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Marginal Identities and Bodies in North African Trance Dance: A Celebration of Madness

الهويات المهمشة والجسد في الرقص الصوفي بشمال إفريقيا: احتفال بالجنون

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between marginal identities, bodies, and the performance of madness in the North African trance dance. It casts light on festive rituals where the illnesses of the soul are manifested through corporeal expressions that variably combine the religious, the spiritual, the socio-cultural, and the psychological aspects. Rather than being stigmatized or pathologized, madness is celebrated to grant a legitimate space and voice to the disadvantaged and marginalized individuals. It is hence posited to produce a counter-discourse that symbolically speaks out against the dictates of formal discourses that control the lives of men and women and shape their identities. By applying a qualitative research method, this study involves observing subjects' corporeal performances in trance from a practice-based perspective. The descriptive analysis of the night of trance (the Lila) takes insights from social semiotics and the concept of the 'meta-sign' to account for the minimal details of madness and the corporeal signs into play. There are stages to follow and intricate bodily moments that would drive the observer of madness to where the order of society comes to a standstill. However, the focus of interest is to assess the readiness of women and men to play other than their normative sociocultural roles in society. The varying dramatic scenes with musical melodies, colors, spirits, litanies, and personifications are overwhelmingly loaded with the passion to celebrate and the desire to transcend time and space. The participants are voluntarily involved in trance as an outlet for their collective endeavor to exteriorize their own mental anxieties and whims. Their sole intention is to defy the prevailing ideologies and the pressures their bodies suffer from. Dancing for them embodies the psychiatric that helps the patients to be dispossessed and hopefully be cured. These observed rites of trance are found to be intentionally performed to relieve individuals from different types of alienation suffered in a 21st century modern world that marginalizes, downgrades, and chains them to the rigidity of disciplinary powers.

Keywords: Identity; Marginality; Celebration; Bodies; Trance dance.

الملخص:

تبحث هذه الورقة في العلاقة بين الجسد والاحتفال بالجنون في الرقص الصوفي أو الحضرة بشمال إفريقيا. وتسلط الضوء على عرض احتفالي تظهر فيه مشاكل النفس من خلال التعبيرات الجسدية التي تجمع بين الديني والاجتماعي والنفسي. بدلاً من وصمه بالدوني، يتم الاحتفال بالجنون لمنحه مساحة وصوت شرعيين. إنه يتحدث برمزية ضد كل الخطابات الرسمية التي سيطرت على الحياة اليومية للأفراد وشكلت مصائرهم. التحليل الوصفي لليلة الرقصة الصوفية أو الحضرة يفسر تفاصيل دقيقة عن الجنون. فجلسات الرقص المتتالية مليئة بالرموز التي تشير إلى الشغف بالاحتفال والرغبة في تجاوز الزمان والمكان. يتم أداء الرقص على النحو الذي يخفف عن الأفراد كل أنواع الاغتراب الذي يعانون منه في مجتمع يقوم بتهميشهم ويقيدهم لسلطاته، أملهم الوحيد هو التحرر والشفاء. تم العثور على طقوس الغيبوبة هذه عن قصد لتخفيف الأفراد من أنواع مختلفة من الاغتراب التي عانى منها العالم الحديث في القرن الحادي والعشرين الذي يقوم بتهميشهم وخفض درجاتهم وتقييدهم بصلابة السلطات التأديبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية؛ التهميش؛ الاحتفال؛ الجسد؛ رقص صوفي.

Introduction:

From the outset, to work on madness in the 21st century seems to pose a tremendous challenge. Many persisting questions immerse to remind us of the risk of researching such a multifaceted il-logical phenomenon, among which are the following: How could one, pretending to be mentally sane and rational, reflect on and approach mad people to experience the truthfulness of their madness? How could one measure the level of madness in any cultural performances, in any work of literature or in any form of art? How objective or subjective one would be when dealing with the 'other' mad who is seemingly not me and not you to truly grasp the implications of their madness? What kind of madness am I dealing with and from what discourse? Does the handling of madness in the Arab North African world differ from that of the west? And finally, can marginalized identities and suppressed voices celebrate their madness beyond the dictates of disciplinary powers?

