

Revolution Remixxx 2011: Protest Song Marocaine John Schaefer

In late 2010, those of us interested in the Middle East were surprised by persistent protests in Tunisia. My family and I were evacuated from Cairo on February 2, 2011. I returned to Egypt on February 13, and a week later, a major day of rage started the revolution in Morocco, with large protests breaking out in all major cities and even many minor ones. Like millions, I avidly watched the music videos and music clips that supported and resulted from the protests in Tunis and Cairo. In particular, I checked the Internet for news from Morocco. I was unsurprised to see Moroccans taking part in massive protests. I was also not surprised to see them using songs and chants. What did surprise me was the presence of one song.

This song, “Feen Ghadi Biya Khoya,” was familiar to me. In 2006 in Tangier, I heard a 2003 cover by the bar band Hoba Hoba Spirit that was included on a mixtape CD I got free with a magazine issue. The song sparked my memory, and I realized I had already had the original from a 1973 Nass al-Ghiwane album, which I had bought years before on CD and which was already in my iTunes library. Nass al-Ghiwane, the venerable folk-pop group from the 1970s, continues to dominate popular music in Morocco—its aesthetics, politics, and social conscience. I quickly listened to both and compared them, and jotted down a few notes. I was working at the time with Mahmoud, a young student of the Gnawa M'allim (“master”) Abdellah El Gourd, translating song lyrics. Mahmoud was educated and from a scholarly family, but his father had been an activist journalist during the 1980s. While Mahmoud was a child, his father had been imprisoned and terribly abused by the regime. Mahmoud had faced some emotional difficulties in the years following, and M'allim Abdellah's tutelage was at once personal, professional, and therapeutic.

In 2007, back in the United States, I got a copy of a colleague's ethnomusicology dissertation¹ and was pleased to see significant analysis of the song's two versions. Then in 2010, when I was back in Tangier for a few weeks, I was sitting with friends while young Abdeslam, the latest acolyte of M'allim Abdellah, was playing around on a ginbri, a large lute imbued with symbolic value in the Gnawa spirit possession ritual. During a lull in the conversation, Abdeslam started improvising Nass covers. Ears pricked up and requests came quickly. I asked him to play “Feen Ghadi Biya Khoya,” and he did to the great enjoyment of those of us gathered. Seized at once by the dynamic incongruities between the two covers from 1973 (studio folk-pop album) and 2003 (cover played in bars and on the festival circuit), I returned to my hotel and wrote 20 pages of analysis over the next three days. I filed away my notes until late February 2011, when the song returned in the Arab Revolution. The return was unlikely because of its transformation between 1973 and 2003. This transformation is linked to broader transformations in Moroccan society. Teasing apart these transformations is my primary focus in this article.

High Nationalism, 1973

Formed in 1971 by four underclass youth from the working-class neighborhood of Hayy al-Muhammadi in Casablanca, Nass al-Ghiwane hit super-stardom in the late 1970s and 1980s, and they remain the single most influential musical group in the Moroccan recording industry, and, indeed, in Moroccan society more broadly. The group composed songs in Darija, the colloquial Arabic language of Morocco, but they intentionally used old-fashioned words and phrases, often drawn from folksongs, religious poetry, and the elite oral poetry genre called malhun. They also drew on traditional melodies and rhythms, seeking to incorporate regional sounds from throughout the nation's diverse cultural groups—Berber music, Gnawa music of the Black former slaves, rural as well as urban styles. Millions

of Moroccans have memorized the lyrics to numerous songs from the band's repertoire. Those who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s form the core of Nass al-Ghiwane's fan base, sustained by strong memories of listening to the music and attending live performances; nevertheless, younger generations also know the repertoire well and attend reunion concerts of the band, still performing with two original members as well as younger additions who are needed to hit the high notes. These high notes are important in Nass al-Ghiwane songs, and indeed in nostalgic Moroccan discourses on the 1970s. Although Callen correctly points out that Nass al-Ghiwane were already critiquing the failures of the promises of Moroccan modernity, in the 1970s such critiques came from a place where the promise was still possible to think.

