

**Basel Abbas**  
**Student Number: 91196**  
**Course Code: RAD0904X**

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# **An Analysis of Arabic**

**Hip-Hop**

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# Preface

This thesis is a review of Arabic Hip-Hop and the contribution of Arab youth to contemporary popular music innovation, promotion and performance. It is the result of research, both theoretical and on the ground, enriched with some “personal experience” that enabled to gain a relatively “insider” look towards the evolution of a modern, but indicative trend within the Arabic cultural and musical scene.

Since I am one of these people, it is also about me and my experiences living and reporting on a world created by many external and internal factors. In this thesis I report on, discuss with and rate some rappers, producers, DJs, and activists who are involved in Arabic Hip-Hop. I will present their methodologies through which they make their own, local version of Hip-Hop.

It is an attempt to explore what, why, and where did Arabic Hip-Hop appear, with some outlook to the future prospects of Hip-Hop among Arab youth sub-cultures, and Hip-Hop as a mainstream product in the Arabic music industry.

While information was the easier part of this thesis, the serious challenge related to finding academic, or practically any research on this topic. In addition to its newness in the region, Arab academics possibly do not find this topic worth of study, preferring to exert effort in examining more “authentic”, or “serious” forms of Arabic music. The almost total absence of previous research constituted a major challenge to this thesis.

Consequently, most of the information included in this paper was gathered from original sources or from Hip-Hop websites, while most of the analytical work does not build on previous scholar work, but builds on interpretations of cultural theories of prominent intellectuals, specifically those related to the impact of post-colonialism, or neocolonialism on Third World cultural identity.



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# 1

## Introduction: Hip-Hop, from Global to “Glocal”

### The origins of Hip-Hop

The origin of Hip-Hop is usually ascribed to the Bronx, although if you ask the younger generation, under 20 years of age, who do not come from the Bronx and who have not re-researched Hip-Hop, their answer will probably cite “Sugar Hill Gang’s” or “Rapper’s Delight”, as the “Sugar Hill” disc was the first and only rap record to cross over the charts at that time<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless most ‘academic’ writings cite the origins of Hip-Hop to New York (the Bronx) and to DJ Kool Herc (Clive Campbell), a young Jamaican DJ. This DJ simply noticed that dancers would especially like the parts of the record when the song faded out and the rhythm section kicked in, so he would get two copies of the same record and play them back to back, using the parts that kept the dance floor busy. That marked the birth of break beat, and with it Hip-Hop was born.

Rapping started, reminiscent of Jamaican deejays that used to talk over reggae dub plates. Tricia Rose<sup>2</sup> points out in her study on African American Hip-Hop culture, *Black Noise*, that rap, one of the Hip-Hop forms, originated from the African-American music of the sixties and seventies: Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron, Millie Jackson and even Blaxploitation<sup>3</sup>, as well as from films and speeches by Malcolm X and Black panther.

KRS-One<sup>4</sup> once said: ‘I am Hip-Hop (The source – January 94). Chuck D, from Public enemy<sup>5</sup> once described Hip-Hop as ‘just black people creativity (The Hip-Hop Years; Alez Ogg 1999, Channel 4 books), others clearly state that Hip-Hop is a form of protest.

All such definitions may be correct. Yet Hip-Hop may be simply another genre of popular music. But, unlike other music scenes, Hip-Hop is one of the few that can be defined as a culture. In popular music the most long lived and successful tend to be those that encompass more than music alone, but also may be a style of dress, attitude and a lot of other little details and signifiers of belonging to a group that has a certain way of doing things.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson G. (1980) ‘Rapping Deeja’s’ *Musician Magazine*. Appears in Nelson G (1992) *Buppies, B-boys, Baps & Bohos* Notes on Post-soul Black Culture HarperCollins Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Tricia R. (1994). *Black Noise: Rap music and Black culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, N.H: Wesleyan University Press of New England.

<sup>3</sup> Combination of the terms “black” and “exploitation”; refers mainly to sensational, low-budget films in the 1970’s featuring mostly African-American casts (and directors). [www.filmsite.org/filmterms3.html](http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms3.html). – Cinematic terms. The films were mostly highlighting jokes on ‘white people’ and had strong African American representations.

<sup>4</sup> Krs one aka Kris Parker, was an ex-homeless teenager who released the original hardcore classic, *Criminal Minded* in 1985 – [A chronicle of Post-soul Black culture](#) – Nelson G. (1992) *Village voice*

<sup>5</sup> A Hip-Hop group that “made Hip-Hop the most vital cultural form of the last 25 years and made everybody from college professors to newspaper columnists come to terms with Hip-Hop, ”A rough guide to Hip-Hop”, Peter Shapiro *Rough guides Ltd*. January 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Neate P. (2004) - [Where you’re at - Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet](#) Bloomsbury

Any record company will tell you that if you want to make some real money, you have to sell the teenagers. And what do teenagers want? Symbols they can appropriate of their growing identity. It is obvious stuff.

Race, politics, religion, boom boxes, partying, sex, drugs, guns, baggy jeans, spray cans ...the list goes on forever, all these things are in some way or another affiliated to or symbols of Hip-Hop that come to one's mind when you think of the word Hip-Hop,

“You speak the b-boy language? You’re speaking Ebonics. You want Hip-Hop champagne? Crystal A watch? Rolex (platinum off course) Gun? Desert-eagle. Car? Used to be an Oldsmobile, then a Lexus, now a Bentley. Hip-Hop has its own movies art and literature. It’s a subculture with its own subcultures. It has a history of wars, revolutions civil wars and colonial conquests. It has its own missionaries, martyrs and above all, mythology.”<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, when Hip-Hop fans refer to Hip-Hop culture they generally are referring to four elements of Hip-Hop: B-boy (emcee-or a ‘rapper’ as labeled by the media), Turntables (Disc Jockey), Graffiti art, and break dancing. (Other elements include beat boxing and other specific practices, but these are the main four). But even this definition starts more arguments than it finishes, as “rap music” (as opposed to Hip-Hop) engulfs popular culture.

The U.S. dominates the Hip-Hop cultural scene, as it is the biggest selling form of music in the USA. It originally started though, as “The voice of alienated, disenfranchised urban youth, and now means so many different things to so many different people, a cultural dialectic that takes quite some explaining.”<sup>8</sup>

There is Hip-Hop the culture and Hip-Hop product.

Yet, Hip-Hop has dominated mainstream culture while mainstream culture has hijacked Hip-Hop culture. Both use each other: Although Hip-Hop is a musical genre that markets itself, the global spread of Hip-Hop may be mainly attributed to marketing efforts carried out by the American/global music industry. In any case, as more people understand it and see how it works it develops like a cycle and moves further, fathers like a snowball, developing in other places; people begin to adapt it to their own needs and adjust it to suit their own ways.

Hip-Hop is now a global phenomenon and can be found on every continent of the world, in many different languages, and in each different place it is suited to fit local needs.

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<sup>7</sup> Neate P. (2004) - Where you're at- Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet

p4 Bloomsbury

<sup>8</sup> Ibid'

"If you go to London right now, it's a different environment, so Hip-Hop over there is different," "If you go to Hong Kong it's something else, and if you go to Australia, something else again.... It's becoming populist, the common expression around the world. Different everywhere, but everywhere, it's Hip-Hop."<sup>9</sup>

Hip-Hop is an African-American popular protest and resistance art, representative of a sub-culture that has transcended frontiers more efficiently and smoothly than international trade. It is though in continuous strife over striking a balance between its authenticity, as representative of a cultural identity, and its marketability and dissemination in mainstream culture inside the U.S. The questions of authenticity, cultural identity, and marketability, become even more intense with the globalization of Hip-Hop, and with its "glocalization" in different parts of the World, including the Arab World, and the diversity of forms it has acquired, the diversity of languages with which it is being practiced, and the diversity of causes it has come to serve.

As globalization has bestowed upon the World, it not only brought with it the corporate globalization we all love to hate. The multinational corporate globalization joins the 'popular globalization' of the masses where exchange and borrowing of tools as means of protest and expression has occurred. Hip-Hop as such, is a local African-American phenomenon that was globalized, and then re-localized to become 'glocalized'

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<sup>9</sup> Bischoff D. (2005) "Taking A Fresh Look into Hip-Hop Culture", The Star Ledger, 5 June

# 2

## The Arab World and Arabic Hip-Hop

### The First Traces of Hip-Hop in the Arab World

It probably happened long before anyone had realized it, but it started to become evident when an alternative to YO! MTV Raps!<sup>10</sup> as the only show you could watch Hip-Hop videos appeared, the French music channel MCM<sup>11</sup> was the first to present to the Arab world Hip-Hop in a language other than American English. While the idea was appealing at first, the French rapping technique in the French language was not quite perfected. With its progress, and the emergence of new rap artists began, MCM constituted an alternative exposure to Hip-Hop. Two of the main factors that led to an increasing popularity of French Hip-Hop is the improvement in the technique and production of French Hip-Hop, and an increasing exposure of a alternative to American English rapping, which gave a better and maybe even different understanding and appreciation of Hip-Hop as a whole, which led to more people taking interest in Hip-Hop, and thus French Hip-Hop.

"It became almost, if not fully, a truism among Hip-Hop fans that France is second only the United States in the venerability of its scenes, the cultural influence of Hip-Hop and its sophistication in the evolution of new artistic forms and cultural practices."<sup>12</sup>

This not only reveals the fact that the Hip-Hop movement in France is strong, but the phrase 'second only to the united states' also indicates that there is a third, a fourth, a fifth and more.

Since the MTV - MCM experience, rapping in German, Polish, Serbian, Japanese and Spanish has developed to an acceptable standard of technique in performing and production skills.

Rapping is the most representative form of Hip-Hop, as it is the most popular, and usually the popularity and output of rap music in a country signifies its involvements in the Hip-Hop culture. This does not mean, however that it takes form, in a country only

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<sup>10</sup> 'MTV was slow to pick up on rap music, but when it finally did, it produced this lively mix of rap videos, interviews with rap stars, live in studio performances (on Fridays) and comedy. It initially aired once a week, but as the show's popularity grew, it was expanded to six days a week, with Ed Lover, Dr. Dre and T-Money hosting during the week, and Fab Five Freddy hosting on the weekends. After the original hosts left, MTV replaced them with different ones each season'. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0158443>

<sup>11</sup> MCM is a French language channel and is always involved in the generation's interest: music (concerts recorded, lives, interviews, videos?), cinema, multimedia, information, games, sports and etc. Its programs try to keep its authenticity of a real musical channel (70% of European creation) through rock, rap, groove or techno, close to its viewers, legitimated by a musical information quality, and always close to its generation. <http://www.macaucabletv.com/channels.phtml>

<sup>12</sup> Durand P. (2002) *Black, Blanc, Beur*, p.vii  
Rap music and Hip-Hop culture in the Francophone world  
Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford  
The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

through rap. Lyon, in France for example, is known for its adoption of 'break dancing' a different element to Hip-Hop.<sup>13</sup>

In the Arab World, break-dancers were witnessed in the street in Tunisia in the early 90's, and for a long time, kids strapped in "Hip-Hop gear" in upper class Amman, Jordan. Yet, this is different than to any innovative or creative output that the Arab World gave back to this "Western/American import":

Where is the Hip-Hop in the Arabic language?

Things did develop however to more than just blind imitation of style of dress to people who could afford it and break-dancing mostly as a reminiscent of Michael Jackson. One Record store in Amman, Jordan ("No.1 records) for example, that sold mostly pirated tapes, started providing a wide Hip-Hop section, and started to attract a lot of Hip-Hop fans, who even started to 'hang out' there. Everyone was mainly influenced by the Hip-Hop lifestyle, from the way they dressed to the way they spoke, it is good to not here that most of these people were Arabs who had been born or living abroad, mostly the US and although many attempted to rap, it was all in the English Language, and none of it was even acceptable in Hip-Hop standards compared to US Hip-Hop.

An attempt in Amman, where the instrumental of Tone-Loc's funky cold medina<sup>14</sup>, was taken, and a simple rhyme in Arabic, made to fit perfectly on the beat was done. Although the song gained popularity across Jordan, and even crossed borders to neighboring Arab countries such as Palestine and Syria, most Hip-Hop fans in Amman resented the song. In fact, the Lyrics were rather bit meaningless, coupled with an absence of any creative technique in the rapping, and an obvious use of an instrumental from an extremely commercial popular track. It should be noted that in the meantime, Hip-Hop fans had already become exposed to more 'hard' and 'serious' types of hip – hop, such as Cypress hill, Spice-1, Jeru the Damaja, Wu-Tang, Bone 'thugz n harmony 2pac, Skee-lo and even Kris-kross. Consequently the Arabic attempt failed to even be described as Hip-Hop. The song was obviously not coming from someone who knew much about Hip-Hop.

Meanwhile, small Hip-Hop crews across the Arab World were slowly emerging, but as advanced mass communication tools, such as satellite television or access to the Internet had not spread at a large scale yet at the time, these small Hip-Hop crews were not capable of learning about each other, not to mention interacting.

A long time has passed since then, and with the rapid spread of mass communication and technology, in addition to a further understanding of Hip-Hop and rap production and performance techniques; there is proof of Hip-Hop scenes all across the Arab

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<sup>13</sup> In Black, Blanc, Beur – Adam Krims, explains the content of the essays in the book on p.ix in the foreword, and divides them to districts in France, with Lyon appearing "only in the medium of dance, along with a peculiar and refreshing mutual permeability between the authenticities of 'the street' and the world of commercial production."

<sup>14</sup> "1980s rap pioneer Tone-Loc was the second rap act ever to reach #1 on Billboard's album charts. (The Beastie boys were the first.) His album Loc'd after Dark (1989) spawned the hit singles "Wild Thing" and "Funky Cold Medina"; they remain Loc's best-known tunes." Who 2 find famous people fast <http://www.who2.com/toneloc.html>

World. In Lebanon, Arab Hip-Hop artists signed contracts with the international corporate EMI Arabia; in France, Tunisian and Moroccan Hip-Hop groups signed contracts with French labels and established websites with lots of different featured artists from their countries. Documentary films about Palestinian Hip-Hop groups and even music videos, although not played on MTV or MCM, or any Arabic music TV channels, can be downloaded off the net.<sup>15</sup>

What currently forms Arabic Hip-Hop and maps out its existence is a combination of Arabs from all over the world. In order to map this out, and taking into account the main form that represents this culture, rapping, we need to first address the question of what is Arabic Hip-Hop?

The obvious definition would be Hip-Hop (rapping) in the Arabic language. However, the fact that a large major contribution to the second biggest Hip-Hop scene in the World (French) came from people with Arab ethnic origins, and the first Palestinian rapper heard ever was an Arab-American who rapped in English (Iron Sheikh) and the recent appearance of Cilvaringz, a rapper of Moroccan origin residing in the Netherlands and signed to the famous New-York based label and group the Wu-tang clan, all this suggests another definition.