The purpose behind raising these queries is to try and define an ambiguous word charged with centuries of philosophical, religious, cultural, sociopolitical, medical, and personal assumptions. Given that madness does not stand in isolation from other contiguous influences; it embodies and symbolically transforms the values of the time and the environment where it is located and nurtured. That is to say, each society has its own versions of madness with particular causes, types, and degrees of mental derangements, but at the same time, each society has its own levels of tolerance or indulgence.

So, writing about the notion of madness and trying to define it will surely lead to some tentative explanations. The winding roads that one should take to reach its essence and ultimately grasp a slippery word that has in "our age become some sort of lost truth," in Foucault's terms (1967, p. vii). Indeed, it is almost difficult for madness to be pinned down to a unitary or static definition. Its truth is over-floating that no one's discourse, description or definition can evoke all the varieties of aberrant, queer or bizarre thoughts, behaviors, performances, and conducts that have been regarded as insane throughout human existence. This multiplicity of madness stretches as self-evident from time immemorial to the modern time.

However, what is strikingly noticed is that madness in the Arab world and especially in North African countries has not held a major interest in the academic discourse as a researchable topic. Al-Merie (2014) argues that in the Arab world madness is physically present, but culturally absent (p. 289). It has been given a scant attention by Arab researchers to result in works where it is treated merely as glosses over the margin by simply attaching it to pathology and social deviance. Although it has kept challenging and threatening socio-cultural norms, its credence to account for the realities of women and men has been undermined to remain on the fringe as an issue discussed solely at the side-lines of the socio-cultural and psychological investigations. This paper is an attempt to remedy this absence and hopefully gives madness the value it deserves.

In such an era of political and socio-economic crises, uncertainties and insecurities, terms like mad, crazy, lunatic, insane, and more specifically, anxious, neurotic, stressed and depressed have widely infiltrated in our conversations to mean different things to different people. In Arabic: (Majnun, Majdub, Majnun, Maskun and Bohali) are common lexical items of daily vocabulary to describe and pigeonhole people who are mentally out-of-order and who do not conform to the ideals of culture. These labels refer not only to those who are psychopathic, but also to those who are not; that is, to impart some sort of the unexplainable to their cases hence categorizing them as mad.

With this in mind, for Quitel (2009), madness "has been tamed and reconditioned" (p. 581), because it is invoked in all sorts and aspects of social situations, such as terrorism, violence, religious fanatic, elimination, absurdity, suffering from adversity, marginalization, disorientation, failure, excitement, to name just a few of such occasions that are rife in modern times (Shaista, 2014, p. 201). Therefore, madness is both psychopathological and metaphorical to lend itself to different readings and interpretations.

No matter how multifarious and ambiguous the interpretations of madness may stand, in this paper, I will focus mainly on one aspect of madness which is believed to be a corporeal one per se. That is, to make of the body the locus of verifying this multifaceted, yet a "lost truth." I will deal with madness and the body in trance and how this latter can disclose a celebrated version rather than a stigmatized popular practice.

The performance of the body in the night of trance, the 'Lila', is promising to remedy the absence of a cultural discourse beyond the prism of the western psychiatrists and anthropologists. It posits that the Arab world has its own ways of viewing and treating madness in its own right; its cultural specificities make it hard to implement psychoanalytic theories and clinical approaches, for they would only end up with simplistic interpretations and overgeneralizations that would undermine the fascinating uniqueness of madness in any Arab Islamic culture.

To this end, the descriptive analysis of the observed bodies in trance will be more concerned with the semiotic associations of the body as a central figure in performance. By adopting "the complete non-participant observation stance" (Kawulich, 2005), in which 'the researcher is able to observe the setting and group under study without participating' (p. 4), the study embarks on an in-depth handling of the 'Lila' from an ethnographic practice-based perspective. It seeks to visually exploit the field notes and single out marginal identities and bodies in their lived experiences to show evidence as well as understanding of their resistive enactments.

