



Art and Decolonial Worldviews: Transcultural Resistance in and Beyond the Installations of Hassan Hajjaj

ARTICLES - FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE

SIOBHÁN SHILTON 



ABSTRACT

Critics have signalled the difficulties for artists from African countries and their diasporas in relation to the hegemonic international art system. Those whose work appears to conform to stereotypes, by depicting subjects such as the Islamic veil, Islamist terrorism and war, more easily gain international visibility (see, for example, Ben Soltane). Tunis-based art historian and curator Rachida Triki signalled, in 2009, an emerging tendency in the work of the latest generation of Tunisian and Maghrebi artists to resist “à la fois à l’uniformisation du goût opérée par le marché mondialisé de l’art, et au traditionalisme à visée identitaire” (Triki, “Art” 54). These artists resist such external and internal essentialising views by drawing on influences from within and beyond Tunisia: “[c]réer dans l’entre-deux de l’endogène et de l’exogène” (Triki, “Art” 58). Triki calls this concept “transcultural resistance”. In this article, I explore how art can resist both globalised and nationalist frameworks by revealing – and reinterpreting – what Walter Dignolo has referred to as “ways of knowing and sensing” that have been hidden by “zero point epistemology” (80) – that is, the enduring colonial belief that there is a transparent and universal knowledge. I show how such art also innovates new ways of knowing, sensing or being. This article asks how art (particularly photography, video and installation) can contribute to decolonial understandings of culture. It focuses primarily on a series of photographic and video portraits by British Moroccan artist Hassan Hajjaj, *My Rock Stars*, which incorporates as participants a range of artists from musicians to masters of Capoeira and visual artists. It concentrates on the series as presented at the Arnolfini in Bristol in 2020, while making comparisons to shows of alternative selections of the portraits in Paris and Casablanca.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Siobhán Shilton

University of Bristol, UK
S.Shilton@bristol.ac.uk

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Shilton, S 2024 Art and Decolonial Worldviews: Transcultural Resistance in and Beyond the Installations of Hassan Hajjaj. *Modern Languages Open*, 2024(1): 2 pp. 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.481>

Critics have signalled the difficulties for artists from African countries and their diasporas in relation to the hegemonic international art system. Those whose work appears to conform to stereotypes, by depicting subjects such as the Islamic veil, Islamist terrorism and war, more easily gain international visibility (see, for example, [Ben Soltane](#)). Tunis-based art historian and curator Rachida Triki signalled, in 2009, an emerging tendency in the work of the latest generation of Tunisian and Maghrebi artists to resist “à la fois à l’uniformisation du goût opérée par le marché mondialisé de l’art, et au traditionalisme à visée identitaire” (Triki, “Art” 54). These artists resist such external and internal essentialising views by drawing on influences from within and beyond Tunisia: “[c]réer dans l’entre-deux de l’endogène et de l’exogène” (Triki, “Art” 58). Triki calls this concept “transcultural resistance”.

In this article, I explore how art can resist both globalised and nationalist frameworks by revealing – and reinterpreting – what Walter Mignolo has referred to as “ways of knowing and sensing” that have been hidden by “zero point epistemology” (80) – that is, the enduring colonial belief that there is a transparent and universal knowledge. I show how such art also innovates new ways of knowing, sensing or being. How can art move, in ways that are distinctive to its media, beyond the “uniformisation of taste” while avoiding traditionalism motivated by a concern with national identity (Triki, “Art”)? How can such art develop understandings of “transnationalism”? How does it undermine the teleological presentation of history and the clear vision of space on which colonialism and (a Western version of) modernity depended (Mignolo 149–209; Tuhiwai Smith 58)? How can it be seen to create an alternative to what W. J. T. Mitchell has described critically as the “smoothness” and “transparency” of the “world picture” projected by global images from maps and models to Google Earth?¹ That is, what might a decolonial worldview look like?

My wider purpose, here, is to demonstrate the importance of the visual arts to developing a decolonial understanding of culture. In *Modern Languages*, film and printed forms have been central to research and curricula since the “Cultural Studies turn”. Scholars have signalled only recently, though, the importance of broadening the definition of cultural production to challenge “a model of language and culture centred on written texts rather than the full range and entanglements of written, oral, visual and multisensory forms” (Wells et al. n.p.). Works of art created for display in galleries, online or in the street, which often involve such entanglements in a single work, are crucial to a greater decolonial understanding of culture and to efforts to decolonise *Modern Languages*.²

Mignolo, a key proponent of decolonial studies, does not refer to visual art forms as what he perceives as alternative “ways of knowing and sensing” (80). He does, though, comment on the hierarchical perception that allowed literature and painting, from the Renaissance, to “set the rules by which to judge and evaluate written expressions and visual figurations not only in Europe, but, above all, in the non-European world” (20). Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her work focusing on decolonising methodologies in research, mentions ancient visual arts – weaving and carving – in a list of forms within which “contested accounts” of history are stored (36). The art I discuss here develops our understanding of these ideas. It tends to both preserve and reinterpret such ancient arts in combination with others from various times and spaces. Indeed, revealing interwoven histories and entangled ways of knowing, this art allows, I argue, for an alternative to Mignolo’s “delinking” of formerly colonised cultures and their “ways of knowing” from modernity.³ As postcolonial studies scholar Priya Gopal asserts, “[m]uch like language, knowledge emerges through a series of intersecting ideas flowing in multiple directions. Rather than delink histories and cultures, our task is to identify these engagements and influences” (880). As she states, “[t]he enslaved and the colonised [...] were not just victims but also agents in the making of [...] modernity” (896). Questioning the tendency to separate decolonial studies and postcolonial studies, this article engages with concepts from both fields,

1 Mitchell takes the term “world picture” from Heidegger to describe “the metaphors, figures, and pictures that constitute discourses of globalization, ancient, modern, and postmodern” (50).

2 My exploration of the questions above, and the interdisciplinary critical approach I adopt, is also intended to contribute to art historians’ considerations of how to decolonise Art History (see especially [Grant and Price](#)). Postcolonial scholarship on the visual arts – including multisensory forms – exists in *History of Art*, *Cultural Studies* and *Modern Languages*. On art from countries in Africa and their diasporas, see, for example, [Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu](#); [Tawadros](#); [Mercer](#); [Mirzoeff](#); [Lloyd, Contemporary](#); [Lloyd, Displacement](#); [O’Brien and Prochaska](#); [Salami and Blackman Visonà, Companion](#); [Welch and McGonagle](#); and [Shilton](#).

3 Critics such as Priya Gopal and [Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui](#) have argued against this tendency in the work of Walter Mignolo.

including scholarship on art or on transnationalism that builds on postcolonial concepts and approaches.⁴ I show how work in visual cultural production can expand our understanding of what Mignolo sees as alternative ways of knowing, but also of postcolonial conceptualisations of the ways in which cultures come together.

Shilton
Modern Languages Open
 DOI: 10.3828/mlo.
 v0i0.481



Figure 1 *My Rock Stars*, room installation view at New Art Exchange, Nottingham, for Hajjaj's solo show *The Path*, curated by Ekow Eshun. Photograph by Reece Straw. Courtesy of New Art Exchange and the Artists.



Figure 2 *My Rock Stars*, room installation view at Arnolfini, Bristol, in 2020. Photograph by Lisa Whiting. Courtesy of Arnolfini, New Art Exchange and the Artists.

I focus primarily on a series of photographic and video portraits by artist Hassan Hajjaj, *My Rock Stars* (see [Figures 1–3](#)). This collection incorporates as participants a range of artists from musicians to masters of Capoeira and visual artists. I concentrate on *My Rock Stars* as presented at Arnolfini, Bristol's International Centre for Contemporary Arts, in 2020.⁵ I also make comparisons to shows of alternative selections of the portraits in Paris and Casablanca. Hajjaj, who was born in Larache, Morocco, in 1961 and moved to London aged 12, draws on diverse cultural influences and his background in fashion, music and club culture to produce vibrant works, especially photographs, videos and furnishings. The artist also created a street fashion brand, R.A.P.⁶ These works playfully undermine Western clichés while also questioning

⁴ Gurminder K. Bhambra attributes the tendency to separate these fields to their distinct origins and development in different disciplines and in relation to distinct geographical territories and time frames (115).

