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Musical negotiations of a ‘moderate’ versus a ‘radical’ Islam in Morocco: dissonance and the sonic among vocal performers of Islam-inspired music

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how in Morocco, music is used to construct and subvert discourses on a ‘moderate’ vs. a ‘radical’ Islam. I focus on experiences and practices of vocal performers of Islam-inspired music, who operate in two different musical domains: state-sponsored stages for Sufi music, and non-state-sponsored stages for *anashid* – acapella Islamic songs, generally associated with more orthodox interpretations of Islam. Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork among these artists, I analyze how the Moroccan response to the War on Terror, and concomitant perceptions of ‘radical’ versus ‘moderate’ Islam, affect the ways in which they present themselves and their music. I propose the notion of ‘dissonance’ to demonstrate how the artists’ musical practices, as well as their narratives of performance, ethics, and emotions converge with, yet simultaneously also rub against state discourses on a ‘moderate’ vs. a ‘radical’ Islam.


KEYWORDS

Morocco; Islam; music; religious politics; dissonance

[T]he idea is to remind dissonant voices that the only voice of Islam in Morocco is that of ‘amir al-muminin who is legally in control of preaching in mosques. (Driss Maghraoui 2009, 200)

Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, many Muslim majority countries not only implemented anti-terrorism laws and security measures to combat terrorism but also started investing in culture to restore the image of Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion. Since then, critical studies have appeared on counterterrorism policies and their implications for Muslims, most of which take surveillance and security as a primary angle of analysis. Less attention has been paid to the aesthetics that accompany cultural policies involved in the countering of violent extremism (CVE) and the sensory regimes they entail

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(Manor and Crilley 2018). With this article, I want to shed light on the aesthetic and affective dimensions of CVE, by taking music and sound practices as a lens to explore Morocco's comprehensive strategy for curtailing Muslim extremism. I specifically zoom into the narratives and practices of vocal performers (called *munshidin*) of two different traditions of Islamic music, as they respond to the state's use of music in the promotion of a 'moderate' Islam.

Morocco is one of the Muslim majority countries that has actively used music as part of its soft power strategy to deploy culture in the promotion a 'moderate' Islam and to counter a so-called 'radical' Islam. After 9/11 and the deadly terrorist bombings in Casablanca in 2003, the Moroccan state (and especially the monarchy) started to enforce firm antiterrorism measures, as well as to support various musical activities to counter Islamic extremism and promote a government-approved tolerant Islam, grounded in the nation's history and traditions. Especially prestigious music festivals featuring internationally renowned artists, along with local pop bands, became pivotal places for the promotion of official views of cultural, religious, and national identity (Belghazi 2006; Kapchan 2008). Among these musical events, concerts and festivals for 'sacred' and especially Sufi-oriented music, hold an important rank. These stages are presented as vehicles of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance and as a means of reaction against terrorism. They also aim to revive local culture and tradition, celebrating Moroccan identity.

In contrast to the state-driven stages for Sufi-inspired music, there is a growing non-state supported niche for Islam-inspired music, called *anashid*. *Anashid* are a cappella Islamic chants.¹ In Morocco, stages for *anashid* concerts are generally run by Islamic activist groups and religious conservatives, who want to offer an alternative response to the state's policy to use music as a weapon against a 'radical' Islam. *Anashid* are however less publicized on state-supported platforms than Sufi music, mainly because many performers of *anashid*, as well as the genre itself, are generally linked to Islamism and a 'radical' Islam.

This article examines how the privileging of Sufi-inspired musical practices by the Moroccan government, as part of their counterterrorism strategy, impacts the national field of Islam-inspired music production, and in particular the performers and their practices (cf. Murphy 2018; Salois 2013). To answer this question, I describe and compare the experiences of vocal performers of both Sufi music and *anashid*: how are they affected by, and respond to, the state's use of music in the promotion of a 'moderate' Islam? Through a comparative analysis of the artists' musical narratives and sound practices, I show how within and between these two musical domains different types of tensions and ambivalences are present, revealing sensory forms of subversion and compliance, that otherwise stay hidden.

The exploration of the artists' narratives and practices draws on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Morocco between 2010 and 2012 (ter Laan 2016). This involved personal in-depth interviews with male and female vocal performers, as well as group interviews with music ensembles. To gain insight in the context in which the artists operate, I also carried out conversations with music producers, band managers, instrumentalists, family members

¹The word *anashid*, which is the plural form of the Arabic word *inshad* or *unshuda*, refers to the raising of one's voice (Barendregt 2011: 235), and can loosely be translated as 'chanting' or 'reciting' of poetry with or without instrumental accompaniment.

of some of the artists, members of the audience, festival organizers, as well as various actors from the political field, civil society, and journalists. Additionally, I observed various musical activities,² such as concerts, rehearsals, jam sessions, studio recordings, singing classes, and festivals. These observations took place at a wide variety of sites, such as festivals, concert halls, and in domestic settings (mostly family celebrations, such as weddings and birthing celebrations, but also jam sessions among artists), neighborhood youth community centers (*dar shabab*), and universities. A couple of artists allowed me to follow their musical life for a longer period of time, having me over at their homes, family dinners, and music tours, and letting me help them out preparing their concerts. During such activities, I had many informal conversations with artists.³

Theoretically, my main concern is to understand the relevance of music in relation to Islam and politics. I build on approaches that conceptualize the relationship between religion and politics through the angle of affect and the senses. Specifically, I call attention to the sonic as an entry point to understand this relationship. I demonstrate how the emotions and visceral experiences evoked by Muslim devotional musical performances become connected with competing political discourses of a ‘moderate’ versus a ‘radical’ Islam in Morocco. This happens in irregular ways. The ethnographic accounts presented in this article, reveal how through subtle, ambiguous, and sometimes even unintentional sensory practices, my interlocutors from both domains confirm as well as challenge state discourses about ‘radical’ versus ‘moderate’ Islam in their musical performances. By moving within and across the two different musical traditions, in terms of styles, stages, and sensibilities, the artists simultaneously confirm as well as defy (wittingly or unwittingly) state discourses about ‘radical’ versus ‘moderate’ strands of Islam.

For the analysis of the empirical material, I use Birgit Meyer’s reflections on religion as ‘sensational forms’ and ‘aesthetic formations’ (2006, 2009) in combination with James Scott’s ideas of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ (1985) and ‘hidden and public transcripts’ (1990). I argue that the linking of sonically evoked religious sentiments to political discourses is not per se a straightforward, univocal process but can be rather blurry and contested, with multiple formations that rub against each other, producing what I call ‘dissonance.’ With this notion, I want to add nuance to existing theories of everyday and indirect resistance, by including the sensorium as part of subtle techniques of non-compliance, which are relevant well beyond the Moroccan context.