In their eclectic synthesis of style—old and new, rural and urban, peripheral and central, elite and popular, domestic and global—Nass al-Ghiwane performed the unity of the modern Moroccan nation. By singing in Darija, they ensured that non-Maghribi audiences would be even less certain of the lyrical content than Moroccan audiences were (although Nass al-Ghiwane was appreciated across the Arab world). Moreover, with their long hair, beards and Afros, their mohair vests and blue jeans, they embodied a domesticated cosmopolitanism that provided a sense of contemporaneity for those Moroccans whose main encounter with global cultural elements of “the Sixties” might only have been in trying to avoid the hordes of stoned European youth in search of cheap highs as they followed the hippie trail's Moroccan path. While Nass looked like hippies, they only ever sang in Moroccan darija. They were not singing for outsiders—their primary audience was fellow Moroccans and North Africans.

The songs were written and performed within the context of political disorder and outright oppression. Nevertheless, percussionist and singer Omar Sayyed (who remains, along with banjo player Allal Yalla, one of the group's two original members) contends that any strong political force to their songs is overstated and has been unfairly imputed by scholars and fans given to over-analysis. Indeed, King Hassan II, the supposed target of their criticism, is said to have been a huge fan, inviting them to perform at numerous state dinners.

Nevertheless, despite later disavowals and lyrics that are often obscure, some say deliberately so, political content is clearly evident in some of the lyrics, at least to fans and scholars. An excellent early example is the song “Feen Ghadi Biya Khouya” from Nass al-Ghiwane's 1973 debut album, *Al-Siniyya*. The phrase “feen ghadi biya khoya” translates roughly to “Where are we going, Brother?” Indeed, the point is proven by the song's reprise in the protest in Rabat.

By the early 1970s, a mature domestic market in Morocco for music spoke directly to Moroccans. At the same time, it was a period of intense political repression. The era's lowest point, between 1972 and the mid-1980s, became known as the Years of Lead (*'am ar-rassas, les annees de plomb*). In 1971 and 1972 the king survived several assassination attempts, and the resulting paranoia and violence was terrible to behold particularly for political activists, but the fear spread throughout all classes and communities. Numerous people, activists as well as ordinary citizens, were “disappeared,” picked up without warning and without any acknowledgment to their families. Some sons and husbands would reappear after a few days or months; others never did. Often it was an anonymous informer who tipped off the secret police and started life-changing consequences for the victims and their families. Ordinary citizens spent their lives in fear of who was listening; thus any expression of pain or anxiety that could be externalized and moreover aestheticized, like the subtle protest songs of Nass al-Ghiwane, was a welcome means of mass autotherapy. I never learned the personal history of Abdeslam, but Mahmoud's father was one of the victims, and indeed Mahmoud was also a great fan of Nass al-Ghiwane, despite belonging to a much younger generation. Despite the state terror, however, I want to emphasize in

Nass's repertoire the solidarity of the 1970s. By singing in Darija and by fore-fronting broad national genres, rhythms, instruments, and the like, Nass proposed a counter-public to the state terror machine, an appeal to ordinary Moroccans to build up and support the nation in addition to or despite its repressive state apparatus. This deft focus on national unity helps explain the state's toleration and even tacit support of Nass. This nationalist subtext is evident musically, as I demonstrate below.

“Fine Ghadi Biya Khouya” begins with a plucked banjo solo by Allal Yaala, soon joined by the lone voice of Laarbi Batma (1948-1998), who wrote the song, both banjo and voice following a slow, irregular rhythm. The voice is modified by a slight echo chamber, so it resounds beyond the intimacy afforded by the sparse instrumentation. The introductory segment, which comprises the poetic stanzas of the song, lasts for two minutes. After that other instruments and voices begin the chorus, which could be translated as “Were are we going?” or “Where are you taking me?” and which dominates the remainder of the song:

Where are you taking me, Brother,
Where are you taking me?

The development toward a climax continues to build through the latter segment. In the first two choruses, Batma skips the first line, which is sung in unison only by the other band members. In the third, one band member adds a harmony part. Then Boujemaa Hagour of the impossibly clear, high voice, who died tragically in a car accident in 1974, leads the chorus three times before Batma returns in the seventh and the eighth, the last including the same harmonizing. Finally, in one of the last choruses, that clear, high voice continues directly into the climax of the song.

I will only discuss one, exemplary, verse from the first two minutes:

To each falcon in a cage
To each rooster showing off up on the bridge
To each mule feeling the dig of spurs
To each wolf howling far-off in pain;
I have never seen a palm tree bear dates,
Never seen a gazelle shod in iron,
Nor knights turned into shepherds.

