

Policy Brief

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# Cultural and Creative Industries: Gnaoua Music and Socio-Economic Development Potential

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The global success of Gnaoua music is both a cause for celebration and a prompt for reflection. It highlights the immense potential of music and other creative and cultural activities to generate income and meaningful employment, particularly for youth, while also showcasing the soft power of embedded cultural values. This soft power is evident in the worldwide influence of Black diaspora music. Despite Morocco's wealth of creative and cultural industries (CCI), their potential for socio-economic development remains largely untapped. What steps are necessary to unlock this potential? This Policy Brief argues that, given the Moroccan government's prioritization of CCI, a national strategy should be formulated to revitalize CCI domestically and develop a market niche internationally.

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# INTRODUCTION

Gnaoua (or Gnawa) music is one of Morocco's most treasured cultural assets. The year 2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the Gnaoua World Music Festival, launched in 1999 in the historic fishing port of Essaouira, which brought Gnaoua music to the global stage. This milestone, along with the 2019 inscription of Gnaoua music on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,[1] underscores its cultural significance.

Originating in sub-Saharan Africa as far back as the 8th century, the Gnaoua were primarily West African slaves brought to Morocco, where they were forced into military, religious,[2] domestic, and agricultural[3] service.[4] Their journey from the obscurity of their origins as former slaves to captivating multinational audiences and receiving UNESCO recognition offers valuable insights into the factors that can further unlock their socio-economic development potential. What lessons can we draw from this remarkable transformation?

This policy brief begins by situating Gnaoua music within the broader spectrum of Morocco's CCI. It then explores key moments in the historical journey of Gnaoua music, emphasizing the profound cultural influence that African music has exerted on Black music in the Atlantic diaspora. The brief concludes with recommendations on how to enhance the socio-economic development potential of Gnaoua music specifically, as well as Morocco's CCI more broadly.

## A Selective Overview of Morocco's CCI

The diversity of Morocco's CCI holds significant potential for developmental, particularly in terms of youth employment.[5] According to the Moroccan Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries (FICC), established in 2017, CCI are categorized into three main groups: Arts and Culture, Media, and Design. These groups are further divided into eight key sub-industries: (1) publishing and bookselling; (2) audiovisual; (3) cinema; (4) visual and graphic arts; (5) performing and choreographic arts; (6) music and live performance; (7) cultural institutions and multidisciplinary spaces; and (8) event organization and communication.

Morocco's handicraft industry is well known, serving as a major draw for the approximately 12 million tourists each year. However, public policies concerning CCI are increasingly focused on nurturing new, emerging and promising sectors such as the film industry, the music industry, digital arts, and video games.

The film industry stands out as one of the most promising sectors within its CCI. Over 15

1. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was established in 1945 with the mission to promote "the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind", in the hope of preventing war.

2. The Gnaoua people were guardians of Zaouïas, holy and sacred places where Moroccan saints with Sufi, Islamic and Jewish roots were buried in the past.

3. The Gnaoua people were also forced into labor in ancient sugar mills in the region of Doukkala, Chiadma, and north of Souss.

4. The Saadi Dynasty ruled Morocco from 1549-1659, followed by the Alawis from then on (Wikipedia).

5. According to ILO estimates, the youth (age 15-24) unemployment rate in Morocco stands at 22.6% (2023). In comparison, South Africa's rate is 49.1%, while sub-Saharan Africa averages 10.2% and the lower middle-income country group 13.4%. (WBG Data). In 2023, the youth population in Morocco, aged 15-24, is estimated at 5.95 million out of a total population of 37.8 million, representing 15.74 % of the Moroccan population (Statista, June 26, 2024).

major film festivals have been organized, with the Marrakech International Film Festival,[6] created in 2001, attracting such pivotal figures in the global movie industry as Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro and Agnès Varda. According to a 2019 Cinematographic Report by the Moroccan Cinematographic Centre, foreign productions shot in Morocco have invested a total budget of close to €70 million. However, data from UNCTAD[7] in 2018 indicated a significant deficit in Morocco's balance of trade for CCI.[8]

While more recent numbers may reveal changes, the potential for Morocco to expand its CCI and improve its trade balance remains evident. As Mohamed Ben Said, the Minister of Culture, Youth, and Communication, aptly stated, "Morocco has all the essential assets to become a driving force in the world's cultural and creative industrie" (The Embassy of Morocco in the United States, 2023).

