moqaddema Zaida* experiences trance amnesia. She is conscious of her surroundings at a given moment, but is “deprived of the records that have been recently added to the autobiographical memory” (Damasio in Becker 2004: 140). When I showed her the video of her Sidi Musa dance, she expressed surprise and was impressed by the performance: “I know that I’m doing something, dancing, but I don’t know what I do. It’s very beautiful” (Z. Gania pers. comm. 2007).

In the foregoing study, I have proposed that the limits of discourse about trance, exemplified in the conversations quoted above, may be complemented by musical analysis to deepen our understanding of the trance experience. I have elucidated how musical

³¹ This refers to the horse that carries the possessed during mystical trances. Besmer’s (1983) equestrian idiom delineates the relationships during spirit possession between gods, chosen adepts (or vessels), and ritual assistants as “divine horsemen,” “mounts,” and “grooms,” respectively.

³² Investigating implicit rules of variation is the subject of a future study.

processes communicate what is not verbalized by Gnawa musicians or remembered by the possessed during moments of trance at multiple levels of temporal hierarchy in a single performance.³³ Although trance is an abstract phenomenon that resists objectification, rendering it difficult to pinpoint when a spirit arrives, when it is fully embodying the dancer, and when it leaves, it seems that a template guiding the music's unfolding tracks the characteristic stages of trance directly and interactively in a ritual.³⁴

Although it should be kept in mind that the procedure for bringing the supernatural world into the human realm requires an immersion of all senses - smell, sight, taste, touch, and sound - which correspond to the *mluk* and signify their sensory preferences (see *Musawiyin* Suite sub-section), this study reveals that the sonic atmosphere is crucial for processing and facilitating possession trance. Analysis helps to decode the language and gain a deeper appreciation for Gnawa musical signification, which, complemented by fieldwork, offers a glimpse of what may be a cognitive framework that governs performance during sacred rituals.

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³³ While questions remain, such as: how similar, with regard to motive-gesture correlations and types of variations, would multiple performances by the same *m'alle*m and *moqaddema* be; what are the principles of equivalence, the limits of varied interpretations of the same pieces; and, more broadly, to what degree do hereditary masters from different families and regions share the same musical knowledge; with a few exceptions, pieces associated with the same supernatural entity have similar gestures and motives bearing the same functions and are considered the same across regions and families.

³⁴ For Gnawa, secular music performances may also track the stages of trance, albeit internally and imaginatively (Sum 2012, 2011).

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