The analysis also draws on social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1995) to uncover the "hidden meanings" as they are represented by the notion of the 'meta-sign.' The latter reflects concepts that are "incorporating oppositional

meanings, moments of resistance (to the dominant ideology) by both women and men" (p. 98). The choice of social semiotics is ascribed mainly to its interpretive role to attribute meaning to power as it emerges out of the concerted intercourse of humans, each with differing motives, goals, and outlooks (p. 2). To capitalize on the role of the 'meta-sign' is meant to highlight "the hostility and conflict between an anti-group and a dominant group," which the trance dance aims to unfold. They are expressed through the transparent signifiers of inversion and displacement to produce an anti-language, that is, the "opposite or displaced meanings, values and ideologies of messages" (Hodge & Kress, p. 78). The bodies under study can reflect such concepts to further explain the possibility for rendering peripheral and marginal signs significant; they are likely to trigger a displacement of the dominant associations buttressed in culture, which this study aims to address while dealing with marginal identities and bodies celebrating madness.

A Brief History of Madness:

Madness is as old as the existence of humanity on earth. In ancient Greek society, madness was regarded as "a blessing, an inducement to prophecy and poetry" (Feder, 1983, p. 6). It is both of a divine influence and sickness. This ambivalent approach to madness makes people feel vacillated between the metaphorical and the pathological and between reason and unreason. Plato further connects the notion of madness to the notion of truth, and philosophical madness as proper madness. He states that "in reality, our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, which is a divine gift (Jun, p. 7). And here, he distinguishes between two types of mania: one arising from human disease, and the other from a divine state, which releases us from our customary habits. He cites four types of divine madness sent by the Gods; the mantic, from Apollo, which brings divination, the teletic, from Dionysus that brings possession trance; the poetic from the Muses, which brings enthusiasm and poetic fervor; and the erotic, from Eros and Aphrodite, which brings frenzied love (p. 7).

In Arabic literature, the word 'Junoon' means madness, unreason, passion and many other attachments that show its lexical and semantic richness. In *Kitab al Uqala Wal-majanin* (The Book of Sanity and Madness) Al-Naysaburi cited various types of mad people and their stories in order to explain how madness in the Arab world is lived, viewed and understood. He considered people's lives as a blending of opposites, such as health and disease, and wrote that reason is mixed with madness so that even the sane are never free from madness (p. 124).

There were many other Arab scientists who pioneered in their psychological studies and treatment of patients suffering from mental problems. Ibn Al-Haytham, Ibn Al-Nafis, Al-Kindi and others had made considerable advances in the field of psychology even centuries before the Europeans adopted medical and clinical handling of mad people (Baker, 2003, p. 447). The Maristane Sidi Frej in Fes, Morocco, is historically considered as the first earliest genuine psychiatric hospital in the world. It was founded by the Marinids in the 13th century. As a therapeutic institution, it used humanistic approaches to treat mental patients. For instance, musical sessions of Andalusian music were performed once a week to relieve the suffering of mental patients.

In the 20th century, in writing *A History of Madness*, Foucault (1967) made his attempt to write a history of madness itself, that is, to let madness speak for itself (p. vii). His controversial approach to lend a voice or to articulate the silence of madness was critiqued, especially by his disciple, Derrida who found Foucault contradictory. Derrida states that the history of European language is bound to a broad and encompassing "logos" or western reason in general. This "logos" is the latent rationality inscribed into the very syntax of all discourses (p. 38). Foucault fails to ex-scribe from his own project the error he identifies in others; by trying to avoid the trap of rationalism, he simply repeated it. To remedy this failure, Derrida (1978) states that

Madness must of necessity remains excluded from language, from reason and from the endeavor that would allow it to speak. Madness (...) has never spoken: it has always been silent, persecuted, taunted, mimicked, dramatized, diagnosed, chained and confined. There is no language of madness itself, because language (as a system of consistently applied rules) and madness are mutually incomparable. (p. 39)

However, the question that imposes itself now is what language or rather what discourse to adopt in order to speak about madness? How would this exclusion from language and reason allow madness to represent itself by the mad?

Derrida's critique does not actually give a substitute when stating that there is no proper language of madness itself. Despite this, Foucault makes it clear that madness, as a disease, is "in fact nothing less than a peculiar disease of civilization, we choose to conjure up this disease to evade a certain moment of our existence (p. viii). And here he refers to the western disciplinary discourse and its institutional handlings, that is, any kind of difference is doomed to incarceration, seclusion and clinical treatment, particularly in lunatic asylums where the insane, the unwanted, and the criminal were housed. Such an approach explains that "people do not in fact go mad but are driven mad by others who are driven in the position of driving them mad by a peculiar convergence of social pressure" (Foucault, 1967, p. viii).