⁵ The first exhibition of this series, *My Rock Stars: Volume 1*, took place at The Third Line in Dubai in 2012. At the exhibition in Bristol, *The Path*, curated by Ekow Eshun, the collection was shown with work from Hajjaj's collections *Dakka Marrakchia* and *Between*. This exhibition (with some differences) was previously shown at New Art Exchange, Nottingham in 2019. Selected images can be found at http://www.nae.org.uk/uploads/exhibitions-attachments/155/20190417095601-NAE_Exhibition-Guide_A2_Hassan-Hajjaj.pdf.

⁶ Real Artistic People.

Western dominance in the worlds of art, fashion and/or the economy.⁷ Hajjaj's renowned *'Kesh Angels* (2010), for example, depicts women from Marrakech on motorbikes wearing caftans and headscarves in their own clashing fabrics, to which he adds brightly patterned socks and heart-framed sunglasses.⁸ His photographic portraits are often presented in wooden frames containing everyday objects or commercial products – here, tins of Roberts corned beef and Target corned chicken.

In *My Rock Stars* Hajjaj unites portraits of artists and friends who have inspired him, from well-known figures such as the jazz musician José James (see [Figure 4](#))⁹ to henna artist Karima who works on the Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech. The selection of portraits presented in Bristol focused primarily on artists based in the UK with family origins abroad. “In gathering them together”, an exhibition panel stated, “the artist presents a portrait of Britain as a modern multicultural nation; a place strengthened, not diminished, by the impact of immigration.”



Figure 3 *My Rock Stars Experimental Vol. 1*, video installation at Arnolfini, Bristol, in 2020.

Photograph by Lisa Whiting.
 Courtesy of Arnolfini, New Art Exchange and the Artists.



Figure 4 *José James*, framed photography.

Photograph © Hassan Hajjaj, 2009/1430.
 Courtesy of José James and the Artist.

⁷ Hajjaj reappropriates globalised products, adapting them to the local perspective to undermine “orientalising” design, as *Krifa* states.

⁸ *'Kesh* is short for “Marrakesh”. The artist parodies fashion shoots by European photographers who use Marrakech as their backdrop but photograph Western models (*Krifa*; see also *Abbaspour and Wender 72*).

⁹ A different version of this portrait was exhibited at Arnolfini.

The cultural crossings evoked by Hajjaj come from within, “emanating from a state of personal intuition or easy grace”, as Martin Barnes puts it (6). Yet his work – and that of the numerous artists he presents – resonates in striking ways with certain theories of cultural contact, while also allowing for their development. *My Rock Stars* can be seen to illuminate the forms that the concept of transcultural resistance can take in multimedia work that resists “uniformisation” and “traditionalism” through its content as well as its aesthetics.¹⁰ I show how this concept can be understood differently in relation to Hajjaj’s series as exhibited in the UK or France and Morocco. The selections of portraits – considered separately or together – convey, in distinctive ways, the complexity of transnationalism, as well as “transnational feminism”.

In various contexts and media, the works of Hajjaj and others provide a complex vision of the “local” which, as Triki suggests in her discussion of the Maghreb’s long history of cultural crossings, is already transnational (Triki, “L’Art”). Hajjaj’s works resonate with scholarship on the transnational that highlights long histories of multidirectional, often transversal, cultural flows and the heterogeneity in which these have resulted.¹¹ Paul Jay argues that the “global”, like the “local”, is composed of “particulars from this culture and that” (70). The emphasis, he states, “ought to be on the multidirectionality of cultural flows, on the appropriation and transformation of globalized cultural forms wherever they settle in, with close attention to how those forms are reshaped and sent off again to undergo further transformations elsewhere” (71). At the same time, Jay critiques celebratory narratives of globalisation.¹² Such works of art also call to mind Henry John Drewal’s assertion that “The flows and currents of the modern are rarely unidirectional” (23). As Drewal states, anticipating Gopal’s argument, “Modernity is not a European invention”, and it is not particular to one period: “Everywhere, and in every era, modernity is the result of trade-offs with tradition and vice-versa: both combine incessantly, reach compromises with each other, negotiate their respective places” (23). As Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visonà state, “Modernism, modernity’s expressive aspect, has as many local and regional variants as modernity itself” (“Writing” 3).

Yet, as I show here, work by artists such as Hajjaj expands understandings of the flow of culture and the formation of knowledge through 1) non-written and non-verbal elements, such as music, movement and materials; 2) the distinctive ways in which works of art can “compress” space and time; and 3) the use of contingency, particularly participation at the stages of the work’s production and reception. In the first section, I demonstrate the model of culture that is evoked via these three features. Secondly, I explore how this model acquires further complexity through the depiction of items of clothing that connect distinct histories of both dominance and resistance across spaces and times. In the final part, I examine specific ways in which images of female artists, across the wider collection and its exhibition in France and Morocco, can encourage a decolonial understanding of culture.

Hajjaj’s project is comparable to work by other artists exploring cultural encounters, despite important differences in content, medium and aesthetics. Paris-based artist Majida Khattari, for example, intertwines references to countries such as Morocco, Lebanon, Pakistan and France through music, movement and materials in her ironic ambiguous mock fashion catwalks or *défilés-performances*.¹³ Berlin-based artist Bouchra Khalili’s video installation *Mother Tongue* (2012) displays five exiled people based in Paris and its outskirts. They read fragments of texts by Malcolm X, Abdelkrim El Khattabi, Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, Aimé Césaire or Mahmoud Darwish in oral languages such as Moroccan Arabic, Kabyle, Malinke, Wolof and Dari.¹⁴ A further connection can be made with *Iko* (2020), an online podcast series conceived by Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga and Paris-based curator Sandrine Honliasso.¹⁵ This

10 Triki’s examples tend to resist these forces indirectly via their form.

11 See, for example, Appadurai; Lionnet and Shih; Inda and Rosaldo; Jay; Drewal.

12 See Jay on the criticism that authors such as Appadurai have received in relation to celebratory narratives of the transnational (33, 60).

13 Hajjaj’s portraits from *Dakka Marrakchia* of Moroccan women modelling “LV” headscarves or *voilettes* bear a striking resemblance to Khattari’s “VIP” (“Voile Islamique Parisien”), resembling Vuitton’s “LV” logo (2008).

14 This is the first chapter of her trilogy, *The Speeches Series* (2012–13). See: <http://www.bouchrakhalili.com/the-speeches-series/>. Further diverse yet comparable examples can be found by artists including Kader Attia, Yto Barrada, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, El Seed, Mounir Fatmi, Katia Kameli and Zineb Sedira.

15 See <https://www.ikoflow.com>.

project unites a plurality of voices, languages, fields and media from different geographical zones (from Senegal, Mali and Nigeria to Bangladesh).

The contrasting projects of Khattari, Khalili and Nkanga convey and create entangled visual, corporeal, material and/or verbal ways of knowing and sensing across spaces and times. This article offers a new perspective on the work of Hajjaj, while also offering this as one example of how art can encourage a decolonial reimagining of the world.

TRANSCULTURAL RESISTANCE AND TRANSNATIONALISM THROUGH MUSIC, MOVEMENT AND MATERIALS

Hajjaj's series of still and moving portraits resonates with Triki's concept of transcultural resistance, but it calls for a nuancing of this term, due partly to the work's focus on diaspora contexts in which Moroccan and other African cultures are viewed as "exogenous". The collection, as exhibited in Bristol, was intended to counter insular perceptions of British identity in the context of the UK's exit from the EU.¹⁶

The artists' origins and trajectories, as well as the influences on them, are wide ranging, as is revealed in the gallery guide for the performers in the video installation or the curatorial notes beside those in the photographs. The video installation unites nine individual performances (see [Figure 3](#)). Beginning on the left-hand side, Mandisa Dumezweni, a London-based South African singer, performs an unaccompanied rap. Boubacar Kafando, based in France, from the Mossi ethnic group in Burkina Faso, plays the Kora – the string instrument used by *jalis* (griots) in West Africa.¹⁷ Moroccan-born London-based Simo Lagnawi plays the guembri, the three-stringed bass instrument used in Gnawa music. Gnawa music is sacred and central to a possession ritual (*lila*) brought to Morocco by enslaved people from West Africa (see [Witulski 8](#); [El Hamel 243](#)). With his various bands, Lagnawi combines Gnawa with influences from countries including Gambia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, India, Japan, Venezuela and the Caribbean. Poetic Pilgrimage is a rare female Muslim hip-hop and spoken word duo born in Bristol to Jamaican parents.¹⁸ Luzmira Zerpa, based in London from Venezuela, performs a Venezuelan merengue on a cuatro.¹⁹ José James, born and raised in Minneapolis, combines hip-hop and modern jazz. London-based Toca Feliciano is a Capoeira Angola master from Brazil and plays an improvised piece on the berimbau.²⁰ Nigerian-born London-based Helen Parker-Jayne Isibor (aka the Venus Bushfires) sings and plays the hang drum.²¹ Finally, Marques Toliver is a singer and violinist born in Florida.²²

