

Pirates of the Mediterranean

Moroccan music video and technology

TONY LANGLOIS

A version of this paper was presented at the ESRC/HRC-supported research network 'Performance, Politics, Piety: Music as Debate in Muslim Societies' at the University of Leeds

Technologies for the consumption and production of global media have brought 'foreign bodies' into the domestic spaces of millions of Moroccans. Such unprecedented access to cultural materials is, however, negotiated at a local and familial level, and this paper considers the workings of this domestic interface. It examines the economy of music video production in Morocco and the close links existing between new technologies, traders and their markets. The paper also shows how moving images can be 'ripped' from global sources and re-edited to fit indigenous musical structures.

Introduction

This article investigates the application of digital media technologies to the production and consumption of music video discs in Morocco. In it I will discuss the range of music videos that have recently been available in street markets, and which, given the close relationship between supply and demand that I will describe, I assume to be a reliable barometer of local tastes. I will also consider the technical and economic circumstances in which video discs are produced and disseminated.

Digital media are widely available in much of Morocco; yet formal state regulation is relatively light, facilitating easy access to global musics. The preferred medium for domestic consumption of music video is the VCD (Video Compact Disc). As in other parts of the developing world (see Pohlman 1992), North Africa has seen a rapid uptake of VCD technologies. Whilst the potential exists for music and video from any location to be accessed via satellite TV and the internet, consumption is highly selective, to the point where global material is sometimes digitally manipulated to create new audiovisual products for the local market. In a small

but significant genre of Moroccan music video, visual material from a range of sources is remixed to fit the structures of local *Cha'abi* pop music. In this paper I will give an overview of music video consumption in Moroccan markets and discuss the economic circumstances behind their production.

Finally, I will discuss music videos at their domestic point of consumption and ask how comfortably 'foreign' images sit with the local sense of propriety. I will suggest that the process of viewing is gradually repositioning the domestic consumer as 'observer' rather than 'participant,' and that this change even extends to indigenous musics and social customs. My views are formed by ethnographic investigations in the Moroccan cities of Fez and Oujda over the last ten years.

New Media Technologies

Though unevenly distributed around the world, access to digital media and their required hardware has never been so affordable nor as ubiquitous. As satellite television stations and faster internet connections proliferate, so the potential for interaction with global media has expanded accordingly. Access to modern entertainment technology is common in urban Moroccan homes, even if, for reasons of cost or residential overcrowding, it is often shared between multiple family units (see Ratiba 2003). The last decade's growth in satellite dish ownership has meant that even in the most remote areas of the country, Moroccans can access media broadcasts from most other places on the planet.¹ However, even though technological development facilitates global consumption, its use is actually highly selective. Because of the country's mountainous landscape many viewers require satellite dishes just to watch national 'terrestrial' channels, and Arabic language stations are preferred to any other international broadcasters. Ten years ago, I remember that European MTV and French satellite channels were by far the most popular in public spaces like cafes, but Western broadcasters have since lost out to Lebanese stations for music videos, Egyptian networks for soap operas, and Al Jazeera for news. Despite the wide range now available, no stations are as popular in the home as the two domestic, state-owned TV channels (2M and RTM). With regard to the music video industry, which is my central focus here, there is a similarly strong preference for indigenous material despite the vast international choice now potentially available.

Whilst satellite television is now popular and affordable, home ownership of computers is less common in Morocco. Internet cafes are

¹ Many of these receivers use illegally 'cracked' access codes, meaning that viewers do not pay to view international broadcasts.

commonplace in cities and are well used, especially by younger people, but a PC is generally too large an investment to make for purely entertainment purposes. Computing and the internet, however, have rapidly become tools for a thriving 'cottage industry' in music and video reproduction. All kinds of music and films are 'ripped' from the internet or television, copied, and sold at market stalls for minimal prices. If customers cannot find what they are looking for, stallholders simply ask them to come back an hour or so later, by which time the recording will have been downloaded to order and burned onto a standard CD-R disc. The latest feature films from the USA, Hong Kong or Mumbai, and a multitude of home-produced music videos are recorded in VCD format, using basic computing technology. VCDs are, relatively speaking, a 'low' technology compared to the quality of DVDs containing up to eighty minutes of audio-visual material (stored as MPEG 1 files). Although reproduction can be poor, and VCDs do not include the 'extra' features of DVDs, their popularity in Morocco is enormous due to their affordability and the wide range of material readily available. A VCD can cost as little as 5 Dirham (approx £0.30 sterling), and it is possible to buy a multi-format player for under £30 that can be linked to an ordinary television set.² Not only does this make the VCD one of the cheapest forms of media entertainment available but, as the material on sale includes locally-produced as well as international features, and as discs can be burned to order, the content is much more diverse than that available on DVD.

