Women's Creative Disobedience and the Continuing (Gender) Revolution in Post-Arab Spring Morocco (2011-2020): Slam Poetry, Theatre, Visual Arts and RAPtivism

Maha Tazi

A Thesis
In the Department
of
Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Communication Studies)
at Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2021

© Maha Tazi, 2021

ABSTRACT

Women's Creative Disobedience and the Continuing (Gender) Revolution in Post-Arab Spring Morocco (2011-2020): Slam Poetry, Theatre, Visual Arts and RAPtivism

Maha Tazi, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2021

This dissertation focuses on women's creative expressions in post-Arab Spring Morocco as they relate to their *continuing* struggle for human rights, social justice and gender equality from 2011 to 2020. Specifically, I examine a number of artistic productions by four self-identified Moroccan women artists from four distinct artistic disciplines - slam poetry, theatre, visual arts and rap. I begin by locating women's creative expressions in relation to the literature on the *creative insurgency* of the Arab Spring and *women's creative disobedience* in contemporary Egypt. I pay particular attention to the *gender paradox* of the Arab Spring, the rise of political Islam to power and its implications for women's agency, creativity and continued activism. This dissertation includes a textual and visual analysis of the selected women's artworks, supplemented by insights from the individual interviews I conducted with the artists. Using bell hooks's (1989) notion of *talking back*, which she defines as a counter-hegemonic discourse that aims to contest and deconstruct structures of domination, I argue that Moroccan women's artistic expressions *talk back* to several social and political realities that continue to undermine women's social status today. These productions emerge from and respond to a specific social and political context in post-"revolutionary" Morocco (2011-2020), one that is characterized by both a hijacking of the (political) revolution by the regime as well as the Islamists' blatant backlash against women's rights.

Many scholars have previously argued that the Arab Spring failed precisely because it did not include a gender-sensitive agenda. Drawing on Badran's (2016)'s idea of the *continuing (gender and cultural) revolutio*n in post-Arab Spring Egypt, I argue that Moroccan women's artistic productions exemplify several aspects of such a *continuing* revolution in present-day Morocco. This is evident in the nature of the themes and topics that women *artivists* address (i.e., epistemology), along with the way they interpret and make meaning out of certain social realities that continue to undermine their social status today (i.e., hermeneutics). The dissertation concludes by suggesting the continuing existence of a

"transnational (feminist) revolution" in the North African region today where women *artivists* are foregrounding gender as the focal point of both political analysis and praxis to carry on the spirit of the 2011 revolutions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the four women artists whose works and life philosophies have provided all the inspiration and motivation for this writing, and who have become dear friends today. I am very much indebted to Khadija Tnana, Naima Zitane, Noussayba Lahlou and Ghizlane Radi (a.k.a Snowflakebxtch) for their generous, genuine and open contributions to complete this project. I wish to thank them for their trust and generosity for openly sharing their texts, visuals, scripts and video clips with me, in addition to the photographs I am using in this dissertation, and for the time they have granted me during the interviews and several follow-up sessions. Thanks to their collaboration, parts of this thesis have already been published in *Feminist Media Studies* and *Cyberorient* in June 2020, and other sections were published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies*.

I also wish to thank all the Moroccan artists and cultural actors whom I met and interviewed at an early stage of my fieldwork and who helped me better understand the workings and behind-the-scenes of the cultural and artistic scene in Morocco. Amongst all those people, I wish to thank particularly Hosni Al Mokhlis, Said Afifi, Mohamed Fariji, Maria Karim, Rim Amine, Aadel Essaadani, Hassan Mannana, Safaa Erruas and Maria Daif.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Yasmin Jiwani who provided me, since the first day into the Ph.D. program, with all the support, advice and guidance to undertake this project and for understanding, very early, that this work was meaningful to me on both a personal and academic level. I also wish to thank Gada Mahrouse and Alessandra Renzi for their patience throughout the process.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at the *Intersectionality Hub* for both their moral and academic support throughout the Ph.D. years, for the days we spent together working relentlessly at the Hub and for sharing food, jokes and life stories. This journey would definitely have been tougher without you. Special thanks to Bipasha Sultana.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents Bouchra Mounzil and Salim Tazi. Thank you for motivating me to embark on this thesis journey and for always trusting and believing in me. But first, thank you for your unconditional love and support throughout my living years. One day I wish to become a parent like you...This thesis is dedicated to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

As a young Arab and Muslim woman who was born and raised in Morocco, I was involved, very early on through several school projects, with local women's NGOs, such as *Association Solidarite Feminine (ASF)* which provides shelter, education and economic opportunities for single mothers and their children born out of the wedlock in Casablanca. At a young age, I became very much aware of both the extent and the socio-political implications of gender inequality in my country. During these years, I also started attending several concerts organized by the alternative music scene in Casablanca that brought together various musical genres- ranging from rap, fusion, hard Metal to Gnawa, a traditional folk music genre in Morocco. As the song lyrics were generally very much anti-system, in that they denounced several social abuses such as police brutality, class inequalities, illegal immigration and widespread poverty, these concerts contributed to and shaped my social and political consciousness at a very young age.

A few years later, my early political and feminist awareness drove me to specialize in *International Studies* and *Women's Studies* in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. I wrote both my Bachelor and Master's theses on some of the early (and more recent) developments of the feminist movement in the region (i.e., "Moroccan women's involvement in the resistance against the French Protectorate" and "The Rise of fourth wave feminism in the MENA region"). My feminist awareness also led me to become increasingly more involved in the field with women's rights activists. In 2011, I volunteered again with *Association Solidarite Feminine*; from 2014 to 2016, I was a volunteer writer for *Ananke*, a digital platform that engaged women through the MENA region to promote women's rights and, in 2017, I was responsible for leading the *Empowering Women in the Atlas (EWA)* initiative, a project designed to create social and economic opportunities for women in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. As my feminist consciousness increasingly developed, thanks to my fieldwork with women's NGOs, my research work on women's movements in the region, and the music concerts that I was accustomed to attending which were largely dominated by men at that time, I wondered why the alternative music (and, by extension, the artistic) scene did not integrate women (and their concerns) amongst its wider social justice agenda. I began to find it quite abnormal not to witness any or only a very few women on stage singing or rapping against social injustice from their own standpoints.

A few years forward, I got accepted into the Ph.D. program in Communication at Concordia University. In my research there, I came across a very interesting paradigm in the

literature on North African women's contemporary forms of resistance that describes it as taking the form of *creative disobedience* (i.e., art activism) today. As this brought me back to my initial interest in the arts, social justice and feminism, I chose to make it the topic of my dissertation and focus on Morocco as a country. Recently, I have also started working on a couple of *creative disobedience* projects myself, including an interactive photography project to tell the story of the backlash against women's rights in the aftermath of the Arab Spring which was successfully published in *Feminist Media Studies*, as well as a slam poetry project, which helped me qualify for the 2*020 African Cup for Slam Poetry*, where I talk about young emigrant Moroccan women's lack of sense of belonging -both to their home country and to the host country- because of the double burden of sexism at home and racism abroad. For all these reasons**,** I feel deeply concerned and personally involved in this research project. I am also very convinced of the potential of art and *artivism* to shed light on issues of social justice and promote a feminist agenda not only in my country but also at the regional and transnational levels. Hence, this dissertation work not only involves my subjectivity as both a researcher and a women's rights activist; but it also foregrounds the selected artists' subjectivities and motivations behind doing their artwork and for being involved in what Wahba (2016, 145) characterizes as women's "parallel artistic revolution" today.

INTRODUCTION

> "*We wonder whether women have become the losers of the Arab revolts".*
> *Fatima Sadiqi* (Sadiqi 2014)

Project Contextualization and Problematization

This dissertation opens with an epigraph by Fatima Sadiqi (2014), a prominent Moroccan feminist scholar. In this quote, Sadiqi discusses, for the first time, the idea of the "gender paradox" of the Arab uprisings of 2011 where women protestors have played crucial roles in the mobilization, documentation and cultural dissemination phases of the uprisings, but then been excluded from political representation and decision-making in the aftermath of those revolutions (Hosni 2017).

Arab women's agency did not start with the digital revolution. Women's activism in the region precedes the digital age and the Arab Spring and can be traced back at least to the late nineteenth century, where women played active roles in their countries' accession to independence during the long years of resistance against imperialism and colonial rule (Sadiqi 2016). However, in this context, nationalist struggles have often taken precedence over feminist causes as evident in the fact that women's mobilization in pro-independence struggles has systematically been followed by their blatant exclusion from nation-building projects in post-independence Arab states (Nadje Al-Ali 2000).

Describing it as the "Algerian lesson", cooke (2016, 33) discusses the specific case of Algerian women's involvement in the 1954-1962 bloody war of independence against the French. Despite their overwhelming contributions to the nationalist struggle through what she describes as "stratégie-femme" (Ibid.32) (i.e., women's unique ways of contributing to the resistance by smuggling weapons, hiding dissidents in their homes, and delivering important messages), Algerian women only constituted 1% of the national assembly in post-independence Algeria. In this sense, Badran (2016) contends that Arab women's activism actually finds its origins not in the fight against colonial rule per se, but in nation-building projects that typically excluded women. For example, the creation of the *Egyptian Feminist Union* in the wake of the country's independence in 1922 marked the birth of the feminist movement in Egypt, in a context where women were denied political rights after independence despite them being at the forefront of the nationalist struggle against British colonial rule.

The return to the 'home' of activist Arab women after a revolution or a war that they have been instrumental in winning has been normalized over time with the discourse of neotraditionalism, which aims to reconcile a patriarchal cosmology with the egalitarian ideals of modern societies. The objective of my work is precisely to challenge this normalizing discourse, through a critical and comparative analysis of the recent history of Arab women's movements, in order to capitalize on women's gains in present and future post-revolutionary contexts. The concept of the "gender paradox", on which my dissertation opens, is therefore a crucial one in my study.

Recent events have spurred the ideal conditions for the resurgence of Arab women's activism where their contributions are once again needed, this time to put an end -not to colonial rule but- to authoritarian regimes throughout the region. miriam cooke (2012) underscores the particularly high visibility (and large number) of women who participated in the Arab Spring uprisings, while Wahba (2016) highlights Arab women's leading roles before, during and after the Arab Spring. Similarly, whereas the events of the Arab Spring constituted a "time out of time" (Wahba 2016, 67) and a disengagement from the status quo for Egyptian, Tunisian and Moroccan women who were, for the first time, considered the equals of men in the coordination and participation in the protests, in 2011, a blatant backlash against women's rights was evident in the aftermath in their exclusion from political decision-making, the foregrounding of complementary rather than equal rights in the newly adopted constitutions, and the extreme forms of violence directed at women protesters (cooke 2016; Sadiqi, 2016).

From the two periods discussed previously (i.e., women's activism during the colonial period and the Arab Spring), there seem to be cyclical patterns in terms of the negative correlation between [Arab] women's involvement in revolutionary struggles and their ensuing exclusion from nation-building projects in the aftermath of those revolutions- an exclusion that somehow constitutes a *break,* a *discontinuity* and even a *paradox* within the emancipatory process that had been initiated in the previous phase. In this sense, *breaks* become important moments of truths, of reconfiguration and of re-building of national, political, and feminist identities. It is, therefore, particularly important to analyze history, especially those moments of *breaks* and discontinuities, from a feminist perspective in order to not only understand their *productive* potential- in terms of the creation of new subjectivities, forms of dissidence and societal projections- but also, to capitalize on women's gains in post-revolutionary contexts.

Research Questions & Objectives

In this dissertation, I focus on the blatant *gender paradox* of the Arab Spring as a point of departure to analyze the contemporary state of North African women's rights in terms of women's agency and *continued* resistance in the face of both political oppression and gender-based discrimination. Ten years after the start of the Arab Spring, women's systemic oppression in the region has persisted until the present-day, which makes it even more relevant to look at women's current mobilization and resistance tactics as both a response to and a potential way out of oppression. In fact, because [Arab] women have faced an(other) significant backlash against their rights in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions, female activists are currently developing effective tactics of resistance and subversion to *talk back* to the gender paradox and continue advocating for gender equality and social justice concomitantly in post-revolutionary states. Creativity (and artistic means) is one of the most powerful, appealing and mobilizing tactics that women are resorting to in this context (Badran, 2016; Nossery, 2016; Labidi, 2016).

Given that the existing literature on women's art activism largely focuses on Egypt, and to a lesser extent on Tunisia, I focus on Morocco as a case study where such a body of literature is almost non-existent; my aim was to investigate the existence and the patterns of women's committed artistic expressions there. By adopting a feminist perspective, my objective was to examine how Moroccan women *artivists*, a portemanteau term combining artists and activists, are responding to the backlash against their social and political rights in the aftermath of the events of the "Moroccan Spring", that is from 2011 onwards. *Artivism* is a neologism derived from *art* and *activism* to describe artists who are committed to creative processes of an activist nature to sensitize people and promote social transformation through a bottom-up approach that sheds light on community concerns through creative and constructive tools (Kuang 2004; Mesías-Lema 2018, 22). *Artivism* is conditioned by a cultural positioning of thought through art that utilizes "guerrilla" methodologies similar to civil disobedience strategies such as street performances, flash-mobs and street tags. Its origins can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States during the period of high political, cultural and artistic turmoil that was marked by the Cold War, the Vietnam War, challenges to racism, sexism and gender inequalities (Felshin 2001). Quoting Thompson (2015, 52) on the role of the *artivist*, cooke (2016) underscores that: "The task of socially committed artists is the deployment of cultural forms and the production of political change" (XV). Therefore, the main tools used by *artivists* are a combination of aesthetics and

politics, including alternative images and metaphors, humor, irony, indignation and compassion "with the aim of making those previously invisible and powerless voices and faces heard and seen" (Lippard 2001, 57).

The Moroccan experience of the Arab Spring constituted almost an "exception" in so far as the local revolutionary movement did not lead to either the toppling of a political system, such as in Egypt and Tunisia, or an exacerbation of the conflict that resulted in the outbreak of a civil war, such as in Syria, Libya and Yemen (Yachoulti 2015; Daadaoui, 2017). This makes the "exceptional" Moroccan experience worthy of a case study to examine the influence of the unique and distinct socio-political environment (from Egypt for instance where the literature is abundant) on women's activism and creativity. Therefore, I draw on Marwan Kraidy (2016) notion of *creative insurgency* [of the Arab Spring], as well as on Margot Badran's (2016) ideas of *continuing (gender) revolution* and *women's creative disobedience* and, finally, on Dina Wahba's (2016) concept of women's emergent *subaltern counterpublics,* to investigate the new spheres that are currently being created by Moroccan women to denounce their ongoing exclusion from the public sphere. Looking at the role of creativity in the ongoing Syrian revolution particularly, cooke (2016, XV) emphasizes that: "The collapse of artist and activist in this single identity emphasizes the inextricability of poetics and politics in Syrian revolutionary practice". Hence, my objective is to investigate the *poetics* of the ongoing political (and gender) revolution in Morocco. To do so, I take four Moroccan women artists from four distinct artistic disciplines - slam poetry, theatre, visual arts and rap- as case studies to examine the concept of women's *creative disobedience* and the *continuing revolution* in Morocco, as well as the patterns (and differences) between various artistic disciplines.

On a theoretical level, I ask, what does the idea of the *continuing gender revolution* that is so-prevalent in Egypt today convey and symbolize for contemporary Moroccan women artist-activists as both a concept and a socio-political and cultural reference point? On a practical and more concrete level, what is the nature of the *subaltern counterpublics* that are currently inhabited by Moroccan female activists and how are they carrying on the revolution today? By looking at four specific art genres (i.e., women's visual arts, theatre, rap and slam poetry), how are these artistic forms vectors of expression of the revolution? In other words, how are women's slam poetry, rap, visual arts and theatre used to advocate for gender equality, national reconciliation and social justice in "post-revolutionary" Morocco? Also, by paying close attention to country specificities, what

are the main patterns and differences that characterize women's creative expressions in Morocco today? All in all, my research objectives informing my dissertation are as follows:

1. To investigate women's artistic forms of resistance that express creative disobedience in contemporary Morocco (i.e., 2011 onwards) by looking at four different art genres, their main characteristics and patterns, as well as the potential differences in women's art activism which reflect country specificities.
2. To examine how women's *continued* creative resistance can advocate and push for an agenda that is inclusive of both women's rights and social justice in "post-revolutionary" Morocco.
3. To analyze the influence and impact of the sociopolitical environment on the expression as well as the reception of women's acts of creative disobedience by paying close attention to contextual factors in present-day Morocco.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Throughout this thesis, I use a number of conceptual tools that have enabled me to illuminate the analysis of women artivists in Morocco. While I have outlined these concepts in the different articles that constitute the various chapters of the thesis, I discuss them in more detail here so as to highlight their various nuances and relevance to the political and economic context of women's realities in Morocco.

'Talking back': Standpoint Feminist Theory, Subaltern Counterpublics and Suppressed Knowledges

Looking at the contemporary state of Arab (and particularly Moroccan) 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). For Fraser, the so-called public sphere, as formulated by Habermas in the 1960s, not only relied upon but was also significantly marked by exclusions, mostly in relation to the status of women and the non-proprietary male working class. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's (1988) term of the 'subaltern' and Rita Felski's (1989) concept of 'counterpublic', Fraser (1990) coined the term of 'subaltern counterpublics' to characterize

the spaces that emerge as a response and a contestation to these forms of exclusion in the dominant public sphere. In this context, subaltern counterpublics develop both in parallel and in opposition to dominant public spheres, granting members of subordinated social groups a space to formulate and circulate counter discourses that foreground their marginalized voices and experiences (i.e., epistemology), as well as oppositional *interpretations* (i.e., hermeneutics) of their subjectivities, identities, needs and interests. They function both as spaces of withdrawal and as bases for counterness - i.e., oppositional and contentious politics. In this sense, the subaltern counterpublics enlarge the space of deliberation and contestation, by foregrounding issues and experiences that have deliberately been ignored or suppressed by dominant publics.

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 in spite of their active contributions to the series of revolutions (Kharroub 2016; Sadiqi 2016). Moreover, Fraser (1990) 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; Wahba 2016). Therefore, instead of "public sphere", my research rather foregrounds Fraser's (1990) concept of *subaltern counterpublics* from which Wahba (2016) draws to characterize precisely the new creative spheres that are currently created and inhabited by North African women who are excluded from their countries' social and political lives in post-revolutionary contexts. 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 openly contest (and subvert) dominant power, as well as systemic oppression and exclusion in order to build more democratic and egalitarian societies.

To investigate the nature of the *subaltern counterpublic*s that are currently inhabited by Moroccan 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 their distinct project of emancipation that is precisely articulated around their so called "subaltern culture" (Foucault 1980; Spivak 1988). In relation to Fraser's (1990) argument about the dominant public sphere (and deliberations) which invisibilize and silence second-class and marginalized groups in the society, thereby creating the impetus for the emergence of subaltern counterpublics, Michel Foucault (1980) discusses the concept of *suppressed knowledges*. In fact, Foucault (1972) defines *suppressed knowledges* as a knowledge [and an experience] that has been locked up and/or evacuated by the dominant power and institutions. He characterizes these knowledges as local, popular, discontinuous, differential, disqualified and illegitimate in the sense that a process of scientific hierarchization of knowledges - one that is endorsed and legitimized by the established history of ideas and regimes of truth - has gradually confined them to the margins of valid and legitimate knowledge. Therefore, Foucault (1980) proposes a project of disordered and fragmentary genealogies to reactivate these localized knowledges and bring them to the fore of the scientific discourse of meaning-making, thereby advocating for a 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 my dissertation, I draw on Foucault's notion of disordered and fragmentary genealogies to foreground Arab (and particularly North African) women's subaltern and suppressed knowledges and experiences. 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. By focusing on a period of break and discontinuity that is the Arab Spring of 2011 and on a major paradox that is the gender paradox and the counterrevolution against women's rights in the post-revolutionary contexts, as well as on the marginalized work and subjectivities of women artists, I apply a fragmentary and disordered genealogy that aims to bring to the fore women's subaltern voices, experiences and knowledges. The (fragmentary) genealogy that I propose focuses on a specific historical and socio-political context that includes the years leading up to the Arab Spring, the 2011 uprisings and their direct social and political aftermath in which Arab women's knowledges have been locked up and suppressed by an overlap of Islamist, patriarchal, authoritarian and imperial forces.

hooks (1989) defines "talking back" as an oppositional stance and a counter-hegemonic discourse that contests, challenges and responds to various structures of dominance. I also draw on this concept in my dissertation to examine how North African (and particularly Moroccan women) use art and creativity as a tool and a vehicle to contest dominant social and political norms and, therefore, to "talk back" to various dominant regimes simultaneously. As mentioned previously, the focus on the work of North African women artist-activists aims at foregrounding and re-appropriating their knowledges and subjectivities that have been suppressed by a combination of historical and geopolitical forces in the region, which have confined them to the realms of marginal and subaltern knowledge. In this sense, women's artistic productions and creations 'talk back' to (i.e., contest and subvert) these dominant regimes of truth in the sense that they aim to reactivate a knowledge that has specifically been evacuated and erased by them previously (Foucault 1972). For instance, this dissertation examines how women's productions talk back to political Islam (and particularly to the Islamist party's discourse about "clean art") by foregrounding the most unclean forms of art possible from the standpoint of the Islamists. Moroccan women's artworks also talk back to the dominant patriarchal norms of the society by foregrounding not only the presence of women artists in the artistic (and public) sphere, which is still largely dominated by men, but also the feminine (naked) body and sexuality— these knowledges are commonly silenced and repressed in a conservative society such as Morocco.

In her seminal work *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* hooks (1989) further elaborates on the meaning and implications of the concept:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "'talking back'," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (9).

Therefore, drawing on a decolonizing framework, 'talking back' becomes not only a way for Moroccan women artist-activists to counter some (dominant) representations or provocations, acts of injustice, physical and moral assaults but also a way to free oneself from the shackles of injustice and oppression. In order to analyze the potential of Moroccan women's artworks in constituting a counter-hegemonic discourse that 'talks back' to dominant social norms and socio-political realities, I draw precisely on Foucault's notion of *suppressed knowledge*s to investigate women's *continued* activism as an attempt to re-

foreground their evacuated experiences and as a first step towards their emancipation and equal access to the public sphere in post-revolutionary Morocco.

In fact, according to Foucault (2008), power is based on and derives from knowledge. It also constantly makes use of knowledge as it (re-) creates its own fields of exercise through knowledge; in other words, power reproduces knowledge by shaping it in accordance with its own intentions, and is, in turn, reproduced and sanctioned by this same knowledge. Since power is based on knowledge, women's artistic creations also create power that 'scales up' from the bottom to the top to destabilize hegemonic power and traditional power relations.

Similarly, standpoint theory underscores that authority is actually rooted in individuals' knowledge and specifically in the power that such an authority exerts in the sense that one's standpoint shapes which concepts are considered intelligible and which thematics are judged salient, as well as which voices are heard and by whom and which conclusions are credible (Sprague and Sprague 2011). Moreover, standpoint theorists emphasize the utility of an experiential concept of knowing (i.e., epistemology) and promote the inclusion of marginalized and oppressed people's perspectives to challenge the status quo and create more objective accounts of the world. Through the position of the so-called 'outsider-within', marginalized people are in a unique position to identify how dominant power (i.e., the hegemonic white male position of privilege) works and in the benefit of whom, and hence to subvert it (Allen 1996).

In this dissertation, I draw mainly on feminist standpoint theory to foreground the standpoints and subjectivities (i.e., epistemologies) of a specific marginalized group (i.e., Moroccan women artist-activists) in the re-telling of the stories of the (pre/post)revolution from women's standpoints and perspectives and the making sense (i.e., hermeneutics) of contemporary politico-historical events using a gender-sensitive lens. In this sense, women artists' creations aim to foreground North African women's political, social and cultural knowledges (i.e., epistemologies) that have been either been repressed or evacuated by various regimes of power at once— from patriarchy and political Islam to authoritarian regimes and imperialism.

Intersectional Feminism and Postcolonial Arabo–Muslim feminism

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 dissertation, 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 such interlocking axes of oppression - including race, gender but also sexual orientation, ableism, age and other matrices of oppression that women from marginalized groups experience and which tend to increase their systemic vulnerability. Therefore, I draw particularly on intersectional feminist theory to examine the *tactics* that are currently being deployed by contemporary Moroccan 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.

Postcolonial feminist analyses, which challenge the dominant narrative of the victimhood and powerlessness of Arab and Muslim women, also serve as the point of departure for my research (Abu-Lughod 2002; Hijri 2014; Khan 1998; Razack 2008; Yeğenoğlu 1998). Postcolonial feminism originated in the 1980s as a response to and a critique of mainstream white feminism and its universalizing and essentialist tendencies of solely accounting for white women's experiences. It sought to account for the ways that interlocking systems of oppression, including racism, economic marginalization and neo-colonialism, affect non-white and non-Western women in the developing world (Weedon 2000; McEwan 2001). In this context, and drawing on postcolonial theory, Arab and Muslim feminist scholars have denounced the narrative of powerlessness that is usually ascribed to Arab women which perpetuates the stereotype that Muslim women are helpless victims in need of Western imperial liberation due to their double-minority status – as an Arab minority vis-à-vis the white dominant majority and as a female minority within the Arab male-dominated community. In fact, Western imperialism has instrumentalized such a narrative of Muslim and Arab women's alleged powerlessness and victimization as a rationale for military intervention where women have been used merely ideological tools rather than the actual cause or motivation, such as in the case of the 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan (Abu Lughod 2002). Postcolonial Arabo–Muslim feminism also denounces the Orientalist Western assumptions that Arab women are complicit in their own oppression (Al-Rawi 2014). Drawing on feminist accounts of women's agency and a decolonizing theoretical framework, my study constitutes a part of this oppositional discourse in challenging this simplistic and reductionist view which fails to capture the complexity of the social realities in the region and the extent to which women are able to mobilize and organize themselves in order to promote effective and sustainable social change, thereby invoking Lila Abu-

Lughod's famous rhetorical question: "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" (2002, 1). In fact, both Valentine Moghadam (2010) and Monika Mookherjee (2005) stress Middle Eastern women's growing agency through their unique strategies for empowerment and their effective use of tactics of negotiation with various regimes of power, from international organizations to state institutions and local NGOs.

Arabo-Muslim Feminism: Intersectionality, Postcolonialism and Transnational Feminist Theory

In this dissertation, I posit that Arabo-Muslim feminism is inherently postcolonial and intersectional given the context in which it has emerged- a context of post-decolonization of the Arab world in the 1970 and 1980s- one that has also emerged as a response against (neo)colonialism and Western depictions of Arab women as passive, submissive victims in need of Western liberation (Abu Lughod 2002). Arabo-Muslim feminism is also intersectional as it addresses a different set of (interlocking) issues concomitantly. First, drawing on a feminist critique, Arab and Muslim feminists have been deploring the persistence of gender inequality, at the political, economic and societal level, which find its origins in the traditional gender roles and the codes of modesty which are imposed on women in the region (Moghadam 2008). Second, they have also denounced the extent and impact of authoritarian rule on democratic rule and gender-inclusive policies in terms of human rights violations, political abuse and corruption in the region (Ibid.). Finally, drawing a decolonial perspective, Arabo-Muslim feminists been affirming women's growing *transnational* agency through their tactics of negotiation with various regimes of power, including patriarchy, authoritarianism and neocolonialism against the backdrop of Arab and Muslim women's depictions of helpless victims in need of foreign liberation (Abu Lughod 2002; Kandiyoti 1988; Mokhrejee 2005).

In fact, in my thesis, I also draw on a transnational feminist approach to examine North African women's efforts that take place within, across and beyond national borders. Since this dissertation is a comparative study between Egypt (i.e., the literature) and Morocco (i.e., the fieldwork), I look at what is happening in one context that may speak to another, in terms of the similarities, differences and resonances between women's discourses and creative productions that circulate across national frontiers. These are inscribed in a common socio-political context that is the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings (2011-2020) where women *talk back* to the same dominant systems i.e., to the Islamists who rose to power after

the revolutions, to the patriarchal and conservative social norms which endorse gender segregation and to the neoliberal powers which continue to depict these women as helpless victims and contribute to the exacerbation of social inequalities in the world and in the region. Reilly (2011) defines transnational feminism as "*collaborative, cross-borde*r endeavours, usually involving engagement by women's movement actors with *state/governmental and/or intergovernmental bodies*, aimed at transforming discourses, contexts and constraints, which – it can be argued – disadvantage women and girls in various *gender-specific* ways" [italics mine] (60). In fact, the comparative dimension of my study focuses on similarities (and differences) of women's political art in national context but also between these contexts as well as on the associations, mirroring effects created by the travel of one specific concept (i.e., creative disobedience) from one national context to another. Here, women's artworks also engage, even if indirectly, state and government powers as they aim to create a conscious feminist call for action for the state to adopt gender-sensitive policies. Most of the time, women artists also "talk back" directly to official state discourses and state institutions that institutionalize and legitimize gender inequality in their countries. Finally, transnational feminism is also inherently intersectional. In fact, Reilly (2011) defines transnational feminism as a critical feminist 'global consciousness' that challenges the systemic interplay of "oppressive *patriarchal, capitalist and racist power relations* across multiple flexible boundaries locally and transnationally" (62). Therefore, although I do not use all these concepts interchangeably in my thesis [postcolonialism, intersectionality and transnational feminism], I examine the connections and associations that exist between them when talking about Arabo-Muslim feminism today while also underscoring the nuances at play and the specificity of each concept.

Mixed Methods Approach

In order to achieve these objectives, I utilized a mixed methods approach which included a fieldwork in the artistic cultural milieux in Morocco's major cities, specifically in the capital city of Rabat and the economic capital of Casablanca, as well as conversations with other artists, and online interviews with four specific artists, each of whom specializes in a particular art form. As well, prior to talking with the artists, I critically examined their works, using both textual and visual analysis as appropriate.

A 2012 dissertation by Dr. Kenza Oumlil at Concordia University adopted a similar methodology by focusing on a selection of Muslim, Arab, South Asian, and Middle-Eastern

women artists living in the U.S. and Canada and looking at how these women 'talk back' to the dominant mainstream media scene in their respective countries with a special attention to the race and gender power relations at play which depict them as passive victims. The artistic disciplines under study included poetry and performance, cinema and television. Oumlil's (2012) textual analysis of the language and imagery used by the artists in their productions was then complemented with individual interviews with the artists involved Although Oumlil's thesis and mine share many commonalities in terms of methodology, they are, in fact, very distinct in terms of the foci of the research (i.e., the sociopolitical context, the artistic disciplines under study, the demographics of the research participants and even in terms of the literature used and the research questions raised).

In my doctoral thesis where I take as case studies four Moroccan women artists living in Morocco, drawing on the literature on women's creative disobedience in the North African region and especially on Egypt, I apply both a textual and visual analyses of the selected women's productions which I complement with individual interviews with each artist. However, I focus on rather emergent forms of *artivism* that became very popular in the context of the Arab Spring and its aftermath such as graffiti, cartoons and more importantly rap and slam poetry (Kraidy 2016). I also focus on two other less emergent forms, including visual arts and theatre because of their 'popular' character and their potential to instigate popular indignation and mobilize people to take action (Badran 2014; Levine 2015). In my research, I pay particular attention to how women's artworks 'talk back' to several dominant systems concomitantly, including patriarchy, authoritarianism and neocolonialism.

To analyze women's artworks, I draw essentially on a feminist epistemological and hermeneutical framework and on other theories that I identify and define in the theoretical framework sections of this dissertation. *Feminist epistemology* aims to understand the effects of the dominant patriarchal system on the production of knowledge by examining the "influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests" on our evidence and rational constraints (Anderson 1995, 1). Further, *feminist hermeneutics* is the theory, art and practice of interpretation in the interest of women which endeavors to challenge and correct the effects of patriarchy by foregrounding women's varied experiences, subjectivities and productions as the major resource for interpretation in a conversation that is "unconstrained by relations of power or ideology" (Warnke 1993, 1). In the context of this thesis, I use these conceptual tools to highlight how Moroccan women artists draw on both feminist epistemology and hermeneutics to challenge the strict boundaries of what is usually permissible to talk about in relation to artistic expressions and women's lives due to the

predominant role of both patriarchy and conservativism in Morocco. Women's artistic interventions also provide alternative readings and interpretations of women (and art)'s place in society that challenge the dominant discourses and narratives on these issues. Therefore, indirectly throughout the dissertation but stated more explicitly in Chapter 5 on theatre and Naima Zitane's play "Dialy", I explore and investigate the epistemology and hermeneutics of Moroccan women's works of *creative disobedience*.

In *Feminist Research Practice*, Nagy Hesse-Biber (2013) defines the practice of feminist interviewing as the retrieval of the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated, by focusing on issues of social change and social justice for women and other oppressed groups. As feminist interviewing allows the researcher to gain a new and fresh perspective on the lives of respondents living in a particular community or society, I chose to conduct an (feminist) interview with the four selected women artists (Hesse-Biber 2013). Because women are usually silenced within the predominantly conservative and patriarchal society that is Morocco, feminist interviewing allowed me to get direct insights on Moroccan women's lives and experiences in this context. Boutkhil (2016) points out how both conservatism and patriarchy contribute to "women's liminal citizenship" in Morocco (251), whereby Moroccan women are not considered or treated as full citizens despite their citizenship being fully enshrined in the state Constitution. In fact, Kerkach (2016) underscores the role of the biased interpretations of the legal system in Morocco (and other Arab-Islamic countries) - in favor of men and male supremacy - which contribute to hinder women's rights and social status in the country. In these contexts, the law plays a central role in the treatment of women as second-class citizens in their invisibilization from the public sphere and in their silencing in order to prevent them from seeking justice or compensation. In addition to the laws, Boutkhil (2016) also points out the core role of religion and traditionalism in the deliberate exclusion of Morocco women from the public sphere which has direct political implications; she observes that: "Patriarchy in Morocco is intricately woven into the fabric of society and culture and is nourished by a religious narrative that functions at all levels, including in the highest political spheres" (265). Therefore, conducting feminist interviews allowed me to shed light on women's subjectivities (i.e., voices, stories and experiences) that are generally silenced and suppressed; by making women (artists) the focal point of my research, I subvert the patriarchal narrative and dynamic which foregrounds male supremacy (particularly men's subjectivities) in all aspects of social life.

Case Study Approach

As mentioned previously, in order to investigate Moroccan women's artistic expressions that reflect *creative disobedience* patterns in post-revolutionary Morocco (2011-2019), I focus in this dissertation on the work of four Moroccan women artists and their productions in four artistic disciplines: slam poetry, theatre, visual arts and rap. I take as case studies two women from an older generation, Khadija Tnana and Naima Zitane who are 75 and 53 years-old respectively, and two women artists from the young(er) generation- Noussayba Lahlou and Snowflakebxtch, who are 24 and 25 years-old. The objective is to ensure a fair representation not only of different artistic disciplines but also of women's perspectives and standpoints from different generations, as well as to potentially contrast artistic expressions of the older generation with the younger one. Below, I offer details of these four case studies.

1) Noussayba Lahlou's Bittersweet Verses:

Born in 1996, Noussayba Lahlou is a 24-years-old doctoral student in French literature and one of the emblematic figures of the Moroccan slam scene today. She currently has about five thousand fans on her Facebook page, three thousand followers on Instagram and 835 subscribers on her YouTube channel. For the past few years, Noussayba has traveled across the country to denounce rampant social inequalities with her bittersweet slams written in French. She is best known for her famous slam "Identity Crisis," which she performed in 2015, where she openly denounces widespread regime corruption in the country.

On 21 August, 21st 2019, I conducted a virtual interview with Noussayba and had the opportunity to meet her several times in person a few months later. I also did a content analysis of a selection of Noussayba's most recent slams written in French and translated all the insights to English. These slams were selected with the help of the artist by paying attention to factors such as contemporaneity, relevance, and saliency (i.e., in terms of the most famous and the ones which convey the ideology of the artist the best). As Noussayba told me during our interview: "These selected texts represent my overall ideas and thoughts at the moment. They also represent me and my art the most" (Noussayba Lahlou, in interview with the author, 2019).

2) Naima Zitane and her Play Dialy inspired by The Vagina Monologues:

Born in the Moroccan northern city of Chaouen in 1967, Naima Zitane is a female icon of modern Moroccan theatre. As a fierce feminist activist, playwright and director of several committed plays, Zitane is behind one of major projects of social theater in the country, the *Aquarium Theatre,* which she founded back in 1994 upon graduating from the *Higher Institute of Dramatic Art and Cultural Animation (ISADAC).* The company's productions promote gender equality through culture by conducting regular communication and awareness campaigns to improve the condition of women throughout Morocco.

I focus particularly on Zitane's 2012 play "Dialy" (*Mine* in English), which she released a few months after the events of the so-called "Moroccan Spring" and the accession to power of the Islamists to respond not only to their overall social and political ideology but also to a specific discourse that emerged in this context. Foregrounding the female genital organ and female sexuality, "Dialy" draws primarily on 150 real-life testimonies of Moroccan women. I conducted a textual analysis of the script's play that Zitane had generously shared with me, which I combined with a visual analysis of the play's setting and an online feminist interview that I conducted with her on October, 30th 2019.

3) Khadija Tnana and her visual installation Kamasutra:

Born in Tetouan in 1945, Khadija Tnana is a prominent Moroccan visual artist, political militant, feminist activist and former University professor. Khadija discovered the fine arts, and particularly revolutionary art, as a student of Political Science in Paris during the May 1968 revolution. In the 1970s, she became a notable political militant under l*'Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* during King Hassan II's years of reign in Morocco. In parallel, Khadija was also a professor of political sciences at the University of Fes.

In this dissertation, I focus on Khadija Tnana's *Kamasutra,* a visual installation consisting of 246 small hands of Fatima, also known as the *Khmisa*, a religious and folkloric cultural symbol predating the Islamization of Morocco commonly used to ward off the evil eye, on which the artist painted an erotic scene of sexual intercourse from the Kamasutra. In *Kamasutra*, all the small hands of Fatima were rearranged by the artist to form a bigger installation in the shape of the *Khmisa*. While a first version of *Kamasutra* was successfully exhibited in 2012, in 2018, a second re-adaptation of the work which consisted of the same artwork but using different materials resulted in Khadija's piece being withdrawn and censored at a national exhibition, thereby stirring a nationwide controversy in Morocco.

Khadija then reworked this adaptation to formulate a response to the censorship of her work, and a final work called *Traces of Kamasutra* was produced later in 2018. I combine a visual analysis of *Kamasutra I, Kamasutra II* and *Traces of Kamasutra* with the analysis of an interview I conducted with Khadija on February 3rd, 2020.

4) "You're not a man.. just a male!": Snowflakebxtch and her RAPtivist Freestyles:

Ghizlane Radi a.k.a Snowflakebxtch was born in 1995 in Benni Mellal, a Moroccan city located in the country's interior. Before focusing on rap, she dabbled in different genres; she wrote poetry, fiction and essays. During our interview, the rapper told me she uses the nickname Snowflake as a reference to the US liberals of her generation who are often perceived as "fragile" (Snowflakebxtch, in interview with the author, 2020). To this, the woman rapper adds the word bxtch to underscore, instead, her power and agency as a self-identified liberal through the juxtaposition of the words Snowflake and Bxtch; the latter is also used as an insult and derogatory term towards women. In reclaiming both idioms, Ghizlane observed: "Once you openly claim it [the word], it is no longer an insult!" (Snowflakebxtch, in interview with the author, 2020). Snowflake is also one of the top and most controversial women rappers in Morocco at the time of this dissertation writing.

Here, I focus specifically on two of Snowflakebxtch's freestyles (i.e., rap tracks): *Listen You Male,* which was filmed directly in her kitchen where she openly addresses and attacks the figure of the "male" with all its negative connotations and the *GruntFreestyle #39,* an excerpt from a documentary on Moroccan hip-hop culture where Snowflakebxtch is shown sitting beside four famous young Moroccan rappers and fiercely deconstructing traditional gender roles. I combine a textual analysis of these two freestyles with an interview I conducted with Snowflake in February 2020 and a complementary interview I conducted with Aisha Fukushima, the founder of RAPtivism, in order to examine the connections of Snowflake's work with the global RAPtivist movement.

Manuscript-Based Thesis

This dissertation is a manuscript-based thesis composed of eight chapters. Some of these chapters have been previously published (Chapter 3, 4 and 5 were respectively published in *Feminist Media Studies*, *CyberOrient* and the *Journal of International Women's Studies*), while some are pending publication (Chapter 2 will be published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* in May 2021, and others are currently under review (Chapters

6 and 7 are currently under review by the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*). My aim is to link these chapters together to provide a cohesive and coherent examination of the various art forms and creators who have mobilized them as effective forms of women's creative disobedience in contemporary post-Arab Spring Morocco (2011-2020).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide some background information on the socio-political and *transnational* context in which women's committed creative artworks have emerged to advocate, concomitantly, for social justice and gender equality in post-revolutionary North African states. Whereas Chapter 1 focuses on the specific events of the Moroccan Spring and its feminist sub-branch *the Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy*, Chapter 2 focuses on the transnational context of the Arab Spring around the so-called "gender paradox" and the ensuing political, legal and social backlash against women's rights in three post-revolutionary states: Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. This chapter sets the context and highlights the relevance of this study in terms of the comparative approach that is adopted i.e., mainly between Egypt and Morocco, as well as the overall (transnational) historical feminist approach of this dissertation work. The chapter is currently in press and scheduled to be published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* in August 2021.

Chapter 3 details a research-creation project that is inscribed in the current and specific socio-political context that is the aftermath of the Arab Spring and addresses the same *ideological, epistemological* and *affective* context issues that women's *continued* creativity aims to raise critical awareness about in the region today . More specifically, this research-creation is an attempt to engage with the kind of work (of creative disobedience) that women artists are doing presently. I was inspired both by the literature I read on women's political art in Egypt and the forms of creative disobedience I encountered during my field work in Morocco. In this project, my intent was to raise critical awareness about a historical event that is absented from traditional mainstream media, namely the blatant backlash against women protesters in terms of the violence that was perpetrated against them on the streets and the co-optation of the feminist revolution. The aim of the piece was to create a conscious feminist call for action. This project was published in the *Feminist Media Studies* journal in June 2020, Vol 20, Iss. 4, pp. 598-604.

Given that this thesis aims to examine specifically the work of four Moroccan women artists and their productions, the remaining chapters of this dissertation focus on the case studies themselves, investigating women's artistic expressions that reflect *creative disobedience* patterns. The case study chapters are connected to one another in the way that they are inscribed in the same socio-political context (i.e., the aftermath of the Arab Spring

from 2011 to 2020), draw on a common research methodology (i.e., feminist interviewing and textual/visual analysis of women's artworks) and literature review (i.e., women's creative disobedience and the *continuing* (gender) revolution in the North African region today). However, integrated into each case study is a review of the literature that deals specifically with the artistic discipline under study, as well as on a theoretical framework that is analytically relevant. I ground my analysis in a discussion of postcolonial Arabo-Muslim feminism, art activism (i.e., *artivism)* as an alternative media source and a vehicle for women's countercultures, in addition to bell hook's (1989) concept of *talking back*, Nancy Fraser's (1991) idea of *subaltern counterpublics* and Michel Foucault's (1972) notion of *suppressed knowledges***.**

Hence, chapter four of this dissertation focuses on the case study of Noussayba Lahlou's slam poetry. Poetry has long historical roots with political resistance and revolutionary tides in the Arab region (Levine 2015). Because slam poetry is the modern equivalent of ancient poetry and has, therefore, become one of the favorite genres for political activists to articulate resistance across the region, especially for the youth, this first case study focuses on slam poetry as a genre and on Noussayba Lahlou as an artist to explore the potential of women's slam to advocate for socio-political liberties in post-Arab Spring Morocco. This chapter was published in *Cyber Orient* journal in June 2020, Vol. 14, Iss. 1, pp. 4-43.

In Chapter 5, I focus on Naima Zitane and the production of her play, Dialy. From Greek Antiquity to today, theatre has always existed as a tool for the weak, poor and marginalized to denounce abuses of power and to advocate for social justice (Rankine 2013). Levine (2015) notes that theatre has a deeply *affective* power across the [Arab] region where the language of drama is much stronger than that of poetry or written texts alone (1291). For these reasons, my second case study focuses on theatre as an artistic discipline and, more specifically, on Naima Zitane's play "Dialy"— one of the most daring interventions in the history of Moroccan theatre that managed to create a nationwide controversy back in 2012. By staging the biggest taboo of the Moroccan society- the vagina- Naima aims to break several taboos and silences anchored in people's mentalities in relation to women's sexuality, and the way it is lived, perceived, *endured*, and talked about as well as to *talk back* specifically to a dominant political discourse that rose to prominence in this context. This chapter was published as an article in the *Journal of International Women's Studie*s in February 2021, Vol 22, Iss. 1, pp. 246-269.

Chapter 6 deals with Khadija Tnana and her installation *Kamasutra*. As Badran (2014) underscores the potential of women's artworks and their assembly in exhibitions to "at once provide and preserve a graphic narrative and visual hermeneutics" (59), this makes an examination of Khadija's work highly relevant. Hence, I explore the visual hermeneutics in Khadija's *Kamasutra* artwork which provide a counter-discourse and an alternative reading on identity, sexual education and emancipation. In my analysis, I am interested in the life of *Kamasutra* as a disruptive project. I thus retrace its trajectory throughout the socio-political climate and developments that marked Morocco from 2012, upon the PJD's accession to power, up to 2018, during the last years of the party's second mandate. This chapter is currently under final review for publication in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies.*

In Chapter 7, I focus on rap artist Ghizlane Radi a.k.a. Snowflakebxtch. Commenting on how specific communities are using hip-hop as a cultural force to bring about political change, Maddex (2014) discusses the role of the young rappers of the 2011 Arab uprisings who presented themselves as the leaders of a cultural and political movement in various countries such 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 offers such an analysis. However, all studies of Arab youth's revolutionary expressions articulated through hip-hop from the 1990s to the Arab Spring focus exclusively on men's creative expressions. Little attention has been given to feminine interventions in the counter-cultural scene of rap and hip-hop. By focusing on a young woman rapper Snowflakebxtch, this chapter aims to fill this gap in the literature. I focus specifically on two freestyles by Snowflakebxtch. *Listen You Male* and the *GruntFreestyle #39.* This chapter is also currently under review for publication in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*.

Chapter 8 is a conclusion that restates this dissertation's research findings and discusses future avenues for research by focusing on the *transnational* aspect of women's artworks that create a sort of mirroring effect between the thematics that women *artvists* effectively tackle, the *transgressive* aesthetics that they mobilize and the socio-political context in which their consciousness-raising and advocacy work is inscribed.

Scholarly Contribution

There is a general tendency, especially from the local [Moroccan] government and its partisans locally and abroad, to assume that because Morocco is a relatively freer and more democratic country compared to its neighbors (especially Algeria, Egypt and Libya), it was spared from the wave of protests that swept across the MENA region in 2011 and that no Moroccan Spring ever took place (Gabay 2014). The implicit and biased assumption is that Morocco 'stands out', more or less, in terms of democratic rule and individual liberties in the North African region. Such a state 'blackout' on the issue of the Moroccan Spring aims to promote, nationally and internationally, the image of a free, hospitable and tolerant country that abides by democratic ideals- in other words, to glitter Morocco's image on the international stage- in order to attract tourism, foreign direct investments (FDIs) and Western aid and, at the same time, to avoid dealing with more pressing issues locally such as the widening socio-economic inequalities, the rise political Islam to power since 2011, and the exacerbation of gender-based violence etc. (Sadiqi 2016).

Given that my dissertation aims to document the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in present-day Morocco, the underlying objective of my work is to reinstate the legitimacy (and the existence) of the Moroccan Spring —or the so-called February 20 Movement (MV20F)— as a political movement that emerged from the people themselves to demand justice and dignity. The movement spanned over a few months in 2011 before starting to fade away in 2012. I examine the implications of the 2011 local revolutionary movement for women's contemporary forms of creativity and for the continuing revolution today. In other words, I *talk back* to the government's persistent denial of both the existence and legitimacy of the MV20F. My postulate is not only that a Moroccan Spring did take place and was effectively co-opted by the regime back in 2011, but that the spirit of the MV20F is still alive today in oppositional political spheres, such as those of the Moroccan Left heralded by the FDG (Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique) party, and other countercultural spheres. In this dissertation, I focus specifically on women artists as a countercultural sphere in which both ideas and ideals of the Moroccan Spring are still alive today and in which the revolution continues relentlessly.