Therefore, the long history of madness has considerably evolved from its alignment with the divine and truth to currently become a mental illness that should be either treated or contained. For Quétel (2009), "it is a history that has not ended and probably will never be until the end of the history of humanity itself" (p. 580). However,

the focus of this paper is to shed some light on how the body, which is the only bearer of madness, is viewed as the language used to represent people as mad and understand their inner afflictions.

Madness and the Social Body:

It goes without saying that the illnesses of the soul are mostly surfaced on the social body as the only visible presence of the whole derangement. Although the mind, translated in Arabic as the soul (Ruh), is seen as a separate entity from the body (Jasad), madness is performed to reveal how the corporeal is related to the psychological, that is, the mind, which is the locus from where the marks of madness uncontrollably often forcibly sprung to be "written on the body, in violent gestures and facial contortions; in tinklings, shinings, watching thoughts which leave the patient trembling in crying, shouting and laughing that heats the blood and stirs the brain (Salkeld, 2014, p. 67).

This idea goes hand in hand when Freud states that the ego is derived from bodily sensations, by calling it a 'body-ego'. It is the mental projection of the surface of the body that spills over onto sounds, gestures, and feelings (qtd. in Foucault, 1967, p. vii). Therefore, madness cannot be treated separately from the body because the latter is many things at once: "a biological entity, a psychosexual construction, and a mirror of various cultural norms (Brooks, 2005, p. xii)". It is regarded as a reference to the conflicting powers into play; some are emanated from the personal, others imposed by the social order. Salkeld (1993) associates madness with corporeal states and argues that its signs "could even be 'read off' apparent visible physical symptoms" (p. 67).

These symptoms indicate how the body is possessed by some strong social powers that shake off its natural propensity to create "an alienation from the self." (Feder, p. 33) Therefore, the possessed becomes withdrawn under the rigid control of values, aspirations and obligations of the family, the tribe and the state in general. To be overburdened leads to the restrictions of one's ability to think, feel and act in proper manners, which would inevitably lead to irrational fears, anxieties and incongruous thoughts. Therefore, being possessed by another code of behavior utterly different from the inherently original is to vie with the imposed social rules and look for ways to dispossess oneself; a process that requires several attempts and confrontations. Does this mean that madness is inherently an act of possession and dispossession?

Madness and Possession:

To deal with madness and possession in the North African cultures is to incorporate the spiritual or rather the pseudo-religious side of the matter. In the cult of trance, for instance, the term possession incorporates the concepts of ownership, control and domination by unknown or unseen powers. To be possessed means to be inhabited by the spirits to become "maskun" for males, or "maskuna" for females. Both labels are often used to describe people who are psychologically sick to ascribe their sickness to some supernatural causes. The body is found trapped in conflicting states of renegotiations through rituals until the possessed submits to the possessor or the latter grants the former its own independence and freedom.

Interestingly, the terms possession and madness appear many times in the Quran, but they are mostly attached to prophets and missionaries. Muhammad, Noah, Hud, and Moses are repeatedly mentioned as being taunted by those who refused to listen to the message of God. Words like possessed, 'mad poet,' madman, crazy, soothsayer, oracle, and 'a lying sorcerer' reflect taunting insults and expressions of disbelief and rejection.

The most explicit example of this connection between possession and mental illness in the Quran comes from the disbelievers replying to Hud, saying: "All we can say is that one of our gods may have inflicted some harm on you," (Quran, p. 54) which means being possessed by an evil spirit or demon. On the contrary, the true meaning of madness in the Quran is mainly connected to the act of committing sins and misguidance. "Truly the wicked are misguided and quite insane" (Quran, p. 27). This verse alludes to many other verses in the Quran showing how the disbelievers taunted Muhammad as "insane."

In general, the Quran is more concerned with the spiritual health than bodily health, which comes from trusting God and eschewing evil. In the saying of Bukhari: "There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart (Bukhari in Hadith 45). This Hadith explains that a sound heart (Qalb) is referring symbolically to the mind that makes a sound body.

