

Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words:

Female Rappers smashing
the prescribed image of the
"Muslim woman"

Hilal Işık

Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

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Contents

Page

1	FOREWORD
7	INTRODUCTION
13	HIP-HOP, RAP AND WHAT WOMAN?
16	BEING A MUSLIM FEMALE RAPPER DESPITE THE MEN ON THE BAD GUYS' STAGE
21	Muslim Majority Countries
26	'A woman in a land of dicks'
34	'I wanted to run, and they hit me on the back...'
40	'This is their fatva'
44	'Let me whisper to you my words...'
54	'Woman's voice that I'm calling'
62	'...rap does not have muñ'
67	Muslim Minority Countries
70	'I cause a stir, guys just by how I look...'
76	'... Is too educated, looks too good...'
85	'I don't want to be a banner of Islam'
92	CONCLUSION
96	REFERENCES
106	ABOUT THE AUTHOR
107	INDEX

About Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)

Women Living Under Muslim Laws is an international solidarity network with a mission to effectively advance women's equality, gender justice, and women's human rights through a variety of channels; providing information, research and analysis, training workshops and conferences, as well as facilitating a transnational and intergenerational collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.

The network started in 1984 by nine women from Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Iran, Mauritius, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Pakistan who came together and formed the Action Committee of Women Living Under Muslim Laws in support of local women's struggles. Since then WLUML has linked individual women and organisations and now extends to more than 70 countries ranging from South Africa to Uzbekistan, Senegal to Indonesia and Brazil to France. It links:

- Women living in countries or states where Islam is the state religion, secular states with Muslim majorities as well as those from Muslim communities governed by minority religious laws;
- Women in secular states where political groups are demanding religious laws; women in migrant Muslim communities in Europe, the Americas and around the world;
- Non-Muslim women who may have Muslim laws applied to them directly or through their children;
- Women born into Muslim communities/families who are automatically categorised as Muslim but may not define themselves as such, either because they are not believers or because they choose not to identify themselves in religious terms, preferring to prioritise other aspects of their identity such as political ideology, profession, sexual orientation or others.

What is in the Name: Our name **challenges the myth** of one, homogenous 'Muslim world'. This deliberately created myth fails to reflect that laws said to be Muslim vary from one context to another. The laws that determine our lives are from diverse sources: religious,

customary, colonial and secular. Many different laws simultaneously govern us: laws recognised by the state (codified and uncodified) and informal laws such as customary practices, which vary according to the cultural, social and political context.

WLUML, as a network, has opted for an open structure which has been designed to maximise the participation of diverse and autonomous groups and individuals as well as collective decision-making. WLUML does not have formal membership and networkers are a fluid group of individuals and organisations who maintain regular two-way contact with the network. For more information please see the WLUML website at www.wluml.org.

What are WLUML's mission and focus? Its mission is to strengthen women's individual and collective struggles for equality and their human rights, especially in Muslim contexts. It achieves this by breaking their isolation, by providing trainings, and by creating and reinforcing spaces for women to share experiences and lend support to one another. This support is created by making linkages between women within Muslim countries and communities, and with global feminist and progressive groups. In this way WLUML promotes the creation and strengthening of both local and transnational women's movements.

Publications, Research, and Media: WLUML conducts research, maps various analyses, mobilizes knowledge through the organization of training workshops, conferences, launch campaigns, circulates information regarding women's diverse experiences and strategies in Muslim contexts and helps to demystify the diverse sources of control over women's lives. It also runs the Feminist Leadership Institute for women in Muslim contexts. WLUML's current focus is on the four themes of: fundamentalism and identity politics, peace building and resisting the impact of militarisation on women's lives, promoting and protecting women's equality under laws, particularly family laws, and sexuality and women's bodily autonomy. Violence against women, as a theme, cuts across all of WLUML's projects and activities. Its publications are primarily in English, French, Arabic (and some in other local languages based on the need assessments and in response to the request from activists on the ground) are freely available on the website at www.wluml.org. Networkers also translate information

into numerous other languages. There are also printed versions of our selected publications, some of which are available on Amazon and other virtual bookstores.

Collective Research for Action and Training Projects and Coalition for Women's Human Rights:

- Exchange programme (1988)
- Mothers of Algiers (1987-1993)
- Qur'anic interpretations meetings (1990-2004)
- Women and Law in the Muslim world programme (1991-2001)
- Women's Reproductive Rights (1993- 1998)
- Vienna Tribunal Campaign (Women's Rights are Human Rights) (1991- 1995)
- Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes (1998, 1999, 2007, 2009)
- Gender, Militarization and displacement in Muslim contexts (1999-2002)
- Initiative for democratizing Afghan Family Laws – INSAF (2002 -present)
- Dress Codes and Modes: Politics of Women's Clothing in Muslim Contexts (2003 – Present)
- The International Coalition on Women Human Rights Defenders, <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org> (2005 –present)
- The Feminist Dialogue, <http://www.defendingwomendefendingrights.org> (2006 - present)
- The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! (2007 -present)
- Violence is not Our Culture Campaign, <http://violenceisnotourculture.org/> (2009 to present)
- Women reclaiming and re-defining cultures: Asserting rights over body, self, and public spaces (2008-2011)
- Gender Equality Program (2008-present).
- Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratization (2012 to present)

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Website: www.wluml.org

The International Coordination Office (ICO) facilitates coordination between networkers.

Asia Coordination Office

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Email: sgah@sgah.org.pk

Website: www.shirkatgah.org



Feminism and Art in Muslim Contexts

In the struggle to gain recognition and a place in society, women use different strategies and different tools. Art is one of these tools. As in most fields, art is male-dominated, and women are overlooked; their existence in these spaces are in question. With the emergence of the feminist art movement in the late 1960s, female voices have become louder and louder, challenging male domination in the art industry. Today, many female artists reflect their struggles into their works, use art as an activist tool, and oppose limited 'womanhood' roles assigned to them by society through their art.

After years of talk and reminding each other of the importance of art forms like cinema, painting, and literature in the feminist struggle, WLUML has finally introduced this long-delayed programme to our activities. As a newly launched programme, 'Feminism and Art in Muslim Contexts' takes a closer look at the works of female artists in diverse Muslim communities and countries. A complex image emerges when attempting to combine consideration of art forms, such as music, painting, and cinema, under the same headings as 'Islam', and 'women'. But this in itself is a clear indication that the subject deserves greater attention. This programme was developed to discuss how female artists, whose acts are not receiving the attention that they deserve, use art as a powerful tool within the framework of Muslim contexts. The programme will focus on how these artists increase the visibility of women in the field of art, how they transform art, and how they transform with art. They rebel against discriminatory systems trying to control female existence, exclude them from public life, or label them as inferior, passive possessions by putting forward arguments

under religion, tradition, or morality. This programme aims to inspire new discussions and activist-works through publications on many different artists and their works in different fields of art.

WLUML publications aim to support the struggle for women’s equality and autonomy and the promotion of women’s human rights worldwide. We aspire to provide a collective, transnational, and intergenerational space to share experiences, strategies, analyses, and initiatives. And the publications also intend to provide information about the lives, struggles, and strategies of women living in diverse Muslim communities and countries. With these publications, WLUML hopes to contribute to future projects and activist works by making the knowledge and experience gained in the field of women’s rights accessible.

This book “Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words: Female Rappers smashing the prescribed image of the ‘Muslim Women’ ” is the first publication under the programme and is about Muslim female musicians' use of rap music as a way to rebel against the role prescribed to them. We invite you to read it, enjoy it, and reflect on the many ingenious ways that women are rebelling against centuries of oppression.

FOREWORD

I am not a rap music fan. I have never been one. Probably these are not the best sentences to start this book, but this is exactly how the book's origin story begins.

I am not sure if I was born a feminist like Agnes Varda (Gianorio 2019) or if it happened later, but it is certain that I am an angry feminist just like her¹. In a lovely autumn evening in 2019 I was chatting with a young man in a bar and he was telling me with great enthusiasm how big a rap music fan he is. He would have noticed my indifference to the subject that he began to embellish the subject with information such as the deep soul of rap music, the prestige of rap battles in Berlin and how he tries not to miss any of them, in order to make a greater impact on me. Later on in the conversation, a sentence I used which I do not remember exactly what it was obviously activated the sensors in him and suddenly he responded to me saying, 'Oh you are a feminist!'. After this reaction, while thousands of questions passed through my head, he managed to connect the subject to rap music again. Obviously, he found the reason for my indifference and made his decision on this matter. 'Because you are a feminist, you cannot like rap music anyway, many things will go wrong for you.' The decision was made, the verdict was reached. Rap music was against feminism, for some reason it had to be that way, it obviously had unbreakable rules, and because I am a feminist, I could not enjoy the 'deep soul' of this music genre.

As Sarah Ahmed put it, I was angry at the status quo, I was wondering why and how this situation came to be, and I started looking into this genre of music. I only had a vague idea about

¹ 'I tried to be a joyful feminist, but I was very angry.' Agnès Varda
The Beaches of Agnès, 2008

it, and apart from a few popular names I know, I hoped that there might be women stepping up for change somewhere (Ahmed 2004).

When you do a simple search for 'rap music' or 'Hip-Hop culture' on the Internet, you encounter articles or collaged clips with the most listened rap music songs. The most common things you see in these clips are expensive cars, money, expensive jewelry, and female bodies used as decoration. In the lyrics, the words you usually hear are drugs, money, guns, and bitches. When you go through the articles about rap music, the topics 'black culture' and 'street culture' are followed by 'misogyny in rap music'. With the way it was portrayed rap music obviously had a problem with women. There are rappers who are women, but their names are rarely mentioned in the lists of 'best rappers' or 'best rap music songs'. Women, who are the subjects of the lyrics, are often referred to as 'bitches', their bodies are commodified in the video clips, all the while academic studies discuss the misogyny in Hip-Hop culture.

While I was continuing my search on the subject, I came across one of the most important news stories about women's place in the Hip-Hop world in 2019. Karim Kharbouch aka French Montana, an American male rapper who called women 'bitches' in accordance with the rules of rap music in many of his songs, such as '[Pop that](#)'² and '[Unforgettable](#)'³, performed his music in front of dozens of bikini-clad women with close-ups of certain parts of their body in his video clips, paying homage

²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVd3--VIHNU&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=FrenchMontanaVEVO (accessed 10.01.2021).

³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTFtOOh47oo&ab_channel=FrenchMontanaVEVO (accessed 11.01.2021).

to Hip-Hop culture, decided to give a nod to his Moroccan roots and liberate women. On the cover of the trailer of French Montana's new album that he shared on twitter⁴ in September 2019 with the statement '*You don't have to change who you are You can bring people into your own world*', a group of women wearing niqabs⁵ are sitting with their legs crossed while sporting red high heeled boots. The fact that the veil, which acts as a litmus paper when the issue of women's freedom is brought up, was added to the album trailer⁶ with a 'sexy' touch, encountered many positive and negative reactions on social media⁷. This time, although in a different style (!), women who were used as showcase objects were brought together, generalized, and passivated under the leadership of French Montana. For years we have become familiarized with the idea men see their right to talk about women rather than being aware of their privileges and making more space for women. What caught my attention were some tweets⁸ congratulating

⁴https://twitter.com/FrenchHMonTanA/status/1176136736897765377?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwterm%5E1176136736897765377%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.middleeastmonitor.com%2F20191002-is-french-montana-sexualising-the-hijab-or-liberating-it%2F (accessed 11.01.2021).

⁵ A type of full-face veil, which covers the neck, hair and entire face leaving the area around the eyes clear

⁶https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku4t5AvuLLs&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=FrenchMontanaVEVO (accessed 11.01.2021).

⁷<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2075756/4-french-montanas-new-album-cover-sparks-outrage> (accessed 10.01.2021).

⁸ The tweet is not available anymore, but you can find the tweet content in this news:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191002-is-french-montana-sexualising-the-hijab-or-liberating-it/> (accessed 02.01.2021).

French Montana for using his platform to represent women wearing headscarves (Rahman, 2019). Obviously, it is believed that women, especially Muslim women, could find a place for self-representation in Hip-Hop world thanks to men like French Montana and their advertisement tools, and we must be thankful for that!

Although I describe myself as an atheist woman who grew up in a secular family and want to stay out of these issues, in Germany, where I have been settled since 2016, my status of being born to a Muslim-Sunni family dominates the image I have for many people. This situation creates a lot of anger, a constant feeling of 'keeping the guard up' and often a great tiredness in me. Though many people in many environments have automatically given me duties and responsibilities such as making statements about Islam -and especially the headscarf problem-(!) and discussing this issue with them, since I was born into a Muslim family, I have to admit that sometimes I took this responsibility upon myself when I heard accusatory or orientalist sayings, especially the comments that deal with the headscarf issue as a static subject (Hoodfar 2001). Although the term usage is scientifically controversial, I have named these moments 'bipolar conflicts' within myself that cause abdominal pains and make me question my own self and I have realized that I have to learn to live my life with these conflicts.

In the end, my brief research into this world gave me some promising results. Women are present in rap music. They reflect their feminist feelings in their music, question the status quo and demand change. I even came across female rappers who transform their conflicts, like mine, into rap music. In different geographies they shatter with their words, rebel with their rhythms, and smash the prescribed image of 'Muslim woman'.

And after all, feminists are listening to rap music, they are making rap music, and some are even turning rap music into a feminist field. I wanted to get in touch with the beloved rap fan who triggered my feminist feelings and pushed me towards this research and shout this bad news in his face. I wanted to shout at the face of women-liberator headscarf magnets once again 'Women don't need you to liberate them, now take your hands-off women' with a rap song in the background. Instead of doing these, I decided to write a book with the support of WLUML.

This book is a product of my own struggle as a feminist woman who was born into a Muslim family. She is a learning process for someone not into rap music. She is an explanation and discussion process that I take responsibility for, myself. She is a reverence to these rebellious women who identify themselves as Muslim or who were born into a Muslim family like me, that gain the representation they deserve in the Hip-Hop world, and who not only rap but also make rap music about women with their existence, words, rhythms, and styles, and shatter the prescribed 'Muslim Woman' image. This work is a collage of how these women using rap music as a tool to empower, inspire, rebel, fight, claim rights and get them.

I would like to thank all WLUML, especially Homa Hoodfar, in the realization of this book; Selen Caner Ertuncay for helping me choose the right words to express my thoughts, Dana Kamour for strengthening the narrative with her beautiful touches, my soul sisters who were as excited as I was during the creation period of the book; and lastly, İpek Şaylı, who transformed this book into a work of art with her magnificent designs.

Finally, I would like to thank the people who were not even aware of the creation process of this book, but made the greatest contribution to her: Alexandra Elbakyan, the creator of Sci-Hub, which removes the boundaries of access to

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INTRODUCTION

The music video begins with a back shot of a young woman. We follow her walking towards a bar, and she turns her head after placing the order. The woman begins to rap in Arabic with her stylish look, combined with a white shawl and oval sunglasses and introduces herself to us:

'I am the girl of Mecca'⁹.

The video is filmed with young dancers in a Café. The rapper's name is Asayel Al-Bishi, aka Asayel Slay. We came across her name quite frequently in the media in February 2020, for which the reason was unfortunately not the success of Asayel Slay's song, but the call for her arrest by the Saudi Arabian authorities¹⁰.

Slay's song is about her pride as a woman being from Mecca, which is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's holiest city. Although the song was called 'a feminist anthem' by some (Armus 2020), it was described as an insult to Mecca, the holiest city of Islam, by many, especially on social media. Reactions generally focused on 'representation of Mecca' and comments were on the song being an insult to the traditions of the holiest city. So much so that in the comments made on social media with the *You_Are_Not_Mecca's_Girls* tag, many people stated that Asayel could not be the real face of Mecca and her song and the video clip directed in a bar with dancers

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlyEjStgp1M>(accessed 11.01.2021).

