Nafada: Industrial, Hip-Hop, and the Diasporic Condition

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In September 2019, industrial band Konqistador released *Nafada*, a nine-track album notable for its collaboration with female Arab and/or Muslim hip-hop artists. This collaboration revealed the powerful synergies between industrial and hip-hop aesthetics that are centered on critiques of control and oppositionality. We argue that this dynamic fusion in *Nafada* worked to amplify the voices of marginalised women speaking out against oppression. This may be against societal rules, cultural norms, or the way in which Arab and/or Muslim women are represented. Grounded in industrial and hip-hop, *Nafada* tells life-stories that both contradict and evade hegemonic narratives and, in doing so, reveals an oppositionality in women who are too often denied agency.

Konqistador was formed in 2005 by Reginald Tiessen and Elizabeth Graham, two Canadians who had relocated to Melbourne, Australia in 2001. Their debut album, *Courage Riot*, was released on Warthog Records that same year. Stylistically, *Courage Riot* was situated in the industrial-rock genre with noticeable elements of blues (unsurprising given Tiessen and Graham's former band 72Blues). Since *Courage Riot*, Konqistador have released two full length albums and numerous EPs that mark an evolution in the band's sound. In 2007, Tiessen and Graham began collaborating with Sydney-based producer INfest8 who remixed three Konqistador tracks.[1] This led to an ongoing collaborative relationship that brought INfest8 into the songwriting process and introduced a sound more oriented towards electronic-industrial.

Under the Konqistador handle, Tiessen and Graham have pitched themselves as 'crusaders for hybridity' (Konqistador 2013). This *raison d'être* emerged during the production of their sophomore album, *Suada* (2012), which was mostly written and recorded in Istanbul. *Suada*

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[1] Authors' note: One of the authors of this chapter is directly involved with Konqistador. Steve Collins (INfest8) is also a music producer and works with Konqistador as a remixer, producer, and songwriter.

saw Konqistador go further in their approach to collaboration, especially with musicians outside of the traditions of Western music: "This not only required us to take risks, but to surround ourselves with creators that could teach us something. We achieved this by opening ourselves up to musicians and artists from multiple disciplines spanning across many forms of artistic expression" (Konqistador 2013). Tiessen and Graham blended industrial-rock with recitals of Afghan poetry, the sounds of Lebanese women, and samples of Turkish street musicians. *Suada* foreshadowed the collaborations and blending of genres, cultures, and aesthetics that would eventuate in the production of *Nafada*.

Throughout Konqistador's work, there is a social justice dimension that grows from a central theme of *courage*. For example, the lyrical themes of *Courage Riot* were teeming with metaphors of war, battle, victory, and defeat (Collins 2020). The thematic centrepoint of courage extends into other motifs such as empowerment, indignation, doubt, resistance, prevailing against challenges, oppression, and obstacles. As artists, Tiessen and Graham have committed Konqistador to "go beyond entertainment and into the realm of purpose … to be a crusader for humanity, an archive for tradition, an educator and student in the global community, and a contributor to world music" (Konqistador 2013). Social justice would become a driving force in the conception of *Nafada*, as a relocation to Detroit placed Tiessen and Graham in the heart of the largest Arab Muslim population in the United States, and one of the largest outside the Middle East (Rasmussen 2016, p.110). Graham explains, "Nafada was really inspired by circumstance and our view of the indignation of women in crisis regions combined with current U.S. anti-Muslim rhetoric, the rise of a resistance movement and our duty to our local Arab community here in Detroit, Michigan" (Vile 2019). Enabled by their history of collaboration and hybridity, *Nafada* became a way for Konqistador to highlight the courage and resistance of Arab/Muslim women.

