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The Reach of Rai: The Modernization and Globalization of an Algerian Popular Music

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**The Grandmother:** A woman in her mid-70s steps to the mike, a tambourine clutched in her right hand. Her left hand rests on her oversize belly. Her beautiful short sleeved, low neck white silk dress, embroidered with lace and pearls, frames her rounded shape, giving her a powerful sensuality. Her wrists, earlobes, and neck are decorated with various jewels and necklaces, including silver bangles. On her dark hair is perched a silver crown, from which dangles strings of pearls onto her forehead. Her wrinkled face has a serene expression but her dark kohl-lined eyes are stern and vibrantly flirtatious. When she opens her red lips, exposing gold teeth, a low, raspy voice sings in Arabic, accompanied by flutes, violins, and drums, with a sense of strength, control, vitality, and pride, but also a hint of pain and hardship experienced by a grandmother.

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**The King:** A man with bushy dark hair and a matching thick mustache beams confidently, his black eyes staring straight ahead. His broad white smile illuminates his dark round face, causing his large cheeks to protrude like apples. He wears a multi-colored button-down polyester shirt, leaving several of the top buttons undone. The right half of the shirt is bright pink, with a jagged white stripe running down the center. The left side and collar of the shirt are purple, with yellow and pink diamonds. However, the left sleeve is bright yellow. His shirt is tucked into blue cotton pants and loafers. His wrists and fingers are set off by gold, so flashy it almost rivals his smile, bright eyes, and loud shirt. His exuberant voice exudes the same sense of vitality and energy; it is clear, direct, and confident, complimented by an uptempo song that he sings in Arabic, with some French mixed in occasionally. His band is comprised of a mixture of Middle Eastern and Western instruments, the most easy to distinguish being the derbouka and electric keyboard respectively. However, his voice has a plaintive, soulful quality, almost like that of a mullah's calling to prayer, masking some suffering behind a smile that reeks of a king's success.

**The Revolutionary:** A man struts assuredly onto stage. He emanates confidence and sex appeal simply by the way he carries his body and stands in relation to the microphone stand. To put an exclamation point onto his attitude, he sports skin tight leather pants in a bright multi-colored floral pattern. His shirt is tight black silk, covered by a long black leather jacket. A thin black bandana attempts to wrangle in his thick brown chin length curls and long sideburns, without much success. A large pair of black sunglasses dominates his strong angular face. When he opens his mouth, a deep guttural sound emerges, dripping with power and life. He sings in Arabic, French, and even English but addresses the crowd strictly in French. He is accompanied by screeching electric guitars, aggressive drums, techno beat synthesizers, and occasionally Middle Eastern instruments like the 'oud (lute). His songs blend various styles of music, languages, and instruments but all of them carry his distinctive stamp, that of a raspy-voiced revolutionary.

Despite the variety and apparent contradictions described in the above artists' appearances and musical styles, Cheikha Remitti, Khaled, and Rachid Taha all belong to a distinctive musical genre known as rai. Rai is native to Western Algeria but has become quite a force on the global music scene, especially in European countries like France. Although some of the artists above resent being lumped into the rai genre, namely Rachid Taha, they are nonetheless masters of a popular, piercing, and addictive sound. Rai songs usually express a lust for life and lament the outcomes of such a lust, sentiments not usually associated with respectable (i.e. devout, middle class) society. However, the infectious beat of rai, one that dares its listeners to sit still, has drawn fans from across social, racial, cultural, and national borders. It

can count the British artist Sting, a working class youth in Algiers, a Tunisian immigrant in Paris, and a student in Baton Rouge among its ardent and devoted fans.

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The first rai song I ever heard was in an international music store in the Adams Morgan area of Washington DC, an area known for its international flavor, earning the title of “DC’s Third World.” In fact, it attracts dozens of international restaurants, especially Ethiopian, and has a large concentration of Peace Corps volunteers that call it home. Rai sounded “exotic” to my Western ears; it was sung in a foreign tongue, Arabic, and employed “Oriental” instruments, especially a small hourglass shaped drum with a skin covered top, known as the derbouka, and a lute, known as the ‘oud. The dreadlocked employee informed me it was the best rai CD in the market, so I immediately bought it, without knowing a thing about rai except that it originated in North Africa. In fact, rai arose in Algeria, a country with a wealth of oil and gas reserves, high literacy rates, and a rich cultural history with Mediterranean, African, Arab, and Berber influences. However, Algeria was ravaged by a lengthy and intrusive French colonial presence that tied Algeria to France so firmly that only a long bloody war could separate the two. Furthermore, an inefficient government, lack of democracy, religious fundamentalism, civil war, demographic explosion, limited economic opportunity, and urbanization have contributed to Algeria’s current economic, political, and social stagnation.

Rai, which literally means “opinion,” is a musical style with ancient North African and Andalusian roots that has adapted and morphed over the years, thanks to many influences. Consequently, it has ironically become both an expression of the Algerian dispossessed and also Algerian pop music. Furthermore, it is a force in France among North African immigrants as a symbol of identity, a voice of the marginalized, and a means to fight racism. Finally, rai has

emerged on the global music scene, particularly since British pop artist Sting's inclusion of the popular rai artist Cheb Mami on the hit song, "Desert Rose" in 1999. Their collaboration brought forth the "rock and rai" trend, which had emerged decades earlier with Cheikha Rimitti, to the forefront of world music scene. Major indicators of the song's global popularity include its performance at the 2001 Super Bowl and its reach into the top ten in US pop charts (and in 10 countries' pop charts). The album in which the single was included, *Brand New Day*, received a Grammy in 2000 with a performance at the Grammys and went triple platinum (over three million copies sold) in 2001. Previously, rai songs were considered successful if they sold between 10,000 and 30,000 CDs, with the phenomenal blockbuster *1, 2, 3 Soleils* (2001) selling only over a million copies.

As I went home from the Adams Morgan record store, I had a vision of the rai singer on my CD as a wizened Arab man, wearing a white djelleba, reciting his ancient poems in front of a small band using "traditional" instruments, like the derbouka, with a smoking hookah and sand dunes in the background. However, the face that greeted me on my newly purchased CD was Cheb Khaled's, shattering my expectations. Cheb Khaled, born Khaled Hadj Brahim, was wearing an opened silk shirt, chic trousers, and slicked back hair. He was grinning broadly. The title of the CD, *N'ssi N'ssi*, was in a stylish neon script. Although my image of the voice behind the song was completely inaccurate, I decided nonetheless to listen to the CD. I skipped to the second song, which was the one played in the store, titled "Kebou." I attempted to belly dance around my room, envisioning myself with a silk veil and henna-covered hands. As the third song played, again my expectations were disrupted. This song, "Adieu," along with the rest of the CD sounded almost cheesy, with a synthesizer as the main instrument. I could detect few, if any, "traditional" instruments and although the language made the song exotic, it did not have the

sense of a wise man imparting his life's wisdom. Instead, it sounded like something played in clubs, with no serious meaning or content. I was incredibly disappointed since now the music did not sound exotic and traditional and instead sounded like songs I had heard in the 1980s, but in another language.

My original judgments of rai as frivolous and cheesy were unfounded and inaccurate. Rai is not void of social meaning or content as I had originally thought, despite its pop qualities. On the contrary, rai addresses many taboo social issues through an accessible and infectious pop style and the rebel personas of the performers, thereby appealing to dispossessed young Algerians. In fact, rai addresses social issues that many in Algeria, namely the National Liberation Front (FLN) government and Islamic fundamentalists, would prefer to keep hidden, causing rai to be banned several times and even one of its stars, Cheb Hasni, assassinated. Thus, rai proves that music can be pop or "mainstream" and at the same time deal with social issues that are unseemly or "countercultural." Furthermore, my perceptions of a truly "traditional" untouched musical style were romantic and uninformed, especially in a world shaped by cultural contact. In fact, my "othering" of rai music as exotic and traditional suspiciously resembled colonial Orientalist discourse. Edward Said, a noted Palestinian scholar, defined orientalism, in his monumental work *Orientalism* (1979), as a system of knowledge about the Orient that emerged from imperialism, especially because of the power given to manufactured colonial knowledge under colonial regimes. This knowledge of the Orient was derived from ethnocentric and often racist Western scholars, termed orientalists, who in turn greatly shaped the tradition of how the West regards the Orient. This tradition robbed colonized populations of not only economic wealth but also of control over how they themselves and others viewed their culture and people. Thus, often "oriental" people and their culture were reduced to childlike, backward,

and static portrayals. However, many vocally resist such orientalist thinking, including Algerian rai artists. In fact, Cheb Khaled states that rai is

the opposite of the quaint acoustic music that sandal-wearing 'world music' fans would prefer to think is African music. 'We woke up modern,' Khaled exclaims. 'We're living in a modern age... People have always got to keep walking forward. The only people who really want African music to remain traditional are the anthropologists. I am a music scientist' (Galloway).

Khaled insists that he lives in the same modernity as his listeners in the West, even though they may want to place him in an Oriental "traditional" past, which is the same struggle that rai itself faces. Although rai is geographically indigenous to Algeria and is rooted in Algerians' experiences, various cultural influences through modernization and globalization have shaped it, consequently making it a hybrid and a global commodity (with varying effects on rai itself).

