

Hip Hop Culture in a Small Moroccan City

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This paper explores Hip Hop culture by tracing its development from the global level through the Arab world to finally its manifestation in Morocco. Hip Hop culture is defined broadly as a wide range of artistic expressions – rap, graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, etc. – and also a mind-set or way of life. The focus on the Moroccan context starts at the national level, pointing out some of the key artists, issues Moroccan Hip Hop faces, and how this has been explored by scholars of Hip Hop. The paper focuses on an ethnographic exploration of Hip Hop culture in Ifrane, a small Moroccan city. An analytic approach suggested in Patti Lather’s 1991 book *Getting Smart* informs and expands the paper particularly by privileging the emancipatory power of Moroccan Hip Hop, creating a nuanced view of the impact of Hip Hop on the lives of youth in this small community. Finally, the paper employs a self-reflexive stance to critically view the author’s own position in the research project in order to name some of the challenges and contradictions of a white male American doing Hip Hop research in the Moroccan context.

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco from 2005-2007. During that time, I worked in a small town, Amizmiz, near Marrakesh that I came to see as “normal” in terms of infrastructure, schools, and people. Of course, I am using the term “normal” here ironically as “normal” is one of language’s powerful tools for the creation and maintenance of arbitrary, and often oppressive, cultural values and practices.¹ When I moved back to Morocco to work as Al Akhawayn University (AUI) in 2010, I lived in another small town near Fes named Ifrane. During my second year teaching, I started a service-learning program that brought youth from the university and local public high school together to work on English learning activities through project-based group work.² Through this collaboration, I got to know Mehdi Essiffi, one of the high school’s emergent leaders. While we did not have many deep conversations during this initial period, I noticed that Mehdi and his friends were a bit less “normal” than the students I had known in Amizmiz in that they wore big baggy clothes and skateboarded around town. Throughout the several years of the program, our relationship grew as Mehdi took on various leadership roles, even staying involved in the program after his Spring 2013 graduation from high school.

In fact, at the final program of the Fall 2013 semester, Mehdi presented a video entitled *Hip Hop in Ifrane* featuring a short introduction to Hip Hop and then examples

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “On the Family as a Realized Category,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 19–26, doi:10.1177/026327696013003002; Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 28.

² Brian Seilstad, “Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating a Department-Wide Service-Learning Program for English Language Learners in Morocco,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 18, no. 1 (2014): 229–63.

of breakdancing, rapping, and DJing from local youth.³ Intrigued, I asked Mehdi if he would be interested in developing this further for a fortuitously planned conference on popular culture in North Africa and the Middle East at AUI.⁴ He agreed. Although neither of us, at the time, were aware of some of the prevailing theories and techniques in ethnographic research,⁵ we were primarily concerned with talking to local Hip Hop artists and documenting their work. As such, we were amateur researchers in this field but developed an ad hoc ethnographic method that was admittedly not as systematic as it could have been but nevertheless sought to capture as much of the Hip Hop culture of the small town as possible. Thus, in the following weeks, we spent time discussing the basic parts of the project, which included two main aspects:

(1) Data at the local level in Ifrane with Mehdi as the main gate-keeper and organizer, including:

- Conducting semi-structured interviews with local rappers, breakdancers, graffiti artists, DJs, et al. – basically anybody involved in the Hip Hop scene in Ifrane.⁶ These interviews were not audiorecorded, but detailed notes were taken during the interview, and in many cases there were ample opportunities for informal follow-up questioning.
- Collecting documentary evidence of Ifrane’s Hip Hop from photos, film, social media, etc. These were recorded through multiple means – my digital camera, Mehdi’s smartphone, and other local artists sharing their work through social media.

(2) Background research done about Hip Hop in the global, MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, and especially Moroccan contexts with me as the main investigator but with Mehdi’s and other youths’ guidance, including:

- Conducting a literature review about prominent Hip Hop theories
- Conducting a literature review about Moroccan Hip Hop
- Watching documentaries about Hip Hop globally and especially in Morocco
- Viewing Hip Hop art widely but with a focus on popular Moroccan artists

³ The full video can be seen here: *Shta.mpg*, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.mediafire.com/watch/g4kceanze96c69w/Shta.mpg>.

⁴ IISMM, “Appel À Communication: 7th International Conference: ‘Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa’, Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane (Maroc),” *Accueil*, October 8, 2013, <http://iismm.hypotheses.org/4426>.

⁵ Jan Blommaert, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Beginner’s Guide* (Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2010); Mike A. Crang and Ian Cook, *Doing Ethnographies* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007).

⁶ Again, we were quite unaware of the many issues with interviews and were inclined to take them more or less at face value. For example, we would have been greatly assisted if we had been aware of the following: Mats Alvesson, *Interpreting Interviews*, 1st ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010); Charles L. Briggs, *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); C. Jerolmack and S. Khan, “Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 43, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 178–209, doi:10.1177/0049124114523396.

- Watching interviews with Moroccan Hip Hop artists, mostly rappers, on popular media
- Reaching out to Hip Hop youth outside of Ifrane, especially young women, through Facebook and other means

Despite Mehdi's fracturing his collarbone in a snowboarding accident in December, the result of this was a conference presentation that located Ifrane within the larger world of Hip Hop from the U.S. to the Moroccan scenes. For this paper, the conference itself and the discussions around our presentation are another part of the data and analysis.

This paper describes and analyzes the results of this process by applying a social constructionist technique summarized by Gergen⁷ of Patti Lather's 1991 book *Getting Smart*.⁸ This starts with creating a realist version of the data. Then, a critical framework is used to approach the issue from a politically invested viewpoint. Next, alternative interpretations are explored through deconstruction to uncover areas of marginality and oppression.⁹ Finally, the exploration turns to self-reflexivity as a final phase of locating the researcher(s) and peeling back any illusions of objectivity. Lest this approach seem to veer into explanatory paralysis, Lather's work centers emancipation as a key goal of post-modern research. This paper takes the same approach to Hip Hop itself and Hip Hop research as a fundamentally emancipatory act; indeed, this paper seeks to "ex-center"¹⁰ the discourse about Hip Hop in Morocco.

The reason to employ such an approach is that studies into Moroccan Hip Hop have tended towards the reductive and what Lather calls "theory-imposing" that runs counter to emancipatory research.¹¹ For example, one common debate is whether Moroccan Hip Hop has been coopted by the government.¹² In this argument, Moroccan Hip Hop is made a pawn of the government and/or marginalized to the point of insignificance. Although this phenomenon may be part of the picture, I suggest that this creates a highly limiting binary with which to study Hip Hop. In fact, in Morocco, the relationship between the government and associated forces – the Makhzen – is deeply woven into life and even survival, as the Moroccan proverb says: "The Makhzen

⁷ Kenneth Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2009), 134.

⁸ Patti Lather, *Getting Smart* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁹ John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Lather, *Getting Smart*, 33–35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹² A. Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco," in *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI*, ed. D. Zisenwine and B. Maddy-Weitzman (London: Routledge, 2013), 161–77, https://www.academia.edu/1803587/Youth_Political_Activism_and_the_Festivalization_of_Hip-Hop_Music_in_Morocco; Karima Laachir, "Contemporary Moroccan Cultural Production: Between Dissent and Co-Optation," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 257–60, doi:10.1080/13696815.2013.824375; Cristina Moreno Almeida, "Unravelling Distinct Voices in Moroccan Rap: Evading Control, Weaving Solidarities, and Building New Spaces for Self-Expression," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 2013): 319–32, doi:10.1080/13696815.2013.820130.

are like fire; if you get too close, you burn, but if you get too far away, you freeze.” In addition, I believe that too many studies focus only or primarily on interviews with famous male Moroccan rappers or analysis of their songs.¹³ Moreover, academic ethnography about Moroccan Hip Hop needs development, and Bhat¹⁴ is a good step in this direction but certainly only a beginning. Thus, this paper seeks to deconstruct this binary and contribute to this field through Lather’s approach by bringing at least two elements into higher relief: (1) the voices of common, that is, not (or not yet) famous, Moroccan Hip Hop artists from a small town and (2) my experience as a Hip Hop researcher and collaborator with Mehdi.