¹⁰ Saudi rapper faces arrest for Mecca Girl music video <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51597561> (accessed 13.01.2021).

are insulting the real women of Mecca¹¹. In addition to those who saw the song as contradictory to the traditions of Mecca and insulting the real women of Mecca, there were also those who described it as haram¹². The Saudi Arabian Feminist Activist Amani Al-Ahmadi told the Washington Post that all rhetoric is targeting a woman they think does not represent Saudi and Mecca (Armus 2020). Having a ‘woman’ rapper making a music video in the holy city and calling herself ‘the girl of Mecca’ also greatly disturbed the Saudi Arabian authorities and Governor of Mecca region, Prince Faisal, called the authorities for an investigation and application of penalties against Asayel and those responsible for the production of the video. This announcement was made on Twitter using the same hashtag `You_Are_Not_Mecca’s_Girls` by The Emirate of Makkah Region’s official account¹³.

Since the rapper is not only a woman but a black woman, there are also those who argue that besides misogyny a racist point of view underlies the reactions¹⁴. When we examine the social media posts and statements targeting Asayel Slay, we can see that the discussion is a multi-layered topic intertwined with the identity politics, state policy, racism, gender discrimination and activism.

¹¹<https://twitter.com/mts6/status/1231908045174775809>
(accessed 11.01.2021).

¹²https://twitter.com/madethnicrn_/status/1230865231519404033
(accessed 11.01.2021).

¹³<https://twitter.com/makkahregion/status/1230488278782095361?s=20> (accessed 11.01.2021).

¹⁴<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/mecca-governor-orders-arrest-saudi-female-rapper-200223094118361.html>
(accessed 02.01.2021).

Women rappers do not always get negative reactions in Saudi Arabia. In June 2018, female rapper Leesa¹⁵ went viral with her song and video clip¹⁶ after the lifting of the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia and received very positive reviews¹⁷. In the video which has more than 9 Million views on YouTube Leesa offers safety tips to drivers and emphasizes the importance of putting on a seatbelt. As a part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's program towards modernization, the lifting of the driving ban for women was announced in September 2017. While the lifting of the ban might seem like an important step in women's rights, the aim, according to some, was to revive the weakening economy of Saudi Arabia. The ban was officially lifted on June 24, 2018, while many activists who fought for this right were still in prison (Al-Khamri 2018, Al-Qadi 2020).

In an interview she gave in March 2020, Asayel Slay, who goes beyond the boundaries that the state and society had set and permitted for her, stated that she was questioned by state officials. However, according to Asayel's interview, the statement she gave was not about the published video, but for an administrative issue (Nabbout 2020). Although there is no official action regarding her song -contrary to Leesa's song

¹⁵ As we have seen in the example of Asayel, who oppose existing political and social norms, allowing you to rap as a woman depends on your submission to the dominant system. You can watch the video Leesa made for Saudi Arabia's national day here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBZJIWPYf8k> (accessed 20.09.2019).

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFVY5gmWPPw> (accessed 25.09.2019).

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44659099> (accessed 11.01.2021).

which is a celebration for state agenda- Asayel irritated state authorities and a certain part of society with her song that went 'beyond' the prescribed role to women of Mecca.

This counter-campaign against Asayel and the pressure exerted on her are an indication of what you may encounter as soon as you step out of the role prescribed to you. The moment you raise your voice and transcend the boundaries of the 'values' of family, society, traditions, state, and laws, you face major threats, but at the same time you draw attention to the issue, set the stage for debate, inspire, empower, and open a path for change.

Despite the general argument that rap is a genre of music made by men and has no place for feminism, today we hear the names of many female rappers. Women tell their stories in their lyrics and some of them do not just rap, they rap about women. In fact, the Muslim women performing this genre of music and their works are featured on many news sites under the themes of 'breaking the stereotypes' and 'smashing the patriarchy' (Estatie 2017)¹⁸. For that matter, many of these musicians support advocacy activities by collaborating with non-governmental organizations with their music and the identities they created for themselves as musicians.

As in many other fields, the efforts to exist as women and as Muslim¹⁹ women in the field of rap music, which is dominated by men, the issues they deal with, and how they use rap music as an empowering activist tool, deserve great attention. There is no doubt that it is a political stance in itself, as a Muslim

¹⁸ <https://gal-dem.com/17781-2/> (accessed 25.12.2020).

¹⁹ My use of 'Muslim' in this article is broadly conceived. It is not the level of religiousness of the person or the extent to which she expresses Islam in her art, but the definition of herself as a Muslim or was born in a Muslim family or country.

woman, to perform a music genre where men are so dominant and where misogynist lyrics and clips are pumped through television, radio and social platforms every day. However, in this book we focus on the work of rappers who reflect this stance in their music and musician identity.

We focus on how the creative work of female Muslim rappers offers an alternative model for engagement and invites new questions about the use of rap music to speak critically about the existing political/social order that prescribes the 'Muslim woman' image. She examines their motivations behind their work, what issues they address in the lyrics and their methods and styles in using it. Of course, these musicians' backgrounds, life stories and their personal experiences are the main factors that shape their music and their activism. In order to understand how the personal background, and personal stories, troubles and goals affect the musical and lyrical production, we will get help from the Muslim female rappers, who communicate their activism through their music, life stories, song lyrics, video clips, statements they give and their stance as musicians.

Even though this book is limited to discussing the work of Muslim female rappers, who were born into a Muslim family or who identify themselves as Muslim, and even if these musicians share common practices, it does not try to define a 'Muslim female rapper'. On the contrary, she aims to undefine it and draw attention to the individuality of these female rappers. These musicians show a great diversity within what they write, compose, say, rap and perform. Also, as we have seen in Asayel example, it is a multilayered topic intertwined with identity politics, state policy, racism, gender discrimination and Muslim youth activism. For this reason, this book aims to provide a comprehensive overview under two main chapters.

Both chapters talk about different topics covered in different geographies. The first chapter opens a discussion on the issues raised by the rappers, who were born and raised in countries where Muslims are the majority; that is even if they have left these countries and keep writing lyrics about what has happened or what is happening in those places. In the second part, we will discuss the subjects about rappers who were born, grown up or immigrated to western countries where Muslims are a minority or who converted to Islam.

HIP-HOP, RAP AND WHAT WOMAN?

Sneakers, baggy pants, breakdance, expensive jewelry, and graffiti art (Pough 2007, Rose 1994). When we say Hip-Hop culture, these are mainly the first things that come to mind. However, when Hip-Hop culture appeared in the 70s, its purpose was not to be called a capitalist industry. Many researchers and artists agree that Hip-Hop was launched as a cultural movement by African, Caribbean and Latin youth in the 1970s (Williams 2017, Perry 2004). This cultural movement was generally based on the problems that black people experienced in America at that time. Smitherman describes Hip-Hop as a response to poverty, joblessness, and disempowerment (Smitherman 1997). Apart from being something that talks about black culture, Hip-Hop was also a form of resistance against white America and the Eurocentric perspective (Wright 2004).

As we often see today, Hip-Hop is not just a certain attitude or style of dress. When discussing Hip-Hop culture and rap music, we need to think of it separately from the Hip-Hop industry today. In an interview Latino rapper and politician George Martinez mentions that we have to make a distinction between Hip-Hop culture and the Hip-Hop industry today: 'Hip-Hop was created on the block; created from the struggles of urban life coming out of the '70s, the ending of the Civil Rights era in terms of all the excitement, and moving toward the Reagan era, which centered conservatism and altered the political landscape significantly' (Hayduk 2010). Today, Hip-Hop is a marketing tool, which sells fast food, cars, jewelry, clothes, and films (Perry 2004).

While there is some confusion in terms of identification, Hip-Hop represents a culture and a genre, while rap represents the poetic and political part of the music. Rap music is a form of

storytelling which is a part of the Hip-Hop culture (Rose 1994). Imani Perry says rap is a mixed medium. It combines poetry, prose, song, music, and theater. She says that rap is black, yet impure (Perry 2004). Although due to the absence of rap samples other than in English, the first attempts to rap music outside the US started by imitating American rap songs. However, bilingual songs of Latin rappers, helped to destroy the English language hegemony in rap music (Fernandes 2011). Today, rap songs are performed in almost every language and which has turned into a global cultural movement. So where do women stand in this global cultural movement?

American journalist, writer and music critic Nelson George published an article in *Village Voice* magazine in 1989, featuring the names of over 20 rap singers / groups for the birthday of rap music (George 1989). The American sociologist Tricia Rose criticized this situation with a letter she wrote to the magazine following his failure to include a single female rap singer among the 20 names included in the article, and this letter of criticism is published by the magazine in a rather sexist manner with the name label 'Lady Complainer'. Rose explains this attitude as the 'what women?' syndrome (Rose 1994). The Associate Director at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Angela Williams, states that during the preparation of her doctoral dissertation, she always got the same reaction whenever she said that she does her research on women rappers in the Middle East and North: 'Are there women who rap?' (Williams 2017).

Even though their existence has tried to be ignored, we know that there are female rappers and their contribution to rap culture is quite important (Perry 2004). We also know that there are many successful Muslim female rappers, and their music is rebellious, empowering, and inspiring as it challenges the current political and social norms and mobilizes the

audiences. In response to this ‘what woman?’ syndrome named by Rose, (Rose 1994) we are going to name many female Muslim rappers in the coming pages.

BEING A MUSLIM FEMALE RAPPER DESPITE THE MEN ON THE BAD GUYS' STAGE

The images of manhood in rap music are criticized mainly for being hypersexual, misogynistic, sexist, and violent. Rap stages come across as a place dominated by 'bad guy' representations. These 'bad guys' use the female body as an object and legitimize the violence against women (Weitzer and Kubrin 2003) in their lyrics and clips as a manifestation of their sexual strength (Perry 2004). Regarding the reason for this situation, it is possible to talk about the existence of two different opinions. The first opinion sees 'the bad guys' as a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Hooks 2006). In addition to this view, Rose points out that the entire music industry is already sexist (Rose 1994). The second view is that the sexist norms and behavioral patterns of the black society that created Hip-Hop culture are effective in this regard (Armstrong 2001, Perry 2004).

I would like to point out that I am closer to the first view, considering that today Hip-Hop culture has become a global culture and women's presence in the rap scene is still not accepted. Some male rappers even express that they are encouraged by the music industry to use sexist lyrics in their songs (Weitzer and Kubrin 2003). Considering that what we call the Hip-Hop industry today is a product of the white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, we can say that this misogynist music genre image is not a product of black communities, who are the creators of Hip-Hop culture.

Of course, it is easy to see Hip-Hop arena as a bad guys' world. The truth is, although women have been active in Hip-Hop culture ever since the mid- 1970s, their presence in this area has been ignored (Pough 2007). Especially in 90s, in order to

gain acceptance in this male-dominated industry, women had to conform to existing industry norms (Emerson 2002). Some female rappers even adopted this sexist language and used it in their songs and clips (Rose 1994). Although there still are female rappers who produce songs and clips in this way or support male rappers by making duets in this style²⁰ towards the end of the nineties this attitude has started to change slowly, and women have started telling their own stories.

According to Nooshin, Hip-Hop culture provides a powerful field for individuals to tell their own stories (Nooshin 2011). Queen Latifah's song UNITY²¹, in which she talks about sexual harassment and cat calling she and her sisters experienced and invites women to unite against it, and the song 'Ain't Nuthin 'But a She Thing'²², in which Salt-N-Pepa talks about social inequality and opposes seeing women as a mere sex object, are just two examples from the 90s.

Today, the number of female artists who see rap music as a storytelling tool is quite high. In fact, this powerful area that Hip-Hop provides to storytelling becomes a tool that women who produce in other branches of art also use to strengthen their expressions. Iona Rozeal Brown reflects her childhood stories and her interest in fashion and music in her paintings,

²⁰ French Montana - Wiggle It (Official Video) ft. City Girls
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4rIE0g1lGA>
(accessed 24.12.2020).

50 Cents ft Olivia Candy Shop
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRcnnld15BA>(accessed 25.12.2020).

²¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8cHxydDb7o&feature=emb_title&ab_channel=QueenLatifahVEVO (accessed 10.01.2021).

²²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na3u8S9tF9o&ab_channel=SaltNPepaVEVO (accessed 11.01.2021).

bringing together traditional Japanese culture and Hip-Hop²³. Written and directed by the lead actress Michaela Coel, one of the most prominent productions of 2020, 'I may destroy you'²⁴ tells the story of a woman who was raped after being drugged. It is not a coincidence that almost all of the soundtrack²⁵ of this strong, shocking and inspiring production, which was enriched with music that deeply question the concept of sexual consent, consist of rap songs.

In 1991 journalist Henry Allen announced Islam as Hip-Hop's official religion in his article (Allen 1991). From the 90s to the present, rap music has been one of the most popular types of music for younger Muslim generation, especially with Islamic rap gaining great success and Muslim rappers taking active roles in political and social movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Indonesia, Morocco, and Libya (Golpushnezhad 2017). For this reason, it was inevitable that researchers' interest in this topic would increase. However, as in almost every field, many of the work in this Hip-Hop / rap field ignore female musicians and focus on male rappers (Emerson 2002). Many existing studies focus on male musicians and specifically associate Hip-Hop culture with masculinity (Rose 1991, Emerson 2002). The issue of being a woman in the male-dominated Hip-Hop world, which we will later talk about in depth, gets even more complicated especially when it comes to Muslim female rappers, because of discussions about the place of music, singing and dancing in Islamic ideology. The issue of women, music, Islam, and prohibitions is expressed with greater ambition when female

²³ <https://vimeo.com/32874904> (accessed 02.01.2021).

²⁴ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11204260/?ref=nr_srsrg_0 (accessed 09.01.2021).

²⁵ <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE8y4DZbbA1ttwdWmk1tUYiv-0LaPD5lc>(accessed 14.01.2021).

musicians make songs that go beyond the scope of the dominant political and social norms.

Despite this male-dominated environment, and sexist and misogynist images, why do female Muslim musicians prefer to tell their stories through rap music? Tricia Rose in her work 'Black Noise', one of the few works written about female rappers in the 90s, states that rap music is giving voice to those 'whose voices have been relegated to the margins of public discourse.' (Rose, 1994). Also, this strong area that Hip-Hop offers for telling a personal story may cause women who want to raise their voices in a subject to prefer rap music consciously, rather than devoting to rap music. In an interview with Elham Golpushnezhad for her dissertation, Tunisian rapper Khadijeh says that choosing rap music is a certain sign of courage. She says that musical genres such as rock and rap allow women to '*boldly voice their minds without fear of the consequences.*' (Golpushnezhad 2017). Moroccan pop music star Manal, of whom we will talk more about in the coming chapters, explains why she has been making rap music songs recently: '*... I wanted to talk about things that many Moroccans don't normally talk about, like sexual harassment and gender stereotypes. When I decided to talk about these subjects, rapping was the first choice. I couldn't talk about these things with a pop song or soul music, so for me, rap was the only way to be able to share these messages.*'²⁶

In her study published in 2001, Miriam Cooke examines how women reimagine fundamental narratives from historiography to war stories and Islamic discourses. Cooke emphasizes that these alternatives, created by the thoughts of women based on their personal experiences, may provide a roadmap for the

²⁶ <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2020-04-20/meet-manal-the-moroccan-artist-changing-the-game/> (accessed 11.01.2021).

future (Cooke 2001). Based on this idea, it would not be wrong to say that the rap music that Muslim female rappers produce offers a new alternative to tell their own stories, revolt, and claim rights, to have a potential to establish a structure that is free from patriarchy, heteronormativity and Islamophobia, and where female sexuality is not oppressed. This situation turns rap music into an activist tool in the hands of these women. In the next sections, we will cover the topics, methods, and styles with the help of song lyrics and video clips of interviews.

