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SNOWFLAKEBXTCH: A Case Study of Women's RAPTivism in Morocco: Rapping Against Social Injustice and Traditional Gender Roles

By Maha Tazi¹

Abstract

In this study, I am interested in investigating the concept of RAPTivism in Morocco from a feminist perspective by examining the potential of women's rap in constituting a countercultural sphere that can create wider social and political awareness. To do so, I focus on the case study of Snowflakebxtch, a twenty-four-years old Moroccan woman rapper who is known for her outspoken and transgressive freestyles. I draw on a mix research methodology where I combine a content analysis of two interviews conducted with Aisha Fukushima, the founder of RAPTivism, and the selected Moroccan rapper along with a textual analysis of two of Snowflakebxtch's most salient tracks. I argue that Snowflake's freestyles are an effective manifestation of RAPTivism and feminist rap in Morocco whereby the young rapper deconstructs widespread gender binaries and traditional gender roles in her society, as she denounces, in parallel, several societal and political woes in the country. These aspects contribute to situate Snowflake's work in what other scholars have theorized as the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in the North African region whereby women artist-activists continue to struggle, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, for social justice and gender equality through creative means.

Keywords: Gender binary; Countercultures; Hip-hop; RAPTivism; Social justice; Traditional gender roles

Introduction

Hip means to know
It's a form of intelligence
To be hip is to be up-date and relevant
Hop is a form of movement
You can't just observe a hop
You got to hop up and do it
Hip and hop is more than music
Hip is the knowledge, hop is the movement
Hip and hop is intelligent movement... Or relevant movement
We selling the music

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So write this down on your black books and journals: hip-hop culture is eternal
Run and tell all your friends
An ancient civilization has been born again, it's a fact . . .
Hip Hop Lives (2007), KRS-One and Marl

In 2009, American rapper and educator Aisha Fukushima, the founder of RAPtivism, received a prestigious fellowship as a senior student at Whitman College to research and examine some of the major manifestations of activism through rap music in several countries across the globe. She arrived in Morocco in 2010 to study and contribute to the local RAPtivist movement (Aisha 2020). RAPtivism is a portmanteau term combining rap and activism which focuses, particularly, on the potential of the hip-hop's counterculture to instigate a wider social movement that can trigger social change and achieving equal access to the public sphere for previously marginalized groups, including women (Maddex 2014). One year later, in 2011, the Arab Spring outbreak in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a series of uprisings aiming to topple several autocratic regimes across the region after a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire for being repeatedly subjected to police abuse and harassment.

Morocco's experience of the Arab Spring was quite exceptional as the local revolutionary movement, which was heralded by the 20th February Movement (M20FEV), did not openly aim to topple King Mohamed VI's regime but rather to achieve a series of reforms touching upon individual freedoms and liberties, the improvement of women's rights and the status of the Native inhabitants of Morocco—the Amazigh, as well as to restrict many of the King's political prerogatives (Yachoulti 2015). The local RAPtivist movement was also impacted and reshaped by the events of the "Moroccan Spring", leading to the rise of a wider and stronger community of committed rappers who openly contested regime abuse and corruption in the context of the uprisings and their aftermath (Levine 2015).

Because the existing literature on RAPtivism in the MENA is very much limited and focuses almost exclusively on men's contributions to the movement, in this study, I adopt a feminist perspective to investigate feminine manifestations of RAPtivism in the region and explore the role of women rappers in the shaping of the local hip-hop counterculture. To do so, I focus on Morocco, a leading country in the field of RAPtivism in the MENA (Levine 2015; Aisha 2020), and I take as a case study Snowflakebxtch, a twenty-four years old Moroccan female rapper who has become quite famous in 2019 for her daring and outspoken feminist freestyles. In addition, I draw on the literature on the "creative insurgency" of the Arab Spring where Arab [countercultural] hip-hop played a key role to denounce various forms of abuse (Kraidy 2016/2017; Levine 2015) and on Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016)'s idea of the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution through women's creative disobedience in contemporary North African States. I also ground my analysis in Fraser's (1990) theory of subaltern counterpublics, Mesia Lemas (2018)'s theories on *artivism* and Maddex (2014)'s theory on RAPtivism and hip-hop as a counterculture.

My objective is to develop a feminist contribution to the literature on the creative insurgency that characterized the Arab Spring and its aftermath. I aim to contribute particularly to the scarce literature on RAPtivism in the MENA region by focusing on women RAPtivists from Morocco, where the literature on women's creative disobedience patterns and artivism, is even more limited. Even Levine's (2015) article which tackles Arab youth's revolutionary expressions from the 1990s to the Arab Spring, where hip-hop played a major role, focuses exclusively on men's creative expressions. Little attention has been given to feminine interventions in the counter-cultural scene of rap and hip-hop. On the contrary, my PhD fieldwork revealed that Moroccan

women's creative forms of activism are quite widespread and common, and that they also have the potential to deconstruct various hegemonic discourses by providing an alternative reading and an insightful social and political commentary on key societal issues in contemporary Morocco.

In this paper, I argue that Snowflakebxtch's freestyles present a counterhegemonic discourse that deconstructs widespread gender binaries and traditional gender norms in Morocco and re-affirms her agency both as a woman and a rapper. The woman rapper also tackles various societal and political issues such as widespread poverty and social inequalities, alongside regime abuse and corruption. Ultimately, Snowflakebxtch's work could potentially be inscribed in what Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016)'s has theorized as the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in "post-revolutionary" North African states.

Literature Review

On the Historical Origins of the Hip-Hop Counterculture and Rap Music

Maddex (2014) and Levine (2015) trace back the origins of [American] hip-hop to the cultural and highly poetic forms of music that emerged within working-class Black neighborhoods of New York during the late 1970s and early 1980s to tackle as various social justice issues as widespread poverty, unemployment, police brutality, drug trafficking, violence and lack of life opportunities. Other authors have also traced back the origins of rap music on the island of Jamaica in the early 1960's when Jamaican sound-system operators had only a single turntable, and would be the first to resort to the services of a slick-talking, rhyme-every-time person on the microphone (Baxter 1988). George (1998) posits that the hip hop culture is made up of four major components including graffiti, break dancing, DJing and rapping. In this article, I focus primarily on rap music because of its lyrical and rhetorical potential in conveying the countercultural spirit that the overall hip hop culture aims to instigate and promote. In fact, Brown (2008) contends that political music has the potential to affect us more significantly than traditional [mainstream] political content and discourses; he observes: "There is something deeply psychological about the musical method of delivery with regard to political thought" (219).

Maddex (2014) refers to various rappers who played a prominent role in the dawn of American rap and hip-hop music during the 1980's and 1990's, such as *KRS-One*, *Grandmaster Flash*, *the Furious Five*, *Public Enemy*, *Tupac*, and *Biggie*. He argues that *Grandmaster Flash* and *the Furious Five*'s 1982 released music video "The Message" was the first track to "integrate lyrical content with harsh ghetto realities" (2014, 3) to tackle issues that characterized everyday life in African American neighborhoods of New York back then, including police harassment, poverty, broken neighborhoods, and unsafety on the streets (Keyes 2004). In 1989, *Public Enemy*, an American hip-hop group formed in New York in 1985, released its worldwide renowned track "Fight the Power" to denounce the role of the American government in several forms of abuse and oppression, such as increasing government surveillance, repression and violence in Black neighborhoods, through its famous injunction and formula "*We gotta fight the powers that be!*" (Maddex 2014). In 1992, at the opposite end of the country, *Tupac Shakur*, the immortal and emblematic figure of West Coast American rap, released his song "Changes" where he deplored the same and enduring problems that the Black community also faces in California, such as drug trafficking, poverty, gang wars and violence and called for the necessity of social change towards a more equitable, less racist and more tolerant America. The track also denounced the role of an unjust and racist penitentiary system and its contribution to the phenomenon of social reproduction in the United States, where most of the locked-up inmates are Black people. Ultimately, *Tupac*'s 1995 autobiographical song "Dear Mama" tackled the struggles of single motherhood in Black

communities, and shed light on issues of poverty, precarious work and social inequity that characterized the working-class neighborhoods where he grew up in East Harlem, New York and Baltimore, Maryland. The song also pays tribute to his mother, Afeni Shakur who was a former Black Panther activist, and to her lifelong struggle to maintain a family despite drug addiction, poverty and societal indifference.

More recently, in 2007, KRS-One and Marl released their track “Hip Hop Lives” (from which the lyrics were taken in the first lines of this article) where they define what hip hop is and what the culture is about. They argue that hip hop is about raising the Black community’s awareness about their plight and living conditions, as well as marginalized people’s all around the world, with the aim of strengthening and empowering them. Hip hop, they contended, is not only a message about systemic oppression and “rage against the system”, but also, if not primarily, a message of hope, healing and liberation (Maddex 2014). In 2008, the Obama’s election campaign indeed revealed how hip-hop and rap music had become an undeniable political force for mobilization and garnering support, in a context where several prominent African American rappers (“Rappers for Obama”) joined the campaign and uploaded videos explaining why they were voting for Obama and how others could join the campaign and make themselves heard. The campaign included emblematic figures of American rap such as P Diddy, Ludacris, 50 Cent, Jay-Z, Common, Will I Am, and Busta Rhymes, who together demonstrated the potential of political rap (and political rappers) in contributing to make a campaign successful with the subsequent election of Barack Obama a few weeks later, thereby suggesting (optimistically) that Tupac’s words in his 1995 song “Changes” where he sadly deplored “We ain’t ready to see a Black president” may have become outdated a decade later.

