

BEYOND NATIONHOOD: HAUL MUSIC FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE IN WESTERN SAHARA AND MAURITANIA

by

LUIS GIMENEZ AMOROS

Abstract: This article examines the mobility of a precolonial musical style known as Haul music in two African countries, Western Sahara and Mauritania. Haul music is based on a modal system in which music and poetry are intrinsically related. This article traces the historical and musicological aspects of the Haul modal system in Western Sahara and Mauritania by offering an insight into how the postcolonial period has determined two narratives of Haul: a historical nationalism by way of revitalising the precolonial past in Mauritania; and political nationalism when reconsidering the ongoing process of decolonisation in Western Sahara and the exile of its people to the refugee camps of the Hamada desert since 1975. Further, this article shows how the mobility of the Haul modal system provides a reconsideration of a precolonial past in existing music cultures in North Africa.

Keywords: Postcolonial, precolonial, nationalism, nationhood, mobility, Haul music, Trab el Bidan, Western Sahara, Mauritania.

Introduction

The mobility of Haul music offers one the opportunity to link three historical periods – the precolonial, the colonial and the postcolonial – in a geographical area known as Trab el Bidan (see Figure 1). Trab el Bidan means “the land of whites” or “the land of Arabs.” Trab el Bidan covers Mauritania and Western Sahara and a small portion of southern Morocco, southwestern Algeria and northeastern Mali. The origins of Haul music are found in the coexistence of Arabic speaking peoples from various regions (predominantly Yemenites from the Arab Gulf), North African Berbers and sub-Saharan communities from Mali and Senegal. These communities have been living in close proximity since the twelfth century.

It is possible to contextualise the history of Haul music in musical practices across postcolonial borders. Haul music is based on a modal system in which music and poetry are intrinsically related. Each mode or *bohr* (sea) has its own significance in poetic and musical terms. For instance, the *fagu* mode is used to express epic stories mostly related to war between different communities. The *lyen* mode is related to love songs and the *sgaller* mode is related to nostalgic feelings. Nikiprowetzky mostly refers to the poetic forms and themes involved in the Haul modes in Mauritania. According to Ahmed Fadel, my research assistant during my research in the Saharawi refugee camps in 2004, the notion of *bohr* relates to the fact that “the Haul musical system is based on

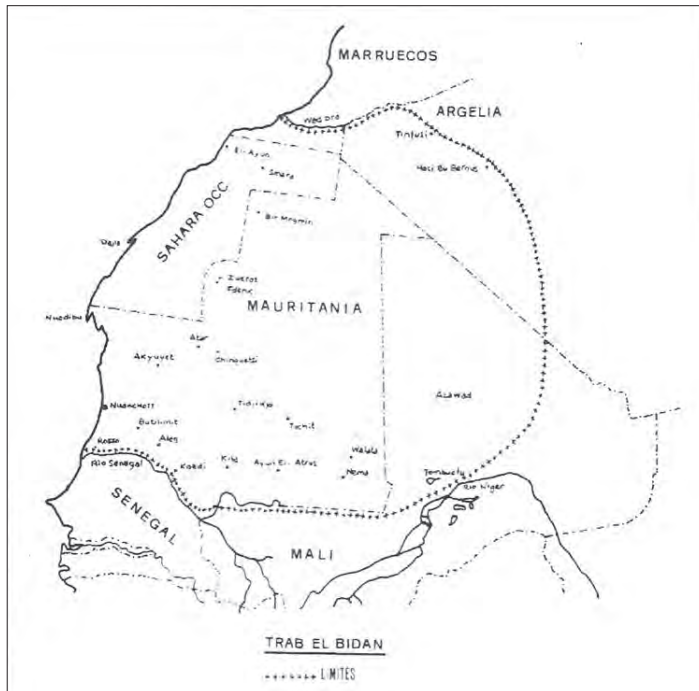


Figure 1. Map of Trab el Bidan (Pinto 1997: v).

the use of poetry and music at the same time, and each mode has its mood or depth, like the seas” (Interview 2 November 2004).

The Haul modal system offers two distinctive narratives: that of the postcolonial and historical in Mauritania, and the process of decolonisation in Western Sahara.¹ This article focuses on tracing changes in musical practices through the historical contextualisation of the Trab el Bidan which covers both territories. The article explores how postcolonial nationhood affects the development of Haul music in Western Sahara and Mauritania. I contend that the mobility and adaptation of the Haul modal system in these regions of the Trab el Bidan reveal much about the production and consumption of this musical system in these nation-state regimes. In these nation-states one may derive a sense of the musical similarities and differences between Western Sahara and Mauritania in their application of the Haul modal system.

I conducted research on the Haul modal system in Western Sahara/Algeria between 2004 and 2015; Mali in 2006 and Mauritania in 2019. This research on Haul music became

¹ The Saharawi people are originally from Western Sahara; however, since 1975 more than half of the population (approximately 180 000 people) has resided in the Saharawi refugee camps of the Hamada desert in southwestern Algeria (Fynn 2011: 40). Spread over 180 kilometers in this arid terrain, the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria are divided into four different *wilayas* (camp provinces): *Auserd*, *Smara*, *Dajla*, and *Aaiun*. Each *wilaya* includes 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* (20 kilometres from Tindouf, Algeria).

the basis of my doctoral dissertation and other outcomes such as the documentary *Los Mares del Desierto* (2006) and Mariem Hassan's album, *El Aaiun Egdad* (2012), which resulted from my collaboration with the Saharawi artist. Participant-observation and interactions with the music have been essential for the study of the Haul modal system and its postcolonial contextualisation in different countries in North Africa. These participatory experiences provided a basis from which to conduct research not only in performance contexts, but also in the compositional and instrumental techniques of the music (Gimenez Amoros 2006, 2012, 2015, 2018).

