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Bollymizwid and Bollyraï: Digital Mash-ups of Hindi, Tunisian, and Algerian Popular Music

Over the past five years, the circulation of popular Hindi film music in local and global media networks has illuminated the routes by which people access and perform cosmopolitanism. While scholars have noted the importance of Bollywood films in defining both local and translocal aesthetics, ideologies, and national culture (Dickey 1993; Ganti 2002; Gopalan 2002; Kaur and Sinha 2005; Larkin 2002 and 2008; Manuel 1993), little attention has been given to the ways in which these films are transformed in 'new media' interactions with other, nonlocal genres of popular media. In this paper, I will examine how Tunisian and Algerian forms of popular music engage with and reconfigure popular Indian films using YouTube and other video-sharing websites. I focus in particular on *Bollymizwid* and *Bollyraï* – a juxtaposition in music videos whereby the *mizwid* or *raï* songs are dubbed over the Hindi soundtrack of well-known scenes from Bollywood films. Calling into question the dynamics of production and consumption obtaining in popular music and dance forms, these digital manipulations, or 'mash-ups,' dislocate the authority of Bollywood, creating room for alternate subjectivities and political-economic currents to emerge.

Algerian raï and Tunisian mizwid can be noted for their similar social and historical trajectories among the milieux of North African musical cultures. Indeed, mizwid is often called the "Raï music of Tunisia" (Stapley 2006), pointing to a confluence of stylistic, formal, and ideological properties within these genres. Associated with anticolonial assertions of nationhood beginning in the 1950s, both raï and mizwid represent alternate forms of youth expression, and of resistance to both 'Islamist' and liberal secular currents in Algerian and Tunisian society (Gross et al. 2002; Langlois 1996; Mazouzi 2002; Schade-Poulsen 1999; Stapley 2006). In the

past five to ten years, Internet exchanges of mizwid and raï songs have increased the ease and speed with which music is shared and experimented upon. This is particularly important for Algerians and Tunisians living overseas, in France, Switzerland, or Belgium. With the advent of YouTube in 2005, it became possible to simply stream songs, instead of downloading them. Furthermore, YouTube allowed users to upload visual elements that supplemented the music. YouTube thus enabled raï and mizwid audiences sharing songs online to exchange with even greater speed, and to remix and reconfigure the original song, particularly by adding visual elements. That many of these music-mixers on YouTube choose to complement these popular songs with scenes from Bollywood films expresses a social configuration that transcends the urban and its underground, and extends its aesthetic and ideological connections transnationally. Dance sequences from well-known Bollywood films provide an enticing visual correlation to mizwid and raï, where performers rarely supply music videos, whether due to lack of capital or to social and religious taboos against dance and, more generally, against raï and mizwid as 'lascivious,' 'underground' genres. Moreover, producers of mash-up videos approach the matching of Bollywood dance to raï and mizwid as technical challenges that offer new aesthetic possibilities. For instance, the beat of the raï or mizwid song must correspond to that of the original film's song-and-dance sequence, so that the dancing accurately fits the music; selection and timing of both musical and visual elements are therefore of great importance in creating an impressive mash-up. The meaning of raï or mizwid and Hindi songs, however, need not be equivalent. Second, gender roles of raï and mizwid musicians are mapped onto actors within the Bollywood film sequences; women's and men's vocal parts are timed to dub precisely over female and male actors' (lip-synched) parts. In addition, despite the separate language groups from which the audio and visual materials are collected, raï and mizwid Arabic lyrics are dubbed

to match the lip-synching of Hindi-speaking actors, so as to present a seamless and well-integrated production. Finally, video mixers on YouTube often take pride in their creations, soliciting comments and positive feedback from viewers. Despite their free and public dissemination on YouTube, video producers express attachment to and ownership of mashups. In return, viewers and fellow mixers comment enthusiastically on the aesthetic and technical qualities of the videos, and provide encouragement for producers who choose to mix raï and mizwid with Bollywood dance scenes. Bollymizwid and Bollyraï thus are not mere adaptations that fit Bollywood into Algerian or Tunisian entertainment modes. Instead, video mixers constitute themselves in and engage with the medium of production, in the process re-imagining how "place" is felt in local urban and transnational communities.

While most studies of media and technology in cultural production have documented a discontinuity between producers and audiences (Ganti 2002; Ginsburg et al. 2002; Larkin 2002), in the case of Bollymizwid and Bollyraï, the processes of production and consumption intersect at multiple levels. Digital music mixers mediate this process, changing relations between consumers and producers. In mixing mizwid or raï songs with Bollywood film montages, for example, digital mixers are themselves both producers (on YouTube) and consumers (of both Bollywood, and raï or mizwid). Moreover, the ultimate consumer on YouTube accesses and experiences these videos at the interface between production and consumption, offsetting the alienation of capitalism. This is usually by virtue of her/his stronger connections to mash-up producers, whether through the social networking features of YouTube, or through regional, ethnic, or class identifications. Bollymizwid and Bollyraï mixers do not solely represent and objectify themselves as Tunisian or Algerian through mizwid and raï mash-ups. Rather, digital mixers articulate and transform their identity through encounters with Hindi popular film and its

