

MUSIC FREEDOM DAY # 2



REPORT

3rd March 2017 at 7 pm
Pietri - **RABAT** (Morocco)

MUSIC FREEDOM DAY - MOROCCO

Friday, March 3rd 2017

• CONTEXT

Initiated by Freemuse in 2006, Music Freedom Day (MFD) is a powerful, united manifestation to support persecuted, prosecuted and imprisoned musicians, many of whose only crime has been that they have spoken up against authorities and insisted on the right to express themselves through their music. Worldwide, musicians' and composers' rights to freedom of expression are violated, but the strong support for Music Freedom Day every year demonstrates the will to continue the advocacy and defend the universal rights to compose, perform and participate in musical activities.

• MUSIC FREEDOM DAY IN MOROCCO

In Morocco, Racines organized, for the second time, Music Freedom Day.

Racines is a Moroccan non-profit organization established in September 7th 2010 and it seeks to promote culture as an influential factor of human, social and economic development.

Racines was created out of the will of Moroccan cultural actors convinced that culture is essential for building citizenship and for social cohesion and development, and that several African and Arab countries

share similar issues in the cultural domain: weak implication of the Governments in terms of cultural policies, non-recognition of culture as a human right, weak creative industries, non-protection of artists' rights and freedoms, insufficient offers of educational programs in cultural professions...

Racines' goals and objectives are:

- To promote culture as a vector of democracy
- To promote culture as a tool for human, social and economic development
- To promote access to culture for all as a universal human right
- To advocate and campaign for the establishment of a cultural policy in Morocco and similar countries in Africa and Middle-East
- To advocate and campaign for the establishment of an efficient cultural economy and for creative industries viable for artists
- To advocate and campaign for the status of the artists and their rights and for the freedom of creative expression
- To raise awareness about crucial questions such as cultural policies, artists' rights, freedom of expression, democratization, political participation, elections, accountability, racism, migration, citizenship, public space...

- To improve the capacities of youth and professionals of arts in the region through programmes of empowerment and incubating young and small cultural structures.

Racines develops several activities and projects for the structuration of the cultural policies in Morocco, Africa and the Middle-East: debates and conferences, national campaigns through the arts and cultural action, trainings and capacity building of cultural operators, information, mapping and research, accompaniment and incubation of cultural enterprises...

• WHY ORGANIZE MFD IN MOROCCO?

The freedom of speech and of creative expression is guaranteed by the Moroccan constitution voted in 2011, in its article 25: *"The freedoms of thought, of opinion and of expression under all their forms, are guaranteed.*

The freedoms of creation, of publication and of presentation [exposition] in literary and artistic matters and of scientific and technical research, are guaranteed".

This constitution has been adopted by a popular referendum, right after the protests of the 20th February Movement. Moreover, Morocco ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which claims in its article 19: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".*

In Morocco, the practices do not reflect the reality of the legal instruments in force,

hence the importance of this event. It will promote awareness among the various stakeholders.

Many cases of violation of freedom of artistic expression, including music, were recorded in Morocco during the past decade.

The case of "Lhaqed" is one of the most known worldwide, because of the several violations he went through, as he has been prosecuted, imprisoned, persecuted, banned...because of being part of the 20th February Movement and because of his lyrics that criticize the system. He finally chose to leave the country and seek asylum in Europe.

"Lhaqed" was not the only one persecuted.

In 2014, the rapper Al Shuaibi was violently arrested at his parents' residence. Police proceeded to search the house without a warrant after allegedly receiving a tip that Al Shuaibi has supplied another individual with drugs. No drugs were found during the illegal search. This arrest followed the release of a song "Zanka Lkahla" in 2013 in which the rapper denounces the excessive violence practiced by local police and the rampant corruption and absence of transparency within the force.

One year later, the Moroccan rapper Yassine Fallate released a divisive song "Korsika" in which the lyrics contained scathing criticism of the police and security officials. Over a month after the release, the rapper was alleged to incite hate and violence, as well as threatening public order and was arrested upon the instructions of the Khenifra Public Prosecution.

Musicians are not the only artists suffering from censorship and persecution in Morocco: it is the case for literature, theatre, visual arts, and cinema...

In 2016, the movie *Much Loved* from Nabil Ayouch was banned in Morocco because it "undermined the moral values and dignity of Moroccan women as well as the image of Morocco" said the Communication Ministry of Morocco. The main actress, Loubna Abidar who played a prostitute in the movie, received messages of hate, threats of death and has been attacked and beaten by three men in the streets of Casablanca. After these attacks, she has moved to France where she feels safer. This case proves that besides legal restrictions, there is self-censorship that is driven by the reaction of public opinion. Those reactions may harm physical security.

Racines, as a civil society organization,

uses all the possible means to advocate for artists rights and freedom of creative expression. In 2016, together with Freemuse, the NGO conducted a research on censorship in Morocco and submitted a Universal Periodic Report focusing on artists' rights and artistic freedom, including several recommendations for a better legal, economic, political and social context to protect artistic expression and to guarantee artists' rights.

In this context, Racines firmly believes that freedom of creation and musical expression are necessary to build a healthy society, where artists play an important role in the social change and for a proper functioning of democratic societies.

This is why Racines celebrates for the second time Music Freedom Day in Morocco.