Although this book wants to be a reverence to these rebellious women, you can imagine that it is not possible to mention the names and works of each one here. Though we are talking about a male-dominated area, like in many other fields, the number of female rappers, even Muslim female rappers is considerably high. Even if I expressed this desire with very sincere good intentions here, in a study on male rappers, there would be no such concern since the number of male rappers is unimaginably high. This fact may be the subject of another study that we will put forward in the future, who knows.



MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRIES

Eva B, Amani Yahya,
Mayam Mahmoud,
Khtek, Bunga, Sonita Alizadeh,
Arapeyat, Ayben,
Soosan Firooz, Leesa,
Manal, Yacko, Justina,
Medusa, Mina la Voilée,
Malikah, Asayel Slay,
Paradise Sorouri, Soultana

In this section, we will include the stories of the rappers who were born or grew up in the geographies where Muslims live as the majority, and even if they have left their country, who still deal with the issues of that geography. Although this classification sounds quite complicated, it creates the correct structure for this book, which is based on the activism communicated by these rappers through Hip-Hop and rap music, as the experiences directly shape their motivation, the subjects they touch and the styles they adopt. The analysis in this section includes the products of female rappers from Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen. I tried to include as many rappers' stories as possible to understand what women born and raised in these geographies rebel against, draw attention to, what rights they demand and what rap music gives them.

We started discussing the subject with the song of Saudi rapper Asayel Slay and what happened afterwards. Asayel's story constitutes a very important example for the structure of our discussion. In a world dominated by men, she is producing in one of the music genres in which male domination is felt the most. Asayel initially faced negative reactions from the public and then directly from the state authorities. She had not acted in accordance with the role society and the state assigned to a Muslim woman. Some of the comments to Asayel and her song were based on discussions on Islam, woman, music, and dance. She was telling the story of the woman from Mecca, giving voice to women, and inspiring the women of Mecca.

(...)

*She is running the show
Look at her glow
Is it the moon or her
You will never know
West coasts praise her beauty
East coasts know that she is a cutie
North and the south have no doubt
She is blessing attitude so groovy
(Asayel Slay-Bint Makkah²⁷)*

It is not known whether Asayel made this song for this purpose, but it is certain that it caused a great controversy. The fact that she is not only a woman who raps, but a black woman, and the reactions to her are also an indication that the topic is multilayered, we should not overlook the issue of intersectionality while making our analysis.

²⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJXPuq2Lpwg&ab_channel=AsayelSlayMeccagirlrapper (accessed 10.01.2021).



**'... a woman in
a land of dicks'
Khtek-KickOff**

After talking a lot about the male domination of the Hip-Hop industry, it would be good to start the discussion from here. As I said in the previous parts, it is easy to say that it is a bad guys' club, accepting the existing situation and continuing with its impositions, or not getting involved at all. But the worst thing is to consciously ignore those who get involved. This is a summary of what happens to female rappers in the process of trying to gain a place in rap music, as in many other fields.

By saying '*Being a female rapper doesn't mean I have to act like boys or talk about gangsters*' Malaysian rapper Noor Ayu Fatini Mohd Bakhari aka Bunga, opposes the impositions of the Hip-Hop culture in one of her interviews (Park 2019). As well as having a stage name meaning flower in Malay language, her colorful video clips and performances²⁸ with floral-patterned Baju Kurung²⁹ draws a style very contrary to the rules(!) of the Hip-Hop industry, as she covers the rap stage with flowers. Challenging the macho style of Hip-Hop with its femininity, Bunga succeeded in gaining coverage in the media, with the news titled 'Hijabi Rapper' (Singh 2019), by creating a huge shock. The social structure was amazed women rap, and on top of that as a woman with a headscarf. Despite being the subject of copy-paste news with her feminine style and headscarf, which do not need to mention much about her music, Bunga is aware of the difficulty of her work. She considers herself as 'living proof' that women can make it in a male-dominated rap world (Park 2019). Bunga's style reminded me of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDx talk 'We should all be feminists', in which

²⁸https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlinLM5dAyhM&ab_channel=WarnerMusicMalaysia (accessed 10.01.2021).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITC0l1Ks9xg&ab_channel=Wolfiex (accessed 10.01.2021).

²⁹ A traditional Malay costume.

she tells of the concern that she might not be taken seriously with the outfit she wore in her first class she gave at college³⁰. As a woman who unfortunately feels this concern herself, I see Bunga maintaining this style as a very brave and important stance. On the other hand, Bunga's comment in an interview, '*The first single was to introduce me as a cute, happy-go-lucky person. I think they were targeting the younger crowd*' (Sathiabalan 2020) brings me to the question of whether Bunga's style has been used by Warner Music³¹ as a marketing strategy, in which they portray it as an 'alternative style' in order not to enter too far into the area of the Hip-Hop industry.

Ayben, who introduces herself as a person bound to Muslim traditions (Solomon, 2006), makes her debut in 1999 at the age of 17 along with her brother, who is also a famous rapper in Turkey, in their rap music group Nefret's song. In her lyrics, instead of celebrating her debut as the first female rapper in Turkey Ayben goes along the path of pre-empting and proving herself against the reactions she will most probably encounter:

*Here's the girl MC, a different voice
Here we come now, stop the fanfare
Who said girls can't do it
Not handwork, just heartwork*
(Nefret feat. Ayben & Roka/Yüz Yüze³²)

³⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc (accessed 10.01.2021).

³¹ <https://warnermusic.com.my/artists/bunga> (accessed on 02.01.2021)

³² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-zu-h-6KM8&ab_channel=EskiOkulRap (accessed on 03.01.2021). The lyrics are translated to English by me.

For Ayben, who has been making rap music since 1999, this difficult process of trying to exist and constantly having to prove herself as a woman has not come to an end. However, she has not lost her hope:

'As someone who has been making this music for more than 20 years, I can say that there is no other solution but to keep your feet firmly on the ground. It is really difficult to break down the established patterns... However, when you do what you believe, these perceptions start to break, albeit slowly.' (Çalışkan 2020).

In 2019 by implementing a project that she wanted to do for many years, Ayben uses another strategy, in addition to reflecting her revolt against the male-dominated Hip-Hop industry in her lyrics. She takes the stage with a full orchestra composed of female musicians in Zeytinli Rock Festivali (Çalışkan 2020), which is one of Turkey's most important music festivals.

There are also rappers who choose the way of cooperation instead of efforts to increase visibility by increasing representation, as Ayben did. Morocco's first recognized female rapper Soultana released her first album in 2015 with a male rapper, Anas Bawss, in collaboration with another male rapper, Abd El Moughit Oukaf (alias Mo Beazy). Soultana explains her decision in an interview: *'It's intentional that I perform with male rappers, because that way I know that men will listen to me and to my messages.'* (Natour 2019). While I personally see Soultana's words as heartbreaking and as throwing in the towel from the start, as someone who tries to look and analyze the industry from the outside, I tried to distance myself from sharply criticizing her strategy. Soultana is simply someone who has been trying to exist and to be heard in this industry. But on the other hand, Moroccan rapper

Khtek's interview,³³ whom we will talk more about below, about the difficulty of reaching out to female audiences despite being a female rapper telling women's stories made me think even more broadly about the Hip-Hop culture. The Hip-Hop industry as a whole, from its producers to its consumers, was already 'male'. If this structure is to be broken, they should reach more female audiences rather than male audiences who have already internalized this heteronormative and patriarchal order, and female representation should increase not only on the production side but also on the consumer side.

The things we have talked about so far in this chapter can be attributed to Hip-Hop culture and rap music in general, and they do not seem to be specific to the title. I underlined in the previous section that I have adopted the idea that the reason why Hip-Hop culture is a male-dominated, sexist, misogynist industry is that the society already has a patriarchal system. That is why, these words spoken about male domination in the Hip-Hop industry cannot be separated from male domination in society. Also, I wanted to look beyond the reaction and coping strategies of these musicians to the most fundamental problem in the industry. Now we will make a slight transition towards the patriarchal society that forms the basis of male domination in this sector.

Rap music is not seen as a 'suitable' activity for Muslim women by the society due to its sexist image. The queen of the Hip-Hop Lynn Fattouh aka Malikah was only 15 when she has started rapping. Born in France and raised in Beirut, Malikah sings her songs in Arabic (Ghanam 2016). She underlines that, as a woman in the Hip-Hop scene, she had to work twice as hard to get to where she is in now:

³³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzgrlr5R5X4&ab_channel=Ne_wzee (accessed 03.01.2021).

'In the Arab world, women are underestimated and need to surpass men's achievements in order to be heard or known of. I consider it an honor having reached to where I am now.' (Al-Kuttab 2013).

Before giving his support to his daughter, Malika's father said that she should not rap on stage as she comes from a good family, she is an Arab and a Muslim girl (Williams 2017). The story of Mahmoud, who was recognized in a talent contest she performed at in 2013³⁴, is also quite similar. Mayam Mahmoud says that at the beginning she caused some controversy in her own family because her family thought that 'rap was not a sufficiently feminine activity', even though her mom was her first inspiration by introducing poetry to her.³⁵ (Kingsley 2013).

Although female rappers, DJs and break dancers are legally free to perform in Tunisia, female rappers state that it is understood as an inappropriate environment for Muslim women because of its sexist reputation (Golpushnezhad 2017). Tunisian rapper Boutheina El Alouadi, aka Medusa, states that although she received great support from her family, she had difficulties in the beginning due to the attitude of the society: *'Go back to the kitchen, [take] care of your family, rap is not for women'* (Neumann 2016). Though it has been said hundreds of times, I still did not want to lose the chance to underline this cliché but still angering fact. There is also no place in the kitchen for women who are restrained from making rap music and sent to the kitchen. There is only one woman on the list of the 17 chefs with the most Michelin stars in the world (Oliver 2021). And yes,

³⁴https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1MrA3435Ik&ab_channel=ArabsGotTalent (accessed 03.01.2021).

³⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-25083806> (accessed 03.01.2021).

the Michelin Guide was created in 1920 by two rich white men³⁶.

In KickOff³⁷, her first single released in 2020, Khtek talks about *'being a woman in a land of dicks'* and interpreting many women's feelings. Houda Abouz, who started rapping with the encouragement of her friends, chose the stage name Khtek, which means 'your sister' in Moroccan Arabic. However, it refers to something more than the direct translation of 'your sister'. Khtek, which is used as 'fuck your sister' in Arabic speaking countries, especially by men to humiliate each other's dignity(!), is also used as 'whore, bitch'. Houda Abouz says she made this choice very consciously: *'I have two reasons for choosing that. First it grabs the attention of the audiences, they try to learn what is behind. The second one is to try to break the stigma around the term. So now when someone says Khtek, people would know it refers to me and not an insult.'* Precisely at this point it is necessary to name the book *'Excitable Speech A Politics of the Performative'*, in which Judith Butler discusses the strategy of repetition -I must admit that they do in a rather complex way- to deconstruct the power of hate language. Khtek's attempt can re-contextualize this power of hurtful language which is created through insult and attacks towards the female body (Butler 1997).

From Khtek's lyrics, we can say that rap music is the genre of dicks which the land of dicks does not consider suitable for women. Producing in such a genre of music with the lyrics that defy the patriarchal structure of society is an attempt which has a destructive effect on the whole system. As a feminist and

³⁶ <https://guide.michelin.com/en/about-us> (accessed 13.01.2021).

³⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgzR5KkbEF4&ab_channel=Khtek17 (accessed 10.01.2021).

LGBT rights supporter (Eljehtimi 2020), Khtek, like many other female rappers, uses rap against rap and its own creator:

*'Rap is my passion and my defense mechanism in a patriarchal society.'*³⁸

³⁸ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/music/how-moroccan-women-are-breaking-into-a-music-industry-dominated-by-men-rap-is-my-defence-mechanism-1.1056074> (accessed 11.01.2021).

**'I wanted to run, and they hit me on the back,
I wanted to think, and they hit me on the head'**

Paradise Sorouri-Nalestan



Societies that do not favor women becoming rappers do not hesitate to offer women a prescription of what they can do. In an interview with the BBC, Amani Yahya states that she hopes the Yemeni society will one day realize that women can do more than just take care of children and cook, and be anything they want³⁹. In her song 'A Free Woman'⁴⁰, which is prepared for International Women's Day in collaboration with Oxfam, she directly talks to a male person and she opposes the roles assigned to women by society:

*You tell me that a woman can never become something big
A schoolteacher, that's all she can ever be
(Amani Yahya-A Free Woman⁴¹)*

In addition to treating society's values and choosing the appropriate profession, there are other issues that women, especially women with headscarves, should pay attention to. The headscarf, which acts as a powerful magnet for women's liberators, activates the sensitivity of the religious part of the society. Even just the presence of female Muslim rappers in this very masculine world is a pioneering act. It is possible to say that those who do not even think about the possibility of women rapping are greatly surprised when the 'headscarf' is involved. Mayam Mahmoud who has added modeling to her

³⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-31456049> (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁴⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8iOTB818VE&lc=UgiRg388eHMIInngCoAEC&ab_channel=OxfamintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica (accessed 03.01.2021)

⁴¹ The English translation of the lyrics is available on <https://l-hit.com/ar/1289> (accessed 03.01.2021).

career in recent years says that when a young woman in a headscarf appeared on the stage in 2013, it was not the expectation of the crowd to see her rapping and jumping around on stage: *'It's got a lot of people talking about whether it's possible for a veiled girl, or even a girl, to do this.'* (Kingsley 2013).

Like Mayam Mahmoud, Bunga says that she also received negative comments and was criticized for undermining the image of women by rapping in a hijab (Park 2019). Senegalese rapper Aminata Gaye, aka Mina la voilée (Mina the veiled) says that she is either accused of wearing the veil, since it is "incompatible with the Hip-Hop scene", or accused of being a veiled rap musician, since it is 'incompatible with Islam'. *'A lot of men insulted me, told me that I was spoiling religion, that I was the incarnation of Satan, etc.'* (Leduc 2020).

Of course, religious sensitivity is not always expressed in such a polite(!) way. The stigmatization as prohibition mechanism could be put in place and the consequences could be very serious. Tunisian rapper Medusa started rapping at the age of 16. She says when she started rapping there were not many female rappers: *'It was viewed as haram⁴².'* (Djilali 2016).

Rap music, which is a rebellious music due to the way it was created, is definitely not welcomed, especially in Muslim communities. It is even seen as a moral collapse (LeVine, 2008). While there is such a negative view of rap music, being a Muslim woman performing rap music in Muslim societies can be seen as an activist act in itself. While in some countries, women are prohibited by law from making music, in countries where there are no such prohibitions, female rappers have to confront society. With rapping they attempt to deconstruct the

⁴² forbidden, prohibited.

institutionalized Islamic standards they had been forced to conform to. And this attempt can even lead to death threats and danger to their lives.

Faryade Zan aka Paradise Sorouri, one of the Afghanistan's first female rappers, was beaten almost to death by a group of men in 2008 on the grounds that she "influences other women badly by making music" and received more threats than she could count because of her protest songs against violence against women in Afghanistan (Stein 2016).