Nafada was conceived in late December 2017 as a return to the Eastern influences present in *Suada* and a "heavy, hard-hitting, celebration of Arab/Eastern/Muslim culture/themes and an all-around sonic assault" (Collins 2017). Production (unknowingly) began in early 2018 with the track 'Eden, Woman's War', which originally featured only Graham's vocals; a later version added rapping by Kid Vishis marking Konqistador's first involvement with the hip-hop genre. As Tiessen explained via email, "[this is the] first time we've EVER done anything like this" (Collins 2018); this chance collaboration, however, provided a catalyst for the *Nafada* album by opening the doors to hip-hop.

In April 2018, as Tiessen took on the role of Director of Intersections for the National Arab Orchestra, discussions began about potential collaborations with Middle East and North Africa (MENA) artists, and the shape of *Nafada* started to form. The word 'nafada' is Arabic, meaning to 'shake off' or 'to be rid of'. It is the root of 'intifada', a rebellion or uprising (Roberson 2013, p.42). Driven by wanting to highlight the experiences of Arab/Muslim women, Tiessen embarked on a recruitment drive to find female, Arab/Muslim hip-hop artists to collaborate with Konqistador on an album that would fuse industrial music, hip-hop, and the Arab world (in terms of sonic elements and lyrical content) to 'shake off' stereotypes and tell experiential life stories. These stories frequently involved subjects such as social oppression, censorship, sex-trafficking, and forced marriage, and were marked by expressions of outrage and resistance. As we will discuss later, the blend of industrial music and hip-hop aesthetics provided an ideal ideological vehicle for conveying such messages. *Nafada* featured seven female hip-hop artists who identify as Arab and/or Muslim: Medusa Tn (Tunisia), Meryem Saci (Algeria), Soultana (Morocco), Salome MC (Iran), Miss Undastood (USA), Sultana (Turkey) and Han Han (Philippines). A number of other artists such as Tendresse (Morocco), Sonita Alizadeh (Afghanistan), and Shadia Mansour (UK/Palestine) were initially involved in tracks for *Nafada* but were replaced for various reasons ranging from lack of commitment to breakdowns in negotiations with managers.

The release of *Nafada* was subject to much travail. Konqistador's work has mostly been self-released through aggregation services such as The Orchard, but *Nafada* attracted the attention of Sony Middle East. While very supportive during its recording and production, Sony Middle East withdrew its interest in licensing the album two weeks before *Nafada* was due to be submitted. The reasons behind this decision were complex and semi-opaque. Music streaming in MENA has been largely dominated by Deezer and Anghami. Spotify and Apple Music were latecomers to the region, only establishing a presence in late 2018, but both are key partners for Sony (Eriksson *et al* 2019, p.5). Tiessen recounts that Apple Music and Spotify introduced a region-specific code of ethics that specifically targets "provocative messaging pertaining to: government, authoritarianism, rulers, Sheikhs, kings, kingdoms and politics in general" (Collins 2019). Sony Middle East expressed concern that some lyrical content might be too abrasive for the censorship policies of some MENA regions. This was also recognised by some artists: after a period of reflection, one artist replaced a lyric directly addressing and criticising a royal family; a similar act later landed one Moroccan rapper in jail (Safi 2019). Although its

withdrawal from licensing *Nafada* was a disappointment, Sony agreed to supervise the album's release through The Orchard, a digital distributor it acquired in 2015. It also committed to assist with marketing the album by organising a 'homepage takeover' whereby a banner advert for the album was pushed to every Spotify user in MENA for the week beginning 9th September 2019, and ensuring tracks were included on prominent playlists such as 'Women Wa Bas' (the only Spotify playlist dedicated to female Arab artists) and 'New Music Friday Gulf' (the fifth most popular playlist in Saudi Arabia).

Ultimately, concern for any controversy caused by *Nafada* appeared exaggerated as the album easily nestled into MENA's digital music platforms. The tracks 'Nafada', 'Kahina' and 'Sahar' were included on editorial playlists, 'Eden, Woman's War' reached number 21 in Saudi Arabia's iTunes charts, and 'Karitha' received over 140,000 plays on Radio Faryad, an uncensored Iranian music platform. Outside of MENA, the video for 'Visaya' (along with mission statement videos with Elizabeth Graham and featured artist, Han Han) was featured as part of Urban Kingdom's Generation W festival. Konqistador was offered a headline slot for the 28th Concert of Colors, an annual diversity-themed music festival held in Detroit (unfortunately postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic). These are formidable feats for an album that was produced without budget, in a home studio, and around day jobs and family commitments.

