

Popular youth culture in Contemporary Morocco and the re-imagining of the nation: a case study of hip-hop

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In the aftermath of King Hassan II, a new generation of Moroccans has become visible by means of the cultural and social movement called *Nayda* (in Moroccan Arabic ‘to wake up’ or ‘to stand up’). This youth is trying to break barriers through music production in order to subvert and resist dominant discourses that speak the nation, youth, freedom, religion, and issues on gender, among others. This paper researches their cultural production focussing on popular music, specifically rap, and its use of iconography to support their discourses. Particularly, the processes of appropriation and transformation of this genre prompt that, within the last decade, this new generation finds itself in the dilemma of fighting towards ‘modernity’ without losing the specificities of their own Moroccan identity. Moreover, this issue becomes especially important in a country with a geographical situation that links Africa, Europe and Middle East.

Hip hop groups in Africa and the Middle East have appropriated much of the American aesthetics, changing it, not only musically, but also iconographically. Accordingly, my main interest is the importance that this subculture gives to image and pictures in its performance and how it presents a way to create different political and social discourses aligning and/or contesting the until now hegemonic ones. Therefore, under the Cultural Studies’ umbrella as a methodological tool and through discourse analysis, I unravel the nuances that their images and pictures highlight in how these groups are re-imagining the Moroccan nation. Hence, as a ‘neo-nationalistic’ discourse appears to be deeply embedded in this genre, it is interesting to explore it from the iconographic perspective. More precisely, examine the use of Moroccan national symbols such as the flag or Fatima’s hand by different groups to support the idea that, although they all belong to the *Nayda* generation, their intake in the political discourse varies considerably. The social critic inherent to this genres combines with powerful images that helps this generation to speak out loud and reach a broader audience.