Finally, my work is inscribed in an effort to document not only that a Moroccan Spring did take place back in 2011, was co-opted and continues today, but also to promote this ongoing dissent by giving it greater visibility and paying tribute to it in a context where the literature on Moroccan women's political art and *creative disobedience* remains

extremely limited for both political (i.e., the state blackout on the MV20F in 2011 and today) and technical reasons (i.e., the lack of academic publications on Moroccan art generally). My objective is to support the ongoing political and social consciousness of the MV20F and the new subjectivities it gave birth to by focusing specifically on what Wahba characterizes as "women's parallel artistic revolution" today (2016, 47).

Thus, I also look at revolutionary struggles from a *non-linear* and *non-continuous* perspective by focusing on the *contradictions, discontinuities and paradoxes* as these moments are when the society reconfigures the (social scientific) discourse and its meaning-making mechanisms to match the new environment. The major paradox or discontinuity that serves as the point of departure for my research on Moroccan women's contemporary forms of resistance is the gender paradox of the Arab Spring (i.e., the counterrevolution against women's rights) and the persistent denial around the historical reality and legitimacy of the Moroccan Spring (Gabay 2014). As Foucault discussed in his work *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1994), the (social) scientific discourse on knowledge, truth and reason has been rather regular and continuous over time, focusing only on the continuities, the similarities (i.e., the vernacular and the linear) which has characterized most studies on social and political movements until now. However, in this dissertation, I look at *discontinuities, breaks* and *transitions* as something that are not only worthy of academic study and analysis but also as potentially *productive*- both politically and creatively- by focusing on how women's works of art are deployed to raise critical awareness and instigate societal and political change by reproducing and maintaining the new [revolutionary] subjectivities that emerge out of a highly tense and charged political moment. In this sense, the regular and continuous becomes scarce as the irregular and the discontinuous increasingly takes the form of the ordinary, the familiar and the productive.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in the following manner. I begin with a chapter that provides contextual information around the events of the Moroccan Spring and the feminist coalition that emerged from it. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the nature and context in which Moroccan women's creative expressions that I examine in this thesis rose to prominence.

Chapter 2 literature provides an in-depth literature review, documentation and analysis of the *transnational* context of the Arab Spring in each of post-revolutionary Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. Drawing primarily on a postcolonial feminist approach, this chapter

aims to examine the effects of the *transnational* revolution on women's rights and their resulting social status in these three post-revolutionary states. It provides a rationale for the comparative approach undertaken in this dissertation.

Thereafter, in chapter 3, I present a research-creation project that I did to convey the idea, effects and implications of the "gender paradox" through a series of photographs that culminate in a conscious feminist call for action.

In the subsequent fourth chapter, I present the case study of Noussayba Lahlou and the political potential of women's slam poetry to advocate for socio-political liberties, alongside gender equality, in post-Arab Spring Morocco through an in-depth textual analysis of eight of her most salient slams, combined with a content analysis of an interview conducted with the woman artivist.

Chapter five focuses on playwright Naima Zitane and her revolutionary play "Dialy". The textual analysis of the play's script, combined with a quick visual analysis of the play's setting and an interview conducted with Naima aims to examine the potential of revolutionary feminist theatre in breaking down societal taboos to advocate for both sexual and artistic freedom in a country that has been recently ruled both politically and morally by the Islamists, therefore responding to a specific political discourse and reality that emerge post-2011.

This thesis' sixth chapter takes as a case study visual artist, feminist activist and political militant Khadija Tnana and her visual installation Kamasutra which depicts several scenes of sexual intercourse inside a symbol with high religious and mystical connotations, the *Khmisa*. My visual analysis of the artwork, combined with an interview with the artist, examines the trajectory of the work throughout the socio-political climate that marked Morocco from 2012 to 2018 to explain how an artwork that breaks several societal taboos simultaneously -in relation to religion, social codes, sexuality and (Islamist) politics- was successfully exhibited in 2012 and consistently attacked and censored by 2018.

Chapter seven of this dissertation focuses on the case study of Snowflakebxtch to examine the potential women's Raptivism (i.e., rap activism) to contest both men's dominance in the rap game and the long-held toxic views on women's role and place in the Moroccan society. The objective is to understand Snowflake's approach and the subliminal (feminist) messages of her freestyles by linking them to the global RAPtivist movement.

The last chapter provides a conclusion and a re-statement of the research objectives and findings in terms of the potential of women's art in continuing to advocate for socio-political demands that remained unfulfilled from the time of the Moroccan Spring, thereby

revealing some important regional patterns for the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution that Badran (2016) suggests is taking place in Egypt today. This last chapter, therefore, contemplates the possibility of the existence of a *transnational* feminist revolution in the region today and suggests a few areas for future research.

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Stage: From the Birth of *La Nouvelle Scène* to the Moroccan Spring (1999-2011)

1999: The Birth of the Underground

The year 1999 marked the transition from the repressive reign of King Hassan II, known as the infamous Years of Lead (or, more commonly, as *Les Années de Plomb)* in Morocco, which witnessed the abduction, jailing and torture of several human rights activists during the 1960-1980s decades of his reign, to the relatively freer and more democratic regime of his son, King Mohammed VI (Mazria-Katz 2020). This transition also had a particular impact on the arts scene and, by extension, on the art market in Morocco. It witnessed the birth and flourishing of many independent art galleries and spaces, especially in the economic capital of Casablanca, and the emergence of independent and non-state commissioned Moroccan artists who, a few years prior, were only exhibiting abroad or working in isolation and 'under the radar' during the Years of Lead, which were marked by extreme levels of state violence and repression against political dissidents and activists, including the repression of political artists or *artivists*. It was also in this context, in the early 2000s, that the first independent art spaces and initiatives were created such as *La Source du Lion*, *L'Appartement 22* and le *Cube*. The latter two emerged as non-profit curatorial initiatives to provide artistic residencies and spaces for contemporary artists while *La Source du Lion* only provides an art space but not artistic residencies (Jürgenson 2014). Several artists and leading actors in the cultural scene in Morocco that I spoke with at an early stage of my fieldwork also emphasized the 1999 transition, such as Maria Daif, the ex-Director of l'Uzine, the leading center for Arts and Culture in Morocco and Hosni Al Mokhlis, the artistic director of Gorara Association for Arts and Culture (Maria Daif, in interview with author, 2019; Hosni Al Mokhlis, in interview with author, 2019).

The year 1999 also marked the birth of l'*Boulevard* music festival. The underground and countercultural Moroccan art scene was born with the first edition of the festival back in 1999. L'Boulevard is a festival for urban music usually held in the outskirts of the economic capital of Casablanca. It was founded by two former musicians and cultural actors, Mohamed Merhari – also known as Momo – and Hicham Bahou *(Figure 1.)*. Every year, the festival

hosts the leading underground groups of Hip-Hop, Rock and Fusion Music in Morocco as well as other internationally renowned groups in these three genres. In addition to the music contests and concerts, the festival also organizes several art workshops and exhibitions around the themes of urbanism, music and fashion with a critical political and socially conscious lens. Therefore, since the late 1990-early 2000s, L'Boulevard has become the yearly meeting spot, gathering space and the spatio-temporal reference point of the underground artistic and cultural scene in Casablanca and, by extension, in Morocco. The counterness [i.e., the underground aspect] of L'Boulevard was evident in the state's sustained efforts to censor and contain the festival, both physically by limiting it initially to the small space of la F.O.L. (Federation des Oeuvres Laiques) in the neighborhood of Gauthier in Casablanca, and symbolically by discrediting the festival's image in mainstream media, describing it as the meeting point for Satanists and delinquents, as well as by censoring some artists. In February 2003, 14 young Moroccan metalheads and hard rock musicians, who were close friends to the festival founders and who used to perform at l'Boulevard on a regular basis, were trialled and jailed for Satanism, contempt for the Islamic faith and public debauchery (Boukhari 2010).

Figure 1. Hicham Bahou and Mohamed Merhari, the two founders of L'Boulevard festival, 2015, Source: L'Économiste, 2015

2003: The Advent of la "Nouvelle Scène"

The year 2003 was marked by the terrorist attacks that ravaged and shocked the city of Casablanca on May 16, 2003. In light of those events, the underground artistic and cultural scene started receiving an unprecedented state support in terms of both funding and access to facilities, as a political strategy to counter both terrorist activities and the growing influence of conservative ideologies rooted in fundamentalist political Islam. Since then, l'Boulevard music festival became more mainstream, increasingly receiving both financial and symbolic support from the local state authorities, in the context of the mounting threats of Islamism that was evident in the 2003 incidents.

These events also marked the birth of the so-called *La Nouvelle Scène* (i.e., The New Scene) in Morocco which proclaimed a new life philosophy and a more punk, laidback and festive way of being in the world— that is in contradistinction with the traditionalism, conservatism and religiosity proclaimed, back then, by the Islamists and their adept followers *(Figure 2.)*. El Maarouf (2004) compares the *Nayda* movement, which led to the emergence of *La Nouvelle Scène* as a more organized and structured alternative artistic and cultural scene in Morocco, to the countercultural Spanish *La Movida Madrileña* of the 1980s which witnessed the birth of the underground punk rock music scene in Madrid following the demise of Franco's autocratic regime in 1975. Inspired by the growth of punk rock in the UK, the New Scene in Madrid also aimed to celebrate a new life philosophy and a new way of being into a world that has just been liberated from the shackles of authoritarianism, similar to the rise of the underground scene in Morocco following the 1999 transition from King Hassan II's autocratic reign to his son Mohamed VI.

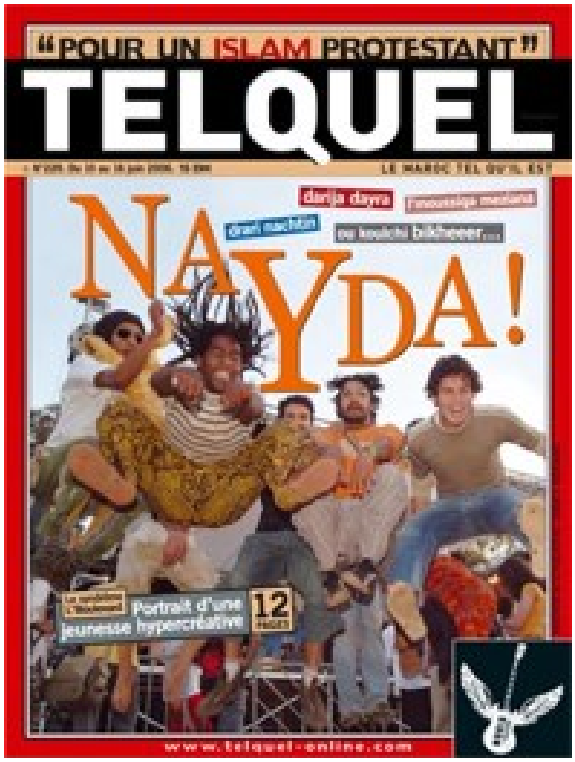

Figure 2. "The Nayda Movement: For a Protestant Islam"

L'Boulevard: The Performance and Celebration of Marginality

The uniqueness of L'Boulevard, which, despite the growing state support, was still considered the emblematic figure and the yearly meeting point of the underground cultural and artistic scene in Morocco, lies in its ability to effectively convey a strong sense of counterness and subalternity— both lyrically and aesthetically. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation preface, L'Boulevard (and other more minor) music concerts organized by the alternative music scene in my native city in Casablanca contributed to shape my social and political consciousness at a very young age as the song lyrics were very much anti-system and deplored several forms of social and political injustices in Morocco such as the classicism of the Moroccan society, which compounded with political abuse and corruption leads to widespread poverty, illegal immigration and drug abuse among the youth.

Figure 3. Taken from El Maarouf (2014) "Enactment of abjection in l'Boulevard festival through mud and dirt" (2010)

In parallel, L'Boulevard is also a place of *pilgrimage* for various subcultural aesthetic styles, including spectacularly daring and *bizarre* attires, dressing styles, looks, hairstyles and costumes inspired, among others, by the underground styles of punk, goth, glam, Rastafari and hip-hop (El Maarouf 2014). The festival is also famous for being a site for gothic disguises, circus shows, acrobatics, cross-dressing, punk tat-toos and hairstyles. Unconventional dressing styles, accompanied with trance dances and the enactment of Gothic traits and behaviors serve to highlight the participants' counterness and perform their belonging to the countercultural sphere. These styles stand, aesthetically, in stark opposition to [and rejection of] anything that is Moroccan, traditional, Arab or Muslim (*Figure 2. & 3*.). In fact, El Maarouf (2014, 2) rightly observes that L'Boulevard is also the site *par excellence* for "the performance of marginality and negotiations of power"; he goes on: "the repetitive escape in those attires can be read as a *simulation*, where the act doesn't fall far from the subject' s real state of being in the *actual world*" (2014, 12). In other words, the marginal presents a re-presentation, through the attires of the grotesque and the carnivalesque, of their situation of marginality, ridicule and exclusion in the *real* world and society; such a representation carries, symbolically, the simultaneously assertive and horrifying agency of the marginal or subaltern who is able to contest dominant power by invading public space and re-enact exclusionary dynamics through transgressive aesthetics (*Figure 3. 4 & 5*). These

dynamics attest to the emergence of new ways of *doing politics* in Morocco in the way that self-proclaimed marginals inhabit public space and contest dominant politics, aesthetics and discourses of exclusion, simultaneously.

In *Figure 3.*, the marginal enacts and celebrates his marginality by covering himself in mud and dirt from head to toe as part of his attire, as well as through his questioning and defying look, which is probably directed at the system that aims to ostracize, and hence ridicule, him. *Figure 4*. conveys the daunting feeling and suffocation and containment of the marginal through the allegory of the cage, that of living in an open air prison for the society's outcast; the woman's act of sticking out her tongue also conveys the idea of subverting the system through moquery, laughter, disguise, attire, and performance. *Figure 5*. underscores how the dominant system objectifies the outcast and subaltern by depicting her as scary and horrifying, hence further justifying and legitimizing her situation of marginality.

In Morocco, the term *bouzebal* which means trash or disposable in the local dialect of Darija, is usually used by the ruling elite and privileged social classes to refer to the poor and working-class people as a *disposable* social category. Similarly, the term *khaser* or *khsoriya*, which literally means expired, refers to the vulgarity of those people, implying that they are unwanted or remaindered- in other words *abject* as theorized by Julia Kristeva (1982). For El Maarouf (2014), l'Boulevard artists and attendees perform precisely their disposability, abjection and (social) excrementality through those unconventional, provocative and horrifying dressing styles, attires and performances. In a tactical act of subversion, the marginal therefore proclaims "I'm shit therefore you are!" (El Maarouf 2014, 2) in order to shed light on the strategy of social distancing used by the ruling political and economic elites to distance themselves from the abject (i.e., the poor, the destitute, the marginal artist, the people). In this sense, similar to Edward Said's theory on Orientalism (1974) but applied to social class in this context, the elite enacts, asserts and derives its superiority through the constant physical, linguistic and symbolic *othering* of the marginal in social hierarchy and experience, which is evident in widespread idioms like *bouzebal* and *khaser*. One of the leading figures of Moroccan rap, Don Bigg, also refers to himself as *el khaser* to celebrate not only his vulgarity, as he has often been criticized for being politically incorrect and cursing in his rap songs, but also his identification with the marginalized and the people, not the elite.

Figure 4. Taken from El Maarouf (2014) Growing Bigger than the Cage: laughter as transgression (L'Boulevard 2011)

Figure 5. Taken from El Maarouf (2014) The Scarecrow (L'Boulevard 2011)

In other words, in the context of events organized by the underground scene such as l'Boulevard, the marginal artist and her audience not only perform their social, political and symbolic marginalization but also produce a counter-discourse and aesthetics that places them, through art, at the centre of the [social and political] stage and meaning-making processes, thereby reversing the dominant gaze and their position at the periphery and margins of society, as El Maarouf eloquently puts it: "Aware of his marginality, he has the potential to produce a counter image, place himself in it, make himself the centre of its

diameters, the antagonist who fears no more, the subject who suddenly loses his master, who now fears none because he can seek refuge behind – and himself becomes – the mass" (2014, 4). Therefore, counterpublics like l'Boulevard become the spaces *par excellence* for the Bouzebal, the remaindered, (literally) the abject, the ejected, marginal to *return* as a unified social group and community– the mass or the people (Kristeva 1982). As the marginal is remaindered, she can't be eliminated, therefore she is doomed to return and haunt those countercultural spaces which constitute not only the possibility of her existence but also the opportunity to enact and celebrate her marginality through unconventionality and, therefore, to talk back to dominant power that aims to repress both her physical (i.e.., the marginal invading public space) and symbolic presence (through artistic creativity).

In 2011, the launch of L'boulevard Souk in 2011 aimed to encourage the production of several goods for exhibition and selling, such as T-shirts, keychains, thereby hinting at the growing mainstreamness of the festival and its commercialisation but always within its original critical lens. In fact, the products put for sale were very much politically intriguing and subversive. *Figure 6*. shows a photograph of a T-Shirt on which was printed an anonymous ruler's skull on a black t-shirt. The skulls symbolize autocrat rulers who stay in power until their death, which is a defiant political statement about the monarchy as a regime.

Figure 6. Taken from El Maarouf (2014) Autocrat saying: “ We are midaliyon [toilet militants] par excellence. ” Shirt sold and displayed at L’Boulevard festival, 2011

In fact, the underground hip-hop and art scene that was born in the late 1990s has been revived by the events that swept the region in 2011, and especially by the spirit of the ‘Moroccan Spring’ and the local revolutionary movement. Most of these photographs were taken from the 2011 edition which was also marked with the launch of L’Boulevard Souk for subversive goods. This spirit has been carried on from 1999 to 2011 and onwards, in the post-’revolutionary’ context.

The “Moroccan Spring”: From (Political) Contention to Co-optation

In December 2010, the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who was repeatedly harassed by the local authorities in his local hometown of Sidi Bouzid, was at the origin of the beginning of a series of protests now known as the “Arab Spring”. Starting in Tunisia, the uprisings catapulted, across the MENA region, a transnational revolution for bread, human rights and social justice contesting several autocratic regimes through both violent and non-violent protests, coups and demonstrations (Sadiqi, 2016). Boum and Daadaoui (2000) underscore the differential impact of the Arab Spring on several countries across the region. While some countries underwent dramatic

radical social and political changes, others did not witness significant disruptions to the status quo. In fact, the Jasmine (i.e., Tunisian) revolution led to the toppling of former president Ben Ali's regime on January 14th, 2011. Similarly, the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions resulted in the overthrow of Moubarak and Gaddhafi's regimes on February 11th and October 20th, respectively. However, Morocco had quite a unique experience of the Arab Spring given that the local February 20th Movement (MV20F) for individual freedoms and socio-political liberties did not directly advocate for a change of regime – unlike most revolutionary movements in other Arab countries – but called, instead, for genuine constitutional reforms that would trigger effective and sustainable social change in the country (Abadi 2014; Boutkhil 2016).

The pro-democracy calls that swept across the region inspired a number of young Moroccans to take action, through the Internet, and mobilize others to join the struggle. In early January 2011, disillusioned with the efficacy and accountability of elected institutions and political parties, several digital activists created a Facebook group called "Moroccans converse directly with the King" to share their concerns with King Mohamed VI. Some of the main demands formulated by the group included a reform of the constitution, the dissolution of the parliament and the firing of the cabinet (Yachoulti 2015). With the start of the Egyptian revolution on National Police Day, 25th January 2011, the group changed its name to "Freedom and Democracy Now" and called, officially, for nationwide protests on February 20th. Subsequently, group members and prominent Moroccan personalities started sharing two-minute YouTube videos showing young men and women explaining their reasons for supporting and joining the local "revolutionary" movement known as the MV20F.

On February 20th, 2011, a large coalition of people, young and old, liberal and conservative, including far-left sympathizers and Islamists, feminist and human rights activists, union members and university students seized the historical momentum to denounce widespread regime corruption and rampant socio-economic inequalities in the country (Mekouar 2016). Each week from February to April, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets and openly expressed their opposition to the regime, ultimately leading the King to make concessions and implement political reforms. In this context, a key reform concerned the adoption of a new constitution that was approved by a large majority in a national referendum in June 2011, only five months after the first demonstrations held by the MV20F (Yachoulti 2015). The new constitution brought major changes including the official recognition of the diversity of the Moroccan culture and the re-affirmation of the rights of the Native peoples of Morocco (i.e., the Amazigh), the introduction of personal freedoms and

freedom of worship and expression, the foregrounding of the necessity to abide by international human rights and gender equality standards, and ultimately, the restriction of the King's political prerogatives; this last point was achieved by strengthening the roles of the newly appointed prime minister and the parliament (Boutkhil 2016; Ennaji 2016).

However, the adoption of mere "cosmetic" constitutional reforms by the regime in June 2011 was aimed primarily to contain the enthusiasm of the protestors and the cycle of contention created by the MV20F (Daadaoui 2017). Moreover, the new constitution also revealed its failure, in the long run, to effectively disrupt the status-quo and address the protesters demands, namely on the issues of human rights and gender equality (Boutkhil 2016). Boum and Daadaoui (2000) underscore how the regime 'got away' with the local version of the Arab Spring, the MV20F, with the adoption of constitutional changes. Therefore, the implementation of the new constitution exposed the failure of the local revolutionary movement in bringing about effective social change; it revealed another specificity of the "Moroccan Spring" (and the MV20F) which has been effectively co-opted by the regime. The pro-democracy calls then waned gradually in the following months before dying out completely by mid-2012 (Daadaoui 2017).

A Brief History of the Moroccan Feminist Movement: From Colonial Times to the Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy (2011)

Moroccan women's activism and involvement in the public sphere did not start with the "Moroccan Spring" but dates back to the colonial era (1912-1956). During this period, women were particularly active on two fronts: in the political struggle for national independence and in societal debates to improve their access to education and schooling in order to put an end to women's seclusion in the private sphere. One of the rare figures of feminist activism back then was Malika Al Fassi, the daughter of the founder of the Independence Party, Abbas Al Fassi (Yachoulti 2015). However, the Moroccan feminist movement was only born as a distinct social and political movement in the post-independence era when women activists realized that they were increasingly being "sent back to their homes" despite the crucial roles they had played in the nationalist struggle- by carrying weapons, hiding dissidents and delivering important messages (Sadiqi 2016). Born in 1946 the urban bourgeoisie of the Istiqlal Independence Party, *Akhawat Al-Safa* became the emblem of Moroccan feminism after independence. The association was the first organization to openly contest Moroccan women's inferior social status by demanding the

improvement of women's educational opportunities, the abolition of polygamy and the unjust inheritance laws that were based on the Shariaa Islamic law. These demands remained on the feminists' agenda for over fifty years, and it was not until 1993 that Morocco ratified, although with some reservations, the 1979 UN's C*onvention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) (Boutkhil 2016).

Yet, after several decades of struggle by Moroccan feminists and women's NGOs, the most remarkable and groundbreaking achievement in the field of [Moroccan] women's rights concerned the adoption of the Mudawana family law in 2004, which is, until today, still considered one of the most advanced family laws in the Arab and Muslim world. The new Mudawana institutionalized gender equality and granted women unprecedented rights within the family, by making men and women equal partners in marriage and household responsibilities, restricting polygamy and granting women the right to initiate divorce and custody, increasing the minimum marriage age to 18 years and abolishing repudiation and the requirement of a male legal tutorship in marriage (Ennaji 2016; Selime 2012). In 2008, Morocco finally lifted all of its past reservations on CEDAW, and instigated the reform of the nationality code which now allows Moroccan women to transmit citizenship to their children (Ennaji 2016).

In 2011, Moroccan women were part and parcel of the local revolutionary movement, known as the MV20F. In early January, four of the 14 activists featured in the MV20F's YouTube videos calling for national protests were young women. The clip of the call started with twenty-year-old journalism student Amina Boughalbi, who was also a founding member of February 20th. Similar to Egyptian YouTuber Asmae Mahfouz who called on mass protests on International Police Day, Amina, also speaking in the first person, initiated the wide protests in Morocco, stating: "I am Moroccan and I will march on February 20th because I want freedom and equality for all Moroccans." (Selime 2012, 101). Zakia Selime (2012) points out that the gender performance of parity in the call for protest was not only virtual, but was also evident in the offline world where women were physically present at different stages of the mobilization and coordination of the street protests. In fact, the online platforms could not substitute for traditional offline communication where activists were also heavily involved in each city's meeting points (Abadi 2015). Selime (2012) also observes that the February 20th movement (MV20F) witnessed new modes of engagement with politics and feminism that were evident, among others, in the blatant absence of feminist organizations from the protests. These were largely dominated by atomized (i.e., autonomous and independent) individuals, men and women, who advocated for the integration of a

feminist stance and a gender-sensitive agenda to the MV20F. In fact, Selime (2012) contends that the new generation did not only integrate and embrace feminist ideals, but that feminism also informed their political activities and practices.

Alongside men, women's rights activists seized the historical momentum to contest political abuses and promote their [feminist] agenda through the creation of a sub-branch of the movement in March 2011, the so-called *Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy* (Yachoulti 2015). The aim of the coalition was to integrate a gender-sensitive aspect to the "Moroccan Spring", and particularly to the new constitution by drafting a memorandum communicating women's demands and their envisioned role in Moroccan society. This memorandum emphasized the principles of parity and the constitutionalization of women's gains and rights in order to promote equal political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights for men and women (Ibid.). As gender equality became the core of the larger discussion of Moroccan citizenry and constitutional reforms, the Feb 20th movement led to the development of a new feminist-activist consciousness among the younger generation of Moroccan women, regardless of their socio-economic background or political affiliations (Sadiqi 2016). As a result, only one month after the creation of the feminist coalition, a major achievement of the "Moroccan Feminist Spring" was evident in the ratification, without reservations, of both CEDAW and its Optional Protocol on April 18, 2011. In June 2011, Article 19 of the new constitution also made both men and women equal citizens before the law to participate in their country's political, economic, cultural, and social life (Boutkhil 2016). Ultimately, in October 2011, two laws concerning women's political participation were adopted; the first set a quota of 15% for women within the Chamber of Representatives and the second, urged political parties to include a third of women in all their governing bodies (Yachoulti 2015). It is worthwhile noting that the *Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy* did not limit itself to acting at the local level but also sought to move beyond the borders and seek coalitions at the MENA level, with the aim of unifying women of the region against dictatorship, inequality, and marginalization (Ibid.).

However, many feminists and human rights activists actually expressed their disappointment with the outcome of the "Moroccan Feminist Spring". First, several Moroccan women activists during the Feb 20th movement reported that they received threats and were met with strong opposition because of their activism; some divulged that they had received threatening messages via Facebook and phone calls. Kamilia Raouyane, an intern at the *Moroccan Association of Human Rights*, said that she received calls at 3 a.m. from someone calling her a whore and threatening her with sexual violence at the start of the

movement. Moroccan activists of the MV20F also had to rely heavily on the movement's social media page and websites, such as *Lakome.com* and *Mamfakinch.com*, to respond to the state's fake allegations that aimed to undermine the movement's credibility and legitimacy, and to mobilize followers both locally and internationally (Abadi 2015). Other activists reported being strongly discouraged by their families to partake in the protests for risk of being jailed and tortured by the police (Yachoulti 2015).

In addition, whereas article 19 of the new constitution stipulates a number of advances for women's rights, it also highlights an important limitation- that such developments can only take place "in accordance with the laws of the Kingdom", thereby re-emphasizing the primacy of the monarchy, tradition and religion in regulating all aspects of women's lives (Boutkhil 2016, 253). In fact, Selime (2012) underscores how many people of the younger generation perceive the precedence of religion and monarchy over international law as the main obstacle to achieving gender equality and safeguarding women's rights in the country. In this context, Boutkhil (2016) speaks about a "feminine liminal citizenship" to characterize the status of women in post-Arab Spring Morocco "whereby their full citizenship is not attained or sometimes denied despite its being fully recognized in the new constitution" (251). Other limitations were also evident in the absence of laws that effectively address and criminalize gender-based violence and marital rape in the new constitution, and in the non-abolition of an archaic law that allows a rapist to marry his victim in order to escape jail despite several calls and protests by women's NGOs (Boutkhil 2016). This law was only abolished in 2013 following the suicide of 16-years-old Amina Filali who swallowed rat poison after being forced to marry her rapist. Therefore, it appears that the Feminist sub-branch of the Moroccan Spring, the *"Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy",* was as effectively co-opted by the Moroccan regime as the political revolutionary movement it emerged from- the MV20F- with the adoption of mere cosmetic constitutional and legal reforms that had a little effect on improving women's lives and their social status. As mentioned previously, both the co-optation of the Moroccan Spring by the regime and the continued official denial of its occurrence by the State and official institutions served as a driving force for activists to pursue the revolution and continue advocating for unfulfilled demands from the time of the Arab Spring. One of the areas in which such an effort is visible is the arts.

The Rise of Political Islam to Power and the Discourse on "Halal" Art

Another major development and political outcome of the "Moroccan Spring" was the rise of political Islam to power for the first time since the country's independence in 1956. Directly following the events of the "Moroccan Spring", the ensuing national elections led to the victory of the Islamist *Parti de Justice et Devéloppement (Justice and Development Party [PJD])* in November 2011. In this context, the newly elected Islamists quickly revealed their stance on women's rights by expressing their reluctance to implement the gender parity provision of the new constitution (Boutkhil 2016). Moreover, the appointment of only one female minister of *Social and Family Affairs* in the first Islamist-led government, compared to six women before the outbreak of the MV20F, and the rejection of the G*overnment Plan For Gender Equality 2011-2015,* which aimed to involve 25 public sector organizations to fight discrimination and violence against women, have also severely disappointed Moroccan women in the direct aftermath of the uprisings (Boutkhil 2016; Ennaji 2016; Yachoulti 2015).

Subsequent to the PJD's victory, one of the leaders of the party, Najib Boulif, made a public statement announcing the party's vision on the role of art in the society and its overall position on Moroccan artists' creativity. In his statement, Boulif underscored that the PJD will only tolerate and promote "clean art", referring to morally acceptable forms of art- or "halal" art so to speak. "Halal" is a term commonly used in the Quran and other Islamic religious laws to designate the categories of lawful or allowed conduct (Lowry 2006). In his statement, Boulif mentioned a specific incident involving one of the major figures of Moroccan cinema, Latefa Ahrrare, when she walked in at the national *11th International Film Festival* that was held in Marrakech in 2011 with a dress showing all her legs. He emphasized that the party will not allow the rendition of what he hyperbolically characterized as "nude scenes" in any discipline or genre of artistic expression (Ait Akdim 2012). The statement created a public outcry among the Moroccan artist and activist community, who saw it as a direct violation of their freedom of creativity and expression. The Moroccan Spring, therefore, also had significant repercussions and implications for artistic expressions in a context where the elected Islamists attempted to limit those expressions to acceptable and moral forms only. Conversely, women artists and activists have also mobilized their agency and skills to respond to and denounce the Islamists' stance and the ongoing social and political realities that continue to constrain them.

In this context, Belghazi (2016) speaks about the concept of *ihbat*, which translates to disillusionment in Arabic, to convey not only the political failure of Morocco's February 20th

movement (MV20F), but also the general atmosphere that prevailed in the post-'revolutionary' context. He characterizes such a context as one of disappointment and disunity [of the people] on the one hand, and of the assertion of state power and survival skills on the other. However, Belghazi (2016) considers *ihbat* as potentially productive in the sense that the general feeling of disillusionment of the Moroccan people post the MV20F led to the rise and exploration of new tactics of resistance through creative and artistic means, that were notably relevant in the field of Moroccan theatre, literary works, cinema, rap music etc. My dissertation will aim to investigate the post 2011 creativity that rose, primarily, in underground circles led by women *artivists*.

CHAPTER 2

The Arab Spring and Women's (Cyber)activism: "Fourth Wave Democracy in the Making?" *Case Study of Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco*

Tazi, Maha (May 2021). "The Arab Spring and Women's (Cyber)activism: Fourth Wave Democracy in the Making? Case Study of Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco". *Journal of International Women's Studie*s, Forthcoming

As mentioned previously, whereas chapter 1 focuses on the particular case of the "Moroccan Spring" and the dynamics that led to its co-optation, including the feminist coalition that emerged from it, this chapter examines the wider regional context of the Arab Spring by providing a comparative study of the three North African countries in which the gender paradox and the transnational socio-political context that led to the emergence of women's *creative disobedience* in three post-revolutionary states: Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia – are evident. This chapter is scheduled for publication in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* and hence, is included here as it appears in that journal. Despite a few critiques addressed to Huntington's (1991) wave theory for being overtly Eurocentric, pro-Western and, perhaps even, anti-feminist, his theory can be particularly relevant to the case of the Arab Spring to understand how a demoractic [or, in this case, more specifically an anti-autocratic] development is generally followed by a backlash or "reverse" phase where the initially secured gains become jeopardized by a set of contextual factors in the post-revolutionary phase. I focus particularly on the "gender paradox" of the Arab Spring to apprehend and illustrate such a development, thereby reversing Huntington's "gaze" by focusing on a non-Western context and by foregrounding gender as the focal point of my analysis.

Abstract

According to Huntington's (1991) theory of "reverse democracy", countries undergoing (or having undergone) a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding in the subsequent wave. During the *third wave democratization*, the fall of the Soviet Union and other despotic regimes in Latin America led to the gradual "autocratization" of many of these countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s. More recently, in 2011, the collapse of several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and

North African (MENA) region underscored important aspects of democratization, a process in which both women and new media technologies played a key role. However, the direct aftermath of the Arab Spring also revealed a significant democratic backsliding with the outbreak of civil and tribal wars in the region, the rise of political Islam to power and the resulting backlash against women's socio-political and legal rights. In this chapter, I question whether, and to what extent, the Arab Spring could constitute a case of "fourth wave democracy"- especially that this most recent wave has been little, if not at all, explored and analysed. To do so, I adopt a feminist perspective that foregrounds the role of gender as the primary focus of my analysis to examine how the Arab Spring exemplified aspects of a "reverse democracy", namely in terms of its impact on women's rights and their resulting social status in the aftermath of the uprisings. I take three countries as case studies: Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.

Introduction

In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Huntington (1991) discusses his theory of "third wave democratization", in which he relates the story of democracy's latest recognized wave which he associates with the fall of the Soviet Union and several autocratic regimes in Latin America in the early 1990s. His main idea is that countries undergoing or having undergone a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding in the period immediately following this wave- a development that he characterizes as "reverse democracy". In the context of the third wave, a major backsliding was evident not only in the rise of autocratic regimes in many Eastern European and Latin American countries starting in the mid 1990s', such as in Poland and Honduras, but also in the ensuing "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 Great Recession. These developments have also significantly impacted women, in terms of their resulting status in the "reverse democracy" phase, and undermined their social and political rights. For instance, Lila Abu Lughod (2002) underscores how the United States used primarily a narrative of Muslim women's victimization to justify their 2001 war on terror in Afghanistan. Under the pretext of "saving Muslim women" (p.1) from the shackles of patriarchal Muslim and Arab men, the US intervention sought to liberate local women in Western and imperial terms - that is without a culturally sensitive project for women's emancipation. As a result, the intervention only furthered Afghani women's seclusion as a reaction against the US military and *cultural* invasion.

More recently, the collapse of several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011, namely in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, underscored important aspects of democratization where the fall of autocratic regimes was followed by free and independent elections, sometimes for the first times in these countries (postcolonial) histories. However, the direct aftermath of the Arab Spring has revealed a significant backlash against both democratic development and women's rights in the region. In fact, a few months after the apparent beginning of the democratic transitions, most of the Arab political openings closed, thereby causing an inevitable pull-back that was mainly noticeable in the rise of Islamist parties to power following the free elections that took place and the subsequent series of political, social and humanitarian crises that are currently devastating the region; these include the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, the Libyan tribal war and the refugee crises that have spread to the European continent and beyond. Moreover, Arab women were also deliberately excluded from political participation and decision-making posts in the aftermath of the revolutions despite playing leading roles at key stages of the uprisings (Hosni, 2017; Sadiqi, 2016). Whereas such developments could hint at a potential "reverse democracy" and "fourth wave democratization" in the Arab region, this new wave has been a little, if not at all, explored and analysed.

In this first chapter, I adopt a feminist perspective that foregrounds the role of gender as the primary focus of analysis in order to examine whether the Arab Spring and its directly aftermath could be theorized as the "fourth wave of democracy", namely in terms of its impact on women's rights and their resulting social status in the aftermath of the series of revolutions. To do so, I examine three countries as case studies: Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Sadiqi (2016) discusses the several patterns and similarities between these three countries in terms of the protestors' intense reliance on digital technologies to rally support and document the revolutions and the (gender) paradox between women's high mobilization in the series of uprisings and their blatant exclusion from state-building efforts in post-revolutionary Arab states.

In this chapter, my argument is twofold: First, by looking at the interplay between gender and the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), I argue that digital technologies played a key role in empowering women to claim equal access to the public sphere during the initial "democratic [i.e., anti-autocratic] transition" phase of the uprisings that led to the collapse (or reform) of various authoritarian regimes across the region between 2010 and 2011. This phase was characterized by a large presence of women

in the mobilization and documentation phases of the protests and an intense reliance on new media technologies to document the progress of the revolutions. However, a significant backlash against women's secured gains during this first period was evident in the direct aftermath of the uprisings, namely between 2012 and 2013, with the rise of various Islamist parties to power that were antagonistic to women's legal and socio-political rights and their *continued* presence in the public sphere, thereby revealing aspects of a "reverse (feminist) democracy" in the region. Finally, the last part of this chapter focuses on some of the most recent developments that marked the period from 2013 to 2016, such as the improvements of women's legal rights, political participation and social status thanks to the continued efforts of women's NGOs and individual activists to advocate a gender equality agenda and the surge of women's creative *subaltern counterpublics* to contest the ongoing social and gender inequalities in their countries. Such recent developments underscore the rather cyclical *nature* and the *continuous* ("wave") pattern of democratic development, thereby ending on a critique of Huntington's theory that questions his rather simplistic and reductionist wave theory on social movements.

Waves of Democracy: From Huntington's Three First Waves to the Arab Spring

Huntington's Three Waves of Democracy

In order to understand the potentially emerging "fourth wave democracy" in its full complexity and implications, it is necessary to go back to previous waves as described by Huntington in his work *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* before elaborating a critique of his work. First and foremost, the foundation for Huntington (1991)'s meaning of democracy is derived from Dahl (1971)'s classic definition of democracy as a "polyarchy", that is a form of government in which power is invested in many individuals at the same time, and where political participation and contestation are essential constitutive elements. Huntington's assessment of democracy is also based on electoral competition and widespread voting participation, as well as on the institutionalization of checks and balances and the limitations on political power (Huntington 1991, 13). In my [feminist] understanding of democracy, this concept is also inextricably linked with the idea of the intersectionality of all struggles [of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, political class etc.] where the necessity of achieving social justice for all marginalized groups is an essential characteristic and requirement of a democratic system.

Whereas many Arab countries can't be characterized as democratic as such, the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring exemplified important aspects of democratization that were evident in the toppling [or reform] of autocratic regimes and the holding of free and independent elections. The main idea of Huntington's (1991) book is that countries undergoing or having undergone a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding. In other words, whenever there is a move toward democracy, such a transition is almost systematically followed by a "reverse move".

The First wave of democracy began in the early 19th century in the United States with the so-called Jacksonian democracy, which was a first attempt to limit slavery in the country and to grant suffrage to the majority of white males regardless of property ownership and tax payment. At its peak, this first wave witnessed the rise of 29 democracies, mainly in the Western world- that is in Western Europe and North America. However, first wave democracy started to fade out when Mussolini rose to power in Italy in 1922, followed by Hitler in 1933 in Germany. The decline of the first wave lasted from 1922 until 1942, during which the number of democracies in the world dropped to a mere 12 (Huntington 1991). The Second wave of democracy began in 1946, following the Allied victory in World War II, and lasted for about 20 years, with a steady increase of democracies in the Western (and other parts of the) world before starting to decline in 1962 at the peak of the Cuban missiles crisis, during which the total number of democracies dropped from 36 to 30 worldwide between 1962 and the mid-1970s (Ibid.).

Finally, the Third wave began in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, also referred to as the 25th of April, a military coup that overthrew the authoritarian regime of the Estado Novo. The number of countries that transitioned towards a democratic system during this wave amounted approximately to 100 democracies, which was a considerable increase in just a few decades. It included, among others, the historic democratic transitions in Latin America during the 1980s, in Asian Pacific countries from 1986 to 1988, including the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan, in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in sub-Saharan Africa beginning in 1989. However, some backsliding was evident in the period immediately following the onset of the "war on terror" after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Moreover, after the Great Recession of 2008, a number of other countries slowly downgraded from democracy including Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Honduras and the Maldives.

Although the notion of "waves of democracy" is widely accepted, their existence is contested by several scholars such as Przeworski et al. (2000) and Doorenspleet (2000b).

Their criticism relates to the fact that Huntington's waves of classification mostly rely on a measure based on the percentage of states that were democratic at a historical point in time. However, the number of states in the global system itself increased dramatically during Huntington's period of analysis, which was characterized by a series of decolonization processes. The "third wave" was, in this sense, not so much an exceptional case that witnessed the rise of numerous (un)democratic states as it witnessed merely the rise of nation-states in a "post-colonial" global world. Przeworski et al. (2000) also found that transitions between democracies and autocracies in the 1950–1990 period occurred mostly in Latin America, and that the rest of the world was relatively stable during this period, thereby undermining Huntington's theory of "reverse democracy" in the context of the second and third wave democratization. Finally, Huntington's classification can also be critiqued for being overtly Eurocentric and pro-Western. For instance, from a feminist critique standpoint, Switzerland, which is typically included as part of the first wave, did not grant women the right to vote until 1971, in the actual context of democracy's third wave only. Not overlooking all these limitations but foregrounding them in my critique of Hungtington's wave theory as a Euro-centric and anti-feminist work, my objective in this chapter is to reverse Huntington's "gaze" [i.e., his perspective] by focusing on the Arab Spring (i.e., my anticolonial perspective) and on women's roles in the revolutions (i.e., my feminist perspective).

Fourth Wave Democracy: On the Origins of Women's Activism in the Region and the Core Role of Cyber Activism during the Arab Spring

In December 2010, the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, a Tunisian street vendor who was repeatedly harassed and humiliated by the local authorities in his hometown, arguably marked the start of the Tunisian revolution and the beginning of the events now known as "the Arab Spring." The Arab Spring was characterized by a series of uprisings that sparked across the MENA region to contest and topple several autocratic regimes through both violent and non-violent protests, coups and demonstrations. The uprisings led to the fall of several dictatorships including former Tunisian president Ben Ali's regime (on January 14th, 2011), ex-Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's reign (on February 11th, 2011) and former Libyan ruler Gadhafi's military regime (on October 20th, 2011). In this context, Howard and Husain (2014) argue that new digital technologies played a key role in the rise of democratic consciousness and organizing.

Anticolonial, social justice and democratization movements in the MENA region had existed long before mobile phones and the Internet came to these countries during the long years of struggle against colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century and, subsequently, when a few authoritarian regimes rose to prominence in newly-independent Arab states during the second half of the century. One example includes the struggle of the Moroccan Left and the *Ila-al Amam* movement against late King Hassan II's autocratic and anti-democratic regime during the infamous *Years of Lead* that marked Morocco between the 1960s and the 1980s. Similarly, women's activism in the region precedes the digital revolution and the Arab Spring and can be traced back at least to the early twentieth century where Arab women played active roles in their countries' independence movements. For instance, Huda Sharaawi was both a feminist and an anti-colonial activist and icon during the 1919 Egyptian Revolution against British rule (Sadiqi 2016). The birth of the *Egyptian Feminist Union* at the home Huda Sharaawi in 1923 officially marked the scission between the nationalist movement and the feminist movement in post-independent Egypt in a context where women activists were denied political and social rights in the wake of the revolution despite them being at the forefront of the nationalist struggle against British colonial rule for many years. Similarly, during the 1912-1956 French Protectorate in Morocco, women were also active on two fronts: in the political struggle for national independence and in societal debates to improve their access to education and schooling in order to put an end to women's seclusion in the private sphere (Yachoulti 2015). One of the rare figures of feminist activism back then was Malika Al Fassi, the daughter of the founder of the Independence Party, Abbas Al Fassi, who was also one of the founding figures of the *Akhawat Al Safa* in 1944, the first association to openly advocate a feminist agenda in Morocco through their demands to abolish polygamy and institutionalize women's formal education (Ennaji 2016).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the advent of new media technologies allowed Arab groups with progressive democratic and feminist ideas and ideals "to built extensive networks, created social capital, and organized political action" (Howard & Husain 2013, 18). In a region like the Middle East where traditional media are still subject to massive state control and censorship, digital technologies act as alternative media for dissenting and opposing voices, where the free flow of information becomes a source of power that enables "political contests to take place over the aspirations, values, and imaginations of people" (Gheytanchi & Moghadam 2014, 4). Hence, in the context of the Arab Spring, digital media served as "an 'information equalizer', allowing for both the telling of compelling stories and

the management of all the small communications and logistics tasks that must happen in concert if an uprising is to succeed" (Howard & Husain 2013, 18).

Howard and Husain (2013) identify five phases to the story of digital media and the Arab Spring. First, the preparation phase where the ICTs have enabled social activists to connect with one another years prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring in order to build solidarity around shared grievances and identify collective political goals starting in the early 2000s. Second, the ignition phase where digital technologies allowed activists to capitalize on an isolated incident, such as the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia or the police murder of a blogger in Egypt, which was deliberately ignored by the mainstream state-controlled media in order to enrage the public and mobilize people to join the protests on-ground and depose their despot. Third, the street protests phase in which activists were able to organize and coordinate the series of offline demonstrations digitally. Fourth, the international buy-in phase where protesters mobilized international support, including global diasporas, overseas agencies and governments, through the documentation of the uprisings and the sharing of stories of regime abuse on various online platforms. Finally, Arab activists also strongly relied on the ICTs during the climax state phase in order to document the gains secured or the backlash incurred in the aftermath of the uprisings, in a context where their demands were either met by their governments or faced a protracted stalemate as was evident in the subsequent cases of civil wars.

In Tunisia, digital technologies played a key role during the ignition phase of the revolution. In the early days of the Jasmine revolution, the media blackout around the tragic death of Mohamed Bouazizi in the mainstream news media, and the wide circulation of photos and videos of his plight in the hospital prior to his death on various social media sites, sparked the first series of protests in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010 which eventually led to the start of the Tunisian revolution (Ryan 2011). Similarly, in the context of the Egyptian Spring, a Facebook-led campaign to memorialize a murdered blogger, Khalid Said, who had been beaten to death by the Egyptian police, converted anti-Mubarak sentiment to general civil disobedience and played a crucial role in both the street protests and the international buy-in phases of the Egyptian revolution. In 2011, images of the young blogger's dead body which were widely shared on social media using mobile phones led to the surge of indignation and popular discontent throughout the country, and beyond (Howard & Husain 2013). Likewise, inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, young Moroccan activists created an online digital campaign consisting of a series of videos to voice their dissatisfaction with the monarchy's top-down approach, and called for a national march in all

major cities, which was at the origin of the so-called February 20th Movement (20-FMV) of the "Moroccan Spring" (Abadi 2014). As Daadaoui (2017) pertinently points out: "The movement's undeniable feature was that it was born out of several tech savvy youth activists using the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube" (para. 2).

However, whereas the series of uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia eventually led to the collapse of Mubarak and Ben Ali's regimes in 2011, Moroccan activists did not demand a change of regime but called, instead, for a "genuine constitutional monarchy" and the limitations of the King's political prerogatives, which resulted in the adoption of a reformed constitution in July 2011 (Boutkhil 2016; Abadi 2014). In this context, digital technologies continued to play an important role in the climax state phase of the Moroccan Spring in order to document the gains (or lack thereof) of the 20-FMV. In fact, many Moroccan activists expressed their discontentment with the outcomes of the local revolutionary movement through several blogs such as "Mamfakinch" and "Avaaz" which they perceive has been effectively co-opted by the regime given that the newly adopted constitution failed to destabilize the status-quo and meet the protestors' demands on the long run (Daadaoui 2017; Iddins, 2018). Therefore, during the series of uprisings that characterized the Arab Spring, digital technologies have allowed activists to create a "pressure from below" to destabilize the traditional hierarchies of power (Al-Rawi 2014, 1149), and paved the way for the initial democratic transitions that were evident either in the toppling of authoritarian regimes - such as in Egypt and Tunisia- or in the adoption of constitutional reforms, as it was evident in the case of Morocco. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that although new media technologies played a key role in the democratization movements of the Arab uprisings, the revolutions could not have happened without the on-the-ground organizing and the people who went down on the streets and risked or lost their lives to put an end to authoritarianism; moreover, several autocratic regimes were also able to instrumentalize new technologies and social media platforms to repress and track down activists' movements. Cases in point include the Egyptian security services use of Facebook and Twitter as a major source of information in order to anticipate the movement of activists during the uprisings, and on several occasions in 2011, the Tunisian government attempted ban of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to stop the Jasmine revolution (Freedom House Report 2012; Howard & Husain 2013).