The writer uses direct address to speak to four animals: a caged falcon, a crowing rooster, a working mule, and a faraway, howling wolf. Although these are no doubt well-established poetic figures, perhaps taken full-cloth from *malhun* poetry, it is tempting to interpret the figures as representing principal segments of the Moroccan population—for example, a caged falcon might imply cultured elites and intellectuals hobbled by the regime; a crowing rooster, publicity-hogging and co-opted politicians; a working mule must be the overburdened working class and poor; and the wolf howling from far off could represent exiled figures like rebel leader Abdelkrim al-Khattabi (1882/3-1963), the hero of the Rif War (1920-1926) and its short-lived Rif Republic.²

These four iconic animals are addressed directly; in contrast, only oblique reference is made to the unknown subject who “has endured so much [that] evil has tanned his hide,” a third-person male. Given the very real danger associated with directly addressing the king, even implicitly, it's not unreasonable to presume that the “evil” that has been endured referred to the attempted assassinations of Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, while the “tanning of his hide” referred to his perceived lack of empathy for his subjects suffering under the ensuing crackdown, the worst of which was still to come

when the song was released in 1973.

In the second section of the song, the single phrase “Where are we going?” or “Where are you taking me?” or even “Where are you taking us?” is repeated 34 times, once every 6.7 seconds on average. Such a pertinent, enduring question begs to be answered. But to whom is it addressed? Is it to the king? Perhaps the band is expressing the worried questions of his subjects: Where will all this end? Will there be a return to constitutional, parliamentary monarchy, a goal that had been promised by Mohammad V in 1956 and to which Hassan II had renewed his commitment in 1963 and even as recently as 1970? Or will the monarchy even survive? Will there be a federal republic, as republican revolutionaries had proposed during the coup attempt the year before? Will the new nation, then merely 17 years old, even remain viable? Will there ever be adequate jobs and education, food and shelter?

Alternatively, and more likely, the addressee in the question is the Moroccan people themselves: “Where are we going to take this country?” There is more hope here, and perhaps it would even be favored by the band, who claim universal, artistic goals in their music rather than banal and limited political commentary. In this scenario, Nass al-Ghiwane are calling on the strength of the people to determine their own fate. The chorus echoes the question of Marvin Gaye in his classic song “What's Going On?” that had been released two years before, or more directly a second song from that album, “What's Happening Brother?” All three songs ask the listener to take a look around at war, police brutality, declining personal and social security, domestic violence, and other ills that have altered their society, once familiar and comforting but now scary and dangerous.

It is clear that the times demanded a nationalist spirit, when ordinary people rose to do extraordinary things. Coming on the heels of public activism necessary to throw off the colonial yoke of France and Spain, the lyrics evoke the revolutionary fervor and spirit of the 1940s and 1950s, when popular uprisings led the Europeans finally to concede defeat. That had been a time of sacrifice and hope for Moroccans, and this spirit was continuous to the 1970s, persisting even despite the state terror campaign.

Finally, dominant in the entire oeuvre of Nass al-Ghiwane is a sense that they are striving together with the rest of the nation. This communal identity is an artifact of state-sponsored efforts such as mass public education, mass media, and the systematic de-emphasizing by the state of particularist identities—regional, tribal, ethnic, religious, etc. Import controls created jobs by mandating state-regulated factories (even if owned by private investors with close ties to the crown) in import-substitution schemes of self-reliance. Utopian projects predominated that sought self-sustainability and economic and cultural independence, five-year plans, and autonomy and solidarity. That era, weakened after 1972 with a turn toward the right after 1981, came to an end in 1991 alongside the collapse worldwide of an alternative to capitalist globalization. In the 1990s in Morocco, a few more citizens were permitted access to the middle and upper-middle classes. In the face of a declining economy among cyclical droughts, meanwhile, ordinary folk either bore up, put up, and shut up, or looked outside to clandestine emigration for a future. The emphasis turned from investment in a sustainable national economy to the realization of a dependent economy built on the model of a flexible labor pool serving as “Europe's Mexico,” in the reported words of Hassan II.