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This thesis seeks to explain the constructed social dimensions of rai, specifically by examining its historical development, evolution, and inclusion in the global music scene. Particularly, the question of authenticity arising from rai's hybrid nature will be examined. Furthermore, the various meanings rai takes on when listened to in different cultural spaces, such as in Algiers, a banlieue of Marseilles, or in Baton Rouge, will be apparent throughout this work. In order to examine these various topics, several theories have been used, including cultural theory, postmodernism, and Marxism. The main sources come from scholarly writings on rai itself from anthropological, sociological, and political perspectives, ethnomusicological examinations of other local musical styles that have been commodified and globalized on the world market, discussions of World Music and World Beat, and newspaper and internet articles, which represent popular notions of rai. In addition, the primary source for this work is the rai



music itself and the words of its creators. Since I have not been able to do traditional ethnographic fieldwork, I have been inspired by Timothy Taylor's use of music and lyrics, and discourses on both, as ethnographic texts (Taylor, 1997: xvii). Despite intense research, there are many areas in which adequate information is lacking, which will be acknowledged throughout the work. I begin by discussing the history of rai, examining particularly its distinct social, political, and cultural features. Then, I look at rai as a product of modernization and globalization, as a commodity for globalization, and the impact of these forces on rai, ending with a brief conclusion. This thesis thus demonstrates that rai, as an Algerian pop music, can not be defined in dualist terms, such as traditional/authentic versus modern or static versus dynamic (although I do use the binaries of core versus periphery and dominant versus marginalized), but is in fact the product of complex social processes, rendering it a unique hybrid, a music with various meanings depending on the social space of the listener, and a force in global music.

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## **The country's soundtrack, its cultural ambassador, its pride**

### ***Hick music sung by hooligan yokels***

Rai is a distinct cultural product of Algeria and the social circumstances of Algerians, earning it the title of "the country's soundtrack, its cultural ambassador, its pride" (Morgan, 2002: sleeve notes). Rai arose in Western Algeria near the port town of Oran as a descendant of ancient Algerian folk poetry, or *malhoun*. The reciting of *malhoun* was the way rural *cheikhs* ("noble sir") gave their advice or opinion (rai), in highly stylized epic songs played on flutes and

drums. These songs were passed down among generations through repetition, but a measure of improvisation and embellishment was allowed. Generally, the gaps in improvisation were filled by performers' chants of "yaa rai." Rapid urbanization occurred in Algeria during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, partly in response to the Depression and global trends in modernization. Rural migrants to the cities, like Oran, brought their culture with them which included *malhoun* music.

However, much of their cultural life had been disrupted, such as traditional social patterns of tribal allegiance, leaving many without a sense of roots. In the cities, the *malhoun* of the *cheikhs* was unprepared to express these sentiments, especially since many *cheikhs* were refined, urbanite colonial collaborators singing to illiterate, poor rural ("hick") migrants who had been displaced partly because of French colonial land policies. Thus, "the cheikhs were popular, but their language [and appeal] was not populist" (Morgan, 1999: 414).

However, despite the shortcomings of *malhoun*, a type of street music evolved in Oran from the *malhoun* tradition that spoke plainly of the problems of the underclass. Known as *zendanis* or bar songs, this music integrated pieces of *malhoun* and improvisation that covered topics important on the street, in a plain style often considered lewd. Like *malhoun*, gaps in improvisation were filled by chants of "yaa rai," demonstrating that the song was expressing the musician's opinion. The performers of such music were called *cheikhas*. Despite the similarity in name, they differed in all respects from the *cheikhs*. Generally daughters of the poor, they were considered far from the realms of respectable society since they performed in mixed gender settings of bars and cafes and sung plainly of taboo subjects like sex and alcohol. Thus, to many they were "hooligan yokels" (Morgan, 1999: 417). As they gained popularity among the marginalized in Oran, their *zendani* music morphed. It kept its *malhoun* and street roots, but also drew from the music of the *meddahas* and Egyptian sources. *Meddhas* were women who sang

songs in the same musical style as *cheikhs* and *cheikhas*, with flutes and pounding drums, but their lyrics were generally songs in praise of the Prophet and sung for female only audiences mainly at weddings but also other social and religious gatherings, like circumcisions and Ramadan gatherings. This urban blend of musical genres was initially dubbed *wahrani* after Oran in which it was performed, and eventually came to be known as *rai*. Through the artistry of the *cheikhas*, like Cheikha Remitti, a traditional music of rural Western Algeria (*malhoun*) was transformed into a populist expression of the urban underclass in Oran. These *cheikhas* formed the basis for *rai*'s musical style, by integrating diverse influences and singing plainly of taboo subjects despite social censor, and for *rai*'s audience among the urban marginalized. For these reasons, the *cheikhas*, especially Cheikha Remitti, embody the title of the grandmother of modern *rai*.

After Algerian independence in 1962, *rai* became even less popular among upper social classes, especially among Algeria's new political elite, the FLN. Instead of the popular *rai*, the politicians opted to promote classical andalousian music as the nation's respected music. Presidents Ben Bella and Boumediene openly disdained *rai* and its singers as hick music sung by hooligan yokels, and demonstrated this contempt by shutting down Oran's TV station and banning alcohol and large *rai* performances in Oran. The government even instructed police to round up women frequenting *rai* establishments and banned the importation of blank cassettes to halt its production and distribution (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 41).

The FLN's suppression found allies among Algerian Islamists and upper classes. It is not difficult to understand why Islamists would oppose *rai*: it was sung by women deemed morally reprehensible in mixed gender settings where alcohol was served. *Rai* openly and brashly transgressed religious morals, especially in the subject matter of most songs, blunt expressions of

the pleasures of life like sex and alcohol. Rai is a moral transgression simply by its frank hedonism and bluntly realistic subject matter. In other words, “in a country like Algeria – torn between religious fundamentalism, social traditions and the glare of modernity – having fun can all too often be in itself a political act (Morgan, 1999: 422). Furthermore, rai’s hybrid nature was further grounds for criticism by Algerian Islamists, who labeled it “noise,” “immoral,” and “illicit.”

Members of older generations and upper classes also objected to rai since they found rai’s performance space, the performers themselves, and especially the lyrics too “dirty” to be respectable music. For instance, one young man with a high educational background and social status described rai as “dirty” and vulgar, and rai producers as “mafia,” even though he acknowledged a few rai songs moved him and he enjoyed dancing to them at parties (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 99). Many consumers of rai even refuse to listen to in front of their parents because of their disapproval of it as dirty (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 75-88). Thus, for some Algerians, rai was just the crude noise of the lower classes, a label often given to popular music. However, this suppression and opposition could not abate the rising national popularity of rai.

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***I built the house and they stole the keys and moved right in***

Starting in the 1960s, at the same time that rai was being suppressed, it was also expanding in a new direction. Although the rai of the *cheikhas* was popular and populist in that it incorporated many diverse influences and used street language, thereby appealing to the urban marginalized, it was not as popular among newer generations listening to Western pop music. Musicians like Ahmed Saber, Bellemou Messaoud, and Belkacem Bouteldja began mixing the

cheikhas' danceable rai with Western styles, like rock and roll, jazz, and flamenco, and Western instruments like trumpets, saxophones, and accordions. By updating rai, they hoped to appeal to Oran's youth who were listening to Western artists like The Beatles, James Brown, and Otis Redding (Morgan, 1999: 418). Furthermore, they wanted to update rai so it would be suitable for larger concert venues, not just weddings and bars. They succeeded in creating pop-rai, much to the anger of cheikhas like Cheikha Remitti, who declared, "I built the house and they stole the keys and moved right in" (Morgan, 1999: 418). This pop-rai took off among the lower class youth, rai's most devoted audience, who turned to the new hybrid pop-rai as their soundtrack and voice. Known as "midnight children," some of these listeners would become the new pop-rai's biggest stars.

Pop-rai gained fame beyond Oran's lower class youth starting in the 1970s when the pop-rai trend exploded in Algeria. The 1970s were a difficult period for youth in Algeria. Unemployment was endemic, government corruption was rampant, governmental and religious authorities strictly controlled morality, and knowledge of radicalism in other areas of the Third World was prevalent (Morgan, 1999: 419). This malaise among the youth is reflected in a cartoon exchange (see figure 1) among men sitting in cafes and on house steps, such as "Algérien. Rien, c'est toute ma vie!" 'Vous les jeunes vous avez toute la vie devant vous.' 'Justement c'est ça notre problème.' 'Nothing is all my life.' 'You young have all of life in front of you.' 'Exactly, that is our problem'" (Gyps, 1198:3). "Algérien" plays on "Algerian" using the word for "nothing" in French, rien." Thus, rai had a ready-made audience, as a form of escape and as an expression of dissatisfaction and alternative morality. Also in the 1970s, the production of rai took a new turn. Cassette technology was introduced into Oran after 1974, with revolutionary effects. Recordings were produced much faster than with vinyl records. And when the

government tried to suppress rai by halting imports of new cassettes, used ones were recorded over. Thus, cassettes allowed rai to elude government restrictions, especially by the elitist state-run Algerian Radio Television (RTA).

Rai producers and singers sprung up on every corner. The most influential producers were the Ahmed brothers, who ran an impressive studio in Tlemcen near Oran. Rai singers were also coming out of the woodwork, being dubbed “cassette chebs” (Morgan, 1999: 419). *Cheb* means youth and was used by the new singers of pop-rai to distinguish themselves from the older *cheikhs* and *cheikhas*. The title *cheb* or *cheba* (young man and young woman) was also used to gain popularity among the lower class youth by identifying with them. The moment rai really broke onto the national stage was when a *cheba* from the lower class of Oran released “Ana Ma H’lali Ennoum” (“I Don’t Appreciate Sleep Anymore”) in 1979. Cheba Fadela, nicknamed the “little Remitti,” conquered the country using “the elements that had made the rai of the cheikhas so controversial- the plain speaking, the realism, the love of life, the lack of concern for accepted mores,” combined with the new cassette pop-rai musical style (Morgan, 1999: 420). *Chebs* and *chebas* continued to gain national popularity and prominence throughout the 1980s, especially among lower class youth, despite the government’s indifference, which alternates with opposition and suppression.

In response to the failure of its suppression, the government under the liberalizing Chadli Benjedid in 1979 began to appropriate rai’s popularity and legitimacy to benefit itself politically, especially at a time when the FLN government was losing credibility and popularity among the young lower classes. For instance, massive rioting erupted in 1988 among the lower classes after detrimental economic reforms took affect, such as a loss of governmental subsidies for food. The rallying song of the riots was Cheb Khaled’s “El harba win” (“Where to flee”).