Fourth Wave Democratization (2010-2011): Cyberfeminism and Women's Empowerment during the Arab Spring uprisings

On the Core Role of Cyberfeminism during the Arab Spring

As mentioned previously, Middle Eastern women's activism precedes the Arab Spring and the digital revolution and can be traced back to the early years of the twentieth century with the rise of anti-colonial movements in which women played a central role. Recent events have spurred the ideal conditions for the rebirth of Arab women's activism, where their contributions were once again needed, this time to put an end -not to colonial rule but- to authoritarian regimes throughout the region in the context of the "Arab Spring". Arab women played a key role during the important stages of the [Arab] uprisings of the 2010-2011, which was particularly empowering for them in so far as their activism resulted in a greater geographic mobility, better access to the public sphere and improved social status. This suggests that the Arab Spring exemplified, initially, an important democratic development in terms of gender equality. In fact, thanks to the advantages of digital technologies, including anonymity, privacy, affordability and (relative) accessibility, women of all social classes were able to contribute significantly to the Arab Spring revolutions (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014). Women activists were also particularly active at three important stages of the uprisings, including during the mobilization, documentation and cultural dissemination phase (Hosni 2017).

During the first phase, Egyptian women bloggers played a leading role in mobilizing mass demonstrations of women and girls during the uprisings, which reflected both their dissatisfaction with their socio-political status in the Egyptian society and their opposition to Mubarak's despotic regime (Naber 2011). Asmaa Mahfouz, a young 25 years-old woman played an important role at the start of the Egyptian revolution through her viral YouTube video that launched the first series of protests in Egypt; she stated the following: "Whoever says women shouldn't go to the protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on Jan 25. I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square and will stand by myself and hold up a banner so that people may have some honor" (Bernard, Bessis & Cherif 2012, 16). In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni's blog Atunisiangirl.blogpost.com also played a key role in the start of the protests. In January 2011, Lina covered the early weeks of the Jasmine Revolution after Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and documented the news of his tragic death that were absented from mainstream

media news outlets, thereby sparking a national indignation that led people to come down massively onto the streets (Ryan 2011). Finally, in Morocco women played a particularly important role in the mobilization phase of the protests, where 14 activists featured in the 20-FMVT's YouTube video announcing the creation of the movement were young women. In fact, the first campaign opens with a young woman, Amina Boulghabi, a founding member of the 20-FMVT, and ends with a much older woman who spoke in Darija, the Moroccan dialect. Telling her personal story with the Moroccan regime's corruption and police violence and incarnating the persona of the Moroccan grandmother who has faced regime abuse her entire life, the older woman called for the right to protest and others to join the movement (Abadi 2014). In addition, Moroccan women's various Facebook and Twitter posts and pages also played a role in initiating the demonstrations of the movement and paved the way for both the rise and flourishing of virtual activism (Yachoulti 2015).

During the second phase of the documentation phase of the uprisings, Egyptian women actively protested and demonstrated in masses alongside their male counterparts in Tahrir square (Gheytanchi & Moghadam 2014) and, in Tunisia, women's platforms served as a major source of information to document the series of uprisings and call for national and international support; the protests were recorded live on cell phone cameras, and, then uploaded onto various social networking sites. For instance, content from Atunisiangirl.blogspot.com was directly used by *Al Jazeera f*or international news coverage, in which the woman activist also denounced several human rights violations committed against non-violent protesters by official authorities during the uprisings (Hosni 2017). Moroccan women were also particularly active during the documentation and coordination phase of the protests. They helped create several Facebook group pages that were affiliated with the 20-FMVT's page, and they urged their Moroccan counterparts to take part in the protests while keeping them informed about the dates and location of the movement's meetings and rallies (Yachoulti 2015). Various websites such as "mamfakinch.com" (we will never give up) and "lakome.com" (To You) allowed Moroccan women activists to share regular updates and information about the movement's achievements (Iddins 2018). More importantly, during the series of uprisings, Moroccan women served as spokespersons of the 20-FMVT's movement during the series of protests; they also took to the front lines and confronted security forces, protecting their male counterparts from police brutality (Yachoulti 2015). Hasna, another female activist in the movement, reported her experience during the 20-FMVT's protests: "We walked side by side with men. Some women were even more

courageous than men, they had shown greater audacity and zeal than that shown by men" (Ibid., 904).

Finally, during the cultural dissemination phase, Moroccan, Tunisian and Egyptian women activists were also able to promote a culture of active citizenry and move from critiquing to contributing to social justice and the development of their societies (Hosni 2017). In Egypt, women artivists of the *Women on Wall* graffiti movement have been resorting to creativity as basic a revolutionary tool during the series of protests to paint Cairo's walls and articulate their vision of an ideal society- one that is free of police abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of gender based-violence (cooke 2016). In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni also launched her initiative "Books to Prisons" campaign for political prisoners who would go on hunger strikes to claim their right to read in Tunisian prisons and promote a culture of human rights through her blog (Hosni 2017). Finally, in Morocco, women's rights organizations seized the momentum created by the MV20F to create a new coalition under the name the "Spring of Dignity" in 2013 following the tragic suicide of a teenager who was forced to marry her rapist in order to demand the official criminalization of domestic violence and rape (Sadiqi 2016; Yachoulti 2015). Therefore, Arab women have played a significant role in their countries' democratic transitions during the series of uprisings, where women's movements and broader social movements have rather become "intertwined social phenomenon" (Gheytanchi & Moghadam 2014, 2). In this context, women's activism reflected their discontent with both their social status and the governments in place and contributed to press for gender-sensitive reforms and political change, concomitantly.

The Arab Spring: Women's Empowerment and Fourth Wave Democratization

Through their continuous reliance and mobilization of new media technologies, Arab women's active participation in the series of uprisings contributed to their temporary empowerment, namely in terms of increased geographic mobility, access to the public sphere and the development of a transnational feminist network of women's solidarity. In Egypt, women's contributions to the uprisings where they marched alongside men was particularly empowering for them, as they were never involved in a community with equal rights before (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014). In fact, women's invasion of Tahrir Square during the series of the uprisings can be seen as a political act and a way of 'doing politics' in itself, given that the public sphere is traditionally seen as the sole domain of men, and that women are strongly encouraged to remain in the confines of the private sphere. Therefore, in 2011,

the 18 days of protests in Tahrir Square constituted a "time out of time" and a "rupture" from the status quo, where gender segregation is otherwise very much prevalent, and women are relatively invisible in the public sphere (Wahba 2016, 67). In this sense, Egyptian women's (cyber)activism has also contributed to bridge the public/private and men/women dichotomy that is used to characterize Arab women in several secularization theories (Hosni 2017, 5). Moreover, the Egyptian revolution also witnessed the development of new forms of solidarity between women from various religious backgrounds, including Muslims and Christians, and social classes, where upper-, middle- and lower-class women came together under the common objective of "Defying the Regime, Defying Patriarchy" (Wahba 2016, 68).

In Tunisia, the women's empowerment aspect was also evident in the leadership positions that women took on during the Jasmine revolution. For instance, Lina Ben Mhenni became a leading figure in citizen journalism through the role of her trilingual blog in which she documented the progress of the Tunisian revolution at the local, regional and international levels. This was facilitated by her presence on the ground to film and record the protests live despite the government's multiple intimidation attempts to block and censor content on her blog (Hosni 2017). Speaking about the role of the Tunisian revolution in setting a model of transnational solidarity as well as a revolutionary ideal for other insurgent Arab states to follow, Yahyaoui, one of the leading Tunisian activists reported that: "We have this huge responsibility to show to the world, and to the Arab world, that we can succeed. Even if we are focusing on Tunisia, we are doing it for the entire region" (Hosni 2017, 15).

Finally, the Moroccan February 20th movement also exemplified an important women's empowerment aspect through the creation of a feminist sub-branch of the movement, the so-called "Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy" (Yachoulti 2015). Founded in March 2011, the aim of the coalition was to integrate a gender-sensitive aspect to the Moroccan Spring, and particularly to the new envisioned constitution. Therefore, one of the earliest achievements of this feminist coalition was the development of a memorandum reflecting women's various demands and their role in the Moroccan society. The memorandum particularly emphasized the principles of parity and the constitutionalization of women's gains and rights in order to promote and guarantee equal political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights for men and women (Yachoulti 2015). Moreover, the Feb 20th Movement led to the development of a new consciousness of feminist activism among the younger generation of Moroccan women, where women from all walks of life, including social classes, ideologies and political affiliations came together under the same unifying movement and its feminist sub-branch (Sadiqi 2016). In this sense, the *"Feminist Spring for*

Equality and Democracy" deployed a gender-sensitive approach to push for social change, making gender equality at the center of a larger discussion of Moroccan citizenry and constitutional reforms. Ultimately, in terms of transnational solidarity, the feminist coalition of the "Moroccan Spring" did not limit itself to acting at the local level but also sought to develop coalitions at the MENA region level in order to "unify women of the region against dictatorship, inequality, and marginalization" (Yachoulti 2015, 905).

As a consequence, Al Rawi (2014) sheds light on the collective identity and character that is forged through Arab women's online movements which aim to challenge gender inequality, and unite several men and women activists across Arab states. Likewise, Gheytanchi & Moghadam (2014) underscore how this new transnational and electronic communicative sphere has facilitated the emergence of a "new Arab public sphere" and a "distinct community" within the Arab world today. In fact, Arab women's active roles during the series of uprisings have contributed to deconstruct the perception of Arab women as powerless, invisible, voiceless and victims (Abadi 2014). Through their strategic use of digital technologies, Egyptian, Moroccan and Tunisian women were able to contribute concomitantly to the struggle against authoritarianism and gender inequality, which, in turn, was particularly empowering for them in terms of access to the public sphere and improved social status to promote a feminist agenda. Foregrounding gender and the role of new media technologies, the Arab Spring has, in this sense, materialized as a case of fourth wave democratization. However, as miriam cooke (2016, 31) pertinently points out: "In revolutions, as in wars, norms and values are suspended 'for the duration' in order to accommodate necessary breaches of what is normally considered appropriate. It also shows that when the crisis is over, the cultural police try to restore traditional gender norms in an attempt to 'squeeze the genie back into the lamp.'" Likewise, a parallel can be drawn between Arab women's active contributions to the Arab Spring and their resulting social status in the period directly following the uprisings.

Fourth Wave "Reverse Democracy" (2011-2012): The backlash against women's rights in the aftermath of the Arab Spring

The Rise of Political Islam and the Legal Backlash against Women's Rights

Whereas women have occupied a center stage in the so-called Arab Spring revolutions, their active contributions have not been effectively translated into egalitarian and

progressive legislations that guarantee their rights as equal citizens and encourage their political representation and labor participation in the aftermath of those revolutions (Sadiqi 2016). The first backlash against women's rights materialized in terms of the rise of Islamist parties to power for the first time in the history of many Arab states, which were very much antagonistic towards women's socio-political and legal rights. In Tunisia, the rise of political Islam to power culminated with the election of Ennahda in the direct aftermath of the Jasmine revolution in 2011. Because of its conservative agenda, the party constituted a direct threat to women's rights in several respects, especially with regards to the gains made in the 1956 Tunisian Personal Status Code under Bourguiba (Hamza 2016). A case in point is article 28 of the newly adopted constitution in 2012 under Ennahda that foregrounded complementary – not equal - roles for men and women in the Tunisian society (Arfaoui 2016).

In Egypt, such a "gender paradox" was also evident in the new constitution that was adopted under Morsi's post-revolutionary Islamist government in 2012, which not only re-emphasized women's family and reproductive roles, but also foregrounded the role of religion and Shari'a in regulating all aspects of their lives (McLarney 2016). Further, with an overtly Islamist-dominated committee, the new constitution adopted a conservative stance against women's divorce and custody rights and the appointment of women's judges; as a result of the new law, an Egyptian female deputy president of the Constitutional Court lost her position following the adoption of the new constitution (Khattab 2016). Because of its pro-child marriage stance, the 2012 constitution also violated many of the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW's) fundamental principles (Khattab 2016).

In 2011, Morocco also witnessed the rise of its first Islamist democratically elected party since the country's accession to independence in 1956, which quickly revealed its anti-feminist agenda by rejecting the *Government Agenda for Equality 2011–2015* (Boutkhil 2016). In addition, although article 19 of the newly adopted constitution in July 2011 stipulates a number of advances for women's rights, it also highlighted an important limitation- that such developments can only take place "with [the] respect for […] the constants and of the laws of the Kingdom" (Ibid., 254), thereby re-emphasizing the primacy of the monarchy, tradition and religion over women's rights in the country. In this context, Boutkhil (2016) speaks about "feminine liminal citizenship" to characterize the status of Moroccan women in post-Arab Spring Morocco "whereby their full citizenship is not attained or sometimes denied despite its being fully recognized in the new constitution" (251).

Arab Women's Lack of Political Representation in the Aftermath of the Uprisings

In addition, the Arab Spring also contributed a backlash against women's political rights in terms of their access to decision-making. This was evident in women's lower levels of representation in political offices directly following the uprisings. In Egypt, women only made up 25% of the elected councils and 2% of the newly constituted parliament in 2011, compared to 12% (i.e., a total of 69 seats in parliament) before the outbreak of the uprisings under Mubarak's regime (Khattab 2016). Likewise, in Tunisia, women's political representation under the newly formed government of Ennahda was even lower than under Ben Ali's regime: whereas women made up 27 % of parliamentarians in 2009, at a time when the government also counted 4 women ministers, in April 2011, Tunisian women were only granted 2 out of 31 ministries and less than half of the members of the new transitional body (Hamza 2016). They also only accounted for 23% of the members of the new parliament, which amounted to a total of 49 seats, out of which 43 were granted to women from the Ennahda Islamist party (Hamza 2016). In fact, elected Tunisian women were instrumentalized as political tools by Ennahda to display and boast gender parity without them having the necessary gender-sensitive background to advocate for women's rights effectively (Ibid.). In Morocco, the appointment of only one female *Minister of Social and Family Affairs* under the first Islamist-led government in 2011, compared to 6 women before the outbreak of the Feb 20th movement, and its reluctance to implement the gender parity provisions of the new constitution, were but two of the new alarming examples that have severely disappointed Moroccan women in the direct aftermath of the local reformist movement (Yachoulti 2015; Ennaji 2016).

The Rise of New Forms of Violence against Women in the post-the Arab Spring context

Another aspect of the backlash against women's rights in the period directly following the uprisings was the rise of new forms of violence against them. In Egypt, several authors point out that a "counterrevolution" actually took place in post-revolutionary Egypt where women's continued protests to advocate for a gender-sensitive agenda under the newly formed Islamist government were met with unprecedented levels of government violence and brutality including virginity testing, gang rapes, police beatings, sexual harassment and systemic violence against women protesters (Wahba 2016, 61). An emblematic figure of the regime's brutality against women in this context is a police officer dragging a topless woman,

with what will become an iconic blue bra in Egypt (cooke 2016). Other forms of violence included the restoration of the long-dated practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) by Morsi's government in 2012, which was a direct backlash against the anti-FGM movement prior to 2010 and a violation of another CEDAW's fundamental principles (Khattab 2016; McLarney 2016). Likewise, in Tunisia, the newly formed government in 2011 not only denies rights to children born out of the wedlock; it also encourages and legitimizes violence against women including sexual harassment and the repression and intimidation of women's initiatives calling for gender justice and equal rights (Hamza 2016). In 2012, a Tunisian woman was charged with indecency after being raped on the streets (Ennaji 2016). During the same year, activist Lina Ben Mhenni was also assaulted and tortured by the Tunisian police for protesting article 28 of the new constitution which emphasized complementary roles for men and women in the Tunisian society (Errazzouki 2012).

Similarly, many Moroccan women activists during the Feb 20th movement reported that they received threats and were met with strong opposition because of their activism. Some confessed receiving threatening messages via Facebook and phone calls. Kamilia Raouyane, an intern at the *Moroccan Association of Human Rights*, said that she received calls at 3 a.m. from someone calling her a whore and threatening her with sexual violence at the very start of the movement. Other activists reported being strongly discouraged by their families to partake in the protests for risking being jailed and tortured by the police (Yachoulti 2015). Therefore, by foregrounding gender equality as the focus of my analysis, the aftermath of the Arab Spring was a clear case of "reverse democracy" in terms of the legal, political and social backlashes against women's rights where their active contributions to the series of uprisings were met with unprecedented levels of violence, repression, exclusion and marginalization in the post-revolutionary contexts between 2011 and 2012. However, more recent developments in the MENA region, starting 2013 onwards, strongly signal the integration of a more gender-sensitive approach and a pro-women's rights agenda.

Fourth Wave "Democratization in the Making" (2013-2016): Capitalizing on Women's Gains in the Post-Revolutionary Contexts

"Pro-Gender Equality" Politico-Legal Developments: The Reform of the Constitutions

In this context, one of the major developments concerned the revision of the constitutions that were adopted in the period directly following the revolutions in order to

guarantee better rights for women thanks to the concerted and continued efforts of women's NGOs and activists. In 2014, a new constitution in Egypt adopted a rather liberal stance under Al-Sissi's "secular" regime, following the overthrow of Morsi's Islamist rule, and emphasized the role of the state in guaranteeing gender equality in all aspects of the social life, including in high-level management positions, in political offices, in the judiciary, and in parliament. It also widely condemned the widespread social plague of domestic violence (Mclarney 2016). Echoing these reforms, 89 women were elected following the 2014 parliamentary elections, compared to less than 2 percent during the Islamist-led parliament of 2012 (Ibid.). However, the notion of complementary roles between men and women in the family, which implies a sexual contract, was not completely abandoned in the reformed constitution, and the Sharia –or Islamic family law- was still defined as the primary source of legislation under Al-Sissi's new military *dictatorship* (Khattab 2016).

Likewise, in January 2014, a new constitution that strongly protects women's rights was voted in Tunisia. Article 46 particularly insists on the provision of equal opportunities for men and women to have access to all levels of responsibility and in all domains. It also emphasizes gender parity in elected assemblies, the eradication of gender-based violence, and the ratification of the CEDAW without any reservations (Hamza 2016). As a consequence of the implementation of the parity law, the 2014 elections witnessed a stark increase of female heads of legislative lists compared to 2011, in addition to the increase in both women's voting and nominations in political constituencies and as presidential candidates, which signals Tunisian women's growing political participation and representation (Arfaoui 2016).

Similarly, in 2013, the Moroccan government adopted the *National Charter to Reform the Justice System*, which centers women as their target priority, as well as the *National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women* that criminalizes sexual harassment (Elattir, El Allame & Tihm 2016). On January 23, 2014, thanks to the concerted efforts of women's rights organizations within the framework of the "Spring of Dignity", the revision of Article 475 of the Penal Code led to the abolition of the archaic law that allows rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victims, following the tragic suicide of Amina Filali, a 16-years-old girl who swallowed rat poison after being forced to marry her rapist (Boutkhil 2016; Iddins 2018). Finally, the adoption of the *Government Plan for Equality 'ICRAM' 2012-2016* aimed to further institutionalize parity and achieve a set of reforms touching upon women's social status and access to the public sphere in Morocco including in the Family Code, the Criminal Code, the Labor Code, the Nationality Code, the Election Code, and the Collective Charter (Yachoulti 2015). As mentioned previously, these changes were adopted

thanks to the continued (transnational) efforts of women individual activists and women's NGOs in the post-revolutionary context to promote a gender equality and social justice concomitantly, such as the Moroccan feminist coalition of the "Spring of Dignity" and others that will be discussed in the following section. In fact, women's organizations put increasing pressures on the newly elected governments to institutionalize gender equality in post-Arab Spring states to acknowledge women's active contributions to the series of uprisings and guarantee the legitimacy of the new established governments from a feminist perspective.

The Surge of Women's NGOs and the Rise of subaltern counterpublics to Advocate for Social Justice

In fact, another important development which signals recent major advances in Arab women's rights following the backlash against their rights in the period following the uprisings is the surge of women- led (individual and collective) initiatives that advocate for social justice. Badran (2016) argues that women artist-activists are currently resorting to *creative disobedience* (i.e., art activism) as a basic revolutionary tool to protest the ongoing gender and social inequalities in post-revolutionary Egypt. She stresses how obedience and disobedience are highly gendered terms in the Arab region: "He wields power and commands. She obeys and defers" (2016, 58), and, therefore, how *disobedience* is mainly marked as female: "In patriarchy, women are subordinate to men, 'superiors' to whom they owe obedience. Obedience is a one-way street. Disobedience is female" (2016, 48). Disobedience, therefore, becomes a tool and a way for women to fight against the social conventions of a highly gendered obedience. Therefore, Badran (2016, 48) highlights the political subversive potential of disobedience in (post)revolutionary North African contexts:

> 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.

In this context, Wahba (2016, 65) discusses the rise of "subaltern counterpublics" to characterize the new spheres that are currently created by Egyptian women who are excluded from the public sphere. Along with the development of several street theater initiatives led by women - such as *El-Batt El-Eswed* (The Odd Ducks), a theatre collective founded in 2013 to promote feminist storytelling - graffiti art continues to rise to prominence from the time of

the uprisings to share Egyptian women's painful stories and give them greater visibility in the public sphere (cooke 2016; El Nossery 2016). For instance, the famous "Don't touch or castration awaits you" graffiti denounces the widespread sexual assaults, virginity testings and sexual harassment of women in post-revolutionary Egypt. In this case, graffiti symbolizes resistance and activism, as well as a form of *talking back* to and subverting power (Wahba 2016). Such developments can also be paralleled with Marwan Kraidy's (2016) concept of revolutionary creative labor during the Arab Spring which he characterizes as "artful dissent".

Another example of the development of those subaltern counterpublics in post-revolutionary Arab states is the organization by the Moroccan Feb 20th movement of a performative act in front of the Rabat parliament until the title of "*Freeze for Democracy"* in response to the government's allegations that the movement has promoted sheer violence and disunity in the country since its outbreak. Young female and male activists used their bodies to 'perform' their message with utter silence and peace, thereby providing a counter-narrative to the government's false accusations of brutality and chaos (Abadi 2014, 18). Their main message was that democracy, like their bodies, was frozen both in time and in space. In addition, Sadiqi (2016) talks about the slow but gradual emergence of an ideological center following the events of February 20th in Morocco that caters to women's voices and defies the classical dichotomy between secularists and Islamists, mainly through the activist role of several women's NGOs in the country. She posits that this movement highlights the possibility of remedying the longstanding dichotomy between the modernists and the traditionalists that was inherited from colonial time in Morocco (i.e.,1940s). This hints at persistent activist and civil society efforts to find an ideological center (i.e., compromise) to both imagine and advance democracy-making in present-day Morocco (in the context of the fourth wave) in terms that are culturally specific and free from both colonial and fundamentalist ideology.

Similarly, a notable development in post-revolutionary Tunisia is the emergence of women's poetry in the Tunisian Arabic dialect to tell women's stories of the revolution and the backlash against their rights (Labidi 2016). The objective of such initiatives is to deplore the prevailing chauvinist social and cultural norms in the region and alter the social perceptions of women. Another development also includes the rise of prominent women cartoonists through the *Union of Cartoon and Comic Strip Artists* who mix public humor with critique of authority in order to parallel Ben Ali's tyrannical rule with that of the newly

elected Ennahda (Labidi 2016). Ultimately, the surge of women's NGOs and grassroots organizations in Tunisia contributes significantly to such democracy-building efforts. Over the past few years, there has been an increasingly important role of civil society in post-revolutionary Tunisia, through NGOs such as *l'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* and the *Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développemen*t, as well as an increasing number of female candidates in National Constituent Assembly elections which both promote a more gender-sensitive approach in Tunisian politics and policy-making (Hamza 2016).

Conclusion

Drawing on a postcolonial feminist critique of Huntington's (1991) "waves of democratization" which aims to reverse the overtly Western-centric and anti-feminist gaze conveyed by his theory, this chapter aimed to assess the extent to which Huntington's model can be applied to the case of the Arab Spring. My objective was to examine whether the 2011 Arab uprisings could be theorized as a case of "fourth wave democratization" by paying close attention to women's roles during the series of uprisings and their resulting social statuses in each of Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. In this sense, I focus on a non-Western context and I adopt a transnational feminist perspective where contrasts and comparisons of cross-border socio-political phenomena in various post-revolutionary contexts become particularly instructive for my study.

The research has revealed that the Arab uprisings did, in fact, exemplify important features of a "wave of democratization" as theorized by Huntington (1991) in so far as they first resulted in an effective initial democratic [i.e., anti-autocratic] transition. During the series of uprisings (2010-2011), Moroccan, Tunisian and Egyptian women activists have been able to contribute effectively to the struggle against authoritarianism and gender inequality thanks to their tactical use of digital technologies, which, in turn, resulted in their direct empowerment in terms of increased geographic mobility, access to the public sphere and improved social status during and in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings.

On the other hand, as Huntington's theory suggests that whenever there is a move toward democracy, the transition is usually followed by a reverse move. In this case, the Arab Spring also validates the assumption with regards to women's rights and can thus be characterized as a case of "reverse democracy". In fact, whereas women actively contributed to the series of uprisings through the creation of a transnational movement that resulted in

their “temporary” empowerment, the period directly following the uprisings (2011-2012) witnessed a severe deterioration of women’s social status, in the context of the rise of political Islam to power, the limitations on political participation, the backlash against their legal rights and fundamental CEDAW principles, and, finally, the rise of extreme forms of violence against them.

However, in light of more recent developments starting 2013 onwards, including the revision of the newly adopted constitutions to integrate gender parity and a gender-sensitive agenda and the rise of women’s subaltern counterpublics, North African women have been able to significantly advance their rights during the last few years (2013-2016) and capitalize on their gains in the post-revolutionary contexts thanks to the concerted and *continued* efforts of both women’s NGOs and individual activists in the region. This last development also signals a strong limitation to Huntington’s theory, in the sense that the “reverse wave” is not the last or ultimate move, and that more progressive developments can, in turn, (re)emerge from a backlash, which underscores that democratic developments are constantly shifting and fluctuating. In this sense, a wave of democracy or democratic transition would not consist of a single “wave” per se, but of many, therefore resulting in a picture of a cycle rather than a wave as advanced by Huntington. Therefore, the foregrounding of a cyclical rather than a wave pattern, along with the overtly Eurocentric and antifeminist stance of his work, are some of the main critiques that this chapter aims to address to Huntington’s (1991) theory.

CHAPTER 3

The Arab Feminist ~~Spring~~ Winter: On Stories of Revolutions & Miscarriages

Tazi, Maha (2020).The Arab Feminist ~~Spring~~ Winter: On Stories of Revolutions & Miscarriages, *Feminist Media Studies*, 20:4, 598-604, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2020.1755554

Introduction

This chapter, which was published in *Feminist Media Studies* journal, is located right before the analysis of my case studies in this manuscript-based thesis as it provides a foundation for subsequent discussions of the specific tactical forms of resistance in the different genres of artistic work that I examine. In particular, my focus in this chapter is on art photography as an art genre and its potential to illuminate issues of social (in)justice in order to call for action and mobilize people. Badran (2014) points out that "[visual] artworks at once provide and preserve a graphic narrative and visual hermeneutics" (59). In fact, images and photographs can be used to raise critical consciousness about a current or historical cause and deplore a set of social realities that continue to undermine a specific group or a community's access to rights and privileges by providing a visual archive that effectively documents these realities. This can then *move* us to take action in favor of that group; as Bruce rightly observes (2000, 1): "The photographic image has long been used in journalism to document events and circumstances, to attract attention, and to stimulate debate and action. That of itself implies that photography can contribute to change in the social and political climate". Hence, in this research-creation project, I use several photographs to document the gender paradox of the Arab uprisings discussed in the previous chapter, where I act as the main protagonist to convey the blatant backlash against women's rights in post-revolutionary North African States— one that was characterized by both physical and psychological forms of violence against women activists and protestors. Drawing primarily on visual cues and symbols of the Egyptian revolution, I used several images of the counterrevolution in Egypt including the iconic blue bra of a topless Egyptian woman protestor who was dragged by a police officer on International Women's Day in 2011 (cooke 2016; Wahba 2016). The objective was to document, from an epistemological feminist perspective, both the existence and the effects of the gender paradox of the Arab Spring on women's lives, who were *violently* excluded from the public sphere in post-revolutionary

states despite playing key roles in the revolutions and, therefore, to create a conscious feminist call for action.

It is expected that revolutionary movements traditionally bring about social change towards freer and more equitable societies. Several philosophers from the Age of Enlightenment, such as Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes and Pierre Bayle, held that "revolutions of the mind" usually create societies that are safer and more stable, more tolerant, as well as more accepting of the dissenting individual (Israel 2009, 8). Baruch Spinoza even contended that such revolutionary tendencies would make societies more resistant to autocracy and authoritarianism, as well as more democratic, libertarian and egalitarian (Israel 2009, 2). Ultimately, Karl Marx argued that only through a radical (i.e., political) revolution can a truly egalitarian society emerge, such as the French Revolution which put an end to autocratic monarchy in the 18th century (Marx 1867). However, in a report entitled "North African Women's Rights in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring", Fatima Sadiqi (2014, 305) discusses what she characterizes as a "paradoxical situation" of the Arab uprisings of 2011:

> On the one hand, there was a spectacular street presence of women of all ages, ideologies, ethnicities and social statuses during the political mobilization phases of the uprisings, which has been well documented by all types of media, but, on the other hand, these women were then excluded from decision-making posts after the uprisings (305).

Figure 7. The Arab Feminist Spring?

As a Ph.D. candidate in Communication Studies at Concordia where I draw on the existing literature on the case of Egypt to investigate women's creative disobedience patterns in contemporary Morocco and Tunisia, my art project is a feminist intervention in so far as it aims to raise awareness around the so-called "gender paradox" of the Arab Spring (Tamara Kharroub 2016, 1) in order to explore the contradiction between North African women's crucial and active contributions to the series of uprisings and their blatant ostracization from the public sphere and state-building efforts in the aftermath of those revolutions. To do so, I act as the main protagonist in a series of photographs to convey the idea of the backlash against women's rights in the aftermath of the uprisings, which was characterized by both physical (assaults, beatings, murders) and psychological (death threats, intimidations, ostracization) forms of violence against women. My objective is to present a counter-hegemonic narrative that challenges the Islamists' official discourse and their socio-politico-legal endeavors in the field of women's rights in post-revolutionary North African States. To do so, I shed light on a suppressed social injustice (i.e., the gender paradox) in order to provide an alternative reading of recent historical events and, therefore, to create a conscious feminist call for action.

Starting in Tunisia with the self-immolation of a street vendor in 2010, the Arab Spring is a series of uprisings that was aimed to topple several autocratic regimes through both violent and non-violent protests, coups and demonstrations that gathered momentum across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region as a transnational revolution for "bread, freedom and social justice" (Badran 2014, 55). Whereas the events of the Arab Spring constituted a "time out of time" (Wahba 2016, 67) and a disengagement from the status quo for Egyptian, Tunisian and Moroccan women who were, for the first time, considered equals of men during the street protests and preparatory phases (See Figure 1. which title refers to Sahar Khamis' (2011) article), in 2011, a "gender paradox" was evident not only in North African women's lower levels of political representation but also in the backlash against women's constitutional rights, and, finally, in the rise of unprecedented forms of violence directed at female protesters (Kharroub 2016, 1; Sadiqi 2016) (See Figure 2.)

On a political level, women's access to decision-making and levels of political representation were even lower than before the outbreak of the Arab Spring in all of Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco upon the accession of the three Islamist parties to power in 2011: the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda and the Justice and Development Party (PJD) respectively (Arfaoui 2016; Khattab 2016; Yachoulti 2015). On a legislative level, the newly adopted

constitutions in Tunisia in 2011 and in Egypt in 2012 foregrounded complementary rather than equal rights for men and women in the society, thereby asserting the role of religion and Shari'a law in regulating all aspects of women's lives (Arfaoui 2016; Khattab 2016). In Egypt, the new constitution threatened to reverse many of women's already secured rights including the elimination of the legally required minimum marriage age for women at 18 years old, the restriction of women's custody and divorce rights, and the restoration of the long-dated practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which was perceived as a direct backlash against the anti-FGM movement of 2010 (Khattab 2016). Finally, on a societal level, a major aspect of the backlash against women's rights in the period directly following the uprisings could be seen in the rise of severe forms of violence against them, including brutal arrests and harsh cases of abuse by the police against Tunisian women and the persistent physical and psychological threats against Moroccan women protestors (Errazzouki 2012; Yachoulti 2015). In Egypt, the various and intense forms of systemic violence against female protesters ranged from sexual harassment to rape and murder, forced virginity tests, death threats and aggressive beatings by security forces — thereby leading several scholars to question, from a feminist perspective, some of the tragic outcomes and implications of the Arab Spring (Khamis 2011; Wahba 2016).

Figure 8. The Arab ~~Feminist~~ Winter

In the context of the "gender paradox" and the severe backlash against North African women's rights in post-revolutionary States, Margot Badran (2016) argues that the end of the political (Arab) revolution only constitutes the beginning of the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution:

> Of the three types of revolution, the ongoing 2011 revolution has been most beleaguered as a political revolution which by now has been effectively stalled. Meanwhile, the culture revolution and the feminist/gender revolution proceed, and it is in this sense that the 2011 revolution continues (47).

Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016) elucidate the continuing (gender) revolution as women's insistence to continue fighting on two fronts today: for the (political) revolution and for their basic human right to remain in the public sphere as active agents despite the physical and sexual violence committed against them during the series of uprisings (See Figure 3.). Badran (2016) derives her understanding of revolutions as *continuous* from Hannah Arendt's (1990) notion that (political) revolutions constitute new beginnings and produce new subjectivities, and highlights the potential of the Arab Spring in also triggering the development of new subjectivities for women in post-revolutionary states. She argues that, in this context, *creative disobedience* (i.e., art activism) is increasingly becoming a revolutionary tool for Egyptian women to denounce systemic violence and interlocking systems of oppression. Similarly, Wahba (2016) uses the term *subaltern counterpublics* to characterize the new creative spheres that are being created by Egyptian women to deplore their ongoing exclusion from the public sphere in the aftermath of the uprisings. Nevine El Nossery (2016) points out that women artist-activists are resorting to poetry, theater, music, dance, graffiti and street performances to protest the persistent social and political inequalities in their country. In this sense, women's new subjectivities aim to articulate their ideal societal projects and projections in the post-revolutionary contexts, and imagine more just and livable futures for both women and social justice in the region.

Figure 9. The Continuing (Gender) Revolution

My project is a feminist endeavor in so far as it aims to advocate for Badran's (2014, 2016) idea of the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution whereby I suggest that North African women need to carry on the struggle today and continue resisting on two fronts simultaneously: for gender equality and for the (political) revolution to truly fulfill its promises of democratization and social justice for the region. I use several symbols and body language cues that are commonly associated with the idea of the revolution (the revolutionary hat and posture, for example (see Figure 1., 2. & 3.)), thereby clearly advocating for the continuing (gender) revolution by, with and for women in the contemporary socio-political context. I also use other symbols and emblematic figures of the "counterrevolution" (Wahba 2016, 61) of the Arab Spring, thereby situating my artwork and feminist endeavor in the post-revolutionary context where I aim to create such a *call for action*. Examples of the counterrevolution include the iconic blue bra of a topless Egyptian woman protestor who was dragged by a police officer on *International Women's Day* in 2011 (Wahba 2016) (Figure 4.).

Figure 10. Blue Bra

In many of those photographs, I also use the allegory of a pregnant woman going through a painful miscarriage to convey the idea of the "aborted" and "miscarried" feminist revolution (see Figure 5.). In fact, North African women went out on the streets alongside men during the series of uprisings carrying the hope that the revolution will fulfill their dreams of (gender) equality and access to the public sphere (Figure 1.). This hope was quickly shattered away in the direct aftermath of the revolutions as they were told to return to their homes (Figure 2. & Figure 4.). Therefore, I underscore not only the pain of this aborted project but also the necessity for the "gender revolution" to be carried once again (Figure 5.), and that those women's (creative) subaltern counterpublics constitute one field in which the revolution is being carried on, and over, in the present day—that is, in addition to the work of women's associations and the civil society.

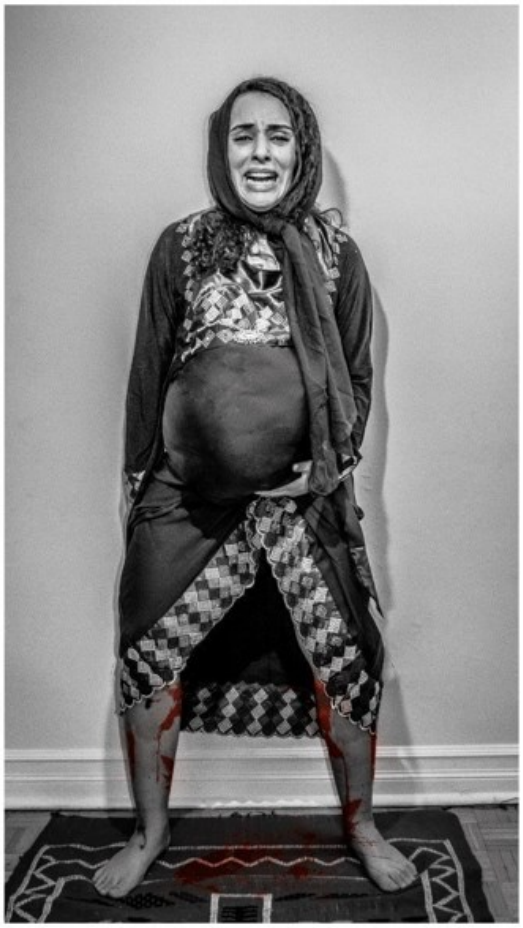

Figure 11. Révolution Fausse-Couche

Conclusion

Therefore, in this project, the [Arab Spring] revolution was personified as a woman wearing a revolutionary hat and showing a revolutionary posture in the first series of photographs; the same woman was silenced by an anonymous hand in subsequent images to hint at the silencing and even, the co-optation, of the women's revolution by the newly elected governments which included a crackdown by both Islamist and military forces. Other photographs support the idea of the aborted [feminist] revolution by showing a woman losing her baby to a painful fausse-couche. The rationale behind this initial research-creation project was to raise critical awareness, transnationally, on both the extent and political implications of the backlash against [North African] women's rights in the aftermath of the uprisings, and therefore, to create a conscious feminist call for action on the need to carry on the women's revolution in contemporary North African States.

CHAPTER 4

Slamming the "Continuing" Moroccan Revolution: Noussayba Lahlou's Bittersweet Verses

Tazi, Maha (2020). "Slamming the 'Continuing' Moroccan Revolution: Noussayba Lahlou's Bittersweet Verses", *CyberOrient*, 14 (1), 4-43

Abstract

In this article, I am interested in looking at women's current mobilization techniques in Post-Arab Spring North Africa. To do so, I draw from the existing literature on the case of Egypt which identifies women's contemporary resistance in creative disobedience patterns – that is women's art activism that advocates, concomitantly, for social justice and gender equality. In my attempt to fill an existing gap in the literature, I investigate the existence of such resistance patterns in Morocco, as well as their main characteristics and country specificities. Because (slam) poetry is a traditionally resistant genre in the Arab region, I take as a case study Noussayba Lahlou's slam poetry to explore the political potential of women's slams to advocate for women's rights and sociopolitical liberties in post-Arab Spring Morocco. To do so, I conducted a virtual interview with the artist by administering a structured online questionnaire, alongside a content analysis of eight of her most recent and salient slams. A 24-years-old slam poet from Morocco, Noussayba's revolutionary verses tackle widespread regime abuse and corruption, alongside women's rights and many other social woes in the country.

Introduction

In December 2010, the self-burning of a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, in his native town of Sidi Bouzid, arguably marked the start of the Tunisian revolution and the beginning of the events now known as the *Arab Spring*. This series of uprisings aimed to overthrow authoritarian regimes across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region through both violent and non-violent protests, coups, and demonstrations. Almost a decade today following the outbreak of the Arab Spring, many feminist and Middle Eastern scholars still wonder what Arab societies have gained from the long and perilous walk towards "democracy," and whether the Arab uprisings particularly have constituted a significant step forward, or the opposite, for the women's movement in the MENA region.

In a report entitled "North African Women's Rights in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," Fatima Sadiqi (2014, 305) discusses a *paradoxical situation* that characterized the Arab uprisings, which witnessed a spectacular street presence of women from all ages and social statuses during the series of protests, but where women have subsequently been excluded from political representation and decision-making in the aftermath of these revolutions. Kharroub (2016, 1) describes this paradoxical situation as the *gender paradox* of the Arab Spring. Ten years after the start of the Arab Spring, women's systemic oppression in the region has persisted until the present day, which makes it even more relevant to look at women's current mobilization and resistance tactics as both a response and a potential "way out" of oppression. In fact, because North African women have faced a significant backlash against their political, social and legal rights in the aftermath of these revolutions, female artist–activists (i.e. *artivists*) are currently developing effective tactics of resistance and subversion to *talk back* to the gender paradox and continue advocating for gender equality and social justice, concomitantly (Badran 2016; Wahba 2016). In this chapter, I take the blatant *gender paradox* of the Arab Spring as a point of departure to analyze the contemporary state of North African – and particularly Moroccan – women's rights, in terms of women's agency, creativity, and *continued* resistance in the face of both political oppression and gender-based discrimination.

Morocco had a unique experience of the Arab Spring given that the February 20 Movement (MV20F) for individual freedoms and socio-political liberties did not directly advocate for a change of regime – unlike most revolutionary movements in other Arab countries – but called, instead, for genuine constitutional reforms that would trigger effective and sustainable social change in the country (Abadi 2014). However, the adoption of mere "cosmetic" constitutional reforms by the regime in June 2011 aimed, primarily, to contain the enthusiasm of the protestors and the cycle of contention created by the MV20F, thereby revealing the failure of the local revolutionary movement in bringing about effective social change (Boutkhil 2016; Daadaoui 2017). In fact, the MV20F gradually waned in the months following the adoption of the new constitution before dying out completely in 2012, at the same time as the new constitution revealed its failure, in the long run, to effectively disrupt the status-quo and meet the protesters' demands, namely on the issues of human rights and gender equality (Boutkhil 2016), thereby revealing another specificity of the "Moroccan Spring" (i.e., the MV20F), which has been effectively co-opted by the regime.

The existing literature which documents and analyzes women's *creative disobedience* patterns in Post-Arab Spring North Africa focuses primarily on Egypt where women *artivists*

have been resorting to poetry, theater, music, dance, and graffiti to protest the ongoing social and gender inequalities in their country (cooke 2016; El Nossery 2016). These creative forms of resistance by women emerged immediately following the toppling of Mubarak's regime in 2011 and the 2013 military coup against the ensuing Morsi's Islamist government, and persist up to the present day under El Sissi's military dictatorship (Sadiqi 2016). Therefore, drawing on the prolific literature on the Egyptian case, including Margot Badran's (2014; 2016) ideas of women's creative disobedience and the *continuing revolution*, in addition to Dina Wahba's (2016) concept of women's emergent *subaltern counterpublics,* my objective is to investigate the new spheres that are currently being created by Moroccan women to denounce their ongoing exclusion from the public sphere.

Because poetry and its contemporary equivalent (slam poetry) have long traditions in the Arab region and have often functioned as vehicles to articulate resistance, in this chapter, I focus on a woman slam poet artist as a case study to investigate the idea of the *continuing gender revolution* in Morocco. I ask, what is the political potential of women's slam poetry to advocate for both women's rights and social justice in post-"revolutionary" Morocco? Noussayba Lahlou, a young 24-years-old slam poet from Morocco is revolutionizing the art scene today with her bittersweet slam that tackles widespread social inequalities, alongside regime abuse and gender inequality in the country.

The Continuing (Gender and Cultural) Revolution

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. She discusses the *longue durée* of revolutionary struggle in the Arab region, which goes back to colonial times, up to the *ongoing* 2011 revolution today, and describes the gender (and cultural) revolution as an ongoing process which exists both in "the before" and "the after" of the political revolutions of the Arab Spring. Badran (2016) derives her understanding of revolutions as "continuous" from Arendt's (1990) notion that (political) revolutions usually constitute new beginnings. Taking Egypt as a case study, she characterizes women's activism in post-revolutionary North African states as a *"continuing revolution."* as she observes: *"*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).

In a similar vein, taking Egypt as a case study, Wahba (2016) describes women's contemporary struggle as a *continuum,* commenting: "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).

The rise of women's counterpublics and creative disobedience in post-Arab Spring revolutionary states

Wabha (2016) points out that the Arab Spring and its aftermath constitute another national project through which Egyptians, particularly women, are reinventing themselves and redefining their national identity. Within the *subaltern counterpublics* where women *continue* denouncing the ongoing social and gender inequalities in their country, Wahba (2016) argues that women are producing counter-hegemonic narratives through various publications, gender-sensitive research and artistic productions that contest patriarchy and aim to trigger social transformation. Women artist-activists are also resorting to those alternative discursive spaces to redefine their roles in the society as they contest the socio-political and cultural realities that *continue* to constrain them, as Wahba (2016) further points out: "As film directors, journalists, publishers, magazine editors, and members of organizations and research groups, women are producing alternative narratives that challenge gender norms in their societies" (66). El Nossery (2016) also observes how Egyptian women *artivists* are increasingly resorting to poetry, theater, music, dance, storytelling, sketches, graffiti, and various street performances to promote and trigger social transformation. She argues that in this context, women's creative expressions are another means to promote struggle, denounce oppression, mobilize people and raise consciousness, where women are "leading a parallel artistic revolution that unfolded underground via rhizomatic machinery – clandestine and often anonymous and yet everywhere – and created what Deleuze and Guattari have dubbed 'strange new becomings, new polyvocalities'" (2016, 145). In addition, women's music and literary works have also been part and parcel of the process of

social change. cook discusses how Arab women's writing has particularly been productive in the wake of the revolutions: "Beyond social change, writing may also produce new identities, turning activists into artist-activists" (2016, 43). For instance, Egyptian women's writings in post-revolutionary context have focused, primarily, on the backlash against women's rights and the marginalization of women from the public sphere. In this context, El Nossery (2016) refers to Dina El Wedidi, a female lyricist and street singer who has gained popularity in Egypt since the uprisings of 2011, thanks to her thoughtful lyrics that pack a political punch and her call for self-realization.

In addition to Egyptian women *artivists*, women activists in Yemen (and other parts of the Arab world) have also been producing counter-hegemonic discourses, notably through poetry, to denounce the outbreak of the war in the country when, in 2015, a coalition of states led by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States intervened to reclaim Yemen on behalf of the internationally recognized government against the Iranian-backed Shia Houthi rebel-group. The latter had emerged in the country with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2012 to denounce widespread corruption in the administration of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. These Yemeni women's poems offer critical discussions about rebuilding the nation after the war and the necessity to achieve peace – namely through their opposition to the Saudi Intervention in Yemen and the promotion of a national consensus to resolve the conflict (Wadekar, 2018). Therefore, as cooke concludes (2016, 43): "It is not in the toppling of presidents for life or in ballot boxes or in new constitutions that the success or persistence of revolutions can be detected, but rather in *the continuity* of [Arab] women's revolutionary activism, consciousness, and creativity."

Iranian Women's Political Art: Contemporary Contentious Politics and Resistance to Islamic fundamentalism

Similarly, Haring (2017) argues that Iranian women's political art has emerged in the post-1979 Islamist revolution as a resistance against both Islamic fundamentalism and contemporary political movements in the context of the current theocratic regime of Iran. First, she underscores how the personal and the political are intimately linked in Iranian women's contemporary artistic productions, she observes that: "The real lives of Iranian female artists have been defined by politics. Their psyche is inextricable from the political framework, and any work emergent from a telling self reflects this intersection of political and personal" (71). For instance, the author underscores how the veil is the symbol *par*

excellence of the intermingling of the personal with the political, which Iranian artist Shirin Neshat effectively utilizes in her productions.

