RAPPING FEMINISM, RAPPING THE FAMILY: HIP HOP, THE MUDAWWANA, AND THE MONARCHY IN MOROCCO

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

Since the 1999 coronation of King Muhammed VI, Morocco has undergone large-scale changes in terms of legal reform via the nation’s Islamic family and personal status laws (the *Mudawwana*), gendered social roles and gender equality, and accepted modes of feminist political engagement in public space. This rapidly shifting sociopolitical landscape has raised questions among Moroccan and international observers alike as to the efficacy of the nation’s protest culture in light of the regime’s cooptive power. This thesis looks to contemporary hip hop in the music of Fnaire and MC Soultana to present a more cohesive picture of Moroccan feminism, political dissent, and engagement with the regime in the early twenty-first century. I frame my analysis in the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who proposes that expressions of popular culture should not be considered monolithic entities of resistance or compliance, but as a landscape on which these concepts are explored and contested (Hall 1981, 227). Examined in this light, the sometimes contradictory messages and behaviors that have marked much contemporary Moroccan political engagement and oppositional expression in recent years can be understood as a lens through which to view larger ideas about state engagement, feminism, and the construction of gendered social space.

I do not understand hip hop musicians as part of a singular collective whose music and artistic output can be analyzed as either expressions of popular dissent unendorsed by the regime and thus valued as genuinely oppositional, or as the monarchically endorsed voice of regime cooptation. Instead, drawing on the work of ethnomusicologist Cristina Moreno Almeida (2013), I examine hip hop groups and emcees as socially and politically active individuals whose music, lyrics, and music videos reflect their own creative agency as well as larger sociopolitical forces (Almeida 2013, 320). By examining the output of two popular artists deeply engaged with gendered political expression, I demonstrate the ways that musicians work within and reflect the contemporary landscape of Moroccan feminism, political resistance, and reconstructions of gendered identities, all while working with, through, and around the regime’s cooptive power.
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Notes on Transliteration

The following document contains words and phrases in both Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Moroccan colloquial Arabic, or Darija. Darija is a primarily unwritten Arabic dialect that differs considerably from standard Arabic in pronunciation and spelling. For this reason, I have adopted separate transliteration methods for MSA and Darija. When using Modern Standard Arabic terminology, I have followed the transliteration system used by the "International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. When words or phrases are in Darija, I have written them phonetically or as they are transliterated by the Moroccan authors and artists in question. For example, the rap group Fnaire does not adopt the IJMES system when transliterating their name. Thus, throughout the following document Fnaire appears as seen on the ensemble’s website and other publications.
Introduction

Through an examination of contemporary Moroccan hip hop music as a vehicle for social commentary, the ongoing contestation of gendered public space as legally codified in the Mudawwana, in this thesis I explore the changing relationship between feminism, protest, and the Moroccan monarchy from the early 2000s to the present. I do not understand hip hop musicians as part of a monolithic entity whose music and artistic output can be analyzed as either expressions of popular dissent unendorsed by the state and thus valued as genuinely oppositional, or as the state-endorsed voice of regime cooptation. Rather, following ethnomusicologist Cristina Moreno Almeida (2013) I examine individual hip hop groups and emcees as active social agents whose music, lyrics, and music videos reflect their own creative agency as well as larger sociopolitical forces (Almeida 2013, 320). By examining the output of two popular artists deeply engaged with gendered political expression, I demonstrate the ways that musicians work within and reflect the shifting landscape of Moroccan feminism, trends of political resistance, and the regime’s cooptive power.

Specifically, I am interested in the ways that the gendered subjectivities of musicians inform their political positions and vice versa. Gender and questions of gender equality have played an important role not only in the recent political uprising of 2011—coined the 20 February Movement, or 20M—but in the contemporary Moroccan political climate at large. The nation’s Islamic Law of Personal Status, the Mudawwana, has been a vital tool of both the monarchy and oppositional feminist activists. Despite its role in providing the king with grounds for religious legitimation, it has also served as a rallying point for those engaged in the fight for political change. Though it was officially abolished in 2010, vestiges of the Mudawwana remain a powerful social force that, according to gender studies scholar Samia Errazzouki, has helped to
encourage new forms of gendered political expression and resistance throughout the past decade (Errazzouki 2014, 260).

Moroccan hip hop is a relatively new musical practice that has only recently garnered the attention of musicologists from the United States and Europe, as well as from Morocco and throughout North Africa. Kendra Salois’s 2009 dissertation from the University of California at Berkley is one of the first studies of hip hop’s large scale sociopolitical impacts in twenty-first century Morocco. She presents the genre in tandem with the nation’s rapid adoption of neoliberal economic policies since 2000, and examines artists’ navigation, reinforcement, and subversion of these policies and their resultant socioeconomic impacts. Similarly, Cristina Almeida Moreno’s 2013 article examines hip hop artists’ musical and political economy through their interactions with state economic apparatuses and modes of production. Finally, Moroccan cultural studies scholars Taieb Belghazi and Said Graiouid approach hip hop and metal music in terms of their involvement with or disengagement from regime influence in large scale music and cultural festivals. I hope the present study will provide a starting place for the consideration of audience members and artists’ gendered subjectivities along with these important factors. By considering hip hop music and gender alongside Mudawwana reform and developments in legal and social institutional frameworks, this thesis offers an alternative lens through which to view developments in both Moroccan popular music and oppositional culture.

**Feminism in Law and in Practice**

The coronation of Morocco’s King Muhammad VI in 1999 marked the beginning of a period of rapid political change as the modes of governmental engagement available to citizens expanded. The nation’s previous monarch, Hassan II, had imposed strict penalties against critics of his administration, penalties that included fines, imprisonment, and in some cases, torture or
execution (Smith and Louidy 2005, 1075). Muhammad VI’s ascent to the throne put an end to the “Years of Lead” experienced during the reign of his father by permitting open expression of political dissent through both oppositional political parties in parliament and politically active NGOs. In 2001, under heavy domestic and international pressure, the King led a commission to reform the nation’s constitution and hotly debated family and personal status laws, ushering in over a decade of dramatic sociopolitical unrest and change.

Based in the Maliki School’s interpretation of Islamic law as revealed in the Qur’an and Sunna, the Mudawwana has historically stood apart from the secular practices and policies that dominate other facets of the Moroccan penal code. In addition to its origins in Islamic legal thought, personal status and family law deals explicitly with conduct in the private spheres of marriage, divorce, and the family, and has thus been the focus of Moroccan feminist and Islamist groups alike. Serious debate about the content and applicability of the original draft of the family and personal status law began as early as 1979, but the oppressive political climate under the nation’s first two monarchs made large-scale reforms difficult. It wasn’t until 2001, under the auspices of King Muhammad VI, that the Mudawwana entered the realm of public debate. After a period of intense, widespread campaigning by political parties and NGOs on both sides of the issue, the King conceded to demands to amend both the Mudawwana and the Moroccan constitution. These changes were met with international accolades, and at the time of their implementation in 2003, both the amended constitution and the Mudawwana were considered among the most progressive political documents in the region by Western observers (Smith and Louidy 2005, 1070).

Skeptics of the new constitution and personal status laws claimed that they represented only a superficial change and kept the problematic underpinnings of monarchical power—the
King’s role as Commander of the Faithful (amīr al-mūminīn)—fundamentally unaltered. For the various feminist organizations that had campaigned for political and legal change during the past two decades, the maintenance of this royal position further ensured that their relationship with the government remained unchanged. In an article exploring recent developments in Moroccan feminist thought, Zakia Salime characterizes this relationship as one of state collaboration rather than outright political resistance (Salime 2012, 103). Despite constitutional and legal assurances of equality and freedom, the King’s role as Commander of the Faithful creates a highly hierarchical system that often prevents truly equitable freedom of expression for individuals or organizations espousing views outside those endorsed by the monarchy.

This has led to the recent emergence of alternative modes of feminist expression in conjunction with 2011’s 20 February Movement. As the so-called Arab Spring protests1 expanded from their origins in Tunisia across the rest of the Maghreb, Moroccan citizens took to the streets and the Internet to demand further reforms to the constitution and the Mudawwana. The 20M denied any direct political affiliation, choosing instead to present itself as a loosely organized coalition without an explicit, unifying ideology. While this lack of a clear goal or leader made criticism of the movement by its opponents somewhat easier, it also created a climate of ideological openness. It is in this openness that Salime locates the impetus of Morocco’s “new feminism.” Members of the 20M tend to avoid the direct engagement with the monarchy that characterized efforts by most established feminist NGOs and political parties, choosing instead to incorporate gender equality into a larger message of social justice through both symbolic and physical parity of men and women in the Movement’s activities (Salime 2012, 106). Not only does this speak to a new form of political activism, it also indicates a

1 I use the terms Arab Spring here with the understanding that it serves as a generalizing phrase for what were highly specific and often localized sociopolitical events rooted in regional history and local concerns as well as larger global political currents.
change in the perception of gendered bodies and the ways in which these bodies occupy similarly
gendered public spaces.

**Gendered Bodies on Musical Display**

In the following chapters, I examine the work of Fnaire and MC Soultana in conjunction
with these changing notions of gendered political engagement. Hip hop in Morocco has been
incorporated into the nation’s large music festival industry since the 1990s, but the genre’s
association with cultures of resistance and political dissent has come to dominate international
depictions of Moroccan artists. For many Moroccans, however, the growing visibility of hip hop
in the national and international media is a source of tension (Almeida 2013, 320). While some
musicians are legitimated through their inclusion in state-sponsored TV and festival events,
others remain marginalized, facing censorship from television and radio, fines, and even
imprisonment.² This uneven endorsement of musicians and their works has aroused suspicions
that the King and his regime ultimately hold sway over the expressive conduits of the hip hop
industry. As many musicians rely on state-sponsored festivals and royal patronage in order to
gain widespread recognition and, ultimately, professional success, such criticisms are not without
merit.

Even so, Moroccan hip hop’s association with political protest in the international market
has been more or less cemented largely through the efforts of Western media outlets in the
aftermath of the 2011 protests. For many artists, the reality of their political positions is much
more complicated. Far from being vessels of either pure social resistance or monarchical
cooptation, Moroccan hip hop musicians play an active role in the ongoing contestation of public
space, governmental legitimacy, and definitions of citizenship. An expanded analysis of these

² Moroccan hip hop artist El-Haqed was sentenced to two years in jail in 2011 and received another four-month
sentence this year.
artists’ often complex sociopolitical positionings is necessary to engender an understanding of hip hop music in North Africa that both shapes and is shaped by local social forces. In her 2009 dissertation on Moroccan hip hop artists and neoliberalism, Kendra Salois writes

… [A] balanced vision of hip hop studies can and should include inquiry into expressions that support, are indifferent to, or try and fail to change existing inequalities in their home communities. An understanding of agency respectful of the full spectrum of interpretations and beliefs held by individuals will acknowledge the efficacy of both those moves which liberate and those which are complicit with existing hegemonic practices, even as it teases them apart. (Salois 2009)

The understanding of artistic agency expressed in the present study reflects Salois’s description. Hip hop musicians discussed in the following chapters both reaffirm and reject certain discourses of both monarchical legitimacy and gendered social roles.

By tracing feminine and feminist representations in the lyrics and music videos of two prominent artists from the early 2000s to the present, my analysis reveals not only the complex and often-overlooked strategies through which musicians navigate systems of royal patronage and state control, but also underscores evolving notions of gender and their important role in contemporary political engagement. Situating artists and their music within specific social and political contexts encourages a more nuanced depiction of both the Moroccan hip hop scene and the politically and socially engaged actors therein (Almeida 2013, 319).

Cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall argues in his 1981 article “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Popular’” that forms of popular expression should not be considered as either traditions of resistance or of compliance, but rather as “the ground on which [these] transformations are worked” (Hall 1981, 228). Considered in this light, hip hop becomes a valuable tool with which to understand the shifting and contested ground of both feminism and regime legitimacy. In examining two case studies separated by roughly a decade of large-scale sociopolitical changes,
my project illuminates some of the ways that transformations, to borrow Hall’s term, take place in the ongoing struggle for gendered social and political spaces. These artists do not speak for a homogenized Moroccan “public,” but the resonance and relevance of their expressions is witnessed in their continued popularity and their inclusion in state-sponsored national and international music festivals.

Fnaire is an all-male rap group that first achieved widespread popularity in 2003 with their celebrated musical response to the Casablanca terrorist attacks of the same year. Generally recognized as a pro-monarchy ensemble, Fnaire provides an important case study due to their relationship to regime rhetoric surrounding both the growing women’s movement of the early twenty-first century and the government’s dramatic anti-terrorist measures in the wake of the 2003 bombings. In visually and verbally joining these discourses, the group also links monarchical legitimation via the king’s protective role as amīr al-mūminīn and the increasing presence of women and women’s bodies in the public sphere. That the ensemble is all male and performs in a male-dominated genre provides an interesting parallel to the dominant monarchical discourse in which the protection of both female and national well-being—the former through the Mudawwana and the latter through strict anti-terrorism law—lies chiefly in the domain of the king.

Placing the work of Fnaire in dialogue with contemporary artist MC Soultana illuminates a dramatic shift in the perception of gendered political economy and public space. The men of Fnaire rap about women and the nation as undifferentiated categories under the allegedly equitable (male) protection of the monarch. MC Soultana, in contrast, is a woman speaking about the experiences of individuals in conjunction with their unique sociopolitical realities. While she does not claim any explicit political allegiance or goal, MC Soultana’s work reflects a
recent shift in the ways that Moroccan citizens, particularly women, engage with issues of economic, social, and political inequality.

Western media outlets have tended to discuss both MC Soultana and Fnaire within the somewhat limiting framework of traditional feminist opposition against regime totalitarianism and discrimination (Stuckey and MC Soultana 2014). Cast in this light, musicians’ lack of clear political affiliation, along with a willingness to participate in state-sponsored television and festival events might contribute to analyses of contemporary Moroccan protest culture as ineffective against monarchical cooptation. Examining hip hop music in dialogue with sociopolitical developments and changes in feminist thought, rather than viewing either phenomenon in isolation, challenges such assessments and may indicate a slightly more optimistic trajectory for Morocco’s political future.

Chapter Summary

In this study I will first explore the evolution of the Mudawwana and state-endorsed feminism in conjunction with Fnaire’s musical output of the early 2000s. Then, following the work of Salime, I will discuss more recent developments in feminist and protest culture surrounding the 20M as it informs the work of MC Soultana. The chapters ahead will attempt to further illuminate the relationship between Moroccan feminism and regime opposition, hip hop music and musicians, and the regime itself.

Chapter 1 will provide a summary of recent reform efforts in Moroccan personal status and family law as they relate to the developing feminist movement. Islamic law is a concept and a term fraught with both academic and social baggage. The Mudawwana has also had a lasting impact on the construction of gendered social spaces and women’s roles therein. It is thus
imperative to understand the law’s development and symbolic significance in order to better grasp the rhetoric and actions employed by Moroccan feminists and their opposition.

I begin my analysis of the *Mudawwana* with a brief exploration of Sharī’a law and its significance in the post-colonial Maghreb through the work of the legal historians and anthropologists Mounira Charrad, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Pinar Ilkkaracan. The symbolic significance of family and personal status law throughout the Arab world has often hinged on its role in shaping cohesive postcolonial identity as well as its perceived religious authenticity. This is not to argue that an analysis of the *Mudawwana* should be divorced from Islamic practice, but that the law’s social and political roles often exist in realms related to but distinct from the religious. An exploration of the sociopolitical history of Sharī’a law in practice helps paint a more thorough picture of Islamic law in its specific contexts and may dispel some of the associations with which the term is occasionally saddled.

I then move to a discussion of personal status and family law’s significance in the gendering of Moroccan space and bodies, and its impact on monarchical legitimation. Despite considerable revisions since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco (CKM) and, by extension, the *Mudawwana* continue to endorse the monarch’s semi-divine position as the Commander of the Faithful. When coupled with much of the language present in Morocco’s family and personal status law, the king’s role as *amīr al-mūminīn* works to strip women of their agency as citizens. The nation becomes gendered as female, while men maintain dominance in a majority of public spaces. Delving into the king’s role as Commander of the Faithful and the reinforcement of gendered public and political spaces helps to illuminate the somewhat limited modes of engagement available to feminist
organizations and thus better explains some of these organizations’ perceived failures in their engagement with the state apparatus.

Finally, the opening chapter concludes with a brief historical overview of reform efforts from 1992 to 2004. This period was vital to establishing a political climate that allowed for the flourishing of previously censored musical and political activities. I will focus especially on the period following Muhammad VI’s 1999 coronation as a pivotal moment in Moroccan political history. The ascendance of the current monarch to the throne marked a transition in the methods of state legitimation and control from forceful authoritarianism under Hassan II to a less overt method rooted largely in the manipulation of expressive symbols. It is this transition that, in part, made the politico-musical reflections discussed in this work possible. Situating the sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory perspectives of artists, activists, and regime-supporters within this legal and political history offers a clearer view of the ongoing sociopolitical work occurring therein.

Chapter 2 focuses on the music of Fnaire and its relationship to the pivotal political moment following the May 2003 terrorist attacks on the city of Casablanca. The first task of this chapter is to more firmly situate hip hop as a global musical form in the specific local context of early twenty-first century Morocco. Though the global interconnections influencing and influenced by this musical practice are somewhat tangential to this particular project, hip hop’s significance as a global musical practice should not be overlooked. Many Moroccan musicians use musical and visual signals associated with hip hop culture in the United States and the West more generally, but the activation of these tropes often comes to signify specific local meanings.

In framing my analysis, I combine Stuart Hall’s theory of popular culture as a site of contestation with the work of art history scholar Amanda Rogers, and Moroccan political
scientist Mohammad Daadaoui. Both Rogers and Daadaoui discuss the monarchy’s usage of cultural and institutional symbols as tools for legitimation. Though Rogers focuses on visual symbols and Daadaoui on sociopolitical institutions, I believe an analysis of music and musical discourse has much to contribute to this discussion. Fnaire uses a series of visual and lyrical tropes that, according to Rogers’s previous analysis, support regime rhetoric through the feminization of the nation. This in turn contributes to the discourse immediately following the Casablanca bombings that reinforced the regime’s legitimacy through appeals to the king’s patriarchal protection.

However, I do not wish to suggest that Fnaire can be understood solely as a puppet of the monarchy whose musical expressions are dictated by regime-approved discourse alone. The ensemble’s political statements in lyrics and visual expression sometimes run counter to their actions off-stage. It is for this reason that I invoke Hall’s theory of expressive media as contested social space. Rather than place Fnaire’s musical output within the resistance-cooptation dichotomy, I understand the ensemble’s work as indicative of larger currents of gendered political engagement in Morocco around the turn of the twenty-first century.

My third and final chapter turns to an artist working nearly a decade later. MC Soultana is one of the first female rappers in Morocco to enjoy widespread popular success since the launch of her solo career in 2010. Her first single, “Sawt Nissa” (“Voice of Women”), represents a distinct shift away from established modes of feminist opposition and expression discussed in the preceding chapters. By putting this work in dialogue with recent political protests that began in 2011, as well as with developments in the nation’s growing festival industry, I aim to present a clearer depiction of contemporary feminist opposition and hip hop’s place within it.
Like Fnaire, Soultana’s actions offstage often seem to contradict the sentiments expressed in her music. Her participation in regime-sponsored music festivals and lack of open support for the oppositional movement complicate her depiction as a musical symbol of women’s dissenting political voices. In order to unpack these contradictory images and better understand MC Soultana’s multi-faceted relationship with both contemporary protest culture and the state apparatus, I will examine music festivals and royal patronage as changing symbols of regime cultural policy. Like the contemporary opposition, large-scale festival events capture a wide array of performers and audience members, and typically fail to conform to a single political message. It is often difficult to determine where state control ends and the individual agency of festival participants begins, opening the events to multiple interpretations and contestation.

I will then examine Soultana’s 2011 hit, “Sawt Nissa” more specifically. I treat this work as a case study in dialogue with both festival culture and emerging forms of feminist opposition. Not only does it illuminate some of the changes occurring between contemporary feminism and that of the past, but tensions inherent in the song’s lyrics and performance evince ongoing contestation about women’s roles as politically active citizens. Rather than considering Morocco’s new feminism and MC Soultana’s career in binary terms of success or failure, I am interested in what these tensions and contradictions imply in terms of the development and expansion of Moroccan citizenship and changing perceptions of regime legitimacy.

What falls in the gaps between rhetoric and behavior often exposes more about the shape of sociopolitical life than either reveals when considered in isolation. With its rich symbolic language and shared expressive space, music is a particularly fertile ground for this type of analysis. Morocco’s political future is yet to be determined, but including socially and politically engaged hip hop in the conversation brings to light some of the nuances between monarchical
cooptation and popular oppositional expression that have become hallmarks of Moroccan protest culture in the twenty-first century. By establishing a more thorough understanding of the ways that feminism, citizenship, and regime legitimacy are continually contested via expressive public space, my thesis presents a picture of contemporary feminism and protest that does not hinge on the limiting, and often discouraging binary framework of state-endorsed expressions and those which are read as genuinely oppositional.
Chapter One

The Moroccan *Mudawwana*:
Monarchical Authority and Legal Reform in Family and Personal Status Law

Since the mid-twentieth century, Moroccan feminism and its counter discourses have been heavily influenced by the nation’s Islamic family and personal status laws, or the *Mudawwana*. The monarchical government often used the laws and their religious origins as a source of political legitimation, while anti-regime and feminist activists have repeatedly seized on the *Mudawwana* and its various reforms as a vehicle for reassessing the construction of social space and gender roles. As such, the document is often a tacit presence in discussions of Moroccan gendered social organization and oppositional culture whose impacts are witnessed but not always openly acknowledged. With this chapter, I aim to bring the impacts of Maliki Islamic law and the *Mudawwana* to the foreground. The history and development of Islamic law in Morocco makes it a fundamental part of contemporary sociopolitical life, and many of the challenges faced by early feminist groups are reflected in contemporary political engagement among hip hop musicians. While I do not propose that the concerns of these temporally and distant groups are identical, the social impacts of Islamic law both in theory and in practice continue to resonate into the present day and are a necessary part of a fuller understanding of contemporary opposition and gendered social life in the Moroccan hip hop community.

The original draft of the *Mudawwana* was implemented in 1957, shortly after Morocco gained national independence from French colonial powers. The original document featured a nearly wholesale adoption of the historical legal interpretations of the Maliki School of Islamic legal thought, including highly conservative rulings such as the maintenance of male guardianship (*jabr*), polygamy, strict limitations placed on divorce enacted by the female spouse, and the male right to unilateral repudiation of marriage (*talāq*). From its implementation to its
official abolition in 2010, the *Mudawwana* influenced not only the social construction of gender and its expressions, but also the very fabric of monarchical power and legitimacy.

In this chapter, I will trace the social and legal repercussions of the *Mudawwana* and numerous reform efforts from 1957 to 2004, with a particular focus on the changes implemented under the nation’s current leader, King Muhammad VI. Politically engaged actors ranging from feminist activists to regime supporters continuously employ the language and gendered understandings codified in Morocco’s family and personal status law. Alterations in legal policy are reflected in the nation’s activist culture and vice versa. Thus, it is necessary to grasp the sociopolitical significance of the *Mudawwana*, as well as its contested history in order to more fully understand the varying perspectives of politically engaged musicians discussed in coming chapters.

I will first situate family and personal status law in the larger context of Islamic legal history and social practice in order to avoid the troubling generalizations that sometimes emerge in discussions of Shari’a law. Like most social institutions, Moroccan Islamic law did not emerge in isolation but was the result of complex historical forces and continuous legal and social interpretation. By exploring the historical context in which it is embedded, I hope to provide a more thorough examination of the law and its sociopolitical impacts. I will then discuss the ways that the *Mudawwana* has shaped understandings of gender and gendered social space. This in turn informs the emergent relationship between forms of feminist activism and the regime. Finally, I will provide a brief overview of recent reform efforts, beginning in 1992 and culminating in the law’s major 2004 reforms.

**The Mudawwana in Islamic Legal and Social Practice**
The historical purpose of articulating an Islamic legal code was to align the practices of the Muslim community with interpretations of God’s divine law (the Sharī’a) as expressed in the Qur’an. Theological understandings of the Sharī’a recognize it as sacred and immutable instruction revealed through the Prophet Muhammad for the purpose of illustrating the path to eternal salvation for both individuals and their faith community, but it poses unique problems in terms of legal codification and practice. Much of the Sharī’a outlined in the Qur’an deals with internal morality and piety, which lie beyond the domain of positive law. Early Islamic legal scholars distinguished between aspects of the law concerned with an individual’s relationship with God and an individual’s relationships with others. The former was considered a matter of divine judgment, while the latter could be organized into formal legal code through scholars’ interpretive efforts. This distinction created an ongoing division in Islamic law between divine ideals and social practice. Though the Sharī’a is understood to present an ideal model of human social life, the level of interpretation required of its textual medium leads to social and legal practices necessarily influenced by human reasoning.

Contemporary Islamic legal systems exist at an intersection between these historically situated interpretation and the supreme, atemporal authority of God’s word as manifested in authoritative texts (the Qur’an and Sunna). On one hand, law in Islam stems directly from revelation and is removed from human influence; yet it also exists in an ongoing dialogue with centuries of legal interpretative tradition and social practice. These two elements of Islamic law, described by legal anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini as the “sacred” and the “temporal,” are not entirely dichotomous and the boundaries between them are seldom clear or fixed (Mir-Hosseini 1993, 1). As the Qur’anic text remains continuously open to interpretation, its legal manifestations cannot be considered in isolation from extant socio-historical influences or
individual biases of scholars. This makes the source of authority in Islamic legal structures somewhat ambiguous, as tensions exist between the ultimate authority assigned to the divine texts and the potentially flawed human judgment exercised by scholars in their interpretation and codification of the law (Abou El Fadl 2003, 3-4).

Yet for many in the Maghreb and the larger Muslim world, family and personal status law’s particular significance lies in its perceived connections to authoritative Islamic sources. The Qur’an and Sunna—the collected writings on the Prophet’s life and teachings—are most vocal about rules concerning personal conduct in family and marital relationships. Family and personal status law is therefore the most developed and encompassing branch of Islamic legal practice, and principles espoused in these doctrines are often said to most closely represent the word of God as transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad. This poses particular legal and religious challenges to reformation efforts as discourse surrounding the legal doctrines often conflates the practice of the law with belief in God’s divinity and Islam (Charrad 2001, 28).

Family and personal status law also maintains symbolic importance through its historical links to local resistance against Western colonial oppression. The colonial period saw the relatively widespread rise of secularism throughout the Muslim world through the formation of colonial governments closely resembling their counterparts in the West. This governmental model generally relegated religious practice to private spheres of interaction and severely limited the presence of Islam in governance. Those engaged in the fight for Moroccan independence often related this reduction of Islam’s social influence to Western subjugation, thus imbuing Islamic law with increased symbolic value.

Mir-Hosseini argues that family and personal status law not only served as symbolic resistance to secularization and local disempowerment, it also created a space in which Islam
could retain its practical legal significance. As the behavior regulated by personal status and family law lies in the private sphere—namely within the home, family, and the female body—it was generally exempt from the largely public rise of secularism. It therefore retained practical, as well as symbolic importance in the lives of many Moroccan Muslims. This double-layered significance, which ties family and personal status law to both sociopolitical identity and perceived religious authenticity, has helped these legal doctrines retain their significance in the face of large-scale social changes throughout the postcolonial period in Morocco.

Despite longstanding claims of religious and social authenticity, family and personal status law in Morocco and elsewhere has been subject to many of the same interpretive efforts and socio-political considerations as other legal branches, and often represents a hybrid between Sharī’a rulings and secular jurisprudence based on Western models (Mir-Hosseini 1993, 10-11). Many contemporary scholars and activists are currently engaging with family and personal status law through the discourses of feminism and human rights in attempts to situate these legal interpretations in their appropriate socio-historical contexts, and to provide alternative readings of the Qur’an in terms of gender roles and social equality. In Morocco, recognition of personal status law as a document susceptible to human influence and human failings allowed the Mudawwana to enter the political arena as a vital source of sociopolitical resistance and early feminist expression.

The Mudawwana as an Expression of Gendered Bodies and Gendered Space

The Mudawwana’s social legacy is most readily observed in conceptions of the gendered organization of space and embodied social roles. Personal status and family law historically served the social purpose of regulating sexual conduct in order to prevent morally degenerate social discord, or fitna. Early perceptions of human sexuality in the Muslim philosophical and
legal traditions often assigned it a neutral moral value: sexuality represents instincts which are neither inherently good nor inherently damaging. Rather, the actions undertaken in the name of such instincts determine their benefit or harm to society (Mernissi 2000, 19). In her article “The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality,” well-known Moroccan feminist author Fatima Mernissi locates contemporary perceptions of sexuality and gender relations in the writings of Imam al-Ghazali, a highly influential medieval Sunni legal philosopher. In his writings, Al-Ghazali described sexuality as a divine creation to assure humankind’s continued existence. As such, sexual desire cannot be eradicated or suppressed entirely, but instead must be carefully controlled in order to better serve God’s divine purpose.

According to Mernissi, sexual desire’s status as both divine and earthly, and its “tactical importance in God’s strategy,” requires divinely inspired regulation (Mernissi 2000, 21). In ideal circumstances, this divine regulation stems directly from the divine instructions elaborated in the Qur’an and Sunna, though in reality, social considerations have often equaled interpretations of the divine texts in terms of legal significance. Mernissi argues that Islamic legal interpretations tend to operate on the basis of women’s sexuality as an active, rather than passive force. Women are portrayed as seeking out the fulfillment of their sexual urges, as opposed to serving as passive recipients of male desire. This understanding historically necessitated more active forms of social control, such as practices of female seclusion, in order to prevent sexually driven chaos in which women’s sexual desires undermine the male-dominated social order. It is also worth noting that this conception of female sexuality and its social and legal ramifications played a large role in the formulation and justification of the Oriental imaginary in the West. In this context Muslim women’s sexuality was not only seen as potentially dangerous for their own communities, but also for the Western social structure as
European men were depicted as especially susceptible to the sexual allure of the haremed woman.

Much jurisprudential literature on women’s roles in marriage focuses on the fulfillment of male desire as a means through which to disempower the potentially subversive and dangerous sexual needs of the female spouse. Restrictions placed on women’s rights in marriage, such as the legal permissibility of unilateral divorce via repudiation, work to reinforce this hierarchical understanding of gender relations in which women trade absolute sexual availability in exchange for financial and material support. Though reforms of personal status and family law in Morocco have gradually decreased the focus on total sexual availability present in the *Mudawwana*’s earliest articulations, this initial legal interpretation helped to transform women from active political subjects into inanimate, politicized objects. The early *Mudawwana*’s treatment of female sexuality and bodily autonomy as a force to be contained and controlled has created a larger political climate in which women are often invested with deep sociopolitical significance in exchange for their social agency (Maher 1978, 101). In addition to placing wives in a sexually subjugated position, family and personal status law’s symbolic value during the struggle for independence further encouraged the perception of women and their bodies as the bearers of Moroccan culture whose roles as wives and mothers superseded their rights as citizens and individuals.

The *Mudawwana* legally codified a rigid distinction between the public sphere, which is the domain of men, and the female-gendered private sphere. This gendered public/private dichotomy emerges as both an abstract sociopolitical concept and a physical reality. Although neoliberal restructuring of the Moroccan economy has both allowed and necessitated the introduction of women into the workplace, they are often still depicted in popular culture as
residing almost exclusively in the home and their domestic duties retain significant moral value (Rogers 2012, 457). Men, on the other hand, are able to symbolically and physically leave the home to enter the socially active space of the political and economic public. According to Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji in a 2006 article on the feminization of Moroccan public space, “this view associates the public space with outside/exterior and the private space with the inside/interior, implying that the outside is the place of power where social constraints are produced and the inside is the place where this power is exercised” (Ennaji and Sadiqi 2006, 89). Ennaji and Sadiqi not only recognize male social power in the public space, but they also acknowledge the ways that family and personal status law works to translate that power to female-dominated private spaces. Many of the most important events in men’s lives occur in private, and the legally sanctioned rights to polygamy, unilateral divorce, and sexual availability historically allowed men to manage women’s personal as well as public behavior (Ennaji and Sadiqi 2006, 91).

Women’s dominant presence within the home as mothers, wives, and culture-bearers thus worked to socially silence them and encourage a legal and political environment in which women are spoken for rather than spoken to. As such political disempowerment is embedded in the configuration of Moroccan social space via the Mudawwana, it has proven difficult for activists to overcome, especially when placed in dialogue with other social factors such as ethnic and class identity. In the decades following the ratification of the first Moroccan constitution, feminist organizations tended to focus their efforts on Mudawwana reform as a means to combat this marginalization. Engagement with the dominant legal and political discourse allowed these women to assert themselves into the distinctly male-dominated political space.
In an article exploring recent developments in Moroccan feminist thought, gender studies scholar Zakia Salime characterizes the emergent relationship between early Moroccan feminist activists and the regime as one of halting collaboration rather than outright political resistance. From its earliest iterations in the mid-twentieth century, mainstream Moroccan feminism has been characterized by its relationship with the monarchy. Rather than working outside the established structures of social and political power, activists work within these systems and often employ similar religious and political language. While this strategy initially allowed for increased visibility of the movement and created the possibility of legal reform, it also inadvertently reinforced the monarch’s authority (Salime 2012, 103). In engaging directly with regime rhetoric and acknowledging the Mudawwana’s significance as a source of religious legitimacy, state-endorsed feminist organizations set a standard of sociopolitical resistance dependent on the monarchy for recognition and legitimation.

**Early Feminism and the Solidification of Monarchical Power**

During the colonial period, the women’s rights movement played an important role in working against French leadership by encouraging a counter-discourse to European understandings of allegedly retrogressive Islamist social policies. Beginning in 1946 with the early feminist group, the Sisters of Purity, politically motivated women’s organizations came forward to challenge the validity of wholesale acceptance of Maliki jurisprudence in family and personal status law. Along with nationalist and religious leaders these groups called for a reactivation of Islamic interpretative tradition (*ijtiḥād*), a practice in which the Sharī’a and its resultant legal codes become a constantly evolving system through continually informed interpretation of religious sources. The concept of *ijtiḥād* was a valuable tool for the independence movement as it discouraged European interpretations of Islam as inflexible and
inherently static, and engendered a sense of empowerment among often socially disparate populations of Moroccan Muslims by highlighting a mode of resistance based in shared faith. Through public cooptation of religious language, early women’s organizations joined the issues of gender equality with the larger struggle for independence and national self-determination.

After the formal usurpation of the French colonial government in 1952, the early postcolonial parliament appointed a group of Maliki legal scholars (‘ulemā) to codify formal family and personal status laws based on the Maliki juristic tradition. No women were present on this parliamentary council, indicating a break between pre-independence discourse that included gender equality as a major symbol of nationalist identity, and the reality of fledgling nationhood in Morocco. Concerns about the practical implications of the nation’s large ethnic diversity prompted efforts to unify disparate ethnic communities under the new monarchical government. The original draft of the Mudawwana provided an effective means by which the monarchy could transform Islam into a unifying political tool.

In her book, States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco (2001), Mounira Charrad demonstrates the powerful influence of kin-based social groupings on Morocco’s early legal development. She argues that the relatively late acquisition of independence and the close alliances forged between semi-autonomous kin-based communities and the newly-formed Moroccan government helped to influence the interpretation and development of the laws of personal status. She claims that, in formally codifying a relatively strict interpretation of Maliki law in the early Mudawwana, the Moroccan government helped to cement the patrilineal structure of existing kinship-based communities through the maintenance of hierarchical gender relations based on agnatic, rather than conjugal bonds (Charrad 2001, 100). Through highly conservative legal rulings, this early draft of the
Mudawwana continued to define marriage and kinship as exclusively agnatic, and to deny female agency in either social or bodily actions.

The strict codification of the Mudawwana also worked to cement the monarchy’s base of power. Under the Moroccan constitution, the king fills the role of the Commander of the Faithful whose primarily responsibility is to unite the Moroccan people under the doctrine of Islam. Within this role, the king is responsible for safeguarding the religious and moral well-being of the nation and is appointed the guardian of the people’s rights and liberties as defined in the constitution. This position effectively transfers the aegis of individual rights into the hands of the monarch. Perhaps more importantly, the title of amīr al-mūminīn signifies the royal family’s right to rule as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and grants the royal regime political legitimation through an Islamic framework, a capacity denied to all other political actors (Smith and Louidy 2005, 1070-1071). The codification of a relatively strict interpretation of Islamic law allowed Morocco’s first king, Mohammad V, to not only gain support of powerful conservative religious factions immediately following independence, but also firmly positioned him as the nation’s guiding father-figure in the religious domain.

This religiously legitimated authority has created a political environment in which any alternative discourse is easily construed as not only anti-regime, but also anti-Islamic and potentially threatening to the social order. An article by cultural studies scholars Andrew Smith and Fadoua Louidy discusses the relationship between expressions of dissent and the king’s position as amīr al-mū‘minīn:

[I]n an Islamic state such as Morocco … where the king’s legitimacy is linked to his being Commander of the Faithful … individual autonomy undermines the

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3 Any politicization of Islam by oppositional groups has frequently been painted as extremist and ultimately dangerous to the nation’s political stability, thus rendering a potentially powerful political tool exclusively into the hands of the monarch.
state that upholds the religion that the monarch invokes for sanctification and, ultimately, political legitimacy.

Smith and Loudiy characterize the regime as a “semi-authoritarian system” in which the government uses ambiguity of permissive and prohibited acts in order to maintain an environment of self-censorship and inevitable regime cooptation of dissident political projects. Semi-authoritarian systems are not to be confused with failed democracies or transitional governments moving between totalitarianism and democracy. Rather, they are controlled governmental constructs in which the status quo of regime power and cooptation is carefully maintained (Smith and Louidy 2005, 1070).

For the Moroccan feminist movement, this system created a form of political and social resistance that was heavily reliant on the monarchy for success. Rather than position themselves as direct opponents to the king and his regime, state-endorsed feminist groups worked as allies of the monarchy and often called on the king to act as arbitrator in their larger disputes with various Islamist political parties and activist groups. As Zakia Salime explains

> These entitlements [of regime alliance] provide feminist groups with leverage to counter the power of the Islamists who could authoritatively speak in the name of God against painfully gained rights. This is why questioning the King’s authority is very risky for feminist groups […] (Salime 2012, 108)

The historical necessity of a cooperative relationship between feminist organizations and the regime has often led critics of the mainstream feminist movement to paint its activists as puppets of the monarchy complicit in the government’s oppressive project (Errazzouki 2014, 262).\(^4\) An examination of contemporary *Mudawwana* reform efforts from 1992 to 2003 demonstrates the sociopolitical impacts of the often uneasy alliance between feminist resistance and monarchical

\(^4\) Errazzouki points to the marginal status of working-class and rural women, and the failure of the new personal status code to engender any meaningful changes in the lives of many individuals outside the nation’s wealthy urban centers.
power. A very similar relationship has developed between many Moroccan hip hop musicians and the regime through institutions of patronage and regime-sponsored music festivals. The monarch’s role as \textit{amīr al-mū’minīn} also stretches into the artistic realm as the nation’s government strives to position itself as a bastion of moderate monarchical Islam. Cultural patronage and the shifting relationship between the hip hop industry and the regime will be discussed further in the coming chapters.

**Mudawwana Reform, 1992–2003: The Birth of Contemporary Moroccan Feminism**

Despite widespread dissatisfaction toward the \textit{Mudawwana}’s first draft among many nationalist leaders, the oppressive political climate under the nation’s second monarch, King Hassan II, through the early 1980s prevented any large-scale reform movements from coalescing until late in the decade. During the Years of Lead immediately following independence, the government resorted to increasingly violent methods to prevent public unrest and silence dissension from both secular and Islamist opposition. Opponents of the regime faced penalties ranging from fees and formal reprimand to jail sentences and, in some cases, torture and execution. International political pressure eventually forced a loosening of restrictions against free speech, and by the late 1980s several publications appeared directly linking questions of women’s rights and gender equality with larger human rights issues spurred on by the efforts of the United Nations.

The gradual increase in publications calling for \textit{Mudawwana} reform amounted to a widespread effort by the organization Union de l’Action Feminine (UAF), one of the country’s first major feminist NGOs, to publicly promote legal changes. In 1992, the UAF published a petition in their magazine \textit{8 Mars} with the goal of obtaining one million signatures in favor of family and personal status law reforms, including acknowledgment of twenty-one as the age of
majority for women, the abolition of polygamy and unilateral divorce, and the right of women to pursue education and work outside the home without permission from a male guardian (Salime 2009, 155). The choice of a published text as a primary medium for major feminist organizations was an important one. The primacy of text as a communicative tool narrowed the movement’s potential audience to an educated and elite segment of the general population, but it also forced the monarchy to respond in kind and publicly acknowledge feminist concerns for the first time. While it has been argued that this ultimately worked to alienate feminist activists from a large part of the Moroccan public, it did achieve the important goal of forcing Islamic law, and the king’s religious authority along with it, into the arena of public debate (Sadiqi 2008, 329).

The political climate of the 1990s in Morocco was one of cautious optimism and change as foreign pressure from Western economic allies resulted in increasing democratic freedom in the form of parliamentary elections. This political environment helped encourage the success of the UAF petition: the document quickly achieved more than its goal of one million signatures in support of UAF’s proposed reforms. However, a number of prominent Islamist groups simultaneously collected one million signatures opposing the UAF’s demands. Tensions came to a head in a publication by a group of conservative religious leaders calling for the death penalty against UAF’s leaders as apostates from Islam. In response to the crisis, King Hassan II issued a public statement in which he expressed his refusal to allow Islamic law into the public political struggle. The monarch appointed a council of twenty men and one woman to work for carefully controlled reforms, including restrictions on polygamy through marriage contracts, the increase of the age of majority from fifteen to eighteen, and a lessening of the legal impacts of male guardianship on unmarried adult women. These reforms were passed into law the following year. However in accordance to the Moroccan Constitution, parliament was dissolved from late 1992
to early 1993 due to upcoming elections. Thus King Hassan held all legislative power during this period and passed the reforms into law without the approval of any electoral body, despite promises of increased transparency and democratization of the reforms process (Buskens 2003, 80).

The resulting changes to the Mudawwana were met with disapproval from both Islamist and secular organizations. Many engaged in the struggle for increased gender equality felt the new draft did not go far enough in its reforms, as institutions such as polygamy and male guardianship in marriage were only amended rather than redressed outright, and the age of majority for women did not reach the intended twenty-one years of age. Instead of undermining male-centric social institutions, the new version of the Mudawwana attempted to protect women and children against male abuses of these privileges. Fears of fitna coupled with women’s status as sociopolitical symbols provided an impetus for maintaining male social control. For individuals involved in Morocco’s growing Islamist movement, these reforms fundamentally altered the social and legal position of the Maliki Islamic School, and therefore of Islam itself. Some groups threatened to act out violently in response to the new version of the Mudawwana. This encouraged new restrictions on freedoms of speech, and minor reforms were gradually enacted without incident.

A major shift in Morocco’s political climate occurred in 1999 with the death of King Hassan II. His son Muhammad VI assumed leadership of the nation shortly after his father’s death. In both Morocco and the international community, Muhammad VI’s coronation was seen as a turning point in Morocco’s halting movement toward democratization. For the first time in the nation’s history, socialist and Islamist political opposition was accepted into the official democratic process, and regime opponents were allowed to run openly in elections and hold
Within this climate of increased political openness, the feminist movement and proponents of legal reform found new official avenues for encouraging change. In early 2000, Muhammad VI formally adopted a proposal authored by the socialist opposition party, Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (PPS), in the form of the National Plan for Integrating Women in Development.

The National Plan sought to address conditions of inequality between men and women across all levels of Moroccan society, including revisions to the Mudawwana and the national constitution. It received accolades from the international community and was considered exemplary in its reflection of UN standards of gender equality as elaborated by the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in their 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (Charrad 2012). Questions still remained as to whether the practical implementation of the Plan would mirror the changes promised in its text, and if such changes in legal theory would amount to similar improvements in legal practice. In an article published in Fez in 2004, prominent Moroccan political analyst Mohammad Tozy expressed his concerns that reform of personal status and family law would fail to alter fundamental social inequalities if it was not coupled with similar changes in access to education and employment. That the National Plan did not address these flaws in the nation’s social infrastructure outright represents a pattern in contemporary Moroccan law reform. Ongoing inequalities rooted in not only gender, but ethnic identity and social class, have created a widening gap between the theory of the law and its practice that remains a major stumbling block for reform efforts.

The deep division the issue of family law reform opened in the populace became evident in a series of demonstrations in the country’s major cities throughout early 2003. Shortly after the National Plan’s proposal over one million people took to the streets of Casablanca in
opposition to the proposed changes, while in parliament the influential Islamist political party Parti del la Justice et du Developement (PJD) organized a national committee “for the protection of the Moroccan family” (Salime 2009, 160). In what has become a widely used tactic by organizations and individuals opposed to potentially secularizing reforms to family law, the PJD attacked the proposed reforms as both anti-Islamic and anti-Moroccan. The group claimed the reforms blatantly contradicted the Sharī’a while simultaneously representing Western cultural imperialism accessible only to the most elite segments of Moroccan society. Such arguments illustrate the volatile intersection embodied in the Mudawwana between Islam as a national social force and the female body as a political symbol. The rhetoric of reform opponents often conflated Moroccan citizenship with Islamic religious devotion and the subjugated status of women with social and moral stability.

The struggle between these deeply opposed stances remained at a political stalemate until May 16, 2003, when a group of youths with alleged ties to al-Qaeda committed violent attacks against Casablanca. The attacks and subsequent political backlash cast serious doubt on Islam’s place in political discourse and caused many citizens to express harsh criticism against both Islamist movements and the monarchy for their perceived failures at safeguarding the populace against religious extremism (Pruzan-Jørgensen 2011, 248). For the regime, the 2003 bombing supported previous assertions that Islamic law did not belong in public political debate and was ultimately the domain of the monarch as Commander of the Faithful. People once again took to the streets after May 16, but unlike demonstrations that occurred earlier in the year, the subject was not Mudawwana reform and increased gender parity in the public sphere. Rather, many citizens sought to demonstrate their commitment to national peace and unity against the allegedly external threats of terrorism and extremism. These protests and their ongoing impacts
on feminist expression and popular musical culture will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

With opposition to reforms severely weakened and the public relatively distracted, Muhammad VI formally implemented the changes to the *Mudawwana* and the constitution proposed in the National Plan in early 2004. In the subsequent draft of Moroccan family and personal status law, women were considered legally equal to their husbands in matters of property rights and child custody, possessed nearly equal access to divorce, and were no longer required to obtain a male guardian’s permission prior to marriage. The revised constitution also promised increased personal and public freedom regardless of gender, and its proponents claimed that it embodied a gradual move toward representational democracy. Recent history clearly demonstrates that the Moroccan feminist movement did not disappear, nor did the quest for increased social equality end after the implementation of the 2004 reforms. However, I understand the Casablanca bombings and the legal revisions that followed as a recent turning point in the struggle for gender equality whose effects continue to echo into the present day.
Chapter Two

The Music of Fnaire:
Moroccan Hip Hop Defining the Public Space

Hip hop group Fnaire’s “Ma Tqich Bladi” was one of the most popular songs in Morocco during 2003 to 2004, the turbulent period immediately following the Casablanca bombings. It appeared on Moroccan State Television (2M and 1 Med) and echoed in the streets during numerous anti-terror demonstrations. A decade later, the song’s music video remains readily available on YouTube, and the group’s 2003 album was released in its entirety on the music listening software Spotify. When placed in dialogue with its local context, the content and continued popularity of Fnaire’s song provides a strong argument for both its musical and sociopolitical relevance. Though it does not overtly comment on the ongoing contestation of gendered public space and the status of women in law and society, Fnaire’s work provides a lens through which important elements of these debates become apparent. Looking ahead to the present, the social reflections embedded in “Ma Tqich Bladi” remain salient.

Fnaire is commonly identified by both Moroccan and international music critics as a conservative, pro-monarchy rap group, but the exact meaning of this label proves somewhat elusive. Though they engage indirectly with the regime and the Makhzen through participation in state-sponsored music festivals and concerts, they have also recently contributed to a number of independent projects intended to increase opportunities for young musicians outside the established royal patronage system (Almeida 2013, 328). In terms of artistic or musical patronage, Moroccan citizens and scholars commonly speak of their government as consisting of

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5 Patronage in the Moroccan context often assumes the role of the monarch himself or members of the Makhzen in funding a concert or musical festival. Events with this kind of support are sometimes considered suspect or counter-productive by musicians, especially those engaged with social reform and oppositional efforts. Fnaire’s acknowledged participation in events deliberately outside this system complicates depictions of the band as thoroughly “pro-monarchy.”
two distinct spheres of operation. Taieb Belghzai and Said Graiouid, researchers at the University Mohammed V-Agdal in Rabat, characterize the regime as a “bicepheral organization” consisting of a modern political administration on the one hand, and the traditional Makhzen, a system of sociopolitical authority that includes the close entourage of the king as the effective center of power and control, on the other hand. In some ways, Fnaire’s ambiguous political position between Makhzen patronage and more independent venues provides a particularly illuminating example of the complex web of interconnections between hip hop and the monarchy as the ensemble’s political ambiguity challenges ideas about the nature of popular musical expression and monarchical discourse as inherently dichotomous.

But while I resist common depictions of the group as purely an instrument of regime cooptation, I also argue that the ways in which Fnaire’s musical rhetoric somewhat mirrors and reinforces that of the regime should not be readily dismissed. If hip hop is understood as one of many arenas in which hegemonic “containment” and anti-hegemonic “resistance,” to borrow Hall’s terminology, compete for cultural capital in Morocco, then “Ma Tqich Bladi” provides a snapshot of this process as it played out between the monarchy and the growing feminist movement during the pivotal period following the Casablanca bombings (Hall 1981, 228).

In order to better illuminate this contested expressive ground, I will first provide a brief overview of hip hop’s position within the larger Moroccan socio-musical context during the early 2000s. This period is often considered the beginning of a shift in regime policy toward speech rights and freedom of public expression under Muhammad VI. In broad terms, the turn of the twenty-first century in Morocco witnessed the burgeoning popularity of musical genres generally perceived as emanating from the West, including both hip hop and heavy metal. Fnaire was among many artists allowed access to public musical space for the first time through
inclusion in state-sponsored broadcasting and live festival events. Taken as a microcosm of larger political processes, artists’ negotiations in the popular music industry underscore the intense social currents working to shape and re-shape the structure of Moroccan civil society during the early 2000s.

The regime’s public response to the 2003 bombings was replete with feminine and feminist imagery, and it is to this imagery that I will turn my attention. Following the work of Moroccan political scientist Mohammad Daadaoui, I examine the regime’s use of powerful social symbols as tools to maintain legitimacy and public stability during a period of intense social and political upheaval. That many of these symbols also carry strong feminine connotations and implicitly speak to women’s roles as culture-bearers and icons of Moroccan citizenship is indicative of the struggles and some of the perceived shortcomings of the state-engaged feminist movement of the early twenty-first century. Despite considerable legal and political victories in the form of Mudawwana reform, the regime’s continued invocation of feminine symbols for legitimation speaks to Moroccan women’s ongoing quest for agency in the public and political spheres.

The musical and visual output of Fnaire during this period intersects with these discourses. Examining the ways that “Ma Tqich Bladi” musically, lyrically, and visually engages with the emergent hip hop community and official symbols of the regime’s patriarchal protection via feminine images and bodies illuminates the contestation occurring between modes of feminist resistance and governmental legitimation and cooptation. This calls into question Fnaire’s status as a monarchical puppet while at the same time recognizing the presence of regime influence on their music and music videos. Through an understanding of Fnaire’s position between state-engaged feminist resistance and monarchical cooptation, I hope to also
provide a platform for analyzing current debates about the future of feminism and feminist resistance in the Moroccan context. Again invoking Stuart Hall, I will elaborate on the role of hip hop music and musicians as intermediaries in the ongoing struggle for increased democratic representation and gender equality in Moroccan sociopolitical life.

**Local Musical Forms on a Global Stage**

Rather than referring solely to a musical genre or style of lyrical delivery, hip hop in the context of this work encompasses the art forms, media outlets, and expressive communities surrounding this form of popular music. More specifically, it refers to DJ-ing and turntabalism, rapping and emceeing, break dancing and other contemporary dance forms, graffiti art and writing, and a system of social knowledge uniting these modes of expression (Morgan and Bennett 2011, 176). Generally speaking, the development of contemporary hip hop as a form of political protest and source of community cohesion is located among minority youth communities on the east coast of the United States beginning in the mid-1970s. In that context, the genre came to signify minority ethnic identity, especially that of African Americans, and heightened political awareness and activism related to an atmosphere of pervasive, institutionalized discrimination and inequality. Much early hip hop was associated with calls for increased civil rights and worked to express frustrations of underprivileged urban communities and solidify community identity. But, as with many globally recognized musical genres, the history and present musical and political trajectory of hip hop remains highly contested.

It is not the intent of this chapter to comment on or contribute to that ongoing debate, nor do I intend to draw distinctions between allegedly “commodified” or “commercialized” rap and that which is depicted as politically and socially conscious, sometimes referred to as

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6 According to Morgan and Bennett, “Hip-hop knowledge refers to the aesthetic, social, intellectual, and political identities, beliefs, behaviors, and values produced and embraced by its members, who generally think of hip hop as an identity, a worldview, and a way of life.”
“grassroots.” These distinctions are often not as salient in the global context as they are when speaking about the American music industry, and can create a false dichotomy that ignores the complexities of artists’ intent and audience members’ interpretations. Borrowing from Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett’s broad overview of global hip hop, I understand the genre in its current context as an emergent community that “encourages and integrates innovative practices of artistic expression, knowledge production, social identification, and political mobilization. In these respects, it transcends and contests conventional constructions of identity, race, nation, community, aesthetics, and knowledge” (Morgan and Bennett, 177).

Whatever its specific origins or sociopolitical role, hip hop’s contemporary place in the global music consciousness is undeniable. In 2009 the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reported that hip hop music made up half of the Top-10 songs digitally downloaded around the world. Despite this worldwide presence, it is important to avoid exceedingly broad characterizations of hip hop culture across international, national, and regional boundaries. The genre’s visual, musical, and aesthetic styles often signify different, locally specific sets of meanings that may fail to translate wholesale from one context to another. This is particularly true of stylistic elements often used to index black social and ethnic identity in the United States. These signifiers do not always engender the same, often racialized representations in all contexts, and may indicate entirely different, regionally specific meanings to local audiences. In her recent article “Rap and Revolt in the Arab World,” Nouri Gana warns of confusing the significance of rap music in the United States with its significance as a global movement. In Gana’s words, “The development of rap music into a world-wide youth phenomenon should be seen as a result of intense circulations, exchanges, borrowings,
adaptations, hybridizations, and graftings of local forms of musical expression and cultural empowerment” (Gana 2012, 26). The same can be said of hip hop culture more generally.

Musicologist Murray Forman writes in his 2002 examination of hip hop and identity among Somali refugees in the United States that

Claiming one’s place within Hip Hop culture involves more than simply exhibiting particular consumption patterns, sartorial tastes, or other surface gestures; it also encompasses the demonstration of deeply invested affinities or attitudinal allegiances that shape one’s mode of expression and inform the core of both self and group identity simultaneously. (Forman 2002, 102)

In this sense, affinity for the genre as either a musician or audience member is often attached to a larger system of assumed values and life ways. The precise significance assigned to these assumptions shifts as the music and practices associated with hip hop culture become embedded in new local contexts. At the same time, such characterizations can be misleading. In terms of the Moroccan hip hop industry, the assumption that all listeners and artists share similar political, social, or religious values may lead to an essentialized depiction of a diverse community. Within American music journalism, such depictions are often based in a particular set of musical values and cultural assumptions that look to the development of hip hop in the United States as a basis for the genre’s sociopolitical significance elsewhere (Lakhani 2012).

Almeida challenges this conception of the Moroccan hip hop community. Instead of a cohesive, unified group of political actors, she sees Moroccan hip hop musicians and audience members as primarily non-collective, with impressions of unity stemming from “fragmented but similar activities” rather than shared ideology or any semblance of organizational leadership

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7 This 2012 article for the American news outlet, CNN, provides one such example. Though the association of contemporary hip hop artists and political protest is not incorrect, the constructed dichotomy between “grassroots” or “authentic” Moroccan musicians and their “commercialized” or “inauthentic” American counterparts assigns a system of musical values to Moroccan artists that may or may not resonate with their specific experiences, and tends to deny such musicians any engagement with the processes of the international music industry and commercial success offered therein.
When examining the activities of individual artists or ensembles, this lack of collectivity becomes even more apparent as the actions and political expressions of even individual members of the hip hop community often fail to totally conform to a single ideological or political objective. The following pages attempt to dissect this complex relationship between the emergent hip hop industry in Morocco, the nation’s monarchical government, and the members of Fnaire as independent socio-musical actors.

“Stand up:” Nayda and the Birth of the Moroccan Hip Hop Industry

As in its nascent phase of popularity in the United States and western Europe, hip hop music in the Arab world—and the Maghreb region more specifically—is often broadly associated with political unrest and periods of social change among youth populations. According Gana’s overview of Arab popular music, many of the earliest rap crews who gained popularity in the Arab world during the late 1990s and early 2000s focused their often deeply critical musical attention on the ongoing conflicts between Israel and Palestine. (Gana 2012, 31) This portrayal of the genre as a politically motivated mouthpiece of popular dissent made it a focus of the international media during the recent 2011 protests throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Tunisian hip hop arguably received the most international attention during the 2011 Arab Spring protests in the Maghreb due in part to the intense governmental reaction against Tunisian musician El Gèneral’s outspoken criticisms of the existing regime. Hip hop culture in Morocco during this period, much like the Moroccan protests themselves, garnered comparatively little global media attention despite a strong national presence and impact.

In my view this overall lack of international interest in Morocco during the 2011 Arab Spring movements is due, in part, to the multifaceted relationship between Moroccan protest culture and music, and the regime. Popular music and culture are often depicted by the
Moroccan and international media like as either engaged with the state and thus wholly commercialized, or as wholly noncommercial and disengaged from official state rhetoric. In this dichotomous framework, noncommercial musical expressions are often understood as unfiltered social and political ideations of a marginalized and disadvantaged population, while commercial music stems from governmental or elite cooptation of these expressions. The social value attached to allegedly grassroots expressions of popular dissent has often engendered competing discourses of regime cooptation versus popular opposition both in the hip hop community and Moroccan protest culture more generally. These discourses do not always reflect individual behavior or personal experience but carve out space in which artists and community members can explore and contest their often varying and variable positions. Cristina Morena Almeida cogently argues that Moroccan hip hop artists occupy a medial social position, operating between rebellion and cooptation in order to navigate the complex socio-musical structure between popular culture, political protest, and monarchical legitimacy. Almeida states that even as some musicians “reproduce and seem to affirm certain state discourses, they can at the same time be involved in opening up public discourses in which to develop networks of solidarities. In this way they can create a strong rap scene that cannot be understood using the limiting framework of corrupt versus authentic” (Almeida 2013, 320).

Hip hop artists’ negotiations between governmentally sanctioned rhetoric and extra-state popular expression has been a hallmark of the genre since it first achieved widespread popularity in Morocco during the early 2000s. Muhammad VI’s ascendance to the throne in 1999 marked the beginning of a period of artistic and social change typically referred to in the local and

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8 I choose to use the terms “commercialized” and “noncommercial” or “grassroots” in place of Almeida’s “corrupt” and “authentic” in order to avoid confusion with the latter terms’ other usage in musicological discourse, and to avoid associations between discourses of authenticity and broad value judgements placed on the musical practices in question.
international press as Nayda. Under Morocco’s previous monarch Hassan II, artistic expression, whether in music, art, literature, or film, was subject to intense governmental censorship. After Muhammad VI’s coronation, state censorship relaxed to promote a “new official discourse of openness and modernity” (Almeida 2013, 322). Hip hop music gained a much wider following during this period as musicians were allowed access to public spaces that had been closed to them under the previous regime. The increase in expressive freedom facilitated an explosion of national and international popular music festivals, the largest of which is the annual Mawazine Festival in Rabat. Mawazine and events like it typically feature popular international artists as well as local acts, and are met with both criticism and celebration by Moroccan musicians and audiences. These festivals and their impact on popular musical expression will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

It is misleading to present Nayda and the numerous musical events with which it is associated as a homogenized and unproblematic whole. Even the term itself, meaning wake up or stand up in Moroccan colloquial Arabic (Darija), was coined by journalists and largely intended as a political message decrying sociopolitical apathy among the nation’s urban youth. Though the command is utilized by many emcees and appears repeatedly in lyrics from the period, it often conveys a very different sentiment in a purely musical context. According to Almeida, some hip hop artists argue that the term simply encourages audience participation during a performance by literally calling on listeners to stand, and object to the word’s overt politicization. In the same vein, this label creates an impression of unity among artists associated with Nayda and frames them as part of a larger social movement (Almeida 2013, 323). Approaching the Moroccan hip hop scene in this way fails to account for the numerous strategies employed by musicians to navigate the linguistic and musical spaces between regime rhetoric
and sentiments of popular discontent. It also discounts the possibility of viewing musical production as a contested expressive space that neither totally affirms nor denies state-endorsed discourse.

Regardless of the exact political affiliations of its associated artists, Nayda served the important musical and social functions of allowing previously censored forms of musical practice a place in the Moroccan musical vocabulary and of permitting open affiliation with these emerging genres for the first time. State-sponsored television and radio began to occasionally feature popular Moroccan hip hop artists, and some musicians have since enjoyed a level of fame outside their home country made possible, in part, by increasing permissibility and visibility in the media. A changing gender dynamic is also somewhat visible in the audiences of hip hop concerts. *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*, a 2007 documentary film produced by American activists and independent filmmakers Joshua Asen and Jennifer Needlman, details the impacts of Nayda on Moroccan musical practice through the organization of the nation’s first all-rap music festival. In the film, a number of audience members participating in these concerts are young women. At performances of popular music, more rigid gendering of public spaces seems to break down somewhat, allowing women to assert both their physical and symbolic presence (Asen and Needlman 2007).

**Hip Hop and (Female) Symbols of Regime Legitimacy: Fnaire’s “Ma Tqich Bladi”**

On May 16, 2003, the somewhat optimistic political atmosphere inspired by increasing democratization and Nayda’s expressive openness was severely disrupted when a group of militants committed a violent attack on Casablanca. Ten suicide bombers simultaneously detonated explosives at locations throughout the city, including a popular hotel, foreign-owned restaurants, and a Jewish community center. The attack killed forty-one civilians and wounded
over one hundred others. The suspects were all Moroccan citizens with ties to Al-Qaida, a revelation that seriously complicated official discourses on Morocco as a nation free from the radicalization plaguing its neighbors to the east and south (Sciolino 2003). The bombings sent shockwaves through both the political and artistic communities and resulted in renewed restrictions on public expression and free speech in the form of anti-terrorism legislation.