## Morocco: A Crossroads of Cultures

Strategically situated in the westernmost northern region of Africa and bordered by the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, Morocco was originally inhabited by Amazigh-Berber tribes.[9] The country has, over centuries, welcomed a succession of visitors and settlers, including Phoenicians, Jews, Romans and Arabs. In the early 20th century, Morocco became a protectorate under Spanish and French rule.[10] Additionally, the country maintained well-established land trade routes with sub-Saharan Africa and sea routes with traders from distant regions. As a result, Moroccan CCI have been profoundly shaped by this rich diversity of influences, including Arab-Islamic, Amazigh, Saharan-Hassania,[11] Andalusian, Mediterranean, Jewish, and European (Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022). This diversity is clearly stated in the preamble to the Moroccan Constitution of 2011. Morocco is renowned for its traditional handicrafts, including Fes pottery, Essaouira woodwork, textiles and embroidery, leather crafts, jewelry and Berber rugs (Filestin, 2023).

Morocco's cultural richness extends far beyond its borders, vividly exemplified in its diverse musical heritage, which encompasses a wide array of genres: Arabo-Andalouse, Malhoune, Chaabi, Classic, Berber, Rifi and Souissi music[12] (Harabi, 2009). Upon Morocco's reentry into the African Union on Jan 31, 2017, King Mohamed VI highlighted in his speech that Africa should take pride in its cultural legacy and use it to benefit its people.[13]

6. The Marrakech International Film Festival: https://www.festivalmarrakech.info/en/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marrakech_International_Film_Festival#:~:text=The%20Marrakech%20International%20Film%20Festival,held%20annually%20in%20Marrakech%2C%20Morocco. The International Film Festival is chaired by Prince Moulay Rachid of Morocco (Wikipedia, last edited April 2, 2024).

7. UNCTAD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, was established in 1964.

8. In 2015, exports of CCI amounted to US$ 220.2 million, while imports totaled US$ 863.3 million (creact4med; Feb 2022).

9. Amazigh means "free people" in Tuareg, while the Romans referred to them as Berber, which means "barbarians".

10. The French protectorate of Morocco lasted from 1912-1956, and the Spanish protectorate covered the same period. Spain relinquished Ifni, located in the far south, in 1969 but has retained Ceuta and Melilla, which are situated on Morocco's Mediterranean coast.

11. Hassania is an Arab dialect spoken across a wide geographical area extending from the Saharan regions of Morocco to the Senegal River in Mauritania.

12. Malhoune, meaning "melodic poem" in Arabic, is a popular art form in Morocco that combines song, theatrics, metaphor and symbolism. Chaabi refers to various types of popular rural and urban folk music. Andalusian classical music is a significant genre of Arabic music with distinct local substyles throughout the Maghreb. Rifi describes musical styles from Southern Iraq, rooted in Bedouin traditions. Souissi music shares many similarities with blues and African music, particularly Malian.

13. Morocco withdrew from the African Union (AU) in 1984 after the AU admitted the disputed territory of Sahrawi Republic and Western Sahara as member states.

The cultural exchange between sub-Saharan African (SSA) and Morocco has been a dynamic, two-way interaction. SSA has been profoundly influenced by the Sufism[14] of Sunni Islam, a core aspect of Moroccan culture, while Moroccan culture has, in turn, absorbed significant influences from SSA. This exchange is particularly evident in two distinct musical traditions: (a) the pentatonic Amazigh music of the Berber people, found south of the High Atlas, beyond the Anti-Atlas, in the pre-Saharan oases; and (b) the Gnaoua music of former black slaves, which shares strong similarities with the music of the Bambara, Malinke and Peul (or Fulani) tribes of West Africa (Aydoun in Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022).