Towards the “Real”: Global Hip Hop Travels to Morocco and Ifrane

Hip Hop is ‘arguably the most profound, global popular cultural movement of the late 20th/early 21st century’.¹⁵ This movement started in the 1970s in the U.S. and specifically in the Bronx and Harlem of New York City from influences including the cultures of Barbados, Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and North American blacks.¹⁶ Scholars have further developed the roots of Hip Hop by connecting deeper African cultural elements (e.g. Dogon, Yoruba, etc.) with Hip Hop’s use of “word power”: on the one hand and rhythm/the beat and the body in dance on the other as the raw attractive elements of Hip Hop.¹⁷ As a result, this new art form quickly gained in popularity in the U.S. as a medium that was both aesthetically interesting and capable of transmitting important messages about the artist’s worldview, including sharp critiques of the society.¹⁸ The impact of Hip Hop in the U.S. has been significant but also contentious involving, among many issues, serious debates and disagreement between the commercialized/hyper-sexualized and the politically conscious versions of Hip Hop.¹⁹

¹³ Anisha Bhat, “Hip Hop Highways: Mapping Complex Identities through Moroccan Rap” (Pomona College, 2014); Boum, “Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco”; Moreno Almeida, “Unravelling Distinct Voices in Moroccan Rap”

¹⁴ Bhat, “Hip Hop Highways: Mapping Complex Identities through Moroccan Rap”

¹⁵ H. Samy Alim and Alastair Pennycook, “Glocal Linguistic Flows: Hip-Hop Culture(s), Identities, and the Politics of Language Education,” *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 6, no. 2 (2007): 93.

¹⁶ Halifu Osumare, “Global Hip-Hop and the African Diaspora,” in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, ed. Harry Justin Elam and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 266–88; Robert F. Thompson, “Hip-Hop 101,” in *Droppin Science*, ed. William Perkins, First Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 210–19.

¹⁷ Halifu Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁸ Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, Reprint edition (New York: Picador, 2005).

¹⁹ Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*

This short introduction uses the word Hip Hop, but the term and practice itself is quite amorphous. Many scholarly studies focus on rap as the focal point in Hip Hop,²⁰ privileging the spoken word and the message being delivered, but it must be stressed that Hip Hop is a 'cultural phenomenon' that involves a spectrum of forms including rap, graffiti, break dancing, journalism, and activism.²¹ Hip Hop can even be described as a way of life for those individuals who are not actively involved in the production of Hip Hop but only the consumption or emulation of it through music, dress, or even a certain style of living or thinking.²²

One key element of Hip Hop that pervades and motivates the movement is the interplay between competition and collaboration, most often manifested in the 'clash' seen between two (or more) rappers, b-boys/girls, DJs, and so on. What is important is that, while these clashes may often be genuine expressions of animosity between Hip Hop artists, they are often constructed and constructive spaces that bring inspiration to the artists and, thus, keep the Hip Hop movement alive and strong.

Globally, Hip Hop has grown exponentially as the latest African-American export as other cultures and particularly youth have seen Hip Hop as an ideal way to convey their message in their specific circumstances.²³ Scholars have traced these connections to virtually every corner of the world²⁴ and documentaries such as *The Hip Hop Years* or *How Hip Hop Changed the World* show how this movement started and spread.²⁵ Despite the fact that these global borrowings come from an American source,

²⁰ H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2006); Alim and Pennycook, "Glocal Linguistic Flows"

²¹ Gwendolyn D. Pough, "Do the Ladies Run This...? Some Thoughts on Hip-Hop Feminism," in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, ed. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (Boston: Northeastern, 2003), 233.

²² Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 26.

²³ Russell White, "Sign of a Black Planet: Hip-Hop and Globalization," in *Issues in Americanisation and Culture*, ed. Jude Davies, Neil Campbell, and George McKay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 163-77.

²⁴ Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle, eds., *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-Hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Sujatha Fernandes, *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation* (London: Verso, 2011); Marame Gueye, "Urban Guerrilla Poetry: The Movement Y'en a Marre and the Socio-Political Influences of Hip Hop in Senegal," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6 (2013): 22-42; Tony Mitchell, ed., *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*, 1st ed. (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan, 2002); Caroline Mose, "Swag'and'cred': Representing Hip-Hop in the African City.," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013), <http://www.jpanafrican.com/docs/vol6no3/6.3-8-Mose.pdf>; Mwenda Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* (University of Illinois Press, 2009); Shani Omari, "Hip Hop Music as a Youth Medium for Cultural Struggle in Zanzibar.," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2013), <http://www.jpanafrican.com/docs/vol6no3/6.3-9-Omari.pdf>; Koen Stroeken, "Immunizing Strategies: Hip-Hop and Critique in Tanzania," *Africa* 75, no. 04 (2005): 488-509; Marina Terkourafi, *The Languages of Global Hip Hop* (A&C Black, 2010).

²⁵ NoRecordSnobs, "How Hip-Hop Changed The World - Part 1/3," November 18, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwfdlC795ag&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Firehouse SoundLabs, "The Hip Hop Years Part 1," January 6, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhrSIOa2bsA&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

it must be stressed that there is a need to historicize the development of each country's adaption from uncritical copying to creative ownership of the Hip Hop culture.²⁶ Even if many of the themes of American Hip Hop are the same, including exclusion and marginalization, in the global context each story is unique.

Among these global particularities are how Hip Hop culture builds its own identity and struggles to become an authentic form in a new context. In general, successful efforts to achieve this have involved an intense focus on two connected points 1) expressing the Hip Hop artist's lived experience and especially strong connections to the local as represented in the 'hood', and 2) transmitting an important message to the audience. These two elements are key, but global Hip Hop artists may also seek to bolster their bona fides by emphasizing the do-it-yourself nature of their art, collaborating with other artists and especially Americans, and even focusing on their own notions of blackness.²⁷

MENA/ Arab Hip Hop

Hip Hop has taken hold and has produced a significant culture in the MENA region and specifically the "Arab" countries from Morocco to Yemen.²⁸ Documentaries such as *Broken Records*,²⁹ *Lyrics Revolt*,³⁰ and *961 Underground: The Rise of Lebanese Hip Hop*³¹ in addition to research focused on the region broadly³² or more specific areas such as Palestine³³ or Tunisia³⁴ bring to the fore the history of Hip Hop in a complex region.

²⁶ Osumare, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip Hop*.

²⁷ White, "Sign of a Black Planet: Hip -Hop and Globalization," 166.

²⁸ I use "Arab" as a convenient term for the swath of countries from Morocco to Yemen in the Middle East and North Africa. These countries adopt Arab identity, Arabic language, and possibly Islam as primary parts of their identity, despite the fact that many other cultures, languages, and religions exist. Israel, Turkey, and Iran are not included in this definition.

²⁹ Broken Records, "Documentary: Broken Records," February 17, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/20067860>.

³⁰ Dj Lethal Skillz, "961 Underground: The Rise of Lebanese Hip Hop (Documentary DVD)," April 13, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sah0rI2mXsY&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³¹ gulfilmfest, "LYRICS REVOLT," April 1, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COBuYSAOIGM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³² N. Gana, "Rap and Revolt in the Arab World," *Social Text* 30, no. 4 113 (December 1, 2012): 25-53, doi:10.1215/01642472-1725784; U. Kahf, "Arabic Hip Hop: Claims of Authenticity and Identity of a New Genre," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19, no. 4 (2007): 359-85.