Industrial Music and its Aesthetic

As can be seen throughout this book, industrial is a nebulous genre; its artists and fans constitute a broad church (Woods 2007, pp.45-56). While elements such as heavily distorted and abrasive sounds, synthesizers, samples from television and movies, and distorted/shouted/screamed vocals are markers of industrial music (Collins 2002, pp.78-88), there is little immediate similarity between the sounds of, say, Ministry's industrial metal and the electronic body music pioneered by Front 242, yet both would be at home on any industrial playlist. Industrial is more than just a genre of music, with some commentators arguing that 'industrial' is more accurately approached as a set of ideas or an aesthetic. Goddard (2008, p.164) argues that first-wave industrial artists such as Throbbing Gristle were not primarily motivated as music-makers, but instead focused on "experimentation with forms of communication". Jon Savage wrote of five ideas of industrial (Vale and Juno 1983, p.5): 1) organizational autonomy, 2) access to information (the notion of an information war), 3) use

of synthesizers and anti-music, 4) extra-musical elements, and 5) shock tactics. Some of these are more reflective of activities carried out by the first wave of industrial artists such as COUM Transmissions, Throbbing Gristle, SPK, and Cabaret Voltaire. For example, there is a rich history of (especially first wave) industrial artists using shock tactics in their imagery and performances. Blood and gore, sexual deviance, serial killers, fascism, and violence are just some of the 'shocking' elements that feature prominently in industrial works. As Savage states, shock tactics are "a time honored technique to make sure what you have to say gets noticed" (Vale and Juno 1983, p.5). Industrial artists employ shock tactics as a form of protest, a means for revealing suffering and injustice, and to brutally highlight to the audience that "something is wrong with this world, and we are going to tell you; we are going to show you what it is" (Woods 2007, p.32).

> Bands attempt to shock their listener with the horrors of something negative, instead of telling them the positive alternatives. For example, the band Skinny Puppy is well known for its stance against animal cruelty. But instead of telling the audience how they might contribute to this fight by purchasing animal safe products or living a vegetarian lifestyle, the band show graphic vivisection and slaughterhouse film footage on gigantic screens during its performances (Hanley 2004, p.164).

Shock tactics in industrial music are not as prominent (nor perhaps as effective) as they once were. From the 1980s, industrial music became less involved with the original avant-garde ideas, but "remained consistent with cultural criticism" (Oksanen 2013, p.12). It is not necessary for us to recount the history of industrial music; as indicated in the introduction, this has been published elsewhere in far more detail (see: Reed 2013, Vecchio 2014, Woods 2007). Rather, in this section we focus on two ideas that are fundamental to and remain prominent features of the industrial aesthetic: dystopias and information war.

Woods (2007, p.32) notes that early industrial bands like Throbbing Gristle were "spokespeople" critical of a "numbness" and "sameness" that they observed present in society. These dystopian qualities are often depicted in industrial music: "The concept of a dystopian future was a major technique used by industrial musicians that allowed them to present social commentary and suggest political action in a manner that was more powerful than simply discussing current events" (Hanley 2011, p.196). These dystopian qualities are intimately linked to the notion of an information war. According to Oksanen (2013, p.7) the preoccupation