Haring (2017) also alludes to the engagement of Iranian women artists with the issue of Islamic fundamentalism; she points out the dichotomy that exists between secular and Islamic feminists today which stems from their different interpretations of the cultural and political value of Iran's Islamization; she points out: "proponents of secularism see Islamic feminist attempts to modernize society without acquiescing to Westernization as futile because they view Islamic society as incorrigibly absolutist in its fundamentalism" (72). For Iranian secular feminists, there is a need to rupture with everything that is religious/Islamic in order to break away from Islamic fundamentalism. In the case of Morocco, Sadiqi (2016) also discusses the ideological polarization that exists between Islamic and secular feminists in the country and their attempts to find an ideological center to break such a dichotomy.

Finally, Haring (2017) cites an example from the work of artist Shirin Neshat that engages with both Islamic fundamentalist and contemporary Iranian politics- the artist's "Women of Allah" series (1993-97). In this series, the artist examines women's roles within a militarized Iran steeped in Islamic fundamentalism, where black and white photographs feature chador clad women, overlaid by hand letter Persian calligraphy, holding the gaze of viewers down the barrel of a gun. In this series, women's bodies become the battleground in the struggle to reclaim self-ownership for women- physical, spiritual and political.

Art as alternative media

Theodor Adorno (1991) developed two visions on art. He conceives of artistic production as either hegemonic (i.e., mainstream) or counterculture (i.e., alternative). He considers that the purpose of revolutionary and countercultural art rests precisely on highlighting and heightening social discord because of its "immanently critical" character, whereby it strives to enable greater human freedom and achieve social justice by challenging the hegemonic system. Levine (2015) posits that art as alternative media creates niches for subcultures and countercultures and becomes particularly important to challenge the power of repressive regimes when civil society has little space for protest; he goes on: "Groups of (usually) marginalized young people, drawn together by common cultural tastes (in music, modes of dress, styles of speech, etc.) and performances, gradually articulate a powerful oppositional political vision that challenges authoritarian state power" (2015, 1278). Echoing African American writer Toni Cade Bambara's famous phrase that "the duty of the radical

artist is to make the revolution irresistible," Levine argues that all great art is by nature revolutionary and all revolutions must have their own art (2015, 1283). He reasons that "art has always been a handmaiden to revolution and culture its fuel" (2015, 1278). Levine also argues that, because of their essentially performative and affective character, artistic and cultural productions have a substantial power to draw people into political mobilization. Indeed, he considers that affects are at the core of not only art but of all revolutionary upsurges where art plays the role of redirecting anger and calls for social justice to less threatening ends. Similarly, St John (2008) uses the term "protestival" to describe the significance of contemporary carnivalized methods of protest, where the carnival performs multiple tasks simultaneously: a political action, a festive celebration, a cathartic release, a way of imagining a new world and abandoning the status-quo. He also speaks about the countercultural role of the festal in the context of anti-neo-liberal and anti-War on Terror movements, where we are currently witnessing a resurgence of autonomism, anarchism and direct democracy.

(Slam) poetry as a traditionally resistant genre in the MENA region

While Levine (2015, 1289) posits that poetry has always been the most ancient and preferred form of expression in Arab civilization, the contemporary equivalent of poetry today is "slam" – or street poetry. This genre flourished in the early 1990s, worldwide, to address issues of race and gender, having ancient roots in spoken word African-American poetry. Poetry as a genre also flourished in the context of the Arab Spring to denounce regime abuse and corruption (Levine 2015). In fact, Levine argues that poetry suffuses most other art forms in revolutionary struggles as "everything is poetry," from the slogans chanted by masses of protestors to the rhymes dropped by musicians and the captions written by political cartoonists. Underscoring the core role of affects not only in art but in all revolutionary upsurges, he highlights the affective power of poetry – "tarab" in Arabic – in triggering both pleasure and reciprocation of emotion between performers and their audiences (2015, 1282). Levine also emphasizes the unique historical role of poetry within Arabo–Islamic culture and Arabic language, from classical Arab poetry to modern poetry and hip-hop. He discusses the historical role of poetry in Arab nationalist struggles and politics where poetry was almost an "antibody" against authoritarian regimes and human rights abuses, as

well as the most recent role of hip-hop, which is almost the sung equivalent of slam poetry, as the most favored cultural forms of the Arab revolutionary youth today.

Similarly, in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, cooke and Lawrence (2005) argue that against the backdrop of the Orientalist trope which aims to champion Western civilization by framing Muslims (in the Media) as regressive outsiders who reject modernity, 21st century Muslim hip-hop, a genre that is very much similar to slam poetry, has emerged as one of the major networks for Islamic identity to contest this Orientalist frame and provide a counter-hegemonic discourse which foregrounds social cohesion in Islamic societies and a deep awareness of and sensibility about social justice issues. For instance, in 2014, Sana al-Yemen, a then 23-year-old journalism graduate born in Yemen and raised in London, composed an anti-ISIS poem which went viral on YouTube to denounce the atrocities and human rights violations committed by the Islamic State in Northern Iraq. Titled *"*This is not my Islam: A message to ISIS," the poem aimed to provide an alternative discourse on Islam and Muslims, one that promotes peace and social unity and rejects the extremist ideology of Islamist Wahhabism (Finn 2015). Amal Kassir, a Syrian-American slam poet also defies the dominant Western stereotypes which depict veiled Muslim women (like her) as passive, submissive and without agency. In her slams, she displays a strong social and political awareness by tackling topics of social justice – ranging from the suffering of the Syrian people during the country's ongoing civil war to the complete apathy of the U.S government towards the Syrian humanitarian crisis (Kerkhoff 2016). In this study, my objective is to investigate the role of slam poetry. I am particularly interested in the ways that slam is increasingly being re-appropriated by Arab (and especially Moroccan) women *artivists* today to advocate for women's rights and social justice, concomitantly.

Methodology

My methodology in this chapter is essentially qualitative. As feminist interviewing allows the researcher to gain a new and fresh perspective on the lives of respondents living in a particular community or society, I chose to conduct a (feminist) interview with the selected slam poet and activist Noussayba (Hesse-Biber 2013). In *Feminist Research Practice*, Nagy Hesse-Biber (2013) defines the practice of feminist interviewing as the retrieval of the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated, by focusing on issues of social change and social justice for women and other oppressed groups.

As mentioned previously, (slam) poetry has long historical roots with political resistance and revolutionary tides in the Arab region. Because slam poetry is the modern equivalent of ancient poetry and has, therefore, become one of the favorite resistance genres for political activists across the region, especially for the youth, I chose to focus on slam as an artistic genre in this chapter. Since I am originally from Morocco and that Morocco has witnessed a unique experience of the Arab Spring where the MV20F was quickly co-opted by the Moroccan regime (i.e., the King and the political elites) with the adoption of a reformed constitution in June 2011 that did not yield effective and sustainable social change (Boutkhil 2016; Daadaoui 2017), I chose to focus on Morocco as a country and on Noussayba Lahlou as an artist, who is currently one of the most famous female slam poets in Morocco. Noussayba is a 24-year-old Moroccan slam poet and doctoral student in French literature. For the past three years, she has traveled across the country to denounce rampant social inequalities in Morocco with her bittersweet slams written in French. She is best known for her famous slam "Identity Crisis," which she performed in 2015, where she denounces widespread regime corruption in the country.

For the purposes of sharing and disseminating her slam poetry, Noussayba Lahlou distributes her work across all social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. She currently has around three thousand followers on Instagram (Noussayba. 2020a) and 835 subscribers on her YouTube channel (Noussayba 2020b). While she only has 14 followers on Twitter (Noussayba 2020c), her Facebook page (Noussayba 2020d) gathers over five thousand fans (i.e. subscriptions). She also has more than six thousand friends on her personal Facebook account. As Noussayba told me during her interview, social media and digital technologies have been particularly helpful for her to disseminate her slam poetry and acquire the notoriety she has today. She first publishes her poems on her social media platforms. These are then picked up by her fans and followers and shared again on their (own) private accounts:

> My slams are first published on my YouTube channel, then on my Facebook page and sometimes I would share an excerpt on Instagram too. The people who follow me on social networks are generous in terms of sharing. They do not hesitate to share my content as soon as it is published and this encourages me enormously. All my published texts are accompanied by a video and sometimes with subtitles. These are necessary steps in creating the form and shape that I give to my "art." Once the writing of a text is finished, I usually select an instrumental and then I record my slam (Noussayba 2019).

However, Noussayba confided that whereas previously, from 2015 to 2018, she had been particularly active across all social media platforms, today she is no longer as present on these social media. As she puts it, “My current presence on social networks is almost non-existent, because of the period of personal transformation that I am going through at the moment. I am taking some time to reflect on the future directions of my art” (Noussayba 2019).

Qualitative Research Methodology

As I am currently based in Canada and Noussayba lives in Morocco, I decided to conduct an online interview whereby I administered, by email, an online questionnaire to the slam poet and activist who chose to receive and answer all my questions in English. The structured interview included questions such as: *What is the overall objective of your art? What does it talk about and which audience does it target primarily?; “Why did you choose slam poetry specifically as an art genre? How is it appropriate to the message you aim to convey to your audience?; “How does your art tackle the theme of social justice?*

In addition to conducting an online interview with the activist, I also did a content analysis of eight of Noussayba’s most recent slams written in French. These slams were selected with the help of the artist by paying attention to factors such as contemporaneity, relevance, and saliency (i.e. in terms of the most famous and the ones which convey the ideology of the artist the best). As Noussayba told me during our interview: “these selected texts represent my overall ideas and thoughts at the moment. They also represent me and my art the most” (Noussayba 2019). The selected slams included the following: “*Introduction*” (“Introduction”), “*Maladresse*” (“Clumsiness”); “*J’accuse*” (“I accuse”), “*Crise d’identité*” (“Identity Crisis”), “*Hiver Arabe*” (“Arab Winter”), “*Ces Gens-là*” (“Those People”), “*Reste en Fourmi*” ("Stay Brave") and, finally, “*Ana Machi Mchicha*” (“I’m not a Cat”). All these slams were produced between 2015 and 2019, a few years following the events of the “Moroccan Spring” of 2011.

Figure 12. Picture of Noussayba- taken from her social media accounts

Findings

My analysis reveals that Noussayba actively advocates for political resistance and social change through her art (i.e., slam poetry). Her slams are a direct call for political mobilization and a celebration of revolutionary figures and symbols, including herself. In her slam "*Crise d'identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), she particularly emphasizes this point: "*C'est pour ça qu'on va lutter / Je reste là et je ne vais pas quitter*" ("That's why we're going to fight / I'm going to stay here and I'm not going to leave"). She also advocates for social change by denouncing various forms of social injustice, including regime abuse and corruption. In the same slam, she underscores: "*C'est vrai que mes paroles ne sont pas pour plaire / C'est de l'art; il dérange... il est tout doucement révolutionnaire*" ("It's true that my words are not here to please / It's Art; it bothers... it is gently revolutionary").

A content analysis of Noussayba's eight most salient slams, including a close reading of those poems, and my interview with the artist, reveal major patterns in terms of the themes (and issues) that she is interested in and effectively addresses. Under the main theme of social justice, Noussayba's poems tackle several sub themes such as the corruption and authoritarianism of the Moroccan political regime, the lack of societal awareness in the country, women's rights, anti-imperialist and environmental concerns, and the rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrants' sentiment in today's world. As Noussayba told me in her interview: "My work celebrates tolerance, human values, love, gender equality, friendship, solitude and a lot more" (Noussayba 2019). In one of her most famous slams, "*Hiver Arabe*" ("Arab Winter"), the slam poet contrasts the violence, hatred, and animosity of the Moroccan

political system with the peace, love, and compassion that her slams aim to convey: *"Je t'écrirai les battements du coeur que la haine oppresse/ Je jetterai des cris d'amour parce que j'adore comment tu stresses/ Que tes larmes coulent sur ma peau sèche/Qu'ils cessent ces discours de bassesse dans ces oreilles de poétesse"* ("I will write you the heartbeat that hatred oppresses / I'll shout love because I love how you stress / May your tears flow on my dry skin / Let them stop these speeches of meanness in these poetess' ears").

Slamming the corrupt "poli-Dogs"

The major theme of Noussayba's slams is the corruption of the Moroccan political elite and the political system as a whole. There are clear references in her work to the corruption of the political dissidents whom she consistently describes as untrustworthy people who only pursue their personal interests. Her slam "*Introduction*" is particularly geared towards expressing her deep-seated distrust of the Moroccan politicians. She begins by addressing her audience and inviting them to beware of their manipulative rhetoric: "*Repose-toi du slam politique des politiciens et leur petitesse*" ("Rest from the political slam of politicians and their smallness"). Here, Noussayba's use of the idiom "political slam" refers to the politicians' (public) speeches and discourses. She underscores their "smallness," in terms of their content and intentionality, probably due to their lack of transparency and consistency. In "*Ces Gens-la*" ("Those People"), the slam poet denounces the politicians' ability, and even skillfulness, to deceive the people through their speeches by avoiding to address serious woes and issues. They focus, instead, on depicting a fake happy state of the affairs in order to escape criticism and keep the people under control, as she deplores: *"Et puis y a les gens bien/ Comme la politique chez nous et quelques politi-Chiens/ Ils embellissent les mots, ils ne prononcent pas le cancer/ Ils embellissent les maux, et oui monsieur le commissaire!"* ("And then there are the good people / Like politics at home and some poli-"Dogs" / They embellish words, they don't pronounce the word "cancer" / They embellish all evils, oh yes, Mr the Commissioner!"). In these verses, the word "cancer" refers to the social issues plaguing and devastating the country such as illiteracy, political abuse, and corruption, as well as rampant social inequalities that the woman activist tackles in her other slams.

In the same slam, Noussayba discusses one of the main techniques used by those *"Politi-Chiens*" ("poli-Dogs") to fool the people, that is by making fake promises of social change during election times that will never be fulfilled afterward. She then denounces how their failure to meet social and political demands has led to an exacerbation of the already

widespread social inequalities in the country between the all-rich and powerful and the most vulnerable: “Even after Hitler's death, there are still Arians in our country / We give them everything, even if they don't do anything / When they get sick they are reimbursed / And the people we hold him tight, during the elections and then we push him away.” Here, Noussayba probably alludes to one critique that is consistently addressed to the Islamist *Justice and Development Party*—that of their failure to fulfill the main promise of their election campaign and agenda’s “top priority” of improving social (and economic) justice in post-Arab Spring Morocco. In “*Maladresse*” (“Clumsiness”), she uses the technique of contrast and comparison to better describe the utopian ideal those politicians should actually incarnate – that is an ideal of honesty, dedication, and benevolence towards the people, as she writes: *“Je te lirai des discours bien moins sinistres/Je me réveillerai en bonne heure, active au parlement/Je te jure amour et honnêteté loin de leur parler qui nous ment”* (“I'll read you far less sinister speeches / I'll wake up in a good hour, active in parliament / I swear love and honesty away from their talks that lie to us.”)

Therefore, in “*Introduction*,” Noussayba expresses her feelings of loss and confusion, that of a whole young generation which does not hold big hopes for the future because of the actual corruption of the people who are in power, which, in turn, creates a sense of despair and disillusion among the Moroccan youth. She deplores: “*Mais sais-tu comment est-il mon futur?*” (“But do you know what my future is like?”). In fact, during our interview, Noussayba explained the main reason why her slams are particularly geared towards a critique of the Moroccan political office holders, as she told me:

> Most people find that politics comes back a lot in my writing, and that’s because, I think, since our politicians represent and decide for us, I feel like I need to act and react with my poems, refusing to be fearful, shy or quiet in front of any kind of injustice, especially social ones. (Noussayba 2019).

In this testimonial, she underscores the political orientation of her slams, which finds its origins in the politicians’ corruption and lack of accountability. For her, the politicians should be accountable to the people and as long as they will attempt to escape their social and political responsibility, her slams will continue to tackle and criticize them.

Subsequently in “*Introduction*,” the slam poet emphasizes she is angry not at those in power alone but at an entire *system* of abuse and corruption; indignation that reflects in her writing which has now become “saturated” or *fed up*: *“Je te montre mon talent d’écriture/Bourré de faute et de quelques ratures/Apparemment il est devenu rageur de*

nature/Ton système moyenâgeux le sature" ("I show you my writing [skills] / Stuffed with faults and a few scratches / Apparently it became angry by nature / Your medieval system *saturates* it."). She characterizes this system as "medieval," probably in terms of it being outdated and unfit for today's world as well as abusive. The term "outdated" could also be a reference to the failure of the Moroccan Spring and the MV20F in successfully reforming the political system in 2011 where the people's demands for effective social change were co-opted with the adoption of mere "cosmetic" constitutional reforms that, in the long run, only had the effect of maintaining, and even furthering, the status-quo under the newly elected Islamist government (Boutkhil 2016; Daadaoui 2017). Therefore, Noussayba seems to suggest that, subsequent to the wave of social and political consciousness that swept the country during the events of the "Moroccan Spring" back in 2011, the unreformed Moroccan political system (that, in addition, is now run by the Islamists) has become "outdated".

Hence, in the same slam, the activist also describes this (political) system as "*déboussolé*" or "disoriented," probably due to its several malfunctions and contradictions. This realization has led her to take on her role as an artivist in the society, which is to denounce a system that she perceives as a total "mess" and a "chaos, " as she slams: "Unfortunately I can only relay this mess here and all this chaos." In her very famous slam "*Crise d'Identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), she further elaborates on what she means by a *disoriented* system – that is a system filled with contradictions and devoid of logic, where principles and values are turned upside down, where the bad has become a transvestite for the good and vice versa. She explains:

> When logic commits suicide in my country
>
> When the rich come first and the poor have to pay
>
> When the honest becomes a traitor and the truth remains denied
>
> And instead of talking the law pushes us to scream […]
>
> A corrupt system that contradicts itself

Here, the choice of the word "disoriented" is very subtle as it implies that the system can only be fixed by being turned upside down, which is a direct hint at the idea of the *toppling* (i.e., the revolution). In fact, at the end of "*Introduction*," she exhorts the political elite to either start working towards such an ideal or to leave (not only their positions but also) the country: "Leave the society and take the country with you." However, in

"*Maladresse*" ("Clumsiness"), Noussayba elucidates that she does not advocate for a radical revolution as we traditionally understand it: "*Je ne suis pas anti-système, je suis bien d'autres saletés / Car avant d'être anti un système, il faut d'abord être anti sa société*" ("I'm not anti-system; I'm much other dirt / Because before being anti system, you must first be anti-your-society"). Hence, the slam poet refuses the label of anti-system because that would mean she and her art stand against her society, which she argues is definitely not the case. She further elaborates on this idea in her slam "*Reste en Fourmi*" ("Stay Brave"): "Le pays t'aime mais souvent le gouvernement est infidèle" ("The country loves you but more than often the government is unfaithful") – meaning that the government does not represent the overall society and that although it is undeniably corrupt, this does not justify the people turning against their own country. The above verses express a tough negotiation between the idea of being a revolutionary and yet remaining faithful and loyal to one's homeland. In fact, Noussayba does not seem to advocate for a revolution in its traditional sense, that is a toppling of the system. She is rather in the favor of a slow but definite reform of the society, as well as a re-building of what she characterizes as a "disoriented" system towards a less corrupt, more equitable, and just one. In this sense, Noussayba carries on exactly the same revolutionary spirit of the Moroccan Spring where activists of the 20MVF did not seek to topple King Mohamed VI's regime, but rather to implement a series of political *reforms* that aimed to restrict the King's powers, improve political transparency and the separation of powers (Abadi 2014; Boutkhil 2016; Ennaji 2016). In "*Maladresse*," the following two verses convey quite skillfully this idea of a more pragmatic, reformist, and sustainable kind of social change: "*Je serai la rebelle conformiste; Et nous vivrons ce rêve de démocrates réalistes*" ("I will be the conformist rebel; And we will live this dream of realist democrats"). Therefore, by continuing to advocate for unfulfilled political demands from the time of the Arab Spring in Morocco and adopting the same reformist (i.e., not radical) political stance of the 20MVF, Noussayba's bittersweet slams exemplify Badran's (2014; 2016) idea of the "continuing (gender) revolution" in post-Arab Spring North African states.

Slamming your "disposable diplomas"

A secondary theme in Noussayba's slams is the corruption of the educational system which, in her sense, reflects the corruption of the politicians and the political system as a whole. First, in her slam "*Introduction*" where she conveys her distrust of the political elites in the country, she also describes most politicians as undeserving of their role and status because of their lack of educational qualification: "*Un fou-tur pour toi c'est ajoutable / Rien*

à faire de ton diplôme jetable / Un diplôme qui ne sait même pas se consoler" ("A fool-tur for you is addable / Nothing to do with your disposable diploma / A degree that can't even console itself"). Describing their degrees as useless and "disposable," Noussayba underscores again the politicians' skill at fooling the people by being able to earn high positions in the government despite their low educational and cultural capitals. These verses also speak to a wider problem of corruption within the educational system in Morocco today where some people resort to paying private schools or Universities to earn their degrees (Hamid 2018). Moreover, through the use of the phrases "*disposable*" (i.e., fake and throwable) and "can't even console itself", Noussayba seems to suggest here it is not impossible some politicians have earned (i.e. bought) their degrees in the same way.

In "*Crise d'Identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), the slam poet further elaborates on the many flaws of the educational system in Morocco which she perceives as highly deficient and ineffective – like the politicians who run it. She deplores: "*L'éducation nationale a démissionné très tôt / Les gamins naissent avec leurs fardeaux*" ("The national education resigned very early / Kids are born with their burdens"). Here, Noussayba denounces the inefficiency of an educational system which creates many hurdles within the society; one of them is the phenomenon of social reproduction. Some children, especially those who belong to less privileged social backgrounds, are doomed not to receive a proper education nor to improve their (low) social status. Badran (2016) points out that women's creative disobedience in contemporary post-revolutionary North Africa states aims to protest the ongoing social inequalities in their societies. Similarly, Noussayba's slams reveal patterns of women's creative activism by tackling issues of social injustice in her country. Finally, in her slam "*Ces Gens-là*" ("Those People"), Noussayba also talks about the deficiencies of a capitalist system of education where students have to either get indebted to get an education today or to compete very harshly for lousy sums of government scholarships that are only granted to a meager minority, as she denounces: "*Et les étudiants qui se battent pour quelques Dirhams de la bourse*" ("Students are fighting for a few Dirhams... those of the scholarship").

Figure 13. Noussayba Lahlou at one of her public performances- taken from her social media accounts

Slamming the "human dream"

In fact, another secondary theme that Noussayba tackles in her slams are the defects of the capitalist system and its devastating consequences not only on individual people and the society as a whole but also on Nature itself. In "*J'accuse*" ("I accuse"), Noussayba deplores: "*Le temps c'est l'argent, le capital, le pétrole*" ("Time is money, capital, oil"), thereby denouncing how life's most precious gift (i.e., time and therefore life itself) has all become about material pursuits in today's capitalist societies. The title of the slam itself "I accuse" is very revealing in the sense that the slammer holds the neoliberal system responsible for several societal woes.

In "*Reste en Fourmi*" ("Stay Brave"), Noussayba deplores, for instance, the role of the neoliberal system in contributing to the rise of a materialist and individualist society that has furthered our social isolation and alienation: "*Une société qui consomme / Mais quels cons nous sommes / Un cocon et vivre seul*" ("A society that consumes, but what jerks we have become / A cocoon and live alone"). In "*Introduction*", she denounces yet another evil product of the capitalist system which is the military-industrial complex that has turned us all into war machines and made us forget about love, solidarity, and companionship – including the artist herself: "*J'aurais aimé tiré sur imbéciles qui vendent des mitraillettes pour s'épanouir*" ("I would have liked to shoot idiots who sell machine guns to flourish"*)*. In the

following verse, Noussayba goes on: “But I'm just a little spoofer who doesn't even know how to harm,” thereby emphasizing her refusal to resort to violence to end to violence despite being tempted to, as well as her powerlessness and helplessness in front of such a barbaric and vicious system. In fact, what the slam poet characterizes as the “disoriented system” discussed above finds its origins not only in the political elites who run the country but also in the type of economic system that governs it. In “*Crise d’Identité*” (“Identity Crisis”), Noussayba provides an example of such a sense of “disorientation” : “*Et même si les Smartphone se vendent en vitrines et les livres par terre*” (“And even if today smartphones are sold on shop windows and books on the floor”). Such a blatant contradiction exemplifies one of the flaws of today’s capitalist system and underscores how the society has become “disoriented” by giving more worth and value to material possessions (even the most toxic and least productive ones) over immaterial ones (i.e., cultural, educational and spiritual).

In “*J’accuse*” (“I accuse”), Noussayba also links these critiques of the capitalist system to environmentalist concerns, in the sense that she perceives the consequences of the system on people and Nature are the same and emanate from the same origin: *“Nous ne connaissons pas une autre plaine pour nous réparer/ Possessifs de nature, la terre nous nous en sommes emparée”* (“We don’t know any other place where we can breathe / Possessive by nature, we have taken over the earth”). Here, Noussayba denounces the role of today’s (capitalist) system in alienating and destroying our nature, the only ecosystem where we can live and thrive, which has furthered our sense of confusion and *disorientation*. Therefore, as an alternative to the capitalist society, the artist advocates for the “Human Dream,” probably in contradistinction with the American Dream that is at the origin of today’s neoliberal system. In “*J’accuse*” (“I accuse”) again, she claims: “*Je prône le* humain dream*, et il n’a pas besoin d’une boussole*” (“I advocate the human dream, and it doesn't need a compass”). The use of the word compass is also strategic here as it could be a direct reference to the “disoriented” system she alludes to in her slam “*Introduction*.” To find one’s way in a disoriented space, one needs a compass. However, if we were to live in the Human (not the American) Dream, we will no longer live in a system full of contradictions where we constantly need a tool to *re-orient ourselves* and re-discover our (more humanist) nature.

Slamming against social backwardness

Noussayba also links her attacks on the corrupt political system and the exploitative neoliberal economic system in Morocco to an overall problem of social awareness in the country. In this sense, she does not place the entire blame on the politicians (and the system)

but admits that a part of the responsibility is also shared by the people themselves who are either inimical to social change or too fearful to stand up against corruption and injustice. In "*Crise d'Identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), she first tackles the problem of toxic and backward mentalities in the country which impede the society from evolving towards a more just and egalitarian one. She decries: "*Tout le monde se mêle de tout le monde même si c'est pas leur affaire*" ("Everyone meddles with everyone even if it's not their business"). She then goes on to enumerate the flaws of what she perceives as a particularly passive and unproductive society: "Everyone wants change but no one is ready to change;" "We're unemployed and often we don't have anything to do;" "Our society is still a teenager / She doesn't want to move just to receive gifts." In this sense, Noussayba presents an intersectional analysis where she posits that political corruption, economic exploitation and lack of societal awareness contribute altogether to the reproduction of social injustice in present day Morocco.

Therefore, in "*Crise d'Identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), the slammer urges the Moroccan people to become more mature and better aware of the situation in the country, as well as to stop living the fake picture that the politicians have so skillfully depicted for them: *"Une société enfantine […]/ Un peuple en enfer qui se croit au paradis/ Qui croit qu'on a une vie pourtant ne vivons que sa parodie"* ("A childlike society […] / A people in hell who think they're in heaven / Who believes that we have a life yet live only his parody"). She also sends a call for the people to become more aware of systemic oppression, including the extent of corruption and social injustices plaguing her country, and therefore, to regain a sense of dignity and freedom: "*Vivez librement, dignement ou au moins perdez la vie à essayer*" ("Live freely, with dignity or at least lose your life trying"). In this sense, Noussayba argues that change starts first at the individual level and that a societal change in people's mentalities and attitudes is needed for Morocco to start evolving towards a more just social, political, and economic society. Hence, the slammer claims she will be the first to stand still in the face of corruption and social injustice, and that she refuses to leave until she sees the change she hopes for her country turn into a reality; her slams become her weapon through which she brings hope and resilience: "*Je reste là et je ne vais pas quitter*" ("Despite all this I'm staying here and I'm not going to leave"). As mentioned previously, because human dignity was the core theme of the Arab Spring, Noussayba's slams are inscribed in a specific sociopolitical context that is the aftermath of the revolutions where the artist–activist continues advocating for social justice. Finally, talking about her own subjectivity as a writer-activist in impacting wider social change, Noussayba also underscored this aspect during our interview:

> I've always considered myself a superhero. Part of me knows I am not and might never be, but it's like that sweet lie or little hope that keeps me going. It motivates me to go forward. It justifies my existence and role in this world, thinking that I might, through my writing, make a change and push this world to become a better one (Noussayba 2019).

Slamming xenophobia and radical nationalism

Another social theme that Noussayba's slams aim to tackle and where change is required, both at the individual and the institutional levels, is the rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment in our day and age. The beginning of her slam "*J'accuse*" ("I accuse") is particularly full of references to the vocabulary of dreams (of travel), frontiers and foreignness whereby she skillfully introduces the theme of migration: "*Nous Sommes tous nés quelque part/ Dans un coin du monde entouré des remparts/Et on veut partir on rêve d'un départ"*("We're all born somewhere / In a corner of the world surrounded by ramparts / We want to leave and we dream of departure"). In the following verses, the rhetorical question: "*Peut-on vraiment se permettre de rêver?*" ("Can we really afford to dream?") introduces the difficulty of dreaming and therefore leaving and becoming a migrant in today's world. The contemporary (gradual) rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment is best conveyed in the following verses: *"On ne peut pas toujours se permettre de rêver/De sourire aux étrangers, et accueillir des étrangetés"; |Je ne suis qu'un immigré, je cause la migraine, bon gré, mal gré"* ("We can't always afford to dream / Smiling at strangers, and welcoming strangeness; "I'm just an immigrant, I cause migraine, willingly, unwillingly").

Then, Noussayba moves on to convey her feelings of anger in the face of this difficulty and even impossibility (of migrating), especially when she realizes the extent of racism and radical nationalism today: "*Mais être rejeté par un terrier pour une différence de nationalité? / Me met les nerfs / Ça m'énerve*" ("But to be rejected for a difference of nationality? / Gets on my nerves / It pisses me off"); "*On en a ras-le-bol d'attendre un visa pour mettre les pieds sur un sol*" ("We're fed up with waiting for a visa to set foot on a floor"). Subsequently, she underscores her indignation at one of the consequences of radical nationalism today – that is the rise of isolationism and the need to build frontiers between people, as she deplores: "Are there public and private lands? / Once upon a time, a world became a small village and now it is on the pavement"; "Citizen of a torn world, divided into ten poles." These verses also convey a sense of nostalgia for a time when there were no dividing lines between human beings, where all the people were just one (i.e., a village), and

now this sense of unity is slowly falling apart, and with it the entire whole (i.e., on the pavement). The title of the slam "*J'accuse*" ("I accuse") is also revealing here in the sense that it addresses a direct critique to the governments that promote and–or adopt such anti-immigration policies. At last, she concludes by re-affirming her sense of being against all human divisions (on the basis of national origin, ethnicity or religion) and frontiers, and thereby re-invokes the need to bring back that lost sense of human solidarity and unity, which once made the world one, and still does for those who stand against racism and divisions:

> Too bad the universe is in me I am neither Moroccan nor foreign
> Keep clinging to your little homeland and its colossal borders
> Because as long as there are human beings on earth
> You'll only have your only small country
> And we'll have the whole earth

Slamming a feminist "cancer"

Noussayba's poems also address the crucial theme of women's rights which she tackles primarily in her slam "*Ana Machi Mchicha*" ("I am not a Cat"). She is concerned about the degree of corruption of the political system which also has negative consequences on the women's condition in the country. Her main argument is that the Moroccan government (and the people) should be concerned with more fundamental issues in relation to women's rights rather than merely superficial and ornamental ones. In "*Ces gens-la*" ("Those People"), she particularly underscores this idea by pointing out: "*Et les femmes on les défend juste quand il s'agit des jupes, des bisous et des blouses*" ("And women we only defend their rights when it comes to skirts, kisses, and blouses"). In fact, the slammer deplores how the Moroccan people and government are not concerned with crucial issues when it comes to the women's condition in the country, such as the extent of domestic abuse and the low levels of female education and literacy. What Noussayba also denounces here is that when the government seems concerned with women's rights, it is, in fact, only a manifestation of "feminist pink-washing." This phenomenon designs a strategy of "state feminism" whereby the leaders of developing countries aim to boast gender equality and modernity on the surface to align with imperialist feminist agendas and attract Western funding while avoiding to tackle more serious issues in relation to women's rights that will have a more substantial impact on their societies. A prominent example of this phenomenon was former Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi's army of women bodyguards and fighters which he used to boast feminist commitments on the surface (i.e., gender equality) while, in reality, those women

were captive sexual slaves in Gaddafi's palaces and victims of several forms of abuse (Rogers 2016).

In the same slam, Noussayba addresses a woman and informs her that she has a "cancer": "Good morning, ma'am! You have cancer, go outside / you can't have a life or a husband, our society is made for the strong." The word "cancer" could refer to the multiple social constraints that women have to deal with on a daily basis in Morocco and that Noussayba addresses particularly in her slam "*Ana Machi Mchicha*" ("I am not a Cat"). From the social pressures to get married ("Nice girls get married right way") and conform to the ideals of femininity ("Be sweet, beautiful, and take care of your face […] A woman who gets angry is not beautiful to look at") to limited geographic (and intellectual) mobility ("Don't come home late / Do not change your mind often / […] Do not get mixed up with thoughts... shopping will make you feel better"), and limited divorce rights ("Never a divorce, don't be crazy and learn to bear"), these social constraints have become a sort of burden (i.e., "cancer") on Moroccan women to bear. This idea is further reinforced through her argument that the "society is only made for the strong," that is the men and the government. In the same slam, she points out the extent of sexual harassment in Morocco: "Street, work, hospital café / Don't think too much, you're still prey to the male," thereby denouncing the impact of those social woes and injustices against women which have resulted in giving them "cancer." Her earlier invocation for women to "go outside" aims to emphasize that they do not have their place in such a society where they are constantly discouraged from claiming their place in the public sphere, a space that belongs to men only. Subsequently, Noussayba denounces the unachievable beauty ideals and standards and their devastating effects on the bodies (and lives) of Moroccan women: "We can't take a picture of you, you're going to break the décor you're pale, without hair / You don't even have a beautiful body;" "Why do you want to know how much I weigh / you see we can't all be J-Lopez / […] I can do better than a model who walks off"). Therefore, by denouncing the effects of the beauty industry on women, the slam poet tackles a serious feminist issue, thereby distinguishing her committed art from the government's pink-washed concerns and invokes her (male) audience to start considering and treating women as fully-fledged beings and their equals: *"Behind every woman, there is her experience, her thoughts, and herself."*

Finally, during our interview, Noussayba underscored how slam poetry was an appropriate medium for her to work around those social pressures, including the necessity of conforming to one's gender role, in order to express herself freely in public:

> Considering the environment and the society I was brought up in, where rap is still largely perceived as a man-dominated domain, and due to the social pressures I was subjected to for thinking about rapping in public, slam poetry was an alternative medium I could use to express myself. Self and peer censorship, along with the traditional gender roles, had drawn me to find a "suitable" art form for my gender (Noussayba 2019).

Slamming the Moroccan Winter

Finally, Noussayba's slams also aim to protest against the extent of despotic rule and authoritarianism in the Arab region by taking Morocco's failed reform as a case study and its devastating consequences on the people and the society. As mentioned previously, her slam "*Hiver Arabe*" ("Arab Winter") is a direct reference to the events of the Arab Spring of 2011, a series of uprisings which aimed to overthrow authoritarian regimes across the Arab region through both violent and non-violent protests. The artist uses the metaphor of the "Winter" to underscore the failure of these uprisings in positively affecting social change in the country, an aspect that will be discussed later in this section.

In this slam, the activist first compares the despotic Arab rulers to Gods: "*Nos dieux ne se cachent pas derrières les nuages mais dans des grottes*" ("Our Gods do not hide behind the clouds but in caves"), that is probably in reference to the former Iraqi President Sadam Hussein who was found hiding in a hut in Iraq in 2003 when he was on the run before being sentenced to death, and the rumors around former Al Qaeda leader Bin-Laden being found in a cave in Pakistan before he was shot in 2011 (Foster 2018; Ross 2011). In another verse, she also highlights the greed, malice and opportunism of these Arab God-like Kings: "The walls have ears and your Gods have a big belly." Hence, the metaphor of Kings incarnating Gods also alludes to them acting all-powerful and exploitative as if they are above all human and mundane laws.

In "*Hiver Arabe*" ("Arab Winter"), Noussayba particularly compares Moroccan King Mohamed VI, who also holds the title of *Emir el Muminin* (i.e., the Prince of the Faithful), to God and talks about her newfound "heresy", which she refers to repeatedly in her slam: "*Je suis devenue infidèle, oui et je le crierai sur les toits*" ("I've become unfaithful, yes, and I'll shout it from the rooftops"); "*Hérétique je ne suivrai plus votre troupeau*" ("Heretic I will no longer follow your flock"); *Je suis un être désormais sans religion* ("I am now a being without religion"). This allegory of the heresy actually alludes to her switching from a loyal follower of the regime to a fierce opponent (and, perhaps, even a revolutionary) due to her refusal to recognize its leader as legitimate. However, this shift does not come without the

realization of the danger it entails for her life, thereby further underscoring the regime's despotism due to its hostility towards all forms of opposition and contestation: "*Seigneur je vous annonce que j'arrête la prière / Et je sais qu'après cette amorce j'irai tout droit au cimetière*" ("Lord I announce to you that I renounce the prayer / And I know that after this confession I will go straight to the cemetery"); "*J'ai choisi le clan des infidèles même s'il y en a que très peu / Et pas la peine de me dire qu'en parler fait mourir*" ("I chose the clan of infidels even if there are very few / And you don't have to tell me that talking about it makes you die"). By emphasizing the fact that there are only a few infidels in the country, Noussayba seems to suggest there are a few people who dare to revolt against the system or express their opposition – for they are either too afraid for their lives or corrupt themselves. Then, the activist officially declares herself a stateless person after her newfound "heresy": "Take this nationality card and never give it back to me / This little piece of paper does not identify me!"

Subsequently, Noussayba moves on to elucidate the motives behind her becoming a stateless activist that is, first, her deep-seated distrust of the leader of the system: "Goodbye to the God you are, your power stops when the people are suspicious" as well as the hatred that it has instilled in her: "Nothing comes out of nothing and I have reasons for my hatred / […] What nation are you talking about, I feel hatred for all that I loved." In fact, in "*Maladresse*" ("Clumsiness"), the slam poet explains that the main reason behind her becoming an activist is her "suffering," a feeling that finds its origins in the many injustices of the political system which instills distrust and animosity in the people, including her: "*La souffrance a fait de moi une activiste sur la piste*" ("The suffering made me an activist on the trail"). Such suffering is also caused by a system that abuses and brutalizes its people; in "*Hiver Arabe*" ("Arab Winter") she explains: "You don't even back down to give us room / While we used to fight to keep you out of the way / Perched on thrones made up of human corpses." In "*Crise d'Identité*" ("Identity Crisis"), she deplores how this suffering is due not only to the physical violence but also to the mental and moral violence (i.e., the deception, the humiliation) that the Moroccan system inflicts upon its people: *"Vivons dans la déception, des décès par million, et on t'apprend en t'humiliant"* ("Let's live in disappointment, deaths by a million, and they teach you by humiliating you")

Therefore, Noussayba underscores that such forms of abuse and humiliation can only produce revolutionary spirits like hers; in this sense, the revolution becomes a fatality in the face of oppression and despotism: *"Celui qui sème la dictature récoltera un jour des braves Il récoltera la rage, la révolution mais jamais des esclaves"* ("Whoever sows dictatorship

will one day reap from the brave / He will reap rage and revolution but never slaves"). Hence, Noussayba's newfound "heresy" in "Arab Winter," finds its origins in the many forms of social abuses and injustices she was a witness to in her country and which made it impossible for her to give allegiance to the system any longer – like the thousands of Moroccans who slid to "heresy" by publicly expressing their opposition to the regime and demanding a thorough reform of the political system during a series of demonstrations that marked the Moroccan Spring from February to June 2011 (Abadi 2014).

However, in one of the final verses, Noussayba points out that the Arab Spring has actually turned into a Winter: "*Je te signale que c'est un hiver Arabe*" ("And I'd like to point out that it's an Arab winter"). In fact, in the aftermath of the series of revolutions, a blatant backlash against human and women's rights was evident in most North African post-revolutionary states with the rise of political instability and political Islam to power and the counterrevolution against women's constitutional rights (Sadiqi 2016). For instance, the "Moroccan Spring" was marked by the rise of political Islam (the PJD) to power for the first time in the history of the country in November 2011. This must be the reason behind Noussayba's use of the metaphor of the "Winter," instead of the "Spring." In Morocco particularly, the February 20 Movement (MV20F) for freedom and individual liberties was quickly co-opted by the Moroccan regime. The adoption of a new constitution in June 2011 that allegedly restricted many of the King's political prerogatives, by strengthening the role of the prime minister and a newly elected legislature, and reaffirmed the social rights of other marginalized social groups, such as women and the Native peoples of Morocco – the Berber or Amazighs – allowed to alleviate some of the people's demands without effectively institutionalizing equality between the sexes or effecting concrete social change in people's everyday lives (Boutkhil 2016; Daadaoui 2017; Ennaji 2016). This power of the King (and the political system) to co-opt an entire revolution is best conveyed in Noussayba's two subsequent verses: "*Mais depuis quand t'as le pouvoir sur les saisons*" ("But since you have the power over the seasons" that is to make a Spring a winter and vice versa), and: "*Celui qui est destiné à tomber, bizarrement un jour se relève*" ("Whoever is destined to fall, strangely one day rises"), that is in reference to the Moroccan King and his political regime still holding steady and unreformed despite the local revolutionary movement of the MV20F. Therefore, Noussayba's slam "Arab Winter" advocates the necessity for the revolution to be carried on exactly because it was co-opted and hijacked by the regime and, therefore, never had the chance to impact the Moroccan society in a significant and meaningful way. In some aspects, it even materialized as a backlash against previously secured social and political

rights. In fact, during our interview, Noussayba underscored that the two oxymorons she used in her slam "Clumsiness" ("I will be the conformist rebel" and "We will live this dream of realist democrats") also speak to her (and the Moroccan people's) surrender and resignation subsequent to their crushed dreams of revolution and reform from the time of the Arab Spring (Noussayba 2019). In this sense, her slams advocate that the revolution needs to *continue* until social and political liberties are effectively affected and implemented in the Moroccan society, not merely cosmetically or in the state constitution only, thereby reflecting Badran's (2014; 2016) idea of the continuing (cultural and gender) revolution in the North African region today. While her bittersweet slams appear to be quite bold and daring, Noussayba told me during our interview: "I have never had any reaction from the government" (Noussayba 2019). Therefore, it seems the Moroccan government never reacted to Noussayba's revolutionary slams, probably to avoid any negative reactions against the establishment, whether nationally or internationally, including from the Moroccan artist and activist community, and, thereby, to avoid stirring a national controversy. But perhaps more importantly, the government did not wish to give Noussayba (and her revolutionary slams) any recognition or credit of any sort.

Conclusion

My analysis of Noussayba's slam poetry and my interview with her reveal that her slam aims to deplore and denounce systemic oppression and several forms of social injustice that continue to plague contemporary (i.e., post-Arab Spring) Morocco. Her revolutionary verses promote such diverse principles and ideals as gender equality, environmentalist awareness, education for all, political transparency, democratic commitment, and other humanist values. This confirms Wahba's (2016, 67) initial argument in relation to women's activism in the context of the Arab Spring where their involvement in the series of uprisings were not only aimed at the removal of the ruler but directed against all forms of oppression, including political corruption, economic exploitation, gender inequality and lack of societal awareness. Such a form of activism where women activists aim to advocate for gender equality and social justice concomitantly has also been carried beyond the revolutions of the Arab Spring to the present context through creative disobedience patterns. In fact, Badran (2016) points out that women's creative disobedience in contemporary post-revolutionary North African states aims to protest the ongoing gender and social inequalities in their

societies that have persisted until the present day despite the so-called progressive movements of the Arab Spring. In this sense, Noussayba's slams are an effective expression of women's creative disobedience in Post-Arab Spring North Africa where women activists are increasingly resorting to art as a revolutionary tool to continue advocating for unfulfilled demands from a decade ago.

Noussayba's slam "Arab Winter" is even a direct reference to the events of the Arab Spring. By focusing on the negative outcomes of the Arab uprisings, her objective is to *continue* advocating for social justice in the aftermath of the "Moroccan Spring". This also confirms Badran's (2014; 2016) idea of the *continuing (gender) revolution* in the North African region today which manifests itself, among other aspects, in women's creative disobedience patterns and art activism. In this sense, Noussayba's political slam and revolutionary verses are inscribed in a specific sociopolitical context that is the aftermath of the Arab Spring where the activist is carrying on the same reformist revolutionary spirit of the MV20F to advocate, not for a mere toppling of the system, but for genuine social, political and economic reforms through her progressive ideals. In fact, as pointed out in the previous sections, Noussayba's writings do not advocate for a radical political revolution per se, but rather, for a gradual evolution and revolution of the minds and spirits towards a more just and egalitarian society, a sort of more sustainable change that can be carried on beyond the time of the revolutions.

Finally, during our interview, Noussayba told me that the audience's reaction to her slams is generally positive, welcoming, and even enthusiastic. For instance, the music video of her slam "*Reste en Fourmi*" ("Stay Brave"), which was viewed over seven thousand times, received over three hundred and thirty likes on her YouTube channel with only two dislikes; she continued: "There have been some negative reactions sometimes but these were rare; this is a truth that cannot be denied but also one of the reasons that drives me to keep moving forward today" (Noussayba 2019). Likewise, the Moroccan civil society also seems to be very enthusiastic about Noussayba's slam poetry. During a fieldwork I conducted recently in Morocco with several *artivists* and cultural actors in the artistic scene, a few representatives from *l'Atelier de l'Observatoire*, a local NGO specialized in art and research to develop socially participative projects by bringing artists, students, researchers, and residents together, told me that they have been thrilled to work with Noussayba Lahlou on a project where she was officially invited to write and perform a slam in the Moroccan dialect of Darija. The objective of the project was to bring slam poetry into the working-class neighborhoods of the economic capital (Casablanca) in order to raise the marginalized

youth's awareness about social justice issues and trigger meaningful societal debates. Noussayba ended up writing a slam in Darija in collaboration with the youth of the working-class neighborhood of Ain Chok, where they provided insights on their daily life in the outskirts of the city and told their stories of social, political and economic disillusion. This co-participative approach underscores one of the tenets of artivism, which is a bottom-up approach that aims to shed light on community concerns through creative and constructive tools (Kuang 2004). As for the Moroccan government, as mentioned earlier, Noussayba never received any reaction. They were no encouraging comments nor threats, attempts of intimidation or legal pursuits. Therefore, for the establishment, it is as if her slams do not exist – or else only exist in a sort of "buffer zone" where she is given no recognition. Last but not least, Noussayba insisted on underscoring the open invitation for peace, freedom, and equality that her slam poetry constitutes for all peoples, regardless of national origin, ethnicity, or religious background:

> My poems address different topics such as politics, social problems, gender equality, humanity in general... which I think are topics that are of interest not only to adults but also to teenagers. So, when I write and publish, I don't choose an audience… but the audience, instead, chooses my poems (Noussayba 2019).

CHAPTER 5

Naima Zitane's Revolutionary Play "DIALY": Using the Vagina Trope to "Talk Back" to the Islamist Party's Calls for 'Halal' Art in Morocco

Tazi, Maha (2021). Naima Zitane's Revolutionary Play, Dialy: Using the Vagina Trope to "Talk Back" to the Islamist Party's Calls for 'Halal' Art in Morocco. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 246-269.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss1/15

Abstract

In 2012, at the outset of the "Moroccan Spring" and the election of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) to power, Naima Zitane, a Moroccan feminist playwright and founder of the *Aquarium Theatre*, directed and released her controversial play *"Dialy"* (*Mine* in English) inspired by Ensler's text "*The Vagina Monologues*" and drawing on the real-life testimonies of 150 Moroccan women. In a context where the recently elected Islamist party was calling for 'clean' and 'halal' art, the play tackled the topic of female sexuality and one of the biggest taboos of the Moroccan society- the vagina. Combining a textual analysis of the play's script with an interview I conducted with Naima Zitane, my analysis revealed that *"Dialy"* aims to "talk back" not only to a hegemonic political discourse that restrains Moroccan artists' creativity and freedom of expression, but also to the dominant social norms that alienate female sexuality in Morocco by depicting the vagina as the ultimate social taboo. While it was initially banned from being performed in Morocco, "Dialy" managed to create a nationwide controversy around issues of (female) sexuality and artistic freedom; it remains, undoubtedly until today, one of the most famous plays in the history of Moroccan theatre.