² These do not play DVDs but work with VCDs, audio CDs and music discs containing MP3s, another increasingly important medium in North African street markets.

Weak Market Regulation

One of the reasons for the proliferation of this industry is the government's light management of the economy at grassroots level. Even the smallest Moroccan village has a weekly market; cities have scores of them, and their traders are largely exempt from tax and government intervention. Some hamlets (such as *Souk el Had*, or *El Khemis*) are even named after the day of the week on which their market is held, and which is their prime reason for existence. Market traders and smallholders are amongst the poorest section of society, and although the government cannot offer them social security benefits, it does enable participation in the economy by waiving street market taxation. Moreover, the large Moroccan rural population needs to trade goods with urban dwellers, often through intermediaries from their own family or village (see Waterbury 1972). Such free-market economic connections sustain important community infrastructures and promote political as well as

economic stability in rural areas. This arrangement also serves traders who import manufactured goods into Morocco from the free-trade Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta.³ In practice, the scale of market trading is so vast that accurate monitoring is all but impossible. This spur to economic sustainability, whilst keeping the population fed and employed, also permits the unregulated import of all sorts of media technologies. Inevitably it has been difficult to impose regulations on copyright for recordings, and efforts to enforce payment for satellite TV access have so far been ineffective. The Moroccan government did attempt to control access to satellite television in 2001 by insisting upon subscription payments. This resulted in rioting in Fez, after which the government settled for a modest tax on all decryption boxes – which does not regulate access to particular channels. More sophisticated methods of encryption, introduced in 2005, seem to have had little impact on satellite viewing habits, and Morocco's one commercial TV station, 2M, was eventually bought up by the state to make it viable.

On the production side of the equation, the music recording industry has a strong history in North Africa, especially since the late 1970s when cheap cassette technology effectively wrested control from major international and state record companies. The business of music-making in Morocco, even before recording, has long had a strong free-market ethos, and although the centre of the industry is now firmly located in Casablanca, most regional towns produce cassettes and CDs reflecting local linguistic and other cultural distinctions. Importantly, audiences for such material are not limited to North Africa, but extend through highly developed migration networks to major cities, and beyond to substantial diasporic communities around the world.

In the early 1990s digital technologies were adopted seamlessly into this environment. Recording studios quickly replaced analogue with digital facilities, and the production and distribution of compact discs was if anything even easier than cassettes. The adoption rate of audio CDs in Morocco throughout the 1990s was dependent on the scale of acquisition of playback equipment rather than the ability to produce discs.

The more recent combination of video with audio material on VCDs has been made possible by a convergence of skills and technologies which were already well-developed within the lucrative 'wedding video' industry. The availability of cheap portable video cameras, more powerful home computers and editing software has made it possible to create music videos which, though seldom of broadcast quality, have opened up an important new marketplace for local musicians.

³ Both are small Spanish enclaves on the North African coast. They have long constituted an interface (see Dreissen 1992) between Spanish, Berber and Arab cultures. All manner of manufactured goods flow freely from them into Morocco and beyond, and they have lately become key destinations for African refugees intent on migrating to Europe.

Musical Styles and VCDs

The Video Compact Disc format, though lower quality than DVD recordings, is easy to copy with the most basic computer equipment. When played, discs are not hindered by 'regional' security restrictions which are applied to DVDs. Their drawback, a limited capacity to store digital information, makes them unsuitable for full-length feature films, but they are ideal for short music videos, several of which can be stored on one cheap disc.⁴ In any Moroccan market one can find stalls selling a wide range of VCDs, and of these the greater proportion (perhaps as much as 70%) feature primarily musical content. By this I mean that the recording is of a musical performance, featuring singers or musicians, or is otherwise a short dramatic piece that accompanies a song, in much the same way as Western pop videos. For the sake of clarity I do not include 'films' where music is secondary to the dramatic content. Amongst such VCDs, I estimate that up to a quarter are derived from existing videotapes, which have simply been transferred to VCD format. This older material includes, for example, 'classic' vintage recordings of Egyptian diva Um Kulthoum, indigenous favourites from the 1970s like the group Nass el Ghiwane, or the star of the Middle Atlas region, Mohamed Rouicha.