with fighting an information war against control entered the industrial aesthetic via the work of William Burroughs: "systems of control are practised through newspapers, radio, televisions and magazines, but also in terms of state institutions that serve to homogenise people. Control functions to deactivate people, to kill dreams, to modify them into dull existence". Industrial musicians were acutely aware that "struggles in society were struggles of power, and the best place to combat this oppression was through waging 'information war' with music" (Woods 2007, p.89). Genesis P-Orridge mobilised Throbbing Gristle as an antagonist in an information war that used media to combat messages of control disseminated by 'the media': "We think the real power lies with who controls the information … Real war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle informational media–under cold conditions" (Vale and Juno 1983, p.9, p.15). P-Orridge was not alone in seeing industrial music as a weapon in the information war, a way to counter control. Stephen Mallinder writes that Cabaret Voltaire "challenged ideas of authority and control" (Reed 2013, p.ix). Ministry's Alain Jourgensen states: "All we're ever saying is 'think for yourself, question authority' … everyone wants things precut, homogenized, spoon-fed, and I won't give it to them" (Hanley 2004, p.168). An analysis of industrial music lyrics reveals that social critique and loss of control are sustained key topics (Collins 2002, p.88).

In the industrial aesthetic, artists are antagonists in a war using music as a counteroffensive against the control of information by those in power (Kromhout 2011, p.23). Konqistador follows the industrial aesthetic by producing music that is designed to push back against dominant narratives; vocalist and lyricist Elizabeth Graham explains that Konqistador's music stems from a central theme of courage—the courage to rise up, resist and prevail against control systems (Collins 2020). *Nafada* was designed to serve as a vehicle for female Arab/Muslim artists to freely articulate their stories and disseminate counter-hegemonic narratives without risk of censorship:

> Here in North America, artists have the freedom to express without fear while in places like Algeria, Tunisia, Iran and Morocco women can be banned from performing music or worse, they could be jailed or killed. Our extensive travels overseas throughout Northern Africa and those artistically censored regions was eye-opening for us and it was the start of us understanding the enormous challenges women artists face … We decided if we were to be the authors of an album that would resonate and make impact, we would hand the torch over to female artists from censored regions so that they could

have a voice and tell their stories. Not only would it mean we share the songwriting process but also open ourselves up to the genre of hip-hop which we quickly learned is the genre of resistance in many artistically censored regions of the world (Vile 2019).

As we will discuss in the following section, hip-hop has often been used to speak out against systemic oppression and injustices, and there is a growing body of literature mapping its political potential in non-Western regions.

The Influence of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop culture and its expressive practices of breaking, graffiti writing, emceeing (rap), and deejaying were developed by African American, Latinx, and Afro-Caribbean youth in the Bronx (New York) in the 1970s. Hip-hop is both a response to, and a product of, post-industrial urban America where marginalisation, social alienation, diminished opportunity, and systematic oppression were rampant (Rose 1994). Hip-hop's stylistic bricolage and 'do-it-yourself' attitude infused with Black and Latinx cultural expressivity facilitated the framework for new forms of expression that could voice opposition, assert presence in new ways, and transform derelict spaces into sites of community and leisure. These characteristics have allowed hip-hop to proliferate, adapt to, and infuse with local cultures, politics, and identities around the world.

There is a long and broad history of using hip-hop to advocate for social and political change. From Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's 'The Message' (1982) to N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) and the birth of 'gangsta rap', hip-hop has been used as a vehicle for social commentary and to inspire political action. Since the 1980s, a proliferation of genres have emerged, including 'political hip-hop' and 'conscious hip-hop', that embrace hip-hop's capacity to speak to exclusionary systems of control, injustices, and invisibilization of marginalized groups and issues. *Nafada* builds upon this tradition in the way it showcases marginalized voices rapping about personal, political, and social issues.

The discursive power of rap music comes from its ability to articulate the local and the personal while also rendering visible the cracks in broader political and cultural spheres. Yet it is more than the lyrics and subject content in rap that so powerfully 'represents' the local. The centrality of the voice grounds rap in the personal, and the stylistic distinctions that emerge through

changes in language and accents give further power and meaning to each performance. Specifically, language changes bring differences in registers, cadences, and stylistic conventions that (re)assert rich cultural histories (Isoke 2013). *Nafada* consists of raps in multiple languages: Turkish, English, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian-French, Quebecois French, and Cebuano. Such 'resistance vernaculars' (Mitchell 2000) resist linguistic (and cultural) dominance, preserve, appreciate, and celebrate culture and heritage, and in doing so facilitate emancipatory potential (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2008; Isoke 2013; Khanjani 2020). For example, for the Dubai women interviewed by Isoke (2013), rapping in Arabic allowed them to maintain a connection to their home country, instil pride in being Arab, and make a statement against US cultural hegemony.