On the Crucial Role of Hip Hop during the Arab Spring

Levine (2015) posits that hip-hop arrived in the Arab region in the mid-1990s where it quickly established itself as a “major force for aesthetic expression and innovation among Arab youth from Morocco to Iran (1284)”. He provides the example of one of the earliest manifestations of Arab hip-hop, the Palestinian-Israeli (i.e., Palestinian citizens of Israel) rap group DAM and their famous song “Min irhabi?” (“*Who’s the Terrorist?*”) which he describes as “one of the most powerful accusations directed in a musical form against the Israeli occupation” (2015, 1285). Levine (2015) further elaborates that Arab hip-hop has played a key role in the more recent context the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 where the [Arab] youth has effectively re-appropriated and integrated hip-hop in their revolutionary struggles and expressions; he observes: “Whether Arabian Knightz’s “Rebel” (Egypt), Ibn Thabit’s “Ben Ghazi” (Libya), or L’7a9ed’s “Klab ad-Dawla” (Dogs of the State), hip-hop was truly at the heart of the soundtrack to the protests. In Syria as in Tunisia, hip-hop helped announced the revolt” (1284). In this context, Levine (2015) points out the role of Tunisian rapper El Général and his song “Rayes Lebled” (“*The President of the Country*”) in triggering the revolution in Tunisia where the rapper implored former ousted President Ben Ali to leave, as he decried: “Your people are dying...eating from garbage...We are living like dogs” (1286). Levine (2015) also provides the example of Egyptian rapper Ramy Essam who, equipped only with his guitar and sleeping bag, managed to galvanize and mobilize revolutionary support in Tahrir Square with his famous song “Iral” (“*Leave!*”) that has since become the anthem of the Egyptian Revolution and of several other protests that sparked across the region.

Moroccan Hip-Hop and the Rise of a Countercultural Space

Levine (2015) further elaborates that Moroccan hip-hop has been particularly productive and fruitful in that it produced some of the best manifestations of the countercultural aspect of hip-hop in the last twenty years. While Moroccan rap has always been *implicitly* political, tackling as various issues as crime, corruption, poverty and widespread socio-economic disparities in the country, most local rappers have persistently and consciously stayed away from directly challenging the legitimacy of the system- let alone that of the King (2015, 1285). In fact, it is considered a crime in Morocco to question or attack the authority of the King (Ibid.).

Levine (2015) argues that, in the context of the "Moroccan Spring", the Moroccan King Mohamed VI was able to co-opt some of his country's most popular rappers, such as *Don Bigg* and *Fnaire*, to serve as key supporters of the reforms that were adopted to crush the local revolutionary movement of the Arab Spring- the February 20th Movement. A major "reform" included the adoption of a new constitution in June 2011 which re-affirmed the rights of previously ostracized groups in Morocco, such as women and the Amazigh, the ethnic native group of Morocco, and restricted some of the King's political prerogatives (Yachoulti 2015). Whereas most of these rappers were previously known to be dissident, especially Don Bigg whose former songs focused on regime abuse and corruption-particularly his 2006 famous album "Mgharba Tal Mout" ("*Moroccan until Death*"), the King was actually able to co-opt such a dissidence to legitimize his power and garner support in the context of the uprisings that constituted a significant threat to the status-quo. As Levine (2015) goes on:

"Morocco and Bahrain are good examples of how government sponsor hip-hop artists who otherwise might be dangerous to their power. They reflect instances where regimes have actively sponsored rappers and other artists in the wake of the uprisings as a counter to the revolutionary artists" (1285).

Creative Insurgency of the Arab Spring

In his seminal book *Creative insurgency in the Arab World: The Naked Blogger of Cairo*, Marwan Kraidy (2017) coins the concept of "creative insurgency" to characterize the mixture of activism and artfulness of revolutionary expression that activists mobilized in the context of the Arab uprisings. He defines creative insurgency as an artful expression that operates through the presence of the human body in public space and foments a new revolutionary identity which he characterizes as "confrontational, no-holds-barred, high-stakes, high-risk, and potentially high-rewards gambit" (235). Focusing on the revolutionary work of various graffiti artists, puppeteers, videographers, cartoonists, satirists, sloganeers, and bloggers, he argues that such creative forms of activism still define contemporary forms of dissent in Arab political life. However, Kraidy (2017) warns that "creative dissidence" is a double-edged sword given that [Arab] activists also face constantly the threats of guns, bombs, fire, chemicals, starvation, disease, exposure, torture and beheadings.

In "Revolutionary Creative Labor", Kraidy (2016) uses similar terms such as "creative dissidence" and "revolutionary creative labor" to characterize the creative forms, such as digital memes, mashups, handheld banners and political rap, that activists mobilized in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011. He observes: "The Arab uprisings has given rise to a notion of creative resistance. Various activists, journalists, academics, and curators have used that phrase to celebrate a gamut of expressive practices and forms that were incorporated into the revolutionary struggle" (2016, 231). Focusing primarily on the role of the body, Kraidy (2016) draws a historical parallel

between the events of the Arab Spring and the revolutionary activism of a longer past where the human body was consistently employed as tool, a medium, a symbol, and a metaphor at the same time. He underscores how in the context of the Arab uprisings, Arab revolutionaries and protestors have resorted to very basic media materials that they were strongly involved with physically, such as through the lifting and carrying the banners, the choreographing of flash mobs or the performance of a rap song or a slam in public where body language plays a key role.

Women's Creative Disobedience in Post-Revolutionary Arab States

Badran (2016) uses the term “creative disobedience” to characterize the nature of Arab [especially Egyptian] women's dissent in contemporary post-revolutionary Arab States whereby she argues that women are increasingly resorting to art [activism] to denounce systemic oppression in their countries. Badran draws such a term from her observation that obedience and disobedience are particularly gendered terms in the Arab region; she notes that: “In patriarchy, women are subordinate to men, ‘superiors’ to whom they owe obedience. Obedience is a one-way street” (2016, 48) and “He wields power and commands. She obeys and defers” (2016, 58). Therefore, Badran concludes that disobedience is female. In this context, she argues that “creative disobedience” is increasingly becoming a basic revolutionary and a politically subversive tool for Arab women in (post)revolutionary North African contexts, as she writes:

“Secular and religious patriarchal structures and systems, with their hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity, and gender, are held together and their power preserved and extended through strict prescription and fastidious practice of obedience. [...] Revolutions are moments when obedience is put in abeyance and disobedience is unleashed in the form of rebellion against established orders and practice” (2016, 48).

In this sense, and taking Egypt as a case study, Badran describes women's activism in post-revolutionary North African states as a “continuing revolution”: “A revolution in Egypt that is capable of realizing a truly democratic state and society must include a full-fledged feminist revolution in order to dismantle patriarchal structures (2016, 46). She, therefore, concludes that the end of the political Arab revolution only constitutes the beginning of the (continuing) gender revolution where women artist-activist continue their struggle for gender equality and social justice concomitantly.

In a similar vein, taking Egypt as a case study, Wahba (2016) describes women's contemporary struggle as a continuum. She observes: “women who were involved in prior social and political struggles participated in the Egyptian revolution and continue to fight for their spaces; they remain central to the ongoing revolution” (74). In fact, (like Badran) Wahba underscores the necessity of dismantling the patriarchal system to achieve effective social and political transformation within the country as well as the need to adopt a gender lens to effectively understand issues facing contemporary Egypt. In this context, she speaks about women's subaltern counterpublics to describe women activists' roles in continuing to reshape the public sphere in the contemporary MENA region despite their systematic exclusion (2016, 66). Within those counterpublics, Wahba (2016) argues, women are producing alternative narratives through various publications, gender-sensitive research and artistic productions that contest patriarchy and aim to trigger social transformation: She describes women's subaltern counterpublics as alternative discursive spaces where women activists are redefining their roles in the society as they contest

the socio-political and cultural realities that continue to constrain them. For instance, Egyptian women's writings in the post-revolutionary context have focused, primarily, on the backlash against women's rights and the marginalization of women from the public sphere. In fact, although these counterpublics include creative aspects, they are not limited to artistic means exclusively.

Theoretical Framework

Revolutionary Creative Labor

Kraidy (2016) theorizes the processes of artful dissent that Arab revolutionaries mobilized in the context of the Arab Spring as "revolutionary creative labor". He contrasts this form of labor with industrial labor, observing that: "Rather than trying to find ways to survive or thrive in the factory, revolutionaries seek to burn the factory down, clean the debris, and build a new and utterly different edifice" (233). He argues that revolutionary creative labor, as a bottom-up expression, is characterized by high forms of human ingenuity and agency which are particularly flexible, reformist and highly subversive. Kraidy elaborates that such creative expressions, are a "breaking-bad" activity and a form of "rebellion" (235), that have the potential to change the relationship between ruler and ruled either by inducing either a toppling of the system or an exacerbation of state repression. In fact, he points out that revolutionary (creative) labor is deployed under persistent threats of jailing, police beatings or murder.