The notion of possession is common in many Islamic communities where exorcism is still performed to heal the mentally sick or generally the possessed. For instance, the practice of Ruqyah, which is the Islamic practice of exorcism to expel devils from the body through reciting verses from the Quran, is widely used against black magic or to expel demons from the body. Similarly, serving the saints and entering into trance is also considered a means to restore the possessed mind and heal the patient in order to regain his soundness and well-being.

Into the World of Trance: Mad Bodies in Movement:

In festive ceremonies, in Moussems (annual seasons) and sacred festivals, trance is highly valorized to involve all people irrespective of their mental or physical soundness. In the Oxford Dictionary, it is defined as a "half-conscious state that is characterized by an absence of response to external stimuli." It is divided into two

types: El jadba (attraction) or El hadra (presence) in which the contours of the possessed/mad body emerge to unfold the sacred as an altered state to create the state of the soul (lhal). This includes psychological, religious, spatial and corporeal dimensions to disclose a transcendental experience beyond the flesh. It is seen as a ritualistic madness that “leads afflicted people to turn their gaze away from those who came before them and transfer their attention to themselves, in a movement that leads the self to re-discover the divine nature of their soul outside the corruption carried on from the past” (Theo, p. 90). Such an endeavor is performed to reach a catharsis, which is mostly sought to ease one’s downtrodden life.

In *Women without Men*, Jason (1987) investigates into the relation of women to trance as they seek occasions to perform their unsecure bodies in order to “maintain their physical well-being (p. 82), which is by implication a means to a psychological relief from the dictates of a patriarchal society, especially for those with unfortunate destinies. By showing how the sexual anxieties of their bodies are intervening to change the course of their daily lives, Jason points to the causes behind this practice, which are mostly seen in their inability to meet the expectations of society. It is only through trance that individuals undergo a sort of a therapy that “can be seen, as among other things, a cure for both men and women who experience tensions because they cannot live up for their socially defined roles” (Jansen, p. 97). In their inability or rather failure to secure their social and economic statuses as real men and real women, they look for mystical moments to make up for their lost and remedy their deviations from the norms. In the same vein, Khatibi (2009) explains the chief aim of trance as a state to reach the vertigo or the blackout that heals the patient. The dancing body becomes empowered by “a magical effect when [she] falls, (faints), this (lhal) gives her a new body” (p. 47). The ultimate purpose is “to fatigue the body and attain levity and lightness (...) it is a happy fatigue, a step towards the sacred to leave the body (Krestiva, 1998, p. 9).

Therefore, trance is considered to be a mystical trip towards the inner realms of the self in which the body rejoices this nearness to the vertigo, as a secret to reach the in-world and the out-world states (Khatibi, 2009, p. 46). By embracing these two worlds can push the body to speak, mime, and discharge its corporeal tensions, which Krestiva describes as “an instantaneous revolt which permeates the body and cries” (p. 26).

The performance of madness as possession, either by spirits or by the dictates of the dominant discourses, is postulated in this paper to show a breakdown of the personal and the social attachments that relate individuals to their societies. It comes as an experience of terror as the person enters the inner worlds of trance where “to speak with a different voice and use different turns of phrase, revealing knowledge (she or he) does not normally possess (...) a different personality is shown (Bynum et al., 2004, p. 233). Despite the strenuous aspect of this adventure, it gives legitimacy and credibility to the performer to be that he or she craves to be. And this credibility will be granted and celebrated in the ‘Lila,’ the night of trance where madness is performed to confuse “compulsion with freedom, anarchy with truth, suffering with ecstasy” (Feder, p. 33).

The Present Study:

Using non-participant observation and unstructured interviewing to collect data resulted in a considerable amount of field notes that can be exploited to unfold the relationship between madness, marginal identities, and bodies in the trance performance. As a public event to which I was invited by one of my key informants in Morocco who is also a performer and an active member in the Isawa order, Mr. Radi helped in most of the investigations and explanations with his firsthand knowledge to introduce me to the world of trance in its technical, aesthetic and symbolic aspects; as a ritual performance with successive scenes, stages and bodies. This multifaceted accumulation of observations and field notes necessitated the use of an analytical and interpretive tool to handle the corporeal meanings and the visual signs into play. Social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1995), as an approach in its own right, capitalizes on highlighting how different meta-signs are produced by bodies in different social contexts; it singles out their resistance to the normative associations by revealing an anti-language, which is posited in this study to be an actual embodiment of madness in celebration.