Postcolonial nationhood and the development of musical styles in Maghreb and West Africa

The different categorisations of Haul music are rooted in the geographical partition of the African continent by colonial powers after the Berlin conference during 1884 to 1885. The partition of Africa initiated a cultural and social fragmentation of many societies on the continent. The consequences of the partition persist and have given rise to postcolonial studies in and of Africa.

For Mudimbe (1988), the study of "Africa as a whole" is a colonial invention in which many scholars focus their studies based on the illusion that these are representative of the entire African continent. However, continental studies on African music do not provide an insight into the particular complexities of postcolonial nationhood and citizenship in each African nation. This article emphasises that the representation of African musical cultures is not universally valid, but fragmented by nationalist histories produced by postcolonial nationhood, or the territorialisation of music since the partition of Africa in 1884. The outcomes of this partition are evident in the music in many countries of post-colonial Africa as much of the music had been forced into nation-state boundaries. This has not been the case with the Haul modal system.

Major linguistic groups determined the representation of a perceived national culture in many postcolonial countries in Africa. For Askew, "[c]olonialism, nationalism, socialism, and liberalisation are all constructs that have informed the processes of imagining a country" (2002: 14). However, the notion of an "imagined country" also offers an emotional attachment between musicians and their national audiences. For example, while the Hassani elite (Arabs) governs Mauritania, many Mauritanian singers such as Coulibaly or Toure raise awareness of the intercultural relationship between different communities within the nation. According to Oloo, performers such as Coulibaly or Toure do not only entertain, "they are also able, and frequently aim, 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). Despite these nationalist sentiments expressed by performers in Mauritania, the mobility of Haul music suggests an intercultural engagement between Mauritanian and Saharawi society as rooted in historical links between neighbouring cultures since the precolonial period.

Similar to the situation in Mauritania, there are a number of other African countries such as Mali that have promoted complex transcultural realities (Gimenez Amoros

2014, Skinner 2015, Tenaille 2002). For Skinner (2015), many Malian musicians in Bamako showcase various forms of national musics, for example, by performing as a *jeli* (griot) and playing the kora, to playing djembe for a hip hop artist on the same day. Regardless of the national origin of Malian musicians, some, such as Adama Drame, plays numerous transnational styles such as Tamaseq, *jeli*, and Wassoulou (Gimenez Amoros 2014). Further illustrating the transcultural interaction among various Malian musical styles, Ali Farka Toure would proudly affirm that his music is a combination of his local Songhay musical culture and Tamaseq (Tuareg) music (Tenaille 2002: 102).

The notion of a plural society coheres with early postcolonial literature regarding a postcolonial “new humanism”, in which individuals continuously seek ways to acknowledge an intercultural sensibility or reality (Cabral 1972, Nkrumah 1957, Nyerere 1967, Zegeye and Vambe 2011). In the contemporary period, African music embodies precolonial (local-regional), diasporic and global musical styles influenced by hip-hop, dancehall, or choral music, among other styles. Charry defines this process of innovation in postcolonial nations as the “imitation-assimilation and transformation” of a musical style through electric instruments or electronic music (2012: 300). In accordance with Charry’s notion of “imitation-assimilation and transformation”, Haul music adopts new sounds such as the electric guitar, keyboards and beat box rhythms in Western Sahara and Mauritania.

In relation to the musical innovation of African music and globalisation, Turino (1998) asserts that many postcolonial countries are highly influenced by musical styles from outside the imagined nation. These styles may be jazz in Zimbabwe (Turino 2003), Cuban rumba in Congo (Stewart 2003, White 2002); the influence of Remmy Ongala’s musicians migrating to Tanzania (Sanga 2010); or political and musical influences from North America, as in Fela Kuti’s interpretation of Afro-beat (Olaniyan 2001). In this article, globalisation or transnationalism is observed in both the historical and continental influence of Mande culture and North African musical styles on Haul music, as well as the influence of other “globalised” musical styles such as reggae or American blues on Saharawi Haul.

Contextualisation of the Haul modal system in Trab el Bidan

The Haul modal system originated among the Hassani people – from North Africa and Yemen – after contact with the Berber *Sanhaya*, who had been living in the geographical area known as Trab el Bidan since the third century. Before the arrival of Arabic-speaking peoples from North Africa and Yemen in Trab el Bidan, the *Sanhaya* communities expanded from Spain to precolonial Ghana as the region is known today, and coexisted with various empires across the region (Rodriguez 2011: 16).

During the eleventh century, Hassani people settled around the city of Sijilmasa in present-day Morocco. From Sijilmasa, the Hassanis established a commercial relationship with the Berber *Sanhaya*, the predominant Berber community in Western Sahara and Mauritania. The *Sanhaya* controlled the trade from Sijilmasa to Timbuktu.

From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, this commercial trade was overtaken by the Hassani community and the area became known as Trab el Bidan (Shoup 2007: 97).

The Islamisation of Trab el Bidan, including the introduction of the *sunna* based on the *Maliqui* school, was effected by the Hassani people between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The national language in Western Sahara and Mauritania, Hassanya, emerged from the coexistence of the Banu Hassan branch and Berber *Sanhaya*. Hassanya is an Arabic dialect, eighty per cent of which is based on classical Arabic combined predominantly with Berber words. As for social structure, the encounter between Saharan and sub-Saharan communities created a type of hierarchical society known as the Hassani (Rodriguez 2011: 17).

Social hierarchies were formed during the gradual formation of Hassanya culture. According to Cleaveland, the social structure of the Hassanya was divided into four different levels (1998: 367): Level 1 consisted of the *Chorfa* (direct descendants of the Prophet) who are at the top of the pyramid. These were the Arab Yemenite communities of Banu Hassan and Banu Hilal; Level 2 consisted of *Arab* (warriors) and *Zuaia* who were dedicated to religious studies and meditation; Level 3 consisted of pastoralists, farmers, fishermen and Berber descendants who had to pay taxes to the higher classes; and, Level 4 were the black slaves, *igagwen* (musician castes), blacksmiths and Berber-Jewish or Christian descendants. They were ranked lowest.

