

“The Text Must Remain the Same”: History, Collective Memory, and Sung Poetry in Morocco

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*I*t was about 3:00 a.m. when the performance of “Kharbusha” began. As the vocalists took turns singing verses imbued with traditional lore, they recounted images of proud cavaliers and beautiful horses, battles, saints, voyages, historical figures, nature, passion, desire, and the agony of love. Alternating between close call-and-response, unison cries, and solo singing over a fast galloping rhythm, the verses followed one another in a whirling motion accompanied by the riffs of the viola.

“Araw l-khayl a t̄ali t̄ali a ba ya ba iḥsan awnu a rasi maḥadru l-lamat l-yum” (Bring the horses! Come to me, father! Oh God have mercy on me! The banner-bearers did not come today).¹ As the verses turned to the images of horses and cavaliers, the male guests began dancing among themselves while crowding around the female performers; unlike the female guests, who danced sensually in small groups among themselves, the men mimicked galloping and horse riding. The performance of “Kharbusha” had taken on a mesmerizing quality.

“Shti ‘Kharbusha?’” (did you see “Kharbusha?”) the lead vocalist asked me as we sat down at a table. The performance had been halted by the hostess of the wedding party who, concerned by the excessive excitement “Kharbusha” had created, had asked another group to go on to cool off the temperature of the celebration. While they performed an Egyptian pop song for the guests, now composedly seated at their tables, I asked the musicians: “is it always like this?” Hafida stared at me with her piercing and knowing eyes as she nodded her head up and down.

“Kharbusha”—the name of the female character who personifies a legendary Moroccan heroine—is the title of one of the most celebrated poems of the *‘aiṭa* (lit. cry or call). This genre of sung poetry, practiced along the Moroccan Atlantic Plains and in their adjacent regions, has traditionally been a favorite

among the population of these areas, and is an essential repertoire at wedding parties, private gatherings, celebrations honoring the birth of a saint, or at performances in public spaces. Along with these traditional contexts of performance, new venues for the *ʿaiṭa* were opened up by the massive rural-to-urban movement of the population that began in the 1930s, together with accelerating urbanization; particularly between the late 1950s and the 1970s, the *ʿaiṭa* could be heard in the cabarets of cities like Casablanca, on popular radio broadcasts, and on commercial recordings. Ever since the official incorporation of the *ʿaiṭa* into the Moroccan heritage—a process that began in the early 1980s and culminated in the first decade of the twenty-first century—the genre is also performed at festivals, on television broadcasts, in hotels, and in other folkloric or tourist settings. Today, with the advent of the Internet, the *ʿaiṭa* can be heard on YouTube or on websites dedicated to the genre.

Despite its undeniable popularity, the association of the *ʿaiṭa* with professional female singer-dancers, *shikhat* (lit. female leaders, sing. *shikha*), was cause for the genre to be marginally acknowledged and more often dismissed for its supposedly licentious and unrefined qualities, first by French colonial and Moroccan scholars in the first part of the twentieth century (Prosper 1931; al-Idris 1935; Chottin 1939) and then, after Independence (1956), by Moroccan cultural politics that favored a culture associated with the imperial cities of the North and with the urban elites. It was not until the 1980s, when a group of Moroccan intellectuals and academics proposed a new approach to traditional culture as a living element of Moroccan culture and life, that a new horizon began to open up for the *ʿaiṭa* (Ciucci 2010). Since the early 1990s, scholarly literature relating to the *ʿaiṭa* has focused on the linguistic treatment of a repertory of verses (Abdeljamil 1993), on the performative role(s) and the social status of the *shikhat* (Kapchan 1996; Soum Pouyalet 2007), on the *ʿaiṭa* as a historical object (Bouhmid 1992, 1995; Raggoug 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Bahraoui 2002), on the socio-historical trajectory of the genre (Najmi 2007), and on the complex and changing relationship between the *ʿaiṭa* and the *shikhat* (Ciucci 2008). Furthermore, general musical analyses of the *ʿaiṭa* can be found in works dedicated to Moroccan musics and arts (among others, Ibn ʿAbd al-Jalil 1977, 1983, 1996; Aydoun 1995; Aguila and Mokhtar 2000). All these different focuses have offered insights about the *ʿaiṭa*.

Crucial insights on the *ʿaiṭa* can be gained, as well, through a formal analysis of its poetry anchored in ethnography, through what Steven Caton refers to as “ethnography of poetry” (1990). In this article I focus on such analysis, which has been overlooked in the scholarly literature on the *ʿaiṭa*. My aim is to understand a key aesthetic requirement of “Kharbusha”—the idea that its text should remain the “same” across different renderings—and to ground it in a social and political reality. This task involves considering how “Kharbusha” is crafted in accordance

with a musico-poetic practice, and exploring what allows the poem to last. It is in this context that I will examine the role of intertextuality, and how it allows for the poem to feel the same on different occasions, by analyzing excerpts from three versions of “Kharbusha” as performed by the group of the Ouled Ben Aguida.

Before delving into the discussion, it is necessary to explain how I will engage with music in this article. In “Hearing the Music of the Middle East” Stephen Blum reminds us that one can “scarcely overemphasize the significance, for musicians of the Middle East and neighboring regions, of poetry” (2001:10). Blum’s statement is quite pertinent to Morocco, where hearing the *‘aiṭa* means, first and foremost, hearing a poetic text.² This is not to say that melody and rhythm—which for the *shikhat* function as mnemonic aids—are unimportant, but rather that these two elements are indivisible from the text. This is especially true for rhythm, which, as the following statement illustrates, is crucial to the proper expression of the text.

If we change the rhythmic cycle, it is as if we change the text . . . we can add something on the *tārīja* (small single-skin clay goblet-shaped hand-drum) or on the *darbuqa* (large single-skin goblet-shaped hand-drum) so as to fill it in, but you always go with the basic rhythm. (Personal communication, Moustapha Houkaki, 6 March 2004, Safi)

Terminology may also help our understanding of local concepts and notions about music. Whereas the Ouled Ben Aguida will consistently use the terms *iqā’* and *mizan* to refer to rhythm, their occasional use of *musiqa* (music) needs to be understood as a relatively recent adoption brought about by their conservatory training and their interaction with musicians practicing other genres or styles and with people involved in the industry of music (promoters, managers, recording engineers, and so forth). In conversations among themselves and with other professionals of the *‘aiṭa*, however, the Ouled Ben Aguida use traditional terms in which melody and text cannot be disentangled: *lāḥn*, which can mean song, tune, melody, dialect, allusion, or linguistic fault; *nəghma*, meaning melody, sound, tune, or song; *ghunna*, meaning melody or song, and also used to indicate a more musical recitation of the Quran; or *ghna*, meaning song or singing.

In this context, it is also important to consider the fact that the role of the male instrumentalists of the *‘aiṭa* is secondary—they perform sitting on chairs behind the *shikhat*, who are standing facing the audience. This is not to say that the instrumental accompaniment to the singing is not worthy of detailed analysis, but rather that in contrast to a music tradition like that of the Gnawa in Morocco, where an instrument such as the *guimbri* is regarded as a central voice (Fuson 2009; Sum 2010), in the *‘aiṭa* the musical gestures of the instrumentalists are secondary to those of the *shikhat* and thus not as vital to “hearing the *‘aiṭa*.”

This lack of centrality is most apparent in musical analyses that, by not taking into consideration the poetic text of the *ʿaiṭa*, have not provided insights into the genre or specific songs (see Aydoun 1995; Aguila and Zagzoule 2000).

In describing and transcribing three excerpts of “Kharbusha,” my aim is thus to illustrate how melody and rhythm support the verses. When it is relevant to the discussion, I also discuss the interaction between the *kamanja* (Western viola) and the voice of the *shikhat*. Such analysis of the last section of “Kharbusha” will establish how melody and rhythm amplify the verses focusing on the galloping of the horses and create intertextual relations with other poems of the *ʿaiṭa* and with another genre closely associated with the *ʿaiṭa*.

