

## The Gnawa Lions: paths towards learning ritual music in contemporary Morocco

Christopher Witulski

**To cite this article:** Christopher Witulski (2016): The Gnawa Lions: paths towards learning ritual music in contemporary Morocco, *The Journal of North African Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/13629387.2016.1151358](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1151358)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1151358>



Published online: 28 Feb 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# The Gnawa Lions: paths towards learning ritual music in contemporary Morocco

Christopher Witulski

College of Music, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA



## ABSTRACT

This article outlines the pressures on young *gnawa* musicians embarking on a career in contemporary Morocco. The influences of the popular music industry provide new options for those looking to learn and advance. They can choose to engage the traditional system of apprenticeship or navigate their career outside it. This article outlines the pathway and expectations built into an apprenticeship-based mode of learning and becoming *gnawa*. It then moves to explore the opportunities and pressures that affect those who chose to sidestep the established system. Young performers who do so adeptly respond to their audiences' desires and can find success, though they may measure it differently. Even so, however, they struggle for respect from the larger *gnawa* community. I examine how these artists strategise their careers between traditional and novel educational systems. They prioritise skills that are important to their movement through the popular music industry. This does not preclude opportunities for ritual performance, though it does affect how and where they find work. While some fail due to a poor knowledge of repertoire or a lack of experience, others utilise a nuanced understanding of their changing audience's tastes to animate possession innovatively and effectively. Even when they are not as adept at moving spirits in ritual, they master moving bodies in concerts.

**KEYWORDS** Ritual; popular music; modernisation; education; tradition; media

## Introduction

*Gnawa* superstars in contemporary Morocco achieve the highest levels of success, appearing on major television features and performing on the country's brightest stages. They record pristine studio versions of the tradition's ceremonial music and play these tunes on world tours with jazz and reggae artists. Their fame within the popular music industries make them influential markers of innovative approaches to this musical tradition, and innumerable young musicians follow their lead. Attempting to replicate the stardom of Hamid al-Qasri or Majid Bekkas, for example, aspiring young musicians buy or build their own instruments and start practising immediately. Some align

**CONTACT** Christopher Witulski  cwitulski@fsu.edu  College of Music, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1108, USA

© 2016 Taylor & Francis

themselves with master musicians and rise through a system based on traditional apprenticeship, performing in rituals and assisting their teacher for years, if not decades. Others, however, choose to learn the hits and stake out a path more familiar to popular musicians. They perform in the streets and on stages, working to expand their audience. These two routes towards a sustainable career intertwine, as each musician struggles to balance commercial priorities alongside the needs of the ritual.

In these pages, I argue that the modes of learning and advancing through a career as a *gnawa* musician are dramatically changing. The options available to a young musician belie contradictory priorities, yet the nuanced performer's skills allow him<sup>1</sup> to bridge the gap between them. This article draws upon three years of fieldwork across Morocco – based primarily in Fez – with *gnawa* practitioners, clients, and fans to follow the incentives and pressures built into these different pathways. Recordings of ritual activities and interviews with musicians from a wide range of backgrounds inform a discussion of two common goals for young artists: becoming a celebrated popular musician known for virtuosity and fame (a *fnān* or artist) or a renowned *m'alem* (pl. *m'alemīn*), a powerful ritual leader. Though these are hardly mutually exclusive end results, they illuminate different priorities for young learners. I outline the stages of the apprenticeship system and the routes of advancement towards ritual specialisation, with special attention on the economic and social incentives for either continuing in the process or choosing to plateau at different points of the education. I then describe the increasingly popular alternatives to learning and achieving fame, along with the struggles towards self-legitimation that these new modes of learning lead to. The article closes with one young *gnawa* musician in Fez who aspires to fame and renown within both commercial and ritual settings. Yassine, a self-described *m'alem*, uses his innovative skills and wit to successfully lead a fusion band (The Gnawa Lions) in concerts across the city and entertain both audiences and possessing spirits (*mlūk*<sup>2</sup>) within rituals. His story and performances illuminate the importance of creativity for contemporary *gnawa*. Furthermore, the fact that self-proclaimed *gnawa* masters working outside the established system of advancement get hired for rituals speaks to that pathway's diminishing authoritative dominance. As I describe below, snubbing expectation invites an uphill battle towards acceptance with other *gnawa*, though direct access to potential clients via strategies familiar to popular musicians allow for at least the potential for an 'outsider' to prove himself with audiences.

These changes expose an economic focus within the *gnawa* community. Becker notes the consistency with which *gnawa* practitioners have been aware of and operating within the national and international marketplace since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, citing a 1904 report that some *gnawa* were travelling the country to monetise their curative powers (2014, 122). Lapassade thanks Essaouira's Abdderrahmane Kirrouche,

better known as Paco in the band Nass al-Ghiwane, for his role in creating a cultural movement around *gnawa* music and trance (1976, 209–210). By 1977, Abdelatif (presumably M'alem Abd al-Latif Makhzoumi of Marrakech) 'decided to no longer conduct ritual ceremonies because the times had changed'. He continues explaining that 'the *m'alemīn* of the new generation ignore the true traditions and consider this craft [*métier*] uniquely as business [*un fond de commerce*]' (Chlyeh 1998, 67). In this sense, what Yassine and other young performers are doing is not new. Yet, the institutions of apprenticeship and lineages that endowed practitioners with authority and authenticity (*tgnāwīt*) are opening up, thanks to disruptive technologies and the increased entanglements of the local and global music industries. These observations derive from my personal recordings of 15 *gnawa* rituals carried out across the country, observations of others that I was unable to record, performances in non-ritual events with *gnawa* artists both established and amateur, and interviews with a variety of participants spread over two years of fieldwork in Morocco between 2007 and 2013. Where there were previously few ways to prove oneself as capable as a *gnawa* musician, now there are as many routes as there are audiences. Each audience – whether trancing in a ritual or dancing before a stage – wants to hear what it wants to hear, opening opportunities for those shrewd performers who can engage their listeners and clients, who can satisfy their demands.

### ***Economic pressures on ritual performance***

The *gnawa* community has its roots in Morocco's history of slavery. Pâques (1991) links *gnawa* history and culture to its West African antecedents, and Hamel (2013) finalises his book on slavery in Morocco with a discussion of the contemporary *gnawa* community's relationship to its past forced migration. Yet, *gnawa* identity as it exists in Morocco now is far more difficult to pin down. Georges Lapassade relays a conversation in which a ritual musician declared that only the ensemble's leader was *gnawī*. His status came in part from his lineage and ancestral history of slavery. Yet, Lapassade goes on to describe how the masters of Essaouira train 25–30-year-olds, who are not of the same ancestry but must demonstrate their 'thèse pratique de gnaoua' to become masters themselves (1976, 202). The professional identity widens further as many clients consider themselves *gnawa*, especially those who regularly host and attend ritual ceremonies. In a 2006 interview, Loy Elrich, then artistic director of the Essaouira Festival of World Music, declared that 'there is not a *gnawa* population! [...] It's not depending on where you came from or what your name is or your color. [...] Everybody can be *gnawa*'. The adjective *gnawa* is therefore a contentious one. In this paper, I use it – or the noun *gnawī* – to describe those who self-define as *gnawa*. Most are avid listeners, clients, or performers. They come from all walks and social classes,

though many are urban poor or otherwise marginalised. All recognise the importance of slavery to *gnawa* ritual and music, but far fewer are themselves of an ancestry that directly links to the experience of enslavement and forced migration.