In 1981 Morocco, which was an ally of the capitalist West during the Cold War, saw the beginning of the end to Western financial largesse and was forced to adopt some structural adjustment reforms. Social and political transformations begun during transitional phase of the 1990s, during which the economy stuttered, took new life following the death of Hassan II in 1999. Upon his assumption to the throne, one of the first acts of Muhammad VI was to dismiss the hated and feared Minister of the

Interior who had been responsible for setting up the police state responsible for so many informers and disappearances. In its attempt to “turn the page,” the state was at least acknowledging past atrocities and seeking to atone for them, no matter how much it was later perceived by some as a clumsily wrought effort at covering up the past.³ In any case, new challenges were rising to meet Moroccans. It is fitting, perhaps, that the theme song of the 1970s, a paean to communal values and nationalist pride, was revived in 2003, thirty years after it debuted, by an upstart reggae band named Hoba Hoba Spirit. In this remix, the chorus remains the same, but the message is very different.

Emigrant Neoliberalism, 2003

Hoba Hoba Spirit was formed in Casablanca in 1998 by Reda Allali and Abu Bakr Zehouani, middle-class professionals who played in bands in college, and formed the band to play in bars and clubs on the weekends. At first their repertoire was mostly covers, but they began to write and develop their own songs, as well as transform some of the covers, like “Fine Ghadi Biya Khouya,” so dramatically that they made them their own. The group has continued since with four to five members comprising two stable middle-class professionals (avocational musicians), alongside other professional musicians who have accordingly seen far less stability in their livelihoods. In this sense, the band is a microcosm of the Moroccan labor force since the 1970s. They are a reggae, rock, and pop-Gnawa band squarely within the “fusion marocain” genre identified, described, and analyzed by Callen (2006). Their cover of “Fine Ghadi Biya Khouya” cover comes from their first, eponymous, album. As is the case for Nass al-Ghiwane, the album has almost no love songs. Their songs instead focus on social issues like racism, drug abuse, domestic violence, and clandestine emigration.

One of the social and economic transformations of the 1990s was the local development of global pop culture. In the late 1990s, as Western tourism picked up, music festivals began to be developed to attract Western tourists to a Moroccan cultural space constructed as “tolerant” while simultaneously giving a showcase to local bands. Meanwhile, the privatization of many state-owned and state-protected factories, alongside capital investment in those industries that rendered many of the workers' skills obsolete, meant that more and more Moroccans were hoping to emigrate to Europe for jobs.⁴ When successful emigrants returned during the summers (and attended the festivals), they brought back with them different musical tastes. By the mid-2000s, people in Moroccan cities also got access to high-speed Internet connections, which made it possible to swap music online.

Political resistance became more possible in the period of “opening” that followed the accession of Muhammad VI. Suddenly people could vote for parliament, protest against the government, publish articles that criticized the government, etc. At the same time, however, the cost of living went up quickly but wages did not. Unemployment remained high. Many Moroccans dreamed only of getting a job “inside”—in Europe. There remained some political repression—the press was not free to criticize the king, merely the government, and many journalists and publishers were prosecuted and jailed, in particular after 2004. But overall, the concerns of the populace switched from an unstated but ever-present political terror to a clear and present economic threat of unemployment. And desires to get to Europe.

While Hoba Hoba Spirit's cover appears at first blush to be more conventional than the original in structure, closer analysis shows it to be fully as complex as Nass al-Ghiwane's version. The song begins with the crackle of digital effects, “disk scratches” that imply an old LP being played on a hi-fi—presumably a nostalgic indication to the way the original sounded back in the 1970s. A strummed introduction begins on acoustic guitar, in a “contemporary” rhythm, followed by a bass guitar picking a little melody over the rhythm of the chords. At 30 seconds, the bass goes into reggae-style riffs as the

vocal begins, a soft rap in French for two stanzas. The last two lines of the second stanza switch to Darija, the first appearance of the strict language of Nass al-Ghiwane. The first line of this couplet rhymes with the last, which is a rapped but conversational and friendly “Feen ghadi biya, khoya?” The chorus is sung in unison by the other members of the band in imitation of Nass al-Ghiwane. By this time more instruments have joined in: trap set and some hand drumming, perhaps a *derbuka*, as well as an occasional shaker, and a keyboard. They sing two rounds of the two-line chorus before the rapper starts the third stanza, the rapper continuing with Darija. But he switches back to French by the end and continues in French until the end the fourth stanza, when he again returns to Darija to introduce the Nass al-Ghiwane chorus. Nevertheless, he ends the fourth stanza as he did the second, with the two-line rhymed couplet ending in the phrase from the chorus. This time it's less conversational than confrontational in tone. The rapper then begins the fifth stanza, in which we see language boundaries breaking down (below, regular font indicates French, **bold** indicates Formal Arabic, and *italics* indicate Darija; my translation):