Kraidy (2016) locates these forms of rebellious creativity in humanity's most basic instrument of communication—the body—as he writes that "freedom is enfolded in humans" and constantly "concretized through practice" (2016, 131). He argues that revolutionary creative labor is deeply entangled and connected with the human body, where bodies become vital instruments of expression when other avenues of voice are foreclosed. This idea is strongly reminiscent of De Certeau's (1984) concept of "make do" which defines as "the art of the weak" or the "clever tricks" that the weak and marginalized usually resort to in order to circumvent hegemonic power and the limitations imposed by it by taking advantages of certain opportunities or openings in the political conjuncture [such as the situation of the Arab Uprisings of 2011 that Kraidy analyzes]. In fact, de Certeau contrasts the time-based tactics of the marginalized with the space-based "strategies" of the dominant power—or the so-called "clever tricks" of the weak (de Certeau 1984, 37). He argues that what the marginalized can achieve within restraining spaces depends on their 'sensibility'. Grossberg (1992) defines "sensibility" as a socially and historically determined mode of engagement with particular (cultural) practices which determines the appropriate way not only of relating to certain practices and but also of integrating them into daily life (72). In fact, Kraidy (2016) further theorizes revolutionary creative labor as not only involving the human body but also affects; he observes: "spawned under life-threatening conditions, they are radical rejectionist expressions of human affects and aspirations" (2016, 231). He argues that revolutionaries deploy creative expressions for the purpose of eking out human dignity and political agency where revolutionary creativity actually remains a form of unremunerated labor, thereby even more deeply entangled with affects and less with direct material benefits.

Finally, Kraidy (2016) posits that social context is key to understanding and examining revolutionary creative labor. He situates such innovative forms of artfulness in the socio-political realm of activism by contrasting state propaganda with creative dissidence. Kraidy highlights the subversive potential of creative dissidence, noting that:

"The creative resistance trope operates primarily according to political and ideological imperatives. Creative resistance refers to propaganda by people

we like—in this sense cre-ative resistance is a more glamorous, bottom-up cousin of the great euphemism public diplomacy (2016, 233).

He also argues that revolutionary creative labor reflects relations of politico-economic power and can be evaluated in terms of the “political-rhetorical value” it is able to generate. This value is assessed by the potential of rebellious creativity to induce a shift from the usual docility and subordination of subjects under authoritarian regimes to the collective upheaval of highly politicized agents in a revolutionary context. Therefore, Kraidy (2016) concludes that revolutionary creative labor entails the convergence of expression, production, and revolution.

Subaltern Counterpublics, Cultural Studies and Intersectional Feminism

Looking at the contemporary state of Arab women’s rights in post-revolutionary contexts, I draw from Nancy Fraser’s (1990) critique of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, which she characterizes as a “bourgeois conception” in the sense that the public sphere is always only accessible to a certain segment of the population, and that multiple publics have always existed, often separated by gender and social location (61). In the post Arab Spring uprising, the so-called “public sphere” is, in fact, mainly a male domain where women were excluded from political representation and decision-making despite their active contributions to the series of revolutions (Sadiqi 2016). Moreover, Fraser posits that the public sphere creates a dichotomy between public and private concerns and can be instrumentalized to further ostracize women and confine them to the private sphere. This was precisely what characterized the post-revolutionary contexts where the adoption of conservative constitutions in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in 2011 constituted an attempt to keep women out of the “public sphere” by foregrounding complementary—not equal—rights for men and women (Ennaji 2016). Similarly, the rise of extreme forms of violence directed at women protesters, who continued to occupy the streets in the wake of the revolutions to denounce their social and political exclusion, was also a way of keeping them *out* of this space (Cooke, 2016). Therefore, instead of “public sphere”, my research rather foregrounds Fraser’s (1990) concept of *subaltern* counterpublics that Wahba (2016) also uses [in the literature review part] to characterize the new spheres that are currently created and inhabited by North African women who are excluded from their countries’ social and political lives. As Fraser (1990) pertinently points out, counterpublics give marginalised groups whose concerns are most often not considered a public concern a voice and a platform. They are spaces where alternate discourses can develop and circulate to build a more democratic and egalitarian society.

To investigate the subaltern counterpublics that are currently inhabited by North African women in the context of their social and political exclusion from public life, I also draw from cultural studies. The latter offers an important paradigm to re-center the role of countercultures and subaltern knowledges in informing- not only the daily lives of the subaltern and the construction of subalternity—but also her distinct project of emancipation that is precisely articulated around her so called “subaltern culture” (Foucault 1980). Arab women are a double subaltern here: they are, at the same time, the colonized subject in the colonizer’s mind and the female subject in the Arab man’s mind. In this regard, Michel Foucault (1980) advocates for the return of popular subjugated knowledges—that is “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (82). He posits that for an effective criticism of existing power relations, the insurrection of these low-

ranking knowledges is necessary against the scientific discourse and the Western canon of knowledge production [and consumption].

In this sense, I also draw on intersectional feminist theory. Feminism initially emerged in the 1880s as a movement to establish equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women (Beasley 1999; Hawkesworth 2006). In this paper, I draw essentially on third wave feminism which, beginning in the 1990s, criticized the dominant and mainstream form of “white feminism” for treating all women as a homogenous group, and introduced notions of post-colonialism, privilege checking and intersectionality (Walker 1995; Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1991) to theorize interlocking axes of oppression - including race, gender but also sexual orientation, ableism etc.—for women from marginalized groups which tend to exacerbate their systemic vulnerability. In this study, I draw particularly on intersectional feminist theory to examine the tactics that are currently being deployed by contemporary North African women artists and activists, within their so-called subaltern counterpublics, to continue advocating for social justice and gender equality in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

RAPTivism: Hip Hop Counterculture and Social Movement

Levine (2015) and Maddex (2014) theorize Hip-hop as a counterculture that was born in the 1970-80s Black segregated neighborhoods of New York to address various social issues as racism, rampant social inequalities and lack of access to public services. In fact, Levine (2015) observes that the rise of alternative popular music genres such as heavy metal, punk and hip-hop involved the creation of subcultures that were inherently subversive and countercultural (1281). He argues that extreme metal, which is known to be a dissident genre, and rap are actually very similar in terms of their origin even if they tend to sound quite distinct. Maddex (2014) further theorizes hip-hop as a counter-discourse that conveyed the Black community's anger and indignation to being excluded from the political sphere by foregrounding an oppositional stance as well as an oppositional identity (p 6-7). He argues that hip hop's counter-ness resides not only in its agents and their socio-economic location (the Black community of rappers) but also in the type of social and political commentary it intends to deliver (rap music).

Maddex (2014) defines a “raptivist” as a rapper who engages in activism not as a hobby but to effectively address the issues of the community and actively come up with solutions for them. The rapper, therefore, becomes the voice [or the agent] of the hip hop counterpublic sphere to contribute to the betterment of the community (108). Maddex extends the definition of raptivists to include not only the committed rappers but also the activists who are in connection with the hip-hop community and the hip-hop scholars who write about these alternative forms of expressions (109). The rapper, in Maddex's definition, is therefore just one of the leaders of hip-hop, insofar as RAPTivism consists of a wider social movement [and counterpublic sphere] which includes various solidarity networks that are built around the hip-hop culture and the so-called rebellious figure to the RAPTivist. Commenting on how specific [raptivist] communities are using rap music and hip-hop as a cultural force to bring about political change, Maddex (2014) provides the example of the young rappers of the 2011 Arab uprisings who presented themselves as the leaders of a cultural (and political) movement in as various countries as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya; he observes: “rap's emerging political influence will provide for future areas of analysis so as to see how the specific context and circumstances affecting a particular country can be affected by hip-hop” (77). My study is inscribed in such an effort of analysis.

RAPtivism is a term that combines rap and activism. Its origins can be traced to the term artivism which Mesías-Lema (2018) theorizes as a neologism that is derived from “art” and “activism” to describe artists who are committed to creative processes of an activist nature to raise awareness towards collectively shared concerns with the aim of triggering social transformation and influencing political decision-making (22). Kuang (2004) also theorizes artivism as bottom-up radical approach consisting of a conscious combination of art and activism to engage in social-spatial issues through art projects (153). In this study, I draw specifically on feminist art theory which focuses on a particular aspect of artivism—that is art as a medium to reflect on women’s lives and experiences by using tactics such as consciousness-raising to change the bases of both the production and the reception of art in contemporary societies (Kennedy 2017). In fact, Mesías-Lema (2018) argues that artivism was also primarily influenced by the success of performance feminism which “demanded more efficient communication strategies within the field of contemporary art, capable of demanding and institutionalizing the non-existent rights of those groups in a situation of risk and social exclusion” (21). Therefore, Kuang (2004) underscores the potential of art and creative productions, over public debates and political activities, to strengthen community identity and trigger social transformation by giving marginalized populations a public platform and a medium to express themselves in a motivating and liberating way (154).