In ancient Hassanya society, it was believed that music was inherited through the genes; thus, *igagwen* families were perceived as being in possession of the art of music. Musician castes existed in the pre-colonial Mande Empire and were known as *jelis* in West Africa. There are historical connections between the Mande Empire and Trab el Bidan which may be evident in numerous cultural expressions. For example, the main string instruments used to perform the Haul modal system (*tidinit* and *ardin*) resemble the kora and the ngoni of the *jelis* (Charry 1996). Shoup (2007: 95) states that the Sanhaja Berber adopted the notion of *igagwen* and their instruments from the Ghanaian Kingdoms and the Mande Empire prior to the arrival of the Hassanis in Trab el Bidan. Shoup also asserts that the traveller, Ibn Battuta (1304–1377), noted that the “Sanhaja Berber’s princes had adopted the elaborate court rituals from Ghana and Mali. These rituals included court musicians or griots” (*ibid.*). Khaldun (1333–1378) examined possible cultural similarities between poems in Hassanya and the Andalusian *muashshahat*, while Norris (1968) explored comparisons between Hassanya old poetry and the Moroccan *malhun* (Shoup 2007: 96).

The Haul modal system is a valuable point of connection between the Sahara and sub-Saharan musical cultures. In Hassani society, the *igagwen* preserved the musical modes of Haul, however, the responsibility of preserving the oral history and poetic forms of the Haul modal system belonged to the *Chorfa* (level 1) or *Zuaia* (level 2); the poets dedicated to the study of the Koran and Hassanya history. As stated earlier, the cultural and musical interaction for Hassani society was based on social engagement between musicians and poets.

The development of the Haul modal system mostly occurred in Mauritania, whereas in Western Sahara there were *lailas* - groups of women playing *tbal* and singing traditional songs based on Haul modes. The Saharawi singer, Mariem Hassan, confirmed that she and her mother were *lailas* and that they sang at weddings and other cultural festivities before their exile to the Algerian refugee camps in the 1970s (Interview 1 August 2012).² Hassan confirmed that the *lailas* used the Haul modal system in their songs as a result of musical influences coming from Mauritania. One of the most popular of the *lailas*' songs, entitled "Siyant Laydad" (The Legacy) was recorded by Hassan and is available on her last album, *El Aaiun Egdad* (2012).

As an example of Mauritanian *igagwen* travelling to perform in Western Sahara, Baroja describes a recital of poetry given by *igagwen* in the 1950s in Smara, a town in Western Sahara:

La poesía épica ocupa un lugar de honor en 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). [Epic poetry takes the place of honour in *igagwen* recitals. On 13 January of 1953, we assisted in a recital in Smara made by Mohammed Uld Adelqaber and Habeyabi Uld Alamin.]

As another possible relationship between music and poetry among the Saharawi people, Bahia (2015) emphasises the development of local poetry in certain regions, such as Tiris in Western Sahara (although his discussion is not strictly related to Haul music). According to the Saharawi poet, Badi Mohamed, the development of Haul poetry mostly developed in the four Mauritanian Emirates (Adrar, Brakna, Tagant and Trarza) and in the *igagwen* families who sang these poems (Contreras Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016: 100). Badi Mohamed adds that during the pre-colonial period, Saharawis were not socially organised in Emirates because their nomadic life was based on transborder activities across Trab el Bidan. Therefore, for Badi Mohamed, the lack of Emirates in Western Sahara provided another social and cultural dimension to the development of Haul music through *lailas* and sporadically by *igagwen* from Mauritania who were performing in Western Sahara (*ibid.*).³

During the 1970s, the introduction of melodic instruments – predominantly the electric guitar – in Saharawi Haul changed the nature of Haul music in Western Sahara, from being rooted in the *lailas*, to its current form closely related to the development of Haul music in Mauritania. According to Kaziza (Interview 23 December 2013), one of the main creators of Saharawi Haul in the refugee camps, the possibility of listening

² According to Mercer (1976: 158), there are "two classes of professional singers: the *igagwen* and the *lailas*. The *igagwen* never join any groups and are considered good company. They accompany themselves on lutes and *t'bals*. Their wives may sing and play. The *igagwen* are hired by the rich people 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."

³ Although the Emirates were dissolved after independence in Mauritania, there is valuable information on the development of Hassani culture in many local libraries such as the manuscripts from Trarza translated into Spanish by Mohamed Baba (2014). Mohamed Baba asserts that there are numerous manuscripts from the *mahdaras* (Koranic schools) and libraries that could yield valuable information about the cultural development of Haul music in Mauritania.

to Mauritanian music on radio inspired Saharawi musicians to create a new form of national music based on a blend of pre-colonial music and innovative elements such as the introduction of electric guitars or keyboards. As a result of this interaction between Western Sahara and Mauritania, two distinctive forms of Haul music were developed in each country. In Mauritania since its independence in 1962, Haul maintains a historical form while in Western Sahara, reflecting its ongoing process of decolonisation since 1975, Haul music is political. The development of Haul music from two nationalist perspectives speaks to the mutability of African music, specifically in Trab el Bidan.

Haul Music in Mauritania and Western Sahara: The continuum of musical and poetic song composition

According to many musicians from Western Sahara and Mauritania (Atage 2019, Hassan 2012), the Haul musical system and methods of composing a song have remained unchanged since the precolonial period. Haul song composition most commonly begins with the poem. Next, the song is created by the vocalist singing the poem who dictates the Haul mode used by the instrumentalists.