According to London-based Arabic rapper Eslam Jawad who is mentioned later (raps in both Arabic and English):

*“Hip-Hop is a culture, and Arabic Hip-Hop is anyone Arab who represents that culture, from an Arabs point of view that can be in English, Arabic ...or Chinese, in its purest form though, Arabic Hip-Hop is in Arabic”*

Arabic Hip-Hop in its ‘purest form’, as Eslam Jawad put it, would also be Hip-Hop from the Arab World, speaking about local issues that are specific to the Arab world.<sup>16</sup>

When Palestinian rapper ‘Tamer il Nafar’ (mentioned later) said in his track,

*“Nokadem Lakom, (we will present to you) the first Arabian Mc, TN (Tamer Naffar), straight from the Middle East, straight from the L, hell. I mean the lid yo! Stop and show some respect”*, he was stating that he was the first Arabic MC to rap in Arabic, which was not the case, as rap groups in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and possibly even Lebanon (heavily influenced by the Franco-ponic world as ex-French colonies) existed much before that track was recorded, it’s either that lack of communication stopped Tamer from hearing about them, or the fact that to him , Algerian and Moroccan dialect of Arabic is not very well understood by him.

In the original birthplace of Hip-Hop, the United States, the most recent Hip-Hop artist affiliating himself with Arabs was Arab assassin.<sup>17</sup> Once again, he is described on his

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<sup>15</sup> [www.bornhere.net](http://www.bornhere.net), to view Palestinian hip-hop group DAM ‘s music video.

<sup>16</sup> In a personal interview conducted with Eslam Jawad in London – June 2005

<sup>17</sup> Arab Assassin website: <http://www.soundclick.com/pro/default.cfm?BandID=351031&content=interview>

website as ‘The first Arabic rapper to hit the scene’<sup>18</sup> and I could not help but notice , a Palestinian flag , on the back of his picture on what appears to be the cover for his upcoming album entitled : Terror Alert. In an interview conducted and hosted on his website, when asked why the name Arab Assassin, he said ‘I choose the name because it fits me, I'm an Arab and ill assassinate yo ass, plus I feel it's real controversial and you know what they say controversy sells’.<sup>19</sup> Only one track was available for listening on the website, and it was quite hard to tell what he was saying, although it was in ‘American English’. I must note that the song is reminiscent of the ‘southern Hip-Hop styles’ with artists like Master p etc. and has to be at much higher standard of production if it is to compete with other US Hip-Hop tracks.

While language is a tool for expression, and English is relatively spread as a second language in the Arab World, yet if we are talking about Arabic Hip-Hop as a popular culture or a form of popular music enjoyed or adopted by Arabs, then it is essential that the rapping language be Arabic, at least in order to feel represented, an essential component of identity. Moreover, and in addition to significant authenticity considerations, interaction and identification with lyrics is more essential in rap than in other form of music.

Language is a major condition for dissemination, a similar example being that of Germany, people did not speak English, could not understand what the American rappers said and thus could not relate to the genre, until Hip-Hop in the German language came out, did it become popularized and enjoyed by a wider German audience.<sup>20</sup>

Anyhow, now Hip-Hop is being used as a tool in the Arab world as well, a glocalized tool that carries its influences as it develops and is utilized to fit local and individual needs, it is used to express thoughts and ideas of individuals according to their past, their influences and most importantly the current situation they are in. It is therefore impossible to define Hip-Hop as a whole and give an insight to what it means to all people involved in the Hip-Hop scene. Even as ‘Arabic Hip-Hop’, the Arab world covers a large area, that is separated into 22 nations and although they are ethnically the same, and share a lot of the same culture attributes, their current situation, the past and present political situation as individual countries, (adding to the political situation as an Arab world and off course, religious situations) and their relations to the west all differ to each other. Even within one country, situations differ in towns and cities and individual experiences of those involved all add up to make Hip-Hop different in each case, but similar as a unified form of expression in the whole world.

It is therefore, more appropriate to study specific examples in Arabic-Hip-Hop that differ in situation and even sometimes musical style but share the title ‘Arabic Hip-Hop

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid’

<sup>19</sup> Ibid’

<sup>20</sup> Pennay M. (2001), Chapter 4-Rap in Germany: the Birth of a Genre Global Noise, Rap and Hip-Hop outside the USA Wesleyan University Press

' to get the broadest possible insight on Arabic Hip-Hop as a cultural/musical phenomenon.

### Arab rejection of Hip-Hop

Although lots of literature can be found on Hip-Hop as a whole, when Hip-Hop first started it was seen as an 'un-serious' form of music. It is not surprising then to see Arab musicians in specific and wide scores of Arab audience, reject it. Such an attitude though represents a cultural stand towards the West (colonizer), rather than being merely the result of musical evaluation. It is manifested by:

1. Resistance of Arab musicians of change towards Western style, a trend that had started ever since the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
2. Resistance of some Arab musicians against commercialization of music, a trend that they perceive as Western as well, thus generalizing the charges of commercialization on any Western style music.
3. Those who it protests against, at the social, economic or political levels despise rap, in its original form as means of expression of protest.

Each one of these factors is by itself a sufficient reason for the strong resistance that faced, and is still facing the evolution of Arabic Hip-Hop.

It is worthy to mention that in the “West” Hip-Hop producers also include Arabic music in their samples; Timberland is one Hip-Hop producer that uses Arabic samples in his productions, and Jay-z’s famous ‘big pimpin’ has the main sample of the track, sampled from an Arabic production.

The Western influence on Arab art in general can be tracked back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this influence has always had its opponents, but many others accepted and welcomed it.

Yet any attempt to further understand the real reasons underlying such resistance necessitates some understanding of the Arab World, its geography, demography, politics and socio-economic conditions as a whole, and then in each particular country in question individually.

The Arab World stretches from the Atlantic coast in northern Africa in the West to the Arabian Sea in the East, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the North to Central Africa in the South, covering an area of 14.2 million square kilometers. The Arab population is 273 million and is young<sup>21</sup>. Fragmentation was inflicted on the Arab nation in the Post World War I era with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the implementation of the Sykes-Picot agreement that divided the Arab land between the victorious parties: The British and the French. This historic event shaped the contemporary Arab World, which

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<sup>21</sup> League of Arab States website: [www.arableagueonline.org](http://www.arableagueonline.org)

currently constitutes of 22 countries<sup>22</sup>. These states have different forms of political regimes, from monarchy to republican and from socialist to free- market economies. Some Arab countries, such as the Gulf countries are oil-producing rich countries, while others are poor developing countries that are mostly agricultural. The Arab World contains all forms of socio-economic and political diversity that evidently reflects itself in the diversity of its cultural representations. Nevertheless, it also contains strong centripetal forces that have throughout history maintained the Arab identity and Arab nation. As Saree Makdisi put it “ There are major breaks that are registered as shared experiences across the Arab World: the violent eruption in 1948 of the state of Israel in what had, until then, been Palestine still haunts the Arabs( it is particularly haunting for the Palestinians of course); and the crushing defeat of 1967, the mutual pathetic betrayals of 1973, and the debacles of the so-called new world order(which seems to have lost its novelty) are similarly shared and experienced as crises throughout the Arab World”<sup>23</sup>.

### Language and Dialects

While Arabic is the language of all the Arab population, with the exception of some small ethnic minorities, such as the Kurds in Iraq and the Berber in North Africa (mostly in Algeria and Morocco), who have their own languages that is spoken along with Arabic, there is a difference between classical and colloquial Arabic. Classical Arabic is the written language, while there are a number of local dialects. In this regard, the Arab World may be divided into three or even four main blocs:

- The Near East: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.
- The Arabian Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Iraq.
- North Africa: Tunis, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Somalia, Djibouti, Mauritania, and,
- The Nile Valley: Egypt and Sudan.

There are a vast number of local dialects that cannot be addressed here, but one can say that the main centripetal dialect that all Arabs comprehend is that of Egypt, for one simple reason, which is the fact that Egypt has been the main capital of Arabic cinema industry since the beginnings of the Twentieth Century. The dialect of the North Africans is particularly difficult to almost all other Arabs, from the Near East, the Arabian Gulf, or even to closer Arabs of Egypt and Sudan. The same applies, to lesser degrees though, between these regions themselves. This relatively restrains the spreading of spoken art among Arabs, unless it is in classical (written) Arabic, which everyone understands. Classical songs are easier to spread despite the colloquial dialect issue, because they consist of several elements, only one of which is the lyrics.

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<sup>22</sup> For more about postcolonial Arab World see “Modern Arabic Culture”, by Makdisi S., in “The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies”, by Afzal-Khan F. (2000) Durham, Duke University Press

<sup>23</sup> Makdisi S., “Modern Arabic Culture” in “The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies”, Afzal-Khan F. (2000) pp.276 Durham, Duke University Press

Moreover, and while these different dialects have never been a major obstacle to interaction among Arabs, yet they must be taken into account upon discussing the emergence of Arabic Hip-Hop, since in this case, lyrics constitute an essential element, as Rap is mainly about lyrics, and comprehension is essential for spreading.

It is worth mentioning that this problem has noticeably dampened with the media revolution that the Globe had witnessed, and the Arab World had enjoyed towards the close of the Twentieth Century, and which exposed the Arab youth to this wide variety of dialects, specifically through music and songs, and facilitated comprehension and interaction. Yet the beginnings of Arabic Hip-Hop did not fully enjoy the privileges of this media revolution, and this may explain the fact that beginnings in different regions were relatively isolated from one another, and possibly took rather separate paths. Eslam Jawad is resorting to classical Arabic rap solution as we will see later, in an effort to overcome this situation and in service of wide dissemination.

# 3

## Algerian Hip-Hop

*They Rap, surf, read, say that Algeria has not recovered; it has greyed seeing its children fall under the blow of bombs. They watch, wake and waltz in the folly of the verb that raps and taps.*

*Latéfa Lafer (Librarian, Algiers)<sup>24</sup>*

One very, popular genre in Algeria and North Africa, Rai, the local popular music of the Berber<sup>25</sup>, an ethnic non-Arab minority, can be used as a metaphor to describe the Hip-Hop situation, where it also constructs its own path by linking east and west and has proven to cause great problems for Algerians.<sup>26</sup>

Rai is described as Algerian “rebel” music that was produced originally in western urban Algeria, mainly from Wahran<sup>27</sup> (Oran) but in the last decade it has spread 'globally' since its involvements in the ‘world music’ scene.

Rai was banned for a while from the airwaves and was considered 'vulgar' and at some times 'politically confrontational' by the authorities. The president even blamed the events of October 1988 where 500 people were shot dead, on Rai, and then the government later tried to promote Rai as a weapon against the Islamists, which probably has something to do with the quasi- downfall of Rai among the youngest of the Algerian music public and the rise of Hip-Hop.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lafer L. (Librarian, Algiers) (1999) Algeria “Revolt in Prose”, Caravan Newsletter for a Responsible and a United World Number 4 October

<sup>25</sup> For more on social and political contemporary history of Berbers in Algeria, read Minorities in the Arab World, Identity or Political Regime Crisis, Case Study (Berber in Algeria), Asaad H., M.A. Thesis, Birzeit University, 2004

<sup>26</sup> On September 29<sup>th</sup> 1994 , Cheb Hasni, one of Algeria’s most renowned Rai singers was gunned down outside his home in Wahran (Oran) , the birth place of Rai music. He was one of the many people killed by the Islamic Salvation front, who were the main opposition party in Algeria and were refused power when they would have won the elections in 1991. Hasni represented a version of identity that the Islamic front could not tolerate, suffice to say that their violence didn’t only stop at musicians who blended east and west, but their victims included lawyers, doctors’ television presenters, and top police men.” The local and Global in North African Music by Tony Lang Lois Popular Music 1996 Volume 15/3 1996 Cambridge University Press

<sup>27</sup> Langlois T.”The Local and Global in North African Popular Music”, Popular Music Vol. 15, No.3, Middle East issue Oct.1996 p.259-273 Cambridge University Press

<sup>28</sup> Rosenberg D. 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001 “Rai rebel: Cheb Mami’s return to the dessert breaks musical borders” -Metro times Detroit’s weekly alternative

*“American rap and Algerian Rai are both styles born out of a strong local culture which use the language of the street to express opinions about street life. They value lyrical improvisation and “borrow” musical ideas from many sources if and when necessary. They antagonize the values of “decent” society and the cultural mainstream. They are the musical styles most favored by the dispossessed in their respective countries, by those who have little to lose [sic] and a lot to say. And for both, their paths to international fame have been littered with controversy and misunderstanding. Just as folk who live comfortably within the cultural pale in America wince when they hear words like “bitch” and “uzi” coming from the mouth of a rap artist, so the cultural muftis of the Maghreb turn red when they hear tales of drunkenness, despair, sex, and hedonism from the lips of a teenage cheb. [“Cheb” is a prefix many male Rai singers attach to their names; it translates to both “youth(ful)” and “charming.” Female Rai singers use “chaba” instead of “cheb.”<sup>29</sup>*

Cheb Mami, an Algerian Rai singer who has even gained popularity in North America with his recent collaboration with Sting<sup>30</sup> said that

“The media and elite detested Rai and its sexual undercurrents, but the people loved it, like the blues. Rai was the music that could be heard on the streets, in the poor neighborhoods.”<sup>31</sup>

Cheb Mami does not stand alone as an Algerian Rai superstar though, and Rai music has long been out of Algeria and more into Paris and Marseilles. This was part of a wave of immigration from Algeria of prominent progressive and liberal artists and intellectuals as a result of the aggravating waves of Islamic fundamentalist violence that, among many other groups, targeted Rai artists, in addition of course, to the available opportunities of signing with a major record label in France.

It is worth noting that Rai, and the conflict surrounding it, is a reflection of the complexities of the Algerian society, one of the reasons being the fact that Rai is a form of Berber, not Arab, traditional music. It got caught in the middle of the cycle of violence in Algeria, between the Islamic fundamentalist and autocratic regime, probably both of whom do not fully acknowledge the rights of Berbers as an ethnic minority in Algeria, (who are Muslims anyway). As essentially an art of public protest that has gained wide popularity, it may be considered at least one of the reasons, if not the origin for the wide spread of Hip-Hop in the Algerian musical scene, especially that Algerian Hip-Hop started in Oran, the same geographic (and ethnic) area.

But, if Rai music is moving from local Algeria to the rest of the world then Hip-Hop on the other hand, is moving in the opposite direction into Algeria.

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<sup>29</sup> Morgan A.(1999) World Music - The Rough Guide, Vol 1 p.413 Eds. Broughton S., Ellingham M., & Trillo R.. London: The Rough Guides.

<sup>30</sup> Sting – Dessert Rose featuring Cheb Mami 25 April 2000 Interscope records.