In addition, roughly a quarter of *all* music VCDs have been illegally 'ripped' from musical performances on popular national or Arabic satellite TV programmes. For example, each weekend 2M, a local TV channel, broadcasts 'live' performances of contemporary popular musicians, and these are almost immediately made available on pirated VCDs. Most of this music belongs to the *cha'abi* genre, by far the most popular indigenous style, typified by singers like Khalid El Bennani and Farid El Kenitri. Regionally (which in Morocco also equates to 'ethnically') distinct groups also perform on 2M, and during the holy month of Ramadan the *andalous* art music ensembles predominate. Alongside these Moroccan styles VCDs also feature material taken from Algerian, Egyptian and Lebanese TV stations.⁵

The remainder of the music VCD market largely consists of material produced locally by musicians specifically for the VCD market. Most of these are very rudimentary recordings of performances by *cha'abi* groups, filmed in hotels, with a small audience as part of the *mise en scène* to give the impression of a live setting. My own experience of actual *cha'abi* performance contexts has been quite different. These have typically taken place late at night in clubs beneath or behind hotels, where male customers can drink beer, dance, and meet girls. To varying degrees, these are morally disreputable environments, far from the

⁴ Standard VCDs can hold up to 74 minutes of audio-visual information, coded using MPEG1 protocols. Their bit rate (how much digital information can be 'read' per second) is 1150 kilobytes per second. By contrast, a DVD has a bit rate of 5000 kb/s and can hold up to 2 hours of material. Storing less digital information, the picture resolution of VCDs is inevitably inferior to DVDs, but they do not need expensive dual layer discs and require less sophisticated equipment to read and record them.

⁵ My survey of VCD genres took place over two weeks in July 2006. In it my prime focus was on the material held at two market stalls in the Fez Medina, and my conclusions were supported by a less formal survey of discs sold in several other stalls in the city.



Figure 1 A local nightclub dancer performs alongside Les Frères Mossir



Figure 2 A performance by Orchestre Jamal in a typical locally-produced VCD

representation included on VCDs. In discussion with *cha'abi* musicians it became clear that these video discs were not moneymaking ventures in themselves, but rather a means of promotion. The medium is so cheap and easy to copy that it is unlikely that musicians could ever make money directly from them. However, by becoming better known, a group's reputation is enhanced, leading to greater demand for live performances, higher fees, and possibly exposure on television or radio in the future.

A minority of more sophisticated videos enhance straightforward performance material with a range of technical manipulations of the image, including 'exotic' transitions between shots – techniques commonly found in the production of wedding videos. This is no coincidence, as

weddings, music and videos are inextricably linked in North Africa. During summer weekends Moroccan towns are criss-crossed by noisy wedding motorcades, and this is by far the most lucrative market for professional musicians. Most weddings involve the production of an elaborate video disc which records the celebrations for distribution amongst the extended family, and this naturally includes much music and dance. Thus, local music video production has largely emerged from a convergence of grass-roots audiovisual media and music industries (rather than, as is the case in the West, as strategic investments by major TV and record companies). This relationship is mutually beneficial; wedding video makers produce the promotional VCDs of musicians, who then have better prospects of working throughout the summer. Correspondingly, the more successful a performer is, the more resources they are able to invest in publicity such as videos.

Western Musics

Since material is so easily accessed via satellite TV or the internet, the range of musics that are potentially available on video disc is vast. This reflects the ethnic diversity within Morocco itself, and accommodates popular tastes for international Arabic-language genres. From the perspective of a European researcher, I am often surprised by the notable absence of Western pop music genres in shops and CD collections. While there is undoubtedly some appreciation of global pop music in Morocco, this is less than might be expected given the degree of European colonial influence and the extent of global media penetration. Examination of any record stall shows a very small proportion of Western audio CDs, and amongst these there is a distinct preference for dance and ballad styles over noisier or aggressive rock styles. Amongst video CDs, Western music is even less common, which I surmise is because of the familial environment in which these discs are viewed. Whilst discordant rock is not to local tastes in any case, the imagery of R&B and hip-hop videos has a tendency towards explicitly sexual posturing and contexts, which is not considered tasteful family entertainment. VCDs are largely bought for domestic consumption, and in North African societies the home is very much a familial and feminine space. As VCD sellers can 'burn on demand' they are highly responsive to local market tastes, which in turn are shaped by established visual and musical aesthetics and the conventions applied to the site of consumption.

Pastiche

There is, however, one area where Western material has recently proved popular, and this is where it is used ironically. A small number of VCD producers have taken to ripping video material from Western films or pop-music videos and overdubbing these with indigenous *cha'abi* songs. Excerpts from Michael Jackson or Shakira videos, dance scenes from Jim Carrey's *The Mask* (1994), or from Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967), are manipulated to fit the song structures of popular *cha'abi* songs. Results are technically rough, but local audiences consider the juxtaposition between indigenous music and global imagery highly amusing. The proliferation of such discs indicates that demand for this type of material has increased considerably since they first appeared in 2005.

Cha'abi music is typically performed with a gradually accelerating 6/8 rhythm, ending in an extremely fast *leseb* section. The rhythmical and structural differences between *cha'abi* and the usually unchanging 4/4 of Western pop would seem to make synchronisation between image and sound very difficult. To overcome this, video editors tend to choose short (one or three beat-long) clips which they repeat in time with the music. The resulting scene is highly unrealistic, as such visual loops appear to make dancers repeatedly 'jump' back to the start of each musical phrase. It also disrupts any narrative structure that may have been part of the video's original intention. However, this 'unnaturalistic' timeline does not seriously confound the conventions of music video, where the structure of the visual material is almost always subjugated to that of the music (see Cook 2001, Chion 1990). It is clear to viewers that the mix of materials is from unconnected sources as they have different production qualities and characters, and no effort is made to disguise the digital manipulation of the materials. Such a collage, which in other contexts might be considered an avant-garde technique in narrative filmmaking, is again acceptable within the field of music video, where rhythmic integration and eye-catching imagery is valued over narrative coherence. As in Western music videos, the song itself is the cement that links these composite pieces. Moreover, the re-editing not only disembeds visual material from its intended semantic context, but also ignores its original visual rhythm, literally forcing the images of global performers to dance to an indigenous beat.

Superficially, some of the results of this 'scratch' approach to video look similar to the work of Western 'mashup' video DJs such as Charles Atlas and Addictive TV. It is possible that similar technologies are employed in both contexts, and that their creative purpose is to subvert any narrative dominance of temporal structure, i.e. the audiovisual rela-

tionships with which audiences are most familiar. In Morocco, however, the prime objective appears to be the rhythmical relocation of video material with ostensibly incompatible audio content rather than the ironic disruption of narrative structure in any postmodern sense. The timing of visual cuts is locked firmly to musical structures; musical repetition is mirrored in repeated visual sections. This relationship between audio-visual fields, where musical structures predominate, is also apparent in the co-ordination of solo/chorus sections of the music with appropriate images of individual and group, and in the synchronisation of foregrounded instruments and voices with particular characters on screen. For example, we may hear the *cha'abi* fiddle of Abdelaziz Stati dubbed onto a violinist from a Hindi dance film, or the voice of singer Simo El Issaoui apparently issuing from the mouth of the Donkey character from the *Shrek* films.⁶

⁶ Examples of this, and every other kind of Moroccan music video, are now appearing on open access websites such as YouTube. This progression from disc to website seems a simple one, but most of the videos are uploaded by Moroccans living outside the country, where computer ownership is more common. As far as it is possible to tell, these videos appear to have been originally produced in Morocco, in which case they were probably first produced on VCD. Typical examples can be found at: <http://www.videoclip.ma/tags/chaabi.html> (accessed March 2009).

As video clips from different sources may be synchronised with a single (audio) song, no attempt is made to construct a cohesive internal narrative, though this is also in keeping with global music video practices. Any coherence the piece may have is determined by the music, which does not change, whilst the visual material is chosen for its structural 'fit', the suitability of characterisations, and for thematic juxtaposition. As with the use of short clips to match 'beats', so the call-and-response vocal patterns (common elements of *cha'abi*) are visually matched by repetitive visual 'phrases'.

Another level of juxtaposition occurs between the words of the songs and the images. *Cha'abi* song texts are diverse, and in the 1970s groups like Nass el Ghiwane and Jil Jilala risked censorship and imprisonment for the critical political messages in their music. Contemporary songs, however, are more likely to have a religious theme, or sing of romantic love, or they can quite frequently be humorous. Inevitably, the latter category is the most common in these pastiche videos, as the images might otherwise be construed as ridiculing religion or being sexually suggestive.

