

“WE AIN’T TERRORISTS, BUT WE DROPPIN’ BOMBS”:
LANGUAGE USE AND LOCALIZATION OF HIP HOP IN EGYPT

BY

ANGELA SELENA WILLIAMS

THESIS

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Adviser:

Assistant Professor Marina Terkourafi

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the localization of hip hop in the context of Egypt. I examine the process of localization in terms of the content (issues and topics), forms (language forms) and musical styles that are used in the cases of four Egyptian groups, *MTM*, *Arabian Knightz*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*. I argue that despite one group's (*Arabian Knightz*) frequent use of English, all the groups have become localized in terms of exploiting local themes and language conventions, as well as creating new language practices. I explore how the groups resist established usage conventions and redefine language ideologies. In demonstrating that language choices in hip hop lyrics do not merely reflect the existing social norms and language ideology, it will be seen that English, which usually functions as an 'elite code' in Egypt, is actually used in the lyrics to resist the English-speaking world. Through the production of rap music, the groups also change local traditions (i.e. meanings of local language), as well as create a space (via the Internet and media) for these traditions to spread (Pennycook 2007:139). I demonstrate that in regards to hip hop culture, localization is a process that involves local topics and the use of language conventions that authenticate the artists as being legitimate participants of hip hop culture while constructing their own hip hop identities.

To my mother and father, Annette and Willie Williams,
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CHAPTER 1: HIP HOP AS *GLOCAL* PHENOMENON

1.1 The origins and global spread of rap music and hip hop culture

Within the past two decades rap music and hip hop culture¹ have widely expanded from being an American production and commercial export to a worldwide movement mediated by global communications. The four elements of hip hop that both fans and scholars refer to are: emceeing, or rapping, deejaying, a term that originates from ‘disc jockey,’ or one who spins turntables, creating graffiti art, and breakdancing (Alim 2009: 2). Despite all these aspects, rapping is often regarded as the most representative form of hip hop. Studies of global hip hop culture have often examined the features and characteristics of rap music in a country in order to observe its involvement in hip hop culture. Rap music, which originated in the Bronx, New York, in the late 1970s, had at its core linguistic conventions prominent in African American communities (Labov 1972). These conventions – phonological, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic – combined with rhythmic beats give structure to lyrical expressions that represent the shared experiences of community members. While the earliest styles of rap music may be classified as ‘party rap’, another style which has gained in popularity is ‘message rap’, or protest rap that is based on social-conscious themes (Rose 1994; Stapleton 1998; also see *The Message, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five* 1982; Chuck D 1997: 87).

Linguistic innovation is a central aspect of hip hop culture. The use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), has been called the “default code” (Androutsopoulos 2008) of hip hop. This variety of language is the base of what has been termed Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) (Alim 2004). Although hip hop originated in the United States, among African American communities as an expression of their struggle against racial oppression and economic disparity, rap music and hip hop culture combines with local linguistic, musical and political contexts to become a vehicle for youth protest and resistance around the world (Mitchell 2001).

Without exception, hip hop culture has established a presence throughout the world. In Asia, rap music and hip hop culture has existed since the 1980s, becoming

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, *rap* will be used in reference to the style of music, whereas *hip hop* will be used as an all-encompassing term that denotes the music, fashion, and culture that also comprises break dancing and graffiti art.

popular in night club scenes in Japan, as participants of the hip hop culture use hip hop to revolutionize societal norms by encouraging the sense of individualism (Condry 2001), while more recently K-Pop has been gaining popularity in South Korea (Lee 2005). In Africa, Nigerian and Tanzanian rappers resist the language ideologies that favor English by using indigenous languages and AAVE in their song lyrics (Omoniyi 2008; Higgins 2008). In Australia, white youth in Sydney have used the participation in hip hop practices as a way to construct their identity within a larger hip hop context (Maxwell 2003), whereas Aboriginal and African-diasporic rappers construct hip hop as an extension of ‘Blackness’ or ‘Africanness’ (Pennycook and Mitchell 2008). In Europe, the indigenization of rap music is manifested in artists’ use of local symbols in their promotional materials, and their discourse on local issues, which establishes a new lyrical tradition unlike contemporary pop or traditional poetry (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003). Prior research has demonstrated that the global phenomenon of rap music and hip hop culture represents a new domain in which to examine how local symbols and language forms are used in certain shared practices, such as the making of rap music, to construct and reinforce new local identities (Bennett 1999; Kahf 2007; Pennycook 2007).

While a substantial amount of research thus exists on rap music and hip hop culture in Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America, little has been done to examine hip hop culture and the increasing popularity of rap music in the Middle East² and Arab World. According to Kerry Capell, a writer for the publication *Business Week*, hip hop in the Middle East is still “underground and largely ignored by the region’s record labels, radio stations, and music television channels” (2007: 2). Local artists in the Middle East remain for the most part unknown and marginalized due to strict state censorship. In this thesis, I will explore the localization of hip hop in the context of Egypt. I will look at the process of localization in terms of the content (issues and topics), forms (language forms) and musical styles that are used in the cases of four Egyptian groups, *MTM*, *Arabian Knightz*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*. I will argue that despite one group’s

² I have used the term “Middle East” in this paper to mean the region in Western and Central Asia, and more broadly, North African countries. I do this not without recognizing the controversy surrounding this term as a Eurocentric reference. My justification is that the term has been adapted into Arab media. I will also use the term Arab World, which for the sake of this thesis, includes West Asia and North Africa, and is a linguistically-based definition.

(*Arabian Knightz*) frequent use of English, all the groups have become localized in terms of exploiting local themes and language conventions, as well as creating new language practices. I will show how the groups resist established usage conventions and redefine language ideologies. In demonstrating that language choices in hip hop lyrics do not merely reflect the existing social norms and language ideology, it will be seen that English, which usually functions as an ‘elite code’ in Egypt, is actually used in the lyrics to resist the English-speaking world. Through the production of rap music, the groups also change local traditions (i.e. meanings of local language), as well as create a space (via the Internet and media) for these traditions to spread (Pennycook 2007:139). In conclusion, I will demonstrate that in regards to hip hop culture, localization is a process that involves local topics and the use of language conventions that authenticate the artists as being legitimate participants of hip hop culture while constructing their own hip hop identities.

This chapter provides a background for the propagation of rap music and hip hop culture in Egypt by introducing theories that explain the spread of hip hop culture, and by introducing fundamental concepts that are central in hip hop scholarship. I will provide a background for youth culture in Egypt as the site for hip hop activities, while exploring how the concept of ‘authenticity’ as established in the language practices of Egyptian hip hop artists. I argue that it is through ‘collective marginality’, the identification with ‘blackness,’ and the use of traditional language conventions of retort that they authenticate their participation. In Chapter 2, I will give an overview of the sociolinguistic landscape of Egypt by examining the uses and ‘linguistic value’ (Bourdieu 1991) of the Arabic varieties – *al-FusHa* and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic – and foreign languages, specifically English, therein. I will explore language ideologies which are influenced by the socio-historical background of English in Egypt as a language with prestige. I argue that these language ideologies are redefined within the local hip hop community. Chapter 3 locates the emerging Egyptian hip hop scene within traditional Arab music by profiling traditional and contemporary artists. It explores the recent media coverage of hip hop in the Arab world by highlighting Egyptian artists in the Arab media. I suggest that although hip hop culture in Egypt operates mainly underground through the production of rap music, the mainstream media has helped to validate the artists and

localize hip hop culture. In Chapter 4, I analyze the lyrics of the four groups mentioned above (*MTM*, *Arabian Knightz*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*) to assess the process of localization through the use of local themes and the incorporation of resistance imagery familiar to U.S. hip hop practices. I also examine code-switching, and the use of AAVE and Egyptian Arabic in the same song, as a poetic device. I will conclude by arguing that participation in hip hop culture in Egypt creates a hybrid identity, comprised of local allegiances, as well as association with global hip hop culture, which is facilitated by language use.

1.2 Theorizing the appropriation of rap music and hip hop culture

1.2.1 Globalization, “already local”, and mondialisation

There have been several theories to explain the spread of hip hop culture. Theories of globalization, advanced primarily by political economy scholars, have analyzed contemporary cultural flows in terms of people or ethnicity, ideology, technology and media (Appadurai 1996), all of which are vital to the spread of hip hop culture. Hip hop has been described as “a culture of the African-American minority” (Bozza, 2003:130) and an American commercial export (Perry 2004:19). This understanding of hip hop culture portrays it as an American creation that is being transplanted across cultures outside of the U.S.

Alternatively, hip hop has been described as a vehicle through which artists may express local concepts. Actually, hip hop has always been used to express local representation, through fashions and language use, the naming of particular streets and neighborhoods in lyrics, and establishing crews or posses (Rose 1994: 34). Pennycook and Mitchell (2008) use the notion ‘already local’ to describe how Aboriginal artists in Australia draw from indigenous verbal expressions in their music. Still, another theory that may explain the uptake of hip hop culture across various global contexts takes on a *translocal* approach by making connections between various local communities throughout the world. *Mondialisation* is an alternative perspective to globalization in that it takes apart the East-West and North-South dichotomies while exploring the intersection of global and local. The use of the term *mondialisation*, a term of Latin origin derived from the word *monde*, as a translation for *globe*, describes “the generalized

interconnection of economies and societies” (Matterlart, 2005:3). It is a ‘Western’ alternative to the English term, *globalization*. It differs from globalization, in that it has been useful in exposing the power struggles that exist between such Western nations as the U.S. and France, and therefore calls to attention the *diversity* of Western perspectives (Darling-Wolf 2008). The term has also been used by Latin American scholars (as in *mundializacion*). More importantly, however, the term proposes the possibility of different social worlds that are created and coexist by transcultural influence (Matouk, 2005).

Darling-Wolf (2008) examines French rap music through the lens of *mondialisation*. She finds that French rap artists negotiate their identities as being ‘the French rappers’ with the creation of a social world in which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationship and separation from other social worlds, including mainstream French society, African American culture, and the legacy of colonialism. Theorizing the spread of hip hop practices in this way makes possible the existence of alternate worlds and hyphenated identities. According to Darling-Wolf, *mondialisation* allows for the notion of the global sphere conceptualized as a “collection of locally connected, socio-cultural arenas intersecting with nation-states and national cultures in multiple and fluid ways and engaged in relationships of differential power” (2008: 197). Examining the spread of hip hop culture through this lens provides a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural situations of the artists as well as how they relate to other artists in other parts of the world.

To help explain the spread and similarities of global hip hop, Omoniyi (2009: 133) suggests a universal pattern that may connect artists internationally. Bridging, for example, occurs internationally when artists make reference to one another in their lyrics: a Nigerian artist, may make reference to American artist *Snoop Dogg* in their lyrics in order to position themselves within the global hip hop community, suggests the author. Omoniyi also explores local language varieties in Nigeria that are used in rap lyrics to construct local identities. In other words, it is both the connection with the global sphere of hip hop as well as the construction of local identity that has promoted the global spread of the movement. Rap music and hip hop culture cannot be understood simply as American cultural imports that are being reproduced by youth around the world. Neither

are they solely the manifestations of an indigenous art form and local expressive traditions. Rather inquiry into global hip hop movements must begin with the examination of local-to-local relationships and the development of global racial identity politics. As previous research supports, hip hop culture is foremost a youth movement which attracts the participation of a younger generation (Cutler 1999; Mitchell 2001; Pennycook 2007; Rose 1994; Wermuth 2001). Therefore, an understanding of Egyptian youth culture is a starting point to discovering the local-to-local interactions between Egyptian and American hip hop artists.

1.2.2 Youth demographics in the Middle East and North Africa

One can better understand how hip hop takes root in a country such as Egypt by understanding the youth demographics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The term ‘youth’ refers to people between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age. During this period of life, an individual transitions from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. The pursuit of education, entrance into the job market and marriage are examples of events that mark the transition. According to the Population Reference Bureau, nearly one in five people living in the Middle East and North Africa region is between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2007). According to the Bureau’s report, the MENA region’s unemployment rate is the highest among other world regions (Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia), primarily because of very high youth unemployment rates. Youth unemployment rates vary considerably across MENA countries, ranging from 6% in the UAE (1995) to 43% in the West Bank & Gaza (2002) and 53% in Algeria (2001). Youth unemployment is also a problem in the Gulf region, reaching 37% in Saudi Arabia (2002) and 38 % in Bahrain (2001). In a majority of MENA countries, the proportion of youth among the unemployed population is over 50%.

In Egypt, the percentage of youth in the total population in 2005 was 21%, and this is projected to decrease only slightly by the year 2025 to 18%. The global economy profoundly affects the lives of young people in the region. The challenges faced by Egyptian youth, as other youth in the region, are foremost due to extended periods of

unemployment after graduation. One reason for the high unemployment rate is the mismatch between the education that youth received and demand in the job market.

One result of high youth unemployment is an increase in youth as media consumers, thereby looking to the media to find representations of their own lives (Stapleton 1998). Trends in global media make available broadcasts from the U.S. to Egypt. For example, satellite dishes on rooftops bring worldwide broadcasts into homes in rural and urban Egypt. With the abundant access and use of the Internet, youth not only gain access to a wider base of global information, but also have the ability to interact and chat with youth in other parts of the world. Although Egypt produces among the highest number of films and television programs throughout the Arab world, a survey indicated that the most-watched television channel among Egyptian youth is the satellite news channel *Al-Jazeera*, based in Qatar (Knight 2004). An increased awareness and interest in current events and political affairs is transmitted into youth popular culture and becomes realized in the making of rap music as a means of providing social commentary.

Due to the current economic situation, Arab youth are faced with obstacles in securing their futures in their home countries as well as abroad. Not only do youth lack preparation for the growing private sector job market in Egypt, but they also must deal with the trauma and effects of international conflicts and wars, as well as negative stereotypes often propagated by Western (U.S.) media. As a result, I argue, the youth of Egypt, as other Arab nations, are marginalized not only locally, but also globally. Ever since the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, citizens of Arab nations are suspect. As a result, their freedom of movement and choice of where to work and live have been seriously curtailed. This status of marginality is an example of the 'connective marginality' that Osumare (2007) proposes connects globally youth who contend with social inequalities. The similar marginalities of African Americans and Arabs have also been recognized in U.S. popular culture. Linguistic anthropologist Lanita Jacobs-Huey (2006) examines African American comedians' use of the concept as the Arab as the 'new nigger,' in that he or she occupies a position of marginality and discrimination that was once reserved for African Americans. Just as African Americans have fought against a history of disenfranchisement that has had the most profound effect

on youth, so too Arab youth are faced with obstacles to secure their futures in their home countries as well as abroad.