The growing arena of global hip-hop studies is testament to the ways in which hip-hop continues to expand in a complex and dynamic interplay of local, regional, and global politics and identities. Hip-hop's reach may be the product of its "connective marginalities", that is the "social resonances between black expressive culture within its contextual political history and similar dynamics in other nations" (Osumare 2001, p.172). These connections may manifest as culture, class, historical oppression, or even the construction of 'youth' as outsiders (*ibid*). Through hip-hop, fans and practitioners can transform their 'outsider' or 'othered' status into an oppositional positionality and use this platform to question and critique structures of power and systems of control.

While hip-hop and industrial musics share few sonic characteristics and sound very different, our aim here is to reveal their aesthetic synergies and show how their integration facilitates a novel and transformative voicing of political issues. What emerges is a common thread of oppositionality, one that is grounded in critiques of control. Like industrial music, the hip-hop genre is varied and multifaceted, and yet positioned to speak back to systems of oppression and control. As such, on *Nafada*, hip-hop's political potential is augmented by its synthesis with industrial music. This point rests on how *Nafada* spotlights voices that are elsewhere diminished, denied or condemned, by dint of their gender, faith, class, and language. That hip-hop should make space for them is not entirely surprising: in the growing literature on hip-hop in Africa and Asia, common themes include hip-hop's capacity to advocate for social, cultural, and political change, to speak back to systems of oppression, as a form of cultural resistance, as a means for protest, and to offer new multidimensional representations of identity that challenge social norms (Clark 2018; Clark and Koster 2014; Isoke 2013; Khanjani 2020;

Williams 2020). Much of this research has examined how women emcees use hip-hop to articulate empowerment within the confines of conservative patriarchal societies. This is not to homogenise the motivations of hip-hop practitioners across these highly diverse regions, but rather to illustrate the ways in which the lyrical tools of hip-hop have been utilised in locally consistent and specific ways. For example, while rappers in Iran are under strict surveillance and regularly at risk of arrest or incarceration, this risk is magnified for women, as Khanjani reveals how, "the female rappers are restricted in expressing themselves, not only because of legal restrictions but also for the social stigmatization they are subjected to. In this regard, the lyrics of Iranian female rappers rarely address sexual issues and instead they are filled with criticism about social and political restrictions on women, such as the obligatory hijab (Keir, 2010)" (2020, p.4). Khanjani's focus on Salome MC, Iran's first female rapper who also features on *Nafada*, shows one way in which lyrics are a powerful tool to articulate resistance. In the next section, we show how *Nafada*, bolstered by the rich traditions and aesthetics of industrial and hip-hop music, articulates complex, hybrid, and fluid identities that challenge hegemonic narratives.

The Diasporic Condition and Resisting Hegemony

Nafada is not only significant in its novel fusion of industrial and hip-hop, nor in its disarming array of female emcees of MENA origin. Rather, the album also speaks to the latitude and plasticity of diaspora. In this instance, diasporas of ethnicity, religion, and genre converge in ways that are both emancipatory and emblematic. *Nafada*'s artists spotlight the myriad ways that MENA identity manifests and morphs, as each emcee articulates a subjectivity that is at once unique and relatable; each woman's 'take' on Islam is different, powerfully rebutting neo-Con attempts to homogenise the 'Muslim women's experience'; and both hip-hop and industrial are freed from hackneyed tropes and motifs, without forfeiting key concerns that have powered both genres over time. That these trajectories converge on *Nafada* reflects the cultural geometry of contemporary media, the emphatic intersectionality of identity politics, and the shape-shifting nature of all artistic genres. For these reasons, *Nafada* is the ultimate example of the diasporic condition, a way of being that rests on postmodern notions of the hybrid, the liminal, and the hyphenated. Following Budarick (2014), this approach to diaspora shifts the focal beam from 'place' (fixed) to 'culture' (not fixed) and considers imagined transnational communities that exist beyond both a homeland and a host state; and calls on deterritorialized ties that bend and stretch across different geographical, social, and cultural

zones. While Budarick was most concerned with diasporas of people, here the logic covers genre as well, as both hip-hop and industrial are seen to honour history and heritage, as well as carry emerging sites of dynamic expression and iconoclastic art.