The Official Arabic Language [that you speak is] *a little low-class*
 Go a little ways out of Casa[blanca] *and there's only Shilha* [Berber spoken]
 And if you want to make up a resume you have to write it in French
 But *how will we do it so that we understand?*
 But all that we know to do is ask our friends

“Who were you with and when did you go to Europe?”
“Did you sin and drink alcohol?”
“Did you make your own way and rise to the challenge?”

“Just let me live my life and make my account with my Lord”
 That's how it is:
“Just let me live my life and make my account with my Lord” [repeated seven times]
Where ... are you ... taking me ... Brother!

Where are you taking me, Brother? [4 x]
 [In English] Exodus! Movement of *harraga!*⁵

In this fifth stanza, the more-or-less systematic division between Darija and French which had heretofore been maintained—one stanza in French, one in Darija—breaks down. The rapper at once begins in formal Arabic then switches to Darija in mid-line. The second line begins in French, then switches back to Darija again by the end of the line. The third line is in French, but the fourth stays in French for only one word before switching back again to Darija. This is the street patois of Casablanca. The next two lines are in French, followed by four lines, all in Darija. The last line is repeated seven times, in a bridge. The bridge forms the climax of the song; the rapper's voice gets more emphatic: you can hear him draw his breath, his voice gets ragged and he almost loses the beat, showing his vulnerability as he reaches the climax: “Feen ... ghadi ... biya ... khoya!,” stated in a descending tone, now angry, even terrified. When, the third chorus begins at 3:47, the same repetition of the Nass al-Ghiwane stanza, it sounds stale. This is the message six cymbal clashes—a disruption—as the band immediately launches into the chorus from Bob Marley's 1977 reggae anthem “Exodus”: “Exodus! Movement of Jah People!” When Hoba Hoba Spirit sing this line in English, however, they substitute for “Jah People” *harraga*, “emigrant” in Darija but literally “the ones who burn their papers.” Below, I treat this matter more fully, but here I would like to point out that the cymbal clashes invade the nostalgia and interrupt the good feelings engendered by the hopeful, nationalistic Nass al-Ghiwane chorus. The immediate insertion of Bob Marley's chorus changes the frame to a critique of European

racism, and the solution to the problem of the failed promises of modernity is not to become unified, nationalist Moroccans but to become immigrants in Europe without nationality.

It is significant that that the “nationalist” Nass al-Ghiwane version is all in Darija, while Hoba Hoba Spirit's version, coming out of the emigration moment of the late 1990s, switches between Darija and French and also throws in some Jamaican English. This situation says a lot about the status of popular culture and its relationship to globalization. Nass al-Ghiwane looked like hippies but never sang in anything but Darija; in contrast, Hoba Hoba Spirit have made a point of singing in multiple languages.⁶

The following three questions in Darija, from the last stanza—“How and when did you go to Europe?” “Have you sinned?” “Did you make it over there?”—encapsulate the fears of the labor migrants: Will I be able to make it over there—will I survive the crossing and stay out of trouble and away from the immigration police long enough to make it worthwhile? Will I be able to live as I please, including practicing my faith without compromising? Will I be able to go with a friend, to become embedded in some kind of generous, trustworthy community? Will this work?

In this version, the principle question—Where are you taking me?—shares its privileged position with the statement from the penultimate line of the stanza, “Just let me live my life and keep my accounts with my Lord” (Darija: *Khlini n'ish hayati u hsabi ma' rabbi*). This statement is repeated seven times during the climax, for a total of eight times in 21 seconds, or once every 2.6 seconds. Thus the heart of the song becomes no longer a spirited question but a hesitant demand—the demand for social security, a steady income, and the right to be left alone. The mention of “my Lord” accounts for the increasing role of religious identities in Muslim life, both in Morocco and in Europe, but the total implication of “leave me alone” also indexes a desire to engage with religious norms more on individual terms and less on corporate ones.⁷

The main question—“Where are you taking me?”—is unchanged from the original version, but the addressee has changed. It's no longer addressed to the ruler or to the masses; instead, it's addressed to a single person. If we interpret the “single person” to be an “everyman” whom the speaker might know and ask for help, then the question mirrors the individualism wrought by neoliberal policies, where every person is enabled (or doomed) to fend for himself or herself, with only the kindness of family and friends to carry one over the rough spots of life.