³³ Ela Greenberg, "'The King of the Streets': Hip Hop and the Reclaiming of Masculinity in Jerusalem's Shu'afat Refugee Camp," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 2, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 231-50, doi:10.1163/187398509X12476683126428; S. Maira and M. Shihade, "Hip Hop from '48 Palestine: Youth, Music, and the Present/absent," *Social Text* 30, no. 3 112 (September 1, 2012): 1-26, doi:10.1215/01642472-1597314; David A. McDonald, "Carrying Words like Weapons: Hip-Hop and the Poetics of Palestinian Identities in Israel," *Min-Ad: Israeli Studies in Musicology Online* 7, no. 2 (2009): 116-30.

³⁴ Ilyana Ovshieva, "Stomping for Tunisia: Liberation, Identity and Dignity in Tunisian Rap Music," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 36-54, doi:10.1163/18739865-00503003.

The origin of this region's Hip Hop often is located in Palestine, which has received a good deal of scholarly attention due to being a contested area where Hip Hop artists' lived experience is truly one of daily conflict with the Israeli occupation.³⁵ Indeed, struggle against oppression, whether external or domestic, is one of the key themes of Palestinian Hip Hop and Arab Hip Hop in general due to the fact that Palestine does not hold a monopoly on oppression in the region.

However, Hip Hop in the Arab countries has some other specific issues worthy of closer consideration. These include the role of religion and Islam because some Muslims take issue with certain art forms such as singing or dancing that form a core part of Hip Hop culture. On the other hand, some Hip Hop artists in this region draw inspiration from Muslim-American rap and specifically groups related to the Five Percenters.³⁶ In addition, the issue of Arabic itself as a medium of expression in Hip Hop is complex as each country has its own Arabic dialect(s) that Hip Hop artists may use in addition to the possibility of using Standard Arabic or other indigenous or colonized languages. Finally, the role of women in Hip Hop is more complex in a region where women's rights are a locus of struggle for many; indeed, this point will be taken up more fully later in the paper.

Moroccan Hip Hop

As this paper focuses on the Moroccan context, it is important to shed light on the general history and key aspects of Hip Hop in Morocco. Again, while much of the scholarly focus has been on rap, it must be stressed that the world of Hip Hop in Morocco involves many other elements including breakdancing, graffiti, DJing, dress, and use of language, especially Darea (Moroccan Arabic). Moroccan Hip Hop has received a good deal of attention as evidenced by documentaries such as *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*,³⁷ *Casanayda!*,³⁸ a feature documentary on Al Jazeera,³⁹ and the film *All I Wanna Do*.⁴⁰ These films and documentaries tend to focus on the main male players in the rap scene such as Bigg, Ash-Kayne, Fnaire, Muslim, or Casa Crew while shedding some small light on females such as Tendresse, Soultana and her group Tigress Flow, or the plight of the beginning artist in *All I Wanna Do*. Locally, programs such as Ajial, Medi1, Hit Radio, or Jota TV regularly feature Hip Hop artists, again with a focus on

³⁵ McDonald, "Carrying Words Like Weapons."

³⁶ Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip Hop and the Gods of New York* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

³⁷ Josh Asen and Jennifer Needle, *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*, 2011, http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/i_love_hip_hop_in_http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/i_love_hip_hop_in_moroccomorocco.

³⁸ Farida Benlyazid and Abderrahim Mettour, *Casanayda!*, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRrT1zRzmFQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³⁹ Al Jazeera Documentaries, *Rap Marocain Sur Al-Jazeera Tv - Part 1*, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQafGmn81CI&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁰ M. Medina, *All I Wanna Do*, 2011.

male rappers, such as Muslim,⁴¹ Dizzy Dros,⁴² Masta Flow of Casa Crew,⁴³ Master Flow,⁴⁴ Caprice, Would Cha3b,⁴⁵ Chaht Man,⁴⁶ or Sa3er Man,⁴⁷ or the most prominent female rappers Tendresse⁴⁸ and Soutlana.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, these interview shows tend to ignore or give little voice to other Moroccan artists such as the internationally award-winning breakdancing crew Lhiba KingZoo with its famous solo breakdancer Lil Zoo⁵⁰ or DJ Key/Khalid Douache, one of the pioneers of Moroccan Hip Hop, or the countless other artists in the graffiti, beatboxing, etc. scenes. In short, it must be stressed that, in Morocco as in other countries, there are many established Hip Hop artists, and everyday new artists are forming; thus, the field is always growing in a cycle of creativity and tension between those Hip Hop artists who succeed and then struggle to maintain their authenticity in the eyes of the up-and-comers.

Through these documentaries and media interviews with prominent Hip Hop artists, one can gain a sense of some key issues facing Moroccan Hip Hop. One of the first points the artists make is the self-made origins of the Hip Hop movement in Morocco and how many artists started 10-15 years ago simply by writing their lyrics, sharing with friends and family, and then moving to recording their tracks in their home and distributing cassettes for free.⁵¹ Today, the presence of YouTube and digital media makes this easier,⁵² but many artists still start by recording tracks in their home using personal computers and some, including Dizzy Dros, prefer to stay independent

⁴¹ AKAPROD, "Muslim 2013 Sur Ajial 2M TV A Propos de Almarhoum," December 17, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF1bZCDVzMA&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴² TvELaiounCity, "Dizzy DROS Sur Ajial 2M TV," March 13, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L15OJzg0ENo&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴³ TheMeBoob01, "Masta Flow 2011 New À Medi1,Masta Flow 2011,Rap Marocain 2011,Top Chat Maroc: Www.L3azz.Com," January 20, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhXbz_7NsEw&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁴ KtwoAlbertcity, "Master Flow Sur L'émission: AJIAL (HD)," March 9, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZdX8eiq53M&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁵ HIT RADIO, "CAPRICE ET WOULD CHA3B DANS LE MORNING DE MOMO SUR HIT RADIO - 12/11/13," November 12, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cLFMX7Cb70&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁶ attawri, "Chaht Man @AJIAL," March 8, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-um9svKdQM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁷ Moncif AISSAOUI, "Sa3er MAN @AJIAL 2M TV, Tremplin Boulevard 2010," March 9, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcavoJ_sd8k&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁸ Roim6, "Tendresse Sur Ajial 2M Dimanche 19 Juin 2011," June 20, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ipr-BRHB7dg&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴⁹ my min, "Soutlana on Jota Tv Part 1 (EXCLUSIVE)," December 14, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5MnRx7dC3s&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁵⁰ Salif Traore, "Biographie de BBOY Lil Zoo (Maroc)," *Bboy Bgirl Africa*, 2013, <http://www.bboybgirlafrica.com/interview-de-bboy-lil-zoo-maroc/>.