1.3 Legitimacy and Authenticity

One of the central aspects of hip hop culture is authenticity (Kahf 2007; Pennycook 2007). All rap artists are faced at one time or another with the criticism from other artists who question their authenticity: is the artist *really* who he or she claims to be? What neighborhood are they *really* from? What connections do they have with other members of the local hip hop movement? This inquiry is made not only by the artists themselves, but also by fans and scholars critiquing global hip hop.

McLeod's (1999) study examined authenticity as it functions to maintain the purity and identity of 'real' versus commercialized hip hop. Artists always have to prove themselves in a hip hop performance. At the heart of rap music has always been a concept of 'keeping it real' in terms of lyrics that portray real life situations, concepts or emotions to which the audience can relate. Kahf (2007) describes how Palestinian rappers in their lyrics construct their authenticity based on their depictions and criticisms of daily life for a Palestinian, and who a real 'victim' or 'terrorist' is. According to Kahf, the authenticity is indicated by how much the artist self-identifies as a victim, as well as how much he or she criticizes the effects of the occupation on Palestinian daily life. Arguably, the rapper's lyrics are what will most identify him or her as authentic members of the global hip hop movement. Authenticity may be demonstrated both in terms of language form and thematic content of lyrics. In the following subsections, I will address the verbal scheme of *signifying* as a convention that authenticates rap artists. I will also explore ethnicity and race as a possible theme that artists may exploit in their lyrics to validate their participation in hip hop practices.

1.3.1 Verbal trumps

Language variation and creative language use are crucial in hip hop culture. Proper use of local language forms and local themes not only authenticate the artist, but may also give them a 'one up', as it were, that trumps their verbal opponents, or other artists competing with them in the market. In contemporary terms, this is known as 'dissing,'

(Alim 2004), but in the context of African American verbal traditions it is known as *signifying*. According to Mitchell-Kernan (1972), *signifying* is a folk notion for constructing meaning based on inference drawn from the context and shared knowledge or experience. The rap lyrics of U.S. artists frequently draw on the practice of *signifying* to insult other artists or other public figures. These insults may not always be easily understood by the lay audience, but often take a certain amount of background knowledge of the artist's history to understand. This cross-textual referencing is another way of showing verbal skill. It is both the verbal ability to one-up the opponent, as well as the ability to identify with marginality that authenticates those participating in the hip hop community.

1.3.2 Exploiting, transforming and constructing race: Being and becoming Black

Since participation in hip hop culture often involves a sense of marginality, artists may exploit their status as racial or ethnic minorities, or draw on experiences that are similar to those of the African diaspora in America. Thus, despite the global involvement of youth in hip hop culture, participation in hip hop inextricably brings to the forefront a discussion on race as constructed in the U.S. context, which is then taken up in local forms in some way. Race continues to be an issue, and 'blackness' is the favored construct upon which hip hop artists draw. Whether they share African ancestry or shared experiences similar to those of Black Americans, (Bennett 1999; Perry 2008), those who participate in hip hop culture make claims to 'blackness' as an extension of marginality.

Hip hop as a site of racial mobilization and self-formation outside the U.S. has been examined in African diasporic contexts, as Afro-Brazilian, Cuban and South African youth have engaged in transnational strategies of 'black self-fashioning' (Perry 2008: 635). Perry argues that even though hip hop has become a widely spread cultural movement, it retains the ability to signify 'blackness' by articulating a black, mainly masculine, urban discourse of marginality. In the U.S., some non-black youth have tried to prove their authenticity to hip hop culture by becoming involved with activities believed to be associated with hip hop, such as gang activity, violence, crime (Cutler 1999) or claiming an experience or connection with poverty (Rebensdorf 1996). These

youth identify with their own stereotyped conceptions of gangs and urban street culture (Morgan 1994). The performance of the hip hop identity by means of a perceived 'blackness' testifies to the complexities of U.S. racial politics. It may be argued that hip hop supersedes conventional notions of race, but there still remain remnants of racialized speech in the language of global artists. The 'N-word' is the most controversial of such terms. There has been much debate both academically and socially surrounding the use of *nigger*, or alternatively *nigga*, in rap lyrics in the U.S. (see Smitherman 1997 for different connotations of these terms). This term has been taken up by artists around the world to signify identification with blackness and marginality (Wermuth 2001: 159, *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* 2007).

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the spread of hip hop culture in Egypt as being grounded in local-to-local connections between American and Egyptian artists. By exploring the dynamics of youth culture and authenticity in hip hop culture, I have sought to evaluate how Egyptian artists may in fact identify with African American artists. Egyptian youth are negatively affected by economic instability caused by lack of employment opportunities in their country. Furthermore, political conflicts in the region which have attracted a great deal of international involvement have stigmatized Arab youth. I have argued that the youth of Egypt, as other Arab nations, are marginalized both locally and globally. It is this 'connective marginality' (Osumare 2007) that connects youth globally who contend with social inequalities. This marginality is crucial to establishing authenticity in hip hop and may serve as a point of entry for the Egyptian artists. I have suggested that 'collective marginality' may be displayed in terms of identification with 'blackness.' I acknowledge that hip hop has been extensively racialized in the U.S., being primarily identified as an African American invention and domain of practice. In doing so, I am by no means overlooking the success of white artists such as *Vanilla Ice* and *Eminem*, who may have drawn on their own personal backgrounds of economic marginality to authenticate their participation in hip hop practices (Omoniyi 2009). Still, I maintain that global hip hop artists may construct 'blackness' to authenticate their lyrics through a sense of collective marginality.

I have also sought to explore authenticity in hip hop in terms of the use of the verbal style of *signifying*. In a sense, hip hop functions as a verbal instrument of defense against mainstream society. Artists' battles are fought through their lyrics, which may contain an 'insider's' message. So, although the lyrics are spread within the public domain, their subversive message that is being communicated – the *diss*, so to speak – may not be realized by the general audience. In demonstrating authenticity, global artists may uptake the status of marginality in terms of 'blackness' or in terms of other local variables, such as religion or nationality, that may cause their marginality within the larger society. They may also make use of the pragmatic strategy of *signifying* in their lyrics, to resist a verbal opponent or other threatening force.

CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE USE IN EGYPT

The variety of Arabic which this thesis focuses on is the Arabic vernacular of youth in Egypt, which, to my knowledge, has not previously been researched. The analysis of language use in the rap lyrics of mainstream and underground artists will examine the interactions between vernacular Egyptian Arabic and a vernacular English that the musicians identify as part of hip hop culture (AAVE). Since language is the means by which the artists construct their hip hop identity, it is necessary to have an understanding of language use within society. In this chapter, I will explore the sociolinguistic landscape of Egypt by examining the use of Arabic varieties and English as well as the language attitudes attributed to these codes.

Although the official language of the country is Arabic, the reality of language use is much more complex than that. Throughout history, scholars have attempted to understand and evaluate the differences between *al-fuchsia*³, and the Colloquial, which is specific to each country and region, and used on a daily basis for all interpersonal, oral communication. These varieties are not only means of communication, but have also symbolized different social and political purposes in Egypt (Suleiman 2006). For example, Pan-Arabism, which called for the uniting of Arab countries against foreign influence, exalted the use of *al-fuchsia*, while those with Egyptian nationalistic sentiments supported the use of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic.

To further complicate language use in Egypt, foreign languages, such as English, French and German, have been ascribed a greater amount of importance due to certain foreign policy decisions that have affected the Egyptian economy and society. In this chapter, I will discuss the sociolinguistic situation in Egypt, focusing on the Egyptian vernacular, and how political and economic developments affected the domains for English use. I will also discuss how language ideologies and attitudes may influence language choice in the domains of youth speech and the language practices of those speakers involved in the hip hop movement in Egypt. Still, the tensions between Pan-

³ I acknowledge the conventional classifications of Classical Arabic, a liturgical language used in the readings of religious texts, and Modern Standard Arabic, which is derived from Classical Arabic and used today as a literary language and in government and civil proceedings and mainstream media (Versteegh 1997: 183). However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will be referring to *al-fusHa* ('the pure') in general as it is compared to Colloquial Arabic (*'amiya*) since these are the terms that are translatable from Arabic.

Arabism and local nationalism with regard to language issues have only barely been examined (Gershoni and Jankowski 1996).

2.1 Arabic language varieties and stylistic variation

Ferguson (1959) establishes a model of ‘diglossia’ for describing variation between a high (H) form of language which carries prestige within a society, and a low (L) form which has low prestige. *Al-fusHa*, which is understood throughout the Arabic speaking countries, is the H form, while the local colloquial varieties are the L forms. The concept of diglossia is not a modern one. Arabs who populated North Africa and countries in the Middle East brought with them two varieties of Arabic: *al-fusHa*, which was the language of Islamic liturgy and religious practices, and a spoken, colloquial Arabic (Benmamoun 2001). However, scholars argue for the existence of more intermediary varieties (El-Hassan 1978; Mitchell 197, 1986; Meiseles 1980; Hary 1996), and have actually defended up to five different levels (Badawi 1973, Blanc 1960), including “educated spoken Arabic,” which is a mix of the standard and colloquial varieties.

2.1.1 Non-classical Arabic varieties

According to Mitchell (1986), Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) is created as a result of the interplay between written Arabic and vernacular Arabic. The label Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is commonly applied to the written language of contemporary literature, journalism, television and radio news broadcasts, scientific and technological writing, administration and diplomacy. However, the lexicogrammatical regularities of ESA are not those of MSA. For instance, unlike MSA, no gender distinctions are made in ESA in the 2nd and 3rd persons plural and a non-MSA type of gender distinction is made in the 2nd person singular. Because of this lack of consistency, scholars have suggested a ‘multiglossic continuum’ in Arabic that is context-specific (Hary 1996).

Haeri (1997) strongly rejects the notion of the ‘intermediate’ variety known as Educated Spoken Arabic. She argues that intermediate varieties are not separate entities, but stylistic resources that Egyptian speakers exploit along the Arabic stylistic continuum. She emphasizes that the speech of educated Egyptians is "one of the styles in

which Egyptian Arabic under certain conditions is spoken" (1997: 14). Haeri's research draws on the frameworks of Ferguson's (1959) model of diglossia, Labov's variationist theory (1971, 1972), and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic market, which will be discussed in greater detail below. She introduces the concept of the 'standard variety', and argues that the repertoire of the Cairene speech community consists of two standard varieties: *al-fusHa*⁴, and a colloquial variety of Cairo. *Al-fusHa* derives its dominance and prestige from its direct link to Islamic culture and civilization.

The non-classical standard, or urban Cairene, on the other hand, draws its dominance and prestige from its association with the social dialect of urban, upper class social groups. Besides syntactic and lexical differences, Cairene Arabic employs the phonological variable of palatalization, which is one of the variables Haeri examines. Haeri explores speakers' attitudes and ideologies towards *al-fusHa* versus Cairene Arabic. The attitudes towards *al-fusHa* are ambivalent. On the one hand, speakers regard the language as correct, beautiful and powerful, while at the same time they also believe that it is rigid and lacks humor. Furthermore, speakers expressed their fear of using the *al-fusHa* because of its prescriptive grammatical rules, while having overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward their mother tongue, Cairene Arabic.

Like other sociolinguists working on Arabic, Haeri warns against directly associating the concept of the 'standard language' with the 'dominant group,' and argues that the education system in Egypt has a more direct influence on speakers' usage of *al-fusHa*. In her study, speakers from higher socio-economic backgrounds more often than not had attended private, foreign language schools where English, German or French was the medium of instruction and *al-fusHa* was taught as a subject. Haeri mentions that even though these speakers may have been accustomed to weekly Arabic tutorials outside of class, their main focus was the acquisition of the foreign language, rather than the national language. Children who attend institutions of public education also take *al-fusHa* as a separate class, while the medium of instruction for their classes is usually Egyptian Arabic. Whereas students in foreign language schools will be eligible to compete for positions at private national and international firms, the public school

⁴ Although some scholars prefer to use the term 'Modern Standard Arabic' for the version of Arabic derived from Classical Arabic that is spoken today, Haeri uses the term 'Classical Arabic' instead, as this is how her speakers referred to the language (1997: 7). I will use the term *al-FusHa* to discuss her research.

students are being prepared for public sector jobs, such as school teachers, government clerks and aides, police or military officers.

Instead, Haeri argues that one must take a critical look at "the role and place of *al-fusHa* within the hierarchy of linguistic varieties of Egypt"(1997: 159-160) in order to reach an understanding of the stylistic variation and language use. To this end, she employs Bourdieu's (1991) notion of the linguistic market, which stresses the importance of symbolic capital for access to the labor market. In other words, knowledge of a certain language variety may give a person enhanced access to gaining employment, securing a loan or purchasing property, among other things. According to the conventional understanding of the linguistic market, especially those in Western societies, knowledge of the standard is like a valuable piece of currency. In turn, this has led to linking greater use of the standard or official variety of a language to dominant groups who belong to the upper classes. However, in contexts such as Cairo, this is not the case. Haeri argues that speakers' bi- or multi-lingualism in a Western language, rather than their use of *al-fusHa*, secures better access to the labor market, upward mobility and belonging to the upper class. She observes that the linguistic market of Cairo requires multiple 'currencies' and that the 'currency' of *al-fusHa* is by no means the only currency, nor is it the most prominent one.

Traditionally, foreign languages, such as English, French and German, have been ascribed a greater amount of importance due to certain foreign policy decisions that have affected the Egyptian economy and society. Certain political and economic developments have affected the domains for English use. But what is the linguistic market for English in Egypt today? How do language ideologies and attitudes influence language choice in the domains of youth speech and the language practices of those speakers involved in the hip hop movement in Egypt?

2.2 Socio-political history of English use in Egypt

Language instruction of French, and then English, began in the 1850s in Egypt as missionary schools began to proliferate in the country. Following British occupation in 1882, the position of English in Egypt began to change. Employment in the government sector was granted only to those who had acquired the English language (Schaub 2000).