By any reckoning, *Nafada* is a triumph of multinational enterprise and initiative, logistically and symbolically. From Konqistador's Tiessen and Graham criss-crossing the globe (Canada/Australia/US—colonial outposts that now boast multicultural metropolises), to its various emcees, almost every contributor has a diasporic backstory: Salome MC relocated from Iran to Japan; Medusa TN from Tunisia to France, Han Han from the Philippines to Canada, and Meryem Saci from Algeria to Montreal. By this measure alone, there is distinct emphasis on personal perspectives that are neither static nor stable, and are instead fashioned from movement and adaptation. These MENA voices are joined on *Nafada* by arguably the world's first Muslim female rapper, Tavasha Shannon, aka Miss Undastood – from New York. All this matters because in this diversity *Nafada* forces open cracks in systems that were hitherto closed or policed, or where access was conditional. Effectively these emcees mount a collective challenge to tired clichés of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' (that is, hijabed, silenced, and without agency), and in their 'glocalised' biographies, they confound expectations or assumptions associated with culture.

By virtue of the textured melange at work in each woman's narrative, it is impossible to locate a centralising axis with precision or certainty; they frustrate attempts to define what it means to be Arab or Muslim. This openness permeates every emcee's story: each has previously collaborated on projects that were both inspired and inspiring. At the same time, while each woman has built a profile in the hip-hop 'scene', they confront the bulwarks and divisions that mark multiple contested spaces. Concepts of femininity, piety, and citizenship run through their *oeuvres*, with each woman's truth parsed through matrices of wider shared experiences – of discrimination and bigotry, of joy and pride. *Nafada* canvasses a spectrum of lived experience and tests any attempt to contain any of these voices to limited (or limiting) rubrics governing identity, affiliation, or ambition. There are common stories of Islamophobia, misogyny, sexism, and wage struggle—a generation of women that have lived through the xenophobic rhetoric post-9/11, Trump's 'Muslim ban', Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo. Yet these are commonalities, not defining characteristics. Therein lies the emancipatory potential of this project: as a compelling counterpoint to dominant narratives that otherwise flatten the MENA woman to stereotype and filter her voice through Orientalist schemas. It is supremely ironic

then that of all the emcees featured on *Nafada*, only one wears a hijab – Miss Undastood, a New Yorker. She has long made religiosity central to her gritty lyricism, as well as self-love, feminism, and a 'trailblazer' sensibility (Khabeer 2007: p.133).

Hip-Hop and Muslim Identities

By showing how industrial, hip-hop, and Islam can so comfortably coalesce, *Nafada* adds to what has already become a rich sub-genre of Muslim-inspired hip-hop. Historically, this makes much sense. As noted, hip-hop has long conveyed experiences of oppression, urban malaise, and discriminatory public policy. In the US, tenets of Islamic faith surfaced through artists that fused their Muslim religion with Black consciousness. From Afrika Bambaataa, Ice Cube and Public Enemy to Q-Tip, Mos Def, Busta Rhymes and Lupe Fiasco, US hip-hop culture is replete with Muslim rappers that channel their frustrations and ideals through a genre primed for lyrical catharsis. In turn, hip-hop allowed them to protest not just White supremacist institutions but fault-lines within US Islam – namely, an Arab and South Asian cultural hegemony that sees Arab Muslims presume greater piety or authenticity through a perceived proximity to the Prophet's birthplace, language, and scripture (Grewal 2013). In this way, it fostered a discourse, an aesthetic, an epistemology, and an embodiment that Su'ad Abdul Khabeer calls 'Muslim Cool', a "way of being Muslim that draws on Blackness" to contest "two overlapping systems of racial norms" (Khabeer 2016, p.2). For these Black Muslims, hip-hop carries a baton passed on by the civil rights and Black Power eras to fight systemic inequality (Khabeer 2018, p.155).

