



Men and Popular Music in Algeria: The Social Significance of Rai (Modern Middle East (Paperback))

Marc Schade-Poulsen

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Raï music is often called the voice of the voiceless in Algeria, a society currently swept by tragic conflict. *Raï* is the voice of Algerian men, young men caught between generations and classes, in political strife, and in economic inequality. In a ground-breaking study, anthropologist Marc Schade-Poulsen uses this popular music genre as a lens through which he views Algerian society, particularly male society. He situates *raï* within Algerian family life, moral codes, and broader power relations.

Schade-Poulsen did his research in the 1990s, in clubs, recording studios, at weddings, and with street musicians. He describes the history of *raï*, which emerged in the late 1970s and spread throughout North Africa at the same time the Islamist movement was growing to become the most potent socio-political movement in Algeria.

Outsiders consider *raï* to be Western in origin, but Schade-Poulsen shows its Islamic roots as well. The musicians do use Western instruments, but the music itself mixes Algerian popular songs and rhythms with the beat of American disco, Egyptian modalities, Moroccan wedding tunes, and the songs of Julio Iglesias. The lyrics deal with male-female relationships but also with generational relationships and the problems of youth, as they struggle to find a place in a conflicted society.

The study, in its innovative approach to music as a template of society, helps the reader understand the two major movements among today's Algerian youth: one toward the mosque and the other toward the West.

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