This article starts with the presentation of the theoretical framework through which I analyze my empirical data. I then give a brief historical review of Morocco’s current promotion of a ‘moderate’ Islam and its intersecting interest to sustain the monarchy’s hegemony over the religious and political field. Thereafter, I discuss the assigned role of Sufism as the acclaimed antidote against Muslim extremism and how music has been used in its promotion. In the next section the ethnographic accounts of the Sufi artists and the performers of *anashid* are presented. In the discussion, I consider how we can understand

²During my fieldwork, I attended a total of 42 live performances, of which seventeen by male ensembles, thirteen by solo male vocal performers, and four by female ensembles (of some artists I attended multiple concerts). Most of the data was acquired in the region of Casablanca, Rabat, Fes, Meknes, and Nador.

³For the protection of my interlocutors, I have used pseudonyms in most cases, unless I had their explicit consent and request to use their real names.

their practices and narratives through the notion of ‘dissonance.’ In the conclusion, I present my main arguments and results, and reflect on further research.

Politics and religion through the lens of sound

The bodily and emotional sensations evoked by sound and music form an interesting, yet largely neglected analytical entry point to understand religious experiences and their relation to larger social and political structures (Laack 2015). Recent developed theoretical perspectives have called attention to the role of the body and the senses in the formation of religious subjectivities (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). Within this framework, I especially want to draw attention to literature that addresses the role of aesthetic sensory experiences in the formation of religious subjectivities and communities (Meyer 2006, 2009). Birgit Meyer understands religion as a practice of mediation between the human level and a professed transcendental realm or force, which is bridged by what she calls ‘sensational forms’, which she defines as ‘relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking, and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular organizations’ (Meyer 2006, 9, 2020). Sensational forms can be all sorts of material forms, which through their appeal to the senses, establish relationships with the divine as well as among believers within specific religious structures, leading to what she calls ‘aesthetic formations’ (Meyer 2009). Yet, Meyer’s concept of ‘sensational forms’ pays little attention to the role of sound and music.

I argue that sound and music can be seen as a sensational form, important for aesthetic formations, as it can mediate religious experiences. Because of its appeal to the senses, music is a powerful tool to produce collective sentiments and shared experiences. The highly affective states of being that music can induce is also the reason why music is handled with much caution in many religious traditions. Within Islam, this has led to heated debates about music’s permissibility and numerous practical recommendations on whether and how music should be performed. These positions vary from puritan interpretations, which condemn dance, stirring rhythms, and the use of melodic instruments, to Islamic mystical traditions, such as Sufism, where certain musical practices constitute a significant pathway to realize spiritual transformation (Frishkopf 2009; Touma 1996).

Whereas Meyer highlights how aesthetic practices are crucial in the production and re-affirmation of religious communities through the shared sensory experiences they induce, I focus on sound practices as a sensational form to trace sensory tactics of non-compliance. This subversive potential of music lies mostly in its ambiguity. The simultaneous enactment of melody, rhythm, lyrics, instruments, performance style, tone, and vocal techniques can articulate multiple meanings at the same time (Rice 2001, 33). The production of meaning through music is therefore very complex because, as British ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes stated: ‘[t]exts and musical messages [can] themselves contain inner voices, contradicting or subverting the overt messages’ (Stokes 1992, 14). Studies of indirect forms of resistance and subversion thus offer properly interesting analytical frames for the study of music’s capacity to simultaneously play into different meanings. Particularly Scott’s notions of ‘everyday resistance’ (1985) and ‘hidden and public transcripts’ (1990) seem to be quite apt to seize the

complexity and multi-layeredness involved in musical practices. Scott discusses how subtle and indirect ways of resistance constitute the common methods used by subordinated groups to challenge hegemonic systems. Herein, ‘public transcripts’ pertain to ‘the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate’ (Scott 1990, 2). ‘Hidden transcripts’ refer to discourses that take place offstage, beyond direct observation by powerholders (ibid.: 4). Scott’s ideas can thus help to interpret and analyze music as a possible form of both open and tacit subversion or compliance within various structures of authority.

Yet, in approaching tactics of subversion and compliance through music and sound, we also need to take into consideration the sensorium, a dimension that is lacking in Scott’s work. Charles Hirschkind does address this dimension in his study of ethical listening practices to Islamic cassette sermons in contemporary Cairo. Particularly his notion of the ‘counter public’ conceptualizes how these listening practices can create sensibilities and affective states, which ‘stand in a disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments’ (Hirschkind 2006, 117). However, as I will demonstrate, the sonic forms of non-compliance that I analyze are not only performed against and alongside public discourse. They are also encapsulated within the performance of dominant discourses. Moreover, Hirschkind’s understanding of the counter public includes the sensorium and sound, yet also builds on a rather dichotomic sense of oppressor vs. oppressed. Scott’s conception of resistance does show these subtleties, yet does not include the sensorium.

To add a sensory – and particularly a sonic – dimension to the existing literature on resistance and subversion, I propose the term ‘dissonance.’ I borrow this term from Western music theory,⁴ where it refers to a classification of simultaneous or successive tones, that are associated with harshness, unpleasantness, or unacceptability, and cause tension within the harmony of a composition, and at the same time a desire to be resolved to consonant intervals, which are assessed as harmonious, sweet, pleasant, and acceptable (Parncutt and Hair 2011). Here, I use ‘dissonance’ as a metaphor to describe and analyze sensory forms of subversion that capture the subtle, ambiguous, and discrepant ways in which my interlocutors engage with Morocco’s cultural policies to promote a ‘moderate’ Islam through music.

Morocco’s promotion of a ‘moderate’ Islam through Sufi music

In Morocco, views of a ‘moderate’ and a ‘radical’ Islam are closely entangled with discourses on national loyalty. Both issues are shaped by the Global War on Terror as well as domestic politics within the country itself. Morocco’s adoption of global antiterrorism policies serves to counter terrorism but is also used to consolidate the traditional religious authority of the monarchy with the King as Commander of the Faithful

⁴With the term ‘Western music theory,’ I refer to a system of music practice and rules regarding harmony, melody, scales, chords, and rhythm, which stems from and is prevalent in Northwestern Europe, North America, and Australia. This musical set-up differs from musical systems from other parts of the world, such as for instance the Middle East, the Balkans, Latin America, Africa, or Asia, where different musical harmonies, rhythms, and scales are dominant. Western music theory commonly divides an octave into twelve tones. From these twelve tones, patterns of whole and semitones can create other scales (Touma 1996). Although culture does shape the perception of tone-intervals, research has indicated that consonance and dissonance are perceived across different cultures various parts of the world (Lahdelma 2019).

(*'amir al-muminin*).⁵ Moreover, Morocco's current promotion of a 'moderate' Islam is grounded in a longer existing fostering of a nationalist image of an 'open' and 'tolerant' Islam, already present before the onset of the US-led global 'War on Terror.' In the mid-1980s, late king Hassan II openly encouraged then so-called 'moderate Islamists' to counter growing secular leftist movements, which at the time were perceived a threat to the Islamic monarchy (Layachi 1998). In this context, the term 'moderate' designated above all those who recognized the King's religious authority. Those who questioned his authority were considered 'non-moderates,' and thus tightly surveilled (Howe 2005, 126).