<sup>31</sup> Rosenberg D. 7<sup>th</sup> October 2001 “Rai rebel: Cheb Mami’s return to the dessert breaks musical borders” -Metro times Detroit’s weekly alternative

The local Algerian Rai singers who remained in Algeria now have to compete with Algerian Rap groups. Yet, the same Europeans and North Americans that made people like Cheb Khaled and Cheb Mami world superstars, are quick to dismiss Algerian rappers as merely copiers of the west, who are lost and deny a sense of local heritage and identity.<sup>32</sup>

In the year 2000 Bouziane Daoudi has estimated that there are more than 150 Hip-Hop groups in Algeria ‘turning Algeria into the Rap leader of Arab nations and probably the entire Muslim World<sup>33</sup> despite its meager output.’ He continues to express that linguistically speaking, Algerian rappers blend English, French and local and formal forms of Arabic which displays a “considerable verbal dexterity” and that the Hip-Hop scene in Algeria has “shifted in focus from an initial middle-class orientation toward a more unprivileged constituency.”<sup>34</sup>

The fact that Algeria lies in North Africa, and at the same time it is an Arab state, places it in both contexts of ‘African Hip-Hop and Arabic Hip-Hop, not to mention the French influence, given that Algeria was a former French colony. The claims that Arabic Hip-Hop is an American import brought about from TV, implies that influences are only inspired from the US. However, and as we will later see in another case in Palestinian Hip-Hop, this claim disregards the fact that Hip-Hop has made a lot of stops and has had a lot of success stories in many countries before it arrived in Algeria and in the whole Arab World. It is safe to say that, especially after the big success of Hip-Hop artists in France that Hip-Hop in the Arab World, and more specifically in Algeria, was not brought about through the impact of New York on Algeria, but is rather linked to French, possibly European, social and musical scene and their evolution. It has undergone a complex and rich evolution by itself, through such interaction, but is not simply a ‘copycatting’ of a Western musical genre.

The group MBS (Le Micro Brise le Silence – The Microphone breaks the silence), the oldest and most celebrated group in Algeria uses a combination of French and Arabic (in Algerian dialect) to speak of the situation in Algeria. French reviewer Fred Guilledoux says, “They don’t bother to strike any poses or hide behind the wire. The most terrible violence is right on their street corner...the message is crude and chaotic, like the sounds the voices are not really mixed evenly. But a formidable vitality and a determination to fight against hatred are unleashed from these fragments, which can leave no one indifferent, either here or down there”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lawrence B. Straight Out of Algiers: As Rai goes global rap attests to the harsh realities at home, north African History, Politics and Culture, Tufts University URL: [http://www.norient.com/de/texte\\_drucken.php?ID=25](http://www.norient.com/de/texte_drucken.php?ID=25)

<sup>33</sup> The term Muslim World refers to all Islamic countries including all Arab countries, Persia, Pakistan Afghanistan, Malaysia; as an indicator, The Organization of the Islamic Conference has 56 member-states, while the number of Muslims is estimated by around 1.3 billion all over the World.

<sup>34</sup> Bouziane D. 2000 “Algerian rappers Sing the Blues.” Unesco Courier, July-August, 34-35

<sup>35</sup> Guilledoux, F. 1998. Album Review of M.B.S - Ouled el Bahdja., Groove (Paris ) 21,89. Translated from French by author Mitchel T (2001) Global Noise: Hip-Hop and rap outside the USA. . pp.9

The emergence of Hip-Hop in Algeria can be traced back to the early nineties, at parties where U.S. and French Hip-Hop would be played,

Hip-Hop in Algeria, just like modern Rai, “constructs its own distinct trajectory, linking local and global, East and West and in this way constitutes a distinct problem for Algerians, and indeed, other North Africans today.”<sup>36</sup>

Ourrad Rabah of MBS says, "We listened to hip hop from the West on ghetto-blasters and we imitated it," he recalls. "But we met resistance. Rap was too Western, too political."

"If you are silent, you will die; if you speak, you will also die, so speak and die", the liberal Algerian writer Tahar Djaout wrote shortly before he was murdered. Rabah and his crew responded by forming MBS, microphone breaks the silence. Algerian rappers have adopted this motto, and this exact quote was printed on the cover of a CD made by MBS.<sup>37</sup>

"There are just copycats left in Raï these days," H Rime, a member of the Rap group MCLP, told the French newspaper Libération. Algerian rappers, in the meantime, indict both sides of the ongoing friction between Islamist rebels and the authoritarian regime, which has claimed more than 100,000 lives since 1992.<sup>38</sup>

“The social consciousness and strong lyricism related with American rappers like Public Enemy and N.W.A. took root in the explosive streets of Oran and Algiers, two port cities on the Mediterranean, and flourished under the Algerian sun, where the local Arabic tongue bears Spanish, French, and Berber shadings. Algerian Rap has since become the voice of a new generation, expressing through words what a bloody, failed uprising in 1988 or in April 2001 sought to achieve through force.”<sup>39</sup>

For many rappers in Algeria, their music is a reflection of the youth protests that occurred in Algeria in 1988. Intik (which means all is well In Algerian dialect), a Hip-Hop group comprising of four members Yousef, Rida, Samir and Nabil which was first heard by most people including myself when a compilation entitled Algerap was first released in 1999 Rap in one of their tracks :

*"I must speak the truth and give a voice to those who are mistreated. I speak of children who were burned, of my sisters who were raped. We are like birds kept in a cage, thirsting for happiness and freedom"*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Langlois T. "The Local and Global in North African Popular Music", Popular Music Vol. 15, No.3, Middle East issue Oct.1996 p.259-273 Cambridge University Press

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence B. Straight Out of Algiers: As Rai goes global rap attests to the harsh realities at home, north African History, Politics and Culture, Tufts University URL: [http://www.norient.com/de/texte\\_drucken.php?ID=25](http://www.norient.com/de/texte_drucken.php?ID=25)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid'

<sup>39</sup> Ibid'

<sup>40</sup> Ibid'

But despite voicing out such a strong message of condemnation and distress, there is a form of manifestation of what Frantz Fanon considers “the numerous obstacles that post colonial societies will face, such as the lack of underlying ideology as well as the more deep-rooted personal and psychological effects that last even after colonialism has formerly ended”<sup>41</sup>. In the blatant case of Algeria, the lack of ideology, or fall of ideologies and the resulting prevalence of crazy violence and intellectual vacuum, is having its repercussion on the Algerian youth, who may find, or at least search for answers or maybe alleviate agony.

Intik is one of the best Algerian Rap groups, who have two albums, the latest self-titled one showing a remarkable improvement compared to the first. While many Arab music listeners complain about the standards of Arabic Hip-Hop when compared to USA Rap, when hearing Intik’s lyrics in their latest album, which is a blend of Arabic and French (one language is enough to get enough of it to enjoy), combined with some understanding of the socio-economic and political realities that had been prevalent in Algeria for at least the last 10 years while the World stood by in silence, you would quickly understand that these guys have a lot to say and that they do it with a lot of intensity and musical ability. Intik’s political lyrics can be tracked back to the ideology of the 1988 youth rebellion that rocked Algeria. One anonymous album reviewer on Amazon says that Intik “Still hasn’t succeeded in bringing down the regime, but you know listening to these lyrics that this regime and the brutal reality they created and preside over shall one day pass”<sup>42</sup>.

SOS, and female groups like MLG (Moonlight Girls) and the Messengers are also Algerian Hip-Hop groups that are appearing in this global Hip-Hop world and representing their side of the Hip-Hop story.

The photos on their cd’s often show them wearing NBA basketball jerseys; Nike caps and looking thoughtfully out at the world, without the smiles that draw listeners to the Rai singers, but identify an adoption of Hip-Hop symbols.

In a documentary produced by Daoud kuttab, Deborah Davies & Ilan Ziv entitled “Arab Diaries”, Shahra and Linda perform in an Algerian Female Rap group called The Messengers. Famous for improvising lyrics that contain social and political critiques, The Messengers’ politicized singing has become a unique expression of dissent, in the face of a conservative society and Islamic violence. It is especially poignant as it comes from two young female artists.

“At Oran, the group called VIX-IT was born in the heart of the university, in the capital of Rai. Their songs – "Where is Algeria heading?", "the morale is zero", and “hip hop dwellers of Oran” - have not yet found their way to recording studios.”<sup>43</sup> In Annaba,

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<sup>41</sup> Fanon F., 1967 The Wretched of the Earth, pp. 199 Penguin Books, London,

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous album review on Amazon .com

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00004RGM6/104-9639901-9311905?v=glance>

<sup>43</sup> Lafer L. (Librarian, Algiers) (1999) Algeria “Revolt in Prose”, Caravan Newsletter for a Responsible and a United World Number 4 October

another Algerian city, Double Kanon, a group comprising of two members, Lotfi and Wahab, started in 1995 have so far contributed to the Hip-Hop world, three albums. "The most dangerous group of Algerian Rap" says the cover of the second album.

“While VIX-IT’ words advocate the art of the verb that has been worked upon and chiseled, Double Kanon brutally bludgeons crude verbs that are styled musically. Poetry without detour, some burning questions, Rap is an ever-growing speedy phenomenon that is difficult to follow. It is a forced means of communication, a brutal declaration. Cities do not sleep very long; the rage cannot be appeased forever.”<sup>44</sup>

Algerian Hip-Hop, with a few exceptions, remains a low -budget production till this day, with group members producing their own lyrics and music, saving and borrowing money for studio time. It was even a circulating rumor between Arabic Hip-Hop heads and innovators that one member of MBS had to sell a pair of his trainers in the market to finish paying for studio time, in order to complete their album.

Rai costs much less to produce because record labels are willing to spend time and money on a positive ‘world genre’ that is more likely to shift units than an anti-establishment angry genre. Furthermore, according to Rabah, "we record a piece every day or two, but Rai singers record a whole album in an hour. Once we've finished a few pieces, we try to make them palatable to a publisher or producer. “But hardly anyone wants to have anything to do with Rap. It's too explosive. One producer wanted to promote Algerian Rap, and today he is dead.” Ourrad Rabah from MBS expressed.<sup>45</sup>

Even so, Rap is reshaping Algeria's cultural landscape. It gives the nation's frustrated (and mostly unemployed) youth a way to voice their irritation with the unending strife, economic crisis, government corruption, and religious intolerance. Threats from military officials and Muslim fundamentalists do not seem to scare them. In contrast to the Rai singers, most of who shrank from the opportunity to be protest singers in 1988; Algerian Rappers view their work as the musical counterpart to recent civic unrest, including the youth uprising in 2001. Groups like Intik and MBS speak explicitly. "We throw silence into a burial shroud," goes a Rap by MBS.

"Rap is the weapon I use to cleanse my rage. What happens to us is no matter, even if I land before the judge. I am alive, and I want to represent my country."<sup>46</sup>

Amid the conflicting concerns of authenticity and marketability<sup>47</sup>, some Algerian Rappers may soon go the way of Khaled and Cheb Mami and lose touch with the harsh realities back home. Intik, for instance, signed with Sony International and resettled in

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Number 4 October 1999 URL: <http://www.alliance21.org/caravan/en/4/algeria.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid'

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence B. [Straight Out of Algiers: As Rai goes global rap attests to the harsh realities at home](http://www.norient.com/de/texte_drucken.php?ID=25), north African History, Politics and Culture, Tufts University URL: [http://www.norient.com/de/texte\\_drucken.php?ID=25](http://www.norient.com/de/texte_drucken.php?ID=25)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid'

<sup>47</sup> Hess M 2005. [Metal Faces, Rap Masks: Identity and Resistance in Hip Hop's Persona Artist](#), pp.298 Popular Music and Society, Vol. 28, 3 July

Marseilles. For now, MBS remains in Algeria. "I want to devote myself to the many Algerian rappers and build them a recording studio," says Rabah, ever hopeful. "If the political situation ever improves, the world will see how many unknown sides the great music landscape of Algeria still has to offer."<sup>48</sup>

As Algerian Hip-Hop groups get signed to labels in France, it is hard to say if Algerian Rap will take the same route as Rai did, with French producers claiming how 'orient' should sound, in order to sell.

Nevertheless, Algerian Rap demonstrates essential components and search for identity within a subculture. While Rai was a traditional form of music that had its clear ethnic roots and that gradually transformed into a global and highly commercialized art, Hip-Hop is emerging in Algeria as a social, economic and political tool for the Algerian youth, not necessarily representing the ethnic minority where it is rooted, but has extended to the majority. At least at the musical level, it represents a "third" orientation, or movement, which may as well be the orientation of the Algerian silent majority. This majority rejects fundamentalist violence, but does not associate with the prevailing regime either. It finds itself trapped in bloodshed and in dire socio-economic conditions that strife only aggravates. Hip-Hop in this context constitutes a representation of the youth sub-culture from within this majority. Moreover, while a main feature of the contemporary Arab World is the search for a "third" or alternative movement, or identity, that provides answers to the strife of this majority amid autocratic regimes and Islamic opposition, it is not surprising to see the Hip-Hop subculture flourishing among the youth as one of the attempts.

Ourrad Rabah hopes that Algerian Rap is not a passing trend, but something that will develop. "I hope that Rap will find its way into Algeria's great, diverse musical culture, and I dream that the time will come when our cassette industry and the concert promoters will begin to respect our art and finally pay us fair rates."<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, this is not likely to happen. According to *The Economist*, "Once totally banned, Rap music can now occasionally be heard on Algerian state radio, sign that a timid breeze of musical freedom may be blowing over that North African nation. Young Algerian musicians have evolved an idiosyncratic musical and lyrical style that strikes directly at the violence and poverty they grew up in. But they look to France for the moral (and financial) support they need to give that style a voice..."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Straight Out of Algiers: As Rai Goes Global Rap Attests to the Harsh Realities at Home Bill Lawrence North African History, Politics, and Culture, Tufts University URL: [http://www.norient.com/de/texte\\_drucken.php?ID=25](http://www.norient.com/de/texte_drucken.php?ID=25)

<sup>49</sup> Burkhalter T "Birds Thirsting for Happiness and Freedom". <http://www.archiv.hkw.de/en/dossiers/popdeurope/kapitel2.html>

<sup>50</sup> The Economist print edition, 8 June 2000.

[http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displayStory.cfm?story\\_ID=316891&subject=Algeria&tranMode=none](http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displayStory.cfm?story_ID=316891&subject=Algeria&tranMode=none)

# 4

## Egyptian Hip-Hop

It was the first ever-Arabian music award to an Egyptian Hip-Hop Group that made the Arab world realize that there is a potential to Hip-Hop as a musical culture in The Arab world. The award can be viewed as an achievement for 'Arabic Hip-Hop', but it can also serve as a model for 'commercialization' of Hip-Hop in the Arab World.

MTM, named by the initials of its three members Mikey, Taki, and Mado, won the prize for Best Modern Arabic Act. The vote was made by the public, thus contesting the allegation that people in the Arab World are critical of rap music and consider it an evil Western cultural import. Nevertheless, when covered by the prominent "Al-Jazeera"<sup>51</sup> satellite TV news channel, some skepticism was expressed towards its harmful influence, and concern was voiced out towards the potentially corruptive lyrics and the possibility of a negative impact on traditional Arabic music.