Methodology

Mixed Research Methodology

My methodology in this study is qualitative. To investigate the notion of RAPtivism in Morocco, I did a textual analysis of the selected woman rapper Snowflakebxtch’s two most famous and salient freestyles—the “*GruntFreestyle #39*” and “*Sma3 ya Dakar*” (“*Listen you Male*” in English). In fact, the two freestyles were originally written in the Moroccan Arabic dialect of Darija; I took care of translating them to English for the purpose of this study. The textual analysis of the two freestyles was then completed with a content analysis of an interview I conducted online with Aisha Fukushima, an American woman rapper and the founder of the RAPtivist movement, and a second interview I conducted both online and in person with Snowflakebxtch. The interviews were semi-structured in nature in order to allow the two women rappers to direct the flow of the conversation and elaborate on aspects that they personally believed would be valuable for the purpose of this study. The objective of conducting interviews was to complement my textual analysis with additional aspects that I could have missed from my textual analysis of Snowflakebxtch’s two freestyles and to get direct insights about the RAPtivist movement, its objective and its wider social and political implications. The ultimate purpose was to investigate a manifestation of RAPtivism in a specific socio-political context, that is present-day Morocco, through the case study of Snowflakebxtch.

Aisha Fukushima, the Founder of RAPtivism

Aisha Fukushima is a multilingual and multiracial woman rapper of African American and Japanese descent. On her personal website, Aisha defines herself as a “singer, speaker, educator, and ‘RAPtivist’ (rap activist)” (AishaFukushima.com 2020). Aisha Fukushima founded RAPtivism in 2009, a hip-hop project spanning 20 countries and four continents to advocate for freedom and justice worldwide. In her rap songs, she tackles various social and political themes such as global citizenship, empowerment, feminism and cultural activism with live musical performance. Aisha has participated in several lectures and performances everywhere from the United States to France,

Morocco, Japan, Germany, England, South Africa, Senegal, India, Denmark and beyond. Fukushima's RAPTivism work has been featured on several international media outlets, including on the Moroccan TV channel 2M.

Snowflakebxtch: A Case Study of Women's Raptivism in Morocco

I decided to focus on Snowflakebxtch as a case study for this article following extensive research I did online on female RAPTivism in Morocco and on-ground research where I asked several cultural and artistic actors in Morocco for their personal recommendations on committed women rappers. Snowflake is also one of the top and most controversial women rappers in Morocco at the time of this article writing in February 2020.

Ghizlane Radi a.k.a. Snowflakebxtch was born in 1995 in Benni Mellal, a Moroccan city located in the country's interior. She lived in Tangier in the North of Morocco for most of her life before moving to Casablanca in 2014, the Kingdom's economic capital. Before focusing on rap, Snowflake dabbled in different genres; she wrote poetry, fiction and essays. During our interview, the rapper told me:

“My stage name is actually just *Snowflake*. It's a term in the US used to refer to liberals, especially from my generation, because we value everyone's unicity and take offence in a lot of what's said or done by others who don't share our beliefs, and that's seen as a fragility...Therefore, fragility plus uniqueness equals Snowflake” (Snowflake 2020).

The rapper explained that she uses the name Snowflakebxtch on social media not only because Snowflake was already taken but also to highlight the contrast between the ideal of values and ethics held by the name Snowflake and the vulgarity that goes with the word b*tch; she continued: “As my friend put it recently, I think the name matches you perfectly because you wouldn't hesitate to slap somebody, but you would also use the right words to explain why” (Snowflake 2020). In this paper, I use both Snowflake and Snowflakebxtch to refer to the selected rapper as she herself claim both pseudonyms. Snowflakebxtch currently has over 7,200 followers on Instagram and 460 posts which include her freestyles and posts about her daily life and lifestyle. According to automatically generated data by Instagram which provides demographical information on the rapper's followers on the same platform, Snowflake's primary audience are young (Moroccan) males aged between 18 and 24 years old; in fact, 73% of her followers are men, and only 27% are women (Snowflake 2020). These numbers reflect the potential of her rap in deconstructing toxic masculinities and patriarchal discourses as she addresses a primarily male audience. In fact, her secondary biggest demographic sample of followers are still men, and they are aged between 25 and 34 years old (Ibid.).

Listen You Male is a freestyle that was produced and released by Snowflakebxtch in December 2019 that directly challenges the foundations of the patriarchal system. Snowflake is filmed in her kitchen performing her rap song where she addresses the figure of the “male”, a strategic rhetorical use on the part of the rapper to underscore the negative connotations of the word in terms of the male's role in the subordination and objectification of women. The second freestyle I selected for the purpose of this study is the *GruntFreestyle #39*. It was produced in November 2019 in the context of the French *Grunt* group filming a documentary on the young Moroccan rap scene, where Snowflakebxtch was the only woman participant. She is shown rapping besides four other Moroccan men rappers; they are all performing in the Arabic Moroccan

dialect of Darija. The *Grunt* group aims to promote Francophone rap across the European and African continents. These two tracks are Snowflake's only freestyles that were posted on her Instagram page; these have also triggered the most significant audience interaction in terms of both "likes" and "comments".

Results Analysis

Rapping Against Gender Binaries and the Traditional Gender Norms

In her two freestyles *GruntFreestyle #39* and *Listen You Male*, Snowflake tackles several gender binaries that are commonly referred to and used in the Moroccan society with the aim of deconstructing and subverting various sexist social constructs. She denounces their impact on Moroccan women's social status as she deplores their implications for women's physical and psychological well-being. The term gender binary describes a social system of classification of gender into two distinct forms of masculine and feminine. In this system, the society categorizes its members into one of two sets of gender roles, gender identities and attributes based exclusively on biological sex, i.e. either male or female (Lorber 2007). Gender binaries are a social construct in the sense that they generally stem from a social system or widely held cultural beliefs. In this binary model, sex, gender, and sexuality are, therefore, assumed to be aligned. Consequently, another concept directly stems from the gender binary, i.e., the gender roles. Also known as sex role, gender role is a social role encompassing a range of behaviors that are considered desirable and appropriate for people according to their biological sex (Levesque 2011). Sex roles are generally built around radical concepts of masculinity and femininity but may vary according to cultural contexts. Snowflake exposes and radically deconstructs various gender binaries with the aim of subverting the traditional gender roles of the Moroccan society.

At the beginning of the *GruntFreestyle #39*, Snowflake proudly exclaims: "*Even if I'm a girl I have my own balls*". Here, the woman rapper deconstructs the very logic and rationale behind the gender binary system—that is the (over)reliance on the biological sex to come up with diametrically opposed classifications of gender attributes and roles. Such a logic implies that because men have a penis (i.e., the metaphor of the testicles), they are generally considered braver than women, which also makes them generally worthier [to the society]. This narrative contributes to justify the subordination of women by radically categorizing them as the weaker sex or as Simone de Beauvoir once pertinently put it as "the second sex" (De Beauvoir 1949). In this system, men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them, on every level, as the *Other*, who is defined exclusively in opposition to men. Man occupies the role of the self, or subject while woman is the object, the other (Ibid.). Therefore, in response to such an unfair social construct, Snowflakebtch denounces the overall societal implications of the gender binaries in terms of women's resulting social status- that of weaker individuals, hence necessarily subordinate to men. In the above line, she actually foregrounds her strength and courage, as a woman, in "talking back" to the patriarchal system ("to have balls" is a phrase commonly used to say that one is brave, daring and outspoken). In fact, hooks (1989) defines "talking back" as an oppositional stance and a counter-hegemonic discourse that aims to deconstruct a dominant system and interests—in this case the dominant interests are those of the patriarchal system. Snowflake re-affirms not only her own power and agency as a woman rapper who bravely speaks out against sexism but also her refusal of the narrative of the victimization and categorization of women as weak.

In her *Listen You Male* freestyle, after denouncing various forms of sexist abuse and violence by men towards women, Snowflakebtch exclaims: "*You're not a man... you're just a MALE!*". Here, the woman rapper deconstructs, once again, the rationale and idea behind the

gender binary system i.e. the biological sex. She underscores that it is a fallacy to hold that because some people are born with a penis (i.e. male), they will automatically live up to the idealized (i.e. constructed) standards of masculinity and "manhood". She also refutes the idea that men are automatically worthier, stronger, braver, more rational and more responsible just because they are born "male". Snowflake, therefore, creates another binary of man vs. male to deconstruct and subvert the original widespread and sexist binary of male vs. female and men vs. women. She implies that whereas real men live up to the ideal standards of equality, fairness and solidarity, the male is the one who subjects women to various forms of violence, both physical and psychological. Similarly, in the *Second Sex*, De Beauvoir also distinguishes between "sex" and "gender" in her famous phrase that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949, 301) which hints at the social constructedness of gender and how it undermines women's resulting social status. Therefore, as a potential solution, Judith Butler (2007) calls for feminist activists to trouble the categories and attributes of gender through performance to question the very foundations of the patriarchal system. Snowflakebxtch's rap performances effectively trouble the categories of gender, particularly through the above discussed incantations "*Even if I'm a girl I have my own balls!*" and "*You're not a man... you're just a MALE!*". Such a deliberately troubling stance is also present throughout her freestyles as will be discussed subsequently.