CELEBRATION AND PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S VOICES

In several countries including Morocco, women performers can be socially, culturally and economically marginalized. Globally, women artists face especially difficult conditions and are often subject to industry discrimination, sexual objectification and significantly less bookings than male artists.

This year, the MFD event in Rabat will thus focus on women's voices and freedom of artistic expression with a debate about "Women artists and the freedom of expression" followed by a concert at the Pietri Bistrot in Rabat, Morocco.

ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

Date: Friday 3 March 2017

Place: Le Bistrot du Pietri – Rabat (Morocco)

7pm: Debate "Female artists and freedom of artistic expression"

9pm: concert – "Moon band au féminin"

Theme of the debate : "Women artists and Freedom of expression"

Speakers: Dounia Benslimane (Director of development and partnerships at Racines)/ Naima Oulmekki (Head of PR at Théâtre Aquarium) / Nour Talbi (Transgender

performing artist, dancer).

Facilitator : Sara Soujar (Gender activist).

The goal of the debate was to discuss the situation and struggles of women artists in Morocco from 3 main perspectives:

• CIVIL SOCIETY :

Racines is an association advocating for cultural policies in Morocco and Africa. It defends artists rights as well, as a necessary condition for the sustainability of the arts creation and for participating to the social change. Racines produced many reports with its partners. It recently produced with Freemuse a report on freedom of expression and creation in Morocco that also presents the situation of artists and the legal restraints in the press code, the criminal code, etc. This report is produced in the framework of a Universal Periodic Report that is presented to the United Nations in Geneva. It presents cases of censorship in music, theater and performing arts (amongst other fields). It also shows that artists are mainly prosecuted and sentenced by the government, and by non-institutional organizations in the second place.

Female artists are a particular case because

they are more threatened of violations of their freedom of expression, either because of religious standards, social norms, tradition, etc.

Racines highlighted the crucial role of CSOs in the advocacy for culture and arts, locally and internationally, and how international cooperation between NGOs can provide a stronger discourse that denounces all violations and persecutions, either by the States or by non-governmental parties.

• **THEATER - THÉÂTRE AQUARIUM :**

Theatre Aquarium believes that theater can contribute to a better facilitation and understanding of the law. It produced many theater plays regarding the moudawana (family law) and women's rights.

Theatre Aquarium produced "Diali", which is a play on the perception that women have on their body parts. "Diali" refers to a vagina, as being a part of all women's body and that they should own it instead of being

ashamed of it. The play is the result of a one year of storytelling with women from different backgrounds. The idea was to organize focus groups with women, and give them a survey to fill on how they perceive their bodies.

The play was very known and criticized because the word "vagina" was pronounced in Arabic. However, the word wasn't meant to cause choc or provocation, it was only present to build a certain context for the play.

According to Naima, the Moroccan society is full of contradictions, and women suffer from this a lot, because they are considered as minorities. Theater is a tool for Theatre Aquarium to confront this censorship.

• **DANCE - NOUR TALBI | TRANSGENDER PERFORMING ARTIST**

According to Nour, dance is a medium to express several emotions and messages, but people only focus on women's body parts instead.



Nour believes that if women want to live and freely express their arts, they should do it regardless of all the judgments. It's not by censoring women that they will be hindered from expressing themselves, because they will always find another way to express their ideas and emotions.

As a transgender artist, she suffers from censorship in the public TV, as she is never invited to perform. Moreover, she is also an actress and some of her scenes in TV series are cut. She is aware that she cannot speak up for her rights, as she would like to, because she could be a target of threats and attacks.

• CONCLUSION :

The audience and speakers debated on the concept of artistic freedom and its limits in society. Several questions have been raised. Do artists have to be provocative in order to practice their art and share their messages? Do they really need red lines to be controlled or can they express themselves, in the framework of the law?

What is the limit between freedom and the respect of tradition, religion and authorities?

How contradictory are the Moroccan laws and the Government that wants to send a message of openness and democracy to the world, and, at the same time, practice censorship and violate the rights of some artists?

Indeed, there are still a lot of contradictions in the Moroccan society. Many artists are still afraid to be persecuted, attacked or threatened themselves or their families. Roles have to be shared between artists and CSOs, in order to keep on the advocacy and the work to change the laws and impose reforms in the laws, to respect universal human rights conventions. Art is also needed to change the mindsets and raise the awareness of the society on the issues of human rights.

After the debate a concert took place with the participation of "Moon land au Féminin" a band that Racines constituted exclusively for the event, accompanied with two female hip-hop dancers from "Ecole Shemsi". After the performance of the band, the stage was open for a jam session, because **MUSIC IS NOT TO BE SILENCED.**



Communication

Poster MFD#2 Morocco

Website and emailing: Press release sent to the 508 contacts of Racines' database.

Facebook event: ([Click here](#))

Twitter: @RacinesMaroc, #MusicFreedomDay #MFD

Photos, videos: See attached.

Number of participants : 300 people (artists, cultural activists, journalists).

Press :

- [9anat.com](#) : “جذور تحتفي بيوم حرية الإبداع بالمغرب و تكرم الأصوات النسائية“
- [Allevent.in](#) : “Music Freedom Day 2017“
- [Alquds.co.uk](#) : “منظمة «جذور» تحتفي بيوم حرية الإبداع الموسيقي في المغرب“
- [Lioumness](#) : “Music Freedom Day 2017“
- [Heyevent](#) : “Music Freedom Day 2017“



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