Performers and audiences generally articulate their experience of “Kharbusha” in relation to its effect, which they invariably locate in its historical significance. In their view, “Kharbusha” is the “witness of that time” (*shahād la dak z-zman*), a sort of oral archive that needs to be set between the late nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century in order to be—or to act like—the “mother of that time” (*umm dak z-zman*).³ By situating “Kharbusha” in the past and by emphasizing the importance for the poem to reflect a time period, performers also assert the need for the text (*klam* or *naṣṣ*) to “remain the same” (*ibqa kif huwa*) and, in some instances, for the text to be “repaired” (*murammam*).⁴ This is how Bouchaib, *kamanja* player and male leader of the troupe of the Ouled Ben Aguida, commented on a verse of a poem of the *ʿaiṭa*:

It reminds me of Hajja l-Hammounia when she sings *l-awd l-dhām wādi tlat bih l-iyam f-l-karwila khadam* (destiny has forsaken the black horse that found itself pulling the cart again). I told her that the cart did not exist at the time of the *ʿaiṭa* and that the verse should be eliminated; it doesn’t belong to that poem. It’s just like eating a plate of couscous that has a lot of salt; you can’t eat it! (Personal communication, Bouchaib Benschlih, 6 March 2004, Safi)

The notion of an unchanging text has been analyzed in relation to the discourse that Moroccan male intellectuals and specialists advanced to re-valorize the *ʿaiṭa* and to officially incorporate it into the Moroccan heritage. Its decline, they argued, had been caused by the fact that during the Protectorate (1912–56) the French created brothels where soldiers could be entertained by the *shikhat*. For these male intellectuals and specialists, the *ʿaiṭa* became a means through which they could validate their moral worth and eventually their authority. To remove the *ʿaiṭa* from the voices of the *shikhat* and publish a final written form of the texts became, at least for a number of these specialists, crucial.

This situation [i.e., oral transmission] has caused either the mix-up (*khalt*) or loss (*ḍayā*) of the texts. It’s time that we document the original texts (*al-nuṣūṣ al-aṣliya*) by collecting them from the mouths of their holders (*afwāhu aṣḥābihā*) so as to investigate and publish them in their final form (*ṣiḡhathun nihāya*). (Raggoug 2000a:18)

I have argued the idea of a fixed text meant limiting poetic variations (*taḍilat*) and errors (*aghlat*) and, ultimately, controlling the interpretative freedom and the verbal authority of the shikhat (Ciucci 2010).

In the present article, however, my purpose is to find out why a particular group of musicians with whom I have been affiliated since 2001, the Ouled Ben Aguida, conceives of different performances of “Kharbusha” as unchanging despite variables arising from the dynamics of performance practices. To this end, I explore the seeming discrepancy between discourses about “Kharbusha” and its performance, and what this discrepancy may tell us about why these performers—and by extension the audiences who hire them and whose expectations the musicians must meet—do not perceive change.

Because “Kharbusha,” like other *qaṣidas* (odes) of the ‘aiṭa, is considered to be embedded in history, I will, through a formal analysis of this poem, explore the role of the ‘aiṭa in expressing a history that is critical to the communal memory, identity, and consciousness of the population of the Atlantic Plains. In this context, perceptions of the unchangeability of “Kharbusha,” rather than reflecting the fixity of the poem *per se*, indicate how it allows for the participants to invoke and reenact a vision of history and of the past on each occasion of performance. The continuity of “Kharbusha,” therefore, appears to depend upon the conservation of memory/history through constant updating; the medium remains intelligible to each generation while the message remains the same through generations.

I will examine three excerpts of “Kharbusha” as performed by the group of the Ouled Ben Aguida at a marriage celebration I attended in the coastal town of Safi, 12 July 2003. My aims are to analyze how the historical context to which the audience relates becomes an instrument through which the interpreters voice the poem; how intertextuality allows for “Kharbusha” to feel the same despite difference; and the role of melody and rhythm in supporting or creating intertextuality while holding participants together as they transcend time.

Whereas intertextuality (the relationship of a text to other texts) usually concerns a variety of relations among different texts, in this paper I also consider each written and recorded version of “Kharbusha” as an individual text, and thus examine the relations between three of such texts. In doing so I focus on the relationship between two meanings of the word text: (1) *klam* or *naṣṣ*, considered to be invariable; and (2) a written document of a performance, or of a version prepared by the musicians. This approach is particularly important if we recognize the durability (and in this case the sameness) of “Kharbusha” emerging from the intertextual relationships that link these cognate texts (cf. Bauman 2004:1). Furthermore, I analyze relationships between “Kharbusha” and other poems of the ‘aiṭa, and of another repertoire that is inherently associated with the ‘aiṭa.

My choice to explore the notion of sameness through intertextuality is dictated by the following considerations. The first is that rather than viewing the wedding version of “Kharbusha” as unique, I am interested in analyzing it as jointly produced with earlier texts. This is not to say that creativity is absent from the wedding version, but rather that to understand what musicians mean when they state that “the text does not change,” (*naṣṣ ma tghairsh*) one needs to focus on the way in which the wedding version develops, comments upon, or echoes previous texts.⁵

The second consideration is that similarly to a number of sung poetry traditions (among others, Sowayan 1985; Finnegan 1988; Caton 1990; Feld 1990), the principles of the oral formulaic theory of Parry and Lord may not be easily applied to “Kharbusha.” For one thing, its text is not solely dependent on the occasion of performance, and it involves composition prior to performance. This is best exemplified in the refrains of “Kharbusha” that, from one performance to the next, remain so similar that they will not to be considered in this discussion. For another, word-for-word memorization plays a central role. In fact, whereas Lord—also acknowledging that for the singer the song cannot be changed—explains the idea of fixity as the byproduct of an understanding of song centered on the stability of the skeleton of narrative and in which wording is not included ([1960] 2000:99), I suggest that the stability of “Kharbusha,” which lacks a linear narrative, centers on its wording: that is, its lines.⁶ Hence, to examine the relationship between texts of “Kharbusha” one needs to focus on the lines and to establish links between the different elements of the story. Single lines, after all, are at the center of any discussion on the *‘aiṭa* and thus of “Kharbusha”; lines are listened to, recognized as belonging to a specific poem, rehearsed, reviewed, judged as to whether or not they are correct, and polished.⁷

The following statements by members of the Ouled Ben Aguida are meant to illustrate some of the points noted above:

A text (*klam*) is so ingrained in me that I sing it as I sleep. The next day, when I get up, I ask Bouchaïb to listen to whether or not I have learned the *‘aiṭa* well enough, if this is the way I should interpret it. And so I start to sing once again in front of him until he tells me that my interpretation is correct (*ṣhiṣa*). (Personal communication, Hafida Hasnaouia, 10 July 2004, Safi)

Each *shikh* must teach the *‘aiṭa* to another. Texts (*nṣuṣ*) are usually learned during gatherings, evenings, and rehearsals held with the old and experienced musicians. (Personal communication, Bouchaïb Benshlih, 6 March 2004, Safi)

Through an examination of the intertextual relations between performances of “Kharbusha,” this case study aims to offer insights about the ways in which the poem unfolds from one performance to the next and, in turn, allows us to (re)consider the agency of the *shikhat* in shaping a poetic discourse. Following

Tanoukhi's critique of the description of the storyteller and the illiterate mind as a "passive, unselective vehicle of accumulated memories, the product of an act of unconstrained remembering" (2003:135), I propose that the shikhat employ their memory strategically and that "Kharbusha" is the product of a historical memory that reconstructs the past meaningfully. In this context, the interpretation of the eroticism of the poem as subversive and as emerging in performance (Kapchan 1996; Soum-Pouyalet 2007) needs to be re-examined as historically intrinsic to the poem, the genre, and its aesthetics.