In addition, Snowflakebxtch also deconstructs the prevailing gender binary of rational (men) vs. emotional (women). Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) argue that early (pre-cartesian) philosophical and sociological interpretations of reason and rationality strongly linked rationality with masculinity, thereby having profound impacts on modern conceptions of rationality which, in a similar vein, automatically define rationality as a masculine attribute and ideal. In *Listen You Male*, Snowflake deplors men's lack of maturity and rationality which she consistently links with their unfairness and sexist beliefs as she raps: "*I didn't want no trouble...But y'all turned out to be immature kids*". Given that rational people tend to be wise and not immature, which is not the case for the Moroccan average male that Snowflake addresses in this freestyle, the rapper successfully deconstructs once more the gender binary around masculine rationality. In the same freestyle, she goes on by telling men that they are actually "brainless" in order to underscore the stupidity of sexism, which could be seen as the ultimate affront to the patriarchal system- one that is based not only on men's relative physical strength but also, if not primarily, on men's intellectual and rational superiority over women (Ross-Smith & Kornberger 2004).

In line with her objective of further deconstructing the gender binary of rational (men) vs. emotional (women), in *Listen You Male*, the rapper sarcastically addresses men by saying: "*Don't get upset*". Here, Snowflake denounces the dominant patriarchal narrative which states that only women can get emotional. She calls out men to abide by the traditional gender roles they so highly cherish and not show their emotionality [i.e., anger and/or vulnerability] especially when listening to her highly anti-sexist freestyles. As hooks pertinently points out in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004), the patriarchal system also hurts men primarily as they have to renounce their emotional self; she observes: "[there is] serious psychological stress and emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sexist role patterns." (75). She also adds that: "Patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples" (27). Therefore, in the same freestyle, Snowflakebxtch continues: "*Cause I know that deep down that you love me*". Here, the woman rapper further underscores the weight of the patriarchal system on men who are unable to express their feelings openly even when they are in love, awe and admiration—for those male listeners who actually understand the value of her freestyles and enjoy listening to them. Snowflake also seems to shed light on Lacan (1991)'s concept of lack here, whereby he posits that (a

perception of) lack is what causes desire to arise. Because men lack the capacity to show their emotions and vulnerability [unlike women] in a patriarchal system, they consequently envy women for such a prerogative that only they can enjoy.

Furthermore, against the backdrop of the dominant societal expectations that women ought to be polite, well-behaved and politically correct and should, therefore, avoid cursing at all costs (Kite 2001; Vetterling-Braggin 1982), Snowflake uses several vulgar words and phrases in her freestyles with the aim of deconstructing and troubling such traditional gender roles and expectations. The implication is that men show their masculinity and virility by cursing and that women should avoid doing so at all costs because it would undermine their femininity (i.e. appropriateness and docility). As a response, in both her freestyles, Snowflake iterates the phrases: “*F*ckinG*”; “*F*CK OFF!*”; “*B*tch!*” on several occasions. This could be read as a form of feminist re-appropriation of a vulgarity that is usually considered a male privilege, but that the rapper directs precisely against men here by telling them to f*ck off!

Kremin (2017) contends that the use of slurs, especially gender-directed insults, serves the functions of policing socially undesirable behaviors. Therefore, Snowflakebitch’s use of slurs that are commonly directed against women, such as “b*tch”, “F*ck” or “F*ck off!”, could also serve the purpose of subverting men’s policing of women and their common use of sexist and insulting slurs against women who do not conform to the dominant norms of femininity and feminine appropriateness. The woman rapper, therefore, re-affirms her agency and her rejection of the need to be policed by men. As mentioned previously, besides the name Snowflake that the rapper uses as a reference to US liberals who value unicinity and are often perceived as “fragile”, the woman rapper adds the world bxtch to her social media pseudonym which is usually used in a demeaning and derogatory way by men towards women; however, the woman rapper actually re-claims and embraces the term here as an attempt to recover from and subvert men’s sexist slurs and attacks. In fact, during our interview, the rapper observed: “Once you openly claim it [the word], it is no longer an insult!” (Snowflake 2020). Such an approach is reminiscent of the Slut Walk movement where women proudly used the demeaning appellation of “slut” as a form of re-appropriation of their bodies and subjectivities (Bell 2011). Hence, the rapper uses a pseudonym that is itself quite provocative and transgressive to reflect her countercultural project of defying the dominant (gender) norms of feminine acceptability and appropriateness.

In *Listen You Male*, Snowflakebitch also raps: “*I spit on y’all*”. During our interview, she told me that she wrote and performed this second freestyle in response to men’s sexist comments on her #Gruntfreestyle 39 video that was uploaded to her Instagram where they repeatedly told her to “sh*t up and return to her kitchen”, as she was shown rapping fearlessly, and on an equal footing, besides four other Moroccan male rappers (Snowflake 2020). Given that the act of spitting is generally associated with men and commonly considered highly inappropriate, and even gross, for women, Snowflake subverts the traditional gender roles (and binaries) another time. Moreover, as the freestyle was filmed in the rapper’s kitchen, the act of “spitting” reflects her rejection of the patriarchal system’s attempt to confine women in the private sphere and the re-assertion of her agency to scold, lecture and shout at (i.e. spit on) patriarchy even from the place where the system aims to ostracize her (i.e. her kitchen). In fact, in the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake deplores a widespread perception of Moroccan women by men that “*You think all we do is clean*”. She deplores a dominant patriarchal narrative that both perceives and defines women’s role in their kitchen (i.e. by extension their home) with the objective of confining them in the private sphere. In this sense, Snowflakebitch subverts another prevailing (gender) binary of public (men) vs. private (women). What’s more, the fact that the rapper is in her kitchen performing a quite daring and anti-

sexist rap song where she urges men to “listen to her” is a latent message that even in the place where men perceive women to be the most helpless, powerless and “under control”, women can still perform wonders and strongly re-affirm their agency in the face of patriarchal and systemic oppression.

In the *GruntFreestyle #39*, in line with her objective of subverting all norms of feminine appropriateness and political correctness, Snowflakebitch deplors another widely held patriarchal view that only men can make the first move towards women and seduce them, and that women ought to be modest and reserved. She refers to one of her previous freestyles called *Snow Dreams*, which was released in July 2019, where she was recorded hitting on several Moroccan men rappers to defy traditional gender roles and deconstruct another gender binary that defines men as the seducers vs. women as the seduced. However, as *Snow Dreams* freestyle was taken for face-value and interpreted as an attempt to sleep with several male rappers, Snowflake wrote as a response in the *Gruntfreestyle #39*: “Listen to Snow’s dreams and believe me... whoever is sitting next to a frustrated man let him wake up!”. In this line, she urges the Moroccan rappers to “wake up”—that is to truly understand the meaning and purpose behind her freestyle. During our interview, Snowflake explained another rationale behind *Snow Dreams*: “Well they really didn’t get it... What I was saying is if I really wanted to fu*k any of you all, I would’ve!” (Snowflake 2020). Hence, Snowflakebitch’s objective in this track could also be to send a signal to some Moroccan male rappers, and men in general, to make them feel what it is like to be constantly seduced and hit on against one’s will; her use of the term “frustrated” probably alludes to former unpleasant sexual encounters with some men. Therefore, the themes of non-consensual flirting and non-consensual sex are quite central in what appears to be just a “fun” freestyle on the surface. Moreover, as Moroccan rappers tend to use highly sexist language in their lyrics that directly sexualize and objectify women, *Snow Dreams* could also be interpreted as an attempt at inverting the dynamic and objectifying men this time- thereby making men feel what it is like to be constantly objectified in their rap songs.

As a consequence of all her attacks on the patriarchal system, the theme of the sick and deviancy appears to be a central one Snowflake’s rap songs, especially in the *Grunt Freestyle #39*. The woman rapper denounces a dominant patriarchal narrative which depicts all daring and outspoken women against sexism as “mad” and “crazy”. In the freestyle, she uses several verbal cues which allude to the theme of the degenerate: “Even if y’all call me sick...”; “My flow’s so sick everybody’s getting sick”; “And only mum’s putting up with my craziness”. While the first two phrases directly allude to how the society perceives her as a result of her outspokenness against sexism (and transgressive lifestyle and songs), the latter phrase underscores the importance of solidarity and support between women in the struggle against the patriarchal system in Morocco by shedding light on her mother’s support to her to which she pays tribute to in this line. During our interview, Snowflake told me that the strong sense of solidarity within the hip-hop culture was actually a key motivating factor behind her involvement in the rap game in the first place; she observed: “I strongly relate to rap music. It was initially made by people who needed to be heard to convey their passion for *being* through a strong sense of brotherhood and community” (Snowflake 2020). In fact, the social construct of the sick outspoken woman against sexism partly finds its origins in the gender binary of strong/brave (men) vs. weak/submissive (women) and women’s traditional gender role of being docile and reserved. Because Snowflake does not conform to such a gender classification and arrangement, and does not fit into the system, she is therefore categorized as sick (i.e., deviant). There are also several stereotypes attached to the figure of the crazy outspoken woman such as social stigma, exclusion and ostracization. In response to

such a stigma, Snowflake proudly proclaims in the same freestyle: “*Alone in my room playing some beats and partying!*”. The rapper cleverly subverts the social stigma that depicts feminists and women activists like her as alone and miserable. Snowflake affirms that although she is alone, she couldn't be happier and overjoyed as she is celebrating, dancing and cheering to her own rap songs. At the end of the *Grunt Freestyle #39*, the rapper even re-appropriates the trope of the disease and sickness to foreground her role as a vocal woman and a change-maker: “*I'm not influencer, I am an influenza!*” as will further be discussed in the next section.