Where has youth gone?  
Where are the brave ones?  
The rich gorge themselves,  
The poor work themselves to death,  
The Islamic charlatans show their true face.  
So what's the solution?  
We'll check it out.  
You can always cry or complain  
Or escape... but where?  
The good times are gone,  
With their celebrations and prosperity.  
Baraka [blessing] has fled  
And selfishness destroyed solidarity...  
Where in this organized chaos  
Are the men of yesteryear  
And the proud women?  
Youth no longer answers,  
This life is nothing to smile about.  
Let's stop saying: everything's all right...  
Gold has turned into worthless lead  
Whose cover stifles all understanding...  
There's only flight... but where?

Although rai artists continue to assert that their music is apolitical and simply a way for youth to enjoy themselves, and thereby deny any connection between Cheb Khaled's song and the riots, many, including government officials and Islamists, would disagree. Rai in many ways expresses the dissatisfaction of the dispossessed, a group with enormous potential political power, as the degree and destruction of the riots demonstrated. "Rai on the one hand [is] the screaming of pain of uprooted peasants, and... the scream of the rebelliousness of James Dean" (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 32). Thus, rai has the ability to mobilize the masses, especially young masses, something the Algerian government wanted to avoid if that mobilization was directed against their corruption and failure to better the daily lives of the masses. In fact, "some sectors of the state bureaucracy promoted rai as an antidote to the growing Islamist trend" (Gross et al., 1992: 13).

The increasing influence of Islamism was not curbed by rai and in fact led to the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. A population frustrated with a lack of democratic representation demanded elections: the FLN was the only legal party available to hold office since independence. After the destruction of the 1988 riots, the government conceded to hold elections. However, when it looked imminent that the FIS would overwhelmingly take control, thanks to its appeal to the frustrated, religious, lower class, and the youth, the army took control and prevented the FIS from taking office. Consequently, civil war erupted. Even though much of the FIS's support came from the same demographic as rai's audience, the frustrated young urban lower class, they vehemently despised rai as immoral because of the majority of its subject matter and its performance spaces. In fact, "an anti-rai plank was a central part of FIS's electoral platform in December 1991" (Gross et al., 1992: 15). Thus, the civil war of 1992-2000 between the Islamist FIS and the ruling FLN altered rai. In towns in which Islamists held control, rai was banned and its performance spaces, such as halls and cabarets, were shut down. Furthermore, some rai artists were even assassinated, such as Cheb Hasni. Finally, rai audiences were attacked by mobs of fundamentalists. Thus, rai, both in its appropriation and rejection, was a politically powerful tool.

In addition to pop-rai's growing popularity, and political power (despite the protests of its creators at home), it was becoming increasingly popular and visible in France, especially among Algerian immigrants. This visibility made it impossible for the Algerian government to continue to ignore rai. The first politician to realize pop-rai's potential economic and political power, if made "mainstream," was Colonel Snoussi, a former liberation army officer. He, along with the French Cultural Minister, Jack Lang, pressured Algeria to relax restrictions and allow rai singers to travel. However, the government's acceptance caused changes in rai, namely in its lyrics and



performance spaces. For instance, the government promoted “clean” rai lyrics and performances were moved to more family-friendly concert halls and festivals. Pop-rai was finally incorporated in a youth festival in Algiers in July 1985 and had its own festival in Oran in August 1985. Thus, although rai was originally disdained by the upper classes, including the government, its massive national popularity, especially among politically volatile young lower classes, thanks in part to modern production techniques, encouraged the appropriation of its popularity by the government.

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### ***My only contract is with God***

This appropriation of rai by younger singers, producers, and even the government did change rai, producing a differentiation between government sponsored “clean” lyrics and the *cheikhas*’ rai and many of pop rai’s “dirty” lyrics, forming diverse strands of pop-rai in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, many features carried over from the rai of the *cheikhas*, such as the continuing brashness in most pop-rai lyrics. For instance, pop-rai performers still catered to rai’s audience by appearing in establishments frequented by both genders of the lower-class, namely in taverns, brothels, and cabarets but also at weddings and other important celebrations animated by rai’s infectious dancing beat (Gross et al., 1992: 12). Rai and pop-rai’s performances are distinctive because of the centrality of the audience, with dedications and requests forming rai songs and sets. Such involvement is still obvious from simply listening to a recent recording of a live performance, such as Cheb Khaled in *1, 2, 3 Soleils* (2001). The audience is audible as it interacts very intimately with the performer. It is a very different performance experience from the large arena shows that pop stars stage in the United States, in which the audience is very

distant. Members of rai and pop-rai's audience hold agency over the performers, mainly because they provide the majority of the performer's income. Thus, requests and dedications form the performance, often with rivals trying to outdo one another in requests, dedications, and tips.

Furthermore, pop-rai's performers also reflect their *cheikha* rai origins. The lower-class *cheikhas* were looked down on as street trash by members of the upper-class. As "hooligan yokels," they were seen as expendable by Islamists and by members of the upper-classes, including government officials. In the same vein, record producers often perceive pop-rai singers as expendable, mainly because of the exploitative relationship upper-class producers have with the lower class *chebs* and *chebas*. The supply of *chebs* and *chebas* performing in weddings and at cabarets, as a source of much needed employment, is so abundant that producers are in control and can afford to be selective. Furthermore, the majority of the songs are not written or composed by the singers. Instead, producers and songwriters create them, often borrowing heavily from previous songs. The *chebs* and *chebas* arrive at a recording studio, which is financed by wealthy producers, such as the Baba brothers, sing their part of the song, receive payment, and leave. Pop-rai singers receive little profit if the song is a hit because they invested little. Royalties for pop-rai singers are unheard of, especially with the popularity of borrowing, which violates many Western copyright laws. In fact, in the pop-rai industry,

the protection of authors' and composers' rights has never functioned in accordance with formal legislation. Pirating and plagiarism have flourished for a long time within the music business; especially since the disappearance of vinyl records, cassette publishers have shown great ingenuity in avoiding paying composers' royalties or taxes (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 54).

Formal contracts are also rare, prompting Cheb Khaled to state "my only contract is with God" (Morgan, 1999: 419). Thus, these artists' relationships with their producers are very strained, which is much different from the personal creative process imagined in the Western music

industry. In fact, Marxist sociological theory claims that a defining characteristic of capitalism is the alienation or psychological distance it causes between the worker and the product of his or her work (Bocock, 1996: 176). Consequently, rai's singers' loss of control over the product of their voice seems to be a perfect example of Marxist alienation theory. In this sense, the pop-rai artists differ from the tradition of the *cheikhas*. Although the *cheikhas* were viewed as expendable, they were in control of the music they produced, especially since it was a blunt expression of their opinions and lives. They added their own improvisation and personal flavor to their rai repertoire, which was built upon *malhoun* and *zendani* songs.

The few pop-rai singers who have built a lasting career, such as Cheb Khaled, Cheba Fadela, and Cheb Mami, also reflect the *cheikhas*' influence with their brash counter-cultural personas. Most successful pop-rai singers have pulled themselves out of the lower class through their work as performers, much in the same way socially outcast *cheikhas* relied on rai performances for economic survival. The rare pop-rai singers who have been successful in the long term have gained much wealth, unlike the *cheikhas*, living plush lifestyles with many women (for the men), fast cars, and big houses often abroad and in Algeria. In many instances, these pop-rai singers are role models for lower classes as "rebels," especially to the young depressed by increasing unemployment.

To call 'pop music' a form of rebel music is to court ridicule... How can pop be rebel? After all, "rebel" is supposed to be counterculture and antiestablishment, not mainstream pop mass-produced and shoved down our throats by a few big record companies... What makes rai so rebel, so politically charged, is the fact that it goes against the hard-line conservative government, a religiously fundamentalist establishment. Unlike traditional music, with its subtlety, flowery language, and innocuous subject matters, rai is notable for its blunt imagery and willingness to tackle subjects such as sex, booze, lust, and drink - all of which the deeply religious establishment frowns upon. Still, it is not so much the subject matter in rai that makes it so rebel, for the topics are all rather lacking in political bite. Instead, it's the fact that rai deals with such hedonistic and 'party hearty' topics so openly in a country where the ruling party is a conservative religious

faction. That, in short, is why rai by definition is highly antiestablishment (Han online).

Although this quote by an anonymous online author uses dualistic oppositions I am not entirely comfortable with, such as traditional/modern music, it is important since a fan of rai, assumed to be North African by a picture posted above the article, has written it. He has discussed the seemingly complex contradiction between pop and rebel personas in rai from an insider's perspective. Cheb Khaled best epitomizes this pop and yet rebel counter-culture image.

According to lyrics of French hip-hop group IAM, "Cheb Khaled.. C'est le Public Enemy Arabe [Cheb Khaled... he is the Arab Public Enemy]" (IAM "Do the Rai Thing," *De La Planète*, 1996).

His flashy style, in-your-face lyrics, and enormously popular danceable songs all express this unexpected combination. "[Pop] rai is at one and the same time Algeria's punk, blues, reggae and funk...Oran is the Kingston of this underground, secret, lyrical explosion. Cheb Khaled is the Bob Marley'" (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 29).

Thus, rai has a history rooted in Algerian history and the experiences' of Algerians, especially the young lower class. The Algerian government and pop-rai's appropriation of the *cheikhas'* rai has changed it somewhat, but nonetheless pop-rai shows many continuities with its influential predecessors.