Denied narrative structure, there can be little intrinsic sense to the visual component of these videos, so their meaning and entertainment value lies in the tension between audio and visual information and in the context in which they are understood. For 'context', I consider here both the stylistic form of the material itself and the social space in which it is typically consumed. It is significant that these 'scratched' discs do not just contain music videos but also include somewhat similar parodies of episodes from popular films. In these pieces, the regional Arabic dialect (*derija*) is dubbed onto scenes from movies as diverse as Jackie Chan's *Rush Hour* (2001) and Charlie Chaplin's *Easy Street* (1917). Situated amongst these other forms of pastiche, it is obvious that the music videos

are also intended to be funny to audiences. It is significant that both the dubbed films and *cha'abi* music employ *derija*, which is otherwise seldom heard on radio or television broadcasts.⁷ As women, who constitute the main market for VCDs, are much less likely than men to speak standard (international) Arabic, let alone a foreign language, this process of adaptation might be regarded as a domestication of global media.⁸

Consumption: Foreign Bodies in Domestic Space

In traditional Moroccan culture, social space is frequently segregated along gender lines, so the context in which music VCDs are most usually watched is significant. The domestic environment, where VCD players are usually found, is strongly associated with women and children. The home is where, at quiet times of the day, female friends and relatives socialise, watch TV and listen to music (Virolle-Souibes 1989). Men, on the other hand, typically spend their free time in cafes or other public spaces, where news and sports satellite TV channels are the norm. It is no surprise, then, that VCD content is geared towards the tastes of women, and this relationship has been established since the use of videocassettes became widespread in the 1980s (see Davis 1989). Even families without their own satellite dish (or *parabole*) might still be able to afford a VCD player, or at least have a neighbour with one; discs are sufficiently cheap to allow access despite a low disposable income. Also, as the primary site for the enculturation of children, parents tend to consider the home both a sanctuary from the world at large and a repository for education into both traditional and national culture. Consequently, private VCD collections often include musical material from other regions of Morocco with which the family has ethnic links, alongside those featuring the privileged *andalous* orchestral tradition. Thus the family maintains important associations with the culture and language of its rural origins as well as subscribing to the received national canon of taste and identity.

This domestic context contributes to a certain conservatism in taste, as mothers are unlikely to allow children access to the sexual or aggressive imagery which may be available on Western satellite channels. The relatively coy romanticism of Lebanese and Egyptian pop music is usually preferred. Despite the disreputable locations *cha'abi* performers may inhabit in the outside world, the song texts themselves are largely innocuous, treating religious subjects, the happiness of festive occasions, and moral and humorous stories.⁹

Professional dancing women, who are closely associated with prostitution in North Africa, do feature in *cha'abi* videos, and though they are

⁷ *Derija* is the name given to the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, which includes many words from Berber languages, French and sometimes Spanish. Whilst *derija* is the popular, domestic form of the language, international and formal communication is conducted through modern standard Arabic (or *Fos'Ha*). As *Fos'Ha* is closest to classical and Koranic Arabic, it is of higher status than dialects and so is the sole language for media broadcasts, official documents, etc.

⁸ See Morley 2006 for a broader discussion of this phenomenon.

⁹ It is rare in North African popular music for song texts to be explicitly sexual or political, or even to voice a strong social critique. Algerian *rai* from the 1980s was an exception in this regard, but even this was soon 'cleaned up' in order to achieve wider airplay (see Langlois 1996). This textual propriety does not prevent many popular genres from having strong immoral associations, and in live performances any sexual innuendo in the lyrics can be fully exploited.

never scantily dressed, their body movements are clearly sexually suggestive. It might seem incongruous that such images appeal to mainly female audiences, but there exists an established tradition of women entertainers, known as *medahat*, who sing and dance in this way for single-sex audiences, especially in pre-wedding events. Whilst women dancing in such a manner for the entertainment of men would be open to criticism, it is acceptable when performed for women in private. The social divide between 'virtuous' and 'fallen' women (as dancers would be considered) is enormous; dancing girls inhabit a nocturnal world of clubs and bars, often having severed links with family and community. They may of course serve as a curiosity, or even a fantasy, for women viewers; but contained within a rigid moral position their images reinforce rather than threaten the moral order.