*I wanted to run, and they hit me on the back,
I wanted to think, and they hit me on the head,
they burned my face in the name of Islam, cut my nose for
revenge,
poured acid on my hands and body,
sold me because I am only a woman
(Paradise Sorouri-Nalestan⁴³)*

Another rapper in Afghanistan, Soosan Firooz, who took a very brave step by performing her music in front of groups including men, is also one of the victims of death threats. Soosan and her family were clearly threatened with death through text messages and phone calls: *'They told my mother, if your daughter is on tv again, we will cut off your head'*⁴⁴

Egyptian rapper Mayam Mahmoud says she has received a lot of negative comments. Some have even commented that she is an infidel and creates a bad name for Islam (Matthews 2019). *'I got anonymous phone calls and threats. They said I should stop*

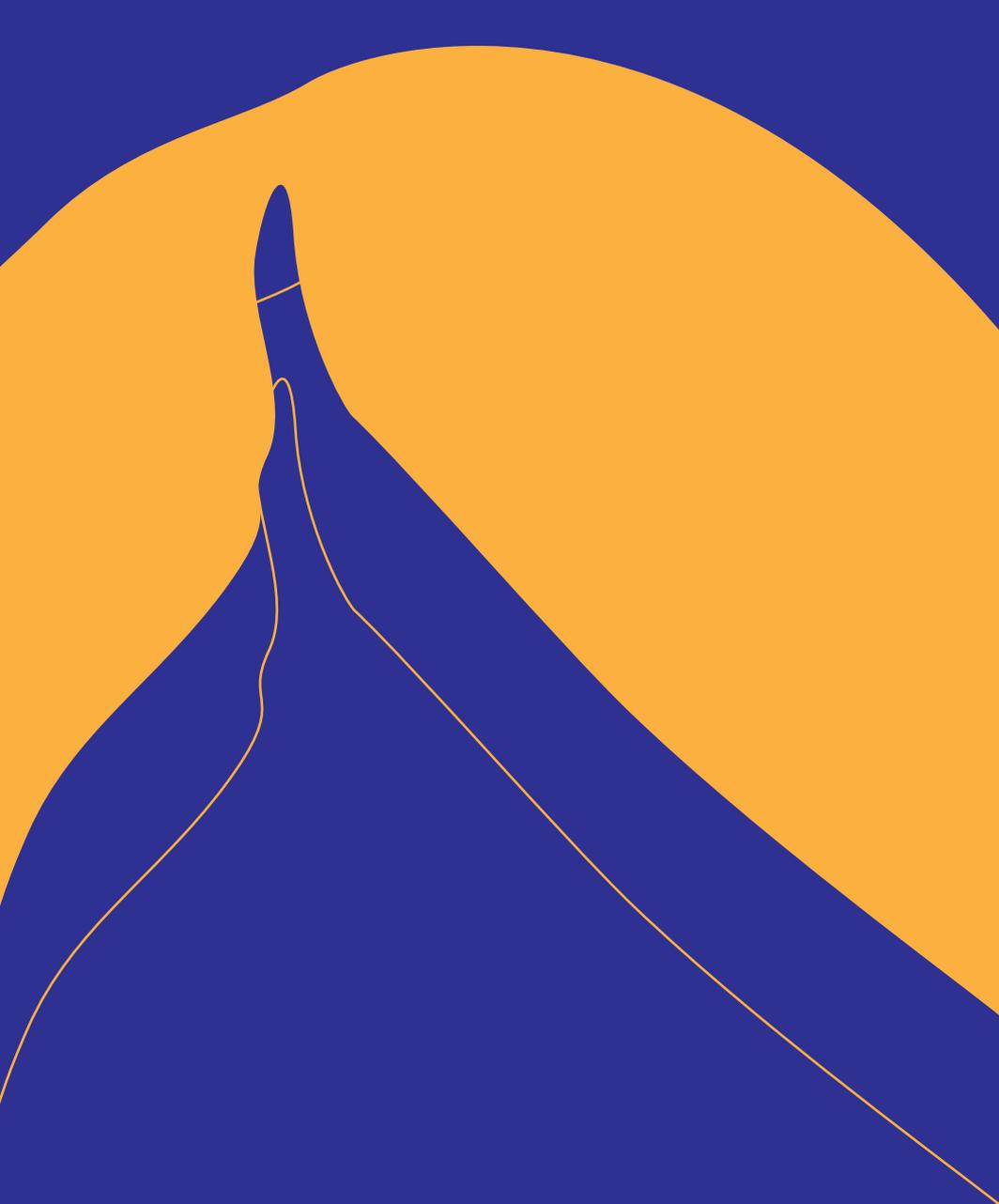
⁴³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O4rdhWkuRY&ab_channel=MWallonie-Bruxelles (accessed 11.01.2021).

⁴⁴https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJQXCcdz1kA&ab_channel=ZaraafatKhan (accessed 27.12.2020).

what I was doing, that it was haram and that I should be ashamed.' This is how Yemeni rapper Amani Yahya expresses her reactions when images and videos of an event in United Kingdom, where she sang, are reflected in the press. Amani Yahya, who is considered Yemen's first female rapper, says she did not stop rapping despite the threats '*So I decided not to tell people and just carry on*' (Khaleeli 2015).

It is a deep debate that music is forbidden according to Islam Ideology. However, since the 'Islam and music discussion' is not the focus of this book I do not want to get my hands on this very controversial topic. Therefore, I will talk about it very briefly to give a general idea. According to some Islamic scholars, music is strictly prohibited in the Qur'an and in the hadiths of Muhammad, with some exceptions like the celebration of Eid Festivals or singing battle songs during jihad. In particular, women are allowed to sing only about Islamic topics in front of a female audience, as the singing of women can have sexual connotations for the male audience (Al-Kanadi 1986). Of course, there are many different approaches that challenge this view. For example, Islamic feminism calls attention to classical and post-classical interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadiths as being the products of patriarchal societies and based on men's experiences and questions (Ahmed and Jahan 2014).

Hilal Işık



'... This is their fatva'
Faravaz Ft Justina-Fatva

In Asayel Slay's story, we saw how state authorities were disturbed by a rap song and were directly involved in the process. The state may prohibit you to sing or require you to sing according to its rules. The state can justify these rules by claiming religion or by saying that it considers the public interest(!).

*'They are telling me to keep my mouth shut
When I scream they mock my pain
This is their fatva:
'you are the disturbance'
(Faravaz Ft Justina-Fatva⁴⁵)*

The song 'Fatva', for which Justina made a duet with Faravaz, is dedicated to all female singers of their Homeland, Iran. The video begins with snippets of interviews of women who are banned from singing in Iran. In the rest of the video, we see Faravaz singing and dancing on the street, accompanied by street musicians. 30-year-old Iranian rapper Justina also joins the song with the rap part. Farima Habashizadeh, aka Justina, started rapping at the age of 16 with the Iranian underground Hip-Hop group Zedbazi. In one of her interviews, she states that the female Hip Hop scene in Iran is not doing well. *'In Iran people think girls shouldn't sing, especially rap'*.⁴⁶

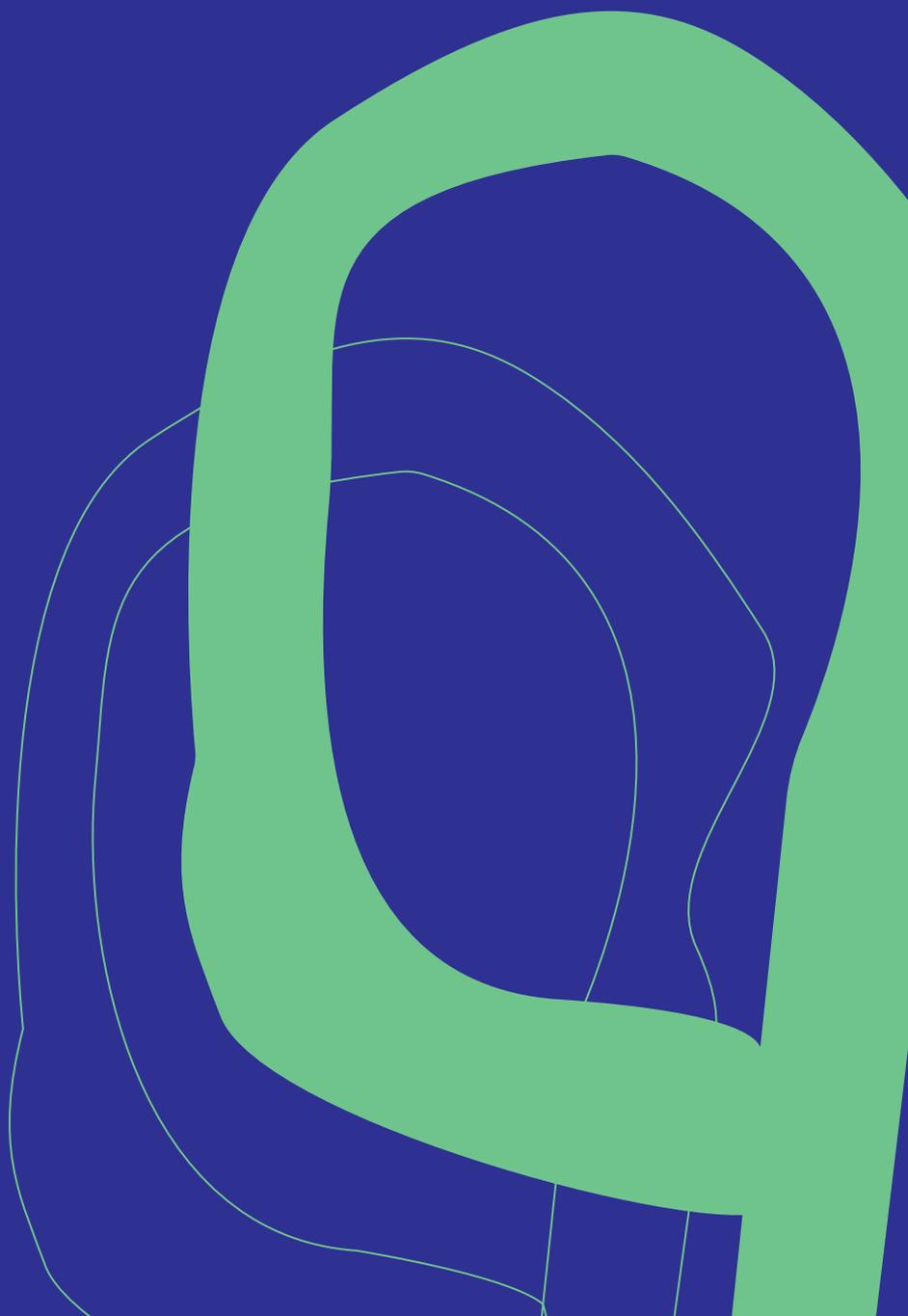
Since the revolution, women in Iran are only allowed to sing as a solo vocalist for a female-only audience or for the general public in a choir. However, even if it is not illegal, it is known

⁴⁵https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhpDkYqNIK0&ab_channel=justinaofficial (accessed 27.12.2020).

⁴⁶ <http://madamerap.com/en/2019/02/21/justina-in-iran-people-think-girls-shouldnt-sing/> (accessed 27.12.2020).

that in many cities except Tehran, women are not allowed to sing even at events with only female audiences (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2018). Iran is not the only country where the law interferes with the right to make and listen to music. The Taliban banned all forms of music during their brutal regime in Afghanistan between 1996-2001, except Taliban 'chants' and certain types of religious song (Baily 2001). Although there is no such ban anymore, it is not easy to erase the traces of it in practice and in society (Najafizada 2019). Even if the state does not officially prevent you, in the name of Shariah, from going beyond the role assigned to you as a woman by a framework of Islamic ideology or by the state interests can still cause you trouble. But of course, there are many female musicians who perform their music by taking all these risks and we will mention some of them in the coming pages.

**'Let me whisper to you my words
So, no one hears that I speak of the selling of girls'
Sonita-Brides for Sale**



Magia Lopez says that women come to the stage ‘With their things to say, with their pain and happiness, with their knowledge, their softness, with the prejudice they suffer for being women, with their limitations, with their weakness and their strength.’ (Fernandes 2011).

Pakistani rapper Eva B. attracted attention with her song Gully Girl⁴⁷, which she recorded on her cell phone in early 2019. Because of her family's opposition to rap music at first and her wish to protect herself, we see Eva B. with her face covered in her concerts and interviews. While researching Eva B, I came across a video prepared by The Centrum Media⁴⁸. One of the comments made under the video on the Facebook page where it was shared attracted my attention. It was by a Facebook user who, if asked, would be pretty sure that he has the responsibility and power to allow women to rap. I do not want to give him even more credit by sharing it directly here but let me guide you through how it ‘comforted all the female rappers’ by setting out the rules. The lyrics have to be healthy (?) and inspiring, but without making girls rebel, because rebellion makes them less dressed (?). While male Muslim rappers could swear, talk about rape, drugs, and gambling⁴⁹ women should chose ‘healthy’ words. I guess ‘healthy’ lyrics do not contain women's pain, happiness, knowledge, weakness, or their strength. In fact, it no ways includes the feminist anger that ‘becomes a response to the world’ (Ahmed 2004). Let's dive deep into the unhealthy lyrics that make girls rebel.

⁴⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF_OqyKI3SA&ab_channel=PatariMusic (accessed 29.12.2020).

⁴⁸<https://www.facebook.com/thecentrummedia/posts/956381214701822> (accessed 29.12.2020).

⁴⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWolpDVkOH0> (accessed 29.12.2020).

*You never feel ashamed of your infidelity
But when I raise my voice you cut my tongue
Get lost, you did not create me!
(Soosan Firooz- Naqisulaql [50](#))*

Soosan Firooz, a member of a family that fled the Taliban and went to Iran as refugees in 1996, sings about the repression of women in Afghanistan. She returns to Afghanistan after spending five years in Iran and she transmits her experiences as a woman to her music. Soosan describes her years in Iran as painful and she responds to the journalist who says it is a difficult life in Afghanistan, for her with that we need to reflect on: *'But it is easier than being a refugee⁵¹.'*

*I am not your slave anymore
And the servant of your morning and evening
I am lost in your hypocrisy
And will never understand you
Listen listen to my voice
It is not just your choice
I am not just a woman
I am also a human
(Soosan Firooz- Naqisulaql [52](#))*

⁵⁰https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrLhtFh3a1Y&ab_channel=ZaaraafatKhan (accessed 27.12.2020).

⁵¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJQXCcdz1kA&ab_channel=TippyRammaDamma (accessed 27.12.2020).

⁵²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrLhtFh3a1Y&ab_channel=ZaaraafatKhan (accessed 27.12.2020).

The director of ‘My Afghan Diary⁵³’ documentary, Afghan-German Filmmaker Arzu Qaderi, underlines the fact that Afghan women pursue their dreams with equal passion as women do in the Western world, even though women in Afghanistan face far more obstacles (Campbell, 2019). Peace talks between the Taliban and the newly elected government, that started in 2020, unfortunately fail to include women and does not give much hope in terms of women rights. What the talks will bring is unknown, but it is clear that women like Soosan Firooz will continue their way with the same passion.

According to Williams, female Muslim rappers use rap to give voice to ‘the desire for women’s liberation from legal and social codes that control more than protect their lives’ (Williams 2017). Laws are inadequate to protect women, especially in the majority of countries governed by Muslim law. On the contrary, there are laws that control women more than protect them like the absence of any legal regulations that prohibit child marriage, but the existence of laws enforcing the turban imperative. Muslim female rappers often express this issue in their songs and sometimes they even call it out directly like Sonita.