The Haul modal system consists of musical modes and innumerable ways of writing poetry in each mode (see Gimenez Amoros 2012, 2015). In my ongoing research on Haul music as a performer during the last two decades, I have identified eight musical modes in Western Sahara and four musical modes in Mauritania.⁴ There is no canon to distinguish between the number of modes employed by Saharawi musicians. These musicians prefer to use the four Mauritanian musical modes - *kar*, *fagu*, *senima* (or *signim*) and *lebteit* – as a point of reference.

In addition to the four musical modes in Mauritanian Haul, Saharawi musicians would include *seinikar*, *chawada* and *entamas* under Mauritanian *kar*; *sgaller* and *leboer* under *sinima*; or *lyen* under *lebteit*. To understand the Haul modes from a musicological perspective, it is important to learn musical variations in each mode. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw an approximation to the Haul modes and to see the relationship between Saharawi and Mauritanian modes by notating them as in Transcription 1.

⁴ One of the first academic references to the Mauritanian Haul modes comes from Nikiprowetzky, who writes that Mauritanian musicians define the four modes according to their moods. These are: *kar* (similar to *seinikar*) for joy and religious purposes; *fagu* for provoking anger; *signim* (similar to *lyen*) for excitement; and *beigi* (similar to *sgaller*) for inducing sadness (1962: 54).

Saharawi *entamas* – related to Mauritanian *kar*Saharawi *seinicar* – related to Mauritanian *kar*

Fagu

Saharawi *sgaller* – related to Mauritanian *sinima*Saharawi *leboer* – related to Mauritanian *sinima*Saharawi *lyen* – related to Mauritanian *lebteit*

Lebteit

Saharawi *chawada* – related to Mauritanian *kar*

Another musical relationship between Saharawi and Mauritanian Haul is based on the notion of *lekhal* (black) and *lebyad* (white). These terms relate to the musical structure of Haul songs. *Lekhal* refers to the rhythmic part of the song while *lebyad* alludes to the non-rhythmical introduction or *mawal* (improvisatory singing part accompanied by a melodic instrument). During the time that I performed Haul in Western Sahara and Mauritania, I mostly referred to the *lebyad* part as *mawal*. Further, during the *lekhal* part, musicians would rather name the rhythm performed in the song. The notion of *lekhal* (black) and *lebyad* (white) has been useful for poets when writing lyrics in different sentimental moods or *bohrs*, either with a rhythmic part or without (L. Alal interview 5 November 2012). The Saharawi poet, Alal, affirms that popular musical variations of Haul modes are crucial to the creative process of writing lyrics in Haul music. Hassan's album, "Shouka" (2010), illustrates Alal's explanation of how musical variations play a significant role in composing the lyrical content in Haul music. Certain melodic phrases in the vocal part clearly portray how Alal envisions the combination of music and poetry during the creative process of writing a poem for Hassan in the *lekhal* part (see Transcriptions 2 and 3).



Transcription 2. *Maatal-la* vocal melody extract (*fagu*). Transcription by Author.



Transcription 3. *Tefla madlouma* vocal melody extract. Transcription by Author.

For the *lebiad* part, there are certain improvisatory techniques that serve to accompany poems either recited or sung in different Haul modes. The following techniques are used by most of the melodic instruments (for example, the guitar, keyboard, *tidinit*, and *ardin*) in the *lebiad* section of Haul music.

Barm: Rapid tremolo played with thumb and index.

Barmasaba: Same tremolo as *barm* but with the index finger only.

Lefguea: Same tremolo as *barm* but with index and middle finger.

Elmenfaga: Strumming backwards with the index finger and concluding with the thumb.

Jeri: Ternary rhythm played on the guitar with thumb and index fingers.

Medra: Basic guitar accompaniment when a poem is recited.

The electric guitar and external influences as the bridge to innovation in Haul music in Western Sahara and Mauritania

The electric guitar represents the coexistence of both the precolonial and the postcolonial periods in Haul music. The electric guitar is played in the same way as the *tidinit*, a traditional string instrument played in Trab el Bidan and the Mande Empire where it

is known as the *ngoni*. In Western Sahara, the guitar is tuned D-A-D-D-A-D (*entamas* and *seinicar*). However, depending on the mode, the third string can generally be tuned to F (*leboer*, *lyen*, *lebteit* and *chawada*) or E (*fagu*, *sgaller*). In Mauritania, the third string is generally tuned to E (as in *fagu* and *sgaller* in Western Sahara). I observed that Mauritanian guitarists either play in A (fifth string) or in D (sixth string) as tonic notes in traditional songs. In contrast, Saharawi guitarists tend to play traditional songs only in D or in the so-called “standard tuning” for strumming chords which refers to the Western tuning used in Classical guitar or jazz (E-A-D-G-B-E).

In modern Haul music, the *tidinit* inspires the playing technique on the electric guitar. In addition, for Haul music the electric guitar incorporates two extra frets (in frets one and three) to reach quarter tones, melodic intervals which are essential in the Haul modal system (Gimenez Amoros 2012: 76). According to Atage Seida – one of the most popular Mauritanian guitarists – in the 1970s the first guitarists to transpose ways of playing the *tidinit* onto the electric guitar in the Haul modal system were Dimme Mint Abba’s brothers, Aida Abba and Ahmed Abba (Interview 7 June 2019).

In addition to the electric guitar, many Haul singers are accompanied by synthesisers and beat box rhythms incorporated in the keyboard. Generally, the keyboard technique is based on performing rapid trill notes and certain chord progressions, depending on the musical mode. The keyboards and guitars are generally used for performances during weddings and national events either in Western Sahara or Mauritania. The transition from the *tidinit* to the electric guitar and keyboards demonstrates the evolution of Haul music in the postcolonial period.

