Artistic Identities and Professional Strategies: Francophone Musicians in France and Britain

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Abstract

This article will focus on the ways in which musicians of North African origin – either born in North Africa or in France and living in France and Britain – define their musical and artistic identities in relation to their national origins, place of birth, migration trajectories and location in which they perform their music. In particular, the article will focus on how perceptions of musicians' national and post-migrant identities vary according to their location on either side of the Channel but also according to how the musicians themselves choose to present their music, depending on whether they are based in France or Britain. In addition to the individual strategies adopted by musicians, the article also considers how the shifting socio-political contexts in post-9/11 France and Britain have affected the choices and opportunities available to artists of North African origin in both national contexts.

Cet article examine les multiples manières dont les musiciens d'origine maghrébine – qu'ils soient nés au Maghreb ou en France et vivant en France et en Grande-Bretagne – définissent leurs identités musicales et artistiques en fonction de leurs origines nationales, leurs pays de naissance, leurs parcours migratoires et les lieux où ils créent de la musique. En particulier, l'article aborde la question de la perception des identités nationales et post-migratoires des musiciens et la manière dont celle-ci dépend de l'ancrage en France ou en Grande-Bretagne mais aussi des volontés subjectives des musiciens eux-mêmes. Au-delà d'une discussion des stratégies individuelles adoptées

par les musiciens, l'article considère les bouleversements socio-politiques en France et en Grande-Bretagne depuis les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 et la manière dont les choix et les opportunités proposés aux musiciens maghrébins dans les deux contextes ont évolué.

Key Words:

North African musicians: France; UK; métissage; fusion music

Introduction

This article will focus on the ways in which musicians of North African origin – either born in North Africa or in France and living in France and Britain – construct their musical and artistic identities by using or by-passing a range of ethnicised markers such as 'métissé', 'French', 'Francophone', 'Moroccan', 'Algerian', 'North African' and 'Arab'. Building on existing research on this topic (Kiwan and Kosnick 2006; Kim 2003; Gibert 2011; Lebrun 2009; Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma, 1996), this article demonstrates how the work of artists from so-called minority backgrounds can often be subject to mis-categorisation. Furthermore, as we might expect, the types of identities which are ascribed to artists vary according to location and socio-historical context.

In France, it can be argued that many artists with a North African background (especially 'second-generation' artists born or brought up in France) are encouraged to foreground their 'hybridity'. Indeed, there exists a rather celebratory discourse around the notion of musical and ethnic *métissage* within the media and the music industry. For some musicians, their North African background and musical influences are

overplayed by the public or cultural institutions; i.e. they would prefer to be recognised as French musicians. For others, their multiple musical heritages are underplayed and their North African origins and aesthetic identification is not sufficiently acknowledged. Furthermore, there are those musicians who may comfortably and clearly acknowledge the *métissage* of their musical identities only to find that such explicitly articulated 'in-betweeness' creates reticence on the part of some audiences and interlocutors. It must of course be acknowledged that with the advent of the 'beur' culture trend against the backdrop of anti-racism movements in the 1980s, many French-born 'second-generation' French-North African musicians, writers and artists from a range of disciplines willingly highlighted their hybridity, arguably as a strategy for greater visibility and inclusion into mainstream French popular culture.[1] As Ted Swedenberg (2015) points out, the so-called beur generation can be viewed as part of a broader political struggle for equal rights and treatment but culture (music, literature, theatre, fashion) was an important part of that struggle.

In Britain, '*métissage*' is also a positive signifier within the music industry although more often under the broader category of 'fusion'. Yet, when researching francophone North African musicians who migrate to non-francophone countries like Britain, the issue of *métissage* is clearly modified. In some cases – mainly with 'second generation' artists born in France - leaving France leads to an identification in terms of 'Frenchness', which was particularly conflictual and almost impossible in France but which on the contrary is welcomed by the British public who simply consider them as 'French' artists. In other cases, for artists who by-passed the 'passage obligé' in France when they left North Africa in the 1990s to come to Britain, the 'Francophone' label is

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[1] For more 'beur' culture in 1980s France, see Lebrun (2012); Derderian (2004).

nevertheless and not always welcomingly ascribed to them, and one of the ways of challenging it is to reinforce, through their music, their North African and/or Arab identity.

This article arises out of research which was conducted under the auspices of a broader collaborative project entitled *Diaspora as social and cultural practice: a study of transnational networks across Europe and Africa* (www.tnmundi.soton.ac.uk). The project (2006-2010) was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and was led by Ulrike Hanna Meinhof and Nadia Kiwan. The main objective of the project was to study the multiple ways in which (post-)migrant cultural practitioners, performers and musicians originating from North-Africa and Madagascar use multiple translocal and transnational networks across African, European and wider global spaces. We suggested that artists who create or enter such networks make use of, but go far beyond the traditional 'bi-focal', ethnically and spatially defined communities that link originating and sending countries, as studied in much diaspora research. Finally, our empirical studies of Francophone Malagasy and North African artists aimed to provide new insights into the creative practices of migrant cultural practitioners which transcend geographic diasporic communities, and throw light on their modes of cultural, social and political engagement.[2] The rationale for comparing the trajectories of artists from Madagascar and North Africa was bound up with their simultaneously divergent and contrastive features. Both Madagascar and the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) are geographically assigned to Africa but culturally, their respective populations tend to culturally and linguistically identify more with their

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[2] Some of the empirical material which is discussed in this article was gathered during a previous research project, the European Union-funded *Changing City Spaces* project, which ran from 2002-2005; see http://www.citynexus.soton.ac.Britain/.