According to Cochran (1986: 136), “Egyptian education under British occupation was aimed at producing obedient clerks.” The Arabic language was lowly regarded and an attempt was made to stifle it completely in education in the early twentieth century by teaching all secondary subjects in English, except for Arabic and mathematics. Standard Arabic remained, however, as the mode of instruction, and English became more secured as a foreign language taken throughout public schools. After the 1973 October War against Israel and the Camp David Accords, Egyptian university students became increasingly more interested in the U.S. Since 1974, the US Agency for International Development has offered assistance to the training of public school English teachers in Egypt (Schaub 2000).

Standard English is available in print throughout Egypt. There are several English publications. The *Egyptian Gazette* is a daily newspaper that has been circulating for 120 years. *Al Ahram*, *The Middle East Times* are weekly publications, and *Cairo Times* is printed bi-weekly, all in English. *Egypt Today*, a current affairs magazine established in 1979, circulates 11,500 to 14,500 copies monthly in Egypt. Available to subscribers in over 40 countries, including those in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia, the magazine identifies its Egyptian audience as “A-class Egyptian nationals and foreign residents in Egypt with an interest in Egyptian and regional current affairs” (www.egypttoday.com April 20, 2009), thus making the association between the English-language magazine and higher social class explicit.

Schaub (2000) examines the forms and functions of English language usage in Egypt. He concludes that English in Egypt is in what Kachru (1992) has called the “Expanding Circle,” which means that English is becoming recognized as a universal second language. However, according to Schaub, English continues to have significant use in popular culture in Egypt, as seen in advertising, television, clothing and music. This causes him to conclude that English has extended into the “Outer Circle,” meaning that English sometimes serves as a first language for communication between natives of the country, within the country.

The main domain of English use in Egypt is for international industries and businesses, as well as tourism and international diplomacy. Many new resorts that have been established within the last fifteen years in Sinai and the Red Sea offer job

opportunities to bilingual youth and businesspeople. It is a necessity for these youth to be competent in at least English, and sometimes German, Russian or French. Although usually entirely staffed by Egyptians, most of the tourism in the Red Sea is organized and run by foreign hotel chains and tour operators (Shaalán 2005). Because of the development and employment opportunities, Egyptian families reside in these areas that are populated by tourists, or may travel to and from Cairo to visit their families.

The many nations represented in Cairo by official embassies or consulates, as well as the many multi-national banks and companies with branch offices in Cairo make English an important *lingua franca* for expatriates. Furthermore, due to President Sadat's Open Door Policy, known as *Infitah* ('the opening'), import and export business has expanded, thus, making English not only a spoken *lingua franca*, but also the language of correspondence and documentation.

The Open Door Policy was a program of dramatic economic change that included decentralization and diversification of the economy as well as efforts to attract trade and foreign investment. However, Sadat's efforts to liberalize the economy came at significant cost, including high inflation and an uneven distribution of wealth, which deepened inequality and led to discontent that would later contribute to the food riots of January 1977 (Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2009). According to journalists writing during this time, the 'open door' economic policy, which intended to attract Western capital, served mainly to flood the country with luxury consumer goods and create a new class of millionaire middlemen and hustlers (Johnson and Wurmstedt 1982). While this specific policy was unique to Egypt, the outcomes of the increased foreign involvement are not uncommon throughout the colonized territories of Africa and throughout the world.

The Policy, funded mainly by the U.S, Germany, France and Japan, ushered in a new era in which Egypt's colonial history repeated itself. During the 1970s and early 1980s, rich foreigners gained much power and control in the country. For an understanding of how the Open Door Policy affected the society and population, Cochran (2008) explains the relationship between Egypt's educational system and its political processes. According to Cochran, the Open Door Policy not only revived the foreign occupier-Egyptian poor dichotomy, it also created a class of wealthy Egyptians. While

poor Egyptians sought comfort in religious fundamentalism and communism, wealthy Egyptians often maintained lifestyles that clashed with their religious and cultural traditions (Cochran 2008: 78). Politically, the populist movement was divided between the illegal Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. The education system reflected the societal and cultural divisions and expanding mixed economy.

2.2.1 English in education

Today in Egypt there are two education systems: the public government-run schools and private, foreign schools. The public education systems are geared towards preparing students to serve in the public sector, even though this is not where the majority of the jobs are found. Government schools have had a tradition of being overcrowded, lacking adequate facilities and equipment. In the past, students who graduated from government schools were guaranteed employment in a low-paying government position wherever the government needed them. In contrast, students whose families could afford to send them to foreign language schools had greater prospects for economic mobility. Upon graduation, a student who had gained competency in English, French or German had access to high-paying jobs in the private sector. English language competency was clearly a privilege and a means of gaining a higher economic and social status.

Post-secondary education in English is also available at private universities, such as the American University in Cairo, or through study abroad in the U.S. or U.K. These options are generally available only to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. However, even English-medium instruction may also be found in certain departments of Egyptian public universities, such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, engineering, the natural sciences, and computer sciences. Other disciplines, such as commerce and law also have prestigious English-medium sections which are difficult to enter (Warschauer, El Said and Zohry 2004). It is generally the case that graduates from these programs will enter fields such as international business or computer science where English will be used as a daily medium of communication, whereas professionals in other specialized fields, such as medicine will use English either in their frequent contact with foreigners or for professional activities such as conferences and publications only.

2.2.2 English in popular culture

English use in Egypt continues to distinguish speakers from one another and to identify them as being either upper class and educated in private schools, or foreign. The communities of Zamalek and Ma'adi are well-known for being dominated by foreigners. There, a non-Arabic speaker can carry out his or her daily routine with limited knowledge of Arabic to the point that foreigners who come to Egypt in order to study Arabic often opt not to live in one of these popular areas, which cater greatly to the expatriate community.

While access to English education is not equally available to all Egyptians, the media is another venue through which speakers may gain access to English.

English is also used in popular television programming in Egypt, as it is a requirement for television announcers and reporters to be able to speak a second language, which is more frequently English and less frequently French. Any English use in popular programming will reach the majority of Egyptians, as a study in 2004 indicated that 95% of all households in Egypt had a television, a percentage greater than any other country in the Middle East or North Africa (World Bank http://devdata.worldbank.org/ict/egy_ict.pdf 2006). According to the BBC, (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/737642.stm July 29, 2009), Egypt's status as the 'Hollywood of the East' causes it to be a central hub of information within the region. The Egyptian press is among the most influential and widely-read within the region, and the television and film industry provide much of the Arab world with its programming. Programs such as talk shows and reality shows are also broadcast, as well as popular American films. Such programs introduce Egyptian youth to American English as a preferred variety.

Youth may also be exposed to English on the Internet. A recent study found that among young professionals in Egypt, Arabic orthography is becoming less popular. Warschauer et al. (2004) examined a group of 43 Egyptian young professional Internet users for reasons why the group uses English and Arabic in their online communication. Their study found that, concerning orthography, Arabic script was used the least by the group. A new diglossia of English and a Romanized, predominately colloquial, form of Arabic has arisen due to the domain of online communication. Romanized, or Latin,

script is often used on websites of rap groups, especially for titles of songs that are in Arabic, rather than the Arabic script. For example, the group *Y-Crew* on their Myspace page, have used Romanized script for all of their song titles, even for those songs which are predominately or entirely in Arabic. Their songs ‘*7elowa ya Balady*’ (حلوة يا بليدي, ‘my country in beautiful’) and ‘*3ayza Ansak*’ (عايزة أنساك, ‘I want to forget you’) use the conventions of *Arablizi*. *Arablizi* is the ‘Arabic chat alphabet’ used for online and SMS communication and is an encoding of Arabic to Latin script (Palfreyman and Khalil 2003). Sounds that cannot conveniently be transliterated into Latin script are given other notations, such as numerals. For instance, the letter ح (/ħ/, voiceless pharyngeal fricative) is notated with ‘7’ in Arabic chat language, while ع (/ʕ/voiced pharyngeal fricative/approximate) is notated with ‘3’. The artists’ use of this notation for their song titles makes them appealing to a particular youth audience who speak Arabic and have a certain competency of the Latin alphabet, but still choose to communicate online with the Arabic chat script. Even though most keyboards may be used to type in Arabic script, it may be that youth are using *Arablizi* because they are interacting on websites that require Latin script, such as *Myspace*, or even signing into an email account with a Latin-based login and password. Rather than switching between scripts, they continue to function in the Latin script.

According to Shaub (2000), the preferred variety of English among Egyptian learners is American English, rather than British English, in spite of the fact that historically British-produced textbooks were most commonly-used in public schools (Bending 1976). It could be that the new generation of learners prefers a variety of English that is not directly attached to the colonial past. However, this issue is further complicated with the U.S.’s recent involvement in the Arab world. The so-called ‘War on Terror’ initiated by President Bush in 2002 indirectly poses a threat to all Muslim countries. It could be argued that the U.S. government’s involvement in the region may lessen the preference for American English, reviving interest in British English instead. Still, it may be that American English, as a younger variety, is received as being *en vogue* and trendy. Due to proximity, it could be presumed that more speakers of British English visit Egypt on average each year than do speakers of American English. It could be

speculated that which variety of English is more strongly associated with tourists is another important parameter determining Egyptians attitudes towards these two varieties.

2.3 Language ideologies and attitudes

Agha (2007) uses the concept of language ideology to explain how a sound becomes attached to the image of a person. For this study, I will use language ideology to refer to the ideas and practices associated with language use that may be positive or negative. In particular, the language ideology surrounding the use of Arabic, specifically Egyptian Arabic, in Egypt, is as an authoritative means to communicate ‘in-group’ identity, whereas the language ideology associated with English is as an elite code, used for economic gain. In Egypt, English has traditionally been viewed as an accommodating language for tourists and foreign business. English has had a high value in the linguistic market, since much of the country’s revenue comes from the tourism industry, and has been traditionally viewed as a class marker and status symbol.

2.3.1 Arabic varieties

While language ideology is centered in a broader context, language attitudes have to do with the *individual’s* feelings about her or his language and the language of others (Crystal 1992). Studies of language attitudes in Egypt have shown that speakers favor certain language varieties based on context. There have been at least two studies that have aimed to investigate language attitudes in Cairo. Both of these studies used the matched-guise test. El-Dash and Tucker (1975) tested five language varieties that were in use in Cairo: *al-fusHa*, Colloquial Arabic, American English, British English, and Egyptian English (defined as the “form of English spoken by well educated Egyptians”). For the study, the researchers recorded spontaneous speech stimuli for each of the above varieties. They then played these recordings to four groups of listeners from four different educational backgrounds and age groups: grade school children, high school students, national university students, and students of the American University in Cairo. The listeners served as judges and were told to rate the speakers based on four personality traits: intelligence, likeability, religiousness, and leadership. In general, the speakers who spoke in *al-fusHa* were rated highest in all four of these traits. When asked which variety

would be most 'suitable' for various contexts, Colloquial Arabic was judged to be "more appropriate for use at home than any other language variety", while *al-fusHa* "was deemed significantly *less* suitable than any other variety" in this context (Ibid: 48). This study shows that the different varieties are recognized as being appropriate in specific contexts.

Haeri (1997), however, does take issue with the fact that the speakers of *al-fusHa* were judged as 'most likeable' by the high school participants. As she points out, the context in which high school students would have most exposure to the language would be at school, most likely in a class which teaches the grammar of *al-fusHa*. Therefore, deeming the speaker of this language as 'most likeable' is a reflection of the *al-fusHa* teacher at school. In Haeri's research, this was not the case, as most often students felt that their Arabic teachers were 'backwards,' old-fashioned and too out-dated. She therefore questions the 'likeability' of speakers of *al-fusHa* by high school students. Despite the dislike for grammar that high school students may have, *al-fusHa*, when spoken, demands respect and admiration. In this regard, I would suggest that 'most likeable' has more to do with the legacy of the language rather than with the students' exposure to it.

Herbolich (1979) investigates the attitudes toward various Arabic vernaculars. He recorded native Egyptian Arabic speakers, as well as Syrian, Libyan and Saudi Arabian Arabic speakers. All the speakers were university students in Cairo. The non-Egyptian speakers were recorded speaking their own vernacular in two different recordings and Egyptian Arabic in another recording. Eighty Egyptians – professionals, university students and high school students – listened to the recordings and served as judges. They rated the speakers along the characteristics of being 'truthful,' 'intelligent,' 'faithful,' 'principled,' 'respectable,' having a 'good reputation' and 'cooperative' (Ibid: 309). The judges rated the speakers of Egyptian Arabic highest among each of these characteristics. Even though these studies are 30 years old, they still represent language attitudes in Egypt. While *al-fusHa* may be highly regarded for its eloquence, Egyptians feel most comfortable expressing intimate feelings in Egyptian Arabic, which is a code of solidarity in the country.

2.3.2 *Standard English*

There has been little or no research surrounding language attitudes of English use in Egypt that I was able to find. Based on my own personal experiences living in Egypt, language ideology surrounding English in Egypt is one of privilege. If one speaks English, then they must have some type of power or influence, and are therefore ‘above’ the rest of society, including the law. I observed this during my first trip to Egypt as a study abroad student at the American University in Cairo (AUC) in 2005-06. During part of that year, my roommate was Mona, an Egyptian American young woman who had recently returned to Egypt for a visit. Due to some unexpected visa circumstances, she found herself residing in the country indefinitely. Mona was constantly challenged by what she felt were the impositions of Egyptian society on her personal life. She often met these challenges by re-enforcing her “foreigner,” American identity. The hotel in which we lived had been converted by the University into a women’s dorm. Additional to the security guards on duty 24 hours a day, residents were requested to sign out whenever leaving the dorm and to sign in upon returning. Mona did not agree with such a policy, as she saw it as an infringement on her personal freedom. Whenever she would have a confrontation with the Egyptian hotel staff, she would speak in English, which was her mother tongue and therefore stronger language. She once told me that she did this so that the staff would not be able to manipulate her by using Arabic, which she was less comfortable using. Her tactic was at least in part based on the ideology that use of the English language would demand greater respect. Rather than alienating her from the person she was speaking with, she felt that her use of English gave her the upper hand. It could be that her language use was all a part of her identity struggle and her resistance to the difficult position she was in; she was more or less stuck in what was her parents’ homeland, but still very much a foreign country to her.

Another encounter I had observing the attitudes to English *vis a vis* Arabic in Egypt concerns the assumption that all Egyptians speak Egyptian Arabic fluently and that any use of English among Egyptians is solely for the purpose of creating a false sense of superiority. There was a small copy shop located near the downtown campus of AUC where students would order copies of class notes and handouts. The staff at the copy shop were all young, and of similar ages to the student patrons. One day, the shop owner,

a young man in his late 20s, expressed to me his dislike of the Egyptian students' use of foreign languages when communicating with one another. Rather distraught, he explained, "They come in here speaking English or German to each other even though they both speak Arabic. So why not speak Arabic? It is because they do not want to be Egyptian." His observation of Egyptians speaking English among themselves is representative of English functioning in the 'Outer Circle' (Shaub 2000).