In contrast, we could also interpret the question to refer to an actual individual—the speaker's best friend or cousin, perhaps, “*son frere*” from the song—who might be a bit older, a bit more wise to the ways of the world. Trust is expected but not assured, however—“You would tell me if only you knew, right?”—the last word betraying the seeds of doubt. When I first heard this version in 2006, I envisioned the experiences of the emigrants from the more immediate perspective of a member of a group of clandestine emigrants trying to make it across the wire fence from Morocco to one of the Spanish enclaves on the African mainland, Ceuta and Melilla, both completely surrounded by Moroccan territory. Inside these tiny urban enclaves can be found the Europe of one's dreams: a euro economy, European Union regulations, high wages and a high standard of living, crosswalks, health care, insurance, helpful and well-paid police officers, legal protections—everything that's missing from a poor person's experience of Morocco. I imagined a group of emigrants—North Africans and West Africans—who, having paid a huge sum of money up front, had met at an agreed-upon cafe, been led and abandoned by various guides, coughed up more money on the spot as demanded, been transported in old taxis and closed vans, walked for hours alone and with a guide through the heat and dust, maybe even had spent nights in the wilderness with not enough food or water. As I listened to the song, I imagined a suspicious young emigrant asking the guide of the hour, “Where are you taking us,

Brother?”—a palpable demand, but softened by “Brother,” since to be abandoned by an angry guide might mean hunger, arrest, or even death.

Overall, the song changed from a message about the promises of a modern postcolonial state—the “Daddy State” in Swedenburg’s terms⁸ that promises economic security in exchange for unquestioning support of the regime, even if these promises are unfulfilled—to a message that completely ignores the state. Instead, the song now imagined larger, transnational structures and their benefits (a Schengen passport, UNHCR status as a refugee, an EU spouse or children, asylum status) that might result in a better life. Nass al-Ghiwane’s musical ethos required writing lyrics in a language understood only by Moroccans and Algerians. In contrast, Hoba Hoba Spirit saw the need to write songs that were fully comprehensible only to urban, Arabic-speaking Francophones, but that were accessible in a partial way to many more across North Africa and Southern Europe. This globalization in music reflects the globalization in identities: Where once Nass al-Ghiwane envisioned a purer, more cohesive Moroccan citizen, Hoba Hoba Spirit actively urged Moroccans to burn their papers, renounce their national identities, and become universalized non-citizens (even if for a season) who relied for their basic security on the commitment of European governments and supra-national organizations to recognize their undifferentiated (non-national) humanity and protect their human rights.

Revolution Redux, 2011

This was still very much the situation in Morocco in 2011, when suddenly the world of optimistic politics opened again. Inspired by the events in Tunisia, young Moroccan activists called for a Day of Action on February 20. The largest event took place in Rabat, with between 4,000 and 20,000 protestors, but other events took place across the country, in all the major cities and in many minor ones. Property was damaged, but the police did not respond with gunfire, as had been the case during the 18 days in Egypt between January 25 and February 11, in which more than 800 were killed. In Morocco in February and March, less than a dozen deaths were reported. In its latest cover, sung on the street in front of the Parliament Building in Rabat on February 20 and distributed on Youtube, the song performs its original task of political critique. I don’t know who is singing the song, but it’s being sung very clearly over a megaphone:

For the one who spent the night and disappeared without celebrating his victory
I have never seen a lion turn into a bear, nor a rooster turn into a cuckoo
Where are you taking me, Commander? Where are you taking me?
Are you taking me to Saudi Arabia?
Blow after blow, who will find me shelter? Even Sarkozy doesn’t want me!
The elites don’t want me! Where will I live?
Where are you taking me, Commander? Where are you taking me?