Indian Ocean neighbours and Polynesian origins in the case of Madagascar and with the Arab Middle East or Amazigh cultures in the case of the Maghreb rather than their sub-Saharan African neighbours. Secondly, both regions share a history of French colonisation and a strong diasporic presence in France and global transnational networks. Yet both regions also are very different in that Madagascar is unfamiliar to the majority of the French population, and Malagasies (both at home and in the French diaspora) tend to be viewed in very different terms to French-North Africans. So instead of distrust, racism and rejection which often concerns French-North Africans, Malagasies are much less visible in the media and French public life. Finally, whilst the North African diasporic presence in France spans several generations and is highly visible, the majority of Malagasies in France tends to be first or early second-generation.

Artists' cultural, social and political engagement is bound up with the multiple ways in which the North African musicians which we worked with project and portray their work to their various interlocutors: their audiences, cultural policy representatives, the media, the music industry and researchers. We argue that these processes of self-representation simultaneously articulate the socio-historical context in which artists are working, the artists' perspectives and own musical pleasure and their professional strategies vis-à-vis the music and performance industry in the broadest sense (Gibert 2011). Since this triple matrix blends external constraints and internal or self-adopted motives and desires, the artists we discuss in this paper reveal conflicting and inconsistent motivations within their own trajectories.

Métissage **and Hybridity in the Academy**

Debates about *métissage* and/or fusion within music and culture have also been reflected in academic discussions – which have often oscillated between the celebration or critique of cultural hybridity. A number of well-known postcolonial theorists have thus adopted enthusiastic approaches to the question of cultural mixing or hybridity.

An example of the enthusiasm for hybridity within academic discussions can be found in the work of Paul Gilroy. In his seminal work *The Black Atlantic,* Gilroy writes about the 'unashamedly hybrid character of these black Atlantic cultures [which] continually confounds any simplistic (essentialist or anti-essentialist) understanding...' (1993: 99). This hybridity is also reflected in the 'montage' which Gilroy argues is characteristic of hip-hop culture with its mixture of electric and acoustic instrumentation, rhythms and sampling techniques. Similarly, Hall's work is well-known for its positive stance on the notion of cultural hybridity with regard to British society – according to him, the hybridisation or *métissage* of cultural production has meant that Britain has been forced to revise its culturally homogenous popular self-image (Hall 1995, cited in Hutnyk 2005: 92). Perhaps most famously, Homi Bhabha adopts the concept of hybridity in order to reflect on the 'interstitial' moment, the 'third space' or 'colonial interface', characterised by a certain positive ambivalence and performativity which produces new categories of meaning and new 'terms of cultural engagement' (Bhabha 2008 (1994): 334).

Other scholars are nevertheless more sceptical about the notion of cultural hybridity, and they argue that its ubiquity as a theoretical concept has sidelined more urgent considerations such as continued socio-economic and political exclusion of those subaltern groups whose so-called cultural hybridity is otherwise fêted. For several

of them, the main problem with the concept of hybridity is that it pre-supposes a past time when cultures were presumably pure. Robert Young points to the troubling origins of hybridity as a 19th century horticultural term and its possible links with the pseudo-scientific study of human racial categories during the same period (see Young 1995; Hutnyk 2005: 82; Amselle 2001: 7). John Hutnyk develops a Marxist critique of the idea of hybridity by arguing that there are clear links between the concept and the emergence of a sort of market cosmopolitanism (2005). For this author, the recent scholarly enthusiasm for hybridity as a concept and analytical tool reflects the ambient 'corporate multiculture' of the West (Hutnyk 1997, 2005: 97; Hutnyk, Kalra & Kaur 2005; Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996). Furthermore, the notion of 'tranquilizing hybridity' – a term used by Néstor García Canclini, which evokes a social context whereby the celebration of hybridity by the media, intellectuals and elites leads to an absence of conflictualisation of social, cultural and economic relations is another further key criticism of hybridity in academic discourse (Canclini 2000: 48-49). The lack of conflictualisation stems from a certain complacent sense – driven in part by the cultural industries – that society is already open towards cultural difference. More specifically within Francophone Studies, the above critiques resonate with analyses by scholars who have made similar points in their critique of postcolonial studies as a field which has often become too concerned with theory, at the expense of detailed socio-historical contextualisation (Haddour and Majumdar 2007). This article seeks to develop that effort of theoretically-grounded socio-historical contextualisation further by focusing on the strategies and trajectories of a number of Francophone North African musicians in France and the UK.

Socio-historical contexts in France and Britain

Of course France and Britain have different histories of postcolonial migration which arise out their different colonial pasts. In France, the North African origin population is a postcolonial legacy. In contrast to the French context, North African immigration in the UK is not linked to a former colonial or protectorate experience. This non-colonial migration is therefore smaller, and much less studied, although academic publications have started to appear over the last decade (Cherti 2008, 2009; Collyer 2004; De Haas, Bakewell and Kubal 2011). According to Cherti, the first migration links between Morocco and Britain seem to have existed for more than a century (2008:73), although the first large wave of migration (mainly guest workers) started in the 1960s. The latest arrivals are often highly skilled students or professionals. Algerian immigration is more recent as it is mainly linked to the political violence in Algeria in the 1990s when many Algerians left the country and dispersed all over the world. Tunisian-born UK residents make up even smaller numbers in the UK, and are largely understudied. In addition, although it is impossible to estimate their number, a large number of British-born and French-born UK residents consider themselves to be of North African origin.