Afghan Rapper Sonita Alizadeh’s family tried to force her to marry in exchange for money when she was 10 years old, but the deal was broken. She says that the money the family was going to get would have gone to her brother, so he could buy himself a bride. Sonita shared the same fate as Soosan and her family fled to Iran due to the civil war. When her family forced her to get married again at the age of 16, her path crossed the path of Iranian documentary filmmaker Rokhsareh Ghaemmaghami and Sonita recorded her first song and video with her:

⁵³ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10709644/> (accessed 02.01.2021).

*Let me whisper to you my words
So, no one hears that I speak of the selling of girls
My voice should not be heard as it is against Sharia
Women must remain silent, this is this city's tradition*

...

*I scream to make up for a lifetime of one women's silence
I scream on behalf of the deep wounds on my body
I scream for a body exhausted in its cage
A body that shattered as a result of the price tags placed on it
(Sonita- Brides for Sale ⁵⁴)*

Sonita, whose story is also included in the book of Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls (Favilli and Cavallo 2017) and in a documentary⁵⁵, prefers a passive image in the video clip of the song despite her rebel lyrics and attitude. Sonita, who has a barcode on her forehead and a bruise on her eye in the clip, raps in a wedding dress. Sonita says that the image she used in the video clip represents what she saw on the faces of her friends who were sold as child brides at a young age⁵⁶. The video, released in 2014, was viewed over 1.3 million times. Sonita uses her music as an activist tool, especially against child marriage (Thakkar 2019).

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n65w1DU8cGU> (accessed 23.12.2020).

⁵⁵ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9028862/?ref_=nm_flmg_slf_1 (accessed 23.12.2020).

⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USBLOFmwUJs> (accessed 23.12.2020).

According to statistics, between 30 and 40 percent of women are married before the age of 18 in Afghanistan (UNICEF 2018). Under Afghan law, the minimum age for marriage is 15, but girls under 15 can be married with the permission of the father or a judge (Civil Code of the Republic of Afghanistan 1977). In fact, although the law appears to provide some form of protection for girls, it gives up the fate of girls to the patriarchal social order.

Sonita, who is currently studying and living in the United States, appears in many events as an activist. One of them was Women in the World 2016⁵⁷, where Sonita answered the drama-pumped questions of BBC reporter Katty Kay⁵⁸. Sonita, whose mother was also a child bride, gives quite solid answers to Kay's questions about how she feels about the scenes of the documentary in which her mother bargains for her marriage and whether her mother is hoping to sell her:

'That does not mean she did not love, she loves me, she cares about me. She did not have another way. She was doing what she learned. What she saw her parents did to her.'

Obviously, Katty Kay was not able to get what she wants from this answer, and this time, she is asked whether girls are still sold for marriage in Afghanistan by emphasizing every word

⁵⁷ Sonita participated in this event also in 2015 and similar questions were asked. However, as the event was moderated by author-journalist Zarghuna Kargar, who was also a child bride, it is possible to watch a more empathetic conversation. It is possible to watch it on youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvEMtDbaBSc&ab_channel=WomenintheWorld (accessed 23.12.2020).

⁵⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USBLOFmwUJs> (accessed 23.12.2020).

one by one. However, Sonita once again reveals the known and undesirable truth:

'It is not just Afghanistan; it is happening all over the world. (...) For some countries it is tradition and also people, that are very poor, they have to do it to survive.'

At the end of the interview Sonita comes with clear answers to the question of what can be done to end child marriage: *'We need to begin with families (...) We need to support girls. (...) We need governments and organizations to support these kinds of projects and finally we need laws to make child marriage illegal all over the world.'*

Yemen is another country where children are not protected from child marriage by law. According to UNICEF's statistics 32% of the girls in Yemen are married before the age 18 (UNICEF 2017). Problems such as extreme poverty and war in the country are cited among the reasons why their families marry their daughters at an early age. In addition to all these social and economic problems, unfortunately, there is no law that protects girls from forced marriage or regulates a minimum age for marriage on the grounds that is against Sharia (Girls not Brides, 2018). In an interview with the BBC in 2015, Amani Yahya states that she wrote the song 'Beautiful Girl', inspired by the life of Mariam, who was forced to marry at the age of 11⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-31456049>
(accessed 03.01.2021).

*Books and toys and playground, that's all what she needs
now that you killed that dream, you left her in pain
(Amani Yahya- Beautiful Girl)⁶⁰*

Although there is no such law protecting girls in Yemen, there are of course laws that restrict women's freedom. For example, Article 40 of the Personal Status Law requires the woman to obey her husband and forbids the woman from going out without her husband's permission (Yemen - The Personal Status Act No 20 1992).

Another rapper who draws attention to the lack of laws protecting women is Yacko from Indonesia. Indonesia has been discussing the Sexual Violence bill for four years. Most recently, the draft law was once again postponed for 2021 discussions (Gerlach 2020).

*Watch where your hand go
I am kickin your ass and I say screw you
My body is not for you to touch
without my consent no you fool
My short skirt is not to attract you
Cuz what I wear is my rule
(Yacko-Hands off⁶¹)*

Unfortunately, there is an ingrained rape culture in Indonesia. The reasons behind this are of course the absence of laws

⁶⁰ The song is not available on youtube but the performance can be seen on Refinery29's video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXVavvDVI84>

⁶¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5aoFTzfMul&ab_channel=YackoOktaviana (accessed 13.01.2020).

protecting women and the fact that sexual harassment and sexual violence cases are very rarely reported (Saraswati 2016). Unfortunately, the fear that the victim will be blamed prevents many women from reporting the harassment (Lih Yi 2016). Baiq Nuril, who was sentenced by the court to a 6-month prison term and a fine of approximately \$ 35,000 for recording harassment calls of her boss, is one of the best-known examples of the victim blaming. Although she was pardoned by the President Joko Widodo in 2019⁶², Baiq Nuril's experience speaks volumes about the situation in Indonesia. In 2017, Yacko initiates a campaign against sexual harassment and releases a song called Hands Off.

*Hands off
Keep your hands off me
I said hands off
Keep your hands off me
(Yacko-Hands off ⁶³)*

While raising their voices to oppose topics such as the codes about women's dress and appearance, partnering with a man, mothering within a socially sanctioned relationship with a man, and choosing a proper job, or proper music genre, women use rap music as a language to demand their rights. Justina says

⁶² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49110578> (accessed 03.02.2021).

⁶³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5aoFTzfMul&ab_channel=YackoOktaviana (accessed 13.01.2020).

she just shouts out her rights, her human rights, the rights that men have but she does not⁶⁴.

*How many times should I die for my right?
To not see me as a material
And how many times should I hear:
How much for a night, ha?
How many lives should I lose?
How many times should I feed the flames
How long should I wait for the equal share?
I won't be silenced
I won't be your property
(Faravaz Ft Justina-Fatva⁶⁵)*

⁶⁴ <http://madamerap.com/en/2019/02/21/justina-in-iran-people-think-girls-shouldnt-sing/> (accessed 27.12.2020).

⁶⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhpDkYqNIK0&ab_channel=justinaofficial (accessed 27.12.2020).

'Woman's voice that I'm calling'
Soultana-Sawt Nsaa



Starting this book will have prompted my sensations, Burka Band, whose video was shared by WLUML from her social media account⁶⁶, immediately caught my attention. Burka Band, an indie rock band founded by women living in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2002, is rebelling against Islamic dress codes. The group, which adds a kind of irony to the situation by exhibiting their performances by wearing a burka, has to take this measure for their own safety. While watching the clip of the band's song 'No Burka', I was fascinated by the satiric understanding of the group, inspired by these powerful women and was very excited to see that the comments under the video were in line with my thoughts. However, I caught another comment: *'omg it is unfair... poor women...'*⁶⁷

While doing my research, I learned about many female musician, some of which I have featured here, I listened to their songs, watched their clips, read their interviews, and acquired their books. Their stories and the topics they talk about at times raised my anger, hurt me, and maybe sometimes broke my heart. Regardless of the circumstances, women are moving on with the same passion, and the last adjective I could think of about them is 'poor'. However, what women share, the things they are subjected to, their fears, resentment and most importantly, their pain are used by the hegemon to turn it into empathy (Ahmed 2004). So, do the women we are talking about in this book want to gain empathy? Why do they share their pain with us? Why do they rap?

⁶⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/WLUML> (accessed 05.01.2021).

⁶⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK7CVNyBALo&ab_channel=li_sseman (accessed 05.01.2021).

*'The world has been ruled by men for far too long, and maybe
if we [women] had more say, the world would be a better
place'
(Malikah)
(Ghanem 2016)*

The answer to the journalist who asked why Soosan Firooz, who received death threats, continued to rap is clear: *'How long should we keep the silence? There is a need for people to rise up'*⁶⁸ Safa Hathoot and Nahwa Abed Alal started to rap as Arapeyat duo in 2001⁶⁹. *'I want to see the outside and show people that there are Arab girls doing rap'*⁷⁰. These Palestinian rappers' paths crossed with filmmaker Jackie Salloum. They make it clear, that they will never stop showing people that they rap as Muslim Arab women, in the documentary Slingshot Hip-Hop, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival⁷¹: *'...We won't let anyone stand in our way and even if something stands in our way we will continue, we won't stop for anyone. I would like to say I want my message to reach all people, this is the most important thing to me. That all this is not for nothing.'*⁷²

⁶⁸https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJQXCcdz1kA&ab_channel=ZaraafatKhan (accessed 27.12.2020).

⁶⁹ <https://hiphopdiplomacy.wordpress.com/hip-hop-geography/arabia/palestine/arapeyat-akka/> (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁷⁰https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BSAnoYCbEs&ab_channel=CharlieShaabi (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁷¹ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1157718/?ref=fn_al_tt_1 (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁷² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rdS8zNp3ow> (accessed 03.01.2021).

Soultana also raps empowering lyrics and speaks directly to Moroccan women on the stage. She states that she is telling them they are free and can do whatever they want, they are not subordinate to anyone (Natour 2019).

*Woman's voice that I'm calling
Girl's voice that is lost in my country
The voice of those who wanna talk who wanna say
A voice for all the women who want a sign
(Soultana- Sawt Nsaa⁷³)*

Confirming Rose's saying, 'rap music gives voice to those whose voices are not heard by society' (Rose 1994), Paradise Sorouri, whose voice had tried to be cut off, by being beaten to death, for 'affecting women badly(!) with her music', also wants to be a voice to women.

*I want to be the voice of a woman
No less, no more
I demand my right
How long should I be slave to tranny
(Paradise Sorouri-Nalestan ⁷⁴)*

'I am a storyteller' says Sonita. '... for who do not have voice, who cannot share their stories.'

We have the strength, now let's go shake the earth

⁷³ The English translation of the lyrics of the song is taken from genius.com. <https://genius.com/Soultana-sawt-nsaa-lyrics> (10.12.2020).

⁷⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O4rdhWkuRY&ab_channel=MWallonie-Bruxelles (accessed 11.01.2021).

*We'll keep on moving on the road, even though it is long
We'll break all the bad rules that we knew
It is our responsibility, if not us then... Who?
The change maker women
The strong and beautiful women
We!
(Sonita- Brave and Bold ⁷⁵)*

Many of these women from different geographies and backgrounds, who choose different topics, different words, different styles and different tones, talk about 'giving a voice to women' as if they are in cahoots: *They want to be a voice to women*. What exactly did it mean to be a voice to women or to voice women, and why was it so important? As far as we have seen in the Hip-Hop industry, male rappers are making songs about women, they almost always make women play in their clips, and even provide visibility to women with their album trailers! At this point, the factor of 'who' tells the story comes into play.

'A man can't really speak for a woman about how she suffers, how she feels like a hostage, how men dominate her, how she would like to work but can't. A man can never understand this like I can.' ⁷⁶ (Malikah).

Having worked as a producer and writer on television for many years Dr. Rosanne Welch, in her presentation *Giving Voice to Silent Films and the Far from Silent Women Who Wrote Them*, talks about the importance of being the person who wrote the

⁷⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6il_l6ZeFbw (accessed 26.12.2020).

⁷⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9XDf68xCjU> (accessed 28.12.2020).

story as a woman: *'All the books about screenwriters have been written by men. They write about all the important men, they read each other's books, they repeat what they learned in the last book.'*⁷⁷ Nowhere in the world have we been able to overcome the patriarchy and the situation that the women are not voiced, or their voice is ignored. Jill Soloway says that the thing that will revolutionize the world is women talking about 'how it feels to be alive and to tell their own stories' (Rizzo 2016). The women mentioned in this work take power by being the story tellers of their own stories and also demolish the passive and needy image of Muslim women.

With her activist works Sonita tells her own story and the stories of other child brides. In doing so, she never loses her guard against those who turn her pain into fetishism and try to create a dramatic story of poor Muslim women.⁷⁸ Khtek thinks similarly to Sonita about her own music. *'My rap is a voice for those who don't have one'*⁷⁹ Khtek also seems to be good at being a voice for those who do not have a voice. By releasing her first song at the beginning of 2020, Khtek made her name on the list of the 100 world's inspiring women prepared by the BBC⁸⁰. The queen of rap, Malikah who also states that she sings about Arab women because she is a woman and wants to

⁷⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA0eZK7VO8A&feature=emb_logo (accessed 11.01.2021).

⁷⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USBLOFmwUJs> (accessed 23.12.2020).

⁷⁹ <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/07/02/as-arab-rappers-challenge-the-old-ways-despots-hit-back> (accessed 11.01.2021).

⁸⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-55042935> (accessed 11.01.2021).

empower Arab women (Al-Kuttab 2013). And in her lyrics, she invites her sisters to walk this road together:

Man has decided that your life is destined for him to rule

Don't live in dismay, go work and earn money.