In addition to the new instrumentation of Haul music, many Mauritanian and Saharawi singers have combined the Haul modal system with other styles such as American blues, rock, reggae, hip hop or electronic music. As an example, Noura Mint Seymali, a Mauritanian singer who is popular in the World Music category, affirms that apart from listening to Haul music, she is inspired by many Western bands such as: “The Police, Dire Straits, Jimi Hendrix. Funk – Herbie Hancock’s Mwandishi band, Miles Davis’ *The Cellar Door Sessions*, all of James Brown, the Daptones (especially for the modern production of the vintage funk sound), Burning Spear, Jacob Miller, I-Roy and Steel Pulse.”⁵ In Saharawi music recorded by Nubenegra Records from 1998 to 2015 in Spain, one can appreciate the fusion of Haul music with other musical styles such as Hassan’s approach to American blues in “La Tumchu Anni” (2005) or “Almalfa’s” (2012). Further, *El Aaiun Egdat* (2012) combines Haul music with neighbouring musical styles such as Tuareg music in the song “Addumua”, or Wassoulou music from Mali in the song entitled, “Arfa.” This musical negotiation between Hassani music and external influences across Trab el Bidan by contemporary artists from Western Sahara or Mauritania suggests a reinvention of Haul music which links the precolonial period with the postcolonial period. As a result, many Haul musicians interested in

⁵ Retrieved from <https://thequietus.com/articles/15764-noura-mint-seymali-interview-tzenni> on 22 August, 2019. Interview with Noura Mint Seymali regarding her musical influences beyond Haul music is in the magazine, *The Quietus*.

preserving the *azawan* (the inclusion of Haul instruments and the modal system) are also interested in fusing their musical vocabulary with other musical styles. However, the development and reinvention of Haul music has been affected by the postcolonial experience of Mauritania and the ongoing decolonisation process of Western Sahara.

Postcolonial Mauritania and Haul music

As in Trab el Bidan, Mauritania is a multicultural country comprised of communities from Saharan and sub-Saharan origins. However, Haul music has been used to represent the interests of only the Hassani elite. The first Mauritanian president, Ould Dadda, abandoned plural politics in favour of the one-party rule of the pre-independence government (Gerthey 1967). The tensions between Arabs and sub-Saharans brought about the dominance of one party, consequent racial attacks, and the birth of slum towns across the main cities from the end of the 1960s (Diallo 1993: 10-13). During the 1970s and 1980s, Mauritania suffered droughts, the war against Western Sahara, and several coup d'états, all contributing to instability in the region. Additionally, the rise of a Hassani elite resulted in the implementation of land reforms favouring the Arabs to expropriate land across the Senegal river belt. The national forces arrested hundreds of sub-Saharan Mauritians during Taya's regime in the 1980s. The supremacy of the Hassani continued despite implementing the multi-party presidential and legislative election in 1991, in which there were twelve Arab parties and one authorised black African party (*ibid.*). As a result of the ongoing Arabisation of the Mauritanian state, in the 2000s, the influence of the Gulf states came to the fore. This provoked a Salafist influence in radical Islam and "Le changement constructif" (constructive change), in which Mauritania would become a new modern African country influenced by Gulf states under Abdel Aziz's regime from 2009–2019 (*ibid.*).

As previously observed, Hassani society is a hierarchical system where the Hassani elite dominates others such as artisans, musicians and sub-Saharan people. Mauritanian musicians contribute to raising awareness of social issues. Through the use of Mauritanian Haul, Shoup affirms that popular singers like Malouma or Dimi Mint Abba sang praises to the government or promoted campaigns against HIV in various national languages (Pulaar or Wolof) in 2006. Furthermore, emerging Mauritanian artists such as Seymali or Daby promote the connectivity between various musical cultures. Seymali mentions certain multicultural neighborhoods such as Quartier Cinquième in Nouakchott and that various Mauritanian musical cultures constantly interact in the capital.⁶ As another example of a Mauritanian artist raising awareness of his multicultural nation, Daby Toure's last album, *Amonafi* (2015), speaks of the unnecessary displacement of human beings across borders either in Africa or elsewhere.⁷ Thus, there are contemporary Mauritanian artists proclaiming the multicultural scope of the country and its connections with Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa.

⁶ <https://thequietus.com/articles/15764-noura-mint-seymali-interview-tzenni>

⁷ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-30/daby-tour-s-new-record-amonafi-homage-displaced>. In this link there is an interview with Daby Toure about one of his last albums and his involvement with social issues.

My research in Mauritania occurred during the political campaign for the national elections in Nouakchott in June 2019. During the campaign, Nouakchott was filled with *khaimas* (tents) where live music was performed. In the *khaimas*, musicians celebrated the nomadic culture of Mauritians and the connection between the social and Islamic codes of the nation, such as the one between Trab el Bidan with the Mandé Empire. In the *khaimas*, there were *igagwen* performing, and various drumming ensembles (mostly Wolof or Soninke) celebrating the diversity of Mauritania. However, Mauritania remains segregated in the public domain and in domestic spaces. Racial tensions were crystallised with the rise of one of the six candidates for presidency – an anti-slavery activist named Biram Dah Abeid, who obtained the second position with more than eighteen percent of the votes. The ex-general, Ghazouani, won the national elections with more than fifty percent of the votes. Given that Ghazouani represents the external interests of the Gulf States (for the expected urban reform) and Western countries (gas and fishing) in Mauritania, it is alleged by the opposition parties and the international press that the counting of votes for national elections was manipulated by the state.⁸ Despite Mauritanian artists singing about social issues and the awareness of multiculturalism, the politics are still governed by the Hassani elite.