Introduction

In November 2018, a new hashtag stirred a controversy around the arts in Morocco--#FreelFenn, which mixes the English and Arabic languages and translates into "Free Art". It was the new watchword for a protest movement born in Casablanca, after the arrest of two young street artists who were prevented from performing in the square of the United Nations earlier in the same month, the preferred address for improvised shows. The artists were

allegedly accused of outrage at the authorities in the exercise of their functions. While they were under arrest, organizations in the civil society immediately mobilized: "*What did they do wrong?"; "Did they steal anything?",* asked many supporters of street art on Facebook. *"Free our children... Free Art!*", many others protested (Ansamed 2018). This unfortunate event was marked the continuity of earlier restrictive interventions in the field of the arts in Morocco, which find their origins in the election of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) to power in 2011 following the events of the "Moroccan Spring".

Subsequent to the PJD's victory, one of the leaders of the party, Najib Boulif, made a public statement announcing the party's vision on the role of art in the society and their overall position on Moroccan artists' creativity. In his statement, Boulif underscored that the PJD will only tolerate and promote "clean art", referring to morally acceptable forms of art- or "halal" art so to speak. "Halal" is a term commonly used in the Qu'ran and other Islamic religious laws to designate the categories of lawful or allowed conduct (Lowry 2006). In his statement, Boulif mentioned a specific incident, when one of the major figures of Moroccan cinema, Latefa Ahrrare, walked in at the national *11th International Film Festival,* that was held in Marrakech in 2011, with a dress showing one naked leg. He underscored that the party will not allow the rendition of what he hyperbolically characterized as "nude scenes" in any discipline or genre of artistic expression (Ait Akdim 2012). The statement created a public outcry among the Moroccan artist and activist community, who saw it as a direct violation of their freedom of creativity and expression.

Moreover, directly following the election of the PJD, the party appointed of only one female minister of *Social and Family Affairs* in the first Islamist-led government, compared to 6 women before the outbreak of the MV20F, and showed a strong reluctancy of the Islamists to implement the provisions of the new constitution, namely on the issue of gender parity (Yachoulti 2015; Ennaji 2016). These were two alarming developments that have severely disappointed Moroccan women in the direct aftermath of the uprising. In the context of the protest movements unfolding in the Arab world and Morocco, Naima Zitane, a famous Moroccan activist and feminist playwright, and founder of the *Aquarium Theatre*, wanted to contribute, through art, to the wave of social and political awakening in the region by pointing out the vulnerable situation of women in these countries through the role of art. It is, therefore, in these highly tense and sensitive socio-political circumstances that Zitane produced and released the famous piece "Dialy" (Racines Association 2017). As Naima told me during our interview (2019): "My overall mission is the implementation of gender

equality and the dissemination of gender culture through the use of art in general and theatre in particular" (Zitane 2019).

In fact, only a few months after the PJD's election, and perhaps as a response to the party's persistent calls for "halal" art, Naima Zitane released her play "Dialy" inspired by Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monogues*, a seminal text that tackles several controversial feminist topics such as consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences, body image, genital mutilation, vaginal care and sex work through the eyes of women of various ages, races and sexual orientations. In "Dialy", Naima addresses the topic of female sexuality which is still widely considered taboo in a predominantly conservative and religious society such as Morocco. The play also tackles one of the top taboos of the Moroccan society- the vagina. The title of the play itself "Dialy" (or "mine" in English) indirectly refers to the genital organ of the vagina in the Moroccan Arabic dialect of Darija. Inspired by Ensler's (1996) text but drawing primarily on real life testimonies of 150 Moroccan women from all social walks, "Dialy", I argue, constitutes one of the most transgressive and resonating responses from the Moroccan *artivist* (a portmanteau term combining artist and activist) community to "talk back" to (and, by extension, to subvert) not only the (hegemonic) PJD's political discourse on 'halal' art but also the (dominant) traditional norms of the Moroccan society, especially when it comes to female sexuality.

Given that the existing literature on women's art activism and the *continuing* revolution focuses primarily on Egypt (and to a lesser extent on Tunisia), my objective is to investigate the existence of women's subaltern counterpublics in Morocco today. I focus on theatre as an artistic discipline because from Greek Antiquity to today, theatre has always existed as a tool for the weak, poor and marginalized to denounce power abuse and advocate for social justice (Rankine, 2013). Levine (2015) also notes that theatre has a deeply affective power across the [Arab] region where the language of drama is much stronger than that of poetry or written texts alone (1291). I take Naima Zitane's play "Dialy" especially as a case study as it was one of the most daring interventions that managed to create a nationwide debate and fuelled controversy in Morocco back in 2012, as one reviewer of the play wrote: "Dialy is a rarity for two reasons: because it is quite unique in Morocco, but also because it is hard to catch, very few venues being prepared to brave the scandal of the Moroccan version of the *Vagina Monologues*" (Jardonnet 2015).

I argue that the play presents a counter-hegemonic discourse that breaks all social and political taboos epistemologically, hermeneutically and symbolically in order to foreground women's alienated and *suppressed knowledges* about their sexuality and call for sexual

liberation and emancipation, while "talking back" to and contesting the PJD's conservative position on women's rights and artistic creativity, as well as the overall conservative norms of the Moroccan society.

Women's Revolutionary Feminist Theatre in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

Levine (2015) notes that theatre has enjoyed a period of intense renewed productivity in the context of the Arab uprisings, in particular theatre geared towards the stories and narratives of women. In this context, El Nossery (2016) discusses Dalia Bassiouny's project, *The Sabeel Group for the Arts*, which researches ways of integrating theatre and video to promote women's rights by creating non-traditional plays and performances, including in their most recent project *Tahrir Stories* that re-tells women's stories of the revolution.

El Nossery (2016) also underscores the potential of revolutionary theatre in addressing wider issues of human rights and social justice. She discusses playwright Rania Refaat Shaheen's initiative, *El Pergola Puppet Theater,* which she founded in 2012, to increase political awareness about the new constitution, human and citizenship rights in the country in order to generate nationwide debates on these issues. Further, El Nossery refers to curator Aida al-Kashef's initiative, the *Wonder Box*, a giant, Islamic-patterned disco ball and an ice-cream-cart lookalike which travelled many Egyptian cities in 2013 to raise awareness and promote social justice and democracy through a storytelling genre that had flourished in Egypt many centuries ago. Finally, Sara El Kamel (2012) discusses the *Tahrir Monologues* theatrical project, which aims to preserve the memory of Tahrir Square by telling folktales about the experiences shared by millions of Egyptians in the Square, including women, during the 18 days of "popular disobedience", thereby re-affirming the vital role of art and theatre in revolutionary practice.

Figure 14. Tahrir Monologues Set Design. Symbolic graphical material merged with an environmentally iconic fabric. Taken from the cargocollective.com

Feminist Art Theory

In this chapter, I draw specifically on *feminist art theory* which focuses on a particular aspect of countercultural art and *artivism*- that is art as a medium to reflect on women's lives and experiences, using such self-organizing tactics as the consciousness-raising group, in order to change the foundation for both the production and the reception of contemporary art (Kennedy, 2017). In fact, while Kuang (2004) theorizes *artivism* as a bottom up-approach that sheds light on community concerns to promote societal change and social justice through creative and constructive tools, Mesías-Lema (2018) argues that *artivism* was also influenced by the success of performance, feminism and queer theory 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). In this sense, Kuang (2004) underscores the potential of art, over public discussions and calculated actions, to strengthen community identity and induce social transformation by giving marginalized populations a public platform and a way to express themselves in a funny, motivating and liberating way (154).

Naima Zitane, the Aquarium Theatre and the "Dialy" Case Study

Born in the Moroccan northern city of Chaouen in 1967, Naima Zitane is a female icon of modern Moroccan theatre. Driven by her great passion for the arts and culture, she joined the local Chaouen Theatre at the early age of 13, and later went on to the *Higher*

Institute of Dramatic Art and Cultural Animation (ISADAC) in the then capital city of Rabat. As a fierce feminist activist, playwright and director of several committed plays, Naima Zitane is behind one of the major projects of social theater in the country, the *Aquarium Theatre,* which she founded back in 1994 to promote gender equality and defend the cause of women in Morocco through the role of culture. The *Aquarium Theatre* regularly conducts communication and awareness campaigns throughout Morocco to improve the condition of women and implement their universal rights. Naima Zitane said she chose the name *Aquarium* for her theatre to suggest that "audiences could watch real life from a fishbowl", in reference to the stage (Zitane 2019).

Mixed Qualitative Research Methodology

My methodology is essentially qualitative and consists of a mixed research methodology combining a textual analysis of "Dialy"'s script with a content analysis of a semi-structured interview I conducted online with Naima Zitane. Because of the scarcity of other media materials to analyze "Dialy"- such as online videos, video recordings or excerpts of the performance- given that the play was consistently censored and prohibited from being performed in Morocco- I reached out to directly Naima Zitane who kindly and generously shared the play's script with me. The rationale behind doing a textual analysis of the written text of the play was to retrieve patterns in terms of the ideas and themes tackled, the vocabulary used, the word repetitions that expressed and reflected Naima's creative disobedience *tactics*- i.e., her attempt to "talk back", through theatre, to a hegemonic political discourse and the dominant social norms in Morocco. I paid particular attention to the verbal cues, but also to the hints on the scenography, the actors' body language, and their interactions with one another. While the twenty-three pages long script was originally written in the Moroccan dialect of Darija, I did my content analysis in English and took care of translating, into English, all the direct quotations that I use in the analysis section of this chapter.

My textual analysis of the script is complemented with a content analysis of an online interview I conducted with Naima Zitane. Due to time constraints, Naima could only accommodate a virtual interview by answering a questionnaire that I had administered to her by email. The interview was semi-structured in nature in order to allow Naima some flexibility to respond to some of my questions and offer additional insights that she judged would be valuable to my research. The objective behind conducting a feminist interview with

the playwright was to find out more about the overall mission and social vision of Naima's *Aquarium theatre*, the motivations and purpose behind her 2012 "Dialy" play and the socio-political context in which it was produced and performed. I also wanted to get additional insights on aspects I may have missed in my textual analysis from not being able to attend a performance of "Dialy" or watch it online. Hesse-Biber (2013) defines the practice of feminist interviewing as the retrieval of the *subjugated knowledge* of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated, by focusing on issues of social change for women and other oppressed groups. Hence, the structured interview included questions such as: "*What is the overall objective of your art?; "Why did you choose theatre specifically as an art genre?; How is it appropriate to the message(s) you aim to convey to your audience?"; "What is the main message of 'Dialy' and which audience does it target primarily?"; "What were some of the main reactions to the play, including both from the audience and the Moroccan establishment?"*

Naima Zitane with Christine Taubira, former *Minister of Justice*, during the Dialy performance at the *Institut du Monde Arabe*, Paris

Figure 15. "Naima Zitane with Christine Taubira"- shared by the artist

Analysis

In 2012, only a few months after the events of the so-called "Moroccan Spring" and the accession to power of the *Islamist Justice and Development Party* (PJD) in the country, Naima Zitane directed and released her famous piece "Dialy" (*Mine* in English) inspired by

"The Vagina Monologues" by Eve Ensler. Foregrounding the female genital organ and female sexuality, "Dialy" draws primarily on 150 real-life testimonies of Moroccan women. These testimonies were collected based on listening sessions with Moroccan women from all social walks and backgrounds, and followed by focus groups with academics, workers and souk traders. On stage, far from the platitudinous Orientalist tropes of the harems, the hammams and the Ottoman Sultans' palaces, three Moroccan actors, Nouria Benbrahim, Farida Bouazzaoui and Amal Benhaddou, tell the everyday real-life stories of Moroccan women as the play crisscrosses the memories of women on a journey into the very heart of their intimacy and their painful, touching and hilarious human stories. By staging one of the biggest taboos of the Moroccan society- the vagina- Naima aims to break several taboos and silences anchored in people's mentalities in relation to women's sexuality, the way it is lived, perceived, *endured*, and talked about.

Figure 16. Dialy's Three Actresses Performing on Stage- shared by the artist

The "Dialy" performance which lasts for about fifty minutes begins with a question to the public: *"What is the female sexual organ in Darija?"*. In the play, "dialy" or "mine" refers in the Moroccan Arabic dialect of Darija to the genital organ of the vagina. "Dialy" was used as a euphemism for the actual hyper-taboo word "Tabboun" that could hardly be put on the flyers to promote the play- thereby alluding to the ever presence of both political and moral censorship in the country. In the play, the taboos are first broken epistemologically and hermeneutically, then verbally, visually, psychologically and symbolically. Subsequently, several verbal cues foreground Naima's strategy to use the sexual organ to

underscore the actresses' re-appropriation of their bodies and sexualities through the trope of the vagina, thereby revealing Naima's strategy of using the female sexual organ as a symbol and an allegory to celebrate women's sexuality and advocate for women's sexual and social liberation.

The Vagina Trope: Breaking Social Taboos Epistemologically & Hermeneutically

In this chapter, I draw mainly on *feminist epistemology* which aims to understand the effects of the dominant norms of the patriarchal system on the production of knowledge (or lack thereof), by examining the "influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences" on our evidence and rational constraints (Anderson 1995, 1). In addition, *feminist hermeneutics* is the theory, art and practice of interpretation in the interest of women; it addresses a broad realm of social realities and endeavors to challenge and correct the effects of patriarchy on women by foregrounding women's varied experiences as the major resource for interpretation in a conversation that is "unconstrained by relations of power or ideology in which all nonexclusionary interpretive voices can be educated by one another" (Warnke 1993, 1). Therefore, in my analysis of "Dialy", I am interested in ways that the play breaks several taboos *epistemologically* (i.e., the limits and constraints) in terms of what we usually know about sexuality in Morocco, the conditions of the possibility and permissibility ('halal') of such a knowledge, as well as the enforced limits of what is commonly allowed to know and talk about in relation to (female) sexuality. I am also interested in the ways that the play offers an alternative *reading* and *interpretation* of women's sexual experiences that rejects the dominant narrative (of denial, disavowal and victim-shaming) on women's sexuality and focuses, instead, on the implications and repercussions of those experiences on women's psychological and physiological well-being, thereby also breaking the taboos *hermeneutically*.

From the outset, "Dialy" addresses several societal issues that are usually deemed taboo and not talked about nor effectively dealt with in Morocco. Based on the real-life stories of the women she interviewed and the focus groups she animated, Naima Zitane first tackles the issue of marital rape in Morocco. One of the actresses begins with deploring an emotionally challenging experience with her husband: "I once fought with my husband over my underpants...he really wanted to take them by force..." (Dialy 2012, 3) and a woman's reaction to her experience: "The man you are married to can't rape you! It's your husband for God's sake!" (Dialy 2012, 11). Therefore, drawing on feminist epistemology, Naima Zitane,

underscores the enduring societal *black-out* around the issue of marital rape and the denial of its implications for women's physical and mental well-being, including from other women who themselves adhere to the dominant patriarchal narrative on the issue- a narrative of denial and disavowal. She also condemns the role of the law in contributing to women's (sexual) alienation. During our interview, Naima observed: "Let's take for example: Women's reproductive and bodily rights. How can this be achieved without changing the laws knowing that these laws are passed by the elected government?" (Zitane 2019). In fact, because marital rape has not yet been criminalized in Morocco, Naima Zitane uses theatre as a tool for both raising societal awareness and political lobbying to denounce the law- and by extension the State-'s absence in this arena. Elaborating on this point, Naima also added: "Because the traditional methods -such as round tables, seminars, conferences- are not sufficient or effective, and even less so political discourses, I use the theatrical approach to address the current metamorphoses and contradictions of within our society" (Zitane 2019).

Later in the play, Naima Zitane moves on to address another highly taboo issue in the Moroccan society- i.e., honor killings- by raising her audience's critical awareness on the extent of the issue in this context and the physiological and psychological implications for women's lives; her objective is to create indignation and articulate a conscious feminist call for action. Drawing on the real-life testimonies of the Moroccan women that the playwright interviewed, one of the actresses reports a death threat by a husband to his wife: "If your daughter brings dishonor to this home, I will put one bullet in your head, one in hers and the last one in mine!" (Dialy 2012, 3). Subsequently, the play tackles several social realities linked to the theme of dishonor such as premarital sex, unwanted pregnancy and rape, as the actresses continue telling the painful life stories of the women interviewed: "You remember the one whose father was going to murder her because she came back home pregnant?"; "and the one whose father dismissed her from the house after she lost her virginity...?"; "and yet the other one who had to marry a very old man to save her family's honor...?" (Dialy 2012, 4). Then, a repetition of the phrases "Is she virgin?", "She can't be a virgin!" "She must be a virgin!", "Is she a virgin, or isn't she?" (Dialy 2012, 12) reflects the Moroccan's society's *insane* obsession with virginity, the only standard against which a woman's worth, honor and acceptability are evaluated in the society – that is regardless of whether the woman lost her virginity willingly (love) or unwillingly (rape). Later on, more traumatizing real-life experiences of rape are also brought in the play: "It happened to me while I was leaving school […] they were four men. They locked me up in a house near the cemetery, a dirty and disgusting house, even the mattress they threw me on was stinky..." (Dialy 2012, 9). One of

the actresses, telling an experience of a date rape, sheds light on another bitter social reality in Morocco: “The law won’t have mercy on you... they will say you went home with him on your own feet [willingly]” (Dialy 2012, 5). Therefore, in “Dialy”, Zitane tells *back-to-back* women’s stories and their painful sexual encounters in order to highlighting all the forms of physical, emotional and psychological abuses that women are subjected to on a daily basis in Morocco and that the law doesn’t punish the perpetrators or protect (the victims) from. In fact, women’s voices are commonly silenced in order to prevent them for seeking justice or compensation. Cain (1994) defines feminist historiography as the re-telling of history and social reality from a woman’s perspective to illuminate female experiences and recover the significance of women's voices. Similarly, Naima’s play enfolds as a sort of feminist historiography to *bring to life* the alienated stories and the *suppressed knowledges* (Foucault 1972) of the 150 women she interviewed- stories that can be generalized to the average Moroccan woman and her everyday struggles.

Figure 17. Dialy’s Performance during the International Action Festival in Belgium- shared by the artist

The play continues to address other social taboos such as women’s menstrual cycle. While acknowledging that women’s first menstruation can be the subject of both worry and celebration, Zitane underscores the shame, guilt and humiliation that is commonly associated

with women's periods in Morocco. For example, one of the actresses deplores a highly sexist comment she received: "Once a man told me you women can't be trusted...You bleed every month, and yet you don't die" (Dialy 2012, 16), while another one calls out her brother whom she had asked to buy her a pad: "Give it to me just like that... no need to hide it in a journal and inside a black plastic bag... As if we are buying a gun or something!" (Dialy 2012, 9). It is true that even today in Morocco, buying sanitary pads at the local supermarket can be a challenging experience, as the vendor, who is usually a man, will wrap the pad in the same way as the actress' brother without looking into the women's eyes as if he wants to conceal an object [of public shame] from the entire society, including himself. Hence, in "Dialy", Naima Zitane sheds light on another issue that the society usually censors, represses and s*uppresses* (Foucault 1972) which reflects her feminist project of unveiling all social taboos, especially those in relation to women's sexual and reproductive lives. In fact, the last taboo tackled by Naima Zitane in the play is women's pregnancy and all the hardships and challenges that women usually go through from the moment of impregnation to childbirth; using humor and irony, she discusses several taboos related to pregnancy and the public space such as women's uncontrollable farting in public transportation, their water breaking compulsively in the office or at relatives' places and people's negative and often condemning reactions to those experiences. Beyond mere exposure, Naima aims to shed light on those every day life stories that are usually kept silenced in relation to women's sexual and reproductive lives; in an act of subversion of the dominant social and cultural norms, the playwright foregrounds those stories in both the creation (i.e., the screenplay writing) and the delivery (i.e., the live performance) processes of her play.

Therefore, all the stories that Naima Zitane chooses to tell in "Dialy" tell *out loud* and quite daringly bring up several issues and social realities that are usually kept silenced and under the radar in the Moroccan society through the women interviewees (and then the actresses) subjectivities. A similar study by Bhatia (2012) on women's revolutionary theatre in Northern India also reveals how theatre provides avenues for women to perform their womanhood and challenge dominant representations. Women in Northern India use theatre to contest (i.e., "talk back to") dominant middle-class codes of female propriety, where women playwrights and actresses resort to theatre to address many taboos and commonly *suppressed* topics in relation to women's lives such as women's dowry to sexual harassment, custodial rape, and women workers' rights, thereby foregrounding women's social realities (i.e., epistemologies) and their "making sense" or interpretations of those experiences and implications for their physical, mental and economic well-being (i.e., hermeneutics).

Similarly, in "Dialy", several taboos in women's sexual lives are first broken in relation to the *nature* and *implications (i.e., meanings)* of the topics tackled. The play addresses many topics commonly considered taboo in Moroccan women's everyday lives, ranging from women's first menstrual cycle, to pre-marital sex and forced marriages, as well as virginity, pregnancy, childbirth, date rape and marital rape. As these issues are not usually the subjects of public debates in Morocco, Naima Zitane transgresses the *epistemological* boundaries of what is usually considered decent, appropriate and *permissible* to talk about in the public space in a society that is still predominantly conservative. As discussed previously, the playwright foregrounds a knowledge around female sexuality that is not usually made available and topics that are not commonly talked about but rather *denied* and *repressed* such as the different forms of violence inflicted upon women and the total absence of the law in regulating such abuses. As Naima Zitane told the *Racines Associations* in Morocco*,* the purpose behind "Dialy" is to convey the idea that female sexuality in Morocco suffers from what she characterizes as a "cultural excision" of words and expressions-- meaning that it is not possible to talk about certain topics, such as an experience of rape or pre-marital pregnancy, without bringing *shame*, *dishonor, disgrace* or *embarrassment* to oneself [and, by extension, to one's family] (Racines Association 2017). Her objective, therefore, is to create a call for action to change the foundations of the dominant cultural and legal systems in Morocco towards a more tolerant, inclusive and pro-women's rights (i.e., feminist) stance.

This echoes Foucault's (1972) idea on *suppressed knowledges* whereby the dominant power forces marginalized groups to repress certain experiences, life stories and other social realities for the interest of the hegemonic narrative. Here, the dominant interests are those of the patriarchal system that refuses to give women a voice in order to prevent them from seeking justice or compensation, as well as the Islamist party (PJD) whose agenda seeks to further women's exclusion and ostracization in the private sphere. It is worth pointing out again here that upon its election in 2011, the PJD was reluctant to implement the provisions of the new constitution on the issue of gender parity (Yachoulti 2015), thereby revealing its overall conservative position on Moroccan women's role in the society.

However, because Naima Zitane presents precisely a counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges the dominant narrative, as the actresses deplore the implications of these social realities and injustices for women's lives and well-being such as their physical, emotional and psychological repercussions, the taboos are also broken *hermeneutically.* In fact, Naima does not share the moralizing and patronizing positions that are widely held on these issues by other conservative factions of the society but rather embraces a progressive

and emancipatory stance as she calls for women's re-appropriation of their bodies and the celebration of female sexuality, thereby providing an alternative *interpretation, reading* and *position* on women's sexual freedom. The purpose of "Dialy" in providing an alternative *reading* will be further discussed in the following section.

The Vagina Trope: Denouncing the Society's Toxic Relationship to the Female Sexual Organ & Celebrating Women's Sexuality

Besides epistemologically and hermeneutically breaking most of the social taboos related to women's sexuality in Morocco, Naima Zitane also breaks the verbal, visual, psychological and symbolic barriers around the biggest social taboo in the society- the vagina. On stage, the young actresses first refer indirectly (i.e., symbolically) to the vagina to address the relationship of the Moroccan society to the taboo topic of female sexuality and the way it perceives and talks about the vagina- that is mainly in a demeaning and derogatory way. One of the actresses sadly observes: "Everybody says eww about *it*... dirty, disgusting, shameful!" (Dialy 2012, 16/21) while another one reminisces: "My mother used to tell me to cover my *worry*" (Dialy 2012, 5). By doing this, Naima Zitane deplores the most common verbal and symbolic ways used to refer to women's vagina in Morocco: disgusting, unclean, a *burden*. Therefore, throughout the play, the three actresses recall several instances when their relatives (mothers, grandmothers, fathers) told them to either sit properly, cross their legs, lower down their skirt, cover up, act modestly... only to conceal their vagina. One of the actresses even deplored an experience of physical abuse by her grandmother aiming at conditioning her to hide her vagina in public spaces: "My grandmother used to pinch me between the legs whenever they were open... At the beginning, I did not understand anything but with time I eventually got it" (Dialy 2012, 3). In addition, those relatives would also never name the girls' vaginas directly, but always use indirect cues to refer to it such as: "*the thing" "your thing", "it", "that".* There are also references to the fact that the vagina is always concealed, hidden, disavowed, and denied as one of the actresses points out: "My mother once told me I had *nothing* in there [between my legs]! (Dialy 2012, 4), thereby alluding once again to Foucault's (1972) idea of *suppressed knowledges* which in this case applies directly to the female sexual organ to deny not only its existence and the knowledge about it (i.e., epistemology) but also its social implications in terms of female sexuality and

freedom (i.e., hermeneutics). Therefore, as the play enfolds, the spectator gradually understands that the vagina is truly the biggest taboo in the Moroccan society.

The actors also refer *directly* to the vagina to break the taboo around the female sexual organ *verbally*. Throughout the play, the actresses speak freely and without the usually enforced epistemological barriers about the woman's sexual organ. In a sort of linguistic re-appropriation of the word "vagina" and a symbolic re-appropriation of women's sexuality, the three actresses enumerate playfully the different names and words commonly used to refer to the sexual female organ in the Moroccan dialect of Darija. These verbal cues range from the cute invented names that mothers usually use to refer to their little girls' vaginas to the vulgar words and appellations used, primarily by men on the streets, to either stalk or call out women by referring to their sexual organ (Dialy 2012, 8). When one of the actresses pronounces the forbidden name for the vagina "Tabboun"- which is the most vulgar and insulting name but also the most commonly used idiom to refer to the vagina in Morocco- she says that she feels she had actually "gotten rid of a stress" (Dialy 2012, 8). In fact, hooks (1989) defines the concept of "talking back" as "a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible […] the liberated voice" (9). Therefore, in *response to* the societal denigration of the vagina, the actresses also utter the same (dominant) derogatory terms in a *symbolic* move of re-appropriation, catharsis and celebration of women's sexual organ and, by extension, of women's sexuality.

Throughout the play, the names used to refer to the vagina are also repeated in sequence, and *back-to-back*, by the three actresses. For instance, the word "Dialy" (or 'mine' in English), a euphemism for the vagina, is repeatedly used and referred to by the three young actresses on stage: "It is *mine, mine* and *mine*..." (Dialy 2012, 21). In fact, the repetition of the words referring to the vagina aims to reach the audience's subconscious and, therefore, to also break the taboo psychologically. The play also uses humor as an ice/taboo-breaker as one of the actresses gladly claims: "I'm a woman and *my vagina* accompanies me wherever I go. At the market, at the school, at the hammam, so it's mine..." (Dialy 2012, 21), while another one confesses jokingly and ironically: "I tighten my legs because no one should see *it*. Nobody should guess *it* is right here... between my legs" (Dialy 2012, 3). Here, the playwright uses irony and sarcasm to work-around and subvert the dominant narrative of shame, disavowal, guilt and embarrassment that is usually associated with the vagina and foreground, instead, a narrative of fun and humor- thereby celebrating female sexuality and freedom of expression. Ultimately, the play closes on the following words: "I even take it with me to the mosque" is particularly revealing. As the mosque is commonly considered the

purest and holiest place in Islamic culture, the fact that women are allowed to enter and pray in a mosque [i.e. the image of carrying their vagina with them there] means that it is not as improper, dirty and disgusting as it appears to be in Moroccan people's common imagination. In this sense, Naima underscores some social contradictions around the vagina in order to subvert the dominant (patriarchal) narrative which depicts the vagina, and by extension women's sexuality, as a symbol of sacrilege and profanity. The play conveys women's re-appropriation of their bodies through the trope of the vagina as they celebrate their sexual organ that they carry everywhere with them while enumerating all its names, from the gentle to the most insulting. In fact, the actresses' utterances of the words referring to the vagina marks their sexual emancipation and what hooks (1989, 9) characterizes as their "movement from object to subject" (Ibid.)- that is in a move of re-appropriation of their bodies, sexualities and human dignity.

Finally, the play's simple but ingenious scenography is also aligned with the idea of breaking the taboo around the female sexual organ, only this time *visually*, as it consists of a rope where the spectators can see women's underpants of all kinds, shapes and colors. The underpants indirectly (and symbolically) refer to the organ they usually hide, but this time *uncover* and make very *visible* on stage- the vagina. The scenography is also an attempt to foreground a previously and widely *suppressed knowledge* and reality about women's sexual organ and, therefore, to celebrate female sexuality and promote sexual emancipation (Foucault 1972). Hence, in "Dialy" Naima foregrounds the symbol of the vagina for emancipatory purposes, that is to denounce the endless toxic social taboos around it which alienate women's sexuality and advocate for women's re-appropriation of their bodies. Naima's daringness in dealing with such a *disavowed* topic in Morocco underscores the potential of creative disobedience and revolutionary feminist theatre to advocate for a more egalitarian society by questioning and defying the commonly held arbitrary and discriminatory beliefs around a given societal taboo (epistemology) and providing alternative readings and interpretations (hermeneutics).

Figure 18. Image of Dialy's Performance in Barcelona showing the scenography. Shared by the artist

"Talking Back" to the PJD's Calls for 'Halal' Art: Media Buzz and Socio-political Implications of "Dialy"

As discussed previously, upon the election of the Moroccan Islamist PJD party in November 2011, Najib Boulif, one of the leaders of the party and former *Minister of Economic and General Affairs* dropped two unfortunate words- "clean art"- to announce the party's vision on the future of art in the country. He only elaborated on his statement to underscore that, from now on, the party will not allow the rendition of 'nude scenes' in any discipline or genre of artistic expression. Hence, without clearly defining what he meant by "clean art", Boulif was referring to a sort of morally acceptable art that abides by the Islamic rulings of morality, appropriateness and acceptability- or "halal" so to speak.

Following the Minister's statement, a Facebook page under the name "Killing Latifa Ahrar is saving a people" was created by an unknown user, calling to end the life of the actress who walked with a dress showing one naked leg at the *11th International Film Festival* in 2011. The page, although clearly inciting for murder, was only deleted by Facebook about ten days following its creation (Ait Akdim 2012). Boulif's statement and its social implications, therefore, sent a strong warning signal to the Moroccan *artivist*

community, who saw it as a direct violation to their creativity, and freedom of thought and expression. Hence, starting 2011, the stage was set- impetuous Islamists against unruly artists. For years, verbal attacks by Moroccan Islamist leaders on a culture deemed immoral have been on the rise. In return, most of the Moroccan women *artivists* I interviewed have also "talked back" to the PJD's calls for 'clean' and 'halal' art by challenging and rejecting not only their vision on the future of artistic expressions in the country but also their wider conservative social, political and ideological stances, especially on the issue of women's rights and creative freedom. Such interventions and expressions of creative disobedience definitely include this chapter's case study- Naima Zitane's 2012 play "Dialy".

Given that it was produced and directed only a few months following the Islamist party's national election and minister Boulif's statement about 'halal' art, Naima's play aimed to "talk back" not only the Islamist party's political discourse which strongly undermines Moroccan artists' creative freedom but also, and perhaps more importantly, to their conservative position on the issue of women's rights as evident in Boulif's controversial statement about Moroccan actress Latefa Aherar's dress which he described as a 'nude scene'- that is in addition to the PJD's clear reluctance to implement the gender parity provisions of the reformed constitution (Yachoulti 2015). As a consequence, the play was severely censored and prohibited from being performed on many occasions in Morocco. As hooks (1989) observes, acts of 'talking back' can be severely punished, contained, and co-opted- thereby serving as strategies of intimidation to impede, neutralize or block any forms of disobedience that would bring about societal change.

As a matter of fact, a few days (even) before its release, the play was the subject of a huge media buzz; the reviews ranged from highly negative to quite positive and enthusiastic with more than 150 published articles in both national and foreign media (Jardonnet 2015). The audience reception was as divided too, though primarily negative in a conservative society like Morocco. Elaborating on the reality of co-optation of *artivist* expressions in Morocco, Naima Zitane told a journalist from *The Guardian*: "We received insults and threats on the social media. In particular, there were calls to murder us, on a Facebook page, which got 5,000 'likes'" (Ibid.). Naima added that even in the art world some people disapproved of this subject, with close acquaintances advising her to stop in order to avoid getting into trouble. Finally, from the establishment's end, the-then in power PJD Islamist party vehemently attacked and denounced the play as a violation to the codes of decency and, even, as an incitement to public debauchery. As a consequence, following its release in 2012, "Dialy" was only allowed to be played in private or independent institutions in Morocco, such

as the French Institute in Rabat and the Studio des Arts Vivants in Casablanca. Later on, performed abroad, in public structures, such as the Institute of the Arab World in Paris (Jardonnet 2015). In this context, the two institutions received threats of legal action from lawyers representing Eve Ensler, the author of the *Vagina Monologues*, demanding that they cancel the show: " Ensler's legal representatives alleged that the status of Dialy, quite openly inspired by the 1996 play, needed to be clarified" (Jardonnet 2015). Upon clarification by Naima Zitane and her team, Ensler's representatives understood that the text was a complete Moroccan re-adaptation of the *Vagina Monologues,* consisting of original interviews conducted with local women from various social backgrounds, and it was allowed to be performed later on without further legal threats (Zitane 2019).

Figure 19. Naima Zitane with Jack Lang, former Minister of Culture, during the Dialy performance at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris. Shared by the artist

Naima's play reflects her agency as an artist and an activist in *disobeying* and subverting the Islamist party's directives in order to shed light on a key issue around female sexuality in Morocco. In fact, Boulif's condemnation was seen as an attempt to undermine Moroccan artists' freedom and creativity to deal with issues deemed crucial to and important in the Moroccan society, a view that was also strongly shared by Naima who told me during our interview: "Art in Morocco is not a luxury; there are many issues that we need to question and debate publicly" (Zitane 2019).

As mentioned previously, “talking back” is a concept initially coined by hooks to refer to the process of moving, in defiance, from silence into speech for marginalized and oppressed people, which also marks their trajectory of moving from object to subject (1989, 9). In this sense, “Dialy” aimed to “talk back” to the elected (i.e., hegemonic) Islamist party’s political discourse which advocates for moral and halal forms of art, thereby allowing the artist (here Naima Zitane) to move from a position of marginalized and oppressed (whereby her creativity and freedom of expression as an artist were undermined by Boulif’s statement) as well as from object (of the party’s directives and vision) to an actual subject —as a thinking subject, a playwright and director doing political lobbying and raising awareness of *suppressed knowledges* around women’s lives and some of the biggest taboos of the Moroccan society- i.e., female sexuality and the vagina. Naima’s play “Dialy”, therefore, emerges as a counter-hegemonic discourse that subverts and deconstructs the dominant party’s discourse and vision on the arts and vindicates the artist it aims to marginalize and oppress. In fact, Levine (2015) underscores that the profusion of creative and artistic revolutionary forms in the context of the Arab uprisings helped shape a counter-cultural and a revolutionary counter-hegemonic discourse which allowed marginalized populations to overcome fear of repression and persecution, as well as to redefine, in their own terms, important notions of citizenship, political participation and civic (dis)obedience.

“Dialy” and the Continuing Gender Revolution in Post-Revolutionary North African states

"Dialy” created a major public controversy in Morocco by reflecting key aspects of *creative disobedience,* thereby inscribing the play in what Badran (2016) has characterized as a continuing cultural and gender revolution in post-revolutionary North African States. Badran defines women’s creative disobedience as a revolutionary tool that allows women to denounce *systemic* violence and interlocking systems of oppression, such as sexism, authoritarian rule and (neo)colonialism. In fact, Naima Zitane remarked that her plays, in general but perhaps more particularly in “Dialy”, aim to advocate against “women’s cultural excision” i.e., against their marginalization from the cultural, artistic and educational scenes over time in Morocco in order to question the place of women in their society (Racines Association 2017). During our interview, Naima elaborated more on the concept of “cultural excision”, observing that: “Morocco is currently witnessing a significant decline in terms of rights and freedoms and especially those of women, with the spread of Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, on the one hand, and the problems facing Morocco, such as illiteracy, despite state-

made efforts in this area. Young people, on the other hand, are very reluctant about reading, and the arts. By working on these issues, we are creating a theatre focused on citizenship" (Zitane 2019). Therefore, Naima's plays aim to tackle varied issues in contemporary Morocco such as women's limited access the public sphere, the rise of political Islam, the pitfalls of the educational system and the lack of youth employability. This could potentially inscribe the playwright's work, and especially "Dialy", in what Badran (2016) theorizes as the *continuing* gender and cultural revolution in contemporary North African States where women artists resort to creativity to protest various forms of social injustice concomitantly.

During our interview, Naima also clearly identified with Badran's idea of the *continuing gender and cultural* revolution and the possibility for her work to be inscribed within this socio-political context (Zitane 2019). Elaborating on the meaning and implications of such a social and political revolution in post-Arab Spring Morocco, she told me: "We must recognize that the Arab reality is very different from that of Europe, and that the public space *here* is not at all an area of freedom, and for women even less; it is a space of oppression and a source of fear where the feeling of lack of security is very present. We can therefore describe this revolution as a way to *free* ourselves from this fear, to free speech, an attempt to share public space with men, an attempt to express ideas and dreams, through dance, painting, singing..." (Zitane 2019). Here, Naima's statement clashes directly with the PJD's vision not only on 'clean' art but also on a society that abides by conservative Islamist values and principles such as gender segregation, the codes of modesty and the absence of gender parity. As such, Naima's art can be described as revolutionary feminist theatre.

Bhatia (2012) argues that Northern Indian women's presence on stage and their involvement in theatre — as actors, playwrights, directors, organizers, and characters — made important contributions to the debates on gender and nationalism at key moments of India's colonial and postcolonial history. Similarly, with her 2012 play "Dialy", Naima contributes to an important debate around issues of artists' freedom of expression and women's bodies and sexuality at a crucial moment of Morocco's contemporary history- that is in the context of the election of the first Islamist party since the country's accession to independence in 1956 which has been restraining artistic expression to 'clean' forms only and holding conservative views on Moroccan women's role and status in the society. Therefore, in an article to *The Guardian*, Naima underscored the potential of her creative disobedience and revolutionary feminist theatre to effectively trigger societal change, as she observed: "Something has happened with this play. Moroccan audiences are dying to see something genuine for a change" (Jardonnet 2015). She also raised this point during our interview: "My

art is all that, feminist, social and political and I will also add artistic because they cannot be separated. […] I strongly believe that theatre can be used as a vehicle for social change and reflection on the difficulties we encounter on a daily basis" (Zitane 2019).

Conclusion

Moroccan feminist activist and playwright Naima Zitane directed and released her famous play "Dialy" (*Mine* in English) inspired by Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues as* a *response* to the election of the Moroccan Islamists to power in 2011 and their increasing calls for 'halal' art and morally acceptable forms of creativity. In this context, the play foregrounded the biggest taboo of the Moroccan society- the vagina- to denounce the toxic relationship of the society to the female sexual organ, deplore women's painful stories and *suppressed knowledges* about their sexual lives in a specific socio-cultural context, and, therefore to bring about concrete social change by raising critical feminist awareness on these issues and encouraging women's re-appropriation of their bodies and sexual emancipation through the trope of the vagina. During my interview with Naima Zitane, the playwright confided that Dialy targets not only women to become better aware of their sexualities and claim their sexual emancipation but also men to become women's allies in this process. In fact, the Dialy's performances, in Morocco and abroad, are usually attended both by women and men, including husbands who accompany their wives to the show and fathers who bring their daughters to watch the play (Zitane 2019).

In fact, "Dialy" also aimed to "talk back" to the PJD's political discourse on 'moral art' by providing the ultimate 'unclean' form of art- one that deals with a vagina- and can in this sense be considered revolutionary as it constitutes a highly transgressive, and consciously subversive, response to the dominant system back then. Such a move of defiance is not only cathartical in nature as hooks (1989) points out- in fact, the actresses on stage underscore, on several occasions, the healing process of talking about their *repressed* sexualities- but also deeply *political*. In fact, Naima's "talking back" also allows her to emerge as a thinking subject and as an artist capable of reflecting on crucial issues touching upon her society and instigating social change by contesting and subverting not only the PJD's hegemonic discourse on 'clean' art, which deeply limits Moroccan artists' freedom of expression, but also their conservative views on women's role in the society which undermine their social status, freedom and agency. In this sense, "Dialy" provides a counter-hegemonic narrative to

the PJD's that deconstructs the Islamists' discourse and allows it to vindicate the marginalized and the oppressed- i.e., the artist and the women's stories she conveys in the play.

Therefore, cultural interventions such as "Dialy" hint at the continuing cultural revolution in contemporary North Africa namely through the arts, and the potential of art activism, alongside civil society efforts, in continuing to advocate for socio-political liberties in post-revolutionary Arab states, including Morocco. Art activism does have a potential to ask fundamental questions to challenge and impact dominant systems and institutions; artists should, therefore, continue fighting for their freedom of expression and their right to make meaningful interventions in their societies to advocate social justice, alongside human rights and gender equality.

Finally, by tackling issues of women's sexual liberation which are still considered top taboos in the Moroccan society, and breaking the verbal, symbolic, visual and psychological taboos associated with the vagina; by transgressing the elected party's sustained calls for a clean and moral art in which issues of sexual liberation are seen as a direct violation of decency and a public incitement to debauchery, the play also exemplified several aspects of what Badran's (2016) theorizes as the *continuing* gender revolution in contemporary post-revolutionary North Africa today. While it was initially banned from being performed in Morocco, the play still managed to create a nationwide controversy around issues of artistic freedom and creativity, (female) sexuality and the role of dogmas and tradition in regulating women's lives. It remains, undoubtedly until today, one of the most pertinent interventions in the history of Moroccan theatre.

CHAPTER 6

Khadija Tnana's *Kamasutra*: A Counter-hegemonic Discourse on 'Halal' Art and Sexual Freedom and Education in Morocco

Submitted to the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies.* Currently pending revisions.

Abstract

Directly following the events of the "Moroccan Spring" and the election of the *Islamist Justice and Development* party (PJD) to power in 2011, Khadija Tnana, a Moroccan visual artist, feminist activist and political militant produced her *Kamasutra*, a visual artwork depicting several erotic scenes of the Kamasutra inside the protective hand of Fatima, a prominent mystical and folk symbol and a palm-shape amulet commonly used to ward off against the evil eye in the region. To examine *Kamasutra*, I did a mixed research methodology combining a visual analysis of the artwork that was initially produced in 2012 with a content analysis of an interview conducted with Khadija Tnana and a textual analysis of five news articles covering the censorship of a second version of *Kamasutra* in 2018. My objective was to retrace the trajectory of Khadija's *Kamasutra* throughout the socio-political climate and developments that marked Morocco from 2012 to 2018. In a context where the recently elected Islamist party was calling for 'clean' and 'halal' art, Khadija's piece presents a counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges not only the Islamists' vision on art, but also a retrograde religious discourse on sexual freedom and equality and the government's continued apathy to implement sexual education and awareness programs in Morocco.

Keywords: Arab Spring; Artivism; Civil Disobedience; (Women's) Creative Disobedience; Installation Art; *Kamasutra*; Sexuality; Subaltern Counterpublics; Visual Arts; "Talking Back".

Introduction

The Arab Spring is a series of protests that started with the outbreak of the Tunisian Jasmine revolution in December 2010 when a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after he was repeatedly harassed by the local police in his local hometown of Sidi Bouzid. The uprisings then spread across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region as a *transnational* revolution for bread, human rights and social justice to topple several autocratic regimes through both violent and non-violent protests and demonstrations (Sadiqi 2016). Whereas the Jasmine revolution was "successful", in that it led to the toppling of former president Ben Ali's regime in February 2011, Morocco's experience of the Arab Spring was quite unique as it was quickly co-opted by King Mohammed VI and the political elites with the adoption of a new constitution in 2011, which ultimately put an end to the local revolutionary *20th February Movement*, known as the MV20F (Yachoulti 2015). The new constitution restricted many of the King's political privileges and reaffirmed the social and political rights of several ostracized social groups, such as women and the Native peoples of Morocco- the Amazigh (Ibid.). For instance, article 19, made both [Moroccan] men and women equal citizens before the law.

Following the events of the "Moroccan Spring", the ensuing national elections led to the victory of the Islamist *Justice and Development Party* (PJD), thereby marking the rise of political Islam to power for the first time in the History of the country. In this context, the newly elected Islamists quickly revealed their stance on women's rights by expressing a clear reluctance to implement the gender parity provision of the new constitution. As a result, only one female minister of *Social and Family Affairs* was appointed in the first Islamist-led government compared to 6 women before the outbreak of the *MV20F* (Yachoulti 2015). At the same time, one of the leaders of the party, Najib Boulif, also announced the PJD's vision on the role of art in the Moroccan society, underscoring that the party will only tolerate and promote 'clean' art – i.e., morally acceptable forms of art (Ait Akdim 2012). The Moroccan civil society interpreted Boulif's announcement as another intrusion on the part of the Islamists, this time in the field of art, to implement "halal" standards (Ibid.). Halal is a term commonly used in the Qu'ran and other Islamic laws to designate the categories of lawful or

allowed (Lowry 2006). The party's announcement was further interpreted as an attempt to limit and undermine Moroccan artists' creative freedom and freedom of expression, thereby creating a nationwide outcry within the local artistic and activist community. From then on, increasing attacks by the Islamists on a culture deemed immoral have been on the rise from the Islamists. In response, Moroccan artists have also increasingly challenged and disobeyed the party's persistent call for 'clean' art.

It is this is context that Moroccan artist and (feminist) activist Khadija Tnana produced her work *Kamasutra* in 2012*,* a visual artwork and installation consisting of 246 small hands of Fatima on which the artist painted erotic scenes of sexual intercourse inspired by the Kamasutra. Also known as *Khmisa (or five)* in the Moroccan dialect of Darija, the protective hand of Fatima is a palm-shaped amulet that carries strong mystical and cultural folkloric connotations and is commonly used to protect against the evil eye across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region (Cuthbert 2015). In *Kamasutra*, all the small hands of Fatima were re-arranged by the artist to form a bigger installation in the shape of the *Khmisa*. While a first version of *Kamasutra* was successfully exhibited at the 2012 International Biennale of Casablanca, in 2018, a second re-adaptation of this initial work called *Kamasutra II*, which consisted of the same artwork but using different materials, resulted in Khadija's piece being withdrawn and censored at a national exhibition, thereby stirring a nationwide controversy in Morocco. This re-adaptation was then reworked by Khadija to formulate a response to the censorship of her work, and a final work was produced later in 2018- *Traces of Kamasutra*. In my analysis, I am interested in the life of *Kamasutra* as I aim to retrace its trajectory throughout the socio-political climate and developments that marked Morocco from 2012, upon the PJD's accession to power, up to 2018, during the last years of the party's second mandate in the country.

In this chapter, I begin with a quick literature review on women's *creative disobedience* and *subaltern counterpublic*s in contemporary North African States, with a special focus on women's visual art and installations in Egypt. Since the existing literature focuses primarily on Egypt, I take Morocco as a case study to address a gap in the literature by examining women's artworks that reflect patterns of creative disobedience in this specific social and

political context. To do so, I draw mainly on theories of art as alternative media, feminist art theory and bell hooks' (1989) concept of "talking back". I argue that Khadija Tnana's *Kamasutra I* presents a counter-hegemonic discourse that "talks back" to several hegemonic discourses and institutions simultaneously: to the predominantly conservative norms of the Moroccan society, and especially to a retrograde religious discourse on sexual freedom and equality, as well as to the Moroccan government's reluctance to implement sexual education and awareness programs and finally, to the PJD's political discourse on 'halal' art which restricts Moroccan artists' creative freedom and advocates moral and aesthetic censorship. I then focus particularly on the socio-political context of the censorship and withdrawal of *Kamasutra II* and the circumstances surrounding the production of *Traces of Kamasutra* in 2018.