In this context, resisting the "endogenous" equates to resisting attempts to separate cultures and to deny the organic formation and ongoing evolution of British culture and identity. The nature of such resistance internally thus, in such a Western context, overlaps with resistance to the external "uniformisation du goût" (Triki, "Art" 54) perpetuated by the Western-centric international art market. This market has tended to construct hierarchies between what is perceived as modern or contemporary versus traditional. Works by artists such as Hajjaj frequently go further in their subversive engagement with globalisation in the worlds of art, fashion and/or the economy. Globalisation emerges as more complex than a one-way uniformising process, calling to mind the ideas of thinkers such as Drewal and Jay discussed above. Hajjaj's appropriation of global commercial products, for example, signals their specific uses in a Moroccan context. The artist has frequently been labelled "the Andy Warhol of Marrakech". He ironically and playfully subverts such comparisons, however, in his clothing line "Andy Wahloo" (Mitter), a pun on the Arabic for "I have nothing", and the bar he opened in Paris with this name (Reade). Hajjaj's work diverges from Pop Art's exploration of mass consumption in 1960s North America. Goods such as cans

16 This is suggested by the gallery guide to the exhibition. Results of research by Chan et. al. "strongly suggest that Brexit, to a large degree, is about people's worldview: whether they take a more cosmopolitan or a relatively insular view of Britain's place in Europe" (848).

17 "Jali" is preferred to "griot", the French term. Kafando is also influenced by genres from rock, blues, jazz and funk to afrobeat.

18 They combine their Caribbean roots with the influences of hip-hop, jazz, world music and electro soul.

19 Zerpa is the lead singer of Family Atlantica, which draws on the local musical traditions of her childhood, as well as being inspired by music from Ghana, Senegal, Cuba and Ethiopia.

20 The berimbau is the instrument used in Capoeira.

21 She draws on avant-garde, psychedelic, tribal and meditative arts, as well as 70s musicians including Fela Kuti.

22 He moved to New York and travelled to the UK as part of Miles Benjamin Anthony Robinson's band.

of Fanta and 7UP represent, in Hajjaj's work, luxury items, and the seats, tables and light fittings he fabricates from recycled materials such as Coca-Cola crates become high-end furnishings (Komaroff 14–15). The products he uses to frame or accompany the person portrayed are, moreover, often selected playfully in relation to them (Hajjaj 116). Brazilian Rilene Martins, for example, is framed by cans of Pimentão Doce (see Figure 5).



Figure 5 Rilene, framed photography.

Photograph © Hassan Hajjaj, 2013/1434.

Courtesy of Rilene Martin and the Artist.

Transcultural resistance – in Maghrebi or diaspora contexts – questions the Western-centric definition and history of art. It can be seen by extension to question the making of knowledge from the point of view of “the West” and its presentation as universal in texts, particularly those written in European languages. Hajjaj includes means of knowing and sensing that have often been marginalised by Western frameworks. His work incorporates (untranslated) non-European languages – both oral and written – via the video performances in Arabic and Moré, as well as the use of products and clothing displaying printed Arabic. An alternative worldview is also indicated textually by the dating of the photographic portraits with the Hijri (Islamic) year alongside the Roman year. The performances by Simo Lagnawi and Boubacar Kafando incorporate enduring oral ways of communicating history and of perceiving the world from both Amazigh (Moroccan) and Mandinka (Mossi) perspectives. This work thus corresponds with recent decolonial debates regarding the need for “history” to include oral histories, but it goes further in presenting sonorous, corporeal and material ways of apprehending, communicating and intervening in the world.

Various spiritualities are evoked across the series. Lagnawi performs sacred Sufi-influenced trance music derived from Gnawa in the same show as the Muslim hip-hop duo Poetic Pilgrimage. Helen Parker-Jayne Isibor's unique style draws partly on her Nigerian heritage, but the hang drum she plays emerged in Switzerland at the beginning of the twenty-first century and is now sometimes combined with ancient yogic practices. Capoeira Angola, evoked by Feliciano's jamming on the berimbau and through posture in the photograph of Rilene Martins' impressive one-handed inversion, shares principles with the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé (Varela). Candomblé syncretised beliefs brought by enslaved Africans to Brazil with local beliefs and elements of Catholicism (El Hamel 244). Hajjaj's series evokes multiple worldviews without hierarchy, as distinct yet evolving and interconnected. In Tuhiwai Smith's view, “[c]oncepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, and then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for indigenous peoples [...] It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control ... yet” (78). The syncretic spiritualities conveyed through Hajjaj's work are “doubly” – that is, transculturally – resistant, in the sense that they negotiate a way between essentialising Western and “local” perspectives (as we will see further in relation to Moroccan Gnawa below). Their resistance to a simplistic

interpretation is, moreover, enhanced by their being alluded to in non-verbal (or untranslated) and indirect ways.

Hajjaj's portraits resonate with scholarship (literary and anthropological) on the transnational that emphasises heterogeneity and long histories of multidirectional cultural exchange. Yet the media he uses provide a distinctively multisensorial experience of the transnational and develop understandings of its complexity. Hajjaj uses music, movement and materials – as well as verbal ways of knowing – in the compressed space and time of his installation and wider exhibition. Although this work necessarily emphasises some cultures more than others, it undermines the usual dominance of art from “the West”, for example at international art exhibitions or music festivals. The work gives a particular place to cultures from, or connected to, African countries, while evoking a simultaneous, non-hierarchical juxtaposition of multiple transnational and transhistorical crossings. Such a juxtaposition destabilises the linear presentation of history and the clear vision of space on which colonialism and (a Western version of) modernity depended (Mignolo 149–209; Tuhiwai Smith 58). We might recall W. J. T. Mitchell's reference to maps and models as examples of the clear vision of space, which I mentioned in my introduction. Heightening the complexity that is indicated by the accompanying texts indicating each artist's histories and influences, the performers wear diverse and clashing colours and patterns from polka dots to distinctive African prints. Smart shirts and bow ties or vintage shoes, casual styles (from bomber jackets to beanie hats, including items designed by Hajjaj) or traditional Moroccan clothing (caftans, babouches or a Gnawa headdress embroidered with cowry shells) contrast with digital-age one-colour sunglasses or others with heart-shaped or cat-eye frames. The artists are, as we have seen, framed or accompanied by products alluding to different parts of the world. They pose against a brightly patterned backdrop composed of a woven mat in an outdoor studio. These sets reflect the influence on Hajjaj of African photographers such as Malians Seydou Keita and Malik Sidibé and Cameroonian Samuel Fosso, as well as the studios he used to visit as child in Larache, Morocco (Komaroff 14).

The artist is also influenced by fashion photography (Komaroff 14) and music videos (Berning Sawa), but he adapts such globalised cultural forms. The low angle he adopts is inspired by the martial arts movies and Hype Williams hip-hop videos that he watched growing up. He uses this angle, though, to make the sitters appear heroic, encouraging spectators literally to look up to them (New Art Exchange).²³ Critics have connected Hajjaj's work to various periods.²⁴ The installation also brings together a striking range of unique sounds which themselves are inspired by multiple musical styles associated with enduring cultural forms (*jaliya*, Gnawa, Capoeira and merengue) or more recent genres from classical and jazz to hip-hop and rap.

Multiple transnational connections emerge, in addition, in the dialogue between the artist and each performer through their art and often their own clothing, to which Hajjaj adds accessories, shoes or socks (Hajjaj, cited in Reade). Transnational connections are also produced between the portraits, which are created and positioned by the artist and perceived diversely by the spectators as they walk around the exhibition. Indeed, Hajjaj allows the worldview he presents to be shaped to some extent by contingent elements through participation.