In terms of public discourse and policies, France and Britain are more often than not regarded as counter-models. France's Republican universalist model has traditionally promoted an integration-led agenda vis-à-vis its immigrant and immigrant-origin populations and hence public or visible assertions of cultural difference have been regarded as potentially threatening to the integrity of a so-called neutral public sphere (what Dominique Schnapper would term 'la transcendence par la citoyenneté', Schnapper 1994: 113). As Barbara Lebrun argues, this has led to an awkward public perception of cultural mixing or *métissage*: the latter is either encouraged as somehow being a step towards integration– this was particularly the case in the aftermath of the

1998 football World Cup victory. Yet at other times, *métissage* is seen as a possible challenge to the 'project' of cultural homogeneity underlying the broader integrationist framework of French political culture (See Lebrun 2009; Weil 2005, 2008; Maxwell 2012). In the post-2002 period, we witnessed the timid emergence of a diversity 'agenda' in French government discourse. However, from 2007 onwards when Nicolas Sarkozy was elected as president, despite a short-lived experimentation with the notion of 'une France riche de sa diversité', the general tone of political debate swung firmly against immigration and non-European cultural diversity, exemplified by the establishment of a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity. The conflation of immigration flows with the notion of national identity which underpinned this move should be seen as part of a broader socio-political context in which questions of post-migrant *métissage* and diversity were no longer necessarily regarded as positive phenomena. Indeed, in the run-up to the 2007 presidential election, presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that if elected, he would embark on constructing a new national museum of French history. The project never came to fruition, but , according to Bancel and Lebovics (2011), can be seen as symptomatic of Sarkozy's desire : 'to offer visitors old-fashioned narrative history of male achievements, with no account taken of new insights that women's, gender, social, cultural, colonial and immigration history have added to any discussion of what France is or might be.' (Bancel and Lebovics 2011: 271).

Nevertheless, the post-2002 period did see the opening of two major national museums which could be said to have reflected a certain celebration of France's cultural diversity – the *Musée du Quai Branly* in 2006 and the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* in 2007. However, as has been shown by a range of critical work on the

Musée du Quai Branly (MQB), this museum project could both be regarded as problematic for a number of reasons. Some have argued that the MQB was a sort of political vanity project led by Jacques Chirac (Froning Deleporte 2005). Others have argued that it is reductive in its treatment of cultural diversity – raising questions about the validity of a museum which seems to want to represent entire cultures and regions of the world via the exhibition of 'exotic' objects and which provides the visitor with very little in the way of information about how such artefacts were collected (Lebovics 2006; Price 2007). In other words, it has been argued that despite its apparent celebration of diversity, the *Musée du Quai Branly* remains silent about France's colonial history. Similar criticisms have been made with regards to the *Musée de l'Histoire de l'immigration* (from 2007-2013 known as the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*) due to its controversial location at the *Palais de la Porte Dorée* , which had been built as a permanent structure for the 1931 Exposition Coloniale before housing *Le Musée Permanent des Colonies*. Furthermore, even though on one level, the *Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration* would seem to celebrate France's immigrant diversity, the museum collections housed there tend to adopt a clear integration-led and fairly linear narrative whereby France's immigrants' trajectories are predominantly portrayed as starting with arrival and ending with integration into the nation-state. (Labadi 2013).

Under the current PS-led François Hollande government, there has been a return to the diversity agenda but with more of a focus on gender parity and sexual orientation, rather than immigrants and post-migrant cultural diversity. Nevertheless, Hollande has once again reiterated his commitment to voting rights for foreign French residents in local elections and he inaugurated the Museum of the History of Immigration in December

2014, something which his predecessor did not do, despite the Museum (then *Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration*) opening its doors to the public in October 2007.

In Britain, until 2001, the predominant public discourse and policy approach to immigrant-origin populations was premised on the notion of multiculturalism – hence the notion of cultural difference was very much pushed to the fore. As Colombo (2015) points out, multiculturalism is a 'polysemous term':

> 'Multiculturalism is closely associated with 'identity politics', 'the politics of difference' and 'the politics of recognition', all of which consider proper recognition of cultural diversity a necessary step towards revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups (Song, 2010).' (Colombo 2015: 801).

However, this well-established multiculturalist self-image has undergone some change and in the aftermath of the 2001 Bradford, Burnley and Oldham riots, '9/11' and '7/7'[3], the concept of multiculturalism has come under serious attack from government, the media, the general public and academics for supposedly encouraging 'parallel lives' and the rejection of British liberal values such as freedom of speech, equality of the sexes and democracy (See McGhee 2009 and Colombo 2015). Indeed, the premiership of Tony Blair saw a clear shift in emphasis from celebrating difference through multiculturalism to minimising separateness by a new emphasis on 'community cohesion' and then later a securitised approach via the Prevent counter-terrorism agenda. The 2001 riots and the '7/7' attacks in particular were portrayed by the

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[3] The New York, Washington and Pennsylvania terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the London bombing in July 7th, 2005.

government and the media as emerging out of a social context whereby multiculturalism had encouraged segregation amongst Britain's Muslim communities. In December 2006, and in light of the '7/7' attacks, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair made a speech about the importance of integration, understood as 'shared, common unifying British values…' (Runnymede Trust 2006:2). More recently, David Cameron's speech about the failure of state multiculturalism at a security conference in Munich in February 2011 can be seen as a key example of this conflation of multiculturalism and radicalisation amongst Muslims (BBC 2011).