After the death of Hassan II in 1999, his son, current king Mohammed VI took the throne and distanced himself from his father's autocratic ruling style. He announced a far-reaching program of reforms to be gradually implemented at various levels of the public sphere. As part of his pursuit of modernization and democratization, the King emphasized that Morocco advocates a tolerant and peaceful Islam and stimulates a policy of openness⁶ (Bogaert 2011, 110; Maghraoui 2009, 143).⁷ With the events of 9/11 however, when Islam became linked to terrorism, the Moroccan discourse of a tolerant Islam changed from a hopeful tone of promised liberalization to a defensive attitude of reactive anxiety. Especially after 16 May 2003, when twelve suicide bombers killed themselves and 33 others in the city center of Casablanca,⁸ concerns about 'radical Islam' in Moroccan society were further raised. In a speech on national television, after the attacks, the King stated:

This terrorist aggression is against our tolerant and generous faith. Even more so, the commissioners and the executors [of these acts] are wretched criminals who cannot claim to be part of Morocco or authentic Islam, because they ignore the tolerance which characterizes this religion.⁹

Here the perpetrators and their interpretation of Islam were portrayed as alien and dangerous, and a threat to the nation state. Moreover, terrorism was no longer presented as just a matter of (inter) national security, but also as a threat to the identity of, and loyalty to, the Moroccan nation (Zemni 2006). This stance is reflected in Morocco's response to the rising threat of extremist groups. Next to a security-based approach of surveillance and policing,¹⁰ various soft power policies were developed to influence the religious sensibilities of Moroccan citizens (Muedini 2012). The

⁵As a constitutional monarchy, the King holds considerable executive and legislative power, particularly over religious matters. He is described in the constitution as the Commander of the Faithful (*'amir al-muminin*). This status is drawn from his acclaimed descentance of the prophet Mohammed through the Alawite Dynasty, whose members have been ruling Morocco since 1666. The power structures and patronage networks surrounding the monarchy, also referred to as *'makhzen'*, co-exist with a modern multi-party system, established upon the country's independence from France in 1956 (Daadaoui 2011, 92). Yet, the modern administration did not abdicate the political authority of the *makhzen*. Rather, the parliament functions as its extension and as an instrument of clientelism (Hammoudi 1997; Mouna 2018: 4). Opposition is carried outside the constitutional realm, through civil society organizations, such as trade unions and religious and cultural associations, that focus on human rights and democratization (Sakthivel 2017), but critical discussion of the *monarchy* is prohibited.

⁶Source: http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/discours_trone_1999.pdf, accessed on 7 July 2016.

⁷Source: http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/premiere_intronisation_2000.pdf, accessed on 7 July 2016.

⁸The bombings also wounded more than 100 people (Arieff 2012). The attacks were ascribed to young men from a poor suburb from Casablanca, connected to Islamic activist groups, believed to be linked to Al-Qaeda.

⁹<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/discours-de-sm-le-roi-mohammed-vi-suite-aux-attentats-de-casablanca-du-16-mai-2003>. The speech was given on 29 May 2003.

¹⁰Hastily passed antiterrorism laws put a strain on the early developing stages of democratization and liberalization.

King implemented reforms of the religious field (see also Pektas, this issue),¹¹ which involved the modernization of religious councils,¹² spokespersons, religious education, the use of new media, and the installment of religious programming on state-run radio and TV. These measures were meant to standardize and nationally propagate a renewed version of ‘Moroccan’ Islam.¹³ The religious reforms placed special emphasis on Sufism as one of the official cornerstones of Moroccan Islam and promoted it as a cure against extremism.¹⁴

Sufism, a highly diverse and complex assembly of mystical forms of Islam that exists throughout the Muslim world, seeks to obtain a direct personal experience with God through the use of a diverse set of ritual practices, such as music, poetry, and dance. Groups of disciples are organized in monastic orders called *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*). Each *tariqa* (literally ‘path’ or ‘way’) is characterized by different ideas and ways of veneration and holds its own claim to a line of spiritual masters going back to the Prophet. Sufism is deeply rooted in Morocco’s political and religious landscape (Hammoudi 1997; Maghraoui 2009, 206). After independence in 1956 however, due to the collaboration of some Sufi leaders with the French protectorate, Sufism disappeared into the shadows of a stricter, more politicized Islam (*salafiyya*)¹⁵, leading to the deterioration of Sufi orders and shrines. It was only under the influence of global antiterrorism policies,¹⁶ and the national religious reforms that Sufism in Morocco was again seen as favorable by the state. This was expressed in royal donations to Sufi-orders, the King appointing Sufi disciples to important political positions (Silverstein 2012, 331; Wainscott 2017), as well as the cultural promotion of Sufism.

An important cultural tool in the promotion of Sufism is music. Many musical traditions associated with Sufi brotherhoods are re-casted through programs on national radio, television, and music festivals. There are two annual music festivals in Morocco that highlight Sufism and Sufi music: the Fes festival of world sacred music and the Fes festival for Sufi culture. There, disciples of various Sufi orders perform ritual music for an audience of Moroccan elites and foreign tourists. The Fes festival of

¹¹The reforms of the religious field were part of a larger set of reforms of the Moroccan public sphere, including the fields of infrastructure, law, economics, and freedom of speech. These reforms were already announced by the King in 1999. The restructuring of the religious field was put into action in 2004 (see also Maghraoui 2009).

¹²Such as the Rabita Mohammedia of ‘Ulama (see Pektas, this issue).

¹³The label ‘Moroccan Islam’ was invented during the French protectorate (1912-1956) to describe the syncretistic mingling of Islamic orthodoxy, Sufi-mysticism, and animistic elements such as spirit possession and exorcism, the evil eye, sorcery, belief in magical religious powers, and saint veneration, present in Moroccan religious culture. This ‘Moroccan Islam’ was favored by the French over puritanical reformist currents, as these modernist currents were adopted by the Moroccan independence movement (Burke III 2014). The notion of ‘Moroccan Islam’ was later further developed as an analytical category by scholars to describe religious practices of Muslims in Morocco. Nowadays, the notion of ‘Moroccan Islam’ is being re-used in contemporary nationalist discourses and presented as a safeguard against a foreign ‘radical Islam.’

¹⁴The other official cornerstones of Moroccan Islam are Malikism and Asharite theology. Malikism is one of the major school of thought (*maddhab*) of religious law (*fiqh*) within Sunni Islam, which leaves room for local traditions and imposes obedience to the sultan, in this case the King (Vermeeren 2009, 191; Wainscott 2017). Asharite theology is regarded a moderate school of thought (Al-Jabouri 2010, 180; Baylocq and Hlaoua 2016).

¹⁵*Salafiyya* here refers to the Islamic reformism that emerged as a response to the European colonial rule of Muslim countries (Schielle 2007). The puritanical revivalist ideas strongly resonated among a small but influential group of Moroccan intellectuals and bourgeois elites, mostly from Fes, who had a religious education and opposed colonial intervention (Eickelman 1976: 195, 227; Geertz 1968: 65; Munson 1993: 79, 86; Zeghal 2008: 15).