• The Descriptive Analysis of the Observed ‘Lila’

This part will be devoted to give a descriptive account of the ‘Lila’; the night of trance I attended and observed in 2018 in Meknes, Morocco. It took place during the celebrations of the (Mawlid), the birth of the prophet Mohamed as a sacred event of a sacred figure in the Muslim world. The occasion was only a pretext to celebrate madness in its fullest sense. The presence of men and women was to cherish the festivity of the moment beyond the grasp of reason and towards embracing the plenitude of life.

Although the two words celebration and madness sound incongruous when they are brought together, as the former suggests some kind of gaiety and happiness, and the latter is always viewed with some fear and scorn, the ‘Lila’ is promising to clear up this incongruity. It tends to reverse all the taken for granted thoughts by offering a feast-like atmosphere that involves guests, dancing, music and scenes to be enacted by performers who attended the event with their enthusiasm and colorful attires.

In general, the “Lila” might be seen as a description of a single night, but its socio-cultural and psychological dimensions cut deep in the representation of madness in the North African countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt), and how its inclusion in the analysis will contribute to confirm the existence of a mad body that

symbolically celebrates itself and writes its own discourse beyond the dictates of language and against all the traditions of stigmatizing the subaltern other. It is an inward trip into the world of madness with different signs, images, phases, colors, stories, spirits, bodies of women and men and musical tunes that are still reverberating to invoke the mysterious facet of madness.

The 'Lila' started with "dikr", the mystic litanies or the spiritual poems (quasaid) followed by different dance sessions: (lmluk), which means the kings/queens or the possessors, (lhadra), the presence, and (ljadba), the attraction. They were all directed by (Imqaddam), the group leader whose role was mainly to direct the sessions and intervene in the course of the successive events involving women and men. They attended the "Lila," as guests in their beautiful gowns and later as performers whose intentions would go beyond the space of the "Lila" to other aspirations and whims for transcendence where the mad embraces the wise, the sacred vies with the profane, the possessed meets the possessor and the feminine mixes up with the masculine with equal ease.

• The Possessors vs. the Possessed

The prominence of possession in the context of the 'Lila' is revealed as a feminine spirit controlling the lives of both men and women. This is synonymous to the patriarchal control to dominate and exert its own dominance over women and impose its own desires on their bodies, as a necessary condition to maintain its own socio-cultural powers. However, in the case of trance, this metaphorical relation between the state of being possessed by a feminine spirit and being possessed by the patriarchal powers is conspicuously tenable, but it is utterly contradictory as the ongoing descriptions may reveal.

The first session was called (Lmluk), the kings or the possessors, which was mainly dedicated to exorcise the body from its possessor, that is, to be cured through prayers, music and singing. The metaphorical possession by the demons/ spirits, which were summoned up one by one according to different colors, was the utmost purpose of the gathering. However, most of the possessors in the 'Lila' were noticeably feminine. Their names were preceded by the prefix (Lalla) as an honorary label to mean a princess, a lady or a saint. They were named successively in dramatic sessions, with fascinating choreographies to make of the 'Lila' long with hectic confrontations between the possessors and the possessed.

• The Feminine Possessor of Men and Women

Lalla Aicha, the living, is widely known to be the most dangerous of all spirits. She is the queen of the Moroccan Jnun (demons), but with different origins and versions attributed to her name. She is a Portuguese "comtessa", a countess, to derive the term "Qandicha" who came to Morocco in the sixteenth century. She is also of a Sudanese origin who was brought to Zarhoun by the Sufi saint Sidi Ahmed Dghughi. Aicha Qandicha, as a (Janiya) or a (Ghola), is ambivalently venerated as a saint and feared as a beast that eats naughty children. Her name was also used to frighten the colonizer, as a resistant woman with guerillas who was believed to kill many French soldiers in revenge for the killing of her family and lover. She can appear to human beings at night wearing a traditional white dress called (haïk) in deserted roads and graveyards. She is a sorcerer, lustful, and a beautiful woman who keeps camel, donkey, mule or goat hooves. She lives in the airs, in the forests, in the water wells, the caves, the rivers and the lands. Her symbol is the black color.