In this cover, the iconic animals are replaced with an unnamed person who “spent the night and disappeared” and by a lion who should not turn into a bear, nor a rooster turn into a cuckoo.⁹ The Nass chorus is transformed: After appealing to the brother, the singer appeals directly to the commander or ruler (*hakim*). He then clearly asks “Are we going to Saudi Arabia?” The line can be understood in three ways: a reference to labor migration to the Gulf (an unlikely reading, since most Moroccans go to Europe); the possible evacuation of the leader to Saudi Arabia; and domination of the political field by Gulf-sponsored religious parties. The second interpretation is more fun to imagine, but the third is most likely; indeed, in the election held in November, the Islamist Party for Justice and Development won the largest number of votes, and its leader Abdelilah Benkirane became prime minister.

Finally, there is the quick section—“Who will find me shelter? Even Sarkozy doesn't want me! The elites don't want me! Where while I live?” Again, it's tempting to think of the leader fleeing and being rejected by Sarkozy. On January 14, it was reported that while deposed Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia, his first choice had been France. It was only after the French government denied his plane landing rights on French territory that he turned to Jeddah. This reading, however, is contradicted by the statement that even the elites (*kubar*) don't want the speaker. Such an assertion suggests that the persona is envisioned to be an ordinary migrant laborer, or even an educated professional, who has been rejected by Europe after the economic downturn of 2008 (“Sarkozy”), and moreover someone who was already excluded from regular or adequate employment in Morocco due to a lack of the connections among the elite (“al-kubar”) that tend to be necessary for gaining a good job there. As a result, we can conclude that the singer is probably more influenced here by Hoba Hoba Spirit than by Nass al-Ghiwane.¹⁰ It is a commentary on emigrant labor, but like songwriter Reda Allali of Hoba Hoba Spirit, the protest singer cannot or does not try to resolve the problem. He merely points it out in a question, while demanding alternatives.

An Neoliberal World?

Morocco stands almost alone with Jordan and the Gulf Arab states (minus Bahrain) as one of the Arab countries where the events of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 did little to challenge the current regime. To his credit, Mohammed VI did propose a full slate of reforms, and he also restrained to a certain extent the forces of state security in responding to the protests that continued through the spring and summer of 2011. Many scholars have trotted out the old alleged thesis of Moroccan exceptionalism—a king who is also a spiritual leader who bears a mystical aura of authenticity—to explain the failures of numerous liberal or leftist impulses over the past century. In contrast, I would like to read this song as a symptom of, or even a tentative explanation why, at least in 2011 the Arab Spring largely failed in Morocco: larger trends that have incorporated the Moroccan economy more tightly into a increasingly neoliberal fortress Europe.

As such, in Morocco, emigration continues to be the hope of most workers. There are some bright points, such as intense investment by the crown in Tangier's economy, which has lifted the North of Morocco in contrast to the rest of the country. Meanwhile, as a whole Morocco continues to lag behind the rest of Arab North Africa with much lower average incomes than Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, or Egypt (Morocco is wealthier only than Mauritania and Sudan). But even this investment comes at a cost, with a few winners (managers and administrators) and many losers: Transnational companies will build assembly plants in the North of Morocco only because skilled labor is so cheap there. Emigration is still the most attractive means of making a living wage.

In 2010 I did see Mahmoud again. My original assistant in 2006 had been facing a lot of trouble getting his life in order after such a difficult childhood and young adulthood. Despite an excellent Arabic-language secondary education, he did not have a job in 2006, which was why he was able to “work” so closely with Abdellah and also why I was able to employ him on an irregular basis for assistance. Indeed, his ability to speak the “elevated” Darija that I had learned in Fes, as well as his full literacy in formal Arabic, were what was so attractive to me (I don't speak Spanish or Berber, the most common languages in Tangier after Tanjawi Darija). I had hoped to work with Mahmoud again in 2010, but in fact I saw him only twice. He had been healed, he was wearing new clothes, he sported a fancy wristwatch, and he was too busy to talk very much. He had gotten a good job in an import-export office at the huge new Tanger-Med port, which will transform Morocco into an export-oriented economy of factories wherein poorly paid workers will assemble imported materials into finished goods for free trade across a brave new Mediterranean world.