Rapping against the Male Gaze and the Objectification of Women

Snowflake also denounces in her bittersweet and highly transgressive freestyles several forms of women's objectification and sexualization, thereby shedding light on the male [objectifying] gaze and its detrimental effects on women's physical and psychological well-being. In the *GruntFreestyle #39*, she raps: “*I am carrying a mic not a butt!*”. Snowflakebxtch points out the sad reality than even when she is performing a rap song, men generally only pay attention to her body (and other body language cues) instead of focusing on her music and rhetoric. Through the metaphor of the “butt”, she denounces the demeaning male gaze that objectifies and sexualizes her and, therefore, shuns away and discredits her socio-political commentary. In feminist theory, the male gaze is the act of depicting women and the world from an exclusively masculine and heterosexual perspective that (re)presents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer (Eaton 2008).

In a similar vein, in the *Listen You Male* freestyle, Snowflakebxtch deploras: “*I shoot [words] at you...and all you do is comment on my lipstick?*”. The woman rapper denounces, once more, the demeaning male gaze that foregrounds her body and her looks (i.e., lipstick) instead of her message (i.e., words). In fact, during my interview the founder of the RAPTivist movement, Aisha Fukushima told me that the potential of a rap song to challenge the status-quo and trigger a shift in the society is a key defining feature of RAPTivism (Aisha 2020). Hence, some of Snowflake's male audience's attempts to shift the focus of the debate from her socio-political commentary to her body are deliberate attempts at subverting her RAPTivist message through a patriarchal strategy which reduces the committed rapper to her appearance and body features exclusively. Snowflake, therefore, underscores the stupidity and ridicule of sexist men who are unable to contribute constructively to the debate on the effects of sexism and who shift the focus to her provocative lipstick as an easy “exit” and way out from the debate. In several photographs on her Instagram account, Snowflake also appears wearing a shining and provocative black lipstick, thereby refusing to conform to the codes of modesty that are generally enforced upon women in Morocco or to yield to men's mockeries and attempts at intimidation. In the subsequent line of the same freestyle, she directly addresses all those men who attempt to objectify her saying: “*If you don't want no trouble, then don't comment [on my posts]*”. Snowflake puts herself in a position of strength and authority where she has the upper-hand and directly “talks back” to and threatens men who attempt to intimidate her, thereby affirming her own agency as a woman rapper against online sexual harassment.

Later in the *GruntFreestyle #39*, the rapper continues to challenge men's objectifying gaze; she insists that what she seeks to achieve through her songs is human dignity and equality—not material benefits: “*Cause I want respect not cash*”. Snowflake deconstructs another dominant patriarchal narrative that depicts all women as gold diggers and material-oriented, thereby providing an alternative reading where women, such as her, are genuinely interested in serious social issues such as human dignity and individual liberties. In the same freestyle, Snowflakebxtch

further elaborates on this point, as she writes: *"I don't want no mansion...or drive a jaguar. I wanna stay in your fucking memory... like the razor stayed on my skin"*. Here, the rapper only talks back not only to the dominant patriarchal narrative that perceives women as essentially materially driven; she also re-affirms her wider purpose to impact people's minds (i.e. stay in your memory) and bring about social change. In these lines, Snowflake also touches upon a highly sensitive societal issue that is mental health, by revealing that she used to do self-harm and cut herself. As she told me during our interview, the rapper used to self-inflict harm and mutilation mainly due to personal issues but also because of the effects of the patriarchal system (and wider societal woes in Morocco that will be discussed in a later section), thereby deploring its effects on women's mental health (Snowflake 2020).

Rapping Women's Emancipation and Re-appropriation of their Place in the Society

As discussed previously, Snowflake's freestyles aim to denounce various forms of sexist abuse and violence, that are both of a physical and psychological nature, in order to deconstruct the gender binary system, the traditional gender norms and to subvert the male (objectifying) gaze. The objective behind this is to foreground women's agency and power in the face of patriarchy and advocate for women's emancipation and the re-appropriation of their place in the [Moroccan] society. Snowflake starts by re-affirming her own power and agency—first as a woman then as a rapper.

Snowflake defines herself as a Westernized and transgressive young woman. In the opening lines of her *GruntFreestyle #39*, she proudly claims: *"Even if I'm a Rasta, I am not a Gnawia"*. Gnawa are an ethnic group inhabiting Morocco and Algeria in the Maghreb. The term Gnawa is used to refer to Morocco's folkish genre of Gnawa with roots in ancient African tradition (El Amraoui 2015). By saying that she is not a Gnawia (i.e., the female version of Gnawi), Snowflake openly advocates and assumes her progressive ideals and her refusal of all forms of social categorizations, especially her affiliation with the Gnawa lifestyle just because she allegedly looks like them. Her Instagram page also shows a Westernized and quite daring lifestyle and dressing styles. In fact, on many of her Instagram pictures, besides her dreadlocks, Snowflake is also shown wearing a strong and shining black lipstick where she re-asserts her modernity and transgressive style, but which many commenters have deplored as either too provocative or bi*chy. These realities hint, once more, at the SlutWalk movement where women protestors denounced the famous incantation that women should stop dressing as sluts to avoid harassment (Bell 2011). In reference to *Snow Dreams* precisely which was interpreted as an attempt to hit on and sleep with several male rappers in Morocco, Snowflakebxtcg also raps: *"If I want to target a man, he won't reject me"*. Here, the rapper underscores not only her self-confidence as a woman go-getter who wouldn't hesitate to make the first move towards a guy she likes and who confidently feels that he won't reject her, but also the fact she does not abide by the traditional gender norms that women should be shy and modest and hide their sensual and sexual urges. She re-affirms her sexuality as active, against dominant representations which depict women's sexuality as passive in predominantly Islamic and Muslim societies.

Moreover, as mentioned previously, in the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake proudly proclaims: *"Even if I'm a girl I have my own balls"*, thereby underscoring her rejection of the narrative of women as weak and helpless victims. She presents herself as a strong, brave and outspoken woman who doesn't need balls (i.e., a male's genitalia) to actually "have balls" (i.e., courage and bravery) and speak out against various forms of oppression and social injustice against women. She probably aims to raise other women's awareness on their own *inner* strength and

power to talk back to sexism and refuse their status of victims. Hence, in her *Listen You Male* track, the woman rapper also writes: “*This is Snow... not Manar’s merchandise!*”. During our interview, Snowflake explained to me that Manar is a woman character in a Turkish series who is consistently portrayed as a passive victim in every aspect of her life. For instance, in one of the episodes, Manar gets kidnapped and ends up falling in love with her kidnapper. In reaction to what Snowflake saw as several problematic [feminist] aspects in the show, she told me: “This was aired to spread stupidity... Well, what I’m saying is that I’m NOT that!” (Snowflake 2020). Therefore, Snowflake utterly rejects the narrative of women as victims in need of liberation; she presents herself as the anti-hero of such a narrative—that is as a resilient woman fighter who is not only conscious of her own agency but also ready to deploy it at any time. In fact, in her freestyle *Listen You Male*, Snowflakebxtch asks rhetorically: “You think Snow will keep enduring [and keep silent]—Do you really think you can oppress me [take advantage of me]?”. Here, the rapper underscores, once again, the unfairness the patriarchal system, her refusal to be yet another victim of sexist and her resilience to continue being outspoken (not silent) against all forms of gendered violence. The rhetorical question “Do you really think you can oppress me?” can translated to “there is no way I am letting you treat me like that!”.