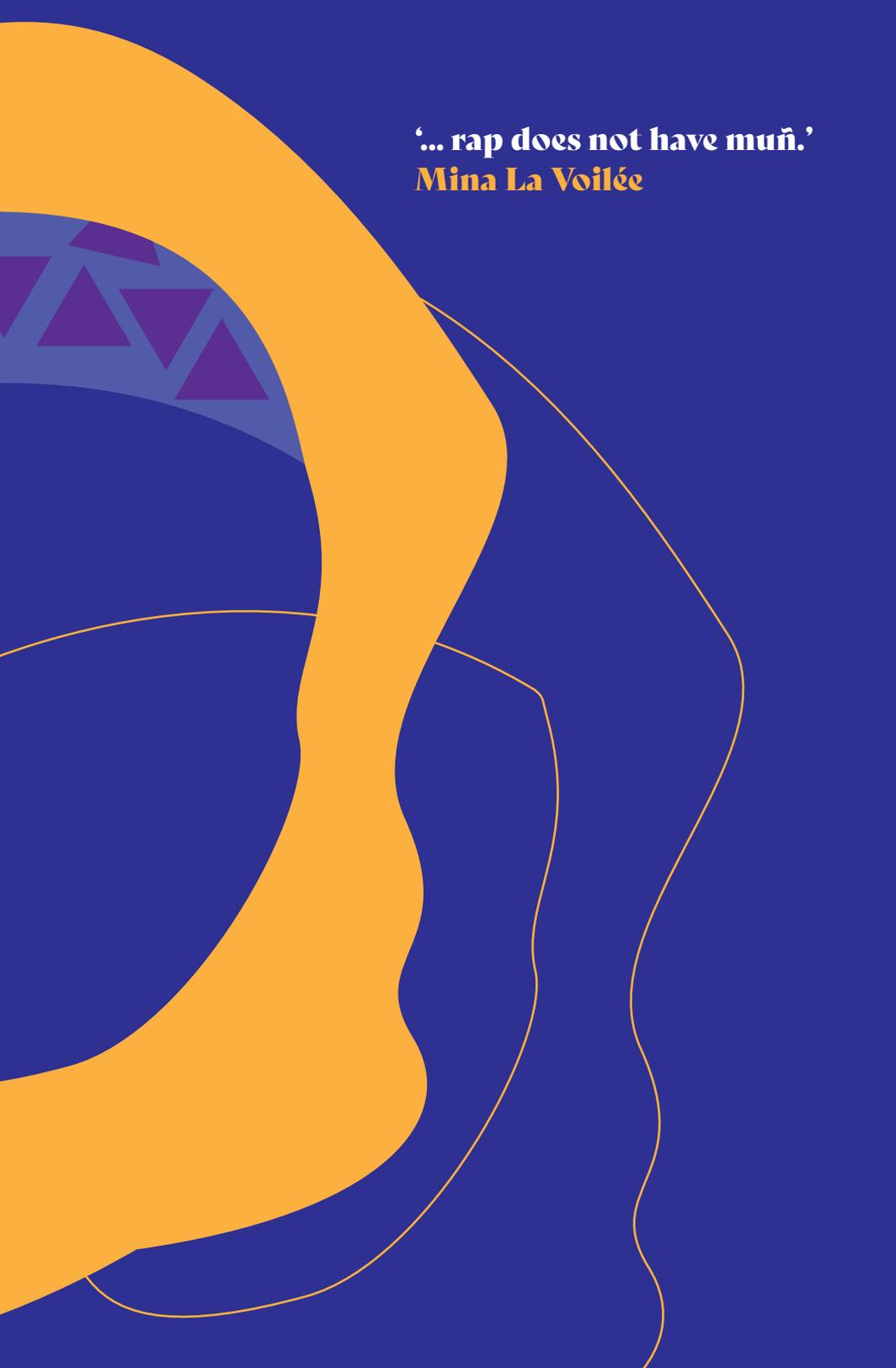
Come with me in this march.

Love your sister and forget jealousy

(Malikah- ya Imra/Oh Woman⁸¹)

⁸¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcQrdSxchuk> (accessed 11.01.2021).

'... rap does not have muñ.'
Mina La Voilée



When it appeared in the 1970s, the Hip-Hop culture also contributed greatly to community building processes (Hayduk 2010). Some examples show us that Muslim female rappers also discovered this power of Hip-Hop culture. Women make musical collaborations together, create platforms where they can support each other, with the initiatives they establish, and become stronger, liberate together, and walk this road together. Tricia Rose defines these established communities as new families and says they may even lead to new social movements (Rose 1994). One of the best examples of this is the women's group Gënji in Senegal. Gënji means 'woman', in Wolof. The group which started as a WhatsApp group in 2017 consists of 70 women rappers, DJs, directors, and graffiti artists. In addition to making music the members of the Gënji Hip-Hop collective organize workshops for women and speaks up about women's issues in this West African country (Shryock 2019).

Gënji members speak out against muñ, a cultural concept in Senegal. A word in Wolof language, muñ means 'patience/silently endure'. In Senegal, women are expected to be impervious to the violations of their rights, even rape. Gënji's secretary general, Wasso Tankoura says that there is not a single family in Senegal who has not experienced rape, 'but no one discusses it because often the perpetrator is a family member.

'Hip-Hop has proven it can change things in Senegal, whether its social or political' says Wasso Tankoura. One of the particular issues that Gënji raised her voice for was rape law, by using the power of Hip-Hop. Women who have been speaking up in Senegal for years have witnessed some improvements in 2020, albeit too late. The law, which sentenced rapists to a maximum

of 10 years in prison, was formally changed in January 2020 and a sentence of 10 years to life imprisonment was approved.⁸²

These artists have united around Hip-Hop to raise a voice together, to stop *muñ*. Their lyrics are about incest, family pressure and rape. Gaye, aka Mina La Voilée, is also one of the members of Gënji: *'Rap informs, rap educates. It truly engages people and can be serious catalyst for change. It can change everything.'*⁸³

As a part of Hip-Hop culture rap music emerged as a rebellion in New York, even though it has become a giant industry today with its well-known misogynist image. Today, rap music turns into power, revolution, and liberalization in the hands of the women, some of which we have named in this work. Rap music educates, unites, and disrupts the role prescribed to Muslim women by society. With this specific kind of communication, they speak about the topics that society keeps silent. *'Rap does not shut up; rap does not have muñ.'* (Gustafson, 2020).

⁸² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-rape-idUSKBN1ZF1NY> (accessed 11.12.2020).

⁸³ <https://www.news24.com/w24/SelfCare/Wellness/Mind/veiled-performer-breaks-taboos-in-senegal-she-raps-about-controversial-societal-issues-that-affect-women-20200130> (accessed 16.01.2021).



MUSLIM MINORITY COUNTRIES

Dr. Bitch Ray,
Mona Haydar,
Poetic Pilgrimage,
EBOW,
Meryem Saci

Here, we travel to the geographies where Muslims live as minority. Therefore, we will talk about the topics that are touched by the Muslim female rappers whose paths cross with racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, besides the misogynistic, patriarchal, and sexist attitude of the Hip-Hop industry (and of course society).

As we mentioned before, personal experiences and the geography lived in channel the rap produced by Muslim female rappers, who use rap music as an activist tool. In this section, although we will touch on the similar issues in the previous section, like male domination in society and in parallel with Hip-Hop industry, Islam-haram and music discussions, different issues will also come up that are experienced by rappers living in geographies where Muslims live as a minority. Also, the issue of 'being in need to be liberated' will make itself felt more here and we will discuss how the women-liberators are trying to protect themselves with a conservative shield against the products of some rappers whose names will be mentioned in this section. Islamophobia is another topic we will talk about here, having increased significantly following September 11 and subsequent terrorist attacks of ISIS on the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris.

Rap, as a strategic communication method for the unspoken subjects, like female sexuality and LGBT issues, opens up a space for Muslim female rappers. Muslim female rappers and their activism create a great anomaly in the general understanding of women wearing headscarves or Muslim women as a monolithic group. They also attract a lot of media attention and therefore some names become icons and even articles and theses are written about them. Let's start with highly provocative and multi-layered discussions, in line with the spirit of Hip-Hop culture, with the help of these iconic rappers' products.

Hilal Işık

**'I cause a stir, guys just by how I look and
This is more than just a rap, this is enlightenment'
Dr. Bitch Ray-Die Aufklärung**



I thought it would be appropriate to start this section by speaking about what has been avoided. Here we find a Muslim woman speaking about both female sexuality and rap. Of course, we will not pass on to the male-dominated Hip-Hop industry, which is covered in the whole book and which we talked about for pages in the previous section, without mentioning here. However, in order to avoid repetition, we will do it by talking about Dr Reyhan Şahin, aka Lady Bitch Ray/Dr. Bitch Ray, who occupied her space in the German Hip-Hop scene with rapping about female sexuality and feminism themes.

'I felt like a circus horse that you looked at and laughed at and actually didn't understand at all what I wanted to move and moved with this music' ⁸⁴.

Dr Reyhan Şahin is a child of an Alevi-Turkish Family who emigrated from Turkey to Germany at the end of 70s as workers. Şahin lost her job at Radio Bremen because she refused to remove the sexually explicit songs she had posted on Myspace (Tuzcu 2017).

Everyone knows my name; I am a phenomenon.

I divide Germany, they say I'm too extreme.

She is too strong, she is too blatant, she is too provocative.

She is so sexy and also so eloquent.

(Lady Bitch Ray- Mein Weg- My Way⁸⁵)

⁸⁴ The interview is in German. The translation of Dr Şahin's words are made by me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHGMqURnF3s> (accessed 02.01.2021).

⁸⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpl4nw4Toy0&ab_channel=LadyBitchRay-Topic (accessed 02.01.2021).

Lady Bitch Ray attracted great media attention with her songs and style. With her lyrics on female sexuality and feminism she badly affected young generation in Germany, in a way that gangster rappers have not done in years despite rapping about guns, rape, violence, and drugs.⁸⁶ *The music producers are mostly men anyway, the bookers are men, the managers are men and the listeners? Well, most of them too. And they support the rappers as long as they bring sales* (Şahin, 2019). And with this awareness, Dr Reyhan Şahin never plays the game according to the rules. On the contrary, as she said about Lil Kim, whom she was a fan of when she was younger, she was not trying to 'become visible' but was taking her place in the Hip-Hop industry by transforming pornography into a feminist rebellion.⁸⁷

We know that in Muslim societies, sex and especially extramarital sex is a taboo. For this reason, there is a common belief that sexuality, especially female sexuality, is never talked about. I personally oppose this belief completely. The memories of encounters with women that I had / had to be in when I was young contain completely unfiltered and uncensored sentences and jokes about sexuality. I would like to state that the memories I have collected, since I opened up this subject to my female friends have a very rich content. Dr Şahin

The lyrics are available on genius.com. The translation of the lyrics are made by me <https://genius.com/Lady-bitch-ray-mein-weg-lyrics> (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁸⁶ Peer Schader accused Reyhan Şahin of affecting young people badly in his article in 2007. The article is available in German here: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/fernsehkritik-bitte-nicht-mehr-ueber-sex-reden-frau-maischberger-1492618.html>

⁸⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mpvc97oYiQs&ab_channel=popFestival%26Convention (accessed 02.01.2021).

also underlines this issue: *'When Turkish women talk to each other, you could easily turn it into an earlier Lady Bitch Ray's porn song.'*⁸⁸

According to Tricia Rose, the process of empowerment of women includes also enjoying their sexual expression. Rose explains the misogyny in the lyrics of male rappers 'focuses on men's fears and anxieties regarding women's ability to control heterosexual sex.' (Rose 1994). The idea that women and sexuality are unspeakable is one of the impositions of patriarchal society. This situation, combined with the 'poor' and 'voiceless' image of Muslim women, causes the society to hide tightly behind the shield of conservatism.

I'm a bitch!

You mean that you diss me, do you fucker call me bitch? Boy it is the truth

I'm a bitch!

Bitch is a trend for me, a compliment for me, boy you're uptight!

I'm a bitch!

(Lady Bitch Ray-Ich bin'ne Bitch⁸⁹/I am a Bitch ⁹⁰)

Dr Bitch Ray added the 'Doctor' title to the beginning of her stage name, 'Lady Bitch Ray', after completing her doctorate

⁸⁸https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoOLRWtno7I&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=GERMANIA (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁸⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oLlo8cP_w&ab_channel=LadyBitchRay-Topic (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁹⁰ The lyrics are available on genius.com. The lyrics are translated to English by me. <https://genius.com/Lady-bitch-ray-ich-bin-ne-bitch-lyrics> (accessed 03.01.2021).

but did not lose anything from the bitchness. She deconstructs this word with her choice of name like Khtek who we mentioned in the first part. Dr Bitch Ray does not leave room for hate language by taking all the power of the word into her hands not only with her choice of name but also with the song she wrote. In fact, with her song die Aufklärung⁹¹ (The enlightenment/ the education), in which she tells men how to have sex properly, she triggers anxiety about the possibility of women controlling heterosexual sex as Tricia Rose mentioned.

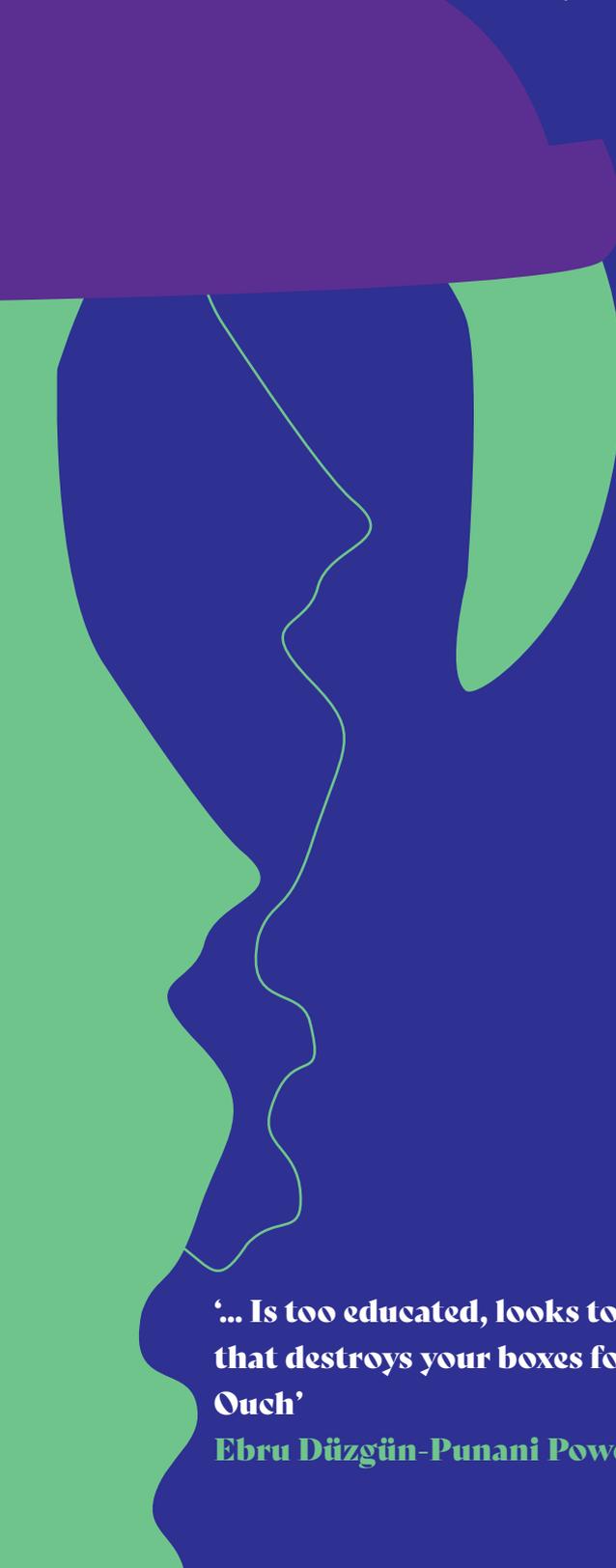
*Do you want to know how to fuck a bitch- haaahh?
How to fuck a really horny bitch- haah?
I cause a stir, guys just by how I look and
This is more than just a rap, this is enlightenment
(Lady Bitch Ray- Die Aufklärung- The enlightment/education⁹²)*

In 2006 I came to Germany for a two-week language course. Imagine the excitement of teenagers who are being abroad alone for the first time. While we were wandering the streets of Cologne with this excitement, our way was headed off by a young woman. Before we could understand what was happening, we became the audiences to her too long monologue. After giving us the information that we were obviously not European, and that young women like us (?) either dress like whores (she really did use this phrase) or wear a hijab, she also did not neglect to thank us for not being like the two groups and for looking modern. Because of our young age and the shock we experienced, we did not know what to say or what to think after that woman left. But there were a

⁹¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGe5iT3RYnM&ab_channel=GoliAti%2FOfficial (accessed 03.01.2021).

⁹²The lyrics are available in Dr Şahin's Book Yallah Feminismus (2019). The lyrics are translated to English by me.

number of facts we had to keep in mind. We belonged to a group in which that woman was not included but that she could judge, and the responsibility to represent this group was on our shoulders. Also, there were obviously two dangerous paths. One was dressing like a whore (I think the woman mentioned was talking about sexy clothes, but of course it is hard to guess where her limits are) and the other was wearing a headscarf. We did not go either way and chose to be modern and sympathetic part of this group to which she was giving her approval!