By the late 1980s, hip-hop had travelled from the Bronx to inner cities across the US, a consonant and charismatic salve for disenfranchised youth (McMurray 2008). By the early 2000s, though, hip-hop was a truly global phenomenon, and found traction in precincts around the world. It is now a dominant art form in countries as diverse as Egypt, Brazil, Japan, Australia, Germany, South Africa, France, China, Columbia, Norway, Senegal, and Cuba. What had become a mainstream genre in the US spread globally, through the commercialization and marketing of its biggest stars, as well as organically as youth saw their own identity narratives so potently captured and were thus emboldened to rearticulate hip-hop on their terms (Collins and Bilge, 2016). As with the US, hip-hop resonated particularly with Muslim youth, whose everyday conditions resembled those that helped birth hip-hop in New

York just decades earlier: poor housing, poor health, and high unemployment (Saeed 2013, p.185).

In France's ghettoized *banlieues*, for instance, marked by underfunded schools, rampant delinquency, and routine police brutality, hip-hop thrives. In these suburbs, over-represented by French Muslims, there is the added tension of *laïcité* – the secularist policy that ostensibly excised religious symbols from public life, but effectively deemed veiled Muslims incompatible with French national identity (Nyawalo 2019, pp.169-171). The heightened debates around veiling and the extent to which it 'proved' a cultural chasm between Islam and the West raged not just through France, but the UK, much of Europe, and Australia. Particularly in the decade after 9/11, the veil became the most visible marker of Muslim presence in traditionally 'non-Muslim' regions; a recurring reference point for those that saw in Islam vestiges of a medieval theocracy, and the symbolic erasure of Muslim women. Not surprisingly, this preoccupation with the veil as a defining (and demeaning) aspect of Muslim identity had several consequences: at the very least, this mindset stubbornly ignored the many and varied ways that Muslim women express themselves and their religion (that is, not just sartorially); and it hardened perceptions that Muslim women lack voice and volition.

That *Nafada*'s emcees articulate and occupy such distinct sites of expression and experience does not disavow the magnetic pull of diasporic connections. Rather, they show how the diasporic condition – as a psychological, emotional, and intellectual state – belies reductionist assumptions. In turn, diasporic connections are best seen as porous and pliable. Once the jarring effect of this convergence subsides (industrial/hip-hop/Islam), a bracing truth finds form: their stories are nuanced and irregular precisely because cultural currents are almost never uniform or symmetrical, so any encounters between, say, industrial, hip-hop and Islam inevitably produce fresh, exhilarating and, in this case at least, edifying insights. The malleability of genre here sees both hip-hop and industrial extended in terms of representation and connotation. At the same time, whatever political bite (or didactic edge) that pulsates throughout *Nafada* is hardly foreign to either genre. For emcees to speak back to power is a defining feature of hip-hop; and industrial has long spotlighted the dystopian existentialism of contemporary life – mechanisms of control that privilege the technological over the human, the standardized over the eclectic, and the state over the individual (Collins 2005, p.173). The ideological affinity at work in *Nafada* might be novel, but it is not implausible, nor an aberration. As such, the diaspora of genre comes to the fore; like people, hip-hop and industrial have both 'roots' and

'routes'. Particularly telling here are not just how genres travel around the world but how they are transformed via bold change-agents, and new scenes blossom, not to replicate or imitate the 'original', but to reflect the material, cultural and interpersonal conditions of hyper-local milieus. This invariably inflects genres with voices and views and that had been otherwise ignored or denied, as well as artistic flourishes that bespeak these new contexts.