In addition, Snowflake also conveys her agency as a rapper. Elaborating on her decision to shift to rap music, Snowflakebxtch told me during our interview: “I found rap to be the perfect combination of both my love for writing and music, especially that it’s a genre built by minorities who sought for their own voice to be heard and identified in that” (Snowflake 2020). In the opening lines of *Listen You Male*, she observes: “*I hear like someone talking...They find my text sharp and cutting [like a knife]*”. Here, she emphasizes the strength and potential of her rap in saying out loud and with no shame some of the painful woes of the Moroccan society such as the extent of sexism and its impact on women’s lives. She clearly states that she doesn’t want to hear people complaining about her raps or attacking her for being outspoken. In other terms, Snowflake says “keep on talking, I really don’t care”—or else what directly comes in the following line: “F*CK OFF!”. Subsequently, she rhetorically asks “*You think rap is a shame?*”; here Snowflakebxtch suggests that the true shame is not to be a [woman] rapper, as many of her detractors claim given that the local hip-hop culture is widely associated with several stigmas such as delinquency and drug abuse, but rather to hold a backward and sexist mentality. She also implies that the shame lies in the several woes the Moroccan society suffers from, not in her tracks, and that her freestyles only aim to shed light on some of these social contradictions. Hence, later in the same freestyle, Snowflake also writes: “*You know Snow can torture you*”. Here, she alludes once again to the power of her pen and sharp words in making men realize some of their worst wrongdoings against women; she then claims that those revelations will haunt men and by extension her audience (i.e., the metaphor of the torture), thereby alluding to the potential of her rap in triggering societal awareness. In fact, in the *Gruntfreestyle#39*, Snowflakebxtch writes: “*B*tch I left some people speechless, and their saliva stuck in their mouths*”. Here, the rapper also hints at the eloquence, perceptiveness and sharp-wittedness of her own words which would make any attempts of subversion or attack (from men) quite unlikely and ineffective. She, therefore, underscores once again her agency as a woman rapper and the power of her rap in not only shocking men but also leaving them speechless.

In the same freestyle, she continues by retracing her beginnings in the rap game to the *Snow Dreams* track: “*When I first took up the mic I just wanted to make fun*” where she teases several male rappers given that rap is still a strongly male-dominated field in Morocco. As she told me during our interview, the purpose of this first track was to make people laugh with provocative and

mocking words: "I started rapping just for fun and giggles" (Snowflake 2020). She also deplors the fact that some rappers interpreted this track as an invitation for a hook up or to become her own ghostwriter, as she told me: "I need no [man] ghostwriter because I can be a ghostwriter myself!" (Snowflake 2020). Her subsequent line also reflects this idea, as she raps: "*I would be writing, and he would be learning by heart*". Here, Snowflakebxtch emphasizes her power as a woman rapper to teach men a lesson through rap; she also effects a sort of a reversal of traditional gender roles and societies' conservative/patriarchal norms whereby men believe women have everything to learn from them. Therefore, the woman rapper also underscores her resilience in remaining in the rap scene by and for herself "*Metro booming and I and I want more*" in reference to an American male rapper "Metro booming" who is famous for always reiterating that "he wants more" in his rap songs i.e., his persistence on remaining in the rap game and truly making a name for himself. Therefore, ultimately underscoring her agency as a woman rapper, Snowflakebxtch raps in the *Gruntfreestyle #39*: "*And my place in the game I will impose*". Here, Snowflake's re-appropriation of her agency, role and place in the hip-hop game, which is still very widely dominated by men, also serves as an allegory to her re-claiming and re-appropriation of her place in the Moroccan society, where the public sphere also remains largely a male domain. Hence, in *Listen You Male*, Snowflake proudly claims: "*In my kitchen and the text hurts yeah!*". She uses the allegory of the kitchen as the woman's place by excellence in the patriarchal psyche, that is inside the private sphere, to say that even in the place where patriarchy aims to ostracize her (i.e. the private sphere) she is still able to make a meaningful intervention right from her kitchen and convey a powerful social commentary. Here, Snowflakebxtch's statement is reminiscent of Audre Lordre's (1984) famous phrase of using the master's tools (i.e. the rhetorical tools of patriarchy: "*Go back to the kitchen!*") to dismantle the master's house (in reference to the entire sexist system: "*My text hurts [from the kitchen]*"). The fact that her *Listen You Male* rap closes on the following words "*Two words in the mic left people running aimlessly like an announcement at the station!*" definitely re-acts the power of her rap in inducing social disorientation and chaos, but for a good reason and towards a better end, that is to create a confusion that instigates self-questioning and improves social awareness.

Rapping Against Wider Societal and Political Woes in Morocco: The Continuing (Gender and Cultural) Revolution

In both freestyles under study for this article, Snowflake openly deplors wider socio-political woes and issues than the extent of sexism alone including regime abuse and corruption, as well as widespread poverty and blatant socio-economic inequalities in Morocco. In the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, she writes: "*As Stati [a famous Moroccan pop singer] once sung...the circumstances are tough here [In Morocco]!*". In the following line, she further elaborates on those bad "circumstances" as she raps: "*My smile is fake like that of Jorf's*". Here, *Jorf* refers to *Jorf Lasfar* (Arabic for "Yellow Cliffs"), a deep-water commercial port located on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The harbor is primarily equipped for the exportation of phosphate rock outside the country. It is primarily funded by investments from European and American energy groups. Snowflake sheds light on a highly sensitive issue in Morocco—that of the phosphate exploitation and who truly benefits from it. As she told me during our interview: "In this line, I was calling out the local phosphate industry for pretending to be ethical!" (Snowflake 2020). In fact, given that Morocco is a rich country in terms of natural phosphate resources, several artists and activists, such as the rapper *Skizopherene*, have previously called out the system for exploiting the phosphate industry without giving the Moroccan people their right on it. Snowflake adopts a similar approach

here and denounces what she perceives as a major politic-economic woe that reflects regime corruption and (over)exploitation. In the same freestyle, the woman rapper goes on: *"I live on Indomie... Misery in my blood"*. Indomie is a Moroccan brand of cheap instant noodles. Hence, after decrying the unethical exploitation of a major natural resource in Morocco, Snowflakebxtch moves on to tackle to the effects of corruption on the Moroccan people in terms of widespread poverty and social inequalities. The woman rapper also proudly claims her positionality as a woman who comes from a lower social class and who was impacted by the effects of poverty.

Subsequently in *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake addresses additional facets of abuse and corruption in the country as she raps: *"My tracks are like Addoha and are made just in black"*. Addoha is the name of a leading real estate developer for economic social housing in Morocco. The rapper attacks the Addoha group on the grounds that it mainly operates "in black" i.e. in reference to the black economy and the widespread corruption of the real estate industry. During our interview, Snowflake told me that compagnies like Addoha claim to develop and promote social housing whereas, in reality, all they do is impose exorbitant prices on people with a limited return on their money; she decried: *"This line was diss to the real estate industry that keeps f*cking with us with f*cking unimaginable prices"* (Snowflake 2020). In reference to her tracks being made in black, the woman rapper told me that all she needs and can afford to produce her rap songs are a pen and black coffee, thereby hinting, once again, to the theme of poverty and the low costs required to produce her tracks. This is also reminiscent of De Certeau (1984)'s concept of "make do" which he defines as 'the art of the weak' or the 'clever tricks' that weak and marginalized people usually mobilize to contest hegemonic power.

During our interview, Snowflake also told me that she was very much inspired by the events of the "Moroccan Spring" in 2011 which was heralded by the February 20th Movement for individual freedoms and liberties. The M20FEV was started by young Moroccan cyberactivists in the early days of January 2011 to advocate, in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings that were unfolding across the MENA region, not for a direct toppling of the local regime but rather for constitutional reforms, including more individual freedoms and liberties and a limitation of the King's political prerogatives in Morocco (Yachoulti 2015). The movement was quickly co-opted by the King and the political elites in power with the adoption of a new constitution in June 2011 that allegedly responded to all these political and social demands but which, on the long run, did not end up disrupting the status-quo in a significant way; such a co-option was also achieved with the support of former political rappers that were exploited by the regime to counter the revolution of the genuinely committed artists i.e. *artivists* (Levine 2015).

During our interview, Snowflakebxtch told me: *"When the movement started, I was just 14 years old, but it really shaped me... When it ended, I became very frustrated [and then my interest switched to US left-wing politics]"* (Snowflake 2020). Consequently, her daring and transgressive freestyles tackle as crucial themes as sexism, regime abuse, political and economic corruption and widespread poverty and social inequalities in "post-revolutionary" Morocco. Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016) define the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in contemporary Egypt as women's insistence to remain in the public sphere despite their systemic exclusion in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, where women activists are increasingly resorting to creative disobedience (i.e., art activism) as a basic revolutionary tool to continue tackling issues of gender inequality and social justice-concomitantly. Therefore, I argue that Snowflake's freestyles are an effective manifestation of women's creative disobedience through rap activism in present-day Morocco which inscribes the rapper and rap song in a similar social and political context- that is the continuing revolution in post-revolutionary North African States today. In fact,

during my interview with the founder of Raptivism Aisha Fukushima, she told me that rap becomes RAPTivism when the hip-hop counterculture can shift the society and political systems by creating a larger societal culture capable of diffusing alternative social norms, including the potential to influence public policy and elections" (Aisha 2020). Snowflake herself claims that she was very much inspired by the M20FEV despite her very young age; the analysis of her freestyles has revealed that she continues to tackle similar issues that remain unfulfilled from the time of the Arab Spring demands, such as gender equality, social justice and a culture of human rights. Snowflakebxtch is, therefore, undeniably a manifestation of RAPTivism in Morocco in the context of what other scholars have characterized as the continuing gender revolution in some Arab States today. The following section will examine Snowflake's project of effectively impacting social change in Morocco through her rap songs.