As far as community cohesion was concerned, the Local Government Association defined 'a cohesive community as one where:

  • there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities

  • the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued

  • those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and

  • strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different

  backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.' (Home Office 2003:7)

It should be noted that Thomas (2014) argues that community cohesion could be regarded as an attempt to recalibrate rather than abandon multiculturalism, although at the time, the move away from multiculturalism towards community cohesion was seen by some critics as a return to 'assimilationism' (Thomas 2014: 475). Whichever interpretation of community cohesion we may wish to adopt, the main point is that it

has entailed a discursive shift away from difference towards commonality and integration. In addition to this, the government response to the '7/7' attacks was to introduce the 'Prevent' terrorism-prevention policy which as part of the wider CONTEST counter-terrorism agenda. Some have argued that there has been a blurring of lines between Prevent and community cohesion, leading to the 'securitization' of multiculturalism (Ragazzi 2012). This new emphasis on integration and British values at one of the spectrum and radicalisation and counter-terrorism at the other of the spectrum, continued under the leadership of Gordon Brown and David Cameron's coalition government elected in 2010 (See Gibert 2011) and has intensified since the election of a Conservative majority government in May 2015.[4]

Artist's perspectives and musical pleasure

From the artists' perspective, the socio-historical contexts strongly affect the development of their career, creating both tensions and synergies between their artistic desires, strategic political positioning, and professional strategies. As previous research on music and migration (see Baily and Collyer 2006; Martiniello, Puig & Suzanne 2009; Aubert 2005; Kiwan and Meinhof 2011b) has shown, music can be studied in various contexts, from private practices (i.e. life cycle events) to public performances, or activities linked with 'heritage' or identity claims (Baily 1995, 1999; Regev & Seroussi 2004; Wrazen 2007). Research on diverse artists' trajectories or artistic processes has also been undertaken such as: artists who became 'stars' through

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[4] Since the election of the Conservative-led coalition government in May 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron has declared his hostility to multiculturalism and has increasingly adopted an anti-immigration stance, in the wake of the rise of UKIP. In November 2014, Cameron stated that he would seek to restrict the free movement of EU member nationals into the UK and since the election of a Conservative majority government in May 2015, the emphasis on the notion of shared 'British values' as an antidote to Islamic extremism signals a clear departure from any multiculturalist agenda. These developments took place after the current article's empirical research but the shifts had already started to occur in Britain in the post-2001 period, as indicated above.

transnational migration (Schade-Poulsen 1999; Mallet 2002a; Kiwan 2005); processes of transformation and creation (Cohen and Shiloah 1983; Winders 2006; Gibert 2008a) and second or third generation's musical practices (Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 1996; Lebrun 2007). However, in this article we investigate the artists' experiences and musical pleasure, by taking into account three main issues, which each play a role in the elaboration of artists themselves as subjects: (1) their expertise and preferences for various types of music; (2) the 'chance encounters' characterising their own trajectories and (3) their potential 'identity' claims.

Whilst some of the artists have a high level of expertise or interest in specific musical genres from North Africa (châabi, 'classical Arabic music', raï, etc.); for others, their training and experience lies, on the contrary, in one or several so-called 'western' musical genres (rock, pop, hard rock, hip hop, electro, jazz, etc.). However, this situation is more often than not affected by a 'burden of representation' (Tagg, 1988), that is the sum of external and internal pressures on the migrant-artist (or any migrant) to conform to certain representations and stereotypes regarding their 'country of origin'. For instance, London-based musician and DJ U-Cef explains that upon his arrival in the UK, he was confronted several times with remarks such as: "*Tu es arabe, tu peux pas faire de la batterie, tu dois jouer du 'oud*"[5]. Exotisation and orientalisation are specifically at stake in the case of North African and Middle Eastern creative arts in Europe. A case in point is the development and the success of the commercial category of 'world music' in particular, pushing migrant-artists into specific niches which respond to the music industry, cultural producers and audience expectations, as we shall see below .

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[5] Gibert's interview with U-Cef, London, 13/09/2007.

Life-histories of the artists have shown that the encounters made through their trajectories and networks in various countries strongly influence their work and their career[6]. As individuals 'on the move', they meet numerous other artists, themselves well-versed in varied musical genres and involved in many different artistic projects and networks. Meeting new musicians and finding opportunities to listen to them and/or to play with them in formal or informal settings allows them to "see how it sounds"[7] before developing potential collaborations further. Such encounters stimulate fresh artistic ideas and discoveries, as well as innovative performance settings, musician networks and gig opportunities. The development of both informal and formal networks which simultaneously reflect musicians' local connections and international perspectives often takes place for instance during jam sessions. These sessions are seen by the artists as an opportunity to discover new people and new artistic traditions, but also as a place for the formation of various bands whose musicians have met there[8]. Artistic life in vibrant multicultural metropolises such as London or Paris is also often mentioned by the artists as one of the sources of their artistic transformations over the years.

As Brubaker and Cooper have shown, whilst the term 'identity' is very often used as a 'category of practice' by various protagonists in the field (politicians, social actors, artists, etc.), it is not always such a useful 'category of analysis' (2000: 2-6). In order to avoid the risk of reification often implied by such use, we have adopted a

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[6] Examples of such trajectories have been theorized and developed in more detail elsewhere: See Meinhof, Kiwan and Gibert 2010; Kiwan and Meinhof 2011a; Gibert 2011.
[7] Informal discussions with various artists (Gibert's fieldwork).
[8] For research on jam sessions, see Cameron 1954; Becker 2004; Buscatto 2004. For a specific analysis of jam sessions as a hub in a transnational setting, see Gibert 2008b.

constructive approach which should permit us to envisage the processes and activities of "identification" and "social location" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 14-19), both from the perspective of the artists and from the perspective of the political and professional milieus which ascribe identities to musicians and music. This allows us to analyse both the internal and the external identification processes, and the interplay between them. Amongst the artists, some have developed public claims for a 'multicultural identity' as a way to challenge an assimilation that seeks to erase cultural specificities, or even, sometimes, as an attempt for recognition of cultural heritage, exhibiting with pride something which has been – and sometimes still is – denigrated. This triple configuration (expertise, trajectory, identity claims) profoundly influences the ways in which artists negotiate between pleasure and necessity when accepting a gig opportunity, collaborating with another artist, networking in the music industry, and so on.