Women's Creative Disobedience and Subaltern Counterpublics in the Post-Arab Spring Context

Mark Levine (2015) argues that the [Arab] region has witnessed an explosion of creative talent since the start of the Arab Spring. He underscores the particular profusion of visual arts production in this context – including graffiti, paintings, videos, sculptures and installations- which have been exhibited in galleries, museums, and revolutionary spaces, as he observes: "More than just art, visual messages were the "war paint" of the revolutions and a weapon in the hands of civil resistance against authoritarian regimes" where aesthetic played a meager role than the message conveyed (2015, 1294). Levine (2015) concludes that art is probably the "weapon of the future" in the struggle against violent, corrupt and repressive regimes in the region. In this context, Margot Badran (2016) talks about *creative disobedience* to describe Egyptian women's contemporary forms of resistance where artfulness is increasingly becoming a powerful tool for women to denounce gendered forms of violence as well as interlocking systems of oppression today. Taking Egypt as a case study, Badran (2014) also contends that the end of the political Arab revolution only constitutes the beginning of the *continuing (gender and cultural revolution)* where Egyptian women continue advocating for social justice alongside gender equality using creative means.

Figure 20. "Blue Bra" graffiti, Mohamed Mahmoud Street, off Tahrir Square, Cairo. Photo by Mona Abaza- taken from Pinterest.com

Dina Wahba (2016) uses the term *subaltern counterpublics* to describe the productive spheres that have been created by Egyptian women over the past decade to produce alternative narratives that promote and trigger social transformation. She contends that such manifestations include women's high presence in visual arts and installation art in the post-revolutionary context. In fact, Badran (2014, 59) notes that artworks and their assembly in exhibitions can "at once provide and preserve a graphic narrative and visual hermeneutics". She discusses Egyptian artist Huda Lutfi's piece "Continuing" which was exhibited in Cairo in 2014. In this piece, the revolution is depicted as a woman, which stands half decapitated among the decapitated and mutilated: one can see a female torso standing in the exhibition with a head sliced off at the top covered in bands that repeat the word *Al-Mustamirra* (Continuing), a clear reference to the continuing revolution or, in Arabic, *Al-Thawra Al-Mustamira* in contemporary Egypt. As cooke (2016, 43) pertinently points out: "It is not in the toppling of presidents for life or in ballot boxes or in new constitutions that the

success or persistence of revolutions can be detected, but rather in *the continuity* of [Arab] women's revolutionary activism, consciousness, and creativity".

Figure 21. "Half Mubarak, Half Tantawy". Mural by Omar Fathi. Cairo's Tahrir Square. March 2012. Photo by Jonathan Rashad- taken from atlanticcouncil.org

Art as Alternative Media: Artivism and Feminist Art Theory

Levine (2015) contends that art as alternative media creates niches for subcultures and countercultures and becomes particularly important to challenge the power of repressive regimes when civil society has little space for protest; he goes on: "Groups of (usually) marginalized young people, drawn together by common cultural tastes (in music, modes of dress, styles of speech, etc.) and performances, gradually articulate a powerful oppositional political vision that challenges authoritarian state power" (2015, 1278). Levine underscores that, because of their essentially performative and affective character, artistic and cultural productions have a substantial power to draw people into political mobilization. Therefore, echoing African American writer Toni Cade Bambara's famous phrase that "the duty of the radical artist is to make the revolution irresistible", he concludes that all great art is by nature revolutionary and all successful revolutions must have their own art. Similarly, St John (2008) uses the term "protestival" to describe the significance of contemporary carnivalized methods of protest, where the carnival performs multiple tasks simultaneously: a political

action, a festive celebration, a cathartic release, a way of imagining a new world and abandoning the status-quo.

In this context, Mesías-Lema (2018, 20) defines artivism is a neologism that is derived from "art" and "activism" to describe "artists who are committed to creative processes of an activist nature but not activists who resort to art as a form of vindication". Kuang (2004) brings an interesting perspective and theorizes *artivism* as a bottom up-approach that aims to shed light on socio-political and environmental concerns to promote societal change through creative and constructive tools. In this chapter, I draw specifically on feminist art theory which focuses on a particular aspect of countercultural and *artivist* art-that is art as a medium to reflect on women's lives and experiences, using tactics such as consciousness-raising in order to change the bases of both the production and the reception of art in contemporary societies (Kennedy, 2017). In this sense, I also draw on *feminist epistemology* which aims to understand the ways in which the dominant interests of the hegemonic (patriarchal) system affect our knowledge, evidence and rational constraints and on *feminist hermeneutics* which the theory, art and practice of interpretation in the interest of women to correct the effects of patriarchy by focusing on women's experiences as the major source and resource for social and political *interpretation*. In fact, Mesías-Lema argues that *artivism* was also primarily influenced by the success of performance, feminism and queer theory 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" (2018, 21).

Postcolonial Feminist Theory and hooks' "Talking Back":

To examine Khadija's *Kamasutra*, I also draw on postcolonial feminist theory and hooks' concept of "talking back" whereby I situate my analysis in such a context and framework. Postcolonial feminism originated in the 1980s as a response to and a critique of mainstream white feminism and its universalizing and essentialist tendencies of solely accounting for white women's experiences. It sought to account for the ways that interlocking

systems of oppression, including racism, economic marginalization and neo-colonialism, affect non-white and non-Western women in the developing world (Weedon 2000; McEwan 2001). In this context, the concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1991) to characterize the interlocking axes of oppression for women from marginalized groups which increase their systemic vulnerability. Drawing on intersectionality, postcolonial Arab and Muslim feminists also denounces the dominant narrative of powerlessness that describes Muslim women as helpless victims in need of Western liberation, thereby echoing Abu Lughod's famous saying: "Do Muslim women really need saving"? (2002, 2).

Drawing on postcolonial feminism and a decolonizing framework, hooks' (1989) developed her concept of "talking back" which she theorizes as a counter-hegemonic discourse that contests, challenges and responds to various structures of dominance. In her seminal work *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* she elaborates on the socio-political implications of "talking back":

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "'talking back'," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (hooks 1989, 9).

"Talking back", therefore, is not only a way to counter some (dominant) representations or social realities of injustice but also a way to heal from oppression and, ultimately, to free oneself.

Khadija Tnana and her work Kamasutra

Born in Tetouan in 1945, Khadija Tnana is a prominent Moroccan visual artist, political militant, feminist activist and a former University professor. During the 1930s, her father, Mohamed Tnana, was a founding member of the nationalist movement against French colonialism. He founded the National Party for Reconstruction (*Islah* in Arabic) with Abdeslam Bennouna which later on became the famous Independence *(Istiqlal)* Party that defeated the French in 1956. During the 1960s, Khadija discovered the fine arts as a student of Political Science in Paris. She was fascinated with the May 1968 revolution which also

reflected in the field of fine arts- a movement that expressed a radical refusal of both State power and the conservative rules of the French society back then. During the early 1970s, upon her return to Morocco, Khadija became a member of the local Socialist party *(l'Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires)* and a notable political militant under King Hassan II against the various forms of State abuse and corruption. She was appointed Vice-President of the Fes city commune, but as she told me during her interview, even then, she considered herself more of "a dissent than a political actor" as she refused to implement many of the directives she was given as a politician (Khadija 2019). During these years, Khadija was also a professor in political sciences at the University of Fes.

Figure 22. A picture of Artist Khadija Tnana (2020)

Khadija's first artwork, *Adam & Eve* was produced in 1974 as a response to a popular myth in Morocco which states that women are born "from men's ribs". Ironically, Khadija responded by painting a man coming out of women's hair as a form of feminist re-appropriation and a reversal of this popular myth. As she told me during our interview, the idea of the painting stemmed from her "anger and frustration at this popular myth, one amongst many others that give all merit to men [over women] even when it comes to matters of giving birth" (Khadija 2019). However, as an autodidact, Khadija's artistic career only really kicked off in the 1990s where she decided to totally dedicate herself to her passion for art: "At almost fifty years of age when my artistic career started, it was almost a race against time to make the most of it to convey my ideals of an egalitarian [Moroccan] society"

(Khadija 2019).

In 2012, Khadija Tnana produced *Kamasutra*, a visual artwork and installation consisting of several small hands of Fatima each depicting an erotic scene of sexual intercourse on either small ceramics (*Kamasutra I*) or paper cardboards (*Kamasutra II* and *Traces of Kamasutra*). All the small hands were then re-arranged by the artist to form a bigger installation in the shape of the *Khmisa*. The installation, therefore, appears as *une mise en abime*, a technique which consists of placing a copy of an image within itself in a way that suggests an infinitely recurring sequence. Inspired by the Kamasutra, an ancient Indian text on sexuality, eroticism and emotional fulfillment which pre-dates Islamic civilisation, each hand of the Fatima depicts a scene of homosexual or heterosexual intercourse, as well as other scenes of men and women exploring their sexualities freely and masturbating.

Mixed Research Methodology

My methodology in this chapter is essentially qualitative and consists of a mixed research methodology combining a visual analysis of the three versions of *Kamasutra* of with a content analysis of an interview I conducted with Khadija Tnana and a textual analysis of five news articles covering the censorship of *Kamasutra II*. First, I did a visual content analysis of *Kamasutra I* (2012), *Kamasutra II* (2018) and *Traces of Kamasutra* (2018), after Khadija kindly shared several photographed images of each work with me, to examine the main symbols and visual cues used in the artworks, their social and political meanings and implications, as well as to retrieve the recurring aesthetics, symbolism, ideas and themes tackled and the artist's positionality on these issues.

My visual analysis was then complemented with a content analysis of an online interview I conducted with Khadija Tnana by administering a questionnaire to the artist via email. The interview was semi-structured to allow Khadija more flexibility to bring in additional insights that she believed would be valuable for the purpose of my study. The objective behind conducting a feminist interview with the artist was to find out more about the overall objective and motivations behind her work in general, especially the three

Kamasutra, and the socio-political context in which they were produced and (attempted to be) exhibited. I also wanted to get additional insights on aspects I may have missed in my visual analysis of the artworks. Finally, I also complemented both my visual analysis of the artworks and the content analysis of the online interview with a textual analysis of five articles published in four leading Moroccan online news outlets (*le 360.ma, Yabiladi.com, les Echos.ma* and *La Vigie Marocaine.com)* and one leading French news outlet online (*Le Figaro.com*) following the censorship of *Kamasutra II* in order to obtain expert insights on the socio-political context in which the piece was attempted to be exhibited and withdrawn, the establishment's response to Khadija's performance of civil disobedience, and the type of media coverage that the censorship received. These articles were selected on the basis that they offered the most in-depth coverage of Khadija's artwork and the circumstances surrounding its censorship. They also covered many of themes that are relevant for the purpose of this study, including *artivism*, civil disobedience, feminist performance and (government's) censorship.

Analysis

Kamasutra I was initially produced in 2012 for the first International Biennale of Casablanca which took place in the city's Sacré-Cœur Cathedral. Initiated in 2012, the Casablanca Biennale aimed to create an intercultural dialogue between Moroccan and African artists and the international scene. At the biennale, Khadija's artwork consisted of 246 small ceramics in the shape of the hand of Fatima; on each small ceramic, the artist painted an erotic scene of sexual intercourse. The 246 small ceramics were re-ordered to form a bigger installation in the shape of the hand of Fatima. Also known as *khmisa (or five)* in the Moroccan dialect of Darija, and depicting an open right hand, the hand of Fatima is a palm-shaped amulet usually used in jewelry and wall hangings. Very popular throughout the MENA region, the *khmisa* is commonly believed to ward off the evil eye, primarily amongst both Muslim and Jewish communities (Cuthbert 2015).

Figure 23. Kamasutra I, First International Biennale of Casablanca (2012)

As Khadija told me during her interview, while this first piece was exhibited at the 2012 biennale "without any incident but mostly tolerated by the authorities", in 2018, a second re-adaptation of the same work called *Kamasutra II*, which consisted namely of the same artwork but using different materials (i.e., the images were then painted on paper cardboard instead of ceramics), resulted in Khadija's piece being withdrawn and censored at a national exhibition, thereby stirring a nationwide controversy (Khadija 2019). This re-adaptation was then reworked to formulate a response to the establishment's censorship, and a final work was produced later in 2018. In *Traces of Kamasutra*, the small drawings were cut off from the former piece and encased in glass boxes to allude to (and thereby) denounce the censorship of *Kamasutra II.* In my analysis, I am interested in the life of *Kamasutra* as I aim to retrace its trajectory throughout the socio-political climate and developments that marked Morocco from 2012 to 2018. I focus on the socio-political context in which the second piece (*Kamasutra II*) was produced, attempted to be exhibited, then ultimately censored and withdrawn.

KAMASUTRA I: A counter-narrative on the History of Sexuality in Islamic Societies and a Revendication for Sexual Emancipation

In *Kamasutra I*, Khadija pays tribute to *The Perfumed Garden*, a fifteenth century Arabic sex manual work of erotic literature written by Sheikh Nefzaoui at the request of the Sultan of Tunis. The book provides a list of names for the penis and vagina, presents opinions on what qualities men and women should have to be attractive, gives advice on sexual techniques, warnings about sexual health, and recipes to remedy sexual maladies. In an article written by *Le Figaro*, Khadija explains her rationale of drawing from this seminal medieval work of Arab literature to produce *Kamasutra I*: "I wanted to show that in the 15th century, we would *learn* about sexuality, without taboos. Especially since in our culture, based largely on the Muslim religion, Islam does not forbid pleasure, unlike Catholicism which evokes the original sin" (Levy 2018). Khadija breaks an *epistemological* taboo around sexuality by underscoring that what we know (and want to know) about sexuality in contemporary Islamic societies is actually much more limited than what we used to know (and talk about) a few centuries ago. She expresses a certain nostalgia for a time when there was more freedom and openness towards sexuality in Muslim societies, namely during the climax of Islamic civilization in the Arab West or what is known as the Medieval Maghreb (Gabrieli 1991). In this sense, Khadija denounces the prevailing sexual taboos in contemporary Islamic societies which alienate people's physiological and psychological well-being. In an article in *Yabiladi,* she further observes*:* "Through this work, I recall that eroticism has never been repressed in the history of Islamic culture. Since the advent of Islam, pleasure has been part of its culture. This is evidenced, among other things, by the erotic work of Sheikh Nefzaoui, *The Scented Prairie*, to which *Kamasutra* pays tribute (Zine 2018). Therefore, using the tactic of re-framing (Jiwani 2011), Khadija aims to talk back to the dominant Western stereotypes which depict Muslim people's sexuality as passive and alienated in Western media (Massad 2007), and to retrace a history of a more liberated and emancipated sexuality in Islamic societies that goes back to medieval times to which Nefzaoui's text, for example, but also others can attest. Therefore, drawing on *feminist epistemology*, the artist foregrounds a knowledge that once used to be common but that is now repressed and suppressed (around sexual freedom and

eroticism in Muslim societies), and provides an alternative reading (*i.e. hermeneutics*) on the history of Islamic sexuality which has been co-opted and distorted by both the Islamic religious scholars and the Western media today (Massad 2007).

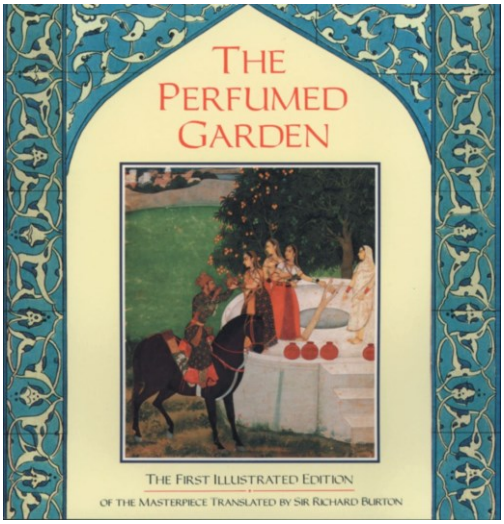

Figure 24. The Perfumed Garden, Sheikh Nefzaoui, book cover

In another article published in *Yabiladi*, Khadija continues: "We must not hide this part of history, which reminds us that Islamic culture carries within it this notion of sexual education, erotic poetry and, overall, a very liberated artistic expression concerning all the themes related to the body and eroticism. When theologians— all men — later took it over, they appropriated this pleasure and expression to the male gent, making it exclusive. A retrograde discourse has then been built on this" (Zine, 2018). In this sense, Khadija's work also talks back to the patriarchal religious establishment which restricts sexual pleasure and freedom to men only. By underscoring that the theologians who appropriated the discourse on Muslim sexuality are all men, Khadija therefore hints to the effects of patriarchy on the nature of our evidence regarding sexuality in contemporary Morocco (Zine 2018). She points out the contemporary societal *black-out* in contemporary Islamic societies around the issue of sexuality, where most of the responsibility is incumbent upon conservative religious people who built a sexist and "retrograde" - i.e. sexist, reactionality and exclusionary - discourse on the issue (Ibid.). In her writings, Amina Wadud (1999) points out how the Qur'an has historically been interpreted through a malecentered lens, thereby paving the way for justifying the marginalization and the mistreatment of women in Muslim cultures. In his

analysis of the carceral and clinical environment, Foucault (1972) defines *suppressed knowledges* as a knowledge that has been evacuated and locked up by dominant disciplinary institutions that are endorsed and legitimized by the established history of ideas or regimes of truth. In this sense, sexual freedom and equality is a knowledge that has been evacuated by a hegemonic religious male-centered institution in Morocco. The fact that Khadija is a woman artist who produces a daring and transgressive artwork about sexuality and eroticism is, therefore, a form of feminist re-appropriation and subversion of a patriarchal male discourse which restricts sexual expression and freedom to men only. Khadija's work aims to shed light on and restore a knowledge on (female) sexual freedom through her work *Kamasutra I* whereby the artist uses a religious symbol to subvert a highly conservative and unjust religious discourse. In this sense, the artist provides a counter-hegemonic discourse and an alternative reading to that of the religious establishment that not only represses sexuality but also restraints sexual pleasure to men only. As hooks (1989) defines "talking back" as an oppositional stance that contests and responds to structures of dominance, Khadija's work, therefore, aims to "talk back" to the conservatism and chauvinism of the religious establishment in Morocco (i.e, an institution) at the same time as she talks back to the demeaning and racist Western stereotypes on Muslim peoples' sexual lives (i.e., a discourse).

KAMASUTRA I: Visual Analysis of the Artwork and Symbolisms Used

In *Kamasutra I*, the *Khmisa* is undeniably a core symbol as it gives its shape both to the 246 small ceramics foregrounding erotic scenes and the wider installation which forms a bigger hand of Fatima comprising all the small ceramics. In the *Khmisa* (also known as the hand of the Fatima), the name Fatima refers to the first daughter of prophet Muhammed (PBUH), who was also wife to Ali Ibnu Abi Taleb, the last of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the first Shia Imam, and mother of Hasan and Husayn, the second and third Imams, respectively (Cuthbert 2015). Despite its apparent religious connotation, the *Khmisa* is more commonly known and used as a mystical and "folk" symbol in the Middle East (and Mediterranean) societies to bring fortune and protect against evil spirits. It is used as a "good luck" talisman and charm appearing on various objects and sites such as necklaces, keychains, door steps, and postcards. Hume (2013) argues that the use of esoteric symbols

can convey significant information about a people's beliefs, faith, identity, power, agency and fashion. The Khmisa is, in fact, also commonly used in the region to boast and celebrate one's identity and belonging to either the Arab nation, the Muslim people or the Middle East and Mediterranean region. In Morocco particularly, the symbol is commonly used to celebrate one's national, ethnic and religious identities simultaneously. In this sense, Kamasutra, as a visual artwork, draws on a symbol that resonates very well with Moroccan people's cultural references as well as their sense of self and identity to make a meaningful societal intervention and shed light on an issue that is perceived to be repressed in this same culture- i.e., sexuality.

Combining a symbol with strong resonances in Islamic culture and civilisation, Khadija Tnana also chose to paint an erotic scene of sexual intercourse inspired by the Kamasutra inside each small hand, a Hindu text that predates the founding of Islam by centuries and comes from a different cultural, linguistic and religious tradition. Commenting on her choice to use this text from a different culture and tradition, Khadija told me during our interview: "My choice to call my artwork Kamsutra is mainly due to the overall symbolic load of this name. It is true that the text belongs to an ancient Hindu religion, far from my homeland; however, it is a universal value which resonates with all societies alike. What resonated with me particularly is that Kamasutra values the body, love and harmony. The Kamasutra was used to learn about love" (Khadija 2019). Hence, Khadija saw in the Kamasutra a suitable reference to convey her overall message about love and freedom, which according to her, overrides all the socially constructed taboos and prohibitions around people's sexuality in contemporary Islamic societies. Khadija also went on: "Kamasutra [the original text] contains two facades: one visible and the other invisible. The first, visible, is the body, which I convey in my work through the different sexual positions, and the second is invisible, and related to the life philosophy of the Kamasutra to bring happiness and balance to the society by breaking the taboos of a falsely constructed modesty and openly encouraging the dialogue around sexual education" (Khadija 2019). In this sense, it is not so much the sexual positions taken from the Kamasutra and painted on the small ceramics (i.e., the aesthetics) that inspired and motivated the artist to draw from this ancient but also, if not

primarily, the life philosophy (i.e., the symbolism) advocated by the Kamasutra which, as the artist explains, is a philosophy of open dialogue, freedom, love, equality, companionship and a shared humanity. All these thematics are central to Khadija's work, as well as to her individual journey as an artist, as will be discussed in the following sections.

While common representations and depictions of the hand of Fatima typically include one eye in the center of the *Khmisa,* probably alluding to its mystical role of warding off against the evil eye, in *Kamasutra I*, Khadija's choice to paint a daring erotic scenes inspired by the Kamasutra on a mystical and almost sacred and holy symbol like the *Khmisa* is not incidental nor without any political motivations. Through her deliberate choice, the artist aims to talk back to various regimes of powers and structures of dominance simultaneously.

Figure 25. Common representations (and uses) of the Khmisa

Kamasutra I: The Use of a Sacred Symbol to "Talk Back" to a Radical Political Ideology Discourse and advocate Sexual Liberation

As mentioned previously, whereas the Hand of Fatima is commonly associated with Islamic and Muslim civilizations, the Khmisa is actually a pre-Islamic symbol and a talisman or amulet that was commonly used acrossed the Mediterranean region to protect against evil spirits that caused diseases and misfortunes. It was a widespread pre-Islamic practice that was adopted by early Islamic cultures and only "tolerated" by its faith. The symbol is therefroe widely considered part of "folk" Islam, given its associations with mysticism and

superstition. Moreover, there is an inherent conflict between the “folk” Islam that the Hand of Fatima represents and symbolizes and the fumendamentalist Islam of some Sunni theologicians who reject any form of “folk” belief and superstition as bid‘ah. In Islamic law, the term bid‘ah denotes any newly invented matter that is without precedent and is in opposition to the Quran and Sunnah with connotations of innovation associated with heresy (Brown 2009). The Khmisa is categorized amongst such inventions by religious Sunni fundamentalists. Moreover, the orthodoxy of a few fundamentalist Sunni theologians is also shared by the radical Sunnis of the PJD who share not only the same ideology but also a clear desire for "clean" art as mentioned previously. In this sense, by foregrounding one of the major symbols of “folk” Islam that falls outside the purview of the PJD and what they stand for, Khadija Tnana talks back to another aspect of the religious [and political] establishment’s stance on sexuality: the PJD’s calls for ‘halal’ art and their overall orthodoxy and ideology rooted in fundamentalist political Islam.

In fact, Khadija’s choice to paint erotic scenes of the Kamasutra on a sacred symbol like the *Khmisa* is a strategic one. As she told me during our interview: “Khmissa is a kind of amulet that protects its wearer from the evil eye. This idea is rooted in the culture of our society. My idea is to pose these sexual drawings which depict a free and liberated sexuality on the Khmisa which is considered sacred by our people, but not by me. It is in this context that I created my Kamasutra to put art at the service of sex education in its erotic dimension” (Khadija 2020). Therefore, while the Khmisa is commonly associated with the religious, holy and sacred in Moroccan’s people’s psyche and common imagination and that common representations of the Khmisa usually include an eye in the center of the symbol, Khadija chose to paint, instead, a daring image of sexual intercourse inside each small hand. As mentioned previously, the name Fatima from the Khmisa refers to the daughter of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH). The scenes of the Kamasutra were painted in the center of the small ceramics in the shape of Fatima, thereby foregrounding not the “sacred” symbol itself and its wider societal, mystical and religious implications and connotions but rather blunt scenes of (either homosexual, heterosexual or solo) intercourse. In a predominantly conservative society like Morocco where sexuality is considered a ‘dirty taboo’, the use of a religious and

sacred symbol in an artwork that foregrounds erotic and sexual scenes makes Khadija's work both a morally and aesthetically *transgressive* one in terms of the imagery and the symbolism used. By doing so, Khadija's objective is to reverse and subvert the sacred and mystical connotation of the *Khmisa* to a sexual (and, therefore, more mundane) one to advocate for sexual freedom and liberation in Morocco. In fact, during our interview, the artist told me that is a staunch believer that art can contribute to key debates in the [Moroccan] society in order to push for more progressive political and societal agendas (Khadija 2019). As mentioned previously, Khadija does so by casting a symbol (i.e., the Khmisa) that highly resonates with Moroccans' sense of self, as well as with their cultural and religious identity, to make a context-specific and culturally sensitive intervention in the field of sexual rights and freedom. Therefore, Khadija's (aesthetically) subversive work lays precisely in giving priority to worldly societal issues of sexual repression and alienation over futile issues of superstition, mysticism, luck (or lack thereof) and other personal beliefs, as she also pointed out during her interview that she does not consider the Khmisa to be a sacred symbol, unlike most Moroccans. Through her artwork, the artist sends a warning signal about the kind of issues that truly deserve attention and concern in contemporary Muslim societies which contributes an *alternative reading* on what Islamic societies consider matters of public concern or not at all (i.e., a 'dirty taboo').

Figure 26. Zoom on Kamasutra I, First International Biennale of Casablanca (2012)

KAMASUTRA I: A Counter-Hegemonic Discourse on Heteronormativity and Sexual Awareness and Education

In *Kamasutra*, Khadija also breaks a major (epistemological) taboo in the Moroccan society around the issue of homosexuality. In her artwork, where each hand of Fatima depicts an erotic sexual scene inspired by the Kamasutra, the artist remained true to the spirit of this ancient Indian work of eroticism by also including images and scenes of homosexual intercourse of men having sex with men and women with women- that is in spite of the predominant homophobic climate and stance on homosexuality in Morocco (Khadija 2019). In addition, *Kamasutra I* also featured images of men and women exploring their sexualities alone and masturbating in a context where the pre-dominant social norms, especially the PJD's, advocate against all forms of pre-marital or extra-marital sex. During our interview, Khadija Tnana told me that because homosexuality is still widely considered taboo in Morocco, where people are still unable to assume or reveal their homosexuality without

directly fearing for their lives, her painting of homosexual scenes of sexual intercourse is a form of revendication for sexual liberation and LGBTQ+ rights in the country (Khadija 2019). Therefore, besides depicting scenes of a liberated and fulfilled heterosexuality, Khadija's artwork also includes erotic images of same-sex people engaging in sexual intercourse, which contributes to breaking the dominant heteronormative norms on sexuality in Morocco. In the context of the election of the Islamist party to power and their discourse on *halal* art, the celebration of homosexuality, which is considered one of the biggest sins in Islam, on a symbol that represents "folk" Islam, which directly clashes with the orthodoxy and political ideology of the fundamentalist Islamists, could be seen as the ultimate form of creative disobedience that talks back to such a discourse by foregrounding the most *haram* form of art possible.

In fact, during our interview, Khadija Tnana told me that *Kamasutra* is a political work in so far as it advocates for LGBTQ+ rights in Morocco at the same time as it consists of a direct claim for sexual education for the youth; she nicely observed: "What would be the point of art if not to awaken consciousness by apprehending the unspoken?" (Khadija 2019). Because sexuality still remains largely a taboo subject in the Moroccan society, the Moroccan *Ministry of Education* does not endorse or encourage sexual education (and prevention) as part of the national curriculum. In an article published in *Le Figaro*, the artist clearly expresses the pro sex-ed stance that *Kamasutra* advocates: "We need sex education. Of course, there are discussions, the press is talking about it and we know how much of a scourge is this taboo that persists" (Levy 2018). During our interview, Khadija noted: "The idea of putting erotic drawings on the Khmissa reflects two aspects of the Kamasutra insofar as the drawings represent the carnal and visible facade and summon *sexual education*, and the invisible side which brings tranquility and happiness to the person, and consequently to the whole of society". In this sense, the blunt scenes of sexual intercourse painted on the Khmisas also speak to the necessity of educating the Moroccan youth about sexuality (Khadija 2019).

Figure 27. Zoom on Kamasutra I, First International Biennale of Casablanca (2012)

Hume (2013) notes that the use of symbols carry strong messages about people's beliefs, faith, identity, power, and agency. As mentioned previously, the Khmisa is widely used in the region to ward off the evil eye in various forms and on various sites -door steps, necklaces, postcards, photographs etc. The symbol is also usually used in the region celebrate one's identity and belonging to the Muslim or Jewish faith, to a people or a nation, as it is the case for many other Moroccans who are neither religious nor superstitious but deeply attached to their Moroccan identity (Hume 2013). In this sense, Khadija uses a symbol that strongly resonates with and speaks to Moroccan people's culture, identity and sense of belonging to also make a meaningful societal intervention and commentary on the necessity of sexual education and emancipation that can resonate as much with them and impact their minds, as well as to exert pressure on the government to implement sex-ed awareness campaigns.

Commenting on the overall societal implications of a lack of sexual awareness and education, the artist pointed out the Moroccan psychologists and sociologists' persistent calls for sexual education to prevent rape in schools and public spaces in the face of the government's continued apathy: "As an artist, I notice that our society suffers from several ills, one of the main causes of which is this lack of dialogue about sex education. Without an adequate framework, our younger generations are left to their own devices. I think people are becoming more aware of that in this country. We're starting to talk about it on television, on the radios. Doctors, sociologists and educators deal with this subject, each according to his or

her area of expertise" (Zine 2018). During our interview, Khadija told me that her artistic productions, such as *Kamasutra,* are her own way of contributing to the debate and pushing for an agenda that endorses sexual education which has been a key concern for many Moroccan activists and artists over the last few years. This further inscribes her work in what Badran (2016) characterizes as the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in contemporary North Africa whereby women *artivists* are resorting to art to protest the ongoing social (and political) issues and injustices and issues in their societies.

Figure 28. Khadija Tnana and her Kamasutra, 2012 International Casablanca Biennale

Modern Art (

In addition to breaking an *epistemological* taboo around sexual freedom and sexual education, Khadija's *Kamasutra* also breaks the taboo around sexuality *hermeneutically* as she tackles the implications of a repressed sexuality for the Moroccan youth's physical and mental well-being in terms of widespread sexual abuse and violence (Khadija 2019). In an article published in *Les Ecos*, the artist observes: "I would like to clarify that the body here was not represented to awaken sexual urges. The idea is much deeper because it is about combating all forms of violence and demystifying the body in the face of various situations of harassment" (Mesk 2018). *Kamasutra* also sheds light on the highly taboo topic of marital rape which has not yet been criminalized in Morocco and its wider social and psychological implications; Khadija told me: "Even marital rape is widespread within our society because people did not receive formal sexual education. We *have to* make peace with our bodies" (Khadija 2019). In *Le Figaro* article, the artist further elaborates on the positive correlation between the lack of formal sexual education and widespread sexual abuse in Morocco: "It is ignorance that brings frustration, something almost perverse, and rape and harassment are part of it. I express what I diagnose as a disease in the society in which I live. Specialists, doctors and sociologists need to be able to prevent rather than cure. Educating about sex is explaining life" (Levy 2018). In fact, in *Kamasutra I*, the installation itself appears as *une mise en abime* as the many small hands of Fatima were re-ordered inside a bigger hand of Fatima- or *Khmisa*. *La mise en abime* is a formal technique of placing a copy of an image within itself, often in a way that suggests an infinitely recurring sequence. By using such a technique, Khadija could, therefore, be alluding to the eternally recurring issues that create a sort of vicious circle in the Moroccan society, in terms of the reciprocity between (lack of) sexual awareness education and widespread forms of sexual abuse and violence. Therefore, Khadija's work "talks back" to the Ministry of Education's apathy to implement sex-ed programs and campaigns by presenting a counter-hegemonic discourse that outlines the dangers and pitfalls associated with the lack of such an awareness, as well as the advantages of sexual education as will be discussed subsequently.

Khadija Tnana explains that the realities of gender inequality and gender segregation in Morocco are major motivations behind her *Kamasutra I*. She deplores how gender

segregation is mainly achieved by instilling a fear in young women that all men are sex predators, and outlines some of the positive repercussions of sexual education : "The idea of my installation was born from an observation: in our countries, there is still a separation between the two sexes, which is accompanied by a discourse that is transmitted to young people, and which basically says that men are dangerous to women, and vice versa... Women and men are afraid to cross paths, I advocate the friendship of the sexes" (Mesk 2018). In addition, the artist also advocates for gender equality in terms of sexual education and freedom(s): whereas the Moroccan society is largely more tolerant towards men's sexuality than women's, in terms of pre-marital sex and adultery, Khadija underscores that her work advocates for "a re-education of boys and girls alike"; she, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of gender equality in matters of sexuality and sexual education, hinting once more at the effects of the religious establisment in restricting sexual awareness, freedom and privileges to men only (Khadija 2019). Commenting on the *feminist* stance of her art, Khadija underscored that gender inequality, besides social justice, is a strong (personal) motive behind her artistic productions: "I am not directly conscious about my art being committed. I am only attentive to several forms of social injustices that exist in the environment I grew up in and live in today. When I was a child, I noticed several forms of injustices and unequal treatment(s), especially between men and women" (Khadija 2019). Therefore, besides promoting sexual education, Kamasutra is also a denunciation of gender segregation and the traditional gender roles in a context where the recently elected Islamist party (PJD) precisely rejected the gender parity provisions of the new constitution and, thereby, expressed their conservative stance on the issue of women's rights and Moroccan women's role in the society (Yachoulti 2015). Khadija's work, in this sense, "talks back" not only to the dominant norms of the Moroccan society that endorse gender segregation but also to the PJD's overall vision on women's role and social status in the Moroccan society.

KAMASUTRA II: On the Act of Censorship and Khadija's Aesthetic and Verbal Responses

In 2018, drawing on the same work, Khadija Tnana produced a second artwork entitled *Kamasutra II*. Very similar to the first one, it only differed in terms of the materials used. Instead of painting images of the Kamasutra on small *Khmisa*-shaped ceramics, Khadija

worked on a fine paper installation this time, where she painted both the 246 *Khmisa* and the erotic scenes inspired by the Kamasutra inside them on fine paper. The 246 small hands were then glued on cardboard to form a bigger hand of Fatima once again. During our interview, Khadija told me that there was no specific rationale behind the aesthetic choice to switch from the use of ceramics in *Kamasutra I* to fine paper and cardboard to produce *Kamasutra II*, except that the initial work that was made of ceramics was heavy and quite inconvenient to transport and carry around to national and international exhibitions (Khadija 2019). All the remaining aesthetical aspects and characteristics remained unchanged from *Kamasutra I* to *Kamasutra II*.

Figure 29. Kamasutra II, Attempted to be exhibited in 2018

Programmed to be shown at an exhibition organized in March 2018 by the *French Institute at Centre for Modern Art* in Tetouan, Khadija's second Kamastura was censored and withdrawn on the opening day of the exhibition on March 1st (Chabaa 2018). Quite ironically, the exhibition was named "Visibles" at a time when Khadija's artwork was precisely made to be invisible and absent by the act of censorship- alluding once more to Foucault's (1972) concept of *suppressed knowledges.* As a response to and in protest against the censorship of her work, Khadija decided to do a performance on the same space that was supposed to be allocated to *Kamasutra II*. In an act of symbolic resistance and contestation, the artist sat on a chair behind a desk, her mouth gagged and both hands and feet tied up. She told me that

nobody from the government or the event organizers prevented her from doing her performance (Khadija 2019).

In addition to the performance, Khadija sent an open letter to the-then Moroccan *Minister of Culture and Communication*, Mohamed Laaraj, through the national media, asking him to break the silence around the censorship of her artwork. She challenged the Minister on the basis that the withdrawal of *Kamasutra II* had provoked heated debates and reactions around the violation of Moroccan artists' freedom of expression by excluding and preventing creative energies from contributing to the development of their society (La Vigie Marocaine 2018). Commenting on this aspect, Khadija told *Le Figaro*: "I don't accept censorship, so I resist. We must continue to fight for freedom of expression. I do not accept the absence of dialogue and, even if subjected to censorship, the artist must believe in her ideas, trust her sensitive world. The artist must move the lines. Shocking is almost a duty to initiate a change in mentalities" (Levy 2018).

Figure 30. Khadija's Protest Performance at the Tetuan Centre for Modern Arts, 2018

Khadija Tnana's performance is also an *artivist* intervention. Mesías-Lema (2018) argues that (feminist) performances constitute a major aspect of *artivism* whereby women artist-activists are resorting to performance as a communication strategy to raise awareness on women's marginalization and ostracization in their societies. In this sense, Khadija's performance is clearly an *artivist* intervention in that it aims to "talk back" to the [Moroccan] government's repression and censorship of her work in order to re-foreground the artist's subjectivity, sensitivity and creativity. As hooks (1989) pertinently points out, gestures of "talking back" are the "expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice" (9). Therefore, Khadija's performance of civil disobedience allows her to move from an object [of the government's censorship] to a subject [a free-thinking artist who not only tackles a crucial societal issue but also engages in a feminist performance to denounce the government's violation of her creative freedom]. Finally, Khadija's act of performance also further re-inscribes her work in the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in North African societies. Badran (2016) defines such a revolution as women's insistence to continue fighting on two fronts today: for the (political) revolution and for their basic human right to remain in the public sphere as active agents. Khadija's performance aims to contest the establishment's attempt at excluding *her* and her work from the artistic sphere in Morocco and suppressing her discourse on sexual freedom and education from the public sphere.

KAMASUTRA II: On the Censorship its Socio-political Implications of "Talking Back" to the PJD's call for 'Halal' Art:

In November 2011, directly following the events of the 'Moroccan Spring' and the victory of the *Justice and Development Party* (PJD) in the parliamentary elections, Najib Boulif, one of the leaders of the party announced the PJD's vision on the future role of art in the Moroccan society. As Boulif stated that the party will only tolerate and promote 'clean' art - i.e. morally acceptable forms of art- the Moroccan civil society interpreted his announcement as yet another intrusion of the Islamists in the field of art to implement 'halal' standards (Ait Akdim 2012). "Halal" is a term commonly used in the Qu'ran and other Islamic laws to designate the categories of lawful or allowed (Lowry 2006). A "halal" version

of art would, therefore, be one that abides by the Islamic rulings of morality and permissibility. In fact, Boulif underscored that the party will not allow the re-edition of 'nude scenes' in any discipline or genre of artistic expression- mentioning a specific incident when one of the major figures of Moroccan cinema, Latefa Ahrrare, walked with a modern dress that showed, entirely, one of her two legs at the *11th International Film Festival* that was held in Marrakech in 2011 (Ait Akdim 2012).

Given that Khadija's Kamasutra *II* directly featured what Boulif's announcement strictly prohibited (i.e., the re-edition of nudes scenes), her work aimed to contest and challenge the PJD's hegemonic political discourse on clean 'art'- one that the artist interpreted as significantly undermining Moroccan artists' creative freedom and their contributions to key debates in their society. In fact, directly following the censorship of *Kamasutra II,* the artist lamented to *Yabiladi*: "Artists are excluded from this dialogue [on sexual education] and we must stop creating these taboos that hinder the development of our society, especially through artistic creation. I do carry a sanctimonious message that would give lessons. By my art, I put my finger on the discomforts of this society to underscore that they must be remedied" (Zine 2018). Following Khadija's letter, the-then and current Minister of Culture and Communication made a public statement responding to her inquiry: "We [the government] support creativity and freedom of expression and freedom of thought, but when there is a violation of societal mores in general, we cannot present to citizens a work that they will reproach us soon after" (La Vigie Marocaine 2018). Therefore, in the context of the PJD's increasing calls for "halal" art, Khadija's work, inspired by the Kamasutra and bluntly depicting scenes of both homosexual and heterosexual intercourse, was considered as a *trespassing* of the boundaries what is permissible to talk about, create about and think about in Morocco. In addition, the artwork was also deemed "illegal" by the Minister in that it [supposedly] constituted a threat against public order (La Vigie Marocaine, 2018). As a consequence, *Kamasutra II* was judged immoral and illicit in so far as it violated the country's values and social mores (of modesty and decency) and was, consequently censored and withdrawn from the national exhibition in Tetouan, which hints at the PJD's persistent efforts to reproduce dominant social norms in Morocco. As hooks (1989)

pertinently points out, acts of "talking back" can be severely co-opted, punished and repressed. The censorship of Khadija's work following her attempt to "talk back" to the government's *black out* on the issue of sexuality and sexual education was a clear manifestation of such a reality. In an interview with *Le 360*, Khadija deplored the establishment's reaction which she described as highly "ideological": "The idea was precisely to break taboos. In Morocco, young people are generally ignorant about sexuality and we wanted to raise their awareness, but apparently this has not been understood" (Chabaa 2018).

As Khadija told me during our interview, six years before *Kamasutra II* was censored in the Tetouan exhibition, the initial work was allowed to be exhibited at the 2012 biennale in Casablanca "without any incident but it mostly tolerated by the local authorities" (Khadija 2019). In fact, the Casablanca municipality sought to ban *Kamasutra I* back then, but the organizers staunchly defended it (Levy 2018). It is only interesting that *Kamasutra I* was allowed to be shown in 2012 but that a second version consisting of the same exact artwork but using different materials was censored and banned in 2018. During our interview, Khadija explained those events by referring to political factors, pointing out that in 2012, only a few months after the Islamist party's victory at the national elections, the ruling PJD had yet not achieved a majority at the Casablanca commune (Khadija 2019). This was not the case in Tetouan in 2018 at a time when the PJD was holding its second mandate (which was almost coming to an end) and had accumulated seven years of power already. Khadija also mentioned an additional societal factor that might explain the censorship, pointing out to the fact that Tetouan, as a smaller city in Northern Morocco, is relatively more conservative and religious than Casablanca, the country's economic capital (Ibid.). Hence, in response to the censorship of *Kamasutra II*, Khadija told a journalist from *Les Eco*s: "I expected it more or less, because we are witnessing a regression of our fatalistic society" (Mesk 2018). Therefore, the withdrawal of Khadija's work reflects the growing influence of the Islamist party not only in the political field (i.e. their cumulation of two mandates) but also in the field of arts and their project to promote 'halal' and morally acceptable forms of art. Further deploring the establishment's decision to remove her work in 2018, Khadija told a journalist at *Yabiladi*: "Until the 20th century in Morocco, there was an openness to artistic and societal spirit on

these themes. During the 1980s, there was a very liberated discourse by women who took up these issues. But today, we can't take that approach. We are fighting first to ensure the *continuity* of the little we have secured at that time, before adopting a forward-thinking discourse" (Zine 2018). This further inscribes Khadija's work in what Badran (2016) theorizes as the *continuing* (gender and cultural) revolution in contemporary North African States whereby women continue struggling for unfulfilled social and political demands from the time of the Arab Spring and even before that. Indeed, following the censorship of *Kamasutra II*, Khadija declared that "the public authorities [in Morocco] do have a core role and responsibility in understanding topics such as love and sex, and therefore, sexual education" (Mesk 2018).

Further rejecting the government's (lack of) response and refusing to give in to the censorship of *Kamasutra II*, Khadija took part in a round table organized by the cultural association *Racines* (*Roots* in English) in March 2018 following the withdrawal of *Kamasutra II* in Tetouan. Organized by *Racines,* a Moroccan NGO which was initially based in the city of Casablanca before being subsequently banned in 2019, the roundtable aimed to tackle the topic of freedom of expression and Moroccan artists' creative freedom as Khadija told me: "the round table aimed to talk about and criticize the reality of censorship in Morocco" (Khadija 2019). During the round table, Khadija provided first-hand testimony about the government's censorship of her work, while other cultural actors from the *Racines* association discussed several other manifestations of repression and the overall implications of censorship for Moroccan artists' freedom and creativity. Elaborating on the dangers of exposing a work that was initially censored, Khadija pointed out: "It was a challenge for me to exhibit this re-worked piece given that *Kamasutra II* was initially censored" (Khadija 2019). In this sense, Khadija's partaking in the roundtable and her *persistent* defiance in re-exposing an artwork that had already been withdrawn also hints at her attempt to "talk back" not only to the PJD's controversial discourse on 'halal' art and what they define as "nude scenes", but also to the government's censorship and of her work and their deliberate attempt to ignore the topic of sexual education. About a year following the roundtable, the cultural association *Racines* was ultimately banned in April 2019 after being charged of "conducting

interviews constituting significant outrages to the official institutions" in which the roundtable with Khadija Tnana probably contributed a major charge, as well as for lending its Casablanca offices, in August 2018, for the recording of a YouTube show during which the hosts has criticized the King Mohamed VI's political discourses (Benargane 2020). The dissolution of the *Racines* association, therefore, hints at the continuing debate around government censorship and repression and the ongoing limitations on freedom of speech in Morocco.

TRACES OF KAMASUTRA: On the Material and Psychological Effects of Censorship and the Ongoing Debate around Freedom of Expression in Morocco

Traces of Kamasutra is a piece that was reworked by Khadija Tnana in 2018 after *Kamasutra II* caused a scandal and was withdrawn from the national exhibition at the *French Institute at Centre for Modern Art* in Tetouan. It was exhibited at the Villa des Arts de Casablanca from December 2018 to January 2019. In *Traces of Kamasutra,* the 'offending' sexual drawings on the 246 protective hands of Fatima (or *Khmisa*) were cut from *Kamasutra II* and encased in a glass box near the new artwork. *Traces of Kamasutra*, therefore, showed empty hands of Fatima to reflect the act of censorship both materially and aesthetically. The new installation also included the glass box where the hands of Fatima that previously depicted scenes of sexual intercourse were "now shown imprisoned inside a transparent box" (Khadija 2019).

The act of cutting the small *Khmisas* on paper cardboard from *Kamasutra II* refers, symbolically, to the effects of the censorship of her work and the restrictions on Moroccan artists' creative freedom and freedom of expression. In fact, while the glass box showcases what the establishment aimed to censor from *Kamasutra* -i.e. the 246 small hands depicting erotic scenes of the Kamasutra- the new artwork shows what would remain if the government were to take out what it judged 'immoral' and 'unclean'. *Traces of Kamasutra* now appears as a sort of *mutilated* and *butchered* piece that a viewer who hadn't previously seen *Kamasutra II,* or paid attention to the glass box accompanying the new work, would not even

understand. Therefore, Khadija reflects the sense of *emptiness* and *hollowness* created by blunt acts of censorship which take out all the intended meanings, messages and reflections that *artivists* like her aim to contribute to crucial issues touching upon their society in the form of a socio-political commentary.

Figure 31. Traces of Kamasutra, Villa des Arts de Casablanca (2018). Shared by the artist**.**

In fact, through the use of the closed glass box encasing the 246 Khmisa, Khadija aims to convey the daunting feeling of containment and suffocation that the government's censorship had created in her. In an article published in *Le 360*, Khadija underscored her feeling of frustration in the face of the Islamists' increasing intrusion in the field of arts and the limitations on creative freedom in the country; she wondered what themes Moroccan artists can still tackle they can't talk about sex, religion nor politics (Chabaa 2019). The title of the piece itself carries the word "traces", which could allude to what remains of and is rescued from the experience of censorship and repression- that is empty white hands showing a *butchered* piece. The hand of Fatima no longer appears to be protective anymore, as it was itself mutilated. As hooks (1989) defines the concept of "talking back" as "a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible […] the liberated voice" (9),

Khadija's endeavor to produce *Traces of Kamasutra* could be seen as the artist's attempt at *healing* from the experience of censorship, which also allows her to recover her subjectivity as an artist and her freedom as a creator. In fact, the 246 small images encased in the glass boxes symbolize Khadija's attempt to freedom that was constrained, but that the author chooses to re-act, once more, through the final masterpiece. During our interview, Khadija told me: "I wanted to create a controversy around artistic censorship and a debate on sexual education, and it was successful" (Khadija 2019).