## Gnaoua Music and its Distinctive Features

Religious and secular, the expanding influence of Gnaoua music—a vibrant expression from a historically marginalized group of former black slaves—offers a compelling narrative. Entirely orally transmitted, Gnaoua music is both spiritual and joyful, embodying a unique blend of traditions. The origins of the name "Gnaoua" remain a topic of historical debate. It may derive from "Guinea", "Djenne", the ancient capital of the Songhaï empire,[15] or the Tamazigh term *akal n-iguinamen* (sing. *Iginaw*), meaning *bilad sudan*, land of the Blacks in Arabic, or "poor", "naïve", or "mystic" (Btarny in Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds., 2022).

Although the exact origin of the term "Gnaoua" remains uncertain, it is clear that Gnaoua music originated from slaves who were traded along the Saharan caravan routes from the 8th century onwards. These slaves, along with commodities like gold, ivory, ostrich feathers, and henna, were exchanged for salt, silver, textiles and other goods from Europe. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that all Black individuals sold to Morocco were illiterate peasants or shepherds. In the 15th century, King Soni Ali Ber (1464-92) of the Songhaï empire, having eliminated his Fulani intellectual opponents, sold them into slavery.[16]

Converted to Islam, the Gnaoua people are considered to possess baraka, a form of spiritual blessing. A notable example is Sidi Bilal l' Abyssin, the first Black slave converted to Islam. The Gnaoua brotherhood, descendants of Sidi Bilal, are ritual musicians known for their trance-inducing music, which is believed to have healing powers. Gnaoua musicians are often hired to perform in private homes, creating a *hal*, "a state that will appease spirits of the possessed and grant baraka, blessing, to those the spirits 'accept', those who fall in light or heavy trance listening to their music. These musicians are spiritual healers […] Music-induced trance is their medium." (Kapchan, 2004).

As spiritual descendants of Sidi Bilal, Gnaoua trance music incorporates spiritual practices that are deeply intertwined with Sufism and animist African rituals (Achrakat El Fitory, 2016).[17] The secular side of Gnaoua music, characterized by its powerful African rhythms, has long resonated with Moroccan audiences and gained increasing international recognition since

14. Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam that "encompasses individual purification, spiritual reconciliation of spirit and soul, and universal values to which all human beings adhere." Chtatou argues that Moroccan Islam is deeplyl rooted in Sufism and that it has played an important role in promoting moderation and tolerance. He notes that "Morocco has been a Sufi country for over twelve centuries, [characterized …] by its generosity, hospitality, and warmth". HM Mohamed VI has praised the role of Sufism in "block[ing] the way to the proponents of radicalism, terrorism, dismemberment, dissension, and mystifying doctrines" (Chtatou, June 2022).

15. The Songhaï empire, which existed from around 1460-1591, emcompassed the territories along the middle reaches of the Niger River. Its domain covered modern day central Mali, extended west to the Atlantic coast, and reached east into Niger and Nigeria.

16. The Saadian Sultan is said to have brought 12,000 scholars displaced from Timbuktu to Marrakech (Btarny in Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022). The Saadi Sultanate ruled present day Morocco and parts of West Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries (1510-1659).

17. The most famous of their healing rituals is called the "Hadra". The Hadra is a nocturnal ritual that blends musical and spiritual elements, performed by a Gnaoua band to heal believed to be "possessed".

the 1960s and 1970s. Notable bands such as Jil Jilala, influenced by Sufi music, and Nass el Ghiwane, rooted in the animistic traditions of Gnaoua music, have played significant roles in this global exposure. Key events in the 20th and 21st centuries that highlight this evolution include:

- 1972: The Gnaoua maâlems[18] songs were featured on Paul Bowles's album "Music of Morocco".[19]

- 1990s and 2000s: Renowned Black American musicians such as Randy Weston (jazz pianist and composer), Pharoah Sanders (jazz saxophonist), and Archie Shepp (jazz saxophonist, educator and playwright) collaborated with Gnaoua maâlems (Btarny in Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022).