Much less clear are the impressions made by 'dancing women' whose images have been ripped from Western pop videos in pastiche VCDs. Singers like Shakira and Christina Aguilera can appear considerably less dressed than their Moroccan counterparts, and though their dance gestures may actually be less sexually explicit than the local dance they are nevertheless stylistically very different. In this case, having been appropriated for use with a completely different form of music, they become one of a series of otherwise disconnected visual fragments, selected primarily to create humorous juxtapositions. Nonetheless their images are dislocated from any cultural or narrative context that might have encouraged preferred meanings to coalesce around them. Here, these images are open to every kind of unpredictable reinterpretation.¹⁰

¹⁰ Interestingly, the women I interviewed about VCD material did not find these images of half-naked dancers particularly noteworthy. Much more shocking material was always accessible on satellite TV channels, so they were familiar with the '*shouma*' (shamelessness) which they had come to associate with certain aspects of Western culture. So long as these images were clearly linked with the foreign 'other', local viewers were content to be voyeurs, though such indecent exposure would be considered shameful for Moroccans themselves.

Conclusion

Given the political and technological dominance of the 'first world', and the penetration of its networks into every potential niche, it seems reasonable to expect regional popular cultures to be drawn inexorably into a global ecumene of converging values and common forms of expression. Not only do the *contents* of mediated cultures – be they musical, linguistic, or visual – influence one another, but global technologies themselves should bring about a re-structuring of local social practices of consumption and production. Critiques of the cultural hegemony theory are a recurring feature of most nationalist discourse, and the extent of this phenomenon has long been debated within academia. When considering macro-cultural flows (Robertson 1992) or global entertainment industries (Taylor 1997), the pervasive influences of globalisation are clearly observable. Following Gramsci, one would

expect that only dissidents (whether individuals or states) would resist cultural assimilation by emphasising regional differences, effectively by much the same means as those by which they are oppressed – the economy, language, the arts, or through media technology. Here, an examination of local (musical) appropriation of global (visual) material in Morocco appears to show that – contrary to this common view – neither production nor consumption are necessarily determined by access to mediated materials or technologies.

My findings have been more in keeping with Appadurai's model (1996) that suggests that the consumption and adaptation of 'global' popular culture is actually highly unpredictable. Appadurai suggests that any particular manifestation of a cultural product is dependent on the complex interaction of several variables that are unlikely to be identical at any two times or places. It is now well established (Ginsburg 1995, Pinney 2002, Davis 1989) that broadcast cultural materials are read through a prism of local meanings, interpretations frequently diverging from the intended message. Given that media consumption is also subject to regulation at every level from state policy to family habits, it is not, in reality, as accessible as technological penetration alone might imply. In practice, whether through personal choice or regimes of censorship, only the most acceptable materials tend to reach the point of consumption. However, whilst the case that global media may have a less pervasive influence upon consumption than might have been predicted is already well made, the technological manipulation of digital material itself in order to fit local tastes has tended to be overlooked.

By focusing on Moroccan VCDs, I have argued that the relationship between music and the moving image is closely tied to specific cultures of consumption and production. Despite access to globalised media technologies, it has been a highly local music-making economy that has most influenced the dominant audiovisual aesthetic. The largest proportion of locally-produced music videos functions as promotional material showing musicians in 'live' performances, made in the hope of securing work during the wedding season. As it happens, this 'low-tech' aesthetic also appeals to a secondary, diasporic market, for whom it will bear other meanings, but for most performing groups the aim is to become, literally, a 'household name'. Global influences are not rejected, but as in any other locus of transculturation, they are selectively appropriated only where they have some resonance with local discourse or practice. Western musics may not 'fit' so neatly as those with closer family resemblances, but their dislocated images can still be adapted to both local tastes and musical structures.

The piratical use of global material is intended to amuse, and – being

made in purely vernacular terms – cannot be reasonably construed as a symbolic resistance to or commentary upon Western cultural hegemony. As the material employed is just as likely to be from India or Hong Kong as from Hollywood, the West has not been singled out for ridicule. Although added amusement is doubtless derived from the fact that sources are known to be foreign, these are not primarily works of political satire. Neither can they be regarded as an emulation of the work of Western ‘scratch’ video DJs, however similar their techniques, or even their products, may appear; Morocco has no strong tradition of using artforms to deconstruct genre discourses in a postmodern sense. These practices have instead emerged from a quite different political situation, where a publicly critical stance is not as welcome as it might appear to be in Western democracies.¹¹

¹¹ In 2003, members of the Moroccan heavy metal bands Infected Brain and Nekros were briefly imprisoned on the grounds of moral depravity, suggesting that ‘anti-social’ music and attitudes are not readily tolerated.