An example of the complex transnational connections evoked by the work can be seen in the portrait of Simo Lagnawi (see Figure 3, third video portrait from the left). He presents the already transnational local Gnawa music, which is particular to Amazigh culture but draws on music and rituals brought by enslaved people from West Africa together with Sufi practices (see Witulski 4, 8; El Hamel 243–53). Lagnawi has transformed this trans-Saharan (rather than globalised) cultural form by appropriating, with his bands, influences which are also “local”, from countries in West Africa, Asia, South America and the Caribbean. The flows evoked thus involve “returning” to West Africa and making transversal connections in opposite directions. In Hajjaj's portrait of Lagnawi, this transnational combination acquires additional layers. It appropriates and transforms the globalised cultural forms of music video and fashion, while the performance is presented within a set designed by Hajjaj, whose portraiture practice involves further alternative journeys to West Africa and Morocco. (An alternative, photographic portrait of Lagnawi, not shown at this exhibition, makes further connections by presenting him together with Boubacar Kafando, from Burkina Faso, framed by globalised products: cans

²³ This contrasts with objectifying fashion photography, as well as the anonymous “types” or high-angle panoramic “scenes” of colonial postcards.

²⁴ Komaroff, for example, comments on the resonance with medieval Islamic art (14). See also Barnes (8).

of Coca-Cola and 7up (Figure 6.) Hajjaj's portraits call to mind Drewal's point regarding the enduring and multidirectional nature of the "modern". We can also understand, from these portraits, that the "modern" continues to evolve through negotiations between already transnational, multidirectional forms in the same location or via numerous displacements, detours and returns.



Shilton
Modern Languages Open
 DOI: 10.3828/mlo.
 v0i0.481

Figure 6 Simo Lagnawi & Boubacar Kafando, framed photography.

Photograph © Hassan Hajjaj, 2010/1431.

Courtesy of Simo Lagnawi, Boubacar Kafando and the Artist.

Each portrait is situated, additionally, in relation to the other video portraits in the installation and the photographs in the adjoining room, which creates further transnational links. Connections between the artists' musical styles and influences can be heard, such as the recurrent influence of hip-hop. The portraits in the video installation are connected by the artists' responses to each individual performance – turning towards the performer, smiling, clapping, gesturing or swaying to the rhythm – as if they had all performed and watched each other perform together. Their responses, though, are slightly out of synch, reminding us that they were filmed separately. These disjunctive contingent reactions call to mind to the ambivalence and dissonance that occurs in cultural encounters but that is often erased from definitions of the transnational.²⁵

Moving beyond a model of culture centred on written texts, this work thus allows for an understanding of culture that is mediated not only through the intellect but also through the senses. Via music, movement and materials, and via intermedial practices, Hajjaj presents a complex, evolving *mise-en-abyme* of transnational connections. The use of non-verbal (as well as verbal) elements, shifting spatio-temporal frames and contingency activates and embodies the diverse spectators, encouraging their awareness of their relationship to – and their involvement in – this enduring process.

CONNECTING HISTORIES OF ENSLAVEMENT AND RESISTANCE

The lively, entertaining spectacle of *My Rock Stars* invites spectators to celebrate cultural plurality. Yet it also indicates the persistence of inequalities reminiscent of colonialism and signals the legacy of the history of enslavement. The series can be related to the critique, by authors such as Jay, of simplistic celebratory narratives of the transnational. At the same time, this collection resists narratives of victimisation (see Becker; Krifa). Through various non-verbal and verbal means, it defies a reductive interpretation while also emphasising agency. Through such means, Hajjaj and the performers highlight the specific and diverse lived experiences of

²⁵ The exhibition title *The Path*, in addition, was taken from Ralph MacDonald's album of the same name, which connects music from Africa, the Caribbean and America, as the gallery guide explains.

transnational phenomena due to gender, generation, ethnicity or class. Distinct histories of both dominance and resistance are conjured and connected across spaces and times through Hajjaj’s multisensorial aesthetic and/or through specific items of clothing or fashion styles from durags to dandyism.

Hajjaj’s distinctive backdrops, and his display of performances in one-colour sunglasses on ancient stringed instruments, for example, link Lagnawi’s Gnawa rendition to Kafando’s Kora playing. But these features also connect the video of Lagnawi to Feliciano’s Capoeira accompaniment, evoking a transversal crossing between already transnational – trans-Saharan and transatlantic – forms. Hajjaj has highlighted the “similar journey” he perceives between Gnawa and Capoeira, which both originate from histories of enslavement (Hajjaj 108).²⁶ Both forms, we might add, simultaneously point to distinct histories of resistance. The martial dance Capoeira emerged from the Brazilian context of African enslavement (*Assunção*). Gnawa, by contrast, is traditionally a sacred trance ritual involving music, but it was similarly developed by enslaved people – from West Africa to Morocco in this case. It also, like Capoeira, reflects a syncretic spiritual tradition, combining rituals from the West African countries of origin with, in this instance, Sufi practices.²⁷ Gnawa can similarly be seen as a form of resistance, albeit via certain songs that express the plight of enslaved people (El Hamel 243). Gnawa can also be seen to resist in the sense of constructing an identity despite its (ongoing) history of marginalisation in relation to Islam by some in Morocco (Witulski 11; El Hamel 254–55).²⁸

The cowry shells worn by Lagnawi, which, like his music, evoke histories of enslavement and resistance, can be found in other portraits in the exhibition, thus linking them materially. These include the poem displayed beside the entrance to the exhibition of Hajjaj’s work at Arnolfini, *Two Worlds Collide*, a response by Bristol-based British artist Sophia Harari. She explores her Moroccan-ness and Blackness, presumably taking inspiration from Lagnawi’s performance: “They adorn themselves in cowry shells and dreadlocks / Wearing the sharpened shoes of our forefathers / embracing all that came before them / They are my kin”. This artist can be seen to extend intermedially the transnational and transhistorical layering in the portrait of Lagnawi to her distinct space, time, generation, ethnicity and gender. The references to histories of enslavement and resistance in her poem via the image of the Gnawi, and more widely in *My Rock Stars*, might serve as a reminder of the legacy of these histories – more specifically, that of transatlantic enslavement and resistance. These references also call to mind the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in Bristol, which culminated in the tearing down of the statue of seventeenth-century slave trader Edward Colston on 7 June, and its being thrown into the harbour opposite this exhibition venue.

Alongside her poem, Harari presents photographic portraits of herself wearing a durag over a hijab, which contributes a further material – and corporeal – way of communicating knowledge and lived experience across space and time. Her five self-portraits are headshots arranged to form a cross, the central portrait showing her looking towards the camera and the other four looking at the central photograph from above, below or sideways. The line in capitals above the portraits – “TWO WORLDS COLLIDE AS THE SILKS SLIP AGAINST ONE ANOTHER” – refers to her overlapping head coverings and the “worlds” they can be taken to represent and to which the artist belongs. Both are defined below the photographs: “a Durag is a protective hair cap worn to maintain or accelerate hairstyles and wave or curl patterns”; “a Hijab is a veil or headscarf worn by Muslim women to maintain modesty and privacy, it may be seen as a sign of religious and cultural devotion”.

Durags have a complex history. Their origins are frequently connected to enslavement in North America, given the headwraps worn by women to protect them from the heat (Wilson-Forsberg et al. 704). But they became, via rappers and hip-hop musicians in the 1990s and early 2000s, “performative gestures of Black masculinity” (Wilson-Forsberg et al. 704, drawing on Street). The durag has been used to stereotype black males, but it has also been reappropriated by

26 Hajjaj, who has practised Capoeira since around 1990, first brought the two forms together in a performance at the Gnawa Festival in Essaouira in 2002 (Hajjaj 108). He has also made a reportage documentary, *Brothahood*, following in parallel a master of Gnawa in Morocco and a master of Capoeira in Brazil, which premiered in 2023.

27 El Hamel notes a parallel between Gnawa and Candomblé in this respect (244).

28 El Hamel compares these songs to spirituals that emerged from transatlantic experiences of enslavement, while underlining differences between the two diasporic communities (255–57).

some musicians – male and female, from Eminem to Rihanna (Street). In this way, the durag has now become “not only a signifier of a shared experience but also a badge. It stands as not only a symbol of a possibly gritty, street mentality but evidences a pride in it” (Street n.p.). Sophia Harari’s durag, particularly alongside her verbal evocation of Gnawa, resonates with histories of enslavement and resistance. Yet it also recalls this more recent history of violence and resistance to it. Her further reuse and layering of a durag and a hijab resists the cultural and gendered stereotypes related to both garments and conveys materially her multilayered identity. Her sense of plurality within herself – and the discrepancies between her self-perception and the ways she is perceived by others – is also conveyed corporeally by her looking towards the central image of herself from different angles. This artist’s verbal-visual response to Hajjaj’s work anchors his portrayal of cultural diversity in a current Bristolian context and contributes a distinct female and generational perspective. It can also be seen to transform three already transnational, transhistorical material forms (cowry shells, the durag and the hijab) by combining and/or embodying them in a specific local site.