- 2023: CBS's *60 Minutes* broadcasted the TV program "Morocco's Gnawa Musicians Bring Ancient Songs to Modern Audiences".[20]

- The documentary film Trances and the music of Nass el Ghiwane were featured in Martin Scorcese's Film Foundation World Cinema Project. Scorcese praised the film as "a mix of the poetry, the music, and the theater that goes way back to the roots of Moroccan culture" (Columbia Univ. Dept of Music, April 2024).[21] He also noted how Nass el Ghiwane's music "opened my eyes and ears and inspired me, moved me, and transported me; it has deepened my sense of the mystery of being alive" (On an Overgrown Path, April 2017).

There are notable parallels between Gnaoua and Black music in the African diaspora of the "New World". Enslavement often meant the complete loss of agency, leading music, movement, and dance to became the slaves' *cri de coeur*, vital expressions of pain, sorrow, fear, hope, joy, love, celebration, praise, protest, community, and creativity, the whole range of raw human emotions. For the oppressed, music serves as a powerful voice.

African music and culture spread through the transatlantic slave trade, influencing the Americas and the Caribbean, much as they did through the trade of sub-Saharan Blacks to Morocco.[22] Despite differences in instruments,[23] there are striking similarities between the Black music of the Atlantic diaspora and Gnaoua music. Key examples include:

18. A Gnaoua maâlem is a master musician who leads a group of dancers and musicians.

19. Paul Bowles (December 30, 1910 – November 18, 1999) was an American expatriate composer, author, and translator. His works include The Sheltering Sky, both a novel and film adaptation, which became a bestseller and established him as a leading figure in Tangier. Bowles and his wife, Jane Bowles, also an American author, lived in Tangier from 1947 onwards.

20. CBS 60 Minutes is the most watched and successful investigative news magazine. Created by Don Hewitt and Bill Leonard, it debuted in 1968. The New York Times has described it as "one of the most esteemed news magazines on American television". Bill Whitaker conducted a segment on the Gnawas, which aired on December 17, 2023.

21. Ahmed El Mamouni presented excerpts from his acclaimed documentary film "Trances" during a conversation with Alessandra Ciucci and Benjamin Steege on April 17, 2024, at Dodge Hall, Columbia University.

22. An estimated 12.5 million Africans were forcibly transported as slaves to the "New World" between 1525-1866, with only 10.7 million surviving the perilous Atlantic crossing. Great Britain outlawed the slave trade for all British ships and colonies on May 1, 1807. The U.S. President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) prohibited the importation of slaves in 1807. President Abraham Lincoln (1809-65) issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which was ratified by the Congress in 1865. Mauritania was the last country to abolish slavery in 1981, nearly 120 years after France ended slavery in all its colonies in 1847. In Morocco under the French protectorate, slavery was abolished in 1923.

23. Gnaoua musicians use the guembri, a three-stringed bass lute tambour, accompanied by 'garabt' (also known as qraqab, krakeb or metallic castanets), as well as clapping and drumming by other players. Their ritual music features large drums called tbel or ganga. The guembri's body is carved from a single piece of wood and covered with camel or goat skin.

**Spirituality:** Gnaoua music, known for its trace-inducing qualities and focus on spirits and healing, has provided a source of strength and sense of liberation for marginalized communities. Similarly, in various regions of the Atlantic African diaspora, the blending of Christian beliefs with West African religious traditions and rituals have given rise to unique musical forms. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean: In 19th century Bahia, northeastern Brazil, Afro-Brazilians practiced Candomblé, a religion deeply rooted in divination, sacrifice, spirit possession, healing, music and dance. During Candomblé ceremonies, practitioners enter trances, transforming into the gods or Orixás they worship. This spiritual tradition significantly influenced Brazilian music, as seen in the work of guitarists and musicians Baden Powell and Vinícius de Moraes,[24] who celebrated Afro-Brazilian music and culture through their Os Afro-Sambas project (1966).[25] This collection of eight songs combines samba with elements of Candombré, capoeira,[26] and Umbamda, incorporating instruments like the agogô, a Yoruba bell commonly used in Brazilian music.