⁵¹ MedRadio Maroc, "Muslim Avec Lamiaa El Bekri Sur Med Radio," May 18, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcQg0Et0hPc&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁵² Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco."

through these self-production methods.⁵³ Another issue with Moroccan Hip Hop is the criticism it faces from the Moroccan community that range from pointing out that Hip Hop is a foreign import to accusing Hip Hop artists of promoting immorality. The reactions to this by the Hip Hop artists themselves range from simply ignoring the criticisms to addressing it head on in song (e.g. Dizzy Dros' song 'Men Hna'),⁵⁴ accusing the accuser of simply not understanding or trying to understand, or taking a more historical view. Masta Flow, as an example of this last approach, pointed out in an interview on the Medi1 program *No Shame* (بدون حرج) that Gnawa, which is now considered an important part of Morocco's patrimony, was once considered a borrowing from Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁵ In addition, rappers sometimes face criticism that their work is morally objectionable from the perspective of language and sex, but the rappers, for example Dizzy Dros, turn this on their head and talk about how the language used is real, that of the street, and to deny that is to deny a linguistic reality.⁵⁶ Specifically, the use of the term "Nigga" (عزي) creates tension for many listeners, but most rappers explain the use of this term in a positive and identity-forming framework rather than that of racism. For example, Dizzy Dros emphasizes that this is a term of affection between friends in his neighborhood.⁵⁷ That said, racism against blacks is certainly a part of Moroccan society, and the popular magazine *Zamane* recently explored this issue, tracing the history of slavery and racial segregation in Morocco.⁵⁸ In terms of sex, most rappers deny that they are breaking this Moroccan taboo; for example, Masta Flow⁵⁹ denied that any of his video clips or lyrics are sexual, and indeed one does not find clips with the sexuality seen in American Hip Hop videos.⁶⁰

With regard to language, Dareeja is the clear choice for Moroccan rappers. One rapper, Nores, sometimes uses Standard Arabic in his work, but other artists such as Dizzy Dros claim that it is impossible to rap in Standard Arabic and that Nores' use is strictly "ironic."⁶¹ One interesting development is the use of Amazight (Berber) with Jamal Rass Derb as a prominent example.⁶² DJs, in turn, sample widely, mixing

⁵³ Mehdi Ouassat, "Le Rappeur Dizzy Dros: L'autoproduction Me Permet de Préserver Ma Liberté," *Libération*, 2013, http://www.libe.ma/Le-rappeur-Dizzy-Dros-L-autoproduction-me-permet-de-preserver-ma-liberte_a44336.html.

⁵⁴ Dizzy DROS, "Dizzy DROS - Men Hna," May 31, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6RIIrJ0R0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁵⁵ TheMeBoob01, "Masta Flow 2011 New À Medi1, Masta Flow 2011, Rap Marocain 2011, Top Chat Maroc."

⁵⁶ TvELaiounCity, "Dizzy DROS Sur Ajial 2M TV."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Zamane*, "Pourquoi Nous Sommes Racistes," *Zamane*, November 2013.

⁵⁹ TheMeBoob01, "Masta Flow 2011 New À Medi1, Masta Flow 2011, Rap Marocain 2011, Top Chat Maroc."

⁶⁰ Elaine Richardson, "'She Was Workin like Foreal': Critical Literacy and Discourse Practices of African American Females in the Age of Hip Hop," *Discourse & Society* 18, no. 6 (2007): 789-809, doi:10.1177/0957926507082197.

⁶¹ TvELaiounCity, "Dizzy DROS Sur Ajial 2M TV."

⁶² Resolve Pic, "La Conférence de Presse Agadir Muslim & Jamal Rass Derb Aziz Style Sous," February 1, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ihm87Aw6yRw&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

American beats with Middle Eastern or even Amazight rhythms. One good example of this is DJ Van's song "Inas Inas," which mixes the famous Taschelhit song by Mohamed Rouicha with a house/trance beat.⁶³

The issues they address, as with all Hip Hop, flow from the artist's lived experience, and many of the rappers talk about how they draw inspiration from daily life. For example, Masta Flow describes observing the street where he might see a person reading a newspaper, another person blabbing in a café, and another person going to pray.⁶⁴ More critically and connected with the importance of the message, artists address the country's persistent poverty, corruption, and lack of real or meaningful employment after education (for example, both Dizzy Dros and Soultana worked in call centers before turning to rap full time).⁶⁵ This has led to the accusation that Moroccan rap is persistently negative, to which two responses can be given: 1) that many rap groups such as Fnaire are quite patriotic and push people to be more civically oriented, or 2) that it is important for the rapper to tell the truth, as the rapper Chaht Man asserted in an interview on Ajial.⁶⁶

However, any criticism plays between the country's official/unofficial "red lines" in public discourse that restrain any open attacks on the monarchy or Islam.⁶⁷ Even those rappers such as Mehdi L'Bassline who dare to push hard on the system with lyrics such as "Fuck Stability" (استقرار) tend to avoid directly attacking the monarchy or specific elements in the political system.⁶⁸ However, those who cross the "red lines" such as Mouad Belghouat/El Haqed may face serious penalties such as time in prison.⁶⁹ This leads to one of the issues raised above: whether Moroccan Hip Hop has been coopted or become successfully controlled by the state, particularly in the way that the state has moved from resistance to promotion of the Hip Hop scene through the major festivals L'Boulevard⁷⁰ and Mawazine⁷¹ that are either under the direct support of the government or receive significant funding from it.⁷² As partial evidence for this view, scholars point out that the government has created a royal federation for the promotion

⁶³ oualid abada, "Dj Van Inas Inas (ROuicha)," October 3, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBACQ44ZLI&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁶⁴ TheMeBoob01, "Masta Flow 2011 New À Medi1,Masta Flow 2011,Rap Marocain 2011,Top Chat Maroc."

⁶⁵ my min, "Soultana on Jota Tv Part 1 (EXCLUSIVE)"; Ouassat, "Le Rappeur Dizzy Dros."

⁶⁶ attawri, "Chaht Man @AJIAL."

⁶⁷ Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco."

⁶⁸ ZaKiViSiON, "Mehdi L'Bassline - L'koul Fer3oun Kin Moussa - (Officiel HD)," June 18, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYWJw0MJV_I&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁶⁹ Paul Schemm, "Mouad Belghouat, Moroccan Rapper, Released From Prison," *Huffington Post*, March 30, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/30/mouad-belghouat-moroccan-rapper-prison_n_2984431.html.

⁷⁰ L' Association EAC-L'Boulvart, "Boulevard," *L'Boulevard*, n.d., <http://www.boulevard.ma/>.

⁷¹ Mawazine, "Festival Mawazine Rythmes Du Monde," n.d., <http://www.festivalmawazine.ma/>.

⁷² Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco.;" Moreno Almeida, "Unravelling Distinct Voices in Moroccan Rap."

of sports and aerobics, of which Hip Hop plays an important part.⁷³ Although this argument may be true in many ways, it must be stressed that these major festivals and the royal federation are by far not the only promoters of Hip Hop with others such as Urban Talent, Hip Hop du Bled, and Morocco Generation⁷⁴ in addition to independent sponsors such as Clear or Head and Shoulders and promoters such as Amine Wakrim from Meknes organizing independent events and competitions.⁷⁵ These venues create spaces for collaboration and competition between artists and, most importantly, take a more holistic view of Hip Hop, offering competitions in a variety of areas such as dance, beatbox, and graffiti in addition to different types of rap.⁷⁶ Thus, while the state may have coopted Hip Hop or is trying to do so, it is unclear whether it is succeeding.

Islam itself plays a certain role in Moroccan rap. Indeed, no rapper seeks to challenge or attack Islam as a religion, even if they might criticize some of the hypocrisy or contradictions they see in the Moroccan Muslim community. In addition, creating and maintaining an image of a good Muslim is an important part of some artists' persona. For example, Muslim evokes this directly through his name and his Facebook page consistently has Islamic-oriented messages,⁷⁷ and Dizzy Dros' lyrics often talk about his reading the Koran, not drinking, and maintaining prayer even if other elements of his work may run contrary to this message.⁷⁸ For women, this issue becomes more complex, as an interview with Hajar, a hijab-wearing b-girl from Temara, pointed out that her wearing the hijab and breakdancing causes confusion in the minds of others and required certain efforts on her part to explain Hip Hop culture to her parents so that they would not forbid her from breakdancing.⁷⁹

Hip Hop in Ifrane

Ifrane is a small community in the Middle Atlas region with a population of about 10,000. There is one public high school which most of the students interviewed either currently attend or attended. Interviews were conducted with local rappers (Omar/RealG and Ashraf of the crew Bad Boys or 3wazza, Achraf/The Dee with his crew Royal Gang, and Nabila, a member of the now defunct all female group The Black Sisters), graffiti artists (Kings of Graffiti, Flowboy, and AthRoot), breakdancers (Ayoub, Youssef, and Fatima-Zahra), a beatboxer (Nassim), a DJ named Tawfik, and Youness, a

⁷³ Ministère de la jeunesse et des sports, "Fédération Royale Marocaine Des Sports Aérobics et Fitness," n.d., <http://www.frmsaf.com/>.