References

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- 1 Callen 2006
- 2 A structuralist reading supports the poetic origin of the text: The animals include two birds and two mammals. Further, each family pair is further divided into one domesticated and one wild specimen. My thanks to Linda Marchant for pointing this out.
- 3 Susan Slyomovits has treated this topic very fairly. On the one hand, she commends the Moroccan government for attempting a South African-style truth and reconciliation project, which has not been attempted or even considered elsewhere in the Arab World, even after 2011. On the other hand, she correctly criticizes the process for not being very transparent and for offering amnesty even in the absence of full disclosure. This shortcoming is likely due to too many continuities between the pre-1999 and post-1999 regimes.
TED: I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WERE SAYING HERE! DID YOU THINK I WAS UNFAIR TO SLYOMOVITS FOR (1) BEING TOO BOOSTERISH ABOUT M6, OR FOR (2) BEING TOO CRITICAL? MY READING OF THE BOOK WAS THAT SHE VERY STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE DISSIDENTS' CRITIQUE OF THE "TURNING THE PAGE" NARRATIVE AS BEING FACILE AND COSMETIC, AND I THOUGHT THAT CRITIQUE CAME THROUGH. BUT YOU WROTE "DON'T MAKE IT SEEM AS IF SLYOMOVITS IS GUILTY OF THIS"--WHAT DID YOU THINK I WAS MAKING IT SEEM SHE WAS "GUILTY" OF DOING?
- 4 Carling (2007) is a great resource that places Moroccan clandestine emigration within larger patterns of West Africans treating Morocco and Mauritania as transit spaces, and also places European countries into these contexts, as transit and destination spaces. It also accounts for authorized as well as unauthorized emigration. Regarding unauthorized or clandestine emigration, a huge spike is clear after 1999 in the number of migrants apprehended by Spanish and Moroccan authorities, from under 10,000 annually by Spain prior to 1999, to a high of 20,000 by Spanish authorities and 25,000 by Moroccan authorities in 2003. The numbers may be distorted by draconian new policies enacted or enforced by the governments (indeed, Morocco does not even appear to have collected figures prior to 2000). Nevertheless, Carling reports that "a survey conducted in 1998 found that 72 per cent of the [Moroccan] population wished to emigrate. Among the population less than 30 years of age, the proportion was as high as 89 per cent" (Carling 2007:21). See the interview with Aomar Boum (2011) for a rich personal description of what it feels like for young unemployed Moroccans to face such an uncertain future.
- 5 These are the lyrics printed in Arabic script in the booklet accompanying the promotional CD (besides being difficult to read, it is also significant that the French portions were transliterated into Arabic script):

L-lugha r-rasmiya l-'arabiya shwiya darija

Tu sors de Casa *ma kayn ghir sh-shilha*
Et tu veux faire un CV alors tu le fais en français
Mais *ki gha ndiru bash ntfahimu*

Mais nous tout ce qu'on sait faire
C'est surveiller son frère
"Ma' min kunti ash min sa'a dkhalti?"
"Yak ma kmiti ula shrabti?"
"Dkhalti liya fasahti tala'ti liya firasi?"

Khlini n'ish hayati u hsabi ma' rabbi
Ça fait comme ça: *Khlini n'ish hayati u hsabi ma' rabbi*

Exodus! Movement of *harraga*...

- 6 According to Callen, Reda Allali's motivation for writing in multiple languages includes a desire to reflect the linguistic complexity of everyday speech in Morocco, which is never reflected in song lyrics (Callen 2006:298). In this sense, Hoba Hoba Spirit's language ideology is more realist (risking impurity), while we can interpret Nass al-Ghiwane's to have been more idealist (risking an accurate representation of everyday speech patterns). Indeed, Nass al-Ghiwane's early lineups were multicultural, with some Arabs but also Berber, Saharawi, and Gnawa members, a complexity that was audible in the music but entirely absent linguistically (see Callen 2006:91 for the ethnic origins of Nass al-Ghiwane's members).
- 7 The history of this impulse in Morocco has its roots in the Rifi North, where massive labor emigration has characterized social life in cities like Nador since the 1950s and even before. David McMurray has documented associated phenomena extensively (for example, McMurray 2001). After the 1990s, the features of Nadori emigrant society that he describes in the 1980s have become much more generalized within certain populations across Morocco. See Hein de Hass (2007:52) for an illustration of this trend.
- 8 Reported in Boum 2011:242.

9 My thanks to Oumnia Abaza for her help in translating the lyrics.

1 0 The original by Nass al-Ghiwane is also interpreted by Callen (2006:305) to be referring to migration. However, this is not international but internal migration, from the countryside to the cities, which began in the 1930s and was complete as a cultural trope in the mid-1990s, when the majority of the Moroccan population became urban (de Haas 2007:55).