In these two examples, it appears that English is used as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991). English is the language that opens doors, providing one with the greatest opportunities, while Egyptian Arabic builds solidarity and a sense of trust among speakers. The difference between the two situations is that Mona, a second-generation Egyptian, was, at that time, more competent in English than in Arabic, although she could have adequately communicated in Arabic (and often did at grocery stores, in taxi cabs and other day to day situations). The students entering the copy shop, however, where presumably Egyptian and therefore competent in Egyptian Arabic as their mother tongue; it is this assumption that lies at the heart of the copy shop owner's irritation. However, this assumption may be incorrect. Competence and fluency in Arabic still may have been an issue for these Egyptian students.

During my time in Egypt, I became acquainted with a number of young Egyptians, several of whom had parents of more than one nationality and who had attended international schools. These (Egyptian-Iranian, Egyptian-Sudanese, Egyptian-German) youth told me that they felt more comfortable (or just as competent) in conversing in English. In each of these cases, the mothers of these youth were non-Egyptian, and had all lived in Egypt for over twenty years and had acquired Egyptian Arabic. It is very probable that the mothers also spoke their first languages in the home with the children, while the children were educated in English. The children could have acquired English, which would have been reinforced in school and with playmates, while Egyptian Arabic was acquired by their socialization within the rest of society. Perhaps these youth felt self-conscious about their competency in Egyptian Arabic since they had been socialized in Egypt among English speakers. Or perhaps they were trying to express solidarity with me, an American studying in Egypt. It cannot be assumed that in all cases English is used by Egyptians in Egypt to put on a false identity of privilege,

since it may be the case that language competency is also an issue. Still, their English usage signified a position of privilege, whether or not this is what was intended.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an overview of language use in Egypt with regards to Arabic varieties and Standard English. Although a substantial amount of studies have addressed Arabic language varieties, an exploration of youth language in Egypt would be useful for discussing such youth-dominated contexts as the local hip hop culture. To my knowledge, such research does not exist. Therefore, I have focused on *al-FusHa* and Egyptian Arabic and have addressed youth language indirectly by referring to new language forms that are becoming conventionalized through internet chat and text messaging. I have explored the language attitudes which suggest that while knowledge of *al-FusHa* is highly admired, its use is not appropriate for the most intimate settings, such as in the home. The studies of Tucker and Dash (1975) and Herbolich (1979) show that speakers recognize the difference between varieties, and also perceive usage of *al-FusHa* and of Egyptian Arabic to be context specific. Egyptian Arabic, the language of the people, signals not only solidarity, but also a sense of Egyptian nationalism.

Traditionally, English language use in Egypt has been used to align oneself with the dominance of the Western world. Economically speaking, fluency in English secures a greater opportunity for financial advancement in the areas of international businesses, tourism and all other large industries. Therefore, it would not be expected that English would be used as a means for speaking against the dominance and superiority of the English-speaking world. But, I wish to argue, this is just the case for the Egyptian musicians who use English as an international language in the context of hip hop.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXTUALIZING HIP HOP IN EGYPT

In order to examine how young musicians and artists have localized rap music and hip hop culture into Egyptian contexts, and have made claims to authenticity, an understanding of local musical traditions and the developments of hip hop culture throughout the Arab world is necessary. This chapter will introduce ‘local’ musicality, by looking at the career of Shaaban Abdel-Rahim and *sha’bi* music in Egypt, and evaluating his connection to hip hop culture. As a background to discussing hip hop in Egypt, I will look at the place hip hop has recently attained in Arab mainstream media and independent international films and speculate how these productions have helped disseminate awareness about the growing hip hop scenes in the Arab world. I will briefly mention the productions which have highlighted groups from Israel (*Subliminal*), Palestine (*DAM*), and Morocco (*I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*), before introducing the artists who are the subjects for this project: *MTM*, *Arabian Knightz*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*. I begin chronologically, introducing the ‘local’ music of Shaaban Abdel-Rahim.

3.1 Sha’bi music and the ‘local’ traditions

Sha’bi music originated in the early 1970s and part of a tradition of verbal art, which provides commentary on local and national events. According to Spady et al., for many, the term *sha’bi* means ‘popular’ music. However the term is also associated with being ‘humble, ‘down-to-earth’, ‘working-class’, and being involved with ‘ghetto culture’ (2006: 19). The author compares *sha’bi* music in Egypt to hip hop in the U.S. It is constituted by local language, culture, style and the aesthetics of Cairo’s urban population. *Sha’bi* music is similar to *rai* music in Algeria, with repetitive rhythms and lyrics that focus on an aspect of society, whether it is romance, the population increase, or politics.

Shaaban Abdel-Rahim is one of the most popular *sha’bi* musicians in Egypt. He grew up in the village of *Mit Halfa* in Egypt in a family of laundry pressers. His low paying job and financial struggles motivated him to speak against the injustices occurring in the world. His strong lyrics, videos, and messages call for all Egyptians to unite. Paul Beldon of the *Asia Times* says of Abdel-Rehim, “One can't really imagine him

composing a love song or expressing unity of any sort. His music is a reflection of himself and his upbringing of deprivation: an illiterate ironworker, the son of another illiterate ironworker, raised in the small village of Mit Halfa in Egypt” (Beldon 2003). Abdel-Rahim, has said, however, that “Just because [he is] an ironer, it doesn’t mean that [he] can’t speak out about our troubled life” (Veash 2002).

According to Spady et al. (2006), Shabaan’s popularity comes from the fact that he speaks *lughat el-shaware*, “the language of the streets.” He is characteristic of a *fahlawi*, an Egyptian personality that possesses a clever wit and has the ability to make a play on words in order to achieve the ends that he wants. Even though many Egyptians may laugh at Shaaban and try to publically disregard his music (the Egyptian broadcasting company refuses to air his video clips), he has become increasingly popular, performing at weddings, as other popular musicians do in Egypt, and has starred in two films. While the most popular contemporary artists in Egypt today are pop stars such as Amr Diab, Tamer Hosni, and Shireen, who sing mainly love songs, with the occasional patriotic ballad, Shaaban emerged as a *sha’bi* artist, and as one of the first artists in Egypt whose lyrics critiqued social and economic problems around the world. The nature of *sha’bi* music, with the half-sung, half-spoken lyrics has been compared to an indigenous form of hip hop (Spady et al. 2006). Because of the nature of the music and topics of the songs, *sha’bi* music may be considered a precursor of Egyptian hip hop.

3.2 Pan-Arab Hip Hop in the media

According to London-based rapper Eslam Jawad, Arabic Hip Hop, in its ‘purest form,’ is hip hop in the Arabic language from the Arab world, “speaking about local issues that are specific to the Arab world” (Abbas 2007: 9). Jawad himself, the son of Syrian and Lebanese parents, does not seem to identify with a national rap scene, but as a diasporic artist he identifies himself as an Arab rapper, even though several songs on his Myspace page are completely in English (<http://www.myspace.com/eslamjawaad>, September 2, 2009). According to this definition, Arabic Hip Hop is like a Pan-Arab movement, and includes those who rap in Arabic but may live outside of the Arab world, such as the Arab diaspora. Including Arab diaspora artists in the genre of Arabic Hip Hop would mean that Arabic Hip Hop begins in France, as most of the original French hip hop artists

were of Arab descent. Likewise, *Iron Sheikh*, a Palestinian-American rapper who raps in English and *Cilvaringz*, a rapper of Moroccan descent who lives in the Netherlands and is affiliated with the U.S.-based group *Wu-Tang Clan*, would also be part of Arabic Hip Hop. Although it is obvious that these figures are important to the hip hop movements in various contexts, I will be focusing on the movement within the region, specifically artists from Egypt, and not on the diasporic artists.

Hip hop culture has spread throughout the Arab world to countries such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Kuwait (Carney 2005), despite the fact that it remains in the margins. According to Kahf (2007), Arabic Hip Hop as a genre authenticates itself in three dimensions: social-political, emotional-experiential, and rhetorical. The lyrics and music come from personal experiences. Even though the various sites of hip hop in the Arab world as well as the greater Middle East may share similar tendencies to ‘speak truth to power,’ each movement within the various countries and regions arises out of unique cultural and political conditions. In terms of commercial artists who have signed contracts with recording labels, it was not until the late 1990s, that the genre began to appear on the music scene. It has been within this short amount of time that hip hop culture has expanded its presence in other forms of media, such as television and film. As a result, rap music and hip hop culture is relatively new to North Africa and the Middle East and has been met with a significant amount of cultural resistance.

Basel Abbas, who examines Arabic Hip Hop, proposes that this resistance was a reaction to hip hop, which is perceived as a ‘Western’ genre, as well as a response to those who feel directly implicated and threatened by the criticism that hip hop has on their way of life (2007:11). Other than similar local music traditions, such as *sha’bi* music, which unapologetically critiques Egyptian society, rap music could be seen as the first radical vehicle for youth self-expression. The notion that rap music is an American product may also make it unattractive to Egyptians. The majority of Egyptians encounter Americans through media reports of violence and crime either in the U.S. or internationally, or through Hollywood films. If parents in the U.S. are concerned about their teens listening to abrasive rap lyrics, certainly adults in Egypt would also be likely to object. Still, hip hop culture and the production of rap music locally in Egypt have

attracted the attention of various media groups.

Various forms of media have been vital to the spread of hip hop culture in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Indeed, hip hop practices are dispersed throughout the region, but it has been such venues as the Internet, satellite cable programming and documentary films that have enabled artists to become connected with one another. Increased media exposure not only influences and inspires new participants in hip hop culture, but it also allows the extended, mainstream community to learn about and witness the new developments in the culture that are taking place locally. The following sections will introduce mainstream and independent media productions that have brought attention to hip hop culture in the Arab world. Without such programs as the following, the presence of hip hop in the local community would remain hidden. These forms of independent and mainstream media platforms allow even for underground artists to be recognized and given a chance for their ‘fifteen minutes of fame,’ so to speak. The media creates a platform and space whereby the artists are validated. In this section, I will briefly discuss two programs produced by *MTV Arabia* that have brought awareness to budding hip hop artists in the Arab world. I will also mention three independent documentary films that have reached international audiences.

3.2.1 *Hip HopNa* and independent films

The first ever hip hop reality show to air in the Middle East was launched in late 2007. There are several other reality talent contest TV shows, such as *Star Academy* and *Star wa Nus* (‘star and a half’), which are expositions of vocal and musical talent feature singers from Arab countries. *Hip HopNa* (‘our hip hop’) is a production of *MTV Arabia*, a newer free satellite channel from Viacom. The purpose of the series was to showcase the talent through auditions and performance competitions. The series was comprised of 12 episodes in which the hosts toured several Arab countries in search of local hip hop artists and to discover the music scenes in their cities. The hosts selected two artists from Beirut, Dubai, Jeddah and Cairo to travel to Beirut for the competition in February 2008. The winning artist, Omar Boflot, a 26-year old Egyptian rapper, recorded a track on the show’s album and had his music video produced by *MTV*.

The show was hosted by Fareed ‘Fredwreck’ Nassir, a Palestinian American producer from California, and Saudi Arabian hip hop artist *Don Legend*. Both artists have spent several years in the U.S. music industry producing and performing and are fluent in English and Arabic. The experiences that the hosts have had in the U.S. are easily recognizable in the show as they code-switch between English and Arabic throughout the series when introducing the artists. Even though they commend the artists for rapping in Arabic, English use, mainly by the hosts, is frequent and accompanied by Arabic subtitles for those viewers who may not be as familiar with English. Furthermore, the title and logo for the show exemplify the blending of cultures and languages. Written as *Hip Hop* ^{لنا} (na, third person plural possessive), it symbolizes the appropriation of hip hop culture by Arab youth, making claims to authenticity and possession (‘our hip hop’). The hosting duo have since started a series which began May, 2009, entitled بيت الهب هوب (bayt al-hip hop, ‘house of hip hop’), which is similar in purpose. In this title, the Arabic script is retained, despite the fact that it lacks a /p/ grapheme. The traditional /b/ (ب) is used instead. This departs from the convention of using three dots under the letter to indicate a /p/ sound in foreign words. The omission of the three dots and use of (ب) instead suggests that “hip hop” is no longer a foreign word, but has gone through a process of Arabization. Therefore, artists who participate in هب هوب are no less Arab, but they have changed and adapted the word, localizing it and making it their own. Other examples of localization of artists in the Middle East are also portrayed in films.

There have been several documentary films created in recent years that deal with hip hop culture in the Arab world. These films have profiled the artists and are subtitled in English, as they are intended for an international viewing audience. The documentary film *Channels of Rage*, directed by Anat Halachmi in 2003, follows the relationship of Israeli rapper, *Subliminal*, and Tamer Nafar, an Arab-Israeli who is from the Lyd, a ghetto outside of Tel Aviv. The film documents the artists’ relationship in the time preceding the second Intifada. After this time, Nafar went on to found the group *DAM*.

The hip hop scene has been developing in Israel and Palestine since the mid 1990s. Rappers in Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories use hip hop music to express their daily struggles having to do with the economic crisis, rising poverty, criminality, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The documentary film *Slingshot Hip*

Hop, produced by Palestinian/Syrian-American Jackie Salloum in 2008, explores the Palestinian hip hop scene. The film profiles seven different groups in Palestine from Lyd, Gaza and the West Bank. Through the making of the film, the artists in the various Palestinian territories were introduced to one another. Even though in some circumstances they were not allowed to travel to meet one another, they watched video clips of each other's performances and began communicating via telephone and online. According to producer Salloum, hip hop started in Palestine because the artists could identify with the ghetto lifestyle that was portrayed in music videos by *Tupac Shakur* (personal interview March, 2009). The documentary *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*, directed by Joshua Ansen and Jennifer Needleman in 2007, tells the story of Morocco's first Hip Hop Festival. The documentary follows the artists as they attempt to set up a hip hop festival in Meknes, Marrakesh and Casablanca.

These documentaries and television programs provide a context for hip hop in the Arab world. Egyptian artists, though not directly featured in the films, maintain connections with artists in the region. For example, in the *Desert Saga* mix-tape, there are tracks in which they have worked collaboratively with *DAM*. It is within this context that the Egyptian rappers emerge.