Especially since independence – and thanks in part to the changes in media, technology, and the post-colonial project of identity construction – the *gnawa* have slowly come from these margins to stand as symbols of Morocco's diversity. Along with race (see Grame 1970), this marginalisation was largely due to the syncretic ritual possession ceremony that serves a central role in *gnawa* practice. The event, occurring mostly in homes and hosted by clients, is a *lila* (lit. night, pl. *lilāt*) and demonstrates the relationship between *gnawa* practitioners and world of possessing spirits. The ceremony is for healing, but the allowed presence of friends, family, and neighbours has created an additional element of entertainment. Bertrand Hell highlights this rise in popularity and notes that it is not a new phenomenon. He cites a description of white Muslims wishing to attend black Muslim ritual events in 1808 (2002, 55). More recent changes, however, take a different turn, thanks to media attention, recordings, festival performances, and the general popularity of this group within contemporary society.

A troupe of musicians animates both the *lila* ritual and the similar but shorter – and therefore cheaper – *‘ashīyya* (lit. evening, pl. *‘ashīyyāt*).<sup>3</sup> A *m‘alem* or master organises and leads the group while singing and playing the only melodic instrument, a three-stringed lute made from a hollowed out square wooden body with a skin. In Fez, this is most often called a *ḥajḥūj*, though other names predominate across the country, most commonly *ginbrī* or *sintīr*. Flanking the *m‘alem* is a group of *ḍrārī*, ensemble members of varying experience and expertise playing the *qarāqib*.<sup>4</sup> Some are early in their education, like the *jūqay*. Others have developed specific skills like the dancing *koyo*, singing *hariqsa*, and the *khalifa*, who can ‘sub in’ for the *m‘alem* and play *ḥajḥūj* when necessary. Advancement through these stages can be a result of a vocational calling, a demand of possessing spirits, or it can come from an eagerness to increase professional viability and economic opportunity within this changing musical–ritual landscape inhabited by the *gnawa* in contemporary Morocco.

In the introduction to his edited volume, *L’universe des gnaoua*, Chlyeh opened a new goal for studies of the *gnawa*. By gathering musical analysis, studies of dance, histories, and other topics, he noted that:

Finally, one could investigate the evolution of traditional *gnawa* activities as the master musicians, notably those who are part of the younger generation, are increasingly attracted by the world of spectacle. (Chlyeh 1999, 10)

Many works follow this question of change. Hell (2002, 346) observes how the repertoire heard in public settings has expanded greatly since he began

his work with the *gnawa*. Prominent *m'alemīn* are far more likely to play portions of the most sacred songs for uninitiated audiences. Kapchan (2007) followed as a *gnawa* troupe adapted their performance abroad, struggling to align their own sounds and ritual to the needs and tastes of international audiences. And, interestingly, Tamara Turner's work with Abdelatif Makhzoumi of Marrakech (2012) brings into focus much of the backlash against these changes, this attraction to spectacle. These commercial activities are not new to the twenty-first century, as *m'alemīn* have been working between ritual and outside engagements for many years. The rise, since the mid- to late-twentieth century, of *gnawa* music's presence within the music industry has created new audiences, however. This impacted the community in a number of ways, two of which are of concern here. First, the increased popularity of the music creates novel audiences for it within commercial and festival settings. Second, some of those new audiences, drawn to the music and its spiritual grounding, become participants in ritual, either as listening audiences or hiring clients, perhaps recognising an untapped resource for dealing with their own spiritual healing needs. Each of these researchers and commentators notes the powerful centrality of the *lila* ceremony to *gnawa* tradition, and its importance to the belief structures and values of the community. Yet, each also cites contested moves made by some practitioners as the music separates from the ritual and becomes a growing subject of the popular music industry, both domestically and abroad.

While the ritual event remains a 'search for successive spiritual states' (Hell 2002, 162), the performance itself is similarly changing in many ways, two of which I focus on here. First, there is pressure for the *m'alem* and his troupe to accommodate the tastes of those present in the room. Fuson (2009) describes a process of 'co-enunciation' in which the performers and possessed bodies come into musical sync. This 'dialogue' tracks the presence of the possessing spirit through a rhythmic and melodic engagement. As audiences and clients in ritual ceremonies listen to more *gnawa* music through media and festival performances, I would argue that this mutual engagement increasingly requires music that appeals to, or at least falls within the experiences of, audiences. Uninitiated listeners and initiated clients alike often have favourite performers and performance styles. They may love the virtuosity or speed of one or the 'heaviness' of another and hire local performers for their *lilāt* and *ʿashīyyāt* accordingly. Similarly, there are certain 'hits' associated with different spirits that clients, or perhaps their possessing spirits when they are mid-trance, request over and over. The navigation of this tension between the tastes of audiences and the effectiveness of ritual work plays into a musician's effectiveness within different parts of the *gnawa* community. While some audiences and clients are looking for those who can perform virtuosically and engage audiences, others prioritise adherence to different local and national conceptions of *gnawa* tradition. In other words, what marks

'authenticity' within festival performances or other commercial endeavours, can also come to mark 'authenticity' for those same listeners when they step into a ritual. This is despite the fact that the priorities of performers within ritual and staged performances can be vastly different and that their performance techniques lean on disparate musical ideals in each setting (see Sum 2011). This leads to diversity within the community of performers, and with this diversity comes competition, debate, and criticism. While some performers earn the respect of the community as a whole, most struggle to attain widespread recognition despite large followings from their specific clients and listeners.

The second pressure on rituals that proves important for this discussion is economic. The aforementioned *'ashīyya* is a shortened version of an overnight *lila* ceremony that moves quickly through the stages of the event. The musicians play songs for all of the spirits, but simply chose fewer for each set. Clients and others who are present in the ceremony have the opportunity to appease their possessing spirits and maintain those relationships, but the event may last from 7:00 pm to 1:00 am instead of 10:00 pm to 6:00 am. While maintaining the integrity of the ritual, this practice demonstrates how performers and clients adapt to the reality of economic conditions. First, the cost is lower. Hiring musicians for fewer hours is usually cheaper and the ensemble is often smaller. The standard practice for the *lila* is to have an open event for family, friends, and neighbours that includes tea, cookies, and occasional large meals. Breakfast is served at the conclusion, once daylight arrives. The shorter duration of an *'ashīyya* requires fewer meals and gets people home in time to sleep before the next work day. Second, the *lila* necessitates local government approvals that circumvent urban noise ordinances in some areas. By ending earlier, the family avoids the hassle of dealing with authorities.

Beyond these pragmatic concerns, major shifts are opening cracks for a new generation's participation within the professional life of *gnawa* ritual and musicianship. People come to the *gnawa* through a variety of avenues and for diverse reasons. Hell notes three 'circles of support' (2002, 48–57) the first of which includes those who have fully accepted their call to initiation. This election is sourced from one of three types of lineage. One can become a *gnawa* through direct lineage, which is well known due to the most famous of *gnawa* families in Marrakech and Essaouira. Baqbu of Marrakech (see Hell 2002, 50) and the Ghania family in Essaouira (see Sum 2011) are good examples. A second way is through wet-nursing, where milk carries 'the powers of blood'. Abd al-Kabir Merchane, a widely recorded *m'alem* of Marrakech who started his career as singer of local popular music, described to me his *gnawa* lineage as a result of his black-African wet nurse. He acquired his vocation through her nourishment. Hell continues with a third method by which a child can inherit a *gnawa* identity: redemption. If a *gnawa* ritual

successfully assists a family who is sterile or plagued with reproductive struggles, the resulting child will be 'anchored in the world of humans' but maintains an 'affiliation' with the spirits. While lineage remains a powerful element of fostering a *gnawa* identity in some cases, it can also serve as a hindrance. Not only do many families outside the community question the validity and acceptability of these ritual activities, some who are active practitioners discourage their children from following in their footsteps. This was the case with most of the established musicians that I worked with in Fez, where lineages are not as prominent and economic opportunities are not as vast as they are in renowned southern cities such as Marrakech, Tamesloht, and Essaouira, which are known for their intergenerational *gnawa* communities.

This pairs with economic realities of poverty and opportunity to bring about change in the initiation process. As there are increasingly few family lineages of *gnawa* practitioners, especially ritual leaders who attain the status of *m'alem*, those who love the music and are attracted to the ritual event rely on their talents as singers, dancers, and instrumentalists to find an alternative source of income. Some enter into the traditional apprenticeship system described below, while others follow the logic of the contemporary music industry. They learn the repertoire from alternative sources such as CD recordings or YouTube clips and undertake careers as performers. This has been the case with Yassine and his Gnawa Lions, young musicians who navigate stages and rituals using this novel logic. The vocation of *gnawa* ritual leadership is changing, though inconsistently. While these younger artists find ways to attract new audiences, others see them as inexperienced and misguided at best or, at worst, sacrilegious competition. The calling to the vocation can now be musical and does not require the same initiation or election that it once did. Authenticity in the contemporary marketplace is achievable through meeting audience demands and winning paying gigs instead of exclusively through maintained intimate relationships with powerful spirits. Further, just as families shift the hours of the ritual, they also show a willingness to hire less-experienced *m'alem'in* to cut costs. This opens opportunities for young artists. As long as performers such as Yassine, who is a student of tradition despite his work outside it, continue to find clients and audiences, the debates between what a ritual practitioner is and should be will grow.

### **Working in the industry**

While it is easy to categorise artists as working within either ritual or commercial spheres, and indeed, much criticism levelled between competing artists utilises this binary dichotomy, economic realities require that most *gnawa* troupes engage in some type of commercial activity alongside employment in ritual contexts. Most of these artists compete for a limited number of



employment opportunities. Some concentrate on strengthening their reputation as ritual leaders, in turn strategically securing more lucrative middle and upper class *lila* performances. Others attempt to grow their name recognition through recordings and festival performances, often eschewing ritual performance opportunities for larger, public gatherings. Yet, even those who primarily enjoy fame through these public contexts must continue to lead occasional rituals to maintain a sense of spiritual legitimacy. M'alem Hamid al-Qasri, one of the most popular *gnawa* artist in Morocco due in part to the vast catalogue of studio recordings and jazz fusion projects to his credit, epitomises this situation. When asked about al-Qasri as a *gnawa* ritual practitioner, most other *m'alemīn* respond with indignation. He records in the studio and no longer runs rituals, they often claim. Yet, when speaking with al-Qasri himself in 2011, I learned that this was not the case. He invited me, twice, to rituals that he was hosting in wealthy suburbs of Rabat, Morocco's capital.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Fnān, m'alem, ḡrārī***

A performer who is not known for his *gnawa* ritual leadership is often called a *fnān* (lit. artist). *M'alem*, therefore, is reserved for those who are deemed to truly know and understand the '*gnawa* sciences' (*'ulūm gnāwiyya*). Yet, as described below, traditional paths to earning this title are giving way to a wider, or watered down, meaning as performers appoint themselves *m'alemīn*, a status reinforced by fans or press regardless of training or experience. The word appears across trades in Morocco as a signifier of expertise: an iron worker or tailor might be a *m'alem*. The bestowal of the honorific is a measure of ritual knowledge, leadership, and ability in dealing with the spirits. Perhaps most important, however, is one's calling, one's relationship with members of the spiritual pantheon that heal through the ceremony. In practice, running a ceremony requires measures of virtuosity, vocal technique, and projection, but those performative elements are traditionally secondary. The areas by which a non-initiate journalist or fan might identify expertise, and therefore *m'alem*-hood are broad and often founded within the values associated with the popular music industry. They highlight the performance, essentially flipping the priorities attributed to ritual practice and *m'alem*-hood. This differentiation causes frustration and confusion among those who adhere to the apprenticeship system of learning and advancement. Hamid al-Qasri was often referred to as *fnān* in conversations I had with other *m'alemīn*, emphasising the widespread belief that he is only a commercial performer – circulating through the values of the industry – and not a practitioner of the *gnawa* ritual. As such, the economic and ritual lives of a *gnawa* artist intersect a great deal.

Even those artists who avoid commercial performances for the non-*gnawa* public engage in the economic sphere, as *gnawa* music and ritual are potential sources of income, able to supply a sufficient living wage. One *m'alem* in Fez with whom I worked closely over the period of my research named 'Abd ar-Rahim 'Abd ar-Rzaq achieved the level of economic stability that allows him to effectively provide for his family between his *gnawa* work and his day job guarding and managing a workshop. They have a house in the old city of Fez, and he maintains an office in Blida not far from a musical instrument shop owned by his teacher who passed away in 2012, Si Mohammed Boujma'. As the *m'alem*, clients come directly to 'Abd ar-Rzaq's office to negotiate the terms of a future ritual. He then hires the appropriate number of his most trusted *ḍrārī*. He controls the rations of payment to each performer after the completion of the event,<sup>6</sup> allowing him to reward those who performed well or completed extra tasks throughout the ritual. He keeps about half of the income for himself. Others push towards bigger goals of commercial stardom and festival stages, such as the young Yassine described later. Many choose to stay within their neighbourhood, becoming an integral part of their local *gnawa* communities as knowledgeable but amateur ritual leaders.

One economic benefit of being a *m'alem* lies within the control of the finances. A successful *m'alem* can monetise his skill either as a vocalist or an instrumentalist, and negotiate his way through the local scene. When asked about why some *gnawa* artists do not express the interest in making the shift from *ḍrārī* (as an apprentice) to *m'alem*, 'Abd ar-Rzaq explained the risks inherent in making such a step. As a *ḍrārī*, a *gnawa* musician is essentially a freelance performer. Many hone close relationships with one or two specific *m'alemīn*, ensuring that they are the first to be called for any performance. Others spend much of their time and energy 'circling' (*duwwar*) the streets, essentially busking for both Moroccan and foreign tourist audiences sitting in cafes. As a professional *ḍrārī* gains experience with different *m'alemīn*, learning the nuances of their personal tastes, styles, and pacing, he is able to both demand larger shares of the income, though this does not approach the share kept by the *m'alem*, and find more consistent employment by working with many different *m'alemīn*. For these reasons, many *ḍrārī* decide that making the leap to the next level is not the right choice. They maximise their skills as ensemble members and find opportunities to thrive within the community by performing with one or more *m'alemīn* across Fez. The most experienced *ḍrārī* hold great esteem and can lend an air of authority to even the greenest young *m'alem*. The role of the *ḍrārī* is therefore an important one with diverse performance and economic opportunities.

### Learning and advancing as *ḍrārī*

The process by which someone becomes a *gnawa m'alem* has changed dramatically over the past generation. This is likely a continuation from past

generations, as well, but the stark contemporary developments are what dominate the conversation of older *m'alemīn*. Here I outline the standard levels of escalation available to a dedicated *ḍrārī* as he advances through his career. Some *ḍrārī* climb through these steps in an effort to achieve the distinction of being a *m'alem*, something traditionally granted by a teacher. Others find a point along this process to stop, a place that fits their skill sets or spiritual calling well. *Ḍrārī* who do not have the ambition to advance or lack skill as a singer or instrumentalist may specialise as a permanent figure in one of these other roles. Advancing to the level of a featured vocalist, a *hariqsa*, to take advantage of vocal skill and knowledge of specific complex songs, for example, will likely lead to an increase in performance opportunities and pay with a variety of *m'alemīn*.

The advancement through these roles relates to a variety of factors, including age, skill, calling, and ambition. As described below, the youngest members of the ensemble, perhaps adolescents who are newly interested in *gnawa* music, spirituality, and community, often occupy the first stage (*jūqay*). With time, these young learners develop their skills as singers, then on the *qarāqib*, and finally on the *ḥajhūj*. To the frustration of their teachers, youth often circumvent this progression by acquiring a *ḥajhūj* on their own and learning songs and styles from prominent recording artists. They do so using CDs, circulated digital recordings on cell phones or other media, and YouTube or similar internet platforms. As adolescents continue on a training that can extend into old age, they may become known for their vocal, instrumental, or dance abilities. Sometimes this is purely based on skill development, but it can also relate to a calling from the possessing spirits or the performer's own ambition. Some of these stages, especially that of a dancer (*koyo*), depend on a relationship with specific spirits or groups of spirits, though in my experience they are also always strong dancers. One, Zakariah from Marrakech, spent his teens learning to breakdance before bringing that skill set into the *gnawa* ceremony as a featured *koyo*. The relationship between the activities of the ceremony and those goals and skills that relate to the world outside is fluid and dynamic. Just as Zakariah's dances relate to his breakdancing past, others master the vocal or instrumental parts of songs not only because of their relationship with the spirits that receive those songs, but also to prove themselves as able performers for their *m'alem*, the possessing spirits, the audience, any cell phones that may be recording, and even any ethnographers like myself who might be in the room. This, therefore, is not a hard-and-fast progression of advancement. It is a template, something that serves as an ideal for teachers as they watch their apprentices grow. Frequently, however, these stages demonstrate a path not taken by younger performers who aim for careers as *gnawa* practitioners on their own terms, both within rituals and on stages.

## **Jūqay**

A new learner begins as a *jūqay*, essentially a personal assistant to the *m'alem*. At this point, he has decided to enter into the process of learning *agnāwīt*, the art and science of the *gnawa*, and chosen a teacher. A good *jūqay* will carry out a range of the non-musical tasks for his teacher both on a regular daily basis and during ritual evenings. He will be around, generally attempting to learn and understand the livelihood while being introduced to the community. During spare moments, he will have the opportunity to ask questions. Common tasks for a *jūqay* include running minor errands, bringing coffee or tea throughout the day, and carrying the *hajhūj* or other instruments. When deemed trustworthy, these tasks extend to the realm of caring for the ritual paraphernalia (incense, rose water, dates, milk, etc.) and holding a goat or other large animal still during the *dbīḥa*, the sacrificial killing that denotes a proper ritual.

The content of lessons is not consistent. Many older *m'alemīn* tell me about how they would hear the way their teacher performed a song, sit all night attempting to remember it, and run home to try and figure the nuances out after a performance was over. This has changed more recently, especially with the advent of recording functionality in even the most inexpensive cell phones. It is not uncommon to see a group of *ḍrārī* or youth on the street huddled around a cell phone and listening to a ritual performance from the evening before. At this point, the assistant is unpaid or poorly paid, usually does not play an instrument during the events, and may dance during the *frāja* (entertainment opening) segments that require the entire group. He will concentrate on memorising the responses of the songs and may mimic the rhythms of the *qurāqib* with his hands.

Most frequently, young members of the group hold this role, even children as young as 10. The boundaries are flexible. During a *lila* in Mulay Brahim, outside Marrakech in 2011, M'alem Abd al-Kabir Merchane's troupe featured an adolescent *jūqay* whose acrobatics wowed the audience. He served as an intern of sorts, doing all of the errands expected of his status, but his virtuosity as a dancer showed his auspicious potential as a *koyo*. He was active during the opening segments of the event, but largely sat alongside the other *ḍrārī* once the possessions began. From this vantage point, he could continue his education by memorising choral responses and beating out *qurāqib* patterns on his knees. Over time, if given the opportunity and calling, he will likely move more fully into the next phase of his apprenticeship.

## **Koyo**

Specific types of musical participation in the ritual event define the remaining roles. The *koyo* plays one of the two *ṭbāl* (or sometimes three) during the opening and closing of the ritual. The *ṭbāl* is the large marching drum,

slung over the shoulder during the procession into the home and opening entertainment segments of the ceremony, and occasionally again at the end. The *koyo* plays a consistent dotted-8th/16th note pattern on the smaller of the two *tbāl*, called the *frādī*. The *m'alem* uses a series of stock and improvised rhythmic figures to communicate with the dancing members of the group on a second larger *tbāl* called the *zwāqī*, the decoration. As he speeds up subtly over time, the *koyo* (playing the *frādī*) keeps his accompanimental pattern locked into the changing tempo.

While this is the standard job of the *koyo* as described to me, I also hear the word used to compliment the featured dancers during the *frāja*. The performance is judged by this *koyo*'s ability to both lock into the rhythmic and melodic intricacies, and his virtuosity in both standard motions and improvised inspiration. The example of Zakariah described above demonstrates the importance of ability within the dance. As he incorporates moves from his breakdancing days into his entranced dance while balancing a bowl of water on his head, he effectively brings together his and his possessing spirit's experience. He and others explained to me that the balancing of the bowl, like the ability to cut oneself with a knife or the resistance to burning candles that highlight trances in other segments of the ritual, proves the legitimacy of a possession. These feats of balance and endurance of pain are only possible for the embodying spirit, they are superhuman. Yet, the spirit claiming Zakariah's body takes advantage of his youth and athleticism to perform a spectacle of spins and rolls.

A very different *koyo* was a part of Abd al-Wahid Stitu's troupe at a *līla* in the 2013 pilgrimage festival (*mūssem*) in Sidi Ali. The troupe was a group of elder *m'alemīn* who came together for the week's events. These were old friends from different parts of the country and there was a certain festivity surrounding the evening. One *m'alem* from Asilah acted as *koyo* and danced during many of the ritual segments, for many of the possessing spirits. His moves were restrained, reverent, and far from the acrobatics of the young Zakariah, yet his stature within the community and expertise in syncing his dance with Stitu's *hajhūj* playing (Fuson's 'co-enunciation'), garnered him similarly enthusiastic responses from those present. After an especially well-received dance, the *koyo* may turn and begin reciting blessings upon those around him in exchange for monetary gifts. These blessings and gifts, both called 'baraka', punctuate the end of a ritual segment. Thus, a good *koyo* can inspire larger gifts from the ritual audience, making his an important economic contribution to the ensemble.