⁷⁴ Resolve Pic, "La Conférence de Presse Agadir Muslim & Jamal Rass Derb Aziz Style Souss."

⁷⁵ TelQuel, "Gloire À L'art de Rue," *Telquel.ma*, October 8, 2012, http://telquel.ma/2012/10/08/Gloire-a-l-art-de-rue_539_4503.

⁷⁶ FESTIVAL HIP HOP WEEK END 2014, "In Facebook [Event Page]," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/events/393571644070848/>.

⁷⁷ Muslim, "In Facebook [Group Page]," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimProd?fref=ts>.

⁷⁸ Dizzy DROS, "02 - Dizzy DROS - Omar Smity [Clean Version]," November 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4HqG0L6xf0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁷⁹ Hajar/B-girl scarf sanchez, personal communication, March 30, 2014.

youth known for his unique way of dressing.⁸⁰ Through the interviews and observations, Mehdi and I sought to learn about the artists' personal journeys with Hip Hop, their influences, successes, challenges, adaptations, and overall perspective about Hip Hop in Morocco and Ifrane. In addition, many of these local youth were able to connect us with other Hip Hop artists outside of Ifrane, including female breakdancers in Rabat and Casablanca (e.g. the aforementioned Hajar/B-Girl Scarf Sanchez and another woman named Ilham/Ilo Godsend) and even the famous Tendresse. Most connections took place over Facebook and many YouTube clips or other Internet links were shared to provide evidence of an artist's work.

Throughout all the interviews, the youth revealed that the initial inspiration for them came from listening to or viewing Hip Hop from outside of Morocco. The rappers liked the sounds of Americans such as Tupac Shakur, Eminem, and others; the breakdancers were inspired by the French b-boy Junior, graffiti artists by various images online, and the beatboxers by how-to YouTube videos. However, the youth quickly found that there was a lively Hip Hop scene in Morocco; with this community, the youth were able to feel connected and develop their own skills within the Moroccan context. Indeed, once established, the Ifrane scene provided internal inspiration, as the perspective of Nabila of The Black Sisters shows – she reported that motivation to form an all female rap crew came from viewing the other male rappers in Ifrane.

The youth all choose Hip Hop as both an art form and identity. This is for various reasons starting with the fact that Hip Hop, as mentioned previously, is a well-known and adaptable genre. It also requires little previous experience or core knowledge; indeed, rappers, for example, can start their career simply by reporting what they see in the street. There is no need for overly complicated musical instruments or memorization of classical texts (as is the case with Moroccan *malhoun*, for example). Similarly, for breakdancers or graffiti artists, all one needs is a place to dance or a spray paint can.

However, one of the main reasons the youth choose Hip Hop is simply because it is the most popular global medium today to express a critical message; indeed, this medium was not the most used in the past and may not be in the future. Omar, for example, elaborated this point by showing that Nass El Ghiwane played this same role in the 70s and that other art forms may develop to replace Hip Hop one day.

What is the Message?

Similar to the issues outlined above, the message that the artists try to express starts with their lived experience and their desire to transmit that to others. This message may be positive or critical but must be authentic to be valued. In Ifrane and specifically for these high-school aged youth, much of the message revolves around

⁸⁰ I use the youths' first name or Hip Hop name only in this paper to offer some anonymity. However, as is suggested later, it is virtually impossible for youth to remain unknown in this small town.

challenges with peers, developing and maintaining an image, dealing with boredom in a small town, and confronting authority.

Omar's lyrics below show some of these elements (Dareeja given in left column, English translation on right):

Omar/RealG 'Blani'	Omar/RealG 'My Plan'
<p>RAP 3awtani Ifrane Real-G -- Ashraf n3awdlikom lblan, 7yati f7al chi moslsal 3aych 7alal, hamd Lah, chad tri9 o hani lbal hada howa l7al dnya ghada o katk7al kola hnar mno ch7al ma3ndakch gha tw7al 3aych khayb lyoum bzwin kan7lam ghada E'nafs diali 7did, 3mrha tatsada dima haz E-ras 3arf mzyan achno kandir li dar l3ib makayn bas dam skhon o 9alb kbir baghi ndir mosta9bal bal7a9 makayn bach lhiba diali dhab 3mrha gha thchach 3yit manchof f had lblad katbanli ghir dbaba tana baghi nkon cha9 tri9 wtagali baba haters o sda3 ras l3alam baghi yban 7san tay9atlonna ghir blbas wli ldakhl 3fan 3aychin street life machi chkon ykon 7san radi bli kayn a sat 3wazza's life 7ta lkfan chi haja chab3a class, this is Real-G school tal9inha tsra7 theme west side o old school wa7d mn cha3b everyday RAP & Roll hadchi li kayn l3b bayn gool ach bghiti tgool li moora dhar bzaf o 3lya ma3araf walo chkatsalo? Salah a sat bnadm malo? ma3lbalich gha mat9is chi haja diali maghatswlnhna a sat bla mat7awl niveau 3ali Real-G m3ak man, I was a steam clean only God judges al3awd you know what I mean bnadm m9ros mskin, f domaine 3ad tzad la drti 3nd 3wazza yhazo machatch alblad makan7mlch RAP howa li fya las9 lmkhyar flbyad9 maychamo wakha sma tlas9 t3ya umatchabat fina 3mr din mok madime f RAP wakhd l prime, flow mbrom f ZigZag Slim mch7al wana galb tangol makayn bas, 3wazza l3foo RAPi lsma haz E-ras</p>	<p>RAP again Ifrane Real-G -- Ashraf I'll tell you the story, my life is like a chain living right, thanking God, walking my way with a free mind this is the situation, life is getting darker many days are just the same, if you're poor you're stuck living bad today, but with good dreaming tomorrow my soul made of iron, never going to get rusty always with my head up, I know well what I'm doing if they've done bad it's okay, hot blood and big heart I want to build my future, but I got nothing my greatness is gold, it'll never be weak in this country I see only fog I want to make my way and hear someone calling me dad haters & headache the world's trying to appear better they kill us with their clothes but inside they're dirty we're living street life it's not about who's better accepting our fate, nig**s life till death something full of class, this is Real-G's school just freestyling, theme west side & old school I'm a citizen like the rest everyday rap & roll everything is obvious say what you have to say they talk a lot behind my back but they don't know a thing what do I owe you? Salah my man, what's wrong with these people I don't care just don't touch something I own you'll never reach us, don't try our level's high Real-G's here, I was clean like steam, only God judges, you know what I mean they're poor jealous people in RAP were just born if you turn to nig**s they'll say nothing's left I don't like RAP, but it's in love with me the best fag***s won't reach this even if the sky collapses they'll keep grabbing us but they'll never dominate in RAP I got a prime my flow's rolled in ZigZag Slim it's been a long time pretending all Okay nig**s God bless you all my RAP to the sky raising its head.</p>

In the graffiti scene, creating an identity is also very important. One of the main groups in Ifrane, a three-person group called Kings of Graffiti, created a number of works around Ifrane with the simple KOG tag in various formations, of which this is an example:



Figure 1: Kings of Graffiti Tag, Ifrane, Morocco

When it comes to confronting authority, the graffiti artists whose work is more public and illegal are especially at risk. However, the danger is part of the inspiration in this cat-and-mouse relationship between the artist and authority. However, the youth must also express themselves carefully, and this graffiti, made by Flowboy and his crew, is deceptively subversive:



Figure 2: VIRUS tag between Ifrane and Azrou

The word, VIRUS, was explained as delivering a message that the police/authority is something that needs to be infected; indeed, Flowboy put it in simple terms by saying that the police/authorities are the anti-virus and the youth are the virus.