3.3 Hip hop profiles: Mainstream and underground artists in Egypt

In this section I will introduce the Egyptian groups that I have included in my study. The groups are *MTM*, *Arabian Knight*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*. I have chosen these groups because they represent both mainstream and underground rap artists in Egypt. *MTM* is the only group of rap artists in Egypt who have been signed to a major recording label, *Kelma Records*. Each of the three underground groups is gaining in popularity. *Arabian Knightz* have been performing in Egypt since 2005, and *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt* were both featured on *Hip HopNa*, which was aired throughout the Arab world.

3.3.1 MTM

One of the most popular hip hop groups in Egypt is *MTM*. Their name is an acronym for *Mezzika Tilakhbat Mukhak* (Music Messes up your Mind) and also is the initials of the group members. The artists are from Alexandria, but their music is popular in Cairo as

well. Their lyrics are in Egyptian Arabic, and concern social issues, especially those involving youth in Egypt. According to group member Takki: “It (rap) is really close to young people because it speaks their 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” (Reuters 2004). *MTM* have produced two CDs and were awarded the prize for Best Modern Arab Act at the Arab Music Awards in 2004. Their lyrics and music often ‘make fun’ of the various issues in Egypt. *MTM* uses Egyptian Arabic almost exclusively as their mode of reaching youth, but more recently other groups have been using English within the Egyptian hip hop scene African American Vernacular English (AAVE), has been referred to as the “default code” of hip hop (Androutsopoulos 2008, Ibrahim 2008) is a symbolic gesture that evokes identification with the global hip hop community.

3.3.2 *Arabian Knightz*

A newer group from Cairo, called *Arabian Knightz*, whose composition includes *E-Money*, *Getto Pharaoh*, *Sphinx* and *Saifullah*, uses both English and Egyptian Arabic in their lyrics, thereby globalizing hip-hop music even more by code-switching. Still very much an underground group, the *Arabian Knightz* released their first mix-tape in 2008, entitled *Desert Saga*. This album has 19 tracks, 15 of which have at least one verse in English, while the remaining 4 are in Arabic. With their use of English there is the potential for their audience to expand to non-Arabic speaking listeners. The use of Egyptian Arabic keeps them authentic to their Arab identity. From the names they have chosen for themselves, we see a mixing of hip hop and traditional Arab culture. *Getto Pharaoh* brings to mind the hard streets of America. In identifying with the ghetto, the artist identifies with a status of being marginalized, oppressed and criminalized. This notion transplants the ghetto into an international sphere by suggesting that certain nations or parts of the world are being ‘ghettoized’ by the rest of the world. *Saifullah* on the other hand, meaning ‘Sword of God,’ gives a religious aspect that authenticates the artist as having authority and ability to defend with his words. In making this claim to righteousness, he turns upside-down the Bush administration’s claim that certain Arab nations are part of the “axis of evil” by criminalizing the other.

3.3.3 Omar Boflot and Y-Crew

Winner of MTV Arabia's Season 1 *Hip HopNa* was Omar Aly Al-Missiry, known as *Omar Boflot AKA B.O.F.* Before going on *Hip HopNa*, Boflot self-recorded and produced his tracks, releasing them online since 2000. Born in Nigeria, to Egyptian and Philippino parents, Boflot moved often, living in Ghana in 1993, where he joined an underground group called *Patty Riddaz*, (Party Riders), who rapped in French. The band was unique to the Ghana community as it consisted of two Ghana rappers and one Egyptian rapper. *Patty Riddaz* performed on a weekly show called *Fun World* and were aired on Ghana TV. Boflot continued with the *Patty Riddaz* until he returned to Egypt in 1998. He eventually met Yassin Zahran, AKA *Alien-X*, a half Egyptian half Algerian rapper, who like Boflot rapped in French and English. They developed a close friendship and in 2001 they formed the group *Y-Crew* and began to rap in Arabic. According to the group's Myspace page, the letter *Y* in the group's name symbolizes the shape of the Nile River as it flows throughout Egypt into the Mediterranean Sea. In explaining his choice to rap in Arabic, Boflot recounted how he then "thought of rap as a career. People were interested in hearing rap in a language they understand. So this helped us move fast" (<http://www.myspace.com/eltofan> April 27, 2009). Boflot's lyrics address issues on behalf of the people of the Arab world. According to his Myspace page, currently, Boflot is building his underground studio and working on his TV show *Make it Happen*, as well as working on tracks with artists from the Middle East and international artists.

3.3.4 Asphalt

The group *Asfalt* was the winner in *MTV Arabia's Hip HopNa* episode in Egypt and one of the groups who advanced on to the final round. The four members of the group are from Cairo, and in an interview on *Hip HopNa* explained the choice of their group name as describing a material that is strong and a part of everyday life but not noticed. The group raps almost exclusively in Egyptian Arabic, although at least one member speaks English very fluently. The group's logo is represented in Arabic orthography (اسفلت , 'asfalt'). The group gained the support of Egyptian clothing label *Al-Fikrah Couture*, with whom they collaborated to create a limited edition T-shirt bearing their logo written in bold letters that was sold in Egypt in 2008. Although they have not posted many songs

3.4 Conclusion

Hip hop in Egypt is a relatively new phenomenon, existing in the margins. This marginal status may be in part due to the (negatively connoted) perception that hip hop is an American invention, and therefore an imposition on Egyptian society. This chapter has provided a context to explain how *sha'bi* music may serve as an example of an indigenous musical tradition that critiques society and uses Egyptian Arabic, and hence a bridge to hip hop. Both the musical style of repetition and lyrical themes that criticize the society and the government while also discussing every-day issues would be familiar to youth participating in hip hop culture.

Hip hop is being spread throughout the Arab world through mainstream and independent media. Mainstream programs such as *Hip HopNa* have increased the visibility of Egyptian artists, while independent films provide a broader perspective of hip hop culture in the region, which is crucial since the Egyptian artists often construct their identity as 'Arab rappers.' The rap groups that I have profiled represent the mainstream and underground hip hop scene. The mainstream scene is still very small and dominated by *MTM*, who have been gaining in popularity for the last five years after they were named Best Modern Arab Act at the Arab Music Awards in 2004. This regional recognition among musicians in the Arab entertainment industry shows that rap is finding its place in the Arab world. As the group raps almost exclusively in Egyptian Arabic, and their lyrics often contain a light humor, they are obviously the most popular rap group in Egypt. The remaining underground groups that I have profiled differ from *MTM* in terms of language use and also lyric themes, which may be more serious and socially-conscious. The *Arabian Knightz* exploit terms for their names which are traditionally thought to be associated with hip hop culture in the U.S., while mixing these ideas with local traditions, such as *Getto Pharaoh*, *E-Money*, *Sphinx* and *Saifallah*. The group's substantial use of English in the majority of their songs broadens their potential audience. The group *Y-Crew* also use English in their verses. Although the artists are based in

Cairo, the mixed-heritage and backgrounds of the two deejays in the group, *Omar Boflot* and *Alien X* have allowed them to be involved with other international hip hop groups. Still the artists do identify themselves as Arab rappers and they have been very much accepted into the local hip hop scene by winning *Hip HopNa's* first season's competition. The group *Asfalt*, who also advanced to the final round of the competition, has also continued to gain local support both in the media and commercial support through the marketing of the group's T-shirts. Each of the groups introduced above, have performed at such reputable venues as *El Sawy Culturewheel*, a cultural center located in Zamalek, an upscale business and residential district in Cairo. Groups have also performed outside of *Bibliotheca Alexandrina*, the new Library of Alexandria, as well as at various clubs and hotels throughout Egypt. While each of the groups is unique in regards to their positions, particular involvements and development of hip hop culture, they share similar language conventions within their lyrics that facilitate the construction of an Egyptian hip hop community. To various degrees, these four groups are beginning to penetrate Egyptian society and localize hip hop in Egypt.

CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE USE IN EGYPTIAN ARABIC RAP LYRICS

To analyze language use in Egyptian hip hop music, I examined 85 songs from four artists: *MTM*, *Y-Crew*, *Arabian Knightz*, and *Asfalt*. I chose these artists because they represent both the mainstream and underground hip hop movements in Egypt (see chapter 3). Of this corpus, 22 songs are from the two recorded albums by *MTM*, *Omy Mesafra* (2001) and *Telephony Biren* (2003). The remaining are independent releases, uploaded online by the artists between the years 2005-2009. I obtained transcriptions of *MTM's* lyrics from www.mtmclub.tk, a fan-based website which may not have official affiliation with the group. The remaining songs I downloaded or accessed online from www.soundclick.com, the online community for independent artists of all genres of music, as well as from www.egy-rap.blogspot.com, a blog devoted to Egyptian underground hip hop artists, and the artists' Myspace pages. Nine songs by the *Arabian Knightz* were first accessed from the group's Myspace page in 2006 as part of a pilot study I conducted on the Egyptian hip hop scene and language use. Of these nine songs, only one, *AKKKAAAAYYYYY*, appears on the group's mix-tape, *Desert Saga*, which was released independently in 2008. I have included the *Arabian Knightz's* earlier songs in the corpus as well as their newer ones in order to examine changes in the language use in their lyrics. While their earlier songs tended to be predominately in English with some degree of Arabic, their newer songs include collaborations with other artists, such as Egyptian rapper *MC.Amin* and Tamer of the Palestinian group *DAM*. As a result, the group's recent collaborations have established an extended network of other artists in the region, such as *DAM*, who rap almost exclusively in Arabic. A breakdown of the corpus is as follows:

Table 1: Corpus of songs analyzed

Groups	Albums	Number of Songs
MTM	<i>Omi Mesafra</i>	8
	<i>Telephony Biren</i>	14
		Total: 22
Arabian Knightz	<i>Desert Saga</i>	19
	Independent releases	8
		Total: 27
Y-Crew	Independent releases	29
Asfalt	Independent releases	7

I analyzed the lyrics to identify instances of code-switching from the matrix language, (Myers-Scotton 1993) either Egyptian Arabic or English, into the alternate language. Two native Egyptian Arabic speakers assisted me with the transcription of some of the Arabic lyrics.⁵ In the examples that follow, the Egyptian Arabic lyrics are transliterated in a line of text below the Arabic text. The translation is located to the left of the transliteration, and titles of songs appear in quotation marks.

To analyze the lyrics, I use the framework of Davies and Bentahila (2008) who examine the use of code-switching as an aesthetic device, which may be motivated by either the structure or the meaning of the lyric. Also, I have adopted the framework of Kahf (2007), which analyzes Arabic Hip Hop as a genre that authenticates itself based on three dimensions: social-political, emotional-experiential, and rhetorical. An important finding of this analysis will be that English in Egyptian rap lyrics functions as a language of resistance. By using English, the artists present a redefinition of the power structure. The analysis follows a top-down approach, as I first explore the scope of hip hop's localization in Egypt, and then move to an examination of switching patterns between languages.

⁵ I am grateful to Fatemah Hermes and Amr Sharaf for their assistance in translating lyrics.

4.1 Trajectories of localization

In this section, I will explore the localization of rap music and hip hop culture in Egypt by examining the themes and messages in the lyrics that the artists produce. According to Pennycook, localization occurs when the artists are “using a particular register that is local, generational, cultural and distinctive” (2007: 105). The language used by the Egyptian artists exemplifies Egyptian Arabic youth language. Hip hop culture is localized by the use of conventions that are known throughout global hip hop communities, as well as through the transmittal of local traditions and verbal expressions. Evidence of globalization is seen in the use of conventions, such as lexicon or speech acts, that are typical of global hip hop artists across the globe. Furthermore, the artists’ self-identification with ‘blackness’ positions them as being authentic participants of hip hop culture. In addition, hip hop is localized in Egypt based on local themes that are discussed in the lyrics that authenticate the artists’ Egyptian and Arab identity. The themes of patriotism and Pan-Arabism are themes through which the artists lay claim to an Arab identity and credibility, even when using English to communicate these concepts.

4.1.1 Hip hop language conventions localized

According to Mitchell, hip hop and rap are a “vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world” (2001: 1-2). The following examples of songs contain lyrics used by the artists that display both a localized variety of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) (see Alim 2004), as well as local youth language. As we have already seen with regard to the production of the series show *Hip HopNa* (section 3.3.1), the term itself, *hip hop*, has been assimilated in local language conventions, as in *Y-Crew’s* song *Hip HopNa*, by acquiring the Arabic first person plural possessive root –نا (-‘na’, *our*, English). The song makes reference to the hip hop competition administered by *MTV Arabia*, in which Omar Boflot of *Y-Crew* was the winner.

حبيب حوبنا

(1) ‘hip hopna’

Our Hip Hop

MTV, Y-Family’s on the screen

Turn up the volume, it's the aggressive machine

أفتح

'iftah'

Open

MTV Arabia

خالي بالك

'khali balak'

Watch out

From the words that I say to **ya**

Boflot is the winner in, in your area

The word 'ya' in this lyric could be characterized as a feature of AAVE. Another way of localizing concepts that are characteristic of hip hop music and culture is to directly translate them into Arabic. *Y-Crew* does this in their song '*Melook Eskinderia*', using the term *تحت الأرض* (taht al-ard, underground), to describe their music.

ملوك الأسكندرية

(2) 'melook eskinderia'

Kings of Alexandria

موجودين تحت الأرض بس أكيد حانطلع فوق

'Mawgudin **taht al-ard** bas akid hantla fo' *We are here **underground**, but for sure we will climb to the top*

Hip hop language practices are also localized by the groups' use of speech acts that rap artists commonly use. Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2006) identifies seven speech acts, which include *self-referential speech, listener-directed speech, boasting, dissing, place and time reference, identification, and representation*. For instance, identification speech is used in a song by the groups *Asfalt* and *Al-Zero*, alongside a lexical item which is exclusively used by youth in Egypt. Each says that they have been participating in the hip hop scene in Egypt for years, and that they are well-known.

يا عم اسفلت مين؟

'ya 'am asphalt min?'

Oh, man, who is Asphalt?

يا عم الزيرو مين؟

'ya 'am al zero min?'

Oh, man who is Zero?

معرفين معالمين

'ma'rfin ma'almin'

We are well-known

أحنا بدأنا من سنين

'ehna beda'na min senin'

We started years ago

أنتو مين أنتو مين

'intu min, intu min'

Who are you, who are you?

طب قولني أنتو اللي مين

'Teb 'uli intu ili min'

Tell me who are you?

فاكسلين فاكسنين

'faksenin, faksenin'

Failures, failures

أنتو اللي فاكسنين

'intu ili faksenin'

You are the failures

The use of the word فاكسنين (faksenin, 'failures') is derived from the word فاكس, meaning *failed* or *empty*. According to native speakers' testimonies, the word entered the lexicon of Egyptian youth as recently as 2007. This song exemplifies how the speech acts of

Another universal hip hop practice is the ‘spelling feature’, which occurs when artists spell either a proper name or other word. *MTM* use this feature in their songs. For example, each artist spells out their names, Mahmoud and Taky in the song ‘*Zay ma inta a’aiz.*’

زاي ما أنت عايز

(4) ‘zay ma inta a’aiz’

As you like

م - ح - م - و - د

‘meem, haa, meem, wa, daal’

ت - ا - ك - و - ي

‘tay, alif, kaf, wi, yay’

The use of AAVE features and conventions that are attributed to global hip hop culture, such as the ‘spelling feature’ and rap terminology translated into Arabic display how hip hop culture is becoming localized in Egypt. Also, rap music in Egypt reinforces local youth language usage, as with the coining of *faksenin* (‘failures’).

4.1.2 Patriotism

The ideals of patriotism are strong in Egypt and play a large role in the education and socialization of youth. From an early age, children are taught about the wealth of Egypt’s ancient history. In Egypt’s public schools, each morning young students line up side by side outside of the school, recite the national anthem and listen to the morning’s headline news broadcast over a loudspeaker. As in many other countries, males are required to serve in the army for two years, except in special circumstances. It is evident that patriotism and love for the country are instilled in young people from an early age. The young people who are members of hip hop groups in Egypt are no exception. This nationalism is often displayed in their lyrics, such as in *Y-Crew’s* song ‘*Tahha al*

Gumheria.’ The first line of the song resembles the anthem that is spoken each morning before school.

تحي الجمهورية
(5) ‘tahya al gumheria’ *Long Live the Republic*

تحي الجمهورية العربية المصرية
‘tahya al gumheria al-‘arabia al-masria’ *Long live the Arab Republic of Egypt*
اللي ناسها كواسين اللي ناسها مية مية
‘ili nas-ha kwaysin ili nas-ha mia mia *Whose people are good and perfect*

The second line exalts the Egyptian people, describing them with an adjective that is popular in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, *mia mia*, which originates from the word for 100. The expression has a positive connotation, as in ‘100% perfect.’

Other patriotic songs also exist that are predominately in English. *Getto Pharaoh* of the *Arabian Knightz* raps an anthem about Egypt, with the chorus, “Lemme tell you where I’m from: *Masr, masr* (Egypt), which is also another instance of self-referential speech. Another song by the *Arabian Knightz* also displays pride in the artists’ Egyptian origins. The song is not only patriotic, but also hints at the groups’ ideals of Pan-Arabism.

(6) C-A-I-R-O

From the M-I-D-D-L-E-E-A-S-T
Ain’t no Israel it’s فلسطين
‘Philistine’ *Palestine*

Straight outta
أم الدنيا
‘Om a-dunia’ *Mother of the world*
These niggas running things

In *C-A-I-R-O*, we begin to see the artists' multiple allegiances to the Middle East, and also to what has been typically understood as Black American culture. Although their lyrics do not directly address the problem of race, they reconcile 'Arab-ness' and 'blackness' in songs such as this one. Juxtaposing the location – أم الدنيا – (om a-dunia, Mother of the world, a conventional reference to Egypt) – with 'these niggas,' who are presumably themselves, they are creating a new space, or new world, in terms of the theory of *mondialisation*, (the artists' self-referential speech whereby they identify themselves as "niggas" will be dealt with in section 4.1.4 below). In this new space, 'Arab-ness' and 'blackness' coexist and become part of the hyphenated identity. The characteristics of this hyphenated identity are the expression of local Arab culture (through local language varieties), as well as an expressed concern for the welfare of Arab nations and territories. Identification with 'blackness' is necessary for the 'connective marginality' which Osumare (2007) observes. Specifically in the case of Palestine, Israel is constructed as the ruthless oppressor, terrorizing Palestinians in the same way as racist supremacist groups terrorized African Americans. In one song by the *Arabian Knightz* released online in 2006, the artists referenced the "Zionist Clan," a term reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan (*Not Ur Prisoner* 2006). Egyptian artists display that they are Arab rappers not only through the use of Arabic, but also by criticizing what they perceive as injustice done to Arabs in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.

4.1.3 Pan-Arabism and English as resistance

Another theme that serves to localize hip hop to Egyptian concerns is that of Pan-Arabism. Given the wider ideology of Pan-Arabism, reflected also in the dominant language ideology supporting MSA across the Arab world, local themes are not restricted to those that are contained within Egypt's borders, but also concern what happens in other neighboring countries in the region. This includes war and conflicts that are often propagated and supported by the U.S. government. The Palestinian struggle is a common theme and concern both in Egyptian society and in the artists' lyrics. Throughout the twentieth century until the present, Egypt has been involved with peace processes in the region, and many Palestinians have sought refuge in Egypt. Although Egypt has offered aid to Palestinian people, at times the government has been criticized by other Arab

أول حاجة جات فى بال 'awul haga gat fi bali'	<i>The first thing that came to my mind</i>
فلسطين فى الوضع الحالى 'filisteen fil wada' al hali'	<i>Palestine's current situation</i>
أسرائيل خالتها تلالي 'israil khaliha telali'	<i>Israel has really worn her out</i>
قلت للعفريت شيلها لى 'alt lil'afreet sheelha li'	<i>I told the ghost to remove Israel</i>
لاعايز فلوس ولا قصر 'la aiz falooos wa la asur'	<i>I don't want money or a castle</i>
أصل ديونا مالهاش حصر 'asl diyuna maluhash hasur'	<i>Our debts are limitless</i>
قلت للعفريت سددها بس أبقى هات لى بيهم وصل 'alt lil'afreet sadedha bas hat li bihum wasl'	<i>I said to pay them and bring me a receipt</i>
وشوف أية اخر أمنية دى اكيد حاجة هتبقى ليا 'wa shuf eh akher amnia di akeed haga liya'	<i>Look what the last wish was for me</i>
خلصت فترة الصلاحية والنبي هات لى 'halst futra al-sulahia wa an-nabi hat li'	<i>The time has run out, so please bring me</i>
كارت بمية 'kart bi-mia'	<i>A (phone card) for 100 (minutes)</i>

The music of *MTM* has become localized as their lyrics discuss topics that are real in Egyptian society. As in many countries throughout the world, mobile phones have become quite prevalent in Egypt; young adolescents begin carrying a phone as early as 11 or 12 years of age. Most people have rechargeable SIM cards in their phones, which means that they must purchase phone cards for 10, 20, 50 or 100 minutes, and when the card runs out, a new one must be purchased. In this song, the artist juxtaposes his wishes, that Israel would cease to occupy Palestinian territory, and that he would obtain a new phone card. Whereas the former may be a valiant request, and the latter a trivial whim, when the two are paralleled, they create a unique picture of the Egyptian society that the artists help to construct. *MTM*, the only group who has been signed to a mainstream record label, represents a less-confrontational, and therefore more-palatable, variety of hip hop. Although the group expresses concern for Palestinians, they are not *too* political. They maintain a light sense of humor in their lyrics that abounds in Egyptian society. As a result, they also reinforce local language conventions that use humor, even when discussing serious or difficult matters. Other groups' lyrics are extremely more direct in their assessment of the Palestinian struggle.

Another song by the group *Y-Crew* discusses the Palestinian struggle in their song '*Philisteen*.' The artist uses English to communicate resistance against the oppression directed towards Palestinian people. In this song, the Arabic lyrics provide religious commentary, while the artist speaks graphically in English against Israel. The chorus and a main portion of the body of the song are reproduced below.

فلسطين	
(8) 'Philisteen'	
<hr/>	
فلسطين فلسطين	
'Philisteen, Philisteen'	<i>Palestine, Palestine</i>
جوها ما فيش أمان	
'Gowaha mafish aman'	<i>Inside there is no security</i>
صوت قنبولة والرصاص في كل مكان	
'sot qanbola wa al risas fi kul makan'	<i>The noise of bombs and bullets everywhere</i>
أحساسنا في القلبنا	

‘ahsasna fil qalb’

Our feelings in our hearts

بس أطالع من لسان

‘bas atala’ min lisan’

Just appear from on tongues

مدفون جوانا بس

‘medfun gowana bas’

A cemetery inside of us

دة من أضعف الإيمان

‘da min ada’f al-aman’

Is the weakest security

سألت نفسي لية ما فيش ما فيش أمان

‘saelt nufsi li mafish mafish aman’

I asked myself where is there no peace

علشان كلنا نعيش

‘ashan kulena na’esh

For all of us to live

So please throw your guns away ‘cause we got to live in peace

So what’s it gonna be

This song’s dedicated to *Philisteen*

.....

فاكرين أحنا نامين مش محناش صحين

ahnash sahin’ *They think that we’re asleep and will not awake*

All I see now is murder-kill gear

And we’re about to crush the star of Israel

Muslims unite together there’s no more fear

And we’re about to make the Jews disappear

There’s no need to make the innocent see more blood

We shall take back our land with the help of our gun

من زما في الحرب بين الخير و بين الشر

‘min zaman al-harb’

Since the past, there is war

‘bain al-khayr wa bain al-shar’

Between good and evil

الله اكبر

‘Allahu akbar’

God is great

Our victory’s possible

We just wanna fight who is responsible

....

حزن في عينينا

‘hozn fi ‘aenayna’

Sadness in our eyes

When I see these people die

أصمدوا يا أبطال

‘asmedu ya abtal’

Endure, oh heroes

I know that you can try

ربنا وعدنا نصر

‘rabina wa’adna nasr’

God promised us victory

We will win in the end

دي مذكورة في القرآن

‘di muzkura fil Quran’

This is remembered in the Qur’an

You don’t believe me ask your friend

Only time will tell

حان وقت احرب

‘han waqt-al harb’

Now is the time of war

One day they will burn in hell

A stone in my hand is the weapon that I need

و نفسي أمدأيد

‘wa nufsi amed ‘id’

I want to reach out my hand and die

و باخلم أموت شهيد

wa bahlem amot shadid'

And dream of dying a martyr

In this song, the Arabic lyrics seem to seek to provide justification for what is expressed in the English lyrics. While the English lyrics assert such notions as opposition and vengeance, the Arabic lyrics offer an explanation and context to the historical and cultural background. Using English as a language of resistance goes against the dominant language ideology in Egypt that prescribes English as a vehicle for catering to foreign desires and demands, such as tourism, international business and trade. The group has such strong feelings for the Palestinian struggle, that the artist claims in his lyrics that he would be willing to die a martyr for the sake of the struggle. These Pan-Arab sentiments are a local theme that these mainstream and underground artists in Egypt focus on in their lyrics.

The song *Electric Chair*, by the *Arabian Knightz*, contains equally lyrics in English and Arabic. The song mentions situations that the artists perceive to be unjustly oppressing the Arab world. Among these are: Zionism, the prison at Guantanamo Bay and the Iraq War. The chorus of the song is, “*If I had my way, I’d put you all in the electric chair.*” The lyrics refer to the death of Saddam Hussein, who was executed in Iraq during a religious holiday in 2007. The artists metaphorically compare the execution to that of an American leader being killed on Christmas day. The lyrics, which are exceedingly direct, are most effective in communicating resistance by indexing an actual event with a hypothetical occurrence to show how horrific it would be. The artist ‘flips’ the situation in order to pose resistance to the infamous prison camp and Zionism, as well as an execution on a religious holiday.

(9) Electric Chair

If I had my way, I’d open the gates of Guantanamo Bay
Zionism would die today
Bush would feel Iraqi pain
Die like Saddam Hussein on Christmas Day

The theme of Pan-Arabism is constructed throughout the artists' lyrics in order to authenticate them as Arab rappers, and express shared marginality with Arab nations who may be suffering under foreign occupation. This marginality also legitimizes their participation in hip hop culture.

Another song by the *Arabian Knightz* also expresses sentiments of Pan-Arabism, as the lyrics literally support the movement. In the song *Da Knightz*, the artist *Sphinx*, promotes the U.S.A, that is the "United State of Arabia," and refers to this area as "the land of the brave." Both of these expressions are conventionally recognized as referring to the United States of America. Using this American English terminology 'flips the script' to create an image of a unified Arab State. This verbal play has roots in local language conventions.

In Arabic, paronomasia, or puns, are constructed from the root of a word that has been initially spoken by an interlocutor. By using the words of the first, the second interlocutor produces a cognate word based on the root and may either bless or curse the first. Although paronomasia and cognate paronomasia has parallels throughout Arabic varieties, Stewart (1997) examines the accusative absolute or cognate accusative that is used in the so-called 'cognate curse' in Egyptian Arabic.⁶ The construction, (*al-maf'ul al-mutlaq*), is used to produce cognate blessings in various social contexts. For instance, (mabruk, congratulations) uttered by one speaker elicits the response, (allah yibarik fik/i, may God bless you) by the addressee/speaker. Its counterpart, the cognate curse, is likewise a root-echo response, using the root of a word to produce a cognate as a retort, as in the following example:

Root: H-R-M

Initiator statement: (haram 'alek, 'shame on you!')

Response: (hurmit 'alek 'istak, 'may you be deprived of your life!')

In the previous example, the optative verb *hurmit* means 'may it be forbidden.' In other constructions, the root of the initial word may be transformed, such as with a retort as below:

Root 1: ' -Y-W

Initiator statement: ('away, 'yes/what?')

⁶ I would like to thank Marina Terkourafi for suggesting this research on the cognate curse.

Response: (gak 'awa, 'may starvation befall you!')
Root 2: '-W-Y

In other instances, the meaning of the word is changed in that it may be understood figuratively according to the context, as in the following:

Root: N-A-M
Initiator stamen: (nam, 'sleep')
Response: (namit 'alek heta, 'may a wall lie down/fall on you!')

The verb (*nam*) is conventionally used to mean 'sleep,' however in the context above, the meaning would make more sense as 'fall.' According to Stewart, the cognate curse exists in classical literature, and the Qur'an also includes at least one instance of a cognate curse (see Q 5:64). The effectiveness of cognate paronomasia lies in the implication that it is the initial statement that contains its own fulfillment or refutation so that one may be affirmed or ridiculed by his or her own words (Stewart 1997: 331). The basis for the success of the cognate curse is the notion that one is trumping, ridiculing and insulting an opponent by using his or her own words against them. I suggest that the cognate curse is a pre-existing rhetorical tradition that is revived in the practices of hip hop artists. Using the English language as a mechanism *against* its own speakers transforms hip hop into a local genre.

Similarly, in the following song, common nicknames for the United States of America are actually applied to the artists themselves, as they construct the Pan-Arab identity. In the song, the first verse is in English, the second in Arabic, and the third verse a mixture of English and Arabic. The chorus of the song is the chorus of the song, "Arabian Nights," the soundtrack of the Disney film *Aladdin*.

(10) *Da Knightz*

عربي, مصري, أصلي

'arabi, masri, asli'

Arab, Egyptian, original

The land of the brave

Good ol' U.S.A.

United State of Arabia
Where the AKs reign
The rarest of strains
Sphinx, best beware of his Arabic rage
His Arabic is crazed
The blood of Mangorian slaves
Go to war and erase
The disgraced race
Replaced by the Arabs
Take Jerusalem back, Lebanon and Iraq
All assassins attack
For the red, white and black
The vision of Pan-Arabism is back
In the form of *kufi* rap
The new *khalifat* dynasty
Arab league
Ramadan's over, tonight we feast.

The artist makes explicit reference to Arabic rap music as being part of a new movement of Pan-Arabism which may be able to unite Arab nations. By also mentioning images that are well-known throughout the Arabic-speaking world, the artist, although rapping in English, again makes claims to his Arab identity. In the English lyrics, the artists use Arabic borrowings of certain terms that call to mind Arab civilization: *Kufi*, a style of Arabic calligraphy, and *khalifat* (*caliphate*), which refers to the political leadership in various eras in classic Islamic history.

4.1.4 Resisting local racial norms: embracing 'blackness'

As it has been seen, Egyptian rappers self-identify as Arabs and, more generally, as Middle Eastern (section 4.1.3 above). The *Arabian Knightz*, especially, repeatedly refer to the Middle East as the "Middle Beast" (e.g. *Bettah* 2008; *CAIRO* 2006). At the same time, the rappers in the underground scene also self-identify with perceived concepts of

blackness. This is made evident in their frequent referrals to themselves and other artists as *niggas*, a word that carries with it a great deal of controversy among African Americans (Asim 2007).

Smitherman (1997) discusses the ‘script flipping’ that occurs with *nigger* and *nigga*, the latter pronounced with the deletion of the post-vocalic /r/. According to her, the latter usage of the word has a variety of positive meanings related to camaraderie. On the contrary, when used in a negative context the word refers to social behavior rather than to race, so that white people or those of non-African decent, can also be “niggers.” Still the word remains to be a racialized term created from a history of racism in the U.S.

In hip hop lyrics, it has been argued that the term is an important signifier of political dissent and oppositional consciousness that also presupposes the social and economic marginalization of those who use it (Perry, 2005; Quinne, 2005; Rivera, 2003). Although Wermuth (2001) mentions that Dutch rappers of African Caribbean background use the word *nigger* in reference to one another, there has been little analysis devoted to the usage of the word in other hip hop cultures based outside of the U.S. Ibrahim (1999) examines the adoption of ‘blackness’ by means of participation in hip hop culture and appropriation of ‘Black Stylized English’ by African youth who are refugees in Quebec. He describes how the youth ‘become black’ by entering a *social imaginary* discursive space, in which their identities are already constructed, imagined or positioned by dominant groups. The youth acquire Black Stylized English, which includes the self-referential term *nigga*.

A similar process can be seen at work in the lyrics of Egyptian rappers, which include the use of *nigga* as well as other Black Power images and elements familiar to Black Stylized English. The Black Power symbol of a raised fist became popularized in the late 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. The image is referred to in the songs *Bettah* and *Ha haha ha* by the *Arabian Knightz*.

(11) *‘Bettah’*

I got the revolutionary area of Arabia **with they fist up**,
Fist up, **then they** clipped up
Flip the script, nobody move
This a stick up

Now for to quip up
The big picture, turbaned up
Sand nigga
Sphinx, what

In this song, *Sphinx* uses Black Stylized English exemplified by the feature of copula deletion (*This Ø a stick up*). He also refers to himself as a *sand nigga*. According to the online *Urban Dictionary*, a *sand nigger* is, “a person of Middle Eastern descent due to the various desert regions there; usually meant in a disparaging and demeaning way” (www.urbandictionary.com; August 29, 2009). By means of ‘script flipping,’ as Smitherman describes, the term, which originated as a racial slur, goes through the phonetic change of final /r/ loss, and is given a positive – and moreover local – meaning in the context of the lyrics.

In another example, the image of a fist in the air is mentioned in the lyrics, this time with reference to the October War, which begun October 6, 1973. For 17 days, Egyptian forces engaged in combat to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula, which had been occupied by Israel. Therefore, October 6, 1973, is a day in heralded in Egyptian history.

(12) ‘Ha haha ha’

Yo, throw up your fists like it’s October the Sixth
If **you down** with this Arabic, rock to this hit, rock to this hit
Rock in your hip hop with a twist
AK we got this

The image of the salute used in the Black Power movement juxtaposed with October 6, 1973 localizes the struggle described in the artists’ lyrics. Localization of hip hop music occurs as the artists mention local themes in the lyrics that parallel those of resistance movements, as well as use AAVE elements, such as copula deletion (i.e. *You Ø down with this Arabic*). By emphasizing resistance and identifying with ‘blackness’, the artists construct and demonstrate a collective sense of marginality.

This section has shown how hip hop culture is localized in Egypt through the exploitation of local themes, such as patriotism and Pan-Arabism in the artists’ lyrics.

their song *Omy Mesafra*, the first Arabic verse ends in the English expression ‘cool’ (i.e. ‘great, excellent’), which is paralleled in the same line with an expression in Arabic that has a similar meaning (قشدة, ‘cream, literally; excellent, figuratively).

أمي مسفرة

(14) *Omy mesafra*

My Mom is Travelling

كلمت كل أصحابي على طول

‘kelemt kul ashabi ‘ala tool’

I called my friends right away

ما كانش فيهم مشغول

‘ma kansh fihum mushgul’

None of them were busy

كله كان يردّ يقول

‘kulu kan yerud b’ul’

They all answered saying,

يا قشدة يا بية يا قمة cool

‘ya ishta ya bey ya ima cool’

Sweet, man, cool!

Rhymes across languages may also occur in the middle of a verse when a code-switched word is used at the end of a line. One such instance occurs in *MTM’s* song, ‘*Ihsibha Sah*’, as the artist switches to a word in English (‘deal’) and continues with the same rhyming scheme in the remainder of the Arabic verse. Whereas ‘cool’ may be more commonly appropriated throughout youth language in Egypt, ‘deal’, as in the following example is not. The word نظام (nazam, ‘system, plan’) is what would conventionally be said by youth in Egyptian Arabic.

احسبها صح

(15) *‘ahsibha sah*

Think About It

صباح الخير يوم جميل

‘sabah al khayr yom gamil’

Good morning; it’s a beautiful day

اقعد في البيت دا مستحيل

It’s impossible to sit at home

‘a’ad fil bayt da mustahil’

كلمت تاكي اشوف ايه ال deal

I called Taky to see what was the deal

‘kelmt taky ashul eh al deal’

لقيته نايم نوم الفيل

I found him sleeping like an elephant

‘le’atu naym nom al fil’

MTM is the most popular mainstream rap group in Egypt, as they were the first to sign a contract with a major recording company. It is no surprise that the majority of their lyrics are in Arabic, as this is the language that appeals to the masses in terms of intelligibility. Also, as it has been shown in section 4.1.3, their themes are generally non-controversial, and therefore would not be subject to the government’s censorship. Even though English is a linguistic commodity in Egypt, popular music is still ruled by the vernacular, Egyptian Arabic. Therefore, the group seems only to use English for aesthetic reasons. Other underground artists use English for different reasons, and in various contexts, which will now be discussed.

4.2.2 Switches within and between lines

Code-switching may also occur within the line-structure of the song. These patterns are often regular in the lyrics of underground artists. A line may begin in Arabic and then continue in English. Davies and Bentahila (2008) have also observed patterns of switching between lines. Sometimes there may be a pattern created when a series begins in one language and continues in the other language. Such is the following song by *Y-Crew*, entitled ‘*Tadmeer Shamel*’, which describes the sky and environment during times of war.

تدمير شامل
(16) 'Tadmeer Shamel' *Total Destruction*

كل أنتو شيفو
'kulu intu shafu' *All that you (all) see*

Is turning into ashes, and dust, ashes and dust

بني آدم بالخاص
'beni adam bil-khas' *Especially humans*

ما لوش حال
'ma lush hal' *There's no solution*

In other instances, the switches distinguish lines of text from each other, as the languages alternate with one another among the lines of the verse. So, for instance, in (17), there is the pattern A E A E A E E A A E.

ملوك الأسكندرية
(17) 'Meluk Asskendriya' *Kings of Alexandria*

أحنا ملوك الأسكندرية
'ehna meluk asskendriya' *We are the Kings of Alexandria*

We be the kings of your city

كلمتكو قبل كدة
'kelmtku abla kada' *I have told you (all) before*

From day one

لحد دالواقتي

Li had dilwati

Up until now

We can make ‘em run

Nothing can make the world go round

زاي الراب العربي

Zay al rap al-a’rabi

Like Arabic Rap

لما ينزل عايكو

‘lema yenzil ‘alayku’

That comes upon you

Poverty

Here, in addition to the code-switching, it must be noted that the variety of English that is used in the first bolded line of English is not what is perceived as the standard variety.

The line employs the variant known as *habitual be*, a feature found in AAVE (Rickford and Rickford 2000, Green 2004). So the artists are displaying knowledge of a particular variety of English that has been identified with hip hop culture.

4.2.3. *Switches in introductions and choruses*

Switching between languages also occurs among larger constituents of lyrics. There are many examples of a theme of a song being developed completely in Arabic, whereas the refrain will occur either predominately or entirely in English. Furthermore, introductions and closings of songs may often use English, even if the remainder of the song is in Arabic. This phenomenon is true for the mainstream artists, such as *MTM*, as well as the underground ones, such as *Y-Crew* and *Arabian Knightz*. Bentahila and Davies (2002) suggest that a refrain performed in a language other than Arabic makes the song accessible to an audience unfamiliar with Arabic used in the body of the song. It also enables an Arabic-speaking audience that may not be familiar with English to grasp the meaning of the refrain, which often points to the underlying theme.

The mainstream artists *MTM* use English in such a way in their lyrics. Even if their audience does not speak English, the Arabic lyrics in the body of the song which

convey the main story or theme will appeal to them. Likewise the novelty of nominal uses of English would also be attractive to some Arabic-speaking listeners. In the song ‘*Li Teshky*’, the artists describe various scenarios that will be familiar to youth and youth culture in Egypt. A young man does not score high enough on his high school exam to go to the university he chooses. Another falls in love with a woman, but is not allowed to marry her since he is already betrothed to another young woman, his female cousin. Finally, a third travels to America and becomes disillusioned with the lifestyle and what he describes as a lack of moral values. After the last verse, the refrain is sung in English, “Why are you not satisfied?” The lyrics of the song are reproduced below.

(18) ‘Li Teshky’	<i>Why Complain?</i>
مكنتش عارف رايح فين ‘makuntsh ‘arif raeeh fain’	<i>I didn’t know where I was going</i>
او هجيب فلوس منين ‘ow hagib falus minayn’	<i>Or where I was going to get money</i>
كل اللي انا كنت عايزه ‘kul ili ana kunt aizo’	<i>All that I wanted</i>
اني اتصرف في قرشين ‘ini atsarf fi urshin’	<i>Was to get some small change</i>
كنت حاطط في دماغي اني اعيش يومين ‘kunt hututu damage ini ‘aish yomain’	<i>It was my plan to live a little</i>
كنت فاكر اني هعمل من الالف الفين ‘kunt faker ini ha’ml min alaf alfain’	<i>I thought that I would make thousands</i>
و دوخت على شغل ‘wa dukhat ‘ala shughl’	<i>I made myself dizzy from work</i>
و رحت و جيت كتير ‘wa rahet wag it katir’	<i>I came and went too much</i>
و دقت هناك المر ‘wa do’t hunak al mur’	<i>I tried it out</i>
و شفت اني اسير للناس	

'wa shuft ini asir linas'

I saw the procession of the people

ملهاش كبير لناس ملهاش ضمير

'malihash kabir inas malihash damir'

People do not have a conscious

لناس ما بتتمناش لحد غيرها خير

'linas ma batetimanash lihad gher ha khayr' *They do not wish any good on others*

'wa kant dareba qadia yom

.....

Why are you not satisfied?

In yourself, will only make you cry

In this game that we call life

Take your time, make up your mind

The switching between languages not only occurs within the body and refrain of the song, but there also may be language switching that occurs in the introduction and closing, as well. In the predominately Arabic songs, lyrics take on the form of an announcement, as they introduce the artist or the theme of the song in English. *Y-Crew's* song, '*Al-Bint al-Masriya*', is an exhortation of the characteristics of Egyptian young women that is performed entirely in Arabic, except for the following that is spoken in the beginning of the song.

البنيت المصرية

(19) '*Al-Bint Al-Masreya*'

The Egyptian Girl

Eh, yo, this song is dedicated to all Egyptian girls around the world

And especially in Egypt, you know.

This story tonight, it's all about you.

Yo, Khalid Samy, break it down for me.

The introduction to this song, though in English, sets the context for the remainder of the lyrics, which are in Arabic.

4.3 Switching in relation to the form of the lyric

Just as language switching may serve the structure of the song and rhyming patterns, switching also can be required by the lyrics' meaning. Certain subjects may demand the use of English. For instance, English is used for expressions directly referring to the music itself, either the rhythm or style. Such words as *rap*, *hip hop*, *free style*, *MC*, *microphone*, *volume*, *beat* may be borrowed from English, while a switch will occur in order to rhyme with the borrowed word, as in the following song by *Y-Crew*.

