

The Language of Hip-Hop and Rap in Tunisia: Symbol of Cultural Change in Post-Arab Spring Tunisia

Authors : Zouhir Gabsi

Abstract : The Arab Spring has had noticeable effects on Tunisia in socio-economic, political, and cultural terms. Few have predicted that the music of hip-hop and rap could engage with the socio-political situation in Tunisia, especially after the downfall of Ben Ali's regime. Having survived as underground music since the year 2000, the genre of hip-hop and rap remains an aberration from the folkloric tradition. By adhering to the socio-economic reality of the Tunisian street, rappers attempt to claim authenticity mainly in both thematic and language uses, and by usurping the power of 'space' from the regime's control. With the songs' fast-paced rhythms, catchy phrases, puns, vulgarisms, and linguistic innovations using metaphors, hip-hop, and rap have struck a chord with Tunisia's youth. Tunisia's new social reality has allowed Tunisian rappers to express dissent and voice people's despair over the socio-economic and political situation. This paper argues that rap artists use language as a vehicle to claim the authenticity of their message. It also explores how the performative nature of the language of hip-hop and rap interacts with the Tunisian culture and argues the power of music in the context of political and socio-economic grievances in post-Arab Spring Tunisia.

Keywords : Arab Spring, hip-hop, evolution, Tunisia, Tunisian Arabic

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