### **Hariqsa**

The *hariqsa*'s role is that of a vocal assistant to the *m'alem*. While the *jūqay*, *koyo*, and *khalīfa* (substitute *hajhūj* player, described below) could carry out

their jobs while only knowing the choral responses of each song, a *hariqsa* steps in when the *m'alem*'s voice needs a break. He, therefore, must know a number of verses for the song and be able to sing loudly, clearly, and confidently. Most often, a *hariqsa*'s opportunity to take over is planned in advance for a point in the ceremony when the *m'alem* will need a short rest. For this reason, a *hariqsa* may not need to know the entire repertoire, but his use is exponentially greater if he has a comprehensive grasp of it, as he could take over 'on the fly' if necessary.

Usually, there will be one member of a group who serves as *hariqsa*. This person has many opportunities during his turn as the main vocalist to demonstrate his high level of repertoire knowledge. Sometimes, though, a *ḍrārī* is able to achieve the state of *hariqsa* solely through his vocal clarity and power. This is especially the case for those who are in groups led by a *m'alem* whose voice is not particularly strong. Interestingly, many uses of a *hariqsa* that I have witnessed came during the most well-known songs in the repertoire, especially those that required a slightly different vocal timbre, higher range, understanding of scalar patterns not standard to *gnawa* performance,<sup>7</sup> or heightened endurance. For example, 'Abd ar-Rzaq once served as *hariqsa* and *khalīfa* for his brother in a performance and took over during the more difficult songs, notably "Aisha Ḥamdushiyya". The use of *ḍrārī* in supporting roles can backfire, however, and be a crutch. In 2012 a young *m'alem* in his 30s invited me to a *līla* where two of his skilled *ḍrārī* served the role of *hariqsa*. They assisted the leader after his voice wore out from the struggle to sing over the rest of the ensemble at about 3 am. In this case, the frequent use of a *hariqsa* opened the young performer up to criticism that he did not have the requisite vocal strength to properly lead a ritual ceremony. His inexperience with more complicated repertoire and his fatigue during the long event proved costly for the clients. Fearing that the spirits were unsatisfied, they hired another *m'alem* to complete a second *līla* a few nights later.

### ***Khalīfa***

The last major role that I discuss here is that of the *khalīfa*. This is a member of the ensemble who has the skill to take the *ḥajḥūj* and play. The instrument is a very physical one and quickly wears out the hand, especially the right index finger. A look at a *m'alem*'s hand shows the abuse that the rough instrument causes. Despite the use of henna and other techniques to strengthen the skin, cuts, bleeding, ripped fingernails, and other injuries might require a *m'alem* to stop in the middle of a song. On occasion, however, the *khalīfa*'s role is pre-planned, allowing the *m'alem* to take a moment of respite from the expected fatigue. In contemporary practice, with shorter rituals and the frequent use of amplification, the *khalīfa* is less common.

Like the *hariqsa*, a *m'alem* can strategically use the *khalifa* to augment the ritual experience for clients. In one of the first rituals that I attended, in 2006, I was invited by Abd ar-Rzaq only to find that the *lila* was to be led by another *m'alem* I knew from Fez's old city named Gaga. The hosting family had hired the *muqaddima*<sup>8</sup> to prepare the event and requested that Gaga's troupe perform. She, however, did not fully trust Gaga's abilities and professionalism and hired Abd ar-Rzaq to be a part of the ensemble as a 'backup'. Gaga performed well, but chose to pass the *hajhūj* over to Rzaq during many of the most well-known pieces of the repertoire. He was able to take some short breaks while also showing his status as the leader of an ensemble that featured an established local *m'alem*, something rare within the community.

This track of advancement through dancing, singing, and playing shows a specific hierarchy of skills. It does not imply that one is more valued than the other as a skill, since every group must be made up of those who specialise in each, but it does demonstrate that, for the *ḍrārī*, rhythmic understanding and lyrical knowledge are more important than virtuosity on the *hajhūj*. Not all groups use a *khalifa*, yet every ensemble needs good dancers, *ṭbāl* players, and vocalists.

### ***M'alem***

The final arrival comes when the learner is deemed to be a *m'alem*. At this point, the student ceases to be a *ḍrārī* and goes out on his own, assembling his own ensemble of *ḍrārī* and looking for work. As stated above, this process might take 30 years or more to complete and many *ḍrārī*, especially those who become a well-known *koyo*, *khalifa*, or *hariqsa*, maintain a productive career without ever making this last move. Once the *ḍrārī* becomes a *m'alem*, it becomes inappropriate for him to enter into another *m'alem's* group as a *ḍrārī*, vastly limiting his economic opportunities. Instead of trying to become a trusted *ḍrārī* for *m'alemin*, he must directly attempt to secure work for himself and his group by building a wider reputation among the community. This final move is generally the result of a calling, spirits demanding this next step from an adept, but increasingly it is also borne of the ambition of the musician and ritual leader. Aside from a firm understanding of 'the *gnawa* sciences', striving to become a *m'alem* requires the mastery of instrumental technique, a vast repertoire, singing, and vocal projection over an ensemble. The experience borne of years of study and training as a *gnawī* moves through this system, following a spiritual calling, earns him respect and authority. For those who step outside the apprenticeship model and instead follow the logic of the popular music industry, this ritual knowledge can be equivocal, changing the aesthetic and ritual values present within any given ceremony.



## Working outside the system

Historically, the teacher granted the status of *m'alem*. Students who learn the repertoire and ascend through these steps often move around, usually visiting other cities, in search of a more complete understanding. Most current *m'alemīn* are able to list a variety of cities from across Morocco in which they spent time working with different teachers. Some older *m'alemīn* claim to have taught a host of contemporary stars. I frequently hear statements such as '[So and so] sat right here and learned from me', (often followed by a negative judgement about how this now-well-known performer did not stay long enough and, therefore, has a deficient understanding of *tgnāwīt*). The also common '[So and so] will tell you that he taught every *m'alem* in Morocco if you ask him' quickly counters the sentiment. The bestowal of status and achievement no longer exclusively works according to the process known to previous generations. According to 'Abd ar-Rzaq and others in Fez, when a *ḍrārī* wanted to prove himself, he would assemble a *līla* and play it in its entirety. He would invite all of the prominent *m'alemīn* of the city, who would sit in the back and watch, judging. This performance, not unlike a juried recital or dissertation defence, would end in a discussion between the 'judges' and a decision to grant the new status to the *ḍrārī* or to require him to continue his studies and practice until future notice. Some have told me of city-wide leaders who acted as final arbiters and made these decisions, something closer in line to contemporary practice in the *ḥamadsha* and *'issawa* brotherhoods.<sup>9</sup> Teachers celebrate those *ḍrārī* who go through this process and achieve their rank via this apprenticeship system by praising them in conversation and even tacking their photos to the walls of their homes, as was the case with M'alem Hamid of Fez Jdid who frequently turned towards a picture of his student Hicham that hung above his low couches. Hicham's move to Belgium following his studies did not disturb his *m'alem*. Instead of interpreting it as a grab for fame and money in Europe (a criticism he levied against other young *gnawī* who travelled extensively), he saw his student as doing a service. The Moroccan diaspora in Belgium, he explained, would need someone of Hicham's character and ability. Those *ḍrārī* who do not complete the training and testing, and instead choose to self-identify as *m'alemīn*, receive the scorn of those same elders. While some do, older professional *ḍrārī* do not always articulate similar biases. This is may be due to the fact that a less-skilled or -experienced *m'alem* might still pay them to join his ensemble.<sup>10</sup>

The frustration expressed by most current *m'alemīn*, though, is that young students want to learn the *ḥajḥūj* right away. Because there are no consistent 'lessons' to be had in most cases, the younger members turn to CDs and other recordings. Once they learn a few tracks, as the story goes, they call themselves *m'alemīn* and go find work. The insults that established *m'alemīn*



articulate come from younger players' focus on musical content instead of ritual and lyric knowledge: they flip the priorities and value pragmatics over a clear understanding of spirits, possession, and history. That their repertoire does not go beyond the most famous songs – meaning that when they are asked to extend a specific portion of the ceremony by a possessed client, they may run out of songs and replay the ones that they have just performed – firmly defends these claims about mistaken priorities.

Many aspiring students of the most recent generation garner their knowledge from very different sources.<sup>11</sup> First, instead of travelling extensively, they collect recordings, fostering the ability to identify and replicate the performance and vocal style of the country's most recorded *m'alemīn*. Those who are not well connected turn to street performance, learning on their own and taking advantage of this informal stage to demonstrate both mastery and creativity. The role of listening and musical memory is vastly different, as learners now have the ability to pause, rewind, and revisit their aural sources using widely available recording technology (including cell phones). Learners who remain outside the standard semi-formal educational system described in the previous sections, however, lack a mechanism by which they can prove their ritual knowledge. While the descriptions of 'juried' *lila* performances may be more nostalgia than past standard practice, apprentices still had the opportunity to impress their teachers and others who they met through their teachers' connections. Instead, YouTube and public performances assist these contemporary students of the *gnawa* sciences as they aspire to renown.

While in Marrakech one evening I experienced a salient example of this novel process of musical and ritual transmission. As I was walking with a friend and knowledgeable *gnawa* participant named 'Adil Walili, we passed a group of youth on the side of the road. It was the late evening, perhaps even the early morning, yet these young men were energetically engaged in impromptu performances of the most well-known pieces of the *gnawa* repertoire. They stopped 'Adil, begging him to join. As we sat, I heard exact replications of some of the most known recordings: 'Sidi Mimun' or 'Baba Hamu' as played by Mohammed Baqbu, for example. They passed the *ḥajḥūj* around between songs, taking turns as the group's momentary *m'alem*. Each knew some of the lyrics, but none continued beyond the first few lines, likely because most recorded songs are shorter than the versions performed in ritual. The musical diversity of their knowledge was limited, but their vocal and instrumental virtuosity was well beyond that of some of the most prominent *m'alemīn* of the older generations. 'Adil, however, was their teacher, their informal *m'alem*. His knowledge went beyond these recordings, but he only rarely performs with troupes in ritual settings. He looks forward to continuing his training, but in the meantime he must continue working at a nearby restaurant in order to feed his family.

These young adults trade recordings, share YouTube videos, and generally critique each other as they all work to improve their own performance techniques. Yet they are left outside a system that still requires a direct relationship for both ritual knowledge and an honorific title of legitimacy. In one sense, their education parallels the crowd-sourcing that is so common throughout our modern world's learning, as the internet, with sites such as Wikipedia, become collaborative efforts towards an end goal. Their aspirations are therefore rooted in the current or potential future world of the *gnawa*, not a nostalgic memory. They are just as competitive for tourist gigs, some festivals, and recording opportunities, especially in fusion settings, but they are almost completely incapable of winning any ritual clients due to their inexperience with the ceremony and lack of apprenticeship-based training. They must prove their ritual abilities through new means, by winning over the respect of their peers and listeners outside the ceremony. Those artists that most fully connect with an audience, either in ritual or on stage, will be successful.

### ***Yassine and his lions***

In this final section, I introduce a talented young *gnawī* who chose to operate in ambiguity outside the system outlined above. Living in Fez, Yassine has spent time with *m'alemīn* from around the region, but did not follow through the traditional system of learning. Instead, he sees his *gnawa* performance as a commercial activity, and he orients his performance practices and economic goals accordingly. He targets youth in non-ritual settings, yet he accepts ritual work when opportunities arise, most frequently resulting from his active staged performance schedule. His *lila* ceremonies can be quite small, as those who need a therapeutic ritual but lack the connections within the *gnawa* community comprise his most frequent clients. On one train ride with Yassine, he pulled out his *hājḥūj* to demonstrate a song that I was asking about. A man who was a few seats away came over to us after he finished and, after an animated conversation, invited Yassine to Rabat to perform a ceremony for his family. News that he leads rituals provoked the ire and disdain of most other *m'alemīn* in Fez. Their opinions of him range from uninterested to offended, as he is seen as taking work that should rightfully go to the 'true' experienced *m'alemīn*. When I asked what he thought of these younger *m'alemīn* finding work Abd ar-Rzaq was dismissive, they do what they want, he told me. I regularly heard expressions of frustration from established *m'alemīn* levied against both these performers, who lacked sufficient respect for tradition to enter into training and fully gain the knowledge necessary to effectively host a ritual, and the clients, whose tastes and priorities were underdeveloped to the point of hiring such a performer. Yassine is one of the more successful young *gnawī* that I met and pursued an alternative career path more akin to that of a professional

musician than a ritual leader, and one of the few who was able to secure ritual clients somewhat regularly. Perhaps those who would hire Yassine simply would not be interested in sitting through (or paying for) Abd ar-Rzaq's version of the ceremony.

When I returned to Morocco in the summer of 2012, I decided to bring my new banjo, an instrument that has been a mainstay in Moroccan music since the 1970s. This is thanks in part to the music of groups such as Nass al-Ghiwane, who brought a variety of Moroccan regional traditions together and created what was arguably Morocco's first popular music.<sup>12</sup> I performed with Yassine during a religious music festival in Fez in Ramadan of 2012 organised by prominent *ḥamadsha* leader and local impresario, 'Abd ar-Rahim 'Amrani. As is common for his events, the conclusion of this concert featured a hastily assembled fusion project. Four of us, myself on violin, Yassine on *ḥajḥūj*, and two percussionists (one on *djembe*, a West African drum uncommon in any tradition featured during the event) accompanied a *malḥūn* singer from Meknes. At this point, I only knew a small handful of *malḥūn* melodies; so I was forced to rely on my aural skills to follow. Yassine, filling out the roll of a rhythmic bass part, did the same.

Later, I was re-introduced to Yassine by a mutual friend, Omar Channafi. Omar is a young Moroccan photographer and a budding impresario of cultural events. His frequent activities are well attended and include exhibitions that readily feature musical performances. For one such event, Omar invited a number of musicians from different backgrounds, representing his ideals of this young, affluent community. Through the rehearsals for this event, I toyed with a few ways in which I could join my own tastes and skills on the banjo with Yassine's ideas about *gnawa* fusion. The resulting performance included freestyle slam poetry in a variety of languages, opening an opportunity to bring in a funk and hip-hop rhythmic sensibility. Alternating between repetitive rhythmic phrases and beds of open claw hammer patterns, I was able to settle into the ambiguous harmonic motion implied by the pentatonic scales used by the *gnawa*. By the end of the evening, the audience of 20-somethings and teenagers were on their feet, dancing and singing along. Yassine invited me to continue playing with his own group, one that he calls the 'Gnawa Lions', possibly in reference to his own mane of dark hair.

I point out my own place within the textural fabric of Yassine's group because the flexibility of creativity he afforded me and the excitement with which he met each of my additions made explicit his eagerness in searching for a 'fusion' with Western funk and hip hop. Other members of the most recent version of the Lions were Fouad, a *sh'abi* violinist, and Bin Kiran, a keyboardist, both experienced in Moroccan popular music. They spent these two performances, like I did, searching for ways to fit their personal voices into a collaborative space alongside Yassine's playing and singing. His array of percussionists, two young *qurāqib* players and a *djembe* player, sang the choral

responses to Yassine's calls, and the sound of the tradition remained at the front of the texture. With each passing performance, however, we found our respective pocket more quickly and the 'fusing' became less ragged. And after each, Yassine was more excited about the next. Most telling, however, was his ability to take these performance skills, developed on stages and in unexpected contexts, and apply them to his work within ceremonies.

### ***Laughing with the spirits***

Among young *gnawa* musicians who found success as performers on stages, Yassine was notable in how he parlayed his skill with audiences into ritual performance opportunities. In ritual, he used his experiences from outside the standard training to his benefit. His performance aimed to entertain his clients while demonstrating the hard-earned knowledge borne of his intense individual study. One of my lasting impressions comes from an event where Yassine was hired to perform the rare Jewish *gnawa* ceremony in January 2013 (see Hell 2002, 272–273). The event features a repertoire vastly different than that of the standard ritual and few *m'alemīn* bother to learn it due to its rare usage. Some of the possessing spirits are identical, but there are others (such as Da'ud, or King David) who might be more commonly associated with the Jewish tradition. The event features specific paraphernalia, including candles, occasionally a cross or crucifix (demonstrating some slippage in the understanding of non-Muslim faiths), and often some type of alcohol. In fact, the presence of alcohol is the most common reason cited by *m'alemīn* when explaining to me why they do not carry out this type of ceremony. Others have clandestine photos with Johnny Walker bottles that they pull out to show their knowledge of, and experience with, this ceremonial repertoire.

During the small event (the ensemble featured only one *qurāqib* player and only the client's family was present), Yassine fell victim to a common issue with young players: he knew some of this non-standard repertoire, but he could not keep up with the continued desires of the trancing and dancing clients. They wanted to continue partially because his performance was inciting trance in his listeners, but also because they were having a great time. The host, a *shuwwāfa* or clairvoyant who works as a *muqaddima* when hosting other *lila* ceremonies throughout the year, demonstrated her possession by reading the futures of the women who were present. To maintain the musical inertia through the event, Yassine went back and repeated a few songs. As the afternoon moved on, however, he began to take liberties. Eventually during a performance of 'Hammadi', a song that also appears in portions of the standard ritual event, Yassine improvised texts about his own life. The listeners laughed as he wound his way through his musical story. He had

departed significantly from the ritual, but his music was still based within it and accomplished its ritual task. Yassine the *artiste*, the *fnān*, was proving himself a creative and successful *m'alem*, at least for this small group of trance-listeners.

### The *Gnawa* lovers

While being ignored or dismissed by established community leaders, young *gnawa* musicians are creatively navigating their new careers, leveraging talent and entrepreneurship to secure performances. Most of these opportunities are minor concerts, small chances to widen their exposure, like bands playing club gigs. Sometimes, though, audience members turn into ritual clients and hire these 'outsiders' for ritual events. This calls into question perspectives and ideologies about what the ritual is and should be. If Yassine and others like him are running ritual events, if they are effectively inciting trance within their listeners and healing them by successfully 'working' the spirits, then the exclusive dominance of lifelong training can potentially be called into question. Determinations of ritual authority that are vested within established lineages and educational pathways may not be as necessary as they once were. In effect, these outsiders are disrupting a ritual system in a way that moves the onus of proof back upon the tradition itself. If both can initiate effective spirit possession, then why would a prospective client pay more for an elder? Answers to this question are easy to find. Experience breeds success and potency within a ceremony while inexperience can (and often does) lead to failure and waste. Health, whether spiritual or physical, is not necessarily someplace to cut corners, to skimp. Perhaps most importantly, a respect for and faith in the lifetime of dedication that the apprenticeship system proves one's own reverence for the *gnawa* ritual ceremony itself.

Even so, the economic realities of a professional career as a *gnawa* musician combine with the range of new technologies available to young learners and listeners to greatly influence their potential livelihoods. The *lila* ritual continues to exist across Morocco as it has for years, but its aesthetics are no longer consistent. In fact, as referenced above, they have been in flux for at least a century, pressured by the commercialisation of the tradition and the influx of new influences. The pace has quickened in the past decades, however. The shifts within ritual and community priorities are not exclusively musical, nor are they moral. The circulation of aesthetics, ideologies, and market pressures contribute to systemic adaptations that bear out within Moroccan ritual practice right now, one of which influences the modes of training and opportunity presented to young, interested *gnawa* learners. *Gnawa* clients demand ritual leaders who speak to them, and while established *m'alemīn* who can prove their authority through experience usually get the nod, openings are increasingly appearing

for those who come from a different background and, therefore, utilise their skills to engage clients on their own terms.

Modes of learning are dramatically changing, thanks to the innovations and aspirations of young artists such as Yassine or those youth on the side of the road in Marrakech. They are not only performers, but they are also a prominent group of influential consumers of *gnawa* recordings. Their ways of learning take new technologies, values, and goals as given. They use their cell phones and YouTube to stay aware of what different artists are doing, to get ideas for their own playing, and to share their innovations with the rest of *their* young community. They are the *muhibbin*, the lovers of this music.

The young artists use what they hear around them, incorporating the sounds of prominent recorded *gnawa* musicians and those of popular music to build their audiences. They are playing to others like them, but they are still tied to a traditional system that values ritual knowledge and efficacy. As they step outside the institution of apprenticeship, they must find alternatives for building their esteem, their authority, and their *tgnawit*. They do so by knowing and fully engaging their audiences. Some listeners want to be entertained while others judge the performers based on their depth of knowledge. Yassine works hard to talk the talk while walking the walk, to meet both demands within the *lila* ceremony. He keeps a notebook that he fills with different versions of song texts that he hears in recordings, *lila* rituals, and staged performances as he travels the country. He is quick to demonstrate Algerian versions of a few songs from the repertoire or other regional variations. He approaches *gnawa* musical diversity and history like a scholar. But when he takes the stage with his band, he and his Lions get the audience up and dancing by digging into what they want: a funky pop beat. They turn giddy when he slides into a tune typical of a wedding celebration. This is the audience of people whose tastes align with his own, they are his cohort, the *muhibbin* that love what he does. It is these audiences, not the elders, who effect such dramatic change on the system of learning and advancement in Morocco. Their values bear performers who speak to them, who play the songs that they want to hear, and who do it in modern ways. Often the performers who engage these audiences lack the ritual knowledge of those who apprentice themselves and become *ḍrārī*, and as such their ceremonies wont fail. But they know how to work a crowd. And, as Yassine's examples above show, some can certainly entertain the spirits as well.