**'... Is too educated, looks too good
that destroys your boxes for Muslim women
Ouch'**

Ebru Düzgün-Punani Power

In 2017, activist rap singer Mona Haydar, the child of a family immigrated to America from Syria, made a big impact when she appeared in front of the camera in headscarf and stroking her pregnant belly for the music video of 'Hijabi, Wrap my Hijab'.⁹³ Mona Haydar, who is exposed to comments that rubbing her belly in her music video is too suggestive and too sexy, responds in a video she made for Elle: *Like dude! How do you think I got pregnant to begin with?* (Semaan 2018).

According to the woman who congratulated us for being the modern face of the group we represent, albeit unknowingly, Mona Haydar's dress style is not obviously known whether it is sexy, but with her rubbing her pregnant belly, it is certain that some people get dangerous thoughts in their minds. Perhaps wearing a headscarf and looking sexy at the same time was the worst! I do not want to comment further on the words of Dr Reyhan Şahin, who has written a dissertation titled 'The Significance of the Muslim Headscarf: A Fashion-Semiotic Analysis of Headscarf-Wearing Muslim Women in Germany (Die Bedeutung des muslimischen Kopftuchs. Eine kleidungssemiotische Untersuchung muslimischer Kopftuchträgerinnen in Deutschland)', who said that the combination of headscarves and sexy clothing is not a contradiction, the contradiction is only in people's reaction. However, the rappers and I have something to say about seeing head-scarved women, Muslim women, immigrant women and even women as one static and homogeneous group and making classifications and judgments accordingly.

'(...) I love representing almost 2 billion people as if [they] were a monolithic group. And they especially love being reduced to a pregnant rapper chaplain!' (Mona Haydar) (Semaan 2018).

⁹³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOX90_kVPeo&ab_channel=monahaydar (accessed 03.01.2021).

Dr Reyhan Şahin says that she did not fit the picture of a Turkish-Muslim woman, by choosing the name Lady Bitch Ray and who speaks positively and publicly about her sexuality in an oversexualized language (Şahin, 2019). The perspective that views Muslim women are as voiceless and passive, offers a limited framework in terms of what they can do, speak about and challenge. And as you can imagine making porn rap under the name Lady Bitch Ray is not included on this list. Also, this point of view does not give you the right to criticize certain things in a general perspective. As a Muslim woman, your troubles have also been determined; and if you are going to raise your voice, you are expected to deal with these issues first. Mona Haydar says she is expected to do it in an authentic, Muslim manner, no matter what subject she speaks: *'But I'm not just talking about Sheikhs or religious institutions, I'm talking about violence against women globally. Unfortunately, a lot of people missed that.'* (Chowdhury 2017).

As we mentioned before rap is a mixed medium which combines poetry, prose, song, music, and theater (Perry, 2004). Dr Reyhan Şahin is one of the rappers who perform this combination as a whole. With a performance full of humor and provocation, she shatters the role that was prescribed to her not only with her lyrics, but also with her style, outfits, and video clips. Lady Bitch Ray uses details associated with eastern culture in her music video for 'Bitchanel'⁹⁴, such as camels, handmade rugs, and belly dance. She combines these images with porno rap lyrics, sexy dancing, and expensive cars, creating a mixture as fun as it is destructive⁹⁵. Having such a high dose

⁹⁴ The lyrics are available in Dr Şahin's Book Yallah Feminismus (2019). The lyrics are translated to English by me.

⁹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6Bcb3LHm5k&ab_channel=Votzenekretariat (accessed 27.12.2020).

of shocking power must be too much for many people as people are beginning to question how she is so free as a Muslim woman: *'My very favorite question is "What do your parents say about that?" Always hoping that I would answer something like: Oh, they rejected me because of my music. Dude, that annoying Orient-sexpress people movie never stops, wallah.'* (Şahin 2019)⁹⁶.

Muneera Rashida and Sukina Abdul Noor - together known as Poetic Pilgrimage are London rappers. The duo, who converted to Islam in 2005, says from that moment on, people who saw them wearing headscarf began to stamp them as immigrants. Sukina states that, also making it clear that she is not one of them, the British people even try to talk to her, assuming she does not speak English: (...) *the receptionist was like 'can your wife even speak English?' and I'd just done a degree in English. So, I was like 'Yes I can!' in my best Queen's English.*⁹⁷

Obviously in Poetic Pilgrimage's case, the multi-layered structure formed by being Muslim women with a headscarf in addition to being black women turns into a bigger confusion and becomes difficult to perceive in the eyes of the audience if it gets combined with performing rap music on the stage. They find the reactions at their concert confusing: *'Sometimes I do question, do people like me? Or do I just shock them? It's good, sometimes, when you're so much the "other" you can just be who you are. Like a unicorn, no-one has any expectations of us'*⁹⁸.

⁹⁶ This part is taken from Dr Şahin's Book Yallah Feminismus (2019). Originally it is in German language and translated to English by me.

⁹⁷ <https://gal-dem.com/17781-2/> (accessed 25.12.2020).

⁹⁸ <https://gal-dem.com/17781-2/> (accessed 25.12.2020).

They put the shocked and unexpected looks of the audiences into their lyrics as in "Unlikely Emcees".

*They call us Unlikely Emcees, yeah, uhum Listen
This is something you were not expecting
Muslim chicks with the microphone rapping
Unconventional Interventional
I see the tension in your jaw
(Poetic Pilgrimage- Unlikely Emcees⁹⁹)*

Sukina takes the discussion of the viewpoint, that sees Muslim women as voiceless and poor, one step further: '*Muslim women are in a very unique position because we are often pitied, but also loathed.*' According to her, there is a group of people who feel sorry for Muslim women and want to liberate them, as well as another group who hate Muslim women for not contributing to the feminist movement and for being regressive.¹⁰⁰

Turkish-Kurdish-German rapper Ebru Düzgün, aka EBOW, on the other hand, states that she arouses hatred in people as an immigrant and a Muslim woman.

⁹⁹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUI3p9CaNLc&ab_channel=MKenzieAngelo (accessed 02.01.2021).

¹⁰⁰ <https://gal-dem.com/17781-2/> (accessed 25.12.2020).

*You hate me, you really hate me
Because this Kanakin¹⁰¹ here makes herself too important
Is too educated, looks too good
that destroys your boxes for Muslim women
Ouch¹⁰²
(Ebru Düzgün-Punani Power)¹⁰³*

The child of a family emigrated from Turkey to Munich in the 1970s Ebru Düzgün¹⁰⁴ says that in this part of her song she targets the passive Turkish-Kurdish woman which was created by the media: *'Your imagination of a suppressed Muslim woman, I destroy it here and now just with the way I am.'* (Stefflitsch 2020).

*You all live in clichés
Want to tell us something
I wear a headscarf, if I want, I wear 10 on top of each other
If I want, I run around in the mini, show everyone the tanga
(Ebru Düzgün-Punani Power)¹⁰⁵*

¹⁰¹ Kanake or Kanak, (discriminatory swear word) is a colloquial word to describe people of foreign descent, mostly from the Arab, Persian, Turkey or Southeastern Europe

¹⁰² The lyrics are translated from German to English by me. You can find the lyrics in German here: <https://genius.com/Ebow-punani-power-lyrics> (accessed 03.01.2021).

¹⁰³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mQsnBMFGo8&ab_channel=SeayouRecords (accessed 03.01.2021).

¹⁰⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un9royJMrzE&ab_channel=DWDeutsch (accessed 04.01.2021).

¹⁰⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mQsnBMFGo8&ab_channel=SeayouRecords (accessed 03.01.2021).

These Islamophobic perspectives and discourses embellished with xenophobia are not always so polite (!) In 2018, I was interviewing members of a small initiative, that teaches German language to the newcomers in initial reception centers, for my master thesis. This initiative, which was mostly made up of students, included a few non-student local people from this small city, Frankfurt Oder in Germany, and one of them agreed to meet with me for an interview. The narrative of this very talkative person was almost hopeful about the future. As a family they host foreign students in their homes and travel frequently. Personally, they know it is difficult to be in countries where you do not speak the language, and they want to be as helpful as they could to the people who are in a similar position. It was time to end the tiring but enjoyable meeting, which lasted about three hours. I was excited when my interviewee, who constantly said, *'this is not very important what I am telling you, it's just general stories'* throughout the interview, said that what they are going to say at that moment was very important and that I should definitely take notes. But then what came afterwards shocked me to my bones: *'People come here with very radical thoughts, I go there (initial reception center) and give German lectures as well as teach them the values of Germany. I tell them the rules of this place (Germany). And they learn that they should not do these radical things in Germany.'*

My aim here is not to discuss orientalism or Islamophobia in depth. I am only interested in discussing how Muslim female rappers share their stories about this topic, reflecting on their style and music and how they deal with it. This is a story that I encountered, which I found shocking and felt stuck between my researcher, female, feminist, migrant, and Muslim identities. And in the context of the subject, I reflect this experience in my writing, which is just one of the examples proving that there are many deep problems under all those positive image and that we have a long way to go.

'I love being a woman on the internet, because like when people will post a video, and everybody gets excited how deep and dope the lyrics are but that's never happen to me. Because in my comments all I ever see is: Go back to Trashganistan you goat fucker!' (Mona Haydar) (Semaan 2018).

When the activist rapper Mona Haydar released her song 'Hijabi, Wrap my Hijab'¹⁰⁶ in 2017 she made a big impact. Mona Haydar swam in very dangerous waters and produced a rap song and a clip that would provoke all the people from Islamophobics to liberators, Second Wave feminists, Islamists, and even people who do not belong to any of these groups but of course had something to say on the subject.

*Yo what yo hair look like
Bet yo hair look nice
How long your hair is
You need to get yo life
You only see Oriental*

(Mona Haydar- Hijabi, Wrap my Hijab)

For some people she was 'bringing Islam and the Shariah law to America.' She says she even received a comment like 'being a mouthpiece for ISIS'. There are those who accuse Mona Haydar of making Islam and Shariah propaganda in the USA. However, according to her statements in the interviews, she does not make turban propaganda and underlines that women should make their own decisions. At the same time, she does not hesitate to criticize Islamism. She mentions the countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia and says that a state cannot tell women what to wear and adds, *'It was one of the strangest times of my*

¹⁰⁶https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOX90_kVPeo&ab_channel=monahaydar (accessed 03.01.2021).

life. In a place like Saudi Arabia, I felt like my hijab was not mine.' (Hosseinzadeh 2020).

*I been stackin my karma
Nefertiti, no drama
Make a feminist planet
Women haters get banished
Covered up or not don't ever take us for granted
(Mona Haydar, Hijabi-Wrap my Hijab ¹⁰⁷)*

Mona Haydar is not the only Muslim female rapper who has to indicate that she does not propagate Islam and Sharia with her music. Although they do not directly cover such a loveable topic like Mona Haydar in their songs, Poetic Pilgrimage, who rap about social and political rights, will have been accused of bringing 'radical ideas' to the west and their headscarves are the greatest proof of this. They feel the need to defend themselves on this topic: *'We're not trying to Islamize Hip-Hop; we're not necessarily trying to make a Muslim point of view in the music'*¹⁰⁸

While Muslim female rappers are the target of orientalist or Islamophobic criticism for being Muslim, they are also criticized for not being Muslim enough.

¹⁰⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOX90_kVPeo&ab_channel=monahaydar (accessed 03.01.2021).

¹⁰⁸ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2016/05/27/-We-re-not-trying-to-Islamicize-hip-hop-say-UK-Muslim-rap-duo-> (accessed 04.01.2021).

*Say my voice is haram, cuz you getting turned on
boy you might need Qur'an,
(Mona Haydar, Dog ¹⁰⁹)*

The comments, criticism or attacks that Mona Haydar, Poetic Pilgrimage and Dr Bitch Ray mentioned in their interviews are quite similar to those we discussed extensively in the previous section. When women, Islam and music topics come together, a very complex structure emerges. And the comments often vary from the question of whether they are Muslim enough, to the fact that they cannot perform music as Muslim women, and if they can perform music, they cannot perform in front of men¹¹⁰, or they are a source of embarrassment for Muslims (Şahin, 2019).

If we are talking about Muslim female rappers and their work, of course, it requires addressing the issue of Islam, Hip-Hop and feminism. The focus of this book is not an academic analysis of these issues. However, following Mona Haydar's advice to those to read Qur'an and say, 'that her voice is haram', I thought it was necessary to say a few sentences about the use of Islam, Muslim, and feminism in the same sentence. This use has been a big problem especially in the west. It is seen as a turning point for the Hip-Hop and feminism debates when the NYC journalist Joan Morgan published her book 'When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost' in 1999. She defined Hip-Hop feminism as 'a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays' (Morgan 1999). Pough defines Hip-Hop feminists as women or men who are working as community activists (Pough

¹⁰⁹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idMJIEFH_ns&ab_channel=monahaydar (accessed 04.01.2021)

¹¹⁰https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1kV1aVaOH4&ab_channel=AlJazeeraEnglish (accessed 08.01.2021).

2007). Hip-Hop feminism started as a Black-American project. However today this style of feminism is infused with broader transnational feminist possibilities (Eltantawy and Isaksen, 2019). Margot Badran (2004) defined Islamic feminism as an 'idea speaking for justice to women, as Islam stands for': *'It is a tool to remind people what Islam is for women. It's not more Islam or more feminism.'* A central component of Islamic feminism is the idea of *ijtihad*—the rereading and reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Basarudin 2005). There are many different interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunnah (Prophet's way of life) and Hadiths (Prophet's sayings). Islamic feminism argues that classical and post-classical interpretations of Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadiths are the reflection of patriarchal societies and they are based on men's experiences and questions (Ahmed and Jahan 2014). While Islamic feminism offers a parallel perspective to the lyrics of Mona Haydar's song, of course there are feminists who view Islam and feminism differently. In addition to those who argue that the Qur'an is currently protecting women's rights and that inequality is created by capitalism and western ideology, there are also perspectives that treat the issue in a more secular and rights-based manner (Şahin 2019). Apart from all these, there are also researchers/women's rights defenders, who refuse to use the adjective 'feminist' by stating that feminism is a westernization and it is not inclusive¹¹¹. Just as the Islamic world is diverse and ever-changing, it should not be forgotten that there are quite a variety of different perspectives on this issue, and that these are reflected in the products of the rappers, who are different and unique individuals.

¹¹¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecntwV7Fo5A&ab_channel=Di%C3%A0legGlobal-Di%C3%A1logoGlobal-GlobalDialogue (accessed 03.02.2021).

Of course, the Islamist comments, criticism or attacks become even more layered by merging with ethnicity issues for the rappers we have discussed in this section. Sukina from Poetic Pilgrimage says that there are some acceptable traditions for Muslim society. However, she mentions that, because they choose this music, they were suddenly questioned whether they were Muslim or not, because they preferred this music genre invented by the African diaspora¹¹².

Dr Reyhan Şahin states that she had to justify herself in each layer within this multilayered nature: *First as a rap listener and a rapping woman, second as this woman with a migration biography - especially a Turkish with a Muslim background - and third as an academic with a doctorate.* (Şahin, 2019). The story of Ebru Gündüz, who describes herself as queer, is also very similar: *'If I'm in a group with Germans, I'm the Turkish woman. When I'm with Turks, I'm the Kurd. When I'm in a group with Kurds, I'm the Alevite. With Alevis, I'm the queer.'* (Lu 2019).

¹¹²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1kV1aVaOH4&ab_channel=AlJazeeraEnglish (accessed 08.01.2021).

'I don't want to be a banner of Islam.'