Music Industry and Professional Strategies

When artists intend to make a living out of their music, financial constraints start to play an important role in their artistic choices. Artists' preferences must, to some extent, be articulated with the potential market, thus sometimes leading to artistic re-orientation. Therefore, these musicians become increasingly subject to the professional and commercial tendencies of the music industry.

Amongst such tendencies is the trend of 'World Music' and 'Fusion' music (Hutnyk 1997, 2000; Mallet 2002b; Connell & Gibson 2004; Arom and Constant-Martin 2006). Emerging at the end of the 1980s, the creation of the commercial/marketing category of 'world music' largely contributed to the reification

of a distinction between 'the west' and 'the rest' in music. This can be linked with yet another strategy arising out of the tension between socio-political context, commercial constraints and artistic practices: artistic recognition via exoticisation or in other terms, becoming known as a 'world', 'fusion' or 'métissage' artist. It could be argued that this process neutralises the alterity of the 'Other' whilst masterfully keeping that Other at a comfortable distance through his/her exclusion from the 'western' musical categories such as rock, pop, electro, jazz, 'classical', etc.[9] However, some of the artists have understood how they can play with this trend in instrumentalising exoticisation as a marketing strategy, thus embracing and potentially transforming the external musical identities ascribed to them. It is thus possible to invoke Spivak's notion of 'a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism' whereby artists voluntarily foreground an essentialist identity 'in a scrupulously visible political interest' (Spivak 1988: 205).

Musical *Métissage* in France

Bearing in mind the above socio-political and historical contexts, the next section will discuss some of the ways in which French-based musicians of North African background present their work and aesthetic goals within a context where 'ethnic identity labels' or markers abound: musique métissée, française, francophone, marocaine, algérienne, tunisienne, maghrébine, franco-maghrébine, arabe. The triple matrix of socio-political contexts, artistic choice and music industry constraints can be seen to influence how French-North African musicians make sense of their work and artistic ambitions. An example of how identity markers which are self-ascribed by musicians with a North African background can be perceived to be at odds with the socio-political context in which they live can be found in the case of the New Bled

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[9] For a useful discussion of the ambiguities of world music, see Veit Erlmann 1996.

Collective – a DJ collective and record label set up in 1998 in Paris. Between 1998 and 2012, New Bled brought together cultural promoters, DJs and MCs who shared an interest in what they themselves called 'les musiques urbaines métissées: Worldbeat - Electr'oriental – Electroworld**'** (www.newbled.com). 'Les musiques urbaines métissées' could be understood as music from a range of 'western' genres such as hip-hop, soul or electronic music which is fused with musical instrumentation, melodies, rhythms, samples and vocals from a non-French or non-Western context, such as raï or chaâbi music from North Africa.   In the first extract below, the New Bled director explains that the collective adopts a non-calculated 'fusion' approach to North African music 'made in France' – a move which is motivated by their own aesthetic concerns or musical pleasure:

> '*L'avantage de ce mouvement-là c'est que la démarche de fusion est naturelle, c'est pas une commande d'une maison de disques, c'est pas une maison de disques qui va nous dire « en ce moment le rap marche bien avec le raï donc on va faire une rencontre, un duo entre les deux donc voilà ».*'

However, in the second extract below, the New Bled director explains how such self-adopted fusion or *métissage* can be misunderstood in a socio-political context which foregrounds integration of perceived cultural difference:

> '*La difficulté c'est de dire que ces musiques-là ont leur place en France…qu'elles sont enracinées en terre de France…mais qu'en même temps,*

elles revendiquent totalement, clairement et sereinement leur appartenance, influence maghrébine [...] [10]

Another French-North African musician who could be described as facing similar dynamics in his work is the Franco-Tunisian oud player, Smadj, who with his duo group called DuOud, mixes what he himself calls *les musiques orientales* with break beats, jazz, metal guitar and electronic music. Smadj was born in Tunis into a pied noir Jewish family and lived there until the age of five when the family moved to France and from that point onwards, the family spent every summer in Tunis. Smadj's collaborator is Algerian-born oud player Mehdi Haddab. In a similar manner to Mohand, Smadj explains that the marrying of western and oriental musics is not a self-conscious or calculated attempt at fusion; rather it reflects the cultural trajectory and artistic choice of the musician(s) concerned. He himself studied jazz in Paris and was a sound engineer before starting to play the oud:

'C'est pas quelque chose de prémédité. C'est un jeu de, je dirais, de ce qui te constitue, qui sort de toi ce qui tu es....comme moi je suis quand même justement, vraiment entre, j'étais vraiment entre la Tunisie et l'occident et Paris, tu vois, ce qui sortait c'était un mélange de deux quoi ...ce qui sortait naturellement c'était plutôt des petites mélodes orientales sur des grooves occidentaux quoi, c'est un peu ça, ce qui sortait naturellement [...] Mais nous quand on joue 'Midnight Express' avec un oud, c'est 'Midnight Express', c'est- à-dire c'est un tube de techno, tu vois, c'est pas plus que ça, et pourtant joué avec cet instrument-là...,