9

## **We woke up modern**

### ***Elusive modernization***

Rai could be viewed as a product of Algerian history. But this is too simple and one-dimensional. Instead, rai should also be examined as the result of other (perhaps) outwardly

imposed cultural forces, like modernization. Modernization and its sidekick modernity are among those terms people use with authority, but that often elude definition. The concept of modernization is a cultural construct. By modernization I mean the processes first expounded upon by Enlightenment scholars that referred to industrialization and the resulting radical restructuring of society, such as urbanization, nation-state formation, secularization, capitalization, and democratization. Put simply, modernization refers to a teleological progress toward a totally modern, Enlightened (and Western) society (Hall, 1996: 426). The processes of and concepts associated with modernization that were in full force by the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe were exported around the globe through imperialism and colonialism. One consequence of this export and interaction of modern societies with local cultures was the production of “alternative modernities,” most noticeably cultural hybrids of which pop-rai (from now on referred to as simply rai) is one of many examples (Gaonkar, 2001:14). The notion of hybridity and the resulting concept of alternative modernity will inform the discussion of modernization since it constitutes one of rai’s most distinctive and powerful features, as will become apparent when discussing globalization. The fact that this hybridity is partly a result of processes of modernization is what qualifies it for discussion in a section on modernization. However, the current use of this term for the purposes I propose is not without criticism. For instance, the term hybrid has been criticized for minimizing differences and ignoring power relations between various cultural influences (that syncretism or synergistic do not). Additionally, its use in colonial discourse inscribed it with racist connotations since it implied that hybrid cultural forms were bastardized and thus inferior to “pure” predecessors. Even though the term was used in a racist manner in colonial discourse, contemporary cultural critics are mindful of its limitations but employ it nonetheless to emphasize an active process of cross-cultural mixing that in many

ways subverted colonial discourses on cultural purity. Thus, despite such criticisms, I find using the term hybrid to be appropriate and helpful, rather than syncretic or synergistic (which might also be appropriate terms) for various reasons. First, it is the term most popularly used in the work by post-colonial theorists writing on contemporary culture. Furthermore, the definition of hybridity lends itself to my examination of rai. Hybridity is defined as the “creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft et al, 1998: 118). This focus on a contact zone produced by colonization (and perhaps even globalization) applies directly to the history of rai as my discussion of Algerian history will demonstrate. Finally, the concept of hybridity destroys ideas of inherent cultural purity in favor of diversity of cultures. Many rai artists articulate strong opposition to notions of cultural purity, claiming diverse influences from Europe, the U.S., Andalusia, and elsewhere. Thus, despite its criticisms, hybridity is a useful term in my examination of rai, especially when discussing processes of modernization.

Although globalization can be thought of in tandem with modernization, as a dual process or one beast with two heads since there is considerable overlap in the two discourses, I think of globalization as a process that began because of several catalysts associated with modernization, such as imperialism, colonialism, and technological progress. However, globalization has taken on a major life of its own and has developed as a distinct force. In this section I examine modernization in Algeria and its effect on rai, especially the creation of hybrid forms of rai, leading to the concept of rai as an alternative modernity. I then discuss the globalization of rai and the effects of this process.

*A good place to do business and an even better place to do pleasure*

The exchange of goods, ideas, and people has historical roots before processes of modernization like colonialism. To assume any differently is simply bad history and smacks of ethnocentrism. Historical migrations have had a great influence in helping to create rai's hybridity since they introduced different cultures into rai's social matrix, Algeria. In particular, the port town of Oran, rai's birthplace, was home to various cultural influences that contributed to rai's hybridity.

Port cities are hotbeds of musical revolution... There's something about the seedy hedonism of the dockside world, with its incessant flow of people, goods, cultures and ideas that invigorates musical life. Oran in Western Algeria is one of the world's great musical ports. For centuries it has been the funnel through which the cultural, economic and human wealth of Western North Africa has flowed into the Mediterranean world, and vice versa. As a thriving commercial port, it has also long had the reputation as a good place to do business and an even better place to do pleasure (Morgan, 2002: sleeve notes).

Algeria in general and Oran in particular are part of the Mediterranean world in which cultures, as a result of trade, migrations, and diasporas, have blended and influenced one another consistently throughout history. Algeria has a rich history of cultural and economic contact with the entire Mediterranean world. Although the Arabs conquered and colonized this traditional home of the Berbers in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, Algeria remained linked to the Mediterranean world. Since antiquity, the people in the area known as Algeria traded, participated in wars, and had cultural contact with such great civilizations as Rome, Carthage, and Phoenicia. In fact, Algeria was briefly part of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Algeria was especially in contact with southern Europe, including Italy, Spain/Andalus, and France. Spain was the most closely linked to early Algerian history since the Almoravids and Almohads, ruling Berber groups originating in Algeria, conquered southern Spain, known as Andalus, and established

their capital there. When these Moors were driven out of Spain in 1492, many took refuge in Algeria, and Spain began to take control of Algerian ports in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of Andalusian cultural influences abound in Algeria, especially in architecture and music, like *malhoun*. In 1519, Algeria became part of the expansive Ottoman Empire, which was ruled by a sultan in Turkey. Even though it was conquered, colonized, and incorporated by the Turks, it kept some degree of autonomy as the Barbary States. Therefore, Algeria has historically been a part of the Mediterranean world politically, economically, and culturally, especially through migration.

Contact with sub-Saharan Africa, mainly through trade, also influenced Algerian culture. For instance, in much Algerian music, the drums and the rhythms produced on them resemble those found in sub-Saharan Africa. North Africans had many similarities with their sub-Saharan neighbors, such as religion and, in many cases, language. These similarities allowed the easy flow of goods, people, and ideas across the Sahara in both directions, having an impact on Algerian culture. Finally, of course other people in North Africa also influenced Algerian culture, in particular Egyptians and Moroccans. Thus, Algerians were historically connected to various cultures surrounding them, which obviously contributed to Algerian culture and thus *rai*'s hybridity, particularly with Spanish/Andalusian, Sub-Saharan, and North African musics. This historical cultural contact and hybridization predates the arrival of the enforcers of modernization, the colonial French.

9

*L'Algérie, c'est la France*



The colonial French were the next to have a huge impact on Algerian culture, again through migration, which contributed to rai's hybridity. However, French migration was much less benign than previous migrants since the French were part of a colonizing force. In fact, French imperialism in Algeria, beginning in 1830, has been cited as the most intensive, and thus destructive, form of colonialism in the Arab world (Brown, 1996: 31). French immigration was part of the colonial plan of assimilating Algeria to France, known as the *mission civilisatrice*, which can be thought of as a modernizing mission.

Due to its modern Revolutionary and Enlightenment ideals of evolution, equality, and progress, France chose to influence its colonies through a style of direct rule. They chose this style, rather than a more behind-the-scenes role, since it would further impart their "superior" modernity in the "uncivilized" colonies. France thus governed more directly than other colonial powers and pursued a social policy of assimilation.

The *mission civilisatrice* was a defining concept in French colonial discourse and appeared in almost every mention of colonialism by government officials and ordinary citizens alike. It was part of colonial rhetoric from the beginning of French imperialism, but was first propounded in 1930 by the Governor-General of French West Africa Joseph Jules Brévié (Gordon, 1964: 6). French assimilation, or the *mission civilisatrice*, had the dual aim of both domination and liberation. "The French have tended to be two-hearted about the policy of assimilation: they have considered it both a political weapon and a generous gift" (Gordon, 1964: 82). Primarily, assimilation was achieved and enforced by the total domination of a colony and the disruptive restructuring of the indigenous, "inferior" way of life. However, the French also believed that assimilation was evolutionary and liberating to "primitive" residents since it meant immersion in French democratic ideals, especially concerning citizenship and equality and

liberation from “superstitious” Islam and “oppressive” Ottoman rule. France saw itself as another Rome or Greece, shining the “bright light of enlightenment” and Enlightenment ideals on dark, backward places, ultimately for the benefit of the colonized by making them *évolué* (evolved).

Imperialism also meant to some the extension of French culture... to the so-called backward areas... To many well-meaning colonialists, France had an almost religious mission to spread all that was good and cultured in French life, and the mission civilisatrice was as important as industries and raw materials. The grammar and history books, in their minds, followed the flag. Many colonialists believed there were millions of souls... waiting to hear the glories of French history and the logic of French philosophy... These Frenchmen were ready to take up the ‘Frenchman’s Burden,’ and they saw the textbook following the flag (Heggoy, 1982: 59).

France communicated and imposed their culture, or civilization, mainly through military service and education, in order to make the colonized think and act like Frenchmen. Military service was compulsory and, ironically, access to education was universal since France held democratic ideals.

For many citizens, the fact that they accepted assimilation of the colonies as worthwhile and possible relied mainly on their own experience of French domestic conditions, namely modernization including internal assimilation and urbanization. For instance, the period of colonialism and the insistence on assimilation coincided with a point in French history in which culturally and linguistically diverse people within France were being assimilated to French ideals. This process is one of modernization, that of nation-state building, or organizing a political state around a cultural group of people known as a nation. The ideal of a single French nation was fictional and imagined, and therefore had to be created through internal assimilation (Anderson, 1991: 6). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many in Provence, Brittany, and Alsace-Lorraine did not speak French as their first language (Braudel, 1989: 96-97). Through joining the army and being involved in French education, these people were being assimilated to the French

language, ideals, and ways of thinking. In fact, many *colons* (settlers), especially in Algeria, were soldiers, political dissidents, or farmers from Alsace-Lorraine who had been displaced by the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and lost their homes to Germany (Behr, 1961: 26-28). For them, assimilation and colonization, often violent, was not foreign due to their experiences in the war. They in fact believed in the *mission civilisatrice*. Therefore, for these Frenchmen, colonial assimilation was justified, desirable, and possible since they themselves were undergoing a process of assimilation.