Distinct histories of violence and resistance are also evoked simultaneously by references to the Black dandy style, which recur in various ways across the portraits. Shantrelle Lewis describes the Black dandy’s approach to fashion: “They mix vintage with modern pieces; clothes designed on London’s Savile Row with African prints; polka dots with plaid; flamboyant colors with classic lines” (10). This mixing is partly due, she suggests, to the influence of hip-hop and the internet (10). In Hajjaj’s portraits, this style is usually adapted. In his video portrait of Marques Toliver, parts of his costume – his bowler hat and striped jacket, for example – are reminiscent of the dandy style. Yet they are combined with casual black trousers and shoes, a multicoloured tasselled scarf and yellow-dotted heart-framed sunglasses (a variation of this style can be seen in a photograph from the wider collection: Figure 7). Despite its “seeming frivolity and lightness”, the dandy style is, as Lewis has argued, “a sartorial maneuver used by Black men to confront criminalizing stereotypes, widen conceptions of masculinity, and create a new self-identity for the twenty-first century” (14).



Figure 7 Marques Toliver, framed photography.

Photograph © Hassan Hajjaj, 2009/1430.

Courtesy of Marques Toliver and the Artist.

Lewis distinguishes the Black dandy from the “everyday dapper Don: a Black dandy is a gentleman who intentionally appropriates classical European fashion, but with an African diasporan aesthetic and sensibility” (8). She details how Black dandyism emerged when the transatlantic slave trade was at its height and enslaved Africans were made to dress up to represent their owners, but they “became more than status symbols when they personalized

their uniforms with their own sense of pride and style” (9–10). White dandyism, which arose during the Victorian era, “has always been outside the traditional tropes of masculinity – queer, in a sense – but dandies also threatened the existing class structure by dressing up. A Black man employing this strategy is even more radical and subversive” (9). Black dandyism, which has its origins in the encounter between European fashions and centuries of African tailoring and aesthetics (9), today resists racist stereotyping (11). This highly tailored look is “the antithesis of baggy wear” to which stereotypes of the delinquent, drug dealer or gangster are frequently attached (10). Recalling the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown Jr, Lewis states, “For Black men, fashion choices can be a matter of life or death” (11). Hajjaj’s adaptation of this style, in dialogue with the individual portrayed, emphasises their unique identity. The retention of dandy elements might serve as a reminder of this complex history of violence and resistance to it, while the addition of casual styles or soft fabric might be taken to indicate the ongoing need to avoid being pigeonholed and develops the style in new directions.²⁹

In Hajjaj’s portrait of Bumi Thomas (“Bumi Sittin’, 2013/1434 (Hijri year)”) the formality of the dandy style is retained while this transnational form is “feminised” and inflected by recent histories of violence and resistance in a specific location (Figure 2, portrait on the left). This adaptation creates a complex transnational portrait which resonates with that of Harari. The singer wears a smart bright-yellow leaf-patterned shirt, an orange and blue striped bow tie, bright blue trousers with a purple and yellow African print and green socks. She also wears vintage blue high-heeled shoes with an ankle strap and light-pink dotted heart-framed sunglasses. The wooden frame contains tins of Geisha mackerel, their green, yellow and red branding toning with Thomas’s socks, shirt, bow tie and guitar. She is seated sideways holding her guitar upright. Despite this vibrant celebration of cultural plurality and musical talent, this photograph, when exhibited in a 2020 context, might be related to a further sinister aspect of the transnational. In June 2019 Bumi Thomas was caught up in the British “Windrush scandal”. Like thousands of people in the UK with roots in former colonies, including the “Windrush generation”, the singer was suddenly threatened with deportation to Nigeria from where her parents had emigrated in the 1970s (Yates; Bungey). This was despite her having been born in Glasgow and lived most of her adult life in London (Yates; Bungey). Thomas was born in June 1983 after the Thatcher government’s British Nationality Act had come into force, which stated that children born to parents from the colonies were no longer entitled to automatic citizenship (Yates). Following a petition, media coverage and an immigration tribunal, the threat of deportation was withdrawn, though Thomas still could not apply for British citizenship (Yates).

The portrait of this artist refutes attempts to impose an identity on her via her dark glasses, her confident straight-backed pose – which is reinforced by the vertical line traced by her guitar at the centre of the composition – and Hajjaj’s typically low-angle shot. These aspects add to the resistance to monolithic identities that is present in the cultural crossings evoked by her costume and his aesthetics. Yet her guitar might serve as a reminder that she was re-accepted because of what the judge deemed to be her valuable contribution to this country (Bungey). Most people who shared her plight are unknown and were not, therefore, given the same opportunity. By presenting the dandy style as adapted and embodied by Thomas, this portrait resists racist stereotypes. If we consider the origins of this style, the portrait also powerfully situates the singer’s twenty-first-century story of deportation in relation to a long history of resistance to prejudice. This transnational portrait is complicated by the resonances of Black dandyism, its origins and its legacy, as well as its associations predominantly with masculinity, across the Atlantic. Bumi performs a female version of this traditionally male style, specifically making space for her identity as a Glasgow-born cross-cultural Black woman and artist.

The shifting decolonial picture conjured and co-created – at the stages of both production and reception – via *My Rock Stars* thus acquires further complexity through the presence of items of clothing. Materials, forms, patterns and styles – and the embodiment and performance of them – “recount” distinct yet interconnected histories of violence and resistance to it. These non-verbal contingent ways of knowing and remembering also evoke the particularity of lived experiences of these histories due to factors such as ethnicity, class, generation or gender. The portrait of Bumi Thomas contributes to the complex portrayal of women across the series.

²⁹ This style is also reminiscent of *la sape* in Congo and the Congolese diaspora, evoking further transnational resonances.

Hajjaj's images of female artists undermine clichés surrounding women migrants and their descendants in the UK and Europe, as well as the traditionally gendered nature of certain forms of art or fashion.³⁰ Exploring such images across the wider collection and its exhibition in France and Morocco reveals site – together with other non-verbal elements – as a further distinctive aspect of the way in which multisensorial art forms can encourage a decolonial understanding of culture.

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS AND DECOLONIAL WORLDVIEWS ACROSS CULTURES AND MEDIA

Bumi Thomas's transformation of Black dandyism is exhibited in the same series as portraits such as the video of Poetic Pilgrimage. Through their multicultural background, fashion style and music, this Bristol-born, hijab-wearing duo resists attempts to marginalise them from the various overlapping communities to which they belong, as well as the male-dominated hip-hop industry. A further example is the photographic portrait of Rilene Martins, a master of Capoeira, which is also traditionally a male form (Green). These women are all involved, in different ways and contexts, in what we might see as feminist transcultural resistance, in the sense that they perform between various essentialising views from within and beyond the communities in which they are located. Through the unique sounds, movements or dress styles they develop, they each transform transnational, male-dominated cultural forms while also revealing diverse contexts and agendas behind the term "feminism".³¹ Transcultural resistance through such ways of knowing and sensing can be found in Hajjaj's wider series, which he adapts for each exhibition.

In his exhibition of *My Rock Stars* photographs in Paris at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (2019), the artist similarly questioned perceptions of French identity that perceive it as separate from its history of immigration, albeit in a distinctive Republican context. In this instance, he portrayed artists such as Algerian-born singer and activist Rachid Taha and Moroccan-born singer Hindi Zahra. His photographic portrait of Hindi Zahra, who sings primarily in English and Tamazight, can be seen to show how feminisms in different contexts can be evoked and connected in an individual image.³² Entitled "Hindi Kahlo", this portrait shows the singer wearing plaits like those seen in some portraits of Frida Kahlo, but with a dress style that recalls Moroccan caftans and displays a pattern of stylised Eiffel Towers and the word "Paris". While playful, we might see this portrait as forging a transversal connection between a member of a female diaspora community that is frequently stereotyped as oppressed and a widely accepted icon of feminism. It might be taken to resist patriarchal attitudes from any direction, while also indicating the plurality and complexity of feminisms.