¹⁶Morocco’s reactivation of Sufism as the banner of a ‘moderate Islam’ strongly resonates US interest in Sufism as a possible ideological counterbalance to political Islam in the Middle East and the Islamic world, even though there has been little evidence for the inherent moderating effects of Sufism (Sakthivel 2016).

World sacred music was founded in 1994 in the wake of the Gulf war by Faouzi Skali, an intellectual from Fes and adept of the Butshishiyya Sufi brotherhood (one of the most influential Sufi orders of Morocco nowadays)¹⁷ (Dominguez Diaz 2010; Kapchan 2008). This major international music festival focuses on sacred music from different cultural and religious traditions across the world but also features local artists. The festival hosts special stages dedicated to Sufi music. The Sufi Culture Festival in Fez, which was founded in 2007 also by Faouzi Skali,¹⁸ is smaller in scale and focuses solely on Sufism, instead of various religious traditions. Both festivals are supported by the Moroccan state under the cultural patronage of the King, and openly promote a public image of a ‘moderate’ and ‘Moroccan’ Islam. In cultural representations and statements, such as official posters, festival booklets, and media reports, Sufism is presented as part of the Moroccan patrimony as well as of a broader universal spirituality, which embraces different religious traditions. Comprehensive values such as tolerance, religious dialogue, diversity, and peace are paraded as attributes found in both Sufism and Moroccan cultural heritage. In the next section, I discuss the experiences of Sufi performers on these state-stages. How are their rituals translated to staged festival performances as a result of the state’s promotion of a ‘moderate’ Islam and how do they deal with them?

From *zawiya* to stage

In April 2010, I visited an evening concert of the Fes festival for Sufi culture. A diverse audience of upper class Moroccans and foreign tourists had gathered on Oriental rugs at the gardens of the nineteenth century Andalusian palace Dar Batha and awaited the start of the performance of the male Sufi disciples of the Tariqa Sharqawiyya. They were seated on a softly lit stage set under the low hanging branches of a large oak tree. Before the start of their concert, festival director Faouzi Skali entered the stage to introduce the group. He explained that this evening concert will initiate the audience in rituals performed in the intimacy of a *zawiya*, a Sufi lodge. However, since the context is a festival, the vocalists, in the display of their rituals, are allowed more freedom than in a *zawiya*. He explained that the evening should be seen and experienced as community prayer, not as a performance. After Skali’s announcement, the group started their performance with prayers. People in the audience closed their eyes and followed in prayer or sat quietly in a meditative position. After the prayer, there was a silence, from which a strong and sensitive voice of one of the disciples emerged, setting in a slow and powerful vocal improvisation (*mawwal*). Then the group collectively started to softly perform parts of ritual sessions of sung poetry called *sama ‘a* and *madih*.¹⁹ These gradually built up toward a culmination of collective rhythmic chanting ‘*la ila ha illa Allah*’ (there is no God but God). Some people in the audience called out ‘Allah!’ when they felt particularly moved by a part in the performance. At a certain moment during the performance, an older slender man belonging to the *tariqa* (Sufi order), dressed slightly different than his fellow disciples, stood up and started to slowly walk back and forth behind the performing group members. In each hand, he held a

¹⁷Members of the Butshishiyya brotherhood in particular were assigned important positions in the religious-political field. Ahmed Tawfiq, for example, who is a member of this Sufi order, was installed as Minister of Endowments and Islamic affairs by the King in 2002. Similarly, the theologian Dr. Ahmed Abadi, who was nominated as the secretary-general of the Rabita al-Mohamedia of Ulama (the council of religious scholars established by King Mohammed VI), also belongs to the Butshishiyya Sufi order (Baylocq and Hlaoua 2016; Heck 2009, 13).

¹⁸Skali founded the Festival for Sufi music, after he had left the Fes festival for Sacred World Music, which grew too commercial to his taste. Interview with Faouzi Skali, Fes, 20 April 2010.

¹⁹*Sam’a wa madih* translates as audition and praise, and refers to poetry that is recited, chanted or sung in order to exalt and praise God and the Prophet Muhammad. Sufis gather to chant these poems in order to reach inner states that bring them closer to God and the Prophet.

murashsha, a silver-colored sprinkler, from which he drizzled drops of rosewater on the performing disciples (see photo). The concert ended with a *hadra* (a bodily trance), where the disciples stood up and moved their bodies repetitively back and forth, while tuning up the volume of the chants, they took the audience with them, ending in an explosion of ‘*Allah-há!*’ Some people in the audience responded emotionally and cried (Figure 1).

The performance of Sufi rituals on state-approved festival stages has brought about profound changes on the level of form, function, and meaning of these rituals, as well as the religiosity of the performers. Rituals, which were never really carried out for outsiders, are reframed in a staged setting where spectacle and visual display is the dominant mode of presentation (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 72). The physical limitations of a stage, the presence of an audience, and the technological environment of lighting and sound engineering, as well as the presence of international press, affect the ways in which the rituals are displayed. Paradoxically, as demonstrated in the vignette presented above, Sufi ritual music is performed on-stage in such a way as to give the impression of an original context, a *zawiya*. The stages on which the brotherhoods perform are usually decorated with attributes, such as silk banners in colors belonging to the specific *tariqa*, copper incense burners, Oriental carpets, and traditional garments of the artists (like a white *jellaba* and yellow pointy leather shoes called *babushes*).

Nonetheless, the rituals performed on stage have been constructed for concert stages. The rituals as the disciples perform them for themselves inside a *zawiya* might be uninteresting for an audience to watch. There, a *dhikr* session might last a couple of hours and consist of much repetitive and monotonous chanting without any musical instruments in



Figure 1. Sufi performers at the Fes Festival of Sufi Culture. © Photo by author, April 2010.

its ritual performances (Dominguez Diaz 2010; Shannon 2011, 268).²⁰ To meet the expectations attributed to a largely Western public, the musical rituals are shortened and divided into ‘songs,’ with a recognizable beginning and ending. The movements of the disciples are choreographed and timed accordingly, like the closing of eyes, folding of hands, and the start and end of an ecstatic trance, and should be rehearsed. Moreover, the presence of an audience demands a certain kind of interaction like stage talk, call and answer, encouraging an audience to clap along with the rhythm of the music, or pointing the microphone towards the crowd. Directors of stage, mostly Sufi disciples themselves with important positions within the order, instruct the disciples how to perform in a staged setting and choreograph them as to look as original and authentic as possible to the audience.

This process of spectacularizing Sufi rituals also produces standardization. The wide diversity of different vocal and bodily expressions, which exist among the countless Sufi orders are compressed into a limited time-frame and have become part of a set-list repertoire performed on stage, which can be repeated (Kapchan 2008, 480). This also means that, within the festival’s discourses, the particular Islamic religious identity of a Sufi order is downplayed in favor of a more generalized sense of Sufi spirituality. Moreover, some Sufi disciples, being drawn by financial rewards and artistic prestige, have become professional artists. Some of them even perform in various Sufi ensembles that present themselves under the label of one specific brotherhood, different than the one they originally belong to.²¹ All these transformations strongly affect both the practices and the experiences of the disciples.

