II. LISTEN, THAT'S US!

Responses from Tafraout to the *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection* (1959)

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VIDEO
And who sees the mystery
by Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane
2014, 27'01", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/17881/2/aw.mp4

Photo-booth picture of Paul Bowles sent to Bruce Morissette from Paris in 1930. The French phrase translates as "and who sees the mystery."

In 1959, the US writer and composer Paul Bowles (1910-1999) travelled across Morocco in order to record traditional music performances. In five months, he managed to document 250 examples, covering some of the most significant Moroccan music genres. The music tapes were later sent to the Library of Congress in Washington in order to be archived. A double LP record containing some of these tracks was published in 1972, making a strong impression on western audiences interested in folk music. In 2010, the entire *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection*[1] was digitized, and copies were sent to the American Legation in Tangier (TALIM), where it is now accessible for consultation. From a musicological perspective, the collection represents an early attempt of cultural preservation by means of modern audio technology. While a few other examples exist,[2] the *Bowles Collection* is remarkable in its size and scope, as well as regarding to the diversity of the music genres that it documents. For the field of sound studies and sound art, Bowles's recording project in Morocco is striking for yet other reasons. Paul Bowles was indeed not an ethnographer, but an established writer and composer with an expressed interest in sound aesthetics and avant-garde music practices. As an American expatriate who lived in Tangier since 1947, he was well acquainted with Morocco and had a clear opinion about Moroccan music and society. Questions therefore arise on how Bowles's ideas were inscribed onto the recordings. What kind of listening experience did he seek to enable, and for which audiences? How did he practically approach recording during these sessions? How did he interact with the local authorities and with the musicians?

1 A detailed description of the collection is available on the website of the American Folklife Center: https://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/paulbowles.html. After a failed attempt to collaborate with the Moroccan Ministry of Culture in order to make the Bowles recordings accessible online, Gerald Loftus, the former director of the American Legation in Tangier (TALIM), came to an agreement with the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT in Boston. About half of the recordings are now freely accessible and downloadable on their website. Direct link: https://archnet.org/authorities/2872

2 Commercial recordings were made by companies such as Pathé, Gramophone, and Baidaphone as early as in the 1920s (see Chapter 1); the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu made a few Moroccan recordings in the early 1950s for the Ethnographic Museum in Geneva, accessible via this link: http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/sql/musinfo_public_ph.php?id=7755.
Alan Lomax also made recordings in Morocco in 1967, accessible online at the Lomax Digital Archive: https://archive.culturalequity.org/node/790

In what ways was Bowles's approach different from earlier recording initiatives in North Africa, colonial and commercial ones? What can be learned by engaging with these recordings in Morocco today?

These questions emerged when I first accessed the *Bowles Collection* in Tangier in 2012. What I heard seemed to materialize ideas and practices that felt already familiar to me as a field recordist and sound artist. These ideas had to do with using sound recording as a way to document situations in remote places, capturing aspects of local cultures, music, voices, and soundscapes, with the possibility of using them later in music compositions. I was well aware of the risks of cultural appropriation and exoticization inherent in such practices, but it wasn't clear to me how exactly power asymmetries tend to be reproduced through listening and recording. Paul Bowles's notes[3] contain detailed descriptions of the 1959 recording sessions. Studying these notes gave me a better sense of how Bowles concretely engaged in recording situations. In this chapter, I consider how Bowles's non-academic approach to sound documentation was fueled by the desire for a "personal redrawing" (Chandarlapaty 2015) and by his belief that sound provided one of the ways to accomplish it. I compare these findings to comments by people in Tafraout, elicited in 2013 during listening sessions. The comparison shows a number of limitations and power imbalances in Bowles's music preservation project, which I discuss in terms of colonial structures, whiteness, and privileges.

More generally, the research in Tafraout highlights the plurality of listenings enabled by historical recordings in a context where cultural

3 Paul Bowles's 1959 field notes are preserved at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. They are now accessible on the website of the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT in Boston. Direct link: https://archnet.org/authorities/2872

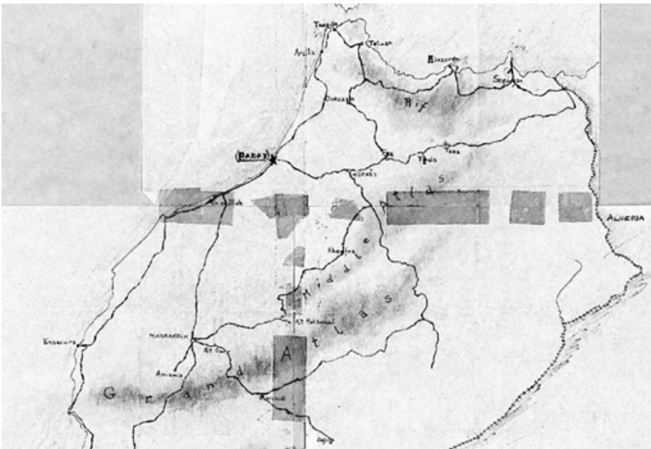
Top: CDs and field notes from the *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection*, Tangier 2012.
Bottom: CD label from the same collection.

expression appears highly politicized. Tensions in the cultural and social fields become more apparent, to which people respond differently according to their needs and interests. Some of these findings also appear in the video *And who sees the mystery* (Aubry and Atbane 2014),[4] which I produced as part of this research in collaboration with the performer Zouheir Atbane. I describe our joint research in Tafraout as an attempt to circumvent some of the limitations identified in Paul Bowles's recording practices. If recording cannot account for the complex sociality of existing or past music traditions, I suggest that this very impossibility offers a new starting point for a reflection on sound, aurality, and alterity. In such a configuration, recording appears as a medium for transcultural exchange and aesthetic experimentation, rather than as a means of cultural preservation. Sonic pluralism is manifested through the multiplicity of aural perspectives enabled by this approach and through the diversity of our research methods—listening sessions, conversations, text commissions, field recording, music rehearsals, and performances. Subjective redrawing becomes a collective project, I argue in conclusion, expressed in the negotiation inherent in transcultural listening.