Distinct, though interconnected, forms of feminist transcultural resistance can be discerned in the selection Hajjaj presented as *My Maroc Stars* (punning on the original title) at L'Atelier 21 in Casablanca (2017–18). In relation to this exhibition, Triki's concept of transcultural resistance can be understood in its original sense of resisting the Western "uniformisation of taste" and internal views of the "local" as authentic and static. The portraits resist both by evoking the diversity of Moroccan culture and identity and by indicating the preservation of traditions, as well as an openness to, and transformation of, external influences. Hajjaj portrays (solely in photography in this case) artists from Morocco and its diaspora. The selection of photographs includes a wide range of musicians who play, or draw on, traditional or contemporary styles or combine both. There are portraits, for example, of the popular DJ Van, who mixes Moroccan folk music and modern electro; hip-hop and rap artist Komy; and the urban pop singer and songwriter Manal Benchlikha. The portraits also feature several Gnawa musicians. Some play in a traditional style, emphasising the spirituality of the music, such as Asmaa Hamzaoui,

³⁰ I refer particularly to the binary thinking surrounding women migrants to Europe in right-wing populist discourse. Debora Spini has highlighted the specific nature of such binary thinking, though it varies in relation to different cultures and political contexts: "public attention tends to focus on their apparent status as oppressed victims of their misogynist cultures" (135).

³¹ Scholars such as Chandra Mohanty have critiqued the ethnocentric universalism produced in some (Western) feminist texts.

³² Hindi Zahra draws on influences from numerous cultures, including Algerian Rai and Chaabi artists, such as Cheikha Rimitti, and the renowned Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum, as well as traditional Amazigh music (Rahhou).

while others combine Gnawa with various musical genres. Hassan Hakmoun, for example, fuses Gnawa with jazz and contemporary Western neo-classical music and pop. Traditional Moroccan music is also represented in the portrait of Khadija El Ouarazia, who leads an all-female folklore group which plays *Chaabi* and *Houara* (NYSCA Living Traditions).³³ These portraits appear together with portraits of actresses and visual artists. Those photographed range from international figures such as Lamia Naji, Nour Eddine Tilsaghani, French Moroccan Chourouk Hreich and London-born Moroccan-Iraqi filmmaker Tala Hadid to local henna artist Karima and an unnamed “Male Belly Dancer”, who both work at the Jemaa el-Fna square in Marrakech.

While the concept of transcultural resistance can be understood differently in this specific context, the portraits similarly combine, across spaces and times, references to various ways of knowing and sensing. Such references include material items, from globalised products and fashion accessories or styles to “local” instruments, as well as performers of Gnawa, Sufi, Hassania and Houara. Hajjaj’s transnational aesthetic allows, comparably, for voices and visions that have often been marginalised. They have been excluded in this case by colonial exoticism or internal views of Moroccan identity as separate from its diasporas in the West, from other African countries and from (already transnational) local cultures within Morocco. The use of Arabic as individual letters on Lego blocks in the wooden frames of some portraits might be taken to allude to a monolithic notion of Moroccan identity. But this is complicated through its juxtaposition with, for example, signifiers of Gnawa: the musicians, their traditional guembri and drum, and the cowry shells on their instruments and costumes. Class divisions and elitism in the art world are undermined by the presence of figures such as Karima and the “Male Belly Dancer”, who also questions conventional perceptions of tradition and masculinity.

Hajjaj’s portraits of women contribute to such transcultural resistance by suggesting various distinctively Moroccan feminist positions, which undermine fixed visions of Moroccan women from within and beyond the country. Fatima Sadiqi underlines the particularity and complexity of Moroccan feminism, which emerged in the encounter with Western culture. Since the late 1950s, Moroccan feminism “has had to establish its agenda vis-à-vis five strong prevailing forces, namely (i) Islam, (ii) local political authority, (iii) local civil society, (iv) Western feminism, and (v) international nongovernmental organizations” (Sadiqi 21). Sadiqi highlights the diversity but also the increasing rapprochement of liberal and religious positions (19–39). Hajjaj’s portraits resonate with this complexity in depicting a range of women who demonstrate implicitly, and/or fight actively for, equality between the sexes while retaining aspects of Morocco’s cultural heritage. As public figures, they already blur the socioculturally constructed boundaries between gendered spaces in Moroccan society (see Mernissi).

Asmaa Hamzaoui, for example, breaks with patriarchal tradition through her status as Morocco’s first female Gnawa musician (Saeed), her all-female band and her female voice. Yet she otherwise preserves this sacred Moroccan music in its traditional form and emphasises its Islamic aspect (thus also undermining views of Gnawa and Islam as separate). The pop singer Manal Benchlikha, in her music videos, questions gender stereotypes. At the same time, as Suja R. Sawafta has shown, she “pays homage to the traditional aspects of Moroccan culture – specifically the culture that is preserved, practiced, and created by women for other women and by women for the broader Moroccan socio-cultural fabric” (Sawafta, cited by Toum-Benchekroun n.p.).

The themes of Oum’s songs on her third album, *Daba* (Now, 2019), reflect a further perspective, combining her feminism, her humanism and her “secular spirituality”.³⁴ Her song *Kemmy* [You], in Tamazight, for example, alludes to women whose destinies are controlled by patriarchies: “Hiding something in your heart / Unable to do as you wish”.³⁵ *Ha* [Here], in Moroccan *darija*, exemplifies her spirituality, enumerating the resources offered by the Earth: “Here is my water, my fire, my air, my earth [...]”. Oum’s use of local oral languages calls to mind the importance attributed to orality by Sadiqi, given that women in Morocco have been distanced from the official national history written by men (partly because the majority of Moroccan women are illiterate) (Sadiqi 18–19). Yet this singer combines these verbal ways of knowing with influences

33 Chaab means “people” in Arabic.

34 <http://oum.ma/en/biography/>.

35 English translation provided by LOF Music/MDC, “Oum: Daba”, posted on 1 September 2020, <https://worldlisteningpost.com/2020/09/01/oum-daba/> (accessed 14 October 2021).

from enduring male-dominated Moroccan musical styles such as Gnawa, Sufi and Hassania, together with jazz, soul and electronic trance. She has also drawn previously on Andalusian classical, Cuban and Ethiopian music.³⁶ Her album *Zarabi* (Rug, 2015), moreover, pays homage to local women who make rugs from old clothing and textiles, while this is also a metaphor for her combining of contrasting musical styles (*Scenenoise*). In this case, an alternative feminist aesthetic manoeuvre can be discerned: an enduring female way of knowing is revealed and revered while also being transposed and transformed, intermedially and transnationally.



Figure 8 Oum &, framed photography.

Photograph © Hassan Hajjaj, 2014/1435.

Courtesy of Oum and the Artist.

Hajjaj's photographs of musicians such as these reflect and enhance visually their retention or reinterpretation of Moroccan culture in their lyrics, music and videos, as well as their dress styles and album covers. These artists layer or juxtapose elements that might be identified as local or global, but to create a unique look that cannot be located. Oum, for example, is portrayed wearing multiple fezzes, flower-patterned babouches, yellow heart-rimmed sunglasses and tiger-print furry trousers (Figure 8). She is framed by American Green fruit cans with Arabic text alongside logos in English. Hajjaj's inclusion of such artists can be seen to question internal and external views of Moroccan women, while also undermining the further neo-colonial view of a modern/traditional binary in the arts. It questions, moreover, what Triki perceives as "[le] traditionalisme à visée identitaire" ("Art" 54) in avoiding any nostalgia for art that predates colonialism. Presenting various female artists (together with male artists) with different relationships to diverse cultures conveys the diversity behind the terms "Moroccan" and "feminist" and the ways in which they can be connected. It points to the existence of plural, distinct yet interconnected feminisms within Morocco, as well as beyond.

Within and between Hajjaj's various exhibitions of *My Rock Stars / My Maroc Stars*, we can discern overlapping yet specific conditions and agendas for feminism.³⁷ The same can be said more widely of instances of transcultural resistance. Indeed, the transnational emerges from Hajjaj's work – within and across the series of portraits – as a *mise-en-abyme* of multiple distinct yet interconnected instances of transcultural resistance across space and time. "Smooth" global images and timelines that have ordered the world according to Western-centric perceptions are disrupted in distinctive ways by the experience of non-verbal forms within the space and time of the exhibition – that is, the time of each video performance and the viewing time determined by each spectator. The installation can be seen, rather, to promote a sense of

³⁶ Regarding the influences on Oum's music, see *Scenenoise*; see also <http://oum.ma/en/biography/>.