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[10] Both extracts are taken from Kiwan's interview with the New Bled Collective, 11/12/2003. Other examples of French-based musicians who are involved in such fusion projects would include Cheikh Sidi Bémol; El-Gafla; Gaada Diwane de Béchar; Karim Ziad.

donc bon, c'est aussi pour ça qu'on le fait, c'est pour montrer que cet instrument, il est totalement vivant, qu'on peut l'électrifier, qu'on peut le jouer, qu'on peut, qu'il n' a pas une sonorité, qu'il ne faut pas le cantonner ou le mettre dans le ce petit champ de la musique traditionnelle ou ethnique ...' [11]

Whereas the above artists' experiences seem to indicate that the main stumbling blocks arise due to the French socio-political context, the Paris-based group *Binobin* (which in Arabic literally means 'in-between') suggest that the main challenge facing them is the reticence of the music industry. *Binobin* was founded by two Moroccan brothers, who moved to Paris from Agadir to pursue their university studies in the 1990s. They describe their music as 'Marock 'n Pop' or 'Gnawa Groove' (their vocals are in Darija – Moroccan Arabic with some French) and they emphasise the hybrid nature of their sound, which combines gnawa, chaâbi rhythms and instrumentation with pop, latino and jazz repertoires. As their website explains: 'Les Binobin ont enfin trouvé un ailleurs musical où ils n'auraient pas à choisir entre leurs cultures multiples. Où les bendirs et les karkabous n'auraient pas besoin de visas pour côtoyer guitares et saxophones.' [12] As Binobin's composer, vocalist, guitarist and bendir player explains:

'*quand on faisait que de la musique marocaine, c'était pas ça, on sentait pas qu'on s'exprimait à 100%, musique anglo-saxonne ou occidentale en général enfin, française, pas ça non plus, c'est pas nous, et du coup, j'allais dans ce sens-là, de trouver une nouvelle forme d'expression, donc c'est dans cet esprit-là que j'ai commencé à aller vers des musiques de métissage, fusion.*' [13]

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[11] Kiwan's interview with Smadj, 24/02/2004.
[12] See www.binobin.com . Accessed 09/11/2015.
[13] Kiwan's interview with *Binobin*, 21/07/2008.

Although the above extract demonstrates a clear aesthetic motivation, one could also argue that initially, when Binobin first came to Paris, they somehow felt obliged to adopt a strategy of fusion, or at least underline the 'Maghrebi' dimensions of their work, in order to distinguish themselves from other musicians:

> '*Sur les radios et tout ça, locales,* [in Morocco] *on écoutait bien sûr des radios francophones, marocaines francophones, ils passaient souvent les musiques plutôt anglo-saxonnes, donc les Beatles, les Eurythmics, en passant par tous les, Paul Simon, Simon and Garfunkel…et moi, c'est ça qui m'intéressait le plus. Et du coup, j'ai joué ces musiques-là. Donc, après c'était un peu la bossanova, après c'était la pop, la bossanova, le rock, le folk, [...] je suis arrivé en France, j'ai commencé à voir autrement les musiques de là-bas. [...] finalement quand on arrive ici et on joue un peu de ces musiques-là, [...] c'est pas ça qui nous distingue du reste...*[14]

Of course, whatever musical identity artists choose for themselves does not necessarily correspond to the identity(ies) which are ascribed to them by the music industry or cultural promoters. We have seen above how some French-North African musicians' self-adopted *métissage* is perceived as problematic within a wider framework of integration. It is perhaps this integration-led agenda which has meant that some North African artists are sometimes subsumed under the catch-all 'Francophone' or even 'French' label. This has on occasion, been the case for the *Orchestre national de Barbès* (ONB) – a Paris-based group comprised of Algerian, Moroccan and French musicians

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[14] Ibid.

who mix rock, raï, gnawa, chaâbi, reggae, alaoui, funk influences, using traditional Maghrebi instrumentation (such as derbouka, guembri, mandol with rock, jazz and ska instrumentation such as guitar, drums, saxophone, piano, flutes, banjos, synthesisers).[15]

The British Context: French, Francophone or North African Artists?

As there is no shared colonial history between the UK and Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the specific socio-political context leads the artists we met into situations which are quite different to those in the French context presented here. However, as we examine the UK-based artists' trajectories, we will show that there are some key points of commonality. For several artists born in France to North African parents, living in the UK has removed them from a French context where children and even grand-children of immigrants are not always fully recognised as French, despite being French citizens. For some artists, leaving France to come to the UK has emphasized the French dimension of their multiple identity. For some of them, however, moving to the UK brings far more than a 'simple refocus' on the French facet of their identity. It radically changes their life, both on a personal and on a professional level. A good example of such experience is the trajectory of Mighty Frero, a former hip-hop dancer born and raised in the south of France to Algerian parents. Mighty Frero arrived in London at the end of the 1980s, 'by chance' as he puts it[16], at the age of 17 years old. As he explains below, leaving France has given him the possibility of going beyond the sometimes fraught post-colonial context there. Through the perceptions brought by his British interlocutors, he has finally been able to articulate an Algerian parental origin and French citizenship in an unproblematic manner.

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[15] Kiwan's interview with ONB, 10/02/2004.

[16] During our various formal and informal conversations, this artist often emphasised the fact that he first came to the UK 'on holiday', 'to visit (his) sister who was living here', but as he felt very comfortable here and was not particularly happy with his life in France, he decided to stay in London.