As a response to the ongoing inequality of Mauritanian society, there has been an emerging movement of interracial hip hop bands, such as Awlad Elbalad, that demand a more egalitarian society. However, due to Awlad Elbalad's political lyrics, the band fled to Senegal after one of their band members was imprisoned in 2011.⁹ Subsequent to Awlad Elbalad, there have been other hip hop artists such as the female rapper, N'dat Bouwaner, or Mister X who condemns "in a four-act slam in various languages" slavery in Mauritania from the sixteenth century onwards.¹⁰

The growth of a Mauritanian musical culture relies on a multidirectional discourse between the old supremacists' generation and the multiracial narratives coming from younger generations, including Haul musicians. The ongoing fracture between the conservatives and the progressive youth provoked serious disorder in national politics and in relationships with neighbouring African countries. As an example, during Ghazouani's campaign, the Western Sahara conflict was exploited to secure alliances with Morocco and other non-socialist countries overseas, either in the West (Spain, France and the United States) or in the Gulf.¹¹ Contrary to this form of supremacist politics in Mauritania, the Saharawi nation abolished the Hassani hierarchical system and introduced a new type of multicultural Haul music in the camps in 1975.

⁸ https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/06/23/actualidad/1561295250_179508.html. This link is related to news on Mauritania in a Spanish newspaper.

⁹ <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mauritania-hip-hop>. This link is related to Awlad Elbalad's exile to Senegal due to the political lyrics in their music.

¹⁰ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/10/30/rap-resistance-slave-owning-mauritania-global-post/74859766/>. This link is related to Mister X's lyrics on the history of slavery in Mauritania.

¹¹ <https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/79605/ould-ghazouani-refuses-granting-mauritanian.html>. This link explains the Mauritanian president's lack of support for the Polisario Front.

The creation of Saharawi Haul was influenced by the non-aligned countries and the advent of Arab-Socialism in Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia in the 1960s. As a result of political instability between socialist countries and conservative, supremacist nations such as Mauritania or Morocco in North Africa, Haul music portrays a multidimensional narrative of the geopolitical situation in the Maghreb region.

Haul music, Western Sahara and the process of decolonisation

Saharawi and Mauritanian Haul have been a platform for the preservation of both the music and the poetry of the Haul modal system. Further, Haul music has been a vehicle of artistic and social expression that takes Hassani artists beyond Trab el Bidan. For example, the Mauritanian singer, Dime Mint Sadum, has sung poems written by Mauritanian or Saharawi poets, as well as from other Arab poets such as the Syrian poet, Nizar Qabbani, with his poem *Garnatta* (Granada, Spain). Sadum would preserve the notion of Trab el Bidan by singing as an *igiw* (singular of *igagwen*) in Mauritania, and by including poems from the Saharawi poet, Embeidi, or from the Arab-speaking world (Contreras Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016: 108). In addition to the use of Haul music to amplify its connections with the Arab world, the development of Saharawi Haul started in the refugee camps of Algeria as a form of resistance and to build a new cultural identity in line with decolonisation and nation building.¹²

Contrary to the notion of Mauritanian nationalism and precolonial nostalgia in Hassani culture, Saharawi Haul was influenced by socialist-Arab ideology and influenced by revolutionaries such as Guevara in Cuba, Lumumba in Congo and Nasser in Egypt. As San 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).

According to Hassan (Interview 1 December 2011), the Haul modal system and its poetic forms were re-introduced in Western Sahara by a local musician and a poet in the 1970s. Hassan learnt the poetic forms of the Haul modal system from the Saharawi poet, Beibuh. Beibuh and Kaziza were responsible for the creation of the first Saharawi band in the camps. The band was named "El Hafed." Its name changed to "El Ualy" in

¹² Western Sahara signed its agreement of independence with the UNO in 1975. However, as the Spanish themselves took tentative steps towards democratic rule after Franco's death in the same year, Spain ceded control of Western Sahara to Mauritania and Morocco in a treaty historically referred to as "The Madrid Accords." This event marked the beginning of the exile of Western Saharawi people from Western Sahara to a desolate territory of Algeria, the Hamada desert (Barbulo 2002: 1, San Martin 2009: 251). Mauritania returned its part of Western Sahara to the Polisario Front (PF) in 1978. The PF was formed in 1973 by the Saharawi activist, Bassiri. The PF is the conglomerate of different Saharawi national movements - as *Movimiento de liberación del Sahara* (MLS) established in 1969 (also by Bassiri) - in the fight for the decolonisation of Western Sahara (Sayeh 1998: 14). Thus, the PF is not a political party but a group of political associations who share the same goal of eradicating colonialism.

1976. Beibuh and Kaziza also contributed to the maintenance of a fluid relationship between the poets and the musicians in the development of Saharawi music in the camps (M. Hassan interview 1 December 2011).¹³

During the creation of Saharawi Haul in the refugee camps of Algeria, the older generation was influenced by Mauritanian Haul and the younger generations who were born in the camps (from 1975 onwards) were influenced by other musical styles from outside Western Sahara or Algeria. Due to the political alignment with socialist states, the younger generation studied mostly in Algeria, Cuba and Libya in every kind of discipline related to the sciences, technology and the Humanities.

In relation to the multidimensional nature of Saharawi Haul, for Mariem Hassan (Interview 1 August 2012), the goal of Saharawi Haul was to keep alive the people's cause in the camps and to inform the world about the conflict in Western Sahara. From 1976 to 1998, Hassan performed with El Ualy in Europe and Africa (especially Libya, Algeria and Ethiopia). In February 1978, she had her first tour with El Ualy in Italy, Spain, Algeria and Cuba. For Hassan, the experience of the concert in Cuba, *Festival de las Juventudes Socialistas* (Festival of Socialist Youths), where Saharawi musicians encountered artists from all over the globe (especially from Africa and Latin America) and the awareness of other musical styles, inspired Saharawi musicians to continue combining the Haul musical system with other musical styles. During the 1970s, the younger generation consisting of guitarists such as Boika Hassan or Baba Salama were influenced by Western rock. Consequently, one can clearly hear the inclusion of rock-inspired guitar effects or the imitation of conga rhythms in songs like *Magat Milkitna Dulaa*, RASD or in the music of El Ualy (1998).