Furthermore, France was experiencing rapid urbanization, a painful characteristic of modernization, which affected acceptance of colonial assimilation. Many *colons* were from agricultural areas, which were becoming less profitable after the Industrial Revolution and the Agricultural Revolution. Thus, urban migration was becoming the norm for poor farmers in search of jobs (Bradley, 1996: 133). However, with colonies, these same poor farmers could emigrate and have their own land again to farm rather than living in overcrowded cities and slums, and working in dangerous factory jobs or being unemployed. Hence, instead of being dependent on the state, they were benefiting the state by their presence in a colony and by making the colony economically fruitful (Behr, 1961: 28). Ironically, once in the colonies like Algeria, they introduced many of the characteristics of modernization that had drove them from France into Algerian society, affecting its culture. Additionally, settlers were also coming from economically and socially unstable Mediterranean countries, such as Malta, Italy, and Spain. However, these settlers formed a distinct *colon* identity from a “polyglot, multi-ethnic Mediterranean flotsam and jetsam transformed into a fusion of *les Français d’origine* (French of origin)... to produce the notion of *Nous Algériens* (Us Algerians)” (Clancy-Smith, 1996: 203). So for these settlers, also known as *pied noirs*, colonialism was a blessing as an escape from the

abject poverty often occurring with urbanization. Therefore, assimilation was accepted to varying degrees by French citizens depending on French domestic conditions.

Algeria's settlers were divided into three *départements* centered around the main cities of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine. A *département* is a French administrative unit, a subdivision of a region, with a representative council elected by all enfranchised, whose responsibilities include governing local affairs and electing a Senator. Some poor Parisians resettled in the cities of Algeria, but by far the largest group of settlers came from the south of France, especially the regions of Languedoc, Provence, and Savoie, as well as from Spain, the Italian states, and Malta. Once in Algeria though, they too were socially, culturally, and politically assimilated as French citizens. In fact, people who had never been to France were indoctrinated through the French education system and military service to believe, just like the Algerians, that France was their nation and fatherland.

Although more than half of the 'French' colonists of Algeria migrated there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Spain, Italy, Malta, or Germany, making French Algeria a colony of remarkable ethnic (and class) diversity, most historical and contemporary sources claim that by World War I all of the non-French settlers of various origins had thoroughly assimilated to French cultural norms, developing into a new French settler society. According to this dominant view, once the foreign settlers became French citizens by legal decree in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great assimilating tools of the French state, which included the educational system, compulsory military service for men, an array of political and legal institutions, as well as social practices such as intermarriage, acted together to dissolve any remaining cultural barriers... their 'Frenchness' is unquestioned and unquestionable... Whatever one's background, 'one is expected to be assimilated, to be simply 'French' (Smith, 2003: 334-335).

Algeria was an economically, politically, and socially "bifurcated society": the *colons* held the dominant economic, political, and social positions while the *indigènes* Algerians were subordinated (Brown, 1996: 7). For instance, European Algerians had higher standards of living than many of their peers in Europe, Argentina, and Australia, not to mention indigenous

Algerians. Algeria was an incredibly profitable and wealthy colony for the French, while the Algerians lived in sub-standard conditions and were economically oppressed. Politically, the settlers were enfranchised and had political agency while the Algerians did not. Socially, the settlers had access to better health care, education, and modern conveniences in comparison to the Algerians. It was as if there were two Algerias that lived side by side but were separated by a high concrete wall: wealthy European Algeria and impoverished Arab/Berber Algeria.

However, within the colonial hierarchy there was also some division among those who were “*vrai*” (true) or “*purs*” (pure) French and those from countries like Malta, who were seen to be racially similar to Algerians, in appearance, language, and culture, and thus inferior. They spoke

a Semitic language, nearly mutually intelligible... with the local North African Arabic idiom. They were a people that Northern Europeans found difficult to define and were viewed by many as closer to the colonized than to the colonists in socioeconomic status, culture, and physical appearance. Ironically, even their strong religiosity, involving a cult of saints, identified them in the Northern European imagination as more ‘Oriental’ than ‘Western’ (Smith, 2003: 337).

These racialized stereotypes created a rigid class system, which in some ways resembled a caste system. The “pure” French held governmental posts and were wealthy businessmen and landholders. Poorer rural immigrants from other Southern European countries, like Spain and Italy, were small landholders, farmers, and businessmen. Those at the bottom of the European hierarchy were liminal groups like the Maltese and Sephardic Jews, who could be neither fully incorporated into the Algerian or European populations due to European racism.

The official narrative of complete settler assimilation and homogenization masks another, darker reality – the existence of an ethnically marked class hierarchy within the larger settler population of Algeria... French and naturalized Germans and Swiss occupied elite political and economic positions, settlers of Spanish or Italian origin occupied an intermediate status, and Maltese and indigenous Jews were awkwardly positioned as liminal populations between the ‘real’ colonists above them and the numerically dominant populations below (Smith, 2003: 337).

Thus, they were put in the difficult intermediary position of being traders, shopkeepers, and laborers. Of course, at the very bottom of the class hierarchy were the Algerians, who were mainly laborers, farmhands, and small shopkeepers, if employed at all.

Because of the *mission civilisatrice*, France saw Algeria as an integral and assimilated part of the French nation-state territorially, politically, economically, and culturally, especially with its large colonial (*colons*) population. Consequently, Algeria was not able to break away, as shown in the statement “‘L’Algérie, c’est la France’ [Algeria, it is France]” (Behr, 1961: 214). In fact, Algeria was considered part of France as a *département*. Thus, only a long and messy war, called “the most hallucinatory war that any people has ever waged to smash colonial aggression,” successfully separated Algeria from France (Fanon, 1965: 23).

French colonialism in Algeria was a force that introduced Western modernization formally to Algeria in several ways. First, it introduced the idea of a nation-state, that there was a nation of “Algerians” who belonged to the state “Algeria.” Of course, even before colonial migration, Algeria contained various ethnic groups, the most obvious being the Arabs, Berbers, and Jewish refugees from Andalusian expulsion, making the concept of an Algerian nation problematic. Furthermore, although Algeria was an entity under Ottoman rule, this notion of a distinct state was not present. For instance, Algeria was composed of Barbary States that did not have strict geographic boundaries from one another and from surrounding Morocco and Tunisia. Thus, the concept that Algeria, as a French *département*, and possibly even an independent nation-state, was a unified entity, ethnically distinct from Tunisia and Morocco was an aspect of modernity introduced by French colonialism.

In addition, another aspect of modernity introduced into Algeria by French colonialism was the concept of democracy and equality. However, the *pied noirs* and not the Algerians

benefited from these aspects of modernity, originating in the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, as French citizens. They suppressed these same ideas in Algeria for Algerians in order to maintain control and reinforce the idea of Algerians as racially and culturally inferior, and, thereby, undeserving of full citizenship. Ironically, one of the justifications of the colonization of Algeria and the underlying assumption of the *mission civilisatrice* was that the French would liberate and modernize Algeria from their cultural and social inferiority with these same democratic ideals that the *pied noirs* suppressed and denied in Algeria.

Furthermore, urbanization was another aspect of modernity introduced by the French.

Cities in Algeria of course pre-dated colonialism but the French introduced new kinds of cities.

We can define European implantation, at least in its first phase, as a struggle to introduce 'colonised' villages... new or renovated, into the rural landscape... Apart from the traditional large village, a new urban order introduced other units: the smaller village, or 'centre of colonization,' the *chef-lieu* or provincial capital, and, crowning all, *villeneuve*, which abolished or ousted the *madina* (Berque, 1962: 133).

Next to the older indigenous cities French settlers created new "modern" cities modeled on French architecture and urban planning, since the latter was considered superior to Arab designs. The new cities, called *villes nouvelles*, contained large spacious boulevards, grid street planning, and French cottage style homes with slanted roofs. In contrast, the older, colorful, and sensual Arab *medinas* contained narrow winding roads, maze-like space planning, and white flat roofed homes that opened onto inner courtyards, as brilliantly depicted in the Casabah in the film *Algiers* (1938). There were two parts of a city, the French and Arab, next to each other but worlds apart culturally, politically, and economically, as reflected in the architecture. In Algeria, "a modern vision of wide, orderly streets" was imposed on the Algerian landscape, leading to urbanization, another feature of modernization (Wright, 1997: 322).

Finally, secularization was introduced into Algeria by French colonialism as a means of modernization. The French colonial administration saw Islam as superstitious, holding back Algerians' progress. Thus, the only Algerians given any access to rights of citizenship, such as voting, were those that rejected Islam in favor of a secular lifestyle. The impact of secularization as part of the French civilizing mission, or modernizing mission, can be seen in the fact that after independence, Algeria became a secular republic and that most Algerians do not attend mosque regularly. However, recent turns to Islamism, such as the popularity of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), show that secularization did not totally eradicate religious devotion, even though Islamism is itself a creation of modernization since it arose to reject aspects of Western modernity. These forces of modernization introduced by the French colonial *mission civilisatrice* can be seen as encompassing the desire to put Algeria on the path to teleological progress, ending when it had become as "civilized" and modernized as France.

The French colonial introduction of modernization had a profound impact on Algerian society. Inevitably, *rai* was also influenced by this modernization, helping to shape it as a cultural hybrid. French colonialism and the imposition of its modernity affected *rai*'s lyrics. For instance, the *rai* lyrics of many *cheikhas* referred to the colonial administration. Also, themes of secularism, such as enjoying the pleasures of life like alcohol and sex, were partly introduced through French colonialism. Furthermore, the French language is used in many songs, often mixed with Arabic, mimicking the way the majority of Algerians speak. Some instruments used in *rai* and *pop-rai*, like the accordion, were introduced into Western Algeria through French colonialism. Finally, the urbanization introduced by the colonial modernizing mission created, in part, *rai*'s audience, performers, and subject matter. Urbanization is a prerequisite for an urban lower class, which formed *rai*'s fan base both for the *cheikhas* and cassette *chebs* and *chebas*.



The *cheikhas*, *chebs*, and *chebas* themselves generally come from this social class, which is reflected in the subject matter of their lyrics that in turn appeals to their lower class audience, especially the youth. Thus, without French colonialism and the subsequent imposition of Western notions of modernity through the *mission civilisatrice*, despite how painful and destructive it was to many, rai would never have become what it is, a cultural hybrid in part thanks to Western modernity.