Tensions and ambivalences within the Sufi scene

To my surprise, only a small minority of the performing artists openly expressed reservations regarding the changes caused by the state’s appropriation of Sufi ritual practices as performances of national heritage, and articulations of a ‘moderate’ Islam. These reservations mainly concerned nepotism within the festival organizations, the large influence of the state on the festivals, and the simplified messages about their religion they are expected to communicate to the public. The majority of performers of ‘Sufi’ music however, claimed to share and support these values, especially towards the message of a ‘moderate’ Islam. A vocalist of the Butshishiyya group from Fes, for instance, told me after one of their concerts at the Fes festival for Sufi culture, that Sufism actively acts against Islamic ‘extremism.’ Through performing Sufi rituals on stage, he believes they construct a ‘moderate’ Islam, one he deems is felt from the heart, and which he places in opposition to a ‘radical’ Islam, which is short of feelings and rigid:

Because (...) Sufism is the moderate Islam, [it is] the middle between Islam and the extremists of Islam [it is the] intermediary Islam. The core of Islam commands us to be kind-hearted to Muslims, Christians, and Jews. So, we try to (...) unite everyone, because everyone is born (...) the same, under the protection of God. (...) the Prophet has told us to love everyone.²²

²⁰Many Sufi brotherhoods have banned the use of musical instruments from their ritual performances. The Butshishiyya and Tijaniyya are examples of this.

²¹This observation is also shared by colleague Philip Murphy in a paper he presented at ICTM in Essaouira, June 2018.

²²Interview with Butshishiyya group of Fes. Fes, 19 April 2010.

Despite their open endorsement of the festival values, the Sufi artists did not passively subsume the festivals' discourses. I noticed that the disciples and their *zawaya* tried to maintain control over the form and meaning of their rituals, but in very subtle ways. For instance, several of my interlocutors told me that not every Sufi order presents all aspects of their ritual sessions on stage. Just before going on stage in his white *jellaba* and turban, a *munshid* of the Sqalliyya order told me that what the audiences see is just a selection of certain rites. He made a comparison with a train track: 'There are many stations in our ceremonies, but on stage, there are only a few stations we stop at, others we pass by. For example, the *hadra*, the *hadra* we pass by.' Likewise, the Butshishiyya group from Fes told me the following about how what they show on the stage relates to their ritual activities in the *zawiya*:

On stage, we only show the songs, *the dhikr* and prayer. In the *zawiya*, we have a calendar for the rituals (...). Like on Mondays we do the *latif*, on Tuesdays we do the *dhikr* of putting out the light, we close our eyes and try to connect with God. While we invoke the presence of God we whisper, we do *dhikr* within ourselves, not using our outer voices, you cannot hear it. On Wednesdays, we conduct the *sura* al-Yassine [chapter in the Qur'an], the heart of the Qur'an, and we remember the birth of the Prophet, and sometimes we chant (*wazifa*). But what you saw tonight was only ten percent of what we normally do.²³

Selecting particular parts of ritual music to be displayed on festival stages, is thus not only a practical outcome of shortening long ritual sessions to the limited time frame of a staged performance, but also demonstrates how Sufi brotherhoods try to retain control over what kinds of sound practices are displayed, and which are kept from the audience. Deliberations about whether and which Sufi rituals can or cannot be displayed on stage are mostly grounded in a belief in music and sound as a powerful force that should be handled carefully.

Within Sufism certain musical practices are considered a significant pathway to the realization of spiritual transformations in a human being and the experiencing of God's presence (Kapchan 2008; Waugh 2005). This comes from the belief that specific types of music and sounds heighten the senses and consciousness of a person, enabling them to perceive the presence of God with the heart. Some of my interlocutors even indicated that certain sonic rituals are considered sacred and in need of protection. *Dhikr*, for instance, is the ritual practice most disputed in debates on what kind of religious music and vocal practices can or cannot be staged. There are religious scholars (*fuqaha*) who believe that a close relationship with God is built through *dhikr*. Exposing this intimacy in the context of a festival with commercial and political objectives, in front of a partially non-Muslim audience, is considered utterly inappropriate by some as it could disturb this connection.

For some artists, the professional performance of sacred rituals before an audience thus creates inner conflict with their religious convictions and the precariousness of their personal tie to God. There are artists and *turuq* who downright refuse to perform such rituals. But most of my interlocutors defended the performance of their orders most sacred musical rituals on stage, such as the *hadra* and *dhikr*. They indicated that displaying these rituals on a festival stage helps to get a positive message of Islam

²³Interview with Butshishiyya group of Fes. Fes, 19 April 2010.

across to a wide audience, hence framing the festival stages as places for proselytization (*d'awa*, a duty within Islam), as well as for the promotion of their own Sufi brotherhood.

The artists' scrutiny of what part of the rituals can be shown and which should be withheld from an audience, was also sometimes phrased as a drive to protect the audience, incapable to fully comprehend and handle the powerful forces evoked by the sonic rituals. The intense emotions elicited by *hadra* or *dhikr* are believed by some to be so powerful, that they could be dangerous to the audience. A concomitant strategy is the carrying out of protection rituals on-stage, to protect the performers from the evil eye that could potentially be lingering in the festival, such as the sprinkling of drops of scented rose-water on the disciples with *murashsha*, as described in the vignette above.

These subtle tactics thus help the artists to hold some sense of control over how the rituals are displayed on stage and to protect their own personal tie to God. Still, many artists and brotherhoods feel they have little influence on how they participate in the festivals and resent their financial dependency on these state-sponsored festivals. The state-supported platforms for 'sacred' music offer the brotherhoods with an opportunity to convey messages about Islam, to promote themselves, and to make a living, but with a price of potential flattening and heritagizing the religious meanings of the rituals. Some of my interlocutors expressed their bitterness over their financial dependence on these festival stages. Especially now they are losing their share in the market of domestic celebrations (such as weddings and baptism) due to the increasing popularity of *anashid* groups, performing among the lower middle-classes in Moroccan cities and towns. The next section focuses on how this genre of Islam-inspired music is affected by and offers an alternative response to the state's discourse of 'moderate' versus 'radical' Islam.

Anashid in Morocco

In the late afternoon I arrived at a youth community house (*dar shabab*) in one of Casablanca's many lower middle-class suburbs. Khadija, one of my interlocutors, had invited me to come to the concert of Khalid, a *munshid* who would perform at the occasion of the celebration of 'Id al-Mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet. When I entered this women-only event, Khadija sat in the back of a small and plain theater room, crowded with women and children. The only men present were the members of the support act, a group of five young men performing *anashid*; slow vocal hymns with Islamic contents, with light percussion but without melodic instruments. The sound system produced a loud echo on the vocals. After the performance of the *anashid* group, the concert of Khalid, one of Khadija's favorite *anashid* artists, was about to begin. She was particularly enthusiastic about him as he performs *anashid* in a style close to Sufi and Andalusian music, which differs from the normally rather sober and uniform *anashid* style. Instead, the stage was set up with paraphernalia reminding of Sufi rituals, like copper incense burners, Oriental carpets, and traditional colored green and red banners on sticks with religious texts. While typically *anashid* artists wear dark suits and matching ties, this performer and the members of the band were dressed in traditional Moroccan garments, with white *jellaba*'s and yellow *babushes* (Figure 2).