## Notes

1. *Gnawa* performance is a heavily gendered genre of music in Morocco. Some examples exist of women playing the *ḥajḥūj* and leading ensembles in commercial settings, but they are the rare exception to the norm. One group of women

assembled by ‘Abd ar-Rahim Amrani of Fez performs on national television somewhat regularly, demonstrating that there is room for female voices within the genre. Their exceptionality as women, epitomised by their title of *bnāt gnawa* (girls of the *gnawa*), is notable in performance and the exception to the rule. Because it is such a male-dominated music, I use masculine pronouns for musicians in *gnawa* ensembles throughout this article. Other roles within the tradition are primarily female roles. Examples include the seer (*shawwafa*) who diagnoses potential clients and the *muqaddima* who usually prepares and presides over ritual events for clients, hires musicians, directs the cooking and presentation of food to audience members, and cares for trancing bodies during the ritual.

2. The *mlūk* are possessing spirits: the term translates literally to “owners.” This segment of the ceremony is when the ensemble moves through the musical repertoire dedicated to each successive set of *mlūk*, inviting them to take over the bodies of the trancing clients.
3. Many scholars of contemporary *gnawa* practice note, and often lament, the shortening of the ritual as a sign of the “desacralization” of *gnawa* practice (for an example, see Hell 2002, 351).
4. The *qarāqib* are pairs of iron castanets tied together at one end. Members of the ensemble take one set in each hand and play various rhythmic patterns accompanying the *ḥajhūj* on most songs.
5. Despite two invitations that demonstrated his desire to show that he was, in fact, a ritual leader, I was unable to attend. I look forward to reconnecting with al-Qasri during a future research visit, when I can witness the content of his ritual practice. Promoters will occasionally refer to a night of music as a *lila*, even though the intention of trance is absent. Even during these events, however, individual maskūn may become overtaken by their possessing spirits. He was clear with me in stating that his *lila* ceremonies contained ritual healing.
6. The division of income is fluid and depends on the individual *m’alem*, the relationship between the *m’alem* and the *ḍrārī*, and other concerns specific to that instance.
7. While there are a few scales that are common throughout the *gnawa* repertoire, possibly because they are idiomatic to the *ḥajhūj*, some songs across the *lila* feature non-standard melodic content that is borrowed from other Moroccan genres. The most well-known example is “Aisha Hamdushiyya,” which comes from the *ḥamadsha* ritual and features a pitch content, melodic structure, meter, and texture that is different from most songs that surround it during the ceremony. Others are borrowed from the *jilala* tradition, popular music styles, *malhūn*, and the Arabic classical modes (*maqamāt*).
8. Often clients hire a *muqaddima*, a woman who runs the practical aspects of the ceremony, to arrange everything for them. When this is the case, it is the *muqaddima* who comes to Rzaq to arrange the agreement. The *muqaddima*, therefore, maintains a significant amount of control in the event and nurtures professional relationships between these ceremonial practitioners across the city who can provide a great deal of employment for musicians. This role, almost exclusively played by women, is deserving of increased scholarly attention.
9. Chlyeh (1998, 60–64) quotes Abdelatif at length as he describes his visions, emotions, and his memory of the community that surrounded his own experience as he conducted a ritual for the first time.
10. In fact, some performers who self-identify as *m’alemīn* go out of their way to hire prominent *ḍrārī* in an effort to bolster the respect given to their group. One *gnawa*

musician that I often ran into during *lila* ceremonies around Fez was Hamid Sharif. He appeared in the *ḡrārī* of many younger *m'alemīn*, and served as an authority figure for those that he performed with. They looked to his presence as a sign of the ensemble's value to potential clients and his willingness to be a leader for these young groups, even though he was not the *m'alem*, helped him to get a great deal of work and influence the community.

11. What I outline here is a form of semi-formal education, a system with its own informal institutions. No *m'alemīn* with whom I worked were able to identify an explicit system with distinct members, even in the broadest sense, yet the idea that something that once was is now faltering was consistent in interviews. The difference appears to be in relation to a changing mode of transmission. While the semi-formal system still exists, the individualistic mode of learning the *gnawa* music and ritual, described in the following sections, is now far more common. The celebration of those learners who remain faithful to the apprenticeship system becomes a way to preserve this system and influence young learners away from relying on CDs for their musical knowledge and the trappings of commercial fame. The efficacy of this strategy in the attitudes of young learners would be an interesting and fruitful avenue of research.
12. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Nass al-Ghiwane's popularity on the public reception of the *gnawa*. Their use of *gnawa* music and the contributions of Abderrahmane Kirrouche (known as Paco) appear in most scholarly discussions of the *gnawa*. See Dernouny and Zoulef (1980) regarding their important social protest aesthetic and the more recent history by their lead singer, Sayed (2011), for a celebratory history of the band, a mainstay of the Moroccan music scene.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to Larry Crook, Fiona McLaughlin, Alexander S. Reed, Welson Tremura, Phillip Murphy, Russell Brown, Hicham Chami, Tom Beardslee, the Journal's anonymous reviewers, and the many others who read previous versions of this work and hashed out the many conversations that preceded it. My sincerest appreciation goes to the *gnawa* community and the *m'alemīn* who welcomed me and were so generous with their time.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by a Fulbright Student Grant; an Alumni Grant from the University of Florida School of Music; and dissertation research support from the University of Florida Center for African Studies.

## References

- Becker, Cynthia. 2014. "Patchwork, Dreadlocks, and Cowries: Trancing the Trans-Saharan Journey of Moroccan Culture." In *Saharan Crossroads: Exploring Historical,*



- Cultural, and Artistic Linkages Between North and West Africa*, edited by Tara F. Deubel, Scott M. Youngstedt, and H el ene Tissi eres, 105–140. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Chlyeh, Abdelhafid. 1998. *Les Gnaoua Du Maroc: Itin eraires, Initiatiques, Transe et Possession*. Casablanca: La Pens ee Sauvage.
- Chlyeh, Abdelhafid. 1999. *L'univers Des Gnaoua*. Casablanca: La Pens ee Sauvage.
- Dernouny, Mohamed, and Boujem a Zoulef. 1980. "Naissance D'un Chant Prostestataire: Le Groupe Marocaine Nass El Ghiwane." *Peuples M diterran ens* 12 (July–September): 3–31.
- El Hamel, Chouki. 2013. *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuson, Timothy Dale. 2009. "Musicking Moves and Ritual Grooves Across the Moroccan Gnawa Night." PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Grame, Theodore C. 1970. "Music in the Jma al-Fna of Marrakesh." *The Musical Quarterly* 56: 74–87.
- Hell, Bertrand. 2002. *Le Tourbillon Des G nies: Au Maroc Avec Les Gnawa*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Kapchan, Deborah. 2007. *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Lapassade, Georges. 1976. "Les Gnaoua d'Essaouira: Les Rites de Possession Des Anciens Esclaves Noirs Au Maghreb, Hier et Aujourd'hui." *L'Homme et La Soci et *, no. 39–40: 191–215.
- P aques, Viviana. 1991. *La religion des esclaves: recherches sur la confr erie marocaine des Gnawa* [The Religion of the Slaves: Research on the Moroccan Brotherhood of the Gnawa]. Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali.
- Sayed, Omar. 2011. *Nass El Ghiwane*. Italy: Senso Unico Editions.
- Sum, Maisie. 2011. "Staging the Sacred: Musical Structure and Processes of the Gnawa Lila in Morocco." *Ethnomusicology* 55 (1): 77–111.
- Turner, Tamara Dee. 2012. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Musical Speech: Sounding Moral Geographies in Moroccan Gnawa Music." Masters thesis, Tufts University.