9

### ***Modernity is not one, but many***

However, rai can not simply be seen as influenced by Western modernization without any adaptation. As is evident from my discussion of the history of rai's development, much of Algerian culture that was apparently not impacted by Western modernization, such as the *malhoun*, also influenced rai. Rai could not be considered a hybrid if it was only affected by Western modernity. Instead, from its inception, rai has synthesized various cultural influences, from Algerian culture, trade, and Western modernization to other influences from globalization [see below]. For this reason, it can be defined as both a hybrid and an Algerian pop music, since these various influences have also impacted the matrix of rai, namely Algerian popular culture.

Rai as a hybrid exemplifies the concept of alternative modernity since it did not simply assimilate Western culture through colonization. Instead, rai artists consciously chose what aspects of Western culture and modernity they wanted to adopt and interpreted it in their own cultural context, creating hybrids (Gaonkar, 2001:14). In alternative modernity theory, people have agency, in that they have control over what they accept and manipulate since there are many ways of being modern by mixing Western "modern" cultures with local cultures. "In short,

modernity is not one, but many” (Gaonkar, 2001:17). Rai artists and producers (and Algerians in general) did just that: they mixed various influences from Algeria, such as *malhoun* and Andalus, which were themselves product of various historical cultural blends, with influences from Western modernity introduced by the French colonial presence, such as Western instruments and the street culture in the *cheikhas*’ lyrics. Thus, rai is a product of Algerian history, including historic cultural interactions, and modernization and alternative modernity, shaping it into a truly cultural hybrid. However, rai has also become a hybrid due to one more social force, globalization.

9

## **Mediated music, commodified grooves, sounds split from sources, products for consumption**

### ***A world in motion***

Globalization refers to the increasing economic, cultural, communicative, and political interconnectedness that links the world. The old vision of the world was a static one, with people, cultures, and capital staying within well-defined nation-states. However, the reality of globalization is far from this picture: the entire world, to varying degrees, is deterritorialized and interconnected through webs of exchange, interdependence, and communication technologies. Globalization began with Western colonization of the Rest in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century since colonization linked the world economically, politically, and culturally. However, the process we recognize today as globalization intensified after World War

II as communication, economic, and cultural flows increased exponentially. Globalization has also been characterized as “a world in motion” because of the perception of space and time either speeding up or shrinking (Inda, 2002:1).

In his book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), David Harvey has explained that globalization has caused a time/space compression in which there has been a shrinking of space and a speeding up of time, thanks mainly to communication and travel technology. For instance, the globe seems smaller thanks to innovations in travel, such as the airplane, in which other continents seem closer than ever before. Additionally, time seems compressed because of inventions like the Internet, in which communication across the globe is instantaneous. Furthermore, in his books *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) and *Modernity and Self Identity* (1991), Anthony Giddens argues that there has concurrently been a time/space distancing in which social relations have become stretched. For instance, previously, most human contact was made face to face. However, now economic, political, or other events in one place in the world can affect a place across the world in a matter of seconds. For example, the Asian stock market crash of the 1990s was triggered by foreign as well as local speculation and had disastrous economic effects not only on Asian economies but economies all over the world thanks to global trade and currency exchange. Some scholars have argued that such time/space compression and distancing have been perceived as cultural imperialism and cultural homogenization, mainly with economically and politically dominant societies like the United States, by those in less dominant societies. However, I hope that my discussion of alternative modernities using *rai* disproves or complicates this claim.

Another characteristic of globalization involves the flows of commodities, ideas, and especially people along former colonial routes (Appadurai, 2001: 5). Stuart Hall has called this

phenomenon “the Empire striking back,” parodying the popular culture classic *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. The migration of North and West Africans to France and South Asians and Caribbeans to Great Britain is a telling example of this phenomenon. Finally, globalization uses Immanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory to describe flows between countries belonging in the core and periphery (globalization theory does not utilize his semi-periphery category). Globalization theorists tend to focus on flows from the core to periphery, which seems to support cultural imperialist arguments. However, as Inda and Rosaldo have argued, flows also occur from the periphery to the core and between countries in the periphery. Globalization therefore is characterized by several overlapping and concurrent processes, including time-space compression and distancing, the “Empire striking back,” and flows in various ways among the peripheries and cores of the world.

9

### ***Hybridization and claims to a pure culture***

Rai can be seen as a product of the characteristics of globalization mentioned above. For instance, rai has been produced by the flows of commodities, ideas, sounds, images and people. As mentioned in previous sections, rai has been formed by not only Algerian influences but also historical and modern colonial cultural influences as rai’s matrix, Algerian society, has been affected by these forces. More recently, as part of globalization these flows have had an extremely influential impact on rai. For instance, with commodity flows, rai has been affected by technology introduced from the West. This flow has introduced cassettes, drum machines, synthesizers, and other instruments that have transformed the methods of production, recording, and distribution. Furthermore, ideas from global flows have also affected rai as musics travel

along these global flows. Most noticeably, rai has recently borrowed from Western musics like disco, flamenco, salsa, and Spanish pop musicians, such as Julio Iglesias, and American pop musics like rock-and-roll and rap. Finally, rai has been affected by flows of North African migrants to France as a characteristic of globalization.

One hundred and thirty two years of destructive French colonialism and assimilation were finally ended after a bloody eight year revolution, considered a civil war by many in France, with Algeria achieving independence on July 3, 1962. However, the politics, economies, and especially cultures of Algeria and France remain intertwined. The cause of this intertwining is the legacy of colonialist policies, namely pied noir immigration and the *mission civilisatrice*. The result of this legacy has manifested in extensive Algerian migration to France. Stuart Hall originally coined the phrase, the “Empire strikes back,” to describe the exact process that occurred in the United Kingdom and is occurring with Algerian migrants, in which the colonized travel to their imperial “homeland” (metropolitan France) in search of economic opportunity. France today has an enormous documented and undocumented Algerian immigrant population, so that French-Algerian relations, and even political events in Algeria, affect France domestically. France’s Algerian residents have migrated to France for various reasons, such as economic opportunity, political oppression, or cultural sympathy. For instance, “France continued to function as a safety valve of sorts for a society confronted with mass unemployment and staggering rate of demographic growth” for Algeria, much like Algeria did for French immigrants during colonialism (Castles, 1998:113). In response to growing unemployment in France and the presence of large numbers of Algerian migrants and citizens of Algerian descent in France, racism and extreme nationalism in France has grown, especially with Le Pen’s

National Front. This growth in ultra-nationalism resulted in increased discrimination and violence against French North Africans.

Massive migration of Algerians to France, around two million both documented and undocumented has made rai a musical force in France. In fact, many rai artists migrated to France in order to flee the censorship and social oppression of the FLN and Islamists who condemned rai as “dirty.” Cheb Khaled even represented France at an international music festival in Central Park, New York City in 1991. He carried the French flag and sang in French, much to the disappointment of the Algerian government. In an interview in *Le Monde* (February 20, 1992) Khaled explained that “he was born under the French flag in 1960, that his godmother was French... that his group members were Jewish, Arab, and French... These conciliatory, pliable answers by a ‘liberal Arab’ representing multicultural French civilization did not please many people in Algeria” (Schade-Poulsen, 1999: 33). Many rai singers, like Taha and Faudel, are French Algerians themselves, born of such immigration.

Rai music was originally popular among young North African migrants beginning in the 1970s not only because it was familiar and reminiscent of Algeria, but also because it helped to form their identities. “‘Pop’ rai became one of the chief means of cultural expression for a minority struggling to carve out an identity in a racist environment” (Gross et al., 1992: 13). In French street slang known as *verlan*, North Africans are known as *beurs*, or Arab backwards. They are often the victims of racism and discrimination, by citizens and even the government. Many are even feared by the French because of their customs, particularly Islamic customs, such as the *hijab*, which are perceived as foreign and even despicable to secular French. Stereotypes of *beurs* abound, such as being noisy, dirty, and violent. The *beurs* live on the margins of French society. While there is a growing *beur* middle class, the majority are usually employed in low

skill jobs, if employed at all, and have more difficulty gaining citizenship. Many young male *beurs* have turned to crime as a source of income because of a lack of opportunity and the despair caused by such racism, marginality, and social exclusion, only reinforcing French stereotypes. Their homes are even on the margins, usually in the poorer crime-infested *banlieues* (suburbs) of French cities, namely Lyon, Marseille, and Paris.

The bulk of the Franco-Maghribi population, immigrants and Beurs, resides in multi-ethnic ghettos- the suburbs, or *banlieues*- ringing French cities. The loci of the 'immigration problem' is in these modernist architectural nightmares, bleak zones of high-rise apartments with minimal public facilities, substandard schooling and excessive unemployment (70 percent of the children of immigrants in Lyons between the ages of 16 and 25 are unemployed). The *banlieues*' spatial marginalization reflects an economic trend towards an ethnicized labor force (Gross et al., 1992: 14).

Thus, the *beurs* hold the same marginal social position in France as *rai*'s audience in Algeria, namely the young urban lower class. Consequently, the messages and themes of *rai*, as an expression of a marginal group, truly reflect the lives of the French migrants, especially those who had come from the lower class in Algeria. "In mid 1980s Algeria, the music expressed a kind of disguised youth protest against the austere morality and moribund economic policies of the regime; in France it became the badge of ethnic identity in the face of intensified white racism" (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 42). Therefore, *rai* helped to shape, define, and protest *beurs*' identity as a marginal group, much as it did for the marginal in Algeria.

However, in response to widespread prejudice, intensified by Le Pen's National Front, anti-racism movements formed to combat French prejudice, namely France-Plus and SOS-Racisme.

*Rai* became associated with the *Beurs* ... and their struggles against anti-Arab racism. In fact, although *rai* had long been brought into France by migrants, it first came into public view at concerts organized by SOS-Racisme, founded in 1985 in response to an upsurge in anti-Arab violence. Its popularity in France is not based

on French tastes for things exotic, but in the Franco-Maghrebi community, its alternative radio stations, nightclubs, safes, and cassette merchants... Rai's association with anti-racist movements also won it an audience among progressive white French youth (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 41-42).