Rewriting MENA Identities

It is not just that *Nafada* is a sonic revelation, a 'next-gen' spin on hip-hop or industrial. It champions emcees that have battled (and survived) interlocking systems of discrimination, and now constitute seminal game-changers. Salome MC was the first woman in Iran to make hip-hop music, even though its urban hubs had underground hip-hop communities in the early 2000s, and a 'mainstream' one by 2009 (Golpushnezhad 2018). Still, in Iran, all cultural products need clearance from the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, and large sections of the population would deem hip-hop anathema to female propriety and virtue. Salome MC, who was also Iran's first female graffiti artist before emceeing, and is also an experimental multimedia artist and peace activist, now lives in the US. For Toronto-based Han Han, hip-hop was born out of her poetry, inspired by her experience as a first-generation immigrant, and the child of a single mother. An operating nurse 'by day', Han Han writes in the two main Filipino languages (Tagalog and Cebuano, with occasional English), an act of resistance to assimilation. Therein lies the activist potential of these women, whose mere presence is both provocative and pioneering. Miss Undastood's work has catalogued her litany of battles over almost twenty years: single parenthood, surviving domestic violence, 9/11, and most recently, quarantining in the age of coronavirus. All the while, as she recounted to *Vogue Arabia*, being told that she was "hip-hopping my way to hellfire" (quoted in Khan 2021), her outspokenness coupled with hijab was seen as a quixotic (read: impossible) combination by many in her community. By this measure alone, these emcees are rewriting MENA identity. For Tunisian rapper Medusa TN, rapping is more than an art-form; it is a responsibility and pledge she made to Afro-Arab women. Growing up, she was inspired by both the 'American dream' as well as the burgeoning hip-hop scene in nearby France. Grafted onto a Tunisian context though, she found her chosen themes (of women's experiences and oppressions) galvanised critics, to the point that Medusa TN received death threats from religious extremists. She pressed on: "the more I toured in Arab countries, the more I would see women come up to me, many times in tears, saying they were

influenced by my music. That's when I really began to understand what rapping is actually about" (quoted in Eshrati 2020).

All these emcees share this trait: an ability to distil what is otherwise a highly personal journey into a clarion call for action – addressed by women, to women. Meryem Saci arrived in Montreal in 2000 with her mother, aged just 13. They were political refugees from the civil war that raged through Algeria. From an early love of soul, 90s R&B, and gospel, she joined the multicultural super-group Nomadic Massive in 2005 – rated the top hip-hop act in Montreal for five years in a row, and opening for Mos Def, Public Enemy, Busta Rhymes and Wyclef Jean. For Saci, even 'hip-hop' does not cover the diversity of her collaborations and outputs: "I am influenced by so many cultures and sounds that I find myself short of labels and boxes to fit in. I just wanna make good timeless music" (quoted in Fama 2016).

That is arguably the overriding point here: the diasporic condition does not recognise or abide by boxes; it is sinewy and singular, and whatever art that emanates will be similarly conceived – breaking boundaries, smashing conventions and blithely indifferent to precedent or protocol. These emcees cohere around the broad parameters of genre, identity, and experience, but cannot be reduced to stereotype, and will not conform to conventions. As such, they are powerful change-agents. At the same time, as hip-hop and industrial meet on *Nafada*, genre itself is shown to be elastic, inclusive, and reimagined. Like these emcees, hip-hop and industrial have travelled around the world, received, and rearticulated by fans, artists, and communities that find in them the tools for creative expression and cultural resilience. Konqistador's Tiessen and Graham intended for *Nafada* to be a countermeasure in an information war, to 'shake off' hegemonic portrayals of Muslim and/or Arab women, and to hand them emancipatory control over the narrative of their lived experiences. In this chapter we have shown the powerful synergies between industrial and hip-hop musics—synergies that coalesce around a mutual aesthetic rooted in resisting and countering oppressive control systems. *Nafada* works to resist and undermine hegemonic depictions of MENA women, and to instead highlight their complex, multifaceted, and shifting identities.

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