*'Moi, je peux pas dire que je suis Algérien. J'suis Algérien, oui, dans l'âme, je suis Algérien dans… dans la coutume, dans le background, dans l'origine, tu vois, mais moi j'ai jamais habité en Algérie, je peux pas dire… 'ana djazahiri' [I am Algerian], c'est pas possible, je peux pas le dire. Enfin, quand je parle à des Rebeu ou à des Français, bien sûr je dis je suis Algérien, je dis pas… c'est vrai que j'ai jamais dit à qui que ce soit 'yes I'm French' (…) Bon, si, à certains Anglais ça m'est arrivé, mais c'est rare. A des Français je vais pas dire à un Français je suis Français, tu vois… Parce que je suis Français d'o-, de… de nationalité, mais je sais très bien que les Français me voient pas en tant que Français ! Eh ouais, il est là le problème ! Dès l'âge de 4 ans j'ai su que… j'étais pas considéré comme welcome, comme bienvenu. Donc, et c'est de là donc, mon exil aussi. C'est **la** raison, y a même pas d'autre raison pour laquelle je suis parti. (…) Quand je suis arrivé, j'ai eu l'impression que tout était nouveau. Tu sais les gens ils me souriaient dans la rue, je rentrais dans un magasin les gens me souriaient, tu vois c'était hallucinant les gens me disaient bonjour et tout, ils me regardaient « ah! vous êtes Français, waah !! », je leur disais je suis fran-, quand j'arrivais, ils me disaient « t'es d'où ? » je leur disais « je suis de France » « waah ! ».*[17]

Today this artist writes and performs francophone rap, and plays drums (derbuka, djumbe, congas) in different bands. Not only has he been able to combine work with various acts (Seeds of Creation, Fantazia, Natacha Atlas, Ali Slimani), playing North African music (raï, chaâbi, etc.) and his own hip hop music, but in addition, he has learned to play with expectations in order to secure more gigs as a drummer. Indeed,

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[17] Gibert's interview with Mighty Frero, London, 14/01/2008.

during the first years of his life in London, he feels that he was appreciated in bands playing any kind of 'latino music' as his physical appearance conformed to the British image of what a 'latino man' should be. Therefore, whilst this physical appearance was also partly the cause of the impossibility for him to be considered as 'fully French' in France, moving to another socio-political context changed outsiders' perspectives, thus moving him from the French undervalued category of 'postcolonial North African' to the valued British one of 'latino' musician.

Whilst for some artists 'finally becoming French' through their move to the UK is a relief, for others this arrival embroiled them in strained post-colonial French-North African relationships. 'Malik', an Algerian-born musician who arrived from Algeria in the mid-1990s due to the political situation explains:

'*Et petit à petit, tu deviens anglais, tu deviens franglais… Un Franglais, même pas un Algérien-Anglais, même pas, non, tu peux pas. (…) Tu deviens français automatiquement. Contre ton gré quoi c'est… You're Algerian ? Yes. Oh, you're… French speaker. Yes. Tu peux pas dire non. Tu peux pas dire non non non, on est un… another thing but we speak French and bla bla bli, colonialism and… et tout ça, tu peux pas !*

(…) T'as jamais vécu en France, t'as jamais vécu en Europe… j'ai vécu 24 ans en Algérie… Tu démarres avec un bagage… carrément différent de… de l'Ouest. T'arrives t'es fier… tu veux exposer tout ça tu… puis après tu te retrouves … non non non, on n'est pas intéressés de ça. Automatiquement tu optes pour ce que tu as comme… roue de secours quoi. [C'est-à-dire] la culture occidentale, tout ce qui est… toutes les influences !'[18]

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[18] Gibert's interview with Malik (anonymized name), London, 15/01/2008.

For artists like Malik, what they valued as their musical North African specificities are overlooked in their new surroundings, and, in order to find professional opportunities, these specificities have to be played down and mainly replaced by another facet of their expertise, that is what Malik calls '*la culture occidentale*'. Whilst this dimension is seen by the British music industry as fully corresponding to what North African musicians are (both unwittingly and through an overplaying of the notion of a North African 'francophonie'), it is not only seen as a life-line by the artists, but also as a loss of their musical richness. For artists such as Malik therefore, their musical career is often divided in two parallel paths: one in which they play 'western music' in paid gigs, and the other in which they develop their own musical desires and expertise – in his case, playing various Algerian string instruments (mandol, 'oud, etc.).

Some other artists have managed to adopt a third path which articulates a current local anchorage (Hackney, Ladbroke Grove, etc.), a (re)discovery of a 'North African musical heritage', and professional links within Europe and North Africa. The Hackney-based band Fantazia and some of the band members' life-stories are a case in point. Fantazia is an 8-piece band founded in the 1990s, and emerged out of the encounter of three Algerian-born musicians with rock-jazz-funk-techno backgrounds. They describe the period when they met as '*a turning point*'[19] where they were '*rediscovering their musical heritage/roots*'[20] yet deeply influenced by their previous

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[19] Mighty Frero talks about a similar process in terms of "musical maturity": "*the more you play, the more interested you become in music itself, and you realize that North African musics are a lot more complex in terms of rythms, intervals, etc., thus more interesting for an advanced musician. So you realize that actually, musically speaking, it is a lot stronger, a lot richer, and you think… so it's a musical effect, it's a musical maturity which makes you come back to it*" (Gibert's interview with Mighty Frero, London, 14/01/2008).

[20] Gibert's interviews with Karim and Yazid (*Fantazia*), both in London, 30/07/2007. See also Meinhof, Kiwan and Gibert 2010: 252-254; Gibert 2008a. Other examples of UK-based artists who have chosen

musical expertise as well as by their life in multicultural Hackney. Inviting British-born musicians to join them, they wanted to create a repertoire composed of tracks from multiple sources of inspiration (mainly jazz, rock, funk, various musical genres from North Africa, and 'classical Arabic music') [21] . In various contexts (written communication; presentations during concerts; applications for funding; lyrics and interviews), they stress their desire to articulate local cultural diversity (London/Hackney), Algerian / North African origin ('*roots*') of some of the musicians and artistic creation.