History and "Kharbusha"

To ground "Kharbusha," as well as my analysis, in a social and political reality it is important to understand the relationship between this poem and history. As already discussed by Moroccan researchers and a number of specialists on Morocco (Bouhmid 1992, 1995; Kapchan 1996; Raggoug 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Bahraoui 2002; Najmi 2007; Soum-Pouyalet 2007), the character of Kharbusha embodies the legendary figure of Hadda or Houidda, a celebrated female poet of the dissident Ouled Zid tribe.⁸ The poet—who is said to have been imprisoned and then killed because she defiantly sang against the powerful governor Si 'Aissa Ben 'Omar l-'Abdi who ruled the region of Safi between 1879 and 1914—is considered a heroic figure, "the symbol of struggle embodying the tribe" (*al-ramz al-niḍāl fi shakl qabila*) (Raggoug 2001:143). The value of "Kharbusha," therefore, lies in its heroic ethos. The poem, which culminates with the image of the running of Arabian horses, is said to derive from the oral epic cycles of the Beni Hilal—the Bedouin tribe that settled in North Africa in the eleventh century—and the figure of Kharbusha is considered analogous to other Hilalian warrior-heroines such as Jazya.⁹ More importantly, the story of Kharbusha cannot be disentangled from that of the rural population of the Atlantic Plains who struggled under Si 'Aissa Ben 'Omar l-'Abdi and colonialism, and against the exploitation and the marginalization they experienced in the post-protectorate period.

The history and the uneven development of the Atlantic Plains—weighed down by a political and administrative structure characterized by corruption, economic instability, and an inadequate infrastructure—fostered tension and disparity between urban and rural populations. The latter came to be marginalized in many of the official historical accounts, including their role in Moroccan Independence and in the formation of a national culture. In this context, the poem should be read as an attempt to exercise what Bourdieu defines as "symbolic power,"¹⁰ able to transform the view of the world. By proposing that "Kharbusha" allows the rural populations of the Atlantic Plains to carve out their own place in the history of colonial and post-colonial Morocco, I see this article

as an extension of the work on intertextuality carried out by William Hanks and other postcolonial scholars.

“Kharbusha”: An Intertextual Analysis

In defining intertextuality William Hanks writes:

Texts may be linked to one another by concrete shared features, for instance by reference to each other, by amplification (where one text elaborates on the other), by contradiction, or by reinforcement. They may also be related by common membership in a single genre within a given literary tradition. Concrete intertextual relations often take the form of transposition of segments of one into another structure. The transposed element is necessarily modified as it is integrated into the new structure, and may or may not retain its recognizability as having originated from without (2000:111).

My analysis of “Kharbusha” compares excerpts from the 2003 wedding performance, the written version that the Ouled Ben Aguida compiled, and a well-known commercial recording from 1989 by the same ensemble (l-Houcine and the Ouled Ben Aguida 1989). I do not regard the written version compiled by the musicians as the original or definitive version, but rather as a map in which the musicians indicated their vision of “Kharbusha” (i.e., the lines that the Ouled Ben Aguida identify as the building blocks of “Kharbusha”). Although disorienting at first, this map invites us to renounce to our idea(s) of fixity, sameness, or change, in order to set off on a different listening journey.¹¹

Because the written version comprises 53 lines while the wedding version I recorded has 170, I will examine the links between the wedding version and the commercial recording of 1989, informed by performances of “Kharbusha” and other poems of the *‘aiṭa* commercially recorded by Fatna Bent l-Houcine and the Ouled Ben Aguida between the late 1960s and 2000. This analysis will not take into consideration the refrains, which are practically unchanging from one performance to the next.

The structure of “Kharbusha,” that of a vernacular *qaṣida*, is characterized by a succession of sections (*fuṣūl*, sing. *faṣl* or *‘atub*, sing. *‘atba*) with an irregular number of lines. Each section is separated by a refrain (*ḥaṭṭa*). Syllabic poetic meter and rhyme may vary from one stanza or one line to the next. The essential feature of this poem is that it consists of a collection of lines comprising semantic, or meaning-bearing, material that performers refer to as *ḥabbat* (lit. grains, units, sing. *ḥabba*), and expressive interjections that can be replaced without affecting the overall semantic meaning and that are referred to as *mādd* (lit. extension) (see also Najmi 2007). The line below illustrates the structure described above; the *ḥabba*—which describes the tomb of the saint Si Bou Adhem located in the medina of Safi—is distinguished from the *mādd* with bold fonts.

a wlidi wlidi la ba safi
wa ma twil mar'id
ḥatta ana shrajemu mən l-ḥdid

Hey my son, my son! **Regarding [the shrine of] the father of Safi**
 And **is neither tall nor spacious**
 I too, **its windows [are made] from iron.**¹²

The brevity of the ḥəbbat, defined as independent poetic units, only allows sketching an image through the use of a terse language and a fragmentary syntax characteristic of the everyday language of the populations of the countryside. The ḥəbbat, which are taught, learned, memorized, and internalized with the aid of a small tārija, are the critical elements in the repertory of performers. Although the ḥəbbat generally have an internal rhyme, this is not a prerequisite, since rhyming is secondary to meaning and should be understood more in terms of similarity of sound rather than as following set rules.

Table 1 illustrates the overall poetic and musical plan of “Kharbusha” as performed at the wedding celebration. The structure I have summarized in the table follows that which Hafida and ‘Aicha, the lead and the co-lead female vocalists of the Ouled Ben Aguida, described in the following terms:

A [qaṣida of the] ‘aiṭa begins, or if we can say, its opening is the *ṭbā’* [the first line, the imprint or mark of the poem], and also the *frash* [the bed or the mattress, the first section]; in other words we prepare the bed where we are going to place the imprint (*ghadi tlak l-frash li ghadi ṭbā’*). So, you first place the imprint on the ‘aiṭa, after that there are the other sections that follow one another until we arrive at the last one, the *sussa*, which ends with the final line (*tamma*), or the end of the [qaṣida of the] ‘aiṭa. (Personal communications, Hafida Hasnaouia and ‘Aicha Noumi, 12 July 2003, Safi).

Table 1. Musical and poetic plan of “Kharbusha.”

Sections	Vocal Melody	Meter
I	Melody based on tetrachord I: g-aṣ-bḥ-c	40-beat rhythmic cycle
Refrain	First half of the melody based on tetrachord I and then on the tetrachord II: g-aḥ-bḥ-c	Series of beats variously grouped
II	Melody based on tetrachord II	19-beat rhythmic cycle
Refrain	Melody based on tetrachord II	Series of beats variously grouped
III	Melody based on tetrachord II	19-beat rhythmic cycle
IV	Melody for the first three stanzas is based on tetrachord II, the rest of the stanzas are based on tetrachord I	10-beat rhythmic cycle
Refrain	Melody based on tetrachord I	Series of beats variously grouped
V	Series of short melodies alternating between the two tetrachords	Compound duple (12/8)

Table 2 shows the first section of “Kharbusha” as performed at the wedding. The ḥabbat from the three versions are indicated as follows:

Regular font: present in all the three versions

Bold: also present in the 1989 recording

Italic: present in the wedding version only

This first section sets the poem in its historical context with the images of horses, of cavaliers, and of the rural governor, and introduces the key themes of tribal and/or regional identity, separation from the loved one or the beloved, and betrayal.

Table 2. Section I of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.”