³⁷ In this way, the series resonates with the work of *Françoise Lionnet* and *Ella Shohat*, while the transnational multisensorial and intermedial feminist manoeuvres we see in the work of Hajjaj provide new perspectives.

unevenness via a reordering of space and time and by allowing the work to be shaped in some measure by contingent elements. Such elements range from the artists' disjunctive responses to each other's filmed performances to the indeterminable point at which each spectator enters the looping video show. By engaging spectators kinaesthetically and intellectually with multiple non-verbal and verbal ways of knowing and sensing, the installation heightens awareness in them of their positionality (their location and cultural background, for example) and encourages a decolonial reimagining of the world.

CONCLUSION

I asked, at the outset, what a decolonial worldview might look like. Hassan Hajjaj's work demonstrates how art can undermine what Mignolo and Tuhiwai Smith have shown to be the teleological presentation of history and the clear vision of space on which colonialism and (a Western version of) modernity depended (Mignolo 149–209; Tuhiwai Smith 58). Such art evokes, by contrast, diverse spaces, histories and ways of knowing as inevitably entangled and perpetually evolving. Indeed, it undermines attempts to “delink” cultures in the formation of modernity, cohering with Gopal's questioning of such attempts within decolonial studies. At the same time, such art expands our understanding of postcolonial concepts of cultural entanglement. It does so by combining multisensorial modes and/or intermedial practices, compressing space and time in distinctive ways, and incorporating contingency, particularly via participation.

In work such as that of Hajjaj, cultural entanglements are echoed and reinforced by those of written, oral and multisensorial forms. Enduring ways of knowing, like the arts of weaving and carving mentioned by Tuhiwai Smith, can be found in such work. Yet in avoiding traditional conceptions of the local – in addition to Western frameworks – this work tends to both preserve and reinterpret such practices and/or invent new ways of knowing, sensing and being. Such art can include oral languages and means of communicating history, but it also highlights the importance of non-verbal ways of knowing and sensing via music, voice or sound, corporeal movement from dance to simple gestures, and materials, including objects or dress, through processes of fabrication, symbolism and style.

Various ways of knowing (non-verbal and verbal) can, in the space and time of a work of art, be juxtaposed or alluded to simultaneously without hierarchy, so that they evoke – and encourage connections to be made between – multiple distinct histories of dominance and resistance in different countries or regions and at specific historical moments. The juxtaposition, superimposition or *mise-en-abyme* of non-written ways of knowing conveys the interconnectedness yet also the distinctiveness of particular moments of transcultural resistance – including feminist transcultural resistance. It reveals sensorially the complexity of lived experiences behind notions such as transnational feminism, indicating plural and distinct agendas but also the potential for solidarity. The work of Hajjaj and that of the artists he includes, moreover, can be taken to illustrate various transcultural feminist and, in many cases, specifically transnational feminist aesthetic manoeuvres. (Such manoeuvres are transnational in the sense of weaving together – as well as resisting by reinterpreting – external and internal influences, such as we see in the work of Oum but not in that of Asmaa Hamzaoui or Khadija El Ouarzazia.)

The convergence of non-written ways of knowing inhibits a simplistic definition of the culture/s evoked and encourages spectators' consciousness of their positionality. At the same time, the performers' agency is emphasised via their contribution to shaping the work – through their own transcultural aesthetics and their postures, gestures or looks towards the camera. The perception of knowledge as universal and emerging from a single point is undermined in these works by their formation – and re-formation in each new site – through the contingent exchange between the perspectives, languages and sensorial ways of knowing and sensing of the artist, participants and spectators.

Through the use of non-verbal elements, shifting spatio-temporal frames and contingency, art such as that of Hajjaj allows for a questioning of the tendency in Modern Languages to focus on “a model of language and culture centred on written texts rather than the full range and entanglements of written, oral, visual and multisensory forms” (Wells et al. n.p.). This art allows

for an understanding of culture that is mediated through the senses, as well as the intellect. Such objects of study allow for comparative reflection on distinct cultures and histories of empire and resistance, as well as traditions of thought (decolonial and postcolonial, for example) that have tended to remain separate, due partly to this model of language and culture.

Returning to what W. J. T. Mitchell describes as the “smooth” “world picture” projected by global images, he identifies an alternative in the poetry of William Blake. For Blake, he states, “the earth is [...] to be seen as ‘one infinite plane’ in which every particular object, and every living thing contains a vortex that opens into yet another infinity” (55). Mitchell indicates, as I said at the outset, the limits of world pictures, taking the example of the app Google Earth:

everything is clear, transparent, and highly defined – until, that is, we come close, and then the world picture dissolves into pixels. This is the moment of Blake’s Minute Particular, the moment when the global image dissolves into the local, the passage into the vortex of dissolution and re-framing of the image [...] There is no way to “zoom” smoothly and precisely from the global to the local [...] or from the heights of abstract infinity to the minute particular – the perspective must pass through a vortex which imposes a new regime of observation – up close and personal – on the spectator. (Mitchell 56)

Works such as those of Hajjaj can be seen to juxtapose – or even conjure a *mise-en-abyme* of – multiple such moments of “dissolution and re-framing”. Through their use of multisensoriality and contingency, and their treatment of space and time, such works open a passage between the global and the local, between the abstract worldview and the close-up of a particular instance. To the idea of such a passage we might add that of “elasticity”, which is central to Otobong Nkanga’s concept of *Iko*, the title she gave to the work I mentioned in my introduction: “*Iko* was conceived as an elastic space that seeks to unite different geographic zones, to bring together research fields of specific subjects of study and to relate heterogeneous practices [...]”.³⁸ Moving inversely from the local to the global, this concept involves relating diverse particular practices “to elicit new readings of the world”. The shifting, “elastic” space in works such as those of Hajjaj can be seen to evoke an uneven, variegated, multiperspectival and perpetually evolving, negotiable world picture. This is a decolonial picture which, while highlighting cultural entanglements, precisely avoids attempts to produce an all-encompassing and static image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the artist Hassan Hajjaj and the Hassan Hajjaj Studio for the images used in this article and for their very helpful feedback. I am also extremely grateful to Alexandra Reza, Kay Chadwick (as former co-editor), and the anonymous reviewers, for their close engagement with this article.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Siobhán Shilton  orcid.org/0000-0001-5442-5467
University of Bristol, UK

REFERENCES

- Abbaspour, M., and J. Wender. “Studio & Street: Hassan Hajjaj’s Style Mash-Up.” *By Hassan Hajjaj: Photography, Fashion, Film, Design*, edited by K. Hadidian. London: Rose Issa Projects, 2014, pp. 70–72.
- Aikens, N. “Bouchra Khalili’s ‘The Speeches Series’: A Reflection from Europe.” *Afterall.org*, 5 January 2015, www.afterall.org/article/bouchra-khalili_the-speeches-series.a-reflection-from-europe. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Appadurai, A. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Assunção, M. R. *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Barnes, M. “Hajjaj in Close-Up.” *By Hassan Hajjaj: Photography, Fashion, Film, Design*, edited by K. Hadidian. London: Rose Issa Projects, 2014, pp. 6–9.