According to Taki, "The best thing about rap is that it is a form of music that criticizes, so it discusses the issues of young people".<sup>52</sup>

"It (rap) is really close to young people because it speaks there Language and it speaks about their real-life problems and social life from their point of view. We really needed this in the Arab World"<sup>53</sup>

MTM Songs mainly deal with social issues through humor rather than politics, which is a thorny issue in this largely autocratic region, with the choice of humor rather than politics possibly being the reason behind their success.

MTM scored a huge hit in 2003 with a song called 'Ummi Musafra' (My Mother's Going Away). The lyrics speak about a teenager who holds a dance party when his mother goes away on holiday. But in the video clip she comes back early and crashes the proceedings.

The chorus to their most popular track translates into:

'My mother's out of town, so I'm going to have a party!  
But I hope she doesn't show up suddenly.'

The verses then describe how they went about organizing the party, and how the mother shows up and catches them.

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<sup>51</sup> Al-jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.net/channel/archive/archive?ArchiveId=89152>

<sup>52</sup> Arab rap to a different beat – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004 Aljazeera website / Culture  
<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7185A83E-1CDC-4589-90AB-F434C194BAF9.html>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid'

These lyrics however, show the true face of the middle –class privileged youth behind this kind of Hip-Hop and describe their social life from their point of view.

MTM clearly reflects the identity of its members, as representatives of a ‘class sub-culture’,<sup>54</sup> the Egyptian middle to upper middle class youth. These lyrics reflect the "concerns" of this group: a group that is rebellious against the rules of the older generation, and whose demands and aspirations are more room for personal freedom, and the ability to have their own "version of amusement" not that defined and governed by the older generation. In fact this is in general a serious concern of this social stratum all over the Arab World, and in this sense it is representative of an Arab, rather than local Egyptian subculture. Moreover, it clearly represents a subculture, not a counter culture, as while it protests against the rules of the older generation, it still seeks legitimacy for its acts from them, so it manifests a dependence on the larger culture for general goals and direction, a major trait of subcultures. It differs, though, from the majority of the Arabic Hip-Hop scene in that it does not address core issues of protest, aside from generation gap issues that are not extremely distinctive. This may be the case of other Hip-Hop groups emerging in other Arab countries, such as Lebanon, but quite different from others, such as Palestinian or Algerian or even expatriate Arab hip hoppers, who manifest a clear identification to Hip-Hop as a sub-culture, probably because of the serious political and identity challenges that they confront.

‘MTM fits neatly into the category of recent trends adopted by Egyptian youth such as, Trance-style roof parties where people are dressed in worn out, sloppy clothes and speak a new dialect they have formed and adopted.’<sup>55</sup>

In an article on youth cultures in Cairo, Zvi Bar'el describes the people who go to these rooftop parties as "Young people from good homes using slum lingo". According to Zvi, there are two main types of 'party goers' in Cairo, the poor youngsters, who just hang about the boardwalk along the Nile river, because they cannot afford to go into the clubs, and there is the rich youngsters who drive around in their fancy cars wearing designer clothes brought from abroad or from expensive local malls.

MTM, in this context represents these wealthy youngsters, who have depicted their personalities from an Egyptian movie trend that almost began with the new millennium, gaining wide popularity among the Arab youth all over the Arab World.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For example, “The typical middle class child lives in a class subculture where he or she is surrounded by educated, cultivated persons who speak the language relatively correctly, enjoy books, music, travel and gentele parties.” Or “The typical lower class child lives in a class subculture that is as different from their richer counterparts as if they were from different planets - he or she is surrounded by uneducated persons, who speak a language that is special to the social class, who barely read, and are unable to enjoy music (unless it is on the radio) and only travel to the funerals of their kin.” Family Life Management School of Family and Consumer Sciences Instructor: David D. Witt, Ph.D. Chapter 10 - Balancing Work and Family  
<http://www.uakron.edu/hefe/flm/flm.html>

<sup>55</sup> ‘You left your chelephone by the chelevision’, by Zvi Bar’el appeared in [www.haaretzdaily.com](http://www.haaretzdaily.com); the article was recently removed from net Last Update: 12/07/2005 14:00. Full article available in annexes.

<sup>56</sup> Egyptian Film critics and sociologists found it hard to explain why such films, being cinematically poor, and lacking 'moral content' can be such a success with youngsters and furthermore their characters turned into role models. Whatever the reasons, it did occur, and now more and more wealthy kids are organizing rooftop parties in poor neighborhoods, reminiscent of the ones in the films. The main aspects of interest at these parties are the dress code and the imitation of lower class speech. For girls, for example the dress was described by London-based Arabic daily newspaper, Al-Hayat as "Blue skirts with red stripes, green tops with yellow flowers". The language they have developed has been carried into their everyday lives, and does not come to an end with the end of the

This creation of a trend, and possibly a new subculture in Egypt has been opposed by clergy men, who oppose the western dancing' and the 'corruption of the pure language used by the prophet'.<sup>57</sup> This subculture, with clear class context, is resented by poorer classes as well, who deem it mockery: "Go to the boardwalk like everyone else", one Egyptian put it.<sup>58</sup>

In an article appearing in Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram, Pierre Loza suggests that the Hip-Hop phenomenon in Egypt began from a man named Shaaban Abdel-Rehim. Shaaban rose to fame after his controversial hit "I hate Israel", which caught the awareness of the international media. Although many Arab Hip-Hop fans would disagree that Shaaban is hip-hop, Loza states, "If there is anything that qualifies Shaaban as a by-product of Hip-Hop, it is the fact that he represents the common man. His language reflects the social background of the majority of the Egyptian masses. With witty street lyrics that are anything but elitist, Shaaban brought ghetto culture to the mainstream".<sup>59</sup>

There is no doubt that Shaaban represents the common man in Egypt, much more than MTM do, but as a musical genre, in terms of technique and style of production, MTM is by far more of a by-product of Hip-Hop than Shaaban.

Anyhow Shaaban remains to be popular in the Arab world, with a recent collaboration with a singer from the Kuwaiti group Miami where the two singers poke fun of each other using lyrics, which can be seen as resembling MC battles.

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party. This language is basically mimicry of mimicry. The wealthy kids are mimicking their peers in the poor areas, who in their turn, try to mimic the upper class kids. For example Television has changed to 'Chelevision' and tomato is pronounced 'Chomato'. What occurred was , as the boys copied the character from 'el Lambi', the girls decided to copy the girl characters from 'My aunt Fransa' , creating a language for boys , a language for girls and Arabic which they share between them.

<sup>57</sup> 'You left your chelephone by the chelevision', by Zvi Bar'el appeared in [www.haaretzdaily.com](http://www.haaretzdaily.com); the article was recently removed from net

Last Update: 12/07/2005 14:00. Full article available in annex.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid'

<sup>59</sup> Loza P. [Hip-Hop on the Nile](http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/723/fe2.htm) Al-Ahram Weekly, 30 December 2004 - 5 January 2005

Issue No. 723 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/723/fe2.htm>

# 5

## Lebanese Hip-Hop

Commenting on contemporary music in the Arab World in the year 2004, Ramsay Short from the Daily star Beirut says:

“The emergence of one after another made-up, bejeweled identical wailing starlet or slick-haired male in cheesy pop videos (on recent Arabic music channels) is enough to make you give up on contemporary Arab music altogether”.<sup>60</sup>

The article's purpose though, was to comment on the Arabic musical scene as a whole and shed light on a minority of musicians in the Arab world, and more specifically in Lebanon, who are defying the contemporary mainstream 'Arab pop' situation. On the forefront of this scene is Hip-Hop, directly or indirectly.

The Lebanese musical scene has gradually become full of Rap, Hip-Hop and even Trip-Hop bands, with large discrepancies in their degrees of success, popularity, standards, as well as in their cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, the major bands reflect an identity, or possibly even a conflict of it, and the one subculture that may have sound common grounds, holds within it, deep socio-economic and political differences that probably would find their roots in those painful differences that shaped the troubled and violent Lebanese modern history itself. The diversity of the Lebanese Hip-Hop scene is indicative of the diversity of Lebanon itself, with its positive and negative aspects.

In order to portray the Hip-Hop scene in Lebanon, an overview of the music underground scene in Lebanon may better place it in its context.

Soap kills; a duo (Yasmine Hamdan and Zeid Hamdan) is described as an 'electro - acoustic' band, a 'western-oriental' fusion band or simply as a band that is distinguished from mainstream Arabic pop. These definitions are all correct, however the sound and the musical elements that Soap kills deliver, have a more complex, and at the same time a much simpler form, with a strong relevance to Hip-Hop. This sound, said to be originating from Bristol, UK, is given the name Trip-Hop.<sup>61</sup>

Zeid Hamdan, the producer/composer behind the sound of Soap kills, is a key character who shapes the movement of a small but vastly growing voice of Arab musicians who are trying to make themselves heard, and present to Arabs and more specifically the youth, an alternative to the mainstream culture that dominates the Arab world in influences from the west, to the continuous adoption of Arabic classical means in composing and producing music with a lack of any real experimentation.

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<sup>60</sup> Short R., The Brilliant, the Brave and the Just Plain Bad Daily Star (December 30, 2004)

<sup>61</sup> An overview of the emergence of Trip-Hop and the relationship of Hip-Hop with trip-hop appears in annexes.

On Saturday 16 April 2005, Zeid planned an event named 'Overground Beirut' which featured in addition to Soap kills, Pop-Rockers, The New Government, Post-Rock improvisers, Scrambled Eggs and some of the biggest names in Lebanese Hip Hop, Rayess Bek and Kitaayoun. The gig name is itself a dig at using the term "underground" to describe the bands playing.

"I called it 'Overground Lebneleh' as a bit of joke. Really we're not this scary underground thing. We're light and airy, effectively without gravity. This isn't a political gig," says Zeid. "We just want to have a big audience get a taste of the new Arabic and Lebanese music, original and creative music [from] people that take the artistic initiative forward. Lebanon is opening up. People are opening up. The feel is there. And we are only as underground as people make us. Stop. Look. Listen. Think. And have a good time."<sup>62</sup>

*\* Labnaneh means Lebanization, i.e., transferring the Lebanese experience (of Civil War) to other countries. It may also be used as transferring other "unique" Lebanese features to other places*

What Zeid means by "underground" here is the notion and the idea that people get when hearing the word, in a social context, that is usually associated to forms of crime; in a musical context he describes the music as 'dirty' and 'raw' sounding, as opposed to the highly polished consumer mainstream music.

The phrase 'we are only as underground as people make us' can also be seen as a call for people in Lebanon to give alternative music a chance before dismissing it.

The same line up was supposed to play at a concert earlier, but was cancelled by the Government with the excuse of being a 'security threat' as the music is too underground.

Al-Maslakh<sup>63</sup>

Mazen Kerbaj, a 30-year-old trumpeter, cartoonist is the creator of the newly minted Beirut-based record label Al-Maslakh (The Slaughterhouse), and together with another Beirut based 'like-minded label, 'Those Kids Must Choke' will join forces to produce an ambitious, multi-disc compilation assembling all that has happened on the free improvisation and experimental music scene in Beirut over the past two years.

"The idea of a label was becoming more and more urgent," says Kerbaj, "because whenever I travel people ask me about the music scene and I always have to say it in words. I can't say, 'Here, listen to this.' So it's really a label to document what's happening." In the future, says Kerbaj, Al-Maslakh may expand to include "everything un-publishable." What defines un-publishable? "Something I like that other publishers would refuse," he says.<sup>64</sup> For now, he plans on putting out four CDs a year, each in a limited edition of 500 copies, each selling at CD-Theque and Espace SD, along with a few venues in France and the UK, for LL20, 000(around 9 British Pounds) a piece.

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<sup>62</sup> An interview with Zeid Hamdan 'Beirut underground' gets a breath of air at B018 Lebanon's premier subterranean club hosts 'Overground Lebneleh' By Short R. Daily Star Saturday, April 16, 2005 [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=10&categ\\_id=4&article\\_id=14306](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=4&article_id=14306)

<sup>63</sup> Al-Maslakh is the name of an extremely poor slum in the outskirts of Beirut that had been wiped out by one of the parties of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. Selecting the name may be representative of poverty, or even ethnic cleansing (as most inhabitants belonged to a poor Kurdish minority that had taken refuge in Lebanon together with poor Lebanese and Palestinians).

<sup>64</sup> Wilson-Goldie K. "Beirut Festival gives dissonance a fair hearing" July 2005 The Daily Star

But given the small size and still nebulous state of Beirut's free improvisation and experimental music scene, is there really room for two upstart and decidedly noncommercial labels?

"It's a matter of filling voids on the spectrum," says Charbel Haber, who, as label chief of Those Kids Must Choke, has been plotting out the city's musical map from commercial pop to the production efforts of Zeid Hamdan and Soap Kills, Ziad Naufal's work with Radio Liban, various rising Hip-Hop groups, and his own brand of Sonic Youth-inspired experimentation, which differs from Kerbaj's in its orientation toward electronics as opposed to jazz. "The radicalism will increase with the levels of freedom in the country," explains Haber. Of starting new labels, he adds, "It's an act of resistance. I mean, it's still in a bourgeois milieu. It's still done with a dose of hypocrisy, as is anything else. But now it's moving along." Going forward, the issue more and more will be "how to survive financially in this mess" adds Kerbaj. "It's richer. It gives more possibilities to have two. The more labels there are the better for Lebanon. There's a lot happening on the underground scene. People should be afraid," he laughs. "It's coming." This kind of self-production, he adds, "is the only way for an artist in Lebanon to be free and do what he wants".<sup>65</sup>

Soap Kills and the two labels "Al-Maslakh" and "Those kids must choke", may not necessarily be Hip-Hop as we know it and some of the artists who are active in this scene have nothing to do with Hip-Hop. But it symbolizes and shows the tendencies of youth sub-cultures and alternative cultures in general in Lebanon, and helps explain the environment that engulfs Hip-Hop in Lebanon to further understand Lebanese rappers and their situation.

Colitare K, born in France, with a tight cling to his Lebanese heritage, combines his lingual knowledge of Arabic, French and English in his raps. His latest album entitled "Lebanese" contains samples of Classical Lebanese Oud as well as samples from Classical Hip-Hop artists such as NWA and Public Enemy. "This is how my life's soundtrack plays inside my head." Says Colitare in an article named back to the oud school by Lucy Ashton.<sup>66</sup>

According to Eslam Jawad (mentioned later), the Lebanese Hip-Hop scene can be categorized into 'new school' and 'old school' Hip-Hop groups, the 'old school' Lebanese Hip-Hop groups that survived, as they were the ones that kept it in Arabic language, while the other groups were singing in English and blatantly copying US rap, and did not find any support in the Lebanese public.

The 'old school' Lebanese groups:

These are produced and managed by Zeid Hamdan of the above-mentioned Soap Kills. Kitaiyoon can be described as street Lebanese gangster Hip-Hop. They are in fact a street gang, the rappers that formed the Kitaiyoon Hip-Hop group, were members of the Kitaiyoon street gang. They have made their name with provocative, aggressive rhymes about gang life in Lebanon. Their beats are heavier, harder and darker than any other

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<sup>65</sup> Beirut Festival gives dissonance a fair hearing" Kaelen Wilson-Goldie July 2005 The Daily Star

<sup>66</sup> Back to the Oud School by Lucy Ashton [http://impressions-ba.com/features.php?id\\_destination\\_info=10&id\\_feature=10278](http://impressions-ba.com/features.php?id_destination_info=10&id_feature=10278)

Lebanese Hip-Hop group to date, and are, arguably, a little more difficult for the masses to access. It is worth to mention here that Hip-Hop groups called Kitaa Beirut, who also belong to the same gang, were formed more recently, but are no where close to the abilities of Kitaiyon, and belong to the “new school”.

During Eslam Jawad’s stay in Beirut, he formed, together with another MC, Omarz, Desert Dragons, the first political Hip-Hop group in Lebanon, that talks of diverse political topics, such as ‘The Arab cause’ ‘The Muslim cause’ Palestine, South Lebanon and the Golan heights<sup>67</sup>. Eslam first arrived in Beirut in 1995 from the United States and at that point all the Hip-Hoppers in Beirut were into the whole East coast/West coast phenomenon that was happening in the United States with the Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac. Wissam found it very displeasing to see Arabs completely imitate Hip-Hoppers in the United States, to this extent. They have nothing to do with East and West coast of the United States, he said. Wissam even went on radio on a Hip-Hop show in Beirut and ‘ridiculed’ the people taking sides with something that is happening all the way in the United States. Hip-Hop is a culture, he said, that is transformed to an Arabic Hip-Hop culture to represent your own culture, not to represent another person’s culture. “We’re not gangsters in the Arab world, we have a lot to say, but it’s not about drugs and street crimes, it’s more like war crimes.”

Rayess Bek and Ebin Foulén, make up the group Aks Al-Seir, (‘against the traffic’, or ‘against the grain’), rapping in the Arabic language they released a self-titled album, which found some success. These guys had a message and were not considered ‘posers’, by many Lebanese. Their track ‘Khartoosh’ (bullets) expresses their defiance towards the ‘Israeli aggressors’, which symbolizes their solidarity with their Palestinian ‘cousins’, as well as their own on-going conflict with Israel over occupied land in south Lebanon. With Ma fik Ta3mol Chi (“You can’t do anything”) they attacked those in the Lebanese society that speak to them scornfully.

In November 2002 they released an album named *Frem 2id 3al Kou3 (handbrake at the corner)*, although technically a big improvement in comparison to other groups that rap in Arabic, there was still room for improvement. However, the importance of this group lies in their use of ‘curse words; in their rap, that is not tolerated in Arabic mainstream music culture at all.

Nevertheless, Aks Al-Seir got some recognition and toured international festivals, but their real success was when one of the members, Wael, launched his solo career under the name Rayess Bek, and released an album *3am Bi7ke Bis-soukout (“I’m speaking in silence”)* under EMI – Arabia. This is probably the first Arab Hip-Hop album which was signed with a major record label and made available in the entire Arab world that is definitely an achievement.

In this album Rayess Bek shows a great ability in rapping in the Arabic language, and tackles all sorts of issues, including Arabic Hip-Hop and ‘Americanism’. In his track Rayess Bek says: ‘lak lesh ‘ambyakhdol microphone u mabistahloo?’ (why are they

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<sup>67</sup> These are regions occupied by Israel in Syria and Lebanon, with Israel having pulled out from the latter in the year 2000.

given the microphone when they don't deserve it), which is probably a hint to other rappers in Lebanon, who have not reached a good technical level, but still perform, put low quality tracks and their pictures in clothes that copy US rappers, even waving "Westside" and "Eastside" hand signs, up on their websites.

The 'new school' groups, are according to Eslam, attempting to bring back US traits into Lebanese Hip-Hop, after the 'old school' groups that did survive, fought to keep Lebanese Hip-Hop, in Arabic; and localize it.

There are serious 'new school' groups as well, such as the political group 'Militia' who represent the Christians in Lebanon, and talk about life as Christians in Lebanon.

On a website of a studio ([www.peakhall.com](http://www.peakhall.com)) which rents studios and equipments to bands, they have hosted tracks and pictures for their clients, which include a large number of these 'New School' Lebanese Hip-Hop groups, two of which are named 'Westsidiers' and 'Southsidiers' which further illustrates the tendency of blindly imitating commercial US rappers, however the fact is, the 'Westsidiers', do actually live in the West side of Beirut, and the Southsidiers live in and come from, the south of Lebanon.

One interesting group on that website was VOC (virus of the community) which interestingly consists of a rapper and a breaker, evidence of break dancing in Lebanon.

These new Hip-Hop groups are extremely un-professional, and as much as it is indicative of the broad interest in and spread of Hip-Hop there, badly made tracks provide mainstream Arab opponents with more reason to dismiss Hip-Hop. Furthermore, many deem the topics tackled by most groups quite irrelevant, and mostly copied from US Hip-Hop, such as guns and drugs (Drugs pose a serious problem in Lebanon though).

Like all the other Hip-Hop scenes discussed so far in the Arab world, Lebanon's most famous rapper so far is an émigré (Colitare K). His energetic performances around Europe in concerts supporting bands such as the Asian Dub foundation, Natasha Atlas and the Transglobal Underground has earned him some popularity in what Dan Glazebrook describes in a review on one such performance that happened at the Royal Festival Hall in Beirut as "Street music Arab's elegant fusion of Eastern melodies with Western beats".<sup>68</sup>

The diversity in the Hip-Hop or underground music scene in Lebanon can only be analyzed within the context of peculiar diversity of the Lebanese society, and the socio-economic as well as political scene. It is in this context that each of the major Hip-Hop or underground music put together may represent a distinct subculture, which may have roots in a political party a religious sect, a social class or sometimes all of them together and either defies them or represents them. Although Lebanon is a small Arab country, its contemporary history is replete with internal social and sectarian conflict and

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<sup>68</sup> Glazebrook D (2004). A welcome harmony Saturday 06 November - Morning Star online [http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index2.php/free/culture/music/a\\_welcome\\_harmony](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index2.php/free/culture/music/a_welcome_harmony)

violence, (civil war 1975-1880), active involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, where south Lebanon has been gradually occupied by Israel since 1978, then evacuated in 1999, with some land still disputed). The political scene is aggravated by the presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon since 1948, and by a heavy presence of the Arab Syrian Army since 1976, and who only recently pulled out as a result of internal and external pressures against Syria. It is one of the most complicated political situations in the Arab World that has had an obvious and grave impact on the socio-economic scene. While Lebanon had been famous for being an oasis for democracy in an Arab World inflicted by the lack of it, it is worth noting that these bands have emerged at an era where violence had receded, but with it democracy and freedom of expression had receded too. Any serious attempt to understand The Lebanese Hip-Hop scene needs to perceive it within this context, of a society ailed with all forms of conflicts and contradictions, struck with poverty and deprived from the freedom that used to distinguish it from its neighbors.

These bands represent clear subcultures; some of them may even be representative of sectarian subcultures too. They generally reflect an identity that had developed from within the turmoil of the civil War and Israeli occupation on top of a historic sectarian and/or social identity, of a younger generation that that still manifests much of the impact of war.

However, common grounds among these different bands can be clearly identified. These bands naturally belong to the younger generation, who suffers from lack of freedom of expression, lack of understanding, and frustration towards the prevailing patriarchal hierarchy, family, society and Government. This generation suffers from unemployment and poverty; it suffers from total alienation from the older generation, the parents, the rulers, who are still haunted by the realities and repercussions of the Civil War. They are trying to defect from that generation which may be deemed as "losers". In this context, many bands reflect a subculture that rejects what the previous generation did to the country and to them, their sons. Yet, total healing has not happened yet, and these sub-cultures that manifest such rejection, cannot detach themselves fully from that heavy heritage, and consequently, some of them fall into the trap and represent an extension to the partisan and sectarian map that led to Civil War in the seventies, and in this sense they fall into the contradiction of condemning attitudes they implicitly endorse, possibly reflecting that such attitude has become inherent in them, and that social healing in Lebanon, which is possibly one of the dreams that Lebanese Hip-Hoppers have, is still far from becoming a reality.

While Lebanese Hip-Hop may be just another Arab experience, it is relatively more widespread and known to Arabs than other Arab Hip-Hop scenes, thanks to the active prominent Lebanese media that dominates the Arab media scene. Lebanese private satellite channels are among the most famous in the whole Arab World. One of the reasons for their overwhelming success over other Arab channels is the fact that they are private, not government run, and consequently they enjoy a higher degree of social openness and their liberal approach. Lebanese private channels for example were among the first Arabic channels to address several social (as well as political and even religious) taboos: rape, violence against women, crimes of honor, AIDS, sex, etc. Such

"bald" media, as described by many Arabs, is better suited to shed light on alternative or different art, including Hip-Hop. This may be one of the reasons for the relative publicity of Lebanese Rappers in comparison with other Arab rappers.

An example may be the Lebanese Rap coverage in 2003 at the prominent "Sireh Winfatahet" Talk show on Future TV, a prominent private Lebanese local and satellite TV station. This was probably the first time that many Arabs had seen Lebanese and possibly even Arabic Hip-Hop. Although that specific show was voted the second best episode, some have expressed their views that the show lacked in style but more than made up for it in content. While some groups were technically less than acceptable, several others revealed great potential showing diversity in the Lebanese Hip-Hop scene. A boy - girl duo named Lix and Mc Moe even challenged one of the other groups 'Ekher Jeel' which opened the show, and told them never to touch a microphone again. All the forums I have checked that speak of the subject seem to agree with Lix, calling Ekher Jeel a 'poser' group. One thing that needs to be mentioned is while Mc Lix raps in English, Ekher Jeel take on the more challenging and more difficult and innovative task of writing and performing in Arabic.

More significantly, this episode revealed that Lebanese rappers are struggling to strike a difficult balance between markets needs and authenticity. Commenting on the Future TV Lebanese Hip-Hop episode, many of the audience questioned the authenticity of Lebanese rappers, accusing them of importing "realities" from the African-American neighborhoods in the US, that do not apply to the Lebanese realities, such as references to drugs and gunshots. Given that scholars have "theorized the performance of authenticity as necessary to establishing credibility as an artist within Hip-Hop"<sup>69</sup>; the audience commented that "these rappers lacked the credibility of a lived experience"<sup>70</sup> that is essential in rap, and provided a form of "translated" rap imitation that does relate to them.

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<sup>69</sup> Hess M 2005. Metal Faces, Rap Masks: Identity and Resistance in Hip Hop's Persona Artist, pp.298 Popular Music and Society, Vol. 28, 3

July

<sup>70</sup> Ibid'

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## Palestinian Hip-Hop

The Palestinian Hip-Hop scene cannot be well understood unless the complex political and social realities of Palestinians are analyzed.

As the Arab World was divided between the British and French Mandate following World War I, Palestine was put then under the British Mandate. The Balfour Declaration of 1917<sup>71</sup> paved the road to the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 and the exodus of the vast majority of Palestinians to Arab neighboring countries. While a minority of Palestinians stayed within the 1948 boundaries of Israel, to become an ethnic minority ever since, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war led to the occupation by Israel of the West bank and Gaza Strip, in addition to Egyptian and Syrian lands.

Palestinians have been ever since divided into a minority group within Israel, those living in the West Bank and Gaza, which under the stalling Oslo Accords of 1993 constitute the forthcoming Palestinian state, and refugees in each of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt Iraq and others. This devastating fragmentation has had its grave impact that on the progress and development of Palestinian life and music.

The Palestinian Hip-Hop scene in two main locations, the West Bank & Gaza and Palestinian- Israelis inside Israel manifests local social and cultural differences, despite many obvious similarities.

Ramallahunderground, a Hip-Hop collective that appeared in the city of Ramallah<sup>72</sup> during its renewed Israeli occupation, is by itself an expression of a mixture of anguish and rejection in addition to defeat and helplessness, of the colonized towards the colonizer.

In this context it represents a straight forward response or defense mechanism adopted by Palestinian youth inside the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza), who despite the severe isolation imposed on them through restraint on travel and movement, have benefited from a global media revolution that surpasses all boundaries, and adopted Hip-Hop as a subculture and a form of expression of protest.

Ramallahunderground website contains more than one form of art (photography and Poetry), and was initially launched in order to promote alternative art and highlight events going on in Ramallah and in other places in the Arab world that are somehow affiliated with the site. This initiative has developed though, and its founders have been collaborating with artists from London, Los-Angeles, Geneva, Brussels, Congo, Beirut and more.

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<sup>71</sup> Qattan H. (1988) *The Palestine Question*, Mackays of Chatham Ltd. Kent, UK, pp. 3

<sup>72</sup> . Ramallah lies in the Palestinian West Bank, 15 km northwest of Jerusalem, with approximately 57,000 residents. It is a small city characterized by its openness and cosmopolitanism, exceptional international media presence, as the political capital of Palestinians. Like other Palestinian towns, it enjoyed a form of autonomy since 1994 following the Oslo Accords. Following the September 2000 Intifada, the Israeli Army invaded and re-occupied these towns, imposing a form of closures that isolate, until now cities, towns and villages from each other, in an apartheid-like political and social conditions Palestinians still have to live with.

Music, mainly Hip-Hop and Down Tempo, occupies a major part of this website and constitutes the major interest of its founders as well, who have developed into a Hip-Hop, Trip-Hop collective that has already locally produced two CDS (unofficial release), and performed live shows in Washington DC, London and Vienna.

Ramallahunderground is a byproduct of cultural interaction with several countries and not just U.S Hip-Hop. Devastated by the first-hand and bitter experience with occupation<sup>73</sup>, the diversity and exposure of its members has helped to combine the peculiarities of the place to the universality of tools. Initiated from Hip-Hop, blended with a sense of authentic local culture and an imposing presence of the place, the outcome is a new specific sound that has never been heard before.

Boikutt, who resides in Ramallah, is mainly a producer. In the year 2002, he recorded an album called ‘The Ramallah Projekt’, which mostly consisted of instrumentals made of rough and distorted drums on top of dark sounding basslines which, according to Boikutt, was a soundscape of Ramallah during times of the war and long curfew hours: The city was quiet, dark and gloomy, and this is reflected heavily on ‘the Ramallah Projekt’<sup>74</sup>. One of the nine tracks on that album, entitled ‘Mamnoo il Tajawol’<sup>75</sup> (curfew hour call) had some rhyming (rapping) on it, and although Boikutt is primarily a producer and not an Mc, a lot had to be said that the music by itself could not reflect. And Boikutt had this to say:

“We’re living each day like kill or be killed.  
Everybody hold your guns, pull the trigger and attack at once,  
There’s no solution but that, put the gun in your hand, stand firm on the ground, attack your enemy before they attack you, that’s what I learned as a little child,  
There’s going to be some carnage, means there’s going to be some carnage, to remind the Zionists of what they did, we tried throwing rocks, but a law was made. NO TO CEASE FIRE...and now we’re surrounded from every corner, everyday all day inside the house, my blood is boiling, thoughts, on how to make Israel fall,  
Sounds from outside shooting and bombing, explosions and rockets from planes, loudspeakers howling,  
It is Curfew time, it is Curfew time.”

The song has samples from classical Arabic music over a simple, rough, conventional Hip-Hop beat, making it difficult to define the track as anything but Arabic Hip-Hop.

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<sup>73</sup> An Israeli soldier slapped Boikutt, one of the two composers and performers of Ramallahunderground, during a “routine” house search, during which the privacy of his own bedroom was violated and all his belongings made to a mess. While Palestinians living under occupation at the time considered such an experience routine rather than unique, it might have played a role in shaping the emotional status that forms an identity to these Palestinians.

<sup>74</sup> For further information on the prevalent conditions in the West Bank during the Israeli invasion, see Amery S. 2005 “Sharon and My Mother-in-Law” Croydon Surrey UK, Bookmarque Limited

<sup>75</sup> It means (call for curfew). Israeli soldiers would use loudspeakers to announce curfew (in Arabic) from inside tanks

Although the rest of his music is instrumentals, with a major influence from Hip-Hop, the lack of lyrics make it unconventional Hip-Hop, and even closer to a genre that had originated in the UK, Trip-Hop<sup>76</sup>.

Nevertheless the Ramallah collective sound cannot be defined as solely Trip-Hop. The many productions made by the same producers that sound closer to conventional Hip-Hop with rappers in different languages showing a solidarity to their fellow Palestinian ‘Hip-Hop comrades’ are also found in the music section on the website.

In an article<sup>77</sup> on Palestinian Hip-Hop, particularly on Hip-Hop group DAM( presented below), Will Youmans, a Hip-Hop “activist” also known as Iron sheikh, describes Ramallah as being cosmopolitan and Palestine’s avant-garde cultural hub – with an international presence, artists, film makers and alcoholics. More specifically, he describes Ramallahunderground artists Boikutt and Stormtrap as “the guys who are helping curve out an underground Hip-Hop party scene.” He described their music as a “fusion of other forms of music with Hip-Hop, including Arabic, drum n bass and electronic music”.

## DAM

The most popular (and the most relevant Arab Hip-Hop group to analyze for that matter) Palestinian group, DAM (da Arab emcees, or ‘dam’ meaning blood in Arabic and Hebrew), consists of three MCs: Tamer Naffar, his brother Suheil and Mahmoud Jariri. They were the first Palestinians to start rapping in Arabic, and they sparked a trend among all Palestinians, to start rapping. Dam resides inside the ‘green line’ within Palestine. The green line is what separates land that’s been occupied in 1948’ to the land occupied in 1967 (i.e. the West-bank and the Gaza strip). DAM live in the 1948 area of the green line, and hold Israeli passports, which is why they are labeled “Arab IL tamanyah WA Arbe’en”, or the 1948 Arabs, or Arab Israelis as Israel prefers to call them, or indeed, Palestinian Israelis.

They come from a city named Lydda( or Lod as it is called by Israel), which lies at a 10 minute distance from metropolitan Tel Aviv, Israel’s main and biggest city which attracts thousands of tourists every year. Lydda though, is “not a likely place for visitors and tourists to pass by. As the dark side of Israel, Lod faces the same problems as most urban centers all over the world: poverty, drugs, pollution, unemployment, gangs, racism and violence. As a minority in their own homeland, they live under conditions that are very similar to those of the black minority in the US. Nevertheless these conditions are further aggravated by an extra national Arab-Jewish dimension, in the “only democracy in the Middle East”.

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<sup>76</sup> More information on Trip-Hop is available as annex.

<sup>77</sup> Youmans W. ‘Rapping truth 2 power’ LeftTurn Notes from the global intifada May/June 2005 Issue#16

“We are the black people of the Middle-East” declared Tamer-Naffar, one of the group members in “The Trailer” to Jackie Salloum’s film on Palestinian Hip-Hop named “Sling-shot Hip-Hop”<sup>78</sup>.

Being forced into the imagined reality of today’s supposedly post-colonial world, Arab Israelis find themselves in a markedly similar dilemma to that of African Americans. W.E.B Du Bois highlighted in the early 1900’s the curse of the ‘double consciousness’ that belongs to African Americans, a black people who exist ‘in the American world’. The unwelcome situation of feeling one’s “twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body.”<sup>79</sup> These are two fundamentally ‘warring ideals’: one is the impulse to join the mainstream society, the other is to reject it and define the world and relate to it from an entirely black perspective. Although slightly different, Arab Israelis find themselves in an equally seemingly contradictory duality, one of joining the mainstream by fighting for equal rights and representation the other of reaffirming their ‘Palestinian-ness’ within the state of Israel.<sup>80</sup> Like W.E.B Du Bois in his *The Soul of Black Folk*, the aim of Arab Israelis is ultimately to strike a balance between these seemingly polar positions

Tamer who started rapping in 1998, was a university student studying Criminology, but soon quit and became a full time artist. Suheil is a Cinematography student, while Mohammed studies Computer Science. Both joined Tamer in 1999.

Their first rap was in English, but urged by the need to address broader audience, they started rapping in Hebrew. Following the October 2000 events<sup>81</sup>, they shifted to Arabic. Suhail comments by saying: “It was easy for us to sing in English, as many had sung before us. Singing in Arabic was a new step that we had to make, and for us it was the peak. This transformation was accompanied by a decision we had made, that Hip-Hop would be our life, and our arena for struggling for the truth, and at the same time to deliver a political message in a simplified form.”

The Microphone is in control may best represent the struggle, the authenticity and the manifestation of identity within Hip-Hop that DAM forms:

The Microphone is in Control<sup>82</sup>

We built our present form our past  
We made our names from what was inflicted on us.  
We speak words of eyes that flare

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<sup>78</sup> Sling shot Hip-Hop a documentary produced by Palestinian New Yorker Jackie Salloum

[www.slingshothiphop.com/](http://www.slingshothiphop.com/)

<sup>79</sup> For more on ‘double consciousness’ and the moral and intellectual issues surrounding the perception of Blacks within American society see W.E.B Du Bois’s 1996 ‘The Soul of Black Folk’ London, Penguin Books

<sup>80</sup> The documentary ‘Istiklal’ [Independence] directed by Nizzar Hassan addresses first hand the dilemma of Palestinian citizens of Israel during the nation’s celebration of its ‘independence’

<sup>81</sup> In solidarity with the Aqsa Intifada of their fellow people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a number of young Palestinians inside the Green line (1948 Israel proper) demonstrated; 13 young Palestinians were killed by Israeli Army fire. The event triggered wide protests and constituted a benchmark in the re-creation, or restoration, of the identity of Palestinian Israelis.

<sup>82</sup> A transliterated version, together with two more lyrics of DAM appears in annexes.

Nervous, anguished, replete with signs,

You can hear us, ignore us  
Try to stop us, you only get us closer  
To our mother, we stand, we never soften  
We never forge, we never weaken

Hey, hey come up just like everyone comes up  
You add and understand the meaning,  
Hey hey, you hold a pen and sit down,  
Until we're done we hold a mic (microphone) and we enjoy

MC. The microphone is in control  
The mic is one of the fingers of your hand  
MC the mic is in control,  
His lyrics are sharp, they cut our hands  
Here who gave it strength?  
Me, me, me, me,

All for one, one for all,  
We sprinkle salt on the wound, all is coming with anger  
Look and see what we're doing,  
This is not cabaret music nor is it do re mi

Fa sol la ti, bring them too  
The Rap beat is our weapon, we bought it from Lod  
You want to demolish what we built  
Like Raid, that eliminates insects

If you forgot I will remind you, call me Nido,  
You do not want it, yet I will keep bringing it up,

You want it, you have it, we are not tying it to us,  
It chose us, yes

The microphone is in control,  
Its words are sharp they cut our hands,  
Here, who gave you power

What should I sing for? There's no one to listen  
What should I sing for? No one understands me  
Try; come close to something that is Arab (runaway)  
Reverse it or in the end it is Arab,

We stand up now, hand in hand, we sustain our strength,  
And in the same manner (may we be protected from envy)  
Rap is a big dream that haunted us like a nightmare,

What is it (those who want to shut us up) what is there (those who want us to sit down)  
Who are we!? They answer, we are steadfast  
Come, leave the beat and we get down to it,

The microphone is in control,  
The mic is one of our fingers,  
The microphone is in control, people are standing, listening to the beat getting higher,  
The microphone is in control  
Its lyrics are sharp, they cut our hands  
Here, who gave it the power?  
Me, me, me, me,

In a documentary entitled ‘Channels of Rage’<sup>83</sup>Tamer expresses his thoughts on languages, saying that he first started to rap in English, under the influence of US Hip-Hop . However, as he felt the need to get a following among locals, he had to develop his technique in rapping in Arabic. Moreover, he is also aware of the need to address the Jewish Hebrew- speaking majority in Israel.

This trilingual experience might have played a role in the unique features of DAM. A clear manifestation of ethnic identity a minority in Israel, this linguistic diversity suggests that Arabic Hip-Hop forms a tool for dialogue.

As Jariri put it, “Through Rap, we seek to create an alternative culture using the word and the microphone; we try to influence the World. The word is a power that attracts and raises the awareness of the youth in order to change their daily routine and stand up for their rights. It is unacceptable for us to remain silent in the face of racism. If we keep silent we die, and if we say our word we may die as well; we’d better then say our word and die”.

These were the exact words used by Algerian Group MBS on the cover of their Album. While this quote may reflect a similarity in the sentimental mood resulting from similar suffering, in fact this state of mind has never been alien to Arab culture; To the contrary this bravery has been a traditional characteristic of Arabs<sup>84</sup>, which may explain this convergence of thoughts. In fact these two groups have collaborated on a track entitled “Boomerang” that is essentially a cry of condemnation against imperialism and colonialism.

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<sup>83</sup> Channels of Rage [http://www.ruthfilms.com/html/fs\\_channels\\_of\\_rage.html](http://www.ruthfilms.com/html/fs_channels_of_rage.html)

<sup>84</sup> Such a concept has been repeated through Arab literature throughout their history. In particular, Al-Mutanabbi, one of the most prominent 10<sup>th</sup> Century Arab poet said (translation):

“If you risk your honor, do not settle for anything less than the stars  
The taste of death in a small matter is similar to that in a big matter”

## Zil-Zal

Zil-Zal (Earthquake), formerly known as MWR, is another group, second in popularity to DAM in the 'Palestinian Hip-Hop scene' 'better sounding tracks' than DAM are the group 'Zil-Zal' before one of their members quit the group. Mahmoud, Wassim, Richi and Charlie (DJ Chuck) which make up the group also, like DAM, reside within the 'Green Line' in the town of Acre and, like Dam, their lyrics also speak of their unique experience as Palestinians living within the borders of Israel. In a profile of 'MWR' written on the Artists network of refuse and resist's website<sup>85</sup>, which appears alongside details on a 'MWR' concert in New York in 2004 it is mentioned that 'Zil-Zal' back in the day when they were still MWR, 'have appeared on CNN, MTV Europe and other television networks worldwide.'

Khaleefa, from Acre shows thorough understanding and endorsement of the Hip-Hop sub-culture. In his song called "Hip-Hop Arabee" which means "Arabic Hip-Hop", the chorus says:

Arabic Hip-Hop we're gonna keep singing  
"Ijakom jeel 3asabi" (here you have a stressful generation)

Then he continues to say:  
"We used to dream of Western rap  
These days I'm rapping Arabic Hip-Hop ...etc

This shows a deep understanding of Hip-Hop as a sub-culture that is localized in order to fit local needs and criteria of authenticity.

The Zil-Zal (MWR) track, "Because I am an Arab" topped the charts for two weeks on a Haifa<sup>86</sup> radio station, and MWR was named the Band of the Year.

Because I'm an Arab" (translated lyrics)  
"Why are we living in a time without happiness and hope?  
When you're looking for a job they gonna fire you  
They turn you down and say you're not qualified  
And why? 'Cause you're an Arab!  
Wherever you go they want you to show your ID -  
Without cause  
Why can't we be equal?  
Why are not we treated as humans?  
Instead of setting free the most beautiful doves of peace  
They invent effective devices to kill  
Instead of looking for a way to peace  
They ask why the youth is wasted  
Why are we living in a time without happiness and hope?  
A policeman sees me, immediately arrests me, asks me

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<sup>85</sup> Article on MWR on Artists network of refuse and resist website: <http://www.artistsnetwork.org/news12/news593.html>

<sup>86</sup> A major coastal city of Israel, characterized by relative coexistence between Jews and remnant Palestinian minority.

Some racist questions, and why? Because I'm an Arab."  
Let me live. I'm just trying to live."

These lyrics describe with precision the situation of 'Arab Israelis': the economic conditions, problems related to them being an ethnic minority, regarding equality and racism.

## The Entertainment group: Arabia

The most promising attempt, in creating a ‘stronghold’ to Arabic Hip-Hop and giving it world recognition at international standards is the newly formed group Aarap (Arab and rap combined in a word). The group consists of three experienced rappers in their own right as solo artists, Eslam Jawad (mentioned earlier, a Syrian living in London), Salaheddin and Clivaringz (Moroccans living in the Netherlands), the latter being already signed to the famous WU-tang Hip-Hop label, and his album, produced by the RZA, is due to be released in early 2006.

Eslam, born in Damascus, Syria, in 1977, started writing lyrics consciously at the age of 13, while residing in the U.S., and has since developed his style in English and given birth to a whole new style of Arabic rapping which is becoming to be known as foos-hop combining classical Arabic and Hip-Hop flow’s. Eslam reigns from the Beirut underground scene where he is a prominent member of the Hip-Hop community. His group, Desert Dragonz, founded when he moved to Lebanon in 1995, is recognized as one of the cornerstones of Lebanese Hip-Hop.

Aarap believe that Arabic Hip-Hop will be better or more accepted by lower class, which generally have weaker English, in comparison with middle and upper classes, which tend to be more fluent in foreign (particularly English) language, and can listen to Hip-Hop in foreign languages.

In late 2003 Eslam left the Middle East where he was weary of the music industry and headed to London where he was quickly noticed by Clivaringz of the Wu Tang Clan, and recruited alongside founding member Salaheddin, to record an album with the international Arab super group “Aarap”, due for release in 2006. Since then he has recorded with various international artists including Freeman from the top French Hip Hop group IAM, Dr. Das of Asian Dub Foundation and Belgian underground crew CNN.

Aarap members describe it as “a group which covers all aspects of life as lived in both the Eastern and Western world. It does not express hate or intolerance towards people of other religions, color or creed. It does not judge people according to their wealth or dedication to their religion. It does not seek political goals or fame. The brothers and sisters of Aarap seek unity, love and respect among their brothers and sisters in the Arab world and hope to foster understanding and respect between peoples across the world. It is a Hip-Hop group whose goal is not to monopolize the Arabic Hip-Hop scene, but to launch it and stimulate others, males and females to follow in their footsteps.”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.rpeg-ltd.com/management/n/arap>

Furthermore, Clivaringz and his partners are also in the process of forming the Entertainment Group Arabia, which strives to be the home of all Arabic Hip-Hop artists, and which will “bring Arabic Hip-Hop to a respectable and global standard”. Eslam told me that they are in the process of signing a deal with Rotana, the biggest record label in the Arab world. They plan for Entertainment Group Arabia to be a sub-label under Rotana in the Arab world to start recruiting rappers/producers that have interest in the Arab-Hip-Hop scene; they want to even go as far as training producers and Mc’s in the Arab world. Coming soon as part of this setting is also the Arabia clothing ltd. Arabic Hip-Hop clothing. Their ‘under construction’ website is ([www.arabia-ltd.com](http://www.arabia-ltd.com)).

Aarap is currently in contact with Dr. Dre and the Neptunes for working on productions for their album. According to Eslam, “that’s the only way you will gain respect rather than despise in the Arab world. Unfortunately in Third World countries, you are only given a chance if there are foreign artists granting you approving. You have to leave the Arab world, and be known internationally before you will start getting known or given a chance locally.

## Conclusion

The Arab Hip-Hop scene is as diversified (or fragmented) as Arabs themselves are. It expresses as much frustration, polarization and diversity as Arabs themselves enjoy and suffer. It strives at identifying a distinct identity amid increasing globalization pressure, just like the Arab nation aspires too. Is it as defeated?

This is a nation that is still experimenting means of response, defense, and a much delayed and impeded rebirth.

While the Arab World had entered the post-colonial phase since more than half a century, and has passed through several stages, most of which are typical to post-colonial characteristics of the Third World as a whole, its Hip-Hop scene, as part of its cultural, socio-economic and political scenes, reveals a clear tendency to experimentation, hesitancy and contradictions that are normal attributes of frustration and oppression, and a clear symptom of, or response to, defeat.

Hip-Hop faces several dilemmas some of which derive from the world Hip-Hop scene, others peculiar to the place. The balance between authenticity and commercialism, between bold lyrics that express the recklessness of a young generation that has given up on the older one, the family, the rulers and the system, and between mainstream conservatism that is on the rise with the rise of fundamentalism.

As we saw in the case of Rai in Algeria, it was met with resistance from Islamic fundamentalists because of its socially bold lyrics. With Islamic fundamentalism increasing in the Arab world, mainstream culture is also following in those footsteps, and is rejecting modernity.

The people are caught in the middle: between their disappointment with the corrupt, defeated, yet oppressive regimes that are the outcome of the post colonial period (pan-Arab or socialist), where people are subjects rather than citizens, and between the Islamic discourse, which has already proven to be quite appealing to masses of the younger generation, but, apparently, does not respond to the needs and challenges of this youth, their liberal lifestyle, their belief in freedom (for their own expression at least) or their aspiration for a different, possibly “modern” future.

Hip-Hop as such is possibly an expression by the youth of a third option. Ideas revolving on the emergence of a third force have become a subject of hot discussions among the Arab intellectuals these days. These intellectuals, who mostly fall within the conventional political classifications, firmly dismiss the mere attempt to compare their

intellectual efforts with a bunch of “rapping kids”. The younger generation though, giving up on the whole generation of “losers”, and benefiting from the “other” side of globalization, is simply experimenting on new forms of protest and expression.

Hip-Hop is emerging as a sub-culture that contributes, together with many other forces within the society, to change, at least in terms of freedom of expression, considered to be one of the most serious obstacles that hinder Arab development effort<sup>88</sup>. With oppression, “resistant subcultures of dignity and vengeful dreams are created and nurtured”<sup>89</sup>.

While Arab Hip-Hop cannot be regarded as a political movement, because it is not, it is definitely a new tool for the youth in search for a lost identity. It is a form of expression that, if seen within an infrapolitical rather than political context, may contribute to the identification of a new (third or more) orientation in the Arab World. Although Arab rappers are considered by many as an outcome of cultural imperialism, both colonizers and colonized must “recognize that no culture is an island unto itself.”<sup>90</sup>.

Arabic Hip-Hop is just starting to attract attention within the Arab cultural scene. Aside from its significant, and apparently inevitable political context, there are several other aspects that require examination and scrutiny, including linguistic aspects and forms of “Arabization”, musical roots in Arabic culture, and most importantly its future as an “imported” cultural product. Is Hip-Hop in the Arab world just another phenomenon, bound to remain restricted within the boundaries of a sub-culture, or is it a serious form of cultural interaction that conceives prospects for success and mainstream approval?

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<sup>88</sup> The Arab Human Development Report 2004 Towards Freedom in the Arab World, UNDP, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations,

<sup>89</sup> Scott J (1990), “Domination and the Art of Resistance, Hidden Transcripts” pp. 192-201, Yale University,

<sup>90</sup> Wa Thiongo N., “Borders and Bridges” in *The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies*, Afzal-Khan F. 2000 Durham. , Duke University Press,

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## **Films**

### **- Sling Shot Hip-Hop**

Documentary film covering life of various Rap groups and individuals related to the Hip-Hop scene in Palestine.

[www.slingshothiphop.com](http://www.slingshothiphop.com)

### **- Channels of rage**

A documentary set in Israel, scriptwriter director and producer Anat Halachmi followed local rising Rap stars Subliminal (Kobi Shimoni) and TN (Tamer Nafar) and their respective posses for three years. This time period did not only involve shifts in the Rappers' musical styles and qualities, but their friendship also took a roller coaster ride alongside the deteriorating situation of escalating violence in Israel/Palestine.

[http://www.ruthfilms.com/html/fs\\_channels\\_of\\_rage.html](http://www.ruthfilms.com/html/fs_channels_of_rage.html)

# Annexes

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## Annex 1

Article recently removed from Haaretz website

You left your chelephone by the chelevision

By Zvi Bar'el

Last Update: 12/07/2005 14:00

Mickey, Taki and Mado gave their initials to MTM, the Egyptian rap band they founded. They dress like rappers should, in wide shorts, backward caps and colorful shirts. Their albums can be found on every street corner in Cairo, and mainly at parties in the more respectable quarters of the city. Their newest hit is "My Mother's Away," about the daughter of a working mother who has gone shopping in the city. The daughter decides to have a party at home, but the mother returns earlier than planned and ruins the celebrations.

MTM uses simple words in Egyptian Arabic that anyone can understand with only a smattering of slang. It could almost be defined as middle-class rap, with not particularly provocative content. The band fits in well with the current fad spreading throughout Cairo of trance-style roof parties, featuring sloppy, worn-out clothes and the adoption of a new dialect: Young people from good homes are using slum lingo.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon and also does not affect all wealthy youth in Egypt, but the combination of trendsetting movies, rap music and new speech patterns is impossible to ignore. What is it all about, anyway?

Two main types of partygoers can be found in Cairo in the summer, especially after exam season ends. First, there are the youngsters from the poorer neighborhoods who cannot afford to go to clubs and instead make do with hanging out with their friends on the boardwalk along the Nile until the wee hours of the night, and then there are the children of the wealthy, who cruise the crowded city streets in their fancy cars and brightly colored jeeps, wearing clothes purchased abroad or in the expensive malls of Heliopolis.

The rich kids have now chosen as role models characters from two

Egyptian movies released about two years ago. One is "El-Lambi," in which Mohamed Saad plays the neighborhood bully, a girl magnet who terrorizes not only his neighbors but also the police; the other is "My Aunt Fransa," about a poor woman and her two nieces who eke out a

living from begging and petty theft. These two films were huge hits and together netted their producers more than 10 million Egyptian pounds, a sum that the Egyptian film industry has not seen for many years.

Sociologists and film critics in Egypt had difficulty explaining how such cinematically poor films - "devoid of moral content" is how they were described - could become cult movies, and their protagonists, role models. One cannot argue with results, however, and suddenly more and more wealthy teens are organizing roof parties in poor neighborhoods, the very ones depicted in those movies. According to some reports, soft drugs are an integral part of these parties.

The main features at the parties, however, are the dress code and the imitation of lower-class speech. Thus, for example, the young men wear simply shirts, colorful pants and caps, while the girls come dressed particularly tawdrily. "Blue skirts with red stripes, green tops with yellow flowers," is how one journalist in *Al-Hayat* described the accepted dress. Sometimes partygoers come wearing masks or heavy makeup.

The language that is developing among these young people is carrying over into their daily lives, and is not isolated to parties. Thus for example one can hear students using the word "chelephone" instead of telephone; "chomato" instead of tomato and "chelevision" instead of television, in what is essentially mimicry of mimicry. The wealthy teens are mimicking their peers in the slums, who themselves tried to mimic the upper classes, but such expressions in their mouths sounded ludicrous and distorted. Not only the words were bastardized, but a whole new slang was created, based on street expressions born in the poor neighborhoods that became part of normal speech at the parties and from there spread to university campuses.

"Sometimes I wander around our campus and do not understand what the students are saying," says Reem, the daughter of an active member of the Kifaya opposition movement, who studies at the American University of Cairo. "I can pass a group of boys and they can call me names that mean nothing to me, because I don't understand that language. And if I, a Cairo native, cannot understand, imagine how the village girls who come to study here feel."

It turns out, however, that girls also have their own special dialect.

"We decided to adopt the speech patterns of the hero in 'Aunt Fransa,'" says Reem, "to create adjectives for the boys. When we go to a roof party - because the rooftops are the only place you can dance these days without sweating too much - we can hear three languages:

regular Arabic, the boys' language and the girls' language. Perhaps that's how culture is created."

This creation of new culture is being opposed by the clergy, who denounce the "western dancing, wanton music and the corruption of the pure language used by the prophet."

They are not the only ones who are worried, however. Some teens, especially from the weaker sectors, are not pleased, and some of them view the mimicking of their speech by the wealthy teens as deliberate mockery.

In the meantime there have already been a few reports of poor families who have ousted rich teens who wanted to invade their rooftops to hold parties. It was not the music or the drugs that bothered these families, but rather the contempt for their dress and speech. In one case, a local resident yelled to the dancers, "Go to the boardwalk, be like everyone else" - like the poor.

## Annex 2

### Translated and Transliterated Lyrics by Palestinian Hip-Hop groups

#### **House Demolitions**

First we need to have initiative, listen, understand conclude, you may name this a lecture,  
We are in a wrestle, where we were raised,  
They call it a conspiracy, and lack of awareness is what keeps it,  
I introduce myself to you; I come from a city called Lod,  
Where a murderer does not pay, where what people pay for the mistake of building on their land,  
All this happens because they are alone; change, take an honorable position,  
Reverse the minds and start to understand,  
That power is for the plural, never for the singular,

Usually if we think as such we are in the singular,  
For all, and the mistake that we think of all,  
This mistake is the right thing and must last,  
And when we said hand in hand we did not mean a finger,  
In order to take you must demand and power is for the plural.

Refrain:

Although our neighborhood is shy,  
It is not dressed in silk ( if fear remains living in it),  
A bride without a head veil, waiting for her turn for makeup (displacement is coming to our gates),  
The time has preceded her, forgotten her,  
That is why it has become hostage for division,  
Every bird will break its cage in the end,  
And soar and fly (I was born here and here is where I am staying).

Transliteration

Awal ishi lazem timtilkoh huwe el mubadarah,  
Isma', Ifham, istakhles, btiqdar tnadiha muhadara  
Ihna be musara'a illi min zaman nabatuna fiha  
Binaduha mu'amara , adam wa'i ili mkhaliha,  
a'arefkum ala nafsi ana min balad ismha ellod,  
fiha illi byuqtul ma byidfa' elthaman wa fiha illi bihed  
lannas illi emlu ghalat wa banu ala ardhom,  
wa kul illi biseer bas ashanhom lawahdhom,

ghayer, wasqef ala mawqef bisharef,  
wa deer eluqul webda ifham,  
inno elquweh bilmujuama' wala wala marra bilmifred,  
wa adatan iza fakkarna heik ihna bilmifred,  
an elkul wa elghalat inno fakarna bilkoll,  
bas hada ghalat li'anno sah wa lazem yadoum,  
wa lama qulna eid bi eid makansh qasdna usba'a,  
we la tukhed lazem tutlob welquweh bilmujamma'.

Refrain:

Ma inno haretna khajouleh mish  
Labseh harir( iza elkhawf dal saken fina)  
Arous bala tarha, mistaniyeh  
Dorha lattajmeel( eltahjee ala bwabna qadem),  
ezzaman sabaqha, nisiha, ammalha  
ashan heik lattafreeq sar aseer)  
kul tayr rah yikser qafasoh akhertoh,  
yhalleg we yteer ( ana hown inwaladet we hon rah adal saken).

## Transliteration

MM (Msayter micro) MM (Translation available in Palestinian Hip-Hop chapter)

Ihna bidyna, hadarna min madeena,  
Swena ismena min illi biseer fina,  
Bnihki kalimat einen byeqdahu shararat,  
asabiyat bilghadab maliyat alamat,  
Inta btiqdar tisma'na, tihmilna  
Itjareb twaqefna inta bas bitqarebna,  
Min umna, ihna bnuqaf wala mara minkhaffef  
Wala marra minzeef illi zeik mned'af,

Hey, hey itla keif el-kol byetla,  
Mtijma' bifham elmaana yetdada'  
Hey hey byimsik qalam byetraba'  
Abal manekhlas bnemsek mic wemnetmatta'

MM msayter micro huwwe  
El- mic byen'ad wahad min asabe' ida,  
Mm msayter micro huwwe,  
Elnas waqfeh samaa el beat huwwe qa'ed a'la  
Mmsayter micro huwwe,  
Kalimato hadde illi tijrah deina  
Mm hown, meen addeilo quwweh,  
Ana, ana, ana, ana, ana, boooooo,

Elkol ashan wahed wa wahed ashan elkol,  
Binhot maleh alwaja' kullo jay bigholl  
Tul, bos, shuf, byi'mel eih,  
Di mish moosicat cabaret, wala moosicat do re mi  
Fa sol la si do jeibo Kaman

Beat rap silahna aw jaibino min al  
Lod biddak ithis illi banyeeno say el  
Raid mubeed el-hasahrat biybeedo

Inseetou hazakkarak nadinin Nido  
Ba treido ala kul hal hadall ajeibo,  
Treido, khudo mish rabteino  
Huwwe illi ikhtarna billi el in den dino,

Mm msayter micro huwwe,  
Al mic yenad wahad min asabe' ida,  
Mm msayter micro huwwe,  
Ennas waqfeh sam'a el beat huwwe qa'ed ala

Mm msayter mciro huwwe  
kalimato haddeh tijrah deina  
Mm hown mein adeilo quwweh  
Ana, ana, ana, ana, ana, booooooooooooooh

Aghani ash ma fi had yisma'ni,  
Aghani ash me fish had yifhamni, bas  
Jarreb, qarreb kul ishi Arab harab,  
i'kis aw bil akher il ishi Arab Arab

kafs ihna halla binqum  
eid be eid binkhali quwwetna tdum,  
nafs wa khamseh bein el hasoud,  
El- rap hilm kbeir rikibna mitl el kabous,

Fi ish fi illi bidhom nuskut  
Fi ish fi, ill bidhom nuq'ud  
Min ihna!? Ya wardeh ihna bnusmud,  
jeib, seib, el- beat wa ihna aleih bnuhbut

Mm msayter micro huwwe,  
el- mic yendad wahad min asabe'na,  
mm msayter micro huwwe,  
el nas waqfeh sam'a el- beat aho qa'ed a'la,  
kalimato haddeh tijrah DINA, mm hown mien, adeilo quwweh  
ana, ana, ana, ana, ana, booooooooooooooh

Who is the Terrorist?

Who is the terrorist?  
Who is the terrorist, I am the terrorist?!  
How a terrorist when I am living in my country?!!  
Who is the terrorist? You are the terrorist  
You are swallowing me while I live in my country

You are killing me just like you killed my grandparents  
Shall I resort to the law? No use my enemy,  
As you play the role of the witness, lawyer and judge,  
With the judge, my end starts,  
Your dream is that we decrease, moreover that we are a minority  
Your dream is that the minority becomes a majority in the graveyard  
Democracy? You are Nazis  
So long as you raped the Arab spirit  
It conceived a boy called explosive bombing  
And here you called us terrorists

So you hit me and wept, you ran before me and complained,  
When I reminded you that you started first, you jumped and said  
“You let your children throw stones; they have no parents to keep them at home?”  
It seems you forgot that your weapons put the parents under the stones?!  
And now when my pain has revolted you call me terrorist?

Who is the terrorist? I am the terrorist?!  
How a terrorist when I am living in my country?!!  
Who is the terrorist? You are the terrorist  
You are swallowing me while I live in my country

What do you mean by terrorist? Because my blood is not calm, but hot?  
Because I raise high my head and my land?  
You killed my beloved, and I am alone,  
My family was displaced, I will keep calling  
I am not against peace, peace is against me,  
It wants to annihilate me, and wipe out my heritage,  
Who ever speaks up to instigate people?  
He used to be a man, you make him trash,  
And who are you? When did you grow up?  
Look how many you killed and how many did you make orphans?  
Our mothers weep, our fathers complain, our lands vanish, who are you?  
You grew up spoilt, we grew up poor,  
Who grew up in ample, who grew up in a cave?  
Became a fidayi, you made him a criminal  
And you the terrorist call me a terrorist??

Who is the terrorist?! I am the terrorist!!  
How a terrorist when I am living in my country?!!  
Who is the terrorist? You are the terrorist  
You are swallowing me while I live in my country

When do I cease to be a terrorist?  
When you slap me on one cheek and I give you the other?  
How do you expect me to thank who harmed me?  
You know what?! First how do you want me to be?  
Down on my knees, handcuffed?  
My eyes to the ground and dead bodies spread around?  
Demolished houses, displaced families?  
Orphaned children? Freedom thorough handcuffs?  
You just give commands, we will comply  
We will be patient and we will hide our hunger  
Most importantly that you feel secure  
Feel comfortable and leave the pain for us,  
Our blood is that of dogs,

No, even when a dog dies, there is the animal friendly society,  
This means our blood is cheaper than that of dogs?!!  
NO! My blood is precious, and I will defend myself  
Even if you call me terrrrrorist  
Who is the terrorist..... You are the terrorist.

### **Transliteration**

Meen Irhabi? Meen Irhabi?  
Meen Irhabi? Ana Irhabi?  
Keef Irhabi wana ayesh fi bladi??

Meen Irhabi? Inta Irhabi!  
Makelni was ayesh fi bladi!  
Qatelni zay ma qatalet ajdadi  
Attijeh lal qanoun? Alfadi, ma inta ya adow,  
Btila'b dor el shahed, elmuhami ,wel qadi,  
Ala qadi binihayti badi,  
helmak nqill fowk ma ihna aqalliyeh,  
hilmak el aqalliyeh tseer fi al maqbara akthariyyeh,  
dimocratiyyeh?! Wallah inkom naziyyeh,  
min kutor ma ightasabtu ennafs el-arabiyyeh,  
hiblat, waldat walad ismo amaliyeh infijariyyeh,  
wo hein nadeitna irhabiyyeh,  
ya'ni darabetni wa bakei, sabaketni wa ishtakeit,  
lamma zakkartak innak badeit, natteit wa hakeit,  
„ ma intou bitkhallou sghar yermou hjar, malhoumesh ahel ,  
yedoubbouhom beddar?! Eish??  
Kunno nseit inno slahak dab elahel tahet lehjar?!  
Wa halla' lamma waja'i thar, bitnadini irhabi?!!

Meen Irhabi? Ana Irhabi?  
Keef Irhabi wana ayesh fi bladi??  
Meen Irhabi? Inta Irhabi!  
Makelni was ayesh fi bladi!

Leish irhabi? Alashan dammi mish hadi, hami?!  
Alashan rafe' rasi wa ard mladi  
Qatalou hbabi, ana lahali,  
Ahli tsharradou, rah adallni anadi,  
Ana mish didh essalam, essalam diddhi,  
Alai biddo yiqdi, turathi biddo yimhi,  
Willi bihki kilmeh bished wara himmeh,  
ykoun zalameh, bti'malou minno rimmeh,  
wo meen intou? Lissa imta kbertou?

Attala'ou addeish ataltou wa addeish yattamtou?  
Immayatna byebkou, abbayatna byishkou,  
aradeena bikhtifou ana balkom meen intou?  
Inta kbiret bidala' wou ihna kbirna bi fakqr,  
meen kiber fi wasa'? wo meen kiber fi juhor?  
Sar fidayi. Emeltou minno ijrami,  
Wa inta irhabi bitnadini irhabi?

Meen Irhabi? Ana Irhabi?  
Keef Irhabi wana ayesh fi bladi??  
Meen Irhabi? Inta Irhabi!  
Makelni was ayesh fi bladi!

Imta bibattel irhabi?  
Lamal tudrubni kaff wo a'teek khaddi el tani?  
Keef tetwaqa' Minh ashkor illi azani?  
Teraf eish? inta awali keef biddak yani?  
Rake' ala rukabi wo eidi mrabatat?  
Oyoun fi el ared wo juthath mzattatat?  
Byout mahdoumeh a'elat msharadat?  
Atfal yatimeh hurriyeh bi kalabshat?  
Int u'mor, inta utol, ihna ben'ber  
Ma aleina bnosbor wo jo'na binsatter,  
aham ishi innak thes bi aman,  
itrayyah wo seebelna el alam, maho damna,  
dam klab, hatta la, lama el kalb biymout, fi el rifek bil hayawan  
ya'ni damna arkhas lk dam el klab?!!!  
La', damna ghali wo rah adaf'e an hali  
Law tnadini irhabiiiiiiii,  
meen irhabi..... inta irhabi

## Annex 3

Following is an exclusive article written by Stormtrap a Palestinian rapper who is involved in the Ramallahunderground collective mentioned earlier, on his first live experience:

Being on stage was something that I've always dreamt of. Yet, at the same time, performing on stage is something I never imagined myself doing. It might have been the lack of confidence that made it easy for me to believe I won't end up on a stage, performing. Though whenever I'd listen to a powerful track, it would pump me up, along with my thoughts and imagination, having me end up on a stage (in my mind) and letting it all out. Anyways, enough of my imagination, at some point you figure out that if all you do is imagine, then you'll never put any effort into transforming that into reality. Maybe I used to underestimate my potentials, but after having tested myself, I don't anymore. Early summer 2005; a friend of mine gave me a call and told me about a Palestinian festival-taking place in Vienna. The festival consisted of many artists from all over the world, and of course Palestinian acts. Now what I had heard from my friends is that there was about an hour or less (on the second day of the festival) that was blank and needed an act to fill it up. It hadn't hit my mind yet to offer a performance; however, it had already come across the minds of my friends. They gave me the idea, and after having thought about it, I really knew that this could be a big opportunity for me. So, I gave it a little more thought (since I had a 1 week notice), and then I said "well, what the hell? I'll go for it!" I was booked to perform on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the festival, some time around 6 pm. I had a week to set up myself and practice. I chose a few tracks and lyrical works. As always though, I left the practicing till the last moment. That moment, being the last day before the performance day. Needless to say, I practiced my ass off. I was aiming for perfection. I wouldn't go onstage till I had my act made sure of. I remember at that time, my colleagues Basel and Jad were helping me stay self-confident, and they encouraged me a lot. Anyhow, the performance day arrived, and there was one more thing that had to be dealt with. Nervousness is an issue that everyone has to deal with in such an event. There is probably no possible way to go on stage without feeling nervous. But what we do know is that one can transform these tense feelings into positive energy. I had received my cue to get up there, and so I did. I had about a few minutes to test the microphone and make sure of everything. As I recall, those few minutes were very helpful in making me feel more at ease on stage. How so? Well, I got to walk around the big stage, and I had a chance to feel more comfortable up there. As the first beat started playing, I still felt quiet nervous. And I hadn't converted all the energy into positive yet. However, when the second beat started playing, I really got the hang of it. That is, moving around stage, waving my hand up, looking at the crowd, and really feeling the words I'm saying. It was then when the crowd really started to interact with me. Many would clap along, and many would wave their hands along too. It was a feeling that one would feel nowhere else than on a stage. When I finished, the crowd started yelling "Zugabe" (in German), meaning that they want more. I didn't have any more tracks prepared that day, but I repeated an Arabic track and asked the crowd to focus on the lyrics again, so that they can really understand it. As all hip-hop listeners know, it's not easy to understand all the words by listening to a track only once. So, after that repetition I was done. Everyone was proud of what I

did. Even the old men and women, whose generation has never come across Arabic hip-hop, were also very proud of what I had done. I felt great, having captured the attention and respect of all those people was something unbelievable to me. Many people also enjoyed the fact that this was non-commercial, pure music, untouched by the hands of the marketing industry. With my words I told stories of what we've experienced in the second Intifada. I felt a great relief after having finished my performance. It was all I could wish for, for a first performance. This has boosted my self-confidence, and I now see a lot more to come in the future.

## Annex 4

### Trip-hop/UK Hip-Hop (taken from Global noise<sup>91</sup>)

The following ideas are taken and copied from “Urban Breakbeat Culture”  
Repercussions of hip-hop in the United Kingdom David Hesmondhalgh & Caspar  
Melville Ch.3 p86 – 110 Global Noise 2001 Wesleyan University Press

Hip-Hop in general has influenced UK music making, primarily in relation to DJing (scratching and mixing) and techniques in production. During the late 80’s the sales of samplers rose significantly. And that was the period that saw rise to the break beat phenomenon described by David Hesmondhalgh & Caspar Melville in their essay on UK Hip-Hop as:

**“The development of a subculture based around searching for rare breaks on soul and funk records and sampling and reconstructing beats using Atari computers with sequencing programs and Roland 808 drum machines. This began to lay roots that would come to fruition in the early 1990’s”<sup>92</sup>**

The form that has made the most impact in the British musical public sphere and that has been adopted by Stormtrap and Boikutt from Ramallah is a style that has been labeled ‘Trip-Hop’. Trip-Hop is a flimsy journalistic tag punning, badly on the fusion of Hip-Hop with ‘trippy’ psychedelic styles, the term, as with most journalistic terms, was resisted as a descriptive term by those who were producing the music itself. Nevertheless the term serves to illustrate that this subgenre modeled itself as a version of Hip-Hop. To draw out some of the key themes in Trip-Hop, it is useful to look at the Bristol music scene and what it consisted of. This will also serve to illustrate how studies of popular music and sub cultures must remain aware of the processes aesthetic and social – that bring particular musical forms and techniques together in surprising ways and unlikely places.

Now Bristol was important center for slave trace in the eighteenth century and has a black population that has been defining what it means to be black British for several centuries and as well as a large mixed population, and a well integrated youth culture based around St. Paul’s and schools where black and white children shared classes and befriended each other. Bristol never had a developed club scene like London’s, and most of the entertainment was at cafes and youth clubs, reggae sound systems and blues parties dominated the musical culture.

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91 Global Noise

Rap and Hip-Hop outside the USA

Tony Mitchell (edited by)

2001 Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut

92 Global Noise Rap and Hip-Hop outside the Tony Mitchell (edited by) 2001

Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut

As the first wave of US Hip-Hop in the early 80's hit Bristol's youth ear drums, they became converts to this culture and adopted style as well as outlook, black and white youth alike. Hip-Hop was at once fused with black music, or elements of black music that had already roots in the UK, such as dancehall, dub and soul etc. However the peculiar socio characteristics of Bristol also meant that other forms of music, like punk rock had a strong influence too. In the early 90's , an influx of Bristol bands were releasing material that clearly adopted heavy influences from Hip-Hop , mainly in production techniques , but was seemingly uninhibited by the potential for comparison with U.S acts.

The most popular of these bands, were Portishead, massive attack, trick and smith and mighty. Trickys' albums for example have become statements of a continuing musical development, an inspiration from Hip-Hop is evident, but where US rappers aimed at a loud and clear voice, Tricky whispered and squeaked in his tracks. His female singing partner Martine Topley Bird sings a version of Public enemy's "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos", along with the numerous re-contextualized samples and slices from the most respected black music, such as Public Enemy's, shows Tricky's debt to Hip-Hop aesthetics. David Hesmondhalgh & Caspar Melville mentioned Tricky's maxinquane album and described it as

**“The beats are equally confident in their portrayal of confusion and f\*\*\* ed-upness: they slide in tantalizingly, disappear unexpectedly. Grooves are found, only to be abandoned.”**

Trip-Hop as a genre can be divided into two parts. The first category might as well be given the tag, Instrumental Hip-Hop. It draws heavily on production techniques of US Hip-Hop producers such as Premiere, Muggs and Pete Rock. Dense layers of drum patterns and samples are unlike conventional Hip-Hop that leaves lots of room and space, for rapping to take place. This type preferred sampling from horror films and mafia and gangster movies and combining them with heavy bass lines reminiscent of dub. Editing (i.e. cutting snippets of the chosen sounds) and the thickness or 'phatness' of the drums, which were usually less than 100 beats per minute (Global noise, p105), were given a special attention by the producers. This form of instrumental Hip-Hop , gave way to a lot of U.K. producers and labels, such as Mo'wax and the popular Ninja tune label and along with the second category of Trip-Hop which we are about to go into finally inspired the Ramallah collective.

The second 'category' of Trip-Hop, can best be described, by looking at a UK group called Portishead and their famous 'dummy' album. Thick and heavy drums, alongside scratching by DJ Andy smith, a Hip-Hop fanatic are layered on top with the vocals of Beth Gibbons. A big adoption of alternative rock is also apparent in this album. Portishead has been described as a group that 'Bridges the gulf between the cultural milieus of "implicitly black, U.S Hip-Hop" and "implicitly white, English student rock."' (Global noise – p .105)

Add Arabic music as an additional influence to all this , with the specific political , economic, social and cultural conditions prevalent in Ramallah, we begin to see that this encodes a much different view that produces very different sounds that can not be easily dismissed as a mere reflection of US Hip-Hop .