Another graffiti piece by AthRoot shows the Angel of Death holding a spray paint can, indicating the relationship between the artist's conception of rebellion through art. This rebellion is not always easy; this particular graffiti was done in about two minutes in the early morning, and the artist had to run away from the guardian of the building. Also, the previous VIRUS graffiti required the artists to get up in the early morning, hike about two kilometers to a space between Ifrane and Azrou, and do the art while looking out for passing cars and police.



Figure 3: Angel of Death tag

Hip Hop dress can be another way for a youth to form an identity. For example, one can observe the hair and dress of Fatima-Zahra, a local b-girl, or the way Youness blends traditional Moroccan clothes and Hip Hop style by wearing the pants that go with a traditional *djabadour* with a puffy Hip Hop style jacket.



Figure 4: Hip Hop dress in Ifrane. Left is Fatima-Zahra and right is Youness.

Challenges and Issues for Hip Hop Culture in Ifrane

Although Hip Hop allows the youth to develop an identity, deliver a message, and react against authority in various ways, there are significant challenges to Hip Hop in Ifrane. All the youth interviewed mentioned the lack of support, material and moral, or even the active or passive resistance they feel in this small community.

The lack of material support impacts the breakdancers most directly as they have few, if any, places to train. This would require a space with appropriate flooring for the various moves the breakdancers perform. This has led Ayoub and his group System Crew to even practice in the street, breaking on the hard concrete.⁸¹ Although this helps to maintain Ayoub's hardcore image, it has negative impacts on the body; indeed, Ayoub used the expression 'kaymut lham' or 'the body's dead' to talk about the physical effect of breakdancing in the street.

Additionally, rappers face the challenge that there is no recording studio in Ifrane and the quality of self-produced work is low. As a result, if they want to record anything, they have to go to Meknes and pay between 200-500 dirhams (\$30 to \$60) to record one track.

The lack of moral support from the community is significant. At the least, Hip Hop artists may be labeled 'Wlad znqa' 'street kids' or worse. Male breakdancers may be told that dancing is only for girls; female Hip Hop dancers may be criticized for dancing with males. Graffiti artists are told that their work is ruining the walls and usually have it painted over within a short amount of time.

More significantly, the youth may encounter both passive and active resistance from the authorities/local Makhzen. The Dee related a particularly egregious episode: During the 2013 Youth Festival in Ifrane, his group, Royal Crew, won the best rap group category, and the host of the event promised in public, as a reward, to outfit the local youth house (Dar Chebab) with material for more events such as microphones, a mixing board, etc. However, following the festival, when the Royal Crew went to the youth house to use the material, the manager told them that Hip Hop was not art and forbade them to use the supplies.

More passive resistance is met when the youth try to register for one of the various festivals such as the Tourtite, Apple, or Snow festivals.⁸² When the youth approach the local administrators or send in their samples, they are either told that the program is full, they should have come earlier, or receive no response at all.

Convincing parents to allow the youth to continue with Hip Hop culture is sometimes a struggle. Some of the youth reported having fairly open-minded parents whereas others were more skeptical and required the youth to swear that Hip Hop would not interfere with their studies or cause problems. However, here the role of the

⁸¹ For example, see the video Mehdi produced about Hip Hop in Ifrane *Shta.mpg*.

⁸² Menara, "La 7ème Édition Du Festival International Tourtite d'Ifrane, Du 22 Au 25 Aout Prochain," *Menara.ma*, 2013, <http://www.menara.ma/fr/2013/07/23/703325-la-7%C3%A8me-%C3%A9dition-du-festival-international-tourtite-difrane-du-22-au-25-aout-prochain.html>.

festivals and competitions, especially Urban Talent and Hip Hop du Bled, is especially important as a legitimizing factor for the youth.

Ifrane youth have done relatively well at these festivals, with Omar, The Dee, Kings of Graffiti, and Ayoub all placing, even winning, during the previous years' festivals. This, in the eyes of the parents, helps them to understand that the youth are serious and may even benefit from participating. Amine of Kings of Graffiti, for example, said that his parents changed their minds about Hip Hop after he got first in graffiti art in 2007 and 2009 and third in 2008.

More generally, these events serve to bring youth together in a positive and competitive environment. Indeed, as these posters show for Meknes' Hip Hop Weekend held in April 2014 and last year's Urban Dance competition, there are youth from all around the Meknes region, of which are Omar's crew Bad Boys and The Dee. Moreover, even if certain youth like the dancer Fatima-Zahra or the beatboxer Nassim have never competed, they are preparing to take this step.



Figure 5: Examples of promotional materials for Hip Hop Weekend and Urban Talent

Despite the benefits of these festivals, it remains true that Ifrane is a small town and one of the challenges is that everybody knows everybody. This is especially hard for the graffiti artists who cannot stay anonymous in reality. However, connections to power in a small town may be useful. Indeed, Amine of Kings of Graffiti was once at risk of being arrested for his work, but because his father is connected to the local authorities, the Makhzen, he was released.

Related to this issue, the role of Islam intersects with Hip Hop culture in a small town in a wider way. Some of the youth admitted that their participation in Hip Hop life brings in other elements such as alcohol, drugs, and sex and ignoring Islamic activities such as prayer. When Omar and Achraf were asked specifically how this makes them feel, they responded that it makes them feel guilty and they hoped that they would correct this behavior in the future. On the other hand, some artists such as Fatima-Zahra feel that, while there might be friction between Islam and dance, they can coexist without guilt as long as one's values, morality, and behavior do not change. On the other hand, Hip Hop and Islamic practice can come together in interesting ways; Fatima-Zahra connected me to Hajar, the aforementioned hijab-wearing breakdancer from Rabat. Hajar makes the hijab a clear part of her Hip Hop persona and frequently posts pictures of herself in different hijab styles on her Facebook page. In general, youth admire artists such as Muslim who manage to foreground their Islamic values while still producing high quality Hip Hop.

Expanding possibilities for Hip Hop and Youth

Hip Hop, as mentioned before, is more than simply rap or certain art forms. The youth understand this and have already adapted Hip Hop to their local and personal tastes. For example, the graffiti artist AthRoot said that he considers street magic and skateboarding to be elements of Hip Hop. In addition, Fatima-Zahra mentioned parkour as a common element, and indeed Amine Wakrim includes this as a competitive element in some Hip Hop competitions.⁸³

The final element to mention is that most of these youth have great aspirations for Hip Hop in Ifrane and for their lives specifically. Amine of Kings of Graffiti is one example, and the situation of DJ Tock/Taoufik is specifically illustrative here as he left high school in his final year and set off to become a professional DJ. He enrolled at a private art academy in Marrakeh focused on Hip Hop⁸⁴ and did a three-month DJ training. Following that, he had several trainings in 'animation' (i.e. how to DJ a party) at different hotels – Songo and Frame in Marrakesh, and the Grand Hotel in Ifrane. He also received a certificate from the Ministry of Youth and Sports. He has invested in buying all the equipment for DJing a party – lights, microphones, mixing table, etc. Currently, he lives in Ifrane and promotes his DJ business in the region. Although he identifies the same challenges to the Hip Hop culture as the other youth, he is eager to be a sort of Hip Hop organizer, perhaps register an organization, and generally advocate for more Hip Hop acceptance and exposure in Ifrane.