- Becker, C. "Hassan Hajjaj: My Rock Stars." *artafricamagazine.org*, 20 April 2016, artafricamagazine.org/hassan-hajjaj-my-rock-stars-by-cynthia-becker/. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Ben Soltane, M. "Élan et espoir: perspectives de développement des arts visuels en Tunisie après la 'révolution.'" *Connect: Rosige Zukunft: Aktuelle Kunst aus Tunesien*, edited by B. Barsch and C. Bruckbauer. Bielefeld and Berlin: Kerber, 2012, pp. 217–31.
- Berning Sawa, D. "Hassan Hajjaj's Best Photograph: Kesh Angels, Girl Biker Gang of Morocco." *The Guardian*, 23 May 2018, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/may/23/hassan-hajjajs-best-photograph-kesh-angels-girl-biker-gang-of-morocco. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Bhambra, G. K. "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 115–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966414>
- Bungey, J. "Bumi Thomas – a Year on from Being Threatened with Deportation from the UK." *LondonJazz*, 9 June 2020, londonjazznews.com/2020/06/09/bumi-thomas-a-year-on-from-being-threatened-with-deportation-from-the-uk/. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Chan, T. W., et al. "Understanding the Social and Cultural Bases of Brexit." *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 71, no. 5, 2020, pp. 830–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12790>
- Cusicanqui, S. R. "Ch'ixinakaz utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 1, 2012, pp. 95–109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472612>
- Drewal, H. J. "Local Transformations, Global Inspirations. The Visual Histories and Cultures of Mama Wata Arts in Africa." *A Companion to Modern African Art*, edited by G. Salami and M. Blackmun Visonà. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013, pp. 23–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118515105.ch2>
- El Hamel, C. "Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco." *Journal of African History*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2008, pp. 241–60. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002185370800368X>
- Enwezor, O., and C. Okeke-Agulu. *Contemporary African Artists since 1980*. Bologne: Damiani, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10757163-2009-25-8>
- Gopal, P. "On Decolonisation and the University." *Textual Practice*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2021, pp. 873–99. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1929561>
- Grant, C., and D. Price. "Decolonizing Art History." *Art History*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2020, pp. 8–66. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12490>
- Green, A. B. *Empowerment through Cultural Practices: Women in Capoeira*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Florida, 2009, ufcd.ufl.edu/UFE0024587/00001. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Hajjaj, H. "Hub Wahad: On Finding Inspiration in a Community of Nomads (Hassan Hajjaj in Conversation with Alice Planel)." *Islamic Art: Past, Present, Future*, edited by J. Bloom and S. Blair. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019, pp. 104–19.
- Inda, J. X., and R. Rosaldo. "Tracking Global Flows." *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, edited by J. X. Inda and R. Rosaldo. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 3–46.
- Jay, P. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Komaroff, L. "A Case of Love at First Sight: A Curator's Perspective." *By Hassan Hajjaj: Photography, Fashion, Film, Design*, edited by K. Hadidian. London: Rose Issa Projects, 2014, pp. 14–15.
- Krifa, M. "Hassan, Enchanting Afropolitan." *Hassan Hajjaj*, edited by S. Baker and L. Hurwitz. Paris: MEP: RVB Books, 2019, n.p.
- Lewis, S. *Dandy Lion: The Black Dandy and Street Style*. New York: Aperture, 2017.
- Lionnet, F. "Afterword: Francophonie, Postcolonial Studies, and Transnational Feminisms." *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, edited by A. Donadey and A. Murdoch. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005, pp. 258–69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386643>
- Lionnet, F., and Shu-Mei Shi, editors. *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Lloyd, F., editor. *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present*. London: Women's Art Library/I.B. Tauris, 1999.
- Lloyd, F., editor. *Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Visual Culture in the Diaspora*. London: Saffron Books, 2001.
- McGonagle, J., and E. Welch. *Contesting Views. France and Algeria in Colonial and Postcolonial Visual Culture*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
- Mercer, K., editor. *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*. London/Cambridge, MA: INIVA/MIT Press, 2008.
- Mernissi, F. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. London: Al Saqi, 2003 [1975].
- Mignolo, W. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv125jqbw>
- Mirzoeff, N., editor. *Diaspora Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "World Pictures: Globalization and Visual Culture." *Neohelicon*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, pp. 49–59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-007-2005-7>
- Mitter, S. "Hassan Hajjaj Turns Moroccan Clichés into London Cool." *New York Times*, 9 October 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/10/09/arts/hassan-hajjaj.html. Accessed 11 April 2024.

- Mohanty, C. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1988, pp. 61–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42>
- New Art Exchange. *Hassan Hajjaj: The Path* (exhibition guide), 2019, https://issuu.com/newartexchange/docs/nae_exhibition-guide_a2_hassan-hajjaj#google_vignette. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- NYSCA Living Traditions. "Chaabi by Bnat Houariyat (The Girls of Houara)." *NYTraditions* (n.d.; fieldnotes taken 1–30 October 2018), <https://nytraditions.org/digital-heritage/chaabi-bnat-houariyat-girls-houara>. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- NYSCA Living Traditions. "Houara (also known as T'houarit) by Bnat Houariyat (The Girls of Houara)." *NYTraditions* (n.d.; fieldnotes taken 1–30 October 2018), <https://nytraditions.org/digital-heritage/houara-also-known-t'houarit-bnat-houariyat-girls-houara>. Accessed 11 April 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2018.110204>
- O'Brien, D., and D. Prochaska. *Beyond East and West: Seven Transnational Artists*. Krannert Art Museum, 2004.
- Rahhou, J. "Hindi Zahra: The Moroccan Artist Proudly Singing in Amazigh." morocoworldnews.com, 10 October 2022, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2022/10/351769/hindi-zahra-the-moroccan-artist-proudly-singing-in-amazigh>. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Reade, O. "Moroccan Rock Stars." *The Guardian*, 25 October 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/25/moroccan-rock-stars-hassan-hajjaj. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Sadiqi, F. *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047404378>
- Saeed, S. "Meet Asmaa Hamzaoui, Morocco's First Female Gnawa Musician." *The National News*, 4 November 2019, www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/music/meet-asmaa-hamzaoui-morocco-s-first-female-gnawa-musician-1.931871. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Salami, G., and M. Blackmun Visonà. "Writing African Modernism into Art History." *A Companion to Modern African Art*, edited by G. Salami and M. Blackmun Visonà. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013, pp. 3–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118515105.ch1>
- Salami, G., and M. Blackmun Visonà, editors. *A Companion to Modern African Art*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118515105>
- Scenenoise. "Oum: Magnetic Moroccan Soul Singer with Deep Saharan Roots." *Scenenoise*, 12 December 2017, scenenoise.com/Features/oum-magnetic-moroccan-soul-singer-with-deep-saharan-roots. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Shilton, S. *Transcultural Encounters: Gender and Genre in Franco-Maghrebi Art*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.
- Shohat, E., editor. *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminisms in a Transnational Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- Spini, D. "Unveiling Violence: Gender and Migration in the Discourse of Right-Wing Populism." *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*, edited by D. Willis, E. Toscano and K. Brooks Nelson. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019, pp. 135–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0153.12>
- Street, M. "What Does the Durag Actually Signify in 2017?" *Highsnobiety* (n.d.), www.highsnobiety.com/p/why-do-people-wear-durags/. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Tawadros, G. *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*. London: INIVA, 2003.
- Toum-Benchekroun, D. "Manal Benchlikha's NIYA Inspires Moroccan Youth, International Academia." *Morocco World News*, 20 March 2021, www.morocoworldnews.com/2021/03/337650/manal-benchlikhas-niya-inspires-moroccan-youth-international-academia. Accessed 11 April 2024.
- Triki, R. "Art et résistance transculturelle." *Museum International*, no. 244, vol. 61, issue 4, 2009, pp. 54–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-5825.2010.01078.x>
- Triki, R. "L'Art au Maghreb: de l'appropriation à la réécriture." *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art*, vol. 2, 2017, pp. 9–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.7378>
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books, 2021 [1999]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350225282>
- Varela, S. G. *Power in Practice: The Pragmatic Anthropology of Afro-Brazilian Capoeira*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw048kn>
- Welch, E., and J. McGonagle. *Contesting Views: The Visual Economy of France and Algeria*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9781846318849.001.0001>
- Wells, N., C. Forsdick, J. Bradley, C. Burdett, J. Burns, M. Demossier, M. Hills de Zárata, S. Huc-Hepher, S. Jordan, T. Pitman and G. Wall. "Ethnography and Modern Languages." *Modern Languages Open*, 1, 2019, p. 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.242>
- Wilson-Forsberg, S., O. Masakure, E. Shizha, G. Lafrenière and M. Mfofo-M'Carthy. "Disrupting an Imposed Racial Identity or Performing the Model Minority? The Pursuit of Postsecondary Education by Young African Immigrant Men in Southern Ontario, Canada." *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2020, pp. 693–711. [published online 2018]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497965>
- Witulski, C. *The Gnawa Lions: Authenticity and Opportunity in Moroccan Ritual Music*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3t5qgm>

Yates, K. "Bumi Thomas: The Glasgow-born Singer Given Two Weeks to Leave the Country." *The Guardian*, 7 July 2020, www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/07/bumi-thomas-glasgow-born-singer-given-two-weeks-to-leave-uk. Accessed 11 April 2024.

Shilton
Modern Languages Open
DOI: 10.3828/mlo.
v0i0.481

20

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Shilton, S 2024 Art and Decolonial Worldviews: Transcultural Resistance in and Beyond the Installations of Hassan Hajjaj. *Modern Languages Open*, 2024(1): 2 pp. 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.481>

Published: 29 May 2024

COPYRIGHT:

© 2024 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Modern Languages Open is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Liverpool University Press.