This legislation primarily manifested as crackdowns on regime opposition of all types, especially Islamist and socialist political groups, on the relatively vague grounds of “national security” (Storm 2009, 997–999). Though not banned outright, many burgeoning forms of popular music, including hip hop, were also painted as complicit in the violence if they failed to conform to the state-endorsed rhetoric against both secularism and radical Islamism (Rogers 2012, 458). Through the elimination of both Islamist and secular oppositional voices, the regime worked to silence two of the most effective modes of past dissident engagement: Islam and western-modeled feminism. This depoliticized the subjects of gender equality and democratization of the public sphere while simultaneously granting the monarchy greater control over this discourse and its symbolic sociopolitical significance.

Fnaire provided a widely recognized musical response to the months of unrest immediately following the 2003 incident. The ensemble had existed in some capacity prior to their 2003 release, but the popularity of “Ma Tqich Bladi” cemented Fnaire’s position in the emergent rap scene. The group hails from Marrakesh, a city that along with Casablanca is considered at the center of Moroccan hip hop production and concerts, and was among the three locations of the nation’s first all-rap musical festival in 2006. Fnaire’s centrality in the burgeoning hip hop community of the early 2000s brings to bear two important considerations. The first is that simplistic depictions of the ensemble as a mouthpiece for the regime and
therefore lacking in musical credibility overlook the reality of the group’s popularity and influence. The second, related point is that this very level of popularity makes Fnaire and their music a powerful potential field of engagement between the Moroccan regime and the public.

*I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* highlights Fnaire’s ambiguous position between regime rhetoric and popular discourse. The film follows its producer, Joshua Asen, as he pairs with several Moroccan musicians, including well-known acts such as DJ Key, H-Kayne, and Don Bigg, in an attempt to organize a series of all-hip hop concerts in Meknes, Marrakesh, and Casablanca. At times the film portrays these artists somewhat dramatically, highlighting stories of personal struggle against an oppressive political and religious climate. However, featured interviews with the artists encourage a far more nuanced understanding of their positions. Members of Fnaire in particular avoid outright engagement with questions of regime legitimacy. In one recorded interview, the group clearly places the impetus of Morocco’s social and political challenges in poverty and economic failure and when pressed, refuses to more directly address the monarchy’s role in continued social inequality. They admit that this form of censorship is self-imposed as part of a larger complex of social responsibility, though again the group locates the aegis of self-censorship not in the larger political structure but in each member’s individual desire to engage with public politics of respectability. They connect their aesthetic choice to avoid the profanity that often contributes to the genre’s subversion in other contexts to their lack of direct engagement with forms of public political dissent (Asen and Needleman 2007).

Members of Fnaire position themselves as “true Moroccans” as opposed to American or western European-influenced members of the opposition. This speaks to the creation of a socio-musical complex in which musicians use hip hop to express, develop, and critique emergent modes of citizenship and national belonging. The group evokes the politics of authenticity to
draw a distinction between their locally influenced and therefore, authentically Moroccan music and the more globalized and allegedly commoditized work of their competitors. In the context of Fnaire’s musical discourse, authenticity and commoditization are not understood as synonymous to political opposition on one hand and regime cooptation on the other, as is discussed above. Rather, these terms here refer to the ensemble’s sonic resemblance to Moroccan, rather than western, soundscapes. To Fnaire, “authentic” Moroccan hip hop is that which draws on local forms and rejects overt usage of Francophone or American hip hop styles.

While it is difficult to discuss an overarching stylistic hegemony in Moroccan hip hop as the genre is characterized by its musical and linguistic diversity, some regional generalizations do appear. Fnaire’s home city of Marrakesh is often considered a hub for hip hop musicians whose work draws distinct influence from musical practices heard as more traditionally Moroccan in origin (Salois 2009). The band’s regional affiliation and role in the development of the subgenre rap taqlīdī (traditional rap) increase the relevance of such claims and more firmly situate them within the purview of Morocco’s hip hop community.

For instance, the ensemble calls their particular mode of lyrical delivery and rhythmic iteration “Aisawwa-style,” referring to local Sufi practices in which devotees reach an ecstatic trance state through repetitive rhythmic music, dance, and chanting. In musical and stylistic discourse, this reference makes a clear discursive connection between Fnaire’s particular musical style in a genre with predominantly western origins, and distinctly local Sufi sonic practices.9

On one hand these claims of musical authenticity can be seen as supporting accusations of regime cooptation through the creation and maintenance of a dichotomy between

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9 Fnaire is not the only hip hop ensemble to use the phrase Aissawa-style when describing their music: Marrakesh-based group H-Kayne also calls their mode of rhythmic and lyrical delivery by this term. It is interesting to note that Fnaire and H-Kayne, while hailing from the same city, are not typically considered musically similar. H-Kayne typically uses less melodic material and has a markedly harder mode of rapped lyrical delivery than Fnaire. This indicates that as a label, Aissawa style functions symbolically rather than strictly musically.
“authentically Moroccan” pro-monarchy hip hop and the American and Francophone-influenced music of political dissent. Yet the ensemble’s simultaneous participation in the film and the concert series speaks to the non-linear relationship between musical production and political discourse. Like many Moroccan hip hop musicians, the members of Fnaire do not address their musical choices outright. Salois discusses this relatively common reticence in her dissertation, positing that among her numerous interlocutors, no musicians had formal training and thus might lack the learned vocabulary necessary to engage in confident conversation about musical specifics (Salois 2009). Even still, Fnaire’s reference to Moroccan musical practices is sonically realized through the presence of both distinctly North African, and American and European musical elements.

Much of Fnaire’s early output features rapped verses alternating with a repetitious sung chorus, a structure common in most American and European hip hop of the same period. The pronounced sound of drum kit, synthesizer, and turntables also resonates with the genre’s Francophone and American iterations that also permeated the soundscape of early Moroccan hip hop. However, the chorus of “Ma Tqich Bladi” uses a minor pentatonic melody and a heterophonic singing style that more resemble some Aisawwa and Gnawa musical practices than the genre’s American or European iterations. Fnaire’s consistent use of electric guitar played in a style quite distinct to the Saharan region of North Africa provides the ensemble’s work with a further regional signature. The length of many songs is also worth noting. In Fnaire’s work, as well as in Moroccan hip hop more generally, song length often stretches between four and six minutes. This slightly extended length, coupled with an often repetitive rhythmic and musical structure can be heard as part of the larger soundscape of Moroccan popular music that is heavily influenced by the region’s prominent Sufi musical practices (Salois 2009). Whether this
hybridization specifically contributes to Fnaire’s popularity and perceived political relevance is beyond the scope of this study, but the relationship between the ensemble’s musical choices and their rhetoric of Moroccan musical authenticity versus the alleged musical and political corruption of their internationally-influenced competitors should not be overlooked.

“Ma Tqich Bladi,” meaning “don’t touch my country” in Darija, appeared almost immediately after the 2003 Casablanca attack and illustrates both visually and sonically the ways that these contestations for expressive power are enacted. On the surface, the piece explicitly condemns the perpetrators of the attacks and calls for Moroccans to remain united against all forms of extremism and cultural imperialism. The title phrase was a common slogan for those backing the monarchy and the anti-terrorist measures instituted in the wake of the violence, appearing on billboards, t-shirts, and picket signs alike. The words were often superimposed over the image of a red and green khamsa, linking the sentiment of solidarity to the feminized nation via the presence of Morocco’s national colors and the Hand of Fatima.

Art history scholar Amanda Rogers proposes in a 2012 article that the regime’s renewed control over artistic and musical production immediately following the Casablanca terrorist attack allowed the Moroccan government to “sustain [itself] through a careful maintenance of expressive culture” in the face of large-scale ideological conflict (Rogers 2012, 456). In Rogers’s analysis, the 2003 incident proved especially threatening because it undermined the monarchy’s claims to governmental legitimacy based in its status as a bastion of moderate Islam, and in the King’s position as Commander of the Faithful. The regime’s response to the event assured that music, art, literature, and other forms of expression could not serve as potential conduits for alternative political discourse. This state-sponsored discourse, which operated within the framework of Islam but denied its explicit politicization, allowed the government to
acknowledge the presence of alternative modes of political and social engagement without necessarily granting them genuine legitimacy in the political sphere.

Mohammed Daadaoui examines the ways that the Moroccan regime exercises increased hegemonic control during times of national crisis through what he calls “rituals of power.” These acts allow the state to exert domination over citizens without resorting to violence, a feat achieved through “education, media, state performances, and spectacles.” Inscribing monarchical discourse on such institutions greatly increases its social efficacy without the need for overtly oppressive tactics by the state, and encourages levels of self-censorship as an implicit requirement for full social participation. Daadaoui further argues that the state primarily manipulates social and religious symbols in order to reinforce the monarch’s primary and most powerful source of legitimacy:

Symbolic manipulation of the sources of legitimacy in Morocco, and appeal to these particular symbols of Moroccan social identity, allows the monarchy to diffuse the Islamist challenge to its legitimacy amidst a slow process of liberalization, mainly by imposing two strategies of cooptation and confinement. (Daadaoui 2011, 4–6)

I expand the targets of this tactic to include not only Islamist resistance to the regime, but secular, state-engaged feminist opposition as well.

Many public reactions to the 2003 attacks witnessed the repurposing of this powerful feminine socio-religious symbol. The Hand is a significant religious-magical symbol for protection against the forces of spiritual and physical evil. It is gendered as female and associated in rhetoric and design with the largely female practice of hennaing. Henna, in turn, resonates with post-colonial national identity and indigeneity. Rogers claims that the practice’s historical and discursive connection to southern Morocco and the Sahara imbues the Hand with national as well as religious connotations. The discourse around henna as both a product and a
practice originating from the country’s southern regions has been repurposed by both early post-colonial nationalists and contemporary regime supporters to strengthen associations between regime legitimacy and an “indigenous” cultural memory independent of western colonial influence (Rogers 2012, 457). As it symbolically references feminine spirituality and fertility through its association with domestic spaces and wedding ceremonies through the image of the hennaed bride, the use of the hennaed Hand implicitly locates this cultural memory in the feminized private sphere. Women’s roles as mothers and wives become paramount in safeguarding the nation not only through the caretaking of its future citizens but through the maintenance of a conscious national identity.

Given this multivalent symbolic meaning, it is not surprising that the Hand appeared throughout regime-sponsored campaigns intended to bolster national unity after the 2003 Casablanca bombings. In this context, like in Fnaire’s music video, it typically appeared in red and green, with the country’s flag superimposed over the palm. Rogers argues that this depiction “links the feminized nation to spiritual protection” and “simultaneously demarcates the boundaries of citizenship and attempts to curb political dissent within the framework of an all-powerful monarchical state” (Rogers 2012, 457). To take the analogy further, the superimposition of the Hand and the flag can also be understood to symbolically marry the nation, represented through its flag and national colors, to feminized cultural memory embodied in the khamsa. In this imagery the nation itself is hennaed, not unlike a Moroccan bride. The responsibility of social reproduction promised through the institutions of marriage resonates with women’s position as the mothers and caretakers of future generations of Moroccans, and thus of the nation itself.
Use of the Hand of Fatima as part of the post-2003 political climate located Moroccan citizenship in shared religious belief and cultural memory. Those standing outside this proposed ideological space were implicitly acknowledged as existing outside the boundaries of national citizenship as well. Within the context of music and other forms of expressive culture beyond official regime rhetoric and visual production, the Hand signified patriotism and a rejection of the violent methods employed by the Casablanca bombers to some and tacit support of governmental oppression to others. Despite the reality of the suspects’ citizenship, evocation of both the *khamsa* and the phrase direct attention outward toward a perceived external threat.

The title of Fnaire’s song and the album’s use of recognizable protest symbols automatically evoke this complex of ideas. The chorus of the song repeats the anti-terrorist slogan by declaring:

Don’t touch my country
My land and the land of my grandfather
My land and the land of my grandchildren
My love is for my country

Including the popular slogan as both the piece’s title and its opening lyrics provides listeners with a clear reference point and immediately situates the song within the complex of pro-monarchy and anti-terrorist activism. The clear use of the singular possessive—“my country” and “my land” rather than “our country” and “our land”—echoes the exclusionary language prevalent in post-2003 regime discourse. Though the lyrics ostensibly seek to reject the perpetrators of the Casablanca attack as morally un-Moroccan, the ensemble’s possessive declaration of both the nation in the abstract and of the physical land it represents opens up the possibility for a much more exclusionary reading (Rogers 2012, 460). When placed in dialogue

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10 Translation by the author.
with the gendered sociopolitical complex of the *khamsa*, the command “don’t touch my country” carries multivalent significance.

The official music video for “Ma Tqich Bladi” plays more heavily on the visual association between the song’s title and the symbolically potent *khamsa*. The opening frames of the video feature a record on a turntable, its face emblazoned with the red and green Hand and the words “ma tqich bladi,” echoing the common pro-monarchy signs in style and color. Here the text and image serve a double purpose: they both introduce the upcoming song to the listener and allude to the group’s stance in the ongoing political conflict. The Hand aids in and reinforces the gendering of the nation, and when placed in tandem with Fnaire’s warning against touching “my country,” it becomes an index of the monarch’s masculine protection over his feminized subjects. As Rogers and Daadaoui point out, this strongly alludes to the king’s role as Commander of Faithful and, by extension, a complex of ideas about the semi-divine nature of the regime and the monarch’s role in fostering an environment of “tolerant monarchical Islam” (Daadaoui 2011 and Rogers 2012).

It is important to recall that the 2003 Casablanca attacks came on the heels of the largest legal reform in Morocco’s independent history, and that much of the discourse surrounding the prevention of terrorism also, intentionally or inadvertently, called on recent attempts to secularize family and personal status law. This made questions of monarchical legitimacy inseparable from questions of women’s places within the public and legal spheres. Though many Moroccan women involved in mainstream feminist organizations, as well as international observers referred to the 2003 reforms as a clear and meaningful victory for gender equality, the ongoing conflation of regime legitimacy and the king’s patriarchal leadership complicates this narrative somewhat. The public and governmental response to the 2003 Casablanca bombings
provided evidence that despite legal gains, women’s roles in the public sphere remained limited as their physical and symbolic presence continued to be closely tied to the nation as abstractly conceived rather than actively realized.

“Ma Tqich Bladi” and its accompanying video illuminate the continued presence of this gendered, patriarchal political complex. The music begins and the camera pans through a relatively nondescript urban environment, eventually coming to rest on the ensemble. The members of Fnaire appear dressed in clothing common in much American hip hop imagery, including jerseys advertising American sports teams. The verbal expression of Moroccan national solidarity paired with a visual reference to American hip hop culture via the ensemble’s style of dress seems to create a tension between the song’s lyrics and the visual components present in the music video. Musically, however, “Ma Tqich Bladi” may be seen to join these seemingly disparate elements. The piece begins with a six-bar guitar solo played in a distinctly North African style. It features pronounced use of down-strokes and ornaments created by hammering on the frets with the left hand. These techniques are heard throughout the pan-Saharan region and achieved recognition in Morocco through the music of 1970s fusion band Nass el-Ghiwane.¹¹

Joined with their discourse on Moroccan musical influence, a sonic reference to the emblematic folk ensemble works to solidify Fnaire’s claims to national authenticity. However, Nass el-Ghiwane’s musical legacy is a complicated one. While popular discourse tends to connect the group to courageous political opposition, citing their lyrics as veiled challenges to the state’s authority during the repressive Years of Lead, ‘Omar Es-Sayed, the ensemble’s surviving founding member, rejects this depiction. He claims that rather than resisting state authority, Nass el-Ghiwane’s music was “aimed at a socio-cultural inquiry, asking towards what

¹¹ For a more in-depth discussion of Nass el-Ghiwane’s influence on contemporary hip hop, see Salois 2009.
future the rapidly changing society was moving” (Salois 2009). Whether or not the members of Fnaire intended to evoke Nass el-Ghiwane’s complex political legacy with the introductory measures of “Ma Tqich Bladi” is unclear, but intentional or not, the discursive and musical link created between the two groups highlights Fnaire’s own sociopolitical ambiguity.