Contrary to the notion of *igagwen* in Mauritania, Saharawi musicians were not "full-time musicians" but they were dedicated to other areas of the socialist state in the camps. As an example, Hassan was trained as a nurse for six months by the Algerian government. Later, Hassan combined her artistic career with her work as a nurse in the *wilaya* [province] of Smara during the 1970s and 1980s.

¹³ Morocco has been occupying the Western Sahara since 1975 up to the present day. In 1991, after 16 years of war between the Moroccans and the Western Saharawis, UN peacekeepers in the region formed a committee that conducted a referendum for self-determination; and the independence of Western Sahara. This committee, named "United Nations International Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara" (UNIMRWS), has been monitoring the ceasefire since 1991. However, UNIMRWS has not been able to secure a binding resolution that would institute an independent state and allow Saharawis to return from exile to Western Sahara. Innumerable resolutions and diplomatic meetings between the UN, MINURSO and both Morocco and Western Sahara have not resolved the conflict of Western Sahara. MINURSO often reports to the UN that the Moroccan government continues penalising Saharawi political activism in Western Sahara (Barbulo 2002: 322). Further, Morocco has built a wall of 2400 kilometres along the borders of Western Sahara. The wall starts in Morocco and extends down through the desert for 2400km to the Atlantic Ocean (*ibid.*). In the areas surrounding this wall, there are "more than 130 000 Moroccan soldiers" on guard in case of a possible encounter with the Polisario Front (*ibid.*). The Saharawis residing in the refugee camps of the Hamada desert named this wall "The wall of shame" (*ibid.*: 30). The decolonisation process of Western Sahara remains the main cause for the development of Saharawi Haul. This process has taken influences from different countries in the Maghreb and elsewhere.

At present, Saharawi Haul remains a token gesture toward the decolonisation of Western Sahara. The transnational state in the camps is culturally represented by various local bands such as the female ensembles, “Estrella Polisaria” or “Moraksi.” Other musicians from the camps such as Sweta, Salma or the guitarist Ahmed Zein perform in weddings and political rallies.

In the international arena, as previously mentioned, Hassan, Aziza Brahim and Nayim Alal fused Saharawi Haul with other international styles such as blues or reggae during the early 2000s. Like many Saharawi artists from the camps who have been to different countries, Brahim promotes herself as an exiled Saharawi singer having studied in Cuba and residing in Barcelona for the last few decades.¹⁴ It is evident that the continuation of Saharawi Haul relies on combining Haul with various musical styles. For instance, during the compositional process of Hassan’s album, *El Aaiun Egdad* (Nubenegra 2012),¹⁵ the Saharawi artist offered new forms of composition by fusing the Haul modal system with other musical styles.

By adopting cultural influences from various parts of Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa the various musical idioms used for the making of Hassan’s *El Aaiun Egdad* reflect the nature of Haul music since its genesis. Thus, during this postcolonial present, the bimusicality – or multimusicality – of Haul music includes the influence of globalised styles and the imaginary re-enactment of precolonial Haul for expressing the aim of decolonisation in Western Sahara.

Conclusion

The postcolonial boundaries in Trab el Bidan have created two distinct forms of Haul in Western Sahara and Mauritania. This article reveals how the evolution of Haul music is only changed, not by its community, but also through musical and social interaction with the postcolonial reconfiguration of the African continent. However, the possibility of linking various historical periods – pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial – through the development of the Haul modal system offers a reconsideration on the mobility and evolution of musical styles on the African continent. Furthermore, this article asserts that the historical evolution of Haul music relies on the influence of neighbouring states and the coexistence of Saharan and sub-Saharan communities in similar contexts, such as the griot or the development of poetry based on Islamic codes. This article asserts that if Haul music is studied through national and linguistic demarcations as well as through musical similarities across borders, then it is possible to examine the mobility and musical encounters in Trab el Bidan, as well as to question the circumvention of these mobilities under present-day nation-state regimes.

This article also acknowledges that mobility in Haul music is based on the notion of a postcolonial cosmopolitanism informed by disparate actors, such as socialists or neoliberal agents representing the wider mobility of cultural goods beyond the

¹⁴ See <http://azizabraham.com/>

¹⁵ El Aaiun is the capital of Western Sahara. The album, *El Aaiun Egdad* (El Aaiun on Fire), refers to the Saharawi revolts that occurred in the Saharawi capital during November 2010.

African continent. In this article, postcolonial cosmopolitanism is observed as both the historical and continental influence of Mande culture and North African musical styles on Haul music, as well as the influence of other globalised musical styles, such as reggae or American blues, on Saharawi Haul. Furthermore, the continuum of the Haul modal system music is based on a dialogical interaction between Charry's (2012) notion of assimilation – of the new instrumentation and new musical elements – and precolonial elements such as the reinvention of compositional interactions between poets and musicians in Trab el Bidan.