Line number	Text	Translation
1	kharbusha zərwala l-krayda ila mshit a nnulli araw l-khayl	Kharbusha, the blue-eyed one, the one with the curly hair If I'm gone I will come back bring the horses
2	mnin nta wa mnin ana srut l-ḥṣba saru l-yum	where are you from and where am I from the cavaliers of the Ḥṣba tribe have left today
3	rasi l-ʾədu u l-kas ḥlu <i>mwalḥək a qaidi</i> maidum ḥal	my head is my enemy and the glass is sweet I'm used to you my governor nothing lasts for ever
4	<i>ʾabda jibu zin</i>	ʾAbda bring the beauty
5	rasi l-ʾədu wa kas ḥlu duk l-ḥṣba saru l-yum	my head is my enemy and the glass is sweet those Ḥṣba cavaliers have left today
6	zwaq iṭir <i>kulshi bi ṭaiba</i> maidum ḥal	the mask comes off everything is done with kindness nothing lasts forever
7	<i>daba ra l-khayl tjdəb</i> <i>mula dāwati yəḍʾi māk</i>	the horses are dancing [as though in trance] the master of curses and blessings prays for you
8	ʾəqlək dāba iji	be reasonable, soon he'll come back to you
9	<i>mwalḥək a qaidi</i> kassi frid	I'm used to you my governor my glass is lonely

Table 3 instead shows a line-by-line comparison of the first section of the three versions of “Kharbusha.”¹³ Many of the ḥabbat, or at times fragments of ḥabbat, that are not present in the version compiled by the performers are transposed from one performance to the next. This transposition supports the central themes of “Kharbusha” and concretely links the performances. The ḥabba of line 4, the two of line 7, and the first one of line 9—not present in the other versions—elaborate on the central images of the poem.

While the ḥabba of line 4 invokes the ʾAbda region, establishing a con-

Table 3. Comparison of the three versions of Section I of “Kharbusha.”

Line Number	Wedding Performance	Commercial Recording (1989)	Written Version
1	<i>kharbusha zərwała</i> <i>l-krayda</i> <i>ila mshit nwalli</i> <i>araw l-khayl</i>	<i>kharbusha zərwała</i> <i>l-krayda</i> <i>l-frəq l-hbib</i>	<i>l-həmra kharbusha</i> <i>zərwała l-krayda</i> <i>ila mshit nwalli</i> <i>maidum həl</i>
2	<i>mnin nta wa mnin ana</i> <i>srut l-həşba saru l-yum</i>	<i>rasi l-ədu</i> <i>‘ad l-khayl</i>	<i>mnin nta u mnin ana</i> <i>ila mshit nwalli</i> <i>jibu l-khayl</i>
3	<i>rasi l-ədu u l-kas hlū</i> <i>mwalḥək a qaidi</i> <i>maidum həl</i>	<i>zwaq itir</i> <i>şbər dir ‘əqlək daba tjik</i>	
4	<i>‘abda jibu zin</i>	<i>l-frəq şib</i> <i>kassi frid</i>	
5	<i>rasi l-ədu wa kas hlū</i> <i>duk l-həşba saru l-yum</i>	<i>kharbusha zərwała l-krayda</i> <i>srut l-‘badi saru l-yum</i>	
6	<i>zwaq itir</i> <i>kulshi bi taiba</i> <i>maidum həl</i>	<i>zman iluḥ</i> <i>şbər dir ‘əqlək daba tjik</i>	
7	<i>daba ra l-khayl tjdəb</i> <i>mula dəwati yədi miak</i>		
8	<i>‘əqlək daba iji</i>		
9	<i>mwalḥək a qaidi</i> <i>kassi frid</i>		

nection to the history of Kharbusha, the first part of line 7 uses the image of horses. A performance of the *‘aiṭa* is traditionally associated with the imagery of the *fantasia* (pseudo-French) or *tburida* (from *barud*, gun powder; to fire muzzle-loading rifles). This event, which takes place in a long field encircled by the spectators, consists of the free running of the Arabian horses that are abruptly stopped as they reach the edge of the field. It is at this moment that the riders shoot their long rifles into the air. An important part of the event, however, is also the display of the horses that are adorned with beautifully decorated saddles. The cavaliers take great pride in their horses that symbolize their honor. The association between the shikhat and horses is reiterated in lyrics, in the images used for album covers, in concert promotions, in the course of performance (Abdeljamil 1993; Kapchan 1996; Najmi 2007; Soum-Pouyalet 2007), and by the same performers.

The historical and erotic themes in “Kharbusha,” as well as in other poems of the *‘aiṭa*, are thus in constant dialogue and often inseparable. The second part of line 7 refers to the traditional image of someone who has the power to curse and bless—*dāwa* is a form of cursing as well as blessing in Morocco—and to the

state of being under his protection.¹⁴ This segment is contrasted with yet another traditional image, *zwaq iṭir* on line 6, an indexical reference to the proverb *zwaq iṭir wākha ikun mən l-qazdir* (the makeup comes off even if it's made of metal), which refers to a bad person who has a pleasant look but whose true nature will soon be discovered. Betrayal, central to the story of “Kharbusha” and to line 6, is in contradiction with the image of protection presented instead in line 7.

The first segment of line 9 uses the figure of a rural governor that, even as it embodies the beloved whose absence is expressed by the image of the lonely glass (*kassi frid*), also connects to the historical dimension of the poem.

“Kharbusha” is one of the *qaṣīdas* of the *ḥaṣḥawi* style of the *ʿaiṭa*. This style, associated with the city of Safi and the Aʿbda region, is said to embody peasant life, and, as such, its musical essence is described as harsh or coarse (*ḥarsh*). To perform the sound of the *ʿAbda* it is desirable for the voice of the *shikhat* to be high (*ṭalʿ, ʿali*), full chest (*qwi*), hoarse (*mjəbbəḥ*), and hard (*qaṣeḥ*), and for the voice to open up (*ṭalqih*) since a *shikha* must release her voice when singing “the cry” rather than restraining it. Long vocal lines characterize the style. These lines, difficult to sustain for a single singer, are typically exchanged between two or more co-lead singers or through close antiphonal singing (see Ciucci forthcoming).

The instrumentation consists of *kamanja*, an array of percussion (*bendir*, a large circular frame drum; *darbuqa*; and *tārīja*), *ʿud*, and *lotar* (a three- or four-string, semi-spiked plucked lute). The *kamanja*—whose two higher strings, traditionally made of gut, are vigorously played with an oversized bow—is the most prominent among the string instruments. It accompanies the voice by playing an embellished version of the vocal melody and/or riffs enchainé one after the other. The *lotar*, when present, also follows the vocal melody or plays riffs behind the voice of the *shikhat*. The *ʿud*, when present, plays a secondary role as a subtle counterpoint to the vocal melody. The percussion instruments are prominent and are characterized by the deep and buzzing sound of the *bendirs* and, to a lesser extent, by the articulation of the low-pitched and high-pitched strokes of the *darbuqa*.

The transcription that follows presents the first line of the first section of “Kharbusha” as sung by Hafida in the 2003 wedding performance. As shown in Table I, the vocal melody of this section is based on a tetrachord that the instrumentalists describe as a *bayati* on G ($g-a\flat-b\flat-c$). The Ouled Ben Aguida, in fact, state that “Kharbusha” is performed on two forms of *bayati*—*bayati ʿla sol* and *bayati ʿla la bəmol*. However, since the range of the melody does not change, and G continues to be the final, what the musicians emphasize by designating the second tetrachord as *bayati* on $A\flat$ is the change in the second scale degree rather than a change in final ($g-a\flat-b\flat-c$).

It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the use or the introduction of the Eastern Arab system of melodic modes (*maqams*) in the *ʿaiṭa*, particularly since

the paucity of documentation on the genre can only allow for suppositions. This said, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of the Eastern Arab School has caused a number of melodic modes of the Maghreb (*ṭubu*, sing. *ṭab'*) to be replaced by maqams, and the two terms to be used interchangeably by musicians (Guettat 2000:375). Nowadays in Morocco, maqams are not limited to the *'aiṭa*, but are part of the musical vocabulary of a number of popular and traditional musics.¹⁵ In the case of the *'aiṭa*, however, and more specifically of “Kharbusha,” the term maqam seems to describe a tetrachord (*jins*, pl. *ajnas*) rather than a mode. This usage reminds us how the definition of maqam as the addition of tetrachords is a feature of the art music of the Levant and the Maghreb that is not found in popular and rural musical traditions whose melodic ambitus, like that of “Kharbusha,” remains narrow (cf. Poché 2002:813).

More importantly, the fact that the Ouled Ben Aguida are aware of the difference between maqam and *ṭab'*—the latter indeed characterized by a distinctive tonal system and nomenclature (see Guettat 2000)—attests to the active knowledge that these musicians have of these systems, and on their ability to adapt them to their own needs. In this context, Boujma's statement that the bayati in Morocco is hard and that it cannot be found elsewhere (*l-bayati fi-l-maghreb qaṣeh, makainsh shi dula*) attests to such active knowledge and adaptation. “Hard,” in this sense, refers to a tuning that is high so as to suit the voices of the shikhat (*msawiya dyal shikhawiya ṭalā*); to a modal system that, although different from that of the Arab East, is not diatonic; and to an intonation that, although differences are slight, needs to be adjusted from one singer to another. Thus, when asserting that the difference between the ways in which a bayati is played lies in the skill of a musician and in the goal of playing (*kain fārḡ fi ṣ-ṣanaā u f-l-maḡṣud dyal l-azf*), both Bouchaib and Boujma acknowledge that changes in the intonation and in the melodic formulae in a performance using bayati are inseparable from what a musician produces. In other words, that the bayati of “Kharbusha” is not the same bayati used in another musical tradition.

Lastly, it is interesting to point out that although the Ouled Ben Aguida affirm that the *'aiṭa* does not use *ṭab'* (literally nature, temper, mark, impression)—a term which as a noun indicates the concept of mode in the Maghreb—they use the verb form *ṭbā* (literally to imprint, to impress, to mark). In fact, among themselves and in the company of other professionals of the *'aiṭa*, it suffices for the verb *ṭab'* to be followed by the title of a poem for the maqam, or the *jins* associated with it, to be recalled.

We say *ṭbā kharbusha* and everyone knows we will perform in bayati. But if we are among non-professionals of the *'aiṭa*, then we will have to say bayati or maqam bayati. (Personal communications, Bouchaib Benschli and Boujma Hilal, 15 June 2011, Safi)

Figure 1. The first line of section I of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.” Text in parentheses is not audible in the recording.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system includes the Voice staff (treble clef, 4/8 time), the Kamanja staff (bass clef, 4/8 time), and the Percussion staff (bass clef, 4/8 time). The tempo is marked as 138. The lyrics are: "ya khar-bu - sha ya zar-wal(a) ya lkray-da a bti". The second system continues the lyrics: "(f)lla mshit a nwal-ly a a ya bti a-raw lkhayl zid u zid". The third system shows the continuation of the percussion part.

The transcription shows the ambitus of the vocal melody, with an ascending-descending stepwise motion, encompassing the bayati tetrachord on G (although using *f* as a lower neighbor for the final cadence on *g*). The notation reflects what the musicians describe as bayati on G, although the final is closer to a *g*♯. Furthermore, because singers’ intonation varies, pitches may be sung slightly higher or lower from the way they appear on this transcription. Sung against the long 40-beat rhythmic cycle—that like most Moroccan rhythms displays a duple and triple subdivision of the beats—the line is characterized by a structure marked by a number of small phrases cadencing/pausing on beats 4, 16, 24, 32, and 36. In the transcription, the main low-pitched strokes (DUM) of the darbuqa are represented by notes with the stems up, and the high-pitched strokes (TAK) that occur between each DUM are represented by notes with the stems down. This structure, which is closely followed by all the other singers, is essential for the placement of the *ḥabbat* that are generally inserted at the beginning and toward the ending of the line. The use of extension (*madd*) is quite prominent in all the lines of this section. Generally placed in between the *ḥabbat*, the *madd* intervenes and interweaves with the semantic material by commenting, personalizing, and engendering the poetic discourse. The use of a diminutive and endearing form

such as “my daughter” (*bti*), for example, permeates this line with an unequivocal feminine quality.

Other characteristics of this and of the other lines include the melodic and rhythmic tag inserted at the end, beats 38–40, that uses a stock phrase (*zid u zid*) whose end rhyme on the sound of *i* is used by all the other lines to unify the sound of the end rhyme for the entire section; and the melody’s divergence in beats 8 to 16 from its characteristic syncopation by closely following the rhythmic pattern punctuated by the *darbuqa*, the *bendirs*, and the handclaps of the *shikhat*.

If on the one hand the transcription illustrates the crucial role of the rhythmic cycle in the proper expression of the text, and the relationship between text and rhythm, on the other hand it also confirms the supporting role of the *kamanja* that plays off the vocal melody by closely following it, embellishing it, or filling the vocal pauses.

Table 4. Section IV of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.”

Line Number	Text	Translation
1	<i>ila kunti ‘abdi shərrəjli ‘awdi nəhdi ‘abdi mən ‘andi</i>	If you are the ‘Abadi saddle my horse for me I’ll offer myself as your slave
2	<i>raḍia b-l-niəktub u dhab rkəb bkit fraq l-ḥbab</i>	I accept my destiny and the golden stirrup I’ve cried for the separation from the loved ones
3	<i>nəbki ma nšbər nškut ma nəjbər shəlla nətfəkər</i>	I cry, I have no patience I become quiet, I don’t heal I think too much
4	<i>fi ləmma dial l-ḥbab l-baqi mulana</i>	In the gathering of the loved ones our Lord is everlasting
5	<i>kanti mərrakshi mən ḥawz asfi l-‘abadi ma ikhfashi</i>	If you were from Marrakech, from the outskirts of Safi you can’t miss the one from ‘Abda
6	<i>moulay lurik ḍalm ‘ib əlik ‘gəbtək l-mmələk</i>	Moulay Lurik (the patron saint of Safi) shame on your oppressors, you’re destined to go back to your people
7	<i>mul kaṭ-kaṭ jmə’ l-bnet ṭriq ṭwaṭat</i>	The owner of the 4 x 4 gathers the girls the road is smooth

In contrast to section I, in the seven lines of section IV presented in Table 4 we no longer find the *ḥəbbat* from the version compiled by the performers, although we continue to find *ḥəbbat* which are present in the 1989 commercial recording of “Kharbusha” (mentioned above in Table 2). In addition, we now also find *ḥəbbat* which are present in a recording from the early 1970s (l-Houcine, Jelloul, and l-Hallaoui 197?), and also *ḥəbbat* present in a 1988 recording of another poem of the *‘aiṭa* (l-Houcine and the Ouled Ben Aguida 1988). The *ḥəbbat* from the different versions are indicated as follows:

Bold: also present in the 1989 recording
Italic: present in the wedding version only
Bold italic: also present in the 1970s recording
Bold underlined: also present in the 1988 recording

In this section ‘Aicha’s singing is lightly punctuated by a 10-beat rhythmic cycle marked by the handclapping of the other shikhat and, to a certain extent, by the percussion. The kamanja, too, is only heard playing a quiet trill during the pause on beat 6. Performing in a rubato style, using a static and repetitive melody that centers on $a\frac{1}{2}$ and g with an almost inaudible accompaniment, ‘Aicha performs the line in a speech-like fashion, much like a *parlando*. She sings the line with a high, full chest and slightly hoarse voice—embodying the aesthetics of the genre and of this particular style. As she carefully enunciates each word, ‘Aicha’s voice envelops the audience, affecting the mood of the celebration. The intimate dialogue is briefly interrupted by an instrumental tag on beats 6–10 of the second 10-beat rhythmic cycle, which is performed in unison with a marked rhythm at a slightly slower tempo.

In the first line ‘Aicha utilizes a ḥabba from another poem whose images are closely related to “Kharbusha:” ‘Abda, the region of Kharbusha, and the horses. This ḥabba, in other words, appears to belong to the poem, although I had never

Figure 2. First line of section IV of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.”

$\text{♩} = 120$
rubato
 Voice
 ya ba - ba (i)la kun - ti ‘ab - di ya shər - rəj - li ‘aw - di
 Kamanja
 Percussion
 $\text{♩} = 120$
 a wli - di ra nəh - di ‘ab - di mən ‘m - di
rit.
rit.

heard it in any of the other performances I attended or listened to. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the singer rearranges and connects the ḥabba that follows, and how she elaborates on the image of the horse and on that of her destiny. Like a horse, the woman accepts the golden stirrup, an erotic image linked to a central theme of the poem,¹⁶ while at the same time she cries for her separation from her loved ones. The theme of separation, another essential element of a poem that expresses “the cry” of a poetess who was imprisoned, may also be connected to marriage, and in particular to the bride, who, as a wife, will be separated from her family, the “loved ones,” as she moves in with the family of her husband. The biography of Kharbusha, therefore, is organically linked with that of the bride and with that of the performer, who, during an interview, stated the following:

There’s a ḥabba that Fatna [Bent l-Houcine] sings that reminds me of my former husband: *hada l-məktub rani bkit ‘la khallit l-ḥbab* (this is my destiny, I cried for leaving the loved ones). (Personal communication, ‘Aicha Noumi, 7 March 2004, Safi)

The ḥabba in line 2 therefore elaborates on the semantic material of a previous ḥabba as it is connected to the preceding line through the image of the “golden stirrup” and thus the horse.

If, as stated at the beginning of this article, the eroticism (*ghəzl* or *baḍad*) of the poem needs to be understood as intrinsic to the aesthetics of the ‘aiṭa, the insertion of the “golden stirrup” by ‘Aicha illustrates not only how the shikhat can engender and eroticize the text in performance, but also what kind of eroticism is appreciated and praised by audiences. Sensory pleasure is in fact obtained by seizing on the description of the body of the beloved, and on other forms of sexual allusions through metaphors or masked descriptions that stimulate the imagination. The type of engenderment and eroticization that ‘Aicha displays in this line is highly valued because of its poetic eloquence, and it is associated with competency, mastery and consequently authority. Shikhat who do not display the same type of poetic sophistication, and who exaggerate the bodily dimensions of a performance, are scorned because of their lack of expertise. “*Kainin shikhat u la shwikhat*” (there are shikhat and little shikhat) is how the late shikha Latifa Makhloufia expressed such a distinction to me. Makhloufia had employed the diminutive form, *shwikhat*, to refer to shikhat who are regarded as poor interpreters; a distinction that was based on the degree of knowledge of the texts and, subsequently, their manipulation.

The ḥabba in line 4—which refers to a *mussem* (*lamma*), the annual celebration honoring the birthday of a local saint held at his shrine—is present in an earlier recording of “Kharbusha” and also connected to those in lines 3, 5, and 6, as they also appear, although in a slightly different order, in “*Kəbbət l-khayl ‘la l-khayl*” (The battle of the horses), another poem of the ‘aiṭa. During an in-

terview conducted with Hafida she commented on the possible interpolation of the ḥəbbat from other poems into “Kharbusha” in the following way:

“Kharbusha” brings the text (*katjib l-klam*) from “Kabbat l-khayl la l-khayl” because they correspond (*muṭabqin*), because their text is the same (*klamhum bḥal bḥal*). For example, you can find *la fi lamma dial l-ḥbab l-baqi mulana* in both. (Personal communication, Hafida Hasnaouia, 20 July 2009, Rabat)

Although Hafida’s response on the sameness of the texts partly refers to a number of ḥəbbat that these poems actually share, it significantly points to the fact that she considers their texts to be the same because both poems are known to deal with the history of the Atlantic Plains.

Finally, the ḥəbba of line 7 elaborates on the theme of the voyage—which is also present throughout “Kharbusha”—and on this ḥəbba present in yet another commercial recording of “Kharbusha” of 1992 (l-Houcine and the Ouled Ben Aguida 1992).

*mul cent vingt-quatre rəfda l-bnet triq twaṭat.*¹⁷

The owner of the [Fiat] 124 carries the girls. The road is smooth.

while the ḥəbba in line 7 of the wedding performance contains:

*mul kaṭ-kaṭ jmə l-bnet triq twaṭat.*¹⁸

The owner of the 4 x 4 gathers the girls. The road is smooth.

The change in the type of car should be read as a quotation, as another way to refer to and link two performances of “Kharbusha,” particularly since, to my knowledge, neither ḥəbbat appears in other poems of the *aiṭa*.

The final section of “Kharbusha” presents an interesting case of intertextuality that, this time, is also signaled by two distinct musical moments. Thus, whereas in the previous sections melody and rhythm supported and even helped order the intertextual relationships among different texts of “Kharbusha,” in this final section my analysis will illustrate the role of melody and rhythm in creating intertextual relations with another genre and in amplifying the affect of verses connected with the riding of the horses. This section is also used at the end of another *qaṣida* of the *aiṭa*.

As Table 5 shows, lines 1–2 of section V present quite different semantic material that draws from a repertoire considered to be the domain of women. Performed by all-female ensembles accompanying themselves on an array of percussion (Baldassarre 1999; Ciucci 2005), the repertoire of these ensembles consists of short poems where the first line, which introduces the unchanging rhythm and vocal melody, functions as a refrain and as an imprint for the structure of the poem. The verses, which are characteristically short and sung in an antiphonal fashion, are made up of stock phrases, proverbs, and traditional expressions, which are put together as a collage and adapted by the female in-

Table 5. Lines from section V of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.”

Line Number	Text	Translation
1	<i>mshit l-dik rmila</i> <i>mshina l-dik rmila (x2)</i>	I went to the land of the sand We went to the land of the sand
2	<i>sgit l-ma b-staila (x2)</i>	I fetched the water with the little bucket
3	<i>nkubb əla nhudi shəlla u kulla bkit</i>	I poured water over my breast and cried
4	<u>araw l-khayl</u> shawər əliya <u>əd l-khayl</u>	Bring the horses They talked about me The horses have come back
5	<u>araw l-khayl</u> <u>ihsan əwnək</u> <u>maħadru l-lamat l-yum</u>	Bring the horses God have mercy on me The banner-bearers did not come today

terpreters in the course of performance. The ḥəbbat from the different versions are indicated as follows:

Bold: also present in the 1989 recording

Italic: present in the wedding version only

Broken Underline: also present in the version compiled by the musicians

Lines 1–2 are similar to the feminine repertoire I have just described. These short verses, sung over a compound duple rhythm stressing beats 3, 5, 8, and 11, and characterized by an unchanging rhythm, close antiphony between the soloist and the chorus, and a repetitive vocal melody that centers on the note *g*, send the listeners back to yet another familiar universe. It is important to remember that, similarly to other shikhat, both Hafida and ‘Aicha grew up listening to these ensembles and started their careers singing with similar troupes. It is for this reason that I hypothesize that the ‘aiṭa, and in this case “Kharbusha,” may include a “simple” repertoire such as this one. This may be particularly true if one considers how the last section of the long poems of the ‘aiṭa is always performed in compound duple meter like many poems from the feminine repertoire; is characterized by an emphasis on rhythm as it represents the dance section of this and other qaṣidas; and is distinguished by simple and shorter melodies, as well as by a text that may be described as formulaic.

The change in melody in line 3 (measure 5 in Figure 3) signals the upcoming climactic moment in performance. In line 4 the ḥəbbat are semantically fragmented and make extensive use of “unintelligibles” (cf. Jacobs 2007) such as *a* or *ya*, infusing the text with a series of cries whose sound and affect are central to the performance. As the lead shikha launches the high-pitched cry on *b* (marked by the symbol $\sqrt{\quad}$ in Fig.3) the others join in unison while the percussionists perform the pressing galloping (*idərdk*) rhythm. The feeling of riding,

Figure 3. Lines 1- 4 of the final section of the wedding version of “Kharbusha.”

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system includes a vocal line (Voice) and two percussion lines (Darbuqa and Bendirs). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 138. The time signature is 12/8. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The score is divided into sections labeled 'solo' and 'chorus'. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1: Tempo ♩ = 138. Solo section. Lyrics: o mshit ldik rmi - la o mshi - na ldik rmi o la.

System 2: Chorus section. Lyrics: sgit lma bsta - ila o sgit lma bsta - o ila.

System 3: Chorus section. Lyrics: nkubb 'la nhu - di shol - la u kul - la bkit a - raw.

and thus of suspension, is amplified by the absence of the DUM and by a vocal melody that, by moving back and forth between the b_b and a_b , builds tension as it delays a sense of finality.¹⁹ Resolution arrives as the melody reaches the final g and as the DUM is sounded while the shikhat intone “the horses have come back” (*ad l-khayl*) at measure 7. The cries, the lack of DUM, and the increasingly faster galloping rhythm unequivocally evoke the familiar images of the fantasia or tburīḍa.

Finally, if line 1 is linked to another central theme of “Kharbusha,” that of voyage, the second and third lines are connected to the feminine dimension of

the poem. The fetching and the pouring of water over her breasts, recounted in the first person, inevitably call to mind the images of women at the *ḥammam* (public steam bath) and, at the same time, the bride's day of the bath (*nḥar l-ḥammam*), when she goes to the bath accompanied by some women of her family to be washed and purified before her wedding day. It is difficult here to ignore the intertextual relation between the short verses of the feminine poems and the long and circular verses that follow, as they reflect and refer to one another while juxtaposing images of women.

Sameness and Sound Recording

- A: (Hafida): The text is the same, the words that are in that one [the 1989 commercial recording] are in this one [the wedding version] (*l-klam li fi ḥadik fi ḥadi*). There's no improvisation (*ma kainsh irtəjal*), it's only that at the wedding we sing about the people who are present (*ghir f-l 'ars ghanni 'la n-nəs li kainin*).
- Q: (Alessandra): I see, like: *l-guerraoui ḥlāf b-ṭrab šini 'la biaḍa ḥəṭta iradha shalada* (I-Guerraoui swears by Trab Sini to crush Biada like a salad)?²⁰
- A: Yes, that's it! (Personal communications, Hafida Hasnaouia, Bouchaib Benshlih, and Boujma Hilal, 6 June 2011, Safi)

This statement, in which the members of the Ouled Ben Aguida compare the wedding version to that of an earlier and rather popular commercial recording, obliges us to reflect on the role of sound recording in the apprenticeship and the transmission of the *aiṭa*. As already noted by Schuyler for the *melḥun* in Morocco (1974), during the twentieth century the traditional form of musical training such as the one described by the 80-year old shikha 'Ida below—in which an apprentice was under the constant guidance of a master for a prolonged time for him/her to learn the trade—gradually changed.

- Q: How did you get started with the *aiṭa*?
- A: I met Dabaaji through a neighbor and after working with him for 3 days I went back home. But shortly after he came back looking for me. It was 1953; I stayed with him until he died [1997].
- Q: And before then?
- A: I sang with other women in the region. (Personal communication, 'Ida Imami, 5 July 2002, Safi)

Whereas for art music and musical traditions associated with it, the rise of conservatory and other forms of institutional training came to replace the traditional mode of learning (see el Shawan 1980, Racy 2003, Davis 2004, and others for similar changes across the Middle East), for genres like the *aiṭa*, commercial recordings, and particularly audiocassettes, began to serve as an alternative teaching device.

Q: How did you get started with the *‘aiṭa*?

A: With a tape of Fatna Bent l-Houcine, with Si Jelloul (*tārija* and voice) and Salah as-Samāili (*kamanja* and voice). I listened to it many times. It was from this cassette that I learned the most. I loved all the songs and I imitated (*qəllədtu*) everything that Fatna said in the texts. (Personal communication, ‘Aicha Noumi, 7 March 2004, Safi)

Although listening to sound recordings constituted a form of learning—‘Aicha’s skills, like those of the other members of the Ouled Ben Aguida, developed through a combination of formal and informal contacts with other musicians of the *ḥaṣbawi* style of the *‘aiṭa* (of which Safi was the undisputed center), some conservatory training (only for the male instrumentalists), informal evenings among peer musicians in which they listened to praise and criticisms and, more importantly, performing on and off together for 30 years—the initial mode of apprenticeship described by ‘Aicha and shared by a younger generation of *shikhat* who came into the profession in the early 1970s may have affected the notion of sameness for performers.

Cassettes, in fact, gave performers the opportunity to repeatedly listen to a song until they were able to emulate its fixed rendition rather than a rendition that, if learned in the company of a master, would have probably been more flexible. Although actual performing remained an essential mode of learning, a young *shikha*—who would generally join a professional troupe as a dancer and back-up vocalist before moving on to become a co-lead and eventually a lead *shikha*—started her professional path after having interiorized a fixed performance before actually finding her voice (*ṣawt dyaḥla*)—her way (*tāriqa dyaḥla*) of interpreting the *‘aiṭa*—before being recognized as a master (*təbbə*).

Recording may have also influenced the notion of sameness among audiences. The proliferation of commercial recordings of the *‘aiṭa* attests to the existence of a musical market sustained by the record-buying public (see Odeon 193?). Although commercial recordings made by European companies such as Odeon, Pathé, and Gramophone in 78 rpm format began to appear in the late 1920s, it was after Independence that Morocco witnessed the growth of a local industry, based in Casablanca. The profusion of small record companies together with the development of the cheaper 45 rpm format caused the large-scale production of 45s from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, a production interrupted when cassette recordings drove the discs off the market in the mid-1970s (Schuyler 1979:97). As the mobile and increasingly affordable technology associated with cassettes brought the *‘aiṭa* into many Moroccan households,²¹ it is possible that, similarly to the performers, the public also began to interiorize, after repeated listening, a fixed version. Whether or not the success of a particular cassette, such as the 1989 recording of “Kharbusha” that is now also available as a CD and on the internet, encouraged the performers

to attempt to replicate its success at live performances is a topic that requires further investigation.

Conclusion

The inclusiveness and heterogeneity of “Kharbusha,” which allows for its text to be bounded, unified, and coherent, may be best understood by considering the *‘aiṭa* as a “complex genre.”²² This concept, coined by Bakhtin to refer to the ability of a genre to include primary or simple genres (1982), is particularly apt for a locally constructed classification system that questions the idea of genre as static, homogeneous, and as lacking relations with other texts and prior discourse. In Morocco, in fact, the term *‘aiṭa* is used for different forms of sung poetry in vernacular Arabic performed in styles that are identified according to location, musical characteristics, and poetic repertoire. As a genre, therefore, the *‘aiṭa* may be defined as a historically specific convention and ideal according to which the shikhat compose discourse and the audience receives it (cf. Hanks 2000:135).

A central feature of “Kharbusha,” and thus of the *‘aiṭa*, is the interpolation of scenes, characters, images, symbols, and sounds entrenched in the history, the culture, and the land of the Atlantic Plains. These elements, woven in and out of the narrative thread, are essential as one moves away in time from the original context of the poem. An experienced shikha—one who knows and who can sense her audience—will inject the necessary interpolations to clarify old expressions, forgotten practices, vanishing institutions as well as persons and places. Such information has its own value and special interest, and is no less appealing than the plot. The interpolations and the lines of the narrative support one another to fulfill the general function of socialization, enculturation, and entertainment. The task of a shikha is thus not only to keep a historical record of past events, but to also perpetuate the memory of all sorts of useful knowledge, especially traditional values and customs (cf. Sowan 1996:50–3).

The notion of an unchanging text is inseparable from the view of “Kharbusha” as history, an oral history that is critical for the collective memory of a rural population historically acknowledged with a mixture of shame and aversion by the urban bourgeoisie. This is where the symbolic power of “Kharbusha” lies: in the relation between its musico-poetic structure and the broader social and cultural world in which it is produced. “Kharbusha,” and thus the *‘aiṭa*, should be viewed as a form of cultural capital, a new form of discourse, a possibility of action, and a medium of political debate.²³ As the poem unfolds line after line, “Kharbusha” becomes a sort of historical theater describing the events of the past as if they are occurring—largely in the present tense—allowing for the audience to experience and to participate through sounds, cries, rhythms, and

gestures of the shikhat that infuse the atmosphere of the wedding celebration. This is how “Kharbusha,” despite its fixity, continues to remain open to innovation, manipulation, and ultimately change.

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Notes

1. In my rendering of the language I have used two transliteration systems: one to represent the written standard Arabic used in the literature I consulted, and another for the colloquial Arabic used in everyday life in Morocco. In transliterating standard Arabic I have followed the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*. Transliterations have not been used for proper names, place names, and terms that have accepted English forms. In transliterating Moroccan Arabic (*darīja*) I have adopted the *IJMES* system for consonants. For vowels, however, I have diverged from this system, since in Moroccan Arabic long vowels are hardly audible. In order to meet Moroccan pronunciation I have employed full vowels a, u, and i, and short vowels ə, o, and e. Since so many French transliterations have become standard, place names, tribes, and proper names are written as they have been conventionally transliterated in Morocco. I have, however, kept the letter *ayn* (ʾ) in all these transliterations. Lastly, spellings used by other authors are retained when I reference or quote their publications. Hyphens are used to indicate the articulation between nouns and their affixes, such as the definite article *al-* in standard Arabic, which in Moroccan Arabic is pronounced as *l-* and transcribed as such. Furthermore, in both standard and Moroccan Arabic, when a word begins with a consonant made with the front part of the tongue, it is assimilated, doubling the sound of the first consonant of the word it accompanies. I have transcribed such assimilations as they are pronounced: for example *z-zit* (the oil). Finally, when the definitive article is prefixed to proper names and pronounced as such, I have capitalized the first letter of the name in the transcription, as in *l-Houcine*. Unless otherwise noted, the plurals are marked with an “s.”

2. The *melhun* is another musical tradition in Morocco in which musicians and non-musicians recognize the predominance of words over music (Schuyler 1974:37).

3. In Morocco the terms *zman* (lit. time) and *bəkri* (lit. early) are used to refer to the past. Unlike *bəkri* (for a full discussion of the different uses of this term in reference to the past see Eickelman 1977), *zman* is first and foremost used to refer to a past that is marked by historical events or personal vicissitudes.

4. Although *klam* may be translated as “speech,” “language,” “saying,” or “word,” this is the term that the performers of the *‘aiṭa* traditionally use to refer to the text of a poem (i.e., *klam dyaḷ* “Kharbusha,” the text of “Kharbusha”). However, because nowadays the male instrumentalists may have received some training in conservatories or have been in contact with musicians performing genres like the *melḥun* or *al-ala*—whose poetic repertoire is based on written texts—musicians are aware of the standard Arabic term *naṣṣ* (lit. text) and use *klam* and *naṣṣ* interchangeably when discussing the text of a poem.

5. Although Lord does not discuss intertextuality *per se*, he acknowledges that the “concept of the relationship between ‘songs’ (performances of the same specific or generic song) is closer to the truth than the concept of an ‘original’ and ‘variants’” ([1960] 2000:101).

6. See Jirari’s analysis of the *qaṣidas* in the Maghreb (1969) and Dagmar Riedel’s analysis of a pre-Islamic *qaṣida*—considered as the model of all the other *qaṣidas* (2002)—and their focus on the single lines of the poems. Riedel in particular defends such focus by arguing that rather than answering to what happens next in the story, the plot answers to what is this within the story (2002:7).

7. See Sawayan (2003), and also Gregor Schoeler on the broad consensus in Arabic studies on how the attempts by Zwettler and Monroe to apply the Parry and Lord theory to other *qaṣidas* have failed (2006:7–110).

8. In his discussion on Houidda based on a document drafted by Ahmed Sbihi—a budget inspector in Safi during the Protectorate—Mohammed Darif cites these two verses that Sbihi asserted were sung by Houidda (2000:330):

nhuḍa nhuḍa ḥætta l-bukshur

nhuḍa nhuḍa ḥætta l-bab si qaddur

Get up, get up, until bukshur (the well in the residence of Si ‘Aissa)

Get up, get up, until the door of Si Qaddur (the servant of Si ‘Aissa)

It is difficult, however, to determine whether or not Houidda actually sang these verses, since Sbihi himself states that he had collected them from the population of Safi. For a similar claim see also Raggoug 2000a, and for a critical response on the difficulty to establish authorship for the poems of the *‘aiṭa* see Najmi 2007.

9. On these oral epic cycles see Slyomovics (1987) and Reynolds (1995).

10. “Power to constitute the given by stating it, to show forth and gain credence, to confirm or transform the world view and, through it, action on the world, and hence the world itself, quasi-magical power which makes it possible to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained by (physical or economic) force, thanks to its specific mobilization effect, is only exerted insofar as it is recognized . . . Symbolic power, a subordinate power—i.e., misrecognizable, transfigured, and legitimated—is a transformed form of the other forms of power” (1979:82–83).

11. For an insightful discussion on the bifocal vision and voice of a map drawn for her by a Moroccan, see Pandolfo (1997).

12. From this point on, the poetic analysis I carry out is, first and foremost, informed by the countless discussions I had with the Ouled Ben Aguida and with Hassan Najmi (with whom I conducted much of my fieldwork). In addition, the analysis is also informed by conversations with Moroccans and by relevant literature on the poetic convention of Arabic poetry germane to the *‘aiṭa*.

13. The *ḥəbbat* that I have marked as present in all the three versions but which do not appear in this comparison, are found elsewhere in the poem.

14. See also Kapchan (1996:81–83).

15. Philip Schuyler, for example, remarked that although the bayati theoretically does not occur in North Africa, one of the *qašidas* of the melhun repertory he analyzed was in bayati (1974:100).

16. In the context of the wedding the image of the stirrup (*rkab*), which traditionally refers to the sultan as well as to being in his service (cf. Deny 1995:528–9), refers to the groom. The verb *rkab*, from which *rkab* derives, means to mount. In Moroccan Arabic the verb may be also used to refer to lovemaking and the woman, in this context, may be referred to as *'awda* (mare).

17. *Cent vingt-quatre*, 124 in French, refers to the rather popular FIAT 124 car produced in Italy between 1966 and 1974 and assembled by the Moroccan car factory SOMACA (Société Marocaine de Constructions Automobiles) in Casablanca.

18. *kaš-kaš* is the Moroccan Arabic phonological adaptation of the French term *quatre-quatre* which refers to the four-by-four vehicles.

19. My thanks to Timothy Fuson for pointing this out to me.

20. Trab Sini is one of the oldest neighborhoods of Safi whose name, Chinese earth, derives from its yellow soil used in Morocco to shine silver and other metals. Built in the south littoral by the French in the 1920s, Trab Sini was intended to house port and railroad workers. Trab Sini is where the first anti-colonial resistance began in Safi. Biada is also another neighborhood in Safi. In this *ħabba*, present in the wedding version, the name of the family who hosted the wedding, Guerraoui, is the sole addition to the *ħabba* also present in the early 1970s recording of “Kharbusha”: *ħlāf b-ħrab šini 'la biaða ħatta iradħa šhalada*.

21. In the 1970s the price for a cassette of the *aiða*, the cheapest on the market, was of 5 Moroccan dirhams (about fifty cents). The price for a portable radio and cassette player was 200–250 dirhams (about \$20–25).

22. Mohammed Bouhmid used the term *murakkab* (lit. complex, compound) to describe the multipart structure of the *qašida* (1992 and 1995) rather than, as suggested by Deborah Kapchan, the *aiða* as a genre (1996:187). *Al-ānmāṭ al-murakkaba*, therefore, should be translated as complex forms or structures and not as “complex genres” (Kapchan 1996:210n5), particularly since Bouhmid refers to the *qašidas* of the *ħašbawī*, *marsawī*, and *ħawzī* styles, not genres of the *aiða*.

23. It is noteworthy to mention here that in 2008 the film *Kharbusha: Maudum Hal* (Kharbusha: Nothing Lasts Forever), directed by the Moroccan filmmaker Hamid Zoughi, was released nationwide in Morocco. The second part of the title is a direct quotation of a *ħabba* from the poem. Excerpts from the film are available on YouTube.

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