Thus, these anti-racist groups are composed of North Africans, French, and other minorities organized to promote understanding and eradicate discrimination, often using rai as a vehicle of expression. They have used international music concerts featuring rai to promote their ideals and to bring together French and minorities. Therefore, rai became a hybrid means of expressing *beur* angst and a product of globalization because of the migration of Algerians to France, one of the characteristics of globalization.

In addition, rai is a product of globalization since it is an example of an alternative modernity. Rai has adapted various global influences but did not become homogenized: in other words, it retained its distinct Algerian rai identity. Rai's hybridization is ongoing through various cultural influences introduced through globalization. In fact, rai is the product of mixing Algerian, historical migrant, and modern French colonial cultures. Adding a few new influences could only enrich rai, not dilute it. Rai artists have echoed this sentiment. For instance, the Tunisian artist Amina has stated that, "I continue preaching for the mixtures of cultures. The more hybridization we have, the less we'll hear about claims to [a pure] culture" (Gross et al., 1992: 16).

Finally, rai is a product of globalization since it is an example of core to periphery, periphery to core, and periphery to periphery exchanges. From the core, rai in the periphery has received technology and musical influences, which has been discussed. However, it has also contributed to the core (the French metropole) through giving *beurs* a means of expressing their identity and as a voice for North Africans and liberal French to oppose racism. Finally, it has



been shaped by flows from other areas of the periphery, such as cultural influences from Morocco, Egypt, and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Caribbean musics like reggae. Thus, rai is a product of globalization, an example of an alternative modernity and the result of various exchanges among cores and peripheries.

9

### *Schizophonia*

Rai's hybridity, formed by syncretism and globalization, has caused it to become a global commodity. As a global commodity, rai has become split from its original place and time and is thus an example of "schizophonia," or "a split between an original sound and its electro-acoustical transmission or reproduction" (Feld, 1995: 97). Thus, rai, along with other musical global commodities, has become "a mediated music, commodified grooves, sounds split from sources, products for consumption with fewer if any contextual linkages to processes, practices, or forms of participation that endow their meanings in local communities" (Feld, 1995: 98).

However, with this distance from its cultural context, rai has become more accessible to a global audience.

In the early '80s, rai itself underwent a transformation, becoming more accessibly 'pop,' less forbiddingly 'oriental.' Synthesizers and drum machines replaced the *oud* and *rhbab*. Violins were electrified. Production techniques were modernized. Club crowds in Paris and New York- not just Algiers and Oran- could now dance to its rhythms (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 39).

Thus, to Westerners, the beat and instruments do not sound as exotic. In fact, often the only foreign aspect of a rai song for English-speakers is the language, if it is even sung in Arabic. Even the center of production and distribution has become globalized and familiar. Rai singers, like Cheb Khaled and Cheb Mami, record their music in Paris, New York, and even New

Orleans, as was the case with Rachid Taha's *Made in Medina*. Paris has now become one of the major centers for rai recording and distribution, along with Oran. Many rai artists even live, produce, and do the majority of their performances in France, such as Cheb Khaled, Cheb Mami, Cheb Sahraoui, and Chaba Fadela, often fleeing either the FLN or the Islamists (Gross et al., 1992: 13). Finally, Sting's enormous hit "Desert Rose" that included Cheb Mami made rai even more familiar to Western audiences.

The newer generation of rai artists, like Faudel and Taha, who were raised in France, sounds even less Oriental. In fact, Taha resists being labeled and pigeon-holed as a rai artist, instead claiming that "I see my music as American. The biggest atom bomb that America made was rock 'n' roll, and I'm irradiated by it. I'm a rocker and I just happen to be Algerian" (Young, 2002: 46). He has also been quoted as saying his music is "the [r]evolution of traditional music" (Nickson, 2001: online). As a rocker, his music, which does have noticeable rai influences, is much more accessible to global artists. Rai has in fact been called "the rock of Arabs," and is descended from similar West African rhythms and Spanish guitar influences as rock in the United States, so Taha's assertion of being a rocker actually does not stray too far from rai's roots (Nickson 2001). "Rai has slid out of the Arab and Middle Eastern landscape and become integrated with syncretic musical styles such as New Orleans blues; Argentinean tango; West African juju; Greek, Turkish, and Flamenco melodies, Portuguese fado; and reggae. After 1987 many of these musical genres were increasingly labeled 'World Music,'" (Schade-Poulsen, 1995: 31-32). Thus, rai has become an accessible product of globalization as part of world music or world beat.

Many rai artists, however, resist this classification, equating such a label with the exotic and limiting since it blocks accessibility to more mainstream audiences. "For Arab music to

work, you have to drop the concept of world music,' he [Hillage, Taha's producer] says. 'It's patronizing. It's like a musical ghetto. What these artists do is as valid as what Madonna or Britney Spears [does], as valid as the most mainstream thing'" (Nickson 2001). Timothy Taylor also discusses this conundrum, that only "native" musics become hybrid and part of the world music label, while Western artists might incorporate the same hybrid influences but be classified by a more mainstream label, such as alternative rock, and thus have access to a wider audience (Taylor, 1997:201). Despite such objections, the labels world music and world beat continue to be influential labels, especially for rai as a global commodity.

Rai has therefore become wrapped up in global world music/world beat networks of production as a global commodity. Steven Feld has examined the difference between these two terms, which are often used in popular discourse interchangeably. He defines world music and world beat in contrast to one another, as mutually complementary terms. World music is seen as the authentic or traditional music while world beat is a hybrid, fused, modern (Feld, 1995:104). Rai has been claimed as both, which figures prominently in later discussions of authenticity. However, it fits historically within the world beat mold since it is a hybrid, a product of fusing of genres and styles, and modernity and globalization (along with a product of Algerian cultural context, which has been shaped by the culture of Algerians and historical migrations in addition to modernity and globalization).

World music channels have consumed many previously local musics, mainly pop musics like rai, as products of globalization.

The development of a 'World Beat' sensibility and market among Western music consumers provided the potential audience (for rai). The growing interest in reggae in the '70s, the advent of multi-lingual/national rock concerts, recordings and televised specials in the 1980s devoted to fund-raising for international issues, tours by African artists (King Sunny Ade, Fela Kuti, Malathini, the Bhundu Boys)

have steadily created an interest and demand for what is variously termed 'world' or 'ethno-pop' music (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 39).

For instance, bhangra music, the pop music of the Punjab, is now a music phenomenon around the world. American rap artists sample bhangra beats. Even Indian bhangra artists, like Punjabi MC, have gained popularity in America, with their music being played not only on college stations but also on mainstream pop stations, indeed to the extent of having videos on MTV. Ironically, Punjabi MC has become popular by making his bhangra more accessible to the West by sampling American rap artists' beats, such as Jay Z. Bhangra sampling enables its global popularity much like rai is made accessible by its use of Western instruments. Furthermore, Indian songs used in the Bollywood film industry, which comprise the bulk of Indian pop music, have also been sampled in American rap music, either as beats or even with the original artists singing in the background. In fact, American rap artists and producers like Dr. Dre have been accused of and sued for stealing Bollywood songs without giving royalties or credit to the artists (D'Angelo online).

Perhaps the first local music to become world music and part of globalization was reggae. Reggae originated as pop music local to Jamaica and, much like rai, it dealt with social problems specific to Jamaica and its globally marginal inhabitants, such as racism and poverty. However, Bob Marley, reggae's most famous artist, became a worldwide sensation thanks in part to globalization, especially in the music industry. His songs dealing with Jamaican struggles ironically became popular with white America to the extent that artists like Eric Clapton covered his music. Today reggae is experiencing another resurgence in American pop music thanks in part to artists like Sean Paul who combine reggae and hip hop, just as Punjabi MC does with bhangra and hip hop. Therefore, rai is not the only local pop music to be caught in the stream of

globalization, as shown by banghra and reggae. Thus, world music/world beat has consumed rai, as it has many other localized musics, transforming this already hybrid genre into a mega-hybrid globalized commodity.

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## **Worldwide mind liberation through confusion of musical boundaries**

### ***Questions of authenticity***

Not only has rai made an impact on the world music scene through globalization, but being a globally accessible commodity has also in turn affected rai. Many rai artists are excited about continuing hybridization through globalization, or as Khaled's project is referred to as "worldwide mind liberation through confusion of musical boundaries" (Was 1994). Such confusion might have created excitement among rai's Algerian audience, but it has also raised questions about rai and rai artists' authenticity. Authenticity again is another problematic and dualistic term that I wish I could avoid, but the discourse of authenticity is charged with meaning by its users and thus deserves discussion.

Taylor examines this concept of authenticity in world music in detail. He sees authenticity as relating to some essential, real, actual essence, which in "native" world musicians is conceived of as premodern and untainted (Taylor, 1997:21). He further examines authenticity as the authenticity of positionality, emotionality, and primality. Authenticity of positionality involves world music artists not betraying their roots in order to avoid being called "sell-outs." Authenticity of emotionality refers to the "inherent" spirituality in the music of Others, which

world artists must not betray. Finally, authenticity of primality speaks to the listeners of world music in the West (often called modern primitives) wanting to hear music that has connections to the timeless, the ancient, the primal, and the pure in contrast to their corrupt, new, modern, secular, and civilized existence. This desire for the authentic in the ancient goes back to colonial racist discourses about the noble savage. Rai is criticized by many Algerians for its loss of authentic positionality.

Rai is obviously still a popular cultural force among lower class Algerian youth: rai singers continue to be demigods and their music dominates radio stations and cassette stores. However, the content of rai has changed due to its global popularity. The lyrics reflect less the sentiments of Algerian lower class youth for several reasons. In particular, rai lyrics were made “clean” with government sponsorship. “The same rai producers who once promoted bawdy lyrics now vigorously cleaned them up to make the music palatable to a wider audience” (Gross et al., 1992: 13). Thus, lyrics dealing with sex and wine have been toned down significantly, with love now being the most popular subject. This cleaning up of rai by government sponsorship, Islamists, and Western world music producers has thereby changed its meaning to many in its original lower class audience.