Despite the entourage reminding of a traditional Sufi performance, at the time of my research, Khalid was not a Sufi. Like many other performers of *anashid* in Morocco, he was affiliated to the Jama'at al-'Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Benevolence Association/JBA). One of Morocco's most significant -but illegal- Islamic activist organizations. Nevertheless, Khalid chose to perform his *anashid* music in an adapted style of Sufi music.



Figure 2. Anashid band performing at a celebration of the birth of a child. © Photo by author, winter 2011.

Anashid is a music genre of songs with moral messages, that traditionally uses no melodic instruments, like flute or violin, but only voice and some light percussion, with lyrics addressing both worldly and non-worldly topics. These musical practices serve as a form of *da'wa* (Islamic proselytization), as well as to benefit the development of piety of the performers themselves. Due to the original absence of instruments, the genre was taken up as 'Islamic music' by Islamic reformist groups in the 1950s (Said 2012). In Morocco, *anashid* emerged in the universities in the 1980s at university campuses, where students provided 'virtuous' music to accompany student gatherings, cultural activities, celebrations and protests (Tozy 1999, 213–214). Recently a wide range of contemporary popular music styles has been embraced into the genre of *anashid*. This has broadened the freedom of artists to promote Islam (even though what the proper Islamic form of *anashid* is, remains a topic of heated debates).

In present-day Morocco, the genre of *anashid* has become quite popular among the lower middle-class in Moroccan cities and towns. At the same time its performers are stigmatized and marginalized in public discourse as they are linked to Islamism, which, as I have demonstrated, over the last decade has been increasingly stigmatized by the Moroccan state.²⁴ This is one of the reasons why *anashid* music is often labeled as a cultural product of a 'radical' and un-Moroccan Islam.

²⁴When I spoke with my Moroccan agnostic personal friends about my research, they often labeled my research group as *intégristes*, or *khwanji*. *Intégristes* is a French term, which in Morocco is used to refer to 'Islamic fundamentalists.' *Khwanji*, literary meaning 'of the brotherhood,' deriving from *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, the Muslim Brotherhood, is

Indeed, a considerable part of the *anashid* performers I worked with, were as a matter of fact affiliated to Islamic activist movements, in particular, the Justice and Benevolence Association (JBA), but also the legal political party PJD (Party of Justice and Development), and its religious and social backbone, Al-Tawhid wal-Islah (Movement of Unity and Reform /MUR).²⁵ Both organizations promote and support the production and dissemination of artforms that are in agreement with their vision of Islam.

As they are hindered to perform at state-sponsored stages, *anashid* artists have developed their own networks. They mostly play at celebrations in domestic settings (such as weddings and baptisms) and at semi-public venues such as university campuses. A great deal of the *anashid* concerts are held at neighborhood youth community centers called *dar shabab* (pl. *dyur shabab*), like the one where Khalid performed. These are located in almost every neighborhood of Moroccan cities, towns, and villages.²⁶ Some performers of *anashid* have managed to make a professional solo career and reached considerable popularity throughout Morocco and also abroad.

The *anashid* performers in my study mainly work in groups of four to seven persons, who accompany a solo vocalist. Players of instruments often double as a choir. A typical musical performance features a *munshid* assisted by a small or larger chorus. In contrast to Moroccan Sufi music, which is generally based on longstanding Andalusian traditional repertoires, *anashid* is strongly influenced by rhythms, harmonies (*maqamat*) and melodies from Middle Eastern styles (and more recently also from contemporary Western pop music). By way of comparison, a typical Sufi repertoire is less innovative and free, as it relies predominantly on age-old established set of rules, modes and scales, existing in traditional poetic texts and music, such as the Andalusian style *muwashsha*.

Anashid do not only differ from Sufi music in terms of music style, but also in terms of dress, lyrics, networks, and styles of performance. For example, whereas Sufi artists perform while dressed in official Moroccan male costume – a white *jellaba*, a red *fez*, and *babush*'s-, *anashid* vocalists typically wear matching dark-colored suits and ties, to emphasize modernity (or in the case of women, matching costumes and headscarves). The song lyrics in *anashid* not only revolve around God and the Prophet, but also communicate broader messages that encourage ethical behavior in different areas of life through the use of modern lyrics on societal issues. Other *anashid* provide a mere licit form of musical entertainment that does not contravene Islamic ethics. But there is also some overlap. The *mawwal*, for instance, can occur in both *anashid* and Sufi music. This is a solo vocal improvisation where an ornamental phrase of extended tones and multiple notes are sung on one syllable. Many *anashid* start out with a *munshid* performing a *mawwal*, which mostly precedes the actual musical composition.

another pejorative label attributed to people associated with Islamism. The labeling of performers of *anashid* with these categories also indicates the social stigma that its performers carry.

²⁵Unlike the PJD, the JBA is not allowed to participate in the parliamentary domain as it questions the religious legitimacy of the King.

²⁶The *dyur shabab* offer an important stage for beginning *anashid* artists. *Dyur shabab* are owned by the (local) government but used by all sorts of community-based organizations providing education and artistic activities to young people of the community.

Tensions and ambivalences within the *anashid* scene

In contrast to the performers of Sufi music I spoke with, most of the *anashid* artists I worked with were very open and direct in their critique regarding the cultural politics of the Moroccan government, promoting a ‘moderate’ Islam. They see its preference for Sufism and Western pop artists as immoral and a waste of public funds. Most *anashid* artists regard the mainstream musical entertainment presented on satellite and national television as morally harmful, as they believe it glorifies materialism and promiscuity. The artists believe that these types of entertainment impair the morality of Moroccan society, preventing its citizens from reaching spiritual fulfillment. Some of the *munshidin*, specifically those affiliated to the JBA, even see the state-encouraged musical entertainment as a deliberate instrument to numb people in order to uphold the current political system, with which they disagree. Several *munshidin* even claim that the Moroccan political system suffers of a lack of Islamic morals and actually opposes ‘true Islam’ altogether. As one *munshid* stated:

They [the *makhzen*] fight against all that has an odor of Islam in it. The organizers don’t like anything that is Islamic. There is a kind of war against everything Islamic (...) They are afraid of Islam. (...) when you want to sing an *anashid* (...) you’re doing Islamic evangelization (*da’wa*), you’re reviving Islam (*tajdid*). And the point is that they do not want an Islamic revival. They want you to stay asleep. And in their politics, they’re constantly stealing and robbing.²⁷

In my fieldwork, especially JBA-affiliated *anashid* performers explained the lack of attention given to *anashid* by state-regulated media platforms as part of a broader censorship strategy of the Moroccan state to reject opinions that are in opposition to the state’s interests, as well as an overall rejection of ‘true’ Muslim ethics and morals.