However, in the 'Lila,' all those descriptions of the woman were not concretely visible. This invisible presence/absence of her body was unique, as an imaginary feminine spirit that possesses both men and women and controls their minds and moving bodies. She is the one who torments and troubles the nerves, the one to be appeased and the only one who can relieve bodies she intentionally or unintentionally touched to become (maqyous) for a man, or (maqyousa) for a woman, which means to be hit, slapped, patted or allured to her charm. All these details made me feel that she was there attending, dancing and listening to the song. At that time, she was the main theme of the musicians. (This is my translation of the song in the Moroccan Arabic dialect.)

O Aicha! Stand and serve God and his prophet.

O God, just peace and salutations to the prophet.

Welcome, O lalla Aicha.

O Gnawiya! O sudaniya! O lhamduchiya.

Lalla Aicha is here is seduced to the henna.

Welcome, O girl of the river.

God, God..., lalla Aicha.

This song was in honor of the first of the feminine spirits. By associating her name with God and the prophet unfolds the quasi-religious side of the 'Lila'. Reciting her name for several times in crescendo music gave the guests a strong feeling to believe that the woman was there dancing in front of the musicians. The different origins and nationalities of the spirit, as mentioned in the song, can stand for different women who were supplicating God and the prophet for their dis-possession and relief.

Her invisible presence was accentuated with the fast beatings of the music, the throbbing of drums, the cries and tears of the women and men shaking their bodies, some guests even left frightened. For several minutes, the ascending level of the music continued until the total loss of consciousness. The melodies which filled the souls of women and men with "orgiastic" feeling as if they had been medically treated and undergone a catharsis. It is a

dramatic scene to invoke madness and anarchy in the 'Lila'. The tensions were high and attentively following the session to create in the performers as well as the spectators a strong belief in her presence.

Indeed, there was a force, a wave of troubled emotions to attain the apogee of exhaustion and exhilaration. Both women and men were totally immersed and moving heedless of themselves or of their surroundings, some fell on the colorful carpets physically tired and unconscious, and some others were still resisting as if her satisfaction in them could not be eased.

She made them beat violently their heads and breasts in a self-torturing manner to transcend the body that might be the source of their anxieties and agonies. There were overwhelming moments with a collective endeavor to choreograph improvisational scenes of players utterly immersed in the space of trance to reverse the social standards and blur the signs of their boundaries. At that moment, many possessed males were noticed to participate in "Eljadba", the attraction, although the taken for granted norm is that it is uniquely a feminine practice. Is it the feminine in men? Or that the feminine spirits can possess even the possessors?

Women moved in space in confrontation with their traditional male counterparts. The movements of their heads in all directions were enacted in a very systematic way. On their knees and hands, they adopted synchronic moves with their unveiled heads, moving their long hair right and left or in a circled way. With their eyes closed, they followed the rhythmic percussions by keeping the hands behind their backs as if being chained or in a total submission to the music played, to the feminine demons or to the power of the body in trance. The support of other women and men was manifested when they placed themselves behind the performers to avoid any dangerous fall. Even when they fell down, they were still in movement with a real body in exercise. It was indeed a cooperative atmosphere where the performers supported each other to appease the spirit in them.

The scene of the camels and wolves was the most striking. To act out the role of an animal was the least I could expect from the 'Lila' and from the participants. Three men and two women were on their knees and hands personifying animals that come to ferociously confront each other. The roaring sounds spoilt the festivity of the 'Lila' by calling the attentions of the guests. The animalism was fittingly manifested to turn humans into predators. The intensity was very high when men whom I was told to be the wolves started attacking the camels personified by two other women. That scene had left me spellbound as it last for a long time to unveil how women and men could give vent to odd feelings utterly different from the taken for granted. Indeed, there was excellence and dexterity to choreograph the story of the mad world where the human impostors the animal in a more natural way.

A Celebration of Madness:

The 'Lila' has provided a window into a dramatic world replete with corporeal meta-signs to read and ponder over. There are women and men who rival the norms of dis-possession to embrace the most transcendental and ecstatic inners of the self. This festive celebration of the body and mind, as Krestiva (1998) describes it, "is an interior experience of transgression (...) to the annulations of the self, of the conscious, and even to death" (p. 2). Its role is not only limited to a therapeutic process, that is, to empty the souls of their tensions, but also to explain how the disturbing tendencies of people are ascribed to the socio-cultural, economic and political pressure exerted over individuals. They seek alternatives in other practices and spaces to make up for their loss to the extent that their normative inherent bodily signs are hardly readable. Indeed, it is the "annulation of the self" which is attributed to how marginalized identities take advantage of the event under study to produce through their bodies an anti-language that speaks out against all the disciplinary powers.

Trance, as a liberating practice can create another discourse of madness, which cannot be solely related to the psychopathology of the participants involved; for there is a force in their bodies that could not be overlooked or easily emulated. As performers on the stage of trance, they ignite a wave of troubled emotions with which the mad embraces the wise, the sacred vies with the profane, the possessed meets the possessor and the feminine mixes up with the masculine with equal ease. Then, the body, as a carrier of all those signs, rushes forward unrestrained with ambivalent feelings; some are angry and happy, some others are fragile and strong. Afterwards, the happy fatigue emerges to satisfy an earnest crave for freedom outside the dancing sessions and the spirits haunting them.

As a mystical performance, which is absent in everyday life, it grants women and men a stage to trance-ascend the material world to reach that of the sacred. It is another subversive space quasi-public where the mad celebrates, plays, exhibits, unveils, writes and expresses with the language of the body meta-signs of resistance and subversion of the rational definitions that modern societies have enforced upon individuals. It is indeed an outlet through which they exteriorize their personal whims and wrath against the hegemonic powers of domination, colonization, marginalization, categorization and elimination.

Although the participation of men and women shows certain discrepancies in terms of their appropriation of the body and space in trance, they both experience a real confrontation between the feminine and the masculine akin to their aspirations to transcend the demarcation lines between the possessor and the possessed. These discrepancies do also reveal that their performance, regardless of its festive aspect, is only a pretext to exteriorize their own mental anxieties and whims to defy the prevailing ideologies and the pressures their bodies suffer from.

Conclusions:

The present study has demonstrated that madness is everywhere echoing the prevailing visions of a modern changing world laden with uncertainties, horrors, insecurities, crises and fears. In such acute circumstances, people often find themselves obliged to pretend the mentally sane and rational towards multiple daily events, images, things and people while deep inside, they hide their weaknesses and troublesome anxieties. Despite the composure, madness is strong enough to drive them away from pretense and claims to resist its overarching powers. It is utterly invincible that once men and women succumb to its grips, it starts to manipulate them by celebrating its conquest over their bodies.

In any social performance or through any form of art, be it official or popular, madness seems to be immeasurable in nature. While celebrating, the mad embraces the wise, the sacred vies with the profane, the possessed meets the possessor, and the feminine mixes up with the masculine with equal ease. Eventually, an unrestrained body rushes forward with ambivalent feelings; some are happy and angry, and some others are fragile and strong.

It is therefore difficult to fully grasp the underlying motives behind its enactments or exactly know why people suddenly go mad because it has no truth in it, or better to use Foucault's term, it is a 'lost truth' to lend itself to different readings and interpretations of the multifarious signs it imparts.

Yet, the most interesting aspect of this modern version of madness is that it imposes itself to have a voice and space of its own. It is the voice of the margin that speaks back. Its expressive ability to produce knowledge other than the formal repressive discourses is remarkably appealing. In general, marginalized people are noticed to be willingly prone to go mad or at times to simulate madness in its fullest sense. They either choose it or it chooses them. But still, the body is always there ready to celebrate in spectacular manners by showing how the mad loses the signs of madness as such, to be no longer that mad.

Trance in North African countries always exists and will always do so. Its practice opens other perspectives of viewing modern madness as a moment in performance. Rather than being a state of the mind that requires formal psychiatric intervention, it is at the disposal of marginal identities and bodies to provide vibrant, captivating and powerful scenes that harbor the festive with the dramatic dimensions in one short-lived moment.

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