PAUL BOWLES'S 1959 MUSIC RECORDINGS IN MOROCCO

At the time he made his recordings, Paul Bowles had been living in Tangier for twelve years as an American expatriate, a city which had the special status of an International Zone established by France, Spain, and Great Britain in 1923. Like

4 The video *And who sees the mystery* (Aubry and Atbane 2014) can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/17881/2/aw.mp4 The work was commissioned for the exhibition *Why Ain't You Rich If You're So Smart*, a parallel project to the Marrakech Art Biennale 2014.



Top: Map of Paul Bowles's recording trips in Morocco, 1959.
Bottom: Photo documentation of Paul Bowles's recording session in Essaouira with Gnaoua musicians, 1959.

William Burroughs, Alfred Chester, and other American writers, Bowles found Tangier to be a place of intellectual and sexual freedom that offered space for personal experimentation. In reaction to the white patriarchal model of Protestant conservatism still prevalent in the US after WWII, these artists were keen to engage with new modes of subjectivity, based on a personal, spiritual, and intellectual "redrawing" (Chandarlapaty 2015). For Bowles, this happened through his encounters in Tangier with what he believed were local manifestations of premodern minds: "primitive" cultures, folk music and trance rituals, exoticism, drugs, illiteracy, and sometimes mere poverty. The ethical significance of these meetings raises critical questions regarding Bowles's behavior. If the shadow of colonial racism and separateness was discarded amid personal involvement with "natives," Bowles, however, often retained the patriarchal attitude of salvage anthropology. While his admiration for oral cultures was sincere, it often went together with a yearning for "authenticity" in local traditions (Mullins 2002), and with a certain romanticization of non-western lifestyles.

Music for Bowles was a privileged site of emotional engagement with local sensitivity. He became fond of *Jilala*, *Gnaoua*, and various styles of Berber music, which were presumedly devoid of western musical and musicological influences. He arguably heard in them the possibility of a "cosmic agency," an "antidote" against modern man's malevolence and technological paranoia, together with a promise of a "psychic regeneration" (Chandarlapaty 2015). These aspects were central to his recording project in Morocco, and therefore, to a large extent, determined his aesthetic approach to recording. As his proposal to the Library of Congress in Washington in 1957 attests, Bowles wanted to preserve music traditions from the growing modernization of the country and cultural policy of the newly independent Moroccan state (Schuyler 2015). Once his proposal was accepted by the Library and secured financially with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Bowles started his project without following a proper scientific method. "I'm making music to sound the way I want it to sound," Bowles once declared (Schuyler 2015). He never considered himself a scholar or an ethnomusicologist, and his plan was to record as many different examples as possible.

As the Moroccan scholar Hassan Bourara (2014) remarks, the persona consciously adopted by Paul Bowles—his self-portrait as an "invisible spectator"—was cultivated during his earliest North African excursions. The ensuing detached attitude involved a self-distancing on Paul Bowles's part,

the better to avoid intrusions while recording the musicians. It was an aesthetic decision generally construed as a desire for objective representation: to have the locals play as they normally do during gatherings and celebrations. Like earlier collectors, Bowles believed that his job was to "capture" the sounds, and that it was up to others to make sense of them (Schuyler 2015). The idea of using modern sound technology in order to preserve cultural traditions from the dangers of modernization was not new. As a form of "salvage anthropology," it relied on faith in the ability of sound reproduction technology to preserve cultures. For Sterne (2003), the principle of *permanence* in sound ethnography was a "Victorian fantasy," as "the performance itself was transformed in order to be reproduced."

Portrait of Paul Bowles, part of the TALIM collection in Tangier, 2012.

If Bowles believed in part in the possibility to preserve music performances through recording, his notes show that he was not just a recording technician in these sessions. By clearly expressing his preference for certain instruments and his distaste for others, and by taking initiative during the recording in order to modify the balance between the instruments, or by asking for unusual music interpretations, he clearly assumed the role of a producer. He relied on his own aesthetic taste and conception of what makes a good recording as well as on his self-granted right to impose modifications on the musicians. Bowles was especially interested in the emotional power of music and listening. He frequently refers to the musicians' and listeners' "ecstatic" and "hypnotic" mind states in his notes, and occasionally describes other affective states induced by music listening, such as "solitude." If Paul Bowles liked to see himself as an "invisible" spectator, he was certainly not a *passive* spectator. In sound, and in recording, he found a new mode of artistic expression, geared toward the production of specific effects on his audience. He targeted primarily western listeners, who like him were adepts of transformative aural experiences.