⁸³ Roim6, "Tendresse Sur Ajial 2M Dimanche 19 Juin 2011."

⁸⁴ "Art Academy," n.d., <http://artacademy.ma/>; KidaKesh, "Art Academy," n.d., <http://www.kidakech.com/activites/danse/art-academy/>.

Conferencing as Entrée to a Critical Approach: Postcolonialism and Cousins

The description to this point involves, more or less, what Mehdi and I presented at the popular culture conference at AUI. We co-presented as equals in the research project and were honored to have many of the local Hip Hop artists mentioned above in attendance. Overall, the presentation was well received, but one of the questions raised helps me introduce a critical, politically-invested, approach – postcolonialism and its cousins – as part of Lather’s interpretive project.

During the conference, one of other participants, Dr. Mustapha Khiri of Meknes’ Moulay Ismail University, presented a paper entitled, “Les jeux et les jouets traditionnels des enfants du Ksar Ait Guetou” (“Toys and traditional games of the children of Ksar Ait Guetou”) during a panel that I chaired. This presentation, in general, lamented the loss of traditional games in his Amazight village and his efforts, as an academic and activist, to maintain and/or revive these practices. His argument was that the modern world was pushing out these traditional games, and he had formed an association to try to save them. This, in itself, is positive, and I enjoyed talking with Dr. Khiri afterwards. However, following our presentation, Dr. Khiri asked several questions that implied that Hip Hop was detrimental to Moroccan culture and that the Ifrani youth had nothing to complain about as they lived in a nice touristic city where, presumably, everybody was economically well off. I addressed this in part, but Mehdi provided a much more grounded response, especially to the second question, by asserting that poverty was a significant issue in Ifrane, despite the stereotype that other Moroccans have about the city.

This episode provides an introduction to a critical and political approach, This is, in reality, a confluence of several trends – post-colonialism, neocolonialism, neoliberalism, globalization, and postmodernism – that create, in this context, what we might call “Hip Hop anxiety,” or the fear that Hip Hop, as some global, capitalist, Western movement, is going to destroy traditional life.

This anxiety does have a rational basis born out of historic and economic situations. Many colonized countries won independence during the 20th century, Morocco included, after a long period of struggle. However, in many cases, the struggle for autonomy was just beginning, requiring the establishment of new governments and fully removing the colonizer (which many suggest has never fully happened).⁸⁵ Then, the rise of the U.S. economy and the spread of its culture brought a new colonizer whose economic and cultural reach expanded exponentially to the point that, today, English and American culture are the world’s lingua franca.⁸⁶ This rise was

⁸⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, “Is Frantz Fanon Still Relevant?,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 28 (March 18, 2005): B14–15; Sankaran Krishna, *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-First Century* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

⁸⁶ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780511486999>; Peter Ives, “Cosmopolitanism and Global English: Language Politics in Globalisation Debates,” *Political Studies* 58, no. 3 (June 2, 2009): 516–35, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2009.00781.x.

partially fueled by the neoliberal consensus that a global regime of low-taxes, free trade, high growth, and low social service programs was the only viable economic system.⁸⁷ On the other hand, in the world of knowledge production, positivism and its predictive capacity has been gradually eroded and replaced by a paradigm that, for some, marks the end of meaning and the eventual rise of nihilism.⁸⁸ As a result, the *zeitgeist* is often portrayed as a zero-sum game of competition where winners survive and losers die. Even if other views exist that promote dialogue and an expansion of ideas as positive and redemptive elements, the negativity and hopelessness can seem overwhelming.

Indeed, one of Hip Hop's most pressing critiques is Western cultural borrowing is contributing to previous and present colonialism in the region.⁸⁹ As such, Hip Hop sits astride these postmodern fears, and although the response to these fears may be incoherent and developing, what seems to arise from the youths' voices is a reiteration that Hip Hop is not an unchanging monolith adverse to dialogue or committed to destroying other art forms. As such, Hip Hop is just a proxy for this fear, expressed in one form by Dr. Khiri. The youth would likely assert that, if traditional games go extinct, it will not be because of Hip Hop. In fact, it might be because of Morocco's own development, spurred by both citizen demands that the government improve their lives as well as the global neoliberal development project. In either case, as more areas gain access to water, electricity, Internet, and education, these games will face increasing pressure. In turn, Hip Hop itself will face pressure to remain relevant. Indeed, Omar pointed out above that Hip Hop is just the medium of the times, but one can imagine that other forms will come that are more appropriate. If Lather⁹⁰ and Gergen⁹¹ are correct in that the trajectory of the postmodern world is to create, in effect, a more caring, open, educated, and dialogic space where people at the margins or borders do not experience oppression, Hip Hop may indeed have little to complain about. That would be, in my opinion, a welcome day, and I look forward to the music this new paradigm would create.

In sum, seeing Dr. Khiri's point in a larger political context is important and, as such, his "Hip Hop anxiety" can be forgiven, but the real question is how to bring the worlds of traditional games and Hip Hop together in dialogue so that both can be preserved and strengthened.

Deconstruction to Magnify Oppressed Voices: Women and Youth

At this point, it is necessary to reassess the experience so as to highlight overlooked or oppressed voices. In this paper, it is clear that at least one voice has been

⁸⁷ Brett Lashua, Karl Spracklen, and Stephen Wagg, eds., *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁸⁸ Lather, *Getting Smart*, 160–161.

⁸⁹ Gana, "Rap and Revolt in the Arab World"; Kahf, "Arabic Hip Hop: Claims of Authenticity and Identity of a New Genre."

⁹⁰ Lather, *Getting Smart*, 1.

⁹¹ *An Invitation to Social Construction*, chap. 7.

submerged: The feminine. Partly, this is a matter of presentation; I wanted to give this voice its own space, but it is also a matter of the data collected in that there were simply far more Hip Hop males to interview in Ifrane and watch in YouTube and other fora. However, this is not a situation that needs to be taken as a given; in fact, the voices of females in Hip Hop are strong, but the males may simply outnumber them at the present moment. On the global level and particularly in the Arab world, female Hip Hop artists nuance Hip Hop studies greatly, highlighting the intersections of art, gender, and race in this region.⁹²

Hip Hop has frequently been criticized as representing and perpetuating the patriarchal, capitalist system that is a cause of oppression and inequality of women; however, Hip Hop is also a powerful site of empowerment and engagement.⁹³ In the MENA region, the issue of women in Hip Hop becomes more problematic still as Arab and/or Muslim female artists may face steeper cultural challenges, even if there are some prominent players such as Shadia Mansour.⁹⁴

Two of the more serious issues faced by Moroccan Hip Hop are those pointed out by the female artist Soultana in an interview on Jota TV.⁹⁵ The first issue is the stagnation of Hip Hop itself, particularly at the national level. Soultana states that, whenever there is a major festival, the organizers invite the five or six main male players (e.g. Bigg, Fnaire, Ash Kayne, et al.) and ignore the others. The second is the loss of the female perspective. Soultana elaborates on this by saying that the male Moroccan rapper talks about the street, but that is not the primary locus of her experience as a female (and, by extension, other women's). The reasons for this lack are various; for example, the artist Tendresse talks about the negative initial reaction women face from the Moroccan community, parents, and other male Hip Hop artists.⁹⁶ Thus, for these women, the "personal is political"⁹⁷ as women seek both greater exposure in the Moroccan market as well as the ability to share their unique viewpoint on Moroccan life through art.