**Caribbean:** In Cuba, Santéria incorporates elements of spirit worship rooted in the rituals of the Yoruba people, who were enslaved on Cuban sugar plantations and in cities during the 19th century. Santéria is the most widespread Afro-Cuban religion, and the Santeros place great importance on the batá drums, believing that their music facilitates direct communication between humans and the supernatural (Lutzu, 2011). Haiti and the Dominican Republic are both renowned for their Vodou rituals, which, though distinct from each other, share a focus on song and dance. In Haitian vodou, participants often dance themselves into a frenzy to summon spirits and offer sacrifices to secure blessings for the future. In one version of Dominican Vodou, it is believed that God created intermediaries called Los Misterios to assist humans. Practitioners of Vodou claim they can connect with these intermediaries to heal illnesses and improve lives. From Jamaica, Bob Marley stands as a spiritual figure whose reggae music is deeply infused with spirituality, often overlooked by many. His lyrics are rich with biblical verse (Blake, CNN, March 2024).[27] His iconic Redemption Song was recorded shortly before his untimely death.

**United States:** American Gospel music,[28] cultivated over the 400-year history of the Black church,[29] played a crucial role in helping enslaved people endure their harsh conditions while fostering mutual support, community, and resilience. In the 1930s, one of the most famous protest songs was Lead Belly's The Bourgeois Blues.[30] Gospel music has since become world-renowned and served as an incubator for some of the most iconic musical

24. Baden Powell (1937-2000) is considered a Brazilian guitar god. He is of mixed African, Portuguese and native Amazonian descent and combines African and European styles in his music. Vinícius de Moraes (1913-1980) was a Brazilian poet, lyricist, musician, singer, and diplomat.

25. The live album Os Afro-sambas was ranked 29th on Rolling Stone's list of the 100 greatest Brazilian albums.

26. Capoeira is a form of Afro-Brazilian martial arts with elements of music, dance, and spirituality. Umbamda is an Afro-Brazilian religion which uses the atabaque, a sacred drum. An atabaque is a tall wooden Afro-Brazilian hand drum.

27. Bob Marley (1945-1981) was born in Nine Mile, Saint Ann Parish, Jamaica. His album Exodus was named best album of the 20th century by Time Magazine, and his song One Love was named the song of the century by the BBC. The movie One Love, released in theaters on February 14, 2024, explores Bob Marley's life and music, highlighting how he inspired generations with his message of love and unity. As a devout Rastafarian, he believed in "oneness" with humanity and the pursuit of equality.

28. Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. produced a four-hour docuseries that explores the origins of Black gospel music, "which blended sacred spirituals with the blues tradition and soared to new heights during the Great Migration" (Marovich, February 2024). This docuseries aired on the Public Broadcasting Corporation (PBS) on February 12-13, 2024.

29. Henry Louis Gates Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, and the director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American research at Harvard University, is the New York Times bestselling author of The Stony Road. The PBS series, The Black Church: This is Our Story. This is our Song, which he authored and hosted, first aired on January 18, 2022.

30. Huddie William Ledbetter (1889-1949), better known as Leadbelly, was a gospel, folk and blues singer. He was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame in 2008.

talents, such as Thomas A Dorsey,[31] Sister Rosetta Tharpe,[32] and Aretha Franklin.[33] Franklin's recordings of "Amazing Grace" (1972) remains the best-selling Gospel album of all time. Gospel's roots in spiritual expression make it a natural conduit for messages of social justice. American jazz, also profoundly influenced by African musical traditions, originated as a form of protest music, conveying powerful social messages and giving voice to those suffering from racial injustice (Isles, 2020).[34] Over time, jazz has achieved global acclaim, with legendary Black musicians including Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald elevating the genre to an art form recognized worldwide (National Museum of American History).[35]

**A powerful voice for social causes—equality, inclusiveness, human rights:** It is no coincidence that the 25th anniversary of the Gnaoua World Music Festival, held on June 28-29, 2024, in Essaouira, was also a Human Rights Forum.[36] Neila Tazi, a co-founder of the festival, emphasized the event's commitment to promoting values of equality, inclusiveness, open mindedness and peace.[37] The festival has brought together over 40 nationalities, creating a shared space to perform and enjoy music together. Tazi highlighted that the festival has become a "great space for social dialogue, encounters, and conviviality", spreading a message of hope and peace (Vaillié, June 2024).

These social values resonate deeply in Black American music, where genres like jazz and blues have long served as vehicles for social activism. Protest songs have a long history in the United States, dating back to the early 18th century, with contributions from both Black and white musicians. Black spirituals, gospel, and folk music played pivotal roles in the American Civil Rights Movement.[38]

Blues music, in particular, has been a potent medium for expressing social discontent. One of the most iconic protest blues songs is "Strange fruit", famously song by Billlie Holiday.[39] Another famous song associated with the civil rights movement is "We Shall Overcome" by Aretha Franklin, an activist who was deeply involved in the struggle for civil rights and

31. Thomas Andrew Dorsey (1899-1993) was a Black American musician, composer, and Christian evangelist who played a pivotal role in the development of early blues and 20th-century gospel music.

32. Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915-1973) was raised by her mother, a traveling evangelist with the Church of God in Christ. Her 1945 song, "Strange Things Happening Every Day" was the first gospel record to reach the Rhythm and Blues Top 10. Tharpe had a significant influence on Elvis Presley (1935-1977), who is known as the "King of Rock and Roll".

33. Aretha Franklin (1942-2018) was the daughter of Baptist preacher Reverend C.L. Franklin and Barbara Siggers Franklin, a gospel singer. Renowned as one of the greatest of R&B pianists of the 20th century, she never studied piano professionally. Aretha Franklin is often referred to as "The Queen of Soul", and the Rolling Stone magazine twice named her the greatest singer of all time.

34. Nabaté Isles is a Grammy winning trumpeter, composer, and producer from New York City.

35. Duke Ellington (born Edward Kennedy Ellington, 1899-1974) was renowned for his big band orchestra. Louis Armstrong (1901-1971), nicknamed "Satchmo" and "Pops", rose from poverty in New Orleans to become a prominent trumpeter and vocalist. One of his most famous songs is "It's a Wonderful Life." Count Basie (born William James Basie, 1904-84), earned nine Grammy awards, and performed at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Ella Fitzgerald, (1917-96), known as "First Lady of Song", "Queen of Jazz", and "Lady Ella", was a singer, songwriter and composer. Renowned for her pure tone, impeccable diction, and "horn-like" improvisational skill, she performed both spirituals and love songs. One of her most famous collaborations was with Louis Armstrong on "Cheek to Cheek". Fitzgerald was also a civil rights activist and founded the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation.

36. In fact, it has served as a human rights forum since 2012.

37. The forum also featured a forward-looking theme of working together: "Morocco, Spain, and Portugal: A History that Looks to the Future." In 2030, these three Mediterranean neighbors will jointly host the FIFA World Cup.

38. The Civil Rights Act, initially proposed by President John F. Kennedy before his assassination on November 22, 1963, was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Johnson further advanced the civil rights legislation by signing a more comprehensive law on August 06, 1965.

39. Billie Holiday (1915-59), born Eleanora Fagan Gough, is a famous jazz and blues singer and recipient of a dozen Grammy awards. "Strange Fruit" is considered the first protest song of the civil rights era.

women's rights. Her songs "Respect" and "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" became anthems for these movements for social change. Franklin was also a staunch supporter of Native American rights. Not to be omitted is B.B. King, known as the "King of the Blues", who sang "Why I Sing the Blues". While he did not participate in marches, he used his influence to support the cause by raising funds to bail out jailed activists—a form of protest he referred to as an alternative protest method[40] (Coleman, Oct. 2021).[41]

**Global influence of African musical genres:** African music is rich, diverse and immensely creative (Pizà, 2023). It is no exaggeration to say that African musical genres, instruments and styles have deeply influenced the music of the Black Atlantic diaspora and, through their global popularity, have left a lasting impact on music worldwide. Some defining characteristics of the music of the African diaspora include:

Strong rhythm: The use of drums and castanets creates the strong rhythm that is central to Gnaoua music, complemented by the rich, deep tones of the three-stringed guembri. Traditional African percussion instruments, such as xylophones, marimbas, and bells, have long been integral to the continent. As African rhythms spread across the Atlantic diaspora, the strong rhythmic foundation was preserved and enriched by the incorporation of western instruments. In genres like Blues, Jazz, Rock and Roll, and Hip Hop, these include the snare drum, bass drum, Dee Dee Chandler's drum set,[42] acoustic and electric guitars, trumpets, trombones, and pianos. By blending Western instruments with African rhythms, the diaspora also invented new genres that continue to enjoy worldwide popularity.

Pentatonic scales: Traditional African music often relies on pentatonic scales—five notes per octave instead of the seven found in western music. These scales are also used in much of Black American music, including American spirituals, Gospel, Blues, Jazz, Pop, Ragtime, Rock and Roll, Reggae, and Hip Hop. The use of pentatonic scales is particularly conducive to improvisation, a key element in both Blues and Jazz.

Polyrhythms: Common in African music, polyrhythms and have become a foundational element in several diaspora genres including American jazz, rock, and Afro-Cuban rock.

40. Riley B. King (September 16, 1925-May 14, 2015), best known as Blues Boy King (B.B. King), was born a sharecropper on a cotton plantation in Indianola, Mississippi. At the age of 10, he had to sing on street corners for dimes. "Why I Sing the Blues", written by Dave Clark and B.B. King, is a protest song when examined through the lyrics. Here is an excerpt of the most relevant lyrics:
When I first got the blues
They brought me over on a ship
Men were standing over me
And a lot more with a whip
And everybody wanna know
Why I sing the blues
Well, I've been around a long time
Mm, I've really paid my dues.
The album was released in 1983. B.B. King was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1984 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. One of his signature recordings is "The Thrill is Gone." Upon his passing, President Obama remarked, "The Blues have lost a king and America has lost a legend".

41. In the B.B. King Museum in Indianola, Mississippi, there is a B.B. King Blues Cotton Sack created by a fellow Mississippi Delta artisan that tells the story of B.B. King's journey from rags to riches. The artisan stitched quilt patterns into an eleven-foot bag to capture the story of King's rise from humble beginnings to prestigious heights. An important part of this patchworked narrative also highlights the role played by King in the civil rights movement.

42. Dee Dee Chandler (Edward Chandler, 1866-1925) was a drummer from New Orleans who invented the drum set. It combined the snare and brass drums with cymbals and other percussion instruments, allowing a single player to perform by operating the pedal with their foot while simultaneously playing the snare drum.

Call and response: This technique is central to Gnaoua music, where it is combined with hand clapping and dance to create much of its dynamism and beat. Common in other traditional forms of African music, it is also a staple of American spirituals, Gospel, Jazz, Reggae, Rap, and more. This approach fosters improvisation and spontaneity, while also helping to build a sense of community.

From Obscurity to Prominence: The Path Forward for Gnaoua Music

**How Gnaoua music gained visibility after centuries in obscurity:** For centuries, Gnaoua music, associated with former slaves and marginalized communities in Morocco, remained relatively obscure. Slavery was officially abolished in Morocco by the French in 1912, when Morocco became a French protectorate (which ended in 1956), but it was not until 1923 that the slave trade itself was banned and slave markets were closed.[43] This historical context explains why the term "Gnaoua" has connotations of black, poor, naïve, and mystical (Btarny in Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022).

The turning point for Gnaoua music came with the launch of the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira in 1999. This festival played a pivotal role in elevating Gnaoua music to the global scene. The festival's founders recognized the potential of music to unite diverse multinational and multicultural audiences. Neila Tazi,[44] a co-founder of the Gnaoua World Music Festival, remarked that the festival's parade, "featuring Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Spain, and Brazil [is] an example of music's power to convey deep messages". She also noted that support for musical festivals and other cultural events came from the highest level,[45] citing "Morocco's commitment, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI, to promoting the values of peace and equality" (Vaillié, 2024). The initial investment in the 1999 festival, driven by both private contributions from Tazi and others and public support, proved catalytic. Over the last 25 years, the festival has grown into a four-day cultural event, drawing up to 500,000 music lovers from around the world.[46]

**Strengthening the Policy, Institutional, and Investment Environment to Enhance the CCI Sector:** The success of the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira highlights the potential of substantial and sustained private and public support for CCI. This annual event has demonstrated the significant impact that effective backing can have on CCI. However, a successful festival alone is not enough to transform CCI into viable and remunerative careers paths, especially for the youth.

Most CCI practitioners work in the formal sector and often need additional jobs to support themselves. For example, Abdellah El Gourd balanced his daytime job as an engineer at Voice of America in Tangier with his evening role as a maâlem (Kapchan, Dec 2023). Additionally, artists frequently suffer from the illegal piracy of their work due to lax enforcement of intellectual property rights.[47] This, combined with meager and uncertain earnings, limits private investment in the sector. The high costs associated with producing

43. Although the slave trade was abolished, slavery is said to have continued for another two decades. The Atlantic slave trade was outlawed by the British in all British colonies in 1833, and by the French in all French colonies in 1848, but the slave trade across the Sahara continued.

44. Neila Tazi, a Moroccan entrepreneur, and the event-organizing company A3 that she founded, co-founded the Essaouira festival in 1999. She has also been a Senator in the House of Counsellors since 2015, and the first woman Vice-President of the Senate from 2016-18. In February 2019, she was elected President of the Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries.

45. At the initiative of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the HIBA Foundation was created as a non-profit association working towards the development of culture and the preservation of Morocco's cultural heritage. Its website is: https://www.fondationhiba.ma/

46. Many events and performances at the Gnaoua World Music Festival can be attended free of charge.

47. Morocco joined the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 1971.

and distributing quality work, coupled with low consumer purchasing power, create a vicious circle of high costs, high risks, and low returns.

Moreover, the dominance of industrialized countries, particularly the United States, exacerbates competitive challenges faced by CCI exports from developing nations like Morocco. For instance, according to the International Commerce Center,[48] the United States controls 85% of the global film and television production (Alaoui M'Hammdi and Jaïdi, eds, 2022). Despite these obstacles, Morocco's CCI sector has a solid foundation to build on. Notably, the first governmental session dedicated to CCI was held in October 2019, and the Strategic Investment Fund (2020), established under Kind Mohammed VI, may offer significant support.

Morocco also benefits from a substantial institutional infrastructure supporting CCI, including:

- Government ministries: Youth, Culture and Communication; Tourism, Handicraft, and Social Economy; Industry, Trade, Green and Digital Economy.
- Associations and NGOs: Centre Cinématographique Marocain; Moroccan Federation of Leather Industries; Conseil National des Langues et de la Culture Marocaine.
- Private sector actors: Moroccan Centre for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship – MCISE; Marrakech International film Festival; Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries – FICC, part of Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc (CGEM).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, public initiatives were launched to assist CCI youth. In early January 2021, the FICC signed a framework agreement with several government ministries to help provide employment and ease the burden on youth through measures such as a fixed monthly allowance of €200, postponement of social contributions, extension of the tax exemptions, and softened loan repayment terms. While these measures were beneficial, they represent only temporary relief rather than structural improvements needed for sustained economic growth in the CCI sector. Additionally, despite the presence of numerous stakeholders and institutions supporting CCI, especially the youth, a lack of coordination and synergy among them limits their effectiveness in creating opening new opportunities (Forouheshfar et al., July 2024).

48. The International Commerce Center (ICC) is located in a 108-storey building in Hong Kong. It was completed in 2010.

# Conclusion

The successful elevation of Gnaoua music onto the global stage serves as a compelling example of the potential to expand market access for Morocco's rich creative and cultural assets. This achievement illustrates the impact of sustained private support, visionary leadership, and substantial public backing. However, to cultivate a thriving ecosystem for CCI, further efforts are needed, particularly in addressing high production and distribution costs, significant risks, and intense global competition.

To build a supportive environment for CCI, several critical questions need to be addressed, including (i) In which areas of CCI does Morocco hold a comparative advantage? (ii) What types of infrastructure investment, including specialized training centers, should the government pursue to stimulate private investment in CCI? (iii) What trade, tax and incentive policies are likely to enhance market access for Morocco's CCI? and (iv) What investments are needed to encourage and support youth in pursuing careers in CCI? By addressing these questions and engaging with experienced stakeholders, the Government of Morocco can develop a comprehensive national strategy aimed at unlocking the significant socio-economic developmental potential of CCI.

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