RESEARCH IN TAFRAOUT AND THE VIDEO *AND WHO SEES THE MYSTERY*

I visited Tafraout in 2013, a Berber-Amazigh town in the Anti-Atlas mountains, where Paul Bowles recorded a village music performance in August 1959. I was joined during this trip by the performer Zouheir Atbane from Casablanca, who also had an interest in field recording. We spent several weeks interviewing local musicians, organizing listening sessions, and experimenting with diverse artistic strategies. We learned a great deal from these encounters, and from each other through our exchanges. With his artistic and linguistic skills, Zouheir was an ideal research companion, well aware of the implications of fieldwork. Our collaboration led to several joint artistic realizations and presentations.[5]

The video *And who sees the mystery* retraces our engagement with the Bowles recordings in Tafraout, offering a parallel narrative to this chapter. It includes sound footages of listening sessions, interviews, soundscapes, excerpts of the Bowles recordings, as well as new recordings with local musicians. The video contains no images and consists of a soundtrack with white text on a black background. The format felt relevant in this case, because we were exploring the limits of

5 Apart from the video *And who sees the mystery*, my collaboration with Zouheir Atbane resulted in the performance *Befuddling the archive*, presented at the French Cultural Institute in Marrakech in 2014. In 2015, Zouheir Atbane contributed a silent video (untitled) to the exhibition *Dissonant Archives*, which I co-curated at the Oslo10 art space in Basel. In 2017 we joined again for a presentation at the art space Le Cube in Rabat.

sound recording as a medium for documentation and preservation, and because of the various instances of invisibility addressed in the work. The text provides English subtitles to the voices in Moroccan-Arabic and Berber-Tashlhit, as well as additional elements. The work is structured in five parts: part I is a discussion on the content of the Bowles recordings with the musician Mohamed Anjjar; part II focuses on Paul Bowles himself and on his music preservation project; part III includes a conversation with Mina Haddadi, a local cultural promoter, and a new song by the band Addal; part IV is a digression on acousmatic sound in avant-garde music; and the concluding part V offers comments on the erasure effects of sound recording.

Listening session with Mohamed Anjjar and Zouheir Atbane, Tafraout, 2013.

LISTENING TO THE BOWLES RECORDINGS WITH MOHAMED ANJJAR

The performance recorded by Paul Bowles in 1959 contains seven tracks of *Ahwash* music, which is a form of expression common in the Grand-Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountain regions of Morocco. Not limited to music, Ahwash performances include dance and improvised poetic exchanges, with up to sixty performers (Rovsing Olsen 1997). The tracks include chanting and percussion played by a core group of thirteen musicians. The chanting alternates between solo and group parts, accompanied by slow and powerful rhythms, and punctuated by joyful shouts. Bowles's notes on this session only mention the group leader's name, Maalem Ahmed, and there is no information on the other performers. When we arrived in Tafraout in June 2013, Zouheir Atbane and I introduced ourselves to the local authorities, who put us in touch with a local Ahwash group. None of our interlocutors had ever heard of the Bowles recordings. One of the musicians, however, quickly identified in one of the songs the voice of Mohamed Anjjar, an eighty-five year-old carpenter from a nearby village. Meeting with Mr Anjjar at his house in Tahala was a true highlight of our research. We spent an entire afternoon listening to the Bowles recordings, and he shared many comments and memories with us. Recorded excerpts of this session are featured in the video. One can feel emotion in Mohamed Anjjar's voice as he hears the fifty-four year-old recordings for the first time:

> Listen, that's us! This comes from us, it's old! [...] Moulay the Haj, it's him singing! All those who are singing this song are dead. Today, I and my brother are the only ones left. The others are gone![6]

Mr Anjjar goes on with explanations on the poetic content of the songs, highlighting moral values in the community:

> The lyrics are always linked to the values of sharing and generosity. [...] This song praises the "generous hand." When this hand is cut off, then everyone is sad. But nobody regrets it when it is stingy. [...] This other one is about love, which should be free of material interests. [...] This one is like a prayer, the lyrics invoke peace and wish other countries to resolve their conflict and to live in peace. [...] This one is about King Mohammed V:

6 All of Mohamed Anjjar's statements have been transcribed from our recorded listening session at his home in Tahala on 13.6.2014. English translation by the author.

> "God have mercy on your soul and that you may always be with us." It was our choice. We were happy to sing for our King.

We also shared Bowles's notes with Mohamed Anjjar, as we were curious about his reaction. Because Bowles needed electricity for powering his Ampex tape-recorder, the recordings took place at the military fort (*bordj*):

> Getting musicians in Tafraout was complicated. The acting governmental chief took us several miles down the valley one morning to meet a certain caid who would send out a moqqadem to each village, commanding the men to appear the following night at the military bordj. (Bowles 1960)

As Mohamed Anjjar bitterly recalls, it was not unusual for villagers to be forced to perform Ahwash during the years of French occupation in the region, and even after the country's independence in 1956:

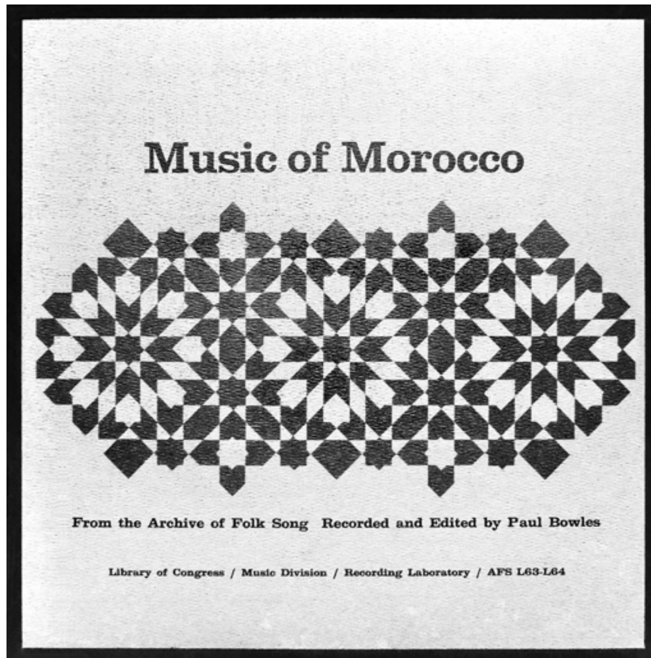
> We were forced to go! Yes! And we didn't know we were being recorded by this American man. I don't recognize the guy on the photo. Foreigners were always protected, inaccessible. The men of the caid would not let us speak to them or exchange addresses.

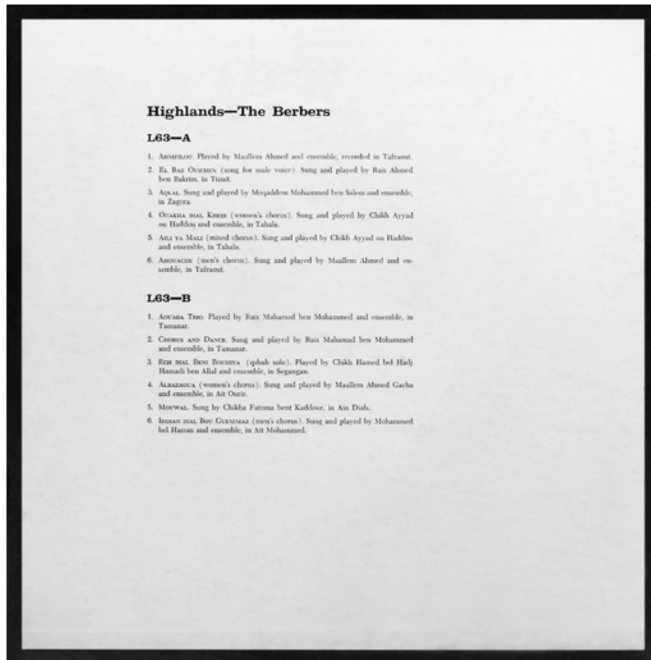
Instead of the ecstatic and regenerative feeling intended by Bowles with his recordings, Mr Anjjar's comments express fear and frustration. This is especially the case when evoking the *caid* and his men—the fierce executives of French colonial power in the rural regions of Morocco. While Bowles did not receive official permission for his project from the Moroccan state authorities, he did not hesitate to use his influential position as an American citizen to convince the local authorities of commanding the musicians to come and play for him. For a project aimed at preserving local musical traditions, this procedure seems highly questionable. It is safe to assume that all of Bowles's recordings of large Berber music groups in his collection took place under similar circumstances. The musicians were forced to play in front of him and the local authorities, sometimes even in the presence of armed soldiers.

As Mullins (2002) suggests, Bowles was not a defender of western colonialism and frequently criticized the negative influence of French politics in his writings. Bowles's freedom of experimentation, however, was secured through the specific forms of political and juridical domination established in Tangier by colonial powers. American residents, for example, were not subject to Moroccan laws or taxes. They thus participated in the social structures of colonization, and their interactions with Moroccan people were shaped by the psychology of colonialism. The methods Bowles used to achieve his recordings mirror the privileges of his position, an aspect his notes do not reflect. There is thus an *erasure effect* of recording, which invisibilizes the particular position of its author. This erasure effect extends to the musicians themselves, whose names and biographies have not been preserved. While acknowledging the significance of Bowles's project, Mohamed Anjjar clearly expresses frustration over the fact that today, only Paul Bowles is credited but not the musicians:

> These recordings are indeed an example of preservation. I regret that only Paul Bowles is known today. The musicians themselves, they have been forgotten! One never mentions them as important contributors to preservation. What is missing are the names and the biographies of the musicians, so that they are not presented as anonymous people.

Two of the Tafraout recordings are featured on the LP *Music of Morocco* published in 1972 by the Library of Congress in Washington DC. The liner notes do not provide additional information on the musicians. Instead, the publication reverses the white colonial fantasy of racial and civilizational superiority into a celebration of sonic primitivism: following Paul Bowles's indications, the first record (*Highlands–The Berbers*) contains "pure" Berber music, whereas the second (*Lowlands– Influent Strains*) features "hybrid" music with Arabic, Sub-Saharan, or Jewish influences. With this editorial choice, *Music of Morocco* appears as a possible American response to the nationalist cultural agenda of the Moroccan state at the time. The record also perpetuates a tendency inherited from colonial ethnography to objectify musicians into static cultural representations, omitting their names and biographies, and denying them authorship and copyrights. This added weight to our conversation with Mr Anjjar:





Highlands—The Berbers

L63—A

1. [illegible]. Played by Maallem Ahmed and ensemble, recorded in Tafraout.
2. El Baz Ouichen (song for male voice). Sung and played by Rais Ahmed ben Bakrim, in Tiznit.
3. Aqlal. Sung and played by Moqaddem Mohammed ben Salem and ensemble, in Zagora.
4. Ouakha dial Kbir (women's chorus). Sung and played by Chikh Ayyad ou Haddou and ensemble, in Tahala.
5. Aili ya Maili (mixed chorus). Sung and played by Chikh Ayyad ou Haddou and ensemble, in Tahala.
6. [illegible] (men's chorus). Sung and played by Maallem Ahmed and ensemble, in Tafraout.

L63—B

1. Aouada Tbio. Played by Rais Mahamad ben Mohammed and ensemble, in Tamanar.
2. Chorus and Dance. Sung and played by Rais Mahamad ben Mohammed and ensemble, in Tamanar.
3. Reh dial Beni Bouhiya (qsbah solo). Played by Chikh Hamed bel Hadj Hamadi ben Allal and ensemble, in Segangan.
4. Albazaoua (women's chorus). Sung and played by Maallem Ahmed Gacha and ensemble, in Ait Ouriz.
5. Mouwal. Sung by Chikha Fatoma bent Kaddour, in Ain Diab.
6. Ideran dial Bou Guemmaz (men's chorus). Sung and played by Mohammed bel Hassan and ensemble, in Ait Mohammed.

Cover of the record *Music of Morocco* by Paul Bowles, 1972.

> Identification is not only the name, but it is also the origin of the people, their history. [...] We never thought to say that it was our music! I participated in the recordings, but I don't own them. We didn't know that we were being recorded. It's not correct to record without the musicians being aware. I find it outrageous!

Mohamed Anjjar's declarations resonate with current debates on ownership and access to ethnographic collections, and on the pressing issue of "cultural restitution."[7] These aspects were part of our conversations with other community members in Tafraout, highlighting tensions in the field of cultural politics in Morocco and beyond.

STATE CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE REVIVAL OF BERBER CULTURE

Our next interlocutor in Tafraout was Mohamed Farid Zalhoud, who worked as a French teacher in the local school. Mr Zalhoud is also an erudite writer and poet, a scholar in English literature, and an Amazigh cultural activist. We learned a lot from him about Amazigh culture and state cultural politics in particular. As part of a generation who grew up during the early post-colonial period in Morocco under the reign of King Hassan II, Farid Zalhoud became a cultural opponent to the state's nationalist politics in the 1980s, struggling for the recognition of Amazigh culture and political rights. Following the involvement of Berber-Amazigh leaders in two failed coups-d'état against the monarchy in 1971 and 1972, the state's primary objective was to

7 The restitution of cultural objects is the subject of an ongoing debate, especially in and around western cultural institutions. For more information on this topic in the field of ethnographic music recordings, see Reddy and Sonneborn (2013).

Listening session with Mohamed Farid Zalhoud, Tafraout, 2013.

counter the political aspirations of the Berbers (Boum 2007). This happened through a structural marginalization of these populations, together with a folklorization of their culture. As a result, the Berber representation in national culture was now reduced to a set of "backward" and "uncivilized" traditions staged as part of national festivals and touristic events. In the following comment, Farid Zalhoud calls for a different orientation in state cultural policy:

> State politics in the field of cultural preservation are too often limited to a mere folklorization of Amazigh music, that is inviting ensembles for festivals or touristic events. Preservation is a matter of collective work. The musicians, the state, the associations, the intellectuals, that is representatives of each field of competence should be involved. What is needed is the consolidation of the local bounds between the musicians and the population, in order for them to be appreciated and demanded. This also means involving younger generations of musicians via musical activities at school.[8]

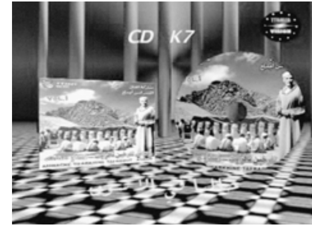
The reforms proposed by Mr Zalhoud in the field of cultural work and education present similarities with the declarations by Ali Faiq in the previous chapter. As a writer and admirer of Paul Bowles's literary work, Farid Zalhoud was very sympathetic to Bowles's music preservation project. His voice can be heard reading some of Bowles's notes in our video, and later a poem that he wrote in Berber-Tashlhit language as a response to our project.

8 Excerpt from an interview in French with Mohamed Farid Zalhoud in Tafraout, 13.10.2013. English translation by the author.

THE GROUP ADDAL: BERBER CULTURE ON THE WORLD STAGE

Yet additional voices populate the soundtrack of *And who sees the mystery*. In the video, one can hear the members of a local female music ensemble named Addal. Along with other bands in the region and throughout the country, Addal is part of a broader revival in Berber cultural expression, which emerged out of the political necessity to re-define modern Berber cultural identity. Following the side-stepping by the state of Berber political claims in the 1970s, culture progressively became "the currency" through which Berber identity could by made visible on the "world stage," and through which recognition could be attained (Goodman 2005). In order to create a unified representation of Berber cultural identity from a diversity of populations across the country and the diaspora, common cultural roots had to be discursively assembled, as part of a new ideological narrative on Berberity, or rather Amazighity. Folklore music and dance, along with artisanal objects and the Amazigh *Tifinagh* script, were central to this operation, as they were particularly well adapted to the global circulation of representations through various media, starting with tapes, CDs, and later videos and digital media.

According to music scholar Miriam Rovsing Olsen (1997), traditional Ahwash celebrations, as they existed in the region up until the 1970s, lasted for a whole night, including complex group choreographies, chanting, and percussion, alternating with long sections of improvised poetic battles between single members of the audience.



Stills from an Ahwash music video-CD by Bnet Ellouz, date unknown.

While similar performances can still be experienced today as part of wedding celebrations in the homes of wealthy families in the region, the sacred and participative dimensions that had characterized Ahwash expression in the past seem to be lost. The group Addal, with its repertoire of short, fixed songs, well suited for cultural consumption in festival contexts, managed to create a kind of portable and commodified version of Ahwash. Since the band's creation in 1995 by Mina Haddadi, songs were adapted from the local repertoire for a transnational audience, as part of an increasingly globalized music market. The band released a number of CDs on local music labels. These productions became quite popular in the region and in the diaspora, enabling the band to perform at a fair amount of festivals in Morocco and Europe.

Significantly, most of the band members were single women in their twenties to fifties, several of them single mothers, and for this reason stigmatized by the village community. In a context where a woman's status as a single mother is a taboo and prevents her from benefiting from state support (Salime 2014), the band came as an opportunity for its members to subsist economically. Being a member of Addal is therefore not just a matter of skilled musicianship. This activity plays a part in the formation of "transnational subjects," characterized by the mobilization of particular "spaces, networks, and resources," and informed by an awareness that "mobility itself is one of the most powerful resources available today" (Biemann 2008). While this offers new possibilities for single women to enhance their position in society, the working conditions of musicians in transnational economies remain, however, precarious and highly uncertain. If gender inequality in Morocco is produced and reproduced by a patriarchal society, gender division is equally a major constitutive force of global capitalism, and therefore sustains some of these inequalities.

Working with Addal led to the recording of a couple of songs. Some of these recordings can be heard in the video (sections III and V), along with excerpts of our conversation with Mina Haddadi about the band's distinctive appearance on stage: the ten singers stand in a line as they perform, wearing one single piece of cloth (*chech*) covering all their faces. Two different narratives were presented to us about the origin of the collective veil in the region. The first narrative describes the veil as a sign of resistance against the French occupiers, who used to force female

musicians to perform in front of them during the colonial period. The second narrative refers to the veil as a regional custom, a sign of God's protection, and the women's due respect when they appear publicly, without being directly associated with the islamic *hijab* or *burqa*. As we were told later, the large cloth was also a way for women performers to agree on the song lyrics without being seen by the audience, in times where poetic improvisation was still part of Ahwash expression. According to Mina Haddadi, it is the first narrative about the colonial origin of the veil that is usually reproduced in festival programs, especially in Europe.

TRIBUTE TO THE EAR: ERASURE EFFECTS OF RECORDING AND THE ACTIVE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Commercial music productions turn cultural identity into a set of unified and simplified representations, so that they can easily circulate on the world stage. Anyone sympathetic to a particular cultural expression can participate in its celebration as part of World Music events, as they offer musical products that can be appreciated without pre-existing knowledge about their context. Audiences are thus transformed in the process, and cannot be addressed any more by the musicians as participants aware of the socio-political subtext of the performance. Mohamed Anjjar was very conscious of this effect in our discussion on the Bowles recordings. Not only were the musicians' names forgotten, he observed, but also the audience, that is the community of villagers who usually participated in Ahwash celebrations. "Ahwash is for the people," he declares in the video, and "basically not a service to satisfy so and so." The constitutive sociality of Ahwash expression was not taken into account by Paul Bowles for his cultural preservation project. In response to the multiple erasure effects identified in the Bowles recordings, we invited Farid Zalhoud to compose a new poem for our video that would tell of the significance of audience participation in Ahwash music. Written in Berber-Tashlhit language, and titled *Tribute to the Ear*, the poem is essentially an ode to music lovers and connoisseurs, men and women of the community who have "harvested many songs:"

Tribute to the ear!
Hello to those gathered here!
I am happy having found
beings who have harvested many songs
Tribute to the ear!
To our evening I brought singing
nectar that the heart has foraged
Tribute to the ear!
For a tribute to the ear that hears me
the golden crown I brought this evening
amongst the connoisseurs of speech
Tribute to the ear!
Women with bangs, music lovers,
I come for them
they are the gullies where singing flows.[9]

The poem appears at the end of the video (section V), along with the recording of a festive song performed by the women of Addal. While the music itself addresses a virtual, transnational community of listeners, the poem arguably re-introduces a sense of local participation in Ahwash expression.

PAUL BOWLES, SONIC MATERIALISM, AND WHITE AURALITY

In our video, Paul Bowles's aesthetic approach to recording is further brought into relation with the broader field of western avant-garde music. Current debates in this field pertain to the "nature" of sound itself, basically contrasting materialist accounts of sound with culturalist accounts. Perhaps best exemplified by the Cagean position in the history of avant-garde arts, the

9 Original text by Mohamed Farid Zalhoud. English translation by Tom Kenis.

defenders of a "realist" and "materialist" account of sound argue for its conception "beyond the domain of culture, signification, and representation," proposing instead its theorization as a "material flux," as a "force" endowed with agency, and capable of generating its own form of thought (Cox 2011). While provocative and challenging, such a view becomes problematic, when it fails to recognize its own situatedness as part of "histories of whiteness and coloniality" (Thompson 2017). The possibility to account for sound-in-itself indeed posits the capacity for sound artists to imagine themselves in a subjectless position, from which sound can be observed from everywhere and nowhere. As it sustains its own privileges, white aurality does not only amplify its views on material sound and listening, but importantly also marginalizes other voices, practices, and histories.

As a composer with a formal education in modern classical music, and as a prolific music reviewer in American magazines, Paul Bowles was well aware of ideas that spread in the avant-garde music circles of his time. Like John Cage, he engaged early with tape experimentations, expressing also his fascination with "sound for its own sake" (Schuyler 2015). While cultivating a rather anti-intellectual posture and supporting forms of popular music expression, such as jazz and folk music, Bowles shared a sensibility for material sound with experimental composers, more than with ethnographers. He was not so much (if at all) interested in the local social significance of music practices, and indeed his notes contain no information about the songs and choreographies that would reveal them as socially coded practices. Paul Bowles also did not hesitate to intervene in the recording situations, dictating the musicians where to stand and which instruments to use or not use. It is therefore much more the *sound* of music that mattered to Bowles, with the possibility of shaping it in order to produce certain *effects* on the listeners. He found in the tape-recorder a device that allowed him to tell a story in sound, which was essentially a story about himself as a listener. Instead of the former white colonial aural culture characterizing modernity, Paul Bowles contributed with his approach to the makings of postmodern and postcolonial white aurality based on self-expression and emancipation. What appears problematic today is the invisibilization of Bowles's own sociality and privileges as part of this process, an aspect recurrent in avant-garde sound art practices focusing on sound as their primary material.

In *And who sees the mystery*, mystery refers to the self-mystifying posture often adopted by avant-garde composers and (sound) artists alike, and to the ambiguous status attributed by them to sound, between socially significant phenomenon and autonomous object. The correspondence between Bowles's sound practices and western avant-garde music is established in section IV of the video. The sequence opens with a sound collage in the style of French musique concrète, starting with frog recordings, followed by other "concrete" sounds (water drops, voices, birds, motorcycle), further developing into a rhythmical, percussive part, and culminating in the introduction of an expressive female voice singing in Berber-Tashlhit language. I recorded all of these sounds during my stay in Tafraout. Their status in the sequence ambiguously oscillates between field recordings (documentation of specific places and situations) and abstracted musical elements that are part of a larger composition. The text along the soundtrack narrates an imaginary conversation between an anonymous composer and his audience.[10] The composer provides a definition of "acousmatic music," a term proposed by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer in his 1966 *Treatise on musical objects*. He makes a comparison between the role of the loudspeaker in electroacoustic music performances and the veil used by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras in order to remain hidden while teaching his students, who were called "acousmatics." By separating sounds from their sources, he argues, the loudspeaker acts like a veil, making sound therefore autonomous and available for new mental

10 The text in this section of the video has been freely adapted from a conference paper by the French composer François Bayle (Bayle 2007).

associations. While this position arguably resulted in significant works in the history of composition and sound art, it also appears as a radical dismissal of the documentary status of recorded sounds—that is of the inextricable sociality of the conditions of their production (Sterne 2003). By favoring abstraction and transcendence, acousmatic aesthetics recapitulate art's and (serious) music's supposedly special ontological status. The soundtrack in this section of the video mimics this aesthetic and at the same time contradicts its logic. Starting as an abstract composition, the soundtrack progressively evolves into an expressive vocal performance recorded during an Ahwash music night in Tafraout in 2013. As a result, a tension arises between the sonic and the textual content of the sequence, calling perhaps into question the listener's own assumptions about the relationship between sounds and their sources, about the ontological status of recorded sounds, and about the ethical consequences of such assumptions

PAUL BOWLES'S SONIC PLURALISM

The structure of *And who sees the mystery* mirrors the indexical logic of the *Paul Bowles Collection*. Inter-titles in the video provide information about the track titles, dates, recording location, and numerical index in the *Collection*. This information guides the spectator's listening experience, while reminding them that this experience is necessarily conditioned by Bowles's own listening and recording practices. As a result, Mohamed Anjjar's comments are given a status of

Reel 9B
Track 1 "Ahmeilou"

We never thought to say
that it was "our" music !

Stills from *And who sees the mystery* by Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane 2014.

Night recording session with musicians from Tafraout, 2013.

supplementary notes in the *Bowles Collection.*[11] This approach is part of an attempt to re-tell history by including the perspectives of local people who were initially excluded from it.

A somewhat similar approach was used by musicologist Philip D. Schuyler for the CD re-edition of *Paul Bowles's Music of Morocco* in 2015.[12] The 120-page booklet accompanying the remastered music recordings contains a well-documented introduction by Schuyler, along with his own comments on Bowles's notes. This information helps the reader situate the musical examples on the ethnomusicological map of Moroccan music. The entire publication, however, contains only two brief and rather anecdotal comments by Moroccan music scholars. The critical views on Paul Bowles expressed by Hassan Bourara (1996), Mohamed Choukri (1996), and Greg Mullins (2002) are not discussed in the introduction (although they are referenced in the bibliography). More importantly, the editor did not seize the opportunity provided by this re-edition for a reflection on transcultural sound practices, cultural appropriation, and restitution. As such, the 2015 version of *Music of Morocco* appears like a missed occasion to engage with a re-examination of white aurality.

Because of his anti-conformist ideas, manners, lifestyle, and aesthetics, Paul Bowles was, and remains today, an influential and controversial figure in Morocco, America, and beyond. It is precisely for this reason that it is necessary to re-examine his work today, I argue. With his thoughtful and provocative work, Bowles participated in the intellectual rebirth of western modernism after WWII, popularizing countercultural ideas and non-mainstream

11 Bowles's 1959 field notes about his recording trip were presented in their totality (100 pages) as part of the installation at the 2014 Marrakech Biennale (Aubry and Atbane 2014). Later in 2015, the archive of the research project was presented as part of our installation *Ears in Morocco* in the *Dissonant Archive* exhibition in Basel (Aubry and Atbane 2015). It included fifty CDs and a printed booklet that reproduced the indexing system used by Paul Bowles in his original field notes. New pages were added with our own notes, photo documentation, and interview transcriptions.

12 *Music of Morocco: Recorded by Paul Bowles*, 1959, 4 CDs, Dust to Digital, 2015

Listening session with Hamida Khaddouj, Mammas Ben Rais, Mina Moustaid, and Zouheir Atbane, Tafraout, 2013.

lifestyles that provided the foundation for subsequent cultural revolutions—from hippie and psychedelia in 1960s, to punk rock and alternative culture in the 1980s. Bowles's non-academic approach to music prefigured the dissolution of centuries-old historical, regional, and intellectual boundaries in western music, clearly influencing the rise of western pop music (Chandarlapaty 2015). This is precisely where Paul Bowles's sonic pluralism is manifested. First, by reworking the borders between ethnography, academic music, and mainstream culture, and second, by repurposing sonic experience toward a deterritorialization of white western subjectivity, adopting experience and reality "far beyond one's social realm." Bowles's renegade approach to ethnography in Morocco was thus not primarily geared toward the preservation of "other" cultures; it was alterity that provided the "stuff" needed for his own spiritual and intellectual redrawing. Sonic experience became a site for experimenting with a plurality of possible "selves" through listening and recording practices. Bowles's plural sound practice arguably played a role in his attempt to let oneself develop, rather than finding oneself "passively developed" by modernization processes and mainstream consuming culture (Diederichsen 2019).

SONIC PLURALISM AS COLLECTIVE LEARNING PROCESS

While radical and transgressive, Bowles's experimentations in Morocco were not devoid of power asymmetries, and perpetuated some of the systemic inequalities of European colonialism.

This was also the case with his music preservation project, causing in some cases moral prejudice about the recorded musicians. Such prejudices are integral to the history of postwar, countercultural white aurality, and we (white western sound artists, experimental musicians, and listeners alike) have to deal with this history today. Examples abound in recent underground music productions, which perpetuate ideas and practices inherited in part from Paul Bowles. These productions often conjure a nonacademic, immersive approach to musical alterity, together with a taste for exotic strangeness. Facilitated by an unequal economy of global mobility, these projects often reproduce the power asymmetries identified so far in Paul Bowles's project.[13]

If power asymmetries cannot be overcome by simply changing one's behavior, as they are indeed systemic, then it is perhaps necessary to acknowledge their existence by making differences in positions visible (and audible) as part of art and music productions. This idea informs a "transcultural" approach to alterity (Suhr and Willerslev 2013), which relies on "an active process of interaction between self and others [...] whereby difference is accounted for and negotiated." In *And who sees the mystery*, transcultural negotiation was part of our conversations with people in Tafraout, and rendered audible through the polyphonic principle that structures the work itself. Unlike Bowles's, our project was not geared toward the individual redrawing of the participants. It tended much more to a *collective* redrawing that we facilitated through a temporary "community of practice" (Wenger 1999). Sonic pluralism became thus the expression of a mutual learning process, out of which each

13 To name just one, yet paradigmatic example, the US label "Sublime Frequencies" commercially releases recordings made by its traveling members in all corners of the world. According to their website, the label "focuses on an aesthetic of extra-geography and soulful experience inspired by music and culture, world travel, research, and the pioneering recording labels of the past." The description presents striking similarities with Paul Bowles's ideas on music and recording. While admirably functioning as a non-profit organization, and despite a sincere commitment to non-mainstream music practices, the label perhaps fails to address the asymmetric power relations that sustain its economy and aesthetics. Some of these issues are discussed in the volume "Punk Ethnography: Artists & Scholars Listen to Sublime Frequencies" (2016), edited by Michael E. Veal and E. Tammy Kim.

participant came out transformed. By making differences in position and privileges more apparent, this approach allowed to re-situate Paul Bowles's sound practices within a broader field of white aurality and western sound experimentalism. It made me re-examine my own position within those fields, and consider different uses of sound that were less likely to reproduce power asymmetries and create erasure effects. Paul Bowles certainly had a sense of the transformative power of sound on a personal, subjective level. At a public level, on the contrary, he never abandoned his "white man" persona, that "invisible spectator" he chose to constantly perform. This persona allowed him to remain in the safe zone of whiteness, perhaps preventing him to attune more deeply to the conditions of the people he interacted with in Morocco.