Furthermore, the most popular rai singers are criticized for living comfortably in France. Few actually live in Algeria, and if they do they are far from their lower class roots. Therefore, they are vulnerable to accusations that they have lost touch with the plight of their audience. Their voices, which often conveyed the feelings of loss and despair felt by their audience, have seemingly lost their edge in their plush lifestyles. Furthermore, their dual image in Algeria as “rebels” and pop stars has been replaced by just pop stars. In fact, Cheb Khaled, the ultimate rebel, who once was referred to by the famous French rap group IAM in the song “Do the Rai

Thing” (1996) as “the Arab Public Enemy,” is unlikely to inspire another revolt as in 1988. In fact, his artistic peers have even called his rebel image into question.

The pressures of the Algerian state endorsement, sophisticated recording techniques and the embrace of the Western audiences raise questions about rai’s ‘authenticity.’ Cheb Sahraoui has hinted that Cheb Khaled abandoned his Algerian audience and departed from ‘authentic’ rai... citing the fact that Khaled employed European musicians and recorded in a European studio (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 42).

They are no longer perceived by young Algerians as the spokesman for the “rai generation,” no longer *chebs* (young men); instead they are seen as middle-aged men.

Thus, instead of being a voice for their young lower class Algerian audience and a challenge to society, rai has been depoliticized (even though most rai artists claim rai is apolitical) and void of meaning. For many, it is solely a dance or pop music. Many of these marginalized youth disenchanted with rai may be turning to rap (*The Economist* 2000). However, it is difficult to determine to what extent because little information exists on this subject. Perhaps the silence that has descended on Algerian cultural life with the rise of Islamist FIS and the civil war between the FLN and FIS is one cause of such difficulty. Rai and other music viewed as dirty and un-Islamic have been repressed by the FIS, making information on the attitudes about and replacement of rai among a difficult research community, marginalized youth, basically non-existent. Thus, rai is often criticized by its audience in Algeria because it has lost its particular Algerian roots in the struggles of the young lower class, and its positionality and the positionality of its singers are thereby inauthentic.

Such claims of rai’s inauthenticity among some Algerians, arising from it becoming a global commodity in world music networks, strike me as somewhat ironic. Rai was born of hybridization and mixing various cultural influences with an Algerian culture, which itself was

historically culturally diverse. In fact, pop-rai's popularity exploded in Algeria particularly when forces of modernization and globalization were beginning to exert a lot of influence. Questions of rai's positional authenticity, had not been a site of questioning until rai became a popular and powerful commodity of globalization. These questions thus strike me as pertaining to another social anxiety, perhaps the growing concerns over Westernization and globalization of Algerian society among Islamists. Nevertheless, such questioning of rai's authenticity have arisen as important among many young lower class Algerians since globalization has apparently altered rai and rai's artists. And these questions of authenticity affect rai's audience and social context, thereby making it worth analysis.

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### ***From rai thing to rap thang***

Furthermore, rai has been affected by globalization in its popularity among *beurs* as a tool of identity formation and for fighting racism. "The French housing projects in the suburbs, the *banlieues*, reproduce the same multiethnic unification through hip-hop culture: 'There is indeed a banlieue culture, rap, and verlan [slang], but it belongs to all the inhabitants of the housing estate populated by as many whites as blacks and Beurs'" (Durand, 2002:xiv-xv). Rap is the now preferred means of expression and defiance among young *beurs*, with rai remaining popular among older generations. Rai's counter-culture message is perceived to be too watered down or diluted thanks to the cleaning of its lyrics, which occurred particularly when it became an accessible global commodity. For these reasons, rai has been replaced by rap among France's *beurs*. It has gone from "the rai thing to the rap thang" (Gross et al, 2002: 213).



Rap is a seemingly natural replacement of rai among *beurs* because it appeals to similar social groups that rai originally did. Rap in America is the chosen popular expression of a marginal population, namely the African American minority, as was rai originally. Furthermore, rap is used as a medium to address and challenge racism, along with other social ills. As one rai fan argued:

American rap and Algerian raï [before it became a “diluted” global commodity] are both styles born out of a strong local culture which use the language of the street to express opinions about street life. They value lyrical improvisation and ‘borrow’ musical ideas from many sources if and when necessary. They antagonize the values of ‘decent’ society and the cultural mainstream. They are the musical styles most favoured by the dispossessed in their respective countries, by those who have little to lose [sic] and a lot to say. And for both, their paths to international fame have been littered with controversy and misunderstanding. Just as folk who live comfortably within the cultural pale in America wince when they hear words like ‘bitch’ and ‘uzi’ coming from the mouth of a rap artist, so the cultural muftis of the Maghreb turn red when they hear tales of drunkenness, despair, sex, and hedonism from the lips of a teenage cheb (Han online).

Thus, rai, before the *beurs* perceived it as diluted, shared many traits with rap, namely in its hybrid construction, social appeal, and counter-culture status. However, *beurs* have not only replaced rai with American rap, but with French rap. French rap has its own rich rap fan base and local artists, many of whom are immigrants and from the young urban lower class, such as IAM. “France is second only to the United States in the venerability of its scenes, the cultural influence of hip-hop, and its sophistication in the evolution of new artistic forms and cultural practices” (Krim, 2002: vii). Thus, rap artists popular among immigrant youth are not only American but also French, many of whom experience the same problems as the *beurs*. Rap is thus seen as a more “authentic” expression of *beur* angst, especially since rai has seemingly lost its edge and touch by becoming world music and being more about making a hit or a good dance beat rather than addressing the pressing social issues of the marginalized.

Rai today is primarily the music of choice for recent immigrants and older Beurs... rap has emerged as the musical expression of the new generation of Franco-Maghribi youth. They regard 'Arab' music like rai... as an important, if somewhat dated, part of their minority heritage, while increasingly viewing rap as the key vehicle for articulating their complex identity. Rap offers a means of expression in French... Rap's stance vis-à-vis white French society is aggressively confrontational and allows *banlieue* French youth to feel connected with oppositional 'Black' culture throughout the world (Gross et al., 1992: 14-15).

It is ironic that globalization, which helped to make rai popular worldwide, a cultural hybrid, and a powerful form of expression for marginalized Algerians and *beurs*, eventually harmed rai's authenticity, power, or popularity by diluting its specific message for the marginalized, namely Algerian youth and North African migrants. Consequently, because of these same forces of globalization, rap music has replaced rai as a vehicle of expression. Therefore, rai has become a product of and commodity for globalization, but that globalization has also altered rai by diluting its social meaning specific to Algerian lower class youth and *beurs*, thereby leading to its replacement by rap as the means of expression.

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### **Conclusion: Cultural border zone of syncretism**

"The complex history of rai highlights its transitional character, the fact that it is a hybrid cultural form, constantly transversing boundaries, shifting meanings, and undergoing transformation" (McMurray and Swedenburg, 1991: 42). Rai was pop music indigenous to Algeria and Algerians' expressions, but it has been shaped by various cultural influences due to historical cultural contact, modernization, and globalization, making it a hybrid art, and has

become a commodity for globalization, which has in turn affected it. Although originating in Western Algeria, rai has challenged notions of “pure” or “authentic” culture because of its hybrid nature. In a world full of cultural exchange, such notions of pure cultures are nothing but denials of reality and promotions of stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and even racism. Nevertheless, French ultra-nationalists like Le Pen continue to claim that France is for the pure French, and want to expel immigrants, failing to realize, or conveniently forgetting, that the French themselves are a result of an intermingling of several cultures and that immigrants add valuable contributions to the nation. Immigrants’ cultural contributions are exemplified in realms of rai music:

Rai is... a cultural border zone of syncretism and creative interminglings of French and Arab. At once ‘ethnic’ and French, rai is a front in a wider cultural struggle that ‘despite racist opposition’ is recasting French national identity, performing a kind of genetic mutation of French culture... the cultural arena is full of dynamic examples of popular Franco-Maghribi practices of ‘inter-culturation’ which problematize dominant Eurocentric notions of what it means to be French... Khaled has hit the pop charts with music that combines the Maghribi drumbeats of the derbouka with African-American funk (Gross et al., 1992: 16).

Thus, even an Algerian pop music like rai, which on the surface might seem to be purely Algerian, on closer examination shows the various processes of cultural hybridization that are a reality in our world – especially a world so closely linked by processes of modernization and globalization – and thereby dispels dangerous, essentializing dualisms.

Unfortunately, essentializing dualisms are alive and well in Algeria in the discourse of government officials and Islamists. In her song “Bastet,” Natacha Atlas, a French singer of North African descent, encourages people, especially the government and religious officials, to open up their minds.

I want to challenge you to open the doors of your minds and discuss yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let's talk about idea's inspiration, liberation, consciousness raising, experimentation, invocation and innovation. Let's make investigations into the reasons for domination and proclamations by government politicians and

media propaganda. What is this all misinformation all over the world? Power struggles continue with the perpetrators of corruption, a continual cycle of same condition. The endless flow of distorted political, religious belief systems that act like an addiction - Let's break it down. Let's make analogies and use anomalies to discover political deceptions. Let's analyze, criticize, philosophize and sympathize with the millions subjected to deprivation and oppression, and let's make it a necessity to become aware. Lord help us to unite with wisdom.

Despite pleas by artists such as Atlas, the future of hybrid musics, like rai, is uncertain, especially in Algeria and France. There are pressing questions left regarding rai's future in Algeria and France. Will hybridity continue to characterize rai's form, and if so what new influences will it incorporate? Or will artists, producers, and those in power try to revert to some imagined Algerian "tradition?" In addition, will rai succeed as a global commodity in world music/world beat markets? Will this global audience replace its disenchanted audience among the marginalized in Algeria and immigrants in France? Will rap completely replace rai as a means of expression and rejection for these groups or will new artists restore rai's authenticity among its original listeners? These questions have yet to be answered, giving rai an interesting and complex future.

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Figure 1



# GYPS

# ALGÉ

# RIEN