This is also visually reinforced. Opening shots of the ensemble are interspersed with images of unnamed individuals who populate the music video’s urban landscape. These “ordinary Moroccan citizens” of all ages and apparent socioeconomic classes add their voices to Fnaire’s in demarcating the boundaries of Moroccan citizenship on the grounds of moral belonging. The individuals responsible for the 2003 Casablanca attack may have held Moroccan passports to mark them as legal citizens, but the language and symbols surrounding “Ma Tqich Bladi” make it clear that they are not granted moral citizenship, as their actions fall outside the boundaries of this category. Several people featured in the video hold up their right hands in invocation of the khamsa, not only symbolically but physically warding off the acts of terrorism and those responsible.

Yet despite a title and imagery suggesting a feminized nation, the individuals shown in the music video, like the members of Fnaire themselves, are exclusively male. The lack of women’s physical presence on screen delimits a gendered dichotomy in which women retain their roles as passive culture-bearers, while men exist as active agents in the public space. Male citizenship includes the ability to actively participate in sociopolitical processes and thus join the monarch in his defense of the nation. Women, by contrast, appear only discursively as the national object to be protected.

This is diametrically opposed to the gendered complex often present in American hip hop videos. In this context, male artists tend to express a strictly masculine identity while their
music videos predominantly depict women. However, women’s inclusion in American hip hop videos is most often equally—if differently—objectifying. In both cases women are reduced to symbolic objects and largely stripped of their agency. Much American hip hop achieves this through the overt sexualization of the female body. Fnaire and other Moroccan artists, in contrast, exchange women’s individual bodily presence for their role as an abstract sociopolitical symbol. While an in-depth analysis of this comparison lies outside the scope of this project, it is worth noting the ways that gendered musical expression resonates and changes across international borders.

A visual and lyrical moment in Fnaire’s music video particularly replete with gendered politico-religious symbols involves the members of Fnaire holding a Qur’an and gesturing to it as they perform against a backdrop of graffitied brick. When condemning the perpetrators of the attack, the group declares in unison:

It’s a shame what you wanted
It’s haram what you did
So raise the khamsa
for peace morning and night.¹²

The use of the Arabic word haram, often translated as “taboo” or “forbidden,” is replete with religious significance, implying a sense of religious condemnation that transcends mere social shame or embarrassment (Rogers 2012, 460). The lyrics and the clear visual presence of the Qur’an make obvious the politico-religious message that the images of the Hand and the title of the song only imply. There is a clear parallel to be drawn between the fight against terrorist threats and the monarch’s semi-divine position. Both the feminine connotations of the Hand and the implications of patriarchal national protection invoked through it also solidify a link between the guardianship of the nation and women’s political and legal roles as dictated in the

¹² Translation by Amanda E. Rogers.
*Mudawwana.* Here these symbols work together to create a referential complex in which Islam, the Moroccan nation, and women’s roles as de-politicized citizens reinforce, rather than call into question, the monarch’s fundamental authority.

On one hand, the depiction of Islam and religious piety in a typically non-sacred context may be understood as having a democratizing effect. Looking again to the influence of Nass el-Ghiwane, whose music and aural references to Gnawa and Aissawa Sufi practices brought expressions of religious faith into alternative performance contexts, Fnaire’s invocation of Islam in their lyrics and visuals works to open a discursive space typically closed to popular culture and the general public. As Salois explains of Nass el-Ghiwane, “The alignment celebrated [in the ensemble’s music] is between ‘authentic’ Moroccan Muslim practice and the citizenry, rather than between the citizens, the official Islam, and the state” (Salois 2009). Considering “Ma Tqich Bladi” in a similar light opens up a possible reading of the song as an attempt to reactivate Moroccan Sufism as a mode of popular political engagement. While Fnaire’s self-proclaimed Aissawa-style, along with their musical references to the folk-fusion sound of Nass el-Ghiwane and their contemporaries, offers compelling evidence for a musical statement that denies the official power of state-supported Islam, the group’s use of religious language and symbols to demarcate boundaries of moral national belonging so closely aligned to official discourse on the subject complicates this understanding.

The connection drawn between Moroccan national belonging and Islam in both the song’s lyrics and visuals reiterates the official governmental position after the 2003 attacks that religion did not belong in the public political sphere but rather within the realm of uncritical patriotism and national culture bearing, a similar position to that which women had also been relegated. This discursive shift, occurring across various forms of cultural and political
expression, helped to tacitly bolster the monarchy’s claims to legitimacy by removing the potentially powerful framework of Islam from all oppositional rhetoric and making the king’s claims of religious legitimation effectively indisputable. The king’s status as Commander of the Faithful has religious as well as gendered implications. “The Faithful” here does not refer to all citizens regardless of religious affiliation, but specifically to the community of Moroccan Muslims whose social and religious behavior echoes that which is approved by the regime’s message of “tolerant monarchical Islam.” The monarch’s legitimacy thus becomes dependent on both his religious and patriarchal protection. As in Fnaire’s music video, references to religious authority are then used to demarcate and reinforce this political space rather than challenge it.

**Conclusion: Fields of Contestation**

It is here that the connection between feminist opposition, Mudawwana reform, and modes of regime legitimation become apparent. Despite large legal gains made by state-engaged feminist organizations around the turn of the twenty-first century, the political climate emerging in the wake of the 2003 terrorist attacks reinforced women’s subjugated social status. The chief mode of monarchical legitimacy and of demarcating the border between peaceful Moroccans and potentially violent, extremist “others” was located at this nexus of gendered social space and Islam. The king’s role as Commander of the Faithful both reinforced women’s roles as culture bearers and objects of national belonging, and removed religious discourse from the public political sphere. Fnaire’s “Ma Tqich Bladi” bears witness to the symbolic contestation occurring across these levels of political engagement. The song evokes common feminine symbols and voices, yet the accompanying visuals locate agency clearly in the male domain. It also makes use of powerful religious language but only as a means to reinforce the dominant governmental
ideology and clarify the boundaries of Moroccan moral belonging and citizenship under the umbrella of beneficent monarchical protection.

When viewed in this light alone, it appears that the ensemble’s political orientation entirely supports the monarchy and the current regime. Group member’s actions outside their musical production serve to complicate this framework, however. As previously discussed, Fnaire continues to be involved in large-scale projects such as the I Love Hip Hop in Morocco concert series that aim to increase artistic autonomy in the hip hop community by changing established modes of royal and governmental patronage. Not only does this demand the recognition of an individual musician’s agency outside limiting frameworks such as coopted by the regime versus independently oppositional, it also supports the notion that music and popular expressive culture are an emergent field of contestation rather than a reified expression of political allegiance. In examining Fnaire’s hit song, we glimpse the struggle between symbols of regime legitimation and feminist dissent that marked the post-2003 period.

The following chapter will continue to explore hip hop music as a field of contestation between the incumbent regime and new modes of Moroccan feminist engagement. Beginning in 2009, a renewed effort by various feminist organizations witnessed the official abolition of the *Mudawwana*. It was replaced by the secular Laws of Personal Status in 2010. This development did not spell the end for the Moroccan feminist movement, however, as difficulties with the law’s implementation as well as challenges to its commitment to social and economic equality began almost immediately following its indoctrination. These developments have been broadly taken up under the auspices of the nation’s 20M movement in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring protests in Morocco. This marks a large-scale shift in the ways that feminism and gender
equality are addressed in both the political and the expressive spheres and it is to this shift that I next turn my attention.
Chapter Three

MC Soultana, Mudawwana Reform, and the 2011 Arab Spring in Morocco

Less than ten years after the attacks in Casablanca and the reform of the Mudawwana, Moroccan citizens again took to the streets and the Internet to demand political reform. As with the protests of the last decade, the 2011 Arab Spring’s articulations in Morocco continued to engage with questions of women’s rights and increased sociopolitical engagement through legal and social change. These recent protests also garnered a rise in visible musical reactions among the hip hop community as the genre has become a widely accepted mainstay of the nation’s music industry. It is not only this growing acceptance into mainstream society that makes contemporary Moroccan hip hop music and its relationship to political dissent an important point of focus, but also apparent shifts in the ways that artists engage with political opposition in general and feminist opposition more specifically.

This chapter explores the musical output of emerging hip hop artist Youssra Oukra, known onstage as MC Soultana, as indicative of the changing landscape of Moroccan musical-political interaction. MC Soultana’s music makes for a particularly compelling case study as she is one of the first Moroccan women to have a successful rap career. Thus, the perspectives embedded in her music, videos, and lyrics are inherently distinct from those of male artists commenting on political and social injustice. Her engagement with questions of Moroccan citizenship also points to changing attitudes toward the state institution and the monarch’s role as a masculine national protector. When placed in dialogue with Fnaire’s “Ma Tqich Bladi” discussed in the previous chapter, the changes illustrated in Soultana’s work become readily apparent.
Beyond her music, Soultana’s public statements will also be considered as highlighting new modes of governmental engagement or, in many cases, choices to disengage with the state apparatus. Compared to the first chapter’s discussion of twentieth-century state-engaged feminism, these new attempts to work around and outside of regime-approved discourse also relate to changing notions of women’s roles as citizens. As I will illustrate, MC Soultana’s music and her actions as an artist defy classification as either entirely oppositional or complicit in regime cooptation. She owes a degree of her commercial success to recognition received through royally patronized music festivals, but at the same time her highly critical hit, “Sawt Nissa” (“Voice of Women”) has been celebrated by feminist activists in Morocco and abroad as a potential anthem to their political cause. The ways that Soultana publicly positions herself inside these competing, but not necessarily diametrically opposed, discourses sheds light on the complex relationship between Morocco’s new feminist opposition, state patronage, and the role of the musician as an individual. Much like Fnaire at the turn of the century, MC Soultana’s artistic work can be understood as a zone in which competing modalities of feminism, protest, and citizenship are explored and contested. I begin with the widespread protests in Morocco beginning in February 2011.

**Women and the 20M**

The so-called Arab Spring protests occurring throughout the Mashriq and Maghreb beginning in 2011 were realized in the Moroccan context via a youth-oriented collective whose demonstrations were organized primarily through mass digital media and became highly visible online. This loosely organized group earned the name 20 February Movement (20M) after the date of its largest public demonstration. Unlike uprisings occurring in other North African nations during the same year, 20M reached only around 300,000 participants at its largest and
tended to garner much less international media attention. Protests in Morocco also remained relatively subdued, resulting in only one violent incident (Molina 2011, 438). The grievances raised by the protestors in 2011 were not far removed from those that inspired the 2003 demonstrations discussed in previous chapters. Many people expressed disillusionment with government programs intended to spur economic growth and decrease the country’s large wage gap, as well as with failures to increase access to economic and educational opportunities across socioeconomic lines. The much-disputed family and personal status laws also continued to receive attention, with some factions of the movement calling for further secularization, while others argued for a return to earlier legal forms more reliant on the Maliki Islamic school of jurisprudence (Ramhøj 2013, 97).

According to Irene Fernández Molina’s overview of the movement published in November 2011, this wide array of often contradictory political positions has characterized 20M since its formation and may be somewhat to blame for its rather feeble international support as compared to concurrent protests elsewhere in the Arab world. As a movement dependent on social media and other online forums, it proved difficult for 20M to reach any consensus on its larger political orientation. This in turn bolstered criticisms from the regime calling the demonstrations leaderless, and referring to those participating as secularists, atheists, and radical Islamists alike. In a region generally perceived by international observers as fraught with religiously based conflict and social challenges, the Moroccan government’s international reputation has repeatedly hinged on its position as politically and religiously moderate. In positioning protestors on either end of an imagined “religious spectrum”—completely non-religious on one side and completely radicalized on the other—the regime worked to ostracize

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13 In the city of Al Hoceima, clashes between demonstrators and police forces resulted in five deaths.
14 The impact of these changes has yet to be fully analyzed, but for a survey of reforms from 2011 to 2013, see Ramhøj, 97-107.
the 20 February Movement both domestically and transnationally. Furthermore, most Moroccan protestors sidestepped outright criticisms of the monarch himself, choosing only to speak in the more broad terms of policy and institutional issues, and avoiding overt challenges to the king’s authority on either religious or secular grounds. Molina cites this hesitant attitude among demonstrators, as well as successful counter-protest measures taken by the regime, as preventing the 20 February Movement from attaining greater recognition and political success (Almeida 2013, 324).

Despite its harsh criticisms against participants, the Moroccan government generally permitted the 20M demonstrations to occur without interference from security forces. Shortly after the largest protests occurred in February, the king announced the formation of a committee charged with constitutional and legal reform. The draft of Morocco’s latest constitution—since passed into law—received high praise from the international community, including a letter of commendation from the European Union calling the new document a “significant step” and declared that it “signals a clear commitment to democracy and respect for human rights” (Ashton and Füle 2011). Regardless of international praise and recognition, the new constitution proved an exercise in compromise for many individuals involved in the 20M. As in 2003, the government enacted what many Moroccan activists considered superficial changes without any substantial alterations to deeper institutional frameworks. In Articles 41 and 42 of the new constitution, for example, the monarch retains the title of Commander of the Faithful and is granted presidency of the Superior Council of the ‘Ulemas, Morocco’s highest religious authority. This continues in the same pattern as the regime’s response to the protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s, in which the potentially powerful resource of religiously based
opposition is rendered effectively inaccessible and the king’s authority remains fundamentally infallible (Molina 2011, 441).

However, closer examination of the movement’s specific content and array of supporters reveals some important distinctions between the contemporary opposition and that of the recent past. Foremost among these is the visible, bodily involvement of women. February 20, 2011’s call to action on YouTube featured the alternating voices and faces of both men and women declaring their support for the opposition and expressing specific grievances against the regime. In nearly all the clips, the individual begins his or her statement with a declaration of citizenship by reciting the words “Ana maghrebi/maghrebia,” or “I am Moroccan.” The individuals in the video span a wide range of ages, dress style, class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation evident through clear visual cues. By more concretely connecting the abstract concept of Moroccan nationhood directly to its citizens through these visual and verbal cues, the nation is no longer a political or geographical object to be possessed but a social concept constituted by diverse and individually realized identities. That a large number of women physically appear in the video and can be heard making this declaration runs counter to the message of the post-Casablanca 2003 demonstrations, in which women and their bodies were mobilized as national symbols. Here they are exercising their agency as members of the national citizenry. Considered in this light, the 20M’s online protests indicate a shift in the ways women perceive their roles in the political process.

In a 2014 article in the *Journal of North African Studies*, Moroccan journalist Samia Errazzouki argues that it is not only the actions of women directly associated with the 20M, who are largely a well-educated and economically privileged group, but the indirect actions of primarily socially and economically disenfranchised women not openly associated with the 20M
that provided the movement with its momentum. The death of a young woman named Fadoua Laroui who committed suicide by publicly self-immolating after the rejection of her housing application is credited as one pivotal moment that forced long-standing tensions to finally erupt into large-scale demonstrations across the country (Errazzouki 2014, 259).

Called the “Moroccan Mohammed Bouazizi” in reference to the Tunisian fruit-vendor whose self-immolation began the political uprisings in that country, Laroui’s actions came to symbolize not only the impacts of entrenched economic inequalities between the lower class and the elite Makhzen, but the marginalization experienced by impoverished women in particular. As a working single mother, Laroui was doubly disenfranchised: she lacked the social security provided by marriage and was forced to eschew her socially and legally sanctioned domestic role in order to materially provide for her family. Her tragic actions spoke to the social inequalities created by Morocco’s rapid transition to a neoliberal capitalist economy coupled with legal and political systems still dependent on modes of patriarchal protection for women’s social security and validation. Her choice to end her life in such a graphic and public manner demonstrated to some feminist regime opponents the ultimate means of asserting bodily control in the public sphere. That such severe physical pain and ultimately, death could be considered in any way preferable to her social and personal situation resonated very strongly with men and women alike, who saw such drastic actions as a powerful symbol of the suffering and continual oppression of impoverished women, and impoverished single mothers in particular. Laroui had no direct connection with the 20M, but her death just one day after the movement’s initial protest created a point of focus for regime opponents and spurred thousands more into the streets.

In addition to the actions of politically unaffiliated individuals like Fadoua Laroui, a large number of lower class women actively joined the ongoing protests throughout 2011. In May of
the same year, video footage of a police officer brutally beating a woman while she held an infant during a peaceful protest in the impoverished Casablanca suburb of Sbata circulated widely as an example of the many social injustices facing under-privileged Moroccan women. According to Errazzouki, the unnamed woman’s presence represented a threat to the state in several ways: as an economically marginalized woman publicly asserting her political dissent against obvious state repression, she stood in blatant contrast to her proscribed class and gender roles. Moreover, that the source of state authority in this case was a male who used violence to assert this authority represented a striking example of the damaging effects of institutionalized state patriarchy. The presence of a young infant in the video added another layer of subversion to the protester’s actions as it visually linked her to motherhood and the strictly domestic roles associated with the care of young children (Errazzouki 2014, 259). This placed her within the de-politicized realm of national culture bearing. Her participation in a highly political event created obvious tension between the status of mothers as national symbols and women as individuals and active political agents.

The above accounts of women’s direct and indirect involvement in the Feb 20 Movement highlight an important change in the perception of women’s roles, not only in the political process, but in the designation of the boundaries of citizenship more generally. Rather than objects to be guarded against external concerns, the women in question actively work to protect themselves against the internal injustices of the state and the Makhzen. This is not to say that all individuals involved in the 20M’s ongoing efforts are committed to a specific gendered ideology. Much like the Moroccan hip hop community discussed in the previous chapter, the movement’s members remain loosely affiliated and it is misleading to consider their actions as motivated by

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15 As the woman remains unidentified, I do not wish to assume the infant she carried was her own but rather that the presence of the child was enough for viewers to label her as a mother, at least in a symbolic sense.
identical concerns or belief systems. Nevertheless, the inclusion of women from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds presents an important contrast to the earlier political movements discussed in the preceding chapters.

**Contemporary Feminism and the State: New Modes of (Dis)Engagement**

Though the 20M defies cohesive labelling with terms such as “feminist,” the movement still addresses many of the same sociopolitical issues that have long been at the center of the Moroccan feminist cause, including income and educational inequality, lack of women’s representation in government, and the ongoing impacts of family and personal status law. However, this generation of politically active women position themselves quite differently vis a vis the regime than feminist activists of the past. Moroccan scholar Zakia Salime (2012) points out that some apparent similarities between the contemporary movement and previous *Mudawwana* reform efforts actually possess very different underlying ideologies. She writes,

> The framing of the movement’s goals in terms of equality and the institutionalization of parity in the movement’s structures, indicate the emergence of a ‘new feminism.’ This is the counter-topography that disturbs first the NGO-ization of feminist activism and demands, second, the confinement of this activism to women’s spaces, and third, its regulation by state institutions. (Salime 2012, 104)

Rather than speak in terms of gender equality per se, activists of the 20M tend to discuss the somewhat more broadly understood subject of gender parity. These concepts, while related, are not identical. State-engaged feminist organizations and NGOs that use the language of gender equality or women’s rights often operate in predominantly female social spaces and frame these issues as problems to be addressed and ultimately solved by women, while Salime’s “new feminist” activists express a desire to assert their gendered activities into male-dominated social spheres through visible parity of men’s and women’s bodies on public display. This also implies that inequality is, or at least should be, something that concerns men and women alike.
The movement’s calls to action on YouTube tacitly represent this ideology by alternating between men and women’s faces and voices at a nearly one-to-one ratio. In conversation, Salime’s interviewees indicated a new approach to the topic of gender and gender equality that is encompassed within larger contemporary narratives of social justice, and thus lies at the intersection of numerous concerns not directly related to individuals’ gendered identities.¹⁶

This reframing of gender equality can be understood in multiple ways. On one hand, it represents disillusionment with state-engaged feminist organizations that have been accused of regime cooptation and elitism. By breaking with these groups, some activists hope to achieve meaningful advances in equality and social justice that previous organizational models have failed to accomplish. That many feminist organizations refused to support the 20M from its outset, choosing instead to back the monarchy and ratify the new constitution, has created considerable tension and resulted in the emergence of what Salime terms “critical citizenship.”¹⁷

This is an expression of citizenship that hinges on a complete lack of engagement with state apparatuses in the belief that any encounter with the king or the Makhzen only bolsters the regime’s claims to authority.

Whereas state-engaged feminism relies on monarchical cooperation for advances in women’s rights via existing legal frameworks, the feminism of the 20M eschews any monarchical involvement in favor of more grassroots operations such as independently organized artistic festivals and self-produced publications. The movement’s critical citizenship is also realized by a record low turnout at the polls during parliamentary elections since 2011. While this mode of disengagement outwardly appears to encourage radical political revolution by

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¹⁶ To my knowledge, this rhetoric recognizes male and female gender identities, but leaves little room for the validation of alternative, non-binary gender identities.

¹⁷ Salime uses this term in reference to the context of twenty-first century Morocco as described by her interlocutors, and does not engage directly with existing literature on citizenship studies in this particular work.
denying political change through the more traditional means of elected officials and governmental discourse, the reality for many members of 20M is more complicated. Despite a refusal to engage with the monarch, Salime points to a reluctance among protestors to support more radical calls for violent revolutionary action. What this means for the future direction of the movement remains to be seen (Salime 2012, 106–108).

This disruption of traditional lines of support has required activists to look elsewhere along the political spectrum for aid. In addition to encouraging disengagement from existing feminist organizations and by proxy, the regime, broadening feminist discourse has also allowed the 20M to include a wider variety of political actors. This is especially important as one of the movement’s largest supporters to date is the anti-monarchy group the Islamists of Justice and Spirituality. According to Salime’s interlocutors, the group’s decision to participate in the 20M was considered by some a key component of the protests’ success as it provided the movement with thousands of additional bodies during street events around the country. But the visible inclusion of openly Islamist rhetoric that often supports a reinstitution of Maliki-based personal status and family law represents to some a complication of the movement’s fundamental goals.

In short, this emerging oppositional culture is in fact highly localized and often defies any single ideological underpinning. The forms of popular expression associated with the 20M are equally diverse and pose similar challenges in analysis.


Since the passage of constitutional reforms in late 2011, the 20M remains highly visible in Moroccan public life via continued protests, an active online community, and annual artistic
festivals organized in various urban centers. The multi-leveled interaction between Moroccan rappers, state-sponsored festivals, the regime, and the 20M is complex, but sheds some light on the ways in which different and often contradictory sociopolitical views are expressed and contested via contemporary popular culture. MC Soultana provides one such example, but before more thoroughly exploring her artistic output it is necessary to first analyze the larger context in which her music and professional career are embedded. Soultana’s international success was made possible, in part, by her open participation in large, regime-sponsored music festivals. This appears to contradict the political position expressed through her lyrics and several interviews. However, much like the 20M opposition itself, politically engaged hip hop musicians fail to conform to any one mode of resistance.

In the Moroccan context, festivals serve as important means of commercial and popular success for musicians, as well as venues through which to form expressive communities and musical solidarities (Belghazi 2006, 100). For political actors these artistic and musical events also create “a wall against obscurantism and terrorism,” a role considered particularly important in the wake of the 2003 bombings (Mous and Wazif 2008, 295). Questions of sponsorship and patronage complicate this discourse, especially for performers of popular youth-oriented musics. Since festivals began to dominate the Moroccan cultural landscape during the late 1990s and early 2000s, most have received a large amount of financial backing from official governmental sources such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and the Aid Fund for Theater and Music, as well as directly from the monarch himself (Belghazi and Graioud 2013, 265). This funding has contributed to a growing association between public performance spaces and the ruling elite. The role of the government in organizing and funding

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18The website https://www.mamfakinch.com/ has been particularly influential since the 2011 protests. Despite threats of government censorship in 2012, the site remains active and regularly publishes articles in Arabic, French, and English.
these events intimately ties them to the rhetoric and cultural policies of the government and the Makhzen. Belghazi and Graiouid describe popular cultural production and the systems of state patronage in Morocco as “ambivalent liaisons.” The necessity of such patronage for artists’ and musicians’ financial solubility often seriously complicates the role of cultural expression and production in Morocco’s ongoing political debates (ibid.). Alternative forms of patronage have grown in importance over the last several years due, in part, to the unfavorable political climate surrounding mainstream governmental organizations and political parties, especially among youths and youth-oriented music. It is important to note, however, that these alternative forms of patronage are not entirely unproblematic as they often include various non-governmental organizations from the United States or Western Europe which tend to entrench local performers in different, but equally hierarchical power relationships.

Patronage of Moroccan music festivals functions as a highly hierarchical system. The highest form of patronage an organization can receive comes from the king himself, while members of his cabinet and other ministries extend their support as well. Festival patrons should not be considered mere economic sponsors, solely supplying financial support. In Darija, the word for patron (ar-ri’āya) implies a unilateral relationship, one of guardianship and oversight rather than of equality and mutual reciprocation (Belghazi and Graiouid 2013, 266). This makes festival patronage a symbol of regime control that is not necessarily dependent on the specific content of the event in question. According to Mohammed Daadaoui, “Rituals of power are displayed in elaborate ceremonies and spectacles to aggrandize the regime and sanctify it in the national memory” (Daadaoui 2011, 3). The element of spectacle is clearly apparent in many music festivals that enjoy monarchical patronage, creating an association between the event’s scale and the regime’s financial and social capital. Though the rituals and symbols of power
Daadaoui describes most often require a “combination of modernity and tradition” in order to reinforce regime legitimacy on the basis of tradition and religion, music festivals tend to be less connected with these modes of legitimation. Instead, such events craft a particular, internationally approved face of the monarchy and its institutional policies.

Mawazine is the largest festival in the country and receives most of its financial backing directly from King Muhammad V (Mawazine 2015). The festival has grown into a transnational showcase of popular music highlighting the allegedly increased freedoms enjoyed by the Moroccan public in the wake of the 2011 constitutional reforms, and is a major source of income and recognition for up-and-coming popular music acts. In this case, the regime’s legitimacy is less tied to ideas about religious tradition than to its image as a tolerant, democratic governmental system. A page on the event’s official English-language website titled “Impact on Morocco’s Image” claims that “Mawazine … strives to convey the Moroccan cultural model abroad, while working to spread the values the kingdom embraces: tolerance, exchange and diversity.” This echoes statements by the regime post-Casablanca 2003 that position Morocco as a religiously moderate and internationally receptive nation, often juxtaposed against an implicitly acknowledged background of Western anxiety over perceived terrorist threats. Mawazine and other, similar music festivals are often depicted as a vehicle for state cooptation that works to paint Moroccan society as an open and tolerant one. This in turn discredits internal claims of state oppression.

In recent years Mawazine’s global musical appeal has broadened. Since 2012, the festival has featured internationally recognized acts such as Rihanna, Shakira, and the Miami-based hip hop artist Pitbull. The event boasted over two million spectators last year alone. The 2014 festival, occurring in late May and early June of this year, featured the widely recognized
American artist Justin Timberlake as its opening act (Vivarelli 2014). For Moroccans, Mawazine receives mixed reviews: it has been the subject of protests focusing on its perceived economic irresponsibility and its misrepresentation of Moroccan citizens’ expressive freedom. Yet the financial success of the festival and its importance for Moroccan musicians hoping to break into the international market make it a significant musical and cultural affair. Many emerging popular artists have performed in its smaller exhibitions as a way to gain access to larger concert venues, despite accusations of regime cooptation. (Almeida 2013, 321–322).

Large-scale events under the auspices of the regime are not the only source of contemporary festival culture. Music and other forms of popular expression remain an important part of the 20M’s public outreach and have allowed for the creation of a festival subculture removed from the constraints of the formal patronage system and thus viewed as removed from regime interaction more generally. This is in keeping with the previous discussion of critical citizenship in that it eschews direct governmental involvement through the traditional institutions of royal or Makhzen patronage. The Festival de Résistance et d’Alternatives (FRA) is one of the largest such nonprofit events with loose ties to 20M. The group’s mission statement, printed in both English and Arabic on the organization’s Facebook page and official website, states:

> The Festival of Resistance and Alternatives (FRA) offers a place dedicated to innovation, exchange and participation, where every individual can express themselves freely [sic]. The festival is an independent Moroccan initiative to create a space where people share their ideas, their principles, their talents and their artistic creations about sociocultural subjects such as economy, politics, art, education and others.

The festival debuted on February 17, 2012 to coincide with the first anniversary of the 20M’s largest protests, and has since occurred every year in mid-February. It features theater and music workshops, photography exhibitions, documentary screenings, and other events.
focused on community engagement and education. The FRA’s website refrains from mentioning any specific artists in connection with the events, instead describing organizers and participants as “Moroccan artists and activists, some of whom are part of a social movement, while others are independent.” This description resonates with the movement more generally in its depiction of semi-independent actors rather than a more homogenous organization with clear leadership and shared sociopolitical goals.

**MC Soultana, ‘New Feminism,’ and the Question of Oppositional Expression**

Though some musicians openly associate with 20M and anti-regime protest through the FRA and other communities, most Moroccan rappers remain less clearly affiliated in the political arena. Accusations of regime cooptation at the Mawazine festival have not stopped many young artists from performing at the event. The 2014 lineup notably included a performance by Muslim, a rapper from Tangier whose early career was marked by open denunciation of the government’s restrictions on freedom of expression and marginalization of Morocco’s northern regions. MC Soultana and her former band Tigresse Flow participated in the festival in 2008, winning Mawazine’s Key Award for amateur artists despite the ensemble’s rather subversive position as an all-female rap group performing in both a genre and a space typically gendered as masculine. Since leaving Tigresse Flow for a solo career in 2010, Soultana has cultivated an even more politically conscious public image. Her most popular single, “Sawt Nissa” (Voice of Women), was released in 2011. The song openly critiques the patriarchal family structure supported by Morocco’s legal and social institutions, and calls for women to more openly express their discontent and desire for change through a discussion of personal lived experience.

Like many hip hop artists in Morocco, she does not address the sonic content of her music outright, but nor does she engage in the politics of authenticity that mark some other
musician’s discussions of their work. Soultana’s home city of Casablanca is known for its “harder” musical and lyrical styling and beat tracks that draw strong influence from the broadly defined genre of Francophone electronic dance music (EDM) (Salois 2009). MC Soultana’s work reflects this overarching musical characterization. “Sawt Nissa” is entirely rapped, without the sung choruses or instrumental introductions that mark the earlier work of musicians and ensembles from Marrakesh, where hip hop tends to draw more influence from other Moroccan musical forms. In this sense, “Sawt Nissa” can be heard as possessing a less regionally distinct sound as it lacks some of the clear regional sonic identifiers heard in “Ma Tqich Bladi” or Fnaire’s other output. Allusions to the soundscape of Nass el-Ghiwane are quite markedly absent here.

It is also worth noting that MC Soultana lacks the institutional support of more established groups like Fnaire. As such, her music is less polished by high-end studio production. English-language comments on some of her online music videos remark on the “lo-fi” quality of her musical output. In the American context, this lack of studio involvement often indexes “grassroots” credibility of an artist allegedly uncorrupted by the politics of state and studio involvement. This is especially true of musicians in contexts such as Morocco, where many mainstream forms of music production and distribution are directly or indirectly funded by state agencies (Salois 2009). Whether Moroccan audiences have similar reactions to Soultana’s self-produced sound and musical aesthetic requires more in-depth fieldwork and remains a point of interest for future scholarship.

Soultana delivers her lyrics at a high volume and in a highly punctuated style, placing rhythmic emphasis on consonant sounds rather than vowels. The combination of strong diction and lack of melodic complexity draws most of the listener’s attention to the song’s lyrics, and in
interviews Soultana most openly addresses the lyrical content. Given this significant attention, her stylistic and musical choices seem like intentional ones. For example, the chorus clearly declares

This is the Moroccan woman, this is one of a million
Woman’s voice that I’m calling
Girl’s voice that is lost in my country
The voice of those who wanna talk, who wanna say
A voice for all the women who want a sign\(^\text{19}\)

Here Soultana positions herself as an ally of economically and socially disenfranchised women through criticism of social discrimination, implying that the Moroccan state has failed to achieve gender equality in either public or private space. “Sawt Nissa” addresses the issues of domestic violence and prostitution, and shifts the impetus of these concerns from male-dominated social and legal spheres such as family and personal status law reform into women’s private lives and perspectives. In much of the discourse surrounding state-engaged feminism and the government, continued legal and economic reform are positioned as central to improving gender relations and issues of inequality. These institutional structures are undoubtedly important to many Moroccan women, especially in light of recent political and legal changes. However, one major criticism presented against this mode of feminist thought has been that it excludes personal individual experience as a mode of political engagement (Salime 2014, 16). Soultana’s lyrics expand feminist considerations to the “voice of women” and the depiction of daily experiences of gendered discrimination.

This claiming of individual experience and personal revolution resonates across both musical and social lines. Since 2011, radical feminist organizations throughout North Africa have encouraged political and oppositional expression via women’s “microrebellious bodies” (Salime 2014, 15). Beginning with the Ukrainian-based radical feminist group Femen and the

\(^{19}\) For a translation of all Darija lyrics in “Sawt Nissa,” see *World Hip Hop Market 2012.*
Moroccan organization Woman Choufouch, women have been using their physical presence in male public and social spaces as a form of highly individualized and localized sociopolitical expression. In the case of Femen and Woman Choufouch, this often comes in the form of street and internet protests centering on the naked female body. Salime argues that by deliberately placing the female body on public display and within the purview of the male gaze, these individual protestors not only desexualize their physical identities, but also begin to rework the gendered power structure embedded in the dichotomy of public and private space by transferring the shame associated with female sexuality to the shame associated with its visual consumption by a male audience. In this way, the women participating in these protests reclaim some of the power associated with their physical identities (Salime 2013, 16). As this form of opposition is located in the individual via the clearly bounded physical body, it marks a distinct break from regime-approved modes of feminist protest that typically utilize rhetoric of the state and the community, rather than that of individual lived experience.

Woman Choufouch and Femen remain on the fringes of Moroccan feminism and I do not wish to suggest that MC Soultana has been directly influenced by the either organization. However, “Sawt Nissa” and the oppositional activities of Woman Choufouch and Femen speak to an overall shift in the way that Moroccan feminism is broadly conceived. In both instances the locus of expression lies not in formal state-controlled discourse but in the bodies and voices of individuals. The complete lyrics of “Sawt Nissa” present the story of a female prostitute from the perspective of her friend (Soultana) who expresses disgust, not at the woman in question, but at the men and male-dominated social institutions that control and abuse her:

She saw in your face the life she lost
You looked at her like a cheap thing
She saw in your face what she wanted to be
You looked at her, a look of humiliation
She’s selling her body ‘cause you are the buyer
And when she’s walking by you act like a Muslim.

The song’s second verse engages directly with the male public and decodes the hypocrisy of the condemnation of many impoverished women by those benefiting from the power structures that fuel and reinforce this social inequality. Unlike Fnaire’s political response to Casablanca in 2003, Soultana invokes religion not as an apolitical source of national pride and protection, but as a highly politicized social tool. The line, “and when she’s walking by you act like a Muslim,” implies that the individuals in question are adopting a façade of piety. This is highlighted by the preceding line which implicates them as not only participants in, but the root cause of the behavior they condemn.

“Sawt Nissa” contains multiple overt references to Islam, the most powerful of which occur in the song’s last verse:

All of you know what I’m talking about
Tell me how many mosques were built on ruins
How many Muslim (sic) were a terrorist, a thief …
How many girls lived the night as a hooker
How many girls went back and now are a good mom (sic)
And you are one of them don’t forget
A rose is still a rose.

This verse can be read in at least two ways. One continues Soultana’s condemnation of hypocrisy within politico-religious institutions voiced in previous lines. Her statement that mosques are built on ruins or that Muslims were terrorists and thieves can be seen to reinforce the idea that Islamic language in the political sphere often covers dysfunctional or sexist institutional frameworks. The ruins beneath mosques do not provide adequate support for either the buildings or the larger social institutions they represent and, much like the Muslim men soliciting prostitution mentioned earlier in the song, the terrorists and thieves here could be seen as similarly hypocritical.
However, the religious imagery appeals directly to women and encourages a more optimistic understanding of the lyrics. The word “you” (anti) in the penultimate line takes a feminine Arabic ending. Viewed in this light mosques built on ruins or the faithful turning from a life of crime and violence, mobilize Islam as a tool for the socially and politically disenfranchised. This marks a considerable shift away from the religiously-informed discourse surrounding feminist efforts of the late 1990s and early 2000s. As discussed in chapter one, the monarch’s role as Commander of the Faithful religiously sanctions state patriarchy and renders Islam and Islamic discourse relatively powerless in terms of state engagement. MC Soultana does not directly engage with the regime or regime discourse and so creates an expressive space in which Islam retains its political accessibility as a tool of individual empowerment.

Considered in this light, Soultana’s work represents the emergence of a new type of feminist opposition and musical political interaction. “Sawt Nissa” depicts Moroccan women as active agents, rather than disembodied symbols. Soultana lyrically embraces her gendered perspective and frames herself as a woman openly expressing shared stories of struggle and discrimination. Even her stage name denotes a conscious feminine identity by adding a feminine ending to the typically masculine Arabic word sulṭān. In a 2011 interview with the online music magazine World Hip Hop Market, she described the difficulties faced by female rappers: “Women in this rap game were, and are still struggling because it’s a hard thing to do. It’s especially hard when you’re compelled to spit rhymes about tough subjects like mental and physical abuse, violence, rape … subjects that men personally know little to nothing about.” By voicing these contentious issues in a highly public space Soultana challenges notions that feminist concerns can be discussed and resolved only within female-gendered spheres of interaction or only under the auspices of the regime’s patriarchal protection and control. Her
public persona and widespread popularity help move questions of women’s rights and social inequality into more male-dominated zones of attention.

Other elements of Soultana’s music and career deny such easy categorization and indicate that, while her work embodies a shift in women’s accepted social and political roles, this debate is far from settled. Lyrically, “Sawt Nissa” contains repeated references to motherhood. One line intones, “Look at her like your mother, like your sister,” while another asks, “How many girls [prostitutes] went back [home] and now are a good mom?” This linking of women’s individual worth with their familial status echoes previous discussions of women’s rights that hinged on marital and motherly duties rather than personal agency. “Sawt Nissa” appeals to listeners to respect the women in question because of their family roles, not necessarily because their status as rights-bearing citizens warrants it. I am not suggesting that MC Soultana has failed in her feminist cause. Music provides an expressive space for sociopolitical value systems to be explored, contested, and perhaps altered. In this sense, “Sawt Nissa” represents the ongoing contestation of the meanings of feminism, opposition, and women’s citizenship rather than a complete snapshot of contemporary Moroccan feminism in its concrete form.

MC Soultana’s political affiliations off stage also reinforce the contested nature of hip hop and oppositional expression. Interviews with her appear on many English-language websites concerned with feminist and other alternative forms of hip hop, and one of her more recent conversations with Mary Stuckey of Public Radio International (PRI) highlights her ambivalent relationship with Moroccan politics and the monarchy. In the on-air interview she states, “We [Moroccans] don’t need a revolution. We just need a solution to the problems.” Rather than speak out directly against the king, Soultana strategically separates the need for a (democratic) revolution and the potential to solve the nation’s social and political crises. In this
sense, Soultana’s public persona can be understood as operating within the discursive framework of self-censorship encouraged by the Moroccan regime’s semi-authoritarian system and complex of approved and unapproved speech acts. In 2003, Fnaire expressed their position within this system via the musical discourse of authenticity and piety. Soultana does not directly engage in the same politics of authenticity or public respectability, but her reluctance to implicate the regime directly in the nation’s perceived struggles echoes some of Fnaire’s statements on-screen in *I Love Hip Hop Morocco*.

Soultana does not position herself as anti-monarchy, but nor does she embrace the openly pro-monarchy stance taken by groups such as Fnaire. Instead, she operates within the restrictions of monarchical compliance, utilizing the global platform provided by the Mawazine festival and other venues to carve out a space for musical and social expression, albeit within limits. Much like the “critical citizenship” espoused by the 20M and its proponents, Soultana’s lack of direct interaction with the monarchy may actually allow her greater expressive freedom as her music remains relatively unhindered by the boundaries of regime-approved discourse.

**Summary: A Contemporary Understanding of Hip Hop and Moroccan Feminist Resistance**

The social movement that began in February of 2011 has illustrated large-scale changes in the understandings of feminism and opposition in Morocco. Whereas previous modes of resistance engaged with the regime and the king through conduits of legal discourse, the 20M moves their calls for action away from these highly controlled governmental spheres into public social spaces. In so doing, contemporary activists also necessitate a reexamination of feminism and its role in current struggles for social justice. By relying on physical gender parity in the movement rather than the state-engaged legal reform sought by earlier feminist groups, the 20M alters perceptions of citizenship as dominated by men’s actions and women’s passivity to a
political status rooted in individual agency. However, the movement’s far-flung net of involvement complicates this discourse. Because they claim no unifying ideology, the 20M and its approach to feminist issues such as educational, legal, and economic inequality provided the regime with a relatively easy target for cooptation and disempowerment (Molina 2011, 438).

An examination of the expressive musical culture surrounding the 20M and subsequent protests allows for a deeper understanding of the contradictions embedded in the movement, as well as the ways that individual political actors work around and within regime structures. MC Soultana’s musical work exists at this nexus of contemporary feminist opposition and regime control. On one hand, “Sawt Nissa” can be understood within the framework of Salime’s new feminism. Soultana is breaking with previous notions of feminist expression by embracing her gendered identity and speaking publicly about women’s issues from an insider’s perspective. On the other hand, her depiction of women’s rights as tied to familial status, as well as her continued participation in state-sponsored festival events highlights her rather ambivalent relationship with the opposition.

I believe that neither MC Soultana nor the 20M more generally represent a dismissal of feminism and issues of gender equality in contemporary Moroccan politics or protest culture. Rather, the contradictions apparent in emerging modes of opposition indicate an ongoing contestation of feminism and citizenship whose final result is yet to be determined. By examining music and other expressive media in light of these debates a clearer picture of Moroccan protest culture emerges, one that does not rely on the limiting binary framework of genuine oppositional expression versus commercialized regime cooptation, but attempts to see both artists and activists as individual agents engaged in highly personal struggles for legitimacy and recognition.
Conclusion

There is clearly still work to be done in exploring the intersections between regime legitimacy, feminist opposition, and emerging hip hop artists in Morocco. A deeper understanding of the history and construction of gendered social spaces and the Kingdom’s use of religious rhetoric as a mode of legitimation through the Mudawwana and its reforms provides a strong starting point for examining the continued evolution of Moroccan feminist engagement. By including hip hop and the hip hop community as another possible conduit for analysis, the preceding pages have hopefully worked to broaden the discourse surrounding Moroccan protest culture and feminism beyond the scope of grassroots popular discontent and regime cooptation to include music’s role in both reinforcing and subverting the organization of gendered social space and roles in contemporary Morocco. Invoking the perspective of Stuart Hall in which popular culture is understood as a space where social power structures are explored and contested allows for a more nuanced depiction of musicians, their works, and the sociopolitical environment in which they are embedded.

Temporally separated by nearly a decade and hailing from two distinct stylistic communities, it is not surprising that the musical and lyrical content of “Sawt Nissa” and “Ma Tqich Bladi” are highly distinctive. But where these differences are most apparent provides a telling look at developments in both feminist thought and the political environment more generally. “Ma Tqich Bladi” evokes the symbolically potent khamsa to engage directly with regime rhetoric in which women serve as national culture bearers under the auspices of divinely inspired monarchical protection. The ensemble employs the language of Islam as an apolitical designation of nationhood and a symbolic barrier against external threats of violence. Fnaire speaks of women but does not include their voices or bodies in either their song or its
accompanying music video. MC Soultana, by contrast, reflects the 20M’s calls for political action disengaged from official regime channels, and the general movement of women into male-dominated social spaces occurring since the Mudawwana’s official abolition in 2010. She raps publicly about gendered concerns from a position of experience and no longer depicts women as passive national symbols, but as active citizens of the nation.

This, however, is only half the story. The spaces between these musicians’ discourse and actions remain a potentially rich field of investigation. As discussed in chapters two and three, Fnaire and MC Soultana engage in activities that can be seen as both confirming and denying regime legitimacy. In the case of Fnaire, the group’s pro-monarchy stance is complicated by their widely publicized participation in musical and social spheres removed from the control of royal or Makhzen patronage, as well as their encouragement of burgeoning talent in these unconventional independent arenas. Their references to Nass el-Ghiwane, both in their musical output and in their musical discourse, also deny a straightforward reading of their political leanings.

While “Sawt Nissa” is portrayed as a highly critical, even revolutionary song by many international musicians and critics, MC Soultana continues to openly participate in large-scale festival events such as Mawazine. These events work to reaffirm regime legitimacy and control of public speech through patronage and the creation of international spectacle. Soultana also echoes common rhetoric in which women’s value as individuals resides in their roles as mothers and daughters. Even in “Sawt Nissa,” she asks for respect not through evocation of women’s inherent human worth, but because a marginalized woman could be a listener’s sister, mother, or daughter. The nation becomes a metaphor for the family, wherein women’s social value is
located entirely in the domestic sphere and, in the case of women’s roles as wives, in their relationships with men.

The complicated intersections between Fnaire and MC Soultana’s artistic output, personas, and public actions do not necessarily implicate them in regime oppression or political opportunism. Instead, these discrepancies demonstrate both the contested nature of sonic space and the shifting nexus of individual agency, socio-musical expression, and external political pressure in contemporary Moroccan hip hop. It has not been my intent to claim that any one musical perspective is more ethically informed or oppositionally engaged than others. To do so would be to reify what is a continually shifting arena between contestation and consent, and to deny the multifaceted concerns and perspectives of individual musicians. Instead, I hope to have contributed to the conversation begun by Kendra Renee Salois, Cristina Moreno Almeida, Zakia Salime, and Samia Errazouki who view both hip hop communities and protest culture as dynamic systems, defying simplistic qualifications as indicators of democratic success modelled on the United States or the European Union, or of often essentialized monarchical cooptation.

The most recent political uprisings in Morocco and throughout the Maghreb are far from resolved, and the impacts of contemporary gendered political opposition have yet to be seen. Continued engagement with Moroccan hip hop musicians and communities may help scholars from both Morocco and elsewhere to remain mindful of the nuanced perspectives of musicians and listeners, and to avoid limiting or essentializing frameworks that rely on dichotomous depictions of political actors and their opponents. Music provides an expressive space free of some of the constraints present in other media. At the same time, the multivalent nature of hip hop’s musical, lyrical, and visual content opens up the possibility for multiple and contradictory readings. When placed in dialogue with the sociopolitical environment in which musicians live,
work, and perform, these understandings do not necessarily point to clear answers to questions of the nation’s political or social outlook. To the contrary, the complex expressions by hip hop artists and their fans begs a reevaluation of both protest culture as broadly conceived and the ways that it is informed by individuals’ gendered subjectivities and actions to shape a nation’s future.
References


Web and Multimedia Resources


————. “Moroccan campaign #feb20 #morocco.” Uploaded February 16, 2011.