There can be no doubt, of course, that audiovisual media from all sources are influencing Moroccan society. Like Moroccan music itself, these VCDs display considerable ethnic diversity, reflecting the traditions of the towns in which they were recorded. As VCDs meet urban demands for all kinds of regional Moroccan musics, so the country’s internal cultural diversity is becoming increasingly visible and audible through this medium. This has the potential to challenge globalising Arabist discourses, which relate themselves to national and pan-national discourses of cultural unity. The phenomenon gives expression to minority Berber ethnicities seeking acknowledgement of cultural rights. As Manuel (1993) showed with regard to Indian cassette producers, the manifestation of regional identities through recorded media can give impetus to political movements. For the current Moroccan regime, which negotiates the discursive weight of both Islamic and Western hegemonic influences, expressions of such indigenous diversity may in time contribute towards a distinctive and inclusive nationalist trope. There are signs that the government is managing such developments with something like this result in mind.¹²

¹² The state-supported Fez Festival of Sacred Music is one such manifestation, where musicians from all over the country are brought together in a collective representation of solidarity, despite the historically divergent political interests of each region.

Perhaps the subtlest influence of music videos lies in the distancing of the viewer from the more visceral experience of live performance. Much Moroccan music is intended to be affective, encouraging dance, song, and in certain contexts, ecstatic states. Sound recordings can still inspire such active participation, but the relationship between *viewer* and music video is inevitably more passive. Time will tell if this mediated disjuncture between first-hand experience and music will influence the ways in which it is played or portrayed in the future.



References

- Appadurai, Arjun (1996) 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press
- Chion, Michel (1990) *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Cook, Nicholas (2001) *Analysing Musical Multimedia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Davis, Hannah (1989) 'American Magic in a Moroccan Town', *Middle East Report*, 19, 12–17
- Dreissen, Henk (1992) *On the Spanish-Moroccan Frontier: A Study in Ritual, Power and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg
- Ginsburg, Faye (1995) 'Mediating Culture: Indigenous media, Ethnographic Film and the Production of Identity', in Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (eds.) *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology and Photography*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Hadj Moussa, Ratiba (2003) 'New Media and Politics in Algeria'. *Media, Culture and Society*, 25, 451–68
- Langlois, Tony (1996) 'The Local and the Global in North African Popular Music', *Popular Music*. 15 (3), 259–74
- (1999) 'Heard but Unseen: The Female *Aissawa* Musicians of Oujda, Morocco'. *Music & Anthropology 4* Web journal
http://gotan.cirfid.unibo.it/M%26A/index/number4/ma_ind4.htm
- (2005) 'Outside-In: Music, New Media and Tradition in North Africa' in David Cooper and Kevin Dawe (eds.) *The Mediterranean in Music*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press
- Lull, James (2000) *Media, Communication, Culture: A global approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Manuel, Peter (1993) *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in Northern India*. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Morley, David (2006) 'What's 'Home' got to do with it? Contradictory dynamics in the domestication of technology and the dislocation of domesticity' in Thomas Berker, Maren Hartmann, Yves Punie and Katie Ward (eds.) *Domestication of Media and Technology*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Pinney, Christopher (2002) 'The Indian Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, what happens when peasants get hold of images', in Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin (ed.) *Media World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 335–69
- Pohlman, Kenneth (1992) *The Compact Disc Handbook*. Middleton WI: A-R Editions

Robertson, Roland (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*.
London: Sage

Taylor, Timothy (1997) *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*.
London: Routledge

Turner, Terence (2002) 'Representation, Politics and Cultural Imagination in
Indigenous Video'. In Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin (eds).
Media Worlds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 75–89

Virolle-Souibes, Marie (1989) 'Une Figure de la Limite: le Seuil domestique', in
Nadir Marouf ed., *Espaces Maghrebins, Pratiques et Enjeux*. Université d'Oran,
Oran: Editions ENAG, 241–54

Waterbury, John (1972) *North for the Trade; the Life and Times of a Berber
Merchant*. Berkeley: University of California Press