music, and with consumers and fellow mixers. Bollymizwid and Bollyraï allow Tunisian and Algerian youth to conceive of themselves as engaged, highly cosmopolitan citizens, especially for those in diasporic communities in France, Belgium, or Switzerland. As such, they draw on a wide set of choices for entertainment that ultimately express an alternative to Western-dominated entertainment. Digital video mixes of Bollymizwid and Bollyraï thus cannot be abstracted as an expression of national identity alone, and instead point toward greater cosmopolitan networks. This form of cosmopolitanism uses the digital public sphere as its basis for defining selfhood, drawing significantly on the multiple interfaces and rearrangements of transnational popular song and dance forms. Bollyraï and Bollymizwid digital mixers assert their cosmopolitanism, especially vis-à-vis diasporic Algerians and Tunisians, through transnational connections to and manipulations of popular music and dance forms. Thus, more important than Bollywood's extensive incorporation into other national imaginaries and expressions is the way in which Algerian and Tunisian popular images and soundscapes are articulated to those of Bollywood. Engaging with translocal media, mash-up producers in Tunisia, Algeria, and the diaspora appropriate the imagery of Bollywood within the frame of raï or mizwid on YouTube so as to privilege Algerian and Tunisian conversations of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism within the dominant cultural discourse of Bollywood.

The consumption of Bollywood films is often considered an escapist immersion into the fantastical plots and narratives of middle- and upper-class lifestyles as depicted in cinema (Dickey 1993; Manuel 1993). This explanation of its ubiquity, however, fails to explain the popularity of film scenes once they cease to be part of the film and are reconstituted as music videos. That is, the original film's narrative and plot is fragmented and given new meaning as a mime for an unrelated piece of music. The choice to use famous scenes from popular Hindi

cinema in the production of mizwid and raï videos on YouTube strategically displays Tunisian and Algerian cosmopolitan identities, which at once animate and dislocate capitalistic and transnational political relationships. Bollymizwid and Bollyraï represent alternative circuits by which Tunisian and Algerian mash-up producers can engage with global media flows. By visualizing raï and mizwid with non-Western cinematic tropes, Algerian and Tunisian video producers provide a culturally accessible and legitimized package of popular music. The visual and the aural, culled from distinct popular music traditions, are amalgamated into an acceptable and pleasurable whole. The ultimate product corresponds with anticolonial and nationalist discourses, while simultaneously projecting a transnational cosmopolitanism.

Digital pastiche, however, may not be as dynamic or liberating as it purports to be. The visual material that producers use is collected from a limited and predictable stock of scenes from Bollywood films. Despite this constraint upon mash-ups, its dynamism is realized in the expansive permutations of both individual and 'Algerian,' 'Tunisian,' or 'French' expressions of self by virtue of the fact that it resists dominant forms of European and American imagery and sounds. While they may reiterate the dominance of Hindi popular film images and their accompanying 'privatized media empire[s]' (Ginsburg et al. 2002:3), they are re-enacted and transposed in the public access setting of video-sharing websites. YouTube, although itself a 'privatized media empire,' is a fertile platform for extra-capitalistic cultural production. Mash-ups, in effect, call into question the foundationally capitalistic idea of ownership and unidirectional production and consumption by virtue of their free distribution on YouTube, thereby dislocating the features of capitalism. Bollymizwid and Bollyraï represent emergent alternate public spheres that simultaneously operate within the bounds of multinational corporations (that of YouTube and Bollywood film companies) and work to erode private

ownership of media and forms of popular culture. By manipulating these media, mash-up producers dilute the imagery of a hegemonic Bollywood, and also of the Western superstructure of capitalism.

The production and dissemination of Bollyraï and Bollymizwid mashup videos on YouTube point toward a resignification of popular images within the genres of raï and mizwid. Yet there is also a resignification of sound in its contextualization on the Internet as a fact of digital materiality. Indeed, the juxtaposition of visual and aural elements that are culled from distinct domains of cultural production suggests a re-evaluation of aesthetic, ideological, and political-economic hegemonies. As an extra-economic and grassroots activity, digital mixing on YouTube represents a significant challenge to both commercial and state-run media, while paradoxically situating itself in the frame of a multinational corporation. While the subversive potential or actuality of music-mixing on YouTube is dubious, mash-ups signal new configurations of domination. In addition, the technological agency of digital music mixers points toward their politicized involvement in a counter-public sphere. Significantly, this cultural phenomenon is mirrored in the content and history of raï and mizwid as alternative social spheres of expression within French colonial society, and later, within nationalized regimes. Thus, Bollymizwid and Bollyraï videos on YouTube are elaborations of popular and underground expression within the dominant calculus of capitalistic media and their associated imagery, indicating alternate subjectivities and social relations within the digital public sphere.

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