Conclusion

Khadija's work of creative disobedience, Kamasutra (*I, II* and *Traces of Kamasutra*) aims to "talk back" to several dominant systems simultaneously. First and foremost, Khadija talks back to the Islamist party in power and their overall political ideology by foregrounding one of the major symbols of "folk" Islam that the orthodoxy and fundamentalism of radical political Islam utterly rejects as bid'a. In addition, Khadija also talks back to the Islamists calls for halal art by foregrounding the most haram form of art possible- one that foregrounds blunt scenes of sexual intercourse, including homosexual intercourse, one of the biggest sins in Islam, inside a sacred symbol that stands as an antithesis for the political ideology of the Islamists.

Second, Khadija also talks back to the chauvinism and conservatism of the Moroccan religious establishment which, according to her, has built a retrograde discourse on sexuality and sexual freedom and restricts sexual pleasure and freedom to men only. By advocating a free and equitable sexuality, Khadija also talks back not only to the theologians sexist discourse but also the Islamists' reluctance to implement the gender parity provisions of the new constitution and their conservative stance on Moroccan women's role in the society

Thid, in Kamasutra, Khadija also talks back the Moroccan government's continued reluctancy to implement sex-ed awareness and eductional programs despite the persistent calls from the Moroccan civil society from before the time of the Arab Spring and the accession of the Islamists to power. To do so, Khadija uses a symbol that resonates strongly

with Moroccan people's sense of self and identity, as well as with their cultural, folkloric and religious references (the Khmisa), to make an effective intervention in the field of sexual freedom. The underlying message is that a free and responsible sexuality does not clash with or threaten Moroccan's identity, but quite the opposite. Drawing on an ancient Indian text that celebrates love, harmony and companionship, Kamasutra symbolizes precisely the resulting harmony of reconciling between sexual education and Moroccan culture. The artist provides an alternative reading that outlines the many advantages of a free and responsible sexuality and pays tribute to a long history of liberated sexuality in Islamic societies

However, by foregrounding transgressive themes of eroticism, sexual freedom and homosexuality, Khadija's work was judged illegal in so far as it violated the PJD's calls for 'clean' art and the dominant social norms and was censored and withdrawn at a national exhibition. In response, Khadija did a feminist performance and addressed an open letter to the-then Minister of Communication, thereby succeeding in creating a nationwide controversy around the censorship of her second Kamasutra, alongside issues of sexual awareness and creative freedom. Her latest work *Traces of Kamasutra* aimed to rework *Kamasutra II* to convey and highlight the effect of the government's censorship not only on the artwork but also on the artist [and by extension the society]'s psyche, thereby underscoring an attempt at collective recovery and healing.

Finally, Khadija's work exemplifies several aspects of what Badran (2016) theorizes as women's creative disobedience and the *continuing (gender and cultural) revolution* in the North African region in so far as it uses transgressive artistic means to shed led on crucial societal issues which encompass both gender equality (equality in sexual freedom) and social justice (the protest against censorship and the promotion of freedom of thought and freedom of expression). During our interview, Khadija told me that her art aims to contribute to key societal debates in Morocco to push for more democratic and egalitarian political agendas (Khadija 2019).

In November 2018, a few months following the censorship of *Kamasutra II*, a new hashtag calling for 'free' not 'clean' art stirred a nationwide controversy in Morocco. #FreelFenn, which mixes English and Arabic and translates into "Free Art", became very

popular on social media after two young street artists were prevented from performing in the square of the United Nations, the preferred address for improvised shows in Casablanca, and arrested by the Moroccan police after being accused of outrage at the authorities. Directly following their arrest, a new protest movement was born in the city of Casablanca, calling for the liberation of the two young artists, as many supporters of street art deplored on Facebook: "*What would they do wrong?"; "Did they steal anything?",* as many supporters of street art deplored on Facebook. "Free our children... Free Art!" (Ansamed 2018). Those events also hint at the continuing controversy around freedom of expression and creative freedom in Morocco, as well as to a continuing cultural revolution, through the arts, in contemporary North Africa- including Morocco. *Artivism,* therefore, has a strong potential to shed light on repressed topics and social realities in order to provide meaningful socio-political commentaries. As Levine (2015) pertinently points out, art is the "weapon of the future" in the region to struggle against violent, corrupt and repressive regimes. Artists should, therefore, continue fighting for their freedom of expression to make meaningful social and political interventions that contest systemic oppression and advocate for social justice.

CHAPTER 7

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

(Submitted to the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies.* Currently revising draft according to the editors' comments)

"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
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

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 and hip-hop in constituting a countercultural sphere that is capable of creating wider social and political awareness. To do so, I focus on the case study of Snowflakebxtch, a twenty-four year old Moroccan woman rapper who is known for her outspoken and transgressive freestyles. I draw on a mix research methodology where I combine a textual analysis of two interviews conducted with Aisha Fukushima, the founder of RAPtivism, and the selected Moroccan rapper along with a content 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.

Introduction

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 RAPtivism 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 is capable of triggering 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 outbroke in the Middle East and North African region 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 (MV20F), 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 (Abadi 2014; 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 examine 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 region (Levine 2015; Aisha 2020), and I take as a case study Snowflakebxtch, a twenty-four years old Moroccan female rapper who became 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 disobedienc*e in contemporary North African States. I also ground my analysis in Fraser's (1990) theory of *subaltern counterpublics* 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 limited 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 women's interventions in the counter-cultural scene of rap and hip-hop. On the contrary, my Ph.D. 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.

I argue that Snowflakebxtch's freestyles present a counter hegemonic 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, Snowflakebxitch's work could potentially be inscribed in what Badran (2016) and Wahba (2016)'s have theorized as the continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in "post-revolutionary" North African states.

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 in New York during the late 1970s and early 1980s to tackle as various social justice issues such as widespread poverty, unemployment, police brutality, drugs trafficking, gang violence and lack of life opportunities. George (1998) posits that hip hop culture is made up of four major components including graffiti, break dancing, DJing and rapping. In this last chapter, 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 the lack of safety 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 the reproduction of 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 faces in California as well, such as drug trafficking, poverty, gang wars and violence and called for 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 the majority of incarcerated 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. 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" (the lyrics of which are quoted in the first lines of this chapter) 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

consciousness of these issues all around the world, with the aim of strengthening and empowering them. Hip hop, they contend, 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 of the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 where the [Arab] youth has effectively re-appropriated and integrated hip-hop in their revolutionary struggles and expressions in the various freestyles that were openly sung and performed during the series of protests; 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 soundtracks to the protests. In Syria as in Tunisia, hip-hop helped announce 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 "Irhal" ("*Leave!*)" that has since become the anthem of the Egyptian Revolution and of several other protests that subsequently 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 various issues such 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", 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 in order to crush the local revolutionary movement known as the February 20th Movement. 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" (*"Moroccans until Death"*)- the King succeeded in co-opting 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 back then. As Levine (2015) argues: "Morocco and Bahrain are good examples of how governments 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 C*reative 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.

Kraidy (2016) also uses the term "creative dissidence" to characterize the creative forms, such as digital memes, mash-ups, handheld banners and political rap, that activists mobilized in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011. He observes: "The Arab uprisings have 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). Pointing out how such revolutionary forms are deeply and intimately connected and entangled with the human body, Kraidy (2016, 234) 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 2011 uprisings particularly, 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.

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 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 "freedom is enfleshed 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 advantage of certain opportunities or openings in the political conjecture [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 this context, dissident rappers foreground the clever yet inexpensive power of their sharp words and rhetorics to denounce social injustice and power abuse. In fact, Snowflakebxtch wittily claims on her Instagram profile "I rhyme rhythmically on rhymes" and, in one of her freestyles, that yet all she can afford to produce her rap songs are a pen and black coffee (Snowflakebxtch 2020). Besides the power of the pen, political rappers also foreground the very role of their body (and body language) during public performances through which they are able to convey *affects* and *move* people by embodying *physically* the anger and indignation of their words as well as the ideals that they stand for. 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 reclaiming human dignity and political agency where revolutionary creativity

remains a form of unremunerated labor, thereby even more deeply entangled with affects and less so 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 creative 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. This fits with Badran's (2016) earlier idea that revolutions usually create new subjectivities, leading to the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness and performativity- characterized by a strong sense of social justice – that is able to exist and thrive beyond the mere time of the upheavals. Therefore, Kraidy (2016) concludes that, in this context, revolutionary creative labor entails the convergence of expression, production, and revolution.

RAPtivism: Hip Hop Counterculture and Social Movement

Levine (2015) and Maddex (2014) theorize hip-hop as a counter-culture that was born in the 1970-80s Black segregated neighborhoods of New York to address as 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 theories hip-hop as a counter-discourse that conveyed the Black community's anger and indignation at being excluded from the political sphere by foregrounding an oppositional stance as well as an oppositional identity (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 (i.e., the subversion and contestation of hegemonic power in a specific socio-political location).

Maddex (2014) defines a "raptivist" as a rapper who engages in activism not as a hobby but to shed light on community-based issues 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). Interestingly enough, Maddex extends the definition of raptivists to include not only the committed rappers themselves but also the activists who are in direct 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 actually 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 a bottom-up and 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 and raise critical consciousness through art (Kennedy 2017). 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

To investigate the notion of RAPtivism in Morocco, I conducted 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). A freestyle is a style of improvisation with or without instrumental beats, in which lyrics are recited with no particular subject or structure. Both Snowflakebxtch's freestyles under analysis here have instrumental beats and, although they do not seem to have a particular structure, they clearly have a specific subject or thematic- i.e., feminist rap. For the purpose of this study, I also took care of translating to English the two freestyles that were originally written in the Moroccan Arabic dialect of Darija.

The textual analysis was then completed with an interview I conducted online with Aisha Fukushima, an American woman rapper and the founder of the RAPtivism movement, and a second interview I conducted both online and in person with Snowflakebxtch, a woman rapper who incarnates the values of the RAPtivist movement in Morocco. 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 analysis of Snowflakebxtch's two freestyles and to get direct insights about the movement known as RAPtivism, its objective and its wider social and political implications. The ultimate purpose was to investigate a manifestation of the global RAPtivism movement, whose founder is Aisha Fukushima, 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)" (AishaFukusima.com 2020). Aisha 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 performances. 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. Her 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 or manifestation of RAPtivism in Morocco, a movement that Aisha Fukushima founded about a decade ago in the United States, following an extensive 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 chapter writing in March 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 Tangiers 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 chapter, I use both Snowflake and Snowflakebxtch to refer to the selected rapper as she herself claims both pseudonyms. Snowflakebxtch currently has over 8300 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 demographic 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."

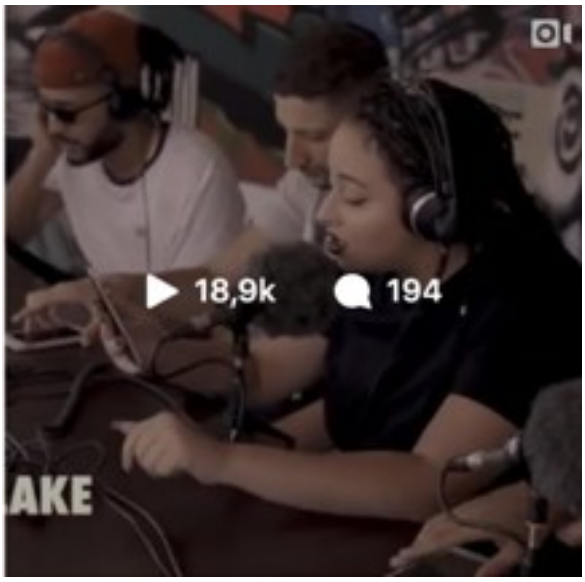

Figure 32. A picture of Snowflake rapping besides four men rappers at the Gruntfreestyle#39 taken from her Instagram profile

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 also 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*". Upon hearing these words, one of the men rappers sitting besides her bursts into laughter. 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 testicles (i.e., a male genital organ), 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, Snowflakebxtch 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 that aims to deconstruct a dominant system and interests— in this case the dominant interests are those of the patriarchal system. Snowflake re-affirms, therefore, 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, Snowflakebxitch exclaims: *"You're not a man... you're just a MALE!"*. Here, the woman rapper deconstructs, once again, the very 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. Snowflabxtch'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 deplores [sexist] men's lack of maturity and rationality which she consistently links with their unfairness and misogynistic 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 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 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 them can enjoy, reminding us again of Snowflake's use of the verb 'love' here which could also refer to 'envy'.

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, Snowflakebxitch'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 rejects the need to be policed by men. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, besides the name Snowflake that the rapper uses to subvert a critique made to US liberals for being too "fragile" — in fact, Snowflake who identifies as a liberal is everything but weak and fragile— she also adds the word bxtch to her social media pseudonym to underscore, instead, her agency and power through the juxtaposition of the two idioms: Snowflake and bxtch. At the same time, Snowflakebxtch also re-claims and embraces the term bxtch, which is usually used in a demeaning and derogatory way by men towards women, as an attempt to recover from and subvert men's sexist slurs and attacks. In fact, during our interview, she observed: "Once you openly claim it [the word bxtch], 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*, Snowflakebxitch 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 in this first freestyle (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" could also reflect 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, Snowflakebxtch subverts another prevailing (gender) binary of public (men) vs. private (women). Hence, in the same freestyle, Snowflake proudly exclaims: *"In my kitchen and the text hurts yeah!"*. Using the allegory of the kitchen as women's place by excellence in the patriarchal psyche, as expressed by her sexist detractors to "return to her kitchen", the rapper seems to suggest 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 and convey a powerful social commentary. In this sense, the fact that Snowflakebxtch 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, Snowflakebxtch deplores 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, *Snow Dreams* freestyle was taken for face-value and interpreted as an attempt to sleep with several male rappers. Snowflake wrote 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,

Snowflakebxtch'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. *Snow Dreams* is, therefore, an attempt by the artist to "talk back" to the prevailing misogynist and discriminatory aspect of the Moroccan rap rhetoric, and rap in general, as a form of feminist re-appropriation that subverts such a patriarchal male narrative.

As a consequence of all her attacks on the patriarchal system, the theme of the sick and deviant appears to be a central one in 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. In this sense, Snowflake expresses her solidarity with all women who are categorized as sick (i.e., deviant) because they do not conform to such a gender classification and arrangement, and therefore do not fit into the system. In fact, as Oumlil (2012) pertinently points out, "hegemonic culture often attempts to construct a particular type of

speech as mad in order to contain it while this type of talk is not always literally insane" (9). In this specific case, patriarchal underpinnings render Snowflakebxtch *insane* in order to dismiss her feminist ideals and feminist intervention through rap; this is evident in the numerous mockeries and sexist attacks that her freestyles received from sexist men online. 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 an influencer, I am an influenza!"*.

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 that even when she is performing a rap song, men generally only pay attention to her body 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 deplores: *"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 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, she 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, disrupt traditional gender norms and 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 sexist idea 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.

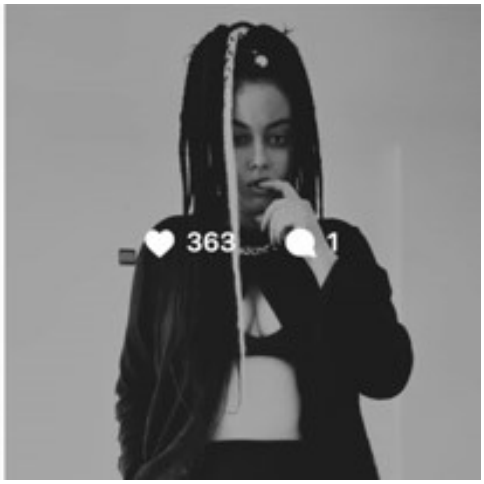

Figure 33. A picture of Snowflakebxtch's taken from her Instagram profile

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 of their own *inner* strength and power to *talk back* to sexism and refuse a 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 who is not only conscious of her own agency but also ready to deploy it anytime. In fact, in her freestyle *Listen You Male,* Sknowflakebxtch 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 of the patriarchal system, her refusal to be yet another victim of sexism 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 rapper but rather to hold a backward and sexist mentality. In fact, many detractors of the hip-hip culture generally associate it with several stigmas such as delinquency, juvenile violence and drug abuse. In this line, Snowflake also implies that the shame actually lies in the several woes that 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 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 wider 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 deplores the fact that some rappers interpreted this track as an invitation for a hookup 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 and to teach male rappers how to write; she also effects a sort of a reversal of traditional gender roles 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 wider Moroccan society, where the public sphere also remains largely a male domain. Here, Snowflakebxtch's statement is reminiscent of Audre Lordre's (1984) famous phrase of using the master's tools (i.e., the hip-hop game and scene) to dismantle the master's house (i.e., contribute a feminist critique and deconstruct the patriarchal system from within the hip-hop game)). 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-enacts 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 societal awareness.

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

In both freestyles examined in this chapter, Snowflake openly deplores 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 largely 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 politico-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 an Indonesian brand of cheap instant noodles that is very popular in Morocco, especially within students' communities. Hence, after decrying the unethical exploitation of a major natural resource in Morocco, Snowflakebxtch moves on to tackle 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 (poor) 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 "making 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 MV20F 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 enfolding 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, as mentioned previously, 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). As a consequence, her daring and transgressive freestyles tackle crucial themes such 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 contribute to inscribe the rapper and her transgressive language and rhetorics under analysis here 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 MV20F despite her very young age. The analysis of her freestyles reveals that she continues to tackle similar issues that remain unfulfilled from the time of the Arab Spring

demands. 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 examines 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 cunny, 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 the same freestyle, Snowflake continues: *"Flow so sick everybody's getting sick"*, implying 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*, Snowfalkebxtch proudly proclaims: *"I am not an influencer, I am an influenza!"*. Here, Snowflake describes herself as a type of contaminating virus, emphasizing 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, the rapper 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, i.e., non-dominant and non-hegemonic 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. 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" (9). In this sense, Snowflake's rap tracks *talk back* both to 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 is 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 predominance of sexist slurs and the male objectifying gaze 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 improve their awareness. Nevertheless, 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 that undermine women's social status. 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, in order to ta*lk back* to a patriarchal discourse that sees women's place in the private sphere exclusively. Snowflake addresses the sexist "male" through various verbal cues and uses many vulgar words as a re-appropriation of a male privilege by a woman in order to recover from gender-directed slurs and reject 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 underlines 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 in the society. 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 various issues such as sexual harassment, the subordination of women, widespread poverty and regime exploitation. In fact, Snowflake told me that she 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 ties between the rap community worldwide through exchange programs and artistic residencies to improve 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.

Figure 34. Snowflake rapping at the Casablanca French Institute in 2019- Photographs supplied by the artist.

Figure 35. Snowflake rapping at the Casablanca French Institute in 2019- Photographs supplied by the artist.

CHAPTER 8
Conclusion and Future Research

The Political Potential of Moroccan Women's Creative Disobedience: 'Talking back' to several Dominant Systems Simultaneously

Drawing on the case of post-revolutionary Egypt (Badran 2016; Wahba 2016), this dissertation aimed, first, to investigate women's forms of resistance that express *creative disobedience* in contemporary Morocco (i.e., from 2011 onwards) by looking at their main characteristics and patterns, as well as to examine the political potential of women's *continued* resistance to advocate for both women's rights and social justice in "post-revolutionary" Morocco. To do so, I used mainly a qualitative approach where I took as case studies, four women artists: Khadija Tnana, Naima Zitane, Noussayba Lahlou and Ghizlane Ghadi (a.k.a Snowflakbxtch). To ensure both an equitable disciplinary and demographic representation of women's forms of resistance that express *creative disobedience*, I selected women artists from different generations whose ages varied between 24 and 75 years old and who specialize in four distinct artistic disciplines - slam poetry, theatre, visual arts and rap. My textual and visual analyses of a selection of women's artworks, which was combined with individual interviews conducted with each artist, has revealed that women's patterns of *creative disobedience* in post-revolutionary Morocco are not only existent and widespread but also deeply socially and politically conscious.

Cavatorta (2013) contends that the Arab Spring was the result of mass revolutionary fervor that developed and spread across horizontal (i.e., non hierarchical) and non traditional networks. This means that atomized (i.e., autonomous, independent and initially isolated) individuals, including artists and activists, rather than civil society networks, were behind the outbreak of the Arab uprisings of 2011 and the spread of the ideals of social justice that inhabited them. These atomized and localized tactics are the essence of the revolutionary fervor that instigated the protests in 2011 and which is still ongoing until today in counter cultural spheres inhabited by such women artists who talk back to various forms of dominant power simultaneously to carry on both the spirit and the essence of the 2011 revolutions. As mentioned in this dissertation introduction, the February 20th Movement (MV20F) was co-opted by the regime with the adoption of mere cosmetic constitutional reforms that failed to disrupt the status quo and bring about effective social change in the long run, namely on the issues of human rights, the political separation of powers and gender equality (Boutkhil

2016). As many of the demands of the MV20F remained unfulfilled, women's artworks aim to redefine, in their own terms, the meaning and purpose of the revolution by constantly repurposing and injecting a revolutionary fervor in the context of a previously *suppressed* revolution and *knowledge* of such a revolution. They do so not only for the demands that were already on the agenda of MV20F activists from the time of the Arab Spring (such as gender parity, sexual education, human rights, political transparency) but also, and if not especially, in light of more recent socio-political events that witnessed the rise of the Islamists to power and their problematic discourse on clean art whereby women artists effectively question the place of women, creativity and artistic freedom in the post-revolutionary society.

In fact, through their artworks, the selected women artists aim to *talk back* to several dominant systems simultaneously i.e., to contest and deconstruct hegemonic systems by reactivating and foregrounding women's localized knowledges (i.e., epistemology) and interpretations (i.e., hermeneutics) that are typically or have previously been quarantined or evacuated by them. First, these productions *talk back* to the predominantly conservative and patriarchal norms of the Moroccan society which advocate gender segregation and the traditional gender roles and define women as the *Second Sex*- i.e., as weak, passive and submissive (De Beauvoir 1949). In her rap freestyles, Snowflakebxtch deconstructs the very logic behind the dominant gender binary system in Morocco by *troubling* the categories of gender (Butler 1991) and underscoring both the fragility and arbitrariness of a system that over-relies on biological sex to come up with diametrically opposed classifications of gender attributes and roles- one that can be easily subverted by words, thoughts and actions. Quite skillfully and lyrically, she raps: *"Even if I am a woman, I have my own balls!"* and *"No you're not a man.. you're just a male!".* In this sense, Snowflakebtxch talks back to patriarchy by pointing out and subverting the weaknesses of the (biological) logic that justifies, sustains and legitimizes such a system of domination.

Second, women's artworks also *talk back* the Islamist party's dominant discourse on 'halal' and morally acceptable forms of art by foregrounding the most 'unclean' and transgressive forms of art possible from the standpoint of the Islamists, such as those that focus on the taboo topics of female sexuality and sexual emancipation. For instance, Naima Zitane's 2012 play "Dialy" was released only a few months after minister Boulif's official statement about the need to conform to "halal" standards in creative expressions as a response to the party's calls for "clean" art and the increasing limitations on Moroccan artists' creative freedom. As a daring and provocative response, and drawing on Eve Ensler's text *The Vagina*

*Monogue*s, "Dialy" foregrounded the ultimate taboo of the Moroccan society- the vagina- to deplore both the physical and psychological effects of a repressed and alienated female sexuality on women's lives and well-being. In that same year, visual artist Khadija Tnana produced her *Kamasutra* where she draws erotic scenes of both homosexual and heterosexual intercourse on a symbol with high religious and cultural folkloric connotations in the region- the hand of Fatima or the *Khmisa*. Her objective was to openly advocate for sexual education and women's sexual emancipation in Morocco by directly addressing the Islamists in power through her use of a religious symbol.

Ultimately, women's works also *talk back* to the government's various forms of abuses including the corruption of the politicians in power and their role in the reproduction of rampant social inequalities in the country. For instance, Noussayba Lahlou's slam poetry deplores the corruption and self-centeredness of what she describes as the *politi-chiens* (poli-dogs), while Snowflakebxtch retraces the origins of widespread poverty in the (over)exploitation of Morocco's natural resources by handful few i.e., the political elites and the big corporations run by foreign companies. Finally, both Khadija Tnana and Naima Zitane deplore the government's *continued* apathy to implement sexual education and awareness programs in order to maintain their so-called politico-religious legitimacy in the country. Therefore, the artists also talk back to the *continued* political authoritarianism in the country in the aftermath of the Moroccan Spring by pointing out various flaws in terms of democratic and equitable governance, as well as to the implications of foreign interference in the country's economic affairs in terms of state sovereignty and neo imperialism.

In this sense, the selected Moroccan women *artivists* have presented in their artworks an intersectional analysis which underscores the interlocking effects of authoritarianism, patriarchy and neo-imperialism in furthering women's systemic oppression in present-day Morocco. In fact, Badran (2016) argues that *creative disobedience* is increasingly becoming a powerful tool for Egyptian women today to denounce interlocking systems of oppression. Therefore, Moroccan women's forms of resistance express similar patterns and characteristics of *creative disobedience* as their Egyptian counterparts in terms of both the tools and techniques that they use -i.e., visuals, lyrics, texts, performances- as well as their intended objectives - to advocate for gender equality and social justice concomitantly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings (Badran 2014; Badran 2016). This context is characterized by a set of shared social and political grievances in the face of *continued*, and sometimes even exacerbated, gender discrimination, political instability and regime abuse and corruption (Howard & Husain 2013).

As hooks (1989) observes, acts of *talking back* are not only defiant but also cathartic in nature: "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible" (9). Therefore, there is another latent objective to women's artistic creations which is to allow them, and their audience, to recover from past trauma, grief and oppression. These include women's (suppressed) experiences of gender violence and authorities' abuse during the protests, as well as the ongoing systemic oppression and inequality in their countries- which they effectively relate through their standpoints and subjectivities in their artworks. This contributes not only to the development of an overall social and political consciousness at the national and regional levels, but also to the imagining of new tomorrows where life becomes more bearable, just and equitable. *Talking back* is, therefore, not only a *tactic* to counter some (dominant) representations or social realities of injustice but also a way to heal from oppression and, ultimately, to free oneself. As El Maarouf (2011, 42) puts it very eloquently: "I think it is necessary, when dealing with Africa, to speak about freedom and the illusion of freedom, democracy and the illusion of democracy, order and the illusion of order, love and the illusion of love, peace and the illusion of peace. These are concepts that come with their shadows. It is interesting to ponder how the illusion of freedom could substitute freedom and act like its model".

The continuing gender (and cultural) revolution in contemporary Morocco

This dissertation also aimed to explore the idea of the *continuing g*ender (and cultural) revolution that has, since 2011, been so prevalent in post-revolutionary Egypt by focusing on a specific socio-political context that is present-day Morocco. Badran (2016) talks about the *longue durée* of revolutionary feminist struggle in the region and situates the feminist revolution as one that exists both in the *before* and the *after* of the political revolution of 2011. Similarly, in Morocco, the *continuing gender revolution* exists in the before and after of the events of the so-called 'Moroccan' Spring. During the long years of colonial rule (1922-1956), the objective of the gender revolution was to advocate for women's access to formal education through the first feminist organization in Morocco, the *Akhawat Al-Safa* (i.e. the Sisters of Purity). This early feminist consciousness was 'put on hold' during the independence struggle against the French where the nationalist cause took precedence over women's rights and women were strongly mobilized, and even instrumentalized, to hide dissidents, transport weapons and deliver important messages. The women's movement was

only reactivated in post-independent Morocco (i.e., post-1956) during the long years for the constitutionalization of women's equality that witnessed the birth of the first leading feminist associations in unions in the country, such as *Association Democratique des Femmes Marocaines (ADFM)* in 1985; this period culminated with the passing of the progressivist and revolutionary Family Code, the *Mudawana*, in 2004 (Ennaji 201). In 2011, the political revolution again took precedence over the women's cause as women activists of the 'Moroccan Spring' considered themselves primarily members of the February 20th Movement (MV20F), and not the *Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy,* which only constituted a sub-branch of the movement. The gender revolution was repurposed again in the post-revolutionary context (i.e., 2011 onwards) to continue advocating for women's rights and the unfulfilled (feminist and social justice) demands that were already on the agenda of the MV20F activists in 2011, as well as against the backdrop of political Islam and the newly elected Islamists' attempts to limit women's physical and symbolic presence in the society. In this context, Moroccan women artivists reinvest the revolutionary fervor of 2011 to re-define the revolution in their own terms through the tactics of both feminist epistemology and hermeneutics that were discussed in this dissertation chapters. As Badran pertinently points out in the case of Egypt: "Women, now with many men on board, mostly of the younger generations, asserted a *reenergized feminism* as part of their continuing revolutionary work" (46).

In fact, my analysis revealed that the four selected Moroccan women's artworks also exemplify several aspects of Badran (2016)'s *continuing (gender and cultural) revolution* in the post-2011 context in so far as these women have been producing a number of transgressive artworks with a strong political and feminist overtone- through the use of unconventional visual, aesthetics, lyrics, words and performances in order to shed light on crucial societal issues which, as mentioned previously, encompass both gender equality and social justice. They, thus, continue the same "revolutionary" spirit- or fervor- of the MV20F, which did not aim to topple King Mohammed VI regime but instead, to implement a series of reforms that would affect concrete and sustainable social change in the country. In this sense, Moroccan women *artivists* have been adopting a similar reformist (i.e., not radical) approach of the MV20F in order to tackle a number of issues that were already the key priorities of the local revolutionary movement back in 2011. These concerns include regime abuse and corruption, the traditional gender roles and women's unequal access to the public sphere, as well as the role of capitalism and regime corruption in furthering the already widespread socio-economic inequalities in the country and the unequal access to education for all

(Boutkhil 2016; Ennaji 2016). Therefore, for Moroccan artists and activists, the idea of the *continuing* revolution exemplifies precisely the continuity, and perhaps also the revival, the repurposing and the celebration of the reformist ideology and contentious politics of the MV20F, which they have been reflecting through their artistic creations and subjectivities since the end of the "Moroccan Spring". In her slam poetry, Noussayba Lahlou underscores that she is not anti-system and does not advocate radical political revolution per se, but rather, for a gradual revolution and a revolution of the minds and spirits towards a more just and egalitarian society: *"I'm not anti-system; I'm much other dirt / Because before being anti system, you must first be anti-your-society"*. According to the artivist, adopting such a stance would ensure a more sustainable social change that can be carried on beyond the time of the (political) revolutions, that is both in the *before* and in the *after* of those revolutions, as Badran (2016) underscores in the case of Egypt's continuing (gender) revolution.

Similarly, Snowflabxtch, Naima Zitane and Khadija Tnana have focused particularly in their works on the prevalence of gender binaries and the traditional gender roles that define Moroccan women's sexuality as passive and alienated and allow for acts of sexual harassment, gender-based violence and (marital) rape to still go unpunished today. They have called for the need to question the sexist and conservative values of their society, and in this sense, have carried on some of the key demands of the *Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy*, that is the sub-branch feminist Spring of the MV20F. In fact, the coalition did not advocate for a toppling of the system either but for genuine constitutional and legal reforms that would improve women's rights in Morocco (Yachoulti 2015). These issues were already key concerns of the feminist sub-branch of the local revolutionary movement back in 2011, and are also recurrent in women's artworks from 2011 until today, which hints at Wahba's (2016, 73) notion of *continuum* of struggle whereby the revolution continues given that people's demands were not met a decade ago. The *Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy* is also a manifestation of how feminist and political concerns are increasingly becoming intertwined in the region today (Gheytanchi & Moghadam 2014). As this dissertation has revealed, such an entanglement is particularly evident in women's various artistic and cultural interventions which exemplify a continuing (gender and cultural) revolution in Morocco today.

As mentioned previously, I draw in this dissertation on Foucault's notion of disordered and fragmentary genealogies to foreground Moroccan women's suppressed stories and knowledges. As Foucault (1994) pertinently points out, the (social) scientific discourse on knowledge and reason has been rather regular and continuous over time, focusing only on

the continuities and the similarities. My dissertation has proposed to take a quite different route, by looking at revolutionary struggles from a non-linear and non-continuous perspective and focusing on the contradictions, discontinuities and paradoxes as important moments when the society reconfigures the (social scientific) discourse and its meaning-making mechanisms. By focusing on a major break and discontinuity in the political history of the region that is the Arab Spring of 2011, as well as on a blatant feminist and societal paradox that is the counterrevolution against women's rights in the post-revolutionary contexts, my objective was to examine the social and political potential of such periods that can be characterized as transitory breaks and discontinuities in activating new subjectivities or consolidating previous anti-status quo and revolutionary subjectivities. The focus on the marginalized subjectivities and creative works of women artists has revealed a strong potential to reactivate and restore women's knowledges and experiences that have previously been erased and or quarantined by various regimes of power simultaneously- i.e., patriarchy, authoritarianism and neocolonialism. The objective of women's artworks is to continue advocating for gender equality and socio-political liberties in the aftermath of the Moroccan Spring of 2011 through a re-telling history from women's subjectivities and standpoints (i.e., epistemologies) and the making sense of socio-political events collectively through a gender lens (i.e., hermeneutics). In this sense, periods of discontinuities, breaks and transitions can be highly productive- creatively as well as politically- as women's artworks are effectively deployed to reproduce and maintain the revolutionary subjectivities that emerged from a highly tense and charged political moment such as that of the Arab Spring. In this sense, the regular and continuous becomes less relevant as the irregular and the discontinuous increasingly take the form of the productive, and even of the revolutionary.

Country Specificities of Moroccan women's creative interventions

Third, this thesis aimed to analyze the influence and impact of the sociopolitical environment on the expression as well as the reception of women's acts of *creative disobedience* by paying close attention to contextual factors in present-day Morocco. In fact, in addition to continuing to advocate for unfulfilled social and political demands from the time of the "Moroccan Spring", women *artivists* have also integrated a number of other issues that have been affecting Morocco in the post-revolutionary context specifically (i.e., from 2011 onwards), thereby further redefining and apprehending the *continuing revolution* in their own terms, including the co-option of both the feminist and the political revolution by

the regime, the rise of political Islam to power and their conservative stance on artistic creations that they limit to "clean" forms only, as well as the exacerbation of the already widespread socio-economic inequalities in the country. Cases in point include Naima's play "Dialy" inspired by Eve Ensler's the *Vagina Monologues* and Khadija Tnana's *Kamasutra,* which can be read as direct responses to the PJD's dominant discourse on "halal" art as they foreground the most imaginable versions of "haram" in art— ones that deal with vaginas and free and emancipated sexualities. Both the play and the visual installation were censored by the Islamists, which also hints at an ongoing and never-ending process of negotiation and contention between those in power and those whose discourse is situated at the very margins- i.e., women artists who engage in *creative disobedience*. Another example is Noussayba Lahlou's slam "Arab Winter" where she deplores Morocco's unique experience of the Arab Spring whereby the local revolutionary movement has been effectively co-opted by the regime through the adoption of a constitution that did not meet the protestors' demands on the long run (Daadaoui 2017; Boutkhil 2016). She slams: *"But since you have the power over the seasons",* where she deplores the Moroccan regime's capacity to make a Spring a Winter, and *"Whoever is destined to fall, strangely one day rises"*, in reference to the King's power to co-opt an entire revolution and to his regime still holding steady despite the waves of political upheavals that swept across the region.

Situating her freestyles in a very specific socio-political context that is post-Arab Spring Morocco, Snowflakebxtch also sheds light on a highly sensitive issue— that of the over-exploitation of the country's natural resources to the benefit of the political elite and the big corporations which are owned by the imperial powers. In one of her most famous lines, she raps: "*My smile is fake like that of Jorf's" in reference* to *Jorf Lasfar,* a deep-water commercial port located on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. This port is equipped for the exportation of phosphate, Morocco's top natural resource, outside the country by leading European and American energy groups. Therefore, by adopting the same reformist approach as the MV20F where women *artivists* continue tackling the same issues from a decade ago, and by addressing other novel issues that have risen to prominence in the new post-revolutionary context and that undermine current opportunities for socio-economic development in the country, Moroccan women's *creative disobedience* patterns exemplify several aspects the *continuing (gender) revolution* in post Arab-Spring Egypt. In fact, Moroccan women artist-activists are using creativity as a revolutionary tool to denounce their ongoing social and political exclusion from the public sphere even after 2011 as they *continue* deploring the everlasting effects of authoritarianism, lack of democratic rule, regime

corruption, neo-colonialism and imperialism on their status and overall societies in order to call for effective and sustainable social change by constantly repurposing the revolutionary fervor of 2011 and redefining the terms, meaning, objectives of the ongoing (gender and cultural) revolution.

On the differences between various genres of artistic expressions

Fourth, this dissertation work also aimed to explore the potential differences between women's expressions across various artistic disciplines. In my analysis of Moroccan women's *creative disobedience* patterns, I found out that some artistic disciplines which can be classified under the category of "street art" tend to appeal more to younger women artivists (such as slam poetry, rap, break-dancing, 3D art, digital drawing etc.) than other disciplines, such as the visual and performing arts, where there is a more significant representation of women artists from an older generation. Such insights could, therefore, reveal a generational divide in the disciplinary leanings of women artists in Morocco. In fact, during their interviews, both Naima Zitane and Khadija Tnana, aged 53 and 75, expressed their lack of familiarity with the hip-hop culture and the emerging forms of urban and street arts (Tnana 2020; Zitane 2019). They confided that these new forms generally speak more to a younger generation who are more "hip" and connected to street culture than they are. Khadija also underscored how her background as a university professor and an admirer of the French museums from the time she was a student in Paris have led her to lean more towards the visual arts, while Naima Tnana spoke of how her early experiences at the Music Conservatory and her training at the Institute des Arts Dramatiques in Rabat (IDRAC) defined her career as a playwright.

These generational disciplinary divides can be explained by the fact that street art is a relatively new and recent phenomenon which, as a consequence, has the ability to appeal more to younger people who grew up being exposed to such novel forms of art. Street art, as a new and radical art form, rejects any affiliation with official institutions such as museums, galleries, banks, national festivals and performances; in fact, most street artists claim that their transgressive art forms aim to contest hegemonic power and, therefore, can only exist outside of its institutional framework. For them, their art belongs to the 'street' - meaning to the people and not the elites- and any attempt at 'domesticating' it (i.e., bringing it into museums, galleries etc.) will be an effective manifestation of subversion (Perez-Reverte 2015). As a consequence, street art inherently carries a radical and revolutionary spirit to

which a socially and politically frustrated youth can relate, such as the Arab youth who have been living in a highly tense and politically unstable climate since (and before) the outbreak of the Arab Spring (Levine 2015). For instance, 24-year-old slammer Noussayba told me that she grew up listening to French "Beur" rap (a rap genre by French rappers of Maghrebi origin) which made her very politically conscious of the plight of the Arab community in France and the extent of both racism and social inequalities there. Since a very young age, she longed to be a rapper, but due to parental pressure and the high social stigma of being a woman rapper in Morocco, where rap is still a predominantly male domain, she decided to go for slam or street poetry, which is a "softer" version of rap situated halfway between rap and poetry (Noussayba 2019). Likewise, during my interview with Snowflakebxtch, the 25 year-old rapper told me she grew up listening to American hip-hop and closely following American politics which made her deeply conscious about the complexity of identity politics in the US. She even uses as a pseudonym a critique that is constantly made to refer to US liberals - "snowflake"- for being too fragile and taking offense in a lot of what is done and said by others who do not share similar beliefs (Snowflakebxtch 2020). Although she first dabbled in different genres - poetry, fiction and essays - rap has always been her vocation; hence, starting 2019, she decided to dedicate herself to rap only.

Therefore, whereas women artivists of the older generation rather resort to complex texts, visuals, symbols and imagery in their visual artworks, installations and plays, young women tend to use the power of the words, the rhymes, the microphone and their bodies to denounce systemic oppression, as Snowflakebtxch rhythmically raps: "*I am carrying a mic not a butt!*" And *"I'm not an influencer, I am an influenza!".* Further research could, therefore, expand on the potential of street art, a relatively novel artistic discipline and phenomenon, in being appropriated by the Moroccan youth today to contest social injustice and challenge various systems of dominance physically, visually and metaphorically. As Levine (2015) posits, street art has the potential to invade the public sphere and the dominant institutions that exist inside it (i.e., the governmental and financial institutions, multinational corporations) and to bring social change from the bottom from the perspectives of highly marginalized populations: the youth, the poor, and the oppressed.

Audience Reception of Women's Artworks

It is also relevant to discuss the audience's reception of the selected women's artworks to understand how their creations are apprehended, read and decoded in the local

context(s) by paying close attention to contextual factors, and how they resonate with governmental institutions on the one hand, and with the people on the other. As discussed previously, from the state's perspective, there was a strong censorship and repression of women's artworks of the older generation - i.e., in the disciplines of visual arts and theatre- that was evident either in the withdrawal of their artworks from local exhibitions, in the case of Khadija's *Kamasutra* in 2018, or in the prohibition of a performance for Naima's play *Dialy* in 2013. The reason behind that is that these forms of artworks circulate through official channels such as public performance spaces and national exhibitions that are not only open to the wider public but which also represent the state and the dominant values it stands for, hence the need to carefully 'watch over' what happens in these spaces. Moreover, the state has total control on these 'public' spaces and can therefore easily intervene to reproduce dominant social norms and assert its position and discourse (i.e., here the Islamists' discourse on 'halal' art). This was evident in the Islamist government's official announcement of Khadija's *Kamasutra* banning from the Centre of Modern Arts in Tetouan on the grounds that it constituted a violation of social norms, a threat to public order and an incitement to debauchery (La Vigie Marocaine 2018).

However, women of the younger generation's artistic productions, such as slam poems and rap songs, circulate primarily through unofficial channels such as streaming (Deezer, Spotify, Anghami) and digital platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram) on which the state has very limited to no control. It is, therefore, harder to regulate what happens in those spaces, the nature of the knowledge and discourses that circulate within digital platforms (i.e., epistemology) and the way younger women artists make meaning of them to promote alternative social ideals (i.e., hermeneutics). When it comes to official venues such as performance spaces, rappers and slam poets like Noussayba and Snowflakebxtch are mostly given a voice and a platform by the *French Cultural Center (CCF)* which has local branches in several cities in Morocco. During her interview, Noussayba told me that she had the opportunity to perform in many CCFs throughout Morocco; similarly, in 2019, Snowflakebxtch was invited to perform at the CCF Casablanca only a few months after she rose to stardom as the last figure in Chapter 7 shows. The fact that these young women artists seldom to never get a chance to perform within public performance spaces and national cultural centres, and are only given a platform by the *French Cultural Center (CCF)*, also hints at the continuing neo imperial dynamics in Morocco, whereby the former colonizer uses soft power - through the role of arts and culture instead of hard power which relies on military means- to intervene in a foreign land to promote a vision of society that is aligned

with theirs through the recuperation of women's works of *creative disobedience*. However, it is important to acknowledge that these productions emerge from women artists' own subjectivities and initiative and that the CCF does not intervene in the creative process itself; it only provides a platform for the showcase, dissemination and promotion of women's creations.

From a societal perspective, women artists' productions have been, relatively, accepted by the people and primarily endorsed within underground artistic and cultural circles. During my interview with Khadija Tnana, the artist pointed out that the calls for censoring *Kamasutra* never came from the Moroccan people themselves, despite their overall conservative ideology and the provocative stance of her artworks in terms of bodily and sexual celebration; she underscored how the censorship discussions and initiatives came primarily from political dissidents working at the city municipalities where her artworks were scheduled to be exhibited, such as the Casablanca municipality in 2012 and the Tetouan municipality in 2018 (Interview with Khadija Tnana, 2020). Moreover, as previously discussed in Chapter 6, Khadija's *Kamasutra II*, which was initially withdrawn from the national exhibition in 2018, was later on recuperated by the *Racines Associations* and openly exhibited at the *Lynx* Cinema in Casablanca despite its official censorship a few months prior. During the 'counter-exhibition', civil society actors including *Racines* representatives, but also artists and other associations' members, welcomed and celebrated Khadija's artwork by organizing a debate to give a voice and a platform for the artist to express herself and discuss her artistic approach in an attempt to reinstate the artist's subjectivity that was suppressed by the state and denounce the overall climate of censorship and repression in Morocco (Interview with Khadija Tnana, 2020). The dissolution of the *Racines Association* in 2019, only a few months after the (counter)exhibition of Kamasutra, hints at the continuing and increasing climate of political censorship and repression in Morocco today. Naima Zitane pointed out a similar aspect during her interview, underscoring that the attempts at censoring *Dialy* from 2012 onwards came primarily from the Islamists in power as well as other Islamist factions in the society, which were probably behind the creation of the Facebook page where Naima and her team received several insults and death threats. On the contrary, the Moroccan people who were able to attend the play's performance and "did not merely judge the play from its title", which indirectly referred to the vagina, or from the journalists' negative reports, usually came with their family relatives- wives, husbands and children- and openly welcomed the play and the messages it conveyed about female sexuality and the

implications of a repressed sexuality for both men and women alike in present-day Morocco (Interview with Naima Zitane, 2019).

From a societal perspective, both Noussayba and Snowflakebxtch's slams and rap freestyles are predominantly welcomed within the underground hip-hop and urban scene in Morocco. Noussayba pointing out during her interview that: "I don't choose my audience, but rather my audience chooses me" directly hints at the existence of a community and a unified art scene with whom her words [and societal message] resonate, which is the underground hip-hop and art scene that was born in the late 1990s with the creation of l'Boulevard Music Festival, which spirit has been revived by the Moroccan Spring, and that continues until today. The existence of networks, links and solidarities within the underground hip-hop scene enable the community to choose Noussayba's slams by following the news about the scene and the artists' performances throughout Morocco such as through the pages of L'Boulevard, the *French Cultural Center* etc. In the case of Snowflake, as mentioned previously, the artist does receive a lot of hateful and sexist comments on her social media pages because of her provocative dressing styles and repetitive cursing; however, Snowflake also pointed out a gradual shift in the societal perceptions and reception of her art in the sense that her predominantly male audience reception is increasingly becoming more supportive (Interview with Snowflakebxtch, 2019). I believe this is primarily facilitated by the 'dialogue' approach adopted by Snowflake in her communication strategy; in each new freestyle, such as in *Listen You Male*, the artist directly addresses her audience with the aim of responding to previous negative feedback and comments. She points out the flaws and social-constructedness of the patriarchal system which are behind men's beliefs and perceptions, not blaming her male audience but the system itself. As pointed out previously, Snowflake's potential to alter/change societal perceptions lies not only in her counterness and provocative discourse and aesthetics, but also precisely in the fact that her audience is primarily made of men between 15 and 24 years old (i.e., men of the future generation).

The 'Transnational Feminist Revolution' and Recommendations for Future Research

Finally, the transnational dimension of my work is evident in the comparative approach adopted in this dissertation. First, I focus on a specific social and political context that is the aftermath of the Arab uprisings in the North African region (2011-2020). Starting from chapter 2, I provide an in-depth documentation and analysis of the transnational context of the Arab Spring in each of post-revolutionary Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia to examine the

effects of the transnational revolution on women's rights and their resulting social status in these three post-revolutionary states. But most importantly, this dissertation is a comparative study between Egypt and Morocco where my objective is to investigate the concept of women's *creative disobedience* that is so prevalent in Egypt today in a different social and political context that is post-'revolutionary' Morocco. I look at what is happening in one context that may speak to another, create resonances with another, in terms of the similarities and differences between women's discourses, creative productions and societal projections.