Rapping Against the Status-Quo: The Potential of Rap in Affecting Social Change

In fact, Snowflakebxtch's freestyles exemplify and reflect her agency as a woman rapper who aims to destabilize the status quo in "post-revolutionary" Morocco in order to fix major societal issues and trigger sustainable social change. In the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake raps: "Leave me alone you can't put up with my venom". In this line, the rapper speaks to a dominant patriarchal narrative in Morocco which describes women as generally cunning, sneaky, surreptitious and deceitful. As a (sadly) famous popular saying goes: "Wilek men Kid N'ssa" ("*Better beware of women's cunningness!*"). At the same time, Snowflakebxtch also re-affirms her agency and the subversive power of her words which she describes as a "venom"—that is a poison that usually attacks the body's immune system and weakens it, thereby causing significant damage or, in extreme situations, death. Snowflake underscores that her words can spread like a venom and leave people numb ("*You can't put up...*"). However, given that her freestyles aim to shed light on some of the major societal and political ills in Morocco, such as regime abuse and widespread social inequalities, as well as to deconstruct men's widely held stereotypes against women, her venom is rather a sort of benign disease or contamination. Therefore, through the trope of the venom, Snowflake sheds light on the potential of her rap in contaminating, positively, the entire [Moroccan] society—in other words destabilizing the status quo and bringing about social change towards a more egalitarian society.

In fact, in the same freestyle, Snowflake continues: "*Flow so sick everybody's getting sick*" as a form of re-appropriation of the trope of the figure of the "sick" and "crazy" free-spoken woman to underscore the inspiring potential of her freestyles. She implies that after listening to her rap songs, everybody will hopefully become "sick" [i.e. contaminated] as well and start speaking out against all forms of social injustices affecting Morocco. Therefore, at the end of the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflakebxtch proudly proclaims: "*I am not an influencer, I am an influenza!*". She describes herself as a type of contaminating virus, underscoring that she would rather be a disease [i.e., an outspoken woman that annoys, bothers and makes people uncomfortable] than another one of the many shallow influencers on social media. In fact, Snowflake conceives her social influencer role differently- that is not to inspire other people to buy certain products or advertise some travel destinations through social media, but rather as a transgressor of all social codes of morality and political correctness to convey a meaningful socio-political commentary that inspires other people to do the same or, at least, to become better aware socially. Indeed, in the same freestyle, Snowflakebxtch raps: "*I wanna stay in your f*cking memory!*", which reflects the societal vision of her freestyles in impacting people by affecting a change in their mentalities [and life priorities]. During my interview with the founder of the

Raptivist movement Aisha Fukushima, she insisted that a key feature of RAPtivism is the diffusion of alternative social norms (Aisha 2020). Similarly, when interviewing Snowflakebxtch, the woman rapper told me: “I rap to speak my mind; there are certain things I can’t tweet, so I just rap them” (Snowflake 2020). The issues that Snowflake can’t tweet are usually considered highly taboo or politically incorrect, such as the extent of sexism and regime corruption in the country, thereby reflecting her RAPtivist project of spreading alternative, non-dominant societal norms.

Therefore, in the same freestyle, Snowflake describes her virus as an actual cure: “*Even if y’all call me sick, I am a healer yeah*”. The rapper refers once again to the popular narrative that depicts women who are outspoken against sexism as “sick” to claim that the standards against which the patriarchal system evaluates her sickness are also those that make her a (social) healer—that is an outspoken woman who aims to fix several social woes by deconstructing dominant social norms and affecting a change in people’s mentalities. She is, therefore, at the same time the disease and its cure. In fact, American rappers KRS-One and Marl’s 2007 released track “Hip Hop Lives” celebrates the empowering role of hip hop music in enabling previously marginalized people to break from their silence and share their plight (i.e., unjust living conditions) and, therefore, to deliver a message that helps strengthen but also heal them from their former situation of oppression (Maddex 2014). Similarly, hooks (1989) defines talking back as “a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible [...] that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice” (hooks 1989, 9). In this sense, Snowflake’s rap tracks “talk back” to both a hegemonic patriarchal system and a corrupt economic and political system with the objective of recovering and healing from the physical, social and psychological effects and damage of systemic oppression. Her objective is also to break free from her situation of “object” of such an unfair system and move to that of a liberated subject as an inspiring woman rapper who delivers a meaningful social and political commentary.

Besides the trope of the infecting and contaminating virus, the theme of the “awakening” or the “enlightenment” is also predominant in both her freestyles, which alludes to the actual positive nature and benign effect of her venom and, therefore, to her agency to trigger social change through powerful rap words. In the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake openly deplores: “*The enlightenment century skipped my country!*”; she sheds light on widespread ignorance and lack of societal awareness in Morocco which are partly due to the pitfalls of the education system, as well as on the vision and power of her raps to elucidate such issues and, ultimately, to enlighten people. In fact, in *Listen You Male*, Snowflakebxtch proudly writes: “*If I meet your woman, she’ll ask for a divorce!*”, which reflects her agency as a woman rapper to create and cultivate indignation in other women against patriarchy by helping them identify some forms of sexist abuse such as the male objectifying gaze—that of (some of) her male followers on social media that she seems to address here. This line underscores the enlightening role of her rap to awaken other women and increase their awareness.

The theme of the “enlightenment” is also present in her *Gruntfreestyle #39*. As mentioned previously, when Snowflake refers to her *Snow Dreams* track where she ironically hits on several famous Moroccan rappers who took it as an invitation to sleep with them, Snowflake claims: “*Whoever is sitting next to a frustrated [man] let him wake up!*”. Here, the woman rapper calls out for several of the Moroccan male rappers to wake up and realize the true objective of *Snow Dreams*—that is to invert and subvert gender roles by making men realize what it feels like to be constantly seduced against one’s will, and even harassed sexually, and to direct their objectifying language against them this time. *Snow Dreams* is, therefore, an attempt by the artist to “talk back” to the prevailing misogynist and discriminatory aspect of the Moroccan rap discourse, and rap in

general, as a form of feminist re-appropriation that subverts such a patriarchal male narrative. However, hooks (1989) points out that acts of "talking back" can be severely punished; hence, Snowflakebxtch continues in the same freestyle: "*My mouth got me in so many troubles*". Here, she alludes to how her rap songs repeatedly put her in trouble for being an outspoken woman against sexism [and, by extension, against social injustice]. As mentioned previously, being outspoken, especially for a woman in Morocco, does not come without its own pitfalls and dangers. It is even more dangerous to be outspoken against political issues directly, which Snowflake also tackles effectively in her freestyles.

Conclusion

In *Listen You Male*, Snowflakebxtch distinguishes between a man and a male to deconstruct the gender binary of man vs. woman which is at the origin of all binaries and the resulting traditional gender roles. The rapper underscores that the main perpetrator of the patriarchal system is not a man but a male; she adopts a strategy of the patriarchal system which consists of reducing individuals to their biological sex, thereby reminding us once more of Audre Lorde (1984)'s famous saying of "using the master's tool to dismantle the master's house". Snowflake's objective is undeniably to subvert such an unjust and arbitrary system. She performs this track right in her kitchen, where women are usually told to return to as a form of intimidation aiming at keeping them out of the public sphere to talk back to a patriarchal discourse that sees women's place in the private sphere exclusively. Snowflake addresses the sexist "male" through various verbal cues such as and uses many vulgar words as a re-appropriation of male language and privilege by a woman to recover from gender-direct slurs and as an open rejection of men's policing of women's language. As mentioned previously, Snowflake's following base on her social media is made up primarily of a male audience (73% men vs. 27% women), which underscores the potential of her rap songs in being widely accessible to men, addressing men directly and deconstructing various forms of toxic masculinities. In the *Gruntfreestyle #39*, Snowflake pursues her objective of deconstructing several gender binaries by attacking the foundations of the patriarchal system in terms of the overreliance on biological sex to assign a distinct set of gender roles to men and women. She denounces several stereotypes that are usually attached to women such as being material-driven, shallow, passive and powerless. Snowflake draws on her own experience of being an outspoken women rapper against sexism to inspire other women and instigate social change. In this freestyle, the rapper also addresses other forms of social injustice in Morocco, including poverty, widespread social inequalities, as well as regime abuse and corruption.

In this sense, Snowflakebxtch's freestyles exemplify several aspects of Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016)'s *continuing* gender revolution in the North African region in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings of 2011 whereby women continue advocating for social justice today, alongside gender equality, mainly through creative means, as well as for women's place in the public sphere despite several attempts of intimidation and keeping them out of this space. Snowflake's freestyles tackle as various issues as sexual harassment, the subordination of women, widespread poverty and regime exploitation. In fact, Snowflakebxtch told me that was strongly inspired by the local version of the Arab Spring in both her life and career as a rapper. Similarly, while interviewing Aisha Fukushima, the founder of the RAPTivist movement, the woman rapper told me that the main objective of RAPTivism is to create a social movement that advocates for transnational and international solidarity by creating a strong awareness on issues of social justice. Snowflakebxtch's freestyles are, therefore, an effective manifestation of RAPTivism in Morocco in the context of the

continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in contemporary “post-revolutionary” North African States.

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