مفیش حدود

(20) 'Mafeesh Hodood'

No Limits

أرفعوا ايديكم ل فوق و اتحركوا مع ال beat

'arfa'u idkum lifo' wa atharak ma' al beat' *Raise your hands up and move to the beat*

الموسيقى عالمة تجسد

'al-musika a'alma tegesid'

The music comes to life

Yo, can you feel the heat?

حد يقولي فين الحفلات و الميكرفون

'had yauli fain al-hafalat wa al-mikrofon' *Tell me where's the party and microphone*

قالولي بالراحه و واحدة وحدة يا فرعون

'uli bilraha wa wahda wahda ya far'un' *Tell me carefully, oh pharaoh*

In this song, a line of English lyric is used to rhyme with an English borrowed word, 'beat,' and in the following line another borrowed word, 'microphone' rhymes with an Arabic word, فرعون (far'un, 'pharaoh'). The borrowings and switches that are the *mora* or center of the rhyme are often the focal point of the lyric.

4.4 Switching in English-dominant lyrics

In order to fully examine the phenomena of code-switching in the lyrics of the Egyptian hip hop artists, it is also necessary to look at songs whose lyrics are predominantly in English. As mentioned earlier, this style has been used primarily by the *Arabian Knightz* in their earlier songs (2005-2007). Since these songs predated the mix-tape, the group's only form of dissemination of their music was via the Internet, making their audience a global one. Perhaps for this reason more of their earlier songs are predominately in English. The switches into Arabic (Egyptian colloquial) then, function as identity markers: with these early songs, the group was able to extend their audience to include English-speaking listeners, and still maintain their Egyptian identity. The song *C-A-I-R-O* contains self-referential speech, boasting speech, and place and time reference, which are examples of speech act patterns Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2006) have identified (see section 4.1.1 above). In the first verse, the artist code-switches to Arabic when making reference to the group's origins, Egypt. By referring to Egypt as '*um a-dunia*', a popular nickname for Egypt, the group acknowledges their origins and boasts about their Egyptian heritage.

(21) *C-A-I-R-O*

Straight outta

أم الدنيا

'um a-dunia'

Mother of the world

Later in the song, there are four other switches to Arabic that occur within an English lyric.

(22) حياة أو موت

'hiyat ow mot'

Life or death

Jihad of course

Now clip that bitch-ass mouth when I spit that

جامد جدا

‘gamid giddan’

Awesome, (fig.); Very strong, (lit.)

First hit and I rip that

Another أنا for the city that’s invincible *first person singular pronoun “I”*

If you forgot that **we on top**, then this convinces **y’all**.

The purpose of this song is to introduce the artists and their location (Cairo). Although the majority of this song is in English, the use of Arabic terms serves as identity markers, which reinforce and assist what they are saying in English. For instance, حياة أو موت (‘life or death’) used parallel to *jihad*, makes the group seem tough. They adopt the use of the word *jihad* as signifying a threat to society, as it is often used in U.S. media, rather than being a multifaceted concept of Islam.⁷ The artist uses the convention from the U.S. media to pose a threat and construct resistance. The use of the phrase جامد جدا (gamid giddan, ‘very strong’) takes on the figurative meaning, ‘awesome,’ which is used in youth language. In other contexts, ‘gamid’ may mean ‘strong’ or ‘hard’, but youth may use it as a favorable exclamation. Either meaning would be appropriate for this song, as it takes on the style of ‘hardcore’ rap.’ The song is contextualized as taking place in a dangerous location, since the beginning and end of the song are marked by gunshots.

Other songs by the *Arabian Knightz* that are predominately in English incorporate Arabic words that may or may not be recognized by a non-Arabic speaking audience. These words when sung in the lyrics maintain the Arabic pronunciation, such as words that contain the Arabic emphatic /h/. For instance *Mohamed*, *Hezbollah* are pronounced with the Arabic pronunciation even when the words occur in the context of English lyrics. The common discourse marker in Arabic *yani*, is also used in the song *Whatchu Know*, as the artist E-Money metaphorically refers to Arab hip hop as his weapon on a battle field.

⁷ The Arabic term *jihad* has been associated in U.S. media with violence that has been done by radical sects in the name of Islam. In Egypt, as well as other Arabic-speaking countries, this meaning of the word does not align with traditional conventions. In Egypt, *Jihad* is even a common proper name for a girl.

Hip hop my battle field, I'm armed to the tee

Using Arab hip hop, **droppin' bombs**, يعني

'yani' *I mean* (discourse marker)

Using slang as a tool to reach the ears that hear

In these lyrics, the use of the Arabic discourse marker, 'yani', could have been motivated by the meaning of the lyric, which discusses Arabic hip hop. Also, the artist displays the feature of copula deletion in the first line, while in the second there is the final g-dropping of 'droppin.' He also uses a popular expression that is found in American rap music. According to the *Rap Dictionary*, the expression 'drop a bomb' means to insult someone (http://www.rapdict.org/Drop_bombs September 3, 2009). The *Arabian Knightz* use this conventional phrase in another song (*Not Ur Prisoner* 2006) in lyrics that state:

We ain't terrorists but we droppin' bombs

In this line, the artist displays his knowledge of AAVE through copula deletion and use of 'ain't', which is also common in other English varieties. Furthermore, the use of the conventional phrase 'droppin' bombs' which is a positive skill to have when rapping and participating in hip hop culture, is juxtaposed with terrorism, a negative stereotype which may be attributed to Arab youth by the U.S. media (as described in section 1.2.2). In this one line, the artist acknowledges the stereotype, and 'flips the script' to actually use the stereotype as a boast for the group. I chose to use this line as the title of this thesis because it encompasses the complex linguistic dimensions within which the Egyptian artists are operating in order to become members of the global hip hop community. They display a mastery of the hip hop 'default code', AAVE. They also use conventional phrases of U.S. hip hop traditions. They recognize a prior insult (i.e. the terrorist stereotype) and resist it with a play on words, which displays their verbal skill. This is

the ultimate demonstration of *signifying* across cultures, and could only be performed by Arab artists.

Language switching in the lyrics occurs to various extents, motivated by the structure of the song as well as the song's theme and meaning. Moreover, the artists' fluency with the languages, as well as that of their listening audiences, must be taken into account. The mainstream group *MTM* will likely sell more albums that have a higher use of Egyptian Arabic, since the majority of youth in Egypt do not speak English to the degree of competency that would be required for writing and understanding the quick-paced rap lyrics. Even the underground group *Asfalt* raps predominately in Arabic and they have continued to gain popularity and media coverage (see *Shaghaal* interview on *OTV*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEard4c7A-Q> accessed on Youtube September 3, 2009). Also, those artists who have been socialized more in English in terms of education or international travel, such as *Arabian Knightz* and *Y-Crew*, will be more likely to compose lyrics in English and include a higher degree of switching.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined localization in terms of language forms and local themes expressed in the lyrics. The integration of local language within hip hop language conventions included such features as the 'spelling feature', speech acts such as self-referential speech, and terminology related to hip hop culture, all being used in the local code, Egyptian Arabic. Hip hop culture is becoming localized as the artists are performing speech acts and exploiting language conventions in the local code. Furthermore, youth language is reinforced in the lyrics. The English language is also used in a deliberate manner: it is not any variety of English that is used, but the English that has stylized features of American hip hop, Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) (Alim 2004). Mainstream and underground musicians in Egypt use the English language in non-conventional ways; lyrics are composed in English not (only) to accommodate, but (also) to express political dissent and opposition to events very much orchestrated by the English-speaking world. The musicians use this style of language because the particular code of English used has historically been used as a medium of expressing resistance.

Furthermore, in using English, the speakers are broadening their potential listeners to include an international audience via the Internet.

The three trajectories of localization I have suggested are: patriotism, Pan-Arabism, and 'blackness.' The artists exploit local images, and the use of references that are characteristic of Egypt throughout the Middle East. Pan-Arabism is expressed in the artists' allegiance to territories or countries that have been involved in armed conflict. This allegiance connects the Egyptian artists to the rest of the Arab world. I have explored how 'blackness' is constructed in the lyrics with the use of certain images and terms, and establish the artists' sense of 'collective marginality.'

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have aimed to examine how language use in the lyrics of Egyptian rappers establishes and authenticates the local hip hop community in Egypt. I have argued that hip hop culture is connected not only by an awareness of and familiarity with the hip hop elements, but also by a sense of ‘connective marginality’ (Osumare 2007). I have touched on the background and origins of rap music and the specific American English language variety, AAVE, which has been associated with hip hop practices through an extension of this variety, which has been called HHNL. In reviewing various theoretical lenses through which to explore global hip hop, I have argued that Darling-Wolf’s (2008) notion of *mondialisation*, which includes shared experiences and local-to-local relationships, is the most useful theory with which to conceive and examine the global spread of hip hop culture within specific youth cultures.

I have also proposed that Arab youth culture is a prime site for the development of hip hop culture. Arab youth may share a sense of ‘collective marginality’ due to various economic and political situations in the world. The construction of ‘blackness’ not only emphasizes this marginality, but also authenticates the artists as rappers. Furthermore, I have introduced two aspects of authenticity central to hip hop culture: verbal skill and race. Rap artists must be able to creatively introduce and defend themselves, ‘telling it like it is’ and ‘keeping it real’ in words and terms that will be received by the audiences and other rappers. I have tried to show how this verbal skill is displayed in puns, plays on words, ‘script flipping’ and various speech acts.

Following the introduction, I have provided an overview of the sociolinguistic situation in Egypt by exploring Arabic language variation in the country, as well as English language use. I have also looked at the language attitudes toward these language varieties. I have affirmed that while *al-fusHa* is the high code, it is not necessarily associated with the elite class, in supporting Haeri’s (1997) claim that foreign languages must also be taken into account. English continues to function as an elite code, while Egyptian Arabic is the code of solidarity. I have also demonstrated how language use in Egypt is influenced by one’s education, and education is contingent upon factors of availability and accessibility. I have also suggested that the language attitude attributed

to *al-fusHa* appears to be favorable among Egyptians because of the linguistic heritage of the language, which cannot be divorced from it. Concerning Egyptian Arabic, it is the most favorable Arabic variety among Egyptians, which suggests that the Egyptians polled (Herbolich 1979) possess a high degree of self-pride in their language.

Language ideology regarding English use in Egypt among Egyptians remains a complicated issue. I have suggested Egyptians of mixed heritage may have a basis for choosing to speak English rather than Egyptian Arabic, which may be unrelated to the language ideology of English functioning as an elite code. Unfortunately, language ideology and language attitudes rarely take into account specific individuals, but posit general associations about the language. Still, it would be useful to examine this subset of youth in Egypt who feel that they are less competent in Egyptian Arabic and more competent in English or another foreign language. I would predict that their linguistic repertoire would locate them ‘in-between’ Egyptian and an ‘other’ society, and would affect with whom they self-identify at different moments. Even though English is used in various popular culture sites in Egypt, it remains ‘foreign.’ Therefore it should not be expected that English would be used to convey deep, intimate emotions.

Furthermore, I have given a background for the existence of hip hop culture in Egypt across two contexts: first, I provided a traditional example of ‘local’, *sha’bi* music which has been regarded as hip hop’s forerunner, so to speak. Outrageous musical and fashion styles have led some to compare such artists as Shabaan Abdel-Rahim to U.S. rap artists. Abdel-Rahim has gained much attention from the media because of his eccentric flare. Mainstream and independent media has also played a large role in disseminating awareness about more recent hip hop developments in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Through the making of *MTV Arabia’s Hip HopNa* two years ago, rap music and hip hop culture achieved its greatest form of recognition and visibility in the region. For the first time, underground artists were validated as local rappers, as their skills were evaluated and they connected with artists throughout the Arab world. The series uncovered a great deal of interest in Arabic hip hop. Furthermore, documentary films have introduced local Arab rappers to international audiences, and even helped the artists in one region establish connections (*Slingshot Hip Hop*). Although the Egyptian artists are not featured in these films, their presence is crucial in gaining a general understanding

of hip hop in the region. Since many of the underground artists' identities are constructed as being Arab rappers, it is important to understand the movement throughout the region. In other words, since the Egyptian artists make these claims in their lyrics, there must be a connection that they have established to rap artists in other Arab countries. The online domains of *Myspace* and *Facebook* are the sites of the networking between Arab artists.

In the analysis of the lyrics of the four groups, *MTM*, *Arabian Knightz*, *Y-Crew* and *Asfalt*, I sought to determine how the process of localization of hip hop culture is apparent in the language use of rap music. I examined localization in terms of three trajectories of localization: hip hop language conventions, patriotism, Pan-Arabism, and 'blackness.' The integration of local language with hip hop language conventions included such features as the 'spelling feature', speech acts such as self-referential speech, and terminology related to hip hop culture, all being used in the local code, Egyptian Arabic. I argue that hip hop culture is becoming localized as the artists are performing speech acts and exploiting language conventions in the local code. Furthermore, youth language is reinforced in the lyrics. Concerning patriotism, the artists capitalize on local images, such as the Egyptian national anthem, and the use of references that are characteristic of Egypt throughout the Middle East, such as *Om a-dunia*. But the artists' Arab allegiances do not stop with Egypt.

Another local theme that I have explored is Pan-Arabism in terms of how it is constructed and realized in the artists' lyrics. Central to this theme is the artists' alignment with territories or countries that have been involved in armed conflict with other powers. Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine are evoked in the lyrics to establish a context in which resistance is necessary. These situations help the Egyptian artists to establish a connection with the rest of the Arab world. I have suggested that *MTM* also align themselves with these sentiments, but to a lesser degree. The underground artists use both Arabic and English to support a Pan-Arab movement, which may be figuratively Arabic hip hop. The use of AAVE and imagery familiar to Black American culture is a means to rebel against social and political forces.

'Race' is an obscure concept among Egyptians. Although differences in phenotype are observable in society, racial classification is obsolete. I have observed how at least one of the underground groups, *Arabian Knightz*, construct 'blackness' in

their lyrics through the use of certain images and terms. This racial construction helps to establish their status as marginal members in the mainstream society. The self-referential use of the term *nigga* is a term of camaraderie which the artists feel legitimized to use as artists located on the African continent. It is also interesting that this group seems to be trying to identify both as Middle Eastern and African. On the one hand, they defend Arabs in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula with lyrics of solidarity, while on the other they construct 'blackness', creating a hybrid identity.

In Egypt, youths' participation in hip hop culture causes local traditions to be changed and transmitted into new forms. I have aimed to reveal these changes and developments in terms of language use and conventions that are shared throughout the global hip hop communities, along with those that are specific to Egypt.

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