> '*Fantazia - 21st century roots music from Algeria, via Hackney, East London, UK. (...)Though deeply rooted in a variety of North African musical cultures, Mul Sheshe* [one of their albums] *is also very much a product of the vibrant cultural mix of East London (...) where the band live and work.* (…) *The music is being welcomed as a unique blend of ancient and modern, deeply rooted in a variety of North African traditions but very much realised in the East London of today, where the band live and work.*'

> '*Mul Sheshe is shaped by this spirit of cooperation and exchange, reflecting London's unique cultural climate and demonstrating the emergence of the distinct musical identity of the UK-based Algerian community. (...) Fantazia are a band with great commitment and spirit, with a strong belief that positive interaction between cultures can banish mistrust, work to prevent conflict and, of course, make for exciting music. (...) They have always been a multicultural band,*

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to mix jazz, rock, or funk with various North African styles may include Seddik Zebiri, MOMO, Abdelkader Saadoun, Natacha Atlas, Boujemaa/Gnawa UK.

[21] See their two albums: *The Lost Place*, 2000 (self production) and *Mul Sheshe,* 2005 (Harmonia Mundi distribution, 'World Village' label). Since 2011, four musicians of *Fantazia* have embarked in a new musical project, *El Andaluz,* a mix of Arabo-andalousian, Turkish, gnawa and chaâbi tunes (see https://www.facebook.com/El-Andaluz-147280585375740/; Accessed November 2015).

and in the aftermath of the July 2005 bombings in London and other recent events, they want to be, both in the UK and abroad, a living example of the way in which, in the 21st century, the traditions of an Islamic country can enrich, interact positively with and find a place within British culture. The ups and downs of their experiences have made them all the more determined to succeed in their aims.'[22]

Amongst Fantazia's founders is Yazid (Yaz), an Algerian-born musician. He explains his desire to practice new musical instruments and the influence of an audience response in the UK:

"Yazid : *Mon instrument c'est la guitare, en même temps j'ai le feeling Nord-Africain par* [là où j'ai grandi]. *(...) j'ai commencé à jouer comme ça des morceaux traditionnels et, j'ai écouté des oud players comme Anouar Brahem, Rabih Abou Khalid par exemple…*

M-P : *Et qu'est ce qui fait que (…) tu as eu envie de faire du oud ?*

Yazid : *c'est la curiosité des gens. (…) Ici même si tu es un bon guitariste, tu peux pas… c'est-à-dire y a beaucoup de guitaristes ici, beaucoup, tu peux pas être remarquable. Mais quand tu joues du oud c'est différent, c'est spécial c'est… inconnu. (…) J'ai fait une jam avec le oud de quelqu'un* [d'autre], *c'était pas à moi, mais les gens ont commencé à* [me demander] *: « ah, ah oui, c'est à toi ? », « Show me show me. What's that ? ah whaaa »*".[23]

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[22] Fantazia's myspace and www.fantaziamusic.com – Accessed 10/08/2010. Pages archived.
[23] Gibert's interview with Yazid, Fantazia, London, 30/07/2007. Yazid continues to work with multiple bands, trios and duos to develop what he calls a '*North African experiment*'. See www.fentazi.com.

So it is possible to argue that audience and event organisers' expectations and requests have to some extent influenced these artists' choices. However, rather than a single-minded opportunism, it is a way for several artists to reconcile personal pleasure and market opportunities:

> ' *J'ai dit pourquoi pas la darbouka ! Et puis c'était beau. Je jouais et j'ai réalisé que j'avais plus de travail avec ça qu'avec les congas, parce que dans le temps y'avait pas beaucoup de gens qui jouaient beaucoup de darbouka. Bon maintenant y'en a plein. Et… c'est bien, parce que plus les gens jouent, plus l'instrument est connu et d'autres musiciens veulent… veulent ce genre de sons. Et c'est grâce à ça que j'ai plus de travail* '(Karim)[24]

So here Karim's remarks resonate with those made by Binobin and highlight quite clearly the combined constraints and opportunities of musical pleasure, artistic/professional opportunities and ascribed musical identities which affect Francophone North African musicians in both France and the UK.

Concluding Remarks

This article has shown how there is an uneasy interplay in France and Britain between self-adopted and ascribed musical identities. We have seen how in France, self-adopted *métissage* by French-North African musicians can be misunderstood in a socio-political context which is defined by a universalist, integration-led agenda. At the same time, the labels which are ascribed to such musicians can be inappropriate – representing the *Orchestre national de Barbès* as a 'French' group is just one emblematic example of

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[24] Gibert's interview with Karim, Fantazia, London, 30/07/2007.

such dynamics and arguably, well-meaning temptations. In Britain, new 'identity opportunities' for francophone North Africans arise, yet also bring new challenges. Some might welcome their recognition as French artists in the UK while others reject what they consider to be a mistake made by the British musical industry ignoring the post-colonial power dimensions of such a categorisation. Yet others have managed to play these various cards at once by engaging within British public discourse, which until recently had been largely positive about multiculturalism. A comparison of the French and British contexts illustrates clearly the shifting balance between processes of recognition and *récupération*; or in other words, between a sort of acceptance of cultural complexity which exists on the artists' own terms and a triumphant hybridity which fails to take seriously the multiple and in-depth identifications of the musicians concerned.

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