Sukina-Poetic Pilgrimage



While I was doing my research for the book, I saw the use of headlines such as ‘Hip-Hop Hijabis¹¹³’, ‘the Muslim rappers’, ‘Pregnant hijabi rapper (Estatie 2017)’, ‘Hijabi Artist’ (Lohale 2019). I have always wondered why we should name a person by their religious affiliation. Considering the subject, the book focuses on and my description of these musicians as ‘Muslim female rappers’ since the beginning of the book, you may think that this is a contradiction. As I mentioned in the introduction of the study, my focus is not on classifying these women, whether they live depending on Muslim practices or their level of religiosity. None of the rappers whose name were mentioned in the study does Islamic rap or directly use the adjective ‘Muslim’ or ‘Hijabi’ as part of their identity as musicians. And I think no one should individually name them that way unless the rappers describe themselves that way. The reason why I use the definition ‘Muslim female rappers’ here is that I want to distinguish these them when addressing how rap music was turned into an activist tool in the hands of these rappers who are Muslim or were born into a Muslim family. I want to point out their feminist fight in one of the most sexist and misogynist music genres, in a sexist and misogynist society, as women, while trying to deal with both Islamism and Islamophobia. For this reason, I tried to be very careful about the rappers I named in this work. Since I do not want to classify anyone with something that they do not associate themselves with as a person or as a musician, I made a selection of female rappers, who reflect the Muslim identity and their struggle on this issue in their style, as well as those who do not express this in their style or lyrics, but touch on this in their statements.

But of course, there are female rappers who are automatically labeled as Muslim against their will and have this subject brought to them, all the time. Although Algerian-based Quebec

¹¹³<https://gal-dem.com/17781-2/> (accessed 25.12.2020).

rapper Meryem Saci does not directly reflect her Muslim identity in her style, music, and narratives, she is frequently exposed to questions about her Muslim identity in interviews. Again, in an interview, she gives a very sincere answer to the question she was asked 'How do you locate your religious identity in what do you do?':

*'As a girl I am not allowed to sing let along rap. It is haram; that is the background that I came from. That made me question a lot of things about religion. (...) I can honestly say that I do not no longer feel like I should be in a religious box anymore. (...) Islam is a very strong piece of my identity but it is not my full identity and I am not an ambassador of Muslim women because I am not your average type of woman, period.'*¹¹⁴

Although Meryem Saci has put an end to this discussion, we do not know if these persistent questions have come to an end. If you come from a Muslim background, this label is constantly attached to your name and you are not allowed to perform your music independent of this identity. Even though you do not reflect your Muslim identity directly in your music, if you are a woman who wears a headscarf, you directly become the address of 'Islam' issues and you have to discuss this issue in your lyrics and interviews like Poetic Pilgrimage. Sukina underlines that, as Poetic Pilgrimage, they challenge stereotypes, but she also opposes what the media is trying to make from them: *'I don't want to be a banner of Islam'*¹¹⁵

As a rapper, even if you use words to reveal your Muslim identity in your lyrics, is it permissible for the media to question

¹¹⁴ <https://www.theislamicmonthly.com/muslim-woman-hip-hop-artist/> (accessed 08.01.2021).

¹¹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1kV1aVaOH4&ab_channel=AlJazeeraEnglish (accessed 08.01.2021).

the religion you belong to and your relationship with it, instead of focusing on the music you are trying to make, the message you want to give, and the issues that make you rebellious? Ebru Düzgün gave the best answer to this in an interview: *'In the media a Muslim woman is equated with a suppressed woman without any rights. It is important to me to address this in my texts. There are people who are quite astonished that I have this background yet was brought up liberally. Whether I pray five times per day or not, whether I live out my religion or not, for me that's an absolutely private matter. If I choose to share it, cool, but to be drilled in interviews about it doesn't feel good.* (Stefflitsch 2020).

CONCLUSION

In her TEDx talk Muneera from Poetic Pilgrimage says, '*Girls like us, girls like us have become accustomed to being asked where are you from, where do you belong, where is home?*'¹¹⁶ As long as I have lived in Turkey, I have had to answer this question hundreds of times due to the obsession with 'townswomen-ness'. In Germany, it stems from the curiosity that awakens due to the fact that obviously I am not 'from here'.

Someone I met on a trip in Hamburg in 2016, thinking that he was complimenting me, said '*oh super, the great mixture of Islam and modernity*' when I had simply answered his '*where are you from?*'. I was immediately associated with an identity that I did not belong to, apart from being born into a Muslim family, and on top of that, I was left under the responsibility of representing modernity. Islam could not be modern anyway, there was no doubt about it; and you had to put those two dissimilar things together to make a great mixture.

During my stay in Turkey the warnings that I get from society, like, 'I should take care of myself as a Muslim (in Germany) and live accordingly', turn into questions like, 'Well, what does your family think about your living your life this way?' in Germany. I too find myself fighting on two fronts with the help of different arguments. As a woman, I am probably too liberal for one part and probably not so liberal for the other, and I am most probably oppressed. And I see my two fights, on these two fronts, like it is discussed in the two main parts of this book. The common ground between my fights on both fronts is the war

¹¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpJiWGcCUqU> (accessed 10.01.2021).

against the patriarchy, which I deeply feel in every aspect of my life, just like the women's fight in both parts of the book.

We are familiar with the fact that anger brings about positive change¹¹⁷. My anger and a little bit of stubbornness made me write this book. Have I become a rap music fan? The answer to this question is unfortunately, no. However, what I watched, heard, and read in the process of creating this book have impressed me, surprised me, made me angry, made me happy, inspired me and mostly gave me hope. In a man's world, in an industry where male domination is so strong, it takes a lot of energy and courage, as a female rapper, to occupy a space where you are able to tell your own stories, and things get even more complicated when the Muslim context is involved. These women are also angry. They are angry about the prescribed image written for them. They speak up, occupy the place, demand change, create change. Just like Mona Haydar says in her song 'Dog', 'the woman's voice is revolution'¹¹⁸. Just like the t-shirt that Khtek wears in her video 'the future is woman'¹¹⁹.

Rap is edgy, as Poetic Pilgrimage says; it does not have muñ, as Mina la Voilée says, it is provocative and full of humor, as Lady Bitch Ray shows, and it provides a powerful space for telling personal stories. This attitude encouraged me to use a language embellished with my personal stories, experiences, and emotions. They oppose the 'poor' or 'voiceless' image attached to them, raise their voices, and become a voice for women. Their rap gave me voice in an indirect way and this production

¹¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc (accessed 10.01.2021).

¹¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idMJIEFH_ns&ab_channel=monahaydar (accessed 04.01.2021).

¹¹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgzR5KkbEF4&ab_channel=Khtek17 (accessed 10.01.2021).

process also became an important learning process for me. In this learning journey where the diversity and dynamism of the stories, struggles, chosen words, perspectives, methods, and styles fire me up, there were of course parts that I questioned. In such a male-dominated music genre, this power, which goes beyond the area assigned to women, occupies space and opposes the role of a Muslim woman prescribed to them, they can use female faces with purple eyes in their clips or advice men in their lyrics to treat other women the same way they treat their own mother or sister. Implying that men cannot even empathize with a woman unless they consider their own mothers or sisters as standard. The references given to the sanctification of the concept of motherhood, which also serves male domination, and videos showing women powerless may one day be replaced by other words and other representations, who knows... The obvious thing is that women will continue to occupy more and more space in the Hip-Hop industry every day, and they will have their existence recognized not only in the rap scene, but also in society.

Sonita says in an interview that society expects you, as a woman, to act like a doll so that everyone can play with you¹²⁰. Family, society, state, and the media are all looking for opportunities to play with you as they wish. In addition to the point of view that tries to suppress you by putting forward religious arguments and claims to have a say about your life, your future, your choices, your clothes, and your body, you have to fight with the other part who sees you as voiceless and poor and who is willing to liberate you but who will also play with you like a doll. As a strategic choice with its characteristic feature that provides a strong space for you to tell your story, and its rebellious background, rap music, has become one of

¹²⁰https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvEMtDbaBSc&ab_channel=WomenintheWorld (accessed 23.12.2020).

the most important tools of activism, empowerment, and fight against all these. And it is getting bigger day by day. It becomes a tool for Hiba and Rama who are 14 and 18 years old and living in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan planning to end child marriages,¹²¹ and it turns into an anthem for the International Day of the Girl Child with the verses of Schilleria girls in Berlin, Neukölln¹²².

The book begins with the fact that I am not a rap music fan and ends with the fact that I still have not become a rap music fan, but I am fascinated by the products these women create and the impression they have built. I hope this study contributes to the awareness of the existence of these inspiring women, the power and the change they create, and it works as a driving force for further research into Muslim contexts within this field.

I have so many dreams. Biggest one is to change the world. Of course, it makes people laugh but you will see me (Sonita)¹²³

¹²¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1t8UyO6Yul&ab_channel=BCMyWorld (accessed 10.01.2021).

¹²²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDIXWmbIVJQ&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=M%C3%A4dchentreffSchilleria (accessed 10.01.2021).

¹²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxjKdJ3JNSU> (accessed 11.01.2021).

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Index

A

Activism 8, 11, 24, 68, 95
Activist x, xi, 8, 9, 10, 20, 36, 48, 49,
59, 68, 77, 83, 85, 89
Adichie 27
Afghanistan 24, 37, 42, 46, 47, 49, 50,
55
Ahmed 1, 2, 45, 55,
Ahmed and Jahan 38, 86
Alal 56
Al-Ahmadi 8
Alizadeh 6, 47
Al-Kanadi 38
Al-Khamri 9
Al-Kuttab 31, 60
Allen 18
Al-Qadi 9
Arapeyat 6, 56
Armstrong 16
Armus 7, 8
Ayben 6, 28, 29

B

Badran 86
Baily 42
Berlin 1
Bunga 1, 27, 28, 36
Burka Band 55
Butler 32

C

Caner Ertuncay 5
Child Marriage 47, 48, 50, 95
Civil Rights 13
Cooke 19, 20
Chowdhury 78

Ç

Çalışkan 29

D

Djilali 36
Düzgün 80, 81, 91

E

Egypt 18, 24, 37
Eljehtimi 33
Eltantawy and Isaksen 86
Emerson 17, 18

Empowering 10, 14, 57
Empowerment viii, 73, 95
Estatie 10, 89
Eva B. 6, 45

F

Faravaz 41, 53
Favilli and Cavallo 48
Fernandes 14, 45
Female rappers xi, 4, 10, 11, 14, 17,
18, 19, 20, 24, 27, 31, 33, 36, 37, 45,
47, 63, 68, 82, 84, 85, 89
Female sexuality 20, 68, 71, 72
Feminism viii, x, 1, 10, 38, 71, 72, 85,
86
Feminist vii, viii, x, 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 27, 32,
45, 72, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 89,
Firooz 6, 37, 46, 47, 56

G

Ghaemmaghani 47
Ghanam 30
Gender vi, viii, 8, 11, 19
George 13, 14
Gënji 63, 64
Germany 4, 71, 72, 74, 77, 82, 92
Golpushnezhad 18, 19, 31
Gustafson 64

H

Hamburg 92
Hathoot 56
Haydar 6, 77, 78, 83, 84, 85, 86, 93
Hayduk 13, 63
Headscarf 4, 5, 27, 35, 36, 75, 77, 79,
81, 90
Heteronormativity 20
Hip-Hop v, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 16, 17,
18, 19, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 36, 41, 56,
58, 63, 64, 68, 71, 72, 84, 85, 86, 89,
90, 94
Hoodfar 4, 5
Hooks 16
Hosseinzadeh 84
Human Rights vi, vii, viii, 42, 53

I

Indonesia vi, 18, 24, 51, 52
Intersectionality 25
Iran vi, 24, 41, 42, 46, 47, 83

Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words

Islam vi, x, 4, 7, 12, 18, 19, 24, 36, 37,
42, 55, 68, 79, 83, 84, 85,
86, 90, 92

Islamic 18, 19, 37, 38, 42, 55, 86, 89

Islamism 83, 89

Islamist 83, 87

Islamophobia 20, 68, 82, 84, 89

J

Justina 6, 41, 52, 53

K

Kay 49

Khaleeli 38

Khtek 6, 30, 32, 33, 59, 74, 93

Kingsley 31, 36

L

Leduc 36

Leesa 6, 9

LeVine 36

LGBT 33, 68

Lih Yi 52

Lohale 89

Lopez 45

M

Majority 23, 24, 47

Mahmoud 6, 31, 35, 36, 37

Malikah 6, 30, 31, 56, 58, 59, 60

Malaysia 24, 27

Manal 6, 19

Matthews 37

Mecca 7, 8, 10, 24

Migrant vi, 77, 79, 80, 82

Migration 87

Minority v, vi, 12, 68

Misogyny 2, 8, 73,

Montana 2, 3, 4, 17

Morgan 85

Morocco vi, 18, 24, 29

Muslim vi, vii, viii, x, xi, 4, 5, 10, 11,
12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 28,
30, 31, 35, 36, 45, 47, 56, 59, 63, 64,
67, 68, 71, 72, 73, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81,
82, 84, 85, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94,
95

N

Nabbout 9

Najafizada 42

Natour 29, 57

Neumann 31

Nooshin 17

O

Oliver 31

P

Pakistan vi, ix, 24, 45

Palestine 24

Park 27, 36

Patriarchy 10, 16, 20, 59, 93

Perry 13, 14, 16, 78

Poetic Pilgrimage 6, 79, 80, 84, 85,
87, 90, 92, 93

Pornography 72

Pough 13, 16, 85

Q

Qur'an viii, 38, 85, 86

R

Racism 8, 11, 68

Rap Music xi, 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 14,
16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30,
31, 32, 36, 45, 52, 57, 64, 68, 79, 89,
93, 94, 95

Rape 18, 45, 51, 63, 64, 72

Ray 6, 71, 72, 73, 74, 78, 85, 93

Rizzo 59

Rose 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 57,
63, 73, 74

S

Salloum 56

Salt-N-Pepa 17

Sathiabalan 28

Saraswati 52

Saudi Arabia 7, 8, 9, 83, 84

Seeman 77, 83

Senegal vi, 36, 63

Shariah 42, 83

Shryock 63

Singh 27

Slay 6, 7, 8, 9, 24, 25, 41

Smitherman 13

Solomon 28

Sonita 6, 47, 48, 49, 50, 57, 58, 59, 94,
95

Sorouri 6, 37, 57

Soultana 6, 29, 57

Stefflitsch 81, 91

Stein 37

Sukina 79, 80, 87, 90

Ş

Şahin 71, 72, 74, 77, 78, 79, 85, 86,
87

Şaylı iv, 5

T

Thakkar 48

Tunisia 18, 19, 24, 31, 36

Turkey 24, 28, 29, 71, 81, 92

Tuzcu 71

U

UNICEF 49, 50

V

Varda 1

Voice v, x, 10, 14, 19, 24, 28, 46, 48,
52, 54, 57, 58, 59, 63, 64, 73, 78, 80,
85, 93, 94

Voilée 6, 36, 64, 93

W

Weitzer and Kubrin 16

Welch 58

Williams 14, 31, 47

WLUML vi, vii, x, xi, 5, 55

Wright 13

X

Xenophobia 68, 82

Y

Yacko 6, 51, 52,

Yahya 6, 35, 38, 50, 51



This book *Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words: Female Rappers smashing the prescribed image of the 'Muslim Women'* is the first publication under the programme and is about Muslim female musicians' use of rap music as a way to rebel against the role prescribed to them. We invite you to read it, enjoy it, and reflect on the many ingenious ways that women are rebelling against centuries of oppression.

Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes