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EXPLODING MYTHS IN MOROCCO AND SENEGAL:

SUFIS MAKING MUSIC AFTER 9/11

Larry Blumenfeld

Why is music called the divine art, while all other arts are not so called? We may certainly see God in all arts and in all sciences, but in music alone we see God free from all forms and thoughts. In every other art there is idolatry. Every thought, every word has its form. Sound alone is free of form. Every word of poetry forms a picture in our mind. Sound alone does not make any object appear before us.

— Hazrat Inayat Khan[1]

It would be nice to think that, in the war against terror, our side, too, speaks of deep philosophical ideas; it would nice to think that someone is arguing with the terrorists and with the readers of [Islamic philosopher] Sayyid Qutb. But here I have my worries. The followers of Qutb speak, in their wild fashion, of enormous human problems, and they urge one another to death and to murder. But the enemies of these people speak of what? The political leaders speak of United Nations resolutions, of unilateralism, of multilateralism, of weapons inspectors, of coercion and non-coercion. This is no answer to the terrorists. The terrorists speak insanely of deep things. The anti-terrorists had better speak sanely of equally deep things.

Paul Berman—[2]

> The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. . . . The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.
>
> **—Susan Sontag**[3]

The attacks of September 11, 2001, took place on the second day of the second week of the fall academic semester at Columbia University. At the time, I was a member of a small group of National Arts Journalism Program Fellows in Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. In our weekly discussion groups, my colleagues voiced an acute awareness of the vast gray areas of identity and intent that seemed all but negated by the black-and-white posturing of politicians and media commentators immediately following 9/11. Among these lost fields of nuance were the complicated modern history of American military and other involvement in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and throughout the Middle East; the volatility of the Israeli-Palestinian standoff and the withering of a once-promising peace process; the vastly different ways contemporary events and empirically verifiable historical facts are perceived in the West and the Middle East; and the diversity of opinion within both the United States and the Muslim communities abroad regarding the 9/11 attack itself and what constituted an appropriate response. Susan Sontag stirred controversy with her short essay in *The New Yorker* for her refusal to call the terrorists "cowards," perhaps a questionable choice on her part,. But she was accurate in her portrayal of public voices that, in their unanimity and the simplicity with which they framed the event and its aftermath, appeared to stifle intelligent, open, and complex discussion of the issues at hand.

In discussions among the Columbia Fellows, one point repeatedly emerged: that the roots of many of the problems underlying the standoff between radical Islamic fundamentalists and Western governments can be traced to deep and long-standing cultural rifts. This assertion led to the group's general conclusion regarding the current global impasse — namely, that cultural solutions had a chance to succeed where other means had not.

Such success would appear to hinge on the ability of both sides to look beyond the stereotypes that condition their perception of the other. Among the more powerful Western stereotypes — and one this essay seeks to interrogate — is the widespread belief that music

is anathema to Islamic practice. This stereotype, which was reinforced by the post-9/11 increase in news reports about the Taliban's infamous antimusic policies in Afghanistan, ignores the central role music has always played in the mystical Islamic tradition of Sufism.[4] In fact, two of the most striking musical responses to 9/11 to come from Muslim nations were inspired by Sufi practices and thought: the Fes Festival of World Sacred Music, along with its offshoot colloquia and 2004 Spirit of Fes U.S. tour; and the recent career of Senegalese singer and bandleader Youssou N'Dour. In both instances Muslim performers used music to emphasize interfaith dialogue and understanding, and as such presented a powerful alternative to dominant Western images of Islam. In so doing, these musical events served as a sane, antiterrorist expression of the sort of "deep things" Paul Berman envisioned in the epigraph above, but emanating from a Muslim source. A close look at these two responses challenges our received wisdom concerning the Muslim world and its attitudes toward the West.

UP FROM MOROCCAN SOIL

The Fes Festival of World Sacred Music grew out of initiatives that predate the World Trade Center attacks by nearly a decade. The festival, launched under the patronage of Morocco's King Hassan II and currently enjoying the support of King Mohammed VI, is on one level a top-flight bazaar of the various musical expressions that accompany spiritual traditions, a nonpareil "world music" event. Entertaining as this has proved to be, the music has also provided a window into the deeper agenda of the festival's organizers: to encourage dialogue among different faiths in order to move toward a more enlightened approach to globalization.

The festival (and my experience of it) must be understood within the context of its setting. Among the oldest of Islamic holy cities, Fez, Morocco, has been a center of learning since two women founded Qaraouine University in the ninth century. It boasts a powerful history of tolerance: when Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century, many immigrated to Fez. It is a city of remarkable contrasts, in which Internet cafes are tucked between ancient fortresses and donkeys pull carts past metered taxicabs. Like much of Morocco, Fez is a cultural crossroads, in which men and women in traditional djellabas (hooded robes) walk alongside teenagers in designer jeans.

Morocco is ruled by a monarchy, but its constitutional reforms and civil society stand in contrast to most Islamic states. Sufism, the mystical humanist face of Islam, is represented in Fez by the many brotherhoods active there. Embodied as it is in the tenor of both daily life and high-level

policy making, the Moroccan Sufi spirit is akin to the voice of liberalism here — a force for moderation and inclusion.

Faouzi Skali, a Fez native and Sufi scholar, first initiated a film festival in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War. He dubbed it the Desert Colloquium, after Desert Storm. "At the time, all of our cultures were in great conflict, largely through the media," Skali told me in a 2002 interview. "I wanted to initiate a direct dialogue between peoples and cultures, not through the news media."[5] The first festival included several concerts of Sufi music, and the enthusiastic response generated by these performances convinced Skali that music could be a more potent tool for the type of exchange he sought to foster. "Music seemed more elemental," he explained, "and it got around barriers of language. It was no longer a question of what you thought or didn't think. It was a direct experience of the Other." Skali's comment echoes the Sufi mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan's idea regarding the exalted qualities of music, expressed in the first epigraph to this essay, and focuses their application to the problem of communicating across cultures in the incendiary political environment of the 1990s.

Beginning in 2000, Skali expanded his event to include "Fes Encounters," colloquia that spanned five mornings. These discussions, held in a dramatic museum courtyard, were punctuated with the trays of traditional mint tea that are ubiquitous in Morocco. When I attended the Fes Encounters in the Spring of 2002, just eight months after the 9/11 attacks, the tea's sweetness contrasted greatly with the mood of many of the academics, artists, authors, and nongovernmental officials in attendance. The French publisher Jean-Claude Petit spoke of access to spirituality as a "fundamental right" which had been somehow contorted in the post-9/11 world. Trinh Xuan Thuan, a Vietnamese-born astrophysicist, speculated on the roots of terrorism. James Parks Morton, an American minister, described an emergent vocation of "interfaith practitioners," a job description that, he argued, would soon enter common parlance in direct response to the post-9/11 political and social situation, much as the terms "psychotherapist" and "social worker" grew familiar in the wake of Freud's writings and of industrialized, urbanized societies. More recently, the annual Fes Encounters discussions have included among their participants the then-Senegalese Prime Minister Idrissa Seck as well as the Brazilian Minister of Culture (and celebrated singer-songwriter) Gilberto Gil. The smooth transition between these discursive colloquia and the musical performances that were the festival's most public manifestation helped solidify the relationship between the sharing of sacred musical traditions and the search for a new mode of political dialogue. That synergy of purpose was highlighted through the short musical interludes that preceded the commentary and

roundtables, and was perhaps complicated when, once or twice, a discussion paused in deference to the muezzin's call to prayer.

Each evening after the colloquias' conclusion, I would wander through the dark, labyrinthine alleys of city's walled Medina quarter, moving from one performance to the next. In Morocco, as in much of the Islamic world, exteriors can be deceiving. Stories are told, wealth and depth revealed, through interiors. Among the palaces hidden from street view in Fez's Medina is the Moqri Palace, with its intricate mosaic tiles and lovely courtyard. This was the setting for extended performances by various Sufi brotherhoods which held both sacred and secular appeal: teenage boys clapped wildly and danced as members of the Jilala brotherhood played wooden flutes, beat hand drums, and offered bent-toned chants into the early morning hours. Around the corner, another hidden treasure of a site, the Fez Hadara, hosted still more nightly performances, some of which extended the festival's emphasis on expressions of shared spirituality; one evening, for example, a drama enacted a communion between Moroccan and Senegalese Sufis. Though the singing and drumming styles of the Senegalese musicians sounded distinct from their Moroccan counterparts, the two groups related a single narrative, of Islamic roots in Senegal dating back to the eleventh century, and of important Senegalese connections to the Moroccan Tijani brotherhood forged in the early nineteenth century.

In addition to music from the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa, the Festival featured a broad range of musicians from other continents. Free concerts of several of these groups were held at Bab Boujloud Square, just outside the Medina, and these drew throngs of local residents, many of whom could not afford the ticketed events. However unfamiliar the music may have sounded, audience members danced, clapped, and cheered as if it were their own. When the McCollough Sons of Thunder, a gospel-based brass band from Harlem, performed, audience members literally threw one another into the air in gleeful celebration. "Don't you feel it?" shouted out Elder Babb, the group's charismatic leader. The crowd cheered in response, never questioning Babb's specific reference.

I gained a more personal understanding of the efficacy of music as a tool to bridge cultural and religious rifts a year later, when I flew to Casablanca on my way to the 2003 Fes Sacred Music Festival just three weeks after terrorist bombings shook Morocco. Everywhere were public-service billboards bearing the Hand of Fatima — a symbol of protection for Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Scholars and cab drivers alike told me that the slogan, in Arabic and French — "Don't lay a hand on our country" — was directed at terrorists and fundamentalist Muslims. In my hotel room on my first night back in Fez, I was startled awake by

the 3 a.m. muezzin's call to prayer, issuing from mosque minarets in all directions. I realized that I'd heard this before, right down to the vocal embellishments, from the Sephardic cantor in my childhood Brooklyn synagogue. Prior to that moment, I'd grasped intellectually music's ability to serve as a conduit connecting traditions; I'd witnessed such communication in Bab Boujloud Square as elsewhere. But when this awareness touched my identification with my own life and my home, when it happened on an unconscious level, the possibility that music could effect a broader cultural transformation seemed ever more real.

"THE SPIRIT OF FES" IN AMERICA

In 2004, the Fes Festival organizers decided to broaden their audience and attempt to reach Americans in their own backyards. The North American Director, Zeyba Rahman, an Indian-American woman of Sufi descent, organized an eighteen-city U.S. tour dubbed "The Spirit of Fes." As she explained in an interview at her Brooklyn, New York, home in 2005, "It was an effort to bring the message of the Moroccan festival directly to the hometowns of American audiences. On one level, we knew that this would be seen as a 'world-music' event with a mission underlining it. But on another level, we saw this as a way to translate the context and spiritual power that the music and its connected issues take on in Fez, and to transform otherwise neutral performance venues."

Rahman was correct in her assessment that the "Spirit of Fes" festival would be promoted and reported on chiefly in the customary contexts for so-called "world music" — as an eclectic aesthetic choice and/or as sociological and anthropological enrichment regarding "exotic" cultures. But, following the example set by Faouzi Skali in Fez, she had deeper ambitions: to create a visceral sense of interfaith sentiment and of enlightened global dialogue, and to transplant this seed to familiar American venues. When the "Spirit of Fes" tour convened in Washington, D.C., at the Coolidge Theater of the Library of Congress, for example, its main concert brought a multinational group of musicians and peace activists together with Moroccan dignitaries and officials of the World Bank. The Bank, an important sponsor of the event, clearly believed that its promotion of capitalism dovetailed with the festival's most overt raison d'etre — to develop a world-class venue for an eclectic collection of music performances. But the "Spirit of Fes" tour was also designed to spawn panel discussions at each venue modeled after Skali's colloquia, to "stimulate similar conversations in the West."

These conversations fused with the musical performances to produce fertile cultural exchanges that sought to bridge the painful cultural

rifts of the post-9/11 world. Terrance Grace's impressionistic short film *Sawt-e-Sarmad: The Sound That Intoxicates Man*, which preceded and contextualized each concert, presented images of Sufis chanting and musicians singing intercut with talking heads of politicians and religious leaders, conflating the two endeavors. A quote from Rumi's Sufi devotional poetry appeared onscreen, then dissolved: "We have fallen into the place where everything is music."

The Washington, D.C., concert was opened by Meyer, an Argentine-born rabbi's son, performing in a duet with recent U.S. immigrant Yacoub Hussein, the Palestinian son of a Sufi sheikh. As the two interwove Hebrew and Arabic calls to prayer, Meyer passed his frame drum to Hussein, scarcely missing a beat. The Algerian Jewish vocalist Françoise Atlan combined the strained intensity of Andalusian melismatics and the graceful purity of European plainsong through stunning renditions of fifteenth-century devotional songs. She was accompanied by the Moroccan oud master Farid El Foulahi, and the Lebanese-American percussionist Jamey Haddad. Hadra des Femmes de Taroudant, from a small village in southern Morocco, sat on a riser, singing folkloric wedding and funeral tunes while beating out complex patterns on small hand drums. After a short solo by Haddad, the Anointed Jackson Sisters, whose leader, Barbara Jackson, referred to the group from the stage as "just some country girls from North Carolina," demonstrated the dramatic range of African-American spirituals, ending with the raucous "God Is in the Building."

Commodified though it may be in our culture, music convinces in ways that tuneless words and beatless ideas cannot. That is the spirit of Inayat Khan's epigraph, and it is an idea that is in some ways put to the test by an event like the "Spirit of Fes" tour: can music drawn from diverse spiritual traditions, performed in languages foreign to the audience, still hold the visceral power it enjoyed in its original contexts? And more provocative, is it possible that this music communicates its purpose better, in fact, because it is removed from specific reference? That was certainly my impression at the Coolidge Theater, where the closing number, sung in Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, and English successively by all of the evening's performers, capped an evening of touching collaborations and virtuosic performance. The stage, hopelessly overcrowded, became a metaphor for tolerance in a world where religions vie dangerously for dominance.

"It's one thing to march in a protest," Meyer told me in an interview after the concert. "But we also need spiritual activists. One thing that Western audiences sometimes need to be reminded of is the fact that it is important to have art rooted in transformation and healing in

addition to art rooted only in aesthetics. The people who write treaties in Geneva are usually disconnected from the local indigenous cultures. I hope we can reach people at the level that CNN cannot touch, a level that exists before and after thought."

Despite the deep feelings of cross-cultural communion that concerts like this engendered, the "Spirit of Fes" tour was not free from the strain of political pressures. "During the buildup to the Iraq invasion, the Library of Congress expressed interest in the show," recalled Jean-Jacques Cesbron, the Columbia Artists Management agent responsible for booking the tour, during a 2004 telephone interview. "But they were concerned about the use of the word 'peace' in the materials." And after 9/11, it became so prohibitively difficult for Middle Eastern males to enter the United States that these concerts highlighted women as voices of Islam, which itself became a provocative element, for both non-Muslim audience members (whose assumptions may have been challenged) and Muslims (many of whom are sensitive to both the travel-restriction issues and the sight of women performing music in public).

The 2004 tour, which stretched from Oromo, Maine, to Savannah, Georgia, to Berkeley, California, encountered no protests. And it stimulated dialogue of the sort not generally associated with world-music presentations. At Harvard University's Paine Hall, prior to one concert, an afternoon panel discussion included Dr. Diana Eck, head of the Pluralism Project, and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, along with religious leaders drawn from Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and interfaith centers. Discussion focused on the following questions: What are the fundamental difference between your religion and those of the other panelists and what are the similarities? Why is it that religion causes conflict? Is there something about religious faith and fervor that causes war? As wars between religions, cultures, and nationalities rage, what gives you hope?

On its face, the "Spirit of Fes" tour fits into a model of world-music presentation that is increasingly popular at universities and nonprofit performing arts centers. According to this model, world music is presented, not as exotic sounds for consumption, but as a vehicle for an alternative, "non-Western" ethics.[6] The U.S. tour, like the Moroccan festival it is drawn from, brought to bear music as a transformative and healing element connected directly to an expression of Islam that is at odds with the stereotypes common in post-9/11 America — namely, that Islam is governed by an essentially exclusionist and antimodern ideology that enables and even encourages terrorism. If this goal was achieved at all, it occurred on a nonliteral level. But the second element of the tour and festival, the colloquia it stimulated, functioned along

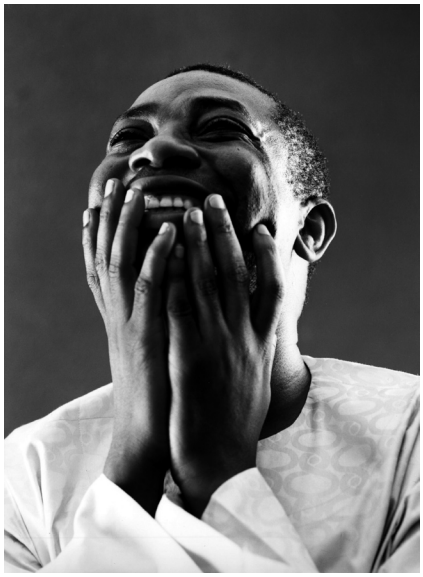

Figure 9.1 Youssou N'Dour. Photo by Galilea Nin, courtesy of Nonesuch Records.

the lines of most American arts-in-education models, using the music as springboard for dialogue — in this case, that which had been largely shut out of our political and media discourse.

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TAKING A STAND IN SENEGAL: YOUSSOU N'DOUR

If you don't know where you're heading anymore, go back to where you came from.

—Youssou N'Dour, "Wiri Wiri"[7]

Had this man not shown up . . .
Islam would have sunk with shame into oblivion
Since religious people were being
Killed or deported by the colonialists
Their goal was to weaken Islam. . . .
Your knowledge and understanding are immense
You taught me tolerance and compassion.

—Youssou N'Dour, "Shukran Bamba"[8]

While the Fes Festival represents an organized, communal expression with Sufism at its core that preceded the 9/11 attacks and took on a deeper significance after them, the recent career of Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour is marked by a more direct and deeply personal response to 9/11, one informed in part by the performer's embedded (perhaps even, to some, hidden) roots in Sufism. To grasp the purpose and depth of N'Dour's responses to the tensions between the United States and the Islamic world, it is essential first to gain a sense of his career to date. N'Dour has been a star in his native Senegal for more than half his life. He has traveled widely during the past two decades, earning acclaim in Europe and the United States. But while his ballooning popularity in the West has greatly increased his mobility, N'Dour has remained connected to his native Dakar, where he still lives. And his music, however far and wide it has ranged in style and in reach, still speaks first and foremost of his home.

N'Dour's sinewy tenor, his dazzling vocal melismas, and his urgent, engaging lyrics (which frequently deal with issues of social responsibility and cultural memory) have become the face of *mbalax* (pronounced "um-balak"), the Senegalese popular music that blends centuries-old praise-singing and percussion traditions with Afro-Cuban arrangements and guitar-based Western pop. The band N'Dour has led since 1979, The Super Etoile, has held sway over Senegalese fans since its formation. They are widely considered to be among the most exciting African bands to hear in concert — a blend of rhythm, voice, and message that can be appreciated without translation.[9]

N'Dour had been issuing cassettes on Jololi, his Dakar-specific label, to the consistent pleasure of his Senegalese fans for twenty-five years, when he unexpectedly broke through to a much broader international audience, in large part due to his singing on Peter Gabriel's 1986 hit "In Your Eyes." N'Dour's 1990 release, *Set* (Virgin) earned him a reputation as "the next Bob Marley," a purveyor of an infectious type of "roots music" that would soon sweep across the globe. Others saw him as the good-looking poster boy for the nascent "world music" wave that swept international markets in the late 1980s. In fact, he was both and neither. "My music is like a spinning ball," N'Dour told me in an interview in New York in 2004. "It can turn in one direction, and then it comes back to origins."[10]

N'Dour's music is an amalgam of old and new, indigenous and foreign. He sings mostly in his native Wolof, with an occasional chorus in French. The instruments on his recordings have ranged from talking drum (a staple of Senegalese music) to electronic drum loops and synthesizers. Jimi Mbaye, the Super Etoile's lead guitarist, plays a Fender

Stratocaster, but often plucks its strings in a style that sounds more like a *xalam* ("khaa-laam"), the Senegalese folk guitar. The music's jumpy six-beat rhythms and soaring, syncopated vocals simultaneously evoke ancient call-and-response refrains as well as contemporary calls to the dance floor. N'Dour's lyrics are heartfelt and traditional, his songs about basic things — the need for hard work, respect for women, love of god and of fellow man — and about more complicated issues, such as political struggles over electrical service in Dakar, or the need to remain connected to one's home. 1990's "Set" — meaning "clean" or "pure" in his native Wolof — was a motivating cry for young Senegalese to clean up their environment and to demand "transparency" in politics and business.

N'Dour likes to say that he wishes to motivate Western listeners to a new view of his native continent. "In spite of the images that one knows about Africa, the economic poverty," he told me in 2001, "there's a joy to living and a happiness in community, living together, in community life, which may be missing here in America. And I think America can learn from that."

In the aftermath of 9/11, and of the American invasion of Iraq, N'Dour's messages — bolder and more pointed than ever — have grown in their precision and potency for his Western audience. It would be difficult to think of a contemporary musician who has blended the personal and the political, the secular and the sacred, with greater depth and sensitivity in the period following 9/11.

In the spring of 2003, N'Dour cancelled what would have been the most ambitious U.S. tour of his career, in protest of the impending American invasion of Iraq. The statement publicly issued from N'Dour's "head office" to the press was heartfelt and nuanced:

> It is my strong conviction that the responsibility for disarming Iraq should rest with the United Nations. As a matter of conscience I question the United States government's apparent intention to commence war in Iraq. I believe that coming to America at this time would be perceived in many parts of the world — rightly or wrongly — as support for this policy, and that, as a consequence, it is inappropriate to perform in the U.S. at this juncture.[11]

"I know that I'm not Bruce Springsteen," N'Dour told me some months later during a telephone interview. "But it was a symbolic statement I wanted to make. I didn't make the decision simply because there was a war mounting against a Muslim country. I did it because the war that was mounting was unjust."

Even more profound, if less direct, was the statement made by N'Dour's 2003 CD, *Egypt*. As ethereal and exotic as this music may sound to the casual listener, it needs to be heard as a courageous personal pronouncement in a troubled and confusing time, a musical engagement with the emerging anti-Muslim stereotypes emanating from the West. Senegalese Islam is largely Sufi; through his original compositions for this album, sung in Wolof, N'Dour celebrated the caliphs, saints, and sages of his Sufi faith, "in order to praise the tolerance of my often misunderstood religion," he told me. The project began as a private thing, a recording N'Dour made for his friends and family to celebrate his faith and to combine Senegalese musical elements with the ouds, violins, and flutes N'Dour remembered from the recordings of Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum that his father used to play.

With *Egypt*, N'Dour offered a document of his introspective pilgrimage to the heartland of Sufi culture in his own country.[12] The compositions on *Egypt* marry Senegalese rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic elements with arrangements from the repertoire of Egyptian and Arab orchestral sound. Recording with traditional Senegalese instrumentalists and singers in Dakar and Fathy Salama's sparkling Cairene Orchestra, *Egypt* references the historical link between the great seats of Islamic learning to the North and West Africa's outposts of Sufi thought. With the album, N'Dour built a symbolic bridge from sub-Saharan Africa to the continent's Arabic north. And he fashioned a corrective pronouncement about Islam directed at the whole world designed to counter the stereotype of Muslims as exclusionist fundamentalists bent on destroying all traces of modernity.

As N'Dour explained to both the BBC and Al-Jazeera in interviews, "*Egypt* is an album which praises the tolerance of my religion, which has been badly misused by a certain ideology. At a time when there is a debate on Islam, the world needs to know how people are taking over this religion. It has nothing to do with the violence, with terrorism."

"I think that Sufism fits all over the world," N'Dour told me in 2005. "The concept is not anything that fits standard Western ideas; it's always related to culture, to music, to religion. It is a dominant religion in Senegal. The music that it creates calls into question the idea that the Muslim religion is only a matter for Arabs —that it belongs only to the Arabs. In the West, you have always associated the Islamic faith 100 percent with Arab culture. This in itself is a fundamentalist attitude and is mistaken."

N'Dour went further in a statement he wrote in the program book for the American live premiere of his *Egypt* project at Carnegie Hall in October, 2004:

> I would be happy if this album, and our performances throughout America, could serve as a gateway toward knowledge of the real face — or faces — of our faith, of Islam. The Muslim world — like the Jewish and Christian communities worldwide — is *remarkably diverse, as an aggregation of geographies, peoples, cultures,* and social and religious practices. A billion Muslims live their faith in a billion ways, probably.
>
> In Senegal, we live as Muslims in a certain way, defined by, and nourished by, our several Sufi turuq [Arabic for 'ways' or 'pathways']. These communities of believers trace their spiritual legacies back to the great Sufi masters of the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, but they have evolved in a modern West African environment where religion fits hand-in-glove with daily life, politics, and the rest. So it is this 'Senegalese way' of Islam, and I prefer to say 'of Muslim culture', which we are presenting with the songs of Egypt.

"'Duty' and 'art' almost always go poorly together," N'Dour continued:

> But there are exceptions. Desperate times call for — not desperate, I'm sorry — but noble measures. Rabbi Hillel, who was evidently the same kind of teacher as the shaykhs I celebrate in the songs of Egypt, famously said in the ***Pirkei Avot***: 'If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when?' So who better than Muslim artists to assume a kind of duty now — to protect Islam, and all the beautiful cultures of Islam, from its slanderers at both poles of the malicious, ignorant, ideologically inane morass of speech which passes for a 'dialogue of religions' in these challenging times?

Like most non-Western musicians who have enjoyed the spotlight and exposure of status within the "world music" community, N'Dour has straddled many identities. He is a pop singer and the front man of a band that plays rhythmically intense, danceable music (often with choruses that are catchy enough to transcend language barriers). He is an attractive and articulate media presence who helped create a veritable "Afropop" industry. And he has blended these roles with his inherited responsibilities as a griot to become a forceful political voice on issues of African, and, in recent years, global concern.

When he cancelled his American tour in the face of the American invasion of Iraq, N'Dour called up both recent and distant memories for his American audience: the many American performers who boycotted South Africa in the 1980s in protest of apartheid; or how Louis

Armstrong caused a stir in 1957 when he rebuffed President Eisenhower and canceled a U.S. State Department tour to the Soviet Union because of riots in Little Rock, Arkansas, over school integration. Moreover, N'Dour identified sub-Saharan Africa with the Arab-centric image of Islam in the West, announcing his solidarity and challenging American ideas. With *Egypt*, N'Dour took a further step. He personalized the issue, exposing himself and even taking career risks (*Egypt* is not the sort of music his American or African fans were necessarily hungering for) and attempted to tap the musical core of his Sufi faith to speak his mind.

It is worth noting that N'Dour brought his Egypt tour to eight American venues during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. Shortly after his first tour stop, at Carnegie Hall, I asked N'Dour whether there was special meaning to this timing. "It's very interesting," he replied. "There was a big debate on Senegalese radio. With professors, Islamic leaders, musicians and rappers — about making music and performing during Ramadan. I'm sorry, but I don't remember reading anywhere that you can't play music after sundown during Ramadan. People like me have decided to ask ourselves, 'Why?' Maybe we'll do something different. Maybe it is time to do some things differently."

CAN VOICES CARRY?

With his Sufi sensibilities, N'Dour has contributed a thoughtful voice to the highly charged multinational discourse on the cultural rift that divides the post-9/11 world, one that criticizes both the United States for its militarism in Iraq and the Muslim world for its tolerance of militant fundamentalism, while simultaneously pointing the way toward a more nuanced understanding of Islam. The Fez Feztival, too, contributes to this project, moving both music and discourse beyond the boundaries of commemoration and political outrage.

These expressions harness two very different forces with potential to transcend borders and beliefs: ancient modes of Sufi (and in N'Dour's case, Senegalese griot) expression, and the contemporary frame of world-music communication. On both levels, they offer potential and purpose to alter the prevalent frame surrounding U.S.-Islam relations. Whether these sane voices emanating from the Muslim world will inspire similar calls for tolerance on either side of the vast cultural rift that so troubled my colleagues and me in Columbia in 2001 is an open question. How deeply they stimulate positive dialogue and how far they reach beyond enlightened entertainment will depend on how successfully they drown out national anthems and fundamentalist calls. In the meantime, however, the music and talk coming from N'Dour's Dakar

and Skali's Fez continue to ring with the promise of reconciliation and the potential to shatter myths that are at the root of much misunderstanding in the post-9/11 world.

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NOTES

1. Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music: The Sufi Teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan,* Boston: Shambala Publications, 1996, 1.
2. Paul Berman, "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror," *The New York Times Sunday Magazine,* 23 March 2003.
3. Susan Sontag, "The Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker,* 24 September 2001.
4. At a public discussion I moderated, "Music in the Islamic World Today," hosted by the Brooklyn Academy of Music in connection with a presentation of Sufi music, I asked panelist Peter J. Awn, professor of Islamic Religion and Comparative Religion at Columbia University, to frame Islamic attitudes about music and the influence of Sufism on this issue. He commented as follows: "It's true that in Islam, there is a historical ambivalence toward music. But if you look at the origins of Islam what you find front and center is recognition of the power of sound. The Koran itself is a collection of sounds. So where does the ambivalence about music come from? It's in how this power of sound is managed by individuals who hear it. Music without text or music with poetry has the power to raise all sorts of emotions that conservative elements find dangerous. Not to say that music per se is bad, but what does it do to emotions? Sufism as it evolves in Islam recognizes this power and enhances it for exactly the same reason, saying, "Look, this is a unique avenue to explore, and if we put it within the proper context of spiritual practice it can be an essential if not critical means of achieving the goal of mysticism, which is union with god. Islam in its extraordinary cultural diversity has had an ability to take classical forms and embed them within the local context. Historically, a main entrée into local cultures has been the power of Sufis. Sufis tended to be much more willing to embrace local practices. Sufism is the bridge for a whole range of philosophical traditions and cultural traditions, especially into Asia,

and music, adapted and influenced by local cultures, has been a primary vehicle." (BamTalk: Music in the Islamic World Today" was held 7 May, 2005 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Hillman Attic Studio. In addition to Professor Awn and I, the participants included the musicians Hassan Hakmoun and Rashid Ahmed Din, and Fes Festival of World Sacred Music North American Director Zeyba Rahman.)

5. Portions of my interviews with Faouzi Skali, Gabriel Meyer and Jean-Jacques Cesbron appeared in "Weapons of Mass Sedition," *The Village Voice*, 30 March 2004, 29.
6. In his 2004 review of the tour, for example, critic Jon Pareles referred to it as "Part concert tour, part peace mission." Jon Pareles, "Songs of peace, from many perspectives," *New York Times,* 8 March 2004.
7. From the song "Wiri Wiri," on N'Dour's 2000 album *Joko: The Link,* Nonesuch 79612-2. Original lyrics in Wolof, English translation contained in the liner notes.
8. From the song "Shukran Bamba" on N'Dour's 2004 album Egypt, Nonesuch 79694-2. Original lyrics in Wolof, English translation contained in the liner notes. Lyrics reprinted with the permission of African Broadband Broadcasting.
9. Note, for instance, Kalefa Sanneh's review of a Youssou N'Dour concert in New York in 2005, in which he wrote, "To a crowd full of non-Wolof speakers, Mr. N'Dour's devotional music might sound an awful lot like dance music; sometimes ecstasy translates more clearly than piety. (As it happened, Mr. N'Dour had played an exhilarating set of dance music — the mbalax songs that first brought him fame — the night before, in Zankel Hall, with his band, Super Étoile.)" Kalefa Sanneh, "From a Senegalese Superstar, an International Hybrid of Music Inspired by Islam," *New York Times,* 28 October 2005.
10. Portions of my interviews with Youssou N'Dour appeared in "Not Your Father's Ramadan," Salon.com, 26 October 2005.
11. Youssou N'Dour issued this statement regarding the tour cancellation as a media advisory on March 7, 2003, through African Hypertext, his U.S. management company.
12. N'Dour's musical engagement with Sufi themes was complemented in 2005 by his pilgrimage to Fez, Morocco, during which he visited sites of historical importance to his Sufi roots and performed the music of Egypt at the Festival of World Sacred Music.