In Ifrane, the number of female artists is also relatively low. The two women interviewed here, Fatima-Zahra and Nabila, both referenced the difficulties they had with their parents at first but, thankfully, were able to overcome them. Although Nabila has left the Hip Hop scene, Fatima-Zahra represents the aspiration to be taken seriously most directly with her dedication to dance and her Hip Hop style. Moreover, her inspiration comes from other female Hip Hop artists and activists such as Laure

⁹² Zenzele Isoke, "Why Am I Black? Gendering Hip Hop, and Translocal Solidarities in Dubai," in *Intercultural Communication with Arabs*, ed. Rana Raddawi (Springer Singapore, 2015), 309–26, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-287-254-8_18.

⁹³ Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Pough, "Do the Ladies Run This...? Some Thoughts on Hip Hop Feminism"; Richardson, "'She Was Workin like Foreal'."

⁹⁴ Nomadic Wax, "Hip Hop: It's a Woman's World Too," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2013, sec. Music, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/jan/24/Hip-Hop-woman-world>.

⁹⁵ my min, "Soultana on Jota Tv Part 1 (EXCLUSIVE)."

⁹⁶ Roim6, "Tendresse Sur Ajjal 2M Dimanche 19 Juin 2011."

⁹⁷ Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, chap. 6.

Courtellemont, a dancehall performer and creator of Regga Jam.⁹⁸ In addition, she connects with other women such as the aforementioned Hajar or Ilham in their mutual activism for women in Hip Hop.

A second oppressed voice is the youths'. As Osumare points out,⁹⁹ youth Hip Hop artists generally see themselves as critical voices reacting to injustice stemming from their culture, class, historical oppression, and their peripheral status as youth. The majority of the Hip Hop artists interviewed here falls into this category by being under 18 years old and still living with their parents. As such, they are creating a youth subculture in Ifrane that is a reaction to the dominant Moroccan culture they live in. This Ifrane Hip Hop culture is part of a repeated process of a subculture's appearing, asserting itself, resisting the mainstream culture, gaining acceptance, being adopted, and then struggling with issues of authenticity and identity. Through this process, the youth subculture manages to be both a revolutionary and reactionary force that causes change while still maintaining the society's essential features.¹⁰⁰

For Hip Hop at the national level, this youth subculture has succeeded in creating an artistic space for expression that is home grown. Masta Flow emphasizes this by describing the most important elements of Hip Hop as the youths' message, self-expression, self-satisfaction, and general enjoyment in addition to pointing out that, for a certain period in Moroccan history, every youths' dream was to emigrate to Europe, but Hip Hop has managed to create an alternate dream, an alternate possibility.¹⁰¹ This view can be supported by the great variety and dynamism in the Moroccan Hip Hop scene as evidenced by the aforementioned festivals in various cities that support the culture as well as the myriad YouTube and Facebook pages promoting aspects of Moroccan Hip Hop culture such as graffiti,¹⁰² beatboxing,¹⁰³ DJs,¹⁰⁴ or various breakdancing crews.¹⁰⁵

Self-Reflexive

In this last section, I turn to a self-reflexive stance. This project has been positive for me personally, and I understand from recent discussions with Mehdi that the

⁹⁸ "Laure Courtellemont," accessed December 15, 2014, <http://laurecourtellemont.com/>.

⁹⁹ Osumare, "Global Hip Hop and the African Diaspora."

¹⁰⁰ Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2006); J. Patrick Williams, *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

¹⁰¹ TheMeBoob01, "Masta Flow 2011 New À Medi1, Masta Flow 2011, Rap Marocain 2011, Top Chat Maroc."

¹⁰² "StreetArt & Graffiti in Morocco," *Facebook*, accessed October 23, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/StreetArtMorocco>.

¹⁰³ Moroccan beat-box, "In Facebook [Group Page]," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/MoroccanBeatBox?fref=ts>.

¹⁰⁴ Moroccan Producers, Beat Makers & DJs, "In Facebook [Group Page]," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/marocprod?fref=ts>.

¹⁰⁵ The Message crew, "In Facebook [Group Page]," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Message-crew/109705752452107?fref=ts>.

conference was empowering for the youth. Indeed, one student not directly involved in the research was able to use the conference's success to convince his parents to allow him to start a new rap group and compete in Hip Hop du Bled, which the group won in Fall 2014. This certainly fits with parts of my emancipatory hopes for the project.

However, there was one thing that bothered me in the end – how quickly I became accepted as an expert on Hip Hop in Morocco. I find this problematic in that, although I have had an interest in this art form during my years in Morocco, I am not a daily connoisseur of it nor have extended experience beyond this four-month research project. Also, although my French and Dareeja are strong enough to conduct interviews myself and understand the news media about Hip Hop, I required the help of youth to understand the details of many songs. Although this experience may be more significant than some other studies, it is still limited.

This expert status was carried to the point that another AUI faculty who produces radio shows for National Public Radio enlisted my help to contact female Hip Hop artists. His project idea was to interview female artists and then me as a resident “expert” on Hip Hop. He was able to contact Tendress and Hajar through me and Soultana through another connection. I accepted and even did the interview, but thankfully it never aired because Tendress and Soultana did not come to their interviews. In the end, Hajar's piece aired by itself, which was the best result.¹⁰⁶

What bothers me here is that I was sought out as an expert about female Hip Hop artists in Morocco when I am none of these things. I should have refused to do the interview on principle but wanted to help a friend and colleague. The more general issue here is that in the media so many times some “expert” is asked to talk about a situation about which he/she has little information or investment. With respect to this story specifically, it develops more troubling binaries such as “traditional” and “modern” as well as the West's fascination/concern with the hijab. Although Hajar certainly evokes many of these elements, in my own conversations with her, she expressed more frustrations with the lack of Hip Hop infrastructure in the Rabat area than issues she had with parents or the hijab. In this way, I agree wholeheartedly with Bhat that “the image of Moroccan Hip Hop largely represents an identity thrust upon the movement by Western and local media in an attempt to fulfill *their* fantasies about what this genre *should* represent” (italics in original).¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

This modest contribution to Hip Hop studies, admittedly conducted by two amateurs using ethnographic methods that most certainly could have been better conceived theoretically and implemented technically, nevertheless brings several useful points to bear. First, Hip Hop is a complex phenomenon at every level, but in Morocco studies have tended to focus on binaries such as the relationship between the artist and

¹⁰⁶ Jake Warga, “Hijab Wearing Breakdancer Turns Heads in Morocco,” *Public Radio International*, June 6, 2014, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-06-06/hijab-wearing-breakdancer-turns-heads-morocco>.

¹⁰⁷ Bhat, “Hip Hop Highways: Mapping Complex Identities through Moroccan Rap,” 43.

the government. This work has sought to dispel this binary by pointing out that there are multiple webs of support and resistance to Hip Hop in Morocco and that the Hip Hop community is not some passive object to be exploited by the government; indeed, the relationship remains complex and unsettled. Second, we have tried to complicate the discourse in Moroccan Hip Hop that privileges the famous male rapper voice by amplifying the experiences of local youth, specifically seeking out female voices, and conceiving of the entire research project as an exercise in emancipation for youth negotiating the transition from youth to adulthood.

Although this work brings certain complexity to the field, more work can be done. As discussed, a much more systematic, creative, long-term, and geographically unbounded approach to the ethnographic work would help immensely in tracking and describing the webs of meanings in Moroccan Hip Hop.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the analytical approach taken in this paper can be extended to uncover more voices – these might be those of Amazight (Berber) Hip Hop artists, geographically remote areas, different age groups, ethnicities, and even the researchers themselves. However, it must be stressed that even such an approach would be incomplete; indeed, there is no completeness to Hip Hop – one can only hope to hold and describe, for a moment, the voices, beats, and moves that emanate from it.

¹⁰⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

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