This thesis work has underscored the *transnational* aspect of the (gender and cultural) revolution that is taking place in the North African region today by revealing major similarities in terms of the rationale, the objectives, and the aesthetics of women's creative disobedience in Egypt and Morocco. Similar to what is happening in Egypt, Moroccan women's *creative disobedience* can be situated in a specific social and political context that is the aftermath of the "Moroccan Spring" of 2011 where women artivists are carrying on the revolutionary struggle through artistic and cultural means and their own subjectivities as women. First, through creative disobedience, Moroccan and Egyptian women artivists aim to constantly rekindle, reactivate and re-purpose the revolutionary fervor that was instigated back in 2011 in order to continue (re)defining the revolution in their own terms i.e., mainly in feminist and social justice terms. Their objective is not only to continue advocating for the political revolution to fulfill its promises of political transparency and social justice for everyone, but also to continue struggling for their own right, as women, to remain in the public sphere despite the pushback realities of patriarchy, conservatism and political Islam that aim to contain both their physical presence in the public sphere (and political life) and their symbolic presence through the invisiblisation, censorship and co-optation of their creative productions. Moreover, Moroccan and Egyptian women artivists draw on similar transgressive aesthetics (i.e., by painting mutilated Egyptian women's bodies on city walls or producing an installation that celebrates people's sexuality in Morocco) to articulate their message which relies on shock and provocation to impact people's minds and bring about social change. In this sense, beyond a project that solely advocates for change from the dominant powers, the continuing revolution can be also read as a revolution in modes of subjectivation and in the expression of these new subjectivities that draw, consciously, from the revolutionary spirit of the 2011 uprisings and constantly (re)inject such a revolutionary fervor in light of more recent socio-political developments to actively reproduce these subjectivities and carry on the spirit of the revolution(s). However, although Egypt's political revolution was somehow "successful" in that it led to a toppling of Mubarak's regime, as

mentioned before, Morocco's local revolutionary movement of the MV20F was quickly co-opted (Daadaoui 2017). Hence, Moroccan women's artistic productions also reveal some country specificities such as the curtailing of the local revolutionary movement by the regime and the exacerbation of social inequalities due to the prevalence of neoliberal politics in the country. In this sense, the comparative dimension of my study focuses on the similarities and differences between women's political art in a national context but also between these contexts as well as on the associations, mirroring effects created by the travel of one specific concept (i.e., creative disobedience) from one national context to another. Here, women's artworks also engage, even if indirectly, state and government powers as they aim to create a conscious feminist call for action for the state to adopt gender-sensitive policies. Such dynamics also led me to contemplate the possibility of a transnational feminist revolution that can create a network of solidarity and a pressure from below that is able to escalate at the transnational governmental level to bring about effective social change in educational and political terms.

In fact, the existence of a number of regional patterns and similarities which include both the common set of social and political *grievances* and women's resistance patterns that take the form of *creative disobedience* could lead us to question the existence of a "transnational feminist revolution" in the North African region where women *artivists* contest and challenge several structures of domination simultaneously- authoritarianism, patriarchy and neocolonialism. Speaking about the enfolding of a "transnational feminist revolution" in the region today, cooke (2016) observes:

> Women are responding to each other and to their local circumstances, often across national borders and between homeland and diaspora. No longer isolated events, the separate revolutions have created contrapuntal resonances so that energy in one place can revive exhaustion in another. Whenever their rights and dignity are threatened, women know where to go for their voices to be heard (43).

Howard and Husain (2013) speak about a set of political and social *grievances* that unite activists throughout the North African region, and even across all Arab States, such as political instability and repression, gender inequality and regime corruption. The objective of North African women's emergent resistance forms is, therefore, to continue advocating for unfulfilled social and political demands from the time of the Arab Spring, and even to denounce an exacerbation of social injustice resulting from the rise of the Islamists to power and the legal backlash against women's rights. Women's (creative) expressions reflect a strong social and political awareness of this set of shared socio-political and culturally

specific issues and have the ability to create a sort of dialogue and mirroring effect between their creative productions. Therefore, future research could expand on this dissertation's findings by examining the existence, characteristics and patterns of such a transnational feminist revolution in the North African region today and, by extension, in the Arab world as well. This research could, for instance, focus on how new digital technologies are facilitating the creation of a *transnational* networked sphere that unites women artists and activists across the region.

Howard and Hussain (2013) have underscored the role of digital technologies in allowing [Arab] activist communities to realize, since the early 2000s, that they share common grievances, which led to a rapid spread of the protests across the Arab world in 2011. At the same time, the *ongoing* democratization processes enabled Arab activists to learn how to use information-technology from each other, share experiences and import (or export) successful organizational strategies. As a consequence, Arab online activists have, over the last few years, been developing transnational solidarities because of "transnational collective interests" (Howard & Husain 2013, 7), which include the sharing of information without government interference, the overthrow of authoritarian regimes across national boundaries, and the restoration of social justice in the region. Recent geopolitical and technological developments around the Arab spring have also facilitated the development of *transnational solidarities* between feminist activists in the Arab region, where access to the online sphere has paved the way for greater access and mobility within the public sphere (Hosni 2017), therefore resulting in women's (temporary) empowerment and their ability to incorporate wider social issues of peace building, human rights, and social justice to their feminist agendas. Acknowledging the potential of online technologies in furthering the transnational revolution and integrating men activists into the struggle as well, Al Rawi (2014) speaks about the "collective identity and character" that is forged through Arab women's online movements, one that appears in the ways in which they challenge gender inequality and unite women and men activists across Arab states (1147). Similarly, Gheytanchi and Moghadam (2014) speak about the "new Arab public sphere" and the "distinct community within the Arab world" to characterize the new transnational and electronic imagined community from which women activists have also largely benefited during and after the uprisings of 2011 (6).

Future research could, therefore, explore the potential of new digital technologies in giving the continuing transnational (gender and cultural) revolution a new impetus, by paying close attention to how women are sharing and circulating their various cultural and artistic

productions online, how people are responding to them and the nature of the debates that are instigated. However, future studies need not only focus on the spillover of women's artivism from the offline to the online sphere. They can also examine how academic and activist networks are being created by women's rights artists and activists to promote and further a feminist agenda at a regional level. For instance, the *Moroccan Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy*, a coalition of women's rights individual activists and NGOs, did not limit itself to acting at the local level to promote a feminist agenda along its political reformist stance; it also sought to move beyond the borders to seek coalitions at the MENA region level, where the aim was to unify women of the region against dictatorship, inequality, and marginalization, thereby revealing important patterns in terms of *transnational solidarity* (Yachoulti 2015). A study of this transnational revolution could, therefore, focus on the transnational networks of solidarity that are created by women (cyber)activists, artists and NGOs as well as their main characteristics, patterns and objectives and how they are able to mobilize and export from the national to the regional level. Reilly (2011) defines transnational feminism precisely as "*collaborative, cross-borde*r endeavours, usually involving engagement by women's movement actors with state/governmental and/or intergovernmental bodies, aimed at transforming discourses, contexts and constraints, which disadvantage women and girls in various *gender-specific* ways" (60). Such a study will be important because it will explore how women artists and activists can jointly mobilize to continue addressing the demands of the long duration of (feminist) revolutionary struggle in the region, since colonial times, and advance both a feminist and social justice agenda.

Gada Mahrouse (2008) argues that colonial and imperial conditions continue to shape transnational social justice efforts today. Using a critical race feminist and transnational cultural studies framework, she underscores the racialized and gendered dimensions of contemporary transnational social justice and humanitarian movements and organizations. A transnational feminist revolution is particularly important because it would suggest that the revolutions of 2011 are *ongoing* not merely at the national-political level but that a feminist consciousness is driving such a revolution, a revolution that is, in fact, both feminist and political in nature. I conclude this thesis with a few words by cooke (2016) which describe the transnational feminist impetus that characterizes the contemporary continuing revolution:

> It is not in the toppling of presidents for life or in ballot boxes or in new constitutions that the success or persistence of revolutions can be detected, but rather in the continuity of women's revolutionary activism, consciousness, and creativity. Few are ready to govern today, but as long as they continue to listen to each other and refuse

to give up on their demands for justice and dignity, in 20 years they may well be ready (43).

REFERENCES

Abadi, Houda. 2014. “Gendering the February 20th Movement: Moroccan Women Redefining: Boundaries, Identities and Resistances” *CyberOrient* 8 (1)

Abadi, Houda. 2015. “The February 20th Movement Communication Strategies: Towards Participatory Politics”. Dissertation, *Georgia State University*, 2015. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss/63

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others.” *American Anthropologist 104* (3): 783–790.

Adorno, Theodor. 2001. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London, UK: Routledge.

Aït Akdim, Youssef. 2012. “Maroc: l’art et la manière forte”. *Jeune Afrique*. Retrieved on 17/12/2019 from https://www.jeuneafrique.com/140890/culture/maroc-l-art-et-la-mani-re-forte/

Aisha Fukushima. AISHA FUKUSHIMA. Retrieved on 1/03/2020 from: https://aishafukushima.com/bio

Al-Ali, Nadje. 2000. *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women’s Movement.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Allen, Brenda J. 1996. "Feminist Standpoint Theory: a Black Woman's Review of Organizational Socialization". *Communication Studies.* 47 (4): 257–271. doi:10.1080/10510979609368482.

Al-Rawi, Ahmed. 2014. “Framing the online women’s movements in the Arab world.” In *Women of the Middle East*, edited by Muge Gocek, 1147–1161. Abingdon: Routledge

Al Mokhlis, Hosni. 2019. Interview by Maha Tazi. September 25, 2019.

Anderson, Elizabeth (1995). “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense”. *Hypatia* 10(3): pp. 50-84

Ansamed, 2018. “Marocco: artisti di strada nel mirino, due arresti”. *Ansamed.* Retrieved on 17/12/2019 from:http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/it/notizie/stati/marocco/2018/11/19/marocco-artisti-di-strada-nel-mirino-due-arresti_256e2e41-cef0-42ab-8f20-4258ce0ae9a6.html

Arendt, Hannah. 1990. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin.

Arfaoui, Khadija. 2016. “Women and Leadership in the Post-Arab Spring: The Case of Tunisia”. In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women’s Movements in Post-Arab Spring” North Africa*. New York: Palgrave

Badran, Margot. 2014. “Dis/Playing power and the politics of patriarchy in revolutionary Egypt: The creative activism of Huda Lutfi.” *Postcolonial Studies* 17(1): 47–62.

Badran, Margot. 2016. “Creative Disobedience: Feminism, Islam, and Revolution in Egypt.” In *Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa*, edited by F. Sadiqi, 45–60. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barber, Benjamin. 1996. *Jihad vs. McWorld: How globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world*. Ballantine Books: New York

Bhatia, Nandi. 2012. *Performing Women/Performing Womanhood: Theatre, Politics, and Dissent in North India.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Baumgardner, Jennifer. 2011. “Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?”. In *F'em: Goo Goo, Gaga and Some Thoughts on Balls,* 3–1. New York: Persus Books Group

Beasley, Chris. 1999. *What is Feminism*? Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications

Belghazi Taieb & Moudden, Abdelhay. 2016. Ihbat: disillusionment and the Arab Spring in Morocco, *The Journal of North African Studie*s, 21:1, 37-49, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2015.1084097

Bell, Sarah. 2011. "Slutwalk London: Yes means yes and no means no". *BBC News*. Retrieved on 01/02/2020 from: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-13739876

Benargane, Yassine. 2020. “Au Maroc, l'année 2019 marquée par la poursuite de l’application des «lois répressives»”. *Yabiladi.* Retrieved on 2/2/2020 from:https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/87863/maroc-l-annee-2019-marquee-poursuite.html

Bernard, Antoine, Khadija Cherif, and Sophie Bessis. 2012. *Women and the Arab Spring: Taking Their Place?*. Paris: Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme. Paris.

Boukhari, Karim. 2003. “10 mois après leur calvaire, les «rockers sataniques» racontent”, *La Vie éco*

Boum, Aomar & Daadaoui, Mohamed. 2020. *Historical Dictionary of the Arab Uprisings: Historical Dictionaries of War, Revolution, and Civil Unrest*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Maryland: US

Boutkhil, Soumia. 2016. “Moroccan Women in Limbo: On Liminal Citizenship and the Quest for Equality.” In *Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa*, edited by F. Sadiqi, 251–265. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Brown, Jonathan. 2009. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World (Foundations of Islam)*. Oneworld Publications.

Bruce, Nigel. 2000. “Images and reflections: photography in the pursuit of public health”, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 54 (1), 846-850.

Butler, Judith. 2007. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Cain, William E. 1994. *Making Feminist History: The Literary Scholarship of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar* (Garland Publications, 1994)

Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell

Cavatorta, Francesco.(ed.) 2013. Civil society Activism under Authoritarian Rule: A comparative Perspective. London Routledge.

Chabaa, Qods. 2018. *Le 360.* Scandale: Une Œuvre “Osee” de Khadija Tnana a été censurée. Retrieved on 20/01/2020 from: https://fr.le360.ma/culture/kamasutra-censuree-khadija-tnana-sadresse-au-ministre-de-la-culture-161613

cooke, miriam, and Lawrence, Bruce B. 2005. *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop. Chapel Hill*: University of California Press.

cooke, Miriam. 2016. “Women and the Arab Spring: A Transnational, Feminist Revolution.” In Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa, edited by F. Sadiqi, 31–44. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

cooke, Miriam. 2016. *Dancing in Damascus: Creativity, Resilience, and the Syrian Revolution.* London: Routledge

Crenshaw, Kimberley. 1991. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color.” Standford Law Review 43 (6): 1241–1299. Accessed April 19, 2020. doi:10.2307/1229039

Creative Talent Evolution S.L. 2020. “Noussayba.” Model Management.com website. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://www.modelmanagement.com/model/noussayba-lahlou/.

Cuthbert, Roland 2015. *The Esoteric Codex: Amulets and Talismans.* Raleigh, NC: Lulu.com

Daadaoui, Mohammed. 2017. “Morocco’s ‘Spring’ and the Failure of the Protest Movement.” HuffingtonPost. Accessed March 12, 2018.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mohameddaadaoui/moroccos-spring-and-the-failure-of-the-protest-movement_b_9287158.html.

Dahl, R. 1971. *Polyarchy: Political Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Daif, Maria. 2019. Interview by Maha Tazi. September 18, 2019.

Diamond, Larry. 2010. "Liberation Technology." *Journal of Democracy* 21 (July): 70-84.

De Beauvoir, Simone 1949. *Le Deuxième Sexe [The Second Sex]*. Paris: Gallimard.

De Certeau, Michel. 1984. ""Making do": Uses and Tactics." In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 29-42. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Deibert, Ronald, and Rafal Rohozinski. 2010. "Liberation vs. Control: The Future of Cyberspace." Journal of Democracy 21 (4): 43–57.

Doorenspleet, Renske. 2000. Development and Democracy: Power and Problems of Empirical Research. In *European Consortium on Political Research Joint Sessions of Workshops*. Copenhagen: DN

Eaton, E.W. 2008. "Feminist Philosophy of Art". *Philosophy Compass,* 3 (5), 873–893.

El Amraoui, Ahmed. 2015. Gnawa music: From Slavery to Prominence. *Al Jazeera.* Retrieved on 10/02/2020 from: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/12/gnawa-music-slavery-prominence-151203135403027.html

Elattir, Manal; El Allame, Yamina.; Tihm, Youness. 2016. Women's Economic Empowerment in Morocco: The Case of Social Entrepreneurship. In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women's Movements in Post-Arab Spring" North Africa*. New York: Palgrave.

Elkamel, Sara. 2012. "Tahrir Monologues: Storytelling the highs and lows of revolution". *AhramOnline*. Retrived on 01/01/2019 from: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/97/50350/Folk/Street-Smart/Tahrir-Monologues-Storytelling-the-highs-and-lows-.aspx

El Nossery, Nevine. 2016. "Women, Art, and Revolution in the Streets of Egypt." In *Women's Movements in Post-"Arab Spring" North Africa*, edited by Fatima Sadiqi, 143–157. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

El Maarouf, Moulay Driss. 2011. The Rise of the Underground Moroccan Music festivals between Laughter, Drunkenness, and Excre-Mentality. *Akademisk* Vol 3

El Maarouf, Moulay Driss. 2014. The aesthetic and practical fields of excrementality of *L'boulevard* festival, *Social Dynamics*, 40:3, 575-588, DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2014.990677

Ennaji, Moha. 2016. “About North African Women’s Rights After the Arab Spring.” *Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa*, edited by Fatima Sadiqi, 97–107. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ensler, Eve. 1996. *The Vagina Monologues*. London, UK: Virago Press.

Errazzouki, Samia. 2012. “The Tunisian Revolution Continues: An Interview with Lina Ben Mhenni.” *Jadaliyya*, Accessed April 1, 2018. http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27217/ The-Tunisian-Revolution-Continues-An-Interview-with-Lina-Ben-Mhenn

Felshin, Nina. 2001. *¿Pero esto es arte? El espíritu del arte como activismo.* In P. Blanco & al. (Eds.), Modos de hacer: Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca.

Finn, Tom. 2015. “A message written in blood – British poet takes on Islamic State.” *Middle East Eye.* Accessed January 15, 2020. https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/messagewritten-blood-british-poet-takes-islamic-state

Felski, Rita. 1989. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Boston: Harvard University Press

Foucault, Michel. 1994. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Vintage Books

Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings. 1972-1979. *Pantheon*. Colin Gordon.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The History of Sexuality*. Paris: Penguin.

Foster, Caitlin. 2018. “15 years ago today, US troops captured Saddam Hussein. See the photos of the underground hiding place where they found him.” *Business Insider*. Accessed March 17, 2018. https://www.businessinsider.com/how-us-troops-captured-saddamhussein-photos-2018-12.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”. *Social Text* 25/26, 56-80.

Fox, Elizabeth. 1994. Communication Media in Latin America. *Journal of Communication*, 44, 4–8.

Freedom House Report (2012). *DIVERGENCE AND DECLINE: The Middle East and the World after the Arab Spring*. Freedom House: Washington, DC. Retrieved from: https://freedomhouse.org/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa

Fukushima Aisha. 2020. Interview by Maha Tazi, 18 February 2020.

Gabay, Florence. 2014. "Le Maroc n'a pas connu de "Printemps arabe" : 3 raisons pour l'expliquer". *L'Obs.* Retrieved on 13/01/2021 from: https://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/1278516-le-maroc-n-a-pas-connu-de-printemps-arabe-3-raisons-pour-l-expliquer.html

Gabrieli, Francesco. 1991. *Maghreb Médiéval: L'Apogée de la Civilisation Islamique dans l'Occident Arabe*. Édisud: Aix-en-Provence

Gheytanchi, Elham, and Moghadam, Valentine. 2014. "Women, Social Protests, and the New Media Activism in the Middle East and North Africa." International Review of Modern Sociology 40 (1): 1–26.

Grossberg, Lawrence. 1992. *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Hague, Barry N., and Brian D. Loader. 1999.. *Digital democracy: Discourse and decision making in the information age*. Routledge: United Kingdom.

Hamid, Malick. 2018. "Maroc, Achat de diplomes: plusieurs arrestations suite au scandale." Afrik.com. Accessed August 28, 2019. https://www.afrik.com/maroc-achat-de-diplomesplusieurs-arrestations-suite-au-scandale.

Hamza, Nabila. 2016. "Engendering Tunisia's Democratic Transition: What Challenges Face Women?" In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women's Movements in Post-Arab Spring" North Africa*. New York: Palgrave.

Haring, Jenna (2017). "Contemporary Visual Art and Iranian Feminism". *Global Societies Journa*l, 5(0)

Hawkesworth, Mary E. 2006. *Globalization and Feminist Activism.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield

Hijri, Faiza. 2014. "Producing Alternative Media Discourses on Muslims." In *Engaging the Other: Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections*, edited by Karim H. Karim and Mahmoud Eid, 191–211. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

hooks, bell. 1989. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.* Boston, MA: South End Press.

hooks, bell. 2004. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love.* Washington: Washington Square Press.

Howard, P.; Hussain, M. 2013. *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Hosni, Dina. 2017. "Middle Eastern Women's 'Glocal': Journeying between the Online and Public Spheres." *CyberOrient 11* (1). Accessed January 18, 2018. http://www.digitalislam.eu/ article.do?articleId=9814.

Hume, Lynne. 2013. *The Religious Life of Dress: Global Fashion and Faith*. Bloomsbury Academic

Huntington, Samuel. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman

Iddins, Annemarie. 2018. Mamfakinch: From Protest Slogan to Mediated Activism. *International Journal of Communication* 12, 3580–3599.

Israel, Jonathan. 2009. "Progress and Enlightenment's Two Conflicting Ways of Improving the World." In *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.*

Jardonnet, Emmanuelle. 2015. "Play inspired by The Vagina Monologues uses laughter to liberate women in Morocco". *The Guardian.* Retrieved on 20/10/2019 from https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/06/dialy-moroccan-women-vagina-monologues-play

Jiwani, Yasmin. 2011. Pedagogies of Hope: Counter Narratives and Anti-Disciplinary Tactics, *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 33:4, 333-353

José María Mesías-Lema. 2018. "Artivism and social conscience: Transforming teacher training from a sensibility standpoint". *Media Education Research Journal*, n. 57, v. XXVI.

Jürgenson, Svea. 2014. Morocco's Contemporary Art Scene: the Context of the Residency. *Metropolism.* https://www.metropolism.com/en/features/23575_morocco_s_contemporary_art_scene_the_context_of_the_residency

Kandiyoti Deniz. 1988. "Barganing with Patriarchy". *Gender & Society,* 2(3), 274-290. doi:10.1177/089124388002003004

Kang, Min Jay. 2004. *Identity Politics and Community Artivism: A Strategic Arts Project of Cultural Landscape conservation at Treasure Hill, Taipei.* Conference Proceeding: The Fitfh Rim Participatory Community Design Conference. (Re)constructing Communities: Design Participation in the Face of Change. Center for Design Research: University of California, p.153-155

Kennedy, Victoria. 2017. "What is Feminist Art?". *Canvas.* Retrieved 28/03/2019 from: https://www.canvas.saatchiart.com.

Kerkach, Rachida. 2016. “Moroccan Women’s Cultural Rights: A Psycho-social Perspective on Cultural Paradoxes”. In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women’s Movements in Post-Arab Spring” North Africa*. New York: Palgrave.

Kerkhoff, Ingrid. 2016. “In Syria even the Deaf can Hear War Crimes: Amal Kassir.” The World Speaks English online blog, October 25. Accessed January 1, 2020. http://www.theworld-speaks-english.com/en/in-syria-even-the-deaf-can-hear-war-crimes-amal-kassir/.

Khan, Shahnaz. 1998. Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space. *Chicago Journals* 23 (2): 463–494.

Khamis, Sahar. 2011. The Arab “Feminist” Spring? *Feminist Studies,* 37, 692-748.

Kharroub, Tamara. 2016. *The Gender Paradox of Arab Democracy Assessing Women’s Rights Five Years after the “Arab Spring.”* Washington DC: Arab Center Washington DC. Accessed April 6, 2020. http://arabcenterdc.org/research-paper/the-gender-paradox-of-arab-democracyassessing-womens-rights-five-years-after-the-arab-spring/.

Khattab, Moushira. 2016. The Struggle of Egyptian Women for Equal Rights Continues: Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward. In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women’s Movements in Post-Arab Spring” North Africa*. New York: Palgrave.

Kite, Mary E. 2001. "Gender Stereotypes". In Worell, Judith (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender,* Volume 1. Academic Press. p. 563.

Kraidy, Merouan. 2016. “Revolutionary Creative Labor”. *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor,* edited by Curtin, M & Sanson, K, 231-240. California, US: University of California Press.

Kraidy, Merouan. 2017. *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Kremin, Lena. 2017. Sexist Swearing and Slurs: Responses to Gender-Directed Insults. *LingUU Journal* 1, 18-25.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press

Labidi, Lilia. 2016. Tunisian Women’s Literature and the Critique of Authority: Sources, Contexts, and the Tunisian “Arab Spring. In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women’s Movements in Post-Arab Spring” North Africa*. New York: Palgrave.

Lacan, Jacques. 1991. *Le Séminaire. Livre VIII. Le transfert, 1960-61*. Paris: Seuil

La Vigie Marocaine. 2018. Pour le ministre de la Culture, l'oeuvre "Kamasutra" porte atteinte à l'ordre public ! *La Vigie Marocaine.com.* Retrieved on 20/01/2020 from http://www.lavigiemarocaine.com/2018/03/maroc-pour-le-ministre-de-la-culture.html

Levesque, Robert. 2011. "Sex Roles and Gender Roles". In: Levesque R.J.R. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. New York, NY: Springer

Levine, Mark. 2015. "When Art Is the Weapon: Culture and Resistance Confronting Violence in the Post-Uprisings Arab World." *Religions* 6, 1277–1313. Doi:10.3390/ rel6041277.

Lévy, Noémie. 2018. Une œuvre figurant le Kamasutra dans une main de Fatma censurée au Maroc. *Le Figaro*. Retrieved on 20/01/2020 from: https://www.lefigaro.fr/arts-expositions/2018/03/05/03015-20180305ARTFIG00263-une-oeuvre-figurant-le-kamasutra-dans-une-main-de-fatma-censuree-au-maroc.php

Lippard, Lucy. 2001. *Mirando alrededor: Dónde estamos y dónde podríamos estar.* In P. Blanco, & al. (Eds.), Modos de hacer: Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa (pp. 51-71). Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca.

Locke, John. *The de-voicing of society: Why we don't talk to each other anymore*. Simon and Schuster: New York.

Lorber, Judith. 2007. *Gendered bodies: feminist perspectives*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Roxbury Publications

Lowry, Joseph E. 2006. "Lawful and Unlawful". In Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.). *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. Brill. doi:10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00107

Maddex, Matthew C. 2014. "Raptivism: the Act of Hip Hop's Counterpublic Sphere Forming into a Social Movement to Seize its Political Opportunities". *LSU Doctoral Dissertation*s. 727. Retrieved on 28/10/2019 from: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/727

Mahrouse, Gada 2008. "Race-conscious transnational activists with cameras: Mediators of compassion". *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* 11(1), 87-105. doi:10.1177/1367877907083082

Marx, Karl. 1867. *The Capital: Critique of Political Economy.* Moscow USSR: Progress Publishers

Massad, Joseph A. 2007. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press

Mazria-Katz, Marisa. 2020. Now, Cultural Casablanca. *New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/travel/09heads.html

McEwan, Cheryl. 2001. "Postcolonialism, feminism, and development: intersections and dilemmas". Progress in Development Studies 1 no. 2: 93–111.

Mckinnon, Rebecca. 2010. "Networked Authoritarianism in China and Beyond: Implications for global Internet freedom". *Liberation Technology in Authoritarian Regimes*. The Hoover Institution & the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL), Stanford University. Retrieved from: http://rconversation.blogs.com/MacKinnon_Libtech.pdf

McLarney, Ellen. 2016. Women's Rights and Equality: Egyptian Constitutional Law". In F. Sadiqi (ed.). *Women's Movements in Post-Arab Spring" North Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mekouar, Merouan. 2016. *Protest and Mass Mobilization: Authoritarian Collapse and Political Change in North Africa.* London: Routledge

Mesías-Lema, José María. 2018. "Artivism and social conscience: Transforming teacher training from a sensibility standpoint". *Media Education Research Journal*, n. 57, v. XXVI

Mesk, Ahmed. 2018. *Les Echos*. Le Kamasutra sur la main de Fatima censuree. 2018. Les Echos. Retrieved on 20/01/2020 from: http://www.leseco.ma/culture/64217-le-kamasutra-sur-la-main-de-fatma-censuree.html

Moghadam, Valentine. 2010. "Women, Structure, and Agency in the Middle East." *Feminist Formations* 22 (3): 1–9.

Mookherjee, Monika. 2005. "Affective Citizenship: Feminism, Postcolonialism and the Politics of Recognition." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8 (1): 31–50.

Morozov, Evgeny. 2011. "Response to Philip N. Howards Review of The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom." *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (4): 895–897. https://doi. org/10.1017/s1537592711004026.

Naber, Nadine. 2011. "Women and the Arab Spring: Human Rights from the Ground." *Journal of the University of Michigan* 1 (1): 11–13. Accessed April 26, 2020 http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/ women_in_the_arab_spring-human_rights_from_the_ground_up.pdf.

Nagy Hesse-Biber, Sharleen. 2013. *Feminist Research Practice*. Boston: SAGE Publication.

Noussayba, Lahlou. 2019. Interview by Maha Tazi. August 9, 2019.

Noussayba, Lahlou. 2020a. Instagram. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://www.instagram. com/noussayba.lahlou/?hl=en.

Noussayba, Lahlou. 2020b. Youtube. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEi3cbQA3VfzUihXnyxUv5Q.

Noussayba, Lahlou. 2020c. (@slamrebelle). Twitter. Accessed January 16, 2020. https:// twitter.com/slamrebelle.

Noussayba, Lahlou. 2020d. Facebook. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://www.facebook. com/NoussaybaL/.

Oumlil, Kenza. 2012. *'Talking Back': Counter-Hegemonic Discourses of North American Arab and Muslim Women Artists.* PhD thesis, Concordia University.

Perez Reverte, Arturo. 2015. *La Patience du Franc Tireur.* Paris: Poche

Przeworski, A, Michael, E, Jos´e, A. Fernando, L. 2000. *Democracy and Development. Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Racines Association. 2017. *Why is Culture the Solution? A Diagnosis of the Cultural Sector in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon*. Mediterranean Action and Research for Sustainability and Development (MARSAD): Morocc

Rampton, Marta. 2014. *The Three Waves of Feminism*. Pacific university Oregon website Retrieved on 10/11/2017 from: http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/three-waves-feminis

Rankine, Patrice. 2013. *Aristotle and Black Drama: A Theater of Civil Disobedience.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Razack, Sherene. 2008. *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics. Toronto:* University of Toronto Press.

Reilly, Niamh. 2011. Doing transnational feminism, transforming human rights: the emancipatory possibilities revisited, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 19(2), 60–76

Rogers, Amanda. 2016. "Revolutionary Nuns, or Totalitarian Pawns: Women's Rights and Libyan State Feminism in the Wake of Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi." I*n Women's Movements in Post-"Arab Spring" North Africa*, edited by Fatima Sadiqi, 177–194. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ross, Brian. 2011. "Osama Bin Laden Killed by Navy SEALs in Firefight." *ABC News.* Accessed June 28, 2020. https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/osama-bin-laden-killed-navyseals-firefight/story?id=13505792

Ross-Smith, Anne; Kornberger, Martin. 2004. "Gendered Rationality? A Genealogical Exploration of the Philosophical and Sociological Conceptions of Rationality, Masculinity and Organization". *Journal of Gender, Work & Organization,* 280-305.

Ryan, Y. 2011. Tunisian blogger becomes Nobel Prize nominee. *Al Jazeera English*. Retrieved on 15/04/2018 from: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/2011106222117687872.html

Sabea, Hanan. 2012. "A 'Time out of Time': Tahrir, the political and the imaginary in the context of the January 25th Revolution in Egypt." *Society for Cultural Anthropology* website. Accessed June 15, 2020. http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/484.

Sadiqi, Fatima. 2014. "North African Women's Rights in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring." *The Mediterranean Yearbook*. Accessed January 28, 2017. https://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anuari/anuari-2014/fatima_sadiqi_women_rights_northafrica_spring_IEMed_yearbook_2014_EN.pdf.

Sadiqi, Fatima. 2016. *Women's Movements in Post-Arab Spring" North Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schneier, Bruce. 2000. *Secrets and Lies: Digital Security in a Networked World Paperback*. John Wiley: New Jersey

Selime, Zakia. 2012. A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco's February 20th Movement. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13(5), 101-114.

Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss5/11

Snowflakebxtch. 2020. Interview by Maha Tazi, 22 February 2020

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 66-111. London:Macmillan

Sprague-Jones, Jessica; Sprague, Joey. 2011. "The Standpoint of Art/Criticism: Cindy Sherman as Feminist Artist?". *Sociological Inquiry*. 81 (4): 404–430. doi:10.1111/j.1475-682X.2011.00385.x.

St John, Graham. 2008. "Protestival: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present". *Social Movement Studies* 7. DOI 10.1080/14742830802283550

Tnana, Khadija. 2019. Interview by Maha Tazi, 16 September 2019

Vetterling-Braggin, Mary. 1982. '*Femininity,' 'Masculinity,' and 'Androgyny': A Modern Philosophical Discussion*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld. Publication

Wadekar, Neha. 2018. "Women Want to Put Yemen Back Together Again." *Foreign Policy.* Accessed January 15, 2020. https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/27/women-want-to-putyemen-back-together-again/.

Wahba, Dina. 2016. “Gendering the Egyptian Revolution.” In *Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa*, edited by Fatima Sadiqi, 61–76. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, Rebecca. 1995. *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. New York: Anchor Books.

Weedon, Chris. 2000. *Feminist practice & poststructuralist theory*. Oxford Blackwell.

Yachoulti, Mohamed. 2015. “The Feminist Movement in the Moroccan Spring: Roles, Specificity, and Gains.” *Sociology Study* 5: 895–910. Doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2015.12.001.

Yeğenoğlu, Magda. 1998. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism.* Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zaki, Abdellatif. 2016. “Reflections on the 20-February Movement: Hope Renewed, Hope Frustrated for Women.” In *Women’s Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa, edited Fatima Sadiqi.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zine, Ghita. 2018. Tétouan: «Kamasutra», une installation interdite par le Centre d’art moderne. *Yabiladi*. Retrieved on 20/01/2020 from: https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/62479/tetouan-kamasutra-installation-interdite-centre.html

Zitane, Naima. 2019. Interview by Maha Tazi, 30 October 2019

Zitane, Naima. 2012. *“Dialy”*. Play’s Script, non-published

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions Participant Consent Forms

Questions Ciblées pour l'Artiste:

1. Quel est l'objectif global de votre art ? De quoi parle-t-il et quel public cible-t-il principalement ?
2. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ce genre artistique spécifiquement ? Comment est-il approprié au message que vous visez à transmettre à votre audience ?
3. Quel est, selon vous, le rôle que l'art devrait jouer dans la société ?
4. Qu'est-ce qui dans votre environnement et/ou vos expériences personnelles vous a inspiré à devenir une artiste ? Avez-vous des modèles qui vous ont inspiré à en devenir une ?
5. Comment décririez-vous/caractériseriez-vous le contexte sociopolitique dans lequel

   s'inscrit votre art ?

1. L'objectif premier de votre art est-il d'abord social, féministe et/ou politique ? Pouvez-

   vous m'en dire un peu plus sur ce point ?

1. Comment votre art contribue-t-il à promouvoir la justice sociale dans votre société ?
2. Dans quelle mesure vous identifiez-vous à l'idée de la "révolution continue" qui est si répandue en Egypte aujourd'hui (ou les femmes *artivistes* estiment que la révolution du Printemps Arabe n'a pas donné ses fruits et poursuivent, ainsi, la révolution principalement à travers l'art) ? Dans quelle mesure votre art est aligné (ou non) avec cette idée ?

Questions Générales:

1. Pouvez-vous m'en dire un peu plus sur la scène artistique au Maroc ? Comment fonctionne-t-elle et qui sont les acteurs clés au sein de celle-ci (organisations, collectifs, individus etc.)
2. Comment évaluez-vous l'implication des femmes dans cette scène ?

3. Voyez-vous un engagement politique particulier de l'art féminin ? Qu'en est-il de l'art féminin qui vise à sensibiliser le public quant à l'égalité des sexes ?
4. En général, l'implication des femmes dans l'art a-t-elle un potentiel politique (pour promouvoir la justice sociale et/ou les droits des femmes) ?

5. Quelles sont les premières initiatives lancées par des femmes qui vous viennent à l'esprit alors que nous parlons ? Pourquoi pensez-vous qu'elles sont particulièrement attrayantes que d'autres initiatives lancées par des femmes ?

CONSENTEMENT ÉCLAIRÉ À LA PARTICIPATION À UNE ÉTUDE

Remarque : Le masculin est utilisé pour faciliter la lecture.

Titre de l'étude :

***Al-Thawra Al-Mustamirra*: La Désobéissance Créative des Femmes, la Poésie Slam et les Caricatures Politiques au lendemain du Printemps Arabe au Maroc et en Tunisie**

Chercheur : Maha Tazi

Coordonnées du chercheur : maha.tazi91@gmail.com; +1 514 889 7391

Professeur-superviseur : Yasmin Jiwani

Coordonnées du professeur-superviseur : yasmin.jiwani@concordia.ca ; +1 514 649 7395

Sources de financement de l'étude : *Graduate Student Mobility Award* (1 August 2019- 30 November 2019)

Nous vous invitons à prendre part au projet de recherche susmentionné. Le présent document vous renseigne sur les conditions de participation à l'étude; veuillez le lire attentivement. Au besoin, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le chercheur pour obtenir des précisions.

A. BUT DE LA RECHERCHE

En me basant sur la littérature abondante sur le cas de l'Egypte, mon étude comparative entre le Maroc et la Tunisie a pour but d'investiguer si des formes de militantisme artistique féminin ont également émergé dans ces deux pays au lendemain du printemps Arabe, à compter de l'an 2012 jusqu'à nos jours, pour promouvoir à la fois les droits de la femme ainsi que la justice sociale dans leurs sociétés respectives. En effet, tandis que les femmes activistes ont joué un rôle primordial dans la série de soulèvements qui ont marqué le Printemps Arabe, elles ont été exclues du processus politique décisionnel dans la majorité des États postrévolutionnaires Nord-Africains.

Neuf ans après le début du Printemps arabe, l'oppression systémique des femmes dans la région a persisté jusqu'à nos jours, ce qui rend encore plus pertinent d'analyser les tactiques actuelles de mobilisation et de résistance des femmes comme à la fois une réponse et une « issue » potentielle de ces formes d'oppression. Parce que les femmes Nord-Africaines ont fait face à une telle réaction défavorable à leurs droits sociaux et politiques à la suite des soulèvements, elles ont actuellement recours à l'art (ou ce que la littérature a identifié comme la désobéissance créative) en tant que média alternatif pour partager leurs histoires des révolutions continuer à plaider en faveur de l'égalité de genre et des droits de l'Homme dans leurs sociétés.

En plus de partager une histoire commune comprenant l'héritage colonial français, l'Arabe en tant que langue officielle et l'Islam en tant que religion prédominante, le Maroc et la Tunisie ont également révélé des voies de développement similaires au lendemain des révolutions du printemps Arabe, en ce qui inclue la montée de l'Islam politique au pouvoir et le recul des droits de la femme. Dans ce sens, ma recherche examinera également le potentiel politique du militantisme artistique féminin pour promouvoir non seulement l'égalité hommes-femmes mais aussi la justice sociale dans chaque contexte. Finalement, dans le cadre d'une étude comparative, mes recherches viseront enfin à analyser l'influence de l'environnement sociopolitique sur les formes de résistance et de créativité des femmes activistes.

B. PROCÉDURES DE RECHERCHE

Si vous participez à l'étude, vous devrez :

1. Prendre part à une séance d'entretien d'environ une heure afin d'aider la chercheuse à en savoir plus et à se familiariser avec la scène artistique de votre pays. Cela inclut notamment le rôle des collectifs, associations et organisations artistiques en général, ainsi que le rôle de votre organisation en particulier, sa *vision* sur le rôle de l'art au sein de la société, le contexte socio-politique dans lequel s'inscrit son travail et, le cas échéant, ses modalités d'interaction et de collaboration avec les femmes artistes-activistes.
2. En effet, m'intéresse particulièrement à l'engagement des femmes au sein de cette scène artistique, la nature de leur travail artistique, sa portée et ses objectifs, ainsi qu'au contexte dans lequel il s'inscrit. Notre séance d'entretien couvrira également ces aspects.
3. Suite à votre entretien avec la chercheuse, vous serez invité(e) à prendre la parole devant une caméra pour une durée de 2 à 3 minutes maximum afin de résumer les idées principales discutées lors de votre entretien, ou de parler d'une idée en particulier qui vous semble particulièrement pertinente en relation avec la scène artistique dans votre pays. Le but de cette intervention est de produire un montage vidéo éducatif de cinq à dix minutes sur le militantisme artistique et la désobéissance créative des femmes au Maroc et en Tunisie sous la forme d'une compilation des interventions des femmes artistes

et acteurs-clés participants face à la caméra. **Cet aspect de votre participation à la recherche est entièrement facultatif et vous pouvez choisir de prendre part à la partie entretien seulement.**

4. Enfin, si applicable, nous faire part de toute autre(s) recommandation(s) que vous jugez utile(s) pour le bon déroulé de ce projet recherche en général, ainsi que pour la protection des femmes artistes participantes.

L'heure (et demi) d'entretien mentionnée ci-haut comprendra aussi bien les introductions avec la chercheuse, la logistique et le déroulé de l'entretien ainsi que, le cas échéant, votre intervention finale devant la caméra. Somme toute, votre participation s'étendra sur une durée d'environ 1 heure pour l'entretien, suite auquel je serai en contact avec vous pour 1 mois afin de valider le contenu de l'entretien et les images prises, le cas échéant. En effet, vous aurez l'occasion de parcourir la transcription de l'interview et votre intervention filmée afin de les approuver avant la publication de ma thèse et le partage sur les réseaux sociaux du montage vidéo. Vous pourrez utiliser aussi bien le montage vidéo et le livre de ma thèse pour des fins éducationnelles et promotionnelles.

Certaines parties de l'étude s'inscriront dans le cadre des soins habituels et seront effectuées dans votre intérêt. Cependant, les activités suivantes serviront avant tout le projet de recherche :

Cette séance d'entretien sera une étape clé dans ce projet de recherche dans la mesure où elle visera à établir un "état des lieux" de la scène artistique dans votre pays, ainsi qu'une analyse préliminaire du rôle des acteurs-clés au sein de celle-ci et des femmes artistes en particulier.

En tant que participant(e) à cette recherche, votre responsabilité sera de vous présenter à l'heure de votre entretien avec la chercheuse en ayant en tête une idée de ce que vous souhaitez discuter en ce qui concerne le rôle des organisations artistiques au sein de votre pays, de votre organisation en particulier, ainsi que ce qui relève du travail des femmes artistes et sa portée, et, de manière plus générale, du rôle social et politique de l'art dans votre société.

S'il existe des possibilités de traitement en marge de l'étude, le chercheur vous les expliquera.

C. RISQUES ET AVANTAGES

En participant à cette étude, vous pourriez être exposé à certains risques, y compris : [ ]

Non Applicable

Vous pourriez bénéficier ou non de votre participation à l'étude. Les avantages éventuels seraient notamment les suivants :

Seulement si vous le désirez, je pourrai inclure une mention de votre nom dans ma thèse (qui sera ensuite publiée sous forme de livre) aussi bien dans la section "remerciements" au début du livre que dans la section analyse dans laquelle je discuterai les résultats de la recherche et les acteurs clés dans la scène artistique et le milieu associatif en relation avec l'art féminin dans votre pays.

Si vous décidez d'être filmé(e) et de participer au montage vidéo, vous aurez également accès au lien YouTube de la vidéo que vous pourriez partager sur les réseaux sociaux de votre organisation (ou personnels) pour des fois à la fois promotionnelles et éducatives.

Vous pouvez aussi choisir de garder l'anonymat et, le cas échant, votre choix sera entièrement respecté.

D. CONFIDENTIALITÉ

Dans le cadre de cette étude, nous recueillerons les renseignements suivants : [ ]

[ ] Vos idées sur le rôle des collectifs, associations et organisations artistiques en général, ainsi que le rôle de votre organisation en particulier, sa *vision* sur le rôle de l'art au sein de la société, le contexte socio-politique dans lequel s'inscrit son travail et, le cas échéant, ses modalités de collaboration avec les femmes artistes.

[ ] Vos idées sur la nature et les modes d'engagement des femmes au sein de cette scène artistique, la nature de leur travail artistique, sa portée et ses objectifs.

[ ] Si applicable, toute autre recommandation pour le bon déroulé de ce projet recherche et la protection des femmes artistes participantes.

- De la collecte des données au stockage et à l'archivage final, mes données seront systématiquement sauvegardées et stockées sur un disque dur crypté (et non sur mon ordinateur portable) ainsi que sur un serveur cloud basé au Canada afin d'éviter toute perte ou destruction potentielle. Les données collectées seront sauvegardées soit au format Word (pour toutes les notes prises lors de l'entretien, analyse de contenu etc.) ou au format MP4 (pour les interventions filmées le cas échéant).
- Afin d'éviter tout accès non autorisé par les autorités au moment de franchir les frontières (c'est-à-dire depuis et vers la Tunisie et le Maroc), les données seront entièrement supprimées de mon disque dur crypté et uniquement stockées sur le serveur cloud basé au Canada. Une fois toutes les données collectées, tous mes documents de recherche seront sauvegardés sur le disque dur et le cloud comme destinations finales.
- Seule la chercheuse (moi-même) aura accès à ces informations tout au long du processus de recherche. L'information sera sauvegardée dans un disque dur crypté ainsi que sur un serveur cloud basé au Canada avant Seule la chercheuse (moi-même)

aura accès à ces informations tout au long du processus de recherche. Une fois tout le processus de recherche achevé, l'information sera uniquement sauvegardée dans un serveur cloud basé au Canada suite à la publication du livre portant sur ma thèse et le partage sur YouTube du montage vidéo éducatif. En effet, le grand publique aura également accès au livre une fois publié, et vous bénéficierez d'une copie. Mais vous aurez tout d'abord l'occasion d'approuver et de revérifier tout le contenu avant sa publication. Les données seront supprimées du Cloud cinq ans après la publication du livre.

- Les résultats de ma thèse seront ainsi principalement publiés sous la forme d'un livre (hormis le court montage vidéo). Je parle aussi de mon sujet de thèse lors de grandes conférences internationales telles que: *La Cinquième Conférence Mondiale sur les Études de Genre* (24-27 avril 2019, Bangkok, Thaïlande) et la *Quatrième Conférence Mondiale d'Études sur les Médias et la Communication* (27-29 septembre 2019, Bonn, Allemagne). Enfin, j'ai l'intention de publier un article préliminaire sur le sujet de ma thèse, y compris la revue de la littérature et une ou deux études de cas, dans le journal scientifique *Feminist Studies*.
- Nous n'autoriserons personne à accéder à l'information, à l'exception des personnes directement impliquées dans la conduite de la recherche, et sauf tel que décrit dans ce formulaire. Nous utiliserons ces informations uniquement aux fins de la recherche décrite dans ce formulaire.

Excepté les situations précisées aux présentes, seules les personnes qui mènent cette recherche auront accès aux renseignements fournis. Nous n'utiliserons l'information qu'aux fins de l'étude décrite dans ce document.

Nous avons l'intention de publier les résultats de cette étude. Veuillez indiquer ci-dessous si vous acceptez d'être identifié ou non à cette fin :

[ ]J'accepte que mon nom et l'information que je fournis figurent dans la publication des résultats de la recherche.

[ ]Je ne souhaite pas que mon nom figure dans la publication des résultats de la recherche.

[ ] J'accepte d'etre filmé(e) et que mon image figure dans le montage vidéo final. Le cas échéant, allez aussi signer un formulaire nous donnant le droit de partager votre image.

[ ] Je n'accepte pas d'etre filmé(e) ni que mon image figure dans le montage vidéo final.

F. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION

Vous pouvez refuser de participer à la recherche ou vous en retirer à n'importe quel moment. Vous pouvez aussi demander que l'information que vous avez fournie ne soit pas utilisée; le cas échéant, votre choix sera respecté. Si vous prenez une décision en ce

sens, vous devrez en avertir le chercheur dans les 30 jours suivant votre entretien afin que l'information fournie ne soit pas utilisée dans ce projet de recherche.

Nous vous rembourserons les dépenses suivantes : dépenses de transport pour vous rendre au lieu de l'entretien (s'il n'a pas lieu dans vos prémices).

Pour s'assurer que les fonds de recherche sont dépensés convenablement, des vérificateurs de Concordia ou d'une autre organisation auront accès à une liste codée des participants qui ne leur permettra toutefois pas de vous identifier.

Nous vous informerons de tout nouvel élément d'information susceptible d'affecter votre volonté à poursuivre votre participation à l'étude.

Vous ne subirez aucune conséquence négative si vous décidez de ne pas participer à l'étude, d'interrompre votre participation à celle-ci ou de nous demander de ne pas utiliser votre information.

Vous pourrez donc décider de vous retirer à tout moment de cette étude même après avoir consenti d'y participer. Toutefois, en ce qui concerne l'information fournie, vous aurez le droit de retirer vos contributions dans les 30 jours qui suivent votre entretien. Ceci inclue aussi bien les informations partagées lors de l'entretien que votre intervention face à la caméra. Leurs données seront détruites sur le champ à la réception d'une telle demande. Au-delà de 30 jours, vous pouvez toujours mettre fin à votre participation mais les informations collectées seront toutefois inclues dans les résultats de cette recherche.

Nous ne serons pas en mesure de vous dédommager si vous vous blessez au cours de la présente étude. Cependant, en signant le présent formulaire, vous ne renoncez à aucun droit légal à l'indemnisation.

G. CONSENTEMENT DU PARTICIPANT

Je reconnais par la présente avoir lu et compris le présent document. J'ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions et d'obtenir des réponses. Je consens à participer à l'étude dans les conditions décrites ci-dessus.

NOM (en majuscules)

_____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

Si vous avez des questions sur l'aspect scientifique ou savant de cette étude, communiquez avec le chercheur. Vous trouverez ses cordonnées sur la première page. Vous pouvez aussi communiquer avec son professeur-superviseur.

Pour toute préoccupation d'ordre éthique relative à ce projet de recherche, veuillez communiquer avec le responsable de l'éthique de la recherche de l'Université Concordia au 514-848-2424, poste 7481, ou à oor.ethics@concordia.ca.