References

- Askew, K. M.
2002 *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Bahia, M. A.
2016 *Tiris: Rutas literarias*. Madrid: Ultima Linea.
- Barbulo, Tomas
2002 *La Historia Prohibida del Sahara Español*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino.
- Baroja, Julio
1990 *Estudios Saharianos*. Madrid: Ediciones Jucar.
- Cabral, Amilcar
1972 "Identity and Dignity in the National Liberation Struggle." *Africa Today* 19 (4): 39–47.
- Charry, Eric, ed.
1996 "Plucked Lutes in West Africa: An Historical Overview." *The Galpin Society Journal* 49: 3–37.
- Charry, Eric, ed.
2000 *Mande Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Charry, Eric, ed.
2012 *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalising World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Contreras Rodriguez, Eduardo Dominguez, Manuel Perez Rivera, Lola Andres, Oliveira Julia and Ahmed Salem
2016 *Haul: Música Saharawi*. Madrid: Editorial Turpin.
- Cleveland, Timothy
1998 "Islam and the Construction of Social Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Sahara." *The Journal of African History* 39 (3): 365–368.
- De la Courbe, Sier
1913 *Premier Voyage du Sieur de la Courbe fait à la Coste d'Afrique en 1685*. Paris: Palais Culturel.
- Diallo, Garba
1993 "Mauritania, the Other Apartheid?" *Current African Issues* 16: 1–56.

- Fynn, Veronica P.
2011 "Africa's Last Colony: Sahrawi people – refugees, IDPS and Nationals?" *Journal of Internal Displacement* 1(2): 40–58.
- Gerteiny, Alfred G.
1967 *Mauritania*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- Gimenez Amoros, Luis
2014 "I Play Wassoulou, Jeli, Songhay and Tuareg Music: Adama Drame in Postcolonial Mali, Bimusical or Multimusical?" *El oído pensante* 2 (2): 1–14.
- Gimenez Amoros, Luis
2012 "Haul music: Transnationalism and Musical Performance in the Saharawi Refugee Camps of Tindouf, Algeria." Masters Thesis: Rhodes University, Grahamstown (Makhanda), South Africa.
- Martin, Pablo San
2009 "Estos Locos Cubarauis!: The Hispanisation of Saharawi society (after Spain)." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7 (3): 249–263.
- Mercer, John
1976 *Spanish Sahara*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Mudimbe, Valentin-Yves
1988 *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana Press.
- Nikiprowetzky, Tolia
1962 "The Music of Mauritania." *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 14: 53–55.
- Nkrumah, Kwame
1957 *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
- Norris, Harry
1968 "Shaykh Ma 'al-Aynayn al-Qalqami in the Folk Literature of the Spanish Sahara." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31 (1): 113–136.
- Nyerere, Julius K.
1967 *Freedom and Unity (Uhuru na Umoja): A Selection from Writings and Speeches*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola
2001 "The Cosmopolitan Nativist: Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and the Anatomies of Postcolonial Modernity." *Research in African Literatures* 32 (2): 76–89.
- Oloo, Adams
2007 "Song and Politics: The Case of D. Owino Misiani." In *Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa*, K. Njogu and H. Moupeu, eds. 177–201. Nairobi: Mkukina Nyota Publishers.

- Pinto Cebrián, Fernando
1997 *Proverbios Saharauis*. Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones.
- Rodriguez, J. A., ed.
2011 *España en África: La Ciencia Española en el Sahara Occidental, 1884–1976*. Madrid: Calamar Ediciones.
- Sanga, Imani
2010 “Postcolonial Cosmopolitan Music in Dar es Salaam: Dr. Remmy Ongala and the Traveling Sounds.” *African Studies Review* 53 (3): 61–76.
- Sayeh, Ismail
1998 *Les Sahraouis*. Paris: Editions L’Harmattan.
- Schauert, Paul
2015 *Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- San Martin, Pablo
2009 “Estos Locos Cubarauis!: The Hispanisation of Saharawi Society (after Spain).” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7 (3): 249–263.
- Shoup, John
2007 “The Griot Tradition in Hassaniyya Music: The *Igagwen*.” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 2: 95–102.
- Solomon, Thomas
2012 “Where is the Postcolonial in Ethnomusicology.” In *Ethnomusicology in East Africa*, S. Nannyonga-Tamusuza and T. Solomon, eds. 216–239. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Skinner, Ryan T.
2015 *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stewart, Gary
2003 *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos*. London and New York: Verso.
- Tenaille, Frank
2002 *Music is the Weapon of the Future: Fifty years of African Popular Music*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books.
- Turino, Thomas
1998 “The Mbira, Worldbeat, and the International Imagination.” *The World of Music* 40 (2): 85–106.
- Turino, Thomas
2003 “Are we Global Yet? Globalist Discourse, Cultural Formations and the Study of Zimbabwean Popular Music.” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 12 (2): 51–79.

White, Bob W.

2002 "Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 42 (168): 663–686.

Zegeye, Adebé and Maurice Vambe

2011 *Close to the Sources: Essays on Contemporary African Culture, Politics and Academy*. New York: Routledge.

Interviews by Author

Atage, Seida, Nouakchott, Mauritania, 8 June 2019.

Ali Salem, Kaziza, Villena, Spain, 23 December 2013.

Ahmed, Fadel, refugee camps of Hamada desert, Algeria, 2 November 2004.

Alal, Lamin, Salamanca, Spain, 5 November 2012.

Hassan, Mariem, Villena, Spain, 1 December 2011 and 1 August 2012.

Filmography

Gimenez, Luis

2006 *Los Mares del Desierto*, Alicante: Visualsonora, (DVD).

Discography

A Pesar de Lasheridas

1998 Nubenegra INN 1-(033). (CD)

El Ualy: Polisario Vencera

1998 Nubenegra INN 1-(031). (CD)

Mariem Hassan

2005 Nubenegra INN 1128-(2). (CD)

Mariem Hassan

2010 *Shouka*, Nubenegra INN 1136-(2). (CD)

Mariem Hassan

2012 *El Aaiun Egdad*, Nubenegra INN 1137-2. (CD)

Mariem Hassan and Leyoad

2002 Nubenegra INN 1114-(2). (CD)

Medej: Cantos antiguos Saharaus

2004 Nubenegra INN 1123-(2). (CD)

Sahara, tierramia

1998 Nubenegra INN 1-(034). (CD)