With their music, the *anashid* performers I worked with thus seek to counteract, what they see as moral decay (encouraged by the state), by actively pursuing Islamically correct sentiments within their listeners and containing undesirable emotions. To evoke pious sensibilities in the listener, so as to draw them closer to God, performers employ different musical practices and performance techniques, such as delicate singing, facial and hand gestures, crying, and specific styles of vocal ornamentation, with or without instrumental accompaniment to engage the audience emotionally in the songs performed. For instance, upon our introduction after his concert, Khalid’s first question to me was whether I cried. The next day at his family home, he again brought up the topic, but now of his own crying during his performance on stage:

Khalid: Did you see me yesterday when I was crying? (...)
 Nina: I did not see that, I was a little bit far from the stage.
 Khalid: For a moment when I was singing, I cried.
 Nina: Why?
 Khalid: It is called *khushu’* (awe, humility before God), do you understand *khushu’*? (...) The words have an intimate relation with Allah, it raises the soul (...) and speaks to the heart (...) you live in another world. I lived with these words, that’s why I cried.²⁸

²⁷Interview with *munshid* Najib. Casablanca, 1 August 2010.

²⁸Interview with *munshid* Khalid: Casablanca, 29 January 2012.

Khalid's on-stage crying exemplifies a shared belief among *munshidin*, that to be able to communicate the intended religious sentiments to the audience, the performers not only need to use several on-stage actions, but also have to be truly emotionally involved themselves. This also applies to Hicham Karim, a successful professional *anashid* solo performer from Kenitra, who told me in an interview how he uses his facial expressions to bring the audience in the same emotional state as himself:

I want the audience to feel exactly what I feel when I am singing. (...) For this purpose I use my facial expressions, for example my smile, to transmit my feelings onto the audience. That's music. They have to be able to enjoy the music from the beginning until the end and taste (*dhawq*) the sweetness (*hilw*) of the spirituality.²⁹

Part of the success of an *anashid* performance thus lies in the ability of the artist to deliver *anashid* in a sincere and sensitive way, so that the audience can feel the songs and be touched by them. Through musically embodied emotions, like crying or smiling, artists signal their inward state to the audience to direct them to follow the singer's experience of the music. Vocal techniques are also particularly important here. Hicham Karim, for instance, but also other *anashid* performers, use what is similar to 'the sob' (as is for instance also used in American country music), especially in *mawwal*. This concerns a 'breaking of the voice, when the singer moves back and forth between head voice and chest voice for dramatic emphasis, as if 'the voice seems to break, as in a sob' (Tichi 1994, 12). In the performance of *mawawil*, and in the vocal performance of *anashid* in general, voice effects on the microphone, mostly in the form of an echo, are added to further intensify the emotional impact (Touma 1996: 97-99). The importance of the evoking of emotions in *anashid* explains why, right after his performance, Khalid's very first question to me was whether I cried.³⁰

Besides inducing religious sentiments, there are also performance techniques that are deliberately used to steer away from less desired emotional states of excitement, such as a restrained body posture, modest dress, and slow rhythms. These unwanted emotional states mostly concern states of arousal, generally associated with fast-paced music styles, where sexualized movements, gestures, and dancing are common practice. As such, the performers of *anashid* I worked with, try to mold the visceral state of their audiences into one of good moral character (*akhlaq*). These visceral states may contrast with the sensibilities induced by the music promoted on state-run stages by Sufi disciples³¹ (or Western pop artists for that matter) who are supposed to embody Morocco's policies to shape its image as a 'moderate' and tolerant Muslim country. By offering substitutes of what they see as immoral musical practices, *anashid* artists try to counter the risk of moral depravation that satellite media and state sponsored entertainment are thought to encourage. Hence, with their music, the *munshidin* offer, in their eyes, a more respectable musical alternative, with the intention to achieve not only an ethical transformation within the listeners, but also in society at large.

What is notable here is that despite their open criticism towards state politics, *anashid* artists do attempt to gain recognition for their artistic merits on state-

²⁹Interview with *munshid* Hicham Karim. Kenitra, 22 Augustus 2010.

³⁰I did not cry during Khalid's performance, although I was moved to tears several times during some concerts of both Sufi and *anashid* music.

³¹Most *anashid* performers I worked with rejected Sufism, which they consider *bida'a* (heretic).

acknowledged stages. This occurs through two strategies. On the one hand, there are renowned artists who openly and in a direct manner make a pass at official stages (but often get rejected). Others however, like Khalid, choose to operate in a more disguised way. His appropriation of Andalusian music and the corresponding style of stage dressing, got him several performances in official settings. In his performances he validates the insignia of ‘national traditional culture’ by wearing for example, a white *jellaba*, yellow *babushe*’s and a red *fez*, instead of the modern Western dark suits and matching ties that are generally recognized as emblems of ‘Islamist music.’ The stage is dressed up in conventional Moroccan style with traditional attributes associated with Sufi-oriented and Andalusian music, like Oriental rugs and tall standing copper incensory holders. This style has even become Khalid’s hallmark within the Moroccan *anashid* music scene.

Gaining access to official stages and public visibility is however not Khalid’s only incentive. He told me he consciously chose to specialize in songs of the Moroccan patrimony because he wanted to popularize this type of music, which normally is only listened to by the Moroccan bourgeoisie. He also believes that *anashid* should be regarded as part of the Moroccan musical heritage. Khalid’s style cross-over can thus be seen as more than only a strategic move towards more artistic prestige, it can also be interpreted as a subtle social commentary on cultural elitism in Moroccan society.

Dissonances between the Moroccan Sufi and *anashid* scene

Despite some irrefutable differences between the Sufi and *anashid* scenes on an ideological, artistic, and organizational level, these are far from two clear-cut fields. Firstly, the vocal performers operating in these different scenes have many things in common. Both groups practice music inspired by Islam and share the objective to promote Islam (*d’awa*) by creating music in accordance with Islamic rulings on music and sound. This is an important goal, next to a shared belief in the power of music to evoke emotions. For both Sufi and *anashid* performers the intent of their projects does not only revolve around the ethical content conveyed in their songs, but also concerns the cultivation of religious sentiments through their style of singing and performing. Secondly, many artists deal quite flexibly with the boundaries of these two domains; some of them even perform in both.³² Driven by political, artistic, commercial, and religious motivations, many of them make strategic choices of musical style and identity, where they perform and how they present themselves musically, and what repertoire they bring to an audience. The two examples from my ethnographic fieldwork demonstrate the tensions and ambivalences occurring both within and between the two musical domains, and show the ambiguous ways in which the performing artists can deal with the two musical infrastructures. This causes a sort of tensional friction, a scraping between these two fields, like a dissonant chord.

This ‘dissonance,’ is not an oppositional form of subversion, but resembles, in line with James Scott’s work (1990), a kind of concealed way to withstand ‘public transcripts’ by partially taking its forms, opposing while simultaneously enabling it. In the case of my

³²Whereas *anashid* performers sometimes appear in traditional Moroccan costumes, it is however rare for Sufi artists to switch to the *anashid* scene.

research, the choices musicians make about such matters as dress, body postures, what themes are referred to, which song lyrics are sung, and the kind of venues where the performance takes place, can thus be seen as aspects of transcripts (either hidden or public) connected to larger ideological constructs. Scott's ideas thus help to interpret and analyze the musical practices of both *anashid* and Sufi artists as a possible form of tacit subversion which can take the form of compliance with various structures of authority, such as *munshid* Khalid who is affiliated to the illegal JBA, yet performs *anashid* in Andalusian style.

The notion of *transcripts* however, does not entirely cover the resilience in musical practice of some of my interlocutors. Most notably because the notion does not address the dimension of the sensorium and affect, which is crucial to musical practices. Through explicit and implicit aspects of sonic performances, both performers of *anashid* and Sufi music seek after particular religious sentiments to be cultivated within the listener. Sonically evoked sensations do however not occur in a vacuum, but interact with and reinforce other sensational forms, like gestures, dress, facial expressions, and scent. The artists' practices and narratives I described concern an implicit undertone that always occurs together with other sensational forms. This is present in what is shown on stage as well as what is left out of the performance, in which emotional experiences are sought after and which ones are controlled or avoided. For instance, Sufi disciples not performing their most intimate sacred rituals on state-sponsored festival stages, or using olfactory elements (rosewater) as a means of safeguarding their relation to God. Such practices can be read as a refusal of the state's high jacking of their devotional rites for political purposes. Yet, them performing on state-stages also contributes to the construction of state discourse on Sufism and a state-approved 'moderate' Islam.

All these elements taken together seek to cultivate particular sentiments through music with the purpose of attaining a moral transformation within the listeners as well as in society at large; an aesthetic sonic formation. Yet as I have demonstrated, different sonically evoked aesthetic formations rub against each other here. And so, it can happen that a performance which on the outside seems to fit a dominant state discourse on 'moderate' Islam in Morocco, could simultaneously appeal to religious sentiments and ethical values, underpinning alternative perspectives on a 'moderate' Islam in Morocco. As such, the intentional or unintentional cultivation of sensibilities can thus form the basis of deviating political thought, deflecting from dominant discourses conveyed through symbolic as well as affective repertoires. This produces dissonances, emerging from the cracks of different layers of meaning production, both within and outside official stages. This complexly produces paradoxes and ambiguities, in what is shown, sung, and felt. It also allows the artists to maintain themselves in a highly competitive market with little funding, and an authoritative political system with little space for open debate. To survive as artists, my interlocutors make strategic choices, which might be at odds with their own religiosity, but also circumvent and may frustrate the influence of the state on the musical field. Dissonance thus enables the artists to create an artistic space, which simultaneously allows them to disseminate their own ideas about Islam with a broad audience, whether this complies with or counters dominant discourses of a 'moderate' vs. a 'radical' Islam, without losing all stakes.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the experiences of vocal performers of Islam-inspired music in Morocco and how they use their sonic practices to connect to the divine as well as engage with state discourses about a ‘moderate’ vs. a ‘radical’ Islam. Since 9/11 and in particular the Casablanca bombings in May 2003, music has become for the Moroccan state, next to the implementation of counterterrorism policies, an important tool to promote a so-called ‘moderate’ Islam as well as to counter ‘radical’ beliefs and practices of Islam. The state-sponsored promotion of a ‘moderate’ Islam through music has strongly influenced the dynamics of the field of Islam-inspired music in Morocco, as well as its performers, their musical practices, and the ways in which they represent themselves. It has not only set off a multitude of state-approved musical activities, but has also instigated a discursive and polarized crystallization of two domains for Islam-inspired music; Sufi and *anashid* music.

The state-run bolstering of Sufism and Sufi music as the emblem of a ‘moderate’ ‘Moroccan’ Islam has curtailed the artistic leeway of *anashid* performers in public space and their opportunities to develop their artistic skills, as their musical practices are associated with ‘Islamic fundamentalism.’ Nevertheless, *anashid* artists have managed to create parallel structures for their music and messages in domestic settings, social media, and abroad. In turn, Sufi brotherhoods and their disciples have witnessed a profound process of commodification and politicization of their musical rituals, affecting their ritual practices as well as their experiences of their personal religiosity.

The analysis of my ethnographic fieldwork among performers of Islam-inspired music in Morocco, as exemplified in the two ethnographic vignettes I presented in this article, has shown however that neither the artists and their music, nor the underlying religious sentiments and political ideas fit into this polarized image of Sufi vs. *anashid*. The two fields are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the distinction between an *anashid* and Sufi music scene mostly reflects and (re)produces a nationalist state policy, aimed at fighting a ‘radical’ Islam and promoting Morocco as a ‘moderate’ Muslim country. The artists, their musical practices, and their religious beliefs and political ideas however, do not always coincide with this polarized image of the state. The way they engage with these fields of Islam-inspired music is rather characterized by discrepancy, patterns of conflict, incongruity and incoherence, strategic action and maneuvering practices, and divergent objectives and compromises.

In order to analyze the different types of tensions and ambivalences present between and within these two musical domains, I have combined theories of everyday resistance (Scott 1985, 1990) with scholarly work on the role of the senses in the formation of religious subjectivities (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005, 2006; Meyer 2006, 2009, 2020). To conceptualize the sensorium as part of subtle tactics of subversion, I have proposed the notion of ‘dissonance’: an implicit form of sonic non-compliance, which is not always intentional. I have used this notion as a metaphor to analyze how the artists’ musical practices, their narratives and ethics of performance, as well as the musically evoked sensibilities, can simultaneously confirm and challenge (wittingly or unwittingly) state discourses about ‘radical’ versus ‘moderate’ Islam. Together with other ‘sensational forms’ (Meyer 2006), the vocal performers from both domains, use sound and music as a medium to mobilize and cultivate particular virtuous sentiments

with the purpose of bringing about moral transfigurations both in themselves and in their listeners. This forms the basis for ethical communities and political engagement and thought, which can be congruent or dissonant with the dominant discourses in which the music is performed (cf. Hirschkind 2006: 25).

The complex and irregular ways in which Sufi and *anashid* performances become connected with competing political discourses of a ‘moderate’ versus a ‘radical’ Islam in Morocco thus shows how sound and music as a ‘sensational form,’ is an important aspect in the establishment of ‘aesthetic formations’ (Meyer 2009). This article has demonstrated that such formations are however not perse univocal but can be contested and multi-layered and can rub against each other, hence creating ‘dissonance’.

Comparing the domains of Sufi music and *anashid* music thus illuminates the complex relationships underlying the Moroccan field of Islam-inspired music. This article has also demonstrated that sound practices are an excellent point of departure for a deeper analysis of the conflicts emerging from the state-project to produce a ‘moderate’ Islam. Where certain musical practices and sounds are perceived as connected to a ‘moderate’ and ‘Moroccan Islam’, other musical forms are being judged as belonging to foreign ‘radical’ tendencies. This shows, more than anything, we need to not only critically reflect on the use of etiquettes such as ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ Islam. We also need to keep an open ear for the subtle dissonant sounds emerging from our research fields.

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